

## Iron Man's and Captain Marvel's Anxieties and Defense Mechanisms in "Civil War II"

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**Abstract:** This thesis deals with the anxieties experienced by the leaders of superhero teams in Civil War II, Iron Man and Captain Marvel. Through their anxieties in Civil War II, I tried to reveal the causes of their anxieties and their ways to reduce these uneasy feelings. To analyze the causes of these two characters' anxieties, I used two of the theory of anxiety, reality and moral anxiety. I found that there are two causes that make Iron Man feel anxieties which are the reaction of Captain Marvel towards Ulysses' prophecies and his responsibility both as a superhero and as a leader to protect people from the outcome of Ulysses' prophecies. On the other hand, Captain Marvel also feels anxieties from the blame of Iron Man and her responsibility both as a superhero and as a public officer to protect people from dystopian future. Iron Man uses two defense mechanisms, which are splitting and rationalization. On the other hand, Captain Marvel also uses two defense mechanism, which are idealization and rationalization. These defense mechanisms are used by both, Iron Man and Captain Marvel to ease their reality and moral anxiety.

Key words:

Reality anxiety, Moral anxiety, Splitting, Idealization, Rationalization.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

*Civil War II* is a superhero comic book which is published by Marvel Comics in 2016. It is a sequel comic from the same title, *Civil War*. Generally, superhero comics happen to be one of the most common format for American comic books. Furthermore, Marvel Comics has also been known as one of the biggest superhero comic publishers. *Civil War II* written by Brian Michael Bendis, this issue is interesting to analyze because it has a different plot from any issue of ordinary superhero comics. In a common plot of superhero comics, the superheroes are pictured as strong or talented persons who fight super villains in order to protect civilians from threats like invasion, chaos, and many bad things which could possibly happen to destroy humanity. However, in the plot of *Civil War II*, the superheroes are pictured differently because they do not only fight super villains but they also fight among themselves because of their different opinions about the future.

The story of *Civil War II* begins with Ulysses Cain, a student at Ohio State University who is exposed to the Terrigen Mist. The Terrigen Mist has turned Ulysses into an inhuman has an ability to see the future. His vision is a dystopia that the earth is in danger of being destroyed by aliens or greatest threats that may happen in the future. The vision of Ulysses has brought a different opinions from Iron Man as the Avenger leader and Captain Marvel the Ultimates leader. These two leaders have their own anxieties about Ulysses' power, yet because of their different perspectives, they have started quarrel among themselves about either to use Ulysses' power as an advantage to alter the future or not. From these texts, I would like to find the causes of Iron Man's and Captain Marvel's anxieties and the defense mechanisms they use to cope with their anxieties in these current situations of *Civil War II*.

The purpose of this thesis is to see that the anxieties that Iron Man and Captain Marvel have are caused by their different reactions towards Ulysses' prophecies and the pressures of being superheroes. Moreover, I also find that Iron Man uses two kinds of defense mechanisms which are splitting and rationalization while Captain Marvel's defense mechanisms are idealization and rationalization.

In Marvel Comic, superheroes are pictured as same as human with their weaknesses when they are faced with struggles or problems that come from their situation, environment or even their personality. These superheroes also face the same thing as normal people because they feel anxious and starts to use defense mechanisms as their ways to overcome these anxieties. It can be seen that superhero in Marvel Comic is similar with normal human being who have troubles and struggles to solve their problems. They are not pictured as gods or even deities. Therefore, superheroes of Marvel comic are pictured as very human, so that they are able to make the readers relate themselves to their favorite superheroes.

In making this thesis, I applied two theories of anxieties and defense mechanisms. Regarding the theory of anxieties, anxiety is known as a painful emotional experience that is produced by agitations that happen in the internal organs of the body. "Anxiety is different from any other painful states, such as tension, pam, and melancholy by some specific quality of consciousness" (Hall, 1999, p. 61). It is an unpleasant inner state that people seek to avoid. Sigmund Freud had divided three different types of anxiety, all of which are signals to the ego. First of all is realistic or reality anxiety, which is normally referred to as fear. Realistic or reality anxiety is a painful emotional experience resulting from the perception of danger in the external world (Hall, 1999). The second type is moral anxiety, this is what we feel when the threat comes not from the outer, physical world, but from the internalized social world of the superego. It is, in fact, just another word for feelings like shame and guilt and the fear of punishment. (Hall, 1999). The last type of anxiety is neurotic anxiety. This is the fear of being overwhelmed by impulses from the id. If somebody feels like he is about to "lose it;" lose control, temper, rationality, or even his mind, he experiences neurotic anxiety. In conclusion, there are three types of anxiety where the ego experiences are fear of the external world, fear of the id and fear of the super ego (Freud, 1923).

