

2015-01-01

Comic Book Fandom: An Exploratory Study Into The World Of Comic Book Fan Social Identity Through Parasocial Theory

Anthony Robert Ramirez

University of Texas at El Paso, ar2830@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.utep.edu/open_etd



Part of the [Mass Communication Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Ramirez, Anthony Robert, "Comic Book Fandom: An Exploratory Study Into The World Of Comic Book Fan Social Identity Through Parasocial Theory" (2015). *Open Access Theses & Dissertations*. 1131.

https://digitalcommons.utep.edu/open_etd/1131

COMIC BOOK FANDOM: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY INTO
THE WORLD OF COMIC BOOK FAN SOCIAL IDENTITY
THROUGH PARASOCIAL THEORY

ANTHONY R. RAMIREZ

Department of Communication

APPROVED:

Roberto Avant-Mier, Ph.D., Chair

Thomas Ruggiero, Ph.D.

Brian Yothers, Ph.D.

Charles Ambler, Ph.D.
Dean of the Graduate School

Copyright ©

by

Anthony Robert Ramirez

2015

COMIC BOOK FANDOM: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY INTO
THE WORLD OF COMIC BOOK FAN SOCIAL IDENTITY
THROUGH PARASOCIAL THEORY

by

ANTHONY R. RAMIREZ B.F.A

THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at El Paso

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of Communication

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

May 2015

ABSTRACT

Comic books and their extensive lineup of characters have invaded all types of media forms, making comics a global media phenomenon that are having a wider profile in media and popular culture. The community of comic book fans has grown as well. The purpose of this study is to investigate how these fans identify with their favorite comic book character(s) through the application of parasocial theory, in order to discover if and how various identification levels lead to the fan's level of fandom or attachment. Various fans of comic books are interviewed, in order to investigate attachment levels and level of fandom regarding their favorite character.

Keywords: Comic Books, Audience, Fans, Fandom, Attachment, Self Identification, Parasocial Theory

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	v
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION - How Comic Books Are More Important Than Ever.....	1
1.1 Comics in Popular Culture.....	1
1.2 How Have Comics Taken Over Popular Culture?.....	4
1.3 Comic Studies.....	10
1.4 Rationale.....	14
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW - Literature on Comic Book Media and Fandom.....	20
2.1 A Brief History of U.S. Comic Books.....	20
2.2 Toward Comic Studies.....	23
2.3 Comic Book Studies Debates.....	27
2.4 Gender and Queer Studies within Comic Book Research.....	32
2.5 Analytical Literature within Comic Studies.....	35
2.6 Historical Analysis within Comic Book Research.....	38
2.7 Identity in Comic Book Research.....	41
2.8 Education Emphasis in Comic Studies.....	45
2.9 Miscellaneous Research within Comic Book Research.....	46
2.10 Fandom and Fandom within Comic Book Research.....	50
2.11 Comic Book Fans.....	51
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY - Qualitative Interviews and Parasocial Theory.....	54
3.1 Methodological Framework.....	54
3.2 Theoretical Framework.....	55

3.3 Data Collection.....	60
CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS - How Comic Book Fans Attach to/or Identify with Their Favorite	
Character(s)?.....	63
4.1 Demographics.....	63
4.2 Early Exposure to Favorite Character(s).....	63
4.3 Characters With an Impact.....	65
4.4 “I Wish I Had Superpowers!”.....	70
4.5 Heroic Similarities.....	73
4.6 Literary and Literature.....	77
4.7 Sexism in Comics.....	80
4.8 Fan Classification.....	83
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION – Concluding Remarks About Comic Books, Fandom, and	
Communication.....	87
5.1 “Until Next Time True Believers”.....	87
5.2 Limitations and Implications.....	96
REFERENCES.....	100
APPENDIX.....	126
VITA.....	128

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: How comic books are more important than ever.

1.1 Comics In Popular Culture

Scott McCloud, author of *Understanding Comics* (1994), defines comic books as “juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence” (p. 9). Comic books include many super-natural characters who have super strength, the ability to run at super speed, fly high amongst the clouds, or that have super “high tech” gadgets that can save the world from villainous criminals. They are the U.S. equivalent to the mythological Greek and Roman gods that continue to inspire many young and old to dream and use their imagination to create new worlds and escape their own (Kantor, 2013). Though initially these characters began with comic books, they carried over into radio, television and film, growing a huge fan base along the way.

With the popularity of comic book media and an increasing fan base, the need to investigate comic book fans has become imperative. For example, a pristine copy of the first appearance of “Superman,”² the first major superhero, was recently auctioned for \$3,207,852, making it the highest selling comic book of all time (Mazza, 2014, para. 2). A recent study estimates that there are approximately 24,000,000 comic book fans in the United States (Schenker, 2014, para. 3). In 2014, four of the highest grossing films were based on comic book adaptations and the second highest grossing film of that year was *Guardians of the Galaxy*, another comic book adaptation, earning \$772,257,316 worldwide to date (“2014 Domestic Grosses,” 2014, Fig. 1). Currently, newly developed primetime television shows about comic book characters are some of the highest rated shows on television (Magilo, 2014; Kondolojy, 2014; Mitovich, 2014; Kissell, 2014). Nonetheless, these notable developments are surprising

² *Action Comics* #1 was released in 1938, and it is considered to be the “holy grail” of comic books.

given that research about comic books is still relatively absent in communication studies.

Yet, comic books and their illustrious groups of characters are more visible than ever through various forms of media. The ever-growing comic book fan base is increasing year to year, as more comic book related media are released. A majority of comic book fans gravitate and attach themselves to their favorite characters as if the character actually exists. Through the increasing use of social media, fans are now able to use this platform to express their fanaticism and attachment towards their favorite characters. Social media websites like *Tumblr* use social media hashtags “#iamcomics” or “#wearecomics” to unite a community of fans together and to describe how comic books or their favorite character(s) impact their lives. This topic will be further addressed later in this thesis.

To such fans these characters are more than just fictional characters, but an embodiment of honor, morals and persistence in overcoming great odds. These principles are just a few key examples of how some fans identify with their favorite comic character(s). In this study, I am investigating whether or not comic book fans actually do attach or identify themselves to their favorite comic character(s) by using the qualitative method of interviewing in combination with parasocial theory. If comic fans do identify with their favorite characters, in what ways do they identify with them and to what extent do they identify with them?

According to one estimation, there are approximately 24,000,000 comic book fans in the United States (Schenker, 2014, para. 3). Many of these fans can be seen wearing clothing featuring their favorite comic book characters' logo or image around local and national comic book conventions. In 2012, *Comic Con International: San Diego* (also known as *Comic Con* or the *San Diego Comic Con*), the biggest comic book and popular culture convention in the world, had over 130,000 attendees, leading to over capacity in the San Diego Convention Center

(“About Comic-Con International,” N.D., para. 4). The San Diego convention highlights the biggest comic books, films, television shows and cartoons, bringing creators and actors from all genres together to interact with the fans. Each year, more comic book related media like cartoons, television shows and films are making their way into our daily lives and the global media landscape.

Whether it is in the form of the actual comic books, toys and action figures, live action or animated shows and films, video games and even in music, comic characters have never been more popular than they are today (Crutcher, 2011). In 2014, four of the highest grossing films of the year (*Guardians of the Galaxy*, *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, *X-Men: Days of Future Past*, and *The Amazing Spider-Man 2*) were all adapted from comic books, and again, the second highest grossing film was *Guardians of the Galaxy*, earning \$772,257,316 worldwide (“2014 Domestic Grosses,” 2014, Fig. 1). Between 2015 and 2020 there will be about thirty-two new comic book based films (Doran, 2014). Most of the titles have not even been fully announced yet.

In 2014, comic book characters took over primetime television with new shows like, *Gotham* on Fox, *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* on ABC, *The Flash* and *Arrow* on The CW’s, and these shows are some of the highest rated shows on their channels. 22 million people watched *Gotham*’s premiere episode across various media platforms, including television and streaming sites, such as *Hulu* and the *Fox* website (Magilo, 2014). As one journalist claims, “The production values will never match the cinematic likes of *Game of Thrones* or *Peaky Blinders*, but the strong writing ensures that viewers will be coming back for more next week” (Debanath, 2014). *The Flash* brought in 4.8 million viewers, making it The CW’s best debut in five years (Mitovich, 2014). Dave Walker, who is a critic for the *Times-Picayune* wrote, “though it’s not

my favorite genre, *The Flash* won me over, just as the same network's *Arrow*, from which this is a spinoff, did" (2014, para. 4). Both *Arrow* and *The Flash* have the same executive producer Marc Guggenheim, so it was announced that the two series will have a crossover episode on each show. During the telecast of *Arrow*'s crossover episode, it reached its highest ratings as a series, attracting over 3.9 million viewers (Kissell, 2014). According to the film and television critic website *Rotten Tomatoes*, the comic related shows that has received high critical praise are *Arrow*, *The Flash* and *Gotham*. *Arrow*'s third season has a perfect 100% rating, *The Flash*'s first season has received a 96% rating, and *Gotham*'s first season received a 90% rating ("Arrow: Season 3," 2014; "The Flash: Season 1", 2014; "Gotham: Season 1," 2014). *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* also is a highly rated show with a 92% "fresh" rating and an average viewership of 4 million viewers ("Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.: Season 1," 2014; Kendrick, 2014). *Constantine* is the lowest rated of the comic book television shows with a rating of 72% ("Constantine: Season 1," 2014). As these reports demonstrate, comic books and their multimedia adaptations have become a leading form of media for fans, businesses and popular culture, and yet they are understudied in communication research.

1.2 How Have Comics Taken Over Popular Culture?

The earliest incarnation of comic book characters appearing in other media were radio shows. *Superman* (1940) and *Batman* (1945) were episodic radio shows that told the stories of the characters. In 1943, Columbia Pictures released serial films of *Batman*, and there were 15 total chapters that were released in theaters. The plot was very different from the "Batman" films that fans know today. Batman was a United States government agent trying to defeat Japanese agent "Dr. Daka," around the time of World War II. Eventually, the magical visual box with moving images known as the television was created, and that led to television shows based on

the characters. One of the first superhero television shows was *The Adventures of Superman*, starring George Reeves, in 1952 (Trushell, 2004). As time went by, more shows based on the comic characters appeared on television, such as the 1960s series *Batman*, starring Adam West and Burt Ward. In the late 1970s, *The Incredible Hulk* (starring Bill Bixby and Lou Ferrigno), and *Wonder Woman* (starring Lynda Carter) took over the small screens. All of these series also featured music or other key characteristics that made them famous.

