

## **Gender Intelligence and Its Role in construction and Developing Marital Relationships**

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### **Abstract:**

Human relationships face challenges in all aspects of life, transcending the boundaries of cognitive understanding and tangible reality. Among the primary relationships forming human society is the biological marital relationship, which evolves into a spousal relationship imbued with cultural, social, and historical dimensions. Avoiding the prevalent approaches to the structure of marital relationships, this study seeks to present alternative perspectives on the concept of gender and its role in building and developing this relationship. It is well known that gender interferes in our daily lives unconsciously and without reliance on the ideological or intellectual background of the concept itself. To avoid the unjust separation between the dual perspectives of biological and social gender, this study aims to explore, examine, and analyze data indicating the presence and relevance of this concept in relation to the cultural and social identity of our lived reality in Arab and Islamic societies. This effort takes place within the context of the expanding field of gender studies, offering a thoughtful analysis of a topic considered central to the mechanisms of preventing familial and social problems in general, and particularly those related to building and developing marital relationships.

**Keywords:** Gender Intelligence- Marital Relationships- roles conflict- Marital compatibility- Marital parity.

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### **Introduction:**

Marriage is considered one of the highest social institutions regulating relationships between genders and one of the human bonds that society has endowed with social status and sacred character, based on various religions and cultural traditions worldwide. Accordingly, marriage requires the fulfillment of expected roles by both spouses, adherence to commitments, and compliance with societal norms and customs to ensure social recognition and achieve the noble objectives of marriage.

The marital relationship progresses in an upward trajectory, transitioning from one stage to another due to the integration of supportive factors and variables that contribute to building and developing the relationship between spouses. This occurs amidst the changes witnessed in Arab and Islamic societies, in particular. Throughout this progression, the relationship faces numerous challenges that demand efforts to strengthen the factors of compatibility and equality between the spouses at various stages of the marital cycle, starting from laying the foundational structure of the marital relationship to its later stages.

One of the most significant challenges facing this relationship is the changes resulting from ideas

and assumptions imported from other cultures, especially Western culture, which promotes concepts of liberation, individualism, and pragmatism. These concepts often aim to expand and propagate their cultural influence. Among these concepts is "gender," or social gender, which has become deeply rooted in societies worldwide, either through its regulation at the level of international organizations or through media and informational openness.

Consequently, the means of prevention and safeguarding against such influences have diminished due to the dominance of overt aspects, leaving behind subtle or soft methods that do not provoke conflicts or confrontations. Among these is human intelligence in its various fields, with a particular focus here on the concept of "gender intelligence" and its extensions into various aspects of married life, aiming to prevent conflicts stemming from the intrusion of this concept into marital life.

This raises the question: How effective is gender intelligence in building and developing the marital relationship, particularly in preventing and mitigating marital problems to achieve family cohesion and enhance the marital relationship and family overall?

In attempting to answer this question, we proceed to deconstruct the concepts that clarify the key indicators revealing the strong link between the changes introduced through the phenomenon of gender and their integration into the lived reality of spouses. The most significant concepts include gender intelligence, marital equity, and marital compatibility.

### **The Concept of Gender Intelligence:**

Gender intelligence is a relatively new concept that has emerged only in recent years and has yet to gain widespread understanding or acceptance, particularly in our society. Among the pioneers in the Arab world who adopted the concept of gender intelligence is the "Gender Center" for Social Consultancy and Training in Jordan (as part of the "Gender in Arabic" program). Prior to this, the concept was explored by the author Barbara Annis, who approached it more from an economic perspective.

Hiba Haddadin defines gender intelligence as "an individual's ability to understand and appreciate the biological and cultural characteristics and differences between men and women, including differences in attitudes and behaviors. Once we recognize how and why the other thinks and behaves, we can understand gender-related tendencies and participate more effectively in the workplace and various fields."

