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#Savequicksilver: How Fans of the Mcu Established Their Fan Identities After Pietro's False Introduction in the Disney+ Series Wandavision

Isabela Scaturro
Illinois State University, scaturroisa@yahoo.com

#SAVEQUICKSILVER: HOW FANS OF THE MCU ESTABLISHED THEIR FAN IDENTITIES

AFTER PIETRO'S FALSE INTRODUCTION IN THE DISNEY+ SERIES *WANDAVISION*

ISABELA SCATURRO

50 Pages

The Marvel Cinematic Universe has one of the largest fandoms in the world, thus making this fandom crucial for fandom studies. In this study, I examine how fan interactions demonstrate fan identities and fandom hierarchies after a particular character in the MCU's first Disney+ series *WandaVision* was reintroduced and caused a controversy about the actor playing the character . Fans used the hashtag #SaveQuicksilver to express their feelings about Pietro, a character who was brought back into the MCU as a different actor and became a random character in the MCU. This is significant in fan studies because it caused fans to have a large discussion on Twitter. In this study, I am to examining how fans expressed their identities by using the hashtag and engaging in online interactions. In my analysis of tweets using this hashtag, I found overarching themes about how fans express their fandom.

KEYWORDS: Marvel, fandoms, MCU, WandaVision

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COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

Lauren Bratslavsky, Co- Chair

Lindsey Thomas, Co- Chair

John R. Baldwin

Phillip Chidester

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The Marvel Fandom has been around for years. Marvel Comics was founded in 1939, during the beginning of World War II. The Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) began in 2008 with its first theatrical release of *Iron Man* (Favreau, 2008), and Marvel Studios has since created 28 films and five Disney+ series. As a fan of this franchise since the premiere of *Iron Man*, I constantly catch myself on Twitter scrolling and engaging with people, like myself, who are fellow MCU fans. By engaging in these interactions and seeing how many people there are that share a love for the same thing as me, I began to wonder if certain fans identified more strongly with a one aspect of the MCU. Fans have done a plethora of things that help increase their fan identity and generate new beginnings for their method of fandom. Whether it be saving shows from getting canceled (Pearson, 2010) or creating fanfiction in some way, fans have been engaging online since the 1990s, as dial-up services actively changed communities (Click & Scott, 2006). The engagement of fans has grown through many online spaces, and Twitter, specifically, has boosted interactions between members of the fandom. Twitter is especially useful to examining whether/how fan activity and identity shift during a point of controversy. For example, Pietro Maximoff, or Quicksilver, who was first introduced in *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (Whedon, 2015), had only a brief time in the MCU, as he was killed off in the very film he was introduced in. This caused a lot of fans to be angry, as the MCU decided to keep Pietro's sister, Wanda, in the universe. However, Pietro quickly makes his return in the 2021 series *WandaVision* (Shakman, 2021). As a fan, I noticed a shift on my Twitter feed about fans' attitudes toward the MCU and I wanted to delve further into it. I decided use this controversy as a moment to analyze fans' identities and hierarchical structures, meaning how fans claimed to be 'better' fans than others, after the introduction of Pietro in *WandaVision.*

In this study, I review previous literature about fans, specifically fandom online and how the perceptions and interactions between the fans and producers affects the identities of the fans. I also review literature about the MCU fandom in relation to other fandoms. Then, I conduct two thematic analyses based on examining tweets using the hashtag #SaveQuicksilver. I conclude with a discussion of the themes as it relates to my research questions, which are about fans expressing their identities by interacting on Twitter.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

I begin this chapter with a discussion of literature regarding fandoms and how fans act in online spaces. I conclude with a description of *WandaVision* (Shakman, 2021) and the functions of this text regarding this study. By reviewing this previous literature, I hope to give an understanding of how fan reactions to a particular plot point in *WandaVision* provide insight into fan identity.

Fandoms

Fandoms are communities where people share their collective feelings about the media text of which they are a fan. These communities have been viewed as a network of networks, or a loose affiliation of subcultures, all specializing in different modes of fan activity (Hills, 2017). This fan activity includes interacting online, buying merchandise, writing fan fiction, and engaging in active media (Hills, 2017). Active media is when fans are actively watching something. This is when they are paying close attention to what it is they are watching. Fans are seen as consumers wrapped in their fantasy worlds and building fantasies around their world (Yockey, 2018). Fans create these communities as a space to engage in joint practices surrounding a text, person, or object. These practices range from sharing feelings with each other to sharing information about specific media texts. The information includes sharing spoilers, emotions, or facts about the media texts.

Fiske (1992) states that these communities are associated with cultural tastes of subordinated formations of the people, particularly with those disempowered by any combination of gender, race, age, and class. Essentially, Fiske suggests that fan communities, like any community, are formations of individuals who share a range of intersecting identities. Fiske incorporates his ideas of fandom community from Bourdieu's cultural economy. This is when he

(Bourdieu) analyzed cultural tastes and how they specifically can be mapped into economic status within a social space. Fiske explains that Bourdieu is essentially "modeling our society with a two-dimensional map in which the vertical axis is the amount of capital (economic and cultural) and the horizontal is the type of capital (economic or cultural)" (as cited in Fiske, 1992, p.31). Bourdieu's model is mostly about social capital and involves money, but Fiske relates the model to fandom. Fiske rotates the capital around a sense of knowledge. Essentially, the more knowledgeable a fan is, the more capital they have. Fiske mentions that social space is that through which both class or social groups and individuals move through time (Fiske, 1992). He used these techniques to align the level of fan discrimination and distinction, and participation and productivity as fans. Fan discrimination is described as certain fans not being supportive of other fans based on their level of fan activity or fan identification. Discrimination in Fiske's definition is outlining the basis of race and gender, but in this case, it is associated with level of fan identity. He goes on to explain that the more mundane a fan is, the more likely they are to say phrases like "I'm not really a fan of course, but…" (p.35). These "fans" then could go on to explain a well-known fact or event that happened within that media text.

Fans themselves are seen as members of a social class, and their taste is focused on their social classification. Essentially, the level of fan identities and fan classification are evaluated based on how much information each fan may know. This evaluation is done by other fans and usually is done through interactions on social networking sites. Hierarchies are established through these classifications. This is what the fans enjoy or what their taste has to do with their social class (Duffett, 2013). Since a fan's social class is seen through their taste, this implies that these fans are moving through different social classes within their online communities, through their tastes. A fan liking a specific media text reflects their social class within their fandom.

These social classes, or social groups, are incorporated and established within online communities, and within these communities, the communication taking place helps with establishing the identities of fans.

Fandom Online

Recently, fandoms have become more popular and possible through social networking sites (SNSs). These communities operate throughout SNSs, and are formed so members can share their feelings, theories, and sometimes spoilers (Hameleers, 2019). Fans use these websites to share common interests and garner interaction with one another in an easy setting. Relationships are also easily formed through these sites. The studies done in previous literature give an insight on how fan communities work in different SNSs. People in fan communities tend to use them as a space to share certain instances and feelings about the media they enjoy. These findings give a look at the extremes that fans go to for their favorite form of media, and how they express their enjoyment for that media text.

Social media have changed throughout the years, and this change has affected the ways fans/fandoms interact online. Not only do SNSs act as information-sharing sites, but they are also "emotional media" (Döveling et al., 2018), in which the sharing of emotion has become central to notions of idea and community (Matley, 2019). Fandom operates in many ways throughout different SNSs. For example, Matley (2019) examines how fans of David Bowie reacted after hearing the news of his death. Matley claims that the social media reactions of Bowie's passing garnered contemporary commentary and criticism that was found in the traditional media outlets. Matley examined different hashtags on Twitter related to Bowie—#Bowie and #RIPDavidBowie—and studied reactions to the musician's death based on what those tweets said. He found that there was an affective stance of disbelief surrounding his death, expressions

of anger, expressions of acceptance, and expressions of sadness. Matley then examined Instagram posts of fan artwork and how those highlighted the positioning of the identities of the fans as they mourned with the community. Relating back to Döveling (2018), the concept of emotional media play a major factor when it comes to interacting within fandoms. Fans use these spaces to interact and share emotional stories that relate back to the media text they are discussing. Various researchers claim that social media activity represents too low of fandom activity (Napoli & Kosterich, 2017). However, Nielsen (2014) did a study on Twitter Television Ratings. According to their study, over one million people per day discuss television programming on Twitter, with those television-related tweets garnering over eleven million readers. This study establishes that SNSs are a feasible tool for fandom research.

