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Agents of Global Armament: Analyzing Masculinity and Militarism in "Captain America" and the Marvel Cinematic Universe

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AGENTS OF GLOBAL ARMAMENT: ANALYZING MASCULINITY
AND MILITARISM IN "CAPTAIN AMERICA" AND
THE MARVEL CINEMATIC UNIVERSE

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Dedication

For mom. Thank you for everything you have done for me.

AGENTS OF GLOBAL ARMAMENT: ANALYZING MASCULINITY

AND MILITARISM IN "CAPTAIN AMERICA" AND

THE MARVEL CINEMATIC UNIVERSE

By

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ABSTRACT

In the current zeitgeist, there has been a surge in the popularity of superhero movies. For many decades, Hollywood has been producing films that propagate ideologies of hyper-masculinity and militarism. This study suggests that it is possible to analyze the recent character "Captain America" as propaganda for militarism and hyper-masculinity. This study proposes to analyze the character in the films *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011), *The Avengers* (2011), *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* (2014), *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015), and *Captain America: Civil War* (2016).

Keywords: Captain America, Masculinity, Militarism, MCU, Superhero Movie

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Rise of the Marvel Cinematic Universe

Worldwide, the fifth highest-grossing film of all-time, grossing $1.5 billion to date, is *The Avengers* (2012), and *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015) and *Captain America: Civil War* (2016) rank in the top-20 highest-grossing ("Worldwide Grosses," 2017). The high gross of *The Avengers* (2012), as well as the other Marvel films, clearly demonstrates that there is a large audience for blockbuster superhero films. These films are blockbusters, because they regenerate their production cost and more so, which is due to "an expanding global market" and the DVD returns (Schatz, 2009, p. 31). In fact, in order to guarantee a blockbuster, Hollywood has invisible "rules" that studios follow (p. 32). The MCU, and "Captain America," fulfill many of these rules. For instance, some rules are to use comic book material to develop movie storylines, the protagonist should be male, and the protagonist should "inhabit a Manichean universe" (pp. 32-33). Hollywood re-uses material, in this case comic book stories and characters, that can be used to extend franchises, such as the Marvel Cinematic Universe (or, MCU).

The MCU is also considered to be one of the most successful franchises in history, with a total gross of more than $4 billion ("Franchise Index," 2016). Though this transmedia market is considered simplistic and mainly for children, it is expressing more than just superheroes that are the good guys who save the world from evil. Ideologies present in these films and other media are being reinforced. Furthermore, by reaching the child audience, the franchise is likely to guarantee an audience that will continue for future decades, which would cause the current zeitgeist to continue as well. It is due to the success of the MCU, these films and characters are

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important for cultural analysis to determine the impact they have on the current zeitgeist, or whether they have an impact.

The phenomenon of the Marvel Cinematic Universe is not just its continuous expansion with the release of a new movie, but with the culture around the release of a new movie. On average, Disney/Marvel[1] releases a new movie each year, and they sometime release more than one film a year. In 2017, Disney/Marvel will release three movies:

1. *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2*, the sequel to *Guardians of the Galaxy* (2014), was released May 5th, and earned $175 million in six days (Mendelson, 2017, para. 1);

2. *Spider-Man: Homecoming*, which is the third reboot of the Spider-Man character, is schedule for release July 7th;

3. and *Thor: Ragnarok*, the third solo film for the "Thor" character, is schedule for release November 3rd.

Disney/Marvel releases films in almost every quarter of the year. While there was no film release in the beginning of 2017, Disney/Marvel did an official announcement for the first day of filming *Avengers: Infinity War*, which will be a two-part film and are scheduled for release May 2018 and May 2019. The MCU is constantly being expanded and Disney/Marvel, even without a film in theater, is always present in media and retail through the saturation of these markets with promotions of the franchise.

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[1] In 2009, The Walt Disney Company bought Marvel Entertainment for about $4 billion. The only movie produced solely by Marvel was *Iron Man* (2008), which had a successful opening. The acquisition of Marvel by Disney, allowed for an increase of funding for more films.

For each movie that is planned for release, there is an obvious process that Disney/Marvel takes to "prepare" the audience. Before any of the movies begin filming, Disney/Marvel releases the cast information. For instance, Brie Larson was announced as "Captain Marvel" at Comic-Con 2016. When Marvel announced that "Captain Marvel" would be the first female superhero film, there was speculation about who it would be. In fandom[2], there were many people that cast various actresses to play the character. Even though the film is not in production yet, fans and journalists continue to speculate about how "Captain Marvel" will be introduced into the MCU, since new characters have made cameos in other films before having their own, such as "Spider-Man" and "Black Panther." By just announcing the movie was in pre-production, Disney/Marvel generated interest in the "Captain Marvel" future movie that fans will always want information about.

There is also a lot of interest by fans when the films begin production. For instance, *Avengers: Infinity War* began filming in January 2017. To include the fans of what is happening in the MCU, Disney/Marvel released a "first look" video in February 2017, which had interviews with some of the actors and the directors. By including the fans in the process of the filming, Marvel further increases interest in the film. The fans will want to know more about what is happening with the character and that direction the story is going; there is a lot of speculation. Furthermore, the actors in the film are also asked about it in interviews. For instance, Chris Evans, who plays "Captain America," continues to be asked about his future with Marvel[3].

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[2] Fandom is the term used for the community that is created by fans.
[3] Chris Evans has a 6-movie contract with Disney/Marvel, which will be fulfilled with the release of *Avengers: Infinity War*.

Between Marvel and the actors, there is always new information about the MCU films that keeps fans interested in what is happening.

Disney/Marvel also reminds its fans that a movie will premier soon by releasing teaser trailers[4], which average two minutes in duration and do not give a lot of information about the film. For instance, the first teaser trailer for *Thor: Ragnarok* (2017) was released April 10, 2017, seven months before the film is scheduled to debut. By releasing a teaser trailer, Disney/Marvel has given fans enough information and content to speculate with. Within an hour of the release of teaser trailer, there were many posts about the teaser trailer on Tumblr[5]. Thus, the fans of the MCU create free promotional content for the film that is shared not only on Tumblr, but other social media sites as well.

The same day the teaser trailer for *Thor: Ragnarok* was released, the official poster was released as well. Taika Waititi, the director of *Thor* 3, and Chris Hemsworth, "Thor," also posted a picture of the official poster on their social media platforms, as well as a link to the teaser. Eventually, the official poster for *Thor: Ragnarok* will be placed in theaters as well. The posters, whether outside or inside the theater, are placed there to constantly remind audiences when the movies will be released. Since *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2* will be released soon, the posters for this film are already placed in theaters. Furthermore, depending on the marketing techniques, there are also card board cutouts to promote the films. Fans of the films can then interact with the card board cutouts by taking photos[6].

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[4] A teaser trailer for a film is often shorter and has less information than a regular trailer.
[5] Tumblr is a social media website. The website is often used by people for fandom, where they post their own fan-made content and have discussions about fandom.
[6] When Atlas and DC Entertainment released *Suicide Squad* (2016), there was a card board cutout of the characters and people could take pictures beside them and pretend they were part of the movie as well.

While *Thor: Ragnarok* will be released November 2017, *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2* will be released May 2017. As the release for *Guardians* is much sooner, Disney/Marvel promotes the film a lot more. By April 2017, there are already two official trailers that have been released, the first trailer was released October 2016 and the second was released February 2017. There are also various television commercial spots for the film. The television promos also show similar content that is in the trailers, but they are shown more often on various channels.

While the release of trailers, posters, and television spots is always highly anticipated, so is the sale of tickets. For blockbuster films, fans often want to buy tickets in advance to the first showings on the day the film premiers[7]. Disney/Marvel and theater companies release information about when tickets go on sale. These companies prepare the fans to buy the tickets, because they can sell quickly, and for blockbusters, they often sellout. Marvel, as well as the actors, posts ticket sale information on their social media platforms. If fans have accounts on any Disney/Marvel website, they also receive emails from them announcing the sale of tickets. Theater companies, such as Cinemark, and ticket companies, such as Fandango, also send out emails announcing the ticket sales to people with accounts. Therefore, fans of the MCU always know when the tickets go on sale and they can prepare in advance when they want to go watch the movie.

There is also a lot of promotion of the release of a MCU film on DVD/Blu-Ray. For instance, when *Doctor Strange* (2016) was set to be released on DVD/Blu-Ray February 2017, Disney/Marvel posted the release date on their social media platforms. The company also

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[7] While the official release date of *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2* is May 5th, 2017, the first showings of the film will be on May 4th, 2017. The first showing of a film used to be at 00:00 am on the day of the official release. More recently, however, the first showings of new films have been after 6pm the day before.

released television promotion spots to announce the release of the film. Stores, such as Walmart, also had posters in the entrances to announce the film's release date. When *Doctor Strange* was released, there were stands with the various media platforms and card board posters by the registers, so shoppers would always be aware the film was on sale without having to go to the media entertainment department of the store.

As the release of a film in the MCU approaches, such as *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2*, it will be promoted a lot more. The week any of the films is released, audiences are bombarded with new promotional content. For instance, the actors of the films will visit news and talk shows to be interviewed about the film. Every time an actor of the film is interviewed on television, the interviewer asks questions about the film, and then a new clip of the film is shown. At the end of every interview, the audience is told to go watch the film and is reminded when it film will be released.

Since a lot of the films the MCU releases are sequels, the previous films are also shown on television. By showing the previous films on television, Disney/Marvel can have old fans re-watch the previous films, and perhaps have new fans watch the previous films so they can watch the new one in theaters. Disney/Marvel also has their films of streaming platforms, such as Hulu and Netflix, so people can watch the previous movies before watching the new films in theater.

Furthermore, Disney/Marvel uses their show *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* (2013-present) as a platform to promote their new films. Marvel has used *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* to show new promotional sneak peaks. As part of the MCU, the audience of *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* are likely to watch the films as well, and will benefit from being constant audience members. This will also entice non-regular viewers watch the show to catch the sneak peak, which will then increase the viewership rating of the show. Since *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* is also part of the overall MCU,

storylines in the show have aligned with storylines of the films, especially *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* (2014), *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015), and *Captain America: Civil War* (2016). If audiences watch *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*, then they need to watch the movie that is released while the show is on television to be able to solve any cliffhangers from the episode that is released before the film's premier, which then sets up the next film in the show.

Disney/Marvel is constantly promoting their brand by saturating the market with their logos and characters. Even if someone did not closely follow Disney/Marvel on social media, or pay attention to any commercials on television, they will still not avoid any MCU content. Disney/Marvel has contracts with food products to place their characters and the names of the movies on the packaging. For certain products, like fruit snacks or cereals, the images of Marvel characters tend remain on the packaging even if there is no MCU movie in theaters. On other products, such as chips or sodas, the images of characters are placed on the packaging to promote films. For instance, since *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2* will be released in early May 2017, the images of the characters could be seen on packages of Doritos chips as early as April 2017.

Furthermore, every time there is a new movie in the MCU, Disney/Marvel releases new merchandise, such as toys and clothes, to promote the film. The new merchandise for each film is changed slightly to reflect the film. Even if kids, or adults, already have certain toys from previous films, the new toys promise new additions or changes in the characters that are going to be present in the new film, such as new weapons or uniform change. For people who are collectors, or kids who want the new toys, they are repurchasing action figures of the same characters from the previous films only to have the newer edition.

If there are new characters introduced in the films, they are also sold and promoted in toy markets. The new character action figures are often found in a package with other characters, so

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even if a person has the other toys, they would need to repurchase them to get the new character. For instance, when *Captain America: Civil War* (2016) was released, there were two packages with all the action figures, one for "Team Iron Man" and the other "Team Captain America." The action figures for the newer characters in the film were in each package. To own the new action figures of the newer characters, the whole set had to be bought even if a person already had action figures for either "Iron Man," or "Captain America."

The phenomenon of the Marvel Cinematic Universe has moved beyond just the film, it is in every aspect of people's lives even if they are not fans of the franchise. Disney/Marvel inundates people with information regarding every movie that they are planning on releasing, new merchandise, and promotions through food products. There is a culture that is formed surrounding the MCU that allows for people to constantly be updated with what is happening with the franchise. The MCU, then, is a phenomenon that is influential in the cultural zeitgeist, and is reflected of and reinforces ideologies present in the cultural zeitgeist.

1.2 A Brief History of "Captain America"

The MCU is an important phenomenon to critically analyze for ideologies that are being propagated to the audience. Furthermore, the character of "Captain America" is also important to analyze within the context of the MCU. "Captain America" originated as a comic book character, and was then adapted for the MCU. "Captain America" was created in 1941 by Jack Kirby and Joe Simon for Timely Comics, which later became Marvel Comics (Conroy, 2009, p. 62).

During World War II, the "Captain America" comics, as well as other comics were used as propaganda tools. The comics were used to promote involvement in WWII to defeat Nazi Germany and Japan. For instance, the first issue of the "Captain America" comics featured "Captain America" punching Hitler (p. 67). "Captain America" issues were also used to save

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paper. In the issues, "Captain America" tells the readers that they are part of the war effort, they should join the organization "Sentinels of Liberty," and need to save paper (pp. 64-65).

As "Captain America," and other superheroes, were constantly fighting and defeating the enemy, the comics became "wish-fulfillment fodder" for soldiers that read them (p. 67). "Captain America" is a soldier that is fighting for America, and is then the symbol of what a soldier, or any a reader, should strive for to bring peace to the world. "Captain America" is also the embodiment of American nationalism (Dittmer, 2005, p. 627). Furthermore, "Captain America" quintessentially represents the "white savior." The character is the "perfect" white male with "American" loyalty and beliefs, and only he can save the world. The narrative of "Captain America" as the "white savior" is also symbolic of the United States as the nation that "saves" everyone else.

Since "Captain America," in the comics and the MCU, is created to fight for the American military. The character is so closely tied to an American organization, which then "establishes him as both a representative of the idealized American nation and as a defender of the American status quo" (p. 627). The character inherently symbolizes the United States and the ideological leanings of the United States. Through this character, American ideologies are reinforced and reflected in the cultural zeitgeist. Therefore, it is important to critically analyze how symbols of militarism and masculinity are reflected and reinforced by "Captain America" in the MCU.

1.3 Militarization in Film

Importantly, these films, particularly the character "Captain America," typically represent a Manichaeistic view, which is the concept that the "forces of light and goodness are destined to confront evildoers," as well as jingoism, which is the "ease in which a majority of Americans can

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be mobilized behind military venture" (Boggs & Pollard, 2016, pp. 17-18). These symbols are reinforced in every movie that is released that foregrounds "Captain America" as the only reason the world is saved from "evil." These symbols that "Captain America" and the MCU represent are indicative of "[Americans that] act modern, cool, and sophisticated… but underneath, want a daddy, a king, a god, a hero…a champion who will carry that lance and that sword in to the field and fight for [them]" (Dowd, 1992, para. 5). Therefore, the MCU and "Captain America" symbolize these ideologies, which are also representative of and symbiotic with the zeitgeist in which they are released.

Though the success of the Marvel Cinematic Universe is a more recent phenomenon, it is not the first time that comic superhero films have been released—Batman (1966) could be considered the first feature length superhero film. Yet, today, comic-based films are at the height of popularity (Hickey, 2014, para. 6). Likewise, the United States is currently involved in the War on Terror, which is considered to be a never-ending war. This has presented the perfect opportunity for Hollywood to produce films that reflect and serve the cultural zeitgeist. There is a war without a visible end, and if a superhero existed, then everyone would be protected and saved. Thus, films are used to make people believe that "super" soldiers need to exist outside of films to live in a "safe" world.

Propaganda has been used as a form of manipulation by dominant groups, in this case the military, since at least World War I. Some of the earliest forms of propaganda have been by cartoons (Conroy, 2009, p. 46). By using cartoons in newspapers, propagandists can reach a larger audience and reinforce ideologies. Within this large audience, there are people with lower education levels, who are more likely to be manipulated by propaganda (Aitken, 2013). Similarly, films can reach a large audience.

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During World War II, the United States government used films as a propaganda tool. In fact, the Office of War Information, or OWI, hired Frank Capra, a film director, to produce propaganda films (Ellis & McLane, 2009, p. 132). The purpose of these films was to convince the population that the U.S. needed to get involved in WWII. Thus, since the 1940s, the U.S. government has had a vested interest in using film as a propaganda medium to reach a large audience.

For propaganda to work, there needs to be repetition. The ideological message needs to continuously reinforced and sustained, especially during a time of war so that the population is always aware of the "enemy" (Regan, 1994, p. 46). The MCU is the perfect platform for propaganda and its reinforcement. As an extended universe, there are new films and television shows being released that are all connected. People are going to watch new material in the MCU to be up to date on how the story is unfolding. Furthermore, they are going to re-watch the movies and shows that have already been released.

Since Disney/Marvel continuously releases new movies, and the audience can re-watch movies, the MCU is the perfect platform for propaganda. The media and popular culture have been used for military propaganda for the U.S. government, because the government does not have an official propaganda machine (Boggs, 2012, p. 13). Thus, the MCU serves as the perfect platform for military propaganda, because it is constantly being reinforced. Furthermore, some scholars have stated that militarism promotes masculinity. Therefore, this study suggests that it is necessary to not only analyze symbols of militarism in film, but symbols of masculinity as well.

