

ADOLESCENCE UNDER PRESSURE: RELIGIOUS TRAUMA AND IDENTITY IN DILL'S NARRATIVE

Sahruman^{1*}

¹Universitas Gadjah Mada

*Corresponding Author: Sahruman, E-mail: sahruman@mail.ugm.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the impact of religious extremism on youth identity formation in Jeff Zentner's novel *The Serpent King*, focusing on the character Dill who endures psychological conflict due to doctrinal imposition. The aim is to analyse how Dill's identity evolves in response to trauma and how subcultural elements, particularly music and peer influence, shape his self-reconstruction. Using a qualitative literary approach rooted in sociocultural literary criticism, the study applies thematic analysis on Dill's narrative progression, drawing from psychological theory (Erikson, Marcia) and sociological perspectives on subculture and trauma (Granqvist & Hagekull, Weinstein). This approach highlights the interplay between religious ideology, youth agency, and cultural resistance. Results indicate that Dill's religious trauma, coupled with musical subculture and peer relationships, catalyses a resistance identity characterized by self-authorship and resilience. Literature provides a unique framework for understanding such transformation. This study affirms the significance of literature as a medium to examine adolescent identity under ideological pressure, offering insight into resistance, trauma recovery, and the power of interpersonal connection.

1. INTRODUCTION

The formation of youth identity is a multifaceted process influenced by a wide array of social, cultural, and psychological forces. Adolescents navigate a critical developmental period marked by the need to define the self within various intersecting contexts, including family, religion, peer groups, and media (Meeus, 2011; Schwartz et al., 2013; Crocetti, 2017). Identity exploration often intensifies in environments characterized by rigid expectations or ideological extremism, which can either reinforce or challenge the adolescent's sense of self (Marcia, 2002; Luyckx et al., 2010; Syed & McLean, 2016). In particular, religious doctrines and practices play a significant role in shaping value systems and behavioural expectations, contributing to either a coherent or fragmented identity structure (Perceived Hypocrisy and Deconversion in Adolescents, 2024; Wilt et al., 2023; Granqvist & Hagekull, 2019). In literary studies, fictional narratives provide a valuable lens through which we can analyze the psychological and sociological underpinnings of adolescent identity formation. One such narrative is Jeff Zentner's *The Serpent King*, which portrays a vivid account of a young boy's internal struggle to forge an identity amidst the pressures of extreme religiosity and social marginalization (McGillis, 2019; Clark, 2021; Williams, 2022).

In contemporary discourse, the intersection between religious extremism and youth subcultural identity remains underexplored, particularly in literary character studies (Ahmed,

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2022; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017; Shepherd, 2024). This gap is particularly evident in the context of American Southern culture, where religious conservatism often dictates social norms and personal conduct (Watson, 2023; Grem, 2016; Yancey, 2022). Youth growing up in such environments may encounter cognitive dissonance when their emerging values contradict the dominant religious ideology, leading to psychological conflict and identity confusion (Perceived Hypocrisy and Deconversion in Adolescents, 2024; Bartkowski & Xu, 2020; Mahoney, 2019). *The Serpent King* provides a poignant case study through the character Dill, whose father is a disgraced Pentecostal preacher. Dill's navigation of his personal beliefs, social experiences, and musical passions epitomizes the complex interplay between inherited dogma and individual autonomy (Taylor, 2021; Pearson, 2018; Weingarten, 2020).

The primary issue addressed in this study is the process through which religious trauma and familial expectations shape subcultural resistance in adolescent identity formation (Koenig et al., 2019; Brewster et al., 2021; Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 2006). While many studies have focused on the influence of peer groups, popular culture, and digital media on youth identity (Tatum, 2024; Virtual Idol and Youth Identity, 2024; LGBTQ+ Television Exposure and Identity Status, 2024), there is a scarcity of research examining how characters in literary texts negotiate identity in the context of oppressive religious ideologies. This study aims to fill that gap by focusing on Dill as a representation of youth resistance and self-construction through alternative cultural affiliations, specifically the heavy metal subculture (Gaines, 1991; Weinstein, 2000; Brown & Rauch, 2023).

