



THE "FORTUNATA SYNDROME": A FORM OF EMOTIONAL DEPENDENCY

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El artículo presenta información sobre una modalidad de dependencia emocional –para la que se acuña el término “Síndrome de Fortunata”– que designa un tipo de relaciones afectivas que determinadas mujeres desarrollan repetidamente hacia hombres casados. En el síndrome son identificables varios patrones de conducta y varias actitudes características, como la fuerte y duradera dependencia emocional y la fidelidad hacia ese hombre, la ambivalencia de sentimientos hacia la pareja oficial (rencor por la creencia de que le ha arrebatado algo propio, pero también deseos de ser ella, de emularla o, incluso, de llevarse bien), el cuestionamiento de la validez de la unión del hombre con la otra mujer y la fantasía reiterada de que las circunstancias cambiarán y ambos acabarán juntos. Además de delimitar e ilustrar este tipo de relaciones, sus peculiaridades y sus diferencias respecto de otras situaciones con las que podría confundirse, se hipotetizan algunas posibles causas de esta forma de dependencia emocional y se presentan varias estrategias para ayudar a las mujeres que quieren terminar con esta modalidad de vinculación afectiva.

Palabras clave: Relaciones extramatrimoniales, Relaciones hombre-mujer, Técnicas psicoterapéuticas, Matrimonio, Personas solteras.

This paper presents information about a form of emotional dependency, for which the term "Fortunata syndrome" has been coined, designating a type of affective relationship that some women develop repeatedly with married men. Several patterns of behaviour and repeated attitudes can be identified in this syndrome, such as the strong and lasting emotional dependency and loyalty to the man, the ambivalence of feelings towards the official partner (resentment due to the belief that she has taken something that belongs to them, but also the desire to be her, to imitate her or even to get along with her), the questioning of the validity of the union of man with the other woman and repeated fantasies that their circumstances will change and they will end up together. In addition to defining and illustrating these relationships, their idiosyncrasies and their differences with regards to other situations with which they could be confused, we hypothesise some possible causes of this form of emotional dependence and we present several strategies to help women who wish to put an end to this form of affective linkage.

Key words: Extramarital intercourse, Male female relations, Psychotherapeutic techniques, Marriage, Single persons.

There is an abundance of scientific literature on the subject of the emotional dependence that some women develop when building relationships with men. The monographs by Beattie (1992), Norwood (2009) and Peabody (2005) are notable examples. In Spain, Castelló Blasco (2005) has also studied this subject in depth, exploring its delimitation, its causes and the most efficacious interventions to help to resolve the issue. Although purely informative, the following texts are worth mentioning because of their wide dissemination: Castanyer (2013), Congost (2013) and Riso (2014). Tangentially, several of these papers have approached the problem of women who become involved in emotional relationships with married men and the development of situations of co-dependence or "affective addiction"

towards them, and a number of elements that are mentioned here have been described. The pattern outlined in this article –the "Fortunata syndrome", which is a particular form of this affective dependence– has not been found described as such in any of these texts.

It is necessary to begin by clarifying that the phrase "Fortunata syndrome" is not identified with any disease, psychiatric disorder or psychopathological condition, rather it is used only to integrate a set of behaviours (thoughts, feelings and actions) that some women repeat when becoming involved with married men. Its use is therefore merely descriptive of a social and psychological phenomenon. Dealing with this issue, it is easy for misunderstandings to arise, confusing the position and feelings of these women with what popular culture calls "mistresses" or "lovers", or relating them to "platonic love" or "romance". Far from pathologising a common situation in societies of all eras –and that is not what we suggest here–, the aim is to identify and delimit a specific

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form of emotional dependency into which some women fall. Therefore, the term "syndrome" is used in a similar way to categories that are well extended in psychology, such as "burnout syndrome", "Ulysses syndrome", "Diogenes syndrome", etc.

