

## WHY ARE WE AFRAID TO LOVE?

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### SUMMARY

*The crisis of the couple in today's society, increases the number of singles and causes difficulty in creating stable and lasting relationships over time. The last two censuses of the Italian population show an increase in the number of singles, especially among the young generation. From this figure we have tried to understand the causes of this phenomenon both from the point of view of sociology and psychology. The sociologist Baumann considers the crisis of the couple and the increase in singles as a result of the crisis of modern society. The author says that we live in a fluid world where everything changes quickly and there is nothing stable and this also affects the couple. From a psychological point of view, reference has been made to all that psychoanalytic writers from Freud, have said about the crisis of the couple. It is clear that some subjects have difficulty maintaining stable and long-lasting relationships because they are suffering from philophobia (fear of love). We have tried to understand what the causes of different types of philophobia for both men and women are. It was found that the origins are created in the early childhood relationships with their parents. It was found that people who have had problems in their childhood relationships with their parents, because of their lack of love, tend to reproduce in adulthood the same dysfunctional relational model, learned in childhood.*

**Key words:** fear of loving - philophobia

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### INTRODUCTION

ISTAT data show that, starting from 2001, there has been a social trend to postpone the moment when young persons go to live alone or in a couple. In ten years, in fact, between 1991 and 2001 there was an increase of two and a half million unmarried persons, equal to 44% of the total population, which has remained constant within the same timespan. The percentage of young people living as a couple, over the ten years of age between 25 and 34 years, is only 45% of the Italian population. 55% of the young people of the same age still live with their parents and only rarely live alone. Even the data of the 2011 census show that single people between 25 and 34 years continue to exceed the number of those who live a stable couple relationship. This suggests that this phenomenon is an ongoing one, and it is interesting to understand what are the reasons that lead an individual to remain for more time at home with his parents, without having a stable couple relationship. One of the factors is definitely the economic crisis in our country and therefore the difficulty to achieve economic independence and a stable job that would allow younger people to build a family. But this is just one of many reasons, while others may be related to socio-cultural and psychological problems, such as a fear to love or to be loved. This is the idea that gave birth to the following article: to understand why people are afraid of love and how this can be one of the main factors behind the crisis of the couple.

### METHOD

A literature search was made in both sociology and psychology, specifically psychoanalytic psychology, of

all the authors who have spoken about the crisis of the couple with the intent to give an explanation / answer to the question of why people especially in today's society find it difficult to love.

### SUBJECT

#### **The crisis of the couple according to a sociological point of view**

The results from the literature search have provided interesting insights on why the couple has entered into crisis in recent years. An analysis of this phenomenon from a sociological point of view by the sociologist Bauman on the crisis of the couple is very interesting. He says that the crisis in relationships, and in particular the fragility of human relationships, can be traced back to the precarious situation faced by the society in which we live. In a competitive and less forgiving world, which is trapped in the hypnotic lure of consumer culture and is regressively and obsessively bent on consumerism, the mentality of "disposable" has also been extended to the area of affections. In this world, "liquid modern world" (Bauman 2007), as it excludes everything that is solid and durable, or that does not lend itself to use instantly, the possibility of a relationship which seems to be a lasting and satisfactory appears utopic. Romantic love, made of promises and desires, turns into a "liquid love" disengaged and ready to dissolve at any moment, when it no longer meets a need. The traditional model of the couple of patriarchal culture is replaced by a new model: the semi-free couple (Bauman 2006). The latter, unlike the traditional model, which was based on total emotional sharing of experiences, is based on a type of part-time relationship, in which the two partners each has an autonomous and independent life (often in fact each one lives alone and

