DISAGREEMENT: DISCREPANCY OF COPING MECHANISMS BETWEEN SINGLE AND MARRIED MALAYSIAN YOUTHS

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ABSTRACT

Disagreements in human interactions are a common feature of communication. When people interact and establish relationships, they inevitably engage themselves with agreements and disagreements. Purposeful disagreements can yield discussions that could lead to better decisions and other positive outcomes. Focussing on the coping mechanisms used after disagreements, a questionnaire was administered on 722 single and married Malaysian youths aged between 19 and 25 years old. SPSS version 18.0 was used to analyse data. Data suggest that as high as 90% of respondents experience disagreements on a weekly basis with parents, siblings, friends, bosses, colleagues or strangers. Findings indicate that married youths had a tendency to self-reflect, interact and share their feelings with a third party while single youths tended to react explicitly in resolving issues concerning their personal needs and interests with activities. Being aware of this distinctive difference in the two groups of young people can enhance our understanding of the existing coping mechanisms used by 'others'. Such knowledge may be invaluable to us when resolving disagreements so that we have more control over the situations to avoid conflicts, confrontations and aggressive behaviors.

Keywords: *Coping Mechanism, Disagreement, Malaysians, Marital Status, Youth*

ABSTRAK

Perselisihan dalam mencapai persetujuan adalah sesuatu yang lumrah dalam hidup. Apabila manusia berinteraksi dan menjalin hubungan, semestinya mereka mempunyai persetujuan dan perselisihan sesama sendiri. Biarpun perselisihan sering dipandang negatif, perselisihan yang bermakna boleh menyumbang kepada perbincangan yang membawa manafaat serta kesan-kesan positif. Berpandu kepada mekanisme yang digunakan setelah perselisihan faham, kajian ini menyelidik 722 orang belia Malaysia yang berumur di antara 19 - 25 tahun yang bujang dan berkahwin. Pelbagai strategi dikemukakan dalam penyelidikan soalselidik yang diedarkan kepada responden dan SPSS versi 18.0 di gunapakai sebagai alat analisis. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa lebih daripada 90% responden kerap mengalami perselisihan pendapat dengan ibu bapa, adik beradik, teman, majikan, kawan dan juga orang yang tidak dikenali. Dapatan kajian juga mengesahkan bahawa responden yang berkahwin cenderung melakukan refleksi kendiri, berinteraksi dan berkongsi dengan pihak ketiga; manakala responden yang masih bujang cenderung memaparkan perasaan secara terbuka dan tersurat melalui aktiviti yang dijalankan. Kesedaran mengenai perbezaan strategi menangani perselisihan dalam kalangan belia berkahwin dan bujang diharap dapat

meningkatkan pemahaman terhadap pihak lain daripada diri kita. Pengetahuan sedemikian adalah berharga apabila menangani perselisihan agar dapat mengawal diri serta mengelakkan konflik, pertelingkahan dan kelakuan agresif.

Kata Kunci: *Mekanisme Menangani Perselisihan, Malaysia, Status Kahwin, Belia*

INTRODUCTION

A disagreement is a common feature in human interactions. The general view of a disagreement is that it can strain a relationship because people do not see a common strand over an issue. As a result, disagreements can sometimes cause a relationship between individuals to deteriorate and this may drain them physically, emotionally or psychologically. In this paper, however, we argue that despite being viewed negatively, disagreements allow the respective parties to communicate their differences albeit in varying degrees. Disagreements over particular issues can be purposeful and non-violent where parties concerned learn a little more about each other. Such kinds of understanding can lead to better decisions as well as other positive outcomes. In contrast, disagreements, when unresolved through silence or pretence, can escalate into hostile situations which could induce violence, riots and chaos even though most disagreements are sparked off as small flickers of discontentment.

This paper examines the idea of MacFarlane (2007 and 2009) who suggests that a disagreement is not to be seen as a conflict to be resolved but merely as a subjective difference in viewpoints (MacFarlane 2009). Even little children have disagreements with their peers when they do not get what they want during play-time so disagreements should be seen as a daily occurrence which can affect our lives. Having some knowledge of how young people in a multi-ethnic society like Malaysia cope with the consequences of disagreements which could induce stress and intolerance can provide us with a better understanding of their communication skills in general. Through such understanding, the society can thus be better prepared in making human capital development of this country as a resource for nation building.

