

Adolescents Develop Their Identities Amidst Adversities

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ABSTRACT

Adolescence is a somewhat turbulent phase of life to many. This paper explores the challenges of 6 Malaysian adolescents aged between 13 and 17 from low socioeconomic background in developing their identities. In depth semi-structured interviews were carried out. Family problems, peer pressure, and learning difficulties were among the main issues encountered. This study revealed that although the respondents' families' socio-economic status had affected them, it is not the determinant to their success nor failure. This study also suggests that a sound identity development and academic outcome could be achieved with relatively good parental involvement, well perceived expectations, fitting in with group of friends as well as a healthy surrounding.

Keywords: Adolescents; Youth; Self-Identity; Group-Identity; Home-identity; Vignettes; Socio-economic Status (SES)

INTRODUCTION

"I wish that I could be like the cool kids,

'Cause all the cool kids, they seem to fit in."

(Lyric of Cool Kids from Echosmith)

The lyric of the song above relates a great deal with how one would want to be identified by their friends in school. Cool kids in the song are likely to depict popular kids in school. Being popular may be perceived as a form of social acceptance in which it is validated by the many 'likes' they attained from their social media accounts or the awards and rewards they received. Thus, one may adjust one's identity so as to gain acceptance from friends. In so doing, developing a good self-identity will lead to many other great outcomes to adolescents or as they develop to being part of social communities. This is no secret to all; feeling good about one self would bring about confidence and advantages in time to come. One can be good and happy regardless of their family

economic background. Happiness is likely to be something that can be earned and not bought. Thus, self-identity contributes much to one's state of well-being, confidence and emotion. This may also give rise to their adjustment in schools.

Adolescence is the period of time that involves a diversity of challenges and transitions from childhood to adulthood. As Miller (2006) highlighted, the process of creating one's individual identity is an ongoing cycle that are built upon previous stages as well as applying new things learned to new contexts. Identity is a reflection of who we are as individuals and how we represent ourselves in the society. Each individual will have his or her own unique identity development. The identity that one possesses is the effect of his or her development and environment they grew up in. One may choose his/her own identity, but it may also be naturally formed by the people around them. Identity changes over time and is complex in nature. Having a positive self-esteem may be a good indicator for a well-developed self-identity.

In the same vein, each individual has his or her own identity to be represented when dealing with others. It may restrict one's own self when there is a pressure of conforming to certain identity in the society they belong to. For adolescents particularly, those from a wealthy family are seen to be of greater advantage as compared to those who come from an underprivileged background. They are seen to have a voice in their endeavors. Being less privileged and 'voiceless' in the society may be the reasons as to why adolescents from this type of groups act and respond to their surroundings in a certain way to be noticed. The 'cool kids' song mentioned at the outset is just an example of how adolescents want to feel being accepted by their friends in school. The song demonstrates that being cool is one who is from a rich family, with style and confidence. Those from the disadvantaged suburban, outskirts or the rural areas or less privileged families may have to work harder in order for them to fit in and be noticed.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Erik Erikson[19], a psychologist in the 1960s introduced "Identity vs. Identity diffusion" as a major identity crisis stage in which individuals deal with during their adolescent years. According to him, one who successfully passes this stage will develop a healthy self-identity and those who fail to counter the difficulties of his or her development will fall into the identity diffusion category. The identity development is assisted by the environment and interaction made with others.

James Marcia, advanced the concept of identity development by operationalizing identity into four categories, evolving from two identity dimensions: exploration/crisis (a period of active questioning in arriving at various decisions in regard to career, religion, and attitude); and commitment (making a stand and remaining firm in one's choices or decisions). Exploration/crisis and commitment vary in the differing categories, or statuses, establishing four such statuses; identity achievement, moratorium, foreclosure, and, diffusion. The first status; the identity achieved by individuals are those who have explored various options and have then made commitments. The moratorium status is when individuals are in the process of exploring, but have not yet made commitments. The foreclosed individuals have made commitments without going through a period of exploration, instead, they have adopted the values and beliefs of their parents or significant others in their lives. Lastly, the identity diffused individuals are neither in a state of exploration nor have they made commitments.

