

**ATTACHMENT DIMENSIONS, PATTERNS OF
INTERACTION DURING CONFLICT AND
MARITAL SATISFACTION AMONG MARRIED
INDIVIDUALS**

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INDIVIDUALS**

by

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CMB	Common Method Bias
CPQ	Communication Pattern Questionnaire
CPQ-SF	Communication Pattern Questionnaire- Short Form
ECR	Experience in Close Relationship Inventory
PLS	Partial Least Square
RAS	Relational Assessment Scale
SEM	Structural Equation Modelling
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences Programme

**DIMENSI PERTAUTAN, CORAK KOMUNIKASI KETIKA KONFLIK DAN
KEPUASAN PERKAHWINAN DALAM KALANGAN INDIVIDU YANG
TELAH BERKAHWIN**

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menghasilkan model yang komprehensif dengan mengintegrasikan dimensi pertautan terhadap pasangan, corak komunikasi ketika konflik dan kepuasan perkahwinan. Aplikasi teori pertautan dalam kajian ini diukur menerusi dua dimensi : kebimbangan dan penghindaran. Kajian ini terdiri dari dua bahagian. Bahagian pertama kajian meneliti tentang dimensi pertautan responden ketika zaman kanak-kanak terhadap ibu, bapa, rakan sebaya dan ketika dewasa iaitu terhadap pasangan romantik. Bahagian kedua kajian ini mengkaji samada dimensi pertautan terhadap pasangan ketika dewasa bertindak sebagai penentu kepada kepuasan perkahwinan menerusi corak komunikasi ketika konflik sebagai pengantara. Dengan menggunakan kaedah tinjauan, data telah dikumpul menggunakan borang soal selidik kendalian sendiri melibatkan 400 individu yang telah berkahwin di Pulau Pinang. Analisis Partial Least Squares (PLS) digunakan dan dapatan kajian menunjukkan semua konstruk mempunyai nilai kebolehpercayaan komposit yang melebihi 0.6 dan menunjukkan konvergen dan diskriminan dengan perbezaan nilai purata diestruk (AVE) lebih daripada 0.5. Model yang terakhir di bahagian satu dan bahagian dua mencatatkan tahap Goodness of Fit (GoF) yang tinggi bagi kedua-duanya sebanyak 0.681 dan 0.401. Model pertama pada bahagian satu meramalkan dimensi pertautan terhadap pasangan menunjukkan nilai penjelasan yang tinggi dengan R^2 sebanyak 73% pada kebimbangan terhadap pasangan dan 63.9% pada penghindaran terhadap pasangan. Model kedua pada bahagian dua pula menunjukkan

sedikit kekurangan nilai penjelasan dengan R^2 sebanyak 39.5% pada kepuasan perkahwinan. Keputusan yang diperoleh daripada ujian Q^2 untuk kedua-dua bahagian mencapai hasil tafsiran yang baik. Hasil kajian juga menunjukkan corak komunikasi secara membina membantu sebagai pengantara hubungan antara penghindaran dan kepuasan perkahwinan, corak komunikasi secara membinasakan pula merupakan pengantara antara a) kebimbangan dan kepuasan perkahwinan b) penghindaran dan kepuasan perkahwinan sementara corak komunikasi secara menghindari merupakan pengantara kepada kebimbangan dan kepuasan perkahwinan. Secara keseluruhannya, kajian ini telah membuktikan kesan berkekalan hubungan antara dimensi pertautan ketika zaman kanak-kanak dan dimensi pertautan terhadap pasangan ketika dewasa. Secara teori, kajian ini telah menyumbang ke arah pembangunan model yang komprehensif yang telah menyatukan hubungan antara dimensi pertautan, corak komunikasi ketika konflik dan kepuasan perkahwinan. Dari perspektif pengamal industri, hasil kajian ini telah menunjukkan kepentingan mengendalikan penilaian yang mendalam tentang dimensi pertautan dan corak komunikasi ketika konflik dikalangan pasangan semasa sesi kaunseling dan terapi.

**ATTACHMENT DIMENSIONS, PATTERNS OF INTERACTION DURING
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INDIVIDUALS**

ABSTRACT

This study aims to create a comprehensive model integrating adult romantic attachment dimensions, patterns of interaction during conflict and marital satisfaction. The application of Attachment Theory in this study was established via two dimensions of anxiety and avoidance. This study comprises two parts. Part One of the study examined the relationship between individual respondent's childhood attachment dimensions with mother, father, peers and adult romantic attachment dimensions. Part Two of the study sought to determine if adult romantic attachment dimensions acted as a predictor to marital satisfaction through the mediating role of communication patterns during conflict. By means of survey method, data was collected using self-reporting questionnaire involving 400 married individuals in the state of Penang. Partial Least Squares (PLS) analysis was employed and result from the analysis yielded all the constructs have composite reliability value of more than 0.6 and convergent and discriminant validity with an average variance extracted (AVE) value greater than 0.50. The final model in Part One and Part Two recorded high Goodness of Fit (GoF) values at 0.681 and 0.401 respectively. The first model in Part One predicting on adult romantic attachment dimensions showed a strong explanatory power with R^2 values of 73% in anxiety with spouse and 63.9% in avoidance with spouse. Additionally, the second model in Part Two indicated slightly lower explanatory power with R^2 value of 39.5% on marital satisfaction. The results of Q^2 tests proposed for both parts are well predicted by the model. Additionally,

