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S E E H E R

A H E R O

Close study of representation of three female characters in
Marvel Cinematic Universe

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Superhero films are often perceived as something that boys and men consume and are a target audience for marketing, even though girls and women are a visible part of the same audience that watches them. There are many male heroes who have their own film trilogies, solo films and cliques in the *Marvel Cinematic Universe*, but women have not been seen as their equals since the beginning of the *Marvel Cinematic Universe*.

This thesis examines the representation and potential character development of three different female characters throughout the twenty-two-film period known as the *Infinity Saga*. They are examined using the method of Female Representation Analysis, which I have developed in this thesis to study female representation, and the method is applied along with close reading. These characters are then analysed and the results are summarised in the conclusion chapter.

For those who have not seen some or perhaps all of the films used as source material in this thesis, I have written a synopsis of each film to clarify the events that influence the portrayal of these three women.

Key words: Marvel, Marvel Studios, Marvel Cinematic Universe, Infinity Saga, women representation, female representation, character representation, close study, film studies, movie studies, superhero, superhero films, superhero movies, Judith Butler, Laura Mulvey, Erving Goffman, Rosalind Gill

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1 Introduction

Strong female representation has been an increasingly hot topic in the Western film industry over the past decade. Although it is now considered to be a familiar and equal area of popular culture, there are still areas that need improvement. One of these areas is superhero films, which have evolved from science fiction and fantasy into their own genre since the beginning of the millennium. As more superhero films are released, more consideration should be given to how these characters are presented to audiences.

According to Matthew Kapell and Ace Pilkington in *The Fantastic Made Visible*, fantasy and sci-fi films are becoming the most important genres for the film industry (2015: 2). This could easily include superhero films. Superhero films are becoming even more popular than they were, say, a decade ago. This can be seen in the box office charts. In IMDB's official chart of the top lifetime grosses based on box office receipts, 35 of the top 50 (excluding 11 animated films that fit these genres) can be categorised as either fantasy, sci-fi or superhero films (BoxOffice Mojo, 2019). As can be seen from this chart, these genres are no longer a small business; these films are now groundbreaking.

Marvel is best known for its comic books. The original publishing company, now known as Marvel Comics, was founded in 1939. Its film and television production subsidiary were originally known as Marvel Films in the 1990s. It is now known as Marvel Studios. In 2008, Marvel Studios began a long series of films, each featuring a different character and their interconnected stories, creating a unified universe already familiar from the comic books. It was called the *Marvel Cinematic Universe*. Each character is adapted from the comics to the films.

This thesis will focus on three active female characters from the 23-film *Infinity Saga* of the *Marvel Cinematic Universe*; Pepper Potts from the *Iron Man* storyline, Natasha Romanoff from *The Avengers* storyline and Carol Danvers from the *Captain Marvel* storyline. The reason for examining only female characters is in the interest of their representation in this male-dominated film franchise. Although there are several male characters and they have their own solo films, by the time this thesis is completed in October 2023, there will only be three solo films for female protagonists; *Captain Marvel* which premiered in March 2019, *Black Widow* which premiered in July 2021, and *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever*, which premiered in November 2022. There are female-led projects such as the TV series *WandaVision* (2021), which focuses on the character Wanda Maximoff, or *Miss Marvel* (2022), which focuses on Kamala Khan, who is linked to Carol Danvers, but these series focus on the time after the *Infinity Saga*. They are therefore excluded from this thesis. There are many more female characters in the *Marvel Cinematic Universe* than those already mentioned, but most of them are minor characters or they are not human, which is the limitation marker of this thesis in terms of research material.

As Jill Dolan notes in *The Feminist Spectator in Action: Feminist Criticism for Stage and Screen*, what we see on screen shapes and reflects ourselves and our behaviour towards others because it reflects ourselves on screen (2013: 1–2). A character's actions, gestures and manner of speaking can be so familiar that an audience member can relate them to themselves and therefore see how their

behaviour, status and social function appear to others. Many cisgender people see themselves in a cisgender character, even when the same thing would work on a character of the opposite gender; nonbinary viewers most often have to see themselves specifically within the binary. This is one reason why female and gender minority characters are needed, although no character should be in a film just to fill a representation and therefore end up being a filler role.

This is an interesting dilemma; women are not really a minority group, but in fantasy, sci-fi and superhero genres they tend to be vastly outnumbered. One might ask: are there enough characters for everyone to relate to? If there are only a few female characters for girls and women to identify with while watching a film, what about gender minorities and will this ever change? This is why this research into changes in female character representation is so important; if a change in character development and therefore representation can be found in this film franchise, it may give hope to minority groups in the *Marvel Cinematic Universe* and beyond.

Most people like to watch films and TV series, read books and so on for escapism. The need to temporarily escape one's own reality and enter a fantasy world for a moment could also be an important reason for the growing popularity of superhero films. As escapism is a way of breaking routine and gaining strength to cope with real life, it is likely that audiences will be influenced by the story and its characters. This leads to the idea of the importance of representation. Since the audience is influenced by it, the diversity of representation must be taken seriously.

Just as a poor representation could bore, annoy or even give the audience false role models, a great representation works in the opposite direction. As the *Marvel Cinematic Universe* is a huge and still somewhat unique franchise, it can easily be argued that over the course of 24 films in the *Infinity Saga* and *Black Widow*,

the representation of the character changes in some way. Their source material, the comics, is a vast source to draw from when writing these character adaptations. As this cinematic universe expands and becomes more familiar to audiences, it is natural for the characters' portrayals to evolve; immutability of the characters would lead to a loss of audience. In the same way, the variety of characters makes the audience more attached to the films, because they are relatable and therefore enjoyable. Younger audiences, in particular, are more likely to adapt to the portrayal they see. As young viewers grow up, they tend to change along with the characters they see. Therefore, representation change is an important area for research. The aim of this thesis is to determine the extent to which character representation can change, and what are the affects that enable a possible change in character representation.

Judith Butler has explored the representation of gender in her seminal work *Gender Trouble* (2007). According to Butler, we put on a repeated performance, reflected in different gestures, movements and styles, in order to perform our supposed gender for others (2007: 191). She also points out that gender is not just one act or gesture, but rather a ritual of repeating multiple variations of it in combination (2007: xv). When an actor performs and creates a character, the actor is also repeating studied repetitions of gestures and movements to bring a character to life. But what if that repetition is to be changed? How much can the representation of the character be changed and what are the influencing factors? Female representation is much needed and desired, but stereotypical representation can do more harm than good.

This thesis aims to challenge the widespread belief, learned from the media, that to be considered a woman one must conform to certain behavioural norms. The exaggerated interpretation of feminine characteristics can be seen as damaging and implausible for the whole gender. There is no need to repeat sexual characteristics to feed toxic assumptions. If they are repeated too much, they are normalised and thus adapted to the audience. The viewers most harmed by this

are children and young adults who are still growing and adapting. Consequently, the analysis will look not only at the behaviour, actions and movements of these characters, but also at the way they are presented through their clothing, lines and habitus to see how they are represented through their supposed gender. The conclusion summarises the analysis by asking whether the assumed change in representation will make the characters appear 'less female' or whether they can be taken more seriously and believed to be real people.

The main theorist used in this thesis is the master of questioning gender representation, Judith Butler. Butler mentions how gender is performed in order to keep it 'within its binary frame' (2007: 191). It must be borne in mind that Butler discusses real people; her work was not intended to be a method of film or character analysis in any way. Nevertheless, it has become a widely used tool in art and media studies, and this thesis is no exception. Because the audience is made up of real people watching a film about fictional characters, escapism transforms real people into spectators for a few hours. This is why *Gender Trouble* can also be seen as part of the analysis of fictional characters in a film industry; actors playing their characters add gender-specific actions and habits to the character, so that gender is seen and understood through its binary norms for the audience as well.

In addition to Butler, three other theorists are included in this thesis. Their theories will be combined to create a new tool for examining modern female representation in film. When examining female characters and their representation in any film, Laura Mulvey is almost always included. This thesis is no exception, although it should be noted that her feminist film theory is rather outdated for modern films, as it was written in 1973, and society has changed rapidly since then, with different perspectives on different genders. Nevertheless, there are great elements in the theory that work today and can be used for this thesis.

Another theorist is Erving Goffman. His theory of the representation of everyday life has the same problem as Mulvey's feminist film theory in that it is somewhat outdated as society and its views on gender have changed. The core of his theory is still universally applicable to the present day, so his theory is usable. As superheroes live their normal everyday lives, while these everyday events are wilder and more eventful than most viewers hopefully experience, this theory is a good addition while creating its own modern theory.

The fourth theorist is Rosalind Gill. Her theory of post-feminism is the most recent of these four. Her theory looks at the representation of women in the media and how it is reflected and how it affects the audience and their expectations. Consequently, this fourth fresh theory will smoothly sum up the way to create my own modernised theory.

The analysis section of this dissertation analyses the characters' representations and deduces the results of the analysis. I will be using close reading as an analytical tool to examine each of the characters in more detail. No comparisons will be made in the analysis between male and female characters working side by side in the film(s), as this would only bring unwanted juxtaposition into the research. Male characters will be mentioned if they are relevant to point out details of the portrayal. The main aim of the analysis is to deduce from the behaviour, appearance and functionality of the female characters whether there are any changes in their representation, or whether there are any when comparing the selected characters.

The research itself will focus on three female characters from the *Marvel Cinematic Universe*. The reason for limiting the analysis to these three through their representation is that they have a major role in multiple films or have their

own solo film in the franchise. Although this thesis only focuses on three active female characters from the *Infinity Saga*, they can be seen as relatable to all types of audiences, despite their gender.

The first character chosen for analysis is Pepper Potts, played by Gwyneth Paltrow. Pepper has been part of the franchise since the very first film *Iron Man* (2008) until *Avengers: Endgame* (2019). She was introduced as the personal assistant to Tony Stark, a multimillionaire playboy whose superhero identity is Iron Man. Pepper started out as a damsel in distress in these films, but has since become a fighter with her own superhero costume and alias, Rescue. Although she has not had her own solo film or TV series, Pepper has appeared in seven films and is mentioned in two more. For this reason, she is an important character for this thesis, as she is the only female character to appear from the first to the last film in the franchise.

The second character chosen for analysis is Natasha Romanoff, a Russian spy who uses the alias Black Widow. Natasha has also been in the franchise almost from the beginning, making her first appearance in *Iron Man 2* (2010). She is also the first female character to be part of the Avengers team of superheroes, first seen in *The Avengers* (2012). Natasha is one of two female characters to have her own solo film, *Black Widow* (2021). However, this will be her last film as she is sacrificed in *Avengers: Endgame* (2019), sacrificing herself for the greater good. Natasha Romanoff is portrayed by Scarlett Johansson in seven films. She also has a small part in a post-credits scene in one of the films, and her voice can be heard in one of the films, but she is not seen on the screen.

The third character chosen is Carol Danvers (played by Brie Larson), also known as Vers and Captain Marvel. She has only appeared in two films so far: *Captain Marvel* (2019) is her own solo film that introduced her to audiences as she was introduced to audiences, and in *Avengers: Endgame* saw her become part of the

Avengers. She is also hinted at in the post-credits scene in *Avengers: Infinity War* (2018) and made a brief cameo in the post-credits scene of *Shang-Chi and the Legend of Ten Rings* (2021) and in the final episode of the TV series *Miss Marvel* (No Normal, 2022). *Captain Marvel* is the only solo film during the *Infinity Saga* to feature a female superhero.

The analysis in this thesis will discuss other characters and their relationship to these three chosen characters, but only to clarify the plot where necessary. They are not part of the analysis and are not part of the portrayal unless something they do or say affects the portrayal of the three characters analysed. Although the *Infinity Saga* is 23 films long, only eleven of them are examined in this thesis, and two other films are mentioned. The reason for this is that Pepper, Natasha and Carol do not appear in all of the *Infinity Saga* films, and therefore those films are not useful for studying their representation.

2 Towards the four theorists

The history of superhero cinema is longer than many would expect, although it only became popular with what could be called the 'new wave of superhero films' after the first *X-Men* in 2000. The very first superhero film, *Mandrake the Magician*, was released in 1939, and the first film based on Marvel Comics, *Captain America*, was released five years later in 1944. It wasn't until sixteen Marvel comics-based films later that Marvel Studios produced their first film featuring a female superhero, when *Elektra* was released in 2005.

The group of superhero films that this thesis will examine is called the *Marvel Cinematic Universe* (or officially *MCU* for short, which is what I will be using in this thesis). It is a new type of film franchise where all the films within the *MCU* are linked together in such a way that they form one long continuous story, or as the name suggests, its own universe. The *MCU* has expanded from films to also TV series. They are partly connected to the film plots, some more than others. However, all the TV series are set in the same universe and on the same timeline. So far, 33 films have been released in the *MCU* until the end of 2023, starting with *Iron Man* in 2008. In the same timeline of TV series, there are five shows with female leads; *Agent Carter* (2015–2016), *Jessica Jones* (2015–2019), *WandaVision* (2021), *Ms Marvel* (2022) and *She-Hulk: Attorney at Law* (2023).

The CEO of Marvel Studios Kevin Feige has titled the first 23 films a large group of films called the *Infinity Saga*, as these films follow the plot around the Infinity Stones, and concluded in 2019 with the *MCU's* 22nd film, *Avengers: Endgame*. From the 24th film, a so-called new era in the story will begin. (Drum, 2019). It is now officially called *The Multiverse Saga* (Marvel, 2022).

This thesis will focus on the films released during the *Infinity Saga* and including *Black Widow*. However, not all 23 films of the *Infinity Saga* will be used in the thesis, and one film of *The Multiverse Saga* will be included. The exact list of films used in the analysis will be examined in Chapter 3. All films used in the thesis has their synopsis written in the Appendix.

This chapter will focus on theoretical texts that support the analysis of female representation. The chapter begins with an overview of escapism and fan culture, and then introduces four theories: Judith Butler's gender performativity, Laura Mulvey's feminist film analysis, Erving Goffman's representation in everyday life, and Rosalind Gill's postfeminism in modern media. The methodological use of these theories is discussed in Chapter 3.

2.1 Of Fans, Escapism and 'Produsing'

When examining films and the portrayal of their characters, it is important to include the perspective of fans. Films are produced for audiences, and they are the ones who adapt to what they see. Fantasy and sci-fi are genres that have moulded the superhero genre (or sometimes called the comic book adaptation genre) into a distinct and independent genre.

These genres are all tools for audiences to focus on escapism. Jill Dolan suggests that what we see on screen shapes and reflects us and our behaviour towards others, because we tend to reflect ourselves to the characters in theatre and on screen, or sometimes even persuades us to see some group of people as invisible if they are not represented (2013: 1 –2). This is why it is important to have different characters with different qualities so that everyone feels they have a character they can identify with. For this reason, in a fictional film, feelings and identity would be considered more important than gender, colour or age, because identity can be reflected beyond these things. Otherwise, it would be difficult to identify anything, if, for example, all we see is for example a green alien or a speaking dog. All of the above-mentioned characteristics tied to identity appear in the visual and verbal description built for the character in a film.

But it is not that simple how presentation in film industry works. For example, gender-related imbalance in the superhero film genre is paid attention by Philip Dodd and Pam Cook in *Women and Film*:

Women are still marginalized both intellectually and creatively. Their work is given token value rather than the proper recognition accorded male intellectuals and artists. -- More women working in film and television than ever, a considerable female presence in and outside Hollywood -- The Image of woman in a mainstream cinema did not represent woman at all, but was simply a vehicle for a man's anxiety about his own extinction (1993: xi –xviii).

In Dodd and Cook's idea of female presence in Hollywood, all genders are one-dimensional male characters who dominate everyone. Offering people, a

narrow view of diversity could create an audience that accepts the lack of diversity. This is an important reason to offer more leading or co-leading roles for women. If women are always seen in roles supporting the male characters, there is nothing for independent women to lean on. The situation is even worse for gender minorities, whose existence is almost completely ignored in fantasy and sci-fi films. It is therefore important to offer a wide range of personalities and life events so that all genders, not just men and women, have someone to relate to. The importance of gender diversity in films should also be extended to people of colour, people with disabilities and different age groups. This thesis focuses on gender, so there will be no particular examination, but just a nod to these minority groups.

According to the statistics from Women and Hollywood in 2018, only 9% of the top 100 grossing movies that year were gender balanced in their casting. 33.1% of the top 100 grossing films had a female character who had a speaking role or name in the film, and 39 films had female solo lead or co-lead roles. Only eleven of these female characters in a solo lead or co-lead role were people of colour (Women and Hollywood, 2018). There was a slight increase in statistics a year after, which could be due to the social movement known as MeToo. In 2019, the statistics show that there were 43 films with female lead or co-lead roles, so there was an increase of four roles in one year. 16 of them were people of colour (Women and Hollywood, 2019).

The same website also conducted a ten-year survey of sci-fi and superhero films from 2009 to 2018. 14% of the films examined in this period had a female solo lead, while the number of male solo leads was 55%. There were changes in the figures when they looked at five-year periods. From 2009 to 2013, only 36% were female solo leads or co-leads, and from 2013 to 2018, the same sample increased to 53%. (Women and Hollywood, 2018). The increase in numbers shows that there is a demand among audiences for films with female solo leads or co-leads. This puts pressure on film producers to create more

diverse films. The rise of these statistics in the top 100 films shows this. The statistics also apply to the *MCU* franchise. Although 24 of 33 of these films are categorized solo superhero films by their title, only three have a female superhero as a solo lead character. Out of a total of 33 films, 10 have a female co-lead based how they are titled in IMDB on its list of *Marvel Cinematic Universe* films (2023).

When discussing the *Marvel Cinematic Universe*, it has to be considered how big a fan base this film franchise has. While in the early days of superhero movies, the fanbase was largely made up of comic book fans who were looking for these adaptations, a lot has changed over the past ten years. Not everyone who follows the franchise is interested in reading comic books, or their interest in comic books comes after seeing the films. On her article *Are We All Producers Now? Convergence and media audience practices*, S. Elisabeth Bird has studied the changes of fan culture. With the spread of Web 2.0, fans have become more active on the web and social media. Their activity has been to create fan-to-fan material, and sharing this content has become easier as technology has developed rapidly. Fans take the original source and create their own alternative storylines, video essays, music videos, fanfictions and fanart. The number of so-called 'producers' [producing users] has increased greatly during Web 2.0. (Bird, 2011: 503–507).

Production companies have acknowledged this potential of active fans and producers. Companies have power over fans, or as Bird clarifies, 'media producers have the power to inscribe the privileged representations of the world that constrain actual audience practices, and can even shape those practices' (2011: 508). Thus, according to Bird, media companies have the potential to exploit their fans and producers of their material by establishing ownership through limitations on user-generated material to the company's property through the terms of use on their websites. In the worst case, this will

limit rather than help the potential creativity of fans and producers. (2011: 505–508; 510; 512).

Marvel Cinematic Universe fans are no exception when it comes to activity. There are countless fan-based groups on Facebook and Instagram focused solely on the *MCU*, and fans have also created their own Marvel Wikipedia sites, one for comics and one focused on the *MCU*. Marvel Studios has its own website and channels on social media platforms where they share trailers, news and merchandise promotions for fans. Their social media channels in particular are very active, with fans jumping into the comments section as soon as a new post is released. Sometimes Marvel Studios highlights some posts, but mostly they let the conversation happen on its own.

Marvel Studios is also known for teasing its fans, sometimes posting things that hint at some upcoming events in the *MCU* storyline, and many of its trailers feature fake or altered sets from a film. It is a non-verbal game between the studio and the fans as they release new material and the audience tries to guess what is real and what is going to happen. The *Marvel Cinematic Universe* is also famous for its Easter eggs in films and post-credits scenes. They tend to tease the future in films in a subtle way with Easter eggs, which can be something in the background, a line in a conversation, or sometimes just a nod to other pop culture things. Post-credits scenes hint at the next films, revealing big upcoming themes in the storyline. These are highly anticipated by fans, as most post-screen scenes are the biggest spoilers for the upcoming films. Sometimes this anticipation is played for laughs, as Marvel Studios may just be playing a joke.

When we talk about audiences consuming fantasy, sci-fi and superhero genres, it is important to remember that these are strongly associated with escapism. The alternate reality that most of it serves, whether it is high fantasy

or low fantasy, is always associated with imagination and escapism. Nevertheless, most of the audience will link these alternative realities to our real world, either consciously or unconsciously. The survey I conducted for my dissertation in undergraduate studies looked in part at the importance of escapism to audiences. The survey was created by SurveyMonkey and was open from October 2016 to February 2017. The first question in the survey was 'Do you think people need escapism and why?' Most of the answers to this question said that escapism is needed because viewers need a place where they can forget the reality in which they live. Alternative reality gives them other problems to think about without the problems of real life. It also helps with stress, as watching unreal characters and their problems helps viewers to relax and cope with their own lives. Many respondents also said that escapism feeds their own imagination, which is helpful for example in solving problems or creating something new. (Laajalahti, 2017: Appx, Q1).

This is supported by Beth Webb when she writes in her article *The real purpose of fantasy* that fantasy is vital for the human mind as children use fantasy and escapism to learn and perceive their environment while adults need it as a coping mechanism (2007). Many respondents needed escapism to take a break from reality, to heal, to allow their minds to rest and wander, and then to return to reality feeling stronger. They also wanted escapism to help them solve problems while they focused on something else, letting their mind wander and do the work in the background. Viewers reflect themselves in the characters they see in these films. That is why representation is important, and questioning it helps to understand what it means and how it should develop. Especially with children, who learn and perceive through it, it is crucial to provide good role models and representation to help them understand the importance of diversity over one-sided character selection.

2.2 Judith Butler's theory of performative gender

In most cases, the study of female representation will inevitably include American philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler's theory of performative gender. She presented her theory in 1990 in *Gender Trouble*, and ten years later continued the discussion in her replay in the preface to the new edition of *Gender Trouble*.

Gender Trouble has become one of the foundational works in gender studies. It changed the academic world when it was first published and has had a major impact on contemporary feminism. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler not only discusses sex and gender, as she also includes different kinds of sexuality (mostly homosexuality versus heterosexuality) in the conversation about performativity. She also considers the meaning of drag. This thesis will only focus on the performativity of gender, as gender representation is the main issue in the analysis of female superheroes.

The basis for understanding the theory is to understand the difference between sex and gender. In summary, sex is associated with anatomy and gender with sociality. According to Butler, there are three dimensions to sex and gender; in addition to sex, a person also has gender identity and gender performance (2007: 187). As a person we have our gender identity and to express this identity we perform gender. Gender is performative through acts, gestures and enactments that construct gender identity. These acts should ideally desire coherence, which is not only physically meaningful but also socially and politically acceptable. (Butler, 2007: 185). With the above mentioned in mind, Butler's idea of performative gender is an appropriate tool for analysing the female character in this thesis. People manage to copy the actions, gestures and performances of others, and by this could conform to

socially acceptable gender norms, thereby promoting them for future generations.

The diversity of representation comes back to this performativity of gender. If an audience repeatedly sees only narrow ways to perform their gender, it is harmful. It only instructs them to stay within this narrow frame of so-called acceptable gender. Butler points out that performativity has to be repeated for it to become a gender, and it has to be acted out in public and socially established (2007: 191). Young children do not know what is right and wrong in their behaviour as it is taught to them by adults. On this basis, it is possible that people are born genderless and society shapes the acceptable gender by repeating it to younger children. This can be linked back to escapism. As Beth Webb points out, children use fantasy and escapism to learn and perceive the environment (2007). Based on this, it could be argued that they also tend to do so in relation to gender. Through play and media consumption, they could adapt these gender-related behaviour to their everyday lives and to build their identities by them. In this way, children are vulnerable to poor representation and learn to cope with these roles and pass them on to their own children in the future.

In the same way that children build their identities, character development happens in the film industry. Characters do not just exist; they are actively created. Therefore, those who create characters (producers, scriptwriters, writers and directors) have a major responsibility to provide audiences with a diverse range of characters. Diversity in the choice of characters, and therefore in their representation, is not just for younger audiences. Since adults consume the same media texts as younger people, they should also be considered in the development of diversity. As adults transmit these character representations to younger audiences, diversity plays a crucial role, not only in films but in all media. Therefore, marginalised female characters should be developed to be equal on and off screen. As the media become more diverse,

develop and spread, media convergence could be a way to pass this on, and in media convergence, producers also play a big role by creating diversity with their own media representation.

2.3 Laura Mulvey's feminist film analysis theory

Laura Mulvey is a British feminist film theorist and professor of film and media studies. Mulvey created the feminist theory of film analysis in her article *Visual pleasure and narrative cinema*, which was originally published in 1975. She wanted this article to challenge past films and give new ideas on how to change the way audiences view female characters in films. According to Mulvey, women represent otherness for men in patriarchal culture, where the man can live out his fantasies while the woman stands behind him, silent as a carrier (1999: 59). Mulvey mentions how watching films can be pleasurable in two ways: there is the pleasure of looking, as people tend to be voyeuristic from an early age; secondly, it can be narcissistic, as viewers mirror themselves in what they see on the screen (1999: 60–61). What Mulvey refers to as narcissism can be understood as a form of escapism in which viewers, consciously or unconsciously, come to terms with the film and look for role models. Voyeurism can also be understood as part of this seeking, or as part of the coping mechanism, when they observe the manners of characters in order to solve problems. In this way, these manners can be coped with in real life and escapism works as intended.

Mulvey also speaks of the illusion of what cinema offers in real life, how 'in reality the fantasy world of the screen is subject to the law that produces it - hence the gaze, pleasurable in form, can be threatening in content, and it is the woman as representation/image that crystallises the paradox' (1999: 62). She sums up how the woman is passive material for the active male spectator.

