JISH: Jurnal Ilmu Sosial dan Humaniora
Vol. 1, No. 1, Maret 2025
Available Online at https://journal.umgo.ac.id/index.php/jish
E-ISSN:
DOI:

Impact of Slander on the Superhero's Self-Identity Based on Social Labeling in the Movie "Spider-Man: No Way Home"

Siti Masita Ibrahim[1*], Happy Anastasia Usman[2], Dahlia Husain[3], Ana Mariana[4]

[1,2] Sastra Inggris, Universitas Muhammadiyah Gorontalo, Indonesia

Corresponding Author sitaibrhim1228@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Submited :
Revised :
Published :

Kata Kunci :
Fitnah, Identitas Diri, Labeling Sosial, Spider-Man

Keywords:
Slander, Self-Identity, Social Labeling, Spider-Man

This is an open access article under the CC BY-SA license.
Copyright ©2025 by Author. Published by Universitas Pendidikan Ganesha

ABSTRACT

This research discusses the impact of slander on the superhero's self-identity in Spider-Man: No Way Home (2021) by Chris McKenna and Erik Sommers through Howard S. Becker's Social Labeling Theory. Using a descriptive qualitative method with data drawn from the film script and supported by scholarly references, this study reveals that slander initiates a sequential labeling process consisting of labeling by authority, false accusation, stigmatization, and the formation of deviant identity. The findings show that manipulated media narratives position Peter Parker as a criminal, enabling authoritative figures to construct negative public perceptions that lead to social rejection and institutional discrimination. These reactions create psychological disturbances such as guilt, anxiety, and identity crisis, reflecting Cooley's Looking-Glass Self and demonstrating how external judgment shapes self-concept. The continuous slander and public labeling ultimately dismantle Peter's heroic identity and force him into an extreme act of self-sacrifice by erasing his existence from collective memory. This study concludes that slander in the film represents real-world social mechanisms that construct, distort, and damage identity, contributing to sociological literary analysis by highlighting the destructive power of labeling in shaping public perception and self-identity.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini membahas dampak fitnah terhadap identitas diri superhero dalam film Spider-Man: No Way Home (2021) karya Chris McKenna dan Erik Sommers melalui Teori Labeling Sosial Howard S. Becker. Menggunakan metode kualitatif deskriptif dengan data yang diambil dari naskah film dan didukung oleh referensi akademik, penelitian ini mengungkapkan bahwa fitnah memicu proses penandaan berurutan yang terdiri dari penandaan oleh otoritas, tuduhan palsu, stigmatisasi, dan pembentukan identitas menyimpang. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa narasi media yang dimanipulasi menempatkan Peter Parker sebagai penjahat, memungkinkan figur otoritas membangun persepsi publik negatif yang menyebabkan penolakan sosial dan diskriminasi institusional. Reaksi ini menimbulkan gangguan psikologis seperti rasa bersalah, kecemasan, dan krisis identitas, mencerminkan Teori Diri Cermin Cooley dan menunjukkan

bagaimana penilaian eksternal membentuk konsep diri. Fitnah yang berkelanjutan dan penandaan publik pada akhirnya menghancurkan identitas heroik Peter dan memaksanya melakukan tindakan pengorbanan diri yang ekstrem dengan menghapus keberadaannya dari ingatan kolektif. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa fitnah dalam film mewakili mekanisme sosial dunia nyata yang membangun, mendistorsi, dan merusak identitas, berkontribusi pada analisis sastra sosiologis dengan menyoroti kekuatan destruktif penandaan dalam membentuk persepsi publik dan identitas diri.

INTRODUCTION

Film is a cultural medium that plays an important role in representing social reality, including issues of identity, stigma, and social conflict. As a modern literary work, films combine narrative, visual, and audio elements to convey moral messages and social values to the audience (Ummah, 2019a). In the era of globalization and mass media development, films not only serve as entertainment but also as a means of shaping public opinion and social perceptions.

The superhero film genre, in particular, has a strong influence in building the moral image and social identity of its characters. Superhero characters are often positioned as symbols of courage, sacrifice, and ideal societal values. However, Juanda et al. (2021) emphasize that the representation of heroes and villains in films can also show how these images are formed and dismantled by the social forces around them. Therefore, superhero films become a relevant space for examining issues of stigma and identity crisis.

The film Spider-Man: No Way Home (2021) by Chris McKenna and Erik Sommers raises the issue of identity through the character of Peter Parker, who experiences slander and negative labeling after being accused of murdering Mysterio. These accusations not only expose his personal identity to the public, but also trigger social rejection and institutional pressure that affect his psychological condition and social relationships. Madundang (2023) states that this film represents the identity crisis of adolescents that arises from social pressure and public judgment.