People can disagree with one another when having a difference of opinion over normal subjects like movies or food. The concept of 'disagreement' is broad and general by layman definitions because a disagreement can exist in practically any situation. The term, 'disagreement' generally means 'failure to agree', 'dissimilarity', 'variance', 'unsuitableness', 'incongruity', 'altercation' and 'quarrel' (Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary of the English Language). In the thesaurus, words which are associated with 'disagreement' include 'incompatibility, 'difference', 'discrepancy', 'disparity', 'dissimilarity', 'dissimilitude', 'divergence', 'diversity', 'incongruity', 'unlikeness' or 'variance' (Collins English Dictionary). This wide spectrum in meaning suggests that disagreements can range from a positive divergence to a neutral difference in opinion, to a highly contested conflict, i.e. the opposite or antithesis of affinity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To genuinely agree with someone's view, utterance and action, we need not say otherwise. We agree, or pretend to agree with another person in order to establish rapport, solidarity and favorable relationship. However, if we genuinely disagree with someone, then we may or may not want to state our views openly. Hence, the differences of opinion, particularly with regard to disagreement, constitute a wider continuum as compared to agreement. The spectrum of disagreement denotes taking a different stance or position from that of another person either in opinion, utterance, or action. Unless there is absolute difference such as in beliefs and principles, opinion or attitudes, most often, we agree to disagree, rather than disagree to agree because it is easier to do the former especially when our personal interest is less at stake. This is demonstrated in diagram 1 which focuses on the dimensions of disagreement.

Diagram 1: Dimensions of disagreement
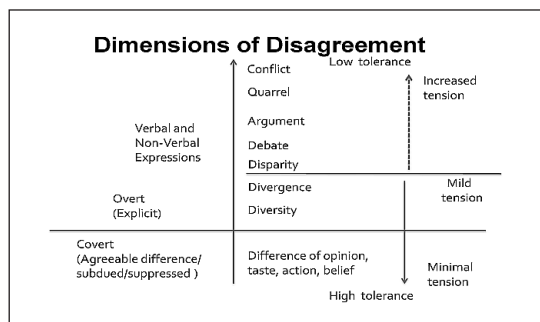
The above diagram illustrates the forms of responses that can emerge in disagreements. Here we stress to clarify that the degree of 'agreeableness' may be subjective. In the more agreeable difference, we state our agreement either covertly (in silence), or overtly (e.g. by nodding, clapping or smiling). In the less agreeable difference, we may resort to the following:

- agree to disagree (e.g. you think differently but I think it's ok for you to have that viewpoint);
- disagree to agree (e.g. I cannot accept the way you think. This is ridiculous).

It is the latter response which is of interest in this paper as we attempt to clarify the kinds of coping mechanisms used by young Malaysians after experiencing disagreements. Our scope covers disagreements in three domains: home, education and workplace. These domains would therefore comprise specific participants. The home domain encompasses people of close relationships while the other two domain encompass people not of close relationships. As we talk about disagreements, we also need to bear in mind that how people react to disagreements also depends on their level of tolerance. The lower the tolerance level, the higher the intensity of tension; the higher the tolerance level the lower the intensity of tension.

Stress and Tolerance in Disagreements

The reasons people disagree with one another vary and so it would be too delicate an area to explore. Snyder (1999) indicates that there are three types of disagreements and she has categorised them as factual, semantic and faith. Of the three, Snyder (Ibid.) thinks that factual disagreements are the easiest to resolve because they involve a difference in facts which can be easily verified by tracing the source of the verification (Snyder 1999). On the other hand, when semantic disagreements occur, it may involve more intricate steps because even if people may agree on facts, the use of words can conjure different meanings to different people. This can be seen in some ambiguous words people use today to mean different things for example, 'quite good' can mean 'fairly good' or 'very good'. Snyder (Ibid.) also mentions that faith based disagreements are the most complicated and most heated. This is because it involves what one thinks about one's religion or beliefs and such disagreements involved would need to be contextualized.

