

A Psycho-Genealogical Study of Partner Selection

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Abstract

Introduction: *In the present article we want to explore the means of selecting erotic partners. In this case we are exploring the specific intergenerational and transgenerational means of choosing partners. Further on, we focus on the psychotherapeutic mechanisms of the transgenerational approach through which clients can be helped to recognize the specific role-sex identity needs in their erotic relationships.*

Objectives: *Our objective is to determine the effects of transgenerational transmission of masculine and feminine roles on relationships. Towards this end we have used the experiential grids of mythology and drama-genograms such as specific psycho genealogical approaches.*

Methods: *For our exploratory and trans-generational experiential intervention process we focused on two investigation strategies: the extensive strategy which included the investigation of an extensive number of 300 cases from among which we selected 120 participants, 65 women and 55 men. The ages of the participants ranged from 22 to 55. The intensive strategy included the evaluation and diagnosis of deep aspects linked to how we choose our partners and how the couple dynamics evolves, using drama-genograms as well as using the instruments of exploring family and community mythologies related to the way we choose our partners.*

Results: *The qualitative analysis indicates specific patterns of choosing one's life partner. These specific patterns indicate how much our ancestors are involved (unconsciously) – in a transgenerational way in our life. As a result of one of our psycho-genealogical interventions concerning the means of choosing one's life partner, we noticed the similarities with the way in which we live in our relationships and which are the unconscious mechanisms that help us make decisions in particular moments of our life.*

Conclusions: *The use of psycho-genealogical approaches during psychotherapeutic sessions makes it easier for students to assess their real needs concerning the way they choose and live with a life-long partner. Thus we help students realize in which ways their choices resemble or differ from those of their parents and grandparents.*

Keywords: *partner, psycho-genealogy, needs, unconscious mechanisms*

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I. Introduction

Choosing one's partner from a trans-generational (psycho-genealogical) perspective is a topic centred on the identification of profound couple dynamics aspects from a family unconscious viewpoint. Therefore, we are referring to the way in which couple relationships are understood from the perspective of the family dynamics which are passed on from generation to generation. The psycho-genealogical analysis of couple relationship dynamics involves all of its defining aspects, ranging from the intention behind choosing one's partner to the way in which the relationship evolves, as well as its periodic or definitive dissolution.

From the psycho-genealogical perspective, the analysis of couple dynamics starts with considering the individual as a result of his or hers family history, as the result of his or her interactions with the family members. These interactions represent their link with the social environment in which they dynamically project their intra-psychical interaction models. In the context of the trans-generational analysis, we are referring to the family ties which represent the psycho-genealogical bedrock activated depending on the proper involvement of its components: carrying, supporting, maintaining and most importantly containing (which elaborates and creates the sense of events) as shown by Gérard Decherf and René Kaës (2005).

The authors categorise family links as follows: couple links (by alliance), consanguinity, filiation, the mother's link with her family of origin (the child's links with the mother's family of origin), the genealogical (transgenerational links) and the family group's links to the outside world (Decherf, Kaës 2005 apud Godeanu, 2011, pg 57). The ideas of the aforementioned authors are an addition to the psychoanalyst Alberto Eiguer's theory, in its turn based on the work of Serge Tisseron. This theory describes "the existence of a filial axis of transgenerational identification, a precept referring to the fact that the links are based on an intra- and inter- subjective dimension; the result of an interaction between the mutually influencing behavioural and phantasmatic acts.

Thus, the inter-generational and the trans-generational psychic transmissions imply a continuous transmission process of various psychic content from one subject to the other, the receiver having to metabolise them and thus integrate them into his or her psychic representation system" (Eiguer, 2005c, pg. 26-31). During his research conducted in the 1980's, Eiguer differentiated between what he calls a "link" and a "relationship". A relationship is the model

offered to the child by his parents, through their inter-functionality, their interactions and what they represent. In 1984, the author stated that the link is stimulated by the fantasies provoked by one partner through the need of making the other partner feel appreciated, loved and acknowledged. Through its nature, the link involves:

- the mutual investing of partners;
- similar desires;
- projecting an internal object onto the other partner and moving the relationship representation out of the internal objects onto the link;
- the attention given to the partner's response according to the type of object specific to the unconscious link;
- mutual induction of behaviours, emotions and representations with the latter kind possibly responding to the produced induction;
- the resonance of internal conduits and fantasies of the partners, known as "*inter-fantasies*" (Eiguer, 1984b, pp.31-45 apud Godeanu, 2011, pg. 53-54).

Returning to the central idea of couple's relationship transmission, we will be referring to two methods of choosing a partner: namely the inter-generational and trans-generational approaches.