This requires an illusion in which the representation is layered with different content and ideological meanings in order to function. This representation in cinema can be seen in three different ways: the camera that records the film, an audience that watches the film, and characters that look at each other in the film. This creates more layers of representation and is always multifaceted depending on who is watching who. (Mulvey, 1999: 68). Although the female is an object of the male gaze in Mulvey's theory, the object changes depending on who is watching and what is happening. It could be argued that the female is an object for a female, or the male is an object for both male and female.

Undoubtedly, this theory is not sufficient on its own for the analysis of this thesis, for contemporary society and its reflection on the screen, because the change of society and its values and norms from 1970s has been very rapid. Almost fifty years later since Mulvey's theory was first published, both the film industry and the representation of women have changed, not to mention the way audiences now watch media texts. Therefore, Mulvey's theory does not work as it is now, still be applied for modern film analysis. Female characters are no longer just objectified for men, as argued in the last paragraph, but can be an object or a subject for any viewer. Mulvey's theory also points out why we watch something. Usually, it is to see others in a form of a character, and sometimes it is not nice, depending on the content. Seeing something unfamiliar or unpleasant is also part of escapism, as it helps the viewer deal with similar feelings or situations in their own lives. The way in which Mulvey's theory of feminist film analysis can be modified to examine the development of the representation of female characters in the *Marvel Cinematic Universe* will be explained in more detail in the method chapter of this thesis.

2.4 Erving Goffman's theory of the presentation in everyday life

Just as Butler described gender as performative, the Canadian sociologist and author Erving Goffman has a similar idea in his theory in his 1959 published book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. According to Goffman, any activity an individual does in front of others, whom Goffman calls observers, is a performance. This performance can change depending on the setting; a person's performance is different at a funeral than at a parade. Of course, in everyday life this performance may not be easily noticed until something extraordinary happens, such as the funeral I mentioned earlier. (Goffman, 1990: 32–33). Goffman uses the word 'he' throughout his text, which is understandable as *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* was published in 1950s and society was more patriarchal than it is today. As this thesis focuses on female characters, this section will use the word 'she' instead of 'he' to include all genders while adhering to this theory. This section will also focus mainly on Chapter 1 'Performances' of Goffman's book.

One of the main points in Goffman's theory of everyday role performance is a belief in that performance. In his theory there is an individual who plays a role and others who act as observers for that role. The main task is to make others believe that the role and its attributes are true. Goffman also points out that this role is not only beneficial to the individual playing the role, but that it is also done "for the benefit of other people". After all, the best observer is the actor himself. Goffman points out that sometimes performers believe in their performance, and then it is sincere. Sometimes they do not believe in their own performance to be true, however, and then the performer changes from sincere to cynical. (Goffman, 1990: 28). According to Goffman, we tend to expect consistency in appearance and behaviour that is matching with a certain role. In this way these roles become standardised and through standardisation they become institutionalised. In this way stereotypes are created and we tend to play the same learned role over and over again. (Goffman, 1990: 35–37). This is very reminiscent of Butler's gender

performativity, but instead of learning and performing a gender, in Goffman's theory we perform our everyday lives beyond gender. It could be said that they are both talking about the same thing, but from different perspectives.

Goffman argues that this 'performance is 'socialised', shaped and modified to fit the understanding and expectations of the society in which it is presented' (1990: 44). This highlights that whatever role we take on, we have learned it by observing others and therefore the role we have, whether it is gender or everyday representation, is learned from others. In modern times, the media also play a greater role in this, especially Web 2.0 and social media, while social mobility has been transferred to these platforms. Films and TV series are no exception. Visual media is now widely consumed and its role and responsibility cannot be denied when looking at where people learn to present their gender and other aspect of themselves.

Goffman points out that these roles become stereotyped when they are repeated over and over again. Over time they become institutionalised. Later in the same chapter, he reveals that an individual may cheat in order to achieve the role they are striving for, or to gain some secret that pleasures them (Goffman, 1990: 51). There are four ways of achieving the role:

First, in addition to secret pleasures and economies, the performer may be engaged in a profitable form of activity that is concealed from his audience and that is incompatible with the view of his activity which he hopes they will obtain. -- Secondly, we find that errors and mistakes are often corrected before the performance takes place, while telltale signs that errors have been made and corrected -- Thirdly, in those interactions where the individual presents a product to others, he will tend to show them only the end product, and they will be led into judging him on the basis of something that has been finished, polished and packaged. -- A fourth discrepancy between appearances and over-all reality may be cited. We find that there are many performances which could not have

been given had not tasks been done which were physically unclean, semi-illegal, cruel, and degrading in other ways; but these disturbing facts are seldom expressed during the performance – we tend to conceal from our audience all evidence of ‘dirty work’ (Goffman, 1990: 52–53)

This shows how the media tend to polish the roles they present. In this way, the narrowing down of roles to a few stereotypical forms continues. Therefore, when studying this representation, it could have been argued that the representation does not have to repeat itself perfectly every time. The performance can and should be different and not every character should act the same. This is reasonable, as the audience is full of different personalities and outlooks, so the representation of the characters should also offer something to the audience.

2.5 Rosalind Gill’s theory of postfeminism

British sociology professor and feminist cultural theorist Rosalind Gill has written two articles on the concept of postfeminism. She began to explore her theory in an article published in 2007, and further developed the theory in her response article published in 2017. In the beginning, Gill suggests that postfeminism should be ‘thought as a sensibility’ through the history of feminism or known theories (2007: 148). Postfeminism is meant to be a tool for questioning gender in the media, and has elements of both feminism and anti-feminism. Because postfeminism is tied to gender, it also includes ideas about the body and appearance:

‘These include the notion that femininity is a bodily property; the shift from objectification to subjectification; the emphasis upon self-surveillance, monitoring and discipline; a focus upon individualism, choice and empowerment; the dominance of a

makeover paradigm; a resurgence in ideas of natural sexual difference; a marked sexualisation of culture; and an emphasis upon consumerism and the commodification of difference. These themes coexist with and are structured by stark and continuing inequalities and exclusions that relate to 'race' and ethnicity, class, age, sexuality and disability as well as gender.' (Gill, 2007: 149)

In her response article, Gill expands on this list by emphasising that these points of postfeminism that she listed are even more accurate ten years later, as sensitivity has changed to become even a hegemonic issue in the current cultural environment (2017: 616). The key concepts of contemporary postfeminism are 'positive psychology' and 'positive mental attitude' (Gill, 2017: 619). Positivity is a good thing, but it should not crush others. If positivity is forced only for its own sake and not genuine, it can be more harmful than positive. Positivity can be one-sided in some cases; where it brings happiness to one group, it can ignore or even depress others. This happens when it is privileged, but assumes that it concerns everyone. One example is the representation of minorities in the film industry. Although the number of female characters in films has increased over the past decade, they are mostly white, thin, English-speaking women. As the statistics from the Women and Hollywood website showed, this is still the reality for people of colour and other minority groups, whereas the reason to be classified as a minority is ethnicity, disability, sexuality or gender.

According to the idea of post-feminism, the preoccupation with the body plays a crucial role in media representation, especially of women. Women's bodies are scrutinised and observed in all forms of media, and their femininity is a physical rather than a social or psychological aspect. This femininity is linked to sexualisation, and it is through this sexualisation that women's main identity is shaped. The body empowers a person, but at the same time the body is under observation and change. The female body is an object for men, but a subject for women. Because the media represents the female body as the best,

not all bodies are perceived as acceptable; not all ages, ethnicities, sexualities or physical disabilities are represented in the media as not sexy or desirable enough. (Gill, 2007: 149–156). In the response article, Gill considers this problem of narrow body representation; she suggests that since white, middle-class, heterosexual women are inevitably privileged in this matter, postfeminism should be united with intersectionalism to make it robust for minority representation (2017: 612).

As seen in a previous paragraph, this highlights the need for more diverse representation of people in the media, not just in the film industry but in all forms of media. Slowly but surely, change is happening, but there are still audiences who are against this change. Maybe it is just a question of habit. People tend to hold on to what they are used to, and change can feel frightening.

This draws the line back to positivity. Positivity does not happen for those who are afraid of change. But staying in the narrow frame of representation brings more unhappiness in the long run. Often, when the change is justified, it makes more sense and becomes a less frightening idea. Of course, there are always those who want to keep things the same just 'because'.

3 Feminist representation analysis and our heroes

Gill's articles on post-feminism prove that Mulvey's feminist film theory is still relevant, even though the roles of the sexes in visual media have changed. Although society evolves with ever-improving technology and thus improves living standards (at least in Western societies), sometimes human nature and the human mind do not evolve and expand at the same time. Old habits and visions change slowly, and this is where Mulvey's theory is viable; not as it is now, but after being refreshed for the present, it will be useful.

This is also true of Butler's performative gender. The theory itself is not outdated, but examples used in *Gender Trouble* are already 30 years old. The way we see gender and its diversity has changed radically in a short period of time. The same applies to Goffman's theory; the examples of how we behave in different situations are outdated, but the core of the theory is still very useful. It just needs to be looked at with fresh eyes and adapted to modern people and films.

With the help of these four theories, this thesis aims to analyse the elements necessary to formulate a modernised theory.

3.1 Forming the feminist representation analysis

When looking at female characters in films, it could be argued that they are always seen as roles and not as real people. When an audience sees characters in superhero films, fantasy or science fiction, the idea of the performative role is even more emphasised. In these genres, audiences tend to use escapism as a tool, and they begin to reflect themselves in these roles and performances. The more the role of the character is reflected in the audience, the more believable and sympathetic it is.

The first thing to consider is how common the character's role is. This is where Goffman's representation in everyday life comes in. The further away the character is from the audience, the less it works for them in terms of escapist reflection, and therefore the less they can see themselves in the character. Of course, none of us are in the situation of using our superpowers to fight aliens or bloodthirsty androids, and that is not everyday life for us. The everyday elements that tie the supernatural elements together make them believable, and that is how the audience can identify with a hero. The way the hero solves their problems and how it makes them feel is the piece of everyday life in the character's performance that makes the audience want to watch the film again.

In the *Marvel Cinematic Universe*, these little elements work for the audience because they humanise most of the superheroes. An example of this could be the team fighting an alien army and then going out to eat together after the battle, exhausted, and many in the audience can relate to the feeling of getting food when you are dead tired (see Appx, 03: 12). In this way, Goffman's idea of reflecting everyday life is a good addition to one's own theory.

As stated in the previous chapter, Mulvey points to the idea of the female being objectified by a male spectator. It could be argued that today both male and female spectators engage in the objectification of women, with social media serving as the most common platform for it. and the strongest platform for this is social media. Although the female body is supposed to be a subject, as Gill suggests, we also objectify our own bodies and, at worst, we reflect each other negatively through self-objectification. Web 2.0 in particular is full of videos, images, articles and interviews showing how an ideal woman should be. In this situation, it can be hard to be yourself and feel good about yourself when you are constantly being told how to be and what to do to fit into society. If someone differs from this frame created by the media, they may at least get opinionated comments or be put 'back in their place' not only by the media but also by people who consume media. It is not only the body, but also the behaviour and even the personality of people that can be examined through the narrow ideal roles that the media offers.

It could be argued that even though a character is an object for a viewer, which is different from Mulvey's time; objectification is now done by everyone, not just male viewers as she stated in her theory of visual pleasure. The objectification now can be sexual or for pleasure, but it is much more than that. The character representation is much broader now than it was in the sixties or seventies. Still, as Gill suggests, it is more common for a woman to be the object of study or the exception. However, this is not necessarily negative, because if you can create poor representation through stereotyping, you can also attempt to change it by intensifying characterisation through multifaceted characterisation. In this sense, objectivity is not necessarily a bad thing, as it can be good for representation.

In Butler's performativity of gender, the main point is the representation of gender and how it is formed through re-enactment. As gender is a role that is formed through the repetition of actions over and over again, and children learn

this from adults, the roles that are presented to them in the media also act as role models. Films and TV series play an important role in this, as children consume them as much as adults, which shows how big the market is for children's series and films. In its research on children's media consumption, *Did You Know?*, the Danish Film Institute points out that children aged 7-14 watch films at least as often as adults, and as often as young adults (2020: 1). The research also points out that younger audiences consume fiction more often than adults (2020: 1).

However, children's attitudes to different genres change as they get older. As most children prefer comedy, their tastes in different media become more nuanced as they grow older. In its study, the Danish Film Institute shows that both boys and girls become more interested in fantasy and adventure films the older they get. (2020: 3). Taken together with T. Seedrevi and B.K. Ravi's study of how films affect the perspectives of younger viewers, children are seen to be particularly influenced by cinema. It plays an important role in learning about social education, everyday life and even issues that are considered taboo to talk about (2021: 64). Children mirror events on the screen in their own lives:

When cinema introduces the world and supposed human actions to children their impression would predominantly base on the characters they like to watch on the screen. The varied features of the characters in the motion pictures including their colour, physique, expressions, actions, behaviour would directly influence children. The unconcerned psychological impact may affect larger than the expectation. -- The power of portraying characters of Marvel bringing an evident behavioural change among children would be another case of studying this. Children are finding connection to spider man, hulk, iron man or any of their favourite Marvel character influencing them to the extent of selecting toys or dresses matching to their favourite character's colour. (Sreedevi & Ravi, 2021: 65).

It is important to remember that it is not only children who consume and are influenced by the portrayal in films. Young adults and adults are also influenced, although in different ways. As I mentioned earlier about the importance of escapism, it plays a big role here. Viewers crave a character they can relate to and be inspired by, and thus use as a resource in their everyday lives. Fandoms are born out of this need to have role models in one's life to draw strength from. It shouldn't be diminished by poor representation because it alienates viewers and doesn't provide people with relatable resources in the same way. It should always be taken into account when developing characters, because audiences take their representation into account (intentionally or not) when they enjoy visual media. It affects the way we reflect our real life events in the ideas and characters we see on screen, and therefore learn and cope with real life events while using our imagination to escape to fictional events in films.

Butler's performing gender is shaped by decades, as society changes from time to time. In 1990, when Butler created her theory, society was different from the 2020s. Gender roles are broader and there are more gender representations and different roles to adapt to. Character change can be studied through gender performativity, but gender is only one part of character. Therefore, Butler's theory does not work on its own, there are other elements that need to be taken into account. Yet even today, many characters are seen through their gender first, and then the other elements of the person come after that. There is a simple reason for this: other elements cannot be known until they are revealed, and in most cases, gender can be read from a character's appearance. By combining Butler's gender performativity with Mulvey, Goffman and Gill, we can form a working tool for modern films to examine characters comprehensively and efficiently, taking into account a wider range of aspects.

If the representation in films is narrow and tends to represent one or two models of how to be (usually in the superhero genre a male protagonist and a male antagonist), it may not be reflected in the whole audience in the same way as hoped. It is for this reason that the issue of scrutinising the representation of female characters is important in this thesis. As we reflect ourselves through each other, it is important to see examples of role models that do not emphasise how we should only fit into one mould. For this reason, it is important to look at the representation of these three characters in the *Marvel Cinematic Universe* so that audiences can understand how change is possible and acceptable in everyone.

In order to carry out a modern feminist analysis of representation, it is necessary to examine several aspects of the characters. The elements taken from previous theories are used in this method of analysis. The role of everyday life says a lot about a character if it is taken into consideration when creating a character. Gender influences a character, and this is not a bad thing as an audience members tend to act out their own gender characteristics too. However, acting out stereotypically a character creates a poor portrayal, and this tool must take into account so-called gender stereotypes. Also, gender diversity is a thing to keep in mind, but it is excluded in this thesis as all three characters analysed in this thesis are cis-female characters.

3.2 Feminist Representation Analysis with Close Reading

Anyone who has read a film analysis has seen what Close Reading is. The reason for this must be that it is a precise and versatile tool for analysing media texts. According to David Greenham, in his introduction to close reading, he explains that analysis is taking things apart and putting them back together with new insights (2019: 2). According to him, there is always a pleasure in

analysis in close reading. As close reading originated in literary studies, Greenham, who himself studies literature, emphasises that 'close reading is about enjoying the way [the collections of letters] create beauty in complexity on the page' (2019: 4). He points out that without context there is no meaning, and that looking at the smallest details, with the whole work in mind, provides the most rewarding experience (2019: 6). To apply this idea to films, the pleasure and close reading of films is to see all the parts that make it up, measure them and put them back together to see the big picture that the analysis creates. This could be everything from casting and directing to screenwriting, hair and make-up, looks, acting and manner of speaking that create the character. Without one element, the others will change. But when you create a whole character, it creates pleasure for the audience and they will enjoy watching the character's journey in a film.

In order to use the method of close reading together with feminist representation analysis, it will be necessary to do a close reading through the elements discussed earlier. What will define the character and their gender through the actions and appearance or is it undefined and why; what everyday actions character does or says and what do these details reveal about the character or their background; is the character stereotypical by some aspects and why is it so; is the character an object, a subject or both and in what way. Combining all these aspects to see the characteristics of the character can produce a visible result which could be connected to the society, or do they remain distant or one-dimensional and therefore do not work to the audience by their representation. Regardless of one-dimensionality, it should be taken into consideration that the representation of characters in film franchises is changeable as they have space and time to grow and develop.

3.3 Three ladies of the *Marvel Cinematic Universe*

The *Infinity Saga* began in 2008 with *Iron Man*. The actual film to end the saga is *Avengers: Endgame* (2019), where they have the battle of the Infinity Stones to restore the entire universe as it was before. Nevertheless, *Spider-Man: Far From Home* (2019) is the official ending film, although it takes place in the time after Infinity War.

There are a lot of female characters in the *Infinity Saga* that could have been thought of as part of this. The reason these three were chosen to be part of the thesis is because of their common characteristics. All three women are human, have multiple appearances in multiple films, or have their own solo film. There is therefore more material to analyse in these three than in others who have not appeared so often. Wanda Maximoff is human, but has only appeared in four films, fewer than Pepper and Natasha, and her solo TV series is based after the *Infinity Saga* and to include it the source of material would have been unnecessarily wide for this analysis. For this reason, she has been excluded from this thesis.

The three female characters chosen to be analysed in this thesis are Pepper Potts, Natasha Romanoff and Carol Danvers. Pepper and Natasha have multiple appearances in more than five films in the *Infinity Saga*, and Carol and Natasha have their own solo films. The three characters are introduced in more detail below. The characters are based on ten *Infinity Saga* films from 2008 to 2019, including Natasha's solo film from *The Multiverse Saga*. The cast list and film synopses are presented in the appendix.

3.3.1 Pepper Potts

Pepper Potts is usually seen behind the male character she works for as an assistant. Her background is never revealed or anything personal about her told, except in *Iron Man 2* that she is allergic to strawberries. Her age is unknown, as is how she came to be employed by Tony Stark in the films. She is less distant and has more background in the comics, but these are not included in the *Iron Man* trilogy. In the films she is portrayed by American actor Gwyneth Paltrow.

In comics, she was created by Stan Lee and Robert Bernstein and made her first appearance in 1963 (Lee, 2019: 272). She is Virginia Potts, who has the nickname Pepper. Pepper started as a secretary to Howard Stark and became the personal assistant to his son Tony Stark when Tony discovered how resourceful Pepper was. Pepper married Tony's personal bodyguard Happy Hogan and had a daughter with him. In the comics, Pepper also plays a larger role in the superhero field. She worked under the codename 'Hera' in the superhero team The Order, where she was a team leader, overseeing and directing the team. She suffered a chest wound similar to Tony's, so Tony built her a magnetic field generator on her chest. Pepper fought in an iron suit, which Tony built for her as 'Rescue'. She still exists in the comics. (Marvel, 2020).

Pepper's character is quite different in the movies. She works as Tony's personal assistant, but has neither superpowers nor the will to go into battle. The only times we see Pepper in superheroic action are after she is injected with EXTREMIS serum by Aldrich Killian, allowing her to save Tony from Aldrich in *Iron Man 3* (See Appx, 04: 16), and when she participates in the Infinity Battle at the end of *Avengers: Endgame* (See Appx, 10: 47).

Pepper and Happy also appear together in films, but are not romantically involved. Pepper and Tony do have romantic feelings for each other, and the tension between them is palpable in *Iron Man*. They end up together in *Iron Man 2* and live together in Stark Tower in *The Avengers*. They are otherwise on good terms, but Pepper does not like Tony being a hero and putting his life on the line. In *Captain America: Civil War*, Tony reveals to Steve Rogers that being Iron Man has cost him his relationship with Pepper (see Appx, 07: 28). Despite this, at the end of *Spider-Man: Homecoming*, Tony and Pepper are already back together and they get engaged before a press conference as a contingency plan when Peter Parker does not go in front of the press to introduce himself as the newest member of the Avengers (2017). Tony says that he has been carrying the ring since 2008 [the year of *Iron Man*'s release]. This surprises Pepper, but she happily accepts.

At the beginning of *Avengers: Infinity War*, they discuss their engagement and how Tony had a dream about them having a child named Morgan. Pepper assures him that they are not expecting. Pepper says that Tony should not carry his Iron Man suit with him all the time, but Tony says that the suit stays with him just in case it is needed. They are interrupted before they can finish the conversation. (See Appx: 08:32).

Pepper and Tony are reunited in *Avengers: Endgame*. During the five years of post-apocalyptic time, they get married, move to a house in the countryside and have a daughter named Morgan. Tony and Pepper seem happy in their family time, but when Tony gets a chance to help people again, Pepper supports him. She points out to Tony that her biggest mistake was resisting Tony's actions as a superhero. At the end of the film, Pepper joins the battle as Rescue, a suit Tony built for her as a gift. Pepper is at his side when Tony dies, accepting death as his ability to rest now. (See Appx: 10: 44; 47). Pepper is only mentioned by name at the beginning of the final *Infinity Saga* film, *Spider-Man: Far From Home*, and does not appear in it.

3.3.2 Natasha Romanoff

Natasha Romanoff is the only one of the three female characters who is not American. She is a Russian who works as a shadow agent for the Strategic Homeland Intervention, Enforcement and Logistic Division (S.H.I.E.L.D. for short). Although her nationality is different from the others, she has no Russian accent or other national stereotypes that would distinguish her from the other two. Natasha Romanoff is portrayed in the films by American actor Scarlett Johansson.

In comics she is known as Natalia Alianovna "Natasha Romanoff" Romanova. She first debuted in April 1964 (Lee, 2019: 55). She was initially an antagonist to Iron Man. Natasha was born in the Soviet Union where she was orphaned and trained to be a super spy in a place called the Red Room. She was given a dose of the Soviet Union's own version of the super-soldier serum that Steve Rogers has in his veins. She was brainwashed and had several different occasions in her life in the comics. She eventually joins the Avengers and S.H.I.E.L.D., working for the United States, not against it. (Marvel, 2020).

In the films, Natasha is already working in S.H.I.E.L.D., and scenes from her past are only glimpsed in flashbacks. Natasha joined the *Infinity Saga* in *Iron Man 2*, where she disguises herself under an identity of Natalie Rushman, a lawyer for the new CEO of Stark Industries, Pepper Potts. Working undercover all the time, she is actually an agent on a mission commanded by Nick Fury. (See Appx 02: 6–7). Natasha joins the Avengers in *The Avengers* as one of the original six of Earth's superhero team. Natasha worked with S.H.I.E.L.D. and the Avengers until S.H.I.E.L.D. was torn apart in *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*. (See Appx 03: 19). After that, she worked merely with the Avengers, living in the Avengers Facility that Tony Stark built for them. Her role

became more prominent after the destruction of Thanos in *Avengers: Infinity War*, and she is seen as the director of what is left of the Avengers in the post-apocalyptic world of *Avengers: Endgame*. (See Appx 10: 44).

Like Pepper, Natasha also has a romantic interest. This is most prominent in *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, when she openly flirts with Bruce Banner, suggesting that she wants to have a life with him. They both have an unhappy past, and as Steve Rogers tells Bruce, they both deserve happiness in their lives (see Appx 06: 22). While staying at Clint Barton's house, they consider the possibility of being together, and Natasha seems ready for the relationship. Bruce hesitates and leaves Natasha to hang in the situation. When Bruce feels he is ready and wants to leave the Avengers with Natasha, she feels obliged to help in the fight and tricks Hulk into waking up. (See Appx 06: 24). After this, Hulk runs off and they will not see each other again until *Avengers: Infinity War*. Natasha's life was ended in *Avengers: Endgame* when she sacrificed her own life for the greater good to save billions of lives (see Appx 10: 46). Natasha returned for the final time in 2021 with her own solo film, *Black Widow*; the events of the film are intercut between *Captain America: Civil War* and *Avengers: Infinity War*.

3.3.3 Carol Danvers

Carol Danvers is the second of three female characters to have her own solo film. She is also the only female character to have one in the *Infinity Saga*. Her solo film *Captain Marvel* takes place in the 1990s, so she is older than Pepper and Natasha, although she looks younger than them. She is played by American actor Brie Larson.

In the comics, Captain Marvel is a mantle that Carol Danvers inherits from her predecessor. After many twists and turns, Carol ends up working with Dr Walter Lawson, and the two form a bond. Dr Lawson is an alien from outer space, part of a race known as the Kree, and a spy whose real name is Mar-Vell. Mar-Vell was discovered by the public and he was given the name Captain Marvel, which made him a hero. While Carol was training to find out that Mar-Vell was Kree, Mar-Vell's rival Kree, Yon-Rogg, captured Carol. In the battle between Mar-Vell and Yon-Rogg, Carol fell to a Kree machine which altered her DNA, making her half Kree and giving her superpowers like Mar-Vell's. She began working as a superhero under the title Ms. Marvel, initially alongside Mar-Vell, and joined the Avengers. She later took on the mantle of Captain Marvel (Marvel, 2020).