1.4 Masculinity in the MCU

Of course, people are conditioned to want a hero that saves the day. That is why the hero exists, to save everyone. Furthermore, superheroes should be able to go above and beyond—it is

implied in the name. By adding "super," the hero should be able to defeat anything. There is something "more" to the hero. In order to have a "super" hero, the character is often given ultimate strength (e.g., "Steve Rogers," or "Captain America"), or is a genius (e.g., "Tony Stark," or "Iron Man"). It is no longer "regular" people that are saving the day, but rather people with enhanced capabilities.

Even when superheroes are parodied, such as in the program The Big Bang Theory, there is still a desire by "normal" people to be superheroes (Brown, 2016, p. 131). The main characters of this show, mostly male and considered to be "geeks," have dressed up as their favorite superhero characters in various episodes (p. 132). As Brown states, *The Big Bang Theory* (2007–present), as a parody of geek culture, shows how superhero films impact fans (p. 132). Superheroes, then, are considered the ultimate form of human greatness, or in some cases alien greatness (e.g., Superman). Thus, the zeitgeist suggests that regardless of who you are, there is always a desire to be a superhero.

These films are telling the audience that the superhero form, for instance the physical strength, is the ultimate goal to achieving worthiness. Furthermore, because the MCU is a franchise, people are not limited to watching these characters save the day in films. Franchises are created by "…megafilms designed to sustain a product line of similar films and an ever-expanding array of related entertainment products…" (Schatz, 2009, p. 30). Therefore, audiences are not limited to these films to see these characters. These characters, Captain America, Iron Man, Thor, etc., are on food products, clothing, toys, etc.—they permeate many aspects of people's daily lives, especially children's.

Through transmedia, the audience continues to interact with the characters, their stories, and the ideologies after they watch the films. As long as these movies continue to yield a high

profit for production companies, they will continue to be released. Often, these films are seen as comic book adaptations that could be thought of as children's movies, specifically, movies for boys. In fact, Disney bought Marvel in order to secure a transmedia market targeted for boys, which they lacked as Disney's main target audience has mostly been girls because of "princesses" in their films (McLauchlin, 2015, para. 14). With the purchase of Marvel, Disney was able to expand their market to boys by providing them "superhero" toys. These "superhero" toys reinforce militarism, and even militarized masculinity, in boys.

Gender discourse has shown that masculinity is a social construct (Tong, 2014, p. 201). That is, the cultural zeitgeist determines what it means to be either a "man" or "woman." Furthermore, scholars have found that militarism promotes a militarized masculinity. David Morgan (1994) states that "of all the sites where masculinities are constructed, reproduced, and deployed, those associated with war and the military are some of the most direct" (p. 165). In the military, men are forced to conform to what the military believes to be the what "real" men are like. Thus, this study suggests that "Captain America" reinforces militarized masculinity, because the character was created by the military and is a soldier.

1.5 "Captain America," Militarism, & Masculinity

Once again, it is important to know that militaristic themes are not just in films but also in comic books. In an analysis of the Captain America comic books, Jason Dittmer (2005) states that the character embodies the "American identity by relating to nationalism and current political affairs" (p. 627). Although Dittmer is analyzing the Captain in the comic book universe, this conclusion could clearly apply to the films as well. Thus, this study suggests that the analysis of militarism in the Captain America comic books and stories is important, because these stories

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are now being made into several films (e.g., *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011) and others).

These symbols are reinforced in every movie that is released that foregrounds "Captain America" as the only reason the world is saved from "evil." These symbols that "Captain America" and the MCU represent are indicative of "[Americans that] act modern, cool, and sophisticated… but underneath, want a daddy, a king, a god, a hero…a champion who will carry that lance and that sword in to the field and fight for [them]" (Dowd, 1992, para. 5). Therefore, the MCU and "Captain America" symbolize these ideologies, which are also representative of and symbiotic with the zeitgeist in which they are released.

Furthermore, Captain America is "a representative of national identity, one must not ignore the display of his physical body as a marker of his heroic manhood" (Barbour, 2015, p. 277). The national identity that Captain America is representing is the belief that "heroic manhood" is achieved through hypermasculinity. Barbour (2015) states that "the transformation of Rogers into Captain America enacts that fantasy of instantaneous metamorphosis from weakling to super hero" (p. 279). Captain America represents the ultimate wish-fulfilling fantasy. He will be the weakling ever again–he is forever the superman.

1.6 Rationale

Though "Captain America" and the MCU is fiction, the ideologies represented in the films could be representative of the cultural zeitgeist. These films, because they are seen as fantasy, are perfect for propagating militarism and masculinity as ideologies—especially since there is a ready-made audience. It is also this ready-made audience that may not necessarily notice the ideologies present in the films. Since members of the audience may have been fans of the comics first, they were already predisposed to the militaristic and masculine themes in these

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films. Furthermore, since the films in franchise are all connected through storylines, there is a guaranteed the audience, because they most likely to continue to watch the films in order to know how the stories continue in each film. This, then, reinforces militaristic and masculine ideologies are reinforced. Thus, the current zeitgeist continues, because the audience does not question, or is not aware, of the ideologies being reinforced in these films.

Therefore, this study suggests that the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) is a transmedia phenomenon that is worthy of scholarly attention and analysis. The popularity of the MCU suggests that this a cultural, ideological phenomenon that can affect many people, not only in the United States, but worldwide. Most films that are analyzed for their militaristic themes are more likely to be about the U.S. military and wars. Within scholarly research, however, there is a gap in analyzing comic book films and militarism. This may be because they are seen as simplistic children's movies, and only about "good versus evil." This research project, however, will analyze how and to what extent the MCU and "Captain America" is used as a propaganda tool for hyper-masculinity and militarism.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 The Beginnings of Militarism in Film

Propaganda has been used as a form of manipulation by dominant groups, in this case the military, since at least World War I. The use of propaganda as a recruitment tool showed that people with less education were most likely to be manipulated (Aitken, 2013). In fact, it was during World War I that propaganda cartoons, in the form of newspaper comics, "truly came into their own, as a means of boosting morale and furthering the war effort" (Conroy, 2009, p. 46). At this time, people mainly received news about the war from newspapers, and a comic strip was the best way for a semi-literate audience to receive news (Conroy, 2009, p. 46). Therefore, these comic strips were also a perfect medium to manipulate an audience into accepting militaristic ideologies.

Years later, during World War II, the United States government had a vested interest in how the military was portrayed in film. According to Harold D. Lasswell, "ideological control of populations in or out of war would be achieved by…the management of opinions and attitudes by the direct manipulation of social suggestions" (as cited in Gary, 1999, p. 83). In our current culture, there is no need to have a specific source of propaganda that directly tells the audience what to think. Rather, the film industries, owned by giant media conglomerates, are able to insert military ideologies subtly without the audience realizing it (Boggs and Pollard, 2016, p. 10). By using films to promote military ideologies, the industry and the government would have a mutually beneficial relationship—the media conglomerates would be able to influence politics and the government would have a free propaganda tool. These ideologies, then, need to be

represented through the discourse and symbols in films. This study suggests that the MCU and "Captain America" are examples of discourses that are worthy of scholarly analysis.

Scholars also state that for the best way for ideological propaganda to work, there needs to be repetition. There needs to be a "sustained effort" to be able to have a specific enemy in the population's mind (Regan, 1994, p. 46). Furthermore, the manipulation of symbols has to occur over time and continuously reinforced, especially during a time in which the people do not support any kind of military action (Regan, 1994). Thus, in order to convince people to support military action, the symbols used in propaganda, particularly in propaganda films, need to reflect patriotic values, which can include militaristic and masculine themes. This study, therefore, recognizes that since the MCU is a franchise, the ideological symbols in the films and "Captain America" are continuously being reinforced with each film that is released.

Although the U.S. government may not have had direct contact with comic book films being made, historically, that does not mean that there is not a form of militarism in films that are about the United States. Interestingly, militarism is the "contradictory and tense social process in which civil society organizes itself for the production of violence…[and] is ongoing" (Davies & Philpott, 2012, p. 65). Film and cinema are what Robin Luckham considers parts of media, "with military themes [that] help to condition public acceptance of armament" (as cited in Regan, 1994, p. 48). Thus, regardless of the involvement of the U.S. government, films can be used as propaganda for military support.

For example, during World War II, the U.S. government needed to make their citizens understand the need to join the conflict and end isolationism (Ellis & McLane, 2009, pp. 130-132). In order to do so, the U.S. government (like the British) began producing documentaries as a form of propaganda. While these documentaries were used for training, informing the public,

battle records, and social documentary, the U.S. government was very much influential about

what was being produced. In 1942, the Office of War Information (OWI) was established to

work with Hollywood on what should and should not be included in films in order to influence

the morale of the audience (Ellis & McLane, 2009, p. 140). The interaction between the OWI

and Hollywood shows how the military was able to subtly manipulate audiences, and it did not

end after WWII. Propaganda, however, has evolved from Frank Capra producing films for the

U.S. military to being subtler—media culture evolved to being the propaganda apparatus for the

government (Boggs & Pollard, 2016, p. 135). This study, however, recognizes how films are

examples of discourses and the symbols used as propaganda.

2.2 Modern War Propaganda

After WWII, the U.S. became a military superpower, which resulted in the heavy

influence of the military over the government, military ties to the economy, and the need to

secure markets throughout the world (Davies & Philpott, 2012). This influence is also referred to

as the military-industrial complex (Boggs & Pollard, 2016, p. 55). Thus, Hollywood continued to

support militaristic ideologies. Between Hollywood and the military-industrial complex, the

cultural zeitgeist continued to evolve with militaristic symbols that promoted military

intervention for the greater good.

More specifically, films that were released after WWII continued to portray the "good

war." The "good war" is a war fought by the good against the evil enemies, and WWII is often

considered to be the ultimate "good war" (Boggs & Pollard, 2016, p. 36). Therefore, Hollywood

released films that embodied this idea of the "good war." Thus, Hollywood released films that

embodied the "good war," because the audience is more likely to accept war if it is seen as "just"

and "good," and will bring peace to the world. By accepting that a war will bring peace to the

world, then the audience of war films is likely to support jingoism, the mobilization of the military. Therefore, these films are worth examining to determine how war films, specifically superhero films, use militaristic themes to reinforce the support of military mobilization.

Furthermore, some scholars argue that a military superpower can also lead to believing that if humans invented war, they can also invent peace (Anderson & Christie, 2001). The notions of "us versus them" and "just wars" are what create violent wars (p. 178). This, in turn, reinforces Manichaeistic views of the world. If a war is "just," then it is necessary to take any action, in this case, to declare war, in order to defeat the enemy and to achieve peace. Scholars also conclude that because of violence in film, people have become desensitized and are more likely go along with militarism in films out of indifference (Boggs & Pollard, 2008, p. 573). Furthermore, the military and war films insinuate that to be able to defeat the enemy, the country should always be prepared.

Military preparedness is often associated with people being told that the only way to achieve peace is through the strength of the nation (Anderson & Christie, 2001, p. 178). In order to have military preparedness, the development of weapons, as well as "jobs, contracts, masculinity, and politics," which furthers the military-industrial complex (p. 178). This severe involvement of the military in society is also justified by the idea that the military is protecting the nation's "interests and investments" (p. 178). Furthermore, this zeitgeist is still present in contemporary films.

To protect the nation's interests and investments, militarism suggests that there is going to be some form of necessary violence. To gain support by people to use military action for national "security," Hollywood has embraced the need to "celebrate a violence that simultaneously reflects and influences the popular Zeitgeist" (Boggs & Pollard, 2008, p. 566).

Likewise, other recent films such as *No Country for Old Men* (2007) and *There Will Be Blood* (2007) are not really war films, but still embrace the use of violence as a means to an end. The casual use of violence in several genres of films, suggests that Hollywood is reinforcing the ideological need for violence as the main response to any threat, thus, supporting militarism.

Hollywood was also able to capitalize on 9/11. After Sept. 11th, 2001, Hollywood produced various war films about the attacks, thus, garnering a profit from cinematic representations of war, violence, fears of terrorism, attacks, battles, militarism and justified causes. Essentially, films that portrayed the U.S. as a "very imperialistic nation prepared to set the world straight" were appealing to U.S. audiences because they were "wounded [and] vengeful" (Boggs & Pollard, 2008, p. 566).

At least one scholar, Boggs (2012), further explains that media and popular culture have worked as forms of military propaganda, since the U.S. government does not have an official propaganda machine (p. 13). As Boggs explains, media and popular culture have become tools to spread "ideological hegemony" that includes the belief that there needs to be a "globalized permanent war system to protect against imminent foreign threats, and, of course, [for] old-fashioned patriotism" (Boggs, 2012, p. 14). Boggs also states that war films help justify the militarization of the U.S., regardless of any anti-militaristic films that are also released (p. 16). This is likely due to the zeitgeist that has developed over many decades that closely links the military and movie entertainment.

One example of a film being used to spread patriotism and justify militarism is *Act of Valor* (2012), which was used as a way to promote the Navy SEALs and attract recruits (Anderson, 2014, p. 23). This film, compared to other war films, went further and even used SEALs to portray the characters because the producers felt that "actors could misinterpret the US

Navy SEALs, as they have before in film" (p. 24). Anderson states that despite the film being released nationwide and having the appearance of a "Hollywood" film, the Public Relations division in the Pentagon was involved (much like the OWI during WWII) in the filming process and even decided what should be taken out of the film that they deemed "undesirable" (p. 22). Anderson also compares *Act of Valor* to war films about the Vietnam War. The author states that while films depicting the Vietnam War were critical of the military, *Act of Valor* ignores the "reality" of war and mainly promotes "patriotism" and that violence is necessary (p. 28). Thus, films promote an unrealistic view of war, which can lead to the audience believing that militarism is necessary. Therefore, war films are worthy of analysis to determine how militaristic themes are used to promote an unrealistic view of war.

2.3 A Nation Terrorized

Some scholars argue that since September 11th, 2001, Hollywood films were used to help people cope with the aftermath of the attacks (Riegler, 2014, p. 104). For example, Riegler states that films post 9/11 represented the "'unbroken' spirit, strove to reassert the symbolic coordinates of the prevailing American reality, and mobilized for a response to new challenges" (p. 104). Hollywood claimed they would change their film to be "gentler," and even canceled film projects or changed them (p. 105). Riegler states, however, that Hollywood got on the military bandwagon shortly after the invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001, by releasing films such as *Black Hawk Down* (2001). Riegler also notes how that Hollywood undertook the retelling of the "War on Terror" as fast as popular culture during World War II, but emphasized the homecomings of soldiers and the problems of their families (p. 112).

By telling the stories of soldiers coming home and the problems that their families faced, there is an undercurrent in which, just because the soldier has returned home does not mean that

the war is over (Grajeda, 2014). According to Grajeda, films whose narrative is about the soldier coming home show their struggles to rejoin society (p. 59). These films that do not have closure are reinforcing the fact that the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are a "forever war" and the "long-war," because, ultimately, these two wars are part of the War on Terror, which always has potential conflict (p. 56).

Another scholar suggests that despite the portrayal of the "forever war," audiences seem to prefer those that suggest that the U.S. is "winning" the War on Terror (Lee, 2015, p. 16). For example, the capture and death of Osama Bin Laden caused a shift in Hollywood, which would account for the $430 million success of a movie such as *American Sniper* (2014). Yet, Hollywood would not have produced *American Sniper* (2014) had previously released war films not had some success. For instance, *The Hurt Locker* (2009) won six Academy Awards including Best Picture, despite "only" making $17 million in profit in the U.S. Thus, films that reinforce successful militarism are preferable to audiences.

2.4 Not All War Films

Although the current cultural zeitgeist values militarism, there are some war films that have been released that do not portray militarization as always beneficial. For instance, Steven Spielberg's *War Horse* (2011) demonstrates a small change on how militarism is portrayed in recent films. David Cox (2012) states that while Spielberg's previous films contributed to the idea of military preparedness, *War Horse* changes the view on war (para. 6). The film shows the "futility" of World War I, which is a sentiment that was held by the U.S. public about the war in the Middle East at the time of the film's release (Cox, 2012, para. 6). Cox notes that when the film was released, the defense budget was being cut, President Obama was pulling the military out of Libya, and Iran was to be dealt with by Israel (2012, para. 9).

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According to one scholar, other films that previously seemed to deal with the "futility" of war are *Flags of Our Fathers* (2006) and *Letters from Iwo Jima* (2006) (Cardullo, 2011, p. 251). These two movies show what is presumed to be the justification of the battle, which created a myth in its history (p. 253). This myth is that capturing Iwo Jima was important for the war in the Pacific, because it would be an important landing and refueling site for U.S. planes. However, this rationale was not the reason for capturing the island. The military used this theory after the battle was successful and after the Marines suffered high casualties (p. 253). Although both films show two sides of the war, Japan and U.S.A., the films are not entirely anti-militaristic, because as Cardullo argues, they would alienate part of the intended audience (p. 254). The audience has been accustomed to watching films in which the U.S. military perseveres against the "enemy," particularly in this "good" war, and, therefore, any film that strays from this trope, would not be accepted.

