

Social Influence in Adolescence's Identity Crisis in Blume's *Are You There God? It Is Me, Margaret* (1970)

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ABSTRAK

Artikel jurnal ini bertujuan untuk membahas pengaruh sosial dalam pembentukan identitas remaja. Penelitian ini ditujukan agar masyarakat terutama orang tua untuk lebih memperhatikan perkembangan yang sedang dialami mereka. Objek yang digunakan adalah novel karya Judy Blume, *Are You There God? It Is Me Margaret* (1970) yang memiliki isu krisis identitas pada remaja usia dini. Novel tersebut menceritakan tentang Margaret sebagai karakter utama dengan latar belakang agama orang tua yang berbeda serta masalah perkembangan terhadap pubertasnya. Oleh karena itu, Margaret selalu bertanya kepada dirinya sendiri tentang identitasnya, mengapa dia berbeda dengan lingkungan dan teman sebayanya. Maka dari itu, fokus dari penelitian ini adalah menganalisis bagaimana pengaruh sosial dapat menyebabkan krisis identitas pada tokoh utama dalam novel tersebut. Penelitian ini dilakukan menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif. Data dikumpulkan melalui proses membaca, mencatat, memilih dan menganalisis kutipan-kutipan dari novel. Berdasarkan data yang diperoleh, kesimpulan yang dapat diambil terkait pengaruh sosial terhadap karakter utama dalam novel tersebut antara lain: teman sebaya, keluarga, dan sekolah. Penelitian ini menggunakan teori Social Impact oleh Bibb Latane (1981) dengan konsep seorang individu dapat menjadi sumber maupun target dari dampak pengaruh sosial. Penelitian ini berbeda dengan penelitian terkait sebelumnya, karena lebih mendetail dalam membahas masalah yang ada di dalam objeknya serta berfokus kepada mengapa masalah tersebut dapat terjadi.

Kata kunci: krisis identitas, masa pubertas, pengaruh sosial, perkembangan remaja, perspektif agama

ABSTRACT

This journal article aimed to discuss social influences in the formation of adolescent identity. This research was intended for the community, especially parents, to pay more attention to the developments they are experiencing. The object used was a novel by Judy Blume entitled *Are You There God? It Is Me, Margaret* (1970) which contains the issue of crisis identity in the early teens. The novel tells about Margaret as the main character with a different religious background and the developmental problems of puberty. Because of that, Margaret always asks herself about her identity and why she is different from her environment and peers. Therefore, this study focused on analyzing how social influence could cause an identity crisis for the main character in the novel. This research was conducted using a qualitative descriptive method. The data was collected through reading, recording, selecting, and analyzing excerpts from the novel. Based on the data obtained related to the social influence on the main characters in the novel, among others: peers, family, and school. This study used the theory of Bibb Latane (1981) with the concept that suggests an individual can be the source or target of social impact. This research is different from previous related researches because it is more detailed in discussing the problems that exist in the object and focuses on why these problems can occur.

Keywords: identity crisis, adolescent development, social influence, puberty, religious perspective

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INTRODUCTION

The social environment is part of life that every individual encounters daily in interacting and carrying out all activities. In

its role, the environment can form an individual or a group. The formation can occur at any age. Especially this often happens when someone enters the early

teenage phase. At the age of 10-18, they are looking for their true identity.

In adolescence, several questions often arise, for example, the question about who they are, how to take appropriate roles in various conditions, and interactions in their environment (Cherry, 2021). These questions usually appear when an individual is confused about what they want to achieve.

Thus, confusion appears, such as questioning who they are, ending with various aspects of life. Usually, they are questioning about school issues, sexual interests, spouses, family, and beliefs (Harianto, 2020). Therefore, they often experience inner conflicts because of these questions; moreover, it will impact how teens see themselves.

