AOSIS

# How Balinese Hindus interpret the story adapted from the story of the Syrophoenician woman found in the Christian Bible in Mark 7:24–30

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This article proposes an alternate way of reading the story of the Syrophoenician woman found in the Christian Bible in Mark 7:24–30. The goal of this contextual reading is to see how cultural and ethnic identity affects the perception of the story and the level of reverence to Jesus in the story. In this study, a non-Christian population was selected to avoid pre-conceived notions of the well-known story. The sample in this study comprised a Balinese student population (90.3% Hindu and 40.3% men). The results show that ethnic identity relates positively to positive perception of the Syrophoenician woman. When forced to choose between siding with the woman or with Jesus (labelled as 'religious leader'), the perception of the good character of the woman relates to her being chosen as the hero of the story; however, her submissive attitude relates negatively to her being chosen as the hero of the story.

**Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications:** This article takes a cultural psychology and narrative approach to evaluate the behaviour and perceptions of Balinese Hindus in seeing the roles of women and religious teachers. The general perception and behaviour in religion seems to be influenced by the sociocultural context. Interdisciplinary implications of theological and psychological study are confirmed in the article.

**Keywords:** Balinese Hindus; Mark 7:24–30; ethnic identity; well-being; hermeneutics.

## Introduction

Some studies have shown that cultural and psychological aspects affect the reading of text materials, including the Bible: Village (2010) found that the psychological type preferences of sensing, intuiting, feeling and thinking (SIFT) correlate with alternative interpretations of the biblical text. Francis (2003) and Francis and Jones (2011) had similar findings using different text found within the Bible. Morris (1996) has also shown through experiments that culture influences alternative readings of biblical text by incorporating culture-specific gender distinctions into the text. These findings indicate that interpretation of the text in the Bible is indeed culture-specific.

This study extends previous research on the effect of culture on biblical text-reading from the perspective of the patriarchal Hindu Balinese culture of Bali, Indonesia. The biblical text we chose to focus on is the story of the Syrophoenician woman and Jesus from Mark 7:24–30. We chose this text because it highlights the minority ethnic status of the Syrophoenician, as well as the status of being a woman. Before we describe our study, we will first describe the psychological variables of ethnic identity and well-being, as well as cultural aspects and the biblical text that was used in this study.

### Ethnic identity

Ethnic identity is a part of self-concept that is derived from an awareness and knowledge of membership in an ethnic group, coupled with emotions, behaviours and values that are attached to the membership (Phinney 1992; Sari et al. 2018a, 2018b). Humans are social beings that derive their well-being from being connected. As such, it has been repeatedly shown that strong ethnic group identification correlates with well-being, which in turn promotes good mental health (e.g. Mossakowski 2003; Sari et al. 2018a).

However, not all memberships benefit equally, and belonging to a minority group could have adverse effects. Stereotype threat effects (Steele & Aronson 1995) refer to the 'predicament' in which members of a social group must deal with the possibility of being judged or treated

stereotypically, or of doing something that would confirm the stereotype (p. 797). The effects are most often demonstrated with regard to ethnic groups (e.g. African-Americans) and gender (e.g. women); when their group identity is made salient, they perform in accordance with the stereotypes of the group. For example, women and African-Americans performed worse in math tests when their gender and/or ethnical identity was made salient (see Nguyen & Ryan 2008 for a meta-analysis). In the multilinguistic and multicultural context of this study, national identity and ethnic identity are in the forefront. National identity refers to one's feelings of commitment and belonging to the country (Phinney & Devich-Navarro 1997), and ethnic identity refers to 'one's sense of belonging to an ethnic group which also includes one's thinking, perceptions, feelings and behaviour due to group membership' (Rotheram & Phinney 1987:13).

A two-dimensional model of acculturation helps us to understand the variation in ethnic identity (Berry 1990, 1997; Phinney 1992); ethnic identity and 'national' identity can be understood as two dimensions of group identity that vary independently; that is, each identity can be either secure and strong or undeveloped and weak (e.g. Bourhis et al. 1997). Ethnic identity can be stronger than national identity, or only one of the two identities may be well developed, but when both ethnic identity and national identity are strong, an individual would have an integrated (or bicultural) identity. When an individual has strong ethnic identity but does not identify with the national culture, he or she would have a separated identity. A person who gives up on ethnic identity and identifies only with the national culture would have an assimilated identity, and the individual who identifies with neither would have a marginalised identity (Phinney et al. 2001). An integrated identity is generally associated with higher levels of overall well-being than are the other identity categories (Phinney et al. 2001). A strong ethnic identity is generally related to psychological well-being amongst members of acculturating groups (Liebkind 1996; Phinney & Devich-Navarro 1997, Phinney et al. 2001; Sari et al. 2018a), and both ethnic and national identities are related to school adjustment, but the relationship is stronger with national than with ethnic identity (Phinney et al. 2001). In Indonesian context, it has been found that national identity is strongly correlated to ethnic identity, and ethnic identity is strongly correlated to well-being (Sari et al. 2018a). Thus, in this Indonesian study, ethnic identity is used in lieu of national identity. The second psychological variable we will investigate is well-being.

