

## Flouting norms, forging identities: Queering of hypermasculinity in Marvel Cinematic Universe's posthuman superhero pantheon

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p><i>Keywords:</i> posthumanism hypermasculinity queer MCU superheroes</p>	<p>This research explores the convergence and intersection of posthumanism and the queering of hypermasculinity as represented in the superhero bodies of the Marvel Cinematic Universe. It examines how the super-bodies of the Marvel Cinematic Universe, specifically Ironman, Captain America, Hulk, and Vision, can be read in light of the intersection between posthumanism and queer theory. By drawing upon posthumanist theory and queer theory, it challenges normative notions regarding hypermasculinity by queering the corporeal forms of superheroes who have experienced technological (like Ironman and Vision) or biological (Captain America and Hulk) enhancement. These posthuman super-bodies stand at the juncture of the ongoing tension between historically evolving heterosexual norms and queer interpretations and can exist as a highly significant site for the representation of heightened masculinity in superhero movies. Thus, this study will attempt to show how posthumanism queers hypermasculine bodies, upending norms by rejecting uniformity and universal definitions. The bodies of these superheroes, which have originated from the human form, move beyond what makes them so and are characterized by constant movement, fluidity, and renewal, which is reminiscent of queer ambiguity.</p>

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## Introduction

In the vast landscape of superhero lore, the notion of hypermasculinity has long been intertwined with power, strength, and physical prowess. But this article would try to establish how superheroes like Iron Man, Vision, Captain America, and Hulk not only embody extraordinary abilities but also challenge traditional notions of masculinity, blurring the lines between strength and vulnerability, power, and identity, by delving into the complex intersection of hypermasculinity and queerness within the posthuman bodies of select superheroes in the MCU. These posthuman super-bodies arise from the ongoing tension between historically evolving heterosexual norms and queer interpretations and can exist as a highly significant site for representation of masculinity in superhero movies. Seeing these characters in the light of queer posthumanism can chart a shift from predominantly existing heteronormative depictions present in the genre to a more inclusive construct. The movies representing these superheroes are texts that are widely consumed, and they exert a significant influence by conveying their representations and ideologies to a diverse global audience encompassing various national, racial, class, and gender identities.

## Method

While they may be considered as phenomena that are viewed as an exaggerated display of masculine dominance, with superheroes representing mythical figures of a technological patriarchy, this article proposes an alternative approach, presenting an opposing interpretation. This approach scrutinizes the exaggerated portrayal of superheroes as "technological sublime in human form" (Wasielewski, 2009) as a divergent embodiment of subjectivity and

blurring of ontological boundaries, thereby projecting its existence as a social construct. By utilizing this approach, it analyzes select movies of the Marvel Cinematic Universe, not as a demonstration of patriarchal power, but as hypermasculinity in turmoil, born out of the technological sublime and its status as a fabricated construction. The research opts for a qualitative approach which allows for a deeper interpretative examination, focusing on the meanings and representations within the films. This discourse analysis diagnoses the language, symbols, and narratives that shape the portrayal of superheroes, uncovering the underlying ideologies and power structures. It also involves text-based film analysis and iconic analysis which through a close reading of the film scripts, dialogues, visual imagery and symbols, explore how these elements challenge traditional notions of masculinity and technological dominance and understand how queerness and posthumanism are depicted in them. By focusing on these qualitative methods in this in-depth examination of the movies will reveal how the posthuman subjectivity of the said superheroes subverts the hypermasculinity of the characters by queering them. Ultimately, this analysis will lead to a general conclusion.