These films, however, did succeed in showing that war is "hell," and that despite a justification of it, it is not always necessary (p. 254). On this topic, another example could be *Saving Private Ryan* (1998). Though some war films show the "hell" that men in combat go through, it is possible that they promote a type of masculinity in these men. Some scholars have stated that militarism promotes masculinity. Therefore, this study suggests that it is necessary to not only analyze symbols of militarism in film, but symbols of masculinity as well.

2.5 A Brief Understanding of Masculinity

Gender discourse in films is also affected by the cultural zeitgeist—that is, how gender is perceived and talked about in society. According to postmodern feminist scholars, gender is a social construct. Gender norms are developed by society, and people are assigned a gender that they must perform (Tong, 2014, p. 201). Society expects people that are either labeled "boy" or

"girl" to have certain behavioral traits that are believed to correspond with those binary labels. This labeling of behavioral traits has created a boy/girl dichotomy that is perceived as the norm, and any behavior that does not follow this "rule" is seen as abnormal. Furthermore, binary oppositions in language and discourse have limited the understanding of masculinity and femininity (Tong, 2014, p 195). Binary oppositions in language have ruled that masculinity is the opposite of femininity, and vice versa. Therefore, the binary opposition has limited the categories for behavioral characteristics to either masculine or feminine.

This construction of behavioral traits in society leads to the reinforcement of hegemonic masculinity. According to Barrett (1996), hegemonic masculinity is "…a particular idealized image of masculinity in relation to which images of femininity and other masculinities are marginalized and subordinated" (p. 130). Through hegemonic masculinity, "other" groups are viewed as being less-than the ideal male figure. Furthermore, hegemonic masculinity also includes "…the process by which these groups and ideals form, the organizational situations and constraints that shape and construct these ideals and groups" (Barrett, 1996, p. 130). Thus, it is important to note how these masculinities are developed. For this study, it is important to look at hegemonic masculinities in militaristic situations.

2.6 Militarized Masculinity

Hegemonic masculinity that forms in the military is known as militarized masculinity. Militarized masculinity is defined by David Morgan (1994) as the following:

Of all the sites where masculinities are constructed, reproduced, and deployed, those associated with war and the military are some of the most direct. Despite far-reaching political, social, and technological changes, the warrior still seems to be a key symbol of masculinity…The stance, facial expressions, and the weapons clearly connote aggression,

courage, a capacity for violence, and sometimes, a willingness for sacrifice. The uniform

absorbs individualities into a generalized and timeless masculinity while also connoting a

control of emotion and a subordination to a larger rationality (p. 165).

A militarized masculinity suggests that the only way a man can be a "true" man is if he embodies

these characteristics. Of course, the only way for men to embody these characteristics is if they

join the military, which is the ultimate school for masculinity (Scheub, 2012, para. 4). An early

example of a society ruled by militarized masculinity is Germany through both World Wars. Dr.

Ute Scheub (2012) states that men in Germany were taught to be "hard," and "disciplined" (para.

7). The United States, however, has also emphasized the need for militarized masculinity.

Furthermore, the military needs a group of men, who would have been at odds in society

based on socio-economic status, to be a cohesive unit. To do so, the military reinforces a

commonality, which is their masculinity. The military "[emphasizes] stoic masculinity, and

differentiating the masculine from the feminine" (Shields, 2016, p. 65). The military ingrains in

them that what unites them is their hyper-masculinity. The military treats training as a "finishing

school" that teaches the soldiers hyper-masculine values and behaviors, such as strength,

toughness, stoicism, aggressiveness, and an exaggerated heterosexuality" (p. 65). Thus, even

before soldiers go to any theater of action, they have already been trained to be hyper-masculine

and to denounce any femininity.

Gender roles and militarism are also reinforced in the spread of militarized masculinity

(Bjarnegård & Melander, 2011, p. 145). Bjarnegård and Melander (2011) state that, through

militarized masculinity, "violence is viewed as an acceptable means of imposing and maintaining

domination…[and] that conflict will be dealt with violently" (pp. 145-146). This, then, reinforces

Shields (2016) argument that the military's main training objective is hyper-masculinity. By

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enforcing hyper-masculine traits, creating a militarized masculinity, the soldiers are prone to use violence to solve conflict.

Furthermore, some scholars argue that masculinity and war are linked. Hutchings (2008) argues that there is a "mutually reinforcing relation between masculinity and war and the links between ideals of masculinity and exemplary or necessary military virtues or qualities" (p. 392). This suggest that there is a mutual relationship between the masculinity, the military, and war. The military uses basic training to form a cohesive unit through masculinity. Without this cohesion through masculinity, the military would not be able to have "war." As Hutchings (2008) further claims that masculinity is a cause of war (p. 391). Thus, there is a continuous relationship between hyper-masculinity and militarism.

One scholar analyzes sense of identity in forming masculinity in the military. Hale (2012) states that "strong sense of belonging to the military community" is important in developing masculinites (p. 708). In her research, Hale (2012) found that some respondents considered the military their "home" and that it was the most important aspect of who they are (p. 709). The researcher's findings show that the military is ingrained into their identities. Hale (2012) also states that respondents feel that there they must conform to "military masculinities," and if they do not, they must leave (p. 713). The military, then, in using masculinity as a cohesive trait, forces people to adopt it, with negative effects if people are not willing to conform. Thus, the military forces masculinity on the soldiers, and takes away their autonomy in doing so.

2.7 Masculinity in Media

Though the military is one way to militarize masculinity, films are also used to influence the cultural zeitgeist. Speaking of gender issues, scholars began analyzing gender in film in the 1970s. Gender in films was often analyzed using feminist film theory, which was developed by

scholars, such as Laura Mulvey and Claire Johnston (Hammett, 1997, p. 85). Feminist film critique was most likely kick-started by the release of *Jaws* in 1975, which was the first blockbuster and dictated that films should cater to the tastes of 15-year-old boys (Dowd, 2015, para. 27). The emphasis of the male audience of *Jaws* (1975) is mostly the same as the target audience of war films. Scholars found that films caused "[oppression] not only economically and politically, but also in the very forms of reasoning, signifying and symbolical exchange of our culture" (Devereaux, 1990, p. 337). Thus, the symbolism of gender in films also contributes to the cultural zeitgeist.

For example, Susan Jeffords (1994) analyzed masculinity in various films, such as the Rambo film series, released in the 1980s. Interestingly, these films, she suggests, represented society's desire to see "spectacular narratives about characters who stand for individualism, liberty, militarism, and a mythic heroism" (p. 16). Of course, these films were released during the Reagan Era, a historical context in which the administration pushed the idea that there was a need for a more "masculine" approach to foreign affairs (Jeffords, 1994, p. 28). This further demonstrates the link between films and the cultural zeitgeist. For the country to be "masculine," men needed to have "hard bodies." According to Jeffords, hard bodies are characterized by not having any feminine traits, have strength, are aggressive, and have power (p. 35). Interestingly, this trend exploded in the 1980s, and lasts until this day.

Furthermore, "the muscular body is a heavily inscribed sign: Nothing else so clearly marks an individual as a bearer of masculine power" (Brown, 1999, p. 27). Musculature is used to determine gender norms. To be considered a "man," the person must be "hard," or have an abundance of muscles. Also, women who are muscular and men who are not are considered

"gender transgressors," because they defy gender norms created by society (Brown, 1999, p. 27). The muscular body, or hard body, is a strong symbol for hypermasculinity.

Interestingly, it is also worth noting how these types of hard bodies have also migrated to comic book characters. Most male comic book male superheroes are drawn with large muscles, which is described as the "Marvel body" (Lang, 2016). This hegemonic masculinity is capable of making people believe that this order is natural and concrete (Brown, 2016, p. 132). This hegemonic masculinity can be represented by superheroes. Brown states that superhero parodies, such as *The Big Bang Theory* (2007–present), criticize and make fun of superhero masculinity (p. 132). In the show, however, the male characters still want to look like superheroes. Thus, there is still the "type" of body that needs to be achieved, because it is considered the "best." Therefore, the male superhero body is most likely for the male audience, in order to reinforce the need for the "hard body" in the zeitgeist.

Though female superheroes are drawn for the "male gaze," male characters are also drawn for the "male gaze." The male gaze, or male perspective, is how society is taught to understand the world. The male gaze is the perspective that considered to be the universal quantifier of how to look at the world and to determine what is "real" (Devereaux, 1990). In other words, the female superheroes are drawn for the male audience to ogle. It might be thought that male characters are drawn for the female audience. Male superheroes, however, are not drawn for "female gaze." Rather, they are still for the male gaze.

The male superhero body is for men that "find male power exhilarating" (Wheeler, 2014, para. 3). The male superheroes symbolically represent what men "should" look like, which also leads to exercise routines that are created to look like these characters (Lang, 2016, para. 2). Furthermore, superhero films "represent a very narrow definition of masculinity," and the

narrative is supposed to make the audience identify with the character (Brown, 2016, p. 134). In a franchise, such as the MCU, hegemonic masculinity is constantly reinforced. Also, "Captain America" is one of the characters that has a "hard body" that the audience will identify with.

Furthermore, "classical comic book depictions of masculinity are perhaps the quintessential expression of our cultural beliefs about what it means to be a man" (Brown, 1999, p. 26). The beliefs about what is "manhood" are reinforced in masculine symbolism in superhero comics. This suggests that there is a continuous cycle in how masculinity is constructed. Brown (1999) states that while comics have showed "that a superman exists inside everyman," they are beginning to erase the "ordinary man underneath in favor of an even more excessively powerful and one-dimensional masculine ideal" (p. 26). By erasing the "ordinary man" duality to the "superman," e.g. "Clark Kent" to "Superman," the comics are giving preference to the "superman." There is no longer room for the "ordinary man," and the comic book audience should strive to be the "superman" all the time.

This duality, however, exists in many superheroes. Brown (1999) argues that "superhero comics are one of our culture's clearest illustrations of hypermasculinity and male duality premised on the fear of the unmasculine other" (p. 31). The duality, as Brown states, is the superhero, which symbolizes hypermasculinity and everyone is aware of, and the "ordinary man," which symbolizes perceived effeminate traits and is hidden from the public. The duality of the alter-ego inherently places one personality as the ideal, which is the superhero. This, then, creates the "wish-fulfilling fantasy for young men" (Brown, 1999, p. 32). If young men see that even "whimpy" men can become superheroes, then they can to. Therefore, this proposed study recognizes the significance of conducting an analysis of masculinity of male superheroes, such as "Captain America," in films.

2.8 Militarism & Masculinity within "Captain America"

Once again, it is important to know that militaristic themes are not just in films but also in comic books. In an analysis of the Captain America comic books, Jason Dittmer (2005) states that the character embodies the "American identity by relating to nationalism and current political affairs" (p. 627). Although Dittmer is analyzing the Captain in the comic book universe, this conclusion could clearly apply to the films as well. Captain America is successful in representing the American people because people use popular culture to understand their positions in the nation and the world (p. 626). Dittmer further states that the Captain represents the idea that only the U.S. acts through military force due to the need for security (p. 630).

Thus, this study suggests that the analysis of militarism in the Captain America comic books and stories is important, because these stories are now being made into several films (e.g., *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011) and others). There are also other comic book series that now have various film adaptations, for instance the Iron Man comics, and that also have militaristic themes. Interestingly, Manohla Dargis of the New York Times, recently wrote a review about *Iron Man 3* (2013). Dargis states that the film uses iconography of Osama Bin Laden, 9/11, and the Wars on Terror (2013, para. 7). Like many other films post-9/11, this film uses these ideas as a backdrop for the film without analyzing political arguments; they are exploiting these events. Dargis also comments on the fact that despite explosions killing people, there is nothing "real" about how the setting looks (e.g., lack of blood and limbs) (para. 4).

Dargis also notes that Steven Soderbergh, a retired filmmaker, stated that people in the U.S. seem to be suffering from post-traumatic stress since the 9/11 attacks (para. 13). For this reason, there is a large audience for escapist films that do not analyze politics, but rather, have a

simplistic view of "good" and "evil" in fantasy. Yet the adaptations of comic books, while there have been many, are becoming bigger blockbuster films recently and in contemporary culture.

Importantly, these films, particularly the character "Captain America," typically represent a Manichaeistic view, which is the concept that the "forces of light and goodness are destined to confront evildoers," as well as jingoism, which is the "ease in which a majority of Americans can be mobilized behind military venture" (Boggs & Pollard, 2016, pp. 17-18). These symbols are reinforced in every movie that is released that foregrounds "Captain America" as the only reason the world is saved from "evil." These symbols that "Captain America" and the MCU represent are indicative of "[Americans that] act modern, cool, and sophisticated… but underneath, want a daddy, a king, a god, a hero…a champion who will carry that lance and that sword in to the field and fight for [them]" (Dowd, 1992, para. 5). Therefore, the MCU and "Captain America" symbolize these ideologies, which are also representative of and symbiotic with the zeitgeist in which they are released.

Furthermore, Captain America is "a representative of national identity, one must not ignore the display of his physical body as a marker of his heroic manhood" (Barbour, 2015, p. 277). The national identity that Captain America is representing is the belief that "heroic manhood" is achieved through hypermasculinity. Barbour (2015) states that "the transformation of Rogers into Captain America enacts that fantasy of instantaneous metamorphosis from weakling to super hero" (p. 279). Captain America represents the ultimate wish-fulfilling fantasy. He will be the weakling ever again–he is forever the superman.

Though prominent film and military scholars such as Boggs and Pollard briefly mention the militaristic themes in superhero films, they do not fully analyze these themes in the films, thus, leaving a gap in the literature. Therefore, previous literature, as well as the gap in the

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literature, informs this study. This research focuses on the application of critical discourse analysis to the character "Captain America" in the Marvel Cinematic Universe.

The research questions that drive this are as follows:

1. How is movie discourse in Hollywood and the MCU franchise in dialogue with post-9/11 culture?

2. How does the MCU advance ideologies of militarism, masculinity, and patriarchy?

3. To what extent can CDA be used to analyze symbols of masculinity and militarism in "Captain America" and the MCU?

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

Based on previous literature, and box office gross, this proposed study suggests that an analysis of the character "Captain America" and the Marvel Cinematic Universe is worth undertaking. The methodology applied in this is Critical Discourse Analysis (or, CDA). CDA "emerged in the late 1980s as a programmatic development in European discourse studies…Since then, it has become one of the most influential and visible branches of discourse analysis" (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000, p. 447). CDA is also "fundamentally concerned with analysing opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power, and control as manifested in language" (Wodak, 2001, p. 2). Since CDA allows for this analysis in structural relationships, it is inherently political.

Since CDA is an influential in discourse analysis, and is concerned with ideological messages in texts, is the most ideal method to use to analyze "Captain America" and the MCU. Previous scholarly work has shown that there are ideological symbols in media. This study shows that there are ideological symbols of militarism and masculinity in "Captain America" and the MCU that are symbiotic with the cultural zeitgeist. In applying CDA to analyze "Captain America" and the MCU, these symbols are identified. The critical discourse of the MCU and "Captain America" will also improve media literacy. By identifying these ideological symbols, the target audiences if these films, which is all ages, will be able to think critically of the messages they are internalizing. Furthermore, the audience can identify how the ideologies reflect, or reinforce, their culture.

Furthermore, CDA allows for "the analysis of the dialectical relationships between semiosis (including language) and other elements of social practice" (Fairclough, 2001, p. 123). The language, and other symbols, used in the MCU can have a potential impact in the social practices of the audience. If these symbols hold ideological meaning, then the audience's social practices could then register these ideologies.

The theoretical implication of CDA is that there will be a form of social change (Hammersley, 1997, p. 238). Since CDA is political, the analysis of ideologies present in "Captain America" and the MCU allows for the possibility of change. By using CDA to analyze texts, people will be aware of ideological problems within a text, which potentially allows social change to occur. CDA allows for the analysis of texts in their social contexts in order to move towards change in society (p. 238). The critical analysis of these ideologies that may be present in the films can lead to the audience thinking critically about the films.

 The "commodification of language" has led to the "mixing of different semiotic modalities (photographs, drawings, diagrams, music, sound effects) that is characteristic of late modern texts" (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p. 12). Since films encompass various of these modalities, such as photographs, music, and sound effects, they can be analyzed using a methodology such as CDA. Furthermore, a text "is any phenomenon that generates meaning through signifying practices" (Barker & Galasiński, 2001, p. 5). The MCU is a recent phenomenon in film history, and there may be ideological symbolism or discourse within these films that is worthy of scrutiny.

In CDA, it is not necessary to view communication as precise, but rather "a narrowing down of possible ambiguities as an interaction progresses and the language is matched with the (situational and linguistic) context" (Flowerdew, 1999, p. 1091). Therefore, any text can be

analyzed within the context of its production to understand an interpretation of the message that it is conveying.

In previous scholarly work, CDA has been applied to different kinds of texts and contexts. For example, De los Heros (2009) used CDA to analyze the language used in textbooks in Peru to determine whether the textbooks supported language diversity. By using CDA to analyze the textbooks, De los Heros concludes that the language used by the education system showed that they did not strive to achieve language diversity, but rather prescriptivism (p. 187). Thus, the research was able to show ideological issues with the textbooks in Peru, which could potentially lead to more inclusive textbooks for the future school years.

