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Avengers Disassemble!

How Varying Views on Public Administration Dismantled the Avengers in the Marvel
Cinematic Universe

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the
Department of Public Policy and Administration
West Chester University
West Chester, Pennsylvania

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of
Doctor of Public Administration

By
Tynslei M. Spence-Mitchell

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Dedication

This research is dedicated to the Black and Brown girls who love comic books. Continue to see yourselves in other worlds while you develop a space for yourself in this one.

This work is also dedicated to Chadwick A. Boseman.

Acknowledgments

“If there is anything you want to do in life, you need devotion.”

-*Devotion*, Earth Wind and Fire (1974)

I ended up writing my dissertation in the midst of a global pandemic, which compounded the already stressful process. During that time, I was fortunate to have the support of my mentors, colleagues, family, and friends. I would first like to thank the members of my committee: Dr. Kristin Crossney, the leader of the DPA department and the first person that welcomed me to West Chester University upon my acceptance to the program; Dr. Mark Davis, who taught about the subject of governance in a manner that I both understood and enjoyed. Because of him, I now see it everywhere. Last but most definitely not least, I would like to thank Dr. Michelle Wade, who has served as the mentor I desperately needed throughout this program in addition to my dissertation advisor. All three have been supporters of my research on social equity throughout the program and have encouraged my creativity during my study of public administration. Special acknowledgments to the entire DPA department faculty and staff for often being understanding and encouraging, especially Dr. Jeremy Phillips and Heather MacQueen.

This dissertation is my contribution to the field and my life experience permeates throughout each page. Thank you, Dad, for encouraging me to read as a child. Thank you, Mom, for allowing me to spend my allowance on Archie Comics growing up, buying them for me when I was short, and saving the comic section of the Star-Ledger for me until I was well into college. Thank you, Lisa, for letting me read your X-MEN, Green Lantern, and other superhero comic books that Mr. Fargo gave you when we lived in Orange. *My love for superhero comics comes from the fact that you do.* Thank you to my brother Derrick, sister Tyriesa, and niece Amani Solé, for your thoughtful conversations, and encouraging me to write when I could not. Last but not least, Terrence, thank you for supporting me during this process, whether watching Marvel movies with me while I analyzed each film, or making me tea while I wrote at all hours of the night.

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I wrote a dissertation in a whole pandemic y’all.

Abstract

Since the inception of the discipline, public administration theorists and scholars have disputed how much, or how little, politics should be involved in public administration. Woodrow Wilson believed that politics and administration should be separate, while Dwight Waldo believed that it is government that should dictate administration, as that builds efficacy, efficiency and measurable outcomes.

Like scholars of the discipline, The Avengers (a fictitious group of superheroes) also could not agree on if administration should be governed with or without political guidance and find themselves at the forefront of a governance dispute regarding their management in the film, *Captain America: Civil War*, which eventually causes the group to disband. In this study, I conduct a qualitative Foucauldian discourse analysis to argue that the Sokovia Accords—the international regulation that directs how the Avengers should intervene in future conflicts—are proposed in the film to centralize Avengers governance to the authority of the United Nations, promote social equity, and reestablish accountability in a network. Using key concepts and frameworks of public administration, I rationalize that the Sokovia Accords not only create a principal-agent problem with its inability to incentivize specific Avengers into compliance but highlight Tony Stark (Iron Man) Steve Rogers's (Captain America) varying approaches to public administration, as explained by the traditions of public administration (Hamiltonian, Jeffersonian, Madisonian, and Wilsonian).

This study can serve as consideration for public administrators on how to ensure that public private partnerships can sustain each other in a collaboration, when working with nonstate agents.

Keywords: *principal-agent theory, politics-administration dichotomy, public administration, governance, collaborative governance, Marvel Cinematic Universe*

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Throughout history, there have been many examples where works of fiction have influenced a government response to existing conditions, in hopes to better serve the public. In 1906, author Upton Sinclair released *The Jungle*, a fictional novel that details the abuse and exploitation that an immigrant family faces while living in early 20th century Chicago. While the book chronicles each downturn that affects the protagonist's life and those around him, at the time of release, readers most notably remember the detail in which Sinclair described the Chicago meatpacking industry. As the book grew in popularity, the unsanitary conditions depicted led to the passage of the Pure Food and Drug Act and the Meat Inspection Act within weeks of its release (Barkan, 1985; Kantor, 1976). While Sinclair wrote the book to encourage people toward socialism, the three pages that detailed the conditions of the meatpacking industry were enough to encourage federal regulation (Barkan, 1985).

Another example of how fiction has influenced government responses has occurred in recent years within the emergency management field. Books, movies, and television shows like *World War Z*, *Train to Busan*, and *The Walking Dead* contribute to the public adoration and consumption of zombies in media. As a result, The Center for Disease Control ("CDC") once created a social media campaign titled "Preparedness 101: Zombie Apocalypse," with the objective being to teach the general public emergency preparedness in the event of a disaster, natural or otherwise (Lowe & Hummel, 2014). The campaign provided the public with tools and resources on how to create an emergency kit and evacuation plan in the event of a zombie apocalypse, or an earthquake (Lowe & Hummel, 2014; Khan, 2011). The CDC took things further by creating a graphic novel (similar to the graphic novel, *The Walking Dead*, upon which the television show is based) detailing emergency preparedness planning. This initiative was a

new method to engage the public based on a popular fictional subject and has permitted the CDC to “reach and engage a wide variety of audiences on all hazards preparedness via “zombie preparedness”” (Center for Disease Control, 2021).

Fiction’s influence on government policy extends abroad as well. The film *Jaws* contributed to the Australian government altering their shark wildlife policy. The film, released in 1975, focuses on a singular great white shark that terrorizes a resort until some men are tasked to hunt and kill it. The story develops a narrative that the shark is willfully killing people to prevent them from entering the water, with the only solution for peace being to execute it (Neff, 2015). After three shark encounters near the western Australian coast led to fatalities in 2000, Australian Fisheries Minister Monty House issued an emergency injunction to have the shark killed, completely relaxing all of the existing shark conservation laws in effect (Neff, 2015). House, like many other legislative actors and members of the public, believed that like in *Jaws*, there was only *one* shark that could have been causing these incidents. While nothing came of the emergency order and no sharks were killed, when three shark attacks occurred again in 2011 withing two months of each other, government officials issued the first ever kill order for the shark responsible (Neff, 2015). The policy was further fleshed out in 2014 to prevent the premature killing of sharks, stating that sharks only pose a threat when in close proximity to people, and that a singular shark may return to an area to harm a person (Neff, 2015). While scientists have confirmed that “not all sharks, even those known to be dangerous, are about to attack just because they are in the immediate area/vicinity where people are present” (Neff, 2015, p. 123), the beliefs that a shark presence is a threat to humans and one shark is the sole cause of all human/shark interactions in a specific body of water are philosophies that come only from the movie, *Jaws*.

Whether literature, film, or other types of media, fictional works have often permitted art to imitate life, as these works have historically served to provide social critiques that highlight the complexities that arise in society (Hicks, 1952). Comic books are another work of literature that have historically provided readers with social commentary on current affairs in politics and society. In 1941, the first issue of the *Captain America* comic shows the titular character punching Adolf Hitler in the face while dodging gunshots from Nazi soldiers (Kirby & Simon, 1941). As the U.S. was preparing to enter WWII, this image could be interpreted by its readers as a predictor of what the impact of U.S. engagement in the war could and would be. Similarly, Stan Lee based the entire concept of the *X-Men* comics on the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s to address racial injustice in America. The two adversarial leaders of mutants, Professor X and Magneto, were based on public opinions of civil rights activists Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X (Darowski, 2011).¹ Inspired by reality, both Marvel comics and its subsequent film universe have the opportunity to provide guidance to the complex challenges faced in our reality.

Whether comic books, books, or television, fiction can serve as an educational resource for government agencies and leaders, as they have the ability to provide perspective on past government mistakes or even analyze fictional scenarios to assess if there are service gaps in current policy. Moreover, Callahan, Whitener, and Sandlin (2007) wrote that stories from popular culture (referenced in the article as popular culture artifacts or *PCA*), serve as effective tools for learning because they teach individuals how to draw conclusions based on phenomena. The belief is that

¹ According to Joseph J. Darowski (2011), direct parallels have been drawn between Professor X and Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr (both advocate for peace between the races) and Magneto and Malcolm X (who have more separatist views as it relates to interracial interactions) because the civil rights leaders were the inspiration for those characters respectively.

if people are able to apply specific theories to PCA, then they are able to demonstrate those same theories in everyday contexts (Callahan et al., 2007). This dissertation intends to apply a popular cultural reference to that of public administration.

For over one hundred and thirty years, public administration scholars have tried to establish what would be the appropriate amount of political authority in government administration. Some scholars believe that politics and administration should be separate to ensure that each remains accountable to the other (White, 1926/2012; Wilson, 1887/2012). The belief here is that the government can maximize its efficiency if it were to operate like a business and without the restraints of bureaucracy. In the alternative, other scholars believe that politics *should* dictate administration because decision-making and implementation are causal actions (Appleby, 1945/2012; Waldo, 1952). These scholars believe that government should not be operated as if it is a business because it is not, and such an approach to administration is fragmented. The public sector and its leaders often struggle to find the balance between these two positions, if one exists at all, when deciding upon the best approach to solve complex issues. This struggle is further complicated in collaborate partnerships with the private and nonprofit sector.

This dissertation examines both approaches in the context of the film, *Captain America: Civil War* (hereafter “*Civil War*”). The film was released on May 6, 2016 in the U.S., and grossed \$408,084,349 domestically and \$1,153,304,495 internationally (Greenspan, 2019). It is the seventh film in the series of movies based on characters from Marvel comics, which is popularly referred to as the Marvel Cinematic Universe (hereafter “MCU”). Though the title suggests that the film is about the titular character, Captain America, the film chronicles

the interpersonal relationships and dynamics of the Avengers, a fictional collaborative taskforce comprised of several notable heroes.

The events that take place in *Civil War* are a culmination of multiple unresolved conflicts from preceding MCU films. However, the main storyline of the film focuses on the implementation of the Sokovia Accords (hereafter “Accords”), an international policy introduced by the United Nations (hereafter “U.N.”) to oversee and regulate the intervention of the Avengers during times of crisis. Because the Avengers could not unanimously agree on how involved government agencies should be in their oversight, the majority of the film details the responses of team members as they openly support or oppose this new condition. Ultimately, the impasse contributes to a breakdown of the team and causes several current members to resign from the group.

The public administration conflict presented in the film greatly relates to the politics-administration dichotomy that has created a conundrum in the field since its inception. Utilizing a Foucauldian discourse analysis, (hereafter “FDA”), the objective of this dissertation is to analyze how challenges in public administration ultimately contributes to several members of the Avengers divesting from the group. *Civil War* is arguably one of the most important and far-reaching films in the MCU because this film affects all subsequent films by altering the membership and administration of the group. That said, this dissertation is about the challenges that occur for public administrators and public managers when competing philosophies disagree on the role of politics in public administration.

This dissertation seeks to specifically answer the following question: in the film, *Civil War*, how did the Accords contribute to the breakdown of the collaborative partnership between the Avengers and the public sector? A study of this kind is significant and applicable to modern

challenges that occur in public administration. While some collaborations with the public and private sector are formal and include a binding contract and clear-cut guidelines, other collaborations are informal and leave its structuring to the parties to develop while they are pooling resources to solve a specific problem. In some instances, informal collaborations work best to serve an immediate need, but sometimes they do not, and more define guidelines are necessary to prevent any form of obscurity. Further reading of this dissertation will determine that the Accords, while necessary, are not in the best interest of this collaboration, as it does not account for existing trust violations in the collaboration, does not incentivize the Avengers to participate in the collaboration, and neglects the varying views on the most appropriate approach to public administration held by members of the Avengers. By analyzing a popular film where a collaborative effort has gone awry, the results will provide a better understanding to government agencies and stakeholders on how to manage the rules (both formal and informal) and expectations that occur in a collaborative network.

Research Questions

As mentioned, Marvel comic books and films are and have historically been social critiques, and critiques possess a very distinct intentionality and awareness of the language used therein. Works that provide commentary not only criticize power dynamics, but also detail the societal implications of this dynamic through discourse (Bové, 1995). Bové (1995) states that when applying Foucauldian discourse analysis, the researcher should ask questions about how the discourse functions and its effects on society at large. I developed the following questions to address in my analysis of the Accords:

1. Why were the Accords suggested for the Avengers' administration?
 - 1.1 How did the original collaboration with S.H.I.E.L.D. fail?
 - 1.2 How did the Accords seek to establish accountability between stakeholders and the Avengers?

2. In what way did the Accords create a principal-agent problem?
3. How do the traditions of public administration affect both Tony Stark's ("Iron Man") and Steve Rogers' ("Captain America") responses to the public sector when proposed with the Accords?
4. What does Steve Rogers' ("Captain America") response to the Accords say about the importance of trust in network governance?

Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter Two is split into two sections. The first section provides a review of the literature on the politics-administration dichotomy, governance, federalism, traditions of public administration, collaborative governance, agency theory, rational choice theory and Maslow's hierarchy of needs, with an emphasis on how these concepts are applied within this dissertation. The second half of the chapter provides the history of the Avengers in Marvel Comics, identifies the characters that comprise the Avengers in the MCU, and synthesizes events that have affected the members of the group in the films leading up to *Civil War*. This is done to give those without knowledge of the MCU timeline an understanding of events that affect the discourse that occurs in *Civil War*, though they do not occur in this specific film. This section also discusses how several theories from the first half of the chapter are prevalent in the administration of the Avengers in the MCU to further assist with the understanding of how the collaboration has functioned leading up to *Civil War*.

Chapter Three introduces the qualitative methodological approach used in this study and the research questions. This study employs a Foucauldian discourse analysis ("FDA"), which is a research method that is most beneficial when studying cultural and political narratives based on unequal power structures (Diaz-Bone et al., 2008; Waitt, 2008). This chapter provides definitions on discourse analysis as well as FDA and introduces the research questions to be answered in

this dissertation. The chapter also details the methods used to collect and analyze data, as well as the limitations of this study.

Chapter Four has seven sections that contribute to the analysis of the film. In addition to summarizing the film, this section also recounts why the Accords are issued and how they are expected to serve as a performance management tool for Avengers oversight. This chapter also examines the principal-agent problem that the Accords create, and also identifies the contrasting approaches of public administration of Steve Rogers (Captain America) and Tony Stark (Iron Man) via an analysis of the administrative traditions of the discipline. Stark hopes to lead the Avengers with a Hamiltonian-Wilsonian approach, while Rogers advocates for a Jeffersonian-Madisonian approach to administration. Finally, the chapter concludes with the effects of government mistrust on the collaboration, and how the Accords deepens that mistrust.

Concluding the dissertation, Chapter Five explores the implications of the film, and what guidance the film provides future collaborative relationships with the public sector. This chapter also compares the Accords in the film to other collaborative agreements that exist in this reality. Comparing this document to the failures of the Accords provides global leaders with insight on how to ensure that global governance agreements succeed as intended.

Chapter 2: Prologue (Literature Review)

This literature review has two parts. The first part of the review synthesizes conceptual frameworks and public administration theories that apply to the film. Here, I explore the politics-administration dichotomy, agency theory, governance and public management, and rational choice theory, and Maslow's hierarchy of needs as these themes are illustrated several times throughout the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) and are integral to this film analysis. The second part of this chapter will provide insight on the MCU: the characters, the creation of the Avengers, and highlight public administration theories that occur during the administration of the Avengers. Doing so will illuminate specific dynamics that contribute to the events in *Civil War* from the perspective of public administration.

