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# The Meaning of Friendship in The Process of Self-Identity Development for Indonesian Adolescents

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## Abstract

In this research, we aimed to explore adolescents' experiences concerning the function of friendship in the process of the development of self-identity. We enacted the phenomenological approach as the method in this research. We conducted in-depth individual interviews for the data sampling. The research results show that friendship becomes a prominent point in the process of the development of middle adolescents' self-identity. It would happen if, in the relationship of a group of adolescents, there are similar values and trust. Therefore, they can influence each other and strengthen the identity of each individual.

**Keywords:** Friendship, Adolescent, Self-Identity

## Introduction

Adolescence is a transition period of children psychologically, physically (Steinberg & Morris, 2001), and socially. Socio structurally, adolescents become more sensitive and start thinking about their self-existence (Blakemore & Mills, 2013). Adolescents desire autonomy for themselves, which not only autonomy for freeing from parents' authority but also including responsibility, self-expression, self-sufficient, and decision making (Hoang, 2015). This matter is a natural phenomenon that escorts and occurs in the process of developing self-identity.

Self-identity is a self-awareness regarding a self that continuously developed through social interaction processes with other people (Erikson, 1950; 1968; 1975). In the process of developing self-identity, someone appraises and values themselves, which then creates an image of "who I am" (Swann & Bosson, 2010). Self-identity has a strong relation with character (Klimstra & van Doeselaar, 2017), and someone's behavior (Birgitta, Niamh, & Wokje, 2014). Therefore, sometimes adolescents display various forms of behavior to show their self-identities. These form behaviors sometimes come positively, but it is not rare to find negative behaviors of adolescents that

deviate from the norms of communities (Qidwai & Ishaque, Shah, & Rahim, 2010; Hasanah, Zamroni, Dardiri, Setyabudi, & Supardi, 2018).

Marcia, (1980) laid out the self-identity of adolescents into four groups, namely, identity diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium, and achievement. These four groups of self-identity is not a stage or level. Therefore, someone does not need to pass through every step to attain the other group. However, in researches (Kroger, 2007; Hejazi, Shahraray, Farsinejad, & Asgary, Ali, 2009; Puspoky, 2018), achievement identity is believed to be the ideal group of self-identity for adolescents because this group succeeded identifying their self-identity thoroughly.

Many factors influence the ability of adolescents to identify their self-identity. Ones of many factors are parenting style (Smits, Soenens, Bart, Luyckx, Duriez, Berzonsky, & Goossens, 2008) and friendship (Jones, Vaterlaus, Jackson, & Morril, 2013). Some researches showed that parenting style has a significant role in the process of the development of adolescents' self-identity (Moscatelli & Rubini, 2011; Hasanah, Susanti, & Panjaitan, 2019; Hasanah, Zamroni, Dardiri, & Supardi, 2019). However, to some extent, the interaction of same-aged friends could take over the role of parents in influencing the behavior of children and or adolescents (Hartup, 1983; 2005). This extent could happen when there is an asymmetrical structure between adolescents and parents (Sullivan, 1953; Ciairano, Rabaglietti, Roggero, Bonino, & Beyers, 2007). When the role of parents become weak, the interaction of same-aged friends could replace the main factor of influence in the behavior of adolescents (Youniss, & Haynie, 1992; Ciairano, Rabaglietti, Roggero, Bonino, & Beyers, 2007; Albert & Steinberg, 2011). Therefore, friendship and same-aged friends interaction could become a prominent factor for adolescents in behaving and developing their self-identity if the relationship between parents and children adolescent is not or less harmonious.

Friendship and best friends mainly influence the psychological and mental development (Youniss & Haynie, 1992; Vitaro, Boivin, & Bukowski, 2009), which directly affect the process of the development of adolescents' self-identity. In this context, the association or friendship of adolescents interpreted as a subject that influences the development of the moral motivation of adolescents (Malti & Buchmann, 2010), which affects their self-identity development. However, it is essential to understand that the causality of social relationships and behavior could be different in every culture (Rubin, Coplan, Chen, Bowker, McDonald, & Heverly, 2015). As an example, in the west, friendship emphasizes the importance of the development of self and the affiliation (Chen, 2012; Rubin et al., 2011), whereas in Asian culture (particularly in Indonesia) the thing taken as essential in friendship is the process of self-identity development and the function of instrument assistance. This research tried to see how is the effect of the influence of friendship in the process of the development of self-identity in Indonesian culture based on the adolescents' experiences. This research is relevant to conduct because Indonesian parents sometimes worry about the association or friendship of their children (Van Zalk, Tillfors, & Trost, 2018), excessively without objectively knowing the causality of the relationship.

