

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

Marriage is the joining of two people in a bond that putatively lasts until “death tears us apart”. As newlyweds enter a new stage of life, they are challenged to adapt interdependently as “husband” and “wife”. This transition is often expected as the least complicated and most joyous. Unfortunately, the euphoria of marriage is temporary. When the going gets tough, some people choose to give up on their marriage. Previous researches indicate that divorce was most prevalent in group of marriage under five years (Bradbury & Lavner, 2012; Butler & Karney, 2013, in Romah, Fitriana, & Rahmatika, 2017). Several researchers also found that marital satisfaction drops over the first 10 years of marriage (Glenn; Valiant & Valiant, in Timm and Keiley, 2011). These findings support the fact that the number of divorces have been increasing in Indonesia.

In 2013, according to *Badan Kependudukan dan Keluarga Berencana Nasional* (BKKBN), Indonesia had the highest divorce rate in Asia-Pacific (Purnawan, in Andriani, Taufik, & Hariko, 2017). Moreover, *Badan Pusat Statistik* (BPS) has reported that the divorce rate increased by 14.6% of cases in 2013, which means increased 324.527 additional cases within a year. Furthermore, Director General of *Badan Peradilan Agama, Mahkamah Agung* Indonesia, reported the average number of divorces had been increasing by 3% between 2014 to 2016, where there were 344.237 cases in 2014 and 365.633 cases in 2016. In fact, Directorate General of *Bimbingan Masyarakat* (BIMAS) (in

Pradipta & Prihanto, 2011), reported that 80% of the divorce occurred in young couples who had not reached five years of marriage. Their data showed that 1 out of 10 couples who were married in 2008 filed for divorce in 2009. In addition, according to Huston and colleagues (in Stritof & Stritof, 2007), the first two years of marriage may foreshadow their long-term marital fate after 13 years. Therefore, the early phase of a marriage is crucial.

From these statistics, on a closer inspection, it was reported by Hidayat (in Anna, 2015), that the major causes of these divorces were disharmony, economy, and extra-marital affairs. Disharmony, economy, and extra-marital affairs might cause frequent conflicts. In fact, Kasdullah (in Andriani et al., 2017) found that frequent conflicts could lead to divorce. All of these reasons were the contributing factors of low relationship quality (Farooqi, 2014). Thus, the current state of the couple's relationship might predict the quality of the couple's marital relationship in the long run.

In their study, Lavner and Bradbury (2010) had observed newlyweds over the first ten years of marriage and found that after four years of marriage, 54% of those who started their marriage with low levels of relationship quality had experienced a more rapid decline in satisfaction and ended their marriage in divorce. Newlywed couples are vulnerable in experiencing relational challenges (Hall & Adams, 2011). Creating one's own marital system might be a challenge for the newlyweds. Starting from adapting to the new role as "husband" and "wife", new spouses begin to function according to the new roles (Hall & Adams, 2011). Moreover, couples would have to establish financial strategies, such as

income division, savings, loans, and other financial managements. Furthermore, newlyweds will be faced with several relational adjustments with the extended families, and also with the partner in order to maintain each other's needs (Vines, in Tantrakul, 2007). Consequently, negative outcomes in the early newlywed stage served as a risk for distress and divorce within the first four to five years (Cobb, Reis & Sprecher, 2009). Thus, to prevent failure in adapting and undesirable outcomes, relationship quality is a vital component especially in the early years of marriage.

Relationship quality is defined by Fletcher, Simpson, and Thomas (2000) as the individual's subjective evaluation of his or her relationship on a number of dimensions and evaluations. Relationship quality encompassed six intercorrelated components from different theoretical basis and had divergent patterns that represented the perceived quality of the individual's relationship, which are trust, commitment, passion, love, intimacy, and satisfaction. First, Lazelere and Huston (in McCray, 2015) defined trust as the ability to feel a sense of comfort with taking risk to become close in an intimate relationship. Next, commitment represented a long-term orientation towards one's relationship, which involved feelings of attachment to a partner as well as a desire to maintain the relationship through challenges (Rusbult; Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, in Chen, 2015). Third, Sternberg (1986) defined passion as an internal drive that led to romance, physical attraction, and sexual satisfaction. Additionally, love is defined as a desire to enter or maintain a close relationship involving one's cognition, emotion, and behavior with another specific person (Aron & Aron, in Chen, 2015). Intimacy is referred

to as feelings in a relationship that promote closeness, connectedness, and bondedness (Sternberg, 1986). Love is also characterized by shared ideas and values, activities, sexual intimacy, knowledge about each other, and acts of affection (Chen, 2015). Lastly, satisfaction is referred to as a person's subjective evaluation and attitude towards his or her partner, as well as the relationship (Chen, 2015). To tie it all together, the overall subjective evaluation of each of the six components would be equal to one's perceived quality on his or her relationship.

Furthermore, the reason that made relationship quality intriguing was that the individual component that made up relationship quality were independent of each other, yet their interaction embodied one's perceived relationship quality. For example, a husband or wife may have loved his or her partner, and may even have been highly committed, but did not trust his or her partner, and hence would be dissatisfied with the relationship (Fletcher et al., 2000). This overall evaluation would then determine the relationship quality. Thus, an individual's perception on his or her relationship quality is indeed important for the outcome of his or her marriage.