It is important to understand that one is not born with a complete identity but the identity is developed and evolves over time. Dombek [16] mentioned that “identity is not just what you know; it is also how you know”. This phrase reflects the journey that one has to go through before reaching certain identity. Problems may arise when the development of one’s identity is disrupted. Identity problems can cause people to have difficulty taking an appropriate perspective towards other important life tasks. The interaction and treatment with the people around can contribute to a healthy or problematic self-identity. It gives a sense of worth and control within oneself. When one has a good self-esteem and confidence to lead their lives, it will be much easier for them to get out of difficult situations when met with challenges ahead.

Stanton, Cuthill, and Amador [50] stated that the developmental challenges that adolescents face such as establishing new relationships with family, developing strong attachments to peers, entering into intimate relationships, establishing a sexual identity, defining long-term career and life plan trajectories are molded and impacted by the myriad of cofactors in the environments. Given all that must be accomplished during this brief set of time, the natural coping mechanisms, sense of identity, family support, and societal expectations all contribute to the youth’s perception of his or her circumstances and how he or she will navigate the course of adolescence.

The much negative stigma that has been associated with adolescents coming from lower social economic status may contribute to the development of “permanent underclass”. With the increasing data that supports the role of “diffusion” in the growth of high-risk area in itself increases the likelihood that youth will engage in behaviors potentially endangering their future. Academic success resulting in completion of higher education, potentially offers the opportunity to improve one’s socioeconomic status. However, the consideration of the growth and development of adolescents and academic performance would be incomplete without examining the impact of parenting. Parenting as referred to Stanton et al. [50]) is one of the most powerful predictors of adolescent competence. Regardless of the structure and socioeconomic status of the family, an authoritative parenting style (demanding but responsive parents) is associated with increased adolescent’s competence.

Romano [44] in his research has developed a hypothetical relationship between dimensions of parenting and identity statuses based on Marcia’s developed identity theory. He examines the dimensions of maternal and paternal parenting behaviors that have influenced the identity formation process in late adolescence. The relationship between identity exploration and the parenting dimensions of acceptance versus rejection and psychological autonomy versus control is examined in addition to the association between identity commitment and firm versus lax control. He found that achievement and moratorium are the expected effects of parental acceptance and psychological autonomy. Conversely, foreclosure and diffusion are the expected effects of parental rejection and psychological control.

Cakir and Aydin [9] concluded that adolescents that perceive their parents as authoritative and permissive scored significantly higher on identity foreclosure than those adolescents that are in a household with a neglectful parent. It can be said that adolescents is basically at a stage where they listen more of their friends advises rather than their parents. Adolescents value their time spent together with their peers a lot. Tanti, Stukas, Halloran, and Foddy [52] established peer group as a predictor to adolescents’ academic achievement and enjoyment over a school year. It

was also found that identification with a friendship group to be an important predictor of positive engagement with social-developmental tasks. The researchers pointed that priming a particular social identity affected adolescence self-perception. They suggested that intergroup behaviors may be possible to adapt priming methods to create or strengthen meaningful social identities for adolescents in order to promote their development. Peer groups are another big agent that contributes to the identity development of an adolescent. The feeling of belongingness may boost their self-esteem and create a more meaningful identity. Campbell [10] asserts that the participation in leisure pursuits either alone or with others was greatly associated with identity. The quality of an adolescent's identity development depends on the kind of activity one chooses to be involved in during one's leisure time.

The different phases in the development of adolescence should also be taken into consideration as Tanti et al. [52] distinguished the different phases of social identities because they appear to vary. During the early stage of adolescence, it becomes highly salient and meaningful for peer group crowds such as reputation based on social categories like 'nerds', 'populars' and 'normals'. However, it decreases in importance during one's late adolescence stage. It can be simplified that in the early adolescence stage, adolescents are preoccupied with achieving a sense of belongingness to one's groups whereas late adolescence shows greater focus in achieving a sense of personal identity.

