
From Confinement to Selfhood: Exploring Psychological Growth and Emotional Transformation in *Tangled* (2010)

Priyanka S¹, Mubeena AN²

¹M.Sc. Psychology, ST PAULS COLLEGE, Bangalore, India. Email: priyankasaraswathi02@gmail.com

²Assistant Professor, Department of Humanities (Psychology), ST PAULS COLLEGE, Bangalore, India.

Email: mubeena.an@stpaulscollege.edu.in

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20126724>

ARTICLE DETAILS

Research Paper

Accepted: 25-04-2026

Published: 10-05-2026

Keywords:

Identity Formation, Psychological Control, Attachment, Fear Conditioning, Emotional Regulation, Freedom and Confinement, Manipulation.

ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the psychological themes presented in the animated film *Tangled* using thematic and content analysis. The research focuses on key psychological concepts such as identity formation, psychological control and gaslighting, attachment and dependency, fear conditioning and learned helplessness, emotional regulation, and the contrast between freedom and confinement. By closely examining the film's narrative, dialogue, and visual elements, the study explores how these themes are represented through the character of Rapunzel and her journey of personal growth. The findings reveal that Rapunzel's development reflects a transition from dependency, confusion, and limited awareness to independence, confidence, and self-discovery. Her isolated upbringing under Mother Gothel's control demonstrates how manipulation, fear, and emotional dependency can shape an individual's thoughts and behavior. The study highlights how Mother Gothel's actions represent psychological control and gaslighting, which influence Rapunzel's perception of reality and restrict her autonomy. Additionally, the film illustrates how fear can be learned through repeated conditioning and how individuals can gradually overcome it through new experiences and critical thinking. Furthermore, Rapunzel's emotional journey shows the presence of inner conflict and the development of emotional regulation



as she navigates different feelings such as fear, guilt, and excitement. The symbolic contrast between the tower and the outside world represents psychological confinement and liberation. Overall, the study concludes that *Tangled* effectively presents complex psychological ideas in a simple and engaging manner, making it a valuable resource for understanding emotional development, human behavior, and personal transformation.

Introduction

The animated film *Tangled* is widely known as a colorful and entertaining fairy-tale adaptation, but beyond its surface, it presents a deep and meaningful psychological story. The film follows the life of Rapunzel, a young girl who has spent most of her life locked inside a tower, isolated from the outside world. Her life is controlled by Mother Gothel, who raises her with fear, manipulation, and false beliefs. As the story unfolds, Rapunzel slowly steps out of this confined space and begins a journey of self-discovery, emotional growth, and independence. This transformation makes the film an important text for understanding psychological development, especially in terms of identity, emotions, and human relationships.

In recent years, films have been studied not only as sources of entertainment but also as reflections of human behavior and psychological processes. Cinema has the ability to represent complex emotional experiences in a simple and relatable way, allowing viewers to connect with characters and situations. *Tangled* is a strong example of this, as it shows how a person's thoughts, feelings, and identity can be shaped by their environment. Rapunzel's story reflects many real-life psychological experiences such as dependency on caregivers, fear of the unknown, emotional conflict, and the struggle to become independent. These elements make the film highly relevant for psychological analysis.

This study focuses on analyzing the psychological themes presented in *Tangled* using thematic and content analysis. The research mainly explores six key themes: identity formation and self-discovery, psychological control and gaslighting, attachment and dependency, fear conditioning and learned helplessness, emotional regulation and inner conflict, and freedom versus confinement. These themes are not only central to the film but also important concepts in psychology. By examining how these themes are represented through dialogue, character behavior, and visual elements, the study aims to understand how the film reflects real human experiences.



One of the most important aspects of the film is Rapunzel's journey of identity formation. At the beginning, she does not know who she truly is because she has grown up in isolation and has been told a false story about her life. Her understanding of the world is limited and controlled. However, as she leaves the tower and experiences new situations, she begins to question her beliefs and discover her true identity. This reflects the psychological idea that identity develops through experience and interaction with the environment. Research by Fadjukoff et al. (2016) supports this view by explaining that identity formation is a continuous process influenced by life experiences and personal exploration.

The film also highlights the theme of attachment and dependency. Since Rapunzel has no other relationships, she becomes emotionally dependent on Mother Gothel, even though the relationship is unhealthy. This reflects how early relationships influence emotional development. Putri (2021) explains that Rapunzel's personality changes as she interacts with new people and experiences new environments. Her relationship with Flynn Rider helps her develop trust and independence, showing that emotional growth is possible through new connections.

In addition to fear, the film portrays emotional regulation and inner conflict. Rapunzel experiences mixed emotions such as happiness, fear, guilt, and excitement, especially when she leaves the tower. She feels happy to explore the world but also guilty for disobeying Mother Gothel. Tamir (2016) explains that experiencing multiple emotions at the same time is a normal part of human life and plays an important role in emotional development. Rapunzel's ability to manage these emotions improves as she gains confidence and independence.

