

## **Exploring Self-Identity in *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret*: A Psychosocial Perspective**

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### **Abstract**

The research analyzes the process of identity formation in adolescence experienced by Margaret, the main character in the film *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* and relates it to concepts in identity theory, particularly Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory. This research uses descriptive-qualitative methods and literature studies by focusing on literature in the form of film scripts. The research object includes the movie script and focuses on Margaret's search for self-identity. Data was collected through literature research, using primary data from the movie and secondary data from articles, author biographies, and books related to the research. This data collection method is in accordance with the problem formulation and research objectives. The data analysis stage uses content analysis including identification, classification, and interpretation of Margaret's character in the movie. The results show that there are four points of results during Margaret's search for self-identity, namely aspects of confusion over self-identity, beliefs that are adopted, search through internal dialogue with God, and conformity with Erik Erikson's theory of self-identity. From all the conflicts experienced by Margaret, she was able to get through the stage by finding confidence, having a clear direction and even being able to remain herself.

### **Keywords**

Adolescent, Identity Development, Psychosocial Theory, Self Identity

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## INTRODUCTION

The search for self-identity during adolescence is a common phenomenon experienced by individuals in this phase of psychosocial development. During this period, adolescents often face confusion in dealing with the changes occurring within themselves, whether physical, psychological, cognitive, or social changes. These changes can lead to an identity crisis, which is one of the major challenges during adolescence (Branje, De Moor, Spitzer, & Becht, 2021). During this time, individuals begin questioning who they are, what they believe in, and what their life goals are. This uncertainty in searching for self can trigger confusion about the values they hold and their life direction, often leading to doubts about their identity (Breakwell & Jaspal, 2021).

In addition to internal factors, external factors such as social pressure, peer influence, and the impact of mass media also play an important role in shaping this search for identity (Riswanto, Thursina, Nurlaila, & Kusuma, 2023). Social media, for instance, provides massive exposure to social norms that can influence how adolescents define themselves. Excessive social media use can negatively affect adolescents' mental health, such as increasing levels of anxiety and depression, which in turn affects their identity search process (Boer, Stevens, Finkenauer, de Looze, & van den Eijnden, 2021; Cataldo, Lepri, Neoh, & Esposito, 2021). Therefore, the search for identity during adolescence is influenced not only by internal factors but also by the rapidly evolving social dynamics surrounding them.

Erik Erikson's psychosocial development theory (1968) provides a crucial framework for understanding the process of identity development during adolescence (Maree, 2022). According to Erikson, individuals in adolescence are at the stage of "Identity vs. Role Confusion," where they experience an identity crisis that must be resolved in order to progress to the next stage of life. This stage is crucial because the success or failure in forming a clear and coherent identity will impact psychological well-being and decision-making in adulthood (Eriksson, Wängqvist, Carlsson, & Frisé, 2020).

The film *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* (1970), adapted from the novel by Judy Blume, tells the story of Margaret's journey in search of her identity. She faces various internal conflicts, including confusion about her religion, physical development, and social pressures from her peers. The character of Margaret reflects the dynamics of identity exploration often experienced by many adolescents. Therefore, the film provides an interesting subject for analysis through the lens of Erikson's theory, particularly focusing on the "Identity vs. Role Confusion" stage that Margaret navigates while facing the challenges that emerge throughout her growth.

From Margaret's journey in finding herself, there are many changes in Margaret's attitude and mindset. These changes will be examined more carefully and in detail regarding what things have changed and whether the changes and character development in the film *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* (1970) are in accordance with the theory of self-discovery by Erik Erikson.