results also suggested that constructive pattern mediated the relationship between avoidance and marital satisfaction, destructive pattern mediated the relationship between a) anxiety and marital satisfaction b) avoidance and marital satisfaction while avoidance pattern mediated the relationship between anxiety and marital satisfaction. In sum, this study provides stronger evidence on the enduring effect of childhood attachment on adult romantic attachment dimensions. Theoretically, the current study also has contributed towards the development of a comprehensive model that integrates attachment dimensions, communication patterns during conflict and marital satisfaction. From practitioners' perspective, the finding has pointed out the importance of conducting proper assessment of attachment dimensions and patterns of interaction during conflict among couples during counselling and therapy sessions.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

As a meaningful institution, marriage purposes are:

To ensure preservation of the human species and continuation of the human evolution:

"O mankind! Be careful of your duty to your Lord, Who created you from a single soul and from it created its mate and from them has spread abroad a multitude of men and women" (Quran: 4:1)

To provide spiritual and legal foundation of the family:

"And of His signs is this: He created for you mates from yourself that you might find rest in them, and He ordained between you love and mercy. Lo, therein indeed are portents for folk who reflect". (Quran 30:21)

Through marriage, the conjugal relationship between a man and a woman becomes lawful. It provides a legitimate outlet for recreation as well as procreation. Islam regards sex as natural and good, but restricts it to the partners of marriage in order to ensure the responsibility of its consequences:

"Your women are a tilth for you so go to your tilth as you will, and send (good deeds) before you for your souls, and fear Allah, and know that you will (one day) meet him. Give glad tidings to believers, (O Muhammad)." (Quran 2:223)

Mohammad Mazhar Hussaini (2003)

1.1 Background

Marriage marks the beginning of a new relationship as husband and wife. It is also a journey of love and understanding between two souls (Saxton, 1986). A marriage is often grandly celebrated because it is the most auspicious and memorable event that unites two souls with an enduring promise that they shall be with each other during times of need, happiness and sorrow. The most vital observation in every wedding ceremony is marked by public pledges of goodwill and unending love between two hearts.

In general, marriage is considered as a basic foundation of society and classified as a common rite of passage. It is still a social institution that is highly regarded in every culture. It is through marriage that couples attain a sense of security, affection and companionship (Heslin, 1980; Omari, 1969). Marriage also provides a strong fundamental structure for establishing family relationships (Larson & Holman, 1994). According to Esere (2003), marriage is officially and legally a union between a man and a woman as husband and wife. It is about a relationship in which two adults of the opposite sex make an emotional and legal commitment to live together. Berger and Kellner (1964) conceptualised marriage as a process of constructing a shared reality or a shared perception of experience among couples.

In the Malaysian context, marriage is viewed as a “sacred contract” in Islam, as “a sacred relationship between souls determined by their karma (the moral law of cause and effect)” in Hinduism and as “a holy and true teaching” of Buddhism. Nasoha (2002) claimed that marriage joins two individuals who share a mutual liking to produce legitimate offspring and thereby ensure the sustainability of family ties. In a similar vein, Abdul Aziz (1994) stated that the purpose of marriage is not only for fun but to produce offspring, to engage in legitimate sexual intercourse and to achieve peace of mind.

As a social institution, marriage promotes the life alliance of two different individuals with different backgrounds to build a family. Probably because of these differences, the marriage institution is seen as a cause of more conflicts than other social institutions (Alhassan, 1988).

Looking at conflict in general, Wall and Callister (1995) defined it as a disagreement through which the parties involved perceive a threat to their needs, interests or concerns by another party. In other words, conflict refers to a divergence of opinion that exist in any interpersonal interactions. A person may end up in the conflict stage when another party refuses to comply to his/her wants or demands.

Conflict is an expected occurrence, circumscribing either implicit or explicit part of most interpersonal relationships. Disagreements and arguments crop up even in the most blissful marriages. According to Wood (2007) and Fitzpatrick (1988), when people live together and affect each other, they cannot avoid disagreements since the needs, desires and ambitions of those involved in the relationships cannot always be synchronised and fulfilled. A local scholar, Nasoha (2002) concluded that conflict occurs whenever dissatisfaction arises among spouses or when individuals harbour dislike/annoyance/resentment towards the behaviour of their partners. By and large, conflict is often associated with negative behaviours such as bitter argument, anger, fighting and acts of violence.