Choosing a partner from an inter-generational perspective is centred on identifying the aspects relevant to the entirety of conscious motivations (family and community mythologies pertaining to masculinity, femininity, sexuality, partnership and role-sex expectations (needs), included in the entire family emotional memory).

Choosing a partner from a trans-generational perspective refers to the unconscious mechanisms of passing on identity roles (identification, projection, incorporation, invisible loyalty) as well as the secrets of the family group's sexual relationships, in addition to the crypt and phantom phenomena.

Returning to the central idea of transmitting couple relationship, we are referring to two partner selection methods: the inter- and trans-generational perspectives. By analysing the inter- and trans-generational dimensions we can decipher the means of choosing one's partner, which has a profound archaeological-psycho-genealogical character.

II. Objectives

For our current study the general objective was to discover the means through which a partner is chosen from a psycho-genealogical (transgenerational) perspective.

Specific objectives aimed at:

1. The identification, exploration and evaluation of the means through which the partner is chosen;
2. Exploring and identifying family and community mythologies pertaining to masculinity, femininity, sexuality, marriage (erotic partnership);
3. Identifying the types of role-sex models transmitted in a transgenerational way;
4. Identifying the partner choosing patterns from a transgenerational perspective.

The hypotheses formulated in order to reach the objectives were:

1. We assume that the family and community mythologies influence the expectations, needs, desires and behaviours associated with choosing one's partner;
2. We assume that the family and community mythologies generate role-sex models which are reflected in the partnership dynamics.
3. We assume that the non-integrated partner needs of the predecessor influences the descendants partner's choices.
4. We assume that the partner choices are associated with transgenerational transmission patterns.

III. Method

Design and analysis

Material and Measures

Procedure

During our exploratory and transgenerational experiential intervention process we have utilised two investigative strategies:

1. **The extensive strategy**, which included the investigation of an extensive number of cases, namely 300 from among which we selected 120 subjects, 65 women and 55 men. The ages of the participants ranged from 22 to 50;
2. **The intensive strategy**, which included the evaluation and diagnosis of certain profound aspects of partner selection and couple dynamics, making use of drama-genograms as well as the explorative instrument of family and community mythologies regarding the choice of one's partner.

The subject's selection criteria

The evaluation and intervention process for all the subjects was based on the confidentiality conditions

mandatory during such research projects and the subject selection process was based on the participants' agreement to take part in counselling and psychotherapy modules concerning couple relationship dynamics.

We have divided the total number of 120 subjects (N=120) into three distinct categories:

- the first category consisted of subjects who declared having difficulties and various dysfunctions in their relationship;
 - the second category consisted of subjects who declared having difficulties in initiating and maintaining relationships (relationships ended and they engaged in other erotic relationships);
 - the third category consisted of subjects who affirmed to be satisfied with their couple relationship;
- within each category engaged in the research, we have also included the subjects who assisted the couples taking part in the psychotherapy process.

The research of the unconscious mechanisms involved in choosing a partner unfolded from 2008 until 2010 in the guise of an extensive empirical study. Subsequent to the qualitative analysis of the empirical research data, we have selected 120 subjects and based our research on the analysis of specific genograms of the Transgenerational Unifying Therapy.

The criteria of choosing the 120 subjects were as follows:

- the existence of specific myths about "femininity", "masculinity", "partnership/marriage", "sexuality" within the families of the assisted subjects;
- the presence of the "crypt" and "phantom" phenomena within the dynamic between the ancestors and he descendants with consequences on partner selection.

IV. Results

Subsequent to the qualitative analysis of the data gained through the research, we have gathered the following relevant aspects concerning the mythologies and role-specific expectancies:

- The family and community mythologies referring to masculinity, femininity, sexuality, partnership (table 1);
- Role-sex expectancies (needs) (table 2).

