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# Ms. Marvel: Genre, Medium, and an Intersectional Superhero

*Erika Chung*

## **Abstract**

Superhero comic books are not known for their diverse representation of characters in their storytelling. Dominated by stories about men as heroes who save the day, women and people of colour are often left to the sidelines. However, the 2014 release of *Ms. Marvel*, a superhero comic book series that featured a young Pakistani-American Muslim girl as its protagonist, challenged and demonstrated that there is room in comic books for diverse representation. This paper examines the superhero genre, the comic book as a medium, and intersectionality, in relation to *Ms. Marvel*, in order to understand how meaningful and nuanced representation of women of colour can be included in superhero comic books.

**Keywords:** *Ms. Marvel*, Kamala Khan, comic books, representation, superhero

## **Introduction**

Superhero comic books are best known for their iconic male characters and series. Popular superhero titles that come to mind are *Superman*, *Batman*, *Captain America*, and *Iron Man*. Female characters and characters of colour are typically marginalized, such as Batgirl from *Batman* who was originally meant to be a love interest or Kato from the *Green Hornet* who was a sidekick and a butler. Further, female characters are commonly objectified or killed, also referred to as “fridging,” in order to have the male protagonist’s story progress.<sup>1</sup> It is uncommon for a female character of colour to headline their own superhero comic book series, and yet in the fall of 2013, Marvel Comics announced they were reviving the *Ms. Marvel* comic book series.

Despite *Ms. Marvel* being a short-lived series originally published in 1977, the 2014 revival would feature a new character as Ms. Marvel. The new lead character is Kamala Khan, a sixteen-year-old Pakistani-American Muslim (Carol Danvers, a white, blonde-haired, blue-eyed woman was the original Ms. Marvel). The switch to Kamala Khan as Ms. Marvel was part of a publication initiative from Marvel Comics to feature more female leads and to diversify its cast of characters.<sup>2</sup> Laura Hudson, former senior editor for *WIRED*, said: “Although the most popular superheroes tend to be white guys created decades ago, legacy heroes who pass their familiar names to new characters are one way publishers like Marvel and DC Comics have brought greater diversity to their fictional worlds.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, the revival and reimagining of familiar superheroes is one way of enabling more inclusive and diverse representation in

superhero comic books. In contrast to the predominant white male representation in superhero comics, the 2014 release of *Ms. Marvel* was a step in a different direction.

Representation in superhero comic books matters because when the narratives of marginalized people are ignored and reduced to objects, it reinforces and naturalizes inequalities in social structures. When the narratives of marginalized people are ignored and reduced to objects, it reinforces and naturalizes inequalities in social structures.<sup>4</sup> Kamala Khan as Ms. Marvel is a nuanced and intersectional representation of a young woman of colour as a superhero. As the protagonist of her series she demonstrates agency and power. Like other superheroes, Kamala struggles with her identity, growing up, her heritage, and her place in her community. She even wears a costume with a mask. It appears that she is no different from other superheroes from Marvel or DC. However, the character and narrative of *Ms. Marvel* complicates assumptions of who can be a superhero and what a superhero looks like. Kamala's gender and race are foundationally incorporated into her narrative and experience as an American teenager, Muslim, and superhero. The comic book series does not break down her identity into categories of difference for exotification, and instead presents Kamala as a teenager trying to learn about her multifaceted identity and community.

