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Reflexive Transformation of Intimacy in Late Modernity Theories: Some Critiques and Conceptual Alternatives

Cătălina-Ionela REZEANU¹

Abstract

*The last decades have seen a growing trend towards researching intimacy. A considerable amount of literature has been published based on the reflexive transformation of intimacy framework. This paper starts from the premise that, recently, more and more scholars have criticized the idea that detraditionalization and individualization led to the transformation of intimacy during reflexive modernity (late modernity). Critics question the ability of late modernity concepts to offer a cross-cultural and nuanced image of contemporary particularities of private life and intimate relations. The purpose of this study is to show the current state of knowledge in the social sciences on individualization thesis and detraditionalization thesis, the main theoretical criticisms of the two theses and conceptual alternatives to them. To achieve these goals, we conducted an interpretive synthesis of 16 articles from international literature, published between 1999-2014, in the thematic area of social changes brought by late modernity into the domain of private life and intimacy. In the Introduction section, we briefly present the two theses as reflected in the two of the most cited books on these themes: *The Transformations of Intimacy. Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies* (Giddens, 1992) and *The Normal Chaos of Love* (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995). In the body of the paper, we synthesize the arguments sustaining the criticism of the two theses and show some conceptual alternatives to these criticisms, as stated in the literature. In the concluding section, we resume the main arguments to open directions for future studies.*

Keywords:

detraditionalization, individualization, pure relationship, democratization of intimacy, therapeutic culture.

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1. Introduction

In the social sciences, intimacy was defined as the quality of social interactions based on mutual interpretation of the actors (Hahn, 2004). Broadly, intimacy is associated with very close relations among a small number of people (personal relations of friendship, marriage or love); and, narrowly, the phrase *intimate relation* is used as a synonym for sex or love. Based on the theories of late modernity, in recent decades, intimacy has undergone multiple transformations under the influence of detraditionaization (Giddens, 1992) and individualization (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995). Detraditionaization thesis suggests that, in the contemporary period, the tradition was not fully removed, but this goal is ongoing, people trying to build their biography without traditional recipes. Individualization thesis involves replacing collective identifiers (social class, age, gender, etc.) with the personal choice. In other words, in late modernity, the power of tradition as a script for building identity is reduced, people have more autonomy, traditional roles disappear, and the actors have to build their own authentic biography. These two theses became popular and widely accepted, Giddens' book, *The Transformations of Intimacy. Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies*, being cited in more than 5500 papers and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim' book, *The Normal Chaos of Love*, in more than 2000 papers (according to Google Scholar statistics).

It became largely accepted that, through these two processes, the characteristics of late modernity are transforming intimate life. At the beginning of the modern period, the family has been maintained through the traditional role of women (staying home, raising children, doing emotional work in the family) and men (working in the public sphere, providing resources for the family, being the head of the household). Contemporary struggles for women's empowerment show that this foundation is increasingly weaker and the crisis of gender relations is more and more visible (Mulinari & Sandell, 2009). Unlike earlier forms of modernity, the current one is reflexive, putting into question the traditional recipes of life and stressing the attempts to find individual solutions and alternatives to redefine and experience intimacy. So, scholars have theorized the emergence of *pure relationship*, as an ideal model of intimate relationship, whose particularities can have both positive and negative consequences at micro, mezo and macrosocial levels.

In analyzing the effects of detraditionalization of intimacy, Giddens (1992) is optimistic. The author brings arguments in favor of the democratization of intimacy through the fusion of love and sexuality in the heterosexual relationship and the emergence of the pure relationship. This relationship is based on sexual and emotional equality, combining *confluent love* (reciprocal, unconditional, and active) with *plastic sexuality* (tolerant, open and disengaged from reproduction). By contrast, stressing the importance of individualization process, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) are pessimistic about its consequences on intimacy. They draw attention to the paradoxes of romantic love due to the tensions among love, freedom and equality arising in contemporary relationships. Specifically, scholars are concerned that in late modernity, personal life is influenced by global market capitalism that encourages consumer individualism and requests employees' flexibility in the labor market, reducing partners' capacity to reflexively build intimacy.

