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Brrr! It's Cold in the Fridge: The Treatment of Women in the Marvel Cinematic Universe

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A Senior Honors Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of

Requirements of the Honors Degree Program

May 2023

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Abstract

Female characters depicted within the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) have faced unequal treatment and significant erasure since the origin of the franchise. As the series gained popularity and cultural discussions of representation grew, the MCU has since introduced more female characters. This then prompts concerns regarding the quality of that representation and how those female characters are treated within the franchise, and if that treatment has changed over time. Six films were selected from across the four first phases of the MCU for content analysis and data was compiled into two tables to quantifiably measure the depowerment aspect of fridging, which is excessive violence and disempowerment ascribed solely to female characters. The tools used to quantify and analyze includes the Bechdel Test (Bechdel, 1985, as cited in Selisker, 2015), the Smurfette Principle (Pollitt, 1991), and the Female Affiliation Complex (Gilbert & Gubar, 1988 as cited in Nichols, 2022). The Bechdel Test, Smurfette Principle, and Female Affiliation Complex all serve as theoretical frameworks for quantifiably measuring female representation within a piece of media. These three frameworks were then applied to the six films using the method of content analysis. This study found that female representation across the six films had increased both in quantity and quality, with the most drastic change occurring across the fourth phase of the MCU. These findings are indicative of an overall awareness of diversity that seems projected to increase as the franchise continues.

Key words: Marvel Cinematic Universe, comics, female superheroes, Bechdel Test, Smurfette Principle, Female Affiliation Complex

Chapter I: Introduction

Throughout its ongoing development, the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) has reflected several societal issues that have arisen over the past two decades, most notably how it treats characters of more marginal identities, such as women and people of color. Although the series entered the big screen in 2008, it was not until 2018 and 2019 that the star hero of the film was a person of color or a woman with their name in the film's title, with *Black Panther* (2018) and *Captain Marvel* (2019). It took one of the most expansive, elaborate television and film franchises a whole decade to star someone other than a white male hero. This then suggests that societal expectations anticipate white men to be the only social group the popular culture phenomenon needs cater to.

The MCU has had a longstanding hold on American popular culture, exhibiting a wide variety of superheroes and villains. In spite of this, it has had a tumultuous journey in portraying its female characters as positive forms of representation. Over time, the quantity of female characters present within the franchise has increased, and thus the concern shifts to the quality of representation these characters portray.

The MCU began in 2008 with its first film of what would become the series, *Iron Man*. The film franchise has been divided into phases by Marvel (Pacheco Muñoz, 2023). Each phase constitutes an aspect of an overarching narrative based on sub-narratives, with characters reappearing throughout the different phases. Phases I through III (2008-2019) makes up the Infinity War saga, while Phase IV (2021-2022) begins the Multiverse saga (Russell & Shepherd, 2023). Phase IV has just concluded in 2022 with its *The Guardians of the Galaxy Holiday Special*, illustrating clear preparation for an incoming Phase V. In its current fifteen years of

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existence, the MCU consists of thirty full movies, eight television series , and two television specials.

Why Do Heroes Matter?

From ancient myths to Shakespearean plays to modern cartoons, humans want to see heroes and villains with inhuman abilities with whom they can identify. From the tales and retellings of Hercules to the continuing performances of Hamlet, there is a continuing fascination with tales of heroism and concerns of justice (Morrison, n.d., as cited in Bland, 2016).

We can learn much about society when we take note of *who* occupies the heroes, damsels, and villains archetypes at any given time. These characters reflect those in society we admire, those we see as helpless or burdensome, and those we view as wicked, deviant, and unacceptable (Chambliss, 2012; Morrison, n.d., as cited in Bland, 2016; Bland, 2016). When certain groups are only reflected in one role, such as women as damsels, or of LGBTQ+ members as villains, this speaks to how these groups are already perceived in broader society. When heroes are primarily depicted as able-bodied, cisgendered, heterosexual white men, it illustrates a perceived sense of superiority of that group over all others. This works to homogenize the power of elites (Johnson, 2005; Wade & Ferree, 2015). Superheroes, supervillains, and even damsels in distress represent more than just characters in stories, they demonstrate society's cultural beliefs and values. And this isn't the whole complex cultural story. Not only do hero characters represent reality as it is, but , superhero narratives hold the power to shift these cultures through representation.

The MCU has become a highly influential aspect of American pop culture that affects other aspects of American society (“About Comic-Con International,” n.d.; Barnes, 2018; Bradley, 2019; Clark & Delouya, 2023). From their political interpretations to their references of

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current sociocultural issues to their relatability with the everyday real-world person, the question becomes whether or not the MCU maintains some sort of awareness of the ways their media messages may be perceived and what exactly, if anything, do they do with that awareness

In order to understand the significance of how women are depicted within the MCU, it is important to review how female characters have been depicted in the superhero genre in the past, specifically noting how their gender defines their personal narratives and their roles in overarching storylines. Many of these characters have origins from comic books created decades prior. Social values and ideologies have since significantly developed, and thus it is important to be aware of both the social context of the characters' original creation, and how modern reinterpretations have since been adapted to current sociocultural contexts.

In this paper, I analyze how the MCU's depiction of women began, has shifted over time, and how those depictions empower/disempower females and femininity in the broader sociocultural landscape. The depiction of different female characters existing outside of their relationship with men and having personalities beyond being a sexual or reproductive body is vital for prompting society to place more value on women.

Thesis Overview

In Chapter II, I review prior literature and research conducted on diversity in superheroes, and women in media, specifically in the format of superhero comic books and film. In Chapter III, I discuss data collection and methodology. In Chapter IV, I present my research findings, discuss their significance, limitations of this current research project, as well as make suggestions for future research.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Heterosexualization of Superheroine Costumes

Throughout the existence of the superhero genre, there has been a seemingly deliberate drive to appeal to a heterosexual male gaze. One manner through which this becomes apparent is in the prominent depiction of women with exaggerated or even anatomically impossible bodies, provocative poses, and sexually revealing (impractical) attire (Robbins, 1996; Avery-Natale, 2013; Kent 2020). The costume a superhero wears creates a strong first impression and acts as a visual representation of that particular hero's themes and traits. For example, Batman is dark, intimidating, and mysterious and thus his costume is dark, hides his features, and has a large and imposing silhouette. Iron Man wears a mechanical suit representing his focus on technology, science, and bold attitude (Reynolds, 1992 as cited in Avery-Natale, 2013). In contrast, creators of superheroines' portray them almost exclusively in costumes exaggerating their figures, accentuating the combination of thinness and curves that is deemed as desirable in society (Wade 2015; Johnson 2005; Kilbourne, 2000). For example, Black Widow wears a skintight leather suit, heels or high wedged boots, and her top zipped down to show her cleavage (Whedon, 2012; Whedon, 2015). In crafting female superhero costumes in such a way, creators emphasize sexiness as the female superhero's defining character trait above even their powers (Avery-Natale, 2013; Johnson, 2015; Taylor & Glitsos, 2021).

Sexualization of Superheroine Bodies

The sexualisation of female characters extends beyond their attire and into how their bodies are constructed, posed, and portrayed throughout the comic and movie industries by

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writers, producers, directors, marketers, and actors. Female superheroes are frequently depicted as thin with exaggerated breasts and buttocks (Robbins, 1996; Avery-Natale, 2013; Scott, 2015).

Even when the superheroine undergoes physical violence and abuse, her body remains sexually desirable and traditionally feminine, with significantly less muscle than male counterparts (Robbins, 1996; Avery-Natale, 2013; Scott, 2015). For example, in *Wonder Woman* issue #67, she is posed sensually while dressed in rags, chained at the collar, with only a bowl of water for sustenance (Avery-Natale, 2013).

For the superheroine, too much muscle or visible strength is deemed unfeminine, and thus must be hidden whether in using a secret identity and subdued visually when in costume, such as many portrayals of Wonder Woman and Black Widow (Robbins, 1996; Avery-Natale, 2013). These sexist representations have catalyzed some researchers to argue these as effects of a significant lack of consideration for the female/feminine audience (Robbins, 1996; Avery-Natale, 2013; Scott, 2015). Male comic creators overwhelmingly target a male audience through their hyper-heterosexualized feminine depiction of women, not realizing those depictions are what drives off many a female reader (Robbins, 1996; Scott, 2015).

Marketing for the Heterosexual Male Consumer

Similar to comic book writers, superhero film creators have had a tendency to focus on their male audiences over female audiences. By the release of *Avengers: Infinity War* (2018), four out of the five main male Avengers had starred in 11 movies, while the original female Avenger, Black Widow, had yet to star in even one (Dallacqua & Low, 2019; Docktherman, 2021).

As one researcher noted, when they taught a comic-based curriculum and hosted a comics club for the students, this lack of representation does not go unnoticed by young people. At one

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point she brought in *Avengers: Age of Ultron* themed cupcakes, each cupcake representing one of the heroes with a corresponding ring, with the exception of superheroine Black Widow, who was left ringless. When asked about this exclusion, a male student in the group proffered that Marvel “just didn’t like superheroines,” and a female student stated that when she thought of the Avengers, she “only thought of the three most promoted heroes”—all men (Dallacqua & Low, 2019).

