

# Nurturing Togetherness: Unraveling Communication Dynamics in Javanese Family Relations between Spouses

## *Merawat Kekompakan: Mengurai Dinamika Komunikasi dalam Hubungan Keluarga Jawa antara Suami dan Istri*

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**Abstract** – The dynamics of couples' relationships significantly impact a family's unity and harmony. This hinges on how spouses interact and communicate, influenced by patriarchal or matrilineal views they uphold. Communication dynamics in these relationships direct family goals. This study delves into how Javanese couples nurture their bonds. Employing qualitative methods, it includes in-depth interviews and group discussions with seven couples, selected based on education, socio-economic status, marriage duration, careers, religious values, and motives. Findings show Javanese couples favor dialogue over conflict, opting for a collaborative and compromising approach. They uphold mutual trust and flexibility in financial matters ("*sing longgar endi*"). Family discussions during tension aim to preserve collective values. Domestic work communication highlights flexibility in task distribution. The research underscores Javanese couples' connection to unique ethics, social norms, philosophies, gender perspectives, structures, language, traditions, myths, and religion.

**Keywords:** Javanese Culture, Couple, Relationship, Family, Communication

**Abstrak** – *Dinamika hubungan pasangan sangat memengaruhi kesatuan dan harmoni keluarga. Ini tergantung pada bagaimana pasangan berinteraksi dan berkomunikasi, dipengaruhi oleh pandangan patriarki atau matrilineal yang mereka anut. Dinamika komunikasi dalam hubungan ini mengarahkan tujuan keluarga. Studi ini menggali bagaimana pasangan Jawa merawat ikatan mereka. Dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif, termasuk wawancara mendalam dan diskusi kelompok dengan tujuh pasangan, dipilih berdasarkan pendidikan, status sosial-ekonomi, durasi pernikahan, karier, nilai agama, dan motif. Temuan menunjukkan pasangan Jawa lebih suka dialog daripada konflik, memilih pendekatan kolaboratif dan kompromi. Mereka menjunjung tinggi saling percaya dan fleksibilitas dalam urusan keuangan ("*sing longgar endi*"). Diskusi dalam keluarga saat ketegangan bertujuan untuk mempertahankan nilai kolektif. Komunikasi pekerjaan rumah menyoroti fleksibilitas dalam distribusi tugas. Penelitian ini menegaskan keterhubungan pasangan Jawa dengan etika unik, norma sosial, filsafat, perspektif gender, struktur, bahasa, tradisi, mitos, dan agama.*

**Kata kunci:** Budaya jawa, pasangan, hubungan, keluarga, komunikasi

## INTRODUCTION

In a social Javanese arrangement, someone who decides to marry will evaluate her partner based on three parameters: *bibit*, *bebet*, and *bobot* (Masfiah, 2022; Suparno et al., 2023). "*Bibit*" is a term related to one's genealogy or the traits inherited from one's parents. Specifically, inquiries about an individual's lineage typically involve identifying their mother and father. Clarity about these parental identities is crucial because it impacts various aspects of an individual's life, such as social, cultural, economic, and ancestral roots.

Once the identities of the parents are clearly established and understood, the individual can then proceed to the next stage. However, if there is ambiguity that requires further clarification, the response will depend on the circumstances and the reasons for the uncertainty. In certain situations, the lack of clarity might be understandable and acceptable, while in others, it could potentially harm the family's reputation.

Secondly, "*bebet*" is a concept that represents social and economic status within Javanese society. This measure is often used as a predictor in decisions

concerning marriages and engagements, with these determinations being the product of negotiations and agreements between the involved parties. Factors such as prestige, status, and family honor are all intertwined with an individual's social and economic standing.

For many within the Javanese community, "*bebet*" is a crucial consideration that cannot be overlooked. Regrettably, discussions concerning "*bebet*" have become commonplace in the lead-up to wedding ceremonies, reflecting its importance in societal interactions and agreements. On the other hand, "*bobot*" refers to a concept that encompasses personality, character, and intelligence. This is typically assessed directly in relation to the prospective bride or groom. Factors such as occupation and education are used as benchmarks to evaluate suitability, serving also as a comparative tool for assessment.

Parents contemplating a potential marital match are often eager to gain a deeper understanding of the prospective bride or groom, both personally and professionally. Consequently, the concept of "*bobot*" becomes pivotal in guiding these evaluations. These principles are not standalone; they are intertwined with other values. Many incorporate and align them with religious beliefs and myths. The advice given is typically aimed at those planning to marry, assisting them in ensuring future success as they jointly manage family affairs.

One must contemplate four primary reasons when deciding to marry:

- a) physical appearance,
- b) wealth and materialism,
- c) lineage and offspring, and
- d) religious convictions.

Prominent scholars in Javanese culture emphasize that the most commendable reason for marriage is rooted in religious beliefs, especially when aligned with Islamic values.