1.1. Detraditionalization of intimacy

According to Giddens (1992), in the last decades, a new ideal type of intimate relationship has emerged, namely the pure relationship. Gradually, the ideal of romantic love has taken the shape of confluent love, based on openness (communication, disclosure, reciprocal inquiry, and discovery), emotional and sexual equality. These transformations of intimacy converge towards the ideal of democratization of intimacy, which is rather difficult to accomplish, due to socialization differences and economic inequalities between men and women. The democratization of private life means developing autonomy and equal positions of power between partners through disclosure, negotiation and compromise. Marriage is no longer a determinant of commitment, but a signifier of it. Sexuality is no longer centered on men's domination, it accepts extra-relational affairs, provided they are compatible with the autonomy of both partners. So the democratization of relationships involves equal positions of partners based on economic independence and maintained through the egalitarian distribution of domestic tasks.

Giddens (1992) states the opposite of confluent love and reflexive intimacy is co-dependency. Such relationship appears as a refuge from social obligations, in which autonomy is canceled in favor of the fusion with the partner, to get ontological security. Partners have a fixation on the relationship, without a life outside of it, being deeply tied

to common habits and routines, and depending on submission and exploitation. Co-dependent relationship maintains asymmetric gender relations and inhibits monitoring of self and other. In the author's view, such risks could be removed by engaging in therapy, which stimulates reflexivity, encourages self-discovery and helps build personal barriers inside the relationship.

1.2. Individualization of intimacy

From the perspective of Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995), in late modernity, people detach from traditional collective identities that leads to isolation and alienation. People respond to such a world of changing and uncertainty by searching refuge in privacy and idealizing romantic love. The authors consider that, in the contemporary period, romantic love is becoming a secular religion, in late modernity the ethic of love playing the same role as the protestant ethic played in the beginnings of modernity. Despite its idealization, love is difficult to accomplish in a world valuing individuality over communion. The fact that both partners are motivated to build their personal biography can create a chaotic situation: one partner might become an obstacle to the development of the other and both might have difficulties in building a common biography from two different authenticities.

In intimate relationships, individualization orients partners towards openness, communication, dialogue, confession, and disclosure. Constrained to reject traditional definitions and recipes, partners must fill the space of intimacy, emptied by the rejection of conventions, with their own definitions of love and marriage which should be consistent and coherent. Consequently, any new situation, any change must be interpreted through personal lenses and discussed inside the relationship. In reflexive modernity, partners no longer confess their thoughts in the presence of an outside expert (priest, therapist), they have to perform it in the private. This pressure for openness makes them vulnerable to conflicts and power games in which secrets from confessions, could be used as resources to sanction through emotional blackmail or manipulation.

The authors show that the ideal of love accomplished through the pure relationship involves contradictions and difficulties. The main contradiction comes from the aspiration to be authentic and autonomous, yet in communion with another person. People engage in

pure relationships hoping to find their authenticity and ignoring their dependence on prescribed gender, sexual and occupational roles. Pure relationship asks for replacing the traditional norms and rules with emotional and individual ones. It stipulates that partners are the only legislators and judges of the relationship which could lead to conflicts, dependencies, and emotionally justified irresponsibility. Above all, the authors show that, even if the pure relationship is an aspiration for security, safety, and refuge in the private sphere, with the abolition of traditional bourgeois norms, intimacy becomes more uncertain and risky.

2. Interpretive synthesis

Despite the popularity of the two theses, recently, several theoretical articles emerged, criticizing the idea that individualization and detraditionalization led to the transformation of intimacy during reflexive modernity. With this in mind, we performed an interpretive synthesis, guided by Major and Savin-Baden (2010), of the results of several articles published in the last two decades on the themes of late modernity and intimacy.