Foundations of the Complex Relationship Between Politics and Administration

At the inception of the field, public administration theorists like Woodrow Wilson wrote that administration and policy should be two separate concepts and that the politics of the latter should not dictate the efficiency of the former (Wilson, 1887/2012). Wilson believed that administration should be politic neutral to ensure that it meets the needs of the public. His beliefs are rooted in the concept that policymakers and policy enforcers operate independently of each other and are expected to work together, yet neither consults with the other to do their job. His philosophies suggest that the expectation that they would be working together is not practical, and the two should officially separate and should employ more scientific methods like a business to better serve the public and increase efficiency (McCandless & Guy, 2013; Wilson, 1887/2012). Frank Goodnow (1900/2012) expanded on this separation, titling it the *politics-administration dichotomy*. Goodnow found that the relationship between politics and administration is interconnected, but should remain separate to meet intended outcomes. Politics

and administration have two isolated functions, and the expressing authority (politics) should always work in conjunction with the executing authority (public administrators/managers) to maintain the balance in the separation of powers and remain effective (Goodnow, 1900/2012). Leonard White (1926) also advocated for the separation of politics and administration, stating that administrative management should come from public administrators alone (White, 1926/2012). These theorists believed that entrusting administrators to govern separate from politics greatly benefits the public because public officials can rely greatly on a having a specialized *think tank* at their disposal, permitting public administrators who are specialists in their fields to bring their specialized skillset and knowledge of a specific topic to meet public needs (Taylor, 1912/2012).

For Wilson, Goodnow, and White, this approach to governance guarantees that those with administrative authority are able to enforce policies impartially and without the threat of tyranny. At the time, politics could not provide such an assurance as many elected officials exploited their positions for personal gain (Wilson, 1887/2012). These theorists believed that both politics and administration should work together to serve the public, but to effectively do that, they must operate separately. This period, known as the Progressive Era, saw many changes during this time that assisted public administrators with reclaiming and reassigning specific responsibilities from political figures.²

² David Osborne and Ted Gaebler (1992) wrote:

Progressives created civil service systems, with written exams, lockstep pay scales, and protection from arbitrary hiring or dismissal. To keep major construction projects like bridges and tunnels out of the reach of politicians, they created independent public authorities. To limit the power of political bosses, they split up management functions, took appointments to important offices away from mayors and governors, created separately elected clerks, judges, even sheriffs period to keep the administration of public services untainted by the influence of politicians, they created a profession of city managers—

The above philosophies were commonplace until the mid-20th century. Between the New Deal and WWII, scholars of bureaucratic systems believed that public administration and politics needed to work together to prevent things like fascism and Nazi states (Shafritz & Hyde, 2012). Scholars determined that administration needed a guide, and political leadership should serve as that guide to ensure that government continues to serve the public. Paul Appleby (1945/2012) notes that the administration of government responsibilities cannot be managed objectively because “government *is* politics” (p. 125). It cannot be apolitical if its entire purpose is political and based on legislative leadership. Dwight Waldo shared similar sentiments, believing that administration needs to be centralized to government to effectively preserve democracy, finding that politics and administration go together because one helps with the instrumentation of the other (Frederickson et al., 2012; Waldo, 1952). Calling previous public administration ideologies *orthodox*, Waldo wrote that detaching politics from administration is not a practical implementation method. Democratizing administration is only effective when there are not immediate threats to national security, and that world no longer exists (Waldo, 1948/2012).

The administrative state changed during post-WWII America, and the ideologies from both Appleby and Waldo were more applicable to the changing political landscape. As government expansion occurred, varying approaches to governance were explored to meet the needs of the public.

Governance

Governance has been consistently defined and redefined by various scholars. Robert O. Keohane and Joseph Nye define it as the formal or informal processes that guide and restrict group activities (Keohane & Joseph, 2000, as cited in Kettl, 2015). Kirk Emerson, Tina

professionals, insulated from politics, who would run the bureaucracy in an efficient businesslike manner. (p. 13)

Nabatchi, and Stephen Balogh (2012) define it as any aspect of governing in the public or private sector. Elinor Ostrom (1990, as cited in Emerson et al., 2012) defines it as a set of norms that standardize the behavior of both individuals and groups, while Rosemary O’Leary, Lisa Blomgren Bingham, and Catherine Gerard (2006, as cited in Emerson et al., 2012) define governance as the ability to guide and influence decision-making and actions within all sectors (public, private, nonprofit). Mark Bevir (2012) defines governance as the processes undertaken by informal/formal networks, governments, or institutions “through laws, norms, power, or language” (p. 1). Osborne and Gaebler (1992) define governance as the process used to collectively solve problems and meet the needs of society. Paul Firstenberg (2009) defines governances as the signaling policies and decisions that guide both the finances and operations of an organization to meet its organizational objectives in the most effective manner, with *responsible governance* factoring in both accountability and transparency so that these methods maintain and enforce social practices and norms. Cathy Trower (2010) defines governance as:

the distribution of legitimate authority to influence and enact policies and decisions; it defines who has the power, who is in charge, and who is responsible. To govern is to exercise sovereign authority; to make and administer public policy; to exercise its sovereign authority over the organization. Its primary governing roles include setting the direction, ensuring adequate resources, and overseeing the health of the organization. (p. 1)

All of these definitions are true. From these varying definitions, governance can be defined as the process of enforcing the norms, policies, or laws that provide oversight to institution/organizational/networked group efforts, with the governing party having the most authority and thus, accountability. Governance differs completely from government, as *governance* is what *government* does when it provides goods and resources to the public (Bever, 2012; Donahue, 2004; Osborne & Gaebler, 1992). Governance that is concentrated in the public

sector is referred to as *public governance* (Bovaird & Löffler, 2009) and occurs when one government agency delegates a responsibility or task to another government entity, like how federal policy is relegated to state and local administrators to enforce. Governance occurs in the private and nonprofit sectors as well, as those organizations and nonprofit organizations govern their employees by enforcing federal, state, local, and organizational policies (this is referred to as *corporate governance* (Bevir, 2009; Bovaird & Löffler, 2009).

Elliott & Salamon (2002) define four attributes that are necessary to public governance, and its actors should keep these attributes in mind when developing a governing relationship between the public and private/nonprofit sector:

- Pluriformity—a wide range of organizations are engaged to bring a vast amount of experts together as participants in the proposed solution;
- Self-referentiality—each actor has their own agenda and approaches the solution in a manner that reflects their own bottom-line;
- Asymmetric interdependencies—all actors in each network have an interdependent relationship. Even if they all want the same thing, they may not consider the same methods to reach those goals; and
- Dynamism—the terms of this arrangement (as outlined above) are subject to change at any point during the relationship.

Federalism and the Traditions of Public Administration

Kettl (2015) identifies four traditions of public administration that affect all approaches to governance: Hamiltonian, Jeffersonian, Madisonian, and Wilsonian. Each tradition has the namesake of the American political scholar that utilized its approach to leadership in the public sector. Per Donald Kettl (2015): the *Hamiltonian* tradition prefers government that favors a strong administrator to delegate their leadership down; the *Jeffersonian* tradition inverts the *Hamiltonian* tradition, preferring government that works from the people upward to leadership; the *Madisonian* tradition believes that political power can be balanced among competing actors

in a network; and the *Wilsonian* tradition supports regulating administrative responsibilities in an organizational hierarchy. These traditions have dictated the relationship between politics and administration since each of their administrations.

Alexander Hamilton was a proponent of centralizing the federal government as a means to end the Jeffersonian approach to government (Mattson, 1998). Thomas Jefferson was the opposite, believing in a more decentralized approach to governance that relegated more authority to the state and local level in lieu of the federal level. This approach to government weakened the executive branch, with Congress becoming the sole authority on federal intervention if necessary (Kettl, 2015), Wilsonian ideologies promoted a more liberal approach to government, believing that government should be centralized to address the rampant political corruption, but administration should be separate. Revisiting the politics-administration dichotomy as it exists in these traditions, U.S. political institutions were created with Madisonian ideals, hoping that the checks and balances between the legislative and executive branch protects the public from political actors who attempt to enforce their own interests (Levinson & Pildes, 2006). Ultimately, that was not the case. As government became more progressive toward the end of the 19th century and open to reform, emerging Wilsonian traditions found the Madisonian approach to be outdated and inefficient to solve more modern problems (Kettl, 2000). By separating politics from administration, the Wilsonian model proposed two separate hierarchies for politics and administration, suggesting that each hierarchy should govern its officials while collaborating with each other.

These four traditions are critical in public administration because they serve as guides for federalism, and subsequently governance. Federalism directs the varied approaches to governance because it assists stakeholders when deciding upon the most efficient methods to

effectuate administration. For context, federalism is a federal system where political power is shared between a primary and secondary authority, often could vary with collaborations between the federal and state government, federal and local government, or federal and nonprofit organizations (Agranoff & McGuire, 2001; Kramer, 1994). A requirement of federalism is efficient resource allocation that not only encourages democratic participation, but the protections of basic freedoms (Inman & Rubinfeld, 1997). However, as governing issues grow more complex, state, local, and federal governments have become more independent on one another by sharing resources and decision making. Referred to as *fused federalism*, this concept limits the scope of autonomous decision making of each agency by blurring the lines between the three branches of government (Gray, 1989).

According to Inman and Rubinfeld (1997), there are three approaches to federalism: economic federalism, cooperative federalism, and democratic federalism. Economic federalism is a decentralized approach to governance. Individual government jurisdictions are authorized to operate without centralized oversight, provided that they are able to finance any externalities. Cooperative federalism is similar to economic federalism, in the sense that the goal is to be fiscally efficient as possible when providing the public with services. However, cooperative federalism centralizes the decision-making process, requiring unanimous approval from lower government representatives for a policy to be approved (Inman & Rubinfeld, 1997). “These agreements can take place directly within a central legislative body...or through intergovernmental agreements between subsets of local governments which are then approved by the central government or by some agreed-upon neutral party, like an appointed court” (Inman & Rubinfeld, 1997, p. 48). Finally, democratic federalism is nestled between the previous two

concepts. The only difference between it and cooperative federalism is that it requires a majority rule vote to approve legislation rather than a unanimous vote.

Collaborative Governance

Collaborative governance as a concept is one that has been around for centuries and has often been used as a tool to assist people when coordinating shared public resources (Ostrom, 1990). As it relates to public administration, the framework of collaborative governance expands on governance theories by asking citizens to more actively engage in the role of policy creation (Bevir, 2012), and is to be considered a feasible response where hierarchical models and implementation have failed (Ansell & Gash, 2008). It is revolutionary, for it invites nongovernment officials into the policy creation process to provide solutions to complex challenges that the government cannot solve on its own (Agbodzakey, 2012; Edelenbos & Klijn, 2007; Kettl, 2015; Sørensen, 2012). Though *collaborative governance* is sometimes used interchangeably with *collaborative management* (Thomson & Perry, 2006), scholar Michael McGuire (2006) defines *collaborative public management* as the process of “facilitating and operating in multiorganizational arrangements to remedy problems that cannot be solved—or solved easily—by single organizations” (p. 33). Collaborative governance is structured differently than traditional governance, and the following paragraphs shall detail exactly how.

Collaborative governance networks can exist between all levels of government and the private and nonprofit sectors. This concept is referred to as public private partnerships (“PPP”) and is the “cooperation between public and private actors with a durable character in which actors develop mutual products and/or services and in which risk, costs, and benefits are shared”

(Edelenbos & Klijn, 2007, p. 3). When defining collaborative governance,³ authors Ansell & Gash (2008) state that the following criteria must be met during a collaboration: 1) a public agency must initiate the need for said collaboration; 2) participants are to be nonstate actors; 3) participants are to have an active role in decision-making; 4) meetings are to be organized and held regularly; 5) all decisions are made via a consensus; and 6) all goals of the collaboration are to positively effectuate its intended goals. Donahue (2004) also details several constructs that are necessary within a collaborative governance relationship. They include formality, duration, focus, institutional diversity, and valence. Formality requires a formal or informal contractual agreement that serves to both solidify and institutionalize the arrangement. Duration determines the proposed timeline of the arrangement. Some collaborative relationships are per diem to serve immediate needs, while others are more longstanding to solve more complex problems. Regarding focus, this aspect of the collaboration addresses the issue at hand, and “can be narrowly structured to meet a single shared challenge, or more broadly designed to address a range of concerns common (whether simultaneously or sequentially) to the collaborating parties” (Donahue, 2004, p. 3). Institutional diversity is also a requirement of collaborative governance, as it requires both a public and private entity, and valence informs how many entities are involved in the collaboration.

Varying from traditional governance, collaborative governance is lateral instead of hierarchical and provides every actor in the network having the same amount of authority as it relates to decision-making and project execution. Participation in this type of government

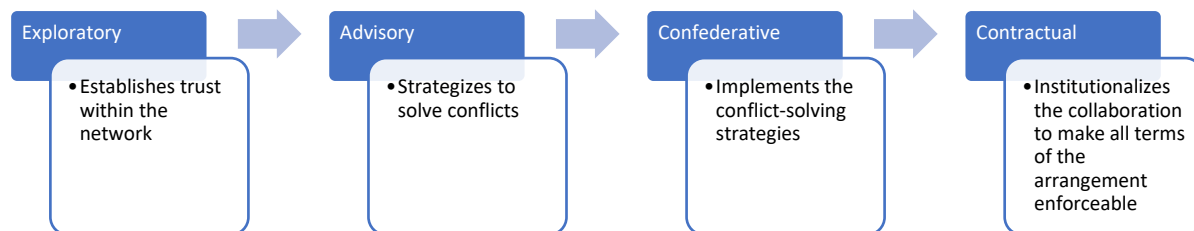
³ Ansell & Gash (2008) define collaborative governance as “a governing arrangement where one or more public agencies directly engage non-state stakeholders in a collective decision-making process that is formal, consensus-oriented, and deliberative and that aims to make or implement public policy or manage public programs or assets” (p. 544).

network is completely voluntary. Classic liberalist thought considers *collaboration* to be an arrangement that “aggregates private preferences into collective choices through self-interested bargaining.” (Thomson & Perry, 2006, p. 20). Simply put: no one will participate in a collaboration without a self-benefitting outcome. This can be a good thing, as those who make decisions on a matter are those who are truly invested in its outcomes, personally or otherwise. Though their presence provides an opportunity for every proposed solution to be evaluated, it also creates space for what Kettl (2015) calls *fuzzy boundaries*. If actor responsibilities are not clearly defined in detail, fuzzy boundaries not only affect decision-making processes and eventual implementation, but accountability in case things do not go as planned. Successes and failures, as it relates to the management of programs, are based upon how effective the collaborative partnership is overall.

According to Barbara Gray (1989), there are four categories used to define the different types of collaborative arrangements: exploratory, advisory, confederative, and contractual. As depicted in Figure 1, each builds on the functions of the preceding category. Exploratory collaborations serve to establish trust with the network. All actors use this phase to understand the resources that each brings to the network, usually setting the terms of the formal or informal collaboration. Advisory collaborations extend the trust built from exploratory collaborations to solve conflicts and provide solutions to existing issues. This collaboration emphasizes strategizing on how actors in the network should address and ultimately solve the problem. Confederative collaborations implement those proposed solutions based on the parties’ consensual agreement to do so. For example, if policy was proposed during the advisory stage, all actors in the network adopt and apply the strategies as discussed. Contractual collaborations

are the most formal of the categories, for they serve to institutionalize all of the actions of the previous categories in a legally enforceable way for stakeholders (Gray, 1989).

Figure 1: Gray's Functional Categories of Collaborative Arrangements



While collaborations promote coordination and cooperation across various stakeholders, it is important to note that *coordination* and *cooperation* are not the same thing and can greatly affect service outcomes. “Coordination refers to formal institutionalized relationships among existing networks of organizations, while cooperation is ‘characterized by informal trade-offs and by attempts to establish reciprocity in the absences of rules’” (Mulford & Rogers, 1982, as cited in Gray, 1989, p. 15). It can be distinguished from Figure 1 that collaborations do not just occur, but are developed over time due to the continued negotiation and renegotiation of terms. Renegotiated exploratory collaborations become advisory. Renegotiated advisory collaborations become confederative, and renegotiated confederative collaborations become contractual. They are built so that *cooperation* (exploratory, advisory, confederative) ultimately leads to *coordination* (contractual).