Another aspect of disagreement originated from the idea of ontological arrogance (Kofman 2010) which claims that what one believes in as reality is what the disagreement thrives on. If one believes that one is the best in cooking spaghetti then when others cook spaghetti in a different way, he/she tends to disagree even if the cooked pasta is better tasting than his/hers. This may be a matter of personal taste or orientation which may not appeal to rationality or reasoning.

Nevertheless, MacFarlane (2009) gives the philosophical view that a disagreement is not just a matter of taste. It involves some values more pertinent to just taste and preference. For instance, attitude towards someone or something is more relative or less absolute than the objective facts pertaining to a person, a place or a situation. The notion of disagreement has been the crux of debates between relativists, objectivists and contextualists (MacFarlane 2009). 'Relativists' would genuinely argue about matters of taste although both parties can be right from their own perspectives regarding tastes whereas 'objectivists' would argue that all opinions on taste are questionable as they exist to address the chauvinism of the beholders. 'Contextualists' tend to think that in a disagreement where two people favor different tastes, their belief determines their idea on taste. MacFarlane (Ibid.) further suggests that should the context change, the 'contextualists' belief and idea may also change accordingly.

Hovatter (1996) categorizes fundamental disagreements from the less significant ones. A fundamental disagreement is one that arises due to one's personal orientation system which encompasses values, needs, interests, and intentions (Hovatter 1996). For instance, religious principles and marital conflict can be highly problematic or conflict prone compared to other issues between individuals. Other areas where people disagree intensely are those pertaining to political ideology, legal dispute, financial mismanagement, extra-marital affairs and sentimental relationships. Where disagreements can be resolved more easily, they include relatively minor or petty issues such as the choice of paint and colour for a room,

what to have for dinner and where to go for a holiday. The more intense it is, the more stressful the two parties involved are (Hovatter, 1996).

While the intensity of disagreements may depend on the context and the people concerned, disagreements are likely to provoke and stir up emotions. Disagreements can be very unpleasant when we do not know how to deal with them. Our emotions are affected either by the other parties' attitude, behavior, action or use of words or our own emotions. Thus, when this occurs, it is imperative that we apply certain coping mechanisms in the process of soothing ourselves or calming our emotions from escalating. These coping mechanisms enable us, as individuals, to manage ourselves by allowing our mental state of mind to be agitated and then return to equilibrium, that is, our normal state of mind.

MacFarlane (2007) explains that when one disagrees with another in a situation, one is in a state of being even if the parties concerned do not know each other. Suggesting that a disagreement can involve both active and passive conditions, he mentions that the notion of 'being in disagreement' can involve both an 'activity' as well as a state of 'being'. He explains that when two people are characterized as disagreeing, it can mean two situations. First, they are having a disagreement thus they engage in a kind of 'activity' which we regard as engaging in some form of action, i.e. being overt. Second, he says, they just disagree with one another in a state of 'being' which may not reflect any form of explicit activity which we regard as being covert or not engaging in any form of action (MacFarlane 2007). MacFarlane illustrates this by saying that sadness or unhappiness, after engaging in a disagreement, is a state of being (mind) but this state of being may or may not bring forth any form of activity such as crying or mourning. It is this concept which we apply in our study when looking at the coping mechanisms. (Ibid.)

MacFarlane (2007) and Hovatter (1996) are of the view that disagreements in interpersonal relationships may be disclosed verbally or non-verbally. Verbal communication strategies may involve stating the opposite opinion, saying 'no' or having a debate whereas the non-verbal strategies may involve the shaking of head, raising of eyebrows, a frown or some change in facial expressions. This may also be accompanied by defensive body motions, hand gestures and a change in personal space. On the level of intrapersonal context, individuals disagree within their inner selves about how something should be done or what would be the best method to handle when faced with particular issues at stake. As a part of those individuals, we might blame ourselves for not doing something, or for doing it wrongly and inefficiently. Suffice to say that as we examine our own behavior and actions, we are seeking to understand why we react in a certain way. We ask ourselves how the situation could have been better handled should it reoccur. In this regard, a disagreement within oneself can be considered as positive as it aids us in decision making and self-development.

Osbourne and Fincham (1996) propose that intensive disagreements should be characterized and measured along four dimensions: frequency, intensity, duration and diversity. These four dimensions, individually and collectively, can lead to conflict and other forms of hostility.

