

Erikson's Psychosocial Development Studies on Merida in *Brave* Movie

Studi Perkembangan Psikososial Erikson tentang Merida dalam Film *Brave*

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Citation: Anjeliani; Muhajir, F. Erikson's psychosocial development studies on Merida in *Brave* movie. J Riset Naturafarm 2025, 2(1), 31-39. <https://doi.org/10.70392/jrs.v2i1.3139>

Received: 23 April 2025

Revised: 15 Mei 2025

Accepted: 16 Mei 2025

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ISSN: 3047-6208

Abstract

This research aims to determine how the stages of Merida's psychosocial development are represented in the *Brave* movie. This research uses qualitative research as the method and psychosocial development theory by Erik Erikson as the approach. Based on the result of this research, the researcher found that Merida passes five stages of the eight stages of psychosocial development theory, namely: 1) Trust vs. Mistrust is evident as Merida develops a sense of trust and feels comfortable with her mother, 2) Autonomy vs. Shame is evident as Merida develops a sense of independence through playing archery, 3) Initiative vs. Guilt is evident as Merida takes the initiative to pick up her arrow that is off target without asking her parents to accompany her, 4) Industry vs. Inferiority is evident as Merida gains skills through homeschooling with her mother, and 5) Identity vs. Role Confusion is evident as Merida knows her identity and can voice it. In conclusion, Merida is portrayed as a character who undergoes development across various stages of Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory. Her journey from building trust and autonomy to taking initiative, gaining industry skills, and ultimately establishing her identity reflects a complex portrayal of psychosocial growth in the *Brave* movie.

Keywords: *Brave* film; personality development; psychosocial; Erik Erikson.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui bagaimana tahapan perkembangan psikososial Merida direpresentasikan dalam film *Brave*. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode penelitian kualitatif dan teori perkembangan psikososial dari Erik Erikson sebagai pendekatan. Berdasarkan hasil penelitian, peneliti menemukan bahwa Merida melewati lima tahap dari delapan tahap teori perkembangan psikososial, yaitu: 1) Trust vs. Mistrust

terbukti ketika Merida mengembangkan rasa percaya dan merasa nyaman dengan ibunya, 2) Autonomy vs. Shame terbukti ketika Merida mengembangkan rasa mandiri melalui bermain panahan, 3) Initiative vs. Rasa Bersalah terlihat ketika Merida berinisiatif mengambil anak panahnya yang melenceng dari sasaran tanpa meminta orang tua untuk menemaninya, 4) Industry vs. Inferiority terbukti ketika Merida mendapatkan keterampilan melalui homeschooling dengan ibunya, dan 5) Identity vs. Role Confusion terlihat ketika Merida mengetahui jati dirinya dan dapat menyuarakannya. Kesimpulannya, Merida digambarkan sebagai karakter yang mengalami perkembangan melalui berbagai tahapan teori psikososial Erik Erikson. Perjalanannya dari membangun kepercayaan dan otonomi hingga mengambil inisiatif, mendapatkan keterampilan industri, dan pada akhirnya membangun identitasnya mencerminkan penggambaran pertumbuhan psikososial yang kompleks dalam film *Brave*.

Kata Kunci: Film *Brave*; perkembangan kepribadian; psikososial; Erik Erikson

1. INTRODUCTION

Humans are influenced by the environment they live in, including society and culture. This interconnected relationship between humans, society, and culture is reciprocal and develops as humans reach adulthood. An individual's personality is shaped by both internal and external factors, such individual experiences, family background and social interactions. These interactions are essential because humans are social beings and cannot live without other people [1]. The relationship between humans and their social interaction has the link with Erikson who put forward a psychosocial theory that discusses the importance of the social environment for individuals. Erikson's involvement with Sigmund Freud's educational institutions made him learn a lot about psychosexual theory. He is categorized as a neo-Freudian expert, because Erikson's views are an expansion of Freud's theory [2]. Erikson's psychosocial theory posits that social environments play a crucial role in shaping individual personalities.