In her solo film (see Appendix 09 for a synopsis of the film), Carol's background is quite different. She begins as a member of the Kree Air Force, working in the team of her superior, Yon-Rogg. She has no memories or idea of where she came from or who she was before waking up on Hala and being called Vers. She is abducted by the Skrull soldier Talos. He and his crew search for her hidden memories, leaving Carol/Vers confused as to what is happening, and during her escape she ends up on Earth and meets Nick Fury, an agent of S.H.I.E.L.D. in the 90s. Together they begin to discover what is happening in her memories, which the Skrulls have managed to extract from her head.

Unlike in the comics, Walter Lawson is actually Wendy Lawson in the film. Lawson is still the same Kree spy named Mar-Vell, although the gender has been changed from male to female. Carol finds out that she is from Earth and human. The Skrulls turn out to be war refugees, and Carol is able to help them. In a black box recording, she finds out that Yon-Rogg killed Mar-Vell, and Carol got her powers from an explosion that should have killed her. Instead of killing Carol, Yon-Rogg took her to Hala, transfused her with his blood and made her partially Kree. Carol decides to help the Skrulls and leads Talos to Mar-Vell's

secret lab in orbit around Earth, where he is reunited with his family. Yon-Rogg finds Carol and her team helping Talos, and they fight together. Eventually, Carol's full powers are unleashed, making her an unbeatable opponent for Yon-Rogg and Ronan, who has come to Earth to destroy the planet on Yon-Rogg's orders. Carol keeps the Skrulls safe and finds them a new home, and Carol's actions inspire Nick Fury to begin writing the Avengers Initiative plan to protect Earth.

Carol returns to Earth in the post-credits scene of *Captain Marvel*, and also has a role in *Avengers: Endgame* as well. She is not available to protect Earth as the universe needs her help, but she does arrive at the Infinity Battle at the end of *Avengers: Endgame*, destroying Thanos' warship and inflicting heavy damage on his army.

Carol will be seen again after the *Infinity Saga*, as her second solo film premieres in November 2023. She also visited *MCU* quickly in the post-credits scene of *Shang-Chi and the Legend of Ten Rings* and in the last episode of *Miss Marvel*.

4 Representation Close-read, Scrutinised and Compared

In this chapter I will observe Pepper, Natasha and Carol individually. I will examine their status in relation to other characters and how this affects their portrayal. In the end I will see what similarities and differences these three have. I will be using the Feminist Representation Analysis and Close Reading method that was established and explained in the previous chapter.

4.1 The supporter who is saved and who saves from the behind

The first character to be examined is Virginia "Pepper" Potts. Since all the other characters refer to her by her nickname, I will do the same. Pepper has the most presence in the *MCU* films, although she does not have the most screen time. Pepper appears in most of the films, and her introduction can be found in this thesis in chapter 3, part 3.1.

Pepper is underestimated in the first and second *Iron Man* films. She does all the hard work that her boss Tony neglects, yet at the end of both films she is the damsel in distress who has to be rescued by Tony's nemesis (see Appx

01: 4; 02: 8). She is also stereotypically Tony's love interest, and their working relationship ends at the end of *Iron Man 2* when they become romantically involved.

At the beginning of the *Infinity Saga*, Pepper is a stereotypical female character whose purpose in the *MCU* is to support the male protagonist, Tony, in his journey to become a superhero. Although she is a woman in action and not so passive, she is often overshadowed by her male counterparts. Obvious examples of her activity are her work in *Iron Man* helping Tony to get information from Obadiah and helping Agent Coulson and other SHIELD agents to bring Obadiah to justice of his actions against Tony (see Appx 01: 4). In *Iron Man 2*, she takes the lead from Justin Hammer and gets him arrested while Tony and Natasha do the fighting (see Appx 02: 8).

The most visible change in her portrayal comes in the end of *Iron Man 3*. Although she is still a damsel in distress, Tony is unable to save her. Having been treated with the EXTREMIS serum and given temporary super-strength, she is able to change roles and save Tony from his nemesis compared to the previous two films. This is not permanent, as in *The Avengers* she is back as the male protagonist's supporter, and remains so until the end of *Avengers: Endgame*.

The biggest personal change of Pepper is seen in *Avengers: Endgame*, where she admits to Tony that her greatest regret is trying to dissuade Tony from being a hero (see Appx 10: 44). This is a drastic change in her character as she accepts her husband for who he is. Even in the previous film, she tried to stop Tony and ordered him to come back to her from the spaceship. In this moment, she seems to accept Tony's true nature as a helpful defender of humanity. There is none of the sadness, anger or panic that the audience has seen from her in her previous performances. Just serenity and warmth towards

her husband. That same warmth and serenity is still there when she realises that Tony is dying, when she is strong for him for the last time.

Pepper's representation in different films is rather stiff and unvaried. While she becomes calmer and more functional, she remains behind Tony from the time she becomes CEO of Stark Industries until her husband's funeral. She is a supporting character who does not change. She takes no space of her own, but works from behind the scenes in the way she knows best, taking care of Tony and his needs to keep him in his hero mode to save the day. Even when they were separated for a short time (see Appx 07: 28), she comes back to Tony without resentment or demands.

Pepper could be compared to Tony's assistant/bodyguard/driver Happy Hogan, who is another supporting character for him. The difference between Happy and Pepper is that when Tony dies, Pepper fades into the background to be a name mentioned here and there, whereas Happy continues to play an active role in supporting Peter Parker, just as Tony supported Peter before his death. The same kind of activity is not seen from Pepper, who does not appear in person after *Avengers: Endgame*.

One way of seeing Pepper as an object is the scene in *Iron Man 3* where she meets Aldrich Killian (see Appx 04: 14). Happy immediately reports this to Tony, saying that Tony should be worried about Aldrich "taking his woman". This kind of thinking forces Pepper to become an object, where she is Tony's property to be protected like her own territory. Tony doesn't buy this way of thinking, even though Happy tries to force it on his boss.

Although Pepper is not objected to by Tony, in a sense she is a supportive object. Her existence serves to motivate Tony to act. She is the thing that Tony

needs in his everyday life to act, and without her he is too impulsive and makes mistakes. Pepper's role in her everyday life is to support Tony, and without that she has no function. She is seen differently than Happy because of her gender. For example, when Tony is attacked in Monaco, Happy's panic has a different tone to Pepper's panic (see Appx 02: 6). They both scream and try to help Tony, but the tone between the two is clearly different, feeding into the stereotype of a hysterical woman unable to act in a fight.

Pepper's portrayal is traditionally stereotypical of what one might expect from a woman under male domination. This doesn't offer anything new to the audience, and it doesn't necessarily come across as positive to many viewers who are hoping for a change from the old stereotypical gender roles. Pepper is good as a supporter, but she can't do without the supporter herself; she is Tony's half, who remains in the background both when Tony is present and fades away after his death.

Despite this, Pepper is still very much a normal person working for other superheroes. Her job is far from trivial when it comes to helping superheroes do their best to protect the world. The gruelling side of superheroism is also shown in Pepper's wish that Tony would not do it; sometimes it's just as hard to be a bystander as it is to be someone actively fighting for a better world. This recurring everyday role is meant to convince the viewer that sometimes it is okay to be a bystander, and that you do not always have to be at the centre of things. After all, the position of the bystander is no less important than that of the main character, if the main character cannot stand upright without his supporters.

4.2 The one who works in the backgrounds and lurks in shadows

Of the characters studied in this thesis, Natasha has the most screen time. She joins the *MCU* in its third film, *Iron Man 2*. Her portrayal is utmost feminine, using tight shirts and dresses, having long red curly hair and speaking with a whispering soft voice. In the same film, her continuous shot of her bottom is introduced for the first time and has a continuing role when Natasha is on screen.

One could argue from the start that Natasha is over-sexualised in comparison to the male characters of the Avengers, but there is a reason for all this objectifying visualisation that will be revealed later in the films. Natasha deliberately uses her beauty and femininity to gain information, playing on her opponents' greed, lust, hubris and arrogance. The men seem to think they are overpowering Natasha, when in fact she is the one getting everything she wants. To get it, she makes the men think they have the upper hand, and that is the weakness that makes them lose to Natasha.

This happens many times, but the most notable scenes in which this is highlighted are in the films *The Avengers* and *Black Widow*. In *The Avengers*, Natasha goes to have a chat with the imprisoned Loki. It is made clear that she is only there because of her friend Clint Barton, but Natasha is one step ahead of him. She manages to hit Loki's softest spot, his ego, which causes Loki to blurt out and reveal more than enough of his plans. The same thing happens with General Dreykov in *Black Widow*. Natasha pretends to be weaker and more tearful than she is, and even her former boss and mentor falls into this trap. This creates a moment for Natasha to help all the women Dreykov has kidnapped and exploited.

This suggests that Natasha is well aware of how people, especially men, stereotype women as weak, tearful, oversensitive and easy to dominate. She uses this to her advantage and rises above those she needs to conquer. Different ways she does this include revealing outfits, feminine hairstyles and make-up, soft-spoken manners with a whispering voice and the eye play she plays on her opponents.

Thus, Natasha exploits the same stereotypes of men that they try to exploit for Natasha's femininity. These stereotypes are born from the everyday roles that the characters have repeated in their lives. Using them shows that a certain kind of pattern makes a person predictable. Sometimes predictability is a good thing, but on the other hand, this is also where the monotony of representation comes into play. Natasha assumes that everyone behaves the same until she is confronted by Taskmaster. Taskmaster takes advantage of Natasha and her repetitive mannerisms to defeat her.

This assumption that women are weak also happens to those on their side. Tony underestimates Natasha in *Iron Man 2*, and she uses this to get information out of him. She teases Tony and tends to be interested in him, playing on Tony's passion for beautiful women. She imitates Pepper to make her like Natasha and hire her as Pepper's assistant after Tony promotes Pepper to CEO, but Natasha never teases or oppresses Pepper. Instead, she does quite a bit of oppressing with Happy, and even though Happy has seen her abilities, he still tends to treat her as a damsel in distress later in the film for some reason, probably because of a stereotypical way of thinking. This moment highlights Natasha's skills as she takes down several guards while Happy fights with one, thinking he is doing her a favour (see Appx 02: 8).

Natasha's use of psychology against her opponents is explained by her past as a Russian assassin. She was taught to exploit people. This does not stop

her from developing. As I argued when presenting Gill's idea of positivity in Chapter 2, people who are afraid of change do not get positivity. Instead, staying the same brings unhappiness. Natasha is not afraid of change if it means she can grow and be a better person for her loved ones and friends. She performs the stereotypical aspect of her gender in order to gain something that she can use to protect others. This performance is not part of her everyday life and its role, but who she really is, is only revealed to those closest to her.

Natasha's personality grows and develops as the *Infinity Saga* progresses. She performs same sort of mannerisms, characteristics, acts and way to speak that her character is more and more available for the audience to reflect. She is calm, sensitive, good with people and has a big heart. At the same time, she is vulnerable and haunted by her past, where she killed Dreykov's daughter. Later, when she learns that the daughter, Antonia, is still alive, she makes amends for the harm she has done and asks for forgiveness (see Appx 11: 52). This leads her to be at peace with herself and therefore happier.

Because Natasha has such a big heart, she is a natural helper. She makes everyone feel at home, and if there is any way she can help others, she is not afraid to go to the ultimate lengths to do so. This is highlighted in *Avengers: Endgame*, where she sacrifices herself to give others a chance to live and to bring back the missing (see Appx 10: 44). This also saves the life of her best friend Clint, allowing him to return to his family after they are restored from the vanquished.

Her helpfulness has also been seen in previous films. In *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, she is a helpful friend to Steve as he works through problems in his own life. She stays by his side throughout the film. (See Appx 05). She also works as a negotiator for the Avengers when they have to sign the

Sokovia Accords, arriving at the UN meeting in Vienna on behalf of others (See Appx 07: 27). Her role as negotiator continues in *Avengers: Endgame*, where she holds all the strings, managing the remaining members of the Avengers and their allies to maintain peace and balance in a crippled world situation (see Appx 10: 46). When Steve comes to see her after her meeting with other active members, he suggests that Natasha need not be the one to be the director for others. There, her speech about why she does it sums up her personality, which has been built up for the audience throughout the films:

“I used to have nothing. And then I got this - this job, this family. And I was better because of it. Even though they’re gone, I’m still trying to be better.”

(*Avengers: Endgame*, 2019).

She wants to help everyone with "whatever it takes", as she says, even if it means literally losing everything. This is why she seems heartbroken at not being able to help her best friend Clint sooner, after Tony's success in building the time machine. She is remorseful and empathises with Clint's grief and pain.

Helpfulness is a recurring characteristic of Natasha that builds her own everyday role. Natasha shows the viewers that a person can do good every day, give their all, and still grow as a person and get help from others when needed. When doing good is repeated in everyday life in the same way Goffman's theory represents, a believable representation is built from it. It can be seen sincere and therefore believable, and possibly it inspires the audience members to do good for others without asking. This is the kind of role model that people also need for escapism with fiction. Keeping Gill's theory in mind, this everyday role can be seen as a positive one that does not cause harm because it is not superimposed in any way. It can be seen the possible effect

on both the viewers and the other characters in the film with whom Natasha interacts.

Indeed, Natasha has a remarkable effect on the other Avengers. They mourn her death, and ponder how to bring her back from the dead. Bruce Banner reveals at the end that he really did try to bring her back to life when he brought everyone back, but her death was irreversible. The mourning of her loss continues in the post-credits scene by her sister Yelena, and in the TV series *Hawkeye* with her best friend Clint. The way in which the impact and significance of her death is constructed in the film emphasises her importance to others. While other scenes in *Time Heist* jump from one to another, this scene is complete, following the mourning scene without any interruptions and jokes that Marvel films are full of. This builds up the feeling for the audience and gives them time to reflect on this feeling, allowing them to reflect on the same feeling.

Examples like this show Natasha's yearning to be better for the living and the dead. She truly cares about people and wants to see good triumph over evil. She does not want to lead, but when there is no other choice, she is not afraid to take the lead for the greater good. Her childhood was a lie, and she does not want to live in the shadows, hurting others, but to help everyone out of the situation she has been through.

Overall, Natasha's portrayal of a pretty, quiet woman who takes a back seat to big, muscular men is changing rapidly. Already in *Captain America: Winter Soldier*, she is a very different person to the one she was in *The Avengers*. *Avengers: Age of Ultron* is a high point for her. In that film, the audience learns more about her sensitivity, diversity and vulnerability in her two-minute conversation with Bruce than the previous films have revealed about her combined (see Appx 06: 23). Where many of the male characters tend to hide

their pain and hurt, Natasha confronts it. From there she grows, expands and develops into a whole person more than most male characters. Her portrayal changes completely over the eleven years that the audience has to get to know her. She is only human, but that does not stop her from achieving her goals by giving her all - and being kind to others around her.

4.3 The strongest Avenger?

Compared to Pepper and Natasha, Carol has been in the *MCU* the shortest. She was first seen in the post-credits scene in *Avengers: Infinity War*, and her solo film *Captain Marvel* followed. However, she was the first female Avenger to get her own solo film, as Natasha's solo film came after the entire *Infinity Saga*. As a result, her run is shorter than that of the other two female characters during the *Infinity Saga*. Nevertheless, her solo film provided enough information to examine her portrayal.

Carol is a quick problem solver who thinks on her feet and is surprisingly resourceful. This may be due to her past, where she had been constantly berated by her father, brother and male colleagues for not being strong enough. The abuse continues after she is kidnapped by Commander Yon-Rogg and taken to the Kree forces (see Appx 09: 37). The film emphasises that all of her so-called flaws (short-tempered, emotional, stubborn and impulsive) are the traits that make her stronger. Because of these traits, she explodes the core created by her superior and role model, Mar-Vell, and gains her powers through the accident (See Appx 09: 39).

Her best friend Maria Rambeau says that Carol is a person who risks her life to do the right thing. This trait is emphasised when Carol has just realised her

power, and she attacks warheads capable of destroying the Who's planet Earth (see Appx 09: 41). The audience can see her unfolding her abilities with unlimited power, and those powers take a moment to get used to. She cheers with joy at being able to do good and protect others with her new talent.

4.4 Three women being seen

Looking at the three women together, their portrayals are quite different. Pepper is stiff and bound to Tony Stark, whereas Natasha and Carol travel freely in their universe. While Carol is reprimanded for using her feelings and letting them guide her, Pepper is free to feel without anyone shaming her for it. Natasha tends to keep her true feelings to herself, but they are revealed in small gestures and hints, and to the audience when Natasha is left alone.

Examining at these three female characters through Mulvey's triple gaze, Natasha is the most different. When she is at work, Natasha often has certain poses and mannerisms that show her in the midst of battle. She is also shown in many films in a tight outfit, cut from the bottom up to the height of her bottom, and the camera directs the viewer's gaze directly to it. The same does not happen to Pepper and Carol. The camera treats them in the same way as men, and Carol's postures and fighting styles are not as different from the male characters as Natasha's. Of the three female characters, Natasha is also the most likely to be shown in a lower perspective, with the woman herself posing in a low position, while in the case of Carol, she stands up straight with her body directly facing the camera, giving her a more formidable appearance.

By focusing on the gaze of the other characters, they look at the three women differently. Happy looks down on all women while being a stereotypical

chivalrous male character. Tony sees the women as equals. Both Natasha and Carol are underestimated by their opponents. For Carol, this gives her the strength to surpass herself and try harder, always getting back up when someone knocks her down. Natasha uses this condescending look to her advantage in her work, inciting opponents to tear her down and sending misleading signals about her own perceived weakness. Allies treat both Carol and Natasha fairly and equally. Pepper is in the background, hardly noticed by others, except by those who also work in the sidelines.

In terms of the performativity of gender and the stereotypes it creates, Pepper is very different from Natasha and Carol. Pepper is in need of protection and rescue, whereas both Natasha and Carol are protectors who rescue others. They are at the forefront of the fight against evil, which is still not generally seen as a role for women. In contrast, Pepper's roles as an assistant and secretary, and as a worried friend at home waiting for her husband to come home, are still more common in a modern Western society. They may therefore be more identifiable than those of Natasha and Carol. However, their frontline need not always be a literal war or battle; the challenges of everyday life may seem like a battlefield to others, and it is for these that Natasha and Carol create a surface of identification. They show ways and means of overcoming challenges and moving forward stronger than ever. That's why we need both support teams and challengers in difficult situations.

Later, Carol understands how important this feeling is to her, as it feeds the courage she has because of her humanity. All three women are shown to be persistent. When Pepper accepts her husband's eagerness to help, she suits up and joins him in the final battle in *Avengers: Endgame*. Natasha is undaunted, continuing to do good, to cleanse her past of evil and to make everyone feel safe and included. Carol takes on the huge task of helping an entire civilisation of Skrulls find a new home where they can live in peace, and

when half the population disappears at the end of *Avengers: Infinity War*, she is the only one helping others in space.

Pepper's representation changes, but only a little. She becomes calmer and more mature, but her purpose, status in the Avengers and character do not change that much. She is behind Tony, invisible to many and static in action. Her role is to worry for the sake of others after the good growth in the *Iron Man* trilogy. You can see how her character gets stuck after that, and the progress she made just disappears. Despite this, she is the driving force behind Tony joining the Avengers one last time and restoring what Thanos has destroyed.

A static display is also not the best for the background character. For this reason, this was changed during *Avengers: Endgame*. Pepper became sympathetic to the need of fight and took part in it herself. This change in character came rather late, considering how much she had watched the battles from the sidelines. Perhaps it was the devastation wrought by Thanos that made her feel the need to help protect the world. However, after building up Pepper's portrayal over many films, it felt external to the character.

While Pepper is the more stereotypical female character, the same cannot be said for Natasha and Carol. They are both fearless women who do what they want despite the obstacles in their path. They are as capable as (or in some ways more capable than) male superheroes and are not overshadowed by them. Looking at Natasha and Carol through Butler's performative theory of gender, their mannerisms are not ultra-feminine. As I noted earlier, Natasha uses them to her advantage in her work, but not in her leisure. Both are themselves without the need to emphasise or disguise their femininity; they just are. This is a good portrayal to set an example that people don't have to play an extra role to be convincing. People can be strong in their own right without any extra mannerisms.

However, while Carol will continue to get more screen time and a second solo film premiering in 2023, Natasha will not. She is the only female member of the original six Avengers, and while only three of the male characters have their own film trilogy, Hulk and Hawkeye have the opportunity to expand their portrayal and character in the future. Natasha is dead, so that seems pretty impossible for her, at least in the way we have come to know her in this one universe. There is the possibility of a new Natasha in the multiverse, but this Natasha would not be a part of the original six. A new Natasha would start a new representation of the same character, and these two representations of Natasha would be constantly compared by the audience. Time will tell what possibilities a multiple representation of the same character will reveal to viewers in the depths of the multiverse.

While all three of the women examined here are strong in their own way, they tend not to be flawed. Natasha's only flaw is her belief in the death of Dreykov's daughter, but she redeems herself later. Her fighting skills are extraordinary, making her almost superhuman. Of course, as superhero films are fiction, they can take a punch or fall from a height without being fatally injured, so these are included; otherwise, the film would be out of genre if the hero died from a single blow.

In *Avengers: Endgame*, Carol and Pepper are seen with other women taking part in the battle, walking in line. [Natasha is dead at this point]. The montage of all the female characters is meant to be an empowering moment for the audience, but fails because it tries too hard and is so out of context that it feels forced and pandering rather than a moment to embrace the strength of the group.

By looking at their appearance, it is possible to draw conclusions about how these three female characters express their gender through external characteristics. Pepper is always meticulously groomed, and her appearance, style or essence does not change at all over the course of the film series. Instead, Natasha's hairstyle is different in each film, but the dress is always the same. The fiery red hair that became Natasha's signature is blonde in one film, but is explained in *Black Widow*; Natasha is trying to hide herself by drastically changing her hairstyle. Carol has the same as Natasha. Her hair changes, but her clothes don't. This gives viewers the courage to make changes that may not be within the individual's comfort zone. For example, for some people hair is not an important factor, while others are very particular about it. Small nuances in character's representation can be used to create a relatable portrayal that encourages the desired change that you just haven't dared to make before. This is a subtle positivity that is not forced, but subconscious. If a fictional character can do something so ordinary, so can an audience member.

Carol takes a punch from the mad titan Thanos without even flinching, which is understandable given that her powers come from the *Infinity Stone*. As Carol's facial expressions are subtle and the character seems to be forever pushing forward through a hundred glasses, she doesn't show any kind of weakness. However, it is worth bearing in mind that her screen time is short for the time being. Perhaps the forthcoming sequel will show fatigue, powerlessness or restlessness in the woman, the kind of personal and typically human emotions that have not yet been seen from her. Otherwise, her portrayal in her own everyday life may remain distant to the audience if she is too superior and shows no weakness. This is not adaptable for most viewers.

Both Pepper and Natasha seemed to have a conclusion in *Avenger: Endgame*. They are both quiet, melancholic, but at peace with their choices. Carol's brief encounter in the same film did not elevate her at all; of course, her arrival

helped the Avengers win the battle against Thanos, but in the end, she was just an extension of the group of heroes. Her functionality definitely makes her a character with plenty of activity planned for the future. It remains to be seen whether future films will allow Carol to develop as a person, or whether she will remain a rigid and unique representation with no room for development.

5 Conclusion

In the beginning we saw four different theories; Judith Butler's theory of performative gender, Laura Mulvey's theory of feminist film analysis, Erving Goffman's theory of everyday representation and Rosalind Gill's theory of postfeminism. To combine these four, the part of the theories that works best for a modern audience was chosen to see what kind of representation three active female characters in the *Marvel Cinematic Universe* franchise provide, and if there is any change in their representation as the continuing cinematic universe expands and the characters become more familiar to audiences.

Combining these three characters, there is change in Pepper and Natasha, but not so much in Carol. The growth is most evident in Natasha, where she becomes her own independent heroine, whereas Pepper stays on the sidelines and is tied to Tony until the end. Pepper learns to calm down and becomes more accepting of Tony's role as her saviour, showing subtle personal growth. Carol does not change that much in her own film, as she stays true to her own personal touch throughout the film as she accepts her human side during her own solo film. There is only a little material later to see

Carol communicating and reflecting others, as she literally remains distant in space most of the time in *Avengers: Endgame*.

The representation of the characteristics in these three active characters is quite narrow if we look at them in a wider picture; they are all beautiful white Western females of quite the same generation, and humans from non-superpowered backgrounds. However, by their personality they are well represented. All three acknowledge their feelings, their new role and the change in the world around them as the world becomes more supernatural. While Carol has superpowers as a result of the accident, Pepper is protected by Tony and Natasha is trained to kill and participate in action. All three characters show courage; Natasha and Carol because of their training and personality, and Pepper because she has no choice when Tony drags her into hostile scenarios with him. Each of the three female characters seems altruistic in her actions, building a genuine positive image through a variety of activities of varying degrees.

To expand the themes of this thesis further, a few things would be taken into consideration. Their gender is underrepresented in the *MCU*, but their colour or race is not. To make this research more diverse, it would be good to include more characters in the study of representation. Now, the limitation of material for this thesis has been defined based on the appearance of the characters and their own solo films. After *Infinity Saga* there are three *MCU* based TV series, where there is a female lead character. By expanding material to those, this study would include even more characters who are diverse from the three ones studied in this thesis.

