

MOTIVATIONS FOR THE MAINTENANCE OF MARRIAGE¹

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ABSTRACT. Increasingly, long-term marriages, or in other words, unions that last for more than 30 years, set a major source to investigate marital dynamics and their transformations over time. This study aimed to understand the main reasons or explanations for the maintenance of marriage in long-term relationships. With each of the 25 married couples for more than 30 years, three interviews were conducted, two individual interviews and one with the dyad, totaling 75 in depth-interviews, analyzed from the scientific literature in the area of conjugality. Motivations are structured either on individual aspects, either on elements shared by the couple, or either on components from the marriage itself, remarkably revealing the affectivity and the inherited idea of the indissolubility of marital bond as essential explanations for the maintenance of the relationship. Thus, the reasons seem to be driven by affective experiences, such as one's own experiences, ancestors and close social networks, including religion, which reaffirm marriage in its traditional and indissoluble character.

Keywords: Marital relations; marriage; couple dynamics.

MOTIVAÇÕES PARA A MANUTENÇÃO DO CASAMENTO

RESUMO. Os casamentos longevosconstituem fonte importante para se investigar a dinâmica conjugal e suas transformações ao longo do tempo. Este estudo objetivou compreender as principais motivações ou explicações para a manutenção do casamento em uniões de longa duração. Com cada um dos 25 casais unidos há mais de 30 anos foram realizadas três entrevistas, sendo duas individuais e uma com a díade, totalizando 75 entrevistas em profundidade, analisadas a partir da literatura científica na área da conjugalidade. As motivações se estruturam ora acerca de aspectos individuais, ora acerca de elementos compartilhados pelo par, ora acerca de componentes procedentes do próprio casamento, revelando notadamente a afetividade e a ideia herdada de indissolubilidade do laço conjugal como explicações essenciais à manutenção do relacionamento. Assim, as motivações parecem ser direcionadas pelas experiências afetivas, como as vivências próprias, dos

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antepassados e das redes sociais próximas, incluindo a religião, que reafirmam o casamento em seu caráter tradicional e indissolúvel.

Palavras-chave: Relações conjugais; casamento; dinâmica de casal.

LAS MOTIVACIONES PARA EL MANTENIMIENTO DE LA BODA

RESUMEN. Cada vez más los matrimonios duraderos, esto es, los que tienen más de treinta años, son amplia fuente para investigar la dinámica de pareja y sus cambios en el tiempo. En este estudio se tuvo como objetivo comprender las principales motivaciones o explicaciones para el mantenimiento de la boda en los matrimonios de larga duración. Con cada una de las 25 parejas reunidas desde hace más de 30 años se realizaron tres entrevistas, siendo dos individuales y una con la pareja, totalizando 75 entrevistas en profundidad, analizadas a partir de la literatura científica en el área de la vida conyugal. Las motivaciones están estructuradas o en aspectos individuales, o de elementos compartidos por la pareja, o acerca de los componentes propios de la boda, sobre todo revelando el afecto y la idea heredada de la indisolubilidad del vínculo matrimonial como explicaciones esenciales para mantener la relación. Por lo tanto, las motivaciones parecen estar dirigidas por las experiencias afectivas, como sus propias experiencias, las experiencias de los antepasados y las experiencias de las redes sociales cercanas, incluyendo la religión, que reafirman el matrimonio en su carácter tradicional e indisoluble.

Palabras clave: Relaciones conyugales; matrimonio; dinámica de pareja.

Introduction

Speaking of conjugality is to deal with a complex and dynamic niche of human relations, and therefore difficult to generalize and conceptualize. The marital relationship, by itself, is multifaceted by the clash of the search for space to develop at the same time that the partner develops. In the psychoanalytic perspective, individual identities and marital identity make up the 'one and one are three' (Féres-Carneiro & Diniz Neto, 2010), articulating a dynamic scenario permeated by conflicts.

It is clear that the configuration of this scenario is based on how each spouse will absorb the adverse or favorable circumstances of life and life together, day-to-day. This perception derives from the abilities that the couple has to deal with them, appropriately or not (Fonseca & Duarte, 2014), meaning that more effective strategies relate to more favorable perceptions of the relationship itself, and vice versa, and therefore bringing marital quality closer to individual well-being and longevity, and health in more global terms (Féres-Carneiro & Diniz Neto, 2010; Margelisch, Schneewind, Violette, & Perrig-Chiello, 2015). Following the same reasoning, it is worth emphasizing that this correspondence can trigger feedbacks on the marital functioning itself, since attitudes and postures that tend to maintain the conjugal balance are based on the marital bond as a source of well-being. Thus, dyadic

coping contributes to the consolidation of marital satisfaction (Landis, Peter-Wright, Martin, & Bodenmann, 2013), as the source of positive analyses of efforts of the partner.