This paper looks at how genre, medium and the intersectionality of race and gender are used in the *Ms. Marvel* comic book series to demonstrate meaningful diverse and inclusive representation. By examining *Ms. Marvel Vol. 1: No Normal*, which collects the first five issues of the 2014 series, this paper argues that Ms. Marvel is an intersectional superhero because of how race and gender are foundational to the character and narrative, thus resulting in a nuanced representation of a young woman of colour as a superhero that goes beyond tokenism. The first half of the paper examines how *Ms. Marvel*, as a comic series and character, challenges the typical male power fantasy. Through an examination of genre, this portion of the paper explores how the superhero genre has been defined and gendered as male. Furthermore, the comic medium itself, in combination with how narration is used in *Ms. Marvel*, will be analysed to demonstrate how issues of race and gender are communicated through the superhero genre and the medium of comic books. The second half of this paper uses an intersectional framework to study how issues of race and gender are utilized in the series, specifically in terms of narrative and character development. By highlighting how intersectionality is used in *Ms. Marvel*, I will provide insight into how racial and gender representation in superhero comics have grown to be diverse and inclusive.

### **The Male Power Fantasy of Superhero Comics**

Superhero comic books predominantly feature white heteronormative men as heroes, in roles of leadership, and as the ones who bring justice and resolution. This encapsulates the male power fantasy, where male characters are centered as the chosen one who will be a saviour, commonly

found in superhero comics. Being right and infallible places the male superhero as the key problem-solver to conflicts, and therefore justifies his decisions. This is reflected in the seven characteristics comic scholar Richard Reynolds developed to define the superhero archetype. Two characteristics in particular play into the masculinist fantasies: justice and superpowers/politics. Reynolds makes the point that a superhero's devotion to justice stems from a blind but well-intended place,<sup>5</sup> and when needed, he will circumvent figures and institutions of authority<sup>6</sup> in order to restore 'justice.'

When narratives of white heteronormative masculinity dominate, the stories of people of colour and women are left to the periphery. Popular culture scholar Jeffery Brown argues that if there were diverse representation in superhero comics then the perception of who can be a superhero would become more complex.<sup>7</sup> Inclusive visual representation of superheroes with different racial and gender identities calls into question why superhero narratives focus predominately on white male characters as protagonists, and offsets the assumed default of these characters and narratives as being white by illustrating how characters from marginalized backgrounds can wield power. In particular, Brown notes how superhero comic book publisher Milestone Comics, which is now under DC Comics, incorporated,

[t]he influential reality of existing norms of gender and race-informed patterns of behaviour...by providing alternatives from within the dominant modes of discourse, by maintaining many of the fundamental conventions of comic book heroism at the same time that they expand the traditional definition of the medium.<sup>8</sup>

In other words, the genre of superhero comics can change from within to address problematic gender and race representations. *Ms. Marvel* demonstrates the genre's capability to change and reinvent itself regarding how characters are used and prioritized. Becoming diverse and inclusive does not mean having to lose the superhero genre in comic books. Instead, it means shifting the discourse and focus to marginalized characters and narratives, and therefore expanding the genre so that a variety of perspectives are represented.

Superhero comics are distinct because of their characters and plot lines. According to comic studies scholar Peter Coogan, there are three important elements that make up the superhero genre's distinct form. The three elements are mission, powers, and identity; any combination of the three will establish the core essence of a superhero comic book.<sup>9</sup> Unlike the characteristics defined by Reynolds, Coogan's elements provide a more flexible and inclusive framework to examine the composition of superhero character and comic book. The mission element refers to the protagonist's fight, which is designed to be universal, prosocial and selfless.<sup>10</sup> Mission is distinct from other genres because it actively places the hero in initiatives that "do good" for the community at large.<sup>11</sup> Powers refer to exaggerated abilities of the character, whether they are magical, scientific/technological or physical.<sup>12</sup> Identity encapsulates

the protagonist's mission and powers because of their secret identity and costume.<sup>13</sup> Coogan argues, "The superhero genre has changed over time because, like all genres, it responds to changes in culture. But the core conventions of mission, powers and identity have remained stable."<sup>14</sup> Coogan's argument further demonstrates Brown's point of how the superhero comic form has potential to change from within whilst keeping the features and tropes that have made the genre distinct. However, these three foundational elements of the superhero genre do not address how female superhero comics are gendered differently, thus resulting in a disparity between female superheroes and their male counterparts.