### **Research Question**

How is the adolescents' experiences about friendship in the process of the development of self-identity?

### **Research Method**

We used the phenomenological point of view in looking at the data. Namely, the validity of data is the viewpoint of the subject phenomenon (Van Manen, 2014). Based on the literature review (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004), this research focusing on the research about the interactivity of individual and their group. Therefore, this research tried to find how the individual makes their experiences when interacting with others become something meaningful.

## Data sources

The data sources of this research are the experiences of adolescents about the function of friendship and its meaning for their self-identity development. Therefore, the participants were determined using a purposive sampling technique (Etikan, 2016). The criteria for the sampling are teenager or adolescent, high school student, living in Javanese culture society. The number of participants in the research is four adolescents, this is determined after studying the writing of Langdbridge, (2007), that phenomenological study does not require a large number of participants in it, it is enough with 2-7 participants. From the four adolescent participants, every participant has a different community or group.

The process of sampling began by visiting two schools with different grades. The first school is a high school well known for one of the best high school in Yogyakarta, the other school is a school renowned for many of its students often deviate and are anti-social by the society. We asked for help from both schools' teachers to determine the students to be the participants according to the criteria noted, based on the school history. From the first school, we got 2 participants. We also got 2 participants from the other school.

## Data Analysis

The process of data analysis conducted based on Moustakas' phenomenological analysis steps (1994). At the beginning of the analysis, the researchers read every transcript thoroughly and repeatedly to find the statements relevant to the research objectives. In reading every statement, we ensured to do epoche, that every statement has equal value. The next step is horizontalization, which then followed with creating themes. The themes are a result of internalization from the statements of the individual, which can represent the whole participants' experiences. To make the research result more contrast, the representation of the data of the research result carried out using a qualitative research method (Cresswel, 2012).

## Findings

The research result is presented in themes, where each theme is a picture of the experiences of the participants. The theme is not a fact that can be generalized. It is an image of a phenomenon of the research in its context. Based on the result of data analysis, three themes became the essence from the friendship experiences in the process of the development of self-identity, namely, 1) Having similarities; 2) Trusting each other; 3) Community strengthen self-identity.

### Theme 1: Having similarities

The participants stated that the similarities are what make them becoming friends. In the community, the participants felt that there is a place for them to self-express accordingly with the values that they believe is right. Therefore their self-identities can grow if they are with the community. The participants stated that the beginning of friendship is coming from the similarities they have. These similarities are including values of living, hobby, and situation. This matter presented in the statements of the participants that they convey explicitly. P1 for example, P1 stated that P1 had a hobby for dancing, hence since the beginning of the high school freshman, P1 joined dancing communities at school and outside school. It shows that P1 had a view that dancing is virtuous for them, which then P1 started finding people who have similar values in dancing. The encounter of the individuals who hold similarities in hobby stimulated the forming of friendship between them and encouraged them to form more extensive dancing communities.

P2 also stated the similar to P1. Fundamentally, P2 liked organizational activities, especially organizations that can improve their leadership. Since junior high school P2 was an OSIS (student council) member, therefore when P2 became a high school student, P2 choose to join MPK (class representative assembly) rather than the other organizations. The statements of P2 about their reasons for joining MPK as follows:

Yes, I have made friends with many people, sometimes I play with them even it is rare. I would instead spend my time with my friends in the MPK, conducting events, meeting, activities coordination, and many more. The point is, managing the organizations. My close friends, most of them are school activists, people who love to organize, just like me (P2, 209-213) I also am active in the scout because scout gives me many good experiences and training for me to develop my leadership (P2, 15-21).

P8, who is known to be a disobedient kid and likely to make troubles in the school environment, also stated that they tried to find the community suitable for them and their living values. Below is the snippet from the interview with P8 regarding the reasons of why P8 joined school gang community:

Yes, I admit it, I am a member of a school gang. I was approached by a friend, well I joined the gang to find good friends, close friends. I mean, I wanted to have friends that kinda like... It was when I first started high school, I wanted some friends, I was curious about how my friends would be... So that I can also have friends who have the same thinking as me (P8, Line 83-85).