Because effective collaborations are built, it is important to examine the foundation of all collaborations: the exploratory arrangement. While in the exploratory phase, network actors should be committed to establishing trust, as the continued collaboration depends on it. According to Edelenbos and Klijn (2007), the three dominant characteristics of trust are vulnerability, risk, and expectations. For an actor to entrust another, the actor must be vulnerable

enough to open themselves up to exposure, and hope that other actors do not take advantage of them while in this state. Opening oneself up to that kind of exposure is risky by nature, but the choice to be vulnerable also serves as a tool to evaluate if the other party is worth that risk of continued vulnerability. Finally, the expectation is that not only will the other actor not cause any harm, but their positive response(s) to shared vulnerability helps predict future motives and intentions. These three characteristics of trust form a cyclical relationship that permits each characteristic to reinforce the two. Establishing trust builds interdependency between the actors in a network and provides each the security to fully commit to a collaboration without fear of being ill-treated or exploited. It is not uncommon for a breach of trust to occur in a collaboration, as individuals and institutions desire to protect their own interests at all times, with some taking advantage of an unequal power hierarchy to do so. (Huxham & Vangen, 2005). As the bedrock piece of all collaborations, when trust is compromised in any way, priorities must be re-shifted to reestablish the trust lost to maintain the partnership.

Agency Theory in Public Administration

Agency theory is an economic theory that was developed in the 1970s and considers all agency relationships to be binding contracts that dictate service transactions (Shapiro, 2005; Waterman & Meier, 1998). Containing both procurers and purveyors of goods/services, these contracts serve as the terms and conditions of the arrangement and outline expectations of each to the other (Waterman & Meier, 1998). Additionally, these contracts detail and bind all incentives, performance management devices, and other terms during the relationship (Shapiro, 2005) with the ultimate goal of the principal being to control agent behavior in a manner that is aligned with principal preferences (Waterman & Meier, 1998).

With contributions from scholars such as Barry Mitnick, Michael Jensen, and William Meckling, the framework for principal-agent theory was developed to better understand the concept of agency within organizations (Jensen & Meckling, 1976; Shapiro, 2005). In this model, the *principal* requires a service to be done that they are unable to complete themselves (this may be due to the lack of skills to complete the task or due to the complex nature of the assignment) (Bertelli, 2012; Moe, 1984). These reasons cause them to hire an *agent*, someone who has the skills to complete the project or assignment, producing an outcome that is beneficial to the principal (Lane, 2007). Jensen & Meckling (1976) considers a principal-agent relationship to be effectuated if the principal *specifically* delegates the authority to make decisions to the agent. In this model, the principal has the responsibility to incentivize the agent (Gailmard, 2014). Because the agent is entrusted to make decisions on behalf of the principal, the principal must ensure that there are constructs in place that curbs undesirable agent behavior by rewarding positive outcomes.

This economic theory finds itself being used in public administration to evaluate the relationship between bureaucratic agents and political principals (Lane, 2007; Waterman & Meier, 1998), especially since politics is essentially formatted principal-agent dynamics in mind (Moe, 1984). The hierarchical model assists both organizations and the public sector by establishing public accountability within the formal and informal social contracts that exist in bureaucracies. Just as elected officials (agents) are accountable to their constituents (principal), federal agents and agencies (agents) are accountable to the legislative branch (principal) (Lane, 2007). In the above example, if an elected official (agent) produces a positive outcome on their campaign promises, their constituents (principal) will re-elect them to office. Without the

incentivization of bureaucrats-as-agents and elected-officials-as-principals, there is no initiative to work selflessly for the public (Kettl, 2015).

What is important to take away from this theory is that principals have the obligation to prevent agents from operating with their self-interests in mind by incentivizing them. The relationship between principals and agents is very much a transactional one. Everyone gets something as long as everyone gives something. The relationship cannot exist if it were to ever become one-sided.

Rational Choice Theory and Public Management

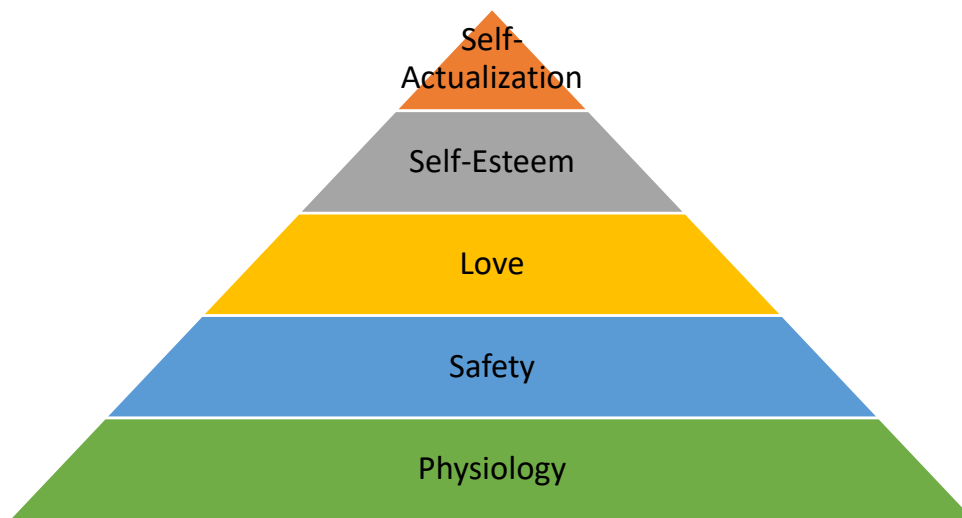
As mentioned in the previous section, a party would not opt to become an agent without being incentivized by the principal. Employees of an organization would not choose to work for free, as that option would not be personally beneficial. This decision falls in line with rational choice theory. Borrowed from game theory and economics, rational choice theory finds that all actors in any interaction will make the most rational choice that aligns with their self-interests after potential benefits and damages have been assessed (Bertelli, 2012; Bevir, 2010; Zey, 1998). This theory, developed by Anthony Downs (1957), is one that stems from his study on voting behavior. Applying economic theory to the political process, Downs (1957) found that voters make decisions that they can rationalize based on their own self-interests. Voters assess the risks and costs that they may incur should a particular party or candidate be elected. Should a stalemate occur and each party offers the same benefits, voters make a decision based on performance management and measurable outcomes, and if no choice can be made, the voter abstains (Downs, 1957). Overall, rational choice theory demonstrates that economic theory is used to rationalize many aspects of civic and social engagement.

Expanding on Downs' findings, Bevir (2010) stated that rational choice theory can be used to describe social phenomena and individual choices on a microlevel, with each small choice contributing to the decision-making process in policy and governance. Applying the theory to public administration, rational choice theory supports the belief that every agent in a network contributes rationally to its goals, with the intent of using the least amount of resources and costs to obtain a maximized result. Rational choice theory finds that any action is calculated, as it has to appease personal or institutional interests (Scott, 2000). Because the primary focus of rational choice theory is individualism, this theory greatly benefits public management networks because it connects government administrators with people or organizations who want to assist in a project or effort, so long as effort aligns with their goals and is the best use of resources. It also assists in the explanation as to why many different institutions and organizations are open to collaborate with other organizations. When applying this theory, policymakers, public administrators, and public managers often use rational choice theory when exercising judgment and discretion in an official capacity.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

In 1943, behavioral psychologist Abraham Maslow created a framework that discussed what people need to feel fulfilled. This chart is called the "Hierarchy of Needs" and includes *physiology*, *safety*, *love*, *self-esteem*, and *self-actualization* (Maslow, 1943/2012). Maslow found that each person satisfies these needs in the order listed, because the satisfaction of each need sets the foundation for the following need to be addressed (Gawel, 1996). Often, these needs are depicted as a pyramid, with *physiology* at the base and *self-actualization* at the top. Figure 2 illustrates this pyramid below.

Figure 2: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



Physiology a basic human need, encompassing a person's need for clothing, air, food, shelter, and water. These are the needs that permit people to sustain life and are the most primal, which is why this is a foundational need (Maslow, 1943/2012). Following physiology is safety. Humans need to feel emotionally and physically safe in their surroundings. They need to feel physically protected from danger, but also emotionally protected from chaos and fears. Once complete, the need for love and affection will arise. People want to give and receive love from a partner, friends, children, and community to experience belonging (Maslow, 1943/2012; Maslow, 1970). When satisfied, the person will desire a need for respect and self-esteem Each person has a desire for social recognition in some capacity and to feel respected by others, and that respect helps them foster and build self-confidence (Zalenski & Raspa, 2006). Maslow (1970 found that people care about their own perception of their skills, and also how others perceive those same skills and abilities. Once confident, a person is able to be self-actualize and become the best versions of themselves. They are better able to commit to their passions or find fulfillment. In public administration, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is used to draw conclusions

about human behavior in organizations and collaborations. It serves as a tool to evaluate the causal relationships between need fulfilment and desirable/undesirable actions and outcomes.

Conclusion of Literature Review-Section 1

This section focuses heavily on many theories and frameworks found in the discipline of public administration. By introducing this information, readers will be able to apply certain ideas to PCA, such as *Civil War*, and better comprehend how these concepts are applicable to the film (Callahan et al., 2007). The above topics will be revisited in Chapter 4 to best explain how and why the Accords severely fractured the group. The above information on the politics-administration dichotomy provides a foundation for the analysis of the conflict that occurs between Stark and Rogers in the film, and each's approach to the traditions of public administration. The sections that define and analyze both governance and collaborative governance offer valuable information to proffer understanding on the Avengers' administration and collaboration with the public sector. It was integral to include information on agency theory, rational choice theory, and Maslow's hierarchy of needs, as these ideas lend themselves to further analysis of the notable heroes.

The next section of the literature review provides foundational information on the MCU to readers who may not be familiar with the constructs that lie in this fictional reality. This section will identify Avengers membership, outline the collaborative relationship that the group has with the public sector, and also chronicle several events, interactions, and unresolved conflicts from previous films that impact the actions that occur during *Civil War*.

Marvel Cinematic Universe

While there were various films with Marvel characters and superheroes released over the years, the MCU as it is known today was launched in 2008 with the release of *Iron Man*. Since

that year, Marvel Entertainment (owned wholly by The Walt Disney Company), Marvel Entertainment has created a film franchise that weaves a single story through a series of films. These films are adaptations of their comic books of the same name and have become so popular that they have broken world records. In 2019, *Avengers: Endgame* became the highest-grossing film of all time by generating \$2.7902 billion worldwide, earning more than films in the *Lord of the Rings*, *Harry Potter*, *Star Wars*, and *Pirates of the Caribbean* franchises (Deardeuff, 2019; Rubin, 2019). Their popularity continues, with more films slated to be released well until 2028 (Muller, 2017).

The stories told in each film are interwoven and connected, and minor decisions made in one film can impact major decisions in another. This link is usually established by the mid- and post-credits scene, with information provided in these scenes being used to further certain storylines of certain characters and subplots (Calandro, 2015; Havard et al., 2019). For more perspective, author Joseph Calandro, Jr. (2015) states:

Characters like Captain America and Iron Man do not exist in a vacuum or in a fictitious world of their own; rather, they are part of a broader charter “universe” in which individual characters crossover to other characters’ stories, either on a one-on-one basis or on a team basis, such as, for example the Avengers. Therefore, many comic book stories are not one-offs, but rather parts of larger story arcs. (p. 31)

The films in the MCU were introduced to audiences in phases so that stories can remain sequential and tell more connected tales. Table 1 below is a chart that identifies the title and year of each theatrical release (and expected release) in the MCU, while Table 2 highlights each film in order of chronological events. Table 3⁴ (noted in the Appendix) highlights the mid- and post-

⁴ At the time of writing, the only film that has been released from Phase IV is *Black Widow* (2021). It is the only film from this phase that is reflected in Table 3.

credit scenes from each film and details how they interconnect to other films in the MCU and set up future story arcs.

Table 1

Films in the Marvel Cinematic Universe			
Phase I	Phase II	Phase III	Phase IV
(known as the <i>Infinity Saga</i>)			
<i>Iron Man</i> (2008)	<i>Iron Man 3</i> (2013)	<i>Captain America: Civil War</i> (2016)	<i>Black Widow</i> (2021)
<i>The Incredible Hulk</i> (2008)	<i>Thor: The Dark World</i> (2013)	<i>Doctor Strange</i> (2016)	<i>Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings</i> (2021)
<i>Iron Man 2</i> (2010)	<i>Captain America: The Winter Soldier</i> (2014)	<i>Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2</i> (2017)	<i>Eternals</i> (2021)
<i>Thor</i> (2011)	<i>Guardians of the Galaxy</i> (2014)	<i>Spider-Man: Homecoming</i> (2017)	<i>Thor: Love and Thunder</i> (2022)
<i>Captain America: The First Avenger</i> (2011)	<i>Avengers: Age of Ultron</i> (2015)	<i>Thor: Ragnarok</i> (2017)	<i>Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness</i> (2022)
<i>The Avengers</i> (2012)	<i>Ant-Man</i> ((2015)	<i>Black Panther</i> (2018)	
		<i>Avengers: Infinity War</i> (2018)	
		<i>Ant-Man and the Wasp</i> (2018)	
		<i>Captain Marvel</i> (2019)	
		<i>Avengers: Endgame</i> (2019)	
		<i>Spider-Man: Far From Home</i> (2019)	

Table 2

MCU Films in Chronological Order of Events⁵		
1. <i>Captain America: The First Avenger</i> (2011)	2. <i>Captain Marvel</i> (2019)	3. <i>Iron Man</i> (2008)
4. <i>The Incredible Hulk</i> (2008)	5. <i>Iron Man 2</i> (2010)	6. <i>Thor</i> (2011)
7. <i>The Avengers</i> (2012)	8. <i>Iron Man 3</i> (2013)	9. <i>Thor: The Dark World</i> (2013)
10. <i>Captain America: The Winter Soldier</i> (2014)	11. <i>Guardians of the Galaxy</i> (2014)	12. <i>Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2</i> (2017)
13. <i>Avengers: Age of Ultron</i> (2015)	14. <i>Ant-Man</i> ((2015)	15. <i>Captain America: Civil War</i> (2016)
16. <i>Black Widow</i> (2021)	17. <i>Spider-Man: Homecoming</i> (2017)	18. <i>Black Panther</i> (2018)
19. <i>Doctor Strange</i> (2016)	20. <i>Thor: Ragnarok</i> (2017)	21. <i>Ant-Man and the Wasp</i> (2018)
22. <i>Avengers: Infinity War</i> (2018)	23. <i>Avengers: Endgame</i> (2019)	24. <i>Spider-Man: Far From Home</i> (2019)

The popularity of these films has created a cultural phenomenon, solidifying the MCU films as one of the most successful film franchises in history.

Who Are The Avengers?

Inspired by DC Comics' Justice League of America⁶ in 1960, the Avengers comic books were created by Marvel Comics in 1963 by sheer accident. When production on the inaugural *Daredevil* comic failed to meet its deadline to the printer, Stan Lee proposed a comic series that combined superheroes and villains that were already in existence to be published (Darowski, 2014). Without major creative deadlines, stories were created and drawn in no time, and the rest was history. In the first issue, the group consisted of Ant-Man (who later evolved into Giant-

⁵ This table represents the fictional timeline's order of events and is not to be confused with the dates of each film's theatrical release as reflected in Table 1.

⁶ The Justice League of America is DC Comics superhero group. Some of its members include Wonder Woman, The Flash, Superman, and Batman (Darowski, 2011).

Man), Wasp, Thor, Iron Man, and the Incredible Hulk, with Captain America joining by the fourth issue (Robb, 2014). During the decade, the group had a bit of a revolving door of active members⁷ in the comics but remained committed to its goal of being protectors of domestic, international, and extraterrestrial threats.