## Results and Discussion

The concept of the posthuman may initially imply a movement beyond gender and/or sexuality. This notion is hinted at by Slavoj Žižek in a discussion of the posthuman in the work of contemporary French author Michel Houellebecq, where he suggests that 'in our postmodern "disenchanted" permissive world [. . .] the constitutive impasse of the sexual relationship seems to reach its devastating apex'. However, it is noteworthy that feminist and queer philosophers, for whom considerations of

gender and sexuality are undeniably crucial, have played a significant role in the critical development of the posthuman concept. These philosophers have introduced new perspectives and approaches to understanding embodiment, gender, and sexuality that transcend the influence of psychoanalytical paradigms prevalent in modern Western models of sexual difference. This article tries to establish the fact that the fluid and queer nature of these posthuman superheroes provide a fertile area for investigating the discord between individuals and posthuman bodies in a world where traditional social norms and heteronormative ideologies are being challenged.

The posthuman perspective rejects uniformity and universal definitions and is characterized by a constant movement, fluidity, and renewal, which is reminiscent of the queer ambiguity. In that context, Donna Haraway's (1991) definition of the cyborg as a cybernetic organism fits the definition of a posthuman being- a hybrid of machine and organism, and a creature of social reality and fiction, suggests that the cyborg challenges all traditional notions regarding the human body. It turns these norms upside down and, in most cases, has difficulty conforming to their essential characteristics, making it a 'social reality' creature. The fluid and queer nature of the cyborg presents an important area for exploring the tension between individuals and cyborg bodies in a world where traditional social norms and heteronormative ideologies are being questioned. As Goc-Bilgin (2019) says that "The Posthuman perspective rejects uniformity and universal definition. It is based on an almost queer ambiguity with a constant movement, a constant fluidity and renewal".

This is expected to lead to conflicts with conventional patriarchal norms, and the concept of cyber fluidity also affects

traditional men and masculinities by challenging hypermasculine dominance and heteronormative perceptions. The crises of masculinity highlighted by the queer cyborg are particularly evident in science fiction. Sara Cohen Shabot (2006) opines in this context "the figure of the cyborg, thus, turned out to be a challenging, transgressive figure aiming at a subversion of the traditional divisions between human and machine, between the self and the other, between inside and outside and between nature and culture". Therefore, analyzing hypermasculinity from a posthumanist perspective in light of the conflicts revealed by the queer cyborg is valuable. The cyborg represents a comprehensive term for a self-regulating system that transcends the organic and the artificial, playing a crucial role in the evolution of man and masculinity (Balmar and Mellstöm, 2016).

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1993) reminds, "The word 'queer' itself means across — it comes from the Indo-European root *-twerkw*, which also yields the German *quer* (transverse), Latin *torquere* (to twist), English *athwart*. At its core, the concept of queerness is not a fixed or inherent part of being human, but rather one that is shaped and defined by larger societal and contextual factors. Rather than being a static identity, queerness must be viewed as ever evolving and situational, dependent on specific circumstances and experiences. This allows for a more nuanced and intersectional understanding of queerness, recognizing that it cannot be proclaimed from a place of authority or superiority, but instead must be thoughtfully examined and understood through individual perspectives.

In this way, queer challenges traditional notions of human identity by acknowledging its contingency and fluidity within contexts. The queer is an open network of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances, resonances, lapses, and excesses of meaning that emerge

when the components of someone's gender or sexuality are not able to or cannot be made to signify in a singular, fixed way (Sedgwick, 1993). Queerness extends beyond homosexuality to encompass a wider spectrum of non-normative constructions and counter-constructions of gender and sexuality. Queerness, in the context of the posthuman superheroes, is a matter of negotiation. To queer their hypermasculinity is like to disrupt what seems like stable, normative categories such as man/woman or straight/gay. It involves questioning heterosexuality as the original sexuality, the true and authentic norm that determines reality, and recognizing gender as a performative act. Judith Butler (1993) has famously argued that performativity should be understood not as a singular or deliberate act, but rather as a repetitive and citational practice through which discourse produces the effects that it names.

