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Making Marvelous Men: Early Marvel Comics and Masculinity Enactment – An Introduction

In his 1994 essay "Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity", Michael Kimmel, renowned American researcher in the field of masculinity studies, refers to *masculinity* as "several stories at once" (125). This thesis investigates the earliest appearances of Marvel Comics superheroes Captain America, Iron Man, Black Panther, and Falcon from the angle of masculinity studies, aiming to lay open these selected stories. This thesis analyzes superhero comics as *serial narratives* defined most strongly by iteration and multiplicity (O'Sullivan), and which borrow from genres like action and soap opera (Wright; Meteling "To be continued"). It investigates and scrutinizes selected comics which, over the course of more than 80 years, have produced a very complex and layered source for fictions about masculinity.

Throughout this thesis, I will make the case for reading masculinity "as a homosocial enactment […] fraught with danger, with the risk of failure, and with intense relentless competition" (Kimmel, "Homophobia" 129). This *enactment* is what informs all those "several stories at once. It is about the individual man's quest to accumulate the cultural symbols that denote manhood" (125). What can be said about superheroes when looking at them through the lens of masculinity as a *homosocial* practice?

The term *homosocial* refers to "social binds between persons of the same sex" (Sedgewick, *Between Men* 1); which is how it will be used throughout this thesis. Talking about "doing" masculinity as *homosocial enactment* means that male–male bonding as well as male–male competition are all in play when one "does" masculinity.

Over the last three decades, the superhero narrative has been examined from various angles: ethnicity, "race"[1], religion, mythology, history, and finally gender studies. In recent years, Carolyn Cocca's *Superwomen: Gender, Power and Representation* and Maja Bajack-Carter's

[1] The word "race" appears in quotation marks throughout this thesis. Applying the term "race" to human beings is connected to such a long atrocious history of racism, genocide, and white privilege (McIntosh; Blakemore; Coates; Spencer; Sussman, *The Myth of Race*) that no other use of this word seems acceptable. This is why throughout the thesis, "race" is not treated like a normal term.

Heroines of Comic Books and Literature have given a thorough analysis of female superhero characters. One very recent publication, Esther De Dauw's *Hot Pants and Spandex Suits: Gender Representation in American Superhero Comics,* has finally taken a long overdue critical look at masculinities in superhero comics and films. De Dauw, for example, dedicates one chapter to analyzing masculinity concepts and white superheroes like Superman, Captain America, and Iron Man. I agree with De Dauw that masculinity enactment as displayed by male superheroes is a "power fantasy" (31), but I disagree that this power fantasy purges male anxieties and insists on an elimination of the feminine for the purpose of ensuring *hegemonic masculinity* enactment (Connell, *Masculinities*), as De Dauw suggests. Instead, this thesis will argue that male superheroes engage in an act of *hybridization* when it comes to "doing" hegemonic masculinity (Demetriou). "Softer" character traits—such as being traumatized, anxious, or insecure—are very much a part of male superheroes. But the comics do not add them to these characters and subtract toughness or aggression in turn; instead, as this thesis argues, male superheroes get to be both soft and tough, which allows them to keep up a "manly" and, especially in the 1960s, also a patriarchal front.

This thesis aims to take a closer look at 1960s-era Marvel Comics and four of their oldest and most popular characters: Captain America, Iron Man, Black Panther, and Falcon. This means looking back at masculinity fantasies in the 1960s, and at how Marvel's marvelous men interact with them.

According to Judith Butler, gender is best understood as "the apparatus by which the production and the normalization of masculine and feminine take place" (*Undoing Gender* 42), and above all as a "regulatory fiction" (*Gender Trouble* 192). Gender turns into a "performance that is repeated" (192). And where better to investigate gender as a performative act which is repeated, than looking at *serial narratives*, a medium characterized by repetition?

This thesis mixes Butler's ideas with masculinity studies for the purpose of reading, interpreting, and analyzing superhero comics.

From its inception, the field of masculinity studies centers on what Raewyn Connell calls the "social hierarchy of men" (*Masculinities* 70). Within this hierarchy, not all

> masculinities are […] created equal; or rather, we are all *created* equal, but any hypothetical equality evaporates quickly because our definitions of masculinity are not equally valued in our society. (Kimmel, "Homophobia" 124)

The hierarchy values some supposedly masculine qualities—toughness, assertiveness, willingness to commit violence, to name but a few—in men more than other qualities—being understanding, caring or empathetic, which are often regarded as feminine. The latter are then both *subordinated* and *marginalized* within the social hierarchy of men (Connell, *Masculinities*).

If gender is an apparatus for producing normative gender identities—a "practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint" (Butler, *Undoing Gender* 1)—then how do these improvisations apply to the male protagonists of Marvel's superhero comics? In terms of "doing masculinities", superheroes offer masculinity enactment as an exercise in *hybridization*. As the "heroes of the story", male protagonists in superhero comics enact Connell's concept of *hegemonic masculinity* (Donaldson). Masculinities exist alongside a hierarchy: *hegemonic* masculinity is at the top, whereas *complicit*, *subordinate,* and *marginalized* masculinities—who all benefit from the *patriarchal dividend*, which is "the advantage men in general gain from the overall subordination of women" (Connell, *Masculinities* 80)—must position themselves in relation to this "culturally exalted form of masculinity" (Carrigan et al. 592).

In the 1960s, Marvel Comics offer very patriarchal superheroes: those are men who routinely dominate others, especially the villainous characters who they overpower and subdue, adventure after adventure. But they are really at their most patriarchal when they interact with women. The female characters Marvel Comics offer in the 1960s are, in terms of "doing" feminism, "nothing to write home about". They are often shown as silly and immature, and most of all nowhere near as powerful as their male colleagues (Wright; Howe; Buszek).

Offering a content analysis of the earliest appearances of Captain America, Iron Man, Black Panther, and Falcon, this thesis argues that all of them enact *hegemonic* masculinity as a *hybrid bloc* (Demetriou). Hegemonic masculinity, here, is interpreted as a

> hybrid bloc that unites various and diverse practices in order to construct the best possible strategy for the reproduction of patriarchy. (347-348)

Hegemonic masculinity is achieved via "cultural consent, discursive centrality, institutionalization, and the marginalization or delegitimization of alternatives" (Connell and Messerschmidt 846). This is exactly how superheroes achieve their hegemonic status.

Understanding masculinity as "several stories at once" also means to understand it as a "homosocial competition" (Kimmel, "Homophobia" 125), a homosocial enactment: masculinity must be enacted, performed, "it must be proved—and proved constantly" (Kimmel, *Manhood* 23). This idea is central to Michael Kimmel's work on men and masculinities. According to Kimmel, men enact masculinity primarily for other men. Men perform

> heroic feats, take enormous risks, all because we want other men to grant us our manhood. Masculinity as a homosocial enactment is fraught with danger, with the risk of failure, and with […] intense relentless competition. ("Homophobia" 129)

Taking risks, performing heroic feats, and generally taking dangerous actions where the risk of failure is high is exactly what happens on every page of a superhero comic book. But their every adventure does not just consist of risks, feats, and dangers; it also provides a chance at receiving respect and appreciation. Other characters—other male characters—grant them approval and manhood, as this thesis aims to reveal.

Masculinity is interpreted as "not a place, territory or type. It is the deployment of power" (Lemelle 169), and "hegemonic masculinity is a dynamic power that men deploy in structural interactions functioning to legitimize patriarchal relations" (13).

Focusing on the years between 1963 and 1975—the period of the very first appearances of Iron Man, Captain America, Black Panther, and Falcon in Marvel Comics—involves taking a closer look at American masculinity enactments in the 1960s. At the height of Cold War anxiety (Ehrenreich; Corber; Cuordileone), American men have quite a few templates to emulate:

from head of the household and breadwinner all the way to the company man, the rebel, and the playboy. The Marvel Comics' marvelous men selected as examples here interact with all of them. When not striking out as Captain America, Steve Rogers tries and fails to turn himself into a husband and breadwinner. Tony Stark effortlessly enacts the part of playboy when not out and about in his Iron Man suit. T'Challa is not just the head of a household but of an entire sovereign nation, when not busy as Black Panther. Sam Wilson, when not chasing criminals across the rooftops of New York's Harlem as Falcon, is a social worker, a subordinate yet successful Black[2] male employee. These characters' social lives positively reek of 1960s masculinity ideals. This is no surprise or novel turn of events for the two white characters on the analysis list. But when Marvel Comics introduce two Black superhero characters in 1966 and 1969 and extend hegemonic masculinity in the "form of the hero" (Donaldson 689) to them, this is indeed a surprise. Steeped in the legacies of slavery and white and male supremacy, the United States have hardly (if ever) granted normative or hegemonic masculinity to Black males (Staples; Mercer; hooks*, reel to real* and *we real cool*; Lemelle). As Connell points out, Black males are relegated to the space of marginalized masculinities, where access to authority and power are slim to non-existent (*Masculinities*)—a reality which can still be observed today, but even more strongly in 1960s Cold War America. When T'Challa and Sam Wilson "emerge" in the late 1960s, they have access to hegemonic masculinity enactment like no other Black character in superhero comic books prior to them (Wright; Nama; Howe). Their arrival interacts with and is a reaction to the Black Power movements of the 1960s. While the Black Power movements are not the focus of this thesis, specific elements of it are explained later on, as they will reveal where Marvel Comics' Black Panther and Falcon overlap with ideas expressed by Black Power groups.

But to read superhero comics for masculinity enactments of its male protagonists also means analyzing male bodies. For the last 130 years, popular culture in the US and Europe has been interacting with one particular ideal of the male body more than with others: the *developed* or *built* body. Usually white, athletic, and muscular, it is a body aiming for the "masculine look" (Easthope 53). Starting in the 1880s, male bodies shaped in such a fashion are popularized via strongman shows in Vaudeville and traveling circus shows (Dutton; Kasson), and men like

[2] Whenever black is used in this thesis it refers to other-identification. The use of Black refers to self-identification.

Eugen Sandow and Charles Atlas shape popular attitudes towards heroic bodies (Dutton). These men display male bodies which are meant to be looked at, to be ogled, to be seen: "They are styled for a masculine look in a particular kind of way" (Easthope 53). Eugen Sandow and Charles Atlas, who will be discussed in more detail later, contribute—as do other male athletes and male sports enthusiasts at the time—to the idea that "the body did not contain the man; it was the man" (Kimmel, *History of Men* 49). They help create the *masculine myth,* which passes off the muscular male body "as natural, normal and universal", and which aims to show off masculinity "as an essence—fixed, self-consistent, pure[…]. Its coercive power is active everywhere—not just on screens, hoardings and paper" (Easthope 167). It is the belief that "masculinity-as-personality can be applied to the body" (Kimmel, *History of Men* 58). American superhero comics pick up this myth and apply it to almost all their male superheroes; and they have done so since the genre emerged in 1936 (Reynolds; Wright; Jones). In the 1960s, the idea that every superhero must have a built body, a body going "for a masculine look", is rather ubiquitous.

As this thesis demonstrates, superhero bodies are *spectacular* bodies, they are *action hero* bodies. They are "constructed through their physicality […] and the display of the body" (Tasker, *Spectacular* 35), and meant to be looked at. Male superheroes display *muscular masculinity* through their bodies, a masculinity which "draws attention to […] 'being a man'[…,] the work put into the male body and the poses that it strikes" (Tasker, "Dumb Movies" 233). And just as action films do in the 1980s, superhero comics—decades earlier—provide stories about men where "extravagant spectacles of violence and power" are combined with "increasingly emotive displays of sensitivities, traumas and burdens" (Jeffords, "Masculinity Terminated" 259). The fact that "the superhero's performance lies in being looked at, ogled, appraised" also amounts to "a reversal of sex roles, with the hero taking a traditional female role: body as object" (Fussell 44).

This reality of male superhero bodies as objects to gaze at has haunted superhero comics since the 1950s. Frederic Wertham, in his 1954 book *The Seduction of the Innocen*t, interprets Batman and Robin as "a wish dream of two homosexuals living together" (187), and further insists that superhero comics provide an atmosphere of "homoerotic sexual curiosity and stimulation" (188). In the 1950s and 1960s, the US is a very homophobic place, and comic book

publishers are so uncomfortable with Wertham's conclusions that they go out of their way to correct Wertham's perception as well as those of other critics accusing American comic books of "immorality" (Wright; Brooker; Easton). Such perceptions eventually help to give birth to the *Comics Code*, as discussed in more detail later. However, superhero comics have a real "weak" spot here, as pointed out by Lee Easton in "Sharing a Quick Look: A Gay Man Reads His Comics": superhero comics, especially in the 1960s, are a very *homosocial* affair where "stories and main characters involve mainly men" (138). And since comic book reading bestows a lot of "meaning-making" (Kukkonen) upon readers, there is a lot of freedom to be had. No one can deter male or female readers, whatever their sexual orientation, from reading these "men's muscular bodies […] not simply as an ego-ideal but also as a desirable male whose physique offers a range of sexual promises" (Easton 146). Basically, Wertham proves in 1954 that "heterocentrist texts can contain queer elements" and "heterosexual, straight-identifying people can have queer moments" (Doty 3).

All homophobic precautions aside (Taylor; De Dauw), the medium of comics, which eschews offering a unified reality and instead provides its audiences with a "plurality of messages" (Hatfield, *Alternative Comics* 132), turns superhero bodies into objects to desire, to admire, to emulate. And while male superhero bodies are not eroticized in the way female superhero bodies are (Cocca), they are nevertheless also objectified. They are constantly depicted as *doing action*; they are objects in permanent action.

This thesis reads and analyzes 1960s American superhero comics for the masculinity enactment of their male protagonists, displayed via their bodies as well as their actions. From Kimmel's concept that "the body is the man" to his idea that masculinity enactment is a homosocial competition fraught with danger and the risk of failure, the thesis reveals superhero masculinity to be "several stories at once".

Superhero comics are *serial narratives* built around iteration: repetitive acts which link them to what Butler says about gender enactment. Superhero narratives are inherently repetitive: from his traumatic origin story to the superhero's continuous skirmishes with villain after villain. And it is this repetition which enables the male superhero to prove his masculinity *again and again,* as Kimmel suggests is necessary.

Theories and Histories of Masculinities

"Doing" Masculinity: Gender Studies Meet Masculinity Studies

Throughout this thesis[3], my understanding of *gender* is based on concepts put forward by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* and *Undoing Gender* where it regards gendered subjects as well as norms and regulations. In *Gender Trouble,* Butler defines gender as a repetitive act (192). In *Undoing Gender,* Butler presents gender as a construct that is both normed and regulated, as well as something that norms and regulates; it is both *doing* and *being done*, a paradox: "If gender is a kind of doing, an incessant activity performed, in part, without one's knowing and without one's willing, it is not for that reason automatic or mechanical. On the contrary, it is a *practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint*" (1, emphasis added). This thesis looks for such a *constrained practice of improvisation* through observation of how male superheroes enact masculinity. How far are male superheroes permitted to broaden this practice?

Butler's approach to gender as a *practice of improvisation* further suggests that gender has no original, is always a repetitive performative act; and yet new elements keep being added to this repetition because it is all a dynamic process. How does this connect to "doing" masculinity? As shown in this thesis, 1960s Marvel Comics offer an interesting *practice of improvisation*. Their male superheroes are allowed "soft" moments of insecurity, traumatization, and vulnerability—especially in the case of Iron Man—yet they are never allowed to remain vulnerable for too long. This is how Marvel Comics negotiate gender as a "practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint": their male superheroes continuously circle between toughness and vulnerability. This circuit—as male superheroes show their toughness and strength *again and again*—is a reminder that masculinity or manhood, as Michael Kimmel explains, "must be earned, manhood must be proved—and proved

[3] In general, this thesis follows the style sheet provided by the Vienna University's English Studies Department (https://spl-anglistik.univie.ac.at/fileadmin/user_upload/i_anglistik/Study/Downloads/Other/SPL12_Stylesheet_Lit_2016-03.pdf). Where necessary, this thesis follows MLA guidelines.

constantly" (*Manhood* 23). Kimmel's ideas inform the main approach this thesis takes to analyzing male superheroes and will be explained in more detail later.

According to Butler, gender is a form of "doing", something that everyone is involved in socially and psychologically. Her approach is adjacent to how sociologists Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman address the idea of gender:

> [T]he "doing" of gender is undertaken by women and men whose competence as members of society is hostage to its production. Doing gender involves complex socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine "natures". (168)

In *Gender Trouble,* Butler identifies these pursuits as stylized repetitions that turn gender into regulatory fictions. She states that gendered identities arise from socially constructed and ritualized legitimations; that gender has no real origin but is a performative act, something the "I" has to do in order to be recognized in the social reality:

> If […] the ways in which a body shows or produces its cultural signification are performative[…,] there is no preexisting identity by which an act or attribute might be measured[…,] no true or false, real or distorted acts of gender, and the postulation of a true gender identity would be revealed as a regulatory fiction. (192)

She also emphasizes that

> [t]he effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body, and hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. (191)

The field of masculinity studies investigates such acts of self-stylizations where male bodies and male gender identities are concerned. It also traces their historical variants. Authors like Raewyn Connell, Michael Kimmel, Eric Anderson, or Anthony Lemelle[4] overlap with Judith Butler's approach on gender identity. To all of them,

> [t]he very notions of an essential sex and a true or abiding masculinity or femininity are also constituted as part of the strategy that conceals gender's performative character and the performative possibilities for proliferating configurations outside of the restricting frames of masculinist domination and compulsory heterosexuality. (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 192-193)

As Arthur Brittan clarifies, within the field of masculinity studies

[4] As shown in the following sections and chapters, these are the authors my theoretical approach is based on.

> Gender is never simply an arrangement in which the roles of men and women are decided in a contingent and haphazard way. At any given moment, gender will reflect the material interests of those who have power and those who do not. (52)

Masculinity studies focuses on men who have power and on how they enact masculinity because of this access to power. Since gender "is not exactly what one 'is' nor is it precisely what one 'has'. Gender is the apparatus by which the production and the normalization of masculine and feminine take place" (Butler, *Undoing Gender* 42), masculinity studies is most interested in de-naturalizing masculinity enactment (Connell, *Masculinities*; Kimmel, "Homophobia" & *Manhood*).

This discipline investigates how men perpetuate a system in which not all men have equal access to power, and in which some are denied it altogether. Masculinity studies analyzes the logics of masculinist domination, compulsory heterosexuality, heterosexism, and heteronormativity, and how these logics influence how men "do" masculinities. In other words, masculinity studies investigate the ideology of *patriarchy*.

In general, the "birth date" of masculinity studies is thought to be a research symposium held by the British Sociological Association in 1988, titled "Men, Masculinities and Social Theory" (Martschukat and Stieglitz 36). Initially called "men's studies", the discipline considers itself a descendant of women's studies, a field that is itself based on the women's movement of the 1960s. In the United States, this background gives rise to an anti-sexist, feminist movement which investigates, questions, and analyzes masculinity and male identity as cultural, historical, and societal myths and constructions (Pleck; Hearn). Researchers engaged in masculinity studies see masculinity as something one "does", meaning that in "speaking of masculinity at all", one is then speaking of "doing gender in a culturally specific way" (Connell, *Masculinities* 70). They research masculinity as an identity to be socialized into, and the notion that "those who are not 'proper men' have not been properly reared" (Beynon 54) into this identity construction.

As Raewyn Connell emphasized from the very beginning, masculinity studies investigate *patriarchy*: an ideology which regulates "the practices and relations that construct the main patterns of masculinity in the current Western gender order", dividing them into *hegemonic*

masculinity and *complicit*, *subordinated,* and *marginalized* masculinities (*Masculinities* 76). Put bluntly, patriarchy is a way to see, understand, structure, and construct the world in a manner which puts power, influence, and authority in the hands of men, and devalues, disenfranchises, and restricts women and female agency in all walks of life. In this sense it becomes an ideology that also "does gender": it organizes around gendered identity as a social practice which preferences men and male bodies as active agents of authority. It weaves together ideas about class, "race", and gender to furbish "a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women" (Walby 20).

What makes patriarchy such a formidable fiend is the ideology's ability to pass itself off as natural when it is really a man-made, socio-cultural order, as pointed out by numerous feminist scholars such as Joan Kelly:

> It has been a strength of patriarchy in all its historic forms to assimilate itself so perfectly to socioeconomic, political, and cultural structures as to be virtually invisible. (Kelly qtd. in Walby 225)

Feminist scholar bell hooks' analysis of patriarchy is even more straightforward:

> Patriarchy is a political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence. (*we real cool* 50)

Patriarchy produces masculinities along a social hierarchy, as Raewyn Connell describes in *Masculinities*. Her concepts have since turned into the most central aspect of masculinity studies (Demetriou; Beasley; Anderson; Yang) and are also applied in my analysis of masculinity enactment in the selected superhero comics. This thesis will neither contradict nor challenge Connell's ideas. However, as it analyses the masculinity enactment male superheroes engage in, its approach to this analysis is based on concepts from masculinity studies which expand upon Connell's original ideas, explained in more detail in the following section.

The Social Hierarchy of Men: Connell's Categories

In her 1995 book *Masculinities*, sociologist Connell explains masculinity as a relational concept:

> No masculinity arises except in a system of gender relations. […] [W]e need to focus on the processes and relationships through which men and women conduct their lives. "Masculinity" to the extent the term can be briefly defined at all, is simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality, and culture. (71)

Connell's approach is intersectional, as she states that "class and gender relations are simultaneously in play. Race relations may also become an integral part of the dynamic between masculinities" (80). She also does away with the idea that there is only one masculinity, and instead talks about masculinities as existing alongside a hierarchy where all "strategies of being male" must position themselves in relation to whichever form of "doing masculinity" is most accepted at that point. Much like Judith Butler, she does not consider gender as fixed and static, but as a dynamic concept (Connell 71)[5]. This thesis is based on their ideas, investigating the "ways of being male" as they appear in superhero comics in order to "de-naturalize" the elements which patriarchy consistently tries to pass off as "natural".

In *Masculinities*, Connell provides a "framework in which we can analyze specific masculinities" (81). The top position is occupied by *hegemonic* masculinity. This form of masculinity

> is not a fixed character type, always and everywhere the same. It is rather the masculinity that occupies the hegemonic position in any given pattern of gender relations, always contestable[…]. Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women. (76-77)

Connell has expanded on this first definition since 1995, as numerous scholars found the definition both too ambiguous and too monolithic (Demetriou; Howson; Yang). In 2005, Raewyn Connell, together with James W. Messerschmidt, amplified the concept further. In

[5] From the time of their first publication, Connell's concepts were distinct from the positivistic, essentialist, and normative approaches—such as sex role theory—that had been dominant in social sciences since the 1970s. This is what makes her framework so poignant and influential even today.

their article "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept", helpful "updates" are provided:

> The concept of hegemonic masculinity is not intended as a catchall nor as a prime cause; it is a means of grasping a certain dynamic within the social process[…]. Hegemonic masculinity has multiple meanings. (841)

Successfully enacting hegemonic masculinity is a relational practice (Lemelle). What is demanded changes over time and always intersects with concepts like "race" and class (Connell; Howson; Anderson). In order to "do" it successfully, men have to act a certain way, appear a certain way. Acting tough, assertive, and confident are just some of these requirements; being able-bodied, middle class, being white as well as heterosexual are also on the list. This "list" always interacts with the system of patriarchy, something both authors emphasize:

> Hegemonic masculinity was understood as the pattern of practice[…,] not just a set of role expectations or an identity that allowed men's dominance over women to continue. […] Hegemonic masculinity was not assumed to be normal[…]. But it was certainly normative. […] Hegemony […] meant ascendancy achieved through culture, institutions, and persuasion[…,] defined in terms of a patriarchal gender system. (Connell and Messerschmidt 832)

Other masculinity scholars further amplify Connell's definition of hegemonic manhood. In "What is Hegemonic Masculinity?", Mike Donaldson refers to it as

> a strategy for the subordination of women[…,] a culturally idealized form, it is both a personal and a collective project[…;] it is pseudo-natural[…,] socially sustained[…,] an economic and cultural force, and dependent on social arrangements. (645-646)

Anthony Lemelle, in *Black Masculinity and Sexual Politics,* speaks of hegemonic masculinity as a "dynamic power that men deploy in structural interactions functioning to legitimize patriarchal relations" (13). Yuchen Yang, in "What's Hegemonic About Hegemonic Masculinity? Legitimation and Beyond", describes it as:

> The dominant masculinity in a consensual relation of domination; it subordinates other masculinities with a combination of force and consent. In other words, what defines hegemonic masculinity is its mechanism of domination, rather than any pregiven masculine qualities. (319)

The list of amplifications is extensive, but for the purpose of the analysis in this thesis, the most useful ideas are those brought forward by Mike Donaldson, Demetrakis Demetriou,

and Anthony Lemelle. Their approach to the concept of hegemonic masculinity reveals how embodying this "culturally exalted form" (Carrigan et al. 892) of being male is a combination—a hybridization—of different traits belonging to different masculinities, rather than just one fixed idea, since hegemony itself is a dynamic concept (Demetrio; Lemelle; Yang).

In his 2001 article "Connell's Concept of Hegemonic Masculinity: A Critique", Demetriou stresses the *hybrid* qualities of hegemonic masculinity enactment. He proposes to read hegemonic manhood as a "hybrid bloc that unites various and diverse practices in order to construct the best possible strategy for the reproduction of patriarchy" (347-348). Hegemonic masculinity is the attempt to

> articulate, appropriate, and incorporate rather than negate, marginalize and eliminate different or even apparently oppositional elements. (348)

that inform "doing" masculinity. As mentioned earlier, Connell already points out an important aspect of hegemonic masculinity: it is normative, not normal (Connell and Messerschmidt). It may be the most "culturally exalted form of masculinity", but the "number of men rigorously practicing the hegemonic pattern in its entirety may be quite small" (Connell, *Masculinities* 79). In addition to Connell's point, Mike Donaldson suggests that it may be fictional rather than real men who most easily embody hegemonic manhood:

> Hegemonic masculinity is naturalized in the form of the hero and presented through forms that revolve around heroes: sagas, ballads, westerns, thrillers, in books, films, television and sporting events. (646)

The subjects of the content analysis done here very much appear in this "form of the hero".

But what are the *subordinated* and *marginalized* masculinities that hegemonic masculinity must interact with? They belong to the system of relations without which, as Connell clarifies in *Masculinities,* no masculinity can arise in the first place. Whereas *hegemonic* masculinity resides on top of the hierarchy, *complicit*, *subordinated*, and *marginalized* masculinities must position themselves in relation to it. From such a relational standpoint, hegemonic masculinity turns into an "entanglement in multiple, normative structures" (Lemelle 169) used by males "to legitimize patriarchal relations" (13). This thesis relies greatly on both Lemelle and Connell here: 1960s Marvel Comics relish patriarchal relations when it comes to how they portray their male superheroes. Important moments in superhero comics, especially in the 1960s—be they

confrontations between superhero and villain, or moments of mutual respect and solidarity between two superheroes—are moments that happen between men. This serves to uphold patriarchal logics, where females are devalued and denied positions of power (Hartmann; Connell; Walby).

To men, patriarchal relations yield what Connell describes as the *patriarchal dividend*: the advantages men gain "from the overall subordination of women" (*Masculinities* 79) in general, which is independent from whether or not they enact hegemonic masculinity themselves. "Doing" masculinity in this way is connected to what Connell refers to as the

> relationship of *complicity* with the hegemonic project. Masculinities constructed in ways that realize the patriarchal dividend, without the tensions or risks of being the frontline troops of patriarchy, are complicit in this sense. (79, emphasis added)

In patriarchal structures, *complicit* men are more numerous than *hegemonic* men. Next to complicit men, there are communities of men which are being *subordinated* under patriarchy. These are masculinities marked by oppression on a legal, material, and personal level. Gay men suffer the most, but not exclusively, from this oppression, which

> positions homosexual masculinities at the bottom of the gender hierarchy among men. Gayness, in patriarchal ideology, is the repository of whatever is symbolically expelled from hegemonic masculinity[…]. Hence, from the point of view of hegemonic masculinity, gayness is easily assimilated to femininity. (78)

Male homosexuality among superheroes—not allowed to be openly depicted until the 1990s—is not a subject of this thesis. Yet fears of male superheroes being perceived as gay affect superhero comics prior to the 1990s (Wright; Brooker). After all, superheroes exist in predominantly male homosocial environments, since female characters are usually scarce within Marvel Comics (and the 1960s are no exception here). In superhero comics, "stories and main characters involve mainly men" (Easton 138), and female characters often only "serve to secure a heterosexual orientation for the main characters" (146) and little else. They are characters put into the plot to police the "homosocial Eden" often provided by superhero comics against the perception of the male superheroes as gay (Jones; Brooker; Easton). The fact that it is always possible to read male superheroes in homoerotic terms is discussed in the section "Male Bodies and Masculinity Enactment on the Superhero Comic Book Page".

Male homosociality, however, does form a part of the analysis undertaken in this thesis. *Male homosociality* and *hegemonic masculinity enactment* are not separate actions. On the contrary, male homosocial relationships play "a crucial role in many contexts in perpetuating gender inequalities and the dominance of particular hegemonic masculinities" (Flood 342). And although "male bonding" is desired in patriarchal structures, it is still often "characterized by intense homophobia, fear and hatred of homosexuality" (Sedgwick, *Beween Me*n 1). But fear of homosexuality does not take away from understanding that "masculinity defined through homosocial interaction contains many parts, including camaraderie, fellowship, and intimacy often celebrated in male culture" (Kimmel, *Manhood* 7). Homosocial bonding—in particular between Captain America and Falcon—plays a big part in how Marvel Comics introduce their first Afro-American[6] superhero, as this thesis will point out.

While sexual orientation informs one level of oppression, categories like class and "race" inform another: *marginalization*. Connell points out how class and "race" relations are

> simultaneously in play. Race relations may also become an integral part of the dynamic between masculinities. In a white-supremacist context, black masculinities play symbolic roles for white gender construction. (*Masculinities* 80)

In nations like the US, which are founded on white and male supremacy (Staples; hooks; Lemelle), white hegemonic masculinity polices what kind of black masculinities it tolerates:

> Marginalization is always relative to the *authorization* of the hegemonic masculinity of the dominant group. Thus, in the United States, black athletes may be exemplars for hegemonic masculinity. But the fame and wealth of individual stars has no trickle-down effect; it does not yield social authority to black men in general (Connell, *Masculinities* 80-81)

A more detailed look into black masculinity in the US is provided in the section "Enacting Black Masculinity". Black masculinity is a "contradictory experience" (Mercer 142) for Afro-American males (Staples; Mercer; hooks). The legacy of slavery denies Black males the "essence of masculinity" (Mercer 143): patriarchal power. Two superheroes selected for analysis here are Black. Marvel Comics' Black Panther and Falcon are among the earliest examples of Black male characters in American superhero comics who embody hegemonic

[6] Throughout this thesis, the terms *Afro-American* and *Euro-American* are applied. This follows an argument made by literature scholar Orlando Patterson in *Rituals of Blood*. To Patterson, it helps emphasize the *Americanness* of persons, characters, and situations described.

masculinity "in the form of the hero". As such, both characters break with the long-established rule of being denied normative masculinity enactment and are in fact turned into males gaining an advantage from the *patriarchal dividend*.

But first, I want to focus on why hegemonic masculinity is best understood as an exercise in *hybridization*. Connell's concepts, as mentioned in the introduction, provide the central framework for masculinity studies. This framework is often critiqued for Connell's ambiguous use[7] of the term *hegemonic*—a term originally based on the theories of Italian political activist and journalist Antonio Gramsci—to refer to the most "culturally exalted form of masculinity". Scholars like Demetriou or Yang claim that Connell de-emphasizes the fact that Gramsci portrays hegemony as inherently *dynamic*. And yet, it is precisely this ability to change, and adapt to changes in the way "doing masculinity" is most accepted and admired in patriarchal relations, which gives hegemonic masculinity its power over males and females alike.

Hegemonic Masculinity as an Exercise in Hybridization

Demetrakis Demetriou argues in "Connell's Concept of Hegemonic Masculinity: A Critique" that, according to Gramsci's theory, in any society in which different classes of citizens have differing opinions, achieving a hegemonic position revolves around internal and external hegemonic status: positions of leadership and domination. A class, according to Gramsci,

> is dominant in two ways, namely it is "leading" and "dominant". It leads the allied classes, it dominates the opposing classes. Therefore a class can (and must) "lead" even before assuming power; when it is in power it becomes dominant, but it also continues to "lead". (*Notebooks 2* 136-137)

Demetriou emphasizes the focus Gramsci puts on internal and external hegemony, which defines which group can lead and dominate:

> [L]eadership and domination could be thought of as internal and external hegemony [and] not an end in itself[…]. It is "merely an aspect of the function of domination". (Gramsci qtd. in Demetriou 345)

[7] Connell's framework has been critiqued often and relentlessly, especially for her reliance on masculinities as always constructed within patriarchal relations, as well as her reluctance to theorize masculinity without relying on patriarchal logics such as violence and domination.

According to Demetriou:

> Where Gramsci and Connell parted company is precisely in their understanding of this fundamental process of internal hegemony. Whereas for Gramsci the process is essentially a dialectical one that involves reciprocity and mutual interaction between the class that is leading and the groups that are led, Connell understands the process in a more elitist way where subordinate and marginalized masculinities have no effect on the construction of the hegemonic model. (345)

Demetriou instead argues for a more dynamic and relational way in which hegemonic masculinity comes about. He applies Gramsci's idea of a *historic bloc* to how hegemonic masculinity comes about. Historic blocs form when "an exchange of individual elements between the rulers and the ruled, leaders and led" (Gramsci qtd. In Demetriou 345) can take place. Without the formation of a historic bloc, no class can lead, because

> [t]he objective of leadership is the formation of a "historic bloc" that unites all the allied groups under the umbrella of the group seeking hegemony by making their conception of the world homogenous and consistent with the project of domination, a process that inevitably involves subordination of some of the interests of the groups that are led. (Demetriou 345)

Such constellations then allow for what Gramsci refers to as "the 'normal' exercise of hegemony", which is "characterized by a combination of force and consent, which balance each other reciprocally without force predomination excessively over consent" (Gramsci, *Notebooks* 2 102-103). Hegemony is achieved when "unstable equilibriums between the interests of the fundamental groups and the interests of the subordinated groups" emerge and "the interests of the fundamental groups prevail" (Gramsci, *Notebooks* 2 180). Demetriou goes on to explain how "for Gramsci internal hegemony culminates in the formation of a historic bloc, which is achieved through leadership of the fundamental class" (345). But this bloc is not so much formed through domination, but—as Demetriou sees it—through "dialectical pragmatism" (345), since

> the fundamental class is in constant, mutual dialectical interaction with the allied groups and appropriates what appears pragmatically useful and constructive for the project of domination at a particular historical moment[…]. The outcome of this process is an amalgam of elements, an "equilibrium". (345)

From this point of view, hegemonic masculinity is no elitist monolith of "pregiven masculine qualities", but an "amalgam of elements, an 'equilibrium'", a *hybrid bloc*, as Demetriou says when he goes on to suggest to

> rethink the concept of hegemonic masculinity in the light of Gramsci's alternative understanding of the process of internal hegemony[…,] deconstruct the binarism between non-hegemonic and hegemonic masculinity and conceptualize the latter as a hybrid bloc that unites various and diverse practices in order to construct the best possible strategy for the reproduction of patriarchy. (347-348)

He describes the process of achieving hegemonic masculinity as "an attempt to articulate, appropriate, and incorporate rather than negate, marginalize and eliminate different or even apparently oppositional elements"(348). In place of hegemonic masculinity, Demetriou talks about a *hegemonic bloc* whose

> internally diversified and hybrid nature […] makes the hegemonic bloc dynamic and flexible. It is its constant hybridization, its constant appropriation of diverse elements from various masculinities that make the hegemonic bloc capable of reconfiguring itself and adapting to the specificities of new historical conjunctures. (348)

In "What's Hegemonic about Hegemonic Masculinity? Legitimation and Beyond", Yuchen Yang—influenced by Demetriou's critique—offers a similar approach when he points out:

> In short, hegemony is a *relation* between different social groups, and attention to the mechanism by which one group subordinates others with force and consent is crucial for clarifying what constitutes hegemony. (342)

Bringing Demetriou in line with Connell, it is this "constant hybridization, its constant appropriation of diverse elements from various masculinities that make the hegemonic bloc capable" (Demetriou 348) of assembling hegemonic masculinity as the "most culturally exalted" version of masculinity, a continuous process of attaining its legitimacy within patriarchal gender relations. As Yang puts it, "masculinities that are subordinated by hegemonic masculinity […] shape hegemonic masculinity by pushing it to hybridize" (322-323). This hybridization reveals hegemonic masculinity to be "not a place, territory or type. It is the deployment of power" (Lemelle 169).

This thesis examines male superheroes and their masculinity enactment. As the "hero of the story", every superhero embodies hegemonic masculinity, and as my subsequent analysis chapters show, they all are *hybrid* heroes in this sense. As demonstrated in the analysis chapters, dual-identity heroes—almost every superhero character has a civilian identity as

well as superhero identity (Coogan; Gavaler)[8]—bring qualities marked as *hegemonic* together with qualities marked as *marginalized* or *subordinated*, such as appearing "soft", insecure, physically fragile, or not being white. While none of the characters analyzed here abstain from acting tough, committing violence, and being angry—all hallmarks of hegemonic masculinity—they are also depicted as showing much softer emotional states. In the 1960s, the character Steve Rogers/Captain America is repeatedly portrayed as anxious about his place in society: he is insecure and doubtful about how to act, yet never abstains from "superheroing" as Captain America. Like his other colleagues in this analysis, he enacts hegemonic masculinity as a *hybrid bloc* in this sense (Demetriou). Whenever this thesis refers to superheroes as *hybrid heroes*, it applies Michael Kimmel's "masculinity is several stories at once" ("Homophobia" 123) to reading and interpreting superhero comics. Instead of reading these texts as if Captain America is "the real thing" to admire and Steve Rogers is "the failed man" to reject. Analysis provided here suggests reading these characters as masculine hybrids, equally capable of being soft and tough while appearing in the "form of the hero" (Donaldson). From Steve Rogers to T'Challa, Marvel Comics' superheroes hybridize, they amalgamize elements from various masculinities in order to enact superhero manhood.

As the "most exalted form of masculinity" within the gender system of patriarchy, hegemonic manhood relies on what has come to be understood as "masculine conventions" (Connell, *Masculinities* 110) in a heteronormative setting: compulsory heterosexuality, sexual virility, being the breadwinner in a relationship, a propensity for physical violence, competitiveness, and the idea of the male body as a machine or weapon (Connell; Kimmel; Demetriou; Howson; Anderson). These conventions are still relevant today, and have been even more so in the 1960s, as explained in more detail in the historical overview provided in "Affluent Societies, Cold War Anxieties, and Masculinity Enactment".

[8] In *Superhero Comics* (2018), Chris Gavaler also refers to superheroes as hybrid heroes, but the context is different. Following Mendelian ideas of crossbreeding, Gavaler goes on to refer to superheroes as "hybrid heroes" (59) and connects this to ideas of combining different qualities. Gavaler then connects these to imperial ideas of being "civilized" versus being "savage", as he analyses the early adventures of Superman and Batman as well as masked pulp heroes who predate them, like Doc Savage or The Shadow.

Masculinities scholar Richard Howson refers to them as *hegemonic principles*, explaining that "central to any hegemony are the socio-historically articulated hegemonic principles" ("Hegemonic Masculinity" 111). According to Howson,

> hegemonic principles have been argued to represent the defining and privileged values, norms and beliefs as well as the strategies employed to ensure the maintenance and expansion of a particular hegemony in any one situation. (*Challenging* 74)

Hegemonic principles are therefore the "must-haves" of masculine conventions informing the "most culturally exalted" version of masculinity. Howson's ideas overlap with what masculinities scholar Eric Anderson in *Inclusive Masculinity: the changing nature of masculinities* refers to as *masculine capital*. It is used "to raise […] masculine worth[…]. [M]asculine capital is used to purchase privilege among peers" (41). This privilege means "to be homophobic, misogynistic, willing to take risks, muscular" (42). Therefore, *masculine capital* describes a

> "masculine level" of a man achieved through attitudes and behaviors[…;] masculine capital is the fuel of masculinity, regardless of one's color or sexuality[…]. Masculinity therefore becomes a currency, in which privilege and esteem are traded. (42)

But masculine capital, the way Anderson defines it, is best spent not in solitude but in a *homosocial arena* (Kimmel). To Michael Kimmel, this includes a "flight from the feminine", a flight that is so "angry and frightened" because all things considered "feminine" are devalued within patriarchy. This turns "doing" masculinity into a "relentless […] lifelong quest to demonstrate its achievement" ("Homophobia" 127). And this achievement is best demonstrated and vied for through *homosocial competition* and *homosocial enactment*. This is how Kimmel explains what it takes to "do" masculinity in patriarchal spaces. Anderson and Kimmel both underline the fact that masculinity is something you *do*, not so something you *are*, which is also what drives the analysis of male superheroes provided here. Kimmel's understanding of masculinity enactment in particular complements the earlier argument that hegemonic masculinity under patriarchy is not a monolith but a *hybrid bloc* (Demetriou; Yang). Kimmel's strongest addition is the idea that masculinity needs to be proven, it does not just happen. One does not enact normative masculinity, or *masculine capital*, in isolation. Instead, one enacts it so that others—especially men—approve of it, which turns masculinity into a deeply homosocial enactment where homophobia is simultaneously in play.

Between Homosociality and Homophobia: Masculinity as Gender Enactment

In his 1994 article "Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity", Michael Kimmel argues that "doing masculinity" involves, above all else, *homosocial competition* and *enactment*. Masculinity is something men "do" for approval by other men.

As mentioned before, Kimmel frames it like this:

> Masculinity is a *homosocial* enactment. Men perform heroic feats, take enormous risks, all because we want other men to grant us our manhood. Masculinity as a homosocial enactment is fraught with danger, with the risk of failure, and with intense relentless competition. (129)

"Doing masculinity" is a public undertaking where men judge other men. Kimmel clarifies:

> [W]e are under the constant careful scrutiny of other men. Other men watch us, rank us, grant our acceptance in the realm of manhood. Manhood is demonstrated for other men's approval. (128)

And "other men's approval" is more easily won, the more males can conform to socio-historically constructed "masculine" conventions. As Kimmel points out, this is a socio-cultural

> standard against which other forms of manhood are measured and evaluated. Within the dominant culture, the masculinity that defines white, middle class, early middle-aged, heterosexual men is the masculinity that sets the standards for other men, against which other men are measured, and more often than not, found wanting. (124-125)

This standard connects to the hegemonic definition of manhood, which is where Kimmel's and Connell's ideas on how masculinity is enacted overlap. It refers to

> a man *in* power, a man *with* power, a man *of* power. We equate manhood with being strong, successful, capable, reliable, in control. The very definition of manhood we have developed in our culture maintain the power that some men have over other men and that men have over women. (125)

These feats of strength, success, control, capability, and reliability are best "demonstrated for other men's approval" in homosocial settings.

Kimmel observes that "masculinity defined through homosocial interaction contains many parts, including camaraderie, fellowship, and intimacy often celebrated in male culture" (Kimmel, *Manhood* 7), and that and for men,

> efforts to prove their manhood contain this core element of homosociality. From fathers and boyhood friends to our teachers, coworkers, and bosses, it is the evaluative of other men that are always upon us, watching, judging. It was in this regime of scrutiny that men were tested. (Kimmel, *Manhood* 7)

The concept of homosociality is complex and layered, as pointed out by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in her seminal books *Between Men* and *The Epistemology of the Closet*. Sedgwick points out:

> "Homosocial" is a word occasionally used in history and the social sciences, where it describes social binds between persons of the same sex; it is a neologism, obviously formed by analogy with "homosexual", and just as obviously meant to be distinguished from "homosexual". In fact it is applied to such activities as "male bonding" which may, as in our society, be characterized by intense homophobia, fear and hatred of homosexuality. (*Between Men* 1)

In her books, Sedgwick investigates the "*structure* of men's relations with other men" (2). Selecting texts from the sixteenth through to the nineteenth century, she focuses on "male homosocial bonds throughout the heterosexual European erotic ethos" (16), because

> in any male-dominated society, there is a special relationship between male homosocial (*including* homosexual) desire and the structures for maintaining and transmitting patriarchal power: a relationship founded on inherent and potentially active structural congruence. (25)

Above all else, homosocial relations regulate male–male friendships, as they perpetuate "gender inequalities and the dominance of particular hegemonic masculinities" (Flood 342). In these friendships, men compete rather than cooperate with one another. They appraise each other's conformity to Howson's *hegemonic principles*.

But any *homosocial enactment* of masculinity, as Sedgwick states, is also guided by homophobia and hatred of homosexuality. Homophobia is also central to Kimmel's understanding of masculinity as homosocial enactment between American males:

> This is then the great secret American manhood: *We are afraid of other men*. Homophobia is a central organizing principle of our cultural definition of manhood. Homophobia is more than the irrational fear of gay men, more than the fear that we might be perceived as gay. […] Homophobia is the fear that other men will unmask us,

> emasculate us, reveal to us and the world that we do not measure up, that we are not real men. We are afraid to let other men see that fear. ("Homophobia" 131)

According to Kimmel, masculinity enactment often turns into a "manly front" which covers everything men do: "What we wear. How we talk. What we eat. Every mannerism, every movement contains a coded gender language" (132). And this gender-coded language does not only "instruct" males how to "do" normative masculinity; it also teaches them about masculinities as existing alongside socio-cultural hierarchies[9]. As Kimmel clarifies:

> We come to know our position of what it means to be a man in our culture by setting our definitions in opposition to a set of "others"—racial minorities, sexual minorities, and, above all, women. (135)

Kimmel's use of the term *homophobia*—men being afraid of being "unmasked" by other men if they abandon the "manly front"—is at least partially in play it the comics analyzed here. While none of the characters analyzed here act overtly homophobic, there are moments when the male protagonist is afraid of being unmasked in a way that has nothing to do with his civilian identity being uncovered. No, it has to do with instances of feeling insecure, fragile, and very much less than "being strong, successful, capable, reliable, in control" as Kimmel said. Moments like these co-exist with moments where the male superhero acts tough, assertive, and aggressive. But why interpret the moments of acting assertive and tough as "real", and the moments of insecurity as "fake", when it comes to analyzing masculinity enactment?

This thesis suggests regarding exactly these moments as acts of *hybridization* in terms of "doing" normative masculinity. Because Tony Stark is not the "fake" part of the protagonist's identity, and neither is Iron Man the "real" part of it. Marvel Comics equip their superheroes with the capacity to be both tough and soft. And since superheroes are eligible to "do" hegemonic masculinity "on the form of the hero", this is a case of hegemonic masculinity enacted as a *hybrid bloc* (Demetriou).

[9] The gender-coded language Kimmel addresses here affects Black males in the US in special ways. Grounded in the legacy of slavery, Afro-American males have been taught to see themselves as anything but "real men". The contradictory experience of being Black and "doing masculinity" is analyzed in more detail below.

Applying Connell, Demetriou, and Kimmel to Reading Superhero Comics

Frankly, without Connell's framework, my analysis has no starting point: the idea that masculinities denote hierarchies between men is nowhere as visible as in fictional texts. Like Connell's approach, my analysis only works if one regards masculinities as inherently relational. This thesis analyzes how superheroes—in "the form of the hero"—enact this "culturally exalted" form of masculinity; how they succeed in doing it, in pulling it off. When Mike Donaldson, in "What Is Hegemonic Masculinity?", first tries to rid Connell's original definition of its ambiguity, he explains that

> hegemonic masculinity can be analyzed[…]. But not apparently, enjoyed[…]. What can it do to men? […] [P]ass itself off as natural, deform, harm[…]. But not, seemingly, enrich and satisfy. (646)

Donaldson, I trust, does not read superhero comics. These texts provide "fantasy figures or models remote from the lives of the unheroic majority" (646), who have been enjoying their hegemonic moments on a monthly basis since 1936—even when it comes with severe costs attached, as my analysis chapters exemplify. Male superhero characters—perhaps unlike any other group of fictional males—embody hegemonic masculinity as a *hybrid bloc*. They never decline the opportunity to enact masculinity in hegemonic, in normative, in patriarchal ways; especially in the 1960s, when female characters are, for the most part, narrative garnish. But at the same time, the same characters are shown as fragile and anxious. Superhero characters offer a constant back and forth in terms of the masculine traits they enact: they display the capacity for being tough as well as being soft. They touch upon every category Connell proposes, from *complicit* to *subordinated* and *marginalized*, as they move from one adventure to the next. Superhero comics are *serial narratives*, meaning the plot is often repetitive but most of all episodic (Fludernik; O'Sullivan). This makes superhero comics a formidable "arena" in which masculinity can be "proved constantly". Superhero characters are at their most innovative, stretch the concept of gender as a "practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint" most ardently, when they are allowed to both fragile and assertive. Where they allow for characters to be fragile, they improvise, since fragile males are an affront to patriarchal masculinity. But superhero comics never add fragility and subtract toughness: they remain within Butler's "scene of constraint"—and so appease patriarchal logics—as they make sure that toughness and fragility co-exist rather than cancel each other out. Marvel Comics

make it a habit to create exactly such characters, a strategy sometimes dubbed the "Marvel Method" (Wright; Hatfield, *Hand of Fire*), which will be explained in more detail later.

When male superheroes "do" hegemonic masculinity, they do it primarily for other men's approval. They enact masculinity as a *homosocial competition*, as they routinely "perform heroic feats, take enormous risks", and display a masculinity enactment which "is fraught with danger, with the risk of failure, and with intense relentless competition". Every time a superhero faces down a supervillain, they prove to us—the reading audience—that they are "man enough". They prove it just as much to all the "non-super" characters in the *storyworld*[10]. Again and again, Captain America, Falcon, or Iron Man prove that they have enough *masculine capital* to come out on top. As a *serial narrative*, superhero comic books lend themselves especially well to displaying normative masculinity as the kind of homosocial enactment which, as Kimmel suggests, needs to be proved *again and again*.

From the perspective of masculinity studies, the question whether Steve Rogers or Captain America is the "real" identity is neither important nor interesting: since the inception of the genre, these characters have been gifted with the ability to embody more than one masculinity, to become a *hybrid hegemonic bloc* (Demetriou), as they reproduce patriarchal ideals. But because they are engaged in hybridization, they can also subvert these structures.

Why? Because the male protagonist of a superhero comic is, due to his dual-identity, not always so straightforwardly hegemonic. Tony Stark is not always depicted as "being strong, successful, capable, reliable, in control" despite being a playboy, a successful entrepreneur, and a very successful superhero. Steve Rogers is nowhere near as confident and tough when he is not wearing his red, white, and blue uniform. Such traits of superhero stories should not be explained by saying: Steve Rogers or Tony Stark are the "fake", whereas Iron Man and Captain America are the "real" identities of these protagonists. This argument has been pursued by other authors (Fingeroth; Packer), but this thesis aims to suggest otherwise. What if instead, male superheroes—from the perspective of masculinity studies—are enacting masculinity as "several stories at once"? What if the genre of superhero narratives owes its

[10] The concept of a storyworld is discussed in more detail in the "Reading Comics, Reading Tensions".

uniqueness to the fact that they provide audiences with male characters who enact hegemonic manhood as a *hybrid bloc*?

Black Males in a System of White Supremacy

In the United States, the community of Afro-American males has, via "coded gender language", been put into the position of an *other*. Colonial rule, slave trade, the practice of slavery, and racial segregation—all informed by the concept of white and male privilege—teach Afro-American males to think of themselves as not just "not human", but as "not real men".

Systems of white and male supremacy construct black masculinity as the opposite of white masculinity; another example of how "people who believe that they are white" (Coates 7) effectively "colonize the definition of normal" (Dyer, "White—Images" 142). This idea of "normal" extends to masculinity enactment and equips white men with "white male virtues, which are not qualities of being but doing" (150). These virtues tie white manhood to concepts like "modernity, reason, order, stability", and black masculinity to "backwardness, irrationality, chaos and violence" (146). In other words, Black males are denied the capacity to "do" hegemonic masculinity, to be "strong, reliable, in control".

Black masculinity in the United States cannot be understood without considering the atrocious legacies of slavery and racial segregation. A concise but by no means complete overview is given here to provide the necessary context.

As historian Ira Berlin explains:

> American history cannot be understood without slavery. Slavery shaped the American economy, its politics, its culture, and its fundamental principles. For most of American history, the society of the mainland colonies and then the United States was one of slaveholders and slaves[…]. The power of the slave-owing class, represented by the pre-dominance of slaveholders in the nation's leadership, gave it a large hand in shaping American culture and the values central to American society. (157)

As citizens of a former colony built around slave labor and enslavement, Euro-Americans enter a colonial relationship with all non-white communities living on American soil, which can be

seen most strongly in relations between Euro-Americans—or "people who believe that they are white"[11]—and Afro-Americans.

Colonialism and colonial rule are best understood as "the political and legal control of one nation by another" (Mikula 27). Or as author, activist, and analyst Frantz Fanon puts it, colonial rule is the system which tells every man and woman of color: "You'd better keep your place" (34). Fanon is maybe best known for *Black Skins, White Mas*ks and *The Wretched of the Earth*. These works are central to what has come to be understood as Postcolonial Theory, as are Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture*, and Edward Said's *Orientalism*. Colonial rule establishes a colonial discourse between colonizer and colonized, in which the

> objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction". (Bhabha 101)

And in these systems, Black males and females are forced to keep in "their place". If not, they will be regarded as "problems to be solved or confined or—as the colonial powers openly coveted their territory—taken over" (Said 207). Colonial discourse is therefore "marked by its dependence on the concept of 'fixity' in the ideological construction of otherness" (Bhabha 94). In the US, Afro-Americans are forced into occupying this role of the *other*, which leads sociologist Robert Staples in *Black Masculinity: The Black Male's Role in American Society* to argue for drawing colonial analogies between the Black community in the US and how colonized peoples are treated by the colonizer in other parts of the world. He suggests viewing

> the black community as an underdeveloped colony whose economics and politics are controlled by the leader of the dominant group[…;] in this framework […] race is a political identity because it defines the way in which you are to be treated by the political state and the conditions of your oppression. (39-40)

Likewise, Anthony Lemelle, jr. argues in *Black Masculinity and sexual politics* to regard colonialism as

> a process that functioned to institutionalize relationships of domination, oppression, and the violent intimidation of all opposition[…]. Like slavery it was a particular type of oppression. (57)

[11] The category of "whiteness" and white privilege are explained in more detail later on.

This oppression creates terms like "Negro" and "Nigger", terms whose purpose it is to categorize, position, dehumanize, and to subordinate. As Fanon explains in *Black Skins White Masks*, "Negroes" are constructed as symbols of "Evil and Ugliness" (140); as "wicked, sloppy, malicious, instinctual. Everything that is the opposite of these Negro modes of behavior is white" (192).

The "Negro" is constructed as stereotypical *other*, and as Pickering[12] reminds us:

> The concept of the Other takes us some way beyond the limitations of the stereotype by bringing more firmly into the frame both those involved in the process of othering as well as the object of this process, and by grounding stereotypical misrepresentations more firmly into the structures and relations of power which give them their binding force. (Pickering, *Stereotyping* 69)

The "Negro" is made to represent everything "white culture" is not, or not anymore. As a "primitive" man, he is everything "civilized" man has left behind (Brantlinger; Dyer, *White*; Pickering, *Stereotyping*).

However, such a thing as a "primitive" has "never existed. The Primitive as a human type was a figure of fantasy" put in place so that "imperial mastery" can appear as a "natural right", and not as an "arbitrary act of violence and subjugation" (Pickering, *Stereotyping* 57). This fantasy of the "primitive" *other* is never really about him or her; it is about us. This *us* may refer to a lot of things: European Empires as well as the United States of America. But above all, it refers to "white" culture and identity practices, because "what the Primitive represented was 'our' historically defined advancement over the ages" (56). It is always "about 'us' refracted through 'them', and 'them' temporarily excised from the social exclusivity of 'us'" (55-56).

The "primitive" *other* is part of the "colonial fantasy" (Bhabha). Predicated on a position of "eternal" white mastery and "eternal" black servitude, it "articulates the demand for the Negro" (117). Fanon refers to this as "a quest for the Negro", since "one cannot get along without him, he is needed, but only if he is made palatable in a certain way" (116). And he is

[12] In *Stereotyping: The Power of Representation*, Pickering suggests studying stereotyping through this lens of *othering* exactly because power structures are so directly involved in it. This fact is often omitted from the study of stereotypes. But *othering*, like stereotyping, can only be done from a privileged and thus powerful position.

made palatable through the invention of *blackness*: a fictive and relational concept. As Fanon explains, the Black man "must be black in relation to the white man" (110). And in order to "be black" in relation to white men, colonized men are forced to live in an "erosive galaxy of stereotypes" (129).

In this galaxy of "all-white truth", the white man is "the bringer of civilization" who "carries truth to savages" (Fanon 147), while they are the "primitives" who better be grateful for all that the "civilized" men give them. The Black man is forced to occupy the place of the "Wolf, the Devil, the Evil Spirit, the Bad Man, the Savage […] [T]he Negro is a beast" (146). And *blackness* is the marker of all these things, equipping Black people "with evil intentions, and with all the attributes of a malefic power" (155). In the context of Black bodies, *blackness* ascertains that "a black body is always already supernatural" (Scott 296) and as such suspicious and in need of being controlled (Fanon; Jordan).

When focusing on Black males, *blackness* marks them as monstruous, criminal, and sexual predators. As Winthrop Jordan points out in *White over Black: American Attitudes towards the Negro, 1550-1812*, *the* system of slavery installed "a mode of thinking about the Negro which operated with a vocabulary and images" (234) previously used to refer to animals. It also encourages perceptions of Black people as "primarily and merely physical creatures" (232). Ideas of Black males as "all body, no intellect" are ubiquitous at the time. During slavery in the US, unsubstantiated stories about Black male rapists on a sexual "quest for white flesh" (Fanon 81) are told repeatedly, and they incite the murder, lynching, and forced castration of enslaved and free Black men (Jordan; Staples; Patterson; hooks). Instances like this shape the concepts of black masculinity as hypersexual and therefore dangerous and in need of subordination (Staples; Mercer; Lemelle). Most "stereotypes of black men as aggressive, unruly predators can be traced to this period" (Alexander 28), and they still influence how Afro-American males are seen in the eyes of legal authority today (Alexander; Purnell and Theoharis). Concepts like *blackness* and *maleness*, which is explained in more detail in the next section, combine to position Black males within marginalized spaces far away from "doing" hegemonic masculinity.

As a system, as an economic way of life (Jordan; Alexander; Purnell and Theoharis), slavery cannot be understood without taking into account the system of white supremacy, as well as white and male privilege. As an ideological practice, *white privilege* is

> less about one individual's specific advantages and more about the systemic underpinnings that allow white privilege to occur and to continue. White privilege is part of a larger system in which white people in general are given advantages over people of color. (Blakemore 13)

The term is coined by feminist scholar Peggy McIntosh in 1988[13]. In "White and Male Privilege", the author points out the systematic "everyday" power of being white, which is always carefully kept invisible:

> [W]hites are carefully taught not to recognize white privilege, as males are taught not to recognize male privilege[…]. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks. (30)

Film scholar Richard Dyer argues similarly that to "be white" is to argue from that most powerful of positions: that of being "just human", as "white people are just people, which is not far off saying that whites are people whereas other colours are something else" (*White* 2). As Dyer puts it: "There is no more powerful position that that of being 'just' human. The claim to power is the claim to speak for the commonality of humanity" (1-2). As such, whiteness holds "representational power[…;] white domination is reproduced by the way that white people colonize the definition of normal" (Dyer, "White—Images" 1993 142). In the United States, this is nowhere more visible than in popular culture and fiction where Black characters are either absent, villains, *Magical Negroes* (Hughey), or such hapless figures that they are in need of a *White Savior* (Glenn and Cunnignham). The latter two concepts will be discussed in more detail later.

White and male privilege inform concepts of white masculinity, as "whiteness colonizes the definition of other norms" (Dyer, "White—Images" 144), such as access to "self-control, self-consciousness", and putting "one's mind over one's body" (*White* 6). Whiteness can claim a normative position as it propagates colonial mindsets and discourses: it regards non-white people as "arrested" and "fixed", as "primitive", "whereas white people in white culture are

[13] In her essay, McIntosh provides a comprehensive list of *white* advantages over *black*. A list sadly still adequate today.

given the illusion of their own infinite variety" (*White* 12). White masculinity is an extension of this concept, an idea already hinted at by Connell in *Masculinities*. Legacies of slavery, colonialism, and racial segregation, streamlined into the fictive concept of *blackness*, make sure that Afro-American males cannot "do" masculinity in hegemonic ways.

Enacting Black Masculinity: Insufficiently Masculine, yet Excessively Male

The legacy of slavery and white supremacy constructs Black males as hypermasculine, hypersexual, and as feminized all at the same time. These concepts deny Afro-American males the access to patriarchal masculinity around which hegemonic masculinity enactment is built in the US and in other Western nations.

Black males in the US often refer to being Black and male as contradictory experiences (Staples; Mercer). This is tied to them not being able to "do" masculinity in normative or traditional ways. In other words, they are not allowed to "do" white masculinity but are only allowed to enact "black masculinity". In this sense, the term *black masculinity* is already problematic. It often refers to a specific enactment of masculinity tied to hypermasculinity and the way men and women "who believe that they are white" regard men of African descent (Clatterbaugh). To clarify: this section examines black masculinity as imagined by white and Western minds. The following paragraphs offer an overview of where exactly societies based on white patriarchal rule—such as the United States of America—position Black males. This position has been, and for the most part still is, defined by subordination and marginalization (Staples; Connell; Mercer; hooks; Lemelle).

Masculinity is both a *homosocial enactment* (Kimmel) and a relational activity, as sociologist Anthony Lemelle argues in *Black Masculinity and Sexual Politics*. It is "not a place, territory or type. It is the deployment of power" (169). Lemelle, like Connell, reminds us that "gender is a form of power", and masculinity enactment is best understood as "a power relationship" (15). So, "from a relational perspective hegemonic masculinity is a dynamic power that men deploy in structural interactions functioning to legitimize patriarchal relations" (13). Afro-American males have been excluded from legitimizing patriarchal relations for centuries. Their exclusion is based on two fictive concepts: *blackness* and *maleness*. Lemelle points out:

> Actually, black males do not exist. There is no essential or biological thing that is black male. Nevertheless […] many men identify as black. The construction is external to individual "males". (77)

Both constructs, however, are applied by the logics of white and male supremacy to marginalize Black men, Lemelle says. *Blackness* has already been contextualized, so what about *maleness*?

Just like *blackness*, *maleness* is an utterly made-up construct with only one purpose: to uphold male supremacy; in countries like the US, specifically white and male supremacy. *Maleness* is a concept most strongly defined towards the end of the nineteenth century, when concepts like "primitive" masculinity, in contrast to "civilized" masculinity (Rotundo; Bederman), become topics of national discussion. In a nutshell: *primitive masculinity* is maleness. And as with *blackness*, it is a concept applied with the intention to uplift white males and subordinate Black males (Jackson; Lemelle). Throughout the nineteenth century, American-Victorian attitudes regard character traits such as "lust, greed, selfishness, ambition and physical assertiveness", all identified as "distinctly male traits" (Rotundo 227), in a negative light. Males are called upon to keep these "in check", or else societal as well as personal ruin will come about. But around 1900, males are actively encouraged to hone these traits in order to make sure that they are not perceived as overly "civilized" or "degenerate" (Rotundo; Bederman; Sussman, *Victorian Masculinities*). This is where masculinity enactment interacts with theories of evolution, eugenics, and "civilization", as white males are busy maintaining the idea that human

> races were assumed to evolve from simple savagery, through violent barbarism, to advanced and valuable civilization. But only white races had, as yet evolved to the civilized stage. (Bederman 25)

Such ideas are of course easily compatible with colonial as well as imperial mindsets. In nations like the US, this encourages the claim that "savage men were emotional and lacked a man's ability to restrain their passions. Savage men were creatures of whim" (25). "Savage" is similar to "primitive": it comes attached to an "us" versus the "other" mentality, where the "savage" exists only to represent "our" development to "us" (Pickering). Likening Black males to "savages" also implies that they are uncontrollably male. And so

> white Americans contrasted civilized white men with savage dark-skinned men, depicting the former as paragon of manly superiority. (Bederman 22)

Around the same time, a range of sources from psychologists to educators and self-help magazine articles (Rotundo; Bederman; Kimmel) start encouraging white men to cultivate their "primitive side", claiming that "primitive males" are more in touch with their "male passions". As it is considered essential to uphold adequate amounts of male virility, white males are encouraged to be assertive in business, take up sports and go camping on the weekends, and join clubs and fraternities that organize not only sport outings but also dramatic re-enactments of the customs of "savage people". White males start considering themselves as "the pinnacle of civilization" who can easily play "the parts of those they considered primitive" (Rotundo 228). This attitude enshrines white men, and by extension white masculinity, as simultaneously capable of performing "primitive masculinity and civilized manliness" (Bederman 23). White masculinity is therefore married to concepts of being able to be "savage" and reckless, while at the same time always capable of being in control of *mind and body* whenever necessary (Dyer; Rotundo; Bederman; Kimmel).

Black males, and therefore black masculinity, are constructed by white eyes as incapable of doing this as well. This is how *blackness* and *maleness* have Black males fixed into positions of *subordination* and *marginalization* (Staples; Connell; Lemelle). Imagining Black masculinity through white eyes turns Black men into a "combination of two fictive concepts, blackness on the one hand and maleness on the other" (Lemelle 77). Within the US, the prevalent "image of black masculinity has a prominent narration. This image comes from a history of domination" (144). As previously explained, slavery and racial segregation are examples of this domination. In terms of enacting masculinity, black masculinity is regarded as a demerit (Lemelle). In this socio-cultural contrivance, *blackness* is adding to this demerit. Black males are being tied up as "excessively male and insufficiently masculine" (Jackson 4).

Accordingly, outlets of US-American popular culture such as comic books often depict Black characters as suspicious, nefarious, and villainous (Gavaler; Nama; Jones). When Marvel Comics introduce Black Panther, the suspicion that he is the villain for the white superheroes to fight is kept up almost throughout the entire first narrative he features in, as the analysis chapter will show.

Blackness and *maleness* are socio-cultural fictions (Kimmel). So are masculinities. They revolve around ideas, images, and fantasies about how men should be (Beynon, Tillner). When it comes to "doing" black masculinity, especially in a US-American context, the fantasy does not pay off for Black men. Black males are excluded from enacting masculinity in patriarchal, in normative ways. As a system, patriarchy grants privilege, influence, and esteem to men. The system of white privilege or white supremacy ensures that these are not granted to all men, but only to men "who believe that they are white". Black males are the system's rejects. Patriarchal structures and power define the "white world", and as Frantz Fanon summarizes, this

> white world, the only honorable one, barred me from all participation. A man was expected to behave like a man. I was expected to behave like a black man—or at least like a nigger. (82-83)

"Nigger", a term of abuse which "connoted violence, claimed space, and indicated that the […] public sphere belonged to whites only" (Purnell and Theoharis 13-15), surfaces in the second half of the nineteenth century.

To be identified as a "nigger" opposes the idea of "being a man" and being treated like a man. It denies Black males access to what Connell refers to as social organization of masculinity in a way that bestows any power to them. They are confined to *marginalization*, which only exists in relation to "the hegemonic masculinity of the dominant group" (Connell, *Masculinities* 80-81). Black males are "allowed" to be mindless bodies and sex fiends, but not "real men". The dominant group—white males—exclude them from "doing" masculinity as a homosocial enactment "demonstrated for other men's approval". And if masculinity is in fact "several stories at once", then it is obvious that for more than two centuries, Black men in the US have not been allowed to turn these stories into success stories.

Forced into *subordinated* and *marginalized* positions, Afro-American men are socialized into being Black and male, but also into lacking masculinity in its patriarchal sense (Staples; hooks; Mercer; Lemelle). As a result, Lemelle states, "It is impossible to understand black masculinity without a conception of gender and race hierarchy", without a "a social construct guiding social relationships" (78).

Masculinities as social hierarchies and *homosocial enactment* in Western societies require, if nothing else, access to patriarchal, to hegemonic, benefits and norms. Robert Staples, in *Black Masculinity: the Black Man's Role in American Society*, points out how Black men come to see themselves as being

> in conflict with the normative definition of masculinity. This is a status which few, if any, black males have been able to achieve. Masculinity, as defined in this (white, American) culture, has always implied a certain autonomy over and mastery of one's environment. It can be said that not many white American males have attained this either. Yet […] even that semblance of control was to be largely denied to the black man. (2)

This "semblance of control" is Connell's *patriarchal dividend*: where it pays off to be male, and to have the privilege to enact patriarchal norms. However, the US-American patriarchy constructs Black men as problematic, as dangerous, as threats—because they are apparently insufficiently masculine but excessively male (Jackson). All of this reveals gender and "race" to be systems of stratification and subjugation. Because although

> Patriarchy and masculine dominance are the foundations of the typical conversations about masculinity[…,] Black masculinity is a useful vehicle to have a conversation about gender and stratification. Black masculinity is an extreme case of male ranking in history. (Lemelle 40)

Nowhere is this more evident than in the ways Black men have been constructed through white eyes. The logic of white supremacy simultaneously dehumanizes and demonizes Black males. It locks them into a "damned if you do, damned if you don't" scenario (Staples 2). In fictional settings, such as novels, comics books, or films, it turns the idea that Black characters are suspicious if not outright villainous—and in need to be controlled—into an atrocious routine (Guerrero; Tasker, *Spectacular*; Brown, "Comic Book Masculinity"; Hughey).

Based on such an "erosive galaxy of stereotypes" (Fanon), American men of African descent are constructed as bodies without minds, as "all nature—no culture", and without access to "doing" normative or patriarchal masculinity.

Black masculinity turns into a "contradictory experience", as the system denies Afro-American males patriarchal privileges and is built upon "complete dialectics of power and subordination" (Mercer 137). The marginalized space the US allows Afro-American men to

inhabit revolves around feminization and hypermasculinization at the same time (Staples; Lemelle).

Afro-American males are imagined as an *otherness*: they are imagined as "possessing dual, indeed diametrically opposed characteristics: feminine and hypermasculine traits" (Lemelle 87). Feminization characterizes them as soft, silly, and of limited intellectual capacity, while hypermasculinization claims that Black men are over-the-top aggressive and voracious, especially in sexual matters. The term *hypermasculinity* refers to

> [a]n exaggerated display of the "overtly" masculine, both in appearance and behavior conveyed by, for example, shows of physicality and "hardness" in the form of highly developed muscularity […, as well as in] demeanor and speech. (Beynon 162)

The hypermasculinization of Black males coincides with their hypersexualization during slavery, as previously mentioned. But what Fanon terms being "fixated at the genital level" (165) does not afford masculinity to Black males, but instead vilifies "black masculinity in the popular imagination as being disreputable and pathological" (Lemelle 96). One reason for this disreputability is that this supposedly superior sexuality of Black males is routinely accompanied by ascribing mental inferiority to them, which serves only one purpose: so that white patriarchy can continue to feminize and hypermasculinize them. This is its method of *othering* black masculinity, which produces "ideologies of inferiority" to structure "the way we think about black males" (Lemelle 95). However, being inferior does not mix well with being part of the patriarchy. What does it mean to be denied the patriarchal benefits of "doing masculinity"?

Patriarchal ideology structures "social relations between men" (Hartmann 345). It further ensures that "men of different classes, races, or ethnic groups have different places in the patriarchy" (346) and different access to what Connell terms the *patriarchal dividend*. In nations like the US, the "essence of masculinity" is often equated with patriarchy. This "essence" revolves around: owning property, being autonomous, being the sole provider and head of a household, and being recognized as the legitimate father of children one has sired. Patriarchal masculinity and hegemonic masculinity—within a Western context—therefore very often overlap. Patriarchy further extends to an idea of manhood rooted in coercion and domination. Feminist scholar bell hooks points out how

> all boys in patriarchal culture learn early that manhood is synonymous with the domination and control of others; that by simply being male, they are in a position of authority that gives them the right to assert their will over others, to use coercion and/or violence to gain and maintain power. (*we real cool* 49)

The predominant experience of Afro-American boys and men is, of course, that they are excluded from enacting this patriarchal masculinity. This exclusion starts with white patriarchy claiming that "black men […] are not men" (Lemelle 125). Black males are thus excluded from being "equal performers in the competition for hegemonic masculinity" (117). White patriarchy "contributes to the inability of the black male class to perform patriarch functions" (114) in US society. This contribution is a reminder that "doing" masculinity is both a relational concept and a "deployment of gender power" (117). It is also a further reminder that "black masculinity is not outside of the cultural history of white patriarchy nor is it synonymous with white patriarchy" (94). In the US, there is never a time when Afro-American males are not existing in a society built around patriarchal values to which they are not granted the same access as Euro-American males. It gives credence to the "black male experience as a condition of black male marginalization in the organization of patriarchy" (133). As discussed in section "Affluent Societies, Cold War Anxieties, and Masculinity Enactment" below, the 1960s witness the formation of two Afro-American organizations—the Civil Rights Movement, and the Black Power Movement—whose male members are "going after" patriarchal masculinity like never before (Estes). This desire to be Black, male, and patriarchal all at the same time is answered by Marvel Comics in 1966 with the introduction of Black Panther, their first Black superhero.

