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THE JOURNEY OF SELF-ACCEPTANCE AND BELONGING IN NATASHA ROMANOFF'S CHARACTER IN THE MARVEL STUDIOS FILMS

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Abstract:

The purpose of this study is to examine the journey of self-acceptance (self- acceptance) and belongingness (belonging) in the character of Natasha Romanoff, which is featured in several Marvel Studios films, including Black Widow (2021), The Avengers (2012), Avengers: Age of Ultron (2015), and Avengers: Endgame (2019). A qualitative descriptive method was used to analyze Natasha Romanoff's self-acceptance and self-belonging process in the Marvel Cinematic Universe. The theory used is Elizabeth B. Hurlock's Theory of Personality Development (1974). Data sources include important films such as Black Widow (2021), The Avengers (2012), Avengers: Age of Ultron (2015), and Avengers: Endgame (2019). This analysis applies thematic coding to identify patterns closely related to family life, trauma, self-acceptance, belonging, and personal growth in Natasha's character development. The findings reveal two central themes in Natasha Romanoff's character development: self-acceptance through trauma confrontation and belonging through surrogate family bonds. Natasha transforms from a traumatized assassin shaped by the Red Room into a woman who reclaims her identity and purpose through emotional connections with the Avengers and her surrogate family. Her ultimate sacrifice in Avengers: Endgame represents the culmination of her journey toward self-understanding, acceptance,

and fulfilment. This study demonstrates that Natasha Romanoff's character embodies the symbolic cycle of rebirth, loss, and healing within the context of social relationships. Through her transformation from a controlled assassin to a self-aware hero, Natasha illustrates self-acceptance through trauma resolution and belonging through emotional connection. This interpretation contributes to understanding how personal growth and identity reconstruction are portrayed in the Marvel Cinematic Universe through the lens of Elizabeth B. Hurlock's personality development theory.

Keywords: *Self-acceptance, belonging, character development*

INTRODUCTION

A fictional character serves as the narrator who experiences the story's events and confronts the conflicts that arise (Tlonaen, 2023). In literature, characters serve as representations of human emotions, experiences, and psychological development shaped by personal history, learning, and emotional responses. These experiences, whether pleasant or traumatic, leave lasting impressions that influence one's personality, worldview, and relationships with others. Some changes manifest outwardly through attitudes and actions, while others remain hidden as unresolved trauma or unspoken desires, shaping an individual's journey toward personal growth.

Within the context of film, a character refers to an individual portrayed in a narrative, whose qualities are revealed through words, actions, and interactions. Characterization refers to the process of creating and developing fictional characters. It is designed to convey certain impressions and values about those characters. In films, characterization tends to be more complex and detailed than in other forms of literature because it relies on visual storytelling. Essentially, characterization is the method an author uses to write, present, and reveal the personalities of the characters within a story (Hariman & Winarta, 2022). Chatman (Hasanah et al., 2018) distinguishes between round and flat characters: round characters are complex, exhibiting multiple and often contradictory traits, which make them lifelike and

capable of growth, while flat characters are defined by a single dominant trait or stereotype, such as “the miser” or “the mad doctor,” contributing little to character transformation. Furthermore, Chatman emphasizes that character analysis involves examining human nature as expressed through actions, behaviours, and narrative functions, highlighting how characters are inseparably linked to other intrinsic elements such as plot, setting, and point of view.

In relation to this, (Hasanah et al., 2018) note that point of view significantly influences how characters are perceived, particularly when their portrayal is mediated through the perspectives of other characters. (Damayanti et al., 2023) stated that a character is an individual or figure who experiences various events in the story of a novel, while characterization is the way the author portrays and describes the traits and personalities of each character in the novel, while Taylor cited in (Hasanah et al., 2018) conceptualizes character development as the process of change in a character’s traits and behaviours. Such transformation may occur from bad to good or vice versa, driven by internal psychological struggles or external narrative forces.

In conclusion, character functions as a representation of identity and personality, uniquely shaped by individual traits and experiences. In film, this is expressed through characterization and character development, which not only illustrate the qualities of a character but also trace their transformation throughout the narrative. This process enables audiences to understand the complexities of human nature and the factors that shape a character’s journey.