In the MCU, The Avengers are a supergroup that consists of private citizens who have enhanced skills or genetic modifications. By the time that the first *Avengers* film was released in 2012, many of the main characters (like Iron Man, Incredible Hulk, Captain America, and Thor) already had individual films that chronicled their separate adventures. In addition to the four films in the *Avengers* franchise (*The Avengers* (2012), *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015) ((hereinafter “*Age of Ultron*”), *Avengers: Infinity War* (2018), and *Avengers: Endgame* (2019)) films in the MCU introduce reoccurring other characters who did not have their own respective films (like Hawkeye, and Bucky Barnes). As Avengers, they work alongside the fictional government agency known as S.H.I.E.L.D. (“Strategic Homeland Intervention, Enforcement, and Logistics Division” as it is known in the MCU), until it is dismantled in the film, *Captain America: Winter Soldier* (hereafter “*Winter Soldier*”) (Favreau, 2008; Russo & Russo, 2014).

The MCU did not stray too far from original Avengers membership as laid out in the comic books. In the first film starring the Avengers, *Avengers* (2012), the group was comprised of Iron Man, Thor, Captain America, and Incredible Hulk. Towards the end of the film, Black Widow and Hawkeye become members of the group. By the end of *Age of Ultron*, members of the group included War Machine, Falcon, Scarlet Witch, and Vision.⁸ While *Civil War* is not

⁷ At various points of tenure during the comic’s successful run, the following superheroes were members of the Avengers at one point: Hawkeye, Scarlet Witch, Quicksilver, Hercules, Black Knight, Black Widow, Black Panther, and Vision (Daniels, 1991).

⁸ Quicksilver, the twin brother of Scarlet Witch, works alongside the Avengers briefly, but dies before the end of the film (Whedon, 2015).

titled as an Avengers film, it is very much an Avengers movie, as many of the group members are present in the film and the film's conflict (and subsequent effects) affect the group in future films. The below details the members of the Avengers at the start of the *Civil War* film and a brief description of their abilities.

Figure 3:⁹ Images and Descriptions of the Avengers

Figure 3.1



Steve Rogers/ “Captain America”

Captain America is a prominent member of the Avengers. A former soldier in World War II, Captain America is a superhero who is notorious for his super strength and being a good soldier. To prevent confusion, this work will specify when Rogers is in his official role as Captain America.

Figure 3.2



Sam Wilson/ “Falcon”

Falcon is an accomplice to Captain America. A veteran of the U.S. Air Force, he possesses mechanical wings that give him the ability to fly. As a veteran, he uses both his military combat training and weapons skills when working as an Avenger.

Figure 3.3



Tony Stark/ “Iron Man”

Tony Stark is a tech genius who becomes Iron Man when he wears the technologically advanced suit(s) that he designs. He, like Captain America, holds an integral role in Avengers leadership. To prevent confusion, this work will specify when Stark is in his official role as Iron Man.

⁹ All characters listed in this section are owned and licensed by Marvel Entertainment and are protected by intellectual property and copyright law. Accordingly, each photo used here is cited on the reference sheet titled “Figure 3 References.”

Figure 3.4



James Rhodes / “War Machine”

War Machine is an accomplice of Iron Man and they have very similar costumes and technically advanced capabilities. Like Falcon and Captain America, War Machine has military experience, as he is an active officer in the U.S. Airforce.

Figure 3.5



Dr. Bruce Banner/ “The Incredible Hulk (Hulk)”

Dr. Banner’s exposure to radiation has caused him to mutate into Hulk, a large, green man when he is angry or experiences distress. Though an Avenger, Hulk is not in the *Civil War* film.

Figure 3.6



Thor

A native of Asgard, Thor is the only Avenger that is not from Earth. Wielding a hammer and the ability to generate lightning, Thor (aka the Norse God of Thunder) often helps fight against otherworldly threats on Earth, or as he calls it “Midgard.” Though an Avenger, Thor is not in the *Civil War* film.

Figure 3.7



Natasha Romanoff/ “Black Widow”

Black Widow is a former spy turned S.H.I.E.L.D. agent who works alongside the Avengers when they collaborate with the government organization. When S.H.I.E.L.D. is dismantled, she becomes a full-time Avenger. Each position that she has had has benefited from her martial arts skills and weapons training.

Figure 3.8



Clint Barton/ “Hawkeye”

Before retiring, Hawkeye (similar to Black Widow) is a former S.H.I.E.L.D agent turned Avenger. While he does not have powers in the capacity of his former team members, he is a master archer. At the end of *Age of Ultron*, Hawkeye retires from the group. He has a brief appearance in *Civil War*.

Figure 3.9



Vision

Comprised of the operating system J.A.R.V.I.S (created by Tony Stark), Ultron (the villain from *Age of Ultron*), and the Mind Infinity Stone, Vision is an artificial intelligence android with a human likeness.

Figure 3.10



Wanda Maximoff/ “Scarlet Witch”

Scarlet Witch is one half of the Maximoff twins. The Sokovian national joins the Avengers at the end of *Age of Ultron*. She possesses telekinetic powers and the ability to generate electromagnetic forcefields.

Government Failure Created the Need for the Avengers in the MCU

In the MCU, the Avengers are created because the government is unable to protect the public from extraterrestrial and intergalactic threats. In the film, *The Avengers* (2012), S.H.I.E.L.D. Director Nick Fury appeals to a council for authorization to form a supergroup to manage the imminent intergalactic threats, stating that “we need a response team” (Whedon, 2012, 0:19:57). Based on the above dialogue, the construction of the Avengers in the MCU is a

direct response to the limited government ability to provide general safety to its citizens. In public administration, this incapability is classified as government failure.

In the film, it was determined that a team of meta-humans with superpowers and/or capabilities would be better equipped to protect the public from an ever-evolving threat. When government failure occurs, public administrators are tasked with finding the means to meet these demands (Kjær, 2004). Often these solutions may cause government agencies to turn to the nonprofit or private sector to meet public needs, and though fictional, the call to create the Avengers is no different. The construction of the Avengers is more than the creation of a supergroup, as it serves as a reminder of what governmental failure looks like and demonstrates the lengths that government agencies will explore to ensure public safety. Despite the costumes and super strength, the Avengers are an emergency management response team tasked with providing safety to Earth (not just Americans) in a nonrivalrous manner.

The Avengers and Governance

Because S.H.I.E.L.D. as a government entity could not protect the public from certain threats, the Avengers are assembled, shifting public protection from government responsibility to one that required varying levels of networks, management, and governance. Based on the definitions of collaborative governance mentioned earlier in the chapter, I posit that the members of the Avengers are collaborative public managers. As volunteer members contributing to collective action, the relationship between the group and S.H.I.E.L.D. is horizontal to allow for new methods of solving more immediately challenging problems (Sindane, 2004).

The collaboration between S.H.I.E.L.D. and the Avengers in the MCU would be considered collaborative governance based on Ansell and Gash's (2008) definitions. It is Director Fury, on behalf of the public agency S.H.I.E.L.D. who suggests to a governing council

that the public sector work with civilians with enhanced abilities (the public agency initiates the need for the collaboration with nonstate actors). In the collaboration, they are heavily involved in the decision-making process and have a collective consensus on how to effectuate goals before executing. Donahue's definition of collaborative governance is also fitting. The Avengers and S.H.I.E.L.D. agree to collaborate on an as needed basis (formality; duration) with an understanding to handle the conflicts that S.H.I.E.L.D. could not (focus) (Whedon, 2012). The members of the Avengers are nonstate actors (institutional diversity) and each member of the network is aware of who else is involved the network, as they are familiar with group membership (valence).

While individuals serve their interests; groups, in the alternative, serve common collective interests that result in shared goals (Olson, 1971). The Avengers as a group are assembled specifically to collaborate with S.H.I.E.L.D. In *The Avengers* (2012), Nick Fury states that the purpose of the Avengers Initiative is to connect a "group of remarkable people, see if they could become something more. See if they could work together when we needed them to, to fight the battles that we never could" (Whedon, 2012, 1:30:24). Based on this statement and the above definitions, the Avengers Initiative is a collaborative network between the heroes and S.H.I.E.L.D.

The Avengers as Autocrats

There is a period in the MCU where the Avengers are no longer collaborating with S.H.I.E.L.D. as the agency has been dismantled by Captain America in *Winter Soldier*. In that film, Captain America learns that HYDRA¹⁰ agents have infiltrated S.H.I.E.L.D. to internally sabotage its efforts, so he, Black Widow, Falcon, and even S.H.I.E.L.D. director Nick Fury use

¹⁰ HYDRA is the fictitious scientific development division of the Nazi party during WWII (Johnston, 2011). Postwar, surviving members of the sect rebrand to become a Soviet terrorist organization (Russo & Russo, 2014).

their abilities/skills to dismantle the agency and report the malfeasance that has occurred to legislators, executive officials, and the public. Without an agency to collaborate with, the Avengers become a self-governing group, which creates problems of its own. According to Waldo (1952): “Autocracy during hours is the price of democracy after hours” (p. 87), meaning that when democratic governance is not prioritized, the decentralization that occurs creates an autocratic approach to administration. This is exactly what happens. S.H.I.E.L.D. is officially defunct by the end of the film (ending the collaboration between the Avengers and S.H.I.E.L.D.), but the group is not reassigned to collaborate with another government agency.

In the film that follows these events, *Age of Ultron*, viewers witness exactly what happens when public administrators and managers become both the expressing authority and the executing authority. In short, the villain of that film is one of their own creation. While on an international Avengers mission to shut down a HYDRA facility, Stark (in his official capacity as Iron Man) discovers technology that would best benefit his development of artificial intelligence for his global defense program, Ultron, with his goal being that the Ultron program could assist the Avengers against unknown threats in the future (Fujikawa, 2018; Whedon, 2015). Without informing other members of the team (aside from Dr. Banner, who helps him with research), he uses what has been discovered in his official position as an Avenger to prioritize his personal interests. Ultimately, the artificial intelligence program self-actualizes and zealously attempts to destroy Earth, with the Avengers spending the rest of the film trying to stop it from doing so. The film culminates with the group saving the planet yet again, but simultaneously contributing to a fulsome number of casualties and property damage in the fictitious eastern European country of Sokovia. Broadly, the Sokovia incident is the end result of what the administration of the Avengers looks like when it is bereft of politics and subsequently, checks and balances. Unlike

in previous films where the Avengers collaborate with S.H.I.E.L.D., when the group is left to make decisions on their own (as both decision-makers and enforcers), a catastrophic incident occurs. This incident becomes a catalyst for policymakers to question their judgment and decision-making while in the field.

Conclusion of Section 2 of Literature Review

Based on the above chapter, governance as a concept is established in the MCU as it relates to the administration of the Avengers. The group is formed for the sole purpose of being a collaborative partnership between the private sector and people with enhanced abilities. When the group breaks away from S.H.I.E.L.D., they become an autocratic organization that still acts as an emergency response team against extraterrestrial threats. Going into *Civil War*, the Avengers still govern themselves. As an emergency management response team, the events that occur in Sokovia prompts policymakers to doubt their judgment and decision-making abilities while on the job, with this conflict playing out fully in *Civil War* with the proposal of the Sokovia Accords.

Chapter 3: Methods

Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA)

This dissertation undertakes a qualitative approach to analysis by utilizing a Foucauldian¹¹ discourse analysis (FDA) as its methodology. Scholars have mostly defined *discourse* to be not just spoken dialogue or written text, but the phenomenon or narratives that directs social interactions (Diaz-Bone et al., 2008; McKinlay & McVittie, 2008). Skinner, Edwards, and Corbett (2014) write:

According to Shapiro (1987), ‘discourse’ can be ‘any systematic or disciplined way of constituting subjects, objects, and relationships’...Parker (1992), for example, defined discourse as ‘a system of statements that construct an object’...For Burr (1995) discourse analysis is ‘the analysis of a text in order to reveal either the discourses operating within in or the linguistic and rhetorical devices that are used in its construction’ (p. 142).

FDA expands on this definition, holding that knowledge comes from discourse and the context of social interactions, and in a constant state of revision (Bazeley, 2013; Jäger & Maier, 2009). What is known, how it is known, and the extent that it is known, is subjective based on the relationships between people and institutions/norms (schools attended, neighborhoods where people grew up, how enforcement authority is viewed, etc.), as these institutions shape personal experiences and create knowledge. FDA focuses on a problem and investigates how, rather than why, this issue or problem arose (Bazely, 2013).

Coined by French philosopher Michel Foucault (1971; 1975/1995), this framework finds it important to understand the 1) history of how social constructs and institutions came to be; and 2) all knowledge related to the power dynamics within these institutions (Bazely, 2013; Parfitt, 2002; Skinner, et. al, 2014). Foucault explores this theory in many of his works. In his lecture,

¹¹ Some texts spell Foucauldian as “Foucaultian” (Merriam Webster, n.d.). Though used interchangeably, they both mean the same thing and are a reference to the theories of Michel Foucault.

Orders of Discourse, Foucault (1971) wrote that in every society, “the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures, whose role is to avert its powers and its dangers, to cope with chance events, to evade its ponderous, awesome materiality” (p. 8). This means that all knowledge, and subsequent discourse related to that knowledge, is constructivist by nature, and was constructed by those in power. This theme is evident in his book, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of The Prison*. There, Foucault writes about the discipline that occurs in schools, hospitals, and prisons in 17th-18th century France. He discusses the evolution of punishment during that period and what that evolution represents. Initially, punishments (like lashings, public executions, and hangings) were implemented by monarchs and other institutional leaders upon the less powerful members of society to curb behaviors like crime and disobedience (Foucault, 1975/1995). This caused society to internalize the threat of punishment to create social norms and standards, evolving knowledge from “do not steal for fear of being publicly lashed” to “do not steal because it is wrong), which is a definitive shift in the knowledge surrounding this topic and subsequent discourse.

According to Norma Riccucci (2010), interpretivists and constructionists build knowledge based on their interpretation of their own opinions, cultural history and life experiences. Knowledge serves as a social construction dictated by three paradigms: there are *known knowns* (things that people know that they know), *known unknowns* (things that people know that they do not know), and finally *unknown unknowns* (things that people do not know that they do not know) (Barnes et al., 2005; Logan, 2009). Foucault found that power dictates one’s position in all three paradigms and determines how much access a person has (Foucault, 1971; Foucault, 1975/1995; Skinner, et. al, 2014). Because power, knowledge, and discourse are

interconnected in this way, Foucault believed that “a field of discourse is co-extensive with a field of power” (Skinner, et. al, 2014, p. 143). One simply cannot exist without the other.

Discourse evaluates the meaning behind conversations (Skinner, et. al, 2014). By applying a Foucauldian discourse analysis, this study is able to examine the structures of power that contribute to the ratification of the Accords by those who intend to monitor the Avengers and lends itself to the research on this phenomena (Lin, 1998).

Research Methods and Analysis

To answer my research questions, it was necessary for me to examine all of the discourse presented in *Civil War*. Though an IRB was not needed to conduct this study because there was no interaction with human subjects, I obtained the necessary discourse from films in the MCU films that would best explain the discourse and institutional power dynamics that are presented in *Civil War*. According to Willig (2012), text of any kind can be considered suitable data to conduct a discourse analysis, and a film can be considered discourse (Jäger & Maier, 2009). While I have seen each movie previously, I viewed and took copious notes on each film for this dissertation. In addition to *Civil War*, I watched the following films several times for this study: *Iron Man* (2008), *Iron Man 2* (2010), *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011), *The Avengers* (2012), *Iron Man 3* (2013), *Winter Soldier* (2014), *Age of Ultron* (2015), and *Spider-Man: Homecoming* (2017). All of the films (including their mid- and post-credit scene(s)) were viewed on Disney+, a streaming platform, except *Spider-Man: Homecoming*. Because that film is not on the streaming platform, I watched the film on Blu-Ray. I watched each film in order of release as well as chronological order of events (see Tables 1 and 2 for reference), as well as its mid- and post-credit scenes (see Table 3 for reference). I also was able to locate the transcript of each film on a MCU film wiki (Fandom.com). Because this is an editable source, the transcripts served as

a guide while I confirmed the language in each film while viewing. For this reason, when I reference discourse in any film, I cite specifically to the film itself and not the transcript to remove potential errors.

