

**DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF
MASCULINE IDENTITY IN POST-9/11
BLOCKBUSTER FILM DISCOURSE:
AN ANALYTICAL STUDY**

BY

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**Discursive Construction of Masculine Identity in Post-9/11
Blockbuster Film Discourse: An Analytical Study**

By

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The undersigned certify that they have read the following thesis, examined the defense, are satisfied with the overall exam performance, and recommend the thesis to the Faculty of English Studies for acceptance.

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Candidate of **Doctor of Philosophy** at the National University of Modern Languages do hereby declare that the thesis **Discursive Construction of Masculine Identity in Post-9/11 Blockbuster Film discourse: An Analytical Study** submitted by me in partial fulfillment of PhD degree, is my original work, and has not been submitted or published earlier. I also solemnly declare that it shall not, in future, be submitted by me for obtaining any other degree from this or any other university or institution.

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ABSTRACT

**Title: Discursive Construction of Masculine Identity in Post-9/11 Blockbuster Film
discourse: An Analytical Study**

Films are visual stories and construct different identities. According to some visual semioticians the filmic text enlarges language categories by fusing scenes, sounds and said words in a steady manner. Hollywood films, particularly post 9/11 blockbuster films echo geo-political and social realities. A seemingly entertaining yet escapist fictional superhero film carries serious underpinnings and suggestions for the public to take away. However, this thesis explores ways of seeing successful blockbusters as cultural and political barometer that can be applied to measure the extent of identity construction approved at a wider cultural and social level. This dissertation discovers how select superhero blockbuster films, post-9/11, are orbiting away from hyper-masculinity and circling more around more human male protagonist, flawed, and requiring assistance from stronger females, hence leading the humanity out of crisis. 5 Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU henceforth) films are explored for this purpose. In doing so certain parallels are drawn from 2 iconic Disney Comics productions (henceforth DC/Pixar) blockbuster animated films to find out how masculinity is being redefined and displayed differently in content meant for children consumption.

This discursive construction of newer angles of gender identities are explored following Johan Galtung (2004) model. Also, the evolution of the New Man model, supported by Gilam and Wooden (2008) is also used. Both explicit and implicit construction of identities are investigated, while tracing and pinpoint the dialogical instances in selected films. The analysed data has helped in understanding how blockbuster film serve as a prism of emerging movements, aspirations, solutions, and life lessons that the audience hopes to resonate on screen. This dissertation focuses on how language gets these messages across to crowd.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

MCU:	Marvel Cinematic Universe
DC:	Disney Corporation
Pixar:	Pixar Animation Studio
CDA:	Critical Discourse Analysis
CATFA :	Captain America: The First Avenger
CATWS:	Captain America: The Winter Soldier
CACW:	Captain America:Civil War
TA:	The Avengers
TS:	Toy Story

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my late parents, my siblings, mentor Prof. Dr. Abdul Latif, my wife, Yonus and Fahad.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Cinema and Postmodernism

Most films are basically visual stories that construct various identities of civil and national groups. According to some visual semioticians (e.g. Metz, 1974) they carry the same structural aspects of language (Dansei, 2002). Precisely speaking, filmic text enlarges language categories through fusing scenes, sounds and said words steadily. For this purpose, it deserves to be categorised as a sign synthetically produced and consisting of both verbal and non-verbal depictions. This combination strengthens this medium and succeeds in capturing attention and imaginations of spectators. A police film, for example, consists of spoken word of characters, descriptive camera shots for story built up, flashback montages, and various cinematic techniques. Sound effects and consistently changing background music works towards complementing the twists and turns in story, unfolding through dialogues. Therefore, the interaction with filmic text is a fusion of modalities of all human senses. According to Paik (2010) cinema is most suitable for implementation of post-modern technique, which the directors of films utilise to achieve two goals, i.e. for depicting imagery to foster present-day cultural milieu, and for using language in conjunction of imagery, to work in close symmetry, for better meaning-making experience by the viewer.

Film producers achieve the narratological, or storytelling, goals through this colourful and versatile medium. When analysed as a research object, the technical details of film making, viewers' experience, publicity tactics and genre stereotypes also come under focus. In the disciplines related to film studies, analysing screenplay is not the main agenda usually, since the film as a wholesome product as too much substance already. If seen fairly, dialogues and attached enactment provide the guiding rubric of expression of narration and themes in a film. For a linguist, text of the film is the real substance, the starting point for considering all other aspects. Language serves as the cement to all bricks of a film, i.e. both abstract bricks of themes

and constructs, and concrete blocks of visible factors of sights and sound. Despite the clear divide and difference of approach, post-modern climate allows for convergence of interests towards language use in films as a vital thread to the rest of film yarn. Films, like TV and social media, are a combination of frames. They also display frames on screen, while achieving 'framing' goals too.

1.2 Frames and Viewers' Perception

Framing is viewed as construction of social truth and media campaigns reinforce existing attitudes (Lang, 2016). The matter on screen displays those frames or contracts for reinforcement or acknowledgment from the audience. A version of sensibility is built from personal experiences besides peer interactions and mass media interpretations (Newman, 2000). Sitting in front of screen is an experience of perceiving life. The messages encoded in each scene or dialogue can be very open or subtle. Framing is "unspoken and unacknowledged and organise the world both for producers who design and for us who rely on these films" (Lang, 2016). The audience does not choose completely which thing to accept as true or which to disregard. Media, in general, exists as a wholesome force, where in its components, newspapers, TV, radio, films and social media, work in consonance. The presentation of circumstances, social constructs and facts through mass media can systematically affect the way recipients of the media come to understand any event. These are then reinforced over time and eventually a target demographic accepts all such content as normal. Be it celebrating special days, dealing with personal relationships, political fact-checking, opinion making, or justifying new trends, everything is offered through frames. Individual frames are defined as "mentally stored clusters of ideas guiding individual processing of information" (Edelman, 1993, p.232). These single frames further help each individual construct her/his social reality.

1.2.1 Socially Constructed Reality

According to the social construction approach, we are not born into this world with predetermined sets of assumptions. Instead, our understanding of reality is largely dependent on the information we receive through verbal and nonverbal means of communication. We interpret recent developments based on previous knowledge. Our understanding of issues is shaped through socialisation, communication processes, and language. In this process, the presentation of facts can determine opinions, and the right to shape facts in a certain light can

help different actors achieve a desired effect.

We can trace the theory of social construction of reality back to the writings of Kenneth Burke (1969). He starts out by exploring the puzzle of why people act the way they do. Burke (1969) pays special attention to symbolic devices that affect motivation and engages in the analysis of linguistic expressions. Berger and Luckmann (2011) explore the question of motivation further and conclude that reality is constructed based on social communication. Accordingly, what people know is determined by this process. Reality is further objectified in symbols that are exchanged while this process is taking place between two or more parties.

Schneider and Ingram (1997) define social construction as a process through which “values and meaning become attached to facts, people, patterns of action, or any other phenomena.” As a result, our insights are malleable, and are subject to frequent changes. As Phillips (2018) points out:

The degree to which a given form of understanding prevails or is sustained across time is not fundamentally dependent on the empirical validity of the perspective in question, but on the vicissitudes of social processes (e.g. communication, negotiation, conflict, rhetoric).

As a result, social construction is closely linked to power politics. In other words, whosoever has the authority and capability of offering better frames to larger recipients has the privilege to instil any idea in people. No wonder the control over mass media is converging into fewer hands, corporations, every year. Every now and then there is news of a bigger corporation devouring a smaller group in the name of merger. This very era of big data is all about more outreach of frames. The whole idea is thoroughly political in nature. According to Young (2002), politics is composed of different concepts that mutate throughout history, and political actors try to transform concepts, thus producing conceptual shifts (p.17). Power plays a key role in the process of reality construction.

According to Young (2002), political elites have control over how events are presented. Further, Goffman (1970) refers to the process of “fabrication” or the “intentional effort of one or more individuals to manage activity so that a party of one or more others will be induced to have a false belief about what it is that is actually going on (p.83)”. Thus, social construction of reality is an outcome of what Schneider and Ingram (1997) term as framing dynamics, which

involves the ability of elites to frame political issues. Social constructions emerge from a broader societal context through the process of framing dynamics, or specific interpretations of events, knowledge, or conditions. Besides achieving political motives, public impulses are also tapped into. Mass media tends to mould itself with changing social tendencies and strives to reflect societal currents. It also has been a driving force in shaping social cognition, by introducing audience to certain patterns of behaving, e.g. gender roles, public behaviours, national or local identities, etc. Thus, framing, discussed in the next section, provides a mechanism that ignites process of social construction of reality.

1.2.2 The Act of 'Framing' in Films

Framing constitutes one of the primary means through which elites try to influence public opinion (Druckman & Nelson, 2003). As Edelman (1993) notes, a “frame in a filmic text is really the imprint of power; it registers the identity of actors or interests that competed to dominate the text” (p.240). In politics, both national and global, corporations and/or studios use filmic frames in their efforts to generate a desired level of policy support. Through highlighting certain features of policies while not others, studios depend on framing to “manipulate popular preferences to serve their own interests” (Druckman & Nelson, 2003, p.731). As Edelman (1993) notes, governments “win public support for (their) actions only by creating and spreading beliefs about those who are deserving and those who are threats and about which policies will bring desirable results and which will be painful, unfair, or disastrous” (p. 231). Thus, through influencing the importance that citizens attribute to certain policy issues, governments use framing to advance their agendas.

Druckman and McDermott (2008) believes that one of the main tenets of framing theory is the premise that “an issue can be viewed from a variety of perspectives and be construed as having implications for multiple values or considerations” (p. 299). Subsequently, framing stands for the process “by which people develop a conceptualisation of an issue or reorient their thinking about an issue” (Dansei, 2002, p. 11). Framing serves both as a map for constructing reality, and a means for developing certain conceptualizations. Redefining public opinion is a political motive, while aligning public perception of social, cultural, and religious notions is a play of frames at cognitive level. Thus, the influence of frames and framing falls into two perspectives: sociological and psychological. The sociological perspective analyses framing as a process facilitating constructions of social reality, where a frame serves as

“schemata of interpretation” allowing individuals to process information they receive (Goffman, 1999). The psychological perspective, on the other hand, treats framing to engender specific personal or societal responses through various presentations of an issue (Kahneman & Tversky, 2000).

Proponents of the sociological interpretation of framing (Goffman, 1999; Gitlin, 2003) focus on the presentation of issues using language, symbols, and stereotypes. For instance, Goffman (1999) distinguishes between empirical and perceptual components of reality. Thus, he uses the empirical notion of a “strip” defined as “any arbitrary slice or cut from the stream of ongoing activity” which he then contrasts with “frames,” or “principles of organisation which govern events... and our subjective involvement in them” (p.79). Frames are defined as “principles of selection, emphasis and presentation, composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters” (Gitlin, 2003, p.6). In other words, a frame is “a central organising idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events, weaving a connection among them. The frame suggests what the controversy is about, the essence of the issue” (Gee, 1999). As such, frames serve as plots that weave together pieces of information to present a coherent storyline (Entman, 2009). Entman (2009) believes that “frames call attention to some aspects of reality while obscuring other elements, which might lead viewers to have different reactions” (p.250). He later adds that framing entails “to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described (p.252).

Films provide that landscape for carrying out the goals Entman (2009) has defined. They happen to be perfect tool for global agenda fulfilment. Their outreach is massive and impact is phenomenal. It explains the fact as to why is there billions of dollars investment in a usual two-hour fictional entertainment film. On a social level i.e. defining gender roles, equality, rights, celebrations, social behaviour, socializing and its nuances, religious orientations, ethnicity etc. framing in films involves selection and salience, i.e. making an issue/notion more noticeable, meaningful, and memorable through frequent references, repetition, and associations with culturally familiar symbols. As for the real-life national or global issues, e.g. terrorism, drugs, peace, conflict, etc. filmic frames perform the functions of defining problems, diagnosing causes, making moral judgments, and suggesting remedies

(Entman, 2009). From this point of view, frames represent tools for corporations/studios with the help of which they can harvest, water, and nurture issues and portray them in a certain light to engender certain public responses. In this sense, frames highlight certain facts while omitting others, which affects ways people think about relevant issues (Tversky & Kahneman, 1985).

As Gamson (1988) points out that “facts have no intrinsic meaning” and argues that they gain meaning in the process of their conveyance to the public. The same events can be related to the viewers in numerous ways (Creel, 2018). Consequently, people would tend to be more responsive to positive presentations of information and would tend to perceive an issue presented in a negative light as a problem. Taking this into consideration, individual opinions can be shaped through certain emphases on issues of potential resonance (Druckman & Nelson, 2003). Accordingly, alternative presentations of the same issue invoke different responses from the viewers and can lead to a move in public opinion towards a certain side in the controversy which is known as a framing effect (Danseï, 2002). As Morgan (1994) demonstrates using the analysis of the perceptions of the Ku Klux Klan, different frames of the same issue can trigger different perceptions. As a result, he defines framing as a “process by which a communication source... defines and constructs a political issue or public opinion” (p. 165).

Films serve as “a site on which various social groups, institutions, and ideologies struggle over the definition and construction of social reality” (Gurevitch & Levi, 1985, p.19). Most images we form of reality are not produced because of direct experiences, but rather through media influence. As a result, the films provide us with information which we utilise for constructing our own reality. Consequently, films play an important role in framing. *Zero Dark Thirty*, about Osama Bin Laden, *Body of Lies* about Iraq war and *American Sniper*, to name a few examples, serve similar purpose. Their narratives have been somewhat perpetuated in the minds of the masses as to who was the hero and who was and will be the bad guy. Similarly, recent surge in films featuring powerful women, for instance, *Wonder Woman*, *Captain Marvel*, etc. is seen as a direct outcome of ongoing fourth wave of feminism. There has been a snowball effect of these films, in TV shows and a plethora of YouTube content.

Films can (and do) influence what the public thinks about social and policy issues (Silberstein, 2004). For instance, analysing the Persian Gulf crisis, Price (2008) find that the

media coverage of an event can produce a threefold effect: it affects agenda-setting, priming, and framing. Thus, the coverage of the Gulf crisis affected the perception of it as an important problem (agenda-setting), it affected the evaluation of the performance of George Bush (priming), and it affected the level of public support for official actions (framing). The same scheme has been in action in every war waged across the globe, e.g. Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, etc. Thus, frames serve as, both, maps for understanding reality, and tools that help instil certain public responses. As such, frames are constructed with a specific focus on certain viewers. Every form of media is grounded in certain visible and invisible frames.

The current study relies on blockbuster films which are chosen for their sizeable global viewership. The scenario is events of September 11, 2001 (henceforth 9/11) and how those triggered a surge in militarized content on screen. Also, the boom in superhero films is a direct outcome from the psychological healing of the wounded American public after the attacks. This genre has been able to garner highest grossing revenue since then, for it supplies content about good fighting with and winning from evil. The outreach of superhero movies transcends many demographics in society. Based on comics, superhero films have audience ranging from comics-reading seniors to superhero toy-loving juniors and everyone in between. As a result, film-makers put in immense amount of attention to frame details, for certain messages to go out, alongside the visual entertainment. In this research, the aim has been to find out how blockbuster films encode or frame masculine gender constructs over time. Frames offer a wholesome experience of visuals and sound. The focus in this study, however, remains on the language use in conveying these constructs. An effort has been made to pinpoint instances of evolved masculinity.

1.2.3 Discursive Nature of Frames

Frames and discourses are intricately interconnected in a complicated way. As Entman (2009) notes, framing offers a clue to deciphering the power of a communicating text. Hence, the “analysis of frames illuminates the precise way in which influence over a human consciousness is exerted by the transfer (or communication) of information from one location – such as speech, utterance, film or novel – to that consciousness” (Entman, 2009, p.254). Discourses are in the language domain, while frames involve broader means of social construction of reality, including stereotypes and symbolic devices. According to Lee (2015):

...choices of words and their organisation into news stories are not trivial matters. They hold great power in setting the context for debate, defining issues under consideration, summoning a variety of mental representations, and providing the basic tools to discuss the issues at hand (p.70)

The use of language is fundamental in the way any construct is presented and perceived. Audience is usually transfixed in the visual aspect of frames on screen, due to advancement in visual technologies. Language, along with the message it has, is comfortably allowed in by the audience. An example of this level of submission is young children learning or picking situational language, good/bad manners, and ethics from cartoons, or films.

According to Rogers (2011), language performs the role of both the carrier of meanings and a medium through which meanings are communicated. Further, he concludes that humans are subject to language and thought process which are connected to ways humans conceive of things. Language is essential to our understanding of reality, and language can employ symbols that advance a certain definition or undermine another (Elder & Cobb, 1983). Fairclough (1995) treats discourses “sometimes as the general domain of all statements, sometimes as an individualizable group of statements, and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a certain number of statements” (p.80).

As a language category, discourses are “ways of talking and writing that carry a set of underlying assumptions about how the world does and should work” (Ginsburg, 1991, p.111). Accordingly, discourses are powerful tools for creating our worldviews and are manifested through speech, text, and language. As Tannen (2013) points out, discourses are embedded within broader frames: as interpretive roadmaps, frames are larger constructs than discourses, but incorporate discourses as one means of shaping reality. Frames and discourses are interconnected and mutually affect each other. Frames can influence discourses: they can determine which discourse becomes dominant, or harness the already dominant discourse (Ginsburg, 1991). Thus, a frame refers to both the constitutive elements of an issue around which details are built, and the borders of discourse on the issue. Discourses, in turn, are capable of restraining and shaping frames (Steinberg, 1998). Thus, frames help in bringing into focus issues that are of importance to society, and discourses further place these issues into language categories that are acceptable to the public. Discourses exist in several distinct forms,

e.g. media discourse, official government discourse, and challenger discourse. In addition, discourses perform different functions. As Mayer (1947) finds, political discourse can incite, pre-empt, or suppress social movements. Media discourse provides discussion of social issues and form public opinion as an agenda. In the similar fashion, films offer a unique perspective about marriage of politics and social issues, wrapped in a glossy entertainment package.

For instance, as Ayotte and Moore (2013) point out, in the aftermath of 9/11, language was used to construct the images of “us” and the “enemy,” those of “evil” and “security.” Further, they argue, the label of “rogue states” was invoked to place foreign policy decisions into certain contexts: the concepts of “rogue nation” and “nation of concern” were coined to describe states allegedly supporting terrorism. Based on their discourse analysis of the language on the “war on terror” (Ayotte & Moore, 2013, p.85) conclude that such manipulations with the language and labels “ensure the absence of public reflection on the complex nature of terrorism,” and oversimplify the considerations on the appropriate response. This serves as an apt example of language or discursive construction as well as definition of political identities during those times.

About the same aspect, Phillips (2018) points out that discursive constructions determine what becomes appropriate for situations, and which perspective is adopted as a prism for dealing with different phenomena. In this respect, the “war on terror” presents an example of a language construct, which affects our understanding of terrorism, and influences our policy preferences for counterterrorism. As Jackson (2013) argues, the “war on terror” is not an objective representation of reality. He performs discourse analysis of the language the U.S. administration used when referring to the “war on terror.” Based on this analysis he finds that the “war on terror” involves a “deliberately and meticulously composed set of words, assumptions, metaphors, grammatical forms, myths and forms of knowledge – it is a carefully constructed discourse” (Jennings, 2013, p.60). In fact, the “war on terror” can in reality be understood as the “war of words” (Silberstein, 2004). Talking about the “war” highlights policy alternatives that are different from those associated with terrorism as a criminal activity, for instance. Thus, under the “war on terror,” the military solution to terrorism becomes a more justifiable alternative since the definition of war implies confrontations with the use of armed forces.

Following the same trend post 9/11, films became thoroughly militaristic and masculine. The superhero genre was revamped and militarised masculinity sold well. For instance, Captain America comics and later films were revisited and crafted around the teams of superheroes fighting imaginary villains in an imaginary time and space. Hollywood, being the biggest film industry yet, has been a perfect place for such frames being discursively and graphically used to consolidate and convey issues. The following section traces Hollywood's role in being used as a tool for conveying frames discursively. The discussion travels back in time to uncover the link and influence of power with screen.

1.3 Hollywood: A History

Evidently, Hollywood is the world's biggest and most popular film industry since its products are seen by more public than any other national film industry. The cultural zones Hollywood does not directly enter, it gives models and blueprints for others to create and circulate, e.g. Korean, European film industry. In fact, Hollywood, in all its hope and horror, is the only word which surely sum up Americanisation. Hollywood films are often synonymous with processes of globalisation, the synthetic idea of the medium offering to convey the idea of America. As Nye (2003) says that:

..the American cultural perspective is absorbed now, not from the experience of immigrant struggle, but from the passive comfort of the cinema seat or a domestic armchair. The suspicion that there is a worldwide phenomenon, the Americanisation of culture", is in part due to the sense that through the seductive images of Hollywood, the will to resist an American viewpoint is undermined (p. 33).

Firstly, it is made clear that Hollywood came to accomplish its global primacy and worldwide power and how the early decades of Hollywood built up both the commercial templates and narrative principles that stretch for all times to come. Then the nature of the 'idea of America' as it exhibits prominently in every Hollywood item, the blockbuster, and what may be implied by 'the Americanisation of culture'.

1.4 A Propaganda History of Hollywood

Before entering WWI, the implications and uses of the film industry focused on its potential for spreading and perpetuating propaganda and any such ideology conveyance that

were still present on the American political establishment. The regulatory body of National Association of the Motion Picture Industry, was built in 1916 by the Hollywood studios to talk about issues of censorship and then a memo was sent from the White House that says that “the motion picture can be the most wonderful system for spreading national propaganda at little or no cost” (cited in Fraser, 2014, p.40). President Woodrow Wilson, of Bulwarked, in April 1917 directed the inception of Committee on Public Information (CPI) and gave them a task to convince the US citizen on American involvement in WWI. At the time of CPI being headed by George Creel, cinema held immense power and hence came into being its involvement with other forms of public media consumption, comic books and cartoon strips. On the development of the division of films inside the CPI, quickly named the ‘Creel Committee’, Wilson remarked that “The film has come to rank as the very highest medium for the dissemination of public intelligence... it speaks a universal language, it lends itself importantly to the presentation of America’s plans and purposes” (cited in Devereaux, 1990, p.337).

Creel also recognised the function of the CPI to be the propaganda machine, but not as the Germans defined it, but propaganda in the true sense of the word, meaning the propagation of faith. The CPI remained for a short period and after fulfilling its war time functions in 1919 it was dissolved. But the relationship between Hollywood and Washington did not change through the unequivocal alteration of the former. Hollywood, purposeful publicity machine, began working for the benefit of the American state which only occurred during the two world wars. Hollywood only focused itself on helping during the WWII and churned out films that postulated American virtues and established the ‘others’ binary of vices as well. It was a suggestion by Senator Ralph O. Brewster of the Truman Committee that “recent citizens were not appropriate filmmakers for the war effort... that the filmmakers were insufficiently American in origin, intellect and character” (Sklar, 2012, p.216). Ironically, the workers of Hollywood had overwhelming nature which had created such solid assimilatory culture. This unified approach postulated Americanising messages in the early long periods of the business and set Hollywood's worldwide knowledge of the market. Ironically those founding blocks of Hollywood, who were immigrants mostly, suddenly came at risk of losing access to industry.

Other than that, the requirements during the war time are obvious for propaganda which guide and drive opinion of people at home, as well as project complete public support abroad. American film industry proved to be an apt place for such events as Elmer Davis,

Director of the Office of War Information in WWII stated that, “the easiest way to inject a propaganda idea into most people's minds is to let it go through the medium of an entertainment picture when they do not realise that they are being propagandised” (1942, cited in Haya, 1955, p.218).

Therefore, CPI laid the foundation of a layout between the American state and Hollywood, resulting in a marriage of ideological goals and financial muscle. This bond was formed in the backdrop of WWI and it continued to serve in WWII and stays intact and stronger even today. As the world wars had favourable results for America, Hollywood was also brought to terms of use from that time till today. Despite military supremacy, Hollywood has not been used as an open mode of propagation of American ideals and policies later. There has not been any check and balance, however, on films selling America, as that brought money and stability to economy. There are observable limits to the use of Hollywood for direct political and policy projection on screen, including what geography, depiction, technology, etc. to appear or not appear at all. Hollywood did a lot of help by selling the idea of ‘America’ to the world and by providing a chance of window shopping for American products and American modes of living. Mayer (1947) has argued this potential as:

The modern American motion picture, almost beyond any possible comparison with other items of export, combines considerations of economic, cultural and political significance... No one has ever attempted to calculate - and it would probably be an impossible task - the indirect effect of American motion pictures on the sale of American products, not only on display, as it were, but in actual demonstrated use. Scenes laid in American kitchens, for example, have probably done as much to acquaint the people of foreign lands with American electric refrigerators, electric washing machines, eggbeaters, window screens, and so on, as any other medium... There has never been a more effective salesperson for American products in foreign countries than the American motion picture (p. 36).

In essence, Hollywood morphed from a direct political tool into a subtle instrument of showcasing American values, products and ideologies. The status of current social media, electronic media and e-commerce is largely American as a result and people across the globe are drawn towards it.

The US emerged as a military superpower following the World War II, because of which military gained great influence over the government, economy and need to secure markets throughout the world (Davies & Philpott, 2013). This influence is also referred to as the military- industrial complex (Boggs & Pollard, 2007). In view of this Hollywood continued to support ideologies related to militarism. The cultural zeitgeist went on to develop with militaristic symbols between Hollywood and the military-industrial complex, which encourage military intervention for the greater good.

Furthermore, it has been asserted by some scholars that a military superpower can also lead to believing that if human invented war, they can also invent peace. (Anderson, 2006). The notions of “us versus them” and “just war” are what create violent wars (p.178). The Manichaeistic of war, which says if a war is just, it necessitates to take any action, also strengthened by this alliance. Scholars also assert that it is due to violence in films that people have been desensitised and are more likely to accept militarism in films out of indifference (Boggs & Pollard, 2007). Moreover, it is indicated by the military and war films that the country should always be prepared to be able enough to defeat the enemy.

The preparedness of military is associated with people who are told that the only way to achieve peace is through the strength of the nation (Anderson, 2006). To achieve military preparedness, the production of weapons, and “job, contracts, masculinity and politics” are important to further the military-industrial complex (Anderson, 2006). The idea that the military is saving the nation’s “interests and investments”, also confirms the serious involvement of the military in society (Anderson, 2006).

Moreover, the contemporary films still have this system of frames by inclusion of superhero blockbuster films. These heroes are either one-man army or collaborators with other superheroes, to ward off enemies. This, being visible in many post-9/11 films, is a subtle reflection of the need to collaborate with other nations in combating terrorism. For protecting nation’s interests and investments, military indicates that some sort of violence is going to occur. With a view to achieving people’s support to use military action for national “security”, Hollywood has accepted the need to “celebrate a violence that simultaneously reflects the popular zeitgeist” (Boggs & Pollard, 2007). For instance, films like *No Country for Old Men* (2007), and *There Will Be Blood* (2007) are not actually war films, but these yet resort to use

of violence to an end. It is evident from the causal use of violence in several categories of films, that ideological need for violence is being strengthened by Hollywood as the major response to any threat, thus militarism being justified.

1.5 The Primary Financial Focus

Fraser (2014) argues about the beginning of 20th century that, “America benefitted from tremendous historical good luck... A combination of technological changes, shifting demographic realities and cataclysmic wars provided America with powerful economic, military, and cultural advantages vis-à-vis Europe and the rest of the world” (p.26). He continues that innovative developments benefitted American economy and those countries which shifted from agricultural to industrial mode, hence more people migrating to cities and changing national demographic. Moreover, many other developments are also done in the industrial era for globalised exchange: mass markets, mass transit, and large scale manufacturing. The advent of mass communication, the medium of film, is the most relevant development of the twentieth century which gives a way to American thoughts and goals to be broadcasted a long way past her borders. It is obvious that, not only America was the nation to become aware of the capability of film as an all-inclusive product. French film makers, such as Pathé and Gaumont occupied a big portion of US market, from the outset of Edison's first Kinetoscope parlours during late 19th century, until the start of World War I (WWI). Other European extraordinary film producers and their products were often welcomed in the American marketplace, without any competition.

America struggled for amazingness, battled with the weapons of ability and levy, at the start of the film era when French had assumed claim for being world's leading film producers. It all changed in a flux, due to the start of WWI, which had immense influence on European film makers, resulting in a steep decline in this industry's fame and popularity. Hollywood began to rise and flourish after it moved to California during the troubled times. It achieved global supremacy over the cinema, that could easily drive intercultural exchanges to its own wishes. It was significant in this development, as the rest of the country still took a century to achieve the same status in other fields. WWI was the root cause of this hegemony and Hollywood attained the most powerful status of storyteller to date, even inside US markets. According to Sklar (2012) the idea was to “replace the Europeans as suppliers

to non-belligerent areas of the world, particularly Latin America and Japan” (p.215).

At the first instance films were made just to get some profit, but now they could also be the places where film-goers would also get exposure to foreign lifestyles, merchandise, model for political setup, definition of abstract constructs as gender equality, glamour, personal struggles, good versus evil binary, etc. One can take the Hollywood template of life to be most likeable and satisfactory. This practice has continued to make viewers fall in love, or even badly crave for the American dream, the popular brands and a huge volume of wish lists associated with life in US. This trend has boosted epidemically with the advent of online shopping, especially from Amazon.com. War impacted and managed a lot of influence inside America and Hollywood with the opportunities for consolidation and expansion. Due to lack of any visible meaningful competition e.g. economic, demographic, ideological and institutional, Hollywood presented and framed films for global consumption.

1.6 Massive Public Appeal

At first filmmaking and filming tended to be very costly affair, being reliant on newer yet still pricey machinery and techniques. Although being rudimentary, all national or international film industries were targeted at recovering costs of productions, if not profits, from other markets. In the US, producers garnered profits through local box office returns, to make up for inflated film making expenditures, and for this very goal, films were to be exported to viewers abroad so that the profits keep coming in and industry would flourish. The scheme worked very well. Times tell the tale. In fact, “since the 1920s between a third and half of Hollywood’s earnings have come from viewers outside the United States” (King, 2008, p.250). According to Sklar (2012) “American producers held an unbeatable advantage over their foreign competitors. They could pour money into ‘production values’ knowing that the more spectacular and expensive their pictures looked, the more they appealed to overseas viewers” (p. 216). It means that this quantitative demographic factor had some qualitative outcomes too. Contextual demographic factors have an influence on the filmic texts themselves and niche narratives, neither domestically nor internationally, could not recover costs in a mass/big market. In early days of cinema, films that were high on spectacle and broad on narrative and framing appeal were being produced.

Fraser (2014) explains that, “since America’s population was largely immigrant-

especially in large urban centres such as New York and Chicago-Hollywood deliberately appealed to a lowest common denominator, with uncomplicated narratives that could be grasped by all viewers, whatever their nationality or level of education be” (p.41). It is said that the contextual factor of demography and the potential viewers for a film again had powerful narrative effects during the early years of American cinema. Wasser (2004) argues that the early days of Hollywood were “an industry shaped by immigrants, both as producers and as viewers, conveying a strong assimilatory message” (p. 424). Due to cultural plurality in America, it was essential for films to project an inclusive image of its society. Hence the idea of American dream came into being, America: the land of opportunity. This idea sold for too long and resulted in a huge influx of foreign workforce, intellectual and professional elite and money inside America. In European markets and cinema, no such economic and social desires for openness were present. Hence their films did not push any such agendas through their character portrayals. European producers didn’t intend to export or sell their cultures through screen, hence they started losing their grip at the nucleus of entertainment and Hollywood jumped in. Hollywood narratives kept it simple and subtly exploited Ameritocratic narratives concerning American universality in expressing notions like gender, race, social class and global good and bad guys. These kinds of films resulted in commercial as well as ideological favourable outcomes.

This strategy is also supported by King (2002), who also suggests that “Hollywood’s notion of its viewers has always had to remain very generalised, because of the size of a film’s market”, with the “lowest common denominator” hence bearing domestic and global consequences. With these notions projected widely, Hollywood became the powerhouse for propagating American version of life and discourse. This does not mean that Hollywood films were not working with specific markets. Instead, with different genres and different time frames, Hollywood targeted different gender, political and racial audience. However, such projections of ideologies were not relevant to viewers till WWII, which meant a sharp reduction in profit margins, but high ideological impact. Consequently, Fraser (2014) says, “viewers flooded into cinemas to see American films whose simple plots and emphasis on emotion and action had widespread cross-cultural appeal” (p.29).

Even after more than a century, this formula still sells, of narrating a climax in a popular blockbuster film. This is done to solidify the idea of making a film that is designed to fit every

cultural mould globally, hence ensuring acceptance and relevance. This results in increasing the number of viewers in cinemas and Hollywood has been using that pseudo-global face to attract viewers worldwide and make them believe that there is just pure entertainment going on, whereas the reality is different with a subtle undertone. The political motives of substantiating past events, presenting modified version of the present events and predicting future to ready the world as to what is coming, have been at the core of film industry. Even Hollywood has been instrumental in hinting perceived dangers and possible defence just to deter any attempts at American sovereignty. Hollywood has been dealing with explaining past, lining up present and planning future all in the name of entertainment and fun.

1.7 National Identity and Hollywood

The American cultural presence in Hollywood films has drawn a lot of criticism for being very conservative and exclusive in its portrayals. For some it is even hegemonic to control what people are offered to see and believe, coming from such magnitude of Hollywood. On the other hand, it should be noted that Hollywood is basically American national cinema first, and global entertainment provider later. Although this division is successfully fused and confused into one, the pattern of portrayal and choices on screen, of characters, themes, locations, voice overs, etc. speak volume about the *Americanness* of Hollywood that the whole world must live with. The narratives and discourses shown in Hollywood are initially American public narratives that are in circulation. Interestingly they are subtly crafted as such that the global viewers start relating and synchronising with this foreign culture.

Hollywood is taken by the critics as bulwark of assertive cultural superiority of US because of too much presence of American products. Yet, we should keep it in mind that Hollywood is the national cinema and narrations of America. What we face at international level are primarily stories Americans tell themselves and probably such stories resonate national values. In this way, we may take American cinema (both domestic and International) and particularly the blockbuster as one of Althusserian Ideology State Apparatuses (or ISAs). According to Althusser (1999) the activities of ISAs to achieve a reproduction of submission to the ruling order, i.e. a reproduction of submission to ruling ideology, thus refers to a capitalist ideology within America but also to US global supremacy externally. The cinema being a medium of soft power culture, applies amusement exhortation to get such submission, which

is to ensure the constant use of its products (p.132).

Further, as the cultural products are absolutely made from the national narrative of their country of origin, the kinds of stories put forth by Hollywood are inspired by essential economic considerations rather than by national culture by itself. The ideological conversations that 'Americanisation' proposes on domestic and global levels are the by – products of what King (1983, 1995) refers to a Hollywood's 'commercial aesthetic.'

Hollywood, being the producer of blockbusters and many such attractive products, happens to become one of the Althusserian ISAs, which is a combination of national interest strategies that help form assimilated American identity through means of media projection, educational investments, sponsorships and cultural exchange programs. In simple words these helps maintain American image in all forms of public discourse, globally and domestically. Films, unlike other prominent ISAs that function mostly domestically, transcend borders and are interactive with viewers in the remotest parts of the world. So, with films of Hollywood, also travels the patriotism (American Patriotism), ethics and the nature of evil in world, and American 'policemanship'. The core process of ISAs has global implications, since the 'ruling order' refers to only one country (Althusser, 1999). Cultural medium of cinema, being a soft power, uses pleasure to get such submission, which internally and externally guarantees the continued consumption of its items in extensive international contexts. 'Submission' concerns itself with the generation of notions about American goodwill and universality, to help the mythos of American global power.

Most of the Hollywood films are not pronounced propaganda productions, in any discrete or open sense. The form of entertainment is thoroughly escapist, as very few people are usually interested in watching a 'lifelike' film. These films do not need any direct link with actual world or ideological or political issues. There are, in fact, other factors that anchor the ship of films in Hollywood, finance and defence. So, "the producer... expresses ideology differently, not as a personal preference or artistic vision, but as mediated by mainstream institutions like government agencies, think tanks, banks and studios, which transmit ideology in the guise of market decisions... Hollywood is a business, and films avoid antagonising significant blocks of viewers; they have no incentive to be politically clear" (King, 2002). Films tend to tap the pulse of the audience before showcasing, and at every step of production.

These days it all starts with the trailer that public pulse is ascertained by the way people react to the 2-minute miniature of actual film. Consequently, a lot of changes take place in terms of deleting or reshooting scenes, improving graphics, etc.

1.8 Ideology Vs. Commercialism

Publicity is vital component of revenue generation in Hollywood, whereas ideological underpinnings act as secondary agenda. Wagnleitner and May (2000) believes that, even the commercial aspect of films follows the ideology of capitalism, the one based in American model of infused liberalism and democracy. The commercial motives overtake all other softer goals of film making, except for independent films where financial returns are overshadowed by performance and art of acting and production. Thus, it is not any surprise that “the Hollywood film - with its emphasis on individualism, competition, the cleansing forces of the market, the freedom of choice, and especially the melting pot - became the most influential iconographic inventory of the capitalist ethos and U.S. democracy in the twentieth century” (Wagnleitner & May, 2000, p.12). In fact, Hollywood has (in the past) been able to pull off an amazing and interesting Wilsonian flexible aesthetic ability by joining together its commercial interests with especially American thinking that leads to “claims by Hollywood marketers and apologists that its films maintain global appeal through universal narratives and the expression of American populist values” (Herbert, 2002, p.30). One of the leading directors of early Hollywood, D. W. Griffith (himself a personal correspondent of President Wilson), expressed the potential for the union of American ideals with the ‘universal language’ of film in deliberately Wilsonian terms:

Are we not making the world safe for democracy, American democracy, through motion pictures? The increase of knowledge, the shattering of old superstitions, the sense of beauty has all gone forward with the progress of the screen. Our heroes are always democratic. The ordinary virtues of American life triumph. No Toryism. No Socialism (cited in Mayer 1947, p.36).

Griffith's statement is unhappily Ameritocratic and the other way around, too. Although Griffith and Wilson considered democracy as the befitting form of government, this term, in its use even inside American, didn't translate as equal thinking of a state where all things are equal like fairness and freedom.

1.8.1 Hollywood: Dominating the Global Discourse

However, nothing is clear not even in its earliest visible signs, there was a perception or a sign about Hollywood that it had the constructive outcome on the individuals who saw its products. Films were engaging social items as well as became shop windows for American (that are bought and sold), ways of living and values; tools which could be detailed and sent out to reinforce country-loving at home and encourage agreement in other countries. The president of MPPDA (Motion Picture Producers and Distributor of America), Will Hays, between 1922 and 1945, asserted that the films were much more than mere vehicles of joy: "We are going to sell America to the world with American motion pictures" (1923, cited in Huckins, 1997). It can be believed that Hays (1955) referred to films as the perfect place for economic showcasing of America as a commodity. In his speech in 1938, he explains the special link between cinema and American products and values:

There is a special reason why America should have given birth and prosperous nurture to the motion picture and its worldwide entertainment. America in the very literal sense is truly the world-state. All races, all creeds, all men are to be found here, working, sharing, and developing, side by side in more friendship among greater diversities of tribes and men than all the previous history of the world discloses. Our country represents the greatest single unity of races, people, and culture. Is it not possible that very quality enabled America to express itself by the creation and development of the motion picture? (Hays, 1955, p. 216)

The historical mistake of Hays' claims for America, regarding the place of the motion picture hints to the link between Ameritocratic ideas of American universality ('all races, all religious beliefs, all men') and film as universal language. In fact, for Hays, the last thing just mentioned unavoidably is a result from the first thing just mentioned, and by the time he wrote his life stories he thought about films as "...at the end of fifty years' travelling the American Movement Picture Industry stood on a mountaintop from which the

guiding light of its silver screen was sending rays of light and colour and joy into every corner of the earth” (Hays, 1955, p. 217). So, “beyond most important/final/moneymaking (things to think carefully about), Hollywood brings across a long-term commitment to a core set of values and beliefs (desire to do things for yourself and not be like others), a system where people own money and valuable things, liberalism and system or country where leaders are chosen by votes” (Fraser, 2014, p.33).It has often been argued that Hollywood's position of worldwide cultural control represents a universal support of these values. For example, Jack Valenti, President of the MPAA from 1966 to 2004, proudly expressed:

It is a fact, blessedly confirmed, that the American film is affectionately received by viewers of all races, cultures and creeds on all continents amid turmoil and stress as well as hope and promise. This isn't happenstance. It's the confluent of creative reach, storytelling skill, decision making by top studio executives and the interlocking exertions of distribution and marketing artisans (Miller, 2001, p. 24).

Valenti's argument apparently confuses the fact of Hollywood's worldwide market control receiving sweet and kind reception everywhere. Americans values cannot be discounted for in its entirety as 'universal' stories of Hollywood film. In fact, Riegler (2014) has argued that “the United States has been a receiver as much as an exporter of worldwide culture” and so “the conception of a well/pleasing and clearly American culture - encircling the globe, inserting its values on foreign minds - has always been a very old /untrue story” (p.116). Certainly, such a conception is overly simple, but 'very old /untrue stories' must at least have elements of truth, or else they would not also have ability to last. American values may not be 'implanted', but they are presented and projected. America may well be internally dealing with many kinds of people or things and is filling with arguments and disagreements, but this does not prevent an international perception of America. The detailed fabric of the stars and stripes appears worldwide as just one flag.

Just as it is difficult to prove that Hollywood is not welcomed everywhere as being too American, it is equally daunting to claim that Hollywood is successful just due to the huge budgets and facilities at its disposal. There must be something inside the films that create demand worldwide. Based on the simple rule of demand and supply, other countries

consuming Hollywood films “would not have to regulate to limit their import unless there was sufficient domestic demand to warrant doing so” (Olson, 2004, p.115). According to Wasser (2004), “the point is not whether international viewers are actually convinced to get involved with such images but that film producers set for themselves the job of representing America that is a dreamscape for ‘universal’ desires rather than a historic reality” (p. 431). Again, such a universal dreamscape is a strange mixture of thinking and interests. Commercial interests are good because of a need that was met or a goal that was reached, in products that offer “a variety of symbols/pictures and viewpoints that have different meanings for different viewers at different times in different countries” (Ueno, 2006, p.22). Often within blockbuster, national thinking is cooked in so much that America, and only America, can offer the space from which such different meanings can be incorporated, and which can absorb differences.

1.8.2 Hollywood’s Cultural Outreach

A scholar, Larry Gross, director of the University of Southern California Annenberg Communications School, commented that media representation is social power and such medium is a social state where two things are not the same (2008), p. 2). This is at the very heart of why the representation of gender, race, religion, etc. in film, and additionally in different types of media, is so critical and why templates have been used in film and in different types of media. Films are an especially important source of social identity construction (Seel, 2008). Research shows that repeated themes in films, newspapers, web sites, and TV influence the way we view social reality. Such messages suggest us to interact with others in a certain manner, and “tell us what to do, how to behave, and how to reduce doubt related to a situation or big picture. The messages tell us how we are supposed to act per our (male/female status), as well as to what we may hope to get” (Holmes, 2009). TV, internet, etc. bring across and reinforce cultural ideas (Seel, 2008). Films are like messenger which are based on ideas. Through their stories they show us the values and ideas of our communities of people, organisations, and communities. Mintz and Roberts (2001) claim that, “of all the products of popular culture, none is more sharply etched in everyone’s imagination than the films” (1993, p. 1). The effect of films on culture is so widespread that even those who have not seen hugely popular film or book can often quote lines from the popular films or instantly recognise images or characters from the films. Mass advertising of films to the public aids in this widespread

nature. A film's message reaches us "not only on the silver screen, but through images presented on television, in print media, on the Internet, and in merchandising tie-ins" (Mintz & Roberts, 2001, pp. 1-2). Films continue to serve as a medium for shaping cultural values and thinking - helped by their growing widespread nature in our cultural mind (Mintz & Roberts, 2001, p. 4).

Hollywood has a history of being a tool, instead of being just a part of American cultural representation across the world. In doing so it has been heavily funded and made to represent belief systems, cultures and managing financial and political preferences of the producers. The events of 9/11 further triggered the idea. From that time onwards, the qualities that make a man, adding military qualities, has been accepted as the only solution to fight against all types of problems in the world. This sensible perspective of what is and is not imperative for inclusion, in terms of identities, into films can be seen in the latest productions.

1.9 Hollywood and Events of 9/11

The event of 9/11 provided an opportunity to Hollywood to capitalise on. Hollywood produced several war films about the attacks, thus amassing returns from cinematic representations of war, violence, fears of terrorism, attacks, battles, militarism and justified causes. In fact, films that depicted the US and its superheroes as a very imperialistic nation prepared to set the world straight, were appealing to US viewers as they were "wounded (and) vengeful" (Boggs & Pollard, 2007).

Later in their research, Boggs and Pollard (2007) define that media and popular culture have worked as forms of military propaganda since the US government has no official propaganda machines (p.13). They continue to describe media and popular culture as a tool to spread "ideological hegemony" that includes the belief that there requires to be "globalised permanent war system to protect against imminent foreign threats, and, of course, for old-fashioned patriotism" (p.14). Boggs and Pollard (2007) also explains that war films help in justifying the US militarisation irrespective of any anti-militaristic film that is also released (p.16). This is perhaps because of zeitgeist that has developed over many decades that deeply connect the military and film environment.