Interpretive synthesis is a technique derived from the method of secondary data synthesis, but it differs from the conventional aggregative methods for analyzing earlier literature (meta-analysis, systematic review, literature review). Gheondea-Eladi (2015) distinguishes among the following types of literature reviews: structured, meta-analysis, exhaustive, bounded, and exploratory or narrative. Our synthesis falls into the last category. Without being comprehensive or systematic, interpretive synthesis only aims to produce more refined meanings, exploratory theories or new concepts. For more information about this technique, see Rezeanu (2015).

To conduct the present synthesis, we selected articles from Google Scholar based on the following algorithm of keywords search: *late modernity* (OR reflexive modernity OR detraditionalization OR individualization OR post-tradition OR reflexivity OR neo-modern OR Giddens OR Beck OR Beck-Gernsheim) AND *intimacy* (OR pure relationship OR personal relationship OR gender relations OR sexuality OR self OR personal life OR love OR emotion OR couple OR family OR marriage). In this way, we identified 16 theoretical articles, relatively popular (published in prestigious sociological journals, like *Sociology*, *The British Journal of Sociology*, *Acta Sociologica* or *Sociological Theory*), influencing

other researchers in the field (with a mean of citations of 82, the most influential one receiving 468 citations). The interpretation of the main critiques will be presented as follows.

2.1. Specific critiques of reflexive transformations of intimacy

Adams (2003) pointed out that the theorizing of self-identity as a product of reflexivity brought by late modernity ignores cultural and situational determinations. In late modernity theories, reflexivity is defined in neoliberal terms, being identified as rationality, teleology, voluntarism and instrumentalism. They disregard that reflexivity itself is a cultural product as defined in cultural terms. For example, the author suggests that the reflexivity based on scientific research might be just another cultural code. In late modernity theories, reflexivity is defined by assuming a self not influenced by context, and an individual immune to local codes of morality and language, capable of self-management, of constructing their identity only by reference to rationality. The author states the reflexive project of the self is just another normative discourse, another ideology: a belief in the sacred power of the person to free from traditional determinants, to become autonomous. On the contrary, the reality check shows that individual knowledge about the world depends on cultural traditions, language codes, and his position in the social structure and social interactions. We interpret that this reflexive project of the self should be reconceptualized by taking into account the sociocultural context, the role of the unconscious, irrational, emotional, ambiguity and anxiety factors.

Holmes (2010) has contributed to the critique of late modernity reflexivity, by appreciating that is not just a rational and intentional process, but a reflex response to wider social changes. The author reminds us that in unfamiliar and uncertain situations where there are no traditional recipes, the person cannot reasonably anticipate all possible consequences of his actions, which leads him to seek standard answers to new questions. So reflexivity becomes a way to make sure the social reproduction of traditional routines and practices takes place. In addition, the reflexivity is not always rational, it has also emotional components involved in any interaction, choice, and decision. The reflexive self is constructed based on emotional relationships with others and emotion helps the persons maintaining their commitment to the

undertaken projects. We can conclude that the cognitive dimension of reflexivity should be complemented by other dimensions such as: emotional, relational and embedded (unconscious, routinized) ones.

Mulinari and Sandell (2009) criticized the theories of late modernity from a feminist perspective, qualifying them as power discourses, reflecting privileged positions (the rhetoric of heterosexual white men from the West), and ignoring how patriarchal, colonial and capitalist relations shape the structure of the world. By orienting the analysis only towards gender relations from the private sphere and by not taking into account how the State regulates the privacy of the family and contributes to the reproduction of traditional gender asymmetries, these theories strengthen women's association with the private sphere and men's with the public one. Late modernity theories assume heterosexual nuclear family, which brings together women, men, children, love, reproduction, and sexuality, is a natural and universal constant, disregarding cultural differences. In addition, it is presumed that the asymmetry between the provider man and the housewife woman is a constant across all social classes, although this model functioned only for the privileged classes, while women from poor families had no alternative but to participate to paid work in the public space. Another disregarded issue is how gender inequalities intersect with ethnic or racial inequalities in the labor market because women entering the labor market do not automatically get equal rights with men. In brief, reflexive modernity theories amplify power discourses framed with the heterosexual matrix, reproducing traditional gender asymmetries and ignoring cultural variations and structural inequalities.

