Disagreements: The Coping Mechanisms Applied by Young Malaysians

Kuang Ching Hei (Ph.D)  
Department of English Language  
Faculty of Languages and Linguistics  
University of Malaya  
kuangch@um.edu.my  
Tel: 603-7967-3102  
Fax: 603-7957-9707  
Mobile: 017-865-3633

Ngeow Yeok Meng (Ph.D)  
Section for Co-Curricular Courses  
External Faculty Electives and TITAS (SKET)  
University of Malaya  
drmeng@um.edu.my  
Tel: 603-7967-5430  
Fax: 603-7967-3155  
Mobile: 012-302-6255

Wong Ngan Ling (Ph.D)  
Department of Asian and European Languages  
Faculty of Languages and Linguistics  
University of Malaya  
nlwong@um.edu.my  
Tel: 603-7967-3070  
Fax: 603-7957-9707  
Mobile: 012-924-7966
Abstract

Disagreements are a fact of life but different people react to disagreements in different ways due to personal differences. With that in mind, our paper aims to distinguish the coping strategies used by single and married Malaysians in disagreement situations. A survey questionnaire containing predominant coping strategies was administered on 722 youths aged between 19 and 25 years old who were of Malay, Chinese and Indian descent. About 90% of the respondents claim to experience disagreements on a weekly basis with parents, siblings, friends, bosses, colleagues, and others like strangers. Findings indicate that married youths coped with disagreeing situations through self-reflection whilst also seeking to interact and share their views with a third party. Single youths, on the other hand, were more explicit, often subjecting themselves to personal needs and interests. This distinction between married and single people in coping with disagreements may shed light on the reaction and tolerance which most of us apply towards ‘others’ (those whom we disagree with). Additionally, knowledge of these existing coping mechanisms of ‘others’ can instill us with more control while in a disagreement situation and this can deflect conflicts, confrontations as well as aggressive behaviors.

Keywords: coping mechanism, disagreement, Malaysians, marital status, youth

Kata kunci: mengatasi mekanisme, perselisihan, Malaysia, status perkawinan, pemuda
Introduction

Disagreements are universal in human interactions and they can occur at the physical, emotional or psychological level. Nonetheless, their degree of intensity varies depending on how variables are operationally defined. There are disagreements in tastes and there are disagreements over behavior, decisions or beliefs but despite being viewed negatively, disagreements allow the respective parties to communicate their differences albeit in varying degrees. Disagreements may also facilitate communication since they allow interlocutors to see where they converge and where they diverge. This possibility may be used as a gauge to see if there is a need to fill in the missing component especially if the relationship is important to both parties, and if so how. In contrast, disagreements which are unvoiced, unresolved or unattended to can escalate into hostile situations which could induce violence, riots and chaos even though most disagreements are sparked off as small flickers. When this happens both parties concerned shut their doors and refuse to compromise any further. Since the concept of disagreements means different things to different people depending on context we provide some definitions of the term.

Definition of disagreement

When people disagree, they are described as having a difference of opinion. The reasons people disagree with one another can be spread over a wide spectrum, varying, as the Chinese say, ‘from sea to sky’ and for that reason, becomes too delicate an area to explore. Nevertheless, there are fundamental disagreements like religious beliefs which occur due to one’s personal orientation system which encompasses values, needs, interests, and intentions (Hovatter, 1996).  

---

In addition, there are disagreements over the normal things that occur in life like choice of colour for a building, what to have for dinner and where to go for a holiday. Although it may not be fruitful to understand the very nature that creates disagreements it is necessary to understand how people cope with the aftermath of disagreements which is the concern of this paper as having the right strategies may help to eliminate stress.

The Webster’s Comprehensive Dictionary of English (1996) defined ‘disagreement’ as “failure to agree, dissimilarity, variance, unsuitableness, incongruity, altercation and quarrel”\(^2\) while the synonyms of “disagreement” provided by the Collins English Thesaurus (2001) are “incompatibility” (difference, discrepancy, disparity, dissimilarity, dissimilitude, divergence, diversity, incongruity, unlikeness, variance) and “argument” (conflict, debate, discord, misunderstanding).\(^3\) Such definitions suggest that there is a continuum in disagreements which may range from very mild ones (difference in opinion) to highly intense ones (conflict).