Black Superheroes and Black Masculinity Enactment

Providing an in-depth analysis of the first appearances of Black Panther and Falcon, this thesis shows how around 1966, black masculinity imagined through white eyes, hegemonic masculinity enactment, and being a male superhero are no longer contradictions. Analyzed here next to the first appearances of Iron Man and Captain America, the parallels in enactment will become obvious. These four men are all able to be "strong, successful, capable, reliable, in control" when situations call for it, and just like their white colleagues, the Black characters will undertake "heroic feats, take enormous risks", and thereby make sure that their masculinity enactment is approved of by other men.

When T'Challa first appears in 1966 and Sam Wilson follows in 1969, two men of color pick up the mantle of the superhero for the first time in American superhero comics. As stated earlier: male protagonists in superhero comics always have access to hegemonic masculinity, as they turn its enactment into an act of hybridization. Enacting masculinity in a way that other men approve of is usually restricted to the superhero persona of the male protagonist, while his civilian persona lacks *masculine capital*. Black Panther and Falcon are no exception here. When appearing as T'Challa and Sam Wilson—their civilian personas—both characters are confronted with a difficult environment where racism is not something they are safe from—but something they know how to handle. When both appear as their superhero personas, the situation is very different: like their white colleagues, they are usually able to overpower their opponents by using their brains and brawns alike. For Black Panther and Falcon, "doing" black masculinity turns into a "deployment of power" (Lemelle): a deployment they now have access to as superheroes. The very first adventures featuring these two Black superheroes reveal how "hegemonic masculinity is deployable" (158) because it is "not a place, territory or type" (169) but "a situational condition" (158). This constitutes a characteristic which can be found in any superhero comic book: the superhero character is able to deploy hegemonic masculinity whenever he needs it. The fact that Black Panther and Falcon can deploy it as well is what makes these narratives "novel" for the 1960s. "Novel" here does not necessarily mean positive. There is no question that Marvel Comics desegregating their *storyworlds*, which they start doing around 1963, is an important step towards racial equality, if only on a fictional level. But this does not mean that Marvel's very first depiction of Black superheroes is flawless.

Many ways in which Jack Kirby, Stan Lee, and Gene Colan—the three artists most directly involved with creating these characters—depict both Black Panther and Falcon are informed by how "people who believe that they are white" imagine Black males to be. The "race and gender hierarchy", which Lemelle sees as the socio-political structure erected to ensure the continued domination of Black males (Lemelle 77), is often at work in their initial appearances. My analysis assumes that all artists involved have the best intentions, but since even "the road to hell is paved with good intentions", a critical approach is needed. Depictions of Black Panther and Falcon are not free from racial stereotypes about Black males. Sam Wilson's a.k.a. Falcon's origin story is riddled with stereotypes about White Saviors and Magical Negroes. Overall, Marvel Comics treat their first Afro-American superhero in far more patronizing ways

than they treat their first African superhero, as my subsequent analysis shows. The comics I examine are produced by white authors and artists, and the way they imagine and depict Black superheroes is very much a case of "black masculinity imagined through white eyes" (hooks). When Marvel Comics portrays characters belonging to groups previously less often portrayed as important or pivotal to the plot—usually characters of color and female characters—in the 1960s, it is well-intentioned but not necessarily equal or democratic regarding gender and "race" equality (Davis; Francis).

This thesis applies the idea that hegemonic masculinity is an act of hybridization to the reading of superhero comics, on the premise that hegemonic masculinity is never static but always adapting itself to new circumstances (Demetriou; Yang). And as long as patriarchal mindsets prevail (Yang), hegemonic masculinity remains a concept which "unites various and diverse practices in order to construct the best possible strategy for the reproduction of patriarchy". Demetriou's view on hegemonic manhood easily merges with Lemelle's proposition to view hegemonic masculinity as relational, as existing in a constant "entanglement in multiple, normative structures" which function "to legitimize patriarchal relations". When T'Challa and Sam Wilson first show up, they are patriarchal men just like their white colleagues.

In 1966, Marvel Comics extend hegemonic masculinity enactment "in the form of the hero" (Donaldson) to Black males for the first time. At the time, Marvel Comics are staunch upholders of patriarchal values, something most easily recognizable in the way the publisher imagines and depicts female characters (Wright; Howe). Whenever Marvel's superheroes are depicted as tough, aggressive, and able to overwhelm and dominate any opponent sooner or later, they are enacting patriarchal masculinity (hooks). Marvel Comics, as if it were the most normal thing to do, involve their first Black superheroes in this "strategy for the reproduction of patriarchy". As the analysis chapters show, when T'Challa and Sam Wilson first show up, Marvel Comics grant them many an opportunity to be patriarchal.

Marvel Comics and 1960s American Masculinity Enactments

This thesis aims to show that Marvel's male superheroes are *hybrid* heroes when it comes to "doing" masculinity. Its focus is on early appearances of the selected characters in 1960s comics. Therefore, a quick look at 1960s masculinity enactment is in order. "Doing" masculinity, as explained earlier, is not just a kind of doing, it is a *homosocial enactment*, engaged in for the benefit of other men. But most of all, masculinity is historical, it changes over time because "Manhood is not the manifestation of an inner essence; it is socially constructed" (Kimmel, "Homophobia" 120). And the sixties offer a lot of versions of masculinity enactment: from the dutiful husband and breadwinner to the playboy. The decade not only witnesses the height of the Vietnam War in terms of war atrocities committed, it is also a "hot phase" of the Cold War. The decade also features unprecedented successes for racial and social equality brought about by the Civil Rights Movement. During this time, Black Power movements first emerge, and the Gay Liberation movement and Second Wave Feminism impact US-American society in ways unheard of before. The 1960s further give birth to the Hippie Counterculture movement emerging towards the end of the decade. These are just a few events on an even longer list of things that happen in the 1960s with an impact on popular culture. In the thick of it, Marvel Comics is born. Characters like Tony Stark, Sam Wilson, or T'Challa appear for the first time, and a character like Steve Rogers "reappears"[14]. When they do, they all carry masculinity traits which go beyond simply being "Cold Warriors" on comic book pages (Costello; Genter). The following sections provide insights into how "proper masculinity" scripts and "proper masculine" roles looked during the 1960s. What were males at the time expected to do in order to be called "men"?

After the end of the Second World War, the US is left in an unprecedented position of power and influence: "It was fueled by the vast expansion of the American economy that would grow at an almost unbroken—and even quickening—pace for two decades, generating an affluence never known before" (Costello 31). Economic growth brings with it an "increasingly globalized, centralized and bureaucratized reality" (31) affecting men's public and private lives (Ehrenreich). These changes clash with what had come to be understood as one of the most

[14] Captain America originally appears in Timely Comics, a publisher who then goes under in the 1950s. Marvel Comics is its successor.

normative of masculinity enactments for American males: the *Self-Made Man*. This is a concept both deeply middle class and deeply American. Michael Kimmel's *Manhood in America—A cultural History* fuses this concept permanently with *homosocial masculinity enactment*, but various other authors have also worked with the concept over the years[15]. To Kimmel, the *Self-Made Man* is a masculinity belonging to the "rising middle class" (*Manhood* 23), which has come to position itself as the hegemonic definition of manhood in the United States. In so doing, it outbid two other types of masculinity: the *Genteel Patriarch* and the *Heroic Artisan*.

"Doing" Masculinity in America: A Class Matter

Looking back at the early days of the American nation, Michael Kimmel differentiates between three types, or archetypes[16], of masculinity: *Genteel Patriarch*, *Heroic Artisan,* and *Self-Made Man,* all related to the *class* concepts and the job market. *Class* is an important feature "in constructing dominant or hegemonic notions of masculinity to do with control, the exercise of power, rationality, and so on" (Morgan, "Masculinity and Class" 171). As industrialization changes societal norms and the means of production, the middle classes gain power, while the working classes and upper classes suffer losses in terms of authority and influence. One detailed overview is provided in Alan Trachtenberg's *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age*. In as far as *class* refers to "embodying status", the "connection between class and masculinity is an intimate one" because: "When I see a middle class man, I do not see someone who is a man, or vice versa. I see both at the same time" (Morgan, "Masculinity and Class" 172). The masculinity of the rising middle class turns into the "most exalted form of masculinity", in a process that starts in the late nineteenth century and continues into the twentieth century.

The phrase *Self-Made Man* is commonly credited to Henry Clay, who writes in 1832: "In Kentucky almost every manufactory known to me is in the hands of enterprising self-made men, who have whatever wealth they possess by patient and diligent labor" (qtd. in Paul 369).

[15] For other uses of the term *Self-Made Man,* see Heike Paul's 2014 *The Myths that made America—An introduction to American Studie*s.

[16] Kimmel's use of the term *archetype* has no connection to Jungian theory. To Kimmel, archetype means *ideal* or *idealized type*.

Shortly after this, the term *Self-Made Man* appears in quite a few publications, as American authors in fictions, self-help books, biographies, and autobiographies start using the term, like John Frost's *Self-Made Men in America* in 1848 or Charles Seymore's *Self-Made Men* in 1858: both best-selling biographies focusing on two young men of poor origins who, through being industrious and hard-working, come to riches (Kimmel, *Manhood* 26). In his autobiography, Benjamin Franklin also refers to himself as such a man: always working to achieve more, to rise to the top of society. In his now seminal essay "The American Scholar", transcendentalist philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson states "self-sovereignty and self-determinacy" as "essential manly virtues" that form the new American men (91-92). The myth of the Self-Made Man involves not just the idea of self-determination and a hard-work ethic, but the implication of social and intellectual mobility, in particular class mobility—the ability of individuals to determine their own material and personal fate:

> [T]he self-made man has often been connected to utopian visions of a classless society, or at least to a society that allows considerable social mobility[…;] the mirage of classlessness is often connected to the belief that most Americans belong to the middle class […] in the face of contradictory empirical evidence. (Paul 368)

Kimmel also defines the Self-Made Man as the masculinity of "the rising middle class" (*Manhood* 23). Despite its actual improbability, the idea gains traction in a young United States (as the term was coined in 1832, not long after 1776). From the start, it is a rather exclusive narrative: excluding Native Americans, Asian Americans, Afro-Americans, Jews, and of course women (Brod).

Despite its exclusivity in terms of gender and ethnicity, the myth centers on the idea that manhood is not a given, but something that is earned. Kimmel also refers to it as *Marketplace Masculinity* or *Marketplace Manhood* ("Homophobia" 124). This type of man

> derived his identity entirely from his success in the capitalist marketplace, as he accumulated wealth, power, status. He was the urban entrepreneur, the businessman […] devoting himself to his work in an increasingly homosocial environment—a male-only world in which he pits himself against other men. (123)

The *Self-Made Man* ideal, somewhat adjacent to the *Heroic Artisan*, bases his success not simply on being self-employed, but having success in his business, and having built it entirely himself rather than having inherited it. As Kimmel points out,

> that is precisely what defined the Self-Made Man: success in the market, individual achievement, mobility, wealth. […] [T]he Self-Made Man embodied economic autonomy. This was the manhood of the rising middle class. The flip side of this economic autonomy is anxiety, restlessness, loneliness. Manhood is no longer fixed in land or small-scale property ownership or dutiful service. Success must be earned, manhood must be proved—and proved constantly. (*Manhood* 23)

According to Kimmel, this manhood "dethrones" both the *Genteel Patriarch* and the *Heroic Artisan*, and becomes

> the normative definition of American masculinity. It describes its characteristics—aggression, competition, anxiety—and the arena in which those characteristics are deployed—the public sphere, the marketplace. ("Homophobia" 124)

But who are the types of masculinity this version dethrones? Simply put, they are upper-class as well as lower-middle class and working-class manhood. There is the *Genteel Patriarch*, who

> derived his identity from landownership. Supervising his estate, he was refined, elegant, and given to casual sensuousness […] spending his time supervising the estate. (123)

In *American Manhood,* Kimmel also adds:

> At his best, the Genteel Patriarch represents dignified aristocratic manhood, committed to the British upper-class […] To the Genteel Patriarch, manhood meant property ownership and a benevolent patriarchal authority [embodying] love, kindness, duty and compassion, exhibited through philanthropic work. (16)

If types like the *Genteel Patriarch* occupy the upper end of this hierarchy of men, the *Heroic Artisan* occupies the lower end. This is a man who

> [e]mbodied physical strength […] in the yeoman farmer, independent urban craftsman, or shopkeeper. […] Economically autonomous, the Heroic Artisan also cherished his democratic community. ("Homophobia" 123)

In my understanding, this type embodies an idea of masculinity which fits both within the working and the lower middle class of pre-industrialized societies:

> [T]he Heroic Artisan […] looks the whole world in the face/For he owes not any man…disciplined and responsible […] His body was his own, his labor a form of property. […] The independence of the Heroic Artisan did not mean that he was isolated, reclusive, nor on the other hand overly competitive; both in his daily interactions in the workplace and as he strolled the city or town, the Heroic Artisan saw himself deeply embedded within a community of equals. (*Manhood* 28-29)

Both versions "lived in casual accord, in part because their gender ideals were complementary[…]. Artisans were decidedly urban and the Genteel Patriarch ruled their rural estates" ("Homophobia" 123). Heroic Artisans in particular gain their self-worth from their actions, undertaken by a strong, agile body. As Kimmel points out, the Heroic Artisan's abilities were generally portrayed as positive and desirable, and he himself described as a successful "republican machine" (*Manhood* 21). As the dominant gender myth of a young United States, it ties the idea of successful masculinity to being active, autonomous, industrious, and self-reliant, as well as having social agency; all qualities that fit into social scripts for accepted and admired masculinity as Connell and others understand them (Connell; Beynon; Anderson).

However, the qualities of the Heroic Artisan turn obsolete once industrialization changes Western economies and the workplace. Before long, in the US these changes mean "casting aside the Genteel Patriarch as an anachronistic feminized dandy—sweet, but ineffective and outmoded, and transforming the Heroic Artisan into a dispossessed proletarian, a wage slave" (Kimmel, "Homophobia" 123) in favor of the Self-Made Man. Industrialization turns entrepreneurial capitalism into industrialized capitalism, which changes workplaces, working conditions, and the types of jobs sought after in such an economy (Sobel). For masculinity enactment, this means that more and more men—especially from the middle classes—find themselves in managerial jobs, interacting more and more with people/customers than they do with things or goods produced (Douglas; Rotundo; Kimmel). Together with women entering the job market and demanding a more equal treatment—by men and by the law—these are the changes usually referred to when the "feminization of the workplace" (Douglas), as well as of American culture, is being discussed. As new economic conditions and opportunities clash with American-Victorian ideals and concepts, new meanings for manhood also emerge (Rotundo; Bederman; Sussman, *Victorian Masculinities*). These new meanings not only instruct men how to best "do" masculinity in everyday interactions, but they also extend to men's bodies. These new meanings are further discussed in the section "Male Bodies on Display: Male Superheroes as Action Heroes". For now, let's focus more on the ways the US, as an ever growing and globalized economy, instructs men how to do their masculinity. The Self-Made Man represents men of "the rising middle class", men who are admired for the business deals they strike and the riches they amass, rather than for being capable, skilled, and self-employed. But this *Marketplace Masculinity* first

> required proof[…,] required tangible goods as evidence of success. It reconstitutes itself by the exclusion of "others"—women, nonwhite men, nonnative born men, homosexual men. (Kimmel, "Homophobia" 124)

Kimmel's understanding of the Self-Made Man or Marketplace Masculinity is defined by its fragility, its aggression, anxiety, and its need for competition: in other words, its constant instability. It exists in a space where failure means being displaced and discarded, means being counted as "failed masculinity" (Morgan, "Masculinity and Class" 173). It requires masculinity to be proven in a "gendered arena" (Kimmel, "Homophobia" 124) in opposition to *others*: women, gay men, and men of color. It turns masculinity into something that needs to be proven in the eyes of other men: into a *homosocial enactment*. And this need to prove to other men that one is "man enough" interacts with "ways of being a man" that are displayed by men living in capitalist and patriarchally structured nations (Connell; Kimmel).

Male superheroes interact with Kimmel's masculinity types in complex ways. All male superheroes prove their masculinity in a gendered arena: in the eyes of other men. In this sense, they are Self-Made Men. But superheroes also borrow from other masculinity types. Characters like Iron Man and Black Panther borrow from all three types, as my subsequent analysis chapters show. Both are men of the upper class—in the case of T'Challa even royalty—but they are also skilled and educated workers: both are scientists and engineers proud of the work they do. Iron Man and Black Panther are therefore Genteel Patriarchs as well as Heroic Artisans. And as men who outsmart and outmaneuver other males when it comes to amassing riches and business successes, they also qualify as Marketplace Masculinity types. In comparison, Captain America and Falcon do not occupy all three types. While both are skilled fighters, are proud of this, and most often move within a community of equals—fighting alongside their fellow superheroes—they cannot compete when it comes to being *Marketplace Men*. Steve Rogers will never have as many luxury toys as Tony Stark. As my subsequent analysis chapters show, they, however, have mastered being *Self-Made Men* in terms of proving themselves in a gendered arena: in the eyes of other men.

Between concepts like the Genteel Patriarch, the Heroic Artisan, and the Self-Made Man, masculinity is indeed "several stories at once". But stories may change, vary, and be rewritten. As a result, while the onset of industrialization pushes the Self-Made Man type all the way to

hegemonic status, and as economic practices change from entrepreneurial to corporate capitalism, marketplaces change and so do ways in which men can prove themselves in the eyes of other men. Ways in which goods are produced, sold, and consumed—by males as well as females—change after the Second World War, when the US emerges as an economic world power. Postwar America changes the way Self-Made Manhood may be realized, and with it the way middle class men may benefit from the *patriarchal dividend*.

Choosing the *Strenuous Life* and Military Manhood

Before looking more closely at Postwar American masculinity enactments, another side to "doing" manhood needs to be covered: *military manhood*. While military organizations have been part of Western nations such as the US for centuries, military qualities enter debates about hegemonic masculinity even more strongly by the end of the nineteenth century (Rotundo). At the time, militaristic guidelines for males are in high regard in the US; they belong to what historian Anthony Rotundo in *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* refers to as "A Changing Standard in Masculinity" (223). Part of this changing standard is the successful "embodiment of manhood" in the form of displaying a fit and sportive body, accomplished demonstrations of "primitive masculinity", as well as mastering "manliness and the military ideal" (223-246). The imagined importance of "primitive" masculinity as a tool for furthering and upholding white and male supremacy has already been explained earlier. Captain America can most straightforwardly be linked to "military virtues", since he starts out as a soldier in his civilian life and starts his superhero life during World War II. But he is by no means the only superhero to embody "the military ideal" since, as shown here, military masculinity and hegemonic masculinity have much in common.

Military ideals for men in nations like the US have been in existence for centuries, and obviously shape how these nations think about men, men's lives, and masculine traits required to "be military men" (Arkin and Dobrofsky; Morgan, “Theater of War”; Barrett; Higate; Parpart and Partridge). In the late nineteenth century, American concepts about military masculinity—funneled through experiences of the American Civil War—are connected to notions of "martial virtues" like "intrepidity, contempt of softness, surrender of private interest,

obedience to command" (James 23). These virtues are regarded as necessary maturing tools for adolescent men (Rotundo). Politicians like Theodore Roosevelt center political campaigns around such "fighting virtues" (Rotundo 246), which he regards as necessary for America as a nation to succeed. The future President of the US argues in his infamous 1899 speech "The Strenuous Life" that America is a nation in need of the

> iron qualities that must go with true manhood. We need the positive virtue of resolution, of courage, of indomitable will, of power to do without shrinking the rough work that must always be done, and to persevere through the long days of slow progress or seeming failure which always come before any final triumph, no matter how brilliant. (Roosevelt 27)

Throughout his speech, Roosevelt demands "manliness in both American man and the American nation", as Bederman puts it (193). Roosevelt argues that "unmanly" men, like the

> timid man, the lazy man, the man who distrusts his country, the over-civilized man, who has lost the great fighting, masterful virtues, the ignorant man, the man of dull mind […] these are men who fear the strenuous life. (Roosevelt 6-7)

And "men who fear the strenuous life" cannot build a great nation, which is what Roosevelt-one of the United States' earliest imperialist Presidents-envisions for the US to become (Bederman; Kinzer). This strenuous life equals a life of constant endeavor, risk-taking and daring, of being active, of a willingness to change one's circumstances from powerless to powerful, as well as an unwillingness to accept defeat. It demands that men

> boldly face the life of strife, resolutely do our duty well and manfully[…]. Let us shrink from no strife, moral or physical, within or without the nation, provided we are certain that the strife is justified, for it is only through strife, through hard and dangerous endeavor that we shall ultimately win the goal of true nation greatness. (Roosevelt 20-21)

Embracing a "life of strife" is of course where Roosevelt's ideas and *military manhood* most closely overlap. Over the decades, ideas formulated in "The Strenuous Life" and the transformation they demand of American men have been discussed and analyzed on numerous levels (Kinzer; Rego; Dorsey). Roosevelt's rhetoric has entered ideas and thoughts about not just American politics, but American individualism and American self-identity. What makes Roosevelt interesting to this thesis is that his own success story, of which he preaches in "The Strenuous Life", is an act of transformation. Born into an upper-class family, Roosevelt starts his career as an unknown and unremarkable New York senator. When a political rival

ridicules him as effeminate, weak, and unmanly, he purchases ranchland in South Dakota, dons buckskin trousers, and learns how to ranch and hunt. In short, he transforms himself into a "frontier hero", into the "Cowboy of the Dakotas" (Bederman 176), and from then on boasts about his "physical hardihood" (177) and toughness whenever the occasion arises. He uses it to masculinize his image as a politician[17]. Roosevelt, therefore, also interacts with all three of Kimmel's idealized masculine types: Genteel Patriarch, Heroic Artisan, and Self-Made Man. Masculine ideals and their proximity to "fighting virtues" inform "The Strenuous Life" so strongly that it has stayed connected to masculine enterprises like warfare, but also to masculine enterprises in general, until today (Bederman; Kinzer; Rego; Dorsey).

Teddy Roosevelt's act of transformation is an act of "doing" masculinity for the approval by other men. Thinking himself a man who is too soft and therefore not manly enough, and changing this by changing his behavior and bulking up, is reminiscent of Captain America. The origin story of this superhero, as discussed in the analysis chapters, is another such act of transformation, albeit by different means. What connects a Steve Rogers and a Theodor Roosevelt is the fact that both want to become somebody else, and do so. In this sense, they are very much Self-Made Men. Like Roosevelt, Rogers chooses the "strenuous life", and enacts it as Captain America.

Concepts praised in "The Strenuous Life"—how men must be active, aggressive, and relentless in their pursual of success—can easily be connected to how Michael Kimmel defines successful masculinity enactment: defined by intense, relentless homosocial competition. The "fighting virtues" Theodore Roosevelt and others like him address and appraise, such as "courage, strength, duty, endurance, principled sacrifice", over time come to be equated with manhood (Rotundo 234) and "doing" manhood "properly". Therefore, military masculinity and traditional and normative concepts of hegemonic masculinity often overlap. As David Morgan points out in "Theater of War: Combat, the Military, and Masculinities", out of

> all the sites where masculinities are constructed, reproduced, and deployed, those associated with war and the military are some of the most direct [where] the warrior still seems to be a key symbol of masculinity. (165)

[17] Roosevelt markets himself in these terms not just during political campaigns, but also in books he writes about his time in South Dakota: *Hunting Trips of a Ranchman* and *Ranch Life and the Hunting Trail*.

In depictions of men as soldiers, as combatants, found in

> paintings, comic books, and popular films the gendered connotations are inescapable. The stance, the facial expressions and the weapons clearly connote aggression, courage, a capacity for violence, and, sometimes, a willingness to sacrifice. (166)

This makes enacting *military masculinity* a "generalized and timeless masculinity", while "also connoting a control of emotions and a subordination to a large rationality" (166). In the military, just like in other workplaces, masculinity must be "proved—and proved constantly" even here. In the military, "Status is derived from the role of combat soldier (proof of manhood) in the extreme case of war (test of manhood)" (Arkin and Dobrofsky 156). Military training relies on well-established traditions "where major forms of achievement which validate masculinity are physical" (Pleck). Here, as in sports, the body does not just *contain* but *is* the man (Kimmel, *History of Men*), and this man must be able and willing to fight, to harm and kill, but above all else to follow orders and be a team player.

Standard definitions of *military masculinity* or militarized masculinity include "physical toughness, the endurance of hardships, aggressiveness, a rugged heterosexuality, unemotional logic, and a refusal to complain" (Barrett 81). It is obvious that

> *Militarized Masculinity* has been theorized as a specific form of masculinity that is inscribed as hegemonic because it is focused on creating a widely accepted dominance over other people, especially women, children, and subordinate males, especially in a patriarchal gender order and is associated with activities that are seen as largely male. (Parpart and Partridge 550)

None of this is surprising, since for the most part of the twentieth century "Militaries around the world have defined the soldier as an embodiment of traditional male sex role behavior" (Barrett 77). In nations like the US, the military was also strictly gender segregated until a few decades ago. Therefore, not only has the military been a "homosocial Eden" for the longest time, but also a space where the "flight from the feminine" and from anything labeled feminine (Brannon; Kimmel) is usually celebrated. As Barrett phrases it, military manhood celebrates qualities which have been deeply masculinized, such as

> risk taking, discipline[…;] tolerance of degradation; stoic endurance of hardship; tenacity and perseverance in the face of difficult physical trials; rational calculations; absence of emotion; and technological mastery. (95)

Another celebrated quality, usually naturalized through demanding training regimens, is that soldiers sport *developed* bodies, or even *built* bodies (Dutton): it is a "body politic" (Morgan, "Theater of War" 170) going for "the masculine look" (Easthope) which is well established within in military masculinity (Higate).

There is further "an ideological emphasis on homosociality" (Morgan, "Theater of War" 168) in the armed services, as soldiers internalize that they "succeed or fail as a unit[…]. We live or die together. We put our lives in each other's hands" (Barrett 83).

At the same time, any military organization impends a strict hierarchy where soldiers are taught how to take orders, and taught to follow them. This means that enacting militarized masculinity is not just about giving orders, but also always entails moments of being subordinated and ordered around (Morgan, "Theater of War"). The hierarchy teaches *military discipline,* which "refers to and thus encompasses the total individual's conformity to a prescribed role[…]. The objective of basic training is to shape the total person into being a disciplined cog within the military machine" (Arkin & Dobrofsky 158). And the "end product of basic training" is to become "a strong, silent, self-reliant man who functions as a loyal member of a team" (159).

This often adds to the experience of the military as a "Boys' Club" where men feel empowered to be honest and rude with each other, since they have all gone through a "cult of toughness and masculinity" together "associated with making soldiers out of civilians" (Barrett 81). This often leads to male members of the military exhibiting rather hypermasculine behavior (Higate). But military institutions are structured like organizations as well (Morgan, "Theater of War"; Seidler). The hierarchy they implement makes sure not all soldiers will experience the same amount of power, or individual autonomy, throughout their careers—depending on the area they work in. A supply officer is not granted as much esteem from his colleagues as is a combat officer (Higate and Henry; Barrett). So while armed services construct and produce men who follow ideas of hegemonic masculinity, they also produce men who only ever follow orders and find themselves in subordinate positions. Therefore,

> Military organizations become complex, overdetermined, and sometimes contradictory mixes of the warrior and the bureaucratic ethos, combining to produce a range of masculinities. (Morgan, "Theater of War" 175)

Looking at *militarized masculinity* as "doing" multiple, and not monolithic, masculinities (Parpart and Partridge) makes sense when considering that even active duty is more than just using weapons to defeat, harm, disperse, or even kill enemy forces. After all, *militarized masculinities* may "also have many different forms—some dominant and some subordinate—and may allow alternative, non-hegemonic forms of masculinity within military structures" (550) as well. David Morgan points out that, all military tough talk aside, "tears are found at the heart of the military experience", as in the face of an enemy attacking, war also

> provides the opportunity for the display of other characteristics more conventionally associated with the feminine than with the masculine. These include open and physical display of mutual concern and care, a willingness to show fear and pain. ("Theater of War" 177)

This is further argued by Paul Higate and Marsha Henry in "Gender in Peace Support Operations", who point out that while "sensitivity and empathy" are "attributes that may have been discouraged by traditional military training", it is

> important to recognize that military masculine culture also accommodates responses that may be deemed feminine, such as compassion for injured or fallen comrades. (484)

However, even if some active responses by military personnel incorporate actions constructed as "feminine" within patriarchal systems, it still leaves room for the dehumanizing and demonizing of enemies, and justifying an ultraviolent response to attacks. For exactly such reasons, the negative aspects of *military masculinity* must not be ignored or trivialized. As "has often been noted, rape and war are almost inevitably linked […] and sexual aggression is often an integral part of the training and the bonding of soldiers" (Morgan, "Theater of War" 166). More recent approaches within masculinity studies highlight how *militarized masculinity* is often the focus of "a great deal of discussion, debate and critical reaction" and "frequently associated with widespread violence, killing and maiming as well as both personal and social breakdowns such as PTSD" (Parpart and Partridge 550), because it can turn into very toxic displays of "doing" masculinity (Higate; Masters).

In the comics analyzed in this thesis, some aspect of military masculinity can be found in every superhero character. Most straightforwardly, all these men share a "refusal to complain"; a "stoic endurance of hardship; tenacity and perseverance in the face of difficult physical trials"

(Barrett), as well as an "open and physical display of mutual concern and care, a willingness to show fear and pain" (Morgan, "Theater of War" 177). Steve Rogers's ties to the military and its tenets for "doing" masculinity cause the only instances where a member of the military is present in the story in "the form of the hero". None of these characters display military masculinity's toxic sides. In the case of Steve Rogers, after his "resurfacing" in Marvel Comics in the 1960s, what he does display are snippets of PTSD, which is tied to the loss of his sidekick Bucky Barnes during WWII and causes him vivid nightmares and feelings of guilt. In the case of Rogers, it opens up the character to capacities for suffering and softness which shape all of Marvel Comics' superheroes (Easton; Wright). This only goes to show how close "doing" military manliness and "doing" hegemonic manhood go together. Teddy Roosevelt's tenacity for toughness in all American men, his passion for sports, and his enthusiasm for the US to go to war are later picked up by the Kennedy administration.

Affluent Societies, Cold War Anxieties, and Masculinity Enactment

After the Second World War, the US emerges as an almost unrivaled political and economic power. This power is built around what has been described as *Cold War consensus* and *conformity* (Englehardt; Sussman). The average "Cold War American" sees him- or herself as

> an individual who lived in the most virtuous political system in the world, as evidenced by American prosperity, and whose divine mission was to extend the benefits of that prosperity to all American citizens and promote the virtues of its governmental systems around the world by defending it against the evil force of totalitarianism. (Costello 32)

American prosperity rested upon a global economy just as much as it rested on *big government*. Legislations like *The National Security Act*, the *GI Bill,* or *The Full Employment Act* lay the groundwork for an interventionist and centralized government "responsible for the domestic economy [and] centered on its executive branch" (34-35). This produces an economic growth the United States has never seen before. By the mid-1950s,

> most working Americans were employed in white-collar jobs for the first time, as organized capitalism replaced the individual entrepreneur and yeoman small-holder of the American myth[…;] thus a key-feature of the postwar era was the economic enfranchisement of the majority of Americans. (36)

Developments like that interact with Kimmel's claims about Self-Made Masculinity becoming the hegemonic definition for manhood. As Kimmel points out in *Manhood in America: a cultural history*: during the 1950s and into the 1960s, "the triumph of the organization man, the professional animated by hierarchy, marketplace rationality and order[…;] what I have called Self-Made Masculinity" (266) sets the tone for successful, normative masculinity enactment. And at first, this manhood status seems to be within reach of every white American male; but as big corporations rise, Self-Made Manhood declines, and with it American men's feelings of "being a man". It is this decline which gives way to what has been termed "male discontent" (Ehrenreich; Bordo).

Part of the Postwar economic growth is that Americans are encouraged to enjoy what Barbara Ehrenreich refers to as "fun morality" (46): to take an active part in the consumer society emerging across the US at the time (Galbraith; Gitlin; Sussman, *Culture as History*). An overall economic boom creates the first suburbs, which "provide an affordable suburban existence to middle-class America whose ranks were swelling daily" (Costello 36). This "age of affluence", as more and more people now find themselves enjoying a comfortable lifestyle—owning a house and a car, going on regular vacations, spending money on a variety of consumer goods from hairdryers to stereo sound systems—is also used on the political stage to "demonstrate the superiority of the capitalist system to that of communism" (37). Motivational speakers of the era encourage or try to enable

> the average American to feel moral […] even when he is spending[…;] even when he is taking two vacations a year and buys a second or third car. One of the basic problems of prosperity then, is to demonstrate that the hedonistic approach to his life is a moral, not an immoral one. (Miller and Nowak 119)

This emergence of an affluent society as a desired side effect of the Postwar economic boom further interacts with the idea of the Self-Made Man as top-dog masculinity enactment (Kimmel). In Postwar America, "organized capitalism" becomes ubiquitous. Now, most individuals in employment are

> in the fact part of the great capitalist organizations. Big business, big labor and big government were the reality. The new suburban homeowner was not the yeoman farmer of free-soil myth, but an on other-directed, team-playing organization man. (Costello 37)

Yet these new layers getting added to "doing" masculinity are not without its critics. In particular, the fact that American men are now more *other-directed* than *inner-directed*[18], and overall less autonomous in "doing" masculinity than earlier in the century, is one of a number of ideas which cause anxiety about masculinity during the 1950s and 1960s: they are the flipside of America as a Cold War powerhouse. So while the 1950s provide an affluent society primarily to white middle class Americans, they are also the breeding ground for male discontent and, as the 1950s give way to the 1960s, male rebellion (Ehrenreich; Kimmel; Bordo).

Cold War masculinity centers around terms like conformity, maturity, and adjustment; all connected to what the 1950s term the "proper adult masculinity" (Ehrenreich). However, these terms seem to have "described everything and explained nothing" (30) when it comes to "doing" masculinity in this decade. Basically, they sugarcoat the extreme homophobia, misogyny, fear of communism, and overall failed male heterosexuality and emasculation revolving around "doing" masculinity at the time, as pointed out by various books on the subject. Masculinity enactment at the time is often structured around a hard/soft dichotomy (Cuordileone): American males as hard, capitalist he-men, and Russian males as soft, deviant, and effete communists.

To reiterate, Kimmel talks about masculinity enactment as "fraught with danger, the risk of failure [and] relentless competition", and in the fifties and sixties, these dangers include being seen as in any way weak or "maladjusted" to one's "masculine role"; this includes being seen as homosexual or as a communist (Ehrenreich; Corber; Cuordileone). Men are supposed to be breadwinners, heads of households, and good fathers. Men who deviate from this norm are labeled anything from delinquent to homosexual or communist[19]. The "proper" male role, as the sociologist Morris Zelditch proclaims, is that "the American male",

> by definition, *must* provide for his family. He is *responsible* for his support of his wife and children. His primary area of performance is the occupational role[…;] his *primary* function in the family is to supply an "income" to be the "breadwinner". (339)

[18] *inner-directed* and *other-directed* are terms championed by sociologist David Riesman in his 1950 book *The Lonely Crowd: a study of the changing American character*. More details on Riesman's thoughts about American males follow in section "Voicing Male Discontent" and are also further discussed in the Captain America and Iron Man chapter.

[19] Labels like *homosexual* or *communist* are thrown around in very haphazard ways back then. Basically, everyone who is not seen as tough and strong-minded is so labeled.

Not living up to these norms constitutes some of the "dangers" manhood enactment faces during the fifties. But as the sixties come around, these exact qualities are seen as "not enough" to do justice to "being a man". American men are then asked to be more virile, more aggressive, and above all tough on communist and homosexual deviants, all in addition to being breadwinners and providers (Corber; Cuordileone).

For the most part, the idealized masculine roles or scripts of the fifties circulate via psychologist self-help books or psychiatric literature. Masculine enactment now centers around what men do "indoors": at home and behind their office desks. On the one hand, the "1950s elevated family life to a level of sacredness never before witnessed" (Kimmel, *Manhood* 245) in American history, and also elevated fatherhood "to an occupation […;] the most important occupation in the world" (May 134). On the other hand, this is also the age of the "common man", as pointed out by Mercè Cuenca in "Invisibilizing the Male Body: Exploring the Incorporeality of Masculinity in 1950s American Culture". She clarifies how this "white, middle-class, heterosexual […] 'common man'" (49), due to "the multiplicity of office jobs, owing to the boom of corporations", now proves his masculinity "indoors, not outdoors" (51). To become one of the "common men" means to be able to adjust

> [t]o the everyday life of a "nine to five" job[…;] if a man was successful at doing this and, as a consequence, able to become the sole provider for his wife and children, he could consider himself a "self-made man", a "common man", one of the rough ones. (51)

And in truth, adjusting and conforming is what is expected of the "common man", if not of all men, between the 1950s and the 1960s. Men are supposed to be a successful employee, a responsible husband, and a good father (Ehrenreich; Cuordileone). Interestingly, it is the last two requirements that nearly all of Marvel's superheroes fail. Especially in the 1960s, Marvel's "super-men" are neither married nor parents[20]. According to Mercè Cuenca, the 1950s blend the idea of the Self-Made Man and the "common man". As previously discussed, Michael Kimmel defines the Self-Made Man as the "manhood of the rising middle class" (*Manhood* 23), which offers success and economic autonomy, but not security, to men. However, now that "being self-made was […] equated with the ability to make money" (Cuenca 51), a new

[20] Concession may be made for those superheroes who are "surrogate" parents, like the Fantastic Four's Reed Richards, who has a fatherly relationship to Johnny Storm, as well as Captain America's fatherly relationship to his young sidekick Bucky during their 1940s adventures.

way of "imagining" men takes shape: "the tailoring of the office man" (51) and the ideal of the white-collar worker. Men are encouraged to

> curtail their lives according to a certain economic market, which is circumscribed orthodox masculinity to the pursual of a white collar job. This type of corporate office work was coveted by would-be mainstream because it both symbolized middle-class status and the possibility of upward social mobility. (51)

Men who fail or reject this new normal model for masculinity are routinely pathologized in self-help books and by popular psychologist and sociologists such as Talcott Parsons, especially in the early 1950s. To men like Parsons, "adult masculinity was indistinguishable from the breadwinner role, and it followed that the man who failed to achieve this role was either not fully adult or not fully masculine" (Ehrenreich 20). As Parsons puts it,

> only in very exceptional cases can an adult man be genuinely self-respecting and enjoy a respected status in the eyes of others if he does not "earn a living" in an approved occupational role. (273)

Being such an adult and adequately masculine male in the fifties coincides with the fact that most men are no longer self-employed, but situated across a corporate managerial ladder they are supposed to climb up (Ehrenreich; Corber; Cuordileone). And in this corporate world, men are expected to act a certain way and look a certain way. As Robert Corber points out in *Homosexuality in Cold War America: Resistance and Crisis of Masculinity,* in the 1950s

> post-war success literature and advice manuals urged men to develop qualities that would attract, please, and impress superiors in the corporate hierarchy. Moreover, they were encouraged to pay careful attention to how they dressed. (35)

And as Barbara Ehrenreich points out, pop-scientific and psychiatric literatures alike construct the "breadwinner role" as "the only 'normal state' for the adult male. Outside lay only a range of diagnoses, all unflattering" (15). American psychiatrists and psychoanalysts of the 1950s—while also naturalizing Western gender binaries—are especially keen on crafting ideals of the responsible adult male versus what they refer to as "immature men" and "male deviants". Among their buzzwords is "maturity" as a quality aspirational to men. *Maturity* requires "predictable, sober ingredients of wisdom, responsibility, empathy, (mature) heterosexuality" (17). The concept is advocated as "not dull, but heroic", so that all responsible men should aspire to act and be *mature*.

These tasks are of course not new in themselves, but harken back to late nineteenth century American-Victorian gender ideologies (Russett; Rotundo; Bederman). In the pop-scientific self-help and psychology literatures of the 1950s and 1960s, "adult masculinity was indistinguishable from the breadwinner role" (Ehrenreich 20). And such well-adjusted and conforming male breadwinners fit perfectly into 1950 Postwar America. The fifties offer "a relentless spirit of pro-domesticity", where men and women are imagined and instructed to exist as happy consumers, while American society "focused on reestablishing American family life, getting man and women together after the war in happy, homey consumer units" (Bordo 112). Such ideas are propagated both in outlets of popular cultures like Hollywood films, and in pop-psychological self-help magazines and of course popular magazines in general:

> Women's magazines helped this effort by arguing that a woman's only true fulfillment was as a wife and a mother; popular sociology urged men to take on the role of breadwinner as a necessary component of masculine maturity and "normal" sexuality. (113)

A refusal to enact this *mature* masculine role leads to pathologizing such men as homosexuals: they are regarded as emotionally fixated on their parents—especially their mothers—and as displaying an "unwillingness to assume responsibility" (Kuhn 153). Such men are understood to lack the ability to turn into good husbands and providers: here "the image of the irresponsible male blurred with the shadowy figure of the homosexual" (Ehrenreich 24).

And this "shadowy figure" of the gay man in 1950s America is not only connected to being soft, effeminate, lazy—and therefore not a "real man" (Ehrenreich; Kimmel; Corber; Cuordileone)—but to being a communist. Political writers and activists, such as Arthur Schlesinger, jr., draw explicit connections between homosexuality and communism in speeches, magazine articles, and books in the late 1940s already, and pretty much refine this argument as the Cold War trudges along (Cuordileone). One of Schlesinger's "bestsellers" *The Vital Centre,* in which he practically connects homosexual behavior and communism on every other page, is despite being published in 1949 still influential to American governments such as the Kennedy administration in the early 1960s (Corber; Cuordileone). When Schlesinger, Parsons, or others talk about homosexual men, they are engaging in what Eric Anderson terms *homohysteria*, which is worse than enacting homophobia. As Anderson explains,

> the term homophobia does not accurately capture the complications of […] how people feel about homosexuals[…]. Homohysteria is characterized by witch-hunts to expose those who are. (85-86)

Or those who *could be* homosexuals. *Homohysteria* is amped-up homophobia and goes together with beliefs that regard being masculine as "being the opposite of the softness attributed to homosexual men" (28). Schlesinger and others like him apply exactly such an approach: to be gay is to be soft, effeminate, weak-minded, and above all "unwilling" to do what "real men" do: get a job, have a career, and provide for wife and children (Ehrenreich; Corber; Cordileone). Such texts contribute to a 1950s atmosphere which brings about the McCarthy hearings, the public hearings of the HUAC, the Red Scare, and the Blacklisting of Hollywood liberals (Corber; Cuordileone).

For the same reasons, the fifties are just as much a watershed moment for the American comic book industry as they are for the Hollywood industry. Critics of the comic book industry like Frederic Wertham, testify in public hearings before US Congress that comic books are dangerous to young minds (Wright; Jones). In 1954, psychiatrist Frederic Wertham publishes *Seduction of the Innocent,* which has been mentioned earlier. Fueled, as so many other publications are at the time, by the fear of the *juvenile delinquent*, Wertham names American comic books—and superhero comics in particular—as the pathway to morally and sexually deviant lifestyles (Wright; Brooker; Jones). Wertham detects homosexuality in the superhero modus operandi. As previously mentioned, Wertham claims that superheroes Batman and Robin display "a wish dream of two homosexuals living together", and that homoeroticism "pervades the adventures of the mature 'Batman' and his young friend 'Robin'" (190). Overall, Wertham regards superhero comics as providing "homoerotic sexual curiosity and stimulation". *Seduction of the Innocent* seamlessly fits in with the atmosphere of homophobia and fear of communism permeating politics and popular culture in the 1950s and into the 1960s. Wertham's books influences the ominous *Comics Code*, a form of self-censorship enacted by the American comic book industry, established in 1954. It "adopted self-regulating code of standards modeled after Hollywood's Motion Picture Production Code" (Wright 103). It regulates depictions of violence, nudity, sexuality and fits into the larger Cold War political discourse which "tended to position Americans […] who rejected the postwar American dream

of owning a home in the suburbs as homosexuals and lesbians who threatened the nation's security" (Corber 2).

Voicing Male Discontent

While the 1950s elevate concepts like heterosexuality, marriage, family, and parentage to a "must-have" for every male wanting to enact "adult masculinity", it does not take long for critics from various disciplines to critique what all this "togetherness" does to men. At first, the idea of adding "consumerist dynamics of grooming"—caring for your looks—to the concept of enacting hegemonic manhood is lauded in popular discourse (Ehrenreich; Kimmel; Cuordileone), as white-collar "job arenas"—men wanting to look and act in a certain way to get ahead in the office—become a part of the "consumerist ethos" of "doing" masculinity (Cuenca 52). But soon, sociologists, psychiatrists, and columnists alike argue that all these "well-adjusted" husbands and fathers "began to look a little too domesticated, a little too feminine and conformist" (Cuordileone 154). It is now feared that all of that "consumerist ethos" of "doing" masculinity (Cuenca 52) does not lead "to adult masculinity, but to emasculation" (Ehrenreich 32).

As previously mentioned, sociologist David Riesman sees these problems as rooted in how American males are now encouraged to act in ways that are *other-* and no longer *inner-directed*. In *The Lonely Crowd: a study of the changing American character*, Riesman suggest that men are now called upon to prioritize the wishes of bosses and potential customers, since most men now work in managerial positions and are employees rather than self-employed. The book becomes a bestseller when first published, and shapes how American masculinity is debated during the 1950s and into the 1960s. According to Riesman, American men—and here the author exclusively addresses white heterosexual males, as do most texts published at the time—used to be mostly *inner-directed,* but are now *other-directed*. He connects this change in "directedness" to the changes in the US economy; a change of focus from producing to selling and consuming things or goods. As Riesman points out:

> The inner-directed man tends to think of work in terms of non-human objects, including an objectified social organization, while the other-directed man tends to think of work in terms of people—people seen as something more than the sum of workmanlike skills and qualities. (111)

An *inner-directed* man is not only "hard and self-reliant", Riesman continues, but "did not look at himself through the customer's eyes", and instead saw himself as a maker, a producer of things (112). And while such inner-directed men created American industries, they are no longer the most sought-after type of man Postwar America seeks and idealizes. In the 1950s, Riesman explains, "it is the softness of men rather than the hardness of the material that calls on talent and opens new channels for social mobility" (26). In other words, men need to be *other-directed*: work in teams, try to please customers as well as bosses. Riesman defines the other-directed man as taking his cues from "mass media—shifting his tastes and ambitions as the 'others' shifted theirs. No deeper compulsion guided him than the need to pay close attention to the signals from others" (26). In contrast, as Ehrenreich summarizes Riesman's concept, *the inner-directed* man

> tamed frontiers, built up cartels or madly pursued white whales—whatever the inner script dictated. At best he was a man of great achievement and deep passion; at worst, he was a nut—obsessive, guilt-ridden, haunted by inner voices. (33)

In short, the "other-directed person was the familiar conformist" of the 1950s/1960s (33).

Over time, more and more authors start to discuss what they regard as "the dangers of male socialization and 'conformity' to middle-class life" (Bordo 119). They project that a surplus of what they refer to as "a model of masculinity that stressed domesticity" (Corber 5) will turn American males into "gray flannel dissidents" (Ehrenreich 29): such men "lived by the rules" and overall presented the image of a male who

> found a wife[…,] made the appropriate marriage adjustments, established himself in a white-collar job[…,] bought a house, and nestled into the "congenial social group"[…]. He was adjusted; he was mature; he was, by any reasonable standard, a success as an adult male breadwinner. But […] he knew that something was wrong. (29)

Here, Cold War "male must-haves" such as being a breadwinner or husband and father, meet another set of Cold War anxieties: the fear that all his "pro-domesticity" will turn American males soft. By the mid-1950s,

> dozens of academic writers[…,] sociologists in particular volunteered to serve as the critical conscience of the decade, periodically assessing the blandness of middle-class life and offering themselves as scientific experts on the penumbra of conformity that engulfed (other) white-collar males. (Ehrenreich 32)

David Riesman's dismay over American males in the workplace is mirrored and somewhat amplified by William F. Whyte in *The Organization Man*. Like *The Lonely Crowd*, the book is a bestseller when first published, but it is "angrier and more openly nostalgic for competitive capitalism and rugged individualism" (Ehrenreich 35). To Whyte, the organization or corporation is ubiquitous in men's lives, as in the workplace arena, "the corporation has affected almost every field of work" (Whyte 3). As Ehrenreich points out, to Whyte there is no question that "white-collar work crushed initiative, rewarded conformity rather than creativity, and forced the individual to submit to the collective will of the committee, the 'team'" (Ehrenreich 35). For Whyte, American men in the job arena can no longer function as individuals, but "subsume their individuality for the good of the whole" (Smith 130). Such an *organization man* does not simply *work for* a corporation but "*belongs* to it, and recognizes its superior claims on his loyalty and his conduct" (130). As Corber clarifies, to Whyte

> the successful negotiation of the corporate hierarchy depended less on personal ambition and individual initiative than on respect for authority, loyalty to one's superiors and the ability to get along with others—all qualities traditionally associated with femininity. (Corber 6)

Mindsets like these must clash with a nation whose self-image is one of individuality and self-determination, an imagined quality deeply worked into all American myths. It further clashes with what Kimmel defines as *masculinity as homosocial enactment,* where Self-Made Men in the marketplace pit themselves against other men in homosocial competition (Kimmel; Costello; Paul). But Riesman and Whyte build their argument around these imagined qualities as they disappear more and more form the workplace realties of men at that time.

Riesman offers the following "solution" for disgruntled males: next to inner- and other-directedness, he offers "autonomous" as another behavioral choice. As Riesman puts it, the *autonomous* man has the "inner freedom" to conform—or not—on the outside. As a result, he

> may or may not conform outwardly, but whatever his choice, he pays less of a price, and he has a choice: he can meet both the culture's definitions of adequacy and those which (to a still culturally determined degree) slightly transcend the norm of the adjusted. (243)

Whyte's "solution" suggests that every American male holding a white-collar job "should fight the organization. But not self-destructively" (12). Instead, white-collar workers need to find

ways to enact "individualism *within* organization life" (11). Whyte further explains: "We need to know how to co-operate with the Organization but, more than ever, so do we need to know how to resist it" (12). If co-operation and resistance are simultaneously possible, individualism can be achieved. To Whyte, this is indispensable for the lives of American males:

> If individualism involves following one's destiny as one's own conscience directs, it must for most of us be a realizable destiny, and a sensible awareness of the rules of the game can be a condition of individualism as well as a restraint upon it. (11)

While Whyte's solution sounds more courageous as well as more deeply steeped in American myths of individuality and the Self-Made Man (Kimmel; Paul), just like Riesman, he argues not for complete rejection of 1950s masculinity scripts, but for compromising with them (Ehrenreich; Corber). Both authors imagine the "gray flannel dissident" or rebel as a man who

> stayed where he was because he could not think of anywhere to go. If he blamed the corporation for his emasculation, he was not about to leave his job[…]. The gray flannel rebellion was never more than a lament, a critique far too diffuse to lead to action, stooping at its lowest, to a nasty reprise against women. (Ehrenreich 39-40)

This "nasty reprise against women" came in many forms: from novels to magazine articles, sociological studies, and newspaper cartoons (Ehrenreich; Cuordileone). A recurring theme is "the tightening grip of 'matriarchy' […;] a favorite theme for male writers, who aspired to be irreverent without being politically offensive" (Ehrenreich 36). One outlet of American popular culture launched in 1953 makes it its mission to demonstrate a way for men to act "rebellious" without fear of being seen as hopelessly inadequate in terms of masculinity enactment: *Playboy* magazine. It provides "an entirely new style of male rebel who hinted, seductively, that there was an alternative. The new rebel was the playboy" (Ehrenreich 41).

Playboys and Cold Warriors

Premiering in 1953 and being a financial success for its publishers a short three years later, "*Playboy* offered an escape from domesticity that did not require giving up bourgeois comfort" (Bordo 121). It does so by suggesting that men not become husbands, fathers and providers, but that they stay single and spend all their earnings on themselves. And above all, it educates its readers on what to spend their money on. The magazine imagines men first and foremost as consumers, and tells them to define themselves through the products they consume

(Cohan; Conekin; Beggan and Allison). It provides an opportunity for middle class males to register

> their opposition to the reorganization of masculinity by refusing to settle down in the suburbs and raise a family[…;] they settled in urban areas in order to participate in the "swinging" lifestyle promoted by magazines such as *Playboy*, which […] positioned their readers as consumers but did not require them to restrict their sexuality to the domestic sphere, nor did it link consumption to fatherhood and homeownership. (Corber 8-9)

Playboy cannot be called subversive in Postwar 1950s America, which after all advocates that men—as well as women—be consumers: buy houses, cars, and lawnmowers. But it pushes back against the idea that the only "mature" and "acceptable" way of life for men is to become husbands and providers (Ehrenreich; Bordo; Conekin; Beggan and Allison). The magazine introduces segments such as *the playboy's bachelor pad* in 1956. This "provides a perfect example of the reinforcement of heterosexuality and conventional masculinity and the simultaneous creation of a more rebellious and allegedly liberated version of both" (Conekin 449) through what is, essentially, giving men interior decoration, dating, and lifestyle tips. It very much illustrates the promise that *Playboy* publisher Hugh Hefner makes three years earlier, when he states his intention "to reclaim the indoors for men" (Ehrenreich 44), as "we plan on spending most of our time inside. WE [sic] like our apartment" (Hefner qtd. in Ehrenreich 44). Described as "[a] High Handsome Haven for the Bachelor in Town" by the magazine, the *bachelor pad*

> operated as a site of consumerism; it marked the single man's marginal position in relation to domestic ideology of the period, while at the same time allowing for his recuperation as a consumer whose masculinity could be redeemed—even glamorized—by the things he bought to accessorize his virility. (Cohan 28)

Playboy magazine explicitly does not advise men to conform and be *mature*; it tells them to "play" and "have fun" (Conekin; Beggan and Allison). In short, Hefner wants all men to become *playboys*. In the April 1956 issue, Hefner defines the term:

> What is a playboy? Is he simply a wastrel, a ne'er-do-well, a fashionable bum? Far from it. He can be a sharp minded young business executive, a worker in the arts, a university professor, an architect or an engineer. He can be many things provided he possesses a certain kind of view[…:] he must be an alert man, a man of taste, a man sensitive to pleasure, a man who […] can live life to the tilt. (Hefner, *Playboy 10* 43)

And for this playboy to enjoy "life to the tilt", he needs to know how to act, to dress, to interact. *Playboy* works as an "aspirational" guide for men-as-consumers. It

> shepherded a generation of young men to the good life. It helped explain how to buy a sports car, what kind of hi-fi set to buy, how to order in a restaurant[…]. *Playboy* served a valuable function: It provided an early and elementary tutorial on the new American life-style. (Halberstam 575)

The magazine introduces men to both "a life of pleasurable consumption" as well as one of "fun morality" (Ehrenreich 46). As explained earlier, none of these ideas are anathema to 1950s American ideals, but in *Playboy,* they are divorced from the idea of domesticating masculinity to home and hearth (Corber). The magazine "advocated fun through consumption", and identifies a "new masculine bachelor" who revels in the "pleasure of shopping for clothes and accessories for himself" (Conekin 457). All such accessories grant entry to the "playboy life style", meaning:

> His dress is conservative and casual[…]. He likes jazz, foreign films, Ivy League clothes, gin and tonic and pretty girls[…;] his approach to life is fresh, sophisticated. (Kessie, *Playboy 4* 35)

The magazine imagines its readers not only as a "fraternity of male rebels" (Ehrenreich 43), but also as socially mobile middle class men (Ehrenreich; Conekin). And even if "the average reader was more likely to be a white-collar 'organization man' or a blue-collar employee than a free entrepreneur" (Ehrenreich 46), Hefner has no trouble "creating the illusion and fantasy of a more upscale clientele for his magazine" (Conekin 449). What makes *Playboy* a "fun revolution", though, is the fact that it tells men to "stray" from the path of being husbands, breadwinners, and fathers. And

> [i]n 1953, the notion that the good life consisted of an apartment with mood music […] was almost subversive. Looking back, Hefner later characterized himself as a pioneer rebel against the gray miasma of conformity that gripped other men. (Ehrenreich 43)

The "revolt" against getting married and being a breadwinner notwithstanding,

> nothing could have been more in conformity with the drift of American culture than to advocate a life of pleasurable consumption[…]. After the privations of the Depression and the war, Americans were supposed to enjoy themselves[…]. Hefner […] took the new fun morality seriously. As a guide to life, the new imperative to enjoy was in contradiction with the prescribed discipline of "conformity" and *Playboy's* daring lay in facing the contradiction head-on. (45)

In 1963—the year Iron Man is created—the March issue of *Playboy* features an article by Hefner in which he explains the "Playboy Philosophy" (Hefner, *Playboy 12* 34). *Playboy*, for him, exists "as a motivation for men to expand greater effort in their work, develop capabilities further and climb higher on the ladder of success" (Hefner qtd. in Ehrenreich 46). Hefner wants men "to throw themselves into their work […] and recognize wealth as an achievement and a means to personal pleasure" (46). In this sense, there is hardly any distance between what *Playboy* "wants" men to be and what Michael Kimmel denotes as *Marketplace Masculinity*. To reiterate, this concept states that a man "derives his identity entirely from his success in the capitalist marketplace, as he accumulated wealth, power, status. He was the urban entrepreneur, the businessman". In fact, the "Playboy Philosophy" both addresses men as "doing" *Marketplace Masculinity,* and as *organization men* doing what it takes to climb up the managerial ladder of success (Whyte).

And while Hefner encourages his readers to think of themselves as a "fraternity of male rebels" and of the female nude centerfold in every issue as a symbol of "disobedience" against prescribed marital domesticity (Ehrenreich 43), it needs to be clear that he means "disobedience for men, of course" (Bordo 120). In a 1967 interview, Hugh Hefner refers to the women who are of interest for *playboys* as "young, healthy, simple girls" belonging to "good, respectable families from every point of view. Financial, social. No, madam, we never choose poor girls" (Hefner qtd. in Conekin 463). *Playboy* indeed stays a masculine, but utterly "bourgeois comfort" (Bordo 121), zone. The magazine defines a *playboy* as "a domesticated bachelor" offering himself up as a "new model for manliness" (Kimmel, *Manhood* 255), who loves women but hates wives (Ehrenreich). Without a doubt,

> [t]his was strong stuff for the mid-fifties […] here was *Playboy* exhorting its readers to resist marriage and enjoy the pleasures the female has to offer without becoming emotionally involved or, of course, financially involved. (Ehrenreich 47)

Confronting 1950s conformity,

> the masculine ethos that Hugh Hefner encouraged […] was a "I'm mad as hell and I'm just not gonna take it anymore" response to the happy homemaker/good provider mystique that the early fifties is famous for. (Bordo 121)

From the start, *Playboy* magazine offers and keeps cultivating "images of cozy concupiscence and extra-marital consumerism" (Ehrenreich 48), as it reevaluates "the status of the single

man" (50). It "rebrands" men who choose bachelorhood over "becoming a husband" as *rebels*. The magazine offers

> something approaching a coherent program for the male rebellion: a critique of marriage, a strategy for liberation (reclaiming the indoors as a realm of masculine pleasure) and a utopian vision (defined by its unique commodity ensemble). It may not have been a revolutionary program, but it was most certainly a disruptive one. (50)

The "go-getter" attitude *Playboy* prescribes for its readers is not just befitting of what Kimmel terms *Marketplace Masculinity* or *Self-Made Man,* but it is also a retaliation against men being nothing more than *organization men* or *other-directed* males (Riesman; Whyte).

As the fifties give way to the sixties, another form of both male and female rebellion appears in the form of "the counterculture, populated largely by the sons and daughters of the white middle class" who "challenged the illusions of suburban comfort and security. In a sense, the hippies represented another revolt" (Kimmel, *Manhood* 263) against what had been, in the early fifties, defined as the one and only "properly" masculine and feminine scripts (Ehrenreich; Bordo; Kimmel).

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, masculinity is scrutinized more and more. On an international level, the USSR demonstrates, they are a nation rivaling the US in terms of power, technology, and influence—the launch of Sputnik is a particular thorn in the side of the US-American writers and scientists fretting over what ails the American male (Kimmel, 1996). Arthur Schlesinger, jr., who as a political writer will influence the political aspirations and career of none other than John F. Kennedy, investigates the American male in an *Esquire* article of 1958, titled "The Crisis of American Masculinity". Schlesinger starts with the question:

> What has happened to the American male? For a long time, he seemed utterly confident in his manhood, sure of his masculine role in society[…]. Today men are more and more conscious of maleness not as a fact but as a problem. (qtd. in Cuordileone, "Age of Anxiety" 522)

The "male problem" in that moment in time is really a combination of feeling emasculated at work and in the home, something which is now framed in new ways. Sociologists following in the footsteps of authors like Riesman and Whyte further analyze the position of the male white-collar worker. But where Riesman and Whyte locate forced teamwork as a source of

distress, other authors, like Robert Blauner in his book *Alienation and Freedom,* identify feelings of emptiness and loneliness as a problem for every male breadwinner, as fear of failure is a constant companion. Books like Blauner's dominate debates now being had in bars, coffee shops, and office break rooms. Now, the "pressure to be a successful breadwinner" is discussed as a "source of strain and conflict, not pride and motivation" (Kimmel, *Manhood* 265). White-collar workers turned *organization men* decry "feeling like cogs in the corporate machine", and complain that "conspicuous consumption in sprawling suburban shopping malls [was] hardly a compensation" (264). More and more, 1960s "American men felt increasingly alienated, stuck in a rut, unable to escape the dull monotony of a cookie-cutter cooperate identity, a suit ready-made to be filled" (264). The sole purpose of being good employees left a lot of men wanting.

In a similar tone, authors like Norman Mailer suggest males need to "relearn" masculinity, as "masculinity is not something one is born with, but something one gains. And one gains it by winning small battles with honor. I'm saying that because there is pretty little honor left in American life" (Mailer 44). To authors like Mailer or Schlesinger, jr., a satisfactory solution to this crisis of masculinity lies in a new direction within American Cold War politics.

In her analysis of American Cold War politics and manhood enactment, Kyle Cuordileone identifies the presidency of John F. Kennedy as one example of "re-masculinizing" Postwar American masculinity. Terming it a "cult of toughness" (*Cold War* 205), Cuordileone regards the governing style of the Kennedy administration as marked by "bold aggressiveness" and "ballsiness", clarifying that "[o]f course, the 'official' term for ballsiness was 'courage'" (201). Kennedy revitalizes ideas of "masculine" courage when he designates space as the "New Frontier" in American politics; a variation on the cultural myth of the West as the "final frontier" which American men had "closed" in the second half of the nineteenth century (Paul).

Kennedy also reuses themes that had entered American politics during the presidency of Theodor Roosevelt in the 1890s. Roosevelt's "The Strenuous Life" speech from 1899 enters American popular and political discourse. To reiterate, Roosevelt stresses the advantages of hard work, being tough, and facing any struggle head-on (Bederman; Rotundo). Roosevelt

praises "masculine" qualities and belittles any man who wants to stray from them. He also speaks of his enthusiasm for competitive sports and physical fitness in the speech. Like Roosevelt, Kennedy emphasizes "physical fitness, vigor, heroism, and virility throughout his political career" (Cuordileone, *Cold War* 202). The Kennedy administration addressed physical fitness in explicit Cold War terms, as it linked "softness, previously a term that suggested one's internal sympathy for Communism[…,] to the body. Kennedy placed importance on hardening the soft American body", and "physical fitness was one dimension of Kennedy's preoccupation with will, courage, and determination" (203)[21], which is the background for Cuordileone's describing it as a *cult of toughness*. But to people like Schlesinger, President Kennedy also displays "an application of Riesman's concepts of *inner-directedness* to the challenge of American statesmanship", as Kennedy shows himself as willing "to follow an independent course of conscience at the risk of going against the grain of public opinion" (Cuordileone, *Cold War* 204). Historians and journalists alike regard President Kennedy as displaying attitudes "desirable in a man[…:] a passion to accrue power [and] the appropriate proportion of self-love and self-interest", which is seen as "essential psychological prerequisites for heroic leadership" (208). Unlike his predecessor, President Dwight D. Eisenhower, "Kennedy adopted a more competitive confrontational tone, treating the cold war as a supreme global contest, a contest not of two rival superpowers, but of masculine will and strength" (211). Kennedy admires secret government agencies like the CIA and frequently makes use of them. Beyond that, the Kennedy administration is described as bringing an "antibureaucratic, action-oriented political style" to the White House (215). Kennedy quickly becomes known for detesting official meetings, loving to "speed-read" through official reports, and opting for "impromptu hallway conferences" where his advisors deliver information to him at "machine-gun" speed (216).

The Kennedy presidency is all about taking dangers and risks, and as Kyle Cuordileone explains:

> In its most troubling manifestations, "coolness" in the Kennedy administration meant the acceptance of the use of force, violence, and subterfuge as routine. (*Cold War*, 219)

It is also a reminder that "masculine" qualities connected to *military manhood* and *hegemonic masculinity* often tend to overlap (Barrett; Higate and Henry). Without a doubt, Kennedy

[21] The president as well as members of his administration emphasize the importance of fitness and health in magazine articles, interviews, and press conferences.

demonstrates to an American public a re-masculinized style of doing politics, and by extension of "being a man". But, as Michael Kimmel points out, "Kennedy was, perhaps, the last president cast in that heroic mold" in American politics (*Manhood* 267). This helps to explain "the shock wave that jolted the American psyche when Kennedy was assassinated in 1963" as it proved that if "Kennedy could be shot down, then the manhood he embodied was itself vulnerable" (268).

John F. Kennedy's *cult of toughness* aside, the 1950s and 1960s may very well be referred to as a time when, as Susan Bordo puts it, several white males are getting up and declaring: "I'm mad as hell and I'm just not gonna take it anymore". As demonstrated here, both decades put pressure on men. They need to prove that they are "man enough" and be successful providers, husbands, and fathers (Ehrenreich; Corber) in a time when working conditions for men, even more so than prior to World War II, are being reshaped (Trachtenberg; Sobel; Breu). At first, men are called upon to "conform" and "adjust", while a sword of Damocles—the shadowy figure of the homosexual or the communist—is hanging over their heads in case they don't achieve that (Corber; Cuordileone). New takes on "how men should be" upset old takes such as Kimmel's Self-Made Man ideal. Men are now more encouraged to be good employees than good entrepreneurs, but in any case, they must be "good consumers" as well (Kimmel; Cuenca). Authors like Riesman or Whyte put the finger on this "masculine grievance": "doing" masculinity has less and less to do with making one's own decision and being independent, and more and more with "fitting in". Magazines like *Playboy* demonstrate an alternative to marriage and parenthood, but not to the workplace, where men still have to prove they "have what it takes"; and certainly not to being enthusiastic consumers (Ehrenreich; Conekin; Ogersby).

But this period in time is nothing if not contradictory: being perceived as good consumers in an affluent society quickly backfires on men, as old fears about men being too soft are rekindled (Corber; Costello)—fears that have been a part of American masculinity enactment since the late nineteenth century (Rotundo; Bederman; Breu). 1960s Cold War doctrines counteract these "threats of affluency" (Ehrenreich; Cuordileone): they demand men be tough on communism and communist nations, otherwise no one dare call them a "proper" American male. The Kennedy administration effectively masculinizes America's Cold War effort,

something which continues after Kennedy's assassination and lasts until the end of the Cold War (Cuordileone; Costello).

Reckless Cold War politics aside, there are clear and devastating shortcomings to Kennedy's presidency for one community in the US: Afro-Americans. Historians and presidential biographers concur that "Kennedy was simply not very interested in domestic issues […] and failed to grasp the moral importance of civil rights, at least until the very end of his life, when the mass movement from below propelled him to act on civil rights" (Cuordileone, *Cold War* 213). The following section contextualizes how the Afro-American males bring about changes for their own community during the 1960s.

An Actual Male Rebellion

The previous pages speak of men striving to be breadwinners, husbands, and fathers. Of men straining to succeed in white-collar jobs so that they can afford the house, the car, and the two annual vacations. But these are expectations and demands strongly attached to white and male privilege, to whiteness colonizing the normal (Dyer), and as such to white masculinity enactment. It's not that the same expectations and demands are not put in front of Black males just as much; but the legacy of slavery and then racial segregation severely limits their chances of achieving them (Staples; hooks; Alexander). For the most part, the Postwar affluent society refuses to extend its reach to Black men. As author and activist Ralph Ellison sums it up in his autographical fiction *Invisible Man,* the Black male, like himself, is an "invisible man. No, I am not a spook[…;] I am a man of substance[…;] I am invisible, understand, because people refuse to see me" (25). Ellison's quote cuts to the heart of the matter: in a society built around patriarchal privileges, Black men are denied being seen as men, as potential patriarchs, as figures of respect. What they do sometimes achieve in the white and male imagination is the status of a "rebel" or "outsider" (Ehrenreich; Bordo). In 1957, Norman Mailer publishes an essay titled "The White Negro", where he imagines Black males as rebels and outsiders "living on the margins of society" (341). In particular, Mailer "admires the Negro's 'art of the primitive' and calls jazz 'the music of orgasm'" (Bordo 76). What Mailer does is prove Fanon right: he treats the Black man as "fixated at the genital level" (Fanon 165) as he fantasizes about Black males enjoying "the pleasures of the body" (Mailer, "White Negro" 356). He also

upholds stereotypes about Black males as "primitive" men in his text. Mailer, and later Beat authors like Jack Kerouac, imagine Black and other men and women of color as rebels and outsiders, mostly because they do not exist in the same proximity to affluent American society as they do themselves. When they imagine them as rebellious and free, they do so because they imagine them "free" from the "burden" of being breadwinners, husbands and fathers, and therefore just as free from "doing" what amounts to *mature* masculinity (Ehrenreich; hooks). What men like Mailer or Kerouac refuse to acknowledge is that Black males are so "free and rebellious" only due to of what author, scholar, and activists William E.B. Du Bois identifies as the "problem of the color line" (5). This line is an economic, legal, as well as socio-cultural devaluation of all things "black", which has been put in place during slavery and stayed in place even after it was officially abolished. The line makes sure that Black men are kept "in their place". After all, although the

> Thirteenth Amendment ended slavery […] it did not set things right. Over the course of slavery, whites had constructed beliefs, laws, policies, practices and systems that designated blacks as inferior to whites and that separated blacks and whites socially. (Williams, *Slavery* 115)

These sociocultural as well as legal constructs make sure that Black masculinity remains "a contradictory experience", considering that Afro-American males are still denied next to all patriarchal privileges, and the "complete dialectics of power and subordination" are continued.

In the 1950s, most Black communities in the US still have worse access to school and university education, adequate housing, job opportunities, as well as healthcare (Alexander; Blakemore). America's Postwar economic boom and its suburban family fantasies of togetherness do not extend themselves to "most notably African Americans" who are "still struggling for access to this abundance" (Costello 38), while white sociologists and psychiatrists already decry its emasculating effects on Euro-Americans. Until the mid-1960s, segregation laws—also referred to as *Jim Crow* legislation (Woodward; Alexander; Purnell and Theoharis)—are the official instruments for barring Afro-Americans from entering Postwar affluent America.

These laws make certain that

> African Americans were […] barred from attending white schools, refused service in public establishments, and forced to use separate restrooms and to drink from

> separate public water fountains. Moreover, white racists treated them with calculated indignity, hatred, and violence. (Schultz 188)

This really only starts to change in the mid-1950s, as activist groups such as the NAACP and later the Civil Rights Movement advocate, organize, campaign, and protest for legal and social change; as "those who have historically been marginalized" speak out in ways that make political campaigns and activities for social justice and equality "a permanent fixture on the national social and political agenda" (Kimmel, *Manhood* 263). Marches, sit-ins, and peaceful and not so peaceful protests encase the US, from Selma in Alabama to Harlem in New York. The movement's tenacity pays off:

> The Civil Rights Act of 1964 formally dismantled the Jim Crow system of discrimination in public accommodations, employment, voting, education, and federally financed activities. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 arguably had even greater scope, as it rendered illegal numerous discriminatory barriers to effective political participation by African Americans. (Alexander 38)

None of this success should be completely separated from a change in the way Afro-American males talk about and enact their masculinity (Estes; Ongiri; Murray). One prominent voice on the side of the Civil Rights Movement is author and activist James Baldwin. His essay "The Fire Next Time", published in 1963, turns into one of the defining texts of the decade. It discusses Black identity and the Black experience in 1960s America, and delivers poignant takes on how Black manhood exists, in the US, only ever in relation to white manhood—and is only ever allowed to exist in a subordinate position. As Baldwin points out, "the black man has functioned in the white man's world as fixed star, as an immovable pillar" (17). Baldwin goes on to clarify how the "white man's masculinity depends on a denial of the masculinity of the blacks" (68), echoing Frantz Fanon's seminal statement that the "black man must be black in relation to the white man". Baldwin is one of many authors who, at the time, address black masculinity in its relationality to white masculinity as directly as never before. Baldwin and his colleagues echo Du Bois, who back in 1903, in *The Souls of Black Folk*, points out that

> [t]he history of the American Negro is the history of this strife—this longing to attain self-conscious manhood[…;] to be a co-worker in the kingdom of culture, to escape death and isolation, to husband and use his best powers and his latent genius. (5)

These days, Du Bois is best remembered for pointing out the "problem of the color line", as well as how, by living in a society based on male and white supremacy, Black males are taught

to think of themselves as "problems" and develop a "double consciousness", a sense of "always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (5).