Thus, the main purpose of this study is to analyze the process of self-identity search experienced by the main character, Margaret, in the film and relate it to Erikson's identity theory. This is important to provide a deeper understanding of how internal and external conflicts faced by adolescents affect their search for identity. In addition, this research seeks to uncover the film's contribution and significance in depicting adolescents' identity exploration from a psychosocial perspective, thus enriching the discussion on Erikson's theory, especially in relation to identity formation in adolescence. This study also uses the following research questions as the key to the research results. First, it is how the development of self-identity depicted on the character Margaret in the movie *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* is. The next is that how Margaret's identity development based on Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory does.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Identity development is a complex process that continues throughout life, influencing various psychosocial aspects of an individual, especially during adolescence. According to Erikson (1968), the "Identity vs. Role Confusion" stage during adolescence is a critical period, where individuals begin to struggle with understanding who they are and how they want to participate in society (Golchha, Bharti, & Mrinal, 2024). During this stage, adolescents face significant challenges in constructing a cohesive identity that encompasses various dimensions, such as religion, sexuality, and societal roles. This process is often characterized by confusion, primarily because adolescents are in the midst of significant transitions in their lives. As noted by (Acheson & Papadima, 2023), identity crises during adolescence are often triggered by uncertainty in coping with the rapid physical and psychological changes that occur.

In addition to internal factors, external factors such as social pressure, peer influence, and the impact of mass media also play a vital role in shaping this search for identity (Tettey, Sarfo-Mensah, & Osei, 2023). Social media, for instance, provides massive exposure to social norms that can influence how adolescents define themselves. Excessive use of social media can negatively affect adolescents' mental health, such as increasing anxiety and depression, which in turn affects their identity search process (Tettey et al., 2023). Therefore, the search for identity during adolescence is influenced not only by internal factors but also by the rapidly evolving social dynamics surrounding them.

Erik Erikson's psychosocial development theory (1968) provides a crucial framework for understanding the process of identity development during adolescence. According to Erikson, individuals in adolescence are at the "Identity vs. Role Confusion" stage, where they experience an identity crisis that must be resolved in order to progress to the next stage of life. This stage is crucial because success or failure in forming a clear and coherent identity will affect psychological well-being and decision-making in adulthood (Camia, Motiani, & Waters, 2022; Mitchell, Adler, Carlsson, Eriksson, & Syed, 2021).

The film *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* (1970), adapted from Judy Blume's novel, tells the story of Margaret's journey in search of her identity. She faces various internal conflicts, including confusion about her religion, physical development, and social pressures from her peers. Margaret's character reflects the dynamics of identity exploration often experienced by many adolescents. Therefore, the film provides an interesting subject for analysis through the lens of Erikson's theory, particularly focusing on the "Identity vs. Role Confusion" stage that Margaret navigates while facing the challenges that emerge throughout her growth.

In addition, the influence of peer groups plays a significant role in adolescent social identity formation. In *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret*, Margaret feels pressured to meet her friends' expectations, especially regarding her physical development. The pressure to wear a bra, despite feeling physically unready, illustrates how adolescents are often forced to conform to social standards that may not align with their personal comfort. (Scholte & Van Aken, 2020) also argue that during adolescence, individuals are heavily influenced by their peer groups in determining how they should behave or even how they view themselves. This social identity process is often influenced by the desire for acceptance within the group, even if it means sacrificing personal comfort.

Erikson's theory of identity provides a solid foundation for understanding how individuals, especially adolescents, build their identity through exploration and commitment processes. However, as this theory has developed, researchers have highlighted the importance of external factors in identity development, such as media influence, family, and peers (Choukas-Bradley, Roberts, Maheux, & Nesi, 2022; Laursen & Veenstra, 2021). Kitchens & Abell, (2020) further emphasized that both personality traits and the social environment play a determining role in how adolescents cope with role confusion and how they eventually commit to specific identities.

There are several studies that are similar to this research, the first research conducted by Viinamäki, (2024) with the title "The Role of Religion and Patriarchy as Oppressive Power Structures and the Allure of Conformity in Judy Blume's *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret*" explores how religion and patriarchy affect Margaret's character development. The study shows how young girls face emotional and mental challenges as they grow up in this environment. Although both studies use Margaret in *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* (1970) as the object of research, Moona's study also focuses more on Margaret's emotional struggle in an environment full of religious and patriarchal rules. While this study focuses on the development of the identity of Margaret who has an identity crisis that is explained emotionally, mentally and behaviorally from Margaret in facing every challenge in the film.

