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A *Children's Crusade*: legacy and the formation of adolescent identity in Marvel's *Young Avengers*

Adam Sorice

While Marvel's most iconic superheroes have played a prominent role within popular culture since their conception, little critical attention has been paid to the derivative characters that ground and populate their respective narratives. This article explores identity formation in the comic book text through *Young Avengers*, a 2000s series following the adventures of adolescent heroes who view established 'legacy' characters such as Captain America and Scarlet Witch as both role models and parental figures. This article, among the first academic analyses published on *Young Avengers*, argues that 'legacy' heroes represent both cultural figures for offshoot characters to emulate as well as cultural structures to rebel against, positioning the Young Avengers as the product of both their cultural upbringings and their own personal identities.

At its most basic level, the superhero text is intimately concerned with the concept of legacy.¹ While narratives may continuously evolve, the comic book genre is predominantly underpinned through the perpetuation of a recurring group of 'legacy' heroes: iconic characters defined by both a substantial period of cultural history² and a supporting group of derivative characters directly tied to their mythos.³ While these entrenched superheroes may represent the public face of comics in 21st century media, the offshoot characters that legitimise their world represent a far more intriguing opportunity for literary consideration due to both their multifaceted relationships with 'legacy' characters and the process of identity formation within the superhero text. In this way, we can understand the very

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¹ Due to the diverse styles of comic book publishing, minor content variations often exist between physical, digital and anthologised copies of issues. To compensate, comic book citations within this article will reference the total number of pages of narrative content within the issue and the cited page being cited in relation. Further bibliography information on the editions cited is also provided at the end of this section.

² C. Hallquist, 'Legacy Sexism and Superheroes', *Patheos* (2013). Available: <<http://www.bit.ly/1fL116B>> [Accessed 04.02.2014.].

³ A. Baxter, 'The importance of legacy in comics', *Times Union* (2013). Available: <<http://www.bit.ly/1gjjfb>> [Accessed 04.02.2014.].

notion of tradition as a legitimising force in the characterisation of these derivative characters; their powers, morals, agency and ideology frequently informed by the influence of their respective 'legacy' characters.

Dependent characters often fulfil the role of the superhero sidekick (a typically adolescent figure) who has become a compelling and integral component of the superhero narrative since the introduction of Batman's sidekick, Robin, in 1940. However, despite the near ubiquity of the teenage hero, comic books have traditionally portrayed narratives of adolescent identity formation from predominantly parental and familial viewpoints. Prioritising the genre prestige of the 'legacy' hero, adolescent character narratives are typically used to counterbalance 'adult' stories, such as the numerous X-Men titles based around the series' mutant high school setting in which established characters double as mentors to the young students. Similarly, Grant Morrison argues that teenage sidekicks were never intended as independent characters with their own agency but instead introduced to compliment and refresh typically 'adult' narratives, noting, 'The introduction of Robin turned Batman's story from a shady crime-and-revenge narrative into the thrilling adventures of two swashbuckling friends'.⁴

As a result of the extensive portrayal of adolescent characters as traditionally derivative of 'legacy' heroes, comic book narratives that directly consider the cultural, psychological and social influence of legacy upon adolescent identity formation are rare – especially from a teenage perspective. This is a key inspiration for the *Young Avengers* series; a post-2000s comic book series following the adventures of a group of adolescent superheroes that are simultaneously interconnected to and disenfranchised from the legacies of the established heroes governing their lives. Introduced as 'the teen sidekicks-who-never-were', the Young Avengers must 'evolve into heroes in their own right',⁵ putting them in direct competition with the traditions that have initially developed them.

Within *Young Avengers*, the conventional challenges of adolescent identity formation are mirrored by the difficulties of life as a super-powered teenager in which cultural icons also function as parental figures. The social independence

⁴ G. Morrison, *Supergods: Our World in the Age of the Superhero*. (London, 2012), 75.