According to these scholars, factors such as physical appearance, wealth, materialism, and lineage (*kufu*) are transient parameters; ultimately, only faith and Islamic values endure (Vera et al., 2018). Through religion and faith, families can be effectively managed and steered, as they operate under the guiding principle of "*ibadah*" - a term signifying obedience or worship to God.

Building on this perspective, in Javanese culture, the rationale behind forming a family is multifaceted.

It can be gauged through the lenses of *bibit*, *bebet*, and *bobot*. Simultaneously, it can also be evaluated based on physical appearance, materialism, lineage, and religious beliefs. The interplay between traditional Javanese value considerations and religious tenets encapsulates the profound philosophy and foundational principles guiding how the Javanese establish families.

From a gender perspective, understanding the Javanese view of the relationship between men and women as partners and spouses is essential. Javanese culture offers a distinctive lens through which the dynamics between men and women are perceived. This understanding is deeply rooted in the societal roles ascribed to men and women in Javanese society, which invariably extends to family dynamics. While there is a division of roles, it is not rigidly dichotomous; rather, it embodies a complementary vision.

For instance, in situations where a wife might be preoccupied, it is not uncommon for the husband to assume domestic responsibilities like sweeping, washing, or cooking and vice versa (Malang et al., 2015; Muhmad Pirus & Nurahmawati, 2020). In Javanese culture, such role reversals are generally accepted without prejudice. Relationships do not strictly adhere to a dominant-inferior or dominant-dominant paradigm. Instead, a spectrum of relational dynamics and patterns is embraced.

Another essential dimension to understand is the intricate web of familial and kinship ties. In Javanese culture, marriages and engagements are not merely unions between two individuals; they symbolize the coming together of two families and their extended relatives. As a result, relationship management within the family extends beyond the couple. It encompasses the broader dynamics and interactions among the entire family and the extended kinship network.

The aspects discussed earlier play a significant role in determining the dynamics of the relationship between a wife and husband in a Javanese family. Numerous studies have been conducted on spousal relationships, and many findings emphasize the significance of these issues. Divorces, conflicts, and disharmony within the family often arise from an inability to manage relationships effectively. A primary contributor to these failures is often a breakdown in communication, which is seen as a leading factor in the disintegration of family bonds.

From the perspective of relational dialectics, Baxter and Montgomery(1996a) posited that no family, particularly the relationship between a husband and wife, is exempt from contradictions and constraints. Within such scenarios, spouses frequently find themselves in disputes. There are instances where their discussions yield no immediate solutions, and at other times, the conversations are counterproductive.

From a theoretical standpoint, Montgomery and Baxter have pinpointed that contradictions and constraints manifest in various ways (Baxter, 2004; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996).The dialectics of separateness versus connectedness, openness versus closeness, and certainty versus uncertainty serve as frameworks that elucidate potential challenges within spousal relationships. To maintain harmony in a relationship, it is imperative to strike a balance, especially when these contradictions and constraints create tensions.

This underscores the necessity for concerted effort and collaboration to sustain a marital bond. If one partner starts to drift apart, it becomes incumbent upon the other to bridge that gap, and vice versa. For instance, if one partner leans towards closeness, the other should foster openness. In essence, myriad factors will influence the trajectory of their relationship in the future.

Motivations and influences underpin an individual's decision to marry. While these motivations are often rooted in various factors, they can also be complex and elusive. Socio-economic status and education, although significant, may not always guarantee the success of a relationship. The principles of *bibit*, *bebet*, and *bobot* further shape the nature and success of a relationship. By examining the interplay and synergy of these various factors, one can gauge the quality and resilience of marital bonds.

This research will zoom in on seven Javanese couples to see how each partner navigates and sustains their relationship within the familial context. A meticulous exploration will be undertaken for each spouse, encompassing aspects such as their reasons for marriage. Factors like socio-economic status, ancestral lineage, motivations related to offspring, and other potential reasons will be scrutinized. The aim is to uncover unique patterns and phenomena that characterize and fortify relationships within the Javanese cultural milieu.

This study centers on the communication dimension within marital dynamics. A key focus is on

communication strategies. The research examines how couples employ tactics such as integration, avoidance, collaboration, finding common ground, negotiation, acceptance, or rejection when confronted with challenging topics or situations.

The aforementioned aspects highlight three pivotal dimensions in relationships and communication: avoidance, collaboration, and compromise (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996a; Devito, 2013). This underscores the rationale for employing a communication relationship approach to comprehend the dynamics between husbands and wives in Javanese culture. Adopting this approach will enhance and deepen insights into familial interactions within the Javanese cultural context.

**RESEARCH METHODS**

This research was conducted using a qualitative method within the constructivist paradigm (Creswell, 2013). Data collection involved in-depth interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with the participation of seven Javanese couples.

The seven couples participated in either individual or group settings, with participants selected based on specific criteria, including education, socio-economic status, length of marriage, occupations, motives for marriage, and the religious values they uphold (Miles et al., 2014).