In this adolescence stage, the transition is crucial because there are many things to learn. For example, when a teenager reaches puberty, several physical and emotional changes (McNelly, 2009). Physical changes including body shape, hair growth, breast growth, periods, acne, body odor, and voice changes. Besides that, there are significant changes that consciously or unconsciously affect feelings and personal life in the adolescent stage. These encourage youth to learn more about the meaning and purpose of life and select a suitable environment. For that reason, Williams (2018) stated that teenagers are shaped by many factors, including family, school, media, peer groups, and cultural and social expectations. Thus, the social environment can be the factor that impacts adolescence, which can cause an identity crisis. The identity crisis is depicted due to the influence of Margaret's social environment in a literary work entitled *Are You There, God? It Is Me, Margaret*, by Judy Blume 1970. This novel shows that Margaret, as the main character, grows up without a religious affiliation due to her parents' interfaith marriage. Because of that, she needs to settle her mixed religious heritage (Jewish and Christian) and communicate her issues of belief in God. Throughout the book, she starts her prayers by "Are You there, God? It is me, Margaret".

The statements from her society about her religion and puberty make Margaret feel

different from her friends. For that reason, she searches her identity among her friends to find out where her position is. Since most of her friends have grown a few steps older than her, Margaret thinks she is left behind in puberty and her society. At this stage in life, puberty has its control; hormones and emotions run uncontrollably as young teenagers try to adapt when they are growing up physically and try to fit in with their social life simultaneously. Margaret has grown up struggling with several issues with early adolescent girls when she is hitting puberty, such as the first time wearing her bra, having her first period, and getting attached to boys. Thus, there are researchers conducting research using *Are You There God? It Is Me, Margaret (1970)*. Not only had the writers that chose this novel, but also a few researchers conducted with the same object. However, the focus of the research is different from the previous researches.

The first research is conducted by Siti Mutmainah (2011), with her research title, "The Way Margaret Solves Problems In Her Puberty Period In *Are You There God? It Is Me, Margaret* by Judy Blume". From this study, the writer has the same object but a different topic in discussion. Her research study only discusses how the main character solves the main character's adolescent problems. The second is Vitriya (2017), entitled "An Analysis of Religious Perspective In *Judy Blume's Are You There God? It Is Me, Margaret*". The previous study only discusses the religious side of the story by using thematic study theory. While there are similarities to Vitriya's and Siti's object of research, *Are You There God? It Is Me, Margaret*. This research uses different theories and perspectives. This research focuses on why the identity crisis could happen to Margaret due to the social influence in her society.

Because of that, the writers think that this issue requires a relevant theory to solve the research question. Therefore, in choosing a relevant theory, the writers must find the correlation between the identity crisis issues that often happens to teenagers.

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Besides, the writers use a theory of social impact by Bibb *Latané* 1981. According to the theory, it specifies the effect of other persons on an individual. When other people are the source of impact and the individual is the target, the impact should be a multiplicative function of the strength, immediacy, and number of other people (Latané, 1981). He also explained that any of the incredible variety of changes in physiological states and subjective feelings, motives and emotions, cognitions and beliefs, values and behavior that occur in an individual, human, or animal, as a result of the real, implied or imagined presence or actions of other individuals. (Latané, 1981, p. 343). He also mentioned that the social impact felt by an individual should be a function of the strength, immediacy, and number of source persons present. Thus, these three elements, or descriptions, of source persons should directly affect the social force a target person feels.

This research has some objectives to achieve at the end of the analysis. This research aims to identify how the social could influence and create an impact, such as social influence in causing the adolescent identity crisis as depicted in *Blume's Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* (1970). This research paper uses a novel as the object, and because of that, this research is categorized in the psychology of literature. The word Literature, which intertwines inside such fields as history, philosophy, sociology, and psychology, is a discipline wherein language is used as a medium of expression to interpret man, existence, personality, culture, and individual distinctness, which have always been studied and discussed by artists, writers, philosophers, psychologists and psychiatrists (Aras, 2015). Moreover, psychology and Literature are branches of study that fulfill each other because of both study humans.