While characterization reveals how individuals are represented and transformed within narratives, these transformations are often driven by deeper psychological processes such as self-acceptance. In this context, self-acceptance becomes a critical concept, referring to the ability to acknowledge and embrace all aspects of oneself. It is a process that enables emotional growth and authenticity, allowing individuals to come to terms with the experiences they have endured. As (Nwanze et al., 2023) emphasize, true self-acceptance involves embracing oneself fully, without conditions or

exceptions. This stage is crucial for personal development, as it requires not only accepting one's physical appearance but also acknowledging mistakes, circumstances, and life events that shape the future.

Nevertheless, not everyone is able to embrace self-acceptance easily. Some individuals carry unresolved experiences or trauma that persistently hinder their ability to move forward. Such lingering pain makes it difficult to accept life's realities with openness and resilience. Yet, there are individuals who succeed in confronting their past and reconciling with their destiny, mistakes, and trauma through the process of self-acceptance. Indeed, self-acceptance becomes a vital phase that allows one to come to terms with realities shaped by past suffering. Self-acceptance refers to a mind-set of being generally content with oneself, including one's qualities, talents, and awareness of personal limitations. In essence, it serves to support and strengthen an individual's abilities (Miswag & Nurwardani, 2025). The significance of self-acceptance is also evident in relation to personality development. Hurlock, as cited in (Mawaddah, 2023) explains that the self is central to how individuals think and feel. The word personality itself originates from the Latin *persona*, meaning "mask," which reflects how people present themselves to others. Personality, however, is not inherited directly but rather shaped through a combination of genetics, upbringing, education, and significant life experiences. Hurlock identifies three major factors that influence personality: inherited traits, early family life, and important life events, each of which contributes to how individuals form their sense of self and navigate personal growth.

Furthermore, self-acceptance is closely tied to self-perception. Individuals with positive self-concepts are more likely to experience reduced stress, anxiety, and self-doubt, leading to healthier self-images and emotional well-being. Conversely, negative self-perceptions may result in the rejection of certain aspects of the self, fostering dissatisfaction and low self-worth. True self-acceptance, therefore, requires recognizing both strengths and weaknesses without harsh self-criticism, while also trusting personal values

rather than relying excessively on external judgments. By embracing both their positive and negative qualities, self-accepting individuals are able to maintain emotional resilience, clarity, and balance, ultimately leading to stronger psychological well-being and more fulfilling lives.

Hurlock (Putri, 2023) identifies several key factors influencing self-acceptance. Self-understanding emphasizes honesty and authenticity in perceiving oneself, while realistic expectations allow individuals to achieve satisfaction by setting attainable goals. The absence of environmental obstacles and the presence of favourable social attitudes, such as fairness, group acceptance, and effective social skills, also strengthen the process of self-acceptance. In addition, maintaining emotional balance by reducing stress and achieving meaningful successes, even in small numbers, can significantly shape one's sense of worth. Positive attitudes, favourable self-judgment, and clear self-perspective further support healthier self-evaluations. Finally, good childhood training through democratic parenting, the cultivation of self-respect, and the development of responsibility play an essential role in forming a stable and positive self-concept.

In addition, Hurlock (Putri, 2023) the effects of self-acceptance can be seen in self-adjustment. A self-accepting person does not view themselves as perfect but focuses more on strengths than weaknesses, which helps build self-confidence and self-esteem. They are open to criticism, willing to reflect on their shortcomings, and able to evaluate themselves honestly. This mindset also makes them more socially adjusted, as they feel secure, show empathy, and are forgiving of others' flaws. In contrast, those who reject themselves often struggle with insecurity and may respond negatively or aggressively toward others.

According to (Kübler-Ross, 1969) the process of self-acceptance generally involves five stages. The first is the denial stage, in which individuals refuse to acknowledge reality and attempt to reject the situation. This is followed by the anger stage, where feelings of frustration, resentment, and blame toward oneself, others, or circumstances may emerge. The third

stage is bargaining, in which individuals try to negotiate, either internally or externally, in the hope of altering the outcome. When these efforts do not succeed, the depression stage occurs, characterized by profound sadness, hopelessness, and loss of motivation. Finally, the process culminates in the acceptance stage, during which individuals begin to embrace reality, reconcile with their situation, and move forward with greater emotional stability.

Building on this, the pursuit of self-acceptance is inherently linked to the human need for connection, which is reflected in the concepts of belongingness and belonging. While self-acceptance fosters internal stability and emotional strength, the sense of belonging complements it by providing external affirmation through social connections. Hagerty and Patusky argue that belonging is generally understood as a subjective feeling of being an essential part of various social systems, such as family, friendships, schools, workplaces, communities, cultural groups, and physical spaces (Aifan, 2024). Most people have an innate need to experience a sense of belonging, which is often described as a positive yet fluid and sometimes fleeting emotional connection to people, places, or experiences (Allen et al., 2021).

