

## GENDER ROLES IN LONG-TERM MARRIAGES: CONTINUANCE OR RUPTURE?

*PAPÉIS DE GÊNERO EM CASAMENTOS DE LONGA DURAÇÃO: PERMANÊNCIAS OU RUPTURAS?*

*PAPELES DE GÊNERO EN MATRIMONIOS DE LARGA DURACIÓN: ¿PERMANENCIAS O RUPTURAS?*

*Ana Carolina Graner Araujo Oliveira* <sup>(1)</sup>

*Carolina Leonidas* <sup>(2)</sup>

*Fabio Scorsolini-Comin* <sup>(3)</sup>

### RESUMO

Os relacionamentos conjugais e as configurações familiares transformaram-se no século XX. Contudo, pesquisas apontam que o trabalho doméstico e o cuidado com os filhos continuam atribuídos às mulheres, mesmo quando elas participam ativamente da economia familiar, demonstrando diferenças no papel exercido por homens e mulheres dentro do casamento. Este estudo, descritivo e qualitativo, investigou a construção e expressão dos papéis de gênero em casamentos de longa duração entrevistando 32 casais unidos há, no mínimo, 30 anos. Esses casais eram provenientes de cidades do interior dos estados de São Paulo e Minas Gerais. Foram realizadas entrevistas individuais com cada cônjuge e com as díades, totalizando 96 entrevistas, transcritas e submetidas à análise de conteúdo. Como principal resultado, encontrou-se haver uma coexistência de valores tradicionais e contemporâneos que influenciam as vivências e percepções desses casais. A definição das responsabilidades de cada cônjuge, entretanto, continua atrelada a papéis de gênero

---

<sup>(1)</sup> Psicóloga pela Universidade Federal do Triângulo Mineiro (UFTM), MG, Brasil. email: anacarolina-16@hotmail.com

<sup>(2)</sup> Doutora em Psicologia pela Universidade de São Paulo (USP), Professora do Departamento de Psicologia e do Programa de Pós-Graduação em Psicologia da Universidade Federal do Triângulo Mineiro (UFTM), MG, Brasil. email: carol.leonidas@gmail.com

<sup>(3)</sup> Doutor em Psicologia pela Universidade de São Paulo (USP), Professor do Departamento de Enfermagem Psiquiátrica e Ciências Humanas e do Programa de Pós-Graduação em Enfermagem Psiquiátrica da Escola de Enfermagem de Ribeirão Preto da Universidade de São Paulo (USP), SP, Brasil. email: fabio.scorsolini@usp.br

Este estudo teve o apoio do Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico (CNPq) e da Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de Minas Gerais (FAPEMIG). A primeira autora recebeu bolsa de iniciação científica da FAPEMIG e o terceiro autor recebeu bolsa de Pós-Doutorado Júnior do CNPq (Processo 501391/2013-4).

historicamente estabelecidos, embora possam ser observados manejos, principalmente por parte das esposas.

*Palavras-chave:* casamento; gênero; relação conjugal.

#### ABSTRACT

Marital relationships and family configurations changed in the twentieth century. However, research indicates that household chores and child care are still assigned to women, even when they actively participate in family economy, demonstrating that men and women play different roles in marriage. This descriptive and qualitative study investigated the construction and expression of gender roles in long-term marriages by interviewing 32 couples married for at least 30 years. These couples were from towns in the countryside of the states of São Paulo and Minas Gerais, in Brazil. Individual interviews were conducted with each spouse and with the dyads, comprising 96 interviews transcribed and submitted to content analysis. As main result, it was found there is a coexistence of both traditional and contemporary values which influence these couples' experiences and perceptions. The assignment of each spouse's responsibilities, however, continues to be linked to historically established gender roles, although arrangements can be observed, especially on the part of the wives.

*Keywords:* marriage; gender; marital relationship.

#### RESUMEN

Las relaciones conyugales y las configuraciones familiares se transformaron en el siglo XX. Sin embargo, investigaciones apuntan que el trabajo doméstico y el cuidado con los hijos continúan atribuidos a las mujeres, aun cuando éstas participan de la economía familiar, demostrando diferencias en el papel ejercido por hombres y mujeres dentro del matrimonio. Este estudio descriptivo y cualitativo investigó la construcción y expresión de los papeles de género en los matrimonios de larga duración entrevistando a 32 parejas juntas por al menos 30 años. Estas parejas provenían de ciudades del interior de los estados de São Paulo y Minas Gerais, Brasil. Se realizaron entrevistas individuales con cada cónyuge y con las díadas, totalizando 96 entrevistas transcritas y sometidas al análisis de contenido. Como principal resultado, se encontró la coexistencia de valores tradicionales y contemporáneos que influyen las vivencias y percepciones de esas parejas. La definición de las responsabilidades de cada cónyuge, sin embargo, sigue ligada a roles de género históricamente establecidos, aunque pueden ser observados manejos, principalmente por parte de las esposas.

*Palabras clave:* matrimonio; género; relación conyugal.

## Introduction

Marriage has been transformed over time by the different social discourses articulated about conjugal union and the historical and cultural aspects that run through gender issues (Amorim & Stengel, 2014; Garcia & Tassara, 2003; Scorsolini-Comin et al., 2018; Torres, 2004). Even though these transformations are significant, it is possible to notice that both male and female roles within the family scope still seem defined by archaic patterns that establish relations of power: women take care of the offspring, while men have the supporting role in this care (Fleck & Wagner, 2003; Poeschl, 2016). The conservative view of the spouses' roles also applies to household chores and responsibility for the care and education of children, and it is difficult to break with values deemed traditional, such as established gender differences, especially when they are reinforced at all times by various discourses that insist on viewing marriage and building up a family as the main “feminine” goals (Coutinho & Menandro, 2010; Jablonski, 2010; Langaro & Preto, 2015; Martins et al., 2014; Perlin & Diniz, 2005; Serpa, 2010; Wagner et al., 2015).