CDA has also been applied recently to the discussion of homelessness in Brazil (de Melo Resende, 2009). De Melo Resende applied CDA to the anlysis of a meeting report in a middle-class neighborhood regarding the homeless community in the area (p. 368). De Melo Resende concludes that the language used in the meeting is constantly used to keep dominant control over the homeless community (p. 376). This study is able to show how language construes or reinforces the dominant ideologies over an oppressed group.

Another study applies CDA to new media and international coverage. Joye (2010) uses CDA to analyze how two Flemish broadcasters covered the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) outbreak in Guangdong, China. Joye concludes that the broadcasters used language that "constructs and maintains the socio-cultural difference between 'us' and 'them'" (p. 598). Thus, this study showes that, through the application of CDA, dominant ideologies are present in news coverage of international events.

In a study conducted by Gavriely-Nuri (2010), a cultural approach was applied to CDA to analyze 60 speeches from 2000 to 2007 (p. 571). Gavriely-Nuri's goal was to determine how the

term "peace" was used in Israeli discourse (p. 580). Gavriely-Nuri's use of multiple speeches delivered over seven years, shows that more than one text can be analyzed. The researcher analyzes changes in the peace discourse rhetoric, which could reflect the evolving cultural zeitgeist.

Recently, application of CDA was furthered by its use in the analysis of popular music. Bell & Avant-Mier (2009) applied CDA to analyze two hip hop songs to show generational concepts of love and gender. The application of CDA to music shows that CDA can be used to analyze other media and popular culture texts. Thus, this study proposes that CDA can further be applied to investigate ideological symbols that may be present in the MCU and "Captain America."

Given the historical contexts in which these films are being released, they are also significant for study of the power relations between the audience of the films and the texts (Barker & Galasiński, 2001, p. 22). The audience can be exposed to ideological meanings within the texts, in this case the MCU, which will then be continuously reinforced in future texts. This relationship between the text and the audience needs to be analyzed. Through the analysis of the power relations between the audiences and the cinematic content, this proposed study would be able to "develop ways of thinking about culture and power that can be utilized by agents in the pursuit of change" (Barker & Galasiński, 2001, p. 25) and to be an emancipatory tool (Fairclough, 2001, p. 125). The application of CDA to analyze the MCU can potentially create an emancipatory tool for the audience to identify the ideological symbolism present in the films and to think critically about them. In general, the critical analysis of the MCU can contribute to media literacy overall.

Furthermore, there is a potential that the MCU and "Captain America" have a symbiotic relationship within the current cultural zeitgeist. "To understand culture is to explore how meaning is produced symbolically through the signifying practices of language within material and institutional contexts" (Barker & Galasiński, 2001, p. 5). Baker and Galasiński are then suggesting that there is a relationship between the cultural zeitgeist and the contexts in which language is produced. The MCU could also be responding to ideologies that are dominant in the current cultural zeitgeist.

As CDA has not traditionally been applied to popular culture, or specifically popular films, this study can also contribute to this field of research. CDA allows a different approach to the analysis of film. Specifically, CDA was used to begin the analysis of symbols of masculinity and militarism in "Captain America" and the MCU.

3.2 Film Theory

Within film theory, there are scholars, such as André Bazin and Gilles Deleuze, that have agreed that it is important to look at the relationship between cinema and belief, or ideology (Sinnerbrink, 2012, p. 95). In doing so, these questions arise:

> "How does the image carry, depict, and elicit conviction for us? What can cinema do when inherited paradigms of representation (what Deleuze calls the sensory-motor action schema) begin to break down? Can cinema restore a sense of belief in the world as image; a mass of images in which we no longer quite believe?" (Sinnerbrink, 2012, pp. 95-96).

In fact, Bazin's work suggests, that, like many scholars are emphasizing today, the best way to study film is to apply both theory and criticism. Thus, films can be analyzed and critiqued for the reality that they present.

Furthermore, Reich and Richmond (2014) state that viewers of any movie are required to leave themselves behind and to not think critically. This means that a film's audience is so immersed in what they are viewing that they are not willing to question any ideologies that are presented as reality. Due to this type of viewership requirements, cinema has created an "ideologically-freighted subject position," in which the film dictates how viewers experience the film (Reich & Richmond, 2014, p. 4).

One critical example of such a shift in the way scholars have been looking at film theory and criticism is how scholars developed feminist film critiques (Reich & Richmond, 2014). Female scholars, such as Laura Mulvey and Mary Anne Doane, critiqued film theory because, if films are looked at through one lens, a lens that does not account for any kind of viewer differences, then female viewers are subject to an experience that is guided by a male point of view for a male audience.

As a text, film has the capability of being analyzed for ideologies because "every film is political" (Comolli & Narboni, 1976, p. 24). According to Comolli and Narboni, "cinema is one of the languages through which the world communicates itself to itself. They constitute its ideology for they reproduce the world as it is experienced when filtered through the ideology" (p. 25). Films are then created to reflect the world in which they are created. The ideologies that are present in the films are often the ideologies of the current cultural zeitgeist. Furthermore, while "there is such a thing as public demand, but 'what the public wants' means 'what the dominant ideology wants'" (Comolli & Narboni, 1976, p. 26). Thus, this further demonstrates that analyzing the MCU in the cultural zeitgeist is critical, intellectual work and a necessary academic endeavor.

Films have been analyzed against at least three theories. Martin Steel (2008) has defined them, in their most idealistic terms as:

"The Realist Thesis: Films are events of sight and sound, uniquely capable of making visual the phenomenal and processual wealth of the real (both human and natural) world…The Illusionist Thesis: Films engender a transparent illusion of the reality of the audio-visual process it presents…The Anti-realist Thesis: Films engender an event of sight and sound that is not – at least not primarily or generally – intended to be perceived as a representation of a real event or like such a representation. It wants to and can be – simultaneously or singly – perceived for the sake of its own attractions" (p. 159-164).

These three theories have allowed film as a medium to be compared to other narrative media to be able analyze not only what it is, but rather what it can do. These theories are not supposed to be used to explain how a film should be made. Instead, they should be used to understand how films are interpreted in the space that they create (Steel, 2008). In the same way, superhero films create a space of their own within today's media landscape and can be analyzed within such a reality.

3.3 Data Collection

In this study, CDA was used to identify and analyze symbols of hyper-masculinity and the militaristic themes in the character of "Captain America" and the MCU. The MCU is considered one text, because each film that is part of the MCU has been used to tell one story. For this reason, the MCU is a phenomenon. Until recently, there had not been a universe developed by the release of multiple films about different characters that will tell one story overall. While all the films released in the MCU are telling one story, there are three characters, "Iron Man," "Thor," and "Captain America," that have their own storylines that are somewhat

separate from the main MCU storyline. Thus, it is possible to analyze these characters storylines individually from the whole.

Furthermore, it is also necessary to have more than one text, because, as scholars note, the effects of media work only through repetition (Baker, et. al, 2008, p. 283). Therefore, the texts in this study will be:

1. *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011)

     a. Kevin Feige, Producer

     b. Joe Johnston, Director

     c. Domestic Gross: $176 million

     d. Worldwide Gross: $370 million ("Captain America: The first avenger," 2017);

2. *Marvel's The Avengers* (2012)

     a. Kevin Feige, Producer

     b. Joss Whedon, Director

     c. Domestic Gross: $623 million

     d. Worldwide Gross: $1.5 billion ("Marvel's the Avengers," 2017);

3. *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* (2014)

     a. Kevin Feige, Producer

     b. Anthony and Joe Russo, Directors

     c. Domestic Gross: $259 million

     d. Worldwide Gross: $714 million ("Captain America: The winter soldier," 2017);

4. *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015)

a.　Kevin Feige, Producer

　　　b.　Joss Whedon, Director

　　　c.　Domestic Gross: $459 million

　　　d.　Worldwide Gross: $1.4 billion ("Avengers: Age of Ultron," 2017);

　5.　*Captain America: Civil War* (2016)

　　　a.　Kevin Feige, Producer

　　　b.　Anthony and Joe Russo, Directors

　　　c.　Domestic Gross: $408 million

　　　d.　Worldwide Gross: $1.1 billion ("Captain America: Civil war," 2017).

Also, the iTunes digital copy edition of each film is used for analysis. This corpus has been selected because "Captain America" is present in all five films. While the MCU is one text, not every film that is released deals with every character in the universe. The films that have been selected are about, or further, the storyline for "Captain America."

　　　To properly critique the symbolisms within the "Captain America" character in the MCU, it is important to analyze how the character has evolved through all five films. While in the corpus, there are three solo "Captain America" films and two "Avengers" films, it is important to analyze all of them. One of the goals of this research is to be representative of the character's story arc within the MCU (Baker, et. al, 2008, p. 275). Every film in the MCU is connected; this does not mean that every character is in each film. Rather, the storyline of one film will, in some way, affect the storyline of the next film. Therefore, each film needs to be analyzed in order of theatrical release.

　　　A goal of the study is to analyze how "Captain America" and the MCU is responding to the cultural zeitgeist. Thus, it is important to follow the character and the MCU's evolution in

chronological order. As part of the movie-going experience, the audience is expected to believe that the MCU is an alternate universe that exists parallel to our own. This means that there is a universe that exists that has a similar history and the main difference is that universe has superheroes. Therefore, the year in which each film is released is also the calendar year in the MCU, unless stated otherwise. Since each year in the MCU somewhat mirrors our own universe, it is important to analyze the five films in release order. By analyzing the films in release order, the films will more cohesively demonstrate the cultural zeitgeist.

Furthermore, within these five movies, the "Captain America" storyline begins and continues in two different time periods in history. The first film, *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011), takes place during World War II, and then there is a 66-year time jump to 2011. It is important to analyze this movie first, because, it not only introduces the audience to the character, it also shows a significant time, and cultural, change. After this movie, the films that follow are *The Avengers* (2012), *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* (2014), *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015), and *Captain America: Civil War* (2016). The total events of these films occur over four years. While the events of each film may occur over a few days, the films may register the cultural zeitgeist.

Also, while the audience is only privy to the events of these films, time has passed between each film. Often, each film begins *in media res*, or in the middle of the action of the film. The audience must assume that between the films, the characters have "lives," without being told explicitly what has occurred. It is then plausible that the films are reflecting the cultural zeitgeist and need to be analyzed in order of the theatrical release.

Another goal of this study is to find patterns in which "Captain America" and the MCU promote ideologies of hyper-masculinity and militarism. To find these patterns, each film was

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analyzed individually, then compared. Since each film represents a certain time and event, the stories can adapt to any changes in the cultural zeitgeist. Again, the films occur over four years, and the analysis needs to reflect the changes in the representations of hyper-masculinity and militarism.

Furthermore, the films were not directed by the same people. There are three sets of directors for the five films in this study: Joe Johnston directed the first "Captain America" solo film, Joss Whedon directed both "Avenger" films, and the Russo brothers directed the last two "Captain America" films. Since films reflect their creators, there are at least three different ideological perspectives in the texts selected. By analyzing each film individually, there is an account for these different perspectives as well as any reflection of the cultural zeitgeist. Furthermore, the individual analysis will be more comprehensive, because it allows for many instances in which hyper-masculinity and militarism are present.

Since there are five films, it is important for the scope of analysis not to be too large. Since each film will have many instances of hyper-masculinity and militarism, it would be easy to analyze every scene from each film. There are, however, five films to analyze and for this study, the number of scenes that will be analyzed from each film will be limited. "Film consists of and is analysable in scenes, i.e. units of action defined by a particular setting and participant configuration" (Androutsopoulos, 2012, p. 306). It is, then, possible to select the scenes that are identified to have symbols of masculinity and militarism.

To keep the scope of this analysis manageable, there will be five to ten scenes that will be analyzed per movie. Ideally, the scenes that are chosen will have aspects of hyper-masculinity and militarism. The scenes that are analyzed for ideological symbols will be in the order they appear in the film. By analyzing the scenes in order, this will give context to when they occur

within the MCU. The chronological order of the scene analysis will also show how symbols of masculinity and militarism evolve over time in the MCU and "Captain America." The changes of the ideological symbols in "Captain America" and the MCU is important, because it allows for the any nuances within these representations to be analyzed and can decrease biases.

While CDA is normally used to analyze language, this study broadens the scope of the use of CDA. In this study, dialogue, music, costumes, and set design in a scene will also be analyzed to determine if, or how, symbols of hyper-masculinity and militarism are presented in the film. In film, there are many aspects that are used to convey a message to the audience. The audience is not just paying attention to the dialogue between characters, but to the whole image. The audience is registering, even at a subconscious level, all the parts of a scene. The music, costumes, and set design are all indicative of what is happening in the film. Importantly, if only dialogue was analyzed for symbolism, there would representations of hyper-masculinity and militarism missing from the analysis.

The analysis of *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011), *The Avengers* (2012), *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* (2014), *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015), and *Captain America: Civil War* (2016), is guided by determining if, and how, "Captain America" and the MCU advance ideologies of militarism and masculinity. Furthermore, the study shows the extent CDA can be applied to analyze these symbols. By critically analyzing "Captain America" and the MCU for symbols of masculinity and militarism, this study contributes to scholarly work in CDA and superhero films, as well as media literacy.

In the previous chapters, this study argues that the MCU and "Captain America" are important to critically analyze. The Marvel Cinematic Universe is a recent phenomenon and is the largest franchise through trans-media. Since the MCU films are all considered to be box

office hits, this franchise has a large audience. Within the MCU, "Captain America" is also one of the most important characters; besides being in the "group" films, he has solo films as well. Therefore, it is important to identify how the MCU and "Captain America" symbolize ideologies of masculinity and militarism. The ideologies in these texts are then representative of and symbiotic with the cultural zeitgeist in which these films are released.

While previous scholars have identified symbols of militarism and masculinity in media, there is a gap in the analysis of superhero films, particularly the MCU. This study applied CDA to identify symbols of masculinity and militarism in the chosen corpus. CDA, a popular discourse method, allows ideologies to be identified and critiqued, which will improve media literacy. The following chapter is the analysis of the symbols of masculinity and militarism in *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011), *The Avengers* (2012), *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* (2014), *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015), and *Captain America: Civil War* (2016).

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS

4.1 *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011)

The story of "Captain America" within the MCU begins with *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011). As the first "Captain America" film, this film is considered the origin story of the character. The "origin story," or back-story, is where the audience is introduced to a character, and we follow their journey to become a superhero. Therefore, this film begins the ideological journey that "Captain America" takes as a character in the MCU. In this film, I argue that militarism and hyper-masculinity are intertwined in many scenes, though one may take precedence over the other.

"Steve Rogers" is first introduced to the audience in a United States Army recruitment office in the 1940s. When the scene starts, all the men in the office all look the same–white, medium to tall build, and muscular. It is not until a recruitment doctor calls for "Rogers, Steve," that a small, scrawny, white man is revealed behind the newspaper. As Rogers prepares to meet the recruitment doctor, a man next to him says, "Lots of guys getting killed out there…kinda makes you think twice about enlisting, huh?" Rogers barely bats an eye when he responds, "Nope."

The interaction between Rogers and the man sitting next to him reveals a lot about Rogers' personality. The interaction between Rogers and the other man signifies a presupposition, which, according to CDA, implies that other alternatives do not exist (Huckin, 1997). Though most of the men, if not all, in the recruitment office seem weary about the war and what they are reading in the newspapers, Rogers does not. His response, "Nope," is very casual and leaves no room for discussion. While there are other ways that a person could help

during the "war effort," Rogers is stating that the *only* way to help is by being a soldier that

fights. Thus, Rogers is placing great importance on being a soldier.

Even though there is a chance that he may die, Rogers does not question whether he

should enlist. In fact, it is why he should enlist; it is almost as though he believes it is his duty.

His unquestionable belief in joining is juxtaposed to the other men in the room. "Nope" is the

first line Rogers speaks in the film, and it is used to compare his own unwavering belief in

becoming a soldier regardless of the outcome.

Rogers' physique is also juxtaposed in this scene. When he is first shown behind the

wallpaper, the camera has already panned the recruitment office. The men shown in the room,

are mostly white, tall, and muscular. The pan of the room is used to show the kind of men that

are going to the recruitment office. Their physique is standard for what the Army is looking for,

and Rogers does not look like these men.

Roger's lack of physicality, and the many ailments he has, make him unsuitable for the

military. The scene establishes that the military only wants men that meet certain requirements.

Rogers, compared to other men in the office, does not meet any of these. The recruitment doctor

even eyes Rogers warily when he approaches, thus showing that even if he did not have ailments,

Rogers' physical appearance would have been enough to declare him unsuitable for war. The

doctor declares Rogers a "4F," which means that he is not capable of joining the Army. The "4F"

stamped in Roger's recruitment papers is given a close-up in the scene, because it signifies that

the Army does not believe that Rogers' is good enough.

When Rogers is finally allowed to join the military, it is because "Dr. Erskine," a German

doctor that works for the "Strategic Scientific Reserve," or "SSR," notices that he has tried to

enlist multiple times. Dr. Erskine even states, "There are already so many big men fighting this

war, maybe what we need now is a little guy." This statement is ironic because as the story progresses, the audience is told that the SSR is trying to make super soldiers with a serum that Dr. Erskine has invented. Therefore, while Dr. Erskine says the war needs "little guys," he does not necessarily believe it. His research and work with the military suggests that wars need people that are physically strong to be able to win.