In "The Fire Next Time", Baldwin shows that little to nothing has changed for Black men and women in the US since the days of Du Bois. He addresses the racist cruelties the United States force upon its Afro-American citizens head-on. The text is structured as a letter to Baldwin's nephew and namesake. Without sugar-coating anything, Baldwin brutally explains to the younger James:

> This innocent country set you down in a ghetto, in which in fact it intended you to perish[…]. You faced the future that you faced because you were black and for no other reason. The limits of your ambition were, thus, expected to be set forever. You were born into a society which spelled out with brutal clarity, and in as many ways as possible, that you were a worthless human being. You were not expected to aspire to excellence: you were expected to make peace with mediocrity[…;] you have been told where you could go and what you could do (and how you could do it) and where you could live and whom you could marry. (16)

He clarifies that in the US, most Afro-Americans are forced to live by "what the white world calls a *nigger*" (13), instead of being treated as equals. That a Black man "is forced each day to snatch his manhood, his identity, out of the fire of cruelty that rages to destroy it" (15). Black men enacting their masculinity as powerful, not shameful, turns into a topic for the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power Movements.

When "the Civil Rights groups of the 1960s enlarged to include movements of Black power and Black pride, so too did the rhetoric of gender" (Kimmel, *Manhood* 271). So, as Steve Estes points out in *I am a man: Race, Manhood and the Civil Rights Movement,* while the "Civil Rights movement was first and foremost a struggle for racial equality", it also understands that "questions of gender lay deeply embedded within this overtly racial conflict" (2). As a result, when

> black men and women confronted segregation and disenfranchisement in the 1950s and 1960s, they contested white supremacy […] and questioned long-held assumptions about race and gender in American society. (6)

Estes goes on to point out that

> during the Civil Rights movement masculinist rhetoric […] served to obscure the questions of racial and economic equality that lay at the heart of the original struggle, complicating and sometimes conflating these issues with the related questions about what it meant to be a man. (8)

One of the most prominent leaders of the Civil Rights Movement, Dr. Martin Luther King, jr., applies similar rhetoric when he stands with the men and women organizing the Sanitation Strike in 1968 in Memphis, Tennessee. The workers protest workplace discrimination: the bad wages they are paid, being barred from joining the union, and being patronized by their white employers (Estes). Although not involved in the protest initially, Dr. King gains the support of the protesters "when he calls for recognition of the striker's manhood through payment of a living wage" (Estes 138). As King puts it, "We are tired of our men being emasculated" (King qtd. in Estes 139)—as they are paid so little in their jobs, they are unable to support their wives and children. King focuses on the fact that Black males are unable to "do" "proper" patriarchal masculinity. Decrying the fact that this situation forces Black women to also take up jobs outside the home to make sure their families can flourish, King effectively defines "a patriarchal ordering of the black family" (Estes 139) as a desirable option for Afro-American communities. A fact also pointed to by feminist scholar bell hooks in her essay "Reconstructing Black Masculinity", where she clarifies that the majority of Black males "never critiqued the dominant culture's norms of masculine identity" (96) in the 1960s.

Questions about black masculinity are even more central to the Black Power Movement emerging around 1965. Black Power is a complex and diverse movement from the very beginning, with the Black Panther Party (BPP) being one of its best-known affiliates (Bloom; Murray). These groups exist in proximity to other political movements of the mid-sixties, such as Black Nationalism, The Nation of Islam, or the Berkeley Free Speech Movement. What unites these activist groups are inspirations taken from "Marxism, as well as the anticolonial movements in Africa, Cuba, and Vietnam" in the 1960s, which points out the parallels between "the subordination of black Americans and oppressed people around the globe" (Murray 43). The BPP party program is very much a mixture of Black nationalism and international socialism, with leading members such as Eldridge Cleaver and Bobby Seale being influenced by authors and activists like Frantz Fanon (Estes). It is an emancipatory movement in which Black men and women start to redefine themselves as a community, and reject being called

"lazy, apathetic, numb, good-timers, shiftless, etc. Those are words used by white America to define us" (Carmichael and Hamilton qtd. in Murray 34), as Stokely Carmichael, Black Panther Party founding member and first chairman, puts it.

The Black Panther Party, founded in October 1966, emerges in part as a response to what they see as "the failure of the Civil Rights Movement" (Carroll 55). The party formulates an ideal of Black manhood that rejects racial stereotypes, but also the benevolent approaches taken by Civil Rights leaders. They formulate an idea of

> black masculinity based on violent self-defense and the promotion of self-determination. For the BPP, living as black men meant meeting violence with violence, resisting threats from the (white) police, and providing for a black community that was starving physically, emotionally, politically, and spiritually. (55)

To the Black Panther Party, one of its most urgent aims is to change how Black men and women see themselves. The Panthers want them to refuse adhering to ideas and images created by people who "believe that they are white" any longer.

Their demand is a powerful reaction to what Du Bois describes as the century-old "disdain for everything black" (5), and it represents a long overdue backlash against being made to feel like a problem (Du Bois). The Black Panther Party is one of many voices who make good on the popular slogan "Black is Beautiful"—originating from the Civil Rights activist and religious leader Malcolm X—in the way they talk about Black identities and cultures. In fact, the word *black*

> became a defining adjective to express the political and cultural shift in the civil rights movement. In 1966 Stokely Carmichael's call for "Black Power" set in motion a sociocultural shockwave. Negroes were now identified as black. Black radicals advocated the need for "black" institutions. Black was beautiful. (Nama 42)

Black Power activists take up traditionally African names, don African garb and try to highlight, instead of obscure, the African heritage of the Afro-American community. They all believe that a "social revolution was not only possible but inevitable" (Ongiri 38). What sets Black Power groups apart from the Civil Rights Movement is their "growing denunciation of nonviolence" when it comes to demanding political change, as they "perceived white liberal influence or control over some civil rights activists and programs" (Dunn 37) as detrimental to their cause. To them, "Black Power […] stressed black pride, self-definition, cultural affirmation, autonomy

over its communities, and the destruction of white power oppression" (37). Black Power members reject being defined by other people, namely by white men and women, which has been the norm in US-American cultures since 1619 (Murray; Ongiri).

Another uniting aspect among Black Power groups is their politicization of black masculinity and Black male bodies (Murray; Ongiri). Activists ask "the African American public to understand its political reality through ideologies in which the masculine body and mind represented the race's political status" (Murray 42). While the goals and actions of all groups are diverse, what gains a lot of attention right away is their call for more masculine authority among the Black community, especially among Black males. Groups like the Black Panthers "opposed King's philosophy of non-violence, and they derided him for expecting anything other than murder, brutality, degradation, and castration from the white power structure" (Estes 153). Instead, their actions aim to reveal how "Americans rationalized violence against the black male body as a way of constituting the authority of a masculinist white nationalism" (Murray 46). They advocate for reclaiming this authority from white males. The Black Panthers construct this reclaiming around creating a distinct Black Panther "look", and going on armed patrols through Black neighborhoods to protect them from police brutality (Estes; Ongiri).

Leading party figures like George Jackson or Eldridge Cleaver fashion this reclaiming along solid patriarchal lines, "grounded in men's traditional roles as breadwinners, protectors, and leaders" (Carroll 56). But to Panthers like Cleaver, it was clear that the party "supplies very badly needed standards of manhood" (Cleaver 175), which include taking risks as well as the willingness to commit violence and do harm, but also to endure it (hooks; Estes; Briefs; Murray). In other words, Black Panthers argue for a display of *masculine capital*. Cleaver's autobiographical essays—published in 1968 in book form as *Soul on Ice*—detail his masculinist vision of Black males as patriarchal men. Repeatedly, the author talks about "negated masculinity" and "conquered manhood" (237) as the source of Black male subordination. And Cleaver's solution to it is strictly patriarchal: when he proclaims, "we shall have our manhood […] or the earth be leveled with our attempt to gain it" (77), he envisions more than just violent resistance to violent oppression. Cleaver sees it as necessary that Black males strike back. He insists on an active, virile, phallic masculinity for all Afro-American males, for them to act with and possess masculine authority (Murray). Huey P. Newton, another founding member of the

BPP, echoes Cleaver when he states that Black males are emasculated because they see themselves as "something less than a man" (Newton qtd. in Briefs 55), and that the Black male is "ineffectual in and out of the home. He cannot provide for or protect his family. He is invisible, a nonentity" (Newton qtd. in Briefs 81). What these authors decry is a lack of patriarchal masculinity enactment, which the American system of white and male supremacy denies to Black males (Staples; hooks; Lemelle). At the same time, as Lemelle points out how Cleaver's idea of Black Power "represented male and female relationships in one of the most machismo, patriarchal, and male chauvinist ways possible" (48).

In May 1967, "the Panthers gained national notoriety when they marched into the California State Assembly […] to protest a gun control bill that would have curtailed their police patrols" (Estes 157). After 1967, the BPP "would become most strongly associated […] with its highly publicized actions to patrol the streets of Oakland in order to monitor police brutality" (Ongiri 42). But the party also carefully curated its public image. It is an image "characterized by the stylized, masculine, military black macho" (21) wearing the "Panther uniform—beret, black leather jacket, gun" in order to "create the Panther legend" (35). Thus, they create a powerful image for general news audiences and for Afro-American audiences to consume: a strong, defiant Black American with masculine authority. A nickname for the Panthers, both in derogatory and admiring use, is "Niggers with Guns" (39). And although the BPP also arms and stylizes its female members in this way, the media focus remains with its male members and the masculinity rhetoric they display. Men like Cleaver and Newton, whose messages range all the way from masculinist to homophobic, influence the early years of the party, during which "Panther men often relegated women to administrative positions" and "required that women submit to the dictates of men who dominated the party's leadership positions at that time" (Estes 163). This has often overshadowed the actual party activities: from neighborhood watch groups to adult education programs and their famous free breakfast program, as well as providing free healthcare clinics to their communities (Estes; Ongiri). Thanks to relentless inner-party activism by female Panthers, towards the end of the 1960s the BPP overhauls its chauvinistic and homophobic attitudes and concepts. In 1970, the Black Panther Party is the first, "and for many years the only, national African American organization to speak out in favor of gay rights or to make open alliances with a homosexual right group" which actually has "many women in positions of power" (Ongiri 21).

This brief and by no means complete overview of the Black Panther Party is relevant here, because the party shapes the way American popular culture sees and depicts Black men and women between the 1960s and early 1970s (Ongiri; Nama). The 1960s are a decade where, alongside women, gay men, and anti-war activists, Afro-American men stand up and demand to be treated as equals to white men like never before. But their rebellion is different from white men refusing to get married or feeling like a rebel for following *Playboy* life style tips. Whereas white males have always been privileged in that they had "permission" to "be men" and enact manhood in a way other men approve of, Black males had never had it as easy as them. In the 1960s, they ask for a share in this male, in this patriarchal privilege.

One outlet of US popular culture, the *Blaxploitation* genre, makes big use of "revolutionary manhood" ideas (Estes 173) espoused by groups like the Panthers. *Blaxploitation,* discussed in detail later shapes how Marvel Comics put together their first Afro-American superhero, Falcon, in 1969. But the desire for "doing" black masculinity as a patriarchal, a normative masculinity is even more explicit in the first appearances of Marvel's first Black, first African superhero, Black Panther. As will be shown in the analysis chapters focusing on these two characters, Marvel's first two "black supers" (Scott) interact with Black Power ideals.

Providers, Playboys, Black Panthers, and Marvel Heroes

What do all these facts and fictions about Postwar American masculinity enactment have to do with my objects of analysis: Captain America, Iron Man, Black Panther, and Falcon? Well, they are all products of the 1960s, except for Steve Rogers/Captain America who, strictly speaking, is a product of the 1940s. While his earliest appearances will also be analyzed and discussed, however: as with his colleagues in this selection, the focus is on his 1960s adventures. In a decade when *everything* seems to happen—Cold War threats, the war in Vietnam, the Anti-War movement, Second-Wave Feminism, Gay Liberation, Black Power and an increase in Civil Rights Activism, the Hippie and Counterculture Movement; to say nothing of political assassinations and major legislative changes for racial justice and equality—Marvel Comics "happen" as well.

As Matthew Costello puts it in *Secret Identity Crisis: Comic Books and the Unmasking of Cold War America*, not only are Marvel's superheroes "born under the mushroom cloud of potential nuclear war"; they are also "born" into a medium which "tends to be very receptive to cultural trends, to reflect them, comment on them, and sometimes inaugurate them" (1). My interest lies in revealing how closely Marvel's superheroes pay attention to masculinity enactments of the late 1950s and early 1960s. Are my selected characters paragons of adult masculinity "Postwar style", or unwilling to adjust and conform?

Sociologists like Parsons would be least likely to have approved of the kind of men populating the pages of superhero comics: after all, not one of them is married or a father, and only Tony Stark and Sam Wilson qualify as steady breadwinners. Steve Rogers has no paid day job, and T'Challa does not have to work for a living. Riesman would have very likely lauded their *inner-directedness,* since superheroes really do follow "the beat of their own drum" rather than worrying about what anyone else thinks of them. They do, however, seek the approval of their male colleagues: they seek homosocial approval of their masculinity. Without a doubt, all selected superheroes are so daring, tough, and aggressive, that Arthur Schlesinger, jr., would have lauded them as much as he lauded the "bureaucratic machismo" (Cuordileone 215) of the Kennedy administration. After all, "Marvel superheroes were in fact fighting the Cold War" (Costello 11), and "Iron Man is the most ardent Cold Warrior of Marvel Comics" in the 1960s (13).

Marvel's superheroes are most definitely *inner-directed,* and rather superficial *organization men*. Tony Stark/Iron Man in particular is the publisher's most straightforward display of Kimmel's *Marketplace Masculinity,* and a subscriber to Hefner's playboy philosophy (Ehrenreich), with T'Challa coming in second place in this masculinity enactment arena.

When Steve Rogers resurfaces in 1964 as a World War II veteran and *man out of time,* he is insecure about his place in a Postwar America. Rogers cannot make it work: he fails at becoming a husband, fails at getting a regular job, or even a place to live, as he is in fact sponsored by Tony Stark at the time.

By comparison, Sam Wilson—a social worker from Harlem with his own apartment—is the closest to an ordinary and easy-going middle class lifestyle any of my selected superheroes get. In the 1960s, Marvel Comics are at their most progressive—in terms of expanding the *patriarchal dividend*—when they introduce their first two Black male superheroes, as shown in more detail in the analysis chapters for Falcon and Black Panther.

When it comes to "doing" adult masculinity—conforming and adjusted—the way a Postwar America demands, most of my objects of study have to take a pass. And yet, their grasp on hegemonic masculinity is never really in doubt. Embodying *hegemonic* masculinity as "the heroes of the story", and gifted with the ability to *hybridize* masculinity traits from *complicit* to *marginalized* masculinities (Connell; Demetriou)—what could go wrong? Early Marvel Comics provide audiences with superheroes who pull off normative masculinity. They can all turn into men who are "*in* power… *with* power… *of* power", and therefore into men wo are "strong, successful, reliable, in control". But they can also be less than successful men who—while gaining from the *patriarchal dividend*—still cannot pull it off as husbands or breadwinners.

The 1960s Marvel Comics selected for analysis here offer interesting hybrids when it comes to the masculinity enactment of their male superheroes. They are men who do not "fail" masculinity "in action", when it is most regularly displayed for the approval of other men. But when *not* in their superhero costumes, things are hardly ever as clear-cut. This is where these superhero character adhere to the *Marvel Method*. This "method" refers to the way Marvel Comics are focusing on the "tragic qualities of the characters" (Wright 203). They stress the "moral and emotional fragilities of human beings" (203), and by that also broaden masculinity enactment. At the time, the publisher "reworked the formula of comic book superheroes" (205) and added a "volatile mix of human emotions and personalities" (205) to every superhero character, in order to create them within Stan Lee's concept of a "realistic fantasy" (Lee qtd. in Wright 206). These fragilities are therefore also added to the masculinity enactments displayed by Captain America, Iron Man, Black Panther, and Falcon—and as these characters get "permission" to feel unsure about themselves as men, they are interacting with Postwar and Cold War masculinity ideas (Corber; Cuordileone). But while Marvel's "Cold Warriors" are allowed to feel inadequate about themselves, at least temporarily, the male

superhero body is a much more constant thing. The male body must not be regarded as separate from masculinity enactment, since this would mean disregarding a fact informing American popular culture since the late nineteenth century: the body is the man (Kimmel, *History of Men*).

Reading Male Bodies, Reading Comics, Reading Male Superheroes

As mentioned in the introduction, there can be no reading of superhero comics for the masculinity enactment of their male protagonists without reading male bodies for the *meaning* they bring to the page. Displays of male bodies within narrative media can differ depending on the type of stories they appear in (Lehmann). As suggested below, *superheroes* and *action heroes* have a lot in common, especially when it comes to the type of male bodies displayed in both narratives, as well as a plot centered around violent action: both types of protagonist display "spectacular bodies" as well as a spectacular capacity for "taking action" (Tasker, *Spectacular*; Lichtenfeld; O'Brien)[22]. And yet, *gazing* at male bodies is never a simple matter within patriarchal logics, since patriarchy aims to *objectify* females while at the same time wanting to *subjectify* males: as John Berger puts it, "men act and women appear" (47). Men are not supposed to be the *object* of the gaze; and yet, nowhere is this less true than in superhero stories, in which most characters are male, and the male protagonist—and what his body can affect—shapes the plot like nothing else. These stories offer male bodies as *objects* of admiration, emulation, and of course desire, since the identification between reader and text, or spectator and screen, is always multilayered and complex (Ellis; Neale; Easthope). This potential for offering "queer moments" in what are usually "heterocentrist texts" (Doty, Easton; Fawaz) is what involves superhero comics in a homophobic debate back in the mid-1950s (Wright; Brooker). As shown here, in terms of masculinity enactment, superhero comics offer male bodies going for the masculine look (Easthope) in terms of muscularity and capacity for violent action. But at the same time, these are bodies "meant to be looked at", so even if authors and artists want their male readers to perceive them as ego-ideals (Easthope), other readings, such as by straight female readers and gay male readers, are always possible.

[22] A concise definition of action films—the genre in which action heroes appear for the first time—is provided later on in the chapter Superhero Comics as Serial Narratives about Enacting Masculinity.

To provide some quick medium-related context: reading comics is different from reading films, televisions, or books. Comics are a hybrid medium consisting of, and relying on, words and images (McCloud; Hatfield, *Alternative Comics*; Kukkonen). Reading superhero comics means reading what most people still regard as *mainstream* comics, especially in a US-American context (Wright; Hatfield, *Hand of Fire*), and they will be contextualized here in terms of their narrative genre qualities as well as a *narrative serial*. They have been discussed as a narrative genre in and of itself before (Coogan), and more recently as a hybrid genre which borrows from other genre stories like action, science fiction, soap opera, or horror (Meteling, "To be continued"; Packard et al.). Like most genre texts, superhero comics rely on repetitive elements. Some of these, especially male superheroes repeatedly facing the villain, fighting and besting him, can be connected to Kimmel's ideas on the *Self-Made Man*. According to Kimmel, this is a type of masculinity enactment always in need of deriving its influence—its integrity, if you will—from *homosocial competition*, from testing itself against other men in the workplace or marketplace. The "workplace" of the superhero is where he faces off against the villain, and his masculinity enactment is tied to successfully walking away from every encounter. And due to the *serial* nature of superhero narratives, neither Iron Man, Falcon, Black Panther, nor Captain America only do this *once*. No, these are stories revolving around the simple idea that superheroes "prove", sometimes bi-weekly, sometimes monthly, that they are "man enough".

Male Bodies on Display: Male Superheroes as Action Heroes

As of now, looking at the male superhero body through the lens of masculinity studies remains an underrepresented topic within comic studies. Too often, male superheroes are only being connected to hypermasculinity enactment and not investigated any further (Brown). In recent years, more multi-layered approaches have been taken. Esther de Dauw's *Hot Pants and Spandex Suits,* or *Superhero Bodies* by Wendy Haslem et. al., are cases in point.

This thesis intends to add another layer by connecting male superhero bodies to what Kenneth Dutton in *The Perfectible Body: the Western Ideal of Physical Development* refers to as the "developed body": the idea of looking at male bodies as something that is *made*, that is *built*, that is overall *constructed* to embody what Anthony Easthope refers to as the "masculine

look" (53). The *developed body* is connected to the discipline of bodybuilding. The superhero bodies analyzed in this thesis—most of them drawn by Marvel Comics artist Jack Kirby, or by artists basing their work on his designs, such as Don Heck, the artist working on the first Iron Man comics—look like bodybuilder's bodies. Male superhero bodies are defined by their physicality and draw attention to the male body, to the actions it can perform and the poses it can strike. This is where superheroes and *action heroes* have a lot in common.

They offer what Yvonne Tasker in *Spectacular Bodies* and "Dumb Movies For Dumb People"—both published in 1993—refers to as "exaggerated masculinity" (Jeffords, "Masculinity Terminated") in her analysis of 1980s action film stars such as Arnold Schwarzenegger, Sylvester Stallone, and Bruce Willis. *Exaggerated masculinity* belongs to *action heroes*: fictional characters who "are constructed through their physicality […] and the display of the body" (Tasker, Spectacular 35). The action film genre, as Tasker goes on to explain, revolves around "the male body and its commodification as spectacle" ("Dumb Movies" 237); it offers *muscular masculinity*, which "draws attention to both the restraint and the excess involved in 'being a man', the work put into the male body and the poses that it strikes" (Tasker, "Dumb Movies" 233). *Action films* offer male bodies "connotative of power and strength"; in terms of actions taken by protagonists, "skill, toughness, and endurance are valorized" (Beynon 65). These films offer "the body of the hero" as the only "narrative space that is safe", but as the plot progresses, "even this space is constantly under attack" (Tasker, "Dumb Movies" 241). It is a body "threated with death […] but also injury, torture and trial" (O'Brien 45); a body frequently "undergoing trials of various kinds, frequently tortures, in order to overcome a challenge to their values" (46). The challenger is usually the villain, who in action films—especially in the 1980 and 1990s—is not American, as Susan Jeffords points out in *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era.* Action narratives pit "hard bodies" against "soft bodies": soft or "errant bodies" are indicative of "disease, immorality", and danger, and usually belong to the villains (24). However, what Jeffords sees as "the normative body[…:] enveloped strength, labor, determination, loyalty and courage—the hard body" (25) routinely belongs to the American action hero. Jeffords' observations are applicable to superhero comics as well. As the analysis chapter focusing on Captain America's very first adventures will show, his enemies in the 1940s are most often not only not Americans; they also do not have bodies as muscular or tough as he does. They represent *soft bodies*. In the 1960s, regarding

both Captain America and Iron Man, the villains they face are often foreigners as well, and are usually from countries who are Cold War opponents of the US (Costello). But now, their bodies are much more massive and muscular, as they are *soft bodies* no more, but still signify danger and immorality (Jeffords). Most often, villainous bodies in action genres do not belong to Euro-Americans but to people of color; a reminder that not all bodies are created equal in the *action genre*[23] (Jeffords*, Hard Bodies*; Lichtenfeld; O'Brien).

Action hero bodies further qualify as what Susan Bordo in *The Male Body—A new look at men in public and in private* calls "phallic bodies": bodies claiming a specific "display of masculinity" (89). And although ideas about what *phallic bodies* are range from male bodies displaying sexual virility to muscular strength, one must remember that—based on Lacanian psychoanalysis—the phallus is "an idea, not a body part" (96). To be *phallic* requires only "the suggestion of masculine authority and power" (85): to act aggressively or capable, and powerful, much more so than merely having male genitalia. Therefore, to be *phallic* requires enacting masculine qualities. In this sense, all action heroes can claim to have *phallic bodies*. By displaying muscular, developed, hard bodies, they also display what Bordo identifies as a "take no shit body": a body radiating "independence, toughness, emotional imperviousness" (57).

Their bodies are in every sense *spectacular,* as audiences are meant to look at them, admire them, fantasize about them. Male superhero bodies—albeit in a different medium—function in the same ways: their bodies and what they can do are often at the center of tasks they perform as superheroes. Even if the body is at a disadvantage—as is the case with Tony Stark/Iron Man—the body, and how it can be enhanced or upgraded, is still the focus of superhero narratives.

But even in the action film genre, physicality is not always everything, as Susan Jeffords points out, adding one more thing superheroes and action heroes have in common: they are not just "super" strong, tough, and ready to commit violence at a moment's notice; they display the capacity for being traumatized and show emotional fragilities alongside their toughness and muscularity. Jeffords highlights this capacity in action heroes in "Can Masculinity Be

[23] A more detailed definition of the *action genre* is provided further below.

Terminated?". Focusing on the *Rambo* and *Terminator* franchises, Jeffords overlaps with Tasker in saying that action films turn the male body into a "form of spectacle", into a "vehicle of display—of musculature, of beauty, of physical feats, and of gritty toughness" (245). And while this equips action heroes with rather traditional masculine qualities, Jeffords also points to changes within the genre, as "internal actions" start joining "external actions" in terms of plot development. Referring to it as new "ways for masculinity to go" (259), Jeffords points out how "extravagant spectacles of violence and power" are paired with "increasingly emotive displays of sensitivities, traumas and burdens" (259), as seen in the *Rambo* and *Terminator* franchises. No longer are action heroes only killing machines, but men beset by personal and emotional dilemmas as well. But emotional fragilities do not keep these men from taking actions.

When it comes to reading the action genre for masculinities enacted, Tasker explains:

> It is more appropriate to frame it in terms […] which [allow] for a discussion of the multiplicity and instability of meaning. Rather than understanding the muscular male hero as […] a reassertion […] of masculinist values, we can examine the ways in which they represent both […] ongoing and unsteady relationship[s] between […] images of masculinity. (*Spectacular* 109)

Male action heroes and, as this thesis tries to show, male superheroes lend themselves really well to such examinations, because their bodies, "offered for pleasure and display" (119), are not normal or natural bodies, but *built* bodies, *developed* bodies (Dutton; Grosz). As such, their bodies are a reminder that "neither masculinity nor femininity operate as clear sets of qualities in relation to the body" (119).

This thesis takes its cues from Tasker and Jeffords to say that what they detect in 1980s action heroes on the big screen is exactly what Marvel Comics do with their superheroes starting in 1961. The comics display male bodies ready to take action against an enemy, while also showing us a superhero's capacity to suffer from traumatization and other tragic fates, something highlighted in almost every superhero origin story. And before there is John Rambo, there is Captain America, Iron Man, Falcon, and Black Panther. All these men display the *spectacular body* any action hero needs, and they suffer through traumas, revealing sensitivity and weakness, just like their action hero colleagues. Action heroes, like superheroes, display "take no shit" bodies (Bordo 57). But the *spectacular bodies* of

superheroes and action heroes are hardly regular male bodies: they are *built* bodies, they are *developed* bodies, which are meant to be taken as "natural" male bodies since most superheroes are never depicted "working out" or keeping to a strict fitness regimen.

As Kenneth Dutton points out in *The Perfectible Body: the Western Ideal of Physical Development,* any human body has not just a physical but also a social function. It is "a fundamental resource. It provides us with the most direct clue to our place in society and to the roles we are expected to perform" (169). Therefore, when talking about bodies, "it is the body as cultural product that must be stressed" (Grosz 23–24). Muscular bodies have been tied to ideas of heroism for centuries (Dutton; Bordo), but it is only shortly before the start of the twentieth century that having this kind of a body is no longer the topic of mythological narratives, but becomes available to everybody. As part of a "sports craze" taking hold of the United States around this time (Kimmel; Rotundo), the idea that "proper" masculinity and muscular male bodies must go together (Kimmel, *History of Men*) takes on a bigger meaning for American males. The "assertion that a strong body was the foundation for a strong character" and equates "physical strength and strength of character" (Rotundo 223) becomes ubiquitous (Bederman; Kimmel). Medical professionals, psychologists, and self-help gurus of the day promote sports, arguing that "[y]ou can't have a firm will without a firm muscle" (Hall, *Adolescence*). For them, sports become a prerequisite for enacting "proper" masculinity and manliness, a "site for masculine proof[…;] a template for the healthy, self-controlled, and therefore self-possessed man" (Kimmel, *History of Men* 58). Around this time, bodybuilding is "born". It emerges in the United States during the 1880s and leaves a mark on masculinity enactment: it provides generations of American men not just with ideas about an athletic body, but a "developed body" to be admired and emulated.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, that "physical culture was to become an increasingly popular activity" (Dutton 99). Self-help books listing numerous exercises are in circulation, as the human body turns into "an object of interest in itself, and the developed body was promoted as being in the reach of the ordinary citizen" (101). At the same time, displays of male muscular bodies become a part of popular entertainment, of the early American "entertainment industry", which refers to segments of popular attractions offered to men and women as amusement (Ashby; Brideson and Brideson), such as circus shows,

fairgrounds, traveling cinema shows or Vaudeville shows (Ashby). These segments are established in the US during the second half of the 19th century. Vaudeville shows, which are a form of traveling circus shows, routinely feature "strongman shows" during which muscular males lift weights and show off their *built* bodies (Dutton; Ashby; Brideson). This form of entertainment shapes ideas about men's bodies and helps form what Antony Easthope refers to as the "masculine myth". This myth revolves around male bodies as muscular, tough, and "in control"; as bodies going for a "masculine look". It inflates one view on male bodies and masculinity "as natural, normal and universal" and "wants to present itself as an essence—fixed, self-consistent", when "in narratives and images that press in from every side, men are invited to recognize themselves in the masculine myth" (167). But what this myth presents as "natural, normal and universal" is entirely cultural. Male bodies do not simply look this way; a *built* body is in truth constantly built, developed, and stylized, yet the superhero comic book and later on action films are busy convincing audiences that this is just the way "real" and "heroic" men look.

In short, the *masculine myth* does what every socio-cultural myth does. As literary theorist and semiotician Roland Barthes reminds us, "myth is a type of speech", and "myth is not defined by the object of its message, but by the way in which it utters its message" (109). Any myth "points out and it notifies, it makes us understand something and it imposes it on us" (117). In this case of the *masculine myth*, it "turns culturally specific content into ideas that appear natural and universal" (Mikula 132). The *masculine myth* focuses on the male body as the place where "true masculinity" originates, which is after all "inherent in a male body or expresses something about a male body" (Connell, *Masculinities* 45). To Easthope, the *masculine myth* demands of male bodies to go for the "masculine look". But what kind of body is this? First, it is a *developed*, a *built* male body:

> The hardness and tension of the body strives to present it as wholly masculine, to exclude all curves and hollows and be only straight lines and flat planes […] because it is so definitely not soft and feminine; hairy, if need be, but not smooth; bone and muscle, not flesh and blood. The masculine body seeks Rambo, not Rimbaud. (Easthope 54)

Easthope's idea that masculine bodies eschew curves and hollows is rather debatable, but I agree that the masculine body wants Rambo and not Rimbaud. Before John Rambo, before Captain America or Black Panther, the US-American "entertainment industry" (Ashby)

presents performers like Eugen Sandow, who are "to change forever the public perception of the muscular male body" (Dutton 105). Sandow becomes the first bodybuilder of international renown. He impresses audiences through "the public display of aesthetic muscularity for its own sake" (Dutton 119). During his performances, which are always "tinged with exhibitionism" (Kasson 58),

> Sandow appealed not just to the eye but also to the touch. He would strip to his tights to display his muscular development and control, make gnarls of muscle bulge and disappear […] and at receptions, urge spectators to feel the size and hardness of his muscles for themselves. The result was a curious mixture of intimacy and distance. (Kasson 54)

Sandow tours the globe, photographs of him are taken by famous photo studios on both sides of the Atlantic and distributed worldwide (Dutton; Kasson; Brideson and Brideson). On stage as well as in the studio, the focus shifts from "the strength of the male physique to the look of the physique", as

> Sandow's posing introduced a revolutionary concept: that of the live display of a male body in the public arena, as an object to be admired solely by virtue of the advanced muscular development[…;] the developed body […] was no longer an object restricted to the context of artistic representation[…]. It was transposed into a new domain, to become a socially acceptable focus of aesthetic attention. (Dutton 122)

Not only is Sandow referred to as "the embodiment of perfect manhood" (124) by the press as well as by health gurus and medical doctors at the time (Dutton; Kasson; Beynon; Brideson and Brideson), but his performances suggest that "perfection implied perfectibility", which to his fans and to devotees means "the possibility of 'perfecting' their bodies" (Dutton 124).

Sandow spawns many imitators. Sandow fan and fitness enthusiast Bernarr McFadden founds *Physical Culture*—a magazine offering exercise tips, dietary tricks, and detailed photos of male and female athletes. It is a bestseller between 1900 and 1930. In 1921—a few years before Sandow dies—a young Italian American, Angelo Siciliano, wins a contest named after Sandow: the "Most Perfectly Developed Man in America" (Dutton 129). Under his stage name, Charles Atlas, he goes on to market not just himself but his training methods and dietary supplements to everybody in America. Charles Atlas's ads promise to turn any "seven-stone-weakling" into a "muscular bodybuilder by the use of Atlas' *Dynamic Tension* method of physical

development" (Dutton 129). Atlas advertises in newspapers, magazines, and comic books. Bodybuilders as masculine ideals and superheroes as bodybuilders coincide (Hack; Reich).

It does not take long for such "perfectible bodies" to leave the sports arena and enter other spaces such as film and comic books. The first *Tarzan* comics strip—an adaptation of the Edgar Rice Burroughs novel series—appears in 1929. In it, artist Harold Foster, who attended art school prior to his work as a comics artist, provides his first take on the muscular male physique. His rendering of Tarzan is not yet an example of a *developed* body, but more of a "well-proportioned though not outstandingly muscular figure" (Dutton 154) based on Greek ideals found in the works of Renaissance artists like Donatello or Michelangelo (Dutton; Jones). As Gerard Jones points out in *Men of Tomorrow: Geeks, Gangsters and the Birth of the Comic Book*, Foster captures

> the beauty of the male human body. No male figure ever printed on cheap paper, not even the muscle men in Bernarr McFadden's health magazines, had ever shown such grace and dynamism. (75)

When Foster starts working on his next comic strip *Prince Valiant* in 1936, the titular hero has bulked up and "had become a bodybuilder" (Dutton 154). Fellow artists working on early costumed superheroes appearing at the same time—such as Joe Schuster, who co-creates Superman with writer Jerry Siegel, or Bob Kane, who co-creates Batman with writer Bill Finger—likewise equip their creations with muscular physiques, what Dutton calls "advanced muscularity" (154). Schuster does a little bit of bodybuilding himself, and is an avid fan of Charles Atlas (Jones). When Jack Kirby, the artist responsible for the majority (if not all) of the comics analyzed in this thesis, co-creates most of the Marvel Comics superheroes to emerge in the 1960s, he is influenced by Hal Foster's style (Hatfield, *Hand of Fire*)[24].

Built bodies stay a part of American popular culture, as images of the muscular hero on movie screens and comic book pages come to signify the "'ideal' muscular development as an embodiment of the American Dream" (Dutton 165) within a socio-cultural setting in which having an adequate body is always an issue (Kasson). Eventually, bodybuilding physiques turn

[24] More details on Jack Kirby's style, which greatly influences both Marvel Comics and superhero narratives, are provided in the section "Reading Comics, Reading Tensions".

into a "must-have" for actors starring in action genre films—a tradition which starts with the American bodybuilder-turned-actor Steve Reeves in the days of "swords and sandals" films (Dyer, *White* 1997), continues with Arnold Schwarzenegger, and has never really stopped since (Tasker, Dyer; Dutton). The muscle mass may vary, but in general, Hollywood's action heroes must have a *developed* body. As Dutton points out, *developed* male physiques appear not only on silver screens, but also in comics strips and comic books. It is there that

> muscularity continued to endow quasi-heroic status on its possessors. Comic-strip characters such as Superman and his imitators were visually defined by their powerful physical development. (210)

The majority of Marvel Comics superheroes after 1961 look like not a week goes by without them successfully completing a Sandow or Atlas exercise regimen. All the superheroes analyzed in this thesis certainly do give this impression, even when in the case of Tony Stark, it is not his biological body but his body-shaped battle suit which looks like it follows a Sandow exercise plan to the letter. For the average male superhero, a non-muscular, non-developed body is no option when it comes to successfully enacting masculinity. In the case of Captain America, the comics are most explicit about the fact that Steve Rogers's original skinny body cannot be sustained. It must be completely transformed and reshaped.

As Anthony Easthope states in *What a Man's gotta do: The Masculine Myth in Popular Culture*: when it comes to the "powerful physical development" of comic book characters like "Superman, Captain Marvel, He Man, Action Man and Conan the Barbarian", or any other superhero since then, what readers are presented with are "images of the hard, trained, disciplined body under rational control" (53). These are "not just there to be identified with—they are there to be looked at. They are styled for a masculine look in a particular kind of way" (53).

In this sense, superhero comics—and action films—continue what Eugen Sandow establishes: displays of male bodies meant to be admired for their muscularity and strength (Dutton; Kasson). Existing as such bodies, defined via "powerful physical development" (Dutton 210), links superheroes and their action hero colleagues, as both are defined by their physicality and are going for a "masculine look". But what happens when male bodies turn into the object of the gaze?

Male Bodies in Action: Gazing at Male Bodies

Before focusing on comic books, this thesis will present a few helpful approaches from film studies. Although a different medium from film, comics apply similar ways of depicting or framing bodies, to the extent that the perspective provided by the individual panels on a comic book page can be understood as camera angles (Taylor; Eisner; Kukkonen).

At least since Laura Mulvey's 1975 essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", film scholars analyze how films frame not only female, but also male characters and bodies (Willemen; Neale; Holmlund). They analyze the power and aim of the *gaze*. To gaze, after all, "implies more than to look at—it signifies […] a relationship of power, in which the gazer is more superior to the object of the gaze" (Chandler 208). In film, the choice of camera shots and angles "guides" the *gaze*; in comics, panel-composition of images in sequence perform a similar function (Eisner).

Mulvey "sought to demonstrate the extent to which the psychic mechanisms cinema has basically involved are profoundly patriarchal" (Neale 9). This means that it is acceptable for female characters to turn into objects of the *gaze,* but male characters are not supposed to. The *gaze* implies a hierarchic relationship in which power and desire are established on firmly hetero-centrist and heteronormative ground. Therefore, since

> in a heterosexual and patriarchal society, the male body cannot be marked explicitly as the erotic object of another male look: that look must be motivated in some other way, its erotic component repressed. (4)

In other words, male characters are not allowed to become the object of an erotically charged *gaze*. Instead, Hollywood films offer male figures to audiences "predicated on the pleasure of seeing the male 'exist' (that is walk, talk, move, ride, fight)" (Willemen 16). Therefore, Hollywood films routinely show male characters enacting what Chris Holmlund refers to as "masculinity as multiple masquerade" (224): male characters equipped with the "trappings of authority, hierarchy, order, position" (213). This masquerade can extend to showing male bodies in action: as can be observed regularly in action or thriller films. Now, masculinity and the male body become a form of spectacle. What is offered is a form of "fetishistic looking" (Ellis 47). Whereas "the voyeuristic look is curious, inquiring, demanding to know[…,] [t]he

fetishistic gaze is captivated by what it sees", and "the fetishistic look has much to do with display and the spectacular" (47).

In terms of displaying male physiques and male bodies going for a masculine look, the action film, offering such a *fetishistic looking*, routinely supplies audiences with *developed* and *built* bodies to look at and admire. In the medium of film, *action heroes* are a good example of such *fetishistic looking* employed; in the medium of comics, the equivalent example are *superhero comics*.

Reading Comics, Reading Tensions

Over the last three decades, literature on how to read comics and what constitutes comics as a medium has been growing, and there appears to be no end in sight. What comics—as a medium—are and how they function, how the reader makes sense of them and interprets them, is a longstanding and ongoing debate in media, cultural, and literature studies (McCloud; Eisner; Hatfield, *Altrenative Comics*; Bongco; Kukkonen; Packard et al.).

Comics are defined as "sequential art", as a "train of images deployed in sequence" (Eisner 6), or as "juxtaposed pictorial and other images in sequence" (McCloud 6). According to Karin Kukkonen, "[i]mages, words, and sequence are the three constituents of comics as a mode of communications" (5).

Relying on visual as well as verbal signs—images and words—make comics a hybrid medium. Both are used to "make meaning", but in comics, images and words can contradict as well as complement each other. This utilization of words and images to convey meaning shapes this hybrid medium:

> When the pictures confirm the meaning of the words—or oppose them, or comment upon them—this interaction, this play, makes possible the irony, complications, double meanings, humour, suspense, melodrama, pun, parody, and secret motivations of the story. By manipulating the interaction between the two codes which make up their language, comics have at their disposal the syntax of other literary and artistic forms: iteration, distortion, amplification, stylization, and so on. (Bongco 14-15)

And "rather than confusing what words and images can do, it seems that comics are a medium which capitalizes on the overlaps of these affordances" (Kukkonen 14).

This turns comics into "an art of tensions" (Hatfield, *Alternative Comics* 32), requiring "active participation and collaboration in making meaning" on the side of the readers. Hatfield understands this as the "otherness of comics reading", because the medium is "radically fragmented and unstable" due to its hybrid nature (36-37). He identifies four tensions: between codes of signification (word versus image); between the single image and the image in series; between narrative sequence and page surface; between reading-as-experience and the text as a material object (36). This thesis will mostly engage with the first two tensions, but all are necessary to the reading process.

The comic book page consists of panels; the spaces or lines in between panels are referred to as *gutter.* As comics scholar Karin Kukkonen observes,

> just as you step across a gutter, your mind creates connections between the individual panels, by drawing inferences about how the action in the one can relate to the other, and thereby trying to integrate them into a single, meaningful narrative. (10)

The same is the case when reading panels and speech bubbles or text captions on the page, where "each panel presents something like a snapshot of the action, relating to what has happened before and suggest how the event might continue" (8). At the same time, the

> speech bubble presents what a speaker says[…]. When the discourse cannot be located with a speaker in the panel image, it is represented in a caption, a box superimposed on the panel. (24)

Most of the time when "the discourse is not spoken", a "thought bubble" (Kukkonen 25) is put into the panel. Panels are there to structure the page and guide reader attention:

> Functioning as a stage, the panel controls the viewpoint of the reader; the panel's outline becomes the perimeter of the reader's vision and establishes the perspective from which the site of action is viewed. This manipulation enables the artist to clarify activity, orient the reader and stimulate emotion. (Eisner 90)

Panels, gutter, word bubbles, and page composition, in short

> [t]he layout of an entire page, the way the panels relate to each other and have been arranged, is called "mise en page" in comics. Your attention as reader fluctuates[…;] this movement creates a dynamic reading experience in comics, and it is the reason

> why both the unit of the panel and the unit of the page should be considered when analyzing comics. (Kukkonen 19)

The content analysis provided in this thesis relies on what Kukkonen refers to as "mise on page" and the analysis of the *storyworld* a term frequently used in narratology studies (Fludernik; Herman). As Karin Kukkonen explains, as we

> [r]ead through a comics page, we create a storyworld. This storyworld has basic features and probabilities, i.e. things are likely to happen within it and we draw our inferences within the framework from this storyworld[…]. These processes create a storyworld peopled with characters with different intentions, attitudes, and convictions. Comics can unfold a narrative in which many different voices interact. (Kukkonen 24)

More than anything, comics as a medium provide "an art of tensions" requiring "active participation and collaboration in making meaning" on the side of the readers, as the medium provides a "plurality of messages" (Hatfield, *Alternative Comics* 32). This thesis is particularly interested in how such a plurality pans out where masculinity enactment is concerned.

The medium of comics relies on repetition, on images in sequence being repeated: a necessity it shares with gender as performative act, as previously discussed. To reiterate: Butler clarifies, "the action of gender requires a performance that is repeated" (*Gender Trouble* 190) and functions "as a regulatory fiction" (192), which is best understood as "a practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint" (*Undoing Gender* 1). The parallels between gender enactment as understood by Butler, and the way the comics medium is a medium powered by repetition—images in sequence where characters are depicted *again and again*—has been pointed out by both Ole Frahm and Veronique Sina.

Comics often display a gender-coded visual language wherein female bodies are drawn differently from male bodies, and are depicted embodying different types of poses (Martindale; Packard et.al.) In superhero comics, normative gender enactment in terms of "doing" masculinity and femininity appears quite often, and is continuously repeated. Superhero characters, if male, are drawn as displays of *action hero* masculinity: they showcase muscular and exaggerated masculinity (Tasker, *Spectacular*; Jeffords, "Masculinitiy Terminated"). As pointed out in *Handbuch Comicanalyse* (Packard et al.) as well as in Aaron Taylor's ""He’s Gotta Be Strong and He’s Gotta Be Fast and He’s Gotta Be Larger Than Life":

Investigating the Engendered Superhero Body", superhero comics more often than not continue to uphold normative masculinity enactment revolving around white and male privilege to this day.

But superhero comics do more than just uphold normative and therefore hegemonic masculinity enactment "in the form of the hero"; they also display the male superhero on every page for audiences to look at and *gaze* upon. As such, superhero comics—displaying a male body to gaze at—are also engaging in a reversal of gender roles (Taylor; Fussell).

Male Bodies and Masculinity Enactment on the Superhero Comic Book Page

Human bodies are no blank spaces, but socio-cultural artifacts (Grosz; Dutton). The body can become "a fundamental resource. It provides us with the most direct clue to our place in society and to the roles we are expected to perform" (Dutton 169). In the case of superhero comics, male bodies can belong to either superhero, supervillain, or bystander. The body of the male superhero is usually a *built* body, a *developed* body (Dutton) defined by its physicality, by the things it can achieve. Male superhero bodies can be admired, idealized, and of course made fun of. But in any case, they are put on the page to be seen, to be looked at. They become the object of the *gaze*. The body of a superhero is always an artistic choice—and their bodies will look different depending on whether Jack Kirby or Steve Ditko, to name but two out of a long list of artists working for Marvel Comics in the early days, are the artist working on the comic book. But most of the time, superhero bodies are looking like they have followed Eugen Sandow's fitness regimen to the letter. From biceps to triceps and quadriceps, male superhero bodies usually look very much like "professional bodybuilders, their physiques are spectacular, nearly impossible, even a little strange" (Taylor 357).

For the comics analyzed in this thesis, comics artist Jack Kirby—or at least his distinct style—is responsible for the bodies on display. The 1960s and early 1970s are formative years for Kirby as a comics artist (Hatfield, *Hand of Fire*). Kirby's superheroes are massive. The artist fills page after page with muscular male bodies *in action*. *Action* is a key word where superhero bodies are concerned. The muscularity of superheroes has come to be associated with the power they have, and the tasks and deeds they undertake. In general,

> bodies represented in superhero comics are malleable, plastic, and subject to all kinds of wild reconfigurations and metamorphoses. Flipping through any superhero comic, one can find bodies that are invulnerable to harm, bodies that are capable of impossible displays of athleticism and supernatural power, and bodies that do not age according to conventional standards of time. (Taylor 347-348)

This thesis analyzes selected male superheroes in terms of their masculinity enactment within an arena of *homosocial competitio*n. In short: how do superheroes fare in proving their masculinity to other men, in enacting masculinity in a way that other men approve of? What are the acts of "improvisation within a scene of constraint" they engage in? One ingredient of this constraint certainly is the fact that nearly all superheroes sport *build* bodies, and that their bodies need to be capable of *spectacular* feats. But when it comes to looking at superhero bodies on the comic book page, it is not what they do, but what readers are willing to imagine them doing, which is at stake.

As Kukkonen points out, each comic book panel "presents something like a snapshot of the action, relating to what has happened before and suggests how the event might continue" (8). Reading the superhero comics therefore requires readers to put together a continuous action—performed by the superhero—out of these snapshots, "the staccato rhythm of unconnected moments" (McCloud 67) which comic panels provide. As such, they are engaging in what McCloud calls doing *closure*: "the phenomenon of observing the parts but perceiving the whole" (63). It is a reminder that comics as a medium may provide sequences of still images where movement can be suggested, but it is the reader who makes the movement happen: they actively "do" closure while reading comics (McCloud; Hatfield, *Alternative Comics*; Kukkonen). In other words, the comic book page provides readers with bodies who look like they are about to jump, punch, or kick, but in truth the movement happens in between, in the gutter and in the reader's imagination. In terms of the *gaze*, it turns the male superhero body into an object, charged with many possibilities. Possibilities which have, over the last six decades, caused numerous responses ranging from amused to homophobic (Brooker; Wright; Weldon). Basically, superheroes can be powerful subjects as well as erotic objects, especially when appearing on the comic book page: any panel depicting Captain America's body or parts of his body can be *gazed* at for as long as the reader desirers, in both erotic and non-erotic ways (Taylor; Easton; De Dauw). Superhero comic books always allow for both readings, due to how the medium works.

Anxiety over reading the male superhero as a possible erotic object—appearing in a genre which is supposed to have a mostly straight, male readership (Fawaz; Brooker; Easton)—is of course related to homophobia, a guiding principle for Western masculinity constructions since at least the late 1800s (Sedgewick; Edwards; Anderson; Woltersdorff). At the heart of homophobic thinking lies the idea that men are supposed to want to *embody* masculinity themselves, but not *eroticize* it in terms of sexually desiring other men. Which is why in classic Hollywood films,

> the male body cannot be marked explicitly as the erotic object of another male look: that look must be motivated in some other way, its erotic component repressed. (Neale 14)

As explained earlier, this repression is accomplished by providing images of male protagonists "predicated on the pleasure of seeing the male 'exist' (that is walk, talk, move, ride, fight)" (Willemen 16), as most Hollywood movies do (Mulvey; Neale). Superhero comics try to do the same by providing most panels showing superheroes about to punch someone, to fly off the roof of a building, or chasing a villain down a street. In this sense, superhero comics "employ conventional methods of body framing […] [f]unctioning in the same manner in comics as it often does in classical film" (Taylor 352). This turns the male body of the superhero into "a form of spectacle" (354), into an action hero defined by his "physicality […] and the display of the body" (Tasker). At the same time, the male superhero on the comic book page—going for the "masculine look"—exists so that audiences look at him and admire him. A *fetishistic looking* (Ellis 47) is taking place, as the "superhero's performance lies in being looked at, ogled, appraised[...;] it's a reversal of sex roles, with the hero taking a traditional female role: body as object" (Fussell 44).

But *appraising* and *ogling* male superheroes can be both an act of idealization and eroticization. Male superheroes have bodies going for the "masculine look", and what comics show them doing overlaps with what action heroes are doing: defined by their physicality, their bodies draw attention to themselves, to what they can accomplish, and the poses they can strike. Male superheroes are very adept at striking poses, especially on the comic book page where "they" strike the pose and the reader fills in the action. Additionally, male superheroes are also "privileged with the majority of close-ups" (Taylor 354) which focus on their faces as well as their actions in comic books, something as true today as it is in the 1960s

comics I am analyzing. Based on the idea that comic book panels, like film cameras, provide the perspective from which to look at the characters and settings on the page, Aaron Taylor clarifies, "the facial close-up is usually an invitation into the emotional interiority of a character" (354). Superhero comics therefore turn the male body of the superhero into a *spectacle*, inviting "the reader […] to ogle at the bodies of these men in much the same way as the bodies of women" (Taylor 355), while at the same time inviting readers to take an interest in their emotional states. To my analysis, this is crucial, since it turns male superheroes into *phallic bodies* "exuding masculine authority", while at the same time displaying "emotive displays of sensitivities".

Emotionality is usually tied to femininity, and therefore receives little to no place within normative masculinity enactments (Kimmel; Connell; Beynon; Anderson). But superhero comics, I argue, want audiences invested in the emotional states of the male superhero. This highlights another parallel between superheroes and action heroes: in both cases, the genre combines "extravagant spectacles of violence and power" with "increasingly emotive displays of sensitivities, traumas and burdens". By focusing on the action the male superhero body performs, as well as on the emotions occupying his mind, superhero comics accomplish exactly the same task that Jeffords ascribes to 1980s/1990s action films. In terms of enacting *normative* or *hegemonic* masculinity in the "form of the hero", this is an act of *hybridization,* as displaying softer ranges of emotions such as fear or doubt are connected to *subordinated* masculinities, and not to the "most culturally exalted form" of masculinity. These are then ways in which to read and *gaze* at male superhero bodies in terms of *idealization*, but what about *eroticization*, this "oh so feared" way of reading male superhero bodies on the comic book page?

In American superhero comics books, any explicit eroticization of male superhero bodies is rare. As Wolfgang Fuchs and Reinhold Reitberger point out in *Comics: Anatomy of a Mass Medium*, superheroes "seem to have absolutely nothing underneath their fighting tights; they all appear to be androgynous beings […] who lack primary sexual organs" (120). This sentiment is echoed by Lee Easton in "Sharing a Quick Look: a Gay Man Reads His Comics", where he refers to male superhero bodies as "anatomically incorrect action figures" who "lack any phallic sexuality, either hetero or homo" (151). Aaron Taylor suggests that while this apparent

lack "undermines the virility of male superheroes" (352), ultimately "the absence of the literal phallus in the world of the male superhero accounts for the relentless struggle for domination of the *symbolic* one" (354). In response to Taylor's article, Esther De Dauw suggests that equipping male superheroes with visible penises only works if you "consider the penis to always be read as a source of power instead of a source of sex" (37). However, superhero comics usually prefer to display male superhero bodies without drawing attention to their genitals, because drawing a penis would "further reduce the superhero to a sex object" (37). And since in superhero comics the male superhero "is not drawn as a sexual object but as a powerful subject[…,] [a]dding a penis would undermine that carefully navigated difference" (37). Male superheroes are supposed to be *phallic bodies* in the way Bordo employs the term—the phallus as "an idea, not a body part" (96)—and not in the sense of being sexually active bodies. This, of course, matches the young readership superhero comics are supposed to have (Wright; Jones; Easton), as well as the sanctions imposed on the genre through the *Comics Code*. To reiterate, this code forbids among other things explicit references to gore, violence, nudity, sexuality and of course any positive reference to homosexuality whatsoever.

To this day, the largely unchallenged refusal to draw male superhero bodies in explicitly eroticized ways is a way of policing the male superhero body against ways of being read in not only erotic, but homoerotic terms; a strategy harking back to Frederic Wertham and his 1954 book *Seduction of the Innocent,* which strongly influences the content of aforementioned Comics Code[25]. For Wertham, superhero comics incite a "homosexual and anti-feminine" (191)—meaning anti-women—atmosphere. This atmosphere is brought about by "[t]he muscular male supertype, whose primary sex characteristics are usually well emphasized" and it is in this setting where such a body type "becomes the object of homoerotic sexual curiosity and stimulation". (188)

As mentioned before, the psychiatrist and anti-comic book activist is famous for calling comics featuring Batman and Robin "a wish dream of two homosexuals living together" and saying that homoeroticism "pervades the adventures of the mature 'Batman' and his young friend 'Robin'" (190), something numerous books on comic books and gender enactment have

[25] For a more detailed look at the long-lasting implications of the Comics Code, see Wright, *Comic Book Nation;* and Jones, *Men of Tomorrow.*

discussed by now, this thesis included. Yet what is hardly ever discussed is how Wertham, as the above quote shows, delivers not just an indictment of homosexuality—in keeping with American homophobic policies of the 1950s (Corber; Cuordileone)—but an indictment of *muscular masculinity*. And while American publishers react by trying to avoid any situations in which their male superheroes may be perceived as gay, they do not step back from displaying male superheroes as muscular male supertypes.

Strategies against being perceived as homosexual can be worked into the superhero narrative, and they are, but their success remains questionable, as Lee Easton explains in detail in his 2010 article "Sharing a Quick Look: A Gay Man Reads His Comics". As Easton points out, superhero comic books want the male reader to "fantasize himself as *being* or wanting to *become* the characters that Robin and Captain America are" (138). The texts, therefore,

> ask their predominately male readers to do the impossible: imagine their male characters (and thus themselves) as attractive and healthy—that is, as subjects and objects of desire—but as neither subjects nor objects of male sexual desire. (139)

Bringing the *masculine myth* as defined by Anthony Easthope into his argument, Easton rightfully points out that superhero comics ask of their male readers to only ever "hetero-gaze" at the male body going for the "masculine look", which after all is "not to be looked at with the eye of desire" (53). Instead, men are supposed to idealize, to emulate this particular male body. But this remains an unstable request at best, especially in the medium of comics where, in the process of "meaning-making" and navigating any comic book page's "art of tensions", readers are afforded a lot of ways of reading the page. Basically, "heterocentrist texts can contain queer elements" and "heterosexual, straight-identifying people can have queer moments". Given the fact that superhero "stories and main characters involve mainly men", such queer moments can easily occur. And these comics offer a male "homosocial Eden", while at the same time avoiding that situations be perceived as homoerotic in nature (Easton; De Dauw). The preferred strategy is to have "women characters in comics serve to secure a heterosexual orientation for the main characters", who in superhero stories are usually male. But such male–female relationships in superhero comics are "distant, impersonal relationships" (Easton 147) compared to the relationship the male superhero has

to his male sidekick or male superhero colleague[26]. I agree with Easton here: on the surface, superhero comics between the early 1960s and the early 1990s[27] may all try to signal "no homo"; but "men's muscular bodies operate not simply as an ego-ideal" but also "as a desirable male whose physique offers a range of sexual promises" (Easton 146). And no matter how hard superhero comics try: if their protagonists remain muscular male hunks in a genre with a slightly bigger male than female readership (Wright; Howe), queer moments will occur.

Any moments which lend themselves to more than just a strict heteronormative or heterocentrist reading can be "queered". Lee Easton gives one of many possible examples when he highlights a panel in *Captain America Comics* #118 "The Falcon Fights!" showing Sam Wilson/Falcon in the background, bare-chested and reclining on a plank bed looking towards his mentor, while Steve Rogers/Captain America is placed in the foreground in the process of taking off his shirt with his head looking over his should towards Sam. As Easton correctly observes, "the implied intimacy here is precisely the kind of setting that Wertham argued served 'as the object of homosexual curiosity and stimulation'" (154). This particular scene is discussed in more details in the chapter analyzing Falcon.

This thesis looks at masculinity enactments in superhero comics, which is not possible without taking male bodies into account. Not looking for queer moments per se, my argument aligns itself easily with reading male superhero bodies—bodies going for the masculine look—as male "ego-ideals" wedded to a Eugen Sandow type of physique (Dutton; Kasson). But Easton's article is further useful when reading superhero comics for masculinity enactment, and this enactment itself as an act of *hybridizing* hegemonic masculinity.

Easton's article is built around the fact that Easton is a fan of superhero comics who "happens to be gay" (136), and therefore a reader willing not just to admire muscular, male superheroes, but also wanting to "feel those hard, male bodies entrusting themselves to mine at times of profound emotion" (136). Easton lists one more reason he is drawn to these characters: their

[26] Easton also points out how the friendship between Captain America and Falcon, as shown in the very first comics Falcon appears in, is easily interpreted in homoerotic terms. The analysis chapter on Falcon returns to Easton's reading in more detail.

[27] The first openly gay male superhero in Marvel Comics is Northstar, who publicly comes out in a story published in 1992. Since then, many superheroes have been members of the LGBTQ+ community.

ability to show emotions other than rage or aggression. Easton explains that "while he never lost sight of the superheroes' "capacity for violence, it was really the heroes' capacity for great suffering and gentleness that kept me captivated. The fact that these hard, powerful men were also capable of deep feelings, usually revealed in short moments of great softness and tenderness" (136). I agree with and share Easton's preferences in this regard. He brings attention to a narrative component of superhero comics which has been with the genre since its inception in the late 1930s (Wright; Jones; Gavaler). This thesis looks at this trait from the perspective of masculinity studies.

As *hybrid heroes,* superheroes have always combined what Yvonne Tasker refers to as "exaggerated masculinity" belonging to characters "defined by their physicality", with what Susan Jeffords points to as the combination of "extravagant spectacles of violence and power" with "increasingly emotive displays of sensitivities, traumas and burdens". Films like *Rambo* or *Terminator* do this by combining muscular male *exteriors* with fragile *interiors*. But superhero comic books do this long before such films are produced. In this sense, superheroes are a variation of what Tasker and Jeffords define as *action heroes*. In a sense, all superheroes have been, ever since 1936. The time period studied here—the 1960s and early 1970s—witness publisher Marvel Comics perfect this combination—the superpowered hero with emotional fragilities—as they effectively add melodramatic and *soap opera* elements to superhero comics.

Superhero Comics as Serial Narratives about Enacting Masculinity

To this thesis, the fact that superhero comics are *serialized narratives* is crucial. Superheroes go on rather formulaic adventures: they fight villains, save the innocent, and in general take the side of the powerless in a fight. They do so by engaging in violent confrontations, as endless as they are repetitive. When not proving that they have the edge in this kind of encounter, their powerful positions are not always so easily secured: Steve Rogers is far less capable of establishing himself as a powerful man than Captain America is. But both kinds of encounter can be understood as *enacting masculinity in homosocial spaces* and as a homosocial competition: most of the villains, fellow superheroes, and victims to be saved are male, as are most people the male protagonists interact with when not in costume. And as

male superheroes test themselves against villains and try to prove to other men in their lives that they "have what it takes", they are also engaged in proving masculinity.

As Kimmel points out, "doing" masculinity is not a one-time act, especially as concepts of the Self-Made Man or Marketplace Masculinity come to embody the central definition of what it takes to be a man in normative ways in a US-American context. As "being a man" is now tied to success in the marketplace or workplace, "Manhood is no longer fixed" and "Success must be earned, manhood must be proved—and proved constantly". Superhero comics display male characters doing exactly this: they are proving constantly—week after week, month after month, year after year—that they can be "man enough" at least some of time. Which is to say, superhero comics also show us that they can fail. But the beauty of superhero comics lies in the fact that "some of the time" is enough: Steve Rogers can be insecure about his private life, Tony Stark can worry about his health, Sam Wilson about his ability to "superhero" on his own, and T'Challa can be anxious about whether he is making the right decisions as the ruler of Wakanda. But when the villain appears, they all know what to do and how to do it.

Never backing down from a violent encounter is exactly what grants all male superheroes normative masculinity in bulk, not to mention the muscular physique they all bring to the page. But showing them equally capable of displaying soft emotions such as worry, insecurity, and anxiety—as all comics analyzed here do—shows something else: in superhero narratives, hegemonic masculinity, persisting as it does "in the form of the hero", is an act of *hybridization*. In the 1960s, the comics analyzed here are at the same time also an act of hybridization in the service of patriarchy, something easily gleaned from the way Marvel Comics in general treat their female characters at the time: female characters are few, and female superheroes even fewer. They do not get to take as much action as their male colleagues, who usually treat them in patronizing ways (Wright; Howe; Cocca).

Over the last five decades, countless books and articles have looked at the American superhero and superhero comic books: from Umberto Eco's "The Myth of Superman", Richard Reynolds's *Superheroes*, Bradford Wright's *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*, to "Menschliches. Übermenschliches" by Ditschke and Anhut, Sean Howe's *Marvel Comics: The Untold Story*, *The Superhero Reader* from Hatfield et al., and Chris

Gavaler's *On the Origin of Superheroes* and *Superhero Comics* [28]. These titles tie superhero narratives to Western mythologies, religions, politics, formulaic and serial fiction, and literary genres[29].

What the texts do very well is show how superhero comics are a narrative genre in themselves—done so most explicitly by Coogan in his 2006 *Superhero: The Secret Origin of a Genre,* and in the 2019 *Handbuch Comicanalyse* (Packard et al.). What is also stressed is how superhero comics as a narrative genre are borrowing narrative elements from other narrative genres such as science-fiction, horror, action, melodrama, or soap-opera. But superhero narratives are also *serial narratives* (Meteling; Packard et al.). Of interest to this thesis is especially how superhero comics borrow elements from the action genre, the soap opera, and melodrama. Reading superhero comics as serial narratives grouped around repetitive narrative elements helps to see how masculinity enactments are shaped within this narrative.

In his book mentioned above, Peter Coogan explains how a pro-social "mission, power, and identity, or MPI […] establish the core of the genre" (39). Superhero narratives routinely start with a disruption to accepted order and rules, brought about by a villainous figure, which calls the superhero to action. In this way, the pro-social nature of superhero missions is always connected to the fact that superheroes do not establish new forms of societal order or structure but help to re-establish the status quo (Ditschke and Anhut). This links superheroes to the heroes of classical mythology, where heroes are called upon to stop harm being done to society (Campbell; Jamme).

In terms of reading superhero narratives as a genre, Coogan clarifies that "as with other genres, specific superheroes can exist who do not fully demonstrate these three elements". This reveals an "apparent indeterminacy" which "originates in the nature of the genre" (Coogan 39-40). Basing his analysis on Thomas Schatz's *Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Filmmaking and the Studio System*, Coogan describes *genre* as a "privileged story form" (25)

[28] Titles named here are of course but a tiny selection from a large list of books, articles, and anthologies already published or about to be published.

[29] Their discussion of gender themes often falls short: it often only extends to discussing oversexualizations of female superheroines (Cocca) and examples of hypermasculinity apparent in the way some artists draw male bodies (Gavaler).

marked by "imitation and repetition" (28). *Genre narratives* are "some of the most important of cultural products because of the way they embody and promulgate cultural mythology" (59). From the viewpoint of masculinity studies, superhero comics promulgate numerous myths or explanatory narratives (Mikula) about "doing" normative masculinity, with the *masculine myth* in terms of bodily appearance being one of many. The willingness to commit violence, which "is often the single most evident marker of manhood" (Kimmel, "Homophobia" 132), is another one. It is the aim of this thesis to point out that these comics always also offer an additional, softer side of masculinity within their titular characters.

Coogan further uses Schatz to define period cycles within the genre: Golden Age, Silver Age, Bronze Age, and the Iron Age[30]. The "Ages" correspond to what Schatz refers to as "experimental stage[…;] classic stage[…;] an age of refinement[…;] and finally a baroque (or "mannerist" or "self-reflective") stage" (Schatz 37-38). The comics analyzed here fall into the Silver Age, corresponding to the "classic stage, in which the conventions reach their equilibrium and are mutually understood by artist and audience" (Schatz 37-38). But genres, although "defined by their conventions or repeated, expected, to-a-degree-predictable qualities" (Newcomb 423) are never a "fait accompli". They move through periods of redefinition, embellishment, and refinement. In the case of superhero narratives, the genre continuously mixes and matches itself with narrative elements taken from other genres: thriller, western, soap-opera, science fiction, action, etc. This makes superhero narratives into *hybrid texts* (Coogan; Meteling, "To be continued"; Packard et al.).

Narrative genres and their propensity for repetition can routinely be observed in superhero comics, since these are periodically produced texts where setting, characters, and plot are often highly repetitive and only vary slightly. The comics, however, offer a constant variation of repetitive elements: new superheroes fight new villains in new settings, but these components—superhero, villain, confrontation—are never exchanged for other components. Over the years, this continuity has grown more and more complex, something which fuels fan discourse, fan studies, and of course comics studies. Of interest to the analysis provided here is the fact that superhero comics are a form of *serial narration*. A *serial* can be defined "as a

[30] The following time periods equate to the four ages: Golden Age, 1938-1956; Silver Age, 1956-1970; Bronze Age, 1970-1984; Iron or Modern Age, 1985 to present.

continuing narrative distributed in installments over time" (O'Sullivan 50), with endless possibilities in terms of storytelling (Meteling, "To be continued"). Plot strands are never completely resolved, but linger on from one adventure into the other, while psychological complexities are added to characters, and their relationships to other characters are explored more and more deeply. Before looking more closely at what soap operas and superhero comics have in common, a concise definition of *serial narratives* is provided.

A *narrative*, in its most basic terms, is "based on cause-and-effect relationships that are applied to sequences of events" (Fludernik 2). Therefore,

> a narrative is a representation of a possible world in a linguistic and/or visual medium, at whose center there are one or several protagonists […] who are existentially anchored in a temporal and spatial sense. (6)

Following the classifications of narratology scholar Fludernik, *narrative* is used here and elsewhere to refer to the overall fictional world which is presented, whereas *plot* refers to a "logically structured story that spells out motivations" (29). *Narratives* can be episodic in structure: a "narrative episode" consist of

> ideally three stages: the opening, the climax […] and the resolution. In its prototypical form, a narrative episode correlates with a cognitive schema which involves changing location, encountering an unexpected event and reacting to it. (48)

Episodic structures often occur in *serial narratives*, and they certainly structure the periodically produced adventures of superheroes. In "Six Elements of Serial Narrative", Sean O'Sullivan highlights six key features of serials which he applies to novels, TV shows, and comic books: "iteration; multiplicity; momentum; world-building; personnel; and design" (52). The first three elements are concerned with *narrative action,* whereas the last three have more to do with how the fictional world presented is shaped and changed over time.

As O'Sullivan explains: "In seriality, *iteration* points to something whose repetitive aspect is a definitional, recognizable feature of the narrative" (53, emphasis added). In superhero narratives, such aspects can range from the dual-identity hero (Gavaler, *Superhero Comics*) present in every text; to the obligatory origin story every superhero gets (Reynolds; Coogan); to short recaps of plot points given at the beginning of a new episode to tie it more directly to the previous one, something O'Sullivan classifies as "semi-synonyms of iteration, such as

structural parallels and story-telling habits" (53). His second element, *multiplicity*, refers to "several interlocking storylines" (54) present within a narrative episode. In superhero comics, with Marvel Comics starting this habit around 1964, this happens frequently as one superhero appears in the adventures of another, and as some superheroes get together in groups—such as the Avengers. This habit within superhero comics adds to serial continuity as well as the overall *storyworld* building (Reynolds; Ditschke and Anhut; Meteling, "To be continued"; Packard et al.). The purpose of multiplicity is "to make satisfactory closure in serials not just almost impossible but perhaps undesirable" (O'Sullivan 55). This is what connects multiplicity to the next element, *momentum*, which refers to "that part of the story that explicitly demands we keep watching or reading" (55). O'Sullivan names the narrative cliffhanger as an example of momentum, and further connects it to a narrative element which all comic strips or books—produced as they are on weekly or monthly schedules—need to have. I agree that in superhero comics, momentum often "points vaguely to some way in which each installment is a part of a continuing quest" (55). Momentum can be what propels a narrative forward from episode to episode, and something which is more and more often explored the longer superhero narratives are in production, as specific story arcs are added to further shape the characters (Meteling, "To be continued"). Momentum can, depending on the narrative genre it appears in, be a more overt or covert part of the text. As O'Sullivan clarifies, "iteration, multiplicity, and momentum […] shape the frames and effects by which we make narrative meaning of serials" (57).

Turning to elements of scope, the author points to *world-building*, which highlights "changes that serials create over time, or that they potentially create[…;] the world of comics does this regularly through the incorporation of new spaces and stories" (57). Superhero comics do this as their protagonists are placed in ever new spaces and plots, whereby their adventurers receive more and more layers. In this sense, *world-building* also connects to narrated time, because most narrative worlds are built gradually. O'Sullivan's fifth element, *personnel*, is "another way of saying 'character'", and as such is "concerned with how characters are organized and distributed across a series" (58). In superhero comics, this is especially obvious as the personality of most superheroes develops over time. Most superhero characters are equipped with some forms of *personnel* element: the tragic origin story as well as the impetus to step up and respond to actions taken by villains (Ditschke and Anhut). Origin stories—the

"'urszene'" of superhero comics (Ditschke and Anhut; Meteling, "To be continued")—not only show how heroes came to acquire their superpowers but give a first understanding of how these characters operate. Sometimes, lots of personnel layers are added over a short amount of time, as is the case in the earliest comics to feature Iron Man. Readers learn a lot about his personal life early on, which is not the case in the Captain America comics of the same period, as personal information about him is rather scarce. As O'Sullivan points out, personnel "progression may be very temporary, or perpetually deferred, and development is far more erratic" (59). This is true even more for superhero comics than for other serials, as authors and artists often *ret-con*[31] characters, thereby making changes to personnel development. O'Sullivan's last element is *design,* which

> alerts us to the machinery of serial construction[…]. Our attention to design depends on our familiarity with the particular shape and infrastructure that a serial has chosen for its basic narrative unit, or segment. (59)

Design patterns can highlight elements the fictional world of the narrative displays to us; it "alerts us to the particularity of a series, its specific systems of habits, preferences, and protocols" (59), and is closely attached to all other elements O'Sullivan mentions, since understanding *design* relies on understanding all other elements. All elements, as O'Sullivan clarifies, can be applied as what he refers to as either "minimalist" or "maximalist seriality" (61): all elements may be in use, or only some of them. Superhero comics employ most of them, but not equally strongly all the time. The main elements certainly used in a *maximalist* fashion are *iteration* and *multiplicity*. *Iteration* plays into both the type of male bodies most superhero comics display, as well as the type of masculinity enactment, while *multiplicity* corresponds to the fact that Marvel Comics, most definitely today but already back in the 1960, rely on how one superhero can appear in the adventure of another superhero, and how teams of superheroes like the Avengers go on adventures together.

Serial narratives can potentially provide endless narrative installments. The possibility to narrate without end defines the *soap opera* genre and marks them as continuous serials,

[31] The term *ret-con* is short for "retroactive continuity" and is used to describe authors and artists rewriting and reshaping either the origin story or other character elements of a superhero or superheroine after the fact. This is something happening almost routinely since the 1970s (Coogan; Ditschke and Anhut; Reynolds).

making them an example of serial narratives (Anger). A short definition of soap operas as serial narratives is given here, and parallels between soaps and superhero narratives are pointed to.

As sociologist Dorothy Anger points out in her study of soap operas, *Other Worlds: Society seen through Soap Operas*, "continuing serials are the answer to our desire to know more" (17). She explains that "soap writers have long known—audiences do not necessarily want quick, tidy resolutions and like to be hooked on 'what happens next'" (16). The same can be said for writers of superhero comics—over time, authors and artists have become more and more invested in producing stories that never really offer a complete narrative resolution; the superhero just moves from one action to the next (Wright; Bainbridge; Howe; Meteling, "To be continued"). Like soap operas, superhero narratives—especially when they appear in comic book form—are what literature scholar Robert Allen refers to as "open serials", where complete narrative closure never really needs to occur. This distinguishes them from "closed serials", where narrative closure does eventually occur (18-24). By now, the number of superhero characters by publishers like Marvel Comics alone is around 7000[32], and not all of these characters are always in use in current comic book publications. This links superhero characters to "soap characters", who "can be picked up and put down at will" (Anger 22) whenever they bring something to what is going on in the plot. Superhero comics borrow another element from soap operas, albeit to a lesser degree: plot elements derived from "emotion and affairs of the heart" (16)[33]. Such "affairs of the heart" are not completely absent from superhero comics, but they are the garnish, not the main course. Since the introduction of their Fantastic Four in 1961, Marvel Comics make it a habit to add interpersonal relationships and emotional conflicts to their superhero adventures (Wright; Fawaz). This is what is often referred to as the *Marvel Method*, as discussed earlier.