McCroskey (1992) also observes that individuals who differ in the extent to which they can tolerate disagreement are more likely to avoid conflict. Those who have a high tolerance for disagreement are more relatively conflict-resistant. His progressive and longitudinal research was based on a revision of the 20-item on Tolerance for Disagreement (TFD) Scale. This scale listed a 15-item to test the tolerance level of someone based on a series of questions on touch avoidance. Other suggested areas in McCroskey's study include 'argumentativeness' and 'verbal aggressiveness' that might be correlated to the measurement of tolerance for disagreement. This proposition of McCroskey (Ibid.) is not within the scope of our study.

Acknowledging that disagreements are often induced by one's personal orientation system, i.e. values, needs, interests and intentions, and that how disagreements are handled is highly dependent on the personality and tolerance level of the individual, Hovatter (1996) argues that in disagreeing with others, one has a choice of disagreeing subtly or vehemently. He continues to say that this may depend on one's ability to take the stress. He adds that as long as the tolerance level is not overstressed, a disagreement may be conveyed in a non-verbal manner suggesting that the individual's emotion is within control (Ibid.). In that regard, there shall be no 'right' way, or 'the best' way on how individuals should react to disagreements.

COPING WITH DISAGREEMENT IN MARRIAGE

A marriage is the physical union of two individuals who come from different upbringings, location, culture, social background and educational qualifications. In that regard, the responsibilities involved in marriages can be demanding when it comes to matters involving money, living style, habits, food and so on. This multidimensional nature of a marriage does not just involve love and compassion, but also deals with mutual obligation, shared responsibility, income and financial support, distribution of household chores, role play, gender and ideology on a daily basis. In addition, married couples must learn to juggle with conflicts faced at home, with family members as well as at the workplace. They also have to deal with external issues such as in-laws and their own personal issues. When they have children, married couples acquire additional commitments thus, they also have to deal with the attitudes of their spouses, their parenting styles, parent-child relationships, all of which interplay with their mood, emotions, respect and tolerance level. In this regard, these individuals need to have appropriate skills to cope whenever they experience negative situations such as disagreements.

Understanding one's level of tolerance during disagreements is essential in maintaining long-term relationships which are embedded within a family, marriage, friendship and as well as comradeship at the workplace. Having a sense of belonging in a relationship is a need for all human beings (see Maslow's hierachy of needs). Thus, they need to know how to manage their relationship with others. If such relationships are shaken or threatened due to disagreements, the personal well-being of the individual can become affected and live may become less harmonious and less meaningful. If an individual can learn to see from the other party's point of view, he/she has empathy and empathy can help to bridge the gap of misunderstandings caused by disagreements. Knowing how to resolve a disagreement is a skill we ought to acquire and appreciate. It is one way of accomplishing a compromise. As Hall and Adams (2011) say, such is the case of newly-weds where two individuals learn to compromise within disagreements and have win-win situations. Hall and Adams (Ibid.) observe that newlyweds are able to sustain their early marriages because they tend to use positive cognitive coping strategies such as giving a spouse the benefit of the doubt, or by reflecting on the commitment themes (get it over and work it out) as ways of coping with the stress induced (Hall and Adams 2011). Nonetheless, Murray and Holmes (1993) note that many couples choose to view disagreements as marital challenges which could help to cement their relationships.

Previous research on married couples shows that financial issues relate positively to marital happiness (Dew 2008 and Grafova 2007). In relation,. theories of social psychology further claim that married people have more arguments particularly when it involves financial management practices of couples (Skogrand et al. 2011). MacFarlane (2009) believes that generally, society accepts that men go out to work and bring home the bacon and women look after family affairs. This is a conservative way of viewing married couples and the view may invariably affect couples who do go out to work respectively and so disagreements may occur. He also mentions that among dual-income couples, traditional men who play the role of bread winner and traditional wives who stay home are less likely to face social pressure in terms of housework distribution or parental participation hence there might be reduced instances of disagreements. However, even though married relationships cannot totally evade disagreements, couples can learn to manage and resolve disagreements skillfully rather than only seeing things 'their way'.