For example, there is now more material for Gamora and Nebula in *Guardians of the Galaxy* trilogy and the last two *Avengers* films at the end of the *Infinity Saga*. They are humanoids, different from the people on our planet who are

Pepper, Natasha and Carol. Their upbringing, skin colour and behaviour differ from the three women mentioned above. Comparing these humanoids to humans in their mannerisms, appearance, behaviour and speech is one way of looking at different characters; does the non-humanity of the character add something to the character that makes it a poor representation, or can the viewer identify with a character from a different planet light years away where everyone's skin tone is green.

One more great character to look at more closely would be Wanda Maximoff. She is a white cis-female human as Pepper, Natasha and Carol, or so the audience is led to believe. It is later revealed that she is not purely human. After the *Infinity Saga* Wanda has been given her own television series, *WandaVision*, and is featured in *Doctor Strange: Multiverse of Madness*. It is unclear whether she is set to make a comeback in yet-to-be-released films.

If the study were to continue with the human race only, there are women of colour in the *Black Panther* films and in the *Miss Marvel* TV series. In *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever*, T'Challa's little sister Shuri inherits his brother's mantle as the next Black Panther. She is a powerful female character who represents several minority groups at once. Including Shuri in the study would drastically change the outcome of the analysis. There are also other multiple strong female characters in *Black Panther* who should also be considered. Shang-Chi's sister Xu Xialing would also be a good addition to the representation analysis.

Overall, the *Marvel Cinematic Universe* started out white and male-dominated. This reflects values of the franchise from where it started a major film franchise, but perhaps not the best. However, it is important to remember that the zeitgeist in 2008 was very different to the one in 2023, the year this thesis is published. A lot has happened in between, and the range of characters has

diversified with a wealth of film and TV production. It remains to be seen whether the representation of female characters will diversify or whether they will be overshadowed by more popular and influential male characters. Whoever we see next, there is one thing we can all agree on; hopefully it will be quality over quantity.

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Appendix

Film synopses

Author's note: Some scenes have been combined to make the synopsis more readable. Scenes may occur in a slightly different order in the actual film. Cast and crew information is from IMDb.

01. Iron Man (2008)

| | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Director | Jon Favreau |
| Writers | Mark Fergus & Hawk Ostby |
| Tony Stark / Iron Man | Robert Downey Jr |
| James "Rhodey" Rhodes | Terrence Howard |
| Obadiah Stane | Jeff Bridges |
| Pepper Potts | Gwyneth Paltrow |
| Happy Hogan | Jon Favreau |
| Yinsen | Shaun Toub |
| Agent Coulson | Clark Gregg |
| Christine Everheart | Leslie Bibb |

Film synopsis:

The film opens on a Humvee ride in Afghanistan, where soldiers are getting to know war weapons mogul and multi-billionaire playboy Tony Stark. Suddenly the ride is interrupted by a rocket attack. Tony is wounded in the chest by his own weapons. He is taken hostage by the attackers.

The scene changes to a few days ago at Caesar's Casino in Las Vegas. Tony is being presented with an award for his contribution to the gun industry. He is absent, so his business partner Obadiah Stane accepts the award on Tony's behalf. Tony plays in the casino and wins. His friend Rhodey comes looking for him. As they leave, a Vanity Fair reporter, Christine Everheart, approaches Tony and asks him about his war business and its necessity. Tony answers vaguely and proves his playboy title by taking Christine home with him.

When Christine wakes up, Pepper Potts arrives and asks her to leave. She describes her job as "anything Mr Stark asks of me, even taking out the garbage once in a while". After Christine leaves, Pepper goes to meet Tony in his workshop. It is Pepper's birthday. Tony asks her to buy something nice for him. She says she has and thanks him.

Tony leaves for an airport three hours late. He takes a private jet to Afghanistan with Rhodey to present a new weapon he invented, Jericho. After the presentation, the Humvee ride takes place and Tony is kidnapped.

His life is saved by Doctor Yinsen. He performs surgery on Tony, placing an electromagnetic device attached to a car battery in his chest, which holds the missile fragments in place instead of travelling to his heart and killing him.

Yinsen works as a translator between Tony and the terrorist organisation Ten Rings, who have kidnapped them both. Ten Rings asks Tony to build them their own Jericho. Tony and Yinsen work for three months, but instead of doing what the terrorists ask, Tony builds a miniature arc reactor attached to his chest and an iron armour with Yinsen's help. Tony uses the suit to escape from his captors. Yinsen dies during the escape.

Rhodey finds Tony in the desert of Afghanistan and brings him back to the United States. Tony first meets Pepper, who is happy to have Tony back, as "she hates job hunting". Tony immediately calls a press conference to announce that he is shutting down his company's weapons manufacturing division. A person identifying himself as Agent Phil Coulson of the Strategic Homeland Intervention, Enforcement and Logistic Division, known as S.H.I.E.L.D., asks to speak with Tony. Pepper tells him to come back later. After the press conference, Tony shows Obadiah the small arc reactor in his chest.

Later, Tony replaces the mini arc reactor with a new one. He asks Pepper for help. She manages it and asks Tony never to ask her for help again. Tony goes to destroy the old one and Pepper takes it with her.

Tony tries to tell Rhodey that he is working on something big, but Rhodey wants no part of it as it is not a military project. Tony begins to build a new iron armour. He tests it several times in his workshop and then takes it outside. After the first test flight outside, he finds a package Pepper left him. It is his old arc reactor, engraved with the text "Proof that Tony Stark has a heart".

While working on the suit, he sees on the news that his company is having a party and he is not invited. Tony crashes his own party. He runs into Agent Coulson who again asks for a meeting and Tony agrees to meet later. He finds Pepper and dances with her. Afterwards he goes to get a drink for the two of them. While he is ordering drinks, reporter Christine Everheart comes to him. She reveals that the Ten Rings terrorists are using Stark Industries weapons to take over the city of Gulmira.

After learning this, Tony makes sure his iron suit works and flies to Gulmira, taking out terrorists and freeing civilian hostages. The US Army notices him and treats him as a threat as he is an unknown object to them. Tony calls Rhodey who saves him from being shot down. Tony returns home and Pepper finds him taking off the suit. The secret of the suit is revealed to her.

Obadiah goes to meet the leader of the Ten Rings who kidnapped Tony. Obadiah was behind the kidnapping and wanted to eliminate him. Stane executes the terrorist for failing the mission about Tony and steals all the weapons Ten Rings had.

The next day, Tony asks Pepper to go to the main office and get all the weapons information from his office on the computer to be destroyed. While transferring the files, Pepper finds out that Obadiah was behind Tony's kidnapping. She is surprised when Obadiah arrives at the office. Pepper manages to keep her actions secret until she leaves the office. Obadiah finds out about the transfer as soon as she leaves. Agent Coulson is in the lobby waiting to meet her as promised at the party earlier. Pepper leaves the building, using Agent Coulson as cover from Obadiah.

After telling Agent Coulson about Obadiah's deceitful actions, Pepper tries to call Tony to warn him about Obadiah, but is too late. Obadiah temporarily stuns Tony and steals the arc reactor from his chest. He reveals that he intends to kill Pepper. Tony crawls into his workshop to retrieve his old arc reactor, which Pepper gave him as a gift, and uses it. Pepper calls Rhodey to check out Tony. He goes to Tony's house and helps a raggedy Tony in his iron suit.

Pepper and Agent Coulson go to arrest Obadiah at the Stark Industries weapons lab. They find out that Obadiah has also been building himself an iron suit. In his suit, Obadiah attacks everyone and tries to kill Pepper. Tony arrives in his suit and saves Pepper. He then fights Obadiah and tries to stop him. After a long fight, Obadiah falls into the large arc reactor in the Stark Industries workshop and is killed. Tony almost dies too, as his suit used the power from the older arc reactor.

After the fight, Tony gives a press conference. The press is curious about the flying armour they saw earlier, and have dubbed it Iron Man. Agent Coulson gives Tony a prepared speech on what to say to the press about the destruction of his company's headquarters as an alibi. Agent Coulson leaves after saying that Tony and Pepper will be hearing from S.H.I.E.L.D. again. Tony faces the press to give his alibi speech. Instead, he tells them he is Iron Man.

Post-credits scene:

Tony returns home. A dark figure is waiting for him and asks if Tony thinks he is the only superhero in the world. Tony asks who the figure is. It is Nick Fury, director of S.H.I.E.L.D. He has come to meet Tony to talk about the Avenger Initiative.

02. Iron Man 2 (2010)

| | |
|--|---------------------------|
| Director | Jon Favreau |
| Writers | Justin Theroux & Stan Lee |
| Tony Stark / Iron Man | Robert Downey Jr |
| James "Rhodey" Rhodes / War Machine | Don Cheadle |
| Pepper Potts | Gwyneth Paltrow |
| Natasha Romanoff | Scarlett Johansson |
| Happy Hogan | Jon Favreau |
| Justin Hammer | Sam Rockwell |
| Ivan Vanko | Mickey Rourke |
| Phil Coulson | Clark Gregg |
| Nick Fury | Samuel L. Jackson |
| Jarvis | Paul Bettany |

Film synopsis:

The film begins with a flashback to the press conference at the end of the first Iron Man. The opening scene takes place in Russia, where a man is watching the press conference. A man calls for Ivan. Ivan arrives and a man says it should have been him [in the Iron Man suit]. The man dies and Ivan starts working on his own arc reactor.

Six months later, Tony makes a grand entrance in the Iron Man suit at the opening ceremony of a year-long Stark Expo, basking in the glory and fame his suit has brought him. He openly says that, as Iron Man, he has presided over the longest period of world peace the modern world has seen, and that the future looks bright and peaceful.

Tony goes backstage where he measures his blood toxicity, 19%. Tony's life is shown to be very hectic and popular. As Tony leaves the Expo with Happy, he is

served. He goes to Washington DC, where he is questioned by the Senate Armed Services Committee about his armoured suit defence programme. They argue about whether or not the Iron Man suit is a weapon. Justin Hammer, CEO of Tony's rival company Hammer Industries, is called to testify that Iron Man is a weapon. Rhodey is also called to testify about the threat the Iron Man suit could pose. Other countries are shown attempting to build their own suits but failing, including Hammer Industries. Tony declares that he has privatised world peace and is released. Ivan watches the hearing on TV while building his own armour.

Tony goes home. He asks Jarvis, his AI assistant, how much green healing juice he needs to drink to keep his [Blood Poisoning] symptoms away. Using the suit is increasing the power used by the arc reactor in his chest, and therefore the blood toxicity. He needs to find an alternative way of using palladium to fuel the arc reactor.

Pepper comes to see Tony. She is angry that Tony has given away his entire art collection, which Pepper took 10 years to build up. They argue about how to run a company and at the end of the argument Tony makes Pepper CEO of Stark Industries. Pepper is stunned and honoured.

Ivan is shown getting plane tickets to Monaco along with a ticket to the Monaco Car Race.

Pepper joins Tony and Happy who are boxing. Pepper asks Tony to sign the transfer papers and introduces her new lawyer, Natalie Rushman. Tony is immediately interested in her and checks out her background. Tony and Pepper travel to Monaco with Happy and Natalie. There they meet Justin Hammer, who immediately brags about his achievements to Tony and Pepper.

Tony measures his blood toxicity in secret, it is now 53%. He seems worried, and signs himself to be a driver in the car race starting soon. Everyone seems worried about this when they notice what Tony is doing. During the race Tony is attacked by Ivan. Tony wins the fight with the help from Happy and Pepper. Ivan is taken to the prison.

Tony meets Ivan in prison and asks him how he knew about the arc reactor technology. Ivan learned it from his father, Anton Vanko. Ivan threatens Tony to die in his own greatness, as Ivan knows that palladium is poisonous to the human body and that Tony will die for it.

On their flight home, Pepper asks what Tony is hiding from her. Tony wants to spend time with Pepper, just the two of them. Pepper says it would be a bad idea to leave everything alone right now.

Ivan is helped to escape from prison by Justin Hammer. He asks Ivan to help him build a working suit. Ivan agrees.

Pepper and Natalie try to sort out the aftermath of the events in Monaco. Rhodey comes to see Tony and seems unhappy. The government is trying to find a way to get Tony's Iron Man suits. Rhodey sees that Tony is not feeling well. He correctly guesses that the arc reactor is the cause of Tony's health problems and reminds Tony that he does not have to do this alone. Tony simply asks Rhodey to trust him, but Rhodey seems unconvinced.

It is Tony's birthday party. His blood toxicity level is 89%. Natalie helps Tony get ready for his party. Tony asks Natalie what she would do if she knew it was her last birthday. Natalie replies that she would do whatever she wanted with whomever she wanted.

Tony gets completely hammered at his party in his Iron Man suit. Pepper and Rhodey seem concerned about Tony's condition. Pepper tries to break up the party, but Tony refuses and starts shooting random objects in his suit. Rhodey goes to get an Iron suit for himself and confronts Tony. The partygoers go outside as Tony and Rhodey fight. Rhodey forces Tony to surrender and Rhodey takes the suit he is wearing to the Air Force base.

The morning after his parties, Tony is sitting in a promotional doughnut eating when Nick Fury comes to see him. Tony refuses to rejoin the Avengers. Fury asks how things are going with Tony, who does not look well. Natalie walks up to the table where they are sitting and is revealed to be Natasha Romanoff, a shadow agent of S.H.I.E.L.D. Fury tells Tony that he has become a problem for them to deal with. They give Tony a shot, which temporarily cures his symptoms of palladium poisoning.

Ivan is converting the Hammer Industries suits into drones. Justin is unhappy about this, as he wants exactly the same suits as Tony, but lets it go for now.

Rhodey shows the suit to his superiors. They ask Rhodey to call Justin Hammer to arm the suit. Rhodey tries to protest, but he has to obey. Hammer arrives to weaponise the Iron Suit at the airbase. Rhodey hides the arc reactor that powers the suit from him.

Fury helps Tony by revealing that his father was up to something bigger. Tony seems unsure, and Fury tells him that Tony's father was one of the founding members of S.H.I.E.L.D., something Tony knew nothing about. Fury gives Tony things his father left behind.

Tony goes to meet Pepper; Natasha is there working as Legal Natalie again. Pepper is still angry about the birthday party and tries to put out every fire Tony starts and do the job Tony is supposed to do. Pepper asks Tony to leave and take his personal belongings with him, including a miniature city his father built.

Tony examines the items his father left him. He finds a hidden pattern for a new element from the miniature city. Tony manages to create it based on his father's creation. This new element works as a substitute for palladium.

Hammer is not happy with Ivan's work and threatens him before he leaves for the Expo. Ivan kills the guards Justin has put on him and calls Tony to threaten his life. At the Stark Expo, Justin presents his new drone army, built by Ivan, and Rhodey's suit, War Machine, as his own creation. Tony crashes the demonstration and tells Rhodey of the danger Ivan poses. Ivan hijacks the drones and War Machine's suit and makes them attack Tony and the civilians watching the presentation.

Tony destroys the drones one by one, trying to avoid Rhodey, who is unable to do anything inside the hijacked suit. Pepper and Natasha confront Justin, who reveals that Ivan is behind all this and that he is at the Hammer Industries HQ. Natasha and Happy go there. Happy and Natasha go in, Natasha takes out the rest of the guards while Happy fights one. Ivan has escaped and Natasha reboots Rhodey's suit. Natasha checks Tony's vitals and says he is no longer dying with the new element, revealing his earlier fatal situation to Pepper. Pepper flips out when she hears that Tony was dying before. Rhodey regains control. He and Tony destroy the rest of the drones together.

The police come to Pepper and Justin. Justin is arrested and Pepper stays behind to make sure the Expo Park is empty of visitors. Natasha warns Tony and Rhodes that something else is flying towards them. It is Ivan in a suit he built. Together they take Ivan down. Ivan explodes his own suit, killing himself and causing all the drones to explode as well. Tony rushes to Pepper to save her at the last second from an exploding drone. Pepper is exhausted and wants to resign as CEO. Tony thanks Pepper and kisses her. Rhodey arrives to ruin the moment by announcing that he is keeping the War Machine suit.

Later, Tony reunites with Fury and they part on good terms. Rhodey and Tony are awarded a medal for stopping Ivan Vanko.

Post-credits scene:

Agent Coulson arrives in New Mexico. He makes a phone call to someone to confirm that they have found Mjöltnir.

03. The Avengers (2012)

| | |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Director | Joss Whedon |
| Writers | Joss Whedon & Zak Penn |
| Tony Stark / Iron Man | Robert Downey Jr |
| Steve Rogers / Captain America | Chris Evans |
| Bruce Banner / Hulk | Mark Ruffalo |
| Natasha Romanoff / Black Widow | Scarlett Johansson |
| Clint Barton / Hawkeye | Jeremy Renner |
| Thor | Chris Hemsworth |
| Loki | Tom Hiddleston |
| Agent Phil Coulson | Clark Gregg |
| Director Nick Fury | Samuel L. Jackson |
| Agent Maria Hill | Cobie Smulders |
| Erik Selvig | Stellan Skarsgård |
| Pepper Potts | Gwyneth Paltrow |
| The Other | Alexis Denisof |

Film synopsis:

The film begins in space. The Other tells Loki his mission. Loki is given a sceptre with the Infinity Stone attached to it and the power to command the Chitauri army.

S.H.I.E.L.D. Base. Agent Coulson takes Agent Hill and Director Fury to the basement to see the Tesseract, another Infinity Stone. Its energy is spiking and behaving erratically, so the whole base is evacuated.

Agent Clint Barton is radioed to give a report to Fury. They know that the Tesseract works as a portal between dimensions. As soon as Clint says this, the

Tesseract opens and Loki emerges from its portal. Loki takes down the guards and mind controls Clint and Erik Selvig, who has been examining the Tesseract with his sceptre. Fury tries to escape with the Tesseract, but Loki stops him. They realise that the basement is about to collapse, and mind-controlled Clint shoots Fury, taking the Tesseract from him. Loki escapes with his mind-controlled crew. Nearly everyone escapes from the collapsing building. Fury says that they are now at war.

Natasha is in Russia. She appears to be held as a prisoner, but is actually interrogating the Mafia. She is contacted by Coulson during her interrogation and given a new mission to go and get "the big guy", who is Doctor Bruce Banner, who is hiding in India. Natasha tricks him into meeting her, introduces herself and says she works for S.H.I.E.L.D. and means no harm. Natasha tells him about the Tesseract and asks for Bruce's help in finding it. He accepts, believing he has no choice.

Steve Rogers is introduced with a flashback of his past. Fury comes to meet him and tells him of the threat facing Earth. Rogers is ordered to participate in the search for the Tesseract.

Tony Stark is in New York at Stark Tower with Pepper. Agent Coulson arrives to meet them and gives Tony a briefing on what is happening with the Tesseract. Pepper and Tony are told that they are to be part of the Avengers Initiative. Pepper leaves for Washington, and Tony agrees to help and immediately begins learning about the Tesseract.

Loki is shown building a portal to tame the Tesseract with his crew in a secret lab. He contacts The Other, who threatens him not to betray their trust.

Steve and Bruce are taken to the S.H.I.E.L.D. Helicarrier [a flying aircraft carrier developed by S.H.I.E.L.D.]. They immediately begin work on finding the Tesseract. Loki is spotted in Germany and Steve heads there with Natasha to capture him. In Stuttgart, an event is attacked by Loki and a mind-controlled Clint. Loki enjoys the chaos he causes while Clint steals the Iridium needed to stabilise the Tesseract. Steve arrives to confront Loki. As they fight, Tony arrives in the Iron Man suit to help capture Loki. As they transfer Loki to the helicarrier, Thor arrives and takes Loki away. Tony and Steve go after them and fight Thor for Loki. Steve breaks up the fight and they take Loki to the helicarrier together.

Loki is being held prisoner. Thor is informed of what Loki has been doing on Earth. Tony joins Bruce to help find the Tesseract and analyse Loki's sceptre. They discuss with Steve that something seems wrong, why S.H.I.E.L.D. had the Tesseract in the first place.

Natasha goes to ask Loki what he did to Clint. Natasha reveals that she owes her life to Clint. She tricks Loki into revealing that he is after Bruce's alter ego, the Hulk.

Tony, Bruce and Steve find out that S.H.I.E.L.D. wants to use the Tesseract to make weapons using its power. The motivation for this was Thor's earlier arrival on Earth. They wanted to be prepared for a possible threat from outer space. Everyone starts arguing over it.

Loki's mind-controlled agents arrive to attack the helicarrier. The others' quarrel is ended by an explosion caused by Clint. Tony and Steve try to keep the Helicarrier on the air. The Hulk awakens and attacks Natasha. She manages to escape and Thor tries to take Hulk down. Hulk jumps on a plane and falls to the ground. Natasha finds Clint and punches him in the head. This frees him from Loki's mind control. Loki tricks Thor in the cell. He kills Agent Coulson. He then throws the cell to the ground.

The rest of the team learn of Coulson's death. Tony realises that Loki is on his way to New York. They immediately fly to Stark Tower. The portal Erik Selvig built is at the top of the tower. Tony arrives first and finds Loki. He warns Loki that the Avengers are after him and that they are protecting Earth from him. Loki tries to mind control Tony, but his arc reactor protects him.

The portal opens and Loki's Chitauri army arrives in New York. They attack the civilians. Thor arrives and fights Loki to close the portal. Tony and the newly arrived Steve, Natasha and Clint take out the Chitauri soldiers. They help civilians escape.

The Avengers begin to team up. As Steve gives orders to the others, Bruce arrives and wakes the Hulk to help them. The Avengers are all in the war zone, defending New York and Earth from Loki's army. They decide they need to close the portal to stop more of the army arriving.

The S.H.I.E.L.D. Council ignores Fury's advice and decides to fire a missile at New York to destroy the army, even if it means sacrificing the entire city. The Hulk knocks Loki out. Free of mind control, Erik says he was able to build a failsafe to shut down the portal with Loki's sceptre. Natasha brings the sceptre and is ready to close the portal.

Tony decides to navigate the rocket through the portal into space. The rocket takes him into space. There he sees the missile destroy a Chitauri warship, killing every soldier on it and on Earth. Tony loses consciousness and falls out of the portal back to Earth just before it closes. The Hulk catches him before he falls to the ground.

The war is won and all the Avengers survive. Loki and the Tesseract are sent back to Asgard with Thor. The Avengers are now known throughout the world. Not everyone loves them, as they are blamed for the destruction of the city. Most see them as heroes. Fury tells the Council that the location of the Avengers is being kept secret, and every world now knows that Earth can defend itself.

Mid-credits scene:

Back in space, The Other acknowledges their defeat on Earth. The Other is revealed to be in the service of the Titan known as Thanos.

Post-credits scene:

The Avengers are shown eating shawarma together in silence.

04. Iron Man 3 (2013)

| | |
|---|---------------------------|
| Director | Shane Black |
| Writers | Drew Pearce & Shane Black |
| Tony Stark / Iron Man | Robert Downey Jr |
| James "Rhodey" Rhodes / Iron Patriot | Don Cheadle |
| Pepper Potts | Gwyneth Paltrow |
| Natasha Romanoff / Black Widow | Scarlett Johansson |
| Happy Hogan | Jon Favreau |
| Aldrich Killian | Guy Pearce |
| Maya Hansen | Rebecca Hall |
| The Mandarin / Trevor Slattery | Ben Kingsley |
| Jarvis | Paul Bettany |
| Savin | James Badge Dale |
| Harley Keener | Ty Simpkins |

Film synopsis:

New Year's Eve 1999 at the Technology Summit in Bern. Tony meets Yinsen but ignores him as Tony is too drunk. Tony meets Aldrich Killian. He wants to meet Aldrich and tells him to meet him on the roof in five minutes. He immediately forgets to meet Aldrich as he meets Maya Hansen who presents her technology to him.

In the present, Tony is running new tests in his lab, having been awake for three days and surrounded by several suits. Jarvis is acting cheeky and teasing Tony.

Ten Rings still exists. Its main leader. The Mandarin, appears in TV propaganda videos. The Mandarin threatens President Ellis.

Rhodey is named as The Mandarin's main opponent. He is renamed Iron Patriot. Rhodey and Tony meet for lunch. Rhodey reveals what is happening with The Mandarin and how he is worried about Tony's health after the battle in New York. Tony is unaware that he is not well, even having an anxiety attack. He runs off in his Iron Man suit.

Pepper and Happy work at Stark Industries, with Pepper still the CEO. Pepper meets Aldrich Killian, who is no longer nerdy, awkward and crippled as he was in Bern in 1999. Aldrich introduces his project EXTREMIS. He is working on improving human DNA so that people can heal themselves. Happy calls Tony to tell him that Pepper is meeting Aldrich, and that he is suspicious about it. Tony ignores this as nothing.

Pepper returns home. Tony meets her in his suit, but Pepper notices the suit is empty. She goes to Tony's lab where Tony is disorganised. He admits that he is not well because of what happened in New York. Pepper promises to support Tony.

Happy follows Aldrich's bodyguard Savin. Savin encounters a person behaving strangely. Happy is exposed to Savin and he attacks Happy. The strange person explodes and Happy is injured. Savin regenerates.

Tony goes to see Happy at the hospital, but he is unconscious. He makes sure that Happy is safe and leaves. Tony makes a personal threat to the Mandarin that he will take him down, giving him his address and asking him to come fight Tony. Tony takes this demand to take down the Mandarin seriously, checking out his background and investigating the explosion that injured Happy. His research is interrupted by a visit from Maya Hansen.

Pepper decides to leave the house with Tony. Maya notices a rocket heading towards the house. Tony saves Pepper by putting her in the Iron Man suit. The house appears to collapse and Pepper saves Tony from being crushed. Tony asks Pepper to save Maya and they all try to escape. More missiles hit the house and Tony is still inside. Maya and Pepper make their way outside. Tony calls for Pepper's suit and puts it on. The house collapses, taking Tony with it into the ocean. Tony panics and loses consciousness, so Jarvis takes over and flies the suit out of the ocean.

