

Article

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**Identity crisis in adolescents experienced by
the main female character in *Moxie* movie**

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Abstract

Moxie is a movie directed by Amy Poehler based on the novel of the same name, written by Jennifer Mathieu. This movie is about the main female character, a young girl called Vivian, who is in the process of finding her identity. This paper aims to analyze the identity crisis experienced by Vivian and shows the reader that an identity crisis is common in adolescence. This thesis uses Erik Erikson's concepts on identity crisis. The focus is on the symptoms, causes, effects, and solution of identity crisis. The writer uses library research to collect relevant data and qualitative research to analyze the data. After conducting the analysis, the results show that Vivian faces various events at school and home. She experiences role confusion, discomfort, and emotional uncertainty, meaning that she experiences an identity crisis that usually occurs in adolescents as a transition process from childhood to adulthood. However, she finally can overcome her identity crisis.

Keywords: identity crisis; adolescence; Erik Erikson, *Moxie* movie

1. Introduction

Every human being is created to have an identity. Identity is a self-structure characteristic or mindset inherent in each individual and makes individuals distinguishable from others (Marcia, 1980: 153). However, in some cases, individuals experience problems with their identity, like identity crisis. Identity crisis is more often experienced by adolescents, because this is the stage where adolescents make decisions about issues related to their identity (Erikson, 1968: 128). Furthermore, identity is an important aspect that distinguishes every individual, but adolescence is often a time of identity crisis due to the ongoing process of self-discovery and self-determination. When specific issues cause an identity crisis, it will produce symptoms in adolescents.

Symptoms in adolescents are seen when they are faced with the social environment. Erik Erikson stated that adolescents grow and develop, they face psychological changes within themselves and experience a crisis characterized by general symptoms, such as questions about their role as adults, discomfort in dealing with social life in transition, stereotyping, and testing the loyalty of others. On the other hand, this identity crisis can be severe if it does not get early diagnosis and appropriate treatment since the adolescents can become delinquent and experience long term psychological problems (1993: 261-262). Adolescents experience inner turmoil at this stage, which causes them to

question their role and identity as future adults. This uncertainty often leads to confusion, social discomfort, and, ultimately, an identity crisis.

An identity crisis occurs when adolescents are curious about existence and life. They are seeking different social roles that match their self-image to build their final identity in adulthood. During this period, adolescents are required to explore their choices and commit to them (Erikson, 1968: 129-130). Meanwhile, Baumeister, Shapiro & Tice stated that identity crisis occurs from individual internal factors due to changes in situation, such as retirement, death of a close person, divorce and other significant life changes experienced by the individual (1985: 409). Therefore, if a person in their teens experiences a divorce of their parents, they will face increased problems in adjusting to circumstances in their life (D'Onofrio & Emery, 2019: 100).

Effects are the result of environmental interaction relationships that influence emotions and cognitive processing. Good mental health will increase positive effects and minimize negative effects on oneself (Tomkins, 2008: 3-4). The effects of the identity crisis can influence oneself and society. If the environment supports someone who is experiencing an identity crisis, then they have the opportunity to be able to rebuild the lost identity and develop self-conception, values, beliefs, and goal determination (Erikson, 1968: 16). The effect of a crisis can also affect the development of their personality, because personality is a dynamic organization in an individual that comes from a psychological system that determines a person's personality behavior and thoughts to change through strong motivation (Hurlock, 1976: 124). Environmental interactions that affect emotions and cognitive processes influence the effects of an identity crisis. Good mental health can enhance positive effects and reduce adverse effects. A supportive environment allows individuals to rebuild their identity and develop self-concepts, values, beliefs, and life goals. This process greatly influences personality development, as personality is a dynamic psychological system influenced by motivation.

After experiencing an identity crisis, adolescents will find a solution or success in getting through the crisis. Adolescents who successfully overcome the identity crisis can make commitments and form a healthy identity, they clearly understand who they are and their goals in the future (Erikson, 1968: 158). Meanwhile, according to James Marcia, identity achievement is when an individual manages to find purpose, trust, and commitment. Individuals are already able to make decisions in life, accept themselves, and feel a stable identity (1980: 161-162). Adolescents who successfully pass the identity crisis can make commitments, understand themselves, and form a healthy identity.