The phenomenon of slander in this film is closely related to the role of the media in spreading information that may not necessarily be true. Ummah (2019b) explains that online media accelerates the spread of information and has the potential to reinforce social stigma. From a sociological perspective, slander can develop into a process of social labeling that affects the way society views and treats certain individuals.

Howard S. Becker's Social Labeling Theory explains that deviance is not inherent in the act itself, but is formed through social reactions and judgments. Negative labels attached to individuals have the potential to cause stigmatization and identity crises. This theory is relevant for analyzing how the media and public authorities in films shape Spider-Man's image as a deviant figure.

Previous studies have discussed Spider-Man: No Way Home from a linguistic perspective and audience response, such as Rahmawati and Aziez (2023), Gunawan et al. (2022), and Liyawan et al. (2022). However, these studies have not specifically examined the impact of slander as a process of social labeling on the formation of the main character's identity.

Based on this, this study aims to analyze the impact of slander on the self-identity of superheroes in the film Spider-Man: No Way Home based on Howard S. Becker's

Social Labeling Theory. This study is expected to contribute to sociology-based literary and film studies and increase critical awareness of the dangers of slander and social labeling.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach with a qualitative descriptive design. This approach was chosen because the study aims to deeply understand the meaning and social processes represented in the film, particularly related to the impact of slander on the formation of the main character's identity (Creswell, 2018).

The object of this study is the film Spider-Man: No Way Home (2021) by Chris McKenna and Erik Sommers, with a focus on the character Peter Parker. The research data consists of primary and secondary data. Primary data consists of dialogues and scenes from the film that represent slander, social reactions, and changes in the character's identity. Secondary data was obtained from books and scientific articles relevant to the concepts of slander, self-identity, and Howard S. Becker's Social Labeling Theory.

Data collection was conducted using documentation techniques, namely systematic procedures for reviewing and evaluating documents in qualitative research (Bowen, 2011), which involved repeated viewings of the film, matching the dialogue with the film script, and identifying and classifying relevant scenes according to the research focus. Data analysis used an interactive model (Miles and Huberman 2014), which included data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. All data were analyzed based on four main concepts in Social Labeling Theory, namely labeling by authority, false accusations, stigmatization, and deviant identity.

Data validity is maintained through consistent observation and the suitability of the analysis with the theoretical framework and academic references used in this study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. Labeling by Authority

Labeling by Authority is the initial stage, when powerful actors (media authorities, government, educational institutions) shape public perception through the discourse they produce. According to (Becker, 1963), deviance is not an inherent characteristic of an action, but rather a social construct formed by those who have the power to define behavior. In this film, J. Jonah Jameson becomes the most dominant moral entrepreneur.

Table 01. Labeling by Authority

NO.	DATA	DESCRIPTION
1.	Data 01 **MJ** I have a weird question. Um... does any part of you feel relieved about all this? **PETER** Ever since I got bit by that spider, I've only had one week where my life has felt normal. Or kinda normal, I guess. And...	The dialog is about MJ and Peter's conversation during the video call, MJ asked about how Peter felt after all the things that happened, from Peter's feelings when he was slandered to where

	that was when you found out. Because then everyone that was in my life that I wanted to know, knew. And it was perfect. (then) But now everybody knows. And I am the most famous person in the entire world... and I'm still broke. (p. 24)	Peter became famous suddenly.

Data 01, Peter's conversation with MJ reveals his confusion and exhaustion due to sudden fame and exposure. Here, the psychological impact of being labeled by the authorities is reflected. Ajiniyaz M. Sarsenbaev, (2024), explains that constant public attention based on slander causes emotional exhaustion and anxiety due to the inability to control one's social narrative. Peter's statement, "I am the most famous person in the entire world... and I'm still broke", shows his frustration with how fame born of lies has replaced his authentic identity. This is in line with (Cooley, 1902) idea that individuals internalize the judgments reflected by others; Peter now experiences fame not as recognition, but as surveillance.

Labeling by authorities in this study became the initial basis that shaped Peter Parker's identity. Authorities such as Mysterio, the mass media (Daily Bugle), and government agencies (Damage Control) labeled Peter a "criminal" before an objective investigation was conducted. This shows that the deviation did not originate from the act itself, but rather from the definitions and assessments of those in power. The fabrication of evidence and media framing shape a social reality that makes the public accept these labels as truth. As a result, Peter's reputation changes from hero to public menace, causing cognitive and emotional stress that affects how he views himself. It is this labeling by authorities that triggers social stigma and Peter's identity transformation throughout the story.