Rich and Schachter [43] and Flum and Kaplan [21] in their studies gathered that adolescents have developmental identity needs in which identity develops positively in nurturing contexts and that school is a potentially important venue for identity development. They claimed that when adolescents perceive their high school environment as high in characteristics that are theoretically supportive of positive identity formation, they will be more confident about their ability to cope with future identity-related challenges and they will report greater engagement in exploration, a central component of positive identity formation. Contrarily, Mine and Lascester [39] reported that depression during adolescents has been associated with a number of factors, including a failure in individuation, insecure attachments, negative parental representations, and object relations which lack self-other differentiation.

According to Phillips [41], living in poverty causes multiple stresses which have adverse effects on development from infancy through adolescence. Exposure to multiple and chronic stressors is related to socio-emotional maladjustment and developmental difficulties. Chronic stress may act as a drag on the identity control process by lacing strain on poor adolescents' cognitive processing resources limiting access to representations of self. At the same time, chronic stress may lessen poor adolescents' personal motivational resources, thus, disrupts their identity exploration.

It has been argued that poverty has placed adolescents at risk for negative outcomes. De Haan and MacDermid [15] mentioned that most studies on populations with low socioeconomic status have dwelt on risk, rather than protective factors, and on problems rather than successes. However, Mercado [37] highlighted that those who were taught with the idea that despite the many disadvantages in his/her upbringing, they could somehow overcome the low social status they had been born into through education. It has been the transformative power of education that drives them to migrate to new spaces of privilege in the hopes of fulfilling their parents' dreams. In other words, good education would be a way out of one's economic hardship.

Numerous researchers have found that educational setting plays an important role in adolescents' identity formation. However, students clearly form identities regardless of educators' explicit attention, school's intentional efforts or parenting styles. Adolescents can develop their identities in an increasingly diverse way that may be unrelated to school. Conversely, Flum and Kaplan [21] mentioned that the identity formation is a variable in which sometimes it is more or less adaptive and is intertwined with and shaped by the contexts within which it takes place, such as the educational settings. Thus, schools should and could provide contexts that promote more adaptive developmental identity formation trajectories regardless of student's background. Students should be given equal treatment in order for him or her to get a chance of having a healthy identity formation. Moreover, the close link between identity and learning highlights the potential for harnessing the psychological energy of identity formation to promote adaptive learning as well as developmental goals. This is also supported by Faircloth [15] in which he stressed that students participate well when they are interested in the learning and that is more significant to them. Thus, teachers have to be creative in making the lesson of interest to the students.

Research conducted by Ramirez [45] strongly supports the relationship between self-identity and higher education experience. He conducted a research on the Chicanas/os identity and how it is related to their higher education experiences. It was found that those who have well developed their identity in the first two years of their studies had a greater experience rather than those who have yet to develop their identities. He further suggests from the findings obtained in the research that self-identity motivates Chicana/os to obtain a higher education and to get involved in their communities. An almost similar research was conducted by Hatcher [28] on Haitians and the result obtained was similar to Ramirez's. This shows that once the identity is developed well, it will contribute to the success in academic and school adjustment for adolescents. These findings are further supported by Miller and Tuttle's [38] study which discovered that one's identity is how individuals make sense of the group he or she would communicate and socialize with. Self-identity affects occupational choice and success, personal relationships, community involvement, value formation and ultimately economic prosperity or poverty. Metadata information in the Web Pages and Expansion of the Query

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study was conducted qualitatively through semi-structured interview sessions and journal writing. During the interviews, respondents were presented with pictures and vignettes. These approaches helped gain insights and understanding of the development of self-identity among the suburban adolescents. Through qualitative inquiry, a researcher can directly document the underlying reasons as to why individuals behave in a certain way.