According to Scott (1986), gender is a constitutive element of social relations based on perceived differences between male and female, used to signal power arrangements. Because of its relational and historical aspect, the gender perspective points to the difficulty of changes in face of the deep internalization of the differences in roles. This conception, anchored in cultural biases deeply rooted in patriarchal societies, would overcome the more individual leanings of spouses, making the traditional view of division of tasks predominate. Thus, the entry of women into the labor market did not entail a more balanced sharing of household chores, as found by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE, 2017) in the so-called Brazilian nuclear families, although it is possible to notice a greater male participation in child care.

In contemporary models of family that have already undergone a lot of influence from new gender relations, a strong presence of women in charge of the care of both house and children is still observed, showing a reproduction of the social model of repression and submission (Serpa, 2010). However, despite patriarchal normatization, these family roles can be modified. Such normatization tends to be remodeled as the concept of gender gains greater breadth as an analytical category capable of producing historical knowledge, and comes to be regarded as a primarily political relationship that takes place in a discursive and historical field of relations of power (Scott, 1986).

This context blends contemporary family models with more traditional settings from the gender point of view and enables the discussion about long-term marriages to emerge. Long-term conjugality has been increasingly highlighted in the literature in terms of transformations of conjugality over the years (Alves-Silva et al., 2016; Campos et al., 2017; Paiva & Gomes, 2006; Scorsolini-Comin et al., 2018), of motivations for the maintenance of the marital bond and the strategies developed by spouses over time (Alves-Silva et al., 2016; Silva et al., 2017), reasons and feelings involved in conjugal conflicts (Costa et al., 2015; Costa & Mosmann, 2015), parenting (Grizólio et al., 2015) and marital satisfaction (Norgren et al., 2004).

Considering the importance of this topic, it is necessary to know the gender roles and the stances taken, especially by men, since current studies predominantly approach the female view (Coutinho & Menandro, 2010; Fleck & Wagner, 2003; Serpa, 2010; Souza & Alvarenga, 2001). Also, the normalization of these roles tends to naturalize various types of violence and oppression, especially those that affect women, which justifies the need for scientific productions on this topic.

In previous studies on long-term conjugality (Campos et al., 2017; Scorsolini-Comin et al., 2018), gender has emerged as a thread of discussions about conjugality, parenting and the division of roles in these settings, raising the need to critically deepen this category, noting how it affects not only the non-dissolution of the relationship, but its transformations over time and with the development of the spouses. Therefore, this research aimed to investigate the construction and expression of gender roles in long-term marriages.

## Method

### *Type of study*

This is a descriptive and qualitative study, part of a larger project that sought to investigate the transformations in marriage conceptions in long-term unions, approved by the Research Ethics Committee from the authors' home institution.

### *Participants*

This study comprised 32 couples, consensually united in civil or stable unions for at least 30 years, without having been separated or being in the process

of marital separation, and with at least one child. These couples came from towns in the countryside of the states of Minas Gerais and São Paulo, in Brazil. The couples had been together, on average, for 41.2 years ( $SD = 8.99$ ), with married time between 32 and 53 years. Participants' mean age was 65.03 ( $SD = 9.64$ ), ranging from 51 to 86 years old. Although a socioeconomic classification protocol was not used, couples, for the most part, were described as middle class, with a relative economic rise over time, in line with the departure of the children from home, which resulted in the family income being used solely by the couple.

### ***Instruments***

Two semi-structured interview scripts were used for data collection: one for the spouses and one for the couple. The instruments were applied face-to-face with the participants at two different times: first, individually with each spouse and, in a second moment, with the spouses together. The application of the scripts in two different moments aimed at allowing individual experiences, feelings and perceptions to come up, avoiding their feeling inhibited by the presence of their partner and, later, to notice the dynamics of the conjugal relationship and the experiences of the couple. Questions were formulated to cover the experiences provided by the union, seeking to understand the process since the transition from single life to married life, to the building of intimacy and the strategies used by the couple to face the challenges and difficulties of life together. Gender-related markers could be inferred from the narratives about conjugality throughout the life cycle, at times such as the beginning of the relationship, the birth of the children, the departure of the children from home, and the processes of aging of the dyad, for example.

### ***Procedure***

#### *Data collection*

The procedure known as “snowball” was used to contact the participants. From the contacts of the researchers' social network it was possible to find the first participants, who suggested other participants, and so on, forming a sample of 32 couples. The first interviews came from social cues in the community in which the researchers lived. As part of the ethics requirements, after present-

ing the project objectives and explaining the terms for participation, the couples signed the Informed Consent Form for the interviews to be performed. Individual and couple interviews were conducted by the same researcher in each family, in a single meeting. The entire team of researchers received training on interview techniques, interviews with couples, and on conjugality, allowing greater uniformity in the way data collection was conducted. Collaborators were given the possibility of being referred to psychotherapy if they experienced any discomfort during the research, a resource that was not requested by any participant. After conducting three interviews with each of the 32 couples, a total of 96 interviews were obtained that made up the *corpus* of this study.

### *Data analysis*

Data analysis was carried out in two moments: (a) pre-analysis (reading the transcribed data from the recordings), where the interviews were analyzed vertically (one by one), in order to explain the contents brought by the participants; (b) exploration of the material. To analyze the data, a content analysis technique proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) was used, which involved steps such as transcription and exhaustive reading of the data, construction, revision and naming of topics, as well as the production of the analytical report. From this process and based on the objective of the study, it was possible to systematize the discussion into the following categories, constructed *a posteriori*: (1) Gender markers in marriages over time; and (2) Old and new ways to be a woman: reinvention or continuance? Data interpretation was based on the literature from the field of long-term conjugality.