American soap operas seem to have taken their names from soap and detergent manufacturers who sponsor the first radio soap operas, produced between the 1930s and 1940s (Creeber). The radio serials are often "introduced and punctuated with melodramatic interludes of organ music" (Anger 24) reminiscent of opera music, which may also have

[32] According to information published on sites like marvel.com and surveys taken by sites like fandom.com.
[33] This focus is, of course, what turns soaps as continuous serials into a "female genre". Early criticism talks down to the genre as well as to its audience, before critics turn around (Williams) and start to read soaps as a "feminist form of narrative" (Anger 18).

influenced the name. And why not? As Anger correctly points out, any "quick survey of opera libretti shows that the stories told therein deal with precisely the same topics as soap operas: love, murder, betrayal, deception" (24). Superhero comics—as subsequent analysis will show—also feature such topics. At times, the superheroes suspect their colleagues of betrayal as well as deception; superheroes are accused of murder by civilian society; and love—although most often in the form of heartbreak—also enters the plot. Finally, American superhero comics and American soap operas have something else in common: they mix the ordinary with the *fantasy*—not in the sense of the narrative genre, but as a means of escape (Williams). Soaps center on ostensibly ordinary family situations, from pregnancy to honeymooning and divorce settlements, while at the same time telling stories about families with an unusually glamorous lifestyle. Anger refers to it as an "intrinsic tension" established within soaps, "between the value of 'ordinary' life and escapism into fantasies of glamour" (26). In Marvel's superhero comics, the reason for escape seems reversed: Marvel Comics introduce superhero characters who do the "glamorous" superhero thing—save innocent people and sometimes the entire galaxy from evil villains on a regular and "continuously serial" basis. But they also live ostensibly ordinary lives, where they are boyfriends, lovers, and spouses, or where they are employees and employers.

In the sixties, creators like Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, and Steve Ditko start adding what are serial soap opera elements to superhero comic books, which is another way of looking at the *Marvel Method* (Wright).

But serialized narratives can also become rather static, something which is certainly the case in superhero comics. After all, no matter how many times superheroes best villains and save the world: by the time the next issue is published, they do it all over again.

It seems the job of a superhero is never done, a fact also discussed by the seminal semiotician Umberto Eco in his essay "The Myth of Superman". The essay overall provides a structuralist analysis of the workings of socio-cultural myth, with a focus on the workings of superhero stories (Packard et al.). Eco's focus on the repetitive necessity of a superhero's actions is what is of interest to me here. To Eco, all popular narratives exhibit this love for narrative immobility, what he refers to as "the pleasure of the non-story" (150). Eco points out how a

character like Superman—although he could change the ways of the world completely—never does more than apprehend and neutralize the "villain of the week". Superman comics thus offer a "circular, static conveyance of a pedagogic message […] of perfect civic consciousness" with no political motivation (162-164). According to Eco,

> the plot must be static and must evade any development because Superman must make virtue consist of many little activities on a small scale, never achieving total awareness. (164)

According to Eco, Superman's—and really any superhero's—job is never complete. Instead, it is started afresh with every new issue produced. This idea of having to do something *again and again* not only connects Eco's reading of superheroes to the serial core of these narratives, but to my analysis of Kimmel's idea that masculinity must be "proved—and proved constantly". This repetitive cycle never ends, and does not get in the way of adding narrative soap opera elements to superhero comics (Wright; Bainbridge; Meteling). In the Silver Age of superhero comics, such narrative elements are found regularly in Marvel Comics, where violent confrontation and emotional conflict are important, but not equal, components of the plot: action sequences take precedence over soap-opera sequences.

As pointed out earlier, superhero characters are action heroes, with their physicality being their strongest asset (Tasker; Jeffords). Within the medium of film, such characters appear in what has come to be referred to as the *action genre* (Lichtenfeld). What defines the genre is not so much what happens during the plot, but how the events are depicted. In *Action Speaks Louder: Violence, Spectacle, and the American Action Movie*, Eric Lichtenfeld ties the genre to a list of predecessors: the western, film noir, the gangster film, and the police procedural. Plot elements from all these genres may appear in action movies, but are rather negligible. A crime investigation may occur in an action film, but what sets this kind of film apart from a police procedural is that it "makes only token use (or even mention) of the investigative process", using it as "but the flimsiest frame for the genre's real concern: depicting not the investigation of crime but the obliteration of criminals" (Lichtenfeld xvii). This can be said of many a superhero comic book, where a crime may be committed, but the plot does not follow Iron Man or Captain America meticulously conducting a search for culprits, but instead focuses on them apprehending and knocking out those who are responsible.

What structures the plot within the *action genre* is the "importance of violence", depictions which often exist in the form of "show-stopping sequences occurring at well-regulated intervals" (Lichtenfeld xvii). Just as poignant are "scenes of physical action, be they fistfights, gunfights, swordfights, fights against nature, risky escapes and so on" (xviii). Film critics and scholars are naturally discussing this genre and its components within the medium of film, where it is "born" around the same time as film censorship laws connected to the ominous *Production Code*[34] (Bernstein) are relaxed, and more realistic depictions of onscreen violence and gore become possible (Pollard). As previously mentioned, the *Comics Code*, implemented in the mid-fifties, functions as a form of censorship within the American comic book industry and similarly curtails depictions of violence and gore. It does not, however, restrict "scenes of physical action, be they fistfights, gunfights, swordfights, fights against nature, risky escapes and so on" (Lichtenfeld xviii), which are all the elements listed by Lichtenfeld as comprising the *action genre*. American comics books produce stories connected to all sorts of narrative genres where "taking action" is central to the plot: western comics, war comics, horror comics, crime comics, and, of course, superhero comics. Superhero stories are also, fundamentally, about taking action oneself, reacting to actions taken by others, and taking risks and punishment, which further connects them to the action genre.

As film scholar Henry O'Brien explains in *Action movies: The Cinema of Striking Back,* the will to act, to struggle as obstacles are overcome, and employing one's body to do so, further define the action genre, whose "heroes are being tested" (3) and where the focus is on "visualization and dramatization of action itself" (6). What defines the action hero is his or her decision to act, to attain agency, as action genre narratives "express a conscious articulation of the desire to act—to respond to the nemesis and eliminate the threat" (14). The genre turns action and violence into *spectacle*, something which is as true for the *Rambo*, *Terminator,* and *Die Hard* film series as it is for superhero comic book series. This is most easily recognizable when looking at the last twelve years of movies released within the *Marvel Cinematic Universe*: superhero blockbusters, all based on adaptations of Marvel Comics from the last sixty years. Superheroes may, overall, perform more fantastical forms of action than John

[34] Also referred to as Motion Picture Production Code, this form of self-censorship was in effect between 1934 and 1968. It regulated what Hollywood productions were and were not allowed to show on screen. The code regulated topics like violence, sexuality, or nudity, which is what links it to the Comics Code, which also regulated such topics.

Rambo, but they perform action nonetheless (O'Brien). Action heroes may use weapons during fights, or use their bodies as weapons (Lichtenfeld). 1980s action films starring martial artist, like Chuck Norris in the *Missing in Action* film series, are among the most direct examples. On posters for his films, the studios often advertise that "Chuck Norris doesn't need a weapon[…;] He is a weapon" (Lichtenfeld 98). The characters Norris portrays are usually defined by their "lack of expressiveness" which "translates into imperviousness" (102), which the character is admired for, and which shapes the idea that an "action star is someone who performs with his body and as such, he is, for the genre, a standard of masculinity" (102). Action heroes are doers, not talkers. Even more so than action heroes, superheroes subscribe to the idea that their body is the weapon: characters like Black Panther or Falcon use no weapons at all when they attack an enemy. And although Captain America has a weapon—a shield—his body is most definitely also a weapon. When Tony Stark dons his Iron Man suit, his body is a weapon, but only by having been technologically upgraded—while his biological body is, without technology, constantly at risk.

What further aligns action hero bodies and superhero bodies is that both display a body that is "driven, chased, hounded, 'pushed' beyond endurance" (O'Brien 42) and traumatized[35]. But by the end of the narrative installment, the body of the hero has successfully "endured its trials" (49) and is ready for the next challenge. Said trials produce injuries—wounds—although this never stops or destroys the hero, but only delays his reaction (Lichtenfeld; O'Brien). The action genre is invested in "visualization and dramatization of action itself" (O'Brien 6), as well as "extravagant spectacles of violence and power", but also "concerned with restoration and repair" (O'Brien 55). The action genre as such adds "regenerative possibilities" to the "image of masculinity" (55), built around images of injuries and images of action heroes "soldiering on" despite said injuries (Jeffords; Lichtenfeld; O'Brien). In this sense, the action genre marries "a stylised rendition of violence" (Prince 175) to an "aestheticisation of physical wounding and bodily punishment" (Fradley 240). But just as important as the action, wounds sustained, and punishments endured, is the "value placed on healing", since in this genre the "capacity to repair a physical wound indicates the potential to continue in a role of agency" (O'Brien 58).

[35]A further parallel between action heroes and superheroes are traumatic origins, which are integral to almost every superhero (Reynolds; Fingeroth; Brooker; Packer), but not to every action hero (Lichtenfeld; O'Brien). However, moments of traumatization—from physical injury to psychological trauma—happen in the majority of action and superhero narratives.

Action narratives are therefore just as much narratives of restoration as they are narratives of violent interactions between hero and villain. More than other narrative genres, they allow for masculinity enactment via "performing heroic feats" and "taking enormous risks". But as pointed out earlier, they also allow for depictions of internal and external traumatization. Both action heroes and superheroes deploy their bodies to prove, *again and again*, that they can be "strong, successful, capable, reliable, in control". This very physical enactment of masculinity becomes part of a *serial narrative* for both hero types, as proven by film series like *Rambo* or *Die Hard*, or superhero comic books, which, as stated above, function like continuous serials (Meteling, "To be continued").

In fact, many of O'Sullivan's six elements of serial narratives can be connected to normative masculinity enactment as well, especially *iteration*, *multiplicity,* and *momentum*. As mentioned earlier, this section is about highlighting that *serially narrating* what male superheroes do is also *serially narrating* how to "do" masculinity. As stated before, "doing" gender is "an act of improvisation within a scene of constraint", and the enactment of masculinity based on *homosocial competition*. What are the serial elements pointing out this act in superhero comics?

Obviously, any superhero's repeated use of violence to fight villains is a marker of manhood, but to use Kimmel's explanation again, granting manhood involves taking risks, performing heroic feats,

> all because we want other men to grant us our manhood. Masculinity as a homosocial enactment is fraught with danger, with the risk of failure, and with intense relentless competition.

Superheroes do all of the above on a serial, on an *iterative* basis. And not just in their own ongoing narratives, and in every adventure they appear in: but on *multiple* narrative fronts. The *momentum* of their adventures aims for readers to wait and anticipate how they are going to do this enactment successfully as they square up with villain after villain. But as my analysis chapters will show, superheroes also best villains to show their fellow superheroes that they have what it takes, as they feel the need to prove to other men, whose approval they seek, that they are "man enough".

When it comes to O'Sullivan's elements of *personnel* and *design*, superhero comics show why they are also *hybrid* texts in terms of masculinity enactment: as they borrow narrative elements such as soap opera elements, they effectively grant their male protagonists a softer masculinity. This is the *element of improvisation* this genre adds to gender enactment: men are allowed the capacity to be traumatized, anxious, and insecure while they are also shown as tough and violent (Easton). For Marvel Comics, this constant turns into a core element of how they put together their superhero protagonists.

As Bradford Wright points out in *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*, most superhero characters in the 1950s and 1960s are "handsome" men and women who live in either "clean, green suburbs" or "modern, even futuristic cities" (184). There is "nothing ambiguous about the hero's character, cause, or inevitable triumph" (184). Marvel Comics as a publisher is founded in 1961. Before that, it exists as Atlas Comics, a publisher belonging to the Independent News Company, a media conglomerate which owns numerous magazine and comic book publishers.

Having fallen on hard financial times in the 1950s, things are looking up around 1958, and former Atlas Comics editor Stan Lee is looking to hire artists (Wright; Howe). One of them, Jack Kirby, is really a re-hire, having worked for the publisher when it was still named Timely Comics, and later for Atlas, but having been let go due to business being bad. He and fellow artist Joe Simon had created Captain America for Timely Comics back in 1941[36]. Under the leadership of Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, and Steve Ditko—the other Stan Lee hire—Marvel Comics change the "superhero formula" by imagining their superheroes as ambiguous, and at times reluctant characters[37]. Starting with the first issue of the *Fantastic Four* (1961), named after the quartet of heroes it stars, Marvel Comics offer narratives where the protagonists have "distinct personalities" in terms of showing each of them as capable of displaying "an often-volatile mix of human emotions and personalities" (Wright 204-205): they are stubborn, authoritative, cheeky, melancholic, etc. Their origin stories are all tragic, either connected to

[36] For a more substantial overview on the history of Marvel Comics, see Howe, *Marvel Comics: The Untold Story;* Wright, *Comic Book Nation*; Jones, *Men of Tomorrow*; Hatfield, *Hand of Fire: The Comics Art of Jack Kirby*.

[37] As Wright, and later Gavaler, correctly point out: reluctant heroes may have been a new thing to superhero narratives, but the cowboy hero of western narratives have always been portrayed as characters reluctant to step in and save the community—although they always do so in the end (Wright; Gavaler, *Superhero Secret Origin*)

accidents or some form of personal loss. Stan Lee refers to this type of stories as "realistic fantasy" about "superheroes who performed amazing feats but evinced believable human qualities and failings" (Wright 207). While no Marvel superhero adventure is without spectacular displays of action and violence, as superheroes kick and punch their way to victory, there is also no Marvel story without moments that "emphasize the weakness and fragilities" (211) of these same characters. This, as discussed before, is what came to be understood as the *Marvel Method* (Wright).

In *Hand of Fire: the Comics Art of Jack Kirby* (2015), Charles Hatfield provides a deep analysis of Jack Kirby as an artist. He is the artist "responsible" for most superhero bodies analyzed in his thesis. Kirby's drawing style is, among comics scholars, referred to as both *narrative* and *non-realistic* (Hatfield). The early works of Jack Kirby at Marvel, which are the object of analysis in this thesis, are still a somewhat *realistic* Kirby. As Hatfield explains, "narrative drawing tends to be action- and character-oriented, streamlined[…]. Kirby's art certainly is" (66). But, as Jack Kirby works for Marvel Comics, referring to his style as *narrative* means something else: His artwork turns into the blueprint for many Marvel Comics. Working as a "layout artist" for Marvel Comics,

> Kirby performed much of the work of narrative drawing for other artists: establishing page design, composition, the staging of action and narrative flow. He also supplied plot notes, penciled directly onto the margins of the art boards. (106)

Don Heck, the artis responsible for the first appearances of Iron Man, draws the character according to Jack Kirby's layouts, as by that point, the "Marvel point of view […] was the Kirby point of view" (106). Around this time, Marvel Comics establish their own "assembly-line" style of work when it comes to finishing a single comic book issue: illustrators, inkers, and writers work in tandem (Howe; Hatfield*, Hand of Fire*). It is not easy to pick apart where Kirby's input ends and Lee's starts. However, by now it is safe to say that Stan Lee cannot be thought of as the sole mastermind behind Marvel Comics' early rise to fame.

Artistically, Kirby's work in the 1960s is still influenced by artists he admired, like Hal Foster who was discussed earlier. Foster was known for his early classical style in terms of rendering body proportions, and for adding more muscles to superhero bodies over time, thereby turning them into virtual bodybuilders (Dutton). Kirby, clearly influenced by Foster, draws all

male superheroes like bodybuilders. In fact, the *built* body is often the only type of male body to appear in Kirby drawings at all. But while Foster is often referred to as drawing figures who appear rather relaxed, Kirby's drawings display much more dynamic tension and activity (Hatfield*, Hand of Fire*). Kirby's art implies movement non-stop: "Kirby draws characters with their legs five feet apart, not because this is how they are supposed to look at rest but because, clearly, they are *not* at rest" (45), but rather just about to leap into action. These bodies appear bulky and muscular, yet Kirby's panel composition always renders them in action: about to leap or jump or punch. Each panel "suggests directionality, purpose, and fierce, frenetic energy" (46). Kirby's style, infused by this need for continuous action and mobility in a medium where all movement only happens in the mind of the reader, serves as background for reading superhero comics as masculinity enactment. If taken literally, all male characters analyzed here are stuck. But Kirby's art convinces us that they are anything but. They can move from being tough to being soft, from being devasted in this panel to being triumphant in the next. Superhero comics offer a very *hybrid* masculinity enactment to their male superheroes.

The Fantastic Four are followed by The Incredible Hulk, Spider-Man, Doctor Strange, as well as Ant-Man, Iron Man, and Captain America. They all adhere to this method in one way or another. And they all, some earlier than others, interact with other characters in a way that turns their adventurers into soap operas, as writers and artists are "inviting readers to return every month to check in on the latest trials and tribulations of the character and his supporting cast" (Wright 212). It is a routine first fully realized in Spider-Man comics, but as times goes by, most Marvel characters get this kind of treatment. As a genre, soap operas stress interpersonal relationships and amass what is usually referred to as melodramatic moments (Williams). These are moments in which something happens to the characters that they cannot control, to which they can only react. In "'Worlds within Worlds': the rise of superheroes in Marvel and DC Universes", literature scholar Jason Bainbridge points out the parallels between Marvel Comics storytelling and melodramatic storytelling.

As film scholar Linda Williams clarifies: as a narrative technique, melodrama "seeks dramatic revelation of moral and emotional truths through a dialectic of pathos and action" (48). It wants to elicit pity for characters from readers or viewers, and usually

> consists of a story that generates sympathy for a hero who is also a victim and that leads to a climax that permits the audience, and usually other characters, to recognise that character's moral value. (58)

With only slight variations, this is exactly what happens to Marvel's superhero characters. As Bainbridge points out, "Marvel storytelling came from melodrama", which is not surprising given that melodramatic narration[38] revolves around

> extreme states of being, situations, actions, and emotions; inflated and extravagant expression; overt villainy that manifests itself in dark plots, suspense, persecution of the good (by the villain) and the final reward of virtue[…;] all elements that clearly map onto the Marvel Universe. (68)

As Bainbridge goes on to explain, melodramatic plots usually focus on a passive victim to whom awful things happen, against which they only have their virtue to offer. Many Marvel heroes qualify, as their *origin story*—often a brutal accident as in the case of Hulk or Iron Man—often fits this scheme. Tony Stark is badly injured in Vietnam and can only *react* to it afterwards. The same goes for Bruce Banner. To Bainbridge, Peter Parker a.k.a Spiderman is Marvel's most straightforward melodramatic hero: he gets his power via a laboratory accident and later loses his Uncle Ben to a tragic crime he could have prevented if he had acted, which he refused to do at the time. His *reaction* is to become a crime-fighting vigilante, in an effort to redeem himself. The fact that the villains who populate superhero comics are usually "driven by […] morally negative emotions such as ambition, avarice, anger, jealousy, or lust" (69) further underlines Marvel's melodramatic qualities.

There is, however, one melodramatic element which Marvel Comics rather poignantly change: "melodrama's protagonists were generally female" (69), and Marvel's heroes are generally male. Bainbridge's observations strengthen my argument. As he observes, female characters appearing in melodrama are marked by their "stereotypically feminine qualities" such as "weakness, passivity" (69). These are qualities which inform Bruce Banner when he is not the Hulk, and they certainly inform Tony Stark after his accident. Because although he has built a technological "fix" for himself, he is constantly weakened after his accident. Bainbridge suggests:

> "In making their heroes melodramatic protagonists, Marvel effectively "feminized" their heroes (along traditional melodramatic gender-binaries) by placing them in the

[38] As is theorized by Peter Brooks in *The Melodramatic Imagination*.

> melodramatic protagonist's role of the good, passive victim. They disguised this "feminization" by simultaneously reinforcing hegemonic masculinity through bodily performance […] and masculine values of strength, activeness, speed, virility, stamina and fortitude […] that become the basis of super heroic abilities. (70)

Where Bainbridge sees a disguised feminization, my argument suggests an act of *hybridization* in the name of patriarchy (Demetriou). I agree with Bainbridge that when Peter Parker or Tony Stark appear as their superhero alter-egos, they carry the most normatively masculine traits tied to the attributes he names. But when they appear in their civilian identity, they are just as much "the hero of the story" and as such eligible to "do" hegemonic masculinity. In fact, it is my argument that what Wright refers to as the *Marvel Age*—the 1960s and early 1970s, when superhero narratives are routinely equipped with melodramatic elements—adds softer elements—usually *subordinated* and *marginalized* within patriarchal hierarchies (Connell)—to the homosocial enactment of masculinity (Kimmel). This does not mean that this enactment is no longer "fraught with danger, with the risk of failure, and with the intense relentless competition". It only means that acting soft and in normatively masculine ways no longer cancel each other out. Within superhero narratives, such possibilities to act, such capacity for violent destruction and softness (Easton) coexist "in the form of the hero".

Jumping Into Action

This first part of my thesis provides the historical and socio-cultural context, while the second part will provide examples via content analysis. As mentioned at the beginning, those Marvel Comics to feature the very first appearances of Captain America, Iron Man, Black Panther, and Falcon are the focus of this critical reading, in an analysis of issues of *Tales of Suspense*, *Captain America*, *Invincible Iron Man,* and *Avengers* published between 1963 and 1975.

Socio-historical concepts which apply to more than one superhero, like the breadwinner principle or the playboy philosophy, have already been explained. However, specific concepts more closely linked to only one character—such as the *masculinization of technology* or the *Military-Industrial Complex* in the case of Iron Man; narrative tropes like *White Savior* and *Magical Negro* (Hughey; Glenn and Cunningham) in the case of Black Panther and Falcon; as

well as the *Blaxploitation* and the *buddy action-comedy genre* in the case of Falcon; are explained directly in the analysis chapters focusing on the respective characters.

All texts in this analysis offer male bodies to the reader's *gaze*; bodies which are both tough and muscular, but also emotionally as well as physically vulnerable. They feature male characters performing heroic feats and taking enormous risks, as they prove their masculinity to other men—be they superhero, villain, or bystander. And they all pull it off, and then prove it *again and again,* as one adventure blends into the next.

The vulnerable male body is most central to the first two superheroes analyzed: Captain America and Iron Man. In the case of Steve Rogers/Captain America, a male body unable to go for the “masculine look" is so unacceptable that it must be entirely re-made. But even after being turned into a super-soldier by a medical experiment, Steve Rogers's body is only invulnerable on the surface. Mixing the tough with the fragile, or the action with the soap opera, Marvel Comics present their Captain America as a man unsure of himself and insecure about his place in society, whenever he's not taking action against an enemy. And while Rogers espouses all the military ideals of manliness (Morgan, "Theater of War"; Barrett), he fails all other 1960s masculinity requirements, like being a breadwinner or provider (Ehrenreich).

The vulnerable male body is even more central to the adventures of Marvel's Iron Man: a near-fatal accident, leading to a lasting physical vulnerability, is at the center of his origin story. Although Tony Stark finds a way to work around his injury, he never overcomes or resolves it completely. When he dons his Iron Man suit, he is as powerful or tough as all his other colleagues, but the possibility of failure, of the technology granting him his power failing him, is closer than it is with all other characters. As is usually the case with action heroes, Iron Man is a superhero for whom even "the body of the hero" turns out not to be a "safe space" at all (Tasker, *Spectacular*). He is, without a doubt, Marvel Comics' most active Cold Warrior (Costello). Stark can easily check off "proper" 1960s masculinity displays like being a success at this job and being a playboy. Yet he is also highly vulnerable all the time, and marries constant displays of violence with physical traumatization (Jeffords, "Masculinity Terminated") in ways the other characters selected for analysis do not.

Marvel's Black Panther, when he first appears, reads like a Black Power *dream*. He is powerful, wealthy, and a head-of-state: he interacts with all three masculinity archetypes Kimmel describes: *Genteel Patriarch*, *Heroic Artisan* and *Self-Made Man*, a feat only Tony Stark also manages to pull off. No Black character appearing in Marvel Comics superhero stories prior T'Challa can claim this. Still, Marvel Comics inject enough reality into the "realistic fantasy" of Black Panther's first appearances—such as experiences of institutional racism when he moves to the States—that the fact that being Black and being super is a novel thing in the mid-sixties cannot be missed. Racism enters and interferes with T'Challa's actions as a superhero in a way it simply does not do where Iron Man or Captain America are concerned.

Racism also affects Falcon in his early adventures, but not in the same way as Black Panther. Unlike his African colleague, Sam Wilson/Falcon's debut is much more affected by *Magical Negro* and *White Savior* tropes. In his origin story, Captain America pretty much plays the part of White Savior, and Falcon is positioned as a Magical Negro character. But when Falcon becomes Captain America's partner in crimefighting, that is when Marvel Comics giving the audience their first bi-racial *buddy action* narrative starring two superheroes. As superheroes, they are equals, even if the comics featuring Falcon also make a returning feature of his insecurity, his desire to prove to Captain America and other superheroes that he is "man enough" to do this job.

Black Panther and Falcon become Marvel Comics' strongest example of "doing" hegemonic masculinity as a *hybrid bloc* in a way that upholds patriarchal values (Demetriou; Yang). When they appear for the first time, they are granted access to "doing" hegemonic masculinity "in the form of the hero" in ways no Black characters have been able to prior to their arrival. Black Panther is not only Marvel's first Black superhero, but their first Black patriarch, and Falcon—albeit with a lot less disposable wealth— follows closely behind.

Masculinity Enactment and Early Captain America Comic Books

As with the other characters chosen for analysis in this thesis', the point of interest here is how masculinity enactment takes place in comic books featuring Captain America. The focus is on his very first appearances starting in 1941, as well as his reappearance in 1964[39]. As stated earlier, masculinity is something one "does", a *homosocial enactment*, which men need to repeat *again and again* so that other people, but especially other men, grant them masculinity (Kimmel). It turns into a "currency […] in which privilege and esteem are traded" (Anderson 42). Discussed here are the ways in which Captain America/Steve Rogers "does" masculinity—how he goes about enacting gender, which, as Butler points out, is always a "practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint" (*Undoing Gender* 1). Once he resurfaces in 1964, the character interacts with masculinity enactments typical of the period (Ehrenreich; Cuordileone), but also carries over elements tied to *militarized masculinity* (Higate; Parpart and Partridge), which are rather central to his debut in 1941. Masculinity enactment in early Captain America adventures always involves "several stories at once".

Steve Rogers/Captain America is one of Marvel Comics' oldest superhero characters. He is one of a few characters[40] already in existence before Marvel Comics exists as a publisher. The character, created by Joe Simon and Jack Kirby, is a product of 'Marvel's predecessor Timely Comics. First published in 1941, he starts out in his own series *Captain America Comics,* which runs between 1941 and 1950. Due to very low sales, the series is discontinued, and only picked up again in 1964, when the character resurfaces in Marvel Comics' *Avengers* #4. This chapter provides an analysis of the very first adventures this superhero is involved in, first in 1941, and then again in 1964.

What sets Captain America/Steve Rogers appearing in Timely Comics apart from the Captain America/Steve Rogers who appears in Marvel Comics is the degree with which the superhero character subscribes to Stan Lee's concept of Marvel telling a "realistic fantasy" (Wright 206)

[39] In 1941 the character has his own series titled *Captain America Comics* an in 1964 he is featured in the comic book anthology series *Tales of Suspense* as well as the *Avengers* series. He gains his own solos series*, Captain America*, in 1968.

[40] Other characters include Prince Namor the Submariner, and the Human Torch. Both also resurface in the 1960s after the founding of Marvel Comics.

about its superheroes. This connects to "doing" hegemonic masculinity as a *hybrid bloc* (Demetriou). Back in 1941, the origin story of Captain America is a tale of Steve Rogers getting rid of *subordinate* masculine qualities—such as having a soft, not tough or muscular, body. But just because his body is now tough does not mean that no subordinated moments occur in his adventures.

Meet Captain America, or Going for the Masculine Look as an Act of Transformation

The origin story of Captain America, who is referred to as "one of America's saviors" (Simon and Kirby, *"Meet Captain America"* 6) in his introduction in 1941, is an act of transformation: a frail male body is transformed into a muscular male "take no shit body" (Bordo 57), and thereby into an *action hero* body (Tasker, *Spectacular*). It is an origin story which establishes frail and skinny male bodies as unsustainable, and naturalizes the *built* body as the only viable superheroic body[41]. Therefore, the most obvious constraint in terms of "doing" gender is the character's body: it must be transformed. This transformation is Captain America's origin story. If one applies the logic that all superheroes have tragic or traumatic origin stories (Reynolds; Fingeroth; Brooker; Coogan), this turns a male body that is not "styled for […] the masculine look"(Easthope)—thereby threatening the possibility of enacting masculinity successfully—into a tragic or traumatic origin. The threat is neutralized by transforming the body of the protagonist. Steve Rogers transforms from being skinny into being muscular; from having an average male body into having a *developed*, a *built* body (Dutton).

First depicted in "Meet Captain America" the origin story starts with the American President—although unnamed, the drawing strongly resembles Franklin D. Roosevelt—introducing two US Army officers to a Mr. "J. Arthur Grover"[42], the head of the FBI. The officers are looking for effective ways to fight Nazi saboteurs operating in the United States. Grover takes the two

[41] The superhero comics genre naturalizes the *built* male body as the only acceptable body for its protagonists and has been since its inception in 1936. Over the decades, a tendency develops to make superhero bodies ever bulkier, especially by artists like Jack Kirby (Hatfield, *Hand of Fire*). Yet there are exceptions. During the 1960s, Marvel Comics offers a few less bulky superheroes: Mr. Fantastic, Spiderman, and Doctor Strange. In superhero comics, body types are often artistic style choices: Spiderman and Doctor Strange are created by artist Steve Ditko, not Jack Kirby.

[42] Calling him J. Edgar Hoover may have been too on the nose for Timely Comics. Hoover had been the director of the FBI since 1924.

men to a laboratory hidden behind a shop called "CURIOS" (Simon and Kirby, *"Meet Captain America"* 3), where the experiment which creates Captain America takes place. In this origin story, it is literally the body that not just *makes* the man but also *names* the man: prior to the scientific experiment which grants him a muscular body and superhuman physical strength, the "frail young man" (4) is not referred to by name. This demonstrates a logic of no "proper" body equals no "proper" masculinity enactment equals no eligibility to a name as an identity marker. After having volunteered to join the army but being rejected due to his "unfit condition" (5), the character volunteered for this experiment. The panel depicts him bare-chested and rather skinny in the lab, where he "allows himself to be innoculated [sic] with the strange seething liquid" (4). Afterwards, the yet nameless character is depicted with a serrated white aura around him, as his body "develops". And not just his body, as the scientist who injected him, Prof. Reinstein, explains to the people witnessing the experiment:

> Little does he realize that the serum coursing through his blood is rapidly building up his body and brain tissues until his stature and intelligence increase to an amazing degree. (7)

His body grows taller and develops muscle mass: it turns into a body "going for the masculine look". Only now does the young man receive a name: "We shall call you Captain America" (7). The plan is for this to be "the first of a corps of super-agents whose mental and physical ability will make them a terror to spies and saboteurs" (7); but one of said saboteurs, who is in the audience, foils this plan by murdering the scientist. In the process, the vial containing the last remaining serum is destroyed. Captain America's first action is to pursue the perpetrator and attack him, causing the saboteur to crash into a piece of technical equipment which electrocutes him. Captain America's only comment is: "a fate well deserved!" (7)[43]. The story then refers to Captain America—now depicted in his signature red, white, and blue uniform complete with a shield—as a "powerful force in the battle against spies and saboteurs", whose "name becomes a symbol of courage" (7). The respective panels depict him looking and running straight ahead. Only then, once his mission has been established and Captain America depicted "in action", is the character given a civilian identity, a name: Steve Rogers. The comic concludes by showing the army Camp Lehigh, where Private Steve Rogers is stationed. He is found out to be Captain America by underage "Bucky Barnes, mascot of the regimen" (7).

[43] At the time, villains being killed off in superhero comics is no extraordinary thing. Only around the mid-1940s do publishers opt for a less violent solution when it comes to superheroes defeating their enemies (Jones; Brooker).

Initially angered by being discovered, Rogers quickly recruits the boy as his sidekick: "From now on we must both share this secret together…that means you're my partner, Bucky!" (8). It's an easy recruitment, as one of the final textboxes of the story confirms: "So Bucky's dream is fulfilled as he fights side by side with Captain America against the vicious elements who seek to overthrow the U.S. Government!" (8). At the end of the first adventure, the character's mission, costume, and secret identity—all necessary to denote Captain America as a proper superhero (Coogan)—are established, and the tone for his 1940s adventures is set. He is obviously an ardently nationalist superhero, but this side of the character has been discussed from various angles over the last decades and is not the focus for this thesis[44]. What is of interest to this thesis is how this origin-as-an-act-of-transformation story interacts with "doing masculinity". In the case of Captain America, this is all about acquiring an "adequate"—going for the masculine look—male body to complement the "adequate" mindset the character already has. After all, the "frail young man" is shown as someone who "wants to serve his country" (5) and therefore volunteers for the experiment. Kimmel's idea that "the body is the man" is so central to this origin narrative that the character's civilian name—Steve Rogers—is only provided after Captain America has been depicted in action for the first time in "Meet Captain America".

The necessity for physical transformation depicted in this first story reveals how much superheroes and action heroes have in common: both "are constructed through their physicality […] and the display of the body" (Tasker, *Spectacular* 35). This body needs to follow a certain look: the muscular look (Easthope; Dutton). Without muscles, the character is not granted a "phallic body" indicative of "masculine authority" (Bordo 87). Nowhere is the notion "the body is the man" more central than in Captain America stories: only once Steve Rogers has a body going for the masculine look, is the protagonist able to enact "proper" masculinity and to be "strong, successful, capable, reliable, in control". Rogers's method of acquiring his *phallic body* is a marvelous fantasy: he does not have to train, diet, or work out; he just swallows a scientific formula, and this turns him into a superhero manufactured by science rather than an exercise regimen (Hack; Reich; Jeffrey).

[44] For detailed material on Captain America as nationalist superhero, see Dittmer, *Captain America and the nationalist superhero* or Weiner, *Captain America and the Struggle of the Superhero*.

This is a further reminder that a body always has a socio-cultural dimension and is "a fundamental resource. It provides us with the most direct clue to our place in society and to the roles we are expected to perform" (Dutton 169). In the case of Captain America, the body is only allocated a meaningful place in society once it has been transformed from frail to muscular. This logic corresponds to the legacies of men like Eugen Sandow and Charles Atlas, both at some point referred to as "the World's Most Perfectly Developed Man" as well as "the world's most handsome man" (Atlas qtd. in Reich 456), whose fame and fortune rests upon turning "the strength of the male physique" into "an object to be admired solely by virtue of the advanced muscular development" (Dutton 122). Their fate also depends on selling their body image, and ways to acquire it, to other men: they sell dietary supplements, dieting guidebooks, exercise equipment (Kasson; Reich), as well as "assorted muscle-building schemes" (Hack 82) to customers. Atlas advertises his products and methods in magazines and in comic books (Hack; Reich). In some ads, Atlas states: "What's my job? I manufacture weaklings into men!" (qtd. in Reich 456), while his muscular body is on display wearing nothing but a leotard. Captain America's body is most definitively "manufactured": it is, after all, not the result of "some assorted muscle building schemes" but the wished-for outcome of "chemical or genetic modification to the cells in Rogers's body rather than through exercise" (Hack 82). It therefore constitutes cheating: the achievement of "muscular masculinity" (Tasker, "Dumb Movies" 233) by science rather than exercise. However, both science and fitness regimen serve the same goal here: they advocate for bodily perfection "via perfectibility", via "the possibility of […] perfecting bodies" (Dutton 124). And the "perfect" male body that Rogers acquires is the body going for "the masculine look".

Captain America's origin story is told a second time after the character's return in 1964. In *Tales of Suspense* #63, published in March 1965, the story titled "The Origin of Captain America" retells Steve's origins, this time by Marvel Comics. Some details are changed, and some narrative blanks are filled in. The program to create "a corps of super-agents" is now titled "Operation Rebirth" (Lee*, Epic Collection* Cap 1 114). Unlike in 1941, the male protagonist is addressed by name right away. He is described via textbox as "a thin, somewhat sickly-looking youth" who enters the laboratory "with obvious nervousness, yet with a firm, fearless tread" (115). In the lab, the scientist—now called Dr. Erskine—addresses him by name and then hands him a big, fuming glass vial, instructing him to "drink this quickly before the

chemicals lose their potency! Good luck, my boy!" (116). At the same time, a textbox on the top of the panel states

> Steve Rogers! Too puny, too sickly, to by accepted by the army! Steve Rogers! Chosen from hundreds of similar volunteers because of his courage, his intelligence, and his willingness to risk death for his country if the experiment should fail! (116)

While the 1965 panels depict Rogers as just as frail and skinny as the comics back in 1941 did, the real difference is how the textboxes "reevaluate" Steve Rogers. In 1941, it is only after the "upgrade" that readers are informed about the volunteer's name at all. Back then, the experiment is also described as growing not just his muscles but his brain tissue, indicating that the young man may have been not just physically, but also mentally frail. But now, Steve Rogers is depicted and described as a man possessing all the *internal* qualities hegemonic masculinity demands, but none of the *external* ones: he is a man without a (man's) body, which excludes him from enacting normative manhood. However: he may be lacking a masculine body, but he is also introduced as a man willing to take risks—here in the form of taking part in the experiment—in order to change his prospects. And a willingness to take risks is a prerequisite for normative hegemonic masculinity enactment (Kimmel), which Rogers already exhibits here. Once he has swallowed the contents of the tube—in 1941 it is injected rather than swallowed—the panels once more show him engulfed in a white aura as his body grows in both height and mass. But this time, Steve verbalizes the strain the serum causes him: "Everything is spinning…Blacking out! Must hang on…Hang on…!" (116). Dr. Erskine encourages him to hang on, that "this is the moment of crisis! You must survive it!" (116). Rogers does survive this crisis and is rewarded with a masculine body. Just like in 1941, his first action is to go after the Nazi spy who murders Dr. Erskine, but this time he offers no grim comment when the villain is electrocuted. This retelling fills in one more blank when it clarifies that "Steve Rogers is given a dramatic new identity by the army" to act as Captain America, but also states that he acted "alone and unaided" (118) during World War Two, which upholds his vigilante status. Bucky Barnes's origin is also revealed. In 1941, no explanation is provided for why he is Camp Lehigh's mascot, but now a textbox reveals that "when Bucky Barnes' G.I. father died in training, Fort Lehigh adopted the orphan boy as camp mascot!" (119). What is further provided is evidence of the risk that Steve takes, and the possibility for failure he accepted. And these are what Kimmel would describe as prerequisites for *enacting normative masculinity in homosocial settings*: "fraught with danger" ("Homophobia" 129) as it is, it yields

the possibility to project the idea of "a man *in* power, a man *with* power, a man *of* power" (125).

Once Rogers has suffered through the experiment, he can lay claim to all of this. In 1941, the scientist who invented the formula further grants him his masculinity by calling him "one of America's saviors" (Simon and Kirby, "Meet Captain America" 6). In 1964, a textbox refers to him as "a new defender…destined to be a living symbol of the glory of America!" (Lee, *Epic Collection Cap* 1 116).

While nationalist sentiment is high in both renderings of his origin story, what also marks the character is an adherence to *military masculinity* much more straightforward than with other Marvel superhero characters. As explained in "Theories and Histories of Masculinities", *military masculinity* and concepts like Teddy Roosevelt's "The Strenuous Life" inform "new meanings for manhood" (Rotundo 223), which take root in the US in the late nineteenth century and emanate into the twentieth century. Also, hegemonic masculinity and military manliness often overlap and therefore often appear to be synonymous in Western nations like the US (Morgan, "Theater of War"; Barrett). Captain America subscribes to tenets of "The Strenuous Life"—the idea of not being complacent, but taking up the "positive virtue of resolution, of courage, of indomitable will, of power to do without shrinking the rough work that must always be done" (Roosevelt 257); and especially, the idea of not being thrown off by failure but persevering. These are qualities also asked of soldiers, since military manhood usually involves "physical toughness, the endurance of hardships, aggressiveness, a rugged heterosexuality, unemotional logic, and a refusal to complain" (Barrett 81). All male superhero characters analyzed here interact with these tenets, especially the refusal to complain. Captain America is among the characters who most directly embody all traits named by Barrett, when he's in action.

As Private Steve Rogers, he represents another side of the military: militaries are organizations based on hierarchy. They implement a strict hierarchy where soldiers are taught how to take orders, and to follow them. The hierarchy teaches that "[m]ilitary discipline refers to and thus encompasses the total individual's conformity to a prescribed role[…]. The objective of basic

training is to shape the total person into being a disciplined cog within the military machine" (Arkin and Dobrofsky 158). Taking orders is what defines Private Rogers in 1941.

Rogers's behavior is also informed by the military culture's "ideological emphasis on homosociality" (Morgan, “Theater of War” 168), since soldiers internalize that they "succeed or fail as a unit[…]. We live or die together. We put our lives in each other's hands" (Barrett 83). This is especially obvious in the way Steve and Bucky function as a unit, which defines the characters in 1941 as well as in 1964, even after Steve loses Bucky. Most importantly though: as Captain America, the character has access to all the "masculine highlights" listed by Barrett, but as Steve Rogers he is much more informed by the military discipline of taking orders (Morgan, "Theater of War").

Powerful, Subordinated, and Relaxed: Captain America in Action in the 1940s

The first comic book series to feature the character, called *Captain America Comics*, runs from 1941 to 1950. The character is never closer to leading an actual military life than in this first series: Private Rogers and his roommate Barnes are stationed at Camp Lehigh, where they are under the constant and patronizing watch of Sergeant Duffy. Switching between following and ignoring his orders, Steve and Bucky learn of crimes committed by people suspected of being spies or collaborators, and then—never with official permission—leave camp to "investigate" as masked vigilantes, referred to by the author as the "daring nemesis of crime" (Simon and Kirby, *"Meet Captain America”* 13).

However, this does not mean that Captain America is an official member of the American military in the 1940s. He is a vigilante like most of his colleagues at the time (Weldon; Brooker), although in his case, the FBI sponsors his act of transformation, and the character is sporadically shown notifying the FBI about his actions as a vigilante.

The first cover of *Captain America Comics,* dated March 1941, has become infamous for its depiction of Captain America punching Adolf Hitler in the face, yet most stories published in the 1940s do not take Captain America (Cap for short) away from American shores. Instead, the character fights his enemies on US soil: Nazi or Japanese (their war allies) soldiers, spies,

and conspirators, as well as American Nazi-collaborators who want to bring down the American government and its military capabilities. In terms of narrative genre, the texts mix elements from thriller, action, horror, and science-fiction; and, this being a *serial narrative*, plots are often repetitive: Steve and Bucky detect or suspect a threat, check it out, and neutralize it.

In terms of "doing" masculinity as a homosocial enactment, this male protagonist is placed in a setting where, as Captain America, normatively hegemonic masculinity comes easy to him: his sidekick Bucky approves of how he deals with enemies, as do other military officials. To them, he is "a man *in* power, a man *with* power, a man *of* power", and as Cap, he displays all the "glory" bits of militarized masculinity: he acts assertively, aggressively, and takes risks; endures hardships and refuses to complain about any of it; all while he gets the job done (Barrett). Bucky and Steve share a strong friendship, which is highly homosocial and features all the softer sides of military masculinity, such as showing concern and giving care (Morgan "Theater of War"; Henry and Higate). As Private Rogers, nobody apart from Bucky grants Steve traditional masculinity: Sergeant Duffy constantly berates and badgers him, his love interest Betty Ross is indifferent to him, and the comics don't really bring in other characters who value Rogers. In those sequences, the character is always in a *subordinated* position. It is where the comics highlight the other, the less glamorous side of military manhood: men having been positioned within hierarchies and having to take orders, having to take abuse from other men and just endure it stoically (Morgan, "Theater of War"; Parpart and Partridge).

Timely Comics' *Captain America Comics* use such moments of being subordinated by Duffy, as well as sequences showing his friendship and care for Bucky, to establish its male protagonist as not only having "capacity for violence" but also capacity for "softness and tenderness" (Easton 136). Marvel Comics explore this in much more depth when Captain America resurfaces in 1964 and becomes part of the "Marvel Age" of superheroes (Wright). Compared to the moments of anger and despair that inform Steve Rogers in the 1960s, 1940s Steve Rogers lacks many of the human fragilities (Wright) that inform Marvel's male superheroes two decades later.

However, both Timely and Marvel provide hegemonic masculinity as a *hybrid bloc*: their protagonist is both in power and subordinate to it; he is both "strong, successful, capable, reliable, in control", and he is not. The comics therefore provide hybridized hegemonic manhood "in the form of the hero'" (Donaldson), since the plot does not exchange a powerless Private for an almighty Captain America; it keeps both. Rogers is either shown as not bothered by moments of powerlessness, or willing to retaliate in humorous ways: the comics have him prank "Sarge" Duffy more than once.

The comics provide readers with a male protagonist who enacts all the types of Connell's masculinities: *hegemonic*, *complicit*, and *subordinate*. Given how Captain America debuts in a time when the US is still suffering from the aftermath of the Great Depression, this should not go unmentioned. For men, the Depression delivers a "system-wide shock to their ability to prove manhood" (Kimmel, *Manhood* 192). The United States regards itself as a nation of "Self-Made" men, of males adhering to what Kimmel refers to as "Marketplace Masculinity" ("Homophobia" 128) where men receive their esteem, their self-worth "as men", from their performance in the marketplace, in the workplace (Rotundo; Kimmel). But this place now turns against them:

> For most men the Depression was emasculating both at work and at home. Unemployed men lost status with their wives and children and saw themselves as impotent patriarchs (Kimmel, *Manhood* 199)

Captain America Comics provide readers with a man who not only enacts multiple masculinities, but also interacts with Kimmel's archetypes of American masculinity. Rogers enacts Connell's *complicit* manhood: masculinities "constructed in ways that realize the patriarchal dividend" (*Masculinities* 79). As a Private and as a superhero, his attitude towards women is both patronizing and chivalrous. Yet, he is far from *Self-Made* in terms of his interactions in the workplace: as Rogers, he takes rather than gives orders, and is in a *subordinate* position. But as Captain America, and therefore outside of his military workplace, he is most ardently *Self-Made* and equipped with *hegemonic* power. First, he volunteers and receives a scientifically engineered make-over. Once transformed, he goes on to prove that no one can best him by going after villains as Captain America on a regular basis, or as Kimmel would see it, *again and again*. Together with his sidekick Bucky, he enacts the role of Kimmel's *Heroic Artisan*: they have a lower middle class background and form "a community of equals"

("Homophobia" 123); and as superheroes, both embody physical strength and perform autonomous actions. Following the logic of the plot, all of this is only possible after "the frail young man" transforms his body from skinny to masculine: only a masculine body makes masculinity enactment possible.

Cap's powers are never explained in much detail, but his muscular physique and his enormous strength are emphasized in the drawings, where Rogers always sports a broad chest and even broader shoulders. His body is both a "take no shit body" (Bordo) and a *phallic body* standing in for "phallic authority" (101) that functions "more unambiguously as a symbol of strength, power and upward aspiration" (91). Textboxes refer to him "exerting every ounce of his mighty power" (Simon and Kirby, "Meet Captain America" 5) or explain how "Captain America's steel muscles prove more than a match" (5) for whatever opponent he is fighting. Sometimes his stealth and agility are likened to an animal's ability, as he is said to have "the lithe movements of a stalking panther" (Simon and Kirby, “Horror Hospital” 43). This is where the character dabs into "primitive masculinity" (Rotundo 223): the ability to enact "civilized manliness" with just enough "masculine primitive" (Rotundo; Bederman) as demanded by the "new meanings for manhood" (Rotundo 223). Cap satisfies "the double bind of masculinity" (Bordo 242), whereby male bodies are idealized as "an unstoppable force of nature" who nevertheless bow to the rules of civilization (234-240). He tests his masculinity enactment against the villains he fights and defeats throughout the series.

Most villains Cap fights are foreigners, some of them aided by American collaborators. Their depictions are always racist: Japanese characters are depicted looking like snakes or monkeys, and in any case far less muscular, tough, or human than Captain America or Bucky. This simply illustrates a sad routine of American comic books at the time, where non-Western and non-white characters are routinely drawn in such fashion (Brooker; Yanes; Gavaler). Nazis are usually depicted as human-looking with grotesque features, rather than as subhuman or animal-like creatures. Whenever Cap and Bucky battle Asian villains, the opposite is the case. Captain America's Asian adversaries carry far fewer traits of human than of animal physicality. They appear in stories titled "Captain America and the Deathless Monster", "Captain America meets the Fang", or "Captain America and the Riddle of the Great Sea Dragon". This fits into a long and atrocious tradition of Asian characters in American comic books being "presented as

demonic subhumans" (Yanes 58); and like in most other US popular fictions at the time, Asians are never "portrayed positively in comic books. An Asian, who was not the villain, was usually portrayed as being incompetent" (Yanes 60). As with Nazi villains, Captain America apprehends and often kills them without so much as a second thought. In contrast to them, Captain America and Bucky as examples of white masculinity demonstrate the principle of "coloniz[ing] the definition of normal" (Dyer, "White—Images" 142).

Asian villains further turn into what Susan Jeffords classifies as the "soft bodies" of enemies (*Hard Bodies* 24). Almost without exception, Asian characters in the comics stand in for "errant bodies" which are indicative of "disease, immorality" (24) and most of all danger. They are usually drawn as long and skinny, hardly ever as muscular or bulky. In "Captain America meets the Fang", the titular villain, a high-ranking Japanese soldier, and his followers are depicted with claws instead of fingernails, and faces with the exaggerated slit-eyes often used as a short-hand to mark Asian ethnicity (Yanes; McWilliams). Fang, especially, is depicted with the facial features of a monkey baring dozens of fang-like teeth, while the rest of his body is very slender, almost androgynous. In contrast to him, Captain America embodies what Jeffords marks as a "hard body", which is "the normative body […] that enveloped strength, labor, determination, loyalty and courage" (*Hard Bodies* 24). His body is also usually taller and bulkier. Where Asian villains appear as more heavily muscled than Cap, their depiction is at the same time even more dehumanized. In "Captain America and the Deathless Monster", Cap's opponents are green skinned, "deathless"—since they appear to be immortal—monsters. Their heads are disproportionally larger than the rest of their physique, and they have fangs instead of regular teeth, and claws instead of regular fingernails. Smuggled into the US by an American collaborator, they tower over Captain America, who struggles, but eventually succeeds in defeating them.

By comparison, Nazi spies and soldiers are depicted as ugly, but not as dehumanized. They, too, are drawn as skinny rather than muscular. In stories like "Trapped in the Nazi Stronghold!", "Captain America and the spy ambush", or "Captain America goes on to Berlin", Cap battles Nazi soldiers and spies. At the end of "Captain America goes to Berlin", Bucky and Captain America exchange punches with Himmler and Göring. Compared to Cap and Bucky, the two high-ranking Nazis are depicted as pompous and overweight. Like other Nazi

characters, they look ugly and are depicted as stupid, silly, and utterly incapable of defeating Captain America or Bucky. None of them are ever as tall or as muscular as the superhero, and even if five or six Nazi spies or soldiers try to defeat Cap all at once, they fail. Cap is presented as a force of nature, or as the comics describe it: "the cyclone strikes again!" (Simon and Lee, "Murder stalks the Maneuvers" 22) as he overpowers them.

This is further underlined in "Captain America and the spy ambush" , where a Nazi "super soldier" makes an appearance. Having followed a group of Nazi soldiers into their compound, Cap and Bucky fight them, as well as their leader Mara (a female spy), and a creature some Nazi scientists have "created": Franz. Franz enters the fight described as a "lumbering six-foot mountain of a man"(Simon et al. "Captain America and the Spy Ambush" 10). He is bald, shirtless, and exposing a heavily muscled chest. Unimpressed, Captain America shouts, "Out of my way, you lummox", while the accompanying textbox clarifies, "Captain America is too enraged to worry about Teutonic giants! Franz becomes just another hateful obstacle to be smashed down!" (10). The sight of Captain America punching out her creation causes Mara to exclaim, "The man is mad! He fights with the strength of a hundred men!" (10). This story is one of many to establish Nazi soldiers as ineffective white men whose bodies—even if bulked up like Franz's—are no match for Steve Rogers/Captain America. One Nazi character to prove the contrary is the 1960's era Red Skull. First introduced in 1941 in "The Fantastic Tale of the Red Skull", he survives into the 1960s, where he is recast as a Nazi. In 1941, his civilian identity is George Maxon, a greedy American aircraft manufacturer who wants to destroy his competitors and does not care if this involves sabotage, murder, or disguising as a Nazi to do so. Two decades later, he is *ret-conned* to be Johann Schmidt, an ardent Nazi soldier whose ambitions outgrow Hitler and who wants world domination all for himself.

Panel sequences depicting Cap in action show that although he carries a shield, which is defensive equipment, he also uses it like a weapon as he throws it at enemies. But it is really his body that is the main weapon. He punches, kicks, and often throws his entire body at his enemies to defeat them. This makes him an *action hero*, as it is his physicality which creates the most impact (Tasker, *Spectacular*). His body withstands all attacks and never tires of dishing out punches and kicks, which turns his body both into the only space that is safe, while at the same time "even this space is constantly under attack" ("Dumb Movies" 241). By the

end of each story (at least routinely so in the 1940s), his body is not just a *safe*, but a *relaxed* space, as he usually relaxes with Bucky at Camp Lehigh after a job well done. But prior to that, Rogers uses his body like a weapon; he is willing to risk it, to endure harm and danger from his opponents—which happens quite a few times, as Cap is overpowered and taken prisoner. He endures pain until an opportunity to escape arises—sometimes brought about by his sidekick Bucky—after which they then retaliate. All of this defines the *action hero* (Tasker, *Spectacular*; Lichtenfeld; O'Brien), and it also defines the actions Captain America and Bucky take. These actions are carried over into the 1960s, when Captain America is just as much an action hero as he is two decades prior. But even more, Captain America is a superhero who enacts masculinity the way Kimmel describes: he performs "heroic feats" and is "taking enormous risks".

He is granted his manhood each time and most immediately by Bucky, but also by other characters such as the people he saves. When presenting as Captain America, Rogers embodies all the powerful aspects of militarized manhood: he takes risks and shows "tenacity and perseverance in the face of difficult physical trials" (Barrett), and in general dominates the men and women he fights (Parpart and Partridge). Captain America—rather than just Steve Rogers—does join US troops at least briefly in "Captain America goes on to Berlin", but unlike Private Rogers, he is not officially a member of the US Army, even though army officers are depicted admiring him. But as a "self-promoted" Captain, he embodies many *militarized masculinity* traits (Parpart and Partridge). To the soldiers Cap meets, he can present a masculine status which "is derived from the role of combat soldier (proof of manhood) in the extreme case of war (test of manhood)" (Arkin and Dobrofsky).

It is obvious to soldiers and officers that Captain America has *masculine capital* and knows how to spend this currency in which "privilege and esteem are traded" among men. Most of it is traded between him and Bucky. The young sidekick is Steve's most immediate homosocial audience in the 1940s comic series.

As mentioned earlier, Bucky—the Camp Lehigh mascot—discovers Steve's secret identity and then becomes his sidekick. The 1940s comics offer no explanation for why an underage boy seemingly without any family lives in an army camp as the soldiers' mascot. This is only

explained in more detail when Captain America resurfaces in Marvel Comics in 1964 and his origin story is retold. In the 1940s comics, Steve Rogers acts as Bucky's caretaker and surrogate parent in one. They share a tent; Rogers takes him to theaters, lectures, and art galleries; and he makes sure the boy does his homework for school. This is shown in "Captain America in the Mummy and the Butterfly Killer", where Steve supervises Bucky as he studies for school exams. The young man complains, "These coming exams are giving me a headache. I wish we were out there hunting crooks!", to which Steve answers, "Yes but passing your exams will help you get into West Point someday!"[45] (Simon and Kirby, "The Mummy and the Butterfly Killer" 2). As a sidekick, Bucky is like a Captain America clone: in battle he is always ready to jump at the enemy, or knock them to the ground with his fists. The comics show that when in costume, he is just as adept at inhabiting masculine spaces as Captain America. Their relationship is strongly homosocial and extends to their masculinity enactment as they repeatedly grant each other "proper" manhood. But this granting is not simply given, it must be earned. And it must be earned along the lines of militarized manhood. In "Captain America goes on to Berlin", soldiers from Rogers's unit are asked to volunteer for a mission in Europe. When Steve decides not to volunteer, Bucky is shocked by his decision. With tears in his eyes, Bucky stammers, "Steve—You—You didn't volunteer! You … sob … you're a coward!" (Herron, "Captain America goes on to Berlin" 40). When the young man realizes—a few panels later—that Rogers joins the mission as Captain America, his mood changes immediately. As "[t]he mighty figure of Captain America leaps from the sea and plunges towards battle" (42), his sidekick shouts "Cap!"—written in red and in all-caps—followed by "So that's why Steve wouldn't come! He wanted to come as Captain America instead! What a fool I've been!" (42). Reassured that Steve/Cap is willing to act tough and aggressive, to fight just like all the other soldiers, Bucky apologizes for calling him a coward and fights at his side until the end of the story. This underlines their friendship as a homosocial bond upholding the military masculinity ideal (Morgan, "Theater of War"; Barrett; Higate).

Cap and Bucky function as a unit in the military sense: they trust each other, and they have each other's backs. In "Horror Hospital", Bucky saves Cap while the superheroes are fighting a

[45] Steve is referencing the well-known United States Military Academy located in West Point, New York, founded in 1801. However, this remains the only mention of a real-world military site throughout the 1940s comics.

monster named Gorro. While Gorro has Cap in a chokehold, Bucky shoots him in the chest with a pistol he lifts off Dr. Grimm, the monster's creator. At other times, it is Cap who carries Bucky to safety after harsh battles between superheroes and villains. Sequences of them saving each other and caring for one another appear often. While "'superheroing'" alongside Cap in "Horror Hospital", Bucky is knocked out by a bank robber. Steve kneels over "his stricken buddy" (Simon and Kirby, "Horror Hospital" 38) and tries to wake him up. Since he doesn't succeed, the vigilante changes himself and Bucky into their army uniforms and takes him to a nearby hospital. Without stating his relationship to Bucky, he has the doctor examine him and declares, "Bucky means a lot to me. Take good care of him" (40).

Whenever they must fear to have lost the other during battle, they show anger, concern, and grief. When Captain America appears to have died in an explosion in "Captain America and the riddle of the Great Sea Dragon", his sidekick is described as being "mad with anger" as he aims a cannon at enemy ships and shouts, "That was for Cap, you scum!" (Simon and Kirby "Captain America and the Riddle of the Great Sea Dragon" 28). When Bucky discovers that Steve has survived, he can only stammer in disbelief before embracing him. The older superhero admits that surviving the explosion "was the closest shave I ever got … I'm still a bit shaken up though" (29) while embracing his sidekick. This display of emotions does not undermine "doing military masculinity". In a military setting, displaying anger and the wish for revenge when a fellow soldier is killed is a legitimate reaction to have (Barrett; Morgan; Higate and Henry). After all, "tears are found at the heart of the military experience" and, given the right context, an "open and physical display of mutual concern and care" and "a willingness to show fear and pain" (Morgan, "Theater of War" 177) are exactly what "good soldiers" are supposed to do.

What further informs Bucky and Steve's friendship is the fact that they know each other's secret identity. Bucky knows that when presenting as Captain America, Steve is assertive, aggressive, and tough. At the end of "Captain America in the Mummy and the Butterfly Killer" Rogers and Bucky, having just changed back into their army fatigues after a successful vigilante mission, come across an older man. The man mistakenly praises the police for apprehending the villain of the story, when actually, the two superheroes are responsible. The exchange that follows underlines the special quality of Bucky and Steve's friendship. Rogers responds to the

man, "I'm glad they got him! That case was giving me the jitters! I'm a very nervous person!" (Simon and Kirby, "The Mummy and the Butterfly Killer" 50). The neighboring panel shows Bucky holding his stomach while giggling madly, as Steve asks, "What are you laughing at?" (50). Eyes pinched together and grinning, one hand clutching his chest and the other hand pointing behind him towards Steve, the boy comments, "Captain America is a nervous person … Ha, ha, ha!" (50). This exchange stresses how Steve does not need everyone's approval to feel adequately masculine, as long as he has the approval of a man he cares about; in this case Bucky. He further has no trouble framing himself in what has been constructed as highly unmasculine in nations like the US: to be hounded by "soft" emotions and thus "feminized" (Douglas; Kimmel, "Homophobia"; Bederman). In this sequence, Steve, Bucky, and the readers all know this is a hoax, yet having a male character so at ease with his public image is a delight in terms of "doing" masculinity. And why should Steve fear that saying such a thing could make him look less manly? He knows he can be assertive, muscular, and tough whenever he needs to be.

The moment is indicative of something else: the comic series shows readers again and again how Steve, when acting as Captain America, is exemplary of military masculinity, the willingness to live *the strenuous life,* and enacting hegemonic manhood. However, the series is just as repetitive in showing readers that as Private Rogers, the same character is willing to come off entirely differently. This is routinely depicted whenever the comic series shows an interaction between Private Steve Rogers and Sergeant Duffy. As explained earlier, the "image of masculinity" constructed within the military is marked by "physical toughness, the endurance of hardships, aggressiveness", and most of all by "a refusal to complain". The military establishes hierarchies, and men entering the Service are expected to comply with and follow them. For Private Rogers, this means that Sergeant Duffy is his superior officer and he must follow his orders. In almost every issue, the comics take care to show Steve being harried and criticized by Duffy. Rogers is usually tasked with menial tasks like cleaning campgrounds or preparing food for the kitchen. The Private is often depicted wearing a white apron over his army green fatigues, sitting down and peeling vegetables in front of the mess hall. A reminder that as a simple Private, Steve Rogers has no real power in the military.

Routinely, Sergeant Duffy yells at him and accuses him of being useless and not soldier material. He is anything but satisfied with Rogers's performance as a soldier and calls him an "unhappy apology for a nin com pop" when he does not wear his uniform correctly, assuring the private, "If you had twice as many brains as you already have you'd still be a half-wit" (Lee "Captain America and the Red Skull's Deadly Revenge!"12). On the other hand, Duffy admires the deeds of Captain America. When Bucky and Steve joke about the good press Captain America gets, and Bucky refers to Cap as "an over-rated bum" (Simon and Kirby, "The Mummy and the Butterfly Killer" 19) Duffy scolds them both. He yells, "So Captain America is an over-rated bum, is he? If you mugs had half his brains, you'd be getting somewhere in this man's army!" (19), to which Steve and Bucky politely and obediently agree. Whenever asked, Rogers states that no matter what the army throws at him, he has no trouble with it since "as a matter of fact I enjoy it all!" (Simon and Kirby, "Captain America meets the Fang" 6).

In "Murder stalks the Maneuvers" Cap's attachment to *military masculinity* is further demonstrated. It starts with Bucky playing a prank on soldiers at Camp Lehigh. When Duffy finds out, he blames Steve instead of Bucky. He yells at the Private, "I get it now. You are at the bottom of this riot! I might have known!" (Simon and Lee, "Murder stalks the Maneuvers" 18). At first, Rogers objects to Duffy's accusations, but in the end he accepts being disciplined by his superiors and even taking the fall for a friend—in this case for Bucky—without batting an eye. It shows how much he has internalized a "refusal to complain" as a key ingredient within militarized masculinities.

However, the story goes on to show that while willing to prank his Sergeant, Rogers would never really act against army regulations. In the same story, another soldier named Clodd complains non-stop. Feeling unnecessarily bullied and mistreated, he promises, "I'm going to get even for the way I've been pushed around", prompting Rogers to think that Clodd behaves "like a typical whiner! He's poison for the army" (19)[46]. Here, the comics showcase the masculinities they want their male protagonist to embody and what type of behavior is off limits: pranking is fine, but whining and vowing revenge against the military is not. A sentiment further underlined when Rogers later discovers that the "whiney" Clodd is helping Nazi spies

[46] In Western nations, since the turn of the nineteenth century, *whiner* has been a word often used synonymously with men thought to be unmanly or effeminate (Bederman; Rotundo).

sabotage army battle exercises. Rogers goes after them and stops them, but Duffy is not around to witness it. Here, Rogers is shown as quite the "soldier material", for unlike Clodd, he has internalized "the endurance of hardships".

Throughout the 1940s, Steve Rogers has a love interest, albeit unsuccessfully so: FBI agent Betty Ross. She first appears in "Meet Captain America" and is among the recurring characters next to "Sarge" Duffy. Her purpose is to be a heterosexual interest for Steve and not a character important to the plot, another routine for superhero comic books (Wright; Jones; Easton). Just as routine: her admiration for Captain America, who usually brushes her off when Betty wants to be close to him. Once, after Cap rescues her, Betty wants to help him catch the villain—but he states in very patriarchal fashion[47], "You're going home! ...I haven't finished my job yet!" (Simon and Kirby, "Captain America and the Deathless Monster" 5). This disinterest is mirrored in Betty's lack of interest for Steve Rogers, whom she either ignores or refers to as "that unfunny private" (6). In the 1940s, Ross is the object of affection that Rogers daydreams about but has no real chance to ever have. Rogers is as easygoing about the rejection he receives from Betty as he is about the bullying he receives from Duffy. Heterosexuality, of course, is attached to any variation of hegemonic masculinity invested in the reproduction of patriarchy (Connell, *Masculinities*; Demetriou) as well as to military masculinity (Morgan; Barett; Parpart and Partridge), and thus cannot be absent from superhero comics.

Steve Rogers's easygoing attitude towards being powerless does not survive into the 1960s. His 1940s debut sets him up as a character who *hybridizes* hegemonic masculinity enactment (Demetriou): his aggressive, assertive and violent actions are married to feelings of powerlessness and his self-deprecating easygoing attitude. A fact the comics confirm when Rogers states, "as a matter of fact I enjoy it all!" (Simon and Kirby, "Captain America and the Deathless Monster" 6). But this is also what sets apart the 1940s version of the character so distinctly from the 1960s version: nothing seems to upset his masculine enactment, not even having no power. Due to a decline in sales, the title *Captain America Comics* is canceled in 1950. When Captain America resurfaces in 1964, the character is much more molded along

[47] Patriarchal attitudes towards women inform the majority of Timely Comics as well as Marvel Comics in the 1960s. While both publishers produce female superheroes, those are never as powerful as their male colleagues; they get less to do than their male colleagues and are mostly shown as silly girls not that interested in doing the work of a superhero: punching out enemies and saving the world from disaster.

the lines of what Wright refers to as Marvel Comics' "reworked […] formula for comic book superheroes" which adds a "volatile mix of human emotions and personalities" to every superhero character (205). In 1964, Rogers's easygoing attitude about masculine "shortcomings" is replaced with anxiety, feelings of loss, and frustration.

1964: Captain America Lives Again

When the character resurfaces in 1964, he remains connected to military masculinity, as he is now treated as a renowned World War Two veteran by his superheroic and non-superheroic colleagues, as well as by people he saves from harm. He makes his reappearance in Avengers comics #4, "Captain America joins … the Avengers", which is published in March 1964. He keeps guest-starring in *Avengers* and then goes on to regularly appear in *Tales of Suspense* from #58 onwards, starting in October 1964. *Tales of Suspense* is a comic book anthology series published by Marvel Comics between 1959 and 1968. The series features the first ever appearance of Iron Man, and then also the first regular appearance of Captain America when the character appears in Marvel Comics for the first time. Both characters continue to appear here, until both earn a solo series in 1968. As a way of fortifying Captain America's reputation as a World War Two hero, *Tales of Suspense*—between #63 and #71—republish several stories from the 1940s *Captain America Comics*. Bucky Barnes, who is revealed to have died in WWII in *Avengers* #4, is featured in these issues as well. Next to their story titles, these issues contain additional titles such as "Captain America and Bucky in the Daring Days of World War II" (Lee, *Epic Collection Cap* 1 146) or "Captain America, Living Legend of World War II" (Lee, *Epic Collection Cap* 1 179). While such titles continue to tie Steve Rogers to militarized manhood, and although Captain America returns[48] during the height of American involvement in Vietnam (Wright; Jones), the focus of 1960s Captain America stories is not really the experience of war. However, in "The Strength of the Sumo", Captain America does fight the Viet Cong in order to rescue an Afro-American POW. But this remains the only reference to the ongoing war in Vietnam in comics featuring Captain America in the 1960s. Instead, when Marvel Comics "bring back" Captain America, they situate him within their *Marvel Method* (Wright): as they do with their other superheroes, they turn Steve Rogers/Captain America

[48] Timely Comics cancel their *Captain America Comics* in 1951.The character appears in Marvel Comics for the first time in 1964. His absence is from then on explained as having been MIA since the Second World War.

into one more character to represent "a volatile mix of human emotions", and he becomes one more layer within the "realistic fantasy" that Marvel Comics employ when they create their superheroes.

In terms of committing violent action, being assertive, muscular, and tough, Marvel Comics take nothing away from Captain America. This way of "doing" masculinity remains a constant for him. However, Marvel Comics turn him into a character "haunted by past memories, and trying to adapt to 1960s society" (Wright 215): he turns into a "man out of time", a label this protagonist has carried ever since (Wright; Weiner; Howe; Stevens). Captain America has certainly always been a masculine power fantasy (De Dauw) in the sense that all male superhero characters are, but when the publisher revives "Captain America, Living Legend of World War II" in 1964, they construct their action hero more strongly as an "extravagant spectacle of violence and power" combined with an "emotive displays of sensitivities, traumas and burdens" (Jeffords, "Masculinity Terminated") than in 1941.

1940s Steve/Cap may have been "enjoying it all", but his 1960s version is not. As before, his adventures offer a repetitive enactment of masculinity within a homosocial setting: he takes risks, pulls off heroic feats where failure is always a possibility, all in order to be granted manhood by other men—usually his male superheroic and non-superheroic colleagues. And as in the 1940s, he does so *again and again*, in every comic book he is featured in. In the 1940s, he is normatively hegemonic and easygoing; in the 1960s he is normatively hegemonic, but at the same time insecure and anxious about his place in society: an anxiety which is a reality for many men in 1960s America and in which Steve Rogers/Captain America now also participates. As explained earlier, Postwar America demands that men be good employees, exemplary providers, passionate husbands, and patient fathers (Cuordileone, "Age of Anxiety"; Cuenca). Marvel Comics show how Steve Rogers wants to, but fails, in these tasks. They focus on this aspect of the character in a way Timely Comics never did.

The willingness to commit violence "is often the single most evident marker of manhood" (Kimmel); it is upheld by all superhero characters analyzed here. Yet, Marvel Comics turn emotional fragilities into a key ingredient for their *Marvel Method*, without which their "realistic fantasy" does not work (Wright). This turns Marvel Comics' Steve Rogers into an

almost blank space to be filled: he is no longer an easygoing Private, but a man who "wants a home[…,] a job[…,] a girl to share things with" (Lee et al. *Epic Collection Cap* 4 8) while this is a statement it will take the character until 1971 to make, first signs are there in 1964. In comparison, when he's acting as Captain America, not much blank space needs to be filled in: normatively masculine traits abound, from his masculine body to his willingness to commit violence. His first appearance in *Avengers* #4 already foreshadows his "potential" to become one more successful example of Marvel Comics' "realistic fantasy" (Wright 207). The following examples demonstrate how the character interacts with 1960s demands for successful masculinity enactment, while also holding fast to rather traditional manhood qualities. Rogers is often a "man who can't", while Captain America is a man "who can". The way the character is reintroduced in 1964 offers a first and meaningful reimagination of what is originally a rather nationalist superhero.

In "Captain America joins … the Avengers", the Avengers—here consisting of Iron Man, Thor, the Wasp, and Giant Man—are traveling in their "undersea craft"—a mixture of submarine and jet plane—when they come across a frozen body floating by. Once brought on board, they identify him by his costume and shield as Captain America, "the once-mighty crime-fighter" (Lee*, Epic Collection Cap* 1 29) but hesitate to believe he can really be who the costume indicates him to be. Once Cap is awake, masculinity enactment ensues. A panel shows Captain America moving up from the gurney he was laid on, with his signature blue cowl next to him. His eyes are open wide, as a textbox explains, "Suddenly with an ear-splitting cry, the powerful figure springs upward … with agonizing shock reflected in his eyes!" (30). The panel puts the superhero's first words in a speech bubble: "Bucky … Bucky! Look out!" (30). The three male Avengers try to hold him down while Steve realizes what has happened to his sidekick: "It's useless! I remember now … he's dead! He is! And nothing on earth can change that!" (30). Asked to identify himself, he tells them he is Captain America, while putting on his cowl and taking up his shield. Iron Man and the others accuse him of lying—"If this is some kind of trick, Mister … You'll live to regret it!" (31)—which leads to a confrontation. Cap answers, "I've no need of tricks! Test me! Try to conquer me!" (31), while the following panel shows him avoiding Iron Man's and Thor's attack.