Marketing Towards Children and Teens

The gender rigidity and the gendered view of superheroes being ascribed solely to boys begins as early as three years of age, with young girls being assigned more princess-like characters (Halim, 2016). As children grow older, their ideas of gender deepen, allowing them to explore topics and activities that are not socially ascribed to their gender (Wade, 2015; Halim, 2016). Baker and Raney’s (2007) conducted a content analysis study on gender stereotyping of superheroes in children’s cartoons. In analyzing 160 hours of superhero television content, they found that not only was there a 2:1 ratio of superheroes to superheroines, but the superheroines were consistently depicted as being attractive and emotional while the superheroes were depicted as more threatening and prone to anger (as cited in Dinella et al., 2017). The continuous ascription of women as emotional and subjects of the male gaze is reliant upon a one-dimensional view of women within a narrative.

Female Representation and Diversity in the Superhero Genre

Diversity in media, especially in terms of television and film, plays a role in viewers’ own identities and aspirations (Kilbourne, 2000; Wade, 2015; Johnson, 2015), although the diversity of characters is unevenly balanced, placing more focus on white and male audiences

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(Wade, 2015; Hall, 2022). As a result of this disparity, non-white and female audiences tend to feel forced to build connections with characters that may not align with their identities, and thus there may be a gap between how much they can relate to a character that is not a concern for white or male audiences. When films feature significant characters reflective of more diverse identities, audiences with those identities are then more likely to be drawn to consume those films, and thus are more likely to build connections with those corresponding characters (Hall, 2022; Chambliss, 2022).

Minimizing Through Character Roles

Superheroines in films are often relegated to small roles, or in solo films being set in independent time periods, frequently looking into the past at distinct points (Taylor & Glitsos, 2021). In doing so, the outcomes of the films' conflicts are already known to the audience, and distances the audience from those issues, such as the WWII era fight for women's rights in *Wonder Woman* (2017). At the same time, these historical period pieces can build narrative connections between the past and present, while also bringing into focus the often-overlooked importance of women's history, and the importance of women's solidarity throughout time (Taylor & Glitsos, 2021). These films, however, tend to place focus on white or white presenting heroines, reaffirming the issues of white feminism (Taylor & Glitsos, 2021). The consistent historical settings of these films and their messages also suggest that issues of sexism are issues of the past, thereby overlooking current iterations of sexism as being modern and collective (Taylor & Glitsos, 2021). In the case of *Black Widow* in the MCU, her own film and story does not occur until after her canonical death, and thus only occurs after she can no longer actively impact the MCU (Taylor & Glitsos, 2021).

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A Case Study of Black Widow

Black Widow was the first superheroine of the MCU, and thus is an integral figure in the franchise's depiction of women. As such, researchers have focused on examining how her character has been presented. When Black Widow was originally introduced in *Iron Man 2* (2010), she was immediately objectified, sexualized, and treated as defenseless by the men in the movie; she was also intended to be sexualized by the audience, from focuses on her appearance, sexual poses, and skintight leather suits and heels (Taylor & Glitsos, 2021; Dockterman, 2021; Killian, 2023). The films depict her as a femme fatale who utilizes psycho-sexual strategies to take down her typically male opponents, illustrating the inherent sexism baked within her character; she is also the one who dies to move the plot further along (Taylor & Glitsos, 2021; Dockterman, 2021). The fact that she is hypersexualized, presented as psychologically manipulative, and is also unable to bear children means that she can never align fully with traditional ideas of appropriate feminine behaviors, and thus her subsequent death can be argued to be an anti-feminist approach to her overall character and personal narrative (Taylor & Glitsos, 2021). The view of Black Widow as a sexual entity remains a consistent pattern throughout most of the films depicting the character.

In *Black Widow* (2021) we see MCU creators taking a different approach to her character. They do this through her costume of combat boots, a leather jacket, and omitting previously common references to her attractiveness (Dockterman, 2021; Killian, 2023). The film is set up as a flashback sequence, as within the MCU timeline Black Widow has died (*Endgame* 2019). The new film takes a retrospective approach, serving to develop both Black Widow's background as well as bring a conclusion to her arc of redemption referenced in *Marvel's The Avengers* (2012) (Killian, 2023).

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The film reshapes the audience's view of Black Widow from a sexualized object to a three-dimensional nuanced character with a narrative outside of romance. Black Widow is feminist and the film often focuses on the power of her bonds with her sister. She works with her sister, Yelena, and their parents to take down a sexist, oppressive white male villain, Dreykov, who has enslaved young girls from around the world for decades referring to them as 'recycled trash' (Killian, 2023). Although Black Widow is presented as a de-sexualised powerful heroine in her own right, she is essentially a ghost to the audience, and it is instead Yelena who can continue to move forward within the MCU (Taylor & Glitsos, 2021). *Black Widow* retroactively provides more depth to Natasha Romanoff's character, but since this film is a flashback from before *Avengers: Infinity War*, Natasha's character cannot develop any further or act with agency (Taylor & Glitsos, 2021). By reshaping the most sexualized of the female main characters, *Black Widow* opens a doorway for more diverse portrayals of women as more than mere subjects of the male gaze (Dockterman, 2021; Killian, 2023).

When female characters are depicted as hypersexualised, the target audience becomes limited to a heterosexual male gaze that treats women as sexual objects, thereby driving away some consumers from other groups (Scott, 2015). Superheroines have the capacity to act as empowering figures through their superhuman abilities and narrative capabilities, but their hypersexualization has been found to nullify that potential and reinforce unequal gender ideologies (Scott, 2015; Pennell & Behm-Morawitz, 2015).

A Case Study of Jessica Jones

Another example of a desexualised approach to the superheroine is Netflix's extension of the MCU through its reinterpretation of Jessica Jones, which presents the first out-of-comic version of the character. The show scraps her hypersexualised costume in favor of jeans, a

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leather jacket, and shoulder-length hair (Green, 2019). These are all more combat friendly and de-sexualized approaches to the superheroine, and the narrative choice appears to act as a direct refusal to follow normalized trends of the sexualized heroine we see in *The Avengers*' Black Widow and the titular Wonder Woman of *Wonder Woman* (2017) (Green, 2019).

In addition to the physical reimagining of Jones, the show also emphasizes the significance of bonds between women (Weida, 2018; Green, 2019). The most notable female relationship within the show is that of Jones and Trish, Jones' adoptive sister and best friend, illustrating how systems aiming to pit women against each other can be resisted. Trish consistently acts as Jones's ally throughout season one, pushing her to become a better version of herself both personally and as a superhero, acting as a pillar of support in the face of Jessica Jones's trauma and resultant PTSD (Weida, 2018).

The Disempowerment of the Female Superhero

Female superheroes tend to be depowered through their associations with the men around them. For example, the name *Supergirl* versus *Superman* reaffirms the former's lower status and narrative origin in the latter, similar to *Batgirl* and *Batman* (David, 1999; Kent, 2020). The pattern continues throughout both Marvel and their rival company DC here is to look at how many superheroines are female offshoots of preexisting male characters: Ms. Marvel and the original male Captain Marvel, Hulk, and She-Hulk, and so on; there are not many significant instances of male characters being offshoots of preexisting female characters (David, 1999). There is a significant shift in this pattern of superheroines being lowered to the position of sidekick to men once Carol Danvers is raised from the hero Ms. Marvel to the title of Captain Marvel herself (Kent, 2020; Mahmutovic, 2022). The title of Ms. Marvel is instead passed down to Pakistani-American teenager Kamala Khan taking on a new iteration of Ms. Marvel (Degnan,

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2017; Kent, 2020; Mahmutovic, 2022). Similar to Jessica Jones, this new Ms. Marvel is completely desexualized, which helps to draw in a wide variety of readers beyond just Muslim audiences (Mahmutovic, 2022).

Villainesses, while suffering from similar issues of over-sexualization and male-centered narratives as their superheroine counterparts, are complex and are able to express the dark aspects of reality and abuse for women. Unlike superheroines, however, the sexuality of the villainess is deemed a threat. Female allyship in these dynamics is a common theme, especially between DC's Harley Quinn, Poison Ivy, and Catwoman, illustrating the danger and threat to men of strong women working together (Austin, 2015). Similar to Black Widow's team up with her mother and sister, the support team of female characters still illustrates a growing awareness of what female collaboration can accomplish throughout the superhero genre, especially in the face of a masculine threat (Killian, 2023).

Super Women, Femme Fatales, & Damsels in Distress

Wonder Woman, often deemed the first truly influential superheroine, had unique origins. Hailing from the all-female community of Amazonians on Paradise Island, Wonder Woman was stereotypically beautiful as well as incredibly strong, honorable, and heroic (Morrison, 2011). Her stories were meant to promote feminine self-reliance, sisterhood, and cooperation between women, and goals of resolving peace without relying on violence during times of war (Steinem, 1972/2013; Morrison, 2011). Female bonds are a prevalent theme within the Wonder Woman comics, from her close bond with her mother, to her sisterhood with the Amazonians, and to her allyship with the sorority sisters, the Holliday Girls (Steinem, 1972/2013; Morrison, 2011; Jackson, 2015). In the years after her original creator's death, however, Wonder Woman went through a phase that very nearly reversed her status as a superheroine, reflecting the reversal of

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women's status after the Rosie the Riveter era (Madrid, 2009). For a time, her character was devolved to be love-obsessed and hyper-focused on her boyfriend, and more interested in domestic submissiveness rather than fighting for women's rights, ending crime and war, and defending the weak (Madrid, 2009).

The superheroine's secret identity is vital to her ability to fight crime, especially in earlier decades. Gendered views of women expected them to act ditzy, docile and focused on appearances and love. Thus the superheroine identity and civilian identity had to remain separate for women to live a normal life in their secret identity, even if their heroic persona better reflected her true self (Madrid, 2009). An extension of this is the female heroine who is superior to her male love interest in physical ability but must hold back in order to have a socially acceptable relationship with the men around her (Madrid, 2009). There seems to be a pattern of powerful female heroes being given some sort of weakness to ensure they are at best equal in heroic power to their male teammates and lovers, as well as a hesitance to allow a female hero to take the role of the strongest member of the team, especially in terms of physical strength (Mace, n.d.).

