People Pleaser Behavior within the Perspective of Sungkan: A Psycho-Anthropological Interpretation

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ABSTRACT

Respect is highly valued in Javanese culture, particularly in social interactions. Children in Javanese culture are taught how to show respect to others, which in Javanese culture consists of three inseparable components, namely *sungkan*, *wedi*, and *isin*. This study identified a case of sungkan behavior in a college student in Yogyakarta, accompanied by a hint of another behavioral concept, namely, people-pleasing. People-pleasing behavior can be viewed from multiple perspectives, one of which is the *sungkan* culture—a cultural norm rooted in respect, modesty, and avoidance of conflict. This cultural framework provides valuable insight into the dynamics of people-pleasing behavior. This study aims to explore and interpret how people pleaser behave within the context of Javanese culture, specifically examining the extent to which the concept of habitus is internalized in such behavior, using a case study approach. The study explores key themes, including the habitus of people-pleasing behavior, symbolic capital and power within the Javanese family, the individual's attitudes toward family dynamics, awareness from others of people-pleasing behavior, and its psychological and social impacts. This study contributes to the integration of psychology and anthropology by demonstrating that behavior is an expression of symbolic structures in people-pleasing behavior within the concept of *sungkan* in the Javanese context.

A. INTRODUCTION

A people pleaser is defined as a person's habit and tendency to continually make others happy, even if it has a negative effect on themselves. This is often influenced by social expectations and cultural norms as a form of politeness (Sekyi-Baidoo & Afful, 2013). In the Javanese context, it is related to *sungkan*. Particular attention is given to the behavior of individuals who habitually say "yes" when asked for help or a favor, despite their true unwillingness to comply. This tendency is often driven by a desire to maintain harmony and avoid causing offense to others.

One case involves a college student in Yogyakarta who frequently feels reluctant to decline requests from peers, even when the requests impose a significant burden. This behavior is not an isolated occurrence, but rather a

recurring pattern. The student expressed concern that refusing a request could lead to social repercussions, such as offending the requester or being socially excluded. Interestingly, the student noted feeling more at ease asserting personal boundaries when the request comes from someone considered a close friend.

The student comes from a financially stable family background and is the second child, with an older brother as the firstborn. The student's father tends to exert considerable control over her personal freedom. In this context, the father is described as highly protective and often anxious about the potential for negative outcomes affecting his child. Meanwhile, the mother frequently advises the student to avoid individuals she perceives as potentially exploitative or burdensome. The student's friends are also aware of her people-pleasing tendencies and often offer advice. Although the student recognizes that she cannot continue to be a people pleaser indefinitely, she still struggles to implement her mother's guidance. She continues to exhibit people-pleasing behavior, largely driven by a fear of social rejection. Additionally, she worries about becoming the subject of gossip or being labeled negatively if she refuses requests or risks offending others.

This condition indicates that the student has, in fact, received considerable support from his mother in addressing her people-pleasing tendencies. In addition, she has also received advice and encouragement from her peers, which should ideally empower her to be more assertive in declining requests or situations that she does not genuinely agree with. However, in practice, this expected change has yet to materialize.

People-pleasing stems from fear, feelings of worthlessness, and a sense of being undeserving (Hinton et. al, 2020). A people-pleaser believes that others will not like or love them if they reveal their true selves. People-pleasing behavior involves pretending to be someone other than one's authentic self to manipulate others' reactions. In essence, people-pleasers attempt to prevent others from becoming angry, offended, or rejecting them by exhibiting excessive compliance, such as habitually saying "yes." While such acquiescence may superficially appear positive, it can have detrimental consequences when practiced excessively or incongruently with one's genuine attitudes (Hinton et al., 2020)

Indeed, courage is required to say "no," and the ability to decline requests at appropriate times is a skill that must be cultivated (Hinton et al., 2020). How, then, does this differ from the behavior of a people-pleaser? A people-pleaser is characterized by an extreme difficulty in refusing requests, an inability to establish personal boundaries, excessive concern about others' opinions, active avoidance of conflict, and an inflated sense of responsibility for others' well-being. Boundaries, as defined by Hinton et. al. (2020), represent limits that no one, regardless of their relationship or affection, may cross. Individuals who practice boundary-setting and learn to say "no" gain more discretionary time to devote to personal passions and priorities, rather than compulsively agreeing to others' demands.

The behavior exhibited in daily life is the result of socialization from the surrounding environment. Bourdieu (1977) explains that every gesture and behavior exhibited by a person arises from various aspects that are internalized during their life, both from macro-social and micro-social systems. Behaviors that emerge consciously or unconsciously are manifestations of the integration of schemas and perceptions that then become habits or habitus (Bourdieu, 1990; Lizardo, 2004). The schemas that are constructed are the result of the influence of existing social systems, both micro and macro. This is one of the concepts in social psychology proposed by Lewin (1947), which suggests that human behavior is influenced by both personal and environmental factors. Perger (2024) explains that habitus can be likened to a concept that explains how knowledge of the social context guides a person's actions and reactions in social interactions.

