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Abstract

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Key Words: Identity Status Theory, Marcia, Identity Integration, Autognition, The American Granddaughter

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Abstract

This qualitative research investigates the protagonist, Zeina's identity development in the novel, The American Granddaughter (2010), written by Inaam Kachachi in the backdrop of the US occupation of Iraq. The investigation borrows James E. Marcia's identity status theory, postulating four statuses of identity development—identity diffusion, identity foreclosure, identity moratorium, and identity achievement. The study delves into how the protagonist moves from one identity status to another, experiencing and exploring her relationship with her own self, her family, and acquaintances, eventually arriving at a greater self-recognition and identity integration. The study will help individuals going through similar identity issues to understand the dynamics of identity development and achieve higher autognition. It will also benefit literary critics and scholars aspiring to work in this literary paradigm by applying psychological theories to literary representations. The findings of the study will solidify the applicability of Marcia's theory as a lens to literary interpretation and hermeneutics.

Keywords: [Identity Status Theory](#), [Marcia](#), [Identity Integration](#), [Autognition](#), [The American Granddaughter](#)

Introduction

In diaspora communities, the issues related to socio-politico-cultural identity pose significant challenges that are complex and multifaceted in nature. The present study seeks to investigate the cognate issue in *The American Granddaughter* (2010), leveraging Marcia's theory of identity status. Identity development and autognition are multifarious issues that have been and continue to be studied

across various disciplines of arts and humanities such as sociology, psychology, anthropology, and literature (Urrieta, 2019). Offering the nuances of the protagonist, Zeina's journey into war and back to peace, the novel is also open to interpretation, providing an understanding of her identity development and autognition. The study examines this development of her identity through the narrative and how her relationship with various



characters in the book specifically, with her grandmother, Rahma, influences her identity formation.

The theoretical lens, Marcia's identity status theory consisting of four statuses of identity, identity diffusion, identity foreclosure, identity moratorium, and identity achievement, provides the philosophical basis to unravel the nuances of identity formation and integration keeping the culture and politics into context. The research, by doing so, disseminates an understanding of revitalization and integration of identity. The investigation particularly focuses on how the protagonist's interaction with her grandmother shakes the foundations of her previous identity and how she undergoes the four identity statuses in the integration of her dual identities, Iraqi and American, and ultimately, the formation of a new identity. Hence, the study highlights how intergenerational relationships and cultural heritage lead to shape individual identity. By investigating the process of identity evolution, the study aims to inform strategies for advancing identity integration and a sense of belonging among individuals cherishing multiple identities, eventually aggrandizing our comprehension of human identity and experience.

Research Statement

The study examines the application of Marcian theory of identity statuses to the literary interpretation of *The American Granddaughter*, tracing the protagonist's journey towards self-realization and integration of her dual identities, Iraqi and American, passing through four identity statuses (diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium, and achievement), thereby scrutinizing the literary insights attained from this analysis.

Tentative Questions

1. How does the protagonist, Zeina navigate through the four identity statuses in the novel?
2. How does the protagonist's relationship with her grandmother influence her identity development?
3. What impact does this identity development claim on the protagonist's psyche?

Objectives of the Study

1. To track down the identity formation of the protagonist in the novel, through the lens of Marcia's theory of identity status.
2. To investigate the relationship between the protagonist and her grandmother with respect to its influence on her identity development and autogognition.
3. To contribute towards the comprehension of identity formation and autogognition in literary representations.
4. To augment the significance of cultural heritage and intergenerational relations in the formation of identity.

Literature Review

Cultural Displacement and Identity: Existing Research

In psychology, identity development is a well-studied and fully developed discipline with various theories by theorists such as (Leed, [1979](#)) Linderman, Caruth, LaCapra, etc. offering one or the other angle of understanding the individual's character and identity development. Marcia's theory of identity status is a unique approach among these theories, promulgating four statuses of identity, identity diffusion, identity foreclosure, identity moratorium, and identity achievement. Various studies have applied this approach in multiple contexts which include Marcia's adolescence ([1966](#)), Archer's adulthood ([1982](#)), and Phinney's cultural identity ([1989](#)).

In literary studies, identity development has been examined via character analysis. For example, (Bloom, [1995](#)) investigates how the characters in literary texts navigate through identity development. (Bortolussi & Dixon, 2003) have also applied identity status theory to analyze character development. The synthesis of psychology and literature promises a rich terrain for the comprehension of identity and experience. Research (Gerrig, [1993](#)) shows that literary naves can advance empathy and understanding of human experience. (Hogan, [2003](#)) also advocates the probing of psychological nuances of characters to gain a greater understanding of identity development.