Often, how people react to and cope with disagreement is highly dependent on who they are, and what role they presume. A legitimate wife would be furious toward her husband's unfaithfulness but an illegitimate mistress would have different feelings due to her marital status. The roles they presume, coupled with their personality, judgment and experience, determine how they respond to a particular disagreement. Examining the above concept of coping strategies from an Islamic point of view, Mohamad Baianonie confirms that "when we are in agreement it is easy for us to behave properly with each other; but when in disagreement, we don't know how we should behave" (Mohamad Bainonie 1998). This implies that disagreements can affect people's behavior and attitude and vice versa. The impact

of inter-parental conflict can leave prolonged impact unto affected children. In a research on the impact of marital relationship, Grych and Fincham (1990) found that children exposed to abusive, aggressive and poorly resolved conflict faced adjustment difficulties.

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) define the concept of 'coping' as constantly changing cognitive and behavior efforts so as to manage specific external and/or internal demands which are related to stress or challenges faced. They suggest that coping strategies can be seen as: 1) problem-focused and 2) emotion-focused. The former is used to handle the problem directly whereas the latter is used to cope with feelings of distress (Lazarus and Folkman 1984). Research has shown that problem-focused coping strategies are most effective in dealing with stress as it takes action by trying to tackle the problem. Lazarus and Folkman (Ibid.) identified six emotion-focused coping strategies namely 1) disclaiming, 2) escape-avoidance, 3) accepting responsibility/blame, 4) exercising self-control, 5) seeking social support, and 6) giving positive reappraisal. However, noticing that there are cultural differences between the US and Malaysia, we acknowledge these emotions index but we place them into two categories of 'being' or 'activity' vis-à-vis MacFarlane's (2009) theory of disagreement.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

It has been reported in The Star (June 5, 2012) that more than 1,000 people have taken their own lives over a three-year period. Of this statistic, majority were aged between 24 and 44. It seems that men outnumber women three to one and that the Chinese had the highest number of suicides at 48%, followed by Indians (21%), Malays (18%) and other races (13%)," he said. Local psychologists, Jin and Lee (2011) mention that suicide among the young is an acute worldwide issue. They explain that teenagers and young adults (270 youth aged 15–24 from various schools and universities in West Malaysia) had higher suicide rate due to issues dealing with boy-girl relationships, family issues and stress from school work. Other local psychological studies (Teoh et al. 2012) also support the report which says that Malaysian youths are more at risk to mental health problems. Of those who are better able to avoid conflicts thereby reducing such depression and suicide rates, studies (see MacFarlane 2009 and Hovatter 1996) show that individuals who differ in the extent to which they can tolerate disagreement are more likely to avoid conflicts. In contrast, highly provocative individuals are likely to trigger negative response when unable to cope with high level stress in disagreements. This study thus, attempts to explore the common coping strategies applied by Malaysian youths who are single and married in situations after they had experienced disagreements to see if there are discrepancies.

AIM OF STUDY

This paper is derived from a larger study that explores how young Malaysians cope with disagreements. The analysis presented in this paper is thus based on one aspect of the study which focusses on single and married Malaysians and their strategies in coping with disagreement. Drawing from a total of 4 questions which provided a wide range of responses, our paper aims to detect whether or not discrepancy exists in single and married Malaysian youths of Malay, Chinese and Indian descents in their coping mechanisms used after disagreements.

SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

Knowing how others cope with disagreements can empower us, as individuals, to apply self-control over ourselves when faced with a disagreement. This can help us to deflect instances of confrontation, aggressive behavior and conflict, thereby facilitating our own development of tolerance level for others. By applying MacFarlane's (2007) proposal of coping with disagreement based on 'activity' and 'being', we can thus examine which of these two main strategies emerge more predominantly between the single and married Malaysian youths. This paper may be able to reveal such a discrepancy when single and married Malaysians disagree with their parents, siblings, friends, bosses, colleagues and even strangers. We hope that this knowledge can help educators or trainers to devise progammes which can help to improve the interpersonal relationships of young Malaysians in general.

LIMITATION OF STUDY

In this study we present the coping strategies of single and married Malaysian youth based on disagreement situations which were hypothetical rather than specific. We acknowledge that the concept of disagreement presented here was not contextualized. In that respect, respondents would be looking at disagreements in a wide perspective. Ideally, this study should have been complemented with other triangulated approaches to demonstrate discriminant validity such as by interviewing Malaysian youths. To address this shortcoming, we endeavor to take up this approach as a future undertaking for further study.