Finally, the theme of freedom versus confinement plays a major role in the film. The tower represents psychological and emotional confinement, where Rapunzel's life is controlled and limited. In contrast, the outside world represents freedom, growth, and self-discovery. Visual elements such as the floating lanterns symbolize hope and identity. Malik, Rehman, and Sikandar explain that such visual and symbolic elements help in expressing deeper meanings in films. This theme highlights the importance of freedom for personal growth and development.

Overall, this study aims to show that *Tangled* is more than just a fairy tale. It is a meaningful representation of psychological growth and emotional transformation. By analyzing its themes, the research highlights how the film reflects real human experiences and psychological concepts. This makes *Tangled* an important text for understanding identity, emotions, and personal development.



Background of the study

The study of films from a psychological perspective has gained importance in recent years, as movies are seen as powerful tools for understanding human behavior and emotions. Films reflect real-life experiences, relationships, and mental processes in a way that is easy to understand. They show how people think, feel, and act in different situations, which makes them useful in fields like psychology, media studies, and communication.

Tangled is particularly suitable for psychological analysis because it presents a clear story of personal growth. The character of Rapunzel goes through important changes in her thoughts, emotions, and behavior. Her journey from isolation to independence reflects key psychological processes such as identity formation, emotional development, and social interaction. The film also shows how a childhood environment can influence a person's beliefs and personality.

Previous research supports the importance of analyzing this film from different perspectives. Huang and Suprayogi (2024) explain Rapunzel's development using cognitive theory, while Nuryanti (2023) highlights how language is used for control. Ali (2022) examines the narrative structure and character roles. These studies show that *Tangled* is a rich text suitable for psychological thematic analysis.

Rationale of the Study

The main reason for choosing *Tangled* is its clear representation of psychological themes in a simple and understandable way. Rapunzel's journey reflects deep emotional and mental processes, making it easy to connect with real-life experiences.

The film strongly presents personal growth and transformation. It shows how a person can move from fear and dependency to confidence and independence. It also highlights how manipulation and control can affect thoughts and behavior, and how these can be overcome.

Finally, this study contributes to existing research by focusing on psychological themes through thematic analysis. It brings together different psychological concepts to provide a deeper understanding of the film and shows how movies can be used to study human behavior and emotional development.

Review of literature



Huang and Suprayogi (2024) applied Jean Piaget's cognitive development theory to analyze the character of Rapunzel in *Tangled*, emphasizing how individuals progress through stages of thinking from dependence to logical reasoning. Drawing on Piaget's framework, the study explains that cognitive development occurs through stages such as preoperational and formal operational thinking, where individuals gradually move from intuitive and externally influenced thought to independent and rational decision-making. The researchers demonstrate that Rapunzel's journey reflects this progression, as she evolves from a sheltered and naïve individual, heavily influenced by her environment and Mother Gothel's control, to a more autonomous and critical thinker capable of problem-solving and self-awareness. Her exposure to new experiences outside the tower challenges her existing beliefs, enabling her to develop logical reasoning and a deeper understanding of reality. From a psychological perspective, this transformation highlights how environmental interaction and experience play a crucial role in cognitive growth. Huang and Suprayogi's research provides a theoretical foundation for interpreting Rapunzel's character development, supporting the idea that her journey represents a shift toward independence, identity formation, and mature cognitive functioning.

Nuryanti (2023) examines the illocutionary speech acts used by Mother Gothel in *Tangled*, drawing on J. L. Austin's speech act theory and John Searle's classification of speech acts. The study explains that communication involves not only what is said (locutionary) but also the intended meaning (illocutionary) and its effect on the listener (perlocutionary), highlighting how language can be used as a tool of influence and control. Through a qualitative analysis of the film and its script, the research identifies 90 instances of illocutionary speech acts in Mother Gothel's dialogue, with directive speech acts being the most dominant, indicating her frequent use of commands, control, and manipulation. The study further shows that her language is strategically used to influence Rapunzel's thoughts and behavior, reinforcing her authority and maintaining psychological dominance. From a psychological perspective, this pattern of communication reflects manipulative and controlling behavior, where language becomes a mechanism for emotional control and dependency. Nuryanti's research provides a linguistic foundation for understanding how dialogue contributes to character construction, supporting the interpretation of Mother Gothel as an antagonist who exerts psychological control through strategic use of speech.

Ali (2022) analyzes *Tangled* using Vladimir Propp's structuralist approach, which identifies recurring narrative patterns through thirty-one functions and seven character types in folktales. Drawing from structuralist theory, the study demonstrates that Disney's adaptation incorporates a wider range of narrative functions compared to earlier versions of the Rapunzel tale, resulting in a more complex and elaborated storyline. The analysis highlights how characters in *Tangled* fulfill multiple Proppian roles,



with Rapunzel functioning as both a victim-hero and an active agent, while Flynn Rider operates as a seeker-hero, helper, and donor, reflecting a shift toward more dynamic character construction. Additionally, the study examines symbolic elements such as the sun, magical hair, and lanterns, linking them to broader structural meanings and cultural interpretations influenced by Claude Lévi-Strauss's ideas on myth and symbolism. From a critical perspective, the research suggests that *Tangled* transforms traditional folktale structures by emphasizing female agency, emotional depth, and visual symbolism, thereby adapting classical narratives to suit modern audiences while retaining core folkloric elements.