Finally, I used the defense mechanism theory to analyze this thesis. Defense mechanism is a strategy developed by the ego in order to deal with the threats or dangers because of the oppression from id, superego, or reality. According to Hall, defense mechanism is an attempt to reduce anxiety by using rational methods such as deny, falsify, or distort reality and it will prevent the development of clash in personality (Hall, 1999). I will only use three defense mechanisms in this research which are rationalization, idealization, splitting, and humor. Rationalization occurs when a person attempts to explain or create excuses for an event or action in rational terms. In doing so, they are able to avoid accepting the true cause or reason resulting in the present situation (Hall, 1999). Second, Idealization, involves creating an ideal impression of a person, place or object by emphasizing their positive qualities and neglecting the reality that they might have negative sides (Lerner & Van-Der Keshet, 1995). Furthermore, the third defense mechanism, Splitting, occurs when the ego attempts to reconcile multiple aspects or rationales, but resorts to understanding the world in "black and white" terms (Goin, 1998). A person who experiences splitting may take an "either-or" approach when making evaluations of the world around them, including objects, situations, and people.

All of these concepts of anxieties and defense mechanisms will be used to answer statement of the problems which are the causes of these two leaders of superhero teams, Iron Man's and Captain Marvel's anxieties and the defense mechanisms they use to cope with their anxieties.

## **2. THE CAUSES OF IRON MAN'S AND CAPTAIN MARVEL'S ANXIETIES AND THEIR WAYS TO DEAL WITH THEM**

### **2.1. Iron Man's anxieties and defense mechanisms.**

Iron Man is the leader of a superheroes team, The Avenger, and he is also one of the most respected man of science. In *Civil War II*, Iron Man starts to have an argument with Captain Marvel because of his opinion about Ulysses is totally opposite with Captain Marvel. Ulysses' power to see future is considered as a dangerous phenomenon because Ulysses always has visions of dystopian future where there are threats and dangers that may approach the earth. In this issue, there are four main prophecies of Ulysses after his early prophecy about celestial villains attack on earth which are Thanos attack, Hulk rampage, Hydra's undercover agent, and Spiderman will get to kill Captain America. These prophecies has brought fear for Iron Man. The fear is rooted in his consciousness which has caused Iron Man to feel reality and moral anxiety.

#### **2.1.1. Iron Man's Reality Anxiety**

Reality anxiety is known as a fear that comes from a person's situation. One of these factors that can trigger reality anxiety is insecure environment. The insecure environment in Iron Man's

situation is coming from the situation of Captain Marvel who put her belief on Ulysses when he spells out his predictions about future. These actions have made Iron Man to feel anxious because of the outcome of Captain Marvel's actions which are uncalculated attack on Thanos and unplanned approach on Hulk.

In the uncalculated of Captain Marvel on Thanos has led to the death of War Machine and She-Hulk ending up in critical condition (Bendis, *Civil War II* Vol 1, 2016). Then, in Captain Marvel's unplanned approach on Hulk, Captain Marvel approaches Bruce, an alter ego of Hulk and asks him to go outside with all of superhero who has been waiting for him. It was soon discovered that Bruce had been experimenting on himself with Gamma cells even after having being depowered. When this information came to light after Beast hacked into Bruce's computers. (Bendis, *Civil War II* Vol 3, 2016). Furthermore, as the result of this emotion trigger that Captain Marvel makes to approach on Hulk, Bruce is killed by an arrow that is shot by a fellow superhero, Hawkeye.

In conclusion, the causes of Iron Man's reality anxieties are coming from Captain Marvel's reaction over Ulysses' prophecies which are uncalculated attack on Thanos and Unplanned approach on Hulk. These reactions have caused Iron Man to feel anxious because both of these actions create a great loss for Iron Man where he lose his friends like James Rhodney and Bruce Banner.