## **Results and Discussion**

### ***Category 1: Gender markers in marriages over time***

In this category, some gender markers that can be observed in long-term marriages will be discussed. These markers are not considered to be typical or exclusive of these conjugal configurations, but they are expressed at different moments in the development of the couple over time, indicating either situations of greater crystallization of gender roles, or changes that can only be perceived in retrospect. It is argued that these changes and continuances are not exclusive to

the dynamics of each couple, but they also resume constructed and reproduced social discourses about marriage, femininity and masculinity.

According to Coutinho and Menandro (2010), family dynamics of marriages carried out in 1960s were considered traditional, with the man being the head of the family and financial provider and the woman responsible for the household and for taking care of the children and the husband. The socialization of boys and girls was influenced by this model, which resulted in the classic division of roles and the asymmetry of power (Torres, 2004), also found in the interviewed couples. Marriage and the constitution of the family were perceived by the couples as a natural destination and usually happened very early. Some of the interviewed wives, even though they were “prepared” for that moment, showed some difficulty in adapting themselves to life with a partner and wondered at the present time if this was the course of life they would really like to trace, as observed by wife 1: *“I started dating very young, at 13 years old, I do not know if that was what I wanted, or not, I do not know. I started dating, but then we thought that getting married would be better, I ended up marrying at 16 years old (...)”*. However, although they have expressed doubts about this choice, many wives consider themselves satisfied with the relationship, such as wife 23: *“I made my life from this relationship, and thank God, everything went well, everything was going in a way that more and more, I was more satisfied, do you understand? (...)”*.

For husbands, marriage was experienced in a positive way: forming their own family enabled them to begin working on the construction of something of their own, leaving aside subordination to parents, as it can be observed in husband 13’s statement: *“(...) for me, the only thing that changed was that now I was forming a family of mine, independent, right? To the family... of which I... have the origins, I was now starting a new family (...)”*. In addition, finding a wife meant the worries about taking care of the house and the children became hers, sticking the woman as the one who takes care of the husband, even in a maternal way, an outcome also found by Coutinho and Menandro (2010) and evidenced in husband 10’s statement: *“(...) She is excellent, my wife, thank God. She takes care of me as if she’s taking care of a child (...)”*.

It is noticed that taking care of home, children, and one’s own spouse obeys rigid gender roles, so that the management of domestic life is a feminine responsibility, and even if the wife can count on the help of a housecleaner or a babysitter, she is the one who must manage the rendered services (Jablonski, 2010; Perlin & Diniz, 2005), which can be observed in the husband 7’s statement: *“The man goes from the gate out there, he goes there and takes care of making money to keep the house, to keep the family, because from the door in, it’s the woman*

*who takes care, because the woman has more capacity (...)*". In the present sample, it was possible to find both unions considered to be quite traditional in terms of gender roles and configurations more influenced by contemporary values, such as the one experienced by couple 20: *"(...) I was the one who, so... took care of the house, practically supported the house, right... because he, his work came to be here in the construction of the house, right? (...)"*. Thus, it can be considered that these couples were constituted in the middle of a social, historical and cultural transition in the way of conceiving gender roles in marriage, being both spectators and actors of these transformations.

Considering these changes compared to more traditional models, it was possible to find family configurations in which the wife worked, reconciling the profession with household chores, which caused an overload of functions, as described by wife 22: *"(...) And it was like that, work, home. Home, work. And, so... Too much responsibility, right? Too much, too much, too much, too much... too much responsibility... Too much. Really too much (...)"*. Thus, even when women can take up other positions, suggesting a break with more traditional models, they still need to hold their position of carers in the universe of home maternal responsibilities, which is a double journey rather than the experience of a new gender role. The scientific literature has similar findings (Fleck & Wagner, 2003; Garcia & Tassara, 2003; Jablonski, 2010; Langaro & Pretto, 2015; Perlin & Diniz, 2005).

The dilemmas arising from this double journey are also evident when the emergence of motherhood and the attribution of new tasks to women are discussed. Due to the strenuous workload faced solitarily, some women report guilt for not having dedicated themselves to caring for their children in the way they thought necessary or the way they were charged with, a result also found in the study by Fleck and Wagner (2003). For wife 22: *"(...) working too hard is not good either for children or for us, it is not. We feel a lot of guilt and the children are left very, but very, uh... adrift, right? Because, well... without the mother at home, it's difficult, right? (...)"*. Thus, there is a disqualification of the importance of women in the labor market by both husbands and wives, reinforcing that the greatest obligation, or priority, of a woman should be to dedicate herself to the home and to the children. In a positive perspective of the presence of women in the labor market, some can recognize the importance of female independence, such as wife 24: *"(...) the opening for women to work was very good because she helps... women's work is very important... for the progress of their own children (...)"*.

Although caring for the children is not a current concern, since the children are already adults and no longer reside with these couples, questions about



how the parenting affected the conjugal dynamics showed that the birth of the children caused conflicts between the spouses, mainly due to a disagreement about the model of education, a result also found by Grizólio et al. (2015). The study by Garcia and Tassara (2003) points to parenting as a source of potential conflict and indicates the mediating position assumed by wives, trying to reconcile parents and children. In this study, different positions assumed by the spouses were found, with the wives being considered more affectionate and the husbands more disciplinary and aggressive.

The study by Martins et al. (2014) points out the weight of the gender issue in motherhood and fatherhood, as well as the differences in the way of conceiving and organizing parenting, translated in the representations of gender present in the cultural imaginary, directly influencing their experiences. In this study it was also possible to find gender differences in determining the meaning attributed to the dimensions “being a father” and “being a mother”. Motherhood is then considered divine and children are seen as a blessing, crowning not only the relationship but also the life of the woman, which gains a new meaning. For wife 20: *“it is a transformation, being a mother is a divine thing, right? So, for me it was a very beautiful achievement, to be a mother and to take care of him, to do everything that was possible for him (...)”*.

