

ADULTS – CHILDREN POWER RELATIONS IN JUDY BLUME’S *BLUBBER*

Nandy Intan Kurnia, Widyastuti Purbani, dan Tri Sugiarto
Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, Indonesia
email: nandy_intankurnia@uny.ac.id

Abstract

(Title: *Adults-Children Power Relations in Judy Blume’s “Blubber”*). This study aims to uncover the power relations between adults and children in Judy Blume’s novel entitled *Blubber*. This study used a qualitative method by paying attention to the expressions used in the novel related to the topic of power relations of adults-children. Peer debriefing techniques were applied in this study in order to achieve the validity of the research results. The collected data of dialogues and narrations suggest that adults assert dominance toward children especially physically and psychologically as a consequence of the adults’ ideologies while trying to retain the image of a mentor. On the other hand, they also give spaces for children to grow and develop themselves. The research also revealed how *Blubber* paints a more realistic depiction of children and explores more of their human nature beyond images of innocence and naivety.

Keywords: abuse, *Blubber*, children’s literature, egalitarian, power relations

INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, in almost all parts of the world, people can find cases of adults abusing their power against children. This happens in all aspects of life ranging from trivial things such as the strict rules created by parents to control their children, to the creation of legal rules by the authorities. All these were done without consideration of the impact on the mental development of the children. Martens (2015) stated, commonly parents will focus more on giving restriction, control, and guidance to younger children.

In relation to the aforementioned explanation, children’s literature has long been used by adults as a medium to teach children since many believe that it can provide understanding to children without patronizing or even coercing. Lukens (2007) elaborates that children’s literature can provide understanding about life, including the values and social or-

der that develops in society. However, the fact that most of the children’s literature is written by adults makes it full of questionable power relations, especially if the work is written without any sincere desire to liberate the children as its target readers.

At a first glance, literature for children made by adults can be seen as a medium to educate or even a form of parenting. However, some children’s literature has the goal to teach the children readers a view which is deemed good by the adults involved in writing the literature. These kinds of literature want the children to learn to act a certain way as what was taught in the literature that they read. If the children can ‘learn’ the message conveyed in the literature, then the literature is deemed good and successful in shaping the children into what the adults perceive as good children. Being put this way, adults restrict children’s freedom in developing and learning by limita-

tions of what is good and bad by adults' standards. Whereas, in fact, similar to adults, children also need all kinds of information related to the world, both positive or negative. Thus, giving them this type of literature can be seen as adults' way of fulfilling those children's rights, and at the same time, it can be seen as adults' way of appreciating children (Wakhyudi & Wibisono, 2019).

If adults try to show their domination through literature, children are also silenced by adults in this field. As it is known, literature plays a vital role in linguistics but also humanities. Good literature will have good impacts on human lives and what it entails such as compassion, morality, behaviour, and how one navigates through life. If literature, which is supposed to show the real world and its idealistic version, were to only portray the imbalanced relationship of adults and children, it can be harmful towards the development and world-views of the children and even adults themselves. The unideal relationship might be taken as the relationship adults and children should aspire to have. Thus, children's literary criticism can be used to assess as to what values a particular children's literature possessed and how it reflects the balance or imbalance in the adults-children relationship.

When viewed from a sociological perspective, the adults tend to have a higher status than the children because they are considered to have more knowledge and experience (Techacharoenirungrueang and Wanchai, 2017). Moreover, concerning the issues of adults-children power relations, most adults think that children do not have the ability to state their opinions, thus the adults act as the one who tries to dominate children. They act and speak on behalf of the children since they think that children are innocent creatures who need to be taught, directed, and guided to be-

come good figures in accordance with the expectations desired by the community (Nodelman, 1992). Furthermore, it is rare to refer to children as a 'minority group' in regard to adult-child relationships. Even if adults meant their role to be of a nurturer, it cannot be avoided that sometimes adults nurture by patronizing or preaching, and end up dominating children in their relationship. It is understandable considering the fact that adults usually have more advantages physically, socially, and economically (Marthens, 2015). Furthermore, children are rarely able to talk over adults, and they are also supposed to be submissive to any kind of treatment given by adults. In some cases, adults use the concepts of "disciplines" and 'prison' to construct children into society's ideal version (Foucault, 1977) Of course this kind of treatment causes unequal power relations between adults and children.

