

Dialectic Perspective on Interpersonal Conflict of Pre-Divorce and Its Reconciliation

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Abstract. *This research examines the Dialectic Perspective of Interpersonal Conflict of Pre-Divorce and Its Reconciliation. The development of the divorce rate in Indonesia has reached its peak in 2022 compared to the last six years. These phenomena interest the researcher in discovering how the married couple in dispute can resolve their marriage and repair their relationship. This research is based on the theory of relational dialectics as a ground theory, supported by narrative sense-making as the middle theory, and complemented by dialogic listening theory as the applied theory for supporting conflict resolution. The method used was a qualitative descriptive approach to study the case of four informants with criteria determined by the researcher. The results of this study indicate a framework dimension from the precursor of marriage conflict, namely individual character and family character, forward to the process of the conflict where the dimension of interpersonal conflict and addressing or problem-solving of the conflict is found, to the reconciliation dimension that contributes to the success of reconciliation such as time, agreement, use of future narrative, satisfaction, financial performance, habitual interdependence, and religion and cultural constraints.*

Keywords: *communication conflict, marriage couples, marriage communication, pre-divorce, interpersonal communication*

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INTRODUCTION

In contemporary society, intense conflicts are prevalent in several marital relationships, necessitating immediate attention and resolution. Marital conflict is a clash or disagreement between spouses or sometimes other family members, characterized by clashing expectations, beliefs, attitudes, values, or goals (AJ, 2018).

Indonesia according to the 2023 report from the Indonesian Central Bureau of Statistics, the divorce rate in 2022 has reached its highest point in the last six years. The total count amounted to 516,334 instances, mainly consisting of young couples from the millennial cohort, namely between the ages of 30 and 40 (Biro Pusat Statistik, 2020). Women's educational and employment

status, varying levels of education within couples, infidelity, young and immature marriages, in-laws and other dependent family members' involvement, misunderstandings or disagreements, financial difficulties or poverty, cultural differences, sexual and violence, fertility issues, and drug addiction all contribute to marriage breakdown. These are only a few marriage relationship challenges. (Emeng & Eteng, 2022).

Meanwhile, how people perceive their capacity to influence their social circumstances and consider the resulting personal and social consequences; by adopting this perspective, the relational dialectic agency can be understood as a paradoxical state between belonging and not belonging within a social ecology—an ongoing exchange of behaviors, modes of

being, and interpersonal connections that establish and maintain social norms and obligations (Cunliffe & Karunanayake, 2023). Dialectical tensions between couples develop when interrelated and opposing notions illustrate the inclusive nature of different views, not a binary approach. Relational dialectics emphasize the complexity of relationships and the many meanings systems partners hold. High degrees of anger, violence, emotional intensity, poor communication, and incapacity to address disagreements cause destructive conflict. This dispute may harm the family, generating severe problems for parents and children (K. Anderson et al., 2023).

Conflict Through Relational Dialectics Theory has reached different results, but all agree on interactional cooperation. Relational dialectics theory, which emphasizes dyadic communication, explains dialectical disputes. Baxter presented a dialectical paradigm in which speech constantly included conflict between opposing system members, with four main ideas that are present in most dialectical scholarly works: Contradiction, Change, Praxis, and Totality (Littlejohn et al., 2021).

Contradictions, which negate each other, are vital in partnerships. Regarding any bipolar feature, “many oppositions are probable. Change is essential, too. Stability characterizes change (Oetzel et al., 2017). It establishes vital events that explain the transformation. The dynamic character of a relationship is shown by its repeated conflicts. Praxis covers how people respond to ongoing conflicts, from denying them to discussing how to change the relationship (Oetzel et al., 2017) in (Littlejohn et al., 2021). Interactional tensions emerge during a conversation between two people, whereas contextual tensions come from organizational structures or policies that impact them (Altman, 1993).