One such film, *Act of Valour* presents an example of a film that is being used to promote patriotism and confirm militarism in its dialogues and graphics. This film was used to promote

the Navy SEALs and attract recruits (Anderson, 2006). According to Anderson (2006), compared to other war films this film even used real SEALs to depict the characters as the producers felt that “actors could misinterpret the US Navy SEALs, as they have before the film” (p.24). He further explains that despite the film being released throughout the nation and having the appearance of a “Hollywood” film, the Public Relations division in the Pentagon was involved and even decided what should be taken out of the film that they deemed “undesirable” (p.22). Anderson also compares *Act of Valor* to war film about the Vietnam war. He remarks that while films that portrayed the Vietnam war were critical of the military, *Act of Valor* overlooks the “reality” of war and mainly provides “patriotism” and an unrealistic view of war that can make the viewers believe that militarism is essential. War films, therefore, deserve to be examined to determine how themes related to militarism are employed for the promotion of unrealistic view of war.

1.9.1 Hollywood and A Nation in Trauma

This is the view of certain scholars that following 9/11, Hollywood films used to help people cope with the aftermath of the attacks (Riegler, 2014). Riegler (2014) explains that films released after 9/11 symbolise the “unbroken spirit, strove to reassert the symbolic coordinates of the prevailing American reality, and mobilised for a response to new challenge” (p.104). According to Dargis (2013), Steven Soderbergh, a retired film-maker remarked that people in the US seem to be suffering from post-traumatic stress since 9/11 attacks. It is because of this, that there is huge number of viewers for escapist films that do not examine politics, but rather present a simplistic view of “good “and “evil” in fantasy. Despite that comic books adaptation are turning into blockbusters films recently and in current culture. It was claimed by Hollywood that they would change their film to be “gentler” and even cancelled film projects or changed them. Riegler (2014) is of the view that soon after the invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001, Hollywood joined the military by releasing films like *Black Hawk Down* (2001). He also remarks on how Hollywood embarked on rewriting of the “War on Terror” rapidly, like the popular culture during the World War II, but stressed on the homecomings of soldiers and their family problems (p.112).

There is a hidden feeling in telling narratives of homecomings of soldiers and their family problems that since the soldiers came back home, it does not mean that the war has ended (Grajeda, 2014). Grajeda (2014) opines that films whose story is about the return of the

soldiers to home indicate their struggles to re-join society (p.59). These films, having no end, strengthen the fact that the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are a “forever war” and the “long war”, as finally, these two wars are part of the War on Terror which always has potential conflict (p.56). Another scholar suggests that despite the depiction of the “forever war”, viewers appear to go for those that suggest that the US is “winning” the War on Terror (Lee, 2015, p.71). The arrest and death of Osama bin Laden, for instance, effected a change in Hollywood, with the great success of a film like *American Sniper* (2014) earning an amount of \$430 million. Hollywood was made to produce *American Sniper* (2014), as war films that were released previously brought little success. For example, *The Hurt Locker* (2009) won six Academy Awards, including Best Picture, earning “only \$17 million in profit in the US”. Similarly, *Zero Dark Thirty*, about the capture of Osama Bin Laden, stayed on top of box office for some time, but faded away in archive. The viewers, therefore, prefer films that reinforce successful militarism, representation of handling global peace problems etc. Establishing this ground, and trying with war films, Hollywood learned that such films may be too direct and lack commercial glamour. Mere patriotism has not been ensuring global financial returns because US war films may try to set the ‘narrative’ and ‘truth’ straight but they fail to inspire global audience who cannot relate fully to American defensive stance in films against ‘others’, which could be anyone in the globe but not American.

Like it is discussed in previous sections, Hollywood runs on numbers and net profit from films is crucial for its existence and hegemony worldwide. The attention, hence, after 9/11 tilted towards fantasy action films, i.e. superhero, futuristic otherworldly stuff. In such films the nationalities and geolocations and space-time are either muted or altered. The audience is presented with a story-like film where they tend to toe the storyline of multi-part or standalone films. The following section discusses the stage in between full-blown war films and fantasy superhero films. This middle ground can be termed non-war or anti-war films.

1.10 Post-9/11 Non-War Films

The cultural zeitgeist in vogue after 9/11 esteemed militarism, yet some war films did not depict militarisation as being ever beneficial. For example, Steven Spielberg’s *War Horse* (2011) displays a bit shift on how latest films portray militarism. David Cox (2012) remarks that previous films produced by Spielberg, added to the idea of military preparedness, *War*

Horse changes the view on war. This film shows the “futility” of WWI, a feeling the US public held about the war in the Middle East at the time of the release of the film (Cox, 2012).

Another scholar states that other films about the “futility” of war are *Flags of Our Father* (2006) and *Letters from Iwo Jima* (2006) (Casey, 2011). In the two films, it was depicted what was thought of to be justification of the war, which produced a myth in its history. This myth tells that Iwo Jima’s capture was essential for the war in Pacific, as it would provide an important site to US planes for landing and refuelling purposes. But this rationale did not form the cause for capturing the island. This theory was used by the military following the success of the war and the marines suffered high casualties (Casey, 2011). Even though, two sides of the war, i.e. US and Japan, were depicted in both the films, the films are not entirely against militarism, for, as asserted by Casey (2011), they would alienate part of the intended viewers (p.29). The viewers have been wanting to see films which showed the US military resolving against the “enemy”, especially in this “good” war and as such no films would be accepted if it deviates from this view. Nevertheless, these films have been successful in showing the war as “hell”, that despite a justification of it, it is not always necessary (p.28). Though some war films depict the “hell” that persons combating experience, they might promote a kind of masculinity in these persons.

According to some scholars, masculinity is promoted by militarism. As such, this study finds it imperative to investigate discursive construction of masculinity using militarism in films. Also, it aims to find out how masculinity keeps developing with every changing social milieu. What starts as militarised masculinity, right after 9/11, transitions into further shades of masculinity, in shapes of superheroes, that Americans and the world in general have been looking up to or are made to idealise. So, like anything else, whatever American public has been going through, the world has been shown to follow the suit too. Hence the identities formed socio-culturally through films, in the backdrop of political events of 9/11, were further supplied globally through Hollywood films, for the world to chew on.

1.11 Before and After 9/11 Superhero films

The incident of 9/11 exerted a phenomenal impact on Hollywood ushering in the era of superhero movies that culminated with the Russo brothers’ closing chapter in the Infinity Saga. *Avengers: Endgame* (2019) demonstrated a distinctive treatment of 9/11, both in the

context of the MCU and wider superhero cinema. In order to develop comprehensive understanding of Hollywood obsession with 9/11, we must trace its starting point and evolution.

Long before 2001, the genre of Superhero emerged in 1978 with Richard Donner's movie *Superman* followed by a decade, preceding 9/11, characterized with sporadic appearance of masked vigilantes on the silver screen especially in a trio of Batman and X-Men movies. Besides the major driving factor of 9/11, advancement in Computer-generated Imagery (CGI) and special effects lent plausibility to incredible actions of characters such as Spider-Man's swinging through Manhattan, Hulk crushing through everything in his path with photogenic realism, Nicholas Cage playing a flaming skeleton in *Ghost Rider*, etc. However, the previous superhero films never attained such popularity and demand. The critics theorized that the consciousness about the emergence of new America in the wake of 9/11 propelled this seemingly unquenchable eagerness. Therefore, superhero movies could be construed as "endless attempts to rewrite 9/11" in the American consciousness. A Vox writer, Todd Van Der Werff, later put it, in backdrop of combats between good and evil in US city skylines in which America would come out victoriously.

The modern superhero cinema turned into a forum that was used by America for the elimination of its lurking fears in the post-9/11 era. The destruction of the Twin Towers posed a problem for Sony in the post-production of its first *Spider-Man* movie that was directed by Sam Raimi starring Tobey Maguire. The studio had to erase a scene, similar to *Jurassic Park III* and Tim Burton's *Planet of the Apes*, from the film's teaser trailer which featured Peter Parker catching a helicopter full of bank robbers in a giant web between the Twin Towers. In addition to *Spider-Man*, numerous films from 2002 to 3 such as *Zoolander* and *Men in Black II* had to erase the scenes of monuments from the city's skyline.

Without ever acknowledging the real-world event of 9/11, Raimi's *Spider-Man* that enkindled optimism by paying a tribute to New York City, earned \$114m on its opening weekend. It not only sparked burgeoning need to broadcast myriads of similar modernistic superheroes on the screens but also sent an emphatic message to studios that during turbulent times, panic-stricken audiences yearned for the surprising advent of redeemer or rescuer who would protect them from impending and inescapable threats of real life. Thus, it heralded an

era of the superhero movies characterized with the arrival of sequels of *Spider-Man*, *X-Men* and *Blade*. A *Fantastic Four* film was augmented, and *Hulk* was transferred to Ang Lee. Moreover, *HellBoy* and *Hancock* offered unconventional variations on the attires of superhero, with innovative *Daredevil*, *Elektra*, *Punisher*, *Catwoman* and *Superman* films announced before the MCU started to develop in 2008 (Shaheen, 2012).

Similarly, *The Dark Knight* in Christopher Nolan's movie posed a pertinent question, "How do you reckon with an anarchistic force whose very ideology is destruction? Similarly, Iron Man asked, "Did America help create the groups that now threatened them?" In that first instalment in the MCU, Tony Stark's captors are terrorists he had previously sold weapons to, which demonstrated America's guilt about the alleged and clandestine financial support to Osama Bin Laden by CIA in the decades preceding 9/11.

As the Post-9/11 introspection in comic book movies continued, Captain America who was ranked among the most nationalistic fictional hero of Marvel, was used to investigating the concepts of nationalism and propaganda. Later, the 9/11 allusions became more explicit in a 2012's film *The Avengers* which presented its final battle in the backdrop of New York, with unidentified aircraft striking into buildings, hurling its debris towards sidewalks below. In this fictional story, however, the designs of the invaders are foiled, Manhattan is saved and 9/11 is redrafted. Similarly, in 2013 Zack Snyder's *Man of Steel*, presented another attempt to rewrite the 9/11 event while filming a battle between Superman and Zod.

In the same year, with the production of *Iron Man 3* the New York Times was prompted to hint at the colonization of 9/11 and its aftermath by the movies. The movie makes a point that "Nothing's been the same since New York tragedy." Robert Downey Jr.'s narration begins in the film's first trailer, tantalizing a plot that would portray Bin Laden's as the attacks' mastermind expressing his violent manifesto through his video diatribes.

But the movie *Captain America: Winter Soldier*, offered a different angle on America's response to the attacks, boasting of militaristic firepower and technological advancement in satellites that can read a terrorist's DNA hiding in their camouflaged abodes. The battle of New York at the climax of *The Avengers* disseminated a message emphasizing the urgency of taking requisite measures to ensure the safety of Americans and reiterating the America's military advances into Iraq and augmented reconnaissance after the tragedy of 9/11.

MCU's The Infinity Saga comprised of 22 films, but most of the films were mere replications of the same plot: A Groundhog Day replaying of 9/11 and its consequences, America prevails thus easing recovery of the nation from the subconscious trauma. Breaking away from this tradition, the *Avengers: Endgame* substituted imaginative 9/11 revisionism with damage, agony and repentance. It resumed right from where *Avengers: Infinity War* left off, with the Avengers having been defeated and left with the only option to accept its reality and muster up courage to proceed.

After the lapse of five years, the movie depicted deserted boats bouncing against the docks at the feet of The Statue of Liberty, the tremors of Thanos' victory fully felt in scenes full of surprising stillness and quiet. The first act of the film is set in this backdrop and this mood in a genre dominated for 18 years as a means of eluding exactly this sense of bereavement. In the early 2000s, superhero cinema emerged as panacea to post-9/11 agony and fretfulness in the wake of 9/11. But *Avengers: Endgame* stretches out the desolation, the vulnerability, the repentance and reflected these real-life emotions of 9/11 in characters that felt like endgame of superhero cinema.

1.12 Narrative Authenticity of Blockbuster Films

Hollywood's primary purpose appears to tell stories to viewers, look for effects and inject certain ideas and thinking. Wagnleitner and May (2000) view it as "seeing is believing... reel facts become real facts" which is surely debatable (p. 12). In fact, "in its most common visible form it is evident that American media will give the world American values, even when the event (s) prove small effects" (Olson, 2004, p.116). The small effects however affect the total of something over time or take time to influence the behaviour. Olson (2004) argues that now the films are following a slightly different or extended agenda i.e. not just to display American values, but also repeat and affirm already established ones. He continues that "they no longer need to create a market for American products, because they can design products that act like they are native to it. Polysemy is built in. In the end it is necessary, selling the product, and that is better completed without having the heavy load of changing the culture first. The *Other* has become just another value to sell" (p.65). Now Hollywood no longer needs to bring attention to American values as the stage is long set. With every hugely popular film or book to show and tell people about a business around the

world, results in huge intellectual global engagement and revenue.

1.12.1 Defining Blockbuster Film

A simple definition of blockbuster has been put forth by Tannen (2013), which terms it as a film which has “a pre-sold properly... within a traditional film genre, usually supported by bankable stars (operating within their particular genre) and director” (p.78). Julian Stringer (2013) proposes a more ambiguous idea of the blockbuster. To him the blockbuster “has no essential characteristics” and links it up to an idea instead of a kind of film. Further, Stringer (2013) referring to a debate of film noir by James Larimore, terms the blockbuster as “a loose evolving system of claims and counterclaims” (p.3). That development has at its centre, box-office earnings. Geoffrey King (2010) finds the blockbuster plan as “part of an effort to create much wider viewers of a broader cultural event” (p.9). To complete this, King (2010) argues that studies circling blockbuster make use of the research of the market to indicate important issues that would attract the viewers who do not frequently watch films in cinema. Briefly, the blockbuster is deliberately given a position as a cultural exception.

It is not surprising that some blockbusters are hits whereas others are not as it is not ideal to anticipate the feelings of any culture. Nevertheless, this can be ascertained with the use of wisdom that only a few films garner exceptional revenues and represent cultural events. For fruitfully analysing these films and the violence therein, more ways of examination are required that can certainly help in bringing approach to the core issues of the films, relating to exposure of violence. It is, therefore, helpful to seek likeness between blockbusters. The claim made by Stringer (2013) about the lack of essential characteristics appears to be odd; the recognition of similarities does not actually mean that correlations are important to the blockbuster. For the purpose, a beginning point was furnished by *Star Wars* one of the films that commenced the blockbuster era.

As *Star Wars* was released, it received overwhelming success and response, so much so that the film at once attracted many a producer who by emulating it, wished to reproduce its theme for success brand as well as on specific story formation. The fact is that George Lucas, Director of *Star Wars*, plainly admitted that mythologist Campbell and Kean’s work had effect on the film especially in respect to the “hero’s journey”. The phenomenon of that journey was surely visible throughout many films that are not blockbuster.

Working on that approach, a means to examine the connection in a better way the Self and Other in blockbuster films would be based on narratology. The significance of the Self/Other concept to the development of cultural violence, masculinity and particularly parts of narratology are most helpful. For instance, Vladimir Propp's (2010) contribution on folk tales is notably beneficial for it examines the narratives in respect of a hero (the Self) and a Villain (the Other). This position better equalises the expression of cultural violence created by Galtung (2004), as that explanation is strongly affirmed to a *chosen/unchosen* binary which certainly expresses itself as Self and Other (p.297). In view of likeness, Propp (2010) work is adaptable to an analysis of the description of masculinity in blockbuster films.

With films being publicised heavily viewers are sure to watch them on the first day and later watch them multiple times. When the same films are released in DVDs or Blu-ray or 3D, they are consumed multiple times more. With streaming services, like Netflix, Amazon video etc. and all the social media publicity the same films are watched repeatedly. All this amounts to a heavy influence intended on the viewers. With the advent of smartphones and tablets the viewers are not at all limited by any geography to watch the films. With the streaming services in boom right now all that matters for the film watchers is to use any of the available platforms to watch the films at ease. Hollywood films, and particularly blockbuster films, are the perfect medium for getting out any such messages across the border and across any culture of country in the world.

Olson (2004) thinks about the polysemic characteristics of blockbuster products as that allows foreign viewers to project native values, beliefs, ceremonies, and series of actions and fit them into imported media. Such template-like role of Hollywood enables it "to become sneaky, silent, and foreign stories that secretly act like native, like Greek gifts to Troy, but with Trojan people inside the horse" (p.114). Olson's argument that something like clearness must exist is convincing, which is after all, the very best expression of a commercial sense of films. It promises as how local values are attached to imported film. Hollywood has successfully created example that should be copied for worldwide films houses to follow. So, the world now copies and picks values. Bollywood Sci-Fi and superhero films are a proof. Like *Krish*, *the One*, *2.0*, etc. and the list is a long one of Hollywood influenced Bollywood films to an extent that Bollywood is probably a very heavily plagiarised version of Hollywood and international films for the Urdu-Hindi

speaking or understanding population worldwide.

1.13 Film Discursive Acts and Identity Construction

In the divergent wealth of literature following 9/11, the question of representation remains daunting. The events of 9/11 resulted in direct and indirect cataloguing of nations through media, especially through camera lenses. The battle for representation continues to date, wherein the global political map, or stereotypes and clichés continue to reflect on screen. An identity, a mental construct, is produced, reproduced, transformed and dismantled, discursively (Wodak, 2001). The institutional and material social conditions and practices interrelate with discursive practices. In imagining national singularity and homogeneity, members of a national community simultaneously construct the distinctions between themselves and other nations (Wodak, 2001). This is the genesis of identities and representations constructed in films too, followed purposefully by producers and production houses.

A film uses discursive acts to establish patterns to reinforce or create a message. Through discourses, actors constitute objects of knowledge, situations and social roles as well as identities and interpersonal relations between different social groups and those who interact with them (Fairclough, 2015). Furthermore, discursive acts are socially constitutive in a variety of ways. Firstly, they are largely responsible for the genesis, production and construction of social conditions. Secondly, they can contribute to the restoration, legitimation or relativization of a social status quo. Thirdly, discursive acts are employed to maintain and reproduce the status quo. Finally, discursive practice may be effective in transforming, dismantling or even destroying the status quo.

On a social level, through linguistic representation in various dialogic contexts, such as films, discursive practices may influence the formation of groups and serve to establish or conceal relations of power and dominance between interactants, between social groups and classes, between men and women and between ethnic, religious, sexual, political, cultural and subcultural majorities and minorities (Danesi, 2002).

1.14 Gender Identities Post 9/11

The cultural zeitgeist also impacts, the gender discourse i.e. how gender is viewed and

talked about in society. Gender is regarded as a social construct, by the feminist scholars of age, and its norms are evolved by society and people are assigned a gender that they must perform (Do Rozario, 2004). To the society, people be characterised as ‘boy’ or ‘girl’, to possess certain behavioural features, that must match with two labels. The diversification of a boy/girl has been created by labelling of behavioural features, that is taken as the norm, and if this ‘rule’ is not followed by any behaviour, is regarded as abnormal. Moreover, binary differences in language and discourse have limited the understanding of masculinity and femininity (Do Rozario, 2004). According to the rule about binary oppositions in language, masculinity is the opposite of femininity and vice versa. As such the categories for behavioural traits have been limited by the binary opposition to be either masculine or feminine.

With this construction of characteristics of behaviour, the hegemonic masculinity is established and strengthened. Barrett (1996) describes hegemonic masculinity as a “particular idealised image of masculinity in relation to which images of femininity and other masculinities are marginalised and subordinated” (p.130). Other groups, through hegemonic masculinity, are being less-than-the-ideal male figure. Moreover, the hegemonic masculinity also includes.... “the process by which these groups and ideals form, the organisational situations and constraints that shape and construct these ideals and groups” (Barrett, 1996, p.130). Therefore, it must be marked how these masculinities are evolved. This is important for this study to observe hegemonic masculinity in militaristic situations.

The other aspect of a more human masculinity is the construct from early 20th century, known as the New Man, a popular notion during second wave of feminism, that men are considerate of female emotions, duties, and are supportive. This idea did not stay strong as more male-oriented literary and cinematic productions emerged. With the culminating point of 9/11 events, masculinity morphed into hegemonic and militaristic one, like discussed above and visible more strikingly in MCU movies. However, last decade has seen a visible change in the way the New Man narrative is making a comeback. Gillam and Wooden (2008), Finklea (2014) and Decker (2010) have observed the change in masculinity representation and this theme shows that male characters have deviated from the common older male presentations in the media. According to Finklea (2014) and Towbin et al. (2004), emotions have played a vital role in transition from Old man to New man. The commonly seen male emotions are only anger, valour or frustrations. Understanding and then portrayal of love and related emotions by

the male characters comes only after they have put their powers aside. They have to put their pride aside to express these emotions.

Male protagonists have been displayed as having emotions, weaknesses and failures compared to powerful and able females. The most visible shift appeared in animated films in early 2000s. DC has been at the forefront of female representations for a very long time. Its owning Pixar Animation Studios appeared to be a positive digression from its focus on princesses and delicate emotions. In DC/Pixar animations, male characters, be it a car, fish, stuffed toy etc. strikingly echo the evolution of boys or men, from being ‘regularly’ macho to surprisingly soft, weak and at times effeminate.

For this particular idea MCU, being a trans-media phenomenon, deserves to be given scholarly deliberation and evaluation. The admiration of the MCU indicates that this is a cultural, ideological phenomenon that can influence many people in the US as well as world over. Many of the films, analysed for their militaristic topics, are certainly about the US military and wars but discreetly. The MCU films show a transition from militaristic stance, while DC/Pixar films transit from macho, to the New Man. There exists, however, a difference in analysing films based on comic books and militarism within the scholarly research work. This is perhaps because the films are simply children’s films and only about “good versus evil”. This study, nevertheless, has examined the extent of application and display of these shades of masculinity within MCU and DC. In order to understand the centrality of DC and MCU is catering to certain demographic is global society, since WWI, a historical purview of these two studios and their films, is presented in the next section. This section is a continuous scholarly commentary about the way these films have proved pivotal in fulfilment of socio-political aims of the studios, a strand of which is the whole topic of this dissertation.

1.15 The Display and Construction of Identities

It appears that studies about the identity construction can be divided into two overlapping areas i.e. those for and against the premise that identities can be constructed and deconstructed through visual medium of TV, films and theatre. Research shows that how the films help in forming illustration, cultural opinions and continue the identities shown on screen. So, based on the discussion so far about detail of identity construction, it can be divided into two big groups, i.e. how does films help to inform controlled opinions, and how does it apply

filter on established identities on the screen.

So, the object of this study is to achieve two tasks. The first job is to examine the development of identity in hugely popular film or comic-book based films that include 9/11 backdrop in identifying how they clearly reflect wishes and concerns from post-9/11 periods. With the established definition of identity construction put forward by Galtung (2004), this analysis suggests different kinds of identities construction, both clear and inexplicit. At the same time the analysis reserves how the reaction to 9/11 finally was different from the dreams explained by the identity construction in post-9/11 hugely popular films.

Based on this, second task this thesis has attempted is to trace and pinpoint the instances of masculine identity construction, as well as evolution in blockbuster films, not opposed to feminism or feminist perspective, but rather as a construct that has close links with the kind of real-life masculinity experienced. However, this thesis has explored ways of seeing successful blockbusters as cultural and political barometer that can be applied to measure the extent of identity construction approved at a wider cultural and social level.

1.16 Objective and Research Questions

The themes that are symbolised in films usually represent the cultural zeitgeist. Though people see these films as fiction, but these are ideal to propagate constructs, particularly when the viewers is fully submissive. This ever-ready type of viewers may not certainly focus on ideologies in the films. Besides, the connection of the films in franchise through storylines, provides a fan conviction to go on seeing the films, curious to know how the stories run in each film, that further cements ideologies. The present zeitgeist, thus, goes on and the ideologies being reinforced in these multi-part films, like Marvel films, or fragmented storyline films, like in Disney Corporation, are not questioned by the viewers nor they are aware of them.

It is due to this fact that this thesis focuses on the following objectives;

1. The nature of representation of masculinity that has evolved drastically in the backdrop of 9/11 and following socio-political events worldwide. This study, therefore, proposes that the examination of masculinity in the Captain America films is significant as several films are being based on these stories (e.g. *Captain America; The First Avenger* (2011) and others). Other films' narratives have also been adapted into different films, e.g. the *Iron*

Man, Hulk, Thor, etc. and those, too, have militaristic topics.

It is important that these films, especially the character Captain America, normally symbolise a Manichaeistic view, the idea that the “forces of light and goodness are destined to confront evildoers,” and jingoism too, which is the “ease in which a majority of Americans can be mobilised behind military venture “(Boggs & Pollard, 2007, p. 17-18). Moreover, Captain America is a “representative of national identity one must not ignore the display of his physical body as a marker of his heroic manhood” (Barbour, 2015, p. 277). What Captain America represents as the national identity, is the conviction that “heroic manhood” is gained through hyper-masculinity. Barbour (2015) remarks that the “transformation of Rogers into Captain America enacts that fantasy of instantaneous metamorphosis from weakling to superhero” (p. 279). Captain America, who symbolizes the final wish-fulfilling fantasy, transforms from weakling to superhero ever again- he is forever the superman. While eminent scholars like Boggs and Pollard, refer to the militaristic topics in superhero films, they do not address it from the perspective of evolved masculinity in films, thus leaving a gap in the literature.

2. Moreover, to provide a parallel version of masculinity in an alternate film universe of DC comics, I have analysed two popular series of animation blockbuster film, that is *Toy Story 3*(2010) and *Cars* (2006). DC comics, after acquiring Pixar pictures, has been able to provide its version of many social constructs. In this comparative analysis I have investigated how masculinity is projected to younger viewers over two different major film series.

Displaying gender related themes has been one of the most attractive and contemporary topics in all ages, throughout all sorts of media, and a favourite theme for research. Although the popularity of gender issues is not new in films and much has been filmed with this perspective, the research on Pixar animated films has not garnered much attention for such themes. The only notable effort to do a cross-sectional quantitative gender analysis of Pixar films has been carried out by Decker (2010). His data, though unique in nature and pursuit, highlights many patterns that require individual in-depth study. His collection outlines and lists many commonalities yet his work deserves further examination of data. An altered design of Wiersma’s coding pattern was utilised by Decker (2010) to study

human subjects, which he applied on humanised animated robot, car, fish, etc. This study utilises this space of academic qualitative inquiry of Pixar films, along with Marvel stereotypical films.

To uncover deeper meanings in Pixar films, as a parallel to hyper-masculinity projected by Marvel, this study aims at finding the patterns of dialogical decisions that lead towards built-up of masculinity in these films. Masculinity in DC Films exists in a very different form. To further investigate the intrinsic differences between the masculinity projection of Disney and Marvel, a historical preview is also done, for better understanding the political and cultural ties these studios have been having with American society. The fact that within the same imaginary landscape of Pixar animated film, there are multiple distinct male characters who exhibit various shades of masculinity. Unlike MCU, where the protagonist Captain America has been the only evolving male centrepiece, DC/Pixar films are analysed for internal thematic similarities within the characters and with Captain America. With this backdrop, I have attempted to investigate the following research questions.

1. How do films construct masculinity through dialogues, in post-9/11 milieu?
2. How do MCU/DC promote varying versions of masculinity through their productions i.e. militaristic masculinity and the New man masculinity?
3. Are there discursive proofs, dialogues, of the evolution of these masculinities over time, which can be analysed?

1.17 Operational Definitions

- 1) Militarised Masculinity: The extreme version of masculinity that believes every problem needs to be settled with force, rather than with softer means of negotiation.
- 2) Hegemonic Masculinity: The form of masculinity that exercise absolute control on the basis of being male. This one threatens the existence of feminism in all forms of discourse.
- 3) Hyper-Masculinity: The form of masculinity that does not account for weakness or fragility. In being so, it projects a hero like persona every time, which is quite distant from real-life men.
- 4) Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU): It refers to the imaginary universe Marvel comics have created over years, with a host of super heroes and villains and battles. The same

imaginary world and its stories are covered in Marvel's superhero movies.

- 5) Blockbuster Movie: A blockbuster movie is also known as chartbuster film that does phenomenally good at the box-office and is able to pull larger audiences over time.
- 6) Discursive Identity Construction: The idea that identities, like race, religion, gender, etc. are primarily produced using language (discursive means) in movies and are complemented by other filmic techniques, like camera angles, music, dress, etc.

1.18 Chapter Breakdown

In the following Chapter Two, the literature on films and trends that followed 9/11 is discussed at stretch. Also, there is discussion about the studies of blockbuster films as how they affect certain social fabric in America and globally. Moreover, the main theme of the thesis is discussed that how masculinity gets translated politically through language inside a film viewing.

In the same chapter it has been discussed that how main production houses, namely DC and MCU, have had immense influence in shaping the way modern films are consumed. Their history, as well as their impact on the current blockbuster, has been discussed. It must be noted that these top production houses have been mainly producing comics, which have always been having a massive outreach in America since WWI and elsewhere and have been a great source for inspiring many blockbuster films.

Chapter Three outlines and discusses methodology and the key terms. It also discusses media, language and film theories.

Chapter Four comprises of the content analysis of MCU. The films are discussed individually and Captain America's projection of militarised masculinity has been approached thematically.

Chapter Five follows exploration of masculinity in two iconic films by DC comics and Pixar. These animation films, though appear to be made for the children, are very potent in themes and are well thought of, even for elderly viewers. All of this has been discussed in the backdrop of the current cultural milieu.

Chapter Six consists of the critical insights, conclusion and the discussion on how the studies can be taken further.

This dissertation follows APA (American Psychological Association) format (6th edition) guidelines for citation of sources, both digital and library, used in this research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Media Portrayal of 9/11

The terrorist attacks of 9/11 resulted in a gigantic amount of cultural and critical academic production, both in print and media. The task of carefully analysing these different ‘takes’ on the event, its background and aftermaths is complex as well as daunting. As a focusing event, 9/11 changed ways of addressing terrorism. The scale of the devastation created the climate of urgency for adopting new measures against the threat. It opened a new chapter in the history of terrorism. As a focusing event, 9/11 changed the perception of the threat as well as means of fighting it. The scale of the attacks questioned the nature of contemporary terrorism, suggesting that the threat states are facing today might be significantly different from that of the past. Subsequently, 9/11 prompted the evolution of the notion of “new” terrorism – a threat which requires new responses. Because of the idea of “new” terrorism a new counterterrorist paradigm of the “war on terror” emerged. The “war on terror” and the ensuing military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq shifted the focus of counterterrorism from deterrence to pre-emption, and military force has come to the fore as a means of fighting terrorism. In turn, it has become more acceptable in the eyes of the international community to employ military force not only against terrorism but also against ethno-nationalist separatist conflicts framed as a terrorist threat.

The “war on terror” itself presents a discourse, which has affected approaches to counterterrorism. For instance, as Jackson (2013) finds, based on discourse analysis of speeches, addresses and interviews of the Bush administration, instead of an objective representation of the counterterrorist reality, the “war on terror” is “a deliberately and meticulously composed set of words, assumptions, metaphors, grammatical forms, myths and forms of knowledge – it is a carefully constructed discourse.” The language of the “war on terror,” Jackson (2013) concludes, is targeted at legitimising the current approach to counterterrorism and marginalising the alternatives. As scholars have pointed out, setting the fight against terrorism in terms of a “war” (as opposed to a police operation or negotiations,

for example), places significance with military means, focusing on a military victory. As a result, terrorism is no longer treated as a crime, but is elevated to the status of an enemy at war, and the military alternative becomes the leading solution.

The 9/11 event is a crucial point of study for this thesis, due to broad-based changes it brings about not only to United States but the world. More important is the fact that those changes were instant. The attention on the time around 9/11 brings a stronger historical opportunity. For the purpose this thesis covers the post-9/11 period from 2009 to 2013, which includes the development and effective execution of Bush Doctrine through the US military. This is necessary to understand how Hollywood blockbuster films have been positioned to further the political agenda and hence pushed forward identity constructs at different levels.

2.2 9/11 Filmographies

Many academicians have worked towards grouping these productions to better understand the outreach and consequences in different geographical circumstances. In his book, *Firestorm: American Film in the Age of Terrorism* Stephen Prince (2009), tries to pinpoint an archetype of media production, a filmography, that sums up the tone of war of terror-related TV and film productions. He intelligently intertwines elements of many topical and generic productions, from coverage of Iraq and Afghan war to fictional narratives and related T.V programs. Eventually, Prince (2009) expands his canvas by including how action, horror and superhero films were massively hit during 2001-2009, the year his book was in market.

Some such earlier works began to analyse media responses to 9/11 and began sifting factual from exaggerated accounts. One such notable work of Wheeler Winston Dixon (2014) is the collection called, *Film and Television after 9/11*. Like Prince, Wheeler's collection encompasses a fuller cultural account of film for the "age of terrorism." Douglas Kellner (2011) in his book *Cinema Wars*, refers to the similar agenda of films and exemplifies that the films produced at the same moment Bush-Cheney administration were creating apparatuses of torture "around the world, which perhaps does not go far enough in interrogating the cultural significance of torture"(p.77). Two other writings help establish filmographic scenario of Hollywood's cinema of terrorism; they also attempt to dig deep into the history of this brand-new genre. Helena Vanhala's *The Depiction of Terrorism in Blockbuster Hollywood Films*

1980-2001 provides amazing insights into the films before 9/11, that bonded politics with cinema. Vanhala (2011) wants “to offer an understanding of how economic interests, intertwined with U.S. foreign policy interests, have influenced the portrayal of international terrorism in blockbuster Hollywood films”(p.101). Vanhala (2011) believes that the relationship between these two is quite single-sided, even though there are constant parallels between the sights and sounds of the actual films and real-time events.

Some films even set the tone for the forthcoming predicted events, which in many cases happened. A large amount of weapons technology, for instance, shown in some futuristic films and cartoons eventually were materialized in real warfare. Despite consistently offering parallels between the words and images of films and actual events, relies on a relationship between the two that is largely unidirectional. Thus, like Prince’s book, this writing proves to be a rich resource for those trying to decipher the shifting political, ethnic and economic milieu in mysterious consonance with cinematic portrayal of terrorism behind every wrong in the world. Hence came to be the era of superhero films, a saviour or group of them, to take matters ‘in their hands’ to ‘save the world’. All this is achieved through the scripts that use situation-specific language. A close look at the box office champion franchises after 2001 surprises one to find how multiple chapters of the *Harry Potter*, *Shrek*, *Toy Story*, *Spider-Man*, *Lord of the Rings*, and *Pirates of the Caribbean* series, can thrive successfully without possessing the ingredients of films in the age of terrorism. For sure, the role of films other than horror or action, as a possible response to 9/11, needs to be carefully analysed in future (. Peter Paik (2010) asserts that as “we cannot get out of or beyond the age of terror while Hollywood’s films promise us otherwise; heroes and narrative denouements provide resolution and closure, an end point to anxieties that seem otherwise so inescapable”(p.14). Even without direct focus on such non-terror films, the assertions of Prince, Vanhala, and Cettl relate to other films of the post-9/11 period. The above-mentioned works relating to cinema of terrorism prove to be a commendable basis of current study.

Many other works sharply scrutinize 9/11 and the academic legacy it became. Jeff Birkenstein, Anna Froula, and Karen Randell collectively edited *Refraining 9/11*, using pop culture “as a profound discursive site of anxiety and discussion” of the aftershocks of that horrible day (Birkenstein, Froula, & Randell, 2010). The collections exhibit unique richness as in the first half it addresses films while in the remaining collection explores evolution of

comics, games, T.V and even music.

Two other significant essay collections identify popular culture as a catalyst in drawing massive attention towards 9/11 outcomes. *September 11 and Popular Culture: A Guide* by Amy Damico and Sara Quays is chaptered by mediums, i.e. Film, Music, T.V and books. The collections take off with focus on everyday life, being a viable category, to understand the influence of 9/11 on individuals and their social spaces. Instead of sifting through singular works the author picked media outlets and social networking sites or groups, which were the defining places for political, cultural and linguistic meaning-making of these attacks (. Similarly, David Slocum (2011) takes on pop culture in broader spectrum. He, on the other hand, depicts how many of the latent societal, mythological and political themes have been recast by persistent media depictions. Hence the discursive construction of American nationhood, national identity and supremacy became major categories and thematic outcomes of printed and media productions. Hence painting ‘other’ national identities in selective terms too. The categorisation ranged from the war on drugs and the use of autocratic language to the manipulation of fear in Hollywood films (Slocum, 2011).

A more comprehensive grasp of cultural meaning of the events is evident in Cara Cilano's collection *From Solidarity to Schisms: 9/11 and After in Fiction and Film from Outside the US*. In its Fourteen essays the discourse is shifted from United States to more diverse cultural and academic products in regions from Canada to Pakistan and Iran, from France to Brazil and so on, hence trying to capture the outreach of these events globally. Actually, this compilation exhibits the importance of analysing the attacks within the current complex geopolitical and cross-cultural scenarios (Cilano, 2009).

2.3 (In) Visibility in Post-9/11 Media Scholarship

Many other areas of inclusion and exclusion surface when more recent works on 9/11 are analysed. A heavy reliance on the story as the yardstick to generate insights about recent history is one such major area. A sheer neglect towards questioning visibility and visual practices in terms of portrayal is another major trend. The latter has resulted in a tilted character portrayal of certain ‘people’, to the extent of perpetuation of a stereotype. This disjunction has graver implication in current times of media when terrorism and political manoeuvring are increasingly understood as a contest of images and narratives. Stories, per Joseph Nye (2003),

hold the primary position in the current geopolitical tussle, configured in written and visual arts. This assertion is evident in a consistent pattern of TV programs, films, and books produced right after any geopolitical issue is ‘addressed’, to perpetuate the authenticity of the version public was told, right or wrong. Such academic or media products, on one hand, clears the stance of the ‘teller’, while vilifying the ‘others’ successfully, on the other hand. Films based on Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and many such highlighted areas tell stories wrapped in box office numbers, glossy marketing, prominent cast and due media attention. A story very hard to disbelieve, according to him.

From his perspective of international relations, stories have an increasing centrality in political, cultural, and even military conflicts. Political violence still has very real and tragic physical costs, of course, but the conflict between, say, the United States and al-Qaeda needs to be approached as both a strategic and symbolic contest over competing narratives of geopolitics and individual events (Nye, 2009). The huge role of cinema, as the centre of media ecosystem and an independent social institution, has drastically changed following these events. Exploring this role remains overdue and under discussed.

2.4 Analytical Viewpoint of Blockbuster Films

Kellner (2011), while using analytical appraisal, preferred the texts that had achieved success in the marketplace. One of the causes of this choice is as described by him “popular media culture taps into existing fears, hopes, fantasies, and other concerns of the day” (p.105). For example, in an analytical assessment of the *X-Files*, Kellner (2011) links the famous television show with existing socio-cultural problems of the age such as abnormal tendency (p. 205). As indicated by that example, Kellner (2011) has focused on larger set of texts that range from cinema to television to music. With the focus given on blockbuster film in this thesis, this would be proper to complement Kellner’s work, with much cinema-oriented access, that is seen in the work of Mike Chopra-Gant (2005). In his examination of famous films in America of the post-WWII period, Chopra-Gant (2005) explains his aim as producing “an account that privileges neither the films nor the materials used to establish a cultural context for those films, but rather see both the films and the wider cultural context as being involved in a dialogic discursive relationship presenting expression of the cultural climate in the early post-war period of the United States” (p.12). Highlighting his stance to the films he is discussing, Chopra-Gant

(2005) argues how early analyses of film noir have been representative of their age although they consisted of fewer than total films produced in that era. Briefly, it is frequently considered that film noir represents all of Hollywood and certainly vulnerable area of American culture during the post-war time where it can be asserted it did not. Taken in this perspective, this is a matter of synecdoche. To quote Chopra-Gant (2005) “the idea of zeitgeist as the spirit of the age demands an unanimity that is inconsistent with the fragmentation and fragmentation that characterised American society and culture during the early post-war years (p.11).

If we go through the films that project the fondness of the viewers of the age, in that case Chopra-Gant (2005) proposes that much authentic perception of culture and society could be obtained. This is not something to dispute that all viewers do not react similarly to every film, but, instead, to give the impression that popular cinema seizes the “spirit of age” in a better way, accordingly, can assist to make good for smaller sample sizes. To Chopra-Gant (2005), the answer is to concentrate on famous films as established by their performance at the box office. This selection aims “to obtain an objective set of films which was very clearly not chosen by one for the films” consistency with any preconceived notions they held about the films and culture of the period after 9/11. So, a choice of films which would exhibit in a good way the wider styles in society, would be one that is constituted of the most famous films from a specific historical period. As the 9/11 events form the historical period of this thesis, this is imperative to think about the fact that films which controlled the box office during that period have been blockbusters.

2.5 Reviewing 9/11 Blockbuster

Following the 9/11 events, Schatz (2012) compared the experience of viewing the disaster to ‘like a film’, connecting the disaster of attacks with numerous cinematic productions from *First Blood* to *Charlie’s Angels*. He also seeks direct links between the collapsing twin towers, and similar scenes pictured in many Hollywood films. To quote Schatz (2012), “it seems very possible that the shape of the act itself, if not the desire, to commit it, may have been inspired at least partly by such conspicuous destruction, internationally distributed American films as *Independence Day* and *Flight Club*” (p.87).

Schatz (2012) holds the view that Hollywood might have indirectly foreseen the 9/11 events through its large-scale destruction of buildings shown in films. He also points out to the

fact that terrorists might have been inspired in conceiving their attack by film violence in Hollywood films produced in the 1990s. Theorist Jean Baudrillard, moved by the pictures of the collapsed buildings, finds a bold connection between Hollywood films and 9/11. Baudrillard (2002) asserts that before 9/11 events, the American system headed towards achieving supremacy. He argues that the more US achieved supreme status; the more opponents in its population, and the world as well, wished US fall-down. He held the view that “the increase in the power of power heightens the will to destroy it” (p.7).

Other idea in films produced prior to 9/11 events and afterwards did not wish for the destruction but to retrieve the legendary distinctiveness of the US, an identity that had disappeared in the backdrop of the Cold War. With a view to outlining this connection, the phenomenon of Self and Other has been thoroughly checked, and it is attained by analysing the violence that prevails between the two.

2.6 Empirical Studies of Blockbuster Films and Film Characters

Blockbuster films have become a well-liked form of American popular culture as seen by blockbuster hits, such as Marvel’s *The Avengers*, *Iron Man*, *The Dark Knight* and *Captain America*. These films are based on their printed comic books counterparts. Superhero blockbuster films ensure economic success and the recognition of an American art form and mythology. Industry data and market research on film viewership in the U.S. is limited. However, Brown (2016), using Facebook data found over 24 million film fans in the U.S. and of that population 46.67% are women. Schenker (2014) also found that female film characters were liked by 5.8 million people, of whom 62.07% were women. Additionally, Schenker (2014) observed that Marvel Films wants to expand their female viewership by adding more female characters, because only 36.96% of their viewers are women. Miettinen (2011) notes that females in DC Films make up 30.9% of characters, while in Marvel Films they represent 30.6%. He concludes that DC and Marvel Films are not representative of the U.S. population in which females make up 51% of the population.

Domestic sales of blockbuster films have been increasing over the years. According to Gus Lubin (2014), in 2000 film sales in the U.S. reached \$265 million, while in 2014 sales reached \$870 million. Although the rising revenue of blockbuster films can be attributed to the growth of streaming services, like Netflix. Additionally, Lubin (2014) observes that film

adaptations of comics have contributed to new viewers, which have in return contributed to the rise in attendance rates at film conventions. For example, San Diego Comicon in 2014 reached over 100,000 attendees (Lubin, 2014).

Blockbuster films are a form of discourse. According to Hall (2004), discourses are systems of representations which occur in forms of language, images and social practices. Consequently, discourses are processes through which meaning, and knowledge are produced (Macdonald, 2003). Within the film discourse, there are familiar symbols, images and meanings. Blockbuster films are also a form of American popular culture. According to Milestone and Meyer (2013), popular culture is a concept that “encompasses an enormous range of cultural texts and practices, from cinema films to newspaper articles, from designing computer games to playing music” (p.22). The notion of ‘popular’ is controversial because it is vague and can encompass many meanings. I use the term ‘popular culture’ in the same way that Milestone and Meyer (2013) use it to refer to “a range of cultural texts which signify meaning through words, images or practices” (p.22). They continue to explain that much of popular culture is media culture. Therefore, popular culture incorporates mass media, such as the press, film, and television.

Kevin Boon (2005) observed that as part of western popular culture (super) heroes can be viewed as a ‘metanarrative of masculinity’. He remarked that the hero figure provides benefits to a culture. For example, the hero can operate as an object of worship and an ideal, “in the sense that heroic qualities serve as models for privileged masculine behaviours” (p.303). In his research, Miettinen (2011) examined how DC and Marvel superhero blockbuster films portrayed true heroes, such as police officers and firefighters, and collective trauma following the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Boon (2005) expands on this stating that the terrorist attacks revitalised meta-narratives in American popular culture. The heroic figure resurfaced because of the presence of a perceived threat, which warranted the revitalisation and application of the heroic figure (Boon, 2005). Furthermore, Miettinen (2011) argues that post- 9/11 DC and Marvel blockbuster films “did much more than just reflect the national trauma of 9/11... they took part in actively creating what would be seen in the popular as the trauma of 9/11” (p.61). Accordingly, DC and Marvel superhero blockbuster films offered an instantaneous response to the traumatic events using iconic superheroes, such as Captain America, Spider-Man, and Wonder Woman, thereby creating an idealised American identity. Superhero blockbuster

films, produced post-9/11, praised the true heroes of the terrorist attacks and there were rare cries for vengeance (Miettinen, 2011). Therefore, these films are characterised by a desire to understand the attacks and to re-establish collective security.

In his monograph, *Hollywood 9/11: Superheroes, Super Villains, and Super Disasters*, Pollard (2015) asserts that the attacks of 9/11 brought about a tangible shift in the scale of discourse on screen. His argument circles around the fact that a visible discursive change as affected an array of film genres, especially superhero films. He deduces several common themes of pessimism and studied films in chronological order since 9/11, to gauge its impact. In his opinion, parallel societal concerns weigh heavily on the formation of constructs in post 9/11 cinema. For instance, the public perception of its state's failure to pre-empt any terrorist danger has been showcased as corrupt US intelligence or police officers inside films, to provide a cognitive sandbag to public to punch on. His work mostly highlights the use of language in highlighting public concerns, fears and resorting to superheroes for help. His work has five chapters dedicated to different genres of films which have directly been coloured by "the most striking discursive change in the increasing darkness of post 9/11 cinema" (Pollard, 2015).