In joining the military, everyone must go through training. In the film, Rogers is shown with all the other men that were selected as part of the SSR program. In this scene, the audience is then introduced to "Agent Peggy Carter" and "Colonel Phillips." As an introduction to the program, Col. Phillips gives a speech to the men:

> General Patton has said wars are fought with weapons, but are won by men. We are gonna win this war because we have the best men…and because they are gonna get better. Much better…Our goal is to create the best army in history. But every army starts with one man…He will be the first in a new breed of super soldier. (Feige & Johnston, 2012, *Captain America: The first Avenger*, Chapter 3)

Col. Phillip's speech shows exactly what the military believes it needs to win a war. While the colonel is a fictional character, the statement he opens his speech with is by General Patton, who is considered one of the best generals is U.S. history. While General Patton was in charge during World War II, this connection between the real and fictional serves to reinforce the need for militarization and hyper-masculinity.

The Patton quotation reinforces the idea that strong men should enlist, because it is only because of them that the wars are won. Colonel Phillips, however, also takes the intentions of the quotation further. If men are what win wars and not weapons, why not make the men the weapon? The "best army in history" needs to have men that can win wars on their own, and what

better way to do so than by making them "super soldiers." Also, the term "super soldiers" is a collocation (Yates, 2001). The collocation of "super" and "soldier" implies that regular soldiers are not enough to win a war. There needs to be soldiers that are enhanced to win wars.

Furthermore, Col. Phillips' refers to the men that will be part of the program as "a new breed." This terminology is often referred to animals that are chosen and bred for their best traits. Thus, the SSR and Phillips intend to use the program to create an Army of men that will be given the best traits that they feel necessary to win a war. Col. Phillips believes that the men in his army must be tall and very muscular. These men must appear to have the best physique as possible, and he is willing to give them a serum that will give them a physique that is beyond humanly possible.

As Col. Phillips speaks to the SSR recruits, there are intercut scenes showing the recruits beginning their training. In two separate intercuts, a drill sergeant yells at the recruits to, "Let's go ladies!" and Agent Carter yells, "Faster, ladies come on." Though the two lines are used to encourage the men to work harder, they are also used to insult the men. The trainers imply that the men are not completing their training the way they should be. To get them to work harder, the drill sergeant and Agent Carter liken them to women. This furthers the hyper-masculine ideology because the trainers are implying that they are not "real" men since they are not performing as well as they need to be. Therefore, to make the recruits work harder, the trainers use the term "ladies" to insult them to make them want to not be considered effeminate.

Once Rogers is selected as the first recruit to be given the super soldier serum, the entire process is made into a military spectacle. There is an audience of military and government personnel at Dr. Erskine's lab; they to know how their super soldier army will be created. Before the process begins, Dr. Erskine addresses the audience and says, "Today we take not another step

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towards annihilation, but the first step to the path of peace." Dr. Erskine's comment about the future of the super soldier program contradicts his earlier statement about needing "little guys." Had Dr. Erskine truly believed that the war was won not with muscles and "big guys," he would not say that this program is what will bring peace. The statement collocates military superiority, by having super-soldiers, and peace. Dr. Erskine justifies the super-soldier program, and war, by stating that it will help achieve peace. Furthermore, his statement reinforces the need for a military whose weapons is not guns themselves, but the men that are created to be more than human. The only way to be on the "path of peace" is by creating a great military that consists of super soldiers.

Though the super soldier serum was a success, Col. Phillips did not allow Rogers to go into the field. Instead, Rogers joined Senator Brant, because, as Brant stated, "You don't take a soldier, a symbol like that, and hide him in a lab." Brant recognized that Rogers' appearance and abilities would allow him to get the people to easily join the war effort. Rogers was famous for running down a German spy and saving a little boy. As Brant stated, he became a symbol for the U.S. war effort; he looked and behaved how every American "should" behave during the war. Brant's reaction to Rogers shows that this person symbolizes militarism and hyper-masculinity–Brant basically says it. Rogers is the epitome of militarism and hyper-masculinity which is why he can be used as part of the government's effort to influence people.

The film then shows a montage of Rogers as part of the United Service Organization, or U.S.O. Rogers is wearing a wearing a costume that is red, white, and blue, with stripes to represent the U.S. flag. This costume is what influences Rogers' "Captain America" uniform later. Rogers travels with U.S.O. Girls, who are also wearing costumes that are red, white, and blue. As part of the performance, they sing a song called "The Star-Spangled Man with a Plan,"

that states that everything Rogers does is "for America." The song is accompanied by very

patriotic music with trumpets and military drummers. The entire montage is the epitome of the

symbolism that "Captain America" represents. Rogers acts out saving people from Hitler and

enemy soldiers, and he is even showcasing his strength when he lifts a motorcycle full of people.

Since this is a travelling U.S.O. show, the entire country is subject to the symbolism that

is being represented by the show and Rogers. Compared to how he was treated before, Rogers is

now famous for his appearance; everyone knows he exists. The song "The Star-Spangled Man

with a Plan" and the imagery used in this scene represent "language and power" (Cameron,

2001, p. 123). Since everyone knows about Rogers, everyone wants to be like him. Rogers even

states that there is always an increase in recruits when he stops by in a city. This increase in

recruits in the film shows that people can be influenced by even a character in a travelling U.S.O.

show[8]. Many of the men that are being recruited are probably joining the military so that they

can be like "Captain America." They believe that the military can transform everyone into

perfect soldiers and that they can end the war.

In fact, Rogers made a flippant comment about the military making him stronger and

bigger. His friend, James Barnes, asks, "What happened to you?" when he first sees Rogers after

months apart. Roger's responds, "I joined the army." Though the response was very simplistic,

the Army and Col. Phillips, have stated that they can make people better–it is practically a

tagline for the military.

This is also a presupposition; the only way that someone can become "better" is by

joining the military. If Rogers, who was once scrawny and tiny, can become a hyper-masculine

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[8] At this point in the film, Rogers is only playing a character called "Captain America." He has
not become "Captain America" in the warfront yet.

soldier, then anyone can. The response, "I joined the Army," also suggests that the Army made him better. Though Rogers always wanted to enlist and was unable to because of his physical problems, the Army made him better. The Army transformed him into the type of person, a very muscular and abled person, that they needed.

The scene in which the interaction between Rogers and Barnes is important because it happens during a rescue mission. Rogers decided to infiltrate a HYDRA[9] base on his own to save any soldier that is still alive. Rogers decided that, even though it could cost him his life, he needed to try to save the soldiers. If Rogers had not gone through the super soldier program, he would not have succeeded in accomplishing his mission. The serum gave Rogers the ability to succeed even though Col. Phillips told him it was impossible. Thus, this scene shows that super soldiers can accomplish tasks that are deemed impossible–it is an endorsement of the super soldier program.

Throughout *Captain America: The First Avenger*, "Captain America" and the MCU have symbols of militarism and hyper-masculinity. The creating of "Captain America" is for militaristic reasons; his main purpose is to be the best soldier. Through his enhanced capabilities, Rogers also represents hyper-masculinity. Rogers is only important, and capable of protecting people, when he is physically superior to others.

Furthermore, Rogers is also considered to be the "first" Avenger. By labeling "Captain America" as the "first" implies that there will be others to follow in his path, or rather the government will seek, or create, other enhanced people that they believe are needed to protect

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[9] HYDRA, a subgroup from the Nazi regime, is revealed to be the SSR and Captain America's real enemy.

the world. This film is establishing that the U.S., in the MCU and our own universe, has always a militaristic agenda, which then leads to increased hyper-masculinity.

4.2 *Marvel's The Avengers* **(2012)**

The Avengers (2012) is an interesting movie, because this sequel unites all the superheroes for the first time and has them fight the same villain. While the film reflects all the actions that had been taken by the superheroes beforehand, this film's storyline is heavily based on some key points of *Captain America: The First Avenger*, which was released the year before. This movie begins with a problem with a joint project between the Strategic Homeland Intervention, Enforcement, and Logistics Division, or "S.H.I.E.L.D.," and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, or "NASA."

To make anything that happens in the MCU seem realistic, the creators of the MCU have included enough "real world" information. For instance, S.H.I.E.L.D. is not a real organization, but NASA is. The creators have blended "real" and fictional to develop a universe that would make sense to the audience. These connections also serve as reference points for the audience. NASA does scientific research in space, and many of the personnel that have been in space were once in the military. Furthermore, many organizations work together on projects. Since S.H.I.E.L.D. is being established as a U.S. government organization, then the natural move would be to make them work with other U.S. organizations. This makes S.H.I.E.L.D. more realistic, which would also help increase its importance in the cultural zeitgeist.

The project between S.H.I.E.L.D. and NASA is the "Joint Dark Energy Mission," and the main object of study, as far as the audience knows, is the Tesseract. The Tesseract was the object in the first *Captain America* film that HYDRA was using to make weapons. The fact that S.H.I.E.L.D. and NASA are experimenting on an object that a villainous group used for weapons

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raises questions. While NASA is predominantly an exploration and scientific organization,

S.H.I.E.L.D. is more militaristic. In previous Marvel movies, as well as in the comics,

S.H.I.E.L.D. was created to be a spy organization that was supposed to "save the world" quietly.

By these two organizations uniting in a project can suggest that they trying to find a way

to militarize space. Director Fury even says "We prepared for this doctor. Harnessing energy

from space." The directors comment further suggests that the reason behind the project is more

than wanting to know what the Tesseract is–they want to use it for other purposes. These other

purposes are also hinted at when Director Fury is concerned about Phase Two. Though the entire

base is about to explode because of the Tesseract, Fury has the assistant director, Maria Hill,

oversee the relocation of Phase Two. At this point the audience does not know what Phase Two

is, but it is hinted at that it may be technology that is important to keep the world turning, as Fury

suggests.

The villain of this movie is "Loki," Thor's brother. He has taken the Tesseract and used

his scepter to mind control various people. While Fury and Hill tried to stop Loki from escaping,

he does. Fury then announces on S.H.I.E.L.D.'s communication system, "This is a level 7. As of

right now, we are at war." Coulson then asks, "What do we do?" Fury does not respond to him,

only stares into the distance. Then, *The Avengers* logo appears on screen.

In this scene, Fury effectively declared "war" against Loki. It is odd to see a director of

an agency state that the country, or just the agency, is at war, because only the U.S. Congress can

declare war. While Loki is a threat, and has been shown to be a hostile force, a director declaring

war is still overreaching in his powers. Further into the film, Fury is not shown briefing Congress

or the President in this universe. Thus, Fury is shown to be able to declare that S.H.I.E.L.D. is at

war, even if the U.S. government is not aware. He has made a unilateral decision about how to deal with Loki.

Furthermore, the ability to use to the term "war" when there is an issue, is very reflective of the cultural zeitgeist. The term "war" is used to collocate groups against one another and militarize an issue. Within our own history, there has been a history of labelling any political or cultural issue that needs to be dealt with a war, for instance the "War on Drugs," or more recently the "War on Terror" and the "War on Coal." Since Fury stated that S.H.I.E.L.D. is at war with Loki, S.H.I.E.L.D. then needs to increase their security and their responses. S.H.I.E.L.D. becomes, if possible, an even more heightened militaristic force to deal with Loki.

Additionally, the audience is also told what Fury believes is the next steps for when S.H.I.E.L.D. is at war. Coulson's question is left hanging to build suspense. By cutting to "The Avengers" logo, the audience is told that Fury and S.H.I.E.L.D. are going to depend on the Avengers to fight the war against Loki. The Avengers, then, are going to be considered an extension of S.H.I.E.L.D. While they are a team on their own, they are ultimately a by-product of a military organization that believes that they need a super-powered group to deal with any crisis that is deemed a "war." This is then showing the audience that if there happens to be a threat that is great, the military needs to have super-soldiers to handle them.

After Fury has declared war and decided to unite the Avengers, he finally speaks to a council about what is happening. The council is not explicitly explained on screen; it is only ever referred to as "the council." Yet, this is the group of people, who are from various countries, that Fury and S.H.I.E.L.D. report to. They do not question Fury's declared war, only the way he plans to win it.

Again, Phase Two is alluded to by the council as the solution because it was designed for these situations, which suggests that Phase Two is weaponry. Thus, this shows that the joint project between NASA and S.H.I.E.L.D. was more about using the Tesseract to create weapons, than anything else. Later in the film, the audience, and the Avengers, find out that Phase 2 was a weapons project that S.H.I.E.L.D. and NASA developed. After Thor arrived on Earth, S.H.I.E.L.D. discovered that there were threats that came from outer space. Fury justifies the need for Phase Two by saying that, "We learned that not only are we not alone, but we are hopelessly, hilariously, outgunned."

Since S.H.I.E.L.D. saw a threat, they had no problems trying to expand their arsenal by using the Tesseract. Fury's reasoning presupposes that if S.H.I.E.L.D. did not advance their arsenal, then the world would be destroyed, which is then a justification for further armament. In this instance, S.H.I.E.L.D. developed a program that was like HYDRA; HYDRA wanted the Tesseract to made world-ending weapons. Yet, S.H.I.E.L.D. did not have any qualms, because they argue it was needed. This, then, symbolically suggests to the audience that the military should always have weapons that are high-tech to protect the world.

While the council prefers S.H.I.E.L.D. to use Phase Two to win the war, Fury insists that the Avengers are what is needed to win the war. Fury considers the Avengers to be a "response team." Fury is practically comparing the Avengers, a superhero group with almost unlimited powers, to similar military units, such as SWAT or the National Guard. The power of the Avengers is being trivialized, because, while they are superheroes, they are the first group S.H.I.E.L.D. wants to send into the fray.

Furthermore, a council woman states, "War isn't won by sentiment, Director." To which Fury replies, "No, it's won by soldiers." Fury is saying that each member of the Avengers team

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is a soldier. In the military, soldiers lose their identities to work as a cohesive unit and take orders from one person. Fury is further stating that the Avengers is a militaristic group that will be overseen by him and S.H.I.E.L.D. This also suggests that the military should have soldiers that are super-powered, because they will be able to win wars more efficiently.

Fury's comment about wars being won by soldiers also alludes to and reinforces Col. Phillips speech in *Captain America: The First Avenger*. It also reinforces the presupposition that the only way to win wars is by having a super-powered military force. Col. Phillips states that wars are won by men, and they were going to have the best army ever seen. This is part of the continual reinforcement in these movies–wars can only be won by having the best soldiers. For Col. Phillips, it was having super-soldiers. In this film, Fury is expanding from super-soldiers, to other super-powered individuals.

The obsession with super-soldiers in this universe is also discussed. While Steve Rogers is on his way to meet up with the rest of S.H.I.E.L.D., he is reviewing the files of the other members. As he reads the file about Dr. Banner, he asks Coulson, "So this Dr. Banner was trying to replicate the serum they used on me?" Coulson replies, "A lot of people were. You were the world's first superhero."

This is the first time that Rogers sees the ramifications of the success of the super-soldier project. "Captain America" set a precedent about what can be achieved in war if there is at least one super-soldier. While the government sees the success of super-soldiers as the key to winning wars, there are people that a negatively affected by it, such as Dr. Banner. Furthermore, Dr. Banner's research was supported by the U.S. government, which shows that they are more concerned with creating a super-soldier army than any problems that follow.

Moreover, Dr. Banner is also considered to be a member of the Avengers because of his ability to turn into "Hulk." While Rogers seems shocked Dr. Banner was trying to replicate the serum, S.H.I.E.L.D. benefits from his mistake. Though Dr. Banner was not able to replicate the serum completely, he did create an indestructible alter-ego that would could be used in wars, which is, in part, what S.H.I.E.L.D. needs him for. Even though Dr. Banner is considered a fugitive from the U.S. government, S.H.I.E.L.D. ignores these issues. The audience is told that S.H.I.E.L.D. will value any kind of super-powered individual, regardless of how they got them. This, then, also sets a precedent for any future superheroes that they may encounter.

Once S.H.I.E.L.D. finds Loki, they send Captain America to arrest him. Loki has attacked a scientist at an event in Germany, and he keeps the other people hostage. As he keeps them hostage, Loki begins to monologue his plans for humans, while making them kneel to him. Then, an older man stands up, defying Loki, and they have the following interaction:

Loki: Is this not your natural state?...You were made to be ruled.

Man: Not to men like you.

Loki: There are no men like me.

Man: There are always men like you. (Feige & Whedon, 2012, *Marvel's the Avengers*, Stuttgart confrontation)

Loki then uses his scepter to attack the man that stood up against him. Before the ball of energy can hit its target, Captain America jumps in front of the man and uses his shield to deflect the energy. Captain America then tells Loki, "The last time I was in Germany and saw a man standing above everybody else, we ended up disagreeing."

This entire interaction between Loki, the man, and Captain America is symbolic of World War II. By collocating Loki with Hitler/Red Skull, the audience is told that Loki is like those

figures, and he needs to be defeated. First, this takes place in Germany, where HYDRA and the Nazi's were based. The old man could be representative of a generation that lived through the dictatorship and oppression of the Nazis and HYDRA. The underlining comparison is that Loki is like Hitler, someone that is going to oppress an entire group. Therefore, the interaction between Loki and the man is used to justify the "war" between Loki and S.H.I.E.L.D.; this fight becomes a "good war."