Aside from that, conflict in marriage is negatively associated with the level of satisfaction in the relationship. In a research conducted by Wagner and Weiss (2007) on the frequency of conflict, conflict behaviour and relationship stability, the result showed that high conflict couples were less satisfied with their relationships and partners are more likely to separate if they were not satisfied with their relationships. One of the most important theories that discusses on the relationship between conflict pattern and relational satisfaction is Attachment Theory (Collins & Read, 1990; Pistole, 1989; Simpson, 1990). The theory provides greater understanding on how

individuals of different attachment styles may interact differently during conflict situation which in turn influence their marital satisfaction.

The first and the most eminent view on Attachment perspective was coined by John Bowlby, who is known as the father of the theory (Lee, 1973). According to Bowlby (1969, 1973, 1980), attachment refers to the bond or the relationship that a person has with someone close to him/her. Attachment perspective was first studied to understand the relationship between an infant with his/her caregiver. The childhood attachment between an infant with his/her caregiver was strongly advocated to be the foundation of future attachment with other people such as romantic partners and peers (Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

Past research found three types of attachment (Hazan & Shaver, 1987), which were later expanded into four types of attachment namely secure (low in anxiety and avoidance), preoccupied (high in anxiety but low in avoidance), dismissive (high in avoidance but low in anxiety) and fearful (high in anxiety and avoidance) (Bartholomew, 1990; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). The secure attachment style is a positive style which reflects a high level of comfort with intimacy and autonomy. On the other hand, the insecure type of attachment consists of three styles. People in preoccupied attachment style have high desire to be loved and gain self-acceptance from the valuable persons. Meanwhile, the dismissive attachment style creates a desire to remain independent and detached from relationship commitments as sticking to the point of relationships is considered as non-essential. On a separate note, the fearful attachment style involves a desire to avoid romantic rejection stemming from a fear of feeling unworthy, coupled with distrust for others (Goodboy

& Bolkon, 2011). In short, secure attachment has generally been found to correlate positively, and insecure attachment negatively, with relational satisfaction (Collins & Read, 1990; Simpson, 1990).

The different types of attachment whether secure or insecure would influence the way couples communicate to each other in their daily interactions. It also affects the way disagreement and grievance are delivered in conflict situation. Past studies explained on three types of conflict pattern namely mutual constructive (Caughlin & Huston, 2002; McCoy, Cummings & Davies, 2009), demand-withdraw (Gottman, 1994; McCoy et al., 2009) and mutual avoidance (Reznik, Roloff, & Miller, 2010). An individual with a secure attachment style will exhibit mutual constructive communication pattern during conflict compared to an individual with insecure attachment styles. In a nutshell, different attachment styles exert dissimilar influence towards the way conflict is communicated while the way conflict is communicated would influence the level of marital satisfaction. Clearly, the three main concepts namely attachment styles, patterns of interaction and marital satisfaction are interrelated to one another. The interplays between attachment styles and patterns of interaction during conflict will result in different level of marital satisfaction.

1.2 Statement of the Research Problem

Imagining two people from different backgrounds with contradicting personalities and expectations need to deal with bad habits and daily trials of life will definitely confront severe arguments and disagreements in between. It is either the husband or wife exhibiting a tendency to perform an action that upset/anger their mate. They are bound to have conflict in their married life and it is indeed unavoidable. Conflict will be

inescapable under many conditions because the interests of men and women rarely coincide (Alexander, 1987; Buss, 1989; Dawkins, 1976 in Buss, 1991).

Review of past literature has shown three patterns of interaction during conflict namely constructive, demand-withdrawal and avoidance. According to Leary and Springer (2001), constructive pattern during conflict is communicating diplomatically, discussing towards the resolution process and showing expression of positivity towards conflict. Couples tend to be cooperative, pro-social and try to preserve the relationship.

Fincham (2003) indicated that one of the significant behaviour patterns exhibited by a distressed couples is the demand-withdraw pattern, in which one spouse pressures the other with demands, complaints and criticisms, while the partner withdraws into a defensive stance and passive inaction. Disengagement or withdrawal is, in turn, related to the decrease in marital satisfaction.

Meanwhile, there are also couples who have a propensity to give in when conflict ensues. This pattern is called avoidance. One party will keep quiet while the other will leave home. People with high negative affectivity or distress may be less assertive in conflict situations thus would try to distance themselves by avoiding the situation. The evasion of conflict is generally associated with lower levels of satisfaction (Caughlin & Vangelisti, 2006 in Hanzal & Segrin, 2009). Redmond (2006) believed that some couples tend to shut down or leave the relationship in the face of conflict. This inappropriate communication during such conflict, practised by married couples when dealing with conflict, corresponds to a decline in marital satisfaction and it was

manifested in various studies (Tam, Lee, Foo & Lim, 2011). Nasoha (2002), in his written book, mentioned that silence is considered as a virtue, also regarded as a key towards avoiding arguments among Malaysian couples. However this can lead to serious consequences such as separation and divorce. Some couples are so afraid towards conflict, to the extent that difficult issues are never discussed among them. Holding back on rendering such grievances can lead to depression.

