

The Search for Spiritual and Self-Identity of the Main Character in the Novel *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* by Judy Blume

Aprilia Rahmawati¹, Ujang Suyatman¹, Dian Nurrachman¹

¹UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, Indonesia

*Correspondence: apriilarahmawati120@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

*The search for identity is commonly experienced in adolescent development and includes various aspects such as spirituality and the self. However, in this process, an individual might struggle to adjust between personal beliefs and social norms. The novel *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* by Judy Blume represents the struggles experienced by adolescents amidst social pressures and personal desires, as depicted through the main character, Margaret. This research applies literary criticism to discuss Margaret's journey in shaping her spiritual identity and anxiety about her physical development using Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity. Using a mimetic approach, the novel reflects social dynamics in 1970s America, including social pressures on gender roles and shifting patterns of religiosity. The results of this study show that Margaret's identity is formed through her interactions with society, influences from her family, and personal experiences. This research emphasizes that identity search is a dynamic process influenced by various internal and external factors.*

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1. Introduction

In its various forms, literature reflects social reality conflicts and emotional problems experienced by an individual or group in society. Literary works are also a medium to represent various life experiences, including the interaction between individuals and their social environment. One literary work that the wider community occasionally enjoys is the novel, which is closely related to everyday life (Abbas et al., 2024; Jumriati et al., 2021; Junaid et al., 2024; Rahman, 2018).

In the novel, the author often creates conflict as the main component to develop the story. In addition, conflict is also presented to represent the reality that is part of life. The existence of various real-life problems described by an author in his work makes literary works rich in psychological aspects. Conflicts do not always have to be physical, but inner conflicts also exist (Mukodas, 2022; Junaid et al., 2025.; Suma et al., 2023). This inner conflict or internal conflict often becomes a dominant issue in adolescence. Adolescence is a crucial phase in an individual's psychological development. Adolescence is usually faced with inner conflicts related to identity, physical changes, and emotional changes. Physical and psychological aspects in adolescence have an equal role in shaping individual development (Fatmawaty, 2017) One aspect that develops during adolescence is the psychosocial aspect, which refers to personal changes influenced by social interactions with people around them (Rusuli, 2022). According to Erickson (in Yuliati, 2012), adolescence has a phase known as "identity versus role confusion/identity diffusion," during which adolescents often question their identity. Adolescents who have not found their identity or are still in the identity search stage are considered to be in a crisis period. In short, identity search can be defined as finding answers to the question, "Who am I?"

The search for identity in adolescence is not only about the physical and social aspects but also the spiritual one. The search for spiritual identity is also often influenced by family values and the social environment on which their beliefs are based. Parents have a significant role in a child's spiritual development. As central figures in a child's life, parents have a significant role in shaping and supporting their spiritual education (Lenggu, 2023; Rahman, 2014; Muslimat et al., 2023). According to Dollahite and Marks (in King & Roeser, 2009), families support the development of religion and spirituality in children in several ways, including direct teaching, conversation, modeling, and participating together in prayer and other ritual activities. However, several findings suggest that factors outside the family, such as peers, also influence the development of one's religiosity (King & Roeser, 2009). In this context, literary works in the form of novels are one medium to depict these experiences and reflect the search for spiritual identity that adolescents often face. By describing the search

for identity, novels can reveal how characters try to find their true selves. According to Hall (Waluyo, 2022), identity is formed through historical transformations that continue occasionally. Therefore, analyzing the search for identity in literary works can explain how a character tries to develop and find his or her identity in the existing social context.