The comparison of Loki to Hitler, and possibly "Red Skull," is furthered by Captain America saving the man at the last minute. Even Captain America refers to his time disagreeing with and fighting oppressors in Germany. During WWII, Captain America punched "Hitler" over 200 times and then fought the Red Skull and defeated him. Captain America saving the man also reinforces the narrative that the U.S. is mainly responsible for the end of WWII and needs to be involved in "saving the world."

Furthermore, this is the first scene where the audience sees Captain America's new uniform. Roger's uniform was always "Stars and Stripes." The uniform in the first Captain America film was looked more like a regular military uniform and the colors were muted. The new uniform, however, looks like the U.S.O. uniform and has the colors (red, white, and blue) are very bright. In this film, the uniform is more representative of a U.S. flag that has not been tarnished, than the original uniform. Even though Rogers even felt that the uniform was "old-fashioned," S.H.I.E.L.D. felt that people needed "old-fashioned." Thus, the uniform is used to continue to remind the people of this universe, and the audience, of WWII, because the "good guys" were victorious.

After Loki is in S.H.I.E.L.D. custody, Thor arrives on Earth to remove him. "Iron Man" tackles "Thor" into a forested area, and they begin to argue with one another, then follows a

three-minute sequence of them fighting one another. While they both want the same thing (Loki leaving Earth alone), they do not agree on how that is to be achieved, and decide to fight one another. They are ultimately trying to prove which one is more powerful, and in the process, ignore Loki, who would have had time to escape them if he wanted to. Captain America then shows up to help Iron Man, and Thor attacks him as well.

The only reason they stop fighting one another is because they finally notice the amount of destruction they caused in the forested area that they are in. This entire sequence is about each heroes' masculinity. Every time each hero realizes they cannot defeat the other with a move, they try another one. They are all trying to be better and more powerful than the other. They are placing they masculinity, and possibly their bruised egos, above trying to find a solution that works for everyone.

The importance placed on masculinity occurs again during the battle between the Avengers and the "Chitauri," the aliens that are helping Loki. After the invasion begins, Captain America heads towards the police officers that do not know what to do in this situation. Captain America gives them instructions, and they respond, "Why the hell should I take orders from you?" Instead of answering, Captain America fights and beats a couple of Chitauri aliens in front of the police, who then do what they were told.

The brief interaction between Captain America and the police officers shows how they place a lot of value on masculinity. The only reason the officers listened to Captain America was because he "proved" his power to them by fighting the Chitauri. The officers were convinced to listen to him, not because his orders made sense, but because of his masculinity. The audience then sees that regardless of how your plan works, they will not be listened to unless they prove themselves, particularly their masculinity.

At the end of *The Avengers*, Fury speaks to the World Security Council, who are concerned about the Avengers. Fury tells them that the existence Avengers "sends a message" that Earth has heroes that will protect it. The entire movie has had a message that the U.S. needs to be "ready" for any possible threats, which is why S.H.I.E.L.D. had Phase Two and the Avengers were formed. While Phase Two did not work, the Avengers did. The MCU has then further established the need for a group of superheroes, (special, chosen individuals) who are part of a militaristic organization, to protect the world.

Since the movie also brought together many superheroes for the first time, the male heroes fought each other, because they were upset with each other. The in-fighting of the heroes also provided a plot point that all of them are evenly matched. This, however, also showed that to be a hero, a person must be a strong, if not stronger, than a God-like alien, a man in a suit, and a super-soldier. "Captain America" and the other heroes have established that hyper-masculinity is the best indicator of whether someone has value, and can be a hero.

4.3 *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* (2014)

During *The Avengers*, the audience is thoroughly introduced to the extent at which S.H.I.E.L.D. operates. In *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* (2014), S.H.I.E.L.D. and Captain America's storyline is continued separate from the Avengers group. Even though Captain America was supposed to work as just an Avenger, this films shows that he has decided to work with S.H.I.E.L.D. as a permanent agent. In this film, Captain America is also a more nuanced character.

The film begins by showing Rogers running around the National Mall in Washington D.C., and there is also another person running the mall. Each time Rogers passes this runner, he says, "On your left." The film then follows the man throughout his run, and emphasizes every

time Rogers passes him, at which point he says, "On your left." When Rogers passes him for the last time, the other runner can hear him approaching, is annoyed, and yells at Rogers to not say "On your left." Rogers still says it; the runner gets upset and tries to run faster to catch up to Rogers.

This opening sequence showcases Rogers enhanced abilities. Though in the past films he has been able to do things that other people cannot do, this is the first time that his abilities are compared to a non-superhero. The runner, "Sam Wilson," is a retired soldier, and even with his training, he is not able to keep up with Rogers. There is also male posturing between them. Though there seems to be camaraderie, Wilson's ego is slightly bruised because he is not able to keep up with Rogers.

Furthermore, once these two characters introduce themselves, they begin to bond over being in the military. This shows that the military has a culture and creates an identity. Though Rogers and Wilson are not active service members, they each use they previous enlistment as a point of familiarity. They instantly bond over having been in the military, because it is part of who they are; they are not going to be able to just be "civilians." Wilson even invites Rogers to a VA meeting for soldiers that are experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD.

Further into the film, Rogers shows up to a meeting a couple of minutes before it ends. Wilson ends the meeting by reminding everyone present that they "…all got the same problems." This meeting reinforces military culture and identities. All the people in the meeting are connected, because they have similar experiences and they can help one another. Even though their problems show that "war is hell," the meeting shows that they will always have the other soldiers because they are a family.

Since Rogers is now a permanent agent of S.H.I.E.L.D., he is part of Special Tactical

Reserve for International Key Emergencies, or S.T.R.I.K.E., which is a special operations team

for S.H.I.E.L.D. Rogers, Natasha Romanov, or "Black Widow," and the S.T.R.I.K.E., need to

recapture the S.H.I.E.L.D. vessel, the *Lemurian Star*. While being briefed, Rogers and the team

find out that the vessel had been trespassing. Rogers, bothered that the ship is trespassing, states,

"You know I'm getting a little tired of being Fury's janitor."

Rogers' comment about being a janitor is very telling about how Fury and S.H.I.E.L.D.

have used him as an agent. In *The Avengers*, Fury told the Security Council that the Avengers,

which included Captain America, would be a response team. The purpose of the response team

would be for conflicts that were at a large scale, larger than what S.H.I.E.L.D. could handle. Yet,

Fury uses Rogers as a "janitor" to clean up problems.

Rogers is being used as just another regular agent, with the bonus of having enhanced

capabilities. Fury and S.H.I.E.L.D. are using Captain America, who is a super-hero, for regular

missions. They are extending their militaristic capabilities by ending him on regular, non-

Avengers, missions.

Rogers is also showing that he is a nuanced character with this statement. In *The

Avengers*, he says, "We have orders. We should follow them." In this film, Rogers is shown to

question the orders he is given. Further into the movie, he tells Peggy Carter, who is visiting,

"…I thought I could throw myself back in and follow orders. Serve. It's just not the same."

While Rogers is having an existential crisis, wondering how he fits into this new world, his

comment also shows that militaristic action has changed from WWII to the present day.

The mission to rescue the *Lemurian Star*, shows why S.H.I.E.L.D. would want to use

Captain America as a regular agent, instead of just an Avenger. He is always the first one on the

scene. Rogers gets on the *Lemurian Star* by himself to take down hostiles, before anyone else arrives. This is also like how Rogers went to rescue Bucky and the 107th division by himself in *Captain America: The First Avenger*. He can fight all the hostiles on the deck of the *Lemurian Star* by himself, without alerting any other hostiles. The benefits of having super-soldiers is showcased in this scene. If there is a super-soldier on the team, then there is a better chance of success.

Then, Rogers has the ultimate fight with "Georges Batroc," who was a former French intelligence agent and is a most wanted terrorist. Rogers and Batroc are alone on the deck fighting one another. Their fight is framed as a death match; it is as if this fight will determine which one is the best fighter.

As they fight, Batroc and Rogers seem to be evenly matched, and neither of them can get the upper hand to win. Due to this, Batroc tells Rogers, "I thought you were more than just a shield." This really bothers Rogers, because during their fight he had been using his shield to help him fight Batroc. Batroc's comment also questions Rogers masculinity; he is implying that Rogers' need to use his shield in fight makes him less than a solider, or man.

Rogers then drops his shield and removes his helmet, which hides most of his face, to fight Batroc. He is going to prove his masculinity my beating Batroc without the shield or helmet to prove his masculinity. This decision shows how Captain America's version of masculinity needs to be proven by fighting an opponent, and winning, with their own physical abilities. Rogers uses his enhanced physical capabilities to fight someone, and in part to prove that they are worthy.

After the rescue mission, Rogers confronts Fury about not being given all the parameters of the mission. Fury had sent Romanov to help with the rescue mission, but to also collect data.

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Since Rogers did not know she had a separate mission, he says it could have compromised the mission:

> Rogers: Those hostages could have died Nick.
>
> Fury: I sent the greatest soldier in history to make sure that didn't happen.
>
> Rogers: Soldiers trust one another. That's what makes it an army. (Feige, et al.
>
> 2014, *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, Don't hold your breath)

Their interaction further shows that Fury and S.H.I.E.L.D. only view Rogers as a soldier that they have at their disposal. Fury presupposes that Rogers was the only soldier that could save the hostages. They have moved beyond seeing him as just a member of the Avengers. Despite S.H.I.E.L.D. having highly trained agent, high importance is placed on Rogers, since he is a super-soldier.

Furthermore, Rogers compares S.H.I.E.L.D. to an army. Though S.H.I.E.L.D. is supposed to be an intelligence agency, Rogers says that they are all soldiers. S.H.I.E.L.D. is then a major militaristic force within this universe. They have transcended from just being an intelligence agency, to being an army that gets to declare war, like Fury did in *The Avengers*. In addition, Rogers also only sees himself as a soldier. Instead of being an agent, he continues to have a soldier mentality, which means that he sees himself as someone that is at war with whomever S.H.I.E.L.D. declares a threat.

To placate Rogers, Fury decides to show him a new project that S.H.I.E.L.D. is working on called Project Insight. When Fury takes Rogers to the lower levels of the Triskelion, the S.H.I.E.L.D. headquarters in D.C., three, fully-armed helicarriers are revealed. As the helicarriers are revealed, there is patriotic music in the background. This is to showcase how far S.H.I.E.L.D. advanced as an agency to protect the world.

Fury states that these helicarriers are going to be "synced to a network of targeting satellites" and S.H.I.E.L.D. is "gonna neutralize a lot of threats before they even happen." Fury's presupposition is that if S.H.I.E.L.D. does not stop terrorism before it happens, then the world will never be safe. To justify S.H.I.E.L.D. preemptive strikes on potential threats, Fury had told Rogers about his grandfather, who had carried around a .22 caliber magnum gun to protect himself. By telling this story, Fury is saying that people have always tried to protect themselves against threats before they happened, because they most likely will. As an intelligence agency for the U.S. in this universe, Fury and S.H.I.E.L.D. are also showing that there is some validity in acting against people that will most likely threaten the safety of the country, or of the world.

Though Rogers concedes that the SSR had to compromise in their missions and did "nasty stuff," the extent at which S.H.I.E.L.D. will operate with Project Insight is too far-reaching. He says, "By holding a gun to everyone on Earth and calling it protection…This isn't freedom. This is fear." This also shows Rogers' nuances. While he is fine with S.H.I.E.L.D. working as an army and using his super-soldier capabilities to protect people, he has a problem with S.H.I.E.L.D. using force in advance to stop threats before they happen.

During the effort to find why Fury was killed and what is on the memory drive he had, Rogers and Romanov go to an Apple store to use a computer. While at the store, an Apple attendant approaches them. He tells Rogers that he owns the same glasses that he is wearing; Romanov calls them twins. The attendant says, "Yeah, I wish. Specimen," while placing emphasis on Rogers' looks. Rogers' physicality and good looks are made to be to ideals for every man. The attendant that wishes he looked like Rogers represents the men that look at Rogers' character as wish-fulfillment, which is reinforced in this sequence.

When Rogers, Romanov, and Wilson, find out that S.H.I.E.L.D. has been compromised HYDRA. After WWII, S.H.I.E.L.D. had Operation Paperclip, in which they recruited German scientist with strategic value, which included HYDRA's "Arnim Zola." The recruitment of German scientist by S.H.I.E.L.D. parallels the how the Allies, in our own universe, also pardoned and recruited Nazi scientists. By paralleling how the U.S. and S.H.I.E.L.D. have both recruited enemy scientists, this normalizes the recruitment of the "bad" people by the "good" people to benefit their own agenda.

To further understand what HYDRA wants to do, Rogers and the team abduct "Agent Sitwell." Sitwell informs them that HYDRA plans to use the helicarriers from Project Insight to kill people that they feel are a threat to their mission of protecting the world. Rogers asks how HYDRA can decide which people would pose a threat to them. Sitwell explains:

> The 21st century is a digital book…your bank records, medical histories, voting patterns, emails, phone calls, your damn SAT scores. Zola's algorithm evaluates people's pasts to predict their future. (Feige, et al., 2014, *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, Call it a resume)

By collecting information about every person in the world, HYDRA can predict what their future actions will be. This will allow them to decide who is "worthy" of living.

HYDRA's collection of everyone's personal information is similar to the U.S. government's own collection and storage of data from every citizen[10]. HYDRA's collection of

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[10]After September 11th, 2001 (9/11), the U.S. government passed the PATRIOT Act on October 26, 2001. The PATRIOT Act broadened the scope of intelligence agencies to collect information about people they suspected could be terrorists. The intelligence secrets "leak" from Edward Snowden later revealed that the NSA was collecting data from every citizen even if they were not considered a "threat."

data is a direct connection to the National Security Agency, or NSA. In the past years, there have been many leaks about the NSA collecting data form every person, yet there have not been any changes to federal laws. In the movie, HYDRA's collection of data is meant to be something that should not be happening, which is why "Captain America" is fighting against it; the audience is supposed to relate to the fight against unlawful collection of data. Yet, in in the real world, there have not been large movements that would end the collection of data without probable cause. In fact, it often seems that people are willing to forgo privacy to stop "terrorists." HYDRA wants to kill people that would go against their own agenda, and the NSA and the U.S. want to weed out "terrorists" that could be living in the country.

After Rogers and his team take down HYDRA and dismantle S.H.I.E.L.D., the U.S. Intelligence Committee interrogates Romanov. They are worried about the ramifications of HYDRA having been controlling S.H.I.E.L.D. They want to arrest anyone that was connected to S.H.I.E.L.D. Romanov tells them:

> You're not going to put me in a prison. You're not going to put any of us in a prison. You know why?...Because you need us. Yes, the world is in a vulnerable place, and yes, we helped make it that way. But we're also the ones best qualified to defend it (Feige, et al., 2014, *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, Life after S.H.I.E.L.D.).

Romanov presupposes that eventually the world will need to be saved again, and they are the only group that could save it. She is also saying that none of them should be held accountable for their actions, because they may be needed to defend the world in the future. In this committee meeting, Romanov has broadened the scope of operations any surviving S.H.I.E.L.D. agents, as well as the Avengers, and has placed them above the law.

Though S.H.I.E.L.D. has been dismantled for being HYDRA, Rogers and the other agents will continue to work independently to protect the world. The MCU and Rogers shows that if someone seems to be working for the "good," then they are above the law. Rogers' actions in this movie continue to show that his appearance and capabilities are the ideal for all men. Throughout the film, Rogers can fight various kinds of people, and win, as well as receive praise for his physique. These instances of hyper-masculinity continue to reinforce the ideals that men should strive for.

Furthermore, while Rogers fought against how S.H.I.E.L.D. was becoming too militaristic, and fought against HYDRA's plans, he continues to use militaristic force. Rogers seems to have issues with planning militaristic venture for the future, but does not have a problem with using military force in the present. This shows that Rogers does not have a fundamental problem with militarism. Rogers use of military force to "save" the world in the MCU, then reinforces the need to use force in the "real" world, as long as it is for the "good" of the world.

4.4 *Avenger: Age of Ultron* (2015)

Despite the dismantling of S.H.I.E.L.D., the Avengers still work as a group that fights threats to the world. At the end of *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, the Avengers, and the "good" S.H.I.E.L.D. agents, became an independent group. Despite the concerns the U.S. government had, Romanov stated that the Avengers would not be held accountable for their actions. and Furthermore, they should be allowed to continue to be an organization because they are the group that can "save" the world.

In this movie, the Avengers have adapted to being the supposed final force that can end HYDRA[11]. The movie begins *in media res* with the Avengers attacking a HYDRA base that is located on Sokovia[12]. While attacking the base, they realize that it has more defenses than other HYDRA bases. By stating this, the audience is told that the Avengers united after the fall of S.H.I.E.L.D. to search for HYDRA bases and destroy them.

As they reach the fortress of the base, the Avengers agree that they need to evacuate the city that is closest to the base, since it is located by a town. In *The Avengers*, the team, with the help of police officers, had to remove civilians themselves. In this film, Tony Stark, or "Iron Man," has the "Iron Legion," which is robots that are programed to evacuate civilians. This shows that the team is also expanding the types of technology they use to deal with "war."

