

The divergence of Conflicts Management Modes in the Conjugal Couple

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Abstract

The conflicts management mode in the conjugal couple is a process that differs from one couple to another. Within the same couple, this process is likely to undergo changes in direction. In this study, we examine the how and why of the emergence of these divergences. This study aims to understand how the divergence of conflicts management modes occurs in the conjugal couple. This work is based on an inductive approach. The orientation is essentially qualitative, using semi-structured interviews. To analyze this study, we used the Thomas-Kilmann Instrument (TKI) [7], which assesses spouses' behaviours as a social group in a conflicts situation based on two fundamental dimensions: Assertiveness and cooperation. A) Assertiveness, where the individual seeks to satisfy their own concerns, and B) cooperation, where the individual tries to address the concerns of the other person (empathy/altruism). The results have shown that the conflicts management mode in the conjugal couple is the result of a historical process that is prone to divergences. These, generated by the behaviours of the spouses such as domestic violence, infidelity, disappointment, greed, the expansion of the social circle, as well as acts of altruism and kindness, are capable of tilting the balance of their conflicts resolution mode ranging from assertiveness to empathy towards their partner. This study highlights the influence of the spouses' behaviours throughout their marital life on their choice of conflicts management mode and therefore on the quality of the marital relationship.

Keywords: altruism, conflict management, disappointment, divergence, domestic violence extramarital relationships, kindness, Process, secondary socialization, selfishness.

1. Introduction

The family has become the "place of the couple" and has entered the "era of identities" [1]; in the couple, each individual must be attentive to the other's identity readjustment. These transformations result from a dual mutation of the family: the primacy of affection in the conjugal relationship and the autonomy of the actors [2]. The contemporary family is now "relational," and the individuals who constitute it are more than ever attached to the quality of the interpersonal relationship. It constitutes a group of people in permanent interaction. There is a valorization of the affective dimension and a diminishing weight of families in the decision to choose a spouse and enter into a conjugal relationship. Building a couple has become more challenging than before. The couple has become the "weakest link" in the entire family [3]. Spouses now manage their conflicts alone. The mode of conflicts management in the conjugal couple is closely related to initial interactions [4]. Inadequate conflicts management in the conjugal couple can lead to its discontinuity.

The increased attention given to the issue of the rising divorce rate, a favored theme of the media, makes the conjugal couple and the management of its conflicts a crucial subject to study. However, few sociological research studies have focused on the study of conflict in

the couple [5]. This led us to conduct a sociological research on conflicts management modes in the conjugal couple (How is conflict managed in the conjugal couple?) in the city of Casablanca, the leading metropolis in the Maghreb, in the years 2021-2023. By conducting this study, we realized that these modes undergo divergences in the majority of cases. That is to say, the overall attitudes of the spouses towards conflicts change significantly. In this article, we will examine how conflicts management modes in the conjugal couple could bifurcate. Our question, therefore, is "How does the divergences of conflicts management modes occur in the conjugal couple?" "How can one or both of the spouses, at a certain point in their marital life, adopt attitudes towards conjugal conflicts that are completely different from what they had before? This study, focusing on the how and why of this phenomenon, will allow us to understand the mechanisms at play in the divergences of conflicts management modes in the conjugal couple. This can prevent deleterious consequences on the future of the couple and replicate positive results in order to achieve better management of conjugal conflicts.

2. Methodology

This study aims to understand how the divergence of conflicts management modes occurs within marital couples. This work follows an inductive approach. The orientation is predominantly qualitative, using the option of semi-structured interviews. The qualitative method is a means of exploring and understanding the significance that spouses attribute to changes in their overall positions regarding marital conflicts. Data collection takes place at the interviewee locations. All interviews were recorded using an application called "magnetophone," preinstalled on a mobile phone, while keeping it at a suitable distance from the interviewee. The collected speeches were then transcribed in their entirety and analyzed using the contextual content analysis method.