Additionally, Barbara Annis, an expert on gender, emphasizes that the goal of gender intelligence is to improve and ensure the success of relationships between men and women when conflicts arise. The success of such relationships depends on the awareness, understanding, and comprehension of each other's personality and how to interact with it. For this relationship to thrive, it is essential to possess effective communication skills and channels that foster positive thinking between the parties across social, economic, cultural, and political sectors worldwide, thereby achieving gender intelligence.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, gender intelligence can be regarded as the ability of individuals to understand, internalize, and appreciate the biophysiological characteristics and sociocultural differences between men and women, shaped through variations in thoughts, tendencies, attitudes, behaviors, and roles. The

concept signifies a form of intelligence in understanding thought processes more effectively in various contexts where men and women interact. This understanding enables one or both parties to discern the underlying ideas, language, and mutual behaviors, interpreting them positively while excluding notions contrary to human nature and historical truths.

This concept can be applied in the family, as well as in work environments, education, politics, media, society, the economy, and various other fields. However, it originates in the family, becomes entrenched in the upbringing of individuals, and then extends to society. As Bertil Alsottari states regarding human intelligence: "As humans, it is natural for us to feel self-satisfied and overestimate human intelligence. There is no denying that humans are the most successful species in adapting to all kinds of environments... Social and cultural adaptation, however, represents another component of this human adaptability, bearing both positive and negative implications. This almost unlimited ability of humans to comprehend and organize their lives and the lives of others is unparalleled."<sup>2</sup>

In this context, we aim to utilize gender intelligence as a central concept based on sociocultural approaches encompassing all aspects of life intertwined with social and cultural considerations, particularly those related to social upbringing and individual self-development trajectories. This is because gender analysis requires delving into the depths of intellectual production and the realities of life. We focus on the factors shaping the attitudes and perspectives of spouses in their journey toward building and enhancing the marital relationship, supported by our extensive readings from various sources.

### **The Concept of Marriage and the Principle of Pairing:**

Here, we examine the concept of marriage as a social system within broader societal systems. Marriage is a multi-dimensional relationship—social and cultural on one hand, and personal on the other, related to the individuals themselves. It is a union involving two people in a relationship supported by society through its various social, religious, economic, educational, legal, and even political institutions. Often, it requires a set of rituals, customs, rules, and roles that vary across societies and cultures. Marriage is based on several bonds, including sexual, emotional, social, legitimate, and legal ties, thereby fulfilling both biological and social functions.

Marriage is considered a relatively stable and enduring social arrangement, depending on the level of compatibility and equality between the spouses. "Mating, at the human level, can be impersonal, arbitrary, and temporary. However, marriage is a social system characterized by a degree of permanence and adherence to social norms. Society organizes sexual matters and determines responsibilities for forms of sexual pairing among adults by the means. It is worth noting that all societies (past and present) impose marriage on the majority of their members. Marriage is a universal system, even though some societies permit sexual relations outside its scope in certain instances."<sup>3</sup>

Referring to gender-related assumptions, marriage can become a multifaceted concept with limitless practices, grounded in the notion of personal freedom without restrictions or conditions. However, we aim to approach the concept of gender from a perspective distinct from its Western origins, steering away from deviations and nihilism. This alternative can be found in the Islamic concept of the principle of pairing, which is based on principles and values rooted in human nature

while simultaneously safeguarding human freedom.

### **The Principle of Pairing in Islam:**

The principle of pairing in life is a fundamental condition that calls for understanding the reality of a universe based on reciprocity to achieve balance in life. According to Abu Ya'rub Al-Marzouqi's perspective on Islamic teachings, the hallmark of organic and spiritual balance lies in awareness of stewardship (istikhlaf), which contrasts with self-deification and embodies the ultimate humility. The issue he seeks to address and clarify regarding the relationship of balance pertains to the principle of pairing as a condition for organic and spiritual equilibrium within the human being and its implications for human actions.

A striking example of this is the lack of awareness that the relationship between the two poles of pairing is itself a "paired orientation" not unidirectional but bidirectional, such as the sexual pairing between man and woman and vice versa, forming a constant exchange.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, the pairing attributed to individual selves relates to a deeper origin that explains the characteristics of individuals as beings lacking absolute unity. Pairing pertains to the attributes of relationships between two separate entities of the same species (i.e., humans), as the superficial comparison between form, image, and consciousness does not suffice.<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, the attributes of the marital relationship are inseparable from individuals and from the relationship itself. This demonstrates that the relationship is profound and involves continuous interaction, making it difficult to sever easily.