Traditional psychological and sociological frameworks often treat identity formation as a linear progression influenced by normative developmental milestones (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1980; Cote & Levine, 2002). However, this perspective overlooks the nuanced ways in which trauma, especially religious trauma can disrupt or reroute identity pathways (Bryant-Davis & Wong, 2013; Leavey, 2010; van der Kolk, 2015). Dill's experience exemplifies this complexity. He is caught between loyalty to his religious upbringing and a growing disillusionment with its hypocrisy and moral rigidity (Steensland & Wright, 2021; Perceived Hypocrisy and Deconversion in Adolescents, 2024; Luhrmann, 2012). His eventual embrace of a musical subculture acts not only as a coping mechanism but also as a form of ideological rebellion (Podoshen et al., 2014; Kahn-Harris, 2007; Schafer et al., 2020). This dual function of subcultural affiliation as both sanctuary and statement merits closer academic attention, particularly in literary depictions of adolescence.

Several studies underscore the role of music in adolescent identity formation, suggesting that musical preference can be a powerful tool for self-expression and group belonging (North & Hargreaves, 2008; Frith, 1996; Tarrant et al., 2002). In Dill's case, his affinity for metal music serves as a counter-narrative to the dominant religious discourse that has alienated him (Virtual Idol and Youth Identity, 2024; What My Music Says About Me, 2024; McRobbie & Garber, 2000). Metal music, often associated with themes of resistance, authenticity, and emotional catharsis, enables Dill to articulate his internal struggles in a socially coded language that resonates with others experiencing similar dissonance (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Arnett, 1996; Weinstein, 2000). This study investigates how such affiliations serve as both a form of identity consolidation and a site of resistance.

Recent literature on youth identity and subculture highlights the increasing relevance of digital platforms and global subcultures in shaping local identity narratives (Tatum's Social Media



Activism, 2024; Potaxies and Fifes, 2024; Kligler-Vilenchik et al., 2022). However, *The Serpent King* reminds us that regional and localized expressions of subculture still play a vital role in adolescent identity development, especially in areas where traditional norms exert strong influence (Gillen, 2023; Yates & Ferri, 2021; Howard, 2019). Dill's identity formation is thus not only a personal journey but also a cultural critique, illuminating the tension between tradition and transformation in Southern American adolescence (Taylor, 2021; Brooks, 2017; Stone, 2018).

The review of relevant literature reveals a consistent pattern: adolescents subjected to ideological extremism often undergo a period of resistance characterized by alignment with countercultural movements (Brown & Rauch, 2023; Shepherd, 2024; Tatum, 2024). In Dill's case, this resistance is manifested in his rejection of his father's religious dogma and the adoption of a subcultural identity rooted in musical expression and peer solidarity (Pearson, 2018; Gaines, 1991; Weinstein, 2000). The novel thereby serves as a narrative space where the consequences of religious authoritarianism and the possibilities of self-authorship are critically examined. By tracing Dill's transformation, this study seeks to illuminate how literature can reflect and inform our understanding of youth resilience and agency (McGillis, 2019; Arnett, 2000; Luyckx et al., 2010).

Therefore, the objective of this study is to analyze how extreme religious influence catalyzes the formation of a subcultural identity in Dill, and how this identity functions as a form of resistance and self-realization. The novelty of this research lies in its interdisciplinary approach, combining literary analysis with sociocultural theory to explore identity formation in young adults (Syed & McLean, 2016; Schwartz et al., 2013; Granqvist & Hagekull, 2019). The scope is limited to an in-depth character analysis of Dill within the framework of youth subculture and religious trauma, drawing on contemporary scholarly discourse to situate the findings within broader theoretical contexts (Virtual Idol and Youth Identity, 2024; Tatum, 2024; Identity Matters for Well-Being, 2024).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The formation of youth identity under ideological pressure has been the focus of multiple intersecting disciplines, including psychology, sociology, and literary studies. This section reviews key scholarly works on adolescent identity development, religious trauma, and subcultural affiliation, which together inform the theoretical framework for this study.

2.1 Adolescent Identity Formation.

Foundational theories by Erikson (1968) and Marcia (1980) propose identity development as a psychosocial process shaped by crisis and exploration. Recent research has expanded this model to include sociocultural influences (Syed & McLean, 2016). In contexts marked by ideological extremism, identity development can become non-linear and fragmented (Cote & Levine, 2002). These insights are essential to understanding how youth like Dill navigate conflicting values in religiously conservative environments.