The narratives of women, and more specifically women of colour, are marginalized in comics. Superhero comics are normalized and standardized around gender and race. As Carolyn Cocca, author of *Superwomen: Gender, Power and Representation*, highlights, "we have been taught to think of 'white and male and powerful' as some kind of natural, neutral norm."<sup>15</sup> Therefore, it is important to examine how women in superhero comics have been framed and represented in opposition to their male counterparts. As Jennifer K. Stuller highlights:

Thematically, the female experience of superheroism appears to differ most from that of men in its focus on collaboration, love and mentorship, which prompts questions about whether the ways in which these ideas play out in the lives of superwomen express or are representative of something distinctly female or are indicative of limited ideas of femininity.<sup>16</sup>

Stuller prompts questions about what defines a female superhero and how female characters are represented in comics. She points out how female superheroes are framed as opposites of their male counterparts. Female superheroes reject the lone wolf model of heroism,<sup>17</sup> as many are motivated by some kind of love.<sup>18</sup> They are often without maternal figures and therefore trained by men rather than women.<sup>19</sup> She argues for the importance of diverse female representation so that female superhero characters are not generalized as one kind of narrative or character type. *Ms. Marvel* is an example of a superhero comic where the narrative and experiences of a young woman of colour is represented as a leading protagonist. Unlike many young female superheroes, such as Batgirl, Supergirl, Invisible Girl and Marvel Girl,<sup>20</sup> Kamala Khan as Ms. Marvel is not meant to be a love interest, nor is she created to be part of a team of superheroes or be a male character's lesser opposite.<sup>21</sup> Her origin story is centered on how she takes a previous female superhero's title and makes it into her own identity.

*Ms. Marvel* has the foundations of Coogan's outline: universal mission, powers, and an identity. It also features the themes of female superhero characters as outlined by Stuller. However, those characteristics and tropes that make a superhero comic and a female superhero are richer and complicated by *Ms. Marvel's* engagement with racial and ethnic identity. The multiple layers of Kamala's character and story explore her identity as a civilian, an American teenager, a child of immigrant parents, and lastly, a superhero. Readers are introduced to Kamala

as an ordinary teenager who is trying to figure out where she belongs. Because her identity is not framed as a spectacle, Kamala is not demonized or othered. Kamala Khan's story of growing up is relatable to vast audiences.

### **Ms. Marvel and the Comic Form: Monstrator**

Using French comic book theorist Thierry Groensteen's concept of narration is helpful in illustrating how *Ms. Marvel* uses the comic forms and conventions of superhero comics to create a visual and textual narrative that engages and represents the experiences of a young woman of colour. He distinguishes how images and text are used to narrate in comics. He also emphasises that, while the two kinds of narration function differently, they work together to create a cohesive story. Groensteen defines image narration as, "the instance responsible for the rendering into drawn form of the story."<sup>22</sup> In other words, the story's structure and organization impacts how images are drawn, coloured and laid out for the reader's eyes. He refers to image narration as "monstrator" and highlights how the artistic style behind the images reflect as much narrative intention as text can impart.<sup>23</sup> Kamala's localities and environments are drawn and designed to reflect this. For example, Kamala's home and mosque are drawn and coloured with enough detail that readers can see what her living spaces are like. In Chapter/Issue one, Kamala is shown at home with her family — mother, father and brother — and readers are shown how the family's home is furnished, what they are having for dinner, the kind of newspaper Kamala's father is reading, and even the kind of mug he is using. This is important because it normalizes Kamal's civilian life as an American teenager and demonstrates how she can still be a superhero with her entire family intact, unlike the common trope of superheroes being orphaned.<sup>24</sup>

In Chapter/Issue three of *Ms. Marvel Vol. 1: No Normal*, after she has gotten her superpowers, Kamala is shown attending a youth lecture at her local Mosque.<sup>25</sup> Over the course of two pages, readers are shown how a Mosque is organized, the patterned carpet for prayer, and the interaction between the Imam and the teens. The monstrator aids in telling the story of the social and cultural spaces Kamala lives and participates in. The illustrative details invite readers to experience and share that space as well. Most superhero comics are set in dense urban spaces, like *Spider-Man* in New York and *Batwoman* in Gotham City, where high rise buildings and bright lights easily communicate the kind of space a superhero and their civilian self would inhabit. The monstrator here, however, helps develop Kamala's intricate multilayer identity through the details and colours of her vibrant and dynamic life. This illustrates how multifaceted this particular superhero's secret civilian identity is.