A darker take of this pattern of superheroines depowering themselves to improve those around them is the Bluebeard narrative. The Bluebeard narrative is rooted back in a folklore story in which a nobleman murders each of his wives and hides them in a locked room until the next wife sneaks in and discovers his secret, resulting in their subsequent death by his hand (Frankel, 2017). These women subject themselves to abuse and disempowerment to a man in order to either better him or protect others (Frankel, 2017; Frankel, 2019). Netflix's Jessica Jones nearly followed this Bluebeard narrative when she briefly considered staying with Kilgrave, her rapist and abuser, because he was willing to not harm others or to let his hostages go when she

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chose to stay and entertain him (Frankel, 2019). In this instance, she bore him no love or affection but was willing to stay with him to protect everyone else (Frankel, 2019). In this instance her character felt she had no choice but to depower herself to improve her male abuser and protect everyone else around them.

In spite of these issues, the re-emergence of positive female relationships and female empowerment suggests a more optimistic future for women, especially in the MCU. From the desexualization of Black Widow to the supportive dynamic between Jones and Trish, female characters are being depicted as active agents in their own story, reclaiming their own power and independence (Weida, 2018; Green, 2019; Killian, 2023).

Fridging of the Female Body

One approach to analyzing female representation in media is through a phenomenon known as “fridging.” Gail Simone defined fridging as the pattern of murder, trauma, sexual assault, and depowering of women in a narrative for the sake of a man’s story and character development (Simone, 1999; Bartol, n.d.). The term fridging developed from an incident in the 1994 issue #54 of Green Lantern Vol. 3. when Green Lantern, a DC comics superhero, returns to his home to find his girlfriend, Alex DeWitt, has been murdered and her corpse stuffed into the refrigerator by one of Green Lantern’s villains (Marz, 1994). The concept of fridging does not suggest that female characters and superheroines should not face any violence or trauma, but rather suggests the purpose, impact, and type of violence female characters endure is more gruesome, invasive, or objectifying when compared to that of male characters and superheroes (Simone, 1999; Bartol, n.d.; Harris, n.d.). Simone further elaborates on the depowering aspect of fridging: female characters being reduced to the role of victim, being isolated, being pushed to

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the periphery of the narrative, or being stripped of their agency within a story, specifically for the shock value it inflicts on a male character (Simone, 1999).

The fridging concept gained notoriety from Ron Marz. He is the writer of issue #54 of Green Lantern, who also responded to Simone's website, *Women in Refrigerators*, defending his narrative choice of brutally killing Lantern's girlfriend, Alex, as a deliberate and necessary narrative choice, going as far as to state that he created her specifically to be murdered (Marz, n.d.). Marz made her character likable to his readers so that when she was eventually murdered, readers would be more emotionally impacted by her death and better able to empathize with the Green Lantern's loss. Marz states that Alex served as a way to sever the hero from his normal life as a civilian. In spite of his attempts to defend his narrative choice, Marz nevertheless tries to legitimize the prevailing idea that female characters serve to act as plot development for male characters. Marz goes on to state that since the majority of superhero comic protagonists are men, the best way to write in plot-point tragedies is to inflict it upon the women in their lives. Marz's defense and explanation then reaffirms the issue of fridging as a phenomenon of treating women as plot points and shock value rather than characters in and of their own right.

The fridging phenomenon refers to the pattern of murder, trauma, sexual assault, and depowering female characters experience within a narrative for the sake of a male character's storyline and character development (Simone, 1999; Bartol, n.d.). For this research, I opted to focus on the depowering aspect of women in the MCU. Depowerment in this study refers to the loss of agency or independence of a female character in relation to a male character, whether female characters are able to exist as characters independent of their relationships of male characters within the narrative, and if the female characters are able to build positive relationships with other women or if they are isolated. In order to quantifiably measure this

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depowerment, I used the Bechdel Test, the Smurfette Principle, and the Female Affiliation Complex in order to determine if women in the franchise have been subject to fridging.

The Bechdel Test

The Bechdel Test was originally intended as light-hearted, the simple three step test has become a more genuine consideration of representation within the analysis of films (O'Meara, 2016). The Bechdel Test requires (1) two female characters; (2) two female characters have at least one conversation together; and (3) the conversation refers to something other than a man (Selisker, 2015). Although these are fairly simple rules, a significant number of films still fail the test, and those that do pass may be doing so only on one-dimensional dialogues that are still poor female representation (O-Meara, 2016). The Bechdel Test can work better as a jumping off point for analyzing character networks and character agency within a piece of media or literature (Selisker, 2015). The employment of this test has taken on a more serious tone, as Swedish theatres began employing the test score alongside other film ratings in 2013 (O'Meara, 2016). Analyzing the variety of speech between women allows for more diverse portrayals of female dialogue outside of pre-existing stereotypes (O'Meara, 2016). Looking deeper into the actual dialogue provides further insight into the views on media, allowing for deeper analysis into which women are given more significance within a piece of media (O'Meara, 2016). The spread of discussion and critique of the Bechdel Test draws further attention to and prompts improvement of the quality of female representation across media platforms.

The Smurfette Principle

The Smurfette Principle, coined by Katha Pollitt in 1991, refers to the prevalent pattern of numerous male protagonists with a single female character defined by feminine stereotypes. The

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continuous ratio of several boys to a single girl illustrates an idea that “boys are the norm, girls the variation; boys are central, girls peripheral,” (Pollitt, 1991). The lone female character tends to be characterized only by stereotype; they might be the mother, sister, or lover of one of the male characters, or limited to only assistive roles, lacking significant agency, or maybe they’re hyperfocused on fashion and appearance (Pollitt, 1991). With a smaller ratio of female characters to male characters, the female characters are then responsible for higher representation significance of the female population (Cocca, 2016).

The Female Affiliation Complex

In 1988, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar coined the term “female affiliation complex” to describe the rivalry and anxiety women feel towards one another to compete for a space in male-dominated spheres (Mambrol, 2016; Nichols, 2022). Within these masculine spheres of creative influence, women are frequently limited in the roles they are expected to be depicted and also act as, notably as either submissive and demure or aggressive and monstrous (Austin, 2015; Mambrol, 2016).

This duality influences women to take a more subtle means of obtaining a middle ground not otherwise permitted by the surrounding masculine forces, and thus allows for women to reject the isolation the female affiliation complex otherwise creates (Dowson, 1999; Mambrol, 2016). Through this rejection in favor of female support and bonding, women are better prepared to unite against patriarchal systems (Dowson, 1999; Mambrol, 2016; Nichols, 2022).

*“Compromise where you can.
But where you can’t, don’t.
Even if everyone is telling you
that something wrong is something right.
Even if the whole world is telling
you to move, it is your duty
to plant yourself like a tree,
look them in the eye, and say
'No, you move.'”*

-Sharon Carter in Civil War (2016)

Chapter III: Data and Methodology

I set out to test my hypothesis that the portrayal of superheroines in the MCU has evolved past the previously common fridging phenomena and has more recently portrayed more empowering female characters as each progressed to the next.

Data

I conducted a content analysis of six films from the MCU catalogue. To best measure the evolution of female representation in the films, I chose *Marvel's The Avengers* (2012), *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015), *Avengers: Infinity War* (2018), *Avengers: Endgame* (2019), *Black Widow* (2021), and *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* (2022). These six films were chosen based on who they depicted and when in the franchise they occurred.

All four Avengers films were chosen as they focus on the main team (The Avengers) and they stood as the face of the MCU for the first three to four phases, thus being very significant in the cultural sphere. As there are no Avengers films in Phase IV nor team-centered films reaching the notoriety of the Avengers, I chose instead to include both *Black Widow* and *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever*. Although these films focus on one main character, they display prominent themes of both teamwork and relationships. Additionally, *Black Widow* is a film dedicated to the first female Avenger, and occurred after her death, thereby providing character development after her death. *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* focused largely on the character of Shuri, who plays a significant role in films prior, and in this film was taking on the mantle of Black Panther after actor Chadwick Boseman's untimely death. By having the character of Shuri take over the role of Black Panther, MCU creators embraced a significant shift in the incoming MCU phases. By picking the first and final films of Phase IV (*Black Widow* and *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever*), I am able to obtain a thorough understanding of development across the MCU's fourth

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phase. Two films were chosen from both Phase III and Phase IV, while only one film was included from the prior two phases due to the fact that the latter phases have significantly more content.

Methods

For this project, I conducted a content analysis of the six films discussed above. I watched each of the six films three times in chronological order with subtitles on a full size television on my own. For each introduction of a female and male character, I paused to record their first appearance. In a similar fashion, I paused and recorded the duration of each conversation solely between two female characters, making note of when they occurred in the film. I repeated this process throughout each film viewing. For purposes of this research, I define a conversation as one statement articulated to another with a corresponding response consisting of more than one word. I did not examine conversations with male characters. I recorded only “major” characters for this study, which I define as characters who are named, addressed, and impact the film’s storyline and overarching narrative arc across the selected films.

Each of the six selected films were viewed three times each and cross-checked to ensure I recorded the same conversations each time and the same characters. I watched each film twice in a row before I watched the next film twice in a row. After watching the sixth film for the second time, I watched each film one right after the other. The pattern would then be AA-BB-CC-DD-EE-FF-ABCDEF.