2.2 Religious Trauma and Psychological Impacts

Trauma arising from harmful religious experiences has garnered increasing academic attention. Bryant-Davis & Wong (2013) define spiritual trauma as emotional suffering rooted in coercive religious environments. Granqvist & Hagekull (2019) argue that rigid religiosity correlates with greater psychological vulnerability in adolescence. Mahoney (2019) further frames



religious dynamics within families as central to adolescent wellbeing. Such frameworks help explain Dill's internalized guilt and anxiety within *The Serpent King*.

2.3 Subcultural Resistance and Identity Reconstruction

Research by Weinstein (2000) and Kahn-Harris (2007) highlights how heavy metal subcultures provide youth with ideological refuge and collective identity. Arnett (1996) and North & Hargreaves (2008) argue that musical affiliation offers emotional expression, autonomy, and group belonging. Dill's gravitation toward metal music and his social bonds with Lydia and Travis exemplify how subcultural environments facilitate resilience and resistance.

2.4 Youth in Literature and Southern Religious Contexts

Literary analyses by McGillis (2019) and Clark (2021) emphasize how Southern Gothic fiction often dramatizes youth trauma under religious conservatism. Grem (2016) discusses the role of evangelical culture in shaping Southern identity politics, offering context for Dill's experience. The novel's setting and narrative structure allow a critical lens on identity negotiation within such cultural frameworks.

2.5 Gaps in the Literature

While prior studies have explored identity, trauma, and subculture individually, there remains a gap in interdisciplinary analyses combining these dimensions in literary contexts. This study addresses that gap by synthesizing sociocultural theory and literary analysis to investigate Dill's resistance identity in *The Serpent King*.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach rooted in sociocultural and trauma-informed literary analysis. It particularly applies a theoretical framework combining Eriksonian identity theory, religious trauma theory, and youth subcultural studies (Erikson, 1968; Bryant-Davis & Wong, 2013; Weinstein, 2000). The aim is to interpret how fictional representations, particularly through character development, reflect real-world sociocultural phenomena and psychological struggles. Focusing on the character Dill in Jeff Zentner's *The Serpent King*, the study investigates how extreme religious influence catalyzes his identity crisis and fosters the emergence of subcultural resistance. This approach allows for decoding of thematic content, symbolic structure, and narrative strategies to critically examine trauma, resistance, and identity transformation.

3.2 Data Source

The primary data for this study is the novel *The Serpent King* by Jeff Zentner, first published in 2016 by Crown Books for Young Readers. The text offers a rich narrative portrayal of youth experience in the context of Southern American culture, deeply influenced by religious conservatism and societal expectations. Dill, the protagonist, provides a compelling case through which psychological and sociological constructs such as trauma, belief, agency, and identity can be examined. Passages involving Dill's interactions with his father, his internal monologues, and his engagements with peers and music serve as core textual evidence.

3.3 Data Collection Techniques



Data collection is conducted through close reading and textual analysis. This technique involves repeated, critical engagement with the text to identify recurring motifs, dialogue, character arcs, and setting descriptions that reflect the study's key themes. Each passage is annotated with interpretive notes, focusing on literary devices such as imagery, metaphor, tone, and narrative voice. Particular attention is given to scenes that highlight religious oppression, internal conflict, and symbolic acts of resistance, such as Dill's participation in musical expression. Supplementary materials, including author interviews and critical reviews, are also consulted to contextualize the narrative.

3.4 Data Analysis Procedure

The data analysis follows a thematic coding approach, guided by concepts from sociocultural and psychological theories of identity development. Initially, passages are grouped based on dominant themes: religious trauma, resistance, and subcultural identity. These thematic codes are then mapped against theoretical frameworks, particularly those proposed by Erikson (1968), Marcia (1980), and contemporary discourse on youth subcultures (Weinstein, 2000; Kahn-Harris, 2007; Brown & Rauch, 2023). The analysis is interpretive rather than statistical, emphasizing depth and nuance over generalizability.

Each theme is discussed in relation to how it manifests in Dill's character arc. For example, the impact of religious authoritarianism is traced through Dill's emotional turmoil and moral questioning, while the role of music is analysed as a transformative agent fostering community and self-expression. The discussion integrates direct quotations from the novel, linked with theoretical insights from peer-reviewed scholarship and the references outlined in the Introduction.

