

## Light in The Shadow: A Screenplay on Self-Determination in Facing Quarter-Life Challenges

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the role of self-determination in navigating the quarter-life crisis faced by young adults. The protagonist, Maya, conflicts with extrinsic pressures from society and her mother's expectations regarding her career choice. Through a mystical encounter with traditional Indonesian shadow puppets, Maya is empowered to exercise self-determination by pursuing her intrinsic passions despite external opposition. The narrative centers on Maya's transformative journey of self-discovery, where she reconciles her autonomous aspirations with controlling extrinsic forces. Ultimately, by harnessing self-determination, Maya overcomes challenges to showcase her authentic self. The screenplay illuminates self-determination's vital role in conquering quarter-life obstacles, cultivating intrinsic motivation, authenticity, and resilience in shaping one's life path while honoring cultural heritage.

**Keywords:** Indonesian culture, motivation, quarter-life crisis, self-determination

### INTRODUCTION

The early stages of adulthood often prompt individuals to grapple with the concept of self-determination, compelling them to uncover personal meaning, establish identity, and navigate pivotal life choices, particularly regarding career paths and relationships. This period is marked by a disordered and chaotic lifestyle, indicative of an internal struggle for self-determination. Decisions made without thoughtful consideration of personal desires and principles often manifest due to external factors such as societal expectations, peer influence, and fear of judgment, leading individuals to adopt unhealthy habits or make decisions misaligned with their values. The quarter-life crisis is characterized by the pressure to fit in, resulting in choices devoid of genuine self-reflection. This pressure is exacerbated by societal expectations, which can negatively impact young individuals, causing depression and public judgment when they deviate from expected milestones (Sabandar, 2010). This societal scrutiny can profoundly affect one's identity and self-worth, creating doubts about the future.

Self-determination theory (SDT), developed by Deci and Ryan (2009), offers a framework for understanding these challenges, particularly in Indonesia, where societal expectations and economic factors significantly impact young individuals' well-being during the quarter-life crisis. By focusing on self-determination, individuals can navigate these challenges authentically, guided by internal motivations rather than external pressures. This theme is central to my creative work, which explores the quarter-life crisis through a supernatural drama genre. Drawing inspiration from Malatesta (2019), the narrative incorporates Indonesian cultural elements, particularly the mystical heritage of Yogyakarta, to enrich the storyline.

The story, *Light in the Shadows*, unfolds in Surabaya, where Maya, a 25-year-old woman, navigates her quarter-life crisis amidst career expectations and the struggle to balance modern influences with traditional values. Discovering a mystical batik painting, Maya encounters Semar in a dreamlike realm, guiding her to discover her strengths and overcome vulnerabilities. This narrative highlights Maya's career aspirations, cultural identity, relationship

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dynamics, and search for personal fulfillment, emphasizing self-determination and resilience. The screenplay aims to motivate young individuals experiencing a quarter-life crisis, illustrating the importance of self-determination in overcoming external pressures and achieving personal growth.

In addressing the societal environment's impact on self-determination, this creative work explores how family expectations shape Maya's determination and how this influences her pursuit of self-discovery, career, and personal fulfillment. The negative impacts of societal pressure, as reflected in SDT, are counterbalanced by Maya's journey toward self-determination, inspired by the supernatural guidance of Semar. This narrative serves as a motivational tool for young adults, encouraging them to embrace self-determination and positive thinking to navigate life's challenges. Furthermore, the screenplay offers insights into parenting, emphasizing the importance of raising children with a focus on future success and self-determination.

The choice of a supernatural drama genre, incorporating Indonesian mystical traditions, aims to provide a unique alternative to the prevalent romantic genre, emphasizing real-world struggles and cultural heritage. By avoiding romantic sub-genres, the story focuses on the internal struggles associated with a quarter-life crisis, inspiring young individuals to appreciate their lives, be more determined, and take proactive steps toward achieving their goals. This creative work, grounded in self-determination theory, is designed to resonate with contemporary Indonesian youth, encouraging them to harness their inherent self-determination and navigate their quarter-life crisis with resilience and authenticity.

Self-determination theory (SDT), as developed by Deci and Ryan (2000), provides a crucial understanding of how external and internal factors affect people's determination. This theory highlights the importance of intrinsic motivation, an inherent drive to seek challenges, learn, and explore without external rewards, and how this natural inclination contributes to lifelong enjoyment and vitality (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Most actions, especially in adulthood, are not strictly driven by intrinsic motivation due to social pressures and responsibilities. Deci and Ryan emphasize that motivation from within, driven by interests, curiosity, and values, plays a significant role in personal development and well-being. This creative work applies SDT to illustrate the challenges faced by the main character, Maya, who navigates social pressures and personal determination to overcome her quarter-life crisis. The research involved browsing articles, reading relevant literature, and understanding genre conventions to create a screenplay that effectively conveys the chosen topic.