Kwon (2015) studied fans in online spaces in Korea, specifically fans who author stories about male singing groups, or novels, that are called Fanfics in Korea. Fan participation in their online communities associates others with the increasing thought of technology in the face of fan spaces. Kwon states that fans created online communities by using a dial-up service, and they used it to share information, photos, and fan-created art like fanfiction. These works give insight to just how fan communities seem to function. For another example, Bergstrom and Poor (2021) studied gaming fans and their posting on Reddit about a new game and how their posting affects the community involvement within their online space. Specifically, they wanted to see if fans transitioned into a new subreddit for the latest version of the video games *The Elder Scrolls, Fallout,* and *Civilization*. They concluded that fans did not transition into new subreddits, as nostalgia for the old versions of the games kept them in their original subreddits to keep up with fan discussions. This research suggests that fans need their communities to incorporate a stronger

relationship with other fans in the community. These relationships work towards incorporating identities within these social groups that are established through taste.

These online communities help with establishing fan identities through the concept of social groups that are associated within the fandom. In these communities, fans of specific MCU content interact with one another and communicate their level of fan identity.

Fan Identities

A multitude of identities and interactions can form between the citizens of a fan community. These fan interactions may be cooperative or competitive, positive or negative. Some fans state that someone else may not be a "big enough fan" (Busse, 2013), thus developing hierarchies of fan identity. Hierarchies have long been present within fan communities (Hills, 2002). The Internet creates new ways of manifesting a fan's status within the community, measured, for example, by the number of posts on websites, forums, or social networking sites (Williams, 2004). While all fans share one thing in common, regardless of the object of fandom—an interest in, and consumption of media, created by others (Plante et al., 2017), there is still a divide among fans based on how they interact online and how they conceive, construct, and convey their fan identities.

Within online fan spaces, individuals have a say in what is posted in these communities and what is not to be posted in the communities. This can be done by one actively becoming the mediator of what content is posted within their communities and what theories, spoilers, words, and thoughts are shared (Arriagada & Cruz, 2014). The hierarchical structures enable unique and consistent relationship activity to happen throughout the community. These relationships, while interpersonal, have a public audience that engages within their interactions in these communities. While the disclosure of facts, threads, comics, and other fan content is usually between two

people, interactions and hierarchies take place because of the publicness of these sites. Some fans use Reddit instead of Twitter (Lynch, 2020), and this leads to different interactions to take place based on how the different platforms are used. However, Twitter is the most beneficial because the interactions are not as narrow, and the bandwidth of how far the reach of the tweet is compared to the Reddit thread allows for an easier access to the tweets. Also, someone may know more information than others (Busse, 2013) and this plays into hierarchies because if a fan knows more than another fan, they may act in a hierarchical position higher than other fans. These hierarchical structures within fandoms allow for there to be a unique relationship between the fans. This relationship includes the fans either engaging more, or less with one another based on how much they may know about the media text.

The hierarchical identity of fans then leads to the term "gatekeeping." This is when a group member determines the conditions upon which group membership is contingent, often to keep out those considered undesirable (Plante et al., 2017). In fan cultures, gatekeeping usually involves one fan accusing another person of making the fandom look bad and insisting that they do not belong (Dunlap & Wolf, 2010). As hierarchies enable elitism, elitist fans begin to gate-keep. Lynch (2020) describes fandom curators as more established fans who have a deeper knowledge and access to the fandom and its texts. These individuals use their knowledge to introduce new people to the fandom and its texts. However, since they work in a hierarchical way, and decide what gets distributed to the fandom, this can call for gatekeeping to occur in the fandom. Gatekeeping remains a powerful influence in the popular media, in part because of the ease of the production and distribution of popular media (Coddington & Holton, 2013). As the act of gatekeeping increases, the feeling of hierarchy increases.

These messages of gatekeeping and hierarchies involve the identities of fans and anti-fans. The anti-fans are not necessarily against fandoms but are generally against a specific text or genre (Gray, 2003). Gray continues that the attitudes of anti-fans change based on specific texts, but the attitude and physicality of the text changes within the amount of fan interaction that happens within the communities. For the fans to be able to construct their identity and understand what others' perceptions might be, they need to engage in active self-reflection. Harman and Jones (2013) explain how fans use specific texts to relate to themselves and have a personal connection to them. In contrast, anti-fans do not see themselves in the texts or relate to them, but rather they find ways to negate the text. Gray (2003) states that to some, fans and anti-fans exist on opposite ends of the fandom spectrum, but in reality the two resemble one another quite a bit. Specifically, they each have a large emotional involvement with a specific text, whether it is a positive one or a negative one, and there are opportunities for interactions to happen between fans or antifans within these online communities.

In sum, a number of relationships begin to transform in the communities based on the common *interests,* even if *attitudes* toward a specific text or aspect of the fandom differ. SNSs enhance these relationships by enabling people to asynchronously forge linkages between people based on their shared interests (Ellison & Boyd, 2013). It is important to note that these relationships might not always be positive ones, but they still affect the ways in which fans communicate and interact in these shared spaces.

The level of fan identity and fan worship may have something to do with parasocial interactions and relationships (Horton & Wohl, 1956). These are relationships based on a person's perception of shared intimacy with media personas due to frequent and consistent viewing. If a fan encounters a celebrity frequently, this may heighten the level of fan identity

they have. However, it is important to note that there is a difference between interactions and relationships. Parasocial interactions are perceptions of media personas as a conversational partner, where audience members conceptualize their viewings like a conversation which turns into speaking and listening between persona and fan (Vickery & Ventrano, 2021). In contrast, the relationships are conceived as a one-sided relationship between the media users and host(s) which extend beyond a single use or episode (Dibble et al., 2016). This can contribute to the identity of fans based on how much they converse or interact with celebrities/producers. Fans may feel their identities shift if they have a stronger parasocial relationship with celebrities/producers than the fans who do not. If the interaction is higher, the identity of the fan may be higher as well. There are multiple interactions that are made between fans and celebrities. SNSs make these interactions easier and more concise as each site is free for anyone to join and can spark interactions—and even relationships.

Fans incorporate their love for the object of fandom and use it to work with their fan content that is made. For example, in Brooker's (2000) work on affect in media, he describes his love for Batman, and oftentimes he incorporates his identity along with his love for Batman. Brooker continues, that there is a distinct form of academic investigation when it comes to studying fandoms. By declaring his love, he is separating his work from normal academic research, and ensuring that it places him as the researcher, in the frame of his research (Brooker, 2000). By Brooker declaring his love for Batman, there is an analysis of 'affect', which is coined as "an intensely felt experience, or of someone showing an emotional attachment" (Caughey, 1984).

Beyond a parasocial relationship, some fans develop quite a serious attachment to the target of the fandom, creating "cults" around a particular actor, singer, character, or text. Hills

(2002) discusses the concept of 'cult' fan or the cult fandom, and how the terms have been defined academically. Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) place fans along a specific spectrum relating to their identities and experience, while also looking at how each moves from a 'fan' to a 'cultist'. They define 'cultist' as those who have "a specific attachment to stars or to particular programmes and types of programme" (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998, p. 12). Hills (2002) states that being a fan and being a 'cultist' at times overlaps. He explains, "This relates not to the intensity, social organization or semiotic/material productivity of the fandom concerned, but rather to its duration, especially in the absence of 'new' or official material in the originating medium" (Hills, 2002, p. x). Essentially, 'cult' fans act with a sense of 'affect' and gain a strong emotional connection and love for a program's characters/story and specific programs gather a large cult following.

