



Negotiating Marriage Norms and Women's Coping Strategies in Almira Bastari's *Ganjil Genap*: A Cultural and Literary Psychology Perspective

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Submitted: Juny 20, 2026
Final Revised: July 25, 2026
Accepted: Agustus 15, 2026
Published: September 30, 2026

Keywords:

Marriage Norms; Literary Psychology; Coping Strategies; Social Pressure.



ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study examines how marriage norms and social pressure are represented through Gala in Almira Bastari's *Ganjil Genap* and how she negotiates cultural expectations through coping strategies. **Methods:** This study employed a qualitative descriptive method using literary psychology and cultural studies perspectives. Data were collected from narratives, dialogues, and character actions in the 2020 novel and analyzed through thematic content analysis based on Lazarus and Folkman's stress and coping theory. **Findings:** The analysis identified 62 data units, comprising 20 representations of marriage norms, 17 instances of stress appraisal, and 25 representations of coping strategies. Marriage is portrayed not merely as a personal choice but as a cultural expectation shaped by family hopes, age-related discourse, and the social environment. Following the end of her thirteen-year relationship, Gala experiences emotional loss and uncertainty regarding her anticipated marital future. Her responses include seeking social support, preparing herself emotionally, and communicating directly to clarify the reasons for the separation. These strategies reflect emotion-focused and problem-focused coping. **Research Implications:** The findings contribute to literary and cultural discussions of gender relations, singlehood stigma, and women's responses to social expectations. They also encourage critical reflection on how marriage norms influence women's identities, life choices, and perceptions of adulthood. **Originality:** Unlike previous studies that primarily examine psychological conflicts, personality traits, or cultural elements separately, this study integrates marriage norms as cultural constructions, social-pressure appraisal, and coping strategies to explain how contemporary Indonesian literature represents women's active negotiation of gendered expectations.



Doi: <https://doi.org/10.61255/jupiter.v4i4.2318>

INTRODUCTION

Marriage is not only understood as a personal choice but also as a social institution influenced by cultural values, family expectations, and collective perceptions within society. In many communities, particularly in Indonesia, marriage is often associated with adulthood, social acceptance, and life achievement. Consequently, individuals who have not married at certain ages may experience social pressure arising from questions, comparisons, and expectations from their surrounding environment. These conditions demonstrate that marriage norms operate not merely as private values but also as social constructions that influence how individuals perceive themselves and their life choices.

Literary works frequently represent social realities through conflicts experienced by characters. Novels portray various human experiences related to family relationships, romantic relationships, and social expectations. One of the social issues commonly represented in literary works is marriage, where marriage can be perceived either as an individual decision or as a social obligation shaped by surrounding communities. Pressure related to marriage may emerge when personal plans do not correspond with social expectations, including expectations from family and comparisons with individuals who have already married.

This phenomenon is represented in Almira Bastari's novel *Ganjil Genap*, which portrays the experience of Gala, a woman who faces uncertainty after the end of her thirteen-year relationship with Bara. Initially, Gala expects that her long-term relationship will continue toward marriage; however, Bara decides to end their relationship (Bastari, 2020). The separation does not only create emotional loss for Gala but also generates concerns regarding her future, age, and social expectations surrounding marriage. Her conversation with Nandi regarding age and unmarried status illustrates how marriage becomes connected with social perceptions of adulthood and personal achievement (Bastari, 2020).

The representation of marriage expectations in *Ganjil Genap* reflects a broader cultural issue regarding the social position of unmarried women. Previous research has shown that single status in Indonesian society is often associated with social stigma and expectations regarding marital status. Himawan, Bambling, and Edrippulige (2018) explain that being single in Indonesia is closely related to social perceptions and stigma experienced by individuals who have not married. Similarly, Himawan et al. (2019) discuss that modernization and changing social conditions influence the psychological and social experiences of unmarried individuals in Indonesia. DePaulo and Morris (2006) further explain that unmarried individuals may experience stereotypes and differential treatment due to assumptions attached to single status.

In the context of literary studies, several researchers have examined *Ganjil Genap* from different perspectives. Rahmadi (2022) investigated cultural elements related to the myth of marriage in the novel and highlighted how social values surrounding marriage are represented through the characters. Tamara (2022) examined psychological conflicts and resolution efforts in *Ganjil Genap* and *Bad Girls in Islamic Boarding Schools*. Sopiana (2023) analyzed Gala's psychological needs using Maslow's theory, while Sugiyo et al. (2023) examined Gala's behavior based on Skinner's psychological perspective. Furthermore, Effendi et al. (2023) analyzed Gala's personality traits using Jung's theory, and Wahzudi et al. (2024) explored urban women's identity in the novel through a feminist approach.

