

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Phenomena

The rise of the gender equality movement in Indonesia is commonly viewed as a necessary development to allow women equal opportunities with men to pursue a meaningful life without the stigma of discrimination. However, surveys revealed that for many of Indonesia's gender egalitarian young adults, traditional gender ideals of 'male breadwinner and female caretaker' still dominate the results or remain the priority, in the expense of gender egalitarian opportunities (Utomo, 2015). This is an example of how differences in sex and cultural factors combine to influence what constitutes a meaningful life and the pursuit of personal meaning.

Wong (1989; in Dhanjal, 2019) described personal meaning as an "individually constructed, culturally based cognitive system that influences an individual's choice of activities and goals and endows life with a sense of purpose, personal worth, and significance." Frankl (1986) states that the 'will to meaning' is a human need as meaning-making creatures and pertinent to an individual's wellbeing. Through the pursuit of a meaningful life and its components of purpose, understanding, responsibility, and joy, a person may achieve contentment regardless of situation or outcome (Wong, 2010). A person who has achieved this state is able to maintain his beliefs and even benefit from their suffering (Wong, 2010). On the other hand, failure to

find meaning life leads to an existential vacuum, which is characterized by a sense of meaninglessness, boredom, and apathy. In a quest to fill their void, people may turn to other sources, which only leads to frustration and becomes the root for other psychopathologies as it enters a negative feedback loop (Frankl, 1986). Wong (2020) stipulates that the rise of depression, loneliness, and addiction is due to the culture of meaninglessness perpetuated by an overdependence on technology, which gets in the way of making meaningful connections with others, especially among young people who are in the process of finding meaning.

The process of meaning-making is a lifelong journey and is important in each of its phases (Wong, 2010). Emerging adulthood constitutes the initial, serious consideration of meaning (Arnett, 2006). Erikson postulated that in the emerging adulthood stage, that is people between 18-25 years old, people are trying to develop and decide on a meaningful, personal identity. Identity is closely tied with meaning, because defining the self requires a value judgement of their own worth. Thus, many during this time continue to universities or institutions of higher learning that would help them explore and develop their potential aptitude for the future, make friends, and decide on commitments to life (Arnett, 2006). As they navigate through new environments, their meaning systems undergo a process of introjection, projection, and identification with new values that a person may end up developing different areas that contribute to their global sense of

meaning. Wong (1998; 2012) discovered seven distinct sources that people derive meaning from: religion, self-transcendence, intimacy, relationship, fair treatment, self-acceptance, and achievement. According to Wong (1989; 2010), a source of meaning would provide a sense of significance through its components: motivational, cognitive, social/moral, and affective. As a protective resource, being fulfilled in these different areas contribute to a greater sense of personal meaning (Reker & Wong, 1998; in Wong, 2010).

During this period, emerging adults will have to consider how to balance personal values with those of cultural expectations, and it is in this process of meaning-making that gender plays a crucial role, as differences in it precede and shape how people understand the concept of meaning. By definition, sex refers to the biological aspect of male and female, while gender refers to the social and psychological aspect of masculinity and femininity (Kachel, 2016). A brief review shows that gender is an important social determinant, because while men and women are more similar than they are different, the differences are culturally pervasive and the largest in the whole psychological literature (Schmitt, 2014). Evolutionary theory states that men and women differ in these important ways due to differing adaptive strategies that play to their needs and bring the most benefit (Archer, 2019).

First, there are some gender differences that are assumed to be universal. On a biological level, organizational theory states that the amount of androgen secreted during birth determines typical male

behavior, which is observable in babies even before sex role socialization (Schmitt, 2016). For example, an essential psychological sex difference is male ‘systemizing’, contrasted with female ‘empathizing’, which refers to an interest in things (Archer, 2019). Evidence for this is found in babies as young as 12 months, where infant boys show a greater preference for cars relative to infant girls for a moving face (Lutchmaya & Baron-Cohen, 2002; in Archer 2019). Furthermore, androgenized girls have shown more interest in things, systemizing, and scientific occupations, than their less affected siblings (Belz, Swanson, & Berenbaum, 2011; in Archer, 2019). Within the context of emerging adults, this difference in thinking processes and interests are reflected in the ‘gendered’ majors, referring to the dominance of women in the humanities and men in the STEM fields of research (Dicke, Safavian, & Eccles, 2019). Interests and thinking processes cover the cognitive and motivational components of meaning and should affect the development of certain sources of meaning, such as the social category (relationship, intimacy, and self-transcendence) for women and achievement for men. According to this model then, women would seem to be more well-equipped to obtain a more meaningful life, as relationship is the most salient source of meaning (Grouden & Jose, 2014).

