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Simultatem Chronicles: **The Fear of Imagination and Discrimination and Their Impacts on Preteenagers**

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ABSTRACT

This short story series is a coming-of-age and dystopian series that focuses on the impacts of the fear of imagination and discrimination on preteens and how they cope with it. This fear is shown through a virus named *imaginatio virus*, a special virus that attacks the main characters to induce imagination. The government made imagination-prevention and discrimination rules to get rid of the virus completely. We explore how the fear of imagination and discrimination affect the four main characters in each story. We apply the theory of social influence, discrimination, and coping mechanisms to show how Dylan, Elias, Bryna, and Corina deal with the effects of discrimination. In our creative work, we show that the four main characters succeed in being confident by focusing on the strength in themselves, finding help in trusted people, and not dwelling in the problem.

Keywords: imagination, short stories, discrimination, dystopian, coming-of-age

INTRODUCTION

This creative work will be in the form of short stories for preteens or children aged 8-12 (grades 3-6), and we will be writing a total of four stories. We believe that writing this creative work will give us a chance to dive into the world of short stories and to explore one of the important topics to address, such as discrimination. Other than that, we believe that this creative work in the form of a series of short stories will be effective with the target audience that we are writing to since the number of words composed in each story is limited.

The genres in this creative work are coming-of-age and dystopian fiction. Coming-of-age is a genre that revolves around children as they navigate through puberty, which is the transition period from childhood to adulthood (Buechel, 2018, p. 3, para. 2). It explores the various challenges of the adolescent and how they overcome them by fighting over their childish habits and growing to become the persons they are at present. A common characteristic of this genre is growth of identity, where the main character faces some kind of external force, either pleasant or painful, and finds how important it is for him or her, and how he or she can use it to grow (Villoria, 2012, p. 3, para. 1). Examples of books in this genre include *To Kill A Mockingbird* (Lee, 1960), *The Catcher in the Rye* (Salinger, 1951), and *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (Chbosky, 1999).

The dystopian fiction genre, a branch of science fiction, is a type of writing that explores an alternate version of the world we know of. It is the opposite of utopian fiction, which is an “ideal” representation of the world we live in. Baldwin (2019) describes this genre with a portrayal of some countries which have been overrun by political regimes, and its plots end with “more questions than answers” (p. 2). According to Williams, there are nine characteristics of dystopian fiction, which are restriction of information and freedom, isolation of the outside world, lack of privacy and security due to government surveillance, destruction of the natural world, conformity to “universal truth”, lack of individuality, high levels of authority in government or certain leader, propaganda-based societal control, and the belief that society is the ideal world (as cited in Fatimah & Marsih, 2020, pp. 16-17). Its plot mostly revolves around

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a protagonist trying to break out of the society he or she is boxed in, and it involves the main characters' fighting the regime with "extraordinary talent and dumb luck", saving the world, giving them hope and confidence in their lives (Baldwin, p. 1). Some examples of dystopian works are *The Hunger Games* (Collins, 2008), *The Maze Runner* (Dashner, 2009), and *The Giver* (Lowry, 1993).

Our topic for this creative work is the impact of the fear of imagination and discrimination on preteens. Imagination is one of the keywords that is deeply connected to children and preteens, mostly due to their age. According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary, imagination is "the act or power of forming a mental image of something not present to the senses or never before wholly perceived in reality" or thinking about something that is new or never thought of before ("Imagination", 2021). According to Vygotsky, this is "essential to life" (as cited in Tsai, 2012, p.13) and a "distinctive characteristic of development" of a person's life. The way adolescents' personality grows is through imagination, as it is through childhood concerning how everything works. Without it, they might not be able to think clearly since it is a critical aspect in the conscious thought process (ibid.). In the context of preteens, this process is crucial to their development. Preteenagers are a group of children aged 8 to 12 who are in the first stage of maturity, namely puberty. As they grow during this period, they will discover a change of perspective, identity, and self-presentation, either through an influence from their surroundings or their way of thinking. We believe that this stage is crucial to their development because they will soon discover their own path in life. If this process gets good influence and encouragement, it will be easier for them to figure out what they want to do. On the contrary, if this is tainted in some way, they will grow up clueless and lost.