In this case, the novel titled *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* by Judy Blume is one of the relevant works in describing the search for identity, especially during adolescence. The analysis in this research focuses on the journey of Margaret Simon, the main character in this novel, who faces challenges in the process of finding her identity. Margaret faces various questions about herself, both in spiritual, physical, and social contexts. Born to parents with different religious backgrounds, her father is Jewish and her mother is Christian, Margaret did not grow up in one particular religion, making her feel a spiritual dilemma. On the other hand, Margaret also faced social challenges in her school and friendship environment. Her friends' conversations about puberty make Margaret feel that she must immediately experience physical changes such as menstruation, relationships with the opposite sex, and others as experienced by her friends so that she can be accepted in her friendship group and not be considered different. With the various dynamics that Margaret feels, this novel illustrates how spiritual, physical, and social aspects are interconnected in the process of finding adolescent identity.

Therefore, this research aims to explore how the conflicts within the main character, Margaret, reflect issues of adolescent identity development. The study of the main character's search for identity in the novel *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* will be studied using Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity. According to Butler, the concept of gender as performativity is not inherent in individuals innate or natural, but something that is done repeatedly. Gender is a social norm that can determine how much a person can be accepted or understood in society and influence what is considered acceptable or realized in social space (Farida, 2016). According to gender performativity theory, identity is not something inherent or innate but rather a social construction that is formed through a series of actions performed repeatedly and by existing social norms.

In a spiritual context, gender performativity theory can be used to understand how individuals shape their spiritual identity through daily actions and experiences influenced by social norms. Gender identity includes physical, social, and spiritual aspects formed through interactions with family, environment, and religious beliefs. This process demonstrates the close relationship between gender identity and spirituality, influenced by social and cultural practices and how individuals interpret their relationship with God and themselves.

As a fictional story, the novel *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* also reflects the social conditions experienced in America in the 1970s. During that time, there were significant changes in society, including the rise of second-wave feminism, which led women to defy traditional gender norms and explore their identities beyond the boundaries set by society. In addition, adolescents' approach to spirituality also shifted to a personal relationship with God rather than following formal religious rules.

This research aims to provide a deeper understanding through a focused analysis of the relationship between gender, spirituality, and self-identity formation in the teenage character Margaret in the novel *Are You There, God? It's Me, Margaret*. Through this research, it hopes to better understand how these factors influence adolescents' search for identity and how social and cultural norms shape Margaret's self-identity and spiritual development.

Butler (1999), argues that gender is not something that is fixed or inherent from birth but the result of social construction that is formed through actions, speech, and behavior that are carried out continuously in specific social environments. This approach reveals that gender is something performative, formed through a series of actions that follow social norms, which then creates an impression of stability in gender.

According to Butler (1999), gender is not just a noun term but something formed through rules and practices that regulate gender harmony. Gender identity is created performatively, that is, through actions that take place continuously, not something that already exists before the action is performed. Gender identity is not derived from something underlying but rather shaped by expressions that are part of the process of its formation (Butler, 1999). Butler also mentions that gender should not be seen as a fixed identity or the center of various actions. Instead, gender is an identity that is temporarily formed through the repetition of structured bodily actions. The effects of gender emerge through movement, expression, and posture that create the illusion of a permanent gender identity (Butler, 1999).

Adolescence is a time when pressure to fulfill expectations about gender often intersects with spiritual identity, which involves family values and religious teachings. The combination of these influences can challenge individuals to understand and formulate their self-identity.

In a spiritual context, Butler explains how gender identity is shaped through action or performance, and this can also be used to develop more gender-sensitive church teachings and practices, including how gender affects the teachings of religious practices. This suggests that church doctrine can be explored to understand how individuals subject their gender through religious faith and practice (Ward, 2000).

In adolescents' search for identity, Butler's theory of gender performativity can be used to understand how individuals cope with social and cultural demands that sometimes do not align with their beliefs. This process includes the repetition of various actions that help adolescents form their identity, both in terms of gender and spirituality, despite the social pressure to conform to existing norms.

Therefore, this research explores the search for identity experienced by Margaret as the main character in the novel *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* which includes two aspects, namely spiritual identity and self-identity. These two intersect in the character's journey as social pressures on gender roles often relate to spiritual values in the family and society. In this case, Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity is used to analyze how Margaret's identity is shaped through repeated actions that reflect social expectations. Margaret's spiritual conflict is also related to her search for personal beliefs that create a connection between her gender identity and her spiritual identity.