Even though the Avengers feel they are the best to save the world, and had the support of many people after the Battle of New York[13], the people of Sokovia do not want the Avengers in their country. The Sokovians are shown chanting, "Avengers, go home!" The Sokovians do not appreciate the Avengers entering their country, and they are questioning the validity of the Avengers. In the previous films, the Avengers constantly presupposed that they were the only people to save the world, and the Sokovians are questioning if that is true. This sequence also shows that the Avengers are entering countries without government permission, which could be an act of war. Furthermore, by entering other countries without permission, the Avengers are forcing their own agenda on other people.

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[11] As a part of the MCU, the television series *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* (2013–present) shows S.H.I.E.L.D. agents that survived the destruction of the agency. These agents are trying to regroup and form a new S.H.I.E.L.D.

[12] Sokovia is a fictional country located in Eastern Europe.

[13] The fight between the Avengers and Loki and the Chitauri is referred to the Battle of New York.

After the Avengers successfully destroy the HYDRA base, they return to Avengers

Tower. In *The Avengers*, Avengers Tower had originally been Stark Tower, and had been

damaged during the battle. Stark had then updated the tower to be able to house the Avengers.

Since S.H.I.E.L.D. no longer exists, the Avengers created their own base of operations. This then

solidifies their independence from the destroyed S.H.I.E.L.D., and the U.S. government. The

government has also allowed for the Avengers to have little oversight, because, as Romanov put

it, they are needed to save the world. Their lack of oversight, then, shows that if this superhero

group is working for the "good" of the country, and the world, then they work as an independent

policing force.

Even though the Avengers saw the consequences of experimenting with alien technology,

Stark still wants to experiment on Loki's scepter, which they had acquired at the HYDRA base

in Sokovia. Stark is using the same presupposition that Fury and S.H.I.E.L.D. used to justify

their use alien technology. Stark tells Dr. Banner:

> If we can harness this power, apply it to my Iron Legion protocol?...What if the world
>
> was safe. What if, next time aliens roll up to the club, and they will, they couldn't get past
>
> the bouncer?...Peace in our time. (Feige & Whedon, 2015, *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, Birth
>
> of Ultron)

Tony wants to use the alien technology to make artificial intelligence and apply it to the Iron

Legion, so that the Avengers have more help, or could retire, from fighting the "bad" people.

Stark would be creating a sentient army of robots that would replace the Avengers as the police

force of the world.

After being convinced, Stark and Banner begin working with the scepter and artificial intelligence, and accidentally create Ultron[14]. Ultron reveals himself to the Avengers, and escapes through the internet[15]. Since Stark lied to the team, Rogers states, "The Avengers were supposed to be different from S.H.I.E.L.D." Again, Rogers is showing nuances in his character. While Rogers is bothered by S.H.I.E.L.D. lying and making decisions about future wars, he is not bothered by militaristic forces in general. He still believes that the Avengers are needed to protect the world.

Though Ultron is the villain in this film, he makes certain points that are relevant within the MCU and our own universe. When Ultron recruits Wanda and Pietro Maximoff [16], Ultron states, "Everybody creates the thing they dread. Men of peace create engines of war." Ultron's collocation of "peace" and "war" shows the irony in that people believe that military action is needed to achieve peace. He is also implying that the Avengers are no exception. Though he has a warped sense of right and wrong, Ultron is privy to all the decisions that the Avengers, S.H.I.E.L.D., and others have made to achieve peace.

When the Avengers confront Ultron for a second time, he tells Rogers, "Captain America. God's righteous man. Pretending you could live without war." Captain America exists because of war, without it there is no need to have a super-soldier. Furthermore, Rogers has even said that he has no idea what to do if he is not working as an agent, or a soldier. Despite feeling like the fights, he is a part of are different now, he would not be able to "get out," because he has

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[14] Ultron is artificial intelligence. When he "wakes up," he learns everything there is to know that is in the files the Avengers have and on the internet.

[15] As artificial intelligence, Ultron can move its consciousness, or program framework, from one robot to another through the wireless internet connections.

[16] Wanda and Pietro Maximoff are twins from Sokovia, who volunteered for HYDRA's human experiment program that gave them powers. Wanda has magic and Pietro has super speed.

lived this lifestyle for so long. He does not know what else to do. Captain America's existence

propagates militarism, because that is the reason he exists.

To regroup and figure out how to beat Ultron, the Avengers go to Clint Barton's secret

home. While there, Rogers and Stark discuss how they got into this scenario. Stark justifies his

actions by saying that he wanted to create peace so they could retire: "Isn't that the 'Why We

Fight'[17]. So we can end the fight. So we can go home!" Stark connects his own motivations to

those of people who fought during WWII, which was to stop the Nazis and bring peace.

Furthermore, comparing his actions to WWII would not only be relatable to Rogers, but also

make his actions seem to be "good."

Similar to his reaction in *Captain America: The Winter Solider*, Rogers does believe in

fighting a war that has not happened yet. He tells Tony, "Every time someone tries to win a war

before it starts, innocent people die. Every time." To emphasize his anger and disagreement,

Rogers rips apart a log with his bare hands. Rogers uses his enhanced abilities to show his

superiority over Stark and to prove that he is in charge. Later in the film, Rogers and Stark fight

each other when they disagree about how to handle the body and mind gem[18].

It seems that the only way Rogers and Stark can handle their disagreements is by fighting

one another. They also wanted to fight one another in *The Avenger*, and the only reason they did

not physically fight in *The Avengers* was because they were attacked by Loki's goons. Rogers

and Stark use their masculinity to make achieve the outcome they want. They are not shown

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[17] "Why We Fight" was a WWII propaganda series directed by Frank Capra for the U.S. government to educate the populace about the war and why it was important to enter.
[18] The mind gem is one of six stones that have magical capabilities. Ultron placed it in the head of the robotic body he was creating.

having debates about how to solve problems, particularly Rogers, who does not seem to change his mind once he has made it.

Though Rogers uses his masculinity with Stark to show he is in charge, it is often questioned during the fights against Ultron and his robot army, much to the chagrin of Rogers. When fighting Ultron, Barton tells Rogers, "You're not a match for him, Cap." Rogers is bothered by this comment, and responds sarcastically, "Thanks, Barton." Barton just told the greatest soldier in history that he was not strong enough to fight Ultron, which bruises Rogers ego. Rogers is used to being capable of fighting anyone. To be told that he was not match, questions his masculinity.

After Ultron is defeated, the Avengers return to the new Avengers facility. As Rogers walks Stark to his car, they discuss retiring from being superheroes and having the "simple" life. As Rogers considers this, there are is audio in the background of a drill sergeant yelling at soldiers. Roger's tells Stark that he does not think he could have a "simple" life, and "I'm home." Rogers reaffirms that the only life he could have is one in the military.

Furthermore, Rogers considers the military settings, such as the Avengers facility, as his home with his family. This reinforces the military culture and how it is part of people's identities. Previous literature has shown that there is a military culture that remains with soldiers. Rogers, thus, represents soldiers that have similar experiences; Rogers is their stand-in in the MCU. Furthermore, Rogers staying at the Avengers facility because it feels like "home" also implies that the military can be a home, or a family. The military is idealized to be a ready-made family where everyone is welcome.

Though in *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, Rogers further questions if preparing militaristic force for the future, they do not question the use of militaristic force in general. The movie

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continues to propagate the use of militaristic force to "save" the world, and the importance and value of hyper-masculinity. Rogers and the MCU are saying that advancing militaristic force to prepare for future fights is not good. They need to just use militaristic force to handle one problem at a time; they need to fight they enemy that they can see, not the one in the future. This is not, however, an argument against militarism, but rather an argument for dealing with the more immediate issues.

4.5 *Captain America: Civil War* **(2016)**

At the beginning of *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, the Avengers had been searching for, and defeated, HYDRA terrorists and bases. By the end of the movie, there were new members in the Avengers. Furthermore, the MCU had been including more voices of objection to the Avengers. *Captain America: Civil War* continues with world-wide objection to how the Avengers operate, and nuances in the "Captain America" character.

The opening scene of *Captain America: Civil War* shows most the Avengers in Lagos looking for terrorists, more specifically Rumlow and other HYDRA operatives. The Avengers are operating in Lagos without the authority of the Nigerian government. They believe that Rumlow may attack a police department, then realize he is attacking a research institute. The Avengers have remained an independent organization to protect the world[19]. Since they are not officially affiliated with a government, they do not, or feel, that they need to inform any government about their presence in their country. This is also not the first time they have done

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[19]After the destruction of S.H.I.E.L.D. in *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, the Avengers are shown to have remained an independent group, even though S.H.I.E.L.D. was reformed in the television show *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* (2013-present), and even helped the Avengers in *Avengers: Age of Ultron*.

this; they did this when they attacked the HYDRA base in Sokovia. By not involving other governments, the Avengers are taking illegal military action, and breaking international laws, because they are "protecting" the world.

Furthermore, since the Avengers did not inform the Nigerian government, or the police force in Lagos, about the possible terrorist act, they were not able to ask for back-up when they could not control the situation. Rumlow and his team successfully got the item they were looking for and entered an area with a lot of civilians. In *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, the Avengers were no longer evacuating cities themselves, but they use the Iron Legion robots to evacuate them. In this film, the Avengers do not attempt to evacuate any civilians as they take fight Rumlow and his team. This shows a complete disregard to the safety of the people in Lagos.

Eventually, Rogers fights Rumlow alone, like he fought Batroc alone in *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*. Though Rumlow is wearing a metal suit, Rogers can fight him and over power him. Rogers enhanced capabilities has constantly been shown in the films so far, and this film is no different. Their fight shows that a super-soldier is capable of fighting someone that is enhanced with a metal suit, which looks heavier that Stark's suit.

Though Rogers overpowers Rumlow and arrests him, Rumlow uses emotions to distract Rogers. Rumlow talks about Bucky Barnes, who is the Winter Soldier and Rogers best friend, and how he recognized Rogers when he saw him. By mentioning Bucky, Rogers became distracted and Rumlow set-off a bomb. To save Rogers, and the civilians standing around him, Wanda Maximoff used her powers to control it, and accidentally pushed it into a building, killing eleven people.

Though Maximoff, believes it is her fault that elven people died, Rogers tells her it was his. To be a "good" soldier, the military attempts to remove any emotional reaction a soldier

might have. Emotions are considered feminine, and the ideal man, or the ideal soldier, does not have any emotions. By Rogers stating that his emotional response to Barnes' name is what caused eleven people to die, there is a reinforcement to the idea that soldiers should not be emotional. Any soldier that is emotional, or has emotional connections, will eventually make mistakes in the field.

After the death of eleven civilians in Lagos, the Avengers are confronted with the fact that there are 117 countries that do not like how they operate. As a compromise, these countries want the Avengers to sign the Sokovia Accords, which would place the group under the control of the United Nations, or the U.N. The new Secretary of State, Thaddeus Ross, tells the Avengers:

> What would you call a group of U.S.-based enhanced individuals who routinely ignore sovereign borders and inflict their will wherever they choose and who, frankly, seem unconcerned about what they leave behind? (Feige, et al., 2016, *Captain America: Civil war*, The Sokovia accords)

While the character Thaddeus Ross is complicated[20], his concerns with the Avengers is sound. The Avengers claim to be trying to protect the world, yet they are solely based in the U.S. and ignore the governments of other countries.

Furthermore, "Captain America" was created for the U.S. military in WWII. While Roger may see himself as just a soldier, or hero, his entire outfit promotes U.S. ideals. Rogers own ideals for peace, and how peace is achieved, are informed through an American lens. His ideals are also shaped by his time in the U.S. military when he became a soldier.

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[20] General Thaddeus Ross oversaw the experiment with gamma radiation that attempts to recreate the super-soldier serum, which then causes Dr. Bruce Banner to become the Hulk.

One of Rogers' arguments for not wanting to be a part of the U.N. is that the panel, "…run by people with agendas, and agendas change." It is not surprising that Rogers is wary of government organizations after it was revealed that HYDRA was controlling S.H.I.E.L.D. The Avengers, however, are also an organization that is run by people with agendas. Rogers may believe that the Avengers "…may not be perfect, the safest hands are still [their] own," but that does not change that fact that the Avengers are an organization that is working above the law. The Avengers have their own agenda, and the other countries may not agree with it. Yet, Rogers believes that because they are "protecting" the world, they do not need oversight, even when 117 countries are telling them directly that they do not agree with how they operate.

When the U.N. meats in Vienna to ratify the accords, a bomb explodes outside the building, which kills the king of Wakanda[21], T'Chaka. The Central Intelligence Agency, and other law officials, begin to investigate who planted the bomb, and camera footage shows that it was Bucky Barnes. Rogers decides that it is his responsibility to apprehend Barnes, because he believes he is the only one that can bring him in[22].

Since Rogers never signed the accords, he has no authority to work as an Avenger in any country. Romanov even tells him not to go to Bucharest to get Barnes. She tells him, "You'll only make this worse." Though Rogers knows that by working as "Captain America" he is breaking the law, he does not care. He does not care that is decision could place other people in danger. His justification for his actions is that his enhanced capabilities make him a better person to apprehend Barnes, and maybe Barnes will trust him, because they were once friends.

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[21] Wakanda is a fake country in Africa.

[22] In *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, it was revealed that Barnes was given the super-soldier serum when he was a prisoner of war in *Captain America: The First Avenger*.

After Barnes and Rogers are cornered by police officers, Rhodes tells Rogers, "Congratulations, Cap. You're a criminal." Rogers acted outside of the law, and there are going to be consequences. Stark even tells Secretary Ross that there will be consequences for Rogers and Wilson. When he says this, Rogers looked surprised, he even asks, "'Consequences'?" Even though Romanov told him there would be problems, and Rhodes called him a criminal, Rogers is still surprised he would have to be held accountable. Rogers actions represent the idea that while a military action may have been illegal, if it was for the "right" reasons, it should be fine.

Furthermore, Rogers and Stark discuss Rogers' need to always get involved in situations he does not agree with:

> Rogers: If I see a situation pointed south I can't ignore it. Sometimes I wish I could.
> Stark: No, you don't.
> Rogers: No, I don't. (Feige, et al., 2016, *Captain America: Civil war*, Bucky's evaluation)

Rogers has always been shown to fight people he does not morally agree with. Rogers has his own idea of how people should be and how situations should be handled. If he does not agree with these decisions, he will not compromise. Rogers forces his own agenda on people, and if there is a disagreement, then he would rather go his own way.

Additionally, later in the film, Romanov tells Rogers, "You know what's about to happen. Do you really want to punch your way out of this one?" and Rogers remains silent. Their interaction further shows that Rogers is willing to use force to achieve what he believes is right. When "Team Iron Man" and "Team Captain America" face off later in the film, Rogers tell his team that they need to fight. The use of militaristic force to achieve goals is routinely reinforced by Rogers actions to achieve what he believes needs to happen.

While Rogers was surprised that he and Wilson would have to face the consequences of their actions, he was even more surprised that Maximoff would face consequences for her actions in Lagos. Stark mentions that Maximoff will be confined to the Avengers facility until further notice, and Rogers responds with, "She's a kid!" Though Rogers and Maximoff could not agree on who was responsible for the death of the eleven people, the Wakandan government and the U.N. felt that someone should be held accountable. The Avengers were in Lagos illegally and used militaristic force and Rogers does not believe anyone should be held accountable. Furthermore, Rogers is upset that Maximoff is being held accountable because he believes that, as a kid, she should not. Rogers is implying that as a kid, she did not know any better, does not have complete control of her powers, and should not be held accountable for any mistakes.

After Rogers refuses to sign the accords, Zemo, the villain of the film, pretends to interrogate Barnes and instead releases the Winter Soldier [23]. Barnes then tries to escape custody by stealing a helicopter. To stop Barnes, Rogers grabs hold of one of the landing skids and a metal rail on the helicopter landing pad. Various frames in this sequence showcase Rogers' ability to stop a helicopter by himself. There is medium shot of just Rogers' arms holding each rail. By showing Rogers as capable of holding a flying helicopter, then this increases his masculinity and power as a superhero. This sequence is more wish-fulfilment for the male audience. Rogers has continuously been shown fighting and defeating a lot of villains, even when they are enhanced. Rogers further becomes an ideal that every male should try to achieve.

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[23] In the opening scene of the film, Barnes is shown being tortured in a HYDRA base. The HYDRA agents release and control the Winter Soldier by reading specific words.

Rogers masculinity is further proven when he interacts with Sharon Carter. Throughout the film, Carter has been helping Rogers. Though they had been interested in one another[24], neither of them had made a move. When Carter gives Rogers his shield, Rogers kisses her, then Wilson and Barnes nod their heads in approval. Since *Captain America: The First Avenger*, Rogers had not been shown to be romantically involved with anyone[25]. Rogers has already been shown to be extremely masculine. By giving him a romantic relationship, Rogers is shown to be able to "get the girl." The superheroes are always able to get the girls because of their masculinity and ability to save the world, and Rogers finally gets the girl. Furthermore, by showing Rogers' friends approving his actions, shows that even they place significant importance in the ability of Rogers' to "get the girl."

Eventually, the Avengers fight one another. Rogers and Barnes fly to Siberia because they believe Zemo, the villain of the film, is trying to get other Winter Soldiers. Stark realizes that Zemo had framed Barnes for the bombing in Vienna, and he goes to Siberia to help the Rogers and Barnes. When they confront Zemo, who has already killed the other assassins, Zemo tells them that his plan was to destroy the Avengers. Zemo believes the Avengers are an "empire" and they do not care about the destruction they cause.

