

## Egalitarian Essentialism: Why Egalitarian Women Opt for Binding Moral Foundations within the Family Structure

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### Abstract

This study explores the moral foundations upheld by Indonesian women within their household context, utilizing the Conjugal Moral Foundations Questionnaire (CMFQ)—a modified version of the Moral Foundations Questionnaire (MFQ) specifically tailored for the marital setting. The study reveals that Indonesian women generally prioritize traditional moral values, showing the highest preference for the foundations of care, loyalty, and sanctity. However, we identify a significant Moral Dissonance—a measurable gap between moral expectations and moral actions—particularly pronounced across the care, fairness, and authority foundations. This study argues that this dissonance is resolved through a cognitive mechanism termed Egalitarian Essentialism. This mechanism manifests in women's moral preference for distributive justice (a balance between rights/obligations and responsibilities) over commutative justice (pure equality), alongside their conditional recognition of male dominance (patriarchy) in household leadership. These findings offer critical insights into the moral complexity of women in the Indonesian household, serving as a vital basis for developing targeted programs and policies that support family well-being. Further research is necessary to track the temporal dynamics of marital moral relations and to explore justice preferences within the household more deeply.

**Keywords:** Egalitarian Essentialism, Indonesian Women's Household Morality, Moral Dissonance, Moral Foundations Theory (MFT), CMFQ

### Abstrak

Studi ini mengeksplorasi landasan moral yang dijunjung tinggi oleh perempuan Indonesia dalam konteks rumah tangga mereka, dengan menggunakan Kuesioner Landasan Moral Perkawinan (CMFQ)—versi modifikasi dari Kuesioner Landasan Moral (MFQ) yang secara khusus disesuaikan untuk lingkungan perkawinan. Studi ini mengungkapkan bahwa perempuan Indonesia umumnya memprioritaskan nilai-nilai moral tradisional, menunjukkan preferensi tertinggi untuk landasan kepedulian, loyalitas, dan kesucian. Namun, kami mengidentifikasi Disonansi Moral yang signifikan—kesenjangan terukur antara harapan moral dan tindakan moral—terutama yang menonjol pada landasan kepedulian, keadilan, dan otoritas. Studi ini berpendapat bahwa disonansi ini diselesaikan melalui mekanisme kognitif yang disebut Esensialisme Egaliter. Mekanisme ini termanifestasi dalam preferensi moral perempuan terhadap keadilan distributif (keseimbangan antara hak/kewajiban dan tanggung jawab) dibandingkan keadilan komutatif (kesetaraan murni), di samping pengakuan bersyarat mereka terhadap dominasi laki-laki (patriarki) dalam kepemimpinan rumah tangga. Temuan ini menawarkan wawasan penting tentang kompleksitas moral perempuan dalam rumah tangga Indonesia, yang berfungsi sebagai dasar penting untuk mengembangkan program dan kebijakan yang tepat sasaran guna mendukung kesejahteraan keluarga. Penelitian lebih lanjut diperlukan untuk melacak dinamika temporal hubungan moral perkawinan dan untuk mengeksplorasi preferensi keadilan dalam rumah tangga secara lebih mendalam.

**Kata kunci:** Esensialisme Egaliter, Moralitas Rumah Tangga Perempuan Indonesia, Disonansi Moral, Teori Landasan Moral (MFT), CMFQ

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## INTRODUCTION

Over the last few decades, the world has witnessed a significant shift in women's behaviors and roles within the household, a phenomenon initially observed in Western societies but now reaching

developing countries like Indonesia (Cherlin, 1992, 2004; Wilcox & Hawkins, 2024). This profound social change has normalized behaviors previously considered unconventional among women, encompassing: infidelity (Russell et al., 2013; Varma & Maheshwari, 2024; Xin & Hassan, 2020), female-perpetrated domestic violence (Bates et al., 2023; Dutton et al., 2014; Goldenson et al., 2014; McKeown et al., 2022), and the prioritization of career over traditional roles (Markel, 2016; Sen, 2004; van der Lippe, 2010). Furthermore, personal decisions regarding delayed pregnancy or childlessness (Kemkes-Grottenthaler, 2003; Mantaru et al., 2023; Shaw, 2011), outsourcing childcare to husbands or others (Compton & Pollak, 2014; Lasio et al., 2017; Salcedo, 2014), and divorce (Jaberi et al., 2022; Kulik & Klein, 2010; Parker et al., 2022), are becoming increasingly common within Indonesian society. These behavioral shifts inherently trigger fundamental questions regarding women's morality in the modern household context, specifically concerning the extent to which their freedom of action can be morally justified within the marital bond. Therefore, the issue of whether women are truly free and how these actions are morally construed demands rigorous academic scrutiny within the Indonesian cultural context. This study specifically addresses these questions by examining the moral foundations—particularly those related to care, loyalty, and sanctity—upheld by Indonesian women in their conjugal relationships.