LITERARY AND CULTURAL REFERENCES

The novel *Fortunata and Jacinta* by Benito Pérez Galdós (published in 1887) was, as the reader will have guessed, the inspiration for the term "Fortunata syndrome" chosen as a common denominator for the behavioural pattern analysed here. In this novel, the author delves with unique insight into the psychology of one of the female protagonists (Fortunata) and narrating, through the entire length of the novel, her feelings and the vicissitudes of her relationships, Galdós provides a comprehensive description of the type of emotional bond that some women develop towards certain married men, and one that can also be identified today.

Over the course of the text by Galdós the elements of this syndrome appear, which clinical experience has revealed to be more common than one might imagine: women who become involved in the long term and repeatedly with married men have similar feelings, beliefs, attitudes and behaviour in many cases and they follow a process that is characteristic. Galdós, therefore, in conceiving Fortunata, also characterised a "type" of emotional dependence, whether imagined or observed, and considering the life experiences of the women who must have served as inspiration to him when he invented the traits of this character.

To present these common factors, excerpts from the novel will be quoted, in which the thoughts, feelings and actions of Fortunata are described in relation to her affair. This is not, of course, a scientific approach that will enable us to conclude anything about the existence of a problematic pattern of emotional dependence that can be extrapolated to other people, but it may however serve as a source of inspiration, undoubtedly an intuitive one, in line with the ideas of Pinillos on psychohistory. "People, with their history, institutions and culture, are great natural laboratories, with their experimental conditions, where scientific psychology is made, such as the psychohistory that Pinillos cultivated in recent times." (Pérez-Álvarez, 2014 p. 34).

Fortunata, a humble village woman, uneducated and completely honest, when she sincerely explains that despite having lived as a couple with other men, and knowing that her former lover, Juanito Santa Cruz, is married, does not cease to believe he is her true love and someone for whom he would give up everything, including life itself. From here a first basic element of the Fortunata Syndrome can be observed: the sense of abiding love for a man, regardless of the time elapsed and despite any other circumstances, including the fact that he is married to another woman whom he does not think of leaving. When Juan Santa Cruz speaks to his wife (Jacinta) of these emotions that Fortunata feels for him, he does not hesitate to consider them an abnormality and describe them as a "mania".

She's got this thing about always loving me the same, just as much as when she met me for the first time. And that's another thing that affects me and makes me indulgent with her. Put yourself in my place, dear. Now if I saw that she was flirting with other men, to heck with her. But you can't knock that idea of being faithful out of her. Faithful to me! Why, for heaven's sake? I assure you that dumb girl has made me ponder it so much... She's been through so many hands, and yet she's always faithful, hasn't budged an inch in her love. Neither dishonor nor marriage has cured her of that mania. Doesn't it sound like a mania to you? (p. 467) ¹.

Galdós also mentions –through the words of Juan Santa Cruz– another important feature of the syndrome: Fortunata would drop everything at once if he should ask her to.

One day I said to her, 'If you want to prove you love me, run away with me.' I thought she'd say no. (...). Her answer was to grab her shawl, and say, 'Let's go.' (p. 58-59).

Fortunata's conviction that her true husband is Juan appears multiple times throughout the pages of the novel, although, paradoxically –and this is another important component of syndrome– the relationship that she establishes with his legitimate wife (Jacinta, in the case of the novel) fluctuates and is ambivalent. First, as to be expected, her feelings are of anger and resentment toward the person who she judges to be responsible for

¹ The page references mentioned refer to Agnes Moncy Gullón's English translation of *Fortunata y Jacinta. Dos historias de casadas* [*Fortunata and Jacinta. Two stories of married women*] by B. Pérez Galdós, published in 1986 by the University of Georgia Press, Athens, Georgia.



having taken away something that “belonged to her”.

“Because you took away what was mine... and if God did justice, you’d put yourself in my place, and I’d be in yours, you big thief...” (p. 559).

“Your husband is mine, and I’ve got to take him away from you. Snob! Fake saint! I’ll tell you whether you are an angel or not. Your husband is mine, you stole him from me, just the way people steal purses. God’s my witness, and if you don’t think so, just ask him. Let go of him this minute or just watch out for me...” (p. 574).