Upon continuous review of each film and its transcript, I noticed several themes that emerged from the discourse that relate to the discipline. These themes are connected to key concepts and frameworks defined in the literature review and will be expanded upon in the next chapter. Because the Accords are a performance management tool to address how the Avengers engage with threats, I found it important to examine the relationship between the public sector and the group as one where one party is making a play for power over another. By using FDA, I was able to identify other important discourses related to public administration.

My analysis of *Civil War* included not just an analysis of why the Accords are presented, but the adversarial discourse between the characters Tony Stark (Iron Man) and Steve Rogers (Captain America). Using a free software (Word Art, 2021), I created a word cloud based on the dialogue from the script (*Captain America: Civil War*, n.d.). Words that are largest appear more frequently in the script, while words that are smaller appear less. The word cloud, as depicted in Figure 4, demonstrates that “Steve” appears 356 times while “Tony” appears 301 times in the script. This is understandable, as these two are the most vocal in their support or opposition to this new governance policy as it aligns with their own philosophies. Chapter 4 details why these two characters, based on the knowledge obtained in this and previous films, hold the stances that they do regarding the Accords.

Chapter 4: Findings

Synopsis and Analysis of *Civil War*

The events of *Civil War* take place one year after the Sokovia incident. The film opens with the Avengers attempting to thwart thieves from stealing a biological weapon in Lagos, Nigeria. While successfully preventing the robbery, they cause a large amount of collateral damage, destroying property and contributing to many civilian injuries and deaths. Though the Avengers have consistently saved the world, both members of the public and government officials begin to view their methods as just as treacherous as each impending threat.

As a result, U.S. Secretary of State Thaddeus Ross informs the team that several nations have proposed establishing a United Nations oversight committee to oversee and manage their participation in future conflicts, whether domestic, international, or otherwise. This new policy, titled the Sokovia Accords,¹² is a formal agreement between 117 countries stating that “the Avengers shall no longer be a private organization. Instead, they’ll operate under the supervision of a United Nations panel, only when and if that panel deems it necessary” (Russo & Russo, 2016, 00:23:22). The policy requires people with enhanced abilities, such as the Avengers, to agree to use their abilities only when engaged by and on behalf of the international governments who authorize them to do so. The Avengers are given a choice: 1) sign the document and comply with the new policy and its implementation or 2) retire. The group finds itself split on the newly proposed governance policy, with Tony Stark (“Iron Man”) supporting the new policy, as he believes that the regulation would prevent execution errors in the field. Steve Rogers (“Captain America”) opposes the regulation, believing that the implementation of this policy and its surrounding bureaucracy will prevent the group from exercising appropriate judgment when

¹² The full title for the Sokovia Accords, as referenced on the title page of the document is “The Sokovia Accords: Framework for the Registration and the Deployment of Enhanced Individuals” (Russo & Russo, 2016).

necessary and also make Avengers involvement in any issue political. Each disposition divides the group in half, with both Iron Man and Captain America becoming the de facto leaders of each. As both groups try to convince the other of how the collective group should move forward, a stalemate ensues, with some Avengers choosing to sign the document (Iron Man, War Machine, Black Widow, and Vision,), and others outright refusing to do so (Captain America, Falcon, and Scarlet Witch).

Upon ratification of the Sokovia Accords, the building where it takes place is bombed, killing and injuring many international government officials. When it is revealed that the attack is caused by James “Bucky” Barnes, an old friend of Captain America from WWII who was initially perceived as dead, both Captain America and Falcon violate the Sokovia Accords (and subsequently international law) to engage him in the field. Later in the film, it is revealed to viewers that Bucky is not acting upon his own volition. He has been brainwashed by HYDRA to become a mercenary known as the “Winter Soldier.” While HYDRA is officially defunct, it is discovered that Lieutenant Helmut Zemo, a Sokovian national (and former member of HYDRA), is responsible for placing Bucky in a trance each time he commits acts of terrorism.

As Captain America, Falcon, and Bucky race to arrest Lieutenant Zemo, they are stopped by Iron Man and reminded that the use of their abilities is forbidden because they have not signed the Accords. Refusing to surrender, an even six-against-six brawl between the two factions ensues. Hawkeye (who returns from retirement), Scarlet Witch, and newcomer Ant-Man¹³ arrive to fight alongside Captain America, Bucky, and Falcon while Iron Man, Black

¹³ Scott Lang (“Ant-Man”) is recruited to fight for Captain America’s faction. He possesses the ability to shrink to the molecular level or grow to an increased size.

Widow, War Machine, Vision, and newcomers Black Panther¹⁴ and Spider-Man¹⁵ attempt to apprehend the opposing group and arrest them. During the brawl, Captain America and Bucky escape and proceed to Siberia, but everyone who assisted them in the battle (Hawkeye, Scarlet Witch, Falcon, and Ant-Man) is arrested. Soon thereafter, Iron Man learns of Lieutenant Zemo and the control he has over Bucky and decides to assist Captain American and Bucky in their pursuit of him. This collaboration is short-lived as Lieutenant Zemo reveals to Iron Man that it was Bucky (while in a trance) who assassinated Stark's parents. Upon his arrest, Zemo discloses that the damage to Sokovia killed his wife, child, and father. He states that his only goal in all of his actions is to implode the group. The film concludes with Hawkeye returning to retirement, and Captain America, Falcon, and Scarlet Witch officially exiting the group.

Though Lieutenant Zemo is the official villain in the film, this dissertation posits that the challenges of administration leads to the dissolution of the Avengers. Learning how his parents were assassinated and by whom surely severs the relationship between Iron Man and Captain America, however, the *Avengers as an organization* becomes divided when some agree to sign the Sokovia Accords and others do not. Using the previously stated research questions and the concepts of public administration mentioned in Chapter 2, the remainder of this chapter will analyze how and where administrative challenges became muddled.

Why The Original Collaboration Did Not Work

Donahue (2004) describes certain relationship dynamics that must also occur when public entities utilize collaborative governance. Both stability and volatility must be analyzed, as a

¹⁴ T'Challa is the prince of the fictional African nation of Wakanda as well as the superhero known as the "Black Panther." While fighting alongside Iron Man, Black Panther makes it very clear that his assistance is not based on his support of the Sokovia Accords. Rather, he wants Bucky to be held accountable for his role in the murder of this father, who is killed during the Austrian bombing.

¹⁵ Peter Parker ("Spider-Man") is a teenage superhero from New York City who was bitten by a radioactive spider and now has superpowers. In the film, he is recruited by Tony Stark to assist with the apprehension and arrest of superheroes who are not in accordance with the new policy.

“collaboration is *stable* to the extent its members share a normative view of successful governance, and *volatile* to the extent members’ norms or interests diverge. The less stable is the collaboration, the larger the share of its energies must be devoted to maintaining the collaboration itself” (Donahue, 2004, p. 3). This means that for the collaboration to meet its intended goals, all parties involved must have clear terms of engagement to work together and obtain the intended results. If expectations and standards are *not clear*, the relationship surrounding the collaboration risks becoming volatile and more labor is used to maintain the collaboration than achieve its outcome. This dissertation documents what happens when actor interests diverge in a network, and there are few formalities to maintain its functionality. If the foundation of this arrangement was more structured, perhaps systemic checkpoints would have been institutionalized to inhibit as many agency costs as possible. Though a work of fiction, this analysis has implications on what public administrators should prioritize when participating in a collaborative working relationship with the private and nonprofit sectors.

First, every actor in the network, especially the public sector, need to remember to enter the arrangement with the understanding that they are not decision-makers, regardless of the resources provided to the collaboration. Collaborative networks do not make decisions, as decision-making implies a hierarchy to some degree; instead, they are engaged to collectively reach agreements (Agranoff, 2006). Regardless of whom assumes the risk, power should be evenly distributed amongst actors during a collaboration. This statement begs the question: can there be true accountability in a collaborative network?

Various theorists think so, as long the accountability model shifts from its traditionally hierarchical representation. Robert Behn (2001, as cited in Sørensen, 2012) defines accountability as a hierarchical relationship between an *accountability holder* and an

accountability holdee, with one reporting to the other. To solve this issue, Behn recommends a 360° approach to public accountability in a collaboration, which acknowledges that actors in a collaboration may shift between accountability holder and holdee during the collaboration at any time (Sørensen, 2012). James March and Johan P. Olsen recommend that every actor participating in a collaboration should be accountable for all collective actions of the network (Sørensen, 2012). While these approaches are ideal, they are unrealistic.

Accountability can never be lateral in collaborative governance, for it is too fluid and accountability needs structure. Because actor accountability can shift from holder to holdee at any given point as Behn states, there is no possible way for each actor to be accountable for every decision made during the collaboration, as March and Olsen (1989, as cited in Sørensen, 2012) suggest. For this reason, no good can come from lateral accountability, as it would only contribute to blame shifting, which is exactly what occurs in between the Avengers, S.H.I.E.L.D., bureaucrats, and the public, ultimately setting the foundation for the Accords. The collaboration went from exploratory to advisory, and ultimately stopping at confederative in *Winter Soldier*. I speculated that if the collaboration had evolved to a contractual one prior to the events of that particular film, the events of *Age of Ultron* that eventually became the catalyst for the Accords would have not occurred. A contractual collaboration would have better streamlined tasks by assigning specific accountability to members in the network, providing a balance.

The Sokovia Accords: How Did It Get To This Point?

Though the film never shows this, public administration frameworks and theories suggest that many microlevel decisions attribute to the creation of the Sokovia Accords. Just as the Avengers are an emergency response team, the Sokovia Accords are an emergency response by public administrators to build more accountability in its relationship with the group. In this

section, I will apply theories and frameworks that examine how and why the Sokovia Accords become an option.

Applying rational choice theory, when rational choices are made, they exist in what is called bounded rationality (Simon, 1946/2012). This means that when making a decision and assessing the pros and cons of each option, the choices (and options available) exist in a space where societal rules, regulations, and norms exist as well. Often, these rules dictate the choices that are made. For example, if one were grocery shopping and realized before checking out that they had forgotten their wallet, they would be presented with a few options to consider. They might abandon the shopping trip and leave the store to return at another time. They also might consider calling someone in hopes that that other person can bring their wallet to the store. Other choices may be considered as well. In this scenario, however, they might not consider leaving the store with a cart of unpurchased groceries, as doing so would be considered theft, which has a host of legal implications. Bounded rationality informs decision-making in this way because all rational choices occur in the context of each situation.

In any governing relationship, policymakers use bounded rationality to solve complex challenges. It is important to note that bounded rationality comes from a reactive space. The problem has already presented itself, so problem solvers (like public administrators and public managers) are limited in their search for solutions due to the immediate need to solve each problem as it appears. For this reason, decision-makers often look for the resolution that meets the bare minimum of the issue, rather than exhausting options for the most ideal outcome (McCaughey & Bruning, 2010).

The Sokovia Accords provide a solution to the autocratic governance of the Avengers. To better understand why it is a tool to reinstate political accountability in Avengers administration,

theorists Carl Friedrich and Herman Finer can provide insight. In 1935, Friedrich discusses governmental accountability in his piece, *Responsible Government Service Under the American Constitution*. In this work, he states that the best way to bring order to administrative responsibility and prevent officials from serving their individual interests is for them to develop as civil servants an “objective and functional responsibility” (Plant, 2011, p. 472) to bureaucracy. Friedrich finds that it is important for the public sector to create a government that is committed to administrative responsibility to create a bureaucracy where checks and balances and objective oversight are inherent to the core of the system and its officials (Plant, 2011; Shafritz & Hyde, 2012). Finer notably disagreed with Friedrich in 1941. In his piece, *Administrative Responsibility in Democratic Government*, he writes that the focus should be more on external checks and balances, as government officials are susceptible to corrupted behavior in their official roles (Finer, 1941; Shafritz & Hyde, 2012). Finer (1941) writes that democratic governments have “demonstrated without the shadow of a doubt that sooner or later there is an abuse of power when external punitive controls are lacking” (p. 338).

S.H.I.E.L.D. initially serves as a collaborator with the group, offering resources and serving as an objective advisor to the group when solving complex problems as Friedrich suggests. This responsibility is woven through each film in the MCU until *Civil War*, where viewers learn of the longstanding corruption within the agency due to HYDRA double agents. Unlike the damages in New York City¹⁶ or Washington D.C.,¹⁷ the battle in Sokovia is the first time that the Avengers, an America-based organization, engage in a conflict outside of its borders, demonstrating that international oversight of the group is necessary if damages can

¹⁶ The conflict and subsequent collateral damage that occurs in this city is chronicled in the film *Avengers* (2012).

¹⁷ The conflict and subsequent collateral damage that occurs in this city is chronicled in the film *Winter Soldier* (2014).

occur anywhere. The creation of a U.N. committee to provide this oversight empowers Finer and his theory on the importance of external authorities to provide responsible, accountable administration. Applying Finer's theory, it stands to reason that an international oversight committee is formed because with or without S.H.I.E.L.D oversight (see *The Avengers; Civil War*), members of the group cause considerable damage and casualties. If public administrators and public managers could demonstrate any administrative responsibility or proper supervision of the group, then it justifies the belief as to why the 117 countries that authorize the Sokovia Accords believe that they can do what the U. S. government could not.

From Decentralized Here to Centralized There

In his text, Pollitt (2005) details five reasons that an organization may move toward centralization:

1. centralization assists organizations in pooling budgets;
2. centralization creates easily accessible resource of specialists in their field;
3. centralization contributes to social equity in outcomes and services;
4. centralization creates a greater environment for collaborative government and federalism; and
5. centralization is a clear method for citizens to identify accountability in a network.

The following paragraphs shall postulate both how and why the aforementioned concepts are proposed in the Sokovia Accords.

Centralization Manages the Discretion of Street-Level Bureaucrats

Centralization does more than create a hierarchical structure that places decision-makers at the top. It limits the administrative discretion of policy enforcers, the street-level bureaucrats to ensure that they complete tasks objectively and as described. In addition to being public

managers, the Avengers are also street-level bureaucrats. The term, coined by Michael Lipsky, describes public administrators and managers who are in direct contact with the community (Lipsky, 1980). Those in these positions are tasked with enforcing public policy (e.g., teachers, social workers, police officers, etc.), but these positions permit them to exercise a considerable amount of discretion while providing services to the public. One of the many conflicts that organizations and institutions have with street-level bureaucrats is that their decisions are almost always made in the moment and without foresight, with all of their conclusions based on the individual executing said decision (Lipsky, 1980). With autonomy as a potential barrier to equitable policy implementation, street-level bureaucrats can sometimes work in opposition to the policies that they are tasked with enforcing.

Discretion creates an ambiguous relationship with street-level bureaucrats because their enforcement of policy is dependent upon their interpretation of said policy. Centralization provides a solution to this issue by constricting by leaving large decisions to the decision-makers and leaving the agents to do what they do best: execute. Granted, centralization does not remove all decision-making capabilities from the agent. After all, agents need to make decisions in the field as they are assuming most of the risk in the conflict (Sappington, 1991). Centralization minimizes the decision-making capabilities of agents from a macrolevel (which can change overall outcomes) to a microlevel (which dictates the methods utilize when completing a task. By removing this aspect of strategic planning from the group's responsibilities, The Avengers become a collective that is solely focused on policy enforcement and implementation as instructed rather than interpreted.

Centralization Contributes to Social Equity

My analysis of Pollitt's Points 1, 3, and 5 has generated an interconnected response, so it is most convenient to address all three in this section on social equity. Because autonomous public administration has the potential to create both intentional and unintentional inequities with citizens (Pollitt, 2005), centralizing the oversight of the Avengers is a viable method to promote social equity in their administration. The National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) defines social equity as the equitable management of public-serving institutions and services and the just implementation of policy (Gooden, 2014). Initially, scholars proposed adding social equity as a pillar of the discipline in 1968, believing that equity and inclusion assisted in the evaluation of public policies (Blessett et al., 2019). Today, it is considered the fourth pillar¹⁸ in the discipline, alongside efficiency, effectiveness, and economy (Blessett et al., 2019).