Newman & Newman (2020) [3] explain that the terms psychosocial refers to both psychological and social factors; the link that exists as an individual interacts with the social environment which affects the psychological or emotional of the individual. Meanwhile, according to Erikson, psychosocial development is the formation of a person's identity as seen through a social and psychological lens, and it refers to how a person's mentality changes as a result of social interactions throughout their lives [4].

First, Trust vs. Mistrust. During the trust vs. mistrust, newborns until a year old baby interactions with caregivers, especially from the mother, play a crucial role in shaping a child's personality. Warmth, closeness, and continuity provided by the mother can help the baby develop a sense of trust in the world and the people around them. During this stage, babies tend to display behaviors of trust or mistrust. They will trust familiar individuals, such as their parents, and show discomfort around strangers. This highlights the importance of early interactions and relationships in shaping a child's sense of trust.

Second, Autonomy vs. Shame. During the autonomy vs. shame stage, which begins at around two until three years old, children start to develop their independence. This is a stage marked by the development of personal control over physical abilities through independent activities such as standing, walking, and playing. If children do not succeed at this point, they may experience feelings of shame. Parents must encourage and support their children's efforts to promote independence and confidence. This stage sets the foundation for a child's sense of autonomy. This time, children begin to demonstrate their talents by moving more actively, such as picking toys that they enjoy playing with. These skills show children's independence or autonomy. **Third, Initiative vs. Guilt.** At this age around three to five years old, children enter the initiative vs. guilt stage, where they start to develop the crucial skill of taking initiative. Initiative is an ability that

allows children to face challenges with confidence and enthusiasm, fostering both physical and emotional growth. It enables them to confidently tackle challenges and become more relaxed, active, and judgmentally bright. At this stage, children begin to mature in their motor skills and ability to take action, explore, and initiate activities. In this stage, there is a tendency for children to control and take the lead during play. **Fourth, Industry vs. Inferiority.** Children at the age of five to twelve years old enter the industry vs. inferiority stage. It is a stage when the children start to focus on learning and developing their skills. Attention, energy, tools, and activities were previously completely focused on playing. Then the next focus is shifting toward knowledge mastery. They become eager to learn about their surroundings, but they may face challenges due to limited knowledge and skills. At this stage, children may feel inferior if they begin to lose confidence in their abilities. Parents must help their children work hard during this period to prevent feelings of inferiority. **Fifth Identity vs. Role Confusion,** Children in the twelve to nineteen are transitioning into teens and going through an identity-searching phase. This stage marks the transition from childhood to adulthood, as adolescents realize their inherent traits, values, beliefs, goals, and preferences. They start taking control of their lives, forming plans for the future, and seeking to understand and define their identity. The role of parents is crucial in guiding adolescents to find their identity during this period. Adolescents face various distractions and obstacles in their quest for self-discovery, and parents must actively support and guide them during this period. **Sixth, Intimacy vs. Isolation.** During this stage, individuals aged twenty to forty years old are ready for close relationships and are capable of making commitments. In this stage, individuals are preparing to integrate their identity with others and tend to form deeper connections with other people. Individuals at this stage appear to be in a relationship, forming connections, working, and even sharing their experiences with others. They also learn to overcome their fear of losing their ego, which means being willing to invest in close relationships, sexual partnerships, and friendships. Avoiding these experiences due to fear of losing ego could lead to feelings of isolation. **The next stage, Integrity vs. Stagnation,** this stage happens between the ages of forty and sixty-five. At this stage, individuals help the younger generation grow and do well. Paying attention to the next generation and contributing to their well-being is a key aspect of generativity, which manifests as involvement and a desire to contribute. It involves a sense of purpose and a desire to make a meaningful impact on the world, especially by guiding the next generation. Failing to enrich this stage might lead to a sense of stagnation. **The last, Ego Integrity vs. Despair,** Ego integrity means feeling complete after overcoming life's challenges. This includes feeling confident about finding meaning in life, caring about others, accepting the aging process, and respecting different cultures. This stage lasts until age sixty-five, during which older adults face physical and social losses such as declining health, loss of work, and the passing of loved ones. The result is a sense of completeness or despair as people look back on their lives. Success in previous life stages leads to satisfaction, while unresolved issues can lead to despair.