## Well-being

Aspects of subjective well-being found in Western countries include life satisfaction and pleasant or unpleasant emotions (Diener et al. 1999, 2010). Life satisfaction is a reflective analysis of a person's life, and reports of his or her experience comprise positive and negative momentary feelings. Over time, it will show a person's life satisfaction (Diener et al. 2010). Previous research amongst bicultural people has shown that having a bicultural identity relates positively to well-being (Han 2009; Hong et al. 2000). Individuals who live in multicultural societies engage with and are shaped by more than one culture (Morris, Chiu & Liu 2015); an example of this is the fact that most Indonesians have to deal with at least two cultures and languages (see Sari et al. 2018a). The process of integrating different cultural influences can yield multiple identities (e.g. Ferguson, Bornstein & Pottinger 2012), and having strong multiple identities in a multicultural context is associated with a higher level of well-being (Ferguson et al. 2012; Ferguson & Adams 2016).

Ethnic identity and national identity are associated positively with well-being (Sari et al. 2018a). In this study, we will discover how identity relates to well-being, and how ethnic identity and well-being relate to text interpretation. It is also necessary to note that social economic status (SES) has been associated with subjective well-being (e.g. Diener et al. 2010). In this study, the respondents are university students from the same year; hence, they have similar levels of education. Following the descriptions of the two psychological variables are the descriptions of Balinese patriarchal society and the Bible text.

## The Balinese in the Indonesian context

The Balinese are a small ethnic group in Indonesia (1.7% of the Indonesian population). They live mainly in the Province of Bali, making up 89% of the island's population of 4.2 million inhabitants (BPS 2020). The Balinese arrived in Indonesia during three periods of migration; the first wave came from Java and Kalimantan in prehistoric times, the second wave came mostly from Java during the spread of Hinduism in Indonesia and the third wave came again from Java during the spread of Islam in Indonesia, causing the Javanese Hindus to flee from Java and migrate to Bali (Tiwary & Choudhary 2009). Karafet et al. (2005) in their study of Balinese Y-chromosomes found that 84% of the Balinese population were likely of Austronesian origin, 12% of Indian origin and 2% of Melanesian origin.

The Balinese aristocrats came from the Kingdom of Majapahit in Java, and thus there are significant similarities between Balinese and Javanese cultures. The difference between Balinese and Javanese culture can be traced back to the spread of Islam in Java. Javanese culture is now dominated by Islam, whereas the Balinese keep and mix Hindu and Buddhist beliefs with local customs (Barski, Beaucort & Carpenter 2007). The people of Trunyan, living on a small island in Lake Batur, provide an appropriate example of these older or original customs and beliefs of the Balinese; however, the current mainstream Balinese culture is still very much influenced by the ancient Javanese culture.

The similarities between Balinese and Javanese cultures are evident in their arts, such as the shadow play (*wayang kulit*), the use of the *gamelan* in music and rituals and the *kebaya* as traditional clothing, as well as in their languages, which both have a significant amount of shared vocabulary (Erawati 2015).

The Province of Bali is Indonesia's main tourist destination. The income from tourism makes up 80% of the province's financial wealth (BPS 2020). Partly because of this, the Balinese have a strong ethnic identity. There is a significant migration of the Javanese people, the dominant ethnicity in Indonesia, looking for better economic conditions in Bali (Javanese make up 7% of the province's population); as such, the socio-economic circumstances are the opposite of what is usual for an ethnic minority, as people of the dominant ethnicity migrate in search of better opportunities in the territory of the ethnic minority.

Ethnic conflicts are a rare occurrence in Bali, although Bali was not exempt from the Indonesia-wide conflicts of the 1950s and 1960s, when many members of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) were killed in the violent anticommunist purge by the Indonesian government militia. It was reported that at least 1 000 000 people were killed across Indonesia and around 80 000 were killed in Bali, equivalent to 5% of the island's population (ed. Cribb 1990). There was violence again in 2002 and 2005, when militant Islamists bombed the tourist area of Kuta and killed around 200 people, mostly foreigners, causing economic hardship amongst the Balinese (Robinson & Meaton 2005).

## Patriarchal culture amongst the Balinese Hindu

The Balinese Hindu culture, like the dominant Javanese culture, is a patriarchal culture (with the exception of the region of Tabanan). Patriarchal culture in Bali is expressed in the Balinese laws of rights and responsibilities of a son and a daughter and in the form of marriage (Segara 2019). It is the sons of the family that 'take' wives and through elaborate rituals, the rights and responsibilities of a married daughter switch to the husband's family and are no longer with her own family. These include her responsibilities in the temple, mainly to the husband's family temple and not to her own, her obligation to participate in social events (birth, marriage and death) and her responsibility to her husband's family members and not to her own, including the obligation to take care of her parents-in-law. Similarly, the rights of inheritance and family line recordings belong to the sons and to the children of the sons, not to the daughters and grandchildren from the daughters (Dyatmikawati 2016). In the case of the caste system, the caste title passes down only to the son's children and not to the daughter's children (unless her husband has a caste title as well).