Existing literature on moral psychology within the Indonesian context, although growing, exhibits three major shortcomings concerning the study of household morality. Much of the moral research relies on general, culturally neutral instruments, thus failing to capture the unique moral nuances and conflicts inherent in the marital context. Consequently, findings are often too broad and neglect the critical disparity between what individuals ideally expect (ideal morality) and what they actually practice (behavioral morality) within their homes. First, prior research tends to heavily focus on the Moral Foundations Theory (MFT) in the domains of politics, such as liberal vs. conservative (Graham, Haidt, et al., 2009; Smith et al., 2017; Weber & Federico, 2013), or gender ideology (Graham et al., 2009, 2013; Haidt, 2012), or simple gendered morality (e.g., women emphasizing care, fairness, and sanctity more) (Atari et al., 2020). This perspective insufficiently addresses morality specifically embedded in husband-wife relationships (conjugal morality). Second, existing studies on household justice in Indonesia tend to emphasize commutative justice (absolute role equality) but overlook women's strong preference for distributive justice (a balance of rights, obligations, and responsibilities) (Layte, 2019; Picanço et al., 2021; Trübner, 2022). Third, studies on domestic leadership generally only identify patriarchal structures without exploring women's conditional acceptance of the wife's leadership role in emergency situations (Baumgartner, 2020; W. Luo, 2012; Martinez et al., 2022). This limited focus leaves a significant lacuna in the understanding of household moral dynamics, particularly in explaining the conflict between traditional values and the practical realities of Indonesian women.

This study aims to address the identified literature gaps by establishing three primary targets focused on the moral dynamics of Indonesian women within the household. The specification of these goals is crucial for presenting findings that directly overcome the methodological and conceptual

weaknesses identified in previous research. Furthermore, these objectives are designed to ensure that the projected findings (e.g., the preference for distributive justice and the moral gap) can be verified through contextually collected empirical data. The first objective is to identify the most dominant moral foundations upheld by Indonesian women in their households (hypothesizing a greater emphasis on care, loyalty, and sanctity), utilizing the CMFQ instrument. The second objective is to analyze the significant gap between moral expectations and moral actions among women in the household, specifically across the care, fairness, and authority dimensions. The third objective is to elucidate women's preferences regarding the type of justice (distributive vs. commutative) and the extent to which a wife's leadership in certain situations is conditionally accepted—an aspect neglected by previous studies. Consequently, this study will provide a more nuanced and contextual description of the moral foundations of Indonesian women, moving beyond the general MFT framework.

To achieve these goals, this research proposes a central concept: Moral Dissonance, defined as a significant cognitive clash between upheld moral idealism (Expectation) and structural, practical, or cultural demands (Action) requiring compromise (Burton & Vu, 2021; Majstorović & Vidaković, 2020; Weder et al., 2020). This internal conflict between ideal moral values and adherence to the social order or household needs is what distinguishes our findings. This dissonance is empirically observed in our CMFQ findings through the following pattern: First, Indonesian women's moral expectations tend to be very high on traditional moral foundations (Care, Loyalty, Sanctity). Second, this ideal expectation clashes with the reality of treatment and structural demands of a household dominated by the patriarchal system on the Authority foundation and a priority on distributive justice on the Fairness foundation. Third, this clash between Expectation (Husband to Wife/H to W) and Action (Wife to Husband/W to H) is what causes a significant expectation-action gap measurable on the Care, Fairness, and Authority foundations. By positioning Moral Dissonance as the central concept, we offer a theoretical contribution by dissecting how women negotiate this dissonance, which will be the primary focus of the analysis and discussion of the findings in the Results and Discussion sections.

## **METHOD**

The primary unit of analysis in this study comprised 223 Indonesian female participants (100%), consisting of married women (57%) and unmarried women (43%), recruited across Indonesia. This sample selection aimed to capture a broad spectrum of women's views on household morality, regardless of their current marital status, focusing on the productive age range (25–50 years). A significant majority of participants (64%) self-identified with a patriarchal ideology, a crucial finding that suggests a potential predisposition toward traditional gender dynamics within the household (Bussell, 2021; Pease, 2021; Ugalde, 2023). The political ideology distribution among respondents also varied, with a dominance of moderate ideology (56%), followed by conservative (37%), and liberal (7%). Participants demonstrated diverse educational, occupational, and ideological backgrounds, which supports the interpretation of a wide spectrum of moral psychology. The inclusion criteria were women in the

productive age range (25–50 years) who provided complete responses to the online questionnaire, without restrictions based on marital status.

This research employed a descriptive and correlational quantitative research design using a survey approach (Le Deuff, 2018; McBeath, 2020). This design was chosen for its effectiveness in identifying the most dominant moral foundations among participants and analyzing the observed correlative relationships between variables. The correlational design was necessary to test the relationship between variables that cannot be experimentally manipulated, such as ideology and moral foundations, and the gap variable. To measure the internal consistency of the CMFQ instrument, a reliability test was performed, yielding a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient ( $\alpha = 0.88$ ). Furthermore, construct validity was assessed using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin statistic ( $KMO = 0.82$ ) and a significant Bartlett's Test of Sphericity ( $p < 0.001$ ), ensuring that each dimension of morality was appropriately measured.

The primary data source for this study was the primary data collected directly from female respondents through a structured questionnaire. Primary data is essential for obtaining direct measurements of subjective and contextual moral perceptions and standards within the household. The collected data must reflect the respondents' personal views on their moral standards regarding the husband's treatment towards the wife (H to W) and, conversely, the wife's treatment towards the husband (W to H), which is not available in secondary data. The main instrument used was the Conjugal Moral Foundations Questionnaire (CMFQ), specifically adapted from the standard Moral Foundations Questionnaire (MFQ) (Graham et al., 2009). This questionnaire was designed to differentiate between H to W and W to H morality, such as on the Sanctity foundation: the statement "If a husband commits adultery, he defiles the sanctity of marriage" (H to W) was confronted with "A wife who commits adultery will ruin the marriage" (W to H). Demographic data, including age, marital status, and socio-economic background, were also collected as control and descriptive variables.

