

# Superhero Costume Design Changes In Film / Creating the Perfect Spider-Man Design

by Connor Chang

## GOALS:

Superhero films currently dominate the entertainment industry with huge box office returns and generally positive critical reception. For example, the Marvel Cinematic Universe, with twelve films grossing a total of nine billion dollars worldwide, is the highest-grossing film series of all time. Frequently, superheroes have costume design changes from film to film. Iron Man has had perhaps the most design changes, with forty-six different mechanized suits over the course of the Marvel Cinematic Universe. As a longtime fan of superhero films and a collector of superhero merchandise, I wish to understand not only why the costume designs change from film to film, but also what audience reactions are to the design changes.

The goal of this research project is to draw a conclusion about the reasons for superhero costume design changes in film, as well as the preferences of audiences for superhero films. From this research, filmmakers and audiences alike will be able to predict costume design changes for future superhero films. In addition, this project will use feedback from randomly selected individuals to create a composite design for the Marvel Comics superhero Spider-Man, based on details from each of the four costumes used in film, in order to highlight the public's aesthetic preferences for superhero designs.

## METHODOLOGY:

First, using funds from my research stipend, I will commission an artist to create turnaround sheets of each of the four Spider-Man designs used in film.

The four designs:

1. *Spider-Man* trilogy (2002-2007, dir. Sam Raimi)
2. *The Amazing Spider-Man* (2012, dir. Marc Webb)
3. *The Amazing Spider-Man 2* (2014, dir. Marc Webb)
4. *Captain America: Civil War* (2016, dir. Anthony and Joe Russo)

Each turnaround sheet will show, from the front and from the back, Spider-Man looking forward and standing in a neutral position, with arms at the side, fists clenched, and feet slightly apart. I will send a reference pose to the artist.

While the artist is working, I will research the history of superhero costume design for film. This research will highlight the changes to costumes from various superhero film series and uncover trends among superhero designs in film. I will also explore audience reactions to various film superhero designs and the changes from film to film.

After the artwork is complete and presentable, I will survey a group of random individuals aged 18-30 using the website SurveyMonkey, also using funds from my research stipend. Each participant will be shown all four turnaround sheets at once, and will choose their favorite of each of the following elements, which notably change from film to film:

1. Web pattern
2. Eye shape
3. Chest symbol
4. Back symbol
5. Overall design

After the survey, I will commission the artist (again, using funds from the research stipend) for a turnaround sheet of a new Spider-Man design incorporating the most popular of each of the aforementioned elements. Using both my research and the feedback from my survey, I will draw a conclusion about the reasons for superhero costume design changes from film to film, audience reactions to these design changes, and overall aesthetic preferences for superhero designs.

#### TIMELINE:

My very first step will be to commission an artist for the turnaround sheets, which I expect will be completed in less than four weeks' time. From weeks one through four, I will do extensive research on the history of superhero costume design and audience reactions. I will then take three days at the most to survey individuals and compile the data from the study. At the beginning of week five, I will commission the final design and expect the artwork in about a weeks' time. Then, I will spend week six preparing my final presentation.

#### BACKGROUND EXPERIENCE:

This is my first research project, but I have experience in research in an academic setting. In my "Art of the Cinema" class in my first year at Loyola Marymount University, I learned about a variety of different film genres and their impacts upon entertainment at large. For said class, I wrote a research paper that explored fire as a thematic element in the films *Frankenstein* (1931, dir. James Whale) and *Night of the Living Dead* (1968, dir. George A. Romero). I have also done research for other classes in areas unrelated to film, but with the intention of using my research to create future screenplays that I will hopefully direct.

#### BENEFITS TO FIELD OF STUDY AND CAREER PLANS:

As a film major and a prospective worker in the film industry, I recognize that superhero movies are box-office successes, and as a fan of superhero movies, I expect to work on them in the future. Therefore, I must be privy to costume design changes and the reasons as to why filmmakers implement them, how audiences respond to them, and what general preferences the public has about superhero designs. Currently, I have a half-finished screenplay for a superhero film in development, and as the screenplay's potential director, I wish to know how to design the characters so that they look good for audiences.

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