A purposive criterion sampling technique was used to select six adolescents between the ages of 13 to 17. All six adolescents interviewed are Malays. They are from families who received help from *Lembaga Zakat Selangor* (LZS) (Alms-giving Organisation) and live in the suburban area. Zakat receivers are those whose income are below average and are considered to be poor. Subjects were interviewed regarding their development of self-identity which included challenges, coping strategies and how the challenges have changed their perspectives of life (if any). Potential respondents were obtained through a list provided by LZS. Parents of selected respondents gave full consent for the involvement of their children in the study.

Vignettes

Vignettes are short stories about a hypothetical person, presented to participants during qualitative research (e.g. within an interview or group discussion) or quantitative research, to glean information about their own set of beliefs. The key property of the use of vignettes in research is the flexibility. Vignettes enable identification with socially approved view (the 'generalised other') or the expression of agreement with normative assumptions or, in some instances, sharing of stigmatized or self-disclosed information.

Journal

Respondents were asked to write a daily/weekly journal about themselves two weeks after their interview sessions with the researchers. Respondents were encouraged to be open about sharing information about themselves that may relate to the interview conducted earlier, questions or whatever they think is appropriate. The researchers gave prompts for them to begin the journal writing as some of the questions that needed to be addressed may be difficult for respondent's to answer face to face with the interviewers. The interview sessions and journal writings were conducted in the Malay language as respondents were most comfortable in using their mother tongue.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondents' Background

Each respondent's name has been changed for confidentiality purposes and to maintain their anonymity

Respondent 1 (Ali)

Ali is a quiet 13-year old boy who has a twin sister. He is a bit reserved compared to his twin sister and hardly expresses himself during the interview. His father is a taxi driver while his mother bakes and sells traditional cakes. Ali's family lives in the suburban of the Klang Valley area. His father described their house as *rumah kampong* (village house) that is situated behind the terraced housing area and malls. Ali in his journal shares about the passing of a family member and how he enjoys the company of his friends. Even though the interview was conducted in May which could almost be considered as the middle of the year, Ali was still trying to adapt himself with his Secondary 1 friends. He needs more time to socialize and be comfortable with the people he just met. Ali is very generous with smiles and has a neat handwriting. His academic performance is on the satisfactory level, not too high nor too low.

Respondent 2 (Annur)

Annur who is in her early stage of adolescence shows that most of her concerns revolve around friends. Gaining her approval and acceptance from her group of friends is considered important. She seems carefree and smiles throughout the interview. For a 13-year old adolescent, she faces some difficulty to express herself verbally but did a great job explaining things further in her journal. Her journal was decorated with colourful flowers that she drew using different coloured pens. Even her journal writings were colourful, as if she was using it to express her feelings and the moods associated with it. Through the stories that she shared, her family was considered adequate except that they were less privileged than other families. She is proud of her education level though it may not seem at a satisfactory level for good achievers.

Respondent 3 (Naha)

Naha is 15-years old and will be sitting for Pentaksiran Tingkatan 3 (PT3) at the end of this year. Among the six respondents, Naha's interview session was the longest. He shared a lot about his experience being bullied in school as well as his brother's situation. Though Naha comes from a less privileged family, he was really helpful and empathetic of his friend's who was in need. Naha's academic achievement may be considered as low but his determination to do better and have a better future is high.

Respondent 4 (Arif)

Arif is 15-years old and lives in Shah Alam. Arif does not talk that much but uses his drawings to express himself. Drawing has been a hobby to him to an extent that he is known as the artistic guy among his group of friends. He aspires to further in Architecture course after school and be an architect. Arif is a hard-working student and has obtained good academic achievements. After the divorce of his parents, Arif and his other siblings stayed with his mother. Therefore, he is really close to his mother.