Data collection utilized an online survey via an encrypted platform to ensure confidentiality and national geographic reach across Indonesia. The online method was chosen because the subject discussed is sensitive and personal, where the anonymity offered by online surveys can enhance the honesty and quality of respondent responses. Moreover, this technique allowed for time and cost efficiency in reaching a scattered sample population in urban and semi-urban areas throughout Indonesia. Prior to mass distribution, the questionnaire underwent pilot testing with 50 female respondents outside the final sample to identify any ambiguities or issues in the language comprehension and CMFQ instructions. Respondents were instructed to complete two similar sets of questions: one measuring the moral expectations of the husband towards the wife and the second measuring the moral expectations of the wife towards the husband. The collected data was then imported and cleaned of anomalies (e.g., incomplete data or excessively fast completion times) before statistical analysis.

Data analysis was conducted in three main stages, utilizing Microsoft Excel software for descriptive and correlational statistical calculations. The focus on associative analysis mitigated the software's limitations, enabling the explanation of relationships between variables without asserting structural causality. The first stage involved descriptive analysis to identify the most dominant moral foundations (CMFQ) among participants by examining the highest mean and standard deviation values. The second stage involved calculating the gap variable using the formula for the absolute score difference between the moral score of the husband towards the wife (H to W) and the moral score of the wife towards the husband (W to H) for each moral foundation. The third stage was Pearson's correlation analysis to test the strength and direction of the relationship between the dominant moral foundation mean scores and the magnitude of the calculated gap variable.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Dominant Morality of Women in the Household

The binding foundations of morality, specifically Sanctity, Loyalty, and Authority, were identified as the highest moral priorities among Indonesian female participants. This high moral preference for binding foundations suggests that, for women, issues of family cohesion and the sacredness of the institution are significantly more important than individual justice concerns. Empirically, the high values place the group-oriented dimension of morality as the principal basis for domestic moral decision-making. First, the three foundations with the highest mean scores (derived from Table 1) are Sanctity (M: 4.74), Authority (M: 4.74), and Loyalty (M: 4.62), all of which are binding foundations. Second, the Care Foundation (M: 4.59), while high, ranks fourth, confirming that traditional and commitment values (binding) are more prominent than Care (individualizing). Third, Fairness is ranked lowest (M: 4.35), demonstrating that demands for role equality are not the main moral driver among the sample. Overall, the women's moral framework is deeply rooted in values that ensure household cohesion, tradition, and order.

Tabel 1. Statistik Deskriptif Rinci Landasan Moral (CMFQ) pada Tingkat Item (N=223)

| Moral Foundation | Code  | Items   | Score (M) | Score (M [SD]) |
|------------------|-------|---|-----------|----------------|
| Care             | HtoW1 | In the household, a husband must treat his wife with love and affection.                | 4.91      | 4.59 (0.40)    |
|                  | WtoH1 | In the household, a wife should be attentive and loving towards her husband.            | 4.86      |                |
|                  | HtoW2 | Domestic violence is a crime.   | 4.83      |                |
|                  | WtoH2 | If domestic violence by the husband is evil, then provocation by the wife is also evil. | 3.75      |                |
|                  | HtoW3 | Harming/making the wife miserable is evil.  | 4.74      |                |
|                  | WtoH3 | Refusing to serve the husband's needs is equivalent to hurting him.                     | 4.29      |                |
|                  | HtoW4 | A husband must pay attention to the wife's needs, interests, and desires.               | 4.78      |                |

|                  |       |   |      |                |
|------------------|-------|---|------|----------------|
|                  | WtoH4 | A wife should serve the husband's needs, interests, and desires.  | 4.57 |                |
| <b>Fairness</b>  | HtoW1 | The extent of a husband's/wife's authority must be balanced with the extent of their responsibility.                                  | 4.44 | 4.35<br>(0.29) |
|                  | WtoH1 | The status of husband and wife in the household must be equal (egalitarian).  | 4.06 |                |
|                  | HtoW2 | The rights and authority of husband and wife must be balanced with the obligations and responsibilities they bear.                    | 4.52 |                |
|                  | WtoH2 | A wife has the same rights and obligations as her husband in all matters.   | 3.99 |                |
|                  | HtoW3 | A husband who is unfair or tyrannical towards his wife is an insolent husband.  | 4.75 |                |
|                  | WtoH3 | If a husband has sacrificed much for his wife but she does not reciprocate, then she is a tyrannical wife.                            | 4.34 |                |
| <b>Loyalty</b>   | HtoW1 | A husband must be faithful to his wife  | 4.91 | 4.62<br>(0.32) |
|                  | WtoH1 | A wife must be faithful to her husband.   | 4.89 |                |
|                  | HtoW2 | A husband who divides love (e.g., cheats) is not a faithful husband.  | 4.74 |                |
|                  | WtoH2 | A wife who divides love (e.g., cheats) is not a faithful wife.  | 4.75 |                |
|                  | HtoW3 | If the household is no longer comfortable, the husband should still maintain the household.   | 4.29 |                |
|                  | WtoH3 | If the household is no longer comfortable, the WIFE should still maintain the household.  | 4.16 |                |
| <b>Authority</b> | HtoW1 | A husband must be capable of being a leader for his wife.   | 4.87 | 4.74<br>(0.21) |
|                  | WtoH1 | If necessary, in certain situations and conditions (emergency or other reasons), the wife can become the head of the family (leader). | 4.32 |                |
|                  | HtoW2 | The husband is the family leader.   | 4.83 |                |
|                  | WtoH2 | The wife respects the husband's leadership in the household.  | 4.79 |                |
|                  | HtoW3 | In the household, the husband must respect the wife in carrying out her roles, functions, and authority.                              | 4.81 |                |
|                  | WtoH3 | The wife must respect the husband's leadership in the household.  | 4.80 |                |
| <b>Sanctity</b>  | HtoW1 | If a husband commits adultery, he defiles the sanctity of marriage.   | 4.71 | 4.74<br>(0.14) |
|                  | WtoH1 | A wife who commits adultery will ruin the marriage.   | 4.76 |                |
|                  | HtoW2 | The wife should not forgive if her husband commits adultery.  | 4.59 |                |
|                  | wtoH2 | If a wife commits adultery, it is an unforgivable act for the husband.  | 4.59 |                |
|                  | HtoW3 | A husband's sexual activity must only occur within the marriage.  | 4.91 |                |
|                  | WtoH3 | A child born to the wife is the husband's biological child (not an illegitimate child/child from adultery).                           | 4.86 |                |