In connection with the discussion of this research, Margaret, a teenage girl who tries to find her identity, grows and develops from a baby to becoming a teenage girl. Some factors can influence a person's improvement during their development; 1. Heredity refers to an individual's physique

once they are born, 2. Environment, where their surroundings have a crucial role in shaping their personalities and life situation, and it affects an individual in the progress of personality development (Prachi, 2015).

In conclusion, adolescents experience identity crisis due to their environment and social interactions, including school, family, peer groups, and institutions in forming their self-identity. The crisis happens as they doubt themselves by asking questions, such as 'Who am I?' 'What will I do?' 'Why am I like this?' and they start to try to define themselves as somebody different from others, and these questions arise as Margaret's confusion about her identity. The crisis is influenced by her environment and it is depicted in Blume's novel.

METHOD

Qualitative research is chosen by the writers in this study as the method to analyze the object. The qualitative research in this study focuses on scholars' descriptions or interpretations. Gerring (2017) declares that qualitative work is expressed in natural language and is often focused on particular individuals, events, and contexts, lending itself to an idiographic style of analysis. Moreover, according to Varvin (2019), each aspect of the object, to be the proof, for example, a dialogue sequence has to be evaluated in the context of the whole session, in consonance with the importance of context in qualitative research. Hence, the nature of qualitative research is to rely on words to generate the data.

Furthermore, the data the writers use in the analysis is in the form of a description without any number that will be analyzed. This research data are words, phrases, clauses, and characters' dialogues in the novel. Then, the analyzed data will be written in a descriptive form that explains the social influence that happens in the novel.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of finding and discussing this chapter is to examine the social influence of the environment that creates an impact, such as an identity crisis that

happens to an adolescent. The issue occurs between the main character, Margaret and society. The identity crisis and social influence have become a common issue in surroundings, especially in the stage of adolescents and related to several dialogues in the novel, for instance, the statements and behaviors from the family, peer groups, teacher, and school which absorbed into Margaret's thoughts and turns into a conflict inside of her head. Thus, as this research aims to know why the identity crisis could occur to Margaret, the writers make a category that classifies people around Margaret that significantly impacted her identity crisis as depicted in the novel. Related to the problems experienced by Margaret, the responses from her social environment greatly impact her response about herself. In this research, the writers focus on social influences related to religion and puberty, including physiological changes and the behaviors toward her maturity.

From the data that has been analyzed, the writers found 54 data related to the process of social influence, which are divided into four main categories as subjects that affected the identity crisis in Margaret, including peer groups, family, school, church, and God.

A. Social Influence towards Margaret's Puberty

Margaret is an adolescent who is about to experience puberty. During this time, they often experience inner conflicts because of the questions and opinions from society; it will impact how teens see themselves. In correlation with Margaret's puberty, the puberty itself is the biological process of sexual maturation that culminates in reproductive competence (Sisk & Foster, 2004). In humans, it is often used as the defining event signifying the end of childhood and transition into adolescence (Steinberg, 2010)

1. Peer groups statement

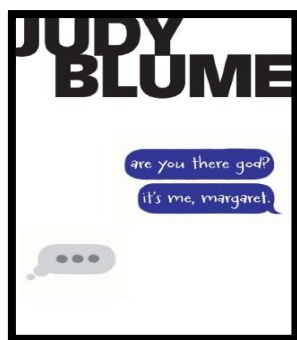
The writers classified the dialogues from Margaret's peer groups with a total of 28 data that make her always try to compare herself with her friends. However, in this

research, the writers only add several proofs from the founded data. First, one day when the first time Margaret moves to Farbrook from New York, she meets Nancy, her neighbor. Nancy asks Margaret to go under the sprinklers, but Margaret does not have the bathing suit, so Nancy lends it to her. However, when Margaret is about to change into the bathing suit, Nancy suddenly shouts, "*Oh, you are still flat...I am growing already*" (Page 8, Paragraph 3) with sticking her chest way out (data 1). From this quotation, Margaret has no response to Nancy's words. Followed by Nancy's opinion when she wants to do Margaret's straps and talks about where was Margaret came from "*I figured you'd be real grown up coming from New York. City girls are supposed to grow up a lot faster*" (Page 8, Paragraph 3) (data 2). Nancy's word tends to build a parameter if a person who used to live in a city has better experiences than those who live in a suburb.

