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The role of Javanese cultural values and conflict style in predicting marital stability

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Abstract: Culture is an influential factor in how relationships are conceptualized and in how people choose to manage conflict in their relationships. Javanese people have three main cultural values: hormat (respect), rukun (harmonious), nrima (acceptance) in their relation to others. Those values associated with an interdependent self-construal at the individual level, wherein the self is viewed not as a bounded or autonomous entity, but as one that is deeply embedded and defined by its social surroundings and roles. We predict Javanese cultural values correlate with a kind of conflict styles, whereas compromise type in marital relationship context can predict marital stability. Three kind of Likert point scale were administered to 42 person: Javanese cultural values scale, conflict styles scale, and marital stability scale. Regression analysis demonstrated that Javanese values and conflict style independently predict marital stability. There is a significant interaction between Javanese cultural values and compromise style in conflict situation (F = 12.319, α = 0.001), Javanese cultural values and marital stability (F = 19.904, α = 0.00). Result also showed compromise style to be most strongly predict marital stability (F = 25.537, α = 0.00, R Square = 0.390) than any other conflict style: domination, submission, separation, avoidance, interactional reactivity.

Keywords: Javanese, conflict, marriage

Introduction

Nearly one third of all marriages fail within the first 5 years (National Center for Health Statistics, 1991), and between one half and two thirds end in divorce (Cherlin, 1992). The consequences of separation and divorce can be severe. Research indicates that individuals who are separated from their spouses or divorced experience greater rates of psychopathology, physical illness, suicide, homicide, violence, and mortality from disease (e.g., Burman & Margolin, 1992). In light of these marital stability statistics and the greater risk for mental and physical health
problems among separated and divorced individuals, identifying the factors that help marriages survive has important implications. Furthermore, understanding how these factors influence marital stability will help build a theory of marital quality and stability. This was the objective of the present study.

Karney and Bradbury (1995) identified some general themes that could provide the basis for understanding how and why marriages survive or break down. Elements of the four theories highlight aspects of relationships that can provide the foundations for an integrated theoretical framework. For instance, social exchange theory suggests that the perception of a relationship is coloured by the rewards and costs associated with the relationship, the sort of relationship the individual thinks he or she deserves and their perception of the rewards and costs of being in a relationship with someone else. Attachment theory specifies certain characteristics of each partner that will contribute to the functioning of the relationship. Crisis theory suggests that events such as the transition to parenthood or the experience of unemployment will have an impact on marital quality. Behavioural theory points to the importance of couple interaction and how members of couples cope with relational issues, conflicts and transitions.

Mackey and O’Brien (1995) identified five factors that appeared to be important to marital longevity.

- Containment of conflict: Couples reported that most of their conflict occurred during the childrearing years. Failure to adequately resolve major difficulties arising during the parenting years undermined satisfaction, particularly if the cycle of negative interaction and defensiveness was allowed to go unchecked as they approached the third (retirement/empty nest) phase of the marriage. For most couples the husbands and wives differed in the way they dealt with conflict, men typically being more avoidant than women, although couples reported that changes towards more open and direct ways of dealing with conflict helped to improve satisfaction – as long as there was seen to be movement on the part of both husbands and wives.

- Mutuality of decision-making: The degree of mutual decision-making increased over the life of the marriage, especially as the children went through adolescence. During the early years of the marriage the role of decision-maker was often split according to gender roles: men made most of the major decisions except where the home or children were concerned, however, there was a general trend towards joint decision-making as couples moved towards the third phase of the marriage, when children began to leave the home. In particular, decision-making with
respect to friends, major financial outlays and leisure activities increasingly involved exchange and reciprocity. Couples who reported higher levels of joint decision-making also reported significantly higher levels of marital satisfaction.

- **Quality of communication:** The period of their children’s adolescence was highlighted as the time when couple communication was fraught with challenges. Often though, it led to better communication patterns. Couples reported that over time they became more open and expressive with each other, characteristics associated with higher levels of satisfaction. Expressive communication, or at least some combination of the expressive and instrumental (“showing” rather than “telling”) modes, was associated with greater satisfaction in the third phase of marriage. Couples who maintained primarily instrumental patterns of relating into their later years tended to be less satisfied with their relationship.