has their own circle of friends in which the other partner is not involved). They share time, space and interest only when they feel like it. This type of limited relationship in time reflects the job situation today, in which to work for an indefinite period has been replaced by intermittent employment, occupation in the short term with a short-term contract. This observation made by Bauman (2006) is used once again to emphasize that the relationship distress of modern man is anchored to the historical context and cultural context in which it occurs. Surely the precarious economic condition, prevailing in today's society, makes it difficult for young people to find a stable and well-paid job, which would allow them to create the economic independence necessary to leave their original family. In some cases this makes it impossible to be stable and well-established enough to undertake a project of married life, with the aim of creating their own family. However, this is sometimes used by young people as an excuse. Beyond the lack of economic assumptions for the creation of a new family, there is in fact, a weakening of the cultural value of the family, which makes it difficult to develop one. There is also a third aspect, which is a high degree of immaturity and irresponsibility of young people today that seems to be the basis of their fear of facing life as a couple. The children remain in the family for more than thirty years, and this contributes to a greater dependence of the latter on the parents and the slowdown in their growth path to autonomy. A reduction to a minimum conflict, between parents and children, allows for a prolonged stay at home. Today in the family the role of the children is central and very important for their parents. They tend to fulfill the desires of the children, often anticipating their needs, without giving the children the opportunity to express their requests, and not allowing them to experience the frustration of a wish unfulfilled. The father satisfies every material need of the child, instead of showing affection (Eiguer 2004). The child lives in an incompetent way, because solutions are offered but not the tools to get them themselves. He/she becomes very dependent on the parents for the satisfaction of his/her needs and less patient enough to endure frustrations. The young people live in their relationship only the moments of joy and satisfaction and exclude anything that brings frustration and responsibilities. The feelings of the young people are ambivalent: on the one hand, they seem to seek satisfying relations, but on the other hand they avoid them, especially if they are stable and durable. They cannot bear the weight and tension of a stable relationship, because they feel that would lose their freedom (Bauman 2003). It appears to them that locking themselves into a stable definitive relationship, although satisfying, may preclude the possibility of living other relationships which might be more satisfying and rewarding than the one they presently have. The solution to this ambivalence could be to have relationships which are pleasurable and superficial,

which can easily be interrupted as soon as they no longer give pleasure and reward. They confuse emotional commitment with the lack of freedom and see a stable relationship as a suffocation of their own autonomy. Technological development of our society and the use of the Internet has allowed new types of 'virtual' relationships to develop. The latter are much sought after by today's youth. In fact, they are easy to obtain and easy to truncate, simply disconnecting from the network. The virtual relationships do not engage people for a long time and satisfy the desire for momentary relationships, without an emotional burden.

### **The crisis of the couple from a psychoanalytic point of view**

The difficulty and fear of young people of engaging in stable relationships leads us to explore what happens to these people on a psychological level. In psychoanalytic theory Freud and several authors have explained the reasons why people have difficulty in establishing stable emotional situations. Everyone agrees that the source of the problem is to be identified in childhood and the child's relationship with its parents. The first emotional bond that the child develops (attachment bond), is with the mother or whoever replaces her. This emotional connection will be the prototype for all subsequent relationships (Bowlby 1969). A bond of insecure attachment in infancy may cause fragile bonds and insecurity in adulthood, with ambivalence and conflict. A secure attachment, based on love and trust, is the basis for a loving relationship in adulthood which is stable and durable. Obstacles in the normal development of object relations of the child may be the first signs of the inability to form loving relationships in a healthy manner and can be the precursors of future philophobia. (Freud, 1912). The causes of philophobia can be found in not overcoming the oedipal phase. In particular, it is caused by the persistence of attachment to the parent in adolescence. In this phase, which is characterized by strong drives to individualisation as a result of which the person becomes an adult, but there tends to resurface a new type of genital gratification. The oedipal object should normally be replaced with an object outside the family upon which the subject should direct its libidinous impulses and emotional needs. In subjects affected by philophobia all this does not happen because they have not overcome the attachment to the first object, and so the partner will be perceived as a substitute and as such as an incestuous object, upon which the subject cannot direct his libidinous impulses. Therefore, it is impossible to love the partner because of the incest taboo, which had been established at the beginning of the latency period. Consequently, there will be a separation of the current of sensuality and that of tenderness, which in normal psychosexual development should be united and directed towards a single object of love. This split between the emotional and sexual

corresponds with a sharp split in the choice of its objects of sex and love (Freud 1912). These people love that which they will not desire sexually, and in fact they also cannot love what they experience a strong libidinous attraction for. This cleavage leads to the selection of a degraded object on which to target their sexual impulses such as women of little value, often of easy virtue, which as such can never be valued and loved. On the contrary, they will tend to direct their own emotional needs to women are impossible to conquer and therefore strongly idealized. The difficulty of conquest thus ensures a defense against the possibility of establishing a relationship with them also, and this completes the cycle, since as we have explained, they must not love because the two impulses of sexuality and love must remain firmly split. For women, as for men, there will be an idealization of the partner who is impossible to conquer, recalling the image of her father. Regarding their sexual impulses, rather than being directed to a degraded object they are repressed and often lead to an inhibition of their sexuality with consequent problems of frigidity. Horney, K. (1932) has made an important contribution to the better understanding of the emotional and sexual fears of those affected by philophobia. She analyzes the reasons for the philophobia men and women by making them originate, contrary to Freud, in the pre-oedipal period. In this period, the child is afraid of the omnipotent pre-oedipal mother by whom it is afraid of being crushed and overwhelmed.