But, at the same time, also almost from the first time she sees her, positive feelings towards Jacinta arise, resulting in desires to become her, to emulate her and to be equal to her.

That woman had taken away what was hers, what, in her mind, was rightfully hers. But this feeling somehow blended strangely with another very different and sharper one; namely a burning desire to look like Jacinta, to be like her (...). If the sinner had been offered at that moment to transmigrate into the body of someone else, she would have automatically, unhesitatingly said that she wished to be Jacinta. (p. 355).

I hate her and yet I like to look at her; I mean, I’d like to look like her, be like her, and let my whole self change till I was just exactly like her. (p. 499).

And when, in the last part of the novel, she becomes pregnant by Juan, she judges that this makes the two women equally “legitimate”.

“Angelic! Yes, she’s as angelic as you like! But she doesn’t have any children. A childless wife isn’t a wife.” (...) “What I think, continued the other with apostolic inspiration and the criminal audacity of an anarchist, “—and you can say what you like—, what I think is, and nobody can change my mind, is that she’s virtuous, all right. Agreed. But she can’t give him an heir. I *could*; I gave him one and I can give him another...” (p. 602).

Finally, with the birth, all resentment towards Jacinta disappears. For Fortunata, neither the sacrament of marriage nor the civil marriage, nor the years of Jacinta and Juan living together, nor his wish to stay married to his lawful wife are worth anything in contrast with the fact that she is the mother of his child. At the end, when Fortunata is convinced that she will die, she writes a letter to Jacinta in which she gives her son to her to raise.

Frankly, I’m amazed at how fond I’ve gotten to be of ‘Angel Face’ [Jacinta], when I remember, that before just the thought of her made me sick. It’s true

I didn’t get to hate her; I mean, I hated her but I liked her, too. Strange, isn’t it? Now we’ll be friends, we really will be. (p. 796).

As Fortunata sees it, her love justifies and explains everything; it is the quintessential law and overrules all other circumstances. Before it, all other considerations give way: this is why the fact that Juanito Santa Cruz is married by the Church with another woman does not mean that she must not love him, or cease to consider him “hers” and that —as indeed happens in the novel— when he’s with her it is impossible for her to escape his influence. She tries several times, but each time Juan appears her intentions crumble. The emotional dependence towards Juanito is complete. This love never dies, despite the scorn and insults, despite the fact that it makes her a victim or that he leaves her periodically when he gets bored of her. In fact, until her death Fortunata will continue to believe he is her husband and the transfer of the child to Jacinta can be understood as the continuation of that link.

It is important to distinguish Fortunata’s feelings from those of other seemingly similar female figures. It has already been mentioned that the syndrome is not equivalent to a “romantic love” with another person. Historically there have been many creations associated with unrequited love. For example, it was reflected in the verses of medieval troubadours, or the heroes of romanticism, who saw their hopes frustrated because the beloved person was inaccessible. The inability to consummate the love could be due to prior commitments that one of the pair had acquired (Tristan and Isolda; Isabel de Segura and Juan Martínez de Marcilla), social or economic differences (Catherine Sloper and Morris Townsend), family obstructions and disputes (Romeo and Juliet; Abelard and Héloïse), to name a few. None of this is equivalent to what happens to Fortunata. Also, there are women who assume the role of “second place” and who know they cannot aspire to become the “official wife.” Traditionally, this happened with the plebeian lovers of kings or noblemen, or women in domestic service and their masters. This is not the case of Fortunata either, who —unlike these women and with a more modern approach— does not resign herself to that role and considers herself to have every right to be the wife of a wealthy bourgeois, no matter how poor, uneducated or common she may be. For this reason, it is not easy to find other literary references that are truly parallel to Fortunata until much more recently, such as those found in the novels of Elizabeth Smart (*By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept*, 1945) or Laura Esquivel (*Like Water for*



Chocolate, 1989), although the social and historical contexts in these cases are very different from those reflected by Galdós.

COMPONENTS OF THE FORTUNATA SYNDROME

The psychological analysis of women that become involved in dependency relationships with married men has been investigated by several authors, among the most notable of which are Akhtar (1985), Oala (2011) and Tuch (2002).