Although previous studies provide valuable explanations regarding psychological aspects, personality, and cultural elements in *Ganjil Genap*, limited attention has been given to the relationship between marriage norms as cultural constructions, social pressure experienced by women, and the ways women negotiate these pressures through coping strategies. Therefore, this study positions marriage norms not only as individual experiences but as social and cultural mechanisms that influence women's identities and decision-making processes.

To understand how Gala responds to these pressures, this study employs Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) stress and coping theory. The theory explains that individuals respond to stressful situations through cognitive appraisal processes and coping strategies, including problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. In relation to Gala's experience, social expectations regarding marriage are interpreted as stressful conditions that require evaluation and responses. The process of appraisal determines how Gala understands her situation, while coping strategies demonstrate how she attempts to manage and negotiate the challenges she faces.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze the representation of marriage norms and women's coping strategies in Almira Bastari's *Ganjil Genap*. Specifically, this research examines how marriage expectations are constructed through social and cultural interactions and how Gala negotiates these expectations through psychological responses and coping strategies. This study contributes to literary and cultural studies by illustrating how contemporary Indonesian literature represents the relationship between gender, cultural expectations, and changing perspectives on marriage.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method using a cultural studies and literary psychology approach. The primary source is Almira Bastari's novel *Ganjil Genap* (2020). Data consist of narrative fragments, dialogues, and character actions that represent marriage expectations, social judgment, and women's responses toward social pressure. Data analysis was conducted through thematic content analysis. The data were categorized into three themes: (1) marriage norms as cultural construction, (2) social pressure and individual interpretation, and (3) negotiation strategies used by women characters. Lazarus and Folkman's stress and coping theory was used to analyze psychological responses, while cultural studies perspective was applied to understand marriage expectations as social practices.

RESULTS

Representation of Marriage Norms and Women's Negotiation in *Ganjil Genap*

The analysis of Almira Bastari's *Ganjil Genap* reveals that marriage norms are represented as social expectations influencing Gala's perception of herself, her relationship, and her future. The coding process identified 62 data units

consisting of 20 representations of marriage norms (N01–N20), 17 data units related to Gala's appraisal of stressful situations (A01–A17), and 25 data units representing coping strategies (K01–K25). Each data unit was categorized based on narrative events, dialogues, and character actions related to marriage expectations, social pressure, and responses toward personal problems.

The findings indicate that marriage norms in the novel appear through three main forms: (1) expectations of marriage after a long-term relationship, (2) the association between women's age and marital status, and (3) family and social expectations regarding women's future. These representations demonstrate that marriage is constructed not only as a personal choice but also as a social expectation influenced by surrounding relationships.

Marriage as a Social Expectation after a Long-Term Relationship

Marriage expectations are represented through Gala and Bara's relationship, which has lasted for thirteen years. Their relationship creates an assumption that marriage becomes the natural continuation of their commitment. In the novel, Bara asks Gala about future plans and connects their relationship with marriage (Bastari, 2020). The conversation demonstrates that marriage has become part of the social imagination surrounding romantic relationships. However, Bara's decision to end the relationship creates a contradiction between Gala's personal expectations and social assumptions about long-term relationships. Gala does not only experience the loss of a partner but also the loss of a future plan that was previously associated with marriage. This finding indicates that marriage norms influence how individuals interpret relationship success and personal achievement.

Age and Marital Status as Social Indicators

The second finding shows that age becomes an important element in the construction of marriage expectations. The conversation between Gala and Nandi regarding approaching the age of thirty demonstrates how women's age is connected with questions about marital status (Bastari, 2020). The issue of age does not merely represent biological development but also reflects social expectations regarding the appropriate timing for women to marry. The data show that Gala's concern emerges not only from her personal relationship failure but also from awareness of social judgment. The expectation to marry within a certain age range becomes a source of pressure that influences how Gala evaluates her future.

Family Expectations and the Meaning of Marriage

Marriage expectations are also represented through family perspectives. The statement: "*Let there be someone to accompany you.*" Bastari, (2020) illustrates the assumption that marriage provides companionship and prevents individuals from living alone. Family expectations in the novel do not always appear as direct coercion; however, they function as cultural values that shape perceptions of women's ideal life paths. The findings show that Gala's experience is influenced by multiple layers of expectations: her personal desire to continue the relationship, her family's hopes, and social assumptions regarding marriage.

Gala's Appraisal of Marriage Pressure

The analysis of stress appraisal reveals that Gala interprets her situation as a significant loss and uncertainty. Bara's decision to end their relationship after thirteen years becomes a major stressful event because it changes the future that Gala previously imagined. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) explain that individuals evaluate stressful situations through cognitive appraisal processes, including perceptions of loss, threat, and available resources. Gala's response demonstrates that the breakup is not interpreted only as the end of a romantic relationship but also as the disruption of social expectations connected with marriage.

