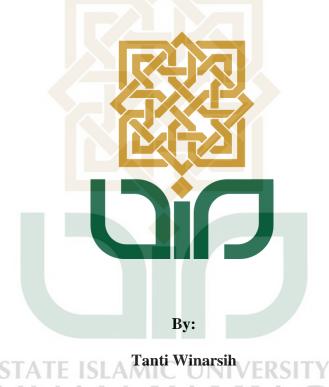# IDENTITY FORMATION OF KAMALA KHAN AS SEEN IN *MS.*

MARVEL (2022)

Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirement for Gaining Bachelor's Degree

in English Department

By:

Tanti Winarsih

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ENGLISH DEPARTMENT

FACULTY OF ADAB AND CULTURAL SCIENCES

SUNAN KALIJAGA STATE ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY

2023

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kami menyatakan bahwa skripsi tersebut sudah dapat diajukan pada sidang Munaqosyah untuk memenuhi salah satu syarat memperoleh gelar Sarjana Sastra Inggris.

Atas perhatiannya, kami mengucapkan terima kasih.

Wassalamu'alaikum Wr. Wb

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IDENTITY FORMATION OF KAMALA KHAN AS SEEN IN *MS. MARVEL* (2022)

By: Tanti Winarsih

ABSTRACT

Ms. Marvel (2022) is a television miniseries about a Pakistani girl born in America who gains superpowers during the process of identity formation. The success or failure in constructing her identity could affect her life as a normal teenager and her path related to the superpower she has. This study aims to find the effect of superpowers on the formation of Kamala Khan's identity. To answer the objectives, this study uses the fifth stage of Erikson's psychosocial development, the theory of identity status by James Marcia, and film theory. This study uses a qualitative method. The results of this study are as follows: (1) Kamala Khan undergoes four identity statuses which mark her identity formation. Those are identity diffusion, identity foreclosure, identity moratorium, and identity achievement. (2) Kamala's superpowers trigger a better coping mechanism for her to overcome the identity diffusion and pushes her to accomplish exploration. Kamala also sees the superpowers as her responsibility based on Islamic values she gets from her parent. The emergence of superpowers indicates American superheroes and values (3) Social supports play role in Kamala's problem-solving related to the exploration of alternatives.

Keywords: *identity formation, identity status, Islamic and American values, social support*

IDENTITY FORMATION OF KAMALA KHAN AS SEEN IN *MS. MARVEL* (2022)

Oleh: Tanti Winarsih

ABSTRAK

Ms. Marvel (2022) adalah sebuah miniseri televisi tentang seorang gadis Pakistan yang lahir di Amerika yang mendapatkan kekuatan super selama proses pembentukan identitas. Keberhasilan atau kegagalan dalam membangun identitasnya dapat mempengaruhi kehidupannya sebagai remaja normal dan jalan hidupnya terkait dengan kekuatan super yang dimilikinya. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengetahui pengaruh kemunculan kekuatan super dalam pembentukan identitas Kamala Khan. Untuk menjawab tujuan tersebut, penelitian ini menggunakan tahap kelima perkembangan psikososial Erikson, teori status identitas dari James Marcia, dan teori film. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif. Hasil dari penelitian ini adalah sebagai berikut: (1) Kamala Khan mengalami empat status identitas yang menandai pembentukan identitasnya. Itu adalah penyebaran identitas, pencabutan identitas, penundaan identitas, dan pencapaian identitas. (2) Kekuatan super yang dimiliki Kamala memicu mekanisme koping yang lebih baik bagi Kamala untuk mengatasi difusi identitas dan mendorongnya untuk melakukan eksplorasi. Kamala juga melihat kekuatan super sebagai tanggung jawabnya berdasarkan nilai-nilai Islam yang ia dapatkan dari orangtuanya. Kemunculan kekuatan super merupakan indikasi dari superhero dan nilai-nilai Amerika (3) Dukungan sosial berperan dalam pemecahan masalah Kamala terkait eksplorasi alternatif.

Kata kunci: *pembentukan identitas, status identitas, nilai-nilai Islam dan Amerika, dukungan sosial*

MOTTO

"*A rose by any other name would smell as sweet*"

Shakespeare

"It wasn't a waste of time. You learned something"

Steve Harvey

DEDICATION

This graduating paper is dedicated to:

English Literature Department

Faculty of Adab and Cultural Science

State Islamic University Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta

And

My parents

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Yogyakarta, January 6th, 2023

The Researcher

Tanti Winarsih

Student ID: 18101050038

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

The appearance of Muslim hero in Western entertainment industry is extremely rare, so when *Ms. Marvel* was first introduced by Marvel Comics almost a decade ago, it got so much attention. It became popular and turned into miniseries. A number of scholars have tried to analyze this production from different angles such as people's reception (Kent, 2015), gender, race and national identity (Cooper-Cunningham, 2020), and so on. However, not many talk about the identity construction of Kamala Khan, the main character, as a teenager.