The origin of the male fear of love, is therefore linked to early development and the failure to overcome the early oedipal conflict, which consists in the transition from the frustrating breast to the desire of incorporating the paternal penis, contained in the body of the mother and the fantasies of castration associated with it. These fears are the result of aggressive fantasies toward the subject's own genitals which are considered too small to satisfy the great maternal vagina, and hence come fears of castration by the woman/mother and consequent fears of penetration into the female body. From here derive sexual difficulties of the man who will be affected by disturbances of psychic impotence, such as disorders of erection or premature ejaculation.

Even for the woman the fear of the partner, comes from not overcoming the early oedipal conflict early and fears related to it. These fears relate to destruction of their own genitals and is connected to the fantasies of penetration by a sadistic penis, by which they fear that their genitals will be destroyed after penetration. Fear of the incorporated penis extends to fear of destruction of their own genitals since the oral desire for the penis is a prototype for genital desire for it. Indeed, during the oral phase, the first genital/vaginal sensations have already begun, although in a much reduced degree compared to the oral desire. This will lead to a fear of penetration and to a state of frigidity in women, due to a virtual removal of the vagina and the feelings of pleasure, linked to it (Horney 1932). This is what has been suggested regarding physical intercourse. From an

emotional point of view Horney believed that these subjects who were not sufficiently loved in their childhood have a strong neurotic need for love so that they can love and accept themselves, since if one has not been loved as a child, it is difficult to love as an adult. However not everyone recognizes this need: there are in fact those who deny it, such as the inhibited, those who are aware of it and search for it obsessively as "lovers of love." There are those who hide it, as with a mask, and confuse it with a desperate search for sexual activity; thus they hope to find the love that is missing with numerous sexual relationships. What is it that drives these individuals to a pressing need for love? An author of our day, the French psychoanalyst Guy Corneau (2004), using his observations on his patients in psychotherapy, outlined the origins of philophobia male and female and divided the philophobia subject into different categories. He notes the recurrence of a familiar situation typical in men: the mother is present and apprehensive, the father is absent physically and emotionally distant. This combination of events, along with other factors, are the basis of male philophobia. Corneau showed that men, raised alongside his mother in the absence of the father, do not feel closer to women, but often they are afraid of them. These are sons who, in the absence of the father, were trapped in the mother complex, remaining in the process of fusion/confusion with the mother. The mother, not having the attention of her husband, replaces the spouse with the child, creating a "symbolic marriage". It is a real emotional incest of the son that will lead to great difficulties in getting out of the maternal orbit. In addition, the child does not have a model of masculine identity with which to identify and oppose the femininity of the mother. He has not, therefore, a positive solution of the Oedipus dilemma, to achieve a fundamental shift from the mother, leaving her to the father, to another woman. A future effect of this is that the son confuses his female partner with his mother. The ambivalence of the man in relation to his desire for women is related to the pressure of maternal love. The effects of this are a weak psychic construction, a difficulty in knowing his own limits and self-assertion and ultimately a separation between sex and love. He can have sex with other women, but cannot love them because he would betray his mother. The maternal overprotectiveness leads the child to be dependent, passive and distressed. When he becomes an adult, he will continually ask pardon when he expresses himself, and he will establish affective relationships with dominant women. If sexuality is not accepted in the family, the children will be either totally inhibited or completely wild. As long as the relational capacity of one man is a prisoner of the mother complex, he will never follow the path of true love. To defeat the mother complex and emerge victorious means ceasing to be always good, kind, polite, accommodating and to take responsibility for their actions even if they hurt other persons sometimes, and accepting the sense of guilt