Recently, live action television shows like *Smallville* (2001), *Arrow* (2012), and *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D* (2013) have appeared on television, appealing to the young adult audience. Live action television series continue to take over the small screen with shows like *The Flash* (2014), *Gotham* (2014), *Constantine* (2014) and *Agent Carter* (2015). This is actually second time “The Flash” has had a television series (an earlier version of the series debuted in 1990, and it lasted only one season due to high budget episodes and low ratings). Even video streaming service Netflix has jumped on board with live action series based on comic books. Marvel characters “Daredevil,” “Jessica Jones,” “Iron Fist” and “Luke Cage” will all have their own Netflix series, leading up to a team up series called “The Defenders” (Lieberman & Andreeva, 2013). Along with television shows, there are numerous animated shows or cartoons featuring comic book characters, which are made for younger audiences.

Additionally, the very first animated series was *Superman*, by Fleischer Studios in the 1940s. In the 1960s *Spider-Man* had his own Saturday morning cartoon which featured the infamous theme song that many know and love. The 1970s featured *Superfriends*, which was a show based on the “Justice League” that featured Superman, Wonder Woman, Batman and Robin. These shows were very colorful, and used bright colors and family friendly action and humor that made them seem like a moving comic book. It was not until the mid 1980s and early

1990s when animated comic based series such as *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (1987), *Batman: The Animated Series* (1992) and *X-Men* (1992) took center stage, becoming widely popular. These animated series were popular among fans and critics alike, who praised the writing and animation style. Since then, many animated comic book series and cartoons have been on television, entertaining youth of new generations. Both television shows and animated series, much like the comic books, have developed from campy family friendly shows into darker, grittier shows (as seen in the story arcs.)

It seems as of late that every year now there are at least two or three superhero/comic based films in the theaters. Though a couple of comic based films were done before, it was 1978's *Superman*, starring Christopher Reeve, that made audiences and critics interested in the comic character genre. Richard Donner, who directed the film, was directing the sequel *Superman II* (1980) simultaneously. With eighty percent of the film already finished, Donner was fired by the producers and replaced by Richard Lester. Lester also returned to direct the third film, *Superman III* (1983). The third film starred comedian, Richard Pryor, who many fans felt ruined the film's serious tone (Ebert, R., 2003). Another problem that fans had with the film was the depiction of an evil Superman, due to a form of "kryptonite" that turns the hero evil. The fourth Superman film, *Superman IV: The Quest for Peace* (1987) was not well received by fans due to the film's poor special effects and multiple re-edits (Wilmington, 1987). Many years later, Superman returned to the silver screen in *Superman Returns* (2006) starring Brandon Routh as the title character, and it was directed by *X-Men* (2000) director Bryan Singer. Critics praised the film, but many fans felt that the drama of the film outweighed the action. The Superman film franchise was put into hiatus until *Man of Steel* (2013) starring Henry Cavill.

In 1989, *Batman* was released, and it spawned a direct sequel *Batman Returns* (1992).

Two more Batman films, *Batman Forever* (1995) and *Batman & Robin* (1997) were also released, but critics and fans cringed at the slapstick writing and tone of *Batman & Robin*. Arnold Schwarzenegger starred in the film as the cold-hearted villain, Mr. Freeze, and the film took elements from the classic *Batman: The Animated Series* episode “Heart of Ice” (1992). The episode made Mr. Freeze a villain who fans could sympathize with, as he did various villainous acts to save his comatose wife, but the film made the character into a long running joke, using every possible ice or cold related pun possible. Similar to the Superman film franchise, Batman took a small hiatus until Warner Bros. released *Batman Begins* in 2005 (director Christopher Nolan).

Throughout the years of the Superman and Batman films there were other comic based films such as *Swamp Thing* (1982), *Howard the Duck* (1986), *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (1990), *Captain America* (1990) and *Judge Dredd* (1995), just to name a few. Most of these films have now had the “reboot treatment” where they start the franchise over by making a new film. Interestingly, *Howard The Duck* was the first film to be based on a Marvel comics character. The film was panned critically, and is known to be one of the biggest box office flops of all time, although it has since gain a cult following (Bouzereau, 2008). The character reappeared in an end of credits scene in *Guardians of the Galaxy* (2014) for a brief and surprising cameo. The “Ninja Turtles” film franchise had two live action sequels, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles II: The Secret of the Ooze* (1991) and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles III* (1993), as well as an animated sequel simply called *TMNT* (2007). In 2014, the franchise was also rebooted with a modern take on the characters, and the film included actors wearing computer-generated imagery (CGI) suits to portray the “heroes in a half shell” in *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (2014). The “Judge Dredd” character also had a reboot with the film *Dredd*

(2012) that more closely followed the 2000 AD comic book, from which it was adapted.

It was not until Bryan Singer's *X-Men* (2000) movie that the comic book film genre gained full steam. The *X-Men* film franchise has been one of the strongest with two direct sequels, *X2: X-Men United* (2003) and *X-Men: The Last Stand* (2006). The franchise also spun off into two films about the fan favorite character "Wolverine," *X-Men Origins: Wolverine* (2009) and a rebooted version *The Wolverine* (2013). Years after the third *X-Men* film, 20th Century Fox, who distributes the film, went into the origin reboot route² by creating the movies *X-Men: First Class* (2011) and *X-Men: Days of Future Past* (2014). These two movies included a younger cast than the original films, introducing audiences to the younger versions of "Professor X" and "Magneto." The next *X-Men* film and conclusion to the "First Class" trilogy will be called *X-Men: Apocalypse* with a release date already set for May 16, 2016.

With the *X-Men* films being huge successes, it has all led to a renaissance of comic book related movies featuring well known and lesser-known characters. Characters like "Spider-Man," "Daredevil," "Catwoman," "The Incredible Hulk" and the "Fantastic Four" all have films now and most of them will even have rebooted in later years. This renaissance of comic book movies, led to some of the most prominent films in history including another Batman movie, Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight* (2008). The film gained praise from critics and fans, and even an Oscar nomination and win for the late actor Heath Ledger for his portrayal as "The Joker." The final film of Nolan's "Dark Knight Trilogy" was *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012), with Christian Bale portraying Batman for the final time.

In 2013, it was announced that actor Ben Affleck will portray Batman in a new film, *Batman v. Superman: Dawn of Justice* (2016), which will have Henry Cavill of *Man of Steel*

² An origin reboot is a retelling or revival of how the comic book characters came to be.

reprise his role as Superman. It was also announced recently that actress Gal Gadot will be the first woman to portray “Wonder Woman” on the silver screen. This film will be the first to include the “holy trinity” (Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman) of comic books. *Batman v. Superman* is said to be a direct lead into the much-anticipated “Justice League” film, which will be released in 2017. In 2014, it was announced that ten DC Comic related films will be released between 2016 and 2020. The films that were announced are: *Batman v. Superman: Dawn of Justice* (2016), *Suicide Squad* (2016), *Wonder Woman* (2017), *Justice League Part 1* (2017), *The Flash* (2018), *Aquaman* (2018), *Shazam* (2019), *Justice League Part 2* (2019), *Cyborg* (2020) and finally *Green Lantern* (2020) (Siegel, 2014). The most notable films are *Wonder Woman* (2017) and *Cyborg* (2020) because both films will be firsts for the comic book movie genre. *Wonder Woman* will be the first film to have a female lead in a superhero-based film in the modern era, and *Cyborg* will be first film of the genre to have a non-caucasian actor as its lead.

The company that took forefront of the comic book film frenzy was Marvel. In 2008, *Iron Man* was the lead film of what became Marvel’s cinematic universe. Actor Robert Downey Jr. plays “Tony Stark/Iron Man” throughout the three “Iron Man” films and in 2012’s *Marvel’s The Avengers*. Other Marvel films like *The Incredible Hulk* (2008), *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011) and *Thor* (2011) were the puzzle pieces helping to setup the comic book powerhouse, Marvel’s *The Avengers* (2012), which became the third highest grossing film of all time (“All time box,” 2013). A sequel for the film, *Avengers: Age of Ultron* is slated for release in 2015. Since Marvel’s *The Avengers*, Marvel continues developing their cinematic universe with an ever-expanding lineup of movies that are setup until 2019 (Doran, 2014), and most of the titles have not yet been revealed to the public.

Along with the various screen adaptations, there is now merchandise galore that is based

on comic book related characters. At comic book stores or even common retail stores like Target or Wal-mart, there is at least one section of comic related merchandise. Aside from comic books, toys and clothing are the most popular items that comic book fans purchase. One key piece of merchandise that has recently become popular in the last 25 years or so is that of video games featuring comic book characters. Video games take the fan into the world of their favorite comic related characters like never before. In these video games, the fans get to become the hero by saving key characters, and by taking down various villains using super powers or gadgets that are used in the comic series. To many fans, these games bring the character to life in a way that feels nostalgic, bringing back memories of the stories that they read and reenacted on the playground as children. Again, it is important to note that with comic book characters taking over so many facets of popular culture, scholarly research on comic books in communication is still rare.

1.3 Comic Studies

Comic books have been a subject of debate between critics, scholars and even fans regarding whether or not the medium can be considered a legitimate form of art or literature (Ndalianis, 2011; Labio, 2011; Mitchell, 2014; Beatty, 2012). While many still consider comic books to be for children, writers like Art Spiegelman, Alan Moore and Chris Ware have made the debate even more difficult with their critically acclaimed works. Spiegelman, who wrote *Maus* (1991), won a Pulitzer Prize in 1992, an award that is given as an achievement in newspaper and online journalism, or literature in the United States (“Art Spiegelman,” 2014). Alan Moore, along with artist Dave Gibbons, created *Watchmen* (1986) which has since then been named one of *TIME* magazine’s 100 greatest all time novels, and the only graphic novel or comic related book on the list (Grossman, 2010). Even with these examples of acclaimed comic books or graphic novels, negative attitudes towards the medium still exist.