Coping Strategies as Women's Responses toward Social Pressure

The analysis identifies several coping strategies used by Gala in negotiating her situation. The strategies include seeking social support from Nandi, preparing herself before meeting Bara, and requesting direct clarification regarding the reason for the separation.

Gala's conversation with Nandi represents the role of social support in managing stressful situations. Nandi does not solve Gala's problem directly but provides emotional support and encourages Gala to seek clarification from Bara (Bastari, 2020). This finding corresponds with Cohen and Wills (1985), who explain that social support can function as a resource for individuals experiencing stress.

Furthermore, Gala's attempt to communicate directly with Bara represents problem-focused coping. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), efforts to obtain information and address the source of problems are categorized as problem-focused coping. Meanwhile, Gala's effort to prepare herself emotionally before meeting Bara reflects emotion-focused coping aimed at regulating emotional responses.

DISCUSSION

Marriage Norms as Cultural Construction and Social Pressure

The findings demonstrate that *Ganjil Genap* represents marriage not merely as an individual decision but as a cultural construction influenced by family, age discourse, and social expectations. Gala's experience illustrates how women's identity can become connected with marital status, where being unmarried after a certain age may generate social concerns and personal pressure.

This representation corresponds with previous studies explaining that single status in Indonesian society is often influenced by social stigma and cultural expectations. [Himawan, Bambling, and Edirippulige \(2018\)](#) found that unmarried individuals in Indonesia may experience social perceptions related to marital status. Similarly, [Himawan et al. \(2019\)](#) explain that modernization does not completely eliminate traditional expectations regarding marriage, as social and psychological consequences remain experienced by unmarried individuals. Therefore, the marriage norms represented in the novel reflect a broader social phenomenon in which personal choices are negotiated within cultural expectations.

Women's Negotiation toward Marriage Expectations

Unlike previous studies that mainly examined Gala's psychological characteristics, this research emphasizes the process through which Gala negotiates marriage expectations. Negotiation in this context does not mean rejecting marriage values entirely, but rather managing the tension between personal aspirations and social expectations. Gala's experience demonstrates that women may encounter multiple interpretations of marriage: as personal commitment, family expectation, and social recognition. When Bara ends the relationship, Gala must reconstruct her understanding of herself and her future beyond the previously imagined marriage plan.

This finding expands previous studies on *Ganjil Genap*. [Rahmadi \(2022\)](#) examined cultural elements related to marriage myths in the novel, while [Tamara \(2022\)](#) analyzed psychological conflicts and resolution mechanisms. [Sopiana \(2023\)](#) explored Gala's psychological needs using Maslow's theory, [Sugiyo et al. \(2023\)](#) analyzed Gala's behavior through Skinner's theory, and [Effendi et al. \(2023\)](#) examined personality aspects using Jung's theory. Meanwhile, [Wahzudi et al. \(2024\)](#) discussed urban women's identity through a feminist perspective. The present study complements these studies by showing how cultural expectations regarding marriage interact with women's psychological responses.

Coping Strategies as Psychological and Cultural Responses

Through [Lazarus and Folkman's \(1984\)](#) framework, Gala's coping strategies demonstrate the relationship between social pressure and individual responses. The process begins with primary appraisal, where Gala interprets the separation as a loss of an important relationship and future expectation. Secondary appraisal occurs when Gala evaluates available resources, including support from Nandi and opportunities to communicate with Bara.

Gala's coping strategies indicate that she is not merely a passive recipient of social pressure. Instead, she actively negotiates her circumstances through communication, emotional regulation, and seeking social support. This finding supports the perspective of [Folkman \(1997\)](#) and [Folkman and Moskowitz \(2004\)](#), who emphasize that coping processes involve continuous interaction between emotional experiences and situational demands.

Furthermore, social support from Nandi reflects the importance of interpersonal relationships in coping processes. [Cohen and Wills \(1985\)](#) and [Thoits \(2011\)](#) explain that social relationships can function as resources that help individuals manage psychological pressure.

Contribution to Literary and Cultural Studies

The findings contribute to understanding contemporary Indonesian literature as a space where social values and changing cultural perspectives are represented. Through Gala's character, *Ganjil Genap* illustrates the tension between traditional marriage expectations and women's attempts to define their own life trajectories. The novel shows that marriage norms continue to influence women's experiences, but individuals are also capable of negotiating these norms through personal reflection, communication, and emotional management. Therefore, the study highlights the relationship between literary representation, cultural values, and social transformation.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that marriage norms represented in *Ganjil Genap* reflect cultural expectations that influence women's experiences and self-perception. Gala's experience demonstrates that marriage is not merely a personal choice but also a social construction shaped by family expectations, age discourse, and surrounding communities. Through various negotiation strategies, Gala attempts to redefine her position when facing social pressure and changing life

circumstances. The findings show that contemporary Indonesian literature provides important reflections on gender relations, cultural values, and ongoing changes in social perspectives toward marriage.

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