In their introduction to the 1995 collection "Posthuman Bodies," Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston noted, "Sexuality is a dispersed relation between bodies and things... What is bodily about sex? What is sexual about sex? What is gendered?" In these expressions and others, the representation of the queer/trans body doesn't just disrupt the human as the norm; it creates alternative possibilities — multiple, cyborgian, spectral, transcorporeal, transmaterial — for existence. Superheroes are proof that interconnections between self and other, body and technology, and cultures and the natural world are not simply interconnected entities, but rather specific material relations that continuously differentiate the world. These entanglements serve as a starting point, but they do not arise from an initial interconnectedness of separate entities. This idea is supported by a quote from Barad (2008) that describes these entanglements as "specific material relations of the ongoing differentiation of the world". The various understandings of the

posthuman superbodies are often deemed to be unnatural, monstrous, disabled, difference-marked, perverse, patented, limited, or owned by societal value-systems. These understandings are prevalent in the domains of body and techno-science studies and highlight the highly sociable nature of these subjects.

However, understandings cannot be simply transposed to techno-environmental concerns. It could be said that these corporeal forms were developed to address the queer, disabling, and disempowered situations of societal praxis and cultures. This explains that these superhero entities were created to challenge the dichotomous thinking and practices that separate nature and culture. Their hypermasculine forms aim to destabilize what is considered "natural" and were primarily developed for disenfranchised individuals due to their interlinking situations of gender, class, skin color, nationality, colonial status, age, ability, or sexual orientation. Additionally, queer perspectives within science studies and human animal studies have long exposed and challenged the cultural values and sexual norms implicit in the realms of nonhumans and natural sciences. It is important to recognize that the superhero body diverges from other bodies. Firstly, it exceeds the normal abilities and capacities of the human body, possessing unique powers derived from technological enhancement (Ironman), intervention of artificial intelligence with synthetic biology (Vision), biological enhancement (Captain America) and lastly scientific mishap and genetic alteration (Incredible Hulk).

*Iron Man* is one of the prime instances of the amalgamation between human and machine, the very first initiative to explore the notion of the cyborg. This article furthers this to address gender issues in superhero movies, particularly in the *Iron Man* trilogy. The enduring presence of the superhero

archetype, even in a more deconstructed and ironic form within mainstream Hollywood solidifies its status as an icon of contemporary culture. This approach diverges from the prevailing interpretation of superhero films as vehicles for patriarchal myths that perpetuate images of dominant and heightened masculinities. Instead, using the cyborg metaphor sheds light on the construction of a queer form within the already complex superhero cyborg body. These movies inherently depict fractured identities, dual personas, conflicting lives, and modified bodies, representing an immersion into the technological sublime that transcends human capabilities.

In accordance with the conventions of the superhero genre, the first *Iron Man* film depicts the origins of the myth, with subsequent films exploring the emergence of new villains and their transformations. The origin story represents a site of plasmatic possibility, prompting a re-evaluation of corporeal potential both within the narrative and in the realm of production (Bukatman, 2003). Thus, the first *Iron Man* film portrays a technological birth, tracing the gradual transformation of Tony Stark, an all-American entrepreneur embodying traditional masculinity, into *Iron Man*, a figure representing fractured subjectivities. In the initial sequence Tony Stark is dramatically reborn within a dark, womb-like cave. With his life in jeopardy, he undergoes a critical need for a new body. This birth is shaped by actions and counteractions, as *Iron Man* is born amidst conflicting hypermasculinities. On one side, a surrogate doctor named Yinsen serves as an altruistic, scientific figure and a benevolent father figure, aiding in the reconstruction of Tony's body and identity.