This study focuses on Natasha Romanoff's character arc in the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU), with primary emphasis on *Black Widow* (2021) as the first Marvel Studios film dedicated to her personal background, and supplemented by her portrayals in *The Avengers* (2012), *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015), and *Avengers: Endgame* (2019). The analysis is limited to scenes, dialogues, and character interactions that illuminate Natasha's evolving self-image and her growing sense of belonging within the Avengers, who function as her surrogate family. While existing scholarship has predominantly explored Natasha Romanoff as an action-driven superhero, this study aims to delve into the lesser examined psychological and emotional dimensions of her character, specifically her transformation from a weaponized spy burdened by trauma into a woman who learns to accept her past and her identity within the Avengers. This research is significant because it situates Romanoff's narrative within broader academic discussions

of trauma, identity formation, and female agency in contemporary superhero cinema, areas that have often overlooked nuanced portrayals of emotional recovery and belonging. Therefore, the study seeks to address the following questions: (1) How does Natasha Romanoff's journey illustrate the themes of self-acceptance and belonging? (2) In what ways does her traumatic past shape her identity and moral agency? (3) How do her relationships with other Avengers and surrogate family figures influence her path toward self-acceptance and emotional wholeness?

METHOD

This research employed a descriptive qualitative method, which is appropriate for exploring subjective experiences and generating data that describe the "who, what, and where of events or experiences" (Doyle et al., 2020). The study adopts a character and narrative analysis approach to examine how Natasha Romanoff's journey reflects the themes of self-acceptance and belonging within the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU). The focus of the analysis is on the process and development of self-acceptance and belonging as represented in the character of Natasha Romanoff, better known as Black Widow, in selected MCU films. The primary text analyzed is *Black Widow* (2021), the first Marvel Studios film devoted to Romanoff's personal history, complemented by selected scenes from *The Avengers* (2012), *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015), and *Avengers: Endgame* (2019).

The unit of analysis in this study is the character Natasha Romanoff as constructed in four Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) films. Rather than involving human participants, this research focuses on Romanoff's characterization, development, and portrayal across the selected films to explore the themes of self-acceptance and belonging. Her experiences, dialogues, and interactions serve as the unit of analysis in order to trace her psychological development. To support the analysis, instruments in the form of textual and visual data were utilized, including film scripts, transcriptions of dialogue, and screenshots of key scenes relevant to the themes of self-

acceptance and belonging. These instruments allow the researcher to preserve and closely examine the verbal and non-verbal elements of the character's portrayal.

The procedures of this study involve several stages. First, the researcher selected four MCU films featuring Natasha Romanoff as the primary data sources, namely *The Avengers* (2012), *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015), *Avengers: Endgame* (2019), and *Black Widow* (2021). These films were chosen based on their narrative relevance to Romanoff's character development and her evolving sense of identity and belonging. Supporting data were gathered from film transcripts, dialogues, and selected screenshots that depict key scenes reflecting emotional and psychological aspects of the character. Second, relevant theoretical frameworks on self-acceptance and belonging were reviewed, particularly Elizabeth B. Hurlock's (1974) concept of self-acceptance, which defines it as "the degree to which an individual, having considered his personal characteristics, is able and willing to live with them." Third, the researcher re-watched the selected films in detail, identifying scenes, dialogues, and character interactions that align with the study's focus. Screenshots and transcriptions of significant moments were collected to serve as concrete evidence for analysis.

Finally, the data analysis was conducted through a systematic process of categorization and interpretation. The identified dialogues and scenes were first reviewed and coded based on recurring thematic elements related to self-acceptance and belonging. The coding process was carried out manually by the researcher using thematic analysis, following continuous comparison and refinement of categories to ensure consistency. Themes were derived inductively from the data and later aligned with Hurlock's theoretical framework, as well as supporting literature on character development and identity. To enhance the credibility and rigor of the analysis, data interpretation was cross-checked with existing scholarly discussions on the representation of trauma and self-identity in film studies. Through this interpretative process, the researcher derived findings that address the research questions, namely

how Natasha Romanoff's traumatic past shapes her identity, how her journey reflects self-acceptance and belonging, and how her relationships with the Avengers contribute to her sense of family and place.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

This study aims to analyze Natasha Romanoff's journey in the MCU reflect self- acceptance and belonging, two essential components of psychological growth and emotional well-being. As a theoretical framework, this research draws on Elizabeth B. Hurlock's theory, which identifies several factors that influence an individual's level of self-acceptance. Based on the ten factors of self-acceptance proposed by Elizabeth B. Hurlock, this study has identified only four factors that are reflected in the character of Natasha Romanoff throughout her journey in the Marvel Cinematic Universe. These four factors are: Favourable Social Attitudes, Realistic Expectation, Absence of Severe Emotional, and Self Perspectives.