Habitus is a mechanism of habitual thinking, feeling, and acting in a person's daily life. Behaviors that are formed consciously or unconsciously are behaviors that represent a general context of a society (Bourdieu, 1977). This occurs because these behaviors are products of systems in society, such as values, culture, politics, and norms. The process of forming these behaviors requires a long time before they become a person's habit, which is why Bourdieu (2020) himself refers to it as history in an individual's experience.

Javanese society adheres to a strong hierarchical system, making it necessary to consider symbolic capital in its social relations. Symbolic capital can explain how certain individuals or groups in a social order have higher power with certain symbols, such as position, wealth, social status, and knowledge (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2013). Tan (2014) explains that symbolic capital or power is interrelated with cultural, social, and economic capital. This means that it depends on what status is recognized by society, especially Javanese society, as individuals or groups perceived to have higher power. This, in turn, influences social relations between individuals in Javanese society, particularly with the emergence of the concept of *sungkan.*

Javanese families often emphasize "respect" for others in social interactions. However, it should be noted that Javanese cultural 'respect' differs from the Western concept of "respect." In Western countries, "respect" is expressed as an individual's effort to honor and value others regardless of their social identity. In Javanese culture, "respect" is largely influenced by the status and identity of others (Geertz, 1961). Status here is not only formal status, but can also be relational and conditional, for example, father-child, guest-host, educated-uneducated, and buyer-seller. This also includes friendships. Often, friendships that are considered equal actually have a hierarchy within them, so that certain people have power in the friendship group because there are people who are more popular and therefore become central to the group (Gest et al., 2001). With this relationship, there are expectations of etiquette that arise. Someone in a lower position of power must show behavior that reflects respect because of the hierarchy and authority possessed by others who have more power (Anderson, 1972). Then, parents in Javanese families teach their children to behave as expected in Javanese norms, namely *sungkan*, in certain circumstances, to prioritize the interests of others. This

behavior is continuously socialized by parents in Java until *sungkan* is formed.

In the Javanese context, *sungkan* is defined as showing respect for others by behaving politely, especially towards individuals who are considered to have a higher status or people who are newly acquainted (Geertz, 1961). *Sungkan* is one of three concepts of "respect" in Javanese culture, alongside *wedi* (fear) and *isin* (shame) (Sukarsih, 2021). Although these three concepts have different definitions, there is a connection between them, and they are often inseparable. *Isin* is defined as a feeling of shame that arises when someone violates or behaves in a manner that is not in accordance with ethics (Geertz, 1961). *Isin*, in the Javanese context, acts as an alarm for oneself. *Isin* usually also arises when people in a social environment judge someone's behavior by saying *ngerti isin ora* (don't you feel shame?) (Keeler, 1983). With such social judgment, a person automatically feels *isin* for having violated ethics. Of course, the first to reprimand are significant others, especially parents. In Javanese culture, children are expected to demonstrate a sense of indebtedness to their parents through respectful and obedient behavior, which is often expressed as *sungkan*. From an early age, children in Indonesia are labeled as "disobedient" or even "rebellious" if they fail to comply with their parents' wishes or requests (Panuti, 2019). This socialization process can lead children to become fearful of expressing their true feelings and attitudes. This fear is what is meant by *wedi* in Javanese society, which is when someone is afraid of making mistakes in ethical behavior (Geertz, 1961). Parents will *nggetak* (shout in a high tone, threatening) at their children as a reprimand and warning to behave politely, especially towards others (Keeler, 1983). This then has implications for feeling shame around others. Keeler (1983) explains that parents in the Javanese context would actually be happier if their children had the trait of *ngalah*, which comes from the word *kalah* (to be defeated). *Ngalah* means that someone voluntarily and consciously decides to give in and give more advantage to others, usually in competitive situations. In Javanese culture, the trait of *ngalah* is valued because it signifies magnanimity and chivalry (Keeler, 1983).

More specifically, in Javanese culture, fathers tend to maintain emotional distance from their children as a way of asserting authority and instilling politeness. In contrast, mothers in the Javanese context are more likely to adopt a permissive and affective parenting style, serving as a counterbalance to the authoritarian approach often exhibited by fathers (Panuti, 2019). The strong status and authority of parents in Javanese culture do not diminish their love (*trisna*) for their children. *Trisna* is defined as the unconditional love given by parents to their children. When children make mistakes, *trisna* is shown by reprimanding them with phrases such as "don't behave like that" or "*ojo nigisin-ngisini*" (Geertz, 1961). As a form of careness, parents in Javanese society teach their children to behave politely in two ways, namely through words and gestures (*basa*) (Keeler, 1983). This is also demonstrated by the existence of a system of *alus-kasar* spectrum in gestures and words in the Javanese context. *Alus* or smoothness of spirit is demonstrated by self-control, elegant appearance, and behavior that shows politeness. Conversely, *kasar* is an attitude of disrespect for others and a lack of politeness in gestures and speech (Anderson, 1972). *Alus-kasar* is then represented by a person's *basa.* Linguistically, Javanese has a tiered linguistic system to indicate which language is considered *alus* and *kasar* (Kusumaningrum, 2021).