The second research by Solehan Wani "A Sociolinguistic Analysis Of Style Speech As Performed By Young Adult Girl Characters In Judy Blume's *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret*" The purpose of this research is to find out, describe, and analyze the speech style of the main character in the novel *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret*. This research results in two very important conclusions. First, in the novel

Are You There God, there are only two types of linguistic characteristics related to the discussion of language style. It's Me, Margaret, namely words and syntax. Second, this study presents two parts, namely the function of speech and the language style that can convey messages. The research by Solehan clearly focuses only on the dialog of Margaret. Meanwhile, this study focuses on the content and character of Margaret from each challenge.

Research conducted by (Agustina, Sari, & Putri, 2023) entitled "Social Influence in Adolescence's Identity Crisis in Blume's Are You There God? It Is Me, Margaret (1970)" where the content raised the identity crisis of Margaret in the movie Are You There God? It Is Me, Margaret (1970). The research written by Agustina and her friends focuses on the factors of identity crisis formation from social influences around Margaret. Judging from the focus, the research by Agustina and this research both uphold the state of identity crisis by Margaret. However, this study is more about the development of character by Margaret while experiencing an identity crisis, so this study tends to examine the whole movement of Margaret.

From the two studies above, the research on Margaret's identity journey based on Erik Erikson's Theory has not been studied by previous research, especially during the Identity vs Role Confusion stage. This gap is very important for this study because it offers a new perspective on how adolescents' search for cultural and religious identity is affected by internal and external conflicts. In addition, this study also provides an insight into the possibility of changes in one's character over time caused by various aspects such as the environment to circumstances.

This study shows that understanding identity search during adolescence requires consideration of various internal and external factors. The influence of social, cultural and family backgrounds significantly impacts how adolescents resolve their identity crisis. Through movies such as Is There a God? It's Me, Margaret, we can see how teenage characters struggle to find their true selves, often caught between the expectations of others and the need to understand who they really are. Therefore, a comprehensive approach to understanding this quest for identity is crucial to expanding the field of psychosocial developmental theory.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This research uses descriptive-qualitative methods and literature studies, as it emphasizes on describing phenomena in depth and exploring individual experiences. Qualitative research questions are more interested in understanding and interpreting the open socially constructed world, whereas quantitative research seeks to explain, generalize, and predict patterns through variable analysis (King, Keohane, & Verba, 2021; Lim, 2024). Descriptive qualitative method is taken because this research explains what character development is displayed by Margaret in the movie. In addition to qualitative descriptive, this research also includes literary studies because this research was conducted using literary works in the form of films that tell about adolescence and self-discovery.

The discovery and exploration of data conducted with qualitative research methods often shows that not much is written about the participants or research topics. Some characteristics of qualitative research include taking place in a natural setting, using a variety of interactive and humanistic methods, producing new data rather than previous data, and being interpretive (Tisdell, Merriam, & Stuckey-Peyrot, 2025). The data in this study itself is in the form of data with humanistic methods where it focuses on the character of Margaret as the object, especially on the emotions, attitudes and mindsets that occur to Margaret from each scene in the movie.

In this research, there are two kinds of research objects, namely material objects and formal objects. The material object of this research is the movie *Are You There, God? This is me, Margaret's* movie. The script of this movie is written by Judy Blume. The formal object of this research focuses on the Search for Self Identity. Every person on this planet has a sense of self-identity. Without self-identity, a person risks being negatively impacted by the outside world and the people around them. Self-identity helps a person shape themselves, interact, and face challenges in life (Siegel, 2020).

In this research, the author uses library research with observation and recording methods and film documentation for data collection by collecting and selecting primary and secondary data sources that are in accordance with the formulation of the problem and research objectives. This research uses a content analysis approach to investigate the psychosocial growth of the main character in the movie *Are You There, God? It's me, Margaret*. The data were analyzed using Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, focusing on the Identity vs Role Confusion stage, which relates to Margaret's journey of self-discovery as an adolescent. The stages of analysis include data identification, data classification, data interpretation, and data analysis.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### **Margaret's Search for Self-Identity: Between Religion and Physical Development**

Margaret's journey in *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* clearly illustrates the identity crisis faced by many adolescents. The film highlights the major theme of self-discovery, which involves multiple psychosocial aspects, particularly religion and physical development. Through the lens of Erikson's psychosocial development theory, we see how Margaret struggles to define herself amidst the internal and external conflicts she faces. Margaret, caught between two different religious worlds, attempts to find her place in the midst of uncertainty brought on by her family background and social environment.