The unequal portrayal of relations between adults and children is not the only type of power relation between adults and children since sometimes both parties can work together to build good relationships. The form of relationships between adults and children that are more equal is known as egalitarian. In this case, as explained by Donoghue & Strobel (2007) in the perspective of children, they see their relationship with adults as being at the same level and not considering adults as having a higher position than them. Another important point is, children can work together with adults with ease. Similar to the point of view of children, adults see this kind of relationship as a kind of relationship where they continually accepting children's opinions and ideas.

Therefore, this study would like to analyse Judy Blume's novel entitled *Blubber* under the topic of power relations between adults and children. The novel itself has won several

awards, such as the North Dakota Children's Choice Award in 1983 and the Outstanding Book of the Year from the New York Times in 1974. As a novel written by an adult, *Blubber* can be assumed as giving ideas on how adults think the adults-children relationship should look like and function. At the very least, *Blubber* can indicate the existing power balance in the relationship between adults and children. The novel portrays the life of fifth-graders, starting with the colourful and wonderful picture of their school life, up to the ugly description of peers bullying. However, if the novel is being read carefully, the readers can see a clear picture that the problems of those fifth-graders are not only about how to deal with their peers but also the problems created by the imbalance of the relationships between them and the adults around them.

This study is still relevant to be discussed since the problems caused by the power relations between adults and children are still found today. The power imbalance in this relationship may cause several problems especially regarding children, whose growth is easily influenced by outside factors. In a previous study done by Martens (2015), there was a notion of ideology that adults are taken as role models and capable figures to children. This caused children to assume the submissive role in the adult-child power dynamics. Children have to submit to the adults who have no direct evidence that they are capable and logical in teaching, leading, or directing children. Moreover, Dahl in *Matilda* rejects the notion of the self-evident and the taken-for-granted ideologies regarding adult-child relationship and power dynamics. One of the concerns regarding adults-children relationship is the blatant yet subtle power domination at play. This power struggle is easily seen in most adults-children relationships and becomes one of the

more domineering qualities and hence it is subtle, because of the normativity of these power dynamics. Adults are readily assumed and be assumed to take the lead in the adults-children relationship, so much so that the children's voices are sometimes unheard. However, many adults have realized that this is in no way the correct approach towards children. Some adults, through children's literature and other means, have been trying to popularize the idea of children's autonomy. Another study by Birditt, et. al. (2009), found that because of the differences in generations, genders, and ages, discrepancies and lack of solidarity can occur between parent and child. In fact, interpersonal tensions of family members caused by ambivalency resulted in detrimental relationships of the individuals involved and affect support exchange, health, and well-being.

The previous studies show how readily acceptable and default it is for adults to assume the more dominant role against children. There are many ways this dynamic is practised in reality. By using Judy Blume's *Blubber* as a lens to see how said dynamics are practised, it is hoped that this study can open the readers' horizons regarding the issue of power relations between adults and children, and it is hoped that by looking at the results of the study, the perspective of adults towards children will change, and awareness will arise, so a better relationship among those two parties can be built. Moreover, this study is a form of attention call to children, that they are also entitled to receive the same information as adults. Thus, issues that are deemed too complex for the children may be presented in a more appropriate way. Therefore, this study will investigate and explore further the issue of adults-children power relations as depicted in Judy Blume's *Blubber*. The research question is: What kinds of power relations between

adults and children are portrayed in Judy Blume’s *Blubber*?

METHOD

This study is a qualitative descriptive study. The data source of this study is Judy Blume’s novel entitled *Blubber*: Expressions, both denotative and connotative, which are related to power relations between adults and children in the novel are the data of this study. Since this study is interpretative in nature, the main instrument of this study is the researchers themselves who used their capacity, knowledge, and reasoning based on the principles of adults-children’s power dynamics, especially in literature, and the theories of orientalism in children’s literature, to interpret the data mentioned above. To make it easier for the researchers to analyze the data, they also used data cards and comparison tables.

The children’s literary work was read repeatedly in order to obtain a clear map of the data. The data were sampled and collected in tables, then the data were reduced by selecting data that were truly relevant to the focus of the study, and data that were seemed less relevant will be discarded. After the data reduction stage was carried out, based on the theoretical framework referred to, the researchers categorized the data. What is meant by data categorization is the sorting and grouping of data that has been obtained. Then the next stage was the interpretation of the data based on the category.