Previous studies have been conducted to examine the novel *Are You There, God? It's Me, Margaret*, with the aim of obtaining comparisons and references. This section will describe some previous studies with various similarities and differences.

First, the research conducted by Agustina et al., (2022) in their journal entitled *Social Influence in Adolescence's Identity Crisis in Blume's Are You There God? It Is Me, Margaret (1970)*. This study discusses social influence on the main character in the novel *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret*, by using the Social Impact theory proposed by Bibb Latane (1981), which states that individuals can act as a source or target of social influence.

Second, the research conducted by Wulandari et al., (2024) entitled *An Analysis of The Main Character, Margaret From The Novel 'Are You There, God? It's Me, Margaret'*. This study examines the character of Margaret Simon from Judy Blume's novel *Are You There, God? It's Me, Margaret*, using Robert Stanton's structuralism theory to analyze her characterization through interests, desires, emotions, and moral principles. This study reveals that Margaret's emotional characterization is the most significant aspect compared to her interests, desires, and moral principles. The findings underscore Margaret's complexity as she navigates life, friendship, and puberty in her search for identity and belonging.

Third, the research was conducted by Janet Maria Rodrigues and Kusuma D'sa (2023) in a journal titled *Indian Adolescent Girls and Quest for Personal Identity in The Selected Novels of Mitali Perkins*. This journal discusses the search for identity by Indian adolescent girls in novels by Mitali Perkins, especially *Rickshaw Girl* and *The Secret Keeper*. The theories used are identity and gender theories, with the influence of Simone de Beauvoir's thought that gender is a social construction different from biological sex. The object of research is the main characters, Naima and Asha, in the two novels. The results show that both characters face social challenges that suppress women in a patriarchal culture. However, they manage to build their identities and empower themselves by resisting traditional norms that limit their gender roles.

Fourth, the research has been conducted by Zuyyati (2023) in her journal entitled *Exploring 'Moana's Achieved Identity': A movie analysis of the main character*. This study discusses how Moana's character shows achieved identity through three domains, namely personality variables, cognitive processes, and interpersonal relationships, which are studied using Kroger's (2005) identity status theory. The results of this study show that Moana's achieved identity is strong in all three domains. This study underscores the importance of identity exploration in fiction to deeply understand identity formation.

Fifth, the research was conducted by Ampera Hia (2024) in her journal entitled *Identity Crisis in Sarah Crossan's Toffee Novel*. This study uses Erik Erikson's (1963) identity crisis theory in analyzing factors such as family trauma, abandonment, and self-discovery that influence Allison's identity crisis. The author highlights first-person narration and poetic prose style in conveying the characters' internal conflicts. The results of this study show that Allison experiences deep confusion about names, belonging, and emotions. The novel displays how negative and positive experiences affect identity formation during adolescence.

Of the few studies done before, most focus more on social influences, general characterization, or broad themes of identity. However, this research is different because it explores the search for identity experienced by Margaret as the main character in the novel *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret*, which includes two aspects, namely spiritual ideality and gender identity. These two intersect in the character's journey as social pressures on gender roles often relate to

spiritual values in the family and society. In this case, Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity is used to analyze how Margaret's identity is shaped through repeated actions that reflect social expectations. Margaret's spiritual conflict is also related to her search for personal beliefs that create a connection between her gender identity and her spiritual identity. This research examines how these two aspects of identity shape Margaret's self-understanding in her quest for selfhood.

2. Methodology

In this study, the researchers used literary criticism with a mimetic approach, focusing on narratives that represent the condition of society in crisis. This approach examines how imitation allows individuals to develop themselves, recreate what exists in nature, and present it in a different reality through words (Nurrachman, 2023). This mimetic literary criticism method is used to analyze how literary works reflect and criticize social reality and how the characters in the novel *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret*, who interacts with social conditions that create internal conflicts in the search for identity.

