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Diploma Thesis

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Zásady pro vypracování

Tato diplomová práce se zabývá zobrazením ženských hrdinek a superhrdinek v Marvel Cinematic Universe. Diplomantka si vybere a představí vhodnou feministickou teorii (např. male gaze, Bechdel test, apod.), kterou bude aplikovat na vybrané filmy či fáze MCU – především pak na konkrétní ženské postavy. V úvodu práce diplomantka odůvodní výběr filmů, postav i fem. teorie. Autorka bude také sledovat vývoj postav napříč filmy, nebo pouze jaký typ ženské postavy reprezentují: zda postava představuje genderové stereotypy, či je nějakým způsobem boří a postava pak působí jako kritický nástroj. Práce bude také pracovat s pojmy (např. femininita, maskulinita, gender, stereotypy, "femme fatale" a další), které budou také vhodně definovány. Diplomantka také zasadí MCU do am. kulturního prostředí (např. spojení s individualismem), navíc také představí historii feminismu (vč. relevantních pojmů a také tzv. "fourth-wave feminism") a krátce pojedná o reprezentaci žen v sci-fi a fantasy. V závěru práce se diplomantka pokusí shrnout vývoj či stagnaci vybraných postav a vyvodí obecnější závěry o zobrazení ženských hrdinek v MCU.

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ANNOTATION

The diploma thesis is dedicated to the depiction of women characters and superheroines in Marvel Cinematic Universe. Feminism and feminist criticism is explained, as well as popular culture and the evolution of superheroines in the genre of comic books, describing the Marvel phenomenon. The paper analyses the depiction of women in Marvel Cinematic Universe and their representation according to gender stereotypes, patriarchal society, binary oppositions or type of women they mirror. To support the feminist criticism, the Male gaze and Bechdel test are a part of the analysis.

KEYWORDS

Feminism, patriarchal society, gender, binary oppositions, angel woman, objectification

NÁZEV

Ženy v Marvel Cinematic Universe

ANOTACE

Diplomová práce se zabývá zobrazením ženských postav a superhrdinek v Marvel Cinematic Universe. Je vysvětlen pojem feminismus a feministická literární kritika, stejně tak pojem populární kultura. Poté je představen vývoj superhrdinek, spojený s žánrem komiksů, se zaměřením na začátky Marvelu a fenoménu, který z toho vznikl. Diplomová práce pracuje s uvedeným teoretickým pozadím, jehož prismatickým analyzuje tři vybrané ženské postavy a jejich vyobrazení v Marvel Cinematic Universe. Analýza se zaměřuje na celkové zobrazení ženských hrdinek a současně zkoumá genderové stereotypy, binární protiklady, typy ženských postav, objektivizaci a sexualizaci žen. Mimo obecné feministické kritiky jsou k analýze použity konkrétní feministické teorie zabývající se filmovou tvorbou, Male gaze and Bechdel test.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

Feminismus, patriarchální společnost, pohlaví, binární protiklady, andělská žena, objektivizace

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Introduction

Superheroes have been a part of fiction for almost a century, introducing some of its most known superheroes such as Superman, Batman, Spiderman, or Iron Man. However, being a woman in a world of superheroes has been difficult with respect to the demands for female characters including their appearance and their overall role in the plot. Therefore, the diploma thesis tries to analyse the development of particular characters from the movie phenomena of Marvel. The aim of this thesis is to explore whether the representation of women supports or reinforces a patriarchal programming of society in a work of popular culture, in particular – movies and if the women develop within the movie or over a period of time. Furthermore, it examines, how the movies represent women, whether they are portrayed according to gender stereotypes, binary oppositions or the type of women they represent over all.

Movies with the label of Marvel Entertainment are possible to score very high visit rate thanks to their popularity among people, therefore, it might be conceivable to think that the movies can have some impact on the viewer. Hence the diploma thesis builds on the presumption that the movies might influence young girls when it comes to the representation of women in the movies. Loid Tyson claims that patriarchal programming of men and women in the society supports the oppression of female gender including popular culture, such as movies, books, songs.¹ Moreover, the thesis attempts to interpret whether the representation of women supports the programming to assist the hierarchical decomposition of society favouring the male dominance. Additionally, it explores whether the leading women in chosen movies developed accordingly to the feminist criticism and whether the representations changed throughout the movie and in the 15 years of the Marvel Cinematic Universe.

A vital part of the thesis discusses the topic of feminism and how the movement influenced societies throughout the history. Feminism and its minor goals have changed according to a period of time they appeared in, but the main goal of equality between women and men has stayed unchanged. Feminists argue that the environment of daily life influences men and women and how they perceive themselves. That includes films, which are an inherent element in feminist criticism. Therefore, it is essential to follow whether the

¹ Lois, Tyson *A critical theory today: User friendly guide* (London: Routledge, 2014), 86.

representation of women in popular culture, and more specifically in chosen movies, is a representative of the society and whether it helps to define equal rights for women and men. Therefore, the literary theory dedicated to feminism with a focus on gender stereotypes, binary oppositions, including the Male gaze theory and Bechdel test.

Based on the above research objectives and hypotheses, the author consider it to appropriate to structure the thesis as follows. The first section of this paper introduces feminism. Thus the first two chapters of the thesis are devoted to explaining the basis of this theory. The first chapter discusses the topic from a historic perspective and describes how feminism has been shaped and developed over the years, focusing on each wave of feminism separately. The second chapter tries to explain the literary criticism of feminists. Pointing out how men and women are programmed to behave in a patriarchal society according to gender stereotypes and how the genders are determined by each other.

The third chapter explains the idea of the Marvel movies as a part of popular culture. The chapter is subsumed because all the movies discussed in the analytical part might be said to belong to the popular culture of the 21st century. The following up chapter is dedicated to the development of the genre of superheroes fiction. It discusses the evolution of comic books and how women were pictured in those books over years. The chapter also includes the development of superheroines in superhero fiction, mentioning the beginning of Marvel. The last chapter of the theoretical part is devoted to the Marvel phenomenon itself. It focuses on the Marvel Cinematic Universe, building on the basis of the previous chapter that explains Marvel comic books. The chapter is divided into four waves according to a timeline provided by Marvel. From each wave one or more movies were selected.

The analytical part is devoted to three female characters from the Marvel Cinematic Universe. The characters are Virginia Pepper Potts, Black Widow and Captain Marvel. They were all selected because of their difference from each other, apart from the author assuming a character development concerning the feminist issues that are discussed in the thesis. Captain Marvel was selected as the first superheroine to be portrayed in a movie adaptation in Marvel Cinematic Universe, which was devoted just to a women character. The character of Black Widow was tabbed since her objectification is widely spread among Marvel fans. Moreover, the actress who played the character of Black Widow spoke about the fact publicly.² The last character, Virginia “Pepper” Potts, was preferred as a matter of being the

² “Scarlett Johansson speaks out over ‘sexualised’ Black Widow,” Independent, Last Modified June 17, 2021.

first female character that was introduced into the Marvel Cinematic Universe. Furthermore, an interest in the development of a woman that started as an assistant and ended as a leader of a company was shown by the author of the thesis.

The analytical part is divided into four waves according to a timeline divided by Marvel, and from each wave, a movie or more was selected. In the first wave, the *Iron Man* movie was chosen due to the fact that it is the first movie of the wave, setting the scene for women of the Marvel Cinematic Universe. Most importantly, it introduced the character of Virginia Pepper Potts, who the author assumed to represent the ideal angelic woman turning into a patriarchal nightmare. The next movie chosen from the first wave was *Iron Man 2*, where the character of Black Widow was introduced. In addition, the first *Avenger* movie was selected for a more specific portrait of Black Widow.

Furthermore, the second wave brought the development of Virginia “Pepper” Potts character in *Iron Man 3* and *Avengers: The age of Ultron* was used for presenting a more comprehensive picture of Black Widow.

The third and fourth waves are each dedicated to a specific woman in the thesis. The third wave brought the character of Captain Marvel which is going to be examined. Lastly, from the fourth wave, a movie dedicated to the character of Black Widow will be discussed to analyse the development of the character.

History of feminism

As the following chapter deals with feminism, it is necessary to explain the term. In modern society, feminism and its features are not anything unknown. The word carries its specific meaning, but it is still very frequently misinterpreted or misused. Even though the definition of the concept may differ from scholar to scholar, Barbara Smith describes feminism as: “the political theory and practice to free all women: women of colour, working-class women, poor women, physically challenged women, lesbians, old women, as well as white economically privileged, heterosexual women. Anything less than this is not feminism, but merely female self-aggrandizement.”³ The definition supports the idea of equality of women and men. Therefore, anyone who claims to be feminist endorses the idea of equality regardless of the circumstances.

The origin of the term is based on the adjective *feminine* and a suffix.⁴ Furthermore, the word feminine originates in ancient French, meaning female with feminine qualities. Jason L Powell stated: “Femininity is then constructed in terms of being all that the masculine is not.”⁵ The term, as explained above, did not exist until the 19th century, but it does not mean that there were no feminists prior to the term obtaining its modern meaning. There were even statements according to which there were feminists as early as in the 13th century. As Marta Easton states: “Christine de Pizan and her active rejection of misogynous attitudes [are] evident in the thirteenth-century dream-poem *Romance of the Rose*.”⁶ The women might not know that they would be called feminists, but it does not mean that they did not believe that they should have the same rights as men.

Feminism is historically divided into four waves. Gail Collins claims that each wave has its own issues and direction they headed to. The first wave tried to obtain the same suffrage for both genders and ultimately succeeded. The second wave, from the 1960s to the 1970s, focused on equality at work, in education, and at home.⁷ The third and the fourth waves are divided only roughly. Arneil states that third-wave feminism: “begins with

³ Gordon Graham, “Political Theory and Political Practice,” *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 16, no 2. (December 2022): 115.

⁴ “Feminism,” *Online Etymology Dictionary*, last modified October 26, 2014, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/feminism>.

⁵ Jason L. Powell, *Feminism* (New York: Novinka, 2013), 15.

⁶ Martha Easton, “FEMINISM,” *Studies in Iconography* 33 (2012): 100.

⁷ Gail Collins, *When Everything Changed: The Amazing Journey of American Women from 1960 to the Present* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2009), 3-8.

women's point of view, notably the diversity and difference in perspectives among women.”⁸ The third wave is followed by the fourth, and thus far the last one. The fourth and up to now the latest wave depends on modern technology like the Internet and the amount of its usage. However, no general consensus exists among academics on a clear dividing line between the two last waves.

Since the most critical category distinctions were mentioned, some crucial representative of feminist thought shall be introduced. An important name worth mentioning is the so-called “mother of feminism” – Mary Wollstonecraft. She lived in the 18th century and pioneered women's rights. She wrote several books on the issue of equality, including the best known of them: *The Vindications: The Rights of Men and The Rights of Woman* or *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters: With Reflections on Female Conduct*, in the *More Important Duties of Life*. While she was criticised by feminists in the 1970s for her social radicalism, she was undoubtedly an influential figure among the first feminists. As Susan Ferguson suggests, Wollstonecraft's ideas contributed a great deal, in particular to the second feminist wave, classifying her work as political and economic criticism. Due to her radical ideas about the nature of property, family and class, she questioned the idea of 18th-century Britain as a class-based society. Furthermore, she claims that Wollstonecraft went beyond the political idea of class and focused more on the domestic household and women's rights. However, her focus was solely on the women of working-class or middle-class women.⁹ Mary Wollstonecraft's connection to feminist waves will be discussed later in the paper.

The term feminist wave has been used in the paper several times already, so it is necessary to explain the term before a closer look is taken at each wave individually. Nancy A. Hewitt suggests that the theory of understanding feminism as a wave is based on radio or oceanic waves. There was a potential seen in radio waves because of the fact that they could spread knowledge. Short waves work best to transmit information over long distances, whereas longer waves transmit better within cities, and transmitters may change the type of waves.¹⁰ She also claims that:

If we think of feminist movements as composed of both short and long waves, and if we imagine the lecturers, organizers, writers, newspapers, 'zines, rallies, and so on as

⁸ Barbara Arneil, *Politics and Feminism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 186.

⁹ Susan Ferguson, “The Radical Ideas of Mary Wollstonecraft,” *Canadian Journal of Political Science / Revue Canadienne de Science Politique* 32, no. 3 (1999): 428.

¹⁰ Nancy A. Hewitt, “Feminist Frequencies: Regenerating the Wave Metaphor,” *Feminist Studies* 38, no. 3 (2012): 659-660.

transmitters, then it is possible to expand significantly the richness and complexity of each phase of feminism.¹¹

However, there is a caveat to such a metaphor. It is necessary for both men and women to listen to the messages and be transmitters. Concerning the oceanic wave, the author only adds that: “Oceanic waves loom up as a kind of natural force out of unknown depths.”¹²

Firstly, there is the need to focus on every wave separately to get a clear historical overview. The first wave of feminism was defined retrospectively and covered the period between the 1840s and 1920. As Hagar Kotef claims, the early stages of the 19th century were dedicated to equal rights concerning the law. She introduces her main work concerning feminism in this period: *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes*, written by Sarah Grimké – American, liberal and feminist. Hagar Kotef claims that Grimké’s work brought the view of comparing women to enslaved people. However, not all women are taken into consideration. The women that are talked about in her letters and set as an example for equality are white middle-class women.¹³ Hagar Kotef, with the help of Grimké’s letter *Legal Disabilities of Women* describes the fact that legally, women did not have the same rights as their male companions.¹⁴ As mentioned before, Grimké compared women to slaves, and it was not different in the case of a legal fight. She points out the physical aspects because husbands could “give moderate correction” to their wives, which was also possible to do with slaves. Her three main points concerning physical aspects of the marriage were: “above law – from the slave (who can be killed, the most severe physical effect) to the poor woman (who suffers from physical violence) to the middle-class lady (suffering from limitations upon her movement).”¹⁵ In the early 19th century, the abolition movement swept through the US concerning the rights of Afro-American people. It might be the reason why many early feminists were abolitionists first. Grimké deals with both issues in her work even though she did consider women of colour equal.

Apart from the Abolitionist Movement, where many women were involved in political activism, mentioning the French Revolution and the Temperance movement is essential. First was the French revolution in the 18th century, and R. B. Rose claims that the French

¹¹ Hewitt, “Feminist Frequencies,”660.

¹² Hewitt, “Feminist Frequencies,”660.

¹³ Hagar, Kotef, “On Abstractness: First Wave Liberal Feminism and the Construction of the Abstract Woman,” *Feminist Studies* 35, no. 3 (2009):495-496.

¹⁴ Kotef, “On Abstractness,”495-496.

¹⁵ Sarah Grimké, *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes and Other Essays*, ed. Elizabeth Bartlett, 1838 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988). ven: Yale University Press, 1988), Subsequent citations appear in parentheses. In Hagar Kotef, 497.

Revolution marked the beginnings of organized participation of women in politics.¹⁶ The revolution and its “*Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*” was the starting point for women to focus on the gaining of the citizenship which had been withheld to them. As a reaction, Olympe de Gouges wrote “*Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen*” in 1791. With the Temperance movement, the shift of feminism returned to the US territory.

The first wave covered a very long period of time compared to later waves of feminism. Amber E. Kinser suggests that the first part of the first wave of feminism in the 19th century focuses on: “rights to property and wages, rights to guardianship of their children, rights to equal education, rights to political voice and, though hardly unanimously, the right to vote.”¹⁷ She then continues to explain that in the later part of the 19th century, the focus shifted slightly towards Afro-American women because they had started to get an education. Although she states: “black women’s contributions were restricted from public recognition and historical record both from within the movement and from the larger public arena.”¹⁸ It was just the beginning of the second wave to come later in the mid-20th century.

As mentioned above, the first wave focused mainly on white middle-class women. However, the focus shifted to the second wave of feminism, which took place around the 1960s in the US. Becky Tomson suggests that the second wave might also be called multicultural feminism. Its start is tied to the publication of Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963, which spurred the foundation of the National Organization for Women in 1966. It brought focus on coloured women, focused more on individual rights and declined the social status.”¹⁹ The overall goal was to provide equal rights to all kinds of women. Becky Tomson then continues with the rise of multicultural feminism being tied to middle-class white women not wanting to be treated unequally in several departments such as education or household. They actively started attending protests and women’s clubs of women of colour and later established their own women’s organizations. The organization dealt with their issues concerning equality, such as sexism, imperialism or health issues.²⁰ For the second wave of feminism, the importance lay in the fact that white women participated in the

¹⁶ R. B. Rose, “Feminism, Women and the French Revolution,” *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques* 21, no. 1 (1995): 191.

¹⁷ Amber E. Kinser, “Negotiating Spaces for/through Third-Wave Feminism,” *NWSA Journal* 16, no. 3 (2004): 127.

¹⁸ Kinser, “Negotiating,” 127.

¹⁹ Becky Thompson, “Multiracial Feminism: Recasting the Chronology of Second Wave Feminism,” *Feminist Studies* 28, no. 2 (2002): 338.

²⁰ Thomson, “Multiracial Feminism,” 337–340.

organisations held by women of colour and also their involvement in the Black Power movement that runs through the US in the 1970s. The focus shifted just from gender equality issues of white middle-class women to much broader issues concerning imperialism and political struggle, as Assata Sakur states: “To me, the revolutionary struggle of Black people had to be against racism, classism, imperialism and sexism for real freedom under a socialist government.”²¹ However, Becky Tomson argues that the second wave had its issues concerning multiracial feminism. At that time, multicultural feminism tried to prove that gender, race, and class were intertwined and that it was essential to focus on more than sex supremacy. While the white middle-class feminists tried to prove that women could do what men did at work, they knew better than them, and girl power was the most important.²² Second-wave feminism got the same roots concerning the effort for the equality of men and women. However, in the late 1970s, the wave was divided into these two spheres.

The 1960s and 1970s are being marked as a peak of second-wave white feminists, while the multicultural feminism marked it as the time of its origin. Gluck states:

By 1982, on the heels of difficult political struggle waged by activist scholars of color, ground breaking essays and anthologies by and about women of color opened a new chapter in U.S. feminism. The future of the women's movement in the U.S. was reshaped irrevocably by the introduction of the expansive notion of feminism.²³

The second wave brought diversity and wider issues to the forefront of the discussion. Feminism was no longer just about gender issues, the position of women and men in politics, households and the society in general. It was no longer about a white middle-class woman, but it started to develop towards diversity. Women looked beyond the gender supremacy and focusing more on a broader context. The newly discussed issues were a good starting point for the development of feminism outside the gender level with the focus on racial, political, social and other issues.

The second wave also brought to the spotlight the issue of sexuality. The wave is well known for its sex wars in the 1970s and 1980s. As Lynn Comella states: “battles over pornography and sexual expression that caused deep and enduring rifts within the broader

²¹ Nancy MacLean, "The Hidden History of Affirmative Action: Working Women's Struggles in the 1970s and the Gender of Class," *Feminist Studies* 25 (spring 1999): 47.