Respondent 5 (Amri)

Amri is 17-years old and will be sitting for Sijil Penilaian Menengah (SPM) exam this year. His parents have divorced and each married to a new spouse. Amri and his younger siblings are staying with his mother. Amri has obtained good results since his primary school years until present. His mother has been in contact with the researcher the past month to talk about how she is worried to see Amri's sudden change of behavior. Amri was reported that he was not present in school for several days. His mother checked his school bag and found a box of cigarette. His mother said that Amri has never been like this before. He may be too stressed out with the major exam coming up and especially the pressure that his stepfather is putting on him. His stepfather has warned Amri that he will be kicked out of the house after he is done with SPM.

Respondent 6 (Mira)

Mira is a shy 15-year old female adolescent. As a sister to Amri (Respondent 5), she also experienced the same situation with her stepfather. She has no freedom to do anything and must follow the rules set by her stepfather. Her interview was conducted in their small apartment house in Kajang with the presence of both parents; thus, it has restricted her from giving more information during the interview. However, Mira expressed herself a lot in the journal. Mira is a bright student but the family problems she faced have lowered her self-esteem.

Lack of Parental Attention***Relationship with Stepfather***

Upon Mira's mother's request, her interview was conducted at her home with the presence of her parents. The size of the house was not big enough to have a separate place to conduct the interview without having the possibility of others hearing the content of the conversation. So, throughout the interview, Mira only whispered the word 'family' and did not do any further elaboration on it. However, she has shared the stories in her journal where it shows that the father figure representation in her life is quite weak and negative. Her father basically neglected their welfare and with the presence of a stepfather at home, things had not been any easier. Mira confessed her sadness through her writing saying that "It's sad to have a father that ignores you and does not look after your welfare. He never came to visit us, send us money or provide things

for us." Her father has never come to visit them ever since the divorce. She again stressed that: "My father never came to see me for 4 years and never send us money."

Respondent 5, Amri, also faced the same problem with his father who had ignored his welfare totally. In his journal, Amri expressed his sadness about his father who never came to visit him or gave any money to him. "I feel sad for not having a father who understands me well."

Through Mira's writing, it clearly shows that she does not have a good relationship with her stepfather.

"I am sad to have a stepfather who is hot tempered, egoistic and self-centered. He likes to accuse others at any time he likes. He would be mad and would shout at me if something happened without even checking what exactly happened. He likes to bring up stories from the past."

She also mentioned how her stepfather treats her unfairly. "I tried to get good results in my previous year end examination but the results I attained didn't reach my target. My parents (stepfather especially), however, think that I am lazy and never try my best. My stepfather never praises me for anything but insults me instead. He always restricts me from doing things when even my own mother never does that. My mother is fair in treating her child. My stepfather is the opposite and if my results turn out bad, he will punish me and I think is not fair at all."

Amri who had the same problem with his stepfather, shared in the interview that without his stepfather's knowledge, he contacted his real father through facebook to ask for money; but all of the efforts of reaching his father was ignored. If his stepfather ever finds out about him contacting his father, his fate is unimaginable.

"my father never gave me any money..i already texted him asking for money but he never gave any..""my stepfather does not know of this..he'd be mad if he knows"

As for Arif, whose parents were also separated mentioned that his problems were mainly about family, and not his studies. "my problems are mostly related to family. My studies is not a problem."

School Bullies

Among the 6 participants of this research, two had disclosed about them being victims of bullies in school. They had been bullied by their own classmates and friends of the same age. The female participant's way of being bullied was more subtle than what the male participant experienced. Annur in her journal wrote that she was forced to do her friend's schoolwork. Her friend was not satisfied with the work Annur did and scolded her right after she saw what Annur had written. For someone like Annur, who described herself as one who is very sensitive, being scolded by her friend after helping out really made her sad.

"I was bullied in school before. A friend forced me to do her homework and when I completed it on her behalf, she scolded me. I felt sad and told her that I had done the

work on her behalf and still got scolded which she then replied that the work I did was not ok. I told her that she is not being grateful and then we never met or became friends again."

