

Beyond the Framework: Identity Formation in *Hani & Ishu's Guide to Fake Dating* through Marcia's Lens

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Introduction

Identity formation is a cornerstone of human development, shaping individuals' self-perception and engagement with the world. This developmental process is especially critical during adolescence, a period characterized by the quest to establish one's roles, values, and beliefs within a broader social context. A coherent sense of identity not only fosters self-esteem and psychological well-being but also facilitates effective social integration. James Marcia's Identity Status Theory, initially introduced in 1966 and refined over subsequent decades, categorizes identity development into four distinct statuses: Identity Diffusion, Identity Foreclosure, Identity Moratorium, and Identity Achievement. Each status is defined by different levels of exploration and commitment to roles, values, and beliefs, which in turn profoundly impact adolescents' self-esteem, autonomy, and psychological well-being. In Adiba Jaigirdar's novel *Hani & Ishu's Guide to Fake Dating* (2021), Marcia's Identity Status Theory can serve as a foundational framework for examining identity formation. However, its limitations are revealed when applied to the nuanced experiences depicted in the novel. Set against the backdrop of contemporary Ireland, the narrative explores the complex interplay of cultural expectations, family dynamics, and internal influences on identity development. While we can categorize both Hani and Ishu within the Identity Achievement status, their experiences illustrate the multifaceted nature of identity formation. These experiences underscore that a well-defined sense of self can coexist with behaviors that do not conform to traditional expectations of identity achievement, highlighting the necessity for a more flexible and inclusive understanding of this status.

James Marcia's Identity Status Theory

James Marcia's Identity Status Theory provides a sophisticated framework for understanding the processes of identity formation, particularly during adolescence. Building upon Erik Erikson's stages of psycho-social development, Marcia's theory delves deeply into the concepts of exploration and commitment in identity development. Erik Erikson, a seminal figure in Developmental Psychology, posited that adolescence is a pivotal period for the formation of identity. According to Erik Erikson's theory developed in 1968, the process of identity formation during adolescence involves a gradual evolution of the ego (Kroger 683). During this developmental stage, the various identifications from childhood are not merely discarded but are transformed into a more complex and integrated self-concept (Kroger 684). This transformation indicates that the simplistic identifications formed during childhood become inadequate as the individual matures (Kroger 684). Consequently, these early identifications are re-evaluated and restructured into a coherent and stable identity (Kroger 684). James Marcia, a highly respected psychologist, expanded on Erikson's ideas by developing an ego identity status model, which has become a widely accepted means of assessing the exploration and commitment dimensions of Erikson's identity formation concept. (Kroger 683). In this context, exploration refers to the process of questioning and experimenting with different roles, beliefs, and goals, while commitment refers to the degree to which an individual has settled on specific roles, beliefs, and goals after a period of exploration ("Identity in Adolescence" 160).

Marcia identified four distinct identity statuses: Identity Achievement, Moratorium, Foreclosure, and Identity Diffusion ("Identity in Adolescence" 161). These statuses are not sequential stages but rather different patterns or processes that individuals might experience as they develop their identity (*Ego Identity*). Identity Achievement is characterized by a high level of both exploration and commitment (*Ego Identity*). Individuals in this status have actively explored different options and have made strong commitments to particular goals, values, and beliefs (*Ego Identity*). They tend to be confident and possess a well-defined sense of self ("Identity in Adolescence" 163). Individuals in the Moratorium status are in the midst of exploration but have not yet made firm commitments (*Ego Identity*). They are actively questioning and considering various identity options (*Ego Identity*). This status is often associated with high levels of anxiety and uncertainty but also with a dynamic and flexible approach to identity formation ("Identity in Adolescence" 161). Foreclosure describes individuals who have made

commitments without a period of exploration (*Ego Identity*). These commitments are often based on parental or societal expectations rather than personal choice (*Ego Identity*). Individuals in this status may exhibit rigidity and a lack of openness to new experiences (“Identity in Adolescence” 164). Identity Diffusion is marked by a lack of both exploration and commitment (*Ego Identity*). Individuals in this status may appear apathetic or indifferent towards the process of identity formation. (*Ego Identity*). They often struggle with making decisions and may feel disconnected from a coherent sense of self (“Identity in Adolescence” 164). Marcia’s Identity Status Theory not only categorizes identity statuses but also explores the various characteristics associated with each status. These characteristics include measures of external pressures, self-esteem, resistance to authoritarianism, internal locus of control and autonomy, and cognitive sophistication and ethical behavior. By examining these dimensions, Marcia’s theory offers a comprehensive understanding of the complexities involved in the development of personal identity during adolescence.

Applying James Marcia’s Identity Status Theory to the characters Hani and Ishu from *Hani and Ishu’s Guide to Fake Dating* reveals that both characters exemplify the Identity Achievement status, albeit in different ways. Hani, a Bengali Muslim teenager, demonstrates a high level of exploration and commitment by presenting her authentic self. Her commitment to her identity is underscored by her honesty and openness about her bisexuality, which is supported by her family. However, Hani struggles with the desire to be accepted by her friends, who do not fully understand or accept her sexual orientation. This external pressure adds complexity to her journey but does not diminish her strong sense of self. The supportive family environment enables her to navigate these challenges with confidence and clarity, characteristics that Marcia attributes to individuals in the Identity Achievement status. In contrast, Ishu, a Hindu teenager, exemplifies a strong sense of self and commitment to her values despite being uncertain about her sexual orientation. She demonstrates traits of Identity Achievement through her autonomy and confidence, particularly evident in her academic ambitions and her relationship with Hani. Ishu’s aspiration to become Head Girl, though driven by a desire to meet her parents’ expectations, showcases her unwavering dedication to her goals and values. While she has not explicitly labeled her sexual orientation, her actions and decisions reveal a deep level of self-awareness and commitment to her identity. Despite the rigid expectations set by her parents, Ishu remains steadfast in her commitments, embodying the confidence and well-defined sense of self that Marcia associates with Identity Achievement. Hani’s and

Ishu's respective journeys underscore the critical role of exploration and commitment to diverse values in cultivating a coherent and stable identity. Their experiences also illuminate the limitations of Marcia's theory, suggesting that, while it provides a valuable framework, it may not fully encompass the diverse and dynamic nature of identity development in contemporary contexts.