The researcher categorized Natasha Romanoff's journey toward self-acceptance and belonging into seven distinct phases, each illustrating a key stage in her emotional and psychological development. These phases are organized thematically to reflect the gradual formation of identity, trust, and self-worth that define her transformation. The phases are as follows:

- a. The period when Romanoff served as an assassin, representing the stage of self-denial and loss of autonomy;
- b. The period when she escaped from the Red Room, marking the beginning of awareness and the desire for freedom;
- c. The period when she met Clint Barton, signifying the emergence of trust and moral awakening;
- d. The period of seeking revenge, showing her struggle with guilt and emotional conflict;
- e. The period when she joined S.H.I.E.L.D., reflecting her effort to find purpose and redemption;

- f. The period of becoming an Avenger, symbolizing the development of belonging and collective identity; and
- g. The period of her ultimate self-sacrifice in *Avengers: Endgame*, representing complete self-acceptance and emotional resolution.

Through this thematic mapping, each phase demonstrates how Romanoff's experiences contribute to the broader psychological process of accepting herself and finding a sense of belonging within her chosen family. Each phase reflects key aspects of her evolving identity, gradually shaping her path from a weaponized agent devoid of agency to a self-aware individual who finds a sense of purpose, emotional connection, and ultimately, inner peace.

Discussion

Natasha Romanoff embarks on her journey burdened by childhood trauma and training in the Red Room. Her identity is shaped through manipulation, loss, and violence, making her emotionally and psychologically detached. However, the character's narrative arc shows a gradual movement towards healing and acceptance. Through her experiences with the Avengers and surrogate family, Natasha begins to reclaim her agency and redefine herself.

The Avengers were the first people to treat Natasha with respect, trust, and emotional support. Through them, she felt a sense of belonging that she had never experienced for years as the Widow. Which was continued by her surrogate family, ultimately enabling her ability to open up, form emotional connections, and finally sacrifice herself for the greater good (*Avengers: Endgame*), is a strong indicator of her complete transformation. These milestones reflect various aspects of Hurlock's self-acceptance theory, particularly the factors of favourable social attitudes, absence of severe emotional distress, and identification with well-adjusted people. However, only four of Hurlock's ten factors were applied in this study. This selective application was intentional, based on the relevance of these factors to Natasha Romanoff's character arc. Several of Hurlock's other factors, such as

physical attractiveness or success in work, were not prominent or thematically significant in Romanoff's journey as portrayed in the films. Therefore, the analysis focuses only on the factors that are explicitly represented in her psychological and emotional development, ensuring theoretical alignment with the narrative data rather than applying the entire framework superficially.

In the end, Natasha Romanoff is no longer defined by her past, but by her choices, the values she upholds, and her relationships. Her story illustrates that self-acceptance is a process that involves confronting one's trauma, embracing vulnerability, and building authentic connections. Natasha's journey stands as a representation of inner strength, emotional growth, and the human desire for acceptance—and it is this emotional evolution that makes her one of the most complex and inspiring characters in Marvel Studios films.

The period when Romanoff served as an assassin

In the Marvel Cinematic Universe, Natasha Romanoff's time as an assassin began with her upbringing in the Red Room, a secret Soviet program that trained young girls to become elite spies and killers. The beginning of *Black Widow* (2021) presents a flashback to her formative years in Ohio, where she lived with her surrogate family consisting of Melina, Alexei, and Yelena under the guise of a normal suburban life. When their assignment ended, Natasha and Yelena were separated from their surrogate parents and sent to the Red Room, where they endured harsh training, manipulation, and psychological conditioning. Under the control of Dreykov, Natasha was compelled to undertake missions that built her reputation as one of the deadliest operatives and ultimately earned her the name Black Widow.