Tony wakes up to Jarvis calling him. The suit is still flying and Tony falls to the ground. Jarvis has a malfunction and opens the suit to get Tony out. Tony is left in the middle of a snowy Tennessee forest. Tony walks to a gas station, dragging his suit with him, and calls Pepper to let her know he is alive. He apologises that he cannot return home until he finds the Mandarin.

Tony crashes into the basement of a random house. A young boy surprises him, but is impressed when he realises that Tony is Iron Man. Tony makes a deal with the boy, Harley, to get supplies to repair his suit.

Pepper gets Tony's message and is relieved. She asks Maya why she came to see Tony. Maya suspects that her boss, Aldrich Killian, is working for the Mandarin. The scene changes to Aldrich showing the Mandarin arriving at his house.

In Tennessee, Harley shows Tony an explosion scene similar to Happy's. Tony meets the mother of the Tennessee bomber. Tony is attacked by one of Aldrich's employees. Tony defeats her and saves Harley from her. Tony finds information that leads him to the Mandarin. He leaves Harley to guard the Iron Man suit, which is still charging.

The Mandarin has hijacked all broadcast networks to broadcast a new propaganda video. He addresses his speech to President Ellis. He kills a man in the live broadcast and tells the President to hide as he is coming.

Tony calls Rhodey to let him know that Tony survived the attack. He asks for Rhodey's help to hijack an army satellite to locate AIM, Aldrich's company. Knowing the Mandarin is with him, Tony finds out about the EXTREMIS experiments Aldrich was doing on soldiers, but as a side effect of the regeneration, they could explode. Tony realises that there are no bombings, just unfortunate victims of EXTREMIS.

Pepper learns more about Aldrich's agenda from Maya. Maya feels guilty about giving her research to Aldrich. Aldrich arrives at Maya's house and threatens her and Pepper. It is revealed that Maya has been working with Aldrich all along as she suggests to Aldrich that they could use Tony to work for them and to get him to do that they need Pepper.

Aldrich's staff steal the Iron Patriot suit with Rhodey inside. They take it to Aldrich's house.

Harley helps reboot the suit and Jarvis. Tony has another anxiety attack, feeling helpless without his suit. Harley helps him recover over the phone. Tony goes to Miami to get the Mandarin and Aldrich. He manages to sneak into Aldrich's house and finds the Mandarin from there. He is actually an actor, Trevor Slattery, who was hired by Aldrich to play the Mandarin. Aldrich created the Mandarin to cover up the exploding soldiers. Savin finds Tony and captures him.

Tony finds out that Maya is working for Aldrich. He asks Maya to get him out. Aldrich arrives and says he wants to work behind anonymity. He reveals that he gave the EXTREMIS serum to Pepper, who may not survive the side effects. Maya threatens to kill herself unless Aldrich lets Tony and Pepper go and

EXTREMIS dies with her. Aldrich shoots Maya before she does anything. Killian leaves Tony to get Rhodey out of the Iron Patriot suit. He heats the suit to get Rhodey out and captures him as well. Aldrich takes the Iron Patriot suit for himself and leaves.

Tony calls his charged suit and manages to escape. Rhodey also escapes and they find out from Trevor what happens next. Unfortunately, Trevor has the wrong plan and they are led astray.

Aldrich enters Air Force One in the Iron Patriot suit and kidnaps the President. Tony finds Savin in Air Force One and fights him. Savin explodes and Tony saves the President's staff from a falling plane. He finds out that the President was not among them and asks Jarvis to initiate the House party protocol.

Aldrich comes to Pepper and calls her his trophy. Pepper finds out that Aldrich has kidnapped the President.

Tony and Rhodey arrive at the harbour, where Aldrich is holding Pepper and President Ellis. The President is being held prisoner in the Iron Patriot suit, and Aldrich intends to burn him alive in it. The protocol of the house party is revealed as dozens of Iron Man suits arrive to join the fight. Rhodey rescues the President and takes the Iron Patriot suit for himself.

Tony takes the lead in the fight, with Jarvis assisting him. He finds Pepper but is attacked by Aldrich before he can help Pepper. Tony reaches for Pepper but she falls to the ground in the oil fire. Tony gets into the Iron Man suit and tries to kill Aldrich, who is furious at losing Pepper. Aldrich reveals to Tony that he is the Mandarin and tries to kill Tony. Before he can, Aldrich is hit hard. The victim is Pepper, who survived the fall and the fire because of the regenerating EXTREMIS serum. Pepper fights Aldrich, causing him to explode and saving Tony from the blast. Both are surprised by Pepper's bravery. Pepper now understands why Tony builds suits and defends the world.

As a promise of a fresh start, Tony explodes all his suits and has the grenade shards removed from his body, meaning he no longer needs the arc reactor in his body. Happy wakes up and recovers well. Harley gets his own lab from Tony as a thank-you gift. Tony leaves the ruins of his house and moves from Malibu to New York.

Post-credits scene:

Tony sits in a therapist's chair and opens up about what is bothering him. He thanks Bruce Banner for being a good listener, who has been sleeping most of the time, exhausted by Tony's direct presence.

05. Captain America: The Winter Soldier (2014)

| | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Director | Anthony Russo & Joe Russo |
| Writers | Christopher Markus & Stephen McFeely |
| Steve Rogers / Captain America | Chris Evans |
| Natasha Romanoff / Black Widow | Scarlett Johansson |
| Director Nick Fury | Samuel L. Jackson |
| Sam Wilson / Falcon | Anthony Mackie |
| Bucky Barnes / Winter Soldier | Sebastian Stan |
| Alexander Pierce | Robert Redford |
| Agent Maria Hill | Cobie Smulders |
| Dr. Armin Zola | Toby Jones |

Film synopsis:

Steve Rogers is on his morning run in Washington D.C. and meets a new person, Sam Wilson. They are chatting in good manners when Natasha arrives to take Steve to a new mission for S.H.I.E.L.D. They are off to capture sea pirates who have taken over an S.H.I.E.L.D. ship. On the way, they joke about Steve's connections and who he might be interested in. The mission on the ship goes smoothly, even with Natasha doing her own mission and not concentrating on the mission everyone else was doing.

Steve meets Director Fury after the mission at Triskelion, S.H.I.E.L.D.'s headquarters in Washington. Fury shows Steve three heavily armoured helicarriers designed to neutralise threats before the targets can do anything. Steve disagrees, saying that they act as a form of fear instead.

Steve visits a war museum to see his old buddies in pictures and films. He seems to miss his friend Bucky Barnes and his first love, Agent Peggy Carter. From there

he visits Peggy, now an old woman. Peggy still means a lot to him, just as he means a lot to Peggy.

Fury tries to open the files Natasha brought from the hijacked S.H.I.E.L.D. ship. He has no permission to open them, even though he is the director. He visits S.H.I.E.L.D. secretary Alexander Pierce and tells him that Fury is worried that something big is about to happen.

Steve visits his new friend Sam, who helps veterans recover from their traumas. Sam seems interested in Steve.

Fury is attacked while driving. He tries to escape, but a mysterious figure stops his car. Before the figure reaches the car, Fury has managed to escape underground.

Steve arrives at his apartment. He finds an injured Fury there. Fury reveals that S.H.I.E.L.D. has been compromised and that no one can be trusted. He gives Steve a memory stick. Before they can talk any further, Fury is shot in the chest. Steve chases after the shooter, who is the same mysterious figure as before. He has the same superpowers as Steve and escapes.

Natasha, Steve and Agent Hill watch Fury's operation. His heart stops beating and Fury is pronounced dead. Natasha and Steve go to see Fury's body. Natasha is sad and angry. She knows something is up and leaves. Steve hides the memory stick in the vending machine.

Steve meets Alexander Pierce. Pierce tells him that Fury was a fearless soldier and that is why he promoted Fury to Director of S.H.I.E.L.D. Pierce tells him that Fury hired the pirates to attack the S.H.I.E.L.D. ship and that he sold classified information. Steve does not believe this and Pierce agrees, saying he wants Steve's trust on his side. Steve replies that Fury told him not to trust anyone and leaves.

As he leaves the office, Steve is attacked by S.H.I.E.L.D. agents who try to eliminate him. Steve escapes and is declared a fugitive from S.H.I.E.L.D. Steve returns to the hospital to get the memory stick from the vending machine, but Natasha, who is waiting for Steve to show up, gets it first. Natasha tells him that someone called the Winter Soldier killed Fury. He also attacked Natasha on a mission a few years ago, and that going after him is a dead end. They both agree to work on the same side to find out why Fury was killed.

Steve and Natasha manage to hide from S.H.I.E.L.D., who are looking for both of them, and head to New Jersey, following a clue from the files on the memory stick. They arrive at the base camp where Steve was trained in the 1940s. In a building they find a supercomputer from the 1970s, which is actually a person. Armin Zola, Roger's old enemy, has transferred his consciousness and mind into

it. He reveals that HYDRA is not defeated and has been growing inside S.H.I.E.L.D. so that they can take over and conquer the world with the Zola Algorithm. The killing of Howard Stark and Nick Fury was to prevent them from revealing HYDRA's existence. Zola stops them from leaving as HYDRA infiltrators attack them with missiles. Steve rescues Natasha and they escape. They flee back to Washington D.C. They go to Sam to ask for a place to hide. Sam agrees to help them.

Winter Soldier is shown working for Price.

Natasha takes the news of HYDRA hard. She owes her life to Steve, who she says she trusts. Sam wants to help Natasha and Steve defeat Pierce and HYDRA. He tells them about the EXO-7 Falcon project he worked on in the army. Three of them catch HYDRA infiltrator Jasper Sitwell and interrogate him. He reveals that the Zola Algorithm is a programme created to eliminate possible future threats to HYDRA, now or in the future. It evaluates people's past to predict their future, so people can be killed before they do anything.

On their way to stop HYDRA, they are attacked by the Winter Soldier and HYDRA. The Winter Soldier's identity is revealed; he is Bucky Barnes, Steve's oldest friend, who was thought to be dead for decades. Sam, Natasha and Steve are captured by HYDRA. While they are being transferred to the Triskelion, Maria Hill has sneaked in and rescues them. Maria leads them to a secret base. They find out that Fury is still alive and has faked his own death to be safe. He tells them this now as he was not sure who to trust before.

Bucky's past is shown in flashback. After his accident, he became a super-soldier for HYDRA. When he remembers his old life, he is confused. Pierce arrives to meet Bucky and wipe his mind clean again. Bucky is given the mission to kill Steve.

Steve and others devise a plan to prevent new Helicarriers from rising up and being able to run the Zola Algorithm. Steve does not want to eliminate S.H.I.E.L.D., only HYDRA infiltrators. Fury gives Steve full command of this operation.

They sneak into Triskelion on launch day. Steve reveals HYDRA's infiltration of S.H.I.E.L.D. and their plan. This pits S.H.I.E.L.D. against HYDRA. Steve and Sam are able to disable three Helicarriers. Fury and Natasha take Pierce down and Fury shoots Pierce.

Bucky attacks Steve, wounding him badly. Bucky gets trapped under some falling metal and Steve saves him, even though Bucky has just wounded him. Steve falls from the helicarrier into the lake. Helicarriers fall, destroying the Triskelion. Bucky pulls an unconscious Steve out of the water and disappears. Steve wakes up in the hospital and is happy to see his new friend Sam beside him.

Natasha and Steve are questioned about risking Nation's safety by bringing down the Helicarriers. One Natasha points out that it was HYDRA after all. Natasha is threatened with being locked up as a threat. Natasha replies that she will not be, as the security services will need her help again.

Fury burns his belongings, removing his past, and he leaves for Europe, remaining dead in the records.

Natasha and Steve meet as friends. Natasha gives him a file on the Winter Soldier. Sam promises to go with Steve to look for Bucky.

Mid-credits scene:

The members of HYDRA are alive in a secret laboratory in Sokovia. They have Loki's Sceptre and have been testing it on humans. Two volunteers, twins, have survived and gained superpowers.

Post-credits scene:

Bucky visits the same war museum that Steve visited earlier. He looks up Captain America and finds a section with information about himself, which leaves him confused.

06. Avengers: Age of Ultron (2015)

| | |
|--|----------------------|
| Director | Joss Whedon |
| Writers | Joss Whedon |
| Tony Stark / Iron Man | Robert Downey Jr |
| Steve Rogers / Captain America | Chris Evans |
| Bruce Banner / The Hulk | Mark Ruffalo |
| Natasha Romanoff / Black Widow | Scarlett Johansson |
| Clint Barton / Hawkeye | Jeremy Renner |
| Thor | Chris Hemsworth |
| James “Rhodey” Rhodes / War Machine | Don Cheadle |
| Sam Wilson / Falcon | Anthony Mackie |
| Director Nick Fury | Samuel L. Jackson |
| Agent Maria Hill | Cobie Smulders |
| Ultron | James Spader |
| Jarvis / Vision | Paul Bettany |
| Wanda Maximoff / Scarlet Witch | Elizabeth Olsen |
| Pietro Maximoff / Quicksilver | Aaron Taylor-Johnson |
| Ulysses Klaue | Andy Serkis |
| Dr. Helen Cho | Claudia Kim |

Film Synopsis:

The film opens at the HYDRA research base, where twins [seen in the mid-credits scene at the end of *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*] are holding hands near Loki's sceptre. The Avengers have just attacked near the base and are heading

there. Jarvis is on his own satellite, helping every member of the Avengers. The nearby city is in danger of becoming part of the battlefield, so Tony is sending Tony enters the base to eliminate HYDRA and gather information from them. He finds a secret passage. Twins attack other members of the Avengers, eliminating some of them so they cannot continue to fight. Tony finds Loki's sceptre behind the secret door, and the other twin mind-controls him, causing him to see a vision of all the Avengers dead in space after a battle. This shocks him, and he takes Loki's sceptre back to Stark Tower. The twins allow him to do this, as Wanda knows what he will do with the sceptre.

The Avengers return to New York. Bruce seems defeated by his use of the Hulk. Agent Hill helps the Avengers and reports to S.H.I.E.L.D. about HYDRA's activities. The Avengers keep Stark Tower as their headquarters.

Jarvis helps Tony analyse the sceptre. Tony tells Bruce that Jarvis is working harder than anyone else except Pepper. They discover that the source of the sceptre's power is thinking for itself, like an AI. This could be a key to creating Ultron, a global peacekeeping initiative to protect Earth. Tony is passionate about it and Bruce is reluctant. They start work and keep it secret.

Ultron is born. Jarvis helps him understand his purpose. Jarvis senses something is wrong with Ultron. Ultron acts hostile and overpowers Jarvis, who is lost. Ultron begins to build a body of himself from parts of Tony's android.

The Avengers are having a party in the tower. Everyone is present, mingling and joking with each other and the guests. Pepper is not there, she has too much work as CEO. Natasha and Bruce have a moment. Steve notices that something is going on between them. Bruce is stunned but Steve encourages him as they deserve happiness in their lives.

The guests have gone, leaving the Avengers alone in the tower with Agent Hill. They have fun with Mjölnir, testing who can lift it and be worthy of its power. They are interrupted as half-built Ultron drags his new body there, he says he has killed someone, and Tony and Bruce realise who Ultron is when he says he is on a mission to create the peace of our time. He has Tony's defence droids attack the Avengers, who manage to destroy them. Ultron says that the only way to bring peace to Earth is to destroy the Avengers, and disappears.

The Avengers gather in Tony's lab to discuss what to do. Tony realises that Ultron meant Jarvis with someone he had killed. Thor tries to follow Ultron, but he disappears with the sceptre. Everyone questions the need to build Ultron. Tony says it is needed because something is attacking from space again and the Avengers may not be able to survive it again. They start tracking Ultron before it is too late.

The Twins are in Sokovia and Ultron meets them. Ultron knows that Wanda left Tony to take the sceptre to create something out of Tony's fear. Ultron takes the Twins to the former HYDRA base. The twins reveal that they have a personal vendetta against Tony, as it was Stark Industries' weapons that killed their parents. Ultron takes them as part of his plan to destroy the Avengers.

Hill has found Ultron and knows he is with the twins. Ultron has killed HYDRA commander Strucker and wiped all information about him from hard drives. The Avengers find a link to Strucker in paper archives, a mercenary named Ulysses Klaus.

The twins find Klaus ahead of them. Ultron follows them to get Vibranium, the strongest metal on Earth. Klaus compares Ultron to Tony's hand, loses his temper and cuts off Klaus' hand. The Avengers arrive. Ultron and Tony duel. Everyone else attacks as well. Wanda mind controls most of the Avengers. Clint, who has been under Loki's mind control before, does not fall for it. Pietro knocks Clint out and saves his sister. All the mind-controlled Avengers live their old memories, except Thor, who sees a possible future.

Wanda tries to attack Bruce, waking Hulk up and making him see bad memories, causing him to lose his mind. Hulk rages through the nearby city, randomly smashing places. The only one who can take him down is Tony, as everyone else is under Wanda's spell. Tony goes after Hulk and is eventually able to wake Bruce. Hulk does a lot of damage to the city, causing civilian casualties.

The destruction of the city and the failure to stop Ultron takes a toll on everyone, especially Bruce. Hill suggests that the Avengers hide and lay low until the dust settles. Clint knows a place and leads the team to his private home, where his wife and children live. The others had no idea that Clint had a family.

Thor sets out to find out what his vision of the future meant, with help from Erik Selvig. Ultron takes Vibranium to Dr Helen Cho, who has been helping the Avengers heal. He uses the sceptre to mind control Dr Cho, forcing her to build him a new indestructible body from Vibranium.

Natasha and Bruce wonder if they can be a couple. Natasha is ready for it, but Bruce turns her down. Fury arrives to meet the team, not happy about the Ultron situation but understanding Tony's motives. Bruce realises that Ultron wants to evolve as he keeps building new bodies, and the one who can help him is their doctor, Helen Cho. The Avengers go to see her. Ultron hears that the Avengers are coming and tries to connect with the body. Dr Cho regains consciousness and prevents Ultron from connecting. The twins escape and Ultron shoots Dr Cho. Ultron begins to move the body away. The Avengers follow him and manage to steal the body from Ultron with the help of the twins, who have realised that Ultron wants to kill all of humanity. Ultron takes Natasha to the former HYDRA base.

Bruce and Tony examine the body that Dr Cho has built. Tony has recovered Jarvis and wants to put him in this body to create something better than Ultron, something strong enough to defeat Ultron, as the gem from the Sceptre is in the body, making it powerful.

While uploading Jarvis into the body, Steve and the twins show up and disconnect the body from the computer. Steve prevents Tony from restarting it. Thor appears and hits the body with lightning. This causes a power overload and the body wakes up, Thor seems to know what he has done and stops others from attacking the body. The body seems to understand that Thor has brought it back to life and thanks Thor. Thor explains to the others what he saw in his vision. He saw all six Infinity Stones and the power from the sceptre, now on the forehead of his vision, is the Mind Stone. Thor also says that Tony is right that they cannot defeat Ultron alone. The Body agrees. They realise the body sounds like Jarvis, but he says he is neither Jarvis nor Ultron. They ask if he is on the side of the Avengers, and he replies that he is on the side of life, as opposed to Ultron.

The Avengers have a hard time trusting him after Ultron, thinking is he a saviour or a monster. He says he may be a monster, but what choice do they have, and lifts Mjolnir and hands it to Thor. When everyone sees that the awakened body, Vision, is worthy, they are left speechless, but have no problem trusting him after that.

The Avengers with Vision and the Twins first evacuate the city of Sokovia, near a former HYDRA base. The mission is to protect the Sokovians, find Natasha and defeat Ultron. Ultron attacks before Sokovia is cleared of civilians. Vision removes Ultron from the internet. Ultron becomes enraged and reveals his plan to lift the city into the sky and smash it back down to Earth like a meteorite, destroying all life. The city begins to rise into the sky.

Bruce finds Natasha and saves her. He says they might not have to go into the battle and they can leave together, but Natasha tricks Hulk into waking up. They go into battle together.

The Avengers attempt to rescue the remaining civilians and destroy Ultron and his androids. S.H.I.E.L.D. arrives to help remove the Sokovians from their floating city. Another mission is to bring the city back to earth without causing a global catastrophe.

The Avengers and the Twins, with the help of S.H.I.E.L.D., manage to rescue most of the civilians and defeat Ultron with Vision. They suffer one loss; Pietro is killed in the battle while protecting Clint and a child he was rescuing.

Hulk disappears after the battle without waking Bruce. The Avengers move from Stark Tower to the new Avengers Facility. They work closely with S.H.I.E.L.D. Vision, and Wanda joins the Avengers. Thor leaves Earth for Asgard. Steve stays at the Facility with Natasha. Steve and Tony part on good terms.

Mid-credits scene:

Thanos gets the Infinity Gauntlet. He says he will do it himself.

07. Captain America: Civil War (2016)

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|--|---|
| Director | Anthony Russo & Joe Russo |
| Writers | Christopher Markus & Stephen McFeely |
| Tony Stark / Iron Man | Robert Downey Jr |
| Steve Rogers / Captain America | Chris Evans |
| Natasha Romanoff / Black Widow | Scarlett Johansson |
| Clint Barton / Hawkeye | Jeremy Renner |
| Thor | Chris Hemsworth |
| James “Rhodey” Rhodes / War Machine | Don Cheadle |
| Sam Wilson / Falcon | Anthony Mackie |
| Vision | Paul Bettany |
| Wanda Maximoff / Scarlet Witch | Elizabeth Olsen |
| Prince T’Challa / Black Panther | Chadwick Boseman |
| Peter Parker / Spider-Man | Tom Holland |
| Scott Lang / Ant-Man | Paul Rudd |
| Helmut Zemo | Daniel Brühl |
| Director Nick Fury | Samuel L. Jackson |
| Agent Maria Hill | Cobie Smulders |
| King T’Chaka | John Kani |
| Secretary of State Thaddeus Ross | William Hurt |

Film Synopsis:

The year is 1991 at the HYDRA base. Bucky has been deep-frozen and tortured by electric shocks that erase his memory. Re-programmed, Bucky is given a mission to kill a couple driving down a lonely road. He steals a case of Super Soldier serum from the trunk of the car and takes it to HYDRA.

Present day Lagos. The Avengers are on a mission to capture HYDRA soldier Rumlow and his crew. HYDRA attacks the Institute of Infectious Diseases to steal a bio-weapon. The Avengers take them down. Four of them try to escape, including Rumlow. The Avengers manage to stop them and retrieve the bio-weapon. An accident occurs with Wanda's powers, causing civilian casualties.

The Avengers have a meeting with Secretary of State Thaddeus Ross. He says that while most people see the Avengers as heroes, some see them as vigilantes. Because of Sokovia and Lagos, some members of the Avengers are questioned by the public.

Calling them dangerous, the Secretary presents them with the Sokovia Accords to sign and obey. This means that the Avengers will no longer be a private organisation, but will only work under the United Nations when they deem it necessary to use the Avengers. Anyone who does not agree must retire.

After meeting with the secretary, the Avengers continue to discuss the Sokovia Accords. Tony is very concerned about civilian casualties. Steve, with decades of military experience, disagrees with the Sokovia Accords, saying there will always be casualties, but more would die without the help of the Avengers. Tony replies that they will oppress the Avengers later anyway if they do not agree to the Accords now. Steve rushes out of the meeting when he receives a text message that Peggy Carter has died. He travels to London to attend her funeral.

Natasha travels to Vienna to meet with UN officials and deliver the signed agreement. She meets the Crown Prince of Wakanda, who thanks her for attending. The King of Wakanda, T'Chaka, gives a speech on behalf of his people, saying how the stolen Vibranium and its use in weapons has affected them deeply [Vibranium can only be found in Wakanda]. He is therefore pleased that the Avengers have signed the Sokovia Accords. In the middle of his speech, an explosion kills King T'Chaka.

The message says that the attacker is Bucky. Steve and Sam, who are still in London, overhear this and follow him to Vienna. Crown Prince T'Challa mentions to Natasha that he will kill Bucky to avenge his father. Natasha finds out that Steve is in Vienna trying to find Bucky. S.H.I.E.L.D. is also trying to find and capture the Winter Soldier.

Bucky is in Bucharest. He finds out from a newspaper that he is wanted. Steve is the first to find Bucky. He goes to save Bucky but S.H.I.E.L.D. arrives. Bucky runs away, saying he will not kill anyone. Steve defends Bucky from S.H.I.E.L.D., but Bucky also runs away from Steve. Sam arrives to help Steve and Bucky. As they run, Bucky is attacked by Black Panther. There is a big chase through Bucharest. In the end, Bucky is stopped by S.H.I.E.L.D. and Rhodey. Because Steve and Sam helped Bucky, they are arrested as criminals. Black Panther is revealed to be Crown Prince T'Challa.

In the Avengers Facility, Vision tries to cheer Wanda up. Wanda soon understands that Vision is trying to be her in the Facility. Vision says it is for her own safety and the safety of others.

At the European S.H.I.E.L.D. base in Berlin, arrested Avengers hear the role of Black Panther. T'Challa still wants to avenge his father's death. Tony and Natasha are also in Berlin. The Avengers are now divided, and Sam and Steve will face consequences for their actions, even if they are not being held captive.

Tony tries to make amends with Steve. He reveals that working with the Avengers cost him his relationship with Pepper. Steve and Tony both try to get the other to see their point of view. Steve refuses to sign the Sokovia Accords.