Fan identities are conceptualized throughout the sharing of information on multiple platforms. Within these multiple platforms, there is a concept of "role-playing" that affects the identity of the fans. Jeewa and Wade (2015) mention that with the help of the internet, fans can imagine themselves in roles they want to be in this world through the aid of virtual reality. Within these roles, fans can feel a sense of anonymity that fans take in their online communities. With these anonymous role-playing accounts, fans feel they can be passionate and display authentic emotions. Smutradontri and Gadavanji (2020) further that fandom studies—and more specifically, fandom identities—did not begin in a digital era. However, there has not been much of a drastic change to the study of fan identities since the pre-internet era. However, it is important to note that the identity of superhero fans is perceived differently. When looking at the identity of these fans, it is important to examine gender differences and how those affect the identity of the fan.

Fan studies typically focus on fan culture and fan identities as a space to explore fans' gender and sexual identities (Smutradontri & Gadavanji, 2020). This is important when taking theoretical approaches to fan identities because it highlights each of the intersectional identities that remain the focus of the fans in online communities. These identities cause some specific gender and sexuality differences in a fandom. In a 2018 study, Kashtan explains how superhero comic fandoms have long been dominated by straight white males. The typical fan is described as a "twelve- to eighteen-year-old pubescent male who searches the aisles of comic book shops for hot new titles or heroines, or villainesses clad in revealing leather bikinis" or who has trouble separating the adventures of Superman or Spawn from Reality' (Putsz, 2000). This definition is labeled as a "fanboy." Fanboys tend to be the most generic form of fans in superhero comic book fandoms. However, lately there has been a shift in the identity of the fan majority. Women and LGBTQ+ individuals have always been superhero comic fans, but there are scholars such as Pustz that claimed they were uninterested in the comics (Kashtan, 2018). These identities are around and make their presence known on sites such as Twitter

Fandom has the potential to promote self-reflexivity, identity building, and social functioning (McInroy & Craig, 2018). Identity that is revealed through fan studies are central to this thesis. They incorporate a stronger idea and function to use while examining tweets to establish fan identity within the MCU.

Fan/Producer Relationships

There are many ways in which hierarchies are established within fan communities, and some of those articulate through fan-producer relationships. If not for the content created by producers, fandoms would not exist. Thus, a large part of fandom identity is if a fan has a closer relationship to a producer, then that fan may feel a stronger sense of hierarchy. Fans and

producers—or content creators—have a complex relationship that varies from fandom to fandom and from fan to fan. At times, producers condemn fans for their attempts at ownership over the content they have created, but some welcome or even incorporate fan theories and ideas into the canon of their projects (McCormick, 2018). The relationship between fans and creators usually has a positive impact on the content the producers/creators make. Fans function as easy representatives for audience behavior: early adapters and adopters, fans are outspoken, passionate, and usually provide extensive feedback (Busse, 2013). Since they have these functions, they can be seen as crucial to the career of producers. Fans enjoy "creating content" outside of the content that is already created. The content that is created by the fans was created for the enjoyment of the fans. However, sometimes fans claim they are the reason for the producers to even create their content and feel as though the producers are indebted to them (Williams, 2010). Basically, fans explain that they are the reason for producers' content to be so successful. In their online communities, fans discuss certain situations to happen in the content they are watching. Essentially, the fans complete the actions of "fan service" (Russell, 2008). This is basically when producers create something to validate the fans and their wants/needs they discuss in their communities. Fan service can be viewed as the tendency of cultural creators to provide fans with story elements that they long to see (Beaty, 2016). Once these acts happen, the fans may begin to act more on their "fannish" behavior. It also causes the fans to have a bit of an emotional attachment to and investment in the content they need. They remain conscious of the implied relationship between fan and performer that suggests an obligation owed to fans (Bird, 2003). This implied relationship may cause the fan to feel a sense of ownership of the content they are watching. The producers and creators are technically providing a service to the fans, and fandoms. This has caused the relationship between the fans and the producers to, in a way,

crumble. They use this notion through hidden easter eggs, teasers, and references to previous or future movies or comic books, and by incorporating many crossovers throughout their universe (Beaty, 2016). Previous research on Marvel argues that the entire existence of the MCU is essentially fan-oriented because it was created on behalf of a fan culture (Taylor, 2014). Typically, hardcore fans are usually the ones who critique the use of fan service because they claim it is cheap, predictable, or distasteful. This can cause higher expectations from the fans for the producers. It also can cause a negative association within the fandom towards specific films.

So, the fans have expectations for the producers, and the producers have expectations for the fans as well. Fans gain some sort of attachment to the content and to celebrities involved in the media they are watching. In fact, regular exposure of fans to celebrities through media products encourages and increases degrees of intimacy and attachment between fan and celebrity (Raphael & Lam, 2018). This attachment to the content created, causes the fans to create their own form of content to show the producers how much they love and enjoy the original content. Producers look at how fans react to certain types of media because fans function as easy representatives for audience behavior: As early adapters and adopters, fans are outspoken, passionate, and usually provide extensive feedback (Busse, 2013). This extensive feedback occurs through different forms; whether it be posts in their online communities or creating content of their own, these fans give producers a multitude of products that keep the content going. This content includes art, videos, and even novels, otherwise known as "fanfiction" (Kwon, 2015). These novels are prevalent among mostly female fans. It is also important to note that fans do not just write "fanfics" (fanfiction), they also produce their own critical accounts of the program's texts (Hills, 2017). This ties back into the concept of free labor done by the fans for the producers. Fanfic became a thing in the early 2000s, and thanks to the internet and help of

online communities it rapidly expanded (Kwon, 2015). Fanfic creations are described as amateur cultural productions (Jenkins, 2006), and the more they gain popularity, the more the original content gets viewed. This is obviously a gain for the producers of the original content and allows for them to receive popularity revolving around their projects. This can be seen as an example of free labor done by the fans for the producers. The fans create this original content to garner popularity and publicity for the producers. There should also be a mention of the economic and capitalistic gain that fan/producer relationships have on the actual project and the studios themselves. Gilbert (2017) highlights the importance of the largest comic convention to be held, the San Diego Comic-Con Convention (SDCC). They explain how SDCC is a demonstration of complementary fan/producer interests, arguing that there is entrenched power, purpose, and reward between the fans and the industry (Gilbert, 2017). When fans attend SDCC, they realize they are consumers there and that the interactions they have within the convention itself interpret the identity they may possess.

Fan/producer relationships offer insight into why the MCU fans may act in the way they do. The MCU fandom engages in the largest level of online fan interaction with producers, and the content that is created shows the establishment of hierarchies that take place in this fandom.

MCU Fandom

Most research on fan studies typically focuses on fandoms of large and popular media. Many of the studies focus on the Harry Potter franchise. For example, Hall (2016) discusses how fans of the franchise created something called "wrock" or wizard rock, a style of music that was started within the popular film and book series, which fans established and made into their own thing. Actions such as these work to increase fan activity and engagement. Research regarding the MCU fandom is slim to none. Scholars have researched minor aspects of the MCU, but not

the breadth and depth of it. Previous research has shown that most members of the Marvel fandom identify more heavily with being a fan of the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) rather than Marvel as a whole (Scott, 2017). However, the Marvel fandom usually comprises of both MCU fans and overall Marvel fans. The Marvel fandom is compiled of the transmedia fandom (Jenkins, 2007). These are fans who engage in multiple forms of media for a specific fandom.