Polygamy is practised in Indonesia, whilst polyandry is not. The national average of polygamy is 5% and according to the Muslim law, polygamy is legal. There is no such law amongst the Balinese Hindus; however, 10% of Balinese marriages are polygamous, twice the estimated national average (Ibrahim & Robertson 2019). According to both the Javanese and Balinese cultures, it is the husband's responsibility to provide for the family, whilst it is the wife's responsibility to manage the family's finances (spending and saving); thus, the husband is expected to give his earnings to his wife and let his wife manage the money of the household. It is debatable whether such divisions of labour lead to injustice or inequality of the genders.

However, it is clear that there are gender gaps in many areas of life in Bali, such as education, employment, politics and social leader roles. The National Socioeconomic Survey or Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS) in 2002 showed that the number of illiterate women was much higher compared to men. Similarly, the rate of high school education completion was higher amongst men, 21% amongst women and 32.1% amongst men. The gender gap in employment persists also because of differences in the rate of participation in the labour force between women (59%) and men (75.9%). The political gender gap is apparent in the differences between men and women in the rate of holding positions in legislative, executive and judicial departments in the government. Similarly, the roles of men and women in civil society differ, with men dominating participation in formal activities and decision-making in meetings and events of the *banjars* (governing bodies in villages) (Jampel & Lasmawan 2019; Zuryani & Leahy 2006). With these contexts in mind, we will now examine the biblical text used in the study.

## The biblical text used in the study (Mk 7:24–30)

Text:

> From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophoenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. He said to her, 'Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs'. But she answered him, 'Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs'. Then he said to her, 'For saying that, you may go – the demon has left your daughter'. So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone. (NRSV)

In the story of a Syrophoenician woman, the narrator adopts Jesus' views on the problem of clean and unclean motives (Hauw 2019). The narrator narrates what Jesus, the protagonist, does according to his own views. Jesus hears the plea of the woman and heals her daughter. The barrier of social relationship creating conflict in the story is solved. The problem raised by clean and unclean motives is over. Through the healing, Jesus declares that he rejects the exclusiveness of the Jews, whilst at the same time he accepts the Gentiles, whom the Jews consider to be unclean people. Jesus' healing annihilates the unclean spirit and unclean sphere as well. Jesus' action must be seen in the light of Mark's presentation in his first passage, that Jesus is the bearer of God's dominion and asks people to repent and believe in God (Mk 1:14–15). As people repent and believe in the dominion of God, barriers of social relationship are nullified (cf. Gl 3:28).

The second explicit character in the story, a Syrophoenician woman (the antagonist), is on stage in Mark 7:25–28 (see Hauw 2019). The narrator chooses this character as a primary example of someone in a crowd who knows and looks for Jesus. Jesus is obviously the main character, as the woman introduces the conflict in the story by her intention not to let Jesus keep his presence a secret. The woman bothers Jesus as her little daughter is possessed by an unclean spirit (v. 25) that is a demon (vv. 26, 30), and asks Jesus to exorcise (v. 26, ἐκβάλλω) the demon. The narrator not only characterises the woman as an opponent who brings conflict, but as an opponent who is also a supplicant. The narrator clarifies the two roles of the woman, an opponent and a supplicant, as the conflict in the story continues. The dialogue between Jesus and the woman is a fierce scene in the conflict. The dialogue begins as the woman hears Jesus, comes and bows down at Jesus' feet (v. 25). These three verbs (hears, comes and bows down) indicate the woman's proactive attitude to ask Jesus respectfully to heal her daughter. Bowing down or falling at Jesus' feet is also done by a haemorrhaging woman in Mark 5:23. The haemorrhaging woman does that after Jesus asks who touched him. Whilst the action of falling at Jesus' feet may be interpreted as an act of pardon (from Jesus, since the haemorrhaging woman quietly recognises his healing power), this does not happen in the story of the Syrophoenician woman. In fact, the proactive attitude of the Syrophoenician woman may be reflected in the story of the haemorrhaging woman as well, for the three verbs (hears, comes and bows down) are also used in that story (see Mk 5:27 and 33; cf. Mk 7:25). This gesture undoubtedly indicates a plea for mercy, as recorded in Mark 1:40. The narrator of Mark 7:26 explicitly expresses the request of the Syrophoenician woman, who begs Jesus to heal her daughter. The Syrophoenician woman's role as a supplicant is confirmed. We are informed by the narrator that she is the one who brings conflict in the story. Her role as an opponent is elaborated now.

The dialogue between Jesus and the Syrophoenician woman begins as the narrator declares Jesus' rejection of the woman's request: 'Let the children be fed first [πρῶτον], for it is not fair to take the children's food [ἄρτος] and throw it to the dogs [κυνάριον]' (Mk 7:27). Whatever meaning is given to the word 'dogs' and the whole sentence as Jesus' answer (v. 27), the narrator shows Jesus' use of derogatory words and rejection of the woman's request (see Hauw 2019). The narrator agrees with Jesus' use of these words, as Jesus is the main character in the story. Furthermore, the narrator does not need to explicitly express reasons for the rejection. Perhaps the narrator's description of the origin of the woman, as a Syrophoenician woman and thus a foreigner, is one of the possible reasons for Jesus' rejection of her request. It is supported by the fact that the woman agrees with what Jesus says (Mk 7:28), so the narrator invites the readers to agree with Jesus' point of view.

