

The Bet of Virtual Tide and the Pathology of Relationships in the Modern Family- Emotional Divorce and Electronic Infidelity as a Case Study

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العاطفي والخيانة الزوجية الالكترونية أنموذجا-

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Abstract:

This study aims to elucidate the relationship between changes in the social and communicative context of individuals and the emergence of pathologies within the modern Algerian family. It provides a socio-cultural and psychological analysis of marital life in the face of the challenges posed by technological advancements and the fluid nature of social communication between genders, transitioning from a limited real-world context to an unlimited virtual context (*e.g., Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, IMO, Viber, Tik Tok*). As this issue also affects married couples, we seek to clarify the relationship between emotional divorce and electronic infidelity in the absence of social supervision. Employing a descriptive analytical approach, the study reveals that the virtual tide has significantly impacted the fluidity of marital relationships. This impact is supported by the socio-cultural changes affecting the Algerian family and the shift in the nature of relationships between genders from a directed pattern to a fluid one. The study identifies a reciprocal positive relationship

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between emotional divorce and electronic infidelity, leading to the collapse of family structure and the emergence of pathologies that may extend beyond the family unit.

Keywords: Emotional divorce; Electronic infidelity; Social media; Social supervision ; Values.

ملخص:

نهدف من خلال هذه الدراسة لتوضيح العلاقة بين تغيرات السياق الاجتماعي والتواصل للأفراد وانبثاق باتولوجيات العلاقات داخل الأسرة الجزائرية المعاصرة، وذلك من خلال تقديم قراءة سوسيوقافية نفسية لواقع الحياة الزوجية أمام رهان التمرد التكنولوجي وسيولة التواصل الاجتماعي بين الجنسين وانتقاله من السياق الواقعي المحدود إلى السياق الافتراضي اللامحدود (فايسبوك، واتساب، أنستغرام، إيمو.فاير...)، ولأن الأمر قد يشمل المتزوجين أيضا فإننا سنحاول توضيح العلاقة بين الطلاق العاطفي والخيانة الالكترونية في غياب إمكانية الرقابة الاجتماعية. معتمدين في ذلك على المنهج التحليلي الوصفي، بحيث يتضح من خلال نتائجها أن المد الافتراضي قد أثر على انسيابية العلاقة بين الزوجين بدعم من التغيرات السوسيوقافية التي مست الأسرة الجزائرية من جهة وتغير نمط العلاقات بين الجنسين من النمط الموجّه إلى النمط السائل، بحيث تشكل علاقة طردية انعكاسية بين الطلاق العاطفي والخيانة الزوجية الالكترونية وهذا ما يؤدي إلى انهيار الأسري وظهور باتولوجيات قد تتعدى الكيان العائلي برمته.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الطلاق العاطفي؛ الخيانة الزوجية الالكترونية؛ وسائط التواصل الاجتماعي؛ الرقابة الاجتماعية؛ القيم.

1. Introduction:

It has become increasingly evident that change is the predominant characteristic of today's society, affecting various domains and encompassing multiple forms, dimensions, directions, and levels, whether material or immaterial. Consequently, social structures are undergoing a re-evaluation of their components and overall systems based on three essential pillars: structure, function, and effectiveness.

The family, as a fundamental social entity based on space, relationships, interaction, and dialogue, has also faced the repercussions of change that have impacted its very foundations and beyond. Despite the modern family's ability to retain some of its core functional aspects, it is not immune to the pressures imposed by both local and global contexts. Today, families find themselves balancing between preservation and adaptation, with both processes inherently embodying change as a dynamic and symbolic force.

Moreover, the openness and technological expansion have altered the semiotics of space and meaning. As a result, we find ourselves discussing dialectics rather than absolutes, contradictions within agreements, and the merging of constants with variables, as well as the private with the public and the permissible with the forbidden.

Values now lack the gradual stability in their semiotics and determinants. Although change is a fundamental characteristic of value, its authority depends on stability. However, change remains inseparable from value in two ways: in the hierarchy of cultural and social values and in the challenge of invoking opposing values amid the current technological upheaval and its obligatory authority.