derived from these actions. We witness the so-called "tragedy of the good guy," who is overadapted to being in the maternal entourage and smothers his own personality and shows inability to love for fear of women and, in particular, of female power. He keeps himself to himself, to defend himself against maternal interference and projects on to his partner the image of the "dragon mother" treating her as he treats his mother. The need of the good son, frustrated and dependent on his mother is to have a territory, a personal space to recapture, which his mother has taken from him. If he does not overcome and free himself from the anger generated when he removes himself from the mother's influence, he will never be able to love a woman and establish a relationship of deep trust with her. If his girl forces him to mark the boundaries of its territory and causes him to leave the complacency of his mother's orbit, his anger against his partner will transform into positive power. Indeed it is only when the son understands and accepts the reason for this anger will he feel that to love is not a weakness. Otherwise, if the maternal complex has not been overcome, the so-called "syndrome of the rope around his neck" will develop. The subject will have fear of commitment in a relationship with a woman in order to avoid feeling suffocated. This sensation is derived from the sacrifice of his independence, including his own needs and his sexuality which he experienced in childhood for the love of his mother. This man will struggle to find a place in a couple relationship until he will find his own autonomy, which is fundamental for every man. If all this does not happen, the man will express the attempt to break free from the mother with the first women who he meets. He will develop towards these a fear which he will experience both physically and symbolically at the same time. He will be afraid to "enter" into a woman physically, that is, to have sexual relations with her, and emotionally to the point of terror of falling in love and experiencing profound intimacy. The image of the vagina with teeth is, metaphorically, the fear of being castrated by a domineering and powerful mother, whose power is feared. From a sexual point of view this fear can manifest itself in problems of impotence or premature ejaculation, or, as in Don Juan, it may manifest as a need to penetrate all women, as an attempt to escape the fear of castration. Men can develop different ways of exorcising the fear of the woman in the relationship. The first is to create a total dependence to woman, satisfying only the need of union and completely excluding that of separation, which is equally important in a relationship. A second way, typical of the man who is very sensitive to the feeling of being choked by the woman, is to make her give him a child, so that she can concentrate on the latter, thus allowing him more freedom. A third way may be to adopt an attitude of independence. The man, not to be stifled by the woman, acts as completely independent of her, only satisfying the need for separation between the couple, ignoring that of union. The man, in order to satisfy the

need of union and separation, and to defend himself from fear, seeks "pieces of Woman", so that he relates to several women at the same time, each of which meets different needs. This shows that the fear of man is not to have relationships with women but having an intimate relationship with one woman, because it reminds him that mother. Finally he can deal with his problem by marrying an honest woman, and simultaneously having a lover, who enables him to escape from the relationship.

Guy Corneau (2004) argues that, in female phobia, the difficulty to recognize what prevents us from loving, is not to accept yourself for what you are, but for what we want to be for others. Even in women, as for men, the origin is a overpresent intrusive mother, and an emotionally absent father. The father figure is very important for the woman because he represents the second object without which it will be impossible to achieve a positive solution to the Oedipus complex, which is an essential achievement for the attainment of femininity, and the father is essential for the subsequent transition to another man to love. When Oedipus is not overcome, and the need of a husband comes to coincide with the need for a father to protect her, sexuality is experienced with guilt, because of the oedipal taboo. Thus we have an emotionally immature person who lives the love as a need to fill their own insecurity and not as a choice. The insecurity stems from the relationship with her father, which is often a silent love, which has never been lived through, with its accompanying pain, and it is this love that the woman seeks desperately in other men. She idealizes the father and the vacuum experienced within himself is filled with the fantasy of the "Prince Charming", that is that one day a man/father will recognize her as a woman and fill the void caused by the paternal silence. The girl remains a prisoner of these fantasies and libido is diluted in romantic dreams rather than evolving into a real love which is possible. Following the narcissistic wound and the vacuum of affection inflicted by the father, the woman can develop two different types of attitude to attract the attention of men. Thus some of these women remain eternally adolescent and others metaphorically become like Amazons. The eternal adolescents are those who remain prisoners of the need to please, who shut themselves in their inner world and whose true personality is not realized. These women lose their identity to please men, and they construct their identities out of the images men project on them. The eternal teenager refuses to grow up, leaving to others the power to choose her destiny. She, instead of acting according to their own interests, adapts to the changes that the men in her life require and takes refuge in fantasy when the situation becomes difficult to manage. There are four types of eternal adolescents: a) the adored doll, b) the girl made of glass, c) the seductress, d) the marginal. The first appears proud and secure. She is often accompanied by a successful man and obeys his every wish. She eventually will have a great difficulty in