She is a Muslim Pakistani-American girl living in New Jersey who tries to construct her identity. As an immigrant, Kamala has difficulty defining and adapting herself to the society around her. She has difficulty balancing between her family values as a Muslim immigrant and her desire to be accepted in her school. The formation of Kamala's identity becomes more interesting after she gains superpowers. While she tries to form her identity as a normal teenager, Kamala has to deal with her superpowers which lead her to a new conflict in defining her identity.

Kamala's parents moved from Pakistan before Kamala was born. Kamala has a brother, Aamir, who is the most religious member of Khan's family. Although Yusuf and Muneeba are not as religious as their first child, Kamala's

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parent always reminds Kamala about Muslim and Eastern values in every act of Kamala. She cannot go to the party; she must obey her parent's will; and she must dress modestly. In summary, her parents want Kamala to stay out of the Western culture.

In contrast, Kamala sees Western culture in everyday life. The school environment which Kamala attends is the source of freedom Kamala never experience in her home. Most people in the school are different from Kamala. They are effortlessly blending each other. Although she has two best friends, Kamala still wants to be part of the crowd, which is challenging to be done since she is an immigrant. The people in school see her as something unusual to them, and Kamala realizes it.

Most of the earlier stage in Kamala's identity is that she has low self-esteem when facing the society around her. However, Kamala's personality changes after she gains superpowers. Kamala begins to gain confidence in facing her school. She corrects the misspelled pronunciation of her name. She also dares to greet or interrupt her friends. She does it without the fear of being rejected. Kamala feels that as she has gained superpowers, all problems in her life are solved. Turns out, the emergence of the superpowers leads to a new issue in her formation of identity.

Defining identity is a critical development during adolescence. Erikson, in the psychosocial theory of development, states that every human goes through eight life stages. Humans will face a major crisis at each stage. Each successfully

resolved crisis increases personal and societal competence and lays a better foundation for resolving future crises (Marcia, 1966, p. 110). The fifth stage, Identity versus Role Confusion, is when humans solidify their identities. The fifth stage occurs during the adolescent years. This stage is critical for constructing a sense of personal identity, which will influence a person's behavior and development throughout their life. Failure fosters role confusion and a frail sense of identity, whereas success fosters the ability to be loyal to oneself.

Adolescent identity formation entails ideological and occupational exploration and commitment (Marcia, 1966, p. 155). According to James Marcia, adolescents go through four stages of identity development. They are identity diffusion, identity foreclosure, identity moratorium, and identity achievement. According to Halim (2010, p. 64-65), teenagers must be aware of where they stand in terms of their identity status to understand how they will fit into society in the future because the position of identity is crucial for the development of self-identity.

The identity issue in Western societies might be overwhelming for several people. The challenge of identity can also be more intimidating for numerous immigrant youth. The issue of identity formation is also represented through literature. Film is a valuable tool for young people who are still forming their identities. It provides settings and points of view that they would not otherwise have access to, and it may serve as a window into the larger world. According to Amy Villarejo in Film Studies, film provides us with "ego-ideals" to identify with by the characters on screen, enabling us to live out the gendered and sexual

dramas that psychoanalysis beliefs are the basis of our unconscious formations (Villarejo, 2007, p. 143).

This present study uses *Ms. Marvel* (2022) miniseries' as the object. *Ms. Marvel* (2022) is television miniseries produced by Marvel Studios based on Bisha K. Ali's comic entitled *Ms. Marvel*. Having a strong foundation for defining identity is Kamala's critical task during her adolescent period. Kamala's difficulty in adapting to her environment caused her identity formation to be less developed. When she gains superpower, Kamala thinks all her problems can be solved. However, Kamala has to deal with several issues since she realises that her power has something to do with the origin of the bangle. The emergence of superhero in the Muslim community is something alienating. Instead of giving the community a safe environment, the community and even her mother think that the emergence is putting shame on them.

Ms. Marvel (2022) miniseries' highlighted the identity formation of Kamala Khan, especially concerning her origin. It is different from other superheroes characters of Marvel; Kamala Khan in *Ms. Marvel* (2022) constructs her identity and deals with superpowers in the presence of family. Moreover, as a teenager, Kamala is confused by the new superpowers while she is at the age when normal teenagers struggle to find and construct their identity in everyday life.