Critique Of James Marcia's Identity Status Theory

Marcia's Identity Status Theory has been pivotal in advancing our comprehension of identity formation. However, it has encountered significant critiques, particularly for its Western Euro-centric viewpoint that posits Identity Achievement as the zenith of maturity (Côté & Levine 180). This perspective may not resonate with non-Western cultures, where communal needs frequently take precedence over individual identity. Côté offers a pointed critique of this theory, asserting that identity formation is shaped by a multitude of cultural and contextual factors. He observes that "Erikson's integration of sociological, historical, and psychological factors within one social psychological perspective has not been considered. Moreover, in focusing on the psychological states of individuals, certain processes seem to have been misidentified as outcomes" (Côté & Levine 148). This critique underscores the theory's oversight of how broader factors interplay in identity formation, and its propensity to misidentify ongoing developmental processes as definitive outcomes. Thus, while Marcia's framework provides invaluable insights, it necessitates adaptation to accommodate cultural variations and the nuanced complexities of identity formation. As Côté and Levine highlight, "the identity status paradigm is decidedly psychological and has ignored historical, sociological, and social psychological evidence that would make it more compatible with Erikson's interdisciplinary perspective" (Côté & Levine 173). This suggests that Marcia's theory could be significantly enhanced by integrating a wider array of influences to more accurately reflect Erikson's holistic approach.

The experiences of Hani and Ishu exemplify that deviations from Marcia's categories are not merely attributable to their Bengali backgrounds. Rather, these variations reflect the intricate interplay of personal crises, cultural expectations, and mutual support. Such complexities elude Marcia's rigid categorization of identity statuses. Kroger et al. Suggest that Marcia's presumption of a linear progression towards Identity Achievement oversimplifies the inherently non-linear nature of identity development (684). For instance, an individual might

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achieve identity in one aspect of their life while grappling with anxiety in another, or exhibit confidence in some areas while remaining in exploration in others. Kroger et al. assert that identity formation involves fluctuations and regressions, with individuals cycling through different statuses multiple times (690). This underscores the necessity for a more nuanced framework that better accounts for the dynamic and culturally diverse nature of identity formation. Marcia's identity status categories fail to encapsulate the fluid and multifaceted nature of individual experiences, highlighting the need for a more flexible and inclusive understanding of this process.

Hani's and Ishu's developmental trajectories illustrate the intricate balance between personal aspirations and cultural and familial expectations, emphasizing the interplay between individual and collective identity formation. Hani's established bisexual identity juxtaposed with Ishu's ambiguous stance creates a dynamic interplay, underscoring the complexities and fluidity inherent in adolescent identity development. Their interactions and mutual support challenge Marcia's rigid categorization, highlighting that identity formation is not a linear process but a multifaceted experience shaped by cultural, familial, and societal factors. This nuanced perspective is reflected in the varying degrees of self-esteem, resistance to peer pressure, authoritarianism, autonomy, cognitive sophistication, ethical behavior, and anxiety observed in Hani and Ishu. Examining these dimensions will underscore the necessity for a more comprehensive and inclusive framework for understanding identity development beyond Marcia's traditional paradigm.

Characteristics Associated with Identity Achievement Status

Family Dynamics

Marcia posits that supportive and balanced familial relationships cultivate an environment conducive to identity exploration and achievement, whereas rigid and authoritarian family structures tend to result in foreclosure, and neglectful or inconsistent parenting often leads to diffusion ("Identity in Adolescence" 171). Applying this theoretical framework to the characters in *Hani & Ishu's Guide to Fake Dating* provides a nuanced understanding of how their respective family dynamics profoundly influence their identity formation processes.

Hani benefits from a supportive familial environment, significantly aiding her in achieving Identity Achievement. Her family's acceptance and open communication provide a foundation for her to explore and affirm her bisexual identity. Hani's assertion, "I trust Amma with my life" (22), underscores the profound trust and emotional security she feels towards her mother. This statement illustrates the depth of her reliance and the strength of the familial bond, with the phrase "with my life" signifying the extent of her trust. Her mother's unwavering support is integral to her emotional stability, reflecting a safe and nurturing environment crucial for identity exploration. Such an environment mitigates the anxiety typically associated with identity formation, enabling Hani to express her bisexuality without fear of rejection or judgment. The profound trust and secure relationship with her mother serve as a foundation for honest self-exploration, fostering a space essential for healthy identity development. This supportive environment is further emphasized by Hani's reflection "Abba and Amma have made things easy for me. How easily I can be myself with them. How easily they'll accept everything about me and their willingness to talk things out" (41). Her parents' readiness to engage in open dialogue and their unconditional acceptance provide Hani with a stable platform for self-exploration. The repeated emphasis on the word "easily" underscores a profound sense of comfort and security within her family dynamics, conveying that Hani's acceptance by her parents is seamless and natural, devoid of struggle or resistance. This distinction between mere tolerance and genuine acceptance is critical for her confidence and sense of security. The phrase "willingness to talk things out" implies a proactive and open-minded approach from her parents, indicating their active engagement in understanding and supporting her identity. This aspect of open communication is crucial in Marcia's theory, as it fosters an environment conducive to identity achievement. Their deliberate effort signifies that their support is both intentional and meaningful. This combination of ease of acceptance and open dialogue creates a nurturing and supportive familial environment, providing Hani with a foundation of unconditional love and support. In Marcia's framework, such an environment is pivotal for healthy identity formation, allowing individuals to explore their identity without fear of rejection or disapproval. Hani's reflection on her parents' acceptance bolsters her self-esteem and empowers her to explore her identity authentically. The absence of barriers or resistance in her familial relationships means she can navigate her identity with minimal anxiety, underscoring the importance of familial support in the complex process of identity formation. Therefore, Hani's experience illustrates how an environment

of open communication and unconditional support can empower individuals to embrace their true selves with confidence and security.