The reader can anticipate Jesus' rejection because of the initial conflict brought about by the woman. However, there is further conflict found in the woman's answer: 'Sir (κύριε),

even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs' (καὶ τὰ κυνάρια ὑποκάτω τῆς τραπέζης ἐσθίουσιν ἀπὸ τῶν ψιχίων τῶν παιδίων, Mk 7:28). This answer indicates the woman's humble acceptance of Jesus' words. The narrator wants the readers to understand that the woman is aware of her Gentile identity and that her expectation is to still receive Jesus' miracle. The reply is an admission from the woman of the superiority of Jesus.

On the other hand, this humble attitude of the woman creates an irony which is a form of conflict. Whilst the woman confesses her Gentile identity as foreign dog, thus unworthy to eat at the table as children do, she does not accept the children's crumbs. Her insistence on getting Jesus' blessing reflects the depth of her faith. Mark's Gospel does not use the word 'faith' in the pericope, however the evangelist Matthew, as one of the earliest interpreters of Mark's Gospel, supplied the word 'faith' (Mt 15:28) (Mann 1986). Mark's Gospel implicitly shows the faith of the woman in her answer. If the designation κύριε is acceptable to refer to the lordship of Jesus, the Syrophoenician woman's true faith is proved. If it is not, the acceptance of Jesus' words, her reverence for him and her quick reply to Jesus are the evidences of her faith. We have seen the woman's acceptance of Jesus' words and reverence for him (as κύριε means 'sir'); her quick reply to Jesus reflects her true faith also. We will discuss this along with the role of implicit characters: Jesus' disciples.

The narrator invites the readers to look at how the woman has faith in Jesus through the only words Jesus speaks in response to the woman '… you may go' (ὕπαγε, Mk 7:29). These words are enough for her. She believes Jesus' word without any visible evidence (Waetjen 1989). For her, what Jesus has said indicates the healing of her daughter. When the woman arrives home, she finds her child lying on the bed (Mk 7:30), a description of the aftermath of the last attack of the demons on the girl when the demons left her (cf. Mk 9:26). She is now healed.

The true faith of the Syrophoenician woman highlights the importance of Jesus in the story. This can be seen through the role of Jesus' disciples, one of implied character. The absence of Jesus' disciples contrasts with the pericope of the commissioning of the disciples in Mark 6:7–13, which records Jesus' giving them the authority to exorcise. Furthermore, the wider context pictures the increasing participation of Jesus' disciples in his ministry (Mk 6:12–13, 35–43; 8:5–8). However, in the story of the Syrophoenician woman, Jesus' disciples are not around. By the absence of the disciples, the narrator intends to place Jesus at the centre of the story – the one who has the authority to exorcise. On the other hand, stories of the disciples' lack of understanding of Jesus, for example, Mark 3:5; 6:35–37, 52; 7:17–18 and 8:14–21, point to the significance of the disciples as well as other characters. The dullness of Jesus' disciples who do not understand Jesus' parable of Mark 7:17 (Lane 1974) and the metaphor of the 'bread' narrated in Mark 8:14–21 (France 2002) stands in contrast to

the quickness of the Syrophoenician woman in understanding Jesus. In the pericope, the woman understands Jesus' metaphor of dogs and bread and replies with an understanding that reflects the depth of her faith (Mk 7:28). As the only account of Jesus' exorcism from a distance (see Mt 15:21–28; cf. Mt 8:5–13; Lk 7:1–10; Jn 4:46–54), the faith of the woman is thus highlighted. Her status as a Gentile does not restrict her belief in Jesus. The narrator portrays the woman as the true disciple who has faith in Jesus, a marginal character to be implied by the reader.

As mentioned early in the introduction, this study is interested in understanding how the cultural background and psychological variables of the reader influence interpretation of biblical text. The cultural background to be examined is Balinese patriarchal culture, and the psychological variables to be examined are ethnic identity and well-being.

# Current study
## Research questions

Based on the literature discussed above, we have devised four research questions:

1. Does ethnic identity relate to positive interpretation of the characters in the text?
2. Does well-being relate to positive interpretation of the characters of the text?
3. Do the positive interpretations of the characters in the story relate to choosing which character is perceived as the hero of the story?
4. Are there differences between male and female Balinese in the negative and positive interpretation of the text?

## Statistical analyses

1. To investigate questions 1–3 above, we proposed a mediation model, as presented in Figure 1, where ethnic identity and well-being were associated with choosing the woman as the hero of the story through the positive perception of both Jesus' and the woman's characters, as well as the positive perception of Jesus' and the woman's attitudes towards each other. In the proposed mediation model, well-being was also a mediator in the relationship between ethnic identity and the positive perception of
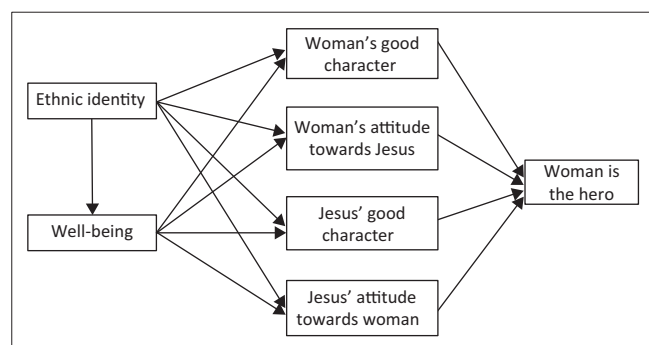
Jesus' and the woman's characters and attitudes (see Figure 1). In order to test whether the proposed mediation model could be applied, a structural equation modelling (SEM) path analysis was conducted. This was an exploratory analysis to find the best model that could be applied to find out the relationship between ethnic identity, well-being and choosing the woman as the hero of the story through the positive perception of the two characters in the story.