The concept of disagreement is broad and yet general by layman definition because it may apply in many situations. However, MacFarlane (2009) thinks that a disagreement is not to be seen as a conflict to be resolved but merely as a subjective difference in viewpoints.\(^4\) Explaining that a subject matter which is disagreed upon may range from different perspectives to the way the disagreement is conveyed, he adds that disagreements involving the taste of food, attitude


towards someone or something, what ought to or ought not to be done, is more relative or less absolute than the objective fact of a person, a place or a situation. He further adds that disagreements have become the crux of debates between relativists, objectivists and contextualists elaborating that ‘relativists’ would genuinely argue about matters of taste although both parties can be right from their own perspective regarding tastes. He also maintains that ‘objectivists’ would argue that all opinions on taste are questionable as they exist to address the chauvinism of the beholders while ‘contextualists’ tend to think that in a disagreement where two people favor different tastes, their belief determines their idea on taste. MacFarlane suggests that should the context change, the ‘contextualists’ belief and idea may also change accordingly.

**Disagreements and tolerance**

Acknowledging that disagreements are often induced by one’s personal orientation system (values, needs, interests and intentions) and depending on one’s personality and tolerance level, Hovatter (1996) says that one has a choice of disagreeing subtly or vehemently, and this may depend on one’s tolerance level. Hovatter (ibid.) explains that as long as the tolerance level is not overstressed, a disagreement may or may not be conveyed and if it is conveyed, may be done in a non-verbal manner suggesting that the individual’s emotion is within control. In that regard there is no one right way to react to disagreements.

Examining the concept from an Islamic point of view, Mohamad Baianonie (1998) confirms that “when we are in agreement it is easy for us to behave properly with each other; but when in

---

5 D. Hovatter. “Understanding conflict and disagreement.”

6 Ibid.
disagreement, we don’t know how we should behave”. This implies that disagreements can affect people’s behavior and attitude.

As MacFarlane (2006) and Hovatter (1996) have mentioned, 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 a 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, it cannot be denied that we sometimes disagree with ourselves about how something should be done or what would be the best method to handle particular issues at stake. As we examine our own behavior and actions, we are seeking to understand why we react in a certain way, and we ask ourselves how the situation could have been better handled should it reoccur. In this regard, disagreement within oneself can be considered as positive as it aids us in decision making and possibly also self development.

MacFarlane (2006) also states 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 also mentioned that the notion of ‘being in disagreement’ can involve both an ‘activity’ as well as a state of ‘being’. He explains


D. Hovatter. “Understanding conflict and disagreement.”
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.\(^\text{10}\) MacFarlane (ibid.) illustrates by saying that sadness or unhappiness after engaging in 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.\(^\text{11}\)

Snyder (1999) indicates that there are types of disagreements and she has categorised them as factual, semantic and faith and of the three, Snyder 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.\(^\text{12}\) 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 conjure different meanings to different people. She further 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.

\(^{10}\) John MacFarlane. “Relativism and disagreement.”

\(^{11}\) Ibid.

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.

**Resolving disagreements**

While the intensity of disagreements that occur may depend on the context and the people involved, it appears that disagreements, depending on degree of intensity, can provoke and stir up emotions. While one person may not find it uncomfortable, for instance, to disagree with one’s close friend over how something should be worn, a teenage son who disagrees with his father over how he should spent his allowance may experience a feeling of being oppressed and dissatisfaction after the event. Likewise a wife who disagrees with her husband over how the children should be disciplined may harbor discontent which could be diffused in a number of ways, depending on her personality. These examples are provided to illustrate that human beings are susceptible creatures who react to such situations with various mechanisms. It is such a condition that spurred this study which explores the type of coping mechanism (strategies) employed by young Malaysians to cope with the aftermath of disagreements.

**Agreement vs. disagreement**

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**

Who we are determines how we react to certain matters and likewise, our personality also determines how we might respond to a particular disagreement. In the diagram we talk about the kinds of responses that can be evoked but we like to clarify that the degree of ‘agreeableness’ here 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 people just after experiencing disagreements. Clearly, how people react 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.
Marital status and disagreement

A marriage involves two individuals of possibly diverse culture and background living together as a couple, in that regard, the toll of marriages can be demanding. This multidimensional nature of 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 to learn to juggle conflict at work and home, learn to manage time as well as marital and in-laws relationships. When they have children, more commitments are required and hence attitude of spouse, parenting style, parent-child relationships, interplay of moods and emotions, respect and tolerance can impact the respective individuals in many ways. This, in turn, affects their attitude towards how they deal or cope with disagreement.