### **2.1.2. Iron Man's Moral Anxiety**

Moral anxiety's source is coming within the personality structure where a person cannot escape from their personal feeling of guilt or shame that comes from their personal life value like responsibility. Freud also stated that "Moral Anxiety...is a structural one and does not involve a relationship between the person and the world (Hall, 1999). In *Civil War II*, Iron Man's moral anxiety is caused by his responsibility both as a superhero and as a leader of The Avenger. The first moral anxiety of Iron Man comes from his responsibility as a superhero who needs to protect civilians from dangerous threats. In here, Iron Man finds the truth that Ulysses' visions may be the one that triggers a problem because he may also see things from his point of view only. Moreover, Iron Man tries to reveal Ulysses' brain works as a system that automatically absorbs all the data and energy that cascades all over the world to create a vision of future. Therefore, Ulysses' prophecies are nothing more than a result of complex algorithms and calculation with an actual probability percentage around ten percent (Bendis, *Civil War II* Vol 4, 2016). Iron Man feels responsible as a superhero when he realizes that Ulysses' prophecy may harm innocent civilians. This prophecy of Ulysses may lead people to distrust superhero as the protector because they act according to Ulysses single vision of Ulysses like what Captain Marvel has done to an innocent civilian. It creates a perception that whatever Ulysses has a vision that these people are bad, they will have no choice but to accept their situation and to lose their freedom over a possible future that Ulysses has predicted about future.

Second, the cause of Iron Man's moral anxiety comes from his responsibility as a leader. In the next prophecy, Ulysses has showed other superhero that Spider Man is going to commit murder on Captain America. Iron Man feels responsible to save his underling from Captain Marvel's reaction on Ulysses' fourth prophecy. He used to mention that Ulysses' power is turned to be so dangerous and it may hurt innocent people like Spider Man who never commit any crime in his life (Bendis, *Civil War II* Vol 6, 2016).

In conclusion, Iron Man has experience moral anxiety which come from his inner conscience as a superhero and as a leader. These anxious conditions are considered as moral anxiety where there are some guilty feelings of Iron Man if bad things are going to happen over a civilian, his underling, and his friend. Therefore, he feels responsible to protect what are important for him because of his role both as a superhero and as a leader. It is similar with what Freud has stated that morality anxiety is a painful emotional experience resulting from the perception of shame or guilty feeling that comes from inner conscience (Hall, 1999).

### **2.1.3. Iron Man's Defense Mechanisms**

To overcome anxiety, normal people usually use defense mechanisms. From many defense mechanisms, people will use one or two kinds depending on their problems and situations. In this issue of *Civil War II*, Iron Man uses two kinds of defense mechanisms in order to cope with his current situation. These two defense mechanisms are splitting and rationalization.

First, Splitting is the defense mechanism where a person starts to determine all of the individual or situation around them as either good or bad. It means that a person who uses this defense mechanism has an inability to see gray area. They only see things either as good or bad only despite

the facts that sometimes good people make mistakes. In Iron Man's case, he uses splitting to perceive an idea that Ulysses' ability to see future is dangerous for people around him. On the other hand, Iron Man sees Captain Marvel as a misleading person who arrogantly takes decision to change Ulysses' prophecies with no consideration for the outcome of her actions. Iron Man uses splitting to see Ulysses and Captain Marvel where he considers both of these individuals as bad persons. Iron Man personally does not hate both of them. However, he only sees a dangerous that lies upon Ulysses' ability because it may bring negative impacts for people around him like other superhero and civilians. Iron Man also sees Captain Marvel as a bad one because she has been misleading with her own arrogance to change the future with no consideration for its effects like the death of their fellow superhero friends.

Furthermore, Iron Man's second defense mechanism, Rationalization, is known as a defense mechanism that people often use where they start to use justification of feeling or behavior in rational or logical manner in order to avoid true explanation (Hall, 1999). In the case of Iron Man, he uses this defense mechanism to defend his belief that Captain Marvel is wrong for her doing to arrest a civilian and Spider Man, who is predicted to kill Captain America in Ulysses' prophecy. In order to make her understand, Iron Man does rationalization to show facts and logical reasons to support his statements about how dangerous Captain Marvel's action can be if she still listens to Ulysses' prophecies about future.

## **2.2. Captain Marvel's anxieties and defense mechanisms**

Captain Marvel is a lead female character in this issue of *Civil War II*, she is a leader of a group that is called as The Ultimates and she also works under governor's order. Captain Marvel has soul of patriotism that always make her to work with physical or action instead of thinking. Therefore, she always tend to look for practical way to solve her problems to save countless life. However, this decision has made her to face several difficulties where she needs to fight her own friend for what she believes in Ulysses' power to see future. For these reasons, Captain Marvel gets to experience both reality and moral anxiety.