⁵ A. Heinberg, *Young Avengers Ultimate Collection*. (New York, 2010), Conceptual Notes, 1.

required as an integral component of adolescent development – in which the young adult seeks a unique ‘position within society and in relation to other selves’⁶ – is explored on a super scale by the Young Avengers’ active rejection of the heroic identities imposed upon them by ‘legacy’ figures. Concisely put by Kieron Gillen, writer of the book’s 2013 run: ‘*Young Avengers* is a superhero comic that uses the metaphor of powers to explore the sensation of being 18.’⁷

This article will analyse and discuss the effects of tradition and legacy on the formation of the adolescent identity of both the Young Avengers as a group and, in particular, the central character of Wiccan. I will begin by discussing the role of legacy in relation to identity development within the central *Young Avengers* narrative before analysing the central ‘legacy’ characters within the series (Captain America and Scarlet Witch), considering their impact as both parental and ideological figures. Following this, I will consider the effect these influences have upon Wiccan, considering how his wish-fulfilment powers (a manifestation of Scarlet Witch’s *écriture féminine* philosophy) represent a direct opposition to the ‘traditional’ nature of the series’ social hegemony (symbolised by Captain America’s role as the Phallus of the Symbolic Order.) Finally, I will conclude by considering the direct competition to the cultural status quo represented by the *Young Avengers*’ identification with signifiers of cultural Otherness, paying particular attention to the series’ depiction of queer sexuality.

In *Young Avengers*’ opening arc, ‘Sidekicks’, a group of ‘super-powered fanboys’ are brought together to fight injustice – adopting identities derived from the classic members: Iron Man, Captain America, Thor and the Hulk – in the absence of the Avengers team.⁸ This cultural absence of traditional authority figures, caused by Scarlet Witch turning against her former Avenger teammates due to the perceived loss of her children, creates a space through which the adolescent characters are able to enter the narrative.⁹ The disbanding of their cultural heroes

⁶ R. McCallum, *Ideologies of Identity in Adolescent Fiction: The Dialogic Construction of Subjectivity*. (New York & London, 1999), 3.

⁷ A. Ching, ‘Kieron Gillen writes a *Young Avengers* with no safety net’, *Newsarama* (2012), quoting Gillen. Available: <<http://www.bit.ly/18Zln9l>> [Accessed 27.09.2013] .

⁸ Heinberg, *Young Avengers Ultimate Collection*, #1, 5/22.

⁹ B.M. Bendis, *Avengers: Disassembled* [*Avengers* Issues #500-#503, *Avengers Finale*]. (New York, 2005).

also can be understood to force *Young Avengers*' teenage heroes to make their own decisions as the removal of authority figures within their lives represents the cultural disconnection from 'any reliance on internalised parents'¹⁰ required in the process of adolescent 'identity achievement'.¹¹

When the media discover the teenagers' activity they are dubbed the 'Young Avengers', directly positioning them as part of the same legacy of heroes that they have culturally idolised. However, this news leads former Avengers Captain America and Iron Man to seek them out and attempt to stop them. When their right to use the 'Avengers' name is questioned the team explains an artificial intelligence identified them as each having 'some significant tie to the Avengers or Avengers history',¹² although these connections are not immediately apparent for several of the characters. This suggests legacy-derived characters are legitimised by the concept of tradition itself (rather than any particular notion of identity) and thus the Young Avengers' attempts to forge their own unique personas can be read as an active rejection of the seemingly inevitable acceptance of their conscribed 'legacy' identities. The Avengers threaten to tell the adolescents' parents about their heroic activities unless they promise to relinquish their superhero identities, resulting in the team operating illegitimately for a period of several years.¹³ This explicit restriction of the Young Avengers' self-constructed identities and objectives can be understood to represent both the parental restraint of teenage rebellion as well as a suppression of alternative forms of expression that may threaten dominant power structures.

Adventures then follow in 'Family Matters' and *Young Avengers Presents* that facilitate the cohesion of the Young Avengers into a group whose mutual understanding of the isolation 'from any sense of wider community [caused] by their personal experience of the fantastic'¹⁴ unites them as a 'family' in their own right.¹⁵ The team returns in *Avengers: The Children's Crusade*, during which Wiccan's spell-casting powers are deemed dangerous to the wider world. While

¹⁰ A. Waller, *Constructing Adolescence in Fantastic Realism*. (London & New York, 2009), 59.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹² Heinberg, *Young Avengers Ultimate Collection*, #3 6/22.