This article will focus on a film entitled *Moxie* directed by Amy Poehler. The aim is on the main female character, Vivian, who experiences an identity crisis. The analysis will be about the symptoms of Vivian's identity crisis, the cause of Vivian's identity crisis, the effects of Vivian's identity crisis, and the solution of Vivian's identity crisis.

2. Methods

Method of collecting data used in this article is the library research method. In library research, data can be accessed via the internet or can directly find the sources in the library (Owens & Elliot, 1998: 34). This article also uses qualitative methods in which qualitative data presents complex data in specific cases and focuses on real-life phenomena (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014: 11). Data refers to collecting and combining information from various sources such as numbers, words, pictures, videos, audio, and concepts (Given, 2008: 185). In this article, some digital data are used to support the analysis, such as the *Moxie* movie from Netflix with a long duration of 1:51:42 directed by Amy Poehler. Besides, other data is from books, articles, eBooks, journals, etc.

3. Results and Discussion

The focus of this section is to analyze the identity crisis experienced by Vivian, the female main character in *Moxie* movie. In order for the analysis to be coherent, after a short description on Vivian,

the discussion is about the symptoms of Vivian's identity crisis, the causes of Vivian's identity crisis, the effects of Vivian's identity crisis, and the solution of Vivian's identity crisis.

3.1. Vivian Carter

Vivian, the female main character, is an ordinary teenage girl, quiet, and has only one friend named Claudia. Vivian has long blonde hair and pale white skin. She grows up as the only child in an incomplete family. Her parents' divorce a long time ago and now she lives with her mother, named Lisa. Vivian is also an introverted person. It can be seen from her dialogue with Lisa:

Vivian : Hey, you are home late.
Lisa : I had dinner after work. That is cute, what is that?
Vivian : This? It's nothing (Moxie, 2020: 18:26-18:41).

From the dialogue above, it can be seen that Vivian avoids answering the question. She is not honest when Lisa asks her about the drawing of stars and hearts on her hand. Vivian thinks that if she tells that it is part of Moxie (the feminist movement she creates), Lisa may not be pleased and tell her not to do anything weird.

Vivian also prefers to avoid conflict. If she faces a problem, she would rather ignore it than give a response. This happens when she and Lisa are talking about the bad behavior of Mitchell Wilson (the bully and the golden boy at school). Vivian says, "You are so dramatic, Mom. Mitchell is fine, all right. It's all good" (Moxie, 2020: 10:42-10:45). It continues when Lisa argues about how to arrange shopping items with the cashier at the supermarket, Vivian prefers to leave rather than interfere. "I'm gonna wait in the car" (Moxie, 2020: 11:01-11:02). This shows that Vivian wants to make her life peaceful and considers small problems as unimportant things.

Her quiet and introverted personality also makes her a low-profile student at school. The students call her "The most obedient girl" (Moxie, 2020: 24:34). They think Vivian is a student who does not have any problems, even though she is never active in school activities like joining a club or organization. However, her personality and school life changes after she starts an anonymous feminist club named Moxie. Vivian becomes a teenager who often takes issues because she cannot stand seeing her friends suffer from bullying and injustice, especially girls (Moxie, 2020: 25:55).

3.2. The Symptoms of Vivian's Identity Crisis

Vivian's identity crisis has several symptoms. Each symptom will be discussed briefly supported by relevant quotations and pictures from the film.

3.2.1 Question about Future

In facing a crisis, teenagers will often question everything in their lives and their roles as adults in the future, even some of them will also be stuck on these questions. Vivian is experiencing this symptom since she has to face her essay on an interesting topic. Vivian feels that question is very difficult to answer and makes her confused so that she does not know what to fill in. It can be known when she talks about that question with Claudia, her friend. "Hey, what you gonna choose for the essay? Because that's a very stressful question" (Moxie, 2020: 05:09). Vivian always repeatedly writes and deletes her answer, then keeps getting stuck in her essay questions. In that case, she also subconsciously questions her values and goals of life in the future, so that even a simple question has influenced her mind and life, leading Vivian to find out more about the meaning and aspects of life around her.

