

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of Study

Popular literature is a form of literary work associated with society's life. According to Fiske (2010), popular literature is created by a less powerful social group, utilizing elements found in the community's social life. Popular literature is characterized as being easily accessible and understandable to various parts of society. According to Singh and Sinha (2019), its high accessibility contributes to its widespread popularity, and, supported by its narrative power, it can capture the attention of readers worldwide. In addition to providing entertainment, popular literature also serves as a reflection of various social phenomena. This is reflected in how popular literature presents diverse forms of social life through media such as novels, highlighting the role of literary works in reflecting and critiquing societal dynamics (Khan, 2021). As times change, popular literature has evolved into various forms, including movies, which have become among the most widely consumed cultural forms and offer significant space for examining social issues, such as how individuals navigate and experience conflicts within their identities.

As a form of popular literature widely consumed by the public, movies play a significant role in representing and communicating social realities to their audiences. As sociocultural institutions, movies tend to generate and

shape identities in accordance with existing norms (Jatuporn, 2023). Unlike other media, movies convey messages not only through language but also through visual elements, narrative structure, and character depictions, making them a powerful medium for representing the complexity of human experience. A movie's visual style helps shape the audience's experience in understanding a character (Chandra & Lakshmi, 2025). Through the characters and stories they present, movies often reflect the real struggles individuals face in society, including social role pressures, societal expectations, and internal conflicts. Kristianto and Wahyuni (2022) explain that characters in movies represent identity conflicts arising from the clash between personal commitments and the social demands surrounding them. In this regard, movies serve not only as a source of entertainment but also as a cultural phenomenon that can be critically analysed to understand how individuals are shaped.

Identity is a distinctive characteristic possessed by every individual or group. Identity is not formed immediately, but rather through a process influenced by personal experiences and social environment. This is because the family environment, friends, school, and society play a crucial role in the formation of individual identity (Pratama et al., 2025). Additionally, Galliher et al. (2017) explain that identity development is a lifelong psychosocial task in which individuals must align various aspects of themselves within a cultural context that shapes societal values and expectations. In the pursuit of the development of identity, a person may

experience various dynamics, including conflict when their identity does not align with the demands of their surroundings. When this happens, tensions arise that can hinder the proper development of identity (Leung, 2021). Identity conflict often manifests as an internally, influencing one's way of thinking, behaving, and acting. This can cause psychological responses such as confusion or anxiety when making conflicting decisions (Carminati & Hèliot, 2022). This conflict becomes increasingly complicated when it relates to sexual identity, particularly a sexual identity that does not fully align with prevailing social norms in society.

This conflict of identity is clearly depicted in the popular movie *Red, White, and Royal Blue* (2023). This movie is adapted from Casey McQuiston's novel of the same title. The movie tells the story of the love affair between Alex Claremont-Diaz, the son of the President of the United States, and Prince Henry of the United Kingdom (Lopez, 2023). The story of these two characters not only portrays a love story between individuals of the same sex but also represents a queer identity amid political pressure, public demands, and conservative values closely aligned with the institution of power. The character of Prince Henry specifically represents an individual stuck between two opposing identities: his identity as a prince and his personal identity as a gay man. Institutional pressure from the monarchy forces him to suppress his personal identity in order to fulfill the social expectations inherent in his position. This situation aligns with Galliher et al. (2017), who state that individuals experiencing identity

conflict often choose to suppress or hide their identity to protect themselves from existing social pressures. It is institutional pressures such as these that make Henry's identity conflict not merely a personal issue but a structural problem deserving of academic examination.

This study uses two theoretical frameworks to conduct an in-depth analysis of the identity conflict experienced by the character Prince Henry. First, Erikson's (1968) theory of psychosocial development, specifically the fifth stage, which addresses identity versus role confusion. This is based on the explanation that, at this stage, individuals experience an identity crisis when they are unable to resolve the tension between the pursuit of self-identity and the demands of their social roles. In a study, Leung (2021) found that identity development for individuals with non-heterosexual identities does not occur only during adolescence. It aligns with Erikson, but it can continue into young adulthood. This may occur due to continuous pressure from the social environment, which hinders full self-acceptance. Second, Butler's (1999) queer theory in *Gender Trouble* will be used as a complementary theoretical framework for the analysis. In that book, Butler explains that gender and sexual identity are not something natural or innate at birth, but rather the result of social performances that are continuously repeated due to demands within cultural and social structures. Although this movie has garnered attention from various audiences, academic studies specifically analyzing the identity conflict of the character Prince Henry remain very limited.

Analyzing the movie *Red, White, and Royal Blue* through Erikson's theory of psychosocial development is essential for understanding the factors that contribute to Prince Henry's identity conflict and how he expresses it throughout the story. Meanwhile, Butler's queer theory serves as a complementary framework to explain how social expectations, heteronormative norms, and performative identities contribute to Henry's identity conflict. Previous research by Nafalitha et al. (2023) examined readers' responses to queer representation in *Red, White and Royal Blue* and found that although most readers responded positively, there were still differences in views regarding the portrayal of queer characters in the story. Furthermore, Darmana et al. (2026) applied Kenney's conflict theory and found that both internal and external conflicts are shaped by social pressures, family dynamics, and the character's public status. In their study, Salsabila & Nugroho (2025) examined identity development using Erikson's Identity Theory in the character Margaret in the movie *Are You There, God? It's Me, Margaret*. The researcher found that Margaret's identity exploration and development were influenced by religious and social pressures from friends, physical development and the roles of parents and the social environment.