disguising his resentment, bitterness and anger which is often not conscious. This anger leads her to blame her partner, while remaining passive and dependent. Other times, in contrast, she takes the upper hand over her husband and manipulates him with sweetness and seduction. This reflects the wound that has been inflicted on this woman by her father, who loved his daughter only for her charm and beauty, and not for her talents. She, to overcome her difficulty, should leave the role of charming girl, affirm her talents and her ideas, even risking to cause displeasure. The girl of glass reacts to the father's wound by using the pretext of her fragility and hypersensitivity by taking refuge in books. Then there is the seductive woman who is immersed in his present and whose designs are changeable and unpredictable. She wants to lead a free life based on instincts and without constraints. In romantic relationships she rejects every form of liability or obligation and, like a great lover, has enormous difficulties in engaging in a lasting relationship. This is a woman who, subdued by his mother and neglected by his father, has not acquired a sense of self-worth. Her rebellion prevents the establishment of an authentic relationship with the man she loves. The marginal woman is one that has identified with a father who was rejected by society and has become the subject of shame. She often has a destructive character, verging on masochism and, in some respects, her fate will resemble the paternal one. She, however, feels the need to criticize him and to assert her difference. This woman believes that she has no value, and so seeks a man that can represent everything to her. Often some of these girls have been sexually assaulted by her father or stepfather, and as a result are unable to love or respect themselves. All eternal adolescents, however, are united by the urgent need of having pleasure at all costs, often bowing to the wishes of men, trying to match reality with their image of the ideal woman. Their request for psychotherapy from a male therapist may often be interpreted as the chance, finally, to receive the attention and the paternal gaze that they have missed, because their father has not been able to appreciate her as a woman and differentiate her from his wife. Love for the analyst represents a transition phase which then leads to the possibility of living an authentic love with another man. While the eternal adolescents suffer from liabilities, the Amazons on the contrary are hyperactive and seem unable to be receptive. These women, having had a tyrannical father, identify with him, they assume the same despotic authority and impose on others what he has imposed on them, without healing the father wound. These are women who are strong in their principles and convictions, who mutilate of their own femininity, rejecting male seduction and sometimes even coming to despise the male gender. They do not only integrate aspects of masculinity into their personality, but have a masculine temperament that leads them to identify with male power, denying

themselves emotional ties with other persons. Among these is the superstar, that is the kind of woman who tries to succeed in everything she does, is cold and cynical, looks strong but is actually suffering from a deep depression. She has lost touch with her emotions and behind this detachment is hiding the fear of being rejected. She has often had a father who treated her as a boy and did not respect her femininity, indeed pointing her towards a male destiny. The second type of amazon is the dutiful daughter, who lived in a very strict and religious family, with a strong sense of duty, who because of her automatically introjected strict upbringing has lost all spontaneity and originality. The woman martyr, the third type of amazon, is the one who is completely committed to devotion and self-sacrifice. It is necessary that this latter feel anger for the harm her sacrifice does to herself, and discovers that behind it lies an abandoned child who is calling out for others to take pity on her. Finally, there is the warrior-queen who strongly opposes the irrationality of his father and who considers not to love as the best defense against men. What unites all the Amazons is having taken control over themselves and considering unacceptable their need for dependence, considering any act of service to a man as weakness. Next to the father, who does not allow his daughter to gain her individuality as a woman, there is the mother and the ambivalent love-hate relationship of the daughter towards the latter. Many young people have been educated by their mother to earn themselves their independence and not rely on men. So when they want a loving relationship with a man, they feel in conflict with this maternal ideal and feel guilty about the need for love. All this complicates their love life and contributes to the difficulty to love.

## CONCLUSIONS

After looking at what various authors have said about the philophobia we can say that people who are afraid of loving subjects are incapable of love. Although they are often convinced to the contrary, they seek the love that was missing in childhood within the family. The origin of the fear of love, therefore, can be traced back to the relationship that the child has established with the parental figures. In the history of these philophobic subjects there are always anxious and depressed mothers, who are unable to have an empathetic relationship with their child. They do not help the child to deal with the strong feelings and emotions that assail his psychic apparatus and make him insecure and dependent on her. Emotionally distant fathers are unable to provide this important function of presentation to the children to the outside world and do not facilitate their separation from their mother. This makes the child emotionally bound to their family of origin with the impossibility of establishing an adult love relationships which are healthy and durable.

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