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**Table 1** Informant Selection

No	Marriage Time	He-She: Social-Economic Status	He-She: Occupation
1	5 years	Lower-Lower	Labour-Housewife
2	5 years	Middle-Middle	Public Servant-Public Servant
3	5 years	Lower-Middle	Housewife-farmer
4	6-10 years	Middle-Lower	Police-Housewife
5	6-10 years	High-Middle	Lecturer-Teller at the Bank
6	11-15 years	Middle-High	Teacher-Financial

			Consultant
7	11-15 years	High-High	Owners of the same company

Initially, the researcher conducted separate in-depth interviews with each informant in March 2023 to obtain initial data regarding the individual experiences of Javanese couples. After collecting data from the seven couples, the researcher further explored the responses of these couples using the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) method in April 2023. This resulted in more comprehensive and in-depth data based on collective experiences.

To deeply understand the nature of relationships among Javanese spouses post-marriage, the research will focus on the following four issues:

1. **Modes of Relationships:** The study aims to comprehend the unique relational dynamics between a husband and a wife in Javanese culture. By examining various elements that influence their bond, the research seeks to map out and systematically categorize relationship patterns from diverse angles and perspectives.
2. **Economic Sharing and Ownership:** This issue revolves around the strategies spouses employ to communicate about financial matters, ensuring that both can negotiate and arrive at decisions that are perceived as just and equitable. The depth of this issue is heightened depending on factors like employment in the public sector and the manner in which the couple shares financial responsibilities and assets. Their discussions and decisions on these matters promise to offer valuable insights.
3. **Kinship and Extended Family Ties:** In the Javanese context, couples are intrinsically linked to a broader network of relatives and kin. These connections are perennial and cannot be sidestepped, even by marriage. The influence of these extended relationships on the husband-wife dynamic is significant and can't be underestimated.
4. **Household Responsibilities Allocation:** The distribution of daily household tasks and family responsibilities often becomes a bone of contention among couples, especially if both are employed, notably in the public sector. The each role plays in the family becomes a sensitive topic. A lack of dialogue and consensus on dividing

these chores and responsibilities can lead to potential rifts within the marital bond.

In essence, at the heart of these issues lies communication, which will be the primary investigative lens of this research, shedding light on the intricate dynamics of marital relationships within the Javanese cultural setting.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Foundations of Relational Dialectics: A Brief Overview

Relational Dialectics Theory (RDT) is anchored in the works of Mikhail Bakhtin and posits that personal relationships are dynamic entities shaped by the tension between contrasting discourses or worldviews. This theory, further developed by Baxter, Montgomery, Leslie, and DeVito in 1996, has since been refined to encompass more intricate facets of dialogism (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996a). Operating within the interpretive paradigm, RDT underscores the importance of discerning meanings in their specific contexts, emphasizing the pivotal role of language in shaping experiences (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996b).

Central to RDT is the idea that relationships are in a perpetual state of flux, influenced by the ongoing interactions between diverse discourses. These discourses embody distinct systems imbued with specific objects, values, and meanings (Bakhtin et al., 1981). Communication within relationships is viewed as intertextual, suggesting that the significance of a statement is interwoven with other concurrent messages. RDT spotlights various connections in this "chain of speech communion," encompassing discourses from the past and the wider cultural context, as well as anticipated reactions in present interactions (Baxter, 2004; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996a).

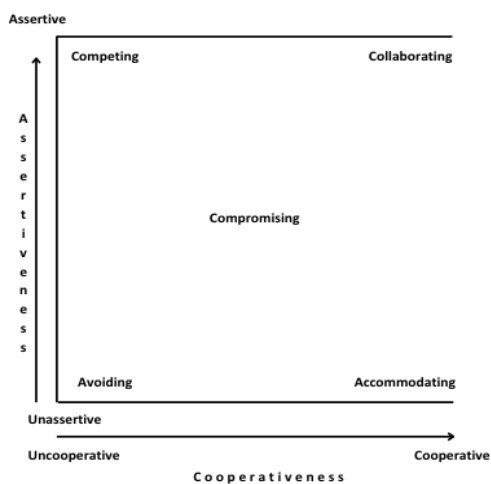
The critical components of Relational Dialectics Theory (RDT) hinge on the dilemmas of integration-separation and expression-nonexpression. These represent the inherent tensions between connectedness and autonomy, and between openness and privacy. Those in relationships grapple with these discursive tensions in their interactions. In their communication, they might prioritize one discourse, oscillate between them via spiraling inversion or segmentation, or resort to ambiguity and hybrid meanings to navigate the tensions (Baxter & Braithwaite, in press).

Addressivity, which pertains to the anticipated responses from others, holds significant importance in this communication framework, complicating the task of upholding authoritative discourses (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996a).

The Relational Dialectics Theory (RDT) offers a profound lens for understanding the dynamics of conflict management styles, especially when viewed through the prism of the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI). Central to RDT is the idea of discursive tensions and the interplay of contrasting worldviews, which can shed light on the motivations driving individuals' choices of conflict-handling styles (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996a).