With the above definitions in place, it is possible that social equity is factored into the creation of the Sokovia Accords, as centralization serves as an avenue to limit the damages incurred to areas that may not have financial means to rebuild after such catastrophic events. Because New York City in the MCU is a fictional representation of New York City as it is known in modern times, it is important to assess social equity through this lens. In modern reality, the U.S. is one of the richest nations in the world with a 2020 gross domestic product (GDP) of \$21.44 trillion (Singh, 2020). In comparison, Nigeria held a GDP of \$448.12 billion in 2019 (World Bank, 2019). While Sokovia is a fictional country, there is pointed language in the MCU films that inform viewers that it is an under-resourced nation.¹⁹ To summarize, the

¹⁸ Some schools of thought consider social equity to be the third pillar of the discipline instead of the fourth, however the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) officially recognizes four pillars (Blessett et al., 2019; Dooley, 2019; Gooden, 2014).

¹⁹ When obtaining intelligence from an employee in *Age of Ultron*, the employee tells Stark that "Sokovia's had a rough history. It's nowhere special but it's on the way to everywhere special" (Whedon, 2015, 0:15:18). In *Civil War*, Lieutenant Zemo tells Captain America that "Sokovia was a failed state long before you blew it to hell" (Russo

devastation that occurs in Lagos and Sokovia has a greater financial impact than the devastation that occurs in New York City and Washington, D.C. In this respect, the Sokovia Accords serve as an equalizer of sorts, so non-Western nations do not have to bear the brunt of rebuilding costs when everyone benefits from Earth being saved by the Avengers. In this new arrangement, partners can share in the expense of international incidents that require rebuilding efforts, which increases both visibility and fiscal responsibility for the damages incurred.

Finally, the Avengers are not *just* saving Americans. They are saving the planet. To promote equity and provide assurances to all countries, it is reasonable to suggest that the government agency responsible for their oversight should be one where all nations have an opportunity for membership. Expanding on Finer's theory, it is not uncommon for some bureaucratic models to move toward external centralization. Sometimes called "devolution," this phenomenon occurs when power is delegated to an entity that is "legally separate from the state (they have their own 'legal personality') and are often in contractual relationship with the reporting ministry" (Pollitt, 2005, p. 375). This shift toward democratic federalism serves to be inclusive toward other nations in the governance of the Avengers, allowing them input and access to the decision-making process that regulates the safety and security of the planet.

Public Opinion and Agency Costs

Pollitt's Point 5 emphasizes the importance of both public administrators and managers to remain accountable to the public. When legislators make decisions about policy, they are concurrently examining potential solutions to the problem as well as how the proposed will be received by the public. In F Russo, 2016, 0:21:15)

& Russo, 2016, 02:00:22). It should also be noted that on the *Spiderman: Homecoming* Blu-Ray, there is a deleted scene where students announce that there is a lunch fundraiser for Sokovian relief efforts (Watts, 2017).

Based on the conversation with Mrs. Spencer and the conversation with Secretary Ross, the public is not pleased with the Avengers or their methods. Aptly, it is in the best interests of legislators to maintain balance with their administrators, as low agency costs shield policies from constituent critiques (Horn, 1995). As public managers, the Avengers were creating expenses and becoming a liability on several fronts. Because principal-agent relationships are commenced to curtail agency costs (Shapiro, 2005), oversight of the Avengers needed to become hierarchical and fast.

An Accord, Not a Treaty

The legislation is not titled the *Sokovia Treaty*, but the *Sokovia Accords*, and I deduce that that is an intentional decision. Besides the fact that that is how it is reference in the discourse, titled the document as an *accord* inhibits the scope of its legality. According to the Cornell University Legal Information Institute (n.d.), an “*accord*” is a well-balanced agreement (usually harmonious) between nations. In case law, it is usually mentioned in conjunction with “*satisfaction*,” which is the execution of the new arrangement (Legal Information Institute, n.d.). In the case, *Rose Inn of Ithaca, Inc. v. Great American Ins. Co.* (2010), defendant claimed that “an accord and satisfaction is effected when ‘the parties . . . enter into a new contract wherein they agree that a stipulated performance will be accepted in the future, in lieu of an existing claim’” (*Altamuro v. Capocchetta*, 1995, as cited in *Rose Inn of Ithaca, Inc. v. Great American Ins. Co.*, 2010, p. 3). In the film, the Sokovia Accords are to produce a specific satisfaction, or the desired output. It should be noted that an *accord* is not a *treaty*. A treaty is legally enforceable agreement between nations that has been ratified by each jurisdiction. Without the extensive legislative process that treaties have, accords are more easily obtainable and though similar, an *accord* and a *treaty* are not the same (Miller & Slattery, 2016). Based on these legal

definitions, a rush to policy in the film permits the U.N. to implement the Sokovia Accords as if it were a treaty. considering those who operate outside of them to be unlawful.²⁰ Unfortunately, this creates some ambiguity in its enforcement.

Though fictional, the Accords represent a real-world issue regarding the challenges of global governance, especially as many agencies implement *accords* as if they are *treaties*, without addressing the shortcomings that accords contain. A prime example of this is the 2015 Paris Agreement. That year, global leaders met in Paris to address the climate change that is currently affecting the planet, and agreed to initiate methods to slow the continued rising of the earth's temperature due to elevated greenhouse gases in the atmosphere (United Nations Climate Change, n.d.). The 196 parties (including the United States) that committed to reducing their carbon footprint by discussing transitioning from fossil fuels to renewable energy, amongst other means, in an effort to address climate change. Each country who entered the agreement pledged to reduce their emissions substantially over time, with the goal to have a sizable reduction in global emissions by the midcentury (United Nations Climate Change, n.d.). The Paris Agreement was subsequently adopted by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate (hereinafter referred to as "UNFCC") on December 12, 2015 (United Nations Climate Change, n.d.).

While the UNFCC website considers the Paris Agreement a "legally binding international treaty on climate change," (United Nations Climate Change, n.d.) this statement is not entirely accurate, at least as it relates to U.S. law. Based on its definition in U.S. law, a treaty is legally enforceable and has been ratified each party's jurisdiction. The Paris Agreement has not been ratified by the legislative branch in the U.S., and as such, participation in the agreement is voluntary and not enforceable by law. Any nation can withdraw from the agreement, permitting

²⁰ When War Machine apprehends Captain America, Falcon, Winter Soldier, and Black Panther in Bucharest, he states explicitly to Captain America, "congratulations, Cap. You're a criminal" (Russo & Russo, 2016, 0:59:29).

that they give the U.N. the appropriate amount of notice (McGrath, 2020). This is one of prominent critiques of the Paris Agreement. Because it is a voluntary pledge to limit the effects of climate change and is not legally enforceable, some critics find that such a document is structured too loosely to effectively meet its bottom line. However, sometimes complex and ever-evolving challenges need looser guidelines to effectively solve immediately pressing problems. “By the time an agreement could be hammered out—if it could be hammered out—the scale and features of the problem, not to mention the technologies that could be used to address it, would have changed” (Slaughter, 2015).

Like the Paris Agreement, the Accords are developed with the intention to be an agreement that all parties can be accountable to and serve as collaborative guidance to provide an immediate solution to an imminent threat. For both challenges, a collaboration is necessary to address each global crisis (whether greenhouse gas emissions or an intergalactic invasion).

The Principal-Agent Problem with the New Administration of the Avengers

The previous section provides administrative awareness as to why the Sokovia Accords are considered by legislators. Even members of the Avengers themselves grasp such a policy is proposed. In the film, Vision states to the group:

In the eight years since Mr. Stark announced himself as Iron Man, the number of known enhanced persons has grown exponentially. And during the same period, the number of potentially world-ending events has risen at a commensurate rate...I'm saying there may be a causality. Our very strength invites challenge. Challenge incites conflict. And conflict breeds catastrophe. Oversight, - oversight is not an idea that can be dismissed out of hand. (Russo & Russo, 2016, 0:28:11)

Viewers may have been perplexed when Secretary Ross informs the Avengers about the proposed policy, but students of public administration best understand why such an idea was proposed. Applying the frameworks of sociologist Max Weber, this request is an attempt for

government officials to establish some form of bureaucratic authority. To establish bureaucratic authority, 1) regular activities are to be assigned as official duties; 2) the authority to assign these duties are organized according to the rules and boundaries set by officials; and 3) officials are to set the provisions for how the task should be executed (Weber, 1922/2012). This is the exact purpose of the Sokovia Accords: to regulate the behavior of the Avengers by better controlling *what* they do *when* acting in an official capacity. With the committee determining when the Avengers are authorized to assist, the relationship shifts from a collaborative effort (as it was with S.H.I.E.L.D.) to a hierarchical principal-agent one.

Some may ask why there is an attempt to create a principal-agent relationship with the Avengers. The answer is quite simple. By introducing the Sokovia Accords, domestic and international government agencies intend to prevent the Avengers from serving individual interests by managing the conditions of their use. When proposing the new arrangement, Secretary Ross states to the group: “For the past four years, you’ve operated with unlimited power and no supervision. That’s an arrangement the governments of the world can no longer tolerate. But I think we have a solution. The Sokovia Accords” (Russo & Russo, 2016, 0:23:01). Creating a bureaucratic arrangement seems like the only option to ensure that when they are using their specialized abilities, it is only in an official capacity as “bureaucracy segregates official activity as something distinct from the sphere of private life” (Weber, 1922/2012, p. 45). The Sokovia Accords serve as a government guide to oversee the decision-making and performance management of the Avengers, ensuring that they are private citizens until the government deutes them to use their enhanced abilities as public managers.

The principal-agent model is effective, as it allows principals to source the best agents to meet a need. However, the principal in the film *forgot* one of the most important aspects of this

model: incentivizing the agent. David E. M. Sappington (1991) describes the steps that are supposed to occur in a principal-agent contractual relationship:

First, the principal designs the terms of the contract, which specifies the payments P the agent will receive depending on observed performance X . The principal then offers the contract to the agent. Next, the agent decides whether to accept or reject the contract. If the agent rejects the contract, the relationship is terminated, never to occur again. If the agent accepts the contract, he begins his “employment” and observes the realization of the productivity parameter, θ . **Next, the agent decides how much effort to put forth** [emphasis added]. Finally, the agent’s performance is observed, and payments are made to the agent, as promised in the contract. (p. 47)

The agent decides on the amount of effort based on being incentivized. Sappington refers to this as *incentive theory*, and it is a fully functional aspect of any principal-agent relationship. The agent must get something out of the interaction or there is no benefit of contributing their labor. This concept of incentivizing agents can be found in *The Human Side of Enterprise*, written by scholar Douglas McGregor. In this scholarly work, McGregor finds that it is in the best interest of any principal to encourage or reward agents when managing them to complete tasks, as any term of employment must meet their needs for physical safety, self-esteem, role satisfaction, and self-fulfillment (McGregor, 1957). When one, or more, of these needs are not met, agents take their skills elsewhere. McGregor writes of two approaches to management: Theory X and Theory Y. He states: “Theory X places exclusive reliance upon external control of human behavior, while Theory Y relies heavily on self-control and self-direction” (McGregor, 1957, p. 157).

Based on the above definitions by McGregor, it can be said the Sokovia Accords are aligned with Theory X ideologies since their primary focus is to control the behavior of the Avengers while in the field. By not incentivizing their efforts, the Avengers who disagree to the Accords struggle to find a reason to continue with the collaboration. A Theory Y approach to the

Sokovia Accords may not have been as detrimental as what is presented, as it would have centered organizational contributions of agents that would achieve personal goals by aligning these goals with organizational outputs (McGregor, 1957). An opportunity was greatly missed here, for if the contract had taken a Theory Y approach to performance management, the entire group may have been more receptive to this shift in governance, especially since a governing relationship existed in the past. Unfortunately, the rush to establish a hierarchical governing relationship with the creates a principal-agent problem between the public sector and the Avengers who remain. For those who ultimately divest from the group, the principal-agent relationship does not align with their ideas on decision-making. Captain America, Falcon, and Scarlet Witch find that by signing the document invalidates the reason that they became Avengers: altruism.²¹ To them, being an Avenger is more than a title. It is about providing timely responses to imminent threats and using their abilities to ensure public safety. The Accords places a parameter on how the Avengers utilize their own judgment to benefit society, removing the altruism that recruited them by forfeiting their ability to make decisions and provide timely responses to dangerous situations (Russo & Russo, 2016).

As it relates to the principal agent relationship, the Accords create a conundrum because how can one incentivize altruism? How can an organization, like the United Nations, attempt to create a hierarchical relationship with a private organization when it is that private organization that has the leverage? In *Winter Soldier*, Black Widow appears before a senate committee to provide testimony on the why S.H.I.E.L.D. is destroyed. When threatened with arrest, she

²¹ In *Captain America: The First Avenger*, Rogers undergoes scientific testing to become a super soldier (and ultimately Captain America) because he reveals that he does not like bullies, implying that he believed the Nazis to be bullying Europe during WWII (Johnston, 2011). In *Winter Soldier*, Falcon joins Captain America and Black Widow's effort to take down S.H.I.E.L.D. simply because Captain America needed help (Russo & Russo, 2014). In *Age of Ultron*, Scarlet Witch is told during a conversation with Hawkeye that if she fights against Ultron, it will repair her poor decisions to help Ultron during the beginning of the film *and* she would become an Avenger (Whedon, 2015).

informs that committee that they will not arrest her or other Avengers because they are the most qualified persons capable of defending the planet from threats that the government cannot manage (Russo & Russo, 2014). Even with this knowledge, a principal-agent problem is created to attempt to force the Avengers into compliance when there is nothing that can be offered to retain their services.

The next sections detail why Avengers like Stark (Iron Man) are eager to support the Accords, and also explains the layered reasons as to why Rogers (Captain America) divests from the group.

Iron Man: A Man About Bureaucracy

The next section of this study will describe how the traditions of public administrations contribute to the conflict between Rogers and Stark in *Civil War*, as they do not agree on how efficient governance should be effectuated.

Many collaborative governance arrangements, like the one that the Accords presents, utilize a Hamiltonian approach, where the dominant actor sets the terms of the collaboration (Kettl, 2015; Putansu, 2015). These methods clearly outline expectations of agents as well as performance goals, and how that performance will be measured. It can be assumed that by supporting the regulation of the Avengers, Stark subscribes to a Hamiltonian-Wilsonian philosophy as a public manager. The Hamiltonian-Wilsonian philosophy may seem familiar because it is by definition, public management (Kettl, 2015). The tradition finds that appropriate implementation depends heavily on political direction, as political guidance focuses on the management of the overall program rather than how it is done (Kettl, 2015). This tradition takes the stance that bureaucratic systems build accountability, as administrators should have to answer to elected officials to meet intended goals (Kettl, 2015). In the MCU films that follow

The Avengers (2012) where Stark appears (including *Civil War*), he both mentions and behaves in a manner that demonstrates that he feels personally responsible for many of the threats faced by the group and expresses remorse and regret for some decisions made in his official capacity as Iron Man, which has negatively affected his mental health causing increasing anxiety (Black, 2013; Russo & Russo, 2016; Whedon, 2015). It is exactly his anxiety about creating defensive strategies for the planet that unintentionally causes create Ultron.²² Furthermore, the continued pressure to make “the right decision” in his official capacity severs his romantic relationship with his longtime girlfriend (Russo & Russo, 2016). By supporting the Sokovia Accords, he hopes that the regulation will absolve him of the burden of making these difficult decisions, stating that he “thought maybe the Accords could split the difference” (Russo & Russo, 2016, 00:59:03). By adopting the Hamiltonian-Wilsonian administrative approach (Kettl, 2015), Stark (and those in the group that agree with him) express that they are open to top-down leadership, clear accountability, and believe that public management is the best way to provide services to citizens.