Effective conflict handling serves to enhance marital satisfaction and closeness. Much of the early studies of marital conflict arose from its robust connections with marital satisfaction (Christensen & Heavey, 1999). Marital conflict, if not managed well, can lead to greater dissatisfaction and an erosion of a relationship between husband and wife. According to Gottman (1994), negative interactions during conflict (e.g., attacking, arguing, manipulating, withdrawing) can be associated with marital dissatisfaction. In similar manner, Greeff and Bruyne (2000) in other study explained that destructive communications during conflict including avoidance, competitive pattern of dominance and subordination, demeaning and degrading verbal and nonverbal interactions can lead to unsatisfactory relationship. Avoidance pattern in conflict is also associated with lowest level of marital satisfaction (Rands, Levinger & Mellinger, 1981). Previous studies on unsatisfactory marriage and disagreement indicated that a person who is dissatisfied with marriage may involve in many disagreements due to the emotional feelings and feeling that his/her marriage are in dire conditions (Gottman & Krokoff, 1989).

One of the major negative outcomes that would affect married couples due to prolonged conflict and marital dissatisfaction is divorce. According to data in the work

by Samuel and Mohamed Sarif (2008), the divorce rate among Malaysians has increased from 9.88% in 2000 to 12.83% in 2005. The 12.83% or 21,016 divorce cases recorded in 2005 have increased to 22,289 cases in 2008 (Harityati, 2010). In the meantime, a source from JAKIM (Kaunselingsyarie.blogspot.com, 2012) reported that in 2010, the number has increased to 28,035 cases. Surprisingly in 2012, The Malay Mail Online (2012) reported that a whopping figure of 56,760 were recorded, which is equivalent to a marriage breaking down every 10 minutes. More recently, data from Malaysian Syariah Judicial Department has indicated that Muslim couples were reported to involve in divorce cases with a sum of 38,035 cases in 2015 (The Star Online, 2016).

Similarly, the divorce rate in other developing countries and the United States has increased for the third years in a row to about 2.4 million cases in 2012 (Bloomberg in The Malay Mail Online, 2012). For illustration, it was reported that the divorce rate in United States has achieved 800,909 cases in 2015 (National Vital Statistics Report, 2017). Although the rate of divorce cases in Malaysia is not as high as the nations that had been mentioned earlier, this scenario still deserves an important attention as it has become an increasingly common social phenomenon (Durai, 2015; Zainab, Wan Ibrahim, Asyraf, 2014).

Samuel and Mohamed Sarif (2008) expounded that divorce exerts the most adverse effects on children. Generally, children from divorced families encounter many difficulties such as separation anxiety and regressive behaviour. According to Datuk Fatimah Abdullah, Sarawak Minister of Welfare, Women and Community, divorce might give negative impact on children mental and physical development especially

towards their social development, education and relationship with societies (Utusan Online, 2015). Ironically, this is in line with a study by Amato (1996) that identifies children from separated or divorced parents, tend to exhibit problematic behaviour, have poorer mental health and academic performance, exhibit social awkwardness and possess lower self-esteem compared to children whose parents remain married.

Similarly, Harityati (2010) stressed that family problems and divorce may indirectly cause an increase in social problems within Malaysia. Victims of domestic violence and those who have experienced a marital dissolution could experience psychological problems or might fall into the trap of vice, drug addiction, prostitution and crime. This is because conflict in family affects children negatively when they watch their parents argue and this further complicates the matters.

Divorce also brings serious impacts on mental, physical and family health. Fincham and Beach (1999) listed various consequences of conflict and divorce such as poorer general health, depression, eating disorders, physical and psychological abuse of partners, alcoholism, anxiety, poorer parenting skills, poorer child adjustment, problematic attachments to parents and likelihood of parent-child conflict and conflict among siblings.

In an effort to understand the remarkably high failure rate of marriages and the large number of distressed marriages, scientists and practitioners have focused their substantial attention to understand the causes and effects of conflict in marriage (Segrin, Hanzal & Domschke, 2009). Similar to Malaysia, studies on conflict among married couples have been conducted with emphasis on causes of conflict and the

effects of divorce (Samuel & Mohamed Sarif, 2008; Tam et.al, 2011; Mohd. Taib & Noor Baiduri, 2011). In Malaysia, little empirical work has examined patterns of interaction during conflict. The current study attempts to address the so far limited research as conflict pattern is the most important tool for better understanding of the conflict problem in marriage rather than just scratching the surface of causes or effect of marital conflict.

One of the most important theories in this area is known as Attachment Theory (Fuller & Fincham, 1995; Guerrero, Farinelli & McEwan, 2009). This theory posits that the relationship between an individual and other people is based on their model of themselves and their model of others. Experiences of security or insecurity during childhood have important implications on how attachment is formed in adult loving relationship (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991).

Additionally, the Attachment Theory also provides useful theoretical underpinning by suggesting on how individuals from different attachments might interact differently during conflict situations. Most of the past research accentuated that secure attachment individuals incline to deal in a constructive way during conflict compared to insecure attachment individuals who are prone to communicate in a negative way (Dominique & Mollen, 2009).