An interesting utilization of the monstrator is at the start of Chapter/Issue two. Kamala has just received her shape-shifting/polymorph superpowers, and has transformed into the original white, blue-eyed and blonde-hair Ms. Marvel (Carol Danvers). Unfamiliar with

her new powers, Kamala's body switches between her own and that of the original Ms. Marvel's.<sup>26</sup> Within five panels, the artistic style changes from semi-detailed realistic to cartoonish. In the largest of the five panels, readers see Kamala drawn with her body in the midst of switching from her own to Carol Danvers. It is an image drawn with detail to show the awkwardness of Kamala's struggle to gain control of her body and shows her hair colour shifting between her natural brown and Carol Denver's blonde. The shift in the artistic style signals how the monstrator is guiding the reader's attention. As Groensteen states, "The question of the neutrality or involvement of the monstrator is posed in terms of homogeneity or heterogeneity of graphic style. The monstrator remains neutral if it adopts a consistent style all the way through the story."<sup>27</sup> Therefore, switching from a detailed artistic style to one that is more cartoon-like reflects how the monstrator is disrupting the visual elements of the story to refocus the reader's attention by presenting a conflicting image made of two different visual styles. It presents an image where the readers need to compare and contrast visual elements so that they can decipher it. Furthermore, here, the monstrator acts like a visual metaphor representing Kamala's struggle with her identity as an American teen and a young Pakistani Muslim. The contrasting effect the monstrator produces reflects the performativity of Kamala as she inhabits Carol Danvers' Ms. Marvel.

### **Ms. Marvel and the Comic Form – Reciter**

The text equivalent of the monstrator is called the reciter.<sup>28</sup> An example of this is in the climax of *Ms. Marvel Vol. 1: No Normal*. There is an evil villain to fight Ms. Marvel in the series, but the actual challenge Kamala overcomes is self-acceptance of her multifaceted identity. Her acceptance of her identity is revealed in the climax, shared between Chapters/Issues three and four.<sup>29</sup> Kamala arrives at the local convenience store to meet with a friend, but she realizes the store is threatened with armed robbery. It is during this sequence of events that Kamala realizes how her role as Ms. Marvel is just as valid as Carol Danvers' Ms. Marvel. Grosenteen states the reciter can, "...occur in the form of a caption box [or] an area within or above the panel frame."<sup>30</sup> In the context of *Ms. Marvel*, caption boxes are used to communicate Kamala's panic about saving her friend. Switching between caption boxes and speech bubbles, readers follow Kamala's dialogue with herself as she musters up the courage to confront the robber. Kamala says, "Wait a minute. I have super-powers. I saved somebody's life on Friday. I am 911!"<sup>31</sup> Understanding what her powers enable her to do, she rushes into the store transformed as the original Ms. Marvel.