Nevertheless, there is still more room for interdisciplinary research that cartels psychological theories to literary interpretation. This study aims to bridge this gap by applying Maria's theory of identity status to the interpretation of *The American Granddaughter*.

Critical Reception and Analysis of the Novel: A Review of Existing Research

Kachachi's *The American Granddaughter* has garnered impactful scholarly attention for its multi-layered implication of socio-politico-cultural themes encompassing trauma and PTSD, identity issues, cultural displacement, and diaspora issues. This section of the Literature Review presents an exhaustive overview of the existing research on this multifaceted novel, *The American Granddaughter*, particularly focusing on identity development, traumatic experiences, and the process of transformation in character development. The initial reception of the novel stood for its portrayal of identity development but the succeeding scholarship has focused on its deep implications in profound psychological and cultural issues (Kirmayer, 2014). The novel also encapsulates the fear and anxieties in the latent Iraqi diaspora experience and politico-cultural tensions of the post-9/11 era (Alqahtani, 2023).

The novel has continued to insight the curiosity of scholars in various philosophical and cultural nuances. (Wadi, 2020) and (Abdulqadr, 2022) explores the novel's themes like modernity, gender roles, and imperialism. Unlike the previous studies, the present study, as discussed earlier, aims to contribute to the previous research, offering a fresh perspective on the identity formation of the literary persona in the novel. By integrating philosophical and cultural perspectives, the research seeks to bring to light Zeina's struggle with identity and autognition. In this pursuit, the study distinguishes itself from the existing body of research offering a more in-depth analysis of the dynamics that shape and integrate an individual's identity, thus advancing a more intricate understanding of the novel's philosophical and cultural impact.

Research Methodology

Research design

This qualitative study is deductive in approach which seeks to investigate the protagonist's journey

in *The American Granddaughter*, through four identity statuses given by Marcia. Hence, the said novel serves as the primary source, while the theory of identity statuses serves as the secondary source. Apart from that, the study has also cited other studies and commentaries by different scholars and critics in this literary paradigm, to solidify the findings of this study. In order to identify the themes and patterns portraying the protagonist's struggle with various identity statuses, a close reading technique has been applied. The collected data has been coded and categorized to analyze identity exploration, commitment, and integration. The themes related to identity development, familial influence, and self-discovery are then analyzed in the light of various tenets of the theory. To ensure research ethics the commentary has been carried out by the researcher's own efforts except for supportive critique from other studies where due credit has been given with in-text citation and the references at the end.

Theoretical Framework

As claimed earlier, Marcia's identity status theory (1966) serves as the philosophical lens for the present study. This theory consists of four statuses or stages of identity: diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium, and achievement. Identity diffusion is the first status which stands for confusion and exploration. In this state, the individual lacks a clear perception of identity. Foreclosure, the 2nd state, represents a premature commitment, where the individual clings to a particular identity without the consideration of options. Moratorium entails exploring and considering options. The last stage, achievement, refers to a state of final commitment and integration on the part of the individual. This theoretical framework guides the analysis, enabling the identification of themes and patterns related to identity development, exploration, commitment, and integration.

Marcia's fascination with identity development began during an internship at the Massachusetts Mental Health Center in Boston, MA. A teenage patient's unusual early discharge, despite a schizophrenia diagnosis, sparked Marcia's interest. After reading Erik Erikson's "Identity and the Life Cycle" (1959), Marcia realized the patient was experiencing identity diffusion, not schizophrenia (Hammons, n.d.). This led Marcia to explore

Erikson's theory, finding it resonated with his patients' struggles. Marcia's dissertation aimed to measure identity's underlying aspects, validate Erikson's construct, and expand the "identity versus role confusion" stage (Marcia, 2004). Developing the Identity Status Interview and conducting further research, Marcia's work ensured Erikson's theory became a staple in adolescent development textbooks and inspired research into Erikson's other psychosocial development stages.

Erikson's theory posits that the two vital factors in shaping one's identity are exploratory experiences and committed actions, which serve as the foundation for determining one's sense of self. One's identity development influences their occupation, ideology, and interpersonal values (Hammons, n.d.). Marcia's examination of Erikson's work revealed that identities can be categorized into four types: two forms of committed identities and two forms of uncommitted identities. Marcia expanded on Erikson's initial identity categories of achievement and diffusion by adding two new categories, foreclosure, and moratorium, thereby establishing a total of four distinct identity statuses. The study posits to exploit this theoretical framework to track back Zeina's journey which can be briefly described as follows:

1. At the initial state, called identity diffusion, Zeina is confused and uncertain about her identity, struggling to reconcile her Iraqi heritage and American upbringing.
2. In the second state, Identity Foreclosure, instead of clinging to a particular identity, Zeina continues to explore and question her values and beliefs.
3. In the continuum of the third stage, the protagonist embarks on an exploration of her identity, investigating her values, belief systems, and life goals.
4. Then comes the final stage, the achievement of identity, inculcating an obvious understanding of her relationship with her surrounding world, not only enabling her to grasp a clear sense of identity but also giving her a direction and eventually transforming her power of perception.