A study will be considered valid if the contents can be trusted. Neuman (2007) explains that the important component in qualitative research is trust. Therefore, to achieve trust, the researchers used peer debriefing techniques to verify the credibility of this study. The researchers asked children’s litera-

ture experts to read and give comments on the discussions carried out, then compared those discussions with other writings relevant to the topic of this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The forms of power relations between adults and children as seen in Judy Blume’s *Blubber*

After careful scrutinization, the study found that the power relations between adults and children are expressed in two ways, positively and negatively, in Judy Blume’s *Blubber*; wherein adults do exercise power over the children but at the same time treat them with respect. The first part is divided into two, they are the forms of adults’ domination over children, and the second one is the egalitarian forms of relations between adults and children. The forms of power relations between adults and children are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. The Forms of Power Relations between Adults and Children in Judy Blume’s *Blubber*.

| POWER RELATION | CATEGORY | SUBCATEGORY | SUB-SUBCATEGORY | DESCRIPTION | INDICATOR |
|----------------|---------------------------|--|--|--|---|
| Domination | Children being controlled | Physical Oppression | | Children are being controlled by adults. | Rules are used to control children, adults making prohibition, children are restricted. |
| | | | Psychological Oppression | Children being ignored, rejected, or excluded | Children are being oppressed physically or psychologically by adults. |
| Egalitarian | Children being trusted | Children are seen as human beings who know what is best for themselves | | Children are being trusted by adults to managed their own will | Adults trust children to do what they want to do, to make their own decisions, and to choose their own choices without being overly critical. |
| | | | Children can solve their/other people’s problems | Children are considered as being cooperative | Children can express their feelings freely |

The forms of adults domination over children in Judy Blume's *Blubber*

1. Children are being controlled by adults

In *Blubber*, the form of adults domination over children appears when the adults try to control the children. The adults' control is conveyed verbally. The example is when Jill's mother forced her to wear a thick jacket that is very tight when Jill wants to participate in the Halloween celebration:

... "It's freezing out. You can't go like that."

"But if I wear a jacket no one will be able to see my flenser suit."

"Not only do you have to wear a jacket," Mom said, "but it has to be a heavy one... zipped up!

"Oh Mom! You do this to me every Hallowe'en."

...

... I walked to the front hall and grabbed my heavy jacket from the closet. (Blume, 1981, p. 25)

The above quote shows that Jill's mother refuses to hear Jill's reason for disobeying her. Jill thinks that the jacket would only cover the *flenser* costume that she had worked so hard to make. On another occasion, Jill is forced to do the instruction given by her teacher:

..."Remember, no talking in the halls or the auditorium"

...

"Jill Brenner!" Mrs. Minish snapped. "I said no talking" (Blume, 1981, p. 27)

One of Jill's teacher named Mrs. Minish is trying to show her power by yelling at Jill. She warns Jill not to make any more noise, without asking first the reason why Jill makes

a sound. Jill does not have any chance to explain since Mrs. Minish prefers to exercise her power verbally than giving a chance for Jill to explain.

Another example of this category found in Blume's *Blubber* happens when Jill and her schoolmates want to go home by using the school bus. While on the bus, Jill and her friends take an initiative to spend their time playing *Keep-Away* games by using the hat of a child named Robby. In addition, they decide to sing a song which tells the story of a girl in France that they have learned from the sixth-grader. Unfortunately, the school bus driver does not like their decision to play on the bus, he even feels annoyed by their action.

... The bus driver yelled, "Shut up or I'll report you to the principal." (Blume, 1981, p. 126)

Jill's school bus driver shows his dominance as an adult by shouting at the kids. He even threatened those children.

2. Children are being oppressed by the adults

In this section, the researchers will present some of the data related to the forms of oppression done by the adults towards the children. The oppressions are divided into three types, they are verbal, physical, and psychological abuse.

a. *Physical Oppression*

When giving punishment to children who are not obeying or violating the rules set by the adults, sometimes the adults do not hesitate to give physical punishment. It happens because the adults see the children as inferior and thus, justified to assert control over them. As explained by Carey (2018), any form of abuse

may result in the destruction of children's emotional development and can give a negative impact on the children's development in general.