Marital satisfaction is understood as a complex network of resources and perceptions about the experience of two. Although some studies have been able to identify some elements that construct it, it is still pointed out as multifactorial (Féres-Carneiro & Diniz Neto, 2010; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Norgren, Souza, Kaslow, Hammerschmidt, & Sharlin, 2004; Rizzon, Mossman, & Wagner, 2013; Wagner & Falcke, 2001). The way in which the identities of the spouses continually compose the notion of conjugality is supported by signs that, over the years, the emotional experiences of the spouses orient less destructive and more constructive attitudes, and can consolidate a motivation for the maintenance of the marriage (Carstensen, Gottman, & Levenson, 1995). Still, it is necessary to consider that marriage maintenance cannot always be explained or attributed exclusively to conjugal satisfaction, since couples considered unhappy can remain united, for example, by reasons such as religiosity, parenthood, commitment to the family, among other variables (Alves-Silva, Scorsolini-Comin, & Santos, 2017; Grizólio, Scorsolini-Comin, & Santos, 2015).

Considering the multiple variables possibly involved in this phenomenon, there is an increasing need to understand how marriages have been sustained, especially when the evaluation of satisfaction may be in the form of motivations or explanations for the maintenance of marriage. At a time when human spaces are evidently marked by the fugacity and solubility of bonds (Bauman, 2004), marriage no longer occupies an essential place in the life project of individuals; its accomplishment is conceived as an evolutionary event (Zordan & Wagner, 2009). Remaining in the perspective of this process of individualization is indispensable to the perception of how marital relations are being sketched, when it is thought that, in the present time, love and other affections coming from a relationship with other person can validate the uniqueness of the 'I' and recognize the partners as authentic and special (Singly, 2005), confirming the idea of a search for a link that meets the satisfaction demands of each one (Carvalho & Paiva, 2010).

This 'emancipation ideology' instils young people, increasingly bombarded with placements about increasing numbers of divorces and financial instability, to question on own life planning, putting them at a deadlock that seems to bring about the dissolution of individual freedom when choosing to carry out a life project for two (Borges, Magalhães, & Féres-Carneiro, 2014). All these issues result in the adoption of positions that lead them to seek more immediate results, reflecting a more uncompromising lifestyle that fits perfectly with the sense of constant adaptation to the instabilities of a world without guarantees of the future (Gallagher, Féres-Carneiro, & Henriques, 2013). The inheritance of these intense social, cultural, and human changes is a parallel and paradoxical conjuncture between the old and the new, increasingly deprived of regal and unique models of social representation.

In this context, it is urgent to discuss how stable marriages and unions have been designed in contemporary times (Scorsolini-Comin & Santos, 2012), seeking the development of more contextualized and grounded clinical theories and practices (Féres-Carneiro & Diniz Neto, 2010). The aim of this study was to explore the dynamics of marriage in couples who have been married for over 30 years, that is, in long-term marriages, which have undergone various challenges and experiences throughout the life cycle and the family life cycle (Alves-Silva et al., 2017; Norgren et al., 2004; O'Leary, Acevedo, Aron, Huddy, & Mashek, 2012; Petrican, Moscovitch, & Grady, 2014; Rosowsky, King, Coolidge, Rhoades, & Segal, 2012), constituting a primordial source to broaden the field of understanding of interactional and conjugality dynamics. Alves-Silva, Scorsolini-Comin and Santos (2016) discuss in their systematic review of the scientific literature on conjugality that, despite data

from the Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística [IBGE] (2013), recognize the increase in the number of marriages and the number of divorces in recent years on the national scene, studies have shown keen interest in investigating the reasons involved in divorce decision or understanding marital dynamics, without directing the focus to the field of long-term relationships.

The long time spent together can expose how much the partners engender unique ways to maintain the relationship by revealing the behaviors of perception and problem solving that best fit the reality of each spouse. These modes reveal themselves as strategies, expressing unique styles of administering conjugality while living with the other, also interfering with the own development (Garcia & Tassara, 2003). Thus, based on these considerations, the goal of this study was to understand the main motivations or explanations for the maintenance of marriage in long-term unions.

Method

Type of study

This is a study based on a cross-sectional qualitative research approach, based on the scientific literature on conjugality. This study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the institution of origin of the authors (Process 2011/1936).