For Naha, being in the last class means there is no choice other than staying quiet. Among the whole Secondary 3 classes, he was in the very last class where majority of the male students were part of the bad boys. He justified saying it was okay when others treated them harshly just because they were from the last class. It was a general labeling which he could not deny even if he doesn't like how people label him as being part of the bad boys group. Naha prefers to pretend not to see the wrongdoings his classmates did because if he ever pointed it out, it would lead to a fight. He claimed that the head or leader of the bad boys group was also in his class which made matters worse.

"..sometimes I feel like telling them off but I don't dare to do so..because if I pointed out their mistakes, then once school hour ends, I'd be dragged into a fight. If I don't head fast enough to my dad's car, I would be dead..."

"they wanted to fight with me... I apologized to them and said I would not bother them again..okay..but then, after school session ends, they waited for me in front of the school gate..they were there in groups..i was scared...luckily a senior who have graduated high school came to save me"

In another occasion, he was trying to help another friend who was also a victim of bully. Even though he was not from a wealthy family, some of his friends regarded him as being rich just because he was given RM5 as pocket money instead of others who only brought RM3 to school. Those bullies would fiercely ask money from whoever they wished to do so.

"..they think I am from a rich family because I brought RM5 while the rest of them only brought RM3..the gangsters would ask money from people every single day and said that they'd pay it back later. But everyone knew that would not happen..."

If Naha was ever found reporting about their misconduct, he would end up in a far greater problem.

"if I ever want to report on their misconduct, I have to do it quietly without anyone's knowledge."

Social Conformity

During an interview, Mira shared her preference to stay in a group rather than be alone when in school. Apart from the good company she got being in the group, she also experienced the pressure to conform with her other friends. At times, she struggled to adapt with her friends. Some of her girlfriends would not accept those who were from a different social class from theirs. Those who were from the high income family were exclusively for those of the same background as theirs only.

"Dorang macam pentingkan kedudukan.. Macam orang kaya kawan dengan orang kaya. Macam tu lah jugak" (They care a lot about one's family background. Like for example, those from a rich family can only be friends with the same kind. Some sort)

Having problem with her friends, alongside with her studies and family problem had lowered her self-confidence. "I don't have a high confidence level. My confidence level is on average."

For Ali, being a quiet boy in school was quite a struggle. When asked if he had any intention of joining the bad boys group if his parents did not restrict him to do so, he shyly nodded and described that being a part of the group would be fun. "yes..because joining them seems to be fun" Annur also faced the pressure of conforming to her friends in school. Other than being involved in small arguments, some also tried to lure her to join their hangout places outside of school. She firmly refused to any of it mostly because her parents would not let her go. 'some friends like to get into small fights and they sometimes want me to join them loiter around outside of school but I said 'No'."

Similarly, Annur said it would feel good to get to hang out together with friends outside of school. She would like to join her friends if her parents did not restrict her from joining the group. Naha's story was a bit different from the rest of the shared stories above. Like any other teenager, Naha was also at the stage where he was more expressive about his feelings for the opposite gender. In his journal, under the 'sad' theme, he wrote something about love and fear. "I don't purposely keep our love as a secret... But I fear you will interpret it wrongly... Because we feel proud when we're admired... And it feels like a fool when treated wrongly...Just pouring out sad words..."

Class Environment

Being in the last class had made the learning experience more difficult for Naha. His classmates would not stop making noises during the class session. Naha felt helpless with the condition of the class. The condition was made even worse when his seat was way at the back and all those seated in front of him were the ones disturbing the class. Thus, staying focus in class was a big problem for him.

"it was difficult to study in school when my classmates kept making noises. I hardly focus what is being taught by the teacher because I sat at the back..the teacher asked me to sit at the back row because the front seats were for the shorter students.."

Ali faces a similar situation with Naha where his friends often make noises in class which made it difficult for him to give full concentration in class. "my friends like to make noises when my teacher teaches in class"

Lack of Exposure

Due to the lack of exposure of the great opportunities that lies ahead of her, Annur faced a difficult time putting herself in another person's shoe. When Maryam's situation was presented to her in a form of a vignette, she was a bit clueless as to how she should respond to it. She had not fully developed the altruistic side in her and could not imagine of what would happen to Maryam. She replied that Maryam's condition would stay the same like her current state when asked how Maryam's future would be like. Emm I think it would just stay the same..that is staying at home.."