In this research, the gender performativity approach is used to help understand the main character in Judy Blume's *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret*. This analysis will examine the search for identity depicted in Margaret's character through Judith Butler's theory. This analysis also describes how Margaret interacts with her social environment and how confused she is in her search for identity.

The data of this research are in the form of narrative text or dialog that shows the inner conflict of Margaret's character taken from the novel *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* by Judy Blume. In addition, some relevant theories regarding the search for identity, especially the theory of Judith Butler are also used as a reference in analyzing the novel. The data are narratives or dialogues from the novel *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* and search for supporting ideas read from supporting sources such as recent research, survey reports, and articles relevant to American teenagers' unrest towards gender and spirituality.

The data are collected from reading the novel *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret*, taking notes on parts of the text relevant to the research, and understanding it by conducting an intensive reading of the novel to identify elements that illustrate Margaret's character's search for identity, both in terms of gender and spirituality-supported through literature studies of research results related to gender and spirituality in America. Data in the form of narratives from the novel and social facts that support the analysis of the novel with a mimetic approach. It aims to bridge the representation in literary works with the social reality experienced by American teenagers, especially related to gender and spirituality issues.

After collecting the data, the data is analyzed by linking the relevant texts with the theories used in the research, namely the theories of identity search, spirituality, and gender. Then, the data is described using relevant theories from literary studies and adolescent developmental psychology to identify how Margaret's character in *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* experiences the process of identity search. Finally, a conclusion is offered.

3. Result and Discussion

The results of this research showed that Margaret's search for spiritual identity and self-identity was influenced by the interaction between social pressures on her about puberty and her spiritual identity. The narratives or dialogues in the novel describe Margaret's emotional struggles as she feels conflicts within herself, such as doubts about her identity and her interactions with other characters who influence her self-discovery process. Margaret feels pressure from her surroundings, such as facing expectations from her extended family, especially her grandparents. Also, from her peers who have expectations regarding the female body and also question the clarity of her religious beliefs. These expectations affect Margaret's life, from her search for spiritual identity to her struggle to accept her physical changes during puberty to her attempts to define herself amidst social and family demands.

3.1 The Quest of Spiritual Identity

The following data includes narratives that describe when Margaret questioned her identity, beliefs, and social expectations. In addition, this data shows Margaret's dialog with her social environment, which reveals her personal dilemmas, uncertainty about her identity, and desire to be accepted by her social environment. The uniqueness of this novel is that there are many monologue narratives of Margaret praying with her God, even though she has not yet found her faith. This shows a spiritual quest that reflects her doubts and confusion.

Data 1

"But Sylvia Simon is a lot of fun, considering her age, which I happen know is sixty. The only problem is she's always asking me if I have boyfriends and if they're Jewish. Now that ridiculous because number one I don't have boyfriends. And number two what would I care if they're Jewish or not?" (Blume, 1970, p.3)

This narrative shows Margaret feeling pressured by her grandmother's expectations about relationships and religion, confusing her in her search for identity. These quotes and interpretations relate to Judith Butler's theory that gender identity is not static but is formed through repeated performative actions based on social norms (Butler, 1999). In this case, Margaret's grandmother used standards which shaped Margaret's identity to be an ideal woman who should follow her family's religious traditions coherently. However, Margaret rejects this because she thinks it does not suit her. Instead, Margaret questioned the norm and showed resistance to the expectations placed on her.

This shows that her identity is not simply shaped by the environment, but is also influenced by her own desires in determining how she wants to be. It also shows that her identity is still in the process of being formed and is not absolutely determined by the social norms that are passed down to her. As the story progresses, Margaret continues to gain experience and self-reflection that continues to shape her understanding of herself. This is in line with Butler's idea that identity is dynamic and formed through a continuous social process.

