


Decoding *Agul Ku Payung Butut*: A linguistic-psychological inquiry through Adler's Theory of Inferiority

Muhammad Daffa Syafiq Nashr Ad-Diba'i 

Department of Quran and Tafsir Studies, Islamic State University of Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung,
West Java 40614, Indonesia
**e-mail: abadi1abda2@gmail.com*

Received 16 July 2025
Revised 28 August 2025
Accepted 12 September 2025

ABSTRACT

This study examines the Sundanese proverb “Agul ku Payung Butut” from the perspective of Individual Psychology, as elaborated by Alfred Adler. The proverb judges’ people on their pride about meaningless things, implying intricate psychological processes that can be explained by Adler’s ideas on inferiority feelings, compensation, and social interest. Using qualitative content analysis, the study combines semantic-metaphoric linguistic analysis with Adlerian psychological ideas. The research was based on the text of proverbs, the novel *Payung Butut* by Akhmad Bakri, and interviews with experts on Sundanese culture. The results show that the proverb depicts sick pay of inferiority complex whereby payung butut (worn out umbrella) signifies inferiority and agul (arrogance) as efforts to create artificial superiority. The wisdom of traditional Sundanese people proves to agree with psychological principles by highlighting genuine contributions to society instead of empty showiness. This adds to the understanding of the overlap between cultural manifestations and psychological processes, which applies to cultural psychology and linguistic research. This indicates that Sundanese proverbs can be used as a medium of psychological wisdom, informing human behavioral patterns that cut across cultures yet remain at the local cultural level.

Keywords: Sundanese proverbs, Alfred Adler, inferiority complex, compensation, social interest, contemporary cultural analysis.

priviet lab.
RESEARCH & PUBLISHING



1. INTRODUCTION

As a living container of West Java's oral tradition, the Sundanese proverb contains leveled wisdom regarding the cathedral of the human psyche. With more than 32 million speakers, the Sundanese language is filled with expressive capabilities, one of which is proverbial: these stingy pieces of cultural wisdom that simultaneously serve as weapons of social criticism and moral guidance (Puspita & Ruhailah, 2021). The most psychological is one of these: *Agul ku Payung Butut*, or, in the words that followed that key word, literally, to boast with a tattered umbrella. This is rather farcical at first sight. However, behind the vision is a telling image of compensatory action, a person boasting of what has become stale or even pathetic in a bid to cover their innate feelings of deprivation. Such a behavioral pattern echoes the main propositions of Alfred Adler's Individual Psychology, according to which human behavior is framed as a continuous negotiation with inferiority, which, in many cases, may be overcome by means of complex compensations (Adler, 1927, 1956). The proverb is a folk saying; it is, in six words, an allegory of psychological camouflage.

Alfred Adler, one of the fathers of holistic psychology, has given a triad of original ideas: inferiority complex, compensation, and social interest, which now provide a very convincing perspective through which one could find what the psychological layers of Sundanese proverbs could be (Adler Graduate School, 2025). According to his theory, all people are driven by an inherent urge to cope with inferiority, which can be transformed into creative self-development or staved off into maladaptive overstretch (Adler, 1956). According to research on Sundanese proverbial culture, these short phrases are not mere sayings. These are pedagogical acts written in the language of metaphor. They are cultural reflectors that reflect inwards in relation to individual behavior and outwards in relation to systems of power and society (Puspita & Ruhailah, 2021). Puspita and Ruhailah (2021) state these terms have spatial and emotional imaginations that infiltrate moral imperatives (religiosity, discipline, and social duty) under the guise of easy-on-the-ear words. In other sections, Suherman (2018) explores the structure of power reflected in such proverbs and states that authority, as it is perceived in Sundanese, is neither a given as such nor a set-in-stone phenomenon but a bargaining position, which is connected to prosperity, family heritage, and education.

In the context of the Sundanese cultural domain, fundamental beliefs, defined as *silih asih* (mutual affection), *silih asah* (mutual sharpening of minds), and *silih asuh* (mutual care), describe a long-term promise to social order and communal prosperity (Sjamsulbachri & Tarsidi, 2018). These ideals strongly echo Adler's ideas around the concept of social interest: psychological wellness cannot be discussed as a personal climb; it is a social construction, and that person is able to contribute to a general good (Ansbacher, 1990). This research determines a notable gap in the literature: no previous study has understood the Sundanese proverb *Agul ku Payung Butut* using the interpretive tool of Adlerian theory. Unlike previous studies or at least in limited cases (Puspita & Ruhailah, 2021; Suherman, 2018), the current study goes a step beyond the linguistic richness and cultural embeddedness of Sundanese proverbs. It suggests a cross-disciplinary method and, thus a method that combines linguistic enquiry with psychological investigation in order to bring out a more dimensioned, more depthful interpretation of the symbolic load of the proverb.

The linguistic part of this work embraces a semantic and metaphorical approach to language analysis. The semantic interpretation breaks the proverb into its denotative and connotative levels, while the metaphorical one organizes the symbolic load of the *payung butut*, or umbrella, literally: the rotten umbrella, into the representation of personal deficiency in the Sundanese cultural imagination (Cambridge University Press, 2016). The theory of metaphors accepted and proven by research confirms that linguistic metaphors support the contextualization and communication of intangible concepts with the help of more concrete, embodied language (Mizoguchi & Yamamoto, 2023). To further support its theoretical framework, the present work is based on the novel (*Payung Butut* by Akhmad Bakri) as a narrative echo of the critique of Akhmad Bakri in the proverb. The novel enlarges the observational field, providing lived descriptions of how such proverbial logic works in Sundanese social reality and how it is the psychological legacy of people who are forced into such acts it condemns. In this manner, fiction proves to be an enlightened integral of theory, explaining the moral architecture of a proverb in terms of the flesh and faultlines of its characters.