Given the existence of people-pleasing behavior in the context of Javanese culture, there is potential for integrating people-pleasing with Javanese ethics. As is well known, human behavior is greatly influenced by cultural context. The Western concept of people-pleasing explains psychologically why someone behaves in this way. However, an integrative study is needed between psychology and culture in an anthropological context, specifically examining people-pleasing behavior within the context of Javanese society. Therefore, this study aims to explore and interpret people-pleasing behavior in the context of Javanese culture, utilizing the conceptual framework of Habitus to interpret this behavior as a response to symbolic capital and power in hierarchical Javanese society.

B. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research approach. This methodology enables researchers to explore complex issues in depth through direct engagement with participants. Data collection involves immersive fieldwork, including community visits and in-depth narrative interviews that allow participants to share their experiences and perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018)

This research employs a case study design. Case study research focuses on the in-depth exploration of one or multiple real-world cases over time through comprehensive and detailed data collection (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This design enables researchers to illustrate unique cases that require thorough explanation and contextualization.

Participant was selected using purposive sampling techniques, wherein participant is chosen based on predetermined criteria to ensure she/he can provide relevant information (Campbell, 2020). Main participant selection was guided by field observations, with the authors identifying a specific case of people-pleasing behavior exhibited by an undergraduate student in Yogyakarta. As supporting and confirmatory data, the researchers interviewed two friends of the main participant and a social-cultural psychologist outside the authors of this study.

Data collection was conducted in two ways: participatory observation and in-depth interviews. Participatory observation was carried out in several activities that were possible, such as eating together, activities on campus, and gathering in cafes. Participatory observation was carried out to be able to explore the subject's behavior more deeply in a natural way to read gestures semiotically. In-depth interviews were then conducted to explore and confirm the behaviors that emerged in relation to people pleasing and *sungkan*. In addition, the researcher also triangulated the data by

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reviewing the views of the subjects' close friends and other documents, especially text conversations for textual interpretation.

As a reflexive stance, the majority of researchers have a Javanese cultural background, which helps explain Javanese culture more contextually from the perspective of native people. There is a researcher from a non-Javanese background (more precisely, Sundanese) who can be useful for reflecting on findings across cultures. The presence of non-Javanese researchers also ensures minimal bias, allowing researchers to better control their assumptions when interpreting findings that could lead to biased interpretations.

Anthropological interpretation is carried out through hermeneutic analysis of the narratives and interactions demonstrated by the participant/subject. Verbal and nonverbal gestures during observation and interviews are not only analyzed psychologically, but also through semiotic analysis of cultural symbols, especially in *basa alus, wedi, isin*, and *sungkan,* with indications of polite behavior and prioritizing others.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the observation and interview results, the study uncovered several key aspects of the subject's people-pleasing behavior. First, the subject reported extensive firsthand experiences of people-pleasing tendencies in various social contexts. These behaviors appeared deeply influenced by familial cultural norms and also a family background that emphasized compliance and social harmony in the Javanese context, especially *sungkan, isin,* and *wedi*. The subject demonstrated complex attitudes toward family members, simultaneously expressing devotion while feeling constrained by expectations. Notably, the research revealed an emerging self-awareness of these patterns, though this realization came gradually over time. Interestingly, people in the subject's social environment had also noticed these behavioral tendencies, often reinforcing them through implicit expectations. Most significantly, the subject articulated multiple impacts of this people-pleasing behavior, particularly regarding emotional exhaustion and compromised personal boundaries. These findings collectively illustrate the habitus of how people-pleasing manifests as an interconnected pattern of learned behaviors from javanese norm *(sungkan, wedi,* and *isin*), social reinforcement, and personal consequences.

1. The Habitus of People-Pleasing Behavior

The subject experienced various experiences in his life that shaped her habitus of people-pleasing behavior. The habitus seen in the subject's behavior is subtle in social interactions. This is formed based on the aspect of affection of *wedi*, which is formed from the subject's experiences.

Within friendships, the subject demonstrates several experiences that indicate people-pleasing tendencies. The subject struggles to refuse requests for help from friends. This occurs because the subject feels compelled to provide clear justifications when declining assistance.

The subject shows *wedi* when she wants to refuse his friend's request. This happens because the subject feels that she does not have the authority and power to refuse. On the other hand, there are also friends of the subject who are more popular than her. Additionally, the subject must formulate reasons that will not hurt the friend's feelings as a manifestation of *basa alus*. However, these explanations are not fabricated but rather truthful. The subject does not wish to deceive friends regarding the reasons for refusal. Yet, the subject also cannot simply decline by stating an unwillingness to help.