On the other hand, fatherhood is a sign of a man’s virility, and the birth of a child is important for the formation of the family he will protect and support. However, the affective sphere of this experience is not evident, which reinforces the idea that fathers’ feelings are different from the mothers’. According to Langaro and Pretto (2015), an explanation for this difference would be the “natural order”, that is, the traditional constructions of these experiences that justify fathers and mothers to be constituted in this way, because these are the general characteristics of these experiences. Thus, this image of the good mother, who is perfect in her functions, selfless and prioritizes her children to the detriment of herself, reinforces this traditional construction of woman that remains alive in contemporary discourse (Martins et al., 2014). As said by husband 27: *“It is important, of course, that the man thinks differently from the woman, right? The woman (...) had all that affection, that intimacy, much greater than the father with the son, always the mother has more than the... than the father. But of course the father also has his feelings, different, but he has the positive, important feeling (...)”*.

In addition, it is observed that this naturalization of the care associated with the feminine universe does not permit disruptions in the sense that the father can experience fatherhood in a more intimate and affectionate way. The responsibility of women for taking care of her children (Grizólio et al., 2015;

Jablonski, 2010; Langaro & Pretto, 2015; Martins et al., 2014; Wagner et al., 2015) and the solitary trajectory they face is striking in the interviews, while the husbands' contribution was sometimes only financial. In the sample, those who offered help reinforced a secondary role in relation to women, delegating to them the responsibility for those tasks. In retrospect, the wives consider that the present-day parents are better companions and help their partners more, which, in turn, demand the sharing of the care, something that was not done by them at the time.

During the interviews it was possible to notice that the characteristics noticed by the spouses in themselves and in their partners also resonate in their gender roles. Thus, individual characteristics such as "being honest and hard-working" were the most pointed out by the wives, stressing the main activity and responsibility assigned to the man. Whereas being a "good housewife", "doing the household chores carefully" and being a "good mother or grandmother" were the most pointed out by the husbands, which also reinforces the place dedicated to the woman within the family. It is noticed that the construction of the feminine identity is influenced by the condition of existing for the other, being from this aspect that their existence is imparted a meaning, not being possible to sustain another space for her other than the one already designated, in consonance with the literature in the field (Coutinho & Menandro, 2010).

According to Amorim and Stengel (2014), at the time of the union of these couples, legal and indissoluble marriage was the only way to legitimize marital relations and to structure a family. This operation was found in the interviews, reinforcing that what was expected in the families of that time was that all the children got married. However, although marriage is an event expected by both men and women, the latter prepared themselves for this moment since a very young age, learning household chores and planning the trousseau, as said by wife 31: *"the woman as a woman was seen as... the lady of the household chores, because in the past woman used to be prepared for what? To marry, to cook, to wash, to iron, to learn to embroider, to learn to sew and to be a mother (...)"*.

In this context, woman's preparation for marriage was naturalized, which was not observed in relation to the man, although it was expected that he also married in adult life. It emerges from these findings that marriage presented itself as a necessity to both, but with different justifications: for the woman, so that she would become a mother and could take care of the home, and for the man, so that he could be taken care of and also express his virility and continuity. The idea of marriage as the only possibility in life is anchored in conceptions that obey historical and cultural constraints that contributed to engender meanings proper

to the feminine condition (Coutinho & Menandro, 2010). Because of these factors, those who deviated from the norm were not accepted, such as women who became pregnant before marriage. Wife 24 says: *“At that time, the couple who... already had children when they were dating was a disaster for the family. There were families that moved from the town, had the girl live elsewhere, it was very hard. That today is seen more naturally (...).”*

Couples mention that there was pressure for the marriage to thrive and that they needed to figure out on their own how to make this new dynamic work for them. Then, it was not possible to go back to the family of origin, and sometimes they had to face problems alone. Apparently, gender roles left partners secure of each other's responsibilities. There is a recognition by the couple of the effort of women to have the marriage work out, given the recrimination they suffered if something went wrong, as they took responsibility for keeping up the home. According to husband 26: *“When you get excited about something, you forget your family. Which I took, I took all the responsibility for the house and [put] on her shoulder.”* Thus, it is observed that women assume the task of resolving domestic conflicts, exempting men from responsibility (Grizólio et al., 2015). The prominence around a successful marriage, often because the relationship is maintained over time and with children, is attributed to women, in a clear gender distinction. In that same line of argument, the failure in this attempt would also be blamed on the woman.

Wives reported that they were never “out of the house”, and expected to be valued for it, demonstrating that having activities beyond family life was considered negative and then repressed. Thus, for husband 17: *“The husband leaves early, arrives in the afternoon and she stays there at one point... because there comes a certain point, when the woman creates, she is young, there is no other type, her type is inside home (...).”* According to Souza and Alvarenga (2001), women's dedication to private life and the fact that they did not have other men, reinforcing the idea of chastity, are arguments governed by the morality that distinguishes the woman “from the house” of the woman “from the street”, the latter being the one who is not well regarded by society and, consequently, will not constitute a family. On the other hand, men are considered “from the street”, that is, they can perform other activities like meeting friends, going to bars and playing ball, which is accepted by the wives, despite their dissatisfaction with the situation. Naturalizing the need for the man to have social and recreational activities outside the home environment, wife 32 emphasizes: *“He likes to be with his friends and I thought not, that he had to stay at home keeping company for me and the children. But a man needs to have this life out there (...).”*