Through the literature review conducted by the researcher, no previous study has been found that analyzes the identity conflict of the character Prince Henry in the movie *Red, White, and Royal Blue* using a combination of Erikson's identity theory as the primary framework and Butler's theory

as a supporting framework within the context of popular literature studies. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by examining the factors contributing to Prince Henry's identity conflict and the ways he expresses it throughout the movie.

In conclusion, this study aims to analyze the identity conflict experienced by Prince Henry in the movie *Red, White, and Royal Blue* through Erikson's psychosocial theory, supported by Butler's queer theory. Through the lens of popular literature, this study explores the factors contributing to Henry's identity conflict and how that conflict is expressed in his thoughts, emotions, and actions. Furthermore, the study highlights the role of social expectations, institutional demands, and cultural norms in shaping individual identity.

B. Research Focus

The focus of this study is the identity conflict faced by the character Henry in the movie *Red, White, and Royal Blue*, with particular focus on the factors that lead to the conflict's formation and the ways in which it is expressed throughout the story. The character Prince Henry serves as a subject of study for analyzing identity conflict in a literary context, drawing on identity theory and queer theory.

C. Research Questions

The research questions of this study are:

1. What factors contribute to Henry's identity conflict in the movie *Red, White, and Royal Blue* from a psychosocial perspective?

2. How is Henry's identity conflict expressed in the movie *Red, White, and Royal Blue* from a psychosocial perspective?

D. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is:

1. To analyze the factors that contribute to Henry's identity conflict in the movie *Red, White, and Royal Blue* from a psychosocial perspective.
2. To examine how Henry's identity conflict is expressed in the movie *Red, White, and Royal Blue* from a psychosocial perspective.

E. Significance of the Study

This study is expected to help readers and researchers understand how identity conflicts are portrayed in popular literature. Furthermore, this study is also expected to provide insight into how social expectations, cultural norms, and environmental pressures can influence the emergence of identity conflicts. The movie *Red, White, and Royal Blue* is the object of study, and Prince Henry is the subject. This study offers insight into how identity conflicts can arise when personal desires, social roles, and environmental demands come into conflict.

In addition, this study is expected to contribute to the study of popular literature, particularly in the analysis of characters and identity conflicts, by applying Erikson's psychosocial theory, supported by Butler's queer theory. This study is also expected to serve as a reference for English Education students in developing critical thinking skills and the ability to analyze literary works. This is particularly relevant when analyzing popular

literature, understanding characters, internal conflicts, and the influence of the social environment on the developing of individual identity. Furthermore, this study aimed to serve as a reference for prospective teachers to better understand the importance of the social environment in supporting the positive and stable development of students' identities. Moreover, this study is expected to serve as a reference for future researchers interested in examining the relationship between identity, social pressure, and character portrayals in popular media through the perspectives of literary or cultural studies.

F. Definition of Key Terms

1. Identity, Conflict, and Concealment

Identity is a distinctive characteristic possessed by every individual or group. Identity is shaped by personal experiences, social environment, and interactions with society. Identity is often related to how individuals understand and describe themselves. During development, individuals may experience identity conflict when there is a mismatch between their true selves and social expectations. This situation can affect how individuals choose to express or conceal their identity within their social environment.

2. Movie

Movies are a kind of audio-visual medium that presents various stories through moving images, dialogue, and other visual elements. Movies are part of popular culture that is easily accessible to the general

public. In addition to serving as entertainment, movies sometimes act as a medium for conveying various social phenomena occurring in society. Through plot, characters, and visuals, movies are able to illustrate the experiences and journeys undertaken by the characters. Therefore, movies are often used as subjects of study in literary and cultural research

3. Red, White and Royal Blue

Red, White and Royal Blue is a romantic comedy movie adapted from the novel of the same name by Casey McQuiston. The movie tells the story of the relationship between the son of the President of the United States, Alex Claremont-Diaz, and a member of the British royal family, Prince Henry. The movie not only presents a romantic story but also highlights various social issues related to identity and environmental pressures. This movie has received widespread attention from the public. Therefore, it can be analyzed as part of popular literature that represents social phenomena in popular media.

4. Psychosocial Theory

Psychosocial theory is a theory of human development proposed by Erik Erikson (1968). This developmental theory unfolds in eight stages, each involving a developmental crisis that shapes personality. One of the most important stages in this theory is Identity versus Role Confusion. At this stage, individuals try to develop a stable identity by integrating personal values with social expectations. If an individual

overcomes this challenge and forms a stable identity, they succeed; however, if they are unable to complete this stage, they will experience an identity conflict.