An example of physical oppression that the children character of *Blubber* has to face is when Miss Rothbelle, Jill's music teacher, walks into the classroom to teach. When no one could give a satisfactory answer to the questions she asked, she hurts one of them:

Miss Rothbelle walked over to Linda's desk. "That was not the correct answer. Weren't you paying attention?" **She pulled a few strands of Linda's hair.** (Blume, 1981, p. 46)

Miss. Rothbelle tugged on Linda's hair on purpose, only because Linda cannot give a proper answer to the question she has asked.

In another part of the story, Jill and her friends are punished by one of their teachers named Mrs. Rothbelle, to write a line "I was rude yesterday. I will not misbehave in music class again" for 100 times:

"We have to write, *I was very rude yesterday. I will not misbehave in music again.*"
"How many times?"
"One hundred." (Blume, 1981, p. 64)

Thus, unlike Pecola in *The Bluest Eye* who has to face physical violence from her parents (Nurhayati, 2019), *Blubber's* characters have to face physical oppression from their teachers.

b. Psychological Oppression

Adults sometimes oppressed children without even realizing that they have hurt children psychologically. The psychological wounds suffered by a child will not be visible

and so it will be difficult to treat. In the worst case, the wound can be carried over through time and will greatly affect the children's mental development.

In her novel, Blume describes vividly the psychological oppressions toward children by the adults. There are two kinds of oppression found, namely first, neglect, rejection, and exclusion of children; and second, rejection towards children's opinions.

1) Children are being ignored, rejected, or excluded

The example of psychological oppression in Judy Blume's *Blubber* can be found in the following data:

... "What am I supposed to eat?"
"oh, Jill.."mom said. "its time you learned to eat like everyone else."
"Everyone else doesn't eat that stuff."
"What your mother means, " Dad said, "Is that practically everyone likes Chinese food. It's very popular in this country."
(Blume, 1981, p. 116-117)

The above conversation occurred when Jill's parents buy Chinese food for dinner. Jill does not like Chinese food, so she refused to eat it. However, her mother insisted on making Jill eat because her mother wants Jill to start to learn to eat what everybody usually eats. Even her father agrees with his wife by saying that everyone loves Chinese food, and this type of cuisine is very popular in their country.

Another example is when Jill's school teacher, Mrs. Minish asks her students to submit their Mathematics homework:

"Well, Jill... Since this is the first time you've ever forgotten your homework I won't count it against you."

“But I didn’t forget it,” I said. “I told you I didn’t forget it.”

All right, Jill. Don’t worry about it. If you find it you can hand it in tomorrow.” (Blume, 1981, p. 121)

Mrs.. Minish ignores Jill’s explanation regarding her homework book. Even though Mrs. Minish does not give Jill any apparent punishment, Mrs. Minish has hurt Jill’s feelings because she refuses to listen to Jill who firmly believes that she is ready to collect it but she could not do it because her homework is thrown away by Wendy and her friends.

2) *Rejection of children’s opinions.*

As it has been explained by Nodelman, the way adults view children is similar to how the colonizer sees the colonized. This case also appears when they reject, subtly or harshly, the opinions expressed by children. There are some data regarding adults’ rejection of children’s opinions in *Blubber*. One of them is:

“ Really Jill... I don’t care for this talking back!”

“But Mrs.. Minish...”

“ No buts,” Mrs..Minish said. “Take it home and do it over.” (Blume, 1981, p. 30)

When Jill and her friends were asked to do Math and Science, Mrs. Minish gives so many red marks on Jill’s paper since she considers Jill does not correctly do her task. When Jill asks whether the answer she gave is wrong, Mrs. Minish says that the problem is not whether the answer is wrong, but rather on Jill’s way of solving the task. Mrs. Minish even states that she is annoyed with Jill’s action because in her opinion Jill is trying to make excuses to oppose her.

In another example, Mrs. Minish shows her rejection of her student’s opinion:

“Take them out Robby,” Mrs. Minish said. “Right now.”

“But they feel nice,” Robby told” her.

“Take them out!” (Blume, 1981, p. 54)

Robby, one of Mrs. Minish students, is being ordered to remove all pins from his fingers. According to Robby, he just wanted to pretend to be a zombie, and the pins on his fingers did not hurt or even bothered him. Responding to Robby’s opinion, Mrs. Minish tried to show her dominance by ordering him to remove all those pins.