Even questioning the fact that men could socialize in collective spaces and outside the home, these women were invited over time to naturalize the domestic universe as a synonym for feminine space of belonging. In the interviews, marriage was viewed in a double way, now as imprisonment, now as emancipation from the family of origin. Marriage is often seen as a prison by both spouses, but in women's discourse this idea is more expressive because they in effect cease to engage in many activities in the name of marriage. Apparently, this feeling of imprisonment is experienced by the woman at some stage of life, and before marriage, normally, it occurred on account of paternal authority and then by the privations of the husband, that is, always by a man, which can be exemplified by wife 2: *"When I was single I was trapped, normal, indoors, I got married, I dedicated to the family, then it remains the same, you understand, then nothing has changed."*

While there are wives who feel trapped in the marriage, others say they felt free from their parents' oppression, given the rigid upbringing offered by the family at the time, as said by wife 25: *"I had more freedom, my father held me down too much (...) after I got married I started to have as much freedom as possible! It's even funny, usually marriages trap us, right? Mine was the opposite (...)".* Therefore, in terms of gender, it is observed that, among these women, female submission to a structure that "imprisons" them is naturalized, whether it is the yoke of the parents when single or the power of the husband when married. The domestic space experienced as a prison seems to pervade the condition of a woman throughout life, conjugality being a possibility of maintaining this *locus* or, less often, offering a little more flexibility in relation to a more rigid parental upbringing.

Characteristics considered to be "appropriate" for each gender are perceptible, and the spouses seem to occupy this previously established place. Husbands are described as "difficult" and "hard to deal with", as perceived by wife 6: *"It is always harder to tolerate men than wives, but go straight through, ask for God's help (...)".* This masculine representation corroborates the idea of a being historically seen as strong, brave, and endowed with vigor, needing an "equally strong personality" that transcends these attributes. The feminine historical representation, however, is of a sensitive, delicate, affective, physically weak and defenseless being, that is, someone of "soft personality". This difference is also marked in the speech of husband 23: *"Man thinks differently from woman... so she has more patience, but I think... it's a woman's thing, right?"* The wife is also described as a warrior and someone whom family members can turn to, being considered the foundation of the house, that is, an essential structure so that the family does not disintegrate.

It was possible to find among the interviewees the profile of the "good husband", as observed by spouse 24: *"I get up... I have... we have a maid three times*

*a week, but I get up, I make coffee, I go to the bakery. It's the life of a good husband, right?"* That is, the one who pleases his wife is considered faithful and a good father and helps with household chores periodically, that is, when we don't have a maid, when asked by their wives or on weekends. For husband 26, the help he offers is seen as a sharing of tasks: *"It's... division, that's how I say it, if she needs it, I'm with her, right?"*

However, husbands' "help" continues to be tied to a historical conception of what a man and a woman are, not actually sharing the tasks and responsibilities, which perpetuates gender roles. For Jablonski (2010), although the situation seems unfair, there is not always a clear sign of nonconformity on the part of the wives, which can be explained by the years of socialization from the gender perspective, which inculcated the notion that household chores do not even need to be shared equally between the sexes or that the domestic universe is an essentially feminine space, being exclusive to the woman.

It should be noted that the "good husband" and "good wife" profiles do not include the notions of marital satisfaction, intimacy, love, or passion. The "good husband", for example, is not meant at any moment as someone who loves himself or loves his wife, but as a companion who may be closer to or more distant from the domestic universe. Thus, long-lived couples seem to prioritize the discussion of the tasks and roles assumed by men and women, both in terms of what each one has in terms of what can be shared or divided. Conjuality, therefore, does not emerge only as an affective dimension in these couples, but also an operational one.

Finally, the idea of separation does not figure as a possibility in long-term marriages, although some couples may have thought about it at some point in their relationship. However, contrary to what can be imagined, this does not necessarily reflect satisfaction with the relationship, but shows that couples end up becoming used to this model of functioning and see that getting out of it can be more "laborious". For wife 32: *"At this point... [pause]. If I break up... I think it will be... a mess. Because then... I'm going to have all the responsibilities on my back again... I think I cannot handle it anymore (...)"*.

Besides, the "prohibition" of divorce from the moral point of view, according to reports, can be considered an important factor for the maintenance of long-term marriage (Scorsolini-Comin et al., 2018). In fact, especially for wives, the break-up seems more frightening than for their partners, since beyond financial and/or affective issues, these women were frowned upon by society, in a process of marginalization (Coutinho & Menandro, 2010), which shows the dependence to which they are subject. There would therefore be distinct consequences for a

divorced man and a divorced woman, which places gender not only as a marker of divorce, but also as a driver of individual trajectories after dissolution.

### ***Category 2: Old and new ways of being a woman: reinvention or continuance?***

In this category, emphasis will be placed on the way gender pervades femininity in a long-term relationship, and can operate in a certain way in face of moments that involve the search for independence or the disruption with traditional and crystallized models about being a couple. According to Coutinho et al. (2015), the way of being a man and being a woman in the context of marriage and life in general is a resultant construction of social, historical and cultural factors, and cannot be treated in a naturalized way, based on the biological and immutable nature of the genders. The interviewed couples, attuned to these changes, insert this into their reports, although they remain, apparently, not likely to adhere to such transformations. They point out that since the end of the twentieth century the relations between men and women are no longer the same, beyond female independence and their insubmission to certain situations, which is seen both positively and negatively.

For wife 14: “(...) *it changed, thank God, right, that men opened their minds more, because, in the old days, at least back home, women suffered too much (...)*”. It is noticed that when this independence concerns the choices of the woman that transcend patriarchal norms, taking it from a role of submission and making her the owner of her own history, she is seen as “bossy”, irresponsible, or “naughty”, as it is possible to notice in wife 30’s report: “*I think that women need to preserve themselves more, they’re very depraved. Women are not respecting themselves.*”

Despite the transformations in the conception of what it means to be a woman, her social role is still assured, that is, the “real” woman is still the one that corresponds to the old ideal of being dedicated to house and husband, who is the head of the family (Coutinho et al., 2015). Regardless of the greater autonomy of women, the woman is still seen as someone who needs to be attached to a partner, to relate to few people, to remain pure and to aim to find a good marriage. This conception can be observed in husband 26’s report: “*She wants to know, do you understand, it means that she wants to stay, she does not have affinity in dating. And then she goes with another, then some other, then another one, another day someone else... a bit complicated in the, marriage, do you understand? (...)*”.