Ishu's identity formation is profoundly shaped by the stringent and demanding dynamics within her family, creating a striking juxtaposition to the nurturing environment that Hani experiences. Her parents' elevated expectations cultivate a pressurized environment that shapes her character and challenges her resolve. Ishu's introspection about her sister, "Like Ammu and Abbu haven't been doting on her, their perfect, favorite child, for our entire lives" (13), illuminates the constant comparison and heightened expectations she endures, particularly regarding her sister. This comparison fosters her resilience and motivates her to meet her parents' exacting standards. The phrase "perfect, favorite child" accentuates her sister's elevated status in their parents' perception, exacerbating Ishu's internal conflict and her struggle for parental approval. This struggle profoundly impacts her self-esteem and identity development, compelling her to assert herself in an environment lacking the unconditional support that Hani enjoys. Consequently, Ishu's experience epitomizes the complexities of identity formation under stringent familial expectations, illustrating how such pressures can impede the process of achieving a stable identity. Nevertheless, Ishu's determination and resilience ultimately guide her toward her own identity achievement, underscoring the intricate interplay between familial pressures and personal development.

Despite the pervasive lack of trust and emotional openness within her family, as exemplified by Ishu's poignant confession, "My sister is definitely not someone I can trust. She's not someone I can go to. Not even if she pretends that she is" (105), her parents' unwavering belief in her capabilities imposes an onerous burden on her to perpetually meet their lofty expectations. This is poignantly encapsulated in their avowal, "We don't have to worry about our Ishu" (27). This duality is of paramount significance as it elucidates the intricate familial dynamics at play. The scarcity of emotional vulnerability and open communication within her family engenders a milieu where Ishu's internal struggles are magnified by her emotional isolation. Her inability to rely on her sister for support intensifies her sense of loneliness, thereby exacerbating the challenges inherent in her quest for self-acceptance and identity formation. Conversely, her parents' confidence in her abilities, while ostensibly positive, introduces a complex layer of expectations. Their ostensibly reassuring statement, "We don't have to worry about our Ishu," serves to place an implicit yet formidable expectation on Ishu to maintain an

unerring facade of competence and success. This reflects an authoritarian familial structure where elevated expectations coexist with minimal emotional support, compelling Ishu to continuously strive for excellence without the requisite emotional scaffolding. The resultant of empowerment and pressure is crucial, as it illuminates the profound influence of external expectations on our identity formation. For Ishu, her parents' belief in her abilities could ostensibly act as a catalyst for motivation and achievement. However, the dearth of emotional openness and support transforms this potential source of empowerment into a significant wellspring of stress and anxiety. Consequently, the relentless pressure to meet these heightened expectations without a supportive emotional foundation profoundly complicates Ishu's trajectory towards identity formation. She is thus compelled to navigate the conflicting imperatives of familial duty and personal authenticity. These intertwined familial dynamics reveal the broader existential challenges that Ishu confronts in her identity formation journey. They illustrate how familial relationships, imbued with both empowerment and constraint, play a pivotal role in shaping the multifaceted and often arduous path of personal growth and self-realization.

Ishu's determination to make her parents proud, despite the emotional strain, is exemplified in her resolute declaration, "I have to show them that I'm willing to do whatever it takes" (18). This statement vividly illustrates her profound commitment to fulfilling her parents' expectations, even at the considerable cost of her own well-being. The significance of this quotation lies in its illumination of the considerable sacrifices Ishu is prepared to make, thereby reflecting the profound impact of familial pressure on her identity development. Her goal-oriented mindset, encapsulated in her fervent desire to distinguish herself from her sister, is further emphasized by her assertion, "I want my parents to see that I'm not my sister" (33). This desire to carve out a distinct identity, while simultaneously seeking parental approval, adds a layer of complexity to her identity formation process. It underscores the intricate interplay between her personal aspirations and the expectations imposed upon her, thereby revealing the multifaceted nature of her internal conflict. The psychological toll of this endeavor is considerable, as it highlights the internal conflict between her intrinsic desires and the extrinsic demands placed upon her by her family. Ishu's relentless pursuit of validation from her parents, evidenced by her willingness to do "whatever it takes," epitomizes the extent to which familial expectations shape her sense of self. This intense drive to prove herself distinct from her sister is indicative of the broader cultural and familial dynamics that compel her to

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continuously strive for recognition and approval. Ishu's declarations serve as a testament to the profound influence of familial pressure on her identity development. They not only underscore the sacrifices she is willing to make but also illuminate the deep-seated internal struggles she faces in her quest for parental validation. The intricate dynamics within her family environment compel her to navigate a complex path toward self-realization, marked by the constant tension between her desire for individuality and the overarching need for familial approval.

The dynamics between familial influences and individual resilience present a more intricate picture of identity formation than Marcia's theory alone can capture. Hani and Ishu's experiences underscore the multifaceted interplay between family dynamics and personal development. Hani's supportive family environment facilitates her journey toward identity exploration and acceptance, closely aligning with Marcia's theoretical framework. In contrast, Ishu's rigid family structure fosters resilience while simultaneously imposing significant emotional barriers that complicate her identity formation. This dichotomy suggests that identity development is not merely a product of familial support or rigidity but is profoundly shaped by individual resilience and the unique pressures exerted by environment. Recognizing this complexity reveals that identity achievement involves navigating a spectrum of influences and challenges and highlights how commitment to our goals can coexist with the necessity for ongoing adaptation. This understanding calls for a more nuanced approach to identity formation, one that appreciates the dynamic and evolving nature of personal development within the broader context of societal and familial interactions.

Self Esteem

Self-esteem is a critical determinant in the process of identity formation, shaping how individuals perceive themselves and navigate their social environments. Within James Marcia's Identity Status Theory, high self-esteem is intricately linked with identity achievement, indicative of a stable and positive self-concept (*Ego Identity*). As Schwartz et al. elucidate, "participants in the Identity Achieved status scored highest on personal expressiveness" (515). This positive correlation between Identity Achievement and personal expressiveness highlights the pivotal role of self-esteem. Marcia's own research further substantiates this relationship, revealing that individuals with high identity achievement consistently rate

themselves more positively in social contexts and exhibit stable self-esteem (“Identity in Adolescence” 163). The characters Hani and Ishu serve as exemplars of this theory, demonstrating that high self-esteem is a crucial factor in attaining a stable and positive self-identity.