Participants

Participated in this study 25 heterosexual couples, consensually united (civil or stable union) for at least 30 years, without having separated and without being in the process of marital separation and with at least one child. All couples come from cities in the interior of the states of Minas Gerais and São Paulo, and the characterization of the participants is found in the Results and Discussion section.

Instruments

The following instruments were used: (a) oral history of life, to allow an expression of memory that values the singular way of constructing the stories and experiences of each individual (Meihy, 2006); (b) semi-structured interview with each spouse and (c) semi-structured interview with the couple. This study had its origin in a response to a broader question about the transformations of conjugality over time in these conjugal arrangements, in which it was possible to note the important role of motivations in the maintenance of marriage. The construction of the forms, designed by the authors to guide the interviews, aimed to collect the basic information, such as age, religion, schooling and number of children, as well as to broaden the pertinent aspects of the marital delineation over time, from single life to married life, building the intimacy of the couple and the strategies used by the dyad to handle the difficulties and challenges arising from life together. The scripts of these forms presented topics that were repeated both in the individual interview and in the interview with the couple, in order to verify if the presence or absence of the partner would promote variation in the answers.

Procedure

Data collection. Potential participants were located from the researchers' social network contacts and later indicated through the procedure known as snowball. The interviews began after the signing of the Informed Consent Term and were performed once with each couple. Initially each spouse was interviewed separately, and then the interview was conducted with both, resulting in a total of three interviews per couple, totaling 75 interviews. All interviews were transcribed in full and literally for the composition of the corpus of this study.

Data analysis. Transcripts were subjected to content analysis using the method described by Bardin (2010). This is a set of techniques of analysis of communications, which consists of a range of resources that come together for the same purpose: to evaluate heuristically and inferentially the interdict of human communicability. In this case, it concerns an analytical description of meanings, which is the treatment of the information contained in the speeches, in a thematic way. The detailed reading of the participants' reports allowed the highlighting of the motivations or explanations mentioned as important for the maintenance of the marriage. Then they were grouped into categories according to their similarities and thematic convergences. These categories were then quantified in terms of their frequencies, expressed by the mentions in the interviews, both in the individual and in the couple interviews. After this quantification, the four categories considered more meaningful, that is, which presented a higher frequency of mentions, were analyzed in depth, from the studies in the field of conjugality, from the speeches of the whole corpus.

Results and Discussion

The sample profile revealed that the couples were married for 39.48 years on average (SD = 6.76), with a mean age of 64.06 years (SD = 13.26) and with 3.48 children (SD = 1.58), with all couples having at least one child. The minimum age of participants was 51 and the maximum was 82 years, and the shortest union time observed was 32 years and the longest, 53 years. Fifteen wives were housewives (60%), three retirees (12%), two saleswomen (8%), two teachers (8%), one nursing technician (4%), one washerwoman (4%) and one maid (4%). In relation to the husbands, three were drivers (12%), three bricklayers (12%), three retirees (12%), two traders (8%), two electricians (8%) and other occupations mentioned were machine operators, farmer, locksmith, civil servant, administrator, self-employed, gardener, farmer, carpenter, artisan, agronomist and consultant, each with a record.

Regarding religiosity, 18 wives consider themselves Catholics (72%); four evangelicals (16%), two spiritists (8%) and one without religion (4%). Also, 18 husbands consider themselves Catholics (72%), three without religion (12%), two evangelicals (8%) and two spiritists (8%). Only six couples presented a disagreement between the religion of the spouses: in three of these couples both spouses expressed distinct religions, while in the other three, spouses did not define themselves as belonging to a religion. As for educational level, the majority of wives have incomplete elementary education (n = 11; 44%), followed by the complete higher education (n = 6; 24%). The majority of the spouses had incomplete elementary education (n = 15; 60%), followed by the complete higher education (n = 4; 16%).

The content analysis revealed four categories of motivations/explanations used to maintain the relationship, which were grouped in terms of frequency of occurrence (mention) in the interviewees' reports: 1) affectivity (f = 148); 2) marriage as a traditional institution (f = 113); 3) need for adaptation (f = 42); 4) impossibility of conceiving the conjugal separation (f = 28). These categories will be explored in more detail below.

Category 1: affectivity

Affectivity, as an existential expression of what was intimately experienced and signified, was highlighted in 148 mentions throughout the interviews, 55 of them by the wives (37.16%), 52 by the husbands (35.14%) and 41 by the couple (27.70%), and concerns elements such as caring, respect, understanding, renunciation, acceptance, tolerance, dialogue, sincerity, fidelity, forgiveness, companionship, absence of violence or emotional support, or mentions that bring an optimistic view of the experience of living together.