2. False Accusation

The second stage is when Peter is found guilty of an act he did not commit. False accusations reinforce the label of deviance assigned by the authorities. (Bernburg et al., 2006) emphasizes that false accusations can have the same consequences as actual wrongdoing, because the stigma stems from public belief rather than factual accuracy.

Table 02. False Accusation

NO.	DATA	DESCRIPTION
1.	Data 02 **QUENTIN BECK (V.O.)** I managed to send the Elemental back through the dimensional rift, but I don't think I'm gonna make it off this bridge alive. Spider-Man attacked me for some reason. He has an army of weaponized drones, Stark technology. He's saying he's the only one who's gonna be the new Iron Man, no one else.	In this dialogue, Quentin Beck (Mysterio) makes a fake recording before he dies. He lies by saying that Spider-Man attacked him and has an army of Stark-designed drones. Beck also accuses Spider-Man of wanting to replace Iron Man, so that the public will

	(p. 1)	believe that Spider-Man is evil and power-hungry.

Data 02 (Mysterio's recorded accusation) marks the formal beginning of false accusations: a recording made before his death stating that Spider-Man attacked him and possessed an arsenal of drones. These accusations were strategic as evidence produced by a public figure, thus quickly gained legitimacy in the media. According to (Becker, 1963), when an authoritative source conveys a narrative, the public tends to accept that narrative as "truth." Psychologically, exposure to this authoritative narrative triggers cognitive confusion in Peter; sociologically, the narrative becomes the basis for legitimizing social actions against him (surveillance, investigation, exclusion).

The data analysis shows that the slander not only distorted public perception of Peter as a "murderer," but also created associative stigma that affected those closest to him. This demonstrates how authorities and public opinion can label someone as deviant without evidence. Psychologically, Peter internalizes guilt and develops an identity conflict, as his moral values as a hero clash with the criminal label imposed by society. Overall, the false accusation triggers social stigma, psychological pressure, and identity disruption, fundamentally altering Peter's life, self-perception, and the major decisions he makes.

3. Stigmatization

This third stage shows changes in the social ecosystem when the public accepts the labels given by the authorities. Stigmatization occurs when the labels given become the "main status" that overshadows other individual identities (Becker, 1963). Yulianto & Farhani, (2021), further explain that stigma is the stage where labeling turns into collective social memory, where people no longer need new evidence of wrongdoing because the image of deviance has been normalized.

Table 03. Stigmatization

NO.	DATA	DESCRIPTION
1.	Data 03 **J. JONAH JAMESON** Governments around the world launch investigations into the murderer known as Spider-Man! (p. 12)	In this dialogue, J. Jonah Jameson reports that various governments around the world are investigating Spider-Man, whom he refers to as a "murderer." His statement reinforces the spread of slander and further damages Spider-Man's image in the eyes of the international public.

Data 03 illustrates the process of formal stigmatization through J. Jonah Jameson's statement: "Governments around the world launch investigations into the murderer known as Spider-Man!" The declaration escalates the accusation from individual slander to global legitimization, when authority figures reinforce a label, it transforms into a social fact. Psychologically, Peter loses the sense of personal control as his image becomes a political and moral issue beyond his reach.

Stigmatization arises as a direct consequence of the labels imposed on Peter by authorities and the media. He is not only branded a criminal but also socially stigmatized as dangerous and immoral, reinforced by sensational media coverage and discriminatory treatment. This stigma damages Peter's self-esteem and emotional stability, leading him to see himself through society's negative judgments, in line with the Looking-Glass Self-concept. Socially, it causes rejection, exclusion, and lost opportunities for both Peter and his friends. Ultimately, stigmatization transforms Peter's social identity from hero to a suspicious figure, intensifying the pressure toward a deviant identity.

4. Deviant Identity

The final stage is when individuals begin to internalize the label of deviance and act based on that label. (Becker, 1963) notes that individuals begin to adopt a deviant identity when external labels become internal truths. The longer a person is exposed to public labeling and rejection, the greater the risk of identity distortion. This does not mean that Peter becomes a criminal, but he experiences an internal deviant identity, which is an identity formed due to the pressure of social stigma.

Table 04. Deviant Identity

NO.	DATA	DESCRIPTION
1.	Data 04 **PETER** I want to kill him. I want to tear him apart. I can still hear her voice in my head. Even after she was hurt, she said to me that we did the right thing.. (p. 129)	In this dialogue, Peter expresses his anger and desire for revenge against the person who hurt May, while acknowledging that he still hears May's words affirming that they did the right thing — revealing an inner conflict between grief, anger, and moral sense.