Ironically, the comic book medium is older than film, television, and video games, and yet there has still been resistance towards the medium as a serious form of art or even as a serious area of research. The negative attitudes stem from the early popularity of the medium, in which it was initially intended for children, specifically young boys due to its subject matter. During the early years of comics, many people believed that comics were the lowest form of popular culture (Ndalianis, 2011). In 1954, psychiatrist Fredric Wertham published a highly influential and controversial book titled *Seduction of the Innocent*. Wertham proclaimed that the violence and questionable sexual exploits depicted in comics encouraged youth to similar behavior (Wertham, 2004; Heer & Worcester, 2009). The author went on to mention how children are corrupted by the exploits of flesh-eating zombies, homosexual references in DC Comics' *Batman and Robin*, or by the bondage imagery that filled the pages of *Wonder Woman* comic books. In the present time, Wertham's arguments are now seen as paranoid and even manipulative on his part (Tilley, 2012).

With regard to scholarly and academic work, comic studies is a growing field of research. The University Press of Mississippi was the first to publish academic books about comics in the 1990s, thus leading to other universities and commercial presses to follow (Ndalianis, 2011). A book that is considered one of the most influential academic books about comics is Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics* (1993), and it is constantly mentioned within comic related literature (Ndalianis, 2011; Howes, 2010; Meskin, 2007; Carleton, 2014). McCloud, whose book *Understanding Comics* (1993) is considered to be a significant book for comic book scholars, as it dives into the inner workings of the comic book medium, examining both the textual and visual forms of communication within comic books. McCloud has written two other books that are also about comic books, *Reinventing Comics* (2000) and *Making Comics* (2006). *Reinventing*

Comics explains how technology has changed the comic book format in terms of creating, distributing and reading comics. *Making Comics* focuses on how to create comic books. It discusses the writing and illustrative processes that McCloud feels will make the reader or comic creator a better storyteller. Scott McCloud is just one of many influential people to promote comic books in the academic world.

Meanwhile, another influential scholar is W.J.T. Mitchell. Mitchell, who is a professor of english and art history, is the author of many publications and has been in plenty of conversations with both scholars and comic book aficionados (Heer & Worcester, 2009; Mitchell, 2014; Beaty, 2012). Comic studies continue to grow with journals now dedicated to this medium such as: *Comics Journal*, *The International Journal of Comic Art*, *ImageText*, *Image & Narrative*, *European Comic Art*, the *Journal of Graphic Novels of Comics*, and *The Comics Grid*. Interestingly, comic studies have no definitive department for academic work; they are being researched in an array of social sciences.

Along with academic journals and writings, comic studies conferences around the United States have also become more common. One of the annual conferences, Comics Arts Conference (CAC) is held either during *San Diego Comic Con* or *WonderCon* in Anaheim, California. CAC is held for three days and is filled with academic panels that discuss the comic book medium. Smith describes comic studies with two observations that summarize the up-and-coming field, "...comic studies is a very loose field defined more by the object of study than by the strategies and theories used to analyze that object" and "...because comic studies is a field that is still defining itself, it attracts scholars from a wide range of disciplines..." (2010, p. 91). These conferences are important to mention as they promote and encourage scholars to research comic books, but they also demonstrate the growing significance of comic book media in popular

culture as well as the academic realm.

With various popular culture related formats, fans range from various categories. There are the leisurely comic book fans, and there are the extremely passionate fans that collect the history and merchandise of their favorite character(s). With this growing popularity, there have been various studies analyzing comics and the characters involved, but there is little very research on comic book fandom, especially within communication studies. The next section will analyze the existing literature on comic books in academic research.

Crutcher (2011) dissects five of the highest selling “Batman” stories analyzing the complexity of the writing and artwork. Genter provides a historical look into the birth of Marvel Comics during the Cold War era (2007). Rubin (2012) explores how superheroes, psychotherapy and psychotherapists coexist, comparing and contrasting how they are alike and different. Saunders (2011), meanwhile, explores the religious and spiritual symbolism within comic books. An example he uses is a comparison of “Superman” to the religious figure of Moses. “...Superman is not Jesus at all, but Moses---a savior figure who escapes deadly peril as a baby in a floating capsule, to grow up gifted with great powers and burdened with great responsibilities” (p. 16). Meanwhile, Trushell (2004) analyzes the various characters of the “X-Men” series, comparing their desire to become a part of society to historical movements.

Comics and Ideology is a series of essays that analyze comic books using various theoretical perspectives such as critical/cultural theory, feminist criticism and queer studies, just to name a few (McAllister et al., 2001). One of the topics discussed in the book is that of the portrayals of nationality and international conflict in comics. “Wonder Woman” is the central character of the chapter and the author discusses how she is an Amazonian figure attempting to live in the United States, yet she has been symbolized as an immigrant in Western society since

her first appearance. Further and more in-depth comic book related studies and research will be discussed in the following review of literature (in chapter 2).

This study provides an initial effort on how comic book fans describe their social identities through their favorite comic book character(s). Thus, this study is increasingly significant for both mass media research and society, and suggests how future scholars continue to work on comic book and comic book fan related research. This research project signifies a move in the right direction, towards comic studies within communication research.

1.4 Rationale

As mentioned above, this study intends to provide an entry point into how comic book fans describe their social identities through their favorite comic book character(s). The plan is to interview comic book fans from various attachment levels to see how much they identify with their favorite comic book character(s). For example, being passionate about a certain subject has led to the term “fanatic” or “fan,” which then leads to the idea of having a fandom. A fan is defined as an “obsessed” individual or someone who has an intense interest in a sports team, celebrity, television show, film or band (Crawford, 2004, p. 19). Being a fan originally referred to religious membership, in reference to being a devotee or temple servant (Sullivan, 2013). The term fandom derives from fanatic and kingdom, and it refers to a community of fans that share the same interest. Fandoms are spread throughout various forms of popular culture, media and entertainment. From television (sports and shows), film, and music to literature and other realms of popular culture, fandoms have been around for a long time. An example of a fandom that many can relate to is having a favorite sports team. If a person is a passionate fan of a football team, that fan will wear their favorite player’s jersey, attend every home game or watch every game on television and follow offseason news of the team. Fans within these fandoms vary in

attachment from the casual fan, who hardly collects or buys products and that is not as knowledgeable about their favorite team. In comparison, those who are passionate enthusiasts are extremely knowledgeable on the subject matter and collect various products of that team. Within popular culture, comic book fans are some of the most dedicated and loyal fans. Throughout various social media and comic book related media outlets, fans are showing how they connect, attach or identify with comic books or a specific comic book character.

For example, “Comicbookgirl19” or “CBG19” is a *YouTube* podcaster who was invited to do a *TEDTalk* presentation in 2014, and she used the opportunity to describe how fans use comic book characters to identify with (Legazcue, 2014). She used herself as an example, identifying with the characters of the “X-Men.” CBG19 mentioned how she feels that two of the characters, “Cyclops” and “Jean Grey” are more real to her than actors such as Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie:

The X-Men are a group of mutants with fabulous and terrifying powers, who are shunned and feared by society. When all they want to do is peacefully coexist and just have their right to be themselves in public. This idea really spoke to me when I was a child.

Because, growing up I was a girl who loved watching horror movies, drawing and reading comic books growing up in Alabama. To make matters worse I was born in a family of conservative engineers. Then I met the X-Men and they showed me I wasn’t alone, that there were other people out there who didn’t fit in, who had to fight for their rights to be individuals (Legazcue, 2014).

In an online article, an editor who goes by the name of “BmSt32” writes why he believes superheroes are an inspiration. “I for one am grateful because to me these superheroes aren't only for entertainment value, but they are also an important part of my life. They are important in the

fact that they have helped me do the right thing from time to time and have kept me away from negative influences in my life” (BmSt32, 2013, para. 1). One blogging website, *Tumblr*, is dedicated to fans describing why they love and attach themselves to the medium. Each testimonial includes a brief paragraph about themselves and how comic books have helped them overcome certain obstacles in their life. Along with each testimonial they include a photo of themselves with the social media hashtag “#iamcomics” or “#wearecomics” (Edidin et al., 2013). A hashtag (#) is a phrase or word that is preceded by the hash (#) character, and it is used on social media websites like *Twitter* or *Tumblr* to be a descriptive label or to build communities around a particular topic (Posch et al., 2013). With each of the “#iamcomics” or “#wearecomics” hashtag, various posts from a diverse community of fans and comic creators express their feelings about how comics help them express their individuality within society. The project is meant to show how comic books bring solidarity to people of all ethnic backgrounds, genders and sexual orientations.

In another interesting article, in Mexico City, there was a recent art exhibition featuring various Batman cowls painted and decorated by a variety of artists (De Castro, 2015). The author discusses how Mexicans can identify with a character like “Batman” since they live in a country similar to “Gotham” with high levels of crime and corruption. “He’s a normal human being that uses his own means to fight for good” (De Castro, 2015, para. 10). Mexican culture is also infused into the art show with Batman cowls that look like an Aztec warrior, a mariachi, Aztec gods and one with a “Day of the Dead” motif. The museum director describes how Mexicans identify with Batman: “Mexicans can easily identify with Batman. He’s a superhero without superpowers. Batman only has his conviction to fight against injustice and this is what ultimately resonates with Mexican fans.”

In addition, this article is relevant towards my research project as it focuses on the identity of a community based on a comic book character. De Castro compares Mexico City to Gotham relating it to the high levels of crime and corruption within the political system. Furthermore, this article becomes an issue of debate about class and culture. The art exhibition can be a symbolic representation of good and evil and/or justice and corruption, due to the fact that both Mexico City and Gotham represent societal issues. In fact, ironic cultural aspects found in this article insinuate issues of high and low forms of art, because of the viewpoints of many critics and scholars who debate about comic books as a form of art.

Another example of how fans such as these attach to or relate to these iconic comic characters is shown in a documentary called *Legends of the Knight* (Culp, 2013). The documentary examines various people who are fans of Batman, and that have used the character inspiration and to better themselves and those around them. Two of the examples in the film are men who dress in costume as Batman, and while in costume they help their communities or children's hospitals around the nation. Others use the character to inspire and motivate themselves while keeping a "never give up" attitude while trying to overcome a disability, handicap or any challenges that life might throw at them. The movie producer of several Batman films and the first instructor of an accredited course on comic books, Michael Uslan appears in the film. Uslan describes how comic books have changed his life.