2. For testing the differences in mean scores between male and female Balinese, a Multivariate Analysis of Covariance (MANCOVA) *post hoc* analysis was conducted.

# Methodology
## Participants

The participants of the study were 176 Balinese students in Denpasar, Indonesia. Their average age was 23.71 years, 40.3% of the participants were men, 90.3% of the participants believed in Hinduism and only 9.1% of the participants were non-indigenous Balinese (see Table 1).

## Procedure

The participants were recruited from Ngurah Rai University in Bali, Denpasar, Indonesia. The respondents participated in this study online and were given academic credit for their participation. The instruments were administered in Bahasa Indonesia. All questionnaires were translated from English into Bahasa Indonesia following a translation and back-translation procedure (Van de Vijver & Leung 1997), with the help of language teachers in Indonesia. The translation process started with the English version of the questionnaires. A translator who was proficient in the original and target languages translated the survey into Indonesian. A second



**FIGURE 1:** Proposed mediation model.

**TABLE 1:** Sample characteristics.

| N | Male | Female | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| | 71 (40.3%) | 105 (59.7%) | 176 (100%) |
| **Level of education (%)** | | | |
| 1 = junior high | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2 = high school | 94.4 | 93.3 | 93.8 |
| 3 = college | 2.8 | 5.7 | 4.5 |
| 4 = BA university | 2.8 | 1.0 | 1.7 |
| 5 = master's degree | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 6 = PhD | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| **Religion (%)** | | | |
| Christian | 0 | 3.8 | 2.3 |
| Hindu | 88.7 | 91.4 | 90.3 |
| Islam | 11.3 | 4.8 | 7.4 |
| **Ethnicity (%)** | | | |
| Indigenous Balinese | 84.5 | 92.4 | 89.2 |
| Mixed Balinese with other | 2.8 | 1.0 | 1.7 |
| Other ethnicity | 12.7 | 6.7 | 9.1 |
| M Education | 3.08 | 4.97 | 3.08 |
| SD Education | 0.37 | 0.85 | 0.33 |
| M Age | 24.31 | 23.31 | 23.71 |
| SD Age | 7.07 | 6.85 | 6.93 |

M, mean; SD, standard deviation.

translator reviewed the Indonesian language version against the original version and recommended refinements. Each participant answered all the questionnaires and then read the story adapted from the biblical text, Mark 7:24–30. The name of Jesus was changed into 'religious leader'. After reading the text, they answered a questionnaire about the characters in the story (the Syrophoenician woman and the religious leader).

## Measures

### Demographic information

Demographic information about each participant's age, gender, ethnicity, religion and level of education was sought (see Table 1).

### Ethnic identity

The scale to measure ethnic identity was an adapted version of the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measurement, which was developed by Phinney (1992). This adapted scale consisted of 81 endorsement format items that related to ethnic group identification and religious group identification (α = 0.97). The participants were asked to rate each statement in terms of how strongly they agreed or disagreed with each statement, such as 'I consider myself Indonesian', and 'I feel that being Balinese is valuable', or 'I feel strongly connected to my religious community', and 'I am proud to be a member of my religious community'. Response options ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

### Well-being

Well-being was measured using the Satisfaction with Life Scale (α = 0.87), which consisted of 5 items, such as 'if I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing' (SWLS; Diener et al. 1985). Response options ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

### Text interpretation

The text was adapted from Mark 7:24–30 (version *Terjemahan Baru*–Lembaga Alkitab Indonesia [LAI]), and the name 'Jesus' was replaced with 'spiritual leader'. To measure the positive interpretation of the two characters in the story (Jesus and the Syrophoenician woman), the respondents were asked to give a score on the good characteristics (strong, kind, brave, humble and sincere) of Jesus (α = 0.90) and the Syrophoenician woman (α = 0.87), the attitude of Jesus (saving, respecting and appreciating) towards the woman (α = 0.77) and the attitude of Syrophoenician woman (respecting and trusting) towards Jesus (α = 0.78). Response options ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The items were developed based on theological hermeneutics.

### Choice of the hero of the story

There were two options: (1) Jesus as the hero is scored as 0, and (2) the Syrophoenician woman as the hero is scored as 1.

# Results
## Structural equation modelling path analysis

We proposed a mediation model, as presented in Figure 1, where ethnic identity and well-being were associated with choosing the woman as the hero of the story through the positive perception of both Jesus' and the woman's characters, as well as the positive perception of Jesus' and the woman's attitude towards each other. In the proposed mediation model, well-being was also a mediator in the relationship between ethnic identity and the positive perception of Jesus' and the woman's character and attitude (see Figure 1).