> "*There's this feeling like I just can't say no, like typing it out feels bad. I mean, I could say no, but I end up just doing it anyway, especially if it's not a big deal….*"
> "*….But when I do say no, I don't wanna lie — like, I won't be like, 'Oh I can't pick you up 'cause I have to go somewhere,' when that's not true. So if I'm gonna say no, I have to come up with a reason that doesn't hurt their feelings. Like, it can't just be 'I don't want to,' there has to be a reason, but not a lie.*"

The subject demonstrates genuine willingness when offering help voluntarily. However, the subject occasionally lacks sincerity when providing assistance in response to direct requests. Despite this insincerity, the subject ultimately complies and offers the requested help. The subject shows an effort to comply with the norms of Javanese culture, namely *gotong royong* (mutual assistance), even though deep down she finds it difficult to help. Although it appears natural, the behavior exhibited by the subjects is actually a form of cultural production in Java that encourages mutual cooperation as a cultural aspect of habitus.

> "*...uh, sometimes when people ask me for help, it's not really from the heart, like I'm not doing it sincerely — but I still go ahead and do it anyway.*"

The subject exhibits significant concern regarding others' perceptions. A fear of being negatively judged compels the subject to comply with assistance requests despite personal reluctance. This compliance persists primarily due to apprehension about becoming subject to negative discourse and acquiring an unfavorable reputation. This fear indicates a sense of *wedi*, or apprehension, about being judged by others when one fails to meet their expectations. This is related to the Javanese cultural norm that emphasizes the behavior of *gotong royong*.

"The point is, basically, I don't wanna be seen in a bad light by other people. Like, I dunno? Yeah, like when I say no to helping out…"

"…it's like, I'd rather just do something nice — it doesn't have to be giving help specifically, but just anything nice, like saying hi to someone or stuff like that — so that, you know, my self-branding doesn't come off negative."

The subject actively attempts to overcome their people-pleasing tendencies by practicing assertive communication to express her true intentions. The subject verbally stated assertive communication as her strategy. However, in the context of Javanese society, what the subject demonstrated was the delivery of messages in a *basa alus* with an emphasis on *sungkan* while still conveying the points of the message and the feelings expressed. The subject endeavors to articulate refusals by providing clear justifications, yet over time, experiences growing confusion regarding what additional reasons might be presented to substantiate their rejections.

"... yeah, assertive communication... I actually tried to say no once, but honestly, I was just confused about what excuse to use to say no."

The subject occasionally resorts to providing false pretexts when refusing requests. This strategy emerges when the subject seeks to avoid compliance but lacks legitimate justifications. Although employing dishonest reasoning, the subject experiences pride in overcoming their characteristic inability to refuse. Recently, the subject has demonstrated increasing success in rejecting undesirable requests.

"Yeah, and in the end, I lied, but that was the effort I made, and I'm kinda... proud of it, even though it's not a big deal, you know."

"But recently, I've actually been able to say no because of course in college."

2. Symbolic Power and Capital in the Javanese Family

The subject received parental teachings regarding interpersonal ethics that remain internalized to this day. According to the subject's account, both parents were religious figures serving as role models for many, which consequently required the subject to exemplify proper behavior. Among these teachings was the practice of bowing when passing by elders. Another example included the use of polite language.

In the Javanese society, people who have power and high status in the hierarchy have the authority to control the behavior of others. This status is considered an important capital for Javanese people. In this case, the father in a Javanese family has a high status and therefore has the power to control his children. Moreover, the participant's father is a religious leader who belongs to the *priyayi* class. With this identity and status, it is important for the father to control his child's (the participant's) behavior to demonstrate politeness in both gestures and speech (*basa*).

"So, both of my parents are religious leaders, so people look up to them. And as their child, I also have to set a good example, and when I meet those people, I have to be respectful. So, I was taught that when you pass by someone older, you should bow. That's really a Javanese thing, right? And also how to use polite language, and that's stuck with me until now."

The subject was taught to prioritize others, especially elders and guests. When failing to do so, the subject received reprimands from their parents. The subject feels *sungkan* due to this habitual practice of putting others first. This is taught to children in Javanese culture as a way of showing respect for others. Especially in relationships with people who are not close family members, it is important to maintain the principle of *ngerti isin*. When a child does not obey this principle, they will be reprimanded or scolded by their parents for not showing shame (*isin*). This causes participants to appear shy when interacting with others, especially those they have just met. This is due to a fear (*wedi*) of not being accepted or liked by others.

On the other hand, parents also instill politeness in their children when interacting with others. This is demonstrated by emphasizing politeness in words and deeds and prioritizing the interests of others, especially when others are visiting. The ability of parents to reprimand and control their children's behavior is a dominant symbolic power seen in Javanese families.

"Of course, the most important thing is that parents should always come first. Even my dad's friends' kids, who are the same age as me, should be prioritized because they're guests, and that's something I've carried with me until now..."