Langaro e Pretto (2015) point out that the education received by women has reinforced traditional gender models, making it difficult to obtain another space for themselves beyond the one already assigned, that is, marriage and the domestic universe. However, it is noticeable that the differences between being a man and being a woman are known by these couples, who recognize the discrimination suffered by women, even when both genders go through the same situation, as said by husband 32 about the separation at the time: *“I believe the man, he was considered more like the male chauvinist, he did not accept that the woman made a mistake, that the woman had a failing. But man has always been more accepted by society and the woman more discriminated (...)”*.

Some wives talk about their lack of independence and the impossibility of performing some tasks because of husbands' prohibitions, such as driving, working or studying. The impediment to studying, however, does not refer only to a prohibition by the father or partner, but to a cultural issue, since the possibility of studying normally was directed towards the middle or upper classes (Coutinho & Menandro, 2010), often involving the teaching profession, which had an eminently feminine character (Coutinho et al., 2015). However, in the course of this relationship, which has accompanied countless changes in society, the image of contemporary women as a subject that not only desires but also realizes, may have influenced wives to seek autonomy. Thus, with the “times are different” discourse, they are able to fulfill their old desires and depend less on their husbands to go out, leaving the partner at home to join their children, for example. Wife 11 says: *“If he does not leave, he stays and I'm going (...) Because I want to go somewhere, I want to visit (...). I'll learn to drive; I'll go where I want... And then the fight is over (...)”*. This possibility of leaving the domestic space without any sanction by the husband is interpreted as an important move in relation to what happened in the initial years of the relationship, suggesting a change towards greater independence.

Torres's (2004) study shows that when wives find themselves less overloaded, they are able to implement personal projects delayed in favor of the family, finding outlets and possibilities to move into being an agent, despite gender constraints. The deprivations experienced by women can explain why they only show regrets about marriage, manifested by the desire to go back in time to change certain things or even not to marry, as said by wife 15: *“What I would do differently... I would not get married! I would not get married any more. That's it, I have already said it to my daughter, I have said it to my son, if time went back, I would not seek marriage, I would live alone.”* The possibility of hearing these individual desires seems to have come with the time of relationship and with the open-

ness to reflect on it, but also as a result of changes observed in society related to the way in which interpersonal relationships have happened and changed. Thus, contemporarily it is legitimate to move on without the experiences of conjugality and parenting, which was not proclaimed when these women were young and got married.

In the past the wife should know how to perform all household chores and be an exemplary housewife, as this made them honorable and important for the maintenance of the family. However, since the end of the twentieth century there have been various arrangements and patterns sometimes bordering conservative discourses, sometimes contemporary ones, the latter being found mostly in the modern woman (Amorim & Stengel, 2014). For these couples, the fact that women no long bother to perform all these tasks is perceived in a negative way. On the other hand, it is recognized that women perform other functions and do not want to take care of everything else on their own, therefore the tasks need to be negotiated. On this subject, the husband 13 says: *“We know that often, today, mainly due to the economic situation (...), today the woman needs to work. And I see this often as a... loss to the marriage... to the family. To the family. Because the woman ends up having to accumulate these two functions, right? (...) the husband has to be, has to resign, right? (...)”*.

Other contemporary ideas also seem to permeate these relationships, influencing the discourse of couples, such as violence against women, the importance of the Maria da Penha Law (which shields partners – mostly women – from domestic violence) and the influence of male chauvinism in the relationship. According to husband 14: *“There is a male chauvinism business there. The guy wants to go to parties (...) And there, most men do not take the wife, they just want to go there to dance with someone else’s woman, to, well, to tell the story the next day.”* However, for Perlin and Diniz (2005), male egalitarian discourse tends not to reflect on concrete attitudes in the daily life of the couple, and the process of adaptation to new roles and to a new way of functioning has been hampered by the absence of a social system that supports the emerging marital and family models.

In the face of conflicts, it is noticed that the behavior of most wives is to remain silent and not engage in arguments so as not to provoke a fight by opposing her husband’s opinion, as said by the wife 22: *“That’s what I tell you. I was raised, like this, to be resigned, right? So I swallow a lot of insults. I swallow not to make trouble (...)”*. A common strategy is to let the husband talk to himself and to “pour oil on troubled waters”, a strategy used by wife 7: *“(...) if I start to talk and think that it is not right and it turns into a fight or argument I leave, I leave him talking alone.”* The study by Silva et al. (2017) found gender differences during



conflict resolution as comprehension strategies were used primarily by women and the Poeschl study (2016) points out that they need to resort to a greater number of strategies to impose their opinion, even when the matter is traditionally female. Even when there is an equal effort by the spouses, it is the husband who has the last word, which reinforces masculine authority and superiority over the woman within these relationships.

Regarding the present category, in terms of the experience of female sexuality, the encounter with the unknown is frequent in the lives of these women, who knew little of daily life, since few subjects were discussed with them. Thus, what was considered taboo in society such as sexual relations and the birth of children, for example, were only known at the time they would happen, favoring the creation of innumerable fantasies and misconceptions about these subjects. Wife 14 reports: “(...) *I did not know I had to have sex to get pregnant. I thought I was lying in bed with the man, sleeping with him every day and getting pregnant... nobody talked about it, nobody (...)*”. This fact is corroborated by Coutinho and Menandro (2010). Wives who married very young “have become women” in the marriages and show that there was a lot of conflict to exert their sexuality freely, so it took time for them to deal more naturally with their own bodies, other people’s bodies and the relationship itself, to get comfortable with the situation. In the study by Paiva and Gomes (2006), other women in long-term marriages also had their first intercourse only after marriage, reporting difficulties in establishing a full sexual relationship with their husbands and even in terms of their own sexuality and the pursuit of pleasure.