The purpose of the study is to create some psychological depth found in the Sundanese proverb, *Agul ku Payung Butut*, and this will be done by interpreting it using the conceptual framework of the Individual Psychology of Alfred Adler. It seeks to reveal the ways in which the Adlerian concepts of feelings of inferiority and compensatory behavior are culturally defined in the specific representations of self-presentation and social criticism. Headed by intertwining a linguistic analysis (as linguistically and metaphorically), the study edifice of the proverb through an Adlerian reading concentrates on the symbolic and emotive construction of the proverb. This way, it acts positively towards the growth process of cultural psychology as well as linguistic analyses, especially since it demonstrates how universal psychological processes are articulated through local customs. The study further contributes a culturally located reflection on the mediation of metaphors of lack and appearance in the relationship between individuals and social norms, identity, and self-worth, thereby adding more to interdisciplinary exchanges between psychology, language, and indigenous forms of knowledge.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Individual Psychology

The Individual Psychology theory developed by Alfred Adler does not view the human being as a single psyche with its inner conflict between its unconscious motives, instead they live their lives in a process of continually struggling to overcome their inferiority complex (Adler, 1927). Abandoning the classic understanding of psychoanalysis, Adler shifted the focus to conscious intentions, social context, and voluntary striving (Adler Graduate School, 2025). The main idea behind his construct is the notion of inferiority feelings, which is natural and common among all people, and it is based on the inability of the child at an early stage in his/her life to rely on his/her own self and feelings of being physically and emotionally limited (Adler, 1956; Bradley, 2020). More importantly, Adler distinguished between ordinary inferiority, which could fuel growth and self-improvement, and the more inhibiting inferiority complex, which deformed self-perception and blocked development. To this extent, the theory does not pathologize weakness but views it as fertile ground out of which as much ambition to live and thrive as maladjustment can arise.

In Adlerian psychology, compensation is a psychological ploy that supposedly enables people to counter or elevate their feelings of inferiority (Verywell Mind, 2024). Adler determined three major mechanisms: successful compensation, overcompensation, and retreat into illness (Bradley, 2020). Healthy compensation, where the realization of skills and pro-social interaction have real depth, can be seen as being opposite to unhealthy variants that often appear in the nature of domination or artificial supremacy, what Adler calls performances of strength, which are the expression of unresolved inner weaknesses (Adler, 1956). Central to the idea of psychological health advocated by Adler is the notion of social interest, which puts the notions of mere adaptation relative to well-being (Ansbacher, 1990). There is no standard sociability in social interest, but an ambiguity that permits cooperation, sympathetic understanding, and active participation in the common good (Adler Graduate School, 2025). Individuals who develop this orientation are interpersonally attuned and committed to something beyond themselves. To this latter vision belonged the idea that the morally perfect man is not to be reduced to the inner state of balance but to the entire possibility of active involvement in the moral life of the society.

It must be emphasized that in Adlerian theory, lifestyle is not about the habits of consumption or routine but rather about the ingrained behavior patterns and perceptions that people develop in an attempt to achieve their personal aims (Adler, 1956). Developed in early childhood, such a way of living eventually becomes the mental map by which someone goes about the world, a subjective reasoning, perhaps not influenced by reality, but the recollection of what was seen, and of what conclusions were arrived at in emotion (Overholser, 2010). The most important component of this framework is the concept of fictional finalism that Adler developed: that people are driven not only by past experiences but also by some imagined endpoints: idealized ends that, even when they can never be achieved, give direction and sense to behavior (Ansbacher, 1990).

Modern scholars have confirmed the cross-cultural applicability of Adler. The focus on purpose, belonging, and meaning is universal; to this extent, Adlerian psychology particularly fits complex problems of identity, belief, and spiritual orientation with references to different cultural contexts (Miller & Taylor, 2016). Instead of dictating one conception of mental health, Adler's theory attempts to conform to the cultural blueprint that is received and recreated by individuals, providing a pliable yet upright gesture to discern the design of the self.

2.2. Linguistic Analysis of Proverbs

A semiotic and metaphorical examination of proverbs implies investigating not only the meaning of words but also the meanings of the culture delivered in the concise form in the present tense (Cambridge University Press, 2016). In this respect, semantics will further explore the implicit (connotative) and explicit (denotative) meanings of the words that constitute the proverb (Mayring, 2014). These definitions are seldom fixed; they glisten with social recollection and situational stress.

The semantic level of *Agul ku Payung Butut* is interesting because it starts out with a literal interpretation: to boast with a ragged umbrella, but soon shows a deeper condemnation: the folly of strutting under the impressions of value. There is in the Sundanese word *agul*, a sort of presumptuousness, an attribute that marks false pride and exaggerated vanity based not upon substance but upon show. This is accomplished through the rather worn-out aged umbrella being used as a synecdoche of lack of quality posing as class status. Semantics decodes not only here; it reveals values and judgments beating their way to life in the shadows of commonplace utterances.

As a metaphorical analysis established, the symbolic construction of the proverbial language, in general, explains that the symbolic frame of a traditional proverb transforms ordinary objects into a cultural critique vessel (Mohler et al., 2013). In *Agul ku Payung Butut*, *payung butut* stands as a strong metaphor for something not just empty of values but bordering on the disgraceful that is being flaunted as something to be proud of. This is because of the intended purpose of the umbrella: a device of cover and shelter. After wearing it out and breaking the cycle, and after it could not serve its intended purpose, it remains an empty representation of utility, and by extension, value (Mizoguchi & Yamamoto, 2023).

Studies on linguistic metaphors confirm that metaphoric utterances can lead to the conception of abstract concepts using concrete and known images (Frontiers in Psychology, 2019). Within this Sundanese proverb, the trope of the *payung butut* serves as a more nuanced but precise form of social criticism, revealing the tension between show and reality. It is a condemnation of not only vanity but also a more universal desire: the frantic desire to be perceived as important, even at the cost of avenues that give away the person they want to make great.

2.3. Sundanese Proverbs and Its Cultural Value

Sundanese proverbs are a treasury of local wisdom, as they condense generations of moral teachings and observations of the social scene into small, easy-to-remember units. They are not dry ornaments of the language but moral compasses moored to life experience and honed by the memory within the community. Puspita and Ruhailah (2021) see in these expressions a set of cultural values: religiosity, honesty, tolerance, discipline, diligence, and social responsibility. Every proverb is not merely phraseology; it is an unspoken pedagogy, a set of governing principles transcribing communal life, and the codes of individual action. In their bareness, they are able to communicate what is difficult to find in volumes, and that is the transmission of an ethical worldview, somehow fit into the regimen of ordinary speech.