P6 also stated that they tried to find some friends who also loved playing games and hanging out. P6 felt that friends who have similar hobbies could become comrade-in-arms. The following is one of the statements of P6 regarding this matter: "I make friends so that I can play with them, chat with them, at cafés ... Playing games... Yes, that kind of thing (P6, line 55-56).

## **Theme 2: Trusting each other**

One of the feelings that became significant matters for the participants is trust. When they decided to befriend with someone or with a group of people, the participants viewed that trust makes friendship bond tighter. They could comfortably with no worries or pressure express their true self and honesty in front of their friends, even when they did something that deviates from the norm of society.

The participants felt troubled to trust people, but it is not implied for their close friends. They believed that their friends are trustworthy. Therefore they could be more honest to express their thinking, feeling, and acts in front of them. Below is one of the statements of P5 about the thing:

Hmmm... Sometimes I *curhat* (Indonesian slang for *curahan hati* or confide their feeling) to my friends... Or sometimes I borrow money from them when I am out of pocket money, and conversely (P5, Line 57-58).

P6 also stated that P6 felt the liberty to express themselves as is in front of their friends. Even when they did something that they knew that it deviated from the values or norms eld by society, they did not dare to be honest with their parents or teacher, but it is okay to tell their companions.

P8 also stated a similar thing:

When I together with my friends, I can tell everything, there is no secret between us, including things we have done that may be deemed to be something wrong by other people. I wouldn't tell my parents, but if it's my friend I would gladly tell them. They would never give bad comments about what I had done. That's what makes me able to be honest with them (P8, Line 65-69).

P4 stated that they loved to befriend with good people. In this context, the word "good" stated by P4 referred to a universal standard of "good," not a subjective assessment of "good." This matter showed in the statement of P4 as follows:

I love to befriend someone who is able to make me better, I don't care who it be, how much money they have or whose child is they don't matter for me. If their character is good then it's a go...being friend...together. We can walk together, study together, the point is it will be fun. To have friends means I can share secrets and we can remind each other (P4, lines 78-83)

### **Theme 3. Community strengthen self-identity**

The participants asserted that when they were together in a community with similar values, it will strengthen their self-identity as the potential they had before joining the community. P1 for example, P1 loved dancing since a child. P1 visited the dancing community in their high school and joined it. P1 did not join any other community. Therefore, their dancing ability kept improving. P1's self-identity as a dancer became more apparent when P1 got along with people who loved dancing. In this context, the community was the one influencing P1, but in the first place, P1 is the one who chooses whom they would befriend.

P3 also stated that in the early of their high school life, P3 started to find a community at their school. P3 liked research. When P3 came into high school, P3 joined the youth research community. In the community, P3 felt that their hobby and potential were developing and gradually becoming her self-identity. The following is one of the statements of P3 regarding this matter:

At the beginning of high school, I was unsure to befriend with whom and where I should go, we didn't know each other after all. However, there were flyers for new members recruitment at school. There were scout, student council, basketball, youth research, and many more. I loved to learn something new, I asked for many things, then I decided to join the youth research community. Well... From the community, I could develop my ability in research (P3, Line 49-56).

P7 stated the similar statements with the other participants P7 loved to live freely and had started smoking since junior high school. P7 did not like to study. Therefore, P7 did not want to join high school organizations voluntarily. P7 only joined compulsory activities at school, that too, P7 only filled the registration and rarely presented in the activities. P7 liked to play games with their friends. Hence P7 decided to join a community known as student gang in their school because P7 thought the community knew more about their condition. The statements of P7 as follows:

Since junior high school, I had started smoking, and my parents knew that. They were angry, but I kept smoking, my father did it too. When I graduated from junior high school, I didn't know where I should go... My exam scores were so low, this school is the one that would accept someone with scores like mine. Well, that's it, importantly, I could get into school, following what my parents want...and also, I can play. Honestly, I hate studying, but I was told to go to school, well, I just go to school. After schools, I change my clothes and go hanging out with my friends in the barracks where the gang usually gathers... Just chatting, playing games, and some cigars... Haha (P7, line 98-107)

In the other section, P7 also asserted that the main activity of the gang was just hanging out and playing games, sometimes they make a convoy just for fun. The statement as follows: "Well, sometimes I go around the city by motorcycles with the gang. I love riding a bike and having fun (P7, lines 109-111)".