Family and community Mythologies	Examples
Myths (stories) referring to the means of internalising the feminine identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The women’s devotion towards their partners (husbands); • Child upbringing and education; • Women who have “catered to the needs” of many men; • The woman should not upset the man and should satisfy his needs and take care of him; • The woman should be a good housewife; • The woman should not have male friends; • Women who took too much care of their appearance were regarded with suspicion by their families (husbands); • The woman should “turn a blind eye if the man cheats on her”.
Myths (stories) referring to the means of internalising the masculine identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The man can have sexual relationships with several women; • The man’s tenseness or anger should be respected and the man should not be contradicted; • The man should not express his feelings, he should be cold and self-confident; • The man is supposed to bring money home, rather than care for the children’s education; • The man takes all decisions within a family; • The man has to take on the father role within the family.
Myths referring to the moment of selecting the partner and getting married	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The man is only ready to get married if he has had previous relationships with women; • The man must have life experience and must have gone through military training before marrying; • Women are taught that it is good to marry a rich man with a house and several other possessions; • Women should not marry a man who drinks, gambles or is unstable; • Women should not marry men who are too attractive because other women will crave them and they will cheat; • Even if a woman finds out she has been cheated on, they are advised by their mothers to “hold their mouths shut”, not to tell anyone because they will be laughed at and it is shameful; • Women are often told that: “You should ignore it if a man beats you because he is just angry”; • Women should have children because children will take care of them when the mothers get old; • Women are taught that if they have a child with a man he will surely never leave them; • Women are taught not to get pregnant outside marriage; • The partners need to know each other for a time, they should not marry immediately, but get familiar with each other firstly.
Myths referring to sexual manifestations within the couple relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The woman should always be available for sex if the man desires it; • Men do not want their women to have had a lot of previous partners or relationships.

Table 1

In order to underline the role expectancies, the needs, expectations and the desires of the research

participants, we will be underlining the following significant aspects:

Role-sex expectancies (needs, desires)	Examples
Needs, expectations, desires regarding the manifestation of the female partner role within couple relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To be appreciated, courted; • To be recognized in front of the others as a life partner; • Autonomy and mutual respect; • Security • Maturity, the partners should be mature, capable of taking on life hardships and challenges.
Needs, expectations, desires regarding the manifestation of the male partner role within couple relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To be taken care of; • Not having to offer extensive explanations regarding the way in which they feel or act in certain situations.
Needs, expectations, desires regarding the selection of the partner and the marriage.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To have a stable partner; • To be confirmed by the partner as the only important person in his or her life; • To have children and to raise them together through the involvement of the two partners in their education; • The preference for not having children outside the marriage; • The respect for each other's leisure time and for each other's career; • To mutually encourage professional development; • To jointly take family decisions; • To make the partner adhere to the rituals imparted by the families of origin; • To offer children examples of the mother and father roles; • Not to stay in a relationship with a violent partner; • To have a partner with a clearly defined professional status; • To have material wealth; • Not to choose a partner that might correspond to a family member not well regarded by the family or the community; • Not to repeat the dysfunctional partner relationship of the parents.
Sexual needs, expectations and desires	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To be an inventive sexual partner; • To have frequent sexual intercourse; • The women's need for their partners to be mature, and capable of confronting the difficulties and challenges in life; • To be a faithful sexual partner; • To connect emotionally during intercourse; • To have children born from mutual desire and not from the need of a sole partner; • The mutual need of having a sexual experience before marriage.

Table 2

The existence of certain family and community myths (mythologies) referring to

femininity, masculinity, marriage/erotic partnership, sexuality.

1. Family and community myths (mythologies) referring to the feminine role-sex identity:

Family and community myths (mythologies)	No. of cases	Frequency
the couple relationship faithfulness myth	100	80%
the myth of taking care of the man	118	98%
the myth of faithfulness towards a single man	120	100%
the myth of being a good housewife	120	100%

Table 3

2. Family and community myths (mythologies) referring to the male role-sex identity:

Family and community myths (mythologies)	No. of cases	Frequency
the life experience myth	120	100%
the job performance myth	115	95%
the myth of taking decisions within the couple	100	90%
the myth of taking on the head of the family role	120	100%
the fortune myth	110	95%
the myth stating that the man must be left to be autonomous and not be checked on by his wife	110	90%

Table 4

3. Family and community myths (mythologies) referring to the reasons, purposes, conditions, justification and the moment of choosing the partner and marriage:

Family and community myths (mythologies)	No. of cases	Frequency
1. the fortune myth	110	90%
2. the myth of choosing a partner who does not drink or is unstable	105	85%
3. the myth of maintaining the relationship even after the man has cheated	100	80%
4. the myth "You should have children because they will take care of you at old age"	120	100%
5. the myth "Women who have a child with a man will surely never be abandoned by him"	116	96%
6. the myth of not having children before marriage	120	100%
7. the myth of knowing the partner and spending a period of time with him/her before marriage	115	95%
8. the myth of marriage (concerning men) with a woman after having had several partners	120	100%
9. the couple violence myth	70	55%
10. the myth of tolerated extra-conjugal relationships of men	100	80%
11. the myth of marrying an older partner	90	75%
12. the myth of marrying a same-age partner	110	95%
13. the myth referring to the idea that children are associated with difficulties and unhappiness within the couple relationship	98	78%
14. the myth of not marrying a woman who has a child from a previous relationship	115	95%

Table 5

4. Family and community myths (mythologies) referring to sexuality:

Family and community myths (mythologies)	No. of cases	Frequency
the myth of the woman being sexually available anytime the man desires her	111	91%
the myth referring to men not wanting their women to have had several partners or relationships prior to their marriage	100	80%
the myth referring to the fact that the woman should be sexually active	112	92%

Table 6

Needs, expectations, desires role expectations within the couple relationship

Another analysed parameter was that of the existence of needs anchored in the four role-sex

identity dimensions of the couple relationship namely femininity, masculinity, partnership/marriage and sexuality.