Modesty, humility, and social harmony are the values at the center of the Sundanese culture. They are not just values that are embraced and spread; they are values practiced through everyday interactions and rituals (Susanti & Sukaesih, 2024). These ideals reach their most vibrant articulation in the triadic ethics of *silih asih* (mutual affection), *silih asah* (mutual sharpening of intellect), and *silih asuh* (mutual care), which form the foundations of Sundanese social relations (Sjamsulbachri & Tarsidi, 2018). Research on

power representation in Sundanese proverbs argues that the cultural orientation of power is quite egalitarian, and authority is not hereditary or defaulted but is granted based on competence, goodness, and knowledge (Suherman, 2018). This opinion purposely contrasts the empty gestures of position or privilege, which fits well with the satirical telegraph of the main theme of *Agul ku Payung Butut*, in that it pokes fun at authority as it pertains to self-worthlessness regarding content. The Sundanese oral tradition, especially its proverbs, is crucial for transferring such beliefs cross-generationally. More than ornamental phrases, proverbs are moral tools: advice vehicles, social criticism guides, and ethical conduct in the doing of life (Munawaroh, 2024; Ramlan et al., 2023). With the help of them, culture is not only maintained, it is also enacted, challenged and re-invented

2.4. Marriage of Psychology and Culture

The cross-platform study of the aspects of psychology and culture indicates that in many instances, cultural expression can be seen as a reflection of more universal psychological laws (Lantz, 1980). Although proverbs, rituals, and social codes might seem highly local, they often contain patterns of thought and behavior that people can recognize. In that respect, the theory of Alfred Adler, and specifically its focus on social embeddedness, goal-oriented activity, and the whole nature of the self, is not only culturally applicable but also empirically supported in modern neuropsychological research (Lantz, 1980).

His observations, which were once regarded as conjectural, now accompany scientific facts indicating that the human mind is naturally communal, goal-oriented, and influenced by interactions between inner pursuits and outer reality. Culture is not the setting of the psychological scene; however, culture is the psychological scene in action.

Basing oneself on the social and cultural underpinnings of personality formation is the reason the Adlerian approach has been successful in multicultural settings (Miller & Taylor, 2016). The concepts of social interest and lifestyle are the core Adlerian ideals that provide dynamic but powerful sources for managing human behavior in varying cultural orientations. Instead of instilling the strict universalist paradigm, the Adlerian approach makes way to communicate the grammar of morality and the language of symbols peculiar to this or that community, there is a more situated understanding of the self to be made.

The Indonesian situation is such that the study of mental health increasingly points to the need for culturally oriented psychological studies. Expert consensus research indicates that frameworks must be developed that combine local values, communal norms, and spiritual aspects for both diagnosis and treatment (Indonesian Health Ministry, 2024). The applicability of the Adlerian theory is particularly sharp here: the teleological and holistic perspective the theory propounds does not only resonates with the collectivist spirit of the various Indonesian societies and justifies the value of indigenous knowledge as a source of psychological awareness.

3. Methodology

3.1. Subjects and Sources of Data

This paper is a qualitative research study, as it uses content analysis to explore the proverb *Agul ku Payung Butut* in Sundanese using the theoretical framework of Adlerian psychology (Delve Tool, 2024). A qualitative framework is especially appropriate for this investigation because it is inductive and tends to inspire hidden cultural and psychological meanings in a broader context (Mayring, 2014). This perspective considers the value of interpretation over the reductionist tendency to transform data into numerical representations.

The data will be examined through content analysis to define and categorize recurrent psychological themes integrated into the proverb, that is, feelings of inferiority, compensatory behavior, and social interest (Columbia Public Health, 2023). This approach makes a stratified form of reading possible, where the analysis of the text is combined logically with theoretical analysis, resulting in an insight

that is both rooted in language and a step higher in conceptualization (Bengtsson, 2016). In this manner, the work follows the process of one proverb being a microcosm of psychological existence, and in the linguistic crevices of the words, the play of self-identification, social dreaming, and cultural protestation.

Three major data sources that were used in this search include: (1) the textual body of the proverb *Agul ku Payung Butut* collected in different references on Sundanese culture; (2) *Payung Butut*, a novel written by Akhmad Bakri, which will be used as a lyrical example; and (3) semi-structured interviews with Sundanese cultural experts carried out to understand how the proverb is traditionally used and in what contexts. These multiple sources will not only be used to enhance the depth of the analysis but also assist in the triangulation of meaning in textual, literary, and lived spaces.

The respondents were a purposely chosen sample of five representatives of the Sundanese culture due to their proficiency and years-long experience of being exposed to the local culture. The selection criteria were: (1) accountability in possessing knowledge of the Sundanese cultural systems; (2) engagement in cultural preservation efforts; and (3) willingness to participate in the study. These people are not mere information providers; they are interpretive allies, providing a locally grounded understanding of the cultural lifeworld in which the proverb under analysis is embedded.

The main research tool that this research will employ is a content analysis guide composed of the main concepts of the Adlerian theory (Delve Tool, 2024). This manual contains certain pointers to identify psychological themes such as inferiority sentiments (because such are depicted through the manifestation of feelings of inadequacy or lack of self-esteem), compensation patterns evident in the demonstration of seeking to overcome the feeling, and intrinsic interest or outlook, which is expressed in orientations of the attitude or gesture towards collective well-being. It also describes styles of living as identity and purpose statements and creates fiction finalism or wolfish accomplishments that motivate people's conduct. Along with this analytic framework, a semi-structured interview guide was formulated to guide informants as to what they understood in the proverb *Agul ku Payung Butut*, the social circumstances surrounding its application, and whether they consider the proverb still applicable in Sundanese community life. This two-instrument architecture allows for a diversity of exchanges between theoretical investigation and what might be called culturally rooted discernment. Three phases of the data collection process were used. In the first stage of my textual analysis of the collection, the proverb *Agul ku Payung Butut* was collected from many sources, both secondary and primary, oral archives, and published works. This stage also involved carefully reading how the events in the novel *Payung Butu* by Akhmad Bakri have been narrated to derive illustrations of the proverb that have psychological and cultural implications. Contextual notes were also made to note the contexts in which the proverb is being used and the inferences it brings out on different occasions.

The second stage focused on semi-structured interviews with selected Sundanese cultural specialists. These interviews addressed how the informants understood the proverb, its social and moral meaning, and the cultural rationale for its use. This phase was also used to validate the textual analysis, since it was up to the experts to criticize, improve, or confirm the interpretations that may have arisen.

