ABSTRACT:
Much has been written about comic book superheroes and their cinematic adaptations. They are cultural icons recognized in every corner of the world and have featured in the childhoods of most Americans and Australians since the 1930s. Superheroes have also helped to construct an ideological worldview from the shifting interactions of politics, history, and culture, as well as define a sense of identity and subjectivity. Yet, for such instantly recognizable icons, little has been written in terms of superhero dress and the collective imagination that sartorial practices produce in framing cultural meanings. Rather than situating male superhero attire in the field of costume design functionality, this chapter sets out to reposition the discourse of superhero clothing as a vehicle for understanding constructions of masculinity, identity, and nation. By providing a set of cinematic case studies, the chapter also comments on the impact of nanotechnology in the construction of superhero attire in producing techno-augmented Uberbodies designed to protect the nation's future.

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Comic books and comic book culture have slowly become more diverse as companies like Marvel have begun prioritizing the inclusion of racial minorities in their stories. Kamala Khan, a Muslim teen, has replaced the white hero Carol Danvers as Ms. Marvel. The hero replacing Iron Man is a black teen named Riri Williams. And Miles Morales, a black Hispanic teen, replaced the white Peter Parker as Spider-Man. Yet despite its recent progressive slant, Marvel and other comic companies have had issues with racial stereotyping, particularly with their black heroes. Marc Singer describes how the medium Hegemonic masculinity is white, heterosexual, privileged/middle-class, and able-bodied masculinity which is generally represented as opposite and superior to femininity and homosexuality (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Thus hegemonic hyper-masculinity marginalises other masculinities (e.g. black, disabled, working class, gay) and devalues femininity (Connell, 1987). Unlike Wonder Woman there are many female superheroes that have not made it into films as sidekicks let alone solo or lead roles in a film (e.g. Ironwoman, Batwoman, Spiderwoman, Ms Marvel, She-Hulk). When women superheroes do appear, often they are dressed in over-sexualised costumes in an attempt to appeal to a presumed male heterosexual audience.