²² Thompson, "Multiracial Feminism," 340-342.

²³ Sherna Berger Gluck, "Whose Feminism, Whose History? Reflections on Excavating the History of (the) U.S. Women's Movement(s)," in *Community Activism and Feminist Politics: Organizing across Race, Class, and Gender*, ed. Nancy A. Naples (New York: Routledge, 1998), 32.

feminist movement that are still felt today.”²⁴ The view on woman’s sexuality, body, and its expression is a topic of one of the feminist theories that is going to be discussed later in the paper. Douglas J. Huffman claims that the decentralization of the second wave allowed the third wave feminism to rise.²⁵ The third wave aimed to respond to certain crucial topics that were erased in the second wave, such as the mentioned sexuality or racial issues. Amber E Kinser supports this idea with the statement: “Women of colour still struggle to have race-related subjectivities occupy prominent feminist space, though they may have met with more success in the third-wave era than in previous ones.” R. Claire Snyder-Hall proposes that the third wave broke into even more minor groups or individual choices in how feminism was seen. It became more about personal choice rather than a group view. One of the topics the second-wave feminism discussed was sexuality, and in the third wave, the discussion was developed much wider with the arrival of Playboy or the porn industry.²⁶

Between the new names that the third-wave introduced, it is important to mention Rebeca Walker, Chela Sandoval and Naomi Wolf. Amber E. Kinser says that each of them defined the third wave differently: “Chela Sandoval [introduced] new subjectivity that honours race, [...] Naomi Wolf [introduced] move from victim feminism to power feminism,[...] Rebecca Walker[calling] for a facing and embracing [of the] contra-dictions and complexities.”²⁷

Rebecca Walker supported the idea of individuality as she stated:

For many of us it seems that to be a feminist in the way that we have seen or understood feminism is to conform to an identity and way of living that doesn’t allow for individuality, complexity, or less than perfect personal histories. We fear that the identity will dictate and regulate our lives, instantaneously pitting us against someone, forcing us to choose inflexible and unchanging sides, female against male, black against white, oppressed against oppressor, good against bad. This way of ordering the world is especially difficult for a generation that has grown up transgender, bisexual, interracial, and knowing and loving people who are racist, sexist, and otherwise afflicted.²⁸

Many more third-wave feminists were inspired by her and her view. The connection between racial issues and feminism was also a part of the third wave, thanks to her.

²⁴ Lynn Comella, “Review of Revisiting the Feminist Sex Wars, by Carolyn Bronstein, Julia Long, and Rachel Aimee, Eliyanna Kaiser, and Audacia Ray,” *Feminist Studies* 41, no. 2 (2015): 439.

²⁵ Douglas J. Huffman, Susan Mann Archer, “The Decentering of Second Wave Feminism and the Rise of the Third Wave,” *Science & Society* 69, no. 1 (2005): 56.

²⁶ R. Claire Sydney-Hall, “Third-Wave Feminism and the Defense of ‘Choice,’” *Perspectives on Politics* 8, no. 1 (2010): 255.

²⁷ Amber E. Kinser, “Negotiating Spaces for/through Third-Wave Feminism,” *NWSA Journal* 16, no. 3 (2004): 124–53. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4317084>.

²⁸ Rebecca Walker, “Becoming the Third Wave,” from Ms. Magazine,” *In Heywood* (2006): 4.

The time when the third wave feminism unfolded was the time of digital cultural evolution. In the 1990s, the internet was started to be widely used as well as mobile phones. Regarding music, RAP, R&B or POP/ teen POP was very successful. MTV was introduced, which brought music videos for songs. One of the most influential artists of the time were Spice Girls, Christina Aguilera or Britney Spears. It was supported by the idea of chick culture, as Suzanne Ferris and Mallory Young claim.²⁹

The dividing line between third-wave feminism and fourth-wave is quite vague. Nannerl O. Keohane claims that thanks to the third wave women are able to go to universities, colleges, take up space in the male dominated industries, all because of the effort of earlier feminists and that is the reason why the term post feminism should not be used. Because the term indicates that the three waves were unsuccessful.³⁰ She then continues to explain the fourth wave and claims that young women concentrate on:

Prejudices against women in positions of authority, the sexual stereotypes that render true corporate camaraderie impossible for women and make them invisible as serious competitors, and, most of all, the cruel choices these women will confront when it comes to career versus home and family.³¹

The issue important in the fourth wave feminism is equality in all aspects of life.

The fourth wave is linked to the online world, as mentioned above. Nevertheless, the meaning of the sentence could be unclear, and therefore, it is necessary to elaborate on it. The connection between the online world and the fourth wave is the fact that in the era of political, economic and social equality, it is essential to acknowledge the spuriousness happening in all areas of life. In other words, not to be passive and let the world know that it is unacceptable if, in the 21st century, any kind of oppression happens and to face this oppression by means of modern online technologies. Gretchen Faust supports this by claiming that the fourth-wave feminism: “calls for active participatory engagement and uses social networking sites to call out injustices and inequalities.”³²

In connection to the fourth-wave feminism and to the film industry, which is part of the analytical part of this thesis, it is necessary to mention the Me Too Movement. The

²⁹ Suzanne Ferris and Mallory Young, “‘Marie Antoinette’: Fashion, Third-Wave Feminism, and Chick Culture,” *Literature/Film Quarterly* 38, no. 2 (2010): 98–99.

³⁰ Nannerl O. Keohane, “A Fourth Wave?,” *The Wilson Quarterly* (1976-) 10, no. 5 (1986): 154–58. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40257114>.

³¹ Keohane, “A Fourth Wave?,” 157.

³² H., Retallack, Ringrose, J., & Lawrence, E., “‘Fuck your body image’: Teen girls’ Twitter and Instagram feminism in and around school,” In J. Coffey, S. Budgeon, & H. Cahill (Eds.), *Learning Bodies: Perspectives on Children and Young People*, (Singapore: Springer, 2016) 86-87.

Movement swept through the US and the rest of the world in 2018 and, its task was to bring attention or even an end to the violence and harassment against women all over the world. Ian Winchester insists that the Movement started in the film industry when forty-eight women named Harvey Weinstein as the man who had sexually assaulted them under the threat of destroying their careers in the film industry.³³ The brave act of speaking up led to the Movement spreading all over the world, with many women uncovering harassment they went through under the threat of losing careers. This act also led to many women taking legal action against their sexual predators. The main point of the Movement was to encourage women to always speak up and take their rightful equal space in society.

³³ Ian Winchester, "MeToo in an Educational Context." *The Journal of Educational Thought (JET) / Revue de La Pensée Éducative* 51, no. 1 (2018): 1–6. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26873048>.

Feminist criticism

The development of feminism was discussed in the chapter above. However, for the purpose of this paper, it is necessary to expound on the topic of feminist criticism, besides the historical overview. Lois Tyson explains that “feminist criticism examines the ways in which literature (and other cultural productions) reinforces or undermines the economic, political, social, and psychological oppression of women.”³⁴ That means that the theory is built on the basics of feminism and is trying to point to several ways in which women are or were suppressed in literary texts, film productions, the music industry, and other areas. This idea is supported by J. Cullers, who states that: “feminism undertakes to deconstruct the opposition man/woman and the oppositions associated with it.”³⁵

Furthermore, Tyson analyses the society and believes that society is part of a patriarchal world, and women are defined by it. Consequently, women are oppressed by living in the patriarchal world and they do not see all the ways they are influenced by because it is so deeply rooted in them. In other words, women grow up, live and function in a patriarchal world, and sometimes the patriarchal way of living is so ingrained in them that they do not recognize it, so they naturally believe that they are submissive.³⁶ To support the idea that feminist criticism uncovers patriarchy in the works of popular culture, Peter Barry claims that feminist critiques “examine power relations which obtain in texts and in life with a view to breaking them down, seeing reading as political act, and showing the extent of patriarchy.”³⁷ Additionally, J. Cullers concurs by stating: “feminists undertake a theoretical critique of the heterosexual matrix that organizes identities and cultures in terms of the opposition between man and woman.”³⁸ Likewise: “Delphy argues, that all relationships between men and women are based on power: patriarchal men want to keep all of it; nonpatriarchal women want power to be equally distributed.”³⁹

For instance, traditional gender roles. Gender studies are intensely connected to feminism as W. Guerin states that: “It is easy to see how constructivist feminism helped

³⁴ Lois, Tyson *A critical theory today: User friendly guide* (London: Routledge, 2014), 83.

³⁵ Jonathan, Cullers, *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*, (Oxford: OUP, 2011), 126.

³⁶ Tyson, *A Critical theory*, 85.

³⁷ Peter, Barry, *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 134.

³⁸ Jonathan, Cullers, *Literary theory*, 126.

³⁹ Tyson, *A critical theory*, 98.

give rise to gender studies, the framing of all gender categories as cultural instead of biological.”⁴⁰ Tyson argues that it is very common in a society to see men as more logical, providers, great leaders and women as more emotional, weak or submissive. This traditional view where women can get equal pay by law, but are not very likely to get to the position of leadership put a ground for biological essentialism, where the biological differences between men and women are taken into consideration. However, there is a difference between the terms sex and gender. ⁴¹ Tyson defines the difference as: “sex, which refers to our biological constitution as female or male, and the word gender, which refers to our cultural programming as feminine or masculine. In other words, women are not born feminine, and men are not born masculine.”⁴² That means that gender roles have been socially constructed by the patriarchy rather than biologically defined by nature, which is supported by Peter Barry because he claims that feminist critique “raise[s] the question of whether men and women are essentially different because of biology, or are socially constructed as different.”⁴³ This view is also supported by Guerin, who states: “gender, not sex, makes an older man open the door for a young woman, and gender makes her expect it, resent it, or experience mixed feelings.”⁴⁴

Relating to gender and sexuality, Guerin introduces binary oppositions. It is argued that the two worlds, male and female, are binary oppositions, also known as masculinity and femininity, each having its own features created by the patriarchal society and culture.⁴⁵ Therefore, as Tyson’s view was explained in the paragraph above, to behave as a woman does not mean that women are biologically destined to behave that way, but are programmed by their surroundings. Moreover, she believes that commenting on men’s programming also means demonstrating women’s programming in the sense of binary oppositions.⁴⁶ In addition, Tyson states the main features that men or women are programmed to display in a patriarchal society:

the patriarchal concept of femininity—which is linked to frailty, modesty, and timidity—disempowers women in the real world: it is not feminine to succeed in

⁴⁰ W.L.Guerin, *A handbook of critical approaches to literature*, (New York: OUP, 1998,)226-227.

⁴¹ Tyson, *A Critical theory*, 85-86.

⁴² Tyson, *A Critical theory*, 86.

⁴³ Barry, *Beginning Theory*, 134.

⁴⁴ Guerin, *A handbook*, 237.

⁴⁵ Guerin, *A handbook*, 236-339.

⁴⁶ Tyson, *A Critical theory*, 92.

business, to be extremely intelligent, to earn big bucks, to have strong opinions, to have a healthy appetite (for anything), or to assert one's rights.⁴⁷

She explains that everything that women should be is considered unmanly and the other way around. Some of the most common features that are considered adequate for men are according to her:

men are supposed to be strong (physically powerful and emotionally stoic), they are not supposed to cry because crying is considered a sign of weakness [...] it is considered unmanly for men to show fear or pain or to express their sympathy for other men. [...]men are not permitted to fail at anything they try [...] they must be the most sexually active (or make others believe that they are) or be able to hold the most liquor or display the most anger [...], that anger and other violent emotions are the only emotions permitted, [...] anger is a very effective means of blocking out fear and pain, which are not permitted, and anger usually produces the kind of aggressive behaviours associated with patriarchal manhood.⁴⁸

Tyson explains that growing up as a woman in a patriarchal society defines women's views about themselves. They are programmed or taught to believe that they are not capable of leadership, they are naturally submissive or less logical than men. Tyson highlights the fact that women might struggle with recognizing their oppression because they are surrounded by it in movies, books, and TV series, which may influence the woman's perspective of herself. Some of the primary figures in their lives might be programmed in this way of thinking, which influences them.⁴⁹ Concerning movies, John Belton supports this idea by commenting on the topic of war movies. He claims that women appeared in the war movies as emotional support, wives, and objects of desire of soldiers.⁵⁰ His claim highlights women's subsidiary, submissive role in these movies. The female characters are just the caretakers or objects of sexual desire.

In the paragraph above, the submission of women to men was mentioned. Referring to that, Tyson introduces the idea of the "good girl" and "bad girl" binary distinction in literary criticism. She claims that female characters are divided either into a category of an angelic girl or a monster girl, explaining that the angelic girl is used in the patriarchal world as a role model for young girls and women. In contrast, the monster girl is pictured as pure evil. According to Tyson, the main features of the angelic girl are to be submissive, gentle, beautiful, virginal and to wait until the man awakens the girl. The ultimate price is to marry a man who will care for everything. On the other hand, the monster girl is jealous, wicked,

⁴⁷ Tyson, *A Critical theory*, 88.

⁴⁸ Tyson, *A Critical theory*, 87-88.

⁴⁹ Tyson, *A Critical theory*, 86-87.

⁵⁰ John, Belton, *American Cinema/American Culture* (New York: Mc Graft Hill Education, 2018),186-187.

knows what she wants and acts on it and is violent and aggressive.⁵¹ Tyson states that: “these characterizations imply that if a woman does not accept her patriarchal gender role, then the only role left her is that of a monster.”⁵²

The importance of assigned features of gender roles that the patriarchal society has determined has been discussed, the fact that women are seen as bad or good women according to their qualities has been discussed. The assumptions of women and men based on binary oppositions were mentioned, and it is necessary to touch on the topic of sexuality. It was mentioned above that men should be seen as sexually dominant. Therefore, in the sense of binary oppositions of the patriarchal world, women should not be sexually dominant. Moreover, Tyson claims: “proper patriarchal young woman is sexually dormant until “awakened” by the man who claims her.”⁵³ Additionally, Guillaumin claims that women are oppressed by: “direct physical appropriation, [...] the reduction of women to the state of material objects”⁵⁴ Guillaumin explains that the sexual obligation to men appears not just in prostitution, but also in marriage.⁵⁵ In other words, women should not be sexually active until marriage, should not enjoy sex outside of the reproductive part, but they should be sexually objectified by men, for their pleasure. Tyson supports this idea of women being taken as objects for men by stating:

patriarchy treats women, whatever their role, like objects: like objects, women exist, according to patriarchy, to be used without consideration of their own perspectives, feelings, or opinions. After all, from a patriarchal standpoint, women’s perspectives, feelings, and opinions don’t count unless they conform to those of patriarchy.⁵⁶

Related to the sexualization and women being seen as objects of men, Tyson claims that even clothing can be a part of patriarchal culture. Tyson believes that there is a feminine way of dressing promoting the patriarchal culture.: “ the most “feminine” styles of clothing for today’s woman is the tight skirt and high heels, which create a kind of “feminine” walk (while precluding running)”⁵⁷

The word patriarchal was mentioned in the text several times, therefore, its definition might be necessary to state for the purposes of development of the further text. Robert Balheida claims that the roots of patriarchy are in the historical dominance of men. It operates

⁵¹ Tyson, *A Critical theory*, 89.

⁵² Tyson, *A Critical theory*, 89.

⁵³ Tyson, *A Critical theory*, 89.

⁵⁴ Collete, Guillaumin, *Racism, Sexism, Power and Ideology*, London: Routledge, 1995, 75.

⁵⁵ Guillaumin, *Racism*, 75-77.

⁵⁶ Tyson, *A Critical theory*, 91.

⁵⁷ Tyson, *A Critical Theory*, 91.

on the same basis in the 21st century as it did thousands of years before.⁵⁸ He then claims that: “patriarchy has become subsumed within today’s world and synonymous with our current social environment despite the absence of its formalized presence.”⁵⁹ This means that patriarchy is a part of society without any legislative persuasions or formal establishments. It is that way because humanity is used to it. The main themes that patriarchy influences society are, according to Eisenstein gender, power, leadership, education, and economics.⁶⁰ Eisenstein develops its definition and claims that patriarchy is hierarchical and gender-based.⁶¹ To conclude, patriarchal society is based on people living their lives unknowingly under gender dominance over the main domains of society such as education or economics, and it has been embodied into the world through history.

To summarize Tyson’s view on the feminist theory and feminist criticism, she claims that all feminists share six core values. The first one is about women being oppressed by patriarchy socially, economically, politically, and basically in all aspects of life. The second one is dedicated to women being seen as the “other”, which means that she is taken as an object defined by their differences from men. The third one suggests that the majority of Anglo – European countries are patriarchal societies. The fourth one declares that gender is socially constructed while sex is biologically determined. The fifth one alleges that the end goal of feminism is to provide equality for women. And the last issue talks about gender issues being a part of every human production.⁶² Some of these ideas also appear in Peter Barry’s work, where he mentions eleven points summarizing what feminist critiques do.⁶³

⁵⁸ Robert, Bahlieda, “Chapter 1: THE LEGACY OF PATRIARCHY.” *Counterpoints* 488 (2015): 15.

⁵⁹ Bahlieda, “Chapter”, 16.

⁶⁰ Zillah R. Eisenstein, “Constructing a Theory of Capitalist Patriarchy and Socialist Feminism,” *Critical Sociology* 25 (1999): 205-210.

⁶¹ Eisenstein, “Constructing,” 203-205.

⁶² Tyson, *A Critical theory*, 92.

⁶³ Barry, *Beginning Theory*, 134.

Popular Culture and the American film industry

The term popular culture can be defined in six ways, and each of them is going to be briefly discussed in this chapter. Firstly, it is important to mention, as John Storey claims, that the definition of popular culture depends on the notion of ideology and culture itself. Popular culture should always be taken into consideration and contrasted with other conceptual categories in order to be adequately defined.⁶⁴

Culture itself has more than one definition and meaning. Williams defines culture as: “a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development, [...] a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period or a group, [...] the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity.”⁶⁵ However, John Storey claims that Williams’ definition is not widely used.⁶⁶ It might be because the definition is from the 1980s. On the other hand, Storey points out that other definitions are commonly known, especially related to the definition of popular culture. The second definition is explained as a particular way of life, in other words, “lived culture or cultural practices” with the given example of the Christmas season.⁶⁷ This means that the second definition consists of different types of special occasions such as festivals or traditions, which suggests that the culture is in the way people live and in special occasions that might be different for everybody. Storey explains the last definition of culture as “cultural texts”, which might be, for example, a novel, ballet, pop music, or comics.⁶⁸ The last definition suggests that culture is connected to the work of a particular author or artist. It is something that is observed, heard, or experienced when a book is read or when live performances or exhibitions are attended. Spencer-Oatey applies his definition of culture to 21st century and states:

Culture is a fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, orientations to life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioural conventions that are shared by a group of people, and that influence (but do not determine) each member’s behaviour and his/her interpretations of the ‘meaning’ of other people’s behaviour.⁶⁹

Outlining an idea of culture that it influences peoples opinion of each other and also their behaviour in the society.