Eldén (2012) examined how the individualization of intimacy relates to the widespread of scenarios of the therapeutic culture. The author starts from the premise that the proliferation of couple therapy manuals had ended the "us" scenarios and replaced them with "I" scenarios. The theories of late modernity have borrowed the language of therapy and imposed as normative a specific type of couple who communicates constantly and aims to a deeper and deeper disclosure of information about partners and their relationship. In this ideology, the new model of the couple has no secrets and is constantly working to maintain the relationship. This effort is rather an individual one aiming for self-knowledge. The compromise, the sacrifice and the change of one partner for the sake of the other is not desirable. Instead, the success of

the relationship depends on the individual's willingness to conform to the experts' recommendations (therapists, psychologists).

Along with the same source, the late modernity theories assume that all people go through the same stages and the same problems and aspire to conform to a new model of couple. It is supposed that gender equality is the same despite the inequalities from the public space of paid work. However, the solutions offered by experts are impregnated with gender stereotypes. Therapy manuals recommend men to take action, to establish autonomy boundaries, to decide the time and place for the discussion about the relationship, and women to connect with their feelings, with nature, with children, to mirror the state of man, to abstain from control and to stay silent. Through promoting the therapy culture, the individualization process does not help persons to free themselves from constraining scenarios, but enforce traditional recipes based on gender inequalities. So, failing to accomplish the ideal of the disclosure relationship is always attributed to the individuals who were considered not involved enough, and never to the therapy method or to the newly imposed model of the couple. In late modernity theories, the individualization imperative is assumed the best answer, without questioning its premises or its instruments.

Dawson (2012) classified the critics of individualization thesis in three categories: 1) the modernists, 2) the interactionists, and 3) the discourse ones. First, the modernists argue that the model of individualization brought nothing new because individualization is not a product of late modernity. On the one hand, contemporary individualization is only an extension of the modernization process, and, on the other hand, the collective categories, such as gender and social class, continue to influence people in the present days. The ideal of pure relationship is not universally valued, being only a generalization of the middle-class values. Second, the interactionists criticize the over-estimation of the role of the individual in building their biographical narrative and the sub-estimation of the influence of the mezosocial factors, such as work, family, neighborhood, network of friends and social class. For instance, theories of late modernity ignore the privileged classes have more options for individualization. According to interactionists, reflexivity is a socially situated action depending on class habitus (to build his authenticity, the individual draws from those in the same field with him) and a relational one (the pressure for reflexivity

makes the person take more into account the position of others). Third, the discourse critics appreciate that individualization is an effect of spreading the neoliberal and consumerist discourse of capitalism. The individual choice is promoted to encourage consumption, although, in reality, the choices are limited to the reproduction of the middle-class' lifestyle. The individualization thesis is the effect of spreading the Western middle-class' vocabularies of motives, ignoring that access to reflexivity is neither equal nor universal.

About the detraditionalization of intimacy, Gross (2005) pointed out that family life is still governed by traditional prescriptions: the gender division of labor, the normative imperative to marry, the stigma with divorcing. Any deviation from the conventional model of the family is still considered deviant. Although in the contemporary period, the stigma against those who do not marry decreased, marriage remains normative because to marry is socially constructed the main goal in life, single parent is socially stigmatized and the nuclear family is the dominant ideal due to the assumption that love is the best way to have children and be fulfilled in life. The tradition continues to be present in privacy, but is reinterpreted through the filter of capitalism: the consumption of goods and services is justified through romance, the mythical discourse of romantic love becomes the narrative of the relationship, the desire for marriage and wedding ceremony is still strong and so is the perpetuation of asymmetric gender identities. In the married couple, patriarchal relations remain dominant. It is still considered that man duty is to ensure financial resources for the woman while she keeps her ideology of devotion to family, often frustrated because domestic responsibilities prevent her from investing time in her career or other domains of life. Women who work outside the home still do most of the housework, even if men have begun to help them. The romantic and sexual imaginary maintain gender asymmetries (women associated with sensitivity, spirituality and in need of protection, spiritualizing men through their love). These reminiscences are not widely distributed, but varies by geography, social class, religion, ethnicity, and generation.