When questioned about the underpinnings of life together, couples have mostly suggested that the construction of intimacy and complicity between partners, when permeated with reciprocal positive affection, fruits of mutual dedication, ends up converging both on individual as to the marital well-being. This correspondence is based on an intrinsic belief and acquired with the very experience that marriage and the partner are sources of affection, and the following excerpt demonstrates this line of thought:

Oh, I think that's really respect, right? It is this affection, that love that we have for each other. And above all respect, right? I think that's it ... Complicity, it's a thing of many years, right? That thing you look at, and it's only you lay eyes on and you already know if he's in trouble, feeling a pain, right? If he's upset, do you understand? All this, you lay eyes on and you know, right? 'What's it? What happened?' (Wife 9).

The sense of belonging validates the relationship as a healthy space for the growth of both spouses if they share similar affections and mobilize similar attitudes for coping with the discomforts. The renunciation, also pointed out in some cases, involves getting acquainted with oneself and the other, imbuing the movement of commitment to please the predilections of the couple in abstention, momentary or not, of their own inclinations. This is genuine when one thinks that renunciation is advised by the notion that the partner will recognize the gesture and thus feel legitimated in the relationship, mobilizing it to the continuity of attachment and the affections present therein (Carvalho & Paiva, 2010; Singly, 2005).

This shared affective clarity, the fruit of the years of closeness, also sensitizes a broader and more precise knowledge about the partner's affective state, which dispenses with verbalizations and demonstrates through attitudes and behaviors what would otherwise go unnoticed in the eyes of the partner. This thought is supported by the study of Costa and Mosmann (2015), which identified attention to the emotional sphere, both of itself and of the partner, as a component of conflict prevention strategies in couples aged between 20 and 32 years.

What seems clear is that affectivity is exalted from the contrast with the various difficulties with which they come in contact, suggesting that their emergence occurs most notably in disharmonious contexts that denote their absence or enhance their contributions. Affective and emotional stability and security occupy a prominent place in this dimension, as shown below:

What motivates me is because I like his company, understand? I like to live with him, our partnership, the way we live ... that's what I told you, it's a company for everything, to vent, to tell, to hold ... security 'you know', that you have to be with someone on your side ... that's what motivates me to continue! (Wife 23).

A safer relationship tends to evoke their potential, unique to each couple, in these moments of helplessness and impasse, emphasizing the importance of affection as a motivation to persist. This more favorable perception of the quality of the relationship is also directly related to more efficient abilities to deal with the problems, confirming what Fonseca and Duarte (2014) point out. Such skills involve a sharper perception of self and the other as well as greater assertiveness in communication.

However, moments of disharmony and turbulence are expected in any relation, and several elements may be listed as promoters of rebalancing or as maintainers or complicators of imbalance. From this angle, feeling companionship and feeling secure, while unfolding affectivity, imply not only adherence to maintenance strategies but also a more positive perception of the quality of the relationship, and vice versa (Féres-Carneiro & Diniz Neto, 2010; Landis et al., 2013; Margelisch et al., 2015). Most couples also indicated the presence and importance of their children as essential for sustaining the conjugal bond and for fortifying the dyad while family as a locus of affection and perseverance, placing parenthood as a promoter of dyadic rebalancing, which was also pointed out by Grizólio et al. (2015). The statement made by Husband 3, when asked about the main sources of help in times of crisis in marriage, helps to illustrate this idea: "It was the children, because then you start to think: we will separate ... What is going to happen with the children?! Then, I think the major strength comes from there" (Husband 3).

From this point on, it is observed that parenting does not necessarily emerge as a 'source of help', but as an element that justifies the life together not only in terms of the attribution of meaning to the family, but the presupposition of the need for parents married so that their children can develop properly. From this perspective, parenting in these couples also seems to justify marriage and its consequent maintenance over time. It has to be considered that having children was one of the inclusion criteria of the participants, which may also have contributed to the assumption of this reason. The fact that the children of these couples are already adults and that the majority does not reside with the parents can be problematized in this sample, since avoidance of divorce no longer occurs because the children are small and depend on the parents, but in function of a consolidated family structure around the conjugal union of the parental couple.

The considerations of affectivity in this category seem to meet Carstensen et al., (1995), if we think that positive affections tend to excel in individuals considered to be emotionally healthy, that is, with a greater expression of emotions considered adaptive as joy, curiosity, hope and optimism. The corollary is reflected in a lifestyle with less destructive and more constructive attitudes that aim at the development and maturation of the partner and collaborate with the excellence of the quality of the relationship, consubstantiating affectivity as a reason for the maintenance of marriage.