### **Discussion**

Based on the research result data presented, we can see that fundamentally, friendship is necessary for adolescents. However, friendship does not just show up. There is a background process of it. Through this research result, we can make clear about the claims that friendship influence adolescents' behavior.

Based on the research result, there are three keywords highlighted by the participants and considered as the factors that make a friendship to be a good or bad influence in the process of the development of self-identity for middle adolescents. These three keywords are similarities, encounters, and trust.

The existence of values similarities stimulates the beginning process of friendship. From the research result, we found that the pattern of the beginning process of friendship (Flynn, 2018) of middle adolescents started by the existence of values similarities held by the adolescent since before they coming into high school. The participants tended to join a community with similar views and values. These values had already formed in the mind of adolescents far before they joined the new community at the high school. Therefore, in this context, the middle adolescent joining a community or middle adolescents gathering to form a community are not the subjects or account of behavior. In this case, the values similarities are the cause that creates a particular friendship and or community. This matter is in line with some researches that people joining a particular club, dating frequency, and academic motivation started by them who have already had the similar values since the beginning (Kinderman, 2007; Zalk, Branje, & Meeus, 2007; Solomon. & Knafo-Noam, 2012)

Intensive meetings and encounters between community members who have similarities create trust.

When middle adolescents who held similar values joining a group or community, they will intensely associate with the community. Association that includes high intensive meetings tends to create closeness (Crosnoe,2000), which results in trust in the members. Trust gives a sense of comfort to every member to be more honest with each other and make self-image unnecessary in front of members. They fell comfortable showing who they are in front of their close friends. The harm is, if a community where middle adolescents are joining is a community with the understanding that not match with the universal values (gangs, for example), the adolescents would be comfortable showing deviant behaviors in front of their community friends. Conversely, a group of adolescents who gather in a community with proper understanding with universal values (dancing community or school communities), make the adolescents express freely and positively in front of their group. Summary, someone's view about values will develop stronger when they affiliate in a friendship/community which has similar values. In other words, a friendship formed from values similarities of each member can make members influence each other and strengthen their self-identity. Visually, middle adolescents' experiences about friendship in the process of self-identity development can be pictured as follows:

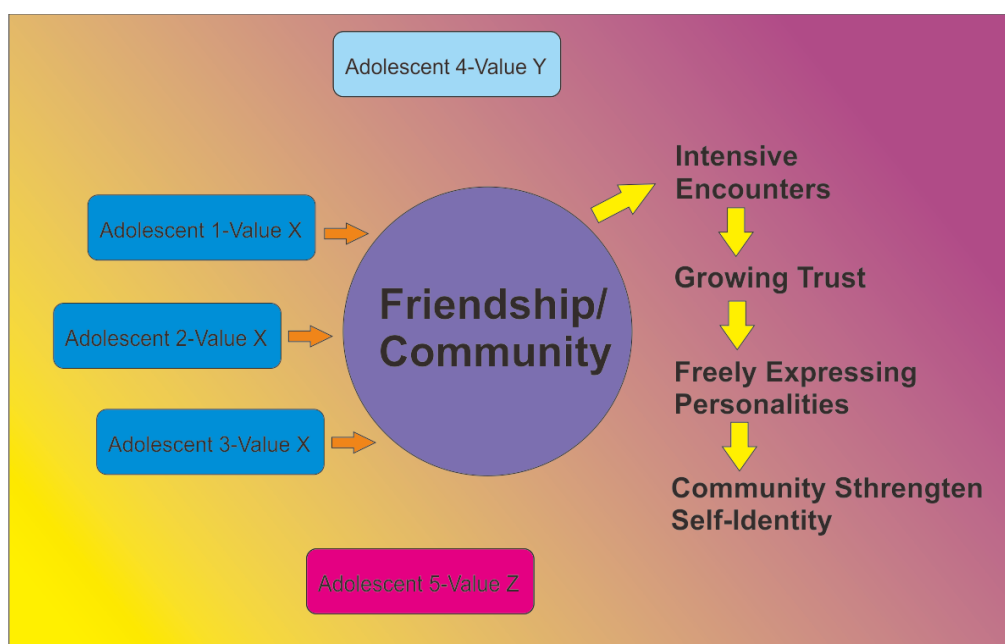


Figure 1 Middle adolescents' experiences about friendship in the process of self-identity development

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