We believe this matter needs a more academic point of view from communication sense-making as a driver of change. Communicated Sense-Making (CSM) pertains to how individuals construct meaning and understanding in their interactions with others, particularly regarding their identities, relationships, and challenges. CSM research shows how humans understand and interpret their lives through communication. (Holmberg et al., 2004) in (Littlejohn et al., 2021) also classify CSM elements into a narrative approach, which involves accounts, attributions, accounts as story-like constructions, and narratives as tools individuals use to comprehend their relationship lives socially. Attributions explain one’s conduct and that of others (Manusov & Spitzberg, 2008)—remedial accounts are verbal explanations for incorrect, shocking, or unpleasant behavior. Accounts that describe complex life events change to overcome credibility issues (Holmberg et al., 2004). We added memorable messaging and transmitted perspective-taking, attributions, stories, and narratives to the CSM study. Communication helps people understand their lives and relationships. Therefore, both are related. Memorable messages, which people remember and experience in their early years and perceive as having an influence (Knapp et al., 2006), are essential for identity formation and familial socialization. Communicated perspective-taking is taking another’s viewpoint to show empathy and understanding. This involves agreeing, paying attention, coordinating, adopting a good tone, allowing the other person room to talk, and contributing to family issues discourse (Koenig Kellas J. et al., 2013).

Attributions accounts as remedial and storied, memorable messages, and communicated perspective-taking are common ways we understand

and communicate our understanding, especially when narratives are needed to understand confusing, complicated, or complex relationships. We utilize dialogic listening to explore how challenging conflicts may be resolved. Four aspects are needed to understand how dialogic listening affects fieldwork: jointly produced, present-centered, openness, playfulness, and embodied horizon fusion. Mutually centered means parties share ideas throughout the talk. Present-centered communication emerges throughout the discussion. Openness represents conversation-shared meaning. Playfulness is the conversational idea exchange. The fusion of the horizon as the last dimension finishes the other four dimensions, and dialogue should be seen from a specific perspective where meaning and interpretations may change. John Stewart's 1983 article, based on Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricoeur, encapsulated the spirit of Dialogic Listening to exchange ideas to create mutual meaning instead of being emphatic, which is common in dispute resolution (Littlejohn et al., 2021).

Combining the three theories mentioned, we proposed a research framework to be applied as thinking guidance.

Figure 1 serves as our anchor to analyze conflict that often stems from micro-conflicts with openness and closeness, novelty, and predictability factors. It revolves around whether the couple decides to exercise autonomy or connection in a more profound sense when having conflict. After the selection and weight determination process, the concept of communication sense-making will serve as a narrative tool to resolve the conflict dialectically. Considering the increasing prevalence of divorce in recent years, as mentioned above, attitudes and societal acceptability towards divorce have transformed (Singh & Singh, 2019). Although the stigma surrounding divorce has diminished in Indonesian society, particularly among Generation Z and Millennials, due to its increased frequency and acceptance, it remains interesting to explore how ordinary individuals rationalize the necessity of divorce and under what circumstances this conflict is