In order to test whether the proposed mediation model could be applied, a SEM path analysis was conducted (see Figure 1 for the conceptual path model). Modification indices also suggested to add arrows between:

1. the positive perception of the Syrophoenician woman's character with the positive perception of the attitude of Jesus towards the Syrophoenician woman
2. the positive perception of the character of Jesus with the positive perception of the Syrophoenician woman's attitude towards Jesus.

Furthermore, modification indices suggested that there were correlations between the error of the following variables:

1. the positive perception of the character of Jesus and the character of the Syrophoenician woman
2. the positive perception of the attitude of Jesus towards the Syrophoenician woman and the positive perception of Jesus' character
3. the positive perception of the attitude of the Syrophoenician woman towards Jesus and the positive perception of the Syrophoenician woman's character.

The new modified path model is represented in Figure 2. The results of SEM path analyses (see Figure 2) showed a very good fit ($\chi^2$ [$df$] = 0.93 (3), $p$ = 0.82, Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI) = 1.04, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = 1.00, Adjusted Goodness-of-Fit-Index (AGFI) = 0.99, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = 0.00 [0.00, 0.08]). Ethnic identity relates positively to well-being and only ethnic identity has direct positive association with positive perception of Jesus and the Syrophoenician woman in the story. Ethnic identity is not significantly associated with the positive perception of the attitude of Jesus towards the Syrophoenician woman and the attitude of the Syrophoenician woman towards Jesus. Regarding the association between well-being and the perception of the readers towards Jesus and the Syrophoenician woman, there was no significant direct positive relationship between well-being and the positive character of the Syrophoenician woman, nor between well-being and the attitude of Jesus towards the woman, and also no significant direct effect between well-being and the woman's attitude towards Jesus. The positive direct association was found
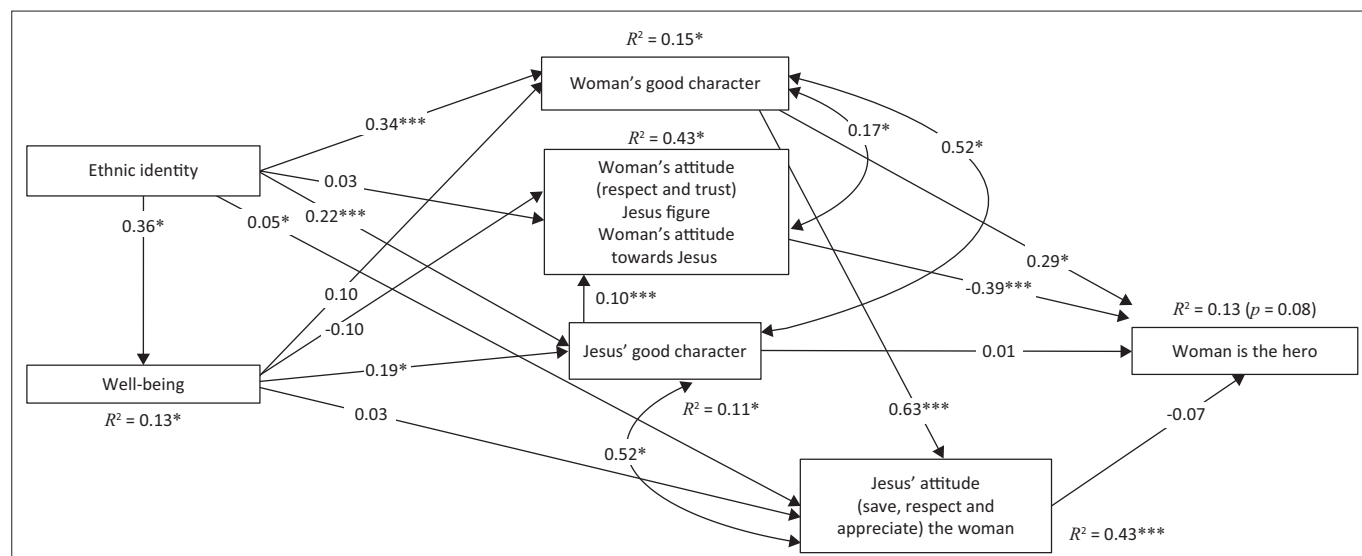
*, $p < 0.05$; **, $p < 0.01$; ***, $p < 0.001$.

**FIGURE 2:** Regression weights of modified mediation model (standardised).

only between well-being and the perception of the positive character of Jesus.

Furthermore, the results of SEM path analysis showed that the positive perception of the Syrophoenician woman associates positively with choosing the woman as the hero of the story, but the perception of the attitude of the Syrophoenician woman to Jesus (respecting and believing in him) is negatively associated with choosing the woman as the hero in the story (see Figure 2). On the other hand, the association between the the positive perception of Jesus and the positive perception of his character is not significant. Similarly, the association between the positive perception of Jesus and his positive attitude towards the woman is not significant. It is noteworthy that there are significant positive correlations of error variables between (1) the positive perception of the Syrophoenician woman's character and Jesus' character, (2) the positive perception of Jesus' attitude towards the woman and Jesus' character and (3) the positive perception of the Syrophoenician woman's character and her attitude towards Jesus.