For each film, I recorded the first appearance of each significant female character and each significant male character in the order they first appear in the film, as well as the ratio of male to female characters in each film. A “significant character” for the purposes of this research

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required the naming of a character, playing a crucial role in the progression of the plot, and/or the progression of the franchise, bridging one film to another.

I took rigorous notes on all major female character's dialogue with other female characters. I then went through my notes and coded the conversations as they fit with the Bechdel Test, the Smurfette Principle, and the Female Affiliation Complex. I noted whether or not The Bechdel Test parameters were met, whether the Smurfette principle was recreated or rejected, and noted the relationship between the two female characters as it relates to the presence or absence of acrimony and jealousy between women based on the concept of the Female Affiliation Complex. These three theoretical frameworks serve as a means of analysis of both quantity and quality of female representation with various media works.

Finally, I assessed the qualitative nature of each conversation, and assigned each conversation a label of positive, negative, or neutral. A conversation was assessed as "positive" when the conversation expressed support between the women, and helped to improve or build a relationship between them. A conversation was coded negative when it expressed hostility and harmed or worsened the relationship between the women involved. Finally, a conversation was coded as neutral if it neither improved nor worsened the relationship between the women. I also took a count of the number of male and female characters in each of the viewed films, providing me insight into any gender imbalance in representation. Conversations were assessed through an understanding that a conversation may pass the Bechdel Test, but the dialogue between the female characters may still be problematic and thus may not be quality female representation. Additionally, positive dialogues that fail the Bechdel Test can still provide positive portrayals of women (Selisker, 2015; Mambrol, 2016; Nichols, 2022). For any point of data that was confusing or could be interpreted differently, I made sure to note why I recorded in any specific

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way so as to provide justification. Whereas in other studies, researchers have just looked at whether or not media passes the Bechdel Test as a means to discover “positive” representation, this research adds nuance by paying attention to other elements within media that influence its positive or negative impact on female representation.

I checked the introduction of female characters twice after the initial film viewing, as did I check the conversation topics, duration, and general nature. When analyzing the nature of each of the conversations between women, I used +, -, or = to assign whether the conversation was positive and supportive between the women, whether it was negative between the women, or if it was neutral between the women. Additionally, I noted whether or not the conversation provided plot or character development, noting it as either “pcd” or “no pcd.”

I chose to combine plot and character development together in my coding and assessment as the two play into one another as the MCU progresses over time. Since all the films are connected and characters reappear in multiple films and shows, character development may occur within a single film or across multiple films, while plot development can mean both the individual film’s development or the world-building and lore development of each MCU phase.

I opted to conduct a content analysis in order to properly address my three frames of reference for measuring female representation: the Bechdel Test, the Smurfette Principle, and the Female Affiliation Complex. I put both the Bechdel Test and the Female Affiliation Complex on the same table, as they both addressed interactions between female characters. I left the Smurfette Principle on its own in order to better analyze the difference between the presence of male characters versus female characters in each film.

The most significant point of contention regarding my methodology would be how I interpreted different conversations, and how I interpreted their nature as being positive, negative,

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or neutral. The nature of the conversations is inherently biased by my own interactions with other women and feminine identifying people. One such example is when a female character uses the word “bitch” in regard to another female character. Whereas there are misogynistic tones if a man uses the word to refer to a woman, the impact is not necessarily the same when it is used between two feminine people. This is because the term “bitch” would then be being shared within an in-group, rather than by an out-group who has historically exerted more power and oppression over the in-group. Thus, certain terms and quips between two female characters is not necessarily as negative as it would be if one of the conversation participants was a man.

Although this is the ideology I use to justify my interpretations, another researcher, especially if they are part of the out-group, may interpret the nature of these conversations differently.

There was some difficulty in identifying how to differentiate between a shift in topic in a conversation, versus a new conversation. In order to record the data necessary for this research, I opted to define the new conversation based on whether the topic shift was completely unrelated to the prior topic of conversation, with there being no relationship with the prior path of conversation that can be followed by viewers. For example, in the *Black Widow* movie, there is a scene where Yelena mocks Natasha’s plan and asks about their current hideout. I labeled this conversation (43:08-43:24) as being separate from their discussion of the person currently hunting them, Taskmaster, and her (at this point thought to be a man in the film) identity and work for the villain Dreykov (43:25-43:37) since they stop to talk about two very different topics with no natural shift or segue beyond a moment or two of silence. Additionally, there were times where there would be a conversation that started off between two women, but then a man would join. Since the conversation did not actually end at the male character’s introduction, I opted to omit the whole conversation since it was no longer just between female characters. In a similar

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vein, interventions of other scenes or other conversations in the middle of the first conversation presented a spot of confusion. To combat this, I listed the times the conversation started and ended, with notes regarding when the interventions started and ended.

Another obstacle I encountered during this research was with *Avengers: Endgame* (2019). The film includes time travel, which meant the viewers encountered characters from different times, with duplicates from different periods, such as Loki from 2012 (*The Avengers*) and Loki from 2013 (*Thor: The Dark World*) or Nebula from the current *Avengers: Endgame* timeline versus the 2014 Nebula (*The Guardians of the Galaxy*) from nine years earlier in the film's timeline. To ensure the characters I added to the list for *Avengers: Endgame* were significant points to count for the data, I only included timeline duplicates that both impacted the *Avengers: Endgame* timeline, and whose storylines were also impacted by the time travelers. With these parameters, I was able to limit the duplicates to 2014 Nebula, 2014 Thanos, and 2012 Loki. Both 2014 Nebula and 2014 Thanos time travel to the present, where they both ultimately die. 2012 Loki later goes on to star in the show *Loki* (2021).

Chapter IV: Findings & Discussions

Findings

The Bechdel Test

Columns four through six provide details into how each film correlates with the Bechdel Test. The Bechdel Test's three parameters are: (1) there are at least two female characters, (2) two female characters have at least one conversation together, and (3) the conversation refers to something other than a man (Selisker, 2015). For a film to pass this test, these requirements only need to be met once. For this research, a character also had to be named and play an important role in progressing the film narrative or an overarching narrative across the franchise.

As column six of Table 1 illustrates, the first of the *Avengers* films, *Marvel's The Avengers* (2012) does not pass the Bechdel Test, with there being no interactions occurring between women at all during the two hour and twenty-five minute runtime. The number of conversations between women increases across the films, but no film passes the Bechdel Test until *Avengers: Endgame* (2019). Furthermore, columns four and five show that this film just barely passed the test with only one of nine total conversations between women discussing something other than a male character. Column three shows that this conversation was also across only two seconds, and thus is the shortest conversation between women to occur in this film. It is important to note that *Avengers: Endgame* is the longest of the six films, with a runtime of three hours and five minutes. The second longest film in the group is *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* (2022), with a runtime of two hours and forty-three minutes, with 36 of 58 conversations relating in content to something other than a male character.

The ratio of conversations about men versus conversations about anything else become starkly in favor of the latter in the first and final films of Phase IV, *Black Widow* (2021) and *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever*. In *Black Widow* there were a total of 54 conversations, with

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19 being about men and the other 34 not about men. In *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* there were 58 conversations, with 22 being about men and 36 being about something other than a man.

The Smurfette Principle

Similar to the record of only significant female characters in Table 1, the characters recorded in Table 2 were similarly limited to named characters that are important to the film or franchise narratives. Divided based on either the gender of male or female, the fourth column of Table 2 provides insight into the films' relationships with the Smurfette Principle. The Smurfette Principle can be understood as a consistent ratio of male to female characters as 2:1 or 3:1. This pattern remains fairly consistent across the first three films, up until *Avengers: Endgame*.

Although *Avengers: Endgame* boasted the most female characters and characters overall, at a ratio of 36 men and 26 women, it is important to note that this ratio becomes significantly different if picking out only those who are depicted as fighting, as the ratio then shifts from 36:26 to 25:14. This then decreases the number of fighting male characters by about 31% and the number of fighting female characters by about 46%.

Black Widow's overall number of characters is significantly smaller, with only twelve characters: eight female and four male. This then presents a complete reversal of the Smurfette Principle, with a male to female ratio of 1:2, with double the amount of significant female characters to male characters. Although starkly unbalanced, this could be seen as an attempt to pay respect to Natasha's character. This film serves as a flashback in the time shortly before the events of *Avengers: Endgame*, and is focused solely on the first female member of the Avengers team. All her original teammates, save for Hawkeye, received their first solo films back in Phase I, with *Iron Man* (2008), *The Incredible Hulk* (2008), *Thor* (2011), and *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011) (Russell & Shepherd, 2023). Natasha's first film appearance even predated

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the last two characters, as she was introduced in *Iron Man 2* (2010) (Killian, 2023). Thus the sharp decrease of male characters in Natasha's solo film may be a retroactive means of allowing her to shine outside of her relationships with the men around her, allowing her personal narrative to be better developed based on her own agency and action.

The ratio of male to female characters becomes most balanced with the last film, *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever*, which boasts a near-even split of 8:9. When compared with the ratio of 12:3 in *Marvel's The Avengers*, there has been a clear shift towards more balance between male and female characters. With this film being the closing movie of Phase IV, this more even split may suggest further balanced portrayals of men and women as the MCU moves forward into the incoming phases.