In the third step, triangulation of data was performed to achieve validity and depth. The textual corpus, narrative illustrations, and interviews conducted with the experts were cross-analytically verified to draw convergences and differences. The informants also underwent member checking to verify the correctness of the interpretations and ground the analysis on the realities of the Sundanese cultural experience.

The data analysis was characterized by a combination of a linguistic and psyche interpretation because of the combination between the linguistic and the psyche analysis with reference to the model of analysis proposed by Mayring (2014). The semantic analysis concentrated on both the denotative and connotative aspects of the proverb under consideration and the way delicate semantic variations are defined by the cultural reasons of the Sundanese community. The use of this layer of analysis was also related to how the proverb was used in various contexts and an attempt to see which patterns of meaning variation and situational meaning resonances. The metaphorical treatment of the emblematic position of the *payung butut* was an allegory of lack or incompetence disguised as pride. This phase scrutinized the way the metaphor does not only work on the decorative level but also serves as a means of harsh social

criticism and how it correlates with some root psychological notions, including the idea of inferiority and the behavior aimed at compensating for it. It aimed to uncover the emotional and cognitive processes through which metaphors undertake cultural evaluation and emotional emphasis.

The Adlerian theoretical perspective underlying the thematic analysis was performed by coding the data using the following central psychological concepts: inferiority feelings, compensation, social interest, lifestyle, and fictional finalism. These codes were then placed in intelligible thematic groups that reflected the dynamism between individual psychology and cultural expression. The authors used Adler's theory of Individual Psychology as a guideline in interpreting the themes, and the study was also able to contextualize each theme in the larger framework of human motivation, self-construction, and social embeddedness.

To ensure the rigor and credibility of the study, several validity methods were applied. The cross-verification of the findings was conducted via data triangulation, based on the use of various sources and different types of data, such as text-based materials, narrative fiction, and interviews with experts. Triangulation also improved the methodology since textual analysis combined with a closed-ended qualitative interview created a multidimensional picture of the proverb in question, not only in respect to its cultural implications but also psychologically.

Member checking was used to check the interpretations with individuals on whom the research was conducted to ensure that the analytical results reflected their cultural and experiential knowledge. Furthermore, an audit trail was maintained during the research, and every step of the research was documented, including data collection, data coding, theme development, and interpretation of the research in terms of the theory. The above method is not only transparent and structured but also offers a direct course for replication and a critical review.

4. Results

4.1. Semantic Analysis of "*Agul ku Payung Butut*"

The semantics of the proverb *Agul ku Payung Butut* are more complex in the sense that there are many layers of meaning to it, and it is culturally loaded compared to its literal form. The denotative meaning of the proverb is, literally, to boast with a tattered umbrella, and at face value, its meaning is misplaced pride in something that is obviously in a degraded state. However, its connotative power is much more cutting, as it is meant to be the condemnation of a certain type of social conduct based on false pride.

The Sundanese word *agul* has a very negative connotation. While *reueus* means good pride based on appropriate accomplishments or moral virtue, *agul* implies overinflated compliments to oneself. One of the cultural informants defined it as:

"Agul teh lain ti reueus. Agul mah nyaeta sombong ka hal anu teu pantes disombongkeun. Sedengkeun reueus mah kabareupna ngabanggakeun prestasi atawa hal alus."
(*Agul* does not mean *reueus*). *Agul* is being proud on something not worth (*reueus* should be pride in accomplishment or something good.)

This is one of the most important distinctions in unpacking the social meaning of the proverb: it does not attack pride per se, but rather, a ludicrous misrepresentation of excellence in its absence.

The metaphorical usage of the phrase *payung butut* can be discussed in the context of representing something that used to be important but has lost its purpose, shape, and social prestige. Sundanese people use umbrellas with connotations of protection and status. Being spoken of as *butut* (worn-out, broken), it becomes a symbol of degeneration strutted about in the name of refinement. Such dissonance enhances the satirical nature of the proverb, highlighting the disparity between what is seen and what has value. The proverb comes with a cultural reproach to the semantic architecture: not to vanity, but to the weak, pretentious displays that usually mask a stronger insecurity.

4.2. Analysis through the Lens of Adlerian Theory:

Having the same psychological dynamic as Alfred Adler’s theory of the persistent struggle with inferior feelings, the true meaning of the proverb *Agul ku Payung Butut* is that the feelings of inferiority are a constant battle (Adler, 1927). In the proverb, a person depicted as a boaster with a worn-out umbrella records a form of compensation for an inadequacy. What might seem at first as the pride of arrogance turns out to be a sign of deeper defenselessness in Adlerian terms (see Table 1).

Table 1. Indicators of Inferiority Feelings Reflected in the Proverb *Agul ku Payung Butut*

Indicator	Manifestation in the Proverb	Theoretical Explanation
<i>Inadequacy</i>	Ownership of a <i>payung butut</i>	Reflects a perception of lacking something of genuine value
<i>Overcompensation</i>	The act of <i>agul</i>	A behavioral attempt to mask inner deficiency through inflated pride
<i>External Orientation</i>	Emphasis on showing off	Seeks validation and self-worth through the gaze and judgment of others
<i>Inauthenticity</i>	False pride	Projects a self-image that contradicts the individual’s actual condition

Based on Adler’s theories, this table demonstrates how the proverb reflects the psychological building of inferiority. The units of psychic conflict that erupt in culturally marked behavior are defined by each of the indicators and their association with the dimension in which a personal lack becomes external and fashionable in social exchange.

4.3. Unhealthy Compensation in Adlerian Terms

Unhealthy compensation, as presented in the psychological framework laid by Adler, could be striking through the proverb *Agul ku Payung Butut* (Adler, 1956). Rather than dealing with the feeling of inferiority either by the creation of an authentic competency or social value, the person turns to a contrived masquerade of personal pride and boasts about something that is not worth bragging about to cover his or her lack of self-worth. This compensatory pose is not adaptive; it falsifies reality and increases the loss of contact with self and the other.