- **Relational values of trust, respect, understanding and equity:** Respondents indicated that in the early years of the marriage, the respect, trust and understanding they received from their spouses was vital to marital satisfaction. In the empty-nest years, however, the *reciprocity* of these values was the key to satisfaction. As time-dependent values, mutual trust and understanding were significantly related to satisfaction only in the post-parenting years, having been built up gradually in the early years. Couples recognised that at times their marriage was unfair to one spouse (usually the wife during the child-rearing years), but as long as the spouses felt some sense of equity, erosion of marital satisfaction was prevented.

- **Sexual and psychological intimacy:** Mackey and O’Brien viewed intimacy as a composite of mutual understanding, acceptance, trust, and respect based on being open and honest about one’s feelings and reflected both physically and psychologically. Of the two, the psychological intimacy that grew during the post-parenting years contributed more to the overall levels of satisfaction in the later years than physical intimacy. Satisfactory marriages were usually described as psychologically intimate, but for dissatisfied spouses that intimacy was absent. Intimacy grew over time, often becoming deeper as couples overcame difficulties and worked through the low points in their marriage. Life events provided couples with opportunities for reinforcement of existing feelings or propelled them towards developing stronger feelings of connectedness.
In this study we use definition marital stability by Carrere, et.al (2000), which is a stable marriage taps into global marital perceptions via eight dimensions: Fondness/Affection, We-ness, Expansiveness, Negativity, Disappointment and Disillusionment, Chaos, Volatility, and Glorifying the Struggle. The Fondness/Affection characterized by each spouse's expressions of pride, fondness, and affection for his or her partner. The We-ness reflects the degree to which each spouse uses terms during the interactions that indicate unification in the marriage. The Expansiveness show how expressive and expansive the spouses are, how the spouses respond to and expand on what their partner is saying. The Negativity characterized by critical statement to their partner, are vague about what attracted them to their partner, and display negative affect toward their partner. The Disappointment and Disillusionment show the degree to which each member of the couple has given up on the marriage by expressing depression about the relationship or not being able to articulate what makes the marriage work. The Chaos show the degree to which the couple feels out of control of their lives and buffeted about by elements outside of their control. The Volatility show the intensity, both positive and negative, of the spouses' feelings for each other. Highly volatile couples express feelings of great passion and yet fight frequently. The Glorifying the Struggle show the extent to which a couple has gone through difficult times but perceives the marriage to be stronger because of these experiences; their marriage is the center of their lives, and they are proud of the struggles they have gone through.

The aspect of marriage that is pivotal to expert such Karney & Bradbury's (1995), Mackey & O'Brien (1995), Carrere, et.al (2000) theories is conflict management and communication— how couples deal with their differences, how they argue and express themselves both verbally and nonverbally. In the past few decades, there has been a considerable amount of research on conflict and conflict management within intimate relationships (Canary, Cupach, & Messman, 1995). Conflict has been conceptualized at many different levels, from subtle nonverbal behaviours that take place in specific interaction episodes to a general expressed dissatisfaction about one's relationship. Many theories include conflict, but few have made it a central focus. Because conflict disrupts ongoing behavior or communication, the latter might naturally seize theorists' attention. For example, social exchange theory (e.g., Kelley & Thibaut, 1978) views conflict as potentially occurring from any interaction in which the rewards/costs ratios are unequal across partners. Systems theory (e.g., Ruben, 1978) views conflict as a breakdown in
communication, the necessary solution being restoration of good communication. Even explicit behavioral theories usually focus on poor communication as the cause of conflict (e.g., Christensen & Shenk, 1991). Interpersonal conflict deserves special attention with respect to its influence on relationship satisfaction and relationship quality, as it is assumed to be inevitable in personal relationships due to the goal discrepancies that arise between the parties (Braithwaite & Kelley, 1979). Given this inevitability, it is important to examine how conflict is managed.

The result of the theoretical variety is a diverse set of partial theories and taxonomies of conflict strategies and tactics. Conflict management involves the strategies that are used to deal with disagreements, ranging from avoidance to direct confrontation. Several typologies of conflict management have been proposed in the realms of intimate relationships (e.g., Kurdek, 1995).