Nancy asks if she wants Margaret to be in her secret club, including Janie Loomis, Gretchen Potter, and Nancy Wheeler. However, Margaret has to obey what Nancy says to her to join and fit into her secret club, and this happens on the first day of school, as proven by this quotation.

"... On the first day of school wear loafers but no socks...Otherwise you will look like a baby." (Page 16, Paragraph 1) (Data 3) and "*Nancy's rule was, we all had to wear bras*" (Page 49, Paragraph 2).

The quotations above are related to Bibb Latane's trans-situational strength that determines a source's impact, such as Physical appearance, the source's age, perceived intelligence, and authority. Hence, the peer groups have it all; they are of the same age (11th years old) and studying in the same school, and Nancy has the authority in her secret club as the leader.



Picture 1. The Book

B. Social Influence towards Margaret's Religion

Margaret is not only experiencing the puberty issue but also the religious issue. After classifying the data, there are 26 collected data found from the opinions from her circles. The data is to explain why Margaret searched and looked for a decision to find her religion. Hence, several data come from the school environment, peer groups, family, church, and God.

1. School environment

Margaret's teacher Mr. Benedict asks her how she hates religious holidays, but she does not find it interesting. "You've *must have had a reason. You can tell me. It's confidential*". (Page 45, Paragraph 2) (Data 1). This quotation shows if Mr. Benedict expects Margaret's answer as he believes someone must have a religion. Besides, he is trying to understand her. He asks more about Margaret's parents' religion to make sure why she hates the religious holidays with a question, "I see. And your parents?" (Page 46, Paragraph 3) (Data 2). During this question, Mr. Benedict is curious and tries to figure out how about her parent's religion, and he gives Margaret a look with his hands folded. The third data which the researchers found is when Mr. Benedict gives an assignment where the students need to share their stories as a year-long individual project, and they did not like it much, including Margaret, because she knows that she does not have any exciting experience for the assignment "... *It is personal between you and me... The only thing I insist on that it be something meaningful.*" (Data 3). The assignment creates confusion in

Margaret's mind in choosing to be Jewish or Christian because she thinks Mr. Benedict wants to know about the choice between her and her religion.

2. Family Environment

The process of social influence also occurs in Margaret's family, including their parents and Jewish or Christian grandparents. Sometimes they argue and suggest that Margaret must choose her religion. The first statement comes from her mother "...*God is a nice idea, he belongs to everybody*". (Page 17, Paragraph 3) (Data 1). The second data is Margaret's statement towards her Jewish Grandmother Sylvia, she explains that if Sylvia always asks her if she has a boyfriend, is he Jewish or not? Therefore, she took the questions as a problem. "*The only problem is she is always asking me if I have boyfriends and if they are Jewish*" (Page 3, Paragraph 2) (data 2).

When the Christian Grandma from Margaret's mother visits their house, she asks her, "*How do you do in Sunday school?*" (Page 154, Paragraph 1) (Data 3). She expected Margaret always goes to Sunday school. Nonetheless, Margaret still says that she is not into any religion. Margaret heard what her grandma said about her mother. Besides, the writers found a quotation that told if her mother was baptized and said a child must have a religion "*But a child is always the religion of the mother. And you Barbara, were born Christian. You were baptized. It's that simple!*" (Page 155, Paragraph 3) (Data 4).