The interplay between spirituality and self-identity is crucial for achieving a balanced and resilient sense of self. Hani’s practice of centering herself through prayer, as she avers, “I sit down with my Qur’an. The one thing that actually helps me center myself” (73) underscores the profound interconnection between spiritual practice and psychological resilience. This illustrates the stability of her self-esteem and her ability to sustain personal equilibrium through her religious convictions. The phrase “center myself” suggests a deliberate and conscious effort to achieve inner peace and balance, highlighting the significant impact of her spiritual practices on her mental well-being. By specifying “my Qur’an” Hani emphasizes a personal and intimate relationship with her faith, indicating that her religious identity is a deeply integrated aspect of her self-concept. This intersection of religious practice and self-esteem reveals a holistic approach to identity wherein spiritual beliefs fortify her self-concept, corroborating Marcia’s assertion that individuals in the Identity Achievement status appraise themselves positively across various domains. Hani’s recourse to her religious practices for solace and strength demonstrates that her self-esteem is not solely anchored in her sexual identity but is also intricately entwined with her spiritual beliefs, thereby providing a multifaceted foundation for her overall identity. The act of sitting down with her Qur’an as a centering ritual underscores a regular, sustained engagement with her faith, which supports her mental and emotional stability. This exploration reveals that Hani’s spiritual grounding is a crucial component of her identity, enabling her to navigate societal challenges with a fortified sense of self and inner peace.

Hani’s confidence in her bisexuality and social interactions serves as a compelling illustration of her elevated self-esteem. For instance, her assertion, “Because... I am bisexual” (20) epitomizes her steadfast confidence in her identity, notwithstanding societal pressures. This declaration transcends mere self-acceptance; it encapsulates her ability to articulate her identity with clarity and conviction, a hallmark of high self-esteem. According to James Marcia’s Identity Status Theory, such unequivocal articulation of someone’s identity signifies Identity Achievement, wherein an individual has traversed the exploration phase and made a definitive commitment to their identity. Hani’s assertive proclamation thus indicates her successful navigation through the complexities of identity

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exploration to arrive at a resolute self-understanding. Hani's emphatic statement, "I do know how I feel about girls" (21) underscores her unwavering certainty and self-assurance in comprehending her sexuality. This level of personal expressiveness aligns with Schwartz et al.'s findings on the correlation between identity achievement and personal expressiveness. Schwartz et al. contend that individuals who attain identity clarity are more adept at articulating their feelings and beliefs with confidence (516). Hani's declaration is a manifestation of her internal clarity and her capacity to communicate it effectively, exemplifying a secure and integrated sense of self.

Despite possessing a robust sense of self and confidence in her bisexual identity, Hani is beset by significant anxiety concerning her relationships and social acceptance. This anxiety is particularly acute in her interactions with her friends, who incessantly demand validation of her sexuality. For instance, Hani reflects on how her friend Aisling "seems to notice all of the little things that make us different. And she hates them all" (10). This reflection illuminates the profound sense of alienation Hani experiences as her friends fail to accept her authentic self. The shift in Aisling's perception from acceptance to intolerance, underscored by the intensity of "hates," reveals the quotidian realities that fuel Hani's anxiety. Her friends' refusal to embrace her differences thrusts her into a perpetual state of self-justification and stress. This emotional impact is significant, transforming friendships, which should ideally provide support, into arenas for validation. Hani's anxiety is further compounded by the pressure to conform to societal expectations, despite her commitment to her true self and her religious practices. She poignantly articulates this internal conflict, stating that it is "better that I just keep that part of my life wrapped up and hidden away in my own home" (10). While she exhibits confidence in her bisexuality, societal pressures necessitate the concealment of this aspect of her identity, leading to internalized stress and anxiety. The metaphor of being "wrapped up and hidden away" vividly conveys the act of concealing her authentic self, suggesting both physical and emotional containment. This concealment highlights the external pressures she endures and the psychological toll of living a bifurcated life, where her true self is suppressed to secure social acceptance. The interplay between these external pressures and resultant anxiety profoundly impacts Hani's self-esteem. The incessant need to justify her identity and conceal facets of herself progressively erodes her sense of self-worth. Despite her inherent confidence, the tension between her internal sense of identity and the external demand for validation engenders persistent

anxiety. The psychological burden of this concealment reveals the substantial impact of societal and relational pressures on our mental health and self-esteem.

Ishu manifests high self-esteem through her assertiveness and leadership qualities, consistently illustrated in her interactions with peers and her proactive approach to challenges. For instance, Ishu's decisive action in grasping Hani's hand and leading her into the rain, accompanied by the directive "We should go" (49), epitomizes her confidence and decisiveness. This act of leadership and initiative not only signifies her robust self-esteem but also underscores her capacity to assume control and make decisions with assurance. The imagery of guiding Hani into the rain metaphorically represents Ishu's readiness to embrace uncertainty and confront challenges directly, embodying her resilience and self-assured nature. Ishu's candidness about her lack of dating experience is evident as she states, "You know, I've never dated anyone before" (35), and her forthright declaration, "I'm not even a lesbian" (38), further accentuate her self-assuredness and comfort with her identity. These admissions demonstrate her ability to be transparent and sincere regarding her experiences and feelings, characteristics commonly associated with high self-esteem. Her willingness to acknowledge her inexperience in dating without apprehension of judgment indicates a secure sense of self. By openly addressing her sexuality and relationship experiences, Ishu exemplifies an internalized sense of worth and confidence. Her confidence in discussing her sexuality and relationship experience aligns with Marcia et al.'s findings that individuals in the Identity Achievement status exhibit elevated self-esteem, enabling them to approach personal topics with confidence and clarity (*Ego Identity*). According to Marcia's identity status theory, individuals who have explored various facets of their identity and made firm commitments to certain values and beliefs are likely to possess high self-esteem and a coherent sense of self ("Identity in Adolescence" 163). Ishu's candidness regarding her sexuality and her leadership behaviors reflect the attributes of someone who has achieved a stable identity, thus reinforcing the notion that high self-esteem is integral to this status.