### **2.2.1. Captain Marvel's reality anxiety**

Captain Marvel shows herself as a patriot who always prioritize the safety of others over herself. Therefore, when she knows that Ulysses has an ability to see future, she asks him to join force with her to prevent bad things before it happens. However, this attempts of Captain Marvel to alter Ulysses' prophecies has made her to get more anxious because the outcome of her actions. These results has made Iron Man, as the one who opposed her to use Ulysses' power, confronts her. This action has made Captain Marvel to feel anxious because Iron Man starts to put the blame on her for the death of War Machine and Bruce Banner which occur in Ulysses' first and second prophecies.

First, Captain Marvel reality anxiety comes from Iron Man who starts to put the blame on Captain Marvel as the one who responsible for the death of War Machine. It happens when Ulysses has reported to Captain Marvel that Thanos will attack earth. However, this attempt has caused a lot of casualties, among others, She Hulk is injured and War Machine is dead. Tony says that Captain Marvel is the one who responsible for his loss and it makes Captain Marvel to get more anxious because Iron Man is not the only one who feels lost over the death of War Machine. Therefore, this outcome of Captain Marvel's attempt to alter Ulysses' prophecy has caused her to feel a great impact because she never realizes that her action to save others will turn to make her as the one who responsible for the death of someone she loves which is War Machine (Bendis, *Civil War II Vol 1*, 2016).

Second, Iron Man puts a blame on Captain Marvel for the death of Bruce Banner. It happens when Ulysses projects his vision about how Hulk will kill all superheroes. In her statement that "... while we were talking, he sort of, well, he hacked into Banner's work server" shows how Captain Marvel's ally, Doctor Henry McCoy has hacked into Bruce's personal data to find information about his research. This data shows that Bruce has made some experiments with himself (Bendis, *Civil War II Vol 3*, 2016). The outcome of this is the death of Bruce Banner in the hand of his fellow superhero friend, Hawkeye. This moment of Bruce death makes Iron Man to put the blame on Captain Marvel as the cause of this outcome. Then, Iron Man's statement that "who's next on your hit list, Danver?" shows Captain Marvel as the killer who slain one by one superhero if they appear on Ulysses' prophecies as evil.

In conclusion, these blames of Iron Man towards Captain Marvel for the death of War Machine and Bruce Banner have made her to feel anxious. Captain Marvel feels that she has been pictured as murderer or villain only because she tries to save innocent lives from a great danger that may approach in Ulysses' vision of future. She also faces difficulty to absorb all of the situation that she is the one who responsible for the death of her friends. These blames and facts of the outcome from her doing to alter Ulysses' prophecies has made her to feel a great oppression which is led to reality anxiety.

### **2.2.2. Captain Marvel's Moral anxiety**

Moral anxiety of Captain Marvel is caused by her responsibility as a hero and as a public officer. In these responsibilities, Captain Marvel feels a great oppression that comes from her inner conscience whether she needs to fully trust Ulysses' prophecies or to believe in facts around her. This moral dilemma is based on her value as a superhero who needs to protect innocent civilians from any dangerous or threats that may come upon them. These moral anxieties of Captain Marvel as superhero that whether or not she has to capture a civilian whom she should protect and as a public officer, Captain Marvel needs to choose whether or not she needs to capture Spider Man.

Captain Marvel's first moral anxiety is about whether or not she has to capture a civilian whom she should protect. Captain Marvel is faced with a difficult choice in this prophecy because she needs to capture a civilian only because Ulysses has this vision that this civilian is an agent of Hydra. Captain Marvel has a responsibility as a hero to secure this woman yet she never finds a clue in her case to proof her action to capture this woman. Then, she starts to interrogate a civilian as her responsibility by forcing this woman to talk about herself as an agent of evil organization. The outcome of this interrogation is the decision of Captain Marvel as a hero to detain this woman to alter Hydra from creating a mass destruction.

Captain Marvel's second moral anxiety is about whether or not she needs to capture Spider Man. It happens after Ulysses showed to every superhero that Spider Man will get to kill Captain America. As a public officer, Captain Marvel feels responsible to prevent this thing from happening. Therefore, she has decided to detain Spider Man. This action feels hard for her because as a public officer, she has responsibilities to save people from threats that may come from this fight between Captain America with Spider Man. Captain Marvel shows struggles when she says "but we can keep him safe here and make sure..." which refers to the safety both Spider man and Captain America if the future that Ulysses has showed to them is altered by Captain Marvel's action to detain one of them in custody.