The success or failure of finding her identity affected not only Kamala's life as a normal teenager but also the other choices and paths for her superhero

identity for the rest of her life. In this research, using the theory of identity development by Erikson, precisely the concept of identity status by James Marcia, the researcher would explain the identity formation experienced by Kamala Khan before and after the emergence of superpowers. Furthermore, since this study is classified as literary analysis, therefore, the researcher will use the theory of film for supporting analysis of the research.

1.2 Research Question

Based on the background study above, this research is aimed to seek the answer to the question below.

- How does Kamala Khan's superpower ability affect her identity formation process?

1.3 Objective of Study

According to the formulation of the research question above, the objective of the study is to reveal the effect of Kamala Khan's superpowers' ability on her identity formation.

1.4 Significance of Study

The aim of this study is expected to be worthwhile, both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, this research is expected to give insight into the identity

development of *Ms. Marvel* (2022), specifically, the identity formation in the fifth stage of psychological development (Identity vs. Role Confusion) based on Identity Status proposed by James Marcia and the role of social support in identity formation. Practically, the findings of the study are expected to raise people's awareness about the issue of identity formation during teenagers.

1.5 Literature Review

After searching for the research related to this study, the researcher found several papers related to this research. The first one is a graduating paper by Adityo Darmadi (2021) from Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University entitled "Social Power as Seen in Marvel Comic's *Ms. Marvel* (2014)". This paper focused on showing the type of social power used by Kamala Khan and the reason for using the power. The result of this research is the types of Social Power used by Kamala Khan are reward power, coercive power, and legitimate power. Additionally, it is discovered in the study that Kamala Khan uses social power in circumstances where she cannot use physical force, such as when interacting with others who have a close relationship with her.

The second paper related to this study is a thesis proposal by Nurila Azhari from State Islamic University Sunan Kalijaga entitled "Women Language's Features and Their Changes in *Ms. Marvel* Comic". The study's goal is to discover the characteristics of women's language and the changes in characteristics of women's language uttered by Kamala Khan. This study yielded three findings: (1)

Kamala's utterances contain nine out of ten characteristics of women's language. (2) This study reinforces Dell Hymes' speech event theory in its entirety. (3) In Kamala's speech, the researcher notices feature changes in women's language.

The third paper related to this research is a journal by Ashika Prajnya Paramita from Gadjah Mada University entitled "*Ms. Marvel* as Representation of the Struggle for American Identity". This study investigates why this series is essential in Muslim immigrants' struggle to establish themselves as a minority group in the United States. According to the findings of this study, *Ms. Marvel* serves as a means of communication for the under-represented American Muslim community. Furthermore, the acceptance of the new superhero shows that American society is changing and that it is beginning to accept the notion that Muslim immigrants are part of American society.

The fourth paper related to this research is a journal by Winona Landis entitled "*Ms. Marvel*, Qahera, and Superheroism in The Muslim Diaspora" from Miami University. This paper will look at how Ms. Marvel from Marvel Comics, in her most recent incarnation as a young Pakistani Muslim woman, challenges post-9/11 American race and citizenship conventions. According to the findings of this study, when *Ms. Marvel* and Qahera are juxtaposed, this work emerges as a visual digital cultural artifact whose significance is obvious when read in the present political era as a means of revealing and combating racism, xenophobia, and Islamophobia.

This present study is different from the papers above. Although the object of the study is similar, which is Kamala Khan, this study provides Kamala Khan's identity formation as the focus of the research. Based on the related paper, there is still no research that has been done on Kamala Khan using Erikson's Psychosocial Development theory before, precisely the concept of identity status by James Marcia.

1.6 Theoretical Approach

1.6.1 Literature and Social Psychology

Literature and psychology have deep connections in human life. The scientific study of how the actual, imagined, or implied presence of others influences people's thoughts, feelings, and behaviours are known as social psychology or psychosocial (Meiliana, 2020, p. 9). Erikson's psychosocial theory examines how people interact with one another, their social networks, and the larger social systems that surround them (Taifel & Fraser, 1978, p. 22). It also teaches the impact of social factors on a person's growth.

Both literature and psychosocial research focus on the human psyche as their study's subject. The sole factor that distinguishes these disciplines is the object's reality. A psychosocial approach studies people and social situations in real life, whereas literature discusses people and social conditions through literary works. Therefore, a psychosocial approach is significant to be used in this study.