"...but I remember once not prioritizing someone when I was getting food. Then, after everyone left, I got scolded. My dad's message was, since he's their spiritual leader, we're supposed to set an example. So if I can't set the example he taught me, that means I'm reflecting on that."

"...Lately, I've been reflecting on myself. I'm kind of overly shy with people, you know? I'm scared they'll get mad or not like me, and that's because I've always been taught to be aware of others, to be considerate, and to prioritize others."

3. Family Background

The subject's parents come from different regional backgrounds. The subject's father is Javanese, while the mother is Sundanese. The subject and their family live in a Javanese cultural environment. According to the subject, neither parental culture dominates their personal identity. This makes sense when the behavior exhibited by participants is influenced by Javanese cultural elements such as *sungkan*, *isin*, and *wedi*

> *"Generally, I have two parents and one older sibling, and thank God, they're all still alive. So, my mom is Sundanese, my dad is Javanese, and I'm a mix of all that. When it comes to culture, I don't really feel like I'm super Javanese, Sundanese, or Chinese, so I just use Indonesian every day..."*

Based on personality traits and parenting patterns, the subject's father was someone whose rules were difficult to challenge. Meanwhile, the subject viewed the mother as less protective than the father. However, the subject reported receiving indirect guidance from the mother. The father here also demonstrates the power he wields as the head of the family, which is a common characteristic in Javanese families.

> *"Yeah, so dad is hard to talk to. If he's being overprotective or has some rules, it's just something you can't argue with."*
> *"Umm, maybe mom is less strict than dad, because if I can't pick her up, she'll just say, 'You can use Grab (online transportation).' She's not as protective as dad, more relaxed, but honestly, I feel like I'm kind of guided by her, like if I'm friends with someone like this, or dress like that, but not directly, you know?"*

According to the subject, the mother was significantly stricter than the father and spoke more matter-of-factly in comparison. The subject admitted being closer to the father before entering junior high school, but later—from senior high school through university—the subject felt closer to the mother.

> *"Actually, Mom is even stricter than Dad, especially in daily life. Umm, what is it... I was actually closer to dad, even though he worked out of town. I connected more with him when I was younger, probably before I entered middle school. When I was in middle school, I felt distant from both of them. Then, during high school, college, and the pandemic, I felt closer to mom. But I feel like mom is colder than dad, you know? Like, when she talks, it's just straightforward. With dad, we could talk about anything, but with mom, it's not as open, you know?"*

Regarding the older brother, the subject admitted not having a close relationship with the sibling. The subject reported frequent conflicts with his brother, emphasizing that these quarrels were not merely playful interactions.

> *"We were never close; we always fought. I don't know why, but what I remember is that my brother and I always fought, and there was always something to argue about, like the remote or getting caught coming home late."*
> *"Yeah, really (angry). Because there was no laughing, at least for me, I don't know about him."*

4. The Subject Attitude towards Family

The subject does not maintain an exceptionally close relationship with the family. The subject's familial dynamics tend to be somewhat rigid. However, this does not prevent the subject from discussing problems related to people-pleasing tendencies, as the mother provides advice more frequently than the father.

> *"Yeah, because mom is more like the one giving advice, you know, while dad listens but it's like, whatever, he doesn't really respond to anything. But with dad, I can talk about anything, I can discuss topics beyond that."*

Furthermore, the subject's mother is more flexible and less protective compared to the father. The mother tends to guide rather than impose direct prohibitions or commands. This approach makes the subject feel more comfortable sharing concerns about their people-pleasing tendencies with their mother rather than their father.

This shows that even though fathers and mothers have authority over their children, they exercise it out of love, warmth, and concern for their children. In Javanese culture, this is called *trisna*, which is unconditional love from parents to their children in the form of guidance on what they should and should not do.

> *"...She's not as protective as dad, more free, but honestly, I feel like I'm kind of being guided by her, like with who I should hang out with, how I should dress, but not in a direct way, you know."*

On the other hand, the subject feels more comfortable confiding in their mother because the feedback provided by her father is perceived as insufficient. Additionally, the subject finds it easier to negotiate with her mother than with her father. The mother tends to be more permissive compared to the father. Therefore, the subject discusses matters with their father only when the topic is unrelated to personal issues they are experiencing.

"Yeah, because mom's more of the one who gives advice, you know? Like, dad listens, but it's more like, okay, whatever, he doesn't really respond. But with dad, I can go anywhere, talk about topics outside of that."

"Umm, the thing is, my dad and I don't really talk about negotiations much. We talk more about things like movies or whatever, things that aren't really important and don't relate to my life or his life. So, I've been negotiating with mom. But mom's not the easiest person to negotiate with. Maybe it's because mom is really logical in her thinking, and I'm not as logical, so I always lose when I argue with her. Or maybe it's just that mom's always right, and I always lose. So, I've been negotiating with mom, but negotiating with her isn't something easy."