Thus, the affection and the more favorable perception of the relationship seem to stand out in the history of each dyad, built over the years in the midst of so many obstacles, conflicts, and strife, suggesting that its power lies precisely in the ability to bring to the surface all this affective universe, such as perseverance, dedication, affection and respect. This universe is modulated by the awareness that each partner expresses from the mutual investment in the project of life together, confirming the study of Costa and Mosmann (2015), also carried out with long-lived couples.

Category 2: marriage as a traditional institution

This category includes the references to the marriage considered in its indissoluble and eternal character, being focused in 113 mentions throughout the interviews, being 43 of them by the wives (38,05%), 46 by the husbands (40,71%), and 24 by the couple (21.24%). The insinuation of this traditional connotation emerges throughout the discourses, especially when couples touch on the essence of their own experiences, that is, on those events that provided the basis for the construction of their own individualities. The answer of the couple 2 to the questioning of the structure of the own marriage reveals this line of reasoning:

Wife: Ah ... That's right, it's the raising, right?

Husband: I think it's not just the raising; is the raising and coexistence.

Wife: It's ... The raising, I think ...

Husband: It has to have the coexistence too.

Wife: Because we saw our parents, what it was like was their lives, so I think we had the obligation to ... imitate them, understand? Because it was the way we were raised. But not today! It's different today, you know? It is no use for me to pass on ... To pass on to my children everything I have gone through that they will not follow, today it is no use. And I don't ... I have already followed my mother's example, so I think it is ... it's the way (Couple 2).

The past and the future are basis of the model of union that the couples preserve in the present, and that they have been preserving since its beginning. Tradition, in its literal sense, is a grandeur widely espoused by the ancestors of couples, and the transmission of this inheritance to future generations is expected to be of equal magnitude. Growing up and maturing in a family with axes and moral values considered traditional by today's individualizing culture had an intense repercussion on the solidification of the beliefs of these couples, who, as it has brought, still use these aspects as motivation to remain together. In addition, the coexistence is also pointed as a factor of crystallization of the permanence in marriage, as accentuated by the couple 16:

Husband: Ah, I think it's like that: in terms of what I face, what I have today to fight, what counts is us, as they say, for the daily life and custom, that we get accustomed, then I think that for us, to separate, it's not bad only for one, it's bad for both, you know? And what I find difficult, as they say ... Ah, that's how 'Let's separate', the difficult thing is to get accustomed. To separate is from one hour to another, now to get used is that it is ... (Couple 16).

The coexistence of two brings, then, the daily life itself as an uncontested source of confirmation and ratification of these beliefs, absorbed and fortified throughout the years of development and of contact with examples of other lasting unions, confirming the studies of more favorable perceptions of the matrimonial bond (Féres-Carneiro & Diniz Neto, 2010; Landis et al., 2013; Margelisch et al., 2015). Tradition here operates in the sense of not opening another possibility beyond the maintenance of marriage, even though divorce is a phenomenon known to couples. The everyday can also be understood as something that imprisons couples in terms of the expression of other relational possibilities. The question of coexistence and having 'become accustomed' to life together can provide clues that the long-lived marriage may not be exactly a pleasant and satisfying thing but a field of emotional security and a reaffirmation of transmitted traditional values through generations. The place of the traditional, of what does not change and of what is maintained despite the

transformations of the life cycle seems to be constantly recovered by some couples. The following reports demonstrate how coexistence with family models also has effects in determining gender roles within marriage:

That's what I tell you. I was raised to be resigned, right? So, I swallow a lot of insults. I swallow to not give trouble, so I swallow insults. So, not always, but I swallow (Wife 22).

Yes, because I told you, married life is not easy, it is mutual, so there are moments that sometimes you want to give up! But then you say, 'No, I am a man! I made the commitment and I will honor that commitment!' [...] (Husband 8).

The idea seems to be that a verticalization has been spread between the roles and functions that can be delineated for each part of the couple: men engage in values considered virile and never give up, and the woman insists with resignation and renunciation. This renunciation devoid of corresponding affective prisms, as discussed earlier, being only the envelope of female submission to the defense of honor by the male counterpart. It is possible to affirm that the presence and the persistence of this verticalization raised the minds of the generations after the questioning of the matrimonial delineation and the relation with the positioning of social roles. The struggle for gender equality (Araújo, 2005), which has increased in recent decades, has also contributed to the exaltation of the feeling of freedom, marked by the escape from what is traditional, and by the primacy of the development of one's own individuality, moving away from the traditional conception of marriage of the life plans of individuals who build their relationships these days.