Data 2

"I'm not any religion," I said

"You're not!" Gretchen's mouth fell open.

"What are your parents?" Janie asked.

"Nothing," I said.

"How positively neat!" Gretchen said.

Then they all just looked at me and nobody said anything and I felt pretty silly. So I tried to explain. "See uh... my father was Jewish and uh... my mother was Christian and..." (Blume, 1970, p. 37).

This dialog shows that Margaret feels isolated and unsure as she realizes that her lack of religious identity sets her apart from her friends. In this dialog, Margaret's friends assume that belonging to a religious community is a necessity. Here, Margaret has not performed in accordance with the social norms around her. Margaret, who has no specific religious identity, feels excluded for not conforming to these expectations. When Margaret tries to explain her situation, she feels silly, which shows that the prevailing social norms make her feel uncomfortable with her position.

Data 3

"But if you aren't any religion, how are you going to know if you should join the Y or the Jewish Community Center?" Janie asked.

"I don't know," I said. "I never thought about it. Maybe we won't join either one."

"But everybody belongs to one or the other," Nancy said.

"Well, I guess that will be up to my parents," I said, ready to change the subject. I never meant to tell them my story in the first place. "So uh... what day should we meet?" (Blume, 1970, p.38).

This dialog describes Margaret who faces the inner tension of not being part of a religious community like her friends, which causes her to feel confused about her identity and where she belongs. The statement "But everybody belongs to one or the other" reflects that there are social rules that assume that every individual should have a definite religious identity. Her uncertainty about which religious community to belong to also makes Margaret feel the social pressure she faces. Margaret's friends also find it difficult to understand that there are people who do not belong to any of the religious groups they refer to. This shows how society tends to see identities within existing categories, so people outside of those categories can feel confused or alienated.

According to Butler, identity-based on social norms organizes a person to conform to certain social expectations. Although this theory discusses gender, in the realm of religion it can be interpreted that society assumes that every individual must have a certain identity, such as religion. Margaret's non-conformity to this norm shows how she seeks and shapes her identity.

Data 4

"Are you there, God? It's Me, Margaret. I'm going to temple today-with Grandma. It's a holiday. I guess you know that. Well, my father thinks it's a mistake and my mother thinks the whole idea is crazy, but I'm going anyway. I'm sure this will help me decide what to be. I've never been inside a temple or a church. I'll look for you, God." (Blume, 1970, p.59).

This quote shows Margaret's deep curiosity due to her confusion amidst family expectations as well as her attempt to define her spiritual identity. It also shows how Margaret's spiritual quest is influenced by her social and family context. Margaret demonstrated her strong desire to explore her own spiritual identity. Her decision to go to the temple with her grandmother was not just a matter of curiosity, but was also part of her search for the meaning of existence and faith. By visiting a place of religion, she hopes to find answers about who she is.

Data 5

"Are you there, God? It's me, Margaret. I'm really on my way now. By the end of the school year, I'll know all there is to know about religion. And before I start junior high I'll know which one I am. Then I'll be able to join the Y or the Center like everybody else." (Blume, 1970, p. 63).

Margaret expresses her desire to finalize her religious identity by the end of the school year, showing her inner struggle and her need to feel part of a group. The line "Then I'll be able to join the Y or the Center like everybody else", shows that Margaret's search for identity is not only spiritual, but also relates to her desire to be accepted in a social setting. This illustrates how the influence of social norms can shape one's identity. Margaret considers that religious identity seems like something that needs to be clearly defined so that she can feel part of a particular group. This is in line with Butler's concept of performativity, which states that identity is not simply an individual decision, but is also formed through interaction with prevailing norms in society.

Data 6

"I went to the United Methodist Church of Farbrook on Christmas Eve. I attended Temple Israel of New York City on Rosh Hashanah, which is Jewish holiday. I went to Confession at Saint Bartholomew Church, but I had to leave the Confessional because I didn't know what to say. I have not tried being Buddhist or a Moslem because I don't know any people of these religion.