On the other side, the terrorist organization "Ten Rings," an all-male aggressive militaristic group, holds him captive and compels him to construct the new superweapon "Jericho" as a condition

for his release. In this predominantly male setting, technology, with its generative and disruptive potential, stands as the sole signifier that transcends a specific masculinity. The persistent link between technologies and the maternal in various science fiction narratives, with technology itself often coded as feminine (Doane, 2004). However, in contrast to this examination of representations of technology reinforcing conventional understandings of the feminine, this article proposes an alternative perspective suggesting that technology occupies an intermediary, somewhat a queer space between masculine and feminine, offering destabilizing possibilities for gender identities. It is this destabilizing force of technology that underlies *Iron Man's* rebirth. *Iron Man's* new, extended corporeal form could be understood from the point of view of Aaron Taylor's (2007) body theory that embraces a "corporeal worldview" that transcends the mind-body dichotomy and acknowledges the interdependence of somatic and physical existence. The body is not a stable, fully knowable physical entity, but rather a process. As such, bodies are continually produced and reproduced through previously mentioned performative acts and reiterative and citational practices associated with the discursive production of gender and sexuality. Adopting a "corporeal approach" to analyzing popular representations of the body enables a comprehension of its broader cultural functions, which Taylor (2007) refers to as "popular body politics". This approach also highlights the growing significance and visibility of "queer citationality" (Petrovic, 2011).

Tony Stark also known as *Iron man* occupies a position between conflicting expressions of masculinity, encompassing both conventional and alternative forms, and blurring the lines between individual and collective, selfishness and selflessness,

as well as dominant and oppositional modes of masculinity. His hypermasculine suit that he builds exists as an intermediary, ironically challenging established norms which are evident throughout the film's narrative. In one early scene of the second film of the franchise, *Iron Man* appears in a Supreme Court hearing, where he faces demands to surrender the Ironman Suit to the government due to its classification as a weapon. Stark vehemently opposes this notion, asserting that the suit is a "high-tech" prosthesis and boldly declaring, "*Iron Man* is me. You can't have me." He concludes his defiant speech by proclaiming, "I privatized world peace.". In the concluding scene of *Iron Man 3*, (Tony Stark discards his prosthesis, reverting to a "normal" human state. However, his inner transformation has permanently altered his previously fixed and stable sense of self, as Stark articulates, "my armor was a cocoon... and now I am a changed man... I am *Iron Man*."

Posthumanism is deeply concerned with the body, as Haraway (1991) argues in her *Cyborg Manifesto*. She contends that the relationship between organism and machine has been a "border war" in the traditions of Western science and politics, which have been characterized by racist, male-dominant capitalism, the appropriation of nature as a resource for cultural production, and the reproduction of the self through the reflections of others. The stakes in this conflict have been the territories of production, reproduction, and imagination. Haraway's argument is for the pleasure of blurring boundaries and the responsibility of constructing them. In the MCU, the character of Vision enters the realm of the posthuman involving a great degree of body restructuring. Vision represents a new species as the physical embodiment of Artificial Intelligence epitomizing a genuine amalgamation of A.I. and advanced Biotechnology. His skin is formed by combining human tissue with

vibranium, resulting in an indestructible body. Unlike a human with augmented abilities, Vision embodies all the elements that a human lacks. Vision is the embodies the term "cyborg" as a fusion of "cybernetic" and "organism," representing a blend of biology and technology, the natural and the artificial, functioning as a unified entity. While such figures have been a longstanding fixture in science fiction, the emergence of communication technologies and other advancements allowed Haraway to present the cyborg as "a postmodern metaphor for the contemporary subject" (Phoca, 2004).

There is a drive to prove that hypermasculinity is tied to a male superiority complex, as masculinity is consistently under pressure to demonstrate itself. This need for validation implies that masculinity is a construct of patriarchy rather than a natural trait. Consequently, an unnatural social phenomenon like hypermasculinity requires reinforcement and repetition to endure. Therefore, the ability to create is viewed to reaffirm masculinity. An enhanced cyborg as utilizing technology to surpass humans in specific roles, such as excelling as a soldier, lover, or superhero. Vision who was born out of the artificial intelligence created by Tony Stark- Jarvis, biotechnology, and something as alien as the Mind stone in true sense surpasses human expectations. His existence itself plays along the queer dimension as he surpasses the heteronormative construct of the human world. Ann Light (2011) defines queering as treating something obliquely, crossing it, or going in an adverse or opposite direction, with movement and flexibility. Queering involves critically questioning apparent structural and foundational relationships, and may include mischief and clowning, as well as serious critique.