The MCU is currently composed of twenty-six different films and 5 series streaming on Disney+. Each of these productions is based on Marvel comics. Thus, fans have multiple forms of media to obtain. Freeman and Taylor-Ashfield (2017) examine *Captain Marvel* fans and how the act of transmedia ethos came into play while fans examined *Captain Marvel* texts. Transmedia ethos refers to the reason that people examine this particular content across media (Freeman & Taylor-Ashfield, 2017). They argue that *Captain Marvel*'s fandom bases their transmedia activities on values instead of storyline and plot. Ultimately, the researchers discovered that these reasonings were based on humanistic values. While this study does not focus heavily on social media site involvement, it reveals how the MCU fandom works in some capacity. This article showcased how within a fraction of this fandom, there are different answers and understandings as to why people navigate their fanship throughout different forms of media (Freeman & Taylor-Ashfield, 2017). The concept of transmedia fandom gives a larger insight to how the MCU fandom functions. As there are multiple media forms, there are also multiple characters within this universe, thus causing there to be different fandoms within the overall audience base; however, there has not been much research done on the MCU fandom, the feelings of the fans' identities, and the hierarchies that come into place.

Description of the difference between Marvel and the MCU

The MCU refers to the content created by Marvel Studios, which is based on the Marvel comics, but such content is not necessarily the same as the comics and can exist in a different timeline.There are other cinematic Marvel movies, but those Marvel movies may not exist within the MCU timeline due to which movie studios had the rights to particular Marvel characters. For example, the Fox X-Men movies are Marvel characters and produced by 20th Century Fox but those characters do not exist within the MCU timeline. Another example of this would be the original Spider-Man films, which were produced by Sony pictures and do not exist within the MCU timeline. Since there are differences among the films, their timelines, and the movie studios, this can lead to a separation of fans. For example, some fans may only be fans of Spider-Man films and not the X-Men films or MCU films. There are also fans who may be a fan of all the universes and the films. In summary, the MCU *and* movies with characters developed over decades of Marvel comics yields vast fandoms that may be separate and/or overlapping.

Marvel Studios was its own company until 2009 when Disney bought the company, making the MCU, legally, a Disney property. This purchased assisted in making the MCU the popular and expanded upon franchise it is today. For ten years, the MCU and Fox;s X-Men universes were separate and did not share the same timeline. However, in 2019 Disney purchased 20th Century Fox (James, Vox, 2019) and this allowed Marvel Studios to have the legal rights to these characters.

Description of *WandaVision* and Its Place in the MCU

Most texts in the MCU are movies, but *WandaVision* (Shakman, 2021) is the first television series to air as part of the MCU. The show provides an especially apt example of transmedia storytelling and fan engagement. *WandaVision* was released on Disney+ in 2021.

Disney purchased Marvel comics and all its characters in 2009. Then in March 2019, Disney purchased the media company, 20th Century Fox (James, Vox, 2019). This is significant because 20th Century Fox owned the rights to Marvel's X-Men, which comes in to play with how fans perceived and reacted to character and narrative plot decisions in *WandaVision.*

The television series follows Wanda Maximoff as she struggles with the death of her love, Vision. In the MCU, Wanda is The Scarlet Witch and the twin sister of Quicksilver. These characters, particularly Quicksilver, also known as Pietro Maximoff, were properly introduced to the MCU in *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (Whedon, 2015). In the movie, Quicksilver is portrayed by Aaron Taylor-Johnson and the character was killed at the end, terminating his involvement in the MCU-or so the fans thought. Meanwhile, a different film franchise, *The X-Men,* made by 20th Century Fox, introduced the character in a different way. In *X-Men: Days of Futures Past* (Singer, 2014) the character, Peter Maximoff, played by Evan Peters, was introduced. Although Peter was never actually called Quicksilver in the film, it was implied that he was that character. Fans were skeptical of the reasoning of Pietro's passing in the MCU, wondering if it was because the character was already introduced in a different---and, some may say, better-- way, and that is why Marvel decided to kill him off as soon as he was introduced. There were also questions of Marvel not actually having the rights to the character, so they killed him off almost immediately. However, in 2019, these theories changed when Disney acquired 20th Century Fox.

Returning to the show, *WandaVision*. In episode 5, titled, "On a Very Special Episode…" the twist at the end was one the audience did not see coming. A visitor is standing at the door, and we see Wanda with a weird expression. She then says, "Pietro?" and the camera turns to show Pietro. However, it is not the Pietro that Wanda recognizes. It is Evan Peters portraying Pietro. Throughout the remainder of the series, Pietro is living with the family, but Wanda is a bit

skeptical about if it is the real Pietro or not. Later in the series, the reveal of Pietro's actual identity comes to fruition. The character is named Ralph Bohner and he is possessed by the villain of the series, Agatha Harkness. Once this happened, fans swarmed to Twitter with complaints. The topic of Pietro was trending on Twitter for four hours, and the hashtags #SaveQuicksilver and #JusticeforQuicksilver was trending on Twitter for five days. Fans spoke their opinions on keeping Pietro and Evan Peters in the MCU.

This example reflects the ways that fans in a fandom space use social media interaction to work out all kinds of contradictions in their identities – the degree to which producer decisions bring their fandom into question, the ways that fellow fans react to content, and the ways that fan opinions and attitudes shape one's own sense of belonging in the space:

RQ1: How do members of the MCU fandom establish their fan identities through interactions with one another by using the hashtag #SaveQuicksilver?

RQ2: How do members of the MCU fandom demonstrate fandom hierarchies through their posts/interactions by using the hashtag #SaveQuicksilver?

CHAPTER III: METHODS

This study aims to gain a better understanding of fan identities and fan interactions through social media sites. Fans have been studied through a plethora of ways including online observations of interactions and, more specifically, an examination of how the subcultures of fandoms have specific interactions and fan expressions (Hills, 2007). In this study, the interactions between fans on Twitter were most beneficial because of how the hashtag, specifically #SaveQuicksilver, organizes fan commentary, and thus, signals identities and hierarchies. By stating facts and knowledge on the MCU, and other media texts, these identities are established (Busse, 2013). Twitter is a popular place for fans to interact with one another, and the use of hashtags assists with navigating trending topics and seeing these interactions in an easier way. Thus, making this site crucial for use in this study.

The interactions that happen on Twitter are different from interactions that happen in physical spaces. With interactions, there is usually two parties that conversate back and forth. These back-and-forth interactions are more common within offline fandom. In this study, I am defining interactions as more of an action that is done by the fans. They are not necessarily doing the back and forth with one another but are discussing about *WandaVision* and about Quicksilver by using #SaveQuicksilver. This discussion online is how I define interactions. Offline fandom requires members to be together in the same physical space at the same time (Jensen, 2017). Online fandom does not require this. Online communication happens more frequently and can happen when two individuals are in separate physical locations. A focus of fandom studies is the identity that is being expressed by the fans (Hills, 2007). On Twitter, the identity of that fan is important because it helps establish the interactions and hierarchical reactions to what is being said. Each fan could have positive and/or negative thoughts or interactions with one another

regarding the current MCU controversy. With identity and interactions being so important, this makes using this platform crucial for this study.

Sampling

To examine MCU fandom hierarchies, I collected a sample of tweets by using the rtweet package for R (Kearney, 2019). I collected the sample starting from March 5th, 2021 to March 10th, 2021. I chose to use March 5th because it was the date the season finale episode of *WandaVision*, in which Pietro was revealed to be Ralph Bohner, premiered. I then chose five days after because there were a massive number of tweets shared during this time period. The total number of tweets collected was 3,141. This time frame and number of tweets allowed me to examine hierarchies and fan identity establishment. I used filters to allow English language tweets to subsequently code and used #SaveQuicksilver as a keyword and searched for original tweets that did not include retweets (i.e. non-original content). By collecting tweets from the earliest moments using these hashtags, I was more likely to obtain accurate and legitimate samples relating to fan identities and hierarchies.