The subject's relationship with the brother is also generally distant. The subject rarely confides in her brother about personal issues. Even when it comes to other topics, the subject tends to be reluctant to share. This is because the subject feels that the brother is not a suitable confidant due to his personality. Additionally, past experiences where the brother frequently reported the subject's behavior to the parents have made the subject hesitant to engage in more frequent conversations with him.

Once again, the power and authority of parents in culture are demonstrated here. The *wedi* experienced by participants arises from their concern that they will not be able to meet the expectations of their parents and social norms. Furthermore, there are rules regarding curfew, and in Javanese culture, there is a stigma attached to women who return home after curfew. The feeling of *wedi* that the parents will be angry at this behavior shows again that power here really influences the participants' behavior, which they end up bringing with them when interacting in social settings. They often think about other people's reactions and prioritize others as a manifestation of *sungkan*.

"I wouldn't say it's hesitation, I don't feel like, for example, saying sorry or anything like that. But maybe I feel... what is it? My feelings... back then, yeah, but not really hesitation, more like being scared that if I do something bad, it'll get reported or if I come home late, it'll get reported to my parents... Yeah, so I prefer not to engage at all rather than... getting reported or whatever, because it has happened before."

5. The Subject's Awareness of the Trait

The subject has actually realized their tendency to be a people-pleaser. This has been reflected in the fact that the subject often shares their problems with friends or their mother. As a result, the subject is making efforts to overcome this trait.

"Recently, I've been trying, one of the reasons being that friend I mentioned earlier, who indirectly made me realize things. And yeah, sometimes when my mom gives advice... when it's repeated, it sticks in my mind, so I've been trying to be more assertive."

6. Social Perceptions of the Behavior

The subject's mother and friends are recognized and concerned about the subject's tendency to avoid discomfort. In particular, the mother is the one who most frequently reminds the subject about this trait and encourages the subject to introspect on the subject's tendency to avoid conflict as a manifestation of *trisna*

"Umm, actually, that friend I mentioned earlier, they don't like the person who's been 'weighing me down.' There's another friend who's even more uncomfortable than I am, and they said this person tends to get pushed around because they're too uncomfortable. Then they told me, 'You remind me of another friend of mine, don't end up like that,' they said."

"Yeah, mostly, because I'm always reminded about it. Every time we talk... well, not every time we talk, but you get the idea."

"My mom isn't the type to directly remind me, but she asks me something, and then I end up reflecting on it. For example, like, 'Why did you agree to this or that?' And then eventually, my mom says 'See?'"

7. Impact Felt by the Subject

The subject is aware that the tendency to avoid discomfort and decline others' invitations has negative effects. The subject feels exploited by her friends because she is unable to refuse her friends' requests. Furthermore, the subject feels that the subject's personal free time is limited, which disrupts the rest time.

"When it comes to offering help or services, during the new student orientation in July and August, I was going back and forth to campus every day. On the day itself, it was at 5 AM. I once offered to help a friend by going together, because I like feeling useful. But over time, they started telling me to come to their place at specific times. If I think about it, I did offer, but eventually, they just used me and took advantage of my motorbike."

"One of the recent incidents happened in the organization, where there was an internship. Each staff member was assigned to plan an internship activity. I was assigned to arrange the LGD, which is usually done three days before the event. But because of other things, it kept getting delayed. Even though I reminded them three days in advance, they kept making excuses. They said their laptop was broken, but it was just another excuse. At that time, I was sick, but I had to

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sacrifice my time to handle their part. They did thank me, but in the group chat, they said that both of us worked on it, when in reality, it was all my work."

8. Habitus of People Pleasing within Sungkan

The findings of this study explain in detail how experiences and social systems can influence a person's behavior to the point of becoming habits. In line with these findings, Bourdieu (1977) explains that habitus can be formed through family structures, cultures, and experiences during education. Furthermore, Lizardo (2004) explains that habitus is formed from the integration of an individual's developmental, cognitive, and affective aspects. This is reflected in the findings that childhood experiences and the existence of a clear hierarchy between children and parents in parenting shape people-pleasing behavior, which is then contextualized in a culture of *sungkan*, given the importance of cultural capital in habitus (Bourdieu, 2013).

It is clear that the subject consistently allowed herself to be asked for help even though she did not want to. This behavior is colored by the inclusion of behaviors that are expected in Javanese society, such as prioritizing others, especially those with higher social status (Keeler, 1983). This is also evident when the subject's family instills the traits of *sungkan, wedi,* and *isin*. However, it should be noted that the family still teaches that helping others has its limits. This has not been fully applied by the subject. Thus, there is a connection between *sungkan* and people pleasing, but they are not entirely the same, especially in terms of personal boundaries. This aligns with the findings of Hinton et al. (2020), which indicate that people pleasers often comply with others' requests or always say "Yes" without considering their own boundaries in order to maintain social judgment. Additionally, the subject continues to make efforts to offer help or fulfill others' requests, even when the subject does not want to.