Building on this idea, Duncan (2011) showed how traditional gender asymmetries manifest differently in various social categories. For instance, the traditional model of provider man and domestic woman, in charge of household tasks and child care, occurs only in wealthy families

who can afford woman not working outside the home. In contrast, women from poor families cannot afford this luxury and are constrained to return to work after childbirth. The author highlights that the illusion of gender equality is maintained by the beauty industry that promotes women under men's standards and by women's rhetoric that men cannot properly handle domestic tasks. Moreover, the author does not consider the widespread of cohabitation as a sign of the emergence of pure relationship because cohabiting couples present traditional family features.

Jamieson (1999) oriented her criticism towards the pure relationship, appreciating the reflexive transformation of intimacy is not a recent feature but started in the middle of the last century. The author considered that the change of family and marriage from an institution to a relationship is just an ideological simplification influenced by therapeutic discourse. Even if women and homosexuals are theorized as promoters of the pure relationships, the therapeutic discourse which feeds these relationships reproduce gender and sexual orientation inequalities. As stated by the author, it is possible that the transformation of intimacy in heterosexual couples not to lead to the elimination of men's privileges in the domestic space, or that family not to be the proper place to change gender relations. Another limitation of the theorizing of pure relationship comes from its conceptualization ignoring the influence of children that could activate gender inequalities. In terms of sexual practices, the equalization of women and men experience and desire has not been accomplished. For instance, in the early stages of the relationships, neither the negotiation of mutual pleasure appears, nor the fusion between sex and emotional intimacy.

According to the same source, relationships end not for lack of mutual satisfaction, but because the cultural ideal of the reciprocal, equal and intimate bond is incompatible with structural gender inequalities. Therefore, the persons struggle to create narratives of equality and intimacy, despite the present inequalities. The author appreciates that, even if women would gain equality in the private sphere, this would not change the strong inequalities from the public sphere. As an alternative to the theories of late modernity, the author speculates that it is possible to achieve the pure relationship rather through equally divided actions than through mutual communication and disclosure.

In a later article (Jamieson, 2011), the author stressed that the practices of intimacy do not reduce to communication, confession, and openness to the other, they also include concrete actions such as: to give, to share, to spend time, to know, to care about, to feel attachment, to express affection, to build a common biography with shared meanings, to prove trust, empathy, and respect. Some of these practices are not totally disengaged with tradition because they reproduce conventional life scenarios of the nuclear heterosexual family. Moreover, many of these practices can be extended to other types of personal relationships such as friendship or kinship. In other words, the pure relationship is not only the effect of reflexivity and disclosure brought by late modernity, but involves actions, some of them derived from traditional practices and is not only a characteristic of the romantic couple, as it was theorized, but of other forms of close relationships.

Other criticisms were directed toward debunking the centrality of romantic love during late modernity. The conclusion that love is understood nowadays as a secular religion was analyzed by Maysless and Keren (2014). They were concerned how persons appreciate that love is the main source of life meaning during emerging adulthood (20-30 years old). They observe that life areas, culturally defined as sources of meaning and individual autonomy, are sources of satisfaction for the persons. In the Western industrialized society, the stable romantic relationship and the well-paid and satisfying job are the normative passage to adulthood. The authors showed that, in the contemporary period, in Western cultures, romantic love no longer occupies the central place for the emerging adults, being surpassed by education and paid work. Similarly, Seiffge-Krenke et al. (2014) report that during emerging adulthood love and work influence each other and it is possible that the investment in one of these areas of life to leave fewer resources available for the other. Therefore, the centrality of love presumed by late modernity theories might be contradicted by the growing significance of education and paid work during emerging adulthood.