It is observed that the question of sexuality is actively pervaded by gender roles from a conception of what is expected of a man and of a woman about the subject. The idealization of a chaste and holy woman makes it impossible for her to be someone who knows her body, who feels pleasure and desire and exercises her sexuality to satisfy herself and not just another. Being bound by a rigid logic in terms of gender, women remain imprisoned within a moral discourse regarding sexual experiences (Souzas & Alvarenga, 2001). It is the opposite of what is expected of the man, who needs to be virile and sexually potent, being able to experience his sexuality better and assume his pleasure and desire. This conception of man and woman is supported by the roles that the spouses fill; therefore, wives behave very seriously in the matter, they assume that intercourse is more important to their husbands than to them, and are considered “weak” for intercourse. On the other hand, husbands are described as naughty and fiery, they reveal that it was not possible to explore sexuality within marriage, so they did it outside the home, or “went without”. They assume that intercourse is more important to

them. It is noteworthy, therefore, that in the context of intimacy and conjugal sociability, the exercise of power is masculine (Souzas & Alvarenga, 2001). Husband 10's report on sexuality in the marriage describes what was discussed: *"It was not very good not because... [low tone of voice] she's very weak, you know? And I, I was a little... hot... naughty, right? All my life I've been. And I really missed it. I missed it, yes. But not to betray, so as not to mess with other women, I held it tight."*

From the analysis of some wives' reports it was possible to note that the suspicion of extra-marital affairs was something frequent, even when the infidelity was not confirmed, as assumed by one of the couples. Although they reported mistrust in their husbands and feeling hurt, they considered that this masculine behavior was normal and should be expected, legitimized by the simple fact that "men are like that". A similar result was described by Souza and Alvarenga (2001), which brings the infidelity of man in the female discourse as a masculine practice of the conjugal dynamics, and can be considered a mechanism of affirmation of masculinity or a symptom of dissatisfaction with the relationship. This freedom, however, is not allowed to the female partner, and entails social penalties. Infidelity, in this way, is socially constructed as a trait of the male personality acquired from the genetic characteristics of man, which becomes naturalized and accepted. Still naturalizing the docile, affable and submissive aspect of the woman, it is associated with a position of passive acceptance before a behavior that a man could not control, disregarding the feminine suffering resulting from the betrayal and even the "possible needs and desires" of these women for experiencing the sexual freedom attributed to the masculine universe. Thus, infidelity is meant as something masculine, and it is up to the woman to be compassionate.

These findings suggest that long-term marriages are based on traditional and culturally determined gender roles. Obviously, this consideration should be analyzed with parsimony, given that it is a sample with certain characteristics that can retain more traditional traits in terms of family, marriage and the roles attributed to being a man and being a woman. It should be noted that the couples interviewed were born, raised and got married at a time when family dynamics were traditional and these roles were not even questioned. There was, then, a socialization of these subjects who, influenced by this model, began to live and organize themselves assuming a division of roles and asymmetry of power. Today, however, these couples may follow a new model in which the concepts of family, man and woman are constantly revised, questioned, and expanded. It is thus considered that long-lived couples went through the emergence of these new models, remaining faithful to the traditional values of family and marriage, but not remaining exempt or distanced from such changes.

Thinking about the continuance and the disruption commonly observed in relationships over time, it is important to note that the new and the old cohabit with these spouses, influencing them, going through their experiences and making them question themselves, modify some practices, and even criticize what they disagree with, in the light of these new concepts. However, it is noticeable that they are not open-minded about these transformations. It is conjectured that this maintenance of concepts deemed traditional and inflexible is due to the considerable role of culture in the studied milieu, considering that these are people living in small towns, with a strong influence of moral values, that postulate, among others, the maintenance of the conjugal relationship as a *locus* of morality and attachment to tradition.

## Final considerations

In conclusion, it can be deduced that several gender markers represent long-term marriages. Although relationships change over time, with different postures being adopted by the spouses, which can be understood as meaning emotional maturity, it is observed that differences between men and women continue to mark the expressions of sexualities and the course of these unions, allowing changes, as long as they do not question gender asymmetry. Although the spouses get emotionally closer to one another, more intimate and more complicit over time, this maturation still seems to be sustained by gender opposition, with men prevailing over women in terms of power and the universe of marriage still typically domestic and, therefore, feminine.

It is necessary to consider that these couples were and continue to be spectators of important changes during recent years and that they also occupy transitory positions when we analyze conjugality in the contemporary scenario and specifically in Brazil. Being in the transition means standing in front of antagonistic and competing models, even if this process is not abrupt, rather the opposite. Thus, it is important to point out that transformations cannot be naturalized or expected as certain either, since these are couples that have been constituted according to a logic that is, more quickly or more slowly, being submitted to revision. The embodiment of these transformations has not been fully observed in these couples, but has occurred in certain opportunities, such as in the possibility of some women working outside the home or with their husbands sharing domestic chores, although these examples can be questioned or considered as part of the maintenance of a *status quo* that crystallizes the woman in the protagonism of the home, as previously discussed.

This study has limitations. It is important to emphasize that the research was based on an existing database in which the focus of research was not specifically on the construction and expression of the gender roles of long-term couples, but rather on general aspects of long-term conjugality, which also presupposes the crossing of the gender category. Thus, the topic emerged in several questions, showing how these roles are part of the constitution and organization of the couple and how much reverberates in their experiences. It is suggested, for future studies, to explore the gender issue from a more directive inquiry into the topic. Interviewing participants from different social strata and from different regions of the country can also broaden the understanding of the subject depicted. Investing in longitudinal studies, accompanying couples over time, can add information on the topic, although conducting such a design will be complex and costly.