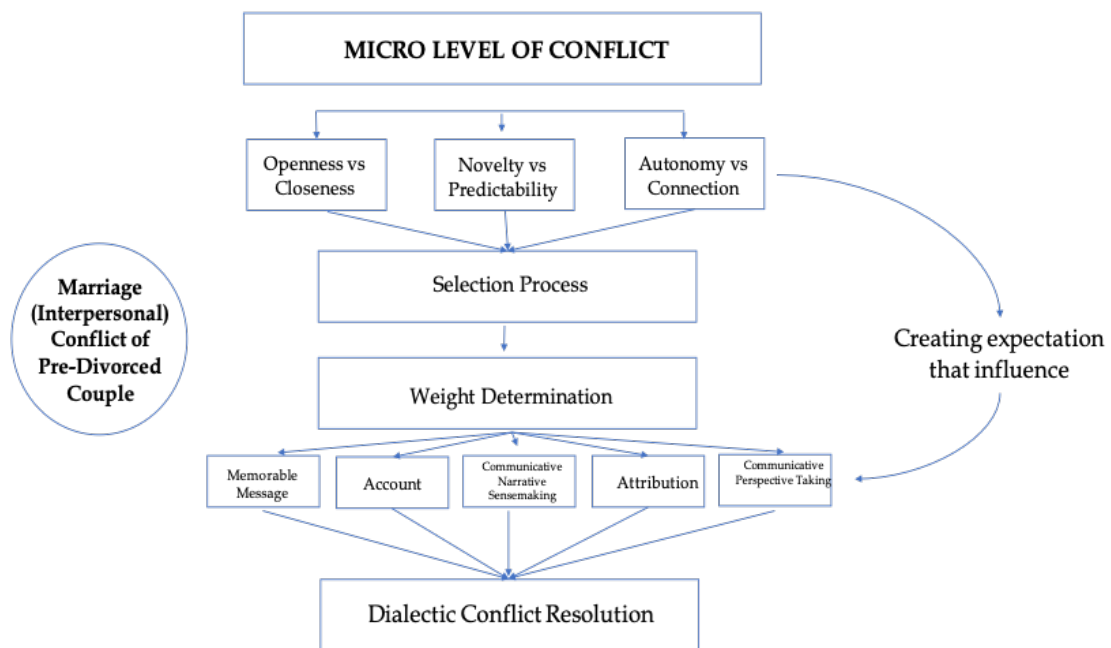


FIGURE 1. Research framework and conceptualisation

resolved, leading couples to choose to stay together ultimately. This research intends to examine the viewpoints of Generation Z and millennial adults about the choice to divorce and their strategies for resolving conflicts to maintain their relationships. Specifically, it aims to analyze the many elements that contribute to the intention to divorce (pre-divorce) and the subsequent settlement of cancellation on the divorce.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to elucidate and summarize diverse circumstances, events, or occurrences to reveal their inherent qualities, attributes, models, signals, or descriptions with a case study research methodology. Bungin (Bungin, 2011) defines the case study research approach as a comprehensive examination of a single group or incident. The case study model research emphasizes getting a comprehensive grasp of the subject under investigation. The case study technique thoroughly examines a specific symptom or phenomenon, focusing on a small aspect. Although the focus is limited, the range of dimensions examined must be extensive, including several factors to ensure no component is overlooked. As a kind of qualitative research, case study research priorities thoroughly examining a specific issue rather than focusing on a vast number of participants.

Hodgetts & Stolte (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2012) stated that doing case studies on people, organizations, and communities may effectively illustrate significant issues, social dynamics within society, and the perspectives of stakeholders via tangible occurrences. Case studies serve as exemplars to demonstrate how research may effectively tackle challenges. From a technological standpoint, a case is an integral component of a more extensive interconnected system. It is hard to comprehend a situation without

considering previous instances—other components of the system function in an integrated and structured way. Comprehension of a case is contingent upon researchers' understanding of other examples since it cannot be comprehended in isolation.

The study is based on a constructivist paradigm. The constructivist paradigm is characterized by its stark contrast to the paradigm that emphasizes observation and objectivity in pursuing scientific knowledge or understanding reality. The constructivist paradigm posits that the truth of a social reality is determined by social construction and that this truth is subjective. This perspective regards social science as a methodical examination of significant social actions, achieved by closely observing the individuals involved in constructing, sustaining, or overseeing their social environment (Hidayat et al., 2022).

The study used a qualitative descriptive methodology after preliminary exploratory research. A descriptive study aims to elucidate the occurrence of events and the methodologies used in conducting such research. Direct interviews were conducted with sources.

The study employed analysis via direct interviews with four respondents, two women and two men, with various education and financial backgrounds. Researchers do exploratory research to develop a comprehension of the study topic. The findings from the exploratory research are then used as input for descriptive research to gather information about reputable sources. The researchers conducted data analysis, which included reducing, presenting, and verifying the data. Triangulation is a crucial and straightforward method for assessing the accuracy of study findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

We illustrated our findings in a map figure consisting of three types of the main categories of pre-divorce reconciliation in a dialectic way, as illustrated in Figure 2.

It shows the focal view connected to the condition and situation of each respondent. We will discuss the result by using the interviewed data we have extracted to synthesize the case description and its reflexive meaning.

Precursor of Marriage (Interpersonal) Conflict. Marital relationships are complicated, and the brain must consider various circumstances when deciding appropriate actions. Existing theories on the quality and durability of marriage partnerships struggle to explain some of the intricacies of marital behaviors. A novel theoretical framework based on the simple claim that marital behaviors, one of the most complex human behaviors, result from the brain’s sophisticated adaptive mechanism (Nikrahan, 2023). The communication issues were founded in persistent distrust (Francia et al., 2019), and conflict was

frequently exacerbated when one parent perceived the other’s words and behaviors negatively.

