

Identity Crisis in Sarah Crossan's Toffee Novel

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine the identity crisis of the main character, Allison Daniel, in novel Toffee by Sarah Crossan. The analysis concentrated on the factors and characteristics of the main character's identity crisis. Erik Erikson's identity crisis theory (1963) is used to analyse the findings of this study. This study was conducted using a qualitative approach. The findings reveal the main character in Toffee experiences identity crisis. Erikson's main identity crisis theory is the stages of development and the factors of identity crisis. Allison is faced with a challenge to discover her identity and the various stages of her life have had both positive and negative impacts on her. While positive experiences can shape her identity in a positive way, negative experiences can hinder her ability to overcome the challenge and lead to negative self-perception. As a result, the main character is torn between the names Toffee and Allison. Moving, feeling unimportant, divorce, and abusive experience are all factors that can contribute to the main character's identity crisis.

Keywords: *identity crisis, its characteristic and factors, Erikson, novel.*

A. Introduction

Adolescence is a period marked by profound self-exploration and identity formation, yet it is also a time of vulnerability and uncertainty. Erik Erikson (1968) posits that during this developmental stage, individuals grapple with the concept of fidelity, seeking to establish a cohesive sense of identity that aligns with their values and aspirations. However, external pressures and internal conflicts often impede this process, giving rise to what is commonly known as an identity crisis.

In "Toffee," Sarah Crossan illuminates the intricacies of identity crisis through the protagonist, Marla, a young girl wrestling with questions of belonging and self-discovery. Against the backdrop of her tumultuous upbringing, Marla embarks on a journey of introspection and growth, navigating the complexities of familial relationships and societal expectations. Through a close examination of Marla's character and narrative arc, this study seeks to elucidate the multifaceted nature of identity crisis and its impact on adolescent development.

Central to the exploration of identity crisis in "Toffee" is the character development of Marla. As the narrative unfolds, Marla grapples with conflicting

emotions and external pressures that shape her sense of self. Crossan masterfully portrays Marla's internal struggles, depicting her evolving understanding of identity amidst familial discord and societal stigma. Through nuanced characterization, the novel provides insight into the challenges faced by adolescents in defining their identities in the face of adversity.

Crossan employs various narrative elements to convey the theme of identity crisis in "Toffee." The use of first-person narration allows readers to intimately experience Marla's inner turmoil, providing a poignant portrayal of her journey towards self-discovery. Additionally, Crossan's poetic prose and vivid imagery immerse readers in Marla's world, evoking empathy and understanding for her struggles. Through these narrative techniques, the novel offers a compelling exploration of identity crisis and its implications for adolescent development.

Sarah Crossan's "Toffee" offers a poignant portrayal of identity crisis, shedding light on the challenges faced by adolescents in defining their sense of self. Through the character of Marla and the novel's rich narrative tapestry, Crossan invites readers to reflect on their own experiences of identity and belonging. By exploring the complexities of identity crisis in "Toffee," this study contributes to a deeper understanding of adolescent struggles and the quest for self-discovery in contemporary literature.

This study aims to address the following research questions:

- How is identity crisis depicted in Sarah Crossan's novel "Toffee"?
- What are the factors contributing to identity crisis in "Toffee"?

This study focuses on literature, specifically the novel "Toffee" by Sarah Crossan, and analyzes the depiction of identity crisis through the lens of character development. The analysis is limited to the exploration of identity crisis using Erikson's theory of identity and fidelity.

This review discusses three related studies on personal identity crisis in fictional characters, which provide valuable insights and theoretical frameworks for the current study.

The first study, conducted by Larasati at Yogyakarta State University (2017), analyzes the identity crisis experienced by Asha in Shilpi Somaya Gowda's "Secret Daughter." Utilizing Erikson's developmental stages theory, Larasati explores Asha's journey as an Asian-Indian adolescent living in America with mixed-race parents. The findings highlight Asha's positive role in navigating her identity crisis, demonstrating her ability to form relationships and trust, and understand others.

The second study, conducted by Mustika at Universitas Negeri Semarang (2019), examines the significance of memory in solving identity crisis in James Dashner's "The Maze Runner." Mustika employs Erikson's theory to analyze the protagonist

Thomas's struggle to form an identity amidst a changing environment and missing memories. The study reveals the pivotal role of recalling old memories in shaping Thomas's new identity.

The third study, conducted by Abu-Samra at Middle East University (2016), compares the identity crisis experienced by Antoinette in Jean Rhys' "Wide Sargasso Sea" and Nazneen in Monica Ali's "Brick Lane." Implementing Erikson's theory, Abu-Samra explores how both protagonists construct their own worlds in marginalized communities based on class, gender, and race. The study highlights the protagonists' resilience in resolving their identity crisis on their own terms.