1. Needs, expectations, desires concerning the way in which the female partner role can manifest in a couple:

Needs, expectations, desires	No. of cases	Frequency
To be appreciated and courted	65 women and 40 men	55% women, 30% men
To be recognized as a life partner	65 women and 30 men	55% women, 20% men
Autonomy and mutual respect	120	100%
Security	110	90%
Maturity, for the partners to be mature, to be able to face life hardships and challenges	95	75%
For the relationship to be defined by loyalty	110	90%
Housekeeping	110	90%

Table 7

2. Needs, expectations, desires concerning the manifestation of the male partner role within the couple:

Needs, expectations, desires	No. of cases	Frequency
The need for autonomy	120	100%
The need to prove one's performances	110	95%
The need to have life experience	120	100%
The need to be allowed to make decisions within the family	110	95%
The need to have a good financial status	120	100%

Table 8

3. Needs, expectations, desires concerning the choice of partner and marriage:

Family and community myths (mythologies)	No. of cases	Frequency
to have a stable partner	65 women, 30 men	55% women, 20% men
to be validated by one's partner as the most important person in his/her life	65 women, 45 men	55% women, 35% men
to have children and to raise them together through the mutual involvement of the partners in the child's education	65 women, 35 men	55% women, 25% men
the preference of not having children outside the marriage	120	100%
respect for each other's spare time and dedication to their jobs	120	100%
to be engaged in the professional development of both partners	110	90%

to make joint decisions within the family	97	77%
to make the partner adhere to the rituals inherited from the family of origin	100	80%
to offer the children examples of the mother and father roles	120	100%
not to remain in a relationship with an abusive partner	55 women	45%
to have a partner with a clearly defined professional partnership	120	100%
to have material wealth	120	100%
not to choose a partner corresponding to an ill-perceived member of the family	100	80%
the need to have a same age partner	110	90%
not to repeat the dysfunctional couple relationship of the parents	120	100%
the need to have a partner older than oneself	90	85%
the need to have a child in order to maintain the couple	90	85%
the need to have a stable relationship before marriage	120	100%
the need to have children in order to be supported at older age	120	100%

Table 9

4. Needs, expectations, desires concerning sexuality:

Needs, expectations, desires concerning sexuality	No. of cases	Frequency
to be an inventive sexual partner	100	90%
to have frequent sexual relationships	50 women, 55 men	40% women, 45% men
the women's need for their partner to be mature and have sexual experience	120	100%
to be a loyal sexual partner	65 women, 40 men	55% women, 30% men
to communicate emotionally during intercourse	65 women, 60 men	55% women, 50%
to have children born from mutual desire and not from only one partner's needs	120	100%
the mutual need for the partners to have had sexual experiences previous to the marriage	120	100%

Table 10

Identifying the aspects pertaining to the needs, expectations and desires, manifested or dormant is an existential diagnosis means of identifying couple psychodynamics and also the couple's transformative

dynamics throughout the evolution of the relationship.

From a transgenerational approach, the data analysis allowed the identification of relevant aspects such as:

The existence of secrets concerning certain members of the family	Examples
The persistence of certain secrets concerning erotic-emotional relationships	Secrets regarding the existence of erotic affairs; Secrets regarding the end of certain relationships without the knowledge of the family.
Transgenerational patterns	Examples
1. The presence of a partner with the same type of behaviour structured as a role spanning	This type of pattern refers to the fact that a woman or a man could choose a partner with a behaviour similar to that of an ancestor. What can be the motivation behind such a choice? Choosing a partner similar to one of our