The application of the psychosocial theory is very useful in literary analysis under the lens of psychology of literature theory. The link between psychology and literature is about the study of the mental conditions of authors, characters, and readers of literary works [5]. Since film as semi-textual genres in literary studies, this study explores psychosocial development in the film entitled *Brave*. This film, a collaboration between Disney and Pixar, vividly portrays the stages of psychosocial development. The main character, Merida, faces a conflict that is characteristic of these stages. *Brave* tells the story of Merida, a Scottish princess who defies traditional royal expectations. Unlike other princesses, Merida rejects the idea of an arranged marriage and rebels against her mother's attempts to control her. Merida's disappointment coincided with her search for identity during adolescence. As she becomes aware of her inherent qualities and desires, her overprotective and authoritarian mother's restrictions lead her to rebel. This shift in Merida's psychosocial development highlights the impact of social and environmental factors on her personality.

Merida undergoes conflicts at various stages of psychosocial development. Initially, she exhibits good psychosocial development, fostering trust in her mother and enjoying the comfort that her mother gave her. However, as she matures, her mother's attempts to steer her toward princess behaviour stifle her freedom, leading to feelings of disillusionment and defiance. This defiance marks a pivotal shift in Merida's psychosocial development, transforming her into a "rebellious" child who challenges her mother's authority. These experiences highlight the profound influence of social and

environmental factors on an individual's personality and development. Given the issues mentioned previously, the researcher highlights psychosocial development as a key concern.

This study can help the readers understand and raise awareness how the social environment plays an important role in individual development, especially the family, which is the initial place for children or individuals to learn about emotions and social issues. As mentioned in the *Family Dynamic* article, the importance of knowing two conflicting psychological tendencies either positive or negative—affects each stage. How social interaction, especially in a family can have positive effects, such as a child who has appropriate morals, or a familial conflict can have negative effects, such as having difficulty controlling themselves (Jabbari and Rouster, 2022). This study aims to identify Merida's stage of psychosocial development and explain the influence of social environmental factors on her personality

2. METHOD

This research uses qualitative research. Qualitative research is a method used to investigate and interpret the meaning that people or groups connect to a social or human event [6,7]. In this research, the researcher uses Erikson's psychosocial development theory as the approach. This theory defines the development of an individual's personality from both social and psychological views, describing how a person's personality changes as a result of social interactions throughout their life [4]. Then, according to Patton and Cochran, qualitative research is distinguished by its objectives, which have to do with comprehending a particular element of social life, and its methodologies, which mostly provide words rather than numerical data for analysis [8].

This theory helps to explain Merida's psychosocial development in the *Brave* film. Merida's personality is developed by how she is treated and affected by others in various social environments, especially her family. Source of the data of the research are taken from the 2012 film *Brave*. While the data comes in the form of words, conversations, sentences, or scenes from the *Brave* film that depict Merida's actions. These data collections can be analyzed by using Erikson's psychosocial development theory. Then Data Collection can be done by gathering the data in a few steps. First, the researcher watched the whole *Brave* film, and identified the data from the dialogue, the script, related scenes, and conducted library research. Next, the researcher took notes on the data that related to Merida's character, specifically her psychosocial development stage. Lastly, the researcher took notes of the information obtained from Merida's narrative, conversation, or depiction that fit the criteria. Besides, in Data Analysis, selection and concentration on the raw data are the initial stage that will be more specific once the researcher has gathered phrases, dialogues, or pictures that illustrate Merida's personality development. The second step is displaying the data. The researcher arranges and maps the data that is relevant to the theory being applied. The third step is concluding. After the data has been selected and categorized in such a way, the conclusions are drawn.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In this part this research presents the findings and discussion of the psychosocial development of the main character, Merida. In the *Brave* film, the researcher found some stages of psychosocial development in Merida. The following provides the analysis and explanation.