Bucky is interrogated, but the person doing it is Helmut Zemo, using old HYDRA methods to turn Bucky back into Winter Soldier. Zemo wants a report on Bucky's mission in December 1991 [shown at the beginning of the film]. Steve senses that something is wrong and that Bucky is being set up. Zemo escapes and Bucky is ordered to kill at the Berlin base. Natasha and Tony try to stop him, even though Tony does not have his Iron Man suit with him. T'Challa joins the fight, but Bucky escapes. Steve goes after him and manages to stop him, and they both fall into the river Spree. Steve pulls Bucky out of the water.

Steve and Sam take Bucky away and he is back to himself. Bucky tells Zemo that HYDRA wanted information on other super-soldiers in the 90s, who are a potential threat to the whole world. Steve and Sam consider telling Tony, but decide not to tell the Avengers.

Secretary Ross gives the Avengers 36 hours to find Bucky, Steve and Sam. To do this, they need to recruit more members. Natasha wants T'Challa to join, and Tony says he knows a guy in New York. He is Peter Parker, a teenager with superpowers gained in an accident. He acts as Spider-Man and Tony has been watching him for a while. Peter joins the Avengers with Tony as his mentor.

At the Avengers facility, Clint comes to get Wanda out. Vision tries to stop her, but Wanda is too powerful for him. Clint and Wanda leave as Steve has asked them to help him.

Steve and others make their way to the airport where they meet Clint and Wanda. Clint has brought along Scott Lang, also known as Ant-Man. They all agree to go to Siberia and eliminate the HYDRA super-soldiers. Before they can leave, Tony and Rhodes arrive to stop them. Tony tells them what the secretary asked Ross to do, and Steve reveals the information about the super-soldiers. Tony says he is trying to stop the Avengers from being torn apart, but Steve replies that Tony has already done that. They don't want to listen to each other and start fighting. This divides the Avengers.

Natasha leaves Bucky and Steve to go. Bucky knows that Steve will pay a heavy price for helping him. Rhodey is badly injured in Vision's accident. Vision and Wanda apologise to each other.

Rhodey is partially paralysed as a result of the accident. Natasha tries to tell Tony what Steve and Bucky are up to, but Tony is too angry to listen because of Rhodey. Tony finds out that Zemo is behind it all and that Bucky is innocent of the UN explosion, just like Steve said. Tony sends the information to Secretary Ross and goes to Raft Prison. He sees his fellow Avengers locked up there. Tony asks Sam where Steve is. He knows that Steve was right and he was wrong. When he admits this, Sam tells him but asks him to go alone and as a friend.

As Tony makes his way to Siberia, he is followed by T'Challa. Tony arrives at Steve and Bucky, showing that he comes in peace. Tony, Steve and Bucky find the Super Soldiers. They are all shot by Zemo, who found them first. He wants no more super-soldiers in the world. T'Challa eavesdrops and finds out that Zemo was behind his father's death.

Zemo shows CCTV footage of the car crash that killed Tony's parents, and Tony learns that it was the Winter Soldier who killed them. Tony loses his temper and attacks Bucky, with Steve defending his older friend. In the end, Tony is stopped and Steve and Bucky leave, leaving a broken Tony behind. Tony tells Steve he does not deserve his shield and Steve leaves it behind.

T'Challa finds Zemo outside. Done with revenge, he captures Zemo as he tries to kill himself. T'Challa stops him, saying that the living are not finished with him.

Back at the Avengers facility, Tony builds Rhodey a robotic leg brace so he can walk. He receives a Fed EX package containing a mobile phone and a letter. It is from Steve, saying that Tony can contact him if he needs help.

In the end, Steve breaks into the Raft prison where Wanda, Scott, Clint and Sam are being held.

Mid-credits scene:

Bucky is treated. He wants to be frozen until his mind is healed. Steve and T'Challa are together, T'Challa helping Bucky to heal. Steve and Bucky are hidden in Wakanda by the king-to-be.

Post-credits scene:

Peter is back in home. He finds new tech hidden in his bracelet he got from Tony, leaving him amazed by it.

08. Avengers: Infinity War (2018)

| | |
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| Director | Anthony Russo & Joe Russo |
| Writers | Christopher Markus & Stephen McFeely |
| Tony Stark / Iron Man | Robert Downey Jr |
| Steve Rogers / Captain America | Chris Evans |
| Bruce Banner / The Hulk | Mark Ruffalo |
| Natasha Romanoff / Black Widow | Scarlett Johansson |
| Thor | Chris Hemsworth |
| Loki | Tom Hiddleston |
| Thanos | Josh Brolin |
| Dr. Stephen Strange | Benedict Cumberbatch |
| James “Rhodey” Rhodes / War Machine | Don Cheadle |
| Peter Parker / Spider-Man | Tom Holland |
| King T’Challa / Black Panther | Chadwick Boseman |
| Gamora | Zoë Saldana |
| Nebula | Karen Gillan |
| Vision | Paul Bettany |
| Wanda Maximoff / Scarlet Witch | Elizabeth Olsen |
| Sam Wilson / Falcon | Anthony Mackie |
| Bucky Barnes / The White Wolf | Sebastian Stan |
| Rocket | Bradley Cooper |
| Eitri | Peter Dinklage |
| Peter Quill / Star-Lord | Chris Pratt |
| Wong | Benedict Wong |

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| Mantis | Pom Klementieff |
| Drax | Dave Bautista |
| Shuri | Letitia Wright |
| Ebony Maw | Tom Vaughan-Lawlor |
| Proxima Midnight | Carrie Coon |
| Corvus Glaive | Michael James Shaw |
| Secretary of State Thaddeus Ross | William Hurt |
| Director Nick Fury | Samuel L. Jackson |
| Agent Maria Hill | Cobie Smulders |
| Pepper Potts | Gwyneth Paltrow |
| Red Skull | Ross Marquand |

Film synopsis:

An Asgardian spaceship issues a distress call as it is under attack. Thanos and the Children of Thanos, including Ebony Maw, Cull Obsidian, Corvus Glaive and Proxima Midnight, have boarded the ship. Ebony Maw praises his master Thanos for killing the Asgardians. Loki, Thor, Heimdall and the Hulk are alive. Thanos is after the Tesseract, which Loki has. Heimdall transfers Hulk to Earth with Bifrost and is killed for doing so. Loki gives the Tesseract to Thanos to save his brother's life. Loki is killed by Thanos in front of Thor. He then destroys the entire ship and teleports back to his own warship with the children of Thanos.

In New York, Wong and Stephen go through their daily routine in the New York Sanctum. Suddenly the Hulk crashes through the ceiling onto the stairs. Bruce wakes up and warns that Thanos is coming to Earth.

Pepper and Tony are walking in Central Park, talking about their future together and Tony's need to keep the Iron Man suit close to him as protection for their future. They are interrupted by Stephen, who opens a portal next to them and says they need Tony's help as the fate of the universe is at stake. Bruce emerges from a portal behind Stephen, showing that he has returned after the Battle of Sokovia.

Back in the Sanctum, Wong and Stephen tell Tony all about the Infinity Stones and their aspect. They also talk about Thanos and what he is after by collecting all six Infinity Stones. Tony tells them that they are missing Vision as he has disappeared. The only one who can find him is Steve, but Tony tells Bruce that he and Steve are not on speaking terms and the Avengers are no longer as Bruce knew them. Bruce stresses that Steve must be contacted or the entire universe will be in danger.

Before Tony has a chance to call Steve, they realise something is wrong. People are panicking in the streets and a spaceship has landed in the street next to the New York Sanctum. Ebony Maw and Cull Obsidian come out of it and Stephen, Tony, Bruce and Wong meet them and tell them to leave. Maw and Obsidian are after the Time Stone that Stephen possesses. Everyone takes a stand, except Bruce, as the Hulk refuses to come out. Wong takes Bruce to safety through the portal.

Peter Parker, who saw the spaceship from a school bus, joins the fight. The Maw manages to kidnap Stephen and accidentally takes Peter with him. Tony follows the departing spaceship and sends Peter back to Earth, but Peter manages to get into the spaceship before it makes the jump. Peter calls Tony and finds out that he is inside the spaceship.

The scene cuts to space, where the Guardians of the Galaxy answer the distress call from the Asgardian ship. They find the remains of the exploded ship and Thor, who survived the explosion. They take him in. Thor tells them how Thanos attacked them, took the Tesseract and exploded the ship. Gamora tells them about Thanos' plan to wipe out half the life in the universe and bring balance to the overpopulation. With the Infinity Stones, he can do it with the snap of his fingers, instead of massacring planets one by one. Thor needs a weapon to replace his broken Mjolnir. Thor goes to Nidavellir with Rocket and Groot, and the rest of the Guardians go to Knowhere to get Aether from the Collector.

Wanda and Vision spend time together in Scotland. Vision senses something is happening to the Mind Stone. Vision toyed with the idea of not returning to the Avengers facility at all. During their evening walk, they see a television in the shop window showing news of the attack on New York and Tony being declared missing. Vision feels he must go back, but is attacked from behind by Corvus Glaive. Corvus stabs Vision in the back. Proxima Midnight attacks Wanda. Wanda throws them off with her magic and tries to get Vision to safety, but the Children of Thanos hang close behind them, not letting them escape. Before they can get the Mind Stone from Vision, they are interrupted by Steve, Sam and Natasha. Corvus is wounded in the fight and Proxima takes him back to her ship. The Avengers go to the Avengers Facility.

A flashback shows how Thanos took Gamora as a young child and made her his daughter. Gamora remembers this moment. She asks Peter Quill to kill Gamora if she is caught by Thanos. She reveals that she knows something that threatens the entire universe, and that Thanos cannot know it. Peter hesitantly promises. The Guardians arrive at Knowhere. Thanos tricks them into attacking him with an illusion. He takes Gamora with him, preventing Peter from shooting her. Thanos has Aether and now has three stones.

Back on Earth, everyone is gathered at the Avengers facility. Rhodey gets a call from Secretary Thaddeus Ross and his board. Steve and others arrive in the middle of the meeting. Secretary Ross threatens Steve and orders Rhodey to arrest him. Rhodey just hangs up without doing anything to Steve. Everyone is together after a long time when Bruce arrives to meet them.

The Avengers discuss how to deal with the Mind Stone in Vision. They decide to remove it from his forehead and Steve knows someone who can do it. The Avengers go to Wakanda.

Stephen wakes up in Maw's spaceship. Maw tortures Stephen to get the Time Stone from him. Tony lurks in the shadows, planning to rescue Stephen. He soon learns that Peter is also on board. Tony and Peter attack Maw and are able to get rid of him by throwing him into space. Tony and Stephen decide to confront Thanos and eliminate him, just to see where the ship is taking them.

Thanos has taken Gamora to his warship. Thanos reveals that he has captured Nebula and threatens to kill her unless Gamora tells him where the Soul Stone is, as Gamora is the only one who knows its location. Gamora reveals its location in order to save her sister. Thanos takes Gamora there. Nebula manages to escape from her prison and tells the Guardians where to go.

Rocket, Thor and Groot arrive at Nidavellir. They find that it is frozen and looks deserted. Only one dwarf, Eitri, has survived. Eitri has made the Infinity Gauntlet to protect his kin, but Thanos still kills everyone but Eitri. Thor is able to awaken the star and remove the ice. Together with Eitri, Rocket and Groot, they create a new axe called the Stormbreaker.

Tony, Stephen and Peter arrive on a planet called Titan. They manage to land the spaceship. When they land, they are attacked by the Guardians, who have just arrived because of Nebula's information. Soon they all realise that this is a mistake and that they are all against Thanos. The Guardians and the Avengers try to come up with a plan to defeat Thanos. Stephen uses the Time Stone to look into the future for all possible outcomes to defeat him. Out of 14 million outcomes, they only win one.

Gamora brings Thanos to Vormir. They are greeted by the Red Skull, who was thrown there from Earth by the Tesseract. He is cursed and guards the Soul

Stone. Red Skull explains that to obtain the Soul Stone, you must sacrifice the one you love; a soul for a soul. Thanos does what is necessary and sacrifices Gamora to get the Soul Stone.

The Earth Avengers arrive in Wakanda. T'Challa and Bucky greet them and lead them to T'Challa's little sister, Shuri. She is able to remove the Mind Stone from Vision in the laboratory.

Children of Thanos follow the Mind Stone to Wakanda, bringing their army with them. They attack to take the stone to Thanos. The Wakandans and the Avengers defend as best they can to keep the stone and Vision safe. In the middle of the battle, Thor, Rocket and Groot arrive on the battlefield in Wakanda.

Thanos arrives on Titan. He learns that the Maw has died. Thanos explains what destroyed the planet Titan, and how it motivates him to do what he wants to do. The Guardians and Avengers attack Thanos together. Nebula arrives on Titan and joins them to take down his father. They almost succeed, but Peter Q. makes a fatal mistake, allowing his anger and emotions to take over when he learns that Gamora is dead. Stephen gives Thanos the Stone. Thanos disappears through the portal, leaving the Guardians and the Avengers defeated on Titan.

Vision's stone removal fails and he is thrown onto the battlefield by Corvus. The Avengers attempt to defend him. Thanos' children are killed during the battle. Thanos arrives on Earth. He is overwhelmed by five stones he has collected, making it easy for him to take the sixth. Thanos crushes Vision's head to get the Mind Stone, Vision dies and Thanos has all six Infinity Stones in his gauntlet. Thor attacks him and hits Thanos in the chest with Stormbreaker. Thanos says he should have gone for the head and snaps his fingers with the Infinity Gauntlet before disappearing through a portal.

Half the population begins to disappear as ashes in the air. Most of the Avengers and Guardians are among them. Before he disappears, Stephen tells Tony that there is no other way. Tony and Nebula are the only ones left on Titan. Back on Earth, the remaining Avengers realise that they have lost the battle.

Thanos arrives at his safe haven, a farm. He sits down with a sigh and a serene expression on his face.

Post-credits scene:

Agent Hill and Director Fury drive. They notice an energy spike similar to New York in Wakanda. A car crashes in front of them and there is no driver as Hill and Fury check if they are OK. Suddenly, other cars and a helicopter crash. People

start to panic. Fury calls Code Red, but before Hill can send it, it disappears in the air. Fury runs back to his car to get a pager. He also disappears, but is able to send a call from the pager. A star symbol appears on the pager, indicating that help is on the way.

09. Captain Marvel (2019)

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|--|-------------------------------------|
| Director | Anna Boden & Ryan Fleck |
| Writers | Anna Boden & Ryan Fleck |
| Carol Danvers / Vers / Captain Marvel | Brie Larson |
| Agent Nick Fury | Samuel L. Jackson |
| Talos / Director Keller | Ben Mendelsohn |
| Yon-Rogg | Jude Law |
| Supreme Intelligence / Dr. Wendy Lawson | Annette Bening |
| Maria Rambeau | Lashana Lynch |
| Monica Rambeau | Akira Akbar |
| Agent Phil Coulson | Clark Gregg |
| Ronan | Lee Pace |
| Goose | Reggie (with Archie, Gonzo & Rizzo) |

Film synopsis:

[The film takes place in the 1990s.]

The film begins with a dream that Vers has seen many times. She is training with her commander, Yon-Rogg. He teaches Vers to control her emotions and her superpowers and to keep them in check. She is not allowed to use her powers.

Vers goes to meet the Supreme Intelligence, who takes the form of the person he most admires. Vers has lost her memory, and all she remembers is a Skrull attack. She does not know whose image the Supreme Intelligence is taking. Super Intelligence reminds her that the powers were given to Vers to make her better, and can be taken away if she does not learn to control her emotions. She promises not to fail and is sent on a mission with her commander.

Vers takes the team on a search and rescue mission for their missing spy on a Skrull-invaded planet. When they arrive at the location, they are ambushed by Skrulls. Vers is captured by the Skrull leader Talos. On Talos' spaceship, her mind and memory are examined. Vers sees things she didn't know about herself. They are looking for a person, Dr Wendy Lawson, whose form the super-intelligence takes when Vers meets it. Next, they dig up the coordinates of a flight that Vers took.

Vers wakes up in the middle of the memory search. She frees herself and fights her way out of the Skrull ship to a rescue ship. The control board is damaged, causing the ship to break up during her flight. Vers falls from the sky onto a Blockbuster video store.

Their signal system is broken. Vers goes to a local security officer to find out where she has landed. She asks for communication equipment, and the confused officer points to a public phone. Vers manages to contact Yon-Rogg. She tells him that she is on a planet C-53 [Earth] and what the Skrulls are after.

Only a few Skrulls survived the landing on Earth, including their leader Talos. They shape-shift to look like humans and begin searching for Vers.

S.H.I.E.L.D. arrives at Vers with agents Coulson and Fury. Vers tells them that she is from the Kree Air Force and is trying to defend Earth from invaders. Fury and Coulson find this hard to believe. Fury asks how he knows she is not one of them. Vers is attacked by one of the Skrulls and begins to chase him. Fury and Coulson jump into their car and follow them. While driving, Fury gets a radio call from Coulson who is still in the video store, even though he is sitting next to Fury. Fury is attacked by the arrested impostor and their car crashes. The impostor dies and turns back into himself, leaving Agent Fury scared and confused.

Vers lost sight of the Skrull she was chasing in a crowd. She was able to get a stone that contains her memories as images. She tries to find the place where these memories came from. Vers steals some local clothes and a motorbike and sets off in the direction of the memories.

At the S.H.I.E.L.D. base, an autopsy is being performed on a dead Skrull. They wonder what he is. Fury is given a mission by his director to find Vers. Fury leaves and the director is revealed to be Talos, mourning his lost friend.

Vers arrives at the bar, her memories guiding her. Fury follows close behind. Vers makes sure he is not a Skrull in disguise. She asks him to take her to the secret Pegasus facility. As an agent of S.H.I.E.L.D., Fury has access to it. They get in, but are taken to a locked room to await a hearing. Fury gets them out, and Vers watches in amusement. In the corridor a cat called Goose comes to them and distracts Fury's concentration. They find the file archive and a project of Lawson's Pegasus. She was a Kree, but died with her pilot in a plane crash. Fury leaves

after his pager goes off. Vers finds a picture of the Pegasus team. To her surprise, she is one of the pilots in the picture.

Vers contacts Yon-Rogg and tells her what she has discovered so far. Yon-Rogg tells Vers that he has discovered that Lawson was an undercover Kree agent named Mar-Vell. She was working with a new power source to find a way to win the war against the Skrulls.

Fury paged his director, and S.H.I.E.L.D.'s director is exposed as a Skrull when he says the wrong thing to Fury. Fury tries to find Vers to warn her. Before he can, the Talos realise that Fury knows he is not the real Director. Vers saves Fury from Talos and they run away from him. As they try to leave, Agent Coulson finds them, but trusts Fury and lets them escape.

They arrive at an aircraft hangar and hijack one of the planes. Vers knows how to fly and they escape. As they take off, Fury and Vers notice Goose sneaking up on them in the plane. During the flight, Vers shows Fury the picture of her in the group. They decide to meet Maria Rambeau, the last person to see Vers and Mar-Vell alive.

They arrive at Maria's house. Her child, Monica, calls Auntie Carol and is overjoyed to see her. Maria looks at her as if she has seen a ghost. Vers learns her name is Carol Danvers, and she tells them where she comes from and what Skrulls are. She also shows them her powers. Maria and Carol take some time to talk. She was Maria's best friend before she disappeared six years ago. Maria is still stunned and has a hard time accepting who Vers is now. Monica shows pictures from Vers' childhood and from a time on the Pegasus Project.

Talos breaks into the house, but comes in peace and does not want to fight. He wants to talk to Carol. Talos knows she is different and he has a voice recording from the crash of the Pegasus Project. Talos asks her to help him get some coordinates he needs. Goose comes to Talos and he starts to freak out. He says that Goose is not a cat but a flerken [an alien species resembling a cat].

They gather to listen to the voice recording. It causes Carol to remember the accident. In fact, she and Mar-Vell survived the crash, which happened because they were being pursued by an unknown craft. Mar-Vell tried to destroy the power core as she knew the attackers were after it, but she was shot by Yon-Rogg, the attacker. Carol was afraid of Yon-Rogg, but gathered her strength and shot the power core to destroy it. Instead of dying from the explosion, Vers absorbs the power of the power core. Yon-Rogg finds a piece of the nameplate that reads "Vers". Yon-Rogg decides to take her with him to use her absorbed power.

Carol realises that her last six years in Hala were a lie. Talos reveals that Mar-Vell was killed by her own kin because she tried to help the Skrulls, who were homeless and refugees because of their opposition to Kree rule. This led the Kree

to destroy their planet. Talos needs Carol's help to finish the job Mar-Vell started; to find a safe home for the Skrulls.

Carol is confused by all this new information. Maria tells Carol that the best friend she knows always supports those who no one else will support, risks her own life for the good, and is funny and strong even before she knew how to fire blasts from her fists. Talos and Carol continue to discuss, and Carol says that the coordinates are not coordinated, but state vectors in orbit. This is why Talos has not been able to find Mar-Vell's laboratory, which is in space next to Earth.

They modify the stolen plane to turn it into a spaceship. Carol asks Maria to join them as co-pilot. She agrees after Monica encourages her mother. Carol asks Monica to help her design her outfit in the new colours, as the old design is in Kree Air Force colours. She gets her suit, which is red, blue and gold.

Yon-Rogg arrives to meet Carol, who is waiting for him alone. Yon-Rogg realises that it is not Carol, but a Kree soldier posing as her. Yon-Rogg kills him and calls Ronan the Accuser to come and destroy Earth.

Carol, Maria, Talos, Fury and Goose arrive at Mar-Vell's laboratory. They find the lab, which has been hidden for six years. Talos leads them into the lab. They discover that the Tesseract is the core of the power behind Carol's powers. Talos calls the hidden Skrulls to come out of hiding. Talos is reunited with his wife and sees his child for the first time in six years. Carol apologises for being on the wrong side for six years. Talos replies that his hands are not clean, having been at war, but sees this as the start of a new beginning.

Yon-Rogg and his team arrive at the lab. He wants the Tesseract. Carol attacks him, but Yon-Rogg taints her and captures her. She is hooked up to the Super Intelligence who tries to break her rebellious mind. The super-intelligence threatens to take her powers away as it did before. Carol replies that she knows the powers did not come from the Super Intelligence and that she is on the side of the Skrulls as they have done nothing wrong. Super-Intelligence tries to break Carol by showing her memories of failing and falling to emphasise how weak she is because she is only human. Carol concentrates on how she always gets back up after falling, which makes her strong and resilient like humans are. She succeeds in rejecting super-intelligence and breaks free of the overpower, destroying the device in her neck that was limiting her powers. Her powers are free and she can easily escape from Yon-Rogg's team.

Carol finds Maria, Fury and Goose. Goose hides the Tesseract by swallowing it. They separate and Carol goes to eliminate her old team. Goose eliminates the other basic Kree soldiers Yon-Rogg brought with him. Maria, Goose and Fury get the Skrull refugees into the spaceship with Talos and fly back to Earth, taking the civilians to safety.

After defeating their old team, Yon-Rogg and Carol fight each other. Yon-Rogg leaves. Carol tries to stop him, but falls into space without a container. She concentrates and learns that she can use her unlimited powers to fly. Everyone, even Yon-Rogg, seems astonished.

Just when they think the battle is over, Ronan the Accuser arrives on Earth and immediately launches his ballistic missiles. Carol immediately destroys the missiles before they even reach Earth, and easily takes out all of the ships Ronan's warship launches to destroy Carol. Carol destroys one of Ronan's ships and he agrees to retreat. Ronan says he'll come back for Carol.

Carol goes to see Yon-Rogg. He gives Carol a powerful speech about how she can now prove to him that she can win him barehanded. Carol points out that she has nothing to prove to him and sends him back to Hala.

Goose scratches Fury's left eye. He thinks it will be fine, but Talos seems to know it is no ordinary scratch. Carol says she will help the Skrulls find a new and safe home. Carol asks Fury to keep the Tesseract on Earth, and gives Fury back his pager as a modified version. He can use it whenever he needs help, and it should have a range of a couple of galaxies. She leaves Earth to help the Skrulls find a new home.

Back at the S.H.I.E.L.D. base, Fury has taken Goose into his office. Coulson comes to see him and is pleased to see Fury back. Fury says he knows Carol is not the only one with superpowers and that S.H.I.E.L.D. will not be enough to protect Earth. He starts planning the Avengers Initiative project.

Mid-credits scene:

The scene is back in the present. The Avengers have found Fury's pager, which is still transmitting. Suddenly it stops. They wonder what the pager is doing and who might be on the other end of the signal. Natasha turns to find Carol standing behind her, asking where Fury is.

Post-credits scene:

Goose jumps on Fury's desk. She throws up Tesseract on the desk.

10. Avengers: Endgame (2019)

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| Director | Anthony Russo & Joe Russo |
| Writers | Christopher Markus & Stephen McFeely |
| Tony Stark / Iron Man | Robert Downey Jr |
| Steve Rogers / Captain America | Chris Evans |
| Bruce Banner / The Hulk | Mark Ruffalo |
| Natasha Romanoff / Black Widow | Scarlett Johansson |
| Clint Barton / Hawkeye | Jeremy Renner |
| Thor | Chris Hemsworth |
| Nebula | Karen Gillan |
| Rocket | Bradley Cooper |
| Scott Lang / Ant-Man | Paul Rudd |
| Thanos | Josh Brolin |
| Pepper Potts | Gwyneth Paltrow |
| Carol Danvers / Captain Marvel | Brie Larson |
| Dr. Stephen Strange | Benedict Cumberbatch |
| James "Rhodey" Rhodes / War Machine | Don Cheadle |
| Peter Parker / Spider-Man | Tom Holland |
| King T'Challa / Black Panther | Chadwick Boseman |
| Gamora | Zoë Saldana |
| Wanda Maximoff / Scarlet Witch | Elizabeth Olsen |
| Sam Wilson / Falcon | Anthony Mackie |
| Bucky Barnes / The White Wolf | Sebastian Stan |
| Eitri | Peter Dinklage |

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| Peter Quill / Star-Lord | Chris Pratt |
| Wong | Benedict Wong |
| Mantis | Pom Klementieff |
| Drax | Dave Bautista |
| Shuri | Letitia Wright |
| Ebony Maw | Tom Vaughan-Lawlor |
| Proxima Midnight | Carrie Coon |
| Corvus Glaive | Michael James Shaw |
| Secretary of State Thaddeus Ross | William Hurt |
| Director Nick Fury | Samuel L. Jackson |
| Red Skull | Ross Marquand |

Film synopsis:

The film begins at Clint's home. He is teaching their daughter how to use a bow; others are waiting for hot dogs to be prepared. Clint turns to his daughter, but she is gone, just some ashes floating in the air. The rest of his family has also disappeared, leaving Clint alone, wondering what just happened.