METHODOLOGY

A questionnaire was constructed in two stages with the first stage piloted on postgraduate students which then led to the revised questionnaire. Seeking to understand how young people cope after disagreements, the questionnaire was then revised for clarity of words used and to add a few more responses. The 14 questions were then revised to 16, by adding two open ended questions. In sum, a total of 127 items were listed for analysis for the main and bigger study which used SPSS version 18.0. A total of 1,000 questionnaires were accessed but only 722 met the objectives of this study. Convenience sampling was conducted based on pre-requisites such as

age group, marital status and ethnicity. The questionnaire was presented in English as majority were educated youths pursuing tertiary education in public and private institutions. Even though the location of the study was within the Klang Valley with close proximity to Kuala Lumpur, respondents were from different states in the country. The distribution of the respondents resembled the demography of Malaysia, i.e. 59.8% were Malays, 22.4% were Chinese and 8.5% were Indians. Of these, 58.2% were females and 39.8% were males (with 2% missing values) indicating that the statistics was more biased towards females. More than half or 58.6% were single and about a third or 37.5% were married. This imbalance also reflects the reality of the current status of Malaysian youths in this country.

The design of the questionnaire was adapted from the doctoral study of Wong (2010) which carried the reliability of 0.918. The key questions for the current analysis and paper are as follows:

- On average, how many times of disagreement do you experience in a week?
- How would you rate the frequency of disagreement with the following people (parents, siblings, friends, bosses, colleagues, strangers)? (Likert's scale was provided)
- How do you normally react after a disagreement? (Responses were provided)
- How would you normally react to a disagreement with the following people - parents, siblings, friends, bosses, colleagues, strangers? (Responses were provided)

The five-point Likert scale ranging from (1) Always; (2) Frequently; (3) Sometimes; (4) Rarely; and (5) Never were applied. For all data presented in the tables below, the lowest item in mean score would indicate the highest frequency in each item. Our findings were based on frequency count of the items. We excluded presenting the standard deviation score here because our findings were meant to raise awareness and not meant to be generalized.

MacFarlane's (2007) proposal of 'activity' and 'being' were applied to detect if the coping mechanisms were action or not action–based in order to detect any discrepancy between the two categories of respondents.

Finding No. 1: Malaysian Youths and Their Experiences with Disagreements

In our aim to understand how often young Malaysians may have disagreement with specific people in their lives, they were asked to indicate whom they usually disagree with, i.e. parents, siblings, close friends, classmates, teachers/lecturers, office administrators, colleagues, bosses and strangers. Table 1 indicates that a high percentage of Malaysians claim to have experienced disagreements in their weekly interaction with others. The result was affirmed by 94.0% of single youths and 91.7% of married youths. Respondents were asked whether or not a disagreement would spoil their day and findings indicate that about 50% of the married and single

Malaysians claim that their day would be spoilt by disagreements. The people whom they often disagree with are presented in Table 2.

Table 1: Percentage of disagreements experienced in weekly interactions

	Single		Married	
Have disagreement in interaction with others		**percentage**	**Have disagreement in interaction with others**	**percentage**
Yes		94.0		91.7
No		6.0		8.3

Of the people whom respondents claim to be in disagreements with, table 2 shows the mean score in rank. The lower mean score indicates a higher frequency and the higher mean score denotes a lower frequency.

Table 2: People whom Respondents Most Frequently Disagree with

	Single		Married	
	People whom they disagree with	**Score in mean rank**	**People whom they disagree with**	**Score in mean rank**
1	Bosses	198.33	Bosses	181.14
2	Colleagues	210.34	Colleagues	190.71
3	Strangers	294.99	Strangers	272.17
4	Office administrator	312.83	Office administrators	292.42
5	Classmates	338.86	Teachers/lecturers	329.00
6	Teachers/lecturers	342.91	Siblings	329.28
7	Close friends	353.79	Close friends	341.48
8	Parents	358.41	Parents	343.17
9	Siblings	361.54	Classmates	353.50

Data suggest that single and married respondents are most frequently in disagreements with people who are not in close relationship with them. This includes entities which were labeled as bosses, colleagues, strangers and office administrators, in order of frequency. The same order applies for both single and married respondents. However, in looking at people in close relationship, the mean score indicates that a distinctive difference exists in married Malaysians who appear to frequently disagree with siblings. Data also imply that single respondents who scored higher in the overall mean rank are generally less confrontational than the married youths. They also had less number of disagreements with parents and siblings. The score could imply that single respondents have better self-control or that married Malaysians had to deal with their parents and siblings more.