Hani's and Ishu's experiences elucidate the transformative role of self-esteem in shaping both individual identity and societal norms. Their robust self-esteem facilitates a confident engagement with and challenge to prevailing societal expectations, influencing their interactions and societal perceptions. By authentically embodying their identities, they offer alternative paradigms that question and potentially shift rigid societal expectations. Yet, their stories also

reveal that high self-esteem does not eliminate anxiety or the desire to hide aspects of oneself. This complexity suggests that even those with a strong sense of identity must continually navigate the pressures and challenges of societal expectations. Their journeys highlight that fostering high self-esteem can inspire individual and societal transformation, but it also involves an ongoing negotiation with internal and external conflicts. This dynamic interplay underscores Marcia's theory of identity achievement as a catalyst for social change, demonstrating how personal self-acceptance and resilience can effect broader cultural shifts.

Resistance to Peer Pressure and Authoritarianism

Marcia contends that individuals who have attained Identity Achievement status exhibit notable resilience to external pressures and display diminished levels of authoritarianism, indicative of their broader open-mindedness ("Identity in Adolescence" 163). He argues that "Foreclosures, both male and female, are the most endorsing of authoritarian values among the identity statuses" ("Identity in Adolescence" 163). This assertion implies that individuals in the Identity Achievement status are less susceptible to conforming to authoritarian values, thereby underscoring their capacity to resist peer pressure and societal expectations. In a complementary vein, Marcia et al. underscore that such individuals are predominantly guided by their intrinsic values rather than external influences (*Ego Identity*), further corroborating their reduced authoritarian tendencies.

In the novel, Hani exemplifies resistance to peer pressure and an absence of authoritarianism through her inclusive stance and advocacy for LGBTQ+ issues. Despite societal pressures, her behavior reveals significant autonomy and a rejection of authoritarian norms. Hani's proactive engagement with challenges, firm belief in her agency, and capacity for self-directed decision-making are central to her character development. The pressure from Aisling, who doubts the authenticity of Hani and Ishu's relationship, further tests Hani's resolve. When Aisling asserts, "You guys aren't really together" (42), and adds, "I mean ... you can't be" (42), underscores the social scrutiny and disbelief Hani must navigate. This phrasing suggests a rigid mindset and a refusal to accept the possibility of Hani and Ishu's relationship, implying a societal expectation that such relationships are implausible or unacceptable. Aisling's definitive tone and choice of words indicate not just doubt but a challenge to Hani's autonomy and the validity of her actions.

Hani's decision to enter a faux relationship with Ishu, despite the potential for social backlash, underscores her internal locus of control and autonomy. However, this decision also complicates her resistance to peer pressure, as it stems from a desire to prove herself against Aisling's authoritarian norms. Her strategic approach to making their relationship convincing such as staging photographs and organizing fabricated dates, demonstrates a calculated effort to exercise control over her circumstances. This is exemplified when Hani says "Nobody's going to believe we're dating if you sit like that" and suggests sitting next to each other instead of having a gaping space between them (44). Hani's acute awareness of societal scrutiny and the importance of appearances in their plan is evident here. Her suggestion to sit closer highlights her proactive and solution-oriented mindset, with the words "for starters" indicating a methodical approach. The term "gaping space" vividly conveys the obviousness of their physical distance, emphasizing the necessity of closeness to convince others of their relationship. By orchestrating this scenario, Hani not only manages her immediate social environment but also reinforces her sense of identity. This calculated effort reflects a sophisticated interplay of autonomy and self-determination amid external pressures. However, it also reveals a nuanced aspect of her character: her actions are, in part, a reaction to Aisling's authoritarianism, indicating that her resistance to peer pressure is complex and multi-faceted. Hani's commitment to maintaining the facade of their relationship underscores her ability to balance external perceptions with her internal values, demonstrating her adeptness at handling complex social dynamics. Her confidence and strategic planning showcase her resilience and determination to assert control over her identity and circumstances, even as she engages in actions influenced by the very pressures she seeks to resist.

Hani's internal conflict is further compounded by the dichotomy of her identity, which intricately complicates her navigation between societal expectations and personal authenticity. The duality is poignantly articulated in her reflection: "Coming home to my mother's voice saying Hani after a whole day of being called Maira always feels strange. Like stepping out of a skin that belongs to me but doesn't quite fit" (22). This metaphor poignantly encapsulates Hani's profound internal dissonance and sense of alienation. The imagery of "stepping out of a skin that belongs to me but doesn't quite fit" powerfully conveys the profound discomfort Hani endures as she oscillates between her public and private selves. Here, the word "skin" represents her public persona, which, while

necessary for conforming to social norms, feels intrinsically foreign and misaligned with her authentic self. This discomfort underscores the significant emotional and psychological toll associated with maintaining a facade that diverges from her true identity. It reveals the nuanced struggle inherent in balancing societal expectations with personal authenticity, illustrating how Hani's dual identity engenders a persistent sense of estrangement and internal conflict. This thematic tension underscores the broader discourse on identity formation, where external pressures compel individuals to navigate the delicate balance between societal conformity and the preservation of their genuine selves. Hani's experience, thus, serves as a microcosm of the larger conflict between societal acceptance and personal integrity. Through this duality, Hani's narrative highlights the complex dynamics of resisting peer pressure while striving to maintain self-authenticity. Her challenge to reconcile these disparate facets of her identity vividly exemplifies the intricate interplay between societal expectations and individual selfhood.

Ishu's character reveals a nuanced engagement with peer pressure and authoritarianism, reflecting her internal struggles and moral dilemmas. Initially, Ishu's proactive stance against Hani's toxic friends, Aisling and Dee, is evident when she insists on going to a halal restaurant during their first meeting. This decision not only underscores Ishu's awareness of negative influences but also demonstrates her commitment to maintaining her values despite prevailing social pressures. Ishu's critical observation, "Why is she friends with people who don't let her be who she is? Who make her feel uncomfortable and embarrassed of who she is?" (72), highlights her profound frustration with the superficiality of peer relationships. The phrase "don't let her be who she is" implies a sense of repression and denial, suggesting that Hani's friends are actively obstructing her authentic self-expression. The descriptors "uncomfortable and embarrassed" further accentuate the emotional impact of such relationships, revealing Ishu's sensitivity to the discord between external validation and personal integrity. This observation illustrates Ishu's growing disillusionment with her social circle's lack of authenticity and her struggle to balance the need for acceptance with a commitment to self-respect and genuine connections.