The methodology involved secondary research, including internet browsing for articles and journals related to the influence of the environment on behavior and overcoming past challenges. The creative process involved selecting a general topic, focusing on detailed discussion points, and choosing a suitable genre to convey the message effectively. The screenplay development included creating character details, plot, roles, problems, background information, loglines, step outlines, pitches, and synopses. The final screenplay aims to inspire young individuals experiencing a quarter-life crisis to reignite their passion for a better life and believe in their potential to lead a respectable life, regardless of circumstances.

## **CONCEPT OF CREATIVE WORK**

The creative work is a supernatural drama that delves into Maya's quarter-life crisis and her journey of self-discovery. Drawing from Mishra's insights (2023) on dramas, the screenplay explores emotionally charged situations within familiar settings, reflecting Maya's struggle with

life decisions. It incorporates supernatural elements inspired by Malatesta (2018), featuring mystical shadow puppet characters that guide Maya through her challenges.

Employing a character-driven writing style, as outlined by Tuli (2023), the narrative focuses deeply on Maya's emotions, motivations, and personal growth. Unlike *When Marnie Was There* (2014), which uses flashbacks to unravel mysteries, this screenplay opts for a present-day approach, spotlighting Maya's ongoing experiences and development. Maya's journey underscores her autonomy and determination, driven by internal forces rather than external revelations, engaging the audience with her real-time struggles and interactions with mystical guides.

This creative approach allows the story to intertwine Maya's personal journey with supernatural elements seamlessly, offering a nuanced exploration of her internal conflicts and resolutions. By emphasizing Maya's agency and resilience, the screenplay aims to captivate viewers through its heartfelt portrayal of self-discovery amidst the supernatural backdrop. Through Maya's interactions with the mystical shadow puppet characters, the story illuminates themes of identity, cultural heritage, and the transformative power of personal determination. Overall, the supernatural drama genre serves as a canvas for Maya's quest, blending the ordinary with the otherworldly to evoke both emotional depth and imaginative intrigue.

In this supernatural drama screenplay, the genre codes and conventions are carefully crafted to immerse viewers in a world where the natural and supernatural intertwine. As explored in Salao (2019) and Malatesta (2018), supernatural dramas typically center around characters grappling with mystical or paranormal elements within familiar settings. Similarly, this screenplay introduces Maya, a protagonist navigating her quarter-life crisis in Surabaya, where Indonesian cultural symbolism and mystical shadow puppetry play pivotal roles.

Central to the genre are characters who embody both human complexities and supernatural connections. Maya's journey is enriched by encounters with traditional shadow puppet figures, serving as guides in her quest for self-discovery and resilience. These characters not only enhance the mystical ambiance but also deepen the narrative's exploration of cultural identity and personal growth.

Setting plays a crucial role in supernatural dramas, often juxtaposing everyday environments with elements of fantasy or mystery. In this screenplay, Surabaya serves as the urban backdrop where Maya encounters both societal pressures and supernatural influences. The incorporation of Indonesian cultural elements, such as batik painting and shadow puppetry, further enriches the setting, adding layers of symbolism and cultural resonance to Maya's journey.

Time in supernatural dramas is fluid, often blurring the boundaries between past, present, and mystical realms. While the screenplay predominantly unfolds in the present day, it utilizes dreamlike sequences and encounters with supernatural beings to challenge Maya's perceptions of reality and offer insights into her inner conflicts. By blending these elements, the screenplay aims to captivate audiences with its fusion of emotional drama, cultural exploration, and supernatural intrigue.

## **Theme**

In crafting the design principle for *Light in the Shadow*, the screenplay aimed to underscore the fundamental right of every individual to pursue a fulfilling life path defined by personal experiences and environmental influences. Central to this principle is the portrayal of Maya's journey as a testament to the transformative power of self-determination. By depicting

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Maya's evolution from struggling with societal expectations to embracing her cultural heritage and artistic aspirations, the screenplay emphasizes the importance of self-definition and resilience in shaping one's destiny. This narrative approach not only highlights Maya's internal growth but also resonates with broader themes of authenticity and the pursuit of passion in the face of adversity. Through Maya's odyssey, the design principle seeks to inspire audiences to reflect on their own paths, encouraging them to embrace their unique identities and navigate life's challenges with determination and self-belief. The story demonstrates that every person has the right to pursue a better life, highlighting how self-definition through experiences and the environment impacts one's journey. Maya's struggles and eventual success are driven by her own motivation and encouragement.