3.1. Findings

3.1.1. Trust vs. Mistrust

During this stage, infants begin to form the foundation of trust or mistrust in their interactions with the people closest to them, particularly their parents. Consistent and nurturing care helps infants develop trust. For instance, when a mother consistently fulfills her child's needs by feeding, comforting, and communicating with the infant, the child learns that their environment is trustworthy.



Fig. 1 Merida was hugged by her mother because she was afraid of the sound of thunder
Queen Elinor: Oh my brave wee Lassie, I'm here. **I'll always be right here.**

In the film scene, Merida hugs her mother after getting scared by the sound of thunder. In her mother's dialogue, "*I'll always be right here,*" makes Merida believe that her mother will always be there for her. It makes her feel calm and comfortable. Through Merida's actions, it's clear that she trusts her mother. Merida's immediate hug illustrates Merida's trust in her mother, as her mother has been a positive influence and provided affection and comfort. Merida feels trust because her mother shows her love and support.

3.1.2. Autonomy vs. Shame

Children in this stage embark on a journey to learn and gain independence. This stage is when children realize that their actions are their own, and after earning the trust of their caretakers, they start to assert their autonomy. Autonomy, in this case, can be in the form of the child's ability to gain control over their muscles, desires, environment, and self.



Fig. 2 Merida learns archery for the first time

Merida : Can I shoot an arrow? (Pick her father's large bow) Can I? Can I? Can I? (She falls and laughs because the bow is too large for her)

King Fergus : Not with that. Why don't you use your very own? (Give her a small bow) Happy birthday, my darling!

The scene of Merida when she expresses her desire to shoot an arrow displays her determination to be independent. The dialogue "*Can I shoot an arrow? Can I? Can I? Can I?*" demonstrates her desire for learning and independence. Merida's pursuit of autonomy is further demonstrated by her actions when she learns to master the bow. With her father's support,

Merida learned to be independent with it and control herself through this training, learning how she positions her hands when pulling the bow and gains control over her actions and surroundings.

3.1.3. Initiative vs. Guilt

At this stage, children start to develop initiative and creative thinking skills. When parents take the time to understand and respond to their questions and support their play activities, children are more likely to show more initiative.



Fig. 3 Merida takes initiative to find her arrow

In this scene, Merida demonstrates her initiative by taking action to help her parents by discovering an off-target arrow. She independently ventures to the edge of the forest to retrieve the arrow without asking for any assistance. This act aligns with Merida's passion for archery, which her parents' support. It is also evident in her enthusiastic quest for her arrow, showcasing her sense of initiative. Her enthusiastic expression and delight upon finding the arrow, and her parents' subsequent smiles and appreciation for her initiative, highlight that she is capable of developing her initiative without feeling guilty.

3.1.4. Industry vs. Inferiority

The industry vs. inferiority stage happens during the school years. During this stage, children typically transition from spending most of their time playing to becoming more focused on learning activities and tools. As they venture into the school environment, they begin to focus on acquiring knowledge and intellectual abilities.



Fig. 4 Merida learns the maps of the kingdom

Queen Elinor: **A princess must be knowledgeable about her kingdom**

Merida also experiences this shift. Merida's shift from playing games such as hide and seek and archery to engaging in learning activities, such as studying maps and the geography of her kingdom, exemplifies this transition. Here, Queen Elinor acts as a teacher, and Merida is homeschooled with her mother. Queen Elinor guides Merida through lessons about the kingdom's areas and domain. It is evident through Merida's action of paying attention to her mother, who teaches her during this lesson and sits with stacks of books that support her learning. It highlights how she acquires knowledge and develops intellectual abilities.

3.1.5. Identity vs. Confusion

In the identity vs. role confusion stage, adolescents start to develop a strong sense of identity, recognizing their unique traits and abilities, as well as their likes, dislikes, and future aspirations. They gain a sense of taking control of their lives. During this stage, parents should guide their adolescents' talents and interests, allowing them to develop their own identities instead of imposing their notions of what is "good" without considering the adolescent's opinion.