I have not really enjoyed my religious experiment very much and I don't think I'll make up my mind one way or the other for a long time. I don't think a person can decide to be a certain religion just like that. It's like having to choose your own name." (Blume, 1970, p. 148).

In this quote, Margaret reflects on her experience of trying out various religious practices, including attending church and confession booths. However, she admits that she did not enjoy her experiments and felt that choosing a religion was not that easy. This quote highlights how complex the relationship between religion and identity is for Margaret.

This quote from the novel refers to the theory of gender performativity, which states that identity is not something static or forced but rather something that is formed through action (Ward, 2000). In this case, Margaret's search for her spiritual identity is shaped through her everyday experiences and social interactions. Margaret goes to temples and churches and finds out about the religions around her, which shows Margaret's efforts to find her own spiritual identity.

Data 7

"I know you can. You're Margaret, aren't you? Tell me-did they try anything?"

"Like what?" I asked.

"You know," Grandma said. "Church business."

"Well... kind of," I admitted.

....

"Just remember, Margaret... no matter what they said... you're a Jewish girl."

"No, I'm not!" I argued. "I'm nothing, and you know it! I don't even believe in God!"

"Margaret!" Grandma said, "Don't ever talk like that about God.

"Why not?" I asked. "It's true!" I wanted to ask God did he hear that! But I wasn't speaking to him and I guess he knew it!" (Blume, 1970, p. 146).

This dialogue shows a conversation between Margaret and her two grandmothers, who both instill in Margaret what religion she will follow. However, Margaret explicitly rejects it by saying, "I don't believe in God!". This sentence shows Margaret's frustration with the pressure to choose a particular religion. Margaret feels trapped between her grandmother's wishes, her family's views, and her own uncertainty. Butler's theory that identity is formed through repetitive and performative actions is in line with Margaret's rejection of the forced religious identity given to her. Margaret's rejection of religious assignment shows part of her identity formation that goes against the social construction that tries to define her.

Data 8

"Are you there, God? It's me, Margaret. I know you're there God. I know you wouldn't have missed this for everything! Thank you God. Thanks an awful lot..." (Blume, 1970, p. 155).

In this quote, Margaret again speaks to God with gratitude as she had previously questioned His existence. Here she has not found a particular religion, but Margaret feels a personal closeness to God, beyond formal religious labels. In gender performativity theory, this can show that although Margaret does not have a clear religious identity, she still forms and expresses her spiritual identity by interacting with God. Although not bound by formal religion, her expression of gratitude shows her relationship with God and reflects how spiritual identity can be formed through personal experiences that are not always bound by the prevailing norms.

Some of the data above represents social dynamics that were relevant in the 1970s in America. It is explained in (Subandi, 2021), that in the 1960s and 1970s, second-wave feminism began to develop. In the United States, women established various organizations and held protests. This movement sparked criticism of the dominant culture, which then spread to universities across the country. In addition, Christian women in the United States, for example, again fought for their right to be ordained as leaders in the church. Since then, women have begun to realize that their work, life goals, and spiritual and moral dimensions do not have to follow the patterns set by men.

Grant (2014) said that in the 1950s, the United States experienced a revival of religiosity marked by increased participation in worship, prayer, and congregational membership. However, in the 1960s and 1970s, religiosity experienced a decline due to social changes that fueled doubts about religious institutions, although this decline stabilized in the late 1970s. The 1970s became a transitional period in which many people began to question the role of formal religion without completely abandoning it.

3.2 The Worries Regarding Physical Changes and Puberty

The following is a narrative excerpt of the anxiety Margaret felt regarding her physical development as a woman as well as her puberty. This made her feel different from her peers who had already experienced physical development and puberty. This unrest not only affected the way Margaret viewed herself in the context of her social environment, but also prompted her to question God in her prayers.