Kamala confrontation with the robber best reflects how the monstrator and reciter operate together in a superhero comic. Kamala, shape-shifted as the original white and blonde-haired Ms. Marvel, storms into the store; the fight sequences that follow are drawn in the cartoonish style. At the same time, readers follow along Kamala's thoughts in the caption boxes as she realizes

using her power to help even one person can be good.<sup>32</sup> Kamala rushes in to fight the robber but is shot in the process. Interestingly, during this conflict the backgrounds of the panels in the climax are all coloured yellow. The background does not show the interior of the store or the streets outside. Instead, it is coloured in golden yellow echoing Ms. Marvel's signature colour and to have readers focus on the characters. The monstator and the reciter work collaboratively in the volume's climax to tell the visual and textual narrative of how Kamala Khan becomes Ms. Marvel. The store robbery represents Kamala's confrontation with her insecurities regarding her multifaceted identities and her acceptance as Ms. Marvel. The golden yellow background sets the narrative tone as positive, because despite being injured by a gunshot, Kamala's attitude and approach to being Ms. Marvel change at this point. She no longer feels the need to present herself as the white, blonde-haired, blue-eyed Ms. Marvel because she realizes in order to be Ms. Marvel, she can combine her own complex identity with the superhero name.

The following section examines how the intersectionality of race and gender are the core focus and theme of the *Ms. Marvel* comic book series. It demonstrates how the narrative and character design of Kamala Khan/Ms. Marvel reflect the experiences of young women of colour.

### **Ms. Marvel: An Intersectional Superhero**

The concept of intersectionality was developed by critical race theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw to address the marginalization of black women in feminist and antiracist theory and politics.<sup>33</sup> It examines how structures of power, such as race, gender, class, sexual orientation and religion, interconnect and operate simultaneously in the lives and experiences of individuals and social groups. Intersectionality is also described as a work-in-progress because it is a framework open to and collaborative with multiple different theoretical concepts and ideas.<sup>34</sup> It identifies and addresses the categorical differences that exist within individuals and collectives, and how these categories organize and construct power relations. Addressing these differences and how they intersect enhances opportunities to create and develop collaborations and coalitions between social and political movements with similarities.<sup>35</sup> According to Crenshaw, the discourse on race is defined by the experiences of black men, while feminist discourse is defined by the experiences of white women, and therefore results in black women and women of colour being ostracized.<sup>36</sup> And on that basis, *Ms. Marvel* is a prime example of how those categorical differences intersect whilst sharing commonalities. Intersectionality is meant to address how power structures, like race and gender, interconnect and the resulting experience of being in-between. Kamala Khan as Ms. Marvel addresses this very overlap. She is a young woman of colour who struggles to understand her identity, and despite the differences in race and gender, her story about growing up remains relatable. As a popular culture artifact, *Ms. Marvel* illustrates how the power relations of race and gender intersect and manifest in the experiences of female Americans Muslims as it is told through the story of Kamala Khan.



At the start of *Ms. Marvel*, readers are introduced to Kamala's school bully, Zoe, a slim, blonde-haired young woman who mocks Kamala's friend Nakia for wearing the hijab. Zoe later ridicules Kamala for her cultural heritage and for smelling like curry, suggesting Kamala finally abandon her family to join a party of mostly white teenagers.<sup>37</sup> While she is not physically hurt, Kamala is made to feel subordinate to Zoe by those comments. Zoe asserts power over Kamala on the basis of race because Kamala does not fit into Zoe's frame of reference as a white female in America. As black feminist scholar and social activist bell hooks highlights, "white racial imperialism granted all white women, however victimized by sexist oppression they might be, the right to assume the role of oppressor in relationship to black women and black men."<sup>38</sup> Therefore, while Zoe's behaviour fits the characteristics of a bully, it also illustrates the racial privilege white American women have over women of colour.