Unfortunately, this process is commonly tainted by society. There are several factors that contribute to this, namely unjust treatment by parents, friends, and society. The influences from these people may produce conflicts when there is a gap of expectation among those being involved. As a result, preteens might feel doubtful of themselves and not fight for the things that actually matter for them. According to KPAI (Indonesian Child Protection Commission) this process might be tainted by poor social surroundings, which include promiscuity and divorce, bullying, excessive social media involvement, and family's strict expectations that diminish their self-esteem and make them feel that they should not do anything ("4 Masalah Penting", 2019). One big issue that also contributes to this is discrimination. According to the American Psychological Association, discrimination is the unfair treatment of one or a lot of people because of their characteristics, such as religion, race, social class, and gender (APA, 2019). Eleanora (2018) describes this problem as a never-ending issue because of low awareness of parents and society, thus causing the children and preteens to feel traumatized, insecure, having trust issues, as well as having difficulty in concentrating and behaving (pp. 257-258). As they grow up, they might be accustomed to these behaviors and not be able to live their lives full of freedom and imagination. Miller (2007) states that in order to fix those problems, they need something to reach for, even if it is risky. Miller refers to dreams however "challenging and difficult" they are, but those are what make the dreams worth chasing (p. 8).

This creative work will be about four recently-graduated middle school students (Bryna, Corina, Dylan and Elias) and how they experienced their school years in *Simultatem Academy*, whose environment was quite toxic for them. The title for the whole series is *Simultatem Chronicles*, named after the school which the main characters went to. Simultatem, meaning "unity" in Latin, holds a clue to the entire plot of the series, where the government of an alternate version of Indonesia aims to control its citizens by "uniting" them as a sort of "perfect society" to get rid of the *imaginatio* virus (literally the imagination virus) epidemic effectively. This virus is a special virus that attacks people to induce the imagination, and it is contagious. Each contracted person will show excessive excitement and physical abnormalities such as jumping up and

down, excessive shaking, protruding eyes, and other symptoms. All of the four characters will grow a love for different things such as socializing with different races, religion, and fields of study that are male-dominated, which are all symptoms of the virus. As they grow their love for those things, the rebellious spirit grows out of their different aspirations and the injustice of the conditions they were living in at the time.

For the theoretical framework, we use the social influence theory (consisting of social pressure and norm theory) and discrimination theory for this creative work. Based on social psychology, social influence in general is a psychological phenomenon where a person's behavior is influenced by another person or group of people in his or her reach. The influence could be from behavior of other people or the norms people follow in their daily life. From this theory, we use two different sub-theories, which are social pressure and social norm theories. First, social pressure talks about the influence of peers to encourage or persuade other people to follow their behaviors and attitudes. This theory is widely known as peer pressure, and it is commonly found in adolescent communities. The peers' pressure could be carried out by indirect speech to the victims and even directly by bullying them because of the victim's inability or inexperience (Manzoni, Rihtaric, & Ricijas, 2011). Second, social norms suggest that the behaviors of humans are influenced by "misperceptions" of how other people do or perceive certain things. In this theory, peer influence plays a very important role, where preteens are more likely to be affected by perceived norms (the typical or normal view of the people's behavior) as opposed to actual norms (the real view) (LaMorte, 2019).

Both of these theories will be implemented in the characterization of the four main characters. For the social pressure theory, our main characters live in a country that is facing an epidemic, whose virus creates the fear of imagination. In order to combat the virus from attacking the citizens, the government imposes strict rules for every citizen to follow. These rules are also implemented as norms in society, thus the government can pressure people who show symptoms of the virus and make them come back to the status quo of the country, that is a society without imagination. For the social norm theory, the perceived norm in the world of the stories is that people are susceptible to the *imaginatio* virus and can get infected if not treated properly. The norm that is imposed by the government is to limit people's imagination, and they perceive it as a good prevention method against the virus. Instead of fitting into the actual norm of their world (trying to limit imagination), these four characters grow to fit into embracing imagination.

The four types of discriminations (Kite and Whitley Jr., 2016), namely interpersonal discrimination, organizational discrimination, institutional discrimination, and cultural discrimination, will be shown to happen to different characters of the creative work. First, racial discrimination will be applied to Dylan's story, where he will be chastised and threatened by major punishment for his interest in befriending Jason, a minority race. Second, religious discrimination will be applied to Elias's story, where his faith is forbidden by the society, and practicing it is threatened by major punishment. Third, social class discrimination will be applied to Bryna's story, where her rich, high-class status parents try to prevent her from learning a low-class and male-dominated fields of study, namely math and science. Lastly, gender discrimination will be applied to Corina's story, where her love for soccer does not match the gender norms set to her by the society.