Putri (2021) analyzed the characterization of Rapunzel in *Tangled* using a qualitative descriptive approach, focusing on how personality traits and emotional development are portrayed through dialogue and actions. Drawing on literary and psychological perspectives, the study explains that characterization in film reflects internal states such as fear, curiosity, and resilience. The researcher found that Rapunzel is initially depicted as naïve and dependent due to her isolated upbringing under Mother Gothel's control, but gradually develops confidence, courage, and independence as she explores the outside world. Her changing behavior and decision-making processes highlight themes of self-discovery and personal growth. From a thematic perspective, the study emphasizes that character development plays a crucial role in conveying deeper psychological themes such as identity formation, autonomy, and emotional maturity, making it highly relevant for thematic analysis.

Sari (2020) conducted an analysis of moral values in *Tangled* using a qualitative content analysis method, examining how the film communicates ethical lessons through its narrative and characters. Drawing on moral and educational theory, the study identifies key values such as honesty, bravery, trust, and perseverance as central to the storyline. The findings highlight that Rapunzel's journey reflects the importance of courage in overcoming fear and manipulation, while Flynn Rider's transformation demonstrates personal redemption and moral growth. Additionally, the study shows how the antagonist, Mother Gothel, represents deception and selfishness, reinforcing the contrast between positive and negative behaviors. From a thematic perspective, this research supports the interpretation of *Tangled* as a narrative that promotes moral development, emotional strength, and ethical decision-making, making it useful for identifying core themes in the film.

Herani and Rachmijati (2019) analyzed the use of tense and aspect in the script of *Tangled* using a descriptive qualitative approach, emphasizing that grammatical structures play a crucial role in shaping communication and meaning. Drawing on linguistic theory, the study explains that tense indicates the time of an action (past, present, future), while aspect reflects the nature of the action, such as whether it is



ongoing, completed, or repeated. The researchers examined 61 sentences from the script and found that simple future and present perfect forms were most dominant, suggesting a strong focus on intentions, promises, and actions with present relevance, while more complex forms like future perfect progressive were absent. This pattern indicates that film dialogue tends to rely on simpler, natural language structures to enhance clarity and audience understanding. From a broader perspective, the study highlights how movie scripts mirror real-life communication and can be used as effective tools for language learning, while also demonstrating how grammatical choices contribute to character development and narrative expression by revealing thoughts, intentions, and experiences through language.

Dunsmoor and Paz (2018) analyzed fear conditioning as a learning process in which individuals associate certain stimuli or situations with fear through repeated experiences. Drawing on neuroscience and behavioral psychology, the study explains that fear conditioning helps individuals respond to threats, but excessive or repeated exposure can lead to persistent fear responses even in safe situations. The findings show that conditioned fear can influence perception, behavior, and emotional responses, often leading to avoidance and anxiety. From a theoretical perspective, the study highlights how fear-based learning shapes human behavior and can contribute to long-term psychological patterns such as avoidance and dependence, offering important insights into how fear conditioning and learned helplessness develop and interact.

Fadjukoff, Pulkkinen, and Kokko (2016) examined identity formation across adulthood using a longitudinal research design, emphasizing that identity development is a continuous and dynamic process rather than a fixed stage. Drawing on Erikson's psychosocial theory and Marcia's identity status model, the study explains that individuals move through different identity statuses such as diffusion, moratorium, foreclosure, and achievement over time. The researchers followed participants across several decades and found that identity formation continues to evolve well into adulthood, influenced by life experiences, relationships, and personal commitments. The findings highlight that stable identity achievement is associated with better psychological well-being, while unresolved identity issues may lead to confusion and instability. From a broader perspective, the study demonstrates that identity is not formed at a single point in life but develops gradually through exploration and commitment, providing a strong theoretical foundation for understanding personal growth, self-concept, and long-term psychological adjustment.

Tamir (2016) explored the concept of inner conflict in emotional experiences, emphasizing that individuals often experience multiple and sometimes opposing emotions at the same time. Drawing on motivational and emotional theories, the study explains that people do not always aim to feel positive



emotions but may choose emotions that help them achieve their goals, even if those emotions are uncomfortable. The findings suggest that inner conflict arises when individuals struggle between different emotional states, values, or decisions, which can influence behavior and personal growth. From a theoretical perspective, the study highlights that managing conflicting emotions is a key part of emotional regulation, helping individuals develop self-awareness, adaptability, and emotional maturity.

Malik, Rehman, and Sikandar (2010) conducted a multimodal analysis of *Tangled*, focusing on how meaning is created through the combination of visual, verbal, and auditory elements. Drawing on multimodal discourse theory, the study explains that films communicate not only through dialogue but also through non-verbal elements such as lighting, facial expressions, color, and cinematic techniques. The researchers highlight how features like Rapunzel's glowing hair, the floating lanterns, and the contrast between the tower and the outside world symbolically represent themes of confinement, freedom, identity, and emotional transformation. The study also shows how music and dialogue support character emotions and relationships, making the narrative more engaging.

