

# NEGOTIATING THE IDENTITY OF PUNK CHILDREN AMIDST SOCIAL DIVERSITY IN THE CITY OF SEMARANG

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**Abstract:** This research examines the identity negotiation process of punk children in the city of Semarang as part of subcultural dynamics in the context of a pluralistic urban society. Punk children are positioned as a marginalized group that faces stigma and social exclusion, but also shows adaptive capacity through various resistance strategies and community solidarity. Using a qualitative approach with phenomenological methods, data was collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews and documentation. The research results show that punk children negotiate their identity through symbolic performativity, situational adaptation, use of digital space, as well as social and artistic activities that build dialogue with the wider community. Community and internal solidarity play an important role in forming and maintaining collective identity amidst external pressures. This study confirms that subcultural identities are dynamic, and punk subculture is an alternative form of expression that contributes to the city's social diversity. These findings highlight the importance of a humanist approach in understanding the existence of subcultures as a legitimate part of urban society.

**Keywords:** Punk Children, Identity, Social Negotiation, Subculture, Community Solidarity, Semarang

## I. INTRODUCTION

Social life in big Indonesian cities, such as Semarang, is characterized by a diversity of identities that reflect the complexity of culture and values that live in society. The city of Semarang as a metropolitan city is not only a meeting place for various ethnic and cultural groups, but also a place for the birth of new subcultures, one of which is the punk community. Their existence often gives rise to social controversy, both in terms of lifestyles that deviate from general norms, and in the way they position themselves in a pluralistic society.

Punk children emerged as a representation of a subculture that rejected the dominant system through symbols such as clothing, music and lifestyle. They are often considered a marginal group on the fringes of the mainstream social system [1]. However, their identity is not something single and static, but rather the result of a complex negotiation process with diverse social environments. In the city of Semarang, this identity negotiation process is important considering that the community consists of various cultural backgrounds, religions and social classes.

Negotiation of the identity of punk children in the city of Semarang takes place through various social interactions, both with fellow communities and with the general public. This interaction can take the form of resistance to negative stigma, adjustment to local norms, and collaboration with other

community groups in various social activities. In this context, the identity of punk children is not just a form of resistance, but also a form of social adaptation that continues to change according to the situation they face [2].

Many studies have been carried out regarding punk identity and subculture, especially from the perspective of sociology and cultural studies. Hebdige (1979) in his classic study explains that subcultures such as punk are a form of symbolic expression of resistance to established social structures [3]. However, in a local context like Semarang, it is important to see how local values and social norms shape the way punks negotiate their identities. This shows that the negotiation process does not only take place vertically between dominant and subaltern, but also horizontally between groups in a plural society.

The phenomenon of punk children in Semarang cannot be separated from urban social dynamics, including urbanization, poverty and social exclusion. Punk children are often identified as part of a vulnerable group that experiences limited access to education, employment and social services. In these conditions, building identity through punk subculture is one way to maintain group existence and solidarity [4].

However, their existence is often faced with negative stigma from the general public and local government policies. The labels "disruptors of order" or "beggars" attached to punks create social barriers that make the integration process difficult.

This is where identity negotiation becomes important: between maintaining subcultural characteristics and meeting social demands to be more widely accepted [5]. This process does not always run smoothly, but it still shows social dynamics that are interesting to study.

Thus, this study focuses on how punk children in the city of Semarang negotiate their identities in diverse social spaces. This research is important to provide a deeper understanding of punk subculture as part of urban social diversity, as well as examining the interaction between marginalized identities and the dominant social order. A qualitative approach with a symbolic interactionism perspective is used to explore the meanings formed by punk children in their daily lives in society [6].

## II. RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological study method to understand in depth the identity negotiation process carried out by punk children in the context of social diversity in the city of Semarang. Data collection techniques were carried out through participant observation, in-depth interviews and documentation. The main informants in this research were punk children who were active in local communities in Semarang, while supporting informants included community leaders, security forces and local residents who interacted directly with the group. The selection of informants was carried out purposively with the criteria of active involvement in the community and experience of intense social interaction in the city community.

Data analysis was carried out through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. Data validity is maintained using triangulation techniques of sources and methods, as well as member checking to ensure the correctness of information from informants. This research attempts to capture the dynamics of punk children's identity as a form of resistance and adaptation to prevailing social norms. Through this negotiation process, punks not only fight for their existence, but also create spaces for social interaction that enable dialogue between alternative identities and the dominant social order in the city of Semarang.

## III. RESEARCH RESULT

### a. Punk Children's Strategy in Negotiating Identity in City Social Space

The phenomenon of punk children in urban social spaces is a reflection of the dynamics of identity in contemporary society which is full of differences in values and lifestyles. Punk children do not just exist as a marginal group, but rather as a form of subcultural expression that carries a spirit of resistance to dominant values in urban society. Their existence is a symbol of rejection of cultural homogenization and a representation of the social anxiety experienced by the younger generation [7].