...I looked for refuge. I looked for a safety net. I looked for a safe place and my safe place was the world of comic books. So I was able to find a spot on the playground or up in a tree house or in my room and delve into the world of superheroes." (Culp, 2013)

Another example of attaching to a comic book character is a bit different. One comic book fan that had just become a father was ecstatic about introducing his son to superheroes or as the fan

described, “larger-than-life characters to identify with and look up to” (Griffo, 2014, para. 1). The man found out his son was born with Down syndrome and was worried that due to his genetic condition he will not find a superhero with which to connect. The father decided to create “Metaphase,” a new superhero with Down syndrome that is based on his son. “He deserves to have characters who are just like him, doing ‘super’ things. He should be able to dream just as big as anyone else, believe that anything is possible” (Griffo, 2014, para. 2). Reece wrote a book for his son, but also to inspire other fans of all ages to see that people with Down syndrome can be productive.

Examples such as these on social media and community events like *TEDTalk*, documentaries or comic conventions show how comic books and characters are further impacting society. These characters affect the lives of people in ways that many disregard and sometimes even laugh at. To some fans, these characters are a part of their everyday lives, personality and psyche. Such examples demonstrate how this study will contribute to scholarly work, but also for other people and reasons.

Finally, another research problem found is the lack of research on comic books specifically within communication research. Comic books are a medium that can blend with multiple forms of media, aside from the actual books. The statistics and examples provided in this introduction are just a few key examples of how influential comic books are towards popular culture. Within this study, comic book culture and comic related media will be explored even further, with hope that future scholars explore these forms of media and culture. To illustrate the need to investigate comic books and comic book fans in this study, the following review of literature will provide: a brief history of comic books, various themes found within comic studies literature and comic book fandom research. In addition, research questions will provide

momentum as a navigation tool for this study. The following are research questions that will drive this research project:

R1 – How do demographics affect fandom? Which fans have a parasocial relationship with their favorite character?

R2 – What impact do other comic book related media (movies, video games, etc.) have on the fan?

R3 –How do comic books or their favorite character(s) impact, influence or inspire the fan's life?

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE: Comic Book Media and Fandom

2.1 A Brief History of U.S. Comic Books

A variety of comic historians have used various eras and categories to describe the history of comic books. A justification for having a historical background within the literature review is to demonstrate the significance of how comic books have become a product of the time in which they were written. Also, this section informative for anybody with no prior historical knowledge of the comic book medium, and will begin with the traditional historical descriptions. For example, mass media scholar and author Laurence Maslon and documentary filmmaker Michael Kantor divided the history of comics into three sections: I. “Truth, Justice, and the American Way” (1938 – 1954), II. “Great Power, Great Responsibility” (1955 -1987), III. “A Hero Can Be Anyone” (1988 – 2013) (Maslon & Kantor, 2013). In a traditionalist fashion, historians use ages like the “Golden Age of Comics” or “Silver Age of Comics” and so on.

With suspenseful, action packed stories and stunning artwork, readers of all ages became immersed in a new world with exciting and endless possibilities. Early comic strips like *Flash Gordon* (1934), *Dick Tracy* (1931), and *Famous Funnies* (1934) were the inspiration and beginnings of the comic book industry. Detective Comics, later known as DC Comics, hired writer Jerry Siegel and artist Joe Shuster to create a new character for *Action Comics* #1 which sold for only 10 cents in June 1938, and this marks the beginning of the “Golden Age of Comics.” According to Morrison (2011), the Golden Age of Comics (1938 – 1950) also includes the birth and first appearances of Superman and Batman, who at the time fought gangster or mob related characters (a major public concern at the time). After 1939, the major publishers released

about 50 various superhero-based comic books, essentially creating a new industry (Kantor, 2013).

The “Silver Age of Comics” (1956 -1970) was the era of the self-aware superheroes developing more humanistic personalities and becoming more involved with real world issues and social problems (Rubin, 2012). This era also brought out many of the characters loved today in the Marvel Universe. Many fans have since dubbed the Silver Age as the “Marvel Age” of comics. The Marvel Age of Comics introduced characters such as the “Fantastic Four,” “The Incredible Hulk” and “Spider-Man” (Genter, 2007).

Meanwhile, the “Bronze Age of Comics” (1970-1985) included some of the most infamous storylines in comics including *Amazing Spider-Man* #122 (1973), which includes the death of Peter Parker’s girlfriend Gwen Stacy and the death of the villain “Green Goblin.” Another memorable storyline came from *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* #85 (1971), where “Green Arrow’s” sidekick “Speedy” is caught using drugs (Jacobs & Jones, 1985). That same year, Stan Lee, who is known as one of the all time great writers of comic books, was approached by the United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare to do a comic book story about drug abuse. Lee ended up writing a three-part story featuring Spider-Man, for *Amazing Spider-Man* #96-98 (1971). The two significant moments of this particular story arc are the story’s topic and the fact that the Comics Code Authority (CCA) actually banned the story. Lee ignored the ban and ran the story without the CCA seal of approval (Kantor, 2013). Other darker social themes like these were being introduced into comics around this era.

It was not until the “Dark Age of Comics” (late 1980s and early 1990s) that comic books were really taken as a serious art form, with more adult related comics books like *Watchmen* (1986) and *The Dark Knight Returns* (1986) (Hogan, 2009; Morrison, 2011). In this era, new

independent comic book companies were being created, and in 1983 Kevin Eastman and Peter Laird created a now defunct Mirage Studios. That same year, they created the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (1984), who were meant to be spoofs of popular 1980s characters from *Daredevil* (1964), *New Mutants* (1982), *Cerebus* (1977) and *Ronin* (1983). Viacom now owns the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* franchise, and the comics are published under IDW Publishing. IDW Publishing started in 1993 and has since grown into a large comic book publisher. IDW releases comics like *30 Days of Night* (2002), *Ghostbusters* (2013), *Locke and Key* (2008) and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (2011). Dark Horse Comics was created in 1986 and is still a strong force in the comics industry with comics featuring Mike Mignola's *Hellboy* (1993) and *Aliens* (1988) (based on the *Aliens* [1979-present] film franchise). One of the independent companies that has made the strongest impact is Image, which was created in 1992. Image Comics includes comic books like Todd McFarlane's *Spawn* (1992), Robert Kirkman's *The Walking Dead* (2003) (the comic book that inspired the current hit television show), and most recently the critically acclaimed *Saga* (2012) from Brian K. Vaughn.

The modern era of comics became known as the "Renaissance" (late 1990s – 2011) with books like *All-Star Superman* (2005) and *Ultimate Spider-Man* (2000) that still keep with the traditions of the past by incorporating humanistic qualities to the characters, making them more relatable to the readers of the modern era. Publisher Marvel Comics even included the tragedy of 9/11 in their comics, since most of their heroes are based in New York City (Morrison, 2011). Wildstorm Comics, a now defunct, adult or mature related subdivision line of DC Comics included two homosexual superheroes, "Apollo" and "Midnighter," who later get married in the comic series *The Authority* (1999) (Rubin, 2012).

In the current era, or the “Digital Age,” as I will now refer to it (2012 - present), both major companies DC Comics and Marvel Comics took all their characters and rebooted all their series. DC Comics called their universal reboot “The NEW 52” and Marvel dubbed their reboot, “Marvel NOW.” These reboots modernized the characters even more, giving the characters significant changes in storylines, origins, and even their looks, by changing the costumes, thus making it easier for new fans to jump right into a comic series. With the various reboots from both major comic book publishers and the multiple film franchises, comic books seem to be taking over popular culture.

2.2 Toward Comic Studies

As mentioned in the previous chapter, comic studies is a rapidly growing field of study within academic research. There have been books like *Comics & Ideology* (2001), *A Comics Studies Reader* (2008), and *Comics Versus Art* (2012), which are all academic books filled with essays of comic/graphic novel based research. The essays vary in subjects that analyze comic books using various theoretical perspectives such as historical analysis, critical/cultural theory, feminist criticism, the consideration of comics as art, and queer studies, just to name a few (McAllister et al., 2001; Heer & Worcester, 2009, Beatty, 2012).

A Comics Studies Reader analyzes the various aspects of the medium. The book is divided into four sections: “Historical Considerations,” “Craft, Art and Form, Culture,” “Narrative, Identity” and “Scrutiny and Evaluation.” Coogan (2009) contributes an essay within the book on “The Definition of a Superhero,” which analyzes what it means to be a superhero, from their powers, identity, and costume, in order to develop a specific definition and concept of superheroes. According to Coogan, the definition of the superhero depends on the character’s mission, powers, identity and generic distinction. In addition, a definition of a superhero is

important, because it brings forth unstated assumptions for those that study superheroes and the production of superhero comics. Another important reason for a superhero definition is that the definition evolves with the age or era of the superhero comics.

In another essay from *A Comics Studies Reader*, Mitchell (2009) writes on the representations of image and text media (film, comic books, literature, art) comparing and contrasting them. Within the essay, he compares and contrasts visual techniques of both the Batman film *The Dark Knight* (2008) and Art Spiegelman's graphic novel *Maus* (1991). One interesting example is that they both include a wide range of complexity and self-reflexive techniques, although one is a film and the other is a form of literature. *Maus* adds visuals to its narrative adding symbolic value to the story, while *The Dark Knight* uses a full repertoire of motion picture and video techniques while continuously breaking frames, and using cutting-edge visual representations. Mitchell concludes that visual media and textual media are equally important in their own way and that people should respect them all as their own media format.

Another collection, *Comics & Ideology*, focuses more on the characters and themes within comic books. Various scholars discuss political, economical, feminist, queer studies and historical themes in comic books within this anthology. For example, McAllister et al. contribute a chapter in the book discussing the economics of the U.S. comic book industry in the late 1990s (McAllister et al., 2001). McAllister et al. analyze how the big two (Marvel and DC) and other major comic companies of the United States comic industry develop revenue through comic books and their other licensed merchandise. A different study focuses on the trends within political economy within general media, but specifically the comic book industry in the 1990s. The concluding point of this chapter is to provide insight on the production and distribution not just with comic books, but also with other forms of licensing that feature these comic characters,

within this particular era.