Linguistic analysis on blockbuster films is limited. Junko Ueno (2006) conducted a linguistic analysis of gender identity in manga films that are written for girls, known as *shojo*, and *ladies' manga*, which are films written for adult women. There are marked gender differences in the Japanese language, which are 'marked both syntactically and lexically' (Ueno, 2006). Ueno concluded that adult female characters in *shojo* and *ladies' manga* use the correct feminine language that is expected of adult women in Japanese society and culture. She suggests that the use of feminine language by older women characters is a way to identify and express themselves through a "voice society" (p.22). Therefore, older women characters are able to express their femininity using 'soft and polite' grammatical and pragmatic linguistic elements, such as the use of honorifics and sentence-final expressions (Ueno, 2006).

2.7 The Hierarchy of Good and Evil

The way the villain is presented and made agreeable image of violence can be well grasped through identifying the critical analysis. Yet, the definite types Propp (2010) has revealed do not always adequately seize the different presentations of violence in films. To consider the means in which non-human factor strengthen the violence in the films is sometime

negligible. For the purpose, there is a need of an added structure that responds to ideological inferences and the ideological implication found outside of the character and their activities. To that end, this is important to use Barrett (1996) work on myth. Barrett (1996) in this situation disputes how the myths strengthen certain cultural standards. It has effective likeness to the pattern of cultural violence as asserted by Galtung (2004). The myth acts to legalise the ideological positions that may hold within them, like certain biased or prejudiced positions like gender, race, etc.

2.8 Marvel and DC Binary: A Historical Preview

Hollywood has been ruled by two major studios, DC and Marvel, that have been churning out comics since WWI, and now are main production houses for blockbuster films. The literature on the influence of these two industry giants on policy implementation and public behaviour is voluminous. First the comics and now their produced blockbuster films have been reading the pulse of the times and providing a carefully orchestrated content to viewers, to help them cope with realities of their time as well as give insights about suggested behaviours. This approach spans from ethnicity, racial profiling, to addressing gender, people and religions on screen.

The sun of the New Year marking the millennium 2000 evoked anxiety and irritability among the Americans. 1990s left Americans in turbulent crises which were even covered by the advancement in technology and a digital era. The impending threat which was posed due to the fabrication of Y2K bug, that threatened the entire world, caused a global panic, and people suddenly became uncertain about the future dependence upon the digital technology. Soon after these fears begin to dismiss, America was bombarded by yet another threat of airplane attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon, causing about three thousand casualties. The catastrophic events of 9/11 filled Americans with an uninvited depression and anxiety as it entered the new century.

The American comic book superhero was inherently influenced by the socio-political turmoil, particularly in its interpretation as films. Throughout this agitated era, this hero was used as sentimentally heartening elusion as well as podium for social assessment and often contradictory contemplation on national recognition of the US. A multitude of comic documentaries featured between 2001 and 2004 generally displayed the basic narrative of

'good' against 'evil' whereas, the films featured in the latter half of decade were sheer inquiry of the national ideology of the US and began questioning the causes which plunged the nation into havoc like 9/11. It is noteworthy that during this era Marvel was successful to shatter the monopoly of DC comics, which had domed over the 'comic book' film industry which can be attributed to the revolutionary collaborative re-patterning and the exclusive branding of the captions (Long, 2000). So, in the first decade of 2000, the exceptional restructuring of the Marvel enabled them to feature multiple multi-millionaire projects, leaving the Warner Bros. and its subsidiary disturbed. Resultantly, Marvel succeeded in structuring its own Marvel Studios and hence pronounced its alteration from licensors to the producers of the Marvel estate (Jennings, 2013).

On the contrary, the addition of Time Warner by AOL in 2001 which, at one point in time, was DC's conveniently managed collaborative structure, tried to accomplish its new uncertain squeak. Marvel's newly found strength and its commercial achievements were boosted by the popular appeal of its thoughtfully dubious key characters. These characters allowed American viewers to probe into a mythology which might question the authenticity of national morals and values, ultimately providing them with a fictional hero to follow. During this era, DC too was successful in featuring few blockbusters, though the success was primarily retrieved from a single fictional character *Batman*. Marvel, on the other hand, successfully ventured all its fictional characters. Only by the virtue of its licensing deals, even before the creation of their own studio, Marvel was able to revive the destitute of the company which occurred in 1996. Sam Raimi's *Spider-Man* (2002) set the box-office on fire by flocking \$114.8 million at its premiere. This was only until *The Dark Knight* (Nolan, 2008) broke the box office which literally marvelled the critics and the fraternity both. Marvel stumbled a lot in its early days with a vivaciously action series on CBS released in 1977 which failed on TV, and afterwards a documentary film which was made but never made it to box-office in 1985. But finally, it made the *Spider-Man* (2002) hit the screens. Avi Arad and Ike Perlmutter slotted the Marvel out of bankruptcy and caused the revival of Marvel. This was attributed to the joint venture of Arad-Perlmutter along with the CEO, Billy Bevis who identified the symbiotic potential of their companies. Toy Biz has been one of the Marvel's ancillaries which had been supervising multiple licensing deals. During reacquisition of rights of Marvel's brilliant achievement *Spider-Man*, Marvel's governing body planned on to making multi-millions in

lieu of revenue, by virtue of Toy Biz. Many of the early licensing deals were augmented by Toy Biz much like DC's licensing collaborates. The eternal accomplishment of films featured by Marvel and the running victory of *Spider-Man* causing release of another two parts of the film in 2004 and 2007 and Marvel executives unleashed another 47 fictional characters for gathering further monetary benefits (Herbert, 2002)

On the other hand, fortune was not much brighter for DC back then which was only able to expand two of its titles *Batman* and *Superman*. Marvel's greater scale of success in the industry, fraternity and population was attributed to the inherent viewers Marvel had earned. Marvel featured *Spider-Man* has its 3 million copies sold on its first day of digital release (King, 2008). Also, during six years between 2000 and 2006 Marvel released two dozen of mega motion films that earned about \$3.6 billion worldwide (Dixon, 2004). DC, on one hand, deduced most of the profit from its endogenous film production house, Warner Bros. Marvel earned only a proportion of its fiscal advantages from the licensing deals from other production houses like Columbia Pictures and 20th Century Fox. Marvel afterwards regained all the neglected benefits by a revolutionary step that still hauls over the mind of Hollywood, by restructuring itself as an independent film production (Dixon, 2004). Merrill Lynch lent \$500 Million to Marvel between 2006 and 2007 to develop its own subsidiary Marvel Studios for monetarily supporting its filmmaking project, the first of which was *Iron Man* in 2008 (Mendelson, 2017). Ticket sales were already facing a descending trend and so this 'big step' of Marvel was perceived as a potentially dangerous move by the film critics and community (Dixon, 2004). Adding fuel to the fire was the risk that if Marvel fails to strike as successful on the box-office, it would be unable to pay its loans and hence the ultimate debts would cause the Marvel to lose their rights on the entire set of fictional characters it ever possessed (Dixon, 2004). In the said backdrop another twelve action superhero comics were featured between 2008 and 2013 and Marvel published seven out of these twelve. *Iron Man*, *The Incredible Hulk*, *Thor* and *Captain America* all productions of the Marvel featured typical characters. These characters were forged to influence viewers cognitively and leave an iconic mark in the industry by virtue of their films. This idea of regulating control was no mishap as it passively engendered viewers, which ultimately ended in the so-far biggest accomplishment of Marvel - *The Avengers* in 2012, and it displayed all the four iconic characters. By a collaborate authority and curb over its every featured production, Marvel expanded the vista of its heroes thereby,

maximising viewers interest and anticipation. The propagative strategies of Marvel which were much brilliant than DC's whose fictional characters were largely self-sufficient. That is why the followers of *Batman* were not fundamentally attracted to its later epitome *Superman* as opposed to Marvel fans who crowded in theatres for much anticipated *Avengers*, even after its premier five years ago.

Rising after almost a shaky start, the exponential success of Marvel clearly indicated that the widespread accomplishment was attributed to its meticulously designed corporate structure. The corporate tumultuousness subsided to clarify and regenerate the prolific capabilities of the Marvel which it gathered over the previous four years. DC in its early years also proposed some brilliant strategies back in 80s and 90s. Likewise, Marvel too proposed a methodology of action-packed buster formula which also contributed to its success. There also had been some mega fiscal projects like Marvel's *X-Men* (Singer, 2000) and *Spider-Man* (Raimi, 2002). CGI encouraged the production of several action projects and formative plans to regain their revenue and budget. An instance includes the aggressive retailing of the *X-Men*, the foremost interpretation of the emerging century published three trailers, twelve internet ad promos and nine TV spots to aim virtually all set of theatre attending population. The leading trailer that published rapid stride and expeditious ventures to exhibit all the basic mega aspects of the action sequence. The trailers launched subsequently highlighted the basic cast of the feature film, the plot of the story and the simplistic battle of the 'good' versus 'evil' about the eternal conflict against humanity which insisted upon the fear attached with the ultra-modern technological and biological up-gradation which was invoked by those 'exceptional freaks'. In the parallel world of biotechnology and genetic engineering back in early 2000s, this anxiety also played a pivotal role in addressing the basic ethical and moral issue which sprouted in the bio-engineered idea of genetic technology, cloning and stem-cell regeneration. Another intellectual move was to target a group of viewers by personalised fictional characters and hence the taste of all of them were catered including the sci-fi fans, the action fans and the drama followers. Also, all the endings of virtually every film included a power-packed, action filled thriller culmination that left viewers anticipating for more. This move was undoubtedly a tactic to maximise the viewers even before the theatrical release. The promotion of the film and Marvel's desire to saturate the market was further magnified by 20th Century Fox, which happened to be its production company. This production house strengthened Marvel

exceptionally, as it could rule the market by virtue of 'Rupert Murdoch's News Corp' (Mendelson, 2017). This licensing deal also enabled Marvel's *X-Men*, its broadcast and promotions thorough Fox's broadcasting network.

Yet another ingredient that gained Marvel such glorious success was its capability to use the methodology of formulating the action sequences which reverberated with the socio-political turmoil of 9/11. To quote an instance the comic film featuring *Superman* in the 1940s processed and purposefully distracted from the war, Marvel's fancy heroes addressed the post terrorism climate of 9/11, both directly and indirectly. The icing on the cake was all this factor combined with a marvellous sense of fictional and realistic aesthetics and an escapist fantasy enjoyment, fabricating the state-of-the-art masterpiece stories, both nationally and internationally. This connection of Hollywood film-making formula and the political environment after 9/11 was further highlighted in October 2001, with the formation of Arts and Entertainment Task Force which was meant to be more in congruence with the requirements of the political administration of Bush back then (Baker, 2004). The films featured recently after this 9/11 event had a viable tinge of Bush's administration motives. A lot of films were rather premiered later than their announced dates, to paint another picture of 9/11.

Remarkably this included the delayed release of *Spider-Man*, in which the hero is shown spinning the web along the twin towers of the World Trade Centre across the skyline of New York City. It involved the depiction of post-9/11 scenario without plunging into any political matter directly. The film has used the technological advancement as an instrument of creating the villain, while morphing Peter Parker in such a way who could be associated with all the young boys of America. To quote an instance in the final fight scene between the hero and the villain, the crowd of NYC surround and attack Green Goblin while Spider-Man saves the people. While attacking the villain the entire crowds shout in a single voice "you mess with one of us, you mess with all of us". This highlighted the post-9/11 unity and awareness of the Americans as a nation and was a vivid message to the rest of the world. Without expressing any direct involvement in the political scenario back then, Spider-Man was able to highlight the narrative of good conquering evil and restoring the belief of citizens in strength, unity and righteousness, maintaining the entire decorum of a power-packed action sequence.

Also, in the concluding scene where Spider-Man expresses grief over the loss of Harry's father and his inability to unite with Mary Jane, Peter's final voice transition finished the scene in a super cool swing sequence. It showed that after every loss one experiences, comes a sense of greater power, strength and confidence which was elaborated by Peter's transition from a shy, under-confident boy to a strong and confident superhero. CGI choreographic moves further superimposed this alteration where the hero is shown spinning webs and hovering along the skyline of NYC. Finally, the physical masculinity of the Spider-Man is shown that instigates the viewers to inhale a feeling of authority and power.

During the first five years of the promising decade Marvel seemingly recovered from the fiscal burden. By using the methodology of inter-conversion of comic-series into super hit action packed films Marvel revived its character and properties. Marvel licensed ten adaptation action sequences even before Warner and Bros. were in a situation to compete Marvel. Also, DC was one of the biggest film corporation in 80s and 90s, there was a strange sense of fear to DC of such exponential expansion. It was noted by one of the film industry critics that DC and Warner have been lagging in producing the expected and required number of blockbusters especially after having given Warner's series of *Batman* in the 80s and 90s (Herbert, 2002). One plausible cause of Warner's hesitated featuring could be the union of AOL-Time Warner. Though this was an undoubted union of two of the world's largest telecom superior freaks yet to the dismay of collaboration and the financiers it was a disastrous merger because the dot com thing was growing which cause the raised tech stocks to collapse. Unfortunately, by the end of 2001, AOL Time Warner faced a loss of \$4.9 billion and all the associated collaborates and auxiliaries were in an utter disappointment (Goldstein, 2011).

Confronting with the challenge faced by Marvel, DC and Warner began to restructure themselves and started finding a methodology and a new set of governing executives who have unleashed the artistic potential of the DC. In the said backdrop, DC in 2004, produced a thriller *Catwoman* directed by Pitoff and Halle Berry in the main lead. To their absolute dismay, the film was a disaster and was a living proof of how productions fail when done in a rush. The film had all the ingredients of a super hit blockbuster including an elegant cast, wonderful cinematography, an acknowledged director, a budget of \$100 million but it lacked a strong plot and a storyline which miserably failed the expectations of the viewers. DC's strategies of featuring and production of films was quite in contrast to the Marvel. Where Marvel, in films

like *Spider-Man* and *X-Men*, focussed on the strength and evolution of characters over the series of production, DC ignored it altogether. In *Catwoman*, the main lead resembled more to the ancient and mythological Egyptian cat and was in part hero and in part female counterpart of *Batman*. This disappointed the fans because they were not able to connect to the character at a very basic level.

Also, DC meticulously designed the promotional strategies and spent multi-million dollars on the promotional events generously on its films earlier, specially trying to win the hearts of comic fans viewers and the action-thriller followers. It slotted the promotional event of *Catwoman* at Henri Bendel which was a female retail store (Prince, 2001). This was the only huge, mega-scale promotional event for the film this event failed to do well, despite a good innovative idea because it did not strike the viewers and hence the costumes and performances were overlooked, unlike previously. Hence, DC once again faced a pathetic failure in re-establishing its name as an accomplished, dedicated and authentic production source of action sequences and electric thrillers. This was even accepted by the executive of Warner, Kevin Tsujihara that this film was a major mistake by the company. At that time the success of the Hollywood pictures depended largely on the inherent viewers with a mind-set and a taste for action sequences and this factor played a major deal in the success story of the Marvel.

The collapse of the *Catwoman* among the audience and fans alike could also be attributed to association of a 'hero' with a female figure in a relatively male-dominant society which was a reason of its failure at a basic level. Bob Kane, the creator of *Batman* influenced the distracted position of the film *Catwoman*, but the film itself also questioned the basic gender traditions and roles. As in his autobiography, Bob Kane regarded women more as 'cats' because they were "cool, detached and unreliable" and because of this very reason they deserved less importance and respect in the comic films (p.107). This 'against-women' tendency was further aggravated through the character of the hero in the *Catwoman* and her transitory ego, Patience Phillips. Debatably the film represented a neutral virgin due to which women were interpreted as either calm and passive or wildly romantic. This perception was in deep contrast to Philip's interpretation of women; shy unlike *Catwoman* who happened to be a dominant creature. The film ironically projects and enhanced the objectification of women and had distracted the viewers from the genuine understanding of female desires. This contradictory character of *Catwoman* coaxed Marvel to launch another powerful female

character in response that could fill the void of expectations and misunderstandings and hence, it resulted in the production of *Elektra* (Brownstein, 1992). But once again this film with a female lead as hero also proved to be a box-office catastrophe.

On the other hand, it was noticed that female lead characters did well when in a combined cast like the character Storm of *X-Men* (2002-present). *Wonder Woman* (2018) from DC and the *Captain Marvel* (2019) by MCU seem to be radically fearless step to be taken in this regard where female heroes are seen in lead and are saving the society from any impending threat. So, the idea is to keep sticking to the traditional Hollywood culture and formulating a character that would have a charismatic appeal as well as the depiction of women as superheroes are concerned. Warner and DC, still not disheartened on their commercial and critical success, had now resolute to bring the company out of crises and reconfigure their image, that resulted in the exhibition of the *Infinite Crisis* comics sequence, and the release of *Batman Begins* (Nolan, 2005). Also, DC introduced virtually their first logo since 1976. This extensive branding over here was meant to meet certain demands of the DC. Firstly, to remove the tarnish that had polluted the name of the company for ages now. This attempt of DC was also regarded as copying Marvel's idea of intricately mysterious yet relatable character banking and a fictional heroism that featured bilateral and introspective technique.

Disney unmasked its brand new 'swoosh' logo to extend its conviction and dedication as a company which is an authentic and organised action film producer company just weeks before the launch of *Batman Begins* (Schatz, 2009). The addition of the 'swoosh' logo branding emphasised DC's desire to convincingly keep moving on the path to make successful and accomplished comic-action sequences and move ahead from the stagnant character bank and the same old 'bullet' logo. By this step of glorifying their new logo and featuring the darkest fictional fantasy till date, DC raised the expectations of viewers for the 'caped campaigner' hero to be launched in all the action film sequences to come from DC and Marvel, both. Directed by Christopher Nolan *Batman Begins* resulted in an exclusive success for DC and Warner and caused the subsequent release of two sequels the *Dark Knight*. This very step explicitly made the company realise that a highly regulated corporate figure and meticulous ancillaries are pivotal for their subsequent success in the industry and the publishing market. *Infinite Crisis* became the #1 comic-book bestsellers back in 2005 then and the market high-tech share rates increased from 32.23% to 36.95% only during a course of one year

(McLauchlin, 2015).

Furthermore, the Legendary Pictures made a licensing deal with Warner Bros. which marked the importance of arranged corporate deals and the agonistic potential of two companies with a plan. Together they produced the *Dark Knight* trilogy. The profit gained from the joined venture was divided into equal halves by the Legendary Pictures that very firmly believed in making a continuous return from its investment as a business deal (Miller, 2001). The vitality of film-making process can be derived from not only the success but also from the failures of the films. All the films which could not win the heart of viewers and were unable to do well on the box-office, produced by DC and Marvel both, all deviated from the basic methodology of making films. To quote an example, Ang Lee's *Hulk* released in (2003), which depicted a meticulously designed, sorrowful, misinterpreted beast staled down as opposed to the powerful, strong and wild *Incredible Hulk* (Letierrier, 2008). Thus, the character was pushed back to the same wild and ferocious beast and the film was framed as a power-packed action film.

Superman Returns (Singer, 2006) and *Watchmen* (Snyder, 2009) were also much desired yet miserably failed at box-office film which were highly undermined and could not perform on the box office. Both the films miscalculated the amount of required drama, action, thrill and transitions; the period between them and the alteration of the subject versus object. There had been sudden nerve wrecking, attention-seeking sequences suddenly altered with a complicated drama, as acclaimed by the critics. For instance, Lang (2016) claimed the incoherence between the rapid action-packed proportion and the lack of depth of characterisation in *Watchmen*'s caused the film being "hollow and disjointed" (p.24). Also, Ang Lee's *Hulk* was not paced up as an action sequence should have been shaped. Also, the heavy cinematography did not go well with the sentimental progression of the film's narrative in the last half of it. There had been plenty of missteps like unnecessary special effects, a multitude of close-ups, artful though a dragged sequence of action and an abstract method and plot which at times was inconceivable.

The family drama and the inclusive behaviour of the film could be predicted by the director's personal influence on the sequence, this also can be envisaged as a step of process in determining the electrically charged, power-packed yet mysteriously ambiguous characters

of the Marvel, the idea of which was conceived back in the 1960s. But the ambiguity created in the characters of Marvel was intended to relate the heroes closely with the fans. So, to succeed both commercially and critically the interpretation of the film Ang Lee's *Hulk*, was hence operational in distancing the Marvel world from rest of its characters and the main story line. This continuous journey of Marvel though differently made and differently directed films all merged together on a broader scale forming *The Avengers*. So here the iconic super heroism was not related to grounded idea of feature films but the continuous process of growth and sharpening over the course of time through market and publishing (Jennings, 2013).

The vitality of the film making, specially the electrical and charged action sequences was highlighted by the production and launch of *The Incredible Hulk* (2005), directed by Louis Leterrier, who also happened to direct *Unleashed* (2005) and *Transporter 2* (2005). But the failure of Lee's film in 2003 was still occupying the directors' minds who were uncertain about further investments. But the Marvel's new structure and pattern kept the investors pacified. Warner and DC's *Superman Returns* (2006) and *Watchmen* (2009) failed badly at box office owing to their deviation from the ground set rules of Hollywood filmmaking.

After 1987, for the first time *The Man of Steel* showed upon screen in *The Superman Returns* was debatably the most loved and asked for film, but it could not do well on the box office and could only \$52.5 million on its opening weekend (BoxOfficeMojo.com, 2017). Just like the Marvel's *Hulk* it was also slotted to be dragged and less filled with action sequences. *Superman Returns* was acclaimed among all the people alike because of two fundamental reasons. First being its inherent ideology to develop with the modern world and second, to prove itself to be inclusive of the perils of the latest complexities of war and after-war. Also, it highlighted the importance of the unity that lies in the bond of family. Needless to mention that it met the criteria of the glorious era Superman, that enhanced the timeless image of the DC's flag-bearer superhero. Directed by Singer in 2006, the sequel's opening credits were similar to the credits of the golden 1978 rendition with Brandon Routh who shared an uncanny resemblance with Christopher Reeve's actual epitome of Superman. Moreover, there is an absolute amalgam of ideas where of this gloriously maintained character trying to look into the errors and flaws in the post 9/11 scenario which is depicted in the film where the secret identity-figure of Superman is shown lamenting over the post-terrorism aura. General Mills Cereal, Pepsi, and even NASCAR reinforced the producers of Superman by aiding promotions and

thus a scrupulous film-making formula along with a cross-promotional budget of \$45.5 was generously invested by Warner and DC. But unfortunately, due to the anti-ascendancy climax the film could not do well in the box-office despite the combined potential, promotional strategies and promo budgets of Warner and DC.

America has always been a fan of thrillers and action films. So, the reason which caused hindrance to the success of film was the fact that film had been a family melodrama and character evolution more than an action film. So, *Superman's* war was shown to be as struggle with his nostalgic past and his lost love Lois Lane which had driven the film rather than thrill-packed action sequences and fight scene with the villain. Although the startling transition of the film, included the traditional method which has been DC's forte since 2005 that included a strong plot and a visionary evolution of the main lead, yet the film could not turn tables due because it was lagging in showing an ultra-dark fantasy which lagged to depict CGI special effects and the traditional heroism, unlike its earlier feature film, *Batman Begins*.

Yet another plausible extension for the whiteness of *Superman Returns* can be attributed to the timing of its exhibition in special relation to the post-9/11 aura. *Superman Returns* was DC's way of depicting the darker aspect of the globe and it played dark fiction through the film and in a way, it worked in absolute opposition of DC's corporate because apparently, they seemed overtly yearning for Reaganomics (Haas & Sells, 1995). The film also budded in theatres at the time when the American socio-political state was in utter turmoil. The time when the Bush-Cheney authority was moving towards culmination where the entire comic-book fraternity and the nation was wary of the American principles and ideology alike. Marvel's comic-book thriller called *Civil War*, questioned the guilt-less, victimised and innocent status of America in the 9/11 mishap. Its filmic adaptation ran in the theatres for a year actively. This production of Marvel seemingly divided it into two segments; one in proposition of the government-based superhero story *Iron Man*, and second those who envisaged this authority as sheer the wreckage of basic morality rules and a big cause of chaos depicted by *Captain America*. Due to these comic-book series the generalised notion of America as the Superpower and highly adorned with the military and force were projected as a potential risk to the peace of world and complicated the earlier stable ideology of the natives. In the film the war instruments and machinery produced in America was exported and ultimately utilised by the terrorists *Iron Man*. The way *Captain America* pulls off at the end

of the series explicitly manifested the plagued morals and conflicted ideology in the post-9/11 scenario. Although the hero was not shown to overlook and ignore the unrest created by the registration and wreckage of basic human rights, yet he gives up restoring apparent peace and stop any further bloodshed. As opposed to it, *Superman's* depicted my spheres restructures and revoked yet the serene positivity relatable to past, which was impractical in the post-9/11 environment, depicted in *Superman Returns* was in absolute imbalance and incoherence with the post-9/11 picture. This is why the film had to face consequences of its release.

Watchmen, a production of DC in 2009 was claimed as successful and hence a revival of comic-book series back then because they very intelligently combined the contemplation and the mind-set of conflicted viewers with the action-packed thriller sequence. It was inspired from the all-loved and charming graphic novel of Gibbon and Moore which came out in 1987. Strangely, where the novel got globally acclaimed because of the wild and classy iconic superhero standards, its transition to film was not as highly celebrated due to the same difference. Kim Newman (2000) commented that if loyalty of the reader was a scale, only then can the film be ranked as successful. Since the filmic shape of the novel was thoroughly planned, the focus remained on following script in detail, instead of acting it out well (Newman, 2000). *Watchmen* happened to be the only adaptation of graphic novel to get ranked as one in the top 100 on Time's list of novels in 2005. This happened last in 1923 before it. It also was awarded the best Sci-Fi Hugo award (Goldstein, 2011).

In this effort of so much getting involved with observing the novel and its plot, the creators of the graphic film faced many issues. The complex and complicated image of the stars, the inability of the cast to show case their own artistic liberty and the conflict therein, due to which viewers could rarely relate to the characters. But the film did not lash into ground because Warner and DC closely remained adherent to the traditional art and methodology of filmmaking (BoxOfficeMojo.com, 2017). *Watchmen* occupied 12 stations at the TV and the success was seemingly derived by following the road map of Marvel in the art of filmmaking and their formula of cross-promotional strategies, in special regard to highlight the silhouette of the hero while subscribing to the new characters. The release of the promos caused the viewers, who were not aware of graphic novel already, to think that the film was about the retired characters who have joined hands to become the saviour of world. But with the release of the film it was all much evident the film is a misanthropic assessment of the heroes of the

current century. The basic difference between *Watchmen* and other highly box-office successful DC's productions like *The Dark Knights* was all the same. It was that viewers could not relate to the characters of *Watchmen*, where *The Dark Knight* was a twisted fiction fantasy that continued connecting with the viewers. DC wanted to showcase heroism hastily where the main leads of the company were shown struggling with their existential crises and their fundamental obligations towards the society in their own capacity as a superhero. But the role of Batman in *The Dark Knight* was used so strategically, that despite a dark theme and an eerie aura, viewers could sense a vibe, a relatability with the film and its characters. Just as in the film hero apparently sets non-moralistic conspiracies to spy on the natives of the city but that was just for the greater good of the citizens and to save them from the villain. In the latter half of the film Batman chooses not to expose Harvey Dent who was considered being an academy of integrity and righteousness. He rather offers himself to be seen as a culprit in an attempt to blow the tarnish on the name of Harvey Dent so that an institutional virtue can be kept safe. Remarkably, the hero's tactic is sealed by the ultimate trust of the citizens which forges the bilateral character of the Batman more understandable. Notably, the cause of revocation of the batman as *The Dark Knight* can be clearly justified to be serving two pivotal functions; first, it maintains the role of the eternal brand *Batman* as both, sinner and a protector. Secondly, the labelling of Dent as gallantry and sin-less exposed DC's long set mission of upholding institutional laws and righteousness by the virtue of Heroes. This highlights the basic ideology of DC that states whether the branding, licensing collaborates, and promotional ads might have changed over the years, but the basic theme of DC's philosophy of justice and equality haven't changed over the course of time. Similarly, another kind of treachery was employed in the formation of *Watchmen* as a tool of uniting the people without any considerable hope. Ironically, this message of positivity was sent sealed in the idea that the world has to be in a deception for regulation of rest and peace. Also, this employed bloodshed for maintenance of peace. So, reverse psychology was played where citizens were convinced to get-together for the fear of a Gothic creature rather than believing in the basic ideological principles of ethics.

Since *the Dark Knight* and *Watchmen* exhibited an extremely depressing dark fiction and a relatively melancholy aspect of post terrorism event, the scarcity of the usual moralistic lesson in the film, the traditional evolution of the hero and the perpetuating anti-heroism caused the film to run rather unsuccessful than comic film alterations.

In the second decade of 2000s both DC and Marvel were questioned and reviewed multiple times, both on their plot stories and the collaborate patterns. Also, on their accession to the themes of heroism, action and justice. Another major advancement in this regard was the cause and consequence of evolution in the careers of DC and Marvel. Marvel became a subsidiary of Disney in 2009 and DC launched DC Entertainment as a reaction to this news. These two factors had major impacts on both the companies. These corporate tactics and possessions marked significantly positive step ups in the industry. A multitude of comic-series adaptations with a wide variety of tech-kind and brilliant cinematographic effects were unleashed. But this sense of ultimate competition and radical adventures left the entire fraternity and the comic fans in utter awe which caused a contrasting conflict in the fundamental approach and artistic imagination of both the companies.

Marvel Entertainment was taken as a subsidiary of The Walt Disney Entertainment in August 2009 for \$4 Billion. This news was perceived and interpreted in all the flavours it could have been and it questioned the individuality of Marvel which had been standing independent as an exclusive company. Disney was seemingly promising as far as the future of Marvel Entertainment was concerned and was believed to be a greater resource for it. For instance, soon after coming in the shade of Disney Marvel collaborated with Disney to publish a manual that featured the animated version of Disney/Pixar heroes. Alternatively, Marvel's universal heroes appeared as Disney cartoons on the cartoon television network in 2012. Even today, Marvel's merger continues to keep the comics and television industries buzzing with excitement over the company's development of a digital comics platform and its release of *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* It was released because of the combination of Marvel and Disney. The very idea of these heroes working together has instilled a heart-throbbing, pulse-pounding enthusiasm among the comic fans and industry since 2013 on ABC (Quay & Damico, 2010). Both the companies unleashed brilliant performances shortly after the merger, because of an ideal synergistic potential, exposing the flawless architecture of how a high-tech company should look like. Marvel was at a benefit due to high tech promos and a variety of multi-media opportunities offered by Disney, which was getting accomplished as the void of strong, ambiguous and meticulous characters was being filled by the inherently powerful character bank of Marvel. But in a parallel universe there was an antagonism arising from previous licensing deals and financial partners of Marvel. Today Marvel's most celebrated brands X-

Men and *Spider-Man* now possessed by Fox and Sony respectively, and their investors are intimidated by the legislative wars that can be started over due to this mixture.

While still being the licence holders Fox and Sony, via the Columbia Pictures, have attempted to expand their brand exponentially and the profits in lieu of the business concerns. Columbia Pictures released four films in a row, the first one of them being *The Amazing Spider-man* still owing the license in 2018. Other business and industrial tactics might involve the introduction of the franchise toys and the theme-park ideas. Now the potential issue seeming to be standing in the way of Marvel is the ignition of industrial legal war that might rise anytime in its career. Since Marvel owes a lot of its success stories to the previous licensing deals and the investors; their fear can play against the company. Also, Disney's collaborate pattern, if it supports Marvel, can be faithful. Once it is not this way, Marvel's story of success can face a collapse. This kind of instance has been recorded in the history of Marvel. From 70s to 90s the legal battles of corporate and the licensing deals affected Marvel disastrously.

The future of Marvel, for this reason, seems vague but the entire query comes to the point of whether Marvel be able to confront the alterations in the corporate framework. While the future of Marvel's success cannot be entirely known, these concerns show just how sensitive Marvel's properties are to changes in corporate structure. Notably, this merger did not only agitate the financiers. The fan bank of Marvel, which it had built over years were fearful and disappointed on the combination of cuddly and sweet Disney with the ferocious and brooding Marvel. From the very conception of the Marvel in the 1960s, its main strength has been creating organically strong yet sinful, grounded yet powerful, silent yet resonant and mysterious yet relatable iconic super-heroes, which was always considered as an excellence of Marvel. During its evolution, when Marvel was making its mark as an accomplished and authentic comic-film industry, it always had a benefit of winning the viewers. With its action-packed films it has been able to reach deeper sentiments, to agitate the cultural norms and to questioning the long-lost morals. The concern of the favouring fraternity and the fans was justifiable as the merger of family-film-producing Disney with a raw, powerful and questioning narrative of Marvel would tarnish the basic idea of Marvel heroes, which would now resemble to DC's monotonous and unrelatable characters as opposed to Marvel's ambidextrous and bilateral heroes. Because of these and many other imminent fears even the executive of Disney, Bob Iger, had desired on board to let Marvel work independently due to the inherent difference

between the main leads of both the companies.

As soon as the announcement of this merger of Marvel-Disney circulated in the market, DC began to restructure and re-pattern their corporate machinery. In just a month after the news of the merger DC came up with a revamped version of its entertainment studio by the name of DC Entertainment as announced by the Warner Bros (Tannen, 2013). DC attempted to distraught the industry and fans from this announcement of Marvel by shuffling the time of launch of their Entertainment studio (Tannen, 2013). This could either be a business strategy that highlighted the competitive spirit of the DC or might have been DC's failure to remain anchored in the continuously changing realm of the comic film industry. This new slogan of the DC-Warner was almost same as they had launched about four years back then that claimed to have revamped their story line and vivacious expansions and grounding of their character bank. But new progress in the claim that DC made back then was selection of a new president that happened to be Diane Nelson. Diane, seemingly oblivious of a super successful brand *Harry Potter* by Warner, was meant to promote aggressively and give blockbusters on the box-office via all the available characters that were already possessed by Warner. This dream revealed itself as an ultimate reality when DC was able to expand its comic-film adaptation exponentially *Watchmen* (Snyder, 2009), *Jonah Hex* (Hayward, 2010), *Green Lantern* (Campbell, 2013), *The Dark Knight Rises* (Nolan, 2012), and *Man of Steel* (Snyder, 2013). But this frequency of films given by Warner did not all proved to be successful. An example is a comic series *Jonah Hex*, which slightly resembled the original comic and failed to win the viewers approval. Only to be re-launched in the 2000s acclaiming DC's brand.

This failure of *Jonah Hex* was attributed to the meagre budget of \$47 million as opposed to other comic-adaptations of DC which were worth million-dollar cross promotional budgets (BoxOfficeMojo.com, 2017). The collapse of *Green Lantern* by DC also highlights its inability to produce a vivid and anchored strong character monopoly on the screens. In consideration of this all, DC came up with yet another idea of a new 'Peel' logo. A promo for the logo projected the idea that the "peel" is relatable to the duplex quintessential characters of the DC Entertainment shade.

In short, by then DC realised that it has ruined its name by the series of failures in the name of previous brands it has owned and those that it had displayed in a rush. So, it decided

now to keep calm, sit back and refresh its previously super hit franchises and erase the tinge of failure from the name of company, thereby regain the trust of investors, fans and ultimately the profit. So, in this attempt it had re-launched a film by the name of *The Dark Knight Rises* which became its maiden to carry the latest logo. DC had inherently believed in the basic monotony and the fundamental singularity of its characters and a simple extension of branding the iconic heroes, yet the introduction of duality and binary characters exposed DC's desire to come up with more aggressive and relatable character bank as following the footsteps of ambidextrous and mysterious Marvel heroism as it had been loved and lauded by the viewers.

2.8.1 Post & Pre-9/11 MCU & DC

As the socio-political landscape of the country kept evolving after 9/11, the fantasy craving and idealistic hunger of viewers was catered with the comic-book sequences like *X-Men*, *Spider-Man*, and *The Fantastic Four* which lit a ray of hope and beacon of trust among people who needed to be united and together in that scenario. Marvel's conviction to relatively simple formula of action-filled, power-packed cinematography and more grounded characters that were much relatable than DC's won them global accomplishment. The less charming branding and multiple baseless franchises worked in antagonism for the DC, on the other hand. For instance, reacting to Marvel's rather edgy characters, DC introduced more ferocious, shadowy and grimy characters in its desire to compete with the ambidextrous heroes of Marvel.

With the increasing aggression of America, the basic beliefs and the fundamental ideology of American heroism grew shaky and faced alterations. This doubt in the heart of the nation caused an explosion of comic-film production and many films, which carried a relatively sardonic and contemptuous framework, were produced like Marvel's *Hulk* and *Iron Man* series and DC's *Watchmen* and *Dark Knight* series. It was taken care of by both the companies that the films that were being produced back then showed coherence with the current political landscape of the country. But the films which were a combination of socio-political appraisal along with fun-filled, action-packed sequences could turn the tables only. Here *Dark Knight* Trilogy by Christopher Nolan worked in favour of DC, which was a sequel of *Batman* franchise that started in 2005.

In contrast, Marvel, now turned producers from licensors, experienced a much-expanded version of success and profit via its successful adaptations including *Spider-Man*,

The Incredible Hulk, Iron Man and The Avengers. Keenly maintain their corporate framework and an anchored formula of filmmaking along with the controlled monopoly of the iconic heroism, Marvel continued to throw hits, thereby, expanding the interest of the followers. Marvel had a strong character bank, a vivid ideology and twisted way of filming its heroes which made it stand out. These properties worked in its favour. Also acquiring the simplistic Hollywood tradition had always been a striking feature of the Marvel, that only worked to maximise its universal charm. Though Marvel marketing strategies had always been different from the traditional norms, yet the characters of Marvel always stood taller and gained more popularity than DC.

All these factors including the promising merger, the corporate re-patterning and the legal battles along with the anticipated success of the budding themes had to determine the industrial lead of Marvel in the universe of comic-film adaptations. But DC too was not too far behind in the race. The latest records of box-office ranked DC's *Man of Steel* as the tenth most famous and celebrated comic- film adaptations till date. *Wonder Woman* and *Justice League* hit the charts as the best as well and had brought the DC back in game (BoxOfficeMojo.com, 2017).

The corporate, commercial and critical success of Marvel was largely due to its revamped Marvel Studios (Dixon, 2004). Marvel's latest subsidiary upgraded the company to a producer from a mere licensor that enabled Marvel to beholding substantial profits and more corporate rights over the brands, franchises and properties. Very meticulously, between 2008 and 2012, Marvel combined the best of it's all characters and forged them to be grown into something so mechanically smart that it would prove to be a chart buster and came up with *The Avengers*. This success owned by Marvel, beyond leaps and bounds, caused Disney to embrace it under its umbrella and Disney owned the company for \$4 billion in 2009. Marked as one of the largest corporate mergers of the globe, Disney and Marvel continued with their game of success through the evolution of their iconic collaboration framework and corporate designing. Since of all these step ups and seemingly being more adjustable to the ever-changing environment of comic-film industry Marvel had proven itself to be more consistent and authentic comic-film maker than DC. Marvel did not change its basic idea of heroism and had always been more inclusive and meticulous about the character formation and projection were successful in winning their now turned politicised fans. They always added the typical

blockbuster method of Hollywood success and electric action in their sequences.

Marvel always focussed on the inclusive duality of the film it featured and hence it was successful in extending the idea it wanted to. The collapse of the *Watchmen* on the box-office despite being so closely resembling to the model of the Marvel marked the introspective simplicity of Marvel when it came to comic adaptation of the films. Marvel had always been self-appraising and critically judgemental about its own performances. By virtue of this Marvel was able to be highly laudable and relatable among the viewers, highlighting the basic flawed nature of man yet sticking to the moralistic values indirectly.

Marvel's continuous story of upgradation and more ups than downs in the career was attributed to its ability to produce larger than life, yet lifelike flawed creations that seemed to be globally charming and that chanted the success mantra of the company. This can be easily gauged from Marvel's *Avengers* as compared to the latest releases of DC which could not make their mark in the industry. Jennings (2013) claimed that the amalgam of new segments of thrill and action with that of conventional heroic technique of Marvel where it had combined all the superheroes under the shade of single film has altogether transformed the genetic structure of comic blockbusters. Beside *Superman* and *Batman*, the aggressive intervention of DC to alter its character bank had been a failure on the box-office because not all the characters could attain a universal acceptance and appeal as Marvel's. DC's failures like *Green Lantern* and others were due to the upheaval of the promotional tactics and less interest in the marketing and formation of ideal characters for an action blockbuster (Campbell & Kean, 2013). The critique given for the DC's *Man of Steel* (Snyder, 2013) highlighted that DC has now become unable to support the brand and reinforce its franchise and is unable to cope up with the transitions of the box-office demands.

Man of Steel can be ranked as one of the best ever given by DC to the industry which added to its overall value and integrity in the industry, but the incoherent story line and the plot made the company absolutely unable to connect with the viewers. The unique ideology of heroism as projected by Marvel and DC is exclusively different for both the companies and hence stand out in their own different ways, but this research depicts that the success story of Marvel is largely ascribed to its calm behaviour in formulation of brands, traditional compatibility and wiser marketing techniques of the company among the film makers,

investors and the industry.

Establishment of Marvel in its early days was associated to the overwhelming environment of competition in the corporate segment and the plot structure. The tendency of the company to move back to the real superheroes of 1930s propelled Marvel to work on its unique and exclusively iconic character methodology. Marvel produced *The Fantastic Four* as a direct reaction to DC's *Justice League* series in the 1960s. The competition grew thicker and the success of companies began to depend upon the licensing deals, collaborates, the corporate framework and the appropriate branding in combination with catering the flaunting socio-economic and political requirements of the fans. Marvel passively increased the number of iconic heroes in its films while preserving the inherent ambiguity and ambidexterity of its characters while looking deep into the modern as well as traditional norms of America. Although Marvel's early brand development was hampered by a series of corporate mismanagement and restructuring deals particularly during the 1980s and 1990s, these setbacks worked to prove that the success of both Marvel and DC was heavily influenced by each company's corporate structures and responses to larger industrial and economic shifts in addition to the cultural resonance of their heroes. Though time decided the ultimate success depending upon the corporate pattern, but the study finalises that Marvel's success is largely dependent upon it vertically positioned engagements and growth, the expansion of marketing strategies and deep connection to the traditional blockbuster methodology of filmmaking. This was the actual recipe for the ultimate commercial and critical success attained by the company. To our astonish, originally Marvel seemed to be copying the film-making tactics of the DC as it was the pioneer, but as the time advanced, rather DC was envisaged to be copying Marvel's ideas, plots and even characters. But the global charm of Marvel had only increased over time due to the awkward connectivity that the viewers felt while watching a Marvel adaptation. This transition could be credited to the right understanding of binary and dual methodology of making films while preserving the essence of heroism in the practice of a blockbuster chart ruled by a comic adaptation.

2.9 Supremacy and Outreach of MCU

There are a number of blockbusters at the MCU credit, which enjoy highest position in the world film market, in particular the films *The Avengers*, produced in 2012, the fifth highest-

grossing film of all-time earning \$1.5 billion, and *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015), and *Captain America: Civil War* (2016) position in the top twenty highest grossing films (Boxofficemojo.com, 2017). The highest box-office earnings of *The Avengers* (2012) and other fantasy films clearly indicate that the blockbusters attract many viewers the world over. These blockbusters successfully managed to recover their production cost and earned more due to an expanding global market and gained returns by the DVD, Blu-Ray, 3D and streaming services (Schatz, 2009).

There are certain Hollywood methods that guarantee a blockbuster which the studios follow. The MCU and *Captain America* meet many of these rules. For example, some rules relate to use of comic books to evolve storylines of films, the hero should be male, the hero should an imaginary universe. Hollywood reemploys, in this case, comic book stories and characters that can be used to expand franchises such as MCU.

The MCU is also taken as one of the most successful franchises in history with an overall gross of over \$4 billion. This trans-media market, though believed to be simplistic and mainly for children, is asserting guys as beyond superheroes who protect the world from evil. The perceptions these films and other media have, are being strengthened. Moreover, the approach to the young viewers is significant for the franchise, and a guarantee to viewers that will persist for decades in the future. These films and characters, because of the success of MCU, are significant for cultural analysis to find out the impact these have on the present-day zeitgeist or if they have an impact.

The fact of the MCU's success lies with the culture around the release of a new film, and not its constant expansion with the release of a new film. Disney / Marvel (The Walt Disney Company in 2009 purchased Marvel Entertainment for around \$4 billion and the only film produced by Marvel was *Iron Man* (2008) with a successful start. The procurement of Marvel by Disney, allowed for an increase of funding for more films which usually releases a new film every year, and sometime release more than one film a year. Disney/ Marvel released three films in 2017, namely 1) *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2*- the sequel of *Guardians of the Galaxy* (2014) was released on May 5 and earned \$175 million in six days; 2) *Spider-Man: Homecoming* the third reboot of the Spider-Man Character released on July 7th 2018, and 3) *Thor: Ragnarök*, the third sole film for the character Thor, released on November 3, 2017

(Mendelson, 2017).

2.9.1 Militarised Entertainment

The militarisation in Hollywood films is inspired by the Manichaeistic view, a concept that the “forces of light and goodness are destined to confront evil-doers” as well as jingoism, which is the ease in which a majority of Americans can be mobilised behind military venture” (Boggs & Pollard, 2007, p.17-18). This concept is well represented by these films, particularly the character of Captain America. These symbols are strengthened in every film that is released which highlight Captain America, as the only hope the world is protected from any evident and perceived evil. MCU expresses the ideals through Captain America “..that Americans act modern, cool and sophisticated but underneath, want a daddy, a king, a god, a hero.... a champion who will carry that lance and that sword into the field and fight for (them)” (Dowd, 2015). These ideologies are also embodiment of and inter-related with zeitgeist in which these films are released.