Punk children's identities are formed through complex social processes, not just based on their choice of clothing style

or the music they listen to. In their interactions with the city's social environment, punk children face various forms of stigmatization, negative labeling, and discriminatory treatment from society and institutions. In the midst of this pressure, they actively negotiate their identity to maintain their existence while adapting to existing social realities [8].

One of the main strategies in negotiating identity is through performativity, namely consistency in the actions, appearances and symbols they display in public spaces. With brightly colored hair, torn clothes, chains, and symbols of anarchy, they consciously create a different self-image and challenge mainstream social norms. This performativity is not only a visual marker, but also a form of ideological expression and criticism of social injustice [9].

Community solidarity is also an important foundation in maintaining the continuity of punk children's identity. They form social networks based on the principles of togetherness, egalitarianism and collectivity, which function as a buffer against external pressures. These communities often become safe spaces for members to share resources, ideas, and emotional support, which they do not find in formal social structures [10].

However, the city as a social space is not neutral, but is full of power relations that operate through regulation, supervision and normalization. Punk children are often considered a disturbance to city order because their appearance and behavior are considered deviant from the norm. Security forces and the city government often carry out raids, forced dispersal and even eviction, which shows that there is structural repression against this group [11].

Facing these conditions, punk children develop adaptive strategies that enable them to survive amidst social pressure. One of which is *code-switching*, namely the ability to adapt the way one speaks, looks, or acts depending on the social situation at hand. This strategy helps them to reduce conflicts with the general public or authorities without having to give up their basic identity [12].

As digital technology develops, punks also use social media as an alternative space to express identity and build community. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, or YouTube have become media for distributing musical works, documentary videos, and narratives of punk life more widely. Their presence in digital spaces is proof that identity negotiations do not only occur physically, but also in a more fluid and inclusive virtual realm [13].

In an effort to improve their image in the eyes of society, some punk communities carry out social activities such as sharing free food (*Food Not Bombs*), alternative teaching, as well as social and environmental campaigns. This activity not only shows the humanist side of the punk community, but also serves as a strategy to break down the negative stereotypes attached to them. Through this approach, they are able to establish better relationships with local communities and show that they are also part of the city's citizens [14].

Street art and community projects are another means used by punks to negotiate identity in a more aesthetic and communicative way. Graffiti, murals, and street music

performances are used as a medium of expression that is easily accepted by urban society. By filling city spaces through art, punk children are able to creatively instill social messages and build symbolic dialogue with city residents [15].

The identity of punk children is not single and static, but is the result of continuous interaction between individual agency and the surrounding social structure. They not only reject dominant values, but also try to adapt to the social context without losing the core of their identity. This process shows that subcultural identities are fluid, dynamic, and always in the process of being reshaped [16].

Through their daily practices, punks show that identity is not something that is given passively, but rather something that must be fought for through various forms of symbolic resistance. Their existence challenges conventional perspectives about social order, fairness and homogeneous cultural norms. In this case, the study of punk children makes an important contribution to understanding the dynamics of power relations and resistance in urban life [17].

Thus, punk children's strategy in negotiating identity in urban social space is a form of complex existential struggle. They use various tactics ranging from performativity, community solidarity, situational adaptation, to cultural creativity to survive in a system that is not always friendly. This phenomenon shows how subcultures are able to create alternative spaces in the city, while also opening up space for dialogue about the meaning of identity, resistance and inclusivity in modern society [18].

#### **b. Social Challenges and Stigma to the Punk Community**

The punk community is a subculture that emerged as a form of resistance to social, economic and political systems that were considered oppressive. In Indonesia, the existence of this community is often underestimated because of their eccentric appearance, such as mohawk hair, torn clothes, and the anarchist symbols they use. This physical appearance has become the main basis for the emergence of negative stigma from the wider community [19].

The stigma against the punk community does not only originate from the general public, but also from state institutions such as the security forces. Many members of the punk community experienced raids, expulsions, and even forced coaching under the pretext of social order. This shows the existence of social exclusion practices that are legalized by the power structure [20].

One of the main challenges faced by the punk community is difficulty in accessing public spaces. They are often prohibited from gathering in city parks or other public areas because they are considered disturbing. In fact, their presence in public spaces is often only to carry out creative activities such as playing music or discussing social issues [21].

Stigma also impacts access to education and employment. Many members of the punk community had difficulty getting formal work because their appearance did not conform to prevailing social standards. They are often considered unproductive and lazy, even though in reality they

are active in artistic activities, social communities and independent entrepreneurship [22].

Media coverage also strengthens negative stereotypes of the punk community. Many mass media depict punk as a group of wild, uncivilized and close to criminal acts. This representation strengthens discrimination against the punk community in various aspects of life [23].