Another chapter in this book reviews various incarnations of Superman, primarily analyzing the 1993 television show *Lois & Clark: The New Adventures of Superman* (Gordon, 2001). This essay examines three components of the character: nostalgia, myth and ideology. Gordon mentions that through the various incarnations of Superman, he represents aspects of our past that will always be reinvented and repackaged to the audience in a different fashion. He also adds that our idea or nostalgic interpretation of the character is adding to the hero's ideology. By using characters like Superman as a marketing tool, the fans memory and nostalgia will become a memorable experience with our consumption.

Meanwhile, Franklin discusses the audience reactions to characters coming out in comic books (Franklin III, 2001). Most of the comments presented in this chapter seem to be emphasizing the acceptance that many fans have towards LGBT characters, such as, "you're doing a good job in depicting gays as real people" (Franklin III, 2001, p. 228). Franklin argues that this study is important because it informs the comic book community of issues such as featuring LGBT characters, and could point to further research on audience responses towards fictional gay and lesbian characters. Sewell also discusses queer characters in comic strips (Sewell, 2001), analyzing various comic strips such as *Doonesbury* (1970), *For Better or for Worse* (1979), and even comic strips within *XY* magazine, a gay magazine. Heterosexual authors, who are also predominantly male, write these queer characters and at times encounter negative reactions from readers due to how they are portrayed. According to Sewell, these characters need to have distinguished characteristics that set them apart from heterosexual characters. On the other hand, queer cartoonists include only queer characters or a small amount of heterosexual characters for narrative purposes only. Another part of the study explains that the internet is a

great place for LGBT comic strips, and concludes with hopes that one day mainstream publications like newspapers will be open to the idea of featuring queer comic strips.

Comics Versus Art is another scholarly book by Bart Beatty that analyzes and criticizes high culture and low culture distinctions and artwork. Beatty (2012) examines cartoonist Gary Panter briefly, then focuses on indie/alternative comic magazines, specifically *RAW* (an avant-garde comics anthology by Art Spiegelman and Françoise Mouly) and *BLAB!* (a magazine very similar to *RAW* created by Monte Beauchamp) and their artwork, in order to examine the question of whether they can be considered high or low forms of art. To further the point, Beatty discusses how controversial and progressive Panter's work was, as he straddles the line between high and low culture through his artwork. This leads to an analysis of how these avant-garde comic magazines are intended for a world of cultivated art, art world highbrows, and never for lowbrow comic book fandom (p. 134). *BLAB!* began as an outlet for Beauchamp's growing interest in the relationship of comics, illustration and contemporary design. Eventually, the magazine became a showcase for new wave comics and cutting-edge narrative forms. After an analysis of both magazines, Beatty goes on to discuss various artists and illustrators that were involved in the discussion of lowbrow and highbrow art within various art related magazines. Upon conclusion most of the artists/illustrators/cartoonists involved within these magazines have gone on to work in other forms of media including, gallery art, commercial illustration, art toys and comic books, due to the impact of artistic genres like "pop art." These artists were then seen in a different and higher regard than they ever were before. Other magazines that were inspired by *RAW* and *BLAB!* such as *Juxtapoz* were created later.

Beatty then focuses on the debate on whether comic books should be considered a form of art. The final verdict according to Beatty is that many scholars and critics feel that comic

books are considered more literature than art, due to their narrative form and storytelling.

Although he does add that other critics do feel that comics are a legitimate art form:

“Comics are an art form because they are ‘subversive,’ ...comics are ‘on the edge of artistic endeavor, with nothing to prove and nothing to lose. You might even call them dangerous in the way that true artists are always dangerous.’” (Beatty, 2012, p. 46)

The chapter ends the way it started, by leaving the issue up for debate.

Beatty concludes the book by analyzing the work of artist/writer Chris Ware, who many feel is a true artist within the comic book world. To further the analysis of Chris Ware, the author provides the many achievements of Ware and his work, comparing him to cartoonists and writers like Robert Crumb and Art Spiegelman. Finally, the book ends on the impact and contribution that Ware has made for comic artists entering the art world. Many of the themes found in these academic books such as queer studies and textual and/or visual analysis, just to name a few, occur in other articles and literature within comic studies. Overall the eight theoretical perspectives that were most commonly found in the scholarly literature are: comic studies, gender/queer theory, analysis, historical, identity, education, miscellaneous and fandom.

2.3 Comic Book Studies Debates

Bernard & Carter (2004) analyze the “fourth dimension” within comic books/graphic novels from writer Alan Moore. The fourth dimension is a term that refers to the relationship of space and time where the two converge into multiple dimensions all at once. This article focuses on *Watchmen* (1986), *Batman: The Killing Joke* (1988), and *From Hell* (1989), and it discusses how the use of the fourth dimension is important within the narrative of each story. For example, “Dr. Manhattan,” a character with God-like powers (from *Watchmen*), is a character that never ages and is always aware of what happens in the past, present and future. Another example used

in the study of Moore's use of the fourth dimension or space-time continuum is found within the pages of *Batman: The Killing Joke*. Within this narrative, the story uses images from the past and present to tell an origin story of "the Joker" and later how Batman plans on stopping the Joker.

One qualitative study examines and justifies how comics can be important for instruction and education (Mallia, 2007). The study consists of 90 young students between the ages of 14-15, and they were given three versions of literature to see which version students found more useful as an instructional tool. The first was a text-only version, the second was an illustrated text version, and the third was a comic book version. The result of the study was that the comic book version was a great instructional tool, if not the best of the three. Students said that due to the fact that the narrative was in sequence and that it was aided by images and character treatment, it helped them learn. It provided assistance with retention similar to that of step-by-step illustrations. All in all, this study resulted in illustrating how comic books can be a beneficial instructional tool.

Meanwhile, Meskin (2007) analyzes the "true definition" of comics. The study provides various definitions of comic books, including definitions from top comic scholars like Scott McCloud, Greg Hayman and Henry John Pratt. It then distinguishes that comic books are different from children's picture books. After analyzing the various definitions and trying to figure out which truly defines comic books, Meskin concludes the study by discussing how more people should think of comic books as an art form, rather than not.

Narrative aspects within comic books are the main focus of analysis in another article. Pratt (2009) discusses the literary narrative dimension found within comic books and then goes into detail about the literary dimension and how it shapes the reader's experiences of narrative within comic books. To sum up the article briefly, it describes how the textual context of comic

books, such as dialogues, leads to the narratives and provides the reader with a way to follow the story, similar to literature. Another study focuses on the Comic Arts Conference (held within the *San Diego Comic Con*) and emphasizes the importance of comic studies within scholarly research (Smith, 2010). Smith goes on to describe the various panels and people who are at the conference and are promoting comic studies, such as Andrew Friedenthal who researched Wonder Woman within 1970s feminist discourses about the famous feminist Gloria Steinem, or Casey Alt's examination of Marvel's attempt to create a black superhero "Black Panther" to demonstrate the importance of diversity in the 1960s.

Howes (2010) analyzes indigenous writing & history and comics side by side, connecting the two. An example used in the study was from Scott McCloud who says that indigenous groups like the Aztec and Egyptians used different techniques like tomb paintings as forms of sequential art, thus leading to the idea of those images as early forms of comics. Ultimately, Howes concludes the study by saying that by viewing the indigenous writing and history of comics side by side, there is clear evidence to prove that visual texts are serious and legitimate for scholarly research. Another article focuses on the historiography of comic art scholarship and why it took so long for scholars to use comics as a topic for research (Lent, 2010). To illustrate this research, Lent examines various regions of the world including Europe, Japan, China, Australia and Canada, all of which were ahead of the United States in doing scholarly research on comic books. The study ends by noting how comics as a field of study became more acceptable for research in the 1980s, with reasons including changing negative attitudes and changing perceptions that many had about comic books, the fact that comics were no longer being ignored due to their impact on popular culture and the global economy, and

lastly, graduate students finally feeling comfortable enough to approach their professors about using comic art as a topic of research for their thesis and/or dissertation.

Lewis (2010) also researches textual and visual communication through comic book storytelling. For example, Lewis examines how comic book text and art are theoretically supposed to tell the same story, though both the art and text represent a specific point in the story, but not necessarily coincide with each other. To further this example, captions representing the character's thoughts are written and the character is jumping off of a building to save someone in trouble. In the reverse example, word balloons are shown conveying a couple fighting "off page," while the image shown "on page" is a young child crying in bed. A different article discusses imagery through comic books, as it focuses on line work, color, composition, shape and amount of realism (Medley, 2010). This study also focuses on how comic book artists try to balance their detail between realism and abstract caricatures, and discusses how readers explain why abstracted images are effective for narrative and easier to interpret visually.

Another author provides a brief discussion on the importance of comic studies in the academy (Ndalianis, 2011). Various points of importance included that comic books are a medium that is older than film, television, and video games; second, that comic book films have been a dominant force within the film industry; and finally, that comic book fans who have become scholars have taken their passion and realized that there is a need for research for such an underexplored medium. In another study, Crutcher (2011) dissects five of the highest selling "Batman" stories: *Arkham Asylum: A Serious House on Serious Earth* (1989), *Batman: The Killing Joke* (1988), *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* (1986), *Batman: Knightfall* (1993), and *Batman: Hush* (2002), analyzing the complexity of the writing and artwork. To put it briefly, the author sums up the complexity of comics and graphic novels with three points: medium, stories

and character. Through the medium, creators are able use their craft to control and build the atmosphere, environment, and characters. The stories in graphic novel format dive into political and cultural topics, the human condition, and duality of personas. Finally, characters are created and developed in such ways that they are coherent and relevant to the reader.

Another author interprets the terms and meanings of comics and graphic novels, (Labio, 2011). According to Labio, comics are complicated to define because some definitions include a story with a few panels while others include a story that is hundreds of pages long, and that some include words while others do not. Also, while graphic novels are usually defined as a compilation or an umbrella term for a whole genre, the term is also used as a “polishing” device to clean the up the “low culture” image of comic books. Finally, the author adds that no matter how comics or graphic novels are defined, they are still works that are often deemed unworthy of critical attention, due to the fact that they are thought to be for lower, less-literate classes and children.