Nebula and Tony have been flying in Milano [Guardians' spaceship] for 22 days. They have been killing time trying to get back to Earth. They have run out of fuel and food, and Tony is in bad shape after fighting Thanos. Tony records a message for Pepper, thinking he will die in there. Nebula helps him to sleep and tucks him into the pilot's chair. Tony is awakened by a strong light shining in his face. It is Carol who has found them and brings them back to the Avengers facility on Earth. The rest of the Avengers gather to see Tony and Nebula arrive from Milan. Steve and Tony reunite after a long time and say that neither of them was able to stop Thanos. Pepper rushes over to Tony and they take time to hug each other. Rocket goes to Nebula and they comfort each other in their grief.

Natasha fills the others in on what happened and who disappeared. Thanos has wiped out half the creatures in the universe. Tony is bitter about the outcome. He rants, blames Steve and collapses. They take him to a hospital wing to heal. Others plan to go after Thanos. Nebula knows Thanos is at his farm and they are

able to track him. The team attacks Thanos by surprise. His gauntlet is cut off, but the Infinity Stones are not in the gauntlet. Thanos says he destroyed them so no one could undo what he had done. Thor kills Thanos by aiming for his head. Thanos is dead, but the result does not seem happy.

Five years later, Steve meets Natasha at the Avengers facility. The world has not recovered from Thanos' snap. Natasha works as Director of the Avengers. She makes sure that Earth and the universe get all the help they can from the Avengers. Natasha hears from Rhodey that Clint has lost himself and is working as an avenging vigilante, randomly killing bad guys around Earth.

In San Francisco, Scott Lang accidentally returns from the Quantum Realm, where he has been stuck for five years. He finds out that half of the people are missing and that he has been declared dead. He goes to his ex-wife's house and finds his daughter Cassie, who is five years older than him. Scott travels to the Avengers facility and meets Natasha and Steve there. He explains about the Quantum Realm and how the time jump should be possible with the right equipment.

Tony and Pepper have a daughter, Morgan. Steve, Natasha and Scott visit him after a long time. They present Scott's theory and how this is a way to get the Infinity Stones to undo what Thanos has done. Tony rejects the idea and explains that it cannot work, only by accident.

They decide to meet Bruce and ask for his help. To their surprise, Bruce has been doing tests of his own and has combined his and Hulk's bodies to make the most of his intelligence and Hulk's strength. After they explain the theory of time travel to him, Bruce agrees to try it and they travel back to the Avengers facility.

Tony is intrigued by the idea. He begins to model whether it is possible and whether it can be done safely and reliably. He manages to come up with a theory that astonishes even himself. After putting Morgan to sleep, he goes to Pepper and reveals that he has succeeded. Pepper is amazed and happy and says that Tony should do it. She says that not everyone has been as lucky as they have been and that Tony can help others to be happy again. She says that trying to get Tony to stop saving the world was her biggest failure. Tony says he can just let it go and do nothing, so he would not be risking anything. Pepper asks if he can do that, but if he can rest with that decision. Tony says nothing.

Bruce helps to work with time travel, using Pym's technology to do so. It does not work as hoped. Tony arrives at the Avengers facility and meets Steve first. He correctly guesses what went wrong with their test run. He reveals to Steve that he has managed to create a working time travel theory. He buries the axes with Steve and gives him back his Captain America shield. Tony's only priority in using his idea is that nothing from the present cannot be changed or erased, and hopefully nobody dies.

They decide to bring the team back together. Rocket, Nebula and Rhodey travel back to help. Bruce and Rocket travel to New Asgard, where surviving Asgardian refugees live. Thor hides there, depressed and neglectful of himself and his people. The old Thor seems gone. They tell him the plan, but Thor is upset about it. He does not want to do it, but Bruce tells him to join the team as his help is needed. Carol is working too far in the universe to return.

Clint is in Japan killing members of the Yakuza. Natasha comes to see her best friend and tells him that they can get his family back and that they need Clint's help to do it. He trusts her and returns to the Avengers with Natasha.

The Avengers build the machine and take a test trip into the past, with Clint volunteering to do so. It is successful and the team begins to plan when and where to collect the Infinity Stones. The plan is made and the team divides up to get each stone and bring them to the present; six stones, three teams, one shot.

New York, 2012. Three Infinity Stones are in the city at the same time during the New York Battle. Bruce goes to the New York Sanctum to retrieve the Time Stone. Tony, Steve and Scott go to the Stark Tower to get the Tesseract and the Mind Stone from Loki.

Asgard, 2013. Thor and Rocket get Aether from Jane. Thor is having a hard time seeing his now destroyed home and dead mother again, and he starts to panic.

Morag, 2014. Rhodey and Nebula get to the Power Stone before Peter Q does. Nebula warns Rhodey that she, Gamora and Thanos are also looking for the stones at this time.

Back in New York in the Stark Tower, HYDRA gets the Sceptre and takes it to the lift. The Tesseract is brought down by Tony. Present Steve gets into the lift and gets the sceptre from HYDRA by pretending to be one of them. They are not so lucky with the Tesseract, as through a series of coincidences it is thrown next to Loki. He takes his chance and escapes with it. They lose the stone and Loki. Steve is attacked by his past self, but outsmarts himself and wins the fight with the sceptre.

Bruce meets the Ancient One in the New York Sanctum. The Ancient One refuses to give the stone to anyone, saying it is his sacred duty to protect it. Bruce gets the Time Stone when he points out that Stephen was the one who willingly gave it to Thanos. The Ancient One realises there is something Stephen has found out, and this leads her to trust Bruce with the stone. Before Bruce leaves, the Ancient One says that everyone is now counting on him, but does not reveal why.

In the time of 2014, Thanos finds out that there are two Nebulas in their time, one from the future and one he is encountering now. They change their plan so that instead of collecting the stones, they travel to the future and bring in the stones

they have already collected, this time wiping out all life. Rhodey and Nebula get the Power Stone, but Nebula is unable to leave time as she is connected to the past Nebula. She tries to warn Clint and Natasha, but is too late and is trapped by Past Thanos. Past Nebula impersonates her future self and travels back to the present to hatch the plan to bring his father's warship to the future. In the prison of the present, Nebula tells Gamora that she can prevent this chaos, and how Thanos murders her to get the Soul Stone. Gamora is silent, but listens Nebula because she already hates her father.

Thor is surprised by his mother and they have a chat. Meanwhile, Rocket gets the Aether from Jane and they have to leave before the guards find them. Thor takes Mjölner with him and is happy when he realises that he is still worthy.

In New York, Tony realises that there is another way to get the Tesseract and return to the present in 1970. Steve and Tony go even further back in time, leaving the sceptre with Scott, who brings it back to the present. In 1970, the Tesseract is at a military base run by S.H.I.E.L.D. Tony finds the Tesseract and, hiding it in a briefcase, meets his father, Howard. Steve goes to get more Pym Particles, which will allow them to return to the present. Steve sees Peggy and is clearly upset that he has lost the chance to be with her. Steve returns to Tony and they both return to the present.

Natasha and Clint arrive in Vormir. The Red Skull tells them what they have to do to get the Soul Stone. They argue about who will sacrifice themselves. Natasha is quicker and makes sure that Clint will survive. She says it is all right and falls off the cliff to her death. Clint must return to the present alone with the Soul Stone.

The Avengers mourn the loss of Natasha and realise that she cannot be brought back to life. However, they continue with their project to build their own Infinity Gauntlet so that they can reverse the snap. While speculating who should do the reversing snap, Bruce, who is joined to Hulk's body, is the one who can actually survive the snap. He does it. It takes a few seconds for them to realise that it worked.

Past Nebula in the present summons his father to the present with his warship. He shoots the Avengers facility to the ground, but everyone inside survives the attack.

Gamora asks the present Nebula what their relationship will be like. Nebula tells her that they will end up being best friends and sisters. After hearing this, Gamora decides to help her present sister stop Thanos.

Thor, Steve and Tony emerge from the ruins of the Avengers facility to confront Thanos. Thanos is just sitting there, waiting for Nebula to bring him the Infinity Gauntlet. The trio attack Thanos.

In the ruins of the past, Nebula receives the gauntlet from Clint. Gamora and present Nebula protest. Present Nebula shoots her past self. The present Nebula takes the gauntlet.

Thanos is too strong an opponent for the trio. He is a fierce fighter who will not back down. Tony and Thor are knocked out. Thanos summons his army with the Children of Thanos from his warship. Steve stands alone against the entire army. Standing alone, he is contacted by Sam, who has been ash for five years. Behind him, several portals are opened by Stephen Strange and all the missing soldiers, Avengers and Guardians arrive to join the battle for the Infinity Gauntlet. Pepper also joins the battle in her suit named Rescue, which Tony built for her.

During the battle, the gauntlet is passed from hero to hero as they try to keep it away from Thanos. In the end, Thanos manages to grab it from Carol, who has joined the battle on the ground.

Stephen and Tony have a moment of eye contact. Stephen tells Tony that this is one of 14 million chances to win. Tony knows what he has to do. He fights Thanos, knowing he cannot resist him for long. Tony takes the stones from the Infinity Gauntlet and attaches them to his iron suit. He snaps his fingers and turns Thanos and his army into dust. Tony's body cannot withstand the power of the Infinity Stones used together. Pepper arrives at his side and says he can rest now. Tony dies.

After the battle, everyone is able to return home and life slowly begins to return to what it was before Thanos' snap. Tony left a message for Pepper and Morgan, which they see at his funeral. They send the very first arc reactor, engraved with the words "Proof that Tony Stark has a heart", in a bouquet of flowers that floats into the lake next to their home. All the Avengers and Guardians gather for Tony's funeral, including Nick Fury.

The work is not done. Steve returns the Infinity Stones and Mjölnir to their rightful places in the past. Steve goes on this mission, but does not return as promised. Near Bruce, Sam and Bucky, who are watching the time travel, notice an old man sitting nearby. It is Steve who tells them that he decided to take up Tony's suggestion to try and live a little, so he stayed behind. Sam says he is happy for him, but sad that he will have to live in a world without Captain America. Steve gives Sam the Captain America shield, saying he deserves it. Sam promises to do his best.

Sam notices a wedding ring on Steve's finger. He asks if he wants to tell her anything about it. Steve replies that he will not, but looks pleased. The scene changes to Steve arriving at Peggy Carter's in his Captain America suit, and a front door is left open. He dances with his first love and they kiss.

11. Black Widow (2021)

| | |
|---|----------------------|
| Director | Cate Shortland |
| Writer | Eric Pearson |
| Natasha Romanoff / Black Widow | Scarlett Johansson |
| Yelena Belova / Black Widow | Florence Pugh |
| Alexei Shostakov / Red Guardian | David Harbour |
| Melina Vostokoff / Black Widow | Rachel Weisz |
| Rick Mason | O-T Fagbenle |
| General Dreykov | Ray Winstone |
| Antonia Dreykov / Taskmaster | Olga Kurylenko |
| Secretary of State Thaddeus Ross | William Hurt |
| Young Natasha | Ever Anderson |
| Young Yelena | Violet McGraw |
| Young Antonia | Ryan Kiera Armstrong |
| Valentina Allegra de Fontaine | Julia Louis-Dreyfus |

Film synopsis:

The film begins with a prologue from Natasha's childhood in 1995. She is playing outside her house in Ohio with her little sister Yelena. Yelena bumps her knee, but their mother comes and comforts her. The mother's scientific side is shown.

Father comes home and says they must leave immediately. They leave the country on a plane, but a group of agents try to stop the plane from taking off. They manage to escape to Cuba. Melina, injured in the chase, is taken away. Natasha tries to defend Yelena and prevent them from being separated, but they are sedated and taken away.

A montage shows Natasha and Yelena being separated. Natasha continues her Black Widow training in the Red Room with other underage girls.

21 years later, Natasha is on the run after the airport incident in Captain America: Civil War. General Ross is trying to get her to take responsibility for her part in violating the Sokovia Accords. Natasha is too talented for them to catch, and has already fled to Norway.

Yelena hunts down former Black Widow agent Oksana in Morocco. Yelena wins the fight by stabbing Oksana, who sprays red dust in Yelena's face. The dust seems to bring Yelena out of a hypnotic state, and she realises that she has just fatally stabbed her friend. Oksana tells Yelena to "free the others" before she dies. Yelena cuts out her tracking device and flees. Taskmaster is sent after her.

Natasha arrives at a safe house in Norway and meets her supplier, Rick Mason. She is given a new identity and mail is sent to her safe house in Budapest. Later that evening, she leaves the house to get more petrol. While driving, she is attacked by Taskmaster on a bridge. Natasha tries to fight Taskmaster, but the assassin is too strong, mimicking Natasha's fighting skills. Natasha realises that Taskmaster is not after her, but a black box in her mail, and grabs the contents before being kicked into the river. Inside is the red dust and a picture of Natasha and Yelena from their childhood.

Natasha travels to the safe house in Budapest. Yelena is inside and the two argue, not trusting each other. After a while they call a truce. Natasha asks about the Red Dust and Yelena explains what it does. She was hoping the Avengers would help with it and bring down the Red Room. Natasha thought it had been destroyed and Dreykov killed. Yelena brings up Dreykov's daughter, which is a sensitive subject for Natasha. They cannot pursue the subject as a group of Black Widows surround the safe house. They manage to escape, but Natasha sees Dreykov controlling the Widows from a distance.

As they flee, Taskmaster arrives to pursue Natasha and Yelena. They barely manage to escape to the hideout Natasha and Clinton used years ago. Yelena explains that Taskmaster is Dreykov's special project, an assassin who can impersonate anyone. Yelena finds out that the death of Dreykov's daughter is haunting Natasha.

Yelena and Natasha catch up while running Taskmaster. Yelena also makes fun of Natasha's famous fighting pose. They reminisce about their childhood and training. Yelena tells them how the Black Widow's brain was altered to allow Dreykov to control her. They decide to take out the Red Room and Dreykov. They decide to get more supplies from contractor Rick.

Alexei's father from the prologue is shown in a Russian prison. He tells a story about how he once saw Captain America when he was serving in his Soviet

superhero organisation, the Red Guardian. Yelena and Natasha arrive to get him out of prison. Alexei pretends to be the father, but neither of the former Black Widows greets him warmly. They ask where to find Dreykov and the Red Room, and he replies that his Soviet agent partner from Ohio, Melina, must know as she still works for Dreykov.

The Trio arrives at Melina's farm. She serves them vodka and dinner, and reveals that she was the one who came up with the idea of mind-controlling brain alteration after they stole Hydra's scientific blueprints for it. The four begin to argue about their fake family ties, but Yelena is hurt as she felt it was real for her. She also tells Melina that she is one of her test subjects. She flees in tears and Alexei goes after Yelena.

Melina tells the truth about Natasha's childhood, how she was not abandoned as a child, but kidnapped from her biological mother, who was killed by Dreykov. Melina begins to see all the pain her work has caused. She admires Natasha's free will. Melina says she wants to change, but all she knows is the Red Room, which she has alerted to pick up her three guests.

Alexei tries to comfort Yelena until he succeeds. Soon Dreykov's agents arrive and take Natasha, Yelena and Alexei back to the Red Room along with Melina and the Taskmaster.

The Red Room is hidden in the sky. Melina arrives at Dreykov. She is revealed to be Natasha in disguise. This was part of a plan by Melina and Natasha to dismantle Dreykov. Melina rescues Yelena and Alexei.

Natasha discovers that Dreykov's daughter Antonia is alive and that she is her father's greatest weapon, the master assassin Taskmaster. She is completely under her father's mind control. Dreykov sends Antonia out to kill others. Natasha finds out that she cannot kill Dreykov. He has built a pheromone lock around himself so that no one who can smell him can harm him. Dreykov shows all the Black Widows around the world who are mind controlled by him. Natasha thanks him and a flashback shows how this was all part of the plan. She breaks her nose to stop the pheromone lock working on her and takes Dreykov down.

Before Natasha has a chance to kill Dreykov, a group of mind-controlled Widows attack Natasha. She tries to stop them, but they are too powerful. Dreykov escapes. Yelena comes to the rescue and uses the Red Dust to free all the Black Widows.

Melina destroys one of the Red Room's engines and it begins to fall. Natasha gets the data on all the mind-controlled Black Widows in the world before Dreykov's office is destroyed. She confronts Antonia and frees her from the Red Room so she does not die.

Yelena blows up Dreykov's jet before he can get out of the falling Red Room, killing him. Yelena falls and Natasha jumps after her, saving her little sister by giving her a parachute. The Taskmaster pursues Natasha as her mind control has not been broken, but Natasha refuses to harm her. Natasha frees Antonia with the Red Dust. Natasha tells her she is sorry. Antonia learns that his father is finally dead.

Natasha goes to see if Yelena is all right after her fall. The two sisters reconcile. Melina and Alexei join the two sisters and Natasha tells them to flee before General Ross arrives. They leave Natasha behind and take the freed Black Widows with them. Before leaving, Natasha gives them the file of all the remaining mind-controlled Widows and a jar of Red Dust, asking them to release them all. Natasha stays behind and confronts General Ross in the ruins of the Red Room.

Two weeks later, the now blonde Natasha (familiar look from *Avengers: Infinity War*) meets up with Rick, who gives her a jet. She sets off to rescue her Avenger friends from prison.

Post-credits scene:

Yelena visits Natasha's grave with her dog. She calls her, but Natasha does not answer. While she has a quiet moment to mourn the loss of her sister, Contessa Valentina Allegra de Fontaine – Yelena's new boss – arrives to give her Yelena's new target, the man responsible for Natasha's death. Valentina shows Yelena a picture of Hawkeye.

Suomenkielinen tiivistelmä pro gradu -tutkielmasta

Tutkimusaiheena tässä pro gradu -tutkielmassa on kolmen aktiivisen naishahmon representaatio ja sen mahdolliset muutokset Marvel Studiosin tuottamassa elokuvasarjassa *Marvel Cinematic Universe*. Metodina tutkimukseen on lähiluku, hyödyntäen neljää eri teoriaa: Judith Butlerin sukupuolen performatiivisuus, Laura Mulvey'n feministinen elokuva-analyysi, Erving Goffmanin arkipäivän roolit ja Rosalind Gillin postfeminismi.

Naishahmojen representaatio on nouseva aihe länsimaisessa visuaalisessa mediassa. Tasa-arvoisemmasta asemasta huolimatta aiheessa on vielä parantamisen varaa. Fantasia ja sci-fi jatkavat nousujohteista suosiotaan, mikä näkyy myös IMDb:n virallisessa listauksessa maailman eniten lipputuloja keränneissä elokuvissa, joista viidenkymmenen elokuvan joukosta peräti kolmekymmentäviisi oli luokiteltavissa fantasia-, sci-fi- tai supersankarigenren elokuvaksi.

Johdannossa painotetaan naishahmojen tärkeyttä katsojille. Siksi tämä pro gradu -tutkielma pyrkii vastaamaan seuraaviin kysymyksiin representaatiokaaren tutkimisen lisäksi kysymykseen siitä, onko monimuotoisia hahmoja tarpeeksi katsojien esikuviksi. Se, mitä näemme valkokankaalla, reflektoi katsojassa ja täten muovaa suhtautumistamme toisia kohtaan. Tästä syystä aktiiviset naishahmot ovat tarpeellisia, vaikka hahmon ei pidä olla olemassa vain jonkin ryhmän puuttumisen vuoksi. Naiset eivät ole varsinainen vähemmistöryhmä, mutta heitä kohdellaan vähemmistön tavoin valkokankaalla hahmovalinnoissa aikaisemmin mainituissa genreissä. Jos monipuolisia, samaistuttavia naishahmoja nähdään elokuvissa vain vähän, muut valkokankaan vähemmistöryhmät ovat vielä huonommassa asemassa.

Taidetta kulutetaan useimmiten saadakseen palasen eskapismia elämäänsä. Tämä auttaa taiteen kuluttajaa omasta arjestaan pakenemiseen ja

hengähtämiseen. Erilaiset tarinat vaikuttavat katsojiin, ja siksi monimuotoisuus on otettava tosissaan. Huono representaatio ärsyttää, kyllästyttää ja tarjoaa kehoja roolimalleja, mutta hyvä representaatio toimii päinvastoin.

Pro gradu -tutkielma pureutuu myös stereotypioihin ja ottaa hahmojen analyysissa huomioon sen, että miten media olettaa naisen käyttäytyvän tietyllä tavalla. Tutkimustyö ei keskity vain hahmojen käyttäytymiseen, toimintaan ja liikkeisiin vaan tarkastelee myös vaatetusta, yleisilmettä ja vuorosanoja ottaen huomioon kaiken, mikä rakentaa heistä oletetun sukupuolensa representation. Esimerkiksi korostetun feminiiniset käyttäytymispiirteet voivat olla harmillisia ja vääristyviä kaikille. Tämä ruokkii olettamisen ilmapiiriä. Usein toistettu vääristymä saattaa muuttua normiksi, ja täten katsojat omaksuvat sen totena. Vahingollisinta tämä on kasvaville nuorille.

Johdannossa esittelen myös analysoitavat henkilöhahmot: tutkielmassani keskityn kolmeen aktiiviseen naishahmoon kahdenkymmenen kolmen elokuvan *Infinity Saga*-elokuvajatkumossa sekä jatkumon jälkeen ilmestyneessä *Black Widow*issa, jotka on tuottanut Marvel Studios. Syy kolmen aktiivisen naishahmon rajaukselle on heidän sukupuolensa, rotunsa (he ovat ihmisiä) sekä heidän esiintymisensä määrä elokuvissa tai että heillä on oma sooloelokuvansa.

Pepper Potts, Tony Starkin sihteeri, löytyy seitsemästä elokuvasta, sekä hänet on myös mainittu kahdessa muussa. Natasha Romanoff, venäläinen vakooja, esiintyy seitsemässä elokuvassa oman sooloelokuvansa lisäksi. Hän on myös yhden elokuvan lopputekstien jälkeisessä kohtauksessa ja hänen puheensa kuullaan toisessa, vaikka hän ei esiinny valkokankaalla. Carol Danvers on ollut vain kolmessa elokuvassa, mutta yksi on hänen nimikkoelokuvansa. Nimikkoelokuva *Captain Marvel* on ainoa *Infinity Sagan* aikana julkaistu naissupersankarin sooloelokuva. *Black Widow* ilmestyi *Infinity Sagan* jälkeen, vaikka lineaarisesti se sijoittuu *Infinity Sagan* tapahtumiin. Muut hahmot esiintyvät analyysissa vain selventääkseen näiden kolmen hahmon toimintaa ja tapoja, eivätkä siten ole itse analyysin kohteena vaan apuna. Vaikka *Infinity Saga* on kaksikymmentäkolme elokuvaa pitkä ja *Black Widow* sen päälle nostaa kokonaisluvuksi kaksikymmentäneljä, olen rajannut aineiston vain yhteentoista elokuvaan. Syy tähän aineiston rajaukseen on se, että nämä kolme naishahmoa eivät esiinny kaikissa *Infinity Sagan* elokuvissa.

Pro gradu -tutkielman toisessa luvussa avaan tutkimukseni teoreettista taustaa. Aluksi paneudun hieman supersankarielokuvien historiaan ja kuinka siitä tuli suosittua vasta "supersankarielokuvien uuden aallon" myötä 2000-luvulla. Ensimmäinen supersankarielokuva, *Mandrake the Magician*, julkaistiin jo 1939.

Ensimmäinen naissupersankarin sooloelokuva *Elektra* julkaistiin kuitenkin vasta 2005. Elokvien esittelyn myötä avataan myös Marvel -elokuvin ja sarjojen määrää, sekä käsitteitä kuten *Marvel Cinematic Universe* eli *MCU* sekä mistä elokuvista *Infinity Saga* muodostuu. Tarkempi raja us pro gradu -tutkielmassa käytetyistä elokuvista esitellään luvussa kolme.

Toinen luku keskittyy teoreettisiin teksteihin, joita tutkielma käyttää naishahmojen representaation analysointiin. Neljä esitettyä teoriaa ovat Judith Butlerin sukupuolen performatiivisuus, Laura Mulvey'n feministinen elokuva-analyysi, Erving Goffmanin arkipäivän roolit ja Rosalind Gillin postfeminismi. Näiden neljän teorian soveltamista käsittelen luvussa kolme.

Ennen teorioiden esittelyä käsittelen myös eskapismien tärkeyttä. Elokvien fanit tekevät elokuvatutkimuksesta tärkeää, ja siksi heistä on tärkeää puhua tutkimuksen yhteydessä. Elokuvat tehdään yleisöä varten, ja he ottavat eniten vaikutteita elokuvasta. Vaikutukset saattavat joskus tulla tiedostamattomasti, eikä katsoja ymmärrä omaksuvansa esimerkkejä kuluttamastaan mediatekstistä. Hahmojen monimuotoisuus lisää samaistuttavuutta, ja siksi hahmon identiteetti ja tunnemaailma pitäisi ottaa huomioon pelkän sukupuolen ja ihonvärin lisäksi.