Previous research on married couples shows that financial issues relate positively to marital happiness (Dew 2008\textsuperscript{14}; Grafova 2007\textsuperscript{15}). 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).\textsuperscript{16} MacFarlane (2009) believes that generally, society accepts that men go out to work and bring home the bacon and women look after family affairs.\textsuperscript{17} This is a conservative way of viewing married couples and the view may invariably affect

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{17} John MacFarlane. “Varieties of disagreement.”
\end{itemize}
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’.

Coping strategies in marriage
Disagreements are unpleasant when we do not know how to deal with them and this is especially so when our emotions are affected either by the other parties’ attitude, behavior, action or use of words. 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 which we also identify as strategies, enable us 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.

Understanding one’s level of tolerance for disagreement is most essential whether in maintaining long-term relationships such as family, marriage, friendship and business partnership. Learning to see things from others’ perspectives which are contrary to ours, is a skill to master and appreciate and one way of accomplishing this is to recognize the need to compromise. Such is the case of newly-weds where two individuals learn to compromise within disagreements and learn to control every disagreeing situation by avoiding, where possible, deeply entrenched emotions and opinions from escalating into conflicts which will hurt or ruin the relationship.
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.¹⁸ 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 (1984) 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.¹⁹

Another set of scholars, Hall and Adams (2011) observe that newlyweds tend to use positive cognitive coping strategies such as giving a spouse the benefit of the doubt, reflecting on commitment themes (get it over and work it out) as ways of coping with the stress induced their adjustment to marriage.²⁰ Nonetheless, Murray and Holmes (1993) note that many couples choose to view disagreements as marital challenges which could help to cement their relationships.²¹

---


¹⁹ Ibid.


Most studies, do not however, provide a list of mechanisms which resembled the ones provided to respondents in this study.

**Statement of the problem**

Young people are the backbone to the country’s future, hence it is necessary to identify their potentials and weaknesses which can help to further develop the state of this country. Reports of social psychological studies (see Teoh et al., 2012) have shown that Malaysian youths are more at risk to mental health problems while other studies mentioned that people who cannot cope with stress can sink into depressions. Of late, the depression rate in Malaysia is on the increase. If undetected and untreated, it can lead to more social disharmony such as ‘amok’ killing where people who are of unstable mind go on a rampant killing spree. Although ‘amok’ killing is not directly related to disagreements, it is related to instability of the mind. A disagreement is just a difference in opinion but when those involved are unhappy over the event, they need to find mechanisms to get themselves out of the situation so that their very being is not consumed by negative energies, which if left unattended can affect their mentality. It is when they use the appropriate strategies suited to their personal being that they can become better human beings who can deal with stress so much so that their mental state of being is constantly resilient. For that reason, our study aims to explore how they cope.

---

Aim

This paper is derived from a larger study that explores the linkage between young people and their strategies in coping with disagreement, in relation to gender, marital status and ethnic backgrounds. In particular, this paper aims to detect what kind of coping mechanisms are employed by young Malaysians (aged 19 to 25) after disagreements with people in close relationship (parents, siblings and friends) and people not in close relationship (bosses, colleagues, and others). Our findings specifically report on the differences between married and single young Malaysians.

Significance of study

The findings of our study will shed light for the respective individual to have an understanding of his/her own strategies of dealing with disagreements with respective people in their lives. This knowledge can help improve interpersonal relationships. In addition, knowing how others cope can empower us when we learn how to control ourselves in a disagreement situation hence deflecting instances of confrontation, aggressive behavior and conflict. This may also facilitate our development of tolerance level for others.

Limitation of study

In this study we presented the disagreement situations on a general basis. The concept of disagreement presented was not contextualized and so, it can be said that respondents would be looking at disagreements in a wide perspective.
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 coped after disagreements, the revised questionnaire contains 16 questions, two of which were open-ended questions. In sum a total of 127 items were listed for analysis using SPSS. A total of 1,000 questionnaires were accessed but only 722 met the objectives of this study. Sampling was conducted based on pre-requisites such as age group, marital status and ethnicity. The questionnaire was presented in English as majority was educated youths pursuing tertiary education in public and private institutions within the Klang Valley with close proximity to Kuala Lumpur. The participants were from different parts of the country. The distribution of the respondents resembled the demography of Malaysia: 59.8% Malays, 22.4% Chinese and 8.5% Indians (with 10% missing values). Of these, 58.2% were females and 39.8% were males (with 2% missing values) and more than half, 58.6% were single (unmarried) while 37.5% were married (with 1.6% missing values).