The exceedingly high moral priority on these binding dimensions implies that women view domestic morality through a cohesive lens: how behavior can maintain the integrity of the household, an orientation that contrasts with Western idealism. This emphasis on Sanctity and Loyalty is functionally designed to tolerate certain moral discrepancies to prevent marital breakdown, positioning

these foundations as the primary moral gatekeepers. This cohesive orientation acts as a self-sacrificing mechanism, where individual interests like justice and equality can be set aside for the sake of the collective harmony of the household. First, the mean score for the Sanctity foundation (4.74) affirms the absolute value placed on the integrity and sacredness of the marriage institution. Second, the similarly high Loyalty score (4.62) indicates a moral commitment to remain in the marital bond despite minor discomforts. Conversely, Fairness ranks last with a mean of 4.35, indicating that demands for role equality are not the primary priority in this domestic moral context. Therefore, the women's moral framework functions as an internal defense system to maintain marital integrity, even at the expense of individual justice claims.

The detailed item-level findings reveal three crucial patterns regarding the moral standards set by women in the household, all of which are oriented towards partner commitment and marital cohesion. The most idealistic and absolute moral standards (scores approaching 5.0) consistently appear in the demands placed on the husband's behavior (H to W) that directly relate to the binding foundations. This pattern shows that even though the average binding foundation scores are high, there are significant differences in the intensity of moral standards at the item level, especially regarding fidelity and commitment. First, the highest score on the Sanctity Foundation reaches 4.91 on the item "A husband's sexual activity must only occur within the marriage" (H to W), affirming that sexual fidelity is the absolute highest moral standard (See Table 1). Second, the Loyalty score also reaches 4.91 on the item "A husband must be faithful to his wife" (H to W), showing that the expectation for partner fidelity is at an uncompromising ideal level (See Table 1). Third, a moral asymmetry exists on the Care foundation, where the item "In the household, a husband must treat his wife with love and affection" (H to W, 4.91) is significantly higher than the item "Refusing to serve the husband's needs is equivalent to hurting him" (W to H, 4.29) (See Table 1). This item-level data analysis definitively confirms that women's moral demands center on marital cohesion and impose highly idealistic standards on their partner's behavior.

### **Moral Gap: Dissonance Between Expectation and Treatment**

The moral gap between the expected treatment from Husband to Wife (H to W) and the expected treatment from Wife to Husband (W to H) indicates a significant potential for psychological conflict, particularly within the Authority and Fairness dimensions. This gap suggests that the moral standards women set for their husbands are higher and more idealistic compared to the standards they apply to themselves toward their husbands in daily practice. The largest psychological conflict is revealed in items related to role equality (Fairness) and absolute leadership (Authority), demanding behavioral adjustments. First, the total mean score for the Authority H to W foundation (4.74) exhibits the largest difference compared to Authority W to H (4.32), yielding the biggest overall gap. Second, the Fairness H to W foundation (4.35) and Fairness W to H (3.99) also show a significant gap, affirming the discrepancy between the expectation of justice and real-world actions. Third, in general, the average moral expectation score (H to W) across all foundations (M 4.74) is consistently higher than the moral

action score (W to H) (M 4.29). Therefore, this data validates the study's argument that there is a gulf between what ought to be and what is in women's domestic morality.

Table 2. Moral Gap Between Husband-to-Wife (H to W) and Wife-to-Husband (W to H): Women's Perspective in the Household (N=223)