¹³ *Ibid.*, #6, 16-22/22.

¹⁴ Waller, *Constructing Adolescence in Fantastic Realism*, 55.

¹⁵ Heinberg, *Young Avengers Ultimate Collection*, #11, 18/21.

the development of Wiccan's abilities primarily represents his ongoing maturation, Captain America and the Avengers interpret this as a direct form of competition to their hegemonic cultural control. Suspicions that Wiccan is Scarlet Witch's reincarnated son prompt the narrative's adult characters to try to control him, but the Young Avengers instead aim to find Wiccan's mother and end her emotional anguish caused by the loss of her children, hoping to resolve the situation.¹⁶ The team's instinct to reach out to a maternal figure in their time of need reflects the duality of 'legacy' heroes as role models; the Young Avengers both aggressively reject and reluctantly embrace 'legacy' characters as mentors in their attempts to define their identities.

The series was relaunched in 2013 as the Young Avengers faced off against an inter-dimensional parasite called 'Mother' that rendered all adults oblivious to their plight. While the series was marketed with the tag line, 'Legacy isn't a dirty word, but it's an irrelevant one',¹⁷ – suggesting the series aimed to distance itself from the scrutiny of tradition within the genre – the series once again rooted its narrative and character development in cultural notions of family and legacy. Gillen's run considered legacy through both its repositioning of parents as antagonistic forces within the narrative¹⁸ and the creation of Mother by Wiccan, conceptualised as a reimagining of the infamous creation of the Avengers-foe Ultron by 'legacy' character, Henry Pym.¹⁹ Following the conclusion of the run, Gillen argued that the series' intention had been to 'give them their own mythology', arguing that 'all tightly-woven Legacy Characters without their own story [...] other than 'kids or stated successor of major hero' are [...] limited enormously.'²⁰ This active distancing of the adolescent characters of *Young Avengers* from their adult counterparts can be understood as further exaggerating the series' portrayal of burgeoning identity development from an explicitly

¹⁶ A. Heinberg, *Avengers: The Children's Crusade*. (New York, 2012), #1, 18-22/22.

¹⁷ Marvel, *Young Avengers: Vol. 1 Style>Substance* product page, *Marvel* (2013). Available: <<http://www.bit.ly/1fja7cA>> [Accessed 20.11.2013].

¹⁸ K. Gillen, *Young Avengers, Volume 1: Style > Substance*. (New York, 2013), #3, 7-8, 17/20.

¹⁹ R. Haupt, 'Take Some Time with the Young Avengers', *Marvel* (2013), quoting Gillen. Available: <<http://www.bit.ly/1fL116B>> [Accessed 04.02.2014.].

²⁰ M. Meylikhov, 'Saying Goodbye to the Young Avengers with Kieron Gillen [interview]', *Multiversity Comics* (2014), quoting Gillen. Available: <<http://www.bit.ly/1lwE8Q>>. [Accessed 05.02.2014].

adolescent and transgressive narrative perspective, rejecting the hegemonic ubiquity of 'legacy' characters within the comic narrative world.

As noted above, many of the key events within the *Young Avengers* narrative are instigated, rooted or affected by the adult characters such as Captain America and Scarlet Witch, who can be understood to fulfil parental roles. In accordance with Robyn McCallum's view that notions of ideology 'pervade and underpin' the development of 'personal identity and selfhood' in adolescent fiction,²¹ Captain America and Scarlet Witch can also be read as active metaphors for divergent cultural ideologies as their representations of order and chaos, male and female, known and unknown, position them as superheroic embodiments of the cultural worldviews outlined by Jacques Lacan's Symbolic Order and Hélène Cixous' *écriture féminine*.