3. **Egalitarian**

As explained in the online *Cambridge Dictionary*, egalitarian can be defined as “believing that all people are equally important and should have the same rights and opportunities in life.” Thus, this section will discuss the form of relationships between adults and children that are more equal, in other words, the children are considered to have the same position as adults. This section is divided into two parts, they are first, children are given trust; and second, children have freedom.

a. *Children are being trusted*

Blume does not only provide a picture of how adults try to dominate children but also tries to show how adult figures can also give trust to children. In *Blubber*, several times the adult characters show that they can trust children, for example when the children’s characters are seen as figures who know what is best for themselves, who can solve their problems or those around them, or when they are deemed to be cooperative so that the efforts made by those children deserve to be appreciated.

1) Children are seen as human beings who know what is best for themselves.

There are times when adults can understand what is going on in the minds of children so that adults feel that they can give full chance to the children to choose what is best for themselves. It can be seen in the following data taken from *Blubber*:

“You can be whatever you want,” my mother said and she didn’t sound insulted. (Blume, 1981, p. 18)

When Jill expresses her wish not to use a witch costume anymore for the Halloween party, her mother said that she can choose to be whatever she wants. Surprisingly, when Jill explains further that she is feeling worried that her mother will reject her wish because this type of costume is the costume that her mother used to wear during her own Halloween party, Jill’s mother stressed that she can accept Jill’s opinion and she respects Jill’s decision. She feels confident that Jill has made the best decision for herself.

In another quote, Jill’s father can be seen as an adult character who can put trust to children, in this case to Jill:

... “Suppose I don’t like what they have to eat?”
 “Just say no, thank you,” Dad told me.
“Nobody’s going to force you to eat anything.” (Blume, 1981, p. 89)

When Jill’s family plans to attend a party hosted by Mr Winkler, Jill feels uncomfortable because she has to sit at a different table far-away from her parents. She is worried that she would be forced to eat dishes that do not suit her taste. Then her father tries to comfort her by saying that she does not have to eat what she does not like, and no one will ever force

her. This case shows that Jill’s father can appreciate Jill’s ability in making and choosing what is best for herself.

2) Children can solve their/other people’s problems.

The below data show that children can solve their problems:

“ They’re my boots, Kenny. Why should mom care if I had to paint them to match my sword?” (Blume, 1981, p. 24)

Jill decides to dye her pair of boots gold so those boots will match the sword of the flenser costume she has prepared to celebrate Halloween. When Jill’s younger brother, Kenny, asks if their mother knew about her decision, Jill says that the shoes belong to her, thus she does not need to ask for any permission from their mother. It is obvious that Jill tries her best to make the flenser costume, so she needs to dye her shoes to match the colour of the sword she had made. Jill’s effort can be seen as an example of how hard children try to solve their problem.

3) Children are considered as being cooperative

There are times when adults need children to help them. Just like when Jill’s mother asks her to get her bathrobe, and Jill without any hesitation reaches out her hand to help:

“... Hand me my robe please..”I went to mom’s closet and pulled down her favorite robe. It’s pink and there’s a hole in one sleeve. I gave it to her, then went into the living room.” (Blume, 1981, p. 75)

Jill gives a quick response to her mother’s request, without saying anything she gives her

mother's favourite bathrobe. This kind of action can be seen as evidence that she is being cooperative.

In another datum, Jill starts to scratch her father's back without being asked, because she knows that her father loves it very much:

... I said, while I scratched his back. My father just loves to have his back scratched. (Blume, 1981, p. 75)

The above action shows that Jill can show her initiative without being forced, let alone being ordered, by the adult figures. It also shows that she is an affectionate and caring girl, and at the same time, it shows that she is being cooperative. Thus, she got a positive reaction from his father, "...mmm... that feels good." (*Blubber*, 1081: 75). Thus, it is important to note that Jill's character has developed throughout the story. Wisdom and cooperation become more dominant than her ignorance and selfishness.

b. Children have freedom of expression.

Blume shows that the children's characters in her works have the freedom to express their feelings. For example in *Blubber*, the main character has shown her freedom of expression several times:

"How was your day, Jill?" Mrs.. Sandmeier asked me in French, as she poured a glass of milk.