Different personalities react and behave differently in response to various forms of stimulus. This remark implies that personality qualities may explain the ongoing acceptance and utilization of novel undertakings (Krisadhi et al., 2023). Marital conflicts may arise from several factors, including disparities in values, wants, and expectations between partners (S. A. Anderson et al., 2007). Conflict is an inherent and inevitable aspect of all human interactions. The resolution of disagreement may have either beneficial or detrimental effects on relationships. Spouses use several methods to address disputes, ranging from engaging in heated arguments to seeking mutually agreeable resolutions. Based on a study by Gottman and Krokoff (Gottman & Krokoff, 1989), positive interactions during a conflicting debate between couples can be classified as accepting responsibilities, making compromises, using humor, expressing physical intimacy, and compliance. On

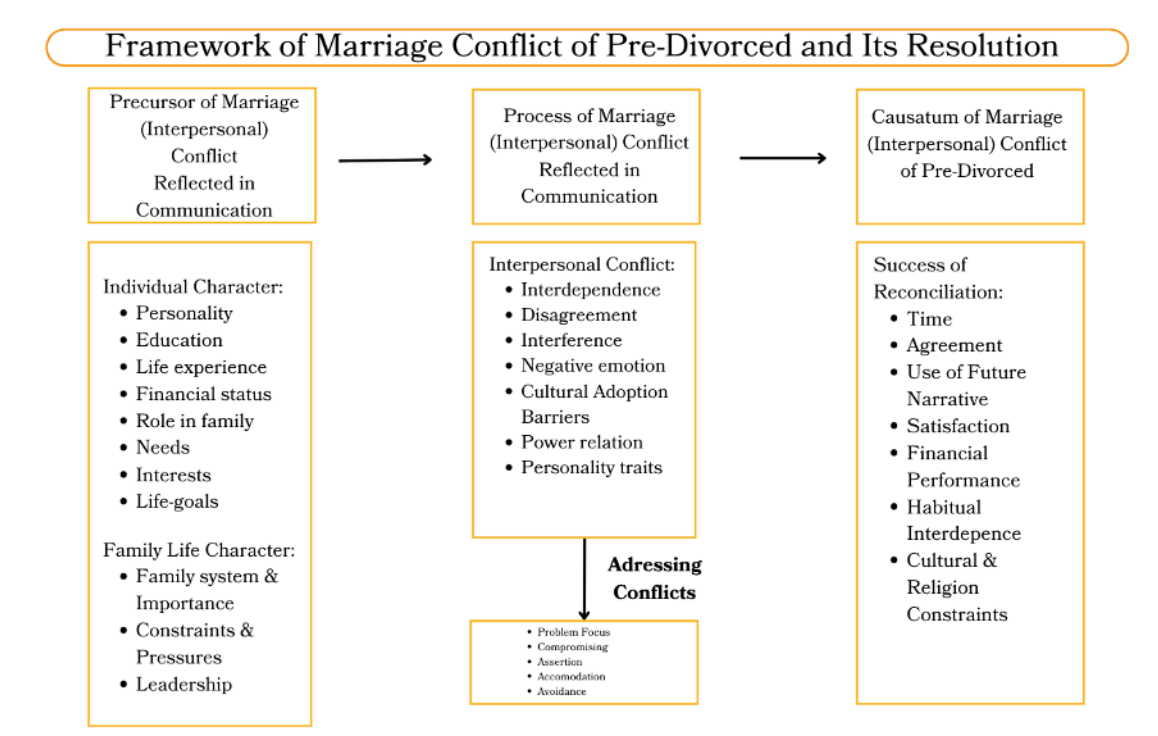


FIGURE 2. Framework of Marriage Conflict of Pre-Divorced and Its Resolution

the other hand, negative interactions can be categorized as defensiveness, stubbornness, criticism, and withdrawal from interaction. We confirm these premises from our four sources with variations.

The variances are contingent upon the heterogeneity of the personalities shown by each marriage. Most conflict triggers that emerge, evolve, and escalate into complex situations stem from the spouses' lack of awareness that their differences are impacted by their social backgrounds. Before marrying, both parties are content with their values, habits, and life level. Conflicts often diminish quickly when both parties, or at least one, become aware of differences. The presence of this consciousness enables the occurrence of contentious conversation, facilitating the gradual elimination of individuality. According to the relational dialectic theory, one or both parties are eager to assume the party's role, which decreases or even alters their personality.