Within a four panel sequence, Cap fights the Avengers and manages to overpower Thor, Giant-Man, and Iron Man. When the Wasp mounts an attack, the superhero is more surprised by her gender than anything else, and stops his actions. This does not so much highlight Cap's chivalrous side as it is a reminder how a female superhero is a rare occurrence in 1960s Marvel Comics. It further shows the routinely patriarchal treatment of female superheroes to be found in Marvel Comics at this time (Wright; Howe); during his debut, Marvel Comics' Black Panther also refuses to attack Invisible Girl, a member of the Fantastic Four, because he does "not consider females to be fair game"(Lee, *Epic Collection Fantastic* 4 22). In *Avengers* #4, it is really Cap's fighting prowess, bodily agility, and tenacity that convince the other superheroes he is who he says he is. Not only does this sequence underline Kimmel's idea that "the body is the man", but it is a textbook case of enacting masculinity in ways other men approve of (Kimmel, "Homophobia"). Rogers first performs heroic feats and takes risks, after which Iron Man, Thor, and the others approve of him and believe that he is the "once-mighty crime-fighter".

Once this is established, Cap tells them about Bucky's death—he was "killed in action" —and explains his own survival. During a mission over Newfoundland, the two men fail to defuse a bomb strapped to a plane. The subsequent explosion kills Bucky, while Cap is thrown into the ocean, unconscious and sinking to the ground. But instead of drowning, until he's discovered by the Avengers just now, he remains in what the comics refer to as "suspended animation" which, Cap guesses, "must have prevented me from aging!" (Lee*, Epic Collection Cap* 1 33). The Avengers believe him and take him to New York City with them. Upon arrival, they are separated when the Avengers exit the craft before Cap, and are attacked without him noticing. Judging himself alone for the time being, the "man out of time" walks through the city and takes a room in a nearby hotel to rest. However, on his way there, people recognize him and show him their gratitude for his World War Two deeds, which continue his militarized and therefore his normative manhood credentials.

Once in the hotel room, and for the second time in this comic book without his face cowl and shield, Rogers starts to feel anxious. He thinks about losing Bucky, and then "the weary, lonesome man drops off to a fitful sleep" (35), as a textbox informs readers in a panel depicting Steve's face, arms, and chest as he is lying on a bed. While he is still awake, he contemplates,

"What happens next?? Can't return to my career as Captain America—it would be meaningless without Bucky! … I don't belong in this age…; no place for me here…; if only Bucky were here…; If only" (35). This panel—literally showing the character in a pose of rest and not action—establishes him as haunted by emotional fragility when not "in action". It also shows him as a character something "has happened to" which he now must come to terms with. Sequences like this one prompt Jason Bainbridge to decide that "Marvel storytelling came from melodrama" (68), as the publisher confronts audiences with characters whose good virtue is obvious and who suffer from anxiety, from "being acted upon" rather than "acting themselves". Captain America's first appearance in Marvel Comics is a good example of this. Obviously, things have happened to him, but in keeping with normative ways of "doing" masculinity, which Marvel's male superheroes enact in hybrid ways—as this thesis argues—he also remains a character who "acts himself"[49].

In fact, this is how Steve resolves his moment of emotional fragility discussed here: while he is musing about Bucky, a young man—Rick Jones—enters his hotel room. Rogers at first mistakes him for Bucky having come back to life. Jones is a Marvel character first introduced in 1962 when Marvel Comics create *The Incredible Hulk* comic book series, who's guest starred in various Marvel comics since. And like the Bucky Barnes the publisher reimagines in the 1960s, Rick is a brown-haired, blue-eyed older teenager. He approaches Cap to ask him for help finding the Avengers, who have gone missing.

Jones's resemblance to Bucky throws Steve: "It's unbelievable! … You could be his double!" (Lee*, Epic Collection Cap* 1 35). But he quickly realizes that Jones is not only not "his" Bucky, but that he demands his help. This demand, or "call to action", is what breaks through Steve's moment of anxiety, and—while putting his face cowl back on—he clarifies:

> I didn't mean to throw you a curve by calling you Bucky…He—once was a close friend of mine—but he's gone now! I was wasting time mourning him—But you've made me realize that life goes on! (36)

[49] Bainbridge suggest that Marvel heroes undergo a feminization—they are victims acted upon—before an immediate re-masculinization—they become superheroes and enact normative/hegemonic masculinity. This thesis suggests an expansion of masculinity enactment which now includes being tough as well as being soft.

Jones is grateful, but also wary about Cap's state of mind. He suggests, "Look fella[…,] after we find the Avengers, I'm sure they can recommend a real nice head shrinker for you!" (36), which upsets Captain America but also fuels his resolve to help the young man. He contemplates how Rick "thinks I'm some sort of madman! Well, I'll prove to him that I'm not!" (36). Said proof is best provided via taking action, so "like an avenging streak, the nimble, seemingly tireless Captain America follows up each lead" (37) until he finds the missing superheroes.

By the end of the issue, not only has Captain America found the Avengers, but he battles the villain—the Submariner[50]—in unison with them. But not before he approves of how they are enacting masculinity. As Cap watches his fellow masked vigilantes during the fight, they gain his admiration and respect:

> I know so little about this new crop of costumed fighters! My best bet is to watch them in action…If there had been such men in my day, what epic battles we might have fought! (46)

Once Captain America approves of how the Avengers enact masculinity, he joins forces with them. After the Submariner has been defeated, Iron Man asks if Cap wants to become an Avenger. Rogers's reply is straightforward: "I have seen you in battle…and there are none braver…my answer is yes!", to which Thor replies, "spoken with honor and with dignity, like a man!" (Lee*, Epic Collection Cap* 1 48). A textbox in one of the final panels of the comic book declares, "Thus, we are privileged to witness a momentous moment in the annals of high adventure" (48). The panel depicts Cap and the rest of the Avengers joining hands in a moment of initiation.

By the end of *Avengers* #4, Captain America/Steve Rogers has not only been successfully reintroduced to the Marvel universe, but he has successfully expanded normative masculinity enactment to coexist with his emotional fragilities. Hybridization has been successful: Rogers can be confused and even overwhelmed by his new surroundings; he can mourn the loss of Bucky. But none of this prevents him from acting tough, aggressive, and assertive when facing

[50] Here, the story about Captain America's "defrosting" features another Timely Comics character who reappears in Marvel Comics. Prince Namor—the civilian name of the Submariner—is originally created in 1939 and re-enters the world of the superhero in 1962 in *Fantastic Four* #4.

an opponent or investigating crime. Like every other male superhero, Steve Rogers/Captain America is defined by his capacity to enact both. If "doing" gender is a "practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint" (Butler), then a male superhero's capacity to feel loss and be overwhelmed by it is the improvisation, and the capacity to feel assertive and act violently is the constraint. After all, the male superheroes analyzed here are "doing" hegemonic masculinity as a *hybrid bloc* in order to keep reproducing patriarchy (Demetriou).

Old Steve, New Tricks

When Marvel Comics bring back Captain America, what they most strongly bring back is how this character uses his *phallic*, his "take no shit" body (Bordo), a body that radiates "independence, toughness, emotional imperviousness" (57) when in action. What they do not bring back is his proximity to real war zones. As explained in the previous section, not every issue of *Captain America Comics* brings Cap and Bucky face to face with Nazi soldiers, but almost every story does feature Nazis as overarching threat. Nazi as well as Japanese soldiers are the "soft bodies" that Captain America, himself an exemplar of a "hard body" (Jeffords, *Hard Bodies*), fights and defeats. When the character returns in the sixties, he does not exist in the same proximity to ongoing wars. Although he returns during the height of the Vietnam War, Cap goes to Vietnam only twice: In *Tales of Suspense* #61, "The Strength of the Sumo!", Cap brings home an Afro-American POW and fights several Vietnamese soldiers to get to him. In *Captain America* #125, "Captured in Vietnam", Cap again enters the country, with the permission of the US State Department, to save a kidnapped United States diplomatic envoy who wants to negotiate for peace in the region. In "The Strength of the Sumo!", the soft/hard body dichotomy is present again, even if slightly remixed. As Jeffords explains in *Hard Bodies*, in film narratives depicting the Vietnam War or other friend/enemy settings, the hard and tough body belongs to the American protagonist while the soft body belongs to the foreign enemy, the villain, and its perceived softness alerts one to the danger it holds. In "The Strength of the Sumo!", *Tales of Suspense* #61, racist depictions of Asian characters are toned down but have not disappeared. Some panels still show what are supposed to be Asian faces looking like grimaces. Also, Cap enters a Viet Cong camp and taunts the "communist fighting man" as "weak, so unsure of himself" when the soldiers point their weapons at "one lone American!"(Lee*, Epic Collection Cap* 1 92). While trying to effect the release of an American

helicopter pilot, Captain America fights several Viet Cong, then faces their General in a fight for the release of the POW, a man named Jim Baker. The Viet Cong are depicted bare-chested and just as muscular as Cap, but the super soldier easily punches out several of them at once. When the General arrives, things are different—referencing the story title he is tall and heavily muscled, wearing nothing but the garb of a Sumo ringer. Compared to him, Cap looks tiny, and during their fight the General tries to crush Cap several times, boasting, "I am twice your size! Three times your weight! To me, you are no more than a bothersome flea!" (97). The American superhero overpowers him thanks to his speed and mobility, and manages to escape with the POW. Until "Captured in Viet Nam" this remains Cap's only mission in Vietnam. Reasons why Marvel Comics decides against doing more stories like this are manyfold, from low sales to negative reactions from their readers (Jones; Howe). In terms of politics, Marvel Comics are more "fence-sitters" than innovators, as both Sean Howe in *Marvel Comics: The Complete Story* and Bradford Wright in *Comic Book Nation* demonstrate. Whereas readers in the forties are in favor of the US entering WWII, 1960s readers are truly split down the middle on the issue. Looking back today, it is a relief that Cap does not spend more time in Vietnam: #61 reeks of displaying white masculinity as not just superior, but tied to concepts like "modernity, reason, order, stability", and non-white masculinity to "backwardness, irrationality, chaos and violence" (Dyer, "White—Images" 146). Luckily, a simple repetition of how Timely Comics depict Asian and German enemies in WWII does not take place. Instead, Marvel Comics let Captain America "re-do" his fights against Nazis when they re-publish Timely Comics in *Tales of Suspense* #63-#72. Overall, Cap is not as ardent a Cold Warrior (Genter; Costello; Donovan) as his colleague Iron Man, something analyzed further in the next chapter.

Marvel Comics both bring back and add new continuous story elements to Captain America's adventures. They create the spy character Nick Fury in 1963 as the star of his own series *Sgt. Fury and his Howling Commandos*, first published in the comic book anthology series *Strange Tales*. Nick turns into such a new story element in "Them!", a story published in *Tales of Suspense* #78. It is an early case of *ret-conning* when Fury greets Cap saying, "Ya still remember the time we tackled the Nazis together, huh?" (Lee*, Epic Collection Cap* 1 279). From then on, Fury pops up often in comics starring Captain America, since he recruits the Captain to join S.H.I.E.L.D. (Supreme Headquarters International Espionage and Law-Enforcement Division),

Marvel Comics' fictional government agency which first appears in the Marvel Comics anthology *Strange Tales* #135 in 1965. A narrative element that's returned is the character Red Skull, who comes back in *Tales of Suspense* #65, "The Red Skull Strikes!". From then onwards, he returns regularly, trying to gain world dominance, or to kill Captain America or destroy his public reputation. He's aided by evil organizations like HYDRA debuting in 1965 or A.I.M. (Advanced Idea Mechanics) debuting in 1966. Via Red Skull, Cold War themes enter 1960s Captain America stories, as he often reaches out to fellow villains from communist nations—China, North Korea, Russia or Vietnam—when plotting against Captain America.

Even before Marvel Comics decide to repurpose Captain America stories from the 1940s, it is evident that when it comes to acting as Captain America, little changes between the forties and the sixties. In both cases, the superhero's body is the weapon of choice: Rogers's *phallic body* will "take no shit" from any other body. Kirby draws Cap in poses of action in panel after panel: when not punching with a fist, he is kicking with a foot, or launches himself, alternately head first and feet first, at his opponents. This attitude is what survives from Cap's 1941 debut to his 1964 return. In "Captain America", published in *Tales of Suspense* #59, the superhero is "on call" at the Avengers' mansion when a group of armed burglars breaks in. To them, Captain America is nothing more than a "costumed clown" (Lee*, Epic Collection Cap* 1 71), they are certain to defat easily. In what turns into another successful normative masculinity enactment within a very homosocial setting, Cap defeats the thieves one by one. While he is moving against a group of men who think he is laughable, the comics describe him as "moving with the easy cat-like grace of a trained judo master" (75) as he "twists and turns and moves like a cougar" (72) in order to stop the villains. As panels depict him pouncing on, and punching out, armed men, descriptions like these are a reminder of how the character employs "animal energy" while enacting "primitive masculinity" (Rotundo 223) with just enough self-control. Not only is this a tenet strapped to the concepts of white masculinity (Dyer, *White*), but *Tales of Suspense* #59 connects it further to militarized masculinities. As Cap punches out the leader of the group of thieves, he taunts him, "A trained fighting man learns how to take punishment as well as dish it out!" (77). Not shying away from physical hardships but enduring them are key elements of *military masculinity*, and Captain America brings them to every fight he enters. By the end of "Captain America", Steve has knocked out every intruder and sits among their unconscious bodies now lining the Avengers' living room. In yet another homosocial

competition, he has taken risks, performed heroic feats, in short: he has enacted normative masculinity and is now "the last man standing". Or sitting, rather, as he jokes, "It was sure nice of you fellas to drop around and help me while away a lonely evening!", before joking self-deprecatingly, "I never used to feel tired! Guess when a fella reaches my age, he starts to get soft!" (78). The character's continuous appearances of course provide ample proof that suffering from old age is not one of his problems.

From the time Captain America agrees to work for S.H.I.E.L.D., comics depict him going on missions by himself, as an Avenger, later together with Falcon, or on missions for S.H.I.E.L.D. This makes him into a mix of superhero vigilante and *organization man* (Whyte). As mentioned earlier, Postwar America advocates that all males, should they want to reach middle class affluence (Costello; Ehrenreich), aspire to working for a big company or organization. Such workplaces call for and produce what David Riesman in *The Lonely Crowd* and William Whyte in *The Organization Man* refer to as *other-directed* employees. *Other-directed* means seeking cooperation, depending on working with others, but also being dependent on how others perceive you. It is a stark opposite to what Riesman calls *inner-directed*, where the individual follows their own wishes and objectives, sometimes without caring about what this can do to others. This can of course be connected to American notions of Self-Made Men (Ehrenreich; Paul; Kimmel), but also to reading superheroes. In "The Superhero as labor: The Corporate Secret Identity" (2008), Greg Smith does just that and suggests that being a superhero can itself be understood as being an *organization man* or corporation man. After all, an organization "demands that people should subsume their individuality to the good of the whole" in order to create a sense of "belonginess" where one is "expected to participate within the corporation for the greater good" (130-131). Whyte, as Smith reminds us in his article, and as explained earlier, argues for a "peaceful coexistence" of employees within the corporation instead of open rejection of such entities. Smith argues that superheroes have secret identities exactly so that such coexistence is possible, because while participating in the organization "for the greater good of all, one recognizes the need […] to exert one's individual will" (Smith 131). Simply put, Steve Rogers "exists" to have personal needs, while Cap "exists" to fight for the "greater good". When Marvel Comics bring back the character in 1964, these two sides of him are explored more deeply than before.

Before looking at Steve Rogers, lets further explore how Captain America is placed between being *inner-* and *other-directed*, since him becoming a S.H.I.E.L.D. agent in addition to already being a masked vigilante diversifies how he interacts with these ideas. "Doing" masculinity involves taking risks and proving that one "has what it takes"; that one has enough *masculine capital* (Anderson) to be "strong, successful, capable, reliable, in control". Kimmel connects this to the workplace and calls it *Marketplace Masculinity*, where a man "derived his identity entirely from his success in the capitalist marketplace" (123). As Captain America, the character has access to this: Cap can derive a lot of *masculine capital*, which is after all the "currency […] in which privilege and esteem are traded" (Anderson 42) among men. As Cap, he always has a job to finish, a task to accomplish. He does so not by deciding between being *inner-* and being *other-directed*, but by becoming a hybrid of both. As an Avenger he cooperates, makes use of the strength that colleagues like Iron Man, Black Panther, The Wasp, or Hawkeye bring to a mission; when fighting alone, he follows what he knows he can do best. Whether facing Red Skull, armed burglars, or agents of HYDRA, Captain America and his colleagues "get the job done"; they demonstrate that they are the best at what they do. This also approximates them all to Self-Made Men. Acting as Captain America, the character fits into "doing" masculinity in a way Postwar America approves of. At the same time, being a superhero and doing the labor of a superhero (Smith) is demanding, and Marvel Comics—committed as they are to telling a "realistic fantasy" (Wright)—show how this demand grates on the character.

Masculinity Not Terminated

As mentioned above, it is only in the 1960s that a lot of blank spaces regarding this superhero character are filled. Timely Comics construct a character that is truly superhuman, in the sense that the character has hardly any flawed or soft spots. But now, in the Marvel Age, Rogers is "repurposed" in a way that aligns him much more with 1960s masculinity enactments. As explained earlier, men in Postwar America better be able to lay claim to a few things: a job, a place to live in—both preferably middle class adjacent—and a fiancée or wife to have children with (Ehrenreich; Bordo; Cuenca). As a recently resurfaced "man out of time", Rogers has none of that, a reality that will grate on him more and more as time passes. After joining the Avengers, Steve Rogers—as Captain America—initially moves into their New York mansion

(originally Tony Stark's mansion that the billionaire playboy and entrepreneur allocates to the superhero team[51]), but later relocates to a run-down hotel room. When not "in action" as Captain America, this is where Steve dwells, usually in connection with feeling lonely and mourning the loss of Bucky. This is shown in *Tales of Suspense* #59, where the story simply titled "Captain America" opens with Cap on "house-sitting duty" in the Avengers' headquarters. The mansion comes fully equipped with a Butler named Jarvis. In a fancy living room, Jarvis serves Cap coffee before retiring for the night, leaving the WWII veteran to his memories of Bucky. Cap has been scrapbooking, and while looking through old photos—one of them showing Bucky—a sad Steve declares, "I should have known better than to look at the album…It's no good! It's over now!" (Lee*, Epic Collection Cap* 1 70). Just like earlier with Rick Jones, Rogers "forces" himself to get over his past and face his present situation. At first, Marvel Comics focus—as Timely Comics do in the 1940s—on the successes Cap can achieve. This is something which usually involves enacting normative masculinity as part of a homosocial competition, as happens in *Avengers* #4 or *Tales of Suspense* #58.

However, the comics establish Rogers's haunted memories as a constant capacity for softness and suffering within him. Starting with "Thirty Minutes to live!" published in *Tales of Suspense* #75, Steve Rogers and what he wants is addressed more and more. The story starts depicting Captain America successfully completing a mission and then returning to his quarters at Avengers mansion. He is shown brooding over how "[t]he room I live in belongs to Tony Stark[…]. The only thing that's rightfully mine is my past[…;] all the memories I can never escape!" (Lee*, Epic Collection Cap* 1 248). While acknowledging his painful past is nothing new at this point, what is new is how Cap judges himself—himself as Steve Rogers—in this sequence. Initially reclining on a sun lounger on a balcony dressed in PJs and a dressing gown, Rogers agonizes over Bucky and his WWII past before moving inside. In his bedroom, he gets dressed, and although he had not planned to go out and patrol the area as Captain America, he finds that he has put on his superhero uniform beneath his street clothes anyway. He comments:

> Strange—even after all these years I'd feel undressed without my Captain America costume under my street clothes! All my life I've tried to find a place for Steve Rogers—

[51] At this point in Marvel's ongoing and multiple narratives, the Avengers do not know about their colleagues' civilian personas, only their superhero personas. Stark—without revealing himself as Iron Man—plays the part of benefactor and sponsor to the group.

> but still he lives under the more colorful shadow of Captain America … Perhaps it's Steve Rogers who is the legend—and Captain America who is the reality. (249)

While uttering those words, Steve is shown putting on a suit, a tie and, a fedora, before he steps outside to "be himself". Yet he has just admitted that there is no such thing. As Rogers, he has no job to build up his masculine capital, a 1960s *no-go*. This sets the character apart from colleagues like Tony Stark or Peter Parker, as their civilian identity and civilian job is a much stronger part of their ongoing serial. Marvel Comics now try to do this for Steve Rogers, by introducing a female character—as of now unnamed—as a love interest for Captain America in *Tales of Suspense* #75. Spotting a handsome blonde woman in the street, Steve is intrigued and wants to talk to her. Noticing that she is being pursued by a stranger, he follows and helps her as Captain America. By the end of the story, Steve only knows that she is an Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D. She remains a mystery woman until she is revealed as Agent 13 in *Tales of Suspense* #95; and her civilian name, Sharon Carter, is first dropped in *Captain America* #103. As a character, Carter adds soap opera elements—in the sense of matters of the heart (Anger)—to Captain America stories. From now on, Steve will go back and forth about how he feels about her: he declares his love for her but then refuses to date her; he wants her to quit her job so they can be together; then he wants to quit being a superhero so that he can marry her. Sharon refuses, because she neither wants him to quit, nor does she want to stop working—something Steve demands of her. They date, they break up, they start dating again. Starting in 1966, this soap opera "supplement" stretches out over the first decade of Captain America stories appearing in Marvel Comics. It is a sad testament to how poorly female characters are written at the time, and to how normal chauvinistic attitudes in male superheroes like Captain America are at the time (Wright; Howe). This is all in keeping with patriarchal attitudes casting females as inferior, and anything resembling femininity as well. Marvel Comics do allow feminine or softer sides to their male superheroes. These capacities for softness (Easton), however, are always balanced out, or reined in, by normative masculinity enactment.

Being haunted by memories remains an issue for Marvel Comics' "man out of time". He is even shown asking for professional help when these memories become overwhelming. In *Tales of Suspense* #79, "The Red Skull lives!", the titular villain uses a technical device to have Cap suffer from hallucinations. He keeps seeing men out to attack him, that no one else can see.

Afraid he may be "actually losing my mind" (Lee*, Epic Collection Cap* 1 294), Captain America goes to see a psychiatrist. The "shrink" calms him down, saying, "You might have merely experienced a hallucination, brought on by overwork and too much anxiety" (294). He invites Cap to the couch to "speak freely of anything that comes into your mind", but the superhero declines, claiming that "it might take months to psychoanalyze me! […] I can't spare the time!" (294). Captain America leaves to seek help from Tony Stark, who designs a device which reveals that Cap is being manipulated. This brief interlude is interesting: it shows Cap looking inside first for the solution to a problem, in a genre where exterior actions are preferred to internal ones. It is not surprising that the superhero does not want to be analyzed, since this would mean dealing with what Steve Rogers, not just Captain America, wants. At this point in the serial, we find out that what Rogers wants is part of how Marvel establish this dual-identity hero. The shrink's suggestion "normalizes" Captain America: published in 1966, the story fits into a time when medical professionals are starting to look into signs of stress when middle class men develop severe health problems, and some judge that it is the workplace that cause men the most stress (Ehrenreich; Kimmel). To the shrink, Cap is just one more middle class employee suffering from stress; if only he knew Cap's daily work schedule.

For the purposes of this thesis, this all goes to show how this character—in terms of "doing" "adjusted" and "conformed" masculinity (Ehrenreich), without any superheroic elements to it, is more of a failure than a success. His work life causes stress, his love life is a mess. Instead of gifting the character with a love life as easily achieved as is beating up various villains and preventing deadly disasters, the comics establish Steve Rogers's private life as a "capacity for softness" in terms of masculine inadequacy. The comics have the character acknowledge as much when Steve states, "only when I'm in costume as Captain America do I seem to come alive … But as Steve Rogers, I'm merely a name, a hollow shell—with no roots—no real life to call my own!" (Lee*, Epic Collection Cap* 1 433). This is also a way of stating that "doing" the traditionally masculine—having a job and achieving great thing in that job— comes a lot easier to Cap than having desires and wishes for himself.

As a way of creating such "roots", the character will try to walk away from his life as Captain America several times. It happens for the first time in *Tales of Suspense* #95, "A time to die ... A time to live!". Rogers decides to quit as Captain America so that he can propose to Agent

13, who has refused to marry him while he is an active superhero. His fellow Avengers are shocked. In his role as the Avengers' benefactor, Tony Stark asks, "have you thought it all out?", to which Steve answers, "Sooner or later, each of us must reach a turning point in our lives! […] Goodbye, old friend…It's time for Captain America to learn who Steve Rogers really is!" (Lee*, Epic Collection Cap* 1 473). This *turning point*, however, does not last long.

The next story, "To be reborn!" in Tales of Suspense #96, "reconciles" Rogers to Cap, so to speak, when the character discovers that normative masculinity enactment in superhero comics must not be terminated. Steve finds himself in a bit of a dilemma: having publicly announced he is resigning as Captain America—and in so doing revealing his civilian identity to the world—has repercussions. On the one hand, other men are now dressing up as Captain America, on the other hand, villains he bested before are now looking for him, wanting to enact revenge. At first, Rogers is being contacted by the police: the numerous impersonators of him running around on the streets of New York are a threat. These men have not been "upgraded" in the same way Steve has been, and as such are both a liability and a nuisance. They are further endangering themselves because, as the police informs Rogers, criminals planning to assassinate him may kill the impersonators instead. When Steve sees just such an incident taking place on a rooftop in Manhattan, his immediate decision is to act: "Another one … dressed like Captain America … in deadly danger! [...] I can't just stand by! [...] I've got to help him … somehow! " (Lee*, Epic Collection Cap* 1 480). While delivering this line, the panel shows Rogers on the roof of a high-rise building, running towards its edge and jumping off to catch a false Captain America about to fall to his death. He manages to save them both by cushioning their fall with his body. Lying on the roof of another building, Rogers moans, "We're bruised…and battered…but…still alive…! […] All I need…is a few seconds…rest" (483). His resting period is cut even shorter than that, as more armed attackers arrive. Enraged, Steve, whose street clothes are shown to be ripped and torn, pounces them. He disarms them, then knocks them out. While doing so, he delivers quippy remarks: "Even in my sleep I could handle a couple of deadbeats like you!"(484). Rogers is so angry that he only stops when Nick Fury and some S.H.I.E.L.D. agents show up and say, "Awright, Rogers! Simmer down! How about leaving somethin' for SHIELD to do?" (485). Steve relents, and Fury uses the moment to both confront him about his "retirement plan", and to play to his masculine pride:

> Since when does a gent with your moxie just put himself out to pasture! […] Guys like you'n me can't never hang up our gloves, hear? You can't give up bein' Captain America

> […] 'cause you are Captain America! It'd be easier for you to turn yer back on Steve Rogers! (485)

Fury's talk about "moxie" is really talking about successfully enacted masculinity in a way other men approve of. In this sequence, Fury and his agents are the men who grant Steve/Cap his manhood (Kimmel, "Homophobia"). Rogers has performed heroic feats, has brought his "take no shit body" to the challenges before him, and succeeded.

Therefore, what Fury is really saying is: why terminate normative masculinity when you are so good at enacting it? Rogers is convinced, and answers, "I … think … you're … right … Fury". Then he adds even more directly, "I realize … a man can't ever stop being …something that he was born to be!" (Lee*, Epic Collection Cap* 1 485). Rogers's decision to stay Cap sets the tone for his coming adventures between 1964 and 1974. He does not think about retiring Captain America again, but neither will he retire Steve Rogers. Which comes as no surprise at all: superhero comics are serials, and like soap operas they are a continuous serial where no final chapter of the story is needed (Allen; Borchers). What is needed is an answer to the reader's "desire to know more" (Anger 17), a satisfactory display of "what happens next" (16). And Marvel Comics deliver.

As discussed above, Steve demands and gets a life where he desires love but cannot make it work, or where he strikes up new friendships only to feel insecure about them—as will be discussed in the chapter analyzing Falcon—and where he continues to miss and mourn the loss of Bucky Barnes. This turns him into a classic Marvel Comics superhero character, where "moral and emotional fragilities" are highlighted (Wright). At the same time, as Cap he keeps enacting tough and normative—in short hegemonic—masculinity, as much informed by Parpart and Partridge's "militarized manhood" ideals as by Riesman's and Whyte's notions of *inner-* and *other-directed* men. Marvel's "realistic fantasy" (Wright) does to superheroes what Susan Jeffords detects late 1980s action films doing to their protagonists: combining "extravagant spectacles of violence and power" with "increasingly emotive displays of sensitivities, traumas and burdens" (Jeffords, "Masculinity Terminated").

When Captain America resurfaces in Marvel Comics, the Marvel Method turns him into a character enacting hegemonic masculinity as a *hybrid bloc* in ways he does not do in 1941.

While nothing changes about the fact that this is hegemonic masculinity enacted in the service of patriarchy (Demetriou), Marvel Comics add a lot more subordinate qualities to the character: Rogers is insecure, anxious, and haunted by his past in ways that make him vulnerable and allow for softness and suffering (Easton) like never before. At the same time, Marvel Comics are not about to terminate the normative masculinity of their oldest WWII veteran.

In *Hot Pants and Spandex Suits*, Esther De Dauw discusses Captain America in her chapter "White Superheroes and Masculinity", where she also examines Cap's 1960s return. To her, superheroes like Cap or Iron Man interact with fears and panics about a lack of masculinity, something I absolutely agree with. Rogers transforms his entire body just to avoid not being masculine enough, and De Dauw is right to refer to male superheroes as a "power fantasy" (31). But De Dauw also claims that these power fantasies are an attempt "to purge male anxiety" (60). My thesis cannot follow her in this regard. De Dauw defines the "ideal masculinity" that superheroes adhere to as consisting of "violence as inherently masculine, elimination of the feminine, as risk-taking behavior" (60). But this ideal masculinity is only achieved by protagonists in superhero comics if one dismisses the fact that these are all dual-identity characters, and how Marvel Comics is particularly invested in showing the fragile and suffering sides of their characters as well as their hard and tough ones (Wright; Easton).

Sure, as Captain America he can enact such an ideal masculinity without batting an eye, but the character is just as much Steve Rogers as he is Captain America. And as my analysis here shows, Rogers has anything but an ideal grip on "doing" masculinity the way the 1960s prefer he would. But, as Marvel Comics refuse to exchange Steve for Cap: even if he is not allowed to retire and be soft, male anxiety is never purged. Instead, it is *hybridized*: being anxious as well as tough, just becomes a part of how Captain America/Steve Rogers enacts hegemonic masculinity.

1960s Masculinity in Every Panel? Reading Marvel Comics' Iron Man

The following chapter offers a close reading of Marvel Comics' Tony Stark/Iron Man and masculinity enactment, with a focus on his first appearances between 1963 and 1969. The character is created by Stan Lee and Don Heck in 1963 and debuts in *Tales of Suspense* #39, the same comic book anthology where Captain America resurfaces a year later, in the story "Iron man is born!" (Lee*, Epic Collection Iron* 1 8). Between 1963 and 1968, Iron man appears in *Tales of Suspense* and, sporadically, also in Marvel Comics' *Avengers,* since he is a founding member of this superhero team. Starting in April 1968, he appears in his own comic book, *Invincible Iron Man*.

As with the other male superhero characters selected for analysis, the focus is on Kimmel's idea of "doing" masculinity as a *homosocial enactment*, based on *homosocial competition* ("Homophobia"). In terms of "doing" masculinity, Tony Stark connects to all three of Michael Kimmel's masculinity types: *Genteel Patriarch*, *Heroic Artisan* and *Self-Made Man* (*Manhood*). As a character, Tony Stark interacts with Postwar masculinity in straightforward ways: he is an inventor, a scientist, an entrepreneur, and a playboy. He is linked to the Military-Industrial Complex (Cooley and Rogers; Henebry; Jeffrey), a constellation formed as America enters the Cold War. From his inception in 1963 on, he is a weapons manufacturer and supplier to the US military during the war in Vietnam, making him one of Marvel Comics' oldest Cold Warriors (Costello; Chambliss).

Stark also has an easy time surpassing middle class goals (Ehrenreich; Bordo; Cuordileone, "Age of Anxiety"). As a playboy, Tony Stark delivers a definitive "no" to an American Postwar atmosphere of "pro-domesticity'" (Bordo), although the 1960s comics stories analyzed here are rather tame when it comes to depicting Stark's love life. This is owed to the rather powerful grip the Comics Code has on the comic book industry at the time (Wright; Jones; Howe). On other levels, Stark both is and is not an *organization man* (Whyte): he owns an organization—Stark Industries—but his company works as a defense contractor for the military and the US government, which are organizations themselves. As historian Robert Genter points out in "'"With Great Power Comes Great Responsibility"': Cold War Culture and the Birth of Marvel Comics", Stark has a lot of freedom in the 1960s as a "self-mastering entrepreneur" full of

"technical prowess" (67), but at the same time, politicians demand insight and oversight into his inventions where they concern his government contracts (Cooley and Rogers). Stark can as such be regarded as a male character oscillating between being *inner-* and *other-directed* (Riesman). In any case, he is an exemplar of Kimmel's *Marketplace Masculinity,* since as Tony Stark, he "derives his identity entirely from his success in the capitalist marketplace, as he accumulated wealth, power, status" ("Homophobia" 123).

The character Iron Man is a cyborg, is himself a weapon; a mixture of cyborg and *militarized masculinity* (Masters; Henry and Higate), as discussed later on. Like other superheroes, Iron Man makes use of what are *action hero* traits (Tasker): he is constructed through his physicality and uses it as a weapon, but this construction is even more artificial than in the case of Captain America. Tony Stark puts on a suit of armor which has numerous weapons built into it. Iron Man's "body" is an actual weapon just as much as it is a "take no shit body" (Bordo 57). As Iron Man, the character is very much a "self-employed" cyborg soldier—and embodies more than a few military manhood traits (Barrett; Parpart and Partridge)—who fights his share of super-powered opponents, many of them explicitly constructed as foreign enemies hailing from communist nations who want to destroy the United States (Costello; Genter). This links 1960s Iron Man to 1940s Captain America: both begin as rather nationalistic superheroes. Iron Man's debut in *Tales of Suspense* pits the US as a democratic superpower against Vietnam as a nation ruled by tyrants, where the white superhero triumphs over his non-white opponents and then saves hapless non-white natives from further harm. This also positions Iron Man as a *White Savior* (Hughey), as his debut appearance is anything but free from racist tropes. His debut further marks Tony Stark/Iron Man as "the most ardent of Marvel's Cold Warriors", as more than "one-third of the stories between 1963 and 1966 pitted him against communist adversaries" (Costello 63).

Iron Man's assertive and aggressive stance against enemies hailing from China, Russia, Vietnam, or Korea construct him as a Cold Warrior official American governments—such as the Kennedy administration—would have applauded: Stark's approach is usually fast and headstrong, which parallels the JFK approach, rather than cool-headed (Cuordileone, "Age of Anxiety"). As Iron Man, he is tough on communist powers, and as Tony Stark he supplies the US government with weapons and with scientific gadgets designed to help them win the war

in Vietnam even faster. All of this presents him as a tough and cunning Cold Warrior (Costello; Donovan) who certainly is in no danger of being labeled soft, communist, or homosexual; the "classic fear"' installed in American males during this phase of the Cold War (Schlesinger; Ehrenreich; Cuordileone, "Age of Anxiety"). It also makes clear how, as Iron Man, the character is a rather successful *Self-Made Man*: he has literally constructed his artificial body—his armor—himself and very successfully bests every opponent he goes up against in the "workplace" of the superhero: wherever and whenever villains are fought and their plans foiled.

A cursory glance at the early Tony Stark/Iron Man appearances therefore seems to reveal only strengths and no weaknesses in terms of "doing" masculinity. But such a glance misses a crucial point: In his earliest adventures, Tony Stark/Iron Man is simultaneously very strong and very fragile. His origin story is the story of a severe accident: wounded by a booby trap laid by Vietnamese soldiers, Stark has shrapnel pieces embedded in his chest. Only self-constructed gadgetry in the form of a battery-powered breastplate keeps the metal shards from reaching his heart and killing him. The early comics analyzed here reveal how this fragility is played upon in almost every issue: Stark is repeatedly shown as nearly "running out of battery life", meaning running out of the energy he needs to remain alive. Numerous panels show him plugged into electrical sockets he only reaches in the nick of time. Although Tony Stark, just like every other Marvel superhero, acquirers a "take no shit body", it is a body which is never secure, never a sure thing. Stark has literal chinks in his armor. He is constructed around his physicality like every action hero, yet his body is even less of a safe space than that of other superheroes (Tasker, *Spectacular*). It is under constant attack not just by supervillains, but by itself. As such, the character follows and expands upon the *Marvel Method*: in his earliest adventures, his emotional fragilities—a must-have for Marvel superheroes (Wright)—are linked to his physical fragilities and they are a constant, his breastplate being a circumvention, not a solution to his infirmity. In terms of "doing" masculinity as a homosocial enactment, it is an even more straightforward display of masculinity under a constant need to "perform"; it is literally masculinity "no longer fixed" but in need to be "proved—and proved constantly" (Kimmel).

Attaching permanent fragility to this character is part of what this thesis discusses as enacting hegemonic masculinity as a *hybrid bloc* (Demetriou). Traditionally, and as such patriarchally, "doing masculinity" entails being assertive, dominant, and aggressive; being in control of oneself, one's body, and of other people always (Connell, Kimmel, Anderson). Yet again, Marvel Comics present audiences with a character who both succeeds and fails when it comes to displaying all these qualities. Stark/Iron Man is only in control as long as he is fully charged, and the comics *again and again* show him having to "recharge". In this way, he is a perfect example of "doing gender" as a repetitive act (Butler): only if he recharges does he have the power to remain strong, in control, and reliable. His breastplate, an external sign of an internal fragility, a softness, remains and is not discarded. It becomes a part of his *hybridized* masculinity enactment and—as the subsequent examples show—is included in this character's hegemonic masculinity enactment in the service of patriarchy.

Even when this physical infirmity disappears, Marvel Comics find other ways to keep the character both fragile and tough at the same time. Iron Man finds a way to get rid of the shrapnel pieces in his chest in 1969, when Stark receives an artificial heart-tissue transplant in *Iron Man* #19 (Lee*, Epic Collection Iron* 3 361). However, this is when Marvel Comics, slowly but steadily, introduce other fragilities to Tony Stark. In 1972, the character starts to question his role as a weapons inventor, manufacturer, and supplier; in particular his role in supplying weapons to US troops in Vietnam and elsewhere (Costello; Henebry). Starting in 1982, the character receives another "chink" in his armor: suffering from alcoholism. The following examples, however, take a closer look at how the character goes about "doing" masculinity prior to having his physical infirmity permanently removed.

Giving Birth to an Iron Man

The "birth" of Iron Man is a response to a moment of crisis: a severe injury during an ambush by Viet Cong soldiers leads to Tony Stark saving himself and "giving birth" to Iron man. This section discusses Iron Man's first appearance as published in *Tales of Suspense* #39 in March 1963. The first focus is on masculinity as a homosocial enactment, whereas connections between militarized technology, cyborg soldiers, and "doing" normative masculinity (Masters; Moss; Jeffrey) are discussed subsequently.

On the first page of the comic book, Tony Stark, wearing a lab-coat, gives a demonstration of his technological gadgets to a man in military uniform, addressed as General. Stark wows him by showing how his mini-transistors, which are powering a magnet, can easily break down solid steel doors. A grinning Stark ask the officer, "Now do you believe that the transistors I've invented are capable of solving your problems in Vietnam?" (Lee*, Epic Collection Iron* 1 8). Even before Iron Man is "born", Stark is introduced as one of "Marvel's Cold Warriors" (Costello 61) at a time when American interference in Vietnam is based more on supplying weapons and technical equipment than on sending soldiers for fighting. He is also introduced as one of many Marvel superheroes who is a scientist in his civilian life (Meteling, "Weird Science"). As historian Will Cooley and communication scholar Mark C. Rogers point out in "Ike's Nightmare: Iron Man and the Military Industrial Complex", back in 1963, when Iron Man first appears, the American government judges that Vietnam "was still an advisors' war" and that due to "American potency and know-how, Vietnam was supposed to be a cakewalk" (82). This corresponds to Stark demonstrating technological equipment and weaponry in *Tales of Suspense* #39 which is then shown to be used by South Vietnamese troops, not by American troops.

After showing Stark in a lab demonstrating what his technology can accomplish, the comic book further establishes Tony's access to *masculine capital* (Anderson). On the second page, the top two panels show Stark first on a beach—identified by speech bubbles to be the Italian Riviera—chatting with a woman in a bathing suit; the second panel has him strolling down a street in front of what is recognizable as the New York skyline with a beautiful woman on his arm—her dressed in a red evening gown, Tony in a black tuxedo. In both panels, textboxes inform the reader that not only is Tony a "rich, handsome, glamorous playboy, constantly in the company of beautiful, adoring women" but that he is "both a sophisticate and a scientist! As much at home in a laboratory as in high society!" (Lee*, Epic Collection Iron* 1 9). One and a half pages into the story, and Stark already carries a lot of "masculine capital" in which "privilege and esteem are traded" (Anderson 42): he is rich, educated, and intelligent; he impresses military organizations with his inventions and is a handsome and virile man at the same time. Before cutting to the "South Vietnam Jungle" (Lee*, Epic Collection Iron* 1 9),

another textbox "teases" what comes next: "This man … is soon to be destined to become the most tragic figure on earth!" (9).

Stark is next depicted in the Vietnamese jungle, taking a closer look at how Vietnamese troops are benefiting from his inventions they are using to fight "the red guerrillas" (10). While looking at debris from a previous fight, Stark walks into a boobytrap: he trips over a wire, and an explosive device goes off. When Stark regains consciousness, he finds himself in the hands of said guerillas fighters. They are led by Wong-Chu, who has been introduced in previous panels as "the red guerilla tyrant!" (9) seizing villages in South Vietnam. All Asian characters in the panels are depicted as having pale yellow skin and facial expressions akin to grimaces, meaning that like in the 1940s, they are still depicted in racist ways. Wong-Chu, however, is drawn as taller and more muscular than the other characters. Panels show him challenging villagers whose town he has just seized to hand-to-hand combat and defeating them all, because "to Wong-Chu other men are but fleas!" (9). Wong-Chu's body is shown as large, not muscular, and the loose, flowy garment he is wearing has his body appear both soft and fat, rather than tough or muscular. This links him to how Susan Jeffords in *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era* defines "soft bodies". These are bodies that usually belong to the villainous characters in action films. The soft body is "the errant body containing […] immorality, illegal chemicals, "laziness" […;] the soft body invariably belonged to a female and/or person of color" (24-25). In "Iron Man is born!" (Lee*, Epic Collection Iron* 1 8), it belongs to Wong-Chu, and the story's "hard body", signaling "enveloped strength, labor, determination" and usually both "male and white" (Jeffords, *Hard Bodies* 25), belongs to Tony Stark/Iron Man. How this hard body is acquired is another, but important, matter to be explained shortly.

After introducing him as a "red tyrant", the comic next shows Wong-Chu when he addresses a kidnapped and injured Tony Stark. Having identified him as the "famous Yankee weapons inventor!" (Lee*, Epic Collection Iron* 1 10) and informed him that he has only a short while to live due to his injures—"much shrapnel near his heart!" (10)—he still forces Stark to build him a weapon in exchange for saving his life. Stark pretends to agree, but it is all a ruse: Tony is

really constructing a device for himself which will have "only one purpose … to keep me alive!" (11). Although critically wounded, Tony Stark sports the "hard body", whereas his captor is depicted as a fat and "soft body". But Stark is building himself as even "harder" body. It is going to be "a mighty, electronic body", able to "duplicate every action of the human body" (12), to save his own life. This becomes the first Iron Man suit.

Up to this point, the Asian characters appearing in the story have been either enemies, friendly soldiers, or powerless victims of Wong-Chu. It should, however, not go unmentioned that "building" Iron Man is a transnational effort. Tony builds it together with Chinese physicist Professor Yinsen, another captive of Wong-Chu's, who initially refuses to aid Tony. Being familiar with Yinsen's work from his college education, Stark makes him his confidant, and they end up building Stark's "mighty, electronic body" (12) together. The first one to refer to it as "Iron Man" is Prof. Yinsen, who is depicted lauding the "wonders he shall perform!", and further refers to building the "iron man" as "the crowning achievement of my life" (12).

The suit is finished just in time to save Tony, and while he is busy charging it with enough electricity for all its functions to have enough power, Yinsen sacrifices himself for Stark's cause: he distracts Wong-Chu's men and is shot by them. Yinsen is therefore killed off as soon as he has served his purpose, which is to assist Stark in creating Iron Man. This is the closest to having a *hegemonic* impact that the physicist, who as an Asian male belongs to *"marginalized* masculinity" (Connell), is allowed to have.

Nevertheless, Yinsen's part in "Iron Man is born!" is contradictory: On the one hand, he represents a smart, educated, and competent Asian male, and while he's depicted as having yellow skin, his facial expressions are not a grimace. The character undermines a longstanding rule within American comic books that says Asians are never "portrayed positively in comic books", a rule formed during the 1930s and 1940s when any Asian "who was not the villain […] was usually portrayed as being incompetent" (Yanes 60). On the other hand, he is drawn as small in stature, and lean rather than muscular, which puts him in proximity to being a "soft body", and therefore a suspicious body. Yinsen also functions as an assistant to the white

character, not as someone who undertakes heroic action himself; only deadly action. His suicide provides motivation for Tony Stark who, albeit not becoming Yinsen's *White Savior* (Hughey; Glenn and Cunningham), nevertheless becomes the White Savior of other non-white characters only a few panels later. As Hughey explains a White savior is a "White interloper intruding upon a non-white culture under assault" (Hughey 762). Tony is such an interloper.

Realizing Yinsen is dead, Stark vows, "You will not have died in vain! I swear it! Iron man swears it!" (Lee*, Epic Collection Iron* 1 13). Once his armor—which at this point is not very form-fitting, looking like a chunky safety suit and metallic-grey in color—is fully charged, Iron Man starts moving around his lab in an effort to learn how to maneuver in his new body. At first, his armor renders him helpless and "like a baby learning to walk!" (14), before he learns to control his mechanical body. Based on his technological know-how, its "transistor-powered circuits are coordinated with my brain waves, just as any living human's brain controls his own body" (14). And after a few stumbles, Stark's "brain which has mastered the secret of science is also capable of mastering its new body!" (14). These actions take place over the course of six panels, wherein Tony stumbles, falls, and gets up again.

This panel sequence ties Tony Stark to a masculine trait briefly mentioned in the beginning: Tony is a highly competent technical engineer who invents and builds weapons as well as other technical equipment. Men like him create something from nothing (Sanders; Moss). As Mark Moss explains in *Models of Masculinity and the Media,* "engineering holds a unique place in American culture. Engineering as a concept and ideal fuses the individualism of pastoral America with Yankee ingenuity and know-how" (140). It ties in with ideas of technology as a masculine prerogative (Sanders), where technology becomes "a surrogate for biological creation" and turns into "what a man can do" (Moss 139). In "Iron Man is born!", Tony, with the help of Prof. Yinsen, gives birth to "himself", he creates himself as Iron Man. This is therefore a moment of "self-making" which connects Tony Stark to Kimmel's *Self-Made Man* concepts. Moss argues that a "specific version of the American entrepreneur and the self-made man is often focused technology", with particular emphasis given to "the appropriation of different kinds. Of technology in order to harness some kind of power" (141). Tony Stark is

such a Self-Made Man even before he creates Iron Man. The first panels depict him demonstrating to the US military how he harnesses the power of magnets and electricity via his mini-transistors. *Self-Made Man*, or *Marketplace Manhood*, as Michael Kimmel clarifies, is connected to business owners who assemble their identity from their "success in the capitalist marketplace", where such a "Marketplace Man"

> accumulated wealth, power, status. He was the urban entrepreneur, the businessman […] devoting himself to his work in an increasingly homosocial environment—a male-only world in which he pits himself against other men. ("Homophobia" 123)

Tony Stark is very much a "Marketplace Man", but he actually connects to all three of Kimmel's archetypes of "doing" masculinity: *Genteel Patriarch*, *Heroic Artisan*, and *Self-Made Man*[52]. In his first appearance, Self-Made Man and Heroic Artisan are the most apparent.

Kimmel defines Heroic Artisan masculinity as embodied by a man who displays "physical strength" and is "[e]conomically autonomous" ("Homophobia" 23). But more importantly, this is a man who is

> disciplined and responsible[…]. His body was his own, his labor a form of property. […] [T]he Heroic Artisan saw himself deeply embedded within a community of equals. (*Manhood* 28-29)

In "Iron Man is born!", Tony Stark is most prominently a Heroic Artisan when he works on the Iron Man suit with Prof. Yinsen. To him, Yinsen is his equal due to his competence and knowledge in the field of technology. After being captured by Wong-Chu, they form, albeit briefly, a "community of equals" (29), as Yinsen and Stark work on Tony's "mighty, electronic body" (Lee*, Epic Collection Iron* 1 12).

However, Tony's new body is not just a body: It is a multifunctional, weaponized tool. It allows Tony to lift and throw heavy objects; it is equipped with suction cups, jet engines, flamethrowers, and laser technology[53]. Kimmel's catchphrase that "The body […] is the man" (*History of Men* 49) applies to Tony Stark/Iron Man as well, but has different implications for him than for the other male superheroes discussed in this thesis. Steve Rogers and Tony Stark

[52] How Tony Stark fits into Kimmel's other archetypes is discussed in more detail in the following section.
[53] These are only the most frequently mentioned tools the Iron Man suit possesses. As the serial progresses, Tony is shown engineering and designing new features and weapons for his armor in almost every issue.

both gain "new bodies" as they become superheroes, but one is biological and the other technological. If Captain America is masculinity taken from a bottle or syringe, then Iron Man is masculinity taken from the workbench and powered by electricity. Stark builds himself this second body out of necessity: It functions like a pacemaker, keeping the pieces of shrapnel that are embedded in his chest from reaching his heart. He must always wear the suit's chest plate because of his injury, which turns him into a medical cyborg. All the suit's other functions are an extra, which Tony uses first to defeat Wong-Chu and then to go to work as a superhero. This makes the Iron Man suit both Stark's source of power and his shackle: he cannot live without it. Male bodies have been likened to machines for a long time (Dutton; Connell, *Masculinities*; Anderson): they are supposed to work like well-kept machines. This is often connected to ideas of physical fitness, but also extends to overall health issues: men are supposed to function, to not get sick or be affected by any sort of strain or illness. Marvel Comics' Iron Man is turned into a man-machine mixture; his body is partly mechanized. As such, Iron Man is both an example of technologized masculinity and masculinized technology (Heggs; Masters; Jeffrey), which is discussed in more detail in a later section.

As explained earlier, superhero bodies are action hero bodies, "constructed through their physicality […] and the display of the body" (Tasker, *Spectacular*: 35); and Iron Man is no exception. His early adventures focus strongly on the fact that his body is both a "narrative space that is safe"—since he is the hero of the story—while at the same time the fact that this body "is constantly under attack" (Tasker, "Dumb Movies" 241) is ubiquitous. Repeatedly, Tony being able to recharge his chest plate or his entire armor is challenged, and his survival endangered. As Iron Man, he enacts *"muscular masculinity"* (Tasker, *Spectacular*) just like his colleagues Black Panther, Falcon, or Captain America. But with this character, the substance of muscular masculinity, where the focus is on "both the restraint and the excess involved in 'being a man'" and "the work put into the male body and the poses that it strikes" (Tasker, "Dumb Movies" 233) is never a sure or secure thing. It can become a matter of life and death in the matter of seconds. Similar to *action heroes* like John Rambo or John McLane, Tony Stark's mechanical body is a weapon (Lichtenfeld) and often is "a body driven, chased, hounded, 'pushed' beyond endurance" (O'Brien 42). Like Captain America or Black Panther, Iron Man possesses a "take no shit body" (Bordo 57) which is tough and powerful, and yet it is an artificially constructed body which secures Stark's claim to authority and power. Such

claims are key ingredients of hegemonic masculinity, and Tony Stark/Iron Man is an example of how these do not come naturally to men but can in fact be engineered. In stories featuring Iron Man/Tony Stark, artificiality is no hindrance to enacting *hegemonic manhood* successfully: with every new chapter in this superhero's serial, the male protagonist risks his body, effects change with his body, and as he takes risks and performs heroic feats, is granted his manhood *again and again*.

This is, of course, also the case in "Iron Man is born!". Once Tony Stark has mastered his new body, he goes after Wong-Chu. He approaches "the red guerilla tyrant!" (Lee*, Epic Collection Iron* 1 9) as he is tormenting Vietnamese men he has taken prisoner. Stark approaches him and arrogantly taunts the frightened man, "Have you never seen an Iron Man before?" (16). Calling Wong-Chu a "heartless man" (16) who represent everything he opposes, Iron Man attacks him and his soldiers, using all his gadgets. When his enemy is about to get away, Stark sets fire to the camp's ammunition room, and the subsequent explosion kills Wong-Chu. Tony is satisfied, since he "has set the prisoners free, and the reds have fled in panic! It's all over! Now, Professor Yinsen, rest easy! You, who sacrificed your life to save mine, have been avenged!" (19).

On the one hand, "Iron Man is born!" positions Tony Stark/Iron Man as a character who opposes tyranny and saves innocent lives, but is not above killing his enemies. On the other hand, the narrative establishes Vietnamese men and women as incompetent, fearful, and powerless, needing American support in order to live in freedom; and it kills off the one Asian character who is none of these things (Cooley and Rogers). It further turns Iron Man into the *White Savior* of non-white characters and marks him as an effective "Cold Warrior" (Costello).

In terms of "doing" masculinity as Iron Man, the comics also show its protagonist to be rather effective. Iron Man takes action and shows strength as well as the willingness to commit violence, which are all normatively masculine traits and signs of possessing *masculine capital*. When wearing his "mighty, electronic body" (Lee*, Epic Collection Iron* 1 12), Iron Man is definitely "strong, successful, capable, reliable, in control". Stark's invention does more than gift him a superhero persona, which the character puts to serial use after his debut in *Tales of Suspense* #39. Iron Man is an example of cyborg technology and experiencing transhuman

subjectivity (Masters; Jeffrey), both of which he uses for his masculinity enactment, which in the 1960s is strictly patriarchal. This is discussed in more detail in "Embodying Iron man: Masculinized Technology and Doing Battle".

But as a Marvel superhero, Stark is always a mix of both emotional fragilities and tough actions. In his case, emotional fragility is tied to physical fragility, only ever circumvented by technology but not abolished. As stated at the end of "Iron Man is born!", Stark needs to recharge his suit if he wants it, and his heart, to remain functional: his armor functions like a pacemaker. This need to recharge because Tony's basic survival depends on it is highlighted often in the comics. Before taking out Wong-Chu, Stark contemplates his new fragility as well as his new strength. Tony wonders, "Can the thing I have created survive? This thing which is less than human … yet far more than merely human! This thing which is now … Tony Stark!" (Lee*, Epic Collection Iron* 1 15), which gives him pause. He then laments, "My brain still thinks! My heart still beats! But in order to remain alive, I must spend the rest of my life in this iron prison!!" (15).

Tony Stark is here established as another one of Marvel Comics' melodramatic heroes (Bainbridge). As Jason Bainbridge points out in "'Worlds within Worlds': the Role of Superheroes in Marvel and DC Universes", so much of "Marvel storytelling came from melodrama" (68). According to him, it pits *virtuous heroes* against *vicious villains* and turns its superhero protagonists into characters that something has *been done to*, to which they now must react. While Tony Stark's virtue can and should be debated—he is after all a weapons manufacturer and supplier—in the comics at this time, Stark is supposed to be the virtuous "hero of the story". Something happens to him, and he has to react. His injuries seem to condemn him to classic *melodramatic* hero traits, such as "weakness, passivity" (69), but Stark refuses to remain that way and builds himself a mechanical body instead. Tony is a "hero who is also a victim" (Williams 57), and by the end of "Iron Man is born!", the "character's moral value" (Williams 58)—at least within American Cold War sensibilities (Costello)—has been established.

Tony is depicted as beleaguered by his new circumstances, but as his subsequent adventures demonstrate, he turns his "iron prison" (Lee*, Epic Collection Iron* 1 15) into quite the place to

be when he goes after villains as Iron Man, or when he invents gadgets or dates beautiful women as Tony Stark. However, his fragility is a constant in every adventure. Starting in *Tales of Suspense* #40, "Iron Man versus Gargantus!" Tony is shown as declining to get closer to his dates, as he can never "appear anywhere bare-chested because I constantly wear this iron chest plate […] which gives continued life to my heart" (Lee*, Epic Collection Iron* 1 23). This physical weakness, demonstrated by the need to recharge his chest plate regularly lest his life is in danger, turns into a reiterative component from his earliest adventures onwards.

It shapes how this character displays a *hybridized* hegemonic masculinity enactment (Demetriou). His infirmity is not erased by technology; it is reined in, but remains a part of his adventures to come. Issue after issue, Marvel Comics depict Tony Stark/Iron Man as reaching an energy outlet at the last possible moment, so that he can plug in and recharge himself. It stresses, on a serial basis, his fragility, and therefore also highlights how for Tony Stark/Iron Man, "doing" masculinity is "fraught with danger, with the risk of failure".

Embodying Tony Stark: Playboy, Inner-Directed Organization Man and Cold Warrior

In "Iron Man versus Gargantus!", Tony Stark is introduced as "a man who leads three lives" (Lee*, Epic Collection Iron* 1 22), which this section shows to be connected to three ways of "doing" masculinity so that other men approve of it (Kimmel).

Firstly, he is a "mechanical genius" and scientist involved in "America's Cold War struggle against the communist menace" (22); secondly, he is a "sophisticated millionaire playboy whom beautiful women adore" (22); and last but not least, he has his "third and most important identity … the creature in the unbelievably powerful iron shell, equipped with many ingenious attachments" (23) who fights crime whether it appears in the form of "gangsters" or a "madman of science" (24). While this description rates Stark appearing as Iron Man as the most important "doing" of masculinity, his two other lives also let him interact with agreed-upon masculinity enactment. Being a playboy, as well as a man working with and inventing technology, ties into 1960s or Postwar prerequisites for "doing" American masculinity "properly". He is both a consumer and a producer of goods, and due to his physical condition

takes the idea of being a consumer to a whole new level. If he does not "consume" energy on a regular basis, he will perish.

This makes Tony Stark into an interesting character to be born in the sixties. As Peter Costello explains, starting in the 1950s, a "vast expansion of the American economy that would grow at an almost unbroken—and even quickening—pace for two decades" generates an "affluence never known before" (31). American men and women are told to consume goods and services non-stop, to become a part of "middle-class America whose ranks were swelling daily" (36). At the same time, a zeitgeist takes shape where people are "increasingly struggling with the fear that Americans were growing too soft and self-indulgent" (Cuordileone, "Age of Anxiety" 23) due to consuming so much.

And while Postwar America, as discussed earlier, urges men

> to amass greater wealth in order to purchase more things for the home and prove their manhood through the acquisition of status symbols […], wealth and consumer culture increasingly created anxiety about the condition of white masculinity in America. (De Dauw 52)

Tony Stark without a doubt functions as an example of white masculinity being a success, related to concepts like "modernity, reason, order, stability" (Dyer, "White—Images" 46). At the same time, he is someone who needs to consume if he wants to enact masculinity in hegemonic ways, which turns this character into someone who both "represented those fears and laid them to rest" (De Dauw 52). To reiterate, Postwar America is presented as a society of affluence, where being a consumer is akin to being a "good American" man or woman (Gitlin; Costello). Both sexes are meant to be active consumers as well as happy homemakers (Ehrenreich; Bordo). If men want to be granted masculinity by other men in this society, they must demonstrate conformity and *maturity* (Ehrenreich), which usually includes having a well-paying white-collar job, and being a husband and father who can provide for the wife and the kids. Tony Stark is neither a husband nor a father, but he is a *playboy*.

As Barbara Ehrenreich and Susan Bordo point out, being a playboy offers men a safe alternative—or a safe rebellion—against America's "relentless spirit of pro-domesticity" (Bordo 112). To be a playboy means to enter a "fraternity of male rebels" (Ehrenreich 43),

where men are never in real danger of being considered "not masculine enough", because *Playboy* magazine "provides a perfect example of the reinforcement of heterosexuality and conventional masculinity" (Conekin 449). Hugh Hefner simply advocates that his male readers refuse to marry, settle down in the suburbs, and father children. He does not tell them to stop being consumers, or having affairs with women. *Playboy* really is a self-help guide for men, providing shopping, dressing, and dating tips: In the spirit of Postwar affluency, it "advocated fun through consumption" and encourages men to partake in the "pleasure of shopping for clothes and accessories for himself" (57). The magazine advises men what car to buy and where to dine, as it "provided an early and elementary tutorial on the new American life-style" (Halberstam 575).

Marvel Comics' Tony Stark is introduced as a playboy in *Tales of Suspense* #39, and this part of his character is continuously built upon. When presenting as Tony Stark, he is often shown dating handsome women who adore him and want to spend more time with him. When he declines due to "other plans", his dates muse that said plans "probably all wear skirts and are dying to marry you! Your name has been linked with every actress and society beauty from Hollywood to Rome!" (Lee*, Epic Collection Iron* 1 23). Not only does this mark Tony Stark as a serial dater—as every playboy should be according to Hugh Hefner—but it also has him living up to one more playboy requirement: as Hefner states in a *Playboy* article, playboys "never choose poor girls" (qtd. in Conekin 463).

Whenever his playboy attitudes are being highlighted, Stark is depicted wearing high-end fashion such as a tuxedo or a three-piece suit while attending high society parties, balls, and galas. He is also repeatedly shown driving or being chauffeured around in luxurious sports cars, and living in stylish mansions. Regarding men's fashion, "one of the most consistent forms of male attire has been the suit", which has "endured as a prototypical male uniform" (Moss 61). The suit has been a staple of men's fashion in Europe and North America since the early nineteenth century (Hollander). A suit is more than a piece of cloth covering the body; it "suggests probity and restraint, prudence and detachment" and has turned into "the standard costume of civil leadership for the whole world" (54). In this sense, a suit can also provide access to masculine capital, to the "currency […] in which privilege and esteem are traded". In Postwar America, with its emphasis on men aspiring to have careers in managerial or white-

collar jobs (Corber; Cuenca), wearing a suit also turns into a sign of being adjusted and mature in one's masculinity enactment (Ehrenreich). Of course, Stark has a completely different set of suits as well—his Iron Man suits—which also give him access to *masculine capital*, albeit being worn on rather different occasions.

When Tony Stark appears in an elegant suit, he is usually granted the respect of other men, as his fine choice in fashion is representative of his successful enactment of Kimmel's *"Marketplace Masculinity*", of him being a successful CEO. This further aligns with what Hugh Hefner, in a 1956 issue of *Playboy,* says about what defines a playboy. Such a man can be a "sharp minded young business executive […] or an engineer", and most of all "an alert man […] sensitive to pleasure" and willing to "live life to the tilt" (Hefner, *Playboy* 10 43).

Stark is a business executive *and* an engineer; and considering the risks he takes as Iron Man, he really does live life to the tilt. In a 1963 issue of *Playboy*—published the same year as Iron Man's debut—Hefner publishes the previously mentioned article called "Playboy Philosophy", wherein he connects men who want to call themselves playboys even more directly to the idea of Kimmel's "Marketplace Man": playboys must put "effort in their work, develop capabilities further and climb higher on the ladder of success", and ought to "throw themselves into their work […] and recognize wealth as an achievement and a means to personal pleasure" (qtd. in Ehrenreich 46). Hefner therefore defines playboys as daring and competitive in business matters, making them men who enact Kimmel's "Marketplace Masculinity". A playboy not only amasses wealth and items of luxury—and as such is an avid consumer—he also devotes "himself to his work in an increasingly homosocial environment—a male-only world in which he pits himself against other men" (Kimmel, "Homophobia" 123). As the CEO of Stark Industries, Tony fits this description perfectly: being a successful entrepreneur makes him a Self-Made Man. It is not the only Kimmel archetype he fits, as he is also a Genteel Patriarch.

As a member of the upper class, Stark is also eligible to be a *Genteel Patriarch*. To men like that, "manhood meant property ownership […,] benevolent patriarchal authority" as well as doing "philanthropic work" (Kimmel, *Manhood* 16).

In *Tales of Suspense* #41,"The Stronghold of Doctor Strange!", Tony Stark is shown doing philanthropic work. The first panel on the first page shows Stark dressed in a tuxedo with a beautiful woman on his arm, attending a children's hospital charity gala. When he is asked to step forward by the hostess of the event, it is revealed that Stark has donated $100.000 to the hospital, enabling it to build its "new hospital wing" (Lee*, Epic Collection Iron* 1 36). Afterwards, Tony's date jokes, "So lady-killer Stark is just an old-softie at heart! He supports charitable causes" (36). But Stark is not just charitable to hospitals in need, but also to his employees.

The comics repeatedly show him as not just a CEO leading his firm from his office desk, but as actively engaged in the weapons and gadgets Stark Industries builds. He is always around to oversee what his staff is doing, and when a new invention turns into a chaotic mess, he is the first to "motivate" his employees—via "benevolent patriarchal authority"—to begin the clean-up process. This happens in *Tales of Suspense* #47, "Iron Man battles the Melter!" (Lee*, Epic Collection Iron* 1 109), where the titular villain destroys Stark property in one of Tony's factories. He is also accepting of employees who take their anger out on him, if he thinks it's justified. In *Tales of Suspense* #50, "The Hands of the Mandarin!", (Lee*, Epic Collection Iron* 1 180) Stark must cancel his appearance at the employees' annual dinner get-together where he is supposed to give a speech, because he must fight the villain Mandarin as Iron Man. He regrets having to do this, and when he tries to explain his decision to Bill, one of his employees, the man reacts very emotionally. In front of Tony's secretary Pepper Potts and his personal chauffeur Happy Hogan, he retorts, "What's to explain?? We get the message! A big shot like you can't associate with the hired hands!" (Lee*, Epic Collection Iron* 1 184). Hogan, wishing to defend his boss' honor, plants a punch on Bill's chin. Tony's reaction is to pull him aside and state, "You ever pull a stunt like this again, and you're through here—you understand? Any employee can talk to me any way he wants and if he gets out of line, I'll handle it … my own way!" (184). His employees are generally shown as approving of Stark's authority over, and treatment of, them, which equates to granting him masculinity in homosocial ways (Kimmel, "Homophobia").

Exchanges like the one described here demonstrate Tony's enactment of Kimmel's *Genteel Patriarch*, as he shows compassion for his staff while not stepping back from the authority he has over them as their CEO. But the comics also repeatedly show Stark as doing *Heroic Artisan*

masculinity. When Stark works with Prof. Yinsen in *Tales of Suspense* #39, they form "a community of equals" (Kimmel, *Manhood* 29), which is one aspect of enacting Heroic Artisan masculinity, as is the fact that, to the Heroic Artisan, the labor he performs equals "a form of property" (28). Tony is shown as very involved in what Stark Industries produces, not to mention his attachment to every update and embellishment he adds to his Iron Man suit. The comics often show Stark engrossed in his work while wearing work-overalls—at times also a lab coat—which are usually the same color as those his employees wear, as can be seen in *Tales of Suspense* #40, "Iron Man versus Gargantus!"; *Tales of Suspense* #46, "Iron Man faces the Crimson Dynamo!"; *Tales of Suspense* #48, "The mysterious Mr. Doll!"; *or Tales of Suspense* #50, "The Hands of the Mandarin!". Depicting him in such clothing marks Stark as both an artisan worker and literally as a worker who connects to Heroic Artisan ideas, which imagine this kind of man as an "independent urban craftsman" and "economically autonomous". As mentioned above, Tony respects his employee's outburst of anger over the CEO not attending the employees' annual dinner. This further indicates how Stark, very much in Heroic Artisan form, considers himself as existing "within a community of equals" with his staff. Displaying Stark in is this way contributes to what Will Cooley and Mark C. Rogers refer to as "a liberal's ideal" (80). Stark is "a capitalist but hardly rapacious", and he is a "benevolent boss", a "hard-working scientist as concerned with enhancing mankind as he is with the bottom line" (80). In a time where predictions made by sociologists David Riesman and Phillip Whyte back in the mid-fifties, about the "rise" of *other-directed organization men* incapable of independent thought and initiative, appear to have come to fruition (Genter; Costello), Marvel Comics' Tony Stark holds fast to the myth of the successful, *inner-directed* Self-Made Man.

This thesis has now connected Stark to the *Genteel Patriarch* and the *Heroic Artisan*, but as CEO of Stark Industries, he of course connects to *Marketplace Masculinity* or *Self-Made Man* concepts just as strongly. As Michael Kimmel explains, this is the one fantasy about "doing" masculinity which becomes "the normative definition of American masculinity" ("Homophobia" 124) against which all other men are measured. It entails character traits such as "aggression, competition, anxiety—and the arena in which those characteristics are deployed—the public sphere, the marketplace" (124). Throughout his earliest appearances in *Tales of Suspense* and later in *Invincible* Iron *Man*, Tony Stark enacts all these qualities, and

they are also enacted upon him by other businessmen. It is also where his masculinity enactment is most strongly homosocial, as it is judged by other men who are themselves powerful: Stark has contracts with the military as well as the US government. But Stark is also the head of an organization at a time when organizations are central to turning the US into a society of affluency (Gitlin).

In Postwar America, "most working Americans were employed in white-collar jobs for the first time, as organized capitalism replaced the individual entrepreneur" (Costello 36). This establishes a workplace reality where "the individual was in fact part of the great capitalist organizations" and "[b]ig business, big labor and big government were the reality" (37). In this job world, every male employee is sooner or later asked to become an "other-directed, team-playing organization man" (37). Tony Stark/Iron Man exists as mixture of being both an *inner-* and *other-directed* man, who is an organization, but also an *organization man* (Riesman; Whyte).

Historian Robert Genter revisits the origins of Tony Stark/Iron Man in "'"With Great Power Comes Great Responsibility"': Cold War Culture and the Birth of Marvel Comics". Stan Lee is said to have modeled Tony Stark on the eccentric but ingenious billionaire Howard Hughes. In the late 1950s, Hughes "used his enterprises to support the Cold War effort and was one of the most prominent defense contractors, developing guided missiles and electronic airplane guiding systems" (969-967). Hughes is often referred to as one of the United States' last rugged individualists in terms of doing business and being successful in the press: a "no-man in the land of yes-men" (Hill 14), which means he represents what David Riesman refers to as *"inner-directed*". Such men are "hard and self-reliant", and see themselves as the makers and producers of things (112). Such men, says Riesman, make decisions and give orders rather than taking orders or deferring decisions to others, which is what *"other-directed"* men do. Such men "pay close attention to the signals from others" (26), work in teams and are what Willian Whyte calls *"organization men*". Whyte sees big capitalism, corporate business, and the white-collar jobs they create as necessary evils of Postwar America, which men must accept but at the same time also keep in check.

As Ehrenreich summarizes, Whyte believes that "white-collar work crushed initiative, rewarded conformity rather than creativity, and forced the individual to submit to the collective will of the committee, the 'team'" (Ehrenreich 38). Whyte wants men to engage in cooperative resistance: "We need to know how to co-operate with the Organization but, more than ever, so do we need to know how to resist it" (Whyte 12). Marvel's Tony Stark/Iron Man is doing this.

Stark is at his most *inner-directed* when he designs his Iron Man suits and goes to work as Iron Man, since this is when he can make up his own rules. The same is true when he designs gadget after new gadget for his suits, for his superhero colleagues, or to sell them via Stark Industries (Genter; Cooley and Rogers). Such sequences show Tony Stark as an exemplary "independent, self-mastering, industrialist" (Genter 966) and most of all as a triumphant Self-Made Man.

At the same time, Stark holds contracts with the military and the US government, and also lends them Iron Man for missions[54]. And they are two organizations to whom he must answer. When Stark has to cancel his appearance at his employee dinner in "The Hands of the Mandarin!" (Lee*, Epic Collection Iron* 1 180), it is because the Military orders him to gather more information on the villain named Mandarin. Right from the start in *Tales of Suspense* #39, Stark and Stark Industries are shown producing all kinds of equipment for the military to use in Cold War related battles, making Tony Stark, the entrepreneur, as much a Cold Warrior in the service of "clobberin' commies" (Donovan 55) as Iron Man is. In fact, in Iron Man/Tony Stark "Marvel generated an orienting figure to balance traditional values linked to the Cold War ideology within the broader domestic dialogue about defense" (Chambliss 164). As the head of Stark Industries, Tony is a "Cold War American" who sees himself as

> an individual who lived in the most virtuous political system in the world, as evidenced by American prosperity, and whose divine mission was to extend the benefits of that prosperity to all American citizens and promote the virtues of its governmental systems around the world by defending it against the evil force of totalitarianism. (Costello 32)

[54] At this point in the serial, Iron Man is said to be Tony Stark's bodyguard, whose civilian identity is kept secret for security reasons. Iron Man officially "works" for Tony Stark and Stark Industries.