Captain America's role as leader of the Avengers and an inherent symbol of American patriotism directly positions him as a figure at the centre of traditional social structures and identity discourses,²² much like Lacan's Phallus. Just as the Phallus 'limits the play of elements and gives stability to the whole structure' so too Captain America aims to restrict the actions of the Young Avengers in order to preserve the pre-existing order.²³ Children must adhere to the 'Law of the Father' to gain access the Symbolic Order and 'enter' language and so too the Young Avengers can only become 'true' heroes with Captain America's permission, positioning him as a symbol of the 'patriarchal order of culture'.²⁴ While Captain America finally does recognise the teenagers as legitimate Avengers,²⁵ it is only after they have decided to no longer operate as heroes. Not only does this reinforce the character's function as a controlling influence of identity formation but also returns to the notion of the Symbolic Order; the Young Avengers are only perceived as 'grown-up' once they have agreed to follow cultural rules.

²¹ McCallum, *Ideologies of Identity in Adolescent Fiction*, 3.

²² Ching, 'Kieron Gillen writes a *Young Avengers* with no safety net', quoting K. Gillen.

²³ M. Klages, *Literary Theory: A Guide for the Perplexed*. (London & New York, 2006), 84.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 86.

²⁵ Heinberg, *Avengers: The Children's Crusade*, #9 19-20/20.

In contrast, Scarlet Witch becomes an active metaphor for both motherhood and chaos, possessing the ability to change reality that often leads to revolutionary or anarchic outcomes. The character signifies a direct antithesis to Captain America's paternalistic control of the Young Avengers through her representation of social transgression, cultural rebellion and self-acceptance to the adolescents. Scarlet Witch's powers also echo the intentions of Cixous' *écriture féminine*, a radical form of feminine expression that 'un-thinks the unifying, regulating history' upheld by the Symbolic Order.²⁶

The empowering and productive nature of *écriture féminine* – 'Her language does not contain, it carries; it does not hold back, it makes possible'²⁷ – relates to Scarlet Witch's ability to use 'chaotic' magic to literally reshape the world as she wishes. This productive potential is directly utilised by Scarlet Witch in her creation of Wiccan, whom she 'wishes' into existence rather than through biological conception, reaffirming the cultural connections between witchcraft and the 'female reproductive system'.²⁸ Within *Young Avengers*, Scarlet Witch becomes a symbol for maternity, possibility, cultural subversion, radical empowerment and alternative sexualities; her portrayal as an inherent manifestation of cultural instability comes into competition with the very establishing context that perpetuates her position as a 'legacy' character. This legacy of instability also underpins Scarlet Witch as a rare female character within the medium who transcends mere gender tokenism and fulfils a variety of intriguing narrative roles (including leader, anti-hero, rebel, mother, villain and saviour) that the majority of male characters appear unable to move between.

Considering these factors, the Young Avengers' search and subsequent alliance with the Scarlet Witch can be understood as a manifestation of their desire to radically redefine their culturally prescribed roles. Just as the teenage heroes can only 'discover their individuality' by 'questioning parental ideology',²⁹ their inherent desire to rebel against the limiting rules of society represented by Captain

²⁶ H. Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', in Vincent B. Leitch et al. (eds), *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism, Second Edition*, 1942-1959. (New York & London, 2010), 1949.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 1955.

²⁸ B. Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism and Psychoanalysis*. (London & New York, 1993), 77.

²⁹ Waller, *Constructing Adolescence in Fantastic Realism*, 59.

America can be understood to manifest in the radical nature of the mysterious and unstable Scarlet Witch. While she may represent a maternal figure to Wiccan, her cultural role as ‘the antilogos weapon’³⁰ – an empowering cultural force in direct competition with the hegemonic structures of organised society – positions her as an anarchic force that encourages the Young Avengers to actively break the rules as they attempt to push the limits of the cultural power structures imposed upon them.