This is also supported by narrative evidence in the novel “*Payung Butut*” by Akhmad Bakri. The main character, Bapak Naib, is a proud man, despite belonging to a low socioeconomic status because of his high-status aristocratic background. His overblown preoccupation with symbolic status is evident in the manner he rejects a potential son-in-law simply because he is not a descendant of nobility. This action, presented as the defense of family honor, is really a form of compensation, that is, the way to save the illusion of superiority without confronting his personal decline. Finally, such unsound compensation ruins even his personal interpersonal relations and psychological integrity. His metaphorical *payung butut*, which he grips to a fragile, inherited situation, does not protect him against the vulnerability he tries to hide.

4.4. Low Social Interest: A Deviation from Communal Ideals

The demeanor upon which *Agul ku Payung Butut* rests hints at a self-orientation that jeopardizes the welfare of the community, as perceived in the Adlerian frame of social interest (Ansbacher, 1990). Instead of trying to give something meaningful to society, the person is haunted by self-image and spends his or her money on image, not on value, fame, not on duty. This lack of social interest is an indication of social alienation from cooperative instincts, which Adler recognized as the key to psychological health.

This mismatch is confirmed by cultural informants who tell us that the ideal ethos of the Sundanese is rooted in the triad of *silih asih*, *silih asah*, and *silih asuh*, a relational ethic of mutual love, mutual cultivation, and mutual care (Sjamsulbachri & Tarsidi, 2018). These ethics emphasize unity and mutual assistance. The *agul* posture, in contrast, offends this ethic: it puts a person higher than the community, a deformation of relations, and creates a disruption of the social fabric with a charade of prestige. In this

way, *Agul ku Payung Butut* turns out not just to be a warning against vanity but a cultural reproach against those kinds of behavior which leave little or nothing to life, having no moral responsibility to deliver, to be, as Adler urged, useful to others.

4.5. Metaphorical Linguistic Analysis: The *Payung Butut* as Symbol

It turns out that the metaphor *payung butut* acts as a culturally charged and psychologically packed commentary on unjustified pride. It wraps into one image both the discrepancy between surface and depth, and between act and undermining of substance. As an object, an umbrella is conventionally associated with usefulness and social purpose: it covers, protects, and can be used as a sign of prestige in some scenarios. However, the umbrella is plunged into a state of *Butut*, and this umbrella turns out to be a symbol of decay. We no longer use it for the purpose it was designed for, and flaunt it nonetheless. This discrepancy lies at the core of this metaphoric strength.

Metaphors have a structure based on clear conceptual mapping. The source domain is a defective physical entity, the inadequacy of which is evident. The targeted domain is more abstract: characteristics, possessions, or identities that have no substance in reality but are luxuriantly presented. Conceptual rapport is attached to the disjunction between the moral and the actual, between what something ought to be and what it has turned to be. Such a metaphor depicts the ridiculousness of self-congratulations that do not entail success but rather the fear of being irrelevant.

In this sense, it is not only personal vanity that this proverb criticizes. It is a criticism of the social pageant of illusion, the desire to assert authority or clout, with instrumentation that is empty of significance. It is impossible not to see how the *payung butut* forms a cultural shorthand around false pride, an exhausted badge of compensatory action, and a rather keen linguistic intrusion on the logic and inflation of ego at the cost of sincerity.

Agul ku Payung Butut is a deadpan or indirect, but rather sharp, social critique, and it works within the framework of Sundanese cultural expression, especially their ideas on communication, since the culture appreciates politeness, restraint, and indirect expression (Puspita & Ruhailah, 2021). Instead of engaging its object of attack with explicit denunciation, the proverb uses metaphor as a cultural tool to pass a message of condemnation that is sharp yet subtle, satirical yet civil. Such indirectness gives the message the potential to go a long way without sounding defensive and, therefore, is effective but socially sustainable.

Cultural informants have also indicated that the proverb is usually applied when one is criticizing actions that depict an overrated sense of self without any real basis. It is aimed at those who pride themselves on a title or position that lacks any actual worth, flaunt their material possessions that lack some form of substance or meaning, or are people who sound elitist but have nothing to base their status on other than a position of privilege, but have not really done anything noteworthy or of any actual bearing. *Payung butut*, as a more dilapidated representation of protection and prestige, is the ideal means to relay this criticism. It enables people to expose pretentiousness, egocentrism, and false pride without violating the social contract of polite manners. Thus, we see that the proverb acts not only to describe an action but also performs a cultural correction, setting right a kind of proportionality between identity and merit.

This proverb *Agul ku payung Butut* is rooted in the widespread Sundanese cultural values, especially those based on modesty, humility, and originality (Susanti & Sukaesih, 2024). At the most fundamental level, the proverb is a critique of a certain type of display that does not fit within the moral imagination of the Sundanese, which prioritizes content over style and restrained self-respect over the performance of itself. In this world, the kind of pride that lacks real merit is not simply disapproved of but is regarded as a corruption of the social order.

There is an urgency to comprehend the conception of *someah hade*: be nice, polite, and really good. This embodies the moral stance that the Sundanese society is supposed to have (Ramlan et al., 2023). It is an ethic of truthfulness, in which what one gives to the community is more important than one's presentation. The actions explained in the *Agul Ku Payung Butut* go against this morale. It forms a smooth facade devoid of any perception behind it, the priorities of which fall on the look, not the functionality,

and personal satisfaction rather than community welfare. Not only is such behavior bad taste, but it is also socially counterproductive. The culture emphasizes the significance of reciprocity in relations and the importance of servicing the community, and the proverb helps to remind of the importance of genuineness before recognition, and boasting without particular value is disrespectful to the culture.

4.6. Contemporary Relevance of the Proverb

The discussions conducted with cultural informants demonstrate that *Agul ku Payung Butut* has become exceptionally contemporary in the current social setting, especially because life in modern society has led to new platforms of self-introduction and expression of symbolic behaviors. Social media, in particular, has been a breeding ground for the very phenomenon so denounced by the proverb, which is the show of lifestyle, success, or prestige beyond means or accomplishment in most cases. The performatic algorithm of digital identity intensifies the temptation to undertake worthiness performances, regardless of whether they have questionable foundations. This contemporary application is illustrated in the following matrix (see Table 2):

Table 2. function of the proverb as a contemporary cultural lens

Context	Manifestation	Proverbial Critique
Social Media	Excessive lifestyle display	Inauthentic self-representation
Professional Life	Exaggeration of accomplishments	Overcompensation for insecurity
Social Relations	Flaunting superficial connections	External orientation in search of validation

In both scenarios, the proverb acts as a medium for some form of cultural interpretation of modern behaviors that is subject to judgment. It is not that it condemns the acts themselves, but the psychological and social motives that directly lead to the acts: forces of insufficiency, ego enhancement, and the need to find it in ways outside of self. Hence, *Agul ku Payung Butut* is still not a traditional artifact but a beacon of a crisis of authenticity in an age of excessive proliferation of imagery.