Content analysis is the most relevant technique for understanding the opinions, beliefs, positions, and viewpoints conveyed in speeches. It allows for the detection of the meaning behind oral expressions [6]. That is why content analysis appears to be the most suitable tool for studying how the bifurcation of conflict management modes occurs within marital couples. Thus, the analysis consisted, first and foremost, in extracting from these transcriptions the most representative text fragments that reflect the interviewees' viewpoints (vertical analysis) and, subsequently, classifying these extracts into categories (horizontal analysis) to highlight the common characteristics of the discourse of the interviewed subjects.

In this research, we selected sixty interviewees. They expressed that their modes of managing marital conflicts have undergone bifurcations during their marital lives, in response to the following question: "Even when spouses get along very well, there are moments when they face a situation of diverging opinions on one or more points or when one of them is angry at the other for one reason or another. What happens when you find yourself in a similar situation?" We selected sixty married or divorced individuals (53% women and 47% men) living in the Casablanca metropolis and belonging to different social categories. Their average age is equal to or greater than 18 years. The initial contacts with the interviewees were made through acquaintances, friends, family members, colleagues, neighbours, and married or divorced students pursuing their studies at the university. Then, the snowball method was used. Everything was done to reach all social categories.

To analyze this study, we used the Thomas-Kilmann Instrument (TKI) [7], which assesses spouses' behaviours as a social group in a conflicts situation based on two fundamental dimensions: A) assertiveness, where the individual seeks to satisfy their own concerns, and B) cooperation, where the individual tries to address the concerns of the other person (empathy/altruism). From these two behavioral dimensions, five conflict management modes emerge. Firstly, competition in conflicts, where the individual is assertive and uncooperative,

prioritizing their own concerns over those of the other person, using power to achieve their goals. Secondly, collaboration in conflicts, where the individual is both assertive and cooperative, attempting to find a solution with the other person that simultaneously addresses both parties' concerns. Thirdly, compromising in conflicts, where compromise is an intermediate solution between assertiveness and cooperation. During a compromise, individuals try to find a quick and mutually acceptable solution. Fourthly, avoidance in conflicts, where the individual is low in assertiveness and cooperation. By avoiding, the individual does not address the conflict. They withdraw, postpone, or bypass the conflict. They do not care about their own needs or those of the other person. Lastly, accommodation in conflicts, where the individual is more concerned about the other person than themselves, expressing empathy towards the other rather than assertiveness. They are low in authority and cooperative. They disregard their own interests to satisfy the other person's. Accommodation can take the form of generosity or altruism, leading the spouse to comply with their marital partner's desires or yield to their viewpoints.