⁶⁴ John, Storey, *An Introductory Guide to Cultural theory and Popular Culture* (Cornwall: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 1-2.

⁶⁵ Raymond, Williams, *Keywords* (London: Fontana, 1983), 87.

⁶⁶ Storey, *An Introductory Guide*, 2.

⁶⁷ Storey, *An Introductory Guide*, 2.

⁶⁸ Storey, *An Introductory Guide*, 2.

⁶⁹ H., Spencer-Oatey, *Culturally Speaking. Culture, Communication and Politeness Theory*. 2nd edition.(London: Continuum,2008) 3.

In this respect, popular culture also has multiple definitions. The first definition, according to John Storey, is: “simply culture which is widely favoured or well-liked by many people.”⁷⁰ It is a vital attribute of popular culture that the culture must be liked by many. John Storey continues with the explanation of the definition and highlights the importance of the quantitative index definition, which statistically determines the existence of large-scale following. However, without a clear and accurate definition of high and low numbers, it is difficult to define with the index what is popular and what is not.⁷¹

The term popular culture is also often associated with the term mass culture or low/high culture. Ulla Haselstein, Berndt Ostendorf, and Peter Schneck support the idea that low culture is supposed to indicate entertainment for socially lower classes and could be spread by the masses. On the contrary, the term high culture refers to cultural products that are consumed by the elites of society.⁷² John Storey supports this idea and further indicates requirements of high culture such as formal complexity, moral worth, and text complexity. If the production fails these requirements, it consequently belongs in the low culture category. Contrary to expectations, he perceives everything except high culture as popular culture. He then gives a few examples of the requirements such as formal complexity, moral worth, being difficult to read that ensure the status of high culture.⁷³ This closely related term of mass culture can thus be understood as popular culture, and it is commercial, manipulative, formulaic and as John Storey claims: “is understood as a collective dream word.”⁷⁴

The terms high and low culture or mass production are linked to the cultural patterns of a society, mainly in the form of artistic outputs. Such outputs are, for example, books, theatre texts, songs, comics, but also movies. John Storey claims that many works of high culture start as a part of popular culture in their contemporary times. He then mentions, for instance, William Shakespeare or Charles Dickens, who could be in the 21st century considered as high culture writers, but in their contemporary times, they could be seen as a part of popular culture. Indeed, there is a fine line between low or popular and high culture as “film [...] can be seen to cross[...] the borderline between popular and high culture.”⁷⁵ John Belton suggests that American cinema is based on a mass factory production of movies which

⁷⁰ Storey, *An Introductory Guide*, 7.

⁷¹ Storey, *An Introductory Guide*, 7.

⁷² Ulla, Haselstein, Berndt Ostendorf, and Peter Schneck. “Popular Culture: Introduction,” *Amerikastudien / American Studies* 46, no. 3 (2001): 331–33.

⁷³ Storey, *An Introductory Guide*, 7.

⁷⁴ Storey, *An Introductory Guide*, 11.

⁷⁵ Storey, *An Introductory Guide*, 8.

created a full-fledged industry. He then introduces the idea that the film industry is based on cheap labour followed by mass production of the movies themselves and builds on the idea of Powdermarker, who claims that American Studios are working as factories. In the sense of the working environment, the studios relate to the central management of a vast amount of well-skilled workers, materials, and production.⁷⁶

The studio system, as mentioned above, plays a vital role in the American movie industry. Regarding the practical parts consisting of an analysis of the Marvel Studios movies, it is important to give an insight into the beginning of the studio system that further developed into widespread the phenomena of Marvel. John Belton suggests that the studio system derives from the fact that the film industry at the beginning was initially owned by an organization consisting of a few minor companies – the Motion Picture Patents (MPPC). However, later, the MPPC was convicted by the US court of violating Sherman's antitrust law. Between the 1930s and 1950s, the studio system was run by eight studios, many playing a huge role in the 21st-century film industry. Paramount, FOX/20th Century-Fox, Warner Bros and Universal are some of the most-known studios from that time.⁷⁷

However, John Belton explains that thanks to the studios' excessive power over film production, book deals and Hollywood stars, it collapsed in the 1950s after it was sued. Nevertheless, a new studio system era began, but there was no corruption or deals between them. The studio system now consists of six major and two minor studios, where one of the major studios is Marvel entertainment.⁷⁸ Official Marvel website describes Marvel Entertainment as:

a wholly-owned subsidiary of The Walt Disney Company, [...] one of the world's most prominent character-based entertainment companies, built on a proven library of more than 8,000 characters featured in a variety of media over seventy-five years. Marvel utilizes its character franchises in entertainment, licensing and publishing.⁷⁹

In the light of the first chapter and the four waves of feminism discussed, there is a parallel between this approach and popular culture. John Storey offers a specific example of women's writing that contributed to popular culture as he refers to the intellectual creation of *Women Take Issue*, Tania Modelski's *Loving with Vengeance*, Ros Coward's *Female Desire*, *The Female Gaze* and Laura Mulvey's *Visual pleasure and narrative cinema*, Janice

⁷⁶ John, Belton, *American Cinema/American Culture* (New York: Mc Graft Hill Education, 2018), 60-62.

⁷⁷ Belton, *American Cinema*, 62-63.

⁷⁸ Belton, *American Cinema*, 75-77.

⁷⁹ "Marvel Corporate Information," Marvel, last accessed March 22, 2023, www.marvel.com/corporate/about.

Radway's *Reading the Romance*, Ien Ang's *Watching Dallas* and Janice Winship's *Inside Women's Magazines*.⁸⁰

For the purpose of this thesis, Laura Mulvey's *Visual pleasure and narrative cinema* will be discussed in detail as it helps to uncover the intricate issues of the feminist theory in Marvel movies. Laura Mulvey is a British filmmaker, film theorist, and professor at Birkbeck University. She helped to shape feminist film study as a field. Mulvey wrote her famous essay *Visual pleasure and narrative cinema* in 1975. John Storey points out that Mulvey, in this essay, talks about the male gaze and how popular cinema is filled with it because it is run by patriarchy. He further adds that Mulvey uses the analysis of pleasure in the essay as a way of destroying patriarchal ruling. She analyses two types of visual pleasure in popular cinema in the essay and uses Freud's theory of psychoanalysis to support her view. John Storey claims that Mulvey talks about scopophilia as a pleasure in looking at someone else as an object of eroticism and excessive narcissism in popular cinema.⁸¹ The ego as an "*identifying process*" is central to this concept.⁸² Moreover, she explains that "in the world structured by sexual imbalance, the pleasure of the gaze has been separated into two distinct positions: men look, and women exhibit 'to-be-looked-at-ness' - both playing to and signifying male desire."⁸³ In other words, the female on screen is viewed in a sexual manner from the male perspective.

John Storey explains that Mulvey points out that the purpose of women in the stories is to be both the main character's and viewers' sexual wish. The viewer, in fact, fulfils both of the desires Freud talks about. The ego in the form of a male hero and the libido in the form of women as sexual objects using two views.⁸⁴ Mulvey claims that:

Ultimately, the meaning of woman is sexual difference [...]. She connotes something that the look continually circles around but disavows: her lack of a penis, implying a threat of castration and hence unpleasure.... Thus the woman as icon, displayed for the gaze and enjoyment of men, the active controllers of the look, always threatens to evoke the anxiety it originally signified.⁸⁵

John Storey then explains that Mulvey highlights that men might feel anxiety provoked by women in films. In that case, men can either take control of the anxiety women can give them by making them the object that needs to be safe. On the other hand, men can also doom the castration and anxiety caused by that. In this case, men simply forget about castration and

⁸⁰ Storey, *An Introductory Guide*, 126 – 150.

⁸¹ Storey, *An Introductory*, 129-130.

⁸² Laura Mulvey, "Visual pleasure and narrative cinema," *Screen*, autumn 1975, 17.

⁸³ Mulvey, "Visual pleasure," 11.

⁸⁴ Storey, *An Introductory Guide*, 130-131.

⁸⁵ Mulvey, "Visual pleasure," 13.

make a desirable sexual object from the woman herself, taking into control the fact that she does not have a penis and sexualize other features of women's bodies.⁸⁶

In addition to Laura Mulvey, concerning films and the position of women in them, John Belton claims that they could either appear as a social menace or in the form of psychological terror. According to John Belton, social menace means that there was a threat to the traditional values of the family because of the war and changing position of women towards men. More importantly, he comments on the fact that powerful women in films were presented as psychological terror.⁸⁷ He agrees with Laura Mulvey: "that the image of women on the screen functioned to recall for the male spectator, the castration anxiety he experienced on first perceiving sexual difference as a child."⁸⁸ He then suggests that Hollywood cinema participated in the patriarchal world dominance by: "process known as disavowal in which the female's castrated status was denied. [...] through her fetishization or through her devaluation, or both."⁸⁹ Firstly, fetishization in movies, according to Belton, means that through close-ups, costumes and other techniques, such as showing women's legs rather than her face. The woman becomes an object of male fantasy and desire.⁹⁰ Secondly, the process of devaluation done in the movies, according to Belton, means that the women are fallen, and they are punished and later rescued by the male hero.⁹¹ Laura Mulvey claims that it was because the male protagonist was threatened by the fallen woman and then needed to devalue her.⁹²

In her essay, she brings up the issue that a woman is viewed as the other in the male dominant world.

Woman then stands in patriarchal culture as signifier of the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning⁹³ She suggests that the film is a part of the patriarchal world and women are seen as erotic objects of male participants. She decided to destroy the pleasure of it by pointing to the techniques that were used to objectify and sexualize women.⁹⁴

⁸⁶ Storey, *An Introductory Guide*, 131-132.

⁸⁷ Belton, *American cinema*, 221-222.

⁸⁸ Belton, *American cinema*, 222.

⁸⁹ Belton, *American cinema*, 222.

⁹⁰ Belton, *American cinema*, 222 – 223.

⁹¹ Belton, *American cinema*, 223.

⁹² Mulvey, "Visual pleasure," 15.

⁹³ Mulvey, "Visual pleasure," 2.

⁹⁴ Mulvey, "Visual pleasure," 1-24

Another feminist, who dealt with the depiction of women, this time in fiction, was Bechdel, who created a test that would identify a female representation in the movies. The test was based on three features in the movie, according to Bechdel: “ One, has to have at least two women in it, who, two, talk to each other about, three, something besides a man.”⁹⁵ Later on there was a more specific test created by Mako Mori, which explored the same field of women representation in science fiction movies.

⁹⁵ “Bechdel Test movie list“, Bechdel Test, last accessed March 27,2023.

From superheroes to superheroine

In this chapter, it is essential to mention and point out the change of superheroes into superheroines, shifting the focus from male to female protagonists, and whether such a trend even exists. Super characters are a part of popular culture in many forms. They may appear in a book, comics or a movie, yet it is important to define the concept of a superhero first. Alex Ramagnoli claims that the: “origins [of superheroes] are grounded in humble beginnings with normal people doing great and noble feats with the powers they have gained.”⁹⁶ The beginnings of a superhero need to be further explained. Superheroes are not anything new to the 21st century. They have been a part of American culture for decades. The origin of superheroes, according to Alex Ramagnoli, was in the time of the great depression in the US. It took the form of pulp fiction which targeted young boys. The main protagonist was a hero who acted before he spoke. The hero usually tried to save a woman with little to wear, and sometimes even her clothes got ripped during the saving mission to attract young male readers even more. However, the first real superhero was introduced in 1938 in the form of the first comic book about Clark Kent, a man known as Superman, who saved the life of a woman – Lois Lane.⁹⁷ Alex Ramagnoli explicitly states that this era introduces: “what would become the archetype for the American superhero.”⁹⁸ He then claims that the success of the first superhero is based on the fact that it was the dream of every American man at that time.⁹⁹

Ramagnoli further suggests that Superman's enormous success helped create many more superheroes, such as Batman, the Flash, Green Lantern, the Sandman, Captain America, and also the heroine Wonder Woman. What all the superheroes had in common was a clear line between good and evil and the fact that all of them were very powerful.¹⁰⁰

With all the success of the superheroes and fans all around the US, there was a rise of fandoms. Gerald Jones indicates that what brought early fans together was a mutual passion for sharing the fans’ opinions and ideas. He then describes the most common fans as: “male, mostly middle class, mostly Anglo or Germanic or Jewish and mostly isolated.”¹⁰¹ Then, with the rise of comic books, Alex Romagnoli mentions that from the 1920s to 1980s, the

⁹⁶ Alex S. Romagnoli, *Enter the superheroes: American values, culture, and the canon of superhero literature* (Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, Inc. 2013), 5.

⁹⁷ Romagnoli, *Enter the superheroes*, 6.

⁹⁸ Romagnoli, *Enter the superheroes*, 7.

⁹⁹ Romagnoli, *Enter the superheroes*, 7.

¹⁰⁰ Romagnoli, *Enter the superheroes*, 7-11.

¹⁰¹ Gerald, Jones, *Men of Tomorrow: Geeks, Gangsters, and the birth of the Comic Book*, (New York: Basic Books, 2004), 33.

popularity of this genre became more than reading a comic as a hobby. The author claims that it became a part of the culture, an obsession, and people wanted to become members of fandoms. He also indicates that comic books were popular thanks to two things: “the rise of Marvel publishing and the growth of the comic book shop.”¹⁰² The beginnings and rise of Marvel publishing will be discussed later in the thesis. However, the rise of comic book shops is huge, according to Ramagnoli. The comic book shops originated from fans’ meeting points, where the fans could talk about superheroes, share their ideas, and most importantly, they were able to change, sell or buy new comics from each other. And it was all thanks to the noticing of comic companies, who started to provide the comics themselves for the readers to buy them at the meetings.¹⁰³

With the continuous expansion of the internet, fandoms gained a new platform to rise and exist at. Ramagnoli represents the idea that with the Internet, readers could authentically and very quickly share their opinion with the world and also with the creators of the superhero story. The internet made it possible for readers to say whatever they wanted about the story without censoring it, so that the opinions might be nice, but they could be rude too, and the publisher could not do anything about that.¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, the Internet comment section was not just about comic books, Ramagnoli stated that: “Since superhero characters have transcended the traditional borders of glossy comic book pages, movies and television shows also now bear the brunt of superhero fans’ opinions.”¹⁰⁵

The first superhero created was Superman, which was mentioned above. Alex Ramagnoli hints that the superhero genre is heavily related to its visual production. Whether it is film production or images, he calls iconography the most critical feature of a superhero and examines Superman as the first hero and the one that sat the trend for many more that followed his standard.¹⁰⁶ Valerie Frankel supports this idea by commenting on the fact that later in the 20th century Laura Mulvey brought attention to the topic of the depiction of women in the movies, which she criticized. However, Mulvey pointed out the importance of the visual concept in the movies.¹⁰⁷ Considering the fact that the hero has to look a certain way to fulfil the criteria of a comic book character, it was extremely important to create an

¹⁰³ Romagnoli, *Enter*, 45.

¹⁰⁴ Romagnoli, *Enter*, 48-49.

¹⁰⁵ Romagnoli, *Enter*, 49.

¹⁰⁶ Romagnoli, *Enter*, 82-84.

¹⁰⁷ Valerie E., Frankel, *Fourthwave feminism in science fiction and fantasy volume 1*, (California: McFarland & Company ,2019),1.

accurate version of the character look-wise in the on-screen adaptation, but also very difficult. As Romagnoli supports this claim by bringing attention to Tim Burton's film adaptation of Batman, where the director changed the colour and armour of Batman. However, because the character still kept its most important features, the change of colour was logical and taken well by the fans. Nevertheless, the director destroyed the traditional colourful aesthetic, and he was not the only one.¹⁰⁸

Building on the fact that the industry is heavily dependent on the visual support of the super characters, the feminine part of the superhero genre has been sexualized even more. Alan Moore describes the ideal superheroine as:

a line on a women's face makes her look old or ugly. She's got to be totally plastic and smooth – as few lines as possible – perhaps a bit of a cheekbone if you are John Byrne. Long eyelashes, little tiny mouth, stuff like that. They have got no character. They are totally interchangeable.¹⁰⁹

The idea of the sexualization of women in the superhero stories was already pointed out above with the fact that the stories were made for young male readers and not for women. Although, Ramagnoli claims that the idea of idealizing the body of a superheroine is the same for a male superhero because he has to look a certain way too. Nevertheless, there is still a difference, and it is not the fact that both gender heroes have to wear tight clothes and be shaped like gods. He claims that it is the fact that women superheroes have been over-sexualized. Moreover, the most crucial factor is the meaning behind the lack of clothes for women.¹¹⁰ Madrid then supports this idea:

Male superheroes are usually presented as being unquestionably more powerful than women. Yet, they wear costumes that cover and protect most of their bodies. Women, on the other hand, are written as weaker, and presumably less able to protect themselves. Yet, they charge into battle with most of their bodies exposed.¹¹¹

To support this idea, Valerie Frankel comments on the fact, pointing out Batgirl wearing a miniskirt, Lara Croft wearing a padded bra, Aeon Flux wearing an open-front, open-back jumpsuit and Catwoman wearing as tight as a second-skin suit.¹¹² Specifying that Wonder Woman and Scarlet Witch had: "Outfits tightened to the point of mass internet protests."¹¹³

¹⁰⁸ Romagnoli, *Enter*, 87-89.

¹⁰⁹ David, Roach, et al., "Garry Leach and Alan Moore," in *Alan Moore Conversations*, ed E.L. Berlatsky (Jakson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012), 22.

¹¹⁰ Romagnoli, *Enter*, 90.

¹¹¹ Mike, Madrid, *The Supergirls: Fashion, Feminisms, Fantasy, and the History of the Comic Book Heroines*, (Exterminating Angel Press, 2009), 290.

¹¹² Frankel, *Fourthwave feminism*, 2.

¹¹³ Frankel, *Fourthwave feminism*, 2.