In this research, we use six subscales conflict strategies (Zachilli, et al. 2009): Compromise, Domination, Submission, Separation, Avoidance, and Interational Reactivity. The Compromise strategy seems to involve both collaboration and negotiation, with the goal of achieving both partners’ satisfaction. Domination is characterized by one partner’s attempt to be in control and win any given argument, whereas Submission is characterized by one partner giving in to the other partner’s wishes in order to satisfy the partner and/or simply end the conflict. Separation is characterized by a cooling-off period with intentions to discuss the issue later, whereas Avoidance involves precluding conflict situations before they occur. Interational Reactivity is characterized by verbal aggression, emotional volatility, and lack of trust between partners. The subscales were intended to tap a range of constructive to destructive strategies. Constructive strategies include those that promote or enhance the relationship. Destructive strategies include those that harm, erode, or eventually destroy the relationship. Compromise is clearly a constructive strategy. Domination and Interational Reactivity are clearly destructive strategies, and Submission may on occasion be actively destructive. Avoidance and Separation are not clearly constructive or destructive.

There has been considerable research on intercultural or cross-cultural differences in conflict management styles (e.g., Holt & DeVore, 2005). Culture is an influential factor in how relationships are conceptualized and in how people choose to manage conflict in their relationships. Culture provides the social norms and rules that regulate and guide interpersonal behaviours. Thus, culture may influence perceptions of appropriate modes
of communication, face maintenance concerns, and strategies for managing conflict.

Conflict management preferences as well as related communication styles have been proposed to differ across cultures (Holt & DeVore, 2005). People from collectivistic cultures have been found to prefer less direct forms of conflict management, such as third party mediation and avoidance, whereas people from individualistic cultures have tended to prefer more direct and confrontational (e.g., dominating, forcing) strategies. Results from a meta-analysis of 36 cross-cultural studies on conflict styles suggests that overall, individualistic cultures prescribe forcing (i.e., dominating) strategies, whereas collectivistic cultures prescribe withdrawing, compromising, and problem-solving strategies (Holt & DeVore, 2005).

Therefore, in this study we focus on Javanese person who marriage Javanese in order to see whether cultural values from the Javanese have a contribution to their style in managing conflict.

We use same cultural background between husband and wife, since marriages that are homogamous in age, education, religion, and race are found as the most stable (Bratter and King 2008). One study that analyzed data from the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH) showed that partners in interethnic unions—both married and cohabiting—reported lower relationship quality than did those in same-ethnic unions (Hohmann-Marriott and Amato 2008). A recent analysis of data on interethnic marriages in Hawaii and Australia has also shown that marriages that cross ethnic lines are more likely to end in divorce than intraethnic marriages (Jones, 1996).

The data on homogamy may be interpreted to mean that, regardless of differences in race or ethnicity, common values and lifestyles contribute to relationship stability. A heterogamous pair may have common values that transcend their differences in background. Some problems of interracial (or other heterogamous) marriages have to do with social disapproval and lack of social support from either race.

A marriage is more than a relationship between individuals. It is also a relationship between groups. As such, marriage has symbolic meaning generally related to the relative status of the groups involved. Difference in status between groups is often the reason why intercultural marriages are not preferred in most societies. Merton (1941) and Davis (1941) reason that most societies prefer endogamy because the similarities between marital partners are expected to reduce conflicts of values and to avoid the
difficulties in identity that children might face when their parents have different cultural backgrounds.

Cultures are extremely complex and consist of numerous interrelated cultural orientation besides beliefs and values, including attitudes, norms, and material aspects. Since there are many dimensions in which cultures differ, for instance, individualism and collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity and femininity, formal and informal, time, relationship, context, etc. To illustrate, collectivist cultures place more positive value on couple’s relation with their origin families than do individualistic cultures. Since self is defined via culture and personality, no two individuals or groups are identical in their beliefs and behaviors, and whatever we characterize about one culture or culture group must be considered as flexible rather than as rigidly structured. By exposing a large group of people to similar experiences, culture tends to generate similar meanings and similar behaviors, which does not mean, of course, that everyone in a particular culture is exactly the same. Culture affects communication through cultural identification, the degree to which individuals consider themselves to be representatives of a particular culture. Since each individual has a different degree of identification with his culture and his culture’s dominant personality profile, some members from a certain culture will not have the typical characteristics of this culture’s dominant personality profile.

How humans react to their perceptions of the universe is largely a result of their learning and cultural situation. Beliefs and values are the important factors that influence both perception and communication. As humans grow up in a culture, that culture’s expectancy, based on beliefs and values, conditions them to believe what it deems to be worthy and true. In addition, belief systems are the basis of values, which furnish standards that permit humans to make individual expectations about their relationship with self and society.