Therefore, the principle of pairing negates the negative unification of the human species, given the variation and simultaneous complementarity of characteristics. Regardless of how advanced humanity becomes, the principle remains rooted in the continuous exchange of innate and acquired faculties to achieve spiritual and physical balance. Numerous processes support the principle of pairing to fulfill its function with the elevated and refined human quality that distinguishes individuals and societies. Among these processes are the notions of equivalence and compatibility.

### **— The Concept of Marital Equivalence:**

Equivalence refers to similarity in value despite differences in form and type. In the context of marriage, equivalence means that both spouses are relatively similar in terms of the standards for marriage across various aspects of life. The required criteria for marriage vary depending on the environment of the spouses and can include equivalence in social, cultural, and religious affiliation; educational and intellectual level; age; physical and health conditions; and appearance.

This implies that marital equivalence does not eliminate the differences between male and female, nor does it blur the responsibilities assigned to each in marital, familial, and educational roles. It does not suggest that spouses should be identical to each other. Studies indicate that equivalent marriages often involve selecting a partner who is similar and close in terms of social status, cultural background, geographic proximity, profession, and educational level. Even though the choice of a partner may appear free and available to both genders, social mechanisms establish the foundation that guides individuals to marry someone similar. Marriage, therefore, is not random but operates within the framework of social communication rules.<sup>6</sup>

### — **The Concept of Marital Compatibility:**

Sanaa Al-Khouli defines marital compatibility as the relative freedom from conflict and the relative agreement between spouses on vital, social, and psychological matters related to their shared life. It also involves collaboration and participation in activities and tasks essential to their family life and the exchange of emotions with the aim of achieving the following objectives: permanence, companionship, and fulfillment of expectations.<sup>7</sup>

Marital compatibility, therefore, involves seeking mechanisms to avoid conflict and interference between spouses. This can be achieved when an individual possesses a degree of gender intelligence, particularly when there is relative agreement in tendencies, alignment in values and beliefs, and partial agreement in goals and ambitions. It is essential to identify all points of convergence that can contribute to achieving balance in meeting vital, psychological, and social needs.

Such compatibility occurs within a reciprocal relationship characterized by flexibility and partnership. It is achieved when an individual exercises gender intelligence by striving for personal and self-balance with flexibility, steering away from perfection in their demands, goals, and ambitions with their partner.

### **The Role of Gender Intelligence in Shaping the Stages of the Marital Cycle**

#### **First Stage: Marital Selection**

Factors influencing marital selection are often studied from cultural, material, or rational perspectives, with most analyses focusing on elements of similarity and compatibility or, conversely, difference and divergence. They also consider inheritance or acquired elements from a new environment. Among the key factors used to measure compatibility are: race, creed, social status and class, professions and activities, income and financial resources, place of residence, level of education, type of culture and values, age, appearance, and other similar factors.

A new development in marital selection is the consideration of compatibility in viewpoints regarding gender-related issues, such as freedoms, personal independence, and thinking contrary to prevailing norms. This is especially evident among the educated elite and highly educated individuals, who tend to assess the alignment of principles and values acquired through the other's upbringing and educational and professional journey, particularly in women.

Key issues in this regard include women's professional careers, the redistribution of roles within the family, as well as modes of thinking and religious orientations ranging from moderation to strictness. These and other related matters will be discussed further in the following pages.

- **Types of Marital Selection**

**Selection Based on Inherited and Acquired Status:** The choice of a partner is often tied to the dynamics of social mobility (i.e., transitioning from a lower social status to a higher one). Sometimes, inherited status dictates the selection of a partner, while at other times, the acquired status of both individuals plays a decisive role.

Inherited status primarily reflects the degree of similarity between the partners in terms of their social position, intellectual level, economic standing, and profession. Acquired status, on the other hand, involves comparing intellectual, professional, cultural, and even financial and material assets that both individuals have attained through their own efforts. This model is more prevalent in our contemporary reality. However, limited social mobility often hinders the ability to break free from inherited status, making marriage a mechanism to preserve social ranks and assets.