In data 04, Peter admits he wants revenge, stating, "I want to kill him. I want to tear him apart." This moment marks the behavioral manifestation of internalized deviance. Becker's secondary deviance concept applies here: Peter's self-perception aligns with the public label of danger and violence. His grief and anger are channeled through the lens of the identity society forced upon him.

Peter Parker's deviant identity is the outcome of a prolonged labeling process that begins with authority, is reinforced by social stigma, and ultimately becomes self-internalized. Repeated negative labels lead Peter to see himself not as a hero, but as a source of harm to those he loves, reflecting Becker and Lemert's theory of secondary deviance. This deviant identity does not indicate criminal behavior, but rather deep self-doubt, guilt, and trauma that cause him to question his moral values and existence. Influenced by how he imagines others perceive him, as explained by (Cooley, 1902) Peter's identity crisis culminates in extreme decisions, marking the darkest stage of his identity journey before he begins to rebuild himself.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of *Spider-Man: No Way Home* using Becker's Labeling Theory and Cooley's Looking-Glass Self, this study concludes that slander plays a major role in transforming Peter Parker's self-identity through four stages: Labeling by Authority, False Accusation, Stigmatization, and Deviant Identity. These stages show that Peter's identity crisis is shaped by social reactions rather than his actual actions.

Authority labeling initiates public hostility by framing Spider-Man as a criminal, which is then intensified through false accusations that remove Peter's control over public perception. As the negative label spreads, stigmatization emerges in the form of discrimination and social exclusion, also affecting those close to him. Eventually, these pressures are internalized, forming a deviant identity marked by guilt, emotional isolation, and loss of self-worth, leading Peter to erase himself from public memory.

Overall, the study highlights that slander and misinformation, when reinforced by authority and public opinion, can severely damage identity, relationships, and psychological well-being. In line with Muhammadiyah values, this research emphasizes the importance of honesty, clarification (*tabayyīn*), and respect for human dignity, reinforcing both the academic relevance of labeling theory and the moral responsibility to resist unjust social judgments.

REFERENSI

Afifi, A. (2024). *The controlled tongue prevents verbal misdeeds, slander, hatred, bullying, incivility, extremism, and radicalism*.

Ajiniyaz M. Sarsenbaev. (2024). *The analysis of the problem of victims of insult and slander*.

Braithwaite, J. (2000). *Shame and criminal justice*.

Branscomb, M. J. (1980). *Liability and damages in libel and slander law*. Seattle University School of Law Digital Commons.

Burke, P. J., & Stets, J. E. (2021). *The microsociology of self and identity*. In *Theoretical Sociology: The Future of a Disciplinary Foundation*.

Carroll, N. (2013). *The psychology of defamation victims*.

Cooley, C. H. (1902). *The looking-glass self*.

Creswell, J. W. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design*.

Elkington, K. S., et al. (2021). *Perceived mental illness stigma among youth in psychiatric outpatient treatment*.

Ernst, D. (2024). *What is slander and how can it impact your reputation?*

Garfield, L. Y. (2012). *The death of slander*. *SSRN Electronic Journal*.

Goffman, E. (1963). *Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identity*.

Gunawan, P. H., Alhafidh, T. D., & Wahyudi, B. A. (2022). The sentiment analysis of *Spider-Man: No Way Home* film based on IMDb reviews. *Jurnal RESTI (Rekayasa Sistem dan Teknologi Informasi)*, 6(1), 177–182.

Juanda, C., Tahrun, & Mulyadi. (2021). Hero and villain representation in the *Spiderman* movie by Sam Raimi. *Proceedings of the International Conference on Education Universitas PGRI Palembang*.

Kavish, D. R. (2022). *Continuing the interactionist tradition: Examining the relationship between juvenile delinquency, formal labeling, and adult criminal behavior*.

Pager, D. (2007). *Marked: Race, crime, and finding work in an era of mass incarceration*.

Rahmawati, D., & Aziez, S. (2023). Deixis in the movie *Spiderman: No Way Home*: A pragmatic analysis. *Proceedings Series on Social Sciences & Humanities*, 13, 161–165.

Sandler, E. T. (2025). The co-construction of non-normative identities: What stigma, labeling, and othering theory have underemphasized. *Deviant Behavior*.

Tannenbaum, F. (1938). *Crime and the community*.

Valenty, L. F. (2021). *The self-esteem sentence: Evidence for labeling theory*.

Zayer, M., & Hassan, A. (2024). *Slander and its impact on judges and jurists in the Bahri Mamluk State*.