Furthermore, the family argues, and the Christian grandma states, "*You're still God's child. Maybe while I'm visiting I could take you to church and talk to the minister. He might be able to strengthen things out*". (Page 156, Paragraph 2) (Data 5). Moreover, Margaret's Jewish grandmother, Sylvia, also imposes on Margaret's mind if she is a Jewish girl "*Just remember Margaret...no matter what they say you're a Jewish girl.*" (Page 164, Paragraph 1) (Data 6). Therefore, both Margaret's Christian grandparents and Jewish grandma try to make sure and persuade Margaret to choose her religion.

3. Peer Groups Environment

After Nancy tells Gretchen if Margaret does not go to Sunday school, she is shocked by saying *"you are not!* (Page 41, Paragraph 2) (Data 1) and the other friend Jannie she asked *"But if you are not in any religion, how are you going to know if you should join the Y or the Jewish community center?* (Page 42, Paragraph 3) (Data 2). Moreover, Nancy added, *"But everybody belongs to one or the other"* (Page 42, Paragraph 3) (data 3). Hence, the expression and statement from the peer groups clearly shows if a person will consider as strange if he or she does not into a religion.

4. Church

The social Influence also happens in the dialogue at church. Due to Margaret's identity crisis in finding her religion, she decided to explore both the Jewish or Christian communities. The first influence is when Margaret comes to the church with Jannie. After they get there, Janie introduces Margaret to the church minister by saying, *"This is my friend, Margaret Simon. She has no religion."* (Page 74, Paragraph 3) (Data 1). The quotation shows that Jannie's way of introducing Margaret to the minister makes Margaret shocked. After Janie says that Margaret almost faints, she also wonders what Janie has to say. The second time Margaret also goes to the church, she goes there because she is arguing with Laura until she is mad and runs to the church. Thus, Margaret follows her in silence about what Laura does at church. However, after Laura returned from church, Margaret was also about to leave, but she headed the other way and saw a booth. Then Margaret gets in and is startled because when she is in the booth, the priest behind the wall says, *"Yes my child... yes my child"* (data 2). He said it two times which made Margaret think that the priest was her God, but then she realized it was just a voice from a priest next to her wall. Furthermore, he made her say, *"...my heart started to pound like crazy and I was all sweaty inside my coat and sort of dizzy too"*.

5. God

In the novel, there is not any statement or opinion from God. However, the writers think that the influence could happen because every time Margaret asks God, He does not answer Margaret's prayer quickly, and it makes Margaret desperate with her prayer. The dialogue is taken from *"... But it is already December and I am not growing. At least I don't see any real difference. Isn't it time God? Don't you think I've waited patiently? Please help me* (Page 96, Paragraph 2) (data 1). *"I really hurt Laura's feelings. Why did you let me do that? I've been looking for you, God. I looked in the temple, I looked in church, and today I looked for you when I want to confess. But you weren't there. I didn't feel you at all"* (Page 140, Paragraph 2) (Data 2). *"...Why can't you helped me? Haven't I always done what you wanted? Please... let me be like everybody else.* (Page 119, Paragraph 3) (Data 3). Therefore, the quotations above represent how the silence from God is impacting Margaret's belief in the existence of Him if He listens to all of her prayers.

CONCLUSION

The object of this research is, *Are You There God? It Is Me, Margaret* (1970). The novel was written in 1970 by Judy Blume, and the story is about a young adult, Margaret Simon, struggling with her identity crisis. The identity crisis which occurs to Margaret is due to the social influence that shaped her. Crisis such as puberty and religion. During the process of the influence, the environment that influences Margaret's identity crisis comes from her friends, her school environment, her teachers, and her family and external influences such as churches and temples. Therefore, the impact is Margaret has to face an identity crisis. Because of that, the writers use the Social Impact theory by Bibb Latane 1981 which discusses how a person's surroundings could affect one another. The writers collected 54 data on the social influence that impacts Margaret's identity. Thus, based on the story in the novel, from the above quotations, where Margaret struggles to fight for herself due to social influence, her friends and family become the most significant influence on Margaret's

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identity crisis especially in finding herself and her belief.

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