Ramagali, discusses in more depth the example of one of the first superheroine - Wonder Woman. Her suit was almost non-existent compared to the suit of Batman or Superman. Her legs and arms were completely bare. Meanwhile, her corset-like armour made her waist look tiny and her bust huge.¹¹⁴ Richard Reynold comments on the fact, that superheroes could change into their costume in a nonsexual way, meanwhile: “for the superheroine, the process can (at least potentially) be viewed as the performance of an uncompleted striptease.”¹¹⁵

Wonder Woman might be one of the most famous superheroines the world knows, but she was not the first one. Mike Madrid points to the fact that there were several superheroines before Wonder Woman. The first one was The Woman in Red. Then there was Phantom Lady, for example, Sheena or several adaptations of Superwoman. Later on, there were more superheroines such as Batwoman or the girlfriend of Superman. Lois Lane got its comic adaptation as Supergirl.¹¹⁶

Mentioning Wonder Woman brings one to her origin as a DC Comics character. Mike Madrid claims that in the 1950s, known as the Silver Era of Comics, several new characters were introduced in the DC world, but they were mainly men. Women appeared mostly as supporting characters for men to have some kind of romantic flirt with. Even in groups of superheroes, there was a woman, but simply as a love interest for the heroic leader of the group.¹¹⁷ Moving on to the 1960s, Wonder Woman became a part of the Justice League and was portrayed as an equal member of the group, not needing any saving or attention from her male superheroes.¹¹⁸

The importance and influence of DC Comics on Marvel Comics is, in fact, immense. Mike Madrid claims that as a result of the Justice League of America, Marvel started its comic revolution. Until then, Stan Lee tried to bring back to life the old heroes of the 1940s, an effort in which he failed, so the publisher of DC decided to write to Stan Lee to suggest that Marvel makes its own superhero team. Thanks to that, the world saw the Fantastic Four for the first time, with a female superhero – Invisible girl. However, she was not at the same

¹¹⁴ Romagnoli, *Enter*, 91-92.

¹¹⁵ Richard, Reynold, *Super Heroes: A Modern Mythology*, (Jakson:University Press Of Mississippi,1992),34.

¹¹⁶ Mike, Madrid, *The supergirls: fashion, feminism, fantasy and the history of comic books heroines* (Ashland: Exterminating Angel Press, 2009), 4.

¹¹⁷ Madrid, *The supergirls*, 102-104.

¹¹⁸ Madrid, *The supergirls*, 105.

level as her male colleagues and was pictured rather as a girl who needed to be saved by her male teammates.¹¹⁹

After that, Marvel reached great popularity among people, creating its most-known superheroes, such as Spiderman. Mike Madrid claims that Marvel reached this popularity thanks to the mirroring of problems that America was facing in the real world and using the most common superheroes. However, mainly male superheroes.¹²⁰ He stated:

Marvel Comics was a man's world, inhabited by a pantheon of male superheroes that starred in their own comics. There were no women who headlined their own titles at Marvel, [...] Not an equivalent of Wonder Woman or Supergirl in the lot. Women were the co-stars, not the leads, and this would be the status quo in Marvel comic books for the next three decades.¹²¹

In conclusion, superheroines and women, in general, were part of comic books from the beginning. However, their part was not as equal partners, but mostly as a minor character who needs to be saved or loved by the male superhero. Even though there were some exceptions, such as Wonder Woman, in Marvel comics, the first female heroines, such as Invisible girl, was a love interest for the male leader of the group, seen as a girl who needed to be rescued.

Nevertheless, the claims of Mike Madrid that since the 1960s, the situation improved for female characters are contradicted by the study of Matthew Facciani, Peter Warren and Jennifer Vendemia from 2015, which claims that even in the 21st century: "data shows that white males are the majority of overall characters, main characters, and aggressors in altercations."¹²²

¹¹⁹ Madrid, *The supergirls*, 105-107.

¹²⁰ Madrid, *The supergirls*, 108.

¹²¹ Madrid, *The supergirls*, 108.

¹²² Matthew Facciani, Peter Warren, and Jennifer Vendemia, "A Content-Analysis of Race, Gender, and Class in American Comic Books," *Race, Gender & Class* 22, no. 3-4 (2015): 216.

Marvel phenomena

The next chapter is dedicated to the Marvel phenomena. Marvel Cinematic Universe originated from comic books, which were included in the chapter above. Ramagnoli asserts that the rise of popularity of comic books over the 1950s and 1960s is a part of Marvel's success.¹²³ The most prominent man behind Marvel was Stanley Leiber, commonly known as Stan Lee. Ramagnoli refers to Lee as a great salesman because of his use of crossovers to create multi-universes, where characters can crossover from one comic book to another. More specifically, Lee created Avengers, so the reader can buy more issues- one about the reader's favourite character and one where the characters are just a part of a bigger story. Moreover, Stan Lee also uses including fans' opinions in each issue on the back page as a strategy to make Marvel more popular, because thanks to that page, fans could feel more included in the process of creating the stories.¹²⁴ Carl Silvio supports the idea of Marvel's popularity and describes Marvel Universe as unique thanks to the fact that Marvel Entertainment Group publishes comic books monthly and organises them into series that do not have an end.¹²⁵

Marvel comic books were the most popular between the 1940s and 1990s. However, in the 1990s, there was a decline in comic books. Derek Johnson supports this by claiming that the focus shifted to the film industry after the decline of Marvel comics. Marvel studios were independent until 2009 when the studio was bought by Disney and continued to produce very successful movie adaptations of the comic books characters.¹²⁶

Ian Sandwell and Chris Longridge present the first phase happening between 2008 and 2012, including movies such as *Iron Man*, *Iron Man 2*, *Thor*, *Captain America: The First Avenger*, and *The Avengers*. The second phase taking place between 2013 and 2015, consisting of films such as *Iron Man 3*, *Thor: The Dark World*, *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, *Guardians of the Galaxy*, *Avengers: Age of Ultron* and *Ant-Man*. The third phase from 2016 to 2019, featured films such as *Captain America: Civil War*, *Doctor Strange*, *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol 2*, *Spider-Man: Homecoming*, *Thor: Ragnarok*, *Black Panther*, *Avengers: Infinity War*, *Ant-Man and The Wasp*, *Captain Marvel*, *Avengers: Endgame* and *Spider-Man: Far From Home*. These three phases are known as The Infinity Saga, whereas phases four to six are referred to as The Multiverse Saga. The fourth phase spanning the

¹²³ Ramagnoli, *Enter*, 40.

¹²⁴ Ramagnoli, *Enter*, 41-44.

¹²⁵ Carl, Silvio, "Postmodern Narrative, the Marvel Universe, and the Reader," *Studies in Popular Culture* 17, no. 2 (1995): 39-40.

¹²⁶ Derek, Johnson, "Cinematic Destiny: Marvel Studios and the Trade Stories of Industrial Convergence," *Cinema Journal* 52, no. 1 (2012): 1-3.

period 2021 - 2022, introduced besides movies the launch of a new platform, called Disney Plus, streaming mainly TV series. Some of the films or series launched during that phase were *Wanda Vision*, *The Falcon and the Winter Soldier*, *Black Widow*, *Loki*, *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings*, *Eternals*, *Hawkeye*, *Spider-Man: No Way Home*, *Moon Knight*, *Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness*, *Thor: Love and Thunder*, *She-Hulk: Attorney At Law*, *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever*, *The Guardians of the Galaxy Holiday Special*. The currently happening-fifth phase is planned for the years 2023 and 2024, where, for example, *Ant-Man and The Wasp: Quantomania* have already been released. Additionally, the Phase six is planned for the years 2024 and 2025.¹²⁷

¹²⁷ Ian, Sandwell, Lonrige, Chris, “ Marvel's 'Phases' explained: What is Phase 4? What happened in Phase 2?,” Digital Spy, July 24, 2022.

From theory to movie characters

As was mentioned in the chapter above, the Marvel cinematic universe is divided into phases. Considering that fact, this part examines whether and how the women and superheroines of the Marvel universe developed in the phases of the Marvel. At the same time, the analysis should reveal whether the evolution of feminism has influenced the selected figures. The analysis follows development through the theory of feministic criticism, concerning personalities or their appearance. The characters that have been chosen are Black Widow, Captain Marvel and Virginia “Pepper” Potts.

As specified in the chapter above, the first phase occurred between 2008 and 2012. The first movie analysed is the first movie of the Marvel Cinematic Universe – *Iron Man*. This movie is the first one to introduce Virginia “Pepper” Potts. Then the movie *Iron Man 2* and *Avengers* are used for the purpose of analysis. It has to be pointed out that in the first *Iron Man* movie, Pepper is not the main character. Her role functions as a supporting character. At the beginning of the movie, the character of Pepper might be seen as an angelic girl, as Tyson would call her in the feminist theory¹²⁸. Pepper is an assistant of Tony Stark, who is the main superhero character, and Pepper works in his company Stark Industry.

The superiority of Tony is shown in their interaction. Pepper wishes for Tony’s health to be checked in the hospital, while he shuts her down with his wish to go to eat. This dialogue might indicate that Pepper is very caring, as a good woman is supposed to be in the patriarchal world, taking care of her male superior. To illustrate:

Pepper: Take us to the hospital, please, Happy.

Tony: No.

Pepper: No? Tony, you have to go to the hospital.

Tony: No is a complete answer.

Pepper: The doctor has to look at you.

Tony: I don’t have to do anything.”¹²⁹

In the movie, she is dressed in a long tight skirt, with a white shirt and black blazer, and wears high heels, to underline her femininity. As is supported by Tyson’s statement: “the most “feminine” styles of clothing for today’s woman is the tight skirt and high heels, which

¹²⁸ Tyson, *A critical theory*, 83-120.

¹²⁹ *Iron Man*, directed by Jon Favreau, written by Mark Fergus & Hawk Ostby, featuring Gwyneth Paltrow , aired May 2, 2008, in broadcast syndication, Marvel Entertainment, Disney Plus, 2022, 00:42:50.

create a kind of “feminine” walk (while precluding running)”¹³⁰ She is commanded to throw out a woman on Tony’s behalf, which does not appear to be usual assistant’s work. However, she did it without any objection addressed to her male superior. The female character then tries to remind the male character of his schedule, but Tony shows his dominance as he completely ignores that. It is also important to point out the fact that Pepper gave Tony a piece of advice because he had asked for it. Although to demonstrate Pepper’s subordinate position, Tony listens to her advice first and then asks her to do the complete opposite. To support the idea, Tyson states: “from a patriarchal standpoint, women’s perspectives, feelings, and opinions don’t count unless they conform to those of patriarchy.”¹³¹ To add more to Peppers’ unimportance in this interaction is the fact that she reminded Tony of her birthday, and he did not know that, then suggested that she buys herself a present. From these first scenes, it is possible to indicate from the point of feminist criticism that Pepper works in a typical women’s job as an assistant to superior men. Supported by Mila Arizah: [women are given] domestic roles such as being a ‘giver of security’ like a good mother, loyal wife, teacher, nurse, and social worker.”¹³² Or, in this case, assistant to a male. Prompted by Folbre: “ ‘feminine’ labor markets (e.g., secretarial labor, garment industry, caring labor) and to the so called private realm of the household and family”¹³³ He then uses her not just for work, but to fulfil all his wishes such as throwing his love interests out of the house and Pepper as a good girl obediently follows her boss’ instructions. Indeed her ideas and pieces of advice are completely ignored by the male protagonists indicating that women perhaps should not be in a position of leadership and compared to the preferred male dominance of the discussed field. The idea might be supported by Mila Arizah claiming: “Women are considered as weak [and] are always subject to male power.”¹³⁴

Apart from the fact that her wishes and opinions do not matter, it is important to point out that she is shown as the emotional one. As a woman should be according to gender stereotypes, it is indicated in their dialogue when Tony gets back from captivity.

Tony: Your eyes are red. A few tears for your long-lost boss?¹³⁵

¹³⁰ Tyson, *A critical theory*,91.

¹³¹ Tyson *A critical theory*,, 91.

¹³² Mila, Azirah, “Feminism: Equality gender in literature,“ *INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR AND ANNUAL MEETING*, September 2020, 513.

¹³³ Folbre, *The Invisible Heart: Economics and Family Values*,(New York: New Press,2001), 233-256.

¹³⁴ Arizah, “Feminism,“ 509.

¹³⁵ *Iron Man*, 00: 42:40.

While Tony is presented as a strong, masculine man, escaping from captivity and showing no emotions, Pepper is shown as a weak woman who waited for her male boss safely at home but cries. In line with Linda Åhäll's words: " 'emotion' is a term that has long been associated with the personal, the body, the feminine. As the constitutive other of 'reason' (as well as the objective, the mind, the masculine) in Western, binary modes of thinking"¹³⁶ Her position as the submissive one might also be registered in the way she always follows Tony and is depicted behind him. Not next to him as a partner but walks behind him, so he is seen as the main character.¹³⁷ This idea of binary oppositions of man as strong and logical and women as intelligible and sensitive is supported by Eagleton.¹³⁸

Another crucial moment was when Pepper helped Tony to change the battery that powered his body. However, in this intimate moment that could seem like Tony is showing his soft side and acknowledging Pepper, he makes it obvious to point out the fact that Pepper looks ladylike by commenting on her hands:

"Tony. Show me your hands. Let's see them. Oh, wow. They are small. Very petite, indeed."¹³⁹

This idea of the importance of women's bodies and their looks in the movies is supported by David Roach, who states: " [Women have to have] long eyelashes, little tiny mouth, stuff like that. They have got no character. They are totally interchangeable."¹⁴⁰ On the other hand, once again, Tony asks for something that is not related to the job of assistant in the company but to gain in his personal sphere, and once again, Pepper fulfils his wishes without any hesitation as an angelic woman in the patriarchal world is supposed to do. Aided by Mila Azirah: "Men are considered authority figures while women are known as gentle, loyal, and devoted creatures."¹⁴¹ In that same situation, Tony represents the logical man that knows exactly what to do and does not show any fear or pain. While Pepper is in the patriarchal world of binary oppositions, shown as the complete opposite of Tony, she loses control of her emotions at that moment. This view of binary oppositions is promoted by Eagleton, who states that men and

¹³⁶ Linda, Åhäll, "Affect as Methodology: Feminism and the Politics of Emotion," *International Political Sociology*, Volume 12, Issue 1, March 2018, 37.

¹³⁷ *Iron Man*, 00: 43:39.

¹³⁸ Mary, Eagleton, *Working with feminist criticism*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 148.

¹³⁹ *Iron Man*, 00: 49:29.

¹⁴⁰ David, Roach, et al., "Garry Leach and Alan Moore," in *Alan Moore Conversations*, ed E.L. Berlatsky (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012), 22.

¹⁴¹ Azirah, "Feminist," 509.

women are like: “head/heart”¹⁴², indicating that the man is the head therefore, logical part of the body, and the woman is the heart, which means that she is the sensible, emotional part of the body.

Pepper: What do I do? What’s wrong?

Tony: Nothing, I am just going into cardiac arrest ‘cause you yanked it out like a trout...

Pepper: What? You said it was safe!

Tony: We gotta hurry. Take this. Take this. You gotta switch it out really quick.

Pepper: Okay. Okay. [...]

Tony: You gonna attach that to the base plate. Make sure...¹⁴³

From this extract, it is clear that Tony serves as a perfect example of manhood that does not show pain and is entirely logical and calm when facing death. At the same time, Pepper represents an emotional creature of a woman, raising her voice and worrying about the situation, what to do and about Tony. As Tyson explained: “men are supposed to be strong (physically powerful and emotionally stoic), they are not supposed to cry because crying is considered a sign of weakness.”¹⁴⁴ From another perspective, it could be seen as Tony being described as good with technology, navigating Pepper, who as a woman does not understand it as well as men. In this same situation, Pepper asks Tony if he is okay, which should show the woman as a caring character, while Tony replies laughing if she is okay and asks if that had been too hard. Again, Pepper is displayed as an angelic woman in Tyson’s description of the patriarchal world.¹⁴⁵ In line with the fact that a good woman shows her emotions and takes care of a man who tells her what to do The idea of women being programmed for caregiving is supported by Tyson, stating: “caregiving, [...] has been labelled a female instinct, it is difficult for many of us to consider it in any other light.” Alternatively, Guillaumin, who states: “ women’s obligation to care for whichever members of the family can’t care for themselves as well as for healthy male family members.”¹⁴⁶ This interaction is then concluded with Pepper wanting Tony to keep the battery that powered his body, and she changed a moment ago, having him reply with:

Tony: Pepper, I’ve been called many thing. Nostalgic is not one of them.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴² Eagleton, *Working*, 148.

¹⁴³ *Iron Man*, 00: 51:34.

¹⁴⁴ Tyson, *A critical theory*, 87.

¹⁴⁵ Tyson, *A critical theory*, 89.

¹⁴⁶ Guillaumin, *Racism*, 76.

¹⁴⁷ *Iron Man*, 00:52:17.

In these two sentences, Tony indicates that while he is not nostalgic, Pepper as a woman is because people as a society live in a patriarchal world with binary oppositions of men and women and clear-cut roles ascribed to both of these oppositions.

As a form of caring, Pepper also brings food and drinks for Tony while he does a more important “man” job, creating new technologies.¹⁴⁸ Despite her care, while Tony and his male colleague discuss the future of his company, Tony shows Pepper her place when she adds detail to their conversation.

Pepper: Fifty-six and a half.

Tony: It does not matter!¹⁴⁹

At that comment, Pepper is put back in her place as a subordinate woman that should not interrupt men talking about business. This idea is defended by Cixous: “Either woman is passive or she does not exist.”¹⁵⁰ Likewise, the situation could indicate that men are capable leaders while women should just sit next to them, look pretty and not get involved in men’s business. Janice Peterson argues that it is because in a patriarchal society, the idea of women at work is seen as a threat to traditional values of a family: “changing relations between men and women, most particularly the decline of the ‘traditional’ two-parent, male breadwinner family.”¹⁵¹

Tony: You look great! I did not recognize you.

Pepper :What are you doing here?[...]Are you by yourself?

Tony: Where did you get that dress? [...]

Tony: You want to dance?

Pepper: Oh, no.

Tony: All right, come on.

Pepper: Thank you, no. ¹⁵²

At that moment, Tony takes her hand, leading her to the dance floor. In this situation, Pepper is, according to Tyson’s theory, taken as the other, which means that she is objectified. To be objectified means: “seeing and/or treating a person, usually a woman, as an object. In this entry, the focus is primarily on sexual objectification.”¹⁵³ Her no is not taken into consideration by the male character noticing her looks thanks to the dress over her attempts to

¹⁴⁸ *Iron Man*, 00:57:27.

¹⁴⁹ *Iron Man*, 00:58:30

¹⁵⁰ H el ene, Cixous, ‘Sorties: Out and Out: Attack/Ways Out/Forays’ in H el ene Cixous and Catherine Cl ement, *The Newly Born Woman*(France: Tauris,1986), 64.

¹⁵¹ Janice, Peterson, “The Great Crisis and the Significance of Gender in the U.S. Economy,” *Journal of Economic Issues* 46, no. 2 (2012): 281.

¹⁵²*Iron Man*, 1:09:32.