"I answered in English. "Pretty Good."

Mrs.. Sandmeier made a face. Part of her job is to teach me and Kenny to speak French. (Blume, 1981, p. 16)

When Jill is being asked by Mrs. Sandmeier, her family's maid, in French, Jill responds it by using English. Jill understands

very well that she is supposed to answer it in French because Mrs. Sandmeier hopes that Jill can show her ability in using French, and at the same time it is the way that Mrs. Sandmeier uses to teach Jill and Kenny.

This is proved by the availability of enough space for the children to share their views and to express themselves freely. For example, when Jill has a serious conversation with her mother:

"You want to talk about it?" Mom asked, a few minutes later, as she sat on the edge of my bed.

"What?" I said, like I didn't know.

"Whatever's bothering you. It might make you feel better." (Blume, 1981, p. 117)

Thus, based on the above datum, in *Blubber* none of the characters are depicted as flat characters. Both adults' and children's characters are very dynamic, take for example the character of Jill's mother, who at first, is described as very violent and tends to dominate her relationship as Jill's parent. From the above datum, one can see that Jill's mother does not hesitate to spend time discussing, exchanging ideas and opinions with her daughter, so her daughter can solve the problem.

Discussion

Power relations can penetrate into various levels, starts from individuals, families, and social communities (Sugiarti, 2007). In relation to the discussion of power relations between adults and children, as with most dominators, the adults feel entitled to define, determine, and control children just because they feel that they have more knowledge and experience. In this case, the adults play the role of the agents who attempt to control children.

Thus, they behave and act on behalf of children as if they are well aware of those children's needs (Nodelman, 1992). Similar to Nodelman, Foucault (1977) see that most of the time, children are not able to speak over adults. They are also expected to be docile and accept adults' treatment toward them without question for supposedly adults know better. Paired with these kinds of docility and ignorance, someone who is subjected to domination and cannot fight back is a perfect subject to be used, transformed, and improved. Therefore, it causes unequal power relations between adults and children, which then can lead to various kinds of injustice toward the children.

Blubber shows several examples where adults dominated the power dynamics and exercised disciplined practices to the children in which they will get repercussions if they are not obeying the adults. The concepts of 'disciplines' and 'prison', according to Foucault, are employed in several state apparatuses including schools to create the desired version of society members (Foucault, 1977). Children are viewed as incapable of decision-making and rational mature thinking. This led to the children being unheard and ignored. The main character, Jill Brenner, had to keep quiet on occasions where she had opinions that matter and needed to be voiced. She is silenced and is forced to be docile in order to be a good child and to avoid punishment. In fact, this case is related to the general expectation of the Western culture toward children. In the perspective of Western culture, children are passive and do not have a chance to share their opinions (Ansell, 2015).

When Miss Rothbell pulled Linda's hair, she tried to instil punishment through a physical approach. This physical approach is a form of domination being used by the adult figure,

in this case, the teacher, towards the children. This kind of action which is done without thinking about the impact of the action can result from the wide gap between generations (Birditt, et. al., 2009), where Linda's teacher, as an older figure, cannot accept any reason given by Linda, as the young generation. As it is explained by WHO (2020) violence towards children may have long-term consequences, such as dropping out of school, having trouble finding and maintaining a career, and being at a higher risk of later victimization and/or the perpetration of interpersonal and self-directed violence, all of which can have an effect on their future.

It is not an easy thing for children to undergo physical punishment because not only it is physically tiring, but it also affects them psychologically. This form of punishment shows that the adults, in this case, Mrs. Rothbelle in giving a punishment to write a sentence a hundred times, have acted unfairly in determining the form of punishment. There is no negotiation process or democracy in responding to the children's behaviour during her time teaching in the class. This kind of punishment is used by the adults to produce a generation who are willing to obey and act according to a set of rules made by them. Physical punishment is chosen because it has a more direct effect than making a threat, order, or advice. Thus, it is considered to have a faster deterrent effect.