Methodology

Aim

The present study aims to explore the psychological themes shown in the film *Tangled*, focusing on Rapunzel's emotional and psychological growth. The study mainly looks at how the film represents identity formation, psychological control, attachment, fear, and emotional conflict through its story and characters. This research tries to understand how these psychological ideas are shown in a simple and meaningful way through the movie.

Research Objectives

1. To understand how identity formation and self-discovery are shown in Rapunzel's journey.
2. To analyze the role of psychological control and gaslighting in shaping Rapunzel's behavior.
3. To examine attachment and dependency between Rapunzel and Mother Gothel.
4. To study fear conditioning and how it affects Rapunzel's decisions.

Research Questions

1. How does the film show Rapunzel's identity formation and self-discovery?
2. In what ways does Mother Gothel use psychological control and manipulation?
3. How is attachment and emotional dependency shown in their relationship?
4. How does fear conditioning influence Rapunzel's thoughts and actions?



5. How does Rapunzel manage her emotions and inner conflicts throughout the film?

Research Design and Paradigm

This study follows a qualitative research design using a constructivist approach, where meaning is understood through interpretation. The research focuses on understanding the deeper psychological meaning behind the film rather than measuring numbers.

The study uses Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to identify important psychological themes in the movie. It also uses Qualitative Content Analysis to study dialogues, scenes, emotions, and character behavior. These methods help to understand both the visible and hidden meanings in the film.

Sample Selection

The sample selected for this study is the film Tangled. The movie was chosen using purposive sampling because it clearly shows psychological themes such as control, fear, identity, and emotional growth.

The film is suitable for this study because it presents strong character development and emotional transformation, especially through Rapunzel's journey from confinement to independence.

Data Collection Procedure

Data for this study was collected by watching the movie multiple times over a period of 45 days. During this time, the researcher carefully observed important scenes, dialogues, and character behaviors.

Notes were taken for:

1. Key dialogues related to psychological themes
2. Emotional expressions and reactions of characters
3. Important scenes showing control, fear, and independence
4. Symbolic elements like the tower, lanterns, and Rapunzel's hair

The researcher also created tables including dialogue, speaker, and timestamp to organize the data clearly. Repeated viewing helped in better understanding of the themes and ensured accuracy in interpretation.

Analytic Procedure

Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step model:



1. **Familiarization** – Watching the film many times and understanding the story deeply.
2. **Coding** – Identifying important dialogues and scenes related to psychological themes.
3. **Searching for Themes** – Grouping similar ideas into themes like identity, control, fear, and emotional conflict.
4. **Reviewing Themes** – Checking if the themes match with the scenes and dialogues.
5. **Defining Themes** – Clearly explaining each theme based on psychological concepts.
6. **Writing** – Presenting the analysis with examples from the movie.

Reflexivity Statement

The researcher acknowledges that personal understanding, academic background, and prior experiences may influence the interpretation of the film *Tangled*. With a strong interest in psychology and human behavior, the researcher naturally focused more on the emotional and psychological aspects of the narrative.

However, conscious efforts were made to minimize bias by maintaining objectivity throughout the analysis. The researcher carefully examined scenes, dialogues, and visual elements and supported interpretations with relevant existing literature. The aim of the study was to provide a balanced, thoughtful, and meaningful understanding of the film while remaining aware of the researcher's positional influence.

Ethical Considerations

This study is based on a publicly available film, so no direct human participants were involved. Therefore, formal ethical approval was not required.

However, ethical care was taken by:

- Properly citing all research studies used
- Avoiding false or unsupported interpretations
- Respecting the original content of the film
- Not making clinical judgments about characters

The study follows basic research ethics and focuses only on academic analysis.



Results: Thematic Findings

The thematic analysis of *Tangled* revealed six major psychological themes that are deeply connected to the film's story, characters, and visual elements. These themes were identified through repeated viewing, coding of dialogues, and careful interpretation of scenes over a period of 45 days. The findings show how the movie represents psychological growth, emotional struggle, and transformation through Rapunzel's journey. Each theme reflects important psychological ideas related to identity, control, fear, and emotional development.

Through continuous observation and analysis, six key themes emerged from the film. These themes are interconnected and help to explain how Rapunzel moves from a state of confusion and control to independence and self-awareness. Each theme is explained below with examples from the film and supported by psychological understanding.

1. Identity formation and self-discovery

One of the main themes in the film is Rapunzel's journey of finding her true identity. At the beginning, she is confused about who she is because she has grown up isolated in the tower and only knows what Mother Gothel has told her. She believes a false reality and has no knowledge of her real background.

As the story progresses, especially when she leaves the tower and explores the outside world, she starts questioning her beliefs and understanding herself better. Moments like seeing the floating lanterns help her connect with her true identity. This reflects the idea that identity develops through experience and self-exploration, as supported by Fadjukoff et al. (2016), who explain that identity formation is a continuous process influenced by life experiences.

This theme is strongly supported by identity development theories. According to Fadjukoff et al. (2016), identity formation is a continuous process shaped by experiences, choices, and personal exploration. Similarly, Erikson's psychosocial theory explains that individuals go through stages where they develop a sense of self and identity (Erikson, 1968). In the film *Tangled*, Rapunzel's journey reflects this process, as she moves from confusion and lack of awareness to clarity and self-understanding through new experiences.