From a purely psychoanalytic approach, Akhtar (1985), in a theoretical study based on his own clinical experience, speculates on the personality factors that characterise “the other woman”, among which he includes traits of anxiety, personal insecurity, low self-esteem, ambivalent feelings and symptoms of borderline personality disorder. The monograph by Tuch (2002), also based on a psychoanalytic perspective, similarly maintains that this type of relationship could constitute a syndrome and that there are factors that exist among women that tend to create emotional ties of this nature, particularly unsatisfied narcissistic needs. In his characterisation Tuch says that, from the woman’s point of view, love explains the attraction and the woman does not realise the role that being single plays in explaining the mutual attraction; the woman seems to think that it is simply “an unfortunate and regrettable coincidence that the man with whom she has fallen in love is already married” (Tuch, 2002, p. 11). Tuch also adds in his characterisation the [woman’s] constant availability, recurring thoughts about when the man will leave his wife (and his enthusiasm about it, despite evidence to the contrary), the capacity to put up with the situation despite its prolongation in time, idealisation of the man and gradually giving more value to the reasons that he provides than to her own reasoning, which results in a reduction or loss of power or influence in the relationship. Some socio-demographic characteristics are also added: the woman tends to have less purchasing power or a lower social status, as well as being younger and less experienced.

More recently and from a narrative and feminist constructivist approach Oala (2011) presents a study based on a methodology that uses in-depth interviews with eleven unmarried women that were involved in relationships with married men. In this work, Oala finds four topics of discussion around which the discourse of these women gravitates: (1) the morality of this relationship; (2) the influence of this relationship on the development and reconstruction of their own identity; (3) the responsibility towards the other women (particularly the man’s wife); and (4) the negative emotional

consequences of the break-up. The women justify their situation based on these four main points.

Integrating the elements that have been extracted from these studies and also taking into account the events and stories of the women who have attended the consultancy of the author of this article, we propose to characterise the Fortunata syndrome based on these nine points:

1. The presence of a feeling of intense, repeated and persistent love towards a man that is married to another woman.
2. A detached attitude in any relationship other than the one established with this man.
3. The capability to leave behind any life situation, to leave everything or to take any risk if the man should ask it of her.
4. The belief that life has no meaning or lacks incentives if she is not with this man.
5. The belief that it is she who, deep down, has more right to be with the man even if it is not socially or legally recognised; the belief that this would be “fair and right”.
6. The previous belief is reinforced if she has had children with the man. Or if she has expressed strong desires to have them although they have not been conceived and she is seeking to achieve this.
7. Ambivalent feelings towards the socially legitimate wife (sometimes resentment and contempt, and sometimes understanding, empathy and closeness).
8. The belief that love is responsible for this situation and justifying the perpetuation of the relationship to herself and to others for this reason.
9. Optimistic fantasies of a future together with the man, since she imagines that something will happen to change the situation and for her to become the woman who has the exclusive relationship, which leads her to tolerate this situation for years.

In defining the particular situation using these elements and giving it its own label (Fortunata Syndrome), this proposal differs from those of other authors due to its synthesis and integration. It is true that, as mentioned, profiles of this type have been described, but not all of them have been combined or presented as common patterns that recur in some women who develop patterns of dependency.

POSSIBLE DETERMINANTS OF THE FORTUNATA SYNDROME

Several reasons have been put forward to explain this situation. To date, the predominant models have been psychoanalytic (e.g., Akhtar, 1985; Hollander, 1975;



Kell, 1992; Tuch, 2002) and have described this behaviour of women as a manifestation of their masochistic or narcissistic traits, a poorly resolved Oedipal conflict or a structure of borderline or neurotic personality. Likewise, explanations have emerged from the evolutionary perspective (Greiling & Buss, 2000), the historicist perspective (Abbott, 2003) and the constructivist-feminist perspective (Oala, 2011).