4.7. Discussion

4.7.1. Alignment with Adlerian Theory

The results of this development indicate that there is a high logical combination of the Sundanese parable, *Agul ku Payung Butut* and the individual psychology model by Alfred Adler. The proverb presents a full psychological landscape of inferiority, unhealthy compensation, and a lack of social interest, which are three of the fundamental dynamics in Adlerian psychology (Adler, 1927, 1956). The proverb demonstrates a cross-cultural psychology mechanism, as opposed to being merely a cultural artifact. The Adlerian view of the proverb is that the condemned action, which is part of the proverb, can be seen as a symptom of inferiority that was never solved. A person who cannot solve this feeling of inadequacy in a constructive way, that is, in ways that lead to feeling and demonstrating competence or doing something worthwhile for others, turns to such superficial forms of showing himself. This illusionary creation of value in the guise of the faded umbrella turns out to be a production of a curlicue: a surface mannerism covering an internal dissociation. The *agul* posture is not a confidence posture but a defensive one. A defense mechanism that ends up reminding the individual of the inferiority he or she is trying to avoid.

Notably, the research asserts that Adlerian values are not culturally confined, as they express themselves in various social manifestations (Lantz, 1980). Although *Agul ku Payung Butut* is rooted in the moral and linguistic landscape of Sundanese culture, the mental pattern it attacks is by far distinctive of West Java. It echoes the universal hierarchy of human conflict: the tension between self-value and self-representation and between genuineness and the necessity to impact. The proverb can thus be regarded not just as a piece of cultural wisdom but as a mirror of a certain psychological point of the phenomenon, which is not limited to the context.

4.7.2. Linguistic Analysis and Cultural Meaning

The linguistic form of the proverb *Agul ku Payung Butut* is used to project a well-developed metaphor that is instructive in terms of cultural critique as well as moral verdict. The fact that the main metaphor is the use of *payung*, which has the connotations of protection, status, and propriety, is significant as a specifically Sundanese sensitivity to the language of symbols (Mohler et al., 2013). After becoming *butut* (worn-out, damaged), the umbrella turns into a silent accusation: a symbol of dignity without its content, which is still flaunted as unimpaired.

This figurative language is not an aggressive form of communication but a polished approach. Direct criticism can be considered undesirable in Sundanese culture, in which decorum and verbal grace are highly valued. Rather, the culture is biased to *kasantunan*, that is, a way of talking that does not deprive dignity but conservatively draws out judgment. The *butut* or *payung* metaphor demonstrates this practice. It does not make an accusation but creates an image, and this is a way of disapproval that does not seem direct but still does its job (Puspita & Ruhailah, 2021). It is a rebuking parable.

Moral focuses on proverbs are also enhanced by semantic differences. There is a stylistic change, especially in the use of *agul* instead of the neutral *reueus* (pride). *Agul* does not mean good self-respect but rather a boastful, proud, and self-worth attitude. This lexical choice reflects both psychological and ethical judgments. However, word choice is not an accident. It shows that the speaker is not reproaching pride to humiliate pride as such, but having in mind some sort of inauthentic self-promotion, which is an offense to reason as well as social having. This is because the linguistic and cultural components of the proverb blend into an efficient and at the same time unobtrusive form of moral pedagogy.

4.7.3. Implications for Cultural Psychology

This paper makes a good contribution to the field of cultural psychology by showing how the native language is expressed, especially in communities with oral forms of language, wherein Sundanese proverbs are an example of local lore. This codes psychological knowledge that reflects universal human tendencies (Miller & Taylor, 2016). These expressions are not folklore at all, but vehicles of ancient psychological insight distributed over the generations not (except through a more accurate phraseology) as a clinical theory, but as a common-sense teaching incorporated in speech and images. The results support the Adlerian principle that people cannot be studied outside their social and cultural backgrounds. In addition to ethical instruction, as it appears in *Agul ku Payung Butut*, local wisdom provides psychological clarification: it defines relationships of inferiority, compensation, and ego-formation in terms that become meaningful in the context of local culture. These facts can contribute to our knowledge of how culturally based discourse can transform into self-monitoring or even social discourse.

In addition, the engagement of linguistic and psychological discussion in this work also reveals the promise of interdisciplinary methods in any cultural study. In subsuming metaphor in mind and idiom in identity, these ways leave possibilities of perceptively more culturally appropriate psychological treatments and not the impositions of foreign schemes but rather one that gets into the reasoning of the symbols already there through the community of its own (Lantz, 1980). By doing so, psychology is less a discipline of abstract science and more a discussion of culture.

4.7.4. Contemporary Relevance in a Digital Age

The saying *Agul ku Payung Butut* has been quite relevant even in the realms of contemporary life, especially in the cycles of social media and consumerism culture. The need to show empty icons of success finds new grounds and popularity in the online environment, where crafted identities and inflated lifestyles are easy to broadcast. What used to be social positioning within confined local societies a few decades ago has now transformed into performance of value, based on algorithms. The expression in this way moves out of the oral tradition onto the center of the virtual stage and is a tongue-in-cheek criticism of false posturing.

The psychological consequences of this phenomenon among young Indonesian adults have been highlighted in recent investigations of the mental health of this population group. It has been associated with increased anxiety, insecurity, and emotional exhaustion due to the need to present a polished persona that is very out of touch with lived experience. In this environment, *Agul ku Payung Butut* provides not only cultural knowledge but also psychological treatment. It makes one reflect upon the gap between the surface and the depths and points at the emancipatory relevance of sincerity rather than managing perception.

This proverb is also applicable in the educational context. It can be utilized as a pedagogical starting point when merging the pedagogical discourses on character building, emotional resilience, and mental health literacy (Puspita & Ruhailah, 2021). Its moral core is along the lines of modern-day objectives in the character education sector, namely, the development of sincerity, humility, and social contribution. *Agul ku Payung Butut* closes the circle of cultural heritage and contemporary psychological issues, showing the difference between tradition as a relic and the same tradition as a resource: a culturally specific set of indicators for negotiating the moral and emotional ambiguities of contemporary life.