Her unstable and neglectful upbringing, shaped by early separation from her family and years of coercion, contributed to both her extraordinary abilities and her lasting trauma. This dark chapter of her life, revealed in flashbacks and references in *The Avengers* (2012), *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015), and more fully in *Black Widow* (2021), left her with guilt but also the resilience to search for redemption. Before defecting to S.H.I.E.L.D., she carried out numerous assassinations and covert operations, but her decision

to leave her past behind marked an important turning point. Through this decision she sought to use her skills for a greater purpose and to rebuild her identity. Natasha's journey also illustrates Elizabeth B. Hurlock's three main factors that shape personality, namely inherited traits, early family life, and important life events, all of which profoundly influenced her development as a character.

The period when she escaped from the Red Room

In the Marvel Cinematic Universe, Natasha Romanoff's escape from the Red Room represents a decisive turning point in her transformation from assassin to hero. After years of manipulation and psychological control under Dreykov, she found the strength to break free, aided by Clint Barton, who offered her the chance to join S.H.I.E.L.D. Although her past continued to haunt her, this moment allowed her to redirect her skills toward justice, redemption, and building new bonds of trust.

Her decision to leave the Red Room also reflects Elizabeth B. Hurlock's concept of realistic expectations as a factor in self-acceptance. Romanoff recognized that her identity and survival were not dependent on the Red Room and that her abilities could serve a greater purpose. By establishing a new path based on her own principles, she demonstrated confidence in her capacity to succeed independently, marking her shift from a tool of manipulation to an autonomous agent with purpose.

The period when she met Clint Barton

In the Marvel Cinematic Universe, the meeting between Natasha Romanoff and Clint Barton was a turning point in her life. At that time, she was still an assassin for the Red Room, and Barton was sent by S.H.I.E.L.D. to eliminate her. Instead of killing her, he saw her potential for change and offered her a chance at redemption. This decision allowed Romanoff to defect from the Red Room and join S.H.I.E.L.D., beginning her transformation into a trusted agent and eventually a hero. Their bond grew into one of the strongest friendships in the MCU, built on trust and loyalty, and this pivotal choice gave Natasha a way out from her violent past and the chance to

rebuild her identity.

The period of seeking revenge

In the Marvel Cinematic Universe, the period of Natasha Romanoff's quest for revenge is most vividly portrayed in *Black Widow* (2021). After escaping the Red Room and working with S.H.I.E.L.D., she believed she had killed Dreykov and dismantled the program, considering it the final step in her defection. Yet, during a conversation with Yelena Belova, it is revealed that Natasha never confirmed Dreykov's death, allowing him to survive in secrecy and continue exploiting countless girls through the Black Widow program. Confronted with this truth, Natasha embarks on a mission driven not only by duty but also by personal vengeance. Joining forces with Yelena, Melina, and Alexei, she returns to the Red Room not as an assassin following orders, but as a woman determined to reclaim her autonomy and seek justice for the life stolen from her. By facing Dreykov once more and ensuring the Red Room's destruction, Natasha transforms her pain into closure and redemption, marking a pivotal stage in her journey from weapon to hero.

The period when she joined S.H.I.E.L.D

In the Marvel Cinematic Universe, Natasha Romanoff's decision to join S.H.I.E.L.D. marked a turning point in her life. After escaping the Red Room, she encountered Clint Barton, who chose to offer her redemption instead of eliminating her. Accepting this chance, Natasha left behind her assassin past and embraced a new identity as a S.H.I.E.L.D. agent, dedicating her skills to a greater cause. This transition not only gave her a new sense of purpose but also laid the foundation for her journey from weapon to hero. A reflection of this transformation is seen in *The Avengers* (2012), during Natasha's interrogation of Loki. This moment recalls her life before joining S.H.I.E.L.D., when she operated independently as a free agent with no loyalty to any government or moral code. Her only concern was survival, and she used her abilities without restraint. Loki's attempt to exploit her traumatic past highlights the emotional scars left by the Red Room. However, Natasha demonstrates emotional maturity by remaining calm and composed, refusing

to let her trauma overpower her. According to Elizabeth B. Hurlock, emotional stress can disrupt a person's mental and physical balance, especially when past pain resurfaces. Yet Natasha's ability to stay relaxed and respond with confidence in this scene illustrates her progress toward self-acceptance, showing that she is no longer defined by her past but by the resilience she has built from it.