Ishu's personal experiences with peer pressure underscore a profound internal struggle, highlighting the tension between her ethical principles and her desire for social acceptance. Her decision to permit Aisling to cheat off her test exemplifies the tension between her ethical principles and her desire for acceptance. Ishu's

introspective question, “If I let her take a look at my test, if I let her cheat, does that mean I’m good in her books?” (90), encapsulates her anxiety about conforming while compromising her integrity. The repetitive construction “if I let her” underscores her indecision and the gravity of the choice before her. The expression “good in her books” suggests a transactional interpretation of friendship, where acceptance is contingent upon actions aligning with peers’ expectations rather than authentic mutual respect. This moment of vulnerability reveals the complexity of Ishu’s resistance to peer pressure, highlighting how the quest for social approval can sometimes lead her to contravene her values. Ishu’s narrative thus illuminates a complex interplay between her resistance to authoritarian norms and her susceptibility to peer pressure. Her actions reflect a continuous negotiation with her moral compass and the external expectations imposed upon her, underscoring the intricate challenges of preserving personal integrity amid social pressures.

Hani’s and Ishu’s narratives illuminate the evolving nature of identity as they navigate the complex interplay between authenticity and societal expectations. Their simultaneous resistance to and conformity with peer pressure exemplify the non-static quality of identity formation. This ongoing negotiation underscores the continual adaptation required to reconcile personal integrity with external demands, reflecting the dynamic and multifaceted nature of self-representation.

Internal Locus Control and Autonomy

Individuals who attain Identity Achievement status are characterized by a pronounced internal locus of control and a high degree of autonomy. Schwartz et al. contend that these individuals perceive themselves as the principal architects of their lives, demonstrating a significant capacity for self-direction and independence (507). This is exemplified by the Informational style of identity formation, which underscores a deliberate and strategic approach to identity development through active exploration and self-directed decision-making (507). Complementarily, Marcia et al. emphasize that those in Identity Achievement status exhibit a strong internal locus of control, often relying less on external validation (*Ego Identity*). This internal orientation facilitates decision-making that is firmly rooted in personal values and beliefs, rather than contingent upon external approval (*Ego Identity*). Marcia clarifies that individuals in Identity Achievement demonstrate a more pronounced internal orientation compared to those in the other Identity Statures (“Identity in Adolescence” 164). Collectively, these insights

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substantiate that internal locus of control and autonomy are quintessential attributes of Identity Achievement, reflecting a sophisticated self-direction and a confident capacity to shape our own outcomes.

In *Hani & Ishu's Guide to Fake Dating*, Hani exemplifies Marcia's concept of Identity Achievement through her steadfast adherence to personal values and her strong internal locus of control. Her commitment to religious practices underscores her autonomy and self-direction. Hani's statement, "Yeah... It's just something that's important for me. Like going to the mosque for jumma during school holidays and reading the Qur'an every weekend (33), reveals the depth of her personal conviction. Her remark, "It's just something that's important for me," highlights that her commitment is driven by internal values rather than external influences. By specifying the frequency of her practices, Hani emphasizes the deliberate and consistent nature of her adherence to her beliefs. This routine reflects her prioritization of personal values over any external factors. Hani's dedication to her religious practices, driven solely by internal motivation, underscores her strong internal locus of control. Her ability to consistently uphold these practices demonstrates her self-directed approach and commitment to her core values, aligning with Marcia's assertion that individuals in Identity Achievement status exhibit a pronounced internal orientation.

The evolution of Hani's internal locus of control and the intricate nature of her self-direction are epitomized in a pivotal moment in her journey. Hani's realization about the burden of deceit makes a critical turning point, shifting the focus from mere self-awareness to a deeper understanding of her own priorities. As she reflects on the repercussions of her decision to fake date Ishu, she states, "I got so caught up in my lies I forgot all the important things" (146). This quotation highlights a pivotal moment where Hani acknowledges the psychological toll of maintaining falsehoods. The words "caught up" suggests losing control through deceit, while "forgot all the important things" reveals her profound recognition of her true priorities. This introspection emphasizes the complexity of aligning personal desires with core values. Hani's journey illustrates that true self-awareness involves not just managing autonomy but also prioritizing what truly matters to her, showing that self-direction must be guided by an understanding of our genuine values.

Ishu's internal locus of control is clearly illustrated through her self-directed actions and decision-making. When her sister Nik abandoned medical school to

marry, their parents were profoundly discontented and chose not to attend Nik's engagement party despite being invited. Acknowledging the necessity of supporting her sister regardless of their parents' disapproval, Ishu confronts her parents and insists they attend the wedding to show solidarity with Nik. This act exemplifies Ishu's steadfast commitment to her principles and her capacity to make autonomous decisions based on her convictions, rather than capitulating to her parents' rigid expectations. Ishu's decision to prioritize her sister's emotional well-being over familial disapproval underscores her strong sense of self-direction and internal locus of control. Ishu's declaration, "I'm not going to miss my only sister's wedding, Ammu. You shouldn't ask me to" (165), explicitly challenges her parents' authority and accentuates the significance of personal happiness and individual choice. The phrase "I'm not going to miss" underscores her resolve and determination, indicating that her decision is final and unwavering. By directly addressing her mother with "Ammu," Ishu personalizes the confrontation, signaling that this is a deeply important and personal stance for her. The directive "You shouldn't ask me to" further reinforces her autonomy, as she establishes a clear boundary and refuses to be swayed by her parents' expectations. Her parents' apprehension that supporting Nik would dissuade her from returning to university is countered by Ishu's reasoning: "She's not going to go back because you decide to punish her for following her own path. She's just ... doing what makes her happy" (165). The phrase "following her own path" highlights the importance of autonomy and individual choice in Ishu's values. Ishu's use of "you decide to punish" underscores the authoritarian nature of her parents' approach, while her defense of Nik's actions as "doing what makes her happy" emphasizes the value she places on personal happiness and self-determination. This dialogue illuminates Ishu's understanding that genuine support and love arise from respecting individual choices and fostering an environment where personal autonomy is esteemed. In a household where parental approval is paramount, Ishu's defiance against her parents' expectations reveals a significant aspect of her identity: her unwavering commitment to personal values over familial or societal pressures. Ishu's actions and words in these moments are unequivocal indicators of her internal locus of control. She does not merely react to her parents' expectations but rather assesses the situation based on her values and the well-being of her sister. Her ability to articulate her beliefs and maintain her stance against familial pressure exemplifies a profound autonomy. Ishu's approach underscores her prioritization of personal integrity and the emotional needs of her loved ones over conforming to external demands, thereby fortifying her identity and sense of self.