Cohn (2012) provides a thorough analysis of visual narrative structure within comic books. Within this study, the theory of narrative grammar is discussed and how it is used within comic books. Narrative grammar uses narrative categories that help map events and roles related to the sequence. Cohn does note that this study could be useful not just for comic scholars but also for linguistics scholars, and it focuses on sentence structure and visual narratives as well. In another study, participants were given blank comic book panels to see how they read or comprehend panels and layouts, and whether the Z-path reading style is the best (Cohn, 2013). The Z-path reading style is very similar to the reading style used with literature, reading from left to right and then on to the next panel or text. The study notes how there are about twelve different ways to read a comic book, depending on the layout, of course.

Otherwise, artistry within comic books is the focus of another article, as the author cites artistry as “invisible labour” within the comic book publishing industry (Murray, 2013). In addition, Murray describes the impact and importance that artists have while helping comic book authors bring the script to life. According to another article (Romero-Jódar, 2013), one scholar offers a proposal for classifying the different types of texts that fall under the term comics and comic books. The author also discusses how a new term, “iconical discourse community” can describe them.

Finally, Deazley (2014) analyzes the copyright system for scholarly writing in the United Kingdom, in order to reproduce images and text from published comics and graphic novels without having to ask the copyright owner for permission, while Mitchell (2014) discusses how comics are a medium like film or novels, and that they should be treated with respect. One other study debates whether comic books are considered art, and again this author seems to believe that comics are forms of art since they stimulate the imagination through text and imagery (Gunning, 2014).

2.4 Gender and Queer Studies within Comic Book Research

Interestingly, comic studies also seem to have their own sub-category of gender and queer studies. For example, Palmer-Mehta and Hay (2002) analyze a story arc from *Green Lantern* which focuses on “Green Lantern” helping his openly homosexual friend after he gets beaten up by a group of men. The article focuses on homosexual violence and discrimination, the reaction or retaliation Green Lantern takes towards the group of men and how the audience reacted towards these themes. Brown (2006) examines two volumes of *Y: The Last Man*, “Girl on Girl” (2005) and “Safeword” (2004), in order to illustrate the opposition of queerness and heteronormativity. Emad (2006) focuses on Wonder Woman and analyzes her character using

various themes such as, mythology, identity, feminism and a discussion of her body image that changes throughout her history. Another article focuses on *Love & Rockets* (1982) by Jaime Hernandez, which was one of nine adult comic books that was investigated and banned by the Directorate of Publications in South Africa (Saxey, 2006). In addition, the study focuses on queer identity and the sexual nature within *Love & Rockets* narrative.

The female character “Araña” is the main focus of an article that analyzes gender and racial stereotypes, and the over sexualized nature of the character (McGrath, 2007). Meanwhile, another article focuses on the choice to change “Robin” (Batman’s sidekick) from a male character to a female character in the 1986 graphic novel, *The Dark Knight Returns* (Tipton, 2008). In addition to analyzing the new female Robin (Carrie Kelly) and Batman dynamic, this article also describes the homoerotic sub-text that critics have assumed that Batman and the other (male) Robins have had throughout the years. In a textual and visual analysis by Shaw (2009), lesbian comic artists are analyzed to see how they represent and define lesbian identity in and out of the comic book community. Each of the four comic artists analyzed represented their own version of what being a lesbian meant to them, both in reality and through their comics, discussing themes such as: dating, oppression, and coming out, just to name a few examples.

A different article focuses on race within feminist movements, which are analyzed within Alan Moore’s *Swamp Thing* (1985) Issue #40, “The Curse” (Condis, 2010). Within this article, Condis discusses Native American females and overall female oppression within masculine societies. For example, the main female character of the story notices images on her way home that depicts and labels women as either housewives or as sexual objects. With regard to Native American oppression or discrimination in the story, Native American women are portrayed as dark, dirty and dangerous, and during their menstruation cycle they are put into a quarantine to

“protect” the tribe.

Alan Moore’s *Watchmen* (1986) is a topic in two articles, both of which focus on the representation of the female characters within the story (Petrovic, 2010; Keating, 2012). Petrovic (2010) discusses the representations of the female characters within the graphic novel and the 2009 film that was based on the graphic novel. Meanwhile, Keating (2012) analyzes the superhero tropes and gender identity within the female characters of the graphic novel. A common theme found within both articles is the discussion of female costumes, as they tend to be more of a “fetish” suit than an actual superhero costume. For example, “Silk Spectre’s” costume looks more like lingerie than a functional superhero costume.

Bitchy Butch: World’s Angriest Dyke! (1989) is the topic of discussion within one essay that discusses counterintuitive identifications political and queer identity (Howard, 2012). In other words, the essay focuses on the visual and textual narrative of *Bitchy Butch*, and how the comic tries to represent lesbian culture and identity, while still being considered a part of “unpopular culture.” The article ends by saying that it wishes that it were as easier to represent lesbian culture in comics, and that steps in the right direction such as DC Comics’ *Batwoman* character (who is an openly gay character in mainstream comics) have been made. North (2013) analyzes the character “Black Cat” from Harvey Comics. It describes her role as a female character/hero and compares her to the most famous female superhero, Wonder Woman. Uoz (2013) writes about the Spanish comic “Manuel,” a surrealist comic about the journey of a homosexual man who has a sexual relationship with another man. It discusses the erotic themes and the use of surrealist art within the comic. In an essay by Parasecoli (2014), he analyzes the first ten issues of the comic book *Chew* (2009) and discusses various forms of masculinity, connections towards food, identity and masculinity. Parasecoli compares the masculinity of other

male comic characters like Superman and Captain America to “Tony Chu,” who is the main character of the comic series.

2.5 Analytical Literature within Comic Studies

Analytical literature within comic research can vary from rhetorical, textual and/or visual analysis. For Fisher (2006), the 2005 film *Batman Begins* is the focus of research as the film is compared to gothic literature (Fisher, 2006). In addition, the article focuses on the capitalistic themes within the film, such as Bruce Wayne being in charge of his family’s company Wayne Enterprises, or that Gotham city is in a crime wave while the city is in the grip of an economic depression. Another essay focuses on the historiography of Alan Moore’s work (Carney, 2006). With this historiography of Moore’s work, various themes were discovered such as: the search for a utopian society, the use of simultaneity or multiple events happening at the same time, some of his characters want to change the course of history by causing a catastrophic event, and finally, the use of history within comic books.

Corey & Hall (2006) visually and textually analyze the graphic novel *Kabuki* (1994). The two authors focus on identity and Ukiko’s (the main character) development or as the researchers call it, metamorphosis. Throughout the study, various Japanese cultural references are mentioned throughout the article (e.g., shoji [Japanese calligraphy], and kanji [Japanese for song, dance, action or art]). Tobe (2006) visually and textually analyzes *Elektra: Assassin* (1986) by discussing the theme’s time and memory, the way time is used in the story, the use of space and the environment, and the gender identity of the title character “Elektra.” The author concludes and summarizes the study by stating, “While making the reading difficult, the temporal and spatial disparities only emphasize this closure. *Elektra: Assassin* provides an excellent illustration of how the combination of image and text provides for a deeply layered feminist

reading of the metaphysics of sexual difference” (Tobe, 2006, para. 39). Camus (2007) analyzes how the comic book writer Neil Gaiman focuses on religious aspects of his work and religious aspects of his personal life. In fact, the research begins by describing Gaiman’s Jewish background, and later focuses on the use of religion and religious symbolism within his writings.

Another textual and visual analysis of *Daredevil: Wake up* (2002) (by Brian Michael Bendis and David Mack) discusses psychological themes such as posttraumatic syndrome and also various disabilities (mental and physical) within the story (Krueger, 2008). Sharkey (2008) textually and visually analyzes *The Sandman* by Neil Gaiman, and this article discusses the themes of religion, gender, identity, philosophical theories of Sigmund Freud within the *Sandman* series. Greenblatt (2009) examines the sidekicks of *V for Vendetta* (1982) and *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* (1986), and their relationships with their hero counterparts. In summary, this study has four sections: the first focuses on the integrity of the two sidekick characters, “Evey” from *V for Vendetta* and “Carrie Kelly” from *The Dark Knight Returns*, the second discusses how both sidekicks are rescued by the hero as children, the third discusses how both the sidekicks and heroes influence each other and balance each other out, and the last discusses the transition from sidekick to fellow hero.

Murray (2011) focuses on gothic themes within the *Hellblazer* comic, primarily the *Empathy is the Enemy* (1988) story arc. One example of a gothic theme used in the story arc is the location in Glasgow, Scotland, which was depicted as a contemporary gothic location, as in being very gloomy, which is a perfect setting for a horror based comic. White-Schwoch & Rapp (2011) analyze the cognitive psychology of *Watchmen*. This study also examines the way comic book readers comprehend or become informed by the narrative, gaining knowledge along the way. The study concludes by mentioning that comics can serve as a way to encourage the

development of critical literary skills with the use of integrating textual and visual forms of narrative.

In another study, ecological issues within Alan Moore's *Swamp Thing* are discussed and examined as the character is referred to the "Green Man" (Beineke, 2010). According to the study, the "Green Man" is an ancient symbol that was adapted by cultural imagination to fit within the structure of society and time. Additionally, Moore uses the "Green Man" idea as a way to expose ecological issues, and in return offers a positive message of hope for future treatment of the environment. Another study focuses on the various interpretations of Alan Moore's version of Superman (Teiwes, 2011). These various interpretations are examined, compared and contrasted with characters similar to the Man of Steel such as "Supreme" and "Miracleman." To summarize, Moore's version of the Superman like characters are not the definitive versions that readers think of right away when it comes to Superman, but his stories led to thought provoking and stimulating stories that were influential toward future comic book writers.

Balinisteanu (2012) compares the female figures from the comic book, *Tank Girl* (1990), and the "Borg Queen" from the film *Star Trek: First Contact* (1996). The author analyzes the Goddess ethos of two female characters from *Tank Girl* and *Star Trek: First Contact*, and the study examines heteroglossia, or, "forms of discourse and derived modes of socialization that parody official, centralized, and institutionalized discourse" (Balinisteanu, 2012, p. 9). Furthermore, the article focuses on nature versus culture, especially focusing on the "Borg Queen" from *Star Trek* who must deal with being a feminized character, while she must also maintain a masculine position in government. Finally, the study analyzes social and antisocial myths within the comic and film, discussing how the two female characters carry the role of

masculine warriors and leaders.