Kamala struggles to fit in at school and is torn between her identities as an American teenager and as a young Pakistani-American Muslim. She expresses her desire to be normal with an internal monologue, "Why do I have to bring Pakoras to school for lunch? Why am I stuck with weird holidays? Everybody else gets to be normal. Why can't I?"<sup>39</sup> Upon acquiring her superpowers, she goes on to elaborate on what she means by this. In a dream, she discusses with Carol Danvers, now known as Captain Marvel, and makes a clear separation between herself being from Jersey City while her parents are from Karachi and how she wants to be like Captain Marvel: "...to be beautiful and awesome and butt-kicking and less complicated."<sup>40</sup> When Kamala wakes up from her dream and uses her shape shifting powers for the first time, she transforms into a tall, slim, white blond-haired woman in a spandex costume with high-heeled boots. In other words, the white American standard of beauty still very much informs Kamala's understanding of normal and who can be a female superhero. This reflects how the power relations of race and gender overlap. Kamala is not only torn about her racial identity but also feels insecure about her femininity because it does not match the idealized beauty standards of the West. Moreover, this demonstrates how racist and sexist ideologies can be internalized because Kamala believes her life would be simpler if she fit the prominent white imagery of superheroes. The intersection of race and gender becomes a barrier for Kamala as she navigates her identity as a female Pakistani-American Muslim because she is conflicted with her sense of identity. However, part of Kamala's character development is about her learning how she can experience and navigate between her multiple intersecting identities and demonstrate how female superheroes do not have to be white.

It should be noted that Kamala Khan is not the first Muslim superhero character Marvel Comics has introduced to readers. In 2002 the company introduced a new mutant character named Dust in the *X-Men* series. Created by Grant Morrison and Ethan Van Sciver, Dust was a practicing Sunni Muslim from Afghanistan who was rescued from slave traders by the X-Men. The characterization of Dust was fraught with orientalist and exotic perspectives while subject to the male gaze.<sup>41</sup> For example, Dust's costuming is a skin-tight abaya, which contradicts the

garment's purpose in modest fashion. It indicates the creators' lack of knowledge about Islamic traditions and dress. Furthermore, Dust was situated in a political, social and cultural landscape shortly after 9/11, which meant her character acted as a representation of Muslim women in the West. Her representation as a Muslim woman is problematic because she was presented as a one-dimensional placeholder for a diverse community of women. Her characterization reduces her and Muslim women to stereotypes, an exotic other, and an overall generalization of an entire group of people. Chandra Mohanty, a post-colonial and transnational feminist scholar, states, "The assumption of women as an already constituted, coherent group with identical interests and desires, regardless of class, ethnic or racial location, or contradictions, implies a notion of gender or sexual difference or even patriarchy which can be applied universally and cross-culturally."<sup>42</sup> To assume women as a coherent and homogenous group that face the same kinds of issues and aspire for one solution is a generalization. It also reduces the multiplicities of race, gender, class, sexuality and religion as experienced and negotiated by women based on their social, cultural, economic and political context. The characterization of Dust is a gross generalization of Muslim women in the comic books and popular culture because she is a character designed out of ignorance by white male creators. It does not help matters that the writer and artist differentiated Dust from other X-Men peers on the basis of her religion, gender and dress.<sup>43</sup>

It is the precedent of Dust and Carol Danvers that makes the weight of the 2014 release of *Ms. Marvel* important in terms of diverse representation in comic books. Dust never had her own comic book series and was relegated to be a very minor character in the X-Men<sup>44</sup> and the original *Ms. Marvel* series only ran for two years. It is important for characters, especially characters of colour, to headline their own series as the main protagonist and have their narratives center stage. The important difference between Kamala Khan and Dust as Muslim women is that Kamala's religion is not a plot point or conflict—being Muslim is a part of her.<sup>45</sup> The best example of this is in Chapter/Issue four of vol. 1, when Ms. Marvel is shot defending a small store from a robber as discussed earlier.<sup>46</sup> Kamala is still performing as the white blonde-haired Ms. Marvel but after getting shot and shape shifting back to her own body, she asks her friend not to call the police because "the NSA will wiretap our mosque or something, and then they'll sell me to science!"<sup>47</sup> This is the clearest moment in the volume that acknowledges the social and political attitudes Muslims face in current day America. In a short piece of dialogue, it summarizes the tensions that exists between the police and Muslim communities and the problematic surveillance policies that track American Muslims.<sup>48</sup>