MCU was not the first to cast comic superheroes in films but prior to that *Batman* (1966) was probably the first feature film with superhero cast. Yet, comic superhero films today are at the apex of popularity (King, 2000). The US, being involved in the ‘War on Terror’ which is subsiding publicly, has relied on Hollywood to produce films reflective of and serving cultural zeitgeist. The presence of a superhero in such films makes everyone feel protected and saved. Films in this way, work to make people believe that existence of super soldiers outside of films is essential to ensure to live in a ‘safe’ world.

2.9.2 Shifts in Gender Portrayal post 9/11

According to prominent gender theorists like Judith Butler and Michael Kimmel American culture has undergone a reinforcement of gender binary after 9/11 events. This shift situated men as the protector of the weak, children and women, where the traumatized American nation was exemplified in a female vulnerable state. It all followed a flood of heroic depictions of “firefighters, soldiers, and the civilians of flight 93 in the media” (Kimmel, 2012). This regression reinforced hegemonic masculinity in American culture, and also in global landscape, which R.W. Connell defines as “the pattern of practice (i.e. things done, not just a set of role expectations or an identity) that allow [s] men’s dominance over women to continue” (1987).

Historically, the idea of hegemonic masculinity has been in constant battle with proponents of feminism. With many phases of feminism, aka waves, more and more female rights have been highlighted and contested for. The origin of this form of masculinity has been identified and challenged by R.W. Connell's *Gender and Power* (1987), in which Connell critiques the model of gender relations that dominated past psycho-social theories, claiming that "it failed to provide an accurate account of how traditional American roles negotiated the unequal distribution of power locally and globally." Hence, Connell's vision of this construct of masculinity reiterates "how particular groups of men inhabit positions of power and wealth, and how they legitimate and reproduce the social relationships that generate their dominance" (Carrigan, Connell and Lee 592). Post-9/11 American culture appeared to reboot the version of masculinity that used to catch attention and heat from prominent feminists. The main push came from strong political backing of Bush Administration which adopted a thoroughly gendered rhetoric to frame the discourse, hence exploiting post-9/11 crisis and need for a masculine, supportive and reassuring narrative. Hence came into being the boom in typical hegemonic and militarized masculinity, based on the following cultural construct in which American politicians construed the nations in gender terms, was America "man" enough to defend the feminized/victimized nation against the barbaric terrorists?

Such a notion became the hallmark of all media discourse following 9/11, with Americans being in a traumatized passive feminine vulnerability, and needed necessary masculine saving. Playing on the idea of both the victim and hero, the Bush administration complicated its political motives and single-handedly defined the rules of its "defensive offensive" during War on Terror. Hence, from the perspective of official policy and right-wing media outlets, 9/11 attacks provided a reset button to the 'traditional' modes of protective/aggressive manhood, as a nation and as individuals.

Obviously, Hollywood's display of men was in line with the template defined politically. It provided audience a more robust and political iconic character of Captain America, who they expected to represent America as a nation, in response to visible and expected dangers. Hollywood also provided people with softer images of real-life male that were to deal with their families and being able to relate to normal male, achieved through animation movies. In a nutshell, it provided audience both the political and real-life versions of masculinity, foisted in blockbuster and heavily funded movies with prescriptive ideologies

broadcasted to the larger American audience and world.

It becomes evident that multi-faceted link between post 9/11 politics and entertainment is not just reflective. Instead, Hollywood has always been an active party in assisting and driving identities to the masses, while serving as an effective tool for policy implementations. It has been instrumental in the shaping of cultural ideas about American power, masculinity, and global terrorism in the 21st century.

The militarised masculinity means forming of hegemonic masculinity in the military. David Morgan (1994) defines militarised masculinity as follows:

Of all the sites where masculinities are constructed, reproduced, and deployed, those associated with war and the military are some of the most direct. Despite far-reaching political, social, and technological changes, the warrior still seems to be a key symbol of masculinity. The stance, facial expressions, and the weapons clearly connote aggression, courage, a capacity for violence, and sometimes, a willingness for sacrifice. The uniform absorbs individualities into a generalised and timeless masculinity while also connoting a control of emotion and subordination to a larger rationality (p. 165).

A militarised masculinity proposes that a man can only be a “true” man if he symbolises these features. No doubt, the only way for men to embody these characteristics lies in joining the military, that is the ultimate school for masculinity (Price, 2008). Germany offers an early example of a society which was ruled by militarised masculinity through both World Wars. According to Price (2008) men in Germany were trained to be “hard” and “disciplined” (p.7). The US, too, has stressed on the need of militarised masculinity.

Moreover, the military, to have a cohesive unit, requires a group of men, who are in conflict in society based on socio-economic status. For the purpose the military enforces a commonality which is their masculinity. The military “(emphasises) stoic masculinity and differentiating the masculinity from feminine” (Scott, 2004, p.59). They are imbued by the military with the idea that it is their hyper-masculinity that unites them. The military considers training as a “finishing school,” which trains the soldiers values and behaviours relating to hyper masculinity, such as power hardness, fortitude, aggressiveness, and an exaggerated heterosexuality” (p.65). The soldiers, thus, have already been trained to be hyper-masculinity and to decry any femininity, before going to battlefield.

Prior to socio-cultural and political bursts of the 1960 decade, researchers engaged in the social sciences first examined gender from a social stance, using standards of abnormality to understand the difficulties of keeping normative standards. There were many studies that particularly concentrated on a gender-related “role” as key indicators of normative identities. “By mid-century, functionalist sex-role theory dominated the Western sociological discourse on women” (Connell, 2014, p.16). Still it was clear that such ways, too, “lacked a stable theoretical object” (ibid., 17). Instead of examining the causal factors that formed normativity, they expected the causes of abnormality through social pressures and historical ruptures that influenced boys and men instead of how socialised and gendered males also affected institutions and industry. Some studies viewed the approaches masculinity had been influenced by urbanisation and industrialisation with fathers working away from home and leaving mothers basically in charge of child rearing (such women more and more asking for rights for themselves in the women’s movement of age. Several scholars had inferred well into the 1960s by finding the definition of normative masculinity not a problem, and that collective social changes that posed a threat to maleness.

Gender roles and militarism are too, strengthened in the dissemination of militarised masculinity (Bjarnegard & Melender, 2011). Bjarnegard and Melender (2011) explain that through militarised masculinity “violence is viewed as an acceptable means of imposing and maintain domination (and) that conflict will be dealt with violently” (p.145). This strengthens argument put forth by Scott (2004) that main training objectives of military is hyper-masculinity. The soldiers are likely to apply violence to solve conflict, through imposing hyper-masculinity features, engendering a militarised masculinity.

In addition, it has been argued by some scholars that masculinity and war are connected. Kimmel (2012) maintains that there is a “mutually reinforcing relation between masculinity and war and the links between ideals of masculinity and exemplary or necessary military virtues or qualities” (p.392). This refers to existence of a mutual relationship between the masculinity, the military and war.

Other scholar examines sense of identity in creating masculinity in the military as compared to real life. In their book, *Projecting 9/11: Race, Gender and Citizenship in Recent Hollywood Films*, Mary Bloodsworth-Lugo and Carmen Lugo-Lugo, from Washington State

University, examine more than thirty post 9/11 Hollywood films to form their opinion about social dynamics and foreign policy in relation to the construction of race, gender and citizenship in these films. The notion of men being the only protectors has been challenged in many films. Interestingly, white male characters may exhibit weakness and defeat but they keep behaving in old patriarchal manner while making decisions (*Take Shelter*), pretending to act in group for collective good but mainly focused on family (*World War Z*). Another interesting aspect highlighted in their work is about the existence of fear as the driving force being character transformation into militaristic beings. The fear that continues to haunt the world is of terrorism and that very construct has helped to generate a lot of on-screen militarism. Such practice has provided world with a template as to how to act or deal with any threat in daily lives. No wonder there have been consistent public pressures world-wide in terms of possessing fire-arms for personal safety (Bloodworth-Lugo & Lugo-Lugo, 2015). The spike in strategy war games, action films and related merchandise is a discrete yet direct outcome of what cinema has been injecting the audience after 9/11 events.

Hale (2012) observes that “strong sense of belonging to the military community ‘is essential in developing masculinities’ (p.708). Hale (2012) in her study, discovered that some respondents regarded the military as their “home” and that it was the most significant aspect of who they are (p.79). Her findings indicate that the military is set into their identities. Hale (2012) also remarks that respondents realise that they must comply with “military masculinities” and if they do not, they must leave (p.713). In applying masculinity as a cohesive trait, the military convinces people to adopt it with negative effects if people do not willingly conform. The military, thus, imposes masculinity on the soldiers and withdraw autonomy in doing so.

2.9.3 Media Portrayal of Masculinity

Besides the military being one way to project masculinity, films too, are employed to impact the cultural zeitgeist. Scholars expressing gender issues started examining gender in films, in the 1970 decade. It was through using feminist theory, that gender in film was often analysed, that was evolved by scholars, like Laura Mulvey and Claire Johnston (Hammett, 1997). It was the release of *Jaws* in 1975 that led to start of feminine film critique. This film has been the first blockbuster that indicated that films should meet the tastes of 15 years old boys (Dowd, 2015). The focus on the male viewers of *Jaws* (1975) is mostly similar as the

larger viewers of war films. Scholars concluded that films caused “(oppression) not only economically and politically but also in the very forms of reasoning, signifying and symbolical exchange of our culture” (Devereaux, 1990, p.377). The representation of gender in films, too, adds to the cultural zeitgeist.

Stringer (2013), for instance, assessed masculinity in different films like *Rambo* films series, which were released in 1980 decade. Stringer (2013) is of the view that these films curiously symbolised society’s desire to see “spectacular narratives about characters who stand for individualism, liberty, militarism, and a mythic heroism” (p, 16). These films were certainly released during the Reagan Era, a historic context in which the idea was pressed by the administration highlighting the need for a more ‘masculine’ approach to foreign affairs (Jeffords, 1994, p.28). This further displays the relationship between the films and cultural milieu. Men chose to have ‘hard bodies’ for the country to be ‘masculine’. Jeffords (1994) states that hard bodies are symbolised by having strength, being aggressive, and having power rather than having any feminine characteristics (p.35). This is interesting that this trend exploded in the 1980 decade and continues until today.

Besides, “the muscular body is a heavily inscribed sign. Nothing else so clearly marks an individual as a bearer of masculine power” (Brown, 1999, p.27). The term musculature is applied to ascertain gender norms. A person must be “hard” or have ample muscles, if he is to be regarded as a ‘man’. Women, too, who are muscular and men who are not muscular, are regarded as “genders transgressors”, for they resist gender norms strengthened by society (Brown, 1999). The muscular body, or hard body, is a strong sign for hyper masculinity.

This is worth mentioning how these kinds of hard bodies too, shifted to comic book characters. Most of male superheroes in comic books are portrayed with large muscles, that is defined as the “Marvel body” (Lang, 2016). People can be made to believe that hegemonic masculinity is natural and concrete (Brown, 2016). Superheroes can only express this hegemony easily. An interesting reaction can be observed in the popular TV series, *Big Bang Theory* (2007-2019) in which characters are critical of superheroes masculinity. The male characters in the show still want to appear like superheroes, which means that there is yet the “type” of body that is required to be gained. As such the male superhero body is most possible for the male viewers, with the purpose to strengthen the need for the ‘hard body’ in the zeitgeist.

Like female superheroes, who are pictured for the “male gaze”, male characters too, are filmed for the “male gaze”. Given the male gaze or male perspective, it is how the society is informed to learn about the world. The male gaze, being a perspective that is regarded as the universal quantifier of how to see the world and to ascertain what is “real” (Devereaux, 1990, p.337). The female superheroes are drawn for the male viewers to stare. However, male superheroes are not cast for “female gaze”, they are yet for the male gaze.

The male superhero body is for men that “find male power exhilarating” (Wheeler, 2014). It is stated that the male superheroes symbolise what men “should look like, which too guides to apply routines that are developed to look like these characters” (Lang, 2016). Moreover, superhero films “represent a very narrow definition of masculinity, and the story should make the viewers identify with the main character” (Brown, 2016). The hegemonic masculinity is persistently strengthened in a franchise such as the MCU. Captain America too is one of the characters that possesses a “hard body” that the viewers will identify with.

In addition, “classical comic book depictions of masculinity are perhaps the quintessential expression of our cultural beliefs about what it means to be a man (Brown, 1999, p.26)”. The beliefs about “manhood” are reinforced in masculine representation in superhero comics. It means that there is a constant cycle in how masculinity is developed. According to Brown (1999) while comics have displayed “that a superman exists inside everything”, they are starting to remove the “ordinary man underneath in favour of an even more excessively powerful and one-dimensional masculine ideal (p. 26)”. By erasing the ‘ordinary man’ duality to the ‘superman’, e.g. Clark Kent evolving into Superman, the comics give preference to ‘superman’. The ‘ordinary man’ has no opportunity and therefore the comic books viewers should attempt to be the ‘superman’ all the time.

However, this duality is present in many superheroes. Brown (2016) claims that “superhero comics are one of our culture’s clearest illustrations of hyper masculinity and male duality premised on the fear of *un-masculine* other” (p.31). According to Brown (2016), the duality is the superhero which represents hyper-masculinity, and everyone knows, and the “ordinary man” that represents marked effeminate features and is obscure from the public. The duality of the person alike basically positions one personality as the ideal, that is the superhero. Again, this generates the “wish-fulfilling fantasy for young men” (Brown, 1999, p.32). As

such, this study admits the importance of organising an assessment of masculinity of male superheroes like Captain America, who transitions from militarized hegemonic masculinity to the New man, a defeated, weak and confused man. Also, the comparison is drawn with animated male characters in DC/Pixar blockbuster films, who evolve from macho to mild masculine.

2.9.4 Marvel and Masculinity

The hero, a symbol of courage and maleness is sought after by the people who, to them, protects the day. The hero exists to save everyone. Moreover, superheroes should be capable to do above and beyond normal human power as the name suggests. The affix of ‘super’ adds ‘more’ to the power of the hero, to be able to defeat anything. With a view to having a ‘super’ hero, the character is often given supreme power (e.g. Steve Rogers or *Captain America*), or he is a genius (e.g. Tony Stark or *Iron Man*). It is the people having added abilities who save the day rather than ‘regular’ people.

Despite the superheroes being imitated ‘comically’, like in the TV series *The Big Bang Theory*, ‘normal’ people still desire to be superhero (Brown, 2016, p.131). The major characters of this show were mostly male and taken as ‘geeks’ and have worn costumes like their favourite superhero characters in different episodes. As Brown (2016) remarks that the show *The Big Bang Theory* (2007-2019) presents a parody of geek culture and indicates how superhero films impact fans (p.132). Superheroes are, then, taken as the conclusive form of human greatness or in some cases alien greatness (e.g. *Superman*). It is proposed under zeitgeist that a desire always exists to be a superhero, irrespective of what you are.

These films give a message to the viewers that the superhero form, for example, physical power, is the final aim to getting importance. Besides, as the MCU is a franchise, people are not restricted to seeing these characters save the day in films. Franchisers are developed by “mega films designed to sustain a product line of similar films and an ever-expanding array of related entertainment products” (Schatz, 2009, p.30). As such viewers are not confined to these films to watch these characters. There are food products, dresses, toys etc, that bear these characters, Captain America, Iron Man, Thor, etc. They imbue a number of aspects of people’s daily lives, in particular children.

Hollywood films provide the viewers an opportunity to communicate with the

characters, their stories and the ideologies after seeing the films. These films continue to be released if these go on generating high return for the production houses. There is another way that these films, because of being comic book adaptation, could be considered as children's films for boys. As stated earlier in this chapter, Disney purchased Marvel because girls have mostly been the major target of Disney in view of "princesses" in their films (McLauchlin, 2015). The purchase of Marvel enabled Disney to extend their market to boys and give them access to 'superhero' toys. The provision of 'superhero' toys to boys greatly strengthened militarism as well as militarised masculinity in boys.

2.9.5 MCU's Evolving Captain America

As the MCU is a significant phenomenon to analyse ideologies that are being spread to the viewers, the character of Captain America is also essential to evaluate within the context of the MCU. Originally Captain America emerged as a comic book character and was later adapted for the MCU. Captain America was devised in 1941, by Jack Kirby and Joe Simon for *Timely Comics* that later changed into Marvel Comics (Conroy, 2009). The Captain America comics and other comics too were employed for propaganda purposes during the WWII, with a view to promoting involvement in the war to defeat Nazi Germany and Japan. For example, the first issue of the Captain America comics highlighted Captain America punching Hitler. Captain America issues were also utilised for conservation of paper. Captain America, in the issues, inform the readers that they are part of the war effort, and as such they should become part of the organisation named "Sentinels of Liberty" and need to save paper.

In view of the Captain America and other superheroes continuously fighting and defeating the enemy, the comics became 'wish-fulfilment fodder' for soldiers that read them. Captain America is a soldier who fights for America, he is the symbol of what a soldier or any a reader, should strive for to bring peace to the world. Captain America is also the embodiment of America nationalism (Dittmer, 2005, p.627), Moreover, he essentially represents the 'white saviour' and the character is the 'perfect' white male with 'American' loyalty and beliefs and only he can save the world. The story of Captain America as the 'white saviour' is also symbolic of the US as the nation that 'saves' everyone else.

Captain America in the comic and the MCU, is devised to fight for the American military. The character is so deeply attached to an American organisation that afterwards

“establishes him as the representative of the idealised American nation and as a defender of the American status quo”. The character basically represents the US and its ideological inclination which are reinforced through this character and are reflected in the cultural zeitgeist. It is, therefore, essential to critically evaluate as to how symbols of militarism and masculinity are reflected and reinforced by Captain America in the MCU.

2.10 Idealism and Hyper-Masculinity of Captain America

Films alone do not have subjects related to militarism, but these are also present in comic books. Jason Dittmer (2005), while evaluating the Captain America comic books, remarks that the character expresses the “American Identity by relating to nationalism and current political affairs” (p.627). His analysis is obviously about the Captain in the comic book domain, yet his conclusion openly relates to films too. Therefore, this study gives importance to the analysis of hyper masculinity in the Captain America comic books and stories as these stories are forming the subject matter of various films (e.g. *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011) and others.

In every film, that is released, highlighting Captain America, as the only cause the world is protected from ‘evil’ strengthened these symbols. Captain America and the MCU are symbols indicative of (Americans) that act modern, cool, and sophisticated, but underneath, want a daddy, a king, a god, a hero, a champion who will carry that lance and that sword into the field and fight for (them) (Dowd, 2015). Moreover, Captain America is a “representative of national identity, one must not ignore the display of his physical body as a marker of his heroic manhood.” (Barbour, 2015 p.277). To quote Barbour (2015) “the transformation of Rogers into Captain America enacts that fantasy of instantaneous metamorphosis from weakling to superhero” (p.279). This is Captain America that symbolises the final wish-fulfilling fantasy. Captain America is the Superman of MCU for all times to come.

We need to learn that films alone do not have militaristic topics, but comic books, too, have these themes. Dittmer (2005) while analysing the Captain America comic books observes that the character represents the “American identity by relating to nationalism and current political affairs”. He is of the view that by examining the Captain in the comic book universe, this inference could also clearly apply to the films. Captain America successfully represents the people of America, as they apply popular culture to know their status in the nation and the

world (p.626). According to Dittmer (2005) the Captain symbolises the idea that it is the US only which acts through military force because of the need for security (p.630).

2.11 DC/Pixar and Masculinity

The dynamics of DC/Pixar world of characters have been different in terms of audience demographics, topics, gender representations and attention to contemporary topics. Disney has been known for providing a very soft version of bitter realities for the young minds to digest. This has changed visibly in the wake of 9/11. As post 9/11 genre in its essence echoes violence, paranoia, fear, and uncertainty, like Marvel, DC/Pixar also reconfigured its manifestations of trouble-free worlds. Hence came into practice animations like, *Monsters Inc.* *Cars* (2006), *Ratatouille* (2007), *Wall-E* (2008), etc., which seemingly had all male characters that were not prince charming any more. They appear flawed, uncertain, afraid, and self-correcting at places. Comparing the pre-9/11 *Toy story* (1995) with Post 9/11 *Toy Story 2, 3*, the difference in the approach of Woody and Buzz Light Year is transformational. They are no longer self-sufficient merry-go-lucky male protagonists any more. Instead they exhibit weakness and need to work in team now. It is no surprise that Disney has been studied mostly for its princesses and their elaborate musical characters. This study tries to highlight the overdue scholarly deliberations its male characters deserve to get.

Although most of gender researchers have been focused on Disney/Pixar has, for some reasons, largely been unnoticed. As mentioned earlier, researchers have occasionally included a few Pixar films with Disney films for analysis, but only inconsiderable number of studies have solely examined Pixar. There are only a handful of papers and theses which deal with gender in Pixar films. Although a few recent books do incorporate some Pixar characters in their discussion of gender, they are deficient in required profundity of analyses (e.g. King, Lugo-Lugo, & Bloodsworth-Lugo, 2010; Smith, 2011). With the 2012 release of *Brave* (2012), the first Pixar film to feature a female protagonist, it was doubted that Pixar may receive more attention from researchers, especially to compare Princess Merida to Disney's long list of princesses. However, since males constitute the overwhelming volume of Pixar's films, masculinity in some form or fashion remains the most dominant theme. In this section, I have reviewed the limited scholarly literature available centring on gender construction in DC/Pixar feature films.

Decker (2010) has carried out the most comprehensive research project focusing on the analysis of gender in Pixar films by conducting quantitative content analysis of the first 10 Pixar films, *Toy Story*, *A Bug's Life* (1998), *Toy Story 2*, *Monsters, Inc. (2001)*, *Finding Nemo*, *The Incredibles* (2004), *Cars* (2006), *Ratatouille* (2007), *WALL-E* (2008), and *Up* (2009). Decker (2010) was mainly inspired by Wiersma's study in choosing quantitative approach for analysis study, but at places he criticized her use of a flexible research method.

Wiersma (2000) describes her method a "spiralling process... [where she went] backward and forward making decisions based on what emerged from the data" (p. 35). However, Decker (2010) insists on *a priori*, unchangeable design. He deliberately eschews the use of any qualitative research methods and rather employs a customized version of Wiersma's coding scheme (stripped of its qualitative components that allowed for character descriptions) to test his 21 hypotheses. Decker (2010) analyses the male-to-female ratio, physical appearance, in-home and out-of-home labour, societal and familial power, and specific character traits.

Decker (2010) notices that both males and females are displayed occupying positions of societal power. However, he observes that female characters are so enormously outnumbered that the audience scarcely notices females performing authoritative roles. Regarding emotional displays, both male and female characters are observed crying, and males are presented as sensitive and altruistic, with their masculinity "defined as much by caring about others as by strength or courage" (p. 88). Decker also observes that female characters continue to serve as a catalyst for male change, like Jeffords (1994, 1995) critique of *Beauty and the Beast*. However, contrasting Jeffords, Decker found that these relationships were not always quixotic. Decker (2010) cited the child-caregiver duo of Boo and Sully in *Monsters, Inc. (2001)* and platonic friendships, like Woody and Jessie in *Toy Story 2* and Marlin and Dory in *Finding Nemo*.

2.11.1 DC/Pixar's Evolving Male

Even though female heroes have undergone major changes, they are not alone. Disney film heroes have also evolved into a balanced, emotional, caring person. Early heroes, such as princes, are often referred to as "silent, dramatic cardboard" (Bell, 2009). Although their screen time has been limited, these princes also show very masculine characteristics (England,

Descartes, & Collier-Meek, 2011, p. 560). Gillam & Wooden (2008) describes the early Prince Charming as “often too two-dimensional to do more than inadvertently shape the definition of the protagonists’ femininity” (p. 3). However, Trice and Holland (2017) support men of similar equation in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *Pinocchio*, *Bambi*, and *The Lion King* where men are not selfish, brave and family oriented. Although analysis of Trice and Holland (2017) is not an extensive insight into Disney films, since they choose a selection of popular films only, it looks like that many other films projected some shape of New-Man themes.

While analysing side-by side, Disney’s early princess-themed films, like *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and *Sleeping Beauty*, Eisner period films like *The Little Mermaid*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Aladdin*, *Pocahontas*, and *Mulan*, and the last hand-drawn princess-based film *The Princess and the Frog*, the researchers were amazed to see little or no development in the princes. However, they show a more feminine style. The five most important qualities shown to all Disney princesses are emotions, kindness, physical strength, stability, and athletic ability. The two different cases, out of total 5 were, Beast in *Beauty and the Beast* and Shang in *Mulan*, where the prominent three characters were all male. As for Beast, it inculcated the feelings of terror, being assertive and exploratory. The most important ‘masculine’ princesses, which appeared in *Pocahontas*, and *Mulan* also had two of the most masculine princes in sample. John Smith and Shang appear to be physically strong, unemotional, stable, athletic, and appeared leader-like, unlike other princes in these films.

At the end of 20th century, Disney films feature typical features and stereotypes for men. Towbin et al. (2004) discovered five different themes on showing men in Disney animations: A) Men usually use physical means to express their emotions or emotions; B) Men do not control masculinity; C) Men are naturally strong and heroic; D) Men are having outside jobs; E) Over-weight men are negative (p. 28). The New Man discourse, in the backdrop of 1990s tough body images, also influenced the male imagery in Disney's films. Disney’s *Beauty and Beast* is a manifestation of this masculine development. Keegan (2013) said in his study of the behaviour of the Batman that “masculinity has been betrayed by its own cultural imagery: what men thought they were supposed to be strong, protective, powerful, commanding has backfired” becoming a curse for men, and the only way to break it is for men “to be nurtured until their ‘true’ goodness arises” (p. 171).

Keegan (2013) said that the burden of blame was reduced, by Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*, from the Beast's behaviour, just because he knew no other way of behaving. His concern is the external factor of his childhood grooming and social expectation, not the inner personality of the person. Keegan (2013) found Beast to a cranky kid, who did not just learn to behave properly. He is protected by Belle and she helped him get rid of his violent behaviour and evolve into a kind and caring man, a New Man. So, when people can recognise the parts that once considered taboo (for example, an open expression of feeling and emotions), they become 'complete' man, instead of a person constantly haunted by his shortcomings. Thus, even Disney reflected the transition away from the 'hard body' of 1980s, exemplified by Gaston transformation of the beast into the prince of love. Trice and Holland (2017) concluded that *The Beauty and Beast* gave the viewers a clear understanding of men and desired masculinity.

2.11.2 DC/Pixar's New Man

Decker (2010) findings, although thoroughly quantitative, reflect other studies that have explored how Pixar enunciates diverse representations of gender, particularly masculinity. His findings indicate, males are shown crying and expressing other emotions, and emotional expression is one of the hallmarks of the New Man. Gillam and Wooden (2008) are the first to examine the New Man model in Pixar films. However, they approach the films from the perspective of cultural studies. Gillam and Wooden(2008) observe that, in the case of *Toy Story*'s Buzz Lightyear and Woody, *The Incredibles (2004)* Mr. Incredible, and *Cars (2006)*' Lightning McQueen, the male protagonists all follow a similar "narrative trajectory": each character is in pursuit of becoming an alpha male, but they ultimately suffer emasculation. Then they develop attachment with another male character while pursuing a feminized object and/or set of values, eventually leading them to the discovery of the meaning of a kinder, more emotionally aware man (p. 3). These characters develop into New Men differently than Decker (2010) concludes because most are transformed due to the involvement of a female character. However, in Gillam and Wooden's analysis, they observe that a bond between two male characters results in transformation from the sturdy alpha male into the New Man. Although, Beast transforms into a New Man because of Belle's love for him, and, in turn, his love for her, but a woman's love does not remain the only factor causing transformation. They change because of their love for a woman or feminized object. Lightning McQueen transforms from

an impulsive and reckless character through his friendship with Mater and mentorship from Doc Hudson as he pursues Sally's affections, not because Sally loves him. The same happens through Woody and Buzz's relationship in *Toy Story* and Mr. Incredible's relationships with Buddy and Frozone in *The Incredibles (2004)* (Gillam & Wooden, 2008).

Gillam and Wooden (2008) have discovered some common narrative themes explicating the audiences that New Men's strength is not purely physical, but rather, it is derived from having a cohesive family unit (whether biological or not) and is signified through cooperation, intelligence, and selflessness. Comparative gender analysis of Pixar films or characters can be found only in handful of works. The characters that have received the greatest admiration and attention include *Toy Story's* Woody (Finklea, 2014; Lugo-Lugo & Bloodsworth-Lugo, 2008) and Buzz Lightyear (Finklea, 2014), *Finding Nemo's* Marlin (Brydon, 2009), and *WALL-E (2008)* (Bolling, 2014; Long, 2011).

The New Men in the *Toy Story* trilogy are depicted simultaneously exhibiting aggression towards each other as well as willingness to cooperate and work collectively with their fellow toys. Woody must extend cooperation towards the "mutant" toys to rescue Buzz in the first film. Buzz, Slinky, Rex, Hamm, and Mr. Potato Head must work in unison to drive a truck to try to rescue Woody in *Toy Story 3 (2010)*. The toys must also work collectively to escape the prison-like day-care in *Toy Story 3*, and "it is only through this massively coordinated effort of teamwork that the toys are able to escape" (Finklea, 2014, p. 16).

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that males are perceived as "natural leaders" (e.g. Woody oversees Andy's toys, Buzz coordinates the rescue mission to save Woody) (Finklea, 2014). Bravery and loyalty are exhibited throughout the trilogy when the toys join forces to confront perilous circumstances to rescue one of their people (e.g. rescuing Woody from the evil toy collector; Woody helping his friends break out of the day-care) and return home.

They toys are endowed with the qualities of selflessness and sacrifice. Surely, being children's films, they would never lose their lives, but their willingness to sacrifice themselves disseminates a significant message. Like most mediated New Men, the males in the *Toy Story* trilogy articulate the desire to be loved and needed. Woody is desirous to become Andy's favourite, which is the ultimate expression of Andy's love for him. Woody also explains to Bo Peep that he enjoys meeting and spending time with Andy at Cowboy Camp. In the third film,

the toys are shown desiring to be played with (i.e. needed) by children, which eventually propels the plot of the film.

Moreover, it may be noticed about masculinity that several characteristics are repeatedly praised by female characters in the trilogy (Finklea, 2014). Physical strength is applauded, such as when Buzz first ‘flies’ around Andy’s room. Bo Peep appreciates Woody’s bulging bicep at the end of *Toy Story 2*, telling him it makes him look strong. In *Toy Story 3*, we observe that Mrs. Potato Head is clearly infatuated with a green muscular-looking insect-like action figure at the day-care, asking to touch his muscles. Later, when Mr. Potato Head is forced to use a cucumber as his body, instead of his normal plastic potato, Mrs. Potato Head admires that he has lost weight and become very tall. Thus, it may be concluded, “Mrs. Potato Head is enamoured with stereotypical masculine features, preferring her men to be tall, dark (green), and handsome” (Finklea, 2014, p. 21).

The last major theme reveals that the male characters who act effeminately face derision and mockery by fellow males, but not females. The character of Ken in *Toy Story 3* is the best illustration of this theme. Throughout the film, Ken confronts mockery and ridicule for his feminine dress and dispositions. One toy calls him “Mr. Softie,” and others refer to him as a “girl’s toy.” Despite his apparent magnetism to Barbie, Ken is presented as a stereotypical homosexual male. Because of his enticement to Barbie, the characters do not explicitly question Ken’s sexuality until the ending moments of the film. In a scene that plays during the closing admirations, Woody is reading a letter sent from the toys at the day-care. The letter is written in hot pink ink and covered in glittery stars and hearts. “That Barbie has some nice handwriting,” Buzz says admiringly. “Uh, Buzz,” Jessie says, pointing to Ken’s signature at the bottom of the letter, “Barbie didn’t write this.” Then Woody and Jessie swap nervous smiles with each other, indicating that something about Ken is “off” (Finklea, 2014).

Lugo-Lugo and Bloodsworth-Lugo (2008) succinctly address gender stereotypes in Pixar films, assigning two paragraphs to Woody and Mr. Potato Head. The researchers assert that gender stereotypes found in Disney films are also present in Pixar’s. However, only two examples of what they call “heterosexual incorporation” are listed. In their argument, Lugo-Lugo and Bloodsworth-Lugo (2008) state that gender stereotypes can be spotted in Pixar films because of the romantic interaction between Woody and Bo Peep and Mr. Potato Head’s

longing for Mrs. Potato Head's arrival. Their sweeping generalization has been criticized because of the limited evidence cited in their research (Finklea, 2014).

Lugo-Lugo and Bloodsworth-Lugo (2008) argue that gender stereotypes are similar in Disney and Pixar films, however, Brydon (2009) observes that *Finding Nemo*'s Marlin represents a modern type of animated parent, Mr. Mom. Brydon (2009) claims Marlin effectively assumes the role of "mother" in the film after the demise of his wife. Observing Marlin's nervous conduct and desire for self-expression, which puts him in a stark contrast to other male characters. Brydon (2009) deduces that Marlin functions as Nemo's mother, rather than simply an overly concerned father. Brydon cites additional evidence supporting Marlin's mothering role, such as his use of "soothing, tender tones, anxiety-ridden rants, or high-pitched commands.... cradling Nemo's face in his fins, grooming him, [and] holding his fin on the 'streets' of the reef"—all which Brydon (2009) believes are associated with a mother's role (p. 139). Furthermore, she assumes Marlin is not involved with Nemo unlike other fathers who have been interacting with their children. Brydon (2009) also believes Marlin's open expressions of emotion, especially his feelings of depression, have feminized him. Her analysis seemingly operates under an assumption that a male must act stereotypically masculine, or else, he will be a female. While she does not include any mention of the New Man model of masculinity, Brydon's findings present a new version of masculinity, albeit a markedly feminine interpretation, observable in Marlin. Alternatively, Marlin can be identified as positive gender role model of a father who clearly loves his son and who is nurturing and caring. He, however, does not delve into a deeper analysis of Marlin's character.

The film demonstrates reversal of some gender stereotypes by presenting WALL-E as emotional, hopelessly romantic, and interested in holding hands, while EVE is observed as being aggressive and unemotional (Bolling, 2014). Long (2000) suggests that to keep WALL-E's emotionality from being construed as feminine, he is represented as childlike. However, Bolling (2014) concludes that WALL-E is already functioning as a New Man, as outlined by Gillam and Wooden (2008), and the character of EVE undergoes a robust transformation into caring and nurturing being (Bolling, 2014), and as Long (2011) observes even "motherly" toward the childlike WALL-E. Long (2000) has also noticed the gender reversal, citing the fact that EVE is technologically superior to WALL-E and therefore dominant over him.

Analyses of Bolling (2014) and Long (2000) differ concerning the gendered nature of WALL-E's job of sweeper. Bolling (2014) views WALL-E's job as simply cleaning up after others, which she says is a job typically given to women. On the other hand, Long (2000) interprets WALL-E's job as physically demanding, resulting broken parts and leaving him dirty, which she says is more indicative of a masculine labour role. Indeed, WALL-E can easily be viewed as a futuristic garbage man, which is traditionally seen as a man's job.

Lastly, Long (2000) has noted that physical differences between WALL-E and EVE help to further delineate their gender. WALL-E is made up of disproportionate parts (e.g. "chunky" hands, wide-set eyes, and large treads) connected to a square-shaped body that has not been pristinely maintained, which, according to Long (2000), is suggestive of a masculine gender. EVE, on the contrary, is "sleeker and curvier, and her gleaming white body is well maintained". Furthermore, Long believes that EVE's appearance reinforces the idea that females should (and do) pay attention about their physical upkeep than males.

2.11.3 Contrasting Males and Females

Most of the gender studies focus into Disney's treatment of female characters, while some studies show both male and female behaviour. Wiersma (2000) and Towbin, Haddock, Zimmerman, Lund, and Tanner (2004) carried out most of the research comparing masculinity and femininity. Wiersma (2000) analysed portraits and roles in 16 animated films and found the difference between men and women in the portrait and compared this image to traditional women and stereotypes of men. Wiersma (2000) said the number of male roles outnumber the female projection, from 199 to 83. Female protagonists are depicted as young, beautiful, tall, wide-eyed. The heroes, on the other hand (except Peter Pan, who does not grow) have muscular bodies. Long (2000) reached a similar conclusion for the body and body types of women shows that the body of the ideal woman is thin, and the ideal male is muscular.

Wiersma (2000) also noted that women were shown looking after home, kitchen and kids, basing her argument on Twenty-five female characters in these films. In contrast, only six males performed some home tasks. The variety of local works was even greater for women. Examples of housework are cleaning, knitting and storing food and water, arranging children in bed and birthday. But men only had four functions: serving food, feeding animals. ironing and cooking. Wiersma (2000) noted that the kitchen work and ironing were performed by

butlers, which is considered their in-job obligation, rather than in-home help.

Wiersma (2000) documents various outside jobs for men, in her research. There are doctors, police officers, pirates, sheriffs, governors, butlers, lawyers, etc. To analyse the male social advantage, Wiersma said 30 male characters were presented in positions of authority, contrasting with only five female characters. The most male social characters belonged to the royal family and some of them retain military positions. Others retained powerful positions, one way or the other. The number of men and men in family domination was almost identical. Wiersma (2000) also analysed the characteristics that are typically stereotypical as women (i.e. dependent, emotional and romantic) and men (i.e. aggressive, independent, unemotional, not romantic). He found that most of the characters correspond to these stereotypes, but there were three exceptions. Recent Disney films, male characters appear as addictive, and almost every male hero was romantic. Dependence depends on the need for savings. Wiersma found that from the 16 films 11 of them analysed the male characters, many of whom needed saving. Female heroes helped in these rescues which is not usual in the actual world. Heroines are also presented as independent, but a need to depend is not completely invisible. This data supported stereotypes of women as emotional, passive and romantic and male as unemotional and aggressive. Content analysis of 26 Disney cartoons by Towbin et al. (2004) showed four supreme themes “A) The appearance of a woman is more valuable than her intellect; B) Women are powerless and need protection; C) Women are at home and maybe married; D) Over-weight women are unpleasant, ugly and cannot marry” (p. 30).

2.12 Moving on

The detailed account presented in this chapter traces the origin of masculinity projection on screen into deep roots of Hollywood. The in-depth analysis of the very creation and usefulness of Hollywood reveals its political ties and financial underpinnings. Also, the status of Hollywood as a cultural mirror is investigated and its role in national and global storytelling assessed. Having met its primary and explicit goals during the two world wars i.e. propagation of American values, viewpoints and political and global superiority, this industry has phased into more subtly themed films in last three decades. The establishment of an American masculine identity through militaristic themes set the template for fictions, comics, novels and literature produced in those eras.

The discussion about Hollywood and its core purpose and values about gender perception narrows down to two main players in the industry, Disney and Marvel studios. These production houses started off as comics producers. Their establishment into giant studio houses and narration of their comic storylines on to screen is probed into. The analysis is grounded into the works of critics and experts who scrutinize the way gender portrayal has been at the cultural core of these studios and how their products, movies, spoke to the audience in their times. Finally, this chapter discusses the previous work on gender portrayal in Marvel and DC. Those studies are discussed at stretch and the hence providing the room for a cross-sectional analysis of gradual evolution of Captain America, the iconic Hollywood militaristic hegemonic white American male superhero of Marvel. His dialogues and exchanges have been studied and select scenes from each of his films, in a chronological order, are analysed. The focus of this study lies at the scholarly attention to gradually softening of his masculinity, a revival of the New Man discourse.

Similarly, since researches on Disney have been mostly circling around its princesses and sporadically attended to the role or presence of male characters in a powerful light. After acquiring Pixar Animation studio, Disney hoped to change that and tapped into male character potential. For discovering Pixar's male and its different shades, two iconic blockbuster films have been chosen for thematic analysis. The rationale for a different treatment of DC/Pixar animation is owing to two main reasons. Firstly, there is no common storyline and characters that span through different films in DC/Pixar, rather there are separate stories and multi-part films for each. Secondly, a Pixar film offers a strikingly wider array of masculine characters, each displaying some unique characteristics, which is very real lifelike. The characters inside one film, though not strictly 'male' but rather a car, a truck, a fish, a toy, etc., offer a medley. Hence it is convenient to find out how many characters evolve from a macho masculinity to a softer New man masculinity. The case in choosing Captain America, on the contrary, across five films is the breadth of coverage he has received film after film. So, in other words, it is discussion about a single iconic character's journey versus a host of animated characters for comparison's sake.

The detailed overview of relevant literature presented in this chapter points to the different cultural and scholarly directions adopted by films and critics. The present study picks on the prominence of masculinity, both hyper masculinity and the New Man. The following

chapter defines the methodology adopted in this research to achieve the comprehension of the research and how they realize gradually in the process. It also discusses the choices I have made in fusing different theories, hence outlining the research process.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

On the basis of relevant literature discussed so far and the investigation of the political roots of controlled messaging inside films, this study suggests a critical discourse analysis of MCU's Captain America and DC/Pixar's Lightning McQueen, Woody, and Buzz Lightyear. Emerging in the 1980s, CDA happens to be the most substantial and visible offshoot of discourse analysis (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000). CDA is also "fundamentally concerned with analysing opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power, and control as manifested in language" (Wodak, 2001). Being thoroughly political, CDA permits this analysis in structural relationships.

Due to its prominence and relevance to ideological text it is befitting for scholarly deliberation of MCU and Pixar character analysis for the constructs of masculinity. Previous scholarly work has shown that there are ideological symbols in media. This study however shows that there are ideological symbols of militarized masculinity, aka hyper masculinity, and the resonance of the New Man which are reflectors of cultural milieu. In applying CDA these symbols are identified. Such examination of discursive symbols is likely to create awareness of the subtlety of message audience receives. Moreover, the audience may relate to the constructs and the way these are inculcated into a glossy form of entertainment.

CDA has been applied to a multitude of forms and classes of text. Multimedia CDA itself has further specialized offshoots. The investigative link between discourse and ideology has broadened the scope of CDA to pop music, tweets, blogs and even vlogs on Snapchat, etc. To see blockbuster films in connection with their cultural and political settings warrants the use of CDA. This way the audience can be better educated in realizing the vitality and depth of the coded messages on big screens.

Through the analysis of the power relations between the audiences and the cinematic content, this study will assist the reader to "develop ways of thinking about culture and power that can be utilized by agents in the pursuit of change" (Barker & Galasinski, 2001, p. 25) and to be an emancipatory tool (Fairclough, 2001, p. 125). The application of CDA to analyse these

superheroes and animated blockbuster movies can potentially create an emancipatory tool for the audience to identify the ideological symbolism present in the films and to think critically about them. This study adopts an understanding of films as texts being polysemic, that are socially located and thereby ideological. But this does not mean that this study does not use a type of objectivity in its approach. To know the ways in which discourse is closely connected to ideology and depiction, it is imperative to understand what discourse is. Among many definitions of discourse, some are more linguistic and some more socio-cultural. According to Casey (2011), discourse is itself 'multidiscursive', with varied meanings, depending on the circumstance employed. Blommaert and Bulcaen (2000) defines discourse as "language in action"; language as a social practice and a cultural tool (p. 447). Discourse, in the perspective of media studies, is taken as more than language and instead refers to all forms of signifying practices that produce meaning including film, photography, and television (Casey, 2011). According to Foucault, discourse is linked to "ways of thinking, talking, representing, and social interactions" (cited in Casey, 2011). While considering discourse, we must see discourse not as "the process of language use and meaning production" and instead consequences of the said processes, those bonds of power which both shape and are shaped by discourse. Hall (2004) sees discourse as a way of representing, through a variety of signifying practices, our knowledge about a subject at a historical moment. Discourses are a part of shaping meaning, beliefs, and values and as such are understood not as neutral but rather as essential part to forming social reality. Knowledge of discourse is as producing social reality and social relations; discourse is viewed as basically about power and ideology. It is asserted by Wodak (2009) that "discursive practice can have ideological effect in the sense that they work to produce and reproduce unequal power relations in the way in which they represent things and position people" (p.11).

This knowledge of discourse is closely connected to ideology and power that leads us to discourse examination as a methodological technique. Discourse analysis, in the media perspective, is used to 'uncover' the ways in which media (newspaper, film etc) make sense of and give meaning to everyday life (Casey,2011). Special discourses are taken up by media and not others in the process of representing people, things and events. Discourse examination after that, can 'open up' the question of representation as it connects representation to discourse and understands discourse as always, an articulation of ideology (Casey, 2011). According to

Casey (2011) “what is included and excluded in representation is, ultimately, determined through discourse, which is in turn, structured by ideology” (p.33). With the discourse being constructive of our social reality, we can start to realise the power that discourse has in the people’s lives. Discourse both creates and symbolises us frequently in ways that verify and reproduce dominance and inequity.

3.2 Notions Defined

According to Miller (2001) culture is defined as the learned behaviours and ideas that characterise groups of people. Culture consists of behaviours, beliefs, traditions, ideas, values, customs, and worldviews that humans learn as members of a society or culture. Culture can be understood as an individual’s way of life. Additionally, culture is grounded in the ability to think in terms of symbols; these symbols are shared by members of the society or culture. Miller (2001) examined two common definitions of culture. The first definition of culture concerns a writer/producer’s output, which is defined and given value by aesthetic and writer/producer’s criteria. The second definition of culture is the anthropological definition; it refers to our way of life and it encompasses everything that makes us a cultural human. Additionally, McKee and Stone (2009) observe that there are countless subcultures in America. Blockbuster films form a subculture within, and they function in a manner like advertisements, that is, blockbuster films reinforce values, traditions, ideals, codes, and norms of behaviour. Cox (2012) argues this point observing that, “comic strips [and blockbuster films] defined good and evil, virtue and corruption, familial relationships, and appropriate social and business conduct. Through its standardised format, the comic strip or book/films have been able to encode ideological claims and address a large public.”