The clash of ideals is so great that the unanimous opinion of couples, when asked about the perception of marriage today, was that today the conjugal compositions are no longer as they were in their time. This thought finds support in Zordan, Falcke and Wagner (2009), who identified a divergence of ideals, between the generations, and of understandings of what is or must be the marriage: the older generation sees the marriage as an institution, the product of a religious or civil contract, while the younger generation sees it as a product of the relationship between the companions, strictly affective and subjective. Despite the recognition of these differences, the couples interviewed still remain in line with the more traditional assumptions, reinforcing gender stereotypes in their relationships.

Another difference pointed out by the partners is that, in moments of intense conflict, the confrontation of differences is silenced from the ears of the social networks of support of the couple and seeks within the relationship itself the resolution. In contrast, long-term couples point out that the spouses do not delimit the extent of their own struggles and end up involving friends, family, and institutions, such as the Church, at the heart of this clash. The sources of examples of long-lived couples, also in unanimity, seem to be the image of the family of origin and religiosity:

[...] I think, well, if God gave that cross to you, you have to carry it to the end, since you have assumed that, that responsibility, as they say ... That mission. You have to carry (Wife 6).

The Christian faith, predominantly practiced by the couples of the sample, allows the association of its fundamental principles in the search for insights that support mechanisms of maintenance of marriage, in addition to that Christian ethics supposes the commitment to the indissolubility, as also indicated by Norgren et al. (2004) with couples married for more

than 20 years in the Brazilian context. The historical connection that Catholicism has with marriage is intimate and almost inseparable, and the understanding of marriage as an affective manifestation, detached from Catholic morals, is a movement that begins in modernity, driven by the enhancement of the individualizing culture (Ariès 1987). All these discussed points ensure that the traditional consideration of the idea of marriage functions for long-lived couples as a source and as a sustaining element of the motivation to persist in the bond, especially when it is thought that they do not share the same conceptions of contemporary society.

It must be considered that the majority of the sample is composed of people who profess the Christian faith, in which marriage emerges as a sacrament, that is, it is the divinization of the conjugal space. In expressing this religious belonging, they also bring elements that stitch together the way marriage will be experienced, which may contribute to explain the search for religious support in times of crisis in marriage or even assurance of the marital structure as a sacrament that, despite legally undone, cannot be due to the beliefs that guided its constitution. It is observed, therefore, that at the same time that tradition, coexistence and religiosity are linked to the maintenance of marriage, they do not show themselves as elements that add quality to the relationship, but reinforce a kind of commitment such as indissolubility, which will be resumed in Category 4.

Category 3: need for adaptation

The need for adaptation was mentioned 42 times throughout the interviews, with 16 wives (38.10%), 13 husbands (30.95%) and 13 couples (30.95%), addressing the ability to be flexible in the accommodation of individualities in conjugality (Féres-Carneiro & Diniz Neto, 2010). The common purpose of engaging in new behaviors and taking on new attitudes is the return to union equilibrium, since the singularities of each spouse can produce oscillations in the union soil.

Ah, it was difficult ... The beginning of marriage is not easy. You're free, at ease, and then you get married, you're stuck there in that person, until you give opinion ... It's hard! And any little thing you do not have tolerance; then you're getting older, you see it's not like that, right? (Wife 11).

This passage evokes a realization about the perception of the beginning of the nuptial coexistence, and symbolizes the notion that the relationship grows concomitantly to the assimilated learning of the impasses and the hardships that the oscillations of the accommodation of the particularities of each one engenders in the affective territory of the marriage. The principle of marriage coexistence is marked by the appropriation of the spouses of living together to their own expectations and preconceptions elaborated in moments prior to the relationship, stating the need for adaptation as an essence of the dyadic relationship.

At the same time the passage also expresses with excellence another idea closely linked to the preservation of the alliance: personal maturation. Carstensen et al., (1995) indicated that more positive emotional experiences lead to less destructive and more constructive coping attitudes. Personal and individual maturation tends to bring about healthier growth experiences, particularly when dialogue, understanding and respect, traits that are most emphasized in emotionally mature individuals, are consonant with more positive affective apprehensions of the relationship. This maturation also concerns the

predisposition to renounce and abdicate habits or positions, leaving the comfort zone towards the growth of the relationship, as explained by the following excerpt:

Any moment of anger, of something, if you talk, you bow your head and let it go. Then you go and say, 'Oh boy, that was not right, or I was wrong, let's fix this thing, let's get out of it, right?' It's the secret of marriage, at least for me (Husband 17).