Digital beings, particularly intelligent, autonomous cybernetic organism-like Vision "knock-on effect on how we understand and manage ourselves as a world" (Light, 2011).

There is an urgency of queering for a more fluid response to changes in technology, methodological commitments, and potential domains affected by computing developments. A being such as Vision stands at the intersection of these paradigms. He himself wonders about his as he claims time and again in the *Avengers: Age of Ultron* that he himself does not completely understand what being himself as he says "Maybe I am a monster. I don't think I'd know if I were one." He also reflects on his ambiguous nature when he says "I'm not Ultron. I am not J.A.R.V.I.S... I am... I am." His hypermasculine form is a borrowed concept which he neither accepts nor rejects, he just is. In a way he performs certain traits that can be interpreted as hypermasculine. His physical strength, stoic demeanor, and sense of duty align with traditional masculine ideals. Additionally, his role as a protector and warrior contributes to a narrative of hypermasculinity often associated with superhero archetypes. However, it's important to note that Vision's character also undergoes significant development, grappling with complex themes of identity and morality, which adds depth beyond mere hypermasculine tropes.

The outcome of the queering method is not "an analysis to inform design, but an ongoing application of disruption as a space-making ploy and, thus, as a hands-on method." By defying definition and embracing a perpetual "off-center, eccentric, critical, reflexive, and self-analytic" role, Vision's queerness leads to no fixed destination, giving rise to new truths, perspectives, and engagements, and subverts hegemony through perpetual repositioning of margins (Light, 2011). The queering of Vision's posthuman nature does not focus on declaring an identity, but rather on creating an interaction that explores the impact of each term on the other. This encounter with the posthuman challenges the traditional understanding of queer" as solely

related to non-normative human sexuality, prompting a re-examination of what sex and gender might mean beyond anthropocentric perspectives. Additionally, the deliberate reclamation of the term "queer" in late twentieth-century activism and analysis serves as a reminder of both the historical marginalization and the aspirational inclusivity associated with it. Vision navigates between these interpretations, acknowledging both the possibilities and challenges of moving beyond humanity, coinciding with a widespread shift in the humanities and social sciences towards a posthuman turn.

The techno-queer nature of both Ironman and Vision involves uncovering and questioning the pervasive influence of technology in twenty-first century life, known as the techno-normative matrix. This exploration aims to imagine alternative futures and embrace techno-queer world-building. Through these utopian visions, both queer theory and techno-culture theory can contribute to revitalizing the interconnected formation of sex, gender, sexuality, race, and technology. Also linking the superhero image with another widely recognized contemporary image, that of the cyborg demonstrates the potential for uncovering new meanings, particularly the disruptive possibilities of the technologically constructed body. This challenges and sometimes undermines the prevailing gender representations that influence the analysis of superhero images, replacing them with ideas of the constructed self and the resulting blurring of boundaries and dichotomies.

However, hegemonic gender depictions are still prevalent in superhero films, often occupying a space between hegemonic and counter masculinity. In science fiction, the cyborg is often designed or attributed to heteronormative gender roles. However, the figure of the cyborg challenges and subverts

traditional divisions between human and machine, self and other, inside, and outside, and nature and culture (Shabot, 2006). As a result, the cyborg challenges all pre-defined categories of traditional Western masculinity, providing an opportunity to redefine and evaluate these categories. The cinematic cyborgs like *Iron Man* and *Vision* thus present a variety of subject positions and perspectives, creating a diverse and conflicting textual landscape that allows for multiple interpretations. Whether this is a deliberate Hollywood strategy to rejuvenate the genre and appeal to a broader audience with differing viewpoints, or a reflection of conflicting social discourses and movements, the superhero myth continues to offer illuminating narratives about the boundaries of identity and the multitude of identities we embrace in our modern world. Therefore, describing *Iron Man* and *Vision* using a cyborg metaphor can provide a fresh perspective for exploring the queer possibilities within the enduring superhero myth.