¹⁵³ Evangelia (Lina), Papadaki, "Feminist Perspectives on Objectification," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2021 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), 1.

make a conversation. To justify the idea that Pepper is treated as an object primarily to her looks, the character in this situation fits into a category of objectification of Martha Nussbaum, who claims that: “[Pepper is] denial[ed] of [her] autonomy: [which means that] the treatment of a person [is] lacking in autonomy and self-determination.”¹⁵⁴ Furthermore, de Beauvoir claims that: “woman’s situation is that she is man’s Other. It was she who said that it is man who is the subject, the absolute, woman the Other.”¹⁵⁵ To defend the idea of being the other and explaining the superiority in the hierarchy of binary oppositions of men and women in a patriarchal society Cixous assert: “ There has to be some other – no master without slave, no economical power without exploitation, no dominant class cattle under”¹⁵⁶

While they were dancing, even though she did not wish for the dance to happen, that situation makes Pepper less of an angelic woman because she tries to remind her male boss that without her, he would be unable to take care of himself and mainly his company.

Tony: You look great, you smell great.

Pepper: Oh, God.

Tony: But I could fire you if that would take the edge off.

Pepper: I actually don’t think that you could tie your shoes without me.

Tony: I’d make it a week.

Pepper: Really?

Tony: Sure.

Pepper: What’s your Social Security number?

Tony: Five. [...]

Pepper: You are missing just a couple of digits.¹⁵⁷

The indication that Tony could not lead his company without her is not something that an angelic woman would have done because, in Tyson’s view of patriarchal society, women should be submissive and let the man lead. Supported by Tyson’s statement:

These gender roles have been used very successfully to justify inequities, which still occur today, such as excluding women from equal access to leadership and decision-making positions (in the family as well as in politics, academia, and the corporate world).¹⁵⁸

The same applies to the fact that he asked her to dance, and she decided to say no. This whole situation led to a rather heated conversation outside. This situation also does not revolve around Pepper being a good woman in the patriarchal world as she had seemed to be until this point in the movie. However, even though she expressed her opinion more loudly than people

¹⁵⁴ Martha, Nussbaum, “Objectification”, *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 24(4): 257.

¹⁵⁵ Simone, de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, (New York: Grune and Stratton,1997),16.

¹⁵⁶ Cixous, ‘Sorties: Out and Out: Attack, 71.

¹⁵⁷ *Iron Man*, 1:10:16.

¹⁵⁸ Tyson, *A Critical Theory*, 85.

would in a normal conversation. She just did not want to be seen by the rest of their colleagues as a woman who wants to have sex with her male boss, in this case, Tony, to get a promotion in the company or be seen as “easy-to-get-to” type of woman. To elaborate on that, Tyson claims that men are supposed to be seen as sexually dominant, so it is acceptable for them to have sex with multiple women.¹⁵⁹ In the world of binary opposition, Pepper would be seen as an object of Tony’s sexual dominance. It might also indicate that she is not capable of getting into a position of leadership without providing sexual pleasure to the male boss. Supported by the statement of Mary Eagleton: “binary oppositions are heavily imbricated in patriarchal value system: each opposition can be analysed as a hierarchy where the ‘feminine’ side is always seen as negative, powerless instance.”¹⁶⁰

Nevertheless, after this situation, there was a significant change on Pepper’s side. In their next interaction, Tony asked Pepper again to do him a favour, this time even an illegal one. In the previous interaction, Pepper behaved and did exactly what Tony, the male, had asked her to do. As was discussed above, she would be called the angelic woman in Tyson’s view of the patriarchal world. However, in this situation, she replied with the following:

Pepper: Tony, you know that I would help you with anything, but I cannot help you if you are going to start all of this again.

Tony: There is nothing except this. There is no art opening. There is no benefit. There is nothing to sign. There is the next mission and nothing else.

Pepper: Is that so? Well, then I quit.¹⁶¹

In this communication, it is possible to see a shift in Pepper’s behaviour. She started to question her male boss’ orders, ending the dialogue with the decision to quit because she did not approve of his action. Firstly, the fact that she started to question male orders is something a good woman in a patriarchal world would not do. As a result of the fact that she is not able to lead herself on her own, there is a man who should provide for her, as in a patriarchal world, women are expected to rely on men economically.

For a moment, Pepper stood up for herself and decided not to be a part of it and not to be a good woman who fulfils her male boss’ wishes. However, the shift from an angelic woman to a bad girl was too substantial for the character to take in two scenes of the movie. Therefore, when Tony made her feel included by reasoning his actions, Pepper agreed to do what he had asked her to, confessing to him that he was all she had. To advocate the

¹⁵⁹ Tyson, *A Critical Theory*, 88.

¹⁶⁰ Eagleton, *Working*, 147.

¹⁶¹ *Iron Man*, 1:29:30.

suggestion that Pepper stepped out of the feminine gender features, Mary Eagleton presents: “there is no inevitable, ‘natural’ link between one’s identity as ‘a man’ or as ‘a woman’ and one’s social behaviour. [...] a man[can] behave in a way that is deemed ‘feminine’ and a woman behave in a ‘masculine’ manner”.¹⁶²

On the other hand, for the first time in the movie, Pepper had her own task to do, functioning without Tony in the scene. However, it was only a short time before another male superior walked into the office where she was stealing the files. At that moment, her logical thinking and intelligence showed. This scene might be added to her behaving as an evil woman because she outsmarted a man who almost caught her. At the same time, as was mentioned above, she did it in order to please her other male boss, Tony. For that reason, her acting this way might be seen from both angles.

The beginning of Pepper’s development might also be seen in the scene where she takes action and calls her friend to check if Tony is all right:

Rhodney: What do you mean, he paid to have Tony killed? Pepper, slow down. Why would Obadiah... Okay, where is Tony now.

Pepper: I do not know. He is not answering his phone. Please go over there and make sure everything is okay.¹⁶³

At this moment, Pepper does not wait for any orders from Tony or other men and decides to lead, which is not something a good woman is supposed to do. One of the agents she led acknowledged her actions: “Looks like you were right.”¹⁶⁴

Moreover, the ending of the movie supports the development of Pepper’s character. As mentioned in the theoretical part, it was usual for the male hero to save the woman whose role was to look pretty and be rescued. This also happened in the movie. When Pepper faced death, Tony came and rescued her while fighting the evil. Something that was not expected was that a male hero needed help from a woman.

Tony: This isn’t working. We are going to have to overload the reactor and blast the roof.

Pepper: Well, How are you gonna do that?

Tony: You are going to do it. Go to the central console, open up all the circuits. When I get clear of the roof I’ll let you know. You are going to hit the master bypass button. It is going to fry everything up here.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² Eagleton, *Working*, 158.

¹⁶³ *Iron Man*, 1:39:00.

¹⁶⁴ *Iron Man*, 1:43:29.

¹⁶⁵ *Iron Man*, 1:50:00.

And even though she did exactly what she was supposed to do, what the male hero told her to do. It is still possible to interpret the situation as Pepper being the saver of the situation. Here Tony was completely dependent on Pepper's actions to save him.

To end the analysis of the movie, the character of Pepper and Tony survived, and in the last scene, it is possible to see some shift in their positions, although not a complete change. Resulting in one of the last scenes where Tony sits in the office, reading a newspaper, and Pepper is taking care of his wounds from the battle. However, as mentioned above, the shift is possible to see because while he asks her questions, she does not hesitate to talk back and is not afraid to tell him what she thinks. Furthermore, that is the first step towards not being seen as the angelic woman who does everything the male character tells her to do, even throwing out other women from his apartment, as mentioned at the beginning of the analysis.

The first phase also introduced Black Widow and, at the same time, continued to develop the character of Pepper Potts, both characters appearing in *Iron Man 2*.

The first look at the character of Pepper in the second movie is when Tony is facing a trial, and she sits behind him to show her support. However, later on in the movie, she came up to Tony, screaming at him:

Pepper: Is this a joke? What are you thinking?

Tony: Hey, I think I am busy and you are angry about something.¹⁶⁶

Her screaming at him indicates that her character did not stop developing from the last movie. In that moment of the film, she is not afraid to tell her opinion and even scream at Tony. Nevertheless, the screaming and Tony's answer might decrease the character of Pepper a bit due to the fact that it is taken as a sign of emotion and women in a patriarchal world cannot control them. Considering this idea, Catherine Lutz states: "the emphatically emotional women could be seen as an angel of the house, quickly transformed into a problem in the workspace".¹⁶⁷ Tony's answer may point out the fact that Pepper should calm down. Otherwise he will not speak to her. Tony started to walk away from her, but she followed him with more questions and things to talk about, this time with a calm voice. Asking:

Pepper: Did you just donate our entire modern art collection to the...

¹⁶⁶ *Iron Man 2*, directed by Jon Favreau, written by Justin Theroux, featuring Robert Downey Jr, aired May 7, 2010, in broadcast syndication, Marvel Entertainment, Disney Plus, 2022, 00:19:32.

¹⁶⁷ Catherine, Lutz, "Emotion and Feminist Theories," which first appeared: Mageo, Jeannette (ed.): *Power and the Self*. (Cambridge 2001), 105

Tony: Boys Scouts of America. [...] And it is not our collection, it is my collection. No offence. Pepper: No, you know what? I think I am actually entitled to say our collection, considering the time that I put in, over 10 years¹⁶⁸

This conversation supports the fact that the character of Pepper is developing more and more when speaking her mind and asking for what she deserves. Considering the fact that she collected the art and worked a lot to collect all those pieces, she feels like she has the right to speak about it as some part of the collection belonged to her. Another example in this particular collection when she does not hesitate to speak her mind is when Tony says:

Tony: There is nothing more important to me than the Expo. It is my primary point of concern. Pepper: The Expo is your ego gone crazy”¹⁶⁹

After this moment, she started to speak more about the company and what her male boss was doing wrong. It all led to:

Tony: You run the company.

Pepper: Yeah, I am trying to run the company. [...]

Tony: Pepper, you are not listening to me! I am trying to make you CEO.¹⁷⁰

The fact that he decided to make her the boss of the company after she started to speak up her mind supports the idea of feminism. As it was pointed out in the patriarchal world, women were supposed to listen to the man and made believe they were not capable of leadership. And as Tyson stated:” patriarchy continually exerts forces that undermine women’s self-confidence and assertiveness, then points to absence of these qualities as proof that women are naturally, and therefore, correctly, self-effacing and submissive.”¹⁷¹ It is possible to see this in this scene of the movie by virtue of Peppers words.

Pepper: Have you been drinking?¹⁷²

The first thing that is possible to see is the character of Pepper doubting her abilities as a woman to lead the company, even though she said a few minutes ago that she is trying to lead the company. The first thing that comes into her mind is not pride or satisfaction for her hard work. Unfortunately, it is doubting Tony’s judgement of herself and assuming that he does not have a clear mind to believe in her like that.

¹⁶⁸ *Iron Man 2*, 00:19:53.

¹⁶⁹ *Iron Man 2*, 00:20:18.

¹⁷⁰ *Iron Man 2*, 00:21:19.

¹⁷¹ Tyson, *A Critical Theory*, 86-87.

¹⁷² *Iron Man 2*, 00:21:21.

As mentioned before, the character of Black widow is also introduced in Iron Men 2. She is depicted as a very attractive lawyer in Tony's company, and she appeared side by side with Pepper for the first time in the movie. It is possible to see that Tony is taken aback by Black Widow's beauty and forgets about Pepper for a moment. Asking her: Tony: What is your name lady?

Black Widow: Rushman. Natalie Rushman.

Tony: Front and centre. Come into the church.

Pepper: No, You are seriously not gonna ask...

Tony: If it pleases the court, which it does.

Black Widow: It is no problem.

Pepper: I am sorry, He is very egocentric.¹⁷³

Concerning the dialogue, he wants her to fight him in the ring. This might be seen as an act of dominance. The character wants to be seen as a strong man, but at the same time to get a chance to touch the new woman character in the movie.

Building up on that tension, Tony would like to get to know her more and thinks that the position of his assistant, which is free thanks to Pepper becoming the CEO, would be a good opportunity. There is a conversation between Tony and Pepper.:

Tony: Who is she?

Pepper: She is from legal and she is potentially a very expensive sexual harassment lawsuit if you keep ogling her.

Tony: I need a new assistant, boss.

Pepper: Yes, and I have got three excellent potential candidates. They are lined up and ready to meet you. [...]

Tony: Oh, wow. Very, very impressive individual.¹⁷⁴

In these few minutes of the movie, it is possible to see that Tony is impressed by Black Widow's beauty that much that he wants her to be his assistant. He is talking to Pepper about Black Widow's skills, but at that exact moment, he is looking at her half-naked pictures. It indicates that he is seeking a new object of his male desire. Therefore, Black Widow is, thanks to her beauty, sexualized and taken as an object of desire by the male character. At that moment, the most essential ability of a woman is her appearance. The character of Black Widow, taken just as an object, is also demonstrated by:

Tony: I want one.

Pepper: No.

¹⁷³Iron Man 2, 00: 23:46

¹⁷⁴Iron Man 2,00: 24:45.

The male character talks about the woman as if she was an object. A toy that needs to be pretty and available for him in the role of his assistant. To fulfil his wishes and be submissive as a good woman should be. In other words, he is trying to find a new old version of Pepper. A good woman is submissive to a man. In this case, the objectification of Black Widow would be part of the category of: “ownership: the treatment of a person as something that is owned by another (can be bought or sold)” according to the division of Martha Nussbaum¹⁷⁵ In a sense that Tony and Pepper speak about Black Widow as she was not there. She did not have the ability to decide for herself, and Tony just decided that he wanted her, so that he would get her.

The next scene with both female characters indicates that Tony, the male, did not listen to Pepper, the woman and now the company's boss and hired Black Widow as his assistant. It displays the fact that he, as a male, is still superior. Even though he made Pepper the CEO of the company, his ideas are the best, and everything has to be done as he pleases. Pointing to the fact that even when women are in CEO positions, the male opinion is more important in the patriarchal world. Prompted by Mila Arizah: “ Men are considered authority figures while women are known as gentle, loyal, and devoted creatures.”¹⁷⁶

Outside of this situation, there was a brief moment of appreciation for the character of Pepper, where they acknowledged her becoming the CEO of Stark Industry. For a few seconds, she was the main character.:

Reporter : My editor will kill me if I do not grab a quote for our Powerful Women issue. Can I?
Pepper: Sure.¹⁷⁷

What makes it even more important for women and feminist is the fact that the character of a reporter was the woman from the first *Iron Man* movie that Pepper had to kick out of Tony’s apartment. It is vital due to the fact that women are made to compete with each other for male attention, but they should instead support each other.

During the same event, Tony was assaulted by another male character, and Pepper went to rescue him. However, in that situation, she was made to look rather hysterical than as savour as it was in the last film.

Pepper: Oh my god! Aaa! Take the case! Take it!

¹⁷⁵ Martha, Nussbaum, “Objectification”, *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 24(4): 257.

¹⁷⁶ Arizah, “Feminism,” 509.

¹⁷⁷ *Iron Man 2*, 00:27:37.

Happy(male character): Give him the case!
Tony: Calm down! Pepper: God! God!¹⁷⁸

Women being an emotional creature allows them to feel deeply. However, hysteria was created by men and their assumption that women are to be crazy. To overreact and behave without logical explanation. Supported by Catherine Lutz: “emotion has been considered an unfortunate block to rational thought, a link to bodily nature”.¹⁷⁹ Nevertheless, in the next scene, Pepper appears, she is sitting in a plane, having a serious conversation with Tony. This time letting him know that her decision to not go anywhere with him is the decision, and he cannot change that. This expresses the development of the character from the first *Iron Man*, where she said no, and the male character completely ignored it as a part of the objectification of the character.

Pepper being the CEO and her own boss and being able to run the company well, is an excellent example how women should not behave in patriarchal world. Tyson states: “it is not feminine to succeed in business, to be extremely intelligent, to earn big bucks, to have strong opinions, to have a healthy appetite (for anything), or to assert one’s rights.”¹⁸⁰ Additionally, Pepper’s character has become everything that a good woman would not do. She runs a big company, is intelligent, earns a lot of money and is not scared to speak her mind. Therefore, she became a monster woman, which in the patriarchal world means that she is suitable for men’s pleasure, but never would get married to one. The difference between her and the character of Black widow can be seen when a male character comes asking about Tony and Black Widow as a good woman, sticking to what she was told by her male boss, Tony.:

Ray: Where is he?
Black Widow: He does not want to be disturbed.
Pepper: He is downstairs.¹⁸¹

On the other hand, the character of Pepper as a woman has developed so much that she just says what she wants to whom she wants, no matter what the male character orders her to tell.

In spite of that, between the character of Pepper and Tony, it is clear that Pepper is intelligent, hardworking, decisive, able to take action and knows about the company even more than Tony does. For that reason, she became the CEO of the company. Although they

¹⁷⁸ *Iron Man 2*, 00:35:02.

¹⁷⁹ Lutz, “Emotion and Feminist Theories,” 104.

¹⁸⁰ Tyson, *A critical theory*, 88.

¹⁸¹ *Iron Man 2*, 00:46:59

both think Tony made a great decision, the patriarchal world around them is not sure that women can lead such a vast company.

A reporter in the news: “ Now we learn that his secretary, a woman named Virginia Pepper Potts, has been appointed as CEO of Stark Industries. What are her qualifications? Miss Potts is doing nothing to manage this terrible situation.”¹⁸²

This monologue indicates that a woman who once worked in the position of secretary cannot lead the company. Moreover, as a woman, she does not have the qualification for it, such as logic and intelligence, to manage the situation well, which may demonstrate in the world of binary oppositions that men would have these qualities. Marry Eagleton claims that: “the hidden male/female oppositions with its inevitable positive/negative evaluation can always be traced as underlying paradigm”.¹⁸³

To build on that the character demonstrates that, it is challenging to run a company in a men’s world, but she seems very confident in herself by showing her assertive side to the male character:

Pepper: Let me just stop you right here, because if you say “I” one more time, I am gonna actually hurl something at your head, I think. I am trying to run a company. Do you have any idea what that entails?

Tony: Yes.

Pepper: People are relying on you to be Iron Man and you’ve disappeared, and all I am doing is putting out your fires and taking the heat for it. I am trying to do the job that you were meant to do.¹⁸⁴

In this situation, Pepper shows assertive behaviour while telling Tony her opinion. Endorsed by Mila Arizah: “women are no longer as weak creatures and imaginary creatures that have been in the minds of men. But women are also able to work and be productive with men.”¹⁸⁵ However, not in a patriarchal society, where Pepper demonstrates everything a woman should not be. Nevertheless, the last sentence indicates that running a company is a male job. Moreover, at the end of the film, the character of Pepper got recognition from a male by commenting:

Male: That’s good. You are starting to think like a CEO, taking out the competition. I like that.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸² *Iron Man 2*, 1:17:03.

¹⁸³ Eagleton, *Working*, 147.

¹⁸⁴ *Iron Man 2*, 1:18:30.

¹⁸⁵ Arizah, “Feminism,” 515.

¹⁸⁶ *Iron Man 2*, 1:48:30.