In conclusion, these moral anxiety comes from the inner world of Captain Marvel both as a superhero and as a public officer. She faces moral dilemma as a superhero that whether or not she should detain a civilian whom she needs to protect. In one side there is no proof that this civilian is an agent of Hydra yet Captain Marvel feels that Ulysses' vision may become true if she decides to free this woman from her hands. Furthermore, as a public officer, Captain Marvel also faces moral anxiety about whether or not she need to capture Spider Man. This dilemma comes from the value of her as a public officer to secure things before it gets worse yet there is no sign that Spider Man is going to kill Captain America. These responsibilities have made Captain Marvel to face anxieties that is rooted to her inner conscience.

### **2.2.3. Captain Marvel's Defense Mechanisms**

Like Iron Man, Captain Marvel also uses defense mechanisms to deal with her anxieties in her current situation. Since Captain Marvel's personality and situations are different from Iron Man, she uses different defense mechanisms. There are two defense mechanisms that Captain Marvel uses in this issue of *Civil War II* which are idealization and rationalization.

The first defense mechanism of Captain Marvel is idealization. It is a defense mechanism by which a person perceives an idea to believe another person or object as far better than they truly are. Otto Kernberg has conceptualized idealization as a view when a person exaggeratedly attribute positive qualities to the self or other (Lerner & Van-Der Keshet, 1995). In Captain Marvel's way to deal with her current situation, she uses idealization as her way to deal with all of the problems that come from her inner and outer worlds. In applying this defense mechanism, Captain Marvel uses idealization towards Ulysses when Iron Man starts to blame her for her actions. This defense mechanism has been used by Captain Marvel as a way for her to defense her current anxious feelings because of the pressure that comes from her outer world. Captain Marvel perceives the idea where

Ulysses' power could become a best solution in order to cease a better future by eliminating all of the threats that may occur in the future.

The second defense mechanism used by Captain Marvel to ease her situations is rationalization. This defense mechanism is a justification of feelings or behavior in rational or logical manner in order to avoid the true explanation (Hall, 1999). In the case of Captain Marvel, she uses this defense mechanism in order to defend her belief on Ulysses' power which occurs in third and fourth prophecies of Ulysses. Furthermore, these acts of Captain Marvel's defense mechanisms are used in order to ease her anxious feelings that she has suffered from her inner and outer world. This defense mechanism, rationalization, also becomes her way to defend her belief on Ulysses' power by talking about logical reasons and facts to support her intention to save countless lives through her reaction on Ulysses' vision of future.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis deals with Iron Man's and Captain Marvel's anxiety and their ways to cope with their situation through the use of defense mechanisms. Psychoanalysis is applied in this study by using Sigmund Freud's theory of personality, especially in the theory of anxiety and defense mechanisms, which include splitting, idealization, and rationalization. These theories are helpful in order to figure out the problem Iron Man and Captain Marvel undergo which finally lead to their anxieties.

From the discussion in the previous chapter, it turns out that Iron Man suffers from his reality and moral anxiety. While Captain Marvel also suffers the same thing as Iron Man does in this issue of *Civil War II*. Iron Man's reality comes from Captain Marvel's reaction on Ulysses' prophecies which has resulted Iron Man to lose both of his friends, War Machine and Bruce Banner. Iron Man also struggles to face his moral anxiety because he has seen how dangerous Ulysses' power can be where it can hurt people and make them to lose their freedom to life. Therefore, as a superhero and as a leader, he feels responsible to protect civilians and his underling from Captain Marvel who has obsessed to change Ulysses' prophecies about them.

It can be seen from this story of *Civil War II* that superheroes of Marvel are pictured as human being with their strength and weaknesses to deal with their problems. However, as the problems grow bigger than their capabilities, these superheroes start to have anxious feelings. These feelings have led them to use defense mechanisms based on their situations and backgrounds. These defense mechanisms are used in order to ease their anxieties so that they can be cooperative in their current stressful situations. However, these defense mechanisms are not only the way for them to reduce their anxious feelings but also the way for them to trigger another problems or even anxieties.

Superheroes of Marvel comic has been well known today because they act and think like human being. They also face some moral dilemmas to decide their actions and fears of the pressure situations. These similarities between superheroes in Marvel comic with human being in real life has made the reader can relate themselves to their favorite superheroes. They can feel sympathy or even empathy when their favorite superheroes face a trouble that they could not handle or when these superheroes finally defeat their enemies in battle. These attachment feelings from the readers can be so close because Marvel comic superheroes are pictured as human being instead of being close to the perfections like gods or even deity beings. With this picture as human being, Marvel comic superheroes can make such a realistic storyline where all of the characters act and think like human being where sometimes they face struggles that come from either their outer or inner world.

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