The dialogue that reveals Margaret's religious confusion shows how she faces a significant dilemma about her beliefs. *"My dad is Jewish and my mom's Christian, so instead of picking which religion I am, uh, they just decided that I wouldn't have one and I can choose when I grow up."* This statement shows how much confusion Margaret experiences regarding her religion. On the one hand, her parents respect her enough to let her choose her path, but on the other hand, this freedom creates a lack of clarity that

disturbs her search for identity. When faced with peers who have clear religious affiliations, she feels isolated and without a defined place.

From Erikson's perspective, this uncertainty suggests that Margaret lacks the clear guidance needed to establish a stable religious identity, indicating role confusion. Her attempts to visit various religious places, such as visiting synagogues with her grandmother and churches with her friends, show her attempts to define her beliefs. However, she became increasingly uncertain instead of finding clarity. This reflects Erikson's opinion that adolescents must resolve their identity disagreements through exploration before coming to believe in a strong sense of self.

This study has similarities with the research conducted by Viinamäki, (2024) which analyzes the character of Margaret in *It's Me, Margaret* (1970), but focuses on different aspects and approaches. The first part compares studies by Viinamäki (2024) and Moona, highlighting how Viinamäki explores religion and patriarchy as oppressive structures that affect Margaret's development, while Moona emphasizes her emotional struggles within this framework. The current study shifts the focus to Margaret's identity crisis, examining her emotional, mental and behavioral responses to challenges. In contrast, the second section delves into Margaret's religious confusion, using specific dialogue to describe her dilemma of being raised without a clear religion and feeling isolated among her peers. This part relates her struggle to Erikson's Identity vs Role Confusion theory, which emphasizes her need to balance between parental expectations and social integration. The first section is comparative and scientific, while the second is more interpretive and psychological, but both underscore Margaret's emotional and mental challenges in navigating identity, religion, and social pressures.

In addition to the religious dilemma, Margaret's physical development is also a key factor in her identity search. She felt behind her peers and was worried about waiting for the signs of puberty, especially breast growth and menstruation. She discussed her discouragement with God “*I've never been so jealous in my entire life, and I hate myself for being jealous. Just please, please let me grow and let me get my period. Let me just be normal and regular like everybody else*”. The dialogue shows Margaret's despair about how physical changes significantly affect adolescents' self-perception. She reinforces feelings of inadequacy as she feels ostracized from her peer group due to her delayed growth.

This phenomenon aligns with Erikson's theory, which emphasizes that adolescent identity is formed through experimentation and the search for an identity that often involves ambivalence toward bodily changes and social roles. The rapid physical changes that are often part of the pubertal experience can exacerbate role confusion, as adolescents must adjust to their new bodies and how they are perceived by others. In this case, Margaret's confusion, both regarding religion and her physical development, creates a complex condition in her search for self-identity.

## Social Conflict and Peer Pressure

Another prominent aspect of Margaret's identity search is peer pressure. In many situations, adolescents tend to evaluate themselves based on how they are seen by their peers, which often intensifies their confusion in finding their true selves. In the context of this film, the pressure from Margaret's friends to have similar experiences, such as wearing a bra or following certain beauty trends, reflects how societal standards significantly influence adolescents in shaping their identity.

An example of dialog is when Margaret has to wear a bra even though she is not physically ready "*I want to get a bra*". This statement shows her strong desire to fit in. This is not because she is comfortable with her physical development, but because her peers have established this as the norm. In another scene, Margaret hesitates and replies, "*I cannot wait to take it off*," when her mother asks, "*How's that feel?*" Although she wants to meet society's expectations, she is also uncomfortable with her changes, as shown in this dialog.

According to Erikson's theory, peers play an important role in adolescent identity formation. In this phase, people seek validation from social groups, which can sometimes result in behaviors that are incompatible with who they really are. Margaret's need to fit in shows the tension between her identity and the expectations of others, a struggle that is common during adolescence.

Margaret exaggerating her romantic experiences is an additional example of peer pressure in this movie. To keep up with her friends' talk of relationships, she lies about kissing a boy. There was a need to write this experience to show how social influences can push teenagers to do things that are contrary to who they really are in order to gain acceptance.