TKI categorizes conflict-handling into five distinct modes. With the conceptual framework of RDT, it becomes evident why individuals might gravitate towards specific styles. Their preferences can stem from the weight they assign to various discourses, such as those emphasizing autonomy versus connection or harmony versus self-interest. Furthermore, RDT underscores the fluidity of relationships, suggesting that people might adjust their conflict management strategies based on the specific discursive tensions characteristic of their current relational scenarios.

Merging the insights of RDT with the TKI framework enhances our understanding of conflict management by adding depth to how we view communication intricacies in personal relationships. RDT illuminates the existence of internal discursive tensions, suggesting that individuals might have evolving preferences in handling conflict based on the situation at hand (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996a).



**Figure 1** Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument  
Source: Thomas and Kilmann (1975)

By integrating these theories, we gain a nuanced comprehension on conflict resolution, emphasizing the pivotal role of internal discursive struggles in determining how individuals approach and resolve conflicts in their relationships.

In Javanese family communication, RDT sheds light on how cultural values can both clash and blend. The Javanese culture strongly values community and intimacy, but at the same time, it respects individual autonomy and privacy. These contrasting values can lead to challenges in family interactions. To navigate these challenges, family members might emphasize certain discourses in particular situations or combine these conflicting discourses to synthesis hybrid meanings (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996a; Braithwaite, 2009).

Below, we outline the communication dynamics that encompass several key issues: a) The nature of the relationship between a husband and a wife within the Javanese cultural context. b) The dynamics of communication as they relate to the challenges of sharing economics and ownership between spouses. c) The negotiation of time distribution and allocation concerning kinship and extended family ties. d) The challenges surrounding the distribution and allocation of household responsibilities between the couple. Each of these dynamics will be discussed and interpreted in depth, providing comprehensive explanations.

**Modes of Relationship**

The modes in which spouses relate to one another offer insights into the patterns and characteristics of their relationships. Crucially, these patterns and characteristics do not emerge in isolation but are shaped by a complex interplay of various conditions and situations. The essence and dynamics of a relationship can be transformed as one condition influences another.

The principles of *bibit*, *bebet*, and *bobot* are evident in different aspects of a couple's life and relationship (Masfiah, 2022; Suparno et al., 2023). According to one of informants said that her parents always suggest and provide an advice with Javanese language wisdom “*Wong arep nikah kuwi, penting ngertine, bibit, bebet, bobote. Ojo grusa grusu sebab iki kanggo selawese*” (Interview with Erni Indriyastuti, March, 20, 2023).

This advice means that each of us who has made decision to marry must consider who are his parents,

what is his position and status, what character which he has. These points are important things because decision to marry is for everlasting not for temporary reasons. Although, a completely equal can not be realized, in Javanese values they devotes to “*sekufu*” which means equation between couples.

Observations reveal that couples may have slight disparities in socio-economic status or educational backgrounds. Differences in their professions or educational pursuits are also noticeable. However, these differences are generally accepted and tolerated by both partners. A common sentiment is that significant disparities might negatively impact the longevity and quality of the relationship they aim to nurture.

According to the interviewees, the decision to start a family is not a short-term one (*Interview* with Dewi Nurjannah, March, 12, 2023). It is a commitment that is projected into the future, extending beyond the present and envisioned to last even after their time on this earth. While they recognize the significance of factors like socio-economic status, education, and occupation, they believe these are not the only considerations for a fulfilling life (*Focus Group Discussion*, April 10, 2023). Nonetheless, these factors are important benchmarks that couples should align with to ensure a strong foundation for their marriage. Such alignment facilitates better communication, cooperation, collaboration, and mutual understanding, equipping couples to tackle challenges they encounter together.

During their time together as spouses, the interviewee noted that various events, both joyous and challenging, will inevitably occur. To navigate these moments, they believe that while socio-economic capital and occupation are essential, they are not the sole foundations for a strong relationship (*Focus Group Discussion*, April, 10, 2023). In addition to these, spiritual strength, understanding, sympathy, and empathy play crucial roles. Thus, they always aim to minimize profound disparities between husband and wife to maintain harmony in the relationship.

The diversity among informants illustrates that the differences among the factors representing the features of *bibit*, *bebet*, and *bobot* in Javanese culture are not starkly pronounced (*Focus Group Discussion*, April, 10, 2023). This indicates that when selecting a life partner, decisions are still anchored in rationality. Observing the duration of marriage, for instance, it becomes evident that categories such as mutual socio-

economic status and shared occupations are relatively balanced. Similarly, when evaluated based on educational levels, both partners often hold comparable positions.

Examining the motives for marriage as presented in the table, it is evident that individuals are driven by straightforward, yet idealistic reasons. Such motives align with the typical Javanese family typology, which emphasizes spiritual motivations or transcendental objectives. Sugino-one of informants said that the most important thing for him as criteria in selecting a wife is religion. He dreams “a *sholehah* wife” (*Interview* with Joko Santoso, March, 8, 2023). It is inherent in Javanese values to advocate for a balance between materialism and spiritualism. This balance is especially emphasized in managing the relationship dynamics between a husband and wife within the Javanese familial context.