3. Collection and analysis of data.

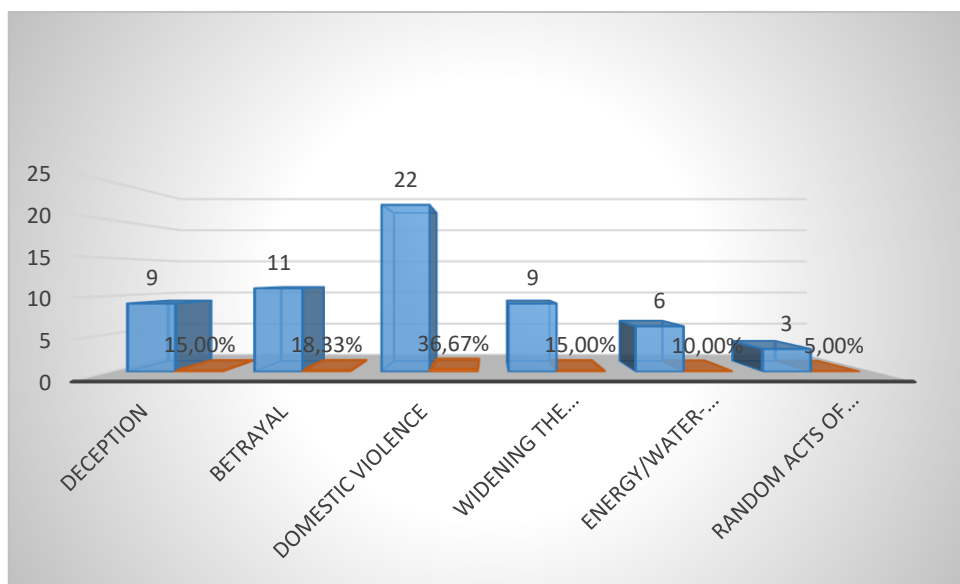


Fig 1: The causes of the divergence of conflicts management modes within marital couples:

Among sixty interviewed, twenty-two individuals expressed that domestic violence is the cause of the divergence in conflict management modes in their relationships, corresponding to a percentage of 36.67% of the surveyed population.

Among sixty interviewed, eleven individuals expressed that betrayal is the cause of the divergence in conflict management modes in their relationships, corresponding to a percentage of 18.33% of the surveyed population.

Among sixty interviewed, nine individuals expressed that disappointment is the cause of the divergence in conflict management modes in their relationships, corresponding to a percentage of 15.00% of the surveyed population.

Among sixty interviewed, nine individuals expressed that expanding social circles is the cause of the divergence in conflict management modes in their relationships, corresponding to a percentage of 15.00% of the surveyed population.

Among sixty interviewed, six individuals expressed that disputes related to energy consumption are the cause of the divergence in conflict management modes in their relationships, corresponding to a percentage of 10.00% of the surveyed population. Among sixty interviewed, three individuals expressed that acts of generosity, kindness, and altruism have been the cause of the divergence in conflict management modes in their relationships, corresponding to a percentage of 5.00% of the surveyed population. Domestic violence represents the highest percentage (36.67%), while acts of altruism and kindness have the lowest percentage (5%).

4. Discussion

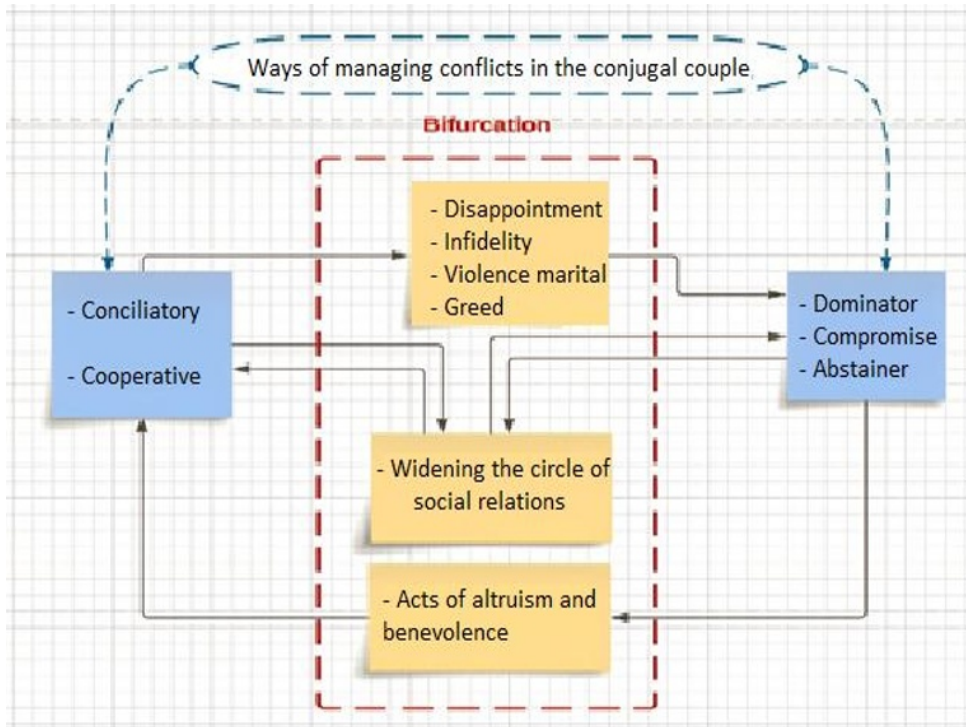


Fig2: Divergences of conflicts management modes within marital couple

The divergences of conflicts management modes within a marital couple can be caused by a multitude of reasons. The following reasons have been repeatedly observed in our research:

1- Disappointment as a cause of the divergence of conflicts management modes within a marital couple:

Expectations towards an ideal partner, someone with a strong personality, a highly significant other [8] capable of providing identity support and managing conflicts within the couple through mutual understanding and communication, without the intervention of a third party, often do not align with the reality of the relationship. As a result, these expectations towards such a spouse become frustrated. According to the individuals interviewed, their disappointment stems from three main reasons. Firstly, reasons related to the individual's personality [9]; the interviewees complain about their misfortune of marrying spouses whom they consider weak in the presence of their mothers. "He is always afraid of his mother, he follows her orders without discussion," "it is his mother who decides for both of us and also for our children," "she precisely follows her mother's instructions; she is always at her

mother's place." Secondly, reasons related to non-conformity to social norms; the interviewees describe their spouses' behaviours at the beginning of their marriages with bitterness. They recount having to take care of all the family tasks on their own without their spouses' help. "He is irresponsible, lazy, good-for-nothing," "he is always out," "I can never rely on her." Lastly, reasons related to morality; one spouse describes their wife as a professional killer, referring to a shocking event that disrupted their life and caused a divergence in the conflicts management mode within their couple. "During winter, she turns off the gas cylinder every time my mother takes a shower, a professional killer."

The confrontation with the disillusionment of a spouse who is incapable of meeting one's expectations, who fails to adhere to social norms, or who is deemed untrustworthy, often leads the aggrieved partner to consider divorce or negotiate a new approach to conflicts resolution within the couple. "I asked for a divorce or to change the dynamics." In our case, the interviewees expressed that they transitioned from a cooperative or conciliatory mode of conflict management to a dominant or compromised mode, or in case of failure, an abstentionist approach.

2- Marital infidelity as a cause of the divergence of conflicts management modes within a marital couple:

The interviewees recount their experiences of infidelity with bitterness, referring to the destructive intrusion of a third person into their relationship. They still hold resentment against their spouses, even though they share stories from the past. "I discovered catastrophic things when I checked his phone; I hate the fool I was." Those who entered the marriage based on love are the most shocked. "I caught him with my friend on my bed, I loved a monster." Love is thus questioned because love exists only when there is evidence of love [10], whereas infidelity is seen as a sign of lack of love. The reciprocity of emotional giving is broken, raising doubts about the sustainability of the marital relationship and the desire to continue it. The process of "convergent love"[11] reaches a decisive crossroad. Being associated with excessive expectations, a love-based marriage is fragile and highly susceptible to divorce [12].

Often, the discovery that a spouse is engaged in a romantic or sexual relationship with another person hastens divorce. This can result in a temporary crisis, separation through divorce, separation while still living under the same roof, or a change in the established order of the marital relationship as long as the spouse prioritizes maintaining the family home and does not engage in a committed relationship with the third person [13]. In fact, the spouse who clandestinely develops an extramarital relationship or more separates their "public life" from their "private life." The latter is kept as their sphere of intimacy. When their infidelity is revealed, they find themselves indebted to their marital partner. This may put them in a position of weakness in negotiations within the couple. In our research, the interviewees expressed that they transitioned from a cooperative or conciliatory mode of marital conflict management to a dominant mode.

3- Domestic violence as a cause of divergence in conflicts management modes within marital couple.