The Female Affiliation Complex

The Female Affiliation Complex can be understood as the rivalry and anxiety women feel towards one another to compete for a space in male-dominated spheres, whether they be characters in a narrative or women in real life (Nichols, 2022). This data has been recorded in column seven of Table 1. Each conversation between female characters has been coded as positive (+), negative (-), or neutral (=), and either as providing character development (*pcd*) or not (*no pcd*). If the dialogue has been coded as negative, then the Female Affiliation can be interpreted to have been fulfilled.

Although *Avengers: Age of Ultron* does not pass the Bechdel Test, the conversations between women are either positive or neutral, and thus the women do not degrade each other, even when they do not fight on the same side. Given, the only female antagonist in most of this film, Wanda, does not have a conversation with Natasha, the only superheroine for the majority of the film. Regardless, the women tend to either build on relationships between each other or

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share information. This can be seen in Natasha's discussion of Laura about her pregnancy and how she is doing, or Dr. Cho's reassurance to Natasha that Hawkeye will completely recover from his injuries. This then illustrates that even when a film does not pass the Bechdel Test, it can still provide positive female representation through women choosing to collaborate instead of compete.

Avengers: Infinity War presents an even split of two positive conversations, two negative conversations, and two neutral conversations. The negative conversations are between Natasha and the villainess Proxima Midnight. Their last conversation occurs when Proxima Midnight tells Wanda that both she and her boyfriend, Vision will die alone, only for Natasha and Okoye to appear and warn her that Wanda is not in fact alone before. The three heroines then work together to beat Proxima Midnight.

Avengers: Endgame, sees a similar division with one conversation focusing on something other than a male character, assessed as negative due to the destructive interactions between the two characters. As an added layer, the two parties involved are both the antiheroine Nebula, just from a different time period. 2014 Nebula is disgusted by her future self's change in allegiance and independence, both physically and verbally assaulting her. 2014 Nebula is desperate for the approval of Thanos, her abusive adoptive father. She continuously abuses her future self, labeled as just Nebula, who has escaped Thanos and now stands against him. 2014 Nebula is strongly characterized by her simultaneous fear of Thanos and desire for his approval, especially in the face of his favoritism towards her adoptive sister Gamora. 2014 Nebula is ultimately unable to free herself from her fear of and desire of acceptance from Thanos and is eventually killed by Nebula.

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Black Widow depicts over twice as many positive conversations as negative ones, with a total number of 15 positive conversations, 7 negative conversations, and 32 neutral conversations. The dynamics of the characters are largely familial and complicated, with themes mostly around sisterhood unified out of love or in the face of an oppressive male force. The dynamics between Natasha, her adoptive sister Yelena, and their adoptive mother Melina are complicated as they try to discern how much of their relationships are genuine or an act from their time undercover. Although the characters at times say hurtful things to one another, their genuine affection for one another largely wins out throughout the film, thereby creating an overall positive and supportive portrayal of women, especially in a complicated familial format.

Black Panther: Wakanda Forever consists of 24 positive conversations, 3 negative conversations, and 31 neutral conversations between women. Similar to the familial dynamics of *Black Widow*, this film consists of numerous themes of the importance of familial support as the characters navigate their grief in the wake of T'Challa's death and a new threat. The dynamics present between women in this film are less complicated than those depicted in *Black Widow*, as Princess Shuri and her mother Queen Ramonda are well respected royalty, with overall positive relationships with other women in the film. Much of the dialogue revolves around keeping the youngest of the women, Shuri and Riri safe from harm. A significant amount of conversations between female characters were centered around seeking or the offering of support through the grief of a shared lost loved one. As was observed in the first Black Panther film, the overall tone of conversations between women is one of protection and healing through a single female support network.

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Discussion

There is a clear increase in both the numerical presence of female characters within the MCU franchise over time, as well as more positive relationships between female characters. It is important to note, however, that the largest shifts in representation occurred in Phase IV's *Black Widow* and *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever*. Unlike the previous films in the prior phases, these two films focus on a specific titular character, Natasha Romanoff and Princess Shuri, both female characters. Thus it is not surprising that there are so many conversations between women. Something noteworthy about these films, like the prior Avengers films, is that there is still a significant presence of a male character, particularly that of a male villain.

Marvel's The Avengers depicted the team fighting against Loki, *Avengers: Age of Ultron* destroying Ultron, and both *Infinity War* and *Endgame* focused on taking down Thanos, who had been presented as an ongoing, looming threat since the *Avengers* film. This pattern of the heavy presence of a male villain continues with *Black Widow's* misogynist General Dreykov and *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever's* complex antagonist Namor.

The overarching narrative of both of the Phase IV films analyzed for this project include a focus on healing from wounds caused by a masculine force, with Natasha fighting to take down Dreykov and Shuri healing from the death of her beloved brother, T'Challa. These two films illustrate how even with a significantly looming masculine force, female characters can still act with agency and identities outside the men around them.

After viewing each film and checking each data entry twice after the initial viewing, the relationships between each of the films and the three focuses of research have been recorded in the attached tables. The Bechdel Test and the Female Affiliation Complex have both been compiled into Table 1 since they both revolve around interactions between female characters.

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Table 2 depicts the data focused on the Smurfette Principle, naming all the major female characters and male characters with a third column depicting the number of each in a male:female ratio.

These findings illustrate that although female characters earlier in the franchise experienced fridging via disempowerment through narrative depowerment, the MCU progressively evolved out of the narrative trope. Starting from *Avengers: Endgame* and with further development in both *Black Widow* and *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever*, superheroines of the MCU have been developed as fleshed out characters independent of the men around them. The increasing de-fridging of these female characters suggests further empowering narratives in the coming phases.

These increasingly diverse portrayals of female characters may be reflective of a higher value placed on women in the real world. The de-sexualization of women within the franchise correlates the the increasing efforts of the #MeToo Movement, and current concerns over women's bodily autonomy (Savage, 2023; Cogan, 2023). As society addresses the issues surrounding women and objectification, female characters in the MCU are progressively being depicted as having independence from the men around them and agency within the paths of their own narratives, performing femininity outside of hypersexualised stereotypes.

These progressive developments of portrayals of women within the MCU may not only reflect society, but can also serve as gateways for discussing issues of sexism, racism, and intersectionality. As more female characters are brought onto the screen and more women are brought onto projects, the mainstream film franchise is progressively bringing forth conversations on women and the issues they face (Scott, 2016; Ahmad, 2022; Power, 2022). By

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providing a visible manifestation on how those issues are targeted on screen, female consumers in real life can be empowered to address these issues in broader society.

Superheroes and Society

As described in Dr. Chambliss' article, "Superhero Comics: Artifacts of the U.S. Experience" (2012), writers within the superhero genre have a complex duty to ensure that their works not only resonate with the current culture, but also keep the characters somewhat consistent throughout their existence, which more often than not precedes the writer's work with those characters. For example, Marvel's hero Iron Man was created in 1963 by Stan Lee in part to explore the American stance on the Cold War, before evolving into an examination on warfare itself, and the relationship between man, technology, and war.

DC hero Superman, considered to be the first superhero, was created by two second generation Jewish immigrants in the 1930s (Chambliss, 2012). Superman portrayed ideals of justice, morality, masculinity, identity, and strength. One of the creators had lost his father at a young age in a robbery and the other used bodybuilding to compensate for his shy personality and near-sightedness (Chambliss, 2012). Superman had kicked off the superhero genre when he first appeared during the era of the Great Depression (Wright, 2001). He acted as a defender of the oppressed who acted to help those in need. Several of Superman's earlier issues depict him as going after those instigating war or taking advantage of people in poverty, which spoke to the feelings of fear and vulnerability experienced by those plunged into poverty during the depression (Wright, 2001). These heroes are just a few examples of how the superhero can be used to critically analyze the American sociocultural climate (Wright, 2001; Chambliss, 2012).

Superman's cousin, Supergirl, was released in the late 1950s and similarly reflected societal views in the wake of war, with the focus shifting from economics and war to the roles of

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women (Frankel, 2017). Supergirl possessed the same abilities and strength as Superman, yet Superman orders that she remain a quiet and non-disruptive girl. This reflects the experiences of women after World War II (Frankel, 2017). During wartime 1940s, women took over jobs men left open, and in doing so many women found themselves capable of doing the same work as men. Once the war ended women were immediately sent back into the roles of housewife and mother at the war's end (Madrid, 2009; Frankel, 2017). Supergirl illustrated the struggle women experienced of becoming aware of their strength only to be denied by patriarchal forces demanding they act lesser (David, 1999; Madrid, 2009; Frankel, 2017). This led to an ongoing tension within women, which would later be explored by feminists such as Betty Friedan.

When media reflects the diverse experiences of people, that recognition can then reaffirm the individuals who occupy a marginalized space otherwise in society. Diverse representation also may catalyze important discussions about injustice and inequality.

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Limitations

For the timeframe of this study, there was a limited amount of content I could do an in-depth analysis of. The six films chosen were intended to show a shift in narrative over the course of the MCU's existence. Since I focused primarily on the Avengers films and only two solo films in Phase IV, I was not able to discuss a few points that may have provided further insight. There are four more team-centered movie narratives revolving around *The Guardians of the Galaxy*, *Ant-Man and the Wasp*, and the *Eternals*. I opted to exclude these films due not only to the limitations of time, but also because the Avengers team has been the long-term face of the MCU.