Finding No. 2: Single and Married Malaysians have Distinctively Different Coping Mechanisms

In this question, respondents were asked what they would normally do after disagreements. A total of 22 coping mechanisms were provided with a range from what actions they might take, what feelings they went through, to whether or not they would talk to others about their feelings. These 22 items include both 'activity' and 'state of being' as proposed by MacFarlane (2006). In this regard, 'activity' is synonymous with taking a particular action while 'being' is a state of mind such as thinking inwardly and reflecting on feelings. Table 3 presents our findings where the lowest score in mean rank shows the highest frequency. The table presents the hierarchical ranking of 10 coping mechanisms (out of 22) most frequently used.

From data presented in table 3, it can be said that both 'activity' and 'being', notions proposed by MacFarlane (2007) were employed by single and married Malaysians as coping strategies after disagreements. More single respondents would respond to the situation by listening to loud music (activity). It could not be verified why loud music is preferred but informal interviews with young people imply that loud music is 'soothing' for them and that they could use loud music to 'drown their emotions and resentment' when affected by disagreements. Single respondents also prefer to write into journals (activity). In the current millennium that is inundated with digital technology, it may be unrealistic to expect young people to keep a personal journal. Hence, we speculate that this concept of journal writing could be related to blogs, twitters and 'facebooks' where young people make known their feelings to the outside world and in return might also get responses from others. In addition, single youths also play games (activity), paint or draw (activity) to channel out their emotions. At times they may cry (activity) or feel sad, angry and unhappy (being) after a disagreement.

Table 3: Coping Mechanisms Most Frequently Used by Single and Married Youth

	Single		Married	
	Coping mechanisms	**Score in mean rank**	**Coping mechanisms**	**Score in mean rank**
1	Listen to loud music (activity)	323.56	Feel restless (being)	319.00
2	Write into a journal (activity)	323.62	Feel that life is unfair (being)	319.29
3	Play games (activity)	324.81	See a counselor/ academic advisor/ someone I can trust (activity)	320.13
4	Paint/draw (activity)	325.05	Feel confused (being)	321.94
5	Feel sad (being)	329.05	Listen to soft music (activity)	322.16
6	Find that you cannot concentrate (being)	336.58	Share feelings with friends (activity)	323.16
7	Cry (activity)	337.30	Mope/Sulk (being)	323.61
8	Feel Angry (being)	338.36	Find that you cannot concentrate (being)	328.88
9	Feel unhappy (being)	339.7	Feel depressed (being)	331.30
10	Feel confused (being)	341.05	Go to sleep (activity)	335.73

On the other hand, married respondents do not react as much as singles do. They appear to withdraw from indulging in an activity by looking inwards within themselves. This is equated to sensing how they feel (being). Of the various emotions identified, married respondents tend to 'feel restless' the most. They also think that disagreements can set off a feeling that 'life is unfair'. Contrary to single respondents, married people prefer talking (activity) to other people like a counselor/advisor and friends. They may also be overwhelmed by a 'feeling of being confused'. Additionally, married respondents may indulge in listening to soft music (activity), mope/sulk (being) and become unable to concentrate (being). Married respondents also resort to inward reflection by dealing with their emotions rather than outwardly channeling their energy through various activities. A comparison is made of the coping mechanisms least frequently used.

Table 4 highlights what single or married respondents seldom do after disagreements and we find this important because it would show what they were going through. Among the 22 items identified as coping strategies, five items were rarely employed. From the data presented, it appears that there is a distinctive discrepancy between the two groups. Single respondents seldom feel that 'life is unfair', they seldom feel depressed, confused, or unhappy and they seldom sleep the matter over. In contrast, married people seldom feel sad, unhappy, or angry and of the activities, they seldom indulge in is crying or playing games. This shows that there is a range of 'being' and 'activity' which are seldom applied by both categories of respondents.