The Marvel franchise caters to a diverse audience spanning different age groups, where the gender messages conveyed may be accepted without question, even by older viewers. The primary allure of most films lies in the audience's ability to identify with the heroes, potentially leading to the adoption of the films' perspectives on masculinity (Brown, 2016). Superhero films featuring male protagonists have come under scrutiny for their perceived repetitive and stereotypical portrayals of (White) masculinity (Harriger et al.; Brown). The male superheroes now epitomize the hegemonic form of masculinity more prominently than ever before. Hegemonic masculinity represents the currently most esteemed and prevalent form of masculinity (Connell, 2005). Within the Marvel universe, the depiction of hegemonic masculinity often aligns with contemporary Western gender

norms and prevailing ideologies surrounding masculinity and femininity. This article has tried to indicate that while portraying hegemonic hypermasculinity, the depiction of Rogers' masculinity was not overtly hegemonic; instead, it was characterized by complexities and discussions involving both hegemony and subordination to uphold this hypermasculine image.

The development of a discourse exploring entities superior to, or transcending, the human condition was a crucial aspect of the journey towards modernity. With the rise of industrialization, urbanization, technological advancements, and medical progress, inquiries into productivity and efficiency became paramount. Modernity was characterized by a profound aspiration to craft an ideal version of humanity, citizenship, or soldiering - a form of life capable of enduring immense global crises like the World Wars and potential nuclear catastrophes, thereby elevating the human species to unprecedented levels of invulnerability and resilience. This fervent desire to envision a futuristic reinterpretation of the human body gave rise to concepts such as the 'super soldier' or the 'new man' within various political ideologies like communism, liberalism, and socialism. The 'new man' represented a utopian vision born out of a desperate yearning for survival, emphasizing the cultivation of healthy, productive, and disciplined bodies - an extraordinary being.

In regard to it, in the first movie of the Captain America franchise, *Captain America: The first avenger* Steve Rogers battles with his identity which is chiefly connected to his physical form. After being a skinny and sickly individual, Steve Rogers transforms into the super soldier Captain America through the injection of a "super soldier serum" in a military experiment. He utilizes his enhanced abilities to combat Nazis, rescue his best friend, and ultimately defeat the villain Red Skull. Captain



America possesses superhuman powers that surpass human capabilities, as his body is improved to excel in various categories such as "strength, smarts, endurance and health" (Munkittrick, 2023). Bukatman (2003) elucidates that "The hypermasculinity of the bodybuilder or superhero-fantasy represents an effort to refocus the self within the body, a simplifying merging of the body with subjectivity," drawing comparisons between the bodybuilder's physique and the powerful superhero body.

Rogers, initially marginalized due to his frailty and inability to fulfill traditional masculine roles, undergoes a significant transformation upon receiving the super soldier serum. Despite his perceived inadequacies by his superiors, the serum alters his physique into a symbol of hypermasculinity. This metamorphosis symbolizes a ceremonial process of masculinization, elevating Rogers from an ordinary man to an extraordinary figure in terms of both his physicality and masculinity (Brown, 2016). This change in his body draws a renewed focus, presenting Rogers as remarkably different and exuding hypermasculine traits. As the film progresses, Rogers' hypermasculinity becomes more pronounced, emphasizing his power and presence. Even following his transformation into a super-soldier, possessing a physique that epitomizes the ideal male physicality is insufficient for Colonel Phillips and other soldiers to acknowledge Rogers as a fully realized posthuman form. He, despite demonstrating resilience, strength, and courage immediately post the super-soldier procedure, faces discrimination which is chiefly due to his newly acquired enhanced form. An incident where a Hydra agent triggers a bomb in the procedure room, stealing the remaining super-soldier serum, prompts Rogers to pursue and apprehend the agent. Regardless of the heroic feat garnering media acclaim, Colonel Phillips

dismisses Rogers as merely an "experiment" and deems him inadequate for participating in any missions. During the war bond selling tour, Rogers assumes the role of Captain America, when the soldiers mock him with labels like "sweetheart" and is treated as an outcast chiefly because of his hypermasculine appearance. Rogers is depicted as a figure of ridicule, labeled as a clown by his fellow soldiers and even subjected to being pelted with tomatoes. As Steve Rogers progressed in his journey through the next movies of the franchise, he has always felt like somewhat of an outcast with his enhanced superbody.