Communication within a family is crafted from various intertwined components, such as socio-economic status, education, occupation, and the motives for marriage. These factors play a pivotal role in shaping the type of conversations, the themes explored, and the narratives that unfold within the familial context. They also influence decision-making processes, conflict resolution methods, and strategies to maintain equilibrium in the family dynamics.

Furthermore, occupation and education serve as enriching elements in shaping the discourse between spouses. Often, experiences from their professional lives become central themes of their discussions at home. Interestingly, while many decisions within the family are made by the wife after deliberation with the husband, there are also instances where decisions emerge from mutual negotiations. Contrary to common assumptions that a husband might dominate or dictate terms to the wife, such dynamics are not always evident. The narrative that a husband's dominance overshadows a wife's voice is not universally applicable, as many decisions are reached collaboratively.

In Javanese culture, as expressed by the interviewees, the foundation of a strong family hinges on two primary factors: the effective utilization of time and space by the spouses. The essence of spousal relationship is often signified by how they allocate and spend their shared and individual time and space (*Interview* with Sarindi, March, 9, 2023). A harmonious marital relationship often reflects the efficiency with which these two dimensions are

managed. Conversely, marital discord or failures are often attributed to the inability to effectively navigate the time and space shared between the spouses.

In a broader perspective, the nature of spousal relationships in Javanese culture resemble organizational leadership functions. These relationship modes can be categorized into four distinct types. However, it is essential to note that while these modes echo the principles of organizational leadership, they are not mutually exclusive within the context of a marital relationship. Each mode can coexist, and one does not negate the presence or importance of the other (*Focus Group Discussion*, April, 10, 2023).

In the realm of relationship management, there are distinct styles, each characterized by specific approaches to conflict resolution and interaction dynamics (Major Christine Locke & Leavenworth, 2007; Thomas & Kilmann, 2008):

1. **Dominating or Competing:** This style is assertive, where one party seeks to impose their will over the other. It often leads to a win-lose scenario characterized by power struggles and intense competition.
2. **Integrating, Accommodating, or Collaborating:** This style is about finding common ground. Integrating involves open dialogue and mutual understanding. Accommodating emphasizes minimizing differences and highlighting similarities, often prioritizing harmony. Collaborating is about seeking a win-win outcome, focusing on mutual gains.
3. **Avoiding:** This style evades conflicts, often sidestepping contentious issues in the hope they will resolve on their own or diminish over time.
4. **Compromising:** This approach aims to find a middle ground, where parties involved make concessions to reach an acceptable solution for all.

Drawing parallels to the dynamics within Javanese marital relationships, these styles offer insights into how couples navigate conflicts and differences. Just as in organizational settings, Javanese couples might adopt one of these styles depending on the situation, their individual personalities, cultural influences, and the specific challenges they face in their marital journey (*Focus Group Discussion*, April, 10, 2023).

First, avoidance relationship mode. this mode signifies that one partner allows the other to make decisions independently without interference. This might be adopted when the issue at hand is highly sensitive or personal, warranting that one partner should not intervene. There exist numerous scenarios where either the husband or the wife exercises autonomy and privacy (*Focus Group Discussion*, April 10, 2023).

Second, dominant relationship mode. This mode highlights situations where one partner dominates for an extended period, without seeking any negotiation or dialogue. However, as previously mentioned, such a mode is not typical in Javanese families. The research indicates that dominant relationship modes are infrequent but might manifest under specific circumstances (*Focus Group Discussion*, April, 10, 2023).

Third, collaborative relationship mode. Compared to the preceding modes, this mode is predominant in family interactions and relationships. Embedded in Javanese philosophy are the principles of "*ana rembuk dirembuk*" (Everything that can be discussed, should be discussed) and "*ana gawe, digawe*" (A duty that arises should be jointly tackled and fulfilled). Emphasis on togetherness and the "we-us" relationship is paramount in Javanese families, with most families demonstrating complementary roles (*Interview with Niken*, March, 12, 2023; *Focus Group Discussion*, April 10, 2023)

Fourth, compromise relationship mode. This mode emphasizes mutual discussions and dialogues. Decisions arise from a balanced blending of differing ideas between the partners. In this mode, neither the wife nor the husband can singularly claim victory. The essence of compromise is to achieve a harmonious, win-win resolution in managing issues and situations (*Interview with Joko Santoso*, March. 8, 2023; *Focus Group Discussion*, April 10, 2023)

**Table 2** Mode of Relationship in Javanese Spouse

Mode of Relationship in Javanese Spouse			
Dominant	Avoidance	Collaborative	Compromise
Rarely-frequently	Rarely-frequently	Frequently	Frequently

Source: Primary data, 2023

From these modes, it is evident that Javanese spouses embody a family system that integrates all these modes to manage the relationship they wish to

sustain. However, when examining the four relationship modes, the collaborative and compromise modes stand out as the most predominant features. Yet, in certain specific situations, both the dominant and avoidance modes play essential roles. The interplay of these simultaneous relationship modes assists in navigating the contradictions and tensions inherent in the family dynamic.