Considering the many frameworks used to describe conflict behaviors, it is essential to assess the degree of similarity across these frameworks that enables simplification. Research on interpersonal conflicts across various domains has identified two fundamental dimensions that account for most variations in conflict behaviors: (a) the degree of direct engagement versus avoidance and (b) the degree of agreeableness or positivity versus disagreeableness or negativity (Caughlin & Gerlikovski, 2023; van de Vliert & Euwema, 1994). Sillars et al. (Sillars & Canary, 2013) demonstrate a straightforward method of categorizing behaviors in marital conflicts into four distinct labels using two dimensions: (a) negotiation (direct and agreeable), (b) direct fighting (direct and disagreeable), (c) nonconfrontation (indirect and agreeable), and (d) indirect fighting

(indirect and disagreeable).

The selection among these four distinct designations is contingent upon one's personality. The outcomes of examining various sources for this study indicate that possibilities for negotiation, confrontation, or direct conflict will also be influenced by additional factors that shape an individual's character beyond personality traits. These factors include education, life experience, financial circumstances, the role of partners in the family, needs, interests, and individual life objectives. In addition to each individual's personality, the character of each partner's extended family or parents also plays a role in determining this. Nevertheless, a set of assumptions may be used to forecast the reasons behind the emergence of conflicts and the subsequent trajectory of the following conflict.

The theory of relational dialectics (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996) holds the following assumptions: (a) change is a constant in relational life and relationships; (b) change in relationships is not one-way but rather multi-directional, meaningful, and never-ending; (c) fundamental to relational life are contradictions or dialectical tensions; and (d) communication is vital in organizing and negotiating relational dialectics, which allows each partner to construct their social reality (Turner & West, 2014). Hence, it is evident that in every relationship experiencing conflict, the recognition of life's ever-changing nature, the practice of two-way communication, and the cultivation of mutual comprehension are fundamental qualities that significantly contribute to the partnership's sustainability.

Partnerships may evolve and thrive due to the cyclical disputes that arise and resolve over time. Practical options include beyond fleeting judgments concerning how to address observed difficulties; the selected reaction during

communication has a role in setting up the tone and general interpersonal atmosphere, which may either foster or hinder future beneficial outcomes for the relationship. Various reactions exhibit varying degrees of functioning in the context of a relationship, with some responses yielding more favorable results than others. Interpersonal relationships undergo continuous changes due to people's reactions to the inherent conflicts that arise in their interactions with others (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Turner & West, 2014). Interpersonal setting refers to the collective emotional atmosphere that exists between individuals. Communication is the "primary influence" that shapes interpersonal climate (Wilson, 2007).

We comprehend that our two female sources, both employed, possess distinct qualities that have become burdens and have resulted in conflicts inside their marriages. The personality traits of couples often contribute to disputes since their communication often leads to disagreements. Factors contributing to marital miscommunication include differences in educational background, age-related life experiences, financial position, dominating roles within the family, unmet needs, individual life interests, and divergent life objectives. These factors typically lead to spouses seeing situations differently, particularly men. The husbands believed that their position as leaders should not be underestimated, given that this study was performed in Indonesia, where the patriarchal family structure is deeply ingrained in the society.

Therefore, it is evident that this group of precursor elements might be likened to a seed. The fundamental elements of this seed consist of individual character and family character, and it is found in many types of partnership relationships, such as marriage. When a trigger occurs,

the likelihood of seeds of disagreement escalating into conflict increases when communication is not conducted effectively. According to relational dialectic, effective communication occurs in several ways, complementing each direction. This leads to progress in addressing the problems being conveyed. The lack of this third aspect often causes frustration for the couples concerned.

Process of Conflict. We see demand and withdrawal in the process of conflict. The demand/withdrawal pattern is when one individual tries to bring up a topic while the other person in the relationship avoids addressing that problem. From a technical standpoint, these behaviors may be seen as a sequence. However, seeing them as co-occurring within a unified pattern is more helpful. This is because one action typically triggers the other - withdrawing leads to demanding, just as demanding prompts withdrawal (Klinetob & Smith, 1996). The demand/withdrawal pattern has mainly been studied in the context of marital relationships, and it is consistently linked to marital unhappiness (Caughlin & Gerlikovski, 2023). Due to the negative consequences and the tendency for demand/withdrawal patterns to remain in relationships, there has been much research focused on comprehending its underlying causes. Most of the research has been dedicated to elucidating the reasons behind the higher likelihood of women displaying demanding behavior and husbands exhibiting withdrawal behavior. Some academics propose that disparities in gender inclinations and socialization account for the variations (Eldridge & Christensen, 2002). Eldridge and Christensen (Eldridge & Christensen, 2002) provide a social structural explanation, stating that the power dynamics between husbands and wives in conventional U.S. marriages result in a framework that benefits males. Consequently, husbands have fewer

grievances to express.