4.7.5. Cross-Cultural Comparison of Proverbs

The skeptical attitude toward the baseless arrogance voiced in *Agul ku Payung Butut* is not an isolated cultural phenomenon. This psychological theme proves to be universal, as indicated by a cross-cultural comparison. The warning expressed in the English proverb *Pride goes before a fall* is strikingly similar, but there is a difference in the register of the imagery. In both proverbs, the root of the threat of excessive self-esteem is identified; however, this is done along two different metaphorical terrains: one haptic and visual, the other abstract and effectual.

The simile of the *payung butut*, the decayed umbrella which is used as a form of honor, appeals to sensory concreteness. It is based on the objects of daily life that have found their roots in Sundanese cultural experience and emphasizes contemporaneity and the imagery of metaphor. In contrast, the English phrase conveys an opposing fall, a theoretical change in the sense of the presence of inner vice to the exteriority of punishment. The difference in cultural orientation to criticism is outlined using the Sundanese proverb, which defuses with irony and home imagery, whereas the English proverb does this with moral inevitableness.

Nevertheless, these differences do not cloud the level of closer similarity that they possess. The two carry the same psychological principle: the theory that is frequently hidden behind an inflated self-image is usually inferiority, yet the position of compensation does not last. The comparison therefore lends credence to the claim that Adlerian theory, which has been constructed in a given intellectual and historical context, has cross-cultural validity. This shows that the language of pride and pretense may change, but the psychological structures called by them are known worldwide. The vehicle turns into a mirror of the culture; the message—the weakness of people when confronted by the ego—remains a common denominator of all times.

4.8. Limitations and Implications for Future Research

Although this study provides a narrow investigation of the psychological meaning inherent in the Sundanese proverb *Agul ku Payung Butut*, it has several limitations. First, it is limited to one proverb. This limited perspective, although permitting depth, limits the scope of generalization. The potential of another psychological dynamic based on other Sundanese proverbs to be discovered in the field of research could further expand the corpus to encompass a broader scope and psychological grounds to be explored.

Second, the theoretical framework is based solely on Adlerian psychology. Although this lens is productive, it is also constraining. The introduction of alternative psychological theories, such as Jungian archetypes, symbolic interactionism, or narrative psychology, might make the analysis more vivid and provide a different perspective on the mechanisms of the self, ego, and social behavior criticized by the proverb.

Third, the research is based on Sundanese culture. Although this specification has depth, it poses a demand for comparative research. A comparison of Sundanese proverbs with those in other traditions that seem similar through cross-cultural studies would shed light on which psychological topics are culturally relative and which would resonate across human cultures. By doing so, researchers were able to outline the boundaries of what Adler called the social embeddedness of the individual and the difference between the variables and constants.

These ramifications are many-fold for future scholarship. Scholars can undertake the development of a psychological mapping of Sundanese proverbs to greater depths of interdisciplinary interaction between folklore and mental health (1), the creation of diagnostic modules to detect current instances of *agul ku payung butut* type behavior, particularly in online environments (2), and controlled studies to understand the pedagogical effectiveness of proverbs as character training/emotional process experts (3). They would not only save cultural heritage but also make use of its psychological insight to apply it to modern relevance.

5. CONCLUSION

The research shows that the Sundanese proverb *Agul ku Payung Butut* bears a complex psychological process that is similar to the main ideas of Alfred Adler's Individual Psychology. At its core, there is a portrait of unhealthy compensation, where a man carries an unnecessary arsenal to hide the emptiness within him. This is not a behavior that solves the problem of inferiority, but it builds a weak sense of superiority reminiscent of Adler's theory of neurotic compensation.

The rhetorical precision of the proverb is highlighted by its linguistic analysis. This image of a used-up umbrella is not only a poetic embellishment but also a scalpel, an instrument of social commentary. It expresses critical disapproval in a magnanimous manner instead of engaging in confrontation, which is evident in the Sundanese culture espousing its values on indirectness, elegance, and richness of symbolism in ethical talk. The results ratify the psychological validity of local wisdom in the long term. Indeed, rather than being vestiges of a distant past, proverbs like *Agul ku Payung Butut* serve as a cultural conduit of psychological wisdom to the psychological homeland, the conveyor through which the people convey moral knowledge and emotional perception. The fact that they are still relevant today in terms of how people behave on social media as well as how they craft their identities indicates that their teachings are not dead, but still urgent.

This study shows how interdisciplinary research is beneficial in cultural studies by crossing linguistic and psychological methods. It helps create a culturally responsive psychology that overcomes differences in cultures that recognize the universality of struggle to respect the difference in which struggle is manifested. In this light, local wisdom is not a decoration of tradition but rather a treasury of psychological verity. In practical terms, this study indicates the pedagogical applicability of proverbs in teaching character and culturally sensitive psychological intervention. Instead of merely providing metaphors, they provide mirrors; that is, they are the means to reflection, empathetic understanding, and a way of change.

Future researchers should consider extending this discussion to interpret more Sundanese proverbs by adopting other psychological perspectives. Intercultural comparisons might also be used to shed additional light on what the themes of the self, pride, and social connection have in common and what they owe to the specific ground where they take root. In this task, we may discover not only what is said in other tongues but also what it means to be human under them all.

Ethical Approval

Ethical approval was not required for this study design.

Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was not obtained for this study.

Author Contributions

Muhammad Daffa Syafiq Nashr ad-Diba'i was responsible for the conceptualization, research design, data collection, analysis, interpretation of results, drafting, and finalization of the manuscript. The author has read and approved the final version of the manuscript and serves as the corresponding author of this study.

Disclosure Statement

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The data presented in this study are available upon request from the corresponding author for privacy reasons.

Funding

This study did not receive any external funding.

Note on Contributor

Muhammad Daffa Syafiq Nashr ad-Diba'i

<https://orcid.org/0009-0006-7063-887X>

Muhammad Daffa Syafiq Nashr ad-Diba'i is an undergraduate in Qur'an and Tafseer Studies with an interest not exclusive to religious research, but interdisciplinary humanities studies, including continental philosophy, cultural identity on sociology, literature theoretical framework analysis implementation and existential psychology. His works mainly focusing on qualitative hermeneutical methodology, exploring and analyzing textual-contextual values, while maintaining methodological rigor which alligns with paradigmic accepted epistemology. His main principle is that all knowledge is inherently neutral as a tool, hence many can be utilized to push the progress towards civilization advancement without putting the humanism aside, providing contributions by putting the theoretical frameworks following said criterion as a foundation.