To assist with finding how fan identity and hierarchies are established, I took the sample and uploaded it to a sentiment lexicon titled the NRC Word-Emotion Association Lexicon (Mohammad and Turney, 2013). This lexicon uses certain words and phrases to develop and understand emotions that each of the tweets are representing. It also assisted in sorting the tweets into themes and categories for a more successful thematic analysis. This tool analyzes certain words in tweets and essentially matches it to the emotion the tweet is portraying. For example, if a tweet had the word sad or angry in it, then the software establishes that it is a more negative tweet. There are limitations with this tool such as the fact that it does not pick up on sarcasm that is used in tweets. However, the sentiment lexicon helps with sorting through the dataset to locate

strong emotions such as frustration and anger. Using these emotions helps with discovering themes within the tweets.

Data Analysis

To answer research question one, I used Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. They explain that a theme captures a specific aspect of data in a patterned way. There are six steps that take place in Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis. They are (1) becoming familiar with the data, (2) generating coding categories, (3) generating themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) locating examples. For step one, I scrolled through all of the tweets found in my dataset. Of the 3,141 tweets, I narrowed down my search to 662 tweets. I took out tweets that were spam, had photos, and were not in English. For step two, I separated each of them based on keywords found in the tweets that coincide with certain identities and hierarchies. After this, I coded each of the tweets to find the overarching themes that related to each of the tweets. Once I finished coding, I then generated themes based on commonalities between each of the tweets. I then had to ensure that each of the themes fit in with the coded data and work along with the data. After deciding if the themes fit together, I named each theme and defined what each of them meant towards fan identities. I then pointed out specific tweet examples that fit under the context of the theme.

To answer research question two, I conducted another thematic analysis, but specifically looked at each of the tweets and found themes regarding Busse's (2013) concept of geek hierarchies. One dimension of geek hierarchies is not being a good-enough fan based on not knowing enough facts (Busse, 2013), I began to conduct my thematic analysis by separating the tweets based on information and emotions expressed about Quicksilver being presented. I coded tweets based on the depth of knowledge expressed about the MCU and about Wanda and Pietro.

I checked for key terms that showed an expression of hierarchy. Once I located these themes, I then named them and provided examples for each of the themes found in the tweets. The primary tweets used in the analysis chapter are listed in the Appendix.

CHAPTER IV: ANALYSIS

MCU fans went to Twitter after viewing *WandaVision*. After the premiere of episode 9, the season finale, the hashtag #SaveQuicksilver began trending. It was trending for around three hours, but was still being brought up five days later. During these days, fans were in constant interactions and engagements with one another. After completing the steps of Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, I discovered themes to assist with answering each of my research questions. Some of the themes I found for each research question were similar, but followed different pathways to fit in with answering the specific research question.

When looking through tweets to follow my first research question, I discovered overarching themes of *being a stan* and *being an anti.*

Being a Stan

The term "stan" has been popularized to mean "someone who is an extremely or excessively enthusiastic and devoted fan" (Merriam-Webster, 2022). "Stan" was first coined in 2000 when Eminem dropped a twisted allegory in a song called "Stan," about a man who was pushed to the edge when his idol wouldn't answer his fan mail. The word used to be synonymous with overzealous or obsessed" (npr, 2019). Move forward 20 years, and the term has been used by fans all over social media to show how committed someone may be towards something they are a fan of. In this study, the fans act as stans by tweeting excessively about their love for Evan Peters, Aaron-Taylor Johnson, their portrayals of Quicksilver, and for the character Quicksilver. Some fans also express how they are stans of the FOX *X-Men* characters as well. With these tweets, fans are establishing their fan identity to being a stan of one of these actors and their characters. Twitter user @ExeQrey explains why they want Quicksilver to come back, "#SaveQuicksilver bring em' back please...they're my emotional support character." This user

shows how they love this character and have such an emotional connection to them, that they need the character to return; establishing that they identify as a stan of Quicksilver. Some fans usually are not as invested in Twitter arguments or threads to help with controversies in media, but they love this character so much that they begin to participate and tweet the hashtag. For example, Twitter user @dirtylunchboi states "normally i don't care that much about this sort of thing but quicksilver is actually one of my favorite characters in marvel, i love speedsters and his personality is great, so please #SaveQuicksilver'. This user loves this character so much that they are willing to participate in something they usually do not care much about. When fans act excessively like this and begin to act like a stan, they are expressing their fan identities.

Being a stan also means to use terms that identify that the fandom is a collective group. They use words like "we" to establish that they are a group and want to be with one another. User @moonymaximoff states "we deserved better, evan deserved better, and PETER deserved better. anyway #SaveQuicksilver". Using these terms to assist in being a stan and expressing how they feel, helps establish their fan identity. Some of the fans were also in shock that one of their beloved characters was taken away from them. @moonymaximoff also tweeted "peter maximoff is a victim of a boner joke THIS CANT BE FUCKING REAL MARVEL #SaveQuicksilver". Being a stan means holding your characters and actors on a pedestal and you are in disbelief that something like this could happen to them. These tweets show how SOME fans establish being a stan through their interactions using the hashtag on Twitter. Fans are also seen saying things about other fan bases in order to prove that the hashtag will work, and he will be brought back into the MCU. For example, @TheTechJacket states

"A lot of the same people saying #SaveQuicksilver is a waste of time, useless and sad are the same people who supported #/ReleaseTheSnyderCut and #/SaveDaredevil. I support all of these, and I can easily say all these cases are the same, doesn't take a genius to figure that out"

This tweet shows how fans are coming together and using other fandoms hashtags to prove that this movement should be supported by everyone. Another user @FedoraGoat_ states, "I mean if we're exploring the multiverse... I say don't give up hope. Dr Who taught me we can have the same actor play multiple people. They even went to a parallel universe and ran into the parallel version of a companion. 3rd time's a charm? #SaveQuicksilver"

This shows that this fan is a transmedia everyfan because they're comparing what has happened in WandaVision to something that has happened in Dr. Who, showing that they are a fan of multiple forms of media. They also use the different knowledge they have from this series to assist with this. This shows that these fans are expressing their identities by interacting through their different fandom channels and enacting that in the MCU fandom. Fans also brought up other characters within the MCU to help compare what is being said with this hashtag. A lot of the fans tweeting the hashtag are fans of the original FOX X-Men films, and some of the current MCU fans do not understand why fans are expressing so much through this hashtag. So, some give other comparisons to help out with the understanding of this expression. User @molykica tweeted,

"For non-xmen fans, imagine if in the new spider-man movie they brought in Tobey Maguire, had him act like Peter Parker from another universe for half the movie, then revealed he was a mindcontrolled loser named Doug Dicker, would you feel amused or disrespected?? #SaveQuicksilver"

This user is essentially "fansplaining" to other fans. This means that they are speaking down to the new fans as a way of demonstrating one's own superiority in the fandom space. This tweet shows off how this fan is expressing their identity as someone who uses other media to show that what happened to Quicksilver should make other people mad too. Essentially, this fan is stating things like "imagine if this happened to your favorite character, how upset would you be", by stating this, this fan is expressing they are a mega fan because they are trying to get other people to feel for them. This theme is important for this study because being a stan assists with incorporating fan identity and how fans express that identity. When someone acts as a stan, they are expressing their love for a certain character, actor, or movie. Thus, they are expressing a fan identity.

Being an Anti

The opposite of being a "stan" is being an anti, or an anti-fan (Gray, 2003; Hills, 2007). Basically, these antis go out of their way to discuss how they do not like a certain actor, character, or movie. These users express their fan identity through tweeting negative comments or essentially stating how strongly they dislike something that had happened in *WandaVision*. Many users stated how they thought the hashtag was a bad idea and that it should not be used and fans should just give it a rest. They post these negative comments and associate them with a hashtag that was created for a positive purpose. However, these anti-fans are still fans of the MCU and of *WandaVision* and of Quicksilver even, but they act as anti-fans because they believe that what happened to the character in *WandaVision* was supposed to happen. Essentially, the fans are acting like anti-fan fans. So, they are actually an anti-fan of the fans but are still fans of the MCU and *WandaVision* and Quicksilver. User @povevan tweeted: "Y'all the type of people that the studio hates. They put out nothing but bangers yet y'all find something to

be mad about and claim they "waste talent" How do you know 100% that they aren't bringing either QS back? Babies /c #SaveQuicksilver". This fan is not an anti of WandaVision or of the MCU, but an anti of the fans making this hashtag trend. They are explaining that they do not appreciate other fans making this hashtag because the fans do not know if Quicksilver is done with the MCU, rather they think the MCU has plans to bring Quicksilver back and that everyone needs to stop trying to bring him back.