three generations	ancestors has a strong link with interference need. The needs of a woman can interfere with the needs of a grandmother or of her mother, maybe even with those of a great grandmother. Family loyalty and involvement in family myths and rituals can favour the interference need and the identification with one's same-sex parent.
2. Choosing a partner based on the Family Umbrella principle spanning three generations.	Taking into account aspects pertaining to the Family Umbrella, the standard-schema for such partner choices is as follows: During the first generation (grandparents), "A" chooses the partner "X". During the second generation (parents), "B" chooses a partner polarized to partner "X" chosen during the first generation, "Y". During the third generation, the client, "C" counter-identifies with the father "B", thus engaging in a counter-scenario and chooses a partner with similar traits as partner "X", chosen by "A".
3. The existence of role-sex inversion spanning three generations. a) one of the partners has the same structured behavioural role over the course of three generations; b) choosing one's partner based on the Family Umbrella principle over the course of three generations; c) the occurrence of the role-sex inversion over the course of three generations.	The presence of these traits confirms the reiteration of certain types of partner selection processes and difficulties in assuming the role-sex identity with implications concerning the needs and role expectancies within the couple relationship. The role-sex inversion refers to the lack of responsibility taken for the role-sex identity and to the lacking manifestation of masculinity and femininity. The most frequent cases in clinical environments are those of women who take on male responsibilities. The effects of such patterns are relationship difficulties, trouble in finding a partner and taking on the role-sex identity. The last two patterns have the same effect as in the case of previous patterns, difficulties in taking on the role-sex identity, the fear of abandonment associated with the partnership. The existence of relationship types presented in the previous examples confirms the presence in the expanded family of certain trap-scenarios centred on choosing a partner.
4. The occurrence of separation spanning three generations (divorce, death).	Separations are the effect of miss adaptation patterns of the couple relationship.
5. The occurrence of multiple erotic relationships.	Multiple erotic relationships stem from family secrets.

Table 11

The frequency analysis concerning the means of the transmission of partner selection from a transgenerational perspective:

Indicators concerning the transmission of transgenerational patterns of partner selection.	No. of Genograms	Frequency
1. The presence of a partner with the same type of behavioural structure as the ones spanning three previous generations.	80	66,6%
2. Choosing a partner based on the Family Umbrella principle spanning three generations.		
The reference-schema for such partner choices is the following:		
• During the first generation (grandparents), "A" chooses the partner "X".	120	100%
• During the second generation (parents), "B" chooses a partner polarized to partner "X" chosen during the first generation, "Y".	110	91,6%

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During the third generation, the client, “C” counter-identifies with the father “B”, thus engaging in a counter-scenario and chooses a partner with similar traits as partner “X”, chosen by “A”. 	116	96,6%
3. The presence of role-sex inversion spanning three generations. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the presence of a partner with the same type of behavioural structure as the ones spanning three previous generations; • choosing a partner based on the Family Umbrella principle spanning three generations; • the presence of role-sex inversion spanning three generations; 	110	96,6%
	100	83,3%
	95	79,1%
4. The existence of separations such as divorce or death and the existence of multiple erotic relationships: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) the number of separations spanning three generations (divorce, death); b) the existence of multiple erotic relationships; c) the existence of relationships ended in divorce; 	110	96,6%
	57	47,5%
	100	83,3%
5. The persistence of secrets concerning emotional-erotic relationships within the families of origin of the partners <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secrets concerning the existence of erotic affairs; • Secrets concerning the end of relationships without the knowledge of the family of origin. 	28	20,8%
	12	10%

Table 12

Thus, from the point of view of the transgenerational transmission taking place after the activation of the family shadow spanning three generations, we can see how partner relationships are polarised around transgenerational scenarios based on mechanisms of identification and counter-identification.

V. Conclusions

Identifying the psycho-genealogical mechanisms concerning partner selection provides us with relevant information on the way in which a couple or a family is functioning. Apart from our conscious motivations, there is a series of unconscious reasons which guides our choices and our entire couple dynamics. By pinpointing the identifications or counter-identifications of our ancestors, we can gain the knowledge of the aspects inherited from them through the function of psychic life content transmission. Whether we are witnessing dysfunctional or a lack of communication or the existence of some dysfunctions at a profound interactional level which generate marital crises and confusing-conflicting situations, all of these aspects are reference points in the process of psychologically “modifying” the couple’s partners’ interaction.

The psycho-genealogical intervention in the case of couple relationships implies the establishment of certain reference points concerning the immediate therapeutic objectives, which are linked to a specific

conflict or a manifested crisis. Furthermore, establishing long term objectives would ultimately regrant significance to the family transgenerational history of the two partners, through the reconstruction of their current relationship. These two objectives can be identified at the inter- and trans-generational analysis levels of couple functioning.

According to our previous statements, rebuilding transgenerational emotional pieces of memory with the aid of drama-genograms brings secrets into light. These secrets involve the emotional-erotic relationships unconfirmed and unaccepted by members of the family in the virtue of certain family myths and rituals, therefore offering the clients the possibility to assume their role-sex identity through the manifestation of masculinity or femininity aspects anchored in their personal needs and those of their life partners.

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