3.2.2 Vivian's discomfort with herself

The identity crisis makes Vivian uncomfortable with herself. It is because she has to adapt to her new environment as a leader of the feminist movement, which requires her to face even more people than before. Not to mention that she is required to listen to the problems of female students and participate in solving them, so this gives Vivian a hard time. This impacted on her emotions and personality. She becomes more sensitive when dealing with problems and easily frustrated when everything never goes well (Moxie, 2020: 01:20:56). Vivian has not been able to adapt to the changes in her life after creating a feminist movement called Moxie. She is unable to handle and respond properly to every problem that occurs, so in the end Vivian can only make conflict to vent her frustration to the people around her. Vivian does not realize that her attitude is negatively impacting the relationships with those around her and damages the trust she has in people who have supported her like Seth Acosta, her boyfriend. It can be seen in their dialogue,

Vivian : I'm sorry I've been under a lot of pressure lately.
Seth : Have you? Really? Seems like you've just been doing reckless shit and letting other people take the blame for you... I've done nothing but support you. I don't deserve to be your punching bag. Maybe you're not who I thought you were (Moxie, 2020: 01:33:24-01:33:50).

The dialogue above shows Seth's disappointment to Vivian. He thinks that Vivian's behavior goes too far and hurts the people around her. Seth wants Vivian to know that the pressure she is experiencing is not an excuse to hurt others because the people who have supported her do not deserve to be her vent.

3.2.3 Stereotyping her Ideals

The next symptom occurs when Vivian stereotypes her mother, Lisa, as her role model for running Moxie. She thought that Lisa is a strong and cool woman. Vivian considered that she is capable of being a feminist activist like her mother and created a stereotype that all women are strong, free, and no less than men. She wants all women to be like her mother, who is able to fight patriarchal culture and bullying after reading a book that said, "Because I believe with my whole heart, mind, and body. The girls constitute a revolutionary soul force that can and will change the world for real" (Moxie, 2020: 21:24). Vivian thought that being a feminist leader is easy and all the girls in her school would follow her. Unfortunately, after running Moxie, Vivian realizes that the stereotype she has made is wrong and Moxie does not run as it has been imagined. Vivian gets irritated because she is different from Lisa and cannot be a good leader. Vivian blames Lisa for everything that happens because she is the one who is considered to be the beginning of Moxie's existence, as seen in the dialogue:

Lisa : What is Moxie?
Vivian : It's a feminist club I start
Lisa : You start the feminist club?
Vivian : Yeah, and it's all your fault. I mean, I only started Moxie because you made me believe I was like strong or something but I'm not that kind of person (Moxie, 2020: 01:31:18-01:31:30).

The dialogue above shows that Vivian is frustrated and blames other people for running away from her problems. This also shows a lack of direction and role from Lisa as a parent in building a responsible attitude to Vivian who is still looking for an identity.

3.2.4 Seeking for Loyalty

In the *Moxie* movie, there are several times when Vivian seems to seek the loyalty from those around her. During her identity crisis, Vivian needs someone to support her psychologically and also believe in her, but she cannot get that from Lisa and Claudia as the people closest to her. Vivian actually gets this trust from her boyfriend, Seth. Vivian feels confident in Seth because he is the only person who knows her secret identity, as shown in picture 5.1 using two shot shows when Seth accidentally finds out Vivian sneaking into school in the morning to distribute Moxie's flyers in the bathroom.



Picture 5.1 [46:39]
Seth meets Vivian in the
school



Picture 5.2 [01:21:23]
Seth helps Vivian run
Moxie



Picture 5.3 [01:30:00]
Vivian says bad things to
Seth and John

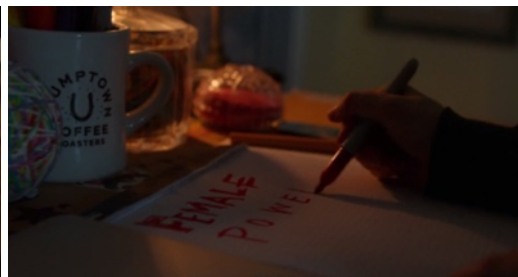
Over time, they become close and form a relationship. Seth also helps Vivian run Moxie, as can be seen in picture 5.2 using a medium shot showing when Seth accompanies Vivian to make Moxie flyers. Unfortunately, Vivian's trust does not last long when Seth is seen getting along with John, Lisa's co-worker. Vivian feels hurt because Seth becomes close to someone she does not like. Vivian immediately expresses her frustration by saying bad things to Seth and John in the middle of dinner, as shown in the picture 5.3 using medium close-up shot. This shows how Vivian is afraid to be alone, she feels anxious when people stay away and no one supports her.