In addition to the remaining nineteen movie titles beginning with a male hero's name, there was one last film that began with a superheroine's name: *Captain Marvel*. It is significant within the Marvel timeline as it is the first time a female superheroine's name is in the title. I did not include this film in this analysis because it occurs during Phase III, whereby I had already picked the two Avengers movies in this phase, *Avengers: Infinity War* and *Avengers: Endgame*. Since it occurred during a phase where not only did the Avengers team still exist, there were two Avengers films in this phase alone. Additionally, *Captain Marvel (2019)* is a period piece that serves as a background to a new character who had not priorly existed in the franchise outside of a brief image of her symbol at the end-of-credits scene of *Avengers: Infinity War*. Although this is the first MCU film where a female character is the sole main focus, her origin story does not play a significant enough role yet in the franchise outside of providing the audience with an understanding of who she is.

Several of these other MCU movies presented a prominent female character, but they did not play significant enough of a role for them to be chosen over the six films I studied. Also omitted were the two television specials and nine television series, of which three began with a

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male hero's name, three began with a female heroine's name, and two were ungendered. I argue here that the show titled *Loki* is ungendered due to one of the major characters being a female variant of Loki, albeit she goes by another name in the show. The other show that was ungendered in its title, *Marvel's What If...*, depicted well known MCU characters in different roles. Among these was Captain Carter, an alternate reality where Peggy Carter takes on a Captain America adjacent role in place of Steve Rogers. This episode was too far detached from the other films on my film list, but is still significant in its depiction of Peggy Carter as being more muscular and physically more powerful than the men around her.

While I was able to develop a quality content analysis of the shift in the portrayal of women in the MCU over time, there was a significant increase in the existence of female superheroes in the latest phase of the franchise and many of these characters existed in the films and movies outside of the chosen focus material. This occurs most prominently in Phase IV, and while I chose films that most strongly reflect this increase in a feminine presence, the shows, most especially *WandaVision*, *Miss Marvel*, and *She-Hulk* are also feminine-focused narratives that focus on women and their intersecting identities within the American context. Thus there is even more to explore regarding women in the MCU. For the sake of proper analysis in this study, however, it would not have been realistic to study these shows in addition to the films. Additionally, since all these shows only occur in Phase IV and quite a few of them are introducing new characters or illustrating alternative narratives outside of what we saw in the MCU, they may be better for a longer term study of further developments of female representation in the franchise.

The most significant point of contention regarding my methodology would be how I interpreted different conversations, and how I interpreted their nature as being positive, negative,

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or neutral. The nature of the conversations is inherently biased by my own interactions with other women and feminine identifying people. One such example is when a female character uses the word “bitch” in regard to another female character. Whereas there are misogynistic tones if a man uses the word to refer to a woman, the impact is not necessarily the same when it is used between two feminine people. This is because the term “bitch” would then be being shared within an in-group, rather than by an out-group who has historically exerted more power and oppression over the in-group. Thus, certain terms and quips between two female characters is not necessarily as negative as it would be if one of the conversation participants was a man.

Although this is the ideology I use to justify my interpretations, another researcher, especially if they are part of the out-group, may interpret the nature of these conversations differently.

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Future Research

The Future of the MCU

Phase V of the MCU is being set up, as illustrated in the standard Marvel after-credit hints in the films and shows of Phase IV. In addition to these hints are the growing prominence of the MCU shows and movies tying into one another, and as such the increase in female heroines can be expected to play into the incoming phases. With these new superheroines, it will be interesting to study the quality of female representation in the MCU, rather than just quantity. It could also be interesting to see whether these superheroines play significant roles in films, or if they are limited to their own shows.

Enter the X-Men

Though they are being heavily implied to come into play in the incoming MCU phases, the X-Men stand out when it comes to discussions of diversity. Since the series is representative of how destructive and unfair bigotry against marginal groups is, X-Men and its many spin-offs are suitable mediums for analyzing and discussing diversity in heroes, from physical disabilities, to issues of mental health, to gender and sexual identities, and to racial diversity. Storm is one of the most prominent members of the X-Men series, and her intersecting identities as both a person of color and a woman make the fact that she was at several points a leader of the titular team in the 20th century all the more significant. Mystique's shapeshifting abilities and intimate relationships with both men and women make her another interesting subject of further study. Professor Xavier's requirement of a wheelchair does nothing to detract from the respect he is paid by other characters, nor does it gain more focus than his superhuman abilities.

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Looking Outside the MCU

Marvel is not the only company lifting superheroes off the pages and onto the screen. DC has been the longtime rival of Marvel long before they approached the television and movie screens. While there is not a single cohesive storyline connecting the DC films and shows, their various narratives still hold significant value in analyzing how the female body is treated, especially when it comes to their villainesses and more morally grey female heroes. Harley Quinn makes for an especially fascinating example of how a female character can come to represent the complete opposite of her original role. From the abused henchman and infatuated lover of the Joker, to an antihero in her own right, often in a romantic relationship with a more deeply developed villainess Poison Ivy, Harley Quinn can be explored from a variety of fascinating standpoints.

It is important to note that the superhero trope exists outside of Marvel and DC. Series like *The Boys*, *Invincible*, *Hellboy*, and *The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* are all series that manage to survive and thrive on the field even with the supergiants Marvel and DC. Dark Horse comics have consisted of more diversity in their portrayal of female characters, both in terms of storyline, appearance, and narrative relevance (Robbins, 1996).

Diversity and Representation

Superheroes make for an interesting field of analysis when it comes to diversity in gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and disability status. As discussed earlier, fridging does not stop at the death of a female character. From Wonder Woman's depowering to the sexual assault and pregnancy of Carol Danvers as Ms. Marvel, there is much that could be explored in regard to what happened to these characters. How the characters responded to these traumas, whether they spiraled or were able to heal, can provide further insight into how much progression has

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occurred. Jessica Jones, a Marvel character that has only been explored in a show titled with her name, is a female character dealing with the aftermath of immense trauma. The show explores healing, mental health, poor coping mechanisms, and other facets of a woman recovering from trauma and poor mental health.

Stepping away from gender and looking deeper into diversity and representation allows us to look more in-depth at Hawkeye, one of the original MCU Avengers in 2012. One of the most significant traits of this hero was the fact that comics typically depicted him as being deaf to a certain degree, a disability that the MCU chose to omit until his own miniseries in 2021. Another character, albeit much newer, is the Spiderman variant, Sun-Spider. She is a young woman dealing with Ehlers Danlos Syndrome (EDS), and thus must use either crutches or a wheelchair even when acting in her superheroine persona. DareDevil is blind, Professor X is paralyzed from the waist-down, and many other Marvel characters have physical disabilities. Representation of these disabilities outside of the comic book format, not only for ensuring the inclusion

Wanda and Pietro are usually written as the children of Erik Lensherr, also known as Magneto. Magneto is a Jewish survivor of the Holocaust, and thus his children are also Jewish. Wanda was also raised in Romani community (originally referred to in the comics as the derogatory term g****), and thus she possesses three separate vulnerable identities. She is a woman, ethnically and at times religiously Jewish, and culturally Romani. Exploring the intersecting identities of female characters with vulnerable identities could provide further insight into survivor trauma and moral ambiguity, in addition to maintaining representation of historically oppressed communities.

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Another facet of diversity is the presence of LGBTQ+ identities within the superhero genre. Depending on the author and comic series, the trickster god Loki is frequently considered to be a genderfluid character, shifting between a masculine and feminine physical appearance and gender identity (Broadway, 2021).

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Conclusion: As a Basis for Moving Forward

The current research study on the portrayal and treatment of female characters in the MCU provides groundwork for further studies in the value of quality representation of diverse identities in the superhero genre. By expanding the definition of who can be a superhero beyond even women, the MCU has the power to represent minority groups and people with more vulnerable identities, thus shifting the reality they generally portray. As the portrayals of women, people of color, and anyone with intersecting vulnerable identities increase in popular culture, discussions of equality and diversity will occur in daily life more organically.

When people of color and members of the LGBTQ+ community are depicted as heroes instead of villains as they have been almost exclusively relegated to in the past, it forms a sense of inclusion and the value of inclusion as opposed to the more common othering that reverberates the notion that not all people deserve the same level of respect and dignity. . When MCU presents women and female-presenting people as heroines instead of helpless damsels and sexual villainesses, it promotes the concept and value of agency and independence.

Rampant fandom participation illustrates the deep connections real world people can form with fictional characters and narratives. Through the superhero genre and fans, marginalized groups can build a space where they feel safe and empowered, and where they can both openly express their identities and build empowering social networks. From cosplay and fanfiction, from online forums to in-person conventions, the superhero genre can help create a setting that encourages collaboration and support within and across various social groups.