2.2. Some conceptual alternatives

Lee (2008) criticized the separation between first modernity and second modernity and proposed replacing the concept of reflexive modernity with "multiple modernities." Many cultures have not yet met the first modernity, but through globalization, were exposed directly to

the second modernity. In his interpretation, the concept of second or late modernity is ethnocentric, claiming universality, although it was generalized only based on experiences from the Western culture. Therefore, a more realistic view would be based on the assumption that modernity is not universally reflexive, having multiple manifestations in various cultural contexts.

Elliott et al. (2012) argued for refining the concepts of individualization and reflexive identity by using the notion of "new individualism", to synthesize the effects of globalization on personal life. This phenomenon has four characteristics: 1) reinvention (consumerism and therapeutic culture are pressing the individual to transform, to continuously improve every aspect of his life, from body and mind to relationship and sex life); 2) instant change (obsessive consumption and search for immediate results); 3) speed (acceleration and dynamism of life); 4) short term (everything being episodic, the job is no longer for life, but temporary and subject to change). Thus, the concept means to suggest how quickly, in the contemporary period, the identity transforms and reinvents and the cultural forms through which persons symbolize their expressions and desires. Because the individualization process started during the first modernity, to represent the idiosyncrasies of the individualization process from late modernity, the concept of new individualism could be useful.

Due to the popularity of the individualization and detraditionalization theses, Brooks and Wee (2008) have seized the opportunity to refine the concept of "gender habitus" (which consists predominantly of unconscious components produced by cultural constraints) by adding a dimension of individual reflexivity. In line with the classical assumptions of the concept, women are not aware of the features and rules of the gender game they play unconsciously, and this condemns them to not be able to change. The refined concept proposes a situation where women are aware of conflicting requirements from different fields (like domestic and paid work) and reflexively adopt negotiation and prioritization strategies. Similarly, Duncan (2011) noted that many of the decisions considered reflexive are actually based on activating the gender habitus (dispositions of thought, action, and emotion) because people follow social rules and norms unconsciously. Therefore, the author proposes to take into account a creative dimension of habitus, defined as the individual ability to pragmatically decide

depending on the situation, but based on pre-existing solutions and recipes. All things considered, by refining the concept of gender habitus through specifying, not only its unconscious dimension, but its reflexive and creative ones, we can come to a better understanding of the transformations of intimacy in late modernity.

To nuance the process of detraditionalization of intimacy, Gross (2005) introduced the distinction between "regulative" and "meaning-constitutive" traditions and the concept of the ideal of "lifelong, internally stratified marriage" (LISM). Regulative traditions refer to external sanctions imposed on the persons if they violate traditional norms fundamental in the community, being threatened with exclusion, embarrassment or low status. Meaning-constitutive traditions indicate internal constraints of the persons who violate traditional prescriptions, their patterns to signify the world, mental schemes and narratives of the self, transmitted from one generation to another and internalized by individuals. LISM designates the heterosexual patriarchal nuclear family centered on hegemonic masculinity. The author notes that, presently, the regulative power of the cultural ideal of LISM has reduced, but the intimacy continues to be governed by meaning-constitutive traditions, such as the ideal of romantic love. However, the hegemony of the couple is still strong. This means that by distinguishing between types of tradition, we can show that detraditionalization reduced the power of the external sanctions of the moral community, but continues to manifest subtler through internal sanctions coming from the symbolic realm (like the ideal of romantic love).