Fig. 5 Merida delivers a speech

Merida : I've been to a conference with the queen. It was an alliance forged in bravery and friendship, and it lives to this day. I've been selfish. I tore a great rift in our kingdom. There's no one to blame but me. And now I know that I need to amend my mistake and mend our bond (looking at the Queen at the end). And so, there's the matter of my betrothal. I've decided to do what's right and... (notices Queen Elinor trying to stop her) breaks tradition. (Merida then says, according to what Queen Elinor is miming)

Merida : **My mother, the Queen, feels in her heart that I... That we... be free to write our own stories, follow our hearts, and find love in our own time.**

In this scene, Merida initially hesitates to discuss her engagement. Despite initial disagreement with her mother, through her speech, Merida can voice her opinion and demonstrate her determination to pursue what she truly wants. Although Queen Elinor initially forced her will, in the end, she ultimately acknowledged that everyone possesses their own interests, including her daughter Merida. She then supported Merida to pursue her passions. Empowered by her mother to follow her heart and create her path, Merida gained confidence and faced her suitors and clans with a genuine smile. Her expression revealed her happiness and relief at being able to express her thoughts and opinions. Merida, as a princess, was able to embrace her love for archery and the activities she enjoyed, finding her love without pressure from any side. Merida can speak out and reveal her true self.

3.2. Discussion

Merida undergoes five out of the eight stages of psychosocial development proposed by Erik Erikson. These stages are trust vs. mistrust, autonomy vs. shame, initiative vs. guilt, industry vs. inferiority, and identity vs. role confusion. During the trust vs. mistrust stage, Merida successfully builds trust with her mother, as seen when she seeks comfort in her mother's hugs when afraid of thunder. Merida shows a sense of trust and comfort with her mother's affection. In the autonomy vs. shame stage, Merida learns to be independent by practicing with her bow and mastering its use. So, her independent learning through archery demonstrated autonomy.

In the initiative vs. guilt stage, was evident as she took the initiative to retrieve her off-target arrow while practicing archery without parental assistance. Merida takes the initiative to find her arrow without asking for her parents' help, showing her ability to make decisions independently. During the industry vs. inferiority stage, Merida engages in learning activities, homeschooling and learning various skills with her mother. Demonstrating her capability to follow lessons well and not feel inferior. In the identity vs. role confusion stage, it was apparent as Merida rebelled against her mother's wishes to assert her identity. Merida voices her opinion and principles, refusing to conform to her mother's wishes and suitors. Merida does not go through the last three stages of intimacy vs. isolation, generativity vs. stagnation, and ego integrity vs. despair, as the film ends and concludes when she is around 18 years old, and these stages are not represented in her actions or dialogues. This result highlights the influential role of social interactions, particularly within the family, in shaping an individual's psychosocial development.

4. CONCLUSION

To sum up the research, the character Merida passed five out of the eight psychosocial stages. These stages include trust vs. mistrust, autonomy vs. shame, initiative vs. guilt, industry vs. inferiority, and identity vs. role confusion. Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, personality goes through eight phases, each of which is marked by a unique crisis or conflict that needs to be resolved for healthy development. These stages span the entire lifespan, starting from infancy to old age. A healthy personality and the development of fundamental values are the outcomes of successfully completing each stage, whereas difficulties later in life and a detrimental effect on one's sense of self can arise from failure. Psychosocial theory seems very applicable in studying the personality of the character Merida in *Brave* film. The way individuals are treated in social surroundings, such as the family and society, have a profound impact on their personality, emotions, thought processes, and moods. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for fostering awareness about the impact of social environments on individual development. Therefore, this study is one example of the personality formation process that can be influenced and shaped by family and social interactions. Thus, this study demonstrates an example of a literary work that showcases the ideas of literary psychology.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION: Anjeliani was responsible for data collection and analysis, while Fatimah Muhajir contributed by analyzing the data, reviewing the manuscript, and preparing supporting articles to reinforce this paper.

FUNDING: This study received no external funding.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: –

CONFLICT OF INTEREST: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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