This has led to a kind of instability, imbalance, and uncertainty regarding the fundamentals and certainties of the family. As a result, various social phenomena have emerged, necessitating in-depth discussion and exploration of their details and dimensions, such as emotional divorce, unheard deviance, postponed dialogue, and automated interpersonal relationships devoid of meaning and emotion, except in times of crises and upheavals.

In light of the glaring emergence of these phenomena within modern families, the influence of technological advancement and the prevalence of the virtual realm have increased at the expense of the real. This has necessitated the emergence of various sociopsychological pathologies such as divorce, deviance, crime, rape, drug abuse, depression, and suicide.

All of the aforementioned highlights the dominance and power of the media age, which has far outpaced social time, placing the family as a fundamental institution in the face of challenges that demand adaptation rather than commitment. This is particularly significant, as familial commitment encompasses several manifestations, including dialogue, cohesion, solidarity, and consensus.

However, the occurrence of these manifestations within diverse, strong, and changing contexts has rendered the modern family a site of resistance and challenge, caught between opposing forces.

Here, we must ask ourselves: *How can we analyze the relationship between electronic infidelity and emotional divorce within the modern family amid the technological surge and the fluidity of relationships in the virtual context?*

2. Conceptual and Theoretical Foundation of the Topic:

The initial contract between the researcher and the reader is the implicit and prior agreement on the meanings contained within the key concepts addressed. Below is a conceptual foundation for our topic:

2.1. Socialization:

Socialization is the process through which individuals are taught and trained in the prevailing social and cultural values and norms of society..." (Abdel-Baset, 2016 ,P .45)

Thus, socialization is considered a process of cultural, value-oriented, and normative internalization. It is "the ongoing process that individuals undergo from birth until they become active members of society, where they learn the behavioral patterns, values, and norms that prevail in their social environment" (Shehata, 2018,P.58).

This environment provides individuals with opportunities for social interaction and engagement, allowing them to acquire various experiences that later grant them the privilege of belonging. Socialization is "a process of social interaction aimed at teaching individuals the expected social roles, norms, and values in society, which occurs through interactions with various social institutions such as family, school, and media" (Al-Zahrani, 2020,P.73) .

2.2. Values:

"Values are common standards among members of society that determine what is desirable and what is undesirable; they serve as guidelines for individual and collective behavior, and they are formed through the processes of socialization and education" (Al-Ali, 2020,P.57).

Values act as a cultural compass that delineates what should and should not be done according to a socially agreed-upon standard. In general, they consist of "a set of fundamental principles and beliefs that individuals embrace, guiding their behavior and interactions with others, and defining what is desirable and what is rejected within society" (Abu Zaid, 2015,P.92).

Values shape individuals' attitudes toward various issues and form the foundation of social relationships and cultural patterns (Al-Faqih, 2018,P.33).

Therefore, we can consider values as "abstract concepts that are cognitively acquired, emotionally selected, and practically obligatory, guiding behavior in both positive and negative terms, both theoretically and in reality" (khedidji.M, 2018,P.9)

2.3. Virtual Expansion:

"Virtual expansion refers to the growth or extension of human relationships and social interactions through the internet and social media, where relationships transcend geographical and temporal boundaries to become more widespread and interconnected in the virtual world" (Al-Hashimi, 2015 ,P.62).

In this context, "social interactions and human relationships are transferred from the physical realm to the virtual world, allowing for increased communication and interactions online and the creation of extensive social networks" (Abdullah, 2017,P.94).

This phenomenon "expresses the expansion of social relationships and human communication through digital platforms, where individuals can interact and communicate online in ways that were previously impossible in the real world" (Al-Qahtani, 2019,P.110).

2.4. Liquid Relationships:

Liquid relationships (Bauman, Liquid Modernity, 2000) are "those relationships that lack stability and permanence, where feelings of connection and commitment among individuals are weak and unstable, making these relationships prone to disintegration and termination quickly" (Bauman, 2017,P.123). They "are characterized by flexibility and fragility, allowing individuals to enter and exit them easily without strong commitments or stable ties" (Ibrahim, 2018,P.45).