The conflict structure explanation provides a detailed analysis, focusing on the individual's desire for change in a particular matter when it comes to demanding and contentment with the current situation on that matter when it comes to retreating (Eldridge & Christensen, 2002). According to the conflict structure viewpoint, when men want more change than their wives in a particular issue, the typical gendered pattern is no longer present (Christensen & Heavey, 1990; Heavey et al., 1993). Indeed, this discovery about the structure of conflicts aligns with the social structure theory since it is common for women to have a more excellent range of desired changes compared to husbands. This discrepancy is likely a result of systemic power imbalances. The elucidation of demand/withdrawal phenomena aids in understanding the prevalent roles assumed by husbands and wives in such interactions, although the role-based explanations remain insufficient.

In this process of conflict, we understand through our sources that interpersonal conflict has taken full force in their life, so they are considering taking drastic measures to plan a divorce. Interdependence, disagreement, interference from third parties in the closest family circle, negative emotions that radiate one another, cultural adoption barriers seen in one of our sources that has a foreign husband, power relation, and clashed personality traits. However, they have also made several efforts to mitigate the conflict by addressing the issue directly, compromising in specific situations, asserting their positions, accommodating each other, and avoiding confrontation. According to our four sources, avoidance is only reached after previous attempts to resolve the conflict have failed and occurs later. From this, we might infer that their disagreement

persisted for almost three years until they reached the twenty-year mark in their marriage. What is fascinating is how this process of fighting has been engrained as a habit.

Within resolving family conflicts, the notion of "habit" carries a certain degree of hope. Although married couples often encounter disagreements, conflicts, and sometimes heated fights, this study found that neither party ever elevated the sources of marital strife to a more intense level. They failed to initiate the process of divorce. They consider intense discussions, prolonged confrontations, and even physical violence to be regular occurrences. One or both sides typically adopt a conciliatory stance to prevent conflict escalation. Nevertheless, concluding that the issue has been settled based on this circumstance would be inaccurate. The possibility remains present. The dispute experiences a temporary lull, but it will inevitably resurface in the future when the appropriate catalyst is present.

Causatum of Conflict. An equally important issue in married unions is how disputes are handled. According to research, companionship satisfaction is impacted not only by the presence of conflict but also by its kind and degree (Kamp Dush & Taylor, 2012). The coping and resolution techniques spouses employ to resolve conflict are essential issues that should not be disregarded (McNulty & Russell, 2010; Scheeren et al., 1983). Conflict management tactics, which relate to repeated patterns people adopt when faced with conflict, may be classified as destructive or constructive strategies (Deutsch, 1973). Constructive methods refer to the preference for more empathic, collaborative ways to solve problems and convey good messages (Sillars & Canary, 2013). Using negative conflict resolution tactics, such as different types of aggression,

makes the disagreement worse for both parties and is classified as a destructive strategy. One often-used classification of conflict resolution approaches in the literature specifies five main types of conflict resolution behavior: coercion, cooperation, compromise, avoidance, and compliance (Rahim, 2000; Thomas & Kilman, 1974; Thomas & Schmidt, 1976). Coercion employs physical or psychological force and pressure to compel people to meet one's demands. Cooperation means working to attain an equitable solution. In a compromise, both parties attempt to establish a mutually acceptable solution by giving up certain parts of their respective expectations. Boardman and Horowitz (Boardman & Horowitz, 1994) define avoidance as the act of dismissing a dispute and not actively seeking a settlement. Johnson and Johnson (Johnson & Johnson, 1994) define compliance as finding a solution that fulfils the desires of the other person concerned.

