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Reflexivity: A Crucial Resource for the Challenge of Family Well-Being

In contemporary sociology, reflexivity stands as a peculiar characteristic of the post-modern man. Beck and Giddens, speaking about the reflexive modernization, strictly connect reflexivity with the individualization of biographies and the growing of risk and uncertainty: individuals, the only architects of their own life course, seek to deal with this condition of instability and blurring, by exercising their reflexivity in extreme ways.

This situation unavoidably affects couple and family relationships. One of the possible outcomes is the so-called individualized marriage, in which, in the face of an emphasis of the romantic dimension, social norms about living as a couple are being withdrawn, partly because of the increasing isolation from the kinship network: each couple has to invent new rules from scratch every day and to judge its own successes or failures without any unambiguous criterion. Ultimately, it seems that building we-ness in a couple relation becomes more and more difficult, whereas an individualized reflexivity prevails. This makes the daily romantic relationship very difficult and chaotic and undermines the challenge of family well-being.

In this presentation, it will be hypothesized that there is also a different kind of reflexivity, relationship-based, rather than individual-based, that limits the damages of individualization, making it easier for a couple to build we-ness and to pursue the we-relation's well-being (a relational good). All these concepts – reflexivity, we-ness and family well-being – will be analyzed in the light of the literature.

At the end, a polysemic concept of couple relational reflexivity and its outcomes (we-ness and well-being) will be provided. Moreover, some methods to empirically study reflexivity will be proposed, presenting the first results of a trial run on a sample of Italian and Russian couples.