Generally, attachment was originally an abstract of the emotional bond between a caregiver and child and subsequently this concept grew to become a prediction in understanding the child romantic relationship during adulthood. Many studies pointed out that type of attachment children have with their parents is strongly associated with

the future quality of attachment in romantic relationships that the child would experience as an adult (Collins & Read, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). The children are expected to adapt the same manner in which they were raised and specifically they even work through disagreement by applying the same patterns of behaviour in their romantic relationship (Baptist, Thompson, Norton, Hardy & Link, 2012). With regards to the point above, there are some arguments that challenge the generic idea. Some scholars advocated that early attachment styles are not necessarily identical to what people experience in their later romantic relationships and might be changed in accordance to situation (Waeger, 2007; Crowell, Fraley, & Shaver 1999). Apparently, several attachment patterns might change because of the new experiences (Staik, 2013). Adult attachment style is best considered as a relatively stable personal characteristic that is sensitive to current relationship experience and open to change over time (Feeney & Collins, 2014). Due to the different thoughts and perspectives on the strength of attachment styles, this study will examine the connection between parent, peer in child attachment and adult romantic attachment. In particular, studies on attachment stability can hardly be found in Malaysia. Therefore, the present study needs to be conducted in order to create new insight of the validity of attachment theory towards the idea that child attachment is a prototype for later romantic attachment in the Malaysian context.

While a number of researchers have appraised the direct bivariate relationship between either the attachment styles with marital satisfaction, or attachment styles with patterns of interaction, or patterns of interaction with marital satisfaction, the research works on comprehensive model that integrate the relationship between attachment styles, patterns of interaction during conflict and marital satisfaction in one study is still

limited. Thus, the current study will provide one comprehensive model that helps to illustrate the concept of studying attachment theory, conflict communication and marital satisfaction as a whole. The connections between these three constructs were rarely discussed in past literature. The importance of attachment theory is obvious in the formation of interaction patterns during conflict and marital satisfaction. It is worth mentioning that conflict which occurred in marriage has been documented as triggering stress, challenging a person emotions and seen as threat which will activate a person's attachment dimensions. A person involved in conflict will automatically react based on his or her own attachment dimensions, which eventually leads to marital satisfaction/dissatisfaction.

In addition to that, there are still lack of studies on mediating mechanism in relationship study (Braithwaite, Selby & Fincham, 2011). The potential mediating processes have not been fully examined. What is missing from most of the previous research is an analysis of potential mediators between an individual's attachment styles and level of marital satisfaction. Attachment literature has not fully considered how interpersonal process might mediate the influence of attachment styles on marital satisfaction. Therefore, a new understanding can be gained by examining the connection between attachment styles and marital satisfaction through patterns of interaction during conflict as a mediating mechanism.

Hence, this study will be divided into two parts. Part One consists of the relationship between childhood attachment styles and adult romantic attachment styles. Later, Part Two will explore the relationship between adult romantic attachment styles, patterns of interaction during conflict and marital satisfaction. Besides acknowledging the

direct effect between the three variables, this research will also examine the indirect effect of adult romantic attachment styles on marital satisfaction with a mediating role of patterns of interaction.

1.3 Research Objectives and Research Questions

The chief objective of the current study is to fill in the research gaps by identifying the relationship between adult romantic attachment dimensions, patterns of interaction during conflict and marital satisfaction with a specific focus on patterns of interaction as a mediator between adult romantic attachment styles and marital satisfaction in the context of Malaysian married individuals.

In particular, this research aims:

- RO1: To examine the relationship between childhood attachment dimensions and adult romantic attachment dimensions among Malaysian married individuals.
- RO2: To explore the influence of adult romantic attachment dimensions on marital satisfaction among Malaysian married individuals.
- RO3: To examine the influence of adult romantic attachment dimensions on patterns of interaction during conflict among Malaysian married individuals.
- RO4: To study the influence of patterns of interaction during conflict on marital satisfaction among Malaysian married individuals.
- RO5: To understand the mediating effect of patterns of interaction during conflict on the relationship between adult romantic attachment dimensions and marital satisfaction among Malaysian married individuals.

- RO6: To propose an integrated model of attachment dimensions, patterns of interaction during conflict and marital satisfaction in the context of Malaysian married individuals.

Specifically, the research questions for this research study are as follows:

- RQ1: To what extent do childhood attachment dimensions with mother, father and peer influence adult romantic attachment dimensions among Malaysian married individuals?
- RQ2: How do adult romantic attachment dimensions relate to marital satisfaction among Malaysian married individuals?
- RQ3: What is the relationship between adult romantic attachment dimensions and patterns of interaction during conflict among Malaysian married individuals?
- RQ4: How do patterns of interaction during conflict influence marital satisfaction among Malaysian married individuals?
- RQ5: Do patterns of interaction during conflict mediate the association between adult romantic attachment dimensions and marital satisfaction among Malaysian married individuals?