Erikson explained that during the *Identity vs. Role Confusion* stage, adolescents not only struggle to form a personal identity but also try to find their place within social groups. This social conflict, which often involves searching for identity within peer groups, is key to understanding the complex identification process. In Margaret's case, it illustrates how personal and social insecurities can be interconnected, creating powerful tension in the development of adolescent identity. This research is the same as the results in Acheson & Papadima's research, 2023 which found that social influences greatly affect awareness in self-identity.

## The Role of Parents in Margaret's Identity Formation

The role of parents is crucial in adolescent identity formation. In Margaret's case, the tension between freedom of choice and uncertainty about those choices greatly impacts her journey of self-discovery. As a child of parents from different religious backgrounds, Margaret was not given clear guidance on matters of faith. When her parents decided to let her choose her religion when she was old enough, this decision placed Margaret in a very confusing position. On one hand, it provided her with the freedom to choose, but on the other hand, this freedom created an uncertainty that disturbed her search for identity.



The study conducted by Branje et al. (2021) emphasized that parental involvement significantly affects the development of adolescent identity. Their study showed that adolescents are more confident in themselves when parents provide emotional support. Similarly, Maree et al. (2022) asserted that parental participation is crucial in giving adolescents the tools they need to navigate identity formation. However, Margaret's case shows how the inability to get direct guidance from parents can only exacerbate identity confusion. Therefore, although Margaret's experience is in line with Erikson's Identity vs. Role Confusion stage, it also shows a lack of parental involvement. This research reinforces the idea that while independence is important, structured guidance is necessary to prevent identity instability.

### **The Impact of Social and Cultural Environment on Identity Search**

Beyond family influence, external factors such as social and cultural environments also play a significant role in Margaret's search for identity. In societies that heavily emphasize certain values, such as religion, beauty, and gender roles, adolescents often feel compelled to conform to those expectations. The film shows how Margaret tries to find herself in the face of immense social expectations.

This finding is in line with research conducted by Tettey et al. (2023), who found that societal norms and peer influence can exacerbate adolescent identity crisis. They found that social expectations about appearance, behavior and values strongly influence self-identity. Margaret experienced this first-hand, mainly due to physical developmental and relationship pressures from peers. In the same way, Scholte and Van Aken (2020) emphasized that peer validation is crucial for adolescents as it affects their identity development and self-esteem.

In this regard, Erikson's theory of *Identity vs. Role Confusion* is particularly relevant. Erikson stated that adolescents undergo an identity crisis involving the search for values, life goals, and social roles. When social and cultural environments put pressure on adolescents to conform, they often experience greater confusion in their search for identity. In Margaret's case, she is caught between the desire to fit in with her peers and the uncertainty about who she really is.

In addition, Agustina et al. (2023) specifically investigated how social influences played a role in Margaret's identity crisis. They found that societal expectations supported her struggle to define herself. Their results reinforce the argument that societal norms and peer pressure play an important role in adolescent identity formation. Overall, Margaret's experience supports Erikson's assertion that unresolved social conflicts during adolescence can lead to long-lasting identity confusion. This research, in contrast to previous studies, emphasizes that a balance between individual resilience and outside expectations is important for adolescent self-identity formation.

### **CONCLUSION**

From the overall results, this study found three factors causing confusion in analyzing identity. These three factors are religious factors, social pressure and the role

of parents. Margaret's religious confusion became one of the central elements in her search for identity. Coming from a family with different religious backgrounds, this situation reflects Erikson's concept of identity crisis, where uncertainty in forming a religious identity can lead to role confusion in adolescence, when adolescents struggle to reconcile their personal beliefs with outside influences. Regarding these results, this research also contributes to additional literature studies related to Margaret's identity crisis research in the film *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret*. The lack of research on identity crisis is also an advantage of this research, coupled with the existence of theories and explanations related to the factors of occurrence to the development of Margaret's character when problems occur.

This research suggests the need to re-examine the social and psychological identity crisis experienced by Margaret, because there is no research that examines this. In addition, more complex evidence and theories are needed that extend to various aspects of research. In addition, comparative studies could look at similar themes in other literature.

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