These beliefs tie greatly into the philosophies of Waldo and Donahue. As it relates to administration, government should serve as the decision-maker and delegate responsibility to public administrators and managers (Waldo, 1952). Though Hamiltonian collaborations with the public sector are ideal for measuring and monitoring performance management (Putansu, 2015), Donahue (2004) believes that a dominant share of the responsibility of the collaboration should lie with the entity that holds the best interests of the public, and *that* entity alone should maintain

²² I would say that the creation of Ultron *as a threat* is unintentional. Ultron is conceptualized by Stark to be an artificial intelligence defense for Earth against intergalactic threats (Whedon, 2015). Unfortunately, Ultron self-actualizes and does harm to the group and the public.

the final say during the initiative. This entity could and should hold the most leverage during a collaborative relationship at all times.

Captain America: The Jeffersonian Avenger

On the contrary, Rogers is a Jeffersonian-Madisonian based on his position on the Accords (Kettl, 2015). Like Hamiltonians, Jeffersonians believe in a hierarchy for proper public administration, except that they believe that the public should have more influence on how public service is effectuated (Kettl, 2015). Jeffersonians are open to government collaborations, as they encourage federalism and interagency networking between local, state, and federal governments (Kettl, 2015). As a Jeffersonian, he is averse to this oversight because the terms and conditions of the Accords are not aligned with Madisonian philosophies (Kettl, 2015).

As a Madisonian, he believes that one group should not hold more power than another in a collaboration, as that is not congruent with creating a proper system for checks and balances and partisanship (Kettl, 2015; Putansu, 2015). When this occurs and one group has more authority, conflicts of interest and corruption arise as they had in S.H.I.E.L.D. When everyone has the same level of authority, the lack of the hierarchy permits participants to collectively reach solutions and explore all options (and reveal potentially self-interested policies of legislators). This Jeffersonian-Madisonian approach is one that is a proponent of federalism, and someone is more partial to collaborative governance would be open to the Madisonian approach to balance power between parties (Kettl, 2015). Rogers is supportive of methods like these, as they permit him to retain more of his autonomy while in his official capacity.

Interestingly at one point, the roles were reversed, with Stark preferable to bottom-up leadership and Rogers preferential to a top-down method. In *The Avengers*, Rogers (in his official capacity as Captain America) states to Stark, “we have orders. We should follow them,”

(Whedon, 2012, 00:58:37), with Stark retorting “following is not really my style” (Whedon, 2012, 00:58:39). The events that occur between that film and *Civil War* cause both men to shift their approach to governance (Stark shifting from a person who is untrustworthy of government to supporting government oversight; Rogers going from a dutiful soldier to becoming wary of government).

Government Mistrust and The Hierarchy of Needs

Rogers’ wariness of government grows out of the conflict in the film, *Winter Soldier*. As mentioned previously, in the film he learned that the federal agency, S.H.I.E.L.D. had been infiltrated by members of HYDRA, a former Soviet terrorist organization perceived by the public to be defunct. The mistrust that he feels toward the government in *Winter Soldier* (and subsequent films) can be likened to how many Americans feel when a political scandal occurs, and an elected official prioritize their own self-interests over the interests of the public. Frederick Mosher (1974/2012) wrote of the Watergate²³ scandal:

Are the various deviations from proper behavior that are popularly associated with Watergate to be regarded as one-time events, the product of a particular combination of circumstances and of people, mostly at high levels, in a political organization and in the administration? Were they unique in American history and unlikely to recur in the future? Or was Watergate simply an extension of trends in American politics and government that have been underway for a long time and which could, unless deliberately checked or reversed, be expected to continue, and even worsen, in the future?...Or finally, was Watergate a cataclysmic shock, a peaking of the trends and forces suggested above, from which society and government may not recover without severe surgery? (p. 321)

²³ The Watergate scandal and subsequent investigation occurred between 1972-1974. On June 17, 1972, police arrested several men for burglary and wiretapping inside the offices of the Democratic National Committee (Dean & Robenalt, 2012). The subsequent trials of those involved led to many convictions of government officials and the resignation of President Richard Nixon.

Mosher found that the Watergate scandal was a combination of all three questions asked. The scandal was collectively an aberration from the expectations of government, an extension of a failed state, and a culmination of inefficient strategies and outcomes in government leadership (Mosher, 1974/2012). When scandals like this occur, many people are left wondering how and why something like this could happen in government, and the mistrust that develops greatly impacts public trust for generations and causes irreparable decreases in voter disengagement (Peterson & Wrighton, 1998).

Such behavior is why Wilson believed that the separation of government and administration would prevent corruption within government agencies, and also justifies why Rogers would agree with such an ideology. In *Civil War*, Rogers had the same sentiment that many members of the American public held post-Watergate. After learning that S.H.I.E.L.D. had been compromised by HYDRA-affiliated officials, Rogers finds himself in an ethical quandary, becoming wary of the government that he once supported. He does not find it rational to entrust Avengers leadership to an international government agency without considering the fact that the corruption that occurred within S.H.I.E.L.D. could occur in the U.N., as government corruption is a result of the behavior of its participants, not the agency itself (Mosher, 1974/2012).

Compounding this concept, the breach of both government trust that occurs in *Winter Soldier* affects his views on government bureaucracy as a whole, as well as his need for psychological safety. While trust and psychological safety are connected, they are not the same concept. Psychological safety is a term used to describe a person's perception on the impact of interpersonal threats in the workplace (Edmondson et al., 2004). It is used to evaluate learning behavior at work, weighing how one would be assessed if they were to ask a question, solicit feedback, propose an idea, etc. (Edmondson et al., 2004). For teams and groups, psychological

safety extends beyond the individual to the group as a whole. The psychological safety—or threat—that may exist in an environment extends to every member of the group because they work so closely together. Because they are able to learn from collective mistakes, they may have a different professional experience than those who do not work in groups (Edmondson et al., 2004). Trust, as defined in Chapter 2 varies from the above definition. Trust is about sharing vulnerability with another party with the hope that that vulnerability is not exploited. Though similar in how they address vulnerability, these are not the same.

Per Maslow (1943/2012, feeling safe and secure is a human need. Without feeling psychologically safe, there is no possible way that Captain America can remain confident in his official role as an Avenger or self-actualize. Since he would not be able to have all of his needs met in this role, he chooses not to sign the Accords with the understanding that such an arrangement would not be in his self-interests, and therefore not a rational choice.

Expanding on the breach of trust, the political oversight of the Avengers becoming political causes Rogers to distrust the policy outright. When discussing the Accords with the Avengers, Rogers notably rejects the idea of the U.N. oversight committed by stating that “it’s run by people with agendas and agendas change” (Russo & Russo, 2016, 00:30:36). This statement serves as a reminder of what he encountered with S.H.I.E.L.D., and the efforts that he went through to dismantle it. He continues his diatribe with the group, concerned about what should happen if the committee sends the Avengers on a mission that they do not agree with, or in the alternative, are not permitted to deploy to a location where intervention is needed (Russo & Russo, 2016). This response reveals that Rogers is concerned about fragmented or corrupted (or both) narratives being used to develop public policy. It is not uncommon for legislators to

craft a specific narrative when developing a policy, utilizing the narrative policy framework (NPF).

Originated in 2010, legislators use this framework to influence how policy is perceived by other legislators and the public. For NPF to be successful in the creation of policy, elected officials approach legislation as if they are designing a theatrical performance. They focus on the setting of each issue (the exact problem); characters (those affected by the issue and subsequent policy that remedies it); plot (a correlation between the setting and problem); and the moral (the solution and remedies of the policy) (McBeth et al., 2014). In this phase of policy creation, legislators like Secretary Ross and the countries who authorize the Accords utilize the *homo narrans* model of NPF. This model focuses on the narrative that legislators tell themselves as to how the policy could, should, or will work. Secretary Ross and the rest of the nations in support believe that the Accords would be in the best interests of the public, minimizing agency costs, and build more transparent accountability. The *agora narrans* model is next in the framework, serving as the narrative of the policy and how it is communicated to the public to sway support. His fear of an “agenda” is not unwarranted as the success (or subsequent failure of policies) depends on the narratives that are developed.

Conclusion of Findings

While some may consider the films of the MCU films to be juvenile (as they are based on comic books), these films can be analyzed as social critiques and used for educational purposes. By scrutinizing this work to examine where failures occur in the fictional reality of the MCU, suggestions can be made to stakeholders and administrators to prevent life from imitating art. *Civil War* was selected as the source material for this research largely because of its impact in the MCU, and because the discourse presented in this film is reflective of the discourse that

permeates collaborative governance networks. Kettl (2015) writes that one of the objectives of public administration is to create checks and balances of government responsibility because too much or too little can contribute to chaos. By applying FDA to the discourse of *Civil War*, it is revealed that one of the main challenges that the Sokovia Accords presents is directly related to the politics-administration dichotomy: how much political steering should be present in the administration of the Avengers?

Based on the events of previous films, and the incident in Lagos that occurred in the beginning of *Civil War*, the Accords are necessary to manage the casualties and damages that occur in the field while the Avengers are defending Earth. The Accords intend to reorient the group to be only deployed when the newly established oversight committee deems it necessary. This prevents the group from contributing to disasters in both developed and underresourced nations, as well as limit the amount of recovery efforts needed in decimated areas (Watts, 2017).

An accord, not a treaty, is proposed to regain oversight of the group as swiftly as possible. Unfortunately, the long-lasting politics-administration dichotomy revealed itself through its implementation. Stark and Rogers are at odds on the matter from the moment they are exposed to the Accords. Stark believes that the government should handle the majority of administrative tasks and grant authority to the Avengers as needed. He feels that if the Avengers followed these guidelines, they would have to pay less consequences if they made mistakes. In the alternative, the Accords do not meet Rogers' expectations for a governing relationship. Being distrustful of bureaucratic agencies, this new arrangement does not fulfill his hierarchy of needs, as it removes his ability to exercise his own judgment in times of crisis. As someone who requires a balance of authority for his own protection, the Accords remove his need for autonomous decision-making.

Chapter 5: Epilogue (Discussion)

Just as other works of fiction, *Civil War* serves as a critical analysis of what may potentially occur when the government works with the public sector and the challenges that may arise from this type of collaboration. Moreover, one research goal of this dissertation has been to use a popular cultural reference, such as the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU), to demonstrate that many people have been exposed to specific theories and themes of the discipline than they may have realized. Employing a Foucauldian discourse analysis to the content of the film enhanced this study because it was important to examine just how powerful a policy that the Sokovia Accords are in the film. Should politics and administration be run separately, or should politics serve as a guide to administration?

Before answering these questions, it is important to again address both the methodology and validity of this study. Because the reality that exists in the MCU is constructed, a universal or absolute analysis of the events that take place in the film would be unable to be attained (Riccucci, 2010) because each researcher is liable to view each film differently. Postmodernism does not task itself with finding an objective truth, as other scientific research methods do. Rather, this approach, combined with Foucauldian frameworks, argues that “truth” (and the reality of said truths) is based on fragmented and incomplete assessments that have historically been used to create social norms, determining what is accepted and what is not. Often these norms are put in place by institutions that have a specific threshold of power. Applying these frameworks to the discourse analysis has provided this researcher with the opportunity to review the film in a manner that assesses the very frequent disconnect between policy and administration.

The Sokovia Accords Apply a Bandage to a Situation That Required Surgery

The goal of this study was to analyze the discourse produced in *Civil War* as it relates to aspects of governance in administration. The analysis concludes that the Sokovia Accords are meant to centralize the oversight of the Avengers to prevent agency costs by limiting their administrative discretion in the field, reducing the Avengers to enforcement agents *only*. Doing so not only establishes accountability between the Avengers and U.N. bureaucrats, and those same bureaucrats and the countries that they represent, but places politics back within the group's administration. As stated in previous chapters, apolitical administration is not in the best interest of the public, as administration needs to be guided by legislators to create checks and balances between the two systems. It is also important to note that a lack of political guidance comes at the expense of government accountability.

Though a governing relationship with the Avengers is necessary, the implementation of the Accords is a poor effort. When the original collaboration with S.H.I.E.L.D is severed in *Winter Soldier*, the trust that once existed between the two parties is severed as well. In lieu of making amends for the violation, the team is instructed to adhere to policy created by an international governing organization, as if a rift does not exist between the public sector and the group. Unfortunately, an assumption is made that such a legislation like the Sokovia Accords can be implemented in a manner that pleases all parties involved.

Limitations

Stake (2010) writes that “qualitative research is subjective. It is personalistic. Its contributions toward an improved and disciplined science are slow and tendentious” (p. 29). Specific scenes, behaviors, and dialogue from the film have been selected to apply to specific theories and frameworks found in the field of public administration. A critique of FDA that often

arises is determining the extent that can subjectivity of the discourse can be theorized (Willig, 2013). Discourse is subjective and conditional, and the findings in this dissertation represent a singular analysis of the researcher's characterization of the source material. Another limitation of FDA is selectivity, as researchers who utilized this analysis method often select discourse that supports their hypothesis, especially those with a deep background or perspective on the matter (Carabine, 2001; Whitehead, 2011). Some scholars consider this to be the cost of constructivism on discourse (Reed, 2000). Because discourse is based on communication and developed by subjective knowledge, critics of the method find that at times it can be a bit reductionist (Reed, 2000).

My approach to this research permitted me to be critical and reflective as possible, even as a fan of the films and comic books. Therefore, I watched *Civil War* first to refresh my understanding of the film, and then re-watched all of the films in order of chronological events (up to and including *Civil War*) to better grasp and assess the conditions that the Avengers create and endure in the MCU. As my findings emerged, I realized that evaluating the films from the lens of public administration (and in the chronological order of events as listed in Table 2) caused me to question my previously held beliefs on the characters as they developed, and my evaluations of the Accords overall. As a fan of the film franchise, I first viewed *Civil War* in 2016 when it was released. My analysis of the story was that oversight was needed, that Stark was correct to sign the Accords, and I frowned upon Rogers for refusing to do so. Conducting a FDA study for this dissertation has caused me to reverse my initial position, as my understanding of public administration has permitted me to better understand why Rogers (and those that agree with him) decide to divest from the group. After executing this study, I realize that the dispositions held by Rogers and Stark can be held in tandem. Stark is correct that it absolutely *is*

a necessity for the Avengers to have some form of oversight, as the group is not formed to be autonomous. For the greater good of the public, it would be logical to work alongside the public sector to achieve goals. However, I have realized in my review of the film that Rogers is also correct: removing the Avengers' ability to contribute to the decision-making process inhibits their ability to do their job, specifically a job where they assume personal risk. In a perfect world, both ideals would have been accepted as truth, which would have potentially given way to a more successful option than the Sokovia Accords. Moreover, this study helped me better my understanding of how researcher assumptions prior to the study can evolve based on the findings and analysis.

Conclusion and Future Implications

As discussed previously, flexible collaborations can be implemented to meet project goals, but there is a great difference between being flexible and being unstable. Because of the Accords' instability from a public administration perspective, the Accords were never going to be unanimously agreed upon by the Avengers as an effective performance management tool. The collaboration ceases between the Avengers and the public sector toward the end of the *Winter Soldier* movie, with the group never being reassigned. To prevent them from becoming autonomous, they should have been assigned to another government agency after S.H.I.E.L.D. collapsed. Though reassignment is both reasonable and rational, the collaboration between the Avengers and the public sector was too fluid. With loosely structured terms of engagement within the network, Avengers administration failed over time because more structure was needed during the partnership. Without clearly set boundaries that identify what each actor is accountable for, administrative ambiguity occurs. Shared accountability in program management contributes to positive program management (Kettl, 2002). The previous collaboration was

confederative, and because an accord is not a treaty (and not legally enforceable), the Sokovia Accords reactivates a confederative partnership with the Avengers *when it did not work in the first place*. The only difference between the previous arrangement and the one presented by the Sokovia Accords is that the Accords create a hierarchical relationship and removed collaborative decision-making. This restriction is more adverse than the previous collaboration with S.H.I.E.L.D.