In the first *Iron Man*, to demonstrate the development of the character of Pepper, she saved Tony and everybody. Even though it is typical for the men superhero to save, his love interest, with the women looking pretty and waiting to be rescued as Mike Madrid claims that women mainly appeared as supporting characters for men to have some kind of romantics flirt with, even in groups of superheroes there was a woman, but simply as a love interest for the heroic leader of the group.¹⁸⁷ From the movies it is clear that Pepper is a love interest of the main male character, the man behind Iron Man-Tony. To broaden the idea, Alex Ramagnoli supports the idea and says that the hero usually tried to save a woman with little to wear. Sometimes even her clothes got ripped during the saving mission to attract young male readers even more.¹⁸⁸ At the end of the second movie of *Iron Man*, the evil male protagonist realizes the love connection between Pepper and Tony. Therefore, the character of Pepper is put in danger, and the male superhero has to save her. Ending with a kiss on a rooftop.¹⁸⁹ The patriarchal tendencies are present in the fact that after Tony saved Pepper, she decided to quit being CEO:

Pepper: Oh my god! I can't take this anymore.

Tony: You can't? Look at me! I can't take this.

Pepper: My body, literally cannot handle the stress. I never know if you're gonna kill yourself or wreck the whole company.

Tony: I think I did okay.

Pepper: I quit. I'm resigning.¹⁹⁰

This decision was wholly illogical and based on emotions, so it may indicate that women cannot lead the company overall even though they are all intelligent and hardworking. However, they will never be as calm and logical as men when handling difficult situations. Cixous uphold the idea by declaring: "In the end, victory is equated with activity and defeat with passivity: under patriarchy, the male is always the victor."¹⁹¹ Moreover, it refers to the fact that biologically it is impossible for women to handle stress.

Moving on to Black Widow, who does exactly as she is asked and is whatever her male boss wants her to be. Always dressed in a tight dress, wearing heels. Addressing Tony with proper respect as Mr Stark. Trying to say what the male boss would like to hear and support the sexual image of herself.

¹⁸⁷ Madrid, *The supergirls*, 102-104.

¹⁸⁸ Romagnoli, *Enter the superheroes*, 6.

¹⁸⁹ *Iron Man 2*, 01:53:20.

¹⁹⁰ *Iron Man 2*, 01:52:31.

¹⁹¹ Easton, "Feminism", 147.

Tony: I should cancel the party, huh?
BW: Probably.
Tony: Yeah. Cause it's uhm..
BW: Ill-timed.
Tony: Right, sends the wrong message.
BW: Inappropriate.¹⁹²
Handing him a drink. BW: Is that dirt enough for you?¹⁹³

She then uses her sexuality to build a connection between her and Tony, building trust and convincing him that she is loyal to him. In spite of the fact that women should be loyal to men in a patriarchal society. As confirmed by Endraswara: “women are figures that should be contested by men, especially their beauty and skill. The important point: women must be loyal to men.”¹⁹⁴

The character of Black Widow was shown as Tony's assistant in the first half of the movie. Portraying a desirable object for men to look at, seemingly representing an angelic girl. Defended by Rae Langton's idea of objectification of women: “reduction to appearance: the treatment of a person primarily in terms of how they look, or how they appear to the senses”.¹⁹⁵ However, after her time undercover as the assistant, the real character of Black Widow was shown in the movie. The character is an agent of the organisation named S.H.I.E.L.D. she is able to fight, kill and certainly does not portray a submissive, non-assertive, waiting for a man to be rescued, desiring marriage type of woman. Therefore, the prescription of an angelic girl was all just an act. Her aggressive side was shown when talking to a few male characters.:

Black Widow: You tell me who is behind this. Who is behind this?¹⁹⁶
Black Widow: Get in the car. Take me to Hammer Industries.
Male character: I am not taking you anywhere.
Black Widow: Fine, you want me to drive?¹⁹⁷

In this situation, she showed dominance over a few male characters, using their socially determined feature of aggression, which is the only emotion that men can feel or show in a patriarchal society, as claims Tyson: “anger and other violent emotions are the only emotions

¹⁹² *Iron Man 2*, 00:52:04.

¹⁹³ *Iron Man 2*, 00:52:09.

¹⁹⁴ Suwardi, Endraswara, *Metodologi Penelitian Sastra*, (Sleman: Pustaka Widyatama, 2011), 144.

¹⁹⁵ Rae, Langton, *Sexual Solipsism: Philosophical Essays on Pornography and Objectification*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 228-229.

¹⁹⁶ *Iron Man 2*, 1:38:00.

¹⁹⁷ *Iron Man 2*, 1:38:54.

permitted, even encouraged, in men”¹⁹⁸ Therefore, it is not feminine to display such behaviour.

However, one thing that stayed present for the whole movie is the fact that the character is seen as a sexual object by the men. Supported by Rae Langton’s concept of objectification: “reduction to body: the treatment of a person as identified with their body, or body parts; reduction to appearance: the treatment of a person primarily in terms of how they look, or how they appear to the senses”¹⁹⁹

In the theoretical part, it was mentioned that superheroes’ clothing differed from what superheroines were wearing. In that matter, superheroes wore tight suits so their bodies could be on display or almost half-naked. For instance, when talking about Wonder Woman for that same reason, it was pointed out that the act of changing into a costume was almost like stripping down. Supported by Richard Reynold: “for the superheroine, the process can (at least potentially) be viewed as the performance of an uncompleted striptease.”²⁰⁰ It is crucial to reveal that because the character of Black Widow was heavily sexualized for the purpose of the movie, one of the scenes in the movie contains the character stripping down to her underwear in the backseat of the car for the purpose of changing into her superhero costume, while a man driver observes her, the character has to remind him:

Black Widow: Watch the road.²⁰¹

When they get to the place, she is in her super hero costume. The costume is a very thigh, black jumpsuit that shows all her curves. The costume even has a zip that does not give the illusion of a bosom.

Her appearance and the way the character is dressed underline the sexualization and being objectified by the male characters in the first wave of Marvel movies. For instance, while being undercover as an assistant to Tony, she was wearing tight dresses and heels.²⁰² The way of the dressing helps define the patriarchal world as Tyson states: “ the most “feminine” styles of clothing for today’s woman is the tight skirt and high heels, which create a kind of “feminine” walk (while precluding running)”²⁰³ Yet, it might be understandable in an office to be dressed well and in heels. Nevertheless, the over-sexualization of the character

¹⁹⁸ Tyson, *A Critical Theory*, 88.

¹⁹⁹ Langton, *Sexual*, 228-229.

²⁰⁰ Richard, Reynold, *Super Heroes: A Modern Mythology*, (Jakson:University Press Of Mississippi,1992),34.

²⁰¹ *Iron Man 2*, 1:40:19

²⁰² *Iron Man 2*, 1:19:13

²⁰³ Tyson, *A Critical Theory*, 91.

of Black Widow in the first wave of the movies was so high that the character was dressed in a short, sexy dress with heels and had to fight with multiple men while wearing it. Continually, the conversation hints to the fact that she is dressed as a prostitute.:

A male character: This is not how I wanted this evening to go.

Black Widow: I know how you wanted this evening to go. Believe me, this is better.²⁰⁴

On the one hand, it is her appearance that leads a man to fall for her innocent face and great body, but on the other hand, it does not take away the fact that the character has to fulfil all the standards of a good girl to be able to manipulate with male characters. Furthermore, sexualization leads to the objectification of women in a patriarchal world. As Guillaumin supports this by claiming that women are oppressed by: “direct physical appropriation, [...] the reduction of women to the state of material objects”²⁰⁵

The first phase introduced the two characters with some possible character development throughout the films, and the characters are followed by the author of the thesis also in the second phase.

As was specified earlier, the second phase took place between the years 2013 and 2015. The movies used for analysis from this phase are going to be the sequel of *Iron Man – Iron Man 3* and the sequel of *Avengers – Avengers: The age of Ultron*. As mentioned before, *Iron Man* was the first movie heading to theatres in the first wave, and its third sequel introduced the second phase in 2013.

The third *Iron Man* introduces Pepper as the CEO of Stark Industries, showing us her face on the front cover of Forbes magazine.

Killian: After years dodging the President’s ban on “immoral” biotech research, my think thank now has little something in the pipeline. It’s an idea we like to call EXTREMIS. I am gonna turn the lights down. Regard the human brain. [...]

Pepper: Wow, that is amazing.

Killian: Thanks it is mine.

Pepper: What?

Killian: This, you are inside my head. It’s .. It’s a live feed. Come on, I’ll prove it to you. Now pinch my arm. I can take it, pinch me .

Pepper: (Chuckles and gasps) What is that?

Killian: It’s the primary somatosensory cortex. It’s the brain pain centre. [...] Imagine if you could hack into the hard drive of any living organism and recode its DNA.

Pepper: That would be incredible. Unfortunately, to my ears, it also sounds highly weaponizable. As in, enhance soldiers, private armies, and Tony is..

²⁰⁴*Avengers*, directed by Joss Whedon, written by Joss Whedon, featuring Scarlett Johansson, aired May 4, 2012, in broadcast syndication, Marvel Entertainment, Disney Plus, 2022, 00:12:18.

²⁰⁵ Guillaumin, *Racism*, 75.

Killian: Tony, Tony... [...] But now there is new genius on the throne who doesn't have to answer to Tony anymore and who has slightly less of an ego.
Pepper: It's gonna be a no, Aldrich. As much as I'd like to help you. [...]
Killian: I am sure I will see you again Pepper.²⁰⁶

In this extract, there can be seen a few points. The first one is Pepper being presented as a proper CEO of the firm. It is not just talked about in the movies, but she is pictured as the decision maker, even pointed out by the male presenting the idea to her. This situation shows the complete opposite of the idea of gender in a patriarchal society. The woman is the boss, a leader, and the man asks for her acceptance. The traditional view supported by Mila Arizah: "women [are seen] as objects and merely weak beings who are under male domination."²⁰⁷ On the other hand, a man is still presented as the intelligently dominant of the conversation, explaining to Pepper the scientific basis, and the character is in awe.

Another point that can be observed from the situation is the objectification of Pepper by touching her without her permission, therefore, eroding her boundaries as a person. Hinting at the fact that he, as a man, can do what he wishes with a woman's body and touch it whenever he wants. The idea might be supported by Soble, who claims that objectification is: "both the body and the compliant actions of the other person are tools (a means) that one uses for one's sexual pleasure, and to that extent the other person is a fungible, functional thing"²⁰⁸ Lastly, the masculine and feminine stereotypes were shown. The male character was trying to pressure Pepper to support his idea. By pointing out that she should stand up to Tony and do whatever she wants and desires, which should be to support him, another male, therefore, it is indicating the fact that she should not have her own ideas and she should support either Tony's ideas or the other male's ideas. Stressed by Andrea Dworking:

Being female in this world means having been robbed of the potential for human choice by men who love to hate us. One does not make choices in freedom. Instead, one conforms in body type and behavior and values to become an object of male sexual desire, which requires an abandonment of a wide-ranging capacity for choice.²⁰⁹

Pepper's development when it comes to her ideas reached its full potential, while the stereotype of a loving, caring, loyal woman to a man is still present and shown in the movie.

Pepper: This is a new level of lame.

²⁰⁶ *Iron Man 3*, directed by Shane Black, written by Drew Pearce and Shane Black, featuring Gwyneth Paltrow, aired May 3, 2013, in broadcast syndication, Marvel Entertainment, Disney Plus, 2022, 00:18:34.

²⁰⁷ Arizah, "Feminism," 510.

²⁰⁸ Alan, Soble, "Sexual Use and What to Do about It: Internalist and Externalist Sexual Ethics". *The Philosophy of Sex: Contemporary Readings*, A. Soble (ed.), Lanham, (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. Inc., 2002),226.

²⁰⁹ Linda, Napikoski, "Patriarchal Society According to Feminism," ThoughtCo. Last accessed March 18, 2023.

Tony: Sorry.
 Pepper: You ate without me? On date night?
 Tony: Yes I had a quick bite. I didn't know if you were coming home or you were having drinks with Aldrich Killian.
 Pepper: Aldrich Killian? What? You were checking up on me?
 Tony: Happy was concerned.
 Pepper: No you are spying on me.
 Tony: I wasn't.
 Pepper: I'm going to bed.
 Tony: Hold up. Come on. Pep? Hey, I admit it. My fault, sorry. I am a piping hot mess.²¹⁰

In the dialogue, it is possible to indicate that Pepper can express her ideas and opinions freely without any hesitation or fear of being judged by patriarchal norms. However, it is possible to see that she is still portrayed as a caring woman, putting the care of Tony in front of herself. When he says he is a mess, she turns back and is willing to take care of him as a woman in a patriarchal society should be. Supported by Elisabeth Spelman: “emotions has often exercised nature of the category woman. This is evident in the focus on women's love [...] and their orientation towards caring for others”.²¹¹ Moreover, it is possible to see the ever-present objectification of the character of Pepper when Tony behaves as if she could not go anywhere with other male characters and belonged just to Tony. Justified by Nussbaum's objectification category: “ownership: the treatment of a person as something that is owned by another (can be bought or sold)”²¹² Nussbaum's concept of objectification, specifically the idea of treating a person as a commodity that can be bought or sold, is evident in a way Tony behaves towards Pepper as if she is his possession.

In a patriarchal world, the genders have their own masculine and feminine stereotypes. The third sequel of *Iron Man* Pepper also begins to be portrayed with some of the masculine stereotypes, not being just the caregiver to support a change and a break from a patriarchal view of the world.

Pepper: You saved yourself a world of pain.
 Tony: What?
 Pepper: Trust me. We're going out of town.
 Tony: Okay, we have been through this. Nope.
 Pepper: Yep!
 Tony: The man says no.
 Pepper: Immediately and indefinitely²¹³

²¹⁰ *Iron Man 3*, 00:21:20.

²¹¹ Lutz, “Emotion and Feminist Theories,”105.

²¹² Martha, Nussbaum, “Objectification”, *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 24(4): 257.

²¹³ *Iron Man 3*, 33:40

In this situation, Pepper breaks the stereotype of women being subordinate to men, following the man's decision and being submissive in a patriarchal society. Ravat explains Wably's point of view: "it is a social system in which the role of the male as the primary authority figure is central to social organization, and where males hold authority over women, children, and property".²¹⁴ Instead of that, she takes the lead and gives orders to a man. Moreover, she was put into a suit of Iron Man and saved Tony when debris almost killed Tony. The suit indicates power, and in patriarchal society power is held by men. Advocated by Delphy: "Delphy argues, that all relationships between men and women are based on power: patriarchal men want to keep all of it; nonpatriarchal women want power to be equally distributed."²¹⁵ Therefore, when Pepper saved Tony in the suit, she displayed qualities that are often associated with masculinity, such as strength and assertiveness.

Pepper has been objectified in a movie couple of times and some of them were mentioned. However, the most visible one appeared almost at the end of the movie.

Killian: Hi.

Pepper: You think he's gonna help you? He won't.

Killian: Having you here is not just to motivate Tony Stark. It's, uhm..Well, it's actually more embarrassing than that. You are here as my, uhm..

Pepper: Trophy.

Killian: Mmm.

It is the third movie of *Iron Man*, and it is the third time Pepper needs to be saved, which supports Romagnoli's claims that women in comic books are there as love interests for men heroes and need to be saved by them.²¹⁶ However, in this case, the conversation and the whole situation underline the fact that the character as a woman is taken as a trophy, stripped down to her underwear, tied up and taken as an object for men's pleasure. The pleasure of just having her in his possession and the fact that he can look at her. She is his, and he can do whatever he wants with her. There is no acknowledgement of her feelings because she is not more than a sexual object, in this case, a trophy for the male character. This idea of objectification is supported by Kant, who states:

as soon as a person becomes an Object of appetite for another, all motives of moral relationship cease to function, because as an Object of appetite for another a person becomes a thing and can be treated and used as such by every one²¹⁷

²¹⁴ Preeti S, Ravat, "Patriarchal Beliefs, Women's Empowerment, and General Well-being," *VIKALPA* 39, no 2 (April - June 2014):44.

²¹⁵ Tyson, *A critical theory*, 98.

²¹⁶ Romagnoli, *Enter the superheroes*, 6-7.

²¹⁷ Immanuel, Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*, Louis Infield (trans.), (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1963), 163.

Moments later, waiting for the male hero to save her indicated her dependency on a male.

Tony: Pep, I got you. Relax, I got you.

Pepper: Ahhhhh.

Tony: Just look at me. Honey, I can't reach any further and you can't stay there. All right? You've got to leg go. You've got to leg go! I'll catch you, I promise.

Pepper: Ahhhhh

Tony: Nooo! As she falls down.²¹⁸

[...]

Killian: It's a pity. I was so close to having her perfect.

Tony: Slow down. You are right. I don't deserve her. Here's where you're wrong. She was already perfect.

[...]

Tony: Honey.

Pepper: Oh my god. That was really violent.

Tony: You just scared the devil out of me. I thought you were...

Pepper: I was dead? Why? Because I fell 200 feet?²¹⁹

To conclude, the ending has showed how the female character of Pepper was completely dependent on the male character to rescue her. However, it did not happen. It was also brought to attention that the male characters talked about the female character of Pepper as some object that needs male validation, whether she is or she is not perfect for male purposes. In conclusion, the portrayal of Pepper's character in *Iron Man 3* highlights the pervasive gender stereotypes and objectification of women in popular culture.

Nevertheless, the falling of Pepper can be seen as a reborn of a woman who no longer participates in the patriarchal society. She survived the fall and managed to save Tony, the male character, who was facing death when she rose. Then she decided to destroy Tony's Iron Man suit that tried to hurt her. The suit can be seen as the symbol of masculinity and power of a patriarchal society, and her destroying it might indicate that the development of the female character outside or against the patriarchal programming and thinking has been completed.

Since the character of Pepper developed just in two phases, one could expect that the character of Black Widow showed at least a slight growth too. Nevertheless, the over-sexualization and objectification of the way the character looks like it reminded untouched in the second phase. It might be visible in how her uniform is still as tight as it could be showing, all her curves. In addition, the 'public' clothing that she has been pictured in, outside her superheroine suit, are, up to now, dresses that show of cleavages and heels.

On the other hand, in the *Avengers: The age of Ultron*, a first view of the soft side of Black Widow is also shown. It is possible to observe her feminine features as she takes care

²¹⁸ *Iron Man 3*, 1:48:37

²¹⁹ *Iron Man 3*, 1:54:50.

of the people she cares about. Except for her long lasting friend Hawker, there might be a possible romance with the Hulk.

Black Widow: If you hadn't been there, there would have been double the casualties. My best friend would've been a treasured memory.

Dr. Bruce Banner (the Hulk): You know, sometimes exactly what I want to hear isn't exactly what I want to hear.

Black Widow: How long before you trust me?

Bruce: It's not you I don't trust.²²⁰

The way she cares for Bruce is the only thing that can calm him enough that he transforms back from the Hulk to Bruce, which shows her feminine feature. When it comes to him, she tries to take care of him, so he feels better. Moreover, she wishes that he liked her as a woman. Tyson's statement supports the stereotyped that women want to be liked by men: "females must be beautiful, sweet, and young if they are to be worthy of romantic admiration"²²¹

Bruce: How'd a nice girl like you wind up working in a dump like this?