Data 9

"Oh, you're still flat." Nancy laughed.

"Not exactly," I said, pretending to be very cool. "I'm small boned, is all."

"I'm growing already," Nancy said. Sticking her chest way out. "In a few years I'm going to look like one of those girls in Playboy." (Blume, 1970, p. 7).

Margaret feels insecure and pressured by societal and peer expectations of physical maturity and social behaviour, leading to self-doubt as she navigates her sense of identity. Her friend Nancy presents herself as developing to meet the

standards of ideal female physical development, while the insecure Margaret hides it by feigning casualness and trying to find excuses to explain her underdeveloped body, as if she needs to provide justification to remain accepted in her friendship circle. Margaret also felt the need to behave in a certain way to fit in with her friends' expectations and not feel different.

Data 10

"I met a girl today. Her name is Nancy. She expected me to be very grown up. I think she was disappointed. Don't you think it's time for me to start growing God? If you could arrange it I'd be very glad. Thank you." (Blume, 1970, p. 15).

This quote shows Margaret wishing to grow into an adult and reflects her insecurity towards social expectations, especially after meeting Nancy, who she feels expects maturity from her. In this case, Margaret is performing performative acts such as praying for her body to develop and reflects that her identity is also influenced by her interactions with social norms so that she can be accepted.

Data 11

"Did you get it yet, Margaret?" Nancy asked.

"Get what?"

"Your period," Nancy said like I should have known

"Oh-no, not yet. Did you?"

Nancy swallowed some soda and shook her head. "None of us has yet."

I was glad to hear that. I mean, suppose they all got it already and I was the only one who didn't. I'd feel awful." (Blume, 1970, p. 33).

The conversation between Margaret and Nancy about menstruation shows the social pressure among her peers. Margaret is relieved that no one has menstruated yet which illustrates adolescents' anxiety about being left behind in their biological development. This reflects how social norms shape a person's understanding of their body. Margaret feels that she has to follow social expectations that menstruation is something that must be experienced in order to be recognized as a normal woman. This shows that gender identity is not only the result of biological changes, but also shaped by social norms that require one to reach a certain stage of physical development and maturity.

Data 12

"We all had to solemnly swear. Then we all had to think up a rule.

Nancy rule was, we all had to wear bras. I felt my cheeks turn red. I wondered if the others wore them already." (Blume, 1970, p. 35).

In this quote, Nancy proposes a bra-wearing rule that makes Margaret feel embarrassed at the thought of being the only one in the group who hasn't worn a bra yet. This makes Margaret have to do so in order to be accepted by her peers. Butler's theory states that gender is a social construction formed through repetition of actions that create the illusion of a stable identity. When Margaret gets demands related to her physical development that conform to social norms, she prays that she will immediately adjust herself to the social construction imposed by her environment. Butler mentions that the social relationships we participate in are subject to certain rules that help shape the way we perceive ourselves and our identities (Ward, 2000). This shows that Margaret's identity is not only formed by herself but also by social pressures that regulate how she should present herself according to the prevailing norms.

Data 13

"Are you there, God? It's me, Margaret. I hate to remind you God... I mean, I know you're busy. But it's already December and I'm 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." (Blume, 1970, p. 84).

This quote shows Margaret feeling frustrated because the physical changes she was waiting for did not happen. Although she has tried to be patient, the expected results have not been seen. This request reflects her desire to fulfill

social expectations of how a teenage girl should look. Her desire to grow faster shows that the female body is often treated as a social construct that has certain expectations. This illustrates that gender according to Butler is not an innate trait, but something that is continuously shaped through social experiences and cultural demands.

Data 14

"How old were you Mom- when you got it?"

"Uh... I think I was fourteen."

"Fourteen! That's crazy. I'm not waiting until I'm fourteen."

.....

"Do you suppose that could happen to me? I'll die if it does!"