Nonetheless, intellectual compatibility and shared tendencies often influence other aspects. When there is agreement on indicators that determine each spouse's role and status within the family, acceptance of non-traditional role distributions, and recognition of individuality and personal independence, the choices often deviate from inherited status, aligning instead with acquired status.

Gender-based dynamics frequently emerge as distinguishing factors between inherited and acquired status. Such differences can often be overcome through awareness of the value of acquired status, which inherently embodies a form of gender intelligence. This awareness acknowledges the significance of individual achievements and integrates them into the marital identity in a way that benefits both spouses, each contributing to the development of various aspects of the marital relationship. These contributions may range from tangible aspects to supporting shared ideas and tendencies between the partners.

#### — **Choices That Defy the Norm:**

Analyzing cases that deviate from societal norms refers to marriages between individuals who are significantly different or dissimilar. This type of choice is based on the idea that "partners find each other more than they consciously choose each other." In other words, an individual discovers their preconceptions reflected in another person, leading to attraction and compatibility.

This type of selection manifests in several scenarios, including:

- Actions by individuals aimed at highlighting their attributes to the fullest extent to create marriage opportunities.
- Supporting the principle of marital complementarity and exchanges, despite gender differences.

Such cases arise when social mobility interacts with changing communication strategies, moving away from socially structured frameworks to achieve better opportunities. This undermines the theory of restricted choices and the inability of social matches to guarantee marital success.

Additionally, the spread of open and free marriage has grown due to the social transformations experienced by conservative societies. These changes include greater gender integration in shared spaces such as education and work,<sup>8</sup> as well as the expansion of digital communication.

These factors have facilitated the growth of the idea of premarital acquaintance, creating opportunities for emotional connection. This, in turn, allows individuals to move beyond the criteria of equivalence and embrace cultural values that favor differences, particularly among younger generations.

This stage is also referred to as the period of acquaintance and discoveries, or "engagement." It is

a phase marked by hesitation and exploration, wrapped in emotional experiences. During this period, the couple is expected to envision the future of their relationship beyond the constraints of time and space, imagining its dimensions based on limited words and actions. This vision is influenced by personal values and what is culturally and socially permissible according to societal norms.

On the other hand, individuals aim to fulfill their personal choices, making this phase distinct for its attempts at acquaintance through available means. In traditional societies, the shared space for this interaction was limited, but with current openness, this space has significantly expanded.

Moreover, this phase is characterized by anxiety related to redefining personal identity and constructing a new identity the "marital identity."<sup>9</sup> This marks the beginning of the narrative of shared marital selfhood, created collaboratively by both partners.

The seriousness of this phase lies in adopting effective selection methods based on gender intelligence. This intelligence is often acquired passively by individuals due to exposure to external influences through modern media and information channels. At the same time, this intelligence is filtered through the lens of cultural specificity, ensuring a balance between external input and traditional values.

Here, we attempt to uncover the methods that have become customary representations and practices among individuals in their partner selection process:

➤ **Exploring gender identity keys:** The first step individuals take in selecting a life partner is to identify aspects of gender identity. Each seeks to assess the extent to which the partner embodies traits that align with their ideal gender model, without conflicting with their principles and values. This includes evaluating whether the assumptions, issues, and matters supported by the Western concept of gender are present in the partner's thoughts and behaviors. For example, this could involve agreement on women's work and whether it is accepted superficially or fundamentally, along with its implications. It also involves considering whether role-sharing is viewed through the lens of justice and functional complementarity or rejected based on sociocultural factors that resist justice, equating it with absolute equality.

➤ **Comprehensive awareness of differences, diversity, and essential needs:** Recognizing the vital differences and variations between men and women is crucial, as diversity fosters innovation within agreed boundaries.

➤ **Possessing effective communication and interpersonal skills:** Both men and women should develop the ability to communicate effectively, think positively and creatively, identify each other's strengths and weaknesses, and deeply understand each other's personalities and behaviors.

