

Gender roles cemented in popular therapy

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In recent years a slew of books and TV programs have been produced on the theme of couples. Popular therapists give advice about the art of succeeding as a couple. The sociologist Sara Eldén at Lund University in Sweden has found that the advice these therapists offer often leads to a reinforcement of traditional gender roles.

In the past it was religion and tradition that provided guidance regarding how to be successful in your relationship. Today these traditional authorities are no longer important.

On the other hand, according to Sara Eldén, new 'scripts' are being created for [couples](#) to relate to as they work to enhance their relationship. One of these scripts is authored by popular therapists in self-help [books](#), TV programs, and magazines.

According to popular therapists, equality, security, and respect are the watchwords for a successful relationship as a couple. The problem arises, as Sara Eldén sees it, when the therapists try to help the couple address their troubles.

"Therapy is about the parties' seeking out faults and behaviors they have that can be changed," she says.

Finding faults in others, for example, that the man is not holding up his end in terms of housekeeping, is not a useful path, according to today's experts. This means that the issue of an uneven distribution of labor never comes up for discussion. The solution to the couple's problem in

popular therapy TV programs therefore often entails that the man and woman actually move closer to stereotypical gender roles.

On the other hand, Sara Eldén has seen other tendencies in TV viewers' discussion forums on the Web that are usually connected with the programs.

"In viewer discussions the popular therapy solutions are challenged," says Sara Eldén. Here women point out, and it is almost only women who take part, that it is precisely the uneven distribution of household work that is the big problem.

Even though Sara Eldén is skeptical to much of the new wave of popular therapy programs, she also see a great deal that is positive, including the fact that they have lent legitimacy to issues that are regarded as "typical women's questions."

"These TV programs have clearly been a catalyst, and in the discussions carried out in the Web forums, there is great potential for issues of equality in the home to be politicized."

Source: Swedish Research Council ([news](#) : [web](#))

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