1.4 Research Significance

In general, this research will test the validity of adult romantic attachment dimensions, the patterns of interaction and marital satisfaction among the respondents by investigating the direct effect between adult romantic attachment styles, patterns of interactions during conflict and marital satisfaction and the indirect effect of adult romantic attachment styles and marital satisfaction with the existence of patterns of

interaction as a mediator. Additionally, the present research will explore the relationship between respondents' early attachment dimensions (childhood attachment with mother, father and peers) on adult romantic attachment dimensions. The final outcome of the study will be two structural models to ascertain the relationship between the variables of the study.

1.4.1 Contribution to Theory and Knowledge

Essentially, this research will contribute towards the development of a comprehensive model that integrates three main research areas that were previously studied separately and unconnectedly. Studies on attachment styles, patterns of interaction during conflict and marital satisfaction have mounted in the past that lead to an advanced knowledge in the related fields. However, most studies failed to integrate the vast knowledge and findings in these three main areas as researchers prefer but to analyse them independently and separately.

For example, past studies have examined direct relationship between attachment and conflict pattern. Prior research works also have explored direct relationship between attachment and marital satisfaction. It can be observed that adult romantic attachment styles, patterns of interaction during conflict and marital satisfaction are co-dependent. Although previous research works have investigated the role of adult attachment orientation, patterns of interaction and marital satisfaction, these variables have typically been considered separately and were examined with other variables (Batholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Sadeghi, Hezardastan, Ahmadi, Bahrami, Etemadi & Fatehizadeh, 2011; Segrin et al., 2009).

The current study would fill research gaps as identified in the previous studies. It is worth mentioning that it will add to limited number of attachment research conducted using Malaysian sample. Although assumed to have universal significance, Attachment Theory in fact is deeply rooted in mainstream Western context and culture. The theory itself has “not been thoroughly tested in the crucible of human diversity” and has been overlooked on the impact of culture on attachment style and orientation. (Rothbaum, Weisz, Pott, Miyake & Morelli, 2000, p. 1102)

1.4.2 Contribution to Method

Methodologically, the present study has contributed towards the development of a new measure of patterns of conflict interaction that is unique to Malaysian context. The new measure was developed via open-ended interaction questions and was later tested in a cross sectional survey. The development of a new measure of communication patterns during conflict was initiated due to criticism given to earlier measurement scale Christensen & Sullaway (1984).

Most of the empirical research (e.g., Marchand, 2004; Bippus, Borren & Worsham, 2008; Weger, 2006) proposed that future research should be conducted on larger samples comprising couples in long-term relationships and married couples. The choice of married individuals will help to fill the current research gap which seems to concentrate only on dating couples. Married individuals were chosen because they are in a more stable relationship and they are more committed compared to those in dating relationships. This study pinpoints on married male and female individuals but not on couples due to time and resource constraints.

Meanwhile, Tam et al. (2011) recommended others to expand the population of respondents to reflect an equal ethnic composition in a wider sample. To address the gap in the research, the researcher recruited a more diverse sample of 400 married individuals involving three major ethnic groups in Penang. The respondents were selected from different races in Penang and the selection process was carried out in accordance to the population composition of Penang with a majority of Chinese respondents followed by other races. Since all the respondents are adults with ample life experiences, it will be easier to pose sensitive questions such as frequency of conflicts and types of conflict to them.

Most previous academic works concentrated on SPSS for data analysis in order to study attachment theory, patterns of interaction and marital satisfaction. Since the Partial Least Square (PLS) functions as a component-based approach for testing structural equation models, for theory confirmation or theory development and also for exploring the relationship between variables (Urbach & Ahlemann, 2010), this study has explored a novel statistical approach by using the analysis of Partial Least Square (PLS).

1.4.3 Contribution to Practitioners

Findings from this research study will assist government authorities in the allocation of resources with the aim of resolving marital problems. The government, especially the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development will be able to create new guidelines for married couples to safeguard marital harmony and to strengthen the content of seminars or courses organized by this department. Findings from this research will also help the concerning agencies to formulate a better designed

counselling techniques. Marriage counsellors will be able to identify the best way to help afflicted couples. The findings will also aid other related programmes pertaining to human development, mind transformation and stress management offered by the Department of Women's Development.

1.5 Research Scope

The overall focus of this research is to obtain an in-depth understanding of the relationship between adult romantic attachment dimension, patterns of interaction and marital satisfaction among married individuals in Malaysia. This research involved legally married individuals (males and females) residing in the northern region of Malaysia. The respondents were selected from different races in Malaysia. There was no age limit criteria in the selection of respondents; however, in terms of stages of marriage, the study had proportionately divided the respondents into one of the four family lifecycles (preparental, parental, launching and postparental).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the literature reviews of this study. In this chapter, the researcher begins by providing a detailed review of past literature concerning attachment styles, patterns of interaction during conflict and marital satisfaction before exploring the main theory used in the study, namely Attachment Theory. The chapter also discusses the interrelationships between the main variables of the study and presents the conceptual framework and hypotheses of the study.