In terms of "doing" masculinity in times of the Cold War (Corber; Cuordileone, "Age of Anxiety"), it means that Stark's manhood enactment is also judged by how effective he fights communist threats. As Genter points out,

> one of the main narratives [sic] threads of Iron Man concerns Stark's continuing problems with military officials who are trying to control his research and who begin to question his loyalty. (968)

In *Tales of Suspense* #46,"The Red Dynamo" (Lee*, Epic Collection Iron* 1 109), a Russian communist villain sabotages one of Stark's rocket ships, which then fails during a practice flight. Military officials and US senators start to question Stark's loyalty and demand an investigation into Stark Industries, suspecting him of being a communist spy. They fear the worst, since if

> Stark is a communist agent look at the sweet spot he's in! First, he grabs up those government contracts! This makes the U.S. heavily dependent on his industrial empire for strategic weapons and research! ... We have to investigate Stark thoroughly !! (Lee*, Epic Collection Iron* 1 117)

Suspicions voiced by the military and the government do not disappear, and pop up again and again. When Stark's production numbers fall behind—he is again sabotaged by a villainous character—Senators admonish him as "his production has fallen off dangerously!" (Lee, *Epic Collection Iron* 1 134), and again accuse him of being a communist sympathizer. In *Tales of Suspense* #69 "If I must die, let it be with honor!", and #70"Fight on! For a world is watching!" (Lee*, Epic Collection Iron* 1 459; 472), the stories focus on Tony Stark and Iron Man as bona fide "Cold Warriors". Iron Man is publicly challenged to fight Titanium Man, a villain whose suit of armor has been built by USSR scientists bent on defeating the US. Their fight is first announced in newspapers, and then televised worldwide. The challenge goes to Iron Man, as he counts as "One of Communism's greatest enemies!" (Lee*, Epic Collection Iron* 1 462). As the CEO of Stark Industries, Tony Stark—in the eyes of the US military and US senators—is as much called upon as Iron Man. Having trouble keeping his armor functional, Stark hesitates to accept the challenge. Senator Byrd, one of the US senators always willing to accuse Stark of being a communist agent, is outraged: "If Iron Man chickens out, I'll make Stark regret it!" (467). At the same time, Tony ponders, "would it be better to fight and lose … than to be branded as a coward?" (467). Having found a way to upgrade his armor, Iron Man accepts, and the fight is

televised. Senator Byrd is on location watching the fight, and when it looks bad for Iron Man, Byrd is vitriolic:

> If that titanium giant beats him, I'll hold Stark personally accountable for the defeat … Stark is supposed to be our weapon genius! He should have made Iron Man's armor stronger! This proves what I've always said … Stark is a phony! …The eyes of the world are on us … and we're losing! (480)

Only when Iron Man defeats Titanium Man is Senator Byrd appeased: "Congratulations, Iron Man! The entire free world is proud of you!" (493).

As K.A. Cuordileone points out in *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War,* and as discussed earlier, in order to be considered "properly" masculine in Cold War America, men must always demonstrate the relentlessness they are willing to display in going after any communist threat. To do any less means to invite doubt about one's masculinity, one's toughness, influence, reliability, and one's sexual orientation (Corber; Cuordileone). Stark/Iron Man is hellbent on showing that he is a perfect "Cold War American" (Costello 31).

Tony Stark/Iron Man as a character is deeply involved with "America's Cold War struggle against the communist menace" (Lee*, Epic Collection Iron* 1 22). After all, his first appearance shows the "mechanical genius" (22) engrossed in solving the military's "problems in Vietnam" (Lee*, Epic Collection Iron* 1 8). From the start, he shows that he has what it takes to be the man the US military can trust in these matters. In "The Stronghold of Doctor Strange!", Tony is further shown developing "atomic naval canons"; a "flesh-healing serum" able to "close any open wound in two seconds"; and "burp guns" with the same impact fire-power as "artillery shells" (Lee*, Epic Collection Iron* 1 37)—all of which the military shows an interest in. And fashioning him with a "separate identity" as a playboy who does not "partake in domesticity, marital commitments" (Genter 969), but instead asserts heterosexual masculine virility as a "playboy whom beautiful women adore" (Lee*, Epic Collection Iron* 1 22) further helps depict Tony as enacting successful Cold War masculinity (Ehrenreich; Corber; Cuordileone). But scenes as depicted in *Tales of Suspense* #69 and #70 also show that Cold War masculinity enactment is as homosocial as it is unstable. Iron Man adventures reveal how masculinity as a "homosocial enactment is fraught with danger, with the risk of failure, and with intense relentless competition" (Kimmel).

Tony Stark and his "product" Iron Man must prove to Senator Byrd, to another powerful man, that they are "man enough". They can only do so by spending *masculine capital* to purchase "privilege among peers", and they do so by being "willing to take risks" and act "muscular" (Anderson 42).

Both as Tony Stark and as Iron Man, this superhero adheres to what Cuordileone calls a "cult of toughness", which includes being "ballsy" and exuding "coolness" (*Cold War* 202). These terms are used by the John F. Kennedy administration in order to "re-masculinize" American Postwar politics (202). "*Ballsiness*" refers to "bold aggressiveness" (201), showing courage, the willingness to act. Used at press conferences and in official statements, it connects to how

> Kennedy adopted a more competitive confrontational tone, treating the cold war as a supreme global contest, a contest not of two rival superpowers, but of masculine will and strength. (211)

Kennedy wants more, not less confrontation between the USSR and the US, and a number of Iron Man's earliest adventures feel like they are adhering perfectly to this Kennedy policy:

> In its most troubling manifestations, "coolness" in the Kennedy administration meant the acceptance of the use of force, violence, and subterfuge as routine. (*Cold War* 219)

This reveals Kennedy's politics as being rather masculinized. Tony Stark/Iron Man and John F. Kennedy have a few things in common. Not only do Iron Man's policies include being assertive and using violence; but as a playboy, Tony Stark appears to match John F. Kennedy when it comes to being a womanizer. And in the same way that Tony Stark hides his physical infirmity from the public, the team around JFK hides his medical conditions from the public while he is in office (Savage; Gunderson).

Iron Man debuts in March 1963, and Kennedy is assassinated in November of the same year. Michael Kimmel points out how a "shock wave had jolted the American psyche when Kennedy was assassinated in 1963" (*Manhood* 268). When it comes to "doing" masculinity in a *ballsy* and assertive way, his assassination shows that if "Kennedy could be shot down, then the manhood he embodied was itself vulnerable" (268). Tony Stark is no politician, but like Kennedy he is ballsy, assertive, a womanizer, and rather vulnerable if he is not careful. This section has shown how Tony Stark is very involved in "doing" masculinity in ways that other men approve of: he successfully enacts Kimmel's Self-Made Man, Genteel Patriarch, and

Heroic Artisan masculinities, but the comics also reveal how "doing" masculinity is, for this character, particularly "fraught with danger" and only ever achieved "through intense relentless competition". "Doing" masculinity as Tony Stark has now been analyzed, but what about "doing" masculinity as Iron Man? Even though the dangers remain, Iron Man can be regarded as a fictional example of what Christina Masters refers to as "cyborg soldiers", and most definitely as an example of masculinizing technology fused to military defense capabilities.

Embodying Iron Man: Masculinized Technology and Doing Battle

In "Theories and Histories of Masculinities", *militarized manhood* is discussed as a conglomeration of qualities which often overlap with definitions of *hegemonic masculinity* and can be found in all male superheroes discussed in this thesis. As a "Cold Warrior" (Costello; Chambliss), Tony Stark/Iron Man is no exception. But hegemonic or militarized masculinity enactment is not to be had without the adequate body. As discussed in the previous chapter, Steve Rogers/Captain America obtains hegemonic masculinity via a scientific experiment that grants him a specific body; he has no body "going for the masculine look" before, only internal masculine traits such as courage and tenacity. In the case of Tony Stark/Iron Man, the character starts out with a lot of *masculine capital* already: a playboy, a successful Marketplace Man, and a socialite. This easy access to "doing" normative masculinity is taken from the character when he is injured in Vietnam, when his male body is severely wounded. The artificial body Stark builds for himself not only saves his life, but restores masculine capital to him. When wearing his suit or just his chest plate, he can once more raise his "masculine level": the esteem and approval "achieved through attitudes and behaviors" (Anderson 42). As Stark, he continues to build weapons and other scientific equipment, he continues to date beautiful women; and as Iron Man, he fights communist villains out to harm the US, as well as other villains out to harm the innocent. But the shrapnel pieces buried in Stark's chest make permanent technological support necessary. Technology powers this male body, and with it his masculinity enactment. "Doing" masculinity and applying technology are fused in the character of Tony Stark/Iron Man, as strongly as with hardly any other Marvel

Comics superhero this early on. Without technology, Stark cannot remain Kimmel's "man *in* power, […] *with* power, […] *of* power".

And as analyzed below, the suit of armor Tony builds is more and more made to look like a muscular body going for "the masculine look" (Easthope 53).

Scholars from various fields have already discussed Iron Man as a "Cold Warrior" (Costello; Chambliss; Donovan), as a representative of the Military-Industrial Complex (Cooley and Rogers; Henebry; Jeffrey). What makes Iron Man so problematic as a "Cold Warrior" is the fact that the character is created around a time when the American government still considers the war in Vietnam to be "a cakewalk" due to their belief in "American potency and know-how" (Cooley and Rogers 82). In Iron Man's early appearances, whenever this superhero fights in Vietnam or faces off against communist villains, he perpetuates such official American rhetoric (Henebry; Cooley and Rogers). As Cooley and Rogers point out, "in the comic, the Vietnamese Communists are all soulless and calculating, while the only goal of the American armed forces is to protect the appreciative peasantry" (85). Early Iron Man adventures often treat the war in Vietnam not as a "war of territory", but a "war for the hearts and minds of the people" (Schell qtd. in Cooley and Rogers 81). The character wants to win both wars as Tony Stark and as Iron Man. Not until 1972 do Iron Man stories venture into actual reality, as Stark questions his role in Vietnam as a weapons creator and supplier, and changes the goods Stark Industries produces from military to civilian purposes. At the time of Iron Man's "birth", the US government still believes that superiority in fire power and weapons technology will defeat and destroy the Viet Cong, and Iron Man is an exemplar of such superiority (Wright; Cooley and Rogers; Henebry).

Iron Man has also been discussed as a cyborg in a transhumanist sense (Jeffrey), but this thesis wants to connect masculinity enactment with masculinizing technology when it comes to reading Iron Man stories.

Technology provides the means by which Stark can enact masculinity successfully—meaning so that other men grant him manhood. But it is more than a convenient tool to use and then discard; it is an absolute necessity for his survival. Tony clarifies this when he says,

> Can the thing I have created survive? This thing which is less than human … yet far more than merely human! This thing which is now…Tony Stark!! […] My brain still thinks! My heart still beats! But in order to remain alive, I must spend the rest of my life in this iron prison!!" (Lee*, Epic Collection Iron* 1 15)

Tony Stark/Iron Man is masculinizing technology to ensure his own survival, and he produces technical equipment and weapons as a defense contractor for the US military, as explicitly shown in *Tales of Suspense* #46 "Iron Man faces the Red Dynamo" (Lee*, Epic Collection Iron* 1 109). This makes him "a superhero who personified the military-industrial complex" (Cooley and Rogers 77) from the start. In Postwar America, scientific research is often funded by the military and/or the government (Costello; De Dauw), and these circumstances "give birth" to the Military-Industrial Complex.

The term *Military-Industrial Complex* refers to companies who manufacture and sell weapons and equipment used in warfare and military operations (Dunlap; Epstein). The term itself is often tied to US President Dwight D. Eisenhower, who in his last public address to the American nation, in 1961, praises the military as a "vital element in keeping the peace" but also cautions against any "unwarranted influence" of the Military-Industrial Complex (*The Papers of Dwight D. Eisenhower*). This complex is best understood as a "frightening alliance between the Military and Industry […] leading […] inexorably toward Global War" (Cook qtd. in Cooley and Rogers 73). After the Second World War, industry branches focusing solely on defense capabilities become more and more profitable as the Cold War becomes a reality. As Will Cooley and Mark C. Rogers point out:

> During the Cold War […] national defense proponents insisted that the battle against communisms and the lethality and sophistication of modern weapons necessitated industries that focus solely on defense. (78)

Many companies support this idea, which translates to them working for both the military and the government, as

> [f]or corporations, military contracts were more profitable, less competitive, and more easily gained through lobbying the incestuous relationship between public and private interests. (78)

As defense contractor, Tony Stark builds and engineers not just weapons but technical devices to help soldiers be more efficient in battle. And he does not work and develop solely for the

military. In 1965, Stark appears in *Strange Tales* #135, a comic anthology like *Tales of Suspense*, which features the first issue of *Nick Fury: Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D*. In this story, the scientist and inventor is introduced as "the agency's chief weapons designer, making him a central supporting character" (Chambliss 167) in the series from that moment on. In this capacity, he also has a few guest spots in 1960s Captain America adventures, starting in *Tales of Suspense* #58, the comic book anthology in which both superheroes appear regularly during the 1960s.

As Iron Man, he is himself a mixture of human and technological equipment when he goes to battle: The Iron Man suit is itself a weapon. It turns Stark into a specialized "cyborg soldier" (Masters 120). In simplified terms, according to Masters, a cyborg soldier is a human soldier who uses and relies on highly technologized weapons and equipment when going to battle. A cyborg[55] may refer to many things. The word is

> coined in the 1960s by NASA scientists[…]. A contraction of the terms "cybernetic" and "organism", the cyborg is a fusion of biology and technology, the natural and the artificial, functioning as a single being. (Jeffrey 25)

Tony Stark is very much such a cyborg. As security scholar Christina Masters points out in "Bodies of Technology: Cyborg Soldiers and Militarized Masculinities", cyborgs, technology, and the military have always been close. In this triangle, the cyborg signals "the insertion of the mechanical into the biological to enhance the biological" (113). A cyborg soldier is further the result of "techno-scientific discourses and masculinist discourses" (115). It is part of a "discursive process […] inscribing hegemonic masculinity on/into military technologies" (116). In other words, machines, weapons, and other pieces of defense equipment are *masculinized*, while soldiers of any gender are *feminized*. Military technology is constructed as tough, enduring, and achieving results, while human soldiers are seen as vulnerable, soft, and in need of protection (Gray; Masters; Boose). This changes technology from something "a man can do" (Moss 139) into something that "does" masculinity better than the "bio-male body" (Masters 120). Such techno-scientific weapons or weapon systems are "superior at information and intelligence gathering […;] superior in 'remote sensing' […;] stronger, faster,

[55] Nowhere have meanings of what cyborgs are been more thoroughly and influentially discussed than in Donna Haraway's seminal essay "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist-Feminism in late Twentieth Century". However, this thesis does not follow Haraway's idea when discussing Iron Man, but is based on how Christina Masters talks about "cyborg soldiers".

more agile and with more staying power" (122) than a human soldier. In fact, human soldiers are reduced to being a "machine-man interface" (119) which can "always be replaced with relative ease" (122). This also means that *militarized manhood* qualities, such as Barrett's "toughness […,] endurance of hardships, aggressiveness […,] unemotional logic […,] a refusal to complain" (81) are now ascribed to weaponized technology, and no longer to soldiers.

Tony Stark/Iron Man, as a character permanently fused with technology for the first six years of his existence[56], is a "machine-man interface" and therefore a "cyborg soldier" in Masters's sense. In "Iron Man is born!", Stark states that the "transistor-powered circuits" (Lee, *Epic Collection Iron* 1 14) in his suit are controlled by his brain which reveals the armored suit as a very sophisticated piece of weaponized technology. And when he fights villains as Iron Man, it is his suit that lets him exhibit military masculinity (Morgan, "Theater of War"; Barrett) as he endures hardships, applies violence and aggression to get the job done, and refuses to complain. In *Tales of Suspense* #83, "Victory!", Iron Man faces off against Titanium Man again, and once again the battle is televised. An American Senator always critical of how Stark Industries is handling its government defense contracts, while watching the fight, describes Iron Man as "a fighting machine … irresistible … unstoppable … invincible!" (Lee, *Epic Collection Iron* 2 156). The Senator masculinizes what Iron Man can accomplish thanks to the piece of technology he wears. But Stark is not to be "replaced with relative ease" (Masters 122): he is the "hero of the story" as well as the inventor and engineer of the suit. He is a key element in making this technology work, which is what turns him into a specialized version of a "cyborg soldier": he manufactures the means of his own protection and survival. The weapons and all the gadgets Iron Man uses ensure normative masculinity enactment. They ensure that he remains Kimmel's "man *in* power, a man *with* power, a man *of* power" and above all "strong, successful, capable, reliable, in control".

But as Iron Man, Stark is not just a cyborg soldier, he modifies his suit so that it resembles a body going for "the masculine look" (see Easthope). This is a masculinization of technology in two ways: it is made to look male, and it is granted hegemonic masculinity qualities (Masters;

[56] In *Iron Man* #19, "What price … life!?", published in 1969, Stark undergoes an operation where artificially grown organic tissue is transplanted onto his heart. This enables the organ to function without being attached to his chest plate. Afterwards, Stark continues to be Iron Man, but is no longer as dependent on his invention to keep him alive.

Poggi). As media scholar Don Heggs discusses in "Cyberpsychology and Cyborgs", this is not novel to cyborg characters found in popular fiction. Heggs observes how fictional cyborgs uphold gendered lines, since "affinities, so often desired of cyborgs, are open to naturalization, for example around the thematic of masculinity" (185). What Heggs refers to here are "images of a masculine ideal" where males are depicted as "strong, self-sufficient bodies acting independently in the world" (192)—all hegemonic masculinity qualities (Connell; Kimmel; Anderson), and also connected to a body that is "going for the masculine look".

As an engineer and manufacturer of all kinds of technical equipment, Tony Stark already starts out in safely masculinized territory (Moss). His new body is a multi-functional tool: it is made of bullet-proof metal; it has suction cups in its gloves allowing him to climb up walls; air-pressure jets allow him to fly; it features extendable radio-antennas, a built-in flame-igniter, and impulse rays he can blast from his gloves as well as from his chest plate. This suit makes him "as strong as any superhero" (Mangels 4). Tony Stark uses his skills as an engineer to continuously tweak and upgrade the technology and weaponry of his armor. Over time, he also modifies his suit to resemble a muscular and therefore masculine body. This act of straightforwardly masculinizing technology leads to Iron Man looking more and more like having a bodybuilder's body over time.

By the end of *Tales of Suspense* #39, Tony Stark has built his first Iron Man suit. It is grey, tall, clunky, and while man-shaped by no means resembles a muscular male body. During *Tales of Suspense* #40 "Iron Man versus Gargantus" (Lee*, Epic Collection Iron* 1 20), the superhero is annoyed to realize that the civilians he tries to protect from harm—in this case from wildcats which have escaped from the zoo—are terrified of him. He realizes that his "appearance terrifies women and children as if I were a monster" (Lee*, Epic Collection Iron* 1 25) and later decides, "I must re-design my costume!!! It's supposed to frighten foes—not friends!" (26). Stark's date for the adventure, a handsome blonde woman named Marion who was with him at the zoo, later helps him decide what changes to apply to his armor. While telling Tony—who of course is "absent" while Iron Man ropes in the wildcats gone astray—about Iron Man's deeds, she contemplates,

> Why does he wear such a terrifying looking costume? […] he battles menaces like a hero in olden times! So, if he's a modern knight in shining armor, why doesn't he wear golden metal instead of that awful dull grey armor? (27)

Stark follows her advice and coats "every visible part of my costume with untarnishable golden paint!", and later compliments himself, "What a difference! Leave it to a woman to figure out an attractive appearance!" (27). In terms of "doing" masculinity, "Iron Man versus Gargantus" tells more than the usual superhero-saves-innocents-from-threat scenario; it also points to a male character who adapts how he looks "on the job" as a superhero in order to leave a good impression. This fits right into advisable male behavior in the workplace in Cold War America, as Robert Corber reminds us. After all, in "post-war success literature and advice manuals", men are "encouraged to pay careful attention to how they dressed" (35). The change of color works, and Iron Man now receives cheers and awes from the people he saves, which contributes to his successful masculinity enactment. The technology Stark wears is *flexible* and *adaptable*, just like male employees must be in Cold War America if they want to climb the ladder of success (Corber; Cuenca; Cuordileone).

Tony Stark redesigns his entire suit of armor to look more like a muscular male body, and later paints it in both red and gold in *Tales of Suspense* #48 "The New Iron Man battles the mysterious Mr. Doll!" (Lee*, Epic Collection Iron* 1 142). Stark builds himself a new, more tight-fitting armor. The need arises because the villain of the episode, Mr. Doll, who builds mini-dolls resembling his opponents to mind-control them, leaves Iron Man nearly powerless. The mini-transistors powering his suit are almost completely drained. The superhero must retreat from fighting him and return to Stark's offices in order to recharge. Tony is bothered by his tech failing him: "I never realized how vulnerable Iron Man is! I seem to need recharging more and more often!" (148).

Tony realizes,

> It's this suit of mine! It's too heavy! Weighs me down too much! Saps too much of my energy! […] [T]he only thing to do is to design a new Iron Man costume…one which will be lighter in weight[…,] less bulky[…]. It's far lighter … but just as strong! (149)

His new amor is much more tight-fitting and makes him look more masculine. The comics show off his new suit across three pages, covering twenty-three panels. Like a camera close-up, individual panels focus on Stark's arms, his hands, his legs, and his feet as he "suits up". These three pages are a direct reminder that as a medium, comics "employ conventional methods of body framing [which functions] in the same manner in comics as it often does in

classical film" (Taylor 354). In this sequence, Iron Man does not perform any impactful action like punching a villain or shooting one of his gadgets at one. He just gets dressed. From classic Hollywood camera work, it has also been mentioned that

> the male body cannot be marked explicitly as the erotic object of another man's look: that look must be motivated in some other way, its erotic component repressed. (Neale 14)

Here, the motivation is to see Stark put on his new Iron Man outfit, stressing the fact that a "superhero's performance lies in being looked at, ogled, appraised", which makes for an easy "reversal of sex roles, with the hero taking a traditional female role: body as object" (Fussell 44). While it is easy to argue that authorial and artistic intent here is to show Tony Stark as a powerful subject (De Dauw), the fact is that what readers do here is watch Stark put on his suit while he explains its new functions. There is nothing to keep readers, male or female, from looking at Tony's body as an object to desire as well as an object to admire, since even "heterocentrist texts can contain queer elements" and "heterosexual, straight-identifying people can have queer moments" (Doty 3). What helps keep these pages in "safe" heteronormative territory is that readers are looking at Stark getting ready to fight a villain, and therefore to take violent action.

The actions that the character takes as Iron Man are usually oozing *masculine capital*. He is assertive, aggressive, and relies on violence to fight and apprehend his opponents. And although "taking action" routinely involves using technologized weapons—such as an impulse beam—to overpower an enemy, just as often Iron Man is depicted punching a villain in the face with his fist or kicking him down with his foot. Numerous panels and cover pages depict Iron Man flexing his arms, displaying muscles; this underlines how thoroughly masculinized his suit, supposed to be a suit of armor, really is: It looks like a red and gold bodybuilder's body, a *developed* body (Dutton). As such, it is reminiscent of the ubiquity of the *perfectible* male body, which has become the standard for drawing a superhero's body (Taylor; De Dauw). Tony Stark pulls it all off when he is wearing his masculinized suit of armor, when he commands technologized weapons, when he uses his mechanical body as a weapon.

To reiterate, in *Models of Masculinity and the Media*, Mark Moss points to how technology has been turned into masculine territory. He also discusses how ads for technical equipment

geared towards men—from cars to wrist watches—play on their product's ability to reacquaint men with nature or allow them a "going back to nature" (145), which turns owning this car or that wristwatch into a "supreme masculine emblem" (145) for the owner. According to such ads, owning an SUV will turn men into rugged explorers of the countryside who take risks, take a "walk on the wild side", before returning to their city apartments. Promising men a "walk on the wild side" is not far removed from ideas thrown at men 150 years earlier—to make sure they can always access their "primitive" masculinity and are not perceived as "over-civilized" (see Rotundo; Bederman). Accessing technology turns into a shortcut for "doing" masculinity "properly".

When Stark puts on his red and gold armor and punches the Mandarin across the face, he is using technology to enact very established masculine rites of passage: a willingness to commit violence. Stark refers to his armor as a *costume* from the very beginning, which he keeps in a briefcase "in collapsible form" (Lee*, Epic Collection Iron* 1 24) so he can always keep it with him. Put on in a matter of seconds, the armor "perpetuates the link between hardness and masculinity" (De Dauw 54) and its connection to technology. The very first changes in Iron Man's armor have already been pointed out and are something Esther De Dauw also discusses in *Hot Pants and Spandex Suits*. I agree with her observations that Tony's suit reiterates the link between technology and masculinity for this character. It starts out as a "mostly faceless monolith", then shows ever more "detail in musculature" before appearing to be "hardened into the shape" of a male and "muscular body" (55-57). The longer Iron Man is around, the more his armored suits look like a male body going for "the masculine look", further proving masculinity and technology to be linked.

Stark's ability to re-design his suit "allows Tony to continually reconstruct his masculinity" (58), and his status as a rich man who can afford all of this further puts him where Postwar America wants its men and women to be: engrossed in the "competitive consumption of expensive items" (58). Where I deviate from De Dauw's reading of Iron Man is in how the comics depict the reasons for redesigning the Iron Man suit. For De Dauw, "the suit underlines the strength" Tony "gained during his escape" (56). Without a doubt, the technology Stark builds while captured returns normative masculinity enactment to him after his accident in Vietnam took it from him. However, the comics turn highlighting his remaining fragility and infirmity into a

serial narrative staple of early Iron Man stories. Turning fragility into something that stays with the character, rather than it getting fixed and never being heard of again, is what marks Iron Man as one more Marvel Comics superhero who pulls off "doing hegemonic masculinity" as a *hybrid bloc* (Demetriou).

At what price … masculinity?

Stark/Iron Man fights Titanium Man for the first time in a fight spanning two issues, *Tales of Suspense* #69 and #70. As "One of Communism's greatest enemies!" (Lee*, Epic Collection Iron* 1 462), Iron Man has been challenged to prove his superiority as a US superhero over the USSR's own superhero. During the fight, Stark thinks to himself, "Tony, boy … you should have stuck to wine, women and song! Who needed this?!!" (477). This is a good question: why does Stark need this? Among his reasons for doing it are reasons he shares with all his superhero colleagues: like them, Tony Stark chooses to live "The Strenuous Life" and enact all the "iron qualities that must go with true manhood" (Roosevelt), as it prescribes. In his earliest adventures, he does so while also holding up Cold War masculinity necessities (Ehrenreich; Cuordileone; Costello).

His first confrontation with Titanium Man has him not just challenged by a Russian villain as Iron Man, but as Tony Stark he is set upon by American senators demanding that he prove he is an upstanding "Cold War American" (Costello 31) willing to meet the demands the US military and the US government make on him as an *organization man*. As discussed in "Theories and Histories of Masculinities", "doing" masculinity involves "several stories at once" as men go after the "cultural symbols that denote manhood" (Kimmel, "Homophobia" 125). Tony Stark is Marvel Comics' bona fide character for displaying the toll this can take on a male character who is at the same time unwilling to relent on any of these stories: Stark wants to be the Self-Made Man, the playboy philanthropist, and the superhero. Whenever Stark contemplates quitting being Iron Man, he decides not to.

Throughout this chapter, I point out how Tony Stark/Iron Man successfully enacts quite a bit of normative Postwar US masculinity. He is an avid consumer of goods (Ehrenreich); he rebels

against Postwar "pro-domesticity" (Bordo) by living life as a playboy. Yet, in terms of "doing" masculinity in the fifties and sixties, "nothing could have been more in conformity with the drift of American culture than to advocate a life of pleasurable consumption" (Ehrenreich 45). *Playboy* magazine simply advocates for taking the "fun morality" (Ehrenreich 45) of Postwar affluency seriously (Gitlin), as it teaches men to be lovers and career men, and to abstain from marriage with children (Ehrenreich; Halberstam). As historian Robert Genter points out, Marvel Comics have Stark carve "a separate identity for himself that does not partake in domesticity, marital commitments or workplace demands" (969)—by making him a playboy. At the same time, he succeeds at being a Self-Made Man: he succeeds in the marketplace as CEO of Stark Industries. As Esther De Dauw points out, "Tony proved that even in the 1960s, when corporate culture had become the norm, it was still possible of the white self-made man to make his fortune" (50). Himself an *organization man* clinging to his *inner-directedness* (Riesman), Stark protests against the military and the US government wanting to control and curtail his work, and he often succeeds (Genter; Costello). His inventions upgrade his fellow superhero colleagues, like Captain America, agents of S.H.I.E.L.D., and on a regular basis himself.

The fight between Iron Man and Titanium Man referred to earlier features such a moment: Stark realizes that the tech powering his chest plate—and keeping the shrapnel pieces from reaching his heart—is no longer working at optimum levels and his heart is growing weaker. He tries to come up with a solution, an upgrade, and while doing so forgets to do what he has been needing to do regularly since his accident in Vietnam: recharge his breast plate. *Tales of Suspense* #69 and #70, therefore, offer a regular and very repetitive sight in early Iron Man adventures: Tony plugged into an energy socket via cord while lying on a bed or cowering on the ground. While he recharges, Stark muses, "I'm safe … for the present! [...] But, if ever I'm unable to re-charge … it will be … the end!" (Lee*, Epic Collection Iron* 1 461). Sequences like this belong to the Iron Man serial as much as Stark taking care of his employees, dating handsome women, or punching out a communist villain as Iron Man. This marks Stark as being among Marvel Comics' "hard, powerful men […] also capable of deep feelings, usually revealed in short moments of great softness" (Easton 136).

Tales of Suspense #48 "The New Iron Man battles the mysterious Mr. Doll!" which has Stark upgrade the design of his armor for the first time so that it resembles a more masculine physique, also has a sequence where Tony is almost too late to recharge. Panels show him collapsing to the floor after having plugged himself in, then lying on the ground unconscious while his breastplate recharges. After he regains consciousness, Tony confesses, "I never realized how vulnerable Iron Man is!" (Lee*, Epic Collection Iron* 1 148). He realizes "It's only a matter of time before my heart fails me if I continue my dangerous game!" (148). The "dangerous game" he is talking about is really enacting masculinity as a homosocial enactment, in a way "demonstrated for other men's approval". And whether Stark seeks approval of other men in the form of his male employees, his male business partners, or his fellow male superheroes, seeking said approval is always a "dangerous game" for him.

But the spoils to be gained are worth it, as the character accentuates on a serial basis. In *Tales of Suspense* #48, Tony concludes, "I can't give up! I'd prefer death to admitting defeat at the hands of a menace like Mr. Doll!" (Lee*, Epic Collection Iron* 1 149).

The same occurs in *Tales of Suspense* #69 "If I must die, let it be with honor!", as Stark works on upgrading the device that powers his chest plate. He knows "the heart of rich, glamorous, successful Tony Stark may stop at any moment, if my chest device should ever fail" (Lee*, Epic Collection Iron* 1 461). His vulnerability bothers him and has him hesitate when Titanium Man publicly challenges Iron man to a fight. He laments,

> Do I dare fight a powerful foe while my chest device is faulty? […] Yet, would it be better to fight and lose…than to be branded as a coward? […]I live in the shadow of death each moment anyways But I don't want to fail […] Not when I'm needed! (467)

Moments like this occur repeatedly, or serially, since almost

> every issue features an uncertain moment when Iron Man must flee from a desperate struggle with a supervillain to recharge his chest plate in order to stay alive. (Genter 968)

As such uncertain moments occur again and again, so does Tony's decision not to quit being Iron Man. Therefore, if, as Michael Kimmel explains, masculinity enactment is always "fraught with danger, with the risk of failure, and with intense relentless competition", then Tony Stark/Iron Man is a character who pushes all these dangers, risks, and failures very directly in

front of readers. He does not succumb to his fragilities, because he wants to prove to other men that he is death-defyingly masculine, that he is not a coward. This also connects Tony Stark/Iron Man's masculinity enactment to what Kimmel refers to as "homophobia". As the author explains,

> Homophobia is a central organizing principle of our cultural definition of manhood. Homophobia is the fear that other men will unmask us, emasculate us, reveal to us and the world that we do not measure up, that we are not real men. We are afraid to let other men see that fear. ("Homophobia" 131)

Stark "doing" manhood, as Iron Man and as Tony Stark, is tied to not wanting to be emasculated, seen as powerless, as soft, as a coward.

I agree with De Dauw that Stark is able "to construct a powerful body and he literally becomes the self-made man" (52). As well as that, creating "the Iron Man is a transformation from soft and inadequate masculinity to hard and superior masculinity" (51). This is especially true for 1960s Cold War America, which starts to fear that all this "pleasurable consumption" will turn American males soft (Ehrenreich; Cuordileone; De Dauw). I disagree with De Dauw, however, when she says that "luxury and femininity are used to portray pre-Iron Man Tony Stark as lacking in masculinity" (52). The comics do not use the fact that he is a rich playboy to diminish him; to the comics, this is one of the three lives Stark leads. In fact, Tony observes everything Postwar America wants men to be. He is rich; sports a virile and active heterosexuality as a playboy; and as a defense contractor for the military and weapons supplier for the war in Vietnam, he underlines how *"ballsy"* his attitudes is (Cuordileone, *Cold War*), how hard, and superior enough—even before he becomes Iron Man.

The actual, most potent threat to Stark "doing" masculinity in homosocial ways remains with him: his fragile and depleted bodily condition. It turns his biological body into a "soft body" which, while not belonging to an enemy or villain, is still untrustworthy as it may fail him at any moment (Jeffords, *Hard Bodies*) and is most obviously in need of protection. This is also where Marvel Comics' superheroes who are also *action heroes* combine "extravagant spectacles of violence and power" with "increasingly emotive displays of sensitivities, traumas and burdens", here in the form of Iron Man.

Although the Iron Man suit "exists as an artificial, self-constructed, hard body" (De Dauw 52), it ensures that Tony Stark has a "take no shit body", and it also ensures that after his accident, Stark continues to have a "phallic body" (Bordo 98). Phallic bodies exude "phallic authority" (101), since "the phallus … is an idea, not a body part" (98), and "having one requires the permission of culture and/or the exercise of attitude more than the possession of a particular kind of body" (101). His Iron Man tech allows Tony to remain exactly that. It turns into Tony's ticket to enact hegemonic masculinity as Kimmel's man "*in* power, a man *with* power, a man *of* power", who for all intents and purposes is "strong, successful, capable, reliable, in control".

But it is also his Achilles heel, his crutch, and his shackle. It saves his life but also curtails it. It also makes Iron Man a somewhat "malfunctioning" playboy, at least between 1963 and 1969. During this time period, the character always needs to wear his chest plate, even under everyday clothing. Starting in *Tales of Suspense* #40, this leads to Stark declining when his dates want to take him skinny dipping in the pool of their mansion, invite him to go on a beach holiday, or simply want him to take them to his bachelor pad at the end of a date. He remains a rather respectable playboy in this regard. Stark keeps dating, but never opens up to any woman about his condition. To Robert Genter, this shows how the comics center "on Stark's inability to reconcile with this wound to his masculinity, symbolized by his castrated condition" (968).

Tony Stark is therefore a castrated playboy, while at the same time strikingly masculine in other hegemonic ways: as CEO and Marketplace Man, and as Iron Man. It reminds readers that all Marvel superheroes are melodramatic heroes (Bainbridge). They are someone to whom something has happened, has been done, and readers can now follow them as they regain their equilibrium. Leaving Stark's fragility in place, showing the things he can no longer do next to the things he *can* do, as well as the power and influence he wields as Iron Man and as CEO of a big organization, is what constitutes how Iron Man/Tony Stark is yet another example of "doing" hegemonic masculinity in *hybrid* form. Stark offers hegemonic masculinity in "the form of the hero" (Donaldson), and he does so by hybridizing being fragile and robust at the same time. And being fragile, being uncertain about what to do about his condition, does not stop Stark form being tough, assertive, and aggressive, from enacting traditionally normative masculine traits. The risks he takes and the dangers he accepts while enacting

normative masculinity are all possibly life-ending for Tony. But he takes them, all so that he can be granted masculinity by other men and avoid any danger of emasculation.

"Doing" Masculinity and Black Superheroes: Resetting Gender Hierarchies

Recent years brought about a long needed and important increase in research and scholarship on comics both produced by Afro-American artists and featuring Black characters[57]. My following analysis looks at the earliest appearances of Marvel Comics' Black Panther and how masculinity enactment takes place in these texts. The character has three introductions: first in *Fantastic Four* #52, then in *Tales of Suspense* #97, and again in *Avengers* #52. All three are analyzed here. Created by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, this is a Black male character constructed by two white male authors, and therefore any analysis of his debut is also an analysis of Black masculinity through white eyes (hooks, *reel to real* and *we real cool*). Jeffrey A. Brown is one of the first comics scholars to take up the inherent conflict between Black superheroes and masculinity enactment in his article "Comic Book Masculinity and the New Black Superhero", and in his subsequent research. His approach focuses on what he refers to as a *duality* within masculine gender identity, as

> [t]he male identity within the twentieth century is perceived in extremes: man or mouse, He-Man or 98-pound weakling[…]. Warrior and wimp exist side by side, each defining the other in mutual opposition. (25)

What Brown refers to as a mutual opposition is the hypermasculine side of a character—the Superman side—always triumphing over his or her less-than-super side—the "Clark Kent" side[58]. What this author sees as mutual opposition, my approach classifies as an exercise in *hybridization* in the service of patriarchy (Connell; Demetriou) whenever masculinity enactment is concerned. When Black male characters, and through them an enactment of black masculinity, become an integral part of the narrative analyzed, things are less simple or straightforward. As discussed earlier, one of the many legacies of slavery in the US lies in Black

[57] From Brown, '*Black Superheroes, Milestone Comics and their Readers;* Howard and Jackson, '*Black Comics;* to Gateward and Jennings', *The Blacker the Ink*; as well as Sheen and Gates, '*Encyclopedia of Black Comics;* the list is extensive and ongoing.

[58] For Brown, the hypermasculine ideal is defined as "muscles, sex appeal, and social competence" while its opposite—at least in the case of superhero comics—is defined as "skinny, socially inept failure"(25).

males being defined as an *other*. As such, they both lack and exaggerate ideals that masculinity hierarchies set ostensibly for all men, but in truth for white males (Staples; Connell; Lemelle).

When it comes to black masculinity, this leaves Black males in a paradoxical position (Staples; Mercer; Lemelle). Brown also points to this contradiction in his work on Black superheroes and comic book masculinity ("Comic Book Masculinity" & *Milestones Comics*), and emphasizes how especially "the black man has been subjected to the burden of racial stereotypes that place him in the symbolic space of being too hard, too physical, too bodily" ("Comic Book Masculinity" 28). This weight and legacy of racist stereotypes is what gives all Black male superheroes a shaky ground to stand on. What I am looking at in this chapter is how masculinity enactment in a way that other men approve of (Kimmel, "Homophobia")—a necessity for doing hegemonic masculinity—is assembled when the superhero is a Black male. Superhero characters come packed with *masculine capital*, and Black Panther is no exception to this rule.

From the first moment, he has the adequate body for the job: it is a body going for "the masculine look" (Easthope). And as pointed out in the chapter on Captain America, a *developed* body (Dutton) is a prerequisite for doing a superhero's job. However, this idea has always been detrimental to Black males living in the US—a nation built on white and male supremacy. The rules of chattel slavery treat them as things, not people, or as bodies without minds. These bodies are imagined as powerful yet uncontrollable, and therefore dangerous and in need of containment (Bhabha; Fanon; Jordan). So what happens when superhero comics focus on a male Black body who is the superhero, and who "in the form of the hero" has access to hegemonic masculinity enactment (Donaldson; Kimmel)? What happens when a Black male body is powerful, reliable, and in control?

As comics scholar Scott Bukatman points out, the "superhero body is everything—a *corporeal*, rather than a *cognitive*, mapping of the subject into a cultural system" (49). As already discussed, the focus on physicality, on the body, is what superheroes and *action heroes* have in common (Tasker). Superhero bodies are specific bodies: they are bodies "invulnerable to harm […] capable of impossible displays of athleticism and supernatural power" (Taylor 347-348). In this sense, they are following the late nineteenth/early twentieth century idea of

having a perfectible or *built* body (Dutton), as made prominent at the time through early bodybuilders like Eugen Sandow and later Charles Atlas. Men like these lay the socio-cultural groundwork for what has come to be regarded as masculine bodies (Easthope). Such bodies display "hardness and tension" and seek "Rambo, not Rimbaud" (54).

All superhero bodies, likewise, seek Rambo rather than Rimbaud. After all, "the superhero genre, as in other body genres" is where "fantastic performances drive the narrative and structure" (Peppard 60). Superheroes are action heroes, and therefore they are characters who "are constructed through their physicality […] and the display of the body" (Tasker, *Spectacular* 35). And the body of the hero is then always a sight to behold, but also reveals how *masculine myths* intersect with white and male privilege (Dyer, *White*). This ideology grants white male bodies the potential and possibility to take on the mantle of the hero while still retaining its *"patriarchal dividend"* (Connell): access to power and control over himself and over others.

But in the US, Black male bodies never had this easy an access to masculine power. So, what happens when a genre like superhero comics comes into contact with the legacy of Black bodies being routinely regarded as ugly, monstrous, as less-than-human and as anything but "properly" masculine (Mercer; Lemelle; Brown)? What happens when *blackness* and normative masculinity enactment no longer cancel each other out? As pointed out by scholars focusing on Black characters in US-American comic books, the

> Black body has historically been linked to physicality and not intelligence, the depictions of Black superheroes already have inherent issues built into the very conventions of the genre. (Gateward and Jennings 4-5)

Displaying Black bodies, and by extension Black characters, as dumb brutes is something American comics routinely do throughout the 1930s and 1940s—when they depict Black characters at all (Francis; Davis; Gavaler). The Timely Comics[59] character Whitewash Jones serves as one atrocious case in point. As the only Afro-American member of the kid-vigilante group Young Allies, the character is depicted as an active and capable member of the group. But Whitewash Jones is also

[59] The publisher Timely Comics goes bankrupt in the 1950s and its titles—among them *Captain America Comics*—are taken over by Marvel Comics.

> drawn with the typical racial-markers of African Americans in comic books and comic strips of the time. The artwork stressed racial stereotypes: exaggerated lips, wide eyes and the look of a white person who was painted in black face. (McWilliams 68)

Whitewash is a reminder that the earliest images "of Black people in comics were loosely based on the stereotypes generated in blackface minstrelsy; stereotypes mired in the notion of fixity" (Gateward and Jennings 5). If Black characters appear in 1940s superhero comics at all, they "were not super at all, rather they were ordinary old niggahs, who happened to have had the good fortune to be tied to a superhero master" (Scott 296). They are characters adhering to *Sambo* or *Uncle Tom* stereotypes (Bogle): they are either lazy, loud and carefree, or dutiful and devoted to their white masters and their well-being.

When Black characters start to regularly appear in Marvel Comics in the 1960s, times have changed at least a bit. Overtly racist images are gone—something owed to the Comics Code introduced in 1954[60] (Wright; Jones; Gavaler)—and a very slow but recognizable diversification in terms of characters depicted on the comics page takes place. Over the decade, more and more non-white characters start to appear. It is

> a gradual introduction of random African-American citizens into common street scenes in which they appeared as policemen, reporters, or mere passersby. It was a belated but important comic book illustration of America as a multiracial society. (Wright 219)

When it comes to the arrival of Black superheroes in American comics, it helps to remember that due to the country's racist history, it is

> entirely possible that a successful black American superhero is impossible because it seeks to combine two ideas which are antithetical to each other: superheroes and American racial thinking. (Francis 138-139)

Only in 1966 do comics publishers like Marvel offer an alternative to this way of thinking: first with Black Panther, then with Falcon in 1969. At the time, comic authors and artists do not acknowledge any racist routines of the genre's past, but instead now depict superheroes as much more racism-aware (Nama; Gateward and Jennings; Peppard; Gavaler). But *racism-*

[60] As a form of self-censorship, the Comics Code is adopted by all big US publishers in the 1950s. On its long list of things better not to show are explicit nudity, sexuality, violence, gore, and sexual perversions.

aware is not the same as *anti-racist*[61]. Early appearances of Black characters are informed by racially charged stereotypes. In the case of Black Panther, one such stereotype is the *Magical Negro*. This is a socio-cultural fantasy about the special nature of Black people. Sadly, it presents the best-case scenario for Black characters appearing in popular fiction until very recently (Scott; Glenn and Cunningham; Hughey). *Magical Negro* qualities are often connected to the concept of *blackness* as discussed in "Theories and Histories of Masculinities". As a fictional concept, *blackness* insists that "a black body is always already supernatural" (Scott 296). This signifies a form of power, albeit a "coveted power[…,] unskilled and unpredictable" (Scott 299). Concepts like *blackness* and the *Magical Negro* are a repurposing of colonial ideas such as the "primitive" or the "black savage" (Pickering; Bhabha). Their purpose is to disenfranchise Black men and women from any white modes of behavior—from the ability to exercise power, control, and autonomy (Jordan; Fanon). The *Magical Negro* is an "old-new 'positive images' trope" usually used by white people who "attempted to portray black people […] in a better light" based on the idea that there is "something special about black people: their closeness to the spirits; their innate understanding of our souls (and here 'our' is the signifier for white people)" (Scott 299). Magical Negroes exist foremost to save and protect white people (Glenn and Cunningham). Portraying them in this way effectively denies Black characters the ability to be just normal, or just human. As Dyer reminds us, there is "no more powerful position than that of being just 'human'" (*White* 1), and this power to be "just human", while denied to Magical Negro characters, is claimed without reservation by people "who believe that they are white" (Coates). The introductions of T'Challa/Black Panther display quite a few Magical Negro traits.

However, Marvel Comics' first Black superhero also interacts with ideas taken from Black Power movements, especially where masculinity enactment and masculine authority is concerned. Black Power themes, as discussed earlier, are present when Black Panther first appears in 1966.

[61] As defined by Ibram X. Kendi in his 2019 book *How to be an Antiracist*, not being racist is not the same as being antiracist. The latter requires actively speaking out against racial injustices, something Marvel Comics do not do when Black Panther debuts in 1966.

This entire thesis, as clarified in the beginning, revolves around the idea that masculinity is something you "do". It is "several stories at once"; it is a homosocial enactment, as "Manhood is demonstrated for other men's approval" (Kimmel).

And whenever hegemonic masculinity is in play, it is a continuous act of hybridization, as Demetriou explains. He regards hegemonic masculinity as a "hybrid bloc that unites various and diverse practices in order to construct the best possible strategy for the reproduction of patriarchy". This bloc takes on ideas and qualities about "doing" masculinity then expelled from being "properly" hegemonic for males (Connell; Demetriou). In other words: *hegemonic* masculinity annexes qualities from *subordinated* and *marginalized* masculinities without relinquishing its grasp on being seen as the most valued masculinity.

This amalgamation can be spotted regularly in superhero comics of the 1960s whose main male protagonists enact hegemonic masculinity in "the form of the hero" (Donaldson). And they do so by absorbing, by *hybridizing* traits usually regarded as non-hegemonic. Black superheroes are a very clear example of this, because in the socio-cultural context of the US, "being Black" and "embodying hegemonic masculinity" have been constructed as opposites for centuries.

As a Black male, T'Challa/Black Panther has been historically barred from possessing *masculine capital*, "the 'masculine level' of a man achieved through attitudes and behaviors" (Anderson). From the moment he appears in the comics, he is depicted as "doing masculinity" in a way that it is approved of by other men. As such, he takes up masculine traits which have always been constructed—in the logics of white and male supremacy—as "dangerous" if displayed by Black males; traits like the willingness to commit violence, being angry, and competitive. At the same time, white males are demanded to display all these qualities if they want to call themselves successfully masculine. Now, for the first time in superhero comics, a Black male displays such "typical indexical markers of the masculine" (Beynon 56).

The following examples show how T'Challa/Black Panther, while being displayed as a *Magical Negro*, is still able to "do" masculinity in very normative ways. He is the head-of-state of a wealthy and technologically advanced nation, is a scientific engineer who crafts his own

equipment, and as a superhero he can best every opponent he faces. He, therefore, also interacts with Michael Kimmel's masculinity types: Genteel Patriarch, Heroic Artisan and Self-Made Man. Amalgamating all three, T'Challa/Black Panther enacts masculinity as a man "*in* power […] *with* power […] *of* power", and thereby becomes a man who is "strong, successful, reliable, in control". And as with all other male superheroes discussed in this thesis, enacting masculinity successfully is not a one-time thing for T'Challa. Like Steve, Tony, or Sam, he must prove his masculinity *again and again*, as the stories he appears in become another serialized enactment of "doing" masculinity.

Introducing a Black Male Superhero

As with Captain America, Iron Man, and Falcon, my analysis looks at the early appearances of Black Panther. The focus is on his introductions between 1966 and 1968. In this time slot, Black Panther appears in the comics series *Fantastic Four*, *Tales of Suspense, Captain America*, and *Avengers.*

Black Panther first appears in *Fantastic Four* #52 in 1966*,* and goes on to guest-star in issues #53 and #54. After a brief disappearance from Marvel Comics, he is re-introduced in *Tales of Suspense* #97 and guest-stars in issue #98 and #99, as well as in *Captain America* #100[62]. Here, T'Challa meets and briefly teams up with Captain America. Black Panther then resurfaces in *Avengers* #52 in 1968, and after becoming a team member, regularly appears here until *Avengers* #87. This chapter analyzes all these introductions.

As before, my focus is on how hegemonic masculinity enactment is achieved via *homosocial competition*. Until 1963, Marvel Comics do not extend the possibility of this enactment to non-white characters. Afterwards, characters of color appear more often in Marvel Comics. They do not, however, enact the part of superheroic protagonist, but that of bystander, person of authority such as policeman, or co-worker of the superhero in his civilian identity (Wright,

[62] After *Tales of Suspense* #99, Captain America and Iron Man each get their own self-titled solo series and no longer appear in the *Tales of Suspense* comics anthology. Both the *Iron Man* and *Captain America* series start with #100.

Jones; Howe; Gavaler). But it is only when they appear as superhero characters that their access to "doing" masculinity in hegemonic ways is most easily possible.

Upon his first appearance in July 1966, Black Panther is introduced as the head-of-state of a sovereign African nation that has never been colonized by European or American powers. Given the rise in activity among various anti-colonial movements in Africa in the 1950s and 1960s, T'Challa is "an idealized composite of third-world black revolutionaries and the anticolonialist movements" (Nama 43). His debut also coincides with the rising popularity of Black Power movements in the US and the founding of the Black Panther Party (BPP) itself. Marvel's Black Panther is "born" after the Lowndes County Freedom Organization (LFCO)the precursor to the Black Panther Party—is founded in Alabama in March 1965; but before the official Black Panther Party is founded in October 1966 in California. As Sean Howe points out in *Marvel Comics: The Untold Story,*

> Shortly before *Fantastic Four #52* went into production, *The New York Times* ran an article about the Lowndes County Freedom Organization, a political party that had formed in Alabama[…]. The LCFO's logo, a black panther, was so striking those reports began calling the group the Black Panther party. (85)

This makes it clear that Jack Kirby and Stan Lee knew that calling any character Black Panther at that point in time could not go unnoticed. Originally wanting to name their Black superhero Coal Tiger, creators Kirby and Lee even actively decide to change the name to Black Panther (Howe; Peppard), ensuring name recognition for their new creation, who manages to "make history as the first black superhero to reach a wide audience" (Howe 85). As such, Marvel Comics interact with political ideas and movements currently active at the time, but opt for "casual representation" (97) rather than overt political messages. As Bradford Wright points out in *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in the United States*, the publisher chooses to strike "an anti-establishment pose without appearing overly political" (219).

And while Marvel superhero comics often address bigotry and intolerance, they never "make explicit references to segregation or the struggles of the African-Americans" (219) during the 1960s and 1970s. But as they create Black Panther, Marvel Comics nevertheless make use of one of the "totems of the late 1960s counterculture" (Howe 85). This is even more obvious

when thinking about the masculinity enactment that Black Power groups like the Black Panthers demand of Black men, and which T'Challa/Black Panther pulls off with ease (Murray; Ongiri).

As Ann Peppard points out in "'A cross burning darkly, blackening the night': Reading racialized spectacles of conflict and bondage in Marvel's early Black Panther comics", upon his first appearance, the Wakandian head-of-state "is granted exceptionally exaggerated trappings of masculinity", which allow him "to be ideally rather than excessively male, while his ideal maleness, in turn, confirms his supreme masculinity" (63-64). T'Challa successfully enacts *hegemonic* masculinity right from the start.

None of this makes up for the fact that Black Panther's debut has deficits which reveal colonialist mindsets on the part of the character's creators. Only more recent story-runs have rectified these shortcomings[63]. One major oversight is that the character only receives a "civilian" name, T'Challa, two years after his debut, when he is re-introduced in *Captain America* #100. Until then, he is referred to as Black Panther, African chieftain, or chieftain of the Wakandas. Until then, he remains a very exoticized character. What becomes obvious through the introductions Black Panther receives in *Fantastic Four*, *Tales of Suspense* and *Avengers* is that the comics have an easier time normalizing Black Panther's successfully enacted masculinity, than they have of normalizing the fact that he is Black. Again and again, he himself and his country of origin are referred to as either "fantastic" or "incredible" by other characters. As if a powerful Black male with authority and integrity residing in a well-off, stable and independent African nation is beyond credible. Or shall we say, just too *marvelous* to believe? As an African head-of-state, Black Panther most notably has exactly the kind of masculine authority Black Power groups want all Afro-American males to have, as my analysis shows (Murray; Dunn).

As discussed earlier, Marvel Comics' superheroes are part of what Stan Lee imagined as "realistic fantasy" (Wright), in which characters display "a volatile mix of human emotions and personalities" (Wright) in addition to indomitable toughness and strength. Characters are

[63] For more information on this aspect of Black Panther see Schulte and Frederick, "Black Panther and black agency" as well as Posada, "Afrofuturism, Power, and Marvel Comics's *Black Panther*".

further shaped by tragic or traumatic beginnings: the death of a family member, an experiment gone awry, or a brutal assault by villainous characters. These origins shape how these characters see themselves and how they behave as superheroes from then on (Wright; Jones). In the case of T'Challa, the murder of his father T'Chaka is the tragic event that shapes him. Taking revenge on his father's murderer Klaw is what motivates this superhero. This further underlines what Jason Bainbridge identifies as *melodramatic* qualities in superheroes: before they act out, they are acted *upon* as something happens to them. Marvel's Black Panther therefore inhabits "the melodramatic protagonists's role of the good, passive victim" (70), and as is always the case with Marvel's superheroes, this earlier passivity does not efface his later activity as a superhero. Black Panther can therefore be understood as one more superhero character who displays "moral and emotional fragilities" (Wright). This informs almost every superhero appearing in Marvel Comics since the 1960s and is part of the publishers "reworked […] formula for comic book superheroes" (205). Is Black Panther therefore a run-of-the-mill Marvel superhero?

Yes and no: Black Panther being a traumatized hero makes him a "regular" Marvel superhero, yet he is singled out by the fact that he needed to be talked into being an international superhero, as first shown at the end of *Fantastic Four* #53. Usually, characters like Iron Man or Captain America show no difficulties with embracing that, although they are American citizens, their task to save the world is always understood in global terms. And of course, the fact that T'Challa is Black and superhero material at the same time is a first for Marvel Comics. The heavy weight of the artificial category "race" comes into full force here. As mentioned earlier, the construct of "race", in nations like the United States of America, exists as a strategy to *subordinate* and *marginalize* in the interest of colonialist worldviews, in the interest of putting white over Black (Bhabha; Fanon; Jordan; hooks; Lemelle) in all ways of life. In the United States, "race" is "a social construct guiding social relationships" (Lemelle 78). And the construct defines being white as the normal or universal position, while at the same time denying all those identified as non-white this most "powerful position […] of being 'just' human" (Dyer). In this context, being heroic or superheroic also has always been a quality attributed to "people who believe that they are white" (Coates).

This is how, when Marvel Comics introduces Black Panther as just another traumatized superhero, T'Challa is a run-of-the-mill character according to the Marvel Method (Wright). But his debut in *Fantastic Four* #52 also makes it obvious that the fact that he is African, that he is Black, and yet able to be superheroic, can only be understood as incredible and out of the ordinary by the white superheroes he meets. In this sense, the comic book holds up *blackness* as an *otherness* (Fanon; Lemelle; Scott). What makes Black Panther's debut so interesting to my analysis is that the plot depicts him as a character who enacts normative masculinity with enormous ease. T'Challa covers all three idealized American masculinity types Michael Kimmel talks about. In almost equal parts, he is a Genteel Patriarch, a Heroic Artisan and a Self-Made Man.

When it comes to being Black and male, Fanon states how the black man "must be black in relation to the white man" (141). This relationality manifests in the Black male having to enact the part of the "savage" and "primitive" opposite the white male, who casts himself as "the bringer of civilization" who "carries truth to savages" (147). In *Fantastic Four* #52, Jack Kirby and Stan Lee depict Black Panther as a "complex mix of racial tropes" (Gavaler, *Superhero Comics* 162) that both uphold and undermine this relationality.

Titled "The Black Panther!", (Lee, *Epic Collection Fantastic* 4 3) the story sees the Fantastic Four being invited to Wakanda—a place they have never heard of before—to meet the Black Panther, who they do not know either. The entire story constructs Black Panther as an opaque figure who receives a villainous introduction, which is kept up until the very end of *Fantastic Four* #52 (Gavaler, *Superhero Comics*).

The story opens with a Wakandian messenger, sent by Black Panther inviting the white superhero team to his homeland. The first time a panel shows Black Panther, he is seated under a baldachin, clad in a pink toga and matching headband, and surrounded by his servants and guards. After being informed that the Fantastic Four have accepted his invitation, the chieftain raises one arm, demanding preparations for "the greatest hunt of all", as "[t]he time has come for the Black Panther to stalk once more" (Lee, *Epic Collection Fantastic* 4 8). The page provides mixed messages about Wakanda and Black Panther. It very directly shows T'Challa, here only referred to as Black Panther or African chieftain—a fact which further

exoticizes him—as a putatively villainous but powerful man in charge. But through the tribal garb he and his subordinates wear, both are also clearly displayed as an *other* and as foreign in comparison to how American or European characters are depicted. And while Black characters are no longer drawn as racist caricatures, the choice of clothing fulfills well established Westernized stereotypes about African people: they are "primitive", while we are "modern" (Bederman; Pickering; Zeller).

Black Panther's invitation reaches the Fantastic Four—Mr. Fantastic, Invisible Girl, the Thing, and the Human Torch—via technology. He sends a messenger on a jet-plane. This astounds the white superheroes so much that the Thing retorts, "how does a refugee from some Tarzan movie lay his hand on this kind of gizmo?" (Lee, *Epic Collection Fantastic* 4 6). This is the first of numerous allusions to adventure stories like Edgar Rice Burroughs's 1912 *Tarzan of the Apes*. Burroughs's narrative not only spawned several sequels back in the day, but also inspired numerous copy-cats to similar stories, all revolving around a *White Savior*, a "White interloper intruding upon a non-white culture under assault" (Hughey 762). This hero then rules and protects over non-white natives either somewhere in Africa or South America. In the medium of comics, these stories are usually found in comics anthologies like *Jungle Comics* or *Jungle Adventure* (Wright; Peppard; Jones). These stories offer one-sided ideas about the continents they take place in. The native population is usually without means, without property, without technology, and most crucially without power. Those who are non-white but have any of those things are usually the villains in these stories. The rest of characters need a *White Savior*, in other words, a Tarzan type of person: a white man or woman of noble origins who takes it upon themself to save and protect the hapless natives. The references to Tarzan reveal something else: in the white imagination, Africa as a continent is never layered, but one big countryside, either imagined as all jungle forest or all desert dunes. Ben Grimm, the Thing, apparently can only imagine an African chieftain as a Tarzan knock-off.

In addition to the jet, Black Panther also sends a messenger: an African male dressed in tribal garb. Once Reed Richards agrees to visit the kingdom of Wakanda, the messenger removes a tiny communication device from his clothes and contacts his chieftain. Marvel superheroes are often scientists or are technologically savvy: Mr. Fantastic, just like Iron Man—discussed in the previous chapter—is such a science superhero (Meteling, "Weird Science"). And yet,

this story makes an effort to convey curiosity and surprise on the side of the Fantastic Four when they see a Black person exhibit the same kind of savviness. Throughout *Fantastic Four* #52, Black Panther and the men of Wakanda are established as mastering all kinds of technology: from rifles to computerized surveillance systems. This upholds the idea that using technology is a task "a man can do" (Moss 139), as well as applying the concept of using technology "in order to harness some kind of power" (141). But now it is also directly tied to Black men and their masculinity enactment. This already goes against racist stereotypes about Black males as lazy, silly, or stupid (Fanon; Lemelle; hooks). None of these qualities fit T'Challa or his messenger.

While upholding the idea of Africa as a dangerous space for white heroes, the narrative at the same time also says something about masculine authority and *masculine capital*. This refers to the "masculine level of a man achieved through attitudes and behaviors", among which are aggression, and the willingness to commit violence and to be dominant. Black Panther and his fellow Wakandians are shown as possessing quite a bit of such masculine capital. They all have muscular physiques. As such, they all have *developed* and perfected bodies (Dutton; Easthope), which is visible in these panels. Consequently, Black Panther and his people also have "take no shit" bodies from the start, bodies that suggest "independence, toughness, emotional imperviousness" (Bordo 57), which make normative masculinity enactment a likely thing. As pointed out earlier, the legacy of white and male supremacy in the US ensures that Black male bodies who are strong and muscular are seen as a threat, not as heroic. At this point in the story, because it presents a mix of racial tropes, the images of a muscular African chieftain surrounded by his just as muscular acolytes can go either way. In superhero narratives, muscular male bodies are as likely to be superheroic as they are to be villainous material.

Even more so than his underlings, T'Challa's first depictions grant him normative masculinity right away. He is shown in the position of a king-like leader in charge of his loyal subjects, and therefore as a man "*in* power, a man *with* power, a man *of* power". It makes Black Panther eligible for what Kimmel refers to as *Genteel Patriarch* masculinity: a man in caring charge of his subjects, something T'Challa clearly is in this first depiction. Textboxes further refer to him as a "powerfully built monarch"(Lee, *Epic Collection Fantastic* 4 9), while simultaneously

depicting his muscular chest. T'Challa is shown operating various "electronic computers, with which he controls the myriad of wonders of his mysterious jungle empire" (9), which further establishes him as having the brawn and the brain to be in charge, since technology is "what a man can do". The panel depicting Black Panther putting on his costume—an all-black skintight overall with a cape and a face-cowl, which covers him from head to toe—also perpetuates his villainous potential. Referring to it as his "stalking costume", the "powerfully built" chieftain states, "Now let the Fantastic Four come! [...] The Black Panther shall greet them … as they have never been greeted before!" (9). At this point, the very first introduction of Marvel's first Black superhero has him look as much the part of the villain as the hero. His actual, superheroic intentions and his traumatic origin story are only revealed the following story, in *Fantastic Four* #53, "The Way it began..!".

At the same time, calling his homeland "mysterious" perpetuates the idea that Black people and the places where they live are an *other* (Fanon; Zeller). These perpetuations continue when the Fantastic Four first judge Wakanda as insignificant, as they can see "no sign of technology … of industrial development" (Lee, *Epic Collection Fantastic* 4 12) [64]. First, Black Panther can only be a Tarzan knock-off, and now his country is not worth mentioning. The Fantastic Four rethink all of this once they meet the chieftain. He attacks and traps one superhero after the other. T'Challa is familiar with their powers and abilities, and has crafted traps designed specifically for them. He welcomes their resistance, since "a victory too easily won, is too soon forgotten" (16). This is one more line emphasizing a theme which remains present almost to the very end of *Fantastic Four* #52: the Black Panther is depicted as the villain of the story (Gavaler).

While he neutralizes the Fantastic Four one by one, the comic book also offers the first in a long line of repetitive comparisons whereby Black Panther is likened to the animal he is named after. His agility, swiftness, and alertness are commented on. During their fight, Mr. Fantastic observes, "He ducked under my blow with the ease of the beast for which he's named!" (Lee, *Epic Collection Fantastic* 4 15). This is how "primitive" masculinity enters T'Challa's masculinity enactment: his animal energy and strength are both lauded and feared by his opponents.

[64] The white superheroes misjudge Black Panther's home country and continue to be wowed by its technological capabilities, and T'Challa's wealth, all the way through *Fantastic Four* #54.

Thinking he has successfully trapped all members of the Fantastic Four, and depicted perching on a piece of equipment, like a big cat about to pounce, Black Panther announces, "The hunt is over! The Black Panther has won!" (23), only to be attacked by all Fantastic Four at the same moment. Freed by Wyatt Wingfoot—Johnny Storm's roommate from college who tagged along on their trip—who had disabled the traps, it is now the Fantastic Four who overwhelm Black Panther. He surrenders and is rewarded with the trust of the Fantastic Four, as expressed by Reed Richards, who argues that a "man such as the Black Panther does not give his word lightly, nor does he dishonor it once given" (24). This almost instantaneous trust in T'Challa will be repeated throughout his introductions in Marvel Comics. Here, it seems especially quick to come to Mr. Fantastic. Until now, all Black Panther has done is fight them. But maybe all of this is less strange if seen through the binoculars of masculinity studies.

Black Panther's Deployment of Hegemonic Masculinity

The man who invites the Fantastic Four to come to a foreign nation has done so to hunt them, to defeat them, without any reason given so far. The chieftain has not pulled off this defeat, yet he has shown that he and his people are sophisticated, technologically savvy, and ready to commit violence if necessary. The "willingness to fight, the desire to fight" turn violence "into the single most evident marker of manhood" (Kimmel, "Homophobia" 132) under patriarchy (hooks). Black Panther and his people can check off this one premise for normative masculinity enactment on their list already. A big part of the story shows how T'Challa enacts masculinity and how the white superheroes react to it. *Again and again*, he proves they are unable to defeat him, while he is able to overwhelm them not just through physical strength, but also through smart strategizing: he designs traps tailored to them, to make sure their powers are useless. Michael Kimmel points out that masculinity is something one "does" in a homosocial arena for other men, much more than for women. To reiterate, he clarifies that

> we want other men to grant us our manhood. Masculinity as a homosocial enactment is fraught with danger, with the risk of failure, and with intense relentless competition ("Homophobia" 129)

In this sense, issue #52 of *Fantastic Four* is also a story about how to prove that one has manhood. T'Challa masters this enactment as he takes enormous risks and performs heroic feats to prove that he is man enough. He has the strength, the power, and the intellect to

defeat not one but four superheroes, who on top of that make up Marvel Comics' "First Family" back in the 1960s (Howe). By the end of issue #52, he has gained Reed Richards's approval. But what is even more interesting: the Fantastic Four also gain his approval. When the Torch asks him why he attacked them, Black Panther answers, "Now that the hunt is over … the game is ended … I shall offer you the explanation … for you have earned it indeed!" (Lee, *Epic Collection Fantastic* 4 24). Examined through the logic of masculinity as a homosocial enactment, the white superheroes have earned hearing the truth because they put up a good fight, took risks, because they faced Black Panther as they would any other opponent: using all their aptitude and ability to defeat him. By the end of *Fantastic Four* #52, Black Panther has enacted nothing but normative masculinity: he is tough, muscular, aggressive, and smart.

His last words, which conclude *Fantastic Four* #52, catapult him right into the center of the *Marvel Method* (Wright): now that the fighting is done, he reveals emotional fragilities that mark him as a tragic character, as a haunted hero who is seeking justice. Black Panther's words, spoken across three panels which first depict him removing his mask for the first time, then focus on his face, before further zooming in closer to just depict his eyes and nose, are: "I am […] chieftain of the Wakandas … and perhaps the richest man in all the world! […] My tale is one of tragedy … and deadly revenge..![sic]" (Lee, *Epic Collection Fantastic* 4 24). The final panel stresses the serial quality of superhero narratives, as a textbox positioned at the lower half of the last panel announces, "Next issue: 'The Reason Why!'" (24).

The story in said issue, *Fantastic Four* #53, titled "The Way it began..!", does list all the reasons why, but in terms of masculinity as homosocial enactment it does even more for establishing T'Challa as a man acing it when it comes to "doing" masculinity. This is mostly done by showing how Black Panther is a rather Westernized man, despite his African background. On the opening pages, the Fantastic Four are again astonished to see how Wakandians combine the simple and the sophisticated; the tribal headdress and the technology. In this sense, Wakanda both follows and discontinues narrative tropes from adventure fiction, where Africa is always only an undeveloped continent where "supernaturalness" exists everywhere (Wright; Scott).

This continues when the Black Panther shows the superhero team his private quarters, where his masculinity enactment is shown to be even more *conformed* and *adjusted*—especially in

terms of doing Postwar masculinity (Ehrenreich). His rooms are furnished with both tribal objects—masks, rugs, and weaponry—as well as modern amenities like stereo sound systems, tape recorders, elegant sofas, and coffee tables. It is Johnny Storm who first bestows *masculine capital* on T'Challa in this sequence. Upon arriving in the Panther's private quarters, the Human Torch asserts, "Wow, Wotta [sic] a pad! I'll bet Hugh Hefner couldn't improve on this layout!", to which the Thing adds, "Man! If you gotta live in the jungle, this sure is the way to do it! There must be a lotto dough in black pantherin' " (Lee, *Epic Collection Fantastic* 4 27). Both statements grant Black Panther normative manhood: first Johnny moves him into proximity to *Playboy*'s editor-in-chief Hugh Hefner, and then the Thing acknowledges his material, his Marketplace Man, success.

As Barbara Ehrenreich points out, it is Hefner's intention "to reclaim the indoors for men" (44) because "we plan on spending most of our time inside. WE [sic] like our apartment" (qtd. in *Hearts of Men* 44). *Playboy* advises men to put together a bachelor pad, where single men show off their masculine style by owning adequate amenities, furniture, and fashion. This is how they show their capacity to partake in "a life of pleasurable consumption". But being rich and successful also belongs to Kimmel's Marketplace Manhood, wherein a man's capacity to enact masculinity is measured by his material and monetary power. The next panel has the Black superhero lighten a cigarette—something Hefner and his editors would have advocated for as well—and confirm his playboy attitude as well as his Marketplace Man credentials:

> You seem puzzled by what you have seen! You shouldn't be! After all, I can afford to pamper myself … to indulge my every whim … enjoy every luxury! I'm one of the richest men in the world! (Lee, *Epic Collection Fantastic* 4 27)

As Richard Dyer reminds us, whiteness colonizes "the definition of normal". But whiteness is a form of having access; here in particular, access to money, means, and power. T'Challa, through his responses, positions himself as "a man *in* power, a man *with* power, a man *of* power"—all requirements for hegemonic masculinity. But the *Marvel Method* requires not just masculine means, but also *melodrama*. Reed Richards prompts T'Challa to tell them more about his tragic past: "There's more to your story than mere wealth" (27), and Black Panther obliges, saying, "Actually, the Black Panther lives under a tragic curse" (27). Here, T'Challa is further humanized, in the way all Marvel superheroes are.

Black Panther goes on to talk about his father T'Chaka[65], a story riddled with masculine authority and patriarchal values: T'Chaka was a skilled hunter, a fierce warrior, a wise chieftain, who to his son "was more than a father…more than a warrior…to me he was like a God!" (31). This statement is found in a textbox on top of a panel depicting a grinning T'Chaka in tribal attire picking up his young son T'Challa. While the boy talks about being chieftain himself one day and hoping to be worthy of the ideals his father lives by, T'Chaka—in a very nurturing fashion—tells his son, "It is bedtime for the littlest chieftain of all" (31). The comic depicts what are essentially T'Challa's memories of his father as a male-only affair. No word or image depicts the Panther's mother, or indeed any Wakandian female. T'Chaka exists in a homosocial environment, where other males grant him their respect, and with it his masculinity, which he proves in hunt, in battle, and in being a protector. He protects not just Wakanda's citizens but one of its most important resources: the metal *vibranium*. As Black Panther clarifies, "every Wakanda chieftain is pledged to protect the sacred vibranium" (31). So far, Wakanda is a nation in which masculine authority is passed on from father to son, in classic patriarchal fashion.

In the case of Black Panther, this "passing on" is of course the key to his "tragic curse". The white villain Klaw invades Wakanda for its metal and kills T'Chaka in cold blood[66]. This forces T'Challa into becoming chieftain himself at a moment's notice. Realizing that Klaw and his henchmen are too powerful, he urges his fellow Wakandians to retreat. While his people retreat, a young T'Challa kneels over the dead body of his father. Here, the comics grant its first Black superhero quite the *normal* origin story: the death of a parent initiates the wish to become a vigilante hero who protects others and avenges the evils others do. Depicted with his head in his hands and the face of his dead father in front of him, T'Challa swears, "I shall be strong … and as fearless as the sacred Black Panther!! This do I swear to T'Chaka …[,] my father who is no more!" (Lee, *Epic Collection Fantastic* 4 33). An asterisk in the speech bubble points to a textbox below, which informs readers that "to the male Wakandian, the Black Panther represents a figurative god image, and is considered to be a sacred being" (33). This

[65] It is noteworthy that Black Panther's father immediately receives a "civilian" name, whereas Black Panther only gets one two years after his first appearance.

[66] The story does little to nothing to humanize Klaw. As a foreign white aggressor trying to overpower and kill Black natives, the character may serve as the most critical comment on colonialism a 1966 Marvel Comics has to offer.

panel provides a first hint at what Black Panther's superpowers are. It further establishes T'Challa's "supernaturalness", which gives him *Magical Negro* qualities (Scott, Glenn and Cunningham). When asked again later about his abilities, Black Panther remains vague, but states that it is "a secret handed down from chieftain to chieftain. We eat certain herbs … and undergo rigorous rituals … of which I am forbidden to speak!" (Lee, *Epic Collection Fantastic* 4 35). Compared to other Marvel heroes who gain their power from scientific experiments or accidents, Black Panther is in definitive Magical Negro territory.