Breaking the rules is both a family matter and a process of identity formation for Wiccan as his wish-fulfilment powers are directly inherited from Scarlet Witch. In accordance with Anthony Baxter’s identification of the ways in which ‘legacy’ as a narrative concept can be passed from one comic book character to another: mentorship, inheritance or idolisation,³¹ and Jason Southworth and Ruth Tallman’s argument that ‘There is a long tradition in the Marvel Universe of family legacies of heroism and villainy’,³² Wiccan’s initial cultural uncertainties within *Young Avengers* can be read as a manifestation of his disconnection from both his biological mother and ‘legacy’ inspiration, Scarlet Witch. His subsequent searching for her is also rooted in his hopes of identity formation as he explains, ‘I know what I **think** I am, but... I have to be **sure**. I have to know my past, my history’,³³ once again affirming the key role of both familial and cultural legacy in the development of adolescent and superheroic characters respectively.

This centrality of familial and social legacy to the formation of personal identity within the series is subsequently reflected in Wiccan’s determination to find and rehabilitate his mother against the wishes of the narrative’s ‘legacy’ characters. Whilst the legitimate Avengers, led by Captain America, aggressively aim to perpetuate the strictly organised cultural system that has been developed since the exclusion of the anarchic Scarlet Witch, Wiccan instead seeks to journey to the very source of ‘without’, to ‘the heath where witches are kept alive; from below, from beyond culture’.³⁴ While Captain America’s Lacanian conceptualisation of a

³⁰ Cixous, ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’, 1947.

³¹ Baxter, ‘The importance of legacy in comics’.

³² J. Southworth & R. Tallman, ‘The Avengers: Earth’s Mightiest Family’ in Mark D. White (ed.), *The Avengers and Philosophy*, 28-40. (Hoboken, 2012), 28.

³³ R. Aguirre-Sacasa, *Young Avengers Presents* #3 (of 6) (New York, 2008), 2/22.

³⁴ Cixous, ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’, 1944.

world 'without' order is one of unsignified disorder, the Young Avengers instead view it as a 'culture' of possibilities that prioritises literal potential over social cohesion, mirroring Captain America's unitary function within the narrative to Scarlet Witch's radical diversity of social roles. The return of the Scarlet Witch into the superhero community at the climax of *The Children's Crusade* symbolises the systemic shift from social adherence to personal empowerment for the series' adolescent characters. As the Young Avengers successfully overthrow the traditionally restrictive control of their parental figures through the active disruption of 'partitions, classes, and rhetorics, regulations and codes',³⁵ their support of Scarlet Witch represents the creation of a new realm of diversity and acceptance based upon social disorder.

The origin of Wiccan's personal empowerment through the manifestation of his wish-fulfilment powers can also be traced to his idolisation of Scarlet Witch and her representation of social change. Following a chance encounter with his 'favourite Avenger',³⁶ Wiccan is encouraged to stand up to a school bully and, in doing so, triggers the manifestation of his wish-fulfilment powers through his decisive rejection of the status quo of his life. Following the personal inspiration of Scarlet Witch, Wiccan's 'wish' to no longer be a victim within his own narrative is made literal as he finds himself able to control his own destiny. Wiccan's challenging of the seemingly 'normal' social dynamic once again represents the liberating possibilities of rejecting the restrictive control of the Symbolic Order by developing meaningful alternatives to self-identification, the character's personal empowerment directly enabled by his desire for cultural self-determination.

The subsequent establishment of Scarlet Witch as Wiccan's mother can also be understood to tie directly into the desire for cultural alternatives as Gillen notes, 'The emotional state and wishes of Reality Warpers can create effects – even to the level of creating whole people'.³⁷ From this perspective we can interpret an even more radical relationship between the two: Wiccan's desire to empower and understand himself can be understood to have predicated the very creation of a

³⁵ Ibid., 1952.

³⁶ Heinberg, *Young Avengers Ultimate Collection*, #13 15/36.

³⁷ K. Gillen, 'Writer Notes: *Young Avengers* 13', *Another Way To Breathe* (2013). Available: <<http://www.bit.ly/1cljr4B>> [Accessed 10.12.2013].

radical legacy to emulate and idolise in the form of Scarlet Witch. Just as Alison Waller argues that fantastic narratives portray ‘new and interesting ways of becoming and being adolescents’,³⁸ Wiccan’s formulation of his own past sees the character construct both a personal ideology to follow and a social purpose to fulfil, similar to Scarlet Witch’s literal ‘creation’ of a child to love and nurture. As a result, both characters can be understood to actively conceptualise a cultural purpose for themselves in their literal creation of each other, interlinking the relationship between icon and admirer, mother and son, ‘legacy’ hero and derivative character in radical new ways.