### Mediation test results

The results of bootstrap SEM analysis (see Table 3) show that well-being is a mediator of the relationship between ethnic identity and the positive perception of Jesus' character, the perception of the attitude of the Syrophoenician woman towards Jesus and the attitude of Jesus towards the Syrophoenician woman. Well-being also has an indirect positive effect on the positive perception of the Syrophoenician woman's attitude towards Jesus through the positive perception of Jesus' attitude towards the Syrophoenician woman. Only the positive perception of the positive character of the Syrophoenician woman has an indirect effect on choosing the woman as the hero of the story through Jesus' attitude towards the woman. The rest of indirect effects are not significant (see Table 3).

### Differences between men and women on mean scores

The results of MANCOVA show that men and women differ in the mean scores of the variables (Wilks' lambda = 0.91, $F[6,169] = 2.80$, $p = 0.01$, $h^2 = 0.09$), but *post hoc* test (Table 3) shows that only the mean score of ethnic identity differs significantly between male and female respondents (on average Balinese men have a higher score in ethnic identity than Balinese women). There are no differences in all other variables (see Table 3).

## Discussion

From the results, we have found that:

1. Ethnic identity relates to the interpretation of the biblical text on who is the hero of the story, Jesus or the Syrophoenician woman. The stronger the ethnic identity of the participants, the more positively they perceive the character of the Syrophoenician woman, and thus the more likely they are to choose the woman as the hero of the story.
2. Well-being also relates to the interpretation of the biblical text in choosing the hero of the story. The higher the well-being of the participants, the more positive participants' view of Jesus' good character and the attitude of the Syrophoenician woman towards Jesus, and thus the more likely they are to choose Jesus as the hero of the story.

Well-being is also a mediator of (1) the positive relationship between ethnic identity and the positive perception of Jesus' character, (2) the positive perception of the attitude of the Syrophoenician women towards Jesus and (3) the positive perception of the attitude of Jesus towards the Syrophoenician woman.

Therefore, we may say that ethnic identity has an association with the perception of both characters in the story directly and indirectly through well-being. On the other hand, well-being is the mediator of the relationship between ethnic

**TABLE 2:** Descriptive statistics and *post hoc* test.

| Variables | Sex | Means | SD | % | N | F | df | η² | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ethnic identity | | | | | | | | | |
| | Male | 138.97 | 27.78 | - | 71 | 9.99 | 1 | 0.05 | 0.00 |
| | Female | 127.82 | 23.74 | - | 105 | | | | |
| | Total | 132.32 | 23.55 | - | 176 | | | | |
| Well-being | | | | | | | | | |
| | Male | 25.11 | 5.44 | - | 71 | 2.09 | 1 | 0.01 | 0.15 |
| | Female | 23.8 | 6.20 | - | 105 | | | | |
| | Total | 24.33 | 5.92 | - | 176 | | | | |
| Perception of woman's character | | | | | | | | | |
| | Male | 27.35 | 5.55 | - | 71 | 0.44 | 1 | 0.00 | 0.51 |
| | Female | 26.79 | 5.44 | - | 105 | | | | |
| | Total | 27.02 | 5.48 | - | 176 | | | | |
| Perception of woman's attitude | | | | | | | | | |
| | Male | 11.72 | 1.86 | - | 71 | - | 1 | 0.00 | 0.87 |
| | Female | 11.67 | 2.18 | - | 105 | 0.03 | - | - | - |
| | Total | 11.69 | 2.05 | - | 176 | - | - | - | - |
| Perception of Jesus' character | | | | | | | | | |
| | Male | 28.82 | 5.61 | - | 71 | 0.28 | 1 | 0.00 | 0.60 |
| | Female | 29.24 | 4.95 | - | 105 | | | | |
| | Total | 29.07 | 5.22 | - | 176 | | | | |
| Perception of Jesus' attitude | | | | | | | | | |
| | Male | 16.44 | 3.06 | - | 71 | 1.29 | 1 | 0.01 | 0.26 |
| | Female | 16.98 | 3.17 | - | 105 | | | | |
| | Total | 16.76 | 3.13 | - | 176 | | | | |
| Woman as hero | | | | | | | | | |
| | Male | - | - | 19.70 | 71 | - | - | - | - |
| | Female | - | - | 18.10 | 105 | 0.07 | 1 | 0.00 | 0.79 |
| | Total | - | - | 18.80 | 176 | - | - | - | - |

**TABLE 3:** Standardised indirect effects (structural covariances).

| Outcome variable | Ethnic identity | Well-being | Perception of positive character of Jesus | Perception of positive character of the woman |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Perception of positive character of the Jesus figure | 0.07*** | - | - | - |
| Perception of positive character of the woman | 0.04 | - | - | - |
| Perception of positive attitude of Jesus towards the woman | 0.25*** | 0.06 | - | - |
| Perception of positive attitude of woman's attitude toward Jesus figure | 0.15*** | 0.12* | - | - |
| Woman is the hero | 0.00 | 0.02 | -0.04 | -0.25*** |

*, $p < 0.05$; **, not applicable; $p < 0.01$; ***, $p < 0.001$ (two tailed).