Another form of being an anti reigns true in tweets about how people should not want the *X-Men*'s version of Quicksilver to come back because the *X-Men* movies were not actually good movies. User @phantom_thieves explains, "#SaveQuicksilver y'all give the fox x-men movies way too much credit lol". Essentially, this shows that this user is being an anti because they are stating that the fans think too highly of the *X-Men* films. While they are not inherently stating that they are an anti-fan, they are still explaining that they dislike what members of their fanbase are doing, and the tone of the tweet indicates that they are not happy with what has happened in previous *X-Men* movies.

Other users just do not think the hashtag is even worth the try. Essentially, as much as the fans love the character, they think the hashtag is not going to do anything and to just let the character be done. User @anahtheme states "#SaveQuicksilver is trending and im like all for pietro recognition but not like this". Essentially, this user agrees with the love and recognition for the character, but does not think it should be expressed in this way. Thus, making them an anti because they do not follow what the other fans are stating.

After investigating how fans express their fan identities, there had to be an examination of how those fan identities turned into hierarchical identities, and how some of the themes may have overlapped in some way, and how some may not have. Some of the fans who expressed

hierarchical identities showed some of the same tactics that were exposed in regular fan identifications. This examination established overarching themes of parasocial relationships, theorizing, and anger. Each of these themes assisted in finding just how hierarchical identities were expressed by using the hashtag.

Parasocial Relationships

While these tweets were trending, I found expressions of parasocial relationships. This concept reigns in with fans feeling a sense of ownership over the character Pietro. Some of the tweets explained how fans were upset because Evan Peters was their Quicksilver and they felt robbed of having that taken away from them. User @Queen_MistyLane stated:

"Listen, I'm so tired of seeing all the put-downs Evan has endured throughout his career. It is not fair that you take advantage of a great actor, with incredible potential, lie to him, humiliate him and reduce him to a boner joke. #SaveQuicksilver"

By stating this, this fan explains how they feel one of their favorite actors was robbed from this role. They show their ownership and parasocial connection to the actor by saying phrases like "take advantage of a great actor" and "I'm so tired of seeing all the put-downs". These phrases show the ownership this user feels towards Evan Peters and how upset they are that he is not getting the recognition they think he deserves. Fans also expressed their anger and frustrations about the character Peter being wasted, when, in their eyes, he had so much potential to succeed in the MCU. User @RelaretheDruid stated:

"Imagine how mad people would be if they wasted Wanda like they did Peter #SaveQuicksilver"

This fan is stating how they feel that Peter was wasted in the MCU, and their ownership of Quicksilver is coming out because they feel a different connection to the character. Showing they are obsessed with this character and that they feel it was wasted, makes the fans feel as

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though they have a hierarchy to other fans. It is because of this, that a fan has a hierarchical identity. Most of the fans who share these feelings, state mainly how they loved Evan Peters' rendition of the character and they loved how great he portrayed the character in the Fox movies, and that that portrayal deserves to be brought into the MCU. Twitter user @PhantomatoYT states: "I don't care if the story to get him I to the MCU is stupid I want Evan Peters quicksilver damn it. He's one of the best characters in the Fox movies. #SaveQuicksilver." This post explains how they do not even care if the story itself is not good, they just want the character in the MCU because he is one of the best characters in the FOX movies. The exact explanation that is shown here, gives a more in-depth analysis of how this fan wants the character to come back and to be a part of the MCU. Since this fan wants the character back in the MCU, they are establishing that they have that parasocial relationship with the character. It shows they feel they know this character, and they would allow for anything to happen within the MCU if that means the character gets to come back.

Another interesting establishment of parasocial relationships is how the fans discussed the differences in their ownerships and their parasocial relationships with both Pietro, portrayed by Aaron Taylor-Johnson, and Peter, played by Evan Peters. Some fans mention that they want Pietro to come back, and others mention that they want Peter to come back. The fans' hierarchical identities come through when they want either Pietro or Peter to come back. There are a lot of different fans who discuss wanting Aaron Taylor-Johnson's return. They explain how they feel that he was a better Quicksilver than Evan Peters. Twitter user @LiamtheCross stated: "#SaveQuicksilver only with Aaron Taylor-Johnson as MCU Quicksilver. I mean no disrespect at all to Evan Peters, it's just unfortunately for him I want as much of the Fox X-Men franchise away from the MCU as possible." This fan does not necessarily show a dislike for Evan Peters,

but is stating that they would rather have Aaron-Taylor Johnson back in his place. They have that ownership and that parasocial relationship towards this actor and this character, and that shows how they feel to have a more hierarchical identity. Another user @KingNiinetalez states: "Yes please. But only if it's Aaron. It didn't feel fair that Fox basically cucked him out of getting to play a great character in multiple movies. #SaveQuicksilver." Essentially, they feel that Aaron should be the one to be brought back to MCU, because they feel it is not fair that he did not get his shot. Some of the tweets though, are not so nice. User @Gregobi89 states: "All the Fox Crap-Men fans trying to use the #SaveQuicksilver hashtag for Evan Peters, when really it's purpose should be to revive Aaron Taylor Johnson in Doctor Strange 2." Using a term like "Fox Crap-Men" definitely shows that they want to keep the ownership of Quicksilver strictly to the MCU version, and not to the FOX version, because they feel he did a better job and that he should stick in the MCU.

However, some fans stated they would like the return of Quicksilver to go to either actor and not a specific one, thus stating they have ownership and a parasocial relationship more for the character rather than the actor, and their portrayal of the character. Twitter user @Raf_010903 states: "#SaveQuicksilver Marvel must know how much money Evan Peters or even Aaron Taylor Johnson as quicksilver would make now, like come on make Ralph Bohner undercover X-Men Peter Maximoff." In this tweet, this fan is stating how they feel that bringing back either character into the MCU would allow the company to make money. This shows how they have an ownership of this character and these actors and how their parasocial relationships towards them can assist in the company making money and expanding with the franchise. This assists with their hierarchical identity because they feel their ownership and their want for the character is assisting with the commodification of the character and of the MCU.

Theorizing

Within these tweets, fans show their hierarchical identities by posting theories along with the hashtags. These are theories about how the MCU may bring Quicksilver back. Fans run theories along the lines of a secret agent, or that follow along with the newest MCU movie, *Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness*. The film has since premiered and there was no sign of Quicksilver, but back in 2021, fans had many theories that he may return in this film, and it may be the version of Quicksilver that was brought in *WandaVision.* These theories demonstrate how hierarchical identities operate because fans establish that they can use their knowledge of the MCU to attempt to bring back the beloved character. Twitter user @RaeDeAnneR states:

> After Age of Ultron came out, I thought of at least 5 ways in existing MCU canon that they could #SaveQuicksilver. Y'all did not want to accept Pietro's fate. At this point? I could probably think of 5 more. I'm just saying they could make it happen.

By stating that they could think of at least five ways the MCU could have saved Quicksilver, they are stating that their knowledge makes them a stronger fan and have a stronger hierarchical identity because they can use their knowledge to think of ways to make the character return. User @perhapsitsem explains that the character could be brought up in the upcoming MCU film: "#SaveQuicksilver multiverse of madness is supposed to be a horror movie so wouldn't bringing atj's pietro back from the dead fit right in w that." This user is using theories they have heard about the upcoming film and bringing in ways the character can be used in the upcoming film. Some of the fans use these theories to give hope to other fans. To not give up on the character not returning to the MCU. Twitter user @dmdunnwriter explains:

> Y'all are not wrong to want to #SaveQuicksilver but there's a whole multiverse out there. Maybe it's an Inception-layered deception. Perhaps Agatha kidnapped Fox's Quicksilver

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from the multiverse then made him pretend he didn't have powers and called him Bohner.