The reasons for Black Panther's attack on the superheroes are explained halfway into *Fantastic Four* #53. Apparently, he "had to! You were the supreme test! If I could fight you to a standstill, then I am ready for Klaw!" (35). Although T'Challa prepares to fight him alone, the Fantastic Four immediately offer to fight by his side, since "it'll be more fun fighting with you than against you!" (36). This exchange again proves that Black Panther has successfully proven his manhood—he has taken risks and performed heroic feats—to his male colleagues in homosocial ways.

During the panels depicting the fight between superheroes and villain, Black Panther is likened to his animal namesake: as a panel depicts him running along a large tree branch, the textbox states, "The Black Panther, emulating his namesake, takes to the trees in search of his prey" (39). This underlines T'Challa's ability to enact "primitive" masculinity. But in the end, it is Black Panther's technological savvy that defats Klaw. T'Challa sabotages the computer powering Klaw's weapon. By the end of *Fantastic Four* #53, "the Black Panther and Wakanda offered unprecedented and upbeat images of Africa and African people" (Nama 42) to a mid-1960s audience. T'Challa embodies what have been established as normal or white qualities (Dyer, *White*). Being shown as an "ethical, incorruptible superscientist, superb warrior […] superhero and leader of Wakanda" (Nama 43) also grants him normative masculinity and *masculine capital*.

However, at the end of *Fantastic Four* #53, all this progress also receives quite a damper. For it takes white superheroes to authorize Marvel's first superhero into keeping up his superhero activities. After he declares "the Black Panther will stalk no more!" (Lee, *Epic Collection Fantastic* 4 45) the Fantastic Four propose, "There's no need for the Black Panther's career to

come to an end! The world will always have need of a dedicated, powerful fighter against injustice" (45). Black Panther replies, "I shall do it! I pledge my fortune, my powers … my very life … to the service of all mankind! (45). If nothing else, this is a reminder of the social hierarchy of men as Raewyn Connell describes it. Following this logic, *hegemonic* masculinity is about authorization (*Masculinities*), and Black males, relegated to the realm of *marginalized* masculinity, are dependent on being authorized into hegemonic spaces, which the Fantastic Four do here. This is especially atrocious as it sets the premise that Black males are not eager enough to take the superhero pledge. It is a gesture repeated in 1969, when Marvel Comics create their first Afro-American superhero, Falcon. It is a reminder how "a successful black American superhero is impossible" (Francis 138). At the conclusion of a story which would have made Black Power groups tremendously happy, since Black Panther bursts with masculine authority and power, the logics of white and male supremacy constrict the Black male superhero.

In *Fantastic Four* #54, "Whosoever finds the Evil Eye" (Lee, *Epic Collection Fantastic* 4 47), the Fantastic Four leave Wakanda, but not before playing a game of baseball with T'Challa and his guards, and Black Panther throwing them a good-bye party. The Black superhero comments on the game, saying, "This will never replace lion-hunting, my friends!" (47). Again, African *otherness* and *blackness* as an *other* are stressed. This is further supported by the fact that all Wakandians participating in the game, except for T'Challa in his Black Panther uniform, wear tribal attire.

Before the FF leave, Black Panther throws them a farewell party and gives them lavish gifts. Textboxes inform readers that to the Fantastic Four, T'Challa's "wealth is virtually beyond calculation" (50). The white superheroes are still flabbergasted to see all this wealth and luxury "in the heart of the jungle", but conclude, "where the Black Panther, is concerned anything is possible!" (50). Therefore, on a visual level, panels grant Black Panther normative manhood: he sports a masculine and muscular body and is depicted in his private and luxurious quarters. However, on a verbal level, his *blackness*, his *supernaturalness* in every sense, is continuously stressed.

Before the superheroes leave Wakanda, T'Challa enacts one more Magical Negro quality: his choice in gifts for the group fixes a problem for, and accommodates the wishes of, each of the white characters surrounding him (Glenn and Cunningham). He gifts Johnny Storm one of his jets, so that the latter can go off in search of his missing girlfriend. He does this because he sees: "There is a sorrow that I see behind your eyes […] the skills of the Black Panther are yours if they are needed!" (Lee, *Epic Collection Fantastic* 4 53). T'Challa as Magical Negro can feel that his white friend is in need, and he immediately tries to help. That he can just give away one of his many jets, since "[t]he vehicle I give you is one of many at my disposal" (54)—a vehicle he has designed and built himself, underlines his successful Marketplace Manhood and confirms his manly mastery of technology.

In terms of "doing" masculinity in ways other men approve of, Marvel's first Black superhero is allotted all the trappings of *hegemonic masculinity*. To recap:

> The hegemonic definition of manhood is a man *in* power, a man *with* power, a man *of* power. We equate manhood with being strong, successful, capable, reliable, in control. (Kimmel, "Homophobia" 125)

T'Challa meets all these requirements with ease, and in his first appearances he demonstrates masculinity "for other men's approval" when he challenges and hunts the Fantastic Four. It constitutes "doing" masculinity as a *homosocial competition*. He admits later that defeating the Fantastic Four is something he does to prove to himself that he is ready to defeat Klaw. He enacts normative masculinity that needs to be tested and challenged, as it must be proven *again and again* (Kimmel). Like his other superhero colleagues, Black Panther possesses *masculine capital*, and in his very first appearance he shows that he will use this "currency, in which privilege and esteem are traded", without batting an eye, if that serves his purpose. As Eric Anderson explains, masculine capital is "used to purchase privilege among peers" and is displayed by being "misogynistic, willing to take risks, [being] muscular" (41-42). T'Challa displays all of this. His misogyny is in accordance with other Marvel superheroes at the time: when he attacks Sue Storm, the Invisible Girl, he does not knock her out, but puts her to sleep through a narcotic gas, because he does "not consider females to be fair game!"(Lee, *Epic Collection Fantastic* 4 22). What sounds chivalrous is simple sexism, one that Black Panther shares with other male Marvel superheroes of the 1960s (Wright; Howe) to whom female

heroes and villains are not equals. This attitude connects to patriarchal logics and therefore to patriarchal masculinity, and T'Challa's first appearance is nothing if not patriarchal.

Firstly, most of the panels in *Fantastic Four* #52 and #53 depicting Black Panther and his people only show male characters. Secondly, the flashback sequence in #53 makes no mention of Black Panther's mother. When female Wakandians do appear, it is in a subordinate position, as a servant to T'Challa and his guests. Wakanda is shown as strictly patriarchal. As bell hooks clarifies, "Patriarchy is a political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior" (hooks, *we real cool* 50). The gender hierarchy it designs teaches women to "serve, to be weak, to be free from the burden of thinking, to caretake and nurture others", while it teaches men "to be served, to provide, to be strong, to think, strategize, and plan; and to refuse to caretake of others" (50). Patriarchy is so intimately enmeshed with masculinity because it is men, not women, who "gain a dividend from patriarchy in terms of honour; prestige and the right to command" (Connell). All of this holds true when Black Panther is first introduced.

This is also what connects Jack Kirby and Stan Lee's character to Black Power ideas. Like these groups demand, Black Panther is a Black male who has masculine authority and patriarchal power (Murray; Ongiri). Both T'Chaka and the son of T'Chaka can lay claim to this "essence of masculinity" (Mercer) that patriarchy offers to men: owning property, being head of a household and a breadwinner, etc. T'Chaka and then T'Challa are not just heads of a household, they are heads of a nation, and they have access to other patriarchal privileges as well. This access to "doing" patriarchal masculinity and the successful homosocial enactment of masculinity is also what connects Black Panther to the other characters analyzed here: Captain America, Iron Man, and Falcon.

Granting Black males the *patriarchal dividend*, as Marvel Comics do here, is novel for popular fiction at that time in America. In a medium considered as mainstream as comic books are (Jones; Wright; Howe), this is an exception, not the rule. T'Challa is among Marvel Comics' first examples of depicting black masculinity as something not defined via dialectics of *subordination*, and reworks some of the "negative images of black masculinity created by Western patriarchy" (Mercer). While doing so, they also grant Black Panther access to

Kimmel's American masculinity archetypes: Genteel Patriarch, Heroic Artisan and Self-Made Man.

Depicting Black Panther as a head-of-state who rules over other men, women, and children, as well as a man of immense wealth—as is done when he appears in *Fantastic Four* #52 and #53—connects him to Kimmel's *Genteel Patriarch*: a man of upper-class origin to whom "manhood meant property ownership and a benevolent patriarchal authority [which] embodied love, kindness, duty and compassion". Foremost, this is a man born into a position of wealth. T'Challa is such a man, one who shows compassion and care for his people. This type of masculine ideal is also "refined, elegant, and given to casual sensuousness". T'Challa reveals himself to be just that when he shows off his private quarters and refers to himself as a very rich man who likes to pamper himself.

Black Panther also taps into what Kimmel regards as *Heroic Artisan* masculinity. This masculine ideal imagines men first of all as independent urban craftsmen or small business owners who are proud of their skills. They are economically autonomous, disciplined, responsible, and regard their "labor a form of property". They are independent tinkerers who see themselves as "deeply embedded within a community of equals" where everyone is revered and honored for their respective skills. Black Panther is such a skilled worker—he builds his own equipment, such as jets or surveillance technology, and refers to himself as a scientist—and he respects others who are just as skilled: in his debut, these are the Fantastic Four, and later he also regards Captain America and the Avengers as such skilled equals. When Black Panther joins the Avengers in 1968, this embedment is even more in focus, as he teams up with superheroes who are all skilled workers in their own regard.

This leaves Kimmel's last concept: the Self-Made Man, also sometimes referred to as Marketplace Manhood. A man achieves this masculinity through accumulating "wealth, power, status", and from "devoting himself to his work in an increasingly homosocial environment—a male-only world in which he pits himself against other men".

As discussed in "Theories and Histories of Masculinities", Kimmel sees this last concept as a new standard for how to "do" masculinity that usurps all other masculine ideals, as it turns

into "the normative definition of American masculinity". Therefore, "doing" masculinity is only achievable if men enter what Kimmel refers to as "intense relentless competition". Once entered, only if men enact "heroic feats, take enormous risks" will "other men […] grant" them manhood.

By and large, all superheroes are men who have something to prove, as my previous chapters exemplify. They all tap into the idea that manhood needs to be proved and proved constantly, with some of them very literally enacting Marketplace Manhood. When Tony Stark makes sure his inventions, and Stark Industries, can best any competition in the field, this is a Marketplace Man in action. When Iron Man, as an "exemplary" piece of equipment made by Stark Industries, bests any villain who attacks him, he wins the "intense relentless competition".

The case of T'Challa/Black Panther is somewhat similar to Tony Stark/Iron Man. As T'Challa, a head-of-state, he sells vibranium—an incredibly powerful resource everybody is after—so that he can advance the opportunities of his own nation and his personal riches, and everybody who wants vibranium must go through him to get it; he controls its *marketplace* value. As Black Panther, he proves—from his first appearance onwards—that he can best anybody. He successfully takes down the Fantastic Four and later Klaw. He proves that he is "man enough" to do it.

The fact that Black Panther can enact masculinity successfully makes him a very regular superhero. He sports a *developed* body, a masculine body; like every *action hero* or superhero needs to do, because he is defined by and functions through his physicality. Like Captain America or Falcon, he displays a "take no shit body" in a skintight uniform as he goes after his enemies. These are all familiar markers of superhero characters. The fact that T'Challa is an African male is what makes him a novelty, especially in the 1960s. He can tick off all of Kimmel's masculinity ideals; ideals which originate in a nation where Black males are above all an *other,* something that needs to be subordinated, marginalized, and controlled. And yet, here stands Marvel Comics' Black Panther in 1966: brimming with masculine authority and power. He has the body, the mind, and the means to be "fully masculine". Lee and Kirby's creation would be even more "marvelous" if *Fantastic Four* #52-54 had been able to handle T'Challa's *blackness* as smoothly as the stories are able to handle his masculinity.

Black Panther's *blackness* is an issue whenever his white superhero colleagues just flabbergast as they see his wealth, or his skills. These sequences are reminders of how concepts like *whiteness* and white manhood are tied to "modernity, reason, order, stability", whereas *blackness* and Black masculinity are connected to "backwardness, irrationality, chaos and violence" (Dyer, "White—Images" 146). His debut, as mentioned before, also depicts him as rather villainous before his motives are thoroughly explained (Gavaler). These shortcomings are mitigated by the way the comics disrupt "a lingering history of presenting Africa as a backward nation in books, television, and film" and by offering, through the Black Panther and Wakanda, "unprecedented and upbeat images of Africa and African people" (Nama).

By comparison, T'Challa's masculinity is much more easily accepted in the comics. This is most straightforwardly the case when Black Panther meets Captain America for the first time.

Captain America Meets Black Panther

After his 1966 debut, Black Panther does not appear again until "And so it begins!", published in *Tales of Suspense* #97 in 1968, where he guest-stars in a Captain America story. Two pages into the story, the setting changes from New York to Wakanda. Black Panther is attacked by armed and masked men. Although outnumbered, Black Panther retaliates—immediately establishing his *masculine capital*—and states, "There are many figures moving just ahead … ! But never too many for me!" (Lee, *Epic Collection Cap* 2 9). The sequence closes on Black Panther being overpowered and his enemies getting away, before it cuts back to New York.

In the following panel sequence, Captain America—in his apartment—is woken by muffled sounds coming from the roof of the building. When he climbs the roof to investigate, he sees a "strange-looking aircraft" which then addresses him: "Captain America! Come forth!" (13). Stepping into the cockpit, Cap sees T'Challa's face on a monitor, introducing himself, "I am the Black Panther, chief of all the Wakandas! You may check my credentials with the Fantastic Four!" (13), and going on to request his assistance. While Black Panther talks, Captain America thinks "He's said to be one of the world's most benevolent monarchs … as well as the most wealthy … and mysterious! […] When such a man speaks … other men listen!" (13)

This first meeting between Cap and Black Panther seamlessly continues T'Challa's successful masculinity enactment: he is a man whose achievements and material means demand respect and attention from other men, and Steve Rogers grants it to him immediately.

The next panel shows where T'Challa is speaking from. Not clad in his Black Panther uniform but semi-naked, he is depicted sitting on a rug made of leopard skin while talking to Captain America. His muscular body is wrapped in several bandages—a sign of injuries sustained during the earlier battle—and occupies the center of the panel, while in the background a female Wakandian brings a bowl of fruit, and behind her a male Wakandian is seen holding a rifle while standing guard. This again shows Wakanda as a very patriarchal space, where women only appear in subservient positions. It also reaffirms how Black Panther displays a body going for what Anthony Easthope calls "the masculine look[…:] male bodies styled in particular ways to denote hardness, not softness, bone and muscle" (54). But such a masculine body must always be a "disciplined body under rational control" (53). In this moment, the comics show T'Challa as pulling all of this off. He has just been attacked but remains under rational control, remains a powerful subject (De Dauw). In this panel especially, showing T'Challa in control while semi-naked helps to mitigate the legacy wherein Black male bodies are always connected to hyper-sexuality but cannot erase it (Francis).

T'Challa tells Cap about foreign enemies attacking Wakanda, and when the American superhero asks whether he request help to fight them off, the chieftain responds, "I have power enough … weapons enough … to repel any hostile force!" (14). All this is said in a panel depicting T'Challa's face in the foreground while a muscular guard carrying a munitions belt across his bare chest is visible behind him. It underlines the masculine authority Black Panther and other Wakandians display. The comics also do not depict T'Challa as a Black man in need of a white man's help, which is important. As discussed earlier, there is a well-trodden path in American comic books in which Black characters are always shown as hapless and in need of a white character to help them (McWilliams; Francis; Gavaler).

Captain America accepts Black Panther's request. The concluding panel of the story has Cap thinking, "Somehow, I feel this is only the first of many unexpected wonders that awaits me … when I meet … the Black Panther" (Lee, *Epic Collection Cap* 2 15) which feels like a reference

to *Fantastic Four* #52. Black Panther does not come to the American superheroes, but has them come to him, and is again connected to the supernatural (Scott). Once Cap lands in Wakanda in *Tales of Suspense* #98, "The Claws of the Panther!", Black Panther, surrounded by three of his guards, immediately move in on him. Uncertain if this is a sign of welcome or an attack, Captain America decides to attack first, since he "can't be sure of their intentions!" (Lee, *Epic Collection Cap* 2 18). Thinking of the Black Panther as a threat reads like one more reference to his original introduction. While fighting the Black superhero, Cap thinks, "He's faster than the beast he is named for!" (19). Here and later, the comics continue to describe Black Panther by comparing him to his namesake animal, and therefore continue to ascribe "primitive" masculinity to him (Rotundo). When one of T'Challa's guards suggests, "stand aside, Panther! We will subdue him!", T'Challa answers, "No! Valor such as his deserves better than that!" (19).

This is how the first meeting of these two superheroes immediately turns into a case of masculinity enacted as a *homosocial competition*. When Cap lands in Wakanda, his reaction to being approached by Black Panther and his guards is to punch first and ask questions later. T'Challa responds in kind, showing off his *masculine capital* since "proper men exercise authority and behave courageously in adversity" (Beynon 65). Something stressed further when Cap approves of his actions: "Whatever his purpose, he's fighting like a man!" (Lee, *Epic Collection Cap* 2 18) Their fight turns into a way of granting each other masculinity. Once masculinity is satisfactorily proven, T'Challa declares, "Enough, Captain America! You have passed your test … like a master!" (19).

Once masculinity is bilaterally granted, Black Panther and Captain America go after the men attacking Wakanda. Whenever panels depict the two superheroes fighting villains, they are shown pouncing and jumping at the enemy, thus displaying muscular masculinity and using their bodies as weapons. But the two of them "doing" normative masculinity together also turns into a bonding experience for Cap, who asks, "How are you doing, partner?" (Lee, *Epic Collection Cap* 2 24). As happened to Black Panther earlier, both superheroes are overpowered and knocked out. When they regain consciousness, the villains return with their leader, who

turns out to be none other than Baron Zemo[67]. The two superheroes will later tirelessly battle Zemo and his henchmen in "The Man who lived twice!", published in *Tales of Suspense* #99 (Lee, *Epic Collection Cap* 2 27). This shows both superheroes displaying a refusal to complain as well as enduring hardships, as Zemo evades them again and again. Displaying such masculinized qualities is as central to being a superhero as it is to embodying *military manhood*. Black Panther, like all his colleagues discussed here, embodies military masculinity in this sense.

The plot concludes in *Captain America* #100. Now joined by S.H.I.E.L.D. Agent 13, Sharon Carter, the superheroes continue to try to neutralize Zemo and his underlings. Having had to retreat into a corridor and unsure if they are about to walk into a trap, the Wakandian chieftain orders them to "Stand back! This is a task for the Panther! I can sense an ambush no matter how well-concealed it may be!" (51). This is yet another hint at T'Challa's abilities, which again seem to grant him supernatural/Magical Negro abilities such as presentiment. Having sensed correctly that many enemies are about to jump them, the superheroes take yet another pounding at the hands of their enemies.

During the fight, Cap manages to unmask Baron Zemo and reveals him to be an imposter. This leaves his henchmen confused and angry. As they are about to open fire on the imposter, Black Panther suggest an alternative.

Taking down his cowl, Black Panther reveals himself to the enemies as the leader of Wakanda. This is also the first time in the comics that the character uses his civilian name. Explaining to the enemy that his reinforcements are about to arrive, he asks them to capitulate. T'Challa's speech is a reminder of all the power—in terms of "doing" masculinity—this character has at his disposal. Raising his arms, the Black superhero tells them,

> I am T'Challa … son of T'Chaka…, king of all the Wakanda! […] There is no place in all the jungle where you can hide …, no place where you can flee! I pledge you a fair trial! I pledge the justice of the Wakanda! The decision is yours! (59)

[67] Baron Zemo is one of Captain America's recurring opponents. Although only invented in the 1960s, he is always referred to as one of his World War Two enemies, retroactively introduced as one of Red Skull's many henchmen fighting the Allies during World War Two.

During his speech, Cap voices his admiration for him in a thought bubble: "he stands before them like a leader born … in whose veins blood of chieftains flows!" (59). The henchmen accept, and T'Challa declares, "[t]he threat is ended! The battle won!" (59). This moment grants T'Challa enormous masculine authority, as he speaks here not just as a superhero but as the head of a sovereign nation, as a man "*in* power […] *with* power […] *of* power". The sequence also once more frames Captain America as approving of the way T'Challa enacts masculinity. This is reinforced only a few panels later, when Cap asks Black Panther not just to join the Avengers but to take his place among the superhero group, since he has decided to take a break from this activity. The last three panels of the story depict Sharon Carter, Steve Rogers, and T'Challa aboard the Panther's jet. Asked if he will consider Cap's offer, the Black Panther answers, "I wish to consider it, my friend!" (Lee, *Epic Collection Cap* 2 60).

Black Panther's 1968 reintroduction solidifies his masculinity enactment. It strengthens his hold on very normative masculinity, because the comics overall spend less time turning him into an exotic character.

From the beginning, he is shown as a man Captain America listens to and fights side-by-side with and, comes to admire. In *Captain America* #100, he enacts very straightforward hegemonic masculinity when he, and not Cap, becomes the voice of authority that puts an end to an ongoing fight between superheroes and villains. Within the social hierarchy of masculinities, its hegemonic variation is, as Lemelle points out, first "not a place, territory or type" (169) but "a situational condition" (158). It is something males can deploy. Historically speaking, "hegemonic masculinity is a dynamic power that men deploy in structural interactions functioning to legitimize patriarchal relations" (13). T'Challa deploys it without any trouble. In countries like the US, Black males have traditionally been marginalized out of ever being able to enact such dynamic power as well. Here, Marvel Comics can be observed most directly rewriting this social hierarchy of men.

The way the comics have T'Challa display how accomplished his masculinity is, is somewhat novel. T'Challa stops the villains not with fists, but with words. If hegemonic masculinity is embodied by "a man *in* power, a man *with* power, a man *of* power" and therefore by a man being able to deploy this kind of power (Lemelle), then *Captain America* #100 ends by giving

its readers exactly such a man: Black Panther. T'Challa enacts the part of Genteel Patriarch. He stresses his role as the ruler of his nation and turns into the benevolent voice of authority who not only overpowers and punishes, but promises law and order to be upheld.

T'Challa is also not shown as a character in need of white appreciation (hooks, *reel to real*). Instead, he tests the white character and then receives his appreciation. This is a long overdue deviation from how US American popular fiction usually treats Black characters. As bell hooks points out, the "pedagogy of popular culture" likes to depict Black characters and especially Black male characters seeing themselves "as always lacking, as always subordinated to more powerful white males, whose approval they need to survive" (hooks, *reel to real* 105). *Tales of Suspense* #97-99 and *Captain America* #100 show Cap and Black Panther as sharing the same homosocial vibes as all other male superheroes in Marvel Comics at the time: once introductions are over, these men appreciate their male colleagues, something which is also routinely depicted in superhero teams such as Marvel's Avengers. And yet in 1968, this is an important step for Marvel Comics, as the publisher desegregates their *storyworlds* (Wright; Howe).

A Black Superhero in America

Black Panther does consider Captain America's offer and joins the Avengers in *Avengers* #52, "Death calls for the Arch-Heroes!" (Lee, *Epic Collection Avengers* 3 292). He appears on the first page of the story, described in a textbox as "a strangely cat-like figure" who "scales the sheer side of the Avengers mansion" (292). As T'Challa enters the building, he refers to this as doing it "in stealth […] a stealth such as only the Panther can achieve!" (292). As before, descriptions likening him to his animal moniker continue, hinting at his access to "primitive" masculinity. Once he reaches the Avengers center of command, he is shocked to discover three lifeless Avengers: Goliath, Hawkeye, and the Wasp. While he leans over one of them to check for a pulse, someone else enters. The next panel depicts a white hand holding a revolver aimed at Black Panther. The hand belongs to S.H.I.E.L.D. agent Jasper Sitwell, who prompts, "You are hereby under arrest for the murder of these three Avengers!" (Lee, *Epic Collection Avengers* 3 295).

T'Challa professes his innocence, but Sitwell says, "Save your excuse" (295), while still pointing the gun at him. He phones the police while holding the Black superhero at gunpoint. The cops who arrive at the scene echo the agent: "You got anything to prove your story to Sitwell that the Avengers invited you here, laughing boy?" (297). The first time the comics depict T'Challa as a Black male superhero in the States, he is immediately drawn into the routine of male gender stratification which defines Black masculinity enactment in the US (Staples; Lemelle). The white cops disparagingly call him *boy*, not man, to let him know his place. Unlike in his earlier appearances, this time straightforward racism is part of the plot.

Unable to give the policemen satisfactory answers, Black Panther is taken into custody. T'Challa complies while planning his next move: "It was meant for me to be thought the Avengers' killer! Of that I am certain! Must think things thru before I make my move!" (297). Once he decides there is nothing more he can learn from the cops, he flees, as "it is time for the Panther to prowl the city once more" (303). After bursting through a window, dodging police bullets, and leaping from a projection in the wall onto a neighboring building, Black Panther starts his own investigation.

He returns to the scene of the crime, where he finds the real perpetrator, the villain Grim Reaper. While fighting back, Black Panther learns that the Grim Reaper has not killed the other superheroes but only put them in a coma-like sleep. Grim Reaper's weapon, a scythe, can reverse the effect, but time is running out. Black Panther wrestles the scythe from Grim Reaper and races to the hospital where the Avengers' bodies are kept. Knowing that police officers stationed there to protect the bodies are unlikely to "accept my story … the story of an accused murderer—!", the superhero decides, "the Panther must act out this life-and-death drama … alone!" (309). Again, T'Challa dodges police bullets and manages to revive the Avengers. The first thing Hawkeye, Wasp, and Goliath do is to protect Black Panther from the police who continue to advance on him. They fob the authorities, saying: "We'll fill you in on the details … as soon as we're sure of them ourselves! […] Right now, it looks like we've got a wounded rescuer to take care of" (310). The last page depicts a patched-up T'Challa, who is officially made an Avenger. As they stand in a circle in their command center, Goliath announces, "T'Challa, son of T'Chaka … welcome to the Avengers!" (311). As they reaffirm that Cap told them about him and that their decision to accept him is unanimous, it is now T'Challa

who asserts, "I shall always strive to be worthy of him whom I replace[…;] today you have gained a new ally[…;] one who has given up his throne, that he may better serve a greater kingdom…; the whole of mankind itself!" (311). After hesitating to do so at the end of *Fantastic Four* #53, Black Panther now officially takes the superhero pledge.

Black Panther's first adventure to take place on American soil is also the first time the comics make overt racism an explicit part of the plot. Earlier, racist tendencies are more covert, such as Black Panther being described as a very mysterious man, or the fact that his white superhero colleagues are astonished to find an advanced and technologized Black nation existing in the heart of a jungle. But once the superhero reaches American soil, the racism he faces in straightforward. When Agent Sitwell threatens him with a gun, T'Challa falls victim to a version of racial profiling aptly described as "superheroing while Black" (Burroughs). The agent, like later on the police officers, reacts to him in ways US authorities routinely react to Afro-American males even today: they see him as a threat, as a possible danger that needs to be contained. Which is then exactly what they do: they handcuff him and take him to the police station. T'Challa—although knowing he would be able to overpower them—does not fight, but cooperates. Instead of escalating the situation, he remains levelheaded. The officers do not show him any respect—something law enforcement officers in Marvel Comics very often do where white superheroes are concerned. Iron Man or Captain America are usually treated as beloved and respected characters.

When T'Challa reveals himself to the policemen as the leader of a sovereign nation, they continue to degrade him by purposely mispronouncing his name as "T'Charlie" and referring to him as a "laughing-boy" (Lee, *Epic Collection Avengers* 3 297). White adult males addressing a Black adult male as *boy* fits with the racist and sexist stratification that informs how white America regards Black men (hooks; Lemelle). Within the system of white and male supremacy, Black males are not allowed to be men in any way that grants them patriarchal benefits. Slaveholders routinely refer to adult male slaves and servants as *boy*. In a similar way, the white policemen deny masculine authority to T'Challa. The sequence upholds Fanon's suggestion that a Black man always must be Black in relation to a white man (Fanon). T'Challa is *marginalized* out of authority (Staples; Mercer; Connell).

Throughout it all, T'Challa remains calm and rational. He does not lash out, he does not threaten the authorities. This adds to Marvel Comics' re-writing of racist stereotypes. In popular fiction, Black males are routinely imagined as dumb, angry, or violent. This story makes an effort to emphasize that Black Panther is a man who thinks before he acts. He takes actions only once they are necessary, and not without coming up with a strategy first. This is a modus operandi which belongs to *hegemonic* manhood: staying calm in a crisis and therefore remaining in control of the situation. When Black Panther escapes the cops and dodges bullets while making his getaway over rooftops, he again exhibits *masculine capital* as he takes risks without hesitation. Once he is out of the reach of the authorities, his successful masculinity enactment continues.

During his fight with the Grim Reaper—a white villain—Black Panther's integrity as a superhero is underlined: he fights fair. When Grim Reaper says he will give up because he is injured, Black Panther lets up. His opponent however only feigns defeat so that he can attack again, which prompts T'Challa to say, "This, then, is the worth of a pledge in the place which men call civilized!" (Lee, *Epic Collection Avengers* 3 306). It is a subtle jab at Western nations in general who, since the late nineteenth century, see themselves as civilized and modern, and deem other nations "primitive". In their imagination, African nations are always undeveloped, "savage", and "primitive" (Bederman; Fanon; Pickering; Brantlinger). "Primitive" men are said to be without honor or integrity. This scene demonstrates how *modern* men can also fall short of this particular virtue.

Throughout *Avengers* #52, the Black superhero takes risks and performs enormous feats in order to rescue his colleagues: all actions which uphold his normative masculinity enactment. The police officers whose harassment he must first tolerate and then fend off do not grant him his manhood, but the Avengers do. Their first actions upon being revived is to attack the policemen about to shoot at Black Panther, and then refer to him as their "rescuer" (Lee, *Epic Collection Avengers* 3 310). Unlike with T'Challa, the police officers have no trouble accepting the words of the Avengers concerning not just Black Panther, but also the nature of their comatose condition: White Privilege at its best.

Avengers #52 starts with a group of white males denying granting T'Challa his manhood—law enforcement officers—but ends with a group of white males and one white female that do grant it to him: the Avengers. They unanimously vote him into their group. T'Challa will serve as Captain America's replacement. This reasoning for accepting T'Challa into the Avengers is not without problems. Why does a Black superhero come in as a replacement for a white superhero? Why is he not simply just another member in an ever-growing team of superheroes? Then again, the fact that a Black male replaces one of the Marvel Comics characters who most straightforwardly embodies a nation's idea of itself, is not to be underestimated. Over the next two years, Black Panther appears regularly in *Avengers* comics, teaming up with Hawkeye/Clint Barton, Goliath/Hank Pym, Wasp/Janet van Dyne, and occasionally also Iron Man/Tony Stark and Captain America/Steve Rogers.

As the only non-white member of the team, his *blackness* and his Magical Negro traits are routinely pointed out through nicknames given to him by his colleagues, and by the comics showing him to have the power of presentiment. Black Panther is called "Jungle-Man", and also a "second-rate Tarzan" (Lee, *Epic Collection Avengers* 3 339). Nicknames are a common occurrence in Marvel's superhero narratives: Goliath is referred to as "Man-Mountain" and Hawkeye as "Bow-Slinger" (340). Yet compared to "Jungle-Man", these are not nicknames that highlight their foreignness or *otherness*. Referring to Black Panther as "Jungle-Man" stresses that he is not from around here. Something else stressed throughout the series is T'Challa's ability to sense dangers or threats. Repeatedly right before or during an attack on the superhero group, it is Black Panther who states, "There is something unnatural here! I can sense it!" (Lee, *Epic Collection Avengers* 3 342). However, such forebodings, sometimes explained as being a part of his superpowers, do not take away from how he applies himself during a fight. He can out-punch as well as outsmart his enemies again and again, and so keeps his hold on successful masculinity enactment. Yet, when both Black Panther or other superheroes refer to his "panther-like reflexes" (386) as giving him an advantage during fights, his supernaturalness, and the idea of the Black body as already supernatural is perpetuated. While other superheroes gain their powers from scientific experiments or accidents, the

source of Black Panther's superpowers remains rooted in supernatural realms[68] for a very long time. Black Panther turns into a Magical Negro who is a source of salvation.

The *supernaturalness* of his superpowers is detailed—for the first time—in *Avengers* #87, "Look homeward, Avenger!", in 1971 (Lee, *Epic Collection Avengers* 5 202). The story also heralds his temporary break from being an Avenger.

"Look homeward, Avenger!" offers a re-telling of T'Challa's introduction, as for the most part the story simply goes into more detail than *Fantastic Four* #53 back in 1966. It is a re-telling which also adds more *masculine capital* to T'Challa. Iron Man, noticing T'Challa's grim look while all Avengers are on a coffee break in their mansion's living room, invites the head-of-state to share what's on his mind. This sets in motion a detailed flashback. In what is almost a copy of the panels from *Fantastic Four* #53, T'Challa talks about the loss of his father T'Chaka due to the actions of the villain Klaw. But this time, more details—although still not of any maternal presence in T'Challa's life—are filled in on what happened to young T'Challa.

When young T'Challa wants to "be a man", to follow in his father's footsteps, N'Baza, one of his father's advisors, explains, "then you must go to school in the outside world […] that you may be a good one" (Lee, *Epic Collection Avengers* 5 209). In a panel taking up half a page, T'Challa, going "to study in the best schools in Europe and in the Americas" (209), is depicted looking through a microscope, doing experiments in chemistry labs, doing sports, and finally getting his university degree. In other words: he is shown getting the education, the skills, and the muscles needed in order to be a man. The flashback then talks about how he came to be Black Panther. Fearing that N'Baza will dispute his claim to Wakanda's throne, an educated T'Challa returns home. N'Baza presents him with a final set of tests he must pass before being allowed to succeed T'Chaka. First, he has to defeat "half a dozen of our finest warriors … in hand-to-hand combat" (210). This once more underlines how masculinity needs to be enacted via homosocial competition (Kimmel). Some panels depict numerous muscular warriors attacking him, but T'Challa defeats them and so accomplishes the first test.

[68] Although *Fantastic Four* #53 offers a brief explanation of how T'Challa gains his powers, not until *Avengers* #87, published April 1971, is a more detailed origin story for T'Challa finally provided.

Before the next task is revealed, the heir apparent is told to spend one night keeping vigil in the "temple of the Panther-God!" (Lee, *Epic Collection Avengers* 5 211). The next day, N'Baza reveals to T'Challa a giant Panther statue hidden in the Wakandian jungle[69]. This is where T'Challa finds and then dons the Black Panther costume. Cheered on by his fellow Wakandians, he is sent to take his final test. N'Baza tells him to climb a plateau in the nearby forest and eat of "the heart-shaped, forbidden herb" that will grant him "powers like those of the great cat himself!" (212). This version of T'Challa's origin story solidifies his Magical Negro qualities in a way the 1966 version has not.

T'Challa succeeds, thanks to what he refers to as his "strenuous upbringing" (213), as he climbs the steep plateau. His "strenuous upbringing" resonates with Teddy Roosevelt's "The Strenuous Life" doctrine. The entire *Avengers* #87 retelling of Black Panther's origin story is rather compatible with it. In his 1899 speech, Roosevelt stresses

> the iron qualities that must go with true manhood[…:] the positive virtue of resolution, of courage, of indomitable will, of power to do without shrinking the rough work that must always be done. (257)

T'Challa's determination to become the ruler of his nation, to become Black Panther, requires all these qualities of him, and the retelling confirms that the has them all.

After he ingests the herbs, he happens upon a group of masked men who are in the process of stealing refined vibranium. They reveal themselves to be working for A.I.M.[70], and once they discover T'Challa, a fight ensues. As he tries to stay alive, Black Panther starts to discover that "[t]he sacred herbs already working within [my] system [are] giving my body a resiliency, a cat-like strength it had never known before" (Lee, *Epic Collection Avengers* 5 215). Confidently, Black Panther throws himself at his enemies—superheroes are after all constructed by their physicality (Tasker)—trying to find out which Wakandian turned traitor and told them where to find vibranium. It turns out to be B'Tumba, his childhood friend who accompanied him when he traveled to Europa and the Americas. B'Tumba justifies his betrayal with jealousy, since he has only ever been T'Challa's lackey all his life. But in the end, he decides to help Black Panther battle the other A.I.M. agents.

[69] The same statue has featured in all Black Panther adventures taking place in Wakanda so far.
[70] This villainous organization is first introduced in Marvel Comics' *Strange Tales* #146.

When B'Tumba is fatally wounded during the fight, T'Challa's is outraged. As he attacks the remaining A.I.M. agents, he is certain that he is

> no longer […] merely T'Challa, son of T'Chaka[…;] But rather, I was indeed the jungle beast whose name and appearance I had taken[…;] I was indeed … a Black Panther! (Lee, *Epic Collection Avengers* 5 221-222)

This is T'Challa most directly and most proudly enacting "primitive" masculinity (Rotundo). But his outrage is followed by sorrow and anguish. His friend B'Tumba dies in his arms. This sequence shows in a very straightforward way that T'Challa/Black Panther possesses what all superheroes need: a "capacity for violence" as well as a "capacity for great suffering and gentleness" (Easton 136).

The death of his childhood friend brings T'Challa's flashback to a close. Back in the here and now, Black Panther reveals to his fellow Avengers that he has just been informed of N'Baza's death. This makes his return to Wakanda necessary, as he now has to decide "whether to don once more the mantle of kingship … or renounce it forever" (Lee, *Epic Collection Avengers* 5 223).

"Look homeward, Avenger!" is both a reiteration of T'Challa's origin story and serves to underline his masculinity enactment. Just like in 1966, it is the death of his father that is the focus, but what is even more stressed is how he gains his masculinity through being tested, and how his success in these tests is what makes his fellow Wakandians grant him his masculinity after he has won the homosocial competition and has displayed his *masculine capital*.

The tests focus on his physical strength and prowess, but are not shown as his only source of masculinity. His education is just as much a necessity for his claim to manhood. A large panel offers a "look" into T'Challa's educational years: from the upper left to the upper right corner, the panel shows him first using microscopes, then doing experiments in a lab while schoolbooks are being shown in the background. The center of the panel shows T'Challa doing track and field exercises, while the lower left corner shows him swimming; finally, the lower right corner shows him with his diploma in hand. This all happens in one panel, which underlines not just all the skills the future Black Panther acquirers, but also his freedom to do

so. He is an independent and powerful Black male with access to all the tools he needs to be a successful man. Until the appearance of Black Panther, this is a position usually reserved for white, and not Black, males in superhero narratives. T'Challa acquirers his *masculine capital* first through higher education, then through a series of tests, and finally through his willingness to commit violence. The character is shown as possessing every masculine necessity even before he ingests the magical herbs that grant him superhuman abilities.

T'Challa masters all tasks set before him almost stoically, which is nothing if not a masculine trait belonging to hegemonic enactments of masculinity: it requires men to be reliable, and in control of circumstances as much as of themselves. Black Panther breaks with his stoicism when his friend is killed. His first reaction is rage, his second is sorrow. This is by no means a deviation from normative masculinity enactment. It fits with approved routines concerning homosocial friendships (Flood; Bird) and with *militarized masculinity*: men are allowed to display sorrow and even rage over a fallen comrade (Morgan, "Theater of War"; Barrett).

Avengers #87 also reiterates T'Challa's access to Kimmel's masculine archetypes. The plot emphasizes his status as a Genteel Patriarch who needs to take care of his subjects. Whether or not he will return to Wakanda and take up the mantle of a Genteel Patriarch—in this case the ruler of Wakanda—is the question the story leaves open. What is also pointed out is Black Panther's ability to enact Self-Made Man traits. He outperforms everybody else, which gains him the recognition and approval of the men around him. The story underlines Black Panther as "a man *in* power, a man *with* power, a man *of* power", and therefore presents him as a man with access to hegemonic masculinity. And he has a lot of *masculine capital* even before he eats from the "sacred herbs" his fellow Wakandians hold in such great esteem.

But the sacred herbs turn into the source of his *supernaturalness*, which is then tied to his superhero abilities: his heightened senses, his alertness, his prowess. As Beatrice Scott points out, turning Black characters into supernatural characters of this sort is a common theme, a case of overdetermination, especially for the early period of superhero comics. When Black Panther emerges in 1966, he is a Black body who "is always already supernatural" (296) because his origin is tied to sacred herbs and then to secret rituals, revolving around a sacred *Panther God*. This ties him to Magical Negro tropes. It turns him into a "noble, good-hearted

black man" (Glenn and Cunningham 137-138) and supports longstanding beliefs that there is "something special about black people: their closeness to the spirits" (Scott 299). But most importantly, any Magical Negro exists in relation to white characters, in relation to what he or she can do for them. Whenever T'Challa senses a danger or a threat to himself and the Avengers, and then prevents them from harm, he enacts these relational qualities. But his *supernaturalness* not only serves white characters; it serves Black Panther as much as it serves his colleagues, which is where the character most strongly deviates from the definitions which stress how Magical Negros only exist for the benefit of white characters (Hughey; Glenn and Cunningham).

While his first appearances analyzed here do nothing to get rid of such tropes, in terms of masculinity enactment in homosocial ways—in ways that other men approve of (Kimmel)—the comics do away with male gender stratification (Lemelle). Where relations between male superheroes are concerned, Marvel Comics get rid of the longstanding and racist concept that the "black man must be black in relation to the white man" (Fanon). Black Panther is no "savage" to whom a white man must bring the truth. While his first appearance in the US is a reminder of the *marginalized* status of Afro-American males, T'Challa refuses to let himself be authorized out of *hegemonic* power by white males. But Black Panther is more than just capable of being "strong, successful, reliable, in control". Like his white superhero colleagues, he displays a "capacity for violence" as much as a "capacity for great suffering and gentleness […] usually revealed in short moments of great softness and tenderness" (Easton).

T'Challa's confrontation with white policemen in *Avengers* #52 is the closest these early Marvel Comics come to depicting structural racism in the US. Black Panther suffers through it without complaining, which further grants him hegemonic manhood. It is also a reminder how doing hegemonic masculinity as a *hybrid bloc*, as Demetriou explains, is always an attempt to "articulate, appropriate, and incorporate rather than negate, marginalize and eliminate different or even apparently oppositional elements" (348).

Black Panther's marginalization as a Black male, as a man negotiating *blackness* and *maleness*, is never negated. It just does not deter him from doing hegemonic masculinity.

Falcon, or Where to Find an Afro-American Superhero

On the opening pages of *Super Black: American Popular Culture and Black Superheroes*, Afro-American scholar Adilifu Nama describes his childhood enthusiasm for the character Sam Wilson/Falcon like this:

> [I]t was the Falcon that captured my imagination and cemented my attachment to virtually all things superhero. Why? He was a black man that could fly[…]. The image of a black man gliding through the air, compelling attention, awe, and respect, made a lasting impact on my imagination. (1-2)

As Nama points out in his book, superheroes "symbolize societal attitudes regarding good and evil, right and wrong, altruism and greed, justice and fair play" (9). Black superheroes represent them just as much as white superheroes, but are too often overlooked, a fact Nama's book remedies. Given the legacy of white and male supremacy in the US, concepts of superheroism have been just as white and privileged (Gavaler), and the success of Black superheroes often appears like an impossibility since, as already pointed out, their existence "seeks to combine two things that are antithetical to each other: superheroes and American racial thinking" (Francis 138-139). Nama's book is about the only source that gives Falcon a thorough analysis, while most other sources simply overlook the character altogether. Falcon is usually belittled as the Black sidekick to a white superhero, and not addressed any further. I agree with Nama that Falcon warrants a closer look. Nama anchors the character within "the dynamic social, political, and cultural backdrop in which he first appears" (70)[71]—the late sixties and early seventies—and mostly focuses on "race" relations. Falcon, like Black Panther, is created in a time when racial justice and racial equality are discussed more directly than before, both in American politics and popular culture. Black identity is now addressed and discussed on a whole new level (Staples; hooks; Ongiri).

My focus here is again on masculinity enactment, and how in superhero comics this is always both a serialized and repetitive activity, as well as a "practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint". As explained in "Theories and Histories of Masculinities", being Black and male make for a contradictory experience, as Afro-American men are regarded both too and not

[71] Not only is Nama's *Super Black* the first book to focus entirely on Black superheroes as they appear in Marvel and DC Comics; he also goes into detail about how Falcon's early adventures offer a discussion of "race" relations in 1970s USA.

"man enough" in the eyes of white and male supremacy (hooks; Lemelle). The burdens put on Black men and their masculinity enactment, rooted in "racial stereotypes that place him in the symbolic space of being too hard, too physical, too bodily" (Brown, "Comic Book Masculinity" 28), aim to keep them "in their place": away from white heroes, white masculinity, and the actions these privileges make possible.

Following this logic, having a Black male character appear as a superhero, and as such "in the form of the hero" who embodies hegemonic masculinity (Donaldson), already points to a big "practice of improvisation". It is also another example of enacting hegemonic masculinity as a *hybrid bloc* (Demetriou). Mirroring the introduction of Black Panther in 1966, when Marvel Comics introduce Falcon in 1969, some stereotypes about Black men are being perpetuated. His origin is a mixture of *White Savior* and *Magical Negro* tropes (Hughey; Scott; Glenn and Cunningham) as is explained below. The fact that, within the social hierarchy of men, Black men belong to the concept of *marginalized* masculinity, is upheld despite all the good intentions Marvel Comics show with their first Afro-American superhero (Nama; Gavaler). Sam Wilson/Falcon first appears in *Captain America* #117 and turns into a co-protagonist in issue #134, when the comics series is "renamed" *Captain America and the Falcon*[72]*.* The character then regularly appears in the series until issue #192, originally published between 1971 and 1978. When Falcon teams up with Captain America, they become Marvel Comics first bi-racial *buddy action* hero duo (Tasker; Guerrero; hooks; Carroll). Sam and Steve are shown having strong *homosocial* bonds with one another, as well as a strong *buddy* relationship and *bromance*. Both concepts are discussed in the following section. Also as subsequently discussed, Sam Wilson is not just Cap's new *buddy*; he is also Marvel Comics' first superhero to enact *Blaxploitation* masculinity traits (Dunn; Gates) and, while partnered with Cap, turns into a "black image in protective white custody" (Guerrero). Falcon starts out as a tame version of John Shaft—a popular *Blaxploitation* film hero—which eventually leads to a controversial as well as racist *ret-conning* of the character in 1974, as discussed at the end of this chapter (Wright; Nama; Howe).

[72] This title change is only *cosmetic*. The series is re-titled on the cover page but Marvel Comics continue to list and number the series as *Captain America*.

A brief overview of how Black characters entered Marvel Comics has already been provided in the previous chapter, with a focus on Marvel's Black Panther. The focus here is on Sam Wilson/Falcon "doing" masculinity, and how early adventures of this character can be discussed within the concept of "doing gender" as an improvisation in a constrained space (Butler, *Undoing Gender*), as well as masculinity as a homosocial enactment which is really "several stories at once" (Kimmel, "Homophobia"). As with T'Challa/Black Panther, I am analyzing a Black character who is the product of white artists; they can "therefore […] be seen as touchstones for how white American society regards black identity" (Davis 211). In the case of Black Panther, it starts with the white eyes of artist Jack Kirby and author Stan Lee; in the case of Falcon with the white eyes of author Stan Lee and artist Gene Colan. Sam Wilson's first appearance interacts with *Magical Negro* and *White Savior* tropes (Hughey) mentioned in previous chapters, and, as discussed below, the story of his "creation" is entirely a White Savior story.

Compared to Black Panther's debut, Falcon's normative masculinity enactment is limited when he first appears, but his *masculine capital* grows with every adventure he appears in. Over time, Falcon accesses this "fuel of masculinity […] in which privilege and esteem are traded" (Anderson 42) on a regular basis, just as much as his white superhero colleagues. And as he grows more self-confident and assertive, he also enacts hegemonic masculinity as a *hybrid bloc*. As Demetrakis Demetriou explains, such a *hybridization* is "an attempt to articulate, appropriate, and incorporate rather than negate, marginalize and eliminate different or even apparently oppositional elements" (348) involved in "doing" masculinity. Traditionally, Black men have been excluded from "doing" hegemonic masculinity, and Sam Wilson represents Marvel Comics' second attempt to allot hegemonic manhood to a Black male.

While doing so, Sam Wilson also interacts with Michael Kimmel's idealized masculinity types. As discussed in "Theories and Histories of Masculinities", out of the concepts of *Genteel Patriarch*, *Heroic Artisan*, and *Self-Made Man*, it is the Marketplace Man or Self-Made Man who turns into "the normative definition of American masculinity". As a "manhood of the rising middle class" (*Manhood* 23), it also normalizes middle class aims and values—in the 1960s those would be working for a big organization, being a husband, a provider, and a

father—as normal for men (Ehrenreich; Corber; Cuenca). It is further a model of masculinity based on "interaction with other men in the marketplace—in short, a model of masculinity […] based on homosocial competition" (Kimmel, *Manhood* 139). As stated earlier, it is my suggestion to regard all male protagonists in superhero comics as such Self-Made Men, especially when they appear in their superhero identity. Some, like Tony Stark or T'Challa, also successfully interact with them in their civilian identity. Sam Wilson, who, as readers learn in 1970, is a social worker in New York's Harlem, is firmly planted in middle class territory and trying to adhere to Postwar aims for men: having a career and aiming to be a provider and a husband. And like his colleagues Iron Man, Captain America, or Black Panther: when appearing in his superhero identity, Sam Wilson has an easy time proving he can be "strong, successful, capable, reliable, in control", and as such eligible for "doing" hegemonic masculinity.

Falcon is introduced, or rather announced, in 1969 in *Captain America* #117, titled "The Coming of the Falcon!" (Lee, *Epic Collection Cap* 2 400) is featured in the next three issue until #120, and then briefly disappears before re-entering *Captain America* #126 in "The Fate … of the Falcon!". In #117, Captain America, caught up in yet another battle with his arch nemesis Red Skull, is transported against his will to a remote island referred to as "lonely and desolate … somewhere in the tropics" (Lee, *Epic Collection Cap* 2 403). But Red Skull has also switched bodies with Captain America: meaning while the Red Skull crash-landing on the island is in truth Steve Rogers, the "Captain America" roaming the streets of New York is really Red Skull. On this island, the body-switched hero is immediately attacked by a group of former allies of Red Skull called the Exiles—a group first introduced in *Captain America* #103, "The weakest link!" (Lee, *Epic Collection Cap* 2 103)—who Red Skull, after a few adventures, exiles to this place for failing to help him defeat Captain America. During their fight, Cap is aided by a bird of prey: a red-winged falcon. This is actually the first time Sam Wilson "appears" in the comics, as he is the owner of said bird of prey. He has sent the bird to annoy the Exiles, who are harassing the natives of the island, take them prisoner, and treat the island as though it belonged to them. During the fight, Cap refers to the actions of the animal as helpful, stating, "That's the second time the falcon got me a breather!" (Lee, *Epic Collection Cap* 2 410). Cap also masculinizes the animal, saying, "He's leaving … like someone who knows his work is done!" (411). Only after the sequences depicting the fight do readers get to see the Falcon promised by the title for the first time.

A large panel, taking up half the page, depicts a Black male wearing a falconer glove and red pants, but nothing else. Crouching upon a rock in a jungle with his muscular torso visible, the yet unnamed man talks to his pet falcon, Red Wing. This is the same bird who earlier helped Captain America. Walking through the forest, he is approached by a white man—Cap, who has taken off Red Skull's face mask and now sports black hair and is dressed in a green shirt and pants due to this body switch. The following three panels depict Sam's body in detail: the first panel looks down his muscular shoulders and back, while he talks to Cap; the second panel depicts his chest as he shakes hands with Cap; and the last one shows his face up-close, revealing blue eyes. Falcon's very first depiction reveals him as being—in terms of bodily appearance—highly masculine already. He sports a body that is already *perfected* (Dutton) and is going for the "masculine look" (Easthope). What is really a display of *muscular masculinity*, which "draws attention to both the restraint and the excess involved in 'being a man'[…;] the work put into the male body and the poses that it strikes" (Tasker, "Dumb Movies" 233) is treated as if it were totally "natural". As if a male body and a masculine body were one and the same. Sam thereby possesses an *action hero* body that, just like a superhero body, is defined through its physicality and "the display of the body" from the very beginning. The very first panels to depict him do nothing but put his semi-nude masculine body on display. And unlike Black Panther's "villainous introduction" (Gavaler), Sam Wilson is shown to be a good guy whose body is superheroic material from the start. Sadly, a White Savior is needed to make him aware of it.

He bonds with Cap, who does not reveal his identity to him, over their shared dislike for the Exiles on the island. Steve places the character in their first exchange, saying, "you sound more Harlem than Haitian!" (Lee, *Epic Collection Cap* 2 417). Not only does this identify the character as Afro-American, but it reveals the place where they meet: the "island in the tropics" is now named as Haiti. Falcon confirms, "You know it man! I'm a big city brother from way back!" (417). Without asking each other their names, the two men walk from the forest to a little village, where the natives hide from the Exiles. Falcon has been unsuccessfully "trying to organize" (418) them into fighting the Exiles. He has been tricked into coming to the island through a job offer: the Exiles were looking for a falconer. Since his arrival in Haiti, he and the locals have been harassed by the Exiles non-stop.

Captain America asks him about his attachment to Red Wing, and Sam tells of how he purchased Red Wing while on vacation in Rio. He then goes on to explain that he is "nuts about birds" and can "practically make those high-flyers talk!" (418). Sam goes on to gush about his pet falcon: "We've got somethin' going for us that nobody else could understand […]. He's more than a bird! More than a falcon! It's like … [h]e's a part of me!" (419). This underlines something that is found routinely in early stories featuring Falcon: his connection to Red Wing is described as *supernatural*. The bird assists him during attacks, alerts him to dangers, and even reaches out to his colleagues—like Captain America—when Falcon is in danger. Sam further refers to his pet as "little brother" or "partner". He talks to him as if the bird could be talking back at any moment. Throughout the comics analyzed here, interactions between Falcon and Red Wing function akin to the sequences when Black Panther "senses" that something is off, as discussed in the Black Panther chapter. Repeated moments like these assign *Magical Negro* traits to Sam Wilson (Glenn and Cunningham; Hughey). They mark his *blackness* as "already supernatural", because there is "something special about black people" (Scott 299). As explained before, *blackness*, like *maleness*, is a socio-cultural construct, and the system of white and male supremacy applies them in order to subjugate and marginalize men of color (hooks; Lemelle; Fanon).

As already discussed in the Black Panther chapter, The Magical Negro is an "old–new 'positive images' trope" usually used by white people who "attempted to portray black people […] in a better light" (Scott 299). The Magical Negro is a "noble, good-hearted black man or woman, whose good sense pulls the White character through a crisis" (Glenn and Cunningham 137-138) and thereby saves the white character. But regarding *blackness* as something supernatural also means to see is as a form of power, albeit a "coveted power[…,] unskilled and unpredictable" (Scott 299). Most of all, it is seen as power that needs to be under white control. This is where the counterpart of the Magical Negro comes in: the *White Savior* (Hughey). The White Savior is a narrative trope referring to a "White interloper intruding upon a non-white culture under assault" (Hughey 762). Such characters routinely step in to save, educate, and elevate Black characters who—without their savior—never would have realized their potential (Hughey; Glenn and Cunningham). This is exactly the case when Steve Rogers meets Sam Wilson. He alerts Sam to the superhero potential he has.

Sam is further introduced as having the right kind of body to do super-heroics. But beyond stating, "Anything is better than not fighting back!" (Lee, *Epic Collection Cap* 2 420), he does not appear ready to take further action. It is Cap who brings up the idea that more is needed: a symbol to the natives that someone is fighting the Exiles; a symbol with "a mask and costume ought to do it … together with a stirring name … like, for instance … The Falcon!" (420). Sam responds, "Don't put me on, man!" But Cap reassures him and promises, "I'm the guy to show you how!" (420). This exchange marks Captain America as the White Savior of this story and turns him into a white man who "carries truth to savages" (Fanon 147). The "truth" in his case is the fact that Black males can be just as normatively masculine as white males, a truth no one ever had to explain to Black Panther.

Captain America #117 concludes with a large panel showing Sam as Falcon, already in full costume, Red Wing sitting on his arm. Next to him, an image of a Black man weaving the fabric of his costume is shown, as well as Black hands holding parts of his costume, such as his mask and his belt. The bottom right corner of the panel shows Sam putting on the mask. The panel tells a lie of sorts: maybe Black hands make Falcon's costume, but it is a pair of white hands that teaches him "how to superhero". His costume is literally revealing: unlike Captain America's or Black Panther's costume, which covers him from the neck down, Falcon's attire leaves his muscular arms bare, and his shirt has a plunging neckline in the front and the back, revealing a just as muscular chest and back. His costume keeps his muscular body "styled for the masculine look" on constant display, and as such shows off that Sam already possesses a "take no shit body" which signifies "independence, toughness, emotional imperviousness". But revealing so much of his body is also a reminder of how Black men "in the popular imagination are often read as hypersexual" (Francis 141). In this case, this Black body looks tough, but has yet to learn how to take independent action. At the same time, depicting Falcon in this way upholds the racist tradition in which Black males are always already hypermasculine, hypersexual, and supernatural (Fanon; Jordan; Mercer; Lemelle).

The opening page of *Captain America* #118, "The Falcon fights on!" (Lee, *Epic Collection Cap* 2 425) depicts Captain America and Falcon—the latter still with a bare torso—chatting at the

village. Only now is the civilian name of the Black character officially revealed by the character himself:

> Sam Wilson, from the "swinging slums" of Harlem, U.S.A. … stuck on a hidden island … with some nut, who's gonna make a superhero out of me! (427)

Cap replies, "You've all the equipment you need! […] You've brains, you have brawn, and a one-in-a-million bird!" (427). Telling him that he has "the brains and the brawn" is a first granting of normative masculinity by other men that appears in the narrative. And as Kimmel reminds us, "Manhood is demonstrated for other men's approval" and granted to men by other men. This is then Sam and Steve entering the homosocial arena in which masculinity is to be successfully enacted. But the fact that it is the white male telling the Black male that he is "man enough" is what turns this into a White Savior story: Cap as the White Savior will make Falcon realize his full potential (Glenn and Cunningham; Hughey). The exchange takes place in Sam's hut, with him reclining on a plank bed in the background, while in the foreground, Steve takes off his shirt as they are about to begin Sam's training. Rogers is, however, fully dressed again when the next panels depict him, while Sam is again depicted shirtless in the same panels. Sam's hypermasculinization is sustained.

The following two pages depict both men exercising hand-to-hand combat skills: On the first page, Cap is teaching Sam how to hit, jab, kick, and block punches. Captain America instructs him, "When you wear that costume, you eat, drink, and breath the Falcon!" (Lee, *Epic Collection Cap* 2 429), in continuation of his White Savior role. The second page offers one continuous panel with no gutter in between. It presents Steve and Sam sparring with one another from various angles, in various sizes and states of close-ups. Textboxes inform the reader how "with each new assault, each new maneuver, the Falcon seems to grow swifter … surer … stronger!" (429). This is a straightforward example of how masculinity hierarchies and "race" interact on levels of authorization (Connell): the white hero of the story—Captain America—authorizes the Black hero into normative, *hegemonic* masculinity. It is a reminder how for Black characters in US popular fiction and culture, the "Black body has historically been linked to physicality and not intelligence", which problematizes "the depiction of Black superheroes" (Gateward and Jennings 4-5). In the case of Falcon, Sam has the body, but needs brawny encouragement from Steve.

The page showing their training sequence is also the first one to grant Sam *masculine capital*, the currency "in which privilege and esteem are traded". He now takes action and acts tough in a way the story has not done before. Now, he not only has a "take no shit body" but also acts accordingly. In this sequence, enacting masculinity in normative ways also eliminates borders, even if they are only panel borders. Sam gets a chance to test his masculine prowess when the two attack the Exiles in *Captain America* #118, "The Falcon fights on!". This is also where comments on Falcon's supposed superhero abilities are first made. One of the Exiles cannot believe how fast Sam dodges one of his blows, to which the superhero replies, "The Falcon can!" (Lee, *Epic Collection Cap* 2 440). "Supposed" is important here, because Sam is not referred to as a man with any obvious superpowers at this point, nor does his origin story given here imply that he has acquired any. And Falcon has no superpowers in the way Captain America does as the result of taking the "super-soldier" serum. He is shown as strongly connected to Red Wing, which adds to his Magical Negro traits (Glenn and Cunningham), but he has no superpowers. What he shows and enacts from the moment his training with Cap is over is grit, guts, and pugnacity. None of these traits are superheroic, but they are all regarded as normatively masculine. The duo's first fight ends with them being transported away from the island to Red Skull's secret lair, which concludes issue #118.

In *Captain America* #119, "The Skull falls!", the two superheroes and Red Wing are not only transported someplace else, but the body-switch between Red Skull and Captain America is also reversed. Only now does Sam realize who his mentor has been. Stupefied, he exclaims: "You … the one who's been helping me […] You're Captain America!" (Lee, *Epic Collection Cap* 2 454). But Sam's stupefaction does not persist, and together they attack Red Skull. Sam Wilson positions himself, here even more directly than on the island—where Captain America suggests attacking the Exiles—as an active character willing to fight against villainous forces. As such, he shows himself as possessing the willingness to "perform heroic feats, take enormous risks", the requirements for "doing" hegemonic masculinity. Annoyed and angered, the Red Skull suddenly disappears, leaving Cap and Falcon stranded on a beach in the middle of nowhere. When Falcon concludes, "It doesn't seem possible, Cap … but you beat 'im!", Steve corrects him and says, "We beat him, Falcon!" (463). This is the first of many moments in the comics when Cap refers to himself and Falcon as a team. It is a dynamic that informs their *buddy* relationship, as will be discussed in more detail later. The last panel of the story

shows the two superheroes, if not riding, then walking off into the sunset together; sandy hills before them and a sky colored in yellow and orange above[73].

In *Captain America* #120, "Crack-up on Campus!", Falcon only appears in a few panels. The splash panel depicts Captain America and Falcon, with a textbox already referring to them as "the two famous friends" (Lee, *Epic Collection Cap* 3 5), standing before a group of Afro-Americans who look at them in awe, fear, and disbelief. As the two of them shake hands, Sam offers, "I'm hopin' we bump into each other real soon, Cap!", to which Steve responds, "Till we do, Mister … I expect to hear big things … of the Falcon!" (5), which are his parting words to Sam. Sam is depicted as looking after the figure of Captain America walking away. The Black superhero ponders, "I found a place for myself … right here in Harlem! But what happens to a guy like him? Where's he gonna find a spot he can really call home?" (6). This sequence anticipates what will happen to Sam Wilson/Falcon several issues later: he will start calling himself the "Hero of Harlem" (Lee, *Epic Collection Cap* 3 133) and actively looking for the approval of his fellow Harlemites. It also establishes him as someone who knows that Captain America is a lonely man looking for his place in the world, a fact many comics featuring Captain America have talked about at this point already. This makes Sam Wilson a character very much interested in the fate of one superhero; into a fan of Captain America. The last panel to depict Sam shows him longingly looking after a disappearing Steve. It marks him as a Black character in need of white affirmation (hooks, *reel to real*). This happens more than once, but also gets reversed as Cap and Falcon team up, as is addressed in more detail below.

The first three comic book issues to feature Falcon introduce him as a Magical Negro who is re-masculinized through being mentored and befriended by a White Savior. He turns into a superhero as the result of an act of white patronization, something often connected with White Savior acts (Hughey). When Steve first meets Sam, he is the one who decides which actions to take, and when. He teaches him how to be a superhero, and while Sam Wilson is shown as a character who can easily apply what Steve Rogers teaches him, his origin story is still initiated by the actions of a white character—which takes most of his agency away from

[73] The comics never really explain where Red Skull has left them, or how they get back to New York—where, however, we meet them again in *Captain America* #120, "Crack-up on Campus!".

him. It is a reminder that American superhero comics, in particular at the time, are "White patriarchal universalism" narratives, telling stories "about White heroes and minority villains, White victors and minority losers, White protagonists and perhaps a minority sidekick" (Howard and Jackson 2).

So, while Sam Wilson is no "hapless native" here—Cap identifies him as "more Harlem than Haitian" earlier—he is still a "hapless Afro-American male": a character all too often portrayed as a "minority loser" and/or "sidekick" to a white hero. Sam needs Steve's help to get started, which makes him a watered-down version of a *Sambo* character. *Sambo* is a racist stereotype dating back to black minstrel shows, representing a "comic buffoon who apes the actions and manners of whites" (Anderson, "Blackface" 18). Sambo is silly, lazy, timid, and always in need of being helped by a white character.

Sam Wilson is given Magical Negro traits, and his closeness to a real bird of prey—and later taking on the name of this animal as his superhero moniker—further grants him access to "primitive" masculinity (Rotundo 223). As explained earlier, the concept of "primitive" masculinity becomes a part of normative masculinity enactment around the 1900s in anglophone nations (Rotundo; Bederman). Men are proud to refer to their animal instincts as something that gives them masculine grit. This is tied together with the idea of white and male privilege—and men who proudly boast about their "primitive" masculinity are usually white. After Black Panther, Falcon is the second Black male superhero to claim "primitive" masculinity for himself. Wilson's access to "primitive" masculinity is then complemented by his White Savior—Captain America—granting him *normative* or *hegemonic* masculinity, after he has taught him "how to superhero". In nations like the US, white masculinity has always been eligible for hegemonic manhood, as it is constructed as being capable of "self-control, self-consciousness" and putting "one's mind over one's body" (Dyer, *White* 6). Steve nudging him into the right—or *white*—direction is apparently all Sam needs. But masculinity, as with all expressions of gendered identity, is something one *does*, not something one *has*: it is a "practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint". It is a relational activity, as Anthony Lemelle points out, as it is "not a place, territory or type. It is the deployment of power". Within the logics of white and male privilege as they exist in the US, this *scene of constraint* is so narrow that Black males never get a foot in the door. When readers first see Sam, he has little

to no power to deploy, and he most certainly is not a man "*in* power, a man *with* power, a man *of* power" (Kimmel). Captain America teaches and trains him to enact masculine qualities that turn him into a such a man.

Just like Black Panther, Falcon is not introduced on American soil, but in a foreign location. But *unlike* Black Panther, he is "made" by a white male. T'Challa knows he has what it takes to be "strong, successful, capable, reliable, in control" (Kimmel) even before he meets white superheroes. Sam Wilson needs suggestions and encouragement from Steve Rogers. When the two attack the Exiles towards the end of *Captain America* #118, Sam is willing to "perform heroic feats, take enormous risk", which means he is willing to enact masculinity "for other men's approval" and to show himself as having what it takes to be a Self-Made Man (Kimmel). Once they are returned to New York, Sam does so by joining the "superhero guild", by becoming the "Hero of Harlem" and teaming up with Captain America.

Falcon and Captain America Team Up: Bi-Racial Buddies in Marvel Comics

Falcon reappears in *Captain America #126* and then starts to fight by Captain America's side more and more often. Starting with issue #134, the comic series is, on the cover page, re-titled *Captain America and the Falcon*, a *cosmetic* title change that lasts until #222. During this time, Falcon appears in almost every issue, and when Cap and Falc appear together, they are not just superheroes teaming up, they are Marvel Comics' first bi-racial *buddy action* heroes (Tasker, *Spectacular*; Carroll; Blake).

The concept of *buddy* characters appearing in comedic narratives has numerous roots, among them Vaudeville traveling shows, one of the earliest forms of popular entertainment in the US and in Europe during the second half of the nineteenth century (Ashby; Blake). At the center of any *buddy* narrative sits male homosocial friendship (Tasker; Carroll). It usually involves two males appearing as if "they could not exist independently of one another"; they have "a rapport or shorthand that develops between them to exclude outsiders" (Blake 139). Over time, this *buddy* scheme branches out into other forms of popular culture, among them film and comic strips. In such narratives, comedic and action elements are mixed to create what is

in film studies most often referred to as *buddy films* or *buddy action comedies* (Tasker, *Spectacular*). Such buddy films

> embrace the same premise: two men of differing personalities and/or backgrounds are thrown together, and their initial lack of understanding of one another is eventually transformed into mutual respect. Buddy films negotiate crisis of masculinity centered on questions of class, race, and gender. (Carroll 73-74)

Most often, buddy action comedies are discussed in the context of the medium of film, and from a film studies perspective. The focus is usually on film franchises like *Die Hard*, *Lethal Weapon, or Fast & Furious*. However, this thesis demonstrates that the same premises also exist in the medium of comics, and decades earlier. Premises as described by Carroll and Tasker also apply to Captain America and Falcon. On the island, Sam experiences a moment of crisis and is not sure what to do about the Exiles, but Steve is. Steve then teaches Sam a more effective masculinity enactment when he motivates him to become Falcon. And whenever they appear as their superhero personas to fight villains, the comics fulfill another staple of *buddy* narratives: they collapse intramasculine differences "into a form of sameness" (Fuchs 194), as both Sam and Steve enact normative masculinity as Falcon and Captain America.

Buddy narratives center on *homosocial*, or male–male, friendships. Such friendships serve as a space were masculine values and ideas are "secured" against "feminizing influences"; an argument dating back all the way to the mid–nineteenth century (Douglas; Rotundo; Kimmel; Anderson). To recap, English scholar Kira Sedgwick clarifies,

> in any male-dominated society, there is a special relationship between male homosocial (*including* homosexual) desire and the structures for maintaining and transmitting patriarchal power: a relationship founded on inherent and potentially active structural congruence. (*Between Men* 25)

Masculinity scholar Michael Flood adds that male homosociality "plays a crucial role in many contexts in perpetuating gender inequalities and the dominance of particular hegemonic masculinities" (342). Homosocial bonds between males cover a large spectrum of emotional attitudes. Kimmel points out that "masculinity defined through homosocial interaction contains many parts, including camaraderie, fellowship, and intimacy often celebrated in male culture". And while male–male friendships can open a "mythic homosocial Eden where men could, at last, be real men among other men", they are at the same time fraught with dangers

like being unmasked as "unmanly", or acting "not man enough". Male–male friendships therefore also imply male–on–male scrutiny (Kimmel; Bird; Flood).

In the field of sociology, studies on friendships between men are sometimes referred to as "bonding without intimacy" (Messner 42), because men do not seek emotional intimacy in friendships with other men. Yet sociologists also suggest that men simply value their friendships differently: spending time with friends and doing things together resembles emotional bonding. Friendships among men may then be best understood as a "covert style of intimacy" (Swain 89): men *do* things together, but do not *talk* about things together. The comics show Steve and Sam practicing such a covert style of intimacy: they spend a lot of time together during which taking actions usually takes precedence over sitting down and talking.

Next to the *buddy* narrative, the *bromance* offers another narrative setting for depicting male homosociality. Where "the buddy movie tends to be more external and action based[…], the bromance has a more intimate social setting" (Blake 141). The *buddy* as well as the *bromance* plot examine elements of male–male friendships: shared hobbies, shared backgrounds and aspirations, etc. In such stories, it is usually females "who intrude upon the space of buddies", since the bromance motto is: "although men will compromise for a woman, the real relationship is with his buddy" (Blake 142). *Captain America* comics also offer *bromance* narratives. This is most clearly visible when female love interests appear and intrude upon the "covert style of intimacy" Steve and Sam share, as will be subsequently discussed.

Buddy and *bromance* narratives create moments where masculinity is usually bilaterally confirmed. However, the logics of white and male supremacy infringe upon such narratives and create unequal circumstances for the Black *buddy* in bi-racial narratives. He runs into the following problem:

> As a *black* within a racist social and political hierarchy, he has neither power nor privilege; yet, on the other hand, as a *male* within a still patriarchal power structure, he has both. (Henry 15)

Hollywood has been producing bi-racial buddy films since the mid-sixties. Film scholar Ed Guerrero concludes that bi-racial *buddy* films create a "Black presence on the screen" that is "in protective custody" of its white buddy and must act in accordance with "White sensibilities

and expectations of what Blacks should be like" (239). The goal is to contain "any threat that black masculinity might seem to imply" (Gates 23). As discussed in "Theories and Histories of Masculinities", such narrative strategies can all be connected to racist and sexist beliefs about Black males as hypersexual and hypermasculine (hooks; Patterson; Staples; Lemelle). In bi-racial buddy narratives, this can amount to "denying the black man romantic involvement with women" (Gates 23) or making sure the Black character does not receive an equal amount of "displays of action associated with heroic masculinity" (24) when compared to the white *buddy* in the narrative.

Compared to the white characters, according to Tasker, Black characters in bi-racial buddy *action* narratives more often occupy "only a secondary or largely supportive role" (*Spectacular* 43) and only follow the actions the white hero takes. Additionally, Black males are "presented in […] solitary roles" (hooks, *reel to real* 111) and are always looking to "receive the affirmation of white males" (106).

Captain America comics offer variations on these themes. Sam is given a love interest very early on in the form of a Black character named Leila. But when it comes to taking action, Falcon receives fewer opportunities to enact normative masculinity than Captain America does.

Bi-racial *buddy action* narratives center on bi-racial *action heroes* which, like all action genre texts, provide characters "constructed through their physicality […] and the display of the body" (Tasker). However, the stronger the *buddy* elements in an action genre text, the more do such narratives offer what Yvonne Tasker refers to as "tough and wise guys" ("Dumb Movies" 230). *Tough guys* are deemed the "strong and silent type"; they offer displays of "muscular masculinity" (233) in action. *Wise guys*, on the other hand, are defined by their wise-cracking persona and their constant exercise of wordplay as they trade "complex insults, challenges and comebacks" (*Spectacular* 37) with both enemy and buddy. *Wise guys* are characterized by their "self-mocking bravado and verbal wit" (37) and are a key element of buddy action narratives. Often, *wise guy* and *tough guy* exist within one character. The comics present both Cap and Falc as doing both a *wise* and a *tough guy* routine whenever hunting after and fighting all kinds of villains.