Both Wiccan’s abilities and actions directly position him as a competitive threat to the pre-existing order of the world around him, as typified by Captain America’s repeated attempts to constrain his powers. Although his powers represent the ‘very possibility of change’,³⁹ his personal identity is equally subversive to the traditional superhero persona. Just as he was unable to challenge the bully before he realised his own potential, Wiccan’s culturally transgressive nature is based upon his rejection of social restrictions placed upon him as he comes to accept both his queer sexuality and limitless potential. Although Wiccan has the power to change the world (a power he discovers he will one day inherit)⁴⁰ this potential is directly linked to his ability to accept the difficult realities of growing up and teenage life, a key task for the adolescent character in comic book narratives.

Issues of cultural difference are often positioned with *Young Avengers* as subversions of the traditional superhero figure, as the acceptance of alternative ethnic, sexual and gender identities by the adolescent characters aim to reflect that ‘(adult) responsibilities and burdens play a part in shaping identity’.⁴¹ This realisation of the marginal cultural positions inhabited by the central characters represents both their active challenging of the ‘legacy’ superhero figure as an inherently privileged individual and the acknowledgement of their social instability as individuals between the spheres of infancy and adulthood. As Robyn McCallum argues, ‘The position of characters on the margins of, or in a

³⁸ Waller, *Constructing Adolescence in Fantastic Realism*, xiii.

³⁹ Cixous, ‘Laugh of the Medusa’, 1946.

⁴⁰ K. Gillen, *Young Avengers, Volume 2: Alternative Cultures*. (New York, 2014), #9, 16-17/22.

⁴¹ Waller, *Constructing Adolescence in Fantastic Realism*, 113-114.

transgressive relation to, a represented society or culture provides a way of exploring [...] the dominant cultural and social paradigms for the construction of subjects'.⁴² Thus the teenage Young Avengers' lack of a 'theoretical place' in culture, due to being neither child nor adult,⁴³ uniquely positions to explore the 'cultural paradigms' that intersect with identity formation.

From this understanding, the consideration of identity challenges within *Young Avengers* can be read as not merely engaging with these social issues but also representing them through its characters. In the opening scene of *Avengers: Children's Crusade*, the teenage heroes are portrayed in a battle against a militarised 'white supremacist' organisation.⁴⁴ As we are formally introduced to each team member by Wiccan's narration, which explicitly identifies their familial, cultural and personal connections to classic Avengers as a central component of their superhero identity, the team discuss how their opponents are not only racist but also 'hate gays and lesbians' and 'uppity women'. These prejudices lead Hawkeye to argue that, due to the noticeable diversity of the group, 'we must be their least favourite superhero team **ever**'.⁴⁵

In this scene, the Young Avengers' moral duty to fight against injustice, their lived experience of identity challenges and their connections to parental and legacy figures are all portrayed as interconnected and interdependent factors that collectively inform their heroic and personal identities. Rather than portray these cultural differences as problematic to the legitimacy of the Young Avengers as genuine superheroes, Heinberg instead uses these features to explicitly define them *as* heroes. While 'legacy' heroes may typically fulfil the role of straight, white, middle-class men who subscribe to traditional social hierarchy, *Young Avengers* directly aims to portray different kinds of heroes that not only compete with established legacies but also come to represent meaningful alternatives of self-expression. The series also aims to offer alternatives to cultural hegemony directly to its readership as *Young Avengers* can be seen as one of a select number of mainstream titles to 'understand that a vast number of the books readers aren't

⁴² McCallum, *Ideologies of Identity in Adolescent Fiction*, 69.

⁴³ Waller, *Constructing Adolescence in Fantastic Realism*, 5.