Furthermore, a two-dimensional conflict model has been proposed, emphasizing whether the individual prioritizes their outcome or that of their relationship (Blake & Mouton, 1964). Similarly, (Vuchinich, 1987) classified compliance as compromise, delay, or withdrawal, and Greeff and Bruyne (Greeff & De Bruyne, 2000) classified competitiveness as cooperation, compromise, avoidance, and adaptation. Other categories include tactics such as authority, control, pressure, and manipulation (Bell et al., 1982), problem resolution, persuasion, negotiation, and politics (Sheth, 1973). When people use coercive, avoidant, and compliant behaviors in disputes, which are widely considered unproductive, at least one of the partners becomes unhappy with the relationship and suffers terrible feelings; couples that use compromise and cooperative behaviors to handle

problems, on the other hand, feel good since they are deemed constructive and productive tactics (Greeff & De Bruyne, 2000). According to Gottman and Krokoff (Gottman & Krokoff, 1989), marriages defined by destructive conflict resolution tactics are likelier to terminate in divorce than relationships with more constructive conflict approaches. Limited research on married individuals in Turkey supports this (Curun, 2006; Soylu & Kağnıcı, 2015; Uğurlu, 2003; Ünal & Akgün, 2022). It is critical in this setting to determine the presence and location of arguments and assess how the couples address these conflicts.

In intricate interactions, disparities might be seen as either advantageous or disadvantageous. Typically, terminology like "tension," "dilemma," or "negotiation" are commonly portrayed negatively. An issue arises when one confronts stress, a dilemma, or is involved in negotiation. Using dialectical thinking, the adversarial viewpoint is substituted with the acknowledgment that encountering conflicts is a common and natural aspect of every interaction without necessarily being evil. For instance, every community-campus collaboration encounters contradictory opportunities: To what extent can I depend on this individual (e.g., significantly, minimally)? What is the extent of information I want to provide, and on which specific subjects now (e.g., all-encompassing, selective)? Will my solution suit this relational context, considering factors such as consistency and the unexpected nature of the change? In effective partnerships, challenges arising from dialectical conflicts are acknowledged and dealt with (Altman, 1993).

Highlighting the importance of dialogic listening is crucial because a sense of being understood could develop as we actively participate in a conversation of ideas in the present moment (Shotter

J., 2009). The act of listening has the potential to foster a sense of unity among individuals. When we listen, we discover our unique method of connecting and developing a particular tendency or attitude towards building relationships (Gehrke, 2009). The researcher's approach of establishing a sense of shared identity with study participants in the field might be called an "intersubjective" position in research (Cunliffe, 2011).

At this point, we also see the significance of the theory of relational dialectic in resolving household disputes. Efforts to convey views at one moment and another moment by being willing to be the one who listens to the other person's ideas are significant. Our sources acknowledged that understanding is more easily developed through a dialogue process that provides equal rights and opportunities to both parties. However, each resource person also realized that communication only encouraged dialectical relations between the two parties. There are several reasons that couples should consider to resolve this.

Our results indicate that, for various reasons, our informants with extensive dispute experience see these conflicts as routine. They deliberated and reassessed their decision to begin the process of filing for divorce. Children's parenting is still one of the most vital reasons for staying together. Looking at the interview, our sources said that time has made the dispute routine bearable. At the same time, they also agree to continue the marriage considering family reasons, family values, future goals, financial performance, habitual interdependence, and cultural and religious constraints.

These reasons were uncovered via an extensive procedure that revealed a dialectical connection, including discussion and conversation with narrative material from each side. Frequently, individuals also get this

rationale from the firsthand accounts of others who have had comparable domestic issues, including interventions or perspectives from their own family or trusted individuals. Furthermore, the interpersonal interactions inside this home are a compelling demonstration of ego suppression. Based on the insights of four different sources, it has been observed that achieving reconciliation becomes more feasible when both parties involved, rather than just one, are actively pursuing resolution and prioritizing their interests.

Moreover, based on relational dialectic as our foundation of prime theory in this research, we conclude that the change dimension held value for the couples who tried throughout many disputes and agreed to disagree. So, from the vantage point of dialogic listening theory, communication is back and forth, though it comes as conflict.

CONCLUSION

Our study has uncovered a new phenomenon: conflict in married couples. In this research, we utilize relational dialectic theory as a foundational framework to examine conflict at a micro level. According to this theory, conflicts involve autonomy, connection, novelty, predictability, openness, and closeness. We combine this theory with communicative sense-making to understand how conflicts progress towards reconciliation. This involves analyzing attributions, remedial accounts, storied messages, memorable messages, and communicated perspective-taking. In addition, in applied theory, we use dialogic listening as a crucial element for resolving conflicts. This approach emphasizes the aspects of mutual creativity, present-centeredness, openness, playfulness, and fusion of horizons.

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