2.2 Conflict in Marriage: An Overview

Conflict and differences of opinion are unavoidable in any types of relationships especially for those involved in intimate relationship. Conflict, disagreement and argument are considered as normal and inevitable in any close and intimate relationships like marriage. However, compared to other types of relationships, conflict among spouses and within families is more severe due to its long term psychological and emotional implications (Wagner & Weiss, 2007). Marital conflict impacts spouses and children's feeling in psychological and emotional ways by threatening their goal of felt security in the relationships or families due to them being closely attached to one another.

According to Uzma (2010), marital conflict is the high level of disagreement that exists between married couples that disturbs their relationship to a great extent. According to Imobighe (2003), conflict normally occurs as social relationship develops and

progresses within and between families, groups and organisations. Conflict is a condition of disharmony within an interaction process, which usually ensues because of clash of interests between the parties involved in some forms of relationship. Such a clash of interest could occur because they are either pursuing inconsistent goals or they are using inconsistent means to pursue their chosen goals. This is in line with the definition by Cahn (1992) who claimed that conflict arises when disagreement, differences or incompatibility occur between partners. In simple terms, conflict can be defined as struggle or contest between couples with opposing needs, ideas, beliefs, values, or goals.

A study by Buss (1991), indicated that conflict in marriage occurs when men and women perform actions that upset and anger their dates and mates. These upsetting actions vary widely in different situations. Furthermore, conflict is typically viewed as something that is negative or damaging because the phase of 'marital conflict' is associated with terms such as fight, argument or yelling between spouses (Faircloth, 2012).

It is noteworthy that when conflict occurs, emotional distress, psychological pressure and perhaps hostile behaviour during conflict could disrupt immunological, endocrinal and cardiovascular functioning which lead to poorer health and other illnesses including cancer, cardiac disease and chronic pain (Fincham, 2003).

Even though research indicates that marital conflict lead to negative implications for partners and their relationships, some data suggest that too little conflict is bad (Gottman & Krokoff, 1989). This is possibly due to the fact that the meaning and

function of conflict can vary. It can be deliberately used to indicate individual commitment to maintain the relationship (Holmes & Murray, 1996). If the conflict is constructive, it can improve or sustain an intimate partnership and promotes greater understanding between partners (Abdullah & Aion, 1999). Gottman and Silver (1994) also claimed that healthy fighting requires staying calm, speaking non-defensively and validating the feelings of the spouse. If couples are able to follow and practise such behaviour over time, the couple will feel closer, increase their trust in one another and derive greater satisfaction from their relationship. The key determinant of relationship health, is not how frequently spouses have disagreements, but the varying tactics they use to resolve their differences (Gottman, 1994).

Eseré (2003) added that marital conflict is an indication that the spouse cares enough about the relationship to fight. As long as conflict exists, the two parties at least have a relationship no matter how bad it may be.

Weger (2006) compiled various scholarly opinions on the positive side of conflict. He stated that couples normally argue to avoid or get rid of excessive negativity (Christensen & Walczynski, 1997; Walton, 1989). Couples need to tackle disagreements with some optimism as constructive discussion will yield positive results (Hample, Thompson-Hayes, Wallenfelsz, & Knapp, 2005; Johnson & Roloff, 1989).

To sum this up, marital conflict arises between partners when it involves different opinions and issues. It is not the existence of conflict in marriage per se that is detrimental to marital satisfaction or stability, but how spouses manage conflict when

it occurs. When poorly handled, conflict will damage the marital relationship. When handled with a respectful, non-abusive spirit, it can lead to a stronger and more satisfying marriage.

2.3 Overview of Research Issues Related to Conflict in Marriage

Over many years, considerable research studies have examined various issues related to conflict within marriage. Despite its varieties in research topics, methods and samples, the researcher observes general trend of conflict issues being studied by past scholars which can be delineated or summarised based on three main subject matters related to conflict namely causes, core process and result or effects of conflict at interpersonal, inter-group and inter-organisational level (Wall & Callister 1995).

According to Bolton and Linberg (1971), the causes of conflict are the issues or factors that trigger or lead an individual to involve in conflict. The process of conflict on the other hand, involves the many ways and approaches used to deal with conflict which include conflict behaviours, conflict resolution styles and emotional expression during conflict situation (Thomas, 1992; Walton, 1969). Meanwhile, the effect of conflict refers to the consequences of the conflict. Figure 2.1 below summarised general overview on the main research issues related to conflict in marriage that were carried out by past scholars.