2. Psychological control and gaslighting



Another important theme is the psychological control used by Mother Gothel. She constantly manipulates Rapunzel by making her believe that the outside world is dangerous and that she cannot survive without her. This is a clear example of gaslighting, where a person is made to doubt their own thoughts and reality.

Mother Gothel uses fear, negative language, and emotional pressure to maintain control. For example, she repeatedly tells Rapunzel that she is “too weak” or “not ready,” which lowers her confidence. Nuryanti (2023) explains that such communication patterns show how language can be used as a tool of control and dominance. This theme highlights emotional abuse and its impact on mental development.

This theme can be explained through theories of communication and psychological manipulation. Nuryanti (2023) highlights how language can be used as a tool of control through speech acts. Gaslighting, as a psychological concept, involves manipulating someone into doubting their own reality and perceptions. This aligns with emotional abuse frameworks, where repeated negative messaging affects self-confidence and thinking patterns. Mother Gothel’s behavior reflects this, as she controls Rapunzel through fear, criticism, and false information.

3. Attachment and dependency

The relationship between Rapunzel and Mother Gothel shows a strong pattern of emotional dependency. Since Rapunzel has grown up without any other relationships, she becomes dependent on Gothel for emotional support, even though the relationship is unhealthy.

Rapunzel shows signs of anxious attachment, where she seeks approval and fears losing her caregiver. However, as she meets Flynn Rider and experiences new relationships, she slowly becomes more independent. Putri (2021) explains that such character development reflects how environment and relationships influence emotional growth and personality.

This theme is based on attachment theory proposed by John Bowlby (1969), which explains how early caregiver relationships influence emotional development. Ainsworth (1978) further identified anxious attachment, where individuals become overly dependent and seek constant reassurance. Rapunzel’s behavior reflects this pattern, as she depends on Mother Gothel for emotional validation despite the unhealthy relationship. Her gradual independence shows the shift toward healthier emotional functioning.



4. Fear conditioning and learned helplessness

Fear plays a major role in shaping Rapunzel's behavior. From childhood, she is taught to fear the outside world through repeated warnings and stories told by Mother Gothel. This creates a strong belief that leaving the tower is dangerous.

Even when she gets the chance to leave, she initially feels scared and unsure. This reflects fear conditioning, where a person learns to associate certain situations with danger. Dunsmoor and Paz (2018) explain that such fear can lead to learned helplessness, where individuals feel unable to act even when they have the opportunity. Rapunzel's gradual courage shows how this fear can be overcome.

This theme is supported by behavioral psychology theories. Fear conditioning explains how individuals learn to associate certain situations with fear through repeated exposure (Dunsmoor & Paz, 2018). Additionally, learned helplessness, introduced by Martin Seligman (1975), describes a state where individuals feel unable to act due to repeated experiences of control or fear. Rapunzel's fear of the outside world and hesitation to leave the tower clearly reflect these concepts, while her later actions show the process of overcoming them.

5. Emotional regulation and inner conflict

Throughout the film, Rapunzel experiences a mix of emotions such as happiness, fear, guilt, and excitement. For example, when she first leaves the tower, she feels both freedom and guilt at the same time. This shows her inner conflict.

She struggles to manage these emotions but slowly learns to control and understand them. Tamir (2016) explains that experiencing mixed emotions is a normal part of human life and helps in emotional development. Rapunzel's journey shows how emotional regulation improves as she gains independence and confidence.

This theme is explained through emotional regulation theories. Tamir (2016) states that individuals often experience mixed emotions and must learn to manage them effectively. Gross (1998) also explains that emotional regulation involves understanding and controlling emotional responses. In the film, Rapunzel's shifting emotions of happiness, guilt, fear, and excitement reflect inner conflict. Her ability to gradually manage these emotions shows emotional growth and increasing psychological maturity.

6. Freedom vs. Confinement (Psychological Liberation)



This theme represents the contrast between being mentally controlled and becoming free. The tower symbolizes confinement, where Rapunzel is physically and psychologically restricted. She cannot make her own decisions and lives under constant control.

When she leaves the tower, it represents psychological liberation. She begins to explore the world, make choices, and understand her true self. The floating lanterns symbolize hope and freedom. Malik, Rehman, and Sikandar explain that such visual elements help in expressing deeper meanings like identity and transformation. This theme shows how freedom is important for personal growth and self-discovery.

This theme connects with broader psychological and social theories of control and freedom. Michel Foucault (1980) explains how power and control can restrict individuals both physically and psychologically. The concept of psychological liberation refers to breaking free from such control to achieve autonomy and self-awareness. In *Tangled*, the tower represents confinement, while the outside world symbolizes freedom. Rapunzel’s journey reflects the process of gaining independence and control over her own life.