The key questions for the current analysis were as follows:

- On average, how many times of disagreement do you experience in a week?
- How do you normally react after a disagreement?
- How would you rate the frequency of disagreement with the following people?
- How would you normally react to disagreement with the following people- parents, siblings, friends, bosses, colleagues, strangers?
The five-point Likert scale ranging from (1) Always; (2) Frequently; (3) Sometimes; (4) Rarely; and (5) Never were applied and for all data presented in the tables below, the lowest item in mean score would indicate the highest frequency in each item. Our findings are thus based on frequency count.

Finding no. 1: Malaysian youths experiencing 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. A high percentage of Malaysians (>92%) claim that they experience disagreement in their weekly interaction with others and this result was affirmed by 94.0% of single youths and 91.7% of married youths. Respondents were asked whether or not a disagreement 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 1.

Table 1: People whom Respondents Most Frequently Disagree with

Our data suggest that single and married respondents are most frequently in disagreements with people who are not in close relationship, namely their bosses, colleagues, strangers and office administrators. The same order applies for both single and married respondents. However, in looking at people in close relationship data suggest that a distinctive difference is seen in married Malaysians who appear to frequently disagree with siblings. Data also imply that single
respondents who scored high in the overall mean rank are generally less confrontational than the married youths in that they had less disagreements with parents and siblings. This may mean that single respondents have better self control or that they hardly ever deal with their siblings and parents.

From table 1, it can be deduced that both single and married youths have lesser disagreements with their parents. This finding is possibly linked to the hierarchy of the Malaysian society which shows high regard for parents such that children either avoid having disagreements totally or they may have little room for disagreement because of better relationships developed from ample communication and compassion.

*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 2 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.

*Table 2: Coping Mechanisms Most Frequently Used by Single and Married Youth*

23 John MacFarlane. “Relativism and disagreement.”
From what is seen, it can be said that both activity and being are employed by single and married Malaysians as coping strategies after disagreements. It appears that more singles would respond to the situation by listening to loud music (activity). Although it is unclear why loud music is preferred, it may be a strategy perceived as either avoiding the feeling by ‘drowning themselves in the music’ or they could be feeling so disgruntled that they had to have it out through the loud music. Single respondents also prefer to write into journals (activity). In the current era, 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.

On the other hand, married respondents do not react as much as singles do. Instead, 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, it appears that 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. Other than that married people may indulge in listening to soft music (activity), or they may 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.
Table 3: Coping Mechanisms Least Frequently (Seldom) Used by Single and Married Youth

Table 3 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 in the table, it appears that there is a distinctive disparity between the two groups. Single respondents seldom feel that life is unfair, they seldom feel depressed, confused, or unhappy and seldom sleep the matter over. In contrast, married people seldom feel sad, unhappy, or angry and of the activities, they seldom indulge in crying or playing games. This shows that there is a range of ‘being’ and ‘activity’ which are seldom applied.

**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 these two groups of respondents. In this study, we try to conceptualise the concept of disagreement by providing what other scholars have defined a disagreement as and we also attempted to illustrate in what conditions disagreements are likely to be stimulated and trigger emotional responses. We also applied Macfarlane’s (2006) concept of activity and being\(^{24}\) as a way of defining the coping mechanisms listed in our study. As mentioned earlier we only aim to explore the kinds of

\(^{24}\) John MacFarlane. “Relativism and disagreement.”
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 analysed in relation to the management of disagreement in the family, at school, in the workplace and in other informal social settings.

Our findings indicate that more than 90% of young Malaysians claim to face disagreements on a weekly basis and this could mean that young people are not spared from the rudiments of disagreements which occur in our everyday life. In other words, they could also be experiencing stress due to these 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.