| <b>Moral Foundation</b> | <b>Statement Description</b>                    | <b>Mean H to W</b> | <b>Mean W to H</b> | <b>t-Statistic</b> | <b>df</b> | <b>P-value (2-tailed)</b> | <b>Cohen's d</b> |
|-------------------------|---|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|-----------|---------------------------|------------------|
| <b>Care</b>             | Loving Treatment (Husband vs Wife)              | 4.91               | 4.86               | 2.073              | 222       | 0.039                     | 0.195            |
|                         | Tolerance for Violence                          | 4.83               | 3.75               | 10.327             | 222       | 1.14E-20                  | 0.692            |
|                         | Obligation to Serve vs. Care for Partner        | 4.74               | 4.29               | 6.744              | 222       | 1.31E-10                  | 0.303            |
| <b>Fairness</b>         | Emotional Well-being (Balance)                  | 4.78               | 4.57               | 4.261              | 222       | 3.00E-05                  | 0.187            |
|                         | Justice in Allocation of Rights and Obligations | 4.44               | 4.06               | 4.693              | 222       | 4.71E-06                  | 0.285            |
|                         | Role/Responsibility Equality                    | 4.52               | 3.99               | 6.446              | 222       | 7.04E-10                  | 0.370            |
| <b>Loyalty</b>          | Respecting Partner's Rights and Authority       | 4.75               | 4.34               | 6.188              | 222       | 2.90E-09                  | 0.314            |
|                         | Demand for Absolute Fidelity                    | 4.91               | 4.89               | 0.780              | 222       | 0.436                     | 0.015            |
|                         | Financial Sacrifice for the Family              | 4.74               | 4.75               | -0.282             | 222       | 0.778                     | -0.004           |
| <b>Authority</b>        | Obligation to Maintain the Household            | 4.29               | 4.16               | 2.965              | 222       | 0.003                     | 0.137            |
|                         | Absolute vs. Conditional Leadership             | 4.87               | 4.80               | 2.196              | 222       | 0.029                     | 0.115            |
|                         | Husband vs. Wife Leadership Hierarchy           | 4.81               | 4.32               | 6.748              | 222       | 1.28E-10                  | 0.291            |
| <b>Sanctity</b>         | Respecting Partner's Roles and Authority        | 4.83               | 4.79               | 1.173              | 222       | 0.242                     | 0.020            |
|                         | Adultery Defiles Sacredness                     | 4.71               | 4.76               | -1.253             | 222       | 0.212                     | -0.065           |
|                         | Forgiveness of Adultery (Unforgivable)          | 4.59               | 4.59               | 0.100              | 222       | 0.920                     | 0.003            |
|                         | Sexual Activity Only Within Marriage            | 4.91               | 4.86               | 1.671              | 222       | 0.096                     | 0.068            |

This significant distance between the ideal demands (H to W) and moral implementation (W to H) can be explained as a compromise mechanism triggered by the high binding moral foundations. Women tend to sacrifice their demands for justice and role equality to maintain a stable household structure, where Loyalty and Sanctity serve as psychological justifications. This mechanism operates through rationalization, allowing women to consciously tolerate inequality in daily roles for the sake of achieving a morally superior value: marital integrity. First, the high preference for Loyalty (M 4.62) and Sanctity (M 4.74) provides a strong moral justification framework for maintaining the bond, even at the cost of equality. Second, the largest moral gaps occur in Authority and Fairness (Finding II), which are notably the foundations that demand the most practical, daily behavioral changes. Third, this

compromise results in the acceptance of Distributive Justice (Finding III) as a middle ground, rather than demanding Commutative Justice, which would threaten marital cohesion. This psychological conflict is not merely a failure of consistency but a logical consequence of conflicting moral priorities, where the urgency to preserve marital integrity overrides the drive for justice.

Key findings from the item comparison reveal three major patterns that explain this moral gap conflict at the operational level, predominantly visible in the Fairness, Authority, and Care dimensions. These patterns consistently show that women hold highly idealistic standards when evaluating their partner's behavior (H to W) but become more realistic and permissive regarding their own behavior (W to H). This score disparity proves that the compromise mechanism specifically operates on issues of roles, leadership, and tolerance for domestic conflict. First, the significant Fairness Gap is evident from the difference between Role/Responsibility Equality (H to W, 4.52) and (W to H, 3.99), statistically proven in Table 2 (Fairness:  $t=6.446$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $d=0.370$ ), indicating an expectation of distributive justice that does not translate into a demand for absolute equality. Second, the sharp Authority Gap occurs between Husband vs. Wife Leadership Hierarchy (H to W, 4.81) and (W to H, 4.32), statistically proven in Table 2 (Authority:  $t=6.748$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $d=0.291$ ), confirming that while conditional leadership is accepted, the patriarchal hierarchy remains the ideal standard. Third, the Care Gap emerges from the comparison of the Domestic Violence item: Tolerance for Violence (KDRT) (H to W, 4.83) is much higher than (W to H, 3.75), which is the statistically largest gap (Table 2, Care:  $t=10.327$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $d=0.692$ ). This moral gap analysis concludes that the difference between ideal standards and pragmatic standards is women's adaptive strategy to maintain a balance between ideal demands and household realities.

### **Justice Preference and Leadership Morality**

The paired-samples t-test results statistically validate definitively that women's preference for Distributive Justice is significantly higher than for Commutative Justice. This finding explicitly challenges the tendency of Western literature to focus on absolute role equality (Commutative) as the benchmark for household justice in Indonesia. The consistency of results across the two pairs of tested items provides a strong empirical basis for concluding that Distributive Justice is the dominant moral framework for women. First, Distributive Item 1 (M 4.44) is significantly higher than Commutative Item 1 (M 4.06), evidenced by a t-Statistic of 4.69 and a p-value of  $< 0.001$  (Table 3). Second, the same pattern is repeated in the second item pair, where Distributive Item 2 (M 4.52) also significantly surpasses Commutative Item 2 (M 3.99), with a t-Statistic of 6.44 ( $p < 0.001$ ) (Table 3). Third, the consistent score difference in both item pairs indicates that women prefer the principle of allocating rights based on responsibility rather than the principle of absolute equality. Therefore, this data directly fills a gap in previous literature that only focused on commutative justice, while simultaneously validating the research hypothesis.