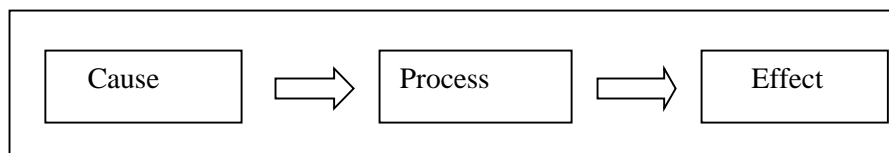


Figure 2.1: General overview on the main research issues related to conflict in marriage

Considerable research has been given in the past to the causes of conflict in marriage by concentrating on the factors/causes of conflict/divorce in marriage. Past research, for example, have focused on causal factors such as breakdown in communication, negative attributions, financial constraint, sexual problems, issues of upbringing, foolish spending and personality that lead to conflict in marriage (Fincham 2003; David, 1998; David, 2012; Fincham & Beach (2003); Deborah Nyangulu-Chipofya, 2010; Esere, 2003 ; Omorogbe, Obetoh & Odion, 2010; Buss 1991). Additionally, Samuel Chan Hsin Chlen and Mohamed Sarif (2008), who analysed divorce situations in Malaysia explained that infidelity, being no longer in love and emotional problems as the main factors that contribute to divorce. Among these research, efforts were made to explore in greater depth why and how conflict occurs and transpires in marriage through qualitative interviews and focus group discussion.

Understanding the process on how conflict is dealt with is another major aspect in conflict study. Research interests have mounted in the past seeking to understand how marital conflicts are managed, controlled and solved. According to McCabe (2006), early research studies on conflict in 1950s have shown a significant shift from a focus on individual to interactional analysis between couples. This trend continues until today with recent studies seek to observe the patterns of interaction between spouses during conflict (Fincham, 2003), particularly looking at demand/withdraw communication pattern used during conflict at home (Papp, Kouros & Cummings, 2009), comparing conflict communication patterns among nondistressed, clinic couples under marital therapy and divorcing couples on psychological distance (Christensen & Shenk, 1991) and evaluating on the effect of gender and social structure on the demand/withdraw pattern of marital conflict (Christensen & Heavey,

1990). Some of the empirical research also have focused on interaction patterns and marital satisfaction including the connection between patterns of interaction and relational/ marital satisfaction (Fincham & Beach, 1999), the impact of individual (e.g., work, health, power, roles) and interpersonal (e.g., violence, communication) on relationship satisfaction (McCabe, 2006) and demand-withdraw pattern and couple dissatisfaction across wide range of relationship duration (Donato, Parise, Pagani, Bertoni & Iafrate, 2014). In many of these studies, investigations were normally conducted through in-depth interview and survey, which sought to understand couples' relational dialectics, disputes and tensions.

In addition to patterns of interaction during conflict, conflict resolution is one of the topics often discussed and investigated in past studies, with many studies conducted to understand how couples resolve their disagreement with each other. In many of these studies, the researchers were interested to examine the relationship between patterns of conflict resolution and relational satisfaction (Gottman & Krokoff, 1989) or patterns of conflict management and their implications towards mental health among Malaysian couples (Tam et al., 2011). There were also past research that looked into a specific conflict resolution style such as the use of silence as a conflict management strategy among married couples (Oduro-Frimpong, 2007) and the application of constructive communication during problem solving discussions (Heavey, Larson, Zumtobel & Christensen, 1996) or explore on a specific issue of conflict such as conflict resolution on financial issues (Dew & Dakin, 2011).

In addition to the causes and process in conflict, prior research have also focused on the effects of conflict on marriage. Specifically, these studies seek to understand the effect of conflict or divorce on the well-being of children (Morrison & Coiro, 1999;

Faircloth, 2012), the effect of divorce on Malaysian couples (Samuel & Mohamed Sarif, 2008), the impact of divorce on sibling relationships (Poortman & Voorpostel, 2009), the impact of conflict on physical and family health (Burman, John & Margolin 1992) and the effect of weaker parenting on child adjustment (Erel & Burman 1995: Grych & Fincham, 1990).

2.4 Marital Satisfaction

Conflict in marriage is closely connected to marital satisfaction. According to Baumeister (2007), marital satisfaction is a mental state that reflects the perceived benefits and costs of marriage to a particular person. The marriage will be more satisfying if it brings about benefits to a person and will be less satisfying if the marriage inflicts more cost than benefits to a person. A high level of marital satisfaction leads to greater well-being. On the other hand, Canary and Lakey (2006) stated that a low level of marital satisfaction increased the tendency to use competitive tactics during conflict confrontation. In other explanation, Agha Mohammad, Mokhtaree, Sayadi, Nazer and Mosavi (2012), defines marital satisfaction as feeling of happiness, pleasure and satisfaction by the wife or the husband when considering all the aspects of conjugal life. It is a positive and pleasing attitude which is possessed by the couple from the parts of a conjugal life.

As explained by (Hendrick, 1988; Ptacek & Dodge, 1995), relational satisfaction which includes marital satisfaction is one of the major topics of research in the area of interpersonal and close relationship. In a review of past literature pertaining relational satisfaction research, it was found that the topic of relational satisfaction is widely investigated in the field of marriage and romantic relationship (Zainah, Nasir, Ruzy