Moreover, these relationships are inherently unstable and subject to rapid change, as individuals primarily rely on electronic communication, leading to weakened emotional and social bonds between them" (Al-Qaisi, 2020,P.78).

2.5. Emotional Divorce:

Emotional divorce refers to "a state of emotional separation between spouses, where each partner lives an emotionally separate life from the other despite the apparent continuation of the marital relationship" (Abdul-Razzaq, 2014,P.112). John Gottman (1994), in his research titled "Why Marriages Succeed or Fail," notes that "emotional divorce is a condition in which couples live together but have emotionally separated, having lost the sense of intimacy and connection that once characterized their relationship" (Gottman, 1994,P.96).

This state represents a stage of emotional detachment and lack of communication, where each partner feels alienated from the other despite living under the same roof (Al-Saadi,

2012,P.85). It underscores the absence of emotional investment between the two parties, where "couples remain physically together but are emotionally disconnected, having lost the intimacy and complicity that once existed" (De Singly, 2007 ,P.215).

This notion is also supported by psychotherapist **Anatrella Tony (2003)** in his book "La différence interdite," which addresses issues of relationships and sexuality from a psychological and social perspective. He highlights the challenges facing family and marital relationships in contemporary societies, indicating that emotional divorce manifests through a lack of emotional communication between partners, where each lives an emotionally separate life despite cohabitation (Al-Hassan, 2016 ,P.176).

2.6. Electronic Infidelity:

Electronic infidelity refers to the use of digital communication tools, such as email, text messaging, and various social media platforms, to engage emotionally or sexually with someone outside of the marital relationship. It is characterized as "one partner secretly and unlawfully communicating with a third party online or through social media, threatening the stability of the marital relationship" (Al-Hassan, 2016,P.67).

Many researchers have explored this topic from various angles. **Monica T. Whitty (2005)**, in her study *"The Reality of Electronic Infidelity: Representations of Men and Women Regarding Online Unfaithfulness,"* describes it as "engaging in online interactions that carry a romantic or sexual nature with someone other than the partner, often involving secrecy and deception, undermining trust in the primary relationship" (Whitty, 2005,P.69).

Brooke L. Mileham (2007) further examines this in her research on *"Online Infidelity in Chat Rooms: An Ethnographic Exploration,"* highlighting behaviors marked by emotional intimacy and/or sexual activity with another person, driven by digital communication technologies (Mileham, 2007 ,P.11).

French researcher **Didier Courbet (2006)**, in his study *"Infidelity Online: Risks of Digital Communication in Marital Relationships,"* emphasizes the secretive nature of such relationships, which often possess emotional and sexual tendencies, threatening a fundamental pillar of marital life—namely, trust and fidelity (Courbet, 2006,P.83).

Anne-Marie Kerckhove (2009), in her work titled *"Virtual Infidelity: Myth or Reality?"* underscores the devastating effects of such relationships on psychological, social, and sometimes even financial levels, which can lead to conflicts and a breakdown of trust within the marital relationship (Kerckhove, 2009,P.45).

3. The Family: Context and Manifestations of Change:

There is no doubt that the family is the most essential social structure based on a triad of existence, relationship, and production. Regardless of cultural differences and extensions, the family functions as a social entity responsible for human reproduction and social and cultural adaptation, adhering to local cultural norms. However, the influence of global cultural standards, facilitated by technological openness, has enhanced the dynamics of change rather than stability (Anthony, 1991).

As a result, the modern family has experienced changes in various aspects, both formal and value-based, and is increasingly viewed as a substitute institution in many cases, compared to its traditional role as an irreplaceable entity.

While the family has historically served to fulfill specific needs, this fulfillment has become temporary, whether emotional, sexual, material, or social (cultural-economic). This shift has diminished the depth of interpersonal relationships within a single family, such as those between spouses, parents and children, and others. Additional factors, such as women's employment and the emergence of alternative institutions like daycare centers, cafes, and public restaurants, have also influenced this dynamic.