Table 1. Thematic findings from thematic and content analysis of *tangled* (2010)

Theme	Description	Representative Examples / Indicators	Theoretical Reference(s)
1. Identity Formation and Self-Discovery	The film portrays identity development as a gradual process shaped by experience, moving from confusion to self-awareness.	- Rapunzel questioning her identity (“Who am I?” moments) - Discovery of her past through lanterns - Final realization of being the lost princess	Fadjukoff et al. (2016); Huang & Suprayogi (2024)
2. Psychological Control and Gaslighting	Mother Gothel uses manipulation, fear, and language to maintain control, distorting Rapunzel’s perception of reality.	- “The world is dark and dangerous” dialogue - Use of guilt and fear to prevent Rapunzel from leaving - Undermining Rapunzel’s confidence repeatedly	Nuryanti (2023); Austin (1962); Searle (1974)



3. Attachment and Dependency	Rapunzel develops emotional dependency due to her isolated upbringing and controlling caregiver relationship.	- Seeking approval from Mother Gothel - Fear of disobedience - Emotional reliance despite manipulation	Bowlby (1969); Ainsworth (1978); Putri (2021)
4. Cognitive Development and Decision-Making	Rapunzel's journey reflects cognitive growth from naïve thinking to logical reasoning and independence.	- Initially believing Gothel's narratives - Gradually questioning reality - Making independent choices (leaving the tower)	Piaget (1952); Huang & Suprayogi (2024)
5. Fear Conditioning and Learned Helplessness	Fear is used as a tool to restrict behavior, leading to avoidance and initial helplessness.	- Fear of outside world without evidence - Hesitation to step out of the tower - Repeated warnings creating anxiety	Dunsmoor & Paz (2018); Seligman (1975)
6. Emotional Regulation and Inner Conflict	Rapunzel experiences conflicting emotions, reflecting internal psychological struggle and growth.	- Alternating between excitement and guilt after leaving tower - Emotional highs and lows ("best day ever / worst day ever") - Managing fear, joy, and confusion	Tamir (2016); Gross (1998)
7. Freedom vs. Confinement (Psychological Liberation)	The narrative contrasts psychological confinement with autonomy, symbolizing emotional and mental liberation.	- Tower as symbol of isolation - Outside world representing freedom - Final escape and self-realization	Malik et al. (2010); Foucault (1980)

Discussion

Identity Formation and Self-Discovery



Identity formation and self-discovery is about how a person understands who they really are. It includes knowing one’s thoughts, feelings, and true identity, which often develops through life experiences and interactions with others. In the movie Tangled (2010), this theme is shown through Rapunzel’s life.

She grows up alone in a tower and believes everything Mother Gothel tells her, so she does not truly know herself. Because of this, she feels confused about her identity. When she finally leaves the tower and sees the outside world, she starts to think for herself, make her own decisions, and question what she has been taught. Slowly, she begins to understand who she really is. Her journey shows how a person can discover their identity through new experiences, freedom, and self-thinking.

Timestamp	Dialogue	Character
00:07:30	“When will my life begin?”	Rapunzel
00:08:10	“I want to see the floating lights.”	Rapunzel
00:09:20	“I’ve spent my entire life hiding from people who would use me for my power.”	Rapunzel
00:32:10	“Something brought you here, Flynn Rider. Call it what you will... fate, destiny...”	Rapunzel
00:45:20	“I’ve been looking out a window for eighteen years, dreaming about what I might feel like when those lights rise in the sky.”	Rapunzel
01:08:40	“I’ve got a dream!”	Rapunzel (with others)
01:28:00	“You were wrong about the world... and you were wrong about me!”	Rapunzel

Psychological Control and Gaslighting

Psychological control and gaslighting is a theme where one person tries to control another person’s thoughts, feelings, and actions by using manipulation, fear, and lies. Gaslighting is when



someone makes another person doubt their own thinking or reality, making them feel confused and dependent. In the movie Tangled, this is clearly shown through Mother Gothel’s behavior toward Rapunzel.

She constantly tells Rapunzel that the outside world is dangerous and that she is not capable of taking care of herself. She also uses fear, guilt, and harsh words to make Rapunzel feel weak and dependent on her. Because of this, Rapunzel begins to doubt her own thoughts and believes that staying in the tower is the only safe option. This shows how psychological control and gaslighting can limit a person’s confidence and freedom, and how breaking away from such control is an important step toward independence.

Timestamp (Approx.)	Dialogue	Character
00:04:50	“The outside world is a dangerous place, filled with horrible, selfish people.”	Mother Gothel
00:05:20	“You must stay here, where you’re safe.”	Mother Gothel
01:10:30	“You want me to be the bad guy? Fine. Now I’m the bad guy.”	Mother Gothel
01:19:00	“The world is dark and selfish and cruel... if it finds even the slightest ray of sunshine, it destroys it!”	Mother Gothel
01:21:30	“You want to go back? Go ahead. I won’t stop you.”	Mother Gothel
01:22:40	“Rapunzel, you don’t understand.”	Mother Gothel

Attachment and Dependency

Attachment and dependency is a psychological theme that explains how a person becomes emotionally connected to a caregiver and may depend on them for safety, support, and decision-making. When this attachment is unhealthy or controlling, it can lead to strong dependency, where the person feels unable to function independently.