Additionally, from the moment that they are introduced to the Accords, Stark and Rogers fail to see eye to eye on the subject. Stark supports the idea that the public sector should bear most of the administrative responsibility and delegate authority to the Avengers as needed. He believes that if the Avengers were to operate within these parameters, they would bear less of the burdens if mistakes are made, transferring most of the accountability from them to the U.N. oversight committee. His perspective is that a Hamiltonian cooperation would appease all parties in the collaboration because executive leadership would have the authority to deploy them at will (Kettl, 2015; Russo & Russo, 2016). Considering that it is his bad decision that creates the technological threat Ultron in the previous film, it makes sense as to why he would want to integrate a top-down approach to leadership into the administration of the group.

Rogers is the complete opposite, preferring a more Jeffersonian-Madisonian approach to governance (Kettl, 2015). The Accords do not work for him for several reasons. First, Rogers is untrustworthy of bureaucratic systems, as the Avengers' previous collaboration with the public sector is revealed to have been infiltrated by the enemy for an undetermined amount of time. To be assigned to another governing agency is triggering, because there would be no way to determine if the same situation would occur again. Second, he finds no personal incentive to continue with this collaboration under the Accords. In his official role as Captain America,

Rogers finds fulfillment using his judgment and his special abilities while protecting the public. The Accords limits both *when* and *how* he would be able to protect the public, making his participation without a benefit to him. while saving the planet,

In its own way, the film serves as a warning to public administrators to not rush to administrative policy without taking heed of all of the facts at play. The film details bureaucratic distrust between Captain America and organized governing institutions. As Gray (1989) notes, partnerships transition from exploratory, advisory, and confederative to contractual over time, building trust along the way. When an impasse occurs and the trust is gone, the relationship must immediately become reparative, *with the understanding that it begins again at the exploratory phase*. Regardless of how familiar the parties are or have been with each other, there is no possible way for the collaboration to move as intended with one party has reservations about another in the network. If there is anything that this film confirmed from public administration theory, is that establishing and maintaining trust within a collaboration is just as important as the collaboration itself.

The Accords created a hierarchical relationship with the Avengers and the U.N. Though this happens often, it is important for public administrations to be mindful of the rules of engagement in a hierarchical network. It is critical that agents remain incentivized during the duration of the collaboration. When the Avengers are instructed by the Secretary of State to sign the Accords or retire, there is no conversation about what they receive out of the new arrangement. Essentially, all that they are to receive from the Accords is oversight. Not only does that create a principal-agent problem, but that is not how agency theory works. How can a principal fully expect to control agent behavior without providing the agent a return on investment?

Collaboration is negotiated order, with the terms of the arrangement able to be negotiated or renegotiated at any time (Gray, 1989). If the public sector ever needs to renegotiate the terms of an arrangement to maximize efficiency or obtain a different result, there is a chance that the agents may not agree to the new terms. If there are not any items in the new contract that would be beneficial to them, then perhaps a review of the terms is necessary. Agents are people who have quintessential needs that must be met to participate in any behavior. When reevaluating new terms and conditions, principals must ask themselves how their proposed conditions can satisfy one's hierarchy of needs. For a collaboration to continue successfully, one requires some form of motivation. The Avengers did not have that with the Accords. Lastly, the public sector should not commit to a long-term collaboration without a clear and outlined plan for operations that are legally enforceable. Regardless of whether hierarchical or lateral, and if all motivational needs are met, an enforceable contract details the expectations of the parties to each other. These contracts can identify performance management and performance measurement techniques that are expected, so that each party in the network has a clear understanding of their responsibilities.

One of my hopes in this study is to effectively emphasize that public administration is a discipline that reveals itself in various mediums. As works of fiction have informed policy for centuries, it was important to assess (via this failure) lessons that both public administrators and public managers can apply to their governance networks. This study serves as a cautionary tale for networks that need to structure or restructure their governance in public private partnerships to navigate more complex challenges in public administration today. Future studies could explore the ramifications of the principal-agent problem that the Accords creates, and the burden that it creates on the Avengers that stay on the team. In *Avengers: Infinity War*, Rhodey (War Machine) hints to this, ultimately regretting his decision to endorse the Accords because it

affects the resources and workforce that once comprised the Avengers (Russo & Russo, 2019)²⁴ . Such a study would provide an intricate analysis that examine both the fallout and organizational effects of what happens when an agent calls a principal's bluff.

Another opportunity for research on this subject would benefit the subject of human resources and workforce management. This dissertation noted that several Avengers left the group because they do not find an incentive to stay. Workforce development research scientists would be able to assess this divesting from a human resource perspective, diving deeper into retention metrics as well as McGregor's theories. Hopefully that research would uncover how organizations would best be able to retain top talent based on what incentivizes their workers.

²⁴ During a conversation with Secretary of State Ross, Rhodey is asked explicitly if he has second thoughts about signing the Accords, to which he responds without hesitation: "not anymore" (Russo & Russo, 2019, 0:54:41).

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Figure 3 References

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- Figure 3.4** [Untitled Image of James Rhodes/War Machine]. Marvel.
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APPENDIX-Table 3

**Mid- and Post-Credit Scenes in the Films in the
Marvel Cinematic Universe (In Order of Release)**

<u>Phase</u>	<u>Film</u>	<u>Mid-Credit Scene</u>	<u>Post-Credit Scene</u>	<u>Future Films That Addressed These Scene(s)</u>
Phase I	<i>Iron Man</i> (2008)	Tony Stark finds S.H.I.E.L.D. Director Nick Fury in his mansion. Fury informs him that he is there to discuss the Avengers Initiative with him, as he is not the only superhero in the world.		<i>Avengers</i> (2012)
Phase I	<i>The Incredible Hulk</i> (2008)	Tony Stark meets a drunken General (and future Secretary of State) Thaddeus Ross in a bar and informs him that a team is being assembled. *This scene appears in the film prior to the credits*		<i>Avengers</i> (2012)
Phase I	<i>Iron Man 2</i> (2010)	S.H.I.E.L.D. Agent Phil Coulson happens upon a crater in a remote New Mexican desert. Inside that crater a large hammer (which is revealed to be Thor's mjölnir (pronounced <i>mee-yol-nir</i>)). Coulson calls S.H.I.E.L.D. Director Nick Fury to report this find.		<i>Thor</i> (2011)
Phase I	<i>Thor</i> (2011)	S.H.I.E.L.D. Director Nick Fury invites a scientist to a S.H.I.E.L.D. facility. There, he asks the scientist to investigate an extraterrestrial power source. The scientist agrees, but it is revealed that his mind is being controlled by Loki, Thor's brother.		<i>Avengers</i> (2012)
Phase I	<i>Captain America: The First Avenger</i> (2011)	Captain America is shown striking a punching bag when visited by S.H.I.E.L.D. Director Nick Fury. Fury informs him that he is there to give him an assignment that has the potential to save the world.		<i>Avengers</i> (2012)
Phase I	<i>The Avengers</i> (2012)	Thanos, an intergalactic villain, is informed by his consigliere (known as "The Other") that Loki (Thor's brother) was defeated during	The Avengers silently eat shwarma at a local shop after the battle that occurs in the film.	<u>Phase II</u> <i>Guardians of the Galaxy</i> (2014) <i>Avengers: Age of Ultron</i> (2015)

<u>Phase</u>	<u>Film</u>	<u>Mid-Credit Scene</u>	<u>Post-Credit Scene</u>	<u>Future Films That Addressed These Scene(s)</u>
		the battle of New York. Thanos smiles grimacingly.		<u>Phase III</u> <i>Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2</i> (2017) <i>Avengers: Infinity War</i> (2018) <i>Avengers: Endgame</i> (2019)
Phase II	<i>Iron Man 3</i> (2013)	Tony Stark recounts his battle during the current film to Dr. Bruce Banner. After realizing that Dr. Banner slept through most of his story, he begins another.		N/A
Phase II	<i>Thor: The Dark World</i> (2013)	Two Asgardians (native of Thor's planet) entrust one of the infinity stones ²⁵ to an intergalactic collector for safekeeping, unaware that he intends to track all of them down for himself.	Thor visits his earthly love interest Jane in London and kisses her. The rest of the credit reveals an extraterrestrial monster chasing a flock of birds.	<i>Guardians of the Galaxy</i> (2014)

²⁵ The infinity stones are various gems (mind, power, reality, soul, space, and time) that grant their possessor(s) specific powers related to each stone (the soul stone permits its possessor to manipulate souls of the living/dead; the space stone permits its possessor to teleport and become omnipresent across space; the time stone permits its possessor to time travel or control time; the mind stone grants telekinesis, telepathy, and possession; the power stone increases its possessor's power; the reality stone permits its possessor to control reality). (Shiach, 2016). When all six are together, the possessor has infinite power (Shiach, 2016). They are very coveted items in the MCU.

<u>Phase</u>	<u>Film</u>	<u>Mid-Credit Scene</u>	<u>Post-Credit Scene</u>	<u>Future Films That Addressed These Scene(s)</u>
Phase II	<i>Captain America: The Winter Soldier</i> (2014)	In a secret bunker, two HYDRA scientists converse about the S.H.I.E.L.D. data that has been leaked online while in a secret bunker. They also reveal that they have Loki's scepter (the one he used while in the film <i>Avengers</i> (2011)) and are studying it. The two then approach two holding cells that house twin siblings Pietro (Quicksilver) and Wanda (Scarlett Witch) Maximoff, who look to be learning how to use their powers while in captivity.	James "Bucky" Barnes (also known as the "Winter Soldier") visits the Smithsonian exhibit on Captain America and reads the memorial written about him.	<u>Phase II</u> <i>Avengers: Age of Ultron</i> (2015) <u>Phase III</u> <i>Captain America: Civil War</i> (2016)
Phase II	<i>Guardians of the Galaxy</i> (2014)	Groot, a tree-like character from the film, is shown dancing as he is potted in a planter. *This scene appears in the film prior to the credits*	After his entire collection is decimated, Tivan, the intergalactic collector introduced in the <i>Thor: The Dark World</i> (2013) mid-credit scene, sips a drink in the rubble of his possessions.	N/A
Phase II	<i>Avengers: Age of Ultron</i> (2015)	Thanos, weary of the failed attempts of others to defeat the Avengers, reveals that he will handle them himself. He places his hand in the Infinity Gauntlet, a glove that is used	A window washer is cleaning windows on a skyscraper in New York City. Spider-Man is perched on the roof of a neighboring building and informs him that he has missed a spot.	<u>Phase III</u> <i>Avengers: Infinity War</i> (2018) <i>Avengers: Endgame</i> (2019)

<u>Phase</u>	<u>Film</u>	<u>Mid-Credit Scene</u>	<u>Post-Credit Scene</u>	<u>Future Films That Addressed These Scene(s)</u>
		to hold all of the infinity stones.		
Phase II	<i>Ant-Man</i> ((2015)	Hank Pym shows his daughter, Hope van Dyne. an unfinished prototype of her Wasp superhero suit.	Captain America, Sam Wilson (Falcon) and Bucky are in an abandoned warehouse with Bucky's mechanical arm secured in a vice grip. Privately, Wilson and Captain America have a conversation where they realize that they cannot share this information with Tony Stark due to the Sokovia Accords. Wilson suggests an acquaintance who may help with this.	<u>Phase III</u> <i>Ant-Man and the Wasp</i> (2018) <i>Captain America: Civil War</i> (2016)
Phase III	<i>Captain America: Civil War</i> (2016)	T'Challa permits Bucky and Steve Rogers entry into Wakanda while they work for a cure to Bucky's brainwashed condition. Bucky decides to become cryogenically frozen until said cure is found.	Aunt May notices a black eye on her nephew, Peter Parker. Once she leaves his room, he launches a web from his wrist.	<u>Phase III</u> <i>Black Panther</i> (2018) <i>Spider-Man: Homecoming</i> (2017)
Phase III	<i>Doctor Strange</i> (2016)	In a conversation with Dr. Strange, Thor reveals that he and Loki are looking for their father, Odin, in New York City. Dr. Strange agrees to help.	Karl Mordo, a sorcerer introduced in this film, confronts another sorcerer and steals his magic.	N/A
Phase III	<i>Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2</i> (2017)	A character in the film, Kraglin, tries to use a specialized arrow, but runs away after accidentally harming Drax (another	Intergalactic law enforcement abandons an informant on a remote planet.	N/A

<u>Phase</u>	<u>Film</u>	<u>Mid-Credit Scene</u>	<u>Post-Credit Scene</u>	<u>Future Films That Addressed These Scene(s)</u>
		<p>character from the film) in the shoulder.</p> <p>*This scene appears in the film prior to the credits*</p> <p>Stakar, a character in the film, reassembles his old team and proposes that they reunite.</p> <p>Ayesha, a character in the film, informs her assistant that she has created a being that will be able to destroy the Guardians of the Galaxy.</p> <p>Peter Quill, a character from the film, expresses disgust in the state of an adolescent-sized Groot's (Groot is another character from the film) living space.</p>		
Phase III	<i>Spider-Man: Homecoming</i> (2017)	The villain of the film, Adrian Toomes, learns in prison that there are people who want to kill Spider-Man and they ask him about Spider-Man's secret identity to exact their revenge.	Captain America shares a public service announcement about patience and why it is important.	N/A

<u>Phase</u>	<u>Film</u>	<u>Mid-Credit Scene</u>	<u>Post-Credit Scene</u>	<u>Future Films That Addressed These Scene(s)</u>
		Toomes denies knowledge of said identity.		
Phase III	<i>Thor: Ragnarok</i> (2017)	During a conversation on their spaceship, Loki asks Thor if visiting Earth (with him in tow) is a good idea. Thor assures his brother that it should be fine as a larger spaceship appears in their view.	The Grandmaster, a character from the film, declares the revolution a draw to curry favor with public opinion.	<i>Avengers: Infinity War</i> (2018)
Phase III	<i>Black Panther</i> (2018)	King T'Challa visits the United Nations to inform others and the press that Wakanda will open its borders and share resources with the world	Bucky awakens from his comatose state and is told that he has much to learn.	<i>Avengers: Endgame</i> (2019)
Phase III	<i>Avengers: Infinity War</i> (2018)	S.H.I.E.L.D. Director Nick Fury sends a page to an unidentified number before he, and others, vaporize due to the events of the film.		<i>Captain Marvel</i> (2019)
Phase III	<i>Ant-Man and the Wasp</i> (2018)	Scott Lang (Ant-Man) enters a quantum realm. Those who were supposed to pull him out are vaporized before doing so.	A giant ant plays the drums.	N/A

<u>Phase</u>	<u>Film</u>	<u>Mid-Credit Scene</u>	<u>Post-Credit Scene</u>	<u>Future Films That Addressed These Scene(s)</u>
Phase III	<i>Captain Marvel</i> (2019)	Steve Rogers, Natasha Romanoff, James Rhodes, and Bruce Banner are in the midst of a conversation when Captain Marvel appears and demands that they tell her where S.H.I.E.L.D. Director Nick Fury is.	Goose, S.H.I.E.L.D. Director Nick Fury's cat, hops on his desk and regurgitates the Tesseract, and extraterrestrial energy producing source.	<i>Avengers: Endgame</i> (2019)
Phase III	<i>Avengers: Endgame</i> (2019)	N/A		
Phase III	<i>Spider-Man: Far From Home</i> (2019)	While on a date, Peter Parker watches a breaking news bulletin where his secret identity is revealed to the public.	Nick Fury and Maria Hill (as presented in the film) are revealed to be Skrulls, shapeshifting aliens who have disguised themselves as these two. One contacts the real Fury to inform him of a complication faced during a mission.	N/A
Phase IV	<i>Black Widow</i> (2021)	Set in 2023 (5 years post- <i>Avengers: Endgame</i>), Yelena visits her sister Natasha's (the Avenger known as Black Widow) grave in Ohio. While there, she is visited by Contessa Valentina Allegra de Fontaine (also known as Val). Val informs Yelena of an opportunity to avenge her sister's murder and shows her a picture of Clint Barton, the retired Avenger known as Hawkeye).		N/A