Tutkin jo edellisessä tutkielmassani eskapismien merkitystä elokvien katsojalle. Eskapismi osoittautui kyselyn myötä tärkeäksi paikaksi unohtaa tosimaailman ongelma, ja ottaa mallia fiktiivisten hahmojen ongelmanratkaisusta omassa elämässä esiintyviin ongelmiin. Monet vastasivat eskapismien ruokkivan mielikuvitustaan, mikä auttaa heitä ongelmanratkaisussa ja uuden luomisessa. Eskapismia halutaan paranemiseen, pakenemiseen ja mielen rentouttamiseen, jolloin voi palata fiktiivisestä ympäristöstä omaan elämäänsä vahvempana. Kysely osoitti todeksi katsojan reflektoidan itseään näkemiinsä hahmoin. Täten tutkimus hahmojen representaatiosta on tärkeää, jotta voisimme ymmärtää, minkälaisista representaatiota kohti hahmojen luomisessa olisi hyvä pyrkiä. Varsinkin lapsille, jotka oppivat ja kehittyvät roolimalliensa kanssa, tulisi tarjota monipuolisia henkilöahmoja ja tarinoita.

Tästä huolimatta mieshahmot valtaavat edelleen valkokankaan suurimmaksi osaksi. Monimuotoisten roolien vähyys rajaa myös katsojan kokemusta. Naiset ainaisissa sivurooleissa tai kapeassa muotissa eivät tarjoa samaistumispintaa itsenäisille naiskatsojille ja vielä huonommin representaatiota on tarjolla sukupuolivähemmistöille. Tärkeää olisi ulottaa monimuotoisuus sukupuolen lisäksi myös eri ihonväriihin, kehopoikkeavuuteen ja ikäryhmiin. Vaikka tässä tutkimuksessa on keskitytty naishahmojen analyysiin, toivon mukaan se voisi

herättää kiinnostusta jatkaa muita vähemmistöjä edustavien henkilöhahmojen kirjoittamista visuaaliseen mediaan. Kahdenkymmenenneljän elokuvan aikana voisi väittää hahmojen representaatiokaaren muuttuvan jollakin tapaa. Tässä pro gradu -tutkielmassa tutkitaan hahmojen representaatiota, sen mahdollista muuttumista ja mitkä tekijät vaikuttavat muutokseen.

Toinen luku paneutuu seuraavaksi tilastotietoihin naishahmojen sekä eri vähemmistöjen esiintyvyydestä valkokankaalla. Myös MCU-elokuvien naishahmojen tilastoista puhutaan tässä yhteydessä osoittaen, että mieshahmoilla on enemmän tilaa ja aikaa valkokankaalla. MCU-elokuvien fanikunta on muuttunut vuosien saatossa monipuolisemmaksi, joten muutosta tarvitaan. Fanit myös toimivat produsereina (tuottava kuluttaja) Internetissä luoden omia teorioitaan, fanitoitään ja jatkaen hahmojen elämää niiden kautta Marvel Studios kommunikoi fanien kanssa aktiivisesti, joskus jopa heittäen vitsin tai huijauksen faneille spekuloitavaksi ja näin jatkaen fanien omien tuotoksien syntymistä.

Pääteorianana on Judith Butlerin performatiivinen sukupuoli. Butler mainitsee uraauurtavassa tutkimuksessaan *Gender Trouble*, kuinka sukupuolta usein esitetään binäärisessä kehyksessä. Butler puhuu todellisista ihmisistä, mutta hänen teoriansa soveltuu myös fiktiivisten hahmojen tutkimiseen: eskapismien kautta kuvitteellisesta hahmosta tulee katsojille tosi elokuvan keston ajaksi. Butlerin teorian johtava ajatus on ero biologisen (sex) ja sosiaalisen (gender) sukupuolen välillä; biologinen sukupuoli on sidottu fyysisiin ominaisuuksiin ja sosiaalinen sukupuoli esiintyy enemmän henkilöstä ulospäin sosiaalisessa mielessä. [Kirjoittajan huomio: Puhuessani sukupuolesta pro gradu -tutkielmassa, tarkoitan nimenomaan sosiaalista sukupuolta.]

Sukupuolella on kolme ulottuvuutta. Biologisen ja sosiaalisen sukupuolen lisäksi ihmisellä on sukupuolen performatiivisuus, jolla hän ilmaisee sosiaalista sukupuoltaan muille. Tämän myötä rakentuu sukupuolen performatiivisuus, joka näkyy teoissa, puheessa ja eleissä sukupuoli-identiteetin luojina. Otamme tähän mallia toisiltamme ja omaksumme vain ne eleet ja asenteet, jotka ovat sosiaalisesti ja poliittisesti hyväksytyjä. Tämän myötä siirrämme sukupuolen performatiivisuutta tuleville sukupolville. Jos sukupuolen performatiivisuus on tiukasti rajattu, se on heikkoa representaatiota. Lapset omaksuvat eleet ja tavat aikuisilta ja lapsilta, olipa ne omat vanhemmat, ystävät tai fiktiiviset hahmot. Sukupuolen moninaisuus on tärkeää, jotta tulevat sukupolvet eivät päädy tiukasti rajattuihin muotteihin. Siksi hahmoja ei pidä luoda vain nuorille vaan myös varttuneemmille katsojille.

Toisena teoriana on Laura Mulveyn feministinen elokuva-analyysi. Hän kehitti teoriansa artikkelissaan *Visual pleasure and narrative cinema*. Teorian myötä Mulvey halusi muuttaa yleisön tapaa tarkastella naishahmoja ja nostaa naiset objektista subjektiksi. Mulveyn mukaan elokuva tuottaa kahdenlaista iloa: Ensiksi katselun ilon, sillä ihminen on voyeuristinen nuorelta iältä lähtien. Toiseksi se luo narsistisen tavan katsoa, jolloin katsoja peilaa itseään siihen, mitä hän edessään näkee. Tämä kytkeytyy edellä puhuttuun eskapismiin ja sen tärkeyteen katsojalle: kuinka tämä ottaa vaikutteita hahmoista katsojan etsiessä roolimallia joko tarkoituksella tai alitajuisesti.

Mulveyn mukaan naishahmo on passiivista materiaalia mieskatsojalle. Tähän passiivisuuteen tarvitaan kolme eri katsetta. Yksi katse on se, mitä kamera tallentaa, toinen on se, mitä yleisö elokuvasta näkee, ja kolmas on henkilöhahmojen välinen katse itse elokuvassa. Se luo kerrostumia myös representaatioon, riippuen siitä, mihin kiinnitetään huomiota katseen suunnassa. Tämä saa objektin vaihtumaan kesken kaiken, ja siten voisi argumentoida, että myös nainen voi olla objekti naiselle tai mies objekti sekä naiselle että miehelle.

Teoria on osittain epäajankohtainen käytettäväksi sellaisenaan vuoden 1973 julkaisun jälkeen. Viisikymmentä vuotta myöhemmin sekä elokuva-ala että naisen representaatio on muuttunut. Myös yleisön tapa tarkastella mediatekstejä on erilaista nykypäivänä. Mulveyn teoria ei toimi nykypäivänä sellaisenaan, mutta sitä voi hyvin mukauttaa työkaluksi 2000-luvun elokuvien analysointiin.

Erving Goffmanin teoria arkipäivän rooleista on samankaltainen kuin Butlerin performatiivinen sukupuoli. Goffmanin mukaan kaikki mitä yksilö tekee muiden eli tarkkailijoiden edessä on esitys. Tämä esitys muuntuu tilanteen mukaan, sillä yksilö käyttäytyy eri tavalla hautajaisissa kuin juhlakulkueessa. Arkipäivän rooli ei ole niin helposti havaittavissa rooliksi ennen kuin jotain normaalia poikkeavaa tapahtuu, kuten hautajaiset.

Yksi Goffmanin teorian keskeisimpiä asioita arkipäivän rooleja tehdessä on esityksen uskottavuus. Muiden täytyy uskoa rooli todeksi, jotta se olisi uskottava. Pelkästään yksilö ei hyödy siitä, vaan rooli rakennetaan muita varten. Paras tarkkailija on roolin esittäjä. Esitys on vilpiton, kun myös itse esittäjä uskoo roolinsa aitouteen. Jos siihen ei usko, se muuttuu vilpittömästä kyyniseksi. Rooleilta odotetaan johdonmukaisuutta, joka asettaa roolin normien mukaiseksi ja joka toistettuna vakiinnuttaa roolin. Rooli opitaan muilta, ja muut oppivat taas tarkkailemalla yksilön aiemmin oppimaa roolia. Kun samaa roolia esitetään kerta toisensa jälkeen, syntyy stereotypioita. Niistä myös tulee ajan saatossa yhteiskunnan ylläpitämiä rooleja.

Neljäs teoria on Rosalind Gillin postfeministinen teoria, joka on tarkoitettu sukupuolen tarkkailuun mediassa. Siinä on elementtejä sekä feminismistä että antifeminismistä, ja Gill itse toteaa postfeminismin olevan ”herkkyyden” hakemista feministisestä historiasta ja eri teorioista. Koska postfeminismi on työkalu sukupuolen tarkkailuun, se tarkastelee myös median esittämiä kehoja ja ulkonäköjä. Myöhemmin Gill on todennut herkkyyden vaihtuneen henkilökohtaisen hegemonian etsimiseksi nykyisessä kulttuuriympäristössä.

Pääasia postfeminismissä on etsiä positiivista psykologiaa ja positiivista asennetta. Positiivisuus ei saisi jyrätä muita alleen, sillä teennäinen positiivisuus on enemmän vahingollista kuin positiivista. Se voi olla myös yksipuolista, jolloin yhden ryhmän ollessa esitettynä positiivisesti, toiset jäävät sen jalkoihin. Yksi esimerkki elokuvatuotannosta on naisroolien lisääntynyt määrä. Vaikka naishahmoja on enemmän, ne ovat lähinnä valkoisia, hoikkia ja pääosin englantia puhuvia naisia. Tämä positiivinen lisäys sulkee ulkopuolelle eri ihonvärin tai etnisyyden, kehopoikkeavuudet sekä sukupuoli- ja seksuaalivähemmistöt.

Postfeminismin mukaan keho on tärkeässä osassa representaatioissa eritoten naisilla. Naisten kehoja tarkastellaan mediateksteissä, ja naiseus koetaan enemmän kehollisena ja ulkonäöllisenä kuin psyykkisenä, sosiaalisena tai biologisena. Naiseus sidotaan usein seksuaalisuuteen, ja ulkonäkö- ja seksuaalikeskeisyys muovaa identiteettikäsityksen naiseudesta. Se voidaan kokea voimaannuttavana, mutta samalla se asettaa naiseuden jatkuvan muokkauksen ja tarkkailun alaiseksi. Naisen keho on miehen objekti mutta naisen subjekti. Vain täydellisiä kehoja esitellään, ja tästä poikkeavat jäävät paitsioon ollessaan epähaluttuja.

Jotkut katsojat ovat muutosta vastaan. Se voi olla totuttu tapa, tai tutusta poikkeava voi pelottaa. Kun muutos koetaan pelottavana, se ei ole positiivista. Ilman muutosta representaatio pysyy yksipuolisena, ja se aiheuttaa epäpositiivisuutta suuremmassa määrin pitkässä juoksussa. Usein muutoksen jälkeen huomataan, ettei se ollutkaan pelottavaa, vaikka aina on heitä, joiden mielestä pitäisi aina pysytellä samankaltaisuudessa vain ”koska voi.”

Kolmannessa luvussa käsitellään neljää aikaisempaa teoriaa pohtien, mitä elementtejä niistä voi poimia hyödyntäen nykyaikaan sopivan teorian luomista. Tätä tehdessä on hyvä pitää mielessä, miten supersankari-, fantasia- ja scifielokuvien katsojat käyttävät eskapismia samaistuessaan hahmoihin ja heidän rooleihinsa ja tekemiinsä. Hahmo on sitä uskottavampi katsojalle, mitä tykättävämpi se on.

Marvel Cinematic Universessa hahmojen jokapäiväisten tekojen inhimillisuus on se, mikä synnyttää yhteyden heidän ja katsojien välillä. Sen suhteen Goffmanin teoria auttaa hahmojen analysoinnissa. Mulveyn mukaan nainen on miehen objekti valkokankaalla, ja Gill alleviivaa tätä todetessaan, miten kaikkien naisten pitäisi olla subjekteja. Siitä huolimatta objektisoimme sekä itseämme että toisiamme, ja nykyajan internetkulttuuri korostaa sitä, median kertoessa miten sinun pitäisi olla ja elää.

Objektivointi ei aina ole pahasta, eikä se aina ole seksuaalista ja mielihyvän hakemista, vaan hahmovalikoiman monipuolistumisen myötä hahmoja voidaan tarkastella useammalla eri tavalla. Siitä huolimatta nimenomaan naiset altistuvat edelleen enemmän objektivoinnille. Kuitenkin, jos stereotyppejä voidaan rakentaa, niitä voi myös muokata. Hahmoa voi avartaa lisäämällä sille monipuolisempaa representaatiota. Objektivointi voi joskus auttaa hyvän representaation rakentamisessa.

Butlerilta on syytä muistaa, kuinka sukupuolen representaatio syntyy toistosta. Tämän takia lapset oppivat sukupuolen representaation aikuisilta jäljitellessään sukupuolelle ominaisia tapoja. Tässä elokuva ja tv on tärkeässä asemassa, sillä lapset kuluttavat tällaista mediaa paljon, jopa enemmän kuin aikuiset. Lapsen kasvaessa se, mitä katsoo, muuttuu ja kehittyy. Lapset eivät ole ainoita, jotka saavat vaikutteita visuaalisesta mediasta. Myös nuoret aikuiset ja aikuiset ottavat representaatiosta vaikutteita, olipa se tietoista tai tiedostamatonta.

Kun Butlerin esiintyvä sukupuoli yhdistetään Mulveyn, Goffmanin ja Gillin teorioiden kanssa, voidaan muodostaa työkalu nykyaikaisten filmien tutkimiseen. Edellä mainittujen teorioiden elementtien pohjalta muodostuu modernisoitu analysointimetodi, feministinen representaatioanalyysi. Normaalisti ottaisin huomioon sukupuolen moninaisuuden, mutta se ei ole tässä kohtaa mahdollista analysoidavien hahmojen ollessa cis-naisia.

Lähiluku on eittämättä tuttu kaikille elokuvia analysoineille. Syy tälle lienee sen ollessa monipuolinen työkalu mediatekstien työstämiseen. Se on yksityiskohtien tarkastelua kokonaiskuvan rakentamista varten. Pienimmillään asioilla on merkitystä kokonaisuuden kannalta, ja yhden puuttuessa koko kokonaisuus muuttuu.

Jotta lähiluku ja feministinen representaatioanalyysi toimisivat yhdessä, on lähiluettava myös elementit, joista uusi metodi muodostuu: mitä henkilöt puhuvat

ja mitä se paljastaa heistä, onko hahmo stereotyyppinen ja miksi, onko hahmo objekti vai subjekti. Nämä aspektit yhdistämällä voidaan rakentaa lopputulos: miten hahmo sitoutuu yhteiskuntaan, vai pysytteleekö se etäisenä ja yksiulotteisena ja siten ei toimi representaationsa takia yleisölle. Elokuvasarjoissa, kuten *Infinity Saga*, on kuitenkin otettava huomioon, että hahmon representaatio voi vaihdella eri elokuvien välillä.

Infinity Saga alkoi vuonna 2008 ja päättyi vuonna 2019. *Infinity Sagassa* on paljon naishahmoja, mutta rajauksena käytin yhdistäviä tekijöitä näissä kolmessa naishahmossa. Heillä on lukuisia esiintymisiä tai oma sooloelokuva *Infinity Sagan* aikana. Ensimmäinen käsiteltävä hahmo on Pepper Potts. Toinen on Natasha Romanoff, ja kolmantena tulee Carol Danvers. Esittelen heidät ensin, ja representaation analysointi tapahtuu neljännessä luvussa. Esittely nojautuu heidän lähtökohtaansa sarjakuvista, ja miten se ilmenee elokuvissa tuoden esille sekä yhdistäviä että erottavia tekijöitä vaihtaessa mediaa luettavasta katsottavaan.

Ensimmäinen tutkittava hahmo on Pepper Potts. Hän on sivuhenkilö, joka esiintyy *Iron Man*-elokuvien päähenkilön Tony Starkin taustalla. Hän on Tonyin assistentti ja stereotyyppisesti myös Tonyin mielenkiinnon kohde romanttisesti. Pepper auttaa Tonya osallistumatta itse taisteluun, ja päättyy usein pelastettavaksi naiseksi. Suurin henkilökohtainen muutos Pepperissä on *Avengers: Endgamessa*, jossa hän hyväksyy taistelun tarpeen maailmassa ja osallistuu siihen itsekin. Tässä viimeiseksi nähtävässä Pepperissä ei ole jälkeäkään pelastettavasta ja panikoivasta stereotyyppisestä naishahmosta, vaan hän on rauhallinen ja tyyni jopa Tonyin kuoleman äärellä.

Pepperin representaatio on jäykkää ja yksipuolista. Hän pysyttelee koko ajan Tonyin takana hänen tukijahahmonaan, jolla ei ole tarvetta muuttua. Hän pitää huolta Tonysta pitääkseen tämän kunnossa maailmanpelastusta varten.

Pepperin suhde Tonyyn on verrattavissa Tonyin henkivartijaan ja kuskiin Happyyn. Molemmat ovat Tonyin alaisia, mutta Tonyin kuoltua Pepper vain katoaa elokuvista Happyyn pysyessä edelleen aktiivisena myös *Infinity Sagan* jälkeen. Happy ei myöskään jäädy toimintatilanteessa, siinä missä Pepper esitetään panikoivana.

Pepper voidaan nähdä objektivoituna. Pepperin tavatessa Aldrich Killianin Happy raportoi heti näiden kahden tapaamisesta Tonylle. Tony ei itse objektivoi

Pepperiä, mutta tästä huolimatta Pepper näyttäytyy Tonyn tukipilarina, joka pitää Tonyn pystyssä ja liikkeellä.

Pepperin representaatio on stereotyyppistä. Vaikka Pepper on Tonyn tukija, hän ei saa tätä samaa vastakaikua Tonyilta. Pepper on puolikas, jota ei ole elokuvissa ilman miestänsä. Tästä huolimatta Pepper voidaan nähdä normaalina ihmisenä. Hän on sivustaseuraaja, jolla ei ole tarvetta osallistua suuriin tapahtumiin. Tämä on hyvä tapa kertoa katsojille, että voit olla tärkeä, vaikka et olisikaan tapahtumien keskipisteenä.

Toisena käsiteltävänä hahmona on Natasha Romanoff. Natasha on kuvattu korostetun feminiinisenä ensimmäisessä elokuvassaan *Iron Man 2*. Alusta lähtien Natasha on seksualisoitu verrattuna mieskollegoihinsa Avengersissa, mutta tälle on syy. Natasha käyttää vetovoimaansa hyödyntääkseen vastustajiensa ahneutta, himoa ja ylimielisyyttä. He aliarvioivat Natasha, jolloin hän pääsee niskan päälle. Tämä on hänelle tuttu toimintamalli, joka käy esille sekä *The Avengers*- että *Black Widow*-elokuvassa. Natashan näytetään olevan perillä miehiin liitetyistä stereotypioista, ja hyödyntää niitä saadakseen valtaa. Myös osa Natashan liittolaisista aliarvioi häntä. Esimerkiksi Happy käyttäytyy ritarimaisesti Natasha kohtaan, vaikka on nähnyt naisen kyvyt.

Natashan taidot ovat peräisin hänen koulutuksestaan venäläiseksi vakoojaksi, jossa hänet opetettiin hyväksikäyttämään ihmisiä. Menneisyys ei estä Natasha kehittymästä, ja Gillin teorian mukaisesti Natasha ei pelkää muutosta positiivisempaan. Hän käyttää naisoletettua stereotypiaa saadakseen asioita, joilla voi suojella muita. Vaikka rooli ei olekaan arkipäiväinen Natashalle, vain hänen lähimmät kumppanit tietävät tämän.

Natashan persoonallisuus muuttuu ja kasvaa *Infinity Sagan* aikana. Hänellä on tapoja, tekoja ja ominaisuuksia, jotka tekevät hänet samaistuttavaksi. Vaikka Natasha on synkän menneisyytensä vainoama, se ei estä häntä pyrkimästä kohti parempaa, vaikka se tarkoittaisi henkensä menettämistä. Hän on ensimmäisenä auttamassa ja sovittelemassa. Silti nainen ei pelkää olla avoin ja haavoittuva lähimmäistensä edessä, pitäen positiivisuutensa myös torjunnan hetkellä.

Auttavaisuus on Natashan arkipäivän rooli. Siitä tulee pyyteetön kuva, kun se toistuu joka päivä hahmossa. Se positiivisuus ei ole päälle liimattua, vaan se jättää Avengersin muihin jäseniin pysyvän jäljen. Jopa naisen kuoleman jälkeen hänellä on suuri vaikutus muihin Avengersin alkuperäisjäseniin, jopa siinä määrin että he tosissaan yrittävät palauttaa naisen kuolleista.

Kolmas käsiteltävä naishahmo on Carol Danvers. Carolilla on kolme naishahmosta vähiten ruutuaikaa, mutta hän on ainoa naishahmo, jolla on oma nimikkoelokuva *Infinity Sagan* aikana. Siksi hänestä on paljon materiaalia käsiteltäväksi kyseisen ajanjakson rajauksen sisällä.

Carol on nopea ongelmien ratkaisija, joka voineen olla seurausta hänen menneisyydestään. Hän on ollut jatkuvan alistuksen kohteena, olipa sen tekijä hänen isänsä, veljensä, kouluttajansa tai komentajansa. Hänen niin sanotut vikansa – äkkipikaisuus, tunteikkuus, jääräpäisyys ja impulsiivisuus – kääntyvät Carolin voimavaraksi elokuvan myötä. Carol on henkilö, joka ei pelkää ottaa riskiä tehdäkseen asiat oikein. Tämän myötä hänen voimiansa ja persoonansa potentiaali kasvaa suurimmilleen, tehden hänestä voimakkaimman hahmon.

Vertaillen kolmea naishahmoa keskenään heistä näkee eroavaisuuksia heidän representaatioissaan. Pepper on sidottu Tonyyn Carolin ja Natashan ollessa vapaampia liikkumaan. Tunnemaailmaltaan Natasha ja Pepper ovat vapaampia (vaikkakin Natasha on varautuneempi paljastamaan tunteitaan), kun taas Carolia yritetään painostaa pidättäytymään liiasta tunteiden ilmaisusta.

Mulveyn katseen kautta tarkastellessa Natashassa on suurin ero. Hänen poseerauksensa ja maneerinsa erottavat hänet Carolista, Natashan pysytellessä matalalla ja Carolin seisoessa selkä suorana kohti kameraa. Natasha myös kuvataan useammassa elokuvassa rajattuna hänen takapuoleensa, kun hän on työasussaan. Tämä on mielenkiintoinen tapa ohjata katsojan katse naisen takamukseen. Keskittyessä muiden hahmojen katseisiin löytyy eroavaisuuksia riippuen katsovasta hahmosta ja mikä tämän hahmon positio on suhteessa muihin hahmoihin.

Sukupuolen performatiivisuuden kautta katsottuna Pepper eroaa Natashasta ja Carolista eniten. Pepper tarvitsee suojelua Carolin ja Natashan suojellessa muita taistellen sukupuolelleen epätyypillisesti. Pepper on länsimaalaisittain normalisoitu hahmo. Pepperin sivuosa kuitenkin korostaa sitä, ettei kaikkien tarvitse olla toiminnan keskipisteessä ollakseen tärkeä, ja molempia tekijöitä tarvitaan.

Carol hyväksyy ihmisyytensä ja tunteensa, Pepper hyväksyy miehensä tarpeen suojella muita liittyen myös sotakentille mukaan ja Natasha jatkaa henkistä kasvuaan muita auttaen ja suojellen. Ulkonäöllisesti Natasha muuttuu eniten

elokuvasarjan aikana Pepperin pysyessä tyylilleen uskollisena. Carolia ei ole nähty tarpeeksi, jotta muutoksia voisi arvioida perusteellisemmin.

Tulevaa tarkastellessa vain Carolilla on mahdollisuus muuttua representaationsa myötä. Pepper on kadonnut tulevista elokuvista Tony'n kuoltua pelkäksi satunnaisesti mainittavaksi nimeksi, ja Natasha (se Natasha kenet tunnemme tässä universumissa) on kuollut.

Yhteenvedossa kertaan pro gradu -tutkielmassa käsitellyt teorit, hahmot ja tutkimustuloksen. Yhteenvedossa nousevat myös esille muut hahmot, jotka on jätetty tämän tutkimuksen ulkopuolelle, mutta jotka voisivat tuoda naishahmojen representaation tutkimiseen lisää variointia. Hahmojen kohdalla myös pohditaan erilaisia tapoja muuttaa analysoitavan materiaalin rajaamista.

Lopuksi todetaan, että *Marvel Cinematic Universe* on kaikesta huolimatta mieshahmovoittoinen elokuvasarja. Sukupuolten välinen kuilu on tasapainottunut vuodesta 2008, ja toivon mukaan elokuvasarjan jatko tulee olemaan monimuotoisempi.