A different point of view is that of Richardson (1985), who discusses and justifies this kind of affective link based on social variables, such as the increased economic autonomy of women and their greater educational development. Richardson (1988) has also put forward that when a single woman has sex with a married man she has more control over her sexuality and she feels freer to act assertively trying out different possibilities, such as exhibiting less sexual repression, refraining when she wants to, always demanding safe sex or exploring her sexual preferences. However, if she is with a single man with whom she is able to start a committed relationship she will be more ready to comply with the sexuality that he demands of her. In sum, according to Richardson (1988), maintaining these kinds of relationships can also bring benefits to a woman who wants to be free of a traditional family scheme, with greater subjugation to the man, although the author does not hesitate to point out the drawbacks, such as the greater difficulty in getting married or the limitations to her social circle that it may entail. In fact, Oala (2011) judged the relationships between single women and married men as satisfactory, in some cases, although they can also be emotionally abusive and distressing/distancing.

It is also worth mentioning some 'popular' explanations or expositions of psychological teaching that can be found on many websites. According to these, many single women 'fall' into these relationships with married men because some of the latter have the skills, the 'ability to seduce', the 'emotional intelligence', the skillfulness in hiding their marital status, or the power to convince when producing any of these excuses: that they will leave their partner but they need time, that their young children keep them tied down for the moment, that the relationship with their wife is poor or that they live purely as friends or siblings, that they do not want to hurt their wife (as she could not bear the separation), that they work together and are bound by unalterable economic interests, that their wife is sick or in delicate health, to name some of the most common ones. Without neglecting the role of these elements, it is clear that the Fortunata syndrome cannot be

explained by the men's lies or excuses -or only very tangentially and in the short term- because over time the promised changes do not occur, lies or concealment are exposed, or new information appears (e.g., the man's very caring attitudes towards his wife is observed or the fact that he has new children with her) making it clear that what the man has said is not true, and this does not cause the women to break off the relationship. In short, it is important to understand that in the Fortunata syndrome the woman remains hooked despite what the man may say or do and she is repeatedly willing to overlook or forgive his lies. It implies, therefore, a problem that concerns her own being and, therefore, the analysis that is carried out should concentrate on the specific aspects of the woman in this situation.

From an approach pertaining to the cognitive-behavioural model, the maintenance of a behaviour is explained by the benefits that it brings (reinforcements). Therefore, women with the Fortunata syndrome receive an immediate reinforcement that perpetuates the situation. This can be seen clearly when the statements and explanations of the women are analysed. It is common to hear comments such as "I suffer a lot due to this situation, especially when he disappears for days and I know he is with his family, but when he returns everything is great, I forget everything else"; "he is so attentive, so special, I enjoy being with him so much during those moments that nothing else matters"; "I put up with it because what I feel with him I have not experienced with any other man"; "life with him would be wonderful; this is the life I wish to have"; "I have to carry on, because in his presence I realise he's the person that I really want, I need, I was waiting for"; "no one has ever understood me like he does, we have a special complicity, we are truly complementary in our tastes, in our way of being and how we see life"; "the attraction between the two of us is very intense, overwhelming, unmanageable, so although we try to put an end to it, we cannot help but stay together"; "sex with him is special; I have never felt before what I feel with him"; etc.

If the immediate or short-term gratification these women get from contact with the man has this notable reinforcing power, the existence of various contextual factors or learning processes that make this a probability can be assumed. As in other cases, the prolongation of the situation may be explained by the difficulty in recognising the problem of the life philosophy itself. When you have accepted a situation, it is not easy to go back, to resign, or to accept the time wasted and face the future alone. Although they may not like being the "other woman", it is



likely that acceptance occurs progressively, and what at first felt intolerable becomes normal by habituation. It is also possible that, in order to put up with it, [the women] may want to continue under the illusion that a change will occur in the situation, although it may seem unlikely, and that fate can work in one's favour at some point, that a lucky strike may occur that changes everything, etc. These "psychological crutches" become increasingly intense, the more the future of loneliness and emptiness is feared, which immediate break-up would cause. In short, escaping and avoiding feelings of loss and isolation in these cases feeds the fantasy that the situation will improve, if one waits long enough.