Consequently, the means of fulfillment have diversified and are no longer exclusive to the family itself. However, the nature of this fulfillment has become pathological and illusory. As these needs are met outside the family, there is an increasing urgency for non-normative fulfillment, leading to a justificatory perception of fulfillment itself. Even if such fulfillment lacks normative and ethical legitimacy, its prevalence and popularity grant it collective social legitimacy, detached from any normative measure.

In this context of change, the space for family dialogue has contracted, while the realm of conflict has expanded. Electronic infidelity emerges as a manifestation of this fulfillment, occupying a dual strategic position within the context and nature of relationships.

We can consider this relationship as both a cause and an effect simultaneously. The interrelationship between emotional divorce and cyber infidelity is a closely linked reciprocal relationship.

The following will elaborate on this relationship:

4. The Psychology of the Spouse: Emotional Immersion and Emotional Paralysis:

Entering the realm of marital life has long been regarded as a culmination for both partners, embarking on a new life characterized by responsibility and maturity, both physically and mentally. However, the reality often proves that marriage, as a fundamental stage, represents a status and role founded on various psychological, social, cultural, and moral connections.

When any of these connections falter, it opens the door for numerous vulnerabilities within the family, leading the relationship to become dysfunctional or even fractured.

Emotional immersion, where spouses deeply engage with one another's emotional needs, is crucial for fostering intimacy and mutual support. This state encourages partners to invest in their relationship, ensuring that emotional bonds remain strong and resilient.

Conversely, emotional paralysis can arise when spouses become disconnected, leading to feelings of isolation and alienation. This paralysis manifests when partners struggle to communicate their feelings or needs, resulting in a stagnant relationship where emotional support is lacking.

The interplay between emotional immersion and emotional paralysis is vital in understanding the dynamics of marital relationships. Recognizing these patterns can provide insight into the challenges couples face and the necessity of fostering open communication and emotional connection to sustain a healthy and fulfilling partnership.

Marital life has long been regarded as a societal bet imbued with a sense of sanctity, reflecting a multidimensional significance that encompasses religious symbolism and social strength. It embodies cultural values that lay the foundation for the first institutions of society: the family.

This social and cultural entity has faced, and continues to face, numerous challenges due to the changing realities and complexities of the contemporary context. As a result, the family, as a conceptual framework—a semantic concept that positions it as a fundamental societal institution—finds itself under actual scrutiny. This scrutiny is fundamentally about exploring what exists in comparison to what should exist.

Thus, the changes currently experienced in Algerian society, particularly regarding shifts in social communication contexts, evolving roles within the family, and changing values, represent some of the greatest challenges it faces. These changes have contributed to a broader space for inquiry and reflection.

In this context, we can discuss the dynamics between genders, whether within marriage (as spouses), in extramarital contexts (a spouse with another gender), or between a wife and someone other than her husband. This relationship expands and contracts based on the availability of communication conditions and contextual circumstances.

The internet has become a significant player in facilitating communication, particularly with the proliferation of virtual communication tools. From *Facebook* to *Twitter*, *Imo* to *Viber*, *Snapchat*, *WhatsApp*, *Instagram*, and more, we find ourselves in a landscape where relationships between genders have shifted from the real to the virtual, and from the virtual back to the real.

What complicates this dynamic is that this transition has also affected married individuals. As a result, relationships have evolved from being limited to unlimited, from private to public, and from stable to fluid. This shift moves from societal oversight to self-regulation, transitioning from direct interaction to a seductive power of relationships conveyed through images, sound, and symbols. These elements foster emotional connections and open avenues for renewed enjoyment driven by curiosity or fulfillment.

Amid this transition from the societal to the personal, and from the real to the virtual, the authority of religious and moral values emerges. These values shape behavior and establish positive representations without negating the opposite, which leads to the absence of potential value. Here, we must necessarily discuss the concept of "emotional immersion" and its existential necessity within any family context.