3.3. The Causes of Vivian's Identity Crisis

The identity crisis that occurs to Vivian arises after she imitates her mother who used to be a feminist activist. This is a form of Vivian's search for identity which leads to confusion about the role she takes. It starts when she has to fill out an essay form for college on a topic of interest. The problems arise when she does not have any special talents or things she likes, and this makes Vivian confused about what topics suit her personality. In the midst of this search, Vivian accidentally finds Lisa's feminist rebel items that are neatly stored in a room. It can be seen in picture 6.1 which uses a medium close-up shot that shows Vivian takes out Lisa's feminist belongings in a suitcase, and then she reads the books from the suitcase.



Picture 6.1 [20:33]
Vivian finds Lisa's suitcase



Picture 6.2 [26:24]
Vivian makes Moxie flyers

Vivian is curious and interested with Lisa's feminist movement. She feels inspired to do the same thing after seeing that no one dares to face the bullying experienced by Lucy and the other students. Vivian finally imitates Lisa as a feminist rebel to fight the bullying and the patriarchal culture at her school, which can be seen in picture 6.2 uses a close-up shot to show Vivian creating flyers filled with anti-patriarchal speech and uplifting slogans that copy from Lisa's books. She named the movement Moxie.

This imitation influences Vivian to face her identity crisis because she has to adapt different life that is opposite to her personality. Vivian experiences two different identities, as a cowardly girl who is afraid of getting into trouble and as a feminist leader who must dare to voice anti-patriarchy. Vivian also defrauds her friends by pretending to be Moxie's supporter to cover up her true identity rather than reveal who she is. This makes Vivian exhausted because she has to play two different roles at the same time. Therefore, Vivian begins to think of her life as a coward which is a far contrast to Lisa who is brave and firm (Moxie, 2020: 43:48). On the other hand, this anonymous identity makes Vivian feel alone and find it difficult to endure the problems she has to face because no one knows her existence to help her psychologically (Moxie, 2020: 01:20:06).

Another factor of Vivian's identity crisis occurs due to the pressure after her parent's divorce. She lost a support figure to help build her personality. Every day, Vivian feels lonely because there are no ones who could rely on and respond her feelings.



Picture 6.3 [19:51]

Vivian looks at her childhood photos

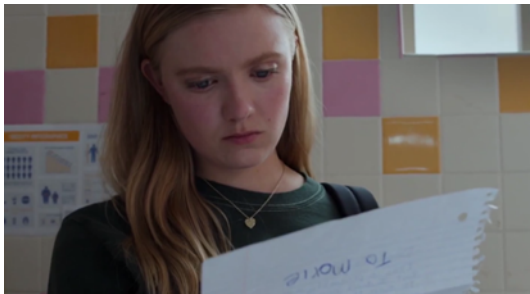
In this movie, Vivian looks close to her father. She misses her father who is always there for her, this is shown in picture 6.3 using close-up shot to show that Vivian looks at her childhood photos with her father. She also misses having an intact family as before.

The divorce has an impact on Vivian's life which is still going through a transition period. Her life turns out to be directionless and she experiences an identity crisis. Vivian does not get guidance from her parents in her growth and development process. She is through all of these alone. The feeling of loneliness is reflected when she argues with Lisa, "... and none of it is working, and no one is helping me, and I'm all alone in this...Why isn't dad spending Christmas with me, mom?" (Moxie, 2020: 01:31:32-01:31:45). This sentence shows how Vivian feels frustrated by her loneliness all this time when she should still have got attention and love from her parents. Vivian also still needs the role of her parents who direct her to plan a future in order to avoid confusion over her own role and identity. Lisa's figure as a mother and role model cannot give what Vivian needs. The poor quality of communication between the two of them and the busy schedule does not give Lisa time to be closer to Vivian.