CONCEPT OF THE CREATIVE WORK

Theme

The theme of the creative work focuses on how discrimination affects the preteens while they pursue their dreams. In order to apply this theme, the four main characters of the creative work

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will go through different processes such as proving that their dreams are valued, overcoming negative remarks, and being brave to do the things they want to do despite the society trying to decide what they should do.

Story This creative work consists of four stories as follows:

Dylan and the Color Mishap

Dylan loves to make friends with anyone, regardless of race, and dreams of becoming a *YouTuber* who makes videos of himself interviewing different people in Indonesia (which is illegal in his world). He tries to befriend one of the new kids, a Papuan named Jason, but his friends (the Mean Girls Clique and others) belittle him for doing it because he will get punished for befriend people from different races (homeroom classes are divided by economic classes). However, Jason eventually takes sides with the Clique and threatens Dylan by attempting to call the police. Dylan tries to put all of that into perspective and finally he realizes that socializing with Jason is right and continues to befriend people from other races, regardless of what others think.

Elias and the Mustard Seed Problem

Elias loves to study the Bible and loves Jesus with all his might and he wants other people to experience what he experiences, but the Mean Girls Clique and a lot of other people in his school belittle and bully him because they think he is “too holy” (religious radicalism is forbidden). One day at his math class, his friend Carla notices his cross necklace hiding in his shirt and asks about it. When Elias explains the meaning of his necklace, he gets called out by Mr. Tanaja for not paying attention to the class. Carla then reports to Mr. Tanaja that Elias is showing symptoms. His faith gets weaker when he goes to school and Carla, one of the Mean Girls, befriends him and feeds him with “earthly” things like drinking beer and joining his bullies to chastise other people. This habit progresses into toxicity, leading him to run away from home. After he runs away from home, he hears news that his mother passes away, which breaks him. Through that experience, he finds God’s voice and eventually regains strength to repent. He comes back home, continuing to be true to his faith without thinking about what other people think of him.

Bryna and the Metallic Mayhem

Bryna loves to learn math and science. She dreams of becoming a scientist, but she gets scolded by her sister because it is forbidden for a high-class girl to pursue STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math). One day in science class, Bryna asks too many questions to Mr. Tanaja, which angers him and leads him to send Bryna to the principal’s office. Bryna gets scolded by her parents and gets grounded for a week. On the third day of her grounding, Bryna let negative thoughts get in her head and believed that she cannot pursue STEM, resulting in losing confidence in herself. Luckily, she goes into her computer and finds a chatroom by Dylan and Elias who share the same longing as her, and finally she finds comfort in them, regains her confidence, and continues learning math and science silently as one of the members of the “rebels group”.

Corina and the Kick-off Catastrophe

Corina loves to play soccer and dreams of becoming a professional soccer player, but her family belittles her because it is forbidden for girls to pursue sports (it is considered as a male sport). She is told to focus on doing good in school and obey the rules, which annoys Corina. When she

gets a bad score in her math test, her parents give her a chance to guard her siblings in the machinery shop after school to help discipline her, but she fails because she spends her time ignoring him and instead thinking about soccer. Finally, she finds strength in herself, bravely defies the odds, and continues to play again. She succeeds and finds her identity in it, without thinking about anyone's opinions about her.

Characters

Main Characters:

Bryna Tedjo (Age 13, European-Chinese-Indonesian)

Bryna is an introvert with a kind heart. She is a logical thinker, and is used to taking things rather coldly, but she is kind to those that are close to her like her best friends. She is sometimes too optimistic when it comes to her dreams. She likes math and science and aspires to become a scientist when she grows up.

Ni Made Corina Julia Lukman (Age 13, Javanese-Balinese)

Corina is a bubbly extrovert. She loves to laugh and make people happy. In stressful situations, she can be calm and be a mediator for her friends. Corina is the oldest child of four, and she tends to become the mediator to her siblings in order to bring peace to the family, but because of them being indecisive, Corina tends to be indecisive as well and a tiny bit clumsy. With that being said, she loves to do activities that bring her freedom, like playing soccer. She dreams of being one of the nation's soccer players, but because of the virus, she has to resist her temptation to play, making her feel bad about herself.