Table 4: Coping Mechanisms Least Frequently (Seldom) Used by Single and Married Youths

	Single		Married	
	Coping mechanisms	Score in mean rank	Coping mechanisms	Score in mean rank
1	Feel that life is unfair (being)	344.32	Feel sad (being)	349.16
2	Feel depressed (being)	342.31	Feel unhappy (being)	348.17
3	Go to sleep (activity)	341.12	Feel angry (being)	341.28
4	Feel confused (being)	341.05	Cry (activity)	337.81
5	Feel unhappy (being)	339.70	Play games (activity)	336.45

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study explores the dynamics between single and married respondents of Malaysian origin. In particular it aims to distinguish the coping mechanism used by the two groups of respondents – single and married. In this study, we try to conceptualize the notion of disagreement by providing what other scholars have defined a disagreement as. We also attempted to illustrate in what conditions disagreements are likely to be stimulated and to trigger emotional responses. We also applied MacFarlane's (2007) concept of 'activity' and 'being' as a way of defining the coping mechanisms listed in our study. As mentioned earlier, we only aim to explore the kinds of mechanism applied and from these choices made, we would be able to detect how different single and married respondents are in their choices selected. Their feedback was analyzed in relation to the management of disagreement in the family, during studies and in the workplace. Our findings indicated that there were discrepancies between single and married Malaysian

youths. However, our findings could not be generalized due to the limitations we mentioned. In that regard, our findings can only aim to raise awareness of the coping mechanisms applied by Malaysian youths who were both single and married.

Findings indicate that more than 90% of young Malaysians face disagreements on a weekly basis with others (whether in close or not-close relationships). From this, it can be deduced that many young people do face some difficulties in communicating with other people. Our findings cannot reveal if these disagreements were due to incompatible personality, non-cooperative communication skills or inefficient working skills but we were able to showcase the coping mechanisms applied by these youths after disagreements. Data suggest that irrespective of their marital status, whether single or married, Malaysian youths were less tolerating at the workplace. They claim to have more frequent disagreements with bosses, colleagues, strangers and office administrators. Should this be the case in this country, then there may be a need for schools especially, to conduct training or hold courses which are necessary to further develop leadership, team building and individual competence at the workplace for these young people so that their weaknesses can be arrested early on. Our findings also indicate that both single and married young people seem to have fewer disagreements with parents and this may be a good or bad sign. It is a good sign because it could mean that young people are more accommodating with parents hence their high tolerance level for people in close relationship. It is a bad sign because it could also be interpreted as having little communication with parents. This probability may need to be further verified.

Of the findings acquired, a remarkable disparity exists between single and married respondents. Married respondents claim to have more disagreements with siblings and this is an interesting area which needs to be uncovered through interviews in order to understand what roles siblings play in married people's lives.

Based on the concept proposed by MacFarlane (2007) which stresses on 'activity' and 'being', it appears that both these 'rhythms' as movements characterized by a certain motion, were employed by both single and married respondents. While single respondents seem to use slightly more 'activity' rhythm like channeling their emotions after disagreements via activities such as listening to loud music, writing into journal, painting and drawing; married people seemed to be applying more 'being' rhythm where they looked inwardly into their emotions as a means of disclosing their feelings. The difference in the way single and married people resolve disagreement, if thoroughly examined and fully understood, would contribute to a better understanding of the coping mechanism for resolving disagreement.

This paper further stresses on the importance of communication in facing disagreement, and the use of other negotiating or coping mechanisms to resolve disagreement in a non-confrontational manner. Hence, it is hoped that future studies will examine reactions other than activity and state of being to complement the initial findings of this study, e.g. the complexity of how marriage plays a role in

making a person more inward-looking and less action-oriented, and the reasons for married people's tendency to face disagreement via self-reflective strategies. This multi-faceted nature of disagreement requires more critical insights so that we can learn about the best practices in resolving disagreement, for the betterment of a more harmonious multiethnic society. Despite its limitation in terms of representativeness, this study verifies that single and married youths do respond differently after they encounter disagreements. To better prepare them for future human interactions, our education system might need to consider providing communication skills as a part of the school curriculum which could help prepare our young people for further challenges. In addition, counseling may become an important aspect of life in school, home and workplace as a way of helping young people to manage their lives.

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