Building on the critiques of ignoring the structural determinations and exacerbating the role of the individual reflexivity, Elchardus (2009) suggested rejecting of individualization and detraditionalization theses and replacing them with "shifts in the mode of social control". This model is based on the empirical finding that tastes and cultural practices continue to be strongly associated with the social positions and collective identities of individuals. The author argues that detraditionalization is just a shift in the way social control is exercised, by moving the focus on the individual self. In his view, the self is just a vocabulary of motives, socially constructed so that the individual conceive himself as an agency. More exactly, the social control is exercised by manipulating the factors influencing the individual choice: knowledge, competence, tastes, beliefs, frames and cultural forms,

routines or meanings. In this way, social control does not manifest as a constraint, but as a supply of personal reasons to choose achieved through defining reflexivity as a desirable social behavior. The factors that encourage this state of affairs are represented by: the expanding of education, the increasing importance of the media, the development of advertising and the proliferation of therapeutic practices. They are sources of new symbols, promoting the confidence in the capacity of the self of being the ultimate criterion of knowledge, value, authenticity, and legitimacy. In the contemporary society, the collective identities (gender, age, social class) have remained significant. Yet, they do not influence choices mediated by traditional, religious or philosophical concepts or by material conditions, but by differences in socialization practices (education, market segmentation in the media and in the commodities market, access to therapy). Hence, detraditionalization did not free the person, but changed the way social control is exercised, the socially desirable reflexivity giving individuals the illusion of agency. In other words, the power of tradition is being replaced by the power of formal education, media, advertising and therapy institutions, which inoculate in selves the criteria of choice.

A moderate alternative to the theories of individualization and detraditionalization is the concept of "institutional bricolage" (Duncan, 2011). Presuming detraditionalization was not accomplished and the individual has not freed himself from the domination of the macro-social structures, the model introduces the idea that, in the contemporary society, the individual has the freedom to rearrange traditional resources and to add new items. The concept is based on the conclusion that, in new situations, the persons tend to reduce cognitive effort and energy involved in negotiating with others and resort to already known rules, practices, and habits. Therefore, the individual makes practical decisions influenced by other persons and by the existing institutional context. He makes a bricolage between traditional and modern and produce adaptive practices. However, adaptive practices are not just collages between old and new but have a component of social validation, created through negotiation and compromise with others. The ability to make this bricolage varies from one person to another, depending on unequal access to knowledge, power, and resources. An adaptive practice always contains elements that relate to traditional practices, which facilitates legitimacy and social validation. This explains why cohabitation preserves

elements of the traditional family and the ideal of romantic love for life, being often conceived as a trial marriage.

Staying in the pragmatic realm, Morgan (2011) recommended introducing the concepts of "family practices" and "family configurations", which enable the study of social interactions without exaggerating the role of the individual or structures, by analyzing rather how everyday interactions configure the relationship between biography history. The author suggests that there is a difference between the social rules of the game and how it is effectively played in interactions. He defines family practices as the everyday actions clearly intended to have an effect on a family member involving expectations and obligations; and family configurations as the sets of interdependent persons who directly or indirectly share the feelings of belonging and connection to a family. Such a perspective emphasizes everyday family life and regularities that assist in reproduction sets of relationships (structures, communities) in which these activities are carried out and based on which derive their meaning.

Though the theories of late modernity glorify the democratization of intimate relations, the emergence of the pure relationship, and the increasing of individual autonomy, empirical social reality reveals the persistence of the traditional ideologies of family and marriage (Budgeon, 2008). The normative model based on which persons are judged and sanctioned is still the lifelong monogamous heterosexual relationship between two persons occupying the same domestic space. The sexual practices and identities continue to be regulated by this model so that those who practice it are privileged and those who refuse it, marginalized or stigmatized. Such a normative model takes-for-granted that each person needs a stable sexual and emotional relationship and those who are not involved in a couple relationship are, for these reasons, expected to be unhappy and unfulfilled. Starting from the premise that cultural and social imaginary confers privileges to the heterosexual couples, the author analyses the "normative structures of intimacy" and their effects on personal, sexual and gender relationships. The conclusion is that the institution of heterosexuality is an implicit one, operating invisibly by questioning any practices in relation to it and pathologizing any alternative forms of intimacy. Any relationship is seen as legitimate only if approximates the heterosexual model and nuclear family values. As a result, the cultural

imaginary produces negative myths associated with those who do not marry, have children, cohabit with their partner or form a couple.