Yet, research into gender differences in meaning in life have remained inconclusive, with some showing no differences or more meaning in either gender (Schnell, 2009; Debats, 1991; Dhanjal, 2016).

Cross-cultural theory attempts to answer this conundrum through cultural values, which determines how traits and adaptive processes manifest themselves in the first place (Wong, 2013). Fundamentally, culture is “a web of meaning that contributes to the adaptation of people to a local ecology” that is shared and propagated amongst its followers (Fiske, 2000; Chao & Kesebir, 2011). It is also a value system, and living the meaningful life or the ‘good life’ is impossible without the standards and values that are produced in cultures. Gender roles refers to the cultural expectations that is set for optimal performance of each sex (Kachel, 2016). In Indonesia, the traditional gender roles follow the ‘male breadwinner, female caretaker’ model, where it is assumed that the best outcome could be produced when women are responsible for housework and childbearing, while men are responsible for the household income (Utomo, 2015). When people succeed in fulfilling these roles, the culture propagates it by investing in them with resources or rewards, such as an improved social standing (Della Fave, 2009). Therefore, culture amplifies and encourages the natural sex differences in thinking processes of men and women, as well as the differences in meaning.

Within the constant evolution of society itself, meaning and culture are also adapting. In Indonesia, gender egalitarianism is a developmental goal in line with the improvement of the economy and healthcare, of which it has recently improved on a national level based on the Global Gender Gap Index (World Economic Forum, 2020).

Gender egalitarian values generally seek to provide equal opportunities and resources for both genders, widening the gap of sex differences in countries that are more supportive of its values (Schmitt et al, 2016). Among the urban youth of Jakarta, where gender egalitarian values are being embraced more so than in rural areas, Western values and ideas have grown into the popular discourse (Utomo, 2015). Surveys of university students in 2004 on egalitarian attitudes have revealed that while they support it, most still subscribe to traditional gender roles (Utomo, 2015). Women were prominently more supportive of gender egalitarian values, but many only support it as a secondary goal after the primary role of home caretaker is fulfilled. In theory, pervasive gender egalitarianism is usually accompanied with the subsequent decrease of traditional gender role beliefs, though research into it in Indonesia has been scarce.

As most meaning research has been focused on educated Western samples, research into meaning in other cultures is scarce (Dhanjal, 2016). The combination of growing gender egalitarianism and the survival of traditional gender roles makes Indonesia a unique cultural context for the replication of meaning research into gender differences. In the near future, Indonesia's economy is also expected to grow the most compared to other Southeast Asian countries, in addition to an ongoing 'demographic bonus' that will peak in 2030 with the country's largest productive population (Tehusijirina, 2020). For this reason, this research will focus on exploring the differences in meaning in life

between genders, as well as where these differences lie and the role that culture plays in influencing meaning.

1.2 Problem Identification

Is there a difference in meaning in life between genders among emerging adulthood in the Jabodetabek area?

1.3 Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this research is to determine and convey the differences in meaning in life between genders among emerging adulthood in the Jabodetabek area.

1.4 Utility of the Study

1.4.1 Theoretical Benefits

The research will bridge the gap of research about sources of meaning and gender within the Indonesian context. The Indonesian context can also be considered as an extension of how meaning is affected by different cultural and economic influences, as a developing country. It will also be beneficial for the area of positive and cross-cultural psychology in revealing how cultural factors may play a role in the development of meaning among people living in different contexts.

1.4.2 Practical Implications

In a clinical or counseling setting, sources of meaning can be used to predict wellbeing and psychosocial functioning in addition to other tools. The breadth and depth of different sources can help to create a holistic approach and hint at areas that could be improved for therapeutic purposes, such as less advocated sources of meaning.