Hence, when analyzing Captain America's superbody, it is crucial to understand the fundamental concept of posthumanism within the discourse surrounding physical well-being and eugenics. This also involved recognizing its representation in a simplified and potentially skewed interpretation of Nietzsche's *Übermensch*. Various critical paradigms endeavored to challenge the foundational principles of humanism, pushing back against Descartes' assertion of human centrality and absolute distinction from machines, animals, and other non-human entities. While these thinkers did not fully realize the emergence of posthumanism as a paradigm, it was Foucault (2002) who shed light on the theoretical gaps within humanism, "[...] the archaeology of our thought easily shows, man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end". This indicates his anticipation of a theoretical shift that would disrupt the core tenets of humanism, while resonating with posthumanist ideals, even though contemporary analysis often portrays him as an antihumanist seeking to challenge the rational, anthropocentric perspectives upheld by humanism. Posthumanism diverges from humanism by not rejecting its legitimacy outright but by highlighting the inherent instability within humanist frameworks. Rogers is one of the early

examples of the posthuman body in MCU whose existence marks this shift.

Another example from the MCU in which the hypermasculine, posthuman body can be found in the portrayal of the green monster in *The Incredible Hulk* and other films in *The Avengers* series. In these daring adaptations of the comic book, the narrative focal point once again delves into the intricate interplay between technology and the human body, that emerges as a pivotal battleground for grasping concepts of identity amidst diversity. While conventional superhero narratives often emphasize the protagonist's journey towards mastering their hybrid nature, Hulk centers on the profound uncontainability of identity in the posthuman era. The protagonist futilely struggles to maintain a singular and containable identity through sheer force of will. Examining the character of the Hulk could enhance the comprehension of the contrasting perceptions of the grotesque, while establishing the queerness of it.

In Derrida's (2009) book *The Animal that therefore I am/I follow*, it is suggested that animals and matter are not only before humans but also a part of them, making complex beings out of it that are constantly evolving. This idea is reinforced by the notion that each monster narrative reminds us that the self is never completely secure. Recent advancements in science and economics are also causing intellectuals, artists, and writers to reconsider how they understand the concept of otherness. Pamela Moss's (2005) states that "bodies acquire specificity through interactions with other bodies and spaces", which supports how the monstrous posthuman being's self-perception takes shape through interactions with humans, interpreting their reactions as a narrative of the 'Other,' the grotesque. The collective human response towards the monster's body, often tinged with disgust, mirrors the process of self-recognition in the

psychological mirror stage. The rejection of the monster's posthuman form, constructed by human perceptions as the 'Other,' fosters a rejection of self within the monster, prompting existential inquiries into its purpose.

The body of the posthuman individual is "not solely about crude technological enhancements but rather the realization of untapped human capabilities" (Jeffery, 2016). It could be argued that the Hulk's nature is essentially an amplification of fundamental human traits like anger, emotions, bravery, and most importantly the body. The Hulk's amplified green grotesque body can be queered, as a queer body is a complex entity that encompasses various identities that cannot be confined to rigid categorizations. It defies the notion of fixed identity markers and binary oppositions, challenging traditional concepts of it. Championing a departure from natural norms, the posthuman monster-Hulk straddles the line between similarity and divergence from humanity. The Hulk embodies the countercultural essence of posthumanism, where advancements in science and technology do not lead to mechanization or rationalization but rather progress based on instinctual impulses and primal instincts. The exposure of Dr Banner's physical form to a high concentration of gamma radiation in the process of conducting an underground detonation of the gamma bomb was an unfortunate accident that triggered an unpleasant tampering of his body, transforming his human form into a posthuman condition. While discussing how to quantify and qualify artificial and animal bodies, Jeffery argues that the artificial body is humanized by mimicking human morphology.