3.2.1 Consumer Mediated Culture

According to Debra Spitulnik (1993), ‘there is yet no anthropology of mass media. However, there has been a rise in the interest of studying mass media and cultural materials by anthropologists. She defines mass media as, “the electronic media of radio, television, film, and recorded music, and the print media of newspapers, magazines, and popular literature” are at once artefacts, experiences, practices, and processes’ (p. 15). Forms of mass media are politically and economically driven, and their existence is tied to the use of language. One continuing concern is ‘the power’ of the mass media, specifically the roles that the mass media

plays as the ‘vehicles of culture’ (Spitulnik, 1993). Mass media are powerful tools that cultures use to see and interpret the world.

Forms of mass media are produced and consumed. In the case of blockbuster films, directors and writers create and produce films and the viewers are the consumers. However, Maureen Mahon (2000) observes, “in spite of the considerable political, economic, and cultural influence media and popular culture have on local, national, and global communities, in anthropology focused attention on the individuals and groups who produce these forms is still unconventional.” Anthropologists who have analysed different types of mass media and the cultural producers of those objects have been concerned with materiality. According to Entman (2009), materiality is defined as, “the physical and discursive condition of having material substance”. Therefore, anthropologists concerned with the discursive and material substances of the production of cultural material view them as, ‘both cultural product and social process’ (Ginsburg, 1991). For example, directors and writers create a cultural product, the film, and in the process the directors create a social process, such as the production of an identity, an ideology or a fan-based community. Ginsburg (1991) views cultural products as a form of ‘public culture.’ Consequently, Mahon (2000) views public culture’ as a ‘contested terrain,’ by which “cultural producers use media and popular culture forms to influence public consciousness (p. 491).”

Popular culture includes a range of cultural texts which signify meaning(s) through words, images, and practices (Milestone & Meyer, 2013). Popular culture is produced by two sets of people. First, there are visible producers, such as the directors and writers. The second group of people are the invisible producers, such as the managers and producers. Popular cultural products and texts are symbolic because they carry meanings. These meanings are produced by both visual and verbal or linguistic representations. The word ‘popular’ suggests that it is liked and/or practiced by many people.’ Therefore, there is a quantitative element to popular culture. Popular culture is thought of as a part of media culture because mass media are central in making culture available to the masses. Consequently, commercialisation plays a role in popular culture.

3.2.2 Filmic Ecosystem

Anderson’s (2006) work on imagined communities offers a compelling argument for

analysing the power of mass media. According to him, communities are distinguished by the style in which they are recognised and imagined. He further adds that something is imagined as a community, because regardless of inequality that may be present, there is always a deep companionship and solidarity between its members. According to Spitulnik (1993), Anderson's concept of the imagined community is a 'mass mediated collectively, where members may not all know each other, but where each shares the idea of a common belonging.' According to Anderson (2006), imagined communities are socially constructed communities that are imagined by people who perceive themselves as belonging to that specific community or group. Regarding this study, the imagined community is applied to Hollywood film culture, which is represented by the fandom community. The fandom community is socially constructed by people, particularly the fans, the film viewers, and the film directors, who perceive themselves as belonging to the community through their shared commonalities and interests. Duncan (2015) remark that "fandom (is not) a highly centralised community, rather it functions more like 'an imagined' or virtual community where people are joined by bonds of mutual interest rather than geographic proximity to one another" (p.8).

3.2.3 Gender/Masculinity

Sex is biologically determined, and it defines individuals as either 'male,' or 'female.'. By contrast, gender refers "to the socially (and culturally) constructed categories of masculine and feminine and the socially (and culturally) imposed attributes and behaviours which are assigned to these categories" (Milestone & Meyer, 2013). Behaviours and attributes that are linked to masculinity and femininity are not natural; rather they are cultural and social constructs. Although differences exist between males and females and masculinities and femininities, the differences are the outcome of social and cultural processes. Masculinity and femininity represent two extremes, that is, they are often set at opposite ends of a spectrum making them binaries. Masculinity is associated with sexual prowess, strength and power (physical, mental and social), competitiveness, toughness, rationality, and the public sphere (Milestone & Meyer, 2013). In contrast, femininity is associated with the traits of emotionality, irrationality, difficulty, submissiveness, gentleness, kindness, and nurturing (Milestone & Meyer, 2013).

McKee and Stone (2009) argue that gender is interconnected with and reproduced through the cultural ideas and practices concerning the body. Gender is a dynamic concept

and cultural constructions about the body have changed over time. For example, in the 19th century, masculinity and the ideal male body shifted from 'thin and unobtrusive to big and muscular' (McKee and Stone, 2009). The shift to a muscular and larger body is attributed to men having to prove their manhood continually via success in the public, competitive, and individualistic domain (Rogers, 2011). Likewise, femininity and the ideal female body has also shifted from 'round and voluptuous until the 1920s 'neutral' flapper; round and full again after World War II; and now back to thin, but in the twenty-first century, more 'toned' and muscular' (McKee and Stone, 2009).

3.2.4 Hegemonic Masculinity and Emphasised Femininity

According to Connell (2014), the construction of Hegemonic masculinity is perpetually determined by multifarious secondary masculinities as well as by its relation to women... The concept of hegemonic femininity is diametrically opposite to hegemonic masculinity. Despite the delineation of the dominant type of masculinity as white, heterosexual, middle-class, and early middle-aged, Connell perceives hegemony as an 'ascendancy achieved within a balance of forces thus discarding the traditional notion of hegemony presupposing cultural dominance and the obliteration of the subordinate masculinities (p. 22).

Consequently, other forms of masculinities are subordinate, not eliminated. Although hegemonic masculinity is the cultural ideal of masculinity, most men's actual personalities do not correspond to the dominant masculinity (Connell, 2014). In fact, "the winning of hegemony often involves the creation of models of masculinity which are quite specifically fantasy figures" (Connell, 2014). Therefore, hegemonic masculinity has the effect of the unattainable ideal. One form of femininity that Connell (2014) discusses is emphasised femininity. As stated by Connell (2014), "It is the global subordination of women to men that provides an essential base for differentiation" (p. 15). However, he recognises that gender can be chosen and that there are variations in gender. For example, other femininities are defined by forms of noncompliance or by strategies of resistance or by a combination of compliance, cooperation, and resistance.

Similarly, there are conservative masculinities, subordinate masculinities, and calculative masculinities. Connell (2014) notes that there are 'multiple dimensions of variation' and that femininity and masculinity need not be treated 'as ends of the same dimension' (p.22).

Moreover, Connell (2014) remarks that there does not need to be any physiological traits which distinguishes masculinities from femininities and vice versa. In fact, femininity and masculinity are very similar in temperament, that is, they are “homogeneous dimensions of temperament, which can be measured in all people (Connell, 2014).” In analysing masculinity and femininity there is a historical context to consider because relationships and patterns change. Therefore, new forms of femininities and masculinities emerge, while others disappear. Also, what most men and women support is not necessarily what they are (Connell, 2014).

According to Philippa Gates (2011), the ‘tough guy’ is a universal and pervasive standard of Hollywood’s dominant fiction. The tough guy masculinity is associated with ‘manly masculinity’ and it uses femininity, particularly the feminine traits of innocence, dependence, and frailness, as its opposite. The tough guy masculinity is pervasive in the heroes of American popular culture and the tradition of toughness in American popular culture is constructed as ideals of hyper-masculinity. Mila Bongco (2014) explains that in scrutinising the identity of a superhero it is obvious that masculinity is a key element in defining and differentiating an everlasting hero. Particularly, masculinity in superheroes manifests itself more in how effectively a superhero uses mind and/or muscle to resolve various power struggles, thereby displaying authority and self-sufficiency, and gaining public recognition (Bongco, 2014). Moreover, John Jennings (2013) observes that the ideal superhero body is “an object of cultural production that stands for many socially [and culturally] constructed ideas regarding power, justice, and morality” (p. 59). Consequently, the superhero body is a personification of cultural and social values in a physical form.

However, Gates (2011) cautions that there are contradictions in the construction of heroes and within the ‘tradition of toughness. For example, in Gates’ examination of the detective genre, she remarks that the detective heroes struggle between opposing forces, particularly between independence and social conformity. Heroes must work within the boundaries of the law, but they must also assert their independence, which leads to subverting the law. Also, heroes must be smart enough to outsmart criminals, but they must also prove their toughness by performing violence. According to Gates (2012), “The tradition of toughness is exhibited through the body, but more importantly it is seen as possible to acquire toughness – an internal quality – through the remodelling of the body – an external one, like

that of *Captain America, Iron Man, Hulk* etc” (p. 32). Consequently, an attempt can be made to construct the tough guy masculinity internally by performing externally visible traits that are associated with the tradition of toughness, such as competitiveness and withholding emotions; this relates to the idea of performing gender.

3.2.5 Doing/Undoing Gender

According to West and Zimmerman (1987), gender is constructed through interactions that are social and cultural. Gender is an achieved status, because it is something that individuals do through social interactions. Therefore, West and Zimmerman (1987) argue against the widely recognised idea that gender reflects biological differences, and that gender is an attribute of individuals. Consequently, we do gender by adapting behaviours that are coded in our culture and in our society as feminine or masculine. For example, a coded behaviour that is masculine is playing sports, while a coded behaviour that is feminine is taking care of children. In the case of blockbuster films, female superheroes may exhibit less powerful superpowers that put them on the defence, rather than in the position of offense. By doing gender, West and Zimmerman (1987) argue that individuals create differences between the feminine gender and the masculine gender. However, the gender differences are created by social and cultural interactions, not biological differences.

Rogers (2011) examines the role of manhood in *Captain America* by examining how men do gender, i.e. how men do masculinity and how men create a masculine identity. He further argues that “the quest for manhood – the effort to achieve, to demonstrate, to prove our masculinity – has been one of the formative and persistent experiences in men’s lives.” This indicates that literature is a way in which savagery and heroic masculine virtues are promoted. For example, Tarzan is half human and half animal, in the sense that he was, ‘an ape by training and environment’ (Rogers, 2011). Tarzan is a hero with a man’s figure, but with an animal savagery and he uses a primitive and ferocious masculinity.

Although the theory of doing gender has changed the study of gender, the theory has been criticised. Do Rozario (2004) suggests that researchers should utilise the undoing gender theory, instead of the doing gender theory. First, the phrase ‘doing gender,’ suggests the idea of conformity, while the phrase ‘undoing gender,’ evokes resistance (Do Rozario, 2004). Second, by doing gender, one is accomplishing gender. If gender is something to be

accomplished, then West and Zimmerman (1987) are reaffirming gender differences, rather than demolishing them (Do Rozario, 2004). Lastly, doing gender is used to refer to social interactions that reproduce gender differences. In contrast, undoing gender refers to social interactions that reduce gender differences (Do Rozario, 2004). Later in time, West and Zimmerman (2009) have addressed Do Rozario's critique and they argue that undoing gender implies the abandonment of the sex category, that is, gender becomes something that people are no longer accountable for. Therefore, for West and Zimmerman (2009), 'Gender is not undone so much as redone.' For example, a man can be viewed as *unmasculine*, but that does not make him *unmale*.

3.2.6 Text Within Discourse

Films are a form of narrative and discourse that depict cultural values, behaviours and ideals; this discourse occurs between the director and the viewer. In linguistics, a distinction is made between text and discourse. A text refers to the 'observable product of interactions: a cultural object' (Thompson, 2012). In this case, the film represents the cultural object. In contrast, discourse is the "process of [the] interaction itself: a cultural activity" (Thompson, 2012). Through drawing, producing, and watching blockbuster films a cultural activity is created, because there is an interaction between the film director and the viewer of the film.

According to James Paul Gee (1999), discourse "is used as a way for combining and integrating language, actions, interactions, ways of thinking, believing, valuing, and using various symbols, tools, and objects to enact a particular sort of socially recognisable identity." Consequently, discourses are like subcultures, because within each discourse there are common ways of thinking and feeling and there are similar identities and beliefs. According to Gee and Gee (2007), discourses are acquired through socialisation and apprenticeship, rather than through instruction. The film subculture represents what they refer to as a 'secondary discourse', because the film discourse allows for individuals to develop and enact identities within larger social institutions. Moreover, the film discourse involves an interest-driven group, that is, the film viewers, directors, writers, and the film industry are part of and create the ecosystem.

3.2.7 Discursive Coding and Decoding

Stuart Hall (2004) argues that culture involves the production and exchanges of

meanings between members of a society or group. Meaning is assigned to people, objects, and events by cultural participants. Hall (2004) observes that we assign meaning to people, objects, and events by how we represent them, that is, through the words we use, the images we produce, the stories we tell, the ways in which we categorise and conceptualise them, the values we assign to them, and the emotions we place on them. According to Hall (2004), ‘meaning is thought to be produced – constructed – rather than simply “found”.’ Thus, representation is a process of secondary importance because it inserts itself only after things are completely formed and their meaning established (p.130). He cautions that representation can only be appropriately analysed in relation to: ‘the actual concrete forms which meaning assumes, in the concrete practices of signifying, ‘watching’ and interpretations; and these require analysis of the actual signs, symbols, figures, images, narratives, words and sounds – the material forms – in which symbolic meaning is circulated’(p. 134). Consequently, the analysis of meaning of concrete material forms can change over time, and there may be more than one, true meaning, because the analysis of meaning is interpretative. Although meaning is not straightforward, meanings are inscribed in relations of power and are often organised into oppositions or binaries.

Hall’s concept of ‘the practices of representation’ is important to this research because it examines ‘the embodying of concepts, ideas and emotions in a symbolic form which can be transmitted and meaningfully interpreted.’ Both the film director and the viewer are active participants in an interactive process. This process is, according to Hall (2004), ‘dialogic,’ because shared cultural codes and shared knowledge frameworks maintain the dialogue between director and viewer. His theory of encoding and decoding places the text, embedded within the discourse practice, at the centre. The discourse practice is itself embedded in sociocultural practices. According to Thompson (2012), the text is a product that contains traces of the production process i.e. encoding. The text becomes a resource from the perspective of the person decoding it and the text contains prompts for the interpretation processes, i.e. decoding. Thus, encoding occurs at the point of cultural production, while decoding occurs at the point of cultural consumption.

Additionally, Hall’s theory of encoding and decoding emphasises that the social processes involved in encoding meanings are not the same as the social processes involved in decoding meanings regarding various media and texts. Thompson (2012) expands on this point

arguing that ‘we cannot assume that the texts mean the same to producers as to viewers.’ Hall (2004) describes three ideological positions that subjects may take when decoding messages relayed to them through media: dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, or oppositional. The dominant-hegemonic or the preferred watching implies that viewers identify with the cultural standards communicated to them by the watching of the media or text. Viewers maintain a negotiated watching of the media or text when they generally accept the dominant- hegemonic view but alter the viewing to reflect their own cultural values. When viewers entirely reject the media or text and create their own interpretations of the messages being conveyed, then the viewers experience an oppositional watching of the media or text.

3.3 Film Theory

Today, film theory argues that blockbuster films involve the process of active watching. Cox (2012) notes that films are not just visual displays, but also texts that necessitate a viewer’s ‘active engagement and collaboration in making meaning.’ Film theory recognises that film is a form that is different from comics due to its own signifying codes, practices, and conventions. According to Scott (2004), a film’s form ‘offers range and versatility within all the potential imagery of comic books and painting plus the intimacy of the written word.’ Consequently, film theory claims that films involve active watching, intimacy, and writing. Cox (2012) argues this point claiming that ‘comic art is a form of writing.’ Scholars like Andre Bazin and Gilles Deleuze admitted within film theory, the importance of viewing the relationship between cinema and belief or ideology. According to Slocum (2011) The following questions emerge in doing so:

How does the image carry, depict, and elicit conviction for us? What can cinematic do when inherited paradigms of representations begin to break down? Can cinema restore a sense of belief in the world as images; a mass of images in which we no longer quite believe? (p. 182)

Bazin (2013) is of the view that, the best way to study film is to use both theory and criticism, like many scholars who are stressing today. The films, therefore, can be examined and critiqued for the truth that they offer. Besides, Reich and Richmond (2014) observe that viewers of any film need to forget themselves and to not think critically, which means that a film’s viewers are so absorbed in what they are seeing that they do not question any ideologies

that are shown as reality. It is because of this kind of viewership needs, cinema has generated an “ideologically freighted subject position”, in which the film directs how viewers experience the world (Reich & Richmond, 2014, p.4)

One important example of such a change in the way scholars have been seeing the film theory and criticism is how scholars evolved feminist film critique (Reich & Richmond, 2014). The film theory has been analysed by female scholars like Laura Mulvey and Mary Anne Doane, because if films are viewed through one eye, an eye that does not explain any type of viewer difference, in that case female viewers are likely to experience that is dictated by a male point of view for male viewers.

The film, as a text, can be examined for ideologies because “every film is political” (Duncan, 2015). He further asserts that “cinema is one of the languages through which the world communicates itself to itself. They form its ideology because they reproduce the world as it is experienced when filtered through the ideology” (p.25). Films are then developed to reflect the world in which they are created. The ideologies that exist in the films are often the ideologies of the present cultural zeitgeist. In addition, while “there is such a thing as public demand, but what the public wants means ‘what the dominant ideology wants’” (Duncan, 2015, p.8). Therefore, this further explains that analysing the MCU in the Cultural zeitgeist, is crucial, intellectual work and a requisite academic endeavour.

3.4 Theoretical Framework

I have used gender and sociolinguistic theories when analysing and interpreting my data. I have predominantly used three gender theories i.e. Connell’s (2014) research on hegemonic masculinity (and how it is constructed in relation to various subordinate masculinities, such as hyper-masculinity, or militarised masculinity, as prevalent in MCU), and West and Zimmerman’s (1987) *Doing gender* and Do Rozario’s (2007) *undoing gender* to analyse Pixar’s leading characters in the light of a shift towards the New Man construct in recent times. Gillam and Wooden (2008)’s research in New Man evolution in Pixar characters has become the anchoring point of this research. Combining these two I have attempted to account for the way male protagonists do and undo gender in these two contrasting yet hugely popular genres, evoking resistance to stereotypical gender traits, behaviours, and roles in the current global milieu. The thoroughly chauvinistic iconic Captain America is also analysed

through the same prism.

To investigate, a content and text analysis of the selected blockbuster films is carried out for finding dialogical instances and comparing them across two mainstream genres in cinema. According to Klaus Krippendorff (2004), ‘content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use’ (p.16). A content analysis is not limited to written materials and can include works of art, maps, images, sounds, symbols, and records. Therefore, I argue that blockbuster films are a valid form of ‘meaningful matter’, in which their content can be analysed. Additionally, texts acquire meaning and interpretation through the context of their use. Krippendorff (2004) notes that, ‘(a context) is always someone’s construction, the conceptual environment of a text, the situation in which it plays a role. In content analysis, the context explains what the analyst does with the texts.’ Consequently, I have analysed the text (dialogues) of blockbuster films which relate to masculinity stereotypes or otherwise.

Moreover, the MCU and its Captain America, have a political background of symbiotic relationship within the present cultural zeitgeist. “To understand culture is to explore how meaning is produced symbolically through the signifying practices of language within material and institutional contexts” (Tannen, 2013). Tannen (2013) propose that the cultural zeitgeist and contexts have a relationship in which language is produced. The MCU, too, could reply to ideologies which are dominant in the current cultural zeitgeist. Like CDA which has not been traditionally used to popular culture or especially popular films, this study can also add to this field of research. CDA permits a different approach to the examination of films and it was applied to start the analysis of symbols of masculinity in films from two major film production giants.

3.5 Data Collection

CDA has been applied in this study to point out and assess identity constructions of masculinity in the character of Captain America from Marvel films, as well as Woody, Buzz, Lightning McQueen from DC/Pixar animation films. Interestingly, where MCU consists of themes and characters that are in direct consonance with the real-world scenarios, political as well as social, DC has been focused on softer topics and fantasy worlds. The researcher has discussed how these two industry giants, while having very different targeted demographic,

are presenting to their viewers evolving shades of masculinity in the current times.

It should be understood that MCU is taken as one big story or plot, for its each film has been used to narrate one strand of story or is dedicated to cover one specific superhero's story of life. MCU, because of its magnitude, is a phenomenon. Till date, no cinematic universe has been created by the release of multiple films about different characters that would tell one story overall. All the films released in the MCU describe one story, however, there are three characters namely Iron Man, Captain America and Thor that have their own branches of storylines. Captain America, however, happens to be the centre of all decision making, leading qualities, and story makeup, much to his name literally. The choice to analyse instances of masculinity in his on-screen appearances is made in this backdrop.

The situation in DC's animated side, Pixar, is relatively different. There doesn't run one big story, but rather there are isolated single films or unrelated series of films. *Cars (2006)*, *Toy Story*, and many others are individual series of animated films, having no link with each other whatsoever. More so, Pixar has produced phenomenally successful and appealing single animated films, like *Up (2009)*, *WALL-E (2008)*, etc. The viewers' demographic for DC/Pixar is apparently young lot but the adult filmgoers are equally addicted to the well-researched themes and excellent animations. The male characters in the films chosen for this research have undergone immense transformation if the DC comics and films are analysed in chronological order. Same sequence continues in animated films too. For this very reason this research intends to find out notions of masculinity in two iconic films of Pixar. The texts, thus, in this study is dialogues of the selected blockbuster films, based on their enormous popularity and revenue generations. Each film is listed for its budget, domestic returns and global returns in terms of profits as mentioned on the website BoxOfficeMojo.com, a subsidiary of IMDB listings.

3.6 Rationale & Delimitation

The films analysed in this thesis are a selection of grossing films, from both Marvel and DC studios, from 2009 to 2016. This is being done in pursuit of the logic presented by both Kellner (2011) and Chopra-Gant (2005) who perceive popular media and cinema respectively as having close relation with the times in which they were presented. Moreover, the selection of high grossing films confirms their popularity and repeated watching at the cinema houses.

This is in conformity with the logic of Kellner (2011) who remarks “when a film becomes a blockbuster, a larger part of its success is generated by viewers members who return to see it again in theatres” (p.135).

Films cater to different demographics universally. There are many genres of films targeted at different audiences. One of the major divisions among film viewers is due to age groups, i.e. adults and young. There are genres targeted at these audiences separately and there are those which cater to all. Since the focus of this research is bringing to light the films that get the most attention, only box office numbers are the yardsticks for popularity of these genres. Between 2008 and 2018, there has been a visible surge in the box office returns of CGI, 3D and animated films, about 5.87 billion U.S. dollars in 2018 alone (Watson, 2018). When seen stacking up with popular superhero blockbuster films, the scores reveal another surprise. Till 2018, based on revenue alone, *Avengers: Infinity War* has been the most successful with \$680 million, whereas the second slot, for the same time span, has been scored by a superhit animation sequel *The Incredibles (2004) 2*, at \$602.58 million (Watson, 2018). Also, at the time of drafting this thesis, *Toy Story 4*, the latest instalment of *Toy Story* franchise, has scored more than its predecessor, \$433 Million so far in U.S and 1.4 billion worldwide. With advancement in CGI, more and more animated films have gained coverage during the time of the draft of this research.

Owing to the popularity, animated films have also become a site for deeper themes and meaning making by viewers. There are delicate messages embedded that resonate with children, teens and adults alike. The researcher spotted the most grossing, or to say the blockbuster, animated films too. From among many, *Toy Story* franchise and *Cars (2006)* have the highest box office scores of their times. It should be noted here that both Marvel and Disney/Pixar rely heavily on CGI in character creation/enhancement. In essence these two genres may be seen as identical, but the key difference lies in the plot points and target demographic. Marvel is aimed at teen and adult audience, while Disney/Pixar cater to younger lot too. Representations of identities in both, or all other genres of films, are happening in parallel. Only that they appear in different shape to different audiences. This study has tried to uncover how two seemingly different genres cover the evolution of masculine representation on screen.

In this way, the films from both Superhero blockbuster and animated blockbuster series, earned their grosses by resonating with viewers and are hence chosen in the research. As for the scene selection, a minimum of 5 scenes per film has been analysed for looking up the themes of this research. However, in some cases the scene count has exceeded because of these films being retrospective of each other.

Selected MCU Movies:

1. Captain America (First Avenger) (2011)
2. The Avengers (2012)
3. Captain America: The Winter Soldier (2014)
4. Avengers: Age of Ultron (2015)
5. Captain America: Civil War (2016)

Selected DC/Pixar Movies:

6. Cars (2006)
7. Toy Story 3 (2010)

Captain America: The First Avenger (2011)

- Kevin Feige, Producer
- Joe Johnston, Director
- Cost: \$140 Million
- Domestic Gross: \$176 million
- Worldwide Gross: \$370 million



Marvel's the Avengers (2012)

- Kevin Feige, Producer
- Joss Whedon, Director
- Cost: \$220 Million
- Domestic Gross: \$623 million
- Worldwide Gross: \$1.5 billion



Captain America: The Winter Soldier (2014)

- Producer: Kevin Feige
- Directors: Anthony and Joe Russo,
- Cost: \$170 Million
- Domestic Gross: \$259 million
- Worldwide Gross: \$714 million



Avengers: Age of Ultron (2015)

- Director: Joss Whedon
- Producer: Victoria Alonso
- Cost: \$250 Million
- Domestic Gross: \$459 Million
- Worldwide Gross: \$946 Million



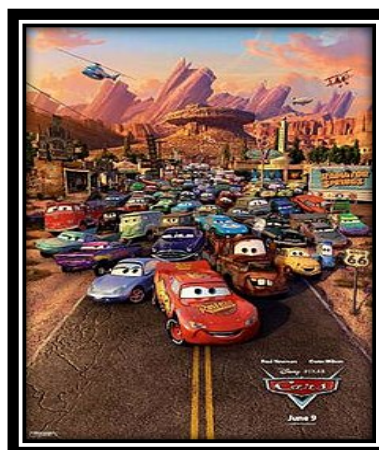
Captain America: Civil War (2016)

- Directors: Anthony Russo, Joe Russo
- Producer: Kevin Feige
- Cost: \$250 million
- Domestic Gross: \$408 Million
- Foreign Gross: \$745 Million



Cars (2006)

- Producer: Darla K. Anderson
- Cost: \$120 Million
- Domestic Gross: \$244 Million
- Worldwide Gross: \$218 Million



Toy Story 3 (2010)

- Producer: Darla K. Anderson
- Cost: \$200 Million
- Domestic Gross: \$415 Million
- Worldwide Gross: \$651 Million



The iTunes digital copy edition of each film is used for analysis. This study aims to point out masculinity in Captain America based films, as well as Pixar's iconic *Cars (2006)*, and *Toy Story (2010)*, that have become cultural phenomenon. Captain America films display predominantly hegemonic or hyper masculinity, which is justified to become militarised too. It appears that it clearly resonated with the post-9/11 situation where the U.S used militarised means to resolve conflicts and handle terrorism. Hence due to this prominence of theme development, each film has been discussed individually to account for the progression of Captain America in line with the geo-political scenario of the world. Disney/Pixar films, on the other hand, explore masculinity in a non-violent or idealistic fashion. The pre-9/11 Disney was predominantly feminine in its heavy focus on princesses and songs, in its comics and animations. The events of 9/11 brought a shift in the discourse Disney wished to offer. Hence its administrative and cinematic moves, as discussed in detail in this chapter, were all aimed at a more lifelike image of male and of female characters. Resultantly, its masculinity appears to correspond to changing times and roles for male protagonists of the age. Hence Disney/Pixar's films are discussed thematically, for overarching thoughts running common in two key films discussed in this research.

The analysis of *Captain America: The First Avenger (2011)*, *The Avengers (2012)*, and *Captain America: The Winter Soldier (2014)*, *Avengers: Age of Ultron (2015)* and *Captain America: Civil War (2016)* is guided by determining if, and how, Captain America and MCU promote ideologies of masculinity. On the other hand, the analysis of two Disney/Pixar films is cross-sectionally thematic. It explores further shades of a developed male image, the New

Man of modern times. Hence instead of a film by film analysis common themes are identified and elaborated with evidence.

Moreover, the study establishes the scope CDA which is used to analyse these symbols. This study, through serious comparative analysis of masculinity in Captain America and Pixar characters, adds to scholarly work in CDA and superhero films and media literacy as well. As both MCU and DC/Pixar films, are all regarded to be box-office hits, they pull large number of viewers easily, their impact factor on culture has always been immense. The ideologies in these films/texts are also typical of and symbiotic with the cultural zeitgeist in which these films are released.

Whereas, symbols of masculinity in media have been identified by previous scholars, a gap exists in the comparative analysis of superhero films of MCU and another kind of superhero film for kids, of DC/Pixar films, the heroes that kids would relate to, mostly. This study used CDA to identify symbols of masculinity in the selected corpus. CDA, a popular method of discourse, allows ideologies to be identified and critiqued, which improves media literacy. The chapter, that follows, gives an analysis of the symbols of masculinity in these films. The analyses have been done thematically first for all Captain America films, followed by a detailed account of how DC/Pixar popular characters exhibit evolving masculinity.

3.7 Study Design

A qualitative form of research can not necessarily take on one form by default. Hence, I assimilated various qualitative techniques to address my questions in this study and test my initial queries about films being a vehicle of identities. Creswell (2013) outlines methods of studying films as individual, as well as, group study and I grounded myself in his method. According to another scholar, Stake, studying films as cases can enhance our comprehension of topics, by offering us cross-sectional as well as individual perspective, hence aligning our research questions with findings. In order for this research to proceed, since each film is taken as a separate case of narration. Then, with more films being watched, the alignment of theme of masculinity was spotted across films in one character, e.g. Captain America being the common string of masculinity in MCU films, and also across various characters in varying films of Pixar, i.e. the common themes but different characters. This mode of analysis was interesting to observe, following Young (2002) suggestions about such analyses.

Eisenhardt (2002) believes that a suitable strategy of carrying out such an analysis is to spot either a dynamic or static theme, as the case with Captain America films, or spot convergence or divergence of characters around a theme, like visible in Pixar films. The data collection and critical insights were driven by this strategy in this research. A similar study was carried out by Towbin et al. (2004), who chose Disney's animated series to find gradual emergence of themes of gender, age and racial profiling. The mainstay of this study has been on the emerging masculine themes of Pixar films; be it a car, a stuffed toy, a bug, or any cartoon character for that matter, contrary to Marvel's Captain America films which received a film by film analysis due to the constant theme of evolving male representation. I have been an avid fan of Pixar animations since their first movie. It is by this repeated observation that the evolution of male characters has become evident over time, and hence I felt compelled to bring animated films in comparison with seemingly unfit MCU superhero genre of movies.

3.8 Data Collection and Analysis

According to Creswell (2013) the best strategy for analysing any case is going through the text (i.e. watching film in this study) along with note-taking. For this research, each film viewing elaborated on character's individual, as well as collective persona, and the visible difference in dialogues and communications. Like Druckman (2001) points out that each character possesses intrinsic and extrinsic 'character map or symbols' which need to be preserved for understanding theme development. Montage, elements denoting various symbols, dialogues of and about a certain figure in films are carefully analysed. Traditional note-taking was not suitable for filmic instances, as films are moving frames, with no numbers but time stamps. To better preserve my understanding of each film, after repeated watching, I used video editing software *Pinnacle Studio 12*, to put markers on those scenes. These markers were later extracted as individual video clips from the actual film. These clips are numbered and inserted inside this thesis in the following syntax, e.g. *Scene #, Acronym of Film Name*, e.g. *Scene 1, TA* where TA stands for *The Avengers*. The abbreviated names of the films are given inside their respective headings (this selection of clips is appended on a DVD with the dissertation.) I have used IMSDb.com (the largest database for movie scripts) for locating the exact dialogues and quoting in my work. This process took extensive amount of time and eventually I had a lot of video clips data that I could go back to any time I wanted to double

check my analysis, while my notes would appear on the side.

Like mentioned earlier, Wiersma (2000) made use of the same strategy to analyse gender in Disney animated feature films. I made note of possible emerging themes and identified specific points of the films that may require further extensive analysis. These notes were transferred to becoming markers in software *Pinnacle Studio 12* and later were extracted as part of video clips. Following the same process of repeated viewing the notable figures and themes were put together, based on their narrative structures and individuality. Based on the prominence of theme in a character, they were discussed accordingly.

The second crucial point by Creswell (2013), about note-taking, was adopted digitally in this study. I used a digital version of this technique, rather customised it to my needs. I used the *Pinnacle Studio 12*, to insert my comments/notes, with the individual clip I saved. This helped me stay paperless and my important data is preserved right during my multiple viewings. It helped me a great deal to look back at my initial ideas about the films during data analysis to see if my emerging themes were based on actual pieces of data or on my own preconceived notions. Multiple careful viewings of the films allowed for detailed analyses of the clips. This technique provided me the opportunity to assemble thick description, which presented “detail, context, emotion, and the webs of social relationships.... [Thus,] the voices, feelings, actions, and meanings of interacting individuals are heard” (Denzin, 2001). For this purpose, I paused and noted my comments on screen while viewing the films which help me filter a lot of data that started proving irrelevant or did not develop notably well. Also, in order to maintain my focus on the delimited theme of masculinity, repeated viewing and digital notes helped me sharpen at every stage.

Each of the selected films were seen multiple times through the course of this study for relevance. Having watched these films already for fun’s sake proved a good heads up for interpretive approach from the first viewing. It is rightly believed that qualitative study does not fit a single mould of orderly research. In this study, data collection and data analysis were simultaneously taking place, as there was a lot of back-and-forth movement between the scenes and among films. During this viewing I checked over my work and made the necessary changes if I was unsure about a trait or category. Although time consuming, I argue that this step was necessary to the content and text analysis because I was the only person analysing the

blockbuster films. In addition, multiple viewing did prove useful as a few mistakes and wrong trait categorizations were corrected. As for this study, it resulted in changing and sharpening the focus.

3.9 Critical Reflexivity on Researcher's Bias

A critically reflexive analysis of myself can serve as a standpoint for readers to estimate my experiences as a male and how my interpretation of masculinity can be influenced unconsciously, following guidelines set by Creswell (2013). The qualitative data itself, in parts, is a researcher's unique take on an issue, "never clearly escaping our own personal stamp on a study" (Creswell, 2013, p.80). It is, thus, rudimentary for a researcher to be aware of the manner in which one may not escape from leaving one's colour on search results. I have attempted to bring to light my understanding of my inclinations, preconceived notions, and share them with the reader of this study. This has presented me with an outsider view of my own findings in later part of this study and have assisted in reflecting constructively.

Films, unlike human respondents, do not get influenced by the researcher, so the only element that changes within the duration of this study is my perception. I have been watching Disney/Pixar films and MCU has been my favourite series of films to follow. However, I believe my experiences, as a father of two kids, have sharpened my critical and media literacy lenses, enabling me to study these films from a critical perspective. Moreover, my academic research experience in my M. Phil. study of cognitive linguistics, about bilingual cognition and the influence of media constructs, holds very much true for films as well, with a major focus on theme of masculinity this time.

Being a male means a lifelong experience of performing and knowing what is like to be a man, hence my opinion may be governed by my experience as and with male lot in my cultural settings of the east. Female researchers studying masculinity possess the advantage of being an outsider, hence providing a better prism of analysing masculinity. They are like onlookers from outside, whereas a male researcher studying masculinity is like an insider wandering around looking for answers. Both have their advantages and disadvantages, without a doubt. Both male and female gender performances are not monolithic, rather they are varying from person to person. I do not intend to advocate that males should study masculinity while females should study feminism, for better perspective. On the contrary, I support the idea of

multiple perspectives being helpful in capturing the true essence of gender performance from all stances. Hence, the critical insights in this study are not *conclusions* per se. They are my takes on the matter to which some may not approve of or chose a different lens to analyse them. Filmic or printed, text of any kind is polysemic which never makes an opinion invalid. Actually, there is not a single right answer. I have tried answering my research questions that are the driving force for this study. Hopefully, others may ask similar or dissimilar question and find different answers.

3.10 Moving on

In the following chapters, the discursive construction of masculinity has been elaborated. Chapter 4 delves on Captain America Films individually, for the prevalent theme of hyper-masculinity, due to the intricate common storyline of MCU. The following chapter, Chapter 5, however, takes differently on treatment of masculinity found in its two iconic animation classics of Disney/Pixar. The difference of approach is due to the isolated film streams in Disney/Pixar which can be analysed horizontally for commonalities.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS (MCU)

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

The story of Captain America within the MCU starts with the film *Captain America: The First Avenger*, produced and released in 2011. This film, being the first Captain America film, is regarded as the origin story of the character. The “origin story” or back-story is where the viewers is acquainted with a character and we pursue their journey to become a superhero. This film, thus, starts the ideological journey that Captain America initiated as a character in MCU. This writer asserts that in this film, militarism and hyper-masculinity are intertwined in many scenes, through one may give preference over the other.

“Steve Rogers” is acquainted to viewers for the first time in a United States army recruitment office in the 1940s. As the scene begins, all the men in the office look alike, white, medium to tall structure, and muscular. The scene shows a small, bony, white man behind the newspaper when a recruitment doctor calls for “Rogers Steve”, when Rogers prepares to see the recruitment doctor, he hears a man next to him say “lots of guys getting killed out there... kinda makes you think twice about enlisting, huh.” Rogers hardly surprises when replies, ‘Nope’ (means no).

The interaction between Rogers and the man sitting next to him discloses a lot about Roger’s personality which signifies a presupposition which, according to CDA, implies that other alternatives do not exist (Huckins, 1997). Even if, most of the men present in the recruitment office appear bored about the war and what they read in the newspapers Rogers does not and his reply “Nope” is very casual and leaves no room for discussion. Though a person could help during the “war effort” by other ways, Rogers states that the only way to help is by becoming a soldier who fights. Rogers, therefore, is attaching great importance on being a soldier.

He does not object to whether he should enlist, knowing that he might die in the process. His indisputable belief in joining juxtaposes to the other men in the room. “Nope” is the first word Rogers speaks in the film and it is applied to compare his own steadfast belief in being a soldier irrespective of the consequence. In this scene, Rogers’ physique is also

juxtaposed and when he is first shown behind the wallpaper, the camera has already panned to the recruitment office. The pan of the room is applied to depict the type of men that intend to go to the recruitment room. The physique of the men is standard for what the army looks for, and Rogers does not appear like these men.

Rogers is declared unfit for the military because of his lack of physicality and the many ailments he has. The scene shows that the military wants men who fulfil certain requirements whereas Rogers, as compared to other men in the office, does not meet any of these. The recruitment doctor sees Rogers indifferently when he comes up thus displaying even if he did not have ailments. Rogers' appearance would have been enough to declare him unsuitable war. The recruitment doctor declares Roger as "4F", which means that he is incapable to join the Army. A close-up scene is given to the "4F" stamped in Rogers recruitment paper; because it indicates that the Army does not believe that Rogers is good enough.

When Rogers at last is allowed to join the military, thanks to Dr Erskine, a German doctor, who works for the "Strategic Scientific Reserve", or SSR, and sees that he has tried to enlist multiple times. Dr Erskine even remarks, "There are already many big men fighting this war, may be what we need now is a little guy". This is an ironic statement, because as the story advances, the viewers are informed that the SSR is attempting to make superheroes with a serum that Doctor Erskine has invented. As Dr Erskine states the war requires "Little guys", he does not essentially believe it Dr Erskine's research and work with the military indicates that physically strong people are required who can win war.

Everyone, after joining the military, must undergo training. Rogers is depicted in the film, with all the other recruits, selected as part of the SSR program. The scene then introduces the viewers to Agent Peggy Carter and Colonel Phillips. As an introduction to the program Col. Phillips delivers a speech to the men.

General Patton has said wars are fought with weapons but are won by men. We are gonna win this war because we have the best men... and because they are gonna get better. Much better... Our goal is to create the best army in history. But every army starts with one man... He will be the first in a new breed of super soldier." (Johnston, 2011) (*Scene 1, CATFA*)

This speech attests exactly what the military believes it needs to win a war. Though the

colonel is a fictional character, he opens his speech with a quotation from General Patton, who is regarded as one of the best generals in US history. Though General Patton was in charge during the WWII, the link between the real and fiction works to strengthen the need for militarisation and hyper-masculinity. His statement strengthens the idea that strong men should enlist, as it is due to them that the wars are won. Col. Phillips also furthers the aims of the quotation, and states if it is men who win wars and not weapons, why not make the men the weapons? The “best army in history” requires having men who are able to win wars on their own, and it is better way to make them “super soldier.” The term “super soldier,” too, is a collocation (Young, 2002). The collocation “super” and “solider” means that regular soldiers are not enough to win a war, and there must be soldiers who are strengthened enough to win wars.

Besides, Col. Phillips points to the men who will be part of the program as “a new breed.” This terminology is often used to refer to animals that are selected and bred for their best traits. The SSR and Col. Phillips, thus aim to apply the program to produce an army of men that will be given the best traits that they feel essential to win a war is sure that men in his army must be tall and very muscular. These men must look, to possess the best physique as possible, and he is willing to give them a serum that grant them a physique that is beyond humanly possible.

While Col. Phillips addresses the SSR recruits, inter-cut scenes depict the recruits starting their training. A drill sergeant, as shown in two separate inter cut, shouts at the recruits to “Let’s go ladies”, and Agent Carter yells, “Faster, ladies come on”. While the two lines are spoken to encourage the recruits, these are also used to insult the men. The trainers’ mean that the recruits are not completing their training the way they should be. With a view to inspiring the men to work harder, the drill Sergeant and Agent Carter compare them to women. This advances the hyper-masculinity ideology for the trainers are implying that they are not “real men since they are not performing up to the mark. In order to make the recruits work harder, the trainers thus use the term “ladies” to offend them, to imbue them with a spirit of to be regarded as effeminate (Johnston, 2011) (*Scene 6, CATFA*).

Rogers is chosen as the first recruit to be administered the super soldier serum, making the whole process into a military spectacle. Thus, gathers viewers of military and government

personnel at Dr Erskine's labs' they want to know how their super soldier army will be developed. Dr Erskine, prior to the process starts, speaks to the viewers and states, "Today we take not another step towards annihilation, but the first step to the path of peace." (Johnston, 2011) (*Scene 5, CATFA*). Dr Erskine remark regarding the future of the super soldier program negates his prior statement about needing "little guys". Had Dr Erskine been sure that the war was not won not with muscles and "big guys", he would have stated that this program is what will bring peace. The statement collocates military superiority by having super-soldier program and war, saying that it will help achieve peace. Besides, his statement strengthens the need for a military, whose weapons are men that are developed to be more than human, rather than guns themselves. Raising a great military comprising super soldiers offers the only way to be on the path of peace.

Col. Phillips did not permit Rogers to go into the field, although, the super-soldier serum was a success. Rogers joined Senator Brant because, as Brant said, "you didn't take a soldier a symbol like that and hide him in a lab". Brant knew that Rogers' appearance and abilities, would allow him to convince the people to easily join the war effort. Rogers gained fame by knocking down a German spy and saving a little boy. As Brant observed, he became a symbol for the US effort, he looked and behaved how every American "should" behave during the war. Brant's remarks about Rogers displayed he represents militarism and hyper-masculinity. Rogers is the embodiment of militarism and hyper-masculinity that is why he can be used as part of the government's attempts to impact people.

After that montage of Rogers is depicted in the film, as part of United States Organization or U.S.O, with Rogers wearing a costume, that is red, white and blue, with stripes representing the US. Flag. This costume is what later influences Rogers' Captain America uniform. Rogers is shown travelling with U.S.O. Girls wearing costumes, that are red, white and blue. They, being a part of performance, sing a song called "The Star-Spangled Man with a Plan", that says that everything Rogers does is "for America". A very patriotic music with trumpets and military drummers, accompanies the song. Rogers plays saving people from Hitler and enemy soldiers and he also displays his strength when he picks up motorcycle loaded by people (Johnston, 2011) (*Scene 2, CATFA*).

While this is travelling U.S.O. show the entire country is liable to the symbolism that

the show and Rogers display. Rogers as against how he was previously treated, is now famed for his appearance; everyone is aware he exists. The song “The Star-Spangled Man with a Plan” and the imagery used in this scene represent “language and power” (Cilano, 2009, p.123). While Rogers is known to everyone, everyone wishes to be like him, Rogers even says that when he stops by in a city, it always increases in recruits. This increase in recruits in the film depicts that even a character in a travelling U.S.O show can impact the people (At this point in the film, Rogers is only playing a character called, Captain America and he has not yet become Captain America in the war front). A number of men who are recruited, are perhaps joining the military so that they can be like “Captain”, believing that the military can transform into perfect soldiers and that they are able to end the war. Rogers, in fact, uttered an offhand remark regarding the military which made him stronger and bigger. His friend James Barnes when first sees Rogers after months; asks “What happened to you”? Rogers replies “I joined the army”. While it was a very simple response, the Army and Col. Phillips have remarked that they make people better—it is especially a tagline for the military.

This is but an assumption that the only way that someone can become “better”, is by joining the military. If Rogers, being once scraggy and little, can become a hyper-masculine soldier, then anyone can. It can be implied by Rogers’ reply “I joined the Army”, that it was the Army that made better. While Rogers even wished to enlist but was unable due to his physical problems. Yet the Army made him better and transformed him into the kind of person, a very muscular and able person that they needed (Johnston, 2011) (*Scene 3, CATFA*).

The scene about the interaction between Rogers and Barnes is significant because it occurs during a rescue mission. Rogers resolved to penetrate a HYDRA base (a subgroup from the Nazi regime is disclosed to be SSR and Captain America’s real enemy) on his own to save any soldier that is still alive. Rogers decided that, even at the cost of his life, he must try to save the soldiers. This is because Rogers having studied the super soldier program that he succeeded in achieving his mission. Rogers gained strength and abilities after he was given serum to succeed even though Col. Phillips told him it was impossible. This scene, thus, depicts that super soldiers are able to fulfil tasks that are considered being impossible it is an affirmation of the super soldier program (Johnston, 2011) (*Scene 4, CATFA*).