What it means to be Muslim and the experiences of being Muslim are represented throughout *Ms. Marvel Vol. 1: No Normal* through the cast of characters and the environment. Kamala's brother is a devout Muslim who adheres to regular prayer and Mosque attendance. Her best friend Nakia chooses to wear the hijab as an expression of her faith. Kamala is shown attending Mosque with her friends and family yet also questioning religion with the imam. Instead of showcasing these as spectacles of the Islamic faith, these experiences of being a

Muslim are integrated into the character's daily life. As Miriam Kent points out in *Unveiling Marvels: Ms. Marvel and the Reception of the New Muslim Superheroine*, "With these characters, the book diversifies the notion of 'the Muslim' as cast members express their faith differently. Islam is not merely a monolith."<sup>49</sup> Unlike Dust, whose representation of Muslim women and the Islamic faith is singular and static and plagued with othering and orientalism, *Ms. Marvel Vol. 1: No Normal* illustrates a variety of experiences that make up being Muslim.

## Conclusion

*Ms. Marvel* has all the tropes of a superhero comic because it is one, but it is a superhero comic that is aware of its genre. It uses the genres' tropes and clichés to reflect and incorporate contemporary representations of race and gender. *Ms. Marvel* addresses that question of what would the power fantasy of a young woman of colour look like? The series redirects the male power fantasy for a young woman of colour to inhabit, and celebrates the story of women of colour as heroes. *Ms. Marvel* demonstrates the power of storytelling and how there is space in popular culture for the narratives of women of colour. In order to combat issues of inequalities, storytelling needs to include marginalized communities.

The comic features Kamala with her family intact, which disrupts the stereotype of superheroes being orphaned or abandoned.<sup>50</sup> The core conflict in the first volume relates to the universal mission of "doing good," but the primary focus is about how a teenage Pakistani-American Muslim harnessed strength and power from her heritage in order to overcome a challenge. As Winona Landis says in *Diasporic (Dis)identification: The Participatory Fandom of Ms. Marvel*, "Kamala Khan's 'restaging' of Ms. Marvel serves to archive this old superhero and convey her history to current readers, while her own awareness and reflection on her performance create a space for her own South Asian and Muslim subjectivity."<sup>51</sup> In other words, there is space in Carol Danvers' Ms. Marvel's legacy for Kamala Khan to incorporate her ethnic and religious realities into the mantle of her superhero identity. *Ms. Marvel* complicates superhero comic books by being inclusive. Ms. Marvel/Kamala Khan claims a space in the legacy of superhero characters, and both the character and series expands the superhero genre to be more inclusive and diverse along an intersectional perspective.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Gail Simone, *Women in Refrigerators*, March 1999, <https://www.lby3.com/wir/index.html>.
- <sup>2</sup> Graeme McMillan, "Marvel Unveils New Muslim 'Ms. Marvel'," *Hollywood Reporter*, November 6, 2013, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/heat-vision/marvel-unveils-new-muslim-ms-653870>.
- <sup>3</sup> Laura Hudson, "First Look at the New Ms. Marvel, A 16-year-old Muslim Superhero," *WIRED*, January 7, 2014, <https://www.wired.com/2014/01/ms-marvel-muslim-superheroine/>.
- <sup>4</sup> Carolyn Cocca, *Superwomen: Gender, Power and Representation* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 5.
- <sup>5</sup> Richard Reynolds, "Masked Heroes," in *The Superhero Reader*, eds. Charles Hatfield, Jeet Heer and Kent Worcester (Jackson: The University Press of Mississippi, 2013), 104.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 277–8.
- <sup>9</sup> Peter Coogan, "The Hero Defines the Genre, the Genre Defines the Hero," in *What is a Superhero*, eds. Robin S. Rosenberg and Peter Coogan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 7.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.
- <sup>15</sup> Cocca, *Superwomen: Gender, Power and Representation*, 219.
- <sup>16</sup> Jennifer K. Stuller, "What is a Female Superhero?" in *What is a Superhero*, eds. Robin S. Rosenberg and Peter Coogan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 20.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.
- <sup>20</sup> Batgirl and Supergirl are published by DC Comics, and both were developed from pre-existing male characters Batman and Superman. Invisible Girl, better known as Sue Storm, is part of the Fantastic Four superhero team, and Marvel Girl is an alias used by two female characters in the X-Men teams.
- <sup>21</sup> Cocca, *Superwomen*, 9.
- <sup>22</sup> Thierry Groensteen, "The Question of the Narrator," in *Comics and Narration*, trans. Ann Miller (Jackson: University of Mississippi, 2013), 86.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.
- <sup>24</sup> Reynolds, 104.
- <sup>25</sup> G. Willow Wilson, Adrian Alphona and Ian Herring, "Chap 3," *Ms. Marvel* 1, no. 3, Marvel Comics, 2015.
- <sup>26</sup> G. Willow Wilson, Adrian Alphona and Ian Herring, "Chap 2," *Ms. Marvel* 1, no. 3, Marvel Comics, 2015.
- <sup>27</sup> Groensteen, "Question," 93.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.
- <sup>29</sup> Wilson, Alphona and Herring, "Chap 3;" G. Willow Wilson, Adrian Alphona and Ian Herring, "Chap 4," *Ms. Marvel* 1, no. 3, Marvel Comics, 2015.
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>31</sup> Wilson, Alphona and Herring, "Chap 3."
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>33</sup> Devon W. Carbado, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, Vickie M. Mays and Barbara Tomlinson, "Intersectionality: Mapping the Movements of a Theory," *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race* 10, no. 2 (2013): 302, doi: 10.1017/S1742058X13000349.
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 305.
- <sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 306.