Disagreements can occur in most couples. In moments of anger and frustration, hurtful words, demeaning remarks, and other violent behaviors can sometimes surface. These occurrences are occasional and do not fit into a repetitive cycle where one spouse dominates the other. This does not refer to domestic violence but rather to couple of quarrels. In contrast, in cases of domestic violence, such actions are frequent and normal within the couple's relationship. They serve the purpose of constant control and domination of the victim by the aggressor. The victim remains trapped in an atmosphere of terror and weakness for a long time. Fear and powerlessness are sharp indicators that differentiate domestic violence from couple of quarrels. (Johnson, 2014) [14]

More than one-third of the surveyed population expressed that domestic violence was a significant cause of divergence in conflicts management modes within their marital couples. This violence can be physical, verbal, or psychological. **Psychological violence** involves devaluing the spouse, directly undermining their self-esteem [15]. It can manifest as belittlement, such as "look at yourself in the mirror, and you'll know why I don't want to go out with you" or "my sisters married wealthy men, I'm the only one who married a civil servant." It can also involve indifference [16], such as "he ignored my existence" or "for the slightest thing, she would stop speaking to me for days, and sometimes months." Additionally, it can include demeaning remarks, such as "we lived with his parents, and they told me to go upstairs whenever they had guests because I wasn't up to their family's standards." **Verbal violence** is described as insults and contempt, such as "he described me using the ugliest words" or "she spewed fire; what she said was truly hurtful". **Physical violence** refers to any act of physical violence directed against a spouse. It can involve pushing, shoving, or escalating to beating, torturing, and/or murder. Physical violence can also have consequences, as in "he slapped me just two days after I gave birth."

The interviewees expressed that at a certain point in their marital lives; they revolted against any violent acts committed by their spouses towards them. "His words were like bullets; for a very brief moment, I felt like I was dead, and another woman, much stronger than me, had entered my body. Since that day, I have never bowed my head again. No more sacrifices." This revolution created a turning point in the course of interpersonal interactions and subsequently led to a divergence in conflict management modes within their marital couples. In our research, the interviewees expressed that they transitioned from a cooperative or conciliatory mode of managing marital conflicts to a dominant or compromising mode, or in case of failure, an abstentionist mode.

4- Expanding social relationships as a cause of divergence in conflict management modes within marital couples:

Expanding the circle of social relationships is a secondary form of socialization. Berger and Luckmann argue, "Socialization is never total or complete" [17]. It involves the acquisition of knowledge constructed later on. Consequently, there may be a problem of adaptation between original and new internalizations. This implies that secondary socialization can cause a rupture compared to primary socialization. In this situation, according to Berger and Luckmann, there are complete transformations of identity during secondary socialization. Regarding this type of divergence, we observed that the interviewees could be divided into two groups. Members of the first group expressed that they transitioned from a cooperative or conciliatory mode of conflicts management to a dominant or compromising mode, and sometimes, in case of failure, an Abstentionist mode. On the other hand, members of the second group expressed that they transitioned from a dominant or compromising mode of conflict management to a cooperative or conciliatory mode after expanding their circles of social relationships through the following opportunities:

Pursuing university studies leads to the construction of cultural capital [18] in a formal manner, which can enhance an individual's social position. This capital is legitimized by obtaining a degree validated by the institution, usually the national education system. It also offers an opportunity for learning autonomy, where individuals can expand their skills, specialize, and subsequently build their careers and attain higher salaries and promotions. These achievements consequently influence an individual's personality, self-esteem, and interactions with others. "My self-esteem has been strengthened; I no longer tolerate being dominated". At university, public speaking is an important source of personal fulfillment and self-awareness. Through repeated exercises in public speaking, students develop their ability to express, inform, convince, listen, communicate, and respect others' viewpoints

while defending their own. "At university, I meet educated people who respect each other's opinions; I learned that in conflicts, there is not only the dominant and the dominated."

Work is a paid activity that brings financial independence and the satisfaction of needs. Through work, individuals develop their skills and qualities, which gives them self-confidence, strengthens their self-esteem, and contributes to personal growth. Work makes an individual a social being, trained in socialization and living in society. It is an essential path towards social integration. "I have become independent; I no longer suffer from the dependence that made me bow my head. Now I can express myself freely."