The subject has made efforts to express their feelings assertively. The subject tries to communicate a refusal when she does not want to participate. Thanks to these efforts, the subject has recently succeeded in rejecting unwanted invitations, which has made the subject feel proud. However, the subject still finds it difficult to do so because the subject needs to find a clear reason behind her refusal to avoid hurting others' feelings. This aligns with the explanation by Dasgupta et. al., (2012), which states that individuals who can communicate assertively are able to express their thoughts and feelings clearly without hurting others' feelings. However, Samfira (2020) adds that practicing assertive communication is still necessary because this communication style is not always applied by everyone.

In Javanese society, this shows an effort to use the most *basa alus* possible when refusing someone's request while still showing respect to the other person (Keeler, 1983). It is a big challenge when someone is required to balance the value of honesty with *basa alus* so as not to hurt other people's feelings. Of course, *basa kasar*, which is to the point and uses more freely chosen words, allows a person to express their feelings more freely. However, *basa kasar* tends to be used when dealing with enemies or rivals (Anderson, 1972), so it is certainly not appropriate to use it when a person in Javanese society wants to politely refuse a friend's request.

The feelings of *sungkan* and assertiveness are interconnected, particularly in the case experienced by the subject. This is evident from several behaviors, including the inability to express her feelings optimally and the hesitancy to refuse others' requests. When examined through the definitions of *sungkan* and assertiveness, both behaviors relate to these two concepts. According to Geertz (1961), *sungkan* is demonstrated through behavior that prioritizes others with respect, especially towards those who have a higher social status. *Sungkan* is also accompanied by respect and politeness towards someone superior (Hermawan & Loo, 2019). Additionally, *sungkan* is seen as an effort to avoid conflict and resolve issues quickly (Verdiana, 2021). On the other hand, Jurevičienè et al. (2012) explain that assertiveness is shown through the ability to express one's thoughts to others without offending their dignity or honor, with assertiveness also being related to social expressiveness.

It can be observed that the feeling of *sungkan* has an assertive basis. However, it is important to emphasize that *sungkan* has a key element that distinguishes it more clearly from general assertiveness. This element is the respect shown to others. Indeed, the concept of assertiveness also involves maintaining the dignity and honor of others. However, *sungkan* is more about showing respect and politeness to others, especially those with higher status, while assertiveness focuses more on preserving the dignity and honor of others while we disclose our opinion and feelings. Also, in the Javanese context, assertiveness can be seen as *basa alus*.

9. Family Cultural Background

The subject was taught to prioritize others, including guests, by the parents. When the subject failed to apply this teaching, the subject received a reprimand. In Javanese culture, there is an understanding of prioritizing the interests of guests by the host (Prakoso, 2019). As illustrated by Prakoso, the host invites the guest to begin eating, followed by a polite refusal from the guest as a symbol of *sungkan*. This practice is based on the concept of *undha-usuk* or *unggah-ungguh*. The subject was taught to bow when passing by someone older and to use polite language (Prakoso, 2019). Keeler (1983) defined this as *basa*. This teaching aligns with the finding that parents in Java emphasize respectful behavior, polite language, deference

towards elders, or other people who have a higher social status (Satrianingrum & Setyawati, 2021).

Parents in collectivist cultures tend to want to remain involved in their children's lives, and this also happens in Javanese culture. In Javanese culture, parents still seek to have an influence on their children's lives, even when the children have grown into adulthood (Geertz, 1983; Amelia, 2014). It is not only about wanting to influence, but parents in Javanese culture also feel a continued responsibility for their children's lives (Geertz, 1983; Amelia, 2014). Parents in Javanese culture apply the values of their culture to shape their children's character (Geertz, 1983; Magnis-Suseno, 1996; Amelia, 2014). In this case, the value being applied is *sungkan.* This also shows that the power possessed by parents in Javanese culture applies throughout life.

Strict and authoritarian parenting can have an impact on an individual. One of the consequences of authoritarian parenting is low self-esteem. A study by Pratama et al. (2014) reveals a negative correlation between authoritarian parenting styles and self-esteem. In this case, self-esteem is mentioned because it is related to social intelligence. Alfiasari et al. (2011) state that higher self-esteem will increase social intelligence. In social intelligence, there is an aspect of relationships with other individuals (Andriani & Listiyandini, 2017). Therefore, the power possessed by parents in Javanese culture needs to be balanced by *trisna* to fulfill their love for their children. The negative impacts described in previous cases occur because power is not accompanied by *trisna*. In addition, communication is often harsh, especially with a raised voice, threats, and insults. This will make children shy and insecure (Keeler, 1983).

The Javanese cultural parenting mentioned earlier are assumed to be a result of the habits acquired from the subject's family environment, which is rooted in Javanese culture. This assumption is based on the research by Andriani and Rachmawati (2022), which indicates that the surrounding environment shapes a person's cultural identity. According to Andriani and Rachmawati (2022), a child with parents from different ethnic backgrounds will build their identity through their surrounding environment.