REFERENCES

- Adler, A. (1927). *Understanding Human Nature*. Greenberg.
- Adler, A. (1956). *The Individual Psychology of Alfred Adler*. Basic Books.
- Puspita, N. W., & Ruhaliah. (2021). Sundanese imagery and education values in Sundanese phrases and proverbs. *Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference on Language, Literature, Culture, and Education*, 481-487. <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.211119.075>
- Ansbacher, H. L. (1990). Individual Psychology theory and practice. *The Journal of Individual Psychology*, 46(2), 123-145.
- Bradley, R. (2022). Exploring the inferiority model in Adlerian psychotherapy. *BYU ScholarsArchive Student Works*, 332. <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/studentpub/332>
- Corey, G. (2023). *Theory and Practice of Counseling and Psychotherapy* (11th ed.). Cengage Learning.
- Erbas, M. M. (2023). Adlerian therapy: A general review. *International Journal of Innovative Approaches in Education*, 7(2), 79-90. <https://doi.org/10.29329/ijiape.2023.567.3>
- Feist, J., & Feist, G. J. (2008). *Theories of Personality* (7th ed.). McGraw-Hill.
- Hsieh, H. F., & Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, 15(9), 1277-1288. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732305276687>
- Adler Graduate School. (2025). Alfred Adler: Theory and application. <https://www.alfredadler.edu/about/alfred-adler-theory-application/>

- Iskandar, D., et al. (2023). Metaphors in Indonesian and Acehese proverbs of similar meanings: Semantic and cultural analyses. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 12(3), 633-650. <https://doi.org/10.17509/ijal.v12i3.63350>
- Suherman, A. (2018). Power representation on Sundanese proverbs. *Macrolinguistics*, 6(9), 112-123. <https://doi.org/10.26478/JA2018.6.9.7>
- Miller, R., & Taylor, D. D. (2016). Does Adlerian theory stand the test of time: Examining individual psychology from a neuroscience perspective. *The Journal of Humanistic Counseling*, 55(2), 91-113. <https://doi.org/10.1002/johc.12028>
- Overholser, J. C. (2010). Psychotherapy that strives to encourage social interest: A simulated case study. *The Journal of Individual Psychology*, 66(1), 94-123.
- Schultz, D. P., & Schultz, S. E. (2017). *Theories of Personality* (11th ed.). Cengage Learning.
- Sperry, L. (2020). Evidence-based Adlerian therapy: A systematic review. *The Journal of Individual Psychology*, 76(3), 234-256.
- Verywell Mind. (2024). Compensation as a defense mechanism: What is overcompensation? <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-compensation-2794972>
- Watts, R. E. (2013). Adlerian counseling. In D. Capuzzi & M. D. Stauffer (Eds.), *Counseling and psychotherapy: Theories and interventions* (5th ed., pp. 123-145). American Counseling Association.
- Lantz, J. (1980). Individual psychology and existential therapy. *The Journal of Individual Psychology*, 36(2), 152-161.
- Delve Tool. (2024). The practical guide to qualitative content analysis. <https://delvetool.com/blog/guide-qualitative-content-analysis>
- Cambridge University Press. (2016). Using semantic feature norms to investigate how the visual and verbal modes afford metaphor construction and expression. *Language and Cognition*, 9(3), 525-552.
- Susanti, S., & Sukaesih. (2024). The meaning of Sunda cultural construction for Javanese individuals in Bandung. *Sosiohumaniora*, 26(1), 12-23. <https://doi.org/10.24198/sosiohumaniora.v26i1.50196>
- Mayring, P. (2014). *Qualitative content analysis: Theoretical foundation, basic procedures and software solution*. Beltz.
- Mohler, M., et al. (2013). Semantic signatures for example-based linguistic metaphor detection. *Proceedings of the Workshop on Metaphor in NLP*, 27-35.
- Sjamsulbachri, A., & Tarsidi, D. Z. (2018). Reflective core values the life of the Sundanese. *Proceedings of the Annual Civic Education Conference*, 516-519. <https://doi.org/10.2991/acc-18.2018.117>
- Columbia Public Health. (2023). Content analysis method and examples. <https://www.publichealth.columbia.edu/research/population-health-methods/content-analysis>
- Mizoguchi, F., & Yamamoto, A. (1980). An approach to a semantic analysis of metaphor. *Proceedings of the 8th International Conference on Computational Linguistics*, 78-83.
- Munawaroh, S. (2024). Understanding the cultural values in traditional Sundanese parenting: A narrative literature review. *Golden Age: Jurnal Ilmiah Tumbuh Kembang Anak Usia Dini*, 9(2), 197-210. <https://doi.org/10.14421/jga.2024.92-02>
- Frontiers in Psychology. (2019). Re-representing metaphor: Modeling metaphor perception using dynamically contextual distributional semantics. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10, 765. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00765>
- Ramlan, A., et al. (2023). Sundanese cultural values in traditional parenting practices. *Indonesian Journal of Cultural Studies*, 15(2), 45-62.
- Bengtsson, M. (2016). How to plan and perform a qualitative study using content analysis. *NursingPlus Open*, 2, 8-14. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.npls.2016.01.001>
- Uparikar, P. D., et al. (2025). Adlerian psychotherapy: A contemporary review of theory, practice, and empirical evidence. *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts*, 13(4), e709-e720.
- Basrowi, R. W., et al. (2024). Exploring mental health issues and priorities in Indonesia through qualitative expert consensus. *Clinical Practice and Epidemiology in Mental Health*, 20, e17450179331951. <https://doi.org/10.2174/0117450179331951241022175443>
- Harwood, T. G., & Garry, T. (2003). An overview of content analysis. *The Marketing Review*, 3(4), 479-498.
- Krippendorff, K. (2019). *Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.

Neuendorf, K. A. (2017). *The content analysis guidebook* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.

Schilling, J. (2017). Qualitative content analysis in practice. *Qualitative Research*, 17(2), 123-145.