Javanese have three main cultural values: hormat (respect), rukun (harmonious), nrina (acceptance) in their relation to others. Those values associated with an interdependent self-construal at the individual level, wherein the self is viewed not as a bounded or autonomous entity, but as one that is deeply embedded and defined by its social surroundings and roles (collectivism). We predict Javanese cultural values correlate with a kind of conflict styles: compromise style, whereas compromise conflict style in marital relationship context can predict marital stability. Collectivism in Javanese, on the other hand, is characterized by family integrity, emphasizes on ingroup harmony and commonalities rather than differences, sharp ingroup–outgroup distinctions, and the regulation of behaviour by group norms rather than personal attitudes (Triandis, 1990, 1995).

There are two basic principles in the social life of the Javanese society, namely: to avoid open confrontation in every situation, and to respect others (Geertz, 1961). The principle of avoiding conflict is reflected in a ‘harmonious manner’ (rukun), characterized by cooperation, mutual acceptance, calm and unity with each other. The second principle is ‘respect’ (hormat). Behavior and languages must show respect. Someone must be able to put themselves in accordance with social class in the interaction. Those who have higher positions should be respected, whereas those with lower social class should be treated well and helped to have welfare. This can maintain harmony in social relations. Social harmony is a necessary condition for a person to develop the abilities and potential, to live with the role and status of each. Both this value will reach perfection when coupled with ‘accepted’ principles (nrina). Javanese believe that everything in life is to follow the provisions of nature. ‘Acceptance’ of destiny (nrina) is the belief that human life is fully in control, and no one can deny it.

**Methods**

**Participants**

The participants were 42 Javanese person (18 men, 24 women) who married with Javanese. Marriage age between 1 year to 31 years of marriage. The participant mean ages and standard deviations were 32.4 (10.15). Participants were recruited through accidental non-probability sampling.

**Measures**

We use 3 types of a 4-point Likert scale (1: never, 5: always). First, the conflict style scale, each items were designed to include various strategies such as avoiding conflict, aggression, submission, separation, dominating, and compromising. The compromise strategy seems to involve both collaboration and negotiation, with the goal of achieving both partners’ satisfaction. Domination is characterized by one partner’s attempt to be in control and win any given argument, whereas Submission is characterized by one partner giving in to the other partner’s wishes in order to satisfy the partner and/or simply end the conflict. Separation is characterized by a cooling-off period with intentions to discuss the issue later, whereas avoidance involves precluding conflict situations before they occur.
Interactional reactivity is characterized by verbal aggression, emotional volatility, and lack of trust between partners.

Second, Javanese cultural values scale, which items based on dimension: hormat (respect), rukun (harmonious), nrima (acceptance). ‘Harmonious manner’ (rukun) characterized by cooperation, mutual acceptance, calm and unity with each other. ‘Respect’ (hormat) characterized: behavior and languages must show respect, must be able to put themselves in accordance with social class in the interaction, to live with the role and status of each. ‘Accepted’ principles (nrima) characterized with believes that everything in life is to follow the provisions of nature, acceptance of destiny, belief that human life is fully in control and no one can deny it.

Last, marital stability scale (Carrere, et.al, 2000) taps into global marital perceptions via eight dimensions—subscales (Fondness/Affection, We-ness, Expansiveness, Negativity, Disappointment and Disillusionment, Chaos, Volatility, and Glorifying the Struggle). Three of the subscales are positive in nature: (a) Fondness/Affection, (b) We-ness, and (c) Expansiveness. The Fondness/Affection scale rates each spouse’s expressions of pride, fondness, and affection for his or her partner. The We-ness scale reflects the degree to which each spouse uses terms during the interaction that indicate unification in the marriage. The Expansiveness scale measures how expressive and expansive the spouses are, how the spouses respond to and expand on what their partner is saying. This is in contrast to spouses who respond to questions with a few short sentences, seem withdrawn, and do not add to what their partner says. Two of the coding dimensions are negative: (a) Negativity and (b) Disappointment and Disillusionment. The Negativity scale indexes the extent to which spouses are critical of their partner, are vague about what attracted them to their partner, and display negative affect toward their partner. The Disappointment and Disillusionment scale assesses the degree to which each member of the couple has given up on the marriage by expressing depression about the relationship or not being able to articulate what makes the marriage work. Three subscales evaluate information about how the couple reports handling marital conflict: (a) Chaos, (b) Volatility, and (c) Glorifying the Struggle. The Chaos scale rates the degree to which the couple feels out of control of their lives and buffeted about by elements outside of their control. The Volatility scale measures the intensity, both positive and negative, of the spouse’s feelings for each other. Highly volatile couples express feelings of great passion and yet fight frequently. The Glorifying the Struggle scale assesses the extent to which a couple has gone through difficult times but perceives the marriage to be stronger because of these experiences. Their marriage is the center of their lives, and they are proud of the struggles they have gone through.