➤ **Adapting to and evolving with modern developments:** Gender intelligence fosters effective communication between men and women across cultural, social, economic, and political sectors. When men and women understand successful thought processes, they achieve higher levels of trust, awareness, and maturity. This leads to innovative positive thinking, which is key to solving problems and making more effective decisions.<sup>10</sup>

➤ **Setting goals and aspirations for the marital relationship:** The discovery phase also serves as the first step for the couple to agree on establishing the foundation of their relationship

and believing in the principle of change.

### **The Second Stage of the Marital Cycle: Facing Reality and Adaptation**

In this phase, the realities of the relationship gradually emerge, typically lasting from one to two years at most. The couple realizes that the shared plan created during the first stage was merely a broad outline of their relationship. This is particularly pronounced in closed societies where the first stage is almost non-existent. Consequently, the couple focuses on establishing the true start of their marital cycle, emphasizing the dynamics of their relationship and maintaining peace, affection, and love within the formal framework dictated by societal rituals. The new context is often contradictory, and the marital situation lacks clear definition due to the abrupt shift from planning to execution without gradual progression. This compels the couple to categorize the realities they encounter based on their level of satisfaction: acceptable realities that align with expectations, manageable realities that require effort and compromise, and unacceptable realities that cause tension and necessitate significant adjustment. This stage challenges the couple to adapt actively, employing flexibility, communication, and mutual understanding to build a harmonious foundation for their marriage.

-The Category of Fulfillment of Aspirations and Ambitions

-The Category of Ambiguity and Clarity in Communication Language

-The Category of Desired and Undesired Behaviors

-The Category of Familiar and Shocking Realities

The adaptation process begins through organizing their interactions based on the rapid revelation of each other's identity due to constant proximity and ongoing interaction within the marital environment. The couple tests their ability to distribute activities and manage time, money, and space while assessing their level of compatibility and adjustment within the new life. At this stage, tendencies emerge to determine whether they are aligned, and the couple often lives under the influence of emotions, which tend to numb conflicts over contentious issues.

### **The Third Stage of the Marital Cycle: Building Reality and Sharing Responsibilities**

In this stage, the marital relationship develops a certain level of expertise in managing family dynamics. Strategies and methods are established for exchanging and organizing thoughts, behaviors, decisions, and agreements, as well as for defining roles, priorities, needs, and obligations within a shared framework. Additionally, interactive rules and routines are set to align with mutually agreed-upon behaviors and each partner's aspirations.<sup>11</sup>

This stage often coincides with childbirth and the arrival of children into the family, necessitating sacrifices and the ability to handle this new reality efficiently, seriously, and with balance. The difficulties and challenging periods faced by women during pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding require parents to adapt to their roles as mother and father. During this time, two possible scenarios may arise:

➤ **First Scenario:** Problems diminish as a result of the maturity gained during the early stages of coexistence, built on overcoming previous challenges and agreements based on shared values.

➤ **Second Scenario:** Problems persist and even intensify due to underlying differences. For instance, one partner might oppose the idea of having children, especially if it comes from the woman influenced by extreme gender ideologies, or if ideas like rejecting maternal roles or household responsibilities creep in. This can destabilize the relationship, leading to neglect between the partners and eventually to issues such as disintegration and separation.<sup>12</sup>

At this point, gender intelligence becomes critical, allowing for the redefinition of goals and the review of initial decisions. However, issues characterized by extremism<sup>13</sup> and deviation whether from the woman or the man are particularly challenging to resolve in this stage. The situation is further complicated by the overwhelming influx of ideas and practices, especially through modern media and information technologies. Many previously prohibited actions become acceptable through exceptions, eventually normalizing what was once taboo in the absence of regulatory policies. This is especially true for family-related matters, which remain a "black box," inaccessible either legally or through social welfare mechanisms.