In addition to that, she also could not describe her own ambition or future plans. She tried to think for quite some time on how to respond to the question but at the end, she surrendered and gave a sheepish smile as a response. It felt sad because by her expression, one can know that she was trying real hard to think of something up to a point it seems like she was about to shed some tear. The last class students in most schools are simply generalized as those who do not perform well in their academic apart from facing other difficulties. Being part of the last class, the general labeling is not exceptional for Naha and his friends. Getting A's was far from reach, thus setting lower scores were enough and satisfying for them. He may have faced a lot of failures that obtaining a 3D 2E result has reached his satisfaction level. This may be part of learning difficulties as he actually faced problem in learning but did not know how to overcome it. The situation that surrounds him and with the lack of exposure of high achievers in his class had made him complacent with what he had achieved. His courage should be admired and given support so as to continue the good effort that he tried to put in.

"I am proud with my UPSR result. I attained 3D2E. Though so, I am proud with the result because it shows the efforts I have put in all this while. I listen to what the teacher taught me in class and when at home, I completed the homework given. After that, I continue reading books so that I can perform better in the PT3 exam."

CONCLUSION

It is quite clear that the respondents' socioeconomic status may have affected the development of their self-identity. However, the family's SES does not act as the only stressor to the family but actually is the starter to a chain of many other stressors. The economic difficulty that these family face not only had affected the relationship between spouses, parent and child, but also the child's studies, the family's comfort of living, as well as the adolescents psychological and emotional state. This opposed DeHaan and MacDermid's [15] study where they mentioned that identity development did serve as a mediating protective factor between poverty and adjustment, while poverty was not directly associated with identity. The finding has proven otherwise as the family's economic difficulty had led to challenges such as coping with internal family problem, adapting to peer pressure and learning difficulties. It is however important to stress here that these adolescents' identity were not the worst but also not the best. Despite the many challenges and economic hardships that these adolescents go through, they turned out okay by struggling through a lot of things. This has much to do with the environmental context and the support they received from around them. The lack of parental attention and unfair treatment received could be the reason as to why the adolescent think low of her/himself. It is more difficult for an adolescent to maintain a positive self in this kind of surrounding. This is consistent with Grotevant [27] who emphasized on the importance of an adolescent's environmental context, particularly family, in providing a framework that either facilitates or hinders the development of an adult identity.

The interview showed that each of their past experiences had given impact in their present life, be it positive or negative. Three of them witnessed their parents' divorce process and had to quickly adapt to the new surrounding of living with only one of the parent. The feeling of having to start and adapt to the new surrounding may not be as good as it seems, especially when it involves the two most important people in one's life. The economic hardship that they went through was mainly due to the separation of their parents. In addition to that, the separations were also

associated with the lack of parental attention, unfair treatment from the stepfather and other internal problems that these adolescents keep to themselves. The experiences that these adolescents face have increased their self-reflection ability and their present actions. Flum and Kaplan's [21] study is consistent with this finding where they mentioned that experiences during adolescence, particularly in social contexts carries a critical meaning in people's lives because of adolescents emerging cognitive capacity, which then elevates their self-reflection ability and develops in the identity. Their developed identity is the combination of their past, present and future experiences. This is also supported by Blackmore [7] and Miller [37] who argue that it is an ongoing process of creating one's individual identity, building upon previous stages and applying new things that adolescents have learned and experienced into new context.