identity and those positive perceptions, and only one direct effect on the positive perception on Jesus' attitude towards the woman is seen. The significant variables that relate to choosing the Syrophoenician woman as the hero of the story are the perception of the attitude of the Syrophoenician woman towards Jesus (negatively associated) and the perception of the character of the woman (positively associated). Therefore, we may interpret that the submissive attitude of the Syrophoenician woman towards Jesus is not perceived as a trait of a hero, but the good character of the woman. Looking at the descriptive statistics (Table 3), we can see that the majority of respondents chose Jesus as the hero. This indicates that the patriarchal culture in Bali has a significant influence on the interpretation of the text. Furthermore, there is no difference in the scores of male and female respondents in their positive perceptions of Jesus and the Syrophoenician woman (see *post hoc* test results in Table 2).

The patriarchal culture in Bali may be seen to influence the findings of this study. Because Balinese men dominate in decision-making process in the *banjars* (governing bodies in villages) and in leading religious activities (Jampel & Lasmawan 2019; Zuryani & Leahy 2006), it makes sense that most Balinese see men as the spiritual leaders and the heroes and expect the women to submit to the leaders. Hence, the heroine is positively associated with the male leadership and negatively associated with the submission of the woman. The submissive attitude of a woman is the opposite of the heroic characteristic of a person. A woman who submits to a male leader is not considered a hero. Therefore, the negative correlation between the perception of the respectful attitude of the Syrophoenician woman towards the male leader (Jesus) in the story and choosing her as the hero is seen.

A biblical story has authorial intended meaning. From the perspective of Mark's gospel (cf. Mk 1:1), the healing of the daughter of the Syrophoenician woman is clearly meant to praise Jesus as the Son of God. This praising is compatible with the setting up of Jesus as the hero of the story. This intended meaning, as expressed by the narrator in the story, is the interpretation provided to the Balinese respondents in this study.

It is clear in the story also that the Syrophoenician woman, the second significant character, takes a role as a supplicant and an opponent against Jesus. Through the supplication of the woman, her faith in Jesus is highlighted. In the same way,

the woman's opposition to Jesus underlines her belief that Jesus is able to heal her daughter. In addition, the woman's opposition creates an opportunity for her Gentile identity to accept Jesus' blessing.

Although the narrator might not intend that the Syrophoenician woman would take a role as a heroine – an opposite role against his or her programme that challenges the patriarchal culture of the narrator and the original readers of the story – current readers might consider her the heroine. This might possibly occur in the process of interpretation, as seen in this research. Some Balinese respondents, influenced by their patriarchal culture, are convinced that the Syrophoenician woman is a heroine in the story. At the same time, they perceive Jesus (religious leader) as a hero also. The Balinese patriarchal worldview influences Balinese women to choose Jesus as the hero because of their submissiveness to men. Similarly, in her own patriarchal system, the Balinese woman is able to positively see her identity and choose the Syrophoenician woman as the heroine. This interesting result suggests that ethnic worldview is one aspect at work in the process of interpretation. It seems also that the methodology of interpretation provided by researchers does not determine the Balinese woman's understanding of the text. A Balinese woman chooses Jesus as the hero partly because of her ethnic patriarchal system. Another reason is well-being. It is clear from this study that well-being is significant as a mediator of ethnic identity and the positive perceptions of Jesus and the Syrophoenician woman. Thus, the methodology of interpretation is not as strong as the influence of well-being for Balinese respondents when choosing the hero of the story.

This research shows that the process of interpretation is not determined by gender. Ethnic identity relates to good perception of a woman, but well-being relates to good perception of a man (Jesus as religious leader). Although there is no difference between Balinese women and men in choosing Jesus or the Syrophoenician woman as a hero or heroine, we see that Balinese men's and women's perceptions about gender roles influence whether they choose Jesus as the hero. The methodology of interpretation, which is not neutral, is not directly related to Balinese readers, who are not neutral either. Ethnic identity, as shaped by the patriarchal system of Balinese, well-being and gender influence the respondents' interpretation of the story.

## Limitation

This study is correlational and the respondents are university students; hence, the generalisation of the study may only be limited amongst students. Further study needs to be conducted to investigate whether similar relationships exist between variables in a different group such as young professionals.

## Conclusion

We conclude from the study that cultural-gender roles (Balinese patriarchal) held by female and male members of the community influence the choosing of the character of

Jesus as the hero. Furthermore, the findings of this study provide evidence that psychological variables (ethnic identity and well-being) relate to a reader's interpretation of the text. Similar to a previous finding showing that ethnic identity relates to well-being (e.g. Sari et al. 2018a) and that psychological factors relate to choosing the hermeneutic interpretation (e.g. Village 2010), this study shows that ethnic identity and well-being relate to positive perceptions of the characters in a story adapted from the biblical text, Mark 7:24–30. Especially amongst the Balinese Hindus, ethnic identity relates to a positive perception of the female character in the story, and the positive perception of the woman's character relates to choosing her as the hero of the story, although the majority of both male and female Balinese Hindus chose the male character as the hero in the story. As stated earlier, this may be influenced by the patriarchal culture in Bali. Further study needs to be conducted to investigate whether similar results can be found in a different culture.

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