1.6.2 Identity Statuses of Psychosocial Development Stages Theory

The psychosocial development stages theory by Erikson is the most influential theory in psychology which can be applied in the field of literature. Philip R. Newman reveals that Erikson's theory is well recognised for identifying eight primary psychosocial tensions that people must manage throughout their lives (Austrian, 2008, p. 46).

Each of the eight stages has two opposing poles, a positive and a negative. When working on the developmental goal associated with each tension, a person's main psychological effort is to find a sense of equilibrium between these two poles (Syed, 2019, p. 4). Passing through each crisis successfully, requires achieving a healthy ratio or stability between opposing dispositions representing each crisis. This balance is called 'Basic Virtue' or 'Basic Strength'. Meanwhile, suppose a person fails to successfully navigate the psychosocial crisis stage (Karcher & Benne, 2008, p. 203).

Defining identity is an essential development task that individuals face during adolescence. There are two core variables of identity formation; exploration, and commitment (Marcia, 1966, p. 551). According to Brzezińska, exploration is a cognitive and orienting activity that focuses on investigating or acquiring knowledge about the surroundings and their properties, as well as practising in and with them, taking on multiple social roles, and becoming acquainted with new ways of thinking and lifestyles (Glodkowska & Pagowska, 2019, p. 11).

The next step of identity formation is people take on the commitment, making decisions based on their life's demands and requirements, guided by their preferred values. Marcia stated that commitments provide a sense of continuity, help create life goals, and strengthen one's capacity for loyalty to decisions made (Glodkowska & Pagowska, 2019, p. 11).

Furthermore, contemplating the individual coping mechanism with identity formation, Marcia distinguishes four identity statuses. Identity statuses in adolescents are indicative of an identity crisis. Adolescents can transition into multiple identity states at once. They can finish the process without having to wait for an identity status.

1. Identity Diffusion Status

The individuals in diffuse are indicated by low levels of autonomy, self-esteem, and identity. Diffusions are more likely to struggle with adaptation and shyness (Kroger, 2003, p. 213). Identity diffusion status shows that adolescents are unsure of who they are and what they want regarding their education, occupation, religion, or culture.

2. Identity Foreclosure Status

The commitment made by adolescents in the identity foreclosure position to specific roles, beliefs, and or values defines the status. Individual in identity foreclosure status makes their identity decisions too early. The person in identity foreclosure status has acquired a set of values and ideas, but they were typically imparted to them by a parent or other institution (Marcia, 1980, p. 111). There is

little thought processing, introspection, or re-examining of values and beliefs. The individual in this status has eliminated the opportunity to develop a unique identity.

3. Identity Moratorium

The person in moratorium status investigates a range of professions, beliefs, and values. The person is actively seeks for their identity (Marcia, 1980, p. 111). He or she has decided to put off committing to any sense of identity for the time being since they are going through an identity crisis, which is a good thing. This is a positive state that is typically accompanied by high self-esteem. Kroger in Identity Development During Adolescent stated that adolescents in this status are most likely to have formed close friendships Characterised by respect for others' integrity, openness, and lack of defensiveness but have not yet committed to a companion (Kroger, 2003, p. 212).

4. Identity Achievement

After reflecting on and fully processing questions about values and beliefs, adolescents have a strong sense of who they are and want to be. Individuals in identity achievement have gone through a decision-making process and are pursuing their occupation and ideological goals (Marcia, 1980, p. 111). The person has made commitments to a profession, religious beliefs, values, and philosophy, as well as gender roles and personal sexuality. This is a solid position to be in and is associated with high self-esteem. Individuals with identity achievement were able to perform well under stress and use more organized,

rational, and logical decision-making techniques than those with other identity statuses. Individuals who have achieved their identity will be the most open to revealing themselves to others and the most secure attachment styles to their families (Kroger, 2003, p. 211).

1.6.3 Film Theory

Film is audio-visual communication to convey a specific social or moral message to a group of people (Stanley, 2012, p. 231). Like literature, film continuously records and projects the reality that changes and evolves in society onto the screen (Sobur, 2006, pp. 126-127). In this paper, the researcher uses film theory since one of the objects is film.

The first step to understanding film production and reflecting on its meaning is learning mise-en-scene. Mise-en-scene contains elements in front of the camera to be photographed, including first angles and camera action, and second is the cinematography (Sikov, 2010, pp. 5-6). The analysis of mise-en-scene could produce what the meaning might be.