Captain America and the MCU show symbols of militarism and hyper-masculinity

throughout the film *Captain America: The First Avenger*. The evolution of Captain America is for militaristic reasons; to be the best soldier is his major goal. Rogers, through his added capabilities and strength, also symbolises hyper-masculinity and being important and physically superior to others, he is capable of saving people. In addition, Rogers is also regarded to be the “first” Avenger. By calling Captain America as the “best” means that there will be others follow in his path, or rather the government will seek, or develop, other strengthened people that they believe are required to save the world. It is confirmed by this film that the U.S, in the MCU, and our own universe has ever a militaristic agenda that then leads to enhanced hyper-masculinity.

4.2 The Avengers (2012) (TA)

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

The creators of the MCU, in order to make anything occurring in the MCU seem realistic, have included enough “real world” information. For example, S.H.I.E.L.D. is not a real organisation but NASA is. To create a universe, a blend of “real” and fiction has been developed by the creators that would make sense to the viewers. Besides, many organisations work together on projects. As S.H.I.E.L.D. is being created as a U.S. government organisation, then naturally they would be made to work with other U. S organisations. This makes S.H.I.E.L. D more realistic that would also help enhance its significance in the cultural zeitgeist. The “Joint Dark Energy Mission”, is the project between S.H.I.E.L.D. and NASA, and the major aim of the study, as known to the viewers, is the Tesseract, that was the goal in the first *Captain America* film that was being used by HYDRA to develop weapons. The fact that S.H.I.E.L.D and NASA are experimenting on an object that a villainous group applied for weapons raises questions. Since NASA is primarily an exploration and scientific organisation S.H.I.E.L.D is rather more militaristic. S.H.I.E.L.D was developed as a spy organisation in

previous Marvel films and in the Comics as well, that was believed to “save the world” quietly.

It is said that these two organisations, by uniting in a project, are trying to seek a way to militarize space. According to the directors the reason behind the project is more than wanting to know what the Tesseract is---they wish to apply it for other purposes. These other purposes are also referred to when Director Fury is concerned about Phase Two. While the whole base is about to explode, due to the Tesseract, Fury’s assistant director, Maria Hill to oversee the relocation of Phase Two. At this point the viewers has no information about Phase Two, but it is hinted at that it may be technology that is important to keep the world turning, as Fury proposes.

“Loki”, Captain America’s brother, is the villain of this film and he has taken the Tesseract and used his sceptre to mind control various people. Fury and Hill tried to stop Loki from escaping but he does. After that Fury then announces on S.H.I.E.L.D’s communication system, “this is a level 7. As of right now, we are at war”. To Coulson’s question Fury does not give any reply about what to do and only stares into the distance. Then appears *The Avengers* logo on screen (Whedon, 2012) (*Scene 1, TA*).

Fury, in this scene, declared war against Loki. It is strange enough to see a director of an agency say that the country, or just the agency, is at war for only the U.S Congress can declare war. Although, Loki, being a threat, has been depicted as a hostile force, a director declaring war is exceeding his power. Fury is not shown further into the film briefing Congress or the President in this universe. Fury, thus, is depicted to be able to announce that S.H.I.E.L.D is at war, even if the U.S government is not aware, and he has made a unilateral decision regarding dealing with Loki.

Moreover, in case of an issue, the capability to apply the term “war” is symbolic of the cultural Zeitgeist and use of the term is meant to collocating groups against one another and militarise an issue. There has been an account of labelling any political or cultural issue in our history that requires to be dealt with a war, for example, the “War on Drugs” or more recently the “War on Terror” and the “War on Coal”. When Fury remarked that S.H.I.E.L.D is at war with Loki, S.H.I.E.L.D then should have enhanced their security and their responses. S.H.I.E.L.D becomes, if possible, an even more strengthened militaristic force to deal with Loki.

In addition, the viewers are also informed what to Fury is the next steps when S.H.I.E.L.D is at war. The question of Coulson is left hanging to create suspense. The viewers are told by cutting to the “Avengers “logo, that Fury and S.H.I.E.L.D are about to rely on the Avengers to fight war against Loki. The Avengers, then, are about to be regarded an extension of S.H.I.E.L.D. They are, though being team on their own, finally a by-product of a military organisation that believes that need a super- powered group to deal with any crisis that is considered a “war”. The viewers are shown that if there happens to be a threat, that is great, the military requires having super-soldiers to deal with them.

After Fury has declared war and decided to unite the Avengers, he finally speaks to a council about what is happening. The council is not clearly explained on screen; it is only always referred to as the “council”. Even, this is the group of people, who are from various countries, that Fury and S.H.I.E.L.D. report to, but they do not question Fury’s declared war, only the way he plans to win it. The council refers to Phase Two as the solution because it was planned for these situations, which proposes that Phase Two is weaponry. This depicts that the joint project between NASA and S.H.I.E.L.D., was much about using the Tesseract to develop weapons than anything else. The viewers and the Avengers, later in the film, learn that Phase Two was a weapons project that S.H.I.E.L.D. and NASA evolved (Whedon, 2012) (*Scene 2, TA*). S.H.I.E.L.D., after Captain America’s arrival on earth, found that threats came from outer space. Fury, confirming the requirement for Phase Two, says “We learned that not only are we not alone, but we are hopelessly, hilariously, out gunned” (Whedon, 2012) (*Scene 3, TA*).

As S.H.I.E.L.D. saw a threat, they find no difficulty in attempting to expand their arsenal by applying the Tesseract. It is assumed from Fury’s analysis that in case S.H.I.E.L.D. did not advance their arsenal, then the world be ruined, which, then offers a justification for more armament. S.H.I.E.L.D., in this case, devised a program that was like HYDRA; the latter wished the Tesseract to develop world-ending weapons. This then typically proposes to the viewers that the military should always have weapons which are high-tech to save the world.

Although, the council prefers S.H.I.E.L.D. to apply Phase Two to win the war, Fury asserts that the Avengers are what is required to win the war. To Fury Avengers are a “response team”. Fury is basically comparing the Avengers, a superhero group, with nearly unlimited powers, to similar military units, like SWAT or the National Guard. The Avengers’ power is

being minimised, though, being superheroes, they are the first group S.H.I.E.L.D wants to send into fray. Besides, a council woman says; “war isn’t won by sentiment, Director”. To that Fury responds; “No, it’s won by soldiers”. Fury means to say that each member of the Avengers team is a soldier. In military, soldiers rather take orders from one person, and they lose their identification to work as cohesive unit. Fury is adding that the Avengers is a military group that will be supervised by him and S.H.I.E.L.D. This also means that the military should have super-powered soldiers, because they can win wars more efficiently (Whedon, 2012) (*Scene 2, TA*).

Fury’s remarks that wars are won by soldiers, too, refer to the assumption that it is by super-powered force that can only help win wars. Col. Philips remarks wars are won by men, and they were going to have the best army ever seen. This forms the part of constant-reinforcement in these films- wars can only be won by having the best soldiers, whereas for Col. Phillips, it was having super-soldiers. Fury is expanding from super-soldiers to other super-powered men. The Super-soldiers’ complex in this universe, is also discussed. As Steve Rogers is on way to come across the rest of S.H.I.E.L.D, he is reviewing the other members’ files, when he reads the file about Dr Banner, he asks Coulson, “so this Dr Banner was trying to replicate the serum they used on me?”. Coulson replies, “a lot of people were. You were the world’s first superhero” (Whedon, 2012) (*Scene 4, TA*).

A precedent was set by Captain America about what can be gained in war if there is at least one super – soldier. Although the government perceives the super-soldier’s success as the key to win wars, there are people like Dr Banner who are negatively impacted by it. The U.S. Government supported Dr Banner’s research, that indicates they are more interested in developing a super-soldier than any problems that follow. Furthermore, Dr Banner is too, taken as a member of the Avengers due to his capability to turn into “Hulk”. While Rogers looks shocked Dr. Banner was attempting to reproduce the serum, S.H.I.E.L.D. benefits from his mistake. Dr Banner though cannot replicate the serum completely, he produced an everlasting duplicate that could be employed in wars, which is what S.H.I.E.L.D actually needs. In spite of that Dr Banner is regarded as a deserter from the U.S government these issues are ignored by S.H.I.E.L.D. The viewers informed that S.H.I.E.L.D will value any type of super-power man, irrespective of how they got. A precedent is, therefore set for any future superheroes that they may confront.

When S.H.I.E.L.D locates Loki, they depute Captain America to arrest him. Loki keeps hostage a scientist from Germany and other people, and he starts to monologue his plans for humans, which forcing them bow to him. To this an older man, stands up, resisting Loki, and they exchange the following dialogue:

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

Man: Not to men like you.

Loki: There are no men like me.

Man: There are always men like you (Whedon, 2012) (*Scene 5, TA*).

After that, Loki attacks the man with his sceptre who stood against him. Before energy ball can hit its target, Captain America jumps in front of the man and deflected the energy using his shield. After this Captain America tells Loki, “the last time I was in Germany and saw a man standing above everybody also, we ended up disagreeing” (Whedon, 2012) (*Scene 5, TA*). This entire interaction between Loki, the man and Captain America is reflective of WWII. The viewers, by collocating Loki with Hitler/Red Skull, is hereby informed that Loki is like those figures and he must be defeated. First, this happens in Germany, where HYDRA and Nazis were based. The old man could represent a generation who lives under dictatorship and oppression of the Nazis and HYDRA. There is an important comparison that Loki is like Hitler, someone who is going to oppress an entire group. The interaction between Loki and the man is, thus applied to justify the “war” between Loki and the S.H.I.E.L.D, and hence this fight becomes a “good war”.

The comparison of Loki to Hitler, and possibly “Red Skull”, is advanced by Captain America protecting the man at the last moment. Even Captain America points to his time disagreeing with and fighting oppressors in Germany. Captain America, during WWII, is shown to have punched “Hitler” over 200 times and after that fought the Red Skull and defeated him. Protection of man by Captain America, too, strengthens the story that the U.S. is primarily responsible for the end of WWII and requires to be involved in “saving the world”.

Besides, this is the first scene for the viewers to see Captain America’s new uniform, Rogers’ uniform was always “Stars and Stripes”, a uniform in the first Captain America film, which appeared to be more like a regular military uniform. The new uniform, however, resembles the U.S.O uniform, with shining colours (red, white and blue). In this film, the

uniform is more symbolic of a U.S flag that has not been discoloured as compared to the original uniform. Rogers even realised that the uniform was “old fashioned” but S.H.I.E.L.D felt that “old fashioned” is needed by people. The uniform, therefore, is used to apprise the people continuously of this universe and the viewers, of World War II, as the “good guys” were victorious.

Captain America arrives on earth, after Loki is in the custody of S.H.I.E.L.D, to remove him. Iron Man tackles Captain America into a forest, and they started to argue with one another, after that follows a three- minute sequence of them fighting one another. Although they both want the same thing (Loki leaving Earth alone), they do not agree on how that is to be gained and decide to fight one another. Their final aim is to prove who one is more powerful, and in the meantime ignore Loki, who finds a chance to escape. Thor, after that, arrives to help Iron Man and Captain America attacks him, too.

They stopped fighting one another only for the reason that they ultimately see the amount of destruction they caused in the forest that they are in. This entire sequence is about each hero’s masculinity. The importance given to masculinity happens during the fight between the Avengers and the “Chitauri”, the strangers helping Loki. After the invasion starts, Captain America moves to the police officers who seem confused as to what to do in this situation. Captain America gives them instructions and they reply. “Why the hell should I take orders from you?” Captain America, instead of replying, fights and beats a couple of Chitauri aliens before the police who then do what they were asked (Whedon, 2012) (*Scene 6, TA*). The short interaction between Captain America and the police officers indicates how they attach a great value to masculinity. The police officers heeded Captain America only for the reason that he “proved” his power by fighting the Chitauri. The officers were convinced to listen to him only because of his masculinity. The viewers next see apart from how you plan works, they will not be listened unless they prove themselves, in particular their masculinity.

Fury, at the end of *The Avengers*, speaks to the World Security Council, who are concerned about the Avengers. Fury informs them that the Avengers’ existence “sends a message” that Earth has heroes that will save it. There is a message in the whole film, that the U.S should be “ready” for any possible threats, that is why S.H.I.E.L.D had Phase Two and the Avengers were evolved. Although Phase Two did not work, yet the Avengers did. The MCU

has then stressed the need for group of superheroes (special, selected men), who form part of a militaristic organisation to save the world.

While, the film also gathered many superheroes for the first time, the male heroes fought each other, being upset with each other. The in-fighting of the heroes also provided a plot point that all of them are evenly compared. However, this also displayed that if a person wants to be a hero, he must be strong, if not stronger, than a God-like alien, a man in suit and a super-soldier, Captain America and the other heroes have confirmed that hyper-masculinity is the best indicator of whether someone has value and can be a hero.

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

This is yet another instalment of Captain America's solo film which revolves around his miraculous achievements. The storyline of S.H.I.E.L.D and Captain America is continued in this film, though separate from the Avengers group. This film depicts that Captain America, though supposed to work as merely an Avenger, has decided to work with S.H.I.E.L.D as a regular agent. Captain America is also a more nuanced character in this film. The film starts with a scene that depicts Rogers running around the National Mall in Washington D.C, and another person is shown also running on the mall. Each time Rogers passes by this man he says, "on your left". After that the film follows the man throughout his run, and as Rogers passes the man, he says "On your left". When Rogers passes the man for the last time, the man feels Rogers coming up and gets annoyed and shouts at Rogers to not say "On your left". Rogers still says it that upsets the man and runs faster to overtake Rogers (Russo, 2014) (*Scene 1, CATWS*).

This opening sequence of the film signifies Rogers' added capabilities. In the previous films, Rogers could do things that other people were unable to do, but this is for the first time that his abilities are matched to a non-superhero. The runner "Sam Wilson" is a retired soldier, and despite his training and experience, he is unable to keep up with Rogers, and thus his ego is slightly hurt.

Besides, when these two characters introduced themselves, they start to build up their attachment with the military. This reflects a culture in military that helps create a familiarity. Hence instant relationship between Rogers and Wilson over having served the military. Wilson even invites Rogers to a VA meeting for soldiers that are experiencing post-traumatic stress

disorder or PTSD. The film further depicts Rogers arriving at a meeting a couple of minutes before it ends. Wilson concludes the meeting by telling everyone present that they "... all got the same problems". This meeting strengthens military culture and identities. All the people in the meeting are bonded, due to having similar experiences and they can help each other. Despite the fact that their problems indicate that "war is hell," the meeting displays that they will ever have the other soldiers as they are a family (Russo, 2014) (*Scene 2, CATWS*).

As Rogers now joins S.H.I.E.L.D as a regular agent, he is part of Special Tactical Reserve for International Key Emergencies or S.T.R.I.K.E, that is a special operation team for S.H.I.E.L.D. Rogers, Natasha Romanov, or "Black Widow" are assigned to recapture S.H.I.E.L.D vessel, the Lemurian Star. Rogers and the team, during briefing come to know that the vessel had been trespassing. Rogers concerned over ship's trespassing remarks, "you know I'm getting a little tired of being Fury's Janitor" (Russo, 2014) (*Scene 3, CATWS*).

Rogers' remark about being janitor is very impressive about how Fury and S.H.I.E.L.D have used him as an agent. Fury in *The Avengers* told the Security Council that the Avengers, which included Captain America, would be response team, whose aim would be for conflicts that were too large for S.H.I.E.L.D to handle. Despite, Fury uses Rogers as a "janitor" to manage problems, he is being used by Fury and S.H.I.E.L.D as just another regular agent, and who is a superhero for regular missions. They are extending their militaristic abilities by ending him on regular, non-Avengers missions.

Rogers is also displaying that he is a nuanced character with this statement. He says in *The Avengers*, "We have orders we should follow them.". In *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, Rogers is depicted to question the orders he is given. Further into the film he tells the visiting Peggy Carter, "... I thought I could throw myself back in and follow orders. Serve. It's just not the same" (Russo, 2014) (*Scene 4, CATWS*). Though Rogers is facing an existential crisis, he wonders how he fits into this new world, his comment too, indicates change in militaristic action from WWII to the present day. The mission to rescue the Lemurian Star Vessel depicts why S.H.I.E.L.D would want to use Captain America as a regular agent, rather than just an Avenger. Rogers gets on the Vessel by himself to remove hostiles before anyone arrives. This is also exactly how Rogers went to rescue Bucky and the 107th Division by himself in *Captain America: The First Avenger*. He was able to fight all hostiles on the vessel's deck

by himself, without alerting any other hostiles. This scene depicts the benefits of having super-soldiers. The presence of a super-soldier on the team offers a better chance of success. After that Rogers has the final fight with “George Batroc”, a former French intelligence agent, and a most wanted terrorist. The scene shows Rogers and Batroc are alone on the deck fighting one another. Their fight is framed as a death match, what will determine which one is the best fighter. Rogers and Batroc, as they fight, appear to be evenly matched, none of them able to get upper hand to win. Batroc tells Rogers, “I thought you were more than just a shield.” Rogers actually confuses by this, as during their fight, he had been using his shield to help him fight Batroc. The remark of Batroc also questioned Rogers’ masculinity; he means that Rogers’ need to use his shield in fight makes him less than a soldier or man (Russo, 2014) (*Scene 5, CATWS*).

Rogers then throws his shield and removes his helmet to fight Batroc. He is on to establish his masculinity by beating Batroc without the shield or helmet. This indicates how Captain America’s meaning of masculinity needs to be established by fighting a hostile, and winning, with their own physical abilities. Following the rescue mission, Rogers faces with Fury for not being given all the parameters of the mission. Fury had sent Romanov to help with rescue mission but also to gather data, which was not known to Rogers. He says it could have compromised the mission.

Rogers: Those hostages could have died Nick.

Fury: I sent the greatest soldier in history to make sure that didn’t happen.

Rogers: Soldiers trust one another. That’s what makes it an army

(Russo, 2014) (*Scene 6, CATWS*).

The interaction between Rogers and Fury further indicates that Fury and S.H.I.E.L.D see Rogers merely as a soldier that they have at their disposal, and that Rogers could only protect the hostages. Though, S.H.I.E.L.D has highly trained agents, great importance is given to Rogers being a super soldier. In addition, Rogers compares S.H.I.E.L.D to an army, it is supposed to be an intelligence agency. Therefore, Rogers says that they are all soldiers. S.H.I.E.L.D is after all a major militaristic force within this universe. They have exceeded from being an intelligence agency, to be an army that gets to declare war, like Fury did in *The Avengers*. Moreover Rogers, too, sees himself as a soldier and he instead of being an agent, continues to have a soldier mentality, which means that he sees himself as someone who is at war with whoever, declared a threat by S.H.I.E.L.D. In order to pacify Rogers, Fury decides to

present him a new project known as Project Insight, on which S.H.I.E.L.D is engaged. When Fury conducts Rogers to the lower levels of the Triskelion, the S.H.I.E.L.D Headquarters in D.C, three fully armed helicarriers are exhibited. As the helicarriers are revealed, there is patriotic music in background, which is to display how far S.H.I.E.L.D advanced as an agency to save the world.

Fury says that these helicarriers are going to be “synced to a network of targeting satellites” and S.H.I.E.L.D is “gonna neutralise a lot of threats before they even happen”. Fury’s presupposition is that S.H.I.E.L.D does not stop terrorism before it occurs, then the world will never be safe. To establish S.H.I.E.L.D pre-emptive attacks on potential threats, Fury had informed Rogers regarding his grandfather who carried a 22 Calibre magnum gun to protect himself. Fury means to say that people have always attempted to save themselves against threats before they took place. Fury and S.H.I.E.L.D, as an intelligence agency, for the US in this universe, are, too, indicating that there is some justification to strike people, likely to threaten the safety of the country or of the world (Russo, 2014) (*Scene 7, CATWS*).

While Rogers accepted that SSR had to compromise on their missions and did “nasty stuff”, the extent at which S.H.I.E.L.D will operate with Project Insight is too far-reaching. He states, “By holding a gun to everyone on Earth and calling it protection.... This isn’t freedom. This is fear.” This also shows Rogers nuances. Though he is fine with S.H.I.E.L.D working as an army and using his super-soldier abilities to protect people, he has a problem with S.H.I.E.L.D using force in advance to stop threats before they occur (Russo, 2014) (*Scene 7, CATWS*).

During the effort to find why Fury was killed and what is on the memory drive he had. Rogers and Romanov visit an Apple store to use a computer. While at the store, they are approached by an Apple attendant, who informs Rogers that he has the same glasses that he is wearing. Romanov calls them twin. The attendant says; “Yeah, I wish, Specimen” focusing on Rogers’ looks. Rogers’ physicality and good looks are made to be ideals for everyone. The attendant who wishes he looked like Rogers reflects the men that look at Rogers’ character as wish-fulfilment, which is strengthened in this sequence (Russo, 2014) (*Scene 8, CATWS*)

As Rogers, Romanov and Wilson discover that S.H.I.E.L.D has been compromised HYDRA. Following WWII, S.H.I.E.L.D recruited a German Scientist for their Operation

Paperclip, with Strategic value, which included HYDRA's "Amim Zola", S.H.I.E.L.D.'s recruitment of German scientist, parallels how the Allies, in our own universe, also pardoned and recruited Nazi Scientists, which normalises the recruitment of the "bad" people by the "good" people to benefit their own agenda.

In order to know more what HYDRA wants to do, Rogers and team kidnap "Agent Sitwell", who informs them that HYDRA plans to use the helicarriers from Project Insight to kill people that they feel are a threat to their mission to save the world. Rogers asks how HYDRA can decide which people would pose a threat to them. Sitwell explains:

The 21st century is a digital book... your bank records, medical histories, voting patterns, emails, phone calls, your damn SAT scores. Zola's algorithm evaluates people's pasts to predict their future (Russo, 2014) (*Scene 9, CATWS*).

HYDRA by collection information about every person in the world, "can predict what their future actions will be, allowing them to decide who is "worthy" of living. HYDRA's intended action compares to the U.S government's own collection of data from every citizen. Shockingly in the real-world scenario, following 9/11, the U.S. government passed the Patriot Act on October 26, 2001. The PATRIOT Act broadened the scope of intelligence agencies to collect information about people they suspected could be terrorists. The intelligence secrets "leak" from Edward Snowden later revealed that the NSA was collecting data from every citizen even if they were not considered a "threat".

HYDRA's collection of data directly links to the National Security Agency, or NSA. In the previous years, there have been many leaks about NSA collecting data from every person, yet no changes were made in federal laws. In the film, HYDRA's collection of data is meant to be something that should not happen, that is why Captain America fighting against it. Despite that, in the actual world there have not been large movements that would end the data collection without likely cause. HYDRA wants to kill people that would go against their own agenda, whereas the NSA and the U.S want to root out terrorists from the country.

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

You're not going to put me in a prison. You're not going to put any of us in a prison. You know why? Because you need us. Yes, the world is in a vulnerable place, and yes, we helped make it that way. But we're also the ones best qualified to defend it (Russo, 2014) (*Scene 10, CATWS*).

Romanov assumes that the world after all will need to be protected again, and they are the only group that could protect it. She also means to say that none of them be held responsible for their actions, for they might be required to protect the world in the future. Romanov has thus enlarged the scope of operations any surviving S.H.I.E.L.D agents and the Avengers, too, and held them above the law.

While S.H.I.E.L.D has been dismantled for being HYDRA, Rogers and the other agents will continue to work indicate that if someone works for the 'good', then they are above law Rogers' actions in this film continue to depict that his appearance and abilities are the ideal for all men. Rogers is shown throughout the film confronting various types of people, and win and get appreciation for his physique, too. Besides, though, Rogers fought against how S.H.I.E.L.D was becoming too much militaristic, and fought against HYDRA's plans, he continues to employ militaristic force. This indicates Rogers does not have a fundamental problem with militarism, and his use of military force to "save" the world in the MCU, stresses the need to use force in the "real" world, as long as it is for the "good" of the world.

4.4 Avengers: Age of Ultron (2015) (AAOU)

In this film, the Avengers have assumed to be ultimate force that can end HYDRA (As a part of the MCU, the television series *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* (2013–present) shows S.H.I.E.L.D. agents that survived the destruction of the agency. These agents are trying to regroup and form a new S.H.I.E.L.D.). Even though S.H.I.E.L.D is dismantled, the Avengers still work as a group that fights threats to the world. The Avengers and the "good" S.H.I.E.L.D agents, at the end of *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* turned into an independent group. In spite of the U.S government's worries, Romanov had said that the Avengers would not be held answerable for their actions and that they should be permitted to continue to be an organisation, because, as a group they are able to "save" the world.

The film starts in media reports with the Avengers attacking a HYDRA base which is located in Sokovia (Sokovia is a fictional country located in Eastern Europe). During attack,

they realised that the base has more defences than other HYDRA bases. The viewers, by this description, is informed that the Avengers unified following the fall of S.H.I.E.L.D to search for HYDRA bases and destroy them. As the Avengers approach the base fortress, they agree that they need to evacuate the city, closest to the base, as it is located by a town. In *The Avengers*, the team with the help of police officers had to evacuate civilians themselves. In this film, Tony Stark or Iron Man, has the “Iron Legion”, which is robot duly programmed to evacuate civilians. This indicates that the team is also expanding the types of technology they use to tackle “war”

In spite of the fact the Avengers deem themselves to be the best to protect the world and had the people’s support after the New York Battle (The fight between the Avengers and Loki and the Chitauri is referred to as the Battle of New York) the people of Sokovia do not wish the Avengers in their country. The Sokovians are depicted shouting “Avengers, go home”, thus they are questioning the justification of the Avengers. The Avengers are upset by Sokovians shouting. This sequence also depicts that Avengers enter countries without government permission, that could be an act of war. Moreover, the Avengers, by entering other countries without permission, are forcing their own agenda on other people.

Following the Avenger successfully dismantle the HYDRA base, they return to Avengers Tower that had basically been Stark Tower in *The Avenger* and damaged during the battle, Stark had then renovated the tower for housing the Avengers. The Avengers as S.H.I.E.L.D no longer exists, developed their own base of operation, thus solidifying their independence from the ruined S.H.I.E.L.D. and the U. S government. The Avengers were also allowed by the government to have little oversight, because, as stated by Romanov they are required to protect the world. This lack of oversight, after all indicates that since this superhero group works for the “good” of the country and the world, then they work as an independent police force.

Despite the fact, the Avengers saw the consequences of experimenting with alien technology; Stark still wants to experiment on Loki’s sceptre which they had acquired at the HYDRA base in Sokovia. He is using the same presupposition that Fury and S.H.I.E.L.D used to justify their use of alien technology. He tells Dr Banner:

“If we can harness this power, apply it to my Iron Legion protocol? What if the world

was safe? What if, next time aliens roll up to the club, and they will, they couldn't get past the bouncer? Peace in Our Time" (Whedon, 2015) (*Scene 1, AAOU*).

Tony wants to use the alien technology to make artificial intelligence and apply it to the Iron Legion, so that the Avengers have more help or retire from fighting the "bad people". Stark would be creating a sentient army of robot that would take the place of the Avengers as world police force. Stark and Banner, after having been convinced, start working with the Sceptre and artificial intelligence, and by chance produce Ultron (Ultron is artificial intelligence. When he "wakes up," he learns everything there is to know that is in the files the Avengers have and on the internet.). Ultron reveals himself to the Avengers, and escapes through the internet (as AI (Artificial Intelligence), Ultron can move its consciousness, or program framework, from one robot to another through the wireless internet connections).

As Stark lied to the team, Rogers says, "The Avengers were supposed to be different from S.H.I.E.L.D". Again, Rogers is displaying nuances in his character. Though Rogers is concerned by S.H.I.E.L.D lying and making decisions about future wars, he is not affected by militaristic forces in general. Thus, he believes the Avengers are needed to save the world. While, Ultron acts as the villain in this film, he makes certain points that are relevant within the MCU and our own universe. When Ultron recruits Wanda and Pietro Maximoff (Wanda and Pietro Maximoff are twins from Sokovia, who volunteered for HYDRA's human experiment program that gave them powers. Wanda has magic and Pietro has super speed), Ultron says: "Everyone creates the thing they dread. Men of peace create engines of war" (Whedon, 2015) (*Scene 2, AAOU*). The irony is indicated by Ultron's collocation of "peace" and "war", that people believe that military action is required to gain peace. He also means to say that the Avengers are no exception, and he is privy to all the decisions that the Avengers, S.H.I.E.L.D and other have made to achieve peace.

As the Avengers face with Ultron for a second time, he tells Rogers, "Captain America God's righteous man. Pretending you could live without war" (Whedon, 2015) (*Scene 3, AAOU*). The existence of Captain America is due to war, without it there is no need to have a super-soldier. Besides, Rogers has even said that he has no idea what to do if he is not working as an agent, or a soldier. In order to regroup and find out how to defeat Ultron, the Avengers visit Clint Barton's secret home. Then Rogers and Stark discuss how they got into this scenario.

Stark asserts his actions by stating that he wanted to establish peace so that could retire; Isn't that 'Why we fight' ('Why We Fight' was a WWII propaganda series directed by Frank Capra for the U.S. government to educate the populace about the war and why it was important to enter). So, we can end the fight. So, we can go home." Stark links his own motivations to those of people who fought during WWII, which aimed to stop the Nazis and bring peace. In addition, matching his actions to WWII, would not only be relatable to Rogers but also make his actions appear to be "good"

Rogers, like his response in *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, justifies in fighting a war that has not occurred yet. He tells Tony: "Every time someone tries to win a war, before it starts, innocent people die. Every time." In order to stress on his anger and discord, Rogers rips apart a log with his bare hands. Rogers employs his added capabilities to display his superiority over Stark and to establish that he is in charge (Whedon, 2015) (*Scene 4, AAOU*). Later in the film, Rogers and Stark fight one another when they disagree how to handle the body and mind stones. The mind stone is one of six stones that have magical capabilities. Ultron placed it in the head of the robotic body he was creating.

It appears that the only way Rogers and Stark can tackle their dispute is by fighting one another. They also intended to fight one another in *The Avengers* but they did not because they were attacked by Loki's goons. Rogers and Stark by using masculinity, gain the outcome they desire. They are not portrayed disputing about how to tackle problems. In particular Rogers, who does not appear to change his mind once he has made it. While, Rogers employs his masculinity with Stark to establish his superiority, it is often questioned during the fights against Ultron and his robot army, much to the chagrin of Rogers. Barton, while fighting Ultron, tells Rogers, "you're not a match for him, Cap". Rogers is upset by this remark and replies sarcastically. "Thanks, Barton". Barton merely told the history's strongest soldier, that he was not strong enough to fight Ultron, which hurt Rogers' ego. Rogers is able to fight anyone, and to be told that he was not match, questions his masculinity (Whedon, 2015) (*Scene 5, AAOU*).

Following Ultron is defeated, the Avengers came back to new Avengers facility. As Rogers and Stark walk to his car, they discuss returning from being superheroes and live the "simple" life. As Rogers thinks over this, there is audio in the background of drill sergeant

shouting at soldiers. Rogers tells Stark that he does not think to have a “simple” life, and “I’m home”. Rogers reiterates that the only life he could have is in the military. Moreover, Rogers regards the military settings, like Avengers facility, as his home with his family, which strengthens the military culture and how it is part of people’s identity. It was displayed in the previous literature, that the military culture is that remains with soldiers, and Rogers, thus, represents soldiers that have similar experiences he is their stand-in in the MCU. Besides Rogers feels staying at the Avengers facility, like “home”, which, too, means that military can be a home or family. The military is idealised to be ready-made family where everyone is welcome.

While in this film, Rogers further questions if preparing militaristic force for the future, they do not question its use in general. The film continues to propagate the use of militaristic force to “save” the world, and the significance and value of hyper-masculinity, Rogers and MCU assert that enhancing military force to prepare for future fights is not good and they require to just use it to tackle one problem at a time; they need to fight their enemy that they can see, not the one in the future. Yet, this is not an argument against militarism but rather an argument for tackling the more immediate issues.

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

At the start of *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, the Avengers are shown hunting for and defeating HYDRA terrorists and bases. By the end of the film, new members were added in the Avengers. Moreover, objections to the Avengers continue by in the *Captain America: Civil War*, to the way the Avengers operate and nuances in the Captain America character.

The film *Captain America: Civil War* opens with a scene that depicts most of the Avengers in Lagos searching for terrorists, in particular Rumlow and other HYDRA operatives. The Avengers operate in Lagos, without the Nigerian government authority. They think that Rumlow is likely to attack a police department and then realise he is attacking a research institute. The Avengers work as an independent organisation to save the world (After the destruction of S.H.I.E.L.D. in *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, the Avengers are shown to have remained an independent group, even though S.H.I.E.L.D. was reformed in the television show *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* (2013-present), and even helped the Avengers in *Avengers: Age of Ultron*). As they are not officially affiliated with a government, they do not,

or feel obliged to inform any government about their presence in their country. They did so when they attacked the HYDRA base in Sokovia. The Avengers, by not involving other governments are carrying out illegal military action, in breach of international laws, on the pleas they are “saving” the world.

Besides, the Avengers did not inform the Nigerian government or the police force in Lagos about expected terrorist act, they could not seek local support in case the situation gets out of their control. Rumlow and his team successfully got the item they sought for and entered an area crowded by civilians. Unlike *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, in which the Avengers used the Iron Legion robots to evacuate citizens while fighting Rumlow and his team. Hence a complete disregard to the safety of the people in Lagos. Rogers, at last, fights Rumlow alone, just as he fought Batroc alone in *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*. While Rumlow is wearing a metal suit, Rogers fights him and overpowers him. The enhanced abilities of Rogers have been continuously depicted in films so far, and this film as well. This fight indicates that a super-soldier can fight someone even that is strengthened with metal suit, which appears heavier than Stark’s suit.

While Rumlow is overpowered and arrested by Rogers, Rumlow using emotions to divert Rogers, talks about Bucky Barnes, who is the Winter Soldier, and Rogers’ best friend and how he recognised Rogers when he saw him. With the mention of Bucky, Rogers was distracted, and Rumlow detonated a bomb. In order to save Rogers, and the surrounding civilians, Wanda Maximoff pushed the bomb into a building killing eleven persons. While Maximoff blames herself for death of eleven persons, Rogers tells her it was his fault. To be a “good” soldier, the military tries to remove any emotional reactions a soldier might have. But the ideal man or the ideal soldier does not have any emotions as these are regarded as feminine. For Rogers to say that his emotional reaction to Barnes’ name, that caused eleven casualties, the idea is strengthened that soldiers should not be emotional. Any soldier, with emotions, or emotional links, will consequently commit mistakes in the field.

Following the seven casualties in Lagos, the Avengers face with the fact that 117 countries in the world do not like how they operate. These countries, as a compromise, want the Avengers to sign the Sokovia Accords, that would bring the group under the United Nations Control. The new Secretary of State, Thaddeus Ross says to the Avengers, “What would you

call a group of U.S.-based enhanced individuals who routinely ignore sovereign borders and inflict their will wherever they choose and who, frankly, seem unconcerned about what they leave behind?” (Russo, 2016) (*Scene 1, CACW*).

Though the character Thaddeus Ross is complicated (General Thaddeus Ross oversaw the experiment with gamma radiation that attempts to recreate the super-soldier serum, which then causes Dr Bruce Banner to become the Hulk), his concern with the Avengers are substantial. The Avengers claim to be trying to save the world, yet they solely based in the US and ignore the governments of other countries.

In addition, Captain America was evolved for the U.S. military in World War II, and though Rogers may see himself as merely a soldier, or hero, his entire group advances U.S ideas. Rogers’ own ideals for peace, and how peace is gained, are conveyed through an American lens, and his ideals are also formed by his time in the US military when he became a soldier. One of the arguments of Rogers for not to be part of the U.N, is that the organisation “... run by people with agendas, and agendas change.” Rogers became dissatisfied with the government organisations; it was disclosed that HYDRA was controlling S.H.I.E.L.D. Nevertheless, the Avengers are also an organisation that is managed by the people with agendas. Maybe Rogers is of the view that the Avengers ‘.... may not be perfect, the safest hands are still (their) own,’ but that does not change the status of the Avengers, working above the law. The Avengers have their own agenda, to which other countries may not need. Still Rogers is convinced that as they are “protecting” the world, they do not read oversight, even when 117 countries are telling them directly that they do not agree with how they operate (Russo, 2016) (*Scene 2, CACW*).

At the time the U.N meets in Vienna to ratify the accord, a bomb exploded outside the building which kills the king of Wakanda T Chako (Wakanda is a fake country in Africa) While Rogers has never been a signatory to the accords, he has no authority work as an Avenger in any country. Romanov even advises Rogers not to visit Bucharest to get Barnes. She tells him: “you’ll only make this worse.” Rogers is aware that by working as Captain America he is breaking the law, but he does not bother. He does not care that his decision could endanger other people. It is his enhanced abilities that make him justify for his action, enabling him to arrest Barnes and may be Barnes will trust him as they were once friends. After Barnes

and Rogers are trapped by police officers Rhodes tells Rogers, “Congratulations, Cap, you’re a criminal” (Russo, 2016) (*Scene 3, CACW*).

Rogers acted beyond the law, and there are likely to be consequences. Stark even tells Secretary Ross, that there will be consequences for Rogers and Wilson. Rogers seemed surprised over Stark’s comment, he even asks “Consequences”? in spite of the fact Rogers was told by Romanov of possible problems, and was called a criminal by Rhodes, Rogers is still surprised he could be held responsible. Rogers’ actions reflect the idea that if a military action, may have been illegal, was for the “right” reasons, it should be fine. Moreover, Rogers and Stark discuss Rogers’ problem to always be involved in situation he does not agree with.

Rogers: If I see a situation pointed south, I can’t ignore it. Sometimes I wish I could.

Stark: No, you don’t.

Rogers: No, I don’t (Russo, 2016) (*Scene 4, CACW*).

Rogers has always been projected to confront people he does not morally agree with, he has his own idea of how people should be and how situations be tackled. He will not compromise in case he does not agree with these decisions. Rogers imposes his own agenda on people and in case of a discord, he would rather follow his own way. In addition, later in the film, Romanov tells Rogers, “you know what’s about to happen. Do you really want to punch your way out of this one”? Rogers keeps silent. Their interaction further reveals that Rogers is willing to use force to achieve who he is convinced is right. When “Team Iron Man” and “Team Captain America” face off later in the film, Rogers tells his team that they need to fight. Rogers’ actions normally strengthen the application of militaristic force to gain goals (Russo, 2016) (*Scene 5, CACW*).

Though, Rogers was surprised over his and Wilson confronting the consequences of their actions this amazed him more that Maximoff would confront consequences for her actions in Lagos. To Stark’s statement that Maximoff will be confined to the Avengers facility until further orders, Rogers replies, “She’s a kid”. While Rogers and Maximoff could agree on who was responsible for eleven casualties, the Wakandan government and the U.N were of the view that someone be held responsible. The Avengers were in Lagos illegally and applied militaristic force, and Rogers does not think anyone is made accountable. Besides, Rogers is bothered about Maximoff being held responsible as he thinks, as a kid, she should not. Rogers

means to say that Maximoff, as a kid, was not better acquainted neither she has complete control of her powers and therefore be not made responsible for any mistakes.

On Rogers refusing to sign the accords, Zemo, the villain of the film, pretends to interrogate Barnes and instead release the Winter Soldier. In the opening scene of the film, Barnes is shown being tortured in a HYDRA base. The HYDRA agents release and control the Winter Soldier by reading specific words. Barnes then tries to escape custody by stealing a helicopter. In order to stop Barnes, Rogers grabs one of the landing skids and a metal rail on the helicopter landing pad. Rogers's ability to stop a helicopter is depicted by various frames in this sequence, and in this way his masculinity and power is enhanced as a superhero. This sequence meets wish-fulfilment for the male viewers. Rogers is constantly depicted fighting and defeating a number of villains, even when they are powerful. Rogers is more than an ideal that every male should try to achieve.

Rogers' masculinity is further established when he interacts with Saron Carter, who has been helping Rogers throughout the film. While, having been interested in one another (Rogers and Carter met in *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* when she was undercover as his neighbour. Though Rogers had been interested in her, he was upset with her when he found out S.H.I.E.L.D. had her be undercover as his neighbour to protect him.) none of them had made a move. When Carter gives his shield, Rogers kisses it, then Wilson and Barnes nod in approval. Since *Captain America: The First Avengers*, Rogers had not been portrayed to be romantically involved with anyone (A running joke in *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* was Romanov attempting to set-up Rogers with various S.H.I.E.L.D. agents, because she felt he should be in a relationship.), and he has already been depicted to be highly masculine. By attributing a romantic relationship to him, Rogers is portrayed to be able to "get the girl". This is the superheroes' ability that they always get the girls due to their masculinity and capability to protect the world, and accordingly Rogers finally get the girl. Moreover, by displaying Rogers' friends approving his actions, reveals that even they attach great importance to Rogers' ability to approach his girlfriend.

After all, the Avengers fight one another, whereas Rogers and Barnes fly to Siberia as they are sure Zemo, the film's villain, is attempting to get other Winter Soldiers. Stark is of the view that it was Zemo who had framed Barnes for the bombing in Vienna and his visit to

Siberia aims at helping Rogers and Barnes. When they face with Zemo, who has already killed the assassins, Zemo informs them that his plan was to ruin The Avengers. Zemo views the Avengers as an “empire” and they do not bother about the destruction they cause.

All the argument of *Captain America: Civil War* is related to how people disapprove the Avengers’ disrespect for the civilians that are caught in their battle. The Avengers have normally caused the civilian casualties during their fight because they ignore evacuation. The Avengers have their own agenda and they impose it through military action, and they overlook international laws. Though some Avengers are of the view that they should report to the U. N, Rogers and others do not. “Team Captain America” strengthens the idea that militaristic action from the Avengers is essential to keep world peace. Since Rogers broke out the team from prison, they also strengthen the belief that they should not confront consequence for their actions, as they are the heroes.

4.6 Thematic Analysis

With a view to identifying symbols of hyper-masculinity and character evolution, each film has many instances in which these symbols are analysed. Therefore, this analysis indicates the Captain America reproduce, reinforce and is reflective of symbols of hyper-masculinity and militarism in the current cultural zeitgeist. The cinematic universe was developed by Marvel, making use of content from its comic books, which meant that a fan base was already set up that would also see the films. The films also provided an opportunity to Marvel to develop new storylines, as these are a separate criterion as compared to the comic books.

In addition, Marvel has a main character Captain America, who has been filmed in three solo films and in two “group” films. Captain America, being a significant character for Marvel, needs to be examined how the character represents militarism and hyper-masculinity. He was a comic book hero in 1941 who was developed to fight Hitler during WWII and thus became food for thought and wish- fulfilment for soldiers during the war. He was also considered as symbolic of U.S ideals, and thus, he is inherently a political symbol that is meant to promote the message of what it means to be “America”

Moreover, Captain America also symbolises what the “ideal” man should be. “Steve Rogers” eagerly joined the military to become a super- soldier to fight in World War II, and thus, the character represents what is meant to be a “real” man and soldier who can achieve

peace in the world. Besides, media has a record of representation of masculinity as the manifestation of hyper-masculinity. The “ideal” man that has the “hard body”, does not have any feminine characteristics and is aggressive (Jeffords, 1994). The male viewers, through projection of hyper-masculinity in media, is informed that they need to achieve this ideal. Films, too, strengthen what the idea man should look like. The male superheroes are devised to represent what the male viewers should achieve. As such, “It is imperative to examine Captain America critically to ascertain how and to what extent, the character strengthens and reflects hyper-masculinity.

It has been revealed in this analysis, that the MCU and Captain America cannot be ignored as harmless fun for children or for mature audience. This franchise is reproducing ideologies found within the cultural zeitgeist and constantly strengthens them. Marvel is wrapping up these ideologies and hiding these behind the fact that the characters and narratives were from comic books which are also overlooked as “low-brow” and for children. Rogers’ very existence throughout the five films, for example, and his constant presence as Captain America is because of militaristic actions and the government’s desire for stronger soldier. Rogers, before he becomes Captain America, always realised that the right thing to do was to join the military to help defeat the Nazis. Rogers could not join because of medical problems; he became a willing member of the super-soldier military experiment. The super-soldier experiment stresses the belief of the government and military that the only way to win a conflict is through war.

As militarism in Hollywood films is also related to nationalism, Captain America, too, is an expression of these ideals. The original uniform of Captain America is depicted in *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011) and continues to be almost same throughout the aforementioned five films. The costume represents the U.S. flag, and its colour is red, white and blue and there are stars and stripes. In *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, the costume’s colour is a dark grey, for one time and that is due to Rogers being in “Stealth mode”. Still this costume is used to reflect nationalism and militarism, and there is never any doubt of who he is fighting for and which ideals he is promoting.

Rogers, throughout all the five films, continuously tells people that he feels more comfortable in military settings. He realises his purpose in life is better served as a soldier,

despite the fact that he has questioned his place in the 21st century. Rogers, Director Fury, and Col. Phillips attach great importance to the use of soldiers. Col. Phillips and Director Fury, in the MCU, are of the view that soldiers or powerful soldiers are what is required to win wars. Col. Phillips wanted the super-soldier experiments to work, and he wanted or thought he required an enhanced army to win World War II. Director Fury wanted the Avengers, whom he regarded as soldiers, to save the world and he was going to employ the Avengers as special group that he could order around.

Rogers was the best soldier for Col. Phillips and Director Fury even Rogers thought of being the best soldier, who should be assigned to hard situations. Rogers, in the MCU, is the embodiment of what every man, or soldier, should be like. Rogers and Sam Wilson, in *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* (2014), bond over their time in the military. Rogers at the end of *Avenger: Age of Ultron* (2015), reminds Tony Stark that he is at home at the Avengers facility as it resembles an army base. The military is shown by the MCU and Rogers as ever part of Rogers' identity and a homely organisation that can be joined by anyone and succeed in.