Hani's and Ishu's experiences accentuate the essential role of internal locus of control and autonomy in defining their identities. Hani's journey highlights the significance of self-direction and unwavering confidence in her beliefs, enabling her to navigate her path with assurance. Ishu's narrative exemplifies the power of self-direction in transcending rigid familial expectations. These narratives collectively emphasize the critical importance of internal locus of control and autonomy in identity formation, demonstrating that true self-identity is forged through self-directed exploration and the courage to make independent decisions grounded in personal values and beliefs.

Cognitive Sophistication and Ethical Behavior

The intersection of identity formation and ethical behavior underscores the profound influence of cognitive and cultural sophistication on personal development. Marcia et al. argued that individuals who attain Identity Achievement demonstrate superior academic performance and exhibit enhanced cultural sophistication and ethical behavior (*Ego Identity*). This assertion is corroborated by Schwartz et al., who found that individuals with higher cognitive functioning and advanced ethical reasoning tend to adopt an Informational identity style, which is closely associated with Identity Achievement (517). Schwartz et al. highlight that "the findings from this study provide support for the hypothesized links among ego identity status, identity style, and personal expressiveness. The Informational style and the personal expressiveness are linked with Identity Achievement" (517). This Informational style, marked by cognitive capabilities and ethical discernment, highlights the crucial role of advanced thinking in achieving and maintaining a well-defined identity.

In *Hani & Ishu's Guide to Fake Dating*, Hani's character exemplifies advanced cognitive sophistication and ethical behavior. Her ethical considerations in various actions underscore her moral development. The conflict between Hani's genuine desire for acceptance and her father's political ambitions, marked by a façade of increased religiosity to secure votes, presents a profound exploration of authenticity versus societal expectations. Hani's confrontation with her father, "You said that if Salim Uncle finds out that I've lied it'll look bad but... what about you? You've spent all this time lying to him and pretending that you're someone you're not" (139), demonstrates her cognitive sophistication in recognizing and addressing hypocrisy. The deliberate choice of words such as

“lying” and “pretending” directly confronts the moral incongruity in her father’s actions, emphasizing Hani’s unwavering commitment to honesty. By framing the situation with, “what about you?” she not only challenges her father’s authority but also prompts him to reflect on his own ethical shortcomings, showcasing her ability to engage in complex moral reasoning. This pivotal moment underscores Hani’s ethical reasoning: she understands the paramount importance of honesty and integrity, even when it conflicts with her father’s pragmatic political strategies. Hani’s use of the phrase “you’ve spent all this time” highlights the prolonged nature of her father’s deception, starkly contrasting it with her own values of truthfulness. This scenario vividly illustrates how Hani navigates intricate social dynamics, balancing personal authenticity with external pressures, indicative of her advanced identity status. Her capacity to articulate this ethical conflict, despite potential familial and social repercussions, exemplifies her mature cognitive processing and steadfast commitment to personal integrity.

Hani’s internal conflict is acutely illustrated by her reflections on her parents’ long-term settlement in Ireland, “Amma and Abba have been living here for more than three decades now. They know Ireland like the back of their hands—it’s their home. But neither Amma nor Abba have spent a lot of time talking about the past—except to rave about all the ways things have gotten better” (147). This quotation encapsulates Hani’s struggle to reconcile her parents’ optimistic perspective on their immigrant experience with the contemporary challenges she faces. The phrase “they know Ireland like the back of their hands” signifies her parents’ profound familiarity and comfort with their adopted homeland, indicating a deep sense of belonging and mastery over their environment. The term “home” is particularly significant, conveying an emotional and psychological attachment that suggests Ireland has become an integral part of their identity. This stands in stark contrast to Hani’s perception of Ireland as a place where she continually grapples with identity and acceptance, highlighting her internal conflict. Hani’s observation that her parents “rave about all the ways things have gotten better” implies an enthusiastic and possibly idealized view of their immigrant journey, characterized by an intense positivity that may overlook ongoing struggles and challenges. This enthusiastic recounting creates a dichotomy between her parents’ narrative and Hani’s lived experience. Hani’s recognition of this discrepancy demonstrates her cognitive sophistication, as she critically evaluates the reality of their situation versus the narrative they choose to present. Her critical assessment of her parents’ perspective underscores her ethical reasoning. By noting that her parents “have spent a lot of time talking about the past” only to emphasize

improvements, she identifies a selective memory that focuses on positive outcomes while potentially ignoring or downplaying hardships. This selective positivity reflects a coping mechanism her parents might use to reconcile their past difficulties with their present stability. Hani's ability to comprehend this complexity indicates her advanced cognitive functioning. Hani's reflections on her family's immigration experience further enhance her cognitive and ethical understanding. Her father explains the struggles and sacrifices the family faced, stating, "When we first moved here, it was difficult. There were barely any Bangladeshi people here" (147), adding depth to Hani's understanding of her parents' motivations and the pressures they endured. The phrase "it was difficult" succinctly captures the initial hardships her family encountered, setting the stage for Hani's empathetic understanding. The term "difficult" immediately conveys a sense of struggle and adversity, which Hani recognizes and appreciates. The specific mention of "barely any Bangladeshi people" highlights the cultural and religious isolation they experienced, emphasizing the loneliness and disconnection from their cultural community. Hani's internal conflict is revealed as a nuanced negotiation between her parents' idealized immigrant narrative and her own lived reality, showcasing her profound cognitive and ethical development.

Ishu's academic success is a testament to her cognitive abilities, firmly situating her within the framework of Identity Achievement. Her consistent performance is evidenced by her confident assertion, "I'm pretty sure I aced it. Like I've aced every single test since I started at this school" (7) which underscores her intellectual prowess and unwavering dedication to academic excellence. The phrase "aced every single test" not only indicates a pattern of success but also reflects her exceptional intellectual capability and mastery of her subjects. Moreover, the expression "since I started at this school" suggests a long-term commitment to maintaining high standards. This sustained academic achievement aligns with the characteristics of Identity Achievement, demonstrating her ability to navigate complex educational demands with competence and resilience.