The subject tended to be closer to the father before entering junior high school, despite the father's need to work out of town. This contrasts with the findings of Andriani and Rachmawati (2022), which suggest that maternal parenting tends to be more dominant than paternal parenting due to the father's limited involvement caused by working outside the region. However, the subject later became closer to the mother after entering senior high school. The subject explained that this shift occurred because she felt more comfortable sharing emotional experiences with the mother. This aligns with the research by Andriyani and Indrawati (2013), which states that as individuals grow older, mothers can become figures with whom they feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings, similar to a friend.

The subject's tendency to avoid confrontation or negotiation with the father is considered natural. This behavior stems from the strict control imposed to instill a sense of *sungkan* toward others, especially toward elders. Additionally, it reflects the authoritative role and power of the father in Javanese culture (Panuti, 2019). When taken to the extreme, such a pattern may contribute to the development of people-pleasing behavior. This aligns with the concept of a people pleaser, which includes difficulty in setting personal boundaries, excessive concern about others' opinions, and a strong sense of responsibility for too many people (Hinton et al., 2020).

This concept intersects with *sungkan*. However, an individual who possesses the trait of *sungkan* is generally more capable of setting boundaries between their own interests and those of others. Moreover, *sungkan* emphasizes showing respect toward others rather than complying with every demand or expectation (Sukarsih, 2021). In this case, the subject also demonstrates the trait of *nrima* when accepting decisions made by the father. The concept of *nrima* in Javanese culture refers to the attitude of willingly accepting whatever one receives (Amelia, 2014).

10. Power in Friendship within the Javanese Context

Power in social relationships often occurs, even in friendships such as those experienced by the subjects in this study. According to Fisker's (2004) relational model theory, friendships are classified as equality matching (EM) and communal sharing (CS) relationships at a higher level. EM refers to interpersonal relationships that emphasize reciprocity. In this relationship, there are still expectations from a person to get something in return. Therefore, this relationship usually occurs in friendships that are not very close, such as classmates or friends from the same batch. In CS relationships, a person does not expect reciprocity from others when doing good deeds or even when they are willing to sacrifice for their friends. This occurs in friendships that have reached the level of best friends because there is a sense of closeness and belongingness.

In the Javanese context, friendships cannot be explained by these two models alone. There is an aspect of authority from one party that has more power. In Fiske's (2004) relational model, this is called authority ranking, which usually occurs in formal groups with clear structures or groups with charismatic leaders. Anderson (1972) refers to this as politics in everyday life in Javanese society. The party with greater power will become the ruler in influencing the behavior of others and the ethics established in the relationship. A study by Olk and Gibbons (2010) supports this concept by showing that friendships are not always reciprocal; however, there is also an imbalance of power, with one individual holding more power within the friendship group. Gest (2001) explains

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that this can occur because of the popularity of one party in the friendship, so that the dynamics of the friendship tend to be centered on that one person.

The impact caused by this power imbalance depends on the person who has more power. If the person is understanding and has *alus* trait, they will build friendships based on trust and greater compassion (Körner & Altmann, 2025). However, if that person has a *kasar* trait, the friendship will cause symptoms of anxiety and depression to appear in the social interaction with less power (Schacter et al., 2023). This means that *wedi* felt by a person, including the subjects in this study, will intensify when they have less power. This also occurs when a person has a strong tendency to be a people pleaser and does not fight for their personal boundaries (Hinton et. al, 2020). This is because they will constantly say "yes" even though their heart says "no." This is different when someone holds the value of *sungkan* and remains assertive. The impact felt will not be negative, especially when they show assertive behavior in expressing their opinions and feelings.

D. CONCLUSIONS

This study reinforces how habitus is influenced by experience, cultural capital, and social systems. These three aspects are interrelated when a person's childhood experiences are influenced by the internalization of the socio-cultural system in Javanese society, which emphasizes hierarchy in the form of social status as symbolic capital, which then produces the typical behavior of Javanese people manifested in politeness and prioritizing others, such as *sungkan* and people pleasing. The trait of *sungkan* is not entirely equivalent to people-pleasing behavior. However, there are notable intersections between the two concepts. Generally, both involve prioritizing the rights or needs of others. The key distinction lies in the nature of *sungkan*, which is rooted in respect and politeness to those who have a higher social status or power, and it is accompanied by an awareness of personal boundaries through the elegant ways (*alus*). In contrast, people-pleasing can be seen as an excessive form of prioritizing others, where those boundaries are often neglected. In addition, another thing that is not found in people pleasers' behavior is the use of *basa alus* of conveying messages and feelings. When this is absent, the internalization of the values of *sungkan, wedi*, and *isin* can lead to people-pleasing behavior. The development of these traits is influenced by multiple factors, with childhood upbringing, particularly one shaped by cultural values, being the most prominent, especially in the Javanese context, such as prioritizing others (one aspect of *sungkan*). In this case, Javanese cultural values play a central role in shaping the subject's behavior. This study contributes to the integration of psychology and anthropology by showing that behavior is an expression of symbolic structures.

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