Emotional immersion serves as a cornerstone for nurturing deep connections, fostering a sense of belonging and stability within the family unit. As relationships navigate the complexities introduced by technology and shifting societal norms, the importance of maintaining emotional ties becomes paramount to counterbalance the fluidity and potential instability inherent in modern interactions.

Thus, "emotional immersion" is a strong indicator of the health of the emotional relationship between spouses, establishing the principle of dialogue and providing a solid foundation that excludes any attempt to enter the realm of non-normative cyber interactions.

However, the repercussions of changes in the social, cultural, and communicative contexts for both men and women within society have often led to the marginalization or absence of "emotional immersion." This has resulted in a pronounced presence of "emotional paralysis," prompting the search for alternative means of fulfillment that achieve a "cyber emotional immersion" involving multiple actors.

In this context, the challenge lies in reconciling the desire for emotional connection with the dynamics of modern communication, where the virtual realm can sometimes overshadow genuine emotional engagement. The implications of this shift necessitate a critical examination of how relationships are navigated in the digital age, highlighting the need for strategies that foster authentic emotional connections despite the pervasive influence of technology.

Thus, the emotional dimension at the beginning of any marital relationship is crucial, as it serves as the foundation for effective and deeply rooted dialogue. When this dimension is absent, emotional paralysis and cyber infidelity in all its forms and manifestations tend to prevail.

In summary, we can consider the virtual cultural wave as a powerful force that brings forth repressed desires and presents possible, albeit not always attainable, alternatives. Cultural commodities exert their influence by captivating through sound and image, intensifying arousal in various forms.

The virtual space appeals to the psychology of both men and women, potentially enhancing the consumption of emotional and sexual content, and encouraging entry into multiple relationships, all while the actual relationship may suffer from stagnation.

In light of the flexibility of achieving desires and the ease of escaping the scrutiny of collective conscience and ethical value standards, both parties' psychology has been reinforced by a "false legitimacy" confined to the necessity of justified fulfillment, which is self-established and virtual.

Especially since this space, thanks to its algorithms, can swiftly and enticingly address the emotions of both parties, aligning their inclinations in a way that deepens their connection and enhances the pleasure and excitement of the interaction. This dynamic often contrasts sharply with their actual realities, transforming the experience into a form of psychological defense mechanisms or a means of psychological escape from the responsibilities and authority of the real world.

The active participants in this virtual realm are diverse and often remain unknown and enigmatic, adding to the allure and complexity of these interactions.

5. Cyber Infidelity: Representation and Practice:

5.1. Family Socialization: Normative Control and Value Engineering:

Despite the fact that socialization is a general process that does not pertain exclusively to one gender at the expense of another—affecting everyone equally—the cultural framework of Arab Islamic societies places particular importance on the socialization of women (specifically young girls). This importance is especially pronounced when it comes to guiding and regulating their relationships with the opposite sex.

The process begins with delineating the boundaries and characteristics of their perceptions of men, extending to the imposition of various regulatory strategies that assess the credibility of these representations in women's behaviors. This focus on normative control reflects broader cultural values that seek to maintain social order and uphold specific gender roles within the family structure.

What has further complicated family socialization today is the multiplicity of stakes involved in achieving effective regulatory strategies amid the expansion of relationships between genders and the ambiguity of their boundaries.

In traditional societies, the parameters of these relationships were clearly defined, allowing for regulation and control. These societies established specific norms for public spaces and dictated women's behaviors, both physically and emotionally. However, this is no longer feasible in the contemporary context, where the changing status of women and the influence of technological advancements have transformed relationships into virtual realms that disregard geographical and temporal constraints.

As a result, the "boundaries of gender segregation" have become transparent or even nonexistent, characterized by a fluid nature and the element of personal choice. This shift has profound implications for the dynamics of relationships, social interactions, and the overall understanding of gender roles within the family structure.

This proliferation of platforms like Facebook, Viber, Imo, and WhatsApp has made them accessible to girls across various ages, educational backgrounds, social statuses, and cultural affiliations.