The hierarchical binary opposition prevailing between human and animal that Western humanism is obsessed with generates questions on whether the 'human' exerts its authority to monitor, regulate,

and control the various forms of the 'Other', and how receptive of such containment is a post-human body. The Hulk, despite its altered physical form, remains open to interpretation and utilization, whether through Natasha's soothing melodies or *Iron Man's* specialized containment apparatus known as the Hulkbuster. In *Avengers: Endgame*, the Hulk modifies its form by reducing itself to a stature of the 'in-between', which is larger than the physical form of Dr Bruce Banner, and smaller than that of the monster. This strategic appropriation creates a space of relativization in the body of the Hulk, wherein humans perceive the posthuman body as a safe and accessible site for interaction. Mapping this process of conscious modification locates the figure of the Hulk in the discourse of the trans-human by branching out from the mainstream narrative of the post-human, whereby the intellect, or the aspect of the rationale, of Dr Banner is incorporated into the mindless animalistic rage of the Hulk.

The emergence of 'bioculture' raises new questions about our way of life and thinking, particularly with the ability of evolutionary biology and digital sciences to blur boundaries and remove the physical aspect of bodies. This calls for consideration of the implications of the potential and sometimes actual dissolution of barriers between living beings, as well as between the living and non-living. Posthumanism, according to Carry Wolfe, refers to the embodiment and integration of humans in not only their biological but also their technological environment, signifying a historical moment in which it is increasingly difficult to overlook the diminishing importance of humans due to their entanglement in technical, medical, informatics, and economic networks. At its core, the association between hypermasculine and/or monstrous superheroes like Captain America and the Hulk and the posthuman queer superbodily arises from the

superhero's identity as a biological misfit and social outcast. As a biological misfit, the superhero's body deviates from real-life bodies, potentially challenging mainstream views of gender and sexuality that are based on physical characteristics. Additionally, as a social outcast who must conceal their secret identity, including their occasional sexual identity, and bear the weight of their superhuman abilities, the superhero has the potential to subvert conventional notions of male and female corporeality, despite the overt promotion of an idealized and hypersexualized heteronormative body.

## Conclusion

The inquiry into whether the hypermasculine posthuman bodies could ever been regarded as queer necessitates a nuanced response encompassing both affirmations and negations. On one hand, affirmatively, the persistent scrutiny of the queering the nonhuman bodies implicitly uphold the human as the normative benchmark. Moreover, numerous queer theorists have unequivocally emphasized the human body and human sexuality in their analyses. Conversely, from a negative standpoint, queer theory has consistently approached with caution the implications of rehabilitation and assimilation linked to liberal-humanist principles. Furthermore, the pursuit of posthuman has not been the exclusive objective of queer advancement. The dual nature of affirming and negating the post humanity of the queer signifies contemplation on the posthuman as a status, rather than a direct challenge to the established category. In essence, the queer identity navigates between aligning with and resisting conventional notions of humanity. This article does not seek to confine queer posthumanism solely to LGBTQI-identified individuals or subjects, nor does it advocate for a rigid adherence of queer theory to its

original inception. Such limitations would stifle the dynamic and diverse nature of this field of thought. Instead, our focus is on a specific condition—a resilience amidst uncertainty—that serves as a primary catalyst for queer ideology as a whole. This circumstance particularly fosters queer posthumanist perspectives, through select superheroes from the Marvel Cinematic Universe as the heightened precariousness in specific contexts challenges the conventional boundaries of posthuman subjectivities.

## Declaration of Ownership

This article is our original work.

## Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest to declare in this article.

## Ethical Clearance

This study was approved by the institution.

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