One other article (Aldama, 2013) is a full analysis and evaluation of Gilbert Hernández's graphic novels *Chance in Hell* (2007), *Speak of the Devil* (2008), and *Troublemakers* (2009). To summarize the study, the author describes Hernández's work as noir fiction or as "B-fiction," and mentions how powerful, yet dim Hernández's stories are by conveying a message of realistic struggles of the world because of capitalist values, poverty, and a futureless society. In a different article, scholar Bukatman (2014) discusses the art of "Hellboy" and other comic books, comparing them to fine art. For example, the author examines the art of a page from *Hellboy: The Island* (2005) and contrasts Mike Mignola's artwork to that of other comic book artists:

...a general tendency towards a kind of photorealism all permit an *Iron Man* film and an *Iron Man* comic book to share attributes. Hellboy has little of this. The colors are largely flat, the palette is more expressionist than naturalistic..." (Bukatman, 2014, p. 108).

2.6 Historical Analysis In Comic Book Research

As scholars note, history and comic books are always going to go "hand in hand" with each other. History influences the writers of comic books to write stories about war, civil rights, class, feminism, terrorist attacks and various key moments in history. For example, Trushell (2004) uses historical analysis to describe how science fiction based literature led and inspired the birth of comic books. Furthermore, he describes how science fiction and pulp magazines led to the creation of superheroes of the "Golden Age" and the "Silver" (or "Marvel") age of comics. Another study focuses on the historical analysis of *G.I. Joe* during its run at Marvel Comics from 1982 - 1994 (Norlund, 2006). The article compares the fictional "Cobra" villains from the *G.I. Joe* series, to real life terrorists such as Al Qaeda. In addition, various themes such as propaganda, nationalism and identity are also discussed within the article.

Genter (2007) discusses the birth of Marvel Comics and compares it to the culture of the Cold War (1950-1966). For example, the “Fantastic Four” were introduced in 1961 as a family of superheroes to try and replicate the idea of a nuclear family (a couple and their children, usually regarded as a basic social unit) and an embodiment of human traits. Another example was *The Incredible Hulk*, who was created in 1962 as a result of scientific developments and the popular culture fascination with nuclear holocaust, and second, of the growing crisis of U.S. masculinity that was put upon U.S. families. Wright (2008) provides a historiography of comic books from 1968 – 1974, focusing on social and political issues. For example, comic writer Danny O’Neil and artist Neil Adams wrote a 1970s issue of *Green Arrow/Green Lantern* where “Green Lantern” became the voice of moderate right winged politics and “Green Arrow” became the voice of the left wing politics, and the creators used these characters to voice their political views.

Since it was first published in 1963 the *X-Men* comic book series continues to discuss various political and social themes. For example, Fawaz (2011) analyzes political and social themes such as identity, equality, civil rights, class, race and feminism within *X-Men* stories. Another study examines the classic DC Comics story arc “Crisis on Infinite Earths” (1985), which is textually and visually analyzed by Friedenthal (2011). This article also provides a brief history of DC Comics before (pre-crisis) and after (post-crisis) the event of “Crisis on Infinite Earths.” Furthermore, the analysis concludes and summarizes the impact of “Crisis on Infinite Earths” by saying that it was one of the few crossover stories that met fans’ expectations and that changed the DC superhero universe, while at the same time being an engaging and enjoyable story.

The topic of the terrorist attacks on September 11th, 2001 was a topic of at least two research articles. One researcher compares the use of propaganda within comic books during World War II to those after the September 11th attacks (Scott, 2007). As a final point, Scott mentions that comics have never been a direct or very effective form of propaganda, although as long as comic books take real life events and use them within the narrative, they are teaching the readers (children and adults) what to think. The other article about to September 11th discusses how various comic publishers, writers and artists addressed the events from the September 11th terrorist attacks (Worcester, 2011). Not only does the author mention how mainstream comic book publishers DC Comics and Marvel wrote stories that addressed 9/11, it also goes on to mention how independent companies were writing stories about the terrorist attacks, the firefighters and policemen/women that saved lives, and comics that parody the government.

A discussion of how U.S. comic books have grown in popular culture and graduate research was the focus of another article (Chambliss, 2012). In addition, the article focuses on how comic books offer an opportunity to examine U.S. history on multiple levels. For example, “Iron Man” first appeared in 1963 during the Cold War era and was introduced as a reflection of military, technology and industry within the United States. Otherwise, D’Amore (2012) focuses on the feminist perspective, female superhero identity, and how women were treated between 1963 through 1980. The three characters he focuses on are “Storm” from the *X-Men*, “Sue Richards” (a.k.a “Invisible Girl/Woman”) from the *Fantastic Four*, and “Jean Grey” (a.k.a. “Marvel Girl”) from the *X-Men*.

Another article examines the earliest respectful representations of African Americans in mainstream U.S. comic books, focusing on three war comics of the 1960s (Hayton & Albright,

2012).³ Various themes such as propaganda, race, civil rights and identity are all mentioned within the article. The final analysis of the article states that the content within these war comics are aimed at readers that are older and also at African Americans. Interestingly, some comics were intended to be propaganda as the publishers were paid to create stories to promote the military, while others were written to reflect what was going on at the time. Another article is a historical analysis that examines romantic comic books of the post World War II era (Gardner, 2013). In conclusion, Gardner states that girls who read these romance comics are exposed to different ways of how women should act, how they are conflicted, and how they resolve their problems. Scully and Moorman (2014) focus on vigilante characters from the 1980s such as “The Punisher” and “Green Arrow,” by examining their comic books visually and textually. In summary, these vigilante comic books were a reflection of their time, as people of the 1980s were angry at the court system and the police for not doing their jobs. These comics represent a moment of resistance that led to the creation of a few iconic characters in comic books.

2.7 Identity in Comic Book Research

Identity (race, nationality, culture and class) within comic books can be seen in various ways. Rivera (2007) discusses comic books where African American artists/writers began to represent black culture and race issues to further the idea of blackness. The main character in focus is “Dethlok,” who is a cyborg that wrestles with cultural alienation, split subjectivity, and a troubling sense of dehumanization. *Truth: Red, White and Black* (2003) is a comic book mini-series about an African American man who becomes “Captain America.” This particular story is analyzed with an emphasis on the themes of racism, race, culture, identity and civil rights (Wanzo, 2009). To put it briefly, Wanzo describes the mini series as racially melancholic, since

³ The three comics that were the focus of this article were *Sgt. Fury & The Howling Commandos* (1963), DC Comics *Our Army at War* (1952) and *Captain America in Tales of Suspense* (1964).

the hero “Isaiah” embodies loss and tragedy by losing friends and even his own sanity, although he still embodies the traits of heroism and hope.

Regarding identity one particular author, Jason Dittmer, stands out because of the various articles that he has written on comic characters and the issue of identity. Two research articles are about Captain America. The first examines the character and focuses on U.S., national identity, geopolitics, and how Captain America’s nationalism has changed post September 11th (Dittmer, 2005). To summarize, this article describes how Captain America has always been an embodiment of U.S. values, the use of territorial symbols to reflect the United States, and finally the use of U.S. geopolitics within the narrative. The second Captain America study focuses on identity and national interest prior to World War II (Dittmer, 2007). This article focuses on the first ten *Captain America* comic books predating the attack on Pearl Harbor, and concludes that various factors led to the shaping of Captain America as a character. Some of these factors include: his creators were both Jewish, Captain America began to fight the Nazis and Japanese before the attack on Pearl Harbor, and Captain America comic books were aimed at children, teenagers and military men.

Dittmer & Larsen (2007) focus on “Captain Canuck” (the Canadian equivalent to Captain America) and discuss Canadian identity and nationalism within the *Captain Canuck* comic. The article focuses on two perspectives, analyzing the content within larger economic context of Canadian popular culture. For example, using “Robin’s Donuts,” a stand-in for popular Canadian establishment, Tim Horton’s, the Canadian equivalent to Dunkin’ Donuts. Second, to examine how the Canadian audience responds to the context and if they identify with Captain Canuck’s Canadian nationalism. Overall, the audience seemed to respond and identify with Captain Canuck as he reflected Canadian national identity, so much so that a new Captain Canuck series

is in print and a Captain Canuck movie began pre-production in 2011.

Finally, Dittmer (2011) visually and textually analyzes “Captain Britain” (the British equivalent to Captain America) and focuses on the identity of that character. The article mentions how the character was made to be a nationalist hero for Great Britain, so audiences could have a hero with which to identify. One of the key facts that is found within this analysis is that of Captain Britain’s origin in which he received his powers through magic, in comparison to Captain America’s origin that used science. Fans had mixed feelings about the character’s magical powers, and they were later downplayed in the narratives and taken out all together in future stories. The audience also mentioned how the character felt as if it were an American trying to understand British identity and nationalism, hence the use of magic and mysticism, due to medieval stereotypes of British culture.

Another article examines Latino/a identity within the comics of Gilbert Hernández (Glaser, 2010), discussing the idea of borderlands, both transnational (U.S. and México) and borders within comic books (stereotypes, race, culture). It is evident through this analysis that Hernández’s goal is to tell stories that are meant to entertain and engage readers, while portraying Latino/as in a humanized fashion and without racial stereotypes, making it easier for Latino/a readers to identify with characters. Manthei (2011) analyzes the work of Brazilian comic creator Mauricio de Sousa. In this article, Manthei describes de Sousa’s work by using many themes such as: settings, language, class, culture and identity in Brazilian culture within his comic *Chico Bento* (1961). To sum up this article, the work of de Sousa provides a modern image of Brazilian culture and society by showing the various historical figures, classes and cultural relationships through cartoon like visuals and text.

Watchmen (1986) is the a topic for yet another article examining the themes of U.S. and national identity within the graphic novel (Prince, 2011). One of the examples here is that of “Dr. Manhattan” and “The Comedian” and their roles in the U.S. military to help win the Vietnam War. Both Dr. Manhattan and the Comedian are used as metaphors for U.S. foreign policy. Prince also adds that Dr. Manhattan is a representation of U.S. security and global prestige, as the U.S. government uses him to be a weapon and diplomat. Otherwise, González (2013) analyzes the use of spatiality in Jaime Hernández’s *Vida Loca: The Death of Speedy Ortiz* (1987) and discusses gangland violence and Latino/a culture and identity. To conclude, González mentions how spatiality is a very important part of graphic narrative, and that is what connects the artist and reader with the transitions of the narrative.