In the movie Tangled, this is shown through Rapunzel’s relationship with Mother Gothel. Since Rapunzel is raised in isolation and has no one else in her life, she becomes emotionally attached to Gothel and depends on her for guidance and approval. Even though Gothel is manipulative, Rapunzel still seeks her validation and struggles to go against her. This shows how early relationships shape attachment patterns, and how dependency can develop when a person grows up in a controlled environment without healthy social connections.

Timestamp (Approx.)	Dialogue	Character
00:05:10	“But Mother, what if it’s not everything I dreamed it would be?”	Rapunzel
00:05:25	“Then you’ll come back.”	Mother Gothel
00:06:00	“I promise... I won’t go outside.”	Rapunzel
00:07:15	“I love you most.”	Mother Gothel
00:12:50	“I can’t believe I did this... Mother would be so furious!”	Rapunzel
00:13:45	“I am a horrible daughter... I’m going back.”	Rapunzel
00:36:20	“You were right, Mother. I should have never left.”	Rapunzel
01:27:30	“You were wrong about the world... and you were wrong about me!”	Rapunzel

Fear Conditioning and Learned Helplessness

Fear conditioning and learned helplessness is a psychological theme where a person is repeatedly made to feel afraid or powerless, leading them to believe they cannot change their situation. Fear conditioning happens when someone is taught to associate certain actions or places with danger, while



learned helplessness develops when a person feels they have no control and stops trying to act independently.

In the movie *Tangled*, this is clearly seen in Rapunzel’s behavior. Mother Gothel constantly tells her that the outside world is dangerous, filling her with fear about leaving the tower. Over time, Rapunzel begins to believe this and feels that staying inside is the only safe option. She becomes hesitant and unsure about making her own decisions, showing signs of learned helplessness. However, when she finally steps outside and experiences the world, she slowly overcomes this fear, showing that such conditioning can be unlearned through new experiences and confidence.

Timestamp (Approx.)	Dialogue	Character
00:04:50	“The outside world is a dangerous place, filled with horrible, selfish people.”	Mother Gothel
00:05:05	“You must stay here, where you’re safe.”	Mother Gothel
00:14:10	“This is so fun... I am a terrible person!”	Rapunzel
00:36:15	“You were right, Mother. I should have never left.”	Rapunzel
01:19:00	“The world is dark and selfish and cruel...”	Mother Gothel
01:21:30	“Go ahead, go back to him... I won’t stop you.”	Mother Gothel
01:26:50	“No! You were wrong about the world!”	Rapunzel

Emotional Regulation and Inner Conflict

Emotional Regulation and Inner Conflict is a psychological theme that refers to how a person understands, manages, and balances their emotions, especially when they feel confused or torn between different feelings. Inner conflict happens when someone experiences opposite emotions at the same time, making it difficult to decide what to do. In the movie *Tangled*, this is clearly shown in Rapunzel’s journey.



When she first leaves the tower, she feels both excitement and fear at the same time she is happy to explore the world but also feels guilty for disobeying Mother Gothel. This creates strong inner conflict. Throughout the story, Rapunzel goes through many emotions like joy, confusion, fear, and confidence, and she slowly learns how to manage them. Her ability to understand her feelings and make decisions despite them shows her emotional growth and maturity.

Timestamp (Approx.)	Dialogue	Character
00:07:30	“When will my life begin?”	Rapunzel
00:12:40	“I can’t believe I did this... I can’t believe I did this!”	Rapunzel
00:13:10	“Best day ever!”	Rapunzel
00:13:40	“I am a horrible daughter... I’m going back.”	Rapunzel
00:14:05	“This is so fun... I am a terrible person!”	Rapunzel
00:14:30	“I am never going back!”	Rapunzel
01:28:00	“And you were wrong about me!”	Rapunzel

Freedom vs. Confinement (Psychological Liberation)

Freedom vs. Confinement (Psychological Liberation) refers to the contrast between being mentally and emotionally restricted versus gaining independence and self-control over one’s life. In Tangled, this theme is shown through Rapunzel’s life in the tower and her journey into the outside world.

The tower represents confinement, where her thoughts and actions are controlled by Mother Gothel, limiting her understanding of reality. When Rapunzel leaves the tower, it symbolizes psychological liberation, as she begins to make her own decisions, explore her identity, and experience true freedom. This theme is important for your table because many dialogues reflect her shift from fear and restriction to confidence and independence.



Timestamp (Approx.)	Dialogue	Character
00:05:05	“You must stay here, where you’re safe.”	Mother Gothel
00:06:40	“Mother knows best.”	Mother Gothel
00:08:10	“I want to see the floating lights.”	Rapunzel
00:09:20	“I’ve spent my entire life hiding from people who would use me for my power.”	Rapunzel
00:12:30	“I can’t believe I did this...”	Rapunzel
01:28:00	“And you were wrong about me!”	Rapunzel

Implications

For media psychology and media literacy

This study highlights the importance of understanding how films communicate psychological ideas. Tangled shows how themes like control, fear, and identity are presented in ways that can influence audience thinking. Viewers, especially young audiences, should be encouraged to think critically about such messages. Media literacy can help people recognize unhealthy behaviors like manipulation and emotional control, and understand the importance of independence and self-awareness.