In the context of Javanese couples, there is an ongoing dialectical process as they navigate the tensions inherent in their relationship. The Relational Dialectics Theory (RDT) posits that relationships are dynamic and continually evolving, driven by the dialectics or inherent tensions between partners (Braithwaite, 2009). Thus, depending on the specific tensions at play, Javanese couples might exhibit a blend of relationship modes.

Two primary dialectics are especially relevant here. First, the Expression-Non-expression dialectic, which captures the tension between the desire to openly convey thoughts and emotions and the inclination to withhold or conceal them. The second is the Integration-Separation dialectic, representing the tension between maintaining one's individual identity and being an integral part of a couple (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996a; Braithwaite, 2009).

### **Spouse Relationship: Economic Sharing and Ownership**

Based on the findings from the research, it became evident that for the majority of Javanese couples, direct discussions regarding economic sharing and ownership are considered taboo. While this does not imply an absence of societal norms and regulations governing these aspects, it does suggest that these matters are often dealt with through mutual understanding, wisdom, and consensus. The cornerstone of these financial interactions is trust and a deep-seated commitment, with both partners anticipated to uphold their respective roles within the family (*Focus Group Discussion*, April 10, 2023).

Interestingly, during the initial stages of their marital journey, couples frequently exchanged dreams and aspirations, which often included discussions about ownership and economic contributions. They collaboratively foundations on fulfilling these aspirations, whether it pertained to procuring essential household items like kitchen sets, securing a family home, or investing in a vehicle for commute.

The findings suggest that Javanese couples typically engage in a process of gradual self-disclosure. Over time, vital elements hidden, including financial and materialistic details, are progressively revealed (*Focus Group Discussion*, April 10, 2023). It was observed that husbands, especially those who earn, commonly entrust their wives with their salaries to manage household expenses. This practice is rooted in the couple's collaborative approach to financial planning, ensuring essential household needs are met while also prioritizing savings or future investments. Additionally, the study found a mutual understanding regarding asset ownership, with many couples being indifferent to whether assets such as houses, vehicles, or land are registered in the husband's or wife's name (*Focus Group Discussion*, April 10, 2023). This points to a shared perspective on collective well-being over individual ownership. (Hanum, 2003).

When both spouses earn a salary, they often engage in deliberative discussions to decide on the appropriate allocation and distribution for household expenses. They debate over whose salary should be reserved for savings and which should be utilized for immediate expenditures. In some instances, a proportional allocation approach is adopted, where both spouses contribute to expenses based on their earnings.

Interestingly, despite many couples having diverse economic backgrounds and varied financial capacities, including differences in salaries, assets, and types of ownership, these differences can sometimes be sources of conflict. Even seemingly minor discussions around economic sharing and ownership can escalate into significant disagreements.

However, the dynamics of communication around financial matters offer a fascinating insight into how couples negotiate their financial contributions within the family. It is not just about daily household expenses. The Javanese community places a high value on social obligations and responsibilities. Hence, events such as wedding ceremonies, birthday celebrations, charity for the less fortunate, and other donations can have a considerable financial impact (*Focus Group Discussion*, April 10, 2023). These 'social expenditures' are often perceived to have significant social value, sometimes even surpassing routine household expenses in importance and magnitude. (Holden et al., 2019)



In summary, when discussing economic sharing and material ownership, the narratives and themes of conversation revealed dynamic interactions. These dynamics were influenced by: a) The methods of distribution and allocation of resources. b) The nature of each spouse' occupation and the type of assets they own. c) The balance between basic necessities and the desire for prestige. d) Contributions towards charitable causes and assistance (Boyle, 2005; Cole, 1992).

Disagreements and disputes often emerge when there is a lack of consensus on who should cover specific expenses. The primary contention revolves around delineating the financial responsibilities of the husband and the wife. The division of these responsibilities is a pivotal point in their relationship. However, the data indicates that, for many Javanese families, decisions regarding economic sharing and ownership typically adhere to the principle of "*sing longgar endi*" (whoever has more financial wiggle room) taking on the responsibility of payments and expenditures (*Interview* with Joko Santoso, March 8, 2023).

Based on the participants' perspectives, various unexpected events can arise within a family setting, such as responding to wedding invitations, contributing to charitable causes, handling educational expenses, acquiring household decor, and even unforeseen circumstances like accidents, illness, or job-related challenges (Holden et al., 2019). Both partners, be it the husband or the wife, can encounter these events. These situations serve as tests, evaluating the depth of their commitment in preserving the family bond. Such scenarios require empathy and selflessness, rather than individualistic attitudes. In these contexts, transparency becomes paramount. Freely sharing feelings and thoughts can alleviate potential strains, echoing the Expression-Non-expression dialectic from the Relational Dialectics Theory (RDT) posited by Baxter & Braithwaite (2009).