Many times, it was shown how adults prefer the children to behave a certain way and enforcing their ideologies or version of truths. Several times Mrs. Minish, Miss Rothbell, the bus driver, and even Jill's parents shown this behaviour. Mrs. Minish likes to brush aside her students' concerns, Miss Rothbell likes to give punishments, and the bus driver threatens to report the noisy children to the principal to

show his power because the principal will most likely listen to another adult than children. When Jill's mother refused to let Jill wear her flenser costume, Jill was not able to speak up her mind and truth, which is repercussion enough for Jill and is an oppression of her free will. Therefore, looking at the cases above, it is clear that adults are acting as the agents who are trying to show their domination towards the children as if they understand what is the best thing for those children and that the adults perceive children as objects who are unable to speak for themselves. (Nodelman, 1992, p. 29). The aforementioned explanation is in line with Nodelman's (1992) theory of orientalism, where the adults stand as the colonizer by having more control, knowledge, and power. Thus, based on this premise, the adults will talk, see and attach definitions or identities that are considered good by them to children.

On a separate occasion, Jill's personal choice of not wanting Chinese food is disregarded by her parents. Carey (2018) elaborates, when parents start to show little or no regard for the child, it means that they have done emotional abuse which can harm the child's development. This kind of action may create a child who is afraid of his/her parents, hate his/her parents, consider his/herself as a bad person, emotionally immature, a sudden change in speech and behaviour. This case is similar to Nodelman's (1992) explanation of how adults see children. In this case, from the adults' point of view, there is something feminine about childhood and masculine about adulthood. Therefore, children are always in an unfair, inferior position because the adults tend to make children believe that passive children are desirable and adorable in the eyes of the adults. Furthermore, children's happiness is in relation to their effort to please the adults.

Seeing the aforementioned case, it is obvious that Jill Brenner is shaped by the wish of the adults and her society. If Jill Brenner dares to go against said wishes, she will have to face consequences where adults will usually be the main punisher. Also, while adults can take control over the repercussions, children who are subjected to adults' ideologies and world-views will likely be involved in the social effects of the "law-breaking" too.

Similar to *Matilda* which challenges the obvious and taken-for-granted ideologies of adult-children power relations (Martens, 2015), Judy Blume *Blubber's* work dares to break out of the habits of adult researchers since the children's characters in it are no longer depicted as angelic and naive. The main character in *Blubber* is portrayed as a person who has the courage to have opinions and expression, even though at the beginning of the story she seems like a rebellious, and mean, child. However, this is the real picture of children who do have a "naughty" nature with a strong sense of curiosity and persistence because they are driven by the desire to fulfil their knowledge (Sarumpaet, 2002).

Blume is great in delivering the children characters for the children are not depicted as only tools for the writer to make a point across. The characters are made relatable and true to their nature. For children who can already form opinions and views of the world, regardless of how shallow they were according to adults, will act accordingly to their ideology. Unlike adults' perception, these children already have ideas, however vague they may be, to differentiate bad from good and right from wrong. *Blubber* illustrates this point brilliantly.

Moreover, in Blume's novel entitled *Blubber*, both the characters of children and adults are not static, so they experience changes from time

to time. Blume describes how the child character, in particular, faces complex and varied problems. For example, psychological problems in romantic relationships, facing incidents of discrimination and oppression, and experiencing fear of losing a friendship. The characters of the adults are also portrayed well. Instead of being figures that can always nurture, protect or assist the child characters in solving problems, which sometimes even caused by the adults, the adults are depicted as humans that can also make mistakes and that it is normal. This breaks the idea that adults are always right or know what to do and therefore are superior to the children. This also allows children to develop because they do not always have to turn to and ask adults for help when they face difficulties. The absence of adults sometimes is needed to open up space and opportunities for children to become more independent, experienced, and better. *Blubber* also features moments when adults are more sensible and encouraging. Mrs. Sandmeier's facial expression slightly changed because Jill did not reply to her in French, but she does not show any protest toward Jill's attitude. This can be read as her readiness to give Jill the right to freedom of expression. Another instance was when Jill openly states that she feels uncomfortable and sad since she has to face problems with her friends, "Nobody likes me anymore" (Blubber, 1981, p. 118). After saying this, Jill starts to cry uncontrollably and says that she hates all of her friends. Her mother does not try to stop her from crying and from expressing her feelings about her friends. This shows that as an adult, Jill's mother has provided space for her child to express her opinion and show her anxiety at the same time. By these notions, the child main character is hoped to be able to develop emotional maturity and able to find answers or solutions to the problems she has to face at the end of the story.