Analysis & Discussion

A narrative is a first-person homodiegetic account of the protagonist's journey into self-realization and

autognition which is studied from the perspective of Marcia's identity status theory. The novel sets out on a solemn journey towards self-recognition characterizing the protagonist's uncertain and confused sense of self, as she is exposed to atrocities of war in the green zone, thus opening the state of identity diffusion. Later on, as she passes through foreclosure and then moratorium, she starts interrogating the reality of war and her own idealistic and temptative assumptions of war as well as her relationship with herself and others. Eventually, going through introspection and exploration, she can achieve greater autognition and integrates her experiences, emerging with a newly found self-recognition and direction.

The protagonist's initial Identity Diffusion is marked by confusion and exploration, as she grapples with her dual Iraqi and American heritage. Zeina embarks on a journey of self-discovery, navigating the four identity statuses. Initially, she is in a state of Identity Diffusion, driven by a desire to improve her family's life and reconnect with her roots. Her conviction that she is contributing to Iraq's freedom also resonates with this idea. She confesses:

I wasn't afraid of the war or of dying or returning with a disability. There was no time to think about such real things in the midst of a raucous carnival of excitement. I repeated after the fox-news that I was going on a patriotic mission. I was a soldier stepping forward to help my government, my people, and my army, our American army that would bring down Saddam and liberate the nation from its suffering. (Kachachi, 2010, p. 4)

Zeina's experience in the Green Zone is marked by a shattered sense of self and a transformed consciousness, characteristic of identity diffusion. Initially, she embarks on a personal and innocent journey, driven by a desire to improve her family's life and reconnect with her roots. However, as she becomes increasingly embroiled in political conflicts, her journey becomes more complex and her sense of self begins to unravel. She struggles with feelings of betrayal and shame, leading to disillusionment with her actions and a transformation of her personality, leaving herself feeling lost and uncertain, like a "dog with two homes" (p. 69). Her relationships become complicated, and she is haunted by the scenes of

death and destruction, ultimately leading to a profound transformation, leaving her "laden with a gravel of sorrow" and "bearing a cemetery inside her chest" (p. 1). Marcia comments that identity diffusion is characterized by a lack of exploration and commitment, making it the most unstable identity status (1993). He further says that individuals in this state often feel a sense of powerlessness over their future and struggle to form meaningful, intimate connections with others due to their unclear sense of self. (Paris et al, n. d.) claim that identity diffusion is characterized by a lack of clear identity, direction, or commitment. Individuals may feel confused, uncertain, or uncommitted, and have not explored their values, beliefs, or goals.

Zeina's experience in the war zone exemplifies identity disclosure, as her initial idealism and sense of purpose begin to unravel in the face of harsh realities. She feels lost and confused, unable to reconcile her past and present selves, indicating a state of identity diffusion: "My life was broken in two: 'before Baghdad' and 'after Baghdad'" yet she continues to say, "I was confused and felt that this wasn't yet the end of the story" (p. 74). However, instead of transitioning into identity foreclosure, where she would cling to a new, rigid identity, Zeina continues to explore and question her values and beliefs, characteristic of the identity foreclosure state. She indulges in self-contemplation and questions herself:

Was I a hypocrite, a two-faced American? A dormant Iraqi like those sleeping cells of spies planted in an enemy land and lying in wait for years?... I collapsed into myself as I watched Baghdad being bombed and the columns of smoke rising after each American attack. It was like watching myself use my mom's cigarette lighter to set my own hair on fire, cut my own skin with my nail scissors, or slap my left cheek with my right hand. (Kachachi, 2010, p. 12)

She remains in a state of flux, grappling with the contradictions and complexities of her experiences, and refusing to settle into a fixed identity. This ongoing exploration and questioning indicate that Zeina is still navigating the challenges of identity development, seeking to find a sense of self that can integrate her past and present. Her relationship with her grandmother serves as a catalyst for identity exploration, as she begins to question her values,

beliefs, and sense of self. Her interactions with her grandmother, coupled with her confrontation with her foster brothers Mohaymen and Hayder, and her observations of the US Army's operations in Iraq led to a shift in her perspective, causing her to question her previous beliefs about the invasion and her native country.