### **Spouse Relationship: Contentious of Kinship and Relatives**

Disagreements between spouses can often stem from issues related to kinship and family ties. As previously highlighted, Javanese marriage goes beyond the union of two individuals; it symbolizes the merging of two extended families. This means that both partners bring with them not only their

immediate family but also a broader network of relatives, including grandparents, cousins, aunts, uncles, and more. In the Javanese context, the distinction between immediate family and extended kinship is often blurred. The deeply ingrained collectivist culture plays a pivotal role in shaping the dynamics and intricacies of Javanese familial relationships (Subandi, 2011).

When a parent is sick, for instance, it invariably affects the dynamics between a married couple. Both partners feel compelled to visit and check on the well-being of the ailing parent. This gesture goes beyond merely assessing the parent's health; it often involves providing financial aid or other resources to ensure their comfort and recovery.

Such actions underscore the deep-rooted respect and commitment that Javanese children hold towards their parents. This dedication persists even if parents do not expressly seek or anticipate assistance from their offspring. These acts of care and concern are deeply embedded in the moral fabric of the Javanese family structure. They epitomize the intricate relationship that exists not just between spouses but extends to the broader family network, aptly termed kinship in this context.

Interestingly, conflicts often arise between spouses due to differing levels of acceptance and rejection towards family obligations. These tensions can significantly influence the dynamics between the couple and their extended family members. Balancing personal privacy, autonomy, and the collective nature of the Javanese culture can be challenging (*Focus Group Discussion*, April 10, 2023).

In some instances, one partner may be less inclined to engage with other family members, especially within the broader kinship context. Such behavior is often rooted in a desire for autonomy or personal space. However, this inclination towards self-centeredness and individualism can sometimes lead to neglecting familial duties, such as visiting and checking on parents. Such negligence stands in stark contrast to the deeply ingrained values of respect and commitment to family that are typical in Javanese culture.

Intentionally or unintentionally, parents often observe their children from a distance, even after they have got married. This observation is not necessarily to interfere, but rather out of a natural parental concern for their child's well-being. They aim to ensure that their children are content and thriving in

their new family life. Parents carry the innate desire to see their children happy, and this does not change even when the children start families of their own.

The dynamics of communication within the realm of kinship and relatives hinge on the emotional maturity of the spouses and their ability to understand and navigate the complexities of extended family relationships. As previously discussed, tensions can arise when spouses feel that their autonomy is being encroached upon, even by well-meaning parents or relatives.

This highlights the concept of maintaining a balanced distance, where each family respects the boundaries of the other, ensuring that while connections are maintained, individual family units retain their autonomy (Andayani et al., 2018; Koerner & Mary Anne, 2002). This inherent tension of balancing individual autonomy with the desire for connection is reminiscent of the Integration-Separation dialectic, as proposed by Baxter & Montgomery (1996). Here, individuals constantly grapple with the desire to maintain their individuality while also fostering their collective identity as a couple or family unit.

### **Division of Household Chores and Routine Activities**

The division of household chores and day-to-day responsibilities between spouses is often a contentious issue, especially when viewed through the perspective of traditional gender roles. The delineation between public (work-related) duties and domestic (home-related) tasks can lead to potential conflicts and feelings of inequality. Factors like the nature of the couple's jobs, the amount of time spent outside the home, routine home responsibilities, and the presence of a housekeeper play a significant role in shaping these dynamics. Thus, striking a balance in household management becomes crucial in maintaining harmony and ensuring both partners feel valued and heard.

From a gender perspective, traditional roles often designate domestic tasks such as doing the laundry, cleaning, ironing, sweeping, and cooking to the wife. This allocation is sometimes interpreted as a manifestation of the husband's dominance over his wife. Such interpretations, rooted in gender studies, suggest that these household responsibilities are not merely chores but represent deeper power dynamics within the relationship (Muhmad Pirus & Nurahmawati, 2020; Purbasari et al., 2015). This

viewpoint can generate tension within the relationship and potentially jeopardize the family's stability. However, an alternative perspective emphasizes collaboration and cooperation, wherein both spouses share responsibilities, ensuring a more equitable division of labor and fostering mutual respect.

Indeed, the division of household tasks and responsibilities between a husband and wife should not be viewed solely in terms of dominance and inferiority (*Focus Group Discussion*, April 10, 2023). As previously noted, the relationship between couples is multifaceted and cannot be reduced to a simple dichotomy. The allocation of chores and routine activities is often determined through mutual dialogue and discussion (Muhmad Pirus & Nurahmawati, 2020; Purbasari et al., 2015; Syuhudi, 2022).

Decisions regarding the division of household tasks take into account multiple factors and the specific circumstances of each family. Whether it is a husband or a wife, either can assume specific domestic responsibilities based on mutual agreement, be it for practicality or personal preferences. What is essential is the underlying mutual understanding and shared consensus, ensuring that the allocation of tasks is perceived as just and equitable by both. This decision-making is informed by various considerations, and the primary focus remains on logical reasoning and mutual acceptance. Each partner strives to contribute in a manner that ensures a balanced and proportionate sharing of responsibilities.