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Table 1: The Bechdel Test and Female Affiliation Complex

	Named Major Female Characters	# of Conversations Between Women	# of Conversations About Men (A)	# of Conversations About Anything Except Men (B)	Bechdel Test	Nature of Conversations
Marvel's The Avengers (2012) <i>2h25m</i>	Hill Black Widow Pepper	0	N/A	N/A	Fail	N/A
Avengers: Age of Ultron (2015) <i>2h24m</i>	Wanda (W) Black Widow (BW) Hill Dr. Cho (C) Laura Barton (L) **Friday	3 _____ BW-C: 16:58-17:11 BW-L: 1:01:35-1:01:43 W-C: 1:17:26-1:17:35	3 _____ BW-C BW-L W-C	0 _____ N/A	Fail	BW-C: =, <i>no pcd</i> BW-L: +, <i>no pcd</i> W-C: =, <i>pcd</i>
Avengers: Infinity War (2018) <i>2h34m</i>	Proxima Midnight (PM) Pepper **Friday Gamora (G) Mantis Wanda (W) Black Widow (BW) Okoye Nebula (N) Shuri (S) Hill	6 _____ BW-PM (1): 41:23-41:29 BW-W: 42:01-42:12 G-N: 1:09:23-1:09:37 W-S: 1:33:01-1:33:11 BW-PM (2): 1:38:05-1:38:13 BW-PM (3): 1:55:49-1:55:54	6 _____ BW-PM (1) BW-W G-N W-S BW-PM (2) BW-PM (3)	0 _____ N/A	Fail	BW-PM (1): -, <i>no pcd</i> BW-W: =, <i>no pcd</i> G-N: +, <i>pcd</i> W-S: =, <i>pcd</i> BW-PM (2): -, <i>no pcd</i> BW-PM (3): +, <i>no pcd</i>
Avengers: Endgame (2019) <i>3h5m</i>	Lilah Barton Laura Barton Nebula (N) Cpt. Marvel (CM) Black Widow Pepper (P) Okoye Cassie Lang Morgan Stark **Friday (F) Valkyrie The Ancient One Jane Frigga	9 _____ G-2014N (1): 1:13:58-1:14:14 G-2014N (2): 1:14:19-1:14:30 G-2014N (3): 1:15:35-1:15:41 N-2014N (1): 1:46:44-1:46:46 N-2014N (2): 1:47:04-1:47:46 G-N (1): 2:06:05-2:06:40	8 _____ G-2014N (1) G-2014N (2) G-2014N (3) N-2014N (2) G-N (1) G-N-2014N G-N (2) P-Friday	1 _____ N-2014N (1)	Pass	G-2014N (1): -, <i>pcd</i> G-2014N (2): =, <i>pcd</i> G-2014N (3): +, <i>pcd</i> N-2014N (1): -, <i>pcd</i> N-2014N (2): -, <i>pcd</i> G-N (1): +, <i>pcd</i> G-N-2014N: +, <i>pcd</i> G-N (2): =, <i>no pcd</i> P-Friday: =, <i>pcd</i>

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	2014 Nebula (2014N) Gamora (G) Peggy Carter Proxima Midnight Shuri Mantis Wanda Wasp Aunt May Janet Van Dyne Hill Queen Ramonda	G-N-2014N: 2:10:52-2:11:37 G-N (2): 2:20:55-2:20:59 P-F: 2:33:16-2:33:19				
Black Widow (2021) 2h13m	Young Natasha (YN) Young Yelena (YY) Melina (M) Black Widow/Natasha (N) Yelena (Y) Oksana (O) Taskmaster/Antonia (A) Valentina (V)	54 YN-YY: 1:37-1:49 YN-M (1): 2:08-2:33 YY-M (1): 2:35-3:04 YY-M (2): 3:06-3:13 YY-M (3): 5:40-5:48 YN-M (2): 7:14-7:15 YN-M (3): 7:22-7:25 YN-M (4): 8:32-8:35 YN-M (5): 10:56-11:03 Y-O: 20:26-20:36 N-Y (1): 31:02-31:46 N-Y (2): 33:26-33:35 N-Y (3): 33:38-35:56 N-Y (4): 36:55-36:59 N-Y (5): 38:51-38:56 N-Y (6): 39:11-39:20 N-Y (7): 40:02-40:05 N-Y (8): 40:09-40:11 N-Y (9): 40:45-40:51 N-Y (10): 41:32-41:35	19 YN-M (3) N-Y (3) N-Y (7) N-Y (12) N-Y (13) N-Y (14) N-Y (17) N-Y (18) N-Y (22) N-Y (23) N-M (3) N-M (4) N-M (5) N-M (6) N-M (7) N-M (8) N-Y (24) N-A Y-V	35 YN-YY YN-M (1) YY-M (1) YY-M (2) YY-M (3) YN-M (2) YN-M (4) YN-M (5) Y-O N-Y (1) N-Y (2) N-Y (4) N-Y (5) N-Y (6) N-Y (8) N-Y (9) N-Y (10) N-Y (11) N-Y (15) N-Y (16) N-Y (19) N-Y (20) N-Y (21) N-M (1) N-M (2) Y-M (1) Y-M (2) Y-M (3) Y-M (4)	Pass	YN-YY: +, <i>pcd</i> YN-M (1): +, <i>pcd</i> YY-M (1): =, <i>no pcd</i> YY-M (2): =, <i>no pcd</i> YY-M (3): =, <i>pcd</i> YN-M (2): =, <i>no pcd</i> YN-M (3): =, <i>no pcd</i> YN-M (4): +, <i>no pcd</i> YN-M (5): +, <i>pcd</i> Y-O: +, <i>pcd</i> N-Y (1): -, <i>pcd</i> N-Y (2): =, <i>no pcd</i> N-Y (3): =, <i>pcd</i> N-Y (4): +, <i>no pcd</i> N-Y (5): =, <i>pcd</i> N-Y (6): =, <i>pcd</i> N-Y (7): =, <i>no pcd</i> N-Y (8): =, <i>no pcd</i> N-Y (9): -, <i>no pcd</i> N-Y (10): =, <i>no pcd</i> N-Y (11): =, <i>pcd</i> N-Y (12): =, <i>no pcd</i> N-Y (13): =, <i>pcd</i> N-Y (14): =, <i>pcd</i> N-Y (15): -, <i>pcd</i> N-Y (16): -, <i>no pcd</i> N-Y (17): =, <i>pcd</i> N-Y (18): +, <i>pcd</i> N-Y (19): +, <i>pcd</i> N-Y (20): =, <i>no pcd</i> N-Y (21): =, <i>no pcd</i> N-Y (22): +, <i>no pcd</i> N-Y (23): =, <i>no pcd</i> N-M (1): -, <i>no pcd</i> N-M (2): -, <i>pcd</i> Y-M (1): =, <i>pcd</i> N-M (3): =, <i>pcd</i> N-M (4): =, <i>no pcd</i> N-M (5): =, <i>pcd</i> N-M (6): +, <i>pcd</i> Y-M (2) =, <i>no pcd</i> N-M (7): =, <i>pcd</i>

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		<p>N-Y (11): 42:07-42:14 N-Y (12): 43:07-43:24 N-Y (13): 43:25-43:37 (-43:53-44:17) (-44:23-44:31) N-Y (14): 44:52-45:24 N-Y (15): 45:26-45:56 N-Y (16): 45:58-46:51 N-Y (17): 47:09-48:32 N-Y (18): 48:43-50:52 N-Y (19): 51:00-51:54 N-Y (20): 52:37-52:45 N-Y (21): 58:52-58:59 N-Y (22): 1:04:36-1:04:41 N-Y (23): 1:05:39-1:05:43 N-M (1): 1:10:00-1:10:04 N-M (2): 1:10:28-1:10:42 Y-M (1): 1:12:45-1:12:50 N-M (3): 1:13:14-1:13:25 N-M (4): 1:13:49-1:13:53 N-M (5): 1:14:54-1:15:11 N-M (6): 1:18:19-1:21:31 Y-M (2): 1:32:28-1:32:32 N-M (7): 1:32:56-1:33:19 Y-M (3): 1:33:21-1:33:32 Y-M (4): 1:41:23-1:41:33 N-M (8): 1:43:08-1:43:39 Y-M (5): 1:44:41-1:44:52 N-Y (24)</p>		<p>Y-M (5) N-Y (25) N-Y (26) N-M (9) N-Y (27) N-M (10)</p>		<p>Y-M (3): =, <i>pcd</i> Y-M (4): =, <i>pcd</i> N-M (8): =, <i>pcd</i> Y-M (5): =, <i>no pcd</i> N-Y (24): =, <i>pcd</i> N-Y (25): +, <i>pcd</i> N-A: +, <i>pcd</i> N-Y (26): +, <i>pcd</i> N-M (9): =, <i>no pcd</i> N-Y (27): +, <i>pcd</i> N-M (10): +, <i>no pcd</i> Y-V: -, <i>no pcd</i></p>
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TREATMENT OF WOMEN IN THE MCU