Black Widow: Fella done me wrong.

Bruce: You got lousy taste in men, kid.

Black Widow: He's not so bad. Well, he has a temper. Deep down, he's all fluff. Fact is, he's not like anybody I've ever known. All my friends are fighters. And here comes this guy, spends his life avoiding the fight because he knows he'll win.²²²

The character of Black Widow is not a perfect description of an angelic woman. However she still wants love. Tyson claims that: "marriage to the right man is a guarantee of happiness and the proper reward for a right-minded young woman."²²³ The right-minded woman in a patriarchal society means submissive to men, which is not the case for Black Widow. Tyson's claim would imply that if the woman is not an angelic woman, she is a monster woman, and for them, love and marriage are forbidden in the patriarchal world. They are admired and used by men but never taken as potential wives. This view of patriarchal society is supported by the movie, where Black Widow wishes for love but only gets sexualized and objectified

The third phase happening between 2016 and 2019, brought a new powerful heroine into the life of the Marvel Cinematic Universe. Introducing the character as the leading superheroine of her own movie. Hence will be the analysed movie's main character in the third phase. The movie is called after the character – *Captain Marvel*.

²²⁰ *Avengers: The Age of Ultron*, directed by Joss Whedon, written by Joss Whedon, featuring Scarlett Johansson, aired May 1, 2015, in broadcast syndication, Marvel Entertainment, Disney Plus, 2022, 00:13:19.

²²¹ Tyson, *A Critical theory*, 89.

²²² *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, 00:26:10.

²²³ Tyson, *A critical theory*, 89.

At the beginning of the movie, Captain Marvel is introduced as a woman named Verse, who serves in an army called Starforce. She was told that she was from a race named Kree, a race of noble warriors/ heroes. A few of them are in the group, including a male commander.

While practicing fighting together he says: Control it. Lose control again and you will have to commute with the Supreme Intelligence. There is nothing more dangerous to a warrior than emotion.²²⁴

Captain Marvel: What is the point of giving me these if you don't want me to use them?

Commander: I want you to use them. The Supreme Intelligence gave me a responsibility of showing you how to use them.

Captain Marvel: I know how.

Commander: Yeah, if that were true, you'd be able to knock me down without them. Control your impulses. Stop using this, start using this. (pointing from a heart to head) I want you to be the best version of yourself.²²⁵

The commander wants her to be the best version of herself while indicating that in order to be that, she has to use more masculine features and oppress her feminine side. In all the examples from the beginning of the movie, the commander suggests that emotion is a hierarchically subordinate feature of a warrior, who is typically a male and needs to be kept under control, therefore, indicating that the reason/ head is the primary feature that Captain Marvel has to obtain. In the binary opposition construction, the male character of the commander suggests that women, as the emotional ones need to be controlled, and men, as the reason, are superior to them. Moreover, if a women wants to succeed, she needs to be more like men. Supported by Olivia Guy-Evants, who claims that: "men may benefit from more opportunities such as being more likely to be promoted to top positions in their career. Women on the other hand have less opportunities and may need to work harder than men to be afforded equal opportunities."²²⁶

Intelligence: Perhaps, it is a mercy. Sparing you from a deeper pain . Freeing you to do what a Kree must. Put your people's needs before your own. We've given you a great gift. The chance to fight for the good of all Kree.

Captain Marvel: I want to serve.

Intelligence: Then Master yourself. What was given can be taken away.

Captain Marvel: I won't let you down.²²⁷

²²⁴ *Captain Marvel*, directed by Anna Boden and Ryan Fleck, written by Anna Boden, Ryan Fleck and Geneva Robertson-Dworet, featuring Brie Larson, aired March 7, 2019, in broadcast syndication, Marvel Entertainment, Disney Plus, 2022, 00:3:13.

²²⁵ *Captain Marvel*, 00:4:32

²²⁶ Olivia Guy-Evants, " Patriarchal Society According To Feminism," *Simply Sociology*, March 20, 2023.

²²⁷ *Captain Marvel*, 00: 6:40

The movie's beginning and character development of Captain Marvel hints that Captain Marvel has to bottle up all her own needs, ideas, and emotions for the greater good. However, the greater good is serving and caring for someone else. Moreover, to do exactly what the male commander tells her to do and believe that it is the right thing to do without any questions. Following his order, she is supposed to do whatever task is given without emotions and her own thinking. Otherwise they will take away her powers. It might indicate the oppression of women based on patriarchal gender features. It promotes the feminine features of a good woman in patriarchal surroundings. The traditional gender role stereotype that it supports, is according to Jack Zipes: "the mark of beauty for females is to be found in her submission and obedience".²²⁸ In this case, to serve well means to be obedient and serve to greater good without any questions, controlling the characters own emotions.

Nevertheless, her first mission starts to break her trust towards her commander and everyone around her, even though she does not believe her own intuition at first because she was taught to believe the commander and to do what she is told to do without her own thinking. The whole process ever since might be seen as the breaking of the patriarchal programming of a good woman and searching for herself, her own ideas and beliefs. Supported by the claims of A. Johnsons, who believes that it is difficult to break the programming because it is deeply rooted in society and taken as a norm between sexes for many.²²⁹

Outside of the character development, and objectification from a male character can be spotted.

Man: Nice scuba suit. Lighten up, honey, huh? Got a smile for me? Freak.²³⁰

Nathan A. Heflick and Jamie L. Goldenberg argue that: "a focus on the physical aspects of women by others causes women to be perceived like, and act like, objects lacking mind."²³¹ In this case, the objectification of Captain Marvel, a young, beautiful women standing in a tight suit supports the deeply rooted patriarchal feminine feature of the angelic girl, that women should behave as objects and do what is said to please a man. In this circumstance, to smile. If the character refuses to do so, she is called a freak. In other words, she is perceived as a

²²⁸ J., Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion: The Classical Genre for Children and the Process of Civilization*, (New York: Routledge Classics, 2012),56.

²²⁹ A.G. Johnson. "Patriarchy, the system," *Women's lives: Multicultural perspectives* 3, (2004),25-32.

²³⁰ *Captain Marvel*, 00:35:49.

²³¹ Nathan A., Heflick, and Jamie L. Goldenberg, "Seeing Eye to Body: The Literal Objectification of Women," *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 23, no. 3 (2014): 225.

monster woman. She then steals a motorcycle of that man, which just supports the presumption of her being petty in a patriarchal world, which fits the feminine features of monster women.

Agent Fury: And you, what do you want?

Captain Marvel: To stop the Skrulls before they become unstoppable.

Fury: And? Look, war is a universal language. I know rogue soldier when I see one. You got a personal stake in this.²³²

This dialogue might indicate that Captain Marvel should focus more on herself and her needs. She should think about what she wants, not just blindly take orders and fulfil them on a higher-positioned man's behalf. In other words, she should not be submissive, which is something that the patriarchal society promotes. MacKinnon believes that it is common in a patriarchal society that women are submissive and object-like (and men are women's objectifiers), which might indicate that women are submissive by their nature.²³³ Prompted by Haslanger: "Once we have cast women as submissive and deferential 'by nature', then efforts to change this role appear unmotivated, even pointless."²³⁴ Therefore, it might be seen as a positive reinforcement by agent Fury, which might help to empower the character of Captain Marvel.

Captain Marvel: I know Lawson was Kree. She was here on C-53 and died in a plane crash. Do you know anything about this?

Commander: I just discovered a mission report sent from C-53. There's only so much I'm cleared to tell you Vers, but... Lawson was an undercover Kree operative named Mar-Vell. She was working on a unique energy core. Experimenting with tech that apparently could help us win the war.²³⁵

Captain Marvel: Does it say anything about me?"

Commander: Anything about you? No, of course not. Why would it?

Captain Marvel: I found an evidence that I had a life here.

Commander: On C-53?

Captain Marvel: Mar-Vell is who I see when I visit the Supreme Intelligence. I knew her. And I knew her as Lawson.

Commander: This sounds like Skrull simulation, Vers.

Captain Marvel: No, it's not. Because I remember. I was here.

Commander: Stop. Remember your training. Know your enemy. It could be you. Do not let your emotions override your judgement.²³⁶

²³² *Captain Marvel*, 00:42:43.

²³³ Catharine, MacKinnon. *Feminism Unmodified*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: Harvard University Press. 1987), 50.

²³⁴ Sally, Haslanger, "On Being Objective and Being Objectified", in *A Mind of One's Own. Feminist Essays on Reason and Objectivity*, Louise M. Antony and Charlotte Witt (eds.), (Boulder, San Francisco, Oxford: Westview Press, 1993) 106.

²³⁵ *Captain Marvel*, 00:49:08.

²³⁶ *Captain Marvel*, 00:49: 58.

The situation backed by the dialogue between the character of Marvel and her male superior might signify that Captain Marvel starts logically to think about her past but still blindly trusts what she was told by her male superior. In this case, it is pointed out that the male character tries to oppress the female character by making her believe her doubts are just a part of emotions. Therefore, she cannot trust emotions. Transforming the idea into the patriarchal view of gender stereotypes and binary oppositions. The feminine feature-emotion marks a feature that is not suitable for a warrior. In other words, emotions are wrong, and logic is good. Emotions display women, and logic displays men. Moreover, the female character should, at this point, forget her emotions, in this matter, her doubts about mission, and put her trust in logic. The logic being represented by her male commander. Concluding with the fact that the best thing to do is to let the man lead her and logically solve the situation.

However, on the other hand, agent Fury encourages her and her feelings.

Fury: I guess he had a feeling, you know? Went with his gut against orders. That's a really hard thing to do. But it's what keeps us human.

Captain Marvel: I get in trouble for that. A lot.²³⁷

The conversation may mirror the feminist encouragement for women's equal rights. In the patriarchal society, emotions are seen as the sub-ordered features of the female gender, although it is just because men, as the superior, who claim the power decided to be so. Eisenstein argues that: "patriarchy is defined to mean a sexual system of power in which the male role is superior in possession of power and economic privilege. Patriarchy is the male hierarchical ordering of society".²³⁸ Therefore, the situation might be seen from the point of encouragement of not letting the male superior tell her that emotions as a women's feature are not as good as the masculine feature of reason.

The commander also showed the objectification of Captain Marvel when she gained her powers and lay on the ground, being unable to speak for herself.

Commander: She absorbed its power. She is coming with us²³⁹.

The fact that the male decided for her future to be with him and to serve his purposes. Taking her away from her friends and family and treating her as an object, very powerful object might be a sign of objectification, where a male thinks that he owns the woman, according to

²³⁷ *Captain Marvel*, 00:56:01.

²³⁸ Zillah R. Eisenstein, "Constructing a Theory of Capitalist Patriarchy and Socialist Feminism," *Critical Sociology* 25 (1999):202-203.

²³⁹ *Captain Marvel*, 1:11:08.

his position in a patriarchal society. Kant explains that objectification of someone is to take a person: “as an object, something for use”²⁴⁰

In the process of discovering her background, history and powers, she discovered that she was lied to and everything she had believed in was a falsehood. Therefore, she decided not to let anyone oppress her anymore and became the superheroine she was meant to be.

Captain Marvel: You have no idea who I am. I do not even know who I am!

Maria: You are Carol Danvers. You are the woman on that black box risking her life to do the right thing. My best friend who supported me as a mother and a pilot when no one else did. You are smart, and funny, and a huge pain in the ass...and you were the most powerful person I knew.. way before you could shoot fire from your fists.²⁴¹

This dialog presents an empowerment of women, and in the case of Captain Marvel, it brings her courage to let go of the oppression and become the best version of herself. She starts to think for herself discovers how smart and powerful she is. When she lets the emotions be because they help her with her powers, they are no longer being oppressed by logic. It might be visible in the scene where she acknowledges the oppression and objectification she has been through.

Captain Marvel: I used to believe your lies...but the Skrulls are just fighting for a home. You are talking about destroying them because they won't submit to your rule. And neither will I.

Intelligence: We found you. We embraced you as our own.

Captain Marvel: You stole me. From my home, my family, my friends.

Intelligence: It's cute how hard you try. But remember, without us. You're weak. You are flawed. Helpless. We saved you. Without us, you are only human.

Captain Marvel: You're right. I'm only human. I have been fighting with one arm tied behind my back. But what happens when... I'm finally set free?²⁴²

She then lets her emotions take control and lights up with all her powers. As was mentioned above several times in a patriarchal society, women are subordinate to men in many aspects of life, such as economic or social. The patriarchal society programmed them to believe that they should comply with feminine features. Otherwise they are not worthy. In this case, Captain Marvel broke all the rules of an angelic woman. How should one behave as submissive to a man, take care of family, desire beauty and marriage and let the masculine features to a man, such as being strong, aggressive, unapologetic and powerful. Cixous claims that in a

²⁴⁰ Barbara, Herman, “Could It Be Worth Thinking About Kant on Sex and Marriage?”, in *A Mind of One's Own. Feminist Essays on Reason and Objectivity*, Louise M. Antony, and Charlotte Witt (eds.), (Boulder, San Francisco, Oxford: Westview Press,1993)57.

²⁴¹ *Captain Marvel*, 01:14:06.

²⁴² *Captain Marvel*, 01:31:55.

patriarchal society: “Either woman is passive or she does not exist.”²⁴³ The character of Captain Marvel stood up for herself, believing in her own powers, not letting others define her as a woman and therefore, represents an empowerment for women, destroying the patriarchal oppression.

The third phase brought an unapologetic powerful superheroine with the first women character’s own movie adaptation in Marvel Cinematic Universe. However, the fourth phase happening between 2021 and 2022, brought a new movie about a character that has been shown to be objectified and oversexualized throughout the other phases. In 2021 the character of Black widow gained its own movie adaptation – *Black Widow*.

The character of Black Widow was objectified and sexualized for the way she looked and was dressed in the previous phases. However, the fourth phase came with a complete change in the concept of Black Widow. The changes might be seen in the following examples.

In the previous phases, the character was portrayed as a very attractive woman in tight dresses and high heels. On the contrary, the movie *Black Widow* shows the character to the viewers as a young girl dressed as a tomboy with short, colourful hair.²⁴⁴

As an adult, the character takes off her significant tight suit²⁴⁵, which may represent the idea that she is done with the over-sexualization and objectification of her body. Compared to the first phase *Iron Man 2* movie, where the character was changing into the suit and her body was displayed to the viewer, the movie *Black Widow* does not show any scenes where the character would strip down from the costume, just the suit on the floor. It might indicate that she will not let anyone use her for their own purposes, and from now on, she will do what she wants to do.

It was mentioned above that the character wore high heels, and tight, short dresses, showing off her legs and curves. Additionally, her hair always looked pretty, and her natural makeup displayed a beautiful young face. As was supported by Alan Moore:

a line on a women’s face makes her look old or ugly. She’s got to be totally plastic and smooth – as few lines as possible – perhaps a bit of a cheekbone if you are John Byrne. Long eyelashes, little tiny mouth, stuff like that. They have got no character. They are totally interchangeable.²⁴⁶

²⁴³Cixous, ‘Sorties: Out and Out: Attack, 64.

²⁴⁴ *Black Widow*, directed by Cate Shortland, written by Eric Pearson, featuring Scarlett Johansson, aired July 9, 2021, in broadcast syndication, Marvel Entertainment, Disney Plus, 2022, 00:01:29.

²⁴⁵ *Black Widow*, 00:18:15.

²⁴⁶ David, Roach, et al., “Garry Leach and Alan Moore,” in *Alan Moore Conversations*, ed E.L. Berlatsky (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012), 22.

Looking pretty is a part of sexualization and is one of the main reasons for Black Widow to be objectified. MacKinnon explains:

A sex object is defined on the basis of its looks, in terms of its usability for sexual pleasure, such that both the looking—the quality of gaze, including its points of view—and the definition according to use become eroticised as part of the sex itself. This is what the feminist concept of ‘sex object’ means²⁴⁷

The basis for the objectification and over-sexualization of the character of Black Widow was her appearance, which served the purpose of pleasuring men. Even when a fighting scene occurred, the character was dressed in a dress and fought. In the movie *Black Widow*, the character decided to live a life according to herself. In this case it meant that she was portrayed very differently in terms of clothing, make-up and hair.

For most of the movie, she wore either sweatpants or jeans, long-sleeved t-shirts, jumpers and jackets, everything in dark colours. When it came to her hair, it was usually messily braided or tied up, and her make-up was almost non-existent. It was even possible to see the dark circles. As for shoes it was nothing with heels but simple sneakers. The way she is portrayed does not correspond with a female object for the purpose of male observation.

Nevertheless, the changes in the way the character was illustrated are enormous. It is discussable to say that perceiving women as an object for the pleasure of the male viewer was not used. Laura Mulvey’s theory of the male gaze introduces us to the fact that the women in movies are used as the other to fulfil males’ sexual pleasure to project fantasies by visual aids of the film industry. She claims that through visual aids of cinema, the woman in the movie has two roles. The first one is being sexualized by the close-up looks at women’s bodies. The second one is to be a sexual object not just for the male character in the movie but also for the male viewer so that he can re-live his fantasies through the male character on the screen.²⁴⁸

The male gaze theory was put into practice in all the analysed movies from the Marvel Cinematic Universe. Regarding the re-living the male protagonist gaining his love interest to be just his. The character of Pepper and Tony would be a great example. Mulvey states that: This is made possible through the processes set in motion by structuring the film around a main controlling figure with whom the spectator can identify”.²⁴⁹ Most of the *Iron Man* movies are based on the dominant male character of Tony, who serves as the leading figure that the spectator can identify with. The spectacular should feel like the character, and the

²⁴⁷ Catharine, MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: Harvard University Press. 1987) 173.

²⁴⁸ Mulvey, “Visual pleasure,” 5-10.

²⁴⁹ Mulvey, “Visual pleasure,” 13.

movie should feel like he controls it. In this case, him perusing the character of Pepper. And also, when the female character belongs to the movie's main male protagonist, she belongs to the viewer too. This could be achieved, according to Mulvey through: "Camera technology (as exemplified by deep focus in particular) and camera movements (determined by the action of the protagonist), combined with invisible editing (demanded by realism), all tend to blur the limits of screen space"²⁵⁰ This might be seen for instance in *Iron Man* when Tony sees Pepper at the ball. The camera shows Tony looking through the dance floor when his eyes get stuck in one place. At that moment, the camera switches to the dance floor and mimics Tony's look, so the spectator feels like he is looking through the dance floor, and when he lays his eyes on Pepper, he stops moving as the camera focuses on her open-backed dress.²⁵¹

The second part of the male gaze theory, where the close-ups of her body sexualise the woman, is presented in the movies evermore. Mulvey states: "conventional close-ups of legs (Dietrich, for instance) or a face (Garbo) integrate into the narrative a different mode of eroticism".²⁵² The scenes were chosen from every movie that has been analysed, where the camera focuses on the analysed characters.