- <sup>36</sup> Kimberlé Crenshaw. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Colour," *Stanford Law Review*, 43 no. 6 (1991): 1282, doi:10.2307/1229039.
- <sup>37</sup> G. Willow Wilson, Adrian Alphona and Ian Herring, "Chap 1," *Ms. Marvel* 1, no 3, Marvel Comics, 2015.
- <sup>38</sup> bell hooks, "Race and Feminism: The Issue of Accountability," in *Theories of Race and Racism: A Reader*, eds. Les Black and John Solomos (London: Routledge, 2000), 375.
- <sup>39</sup> Wilson, Alphona and Herring, "Chap 1."
- <sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>41</sup> Miriam Kent, "Unveiling Marvels: Ms. Marvel and the Reception of the New Muslim Superheroine," *Feminist Media Studies* 15 no. 3 (2015): 523, doi:10.1080/14680777.2015.1031964.
- <sup>42</sup> Chandra Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," in *Theories of Race and Racism: A Reader*, eds. Les Black and John Solomos (London: Routledge, 2000), 304.
- <sup>43</sup> Julie Davis and Robert Westerfelhaus, "Finding a Place for a Muslimah Heroine in the Post-9/11 Marvel Universe: New X-Men's Dust," *Feminist Media Studies* 13, no. 5 (2013): 807, doi: 10.1080/14680777.2013.838370.
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 807.
- <sup>45</sup> Kent, "Unveiling Marvels," 524.
- <sup>46</sup> Wilson, Alphona and Herring, "Chap 4."
- <sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>48</sup> Basia Spalek and Bob Lamber, "Muslim Communities Under Surveillance," *Criminal Justice Matters* 68, no. 1 (2007): 12–13, doi: 10.1080/09627250708553274.
- <sup>49</sup> Kent, "Unveiling Marvels," 524.
- <sup>50</sup> Reynolds, "Masked Heroes," 104.
- <sup>51</sup> Winona Landis, "Diasporic (Dis)identification: The Participatory Fandom of *Ms. Marvel*," *South Asian Popular Culture* 14, no. 1–2 (2016): 4, doi: 10.1080/14746689.2016.1241344.