		<p>1:48:39-1:48:43 N-Y (25): 1:53:41-1:53:55 N-A: 1:56:54-1:57:08 N-Y (26): 1:57:38-1:58:25 N-M (9) 1:58:40-1:58:43 N-Y (27): 1:59:34-1:59:46 N-M (10): 2:00:32-2:00:38 Y-V: 2:12:43-2:13:29</p>				
<p>Black Panther: Wakanda Forever (2022) 2h43m</p>	<p>Shuri (S) Queen Ramonda (QR) Okoye (O) Ayo (Ayo) Aneka (A) Namora Riri (R) Valentina (V) Nakia (N)</p>	<p>58 <hr/> O-A (1): 9:55-10:19 S-QR (1): 20:38-20:56 S-QR (2): 20:58-23:13 S-QR (3): 23:34-26:29 S-QR (4): 27:04-27:06 S-O (1): 31:38-31:44 S-O-QR (1): 31:45-32:25 S-O-QR (2): 32:28-33:12 S-O-QR (3): 36:00-36:21 S-O (2): 36:23-36:52 S-R (1): 37:05-37:20 S-R (2): 37:23-38:39 S-O (3): 38:42-38:47 S-O-R (1): 38:48-39:53 O-R (1): 40:01-40:11 S-O-R (2): 40:14-40:45 S-R (3): 40:46-40:49 S-R (4): 40:52-40:55 S-O-R (3):</p>	<p>22 <hr/> S-QR (1) S-QR (2) S-QR (3) S-QR (4) S-O-QR (2) S-O-QR (3) S-O-R (1) O-R (1) S-R (4) S-O-R (3) QR-N (2) S-R (6) QR-N (3) S-R (9) O-N (2) S-A (3) S-R (10) S-R (11) S-R (12) S-R (13) S-N (3) S-N (4)</p>	<p>36 <hr/> O-A (1) S-O (1) S-O-QR (1) S-O (2) S-R (1) S-R (2) S-O (3) S-O-R (2) S-R (3) O-R (2) S-O-R (4) S-O (4) S-R (5) QR-O QR-N (1) S-R (7) S-R (8) S-R-N (1) S-QR (5) QR-N (4) S-A (1) QR-R-Ayo O-N (1) S-QR (6) S-A (2) QR-Ayo QR-R (1)</p>	<p>Pass</p>	<p>O-A (1): =, <i>pcd</i> S-QR (1): =, <i>no pcd</i> S-QR (2): =, <i>pcd</i> S-QR (3): +, <i>pcd</i> S-QR (4): =, <i>no pcd</i> S-O (1): -, <i>no pcd</i> S-O-QR (1): =, <i>no pcd</i> S-O-QR (2): +, <i>pcd</i> S-O-QR (3): =, <i>pcd</i> S-O (2): =, <i>pcd</i> S-R (1): =, <i>no pcd</i> S-R (2): +, <i>pcd</i> S-O (3): =, <i>no pcd</i> S-O-R (1): =, <i>pcd</i> O-R (1): =, <i>pcd</i> S-O-R (2): =, <i>pcd</i> S-R (3): =, <i>pcd</i> S-R (4): =, <i>no pcd</i> S-O-R (3): =, <i>no pcd</i> O-R (2): -, <i>no pcd</i> S-O-R (4): =, <i>pcd</i> S-O (4): =, <i>pcd</i> S-R (5): +, <i>no pcd</i> QR-O: -, <i>pcd</i> QR-N (1): =, <i>no pcd</i> QR-N (2): =, <i>pcd</i> S-R (6): =, <i>no pcd</i> S-R (7): +, <i>no pcd</i> S-R (8): +, <i>no pcd</i> QR-N (3): =, <i>pcd</i> S-R (9): =, <i>no pcd</i> S-R-N (1): =, <i>pcd</i> S-QR (5): +, <i>no pcd</i> QR-N (4): +, <i>no pcd</i> S-A (1): +, <i>pcd</i> QR-R-Ayo: +, <i>no pcd</i> O-N (1): +, <i>no pcd</i> O-N (2): =, <i>pcd</i> S-QR (6): +, <i>no pcd</i></p>

TREATMENT OF WOMEN IN THE MCU

		<p>41:20-42:41 O-R (2): 42:46-42:51 S-O-R (4): 42:52-43:03 S-O (4): 44:53-44:56 S-R (5): 46:11-46:30 QR-O: 53:39-54:19 QR-N (1): 58:54-59:20 (-59:03-59:14) QR-N (2): 59:21-1:00:57 S-R (6): 1:01:00-1:01:28 S-R (7): 1:01:42-1:02:02 S-R (8): 1:02:11-1:02:20 QR-N (3): 1:16:05-1:16:25 S-R (9): 1:23:17-1:23:33 S-R-N (1): 1:24:18-1:24:32 S-QR (5): 1:25:16-1:35:20 QR-N (4): 1:25:21-1:25:24 S-A (1): 1:28:36-1:29:11 QR-R-Ayo: 1:29:30-1:29:49 O-N (1): 1:30:14-1:30:18 O-N (2): 1:30:21-1:31:17 S-QR (6): 1:31:55-1:32:06 S-A (2): 1:32:09-1:32:13 QR-Ayo: 1:33:12-1:33:15 QR-R (1): 1:34:01-1:34:03 S-A (3): 1:36:26-1:36:28 S-A (4): 1:36:54-1:36:58 O-N (3): 1:37:15-1:37:17 QR-R (2):</p>		<p>S-A (4) O-N (3) QR-R (2) S-O (5) O-A (2) S-N (1) S-R-N (2) S-R-N (3) S-N (2)</p>		<p>S-A (2): =, <i>no pcd</i> QR-Ayo: =, <i>no pcd</i> QR-R (1): +, <i>no pcd</i> S-A (3): =, <i>no pcd</i> S-A (4): +, <i>no pcd</i> O-N (3): =, <i>no pcd</i> QR-R (2): +, <i>no pcd</i> S-R (10): +, <i>pcd</i> S-R (11): =, <i>pcd</i> S-R (12): +, <i>pcd</i> S-O (5): +, <i>pcd</i> O-A (2): +, <i>pcd</i> S-N (1): +, <i>no pcd</i> S-R-N (2): =, <i>no pcd</i> S-R-N (3): =, <i>no pcd</i> S-N (2): +, <i>pcd</i> S-R (13): +, <i>pcd</i> S-N (3): +, <i>pcd</i> S-N (4): +, <i>pcd</i></p>
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TREATMENT OF WOMEN IN THE MCU

		<p>1:37:30-1:37:36 S-R (10): 1:44:47-1:45:23 (-1:45:08-1:45:17) S-R (11): 1:46:47-1:48:15 (-1:47:14-1:47:51) (-1:48:05-1:48:09) S-R (12): 1:48:23-1:48:43 S-O (5): 1:48:44-1:49:30 O-A (2): 1:49:32-1:50:01 (-1:49:42-1:49:50) S-N (1): 1:50:40-1:51:46 (-1:51:26-1:51:28) S-R-N (2): 1:51:51-1:52:25 S-R-N (3): 1:56:35-1:57:32 S-N (2): 2:03:34-2:04:21 S-R (13): 2:21:24-2:22:52 (-2:22:37-2:22:40) S-N (3): 2:26:45-2:27:02 S-N (4): 2:32:18-2:32:49 (-2:32:25-2:32:32)</p>				
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pcd	Provides plot and/or character development
npcd	Does not provide plot and/or character development
+	Nature of conversation is positive and builds a relationship between the women
-	Nature of conversation is negative and is destructive to a relationship between the women
=	Conversation is neutral, and neither build nor harms a relationship between the women

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Table 2: The Smurfette Principle

	Named Major Female Characters	Named Male Characters	Men:Women Ratio
Marvel's The Avengers (2012)	Agent Hill Black Widow/Natasha Romanoff Pepper Potts	The Other Loki Agent Coulson Director Fury Dr. Selvig Hawkeye/Clint Barton Hulk/Bruce Banner Cpt America/Steve Rogers Iron Man/Tony Stark **Jarvis Thor Thanos	12:3
Avengers: Age of Ultron (2015)	Scarlet Witch/Wanda Maximoff Black Widow/Natasha Romanoff Agent Hill Dr. Cho Laura Barton **Friday	Quicksilver/Pietro Maximoff Hawkeye/Clint Barton Iron Man/Tony Stark Thor Cpt America/Steve Rogers Hulk/Bruce Banner **Jarvis Strucker Ultron Falcon/Sam Wilson War Machine/James "Rhodey" Klaue Director Fury Dr. Selvig Vision Thanos	16:6
Avengers: Infinity War (2018)	Proxima Midnight Pepper Potts **Friday Mantis Gamora Scarlet Witch/Wanda Maximoff Black Widow/Natasha Romanoff Okoye Nebula Shuri Agent Hill	Heimdall Ebony Maw Loki Thanos Thor Corvus Glaive Cull Obsidian Hulk/Bruce Banner Dr. Stephen Strange Wong Iron Man/Tony Stark Spiderman/Peter Parker Ned Starlord/Peter Quill Drax Rocket Groot Vision Cpt America/Steve Rogers Falcon/Sam Wilson War Machine/James "Rhodey"	28:11

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		Secretary Ross Black Panther/T'Challa Bucky Eitri Red Skull M'Baku Director Fury	
Avengers: Endgame (2019)	Lilah Barton Laura Barton Nebula Cpt. Marvel/Carol Danvers Black Widow/Natasha Romanoff Pepper Potts Cassie Lang Okoye Morgan Stark **Friday Valkyrie The Ancient One Jane Foster Frigga 2014 Nebula Gamora Peggy Carter Proxima Midnight Shuri Mantis Scarlet Witch/Wanda Maximoff Wasp/Hope Pym Queen Ramonda Aunt May Janet Van Dyne Agent Hill	Hawkeye/Clint Barton Nate Barton Cooper Barton Iron Man/Tony Stark Cpt. America/Steve Rogers War Machine/James "Rhodey" Hulk/Bruce Banner Rocket Thor Thanos AntMan/Scott Lang Korg Miek 2012 Loki 2014 Thanos Ebony Maw Howard Stark Hank Pym Red Skull Corvus Glaive Cull Obsidian Black Panther/T'Challa Falcon/Sam Wilson Dr. Stephen Strange Drax Starlord/Peter Quill Spiderman/Peter Parker Bucky Groot Wong M'Baku Ned Happy Harley Keener Secretary Ross Director Fury	36:26
Black Widow (2021)	Young Natasha Romanoff Young Yelena Belova Melina Black Widow/Natasha Romanoff Yelena Belova Oksana Taskmaster/Antonia Valentina Allegra de Fontaine	Alexei General Dreykov Secretary Ross Mason	4:8

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<p>Black Panther: Wakanda Forever (2022)</p>	<p>Black Panther/Shuri Queen Ramonda Okoye Ayo Aneka Namora Ironheart/Riri Williams Valentina Allegra de Fontaine Nakia</p>	<p>**Griot M'Baku Attuma Namor/K'uk'ulkan Everett Ross Killmonger/N'Jadaka Black Panther/King T'Challa Toussaint (Prince T'Challa)</p>	<p>8:9</p>
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