As a result, we can assert that the expansion of relationships between genders has placed young women in a critical transitional state regarding their identity, both mentally and behaviorally. This dynamic allows them to adopt and embody multiple virtual identities (profiles) at a time when the possibility of achieving such identities in the real world is limited.

This transition highlights the complexities of navigating personal and social identities, as the digital realm offers both opportunities for self-exploration and potential risks associated with disconnection from reality. The interplay between these virtual personas and actual social interactions can significantly influence their understanding of self and relationships with others.

In light of this situation, the stakes surrounding the family upbringing of young women increase significantly, particularly as the virtual world presents an apparent possibility of "escaping oversight."

Since this oversight remains a fundamental socio-cultural concept within modern Algerian families, especially concerning girls or women and their relationships with the opposite sex, it prompts us to question the effectiveness and functionality of familial oversight as a crucial element in the upbringing of young women in Algerian society amid these emerging circumstances and their implications.

The challenge lies in reconciling traditional values with the rapidly evolving landscape of digital interactions, raising concerns about how families can adapt their supervisory roles to ensure healthy development while acknowledging the new dynamics introduced by virtual communication.

The engineering of values in modern society has significantly changed, impacting how both men and women perceive these types of relationships. We are now witnessing the emergence of a new "habitus" in contemporary society, specifically the habitus of virtual communication.

This shift reflects a transformation in social interactions, where digital platforms shape perceptions, behaviors, and expectations within relationships. As a result, traditional norms may be challenged, leading to a redefinition of intimacy and connection in the context of evolving technological landscapes.

5.2. Fluidity of Relationships and the Transformation of Values: The Challenge of the Modern Family:

Communication today has taken a different direction than in the past, characterized by fluidity and ease. This has significantly enhanced individuals' ability to weave networks of virtual and social relationships, creating and dissolving them with the simple click of a button.

These relationships can emerge and vanish, whether in a pathological or healthy manner, particularly because they allow individuals to escape the strict societal oversight imposed by cultural and moral standards. For instance, social media platforms like Facebook have become refuges for everyone, each according to their desires, inclinations, and purposes for accessing them.

Despite the varied objectives and uses of individuals, the communicative nature of these platforms remains dominant, driven by the multiplicity of actors involved. This dynamic environment not only reshapes interpersonal connections but also challenges traditional values, compelling families to navigate new complexities in maintaining relationships amidst the rapid evolution of social norms.

Social media has significantly contributed to changing the dynamics of marital relationships, with many couples spending substantial time in front of their screens, often exceeding three hours daily during various times such as afternoons and evenings (Fawzia, 2020, P:287-288).

This intensive usage can lead to a "communicational rift" within the family, diminishing the capacity for direct and intimate interaction. Researcher Huda Al-Rifa'i, a psychologist, has confirmed that the misuse of social media increases the incidence of marital disputes, noting that these conflicts can escalate due to technology addiction, potentially resulting in requests for divorce from wives (Fawzia, 2020, P:287-288).

This transformation underscores the necessity for effective communication strategies within families and the need to rebuild emotional connections that may be adversely affected by digital influences. It is essential for couples to strive to enhance their interactions by allocating specific time for direct communication and avoiding immersion in devices during shared moments, thereby fostering intimacy and understanding.

Consequently, technological rebellion is a key factor in transforming the value context and the semiotics of social relationships. It has become a primary cause for the emergence of

various pathologies such as emotional divorce and cyber infidelity. Dutton and White indicate that technology plays a significant role in the dynamics of marital infidelity (Dutton, 2013), reinforcing the overlap between emotional divorce and electronic cheating. The latter is closely associated with new technologies that facilitate invisible and unrestricted communication (Whitty, 2005).

Moreover, Wessel and Tetenbaum discuss the relationship between technology use and the increase in cases of marital infidelity (Wessel, 2011), considering that the unusual effects of online communication can lead to atypical behaviors, as noted by Suler (Suler, 2004, p. 322).