Once again, understanding, flexibility and dialogue permeate maturity and humility, and together these elements seem to prelude a change of scenery. Such a change in scenarios may be stimulated by the observations that the spouse establishes from its pattern of behavior or by the records and manifestations of its pair, as elucidated in the following quotations:

Her head has changed me a lot that, as they say, when we are an age, we want to lead life as it was, that is, take a drink, go out, walk, then it was her. I looked at her, so I thought that I could not do that, that in the end separates the two of us and the children, right, so I said that we both have to win this fight and let's go, right (Husband 17).

Wife: He was very difficult ... he liked to drink, you know? I thought that was a bad thing ... He went out to work on Saturday, I did not know if he worked or not. When I saw him he was dizzy, I thought that was horrible!!

Husband: There were times that it was not good, sometimes it was beer [laughs].

Wife: Then I got nervous. Every now and then he was ... I never said anything, you know? After he got it right, I would say, 'Oh, you did it, this, this, this, this, this and that', 'Wow! Did I tell you this?', 'Yes, you did'. There, now, thank God, he got himself. But also, if he did not, right? I was going to throw him away ... (Couple 10).

The perception of the effort and dedication invested in the relationship takes place in parallel with the explicit declaration of assuming oneself imperfect, demonstrating a disposition in the assimilation of notes for personal improvement. Perception of self also enables the perception of the other as an individual able to grow, collaborating to immerse oneself in a terrain of reciprocity and presence that sustains the decision to continue together. This analysis, however, cannot disregard the fact that conflict management, in the couples interviewed, started from aspects narrated as renunciation, especially on the part of the wife. The woman, being flexible and sometimes submissive, contributed to the fact that some spouses could, over time, modify behaviors considered negative by the wives, which could lead to divorce. Thus, the willingness to wait for change not only reveals an attitude of tolerance on the part of the woman, but also the assumption of a position of passivity that seems imposed by the fact of being a woman. These gender stereotypes, associating the feminine with patience, care and self-denial, emerged in the reports of these couples, showing in many as a naturalized position in the relationship, which also dialogues with the life context of these couples and their social and cultural aspects, marking marriage as a phenomenon that extrapolates the dimension of dyadic intimacy (Torres, 2004)

Category 4: impossibility to accept marital separation

This category alludes to the motivation found in the form of thoughts that prevent the possibility of marital separation, representing the permanence in marriage or personifying the fear of an unpredictable lifestyle that would happen after conjugal separation, and offer only an alternative to the partners: the maintenance of the relationship in the present with a

view to its continuity in the future. A total of 28 mentions were found in this category, with 21 by the wives (75%), 5 by husbands (17.86%) and 2 by couples (7.14%).

I believe that, the ... The person ... Living alone, especially when a certain age arrives ... He alone is very difficult! So, the life together becomes easier, even if he ... Have the struggles, but as they say, if you have someone to change an idea, if you have someone to talk, how do you say, you know? So, life together I think is the ... One of the most important causes in this continuity (Husband 8).

The idea of Carvalho and Paiva (2010) also seems to apply to this long-term context, since the search for a link that corresponds to the expectations of satisfaction of each one has reached its goal in some way. However, we can question this position, since to affirm that the couples stayed together over the years is not necessarily equivalent to considering that the expectations were minimally met or that the main expectations were materialized, turning the union into an indispensable totem in its planning of life.

The question of aging and the finitude of life seems to be the scene in which couples see their present and future, immediate or long-term, as pointed out by Husband 8, listing the most important events up to that point in life as invaluable treasures that disregard any chance of discarding, and marriage and partner are counted as precious jewels, in that sense: "So I ... I clung to that word which is: a good person. You know? That was a jewel I got and I never thought to lose it" (Wife 8). This overvaluation of marriage is closely related to the traditionalist designation of the institution:

You drop one to get another does not help. And you're going to separate, you're going to have to split everything, this is not your loss, but your children! Then we have to have a lot of head at that time. And my family was like that, to marry to stay married (Wife 11).

The maintenance of the marriage is linked to the permanence of the conservative ideal that goes back to the traditional roots of the family of origin, implying still a sense of unification of the acquired and constructed goods to preserve the inheritance to their children and other descendants. Moreover, this conception may help to understand why 75% of the reports about the desire not to separate have been expressed by the wives, reinforcing the conservative conception of the definition of roles and functions within marriage. The man supports the home while the woman cares for them, placing her in a situation that prevents her from expecting her own livelihood if her future does not involve the husband's presence any more. The patrimonial question seems in some cases important for the consolidation of this manifestation that makes the separation unfeasible:

I think, well, how do you mean ... Because these days I think it's very difficult for a person to live alone, you know? Nowadays no, sometimes it can be even easier, because everyone has studied, has their jobs, even if it is not so good, but they are earning their buck. I did not have this opportunity to study hard, right? Because I lived in the interior [...]. So, I cannot almost live this way alone, right? Leaving husband, right? To live alone (laughs) (Wife 15).