With the US being a nation built on white and male supremacy (Jordan; Staples; hooks), the socio-cultural routine of projecting "its fears and desires onto the black body" (Tasker, *Spectacular* 38) runs just as deep. Therefore, any "reclamation and production of images of the black body […] involve[s] a difficult set of negotiations" (38), and neither 1960s buddy action films nor early superhero comics always do a decent job here. Falcon's earliest appearances are no exception. Marvel Comics' Falcon does not always follow long-established norms of "occupying only a secondary or largely supportive role" (43) in the narrative, or always marveling "at the hero's achievements and […] support[ing] him in difficult situations" (44). But Marvel Comics still decide to partner their first Afro-American superhero with a white superhero and not give him a solo series until 1983. It supports a sentiment often found in US-American popular fiction, where "from a standpoint of white patriarchy, black masculinity must be kept in check" (hooks, *reel to real* 105).

Cap and Falc: Being Buddies and "Doing" Masculinity

Wise guy exchanges (Tasker) are a constant in the interactions of the two superheroes, as are confirmations of their friendship. After Falcon reappears in *Captain America* #126, "The Fate of…the Falcon!", Falcon is wanted by the police for murder, while Captain America is certain of his innocence and wants to help. To him, Falcon is a man who has "fought beside him" and who he has "trusted […] with my life!" (Lee, *Epic Collection Cap* 3 133), all expressions of their homosocial bond. A bond confirmed when Cap finds Falcon. The Black superhero has been injured while running from the police, and Cap offers to help him. Sam is amazed to see that Steve believes he is innocent, and Cap responds, "Don't insult our friendship with a question like that!" (137).

They find the real culprits, and Falcon offers wise-cracking/*wise guy* bravado while simultaneously throwing himself at the villains:

> Whatcha tryin' to do, boys…wake up the whole neighborhood?[...] I always did hate to miss out on a party […] You didn't think I'd let my buddy have all the fun, didja? (148)

The sequence demonstrates the "rapport or shorthand" (Blake 139) these two buddies share. However, Falcon never fights villains alone in #126, but always together with Captain America.

The conclusion of *Captain America* #126 mirrors *Captain America* #120, "Crack-Up on Campus!" (Lee, *Epic Collection Cap* 3 115): both times, Sam is shown staring after Steve as the white superhero leaves. Sam appears in a "solitary role" looking for "white affirmation" (hooks*, reel to real*), and stresses Steve's importance to him when he states, "there's no man alive I'm prouder to call … brother!" (Lee, *Epic Collection Cap* 3 149). This theme continues in *Captain America* #132, "The Fearful Secrets of Bucky Barnes!" (Lee, *Epic Collection Cap* 3 250) where Sam Wilson makes his first reappearance after #126. Sam does not perform any actions in that story but is instead depicted as devastated when he learns that Cap chooses to partner up with his old buddy Bucky Barnes—mysteriously returned from the dead—instead of him. Shown in his Harlem apartment, where the costumed superhero lounges in front of his TV, watching as Cap makes said announcement publicly, Sam exclaims,

> Well I guess that really sinks it! […] All this time I kinda hoped that Cap'n me would team up some day! […] looks like it's just […] the Falcon… and Red Wing from here on in! But man…wouldn't it have been somethin' if only Cap […] Aww nuts! What's the use'a dreamin'? (Lee, *Epic Collection Cap* 3 253)

Here, Marvel Comics uphold what feminist scholar bell hooks describes as the refusal of American popular culture to show "any complex representation of black masculinity" (*reel to real* 113). They refuse to depict Sam Wilson as a man who has his own agenda. Instead, they turn him into a Black character who thinks he is lacking unless he is granted the "affirmation of white males" (106). Sam starts to receive this white affirmation regularly from issue #134, "They call him Stone-Face!" (Lee, *Epic Collection Cap* 3 290) onwards. This is when Marvel Comics rename the series *Captain America and the Falcon* on its cover. The story continues Cap and Falc's *wise* and *tough guy* routine (Tasker). While fighting a group of four villains, Steve and Sam exchange quips: "I'll keep them off your back! […] Good idea, partner! I'd hate for you to get out of practice!" (Lee, *Epic Collection Cap* 3 292). Issue #134 also provides more details on Sam Wilson's civilian life as his day job as a social worker in New York's Harlem is now depicted for the first time.

This is a typical middle class job involving office work and managerial tasks, which situates Sam Wilson firmly within what Postwar America advocates all men aspire to be: affluent members of the middle class (Costello; Cuenca). As Adilifu Nama points out in *Super Black*, it also marks Sam Wilson as one of many "black professionals in white collar jobs, administrative,

and public positions" who "were increasingly entering the ranks of the middle-class in the mid-seventies" (73). The fact that he has a paid job whereas Steve Rogers does not—which is the case at this point in the series—actually puts Sam ahead when it comes to enacting "adjusted" Postwar masculinity.

As always with superhero narratives, Sam Wilson can enact normative masculinity more easily as a superhero. This is when demonstrating that he is a man "*in* power, a man *with* power, a man *of* power" (Kimmel) is the easiest. In "They call him Stone-Face!", the titular character, who is a Harlem-based drug dealer, hurts Sam's sister and kidnaps his nephew Jody. The two superheroes go after them, and again "self-mocking bravado and verbal wit" (Tasker) are exchanged while villains are fought.

What stands out is how Falcon claims his "right of way" during the action sequences in the comics. Sam tells Steve, "They roughed up the kid, Cap! […] [A]nd shot his Ma! So kind'a leave 'em to me, huh?" (Lee, *Epic Collection Cap* 3 304). Sam adds, "if ever a guy deserves the whole full treatment" (307), it is Stone-Face. Cap agrees without hesitation. Over the next few panels, it is really Cap assisting Falcon rather than punching the henchmen out himself. This is a rare moment in the comics: for once, Falcon does not play "second fiddle" or a supporting role to the actions of the white hero (Tasker; Guerrero; hooks). The two superheroes only relent once the cops are about to show up. Dangling Stone-Face from his one arm and about to deliver a punch with his other fist, Sam asks, "Anything you would like to add before the cops take over, Cap?", to which Cap replies, "No thanks, Falc! I think you've said it all!" (Lee, *Epic Collection Cap* 3 308). "They call him Stone-Face!" positions Falcon as an Afro-American male who is aggressive, violent, capable, and gritty. In other words, he does what every white superhero or action hero does: he cashes in his *masculine capital* as he takes risks, uses violence, and performs difficult feats, as well as using his body as a weapon as he overpowers his enemies (Kimmel; Anderson; Lichtenfeld). It earns him his Self-Made Man or Marketplace Masculinity spurs, as he devotes himself "to his work in an increasingly homosocial environment"—Falc and Cap fight only male villains in this and most other issues—where "he pits himself against other men". And like his partner, Sam proves that he can be "strong, successful, capable, reliable, in control".

As Tasker reminds us, due to racist traditions of how Black males are represented in US popular fiction, any depictions of Black characters as action heroes, or superheroes, warrants sophisticated negotiations, as specters of Black males as hypermasculine threats loom large (*Spectacular*). Marvel Comics offer such negotiations here, since Sam is more than just an assertive and tough character sporting a perfected male body "going for the masculine look" (Easthope; Dutton). He holds a middle class job and has family and friends, which makes him a rather adult and well-adjusted American male (Ehrenreich; Cuenca). And all the while, Captain America approves of and grants him his masculinity.

Sam may be a "black image in protective white custody" (Guerrero) who only co-stars in *Captain America* comics, but at the same time he is also shown as being quite capable, self-reliant, powerful, and strong. As Nama put it in *Super Black*, Falcon is a Black man "compelling attention, awe, and respect" (1-2). His ability to compel these things is connected to his successful masculinity enactment.

But "doing" Self-Made Man masculinity is not a one time thing, but a repetitive, a serialized activity, which is as true for Steve Rogers/Captain America as it is for Sam Wilson/Falcon. As Kimmel reminds us, masculinity enactment is "demonstrated for other men's approval", and masculinity needs to be successfully enacted and proven *again and again*. Sam demonstrates numerous times how well he can "do" normative masculinity. In *Captain America* #135, "More Monster than man!" (Lee, *Epic Collection Cap* 3 310) Cap introduces Falc to S.H.I.E.L.D. Agent Nick Fury. Nick requests a demonstration of Falcon's skills to see if he is "as good as Cap says ya are" (313). Falcon then competes against various S.H.I.E.L.D. agents, a reminder how "doing" normative masculinity is based on "homosocial competition". Steve tries to give Sam advice, which he dismisses as unnecessary, yet during the fight his thoughts make it clear that he wants to impress his partner: "I can't let the shield slinger down" (315). In the end, Falcon's fighting prowess impresses both Fury's team and Cap. Through displaying *muscular masculinity* (Tasker), Falcon establishes his *masculine capital* in the eyes of Nick Fury and Captain America.

Steve's appreciation and admiration for his friend—following the logic of male–male friendships as displaying a covert style of intimacy (Swain)—is packaged into a *wise guy*

exchange (Tasker, *Spectacular*). Sam asks, "Waddaya say, Cap? Did I do ya proud?", to which Steve responds "Not bad for a fledgling. Just don't put the old man out of a job, hear?" (317). This also applies to how they thank each other when one rescues the other. In *Captain America* #136, "The World Below" (Marvel, *Epic Collection Cap* 3 330), Falcon rescues Cap from being trapped underground with the villain Mole-Man. Cap disguises his thank-you to Falc as a *wise guy* quip: "Say, partner … before it slips ma mind … thanks for saving the old man's life", to which Sam replies in kind: "Don't mention it! At least it took me away from the TV!" (353).

Proving his masculinity to Fury and his colleagues only takes a few panels; getting another superhero to grant him masculinity takes somewhat longer, as shown in *Captain America* #137, "To stalk the Spider-Man!". It provides another example of how "doing" masculinity as a homosocial enactment is "fraught with danger, with the risk of failure, and with intense relentless competition". In the story, Falcon suspects Spider-Man of wrongdoing and tries to overpower him with Captain America's help. When Spider-Man taunts him during their fight as being no more than Cap's sidekick and his "pride'n joy!" (Lee, *Epic Collection Cap* 3 366), Sam takes it as a challenge to his masculine authority. First, he is shown thinking, "Why must it always be Cap? I'll prove I can do it … on my own!" (366). His response to Spider-Man is more aggressive:" Cap's my partner … sure! But no one has to wet nurse me!" (367). This also shows how

> the character was a self-reflective and ambitious black superhero that consciously rejected being a sidekick to the white protagonist and constantly strove to assert his equality. (Nama 70)

It also shows how Marvel Comics infuse Falcon with their *Marvel Method* (Wright): he is just one more player in the publisher's "realistic fantasy" populated by "superheroes who performed amazing feats but evinced believable human qualities and failings" (207). Sam Wilson is insecure about his abilities as a superhero. While fighting Spider-Man, Falcon ponders, "maybe I'm tryin' to prove something … to a partner of mine" (Lee, *Epic Collection Cap* 3 383). Sam's doubts fit into how the system of white and male supremacy teaches Afro-American males to see themselves as problems, as pointed out by W.E.B Du Bois. It creates what he terms the "double consciousness", a way "of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others" (5). The comic concludes with another moment of white affirmation for a Black character (hooks, *reel to real*). In the story, Captain America arrives after Falcon and Spider-

Man settle their differences peacefully, realizing that they are "in the same line of work" (Lee, *Epic Collection Cap* 3 384). Spider-Man praises Falcon's skills and toughness in front of Captain America: "You picked some pard, Cap! He's as tough to handle as you", to which Sam replies, "That's all I wanted to hear" (386). This is a straightforward case of white men granting manhood to a Black man. And yet, Spider-Man's praise also equates Captain America and Falcon. Sam is often shown as sharing Steve's tenacity and assertiveness; like Steve, Sam throws himself at his enemies and won't give in until the job is done. The comics grant the same *masculine capital,* and as such "attitudes and behaviors" through which men can achieve hegemonic masculinity, to Sam as it does to Steve.

The series also provides numerous examples of Sam and Steve being not just *buddies*, but in a *bromance* as well. A *bromance* narrative is about how "men will compromise for a woman" but "the real relationship is with his buddy" (Blake 142). Sam and Steve are both given love interests: Sharon and Leila.

As pointed out in the Captain America chapter, Steve and Sharon's romance is a rocky road: Steve is depicted wanting to have a traditional relationship with Sharon, but not being able to have it. To this hetero-romance dynamic, the *bromance* between Steve and Sam is added. Cap is shown as prioritizing his "homosocial Eden" with Sam over his relationship with Sharon, and the comics allot more panels to Falc and Cap making time to do things together, than they do to either one of them with their respective love interests.

In true *bromantic* fashion (Blake), Sam is ok with Steve having a girlfriend and offers Steve a sympathetic ear when he has a falling out with Sharon. This happens at the beginning of *Captain America* #137, "To stalk the Spider-Man!" (Lee, *Epic Collection Cap* 3 350). Cap starts talking about love relationships, prompting Falc to ask, "What's buggin' you, Steve? Sharon?" (Lee, *Epic Collection Cap* 3 354). Steve then suddenly starts avoiding the topic, which leads to Sam stating, "You're a real bundle of laughs tonight!" (355). Falcon later goes on patrol without Captain America, being in no mood to deal with his antics. This is also an example where the dynamics of Falcon as a "Black image in protective white custody" (Guerrero), always on the lookout for white male affirmation (hooks, *reel to real*), are annulled. The dynamics are later reversed when Cap looks for Falc to make amends and make his priorities clear: "I shouldn't

have let off steam the way I did […] So I've been hoping you'd come back soon […] to give me a chance to apologize" (Lee, *Epic Collection Cap* 3 360). Sequences like this also offer a reversal on the idea that male–male friendships are "bonding without intimacy": while Steve has a hard time sharing his emotions with Sam, he comes around eventually. Sam has no such qualms, but also does not coddle Steve. Here, he sports a "take no shit body" on both an interpersonal and a physical level. However, having a tough body does not prohibit "acting soft". Sequences like these not only highlight the homosocial intimacy between Sam and Steve, they also highlight Sam's superhero capacity for being hard as well as soft (Easton).

Falc is also quick to present himself to Cap as a fun alternative when Sharon is unavailable. This happens in *Captain America* #143, "Power to the People!", when Sharon needs to debrief after a S.H.I.E.L.D. mission. Sam suggests, "sounds like the lady's gonna be tied up for a while, Cap […;] so what say you and I split for my pad?!" (Lee and Thomas, *Epic Collection Cap* 4 87), which is what they end up doing. This further confirms that the older the superhero comics, the more likely it is that female characters are only there to serve to "secure a heterosexual orientation for the main characters" (Easton). 1960s/1970s Marvel Comics depict male–female relationships as romantic but often distant and impersonal, as opposed to those that male superheroes have with their "male partners" (147). This is most certainly the case when it comes to Cap and Falc.

As Yvonne Tasker reminds us, male buddy relationships also offer "a space for the covert exploration of the homoerotic possibilities of male bonding" (*Spectacular*, 45). This possibility is, however covertly, explored when Sam and Steve team up in the early seventies. Wilson receives a love interest in *Captain America* #139, "The Badge and the Betrayal!" (Lee amd Thomas, *Epic Collection Cap* 4 4): Leila, a fellow Harlemite, outspoken, handsome, and tough. Steve does not exhibit the same kind of relaxed attitude towards her as Sam does towards Sharon. When Steve sees Leila and Sam kissing, he is devastated. To Steve, this immediately signals that he is "losing yet another partner!" (Lee and Thomas, *Epic Collection Cap* 4 118). To Captain America, Falcon can either be his partner, or be in a romantic relationship—if Sam is "that close with her … then he can't be with me!" (131). This utterance makes Cap into more of a jilted lover than a disappointed buddy and reminds us that "heterocentrist texts can contain queer elements" and "heterosexual, straight-identifying people can have queer

moments" (Doty 3). Such queer moments amount in *Captain America* #144, "Hydra over all!" (Lee and Thomas, *Epic Collection Cap* 4 119). Lee Easton discusses this story in his 2010 article "Sharing a Quick Look: A Gay Man Reads His Comics". As explained earlier, Easton highlights the homo-erotic potential male superheroes can develop on the comic book page, no matter how hetero-normative the intentions of author and artist. The story in #143 ends with Cap seeing Falc kissing Leila. The following comic opens with Cap having a nightmare where remembers their kiss, which to Steve signals that he is "going to lose my partner" (Lee and Thomas, *Epic Collection Cap* 4 131). In reference to this sequence, Easton suggests that

> Cap's nightmare is more than his fear of failing as a mentor yet again […] It is, if we read the words on the page, a moment of jealousy, a fear of losing his African-American partner to an African-American woman. (144)

The story is titled "Hydra over all!", but the cover page offers an additional title: "Cap and The Falcon split up!" (Lee and Falcon, *Epic Collection Cap* 4 118). *Captain America* #144 also has a second chapter, titled "The Falcon fights alone!". And a split-up indeed happens, but not of Sam and Steve's *buddy* relationship, but of their working relationship, as Falcon starts working solo more often after that. This is further discussed in the "Marvel Comics' Falcon and Blaxploitation Masculinity" section below.

In terms of reading Sam and Steve with an eye towards homosocial intimacy, Easton suggest to leave aside the "heterocentric lens […] for a moment" (144). If one does, it becomes clear that this story "provides opportunities to read the story form a gay perspective" (144), especially since the comic plays on the idea of a break-up between Sam and Steve. In the nightmare sequence, Steve is depicted as yearning for Sam, and as saddened by the fact that Falcon has something else on his mind than their partnership. I agree with Easton: if nothing else, this story is a great reminder that *bromance* is after all a fusion of the words brother and romance. But there are earlier moments than #144 for reading male–male friendships as an opportunity for a "covert exploration of the homoerotic possibilities of male bonding" (Tasker, *Spectacular* 45). Easton points to *Captain America* #118, "The Falcon fights on!", (Lee, *Epic Collection Cap* 2 422) where a panel depicts Sam and Steve getting ready for combat training. It shows Steve in the foreground taking off his shirt and revealing his muscled chest underneath, while a bare-chested Sam is reclining on his plank bed in the background. This panel can be suggestive of two men not just getting ready for training, but just as likely getting

ready to have sex. Comics is after all the medium of "meaning-making" (Kukkonen), and lots of meanings can be deduced from this one panel. Here, Easton points to the parallels between the type of male body favored in superhero comics, and the type favored by gay pornography: both mediums favor a perfected and developed body (Dutton; Easthope), which makes an erotic reading even easier (Easton).

Another sequence of panels in *Captain America* #143, "Power to the People!" (Lee and Thomas, *Epic Collection Cap* 4 84) lends itself to a similar homoerotic reading. It shows Sam in the foreground in the process of putting on his shirt, while a bare-chested Steve is in the background, hanging up his Captain America cowl and about to put on his street clothes. This panel may just as well show two men who have just had sex. The panel is couched between two other panels: the first shows Cap and Falc during a workout session on the rooftops of New York, while the third one shows both men in street clothes about to head for their respective day jobs. This sequence, of course, detracts from an openly homoerotic reading. However, in a previous panel Sam talks about wanting to go home to take a shower after their workout, and in the panel where both men are getting dressed, Steve asks Sam about the shower which he has not taken yet. This is most definitely a "queer moment" in a what is most definitely a very "heterocentrist text" (Doty 3). It is another reminder of comics as a medium offering a "plurality of messages" (Hatfield, *Alternative Comics* 43), and where readers are very actively involved in "meaning-making" (Kukkonen).

Until the 1990s, there are no openly homoerotic sequences to be found in superhero comics. But these texts are always open to this possibility. As Easton goes on to point out, "men's muscular bodies operate not simply as an ego-ideal but also as a desirable male whose physique that offers a range of sexual promises" (146), which is as true for superhero comics as it is for any other depiction of men's bodies. And since superhero "stories and main characters involve mainly men" (138), even if that is more accurate for the period analyzed here than for today, homoerotic readings are always possible. This is because superhero comics often suggest "the existence of same-sex love, if not of same-sex desire" (52)[74].

[74] This of course changes when Marvel Comics and superhero comics in general introduce their first openly gay characters, which happens in the 1990s. From then on, these narratives affirm both same-sex desire and same-sex relationships.

However, depicting Steve as upset that Sam may break up their partnership due to having a love interest should not detract from another element introduced here: the reversal of a Black character needing white affirmation (hooks, *reel to real*). This is now the other way around. When Captain America is weary after a fight, he seeks Falcon's company. In *Captain America* #151, "Panic on Park Avenue", on such an occasion Steve goes to Sam's apartment and asks, "If you've got a moment […] I need a friend" (Lee and Thomas, *Epic Collection Cap* 4 278). Sam agrees, and while Cap sits down and talks, Falc makes coffee and listens. Sequences like these keep reaffirming their *buddy* and *bromantic* relationship throughout the series and show how their friendship marks a "covert style of intimacy" and not "bonding without intimacy".

But reversing white over Black dynamics in this friendship does not change the fact that Steve Rogers remains an incredibly powerful and influential force in Sam Wilson's life. When Captain America thinks about "quitting" at the end of *Captain America* #176[75], Falcon tries his best to make him change his mind. He pleads,

> [Y]ou'd molded me into the man I always wanted to be! […] You'd made me … the Falcon! […] [N]othing else in my life, before or since, has ever come close to that moment! […] From then on, I've … well I've idolized you … tried with all my strength and soul to become what you already are! (Thomas, *Secret Empire* 153-154)

Sam's plea to Steve is shown via flashback panels: one and a half pages provide panels mimicking images from the first appearances of Falcon back in *Captain America* #117-#120. The sequence is a reminder that Sam Wilson remains a Black character looking for white approval and learning how to "do" masculinity by following the examples of white males.

At the same time, while Falcon "co-stars" next to Captain America, the comics offer an Afro-American character the opportunity to "do" normatively masculinity like never before. As Anthony Lemelle reminds us, masculinity is "not a place, territory or type. It is the deployment of power" (169). From "a relational perspective hegemonic masculinity is a dynamic power that men deploy in structural interactions functioning to legitimize patriarchal relations" (13).

[75] *Captain America* #169-176 are nowadays better remembered as *Captain America and the Falcon: "Secret Empire".* The main story arc of these issues sees Captain America first framed for murder and then retire from being Captain America. Not because he is guilty of murder, but because he discovers that the US Government itself is behind the group *Secret Empire* who conspired to frame and discredit him. The "Secret Empire" storyline is generally seen as Marvel Comics' response to the Watergate Scandal and President Richard Nixon's subsequent resignation (Wright; Howe).

It is a dynamic power the United States never allow Black males to have as long as slavery and racial segregation are in place. This legacy makes black masculinity "a contradictory experience" because the "essence of masculinity" (Mercer 143)—the patriarchal dividend—is withheld from Black males.

When Sam Wilson first appears in 1969, he seems to have little access to "doing" masculinity in this way, but this situation quickly remedied. While needing a White Savior to jumpstart him on his way to enacting masculinity in a way other men approve of, Falcon excels at it immediately. But although he successfully masters masculinity as a homosocial competition, he remains a minor character in the series. This is apparent in how Marvel Comics do not allot the character his own solo series until 1983 and is further visible in how they only "cosmetically" re-title the series, from *Captain America* to *Captain America and the Falcon*. In terms of panel time and story focus, the series remains focused on Steve Rogers, not Sam Wilson. Nevertheless, Sam Wilson can assert his masculinity in a way that Steve Rogers and other men approve of on a serial basis. He proves it anew in every issue. He can be "a man *in* power, a man *with* power, a man *of* power", *again and again*.

As a bi-racial *buddy/bromance* action narrative, the series covers more interesting territory. On the one hand, Sam suffers a fate bestowed upon most Black action heroes: he is much more assisting, supporting, and helping than doing the heroic action himself. And because the comic series remains centered on Captain America, Falcon remains a "black presence […] in protective custody" (Guerrero) of white characters for the better part of the series. An Afro-American male is simply not allowed to be "a man *in* power, a man *with* power, a man *of* power".

The comic series further creates a "male homosocial Eden" (Kimmel). Steve and Sam spend time together, go on missions together, and are having a great time being around each other. The texts offer their most democratic enactment of masculinity, for both the Black and the white male, when they allow Falcon and Captain America to be both equally *wise guys* and *tough guys* (Tasker, *Spectacular*).

More than once, the comics undermine the "pedagogy of popular culture" (hooks*, reel to real* 105) when they show Steve rather than Sam as a solitary figure longing for the approval of a Black male. As "white cultural productions", which these comics definitely are, they play fast and loose with the certainty of teaching Black males "to see themselves as always lacking, as always subordinated to more powerful white males, whose approval they need to survive" (105). But "playing fast and loose" is not the same as "doing away with it". Sam's plea to Steve not to quit as Captain America reaffirms exactly this "pedagogy of popular culture" according to which, from a "standpoint of white patriarchy, black masculinity must be kept in check" (105). Sam is just as often a Black male yearning to be kept in check, as he is shown yearning to be his own man. This is also why it makes sense to read Falcon as another one of Marvel's superhero to enact hegemonic masculinity as a *hybrid bloc* (Demetriou). Depicting an Afro-American male "doing" hegemonic masculinity already renegotiates the masculinity hierarchy in which Black men are relegated to a position of *marginalized* masculinity (Connell, *Masculinities*). Sam Wilson starts out as a Black male who is unsure of himself, but he learns how to assert his masculinity quickly. He then goes on to prove it *again and again*.

Marvel Comics' Falcon and Blaxploitation Masculinity

Falcon is Marvel Comics' first superhero to interact with *Blaxploitation* themes. Whenever he is not on a mission with Cap, he enacts black masculinity the way *Blaxploitation* characters usually do, and is also put into situations which frequently occur in *Blaxploitation* narratives.

As pointed out earlier, black masculinity is an example of gender stratification within a system of white and male supremacy (Staples; Lemelle). Black males are not authorized into spaces that allow for them to enact or embody hegemonic masculinity (Connell, *Masculinities*). This way of thinking about and looking at Black males extends from everyday social realities to spaces of popular culture. This changes in the early 1970s through the emergence of *Blaxploitation* films (Dunn; Bausch).

The term *Blaxploitation*, a portmanteau of the words *black* and *exploitation,* is nowadays mostly used to refer to films, most often to "the production of the sixty or so Hollywood films that centered on black narratives, featured black casts playing out various action-adventures

in the ghetto, and were released roughly between 1969 and 1974" (Guerrero 369). The film genre has a bookish ancestor: Chester Himes's detective novel series *Coffin Ed and Gravedigger Jones*. Its two titular heroes are Harlem police detectives who "clean up" their neighborhood in both *tough* and *wise guy* ways (Tasker, *Spectacular*). One of the novels, *Cotton Comes to Harlem*, is made into a movie in 1970. *Blaxploitation* movies leave a mark on how US-American popular culture has been depicting Black characters ever since. They

> seemingly cement in the lexicon of U.S. popular culture the vision of African American cultural authenticity and primarily constituted by the vernacular archetypes of the glamours gangster, the pretty pimp, the Black radical, the hustler, the beautiful "bad" woman, and the con man mixing it up in the unrelentingly mean streets of the urban ghetto. (Ongiri 12)

The term *Blaxploitation* is often used by critics and scholars as a way of "signifying on the specific exploitative nature of films that capitalized on black audiences' desire for more empowering, culturally familiar black heroes" (Dunn 47). As a genre, Blaxploitation interacts with and borrows from Black Power ideas in its own way.

As discussed earlier, Black Power activism, among other things, advocates for Black males to enact masculine authority, to become *black patriarchs* (Murray). *Again and again*, male Black Power activists are "proudly asserting their powerful black masculine manhood" (Dunn 38) in the way they conduct themselves at protests, public discussions, and when portrayed by the news media of the time (Ongiri; Murray). Overall, the Black Power movement articulates "a radical resistance to and interrogation of white supremacy", yet it also "gave black men a space for affirming patriarchy" (Dunn 38). Groups like the Black Panthers provide expressions "of Black Power through sexualized masculine imagery" and this imagery turns into "a key signpost of the political cultural era" and produces "codifiable images of black masculinity" (39). Blaxploitation films borrow from such images when creating their Blaxploitation heroes.

They also repurpose racist stereotypes found in black minstrel shows (Anderson, "Blackface"). Harris and Mushtaq name the *Buck* as an example, the stereotype of a Black man "who refuses to submit to white authority (possibly with violence)" (31). Above all, Blaxploitation narratives borrow the Black Power idea of Black male virility as "another 'dis' to white male supremacy" (Dunn 39) when assembling their male protagonists.

And yet, Blaxploitation narratives reject Black Power political activism: usually, Black Power characters are referred to as radicals or militants, and are depicted as ridiculous or silly. The male protagonist may be on friendly terms with them, but he never openly voices his support for them (Ongiri; Dunn; Harris and Mushtaq). Blaxploitation heroes take on the codifiable black masculinity, but leave behind the politics. Black Power groups are overtly dismissed by these narratives; covertly, Blaxploitation heroes tick every box when it comes to exuding masculine authority, enacting the part of *black patriarch* and refusing to defer to white power structures (Dunn*;* Ongiri; Murray; Estes).

Blaxploitation does away with the notion of the Black hero-as-martyr, and instead offers the Black hero-as-macho (Dunn; Ongiri). Films like *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song, Shaft,* or *Superfly* focus on "the 'new' empowered black hero thematic", wherein a Black male hero faces off against "white male power" on all levels of society: from law enforcement to the criminal underworld (Dunn 49). The movie *Shaft* is

> about an African American uptown detective who wages war against the mob by using Harlem Street smarts and both uptown and downtown connections[…]. John Shaft is a renegade detective using methods outside the law in service of the law. (Ongiri 166)

The "outlaw lawman" becomes "a standard, oft-repeated trope during the Black action-film boom of the 1970s" (Ongiri 11). Characters like John Shaft really are a "Superspade": a "violent man who lived a violent life in pursuit of black women, white sex, quick money, easy success" (Leab 253-254). But whether

> the hero is a pimp or drug dealer, private eye, cop or rising revolutionary, his sexual prowess and hold over women help to establish the fantasy of the character's agency. (Dunn 50)

Another staple in the stories are depictions of drug related crimes, drug trafficking and drug abuse; sometimes the male protagonist is himself part of the drug business—as in *Superfly*—sometimes he fights against this form of organized crime. As such, *Blaxploitation* offers "a significant point of origin" (Tasker, *Spectacular* 37) for Black characters to appear in popular fiction later. Basically, Tasker explains, the texts create Black action heroes in their earliest form and grant them unprecedented visibility. Equipped with "an aggressive articulation of black masculinity" (37) and equally adept at wise-cracking wordplay, Blaxploitation action heroes set the tone for many Black characters found in action thrillers and *buddy* comedies in

later Hollywood productions (Tasker; Holmlund). As my subsequent examples show, Blaxploitation traits also inform how Marvel Comics portray Sam Wilson/Falcon in the early 1970s, especially when the character goes out on a mission of his own.

Obviously, Blaxploitation characters are extreme fantasies; but it cannot be overstated what they offer to Black audiences who are drastically underserved by US-American popular fiction at the time (Dunn; Ongiri). Blaxploitation films

> allowed black characters to reclaim their sexuality—their femininity and masculinity. Importantly, these films allowed black actors to take a leading role instead of taking the role of the antagonist or the "other" in film. (Harris and Mushtaq 32)

The films offer a "wish-fulfillment narrative of masculine emancipation", as the genre focuses on "beautiful phallocentric masculinity" (Ongiri 172-173), and therefore on men "*in* power[…,] *with* power[…,] *of* power". Blaxploitation offers "negotiations around the presentations of African American masculine subjectivity", even as "the genre's reliance on narratives of destruction and hypermasculine empowerment both countered and was complicit" (Ongiri 166-167) in how White America constructs black masculinity as a problematic *other* for centuries (hooks; Lemelle).

Blaxploitation stories rise to popularity around the same time that Marvel Comics create their first Black superheroes. As Adilifu Nama points out in *Super Black: American Popular Culture and Black Superheroes*, "black superheroes are a direct result of blaxploitation cinema", since they

> were inspired by blaxploitation film characters. The unmistakable commonality between the two exists because blaxploitation characters *were* black superheroes. (37)

Blaxploitation heroes act in powerful ways: they act out against white and Black enemies, use violence to punish the guilty and protect their loved ones as well as innocent people from harm. All while wearing eye-catching outfits and driving around in outrageous automobiles. No wonder Nama calls them "black superheroes". And like their silver screen colleagues, they get to display "over-the-top black masculinity" (53) while at the same time able to enact normative masculinity in a way other men—both black and white—"approve of" (Kimmel).

A Hero for Harlem—Black Power and Falcon as Blaxploitation Hero

Falcon is Marvel's first Blaxploitation-infused superhero. After his "initiation" into being a superhero, Sam Wilson returns to the States with Captain America in *Captain America* #120, "Crack-up on Campus!" (Lee*, Epic Collection Cap* 3 4). Only a few panels of the story show Falcon, but those that do start to place him within a Blaxploitation narrative right away. Cap and Falc say their good-byes in Harlem, the preferred setting for *Blaxploitation* narratives. As mentioned, earlier in *Captain America* #118 Sam is referred to as being from the "'swinging slums' of Harlem!" (Lee*, Epic Collection Cap* 2 427) where he has been "fighting all those street gangs" (429). In "Crack-up on Campus!", Sam already states that he has "found a place for himself" (Lee*, Epic Collection Cap* 2 436) in Harlem, and the character goes on to become the superhero of Harlem throughout the series. The crimes he fights in this part of Manhattan are usually drug or street gang related. In this sense, a Blaxploitation view of Harlem is present in the comics from the start. Adding Blaxploitation elements to the character adds to how Falcon "does" hegemonic masculinity as *hybrid bloc*. As Marvel Comics turn his appearances into a "wish-fulfillment narrative of masculine emancipation" (Ongiri), they also underline that he is a Black man "doing" hegemonic masculinity in ways that other men approve of. This stresses how hegemonic masculinity as a concept is not a monolith, but "an attempt to articulate, appropriate, and incorporate rather than negate […] oppositional elements" (Demetriou 348) of "doing" masculinity.

Blaxploitation tropes carry on into *Captain America* #126, "The Fate of… the Falcon!", which starts with Cap overhearing police forces who are looking for Falcon. Blaxploitation plot devices such as mob crime, drug trafficking, and gang related street crime all feature in the story. Falcon has been trying to clear a drug dealing gang—the Diamond Heads—out of Harlem, and as a result he has been framed for murder.

> It's a frame! [...] I been fighting a bunch'a creeps … call themselves the Diamond Heads! One was murdered … the others claim I did it! [...] Don't care about myself! But … they gotta be stopped!" (Lee, *Epic Collection Cap* 3 137)

The description of the criminals Sam gives to Steve adds derogatory Black Power traits to them: They are like "a version of the Klan! All they preach is hate whitey! They're dangerous fanatics[…;] they can set our progress back a hundred years!" (137). Sam's utterance appears

in a panel where he is wearing Cap's uniform. The costume change is part of their plan to distract the cops surrounding the building Sam is hiding in, so that he can get away safely. So here is Marvel's first Afro-American superhero, "discovered" and taught by Captain America as discussed earlier, and now wearing his uniform. For the duration of this panel, Sam *is* Captain America, a superhero constructed as a cunning, courageous one-man army ever since his Timely Comics debut in 1941. Falcon, as this sequence here establishes, is as much superhero material as Captain America, which is underlined by having him wear Cap's uniform. The panel might further be interpreted as a prophetic move of sorts: Sam Wilson actually "takes over" as Captain America in a Marvel Comics story run published between 2012 and 2015.

The costume change works as desired, and the rest of the story sees Falcon and Captain America going after the Diamond Heads together. During a fight, they discover that the leader of the Diamond Heads is Rocky the Lynx, head of a rival Italian American gang wanting to take over the Diamond Heads' territory. Drug-related gang wars appear often in Blaxploitation narratives, as do "outlaw lawmen" who fight the gangs. In this case, Falcon and Captain America are just such "outlaw lawmen". "The Fate of… the Falcon!" concludes with Sam reaffirming that he is the superhero of Harlem: "I'm here to stay! … so long as there is tragedy and need … among my people … this is where the Falcon belongs!" (Lee, *Epic Collection Cap* 3 149). This promise to "stay local" is also a promise to stay put. How Marvel Comics depict their first Afro-American superhero mirrors their first African superhero. Like Black Panther, Falcon is shown to care more about the fate of "his people" than about taking action as a superhero on a global level—something that Iron Man or Captain America do without batting an eye. By comparison, Falcon literally grounds himself into Harlem unless he is teaming up with Captain America, a fact underlining his existence as a Black male in white protective custody (Guerrero; hooks) when outside of "his" neighborhood.

"The Fate of… the Falcon!" also offers a first example of Marvel Comics depicting Black Power attitudes as extreme and undesirable. Members of the Diamond Heads—those who are preaching to hate Whitey—are shown as both being dangerous and being taken advantage of by other villains. In this story, it is a white mobster who tries to take advantage of them. In general, 1970s Marvel Comics seem to take one Black Power objective, "the destruction of

white power oppression" (Dunn 37), very literally. When Black Power activists appear in their comics, they are after destruction—of property and sometimes also people.

At the same time, Marvel Comics deploy Captain America and Falcon as an example of bi-racial companionship, while also incorporating Blaxploitation tropes, starting with #126. In the concluding panel of that story, Sam refers to Steve like this: "Your skin may be a different color … but there's no man alive I'm prouder to call … brother!" (Lee, *Epic Collection Cap* 3 149). Adilifu Nama regards this moment as the first of many in Falcon's early adventures where the comics provide a clear rejection of Black Power nationalism:

> Ostensibly Sam's statement was directed at Captain America; in reality, the comment was a tacit critique of essentialist notions of racial identity advocated by Black Power nationalists. (72)

To Nama, Sam's overt rejection of more extreme Black Power attitudes turns Falcon's earliest appearances into a conversation about "race" and "symbolized a social debate about if aggressive or incremental steps were more effective in achieving racial equality" (70). Throughout #126, Falcon offers tough opposition to the Diamond Heads. He is willing to go after them without restraint in order to get them off the streets. His attitude here and later links him to *Blaxploitation* heroes like John Shaft. And Sam's attitude, as already analyzed in the story he debuts in, is of course ripe with masculine capital: Falcon is "willing to take risks" and "act muscular" (Anderson).

Drug dealing criminals appear routinely when Falcon goes after villains by himself. One of them, Stone-Face, is first seen in *Captain America* #134, "They call him Stone-Face!" (Lee, *Epic Collection Cap* 3 290), and then again in *Captain America* #138, "It happens in Harlem!" (Lee, *Epic Collection Cap* 3 370). Falcon going after drug traffickers like Stone-Face is of course also something granting him Blaxploitation hero credibility in addition to granting him normative masculinity in the Self-Made Man sense: every time he faces down and overpowers a villain, Sam is "devoting himself to his work" as Harlem's very own superhero—and "pits himself against other men" in a *homosocial competition* (Kimmel).

Over time, Marvel Comics add more Black Power tropes to narratives featuring Falcon. Those pile on to the aforementioned negative take on Black Power as an extremist movement, but

they also turn Falcon into a positive take on Black Power ideas. More negative takes on Black Power are introduced in the form of Leila, Sam's love interest. First seen in "The Badge and the Betrayal!", " (Lee and Thomas, *Epic Collection Cap* 4 4) she walks into Sam's office and immediately belittles his day job, saying that "our people need heroes, not handouts! […] We need fighters … to give our people pride" (Lee and Thomas, *Epic Collection Cap* 4 10). She also calls him an *Uncle Tom*[76] because he is eager to get along with white people.

This identifies Leila as an extreme Black Power activist. In fact, from that point on, whenever an issue of *Captain America* focuses on Sam and Leila, Black Power activists are never far away from what is going on. Here, Marvel Comics adopt Blaxploitation tropes and depict Black Power activists as radicalized dupes. During their first meeting, Sam deflects Leila's criticism by saying that getting someone a job—like he tries to do as a social worker—is also a source of pride. Leila is not persuaded and turns to leave his office. Instead of arguing with her, Sam starts to flirt: "At least tell me your name! I don't wanna dream about a stranger tonight" (Lee and Thomas, *Epic Collection Cap* 4 10). This attitude—immediately flirting with any woman he meets—is very much a staple of Blaxploitation heroes, a sign of their sexual prowess and proficiency (Dunn; Tasker; Bausch). Compared to the explicitness of films like *Shaft* or *Superfly*, Marvel Comics remain tame where the relationship of Sam and Leila is concerned. Yet without a doubt, Leila is here to highlight Sam's sexual prowess.

Leila stands in for Black Power activism, as to her, Black Power stresses "black pride, self-definition, cultural affirmation, autonomy over its communities, and the destruction of white power oppression". In keeping with Blaxploitation tropes, Leila is not meant to be a sympathetic character; a notion immediately underlined by Steve, who fears that she could turn Sam against him after he meets her: "If she's a friend of Sam's I'm in trouble […] A gal like that will do everything she can to turn him against me" (Lee and Thomas, *Epic Collection Cap* 4 40). Here, Marvel Comics' rejection of Black Power ideas as extreme meets with misogynistic *bromance*: as discussed earlier, Leila is also the female intruding upon Steve and Sam's *bromance*.

[76] The racist stereotype of an *Uncle Tom* stands in for "black slaves as passive, happy, and satisfied with plantation life" (Anderson, "Blackface" 17).

In keeping with male Blaxploitation heroes as macho men, Sam belittles Leila when she talks about Black Power and instead flirts with her. In *Captain America* #143, "Power to the People!", she shows up in his office to talk "strictly business" (Lee and Thomas, *Epic Collection Cap* 4 93) and to invite him to a meeting of the "People's Militia"[77]. Sam replies, "there's a real woman lurking under that militant exterior", prompting Leila to refer to him as a "male chauvinist" (94). He ignores her words and keeps flirting. Sam suggests a bargain of sorts: he will come to the meeting if she shows him that she can "think about something besides Black Power […] like that I'm a man and you're a chick" (94). Leila relents and kisses Sam. He will go on to interrupt her with a kiss whenever they argue-as happens in *Captain America* #144, "Hydra over all!" (Lee and Thomas, *Epic Collection Cap* 4 119), referring to it as them having "finally found a language [they] both speak!" (131).

Sequences like these offer two *Blaxploitation* tropes: Black women, no matter how defensive they act, are all sexually loose and are just waiting for virile Black men to show them a good time (Wallace; Dunn). And male Blaxploitation heroes are machos, always flirting and chasing after women (Dunn; Leab; Ongiri; Bausch). Sam and Leila are depictions of each. Of course, acting in macho and misogynist ways is part of *masculine capital,* the " fuel of masculinity […] achieved through attitudes and behaviors" (Anderson). Here, the comics depict Sam's macho virility. It is also a reminder that "doing" hegemonic masculinity as a *hybrid bloc* also always aims to unite "various and diverse practices in order to construct the best possible strategy for the reproduction of patriarchy". *Blaxploitation* heroes are a great example of this: they are Black but also patriarchal, and as such often chauvinistic when it comes to how they treat women.

But Sam's virile machismo does not guarantee his romantic relationship to be an easy one—because he "can't go along with the militant methods of the People's Militia!" (Lee and Thomas, *Epic Collection Cap* 4 118). The comics make it easy to follow Sam's line of reasoning here, since Leila's "People's Militia" is shown to be very easily duped. In *Captain America* #143, the leader of the group incites them to destroy run-down buildings in Harlem, and to start

[77] Titling the episode "Power to the People!" and naming Leila's activist group "People's Militia" are clear references to Black Power groups. "Power to the People" is an official slogan of groups like the Black Panthers, and forming a militia for self-defense against white supremacy and oppression is regularly called for at BPP meetings.

fights with the police. He is later revealed to have been Cap's arch nemesis Red Skull all along, who was hoping to start racial violence. Not only do Marvel Comics depict Black Power activists as dangerous dupes here, but by making Red Skull the instigator, they also shy away from depicting institutionalized racism against Afro-Americans in any form.

However, showing Sam wondering if his feelings for her might be "clouding my judgement … or could it be that she's right … and I'm wrong!?" (Lee and Thomas, *Epic Collection Cap* 4 132) underlines that he adheres to the Marvel Method (Wright). While the comic series never shows him to be as uncertain as Steve Rogers is about how to make his love life work, Sam Wilson is nevertheless a man with emotional fragilities, which tones down his Black macho credentials (Wallace; Dunn).

And yet, Leila's Black Power ideas change how Sam sees himself. Her criticism turns him into a stronger *Blaxploitation* hero. It is how he justifies stepping away, at least momentarily, from being Captain America's partner. In *Captain America* #144, "Hydra over all!" (Lee and Thomas, *Epic Collection Cap* 4 119) Sam tells him, "My people call me Uncle Tom … and the girl I love won't give me the time of day! I don't know how that looks to you … but in my book that makes me a failure!" (Lee and Thomas, *Epic Collection Cap* 4 133). Being called a *failure* is an accusation Afro-American males must endure very often (Staples; Lemelle; hook*s*). It is usually tied to how "the essence of masculinity"—patriarchal privilege—is denied to them (Mercer). What Sam bemoans here is that other Black men and women do not grant him masculinity.

But his exchange with Steve also provides the comics' most direct Black Power affirmative moment yet: Sam straight out tells Steve that as a white man, he does not know what it's like to be Black.

> That's the trouble with you whites! You think you've got all the answers […] when you don't even ask the right questions! […] On the day you realize that … then maybe you'll have the right to say you know how it is! (133)

Steve does not argue with him, he accepts his criticism. "Doing" masculinity, as his thesis argues, is "several stories at once". In the case of Sam Wilson, one of these stories has been to look for white male affirmation (hooks; Guerrero). Until now, he has engaged in masculinity

"as a homosocial enactment […] fraught with danger, with the risk of failure, and with intense relentless competition" (Kimmel) mostly for the benefit of white males.

As Falcon turns into more of a Blaxploitation hero, this changes. In *Captain America* #144's second chapter, "The Falcon fights alone!", Sam decides to no longer just be Cap's "pride 'n joy" but to work solo, especially when it comes to protecting Harlem. Sam explains to Cap,

> I'm gonna change all of that! I'm gonna be proud, baby[…;] proud to be black … and proud to be me! […] As far as you and I as a team … you can forget that! […] The Falcon fights alone! (Lee and Thomas, *Epic Collection Cap* 4 133)

This sequence between Cap and Falc most clearly shows Sam as a man who embodies the kind of masculinity the Black Power groups advocate for Black males (Estes; Murray; Dunn). He acts strong, assertive, muscular, and he has no trouble putting the white male in his place. His declaration is accompanied by a costume change: Falcon's costume changes from green and orange to red, white, and gold. Features like bare arms and a plunging neckline remain. Showing off his body in this way reaffirms Sam's mastery of the masculine look as well as his *action hero* credentials, as he will continue to apply his body as the solution to any problem (Tasker). But it is also a reminder that through white eyes, Black men "in the popular imagination are often read as hypersexual" (Francis "141), and Falcon's white authors and artists support this notion here. White male superheroes in general show less skin than their Black colleagues.

Once Falcon fights alone, the comics provide ample examples of how his possession of *masculine capital* is tested, and Sam gets to prove his masculinity *again and again*. Immediately after Sam's declaration to Steve above, a young man enters his office, alarmed and extremely agitated as his friend is in trouble. The young man's friend—who is trying to break his drug habit—is being harassed by a local drug dealer. Falcon's first "solo flight" turns into another story steeped in Blaxploitation tropes: Harlem as the site of drug related crimes, and a "lawless lawman" taking action to do something about it. As Falcon sets out to help the kid, he starts having doubts:

> What if I'm not in time? What if I blow it my first time out? What if … No! I won't let petty doubts and fear cloud my reactions and reflexes! … I'll either stand … or fall … as the Falcon! (Lee and Thomas, *Epic Collection Cap* 4 136)

If nothing else, this scene is a reminder that masculinity enactment is "fraught with danger, with the risk of failure". But just like all his superhero colleagues before and after him, Falcon chooses taking action over worrying, and goes to work. And as with all other superheroes, Sam's efforts pay off. He successfully overpowers the two white drug dealers who are trying to force the young Black boy into taking their drugs. On his own, just as much as when he is fighting alongside Captain America, Falcon takes to heart how hegemonic masculinity is "not a place, territory or type. It is the deployment of power". Celebrated and circled by Harlemites afterwards, Sam again vows to be "their" hero from now on:

> I want to devote myself to helping my own people … and I can do that best by myself! There's a lot wrong in the ghetto […] and I want to do what I can to help change things … if you'll have me, that is? (Lee and Thomas, *Epic Collection Cap* 4 139)

Sam gets a quick answer, as the next panel shows his fellow Harlemites carrying him on their shoulders and cheering him on. This is not the first time Sam makes this vow—it also occurs in #126—but it is the first time he receives a direct response. His fellow Harlemites approve of his actions, they grant him his masculinity. His speech promises to Harlemites that they can count on him to be there for them, to save them. In other words, he promises that he will be "strong, successful, capable, reliable, in control" when it comes to protecting them. Such qualities are of course exactly what it takes to be a man who enacts hegemonic masculinity.

In his capacity as a superhero who fights drug crime and drug lords, Falcon is also shown as winning in the homosocial competition of "doing" masculinity. In *Captain America* #158, "The Crime Wave breaks!" (Lee and Thomas, *Epic Collection Cap* 4 419) Falcon wants to shake down Morgan, a drug dealer he has confronted before, for information. One of Morgan's bodyguards has a very personal grievance against Falcon: "You … out-classed me twice … Mr. Morgan fired me as his bodyguard" (427). After Sam knocks him out, he confronts Morgan. As it turns out, the mob boss wants to hire Falcon as his new bodyguard. Sam angrily rejects the offer and storms off. The "hero of the story" being propositioned by villains in this way is another *Blaxploitation* staple. It happens in *Shaft*, *Superfly,* and *Trouble Man*, to name but a few. Blaxploitation heroes often have ambiguous relations to both the world of law enforcement and the world of crime, which makes such offers a recurring theme (Gates; Ongiri). This is something else that superheroes, who are all vigilantes with often ambiguous

connections to both worlds, have in common with Blaxploitation heroes (Hoppenstand, Nama).

When Morgan's bodyguard justifies his attack with the claim that Sam has "outclassed" him in front of his boss, masculinity enactment comes into play. Masculinity, as Kimmel clarifies, is "a homosocial competition", and *Self-Made Man* masculinity is "the normative definition of American masculinity" men aspire to achieve ("Homophobia" 122). But a Self-Made Man achieves his status from his workplace "in which he pits himself against other men" (123). It is a masculinity enactment which needs to be proven *again and again*. The bodyguard's behavior reveals how strongly masculinity is something you "do", something "achieved through attitudes and behaviors" (Anderson 42). Once you cannot "do" it anymore, "all bets are off" until you can successfully "do" it again. But it is other men who evaluate this enactment. Morgan's bodyguard reveals what Michael Kimmel refers to as the *homophobia* at the center of any masculinity enactment,

> the fear that other men will unmask us, emasculate us, reveal to us and the world that we do not measure up, that we are not real men. ("Homophobia" 131)

In this case, Sam has unmasked, has unmanned, Morgan's bodyguard. Falcon reveals to the world that this bodyguard does not "measure up". Morgan's proposition signals a granting of masculinity to Falcon and a willingness to cast aside any man who loses in homosocial competitions for masculinity.

Sequences like the one discussed here and earlier establish Sam as Harlem's "'street fightin' Falcon!" (Lee and Thomas, *Epic Collection Cap* 4 405), and as Marvel Comics' version of John Shaft. He is an "outlaw lawman" who cleans up his neighborhood while also looking for opportunities to flirt and chase after women. Sam Wilson is of course a choirboy compared to John Shaft. He only has one love interest, and that is a Black woman. *Blaxploitation* narratives routinely depict bi-racial relationships, but 1970s superhero comics are not as adventurous as that due to their adherence to the *Comics Code*. Until the 1970s, publishers like Marvel Comics mostly adhere to the Comics Code—established in 1954—which prohibits explicit displays of violence, sexuality, gore, crime, perversion, adultery, mixed-race relationships, and corrupt government officials, to name but a few highlights on its list of things not to show (Wright; Jones; Brooker).

However, the 1970s are also when Marvel Comics break with this code: In the summer of 1971, in *Amazing Spider-Man* #96-#98, a storyline including drug abuse is published. The comic books are published without the CMAA's (Comics Magazine Association of America) stamp of approval. Marvel Comics are criticized by competitors at the time, but sales are good, so Marvel Comics do not go back on their decision to publish comics without this stamp of approval if necessary. Drug abuse often appears in Falcon's early adventures, published the same year as the Spider-Man stories. Depicting drug related crimes is a narrative routine for Blaxploitation stories and thus lends Falcon more depth.

But anything can be taken too far. In 1975, in *Captain America* #186, "Mind Cage" (Englehart et al.) they *ret-con* Sam Wilson's origin story. Before then, the character is a social worker turned superhero turned Blaxploitation badass. But writer Steven Englehart reimagines him as the mob gangster Snap Wilson, whose memories get altered by Red Skull after he arrives in Haiti and meets the Exiles. In this reimagining, Red Skull alters Sam's memory on purpose, to hurt and disillusion Captain America when he finds out that his best friend is a criminal. With a lot of narrative goodwill, and given

> that Blaxploitation cinema frequently presented black protagonists with a criminal background that validated his/her status as an authentic antihero, the "Snap" Wilson storyline may have been an attempt to make the characters more edgy and relevant. (Nama 77)

But Nama is also clear on how this rewriting drains Falcon of "virtually all of his moral standing", which is essential to all superheroes, and instead turns him into "a pawn of the criminally insane Red Skull" (77). All superheroes are vigilante heroes, and as such have an ambiguous relationship with the world of law enforcement (Gavaler). But one red line is usually never crossed, which is to turn them into criminals themselves (Coogan).

In terms of enacting *Blaxploitation* masculinity, Snap Wilson adds nothing, because Falcon is just as aggressive, wise-cracking, and cocky as his silver screen colleagues even without turning him into a criminal. As Falcon goes around Harlem and punches out drug dealers and other villains, he is very much a Blaxploitation hero who goes after the "cultural symbols that denote manhood" (Kimmel, "Homophobia" 125). Enacting normative, enacting patriarchal

masculinity is all part of being such a hero, of "doing" "over-the-top black masculinity" (Nama 53).

But such "over-the-top" enactment needs to be compared to "none-at-all". Blaxploitation narratives are masculine empowerment fantasies (Ongiri), and as such are counternarratives to the stories that white and male supremacy produces about Black males (Mercer; Lemelle). Blaxploitation narratives no longer *subordinate* or *marginalize* Black males. And the masculinity they are now able to enact is nothing if not patriarchally normative. Black superheroes as Blaxploitation heroes enact very normative masculinity: Sam Wilson is virile, aggressive, respected, and successful. As Lemelle reminds us, "from a relational perspective hegemonic masculinity is a dynamic power that men deploy in structural interactions functioning to legitimize patriarchal relations" (13). As a *Blaxploitation* hero, even more than as the as wise-cracking buddy of Captain America, Sam Wilson/Falcon gets to deploy *hegemonic* masculinity. And he does so due to his willingness to commit violence, act tough, muscular, and misogynistic (Kimmel; Anderson) which is all in keeping with patriarchal masculinity's playbook.

How Marvel Comics, at the time, cannot see how turning their first Afro-American superhero into a criminal is atrocious, is beyond puzzling. Turning Falcon into a criminal means they take from him what every superhero symbolizes: "societal attitudes regarding good and evil, right and wrong, altruism and greed, justice and fair play" (Nama 9). It further reveals an utter tone-deafness on the side of their authors when it comes to the situation of Black males in the US, and the intricacies of institutional racism. It marks a worst-case scenario of what black masculinity through white eyes can look like, and reminds us how any "reclamation and production of images of the black body […] involve a difficult set of negotiations" (Tasker, Spectacular 38). If such negotiations fail, very unpleasant "fears and desires" are mapped "onto the black body" (Tasker, *Spectacular* 38). From the standpoint of investigating depictions of black masculinity in popular culture, turning Sam Wilson into Snap Wilson is such a failed negotiation.

It further demonstrates how "doing" hegemonic masculinity as a *hybrid bloc* while being

> an attempt to articulate, appropriate, and incorporate rather than negate, marginalize and eliminate different or even apparently oppositional elements. (Demetriou 348)

can lead down strange paths. Because such an attempt—after all undertaken "to construct the best possible strategy for the reproduction of patriarchy" (347-348)—does not have to exclude long-standing stereotypes about subordinated and marginalized masculinities.

Conclusion

This thesis has applied Michael Kimmel's idea that masculinity is "several stories at once", and as such about "the individual man's quest to accumulate the cultural symbols that denote manhood" ("Homophobia" 125), to superhero comics. In order to do so, a content analysis of the first appearances of Captain America, Iron Man, Black Panther, and Falcon as they occur in Marvel Comics throughout the 1960s and 1970s has been conducted.

More than anything else, this has been an investigation into how gender, how masculinity, is "done". As Judith Butler reminds us, *gender* is "the apparatus by which the production and the normalization of masculine and feminine take place" (*Undoing Gender* 42). I have examined this *normalization* in terms of how it affects the masculinity enactment displayed by the male superheroes chosen for analysis. According to Kimmel, masculinity is *homosocial enactment,* something men do for the approval of other men. As such, "doing" masculinity involves spending *masculine capital,* which ranges from acting tough and muscular to acting homophobic and sexist (Anderson). But "doing" gender is also always a "practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint" (Butler, *Undoing Gender* 1). I wanted to find out how far male superheroes are allowed to stretch this *improvisation*. But masculinity is not something one "does" once; in fact, it is something one does *again and again* in order to prove that one is "man enough" (Kimmel). Superhero comics, which are structured like open-ended *serial narratives*, offer its male superheroes just such an opportunity of "doing" masculinity, of enacting masculinity successfully*, again and again*.

Superheroes are admired and cherished figures, representing ideas and ideals which are popular, in the sense that they are agreed upon by many (Wright; Jones). This turns the masculinity enactment male superheroes provide into an exercise in embodying *hegemonic masculinity*, "the most exalted form" of being a man (Connell; Carrigan et al.) Necessarily, how one "does" hegemonic masculinity, and especially how the chosen superheroes do it, is central to this thesis. Kimmel's suggestion that manhood is several stories at once is applied to Demetrious's reading of Connell's social hierarchy of men: that hegemonic masculinity is no monolith, but in fact an act of *hybridization*. Achieving hegemonic masculinity is not about exclusion and rejection, but about a constant negotiation and incorporation (Demetriou;

Yang). It is an upholding of specific values and traits in the name of patriarchy. This is especially true for 1960s Marvel Comics. At that time, Marvel Comics are not very progressive, something most easily recognizable in how they write their female characters (Cocca). When it comes to the masculinity enactment of their male superheroes, patriarchal or normative masculinity is a key factor. They present as dominant, powerful, and violent, especially when they appear in their superhero personas. But every superhero is a dual-identity hero (Gavaler), which turns them all into imperfect patriarchs with chinks in their armor.

Each male Marvel superhero discussed in this thesis demonstrates how the *Marvel Method* interacts with "doing" masculinity. This is about superheroes as part of a "realistic fantasy", where enormous powers and abilities coincide with "emotional fragilities" (Wright) and their capacity for "weakness and suffering" (Easton). In short, Marvel allows their superhero to be both soft and strong, which is part of their *Marvel Method*. In the 1960s, this capacity to "be both" interacts seamlessly with ideas and demands for "doing" masculinity in a way other men approve of. At that time, men are expected to be breadwinners, husbands and fathers, lovers, and avid consumers, all in keeping with being a member of Postwar America's affluent society. Hugh Hefner's concept of a *playboy* exists as a bourgeois-compatible alternative, wherein men are encouraged to be all these things, just not husbands or fathers. "Adjusted" and "conforming" men, so the jargon of Postwar"experts", apply themselves to such goals, or otherwise count as dangerously "delinquent". These experts and advisors want American men to be *organization men*, to be *other-directed* (Whyte; Riesman), as the US establishes itself as a Cold War power (Costello, Cuordileone). All of these are of course agreed upon goals applied to *white* men, but in the mid-sixties, Black males demand access to such *patriarchal dividends* stronger than ever before. They demand to be as eligible to "doing" masculinity in normative ways as white men have been since the founding of the United States of America.

As this thesis shows, Marvel Comics' 1960s "supermen" interact with these demands and goals in their own ways. Marvel Comics are at their most progressive when they extend the *patriarchal dividend* to Black males, when they create their first African and first Afro-American superheroes: Black Panther in 1966 and Falcon in 1969 respectively. They are at their most conservative when they create Iron Man in 1963 and bring back Captain America in 1964. Tony Stark/Iron Man is a 1960s dream man: a playboy, an entrepreneur, and an

ardent Cold Warrior always ready to take on the "commies", on top of being Iron Man. Compared to him, Steve Rogers/Captain America struggles to meet 1960s requirements of men: being a provider, a husband or lover, and a father. He wants, but cannot achieve, these things.

T'Challa/Black Panther is just as dreamy as Tony Stark: he is a rich head-of-state and a businessman, on top of being a powerful superhero. On a somewhat smaller scale, Sam Wilson/Falcon is a successful social worker and has luck with the ladies, on top of being Falcon, who both teams up with Captain America and works solo. All in all, none of them are in great danger of being called "delinquents". When appearing as their *superhero* personas, these men are strong, reliable, and in control; when they appear as their *civilian* personas, this is not always the case. This is exactly where Marvel Comics offer "improvisation within a space of constraint" when it comes to "doing" masculinity. Their male superheroes are allowed to be soft and hard; they do not have to trade in the one for the other. They *hybridize*.

Likewise hybridized are what Kimmel refers to as the idealized masculinity types that shape American manhood: *Genteel Patriarch*, *Heroic Artisan*, and the *Self-Made Man*. The superheroes analyzed here interact with all three of these.

In the four analysis chapters of this thesis, the masculinity enactments of Captain America, Iron man, Black Panther, and Falcon, connected to both their "body and mind", have been scrutinized. It has become clear that when it comes to these superheroes, "doing" masculinity is most definitely *several stories at once*.

In the case of Captain America, "the body" is most emphatically "the man" (Kimmel). This character must first acquire a "masculine body" (Easthope) before anything else can "be done with" him. Having adequately masculine emotions—such as courage, anger, or assertiveness—are not enough to make Steve Rogers "a man". Created at a time when the US was still working through the aftermath of the Great Depression, Captain America/Steve Rogers ties "doing" normative masculinity to acquiring a body "going for the masculine look". Men with masculine bodies, it seems, can do anything. However, having such a masculine body does not mean that Rogers can always be in power or in control. First in the 1940s Timely

Comics, and again in the 1960s Marvel Comics, the character remains in a subdued and disempowered position as Steve Rogers. In the forties, it is the military chain of command that curtails him. In the 1960s, it is his tragic past—going MIA in World War Two and losing his sidekick Bucky—as well as his tragic present—his inability to "do" masculinity the way Postwar America demands. In both cases, the character responds by upholding what are military manhood "must-haves": a refusal to complain, a willingness to endure hardships and to make sacrifices. This also turns Steve Rogers/Captain America into a character who suffers, to whom something has happened, and who is now in the process of coming to terms with it (Bainbridge). None of this makes hegemonic masculinity enactment impossible. This is where Captain America enacts hegemonic masculinity as a *hybrid bloc* (Demetriou). He cannot make his love-life work or amass riches, but he knows how to use his body as a weapon and apprehend villains. He can rely on these skills. In this sense, he displays both *Heroic Artisan* and *Self-Made Man* qualities.

When it comes to Iron Man/Tony Stark, masculinity enactment as an exercise in constrained improvisation functions rather differently. In contrast to Captain America, whose physical infirmity is resolved after one experiment, Iron Man's fragility remains a part of him. Severely wounded in Vietnam, Stark finds a workaround but not a solution to his injury. His infirmity is constantly addressed in the comics; it is used to heighten the suspense: will he or won't he be able to recharge in time to fight and live another day? Tony's workaround fuses masculinity and technology in direct ways, as technical equipment becomes what keeps him alive, and his masculinity enactment possible. And what an enactment it is: he is an upper-class playboy, an entrepreneur, a consumer of luxury goods and, quite literally, of energy. He interacts with all three of Kimmel's idealized masculinity types: *Genteel Patriarchal*, *Heroic Artisan*, and *Self-made Man.* Stark's go-get-them attitude towards communist villains would have made the Kennedy administration proud. His technologized body is a weapon in the same way that Captain America's body is. At the same time, it is a narrative space that is almost never safe, but one that has to be constantly defended and protected (Tasker; Jeffords). More than for the other superheroes analyzed here, Iron Man's masculinity enactment is fraught with danger and the possibility of failure (Kimmel). It is a relentless homosocial competition, where Stark must constantly best other businessmen, and upgrade his armor so that Iron Man can remain invincible. His upgraded armor increasingly develops towards displaying a body "going

for the masculine look" (Easthope). When it comes to Iron Man/Tony Stark, "doing" hegemonic masculinity is a matter of masculinizing technology.

In the case of Black Panther, Marvel Comics demonstrate how "doing" hegemonic masculinity is really nothing but a deployment of power (Lemelle), and not something that Black males might not be "equipped" to do. When Black Panther/T'Challa first appears, he has all the trappings of normative masculinity any 1960s man could ask for: he is rich, the head of a nation, smart, assertive, aggressive, and tough. So tough that he can best other superheroes with ease. In terms of enacting masculinity in a homosocial setting and in a way other men approve of (Kimmel), Black Panther is a real powerhouse. Reed Richards, Johnny Storm, and the Thing all grant him masculinity when they first meet him, and so does Captain America when they first meet. When he first appears, he puts into practice a lot of the demands Afro-American males are calling for in the US in the 1960s: for Black males to be men who share in the *patriarchal dividend* and are no longer marginalized out of it (Estes; Murray). And although Marvel Comics cannot create a Black superhero without furnishing him with *Magical Negro* tropes—his superpowers are tied to ancient supernatural rites and customs, perpetuating the idea that Black people are "always already supernatural" (Scott)—when it comes to "doing" masculinity in normative ways, T'Challa's access is unprecedented. As a confident, powerful, and muscular Black male, Marvel's Black Panther is eerily close to what the Black Panther Party advocates all its male members behave and act like. Marvel Comics do not spare their Black Panther from being the victim of institutionalized racism when he moves to the United States. But this never lessens his access to being in control, reliable, and strong. And like Tony Stark, T'Challa interacts with *Genteel Patriarch*, *Heroic Artisan*, and *Self-Made Man* ideals.

Compared to Black Panther, Marvel Comics' first African superhero, the publisher's first Afro-American superhero Falcon lacks a lot of *masculine capital*. He is literally discovered by Captain America, who then becomes his *White Savior* and shows him "how to superhero". And while Sam Wilson is a quick learner, this is a very weak start for a superhero, as it holds up the racist notion that "the black man must be black in relation to the white man" (Fanon). Once "discovered", Sam Wilson is also tied to *Magical Negro* tropes, as he is shown to have a supernatural connection with his animal sidekick, the falcon Red Wing. Despite this, his early appearances also show him proving his masculinity to other men: first Cap and Nick Fury, and

later other Black males. More and more, Falcon can deploy hegemonic masculinity. But he remains a side character, routinely looking to white males for approval, throughout his first appearances, and is only granted a solo comic series in 1983. Black Panther suffers a similar fate, as he only gains his solo series in1973—however, whenever he appears in another superhero's comic series, he is the focus of attention and is granted masculinity by other male characters quickly. The same cannot be said for Falcon, even when Marvel Comics have him co-star in *Captain America* comics during the 1970s. Falcon must work much harder for his masculine spoils. When he does, however, he does so without a white superhero's help, which qualifies him for *Self-Made Man* status. When he teams up with Captain America, the two become Marvel Comics' first bi-racial *buddy action* superhero duo. They enact the parts of *tough guys* and *wise guys* (Tasker), using their bodies like weapons to successfully apprehend and neutralize villains all while cracking jokes. Their team-up also strengthens the homosocial bond, the *bromance*, which Steve and Sam share, as their friendship becomes a focus point for the series. When Sam falls in love with a woman, their "homosocial Eden" is shattered, and Captain America is very distressed. This lends more capacity for softness to Steve Rogers as well as Sam Wilson. In terms of succeeding at 1960s masculinity, Sam Wilson fairs very well: he is a middle class man working successfully as a social worker, who has luck with the ladies, and on top of that defeats all kinds of villains as Falcon. Next to *Magical Negro* tropes, Falcon is also steeped in *Blaxploitation* qualities. He is a Harlem resident and routinely fights and gets rid of villains—usually related to organized drug crimes—who harass Harlemites. This links Sam Wilson to Blaxploitation heroes like John Shaft. Blaxploitation heroes are always bursting with normative masculinity, and Sam Wilson is no exception. When Marvel Comics *ret-con* Sam Wilson to be Snap Wilson, a Harlem drug dealer, it serves as an atrocious reminder of how easily it came to early-days Marvel Comics to perpetuate racist stereotypes and appear tone-deaf when constructing their first Afro-American superheroes.

All characters analyzed in this thesis demonstrate how "doing" masculinity is always several stories at once, and how going after the "symbols that denote manhood" turns into a *relentless homosocial competition*. In terms of "doing" masculinity as an act of *constrained improvisation*, male superheroes are allowed a lot of emotional softness and fragility (Wright; Easton). But the capacity for softness never cancels out the ability to act tough and commit violence. "Doing" hegemonic masculinity in superhero comics is always an act of *hybridization*,

not cancelation. And the opportunities to *hybridize* are as open-ended as superhero comics as open-ended *serial narratives* are.

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Appendix

Abstract German

Die vorliegende Doktorarbeit befasst sich mit Männlichkeitskonstruktionen in den Marvel Comics der 1960er und 1970er Jahre. Ausgehend von den Masculinity Studies stellt die Arbeit die Frage nach der Herstellung von hegemonialer Männlichkeit in diesen Texten und wie diese durch die im Einzelnen besprochenen Superhelden hergestellt werden. Die allerersten Auftritte der Figuren Captain America, Iron Man, Black Panther und Falcon werden analysiert. Dabei zeigt sich das Superhelden Comics, hegemoniale Männlichkeit durch einen Akt der Hybridisierung erreichen. Der männlichen Hauptfigur werden als nicht-hegemonial erachtete Eigenschaften zu den bereits vorhandenen hegemonialen Eigenschaften hinzugefügt. Gerade in Superhelden Comics zeigt sich hegemoniale Männlichkeit als ein homosoziales und immer wieder zu verhandelndes Konstrukt. Superhelden erbringen diesen Beweisen wieder und wieder-seriell-in immer neuen Abenteuern. Männlichkeit, ist etwas das man tut, nicht etwas das man ist. Dabei ist was Superhelden in punkto Männlichkeit tun ebenso essentiell wie der Körper durch den sie es tun.

Die Arbeit zeigt weiter Parallelen zwischen den in den sechziger Jahren entstandenen Marvel Superhelden und amerikanischen Männlichkeitsidealen der 1960er Jahre auf. Der Prämisse von Männlichkeitsforscher Michael Kimmel folgend-"masculinity is several stories at once”-belegt die Dissertation wie stark Marvel Comics mit den Männerbildern der sechziger Jahre interagieren und diese ihren männlichen Superhelden überstülpen. Von Playboy Attitüden bis zu Black Power Bewegung ist alles dabei. Marvel Comics ist zu dieser Zeit kein progressiver oder feministischer Verlag. Weibliche Figuren dieser Dekade sind durch heteronormative und sexistische Weiblichkeitsbilder geprägt.

Was den Umgang mit traditionell von der Position hegemonialer Männlichkeit ausgeschlossenen Charakteren betrifft, ist der Zugang der Marvel Comics aber durchaus progressiv. Dies ist am deutlichsten anhand der ersten beiden schwarzen Superhelden zu erkennen. Black Panther und Falcon können hegemoniale Männlichkeit in einen bis dahin nicht vorhandenen Ausmaß für sich in Anspruch nehmen, obwohl rassistische Ideen über schwarze Männer die allerersten Auftritte beider Figuren begleiten.

Abstract English

This PhD thesis analyzes masculinity constructions as they appear in 1960s and 1970s Marvel Comics. The question how hegemonic masculinity is constructed in the form of the hero in these texts is based on the discipline of masculinity studies and especially on Michael Kimmel's suggestion: "masculinity is several stories at once". The very first appearances of Captain America, Iron Man, Black Panther, and Falcon are discussed.

The thesis demonstrates how in superhero comics, doing masculinity in hegemonic ways is always an act of hybridization. The male superhero exhibits qualities considered both hegemonic and non-hegemonic. It is shown that superhero comics are narratives where embodying hegemonic masculinity is never an easy or secure act, but an enactment which is both homosocial and something which must be negotiated and proven again and again. Masculinity, as this thesis demonstrates, is something you do, not something you are. Superheroes prove their masculinity on a serial basis, and every new adventure affords them a new opportunity to do so.

Further, parallels between 1960s masculinity ideals and 1960s Marvel superheroes are shown. Marvel Comics strongly interact with sixties demands for and fantasies of doing masculinity, and impose those on their male superheroes. Everything from playboy attitudes to Black Power ideas is present. However, during the sixties and seventies, Marvel Comics are not a progressive publisher. This can be easily seen in their early female characters. They are based on sexist and heteronormative ideals about women and femininity.

However, Marvel Comics take a progressive approach when they create their first Black superheroes. Black Panther and Falcon have access to doing hegemonic masculinity like no other Black character appearing in Marvel Comics prior to them. And although their first appearances are not devoid of racist stereotypes, both characters are able to deploy hegemonic masculinity with relative ease.