### **Plot**

The plot of my creative work is about Maya, a 25-year-old woman who lives in Surabaya's urban pulse. Maya's quarter-life crisis transforms into a cultural odyssey when an ancient shadow puppet propels her into a dreamlike realm, forging a journey of self-discovery and resilience amidst societal pressures in *Light in the Shadows*.

Here is the pitch of my creative work

- A. Maya, a cafe worker longing to pursue her dreams, embarks on a journey into a magical dream world with Semar, where she finds encouragement to embrace her passion in having a right career based on her passion.
- B. In reality, Maya faces opposition from her mother and battles self-doubt, struggling to balance her dreams with familial expectations after failing an art competition.
- C. With newfound confidence from her ancestry and Semar's mentorship, Maya defies expectations and launches a successful career as an artist.

And for the synopsis, Maya, a determined 25-year-old cafe worker, embarks on a transformative journey to pursue her artistic passion and career aspirations despite facing criticism from her mother. Her odyssey begins when she stumbles upon an ancient engraving pen at an art exhibition, transporting her to a magical dream world guided by the wise shadow puppet, Semar. In this enchanting realm, Semar empowers Maya to embrace her artistic talents and reconnect with her cultural heritage. Back in the real world, Maya grapples with self-doubt and familial pressure, particularly after a setback in an art competition. As the conflict escalates, Maya confronts the challenge of balancing her dreams with her family's expectations. With newfound strength drawn from her ancestral legacy and Semar's guidance, Maya defies the odds and boldly showcases her artwork to the world. Prepare to be captivated by this enchanting tale of self-discovery and resilience.

### **Characters**

Maya, the main character, is a 25-year-old woman with long straight black hair who works as a barista in a small cafe. She lives with her small, needy family and comes from a background deeply rooted in Javanese culture. Maya has a strong affinity for traditional arts, influenced by her family's ties to rituals and ceremonies. Despite these traditional values, Maya's life in the rapidly modernizing city of Surabaya exposes her to contemporary influences, creating a clash between her heritage and modern lifestyle.

Supporting Maya in her journey is her mother, a 45-year-old woman with a thin body, pale and wrinkled face. She is driven by a desire for her children to be successful and not lead miserable lives. While she possesses a tough and wise nature, she also has soft and gentle feelings, adding depth to her character.

Another pivotal character is Semar, a mystical figure painted by Maya's ancestors. Semar is depicted as dashing and brave with a charming, beautiful appearance, dressed in royal clothing. She serves as a guide for Maya, helping her find her identity. Semar's high emotional intelligence allows her to understand and empathize with others' feelings, making her a valuable advisor. A unique aspect of Semar is her ability to shapeshift, adapting her form to suit the needs of those she guides. In this story, Semar takes on a female form to resonate more closely with Maya.

Additionally, there is an old woman, aged 70, who owns a museum gallery in Yogyakarta. This character has a historical connection to Maya's family, having known Maya's great-grandmother. She provides valuable information about Maya's ancestors and helps Maya understand her passion for art, playing a crucial role in Maya's journey of self-discovery.

### **Conflict**

In this creative work, the central conflict is "Man vs. Self," focusing on Maya's internal struggle. As Yang (2022) describes, this type of conflict often involves characters making tough choices, dealing with their own flaws, or coming to terms with who they are. Maya's struggle revolves around her determination to pursue her dream of becoming a traditional artist in the modern era. The story emphasizes her choices and how she decides to shape her own path.

### **CONCLUSION**

The journey of crafting the supernatural drama screenplay, *Light in the Shadow*, has been profoundly rewarding and transformative. Rooted in the exploration of self-determination amidst the quarter-life crisis, this thesis has delved into the theoretical foundations of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) to elucidate the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations that shape personal autonomy, competence, and relatedness. By integrating supernatural elements into a realistic setting, the screenplay blends the themes of cultural identity and personal growth through the protagonist, Maya, who navigates her struggles with resilience and determination.

Throughout this creative process, Maya's journey has served as a painful exploration of universal themes such as self-doubt and the pursuit of authenticity. The screenplay's narrative development, enriched by encounters with mystical shadow puppets and cultural symbolism, underscores the importance of perseverance and inner strength in overcoming external pressures. This storytelling approach not only deepens the audience's engagement but also reinforces the enduring power of self-belief in shaping one's destiny.

Looking ahead, refining the screenplay through feedback and exploring its adaptation into novel or graphic novel formats are among the future plans. Continuing education in screenwriting and filmmaking, alongside the creation of new projects that explore themes of self-determination, will further expand the narrative's impact and reach. Ultimately, this journey has been a testament to the transformative potential of storytelling, offering valuable insights into the complexities of personal growth and the resilience needed to navigate life's challenges.

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