The entire premise of *Captain America: Civil War* is about how people dislike the disregard the Avengers have for the civilians that are caught in their battles. The Avengers have routinely caused the deaths of civilians during their fights, because they overlook evacuation.

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[24] Rogers and Carter met in *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, when she was undercover as his neighbor. Though Rogers had been interested in her, he was upset with her when he found out S.H.I.E.L.D. had her be undercover as his neighbor to protect him.
[25] A running joke in *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* was Romanov attempting to set-up Rogers with various S.H.I.E.L.D. agents, because she felt he should be in a relationship.

The Avengers have their own agenda and they enforce it through military action, and they ignore international laws. While some of the Avengers believe that they should report to the U.N., Rogers and the others do not. "Team Captain America" reinforces the idea that militaristic action from the Avengers is necessary to keep peace in the world. Since Rogers broke out the team from prison, they also reinforce the belief that they should not face consequences for their actions, because they are the "heroes."

4.6 Summary

Throughout this chapter, *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011), *The Avengers* (2012), *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* (2014), *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015), and *Captain America: Civil War* (2016) were analyzed to identify symbols of hyper-masculinity and militarism. In each movie, there were many instances where these symbols are examined. Thus, this research project shows the MCU and "Captain America" reproduce, reinforce, and are representative of symbols of hyper-masculinity and militarism in the current cultural zeitgeist. In the following chapter, the research project will be concluded.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

5.1 Militarism and Hyper-Masculinity in the MCU and "Captain America"

In chapter one of this research project, I explained how the Marvel Cinematic Universe, and "Captain America," is a new phenomenon that is worthy of critical analysis to identify symbols of militarism and hyper-masculinity. Disney/Marvel created a cinematic universe by using content from its comic books, which meant that there was a fan base that was already established that would also watch the movies. The movies also allowed Disney/Marvel to create new storylines, since they are a separate canon from the comic books. Since beginning the MCU with the release of *Iron Man* (2008), the MCU is now the largest franchise in history, and there are at least three movies that are listed as top-20 highest-grossing films of all time.

Furthermore, the MCU permeates the cultural zeitgeist. Every time there is a new movie that is going to be released, Disney/Marvel saturates media with new forms of promotional materials. On average, Disney/Marvel releases two new films every year, which means that they are constantly present in media, and outside media. The goal of a franchise is to garner as much money possible in the box office. To do so, Disney/Marvel promotes each film extensively.

The promotion of each film is so vast that it infiltrates every person's life, even if they are not Marvel fans. To promote the films, Disney/Marvel uses many promotional tactics. Promotional materials include trailers, television spots, sneak-peaks, interviews, and posters. There is also an increased presence of MCU promos in stores as well. In stores, people will find promotional pictures on food products, new clothing with logos, and new toys. Thus, the MCU is worthy of critical analysis to identify the symbols of militarism and hyper-masculinity, because they inform the cultural zeitgeist.

Furthermore, a major character for Marvel is "Captain America," who has three solo films and is in two "group" films. Since "Captain America" is an important character for Marvel, it is also important to analyze how the character symbolizes militarism and hyper-masculinity. In 1941, "Captain America" was a comic book hero created to fight Hitler during World War II. The character became fodder and wish-fulfillment for soldiers during the war. "Captain America" was also meant to be the embodiment of U.S. ideals. Thus, "Captain America" is inherently a political symbol that is meant to further the message of what it means to be "American."

Furthermore, "Captain America" also represents what the "ideal" man should be. "Steve Rogers" willingly joined a military experiment to become a super-soldier to fight in WWII. In doing so, the character represents what is means to be a "real" man and soldier to be able to achieve peace in the world. Within the MCU, "Captain America" is also worthy of critical analysis. Thus, it is important to analyze how "Captain America" and the MCU symbolize ideologies of militarism and hyper-masculinity that are also representative and symbiotic with the cultural zeitgeist.

In chapter two, I provided a brief history of militarism in film and its use a propaganda for war. During WWII, films were used to promote the war. Movies were an ideal for propaganda, because the film industry inserted militaristic ideologies into the films without the audience realizing it (Boggs & Pollard, 2016, p. 10). The audiences were then internalizing, and possibly agreeing, with militaristic ideologies in the movies. Also, ideologies need to be constantly reinforced for an audience to continue to agree with them (Regan, 1994, p. 46). This means that the film industry will continuously include militaristic ideologies in movies to keep the audience believing in them.

Additionally, within the military, there is a reinforcement of hyper-masculinity. The literature has shown that the military teaches its members to be hyper-masculine. The militarized masculinity is the ideology that a "true" man must embody hyper-masculine traits, such as aggression and violence (Morgan, 1994). Since the military and war are constantly used theme for Hollywood movies, then these films also have symbols of hyper-masculinity within a military context.

Furthermore, there has been a history of the representation of masculinity in media. In media, the "ideal" man is portrayed as the embodiment of hyper-masculinity. The "ideal" man has the "hard body," does not have any feminine traits, and is aggressive (Jeffords, 1994). Through the portrayal of hyper-masculinity in media, the male audience is told that they need to achieve this ideal. Comic book superheroes also reinforce what the ideal man should look like. The male superheroes are designed to represent what the male audience should achieve. Therefore, "Captain America" is worthy of critical analysis to determine how, and to what extent, the character reinforces and represents hyper-masculinity.

In chapter three, I showed that critical discourse analysis, or CDA, could be applied to the analysis of the MCU and "Captain America." CDA is a method that is inherently political. The use of CDA allows for texts to be analyzed to identify ideological symbols. The identification of these symbols can lead to social change and media literacy (Hammersley, 1997). Also, film theory states that every movie is political (Comolli & Narboni, 1976), which means that they can be analyzed for symbols of militarism and hyper-masculinity. I also explained why and how I would analyze *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011), *The Avengers* (2012), *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* (2014), *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015), and *Captain America: Civil War* (2016).

In chapter four, my analysis determined that "Captain America" and the MCU continuously represent and reinforce symbols of militarism and hyper-masculinity. Through the analysis, I identified ways in which the MCU and "Captain America" represent these ideologies. The symbols of militarism and hyper-masculinity were found in the dialogues and the actions of "Captain America," as well as other major characters in the MCU. Furthermore, the set and costume design, and the music of the movies also had symbols of militarism and hyper-masculinity.

This analysis has shown that the MCU and "Captain America" cannot be disregarded as harmless fun for children, or for an older audience. This franchise is reproducing ideologies found within the cultural zeitgeist and continuously reinforces them. Disney/Marvel is packaging these ideologies and hiding them behind the fact that the characters, and stories, were from comic books, which are also disregarded as "low-brow" and for children. Therefore, this study shows that the MCU and "Captain America" are worthy of critical analysis, because they do have symbols of militarism and hyper-masculinity, that are continuously reinforced in each film that has been analyzed.

For instance, throughout the five films, Rogers' very existence, and continued existence, as "Captain America" is due to militaristic action and the government's desire for enhanced soldiers. Rogers, before becoming "Captain America," always believed that the right thing to do was to join the military to help defeat the Nazis. Since he could not join due to medical problems, Rogers became a willing member of the super-soldier military experiment. The super-soldier experiment emphasizes the government's, and military's, belief that the only way to win a conflict is through war.

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Since militarism in Hollywood films is also associated with nationalism, "Captain America" is also the embodiment of these ideals. The original uniform of "Captain America" appears in *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011), and throughout the five films does not drastically change. The costume always symbolizes the U.S. flag. The colors are red, white, and blue, and there are stars and stripes. The one time the costume's colors are a dark grey in *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* is because Rogers was in "stealth mode." Yet, the costume is used to symbolize nationalism, and militarism, and there is never any doubt of who he is fighting for, and which ideals he is advancing.

Throughout all the five films, Rogers constantly reminds people that he feels more comfortable in military settings. He feels his purpose in life is better served as a soldier, even though he has questioned his place in the 21st century. Rogers, Director Fury, and Col. Phillips, place a great importance on the use of soldiers.

In the MCU, Col. Phillips and Director Fury believe that soldiers, or enhanced soldiers, are what is needed to win wars. Col. Phillips wanted the super-soldier experiments to work. He wanted, or believed he needed, an enhanced army to win WWII. Directory Fury wanted the Avengers, whom he considered to be soldiers, to protect the world. He was going to use the Avengers as a special group that he could order around.

For Col. Phillips and Directory Fury, Rogers was the best soldier, even Rogers believed he was the best soldier, who should be sent into tough situations. In the MCU, Rogers is the embodiment of what every man, or soldier, should be like. In *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* (2014), Rogers and Sam Wilson bond over their time in the military. At the end of *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015), Rogers tells Tony Stark that he is at home at the Avengers

Facility, because it is similar to an army base. The MCU and Rogers show the military as always part of Rogers' identity, and a familial organization that anyone can join and succeed in.

While Rogers does not like to prepare for future conflicts, he does not oppose fighting conflicts in general. In *The Avengers* (2012) and *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* (2014), S.H.I.E.L.D. was always trying to prepare for future wars by advancing their technology. In *The Avengers*, S.H.I.E.L.D. used the Tesseract to create advance weapons that could be used to fight aliens. In *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, S.H.I.E.L.D. developed the helicarriers that can kill anyone that are potential threats.

In both cases, Rogers did not agree with their methods, but did not disagree with wars in general. He does not like to fight the enemy he does not know. Though Rogers seems to be working towards peace, he believes the only way to achieve peace if by fighting. Therefore, Rogers is not arguing against war, he is just arguing about thinking about wars in the future; he would rather fight the war that is in front of him. Thus, the MCU and "Captain America" represent and reinforce militarism.

This study also identified and analyzed how the MCU and "Captain America" symbolizes hyper-masculinity. As a super-soldier, Rogers is the embodiment of the belief that hyper-masculine soldiers are what the military needs. Super-soldiers are the perfect "hard body" (Jeffords, 1994). When Rogers becomes a super-soldier, he can do things he could not before, such as running fast, or jumping very high. Once he becomes a super-soldier, his new enhanced abilities are constantly being showcased. The movies give special attention to any feat that Rogers accomplishes because of his abilities. The constant reminder of Rogers' abilities forces the audience to "wish" they looked like him and can do what he does.

There is even a scene in *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* (2014) that has a "normal" man say he wishes he looked like Rogers. The "normal" man is the stand-in for the audience in the film, and he is revealing what the audience should want. The movie acknowledges the audience's desires to look like Rogers, and, throughout all the films, validates and reinforces these desires by showing how "masculine" and "heroic" Rogers is.

Throughout all five movies, there are many scenes in which Rogers' enhanced abilities are showcased. Rogers is constantly going behind enemy lines to fight most of the opponents before his team, if he has one, arrives to help him. For instance, in *Captain America: The First Avenger*, Rogers goes into a HYDRA base by himself to rescue prisoners of war. In *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, Rogers lands on a ship to fight most of the terrorists, and then his team arrives.

The displays of Rogers ability to fight many opponents at once places a great emphasis on what a super-soldier is capable of. The male audience then envisions what they could do if they were super-soldiers. The super-soldier is the perfect hyper-masculine soldier. The emphasis on super-soldiers then further reinforces the desires of the male audience to want to look, and even behave, like "Captain America." In the five movies, the feats that Rogers accomplishes are further proof of the possibilities that the male audience could achieve if they were like Rogers, even if they are not humanly possible.

Furthermore, after Rogers becomes a super-soldier, women become attracted to him. Before the experiment, the only woman to consider Rogers suitable for a potential relationship was Peggy Carter. After the experiment, Rogers became attractive to many women throughout all five films. The emphasis on Rogers not being attractive to being very attractive, symbolizes to

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the male audience that if they want to be in relationship with a pretty woman, they should look like "Captain America."

Eventually, in *Captain America: Civil War* (2016), Rogers even gets to kiss Agent Carter (the great-niece of Peggy Carter), and is applauded by his male friends. This interaction places a lot of value on Rogers' ability to kiss an attractive woman. The male audience is told that they need to look like Rogers to be a "true" man, and to "get" the girl. Thus, "Captain America" symbolizes hyper-masculinity as the ideal for the male audience.

5.2 Contributions to Scholarly Work

After analyzing the MCU and "Captain America," I hope that this study shows that superhero films are worthy of critical analysis. Though superhero movies are not new, the use of multiple movies, about individual superheroes, that are interconnected is new. The MCU is also a recent phenomenon that has a large audience worldwide. Therefore, this study shows that the MCU, and other superhero movies, is worthy of critical analysis, because they are representative and reinforce ideologies of the current cultural zeitgeist.

Also, this research project contributes to the literature on militarism. The critical analysis of the texts in this study has shown that the MCU and "Captain America" represent and reinforce this ideology. In scholarly work, there is a gap in analyzing militarism outside of "war" films. This study has shown that superhero movies are also worthy of critical analysis to identify symbols of militarism.

Moreover, the study shows that one character, such as "Captain America," can be analyzed for symbols of militarism. Though "Captain America" has been analyzed for militaristic symbols (Dittmer, 2005), there is not a lot of scholarly work on analyzing how

"Captain America" is used in movies to represent ideologies. Thus, this study also contributes to the scholarly work about "Captain America."

Additionally, this study also contributes to the analysis of masculinity in media. Though there is literature about the representation of the "ideal" man by superheroes, this study further shows how masculinity is represented in superhero movies. The analysis of "Captain America" has identified how Hollywood emphasizes the importance of the hyper-masculine traits of the character.

Furthermore, this study contributes to the use of critical discourse analysis, or CDA, as a method. CDA has been developed to analyze written text, and has more recently been applied to other kinds of texts (Bell & Avant-Mier, 2009; Joye, 2010). CDA was used in this research project to identify and analyze ideologies in movies. Since the application of CDA in the study was successful, then this study further shows how CDA can be used to analyze all kinds of texts, including popular media and possibly, visual media.

5.3 Weaknesses and Future Research

While this study was successful in identifying symbols of militarism and hyper-masculinity in the MCU and "Captain America," there are still weaknesses of the research project. A weakness of the project is the number of films analyzed for militarism. The MCU is comprised of more than ten films, and six television series, which have multiple seasons. For the scope of this research project, the number of texts that were chosen for analysis were limited to the movies that had "Captain America" in them. If all the movies and televisions shows had been used for analysis, the corpus for this research project would have been too large.

The MCU, however, can be analyzed in its entirety to identify the representation of militarism. This study showed that at least the five movies in the corpus did have militaristic

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themes. Therefore, future research can be conducted to determine how the other movies, and television shows, are representative and symbolize militarism.

Another weakness of the study is that only one character of the MCU was analyzed. For this study, "Captain America" was the only character that was analyzed to determine how it symbolized militarism and hyper-masculinity. The MCU, however, has many major characters, such as "Iron Man" and "Thor," that can be similarly analyzed. Though this research project only analyzed one character, future research can critically analyze the other characters in the MCU.

Furthermore, while this research project identified and analyzed masculinity in "Captain America," it did not address how the portrayal of hyper-masculinity, and the importance it is given, affects feminism. A goal for feminism, and even queer theory, is to change the societal view of gender norms. While this study does show that hyper-masculinity is dangerous, it does not place it within a feminist argument. By not framing the study through a feminist lens, there is a weakness within this project. This, then, can be used for future research. It is important to know whether and how the MCU is using male characters to reinforce gender norms, which are detrimental to a progressive society.

Also, this study does not address female characters in the MCU. The MCU is notorious for its lack of female representation. Yet, this study does not address this problem; the study uses a male character for analysis. The critical analysis of female representation in the MCU is important for future research. There is an imbalance of the number of female characters to male characters. The application of feminist film theory would also be beneficial for future research on the MCU. As of Spring 2017, there has not been a solo film for a female superhero in the MCU. There are also not many female superheroes in the MCU. While this study did not address

or critique this problem, future research should examine how female characters are treated in the MCU, if Disney/Marvel ever produces such movies.

Similarly, there is also a lack of racial representation in the MCU. Like the female characters in the MCU, there has not been a solo film for a character of color. Within the MCU, there are few characters of color, and this study did not address that problem. In the MCU, *Luke Cage* (2016) is the first television show with a black character as the lead, and *Black Panther* (2018) will be the first movie with a black character as lead. Furthermore, the MCU has had problems with casting Asian actors for characters that were influenced by various Asian cultures and traditions, such as martial arts. The refusal of Disney/Marvel to cast people of color for these roles needs to be addressed as well.

The MCU has been a growing franchise since 2008, yet all the characters of color have been secondary characters (until *Luke Cage* and *Black Panther*). The lack of diversity within the MCU can also reflect the lack of diversity in other media. While this research project used a white character for analysis, there needs to be critical analysis on how the MCU treats characters of color.

Though this study did not address many issues within the MCU, it did show that the MCU, and other superhero films, is worthy of critical analysis. The MCU and "Captain America" symbolize ideological positions, such as militarism and hyper-masculinity. The identification of these symbols can contribute to scholarly work in militarism, hyper-masculinity, and CDA. The identification of these symbols also furthers media literacy, which allows the audience to be aware of the ideologies that are being represented and reinforced in the current cultural zeitgeist.

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