In the first *Iron Man* movie, it is not far in the movie that the theory of the male gaze can be applied to the character of Pepper. There is a scene where Pepper is talking to Tony but the camera focuses on Tony, even though Pepper is speaking. Moreover, while the camera shows Tony, the scene also presents Pepper's bottom part, in a skirt, with heels on, displaying her legs, so the spectator focuses on her erotic zones rather than the words she communicates.²⁵³ Another example might be when Pepper walks down the stairs, and the camera focuses on her legs.²⁵⁴ Moreover, when Pepper walked into a building, and the camera went slowly from her heels up.²⁵⁵

The second movie, *Iron Man 2*, managed to put both of the analysed characters into the same scene, where it might be said that their bodies were objectified by the visual acts. In the scene, both of the characters, Pepper and Black Widow, are walking up stairs in tight black dresses with heels. The camera then focuses on their synchronized walking, moving from their heads to their bum and legs. Therefore, the spectator can focus on their legs and a bum in the tight dresses.²⁵⁶ The camera focusing on Pepper's bum might be another example from the

²⁵⁰ Mulvey, "Visual pleasure," 13-14.

²⁵¹ *Iron Man*, 1:09:00

²⁵² Mulvey, "Visual pleasure," 12.

²⁵³ *Iron Man*, 00:11:18.

²⁵⁴ *Iron Man*, 01:25:00.

²⁵⁵ *Iron Man*, 01:50:17.

²⁵⁶ *Iron Man 2*, 01:32:19.

movie when she was leaving a room, and the character of Tony was following her with his eyes.²⁵⁷

In the *Avengers*, one of the most famous scenes might be when the character of Black Widow is tight up to a chair in a dress and then is forced to fight in them. When Black Widow is pushed back while sitting on the chair, the camera close-up is on her face, then on her legs and then back to her face, but the frame is big enough that the spectator can see Black Widow's chest while she is heavily breathing.²⁵⁸ So the spectator might see her breasts, which are an erotic zone, going up and down.

When it comes to *Iron Man 3* and the objectification and sexualization of Pepper through the camera, the author of the thesis did not register any instances. Even when Pepper was in captivity, tied up half-naked and waiting for Tony to be rescued. The camera did not focus or give any close-up looks at her body but rather focused on her face and ever since the objectification through camera lens started to be more difficult to indicate, therefore, it might be a sign of a change in the Marvel Cinematic Universe and how they portray women. However, the sexualization is still possible to be identified, but not so quickly and not so often.

The chosen scene from *Avengers: Age of Ultron* is when the character of Black Widow flirts with her protentional love interest. The camera uses close-ups to her face focusing on her eyes and her lips as erotic zones for the spectator.²⁵⁹

The sexualization of Captain Marvel in the *Captain Marvel* movie is also not that frequent. There was a scene where the whole squad of fighters was walking into a space shift, they all were wearing their tight uniforms, and the camera followed them from the back angle and from darkness into light. However, it was captain Marvel's body and her bum as an erotic zone that were the most visible place for the spectator.²⁶⁰

The last movie mentioned is *Black Widow*, even when her dressing style and makeup suggested that the sexualization of the character would disappear. It is possible to apply the Male gaze theory through the camera. For instance, when the character picked up a canister and put it into a car. The camera slowly went from her hand, picking up a canister and ending the frame on her bum, following the erotic zone while the character was walking.²⁶¹

²⁵⁷ *Iron Man 2*, 01:19:52.

²⁵⁸ *Avengers*, 00:12:26.

²⁵⁹ *Avengers: The age of Ultron*, 00:26:21.

²⁶⁰ *Captain Marvel*, 00:07:00.

²⁶¹ *Black Widow*, 00:25:33.

Another interesting test to see the representation of women in the Marvel Cinematic Universe might be the Bechdel test, created by a woman of the same name. It was mentioned before that the test examines three features of the representation of women in movies.

The first one is whether more than one woman is involved in the movie. All of the analysed movies in the thesis have passed this part. In *Iron Man*, it was, for instance, Pepper and one of Tony's lovers. In *Iron Man 2*- Pepper and Black Widow, *Avengers*- Pepper and Black Widow, *Iron Man 3* – Pepper and Tony's ex-girlfriend, *Avengers: The Age of Ultron* – Black Widow and the wife of Hawkeye, *Captain Marvel* – Captain Marvel and her friend Maria, *Black Widow* – Black Widow and her sister. These characters were chosen because one of them is a subject of the thesis, and the other women were chosen randomly, indicating there were more than two female characters in the movies.

The second criterium is the two women talking to each other, and the third one is the fact that they should talk about something other than men. These points are going to be pointed out by chosen dialogues from the movies.

Iron Man

Pepper: That's Jarvis. He runs the house. I've got your clothes here. They've been dry-cleaned and pressed, and there's a car waiting for you outside that will take you anywhere you'd like to go.

Woman: You must be the famous Pepper Potts.

Pepper: Indeed I am.

Woman: After all these years, Tony still has you picking up and dry-cleaning.

Pepper: I do anything and everything that Mr. Stark requires, including occasionally, taking out the trash. Will that be all?²⁶²

In this dialogue, it is possible to see that two women are talking to each other. Therefore, the second requirement of the test was accomplished. However, the third requirement was not because the characters were talking about Tony.

Iron Man 2

Black Widow: Miss Potts.

Pepper: Hi, come on in.

Black Widow: Wheels up in 25 minutes.

Pepper: Thank you.

[...]

Pepper: Actually, while you are here, maybe you and Natalie could discuss the matter of the personal belongings.

Black Widow: Absolutely.²⁶³

²⁶² *Iron Man*, 00:10:23.

²⁶³ *Iron Man 2*, 01:19:51.

In the dialogue, it is possible to see that a man was mentioned because Pepper wanted Black Widow to take care of his belongings. It might be added that the fact that Tony sat in that room while the dialogue was happening and interrupted is also a mark of not passing the third requirement.

Avengers

It must be noted that even when Black Widow and Pepper were part of the same movie, they did not talk to each other or any other female character, so the movie doesn't pass the third, neither the second requirement.

Iron Man 3

Pepper: Why were you at the house tonight? What was so important that you had to speak to Tony?

Ex girlfriend: I think that my boss is working for the Mandarin. So, if you still want to talk about it. I suggest that we get ourselves someplace safe.

Pepper: Your boss works for the Mandarin, you think? But Tony says you're a botanist. So..

Ex girlfriend: That figures. What I actually am is a biological DNA coder running a team of 40 out of a privately funded think tank.²⁶⁴

The dialogue shows that their conversation has abounded to a man, not one, but about two. Therefore, the third requirement is not fulfilled.

Avengers: the age of Ultron

Hawkeye's wife: Honey.

Black Widow: I missed you. How's little Natasha, huh?

Hawkeye's wife: She's... Nathaniel.

Black Widow: Traitor.²⁶⁵

In this case, the women know each other very well. However, even when they talk to each other, which is the second requirement accomplished, they talk about a baby, so it would seem that the third requirement was fulfilled too. Nevertheless, they mention that the gender of the baby is a male. Therefore, the requirement cannot be met.

Captain Marvel

Captain Marvel: I do not even know who I am!

Maria: You are Carol Danvers. You are the woman on that black box risking her life to do the right thing. My best friend...who supported me as a mother and a pilot when no one else did. You are smart, and funny, and a huge pain in the ass...and you were the most powerful person I knew way before you could shoot fire from your fists. You hear me? Do you hear me?

Captain Marvel: (nodding)

Maria: Come here. Come here, girl. I got you.²⁶⁶

²⁶⁴ *Iron Man 3*, 00:47:17.

²⁶⁵ *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, 01:01:45.

²⁶⁶ *Captain Marvel*, 01:14:17.

From this conversation, it is clear that the two women spoke together, did not mention any men, and yet empowered each other. Therefore, the movie passes the Bechdel test.

Black Widow

Yelena: Then why are you skulking about like it's a minefield?

Black Widow: 'Cause I don't know if I can trust you.

Yelena: Funny, I was going to say the same thing.

Black Widow: So, we gonna talk like grown-ups?

Yelena: Is that what we are? Put it down before I make you.

Black Widow: You put your down.²⁶⁷

The chosen dialogue between Black Widow and her sister represents the fact that the second and the third requirement was fulfilled, therefore the movie made it successfully through the Bechdel test.

Overall the test proves the development of the movies throughout the phases. In the first and second phases, some movies did not fulfil the requirements, therefore, did not pass the Bechdel test. The following third and fourth phases, with movies dedicated to female characters, successfully passed all three requirements of the Bechdel test.

²⁶⁷ *Black Widow*, 00:31:45.

Conclusion

According to feminism, the presence of male dominance over women is undeniable. Modern society lives in a patriarchal world where men oppress women in different aspects of their lives. The patriarchal programming is thus established throughout society leaving women and men are often unaware of it even though it surrounds them in everyday life, for instance, in the form of movies, books, ads or social media. The analytical part explored whether the Marvel phenomena represents gender stereotypes of women. Moreover, it examined the development of women's characters and their overall representation as a part of popular culture in a patriarchal society. The aim of this thesis was to explore whether the depiction of women supports or undermines the patriarchal programming of society.

The first character chosen for the analysis was Virginia "Pepper" Potts. The character appeared to be the perfect assistant and, in the view of feminist criticism, an angelic woman. At first, she seemed to support how the ideal submissive woman should look in a patriarchal society. However, the character has significantly developed in the first two waves of the Marvel Cinematic Universe. It was pointed out that at the beginning, the character fulfilled every wish of her male boss. Nevertheless, with small steps, she started to increasingly believe in her ideas and capabilities. Even when she was portrayed as an emotional and incapable leader, her character proved everyone wrong. Eventually, she destroyed the idea of her as an angelic woman and built herself a reputation as a successful businesswoman, which is perceived as a masculine feature in the patriarchal world. Therefore, the character appears to be destroying the patriarchal programming of society with its gender stereotypes.

The second character chosen was the character of Black Widow. The character was heavily sexualised at the beginning of Marvel Cinematic Universe, because of her appearance. She was made to look beautiful, dressed in short dresses, and wore heels. All these aspects were to underline her femininity to please men in the movie and the male audience of spectators. There is a significant difference in how the character appeared in the first way of Marvel Cinematic Universe in comparison to the fourth wave because even the character's appearance was changed to avoid oversexualising her. Nevertheless, the visual aids of cinema were still used to objectify her, thanks to close-ups of her body. Outside of the visual aids it is possible to say that she also represented a woman that helped to destroy a patriarchal programming. She was able to live fulfilled life without having to please men with her appearance.

The last character portrayed was Captain Marvel. She has been described as a strong, empowering character for young women. She was oppressed and objectified by the male commander. She was lied to, treated like she should not be thinking for herself, and made to feel like a weak creature thanks to her feminine features- emotions. Nevertheless, the character was depicted as a true superheroine, embracing her feminine features and breaking free of the oppression to become one of the most powerful superheroes of the Marvel Cinematic Universe.

The author also used two theories concerning feminism designed explicitly for movies. The Male gaze and the Bechdel test to show that the development of the Marvel movies is positive for feminists and the portrayal of equality for women. While the analysed movies from the first two waves did not pass the Bechdel test, the chosen movies from the third and fourth waves, which were more oriented to female characters, passed the test. Whether the use of the Male gaze decreased or increased is discussable due to the fact that it would have to be analysed in every movie of the Marvel Cinematic Universe. Nevertheless, the visual aids functioning as a means of objectification of women are present in the analysed movies.

To conclude, all the chosen women characters from the Marvel Cinematic Universe have progressively shown that with time the representation of women in the movies develops in a positive direction. This means that the portrait of women seems no longer to serve the purpose of patriarchal society, to ensure the hierarchal dominance of men. On the other hand, it tries to indicate that women and young girls should try to speak up their minds, should not be afraid to be leaders and should not let anyone objectify them or to tell them to be more like men if they want to succeed or not to be themselves at all if they want to live happily ever after without a man.

The conclusion reiterates the findings, namely that the development of depiction of women has significantly shifted from the characters being sexualized, objectified and portrayed as ideal patriarchal women, towards being representatives of independent women, not letting men oppress them in work space, sexualize them because of their looks and clothes and finally allowing them to be in their feminine energy without any attempts of criticising the feminine features compared to masculine ones. After all the women protagonists are initially depicted to support the features of patriarchal society, displaying objectification and gender stereotypes. However, as time progresses, they became women that fight against oppression and destroy the male dominant society. Generally, Marvel Cinematic Universe is developing

with each time phase considering the depiction of women. Comprehensively pointing out that even popular culture can be perceived in order to analyse gender stereotypes and perceptiveness of society.

Resumé

Obsahem této diplomové práce je analýza třech vybraných ženských postav a jejich zobrazení v Marvel Cinematic Universe. Cílem práce je za pomoci metod feministické kritiky odhalit, zda filmová díla posilují či podřívají patriarchální systém, s tím spojené genderové role a jak se zobrazení ženských postav vyvíjí. Postavy a jejich vývoj je sledován nejen napříč filmy, ale i prostřednictvím jejich typové reprezentace a rozvoje v konkrétních filmech. Autorka se zaměřuje na zkoumání genderových stereotypů, binárních protikladů, typů ženských postav, objektivizaci a sexualizaci žen a konkrétní feministické teorie zabývající se filmovou tvorbou, čímž jsou Male gaze and Bechdel test.

Práce je rozdělena na dvě části, v níž první se zabývá teoretickým ukotvením. Jelikož je práce zaměřena na ženské postavy, důležitým faktorem je feminismus a feministická literární kritika. V první kapitole se autorka věnuje feminizmu i jeho historickému rozvoji a popisuje jeho čtyři vlny. V druhé kapitole se autorka zaměřila na feministickou literární kritiku, vysvětlila pojmy jako patriarchát, gender nebo binární protiklady. Autorka se poté zaměřila na vysvětlení pojmu populární kultury, jelikož filmy, kterými se zabývá v diplomové práci, jsou její součástí. V této kapitole se také čtenář dozvídá o teorii Male gaze a Bechdel test. Čtvrtá a pátá kapitola se věnuje světu superhrdinů a superhrdinek. Nejprve je představen samotný žánr a okolností jeho vzniku. Dále se autorka věnovala zobrazení superhrdinek a žen v tomto žánru. Následuje představení fenoménu Marvel.

Analytická část se věnuje samotným ženským postavám a jejich zobrazení napříč filmy, které jsou časově rozděleny do čtyř fází Marvel Cinematic Universe. V analytické části je kladen důraz na genderové stereotypy objevující se ve filmech a jejich ženské a mužské vlastnosti a zkoumáno, zda podporují či podřívají patriarchální společnost. Současně se kapitola soustředí na zobrazení binárních protikladů či typologie ženských postav. Jako poslední je uplatněna teorie Male gaze a Bechdel test na vybrané filmy, či postavy. Filmy byly vybrány z každé fáze Marvel, která je rozdělena do časových úseků. Z první a zároveň nejstarší fáze byly vybrány tři filmy. Prvním je *Iron Man*, který nám představí jednu z hlavních postav analytického rozboru této práce - Virginii "Pepper" Potts, poté to je *Iron Man 2*, kde se kromě Pepper představí další ženská postava Black Widow. A jako poslední film je vybrán film *Avengers* kombinující více superhrdinů. V druhé fázi autor zkoumá rozvoj zmíněných postav napříč filmy, kterými jsou poslední *Iron Man 3* a pokračování *Avengers*, *Avengers: Age of Ultron*. Ve třetí fázi se představí nejmocnější hrdinka Marvel Cinematic Universe, která je také první ženou, které je věnován celý film. Postava Captain Marvel je

zobrazena ve stejnojmenném filmu. V poslední zkoumané fázi autor představí film *Black Widow*.

První ženskou postavou z Marvel Cinematic Universe je Virginia “Pepper“ Potts. Tato postava je v začátcích celého Marvel Cinematic Universe zobrazována jako ideální příklad andělské ženy, která přispívá svým chováním k upevnění patriarchy ve společnosti. Je zobrazena jako asistentka milionáře a později superhrdiny Tonyho Starka. Tony Pepper využívá ke svému prospěchu jako objekt a Pepper svého mužského nadřízeného poslouchá na slovo s tím, že mu splní vše co si přeje. Její chování podporovalo genderové stereotypy submisivní ženy. Avšak v průběhu časového rozložení filmů se Pepper osamostatní a dokonce převezme zodpovědnost za vedení firmy. Proto z rozboru vyplývá že její vývoj napomáhá podryvat programování patriarchální společnosti o tom, že žena musí být submisivní a není schopna vést společnost. Co se týče binárních protikladů, Pepper je zde vyobrazena jako srdce neboli emoce, zatímco její mužský protějšek je představen jako hlava či logika. V souvislosti s feministickou literární kritikou je toto žena, která je brána jako snadno podléhající emocím a muž schopný vše řešit logicky s chladnou hlavou. Toto vnímání také podporuje patriarchální rozdělení společnosti, nastiňující fakt, že žena je schopna díky svým emocím vést jen domácnost, aby se postarala o muže, který vše ostatní zařídí.

Druhou ženskou postavou je Black Widow, která představuje charakter, který je kvůli svému vzhledu objektivizován a sexualizován. V prvních filmech je zobrazena vždy perfektně upravená v přiléhavých šatech odhalující její postavu a ženské křivky. Pokud je převlečena do superhrdinského kostýmu, její křivky jsou znovu stejně viditelné. Tím postava napomáhá vykreslení dokonalé ženy v patriarchální společnosti, jejíž vzhled musí splňovat kritéria patriarchální společnosti k potěšení mužského elementu. Markantní posun je zde vidět v kontrastu s posledním filmem, který se zabýval právě jejím příběhem. Zde byla Black Widow znázorněna v oblečení, které nepodtrhovalo její ženské křivky a ani její make-up nebyl vždy „dokonalý“. Tím se stává reprezentací pro mladé dívky, které nemusejí splňovat kritéria krásy pro mužské potěšení proto, aby byly schopné žít naplňující život.

Jako poslední byla k analýze vybrána superhrdinka Captain Marvel, která představuje postavu bojující s utlačováním v patriarchální společnosti. Postava v průběhu filmu odhalí, že i když jí okolí přesvědčuje o tom, že by měla potlačit sama sebe, svou intuici, nápady, emoce a podřídít se patriarchy, to, na čem nejvíc záleží, je ona sama, i přesto, že je žena. A tak naplno přijme své ženské vlastnosti, kterými jsou emoce. Upřednostňující své nápady a

představy o životě se stane jednou z nejmocnějších superhrdinek Marvel Cinematic Universe. Tato postava také napomáhá k boření programování patriarchální společnosti a slouží jako vzor a posílení ženského postavení ve společnosti.

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