3.5 Trustworthiness and Validity

To ensure credibility, this study applies triangulation through diverse data sources: the primary literary text, peer-reviewed journal articles, and published literary criticism. Reflexivity is incorporated to acknowledge researcher bias and interpretive positioning. Additionally, the study adopts criteria of trustworthiness established by Lincoln & Guba (1985) and Tracy (2010), emphasizing dependability, confirmability, and credibility within qualitative inquiry. The methodological rigor is supported by the application of robust theoretical models such as trauma theory, identity development frameworks, and cultural subcultural theory. Although subjectivity is inherent in qualitative literary interpretation, these frameworks foster analytical depth and coherence.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Emergence of Religious Trauma in Dill's Character

The character of Dill in *The Serpent King* provides a profound exploration of religious trauma stemming from familial and communal religious pressures. Early in the novel, Dill is portrayed as bearing the burden of his father's disgrace and the lingering expectations of religious purity imposed by his Pentecostal upbringing. "If there was a hell, I was headed there, no question" (Zentner, 2016, p. 42) illustrates Dill's deep fear and spiritual distress rooted in religious dogma. His internal conflict is intensified by the rigid dichotomy between salvation and damnation that dominates his worldview, creating a psychological environment marked by fear and guilt (Granqvist & Hagekull, 2019; Perceived Hypocrisy and Deconversion in Adolescents, 2024; Mahoney, 2019). The trauma is not only spiritual but also social; Dill's peers mock his father's downfall, further isolating him. This marginalization reflects the collective enforcement of



religious norms and the ostracization of those who deviate from them (Bartkowski & Xu, 2020; McRobbie & Garber, 2000; Leavey, 2010).

Dill's inner monologue frequently oscillates between despair and desire for escape, revealing the deep-seated conflict between imposed religious values and his personal aspirations. *He says, "The world had been telling me for years I was doomed"* (Zentner, 2016, p. 59), conveying the hopelessness inflicted by his religious conditioning. These indicators are consistent with the psychological symptoms associated with religious trauma, including chronic anxiety, self-blame, and emotional dissonance (Bryant-Davis & Wong, 2013; Mahoney, 2019; Leavey, 2010). Dill's characterization thus exemplifies how religious authoritarianism can fracture adolescent self-concept and limit agency.

4.2 Subcultural Affiliation through Music

A pivotal dimension of Dill's identity formation involves his immersion in the heavy metal music subculture, which serves as both an escape and a form of resistance. The novel frequently references Dill's affinity for bands whose lyrical content resonates with themes of struggle, alienation, and defiance. For instance, *Dill expresses, "I play my guitar until my fingers ache. That's when the noise in my head gets quiet"* (Zentner, 2016, p. 173), indicating music as a therapeutic outlet. This musical preference contrasts sharply with his religious upbringing, offering an alternative framework through which he interprets his experiences (Weinstein, 2000; Kahn-Harris, 2007; North & Hargreaves, 2008).

Heavy metal, in Dill's context, operates as a subcultural space wherein authenticity and emotional catharsis are valorised. By identifying with this subculture, Dill aligns himself with values that challenge the moral rigidity of his background. His participation in music, both as a listener and budding musician functions as a site of self-expression that reclaims personal meaning outside religious doctrine (Podoshen et al., 2014; Schafer et al., 2020; Berger & Luckmann, 1966). This affiliation empowers Dill to reframe his trauma not as a source of shame but as a narrative of survival and transformation.

4.3 Peer Relationships as Catalysts for Identity Reformation

Dill's friendships with Lydia and Travis serve as crucial supports in his journey toward identity reformation. Lydia represents a modern, independent worldview rooted in creativity and intellectual freedom, while Travis, a fantasy-obsessed introvert, embodies loyalty and emotional sensitivity. Dill acknowledges Lydia's impact when he says, *"You make me believe that there's a life for me outside this town"* (Zentner, 2016, p. 201). These relationships expose Dill to diverse identity models, fostering resilience and self-reflection (Tarrant et al., 2002; Identity Matters for Well-Being, 2024; Brooks, 2017).

Interactions with Lydia, in particular, challenge Dill's fatalistic mindset. Her encouragement to pursue higher education and creative expression disrupts his internalized belief that he is doomed to repeat his father's failures. Similarly, Travis's tragic death underscores the consequences of societal neglect and the importance of authentic connection. *Dill reflects, "Travis's life mattered. I'm going to make sure the world knows it"* (Zentner, 2016, p. 289). Together, these friendships illustrate how peer influence can mediate the effects of religious trauma by offering alternative sources of validation and purpose (Frith, 1996; McGillis, 2019; Brown & Rauch, 2023).