What has been said so far may account for the maintenance of the situation. However, the onset of emotional dependency is more difficult to fathom, given the absence of scientific literature on the subject. However, it is worth proposing the existence of a number of dispositional variables that make the onset of emotional dependency a probability. Among these factors and processes the following are notable:

- a) *Educational patterns of dependency.* Having been raised in a family (and social) environment in which the role of the woman is associated with dependence, a lack of autonomy and a man being in charge facilitates, in general, subordination to male figures. In addition, however, married men are associated more clearly with people who have made major life decisions, or who have responsibilities, and this promotes the beginning of dependency in women who have been dominated in their lives and have handed over the reins of their existence and their decisions to other people with more authority, personality or ability, in principle.
- b) *Assessment of self-sacrifice.* A similar thing happens with growing up in a family or educational context in which personal sacrifice and postponing one's own needs (particularly for the women) to meet those of the men of the family is promoted. If a married man conveys to the woman that he needs her company, and that her support is an invaluable asset, this helps to maintain the pattern.
- c) *Pity for the other person and guilt.* When she has been in that situation for some time and believes that the man will suffer greatly if she decides to leave him, this adds to the difficulty of feeling the pain of break-up herself and the guilt regarding the distress that it would cause the other person, especially if the man suggests that he could not bear it, or that it would put an end to his happiness.

- d) *Overvaluation of love and myths about its importance.* Attachment to the schema that life is only worth it if you have love and that a woman is worthless if she is not in love, and acting accordingly, may represent another important element.
- e) *Biases and distortions regarding relationships of cohabitation.* The relationship established by the married man with the woman who does not live with him can seem more like a courtship than a marriage. The man goes to his 'other home' with the hope of finding something exciting, fun, different; he need not deal with arduous domestic issues there; he has no responsibilities for children or –usually– economic implications; there is no routine. This creates a special couple atmosphere, away from the everyday life. Therefore, it is normal for him to experience much more joy and express passion there and he is sincere when he says that it is what he really enjoys and what he wants. However, when the man returns to his wife, reality hits him and he realises that he cannot undo their marriage and all that this implies at the drop of a hat or just because of the hope that the 'other life' gives him. Meanwhile, the woman, as she only sees the part where he's with her, idealises the thought of living with this man, as Richardson noted (1985), and she is not as aware of the obstacles that he will have if he breaks up with his family, nor is she aware of the consequences, or what daily living would be like with him in the long term.
- f) *Poor self-esteem.* If a woman accepts and agrees to be the "second" or "other" woman, it reveals, in principle, low self-esteem. Perhaps she hesitates to aspire to be the wife of this man publicly and to be at the same level as the other woman, or even deserve it. Once these deficiencies in self-esteem are generated, it is likely that the relationship will continue as it is and the woman will not demand the change categorically.

To summarise, with respect to the explanatory model of the Fortunata Syndrome, what has been suggested here is that although the situation will eventually be negative for the woman and will limit her own life progression, the immediate gratification that she feels when she is with the man and the intense fear of loneliness and the emptiness that breaking up would involve perpetuate the situation. This situation has been created due to previous factors, such as certain personality traits (low self-esteem, fear of being alone, resignation, guilt, etc.), educational patterns (it is good to make sacrifices, and be selfless, etc. for a man), environmental and social circumstances (biases regarding the nature of cohabitation, social myths about



love, etc.) and values associated with married men (attribution of strong personality, capacity for decision-making and commitment, maturity, security, paternal nature, masculinity, etc.).

HELPING WOMEN WITH FORTUNATA SYNDROME: GUIDELINES TO UNDO THE EMOTIONAL DEPENDENCY ON MARRIED MEN

If a woman seeks psychological advice to get out of this relationship, the psychologist should first evaluate how the relationship has developed, understand its history and determine what personal, cognitive and emotional resources the woman has in order to undertake this difficult life change. To begin with, it is important not to suggest that the only way for her wellbeing is to break up with this man, especially when it is not known for sure if, in the event that his marriage breaks down, he will get together with this woman (because often one thing does not imply the other) and if, therefore her expectations will come true. The woman must decide freely –not due to specific pressures or other people– that she does not want to continue in this emotional dependency and then the plan of therapeutic work should be presented to her.