Since Rogers does not like to prepare for future conflicts, he does not oppose combating conflicts in general. In *the Avengers* (2012) and *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* (2014), S.H.I.E.L.D was always trying to prepare for future wars by furthering their technologies. For example, in *The Avengers*, S.H.I.E.L.D applied the Tesseract, to develop advance weapons that could be used to fight aliens, whereas S.H.I.E.L.D, in *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, created the Heli carriers that is able to kill anyone that poses potential threats.

Rogers did not agree with their methods in both cases but did not dispute with wars in general. Rogers does not like to fight the enemy he does not know. While Rogers appears to be working towards peace, he thinks the only way to achieve peace is by fighting. Thus, Rogers is not disputing against wars, he is merely arguing the feeling about wars in the future; he would rather prefer to fight the war that faces him. As a super-soldier, Rogers is the reflection of the belief that the military requires hyper-masculine soldiers and that super-soldier are the perfect "hard body" (Jeffords, 1994). After Rogers becomes super-soldier, he has the ability to do things he could not before, like running fast, or jumping very high. When he becomes a super-soldier, his new added capabilities are continuously projected. It gives any feat by Rogers

special focus in the films for his capabilities and repeated reminder of these compel the viewers to “wish” they looked like him and can do what he does.

Even a scene in *Captain America: The Winter Soldier (2014)* shows a “normal” man saying he wants he looked like Rogers. He is the stand-in for the viewers in the film, and he is disclosing what the viewers should wish. The viewers’ desires are recognised in the film to look like Rogers, and these desires are justified and strengthened throughout all the films by displaying how “masculine and heroic” Rogers is. Many scenes throughout all five films portray Rogers’ strengthened capabilities. Rogers is continuously entering enemy lines to combat most of the opponents before his team arrives to help him. For example, in *Captain America: The First Avenger* Rogers goes into a HYDRA base alone to rescue war prisoners, and in *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, he lands on a ship to fight terrorists, and then his team arrives.

The portrayal of Rogers’ capability to fight many opponents at once, attaches great significance to what a super-soldier is capable of. The male viewers perceive what they could do if they were super-soldiers, and the super-soldier is the ideal hyper-masculine soldier. The focus on super-soldier after that more strengthens the male viewers’ desires to what to look and even behave like Captain America. In the five films, Rogers’s achievement of feats after more evidence of possibilities that the male viewers could realise if they were like Rogers.

The overall tone of Captain America’s presence in his solo and group films speaks volume about the projection of masculinity that MCU picks to project to an international audience yearning for America’s decisive and divisive role against real and expected threats. In the backdrop of 9/11 US has been aiming to solidify its stance against threats, through all possible media channels, to garner support for its public and politicians for humongous defence budgets and acts of wars. Captain America and his dialogues speak directly to global audience. Across these five films, his stances and thought processes are highlighted and discussed above to prove that he is created to serve a very particular set of ideals to the audience.

4.7 Moving forward

From this point forward, is a very different take on masculinity is discussed in the coming chapter. Captain America had very clear militaristic and political undertones to him. He did not serve as a template to the average male in society after 9/11. Rather, he was a

representative symbol of US itself. So, the persona was larger than life, that audience would look up to in awe and submission. Disney/Pixar studios, with their creative animation, offered a very different version of 'ordinary' masculinity of daily life. The broken spirits after 9/11 were allowed to heal in a natural way through these movies, where real life like configurations of father, son, friends/buddies, enemies, pets, husbands, etc. are crafted. So, each film Disney/Pixar created contained an array of intricate layers of different masculine characters. The next chapter gives thematic coverage to two iconic Disney/Pixar blockbuster animations, *Cars (2006)*, and *Toy Story*.

CHAPTER 5

DATA ANALYSIS (DC/PIXAR)

The trend of gender becoming less binary is also reflected in DC/Pixar films deeply. These films showcase a mix of characters, both male and female, but their roles and placement in story is not reliant on their maleness or femaleness, for that matter. Pixar films hold a prominent meaning-making position for younger and adult viewers alike. For instance, according to physical ability or inability, a man's masculinity can be questioned or confirmed, that is, stories provide a way for men and women to define themselves and others. In comparing superheroes to animated character, it is clear that body types are changing and becoming acceptable.

This chapter includes a detailed explanation of the themes with supporting evidence from the texts of Disney/Pixar's blockbuster animations, *Cars* (2006) and *Toy Story 3* (2010) regarding the masculinities' construction and development in these films and that why this is significant for us to know what the themes are being depicted in these films about masculinities. Although the focus of this research is to dissect these two animations only, yet there are many mentions of similar themes in other productions of Pixar, e.g. *Brave* (2012), *The Incredibles* (2004), *A Bug's Life* (1998), *Up* (2009) etc. to draw striking comparisons and similarities. These themes basically make the foundation of the depiction of masculinities in Pixar's films with those two major films symbolising the trends being led in all the films. Due to the frequent usage of these themes in all the films, these have developed a framework in which the masculinities function in close relation to each other. These themes also work as the discerning power for the viewers on the basis of which they decide that a particular masculinity is good or bad or acceptable or unacceptable.

The themes that have been enlightened depict the ability for altering into New Man by the protagonists, whereas the antagonists tend to make themselves align according to the Old Man masculinity versions that have been portrayed in a negative sense. When we examined the sample two films there emerged four major themes about masculinity. These are (1) cooperation makes the males achieve success (2) the presence of courage in males (3) modern day confused masculinity (4) wishes of a male to be wanted or loved.

5.1 Cooperation

Cooperation is the theme which is most common throughout Pixar's films. They frequently depict the male characters participating in cooperation which they consider being essential for the success and realisation of their objective. At least one scene is shown in each of Pixar's feature-length films where protagonist male character has to work in team, with either masculine or feminine character, for the successful completion of task, which may range from getting victory against a giant robot to gaining the position of a well renowned French chef to fleeing from a day-care under the control of oppressive teddy bear. This is also shown that learning the value of cooperation is essential for some masculine characters especially the ones playing alpha characters (e.g. the character of Lightning McQueen in film *Cars (2006)* and Woody from the *Toy Story 1*) to make themselves better and become the "New Men" of Gilliam and Wooden (2008). Furthermore, for the purpose to view cooperation as good, characters other than the protagonist should also take advantage from the results of the cooperation. In case of the characters cooperating to look for personal gains, their plans often prove to be counterproductive and it reveals them to be in a negative shadow. The ability of alpha male characters to work with teams is considered in these films as part and parcel for the good depiction of masculinities. It also conveys this message in the films that those who work in team to help others are good men. Lastly, the promotion of the idea by the Pixar that cooperation is a positive act, also empowers this theme by making the villains disregard this concept of cooperation openly and not agreeing to work in association with others. This non-agreeing nature of these villains regarding cooperation thus often leads to their destruction or defeat.

5.1.1 Mechanisms of Cooperation

This is the basic purpose of cooperation to make the male protagonists reach their goals and objectives. Therefore, male characters are depicted again and again that until they take part in cooperation, they would not succeed in their objectives. Several male protagonists in Pixar films are shown the talents and abilities of other characters and often they are portrayed. They, too, are often portrayed as endeavouring to express the idea they cannot do without other's help. The male characters are compelled by situations that are conducive for transformation into New Men of the male alpha male roles. Gilliam and Wooden (2008) noted that two qualities

of the New Man are selflessness and cooperation and all characters in the role of alpha position examined thus had to understand the importance of cooperation.

In the film *Cars (2006)* the theme of cooperation has been portrayed vividly where in the early portion of film the character of Lightning McQueen overlooks the advice of his crew for getting new tires and the boasting about it. In fact, McQueen, despite being a celebrity and famed person, does not possess the ability to work with team as well he lacks confidence regarding his own qualities and abilities that has led him to defeat. The character of McQueen appears to be habitual of being 'one-man show' that he keeps on pushing other away from himself and his work. One of the commentators of race told that McQueen, in that season, had dismissed three chiefs of the crew and also did not pay attention to his current chief's advice for the new tires, and thus the whole crew along with the chief then had to quit. McQueen is not interested in getting help or advice from anyone. He has a firm belief that his immense talent is more than enough for his victory in the Piston Cup.

According to Jeffords (1994), this is associated with the portrayal of other masculinities who are loners and self-destructors as they do not need others not seek anyone's help for getting them to the desired goal. This defect in McQueen's nature is featured in the starting portion of the film and it strongly suggests the viewers that cooperation is necessary for the success and victory. The King admired McQueen for having more talent in his only one nut lug as compared to other cars by saying, "You're one gutsy racer". Lightning McQueen then replied in an arrogant way: 'Really? Oh, that...'. The King then continued and said to him, but he was a stupid one. Lightning McQueen was surprised and said: 'Excuse me?' The King told him that this was not the thing to do alone and addressed him as a kid. He advised McQueen to get himself a good chief and a crew to work for him. He told him that he could not win unless he has good companions working behind him and unless you let them work like they should (*Scene 1, Cars*). No doubt there are many masculine transformations that take place, but the viewers were quite confused and also struggled with their beliefs of self-confidence and self-reliance.

Mr Incredible is depicted in *The Incredibles (2004)* film as an endeavouring character to deal with his own lacking, assuming the roles of both a superhero and a man with family to look after. Mr Incredible in the early part of the film wants to work without any cooperation

i.e. all alone and says to his wife Elastigirl that he does not need any of her help and also, he then tells his wanting to be sidekick, the Buddy Pine, that he does not work with anyone and is habitual of working alone. However, Mr Incredible finally, before the battle with Syndrome's robot, expresses his fears about the failures that a man can face in his life. Nevertheless, before the critical battle of the film with Syndrome's robot: that a man must not be single handed but also have mental, emotional and physical strength to get victory. He realised soon that he himself alone will not be able to defeat Syndrome's robot, which has been a threat to the lives of his family members. There was the point where he also felt his emotional difficulty of not being able to survive the losing if his family. Just as Lightning McQueen was guided by The King in *Cars (2006)* regarding the significance of cooperation, Elastigirl who is Mr Incredible's wife also made him understand the importance of cooperation being the key of success and says to him that if they work together, they will no longer need to be strong individually. Also, she reassures her husband and recognises his fears, and this highlights the basic forms of transitions seen in films and televisions in the 1990s regarding the New Men i.e. to find the strength in connecting the family members (Jeffords, 1994). This is the example that illustrates the crucial part played by familial connection in making a successful family.

As asserted by Jeffords (1994), the men with hard bodies in the films from 1980s had been focused personal achievements in the work. In both the films i.e. *The Incredibles (2004)* and *Cars (2006)*, the characters of Mr Incredible and McQueen respectively, appear focused towards their careers. Mr incredible is a superhero whereas Lightning McQueen is a famous racer before being emasculated and they paid a high personal price for their success. McQueen could not choose a single one out of his friends when he was asked to give a complementary ticket to race. On the other hand, Mr Incredible has been depicting the role of a man who is not much connected and is quite detached from his wife and children. However, both these films illustrate that friend and family both have a significant value in gaining success in life for each male character.

Another excellent example of cooperation is shown in the film *A Bug's Life (1998)* by the ant colony where these ants were shown to work with the circus bugs to make a scarecrow for making the grasshoppers go away as that gang had been frightening the colony of and for many years. *A Bug's Life (1998)* presents other examples of cooperation where the main alpha character was shown working with the circus bugs to construct a scarecrow that will scare the

grasshoppers' gang that had been spreading threats and frightening the colony for years. Similarly, in *Monsters, Inc. (2001)* it had only been possible by the working together of Sully and Mike to make the return of Boo to the human world. Each of these examples portray male insufficiency with respect to the realisation of need of help and abilities of others to gain success.

5.1.2 Cooperation That Aids Others

Although in most of the film cooperation has been given a positive view but there are some films where the cooperation, adopted for personal benefits, has been shown to backfire and these are considered being counterproductive regarding the cooperation. These are the cases where one chooses to do cooperation for personal reasons, and this affects one's relationship with the other members of the team. The principal characters, even in these cases, could find a way to work in team for the benefit of the team as a whole and thus making their relationship alive again. This concept of cooperation resembles with the concept of selflessness that had been considered by Trice and Holland (2017) in the analysis of the classics of Disney Animated films such as *Pinocchio*, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *The Lion King* and *Bambi*. In these films it was quite evident that how the male characters used their abilities for the benefits of others. In Pixar's films the male protagonists have thus same quality and they must also learn to be able to at least think of others in their good interests. This in no way means that male protagonists cannot benefit themselves from the cooperation, in fact their benefit is connected to the good of others.

Let's look at, *Toy Story* film in which the cooperation of Woody and Buzz Light year depicts that how the goals are destroyed when selfishness comes in the way of cooperation. Buzz worked with Woody unwillingly, only in the need of finding a way back to home once they found out to be lost at the gas station after Andy has shifted to the new house. In this scenario Woody's motivation is completely based on personal benefits. He only worked with Buzz he knows it clearly that he does have the capability to return home without Buzz and as well the toys would not accept him easily as they will think that he had deliberately left Buzz to get himself rid of Buzz. "Oh, no," while gasping he says that he can't even show his face without Buzz in that room. Woody is being so selfish that he does not even seem to think a little about the effect that would Andy suffer from when he will lose both Woody and Buzz. Also, there is no worth of Buzz's wellbeing to Woody and he is only worried about his return

to his world where he possesses the role of an alpha male and also is the favourite toy of Andy. However, so far, the cooperation of Buzz and Woody is successful as they make it to escape the Sid's house.

There is no doubt after reviewing the above examples that involving in cooperation for personal benefits is considered bad. Nonetheless, there are other films where cooperation for others' benefit has been shown positively. In all of these examples the males have been shown to work in assistance with other characters either male or female with the purpose of betterment of others rather than themselves.

One similar example is *Ratatouille (2007)*, a film where a poor and clumsy boy Alfredo Linguini makes a team with Remy, who is a mouse that desires to become a professional gourmet chef. The dream of Remy to be a professional chef could never have become the reality without making a team with Alfredo. This happens by the use of a fabulous device with the help of which Remy could control Linguini's body as a puppet. The first impression of this concept is very positive as both the members of team get success in achieving their goal i.e. Remy becomes a chef of gourmet and Linguini gets closer to his lady love, Collette, who is also impressed by the marvellous skills of Linguini in culinary. Although Remy plays the main character in the kitchen but his working as a chef is dependent on the presence of Linguini. No doubt Remy is the chef who controls Linguini but still without his assistance Remy can't cook ultimately. Linguini's job is to chop the vegetables and keep stirring the pots where cooking is going on and the role of Remy's is merely of a puppet master and not of a real chef.

Linguini, On the other hand, becomes closer and to Collette especially after she praised him for the soup that actually had been cooked by Remy. He started to spend more time with Collette as they were cooking together now for work. He has even still not learnt a little of cooking though. This concept finally proved to be incomplete regarding the cooperation as conflicts raised due to the deception of both the partners for the gain of personal benefits. Remy started to carry out work hidden from Linguini especially after he gives the credit to Collette in front of public which makes him go jealous of her as Linguini declared Collette the inspiration of his cooking. During all this time the culinary skills of Linguini became a total shun, and the partners separated because they had been working not in the true spirit of cooperation. Since both the characters were working in a team but not being honest to each

other this partnership could not stand and led to failure of both the members as selfishness was rooted into this cooperation and thus, they lost for what they had wished. The true spirit of their cooperation emerged when Remy could cook openly, and Linguini works only as a restaurant server instead of being the main chef of restaurant and that's how their goals were achieved.

There is also an example of cooperation of Carl Fredricksen and Russel in the film *Up (2009)* that has similar results to that of the story of *Ratatouille (2007)*. Carl joins the company not in a good will with Russel just to get a house of his dreams in the Paradise Falls. The partnership with Russel is not guided by the true spirit of cooperation but only to get his floating house got supported by Russel. It is mainly the wish of Carl's dead wife who wanted to live nearby the waterfall and he is also satisfied by his plan of using Russel for his task to accomplish. This is a clear example of being involved in a partnership merely for personal benefits and also it depicts that Carl still has not transformed into a New Man even when he is at this point of his life and it's mainly because of his touch attachment to his past and does not care about others and won't even consider anything good for the people with whom he will interact in the future.

Carl's objective is however achieved. At first, he does not help Russel, but it was until Russel himself sets out to free the bird and Carl finally realises his selfishness. He realised that how he has used Russel for the fulfilling the desire of his dead wife but now he is being selfish by not helping Russel in freeing Kevin the bird. Finally, they worked as a team to get the exotic bird freed but thus happened as the main goal was related to a bird and not themselves. Thus, this example did fulfil the criteria of cooperation at the end.

In the film *The Incredibles (2004)*, Mr Incredible joins a company in the early scenes with Frozone so that he might get involved in the secret superhero task. When he got arrested by the police, his wife Elastigirl got afraid that they will be relocated according to the plan of government for keeping the superhero away from the sight of public and this would endanger the lives of their family members. Mr Incredible in an early scene in *The Incredibles (2004)*, joins Frozone in his company to get himself involved in superhero work secretly. When the police arrest them, Elastigirl is afraid that Mr Incredible will endanger the lives of his family member and that they will be again located as part of the plan of government for keeping the eyes of people away from superheroes. It was not that much evident that Mr Incredible's wife

is being selfish, but it becomes so obvious when she says to him that again uprooting her family for the sake of rejoicing the old days of glory is not a thing in their good interest. The marriage and family life of Mr Incredible had been suffered in past due to selfish attitude of Mr Incredible and it was quite evident to the viewers that Mr Incredible would turn face away from. The responsibilities of family in order to have superpowers that he will get by working with Frozone. Mr Incredible should clearly be prioritising his family rather than to his own wishes of becoming a superhero for the reliving of glorious days and it has been portrayed efficiently that it not a good thing to be selfish, in fact it is a very bad thing.

Brave (2012) also displays the concept of cooperation. It is about the mutual fight of the four clans regarding the choice of Merida's refusal for the selection of a suitor. Merida interrupted the fight by reminding all the men a tale of the battle where all the four clans came together to fight their common enemy. She also made them remind the attitude of each lord that how they helped through the battle and put their lives on stake for the wellbeing of others. The attempts of Lords for capitalisation throughout the films depicts their insincere attitude. It is important to realise that despite of acting as an Old Man, they had their rough body typically only for the exhibition. It was fitted beforehand in their knowledge how to work as New Man and have also witnessed. In the past, their cooperation led to the safety of their own as well as the lives of their clan members and it thus ensured the survival of their future people. Thousands of people got the benefit from the cooperation of merely four men. This example has clearly depicted that for survival cooperation is an essential element. *Toy Story 2* and *3* both have enlightened display of characters engaged in cooperation for the sake of giving benefit to other characters (like the character of Woody in *Toy Story 3 (2010)*) or for the benefit of a whole crew of members working as a team (like the toys wanting to escape the Sunnyside Day-care). Al has been shown to steal Woody from the yard sale of Andy's mother with the thought of selling it to some museum in the foreign. So, when Buzz came to know that Woody may become a part of Al's barn of toys and also declared the mission of rescue:

Buzz: That's where I need to go.

Rex: You can't go, Buzz. You'll never make it.

Buzz: Woody once risked his life to save me. I couldn't call myself his friend if I weren't willing to do the same. So, who's with me? (Unkrich, 2010) (*Scene 1, TS*)

It is clearly seen here that Buzz gets ready quickly to get help from the other toys and

he also thinks that the toys are also willing to help him. This makes a vividly different example of team work as compared to that of Woody who wants to work in team with only to get in good relationship with other of Andy's toys. In this example Buzz has appeared inconsiderate of his own wellbeing and has thus portrayed him as a good character as his only aim to rescue Woody.

The film *Toy Story 3* depicts the use of cooperation for the realisation of safety of family of toys. Buzz has many times expressed his feelings for the unity of the group of toys. Just like at the time of a conversation of Woody in the start of the film about being put into the attic would be an enjoyment and makes Buzz to question Woody:

Buzz: You guarantee it, huh?

Woody: I don't know, Buzz. What else could I say?

Buzz: Well, whatever happens, at least we'll all be together. For infinity and beyond.
(Unkrich, 2010) (*Scene 2, TS*)

Ultimately, the toys worked in close alliance of each other to portray that cooperation is part and parcel for the benefits of the team as a whole. All the toys of Andy worked as a unit to get escape and every character had its own role in this.

Toy Story is the film that has shown the worth of cooperation to protect the sense of family however there are other films portraying the use of cooperation for the protections of biological family of a character. Such as shown in *The Incredibles (2004)* where the family of Mr Incredible has worked together as a team to defeat the Syndrome's robot. Cooperation of the family assured their survival. Individual benefit is also gained by this cooperation of the whole family as it then revived the emotional and romantic connection of Mr Incredible and his wife Elastigirl and their children were also now permitted to use their powers of superhero from which they had been restricted to use in front of the public. Mr Incredible had been excited about using his super speed and uses it for helping his family. Thus subsequently, Mr Incredible became a little busier father and this all change was brought by the cooperation of the family that brought this family the success.

5.2 Courage

The display of bravery in characters varies from case to case, as sometimes it results from external quality (e.g. physical quality) or internal quality (e.g. thinking of others, it must

secure friends or family). Courage also adds positive and negative light. It is usually represented as an affordable character trait as you can do anything. However, there are instances where courage is painted negatively. This case is often to show or support the plot.

5.2.1 Courageous by Nature

Trice and Holland's (2017) analysis of a small sample of remarkably exceptional Disney films discovered that bravery was a generic trait among the male characters. Similarly, in Towbin et al. (2004) study of Disney characters across 26 films, they observed males to be intrinsically valiant. I deem the acts Towbin et al. (2004) coded as "heroic" to be primarily based on those characters' bravery; however, their preference for examining heroics is in alignment with the belief that male protagonists are hero characters, rather than solely being male characters who exhibit bravery. The analysis of Pixar's films, though different in terminology, explicates that male characters, like their Disney proper counterparts, display bravery as an essential part of their masculinity. This theme became discernible to me during preliminary research on the *Toy Story* trilogy (Finklea, 2014), and the current project subsequently corroborates that it is a recurrent theme all through Pixar's feature film narratives.

The film *Brave* (2012) centres on theme of bravery. The film's title primarily directs our focus to the bravery of Princess Merida as well as provides very lucid instances of male bravery of King Fergus and the other lords. In the start of the film, the evil bear *Mor'du* makes an appearance from the forest during the ongoing celebration of young Merida's birthday by the King and the Queen. When King Fergus notices the bear, following the male attendants of the royal family, he launches an attack at it with a spear. As the King's spear breaks, Fergus draws his sword and roars, "Come on, you!" at *Mor'du* as he assaulted the bear. Later, Merida discloses that her father lost his leg to *Mor'du* in that encounter. During this scene, Fergus does not exhibit any trepidation or unwillingness when *Mor'du* emerges.

Afterwards Fergus along with his Lords pursued the beast gallantly through the castle. They appeared vigorous, dauntless and unyielding in this pursuit. For these men, bravery is delineated as perfectly natural as the film also depicts it as a character trait instilled in men from childhood. In an establishing shot that displayed everyday life in the kingdom, children are shown attacking a stuffed bear with wooden swords indicating that, from an early age boys rehearse to develop into tenacious and combative fighters in such a situation.

The film further delineates bravery as being ingrained in heterosexual attraction. The patriarchal society that obligates Merida to select a suitor renders bravery as the most commendable and desired traits for females in a potential mate. As the lords are presenting their sons for Merida's hand, each of the loving fathers boast about his son's heroism in battle as one of the primary reasons Merida should choose that son as her suitor, telling tales of their sons single-handedly wiping out armies of thousands of foes. The lords' competitive nature becomes evident as each one tells a story more imaginative than the previous one. Lord Macintosh says his son "vanquished a thousand foes." Lord MacGuffin then says his son defeated 2,000 Vikings, and Lord Dingwall tells King Fergus and Merida that his son was "besieged by 10,000 Romans, and he took out a whole armada single-handedly...with one arm." Clearly, the men view bravery, specifically coupled with aggression and violence as a praiseworthy characteristic for both young and old men. However, since Merida is a non-stereotypical female who exhibits great amounts of bravery of her own, she is not impressed by these stories of bravery, strength, and conquest, unlike some village girls later shown swooning over the suitors.

Besides the King, several other male characters evince bravery, such as Buzz Lightyear performing his flying demonstration in *Toy Story*, Flik leaving the ant colony in search of help in *A Bug's Life* (1998), Mr. Incredible fighting villains in *The Incredibles* (2004), Remy and Linguini teaming up in *Ratatouille* (2007) with the knowledge that being caught would most likely lead to Remy's death, and Carl Fredricksen's planning to fly his house to South America using thousands of helium-filled balloons in *Up* (2009). All these acts strike you as being natural to all these characters and they do not at all seem to be coerced into these heroic accomplishments.

Manifestations of bravery are noticeable even among the timid characters who are least expected of putting on a brave show. Particularly, Marlin in *Finding Nemo* exhibits excessive fear and consternation in the early part of the film. Even in the opening scene when the Barracuda appears outside their new home, Marlin tells Coral to hide with him inside. His initial reaction is one of timidity, compared to his wife who audaciously tries to safeguard their unhatched eggs. Subsequently, as we see Marlin raising Nemo, the effects of the barracuda attack manifest in Marlin's oppressive, over-protective parenting style. Time and again, the audience hear of Marlin's fear of the open ocean. However, when the diver takes

Nemo, Marlin swims unhesitant into the open water after him. His bravery originates from his parental instincts and he was ready to face all challenges to safeguard his only child.

Although being presented as an overly coward, WALL-E also exhibits natural bravery, Initially, WALL-E flinches in fear and goes into hiding during the arrival of EVE's spaceship. Even during his initial encounters with EVE, WALL-E fails to conceal his apprehensiveness and cowardice. However, when EVE's spaceship returns to retrieve her, WALL-E quickly begins to climb a ladder on the hull and clings to the ship as it travels through space. Later, while on the ship, WALL-E selflessly and courageously uses his body to stop a mechanical device from closing. The device virtually crushes him, but WALL-E exhibit confidence when trying to stop it from closing. Thus, even though he is timid and shy, he can make a conspicuous exhibition of bravery in the face of perils and the unexpected situations.

5.2.2 Sources of Courage

The bravery evinced by male characters originates from either external, physical features or internal, emotional characteristics. Physical features often manifest bestial strength or superiority, while emotional characteristics tend to manifest as considerate towards others. In their analysis of Disney films, Towbin et al. (2004) observed the presence of physical strength as reflecting the strength of the characters. Characters endowed with external sources of bravery tend to be the most dominant male characters. Particularly, Mr. Incredible is an exemplification of this style of bravery evident in his fearless pursuit of the criminals which renders him a superhero. His exceptional strength enables him to fight off villains courageously because he bears the strength to crush them. His confidence in his physical abilities clearly springs out of his bravery. This is comparable to King Fergus's heroic exhibits depicted previously; Fergus had a fight with *Mor'du* because he considered his fighting skills to be extraordinary enough to kill the bear.

In *Toy Story*, Buzz Lightyear exhibits of bravery can be observed at numerous occasions, especially his splendid demonstration around Andy's room and when he and Woody are taken to Sid's house are excellent examples. These manifestations of bravery transpire before Buzz's emasculation that becomes a cause of his fall from his alpha male position. He is brave because he holds a belief that he is an actual space ranger. Despite his delusory belief about his bravery that he is a highly trained space ranger,

the accomplishments of his bravery are not belittled. His bravery springs from his confidence that he is physically capable of flying. He also does not express any fear of Sid or his toys, while Woody literally trembles with fright at the thought of being dismembered. Repeatedly, Buzz considers he can defend himself with his physical abilities and his laser.

Finn McMissile in *Cars* (2006), another character whose bravery appears to be entrenched in his physical abilities as well as the abundance of gadgets in his possession, is engaged in spy work that requires fearlessness and expertise. His extreme motivation for the timely completion of the tasks assigned to him, avoidance to form many close relationships, both are indicative of Old Man models of masculinity. Furthermore, Sulley in *Monsters, Inc.* (2001) displays bravery that is primarily attributable to his skills as a highly competent “scarer,” who is poised to set new scare records. Although Sulley holds a belief that human children are highly toxic, Sulley invades the human world countless times to scare children, all the while believing that he is putting his life on the line.

Contrarily, numerous other male characters exhibit bravery originating from internal characteristics. This can often be ascribed to their emotional connections to others and their profound considerateness for other people. The males that demonstrate this type of bravery are not usually not presented /delineated as alpha males. Marlin, as previously mentioned, is depicted as lacking the stature of a domineering and powerful alpha male and rather possessing an insignificant authority in his role as a parent which can be interpreted as “distinctly feminine and motherly” (Brydon, 2009). Marlin is always apprehensive about losing Nemo, and later this apprehension turns into reality but Marlin manifests tremendous nerve and sets out across the ocean to find Nemo. Nemo on the other hand, is so accustomed to his father’s fearful demeanour that he initially does not believe the pelican’s story about Marlin making his way to Sydney. However, Marlin’s love and devotion to Nemo overpowers his paralyzing fears. Additionally, he exhibits mettle to rescue Dory from the jellyfish after they injure her. Marlin is courageous enough to re-enter the smack of jellyfish, therefore, he endures physical harm and pain in order to save her. He proves his capability of giving priority to Dory’s needs above his own, even though he might be hurt. Although extraordinary circumstances can precipitate the display of Marlin bravery, his character traits such as solicitude, affection and cordiality are displayed as being natural part of parenthood and friendliness.

Flik's bravery in *A Bug's Life* (1998) also emanates from his desire to improve the lives of the ants in the colony. He withstands Hopper at the arrival of the gang and even volunteers to depart from the island to assemble help to crush the grasshopper gang. Volunteering for this mission is unmistakably speaks volumes of his bravery because Flik is willing to go on this dangerous pursuit even though he gets a warning from a queen that abandoning the island is a suicide mission. Notwithstanding the fact that Flik volunteers to recruit warrior bugs to impress Princess Atta, his aspiration to make a difference in the lives of those living in the colony is the driving force behind his brave actions, which he has already expressed in a conversation with Princess Dot.

The bravery in Marlin and Flik is embedded in paternal instincts or in an eagerness for the improvement of the lives of others, whereas WALL-E's bravery, in contrast is grounded in his romantic attraction to EVE. During EVE's arrival on Earth, WALL-E's timidity is exposed, however, once his attraction to her becomes evident, he transforms into a heroic character. When the ship returns to retrieve EVE, WALL-E fearlessly rushes towards the ship and later ascends the ladder to have a glimpse of hers. Even when the ship's engines start off, WALL-E clings the ladder as the ship is launched into space. In fact, from this point onwards, WALL-E's attraction to EVE stimulates most of his actions, thus allowing the romantic plot to drive most of the film as well as working as a fountainhead of WALL-E's bravery.

5.2.3 Negative Display of Courage

The theme of bravery is overwhelmingly presented in a positive light; however, there are a few instances where excessive bravery is depicted negatively. These displays involve the males placing either themselves or others in danger, which goes against Pixar's general construction of protagonists' positive and caring portrayals of masculinities. For the protagonists, these excessive displays often result in heightened drama and the creation of a learning opportunity that proves beneficial for them. However, when an antagonist excessively displays bravery, it often is a contributing factor to their demise (much like a lack of teamwork as discussed in the previous section), and Pixar appears to imply that antagonists are unworthy of a chance at redemption.

The most prominent instance of this facet of the bravery theme is noticeable in the penultimate battle in *Brave* (2012) when King Fergus and the lords have unknowingly captured

Queen Elinor, who is in bear form, and are preparing to kill her. Fergus shows no fear toward the bear, which he believes killed his wife. As he is about to kill the bear, Merida fights him off with a sword. The two characters briefly engage in battle until she convinces her father that the bear is the queen. In this scene, Fergus's bravery nearly results in him injuring Merida in their sword fight and killing his own wife. Had Merida not been able to intervene, Fergus would have undoubtedly killed the queen which would strongly clash with Pixar's family-friendly appeal and requisite happy ending for a children's film. Although audiences, at least adult audience members, can assume Fergus will not be successful in killing the bear, most, no doubt, want him to fail, and children may have been scared by the dramatic scene. Although this display of excessive bravery is used to heighten the drama of the battle, it paves the way for King Fergus to learn from and respect his daughter. Merida's timely intervention not only saves the queen's life but also allows Fergus to observe how much maturity she has attained. It is noteworthy that it takes a brave girl to control her father's excessive bravery. Unlike antagonists, King Fergus must be given the chance to redeem himself from his wrong ways (i.e. excessive displays of bravery) to be viewed as an acceptable male character. Ultimately, after the return of the queen to human form, this understanding contributes to the creation of a stronger familial bond.

The original *Toy Story* abounds in Buzz Lightyear's instances of bravery which mainly stem from his endeavours to be acknowledged as a real space ranger. After watching a television commercial that distinctly tells him that his space ranger reality is nothing more than a marketing sales pitch, Buzz desperately searches for some way to validate his identity. Earlier in the film when Woody challenges Buzz's identity as a space ranger and his ability to fly, Buzz's successful—albeit extremely lucky—demonstration makes him think that he has in fact flown and further validates his own belief that he is a real space ranger. Now to affirm that identity once again, Buzz climbs the stair railing and intends to fly out of an upstairs window of Sid's house. Buzz is certainly brave enough to leap from the railing; but as he goes crashing toward the floor, the last “remnants of Buzz's reality also come crashing down around him”. This moment of emasculation serves as the catalyst for Buzz's transformation into a New Man (Gillam & Wooden, 2008). The audience knows Buzz is a toy and that jumping from the railing will result in a long fall to the floor, but Buzz has such a profound confidence in his identity as a space ranger that he overlooks consequences of his dangerous situation. Unlike *Brave (2012)*

where audiences, no doubt, wanted King Fergus to fail in his efforts to kill the bear, *Toy Story* presents audiences with a situation where they would like to see a character succeed, but ultimately, they know he will fail. Thus, although both films contain scenes of excessive bravery, they are constructed to elicit conflicting emotional responses from the audience. But both examples are viewed negatively because Fergus wants to (unknowingly) kill the queen and Buzz is doomed to fall and hurt himself.

A villain from *Up* (2009), Charles Muntz, also displays gratuitous acts of bravery which smack of negativity (in part because he is the villain), and ultimately result in his demise. When he is engaged in a fight with Carl on the outside of the blimp, Charles jumps from the blimp to Carl's floating house, both of which are thousands of feet in the air. Even if he does not have any symptoms of acrophobia, his actions, which constantly endanger his life, still obligate bravery. Here, Charles's inordinate bravery and the King Fergus's in *Brave* (2012) both almost evoke the same reaction: audiences aspire both men to fail when they exhibit unwarranted bravery. Audience members, no doubt, feel exultant for the protagonists and wish Kevin to live. Charles and Fergus demonstrate audiences that gratuitous bravery can manifest itself as extreme aggression, where both men are willing to exterminate other living beings.

Eventually, Charles's unjustifiable bravery sparks impulsive actions which, at last, prove fatal for him. Charles, an antagonist, does not receive learning opportunities unlike their protagonist counterparts. This enables Pixar to construct lucid messages about good and evil, in which good men are provided chances of leaning and growth from their mistakes, whereas bad men are portrayed as being deprived of getting any opportunity begetting maturity and sensibleness.

The Antagonists face penalties of varying degree of severity ranging from public humiliation to abominable death, with complete deprivation of any a chance of redemption for themselves. Like Charles Muntz, Syndrome expires towards the end of *The Incredibles* (2004) after he endeavours to abduct Mr. Incredible and Elasti girl's baby. Nevertheless, most of the other villains meet less harsh fates: Lotso gets tied to the grill of a dump truck; Skinner loses the restaurant he so desperately wants to possess; Sir Miles Axlerod is publicly disgraced and seemingly arrested; Auto is extricated; Mr. Waternoose is arrested and loses control of the

company that was in his family for generations; Stinky Pete is given to a little girl who is a threat to his mint condition. Anton Ego in *Ratatouille* (2007) is the only somewhat villainous character who is granted a chance of redemption. His role in the narrative is to function as more of a tangential challenge that the staff must overcome than as a villain even though he is a foil for Linguini and the rest of the kitchen staff. As a food critic, his review will not physically harm anyone, and he does not set Linguini up for failure. He simply issues him the difficult challenge of impressing him with his cooking, and there is hope that Ego can relish the food. This is in sheer contrast to Skinner, who keenly sets Linguini up for failure.

5.2.4 Courage Summary.

By and large, bravery remains another dominant theme across all of Pixar's films, and despite heterogenous characters in those films, most male characters exhibit bravery to some degree. Bravery, in some characters, is entrenched in physical superiority and other external factors. They have full confidence on their physical capabilities to be victorious on any front. However, several other characters who lack such physical superiority, their bravery is expressed in internal qualities, such as emotional connections to others. All these performances of bravery are shown as being inherent for males. Moreover, they are primarily veiled as good, and bravery is predominantly portrayed as an essential admirable quality. However, not only a few examples illustrate that uncalled-for bravery, a bad example of bravery, may cause damage to themselves or the others. Moreover, protagonists are given the chance of redemption whereas antagonists are characteristically excoriated and penalised for their actions, with no chance of salvation which clearly allows for evident distinctions between positive and negative portrayals of masculinities and concomitantly imparts an implication that iniquitous characters do not deserve the opportunities for redemption.

5.3 The Confused Masculinity

The doubtful nature of Ken depicted in *Toy Story 3* needs to be discussed for the understanding of sexuality in Pixar's films. In this section Ken's presentation in film is presented and that the expression of his romantic desire for Barbie is apparent and he in reality is utterly confused. Ken, with an ambiguous starry-eyed, makes the Pixar's representation a little way out of the normal terms. In 2013 an early draft of this examination was presented at Broadcast Education Association Convention in Las Vegas, Nevada. This character required

extra study as he does not symbolise the typical masculinities as in other films of Pixar. Some methods applied by Pixar for putting Ken into hetero normality framework of hegemony have been revealed by the analysis of Ken's character by the acceptance of masculine version of Ken. This idea has nonetheless taken a special place by being different from the normal overarching hegemonic ideas.

5.3.1 Exemplifying Manhood and Womanliness

Firstly, the fact should be considered that Ken does know about Woody, Buzz and all the other toys that have been donated to the Sunnyside day-care by chance. The viewers could have their first good look at the Ken's character as he rides the elevator down in Ken's dream house where he is dressed in a leopard printed blue shirt open up to navel that is tucked into his shorts of light blue colour and the cuffs are rolled. Around his neck he also wears a pale blue ascot. Although Ken's wardrobe gives an idea of his homosexuality, the film gets onto the confused aspect of Ken's character by showing his attraction to Barbie where he opens his eyes wide and drops his jaw while looking at her. He is amazed by beauty of Barbie and he flirts shamelessly with her.

In the introducing scenes of Ken's character, some messages have been clashing that typify King's (2000) statement where he declares hegemonic masculinity an overdetermined and complex concept and not merely monolithic out of which multiple and conflicting, masculinities can emerge. In the film, Ken has been shown to be attracted to Barbie as well as having a feminine passion for clothing simultaneously. His character symbolises both feminine and masculinity. It can thus be ascertained that Ken is male who pays most of his attention to appearances as observed by King (2000) who suggests that although Ken can be categorised as a man, his personality portrayal does not clearly define his performed gender, being male or female or both. Also, other than the first look of Barbie attracting Ken, in the rest of the film Ken is interested to be with Barbie for the love of dressing rather than for the sake of seeking her love. King (2000) thinks that both Barbie and Ken only have possibilities of being in a romantic relation. As Ken acts more like her gay best friend just like the narrative described between a TV sitcom *Will and Grace*'s characters.

The whole film is filled with the close features of Ken's both masculine and feminine blended nature. During his explanation of his idea of dream house Ken says his house has a

dune cart. He possesses a whole big room for trying on the clothes. A typical masculine touch is given by the sand buggy but relating it to the Ken's closet he has been shown to be denying aligning with the traditional masculine or feminine role. These changes disclose the main narrative just as according to Campbell and Kean (2013) in the Christian-based *Left Behind* book series, as here male characters had a clear interchange from this alpha position to those weeping and being submissive to their Lord. Although Ken's mental state had been made vague at its best, the role had been clearly positioned.

In the later part of film Ken is seen to take Barbie to his house of Dreams where he tells her that magic happens. However, whole of the narrative of romance created by the word magic disappears when Ken's closet, instead of bedroom, appears after Ken turns on the light and thus dissembles the confused perception of Ken's character. Barbie's appreciation of his wardrobe upsets him as he says "No one appreciates clothes here, Barbie. No one." After this they go through his closet and his clothes where he shows his uniform of Kung Fu and campus hero and the jacket of letterman. This might be another attempt to depict Ken as a hetero normality male character, but it is obscured by his feminine taste of fashion. Ken is thus alternating between masculine and feminine worlds and is not satisfied with either.

After watching Ken's love for his closet and clothing it became clear that Ken finds pleasure in spending time in his closet as it is the place where he could express his fanciful tasted. This fact can't be denied that showing how Ken loves his clothes and wants to spend time in his closet does prove that he is confused factually. When on Barbies request Ken tries some of his own outfits while playing Chic's disco anthem in the background "Le freak", this portrayed the fact that Ken is a freak because he steps out of closet marching in different outfits including a red glittering tuxedo, that too of 1970s style of leisure clothing. He also tried a shiny told shirt that had rainbow stripes on it and a German Lederhosen and many others too.

5.3.2 Ken Being A Show-Off

If we compare the scenes in *Toy Story 3* where Buzz praises the new belt after Woody loses his hat and those where we see Ken being fixed to his outfits brings a different light to the concept as Woody is too indulged with finding his hat and it's the Buzz who arranges to search for it. Then comes Bo Peep, a female character, who makes Woody relaxed by saying to him that it is absolutely fine even his hat remains disappeared. The contradictory scenes

convey this message that for a male character, it is not that much absurd to have attraction and emotional relation with the fashion and accessories and its acceptable but for Ken we can see that it's his weakness to be that feminine for the love of clothes. We can see that in *Toy Story 3* Ken is disgusted by Barbie for disrupting the pieces of his wardrobe. This view made him collapse with the emotions and thus was a gesture for Barbie to help Buzz.

5.3.3 Conventional Yet Unsure

Although the viewers might have many questions regarding the romantic of Ken however, throughout the film it is not questioned by other toys and they don't even question Ken's behaviour. When Barbie is asked by Ken to move into with him in his dream house. Barbie looks back at the remaining toys and Woody for the permission. She had already been convinced by the Mrs Potato Head and Jessie, with Jessie giving Barbie good gestures with smiles and thumbs up, but it looked like they are ridiculing Barbie along with Ken. There is no change in the expressions or behaviours of the male characters in meanwhile which signifies that they also have no problem in Ken asking Barbie to live with him. This is actually considered hetero normative by all other toys just as said by Shugart (2003) that straight female and gay male make good comedy in romance (e.g. the films *Object of My affection*, *My Best Friend's Wedding* and *The Next Best Thing*) and sitcoms (e.g. *Will & Grace*) are structured narratively. Making the toys appraise Ken for his relationship with Barbie is a sign that children do understand the relations i.e. Ken being a boy must like girls like other boys. He is going out of way to establish hetero-normative traditional masculine trend. Thus, another method is applied i.e. of hegemonic masculinity because it asserts a positive impact of toys being considering Ken straight, although there is evidence of otherwise condition is various scenes.

Although we have seen that Ken's clothes have a rich taste of feminism, he has been seen in many scenes taking up the role of a strong masculinity i.e. a "tough guy" personality. This could be seen where the senior members of day-care are involved in gambling and Ken also participates in it just like of the tough guys but when there is a mentioning of Barbie by the muscular character Twitch, Ken assumes a defensive role.

Twitch: You got yourself a little keeper yourself. Don't you, Ken? Ken: Hey, lay off,
Twitch: Barbie's different.

Stretch: Aw, Mr Softie over here. Chunk: What do you expect from a girl's toy?

Ken in anger slammed on table and said that he was not a girl's and why does they keep saying that? (Unkrich, 2010) (*Scene 3, TS*)

It is made quite clear in this scene that although Ken is interested in a female character, but the other more masculine toys still tease him because he has a feminine nature. Ken is also irritated by not having enough masculine nature. The accusation of being called a Girl's toy has made Ken enraged because in actual he is constructed without the connection with Barbie as Ken assumes this is fine for him to have a closet full of clothes, but he is unaware of him being too feminine in his nature. He defends himself for wearing a trimmed jacket with pink glitter with ascot of matching colour which later was revealed to be Barbie's scarf.

Ken was converted back to the personality with authority and threat after Buzz was arrested for spying on the gambling. He rides to take Buzz away for interrogation. As a warden Ken has acted as a good masculine character where the Andy's toys are locked in a metal basket. However, Ken's masculinity is not permitted for assertion by Pixar without giving the viewers an idea of Ken's feminine nature as they show Ken in a fuzzy clothing and slipped during even the scenes where he makes a round of prison. Also, in another show he is made to wear Barbie's scarf and pulls it off in their fight. It is clearly depicting a male to female contravention according to Long (2008) where a male is being dressed in a feminine way. It might be considered a way of portraying villain's nature in children's film as Ken might act as a secondary villain to Lotso as being narrative.

5.3.4 Ken as a Questionable Male

Throughout the film Ken has been shown to be unsettled in his character alternating between feminine and masculine aspects but we can see in the two example that all other characters flagrantly address as a doubtful gender holding personality. The first one is where Mr Potato Head who has a humiliating nature and keeps on calling everyone an idiot or a moron tells Ken that he is not only a toy in fact he was an accessory. A purse with legs was what Mr Potato Head called him. This dialogue signifies once again. Ken's existence is for Barbie. But as we know Barbie has been portrays as the overpowering partner in this relationship, Thus Ken has been put into a feminine way for the film to complement Barbie. The efforts made by Ken to portray him as an alpha male character are comical and inauthentic. In fact, as the role of Ken is dependent on Barbie, it is difficult to consider him the main masculinity of the film. Calling him a purse clearly puts him in the feminine aspect.