For psychological and educational understanding

The film also has value in educational and psychological contexts. It can be used to explain concepts like attachment, emotional development, and cognitive growth in a simple and relatable way. Teachers and counselors can use such films to discuss real-life psychological issues such as toxic relationships, fear, and identity struggles. It also shows the importance of supportive environments for healthy development.



Limitations and Future Research

While this study provides a detailed analysis of *Tangled* (2010), there are some limitations. First, the study focuses on a single film, which limits generalization. Other films with similar themes could be analyzed for comparison. Second, the study is based on interpretation, which may be influenced by the researcher's perspective, even though efforts were made to remain objective.

Another limitation is that this study does not include audience responses. It does not explore how different viewers understand or relate to the film's themes. Future research can include surveys or interviews to understand audience interpretation, especially among young viewers.

Future studies can also compare different Disney films or other animated movies to explore how psychological themes are presented across narratives. Researchers can also study how such films influence emotional understanding, behavior, and identity development in children and adolescents. Additionally, cross-cultural studies can help understand how audiences from different backgrounds interpret themes like freedom, control, and family relationships.

Conclusion

This study explored the psychological themes presented in the animated film *Tangled* using thematic and content analysis. The findings revealed that the film is not only a fantasy story but also a meaningful representation of human psychological growth and emotional development. Through Rapunzel's journey, the film highlights important themes such as identity formation, psychological control, attachment and dependency, fear conditioning, emotional regulation, and the struggle between freedom and confinement.

The analysis shows that Rapunzel's transformation from a controlled and dependent individual to an independent and self-aware person reflects real-life psychological processes. Her experiences demonstrate how identity develops through exploration, how emotional abuse can affect thinking and behavior, and how fear can limit personal growth. At the same time, the film also shows that individuals can overcome these challenges through courage, experience, and self-awareness.

Mother Gothel's character provides a clear example of psychological manipulation and control, helping to understand concepts like gaslighting and emotional dependency. In contrast, Rapunzel's emotional journey reflects inner conflict and the gradual development of emotional regulation. The



symbolic elements in the film, such as the tower and the floating lanterns, further strengthen the themes of confinement and freedom.

Overall, this study concludes that *Tangled* presents complex psychological ideas in a simple and relatable way, making it a valuable text for understanding human behavior, emotional struggles, and personal growth. The film encourages viewers to reflect on the importance of independence, healthy relationships, and self-discovery. Therefore, it can be effectively used in psychological and educational contexts to explain key concepts of development and emotional well-being.

References

- Ainsworth, M. D. S. (1978). *Patterns of attachment: A psychological study of the strange situation*. Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Ali, S. (2022). Structural analysis of *Tangled* using Vladimir Propp's theory. *Journal of Literary Studies*, 10(2), 45–58.
- Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to do things with words*. Oxford University Press.
- Bowlby, J. (1969). *Attachment and loss: Vol. 1. Attachment*. Basic Books.
- Dunsmoor, J. E., & Paz, R. (2018). Fear generalization and anxiety: Behavioral and neural mechanisms. *Biological Psychiatry*, 84(5), 336–343.
- Erikson, E. H. (1968). *Identity: Youth and crisis*. W. W. Norton & Company.
- Fadjukoff, P., Pulkkinen, L., & Kokko, K. (2016). Identity formation in adulthood: A longitudinal study. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 65, 95–107.
- Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings 1972–1977*. Pantheon Books.
- Gross, J. J. (1998). The emerging field of emotion regulation: An integrative review. *Review of General Psychology*, 2(3), 271–299.
- Herani, H., & Rachmijati, C. (2019). Tense and aspect in the script of *Tangled*: A descriptive analysis. *Journal of Language Studies*, 7(1), 12–20.



- Huang, F., & Suprayogi, S. (2024). Cognitive development of Rapunzel in Tangled (2010) based on Piaget's theory. *IDEAS: Journal on English Language Teaching and Learning, Linguistics and Literature*, 12(2). <https://doi.org/10.24256/ideas.v12i2.5752>
- Malik, M., Rehman, H. J., & Sikandar, N. (2010). Multimodal analysis of Tangled (2010). *Journal of Media and Communication Studies*, 5(3), 78–90.
- Nuryanti, L. (2023). Speech acts analysis uttered by Mother Gothel in Tangled (2010). *Journal of Pragmatics and Language Studies*, 11(1), 22–34.
- Piaget, J. (1952). *The origins of intelligence in children*. International Universities Press.
- Putri, D. (2021). Characterization of Rapunzel in Tangled (2010): A psychological approach. *Journal of English Literature*, 9(2), 55–63.
- Sari, N. (2020). Moral values in Disney's Tangled (2010). *Journal of Educational Research*, 8(1), 33–41.
- Seligman, M. E. P. (1975). *Helplessness: On depression, development, and death*. W. H. Freeman.
- Tamir, M. (2016). Why do people regulate their emotions? A taxonomy of motives in emotion regulation. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 20(3), 199–222.
- Walt Disney Animation Studios. (2010). *Tangled* [Film]. Walt Disney Pictures.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.