The profession of a spouse, be it the wife or husband, plays a significant role in determining the distribution of household chores (*Interview* with Niken, March 12, 2023). Essentially, the division of these tasks is approached from a complementary perspective. The intention is not for one party to dominate or shoulder all the responsibilities but for both partners to contribute fairly and willingly.

The findings from this research underscore the importance of dialogue in deciding the distribution of household duties. When both partners work in public sectors or similar professional fields, the division tends to be more collaborative and balanced. However, in situations where the husband is the primary breadwinner in the public sector and the wife stays at home, she typically takes on the bulk of household responsibilities. That said, it does not imply that the husband is entirely detached from domestic duties; he still participates in home management to some extent (*Interview* with Sarindi, March 9, 2023)

When the wife is the primary breadwinner in the public sector and the husband does not work in the same domain, the husband typically takes on the primary role in handling household chores and responsibilities. This does not exclude the wife from participating in household tasks. Although the husband predominantly manages household activities due to his availability, the wife, despite her professional commitments, still contributes to family duties when she can (Utomo, 2016).

Therefore, the dynamics of how husband and wife share and divide household responsibilities can vary greatly. Factors such as their respective occupations and the time they can allocate play a significant role in shaping these dynamics.

Open dialogue and discussion are pivotal in determining the nature of their relationship. Many contend that the success or failure of maintaining a family unit hinges on the quality of communication between the couple. A lack of openness or stubbornness from either party can strain and potentially jeopardize the relationship.

The study paints a vivid picture of the intricacies in the dynamics between couples striving to uphold their relationships. Various elements, such as education, occupation, genealogy, kinship and relatives, ideology, and belief, play a pivotal role in shaping the ways husbands and wives interact, communicate, and maintain family stability.

Within the Javanese cultural framework, the concepts of harmony and togetherness are paramount. These principles are foundational in understanding relationships within the Javanese community, extending to familial bonds. The preference is towards peace and cohesion, with a general tendency to sidestep conflicts and disruptions. This cultural inclination promotes a serene environment, valuing peacefulness over conflict.

## CONCLUSION

Communication serves as the bedrock of all interactions, whether within familial bonds, professional engagements, group dynamics, or organizational structures. In the Javanese context, the emphasis is on harmony and cohesion. This cultural tenet is evident in the way Javanese couples navigate their marital relationships. They often opt for silence as a means to circumvent potential conflicts, leaning towards dialogue and discussions when resolution is sought.

Within the landscape of Javanese marital communication, there are four distinct models that emerge: avoidance, dominance, collaboration, and compromise. However, rooted in their cultural ethos of peace and unity, Javanese couples predominantly lean towards the collaborative and compromise models. These choices underscore their overarching aim to steer clear of conflicts and maintain equilibrium in their relationships.

Financial considerations often form a significant component of discussions among Javanese couples. Even though openly discussing financial matters is somewhat taboo in their culture, the importance of financial planning and management necessitates dialogue. This dialogue is anchored in mutual trust and understanding. Among the myriad financial topics that couples broach are the allocation and distribution of finances, asset ownership, individual earnings, and setting financial priorities, both for immediate household needs and long-term aspirations.

Post marriage, couples usually align their dreams and aspirations, leading to collaborative financial planning to turn these shared dreams into reality. Such discussions ensure that both partners are on the same page and contribute proportionally to the household's financial well-being.

Furthermore, in the Javanese cultural milieu, social obligations often take precedence over daily household expenses. This includes contributions towards communal activities, ceremonies, or assisting extended family members. Consequently, the Javanese often adhere to the principle of "*sing longgar endi*," which translates to addressing urgent financial needs first, irrespective of which partner's income is utilized.

In Javanese culture, which respect collectivism, family ties are deep-rooted and extend beyond the nuclear unit. When two individuals marry, it is perceived as a union of two families, not just the couple. This interconnectedness, while fostering a sense of community, can also lead to tensions, especially when there is a perceived breach of familial expectations, such as infrequent visits to in-laws. Each spouse, valuing their autonomy, believes that while family ties are crucial, they should not overshadow personal boundaries.

Domestic responsibilities in Javanese households are fluid rather than fixed. Instead of strict gender-defined roles, the division of household tasks is based on practical considerations. For instance, if the

husband is employed outside and the wife is not, she might handle most household chores. However, this does not absolve the husband from contributing domestically. Open dialogue ensures that both partners feel their roles are equitable and valued, emphasizing mutual respect and understanding.

This research offers insights into communication dynamics and relationship management between Javanese husbands and wives. The study highlights collaborative and compromise approaches as predominant features in marital dynamics, signifying the importance of cooperation and the pursuit of mutually agreeable solutions. Both financial matters and familial ties profoundly influence marital communication. Open dialogue and mutual trust prove crucial for informed decision-making. However, this study is limited, focusing exclusively on Javanese culture and relying on self-reported qualitative data. To enhance understanding, future research might consider cross-cultural examinations, introduce quantitative methodologies, and assess the influence of technology on marital communication. Such endeavors could provide deeper insights and formulate strategies to boost relationship satisfaction and wellness among couples across diverse cultural settings.

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