Dylan Setiadi (Age 13, Chinese-Indonesian)

Dylan is a social butterfly. He loves to socialize with different types of people and listen to their stories. He also loves to make videos and upload them to an illegal YouTube site. He is an only child and is not close with his parents. This triggers him to meet other people and socialize with them, and he loves it. He aspires to be a YouTuber one day to bring awareness to the positive impact of socializing with lots of people. Unfortunately due to the virus, it makes him rethink his choices and tends to be insensitive to the things around him, even important things like doing homework and trivial things like making friends (he tends to do everything according to his will).

Elias Eka Jaya Abimanyu/EJ (Age 13, Papuan-Mollucan-Javanese)

Elias is a good boy with good manners and charm. He is an extrovert and also loves to meet other people. He is the oldest child of three. Elias loves the Lord with all his heart and wants other people to experience His love as much as possible. Unfortunately, the virus limits him to do so (religious radicalism is forbidden and will be punishable by death), so he feels low about himself. He is also the type of person that is influenced easily by a lot of people. Elias is a devout Christian, but he stumbles most of the time. He has a habit of being swayed by negative criticism easily.

Supporting Characters:

- 1) Regina Tedjo: Bryna's older sister. She is a bit childish and whiny, only because of Bryna's "immaturity."
- 2) Mr. Tanaja : Bryna, Corina, Dylan, and Elias' homeroom teacher. He is the one who chastised Bryna the most.
- 3) Jason Wenda: A new student in Simultatem Academy. Dylan befriends him during his journey in school. He is shy but never afraid to express his feelings to people, although it might be because of outside influences.

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- 4) Septiana Abimanyu: Elias' mother. She is a wise and fearless woman, who is not afraid to voice out her faith. She has rebelled against the government before but has avoided punishment by living in the slums of the city.
- 5) Mean Girls Clique: The main antagonists of the whole story. They consist of: Annalise Tjahaya, Carla Joanne, Grace Antonia, Amanda Kezia, Jesseline Pitaloka, and Christie Angelina. Annalise is the "leader" of the clique and all her friends follow her lead.
- 6) Haryo and Abigail Tedjo: Bryna's ignorant parents. Haryo is the CEO of a big corporation in the city. Abigail is a socialite wife who gets to be spoiled by Haryo's earnings. They rarely spend time with their children.
- 7) I Gede Abraham and Jasmine Lukman: Corina's simple parents. They are quite wise but sometimes hypocritical due to their financial troubles.
- 8) Joel and Anna Setiadi: Dylan's indifferent parents. They strive to give the best example to Dylan although they do not really do what they advise.
- 9) George Abimanyu: Elias' emotional father. He is an alcoholic who struggles with having a good relationship with his kids.

Conflict

There are two kinds of conflict in our creative work, which are based on Folarin's types of conflict. Both conflicts are related to each other. First, the characters vs. society, where the conflict arises from the characters' hatred against society or man-made institutions (Folarin, 2015). Each of the characters will fight against the society's norms (symbolized by their parents, friends, and homeroom teacher). Since they want to reach their "rebellious" dreams, some people might get angry and try to bring them back to the status quo in order to avoid the government interfering, like their family and school friends. Second, the characters vs. themselves, or intra-personal conflict. This conflict arises when the characters fight against their minds (Folarin, 2015). In each of the stories, the characters want to reach their dreams, but because they are still relatively young, they might get confused and question their beliefs, especially because they have lived by their world's rules for a long time.

CONCLUSION

There are some points to say about the process of writing this creative work. First, to find a genre that suits our creative work is not easy. At first, we had three possibilities: coming-of-age, dystopian, and social problems. We then decided to choose dystopian and coming-of-age genres related to social problems. Second, we learned how to write a serious topic for a younger demographic. We felt that this was a challenge for us because we needed the plot and the word choices to suit their way of thinking, so we had to write with simple words. Not only that, but we also find it difficult to maintain the simplicity despite the topic being so serious. We tried to combat this with reading more middle-grade books and short stories. We also tried to think about the characterization of each of the characters (both main and supporting), conflicts, personalities, and endings in order to make the stories believable and interesting. Lastly, we learned to connect the topic and the story. This was quite challenging because we needed to make it as simple as possible. There are some moments where we did not know what to write for this, but we are thankful that this creative work can be completed well.

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