CONCLUSION

This study examines the power relations between adults and children in the novel *Blubber* written by Judy Blume. The results show that the power relations between adults and children appear in the domination of adults over children, and the worst practice of this power is seen in the form of control and oppression of the children. Those children are harassed by the adults in two ways, physically and psychologically. The form of psychological oppression is ignorance, rejection, and exclusion. Whereas another form of power relations of adults and children is an egalitarian relationship. In this form of relationship, the positions of the adults and children tend to be equal. Children began to be trusted and have freedom of expression. Therefore, both the adults and the children can build a good relationship.

The results display that *Blubber* shows not only the realistic part of adults-children relationship which includes the unnecessary, and even abusing, power-induced interactions but also the good potential adults-children relationship has in developing both the adults and the children involved to be a better version of themselves and as human in general.

While adults think that they objectively are better in terms of cognitive ability or life in general, the reality is different. Adults may in some way be superior to children in the sense that they experience life longer and have the privilege to experience and perceive life longer than children. However, this does not mean that adults know children best. After all, most adults agreeably have already forgotten how it feels like to be children and to navigate life as children. Not to mention that an adult's lifestyle is different than a child's.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The researchers would like to express their gratitude to the Faculty of Languages and Arts for providing the funds to conduct this research. They would also like to extend their sincere thanks to Egha Retno Widayani, Fauziah Khoiriani, and Danika Rahma Irianti for helping them with the data collection.

REFERENCES

- Ansell, N. (2005). *Children, youth and development*. London: Routledge.
- Birditt, K. S., Miller, L. M., Fingerman, K. L., & Lefkowitz, E. S. (2009). Tensions in the Parent and Adult Child Relationship: Links to Solidarity and Ambivalence. *Psychol Aging*, 24(2): 287-295. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2690709/pdf/nihms-94367.pdf>. DOI:10.1037/a0015196
- Blume, J. (1981). *Blubber*. London: Pan Books Ltd.
- Cambridge Dictionary*. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/egalitarian>
- Carey, E. (2018). *Child emotional and psychological abuse*. Healthline. <https://www.healthline.com/health/child-neglect-and-psychological-abuse>
- O'Donoghue, J. L., & Strobel, K. R. (2007), Directivity and freedom: Adult support of activism among urban youth. *American Behavioral Scientist*. Vol. 51 Number 3. Sage Publication
- Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, New York: Random House.
- Lukens, J. R. (2007). *A Critical Handbook of Children's Literature*. New York: Pearson.
- Martens, A. (2015). "Ideology in children's Literature: critical discourse analysis of the adult-child power relation in Roald Dahl's *Matilda*." University of Amsterdam.
- Neuman, W. L. (2007). *Basics of Social Research: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Nodelman, P.(1992). *The Pleasure of Children's Literature*. USA: Longman, 1992. Print.
- . (1992). The Other; Orientalism, Colonialism, and Children's Literature. *Children's Literature Quarterly* 17.1 29-35. DOI: 10.1353/chq.0.1006
- Nurhayati, A. (2019). Intersecting oppression of gender and race in Toni Morrison's *The bluest eye* and *God help the child*. *Litera*. Vol. 18, No.3.DOI: 10.21831/ltr.v18i3.27796
- Sarumpaet, R. (2002). *Anak dan Sastra Anak: penjajah dan taklukannya (Children and Children's Literature: Colonizer and its Colonized)*. Jakarta: Horizon.
- Sugiarti. (2007). Telaah dekonstruksi kekuasaan dalam novel dari fontenav ke magalhanes karya Nh. Dini dalam perspektif budaya. *Diksi*. Vol 14 No. 2. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21831/diksi.v14i2.6596>
- Techacharoenrungrueang, S., & Wanchai, M. (2017). Power relations between adults and children in Thai children literature: the critical discourse analysis revisited. *The 10th International Conference of HUSOC Academic research 2017*. Chiang Rai Rajabhat University.
- Wakhyudi, Y., & Wibisono, Y. (2019). Penguatan Karakter Islami Anak Melalui Cerita. *Jurnal Dialektika*. Vol. 9 No. 2.
- WHO. (2020). Violence against children. <https://www.who.int/news-room/factsheets/detail/violence-against-children>