Since, as discussed above, educational and personal factors associated with the syndrome have yet to be ratified experimentally, it is not possible to offer a structured and defined treatment program. As Oala (2011) has noted, there is abundant literature on which therapeutic approach is the most appropriate way to handle the pain involved in discovering an infidelity, however no papers have been published on the experience of or on the efficacious support for a single woman after breaking off a relationship with a married man, besides a few informative titles (Culver, 2012; Falk, 2009; Subotnik, 2005). In spite of this deficiency, and taking advantage of the line of action that is used for intervention in codependency, the psychological counselling should cover three features: (a) on the one hand, becoming aware of the problem and the distress associated with its perpetuation; on the other (b) providing women with strategies for coping with the moments of intense distress involved in trying to undo this dependency; and (c) finally, attention to a number of aspects regarding the dynamics of the therapeutic support, such as its foreseeable long duration, the involvement and commitment to the process and preparation for potential setbacks.

a) Regarding the process of becoming aware, the professional must perform a task that facilitates an

accurate perception of the woman's reality without distortion or mitigations. It is important that, through the functional analysis, a non-blaming explanation is offered, free of the negative social biases that are often associated with this type of relationship. The practitioner must make the patient see the role that the short term rewards and the fears associated with the separation play in perpetuating the situation, meaning that she always postpones the decision and does not demand that the man changes, which will lead in the long term to significant harm in her life, her development, her self-esteem and achieving her own objectives. The goal of this process of becoming aware is to create a strong enough motivation for the patient to persevere with her decision. Since pain, fear, blockages and excuses will all appear at the moment of breaking the dependency, it is fundamental that the patient understands the problems of procrastination and the negative effect it has on her.

b) With regards to the strategies, among the cognitive-behavioural techniques the following may be useful: (1) techniques of time management and organisation, separate from work, helping the woman to restructure her time according to her own needs and desires, with her own program of daily activities that enhance her personal development and provide opportunities to test that she is capable of being successful and resolute; (2) exposure techniques, to check that she is capable to expose herself and do things alone that she considered boring or meaningless before unless accompanied by the man. Thus, she can go shopping or play sports without company or with other people, or she can go to the cinema, to a course or workshop, lectures and concerts, lunch or dinner, a trip or journey, etc. with the aim of enjoying it all. Similarly, exposure to any major task which previously made her feel helpless if she was not assisted or accompanied by the man is fundamental. If she has been involved in the relationship for a long time, exposure to other people, particularly men, should be prioritised; (3) problem-solving techniques. This training seems particularly relevant in these cases since it connects with the heart of the problem: making rational and useful decisions in the long term regarding the life that the woman wants, with a clear judgment on the immediate problems and consequences in the medium and long term; and finally (4) techniques of working with values and acceptance, to clarify the values and objectives of the



woman who is undergoing this process, to serve as a safety crutch and a permanent reminder during times of emotional distress. Working with the woman's own values, which do not have to be those of the man, is particularly necessary. Acceptance techniques –for example, those of mindfulness or deliteralisation– can be very practical in the moments when the pain of the breakup, the crippling fears and the feelings of not being able to bear the suffering, and it making no sense, may compromise the process.

- c) With respect to the dynamics of the therapy in these cases, it should be structured in various phases which include: (1) preparing to disconnect from the married man; (2) attention and support in times of greatest distress once the separation has occurred; and (3) preventing relapses (in a dependent relationship with a man). Consultations are likely to extend considerably over time and will require significant involvement from the professional, which will help the patient to establish a safe and secure relationship. Also, moments of stagnation in the process are to be expected. The use of support groups for women in similar situations would be a very useful addition. It must be kept in mind that it is necessary to disconnect completely from the man, which means not having any contact with him, and that regular counselling with the therapist must take place to increase the probability of success.

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