Table 3. T-Test Results for Distributive and Commutative Justice

| <b>Distributive Justice (DJ) Items (E)</b>  | <b>Commutative Justice (CJ) Items (A)</b>                                   | <b>DJ Score (Mean ± SD)</b> | <b>CJ Score (Mean ± SD)</b> | <b>t-Statistic</b> | <b>P(T&lt;=t) two-tail</b> |
|---|---|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------|
| The extent of a husband's/wife's authority must be balanced with the extent of their responsibility               | The status of husband and wife in the household must be equal (egalitarian) | 4.44 ± 0.97                 | 4.06 ± 1.34                 | -4.69              | 4.71E-06                   |
| The rights and authority of husband and wife must be balanced with the obligations and responsibilities they bear | A wife has the same rights and obligations as her husband in all matters    | 4.52 ± 0.89                 | 3.99 ± 1.37                 | -6.45              | 7.04E-10                   |

Table 4. T-Test Results for Household Leadership Concepts

| <b>Patriarch Item (E)</b>                                | <b>Egalitarian Item (A)</b>  | <b>Patriarch Score (Mean ± SD)</b> | <b>Egalitarian Score (Mean ± SD)</b> | <b>t-Statistic</b> | <b>P(T&lt;=t) two-tail</b> |
|--|--|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------|
| A husband must be capable of being a leader for his wife | If necessary; in certain situations and conditions (emergency or other reasons), the wife can become the head of the family (leader) | 4.87 ± 0.41                        | 4.32 ± 1.11                          | 6.86               | 6.93E-11                   |

This high preference for Distributive Justice must be understood as a strategic moral rationalization mechanism, not merely an indifference to equality. By choosing Distributive Justice, women can meet the moral demands of Loyalty and Care (Finding I) without having to achieve rigid absolute role equality, as the priority is the justice of outcome (family well-being) rather than the equality of process. This concept allows women to accept traditional role divisions as long as the contributions and responsibilities borne lead to subjectively fair justice and support the collective goal. First, Distributive Justice provides moral justification for the observed Fairness Gap (Finding II), as role inequality becomes acceptable if it results in a just integrity. Second, the emphasis on "the extent of responsibility" in Distributive Justice aligns with the high values of Loyalty and Sanctity that demand sacrifice for the marital bond. Third, this preference allows women to continue valuing the Care foundation with a focus on collective (family) well-being, rather than just individual (wife's) needs. Therefore, Distributive Justice functions as a critical counterbalance that mitigates the conflict caused by the Fairness Gap (Finding II), serving as an adaptive moral strategy.

Three main tendency patterns emerge from the analysis of authority and justice, defining the adaptive nature of women's domestic morality. These patterns affirm that although women uphold an ideal hierarchical structure, they also maintain the ability to activate the wife's leadership role as a situational and emergency function. The combination of Distributive Justice and Conditional Authority proves that domestic morality is flexible and functional, designed to support the continuity of the

household above rigid role dogma. First, the paired-samples t-test on the concept of leadership shows that the expectation of Patriarchal leadership (H to W, M 4.87) is significantly higher than the acceptance of Egalitarian/Conditional leadership (W to H, M 4.32), statistically proven with  $t=6.86$  ( $p < 0.001$ ) (Table 4). Second, the significant acceptance of Conditional Leadership (M 4.32) shows that women view authority as a functional resource that can be activated in crisis situations (emergency), rather than as a static gender role, consistent with the W to H item in Table 4. Third, all findings indicate that Distributive Justice (Table 3) and Conditional Authority (Table 4) collectively create space for women to act freely without violating the moral cohesion of the household bond. Overall, Indonesian women manage moral complexity by holding onto cohesive foundations (Loyalty, Sanctity) projected through the functional mechanisms of Distributive Justice and Conditional Authority.

The study reveals a significant and complex moral dissonance in the domestic ethics of Indonesian women, (Burton & Vu, 2021; Majstorović & Vidaković, 2020; Te Brake & Nauta, 2022), a tension between traditional and modern values. This complexity is rooted in an internal conflict driven by high expectations for individual justice (Care and Fairness) against the behavioral priority given to Binding Foundations to maintain marital stability. (Clark et al., 2017; Garvey & Ford, 2014). This dissonance results in a unique moral configuration that necessitates the development of new theoretical frameworks to explain how women navigate their obligations. (Alamrani, 2021; Davis & Love, 2018; Kochak, 2022). First, the data indicates that respondents' moral preferences are dominated by Binding Foundations (Loyalty, Authority, Sanctity), confirming their strong support for family cohesion. Second, a critical finding is the significant moral gap between Expectations (E) and Actions (A), particularly in the Care and Fairness foundations. Third, justice preferences lean towards Distributive Justice and a conditional acceptance of the wife's egalitarian role, indicating the emergence of the Egalitarian Essentialism ideology. Therefore, these findings serve as a foundation for an in-depth analysis of how Indonesian women balance individual and social moral demands within the household.

The moral configuration of Indonesian women in the household is characterized by a structural blend of traditional cohesive values and the cognitive manifestation of individual demands for equality, as revealed by the Conjugal Moral Foundations Questionnaire (CMFQ). This blend creates a hybrid moral system where Binding Foundations provide the normative behavioral framework, while Individualizing Foundations serve as ideal standards for justice expectations (Holy-Luczaj & Blok, 2021; Song & Yeung, 2024; Vernon, 2023). The conflict between the behavioral norm (Binding) and the expectation standard (Individualizing) is what produces moral dissonance (Te Brake & Nauta, 2022; Weder et al., 2020), specifically measured through the analysis of Expectation vs. Action Theory and justice preferences (Van Hootegem, 2022; Van Hootegem et al., 2020). First, quantitative findings show that respondents' moral preferences are heavily dominated by Binding Foundations, particularly Loyalty and Sanctity, reflecting strong support for traditional values and social cohesion within the family (MFT). Second, the Expectation vs. Action Theory analysis demonstrates a significant moral gap between Expectation (E) and Action (A), especially in the Care, Fairness, and Authority foundations,

confirming a compromise between individual demands and social norms. Third, the respondents' justice preferences consistently prioritize Distributive Justice—which emphasizes a balance of rights and obligations alongside responsibilities—over Commutative Justice, supporting the emergence of the Egalitarian Essentialism ideology. This unique configuration, which positions Binding Foundations as the action priority and Individualizing Foundations as the compromised expectation, becomes the main focus for understanding the moral adaptation mechanisms of Indonesian women.