When Mrs Potato Head expresses her views of getting respect from Lotso due to her possession of at least 30 accessories, she also actually refers Ken as an accessory here and makes it a feminine drive for the Ken. In this context Ken has been belittled to be considered only a thing not a someone with a real character. Mr Potato Head who called Ken a womanly accessory i.e. a purse, made him to be viewed as a feminine possession and thus it reduced Ken's masculine value even more. If Mr Potato Head would have called him a briefcase with legs the humiliation would have a different meaning. When Andy's toys are presented to Bonnie, a little girl, the toys of Sunnyside, somehow manage to stay in contact with each other via letter that was put into Bonnie's backpack. When Woody reads the letter, the film shows letter to be written with pink glittering ink with drawings of hearts and stars for the toys. Woody, while reading the letter, goes "So I guess you could say that Sunnyside is sunny once again! Hope to hear from you soon! We're all super excited about your new home. Hugs and kisses to everyone" (Unkrich, 2010) (*Scene 4, TS*). Buzz then appreciates good writing of Barbie while calling it Jessie, however, tells Buzz while scoffing that it was not Barbie's writing. Jessie looked nervous when toys exchanged signatures of Buzz and thus here, we can see the adherence of Pixar to the concept of hegemonic masculine values and is almost re-established here, due to such rapid presentation of confused looks. These confused looks finally make the deciding point in the film as Woody and Jessie are questioning the masculinity of Ken and are uncomfortable with his changed masculinity representation. Although in the rest of film Ken was permitted to draw a line between the genders with no one asking him but this final scene made it clear that Ken's behaviour was not acceptable, in spite of the fact that there are many masculine features that Ken shows in the rest of the film. Jessie's and Woody's reaction to Ken's letter has played its role to establish the hetero normative aspect for the viewers. As in this scene Ken has been allowed to express his behaviour, it is here where Pixar's concept of hegemonic masculinity was established as "right for the world" i.e. the proper masculine nature.

5.3.5 The Denouncing of Fellow Toys: A Social Metaphor

Watson (2018) has analysed that Ken in many ways is like Fab Five from the TV series *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* (2013). They say that this concept works as a rebellion in the typical ritual that permits minor but highly controlled violations from the mainstream social values (p. 430). Mostly the same manner is applied in *Toy Story 3* the flexible nature of Ken's

morality is limited to the film and that too in day-care only. For this short period only, Ken has been permitted to twist the rules of gender narratives, and it seems that strong Pixar concept of hegemonic masculinity have overshadowed Ken's behaviour, making it quite acceptable. Nonetheless, the final decision that reaffirms a proper norm of manhood in the film appears with the reaction of Jessie and Woody to Ken's letter. Thus, was the main method that converted everything back to normal as after this the screen fades to black. His message in fact has strengthened the real mainstream hetero-normality aspect as expected from a Pixar- Disney film obviously. It would have been risky for the company to challenge the expectations of society with a kid's friendly film and thus the attraction of Ken towards barbie confirmed his confused nature for those viewers who might have any doubts.

5.4 Want to Be Demanded

The next major theme and the fourth one about masculinities is the desire to be loved. However, there could be two narratives desired to be and wish to be needed by someone had these might appear to be different but connected in all the Pixar's films. This desire to be sought after and needed is not more than blunder from their part though.

Perhaps this theme might be the strongest aspect for showing the transition of cultural values associated with the Old Man until at least 1980s. Regarding masculinities in chapter 2, Old Man was analysed by Jefferd (1994) and was found to be deserted emotionally. New Man, however, does have some emotional aspects and they do try to find the connections as they have shifted their focus from their careers towards their families and a life with family. It's not only in the Pixar's films that the males discuss the theme of being loved and desire to be needed. There is a constant message in the Pixar's films that the desire of males to be loved and needed makes the decisive power of males weak that might lead to some not so good effects on their families. Just like the quality of valour, this desire must be beneficial to others as well and if we have to choose between the two, the desire to be loved will be the right choice.

The wishes to be wanted act as the narrative engines just like previously discussed themes, it acts as the motivation of acts of male characters that also signifies the transition to New Man. However, the viewers are also shown the negative side of this theme which becomes clear when this desire of males to be loved and needed is not fulfilled. These emotions are considered natural and acceptable and also considered of prime importance for the satisfactory

masculine performance in the film.

5.4.1 'New Man' Evolved

These films have presented masculinities with the concepts of New Man narrative e.g. *Cars (2006)*, *Toy Story Series*, *Up (2009)* and *The Incredibles (2004)*. For example, Woody can't understand how to tell Buzz that what he is feeling regarding their antagonist relation with each other until it was clear that none of them is going to live. We can see the desires of cowboy to become Andy's favourite toy after Buzz and Woody were trapped with the Rocket and Crate, respectively;

Woody: Hey. Get over here and see if you can get this toolbox off me.

Woody here accepts that he can't do this without Buzz's help, but Buzz says that he is unable to help anyone.

Woody then encourages Buzz that he can definitely do this and then he will make that rocket off him and they both will be free, and they will then go for the search of Andy's house.

Buzz asks what's the difference between Andy's and Sid's house?

Woody: Oh, Buzz. You've had a big fall. You must not be thinking clearly.

Buzz: No, Woody. For the first time I am thinking clearly. You were right all along. I'm not a Space Ranger. I'm just a toy—a stupid, little, insignificant toy.

Woody: Whoa, hey, wait a minute. Bein' a toy is a lot better than bein' a Space Ranger. Buzz says "yeah right" (Unkrich, 2010) (*Scene 5, TS*)

Woody is continuously encouraging Buzz and diverts his attention to a boy in a house who thinks of Buzz as the greatest toy as Buzz is his toy not only a Space racer for him. But Buzz is thinking that why would Andy want him.

Woody: "Why would Andy want you? Look at you! You're a Buzz Lightyear! Any other toy would give up his moving parts just to be you. You've got wings! You glow in the dark. You talk! Your helmet does that, that, that *whoosh* thing. You are a cool toy. As a matter of fact, you're too cool. I mean, what chance does a toy like me have against a Buzz Lightyear action figure? There's a snake in my boots. Why would Andy ever want to play with me when he's got you? I'm the one that should be strapped to that rocket." (Unkrich, 2010) (*Scene 6, TS*)

Now was the point where Woody asked for help that again portrayed the theme of cooperation and the aspect of the Mew man narrative and also this depicts the fears of Woody

for not being loved anymore. This is the point where he can express his feeling without hesitation as his character as an alpha male has not been in the view now and taken away. On the other hand, Buzz is struggling with the thoughts that he is not in reality what he did think of himself as well he gets to know that he is not the main male of alpha position. In the desire to live like Older days i.e. being an alpha male believing himself to be a Space Ranger, he could have risked his life when he jumped off the stairs.

Named as the Big One, this rocket was tied to his back and was taken as a metaphor for the concept of Old Man. Buzz fails to change himself, he will be blown away by the massive bomb. An image of patriarchy and masculinity might perish the image of Buzz. It became essential for Buzz to come to the newer version and must want to be desired in the new way rather than the old method which is a major change as Buzz thinks that he was the one needed for saving the galaxy and now he is needed a thing of joy or to be playing with for a little boy only.

Jeffords (1994) also thinks that this changes the portrayal of hard-bodied males of 1980s. The Old Men were focused towards their career rather towards their families. It was a good transition when Buzz chose to have real happiness for him instead of being called an amazing space ranger. This was the first scene for Woody where he also expresses his desire to be loved and as well openly expresses his fears for not being loved any longer now. This was important for both of the characters i.e. to understand transformation into New Man for the fulfilment of their desires.

The transformation of Lightning McQueen in *Cars (2006)* is also basically the reason for his desire to be lived and to be needed when he realised that he will live alone without his family and finds himself unable to do so. His friendship with Mater and a romantic relationship with Sally all shows his transformation. Both of these relationships shatter the isolated personality of McQueen as seen in the start of film. Moreover, McQueen now understands that his needs are not only limited in being successful, but he also needs to be loved and he wants to be needed by someone as well. His perspective for relations has been changed and especially by establishing connection with the people of Radiator Springs.

5.4.2 Being Centre of All Universes

This wish for being loved and needed actually act as a working force and a pointer for

the New Man narrative of masculinity in many films. When Woody and Buzz have transformed into the narrative of New Man, they are shown to express their desire for being loved and being needed by others as in the film *Toy Story 2 and 3*. This desire of Woody has plotted for the next film of the trilogy. Woody realises that he is divided between his desire to be loved and needed by other toys of Woody's Roundup as they are all accepted for being displayed in a museum in Tokyo and his own love for Andy.

However, it is clearly being conveyed by the film that there is a difference between wanting to be loved and to desire to be needed. As we can gather that there are personal motives of being selected for the museum in the shadow of his desire to be needed by the other toys. In comparison to that if he wants to be loved only this will be in good interest of both himself and Andy as well as to other toys as well.

The tear marks on the body of Woody is actually signifying that he is divided by his desire to be loved by the toys of Woody Roundup and his love for Andy. In the beginning of the film, Woody suffers a severe laceration in his shoulder that made his arm lifeless and limp. Andy's mother told him that toys are not for always and this made a hallucination to occur to Woody that he will be thrown away and Andy will jog play with him anymore. Woody was made calm by Prospector, a toy in box, when he told Woody that they will be valued for longer time and will surely become the toys of museum. He told him that they could live without fear forever and there is no need to get scared of the thought of being thrown away. Woody had a new purpose in his life despite of knowing the program of Woody's Roundup Here definitely as Woody was fearful of ending his relationship with Andy, he was attracted by the appeal of museum and thus he desired to be loved. Here still, Buzz is clear that being loved and being adored are two different things, but Woody is confused:

Woody: They *need* me to get into this museum. Without me, they'll go back into storage... maybe forever. (Unkrich, 2010) (*Scene 7, TS*)

But here Buzz makes Woody to think about the fact that he is not on the items of collector and he is a playful thing for the child. He emphasises and says that he is a toy. But Woody counters back by saying that how long will this continue and what will he do after Andy is done with him.

Buzz: Somewhere in that pad of stuffing is a toy that taught me that life's only worth

living if you're being loved by a kid. And I travelled all this way to rescue that toy because I believed in him.

Woody tells Buzz that he has only wasted time as this was his final chance.

Buzz: To do what, Woody? Watch kids from behind glass and never be loved again? Some life. (Unkrich, 2010) (*Scene 8, TS*)

In *Toy Story 3*, theme of being loved and to be needed continues but with the exception of Woody, as the toys finally decided to offer themselves for the day-care since they have spent many years in toy box of Andy and now, they have the desire to be loved and played with by others. In the day-care Lotso tells the toys that they will never be heartbroken now as they won't be in ownership of anyone and will have an everlasting supply of children who will never stop playing with them. Here the toys have completely submitted to their desire for being loved which is quite similar to the behaviour of Woody in *Toy Story 3 (2010)* being selfish. Actually, the basic idea behind this concept is that the toys have discovered the fact that they need a relationship of love with the child, an emotional contact rather than only being considered a thing to play with and then leave it. But the children who played with them at day-care had no emotional link with the toys and play too roughly with these toys. Finally, the way to Andy's house is recognised by the toys as Andy was given a note by Woody with an address written on it. Andy finds the house of Bonnie who is one of the daughters of Day-care owners playing in the yard. Andy's old toys are handed over to Bonnie. His old toys are finally given to Bonnie, and this was the way how he gives her his old toys, and this is how the toys got the relationship that they desired for. Bonnie finally plays with them with an emotional link and the toys once again feel that they are being loved by someone.

This theme of desiring for love is also depicted in *Toy Story 3* where Ken where he feels sad for his isolation with a Barbie. When they reach in front of Ken's house while Barbie was playing with butterfly:

Ken: And this, well, this is where I live. It's Ken's Dream House. It has a disco.

It's got a dune buggy. And a whole room just for trying on clothes.

Barbie: You have everything!

Ken: Everything... except someone to share it with. (Unkrich, 2010) (*Scene 9, TS*)

No doubt here Ken is alone and feeling lonely but still this is not clear if he wants a romantic connection or merely needs someone to accompany him as discussed in above section.

When we look at the trilogy of *Toy Story* as a whole, we can gather that in this film the desire to be loved and to be needed is merged but these films convey the message that it's better to be loved rather than to be wanted. The desire of being wanted appears to reflect some selfish emotion which is taken as bad, however meeting for the desire to be loved seems to provoke good sensations in the viewers and is also depicted as positive behaviour. However, where both occur simultaneously, they appear to be positive but if the characters are made to choose between them, Pixar has clearly made them to choose the desire to be loved as this is considered the correct path.

5.4.3 The Unfulfilled Wish

Despite of the open expression by the New Mean characters in film of their desire to be loved and being wanted to serve as the notion of transformation, there remain some characters whose desires are not fulfilled according to their satisfaction. Despite the expression of the desire to be loved or needed serving as a symbol of the New Man, some characters are depicted as males whose desires remain unfulfilled. However, at last the needs of protagonists (e.g. Remy, Carl Frederickson and Flik) male does reach the level of fulfilment, although they might feel depressed as a protagonist earlier having an endeavour to live with thus lack of fulfilment of their desires.

The males ultimately become villain if this non-fulfilment of their desires continues. The most prominent example being the Syndrome's robot from the film *The Incredibles* (2004), Lotso from *Toy Story 3* and Stinky Pete the Prospector from the film *Toy Story 2*. In each of these films the desires of these villains to be loved is not portrayed as wrong, in fact it is depicted as positive as for their protagonist counterparts and is considered natural as well. Only when they show their reaction to their non-fulfilments of desires, they become the villainous characters. We can see this clearly where Buddy Pine who was when young wanted to become only sidekick of Mr Incredible but once he got rejected by his idol, he leads in to becoming a villain ultimately. Gilliam and Wooden (2008) have referred the name Pine to a relationship that has been never gone according to Pine's longing and is given the value of an unreturned relationship with Mr Incredible. In the similar manner, The Prospector has been spending whole of his life wishing for any relationship but despite of his strong desire he spent his life in devotion to a worthless store shelf where he watches other toys getting selected and purchased. In case of Lotso, he gets lost by his owner and even gets replaced by his owner with

a same looking stuffed teddy bear.

If we compare the villains' behaviour after not getting loved with those of protagonist males, these get the feeling of indignity and get furious, but the protagonists do not even after facing the same or worse situation. They get themselves hard against the options of having a true relationship with some meaning to their lives. All of these villains create examples of violent behaviours when they get rejected, dismissed or furious.

To ascertain that why some characters turn into villains and why the others become heroes considering the fictional characters is not enough. Also, the viewers already have the knowledge that in films some are good guys, and some are bad guys so its pre-understood that some characters will be in the roles of villains portraying bad impressions while others will be heroes depicting good impressions. The examples portrayed by these characters basically teach the viewers what male characters can turn into if their desires do not get fulfilled especially the desire to get loved or when they don't get the desired attention from the ones they want. The Old Man narration depicts that men usually want to stay alone and not at all bounded by the relationships. This is a message conveyed in all the films by Pixar that in the absence of love, a purpose in life or attention males become stiff in their nature and bitter in their actions. These two qualities are always portrayed as negative. The characters of villains thus convey a strong message to the young males as well as mature men that in the absence of love in their life they may turn into villains or a negative character, so they must take this condition as a warning in their actual lives and they must be engaged in good and loving relationships. We can see that each of the villains in Pixar's films do not have close friends or anyone who they love purposefully. They are alone in their lives and have no one to love them. This situation is the exact contrast to the condition of Pixar heroes who always have relationships of love and friendship in all the films.

5.5 Summary

Pixar uses quite pretty versions of masculinities in all the films with some specific strategies that are discursive as well. These themes that are all embracing i.e. cooperation, desire to be loved, valour and courage, fearful nature of the fathers for the future have depicted much of the features of the New Man model of masculinity in all the 13 films presented by Pixar. In addition to these qualities of masculinity these films have also portrayed the methods

to discern between bad and good as they have compared villains with heroes. The villains being shown as those characters who do not obey or abide by any rule or usually are involved in personal motives selfishly.

Out of all these themes cooperation has grabbed the position of the most prominent and important one in all the films. The males of good character are seen to work in association with others as well as have also been seen asking help from others frequently whereas the villains are shown to work alone or boss all around. The themes of courage and cooperation narrate the concepts of selflessness whereas in some examples selfishness is also depicted in this cooperation. The difference is with the character, as the good characters work for the best interests of other members of the team whereas the bad characters work only for their personal gains with team.

It is not surprising at all in the theme of confused maleness that has been examined in detail as the studios do not have any issue in releasing these scenes or ideas to the viewers. No danger is expected by the use of these films as they have strong and huge appeal from the families and in fact a good and huge box office response comes with these alternate ways of depiction of masculinity. In fact, Pixar films openly and clearly show the framework of a dual personality character, but the only form of romantic expression has been portrayed as purely confused. The romantic desires are usually used for the acceleration of non-human characters to be shown in paired frameworks of gender that can be easily understood by the younger members sitting in viewers, however sometimes it might not be that important to plot such events (e.g. Woody and Bo Peep). With the help of these characters such confused masculinity can be rooted into the thought processes of viewers and will also remove any doubts about the romantic identity of a character.

The desire to be loved is another theme that indicates the presence of qualities of New Man as these are the males that, being in an alpha role, still want to have relationships and friendships for being contended. These desires are depicted as natural requirements of masculinities and is acceptable for these males to talk openly about these desires. This theme presents the sharpest contrast with the concepts of Old Man narrative of masculinity and it was clearly a villain quality to not have such desires in these films. Pixar has thus used the characters of heroes to portray that the New Man is good one and the Old Man is bad one. Pixar has also

very vividly made his view clear that males must want to be loved in preference to being needed just as shown by dilemma of Woody in *Toy Story 3 (2010)*, thus once more spreading the message that having close associations with others is much more valuable than that of getting some selfish personal desires fulfilled.

We can see that male characters in Pixar's films are more careful emotionally and it seems quite reasonable that they will have relationships that will be impacted and influenced specifically for the characters with paternal aspects. This is because Pixar's films make a part of the period when children grow up and definitely that makes parents apprehensive for the material being shown to the children. This theme where the fathers are scared of future connects the fatherly portrayal of characters to the New Man concept as they take role in the well-being of their families more actively. Its natural part of life to grow up and no father can control it. When fathers are able to realise this fact, they become more vigilant in their purpose of life and try to have deeper and close relationship with their children.

For the analysis of patriarchal power and to teach some good lessons regarding greed Pixar has managed to use a Boss in various settings of work. Although most of the members in viewers won't give a second thought to the issue of genders of Bosses in the Pixar films but the fact that this issue goes unnoticed may refer as effecting the patriarchy. Holmes (2009) has analysed that even when Pixar was analysed for not portraying any female character in the protagonist role this issue was still not questioned regarding the gender of boss in the workplace. But as far as Pixar is concerned, he has balanced the condition by showing that all these male characters with the power are not good always and has presented them adversely or even as villains in many films. Here arises a question that whether the things would be any different if a female character is given the charge? But as seen previously Pixar does not allow the main roles of leadership to the females that basically limits the dominancy in patriarchy in true sense.

It is a vivid fact to consider in the last that despite of depicting various narratives in Pixar's films with help of characters who are often displaying these themes in multiple ways, there is still a clear message in these films that masculinities that are constructed must be in the colours of kindness, emotional awareness and loving relations. Moreover, the comparison of positive figures with the negative ones is a good feature of these films that denies the old

stereotyped male behaviour. The main aim is to get results and not to consider what themes are followed by the protagonist males in order to learn the correct pathway. The construction of masculinities by Pixar represents basically the Old Men ad bad and depicts their conversion to good men by adopting the qualities of New Men.

CHAPTER 6

CRITICAL INSIGHTS AND CONCLUSION

6.1 Duality of blockbuster films

Although superhero bodies are a standard of blockbuster films, male and female superheroes are very similar despite their differences. In fact, society is becoming less binary in general and this trend is reflected in blockbuster films as superheroes demonstrate qualities associated with tough guy masculinity aka hyper-masculinity. However, female superheroes are able to cross gender boundaries more often than male superheroes, as visible in blockbuster of recent years, such as DC's *Wonder Woman*, and Marvel's *Captain Marvel*. This is evidence that confirms modern age superhero blockbuster films are in search of new heroes, those of which are made visible, as Jenkins (2009) argues, if we examine how the film industry has responded to increasing multiculturalism within a society and is working more towards inclusion of all possible trends. Pixar's depiction of male is more lifelike, due to this very reason.

Discussion on masculinity provides an alternative view of gender. It is a type of gender that is valued in society. Similarly, it is valued in superhero blockbuster films, unless it causes destruction and harm, which then turns into hegemonic masculinity, but it is not constructed in relation to women or men. In fact, both male and female superheroes demonstrate traits associated with masculinity, such as toughness, competitiveness, romance, proper morality, and a trained body. This can be seen in the modern versions of *Wonder Woman*, and *Captain Marvel*, both powerful female superheroes.

6.2 Significance and Contribution of Research

What makes this research unique regarding anthropology, gender, and culture is that it examines changing cultural expectations in society with respect to gender. Culture is the learned behaviours, ideas, beliefs, traditions, values, customs, and worldviews that characterise particular groups of people. The anthropological definition of culture refers to our way of life and it encompasses everything that makes us a cultural human. Blockbuster films form a subculture on screen. In fact, blockbuster films reinforce values, traditions, ideals, codes, and

norms of behaviour that are important to various demographics and geographies. Additionally, film and fandom culture forms what Anderson (2006) terms an 'imagined community.' For example, the fandom community is socially constructed by fans, film viewers, film directors and writers, and the film industry, who perceive themselves as belonging to the community through their shared interests and commonalities, rather than their geographic proximity to one another.

There has been a rise in the interest of studying mass media and cultural materials by linguists. However, Mahon (2000) argues that 'in linguistics focused attention on the individuals and groups who produce media and popular culture is still unconventional.' In fact, cultural anthropologists have not produced extensive scholarship on blockbuster films. For instance, the images and text of modern age blockbuster films, specifically the superhero genre, have not been examined extensively. Although blockbuster films are still in search of cultural legitimisation, this research shows that blockbuster films function as a 'vehicle of culture' and the construction of all types of identities is subtly done through vehicle of language (Spitulnik, 1993). This research also demonstrates that film directors create a cultural product, the film, and in the process of creating the cultural product they create a social process, such as the production of a fan-based community, ideology, stereotypical assumptions, and/or a newly emerging and culturally acceptable gender. Additionally, this research supports the idea that the study of blockbuster films should be an area of research and scholarship because these address social issues happening during their time of production and screening, such as the threat to global safety and values represented in post-9/11 scenario and the search for new heroes in modern age blockbuster films. These films also chronicle history and historical events and address social inequalities, such as racial, gender, age, and sexual orientation inequalities. Furthermore, blockbuster films are a form of culture and discourse. For example, blockbuster films are a form of storytelling and both meaning, and knowledge are produced through the use of familiar symbols and images.

Many film viewers and directors suggested that the stories told in blockbuster films are the only true form of latest mythology. In fact, these films are a unique form of storytelling involving both text and images. Since such films are cultural objects, they express culturally specific values and ideas, such as global idealism and heroism. Culturally, blockbuster films give us a greater understanding of our values in an idealised version of what society can be.

Consequently, we are provided with a commentary on our society and tell us about shared global idealism, which is in fact American Idealism, American patriotism, American optimism, and the triumph of good over evil. The rest of the world must conform to this vision silently. For instance, each instance of Captain America discussed above reflects authority, even in the most troubles situations. The other characters around him, no matter how free they may appear in doing and saying things, eventually surrender the decision making to the smartness of Captain America. Similarly, the notion of social roles and family ties, animation blockbuster films play a pivotal role in determining and demonstrating how thing are done between siblings, friends, parents and across genders.

Currently, superhero blockbuster films provide us with a social commentary on the War on Terror, either through direct and explicit references to evil people and places, or through excessive use of foggy fantastic symbolism, just to highlight the importance of global safety. Heroic and super heroic tales dominate filmic storytelling and the stories inspire us to be heroes. Heroes are identifiable to us as we follow their heroic journey; as viewers we grow with them and we see their character flaws. Although blockbuster films, specifically superhero blockbuster films, are not solely an American ‘invention,’ they represent a form of American storytelling and mythology. Moreover, superheroes augment mythology itself. For example, like Greek myths, superhero blockbuster films are episodic. Also, like Greek mythology, the hero has sought after traits. Particularly, heroes in Greek myths and superheroes in blockbuster films embody the sought-after traits of tenacity, humiliation, will power, strength, and intelligence. Interestingly a much-wrapped version of this kind of superhero are packed inside seemingly childish characters of Woody, who exhibits immense courage, doesn’t give up easily and continues to lead. For children, he has been the embodiment of persistence.

Since the development of male characters in Pixar’s films has taken over decades, the transformation of narratives in these giant animated constructions has also continued for the alpha male protagonist characters. The most recent release of Pixar, *the Monster University* which involves the story of Sulley and Mike who met during their period of college. Although in *Monsters*, the two alpha male characters have been portrayed as best friends, while on the other hand they have been enemies in *Monster University*.

Accordingly, thus viewers saw these roles in traversing their bond in the earlier days

but knowing finally this will result in a powerful relationship. Many of the themes used in this study have been depicted in this film such as the family members who work in team to make themselves able for competing in the Hunger Games, with the hidden objective of showing courage for the sake of gaining benefits for fraternity members and thus has been also shown that homosocial bonds are responsible for the transformation of masculinities. The team members of Sulley's and Mike's fraternity team, just like WALL-E and Flik, have been shown to be the weaker ones who don't play the roles of neither the New Man nor the alpha characters and thus showing that cooperation has resulted in the transformation of masculine characters into New Men.

Analysing the two major iconic films released by Pixar shows that Pixar has throughout tried to alter the masculine narratives for adopting the model of New Man. The themes like the need to be loved or being wanted and fears of being engaged fathers have also helped in this aim. These masculine embodiments have been portrayed as good and has mostly put the masculinities with the touch of Old Man as being bad ones or even the villains of the film. Being alone and plain emotionally or physically is not portrayed as good for masculine characters in these films. As we can see that there is nothing more than a companionship that WALL-E wishes for. Similarly, it was made clear to McQueen by the other characters that he should not work alone. The positive portrayal of cooperation helped a lot in diminishing the concepts of Old Man masculine narratives that had been the physical and emotional loneliness a strong quality. Pixar has always depicted the value of cooperation as considering it a necessary element for victory of alpha male characters. Additionally, it was also seen that male characters are made to accept without any hesitation that they have faults and they also have been shown talking openly regarding their emotions as well as in assuming the engaged roles of fathers for their families.

Although Pixar has made adoption of New Man model obvious but there are certain limits to the classification of masculine narratives. If we consider the factual display of masculinities, there is a continuum from the Old Man to the other extreme where Ken has been shown in a feminized role, but there has been shown advancements of the masculinities that are somewhere in the middle. No doubt the outliers are shown in the film, but they seem to be quite avoided e.g. where they show the villains assuming the roles of Old Man with reforms just as where Pixar normalised the role of Marlin as a father or when the masculinities are

objected just as the expressions that Woody and Jessie have regarding Ken's letter. Messages like men are emotional but not too much may also be conveyed or like men are brave but if they are too much aggressive valour disappears. The New Man version of masculinities is such that it is in a continuous developing state with a flux that is contradictory to the Old Man version. Here the masculinity displayed in "Middle of the Road- Manhood" was viewed as safest to be embodied and symbolised in this regard. These films are promoted for the global viewers in this context thus, it's not that surprising to know that Pixar would obviously restrict the narratives of masculinities to a middle level but it us a question that we should ask ourselves that what these portrayals would have. On one hand where putting the concept of Old Man out of the list of acceptable masculine narratives would work to cast down the negative effects by also portraying some other forms of masculinities e.g. Marlin and Ken and putting them in a position of being questionable or unacceptable, though there is no issue in having some love for fashion in males or having some over cautious behaviour of parents. For the sake of making the matter more complex, the tomboy type of girl i.e. Jessie is seen to criticise the feministic manner of Ken's nature. Thus, it has been further enforced by the observation of Quint (2005) that effeminate male gender characters are ridiculed but not a female tomboy character. The message conveyed by this film then becomes that it is not a big deal for the girls to have a taste of men in nature, but it is not acceptable for males to have a feminist colour in their nature.

In society, the transformations shown in these Pixar films for masculinity are contrasted but Pixar has also displayed strong parallels as well. In the crises of 1990s these key concerns then arose vividly in Disney comics and films. These films frequently display crises of, or lack of family leadership, identity and gender displays and it's also focused on the ideas of showing the Million Man and Promise Keeper type of movements. The men in real world, however, have been facing these problems in their everyday life and many of the people visiting cinema regularly also know that in similar way characters which are computer generated are also dealing with the same issues. The resolutions of the narratives portrayed in these films explained the results that identities of men must be re-established and hardened to act as leaders in their areas of interaction i.e. their home and society. This is a clear fact that in this study the concentration has been paid to the parallels between Million Man March and movement of Promise Keepers and masculinity's portrayal in Pixar's films, still, there are many other factors like emergence of Generation X and third gender idea which can also be

considered for study regarding their role in the social shifts of masculinities throughout 1990.

Pixar has promoted masculinity and authority of males in such a way that they are depicted to have a friendly and positive effect just like the Million Man March and Promise Keepers. Many forms of masculinities are shown thought but not all are accepted. This research has also furthered our understanding of gender concepts depicted in a form of popular culture, the superhero film, and defines a new and culturally acceptable gender that is reflected in films.

6.3 Contribution to Scholarly Work

At first, following analysis of the MCU particularly, I expect that this study establishes that superhero films must be critiqued. While superhero films are not new yet use of multiple films about individual superheroes that are interlinked is not common. The MCU, being a new phenomenon has big viewers the world over. This study, therefore, establishes that superhero films deserve critical examination, because these represent and strengthen ideologies of the current zeitgeist. This study also adds to the literature on militarism, which is revealed by the critical examination of the filmic texts in this study, that the MCU and Captain America embody and make stronger this ideology. There is a difference in the scholarly work in examining militarism outside of “war” films. This study has revealed that superhero films also need to be inspected to identify militaristic symbols. Furthermore, the study displays that one character like Captain America can be examined for symbols of masculinity. Though Captain America has been analysed for militaristic symbols (Dittmer, 2005), much scholarly work does not exist on examining how Captain America is used in films to depict these ideologies and show masculine approach, which is made to shift.

Moreover, this study adds to the examination of masculinity in media. This study further reveals how masculinity is symbolised in superhero films, in spite of the fact that literature exists about the portrayal of the “ideal” man by superhero. It has been pointed by the Captain America’s examination how Hollywood stresses on the significance of the hyper-masculine characteristics of the character. In addition, this study adds to the application of critical discourse analysis, or CDA, as a method. In order to examine filmic texts, CDA has been devised, and it has been more recently used to analyse other kinds of texts (Bell & Avant-Mier, 2010). CDA was applied in this study to identify and examine discursive instances of

masculinity while discussing films. While the use of CDA in this study was successful, this study further reveals how CDA can be applied to examine all kinds of texts, including popular media and visual media if possible.

6.4 Limitations

Blockbuster films require more in-depth studies regarding the illustration of gender, religious and racial inequalities. Not only do blockbuster films and graphic novels require further examination, but blockbuster films and graphic novels produced by other cultures require more in-depth analysis as well. Different genres of blockbuster films require further research, as well as the study of social issues and social inequalities portrayed across producers, particularly how independent film companies depict social issues and inequalities. In addition, blockbuster films are not only created by directors, but by an entire design team, including editors and writers. It is important to examine the role that writers and editors play in producing blockbuster films. For example, are there differences in the content of blockbuster films with respects to male and female writers and directors?

The biggest limitation for this study is the polysemic nature of the text. Reading text (dialogues) is the main finding of this project but since the diversity of context is high here, these texts may be read uniquely by the other researchers. Although mentioned as a limitation, a second or alternative reading of the text may not put that much restriction in the true sense. In fact, these number of reading will help in better understanding of the gender narrative in these Pixar films. A second and a more concrete limitation that this study possesses is that out of all the males for whom data is collected in this study, there are many secondary male characters that were not that significant to be analysed for the understanding and construction of the themes that have been analysed here.

Additionally, the results of this study can't be generalised or applied to other films. It is our own effort to watch whole of the film and gather what culture or theme is the film expressing especially regarding masculinity or gender narrative. As well as the concepts, ideas and themes used and analysed here may be unique enough for this study particularly. We know that the main concentration of this study was on MCU's Captain America and Disney/Pixar films, so the results and findings might not be good enough to be applied to other superhero films, like *Thor*, *Iron Man*, etc. or films of children like *Turbo*, *Inside Out*, etc. In the future

there could be studies with comparative analysis of the methods of portrayals of New Man in contemporary animated and other forms of popular text cultures.

6.5 Difficulties and Forthcoming Directions

Since this study has successfully pointed towards the symbols of militarism and hyper-masculinity in the MCU's Captain America, and performed masculinity in Pixar films, difficulties yet exist in the research study. One of the difficulties of the study is the number of films analysed for masculinity themes and variations. Due to the over-arching theme in MCU, its films got more coverage. The MCU has more than fifteen films and six television series at its credit. For the scope of this study, the number of films selected for examination here restricted to films that had Captain America in their cast. Had all the films and television shows been applied for analysis, the corpus for this study would have been too large. Disney/Pixar being fragmented in their films and varying in depictions, leaves much to be desired. My choice of two iconic films, though appears out of proportion with MCU films, provides a very rich contrasting parallel view of masculinity.

Both MCU and Pixar films, however, can be examined in their entirety to identify depiction of masculinity. The future research, therefore, can be organised to ascertain how the other films, and television shows, are symbolic of specific type of masculinity. Another difficulty of the study is that only one character of the MCU was examined, i.e. Captain America, that was analysed to ascertain how it symbolised militarism and hyper-masculinity. Nevertheless, the MCU has a number of key characters like Iron Man and Thor that can be examined likewise.

Besides, though, this study identified and examined masculinity in Captain America, it did not focus on how the depiction of hyper-masculinity and the significance it is given, impacts feminism. An objective for feminism, and even for theory, is to change the societal outlook of gender norms. Since this study reveals that hyper-masculinity is dangerous, it does not place it within a feminist argument. By not framing the study through a feminist lens, there may be a difficulty within this study, and this can be used for future research. It is imperative to know whether and how the MCU and Disney/Pixar are applying male characters to strengthen gender norms, which are averse to a progressive society.

Similarly, this study does not discuss female characters in the MCU. The MCU is

known for its lack of female representation. Though this study does not focus on this problem yet chooses a male character for examination. This is important to have critical analysis of female representation in the MCU for future research. An imbalance exists between number of female characters and male ones. The use of feminist film theory would also be beneficial for future research on MCU. As of spring 2017, there has not been a solo film for a female superhero in the MCU. There are also not many female superheroes in the MCU. Since this study did not address this problem, future research should study how female characters are treated in the MCU in case such films are ever produced by Disney/Marvel.

Likewise, the MCU also lacks racial representation and just as the female characters in the MCU, there has not been a solo film for a race-based character. There are few characters of colour within the MCU, and as such that problem has not been discussed in this study. In the MCU, *Luke Cage* (2016) was the first television show with a black character in leading role, and *Black Panther* (2018) has been the first film with black superhero as lead. Besides, the MCU faced problems with casting Asian actors for characters that were affected by various Asian cultures and traditions like martial arts. Disney/Marvel's reluctance to cast people of colour for these roles also needs to be given focus.

Though the MCU has been a progressing franchise since 2008, yet, all the characters of colours have been secondary roles (until *Luke Cage* and *Black Panther*). The lack of diversity within the MCU can also has effects in other media since this study applied a white character for examination, the MCU's treatment with characters of colour should be critically analysed. Since this study, did not and could not possibly focus on many problems within the MCU and Pixar films, it did reveal that these need to be critically analysed for their other thematic meanings. The MCU and Captain America represent ideological positions like militarism and hyper-masculinity. The recognition of these symbols can add to the scholarly work in militarism, hyper-masculinity, and CDA as well as promote media literacy, which helps the viewers to know of the ideologies being depicted and strengthened in the current cultural zeitgeist.

6.6 Future Directions

The continuous release of films by Pixar is a slight motion of the fact that this study might be reanalysed for the inclusion of these new entries e.g. *Finding Dory* and *Monsters*

University. The results of this study can be helpful in future for making the basics of the further investigations that will be applied to Pixar's films in the form of newer researches for the portrayal of genders. As the focus of this study was male gender, there is a strong temptation with the end of this study to put forth another study with the analysis of themes that portray femininity. Although the feminine roles and narratives have been taken as an example in this study, but that is because of connection of that feminine character to the male character. Such a research study with deep analyses on feminities and their narratives would be warmly welcomed in the research world especially where examples of films such as *Inside Out* released in 2015, will be considered. This is a film which has been filmed inside the mind of an alpha female character, the protagonist feminine character (Keegan, 2013).

The lack of considerations of race and ethnicity also will lead to expand this study's scope as there is a need to analyse race and ethnicity together. Spanish Mode of Buzz is a strong depiction of "Latin Lover" stereotypically and the Latino character of *Cars (2006)*, i.e. Ramone have been portrayed as romantic customarily. The only example of interracial marriage shown in Pixar's films is that of Rone with Flo who is African American. The focus, however, of this study was the western masculinities versions. For the sake of comparison of the finding with that of international media like anime or manga, examples will be required to depict how masculinity is used by media worldwide. In addition to international media, the portrayal of masculinities in Pixar's films can also be compared to releases of other famous U.S. studios e.g. *How to train your Dragon*, *Madagascar* and DreamWorks's *Shrek* or 20th Century Fox's *Ice Age* along with streaming services and YouTube content.

This study can pave the way for conducting an ethnographic study based on Pixar studios in California, related to filmmakers this time. Such research works are imperative for the explanations of similarities discussed related to various films in above chapters. This, however, could be quite difficult to get such access to behind-the-scenes reality. There are many interesting studies still present that can be conducted on the gender portrayals of Pixar. This study is being expected to inspire and act as a beacon for the further complex processes.

6.7 Final Words

This research was aimed at underlining the themes and narratives which have been used by MCU and Disney/Pixar in order to construct masculinities discursively in their films

and to analyse those items contrasted to societal changes during the time of the films' production. According to Jeffords (1994), MCU still relies on old man's model, while Pixar has been the advocate of The New Man model on television and film. It is expected that a thorough analysis into these portrayals of masculinities will be provided through this qualitative research with the view of having a better understanding of how these films present masculinity to their global viewers. The objective of the films current body of research continues to lay the groundwork for future studies that can analyse the actual effect these films have on viewers' understanding of gender. This study helps complete the first step of the study of mass media as highlighted by Signorielli (2012), studying the images viewers view in the media. It also alludes to Signorelli's second step, which is to search possible impact the images may exert on viewers. Moreover, the messages in these films, from these two industry giants, cannot be overlooked because they are global society's dominant cultural storytellers and we should be analysing what messages these films may be communicating to those young members of the viewers who are easily influenced.

Not surprisingly, most of the literature and discussion so far illustrates that masculinity is a positive trait, even encompassing very minutely tailored unconventional masculinities like those of Ken, Buss Lightyear, and lightning McQueen. These characters can easily be envisioned to stay outside the periphery of normal masculinity or maleness. Despite being placed and perceived as acceptable and "normal" maleness, their acceptance and recognition guarantees that viewers are made aware of the kind of masculinity they may come across in the real world, especially the roles seemingly tough guy males have to perform. It shatters the very idol of male worshipping and brings home justification of a male that is selfless, emotional, has weaknesses and can break under pressure as well. This trend is getting displayed in many recent films, both mainstream blockbusters and small-scale films. Even in *Avengers: Civil War*, the character of Hawkeye, is shown to live a shadow family life off the radars of glamour. Even the Antman, in *Antman and the Wasp (2018)*, is shown to be a superhero, but a full-time dad and is seen engaging in emotional fixes and kids pretend play engagements. Pixar's Mr Incredible, in *the Incredibles 2 (2018)*, is another remarkable shift towards the evolved male. Unlike the first *The Incredibles (2004)* film, Mr Incredible is at home, managing kids, while Elastigirl is out there fighting crime. The dialogues of husband and wife, before she sets out to her, 'new job' are quite interesting to witness. The growing volume of films every

quarter, by Marvel and Pixar, are generating enough data for continuous assessment of gender portrayals. The themes of family are resurfacing, much like the real-world is yearning to inculcate amidst epidemic media consumerism and disintegration of family values. No matter how these characters are classified, still the films discussed here in this study account for a fraction of the larger discourse about gender in all types of media. The viewers, interact with constructs which are visually or discursively presented to them on social media, advertisements, TV, and radio, etc. Films, since they become a cultural phenomenon due to their entertainment value and viewing pleasure, happen to carry a prominent place in pushing agenda. They happen to become primary childhood and adulthood experiences, both through Marvel and Disney/Pixar productions. Even more and more cinematic products are jumping in, and from different countries as well. It is due to this fact that decoding a film is far more twisted than simple constructing and deconstructing of filmic dialogues, like in the fashion of printed literature. The amalgamation of sound and images, adds further layers of richness to it.

As for the themes, constructs and agendas in films, it should be understood that there is not a thing as chance, when it comes to what gets shown on cinema screen. Each shot, dialogue, camera angle, character choice and role allotment, physical settings, and music, etc. are all carefully chosen and executed, fused with the vision and personal biases of the film makers. The financiers and approving bodies, political of course, add another layer of influence in all the decisions mentioned earlier. These themes become the driving force of storytelling, which is successful as well as well-researched, and agents of narratives which are introduced, reinforced and solidified to the viewers gradually over a period of years. This brings to light another key question, as to how do films manage to resonate with large number of crowds? Are films a culture that adults and children like to hang out to, or do they offer a picture of society, or social problems or life lessons that all viewers willingly enter cinema halls to understand or show their younger generations? These could be because perhaps as people we approve of the message that we wish to get, in the name of entertainment. These answers, although residing outside the realm of this study, hope to trigger a thought process in readers of this study before entering a cinema hall, as is it entertainment or the message that we give ourselves in to.

Hopefully the studios continue to extend their storylines to accommodate realistic depictions of masculinities, following the 'The New Man' model, which has garnered special

coverage in Disney/Pixar animations lately. This effort is necessary since the viewers need to process that it is fine to have problems, imperfect plans, or to need assistance, companionship and family support. Using language to achieve this can cement such notions, besides powerful visual representation. It can be seen even when these studios used to produce comics, in times of World War I and II, their written words on comic strips would achieve goals of public mind making and understanding the good and evil binary, as described to them in comics. As the times are moving, the discourse about and of gender is drastically evolving. Hence the need for these studios is to avoid unnatural and irrelevant adherence to staunch patriarchy and resort to inclusion of powerful and responsible female portrayals. The studios, being a global phenomenon, have to consider global cultures as well, where there is still room for patriarchy, and that's good for business. Dealing with all kinds of viewers is risky but driven by financial considerations.

Moreover, when the male or female characters display the qualities that are not usually known for, e.g. Marlin, in *Finding Nemo*, as an over-cautions father, or EVE, in *WALL-E*, as dominant female, they are not projected as abnormal or requiring correction by other characters. Films, instead, should be able to assist in establishing and defining these fine details to enrich and inculcate a lifelike imperfect and flexible image of masculinity. So, despite their out of ordinary gender performances, both EVE and Marlin and even Hawkeye do not portray a wrong image. It is for sure that such identity construction would resonate with many real fathers, and independent females and would relate to them. Of most of contemporary studios, Pixar, an animations studio, has set the tone of very carefully selected realist dimensions of masculinity portrayals, beside many other wonderful depictions of grown feministic viewpoint, as in *Inside Out*.

It is eventually expected that both researchers and readers alike will be helped by this study in understanding the messages about masculinity in contemporary films in a better way. Society has afforded a great deal of power and prominence to masculinity already and MCU is still trading that path, unlike Pixar which has not received much coverage like Disney's films have been. Hyper masculinity, which is largely understood as the only version of masculinity, happens to stay unnoticed as seen in this study how Captain America, for instance, is expressing hegemonic messages that are stated so skilfully that one is immersed in the CGI fantasy completely. After a careful academic inquiry, this study has tried to highlight some of

these messages which will transcend the realm of academia in scope. The readers should be able to decipher the gender coded messages, like many other embedded messages, by using this resource as a guide. Films, being a global medium, are like ‘messengers without borders’. Translations and localizations of films make them relevant and focused in message delivery.

These messages are not confined to films, TV or even smaller screen and have caused a global culture of consumerism, allowing viewers to have these iconic figures on their food boxes, clothes, toys and all other merchandise. Overall, the study suggests that It is desirable for the media to adopt the New Man Model which encourages men to work together, express feelings, participate in family matters and engage with kids. This study hopes to ignite discourse among parents and their offspring, among peers, academicians, researchers, etc to filter and see through awareness of gender portrayals.

Both MCU and Disney/Pixar have developed evolving templates of masculinities which acquaint the viewers with an array of surprising shades of gender portrayals. With the emergence and existence of The New Man model, both in media and real life, it will be fascinating to come across newer developments in established images of male and female. Also, cultural relevance in future representations will be crucial as the global viewers connects and will connect with filmic content in the backdrop of their environment. A single film to be able to check all the boxes will keep getting difficult and mediated gender messages are likely to keep surfacing. However, teams of experts at MCU and Pixar have the capacity and means to keep amazing the viewers with plethora of storylines, character designs and methods of storytelling. Every coming film points to the possibilities to infinity and beyond!

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