3.4. The Effect of Vivian's Identity Crisis to her Personality

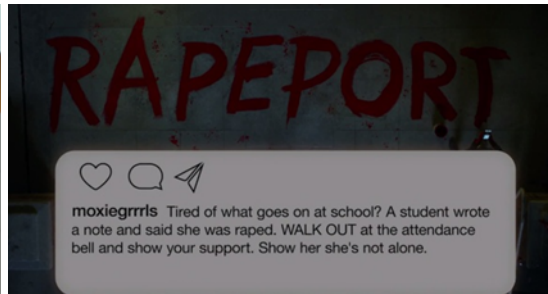
The identity crisis experienced by Vivian affects her personality. Previously she was an introverted girl who was always hiding herself in anonymous identity to become someone who is brave and not afraid to uphold justice. Previously, Vivian is afraid of doing something that gets her into trouble. She is not confident in herself and could not make good decisions because of the lack of support. It is proven when she tries to put flyers in the girl's lavatory, "Oh, my god! This is stupid, what am I doing?" (Moxie, 2020: 28:20). This indicates that Vivian has difficulty letting go of her cowardly personality.

After Vivian faces several obstacles when running Moxie, she finally finds a way out of her identity crisis. She wants to accept herself and to change to be a better person. It starts when Vivian finds the letter in the girl's lavatory. An anonymous person wrote a letter confessing that she had been a victim of Mitchell Wilson's rape as shown in picture 7.1 using medium shot. The victim is a female student at Rockport. After reading the anonymous letter, Vivian helps her by spreading the rape case on the internet and destroying Shelly's best headmaster's trophy as a form of rebellion against injustice at school. It is proven in picture 7.2 using close-up shot to show large 'Rapeport' letters written by Vivian using red paint.



Picture 7.1 [01:34:15]

Vivian found anonymous letter in girl's lavatory



Picture 7.2 [01:35:34]

Vivian uploads the rape cases to the internet

This shows that the identity crisis experienced by Vivian has developed into positive effects. Vivian has a strong motivation and makes herself develop, that motivation is obtained by Vivian from her friends who are always there without her realizing it. Vivian's great desire to uphold justice in her school also makes Vivian discover values, beliefs, and goals that used to be absent in her.

3.5. Solution of Vivian's Identity Crisis

After experiencing an identity crisis that makes Vivian have to face many problems in herself and from the environment around her, Vivian finally finds out who she is. She makes a commitment to the decisions she chooses. Vivian has a goal to become someone who is useful to the people around her without being afraid of uncertainties. This happens after Vivian bravely gives herself up to be expelled from school because she is the founder of Moxie. Picture 8.1 using a medium shot shows when Vivian stands up in the middle of a crowd of students saying that she is the founder of Moxie and asks students to speak out against injustice at school.



Picture 8.1 [1:37:30]

Vivian stands among the crowd

This also shows that Vivian manages to get out of the crisis that she is experiencing by choosing her new identity as a leader of the feminist movement and leaving her exploration period of her identity. Vivian is committed to determining which identity will be her final identity in adulthood. She will live as a girl with a strong and courageous personality owing to her friends who have supported her and her mother, Lisa, who has accepted her choice (Moxie, 2020: 01:41:45-01:41:05).

5. Conclusions

Moxie is a movie directed by Amy Poehler based on the novel of the same title written by Jennifer Mathieu. It tells about the problems of Vivian Carter in high school after she imitates her mother's identity, the opposite of her quiet personality. Vivian, who is unable to adjust to two different identities, experiences role confusion, which can be seen in how she covers her true identity by being anonymous. After analyzing the *Moxie* movie using Erik Erikson's theory, the writer finds that the main female character, Vivian Carter, is experiencing an identity crisis in adolescence.

Vivian has to face an identity crisis in a modern society that shows ignorance towards each other and a lack of awareness of mental health. This makes Vivian have to go through a period of identity crisis with much pressure and discomfort. She cannot develop herself in an environment that does not understand the difficulties she is experiencing. Furthermore, the role of parents and friends cannot positively support the search for identity. This impacts Vivian in which she becomes directionless in her actions, gets emotional quickly and often conflicts with people around her to overcome her loneliness. Eventually, Vivian can finally get out of her identity crisis which is characterized by accepting a new identity adapted from her mother's identity.

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