The moral gap in Care and Fairness (Expectation vs. Action) is causally connected to the strong preference for Distributive Justice (Alneyadi et al., 2019; Hao et al., 2005; Y. Luo, 2007; Yadav, 2017). Within the Distributive Justice framework, roles and responsibilities are socially defined, where the husband has the obligation to provide (economic/Authority) and the wife has the obligation to nurture (domestic/Loyalty) (Gager & Hohmann-Marriott, 2006; Persad, 2018). This gap emerges because high binding moral standards (Malka et al., 2016; I. H. Smith et al., 2014; Vecina et al., 2022) compel women to compromise on the individualizing dimension to maintain the stability of the marital bond (Van Hootegem, 2022; Van Hootegem et al., 2020). First, Distributive Justice legitimizes the traditional division of roles, often demanding greater sacrifice from the wife, which directly conflicts with high individual expectations in the Care and Fairness foundations (Kim et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2023). Second, the moral gap arises because the wife's expectation for emotional support and fair treatment (Fairness/Care E) remains high, but the action or treatment she provides (Fairness/Care A) is adjusted or even reduced, as a manifestation of compromise for the sake of Binding Foundations (Motahari Nasab et al., 2022; Wong & Goodwin, 2009). Third, a moral gap in Authority is also visible, where the expectation of fair husband leadership (E) is not balanced by participatory action (A), which is tolerated to maintain the family hierarchy (Malka et al., 2016; I. H. Smith et al., 2014; Vecina et al., 2022). This connectivity indicates that binding moral foundations function as a psychological justifier (Expectation vs. Action Theory) that allows women to tolerate discrepancies in justice, provided the stability of the marital bond (Loyalty and Sanctity) is maintained.

These findings represent a significant divergence from global MFT literature, which often characterizes liberal populations (typically Western) as scoring high on Individualizing Foundations (Care/Fairness), while conservative/traditional populations prioritize Binding Foundations (Loyalty/Authority/Sanctity). This research reveals an integration where Indonesian women strategically uphold both categories. First, the study demonstrates this integration: Binding Foundations are prioritized for maintaining cohesion, but Individualizing Foundations (Care/Fairness) are sustained as high expectations (Alper & Yilmaz, 2020; Clark et al., 2017). Second, the core novelty of this research is the specific measurement of household morality (CMFQ), which successfully differentiated the preference for Distributive Justice versus Commutative Justice within the Fairness foundation (Klein, 2020; Porta, 2014; Roque, 2022). Third, by unveiling the Distributive Justice preference, this research identifies a specific moral mechanism women use to navigate justice, a mechanism not

explicitly defined in previous MFT household research, thereby bridging the ideologies of Patriarchy and Egalitarianism.

Respondents' moral preferences are a tangible reflection of the Egalitarian Essentialism culture (Cotter et al., 2011; Koo et al., 2020; Scarborough et al., 2019) within the Indonesian household context. Respondents view domestic morality through the lens of Distributive Justice, combining the desire for equality with traditional gender roles (Breger, 2014; Lomazzi, 2023). The core of this Egalitarian Essentialism is the conditional acceptance of equality, where rights and obligations are distributed fairly based on inherent functions rather than absolute equality. First, the acceptance of the wife's leadership in emergencies (WtoH1 Authority) indicates that respondents do not entirely reject equality (Egalitarianism), but they define justice and leadership through the lens of Gender Essentialism (Fine et al., 2024; Skewes et al., 2018). Second, Distributive Justice becomes the functional interpretation of justice in this social context, where rights and obligations are measured based on inherent biological and social roles (husband as leader/provider, wife as nurturer/guardian of sanctity) (Van Hootehem, 2022; Van Hootehem et al., 2020). Third, this preference confirms that although egalitarian ideology is widely accepted, essentialism beliefs and norms remain deeply rooted, forming the basis of women's moral decision-making (Rossi & Caricati, 2025; Skewes et al., 2018). Thus, Egalitarian Essentialism becomes a key concept for understanding how Indonesian women negotiate domestic roles without directly rejecting traditional values.

This moral configuration results in contrasting functions and dysfunctions in household dynamics, where institutional stability is balanced with individual pressure. The high preference for Binding Foundations ensures institutional stability such as marriage (Atari et al., 2023; Graham et al., 2013), but simultaneously creates significant moral pressure on the wife (Abdur Rofik et al., 2023). This pressure is caused by the forced prioritization of bonds over individual needs, reflected in the Expectation vs. Action gap. First, the primary function is marital stability and resilience; the high scores on Loyalty and Sanctity directly support long-term commitment, even in discomfort, aligning with the core goal of Binding Foundations to preserve the institution (Malka et al., 2016; I. H. Smith et al., 2014; Vecina et al., 2022). Second, conversely, the main dysfunction lies in the psychological and moral pressure experienced by the wife, indicated by the large Expectation vs. Action gap in Care, Fairness, and Authority (An, 2020; Hwang et al., 2023; Mandel et al., 2020; Sullivan, 2021). Third, this gap suggests a motivation for sacrifice that is not fully aligned with personal interests, which, if left unaddressed, can damage the wife's emotional well-being (Alboghubish et al., 2020; Mandal, 2020; Righetti & Impett, 2017). Therefore, although the Binding moral foundations are institutionally functional, they demand a high psychological cost from women.