Ishu's character development illustrates the maturation of her ethical awareness. Initially, her decision to run for Head Girl is primarily motivated by a desire to garner parental approval, as evidenced by her confession, "No ... I'm pretending to date you because I want to be Head Girl because of my sister. My sister is like ... perfect. She has been perfect in my parents' eyes" (50). The fragmented nature of this confession, punctuated by ellipses and repetition, underscores Ishu's hesitation and internal conflict. The term "pretending" accentuates a sense of dis-

ingenuousness, indicating actions misaligned with her authentic desires. Ishu's view of her sister as "perfect" underscores her perception of her sister as an unattainable ideal, intensifying her struggle with familial expectations. This quotation poignantly encapsulates Ishu's internal conflict and her tension with familial expectations. As the narrative progresses, Ishu's ethical reasoning undergoes significant evolution, prompting her to reassess her motivations. Her internal monologue, "Why do I want to be Head Girl? Everyone else was talking about class hoodies and debs, and how they have all of this leadership experience. I don't want to be a bloody leader of these girls; I barely even like talking to them half the time. I definitely don't want to spend half of the final year in school planning a dance where I'll probably have a miserable time" (157), exemplifies her cognitive sophistication. The rhetorical question "Why do I want to be Head Girl?" marks the commencement of her introspection. Her dismissal of typical student leadership concerns, such as "class hoodies and debs," sharply contrasts with her disinterest, highlighting the disparity between her genuine interests and external expectations. The repeated assertions of "I don't want" and "I definitely don't want" express a strong personal aversion, signifying an advanced level of self-awareness and ethical deliberation. Ishu's pursuit of the Head Girl position ultimately reveals a misalignment with her authentic self. Her realization becomes apparent when she hesitantly admits to Hani, "To ... show Ammu and Abbu that I'm ... not you" (157). The fragmented nature of her confession, punctuated by ellipses, underscores her profound internal conflict and struggle to articulate her true feelings. This admission emphasizes her deep-seated need to assert her individuality and distinguish herself from her sister's idealized image. The verb "mumbles" suggests her lack of confidence and the emotional difficulty of this significant revelation. This moment signifies a crucial turning point in Ishu's journey toward Identity Achievement, demonstrating her evolving self-awareness and ethical reasoning. By confronting the pressures to conform to her sister's example, Ishu begins to navigate her path, reflecting significant personal growth and maturity.

Hani's and Ishu's experiences reveal that Identity Achievement is a dynamic process involving cognitive sophistication and ethical reasoning. Their journeys underscore the complexity of navigating personal values amid external challenges. The nuanced decisions they make demonstrate that one can be deeply aware of ethical dilemmas while simultaneously employing cognitive reasoning to justify actions. This ongoing negotiation between cognition and ethics highlights the

fluid nature of identity formation, where self-awareness and the prioritization of personal values are pivotal.

Conclusion

James Marcia's Identity Status Theory provides a foundational framework for understanding identity development, emphasizing the importance of exploration and commitment. However, the experiences of Hani and Ishu in the novel reveal that identity formation is a multifaceted and non-linear process, influenced by personal crises, cultural expectations, and mutual support. While Marcia's theory presupposes a well-defined, individually determined identity, Hani's and Ishu's narratives illustrate that a robust sense of self can coexist with traits that do not align with traditional expectations of identity achievement.

The stories of Hani and Ishu exemplify the intricate interplay of factors in identity formation, including family dynamics, self-esteem, resistance to peer pressure, internal locus of control, autonomy, cognitive sophistication, and ethical behavior. Their experiences underscore that authentic self-identity emerges through self-directed exploration and independent decisions rooted in personal values. Despite the anxiety and external pressures, both characters exhibit resilience and self-awareness, underscoring the fluid and dynamic nature of identity formation shaped by both internal and external influences. Their evolving journeys advocate for a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of diverse identities, highlighting the necessity for a flexible approach that accommodates the dynamic nature of personal development within societal and familial contexts. Hani's and Ishu's narratives emphasize the significance of nurturing environments that support individual growth and the prioritization of personal values, contributing to the broader evolution of societal attitudes toward identity.

The intricate relationship between coming out and self-confidence is exemplified by the experiences of Hani and Ishu. Rosati et al. underscore that the act of coming out is pivotal for enhancing self-esteem, life satisfaction, and the quality of interpersonal relationships (2). Correspondingly, Legate et al. demonstrate that individuals who disclose their sexual orientation experience greater well-being, particularly when supported by their environment (145). James Marcia's theory of identity development, which emphasizes the importance of commitment to beliefs and goals, prompts an inquiry into whether this framework can be extended to encompass our commitment to our sexuality. In *Hani & Ishu's Guide to Fake*

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Dating, Hani's open identification as bisexual and her commitment to her sexuality ostensibly suggest an increased level of self-assurance. However, the narrative presents a complex reality: despite Hani's commitment and the act of coming out, she continues to grapple with self-assurance. Conversely, Ishu, who remains reticent about her sexuality and has not come out, exhibits a pronounced sense of confidence and self-assurance. This juxtaposition challenges the simplistic correlation between coming out and self-confidence, indicating that while coming out and committing to our sexuality can substantially enhance well-being, they are not the sole determinants of self-identity. The characters' experiences suggest that personal resilience and inherent personality traits are equally pivotal in shaping self-identity.

The examination of the nuanced interplay between coming out and self-confidence becomes particularly pertinent when considering the intended readership of *Hani & Ishu's Guide to Fake Dating*. The novel provides profound insights into the fluid and multifaceted nature of identity formation, particularly for adolescents. The journeys of Hani and Ishu illustrate that it is entirely possible to experience simultaneous confidence and doubt, thereby reassuring readers that struggles and uncertainties are inherent components of the journey toward self-acceptance. The narrative underscores that being secure in our identity does not preclude the experience of challenges, emphasizing the significance of resilience and support in personal development.

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