The researcher uses cinematography focused on framing techniques in this paper as support from movie to picture. According to Ed Sikov, cinematography is the standard term that brings together all the entirely photographic components that deliver the images we see anticipated on the screen (Sikov, 2010, p. 38). According to Villarejo, there are seven types of framing techniques.

a. The extreme long shot (ELS), which is the frame of the camera cover a wide area from the figure of a human and the background;

b. The long-shot (LS) in which humans are recognisable but stay overshadowed by the background;

c. The medium-long shot (MLS) in which the human is framed from knees up;

d. The medium shot (MS) human is framed from the waist up;

e. The medium close-up (MCU), the framing is slightly closer and focused from the chest up;

f. The close-up (CU) isolates the portion of the human body, most prominently, the face

g. The extreme close-up (ECU), the framing is focused on the a part of a face.

1.7 Method of Research

1.7.1 Type of Research

The method of research that the researcher uses is the qualitative method. According to Creswell, qualitative research is a method to investigate and understand the meaning individuals or groups attribute to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2009, p. 173). Hayllar and Veal stated that qualitative research methods are concerned with information that contains numbers (Hayllar & Veal, 1996, p. 30). This research uses qualitative research since the focus of this research is the phenomenon of the human issue, specifically identity formation.

1.7.2 Data Sources

The researcher uses primary and secondary data sources. The secondary data sources provide a supportive role in the research (Cresswell, 2007, p. 208). The primary data sources will be taken from the scene in *Ms. Marvel* (2022), including shots and dialogue of the main character Kamala Khan and other characters. The primary data sources will be interpreted and explored deeply using secondary data sources, that is, books by Erik H. Erikson entitled *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (1968) and *Identity and the Life Cycle* (1959). Furthermore, the researcher uses books, journals, articles, and essays related to the primary data sources.

1.7.3 Data Collection Techniques

There are several techniques for collecting data in qualitative research. This research uses a document study to collect the data. Document study is a data source from recorded text or image (Bowen, 2009, p. 27). To collect the data, the researcher downloaded the miniseries of *Ms. Marvel* (2022) in English and Indonesian subtitle. Then, the researcher watches the series and selects the dialogue and shoot related to identity formation. The last step was selecting and writing down the dialogues of the character in *Ms. Marvel* (2022), which concern identity formation.

1.7.4 Data Analysis Technique

This research is a content analysis research technique. The researcher begins the analysis by reading *Ms. Marvel* (2022) miniseries. Then, the researcher takes the data concerning identity formation. The data were divided into six

sheets: Identity diffusion, identity foreclosure, identity moratorium, identity achievement, family support, and peer support. Each sheet is divided into three columns containing dialogue, picture, and description. The researcher analysed and interpreted the data based on the theory. In the next step, the researcher concluded the findings to be reported the finding through the paper.

1.8 Paper Organization

This research paper consists of four chapters. The first chapter is introduction. This chapter consists of background of study, research question, objective of the study, significance of the study, literature review, theoretical approach, research method, and paper organization. The second chapter is the information and intrinsic elements of *Ms. Marvel* (2022). The third chapter is the analysis. This chapter contains the analysis of the data that has been classified. The last chapter is conclusion and suggestion.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

4.1 Conclusions

Based on the finding and the analysis in the previous chapter and the objective of research, several conclusions can be drawn.

1. This present study highlights the emergence of superpowers in the identity formation of Kamala Khan using the theory of Identity Status by James Marcia and the concept of social Support in identity formation.

2. The researcher concluded that Kamala Khan undergoes the identity formation process during the fifth stage of Identity Development. It can be seen from the exploration and commitment she had to the four identity statuses of James Marcia. Those statuses are identity diffusion, identity foreclosure, identity moratorium, and identity achievement. The emergence of superpower has triggered a better coping mechanism, so Kamala can overcome the alienation she had in identity diffusion status and make the commitment to the identity foreclosure status. Her superpowers also being one of the factors that push her to accomplish exploration. Also, in moratorium status, although Kamala realises that she has superpowers, Kamala still concern about other people opinions upon her. In the identity achievement status, Kamala sees her superpower as her responsibility. Her decision to help other is defined by the Islamic values she gets from her family. The emergence of superpowers in Kamala

Khan's identity process is a supporting factor for Kamala as a way to fulfill the characteristics of American society. The social support is little to none in influencing Kamala's identity formation. The presence of peer and family contribute to Kamala's problem-solving, especially in the exploration of alternatives.

4.2 Suggestions

After accomplishing this research, there are several suggestions for further researchers interested in researching *Ms. Marvel* (2022). While this research is focused on Kamala Khan's identity formation, further research may discuss the issue of South Asia representation in the movie. Furthermore, since Kamala Khan comes from an immigrant family, the diaspora study can also be applied to the movie.

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