### **The Fourth Stage of the Marital Cycle: The Stage of Stability and Comfort**

At this stage, the couple achieves a lifestyle that suits both partners. They resolve compatibility issues, solidify the foundations of their relationship, and build upon their accomplishments. They adapt to the shared family system, giving the domestic context enough significance to create a sense of comfort through arrangements, activities, and the intimacy of interactions.<sup>14</sup>

This stage reflects the stability of the marital identity achieved through the couple's collaboration. Although the situation may include some routine, it maintains a sense of security. Additionally, the family's role matures in planning for the future and the children, offering an opportunity to reaffirm creativity, take on new challenges in married life, and further develop and fulfill the marital self.

### **The Fifth Stage of the Marital Cycle: The Stage of Post-Responsibilities and Mutual Care**

After the couple surpasses the stage of responsibilities and resolves the problems and crises of previous phases, they enter a period, often coinciding with one or both partners retiring. This phase is marked by both emptiness and availability. The emptiness can be painful due to detachment from the work environment with its interactions or separation from grown children who have become independent, leading to feelings of loneliness. On the other hand, availability offers more time for self-reflection and shared marital experiences.

During this phase, the relationship is characterized by stability, familiarity, and a deep understanding of the partner. There is better comprehension of each other's needs, acceptance of differences, and the ability to offer constructive criticism in a friendly manner. These dynamics foster greater happiness. However, both partners require significant support, affection, and care from each other, as well as from their children and family, particularly if health issues arise that necessitate attention.

### **Conclusion**

In summary, our discussion on the mechanism of gender intelligence in marital relationships delves into the meanings associated with gender intelligence and applies them to three key terms for

gender analysis within a cultural specificity framework:

- **The principle of pairing** in marital relationships.
- **The principle of social justice.**
- **The principle of awareness of differences in all aspects.**

This does not imply acceptance of the concept of gender equality. Instead, the principle of pairing, with its inherent continuous reciprocity based on the unity of origin and complementary differences between spouses, and the principle of justice, grounded in equal opportunities while acknowledging and respecting biological and cultural differences, are emphasized. Equality assumes similarity between genders, whereas pairing and justice address genders based on their differences.

Focusing on our reality and the cultural specificity of our society in incorporating the concept of gender, gendered social upbringing cannot oppose these principles but is instead adapted to serve them. For this reason, educational programs in our society do not align with extreme gendered assumptions but rather draw from them what aligns with the values and principles underlying Algerian society. Consequently, the community develops new methods that intelligently address gender changes, allowing flexibility and adaptability in incorporating these changes without compromising cultural specificity.

In contrast to Simone de Beauvoir's perspective, our discussion on gender intelligence emphasizes that birth distinguishes between genders, while upbringing shapes their identities and personalities through the work of socialization institutions such as the family, school, friends, society, and media. This process transforms individuals from biological beings into sociocultural beings, as conceptualized by Margaret Mead.

Through this analysis, we aimed to adopt an alternative approach to what most gender studies propose, which often oscillate between two extremes. One extreme rejects all cultural inputs, particularly those affecting religious values and objectives. The other uncritically accepts external influences from dominant societies and invasive cultures.

We sought a third approach, focused on comparative studies, exploring the possibility of adapting those inputs to minimize harm and emphasize positive aspects while avoiding negatives as much as possible. In this work, we attempted to strike a balance by aligning the concept of gender intelligence with ideas that best reflect the value of human intelligence in filtering what serves humanity and achieves balance between values and utility.

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### Endnotes:

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<sup>2</sup> Bertil Alsottari, *Social Theory and Reality*, 1st ed., Translated by Ali Farghaly, National Center for Translation, Cairo, 2015, p. 30.

<sup>3</sup> Sanaa Al-Khouli, *Family and Family Life*, Alexandria: Dar Al-Ma'arifa Al-Jami'iyya, 2011, p. 43.

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<sup>6</sup> Jean-Claude Kaufmann, *Sociology of the Couple*, Translated by Basma Badran, Beirut: University Institution for Academic Studies, 2001, p. 12.

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<sup>13</sup> Jean-Claude Kaufmann, *Ibidem*, p. 83.

<sup>14</sup> Wilfried Rault, Arnaud Régnier-Loilier, *Same Source*, p. 3.