The period of becoming an Avenger

In the Marvel Cinematic Universe, Natasha Romanoff's transformation into an Avenger represents the fulfillment of her journey from assassin to hero. Officially joining the team in *The Avengers* (2012), she found both purpose and belonging while fighting alongside Earth's mightiest heroes. This shift reflects Elizabeth B. Hurlock's view of self-acceptance shaped by favorable social attitudes, as Natasha gained group acceptance, trust, and harmony within the Avengers. By embracing her new role, she moved beyond her violent past and established herself as a protector of humanity and a valued member of the team.

The period of her ultimate self-sacrifice in Avengers: Endgame

In the Marvel Cinematic Universe, Natasha Romanoff's ultimate self-sacrifice is shown in *Avengers: Endgame* (2019). After uniting the remaining heroes with hope that they could undo Thanos's snap, she joins Clint Barton on the mission to obtain the Soul Stone on Vormir. Faced with the condition that one of them must die, Natasha chooses to sacrifice herself so the Avengers can succeed. This act marks the peak of her journey from assassin to hero, as she freely gives her life out of love, loyalty, and the belief that her existence has meaning through protecting humanity and restoring those who were lost.

Natasha Romanoff's self-acceptance in the Marvel Cinematic Universe is shaped largely by her early family life and significant life events. From a young age, she believed her mother had abandoned her, leaving her with feelings of being unwanted and unworthy. This trauma deepened during her years in the Red Room, where she endured harsh training, psychological manipulation, and the loss of autonomy. One of the most devastating

experiences was her forced sterilization, revealed in *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015), which stripped her of choice and reinforced her sense of being “incomplete” or a “monster.”

Despite these wounds, Natasha’s return to the Red Room in *Black Widow* (2021) demonstrates her transformation. In confronting Dreykov, she acknowledges the childhood and choices stolen from her, but asserts that he will never again break her or others. This moment signifies her growth from victim to survivor, reclaiming her agency while breaking the cycle of abuse and affirming her identity beyond the trauma.

Natasha Romanoff’s journey toward belonging is tied to her relationships with both the Avengers and her surrogate family. In *The Avengers* 2012 she is introduced not only as a skilled operative but also as someone who begins to form bonds beyond duty especially with Clint Barton. She later admits in *Black Widow* 2021 that she chose to join the Avengers because they treated her like family showing that the team gave her respect and acceptance absent from her past. Her bond with her surrogate family Yelena Melina and Alexei also grows from a fabricated mission into genuine affection culminating in her emotional admission to Yelena it was real to me too.

Her belonging is further affirmed in *Avengers Endgame* 2019 when she reflects I used to have nothing and then I got this this job this family And I was better because of this. This shows that the Avengers were not just teammates but her true family. According to Hagerty and Patusky’s theory Natasha’s sense of belonging is shaped by two elements valued involvement seen in how the Avengers welcomed and needed her and fit reflected in her belief that the team aligned with her identity and gave her purpose.

CONCLUSION

Natasha Romanoff’s journey in the Marvel Cinematic Universe embodies one of the most profound explorations of self-acceptance and belonging within contemporary superhero narratives. Her transformation from a weaponized assassin to a self-aware and compassionate individual

illustrates the dynamic interplay between trauma, agency, and identity. Interpreted through Elizabeth B. Hurlock's theory, Natasha's evolution reflects how favourable social relationships, realistic self-perception, emotional stability, and self-perspective can foster psychological growth despite adverse beginnings. Simultaneously, her experiences align with Hagerty and Patusky's concept of belonging, demonstrating both valued involvement and personal fit within her chosen family, the Avengers.

Rather than merely recounting her life story, this analysis highlights how Romanoff's arc contributes to broader discussions of female heroism, emotional recovery, and the human need for connection. Her narrative demonstrates that self-acceptance is not the erasure of past pain but the ability to integrate it into a coherent sense of self, grounded in empathy and purpose. In this sense, Romanoff stands as a nuanced representation of resilience and psychological healing in popular culture.

However, this study is not without limitations. It focuses solely on one character and a limited selection of films within the MCU, which may restrict the scope of interpretation. Additionally, as a qualitative and interpretive analysis, the researcher's subjective lens inevitably influences the reading of the character's development.

Future research could expand upon this study by comparing the representation of self-acceptance and belonging across other female heroes in the MCU or similar franchises, such as Wonder Woman or Captain Marvel. Scholars might also incorporate mixed-method approaches, including audience reception studies, to examine how viewers interpret and emotionally respond to these portrayals of growth and identity. Such investigations would deepen our understanding of how contemporary cinema constructs narratives of healing, empowerment, and belonging in the context of gender and trauma.

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