These studies collectively underscore the common themes of identity crisis and the application of Erikson's theory in fictional characters. However, they differ in focus, context, and outcomes. While Larasati's study emphasizes positive contributions to identity crisis, Mustika's study delves into the role of memory, and Abu-Samra's study examines resilience in marginalized communities.

Furthermore, this review identifies a gap in the literature regarding the identity crisis in "Toffee," the main character of Sarah Crossan's novel. Therefore, the objective of the current study is to apply Erikson's theory to analyze the identity crisis in "Toffee," contributing to the understanding of adolescent struggles in contemporary literature.

B. Method

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to explore the depiction of identity crisis in Sarah Crossan's novel "Toffee." Qualitative research is well-suited for investigating complex phenomena such as identity crisis, allowing for an in-depth exploration of the subject matter within its natural context (Creswell, 2013). Data for this study will primarily consist of excerpts from "Toffee" by Sarah Crossan. Relevant passages depicting instances of identity crisis, as experienced by the protagonist Marla, will be selected for analysis. Additionally, secondary sources such as literary critiques and scholarly articles discussing themes of identity crisis in young adult literature may be consulted to provide supplementary insights. The analysis will focus on character development and narrative elements in "Toffee" to elucidate the portrayal of identity crisis. Specifically, the researcher will closely examine Marla's character arc, her internal struggles, and interactions with other characters. The use of narrative techniques such as first-person narration, poetic prose, and imagery will be analyzed to understand how identity crisis is conveyed in the novel. Themes, motifs, and literary devices employed by Crossan to depict identity crisis will be identified and analyzed in-depth.

C. Findings and Discussion

In this section, the identity crisis depicted in Sarah Crossan's novel "Toffee" is examined, particularly through the character of Allison. The analysis focuses on

various aspects of confusion experienced by Allison, shedding light on the factors contributing to her identity crisis.

1. Allison's Identity Crisis

Allison's identity crisis is portrayed through her confusion regarding her name, sense of belonging, and emotional state. Erikson (1963) suggests that identity crisis involves grappling with significant issues related to one's sense of self, which is evident in Allison's struggles throughout the narrative.

1.1 Confusion

One aspect of Allison's identity crisis is manifested in her confusion regarding her name. According to Erikson (1963), confusion often accompanies identity crisis, particularly during adolescence when individuals are exploring their identities. Allison's uncertainty about her name is illustrated in the text: "Her name is Marla, and to her I am Toffee, though my parents named me Allison" (Crossan, 2019, p. 1). This ambiguity surrounding her name reflects a lack of control over her own identity, as it is defined by external influences rather than her own agency.

Furthermore, Allison's confusion extends to her sense of belonging and emotional state. She expresses feelings of displacement and detachment from her surroundings, evident in lines such as "This is not my home. This is not my room. This is not my bed" (Crossan, 2019, p. 2). This sense of disconnection underscores her struggle to establish a coherent sense of self within her environment.

Moreover, Allison's confusion is compounded by her family dynamics and the uncertainty surrounding her parents' relationship. She grapples with conflicting emotions regarding her father and mother, as depicted in her internal dialogue: "Do you have somewhere to go? ... Who else did I have apart from him?" (Crossan, 2019, p. 8). This internal conflict reflects her struggle to reconcile her familial ties with her own desires and sense of identity.

Additionally, Allison's confusion is evident in her interactions with others, particularly Marla. Despite asserting her real name, Allison finds herself accepting Marla's perception of her as Toffee: "So I stop correcting her, and anyway, I like the idea of being Sweet and hard, a girl with a name for people to chew on" (Crossan, 2019, p. 35). This acceptance of an alternative identity highlights Allison's internal turmoil and her willingness to conform to external expectations.

Allison's identity crisis is characterized by confusion surrounding her name, sense of belonging, and emotional state. Her struggle to assert her own identity amidst external pressures and internal conflicts exemplifies the complexities of adolescence and the quest for self-discovery.

D. Conclusion

In conclusion, the examination of Allison's journey in "Toffee" reveals the profound impact of identity crisis on her teenage years. Allison's struggle to find her place in the world is evident through her conflicts and experiences, including the abuse she endures from her father and the neglect she faces from her parents and school.

Throughout the narrative, Allison grapples with feelings of insignificance and worthlessness, exacerbated by her tumultuous family life and traumatic experiences. The emergence of her alter ego, Toffee, serves as a coping mechanism to navigate her difficult reality and find solace in a new identity.

The factors contributing to Allison's identity crisis are multifaceted, encompassing feelings of neglect, the upheaval of moving, the dissolution of her parents' marriage, and the trauma of abuse. These challenges shape Allison's perception of herself and her struggle to establish a sense of worth and belonging.

Moving forward, it is imperative for future studies to delve deeper into the complexities of identity crisis, exploring its impact on various aspects of adolescent life. Furthermore, examining identity crisis from different perspectives, such as social dynamics among peers, can provide valuable insights into the challenges faced by teenagers in their quest for self-discovery.

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