Rahma, nonetheless, succeeds in pushing her to identity foreclosure, where Zeina is confronted with the expectation to adopt a predetermined identity based on her family's history. Rahma's stories and the physical surroundings serve as a way to immerse Zeina in this legacy, implying that she should embrace her family's past and traditions. (Hammons, n.d) contends that, unlike persons in identity achievement, the self-esteem of a person in foreclosure is dependent on how well they fulfill the expectations of those who conferred the identity. However, Zeina feels a sense of disconnection, like there are "missing links" that her grandmother will need to provide. Zeina soon realizes that she needs to approach this history with a childlike mindset, yet, instead of passive acceptance, as offered by the grandmother Rahma, Zeina is acknowledging the need to re-explore and re-define her own identity,

It is my history whether I like it or not. It was mine even before I was born. I am its legitimate child, no matter how foreign I may seem. How dare she, that gullible writer, think that I'll just hand over my inheritance to her, even if that inheritance is nothing but a tattered piece of nationalism, good for nothing, a handful of coins in a currency that went out of circulation a long time ago? (Kachachi, 2010, p. 17)

In fact, Zeina's narrative reflects a dichotomy within her own character, where she grapples with conflicting perspectives as both the protagonist and the narrator of her story, which stands for Erikson's concept of the dichotomy of identities i.e. committed and non-committed (1959). The writer Zeina, the embodiment of committed identity, who is embedded within the protagonist, showcasing con-committed identity, attempts to influence the narrative, urging her to infuse it with patriotic sentiments. This internal tension is evident in various parts of the novel, showcasing the struggle between the author's intentions and the protagonist's experiences.

The protagonist's entry into Identity Moratorium is characterized by a deep exploration of her identity

options, as she navigates her relationships, cultural heritage, and personal values. This stage is marked by a continuation of a sense of searching and questioning, as she seeks to integrate her multiple identities. At this stage, she begins to ponder over different identity options and possibilities. Her experience in the green zone sparks identity moratorium, with her idealism and adventurous soul encountered by the harsh realities of war and massacre. Here she confronts a series of mishaps that push her to question the initial temptations and romanticized notions of war which gave her a dare to step into war. Their mistaken raid on a professor's home, the suicide of her friend Malek, the murder of a comrade and humiliation of the dead body, and finally the event of Abu Ghraib, led her to reexamine her understanding of her own reality and that of the war. Linderman (1988), claims that the idealism that pushes us into war ultimately brings about transformation in an individual's understanding of himself, of war, and of his relationship with others. This identity moratorium is found in Zeina's quest to reconcile her past and present, the complexity of war, and the nuances of her own identity. The Abu-Ghraib scam is the final blow that causes her disillusionment of the US occupation and the wrongly avowed Operation Enduring Freedom of the US. Her initial beliefs are challenged, eventually leading her to transform and acquire a greater autognition.

Zeina's return to the US marks a pivotal moment in her journey towards identity achievement. Unable to identify with her surroundings, she begins to integrate the trauma of war into her identity, transforming her worldview and finding new meaning in everyday objects and experiences. Through bearing witness to her experiences, she takes steps towards reconciling her past and present selves.

From that day on I became aware of the malady of grief that afflicted me, to which I adapted and for which I sought no cure. For how do I fight a malady that brought about my rebirth, that fed me and let me grow, and rocked me to sleep, that honed and educated me, and disciplined me so well? (Kachachi, 2010, p. 8)

This process of transformation and integration signifies Zeina's growth and transition towards a

new sense of self, hallmarking her progress towards identity achievement. As she navigates this new landscape, Zeina's story becomes a testament to the complex and powerful process of identity formation. Ultimately, she achieves Identity, marked by a clear sense of commitment and integration. Her identity is no longer fragmented, and she has developed a cohesive sense of self that incorporates her multiple identities.

Conclusions

The present study has successfully explored Zeina's identity evolution in the novel passing through four statuses of identity as propounded by Marcia, marking that her identity status undertakes a remarkable development throughout the narrative, passing through identity diffusion to achievement. The research also finds that her relationship with her grandmother Rahma has a vital role to play in the formation of her identity, claiming a significant influence on her values, beliefs, and self-perception. Moreover, the reconciliation of her dual identities, Iraqi and American, also leaves remarkable influence in shaping her identity and making it a more cohesive and inclusive development. The findings of the study enhance our understanding of the mechanism of identity development and integration in literary representations, pronouncing the importance of intergenerational relations and cultural legacies in shaping the self. The interdisciplinary approach of the study validates the importance of synthesizing the psychological theory to literary interpretation to provide the nuances of human identity and experience in multiple backgrounds.

Limitations and Future Directions

For the scope of a single study, the research is restricted to a single angle of looking at the identity development of the protagonist with respect to a single work. Future studies can explore the impact of similar experiences in other works of fiction. Moreover, the research has been delimited to Martia's identity status theory, future researchers can include further theories to reinforce Marcia's theory such as Kelley's theory of personality (Kelly, 1963).

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