Especially for most adults, an intimate relationship with a partner is one of the strongest sources of support in facing both major and minor life stressors, and evidences have shown that support from other relationships could not compensate for the lack of intimate or marital support (Coyne & DeLongis; Lieberman; O'Hara, in Chen, 2015). Moreover, researchers have found that trust was one of the most important and highly valued qualities in romantic relationships and could

predict individual and relational outcomes (Rodriguez, DiBello, Øverup, & Neighbors, 2015). In addition, research by Weigel and Ballard-Reisch (2008) found that the greater likelihood for both husband and wife in maintaining their relationship was related to their level of commitment to their marriage. However, if the overall evaluation indicated low relationship quality, conflict, irritation, and antagonism would arise between spouses and could lead to divorce (Dush & Amato, in Farooqi, 2014). Therefore, both husband and wife individually were required to invest in the quality of their relationship.

It is essential for a couple to preserve the quality of their relationship, especially in the early years of marriage. The challenge is to keep the transition progress on track, in which, both individuals are required to strive for each other. On that basis, individual's characteristics would be valued as a prevailing factor in maintaining the marriage. One of those characteristics is the ability to give each other a sense of felt security which was obtained by the emotional bond between partners. To achieve this felt security, it is vital to consider the partner's emotional attachment to the other partner. This personality trait is referred to as adult attachment.

Adult attachment is a behavioral system, where the goal of the system is to feel a sense of protection or security (Bowlby, in Mickulincer & Shaver, 2007). During distress, the system would be activated to attain the security from their attached figure. On that basis, Hazan and Shaver (1989) defined adult attachment as an affectional bond between adult lovers in the same way an affectional bond is between an infant and its caregiver. Brennan, Clark, and Shaver (1998) later

proposed a two-dimensional approach to adult attachment. Attachment avoidance is referred to discomfort with closeness and dependency (Brennan et al., in Fraley & Shaver, 2000). On the other hand, attachment anxiety is defined as being overly worried and vigilant regarding rejection and abandonment.

As problems arise in the early years of marriage, the attachment strategies would be a contributing factor to the quality of the marriage. Individuals with higher tendency of attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety have been found to have a negative perception, beliefs and expectations on the partner's availability, responsiveness, and dependability (Collins & Feeney, 2004). In addition, Givertz, Woszidlo, Sergin, and Knutson (2013) found that both attachment anxiety and avoidance were negatively associated with relationship quality, where one partner's insecure attachment was found linked to his or her spouse's report of lower relationship quality. Specifically, if the partner failed to respond at times needed, it would influence the quality of the intimate relationship (Simpon & Rholes, in Loubser, 2007). Contrastingly, spouses with high levels of commitment promoted more relationship maintenance behavior, which would result in greater satisfaction for both spouses (Weigel & Ballard-Reisch, 2008). Givertz et al. (2013) also found that a person's attachment influenced the development of trust over time. Therefore, an individual's attachment towards their partner might contribute to how they perceive and evaluate the overall quality of the relationship.

This study was aimed to fill the knowledge gap on the effect of adult attachment on relationship quality among newlywed couples in Indonesia,

especially taking into account the evidences on divorce rates in Indonesia. Moreover, this study was also recommended by Kumar and Mattanah (2016), in which they suggested further studies to expand on factors that might contribute to attachment and adjustment outcomes. Even though the relationship quality embodied the overall subjective evaluation of the relationship, the basic principle of the six components of relationship quality originated from different theoretical perspectives and were correlated between each other. However, the dynamics between each component might differ from one another. For instance, a person could be passionately and highly committed in their relationship despite having a lack of trust with his or her partner. Accordingly, the matter of relation between the two dimensions of attachment with perceived relationship quality as a whole construct as well as its components were worth studying further. Furthermore, this study focused on newlywed individuals, which is defined as recently married couples.

The present research specifically studied the newlyweds on their first four years of marriage. The newly married individuals might have experienced emotional distress, which coupled the strength of the emotional bond between them, could impact the relationship quality. In addition, this study emphasized on the newlywed individuals with minimum age of 20 and maximum of 40 years old for both genders and in their first marriage. This period is classified as young adulthood (Erickson, in Santrock, 2013), as in this stage, young adults enter the intimacy versus isolation psychosocial crisis. Therefore, conducting the present study could have important implications for understanding how the two

dimensions of adult attachment towards the partner in early marital relationship contribute to relationship quality as adjustment outcomes in newlywed period.

1.2 Research Questions

The basic question raised in the present study was whether adult attachment towards the partner significantly affected the relationship quality in newlywed individuals.

1.3 Research Purposes

This research was aimed to examine whether adult attachment towards the partner significantly affect relationship quality in newlywed individuals.

1.4 Research Contributions

1.4.1 Theoretical Contributions

- 1) The result of this study contributed in identifying components of relational quality affected by adult attachment.
- 2) This study contributed theoretically in the development of personality psychology in the effect of adult attachment on relationship quality on newlywed individuals.
- 3) This study contributed to the research and theoretical development in the area of Counseling Psychology and Family Psychology. This study could contribute in giving insights how adult attachment towards the partner influence one's relationship quality, and thus, impacting the marriage

system as an outcome. Therefore, practitioners could use the result of this study in couple's pre-marital counselling as well as marital counselling.

1.4.2 Practical Contributions

- 1) This study contributed in giving insights to the reader, especially to the newlywed individuals and prospective spouses, on the role of adult attachment in the relationship quality of their own relationship.
- 2) The result of this study could be considered to help practitioners in the field of premarital counseling, and practitioners who specialize in marriage counseling.