From the analysis of data, it appears that young Malaysians who study in higher institutions are also working, possibly to sustain their finances and in this aspect they would also need to attend to the requirements given by their bosses and colleagues. Analysis implies that respondents claim to be experiencing disagreements more frequently with people not in close relationships such as bosses, colleagues and office administrators in that order. Although the disagreements were not contextualized, it can be deduced that young people do have difficulties in communicating with people of this category and the cause of this can include incompatible personality, non-cooperative communication skills or inefficient working skills. There is also the probability that Malaysian youths are less accommodating at the workplace and other social settings. In that regard, communication courses are thus necessary for the development of young people so that their weaknesses can be arrested early on before it wrecks their respective future and the future
of this country. Our findings also indicate that both single and married young people seemed to have fewer disagreements with parents and this may be a good or bad sign. Good because it could mean that young people are more accommodating with parents hence their high tolerance level for people in close relationship and bad 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 (2006) 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 seemed 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

---

25 John MacFarlane. “Relativism and disagreement.”
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.

Acknowledgement

We would like to thank the University of Malaya for the research funding extended to this project (UMRG: RG238-11HNE).
Difference of opinion, taste, action, belief

Divergence
Disparity
Quarrel
Argument
Conflict

Overt
(Explicit)

Covert
(Agreeable difference/ subdued/suppressed)

Verbal and Non-Verbal Expressions

Debate
Disparity
Divergence
Diversity

Diagram 1: Dimensions of disagreement
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Single: People whom they disagree with</th>
<th>Score in mean rank</th>
<th>Married: People whom they disagree with</th>
<th>Score in mean rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Bosses</td>
<td>198.33</td>
<td>Bosses</td>
<td>181.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Colleagues</td>
<td>210.34</td>
<td>Colleagues</td>
<td>190.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Strangers</td>
<td>294.99</td>
<td>Strangers</td>
<td>272.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Office Administrator</td>
<td>312.83</td>
<td>Office administrators</td>
<td>292.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Classmates</td>
<td>338.86</td>
<td>Teachers/lecturers</td>
<td>329.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Teachers/lecturers</td>
<td>342.91</td>
<td>Siblings</td>
<td>329.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Close friends</td>
<td>353.79</td>
<td>Close friends</td>
<td>341.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>358.41</td>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>343.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Siblings</td>
<td>361.54</td>
<td>Classmates</td>
<td>353.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Coping mechanisms</td>
<td>Score in mean rank</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Coping mechanisms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Listen to loud music (activity)</td>
<td>323.56</td>
<td></td>
<td>Feel restless (being)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Write into a journal (activity)</td>
<td>323.62</td>
<td></td>
<td>Feel that life is unfair (being)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Play games (activity)</td>
<td>324.81</td>
<td></td>
<td>See a counselor/academic advisor/someone I can trust (activity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Paint/draw (activity)</td>
<td>325.05</td>
<td></td>
<td>Feel confused (being)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Feel sad (being)</td>
<td>329.05</td>
<td></td>
<td>Listen to soft music (activity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Find that you cannot concentrate (being)</td>
<td>336.58</td>
<td></td>
<td>Share feelings with friends (activity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Cry (activity)</td>
<td>337.30</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mope/Sulk (being)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Feel Angry (being)</td>
<td>338.36</td>
<td></td>
<td>Find that you cannot concentrate (being)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Feel unhappy (being)</td>
<td>339.7</td>
<td></td>
<td>Feel depressed (being)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Feel confused (being)</td>
<td>341.05</td>
<td></td>
<td>Go to sleep (activity)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3: Coping Mechanisms Least Frequently (Seldom) Used by Single and Married Youth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Single</th>
<th>Score in mean rank</th>
<th>Married</th>
<th>Score in mean rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Feel that life is unfair (being)</td>
<td>344.32</td>
<td>Feel sad (being)</td>
<td>349.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Feel depressed (being)</td>
<td>342.31</td>
<td>Feel unhappy (being)</td>
<td>348.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Go to sleep (activity)</td>
<td>341.12</td>
<td>Feel angry (being)</td>
<td>341.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Feel confused (being)</td>
<td>341.05</td>
<td>Cry (activity)</td>
<td>337.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Feel unhappy (being)</td>
<td>339.70</td>
<td>Play games (activity)</td>
<td>336.45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References


http://www.johnmacfarlane.net/disagreement.pdf/.

http://www.johnmacfarlane.net/disagreement.pdf/.