Procedures

Participants first answered several demographic questions about themselves and their relationships. Then, they were asked to indicate the frequency with which they employed six conflict styles behaviors on a 4-point Likert scale (1: never, 4: always), Javanese cultural values scale, and marital stability scale.

Statistical Analyses

In order to predict whether Javanese cultural values have a contribution to conflict style, we use regression analysis. Independently, we also try to predict whether a type of conflict style have a contribution to marital stability.

Results

There is a significant interaction between Javanese cultural values and compromise style in conflict situation (F = 12.319, \( \alpha = 0.001 \)). Javanese cultural values, it self, also predict marital stability (F = 19.904, \( \alpha = 0.00 \)). Result also showed compromise style to be most strongly predict marital stability (F = 25.537, \( \alpha = 0.00 \), R Square = 0.390) than any other conflict style: domination, submission, separation, avoidance, interactional reactivity.

Discussion

The result shows that Javanese cultural values has a significant correlation with compromise style in managing conflict. This finding has a similarity from previous study (Holt & DeVore, 2005) which say that people from collectivist cultures have been found to prefer less direct forms of conflict management, such as third party mediation, compromising, and problem-solving strategies; whereas people from individualistic cultures have tended to prefer more direct and confrontational (e.g., dominating, forcing) strategies. Javanese values (rukun, hormat, nrima) associated with an interdependent self-construal at the individual level, wherein the self is viewed not as a bounded or autonomous entity, but as one that is deeply embedded and defined by its social surroundings and roles (collectivism). Collectivism in Javanese, on the other hand, is characterized by family integrity, emphasis on ingroup harmony and commonalities rather than differences, sharp ingroup–
outgroup distinctions, and the regulation of behaviour by group norms rather than personal attitudes (Triandis, 1995).

Our study also found that Javanese cultural value has a contribution to make a marriage last and stable. We can offer at least three explanations for marital stability that may exist among Javanese couples. First, significant similarity in values and interests between partners can create a mutual understanding, resulting in emotion closeness and decrease couple conflict (Durodoye and Coker 2008). Second, such marriages may create conflict between the partners and other groups, such as parents, relatives, and friends. Continual discriminatory pressure from the broader society may create undue psychological and marital distress. In this homogamous Javanese couples, they have a supporting social network, partners can maintain their union in times of crisis more easily; they can manage conflict between the partners and other groups (parents, relatives, and friends) easily, since they have the same values. Also, homogamous marriages may reflect the fact that these partners are likely to be conventional in their values and behavior, and conventional people may stable in their marriage more than others (see Hohmann-Marriott and Amato 2008).

Compromise style related to marital stability. A couple's agreed experience in dealing with difficult or stressful circumstances will affect spouses' perceptions of the quality of their relationship and vice versa: satisfaction with the marriage is likely to lead to more positive interactions and behaviors, while engaging in positive interactions and behavior is likely to enhance marital satisfaction and perceptions of quality. Alternatively, unrealistic expectations or dysfunctional patterns of conflict style may increase the likelihood of relationship problems and declines in satisfaction over time (Parker, 2002). Ultimately, repeated failures of adaptation will undermine the stability of the marriage, leading to increasing frequency of thoughts of divorce; successful adaptation will strengthen or maintain the relationship and reduce the chances of eventual dissolution of the marriage. Gottman (1993) also find that a "lasting marriage results from a couple's ability to resolve the conflicts that are inevitable in any.

relationship". The key lies in the balance between positive and negative behaviors. Couples whose positive interactions outnumber their negative interactions are known as "regulated" marital stability is stronger when the ratio of positive to negative behaviors is at least 5:1. Those marriages where negativity prevails are labelled "non-regulated" and are more likely than regulated ones to be unhappy marriages in which separation and/or divorce are or have been considered.

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