"If you don't start by the time you're fourteen, I'll take you to the doctor. Now stop worrying!"

"How can I stop worrying when I don't know if I'm going to turn out normal?"

"I promise, you'll turn out normal." (Blume, 1970, p. 103).

This dialogue between Margaret and her mother reflects Margaret's concern that she may not be normal if she does not get her period at the expected time. Margaret not only awaits menstruation as a biological process, but also as a sign of social validation that she has reached a certain stage in her maturity. In addition, when her mother reassures Margaret with the phrase "turn out normal", this reflects how society sets certain standards regarding what is considered appropriate development. Margaret is anxious because she feels that she has not achieved these expectations, which confirms that identity is not only something that is formed and maintained through language, norms, and daily social interactions.

Data 15

"Are you there God? It's me, Margaret. Gretchen, my friend, got her period. I'm so jealous God. I hate to be jealous, but I am. I wish you'd help me just a little. Nancy's sure she's going to get it soon, too. And if I'm last I don't know what I'll do. Oh please God. I just want to be normal." (Blume, 1970, p. 104).

This quote describes Margaret jealous of her friend who had menstruated first. Margaret feels left behind which shows how biological development symbolizes social achievement among her group. Butler said that gender is a social construction formed through a series of repeated actions and behaviors, and identity is formed performatively through 'expressions' that are considered a result of the process (Butler, 1999). This quote depicts Margaret feeling pressure to fulfill social expectations of how women should be. This reflects how gender is understood through repetitive physical actions expected by society, such as wearing a bra in her teens, menstruating, and wanting to be normal like everyone else, reflected in Margaret's concerns.

Data 16

What is it? What's the matter?"

"I got it," I told her.

"Got what?"

I started to laugh and cry at the same time. "My period. I've got my period!" My nose started running and I reached for a tissue.

"Are you sure, Margaret?" my mother asked.

"Look-look at this," I said, showing her my underpants.

"My God! You've really got it. My little girl!" (Blume, 1970, p. 154).

Margaret's dialogue with her mother when she finally gets her first period, she feels mixed emotions of happiness and relief. This moment is the climax of her wait regarding her biological development where she feels normal and accepted as part of the group. In the perspective of Butler's gender performativity theory, this experience is not just a biological

change, but also a social validation of her identity as a woman. In other words, Margaret's menstruation is not just a sign of her physical change, but also affirms social norms regarding what it means to be a woman.

Data 17

"And I'd been so sure it would be me! How about that! Now I am growing for sure. Now I am almost a woman." (Blume, 1970, p. 155).

This quote shows Margaret welcoming her growth as a step in the process towards adulthood. Her belief that she is almost a woman shows how she adopts the social norms of what is considered the characteristics of a young woman. The feeling of happiness Margaret feels when she gets her first period shows that she feels this achievement is not only a biological matter but also social recognition, and her identity as a woman is finally achieved. This relates to performativity theory in that this moment reflects how Margaret's gender identity is shaped through expressions that are considered the result of social processes.

Through her journey, Margaret is faced with questions about her beliefs and about herself. Every experience helped her to understand how her environment and interactions with those around her shaped her view of identity. This process did not lead to immediate answers, but it did lead her to a deeper understanding of herself. In the process, she realized that identity is not something that has to be set in stone, but rather something that is constantly developing through new experiences and understandings.

4. Conclusion

Based on the results of the analysis above, Margaret's journey in her search for identity shows that identity is not formed instantly. In the search for spiritual identity and self-identity, Margaret tries to understand herself amidst various influences from social interactions, culture, and personal reflections. Using Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, the novel *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* shows that identity is not fixed but is formed through the interaction between social expectations and personal experiences.

Margaret's journey in this novel not only shows her struggle to understand herself but also illustrates how identity is a space that can continuously change. Therefore, this novel illustrates a reflection of how the complexity of identity experienced by individuals, especially during adolescence, in facing the transition to adulthood.

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