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# GENDER FORUM

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## Gender and Super Heroes

Edited by  
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## Editorial Deadlines

Spring Issue:

abstracts (October 1),

completed papers (January 1)

Summer Issue:

abstracts (January 1),

completed papers (April 1)

Fall Issue:

abstracts (April 1),

completed papers (July 1)

Early Career Researchers Special Issue:

abstracts (May 1),

completed papers (August 1)

Winter Issue:

abstracts (July 1),

completed papers (October 1)

## About

*Gender forum* is an online, peer reviewed academic journal dedicated to the discussion of gender issues. As an electronic journal, *gender forum* offers a free-of-charge platform for the discussion of gender-related topics in the fields of literary and cultural production, media and the arts as well as politics, the natural sciences, medicine, the law, religion and philosophy. Inaugurated by Prof. Dr. Beate Neumeier in 2002, the quarterly issues of the journal have focused on a multitude of questions from different theoretical perspectives of feminist criticism, queer theory, and masculinity studies. *gender forum* also includes reviews and occasionally interviews, fictional pieces and poetry with a gender studies angle.

Opinions expressed in articles published in *gender forum* are those of individual authors and not necessarily endorsed by the editors of *gender forum*.

## Submissions

Target articles should conform to current MLA Style (8th edition) and should be between 5,000 and 8,000 words in length. Please make sure to number your paragraphs and include a bio-blurb and an abstract of roughly 300 words. Files should be sent as email attachments in Word format. Please send your manuscripts to [gender-forum@uni-koeln.de](mailto:gender-forum@uni-koeln.de).

We always welcome reviews on recent releases in Gender Studies! Submitted reviews should conform to current MLA Style (8th edition), have numbered paragraphs, and should be between 750 and 1,000 words in length. Please note that the reviewed releases ought to be no older than 24 months. In most cases, we are able to secure a review copy for contributors.

## Article Publishing

The journal aims to provide rapid publication of research through a continuous publication model. All submissions are subject to peer review. Articles should not be under review by any other journal when submitted to *Gender forum*.

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There are no submission or page charges, and no colour charges.

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## Editorial

1 Superhero films are, despite their commercial appeal across the board, often seen as a boys' club. Yet, as the submissions to this issue show, the club is a complex and complicated one filled with ideals so unattainable that not even the titular heroes can fulfil them. This issue of *gender forum* therefore engages not only with superheroes, but primarily with the crises of masculinity negotiated in the superhero films of the past twelve years, starting with *Batman Begins*.

2 Annette Schimmelpfennig's article "Capitalism and Schizophrenia in Gotham City – The Fragile Masculinities of Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight Trilogy*" examines the series' various presentations of masculinity and their dependency on gadgets and 'theatricality'. The success of a man's performance of his masculinity is measured in how convincing he is as either hero or villain and in his exertion of power. Schimmelpfennig thereby argues that the men in the three installments are stereotypes that cater to a heteronormative world view and constantly need to reassure their compulsory heterosexuality and gender affiliation to persist within the society of Gotham. By contrasting the films' protagonist Bruce Wayne and his superhero alter ego Batman with the villains, she concludes that the masculinities are fragile because they strongly depend on money, physical strength and control over other, physically and financially weaker people, otherwise they are not of value for the predominant heterocentric, capitalist community. Furthermore, she observes the subordinate role of femininity in the films which again emphasize the films' focus on the desire for a hypermasculine saviour. Schimmelpfennig consequently stresses that the city (and through it the films themselves) requires an immaculate masculinity that is as good as unattainable and promotes obsolete role models.

3 In "Iron Man as Cyborg: Between Masculinities", Evdokia Stefanopoulou examines the mass proliferation of superhero movies since the turn of the century. The gender issues in superhero movies are often accompanied by the common observation that the vast majority of superheroes are men and the rare presence of women is marked by their placement in a supporting role, thus reproducing a patriarchal ideology. Although this phenomenon can indeed be characterized as an excessive demonstration of masculine power and superheroes can be seen as mythical figures of a technological patriarchy, Stefanopoulou suggests an antithetical reading. Her approach examines the overstated "technological sublime in human form" (Wasielewski 66) as a sort of divergent embodiment of subjectivity containing the notion of the cyborg as described by Donna Harraway. It entails its own blurring of the

ontological boundaries (161), therefore projecting its own existence as a social construction. Deploying this approach, she examines the gender representations in the *Iron Man* trilogy (2008, 2010, 2013) not as demonstration of patriarchal power, but as masculinity in crisis, a masculinity undermined by its excessive technological look and its status as a constructed fabrication. A close analysis of the three texts and a special focus on gender representations will demonstrate how the technological subjectivity of Iron Man and the ironic performance by Robert Downey Jr. actually undermines the surface super-masculinity of the character.

4 Yen-Lian Liu writes about “The Masculine Masquerade of Superheroes in *Watchmen*”. He proposes that the image of many American male superheroes is represented as ‘phallic’ in their costumes. Even though it is a long-term reality that the representation of superheroes often connotes an ideally mythic but essentially un-realizable embodiment of men, such a costuming more often than not involves, as Harry Brod sees it, a process of men’s conscious self-masquerade. How well, or how falsely, do male characters accommodate themselves to their masculine costuming as superheroes? How does this costumed heroism affect men’s lives, both in public and in private? *Watchmen* examines this relationship with regard to the metaphorical representations of the bodily images of men and their associations with justice and masculinity. If the actualization of superheroes in the reality of *Watchmen* debunks heroism itself, then the graphic representations of those male superheroes’ masculine but masked bodies also belie an apotheosizing but simultaneously dehumanizing dimension through such a male masquerade. By juxtaposing the different representations and embodiments of male superheroes in *Watchmen*, the article focuses on how men’s negotiations between a performative identity and an unmasked selfhood are relentlessly exposed and problematized. Accordingly, the artificiality of men’s masculine images is not only highlighted in the graphic representations of *Watchmen* but also subversive to the conventional notions of super-heroic male embodiments.

5 The issue’s final contribution is Nicole M. Rizzuto’s review of Kristen Hogan’s 2016 book *The Feminist Bookstore Movement: Lesbian Antiracism and Feminist Accountability*, published by Duke University Press.