However, behind the stigma attached, the punk community actually shows a high spirit of solidarity. They have a strong internal support system, such as a free food community (food not bombs), a street library, and a collective music scene. This shows that they have social values that are not inferior to other community groups [24].

In a socio-cultural context, punk can be seen as a form of resistance to the homogenization of mainstream culture. This community tries to create an alternative space that provides a place for free expression, social criticism, and identity formation outside dominant norms [25].

Another challenge faced is symbolic violence through labeling. When the punk community is labeled as "wild" or "scum", a systematic process of dehumanization occurs. This label is not only psychologically painful, but also has material consequences in the form of social exclusion [26].

Several studies show that social development of the punk community often fails because of a repressive approach. Instead of humanizing them, this coaching actually strengthens the identity of resistance and social alienation they feel [27].

The punk community's response to these social challenges was generally collective and political. They voiced minority rights, rejected exploitative systems, and built solidarity networks between communities in various cities. This proves that punk is not just a lifestyle, but a form of ideological struggle [28].

A new, more humane and participatory approach is needed in understanding and interacting with the punk community. Instead of placing order, the state and society should open up space for dialogue to understand the background to the emergence of this subculture, and support their positive activities [29].

Thus, the stigma against the punk community is not only a cultural problem, but also a manifestation of greater social inequality. A paradigm shift is needed so that this community can be accepted as part of a legitimate and dignified social diversity [30].

#### **c. The Role of Community and Internal Solidarity in Strengthening Identity**

Communities play a central role in forming and strengthening individual and collective identities. Identity is not only personal, but is also formed through social relations in a community. In this context, the community becomes a space for social interaction that provides values, norms and symbols that define who someone is in the group [31].

Internal solidarity within a community is an important foundation in strengthening a sense of togetherness and collective identity. Solidarity allows for a sense of belonging (*sense of belonging*) that makes community members feel an

integral part of the group. This directly strengthens their social identity [32].

Durkheim differentiated between mechanical and organic solidarity, where mechanical solidarity is more often found in homogeneous traditional communities, while organic solidarity appears in heterogeneous but interdependent modern societies [33]. Both forms of solidarity play a role in strengthening identity, depending on the social context.

The identity formed in a community often transcends individual aspects. Communities provide shared narratives that shape the meaning of group identities, such as ethnicity, religion, or profession. In studies of minority communities, collective identity becomes a tool of resistance to social marginalization [34].

Social media shows a new form of virtual community that is not bound by time and space. In online communities, solidarity is built through symbolic communication and participation in shared discourse. The digital identity of community members is formed through consistent and meaningful interactions [35].

Internal solidarity also functions as a community defense mechanism. In situations of crisis or external pressure, communities that have high solidarity tend to be able to survive and maintain their collective identity. This shows that solidarity is not only a social function, but also a strategic function [35].

Furthermore, identity in a community is not static, but is constantly being negotiated. Internal solidarity supports this process by creating a safe space for dialogue and value adaptation. This allows the community to develop without losing the essence of its identity [36].

Community education is also an important factor in building solidarity and identity. Through joint learning activities, shared values are instilled and strengthened. This process supports the formation of an identity rooted in a shared understanding of the history and goals of the community [37].

Rituals and symbols in a community function to strengthen social bonds and emphasize collective identity. For example, traditional ceremonies, traditional clothing, or religious symbols become a means of expressing identity that strengthens solidarity [38].

However, communities also face challenges when identity and internal solidarity clash with social change or internal differences. In this case, community leadership plays an important role in maintaining cohesion without eliminating diversity [39].

Research shows that the success of a community in strengthening its identity is very dependent on the sustainability of internal solidarity. Without solidarity, communities risk fragmentation and losing direction of their collective identity [40].

Thus, it can be concluded that community and internal solidarity have a significant contribution in strengthening identity, both at the individual and group levels. Social relationships, shared values, and active participation are key elements in a dynamic and sustainable identity formation process [41].

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Based on the results and discussion above, it can be concluded that punk children's strategy in negotiating identity in urban social space is a complex and dynamic form of existential struggle. They not only reject dominant values through visual symbols such as clothing style or music, but also actively form identities through community solidarity, situational adaptation, and the use of digital space and street art as a medium of expression. In the face of structural pressure and social stigma, punk children develop strategies such as: *code-switching*, social activities, as well as building alternative spaces that allow them to continue to exist and be accepted in an urban society that tends to be homogeneous and normative. Furthermore, community strength and internal solidarity are important foundations in strengthening the subcultural identity of punk children. Communities not only provide moral and material support, but also become social spaces where collective values, symbols and identities are constructed and maintained. In this context, internal solidarity functions as a defense mechanism against marginalization as well as a medium for joint learning to adapt identity to changing social dynamics. Therefore, the existence of the punk community not only reflects resistance to exclusive social order, but also becomes an important part of the discourse on diversity of identities in inclusive urban spaces.

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