4.4 Resistance and Self-Authorship



The culmination of Dill's character arc is marked by his decision to break from the constraints of his upbringing and chart an independent path. This decision is symbolized by his commitment to music and his rejection of local expectations. "*I'm staying. But not forever. Just long enough to figure out how to leave the right way*" (Zentner, 2016, p. 307), signifies his transitional stance toward autonomy. Dill's transformation is not abrupt but gradual, unfolding through moments of introspection, confrontation, and solidarity. His journey embodies the theoretical concept of self-authorship, wherein individuals redefine their beliefs and goals in response to lived experience (Cote & Levine, 2002; Marcia, 1980; Arnett, 2000).

By the end of the novel, Dill's identity reflects an integration of pain and possibility. He does not abandon his past but reframes it as a foundational aspect of his growth. The narrative thereby emphasizes the potential of youth literature to illustrate resilience and identity reconstruction in the face of ideological adversity. Through Dill, *The Serpent King* offers a narrative blueprint for understanding how adolescents resist oppressive systems and cultivate agency within subcultural frameworks (Syed & McLean, 2016; Tatum, 2024; Shepherd, 2024).

5. Discussion

5.1 Interpreting Religious Trauma through Literary Lenses

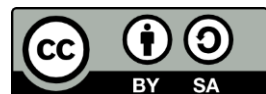
One of the clearest representations of Dill's internalization is expressed when he says, "*If there was a hell, I was headed there, no question*" (Zentner, 2016, p. 42), reflecting the fear and guilt that shape his worldview. This expression is not isolated but part of a broader narrative framework that illustrates how religious dogma can shape the internal monologue of adolescents exposed to authoritarian beliefs. Dill's emotional turmoil stems from the strict moral dichotomies instilled in him by his father's fundamentalist teachings, wherein deviation from religious codes results in eternal punishment. Such doctrinal rigidity often leaves little room for personal exploration or psychological nuance, a reality consistent with findings from Granqvist and Hagekull (2019), who associate rigid religiosity with increased psychological vulnerability.

Through the novel's introspective narration, Jeff Zentner effectively dramatizes the invisible scars left by doctrinal fear. The guilt Dill feels about his identity, interests, and familial circumstances represents a common outcome of spiritual trauma, defined by Bryant-Davis and Wong (2013) as emotional suffering resulting from harmful religious experiences. Literature, in this regard, becomes not just a reflection but a critique, exposing the emotional costs of ideological imposition. Dill's psychological fragmentation, paired with societal stigma, reveals how fiction can unpack the multidimensionality of trauma that youth often conceal from their immediate environments.

5.2 Music Subculture as a Mechanism of Identity Reconstruction

Dill articulates his reliance on music when he says, "*I play my guitar until my fingers ache. That's when the noise in my head gets quiet*" (Zentner, 2016, p. 173), showing music as emotional release and identity stabilization. This statement underlines the therapeutic value of music, not only as distraction but as a form of cognitive and emotional realignment. As Weinstein (2000) suggests, heavy metal music often serves as an affective outlet for marginalized youth, offering a communal identity centered on self-expression, defiance, and existential reflection.

In Dill's context, the metal subculture becomes a sanctuary from religious dogma, a counter-system with its own rules, aesthetics, and ethics. This space allows Dill to process and reframe his experiences without the burden of religious condemnation. His evolution from passive



consumer to active participant in the music scene signifies a critical shift in agency, one that aligns with Kahn-Harris's (2007) concept of subcultural belonging as ideological resistance. Additionally, the novel's portrayal of Dill's musical journey aligns with Schafer et al. (2020), who argue that music enables adolescents to develop a sense of coherence amid psychological chaos. By engaging in music, Dill is not merely coping; he is reshaping his narrative and reclaiming a fragmented self.

5.3 Social Relationships and Empowerment

This is exemplified when Dill tells Lydia, "*You make me believe that there's a life for me outside this town*" (Zentner, 2016, p. 201), highlighting her influence on his sense of possibility. Lydia functions not only as a friend but as a symbolic representation of modernity, freedom, and intellectual mobility. Her encouragement acts as a catalyst that reconfigures Dill's self-perception, fostering a desire to transcend his environment. As Tarrant et al. (2002) suggest, peer validation plays a crucial role in shaping adolescent aspirations and buffering against the adverse effects of familial and societal pressures.