It's on brand.

By showing these theories and giving hope to other fans, this user is establishing the hierarchical identity because they are the one who might know more about the character and about the show. Theorizing also includes setting reminders about events that have happened in WandaVision and how that can still present hope for the return of the character. For example, many fans state how Agent Jimmy Woo? Mentioned there was someone in witness protection who they lost contact with. Many of the fans discussed this in the tweets. For example, @tonygoldmark tweeted:

I'd like to point out to everyone tweeting #SaveQuicksilver that Jimmy mentioned someone in Westview was in Witness Protection, presumably using a fake name, but he never actually said who. And Multiverse of Madness WILL contain, y'know, a multiverse. Just sayin'.

In this tweet, the user never specifically states that they think Quicksilver is the person in witness protection, but the context clues they use insinuates that they are talking about Quicksilver. This tweet itself shows a hierarchy identity because the user is using a fact that is from the show and that fans need to remember that when using the hashtag.

Anger

The last theme that shows hierarchical identities is anger. This means that fans, or anti-fans, demonstrate their hierarchical identity by showing their anger for other fans using the hashtag. Essentially, they believe it is not going to work, and that makes them a stronger fan. However, the version of hierarchical identity that is out on display is that these fans or anti-fans think they are better than other fans and want them to stop posting about this hashtag, because they believe that the hashtag is either dumb, or it will not work and it is pointless to use it. I use

the term anti-fan lightly, as these fans may be fans of Quicksilver and of WandaVision, but they may not be a fan of what the MCU fandom are doing to get the character back. Twitter user @TheirUsernameIs explains how they feel the hashtag is dumb:

> I'm sorry but this #SaveQuicksilver is stupid. You really want Marvel's first introduction to the X-Men to be the Fox versions? Really? Also, it was a TV Show on a streaming service, they were never going to introduce the huge multiverse concept there!

This fan is not necessarily an anti-fan, but they are stating that the hashtag is a waste because Marvel should not introduce the X-Men into the MCU this way. They also are stating how they do not support the FOX version of the X-Men and that those characters should not be introduced this way. This fan is showing a hierarchical identity because they are showing how they are a stronger fan since they do not want these characters to be brought into the MCU.

Some fans also bring in other fandoms to show their anger and show their hierarchical identity. Essentially, these fans are not happy that people are using the hashtag, and they bring up situations that have happened in other fandoms to compare and show how using the hashtag is not going to work. This anger from the fans establishes a hierarchy because they feel sharing their anger and comparing it to other situations validates their arguments as to why the hashtag will not work. For example, Twitter user @vicrulren explains how a similar thing happening in the Star Wars franchise and it failed: "the #SaveQuicksilver tag is so embarrassing. have u learned nothing from ben solo stans. Embarrassing." Bringing up this situation that happened in the Star Wars fandom gives this fan a hierarchical identity because they are showing how angry they are this is happening again when it happened to them in a different fandom.

After examining this set of tweets, overarching themes were found to assist with answering the research questions. The themes of *being a stan* and *being an anti*, assisted with

answering the first research question because they assisted with embracing just how fans

established their identities by using #SaveQuicksilver. The themes of *parasocial relationships*,

theorizing, and *anger* assisted with answering the second research question by showing how fans

express a hierarchical identity.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

In fan studies, fans who express hierarchies usually show some form of elitism (Dunlap & Wolf, 2010), which then enables fans to start doing hierarchical activities such as gatekeeping. There are not a lot of studies on gatekeeping or hierarchies in general, and while this study may not fully show acts of gatekeeping, it does offer an insight into how fans really establish a hierarchical identity based on simple words they are saying with each other. Using fan interactions assists with this because fans embark in discussions with one another by use of #SaveQuicksilver and it causes an array of explorations and observations into fan interactions and fan identity expressions. Being a stan revolves around having support and acting as a group to ensure that Quicksilver is brought back after the hashtag begins to start trending. Online fan communities, or stan communities, like the MCU fandom engage in participatory cultures. This is a "culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one's creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices" (Jenkins et al., 2007, p.3). This culture is strong in showing support for one another and being a stan is that. However, the participatory culture can also fit in with what defines someone having a hierarchical identity. Participatory culture is an act of some informal mentorship meaning that some fans may look up to other fans who know more information and facts than they do as fans. This would make those hierarchical fans more experienced in being a fan of the MCU.

A large portion of fan studies is the fan/producer relationship that is explored through that fandom. In this study, the parasocial relationship the fans have with Quicksilver plays a large role in offering insight to fan studies. Parasocial relationships are when fans feel a sense of ownership over a specific character and express that ownership through use of certain words or

phrases. If this parasocial relationships is ruined in any way, the fans let the producers know by tweets associated with #SaveQuicksilver. The producers make the content for the fans, thus the relationship between the fans and the producers is important for fan studies because the fans help keep the content up and running. Since a parasocial relationship is between fans and a character, it is, in away, between fans and the producers/creators of the character. Since something happened to the character Quicksilver, and it upset fans, it upset the relationship between the fans and the producers. This offers insight into fan studies because the relationship and how each party in the relationship acts is crucial to fan identities and fan studies.

Fans expressed their fan identity through the use of being a stan and being an anti. These are popular terms used in a lot of online fan communities, and follow this study promptly. The terms are similar to Busse's (2013) concept of all fans having a certain identity: mega fan, anti-fan, and everyfan. The themes pertaining to this research question act as the identities of the fans. By looking at the conversations and interactions done on Twitter by fans, the establishment of each of the identities was created. There is no key explanation of who is actually a stand and who is not, but by examining the tweets using the hashtag, there is a wide variety of experimentation between being a fan and not being a fan. When a fan is considered a stan, they look to their peers to ensure they are not alone in their fandom. However, being an anti or an anti-fan, differs. Antis do not look to the cohesiveness of other fans to assist in making their "arguments" or their dislike for certain events or characters. They typically enjoy keeping their arguments true and not listening to what others say.

When it comes to hierarchies, the fans used a lot of interacting to give this expression a highlight. Themes of anger, therorizing, and ownership were established after examining tweets. To express a hierarchical identity, fans showed feelings of anger towards Pietro's false

introduction. This anger was also partnered with an expression of knowledge about Wanda and about the MCU in general. With this knowledge, the fans show that they know more, therefore they are a better fan than others, and they deserve to be angry about this false introduction. Hierarchical identities also reign true with feelings of ownership. The fans feel they own the character and to them, this makes them a stronger fan. Lastly, the fans who make up theories for the character's return also have strong hierarchical identities because they are the ones with knowledge and creating these theories based on the knowledge. Thus, causing them to be a stronger fan.

The present study holds methodological, theoretical, and contextual implications. Methodologically these findings contribute to understandings of fan interactions. Theoretically, these findings offer insight in just how fan studies work, and how fandoms work within those studies. Contextually, these findings show the understandings of identities of the fans, and how these identities are affected by the relationships they share with the producers.