⁴⁴ Heinberg, *Avengers: The Children's Crusade*, #1 2/22.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, #1 2/22.

heterosexual men'.⁴⁶ (Sava, 2013) The series' inclusive depiction of alternative ethnicities, sexualities and gender identities in the context of widely normative 'legacy' heroes is undeniably a conscious attempt by the series' creators to broaden the positive social representation found within mainstream comic book texts, celebrating the plurality of readers' 'attitudes' and 'lifestyles' just as it does its characters' 'diversity'.⁴⁷

The series' most prominent exploration of adolescent identity challenges is the ongoing romantic relationship between Wiccan and his boyfriend, Hulkling. While the series has been celebrated for its progressive consideration of homosexuality – the 2013 run features one of the few same-sex love triangles in the history of mainstream comic books⁴⁸ – *Young Avengers* is also not afraid to actively explore the marginalised cultural positions of adolescent queer individuals through its ostensibly supportive characters. A key example of this occurs in *The Children's Crusade* when Wiccan and Hulkling are invited to Avengers' Tower and are assigned a room with two single beds.⁴⁹ Despite Wiccan and Hulkling having the most traditionally romantic and enduring relationship of the series, the Avengers' refusal to acknowledge their personal relationship can be understood to represent traditional cultural views that prefer to mitigate, rather than advocate, queer sexuality.⁵⁰ In an example of his ability to refashion the world around him, Wiccan uses his reality-warping powers to transform the room, converting the single-beds into a double, and in doing so not only rejects any attempts to downplay his cultural difference but also celebrates that very difference as the source of his powers. Similarly in the final confrontation of the series' 2013 run, the story's key villain is overthrown by the transgressive potential of queer sexuality as Wiccan and Hulkling are reunited and discover the emotional strength in one another to overcome the restrictive forces limiting them. While the notion may seem clichéd – highlighted by Loki's outcry, 'Is love **really** going to

⁴⁶ O. Sava, 'Young Avengers #8 and the Rise of the Tumblrheroes', *A. V. Club* (2013). Available: <<http://www.avc.lu/17IhGCW>> [Accessed 28.10.2013].

⁴⁷ B. White, 'In Your Face Jam: Young Avengers Shows How Its Done', *Comic Book Resources* (2013). Available: <<http://www.bit.ly/NS5Cu9>> [Accessed 04.03.2014].

⁴⁸ Sava, 'Young Avengers #8 and the Rise of the Tumblrheroes'.

⁴⁹ Heinberg, *Avengers: The Children's Crusade*, #1 18-19/22.

⁵⁰ SmileDesu, 'Displays of sexuality in Young Avengers, V1 vs. V2', *Tumblr* (2013). Available: <<http://www.bit.ly/HqLCLN>> [Accessed 04.03.2014].

save us all?⁵¹ – the series’ portrayal of the redemptive potential of homosexuality (as opposed to heterosexuality) representing the solution to ‘saving the day’ not only reaffirms Wiccan’s empowerment through cultural Otherness but also cites self-acceptance as the most revolutionary power of all.

In conclusion, *Young Avengers* portrays the role of legacy within the comic book genre as far more complex and pervasive to the formation of adolescent identity development than in conventional superhero texts but also succeeds in recognising its traditional narrative centrality. The Young Avengers may initially depend upon the ‘legacy’ characters to inform their cultural identities but over time these personas are cast aside as identity formation is shown to occur. However, while these traditional characters no longer directly dictate the identity of their successors, their roles as cultural icons, parental figures and representations of cultural ideology continue to pervade the series’ narrative. While the cultural instability of Scarlet Witch is accepted and internalised by the characters as a revolutionary form of cultural potential, *Young Avengers* actively portrays adolescent and heroic identity formation as products of both the influence of ‘legacy’ figures and the transgressive nature of teenage life itself. Although the teenage characters may feel the need to choose between the tradition of Captain America and the radical alternatives of Scarlet Witch, between subscribing to cultural hegemony and following their own paths, the recurring message of *Young Avengers* is that legacies are merely waiting to be written. The Young Avengers have no need to ‘assemble’ themselves; their cultural legacy has just begun.

⁵¹ K. Gillen, *Young Avengers, Volume 3: Mic-Drop at the Edge of Time and Space*. (New York, 2014) #13, 12/20.

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