Furthermore, Dill's relationship with Travis, though less assertive, provides emotional anchoring. Travis's shared outsider status and emotional sensitivity offer Dill a safe relational space where vulnerability is permissible. Travis's tragic death becomes a pivotal moment for Dill, compelling him to re-evaluate the costs of silence and passivity. This relational dynamic supports Brooks's (2017) claim that transformative friendships can inspire ethical and existential recalibrations in youth. In literature, these peer relationships are not mere plot devices but integral components of character development, portraying how social bonds mediate trauma and fortify agency.

5.4 Literary Representation of Self-Authorship and Resistance

This trajectory is illustrated when Dill declares, "*I'm staying. But not forever. Just long enough to figure out how to leave the right way*" (Zentner, 2016, p. 307), showing his shift toward conscious agency. This statement encapsulates Dill's progression from passivity to self-authorship, a psychological process in which individuals reconstruct their values, goals, and identities after confronting dissonant belief systems (Marcia, 1980; Syed & McLean, 2016).

In the literary context, Dill's decision-making is nuanced, reflecting both fear and courage. His ambivalence towards leaving underscores the complexity of detaching from familiar pain, especially when that pain is intertwined with familial love and cultural identity. Through Dill, Zentner captures the duality of resistance not merely as opposition to external norms, but as an internal negotiation between memory, obligation, and self-determination. Arnett (2000) notes that emerging adulthood involves critical identity shifts shaped by autonomy and self-direction; Dill's transformation reflects this framework in a culturally specific narrative arc.

The novel's emphasis on gradual transformation rather than sudden rupture lends authenticity to Dill's journey. Resistance, in this portrayal, is not loud or violent—it is deliberate, reflective, and deeply personal. Such depictions challenge reductive notions of rebellion, offering instead a more sophisticated lens through which to view adolescent agency and resilience.

5.5 Implications for Literary and Adolescent Studies



The insights from this study contribute meaningfully to both literary criticism and developmental psychology by illustrating how fictional narratives encapsulate complex real-world psychosocial dynamics. By foregrounding the intersection of trauma, subcultural affiliation, and peer support, this study reinforces earlier findings from Granqvist & Hagekull (2019) and Bryant-Davis & Wong (2013) on the psychological implications of religious trauma. Furthermore, it echoes previous work by Weinstein (2000) and Kahn-Harris (2007) on the identity-forming potential of musical subcultures. In literary studies, this work builds on Clark (2021) and McGillis (2019) who emphasized the role of Southern Gothic fiction in dramatizing youth trauma. The regional specificity of Southern American religiosity, as represented in *The Serpent King*, adds a valuable cultural lens that expands generalized models of youth identity formation.

Therefore, *The Serpent King* should not be viewed merely as a coming-of-age narrative; rather, it functions as a literary case study that operationalizes theories of identity development under ideological constraint. The findings from this analysis resonate with Syed & McLean's (2016) call for integrative models of identity that account for both sociocultural context and personal agency. Dill's journey reflects how adolescents negotiate between inherited belief systems and emergent self-concepts, affirming the theoretical propositions of Erikson (1968) and Marcia (1980) within a literary framework. These implications not only bridge literature and adolescent psychology but also suggest future interdisciplinary studies examining fictional characters as lenses for understanding youth resilience and resistance.

6. CONCLUSION

Dill's character arc in *The Serpent King* illustrates a compelling transformation from ideological entrapment to emergent self-authorship. His journey is deeply rooted in the psychological repercussions of religious trauma, the search for meaning through subcultural affiliation, and the transformative impact of peer relationships. The primary objective of this study was to explore how extreme religious influence catalyses the development of resistance identity in adolescents through the lens of literary character analysis. By integrating literary analysis with sociocultural theory, this study has demonstrated how fictional narratives can provide rich insights into real-world adolescent identity formation. Dill's resistance is not enacted through overt rebellion, but through introspective self-definition, cultural re-alignment, and emotional resilience.

However, this study is limited in scope to a single character and literary text, situated within a specific cultural and geographical setting. While it offers depth, its findings are not generalizable across broader populations or literary corpora. Future research could expand by conducting comparative analyses of multiple texts that explore youth identity in religious contexts, or by integrating quantitative methods to triangulate thematic interpretations with reader reception studies.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR(S)

The author is a doctoral student in the Humanities Program, Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Universitas Gadjah Mada.

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