In terms of the repercussions of these findings for psychological practice, the possibility of developing a supportive space where these couples' experiences can be heard stands out, especially in terms of how the gender markers cross the couple's experiences over time and the different stages of the life cycle. Recognizing the political aspect of the work in Psychology, questioning the crystallization of gender roles in marriage and taking stands to point out situations of oppression and discrimination of women should lead to more reflective practices in different scenarios, especially those of greater vulnerability, also bringing social voices that tell what it is to be a man and what it is to be a woman, of which marriage is an important depository.

## References

- Alves-Silva, J. D.; Scorsolini-Comin, F.; Santos, M. A. (2016). Conjugalidade e casamentos de longa duração na literatura científica. *Contextos Clínicos*, 9(1), 32-50.
- Amorim, A. N.; Stengel, M. (2014). Relações customizadas e o ideário de amor na contemporaneidade. *Estudos de Psicologia (Natal)*, 19(3), 157-238.
- Braun, V.; Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Campos, S. O.; Scorsolini-Comin, F.; Santos, M. A. (2017). Transformações da conjugalidade em casamentos de longa duração. *Psicologia Clínica*, 29(1), 69-89.
- Costa, C. B.; Falcke, D.; Mosmann, C. P. (2015). Conflitos conjugais em casamentos de longa duração: motivos e sentimentos. *Psicologia em Estudo*, 20(3), 411-423.
- Costa, C. B.; Mosmann, C. P. (2015). Estratégias de resolução dos conflitos conjugais: percepções de um grupo focal. *Psico*, 46(4), 472-482.

- Coutinho, S. M. S.; Menandro, P. R. M. (2010). Relações conjugais e familiares na perspectiva de mulheres de duas gerações: “Que seja terno enquanto dure”. *Psicologia Clínica*, 22(2), 83, 106.
- Coutinho, S. M. S.; Trindade, Z. A.; Menandro, M. C. S.; Menandro, P. R. M. (2015). Sonoridades da vida conjugal registradas em versos de canções brasileiras produzidas entre 1940 e 1960. *Estudos de Psicologia*, 32(3), 461-473.
- Fleck, A. C.; Wagner, A. (2003). A mulher como principal provedora do sustento econômico familiar. *Psicologia em Estudo*, 8(esp), 31-38.
- Garcia, M. L. T.; Tassara, E. T. O. (2003). Problemas no casamento: uma análise qualitativa. *Estudos de Psicologia*, 8(1), 127-133.
- Grizólio, T. C.; Scorsolini-Comin, F.; Santos, M. A. (2015). The perception of parenting couples engaged in long-term marriages. *Psicologia em Estudo (Maringá)*, 20(4), 663-674.
- IBGE – Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (2017). *Estatísticas do Registro Civil*, vol. 44. Rio de Janeiro: Autor.
- Jablonski, B. (2010). A divisão de tarefas domésticas entre homens e mulheres no cotidiano do casamento. *Psicologia: Ciência e Profissão*, 30(2), 262-275.
- Langaro, F.; Pretto, Z. (2015). Experiências de parentalidade como fatores geradores de sofrimento em mulheres. *Fractal: Revista de Psicologia*, 27(2), 130-138.
- Martins, C. A.; Abreu, W. J. C. P.; Figueiredo, M. C. A. B. (2014). Tornar-se pai e mãe: um papel socialmente construído. *Revista de Enfermagem Referência*, 4(2), 121-131.
- Norgren, M. B.; Souza, R. M.; Kaslow, F.; Hammerschmidt, H.; Sharlin, S. A. (2004). Satisfação conjugal em casamentos de longa duração: uma construção possível. *Estudos de Psicologia*, 9(3), 575-584.
- Paiva, M. L. S. C.; Gomes, I. C. (2006). Casamentos duradouros: uso de entrevista e TAT na análise psicanalítica da relação conjugal. *Mudanças: Psicologia da Saúde*, 14(2), 151-159.
- Perlin, G.; Diniz, G. (2005). Casais que trabalham e são felizes: mito ou realidade? *Psicologia Clínica*, 17(2), 15-29.
- Poeschl, G. (2016). Relação de poder entre cônjuges e representações sociais das estratégias de influência no casal. *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais*, (111), 109-132.
- Scorsolini-Comin, F.; Alves-Silva, J. D.; Santos, M. A. (2018). Permanências e discontinuidades nas concepções contemporâneas de casamento na perspectiva de casais longevos. *Psicologia: Teoria e Pesquisa*, 34, e34423.
- Scott, J. W. (1986). Gênero: uma categoria útil para análise histórica. *The American Historical Review*, 91(5), 1053-1075.
- Serpa, M. G. (2010). Perspectivas sobre papéis de gênero masculino e feminino: um relato de experiência com mães de meninas vitimizadas. *Psicologia & Sociedade*, 22(1), 14-22.
- Silva, L. A.; Scorsolini-Comin, F.; Santos, M. A. (2017). Casamentos de longa duração: recursos pessoais como estratégias de manutenção do laço conjugal. *Psico-USF* 22(2), 323-335.

- Souzas, R.; Alvarenga, A. T. (2001). Da negociação às estratégias: relações conjugais e de gênero no discurso de mulheres de baixa renda em São Paulo. *Saúde & Sociedade, 10*(2), 15-34.
- Torres, A. (2004). Casamento: tempos, centramento, gerações e gênero. *Caderno CRH, 17*(42), 405-429.
- Wagner, A.; Predebon, J.; Mosmann, C. P.; Verza, F. (2005). Compartilhar tarefas? Papéis e funções de pai e mãe na família contemporânea. *Psicologia: Teoria e Pesquisa, 21*(2), 181-186.

Recebido em 04 de fevereiro de 2019

Aceito para publicação em 03 de abril de 2019