Repeated encounters with other couples in a social setting: These encounters represent secondary socialization for the members of these couples. In fact, an individual's socialization is never complete; their internalization of reality is not a definitive process, and their identity is constantly being reconfigured [19]. "I learned from other women how to be a true woman. When he saw the person I had become, he began to respect my decisions."

5- Couple's disputes related to energy consumption (electricity/water - diesel - gas) as a cause of the shift in conflict management modes within the marital relationship.

Financial resources grant more power in the marital relationship, both in decision-making and expenditure control [20]. Couples with limited resources face significant financial challenges such as paying water and electricity bills, which have been deemed excessive in recent years. Studies have shown that financial stress has detrimental effects on the couple's relationship and can generate conflicts that threaten the stability of the marital bond [21] [22]. "She complained all the time because of the high amounts on the water and electricity bills. I could not say anything; I was not working, you know, it was because of the pandemic [...] I was going to leave the house, I could not take it anymore. Luckily, I got a call to go back to work; my salary is higher than hers now, so I'm the one in charge." Spouses with more resources are the ones making financial decisions [18]. They are likely to influence decisions within the couple in favor of their own preferences [23]. "He asked me to take the kids to school to avoid paying transportation fees, but he didn't want the fuel gauge to move [...] he forgot that the driver was already free. Instead of being grateful, he accused me of wandering the streets [...] so I stopped being the chauffeur, that's it." The interviewees expressed that they transitioned from a cooperative or reconciling conflicts management mode to a dominant or compromising mode after putting an end to disputes related to energy consumption.

6- Acts of unexpected kindness and altruism as a cause of the divergence in conflicts management modes within the couple.

The interviewees expressed surprise at the altruistic acts of their partners. They showed selfless concern for their well-being, demonstrating kindness, generosity, empathy, and dedication by sacrificing their money, time, and energy to promote their partners' well-being without expecting anything in return. "She took care of my mother during her illness without even being asked," "She sacrificed all her money and time to help me through my crisis," "He surprised me by putting half of the house in my name to protect me from life's uncertainties." These altruistic behaviours from spouses, perceived positively by their partners, acted as powerful amplifiers of reciprocity [24]. In such a context characterized by generosity, beneficiaries tend to adopt a generous attitude themselves [25]. In fact, our interviewees expressed that they transitioned from a dominant or compromising conflicts management mode, and occasionally, in case of failure, an abstentionist mode, to a cooperative or reconciling conflicts management mode. This means that by granting their partners more control over conflicts management in their marital relationships, our interviewees themselves demonstrate generosity [26].

5. Conclusion

The main contribution of this study lies in the analysis of interpersonal processes related to the associations between the emergence of divergences in conflicts management modes within marital couples and the behaviours of its members throughout their conjugal life. The results suggest that positive behaviour from one spouse leads the other to choose a more cooperative and even conciliatory conflicts management mode, while negative behavior leads to the adoption of a dominant, compromising, or abstaining conflicts management mode. These findings shed light on the effect of spouses' behaviours on the management modes of their conflicts and the relationship between behaviour type and the quality of its divergence. Intimate partner violence represents the highest percentage (36.67%), while acts of altruism and kindness are the lowest (5%). This significant gap opens the way for an in-depth study to explore the nature of the current relationship between spouses. In fact, available statistics in Morocco conclude that intimate partner violence is a prevalent phenomenon in the country. The national survey conducted in 2019 by the High Commission for Planning [27], based on a statistically representative sample, shows that the conjugal context remains the living space most marked by violence, with 46.1% of women aged 15 to 74 having experienced intimate partner violence in the 12 months preceding the survey. The conjugal space is where gender-based violence occurs most frequently, resulting in physical and/or psychological suffering for women.

Furthermore, only female interviewed mentioned marital infidelity as a cause of the divergence in conflicts management modes within marital couples. Several hypotheses emerge from this result, and an exploratory study in this regard would be of great importance.

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