3. Synthetizing remarks

Despite the popularity of the individualization and detraditionalization theses during the last two decades, a growing number of scholars have argued recently against the transformations of intimacy postulated by the late modernity theories. The main criticisms are based on the finding that, in the contemporary period, family life is still governed by traditional prescriptions: marriage remains the normative ideal, the nuclear family is the dominant matrix, the family relations reinforce the hegemonic masculinity, and the romantic and sexual imaginaries reproduce gender inequalities. In this way, the theories of late modernity could be conceived as capitalist neoliberal interpretations of traditional discourse on intimacy. Through these lenses, the reflexive project of the self becomes just another normative discourse, another sacred ideology preaching the belief in the power of the individual to free himself from traditional recipes and achieve autonomy.

Sometimes what is labelled as reflexivity is just a cultural or automated response. Several scholars warned us that the definitions of reflexivity, gravitating around its rational dimension, are ethnocentric, by ignoring the irrational components (corporeal, cognitive, pragmatic and emotional automatism, class and gender habitus). Other scholars implied that the practices of intimacy are not limited to communication, confession and disclosure, also including concrete actions (many of them reproducing traditional scenarios). Ethnocentrism also manifests by the imposing of the ideal of pure relationships which are not universal constants, but the results of the propagation of Western middle-class values and ideas from the capitalist neoliberal rhetoric.

From other perspectives, the theories of late modernity have led to the widespread of the scenarios proposed by the therapeutic culture which reproduce gender and sexual orientation inequalities and are incompatible with the democratization of intimacy and the emergence of the pure relationships. Other authors stated that these theories amplify the power rhetoric through the heterosexual matrix. Many scholars concluded that these theories ignore the structural determinants of intimate relationships because traditional collective categories continue

to influence persons and, so, access to reflexivity is neither equal nor universal. Hence, the individuals are struggling to produce narratives of equality and transformation of intimacy, despite the present inequalities, which mean they are interested more in maintaining the intimacy, than in transforming it.

To counter such criticism, conceptual alternatives appeared, refining the two theses. As certain countries have not yet known the first modernity, but through globalization were exposed to the second one, the concept of “multiple modernities” was suggested. It was assumed that modernity is not universally reflexive, having different manifestations in various cultural contexts. Other scholars advocate for refining the concepts of individualization and reflexive identity by introducing the concept of “new individualism”, to communicate the effect of globalization on personal life. To express the complexity of the concept of reflexivity, a few authors have seized the opportunity to refine the concept of “gender habitus”, by taking into account an individual reflexivity dimension intervening in the construction of gender behaviors.

Since private life is not entirely purified of the influences of the tradition, the distinction between “regulative traditions” and “meaning-constitutive traditions” was introduced. The conceptualization is based on the finding that currently the power of the regulative tradition of lifelong marriage constructed on gender inequalities had decreased, while intimacy continues to be governed by the meaning-constitutive tradition of the ideal of romantic love. In the field of intimacy, traditional influences were conceptualized as “normative structures of intimacy”.

The more radical views focus on interpreting the theories of late modernity as “shifts in the mode of social control”, by manipulating the factors influencing the choice. Thus, the control is not exercised as a constraint, but as a supply of personal reasons to choose by defining reflexivity as a desirable social behavior. Detraditionalization did not free the persons, but changed the mode of social control.

A moderate perspective to interpret the reflexive transformations of intimacy is that of the “institutional bricolage”. The model suggests that, in the contemporary period, the individual has the freedom to rearrange traditional resources and to add new items, producing adaptive practices. Therefore, it was recommended that the study of family intimacy to take into account the “family practices” and the “family

configurations”. These concepts are useful to study social interactions without exaggerating the role of the individual or structures, analyzing how everyday interactions mediate the connection between biography and history.

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