Based on findings indicating moral dissonance, a preference for *Distributive Justice* and high support for husband's leadership (Authority), policy implications should not involve demands for absolute equality (Commutative Justice). Instead, policy recommendations must firmly side with strengthening familial resilience (Djawas et al., 2022; Saleh et al., 2022) and long-term collective

happiness, which demands reciprocal sacrifice for a greater ultimate goal (Haidt et al., 2008, 2013; Uchida et al., 2024; Uchida & Rappleye, 2024). Focusing on Distributive Justice and collective sacrifice (in line with Sanctity and Loyalty) is the most effective way to transform the existing moral dissonance into a functional and sustainable adaptation mechanism, thereby strengthening the family bond as the primary unit of society (Alboghush et al., 2020; Gager & Hohmann-Marriott, 2006; Mandal, 2020; Righetti & Impett, 2017). First, Pre-Marital and Family Education Programs must explicitly address the Expectation-Action Gap in Care and Fairness by teaching husbands that the role of Authority accepted by wives demands a reciprocal Distributive obligation to provide emotional support and fair participation in household burdens (Kamarusdiana et al., 2022; Sururie et al., 2023). Second, Religious and community institutions must strengthen the Sanctity and Loyalty Foundations through continuous spiritual reinforcement programs that reaffirm marriage as a sacred covenant demanding unconditional fidelity and sacrifice, thereby minimizing the temptation to seek individualistic happiness that undermines the integrity of the bond (Hasan, 2023; A. Wendołowska et al., 2022; A. M. Wendołowska & Czyżowska, 2021). Third, Family Counseling must focus on the Binding Foundations framework, actively promoting the understanding that individual sacrifice is a long-term investment for the family's collective happiness, and not a loss centered on women (Mandal, 2020; Mani, 2020; Righetti & Impett, 2017). Therefore, policies rooted in strengthening reciprocal roles and rectifying Distributive Justice will effectively transform individual compromise into a robust synergy that ensures the sustained resilience and happiness of the marital institution.

## **CONCLUSION**

The core wisdom of this research is that the domestic morality of Indonesian women is a strategic and functional negotiation primarily oriented towards maintaining marital institutional stability over individual moral satisfaction. This orientation results in a structural moral dissonance where individual moral expectations must be compromised for the sake of fulfilling the higher duty of preserving the bond (Binding Foundations). This dissonance is then functionally legitimized through the framework of Distributive Justice. First, the women's moral configuration is heavily dominated by Binding Foundations (Loyalty and Sanctity), reflecting strong support for traditional values and social cohesion within the family. Second, this institutional stability is achieved at the expense of individual moral balance, evident from the significant Expectation vs. Action gap in Individualizing foundations (Care and Fairness) as well as Authority. Third, this imbalance is morally legitimized through the Distributive Justice framework and the Egalitarian Essentialism ideology, allowing for the acceptance of traditional roles while maintaining a claim to distributed rights and equality. Therefore, the wisdom of this research is to understand that women's moral "freedom" is structurally limited by the duty they impose on themselves to maintain the household order, making it a critical choice between institutional stability and individual moral fulfillment.

This research makes a significant and structured scholarly contribution to the study of domestic morality, particularly in the non-Western societal context. This contribution focuses on the validity of specific measurement tools in the context of marriage, as well as the provision of a more nuanced integrated conceptual framework. This new framework allows for the analysis of Expectation vs. Action dynamics alongside justice and gender ideology. First, the greatest contribution is the development of a new instrument, the Conjugal Moral Foundations Questionnaire (CMFQ), which is a specific and valid modification of Moral Foundations Theory (MFT) for measuring morality in husband-wife dyadic relationships. Second, the research presents an innovative integrated conceptual framework, which simultaneously analyzes Expectation vs. Action dynamics through the lens of the five MFT foundations while dissecting justice preferences (Distributive vs Commutative) and gender ideology (Patriarchy vs Egalitarian Essentialism). Third, the finding regarding the dominance of Egalitarian Essentialism as the gender ideology adopted by women in the household offers a new concept that explains why values of equality and traditional roles can coexist. Thus, this research paves the way for a richer new approach in studying moral psychology and domestic gender interactions, transcending the simple traditional versus modern dichotomy.

Despite providing significant contributions, this research has methodological limitations that restrict the depth of analysis and the generalization of findings, thus requiring future follow-up. These limitations lie in the study design, which is unable to capture dynamic changes over time, and data collection focused solely on one party. This restricts dyadic validity and the generalization of findings. First, the research is cross-sectional, making it unable to capture the dynamics of change or development in moral dissonance and the Expectation-Action Gap across the marital life cycle. Second, data was collected only from the wife's perspective (unilateral), making the Expectation vs. Action Theory analysis not fully dyadic, thus lacking reciprocal validation from the husband's perspective. Third, sampling limitations (focusing only on specific regions or homogeneous socio-economic groups) restrict the generalization of findings regarding Egalitarian Essentialism to the entire highly heterogeneous population of Indonesian women. Therefore, future research is advised to conduct longitudinal studies, involve the husband's perspective (dyadic research) using the CMFQ, and expand sample variation to achieve more comprehensive findings.

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