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FREEDOM, WILL AND PARTNER CHOICE IN FAMILY CONTEXTS: AN ANALYSIS FROM SYSTEMIC FAMILY THERAPY

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Abstract: This article analyzes how human decision making -from everyday aspects such as choosing a career, to significant events such as choosing a partner- is influenced by factors that transcend individual will. Through a theoretical review of different types of determinism (biological, sociological, historical, psychological), a reflection is articulated from Systemic Family Therapy, which considers invisible loyalties, family roles and transgenerational dynamics as unconscious conditioners of freedom. Furthermore, it discusses how these patterns influence partner choice and proposes clinical implications for therapeutic work with families. The aim is to question the notion of freedom as an isolated capacity, and to propose a more systemic, relational and contextual understanding of decision-making.

Keywords: Freedom, will, determinism, systemic family therapy, partner choice, family relationships.

INTRODUCTION

Freedom is a concept widely valued in modernity, associated with the power of self-determination and acting according to one's own will. However, various disciplines - such as philosophy, psychology and sociology - have questioned whether we are really as free as we think we are. In family contexts, personal decisions often do not respond to conscious choices, but to inherited relational patterns, implicit expectations or invisible loyalties.

This article starts from this concern: to what extent are our decisions our own? Through an integrative approach that encompasses different forms of determinism and the perspective of Systemic Family Therapy, it seeks to offer a critical look at the role played by the family system in the formation of will, the construction of identity and the choice of meaningful bonds.

DETERMINISM AND HUMAN CONDITIONING

BIOLOGICAL DETERMINISM

Biological determinism proposes that human behavior is conditioned by genetic and neurophysiological factors. Lewontin (2001) criticizes the extreme versions of this position that explain inequality or social behavior solely from genetics, but recognizes the influence of the body as the substrate of our subjectivity.

SOCIOLOGICAL DETERMINISM

From sociology, it is understood that behavior is modeled by social structures such as education, religion, politics and family (Durkheim, 1895; Freire, 1970). Socialization imposes frameworks of meaning that condition what we consider possible, desirable or legitimate.

HISTORICAL-CULTURAL DETERMINISM

Geertz (1973) points out that culture acts as a network of shared meanings that organizes human experience. Customs, values and institutions persist over time, influencing the thinking and behavior of later generations.

PSYCHOLOGICAL DETERMINISM

From psychoanalysis, Freud (1923) proposes that the unconscious - formed during childhood - exerts a determining influence on behavior. Later, humanistic approaches such as those of Carl Rogers (1961) and Viktor Frankl (2004) vindicate individual freedom, although they recognize that this is not absolute: human beings can choose, but they do so within certain margins given by their history and context.

FREEDOM FROM A SYSTEMIC FAMILY THERAPY PERSPECTIVE

Systemic Family Therapy offers a relational vision of the human being, where individual decisions are deeply intertwined with the dynamics of the family system. Authors such as Bowen (1978) and Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark (1973) argue that family relationships are governed by implicit rules, unconscious roles and transgenerational loyalties that condition behavior.

Bowen introduces the concept of self differentiation, understood as the capacity of a person to maintain his or her identity without merging emotionally with his or her family system. The lower the differentiation, the more likely it is that the individual will act out of fear of disapproval, sacrifice or repetition of familiar roles.

Minuchin (1974), for his part, points out that families with diffuse boundaries tend to generate role confusion, hindering the development of personal autonomy. The lack of a clear structure favors emotional overload, parentification and inhibition of freedom of choice.

FAMILY ROLES AND PARENTALIZATION

Family members not only fulfill visible functions, but also adopt emotional and symbolic roles that ensure the homeostasis of the system. Among these roles are the caregiver, the mediator, the rebel, the scapegoat or the hero. These roles are usually assumed unconsciously as a way of balancing family debts or covering affective gaps (Boszormenyi-Nagy, 1986).

One of the most relevant phenomena in this context is parentalization, which occurs when a child assumes emotional or practical responsibilities that correspond to an adult. Boszormenyi-Nagy (1986) documents how children who develop school phobias may actually be emotionally protecting an anxious

parent who fears being left alone. The child's seemingly dysfunctional behavior makes sense as an act of family loyalty.

MATE CHOICE AS A SYSTEMIC ACT

The choice of a partner, commonly seen as a free and personal act, can be influenced by multiple unconscious and systemic factors. According to Boszormenyi-Nagy (1986), the choice of a partner brings together not only two individuals, but also two family histories. The choice may respond to the search for balance, relational justice or reparation of past ties.

From a more contemporary approach, Siegel (2012) argues that attachment patterns and affective relationship styles are transmitted from generation to generation. Thus, people who have experienced dysfunctional or inconsistent attachments may be unknowingly attracted to partners who replicate these dynamics.

In a more phenomenological line, Hellinger (1999) proposes that invisible loyalties to excluded members or unelaborated facts in the family system can influence the choice of partner, leading us to repeat destinies that are not ours.

CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS

Understanding freedom from a systemic perspective has important implications for clinical practice. First of all, it allows us to identify that many apparently individual decisions have deep relational roots. In addition, it favors therapeutic work aimed at making visible the invisible patterns that condition the patient.

The therapeutic objective is not to deny individual agency, but to broaden awareness of the factors that limit it. As the patient understands his family loyalties, unconscious roles and inherited dynamics, his capacity to act with greater freedom and responsibility increases.

CONCLUSION

Freedom cannot be understood as an isolated property of the individual, but as a capacity situated in the context of relationships, family histories and social structures. Through Systemic Family Therapy, it is possible to make visible the conditionings that operate from the family system and that shape the will.

Questioning our decisions, exploring our invisible loyalties and understanding our place in the network of relationships is a profound act of freedom. As Foucault (1977) suggests, power and freedom coexist: being free implies recognizing the systems that condition us and deciding how we want to position ourselves in the face of them.

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