From this perspective, we can assert that social relationships are no longer founded upon previously established cultural value standards within a specific ethical framework. Instead, they are characterized by their liquid nature, which rejects any logic of control, formation, or modeling. In the context of this liquidity, values have become mutable, leading to the emergence of numerous unusual pathologies and deviations within the modern family.

Most studies addressing the modern family have explored this change and its complexities, particularly as the semantic meaning of communication in modern and postmodern societies has undergone a complete transformation. Communication has shifted from being a tool for meaningful interaction to a pathway for pleasure, entertainment, gratification, and the pursuit of the forbidden, all without the constraints of effort or the suffering typically associated with achieving such desires.

This is further corroborated by researcher "Abeer Hassan Al-Zawawi," who refers to the findings of the study conducted by Beatriz Lia Avila and Mileham in 2007, which aimed to explore online infidelity in chat rooms. The results revealed three theoretical structures that represent the experiences of married individuals in chat rooms (Al-Zawawi, n.d., pp. 218-217):

- **The First Structure: The Anonymity of Sexual Interaction:**

This refers to the inclination of individuals towards anonymous sexual interactions in chat rooms. The allure of not disclosing their identities becomes particularly significant for married individuals, who may find a relative sense of security in expressing fantasies and desires without the risk of being identified or exposed.

- **The Second Structure: Rationalizing Behavior:**

This indicates that the logic of chat rooms leads users to perceive their engagement as harmless, despite the secretive and highly sexual nature of these interactions.

- **The Third Structure: Avoiding Emotional Discomfort:**

This involves users of chat rooms sidestepping psychological discomfort by exchanging emotional or sexual messages with strangers, thereby mitigating feelings of unease.

From this perspective, the absence of public social oversight exercised by society over its members—both normatively and ethically—emerges as one of the key factors contributing to the transformation of relational patterns and their legitimacy between the sexes. This shift renders the nature of these relationships inherently illusory, ambiguous, and secretive, making them resistant to measurement, monitoring, or judgment.

This idea is echoed in the study by Whitty T. Monica and Laura-Lee Quigley (2008), which aimed to investigate emotional and sexual infidelity among online and offline individuals. The findings indicated that men experienced greater distress when faced with sexual infidelity, whereas women felt more troubled by emotional infidelity (Al-Zawawi, n.d., p. 218).

What distinguishes cyber infidelity is that its impacts extend beyond the individuals involved to affect the family unit as a social institution, which encompasses a specific value system and other members. Consequently, emotional divorce can have significant repercussions for both adults and children, even in the absence of formal legal separation (Amato, 2000, p. 1275).

In summary, emotional divorce remains a psychological, social, and cultural problem, arising from communication issues that can lead to negative impacts on relationships (Kalmijn, 2007). The psychological aspect of cyber infidelity can manifest through the disinhibition effect of the internet, which allows individuals to engage in behaviors they might not typically display in face-to-face interactions. This disinhibition can consequently lead to online infidelity (Suler, 2004, p. 322).

6. Conclusion:

Considering emotional divorce between spouses as a social phenomenon allows us to understand the various factors contributing to it across different societies and cultures.

Emotional divorce and cyber infidelity are social harms that can lead to family breakdown and child displacement.

Legal divorce does not serve as a definitive indicator of the end of a relationship; a marriage can remain legally intact even after communication has ceased. Thus, exploring ways to mitigate emotional divorce among spouses in modern families has become an urgent area of research that can help curb the emergence of related issues, such as infidelity in all its forms, family disintegration, and domestic violence.

Furthermore, modern societies are undergoing a psychological and socio-cultural revolution alongside technological advancements, resulting in ambiguous and unclear relational dynamics. The nature of relationships has shifted from a limited, monitored, and directed form to fluid relationships that disregard geographical boundaries, cultural values, ethical standards, and even gender distinctions.

This situation underscores the necessity for more in-depth scientific studies and research on the phenomenon of emotional divorce and cyber infidelity, as well as the establishment of specialized counseling centers for marital relationships. Such centers could provide pre-marital and post-marital counseling services to reduce the rates of emotional divorce and cyber infidelity.

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