This study offers insight in future fan studies from a methodological standpoint in a multitude of ways. First, previous fan studies have little to no interaction between fans in an online setting. Most of the studies used are examining online forums or blog posts, but never really investigate actual fan interaction in online spaces such as Twitter. By using Twitter as the main social networking site, this study allows readers to see the engagement level/interaction level between fans in an easier way. Twitter's hashtag tool is strong in a sense of enabling more interactions and allowing easier access to these interactions. The interactions done on Twitter are broad and at times long and go on for a lot of threads, but the threads are helpful for finding long and in-depth interactions to see the expression of fan identities. There are so many different interactions and different topics discussed on Twitter, and using this site and seeing these

different interactions, is crucial to fan studies because it shows the importance of fan

interactions. Using the MCU as the model for this study is crucial for critical analyses. The MCU

is one of the largest media companies in the world and is a cultural phenomenon with a large

fandom. As mentioned in the literature review, there is little to no research on the MCU, let alone

the MCU fandom. Thus, this study should act as a gateway into that. The MCU is filled with

many different forms of fandoms because it had subcultures within it. Choosing *WandaVision* as

the focus is important to fan studies because the popularity of the series brought many new fans

into the fandom and sparked a form of hierarchical identities with old fans. This series also

brought in a character from a different movie universe, thus bringing in fans from that universe

into the MCU as well. Using Quicksilver's false introduction offers insight to fan studies because

it brings fans from different fandoms together to interact on Twitter and express their identities.

All research studies have limitations and this one is no different. There are two

limitations to this research study: using only Twitter to find data and using the specific MCU

controversy. While there are many alleyways for interactions to happen on Twitter, it would be

beneficial to study fan comments on other social networking sites like Reddit or Tumblr. These

sites use message boards and have more obvious and direct threads as opposed to Twitter.

Facebook is another useful platform because there is an option to create Facebook groups where

people talk and post about specific things. This makes the engagement between the fans easier

and more prominent. The choice to focus on the narrative plot about the controversy of Pietro

being falsely introduced acts as another limitation. The Marvel Cinematic Universe is very large

and there are many different types of film and television series. As such, there are many different

controversies that happen within texts and across texts that upset the fans. Choosing just Pietro's

false introduction limits the amount of research and fan interaction. However, this choice was

useful because it had a large amount of fan engagement and interaction online, and touched on how embarking in transmedia usage can really affect fan studies.

Future research could expand upon how representations of fan identities are established throughout the MCU. Fan identities typically reign from anti-fan, mega-fan, and transmedia fans, but there are still identifying factors that come into play. Such as the intersections of race, class, gender, and sex. These identities resonate strongly with fans, and if they are not properly represented within their favorite media this could cause backlash from fans. A study showing how the MCU fails to share certain representations is strong. The MCU is owned by one of the largest media companies in the world. Thus, making it a crucial part of culture and of cultural studies. This study itself is a textual analysis of the MCU and how the fans interact, but to make this more of a critical media analysis, looking at misrepresentations can offer a stepping stone for just that. Another direction that could be beneficial to a study similar to this one would be to examine the commodification of the MCU and how that causes fans to react to this media.

Conclusion

The MCU has a strong fandom community, and the lack of the research surrounding this fandom shows how important a study like this one is. After examining how fans of the MCU work towards their establishment of their identity, the fans identities of being either a stan or an anti came to fruition. These are two terms that exist in the fan community and finding how fans fit under the identities of these two terms assists with this study because it is important to see how fans enact on their specific identities and if these expressions affect the way fans interact with one another. If one fan enacts a stan type of identity, then that is expressed within their interactions with other fans, and this can affect the way that fan may be perceived by the rest of the fandom. The same thing reigns true when it comes to being an anti. These interactions

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between fans and the way fans use the hashtag to interact are important to fan studies because it shows how fans need to act as a collective unit to have success within their fandom.

Fandoms would not be fandoms without the producers and having a sense of a positive fan and producer relationship is important for a successful fan study. When the producers make decisions that make the fans mad, this can affect how the fans decide to engage in the media the producers are making. By the fans expressing they are not happy with the decision of Quicksilver's false introduction, they are also expressing their anger with the producers for not engaging in what the fans wanted to happen. Each of these expressions of the fans identities offer insight into a successful fandom study.

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    building beyond capitalism. *Film Criticism*, *42*(3).

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APPENDIX: TWEETS REFERENCED IN ANALYSIS

[@anahthema], (2021, March 10). *#SaveQuicksilver is trending and im like all for the pietro recognition but not like this*[Tweet]. Twitter

[@dirtylunchboi], (2021, March 10). *normally i don't care that much about this sort of thing but quicksilver is actually one of my favorite characters*[Tweet]. Twitter.

[@dmdunnwriter], (2021, March 10). *Y'all are not wrong to want to #SaveQuicksilver but there's a whole multiverse out there. Maybe it's an Inception-layered deception*[Tweet]. Twitter.

[@ExeQrey], (2021, March 10). *#SaveQuicksilver bring em back please…they're my emotional support character*[Tweet]. Twitter.

[@FedoraGoat_], (2021, March 10). *I mean if we're exploring the multiverse... I say don't give up hope. Dr Who taught me we can have*[Tweet]. Twitter.

[@Gregobi89], (2021, March 10). *All the Fox Crap-Men fans trying to use the #SaveQuicksilver hashtag for Evan Peters, when really it's purpose should be*[Tweet]. Twitter.

[@KingNiinetalez], (2021, March 10). *Yes please. But only if it's Aaron. It didn't feel fair that Fox basically cucked him out of getting to play*[Tweet]. Twitter.

[@LiamtheCross], (2021, March 10). *#SaveQuicksilver only with Aaron Taylor-Johnson as MCU Quicksilver. I mean no disrespect at all to Evan Peters, it's just unfortunately*[Tweet]. Twitter.

[@molykica], (2021, March 10). *For non-xmen fans, imagine if in the new spider-man movie they brought in Tobey Maguire, had him act like Peter*[Tweet]. Twitter.

[@moonymaximoff], (2021, March 10). *Peter maximoff is a victim of a boner joke THIS CANT BE FUCKING REAL MARVEL #SaveQuicksilver*[Tweet]. Twitter.

[@monnymaximoff], (2021, March 10). *we deserved better, evan deserved better and PETER deserved better. anyways #SaveQuicksilver*[Tweet]. Twitter.

[@perhapsitsem], (2021, March 10). *#SaveQuicksilver multiverse of madness is supposed to be a horror movie so wouldn't bringing atj's pietro back from the dead*[Tweet]. Twitter.

[@PhantomatoYT], (2021, March 10). *I don't care if the story to get him I to the MCU is stupid I want Evan Peters quicksilver*[Tweet]. Twitter.

[@phantom_thieves], (2021, March 10). *#SaveQuicksilver y'all give the x-men movies way too much credit lol*[Tweet]. Twitter.

[@povevan], (2021, March 10). *Y'all the type of people that the studio hates. They put out nothing but bangers yet y'all find something to*[Tweet]. Twitter.

[@Queen_MistyLane], (2021, March 10). *Listen, I'm so tired of seeing all the put-downs Evan has endured throughout his career. It is not fair that*[Tweet]. Twitter.

[@RaeDeAnneR], (2021, March 10). *After Age of Ultron came out, I thought of at least 5 ways in existing MCU canon that they could*[Tweet]. Twitter.

[@Raf_010903], (2021, March 10). *#SaveQuicksilver Marvel must know how much money Evan Peters or even Aaron Taylor Johnson as quicksilver would make now, like come on make*[Tweet}. Twitter.

[@RelaretheDruid], (2021, March 10). *Imagine how mad people would be if they wasted Wanda like they did Peter #SaveQuicksilver*[Tweet]. Twitter.

[@TheirUsernameIs], (2021, March 10). *I'm sorry but this #SaveQuicksilver is stupid. You really want Marvel's first introduction to the X-Men to be the Fox*[Tweet]. Twitter.

[@TheTechJacket], (2021, March 10). *A lot of the same people saying #SaveQuicksilver is a waste of time, useless and sad are the same people*[Tweet]. Twitter.

[@tonygoldmark], (2021, March 10). *I'd like to point out to everyone tweeting #SaveQuicksilver that Jimmy mentioned someone in Westview was in Witness Protection, presumably*[Tweet]. Twitter.

[@vicrulen], (2021, March 10). *the #SaveQuicksilver tag is so embarrassing. have u learned nothing from ben solo stans. embarrassing*[Tweet]. Twitter.