After all, one of the purposes of marriage is the construction and continuity of a life together, enabling the development of the home and family and providing a safe source for the personal growth of all family members. Marriage permanence may be a denial to a potentially harmful state of the individuals of these couples, a state devoid of these elements that favor the personal growth of family members. Moreover, this line of reasoning can

express ways of dealing with this aversion to loneliness as a style of administering conjugality and individualities, transmitting to the other individual of the dyad desires and expectations and thus interfering with their development, which with certainty will reverberate in the own development, according to Garcia and Tassara (2003).

The core of this category seems to be that knowing someone, building intimacy and understanding the existential uniqueness of the partner, all this requires time, patience, dedication and cooperation, and the age in which they find themselves, the time of coexistence and the patrimony seem to be directed towards the motivation for persistence in the marital bond. It must be pointed out that the dissolution of marriage involves contact with dimensions that seem to be difficult to handle, such as the possibility of aging alone or the financial difficulties resulting from a divorce. Thus, this category operates dimensions both affective, as highlighted in Category 1, as of more material aspects and also centered on the power of tradition under which these couples are sustained. The possibility that the maintenance, from this analytical bias, recognizes more movements that justify the non-dissolubility than the motivation to stay together is suggested. These aspects can and should continue to be investigated, possibly comparing couples at different points in the life cycle and in distinct sociocultural settings, in order to understand the movements that operate in the phenomena of maintaining the marital bond.

Final considerations

The motivations or explanations pointed out constitute important resources for maintaining marriage as justifications or pretexts to maintain stability in times of antagonism and divergence, especially the constructed affectivity and the idea inherited from the indissolubility of the marital bond. Parenting and the presence of the children also appeared as strong arguments to maintain the marriage bond, indicating that some elements present in the construction of the conjugality function as resources for its own sustentation.

The categories analyzed make up a complex network that must be analyzed in a global and interdependent way. These motivations or explanations pointed out by the participants indicate a dynamic that ends sometimes around more individual aspects, sometimes around elements shared in the affective territory of the union, and sometimes around elements coming from the own marriage, as the presence of the children. The motivations or explanations seem to emphasize the traditional character of marriage in long-lasting unions. The cult of freedom and individualization, in these days, are violently clashing with the perseverance of affective bonds, especially marital bonds, which provides clues to the differences of values and mainstays considered essential for the constitution of any relationship, whatever it may be. The culture of perseverance of long-lived couples pointed to categories of motivations or explanations that support the union in the face of the many divergences that may emerge during the process of personal development.

It has been realized that there is a maintenance not only of the marriage itself, but of the whole universe that it encloses; to mention, among other elements: religiosity; the definition of social roles between genders; affectivity; and the inherited conceptions of cultural habits considered traditional. Thus, motivations or explanations seem to be directed by direct affective experiences, such as one's own experiences, of ancestors and nearby social networks, including religion, and also seem to reaffirm marriage in its traditional and indissoluble character.

This study allowed a broader understanding of long-term marriages in the last decades from a detailed look at the narratives of these couples and their own experiences. Although the qualitative proposal has limitations in terms of the generalization of its findings, for example, the possibility of a more concrete and deep reading about what maintains a marriage is made. The originality of the results discussed here seems to be that many elements intertwine in this maintenance beyond the aspects recovered in the intimacy of the couple, which causes the need for social contextualized readings in the sense of understanding conjugality. The construction of this knowledge favors the follow-up of the investigations, since the affective relationships in contemporaneity, especially the conjugal ones, are intimately related to these discoveries. In addition, it contributes to discussions that evaluate at the same time the specificities of each relationship and also the hegemonic paradigms of human relations, permeated by the volatility and individualization that guide human life today.

The analysis from the perspective of the main exponents of the scientific literature on conjugality also limits the exploratory advance of the subject, since it is still a scarce literature and only a perspective of analysis among many others on this subject. The peculiarities of the sample, the vast majority Catholic practitioner recruited in inner cities, may suggest the commitment to indissolubility and the attachment to traditional values, reflected in the maintenance discourses and the duration of marriage itself. There is a need for future and constant inquiries and reflections on the subject, seeking to understand, for example, the relationship between the motivations or explanations of long-term couples and the motivations or explanations of newlyweds, or exploring even more the creation of long-term couples and their transformations throughout the life cycle.

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