Considering the surrounding and problems these adolescents face, learning has been quite a challenge to most of them. The class surrounding plays an important part in building interest and focus to these adolescents. It really is a huge struggle for those in the very last class especially to give full focus to what is being taught in class. The other few participants who were placed in the front classes showed great interest in their studies and have gained good results throughout their years of studies. This is consistent with the idea of Faircloth [15] in which he stressed that students would participate well when they are interested in the learning and that is more significant to them. The interview clearly reflected how some struggle to fully concentrate in their class when majority of the students in it does not care to study at all. This can also be supported by Ramirez's [41] study which found a strong relationship between the Chicanas/os identity and higher education experience. He stressed that one who has a well-developed identity in the first two years of their studies had a greater experience rather than those who has yet to develop their identity. The participant from the front class was already in a good class from the start; thus, he is often seen to have a greater experience in school and has a well-developed identity. He would simply ignore any of his friends who try to interrupt his learning process and would just give full attention to the teacher. Perhaps, the underlying reason to this may be that he had the opportunity to do more exploration within his area of interest, unlike others who had more limitations in doing so. This has led most of them to have a not so pleasant experience with their studies. This research also found that participant's academic outcome is not as good when they have problems and feelings of not being accepted among their peers. This finding can be supported by Chen, Rubin and Li's [7] study which found that among Chinese early adolescents that negative experiences with peers, such as being rejected or not accepted by peers, have also been demonstrated to be related to poorer academic outcomes.

If we were to categorize these adolescents to Maria's identity statuses on the basis of levels of self-exploration and commitment, it can only be under identity diffusion, moratorium or/and foreclosure. It is hard to determine these adolescents commitment level for what has not happened yet; seeming that they are still in school and none are involved in any job at the moment though some of them may already have plans for their future careers. This may also be due to the cultural difference that we are in as compared to the theory itself. The theory is clearly known to be a reflection of the culture and lifestyle of the West. Graf, Mullis & Mullis [25] in their study found that Asian Indian adolescents were more diffused, foreclosed and moratorium in identity formation than adolescents in the United States. Adolescent males and females in India had higher moratorium scores than adolescents male and females in the United States. This is because the culture of the West in which adolescents have more freedom to explore the choices and

commitment in the things they want to do, whereas the Asian counterparts have a more restricted idea of choices and commitment level. For most Asian families, parents are the primary socializer of their children. Simhadri [48] and Shukla [47] mentioned that the symbolic relation shared by Asian adolescents and their parents last longer than in other cultures. In contrary to that, Stegarud, Solheini, Karlsen and Kroger [50] point out that the Western families promotes more individualistic qualities in their children. Thus, this can be said that the collectivistic culture values more familial norms, loyalty and obligation. From the findings, the adolescents aged between 15 and 17 can be classified under the identity moratorium and/or foreclosure stage as they are either are actively exploring the choices they have but have yet to commit in any one of it or they simply allow their parents to determine their direction without exploring the choices they have ahead of them. Whereas the participants aged 13 are seen to fall under the identity diffusion status as they have yet to explore the choices and commit themselves in any of it. The research finding in this study disagrees with Corcoran [14] who mentioned that there was a greater likelihood of female adolescents being categorized as moratorium than were males. He added that there was a greater likelihood of males being categorized as diffusion. If we were to relate this with the research finding, it can be said that age factor plays a more important role in determining one's identity status than the gender itself.

The challenges and struggles that these adolescents went through are mainly caused by outside factor that has given effect on their development of self-identity. Each of them went through a unique experience and each of it will contribute to who they will become in the future. The journey has never been easy for any of them but the surroundings can help shed some light to their future. The findings of this study provide an important contribution to understanding pathways to academic achievement among adolescents from low SES family. Given that this is a time when adolescents may be more vulnerable to the changes they are undergoing, assessing pathways to academic success is particularly important. This study also found that the parental involvement and expectations, the peer group involvement, together with a healthy surrounding, help contribute to a better development of identity and academic achievement. Despite the SES of the family, creating a healthy environment is essential and is possible. The success of an individual is not determined by the SES of the family, but solely on the effort they put in to make things work. Hence, parental involvement and peer group involvement that one chooses can be the contributing factors that shape one's positive identity. The healthier the surrounding is, the better the identity flourishes.

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