Another researcher also wrote two research articles on identity within comic books. Royal (2010) analyzes the portrayal of Native Americans within the noir genre of comic books, and the comics discussed within this study are *Streetwolf* (2013), *Scalped* (2007), and *Skinwalker* (2003). As a final point, contemporary Native American noir as a genre gives Native American characters equal treatment in comparison to the Caucasian characters in more mainstream comics. For example, the use of the troubled history of Native American culture, mythologies and the social challenges told in contemporary narrative. Meanwhile, Jewish comic creators are the focus of another article as one author provides a historiography on Jewish identity within comic books (Royal, 2011). This article begins at the very beginnings of comic book history by mentioning how Jewish people created some of comic book’s greatest characters (for example, how Bob Kane and Bill Finger created Batman).

Likewise, Jewish characters or culture have been featured in different genres of comic books and have helped draw attention toward the importance of Jewish identity and history.⁴ In addition, Jewish culture within comic books is examined again, and two subjects this article discusses are the justification for critically examining the Mahrwood Press Orthodox comics, and the argument of the importance that the Mahrwood Press has on Jewish American literature (Roth, 2012). Second, this study analyzes various works to show examples of a Jewish masculine ethos.

2.8 Education Emphasis in Comic Studies

Another topic that is widely discussed within comic book studies is whether or not comic books are useful for education. Do comic books help students read better? This is the question that is asked in education research within comic studies. For example, Jacobs (2007) examines *Polly & the Pirates* (2005) and how comic books engage students in literacy. This article emphasizes two key ideas: the first is that reading comic books involves complex, multimodal literacy, while the second is that by using comics in classrooms, educators can help students develop as critical and engaged readers of multimodal texts. One author takes a positive approach by describing how comic books help children read and find a love for reading (Kraver, 2010). The main idea of this article is to show the creative process behind comic books that help developing students in academic literacy and composition skills. This article also mentions literary form and the cultural understanding that the readers get from reading comics.

Yet another article analyzes the literary use of comic book characters and the various themes that they represent (Cates, 2011). For example, *Watchmen* is used as a metaphor for talking about politics and the condition of the world, while a book like *Kingdom Come* (1996)

⁴ The various genres that include Jewish characters and culture are: superhero, noir, comics on the Holocaust, comic parodies and instructional comics.

uses religious undertones to describe superheroes like Superman and Wonder Woman, who have God-like superpowers. Low (2012) argues that comic books offer inferences on how readers comprehend the story. The author suggests that more educators, researchers and curriculum writers should use comic books as a teaching tool to explore the medium's full potential. Another qualitative study examines how two teachers attempt to become connoisseurs of comics to help their students with reading (Simon, 2012). While there is only a brief mention of comic books within this article, one teacher does proclaim that he is a fan of comics and believes that they are great teaching tools.

College professor Stergio Botzakis explains why he uses comics and graphic novels in his college classes (Botzakis, 2013). He explains how they are great for discussions on power, justice and ideologies. Another professor uses comic books as modern day mythology to discuss classic mythology, in order engage his students about other cultures (Kremer, 2014). For instance, Kremer uses the 2001 graphic novel *Ultimate Spider-Man: Power and Responsibility* to discuss cultural themes like peer pressure, being a teenage in the United States, searching for identity, loss of innocence, and responsibility versus egoism.

A U.K. study focuses on an extra curricular graphic novel reading group in a middle school (Sabeti, 2014). This study investigates how comic books are the subject matter of complex issues such as low literacy levels, reluctant readers and how comics are a male dominated audience. Struthers (2014) examines how a Christian school uses various forms of mass media, including comic books and graphic novels, to teach biopsychology in the classroom. The graphic novel *The Surrogates* (2006) was used in classrooms to discuss various themes such as biophysics, religion, theological themes, and the use of scripture.

2.9 Miscellaneous Research within Comic Book Research

Kirsch & Olczak (2001) investigated the effects of reading incredibly violent comics. For example, this study used *Curse of Spawn* (1996) to represent extremely violent comics, and *Archie & Friends* (1998) to represent mildly violent comics. After reading six short stories, participants were asked to give their opinions/responses on the matter of violence within comics. In another study, Brody (2004) discusses the trauma that Batman/Bruce Wayne suffers in the 1989 *Batman* film. The trauma that is most notable is that Bruce Wayne lost his parents, leading him to become Batman. To conclude, Brody discusses how Batman is a relatable character due to his traumatic experiences and how he recovers from those traumas.

Another study also focuses on the traumatic experiences of comic characters, and how those affect the narrative of the story (Sandifer, 2008). Specifically, it discusses how these characters are influenced by traumatic situations, and how those lead to various behaviors that stem from those traumas. A character that is frequently mentioned in this article is Spider-Man/Peter Parker. Peter Parker's traumatic experiences include the death of his Uncle Ben and getting bitten by a radioactive spider, but also the death of his girlfriend, Gwen Stacy. The death of Gwen Stacy is said to be of the most shocking moments in comic book history, one that still impacts Spider-Man comics to this day.

Another article discusses the difficulties of publishing a graphic novel due to the various restrictions due to the book's violent subject matter (Campbell, 2004). For example, Alan Moore's 1989 graphic novel *From Hell* was the topic of this study, describing how the book was never published properly in Australia, and how the book was banned by various businesses due to its subject matter of Jack the Ripper. In another study, Fenty et al. (2004) investigate "underground comix" (small press or self-published comic books) and their resurgence on the internet. Underground comix are a genre of comic books that started in the 1960s. They are

usually small press or self-published stories that often feature satire or socially relevant themes. The study goes on to explore the connections between underground comix and web comics. Themes that underground comix and web comics have in common are audience connection and subject matter that are topics of discussion, such as politics, economy or other social issues.

The focus of another study is how comic books can be used in health promotions as a primary or secondary intervention strategy (Branscum & Sharma, 2009). This study mentions how comic books may have benefits when used in education. In regard to health education, comics are not as beneficial due to how vague the information provided is, and it is unknown if participants of the interventions actually read the comic or not. Hogan (2009) analyzes various Iron Man comics and how humanity and technology interact within these comics. To illustrate this research, the author concludes that stories like *Iron Man: Armor Wars* (1987) and *Iron Man: Extremis* (2005) depict “Tony Stark/Iron Man’s” dependency on technology. In the case of *Iron Man: Extremis*, Stark uses technology dependency to upgrade his Iron Man suit armor to become an extension of himself, and by turning his body into a machine with nanotechnology.

Meanwhile, Shannon (2010) contrasts the work of two classic comic artists Wisnor McCay and Robert Crumb. Subject matter and form, along with matters of class, gender and race are all investigated within this article. To summarize, both artists discuss race within their comics, and both use racist imagery, such as black face. Crumb, who is known for the satire and irony within his work, admits that his imagery is racist, but he often includes racist imagery in his work, just to start a conversation about race. The two artists also focus on the U.S. middle class. For example, McCay was more about courting the nuclear family with whimsical and innocent fantasies, in comparison to Crumb, who pushes the boundaries with his imagery by illustrating various sexual fetishes he has of women, drug abuse and mental illness.

Another article criticizes the comic book movie genre, as the author describes that he couldn't care less about these films as they constantly retell origin stories, lack of substance within the script, and over use computer generated imagery (or CGI) within these films (Bukatman, 2011). Rubin (2012) labels superheroes as psychotherapists describing the ways that help readers deal with various situations or traumas and internal conflicts. According to Rubin, superheroes help readers identify with someone that helps them overcome internal conflicts of their own. This study in particular is extremely important for this thesis, as it demonstrates the possibilities of fans attaching themselves to comic characters by having these characters become something more meaningful, than just ink and words on a page.

Tilley (2012) rhetorically analyzes Fredric Wertham's *Seduction of the Innocent* (1954), a book that condemns comic books. In addition, this article discusses how manipulative and exaggerated Wertham's claims were, and it even mentions how Wertham had fabricated evidence to gain tenure. A discussion of musical sequences found within three graphic novels is the focus of one study (Brown, 2013).⁵ For example, *Cages* uses jazz music throughout the story, especially in one chapter, where the main character "Angel" guides the reader through each stage of the chromatic scale. In conclusion, *Scott Pilgrim* and *V for Vendetta* discuss musical timing within the narrative, while *Cages* uses pitches from the chromatic scale as a symbolic and sequential guide for the reader to navigate through various periods for time of the characters in the story.

As a teaching method for surgical education, comics and graphic novels are used to

⁵ The three graphic novels that were discussed in this article were: *Scott Pilgrim vs. The World* (2004), *Cages* (1990) and *V for Vendetta* (1982).

address visuospatial skills⁶ and motor skills, by providing information on patient care, and to provide a well rounded education on the head and neck surgeries (Babain & Chalian, 2014). *A People's History of American Empire* (2008) is the focus of a political analysis, as the author examines politically progressive content that promotes activist learning (Carleton, 2014). To summarize this article, Howard Zinn's (the author of *A People's History of American Empire* [2008]) main purpose of using the comic book medium was to reach a new generation and to connect with them. He also wanted to encourage them to resist US imperialism, and to continue fighting for love, justice and liberation. Da-Silva et. al (2014) compare and contrast arachnid-based superheroes from the two major comic book publishers, Marvel and DC Comics. Notably, there have been 124 arachnid-based comic characters between the years 1930 and 2010. Another interesting fact that this study included was that most of the arachnid-based female characters use some power of fascination or seduction to fight their enemies.

2.10 Fans and Fandom within Comic Book Research

Two research articles on fans are by Stergio Botzakis, and one article is an analysis of adult comic book fans and why comic books are important for literacy (Botzakis, 2009). All participants within the study were male, and the focus is on why these fans read comics. According to the study, male fans read comic books for leisure, temporary shelter from worries, companionship when lonely, and as a mirror that allows them to view themselves and the whole world differently. The other article, by Botzak also focuses on adult comic book readers and is meant to show the meaning making activities found within reading comics (Botzakis, 2011). One fan describes his reading practices as involving himself in a new world, and he also describes how the interactions in the comic books helped him shape how he views these characters. The

⁶ Visuospatial skills are the ability to visually perceive an object and the spatial relationship of that object.

fan also describes how comic books are as important to him as The Christian Bible is to others. He also uses these superhero stories and incorporates them into his own beliefs. This study is crucial research for this thesis, as it is also describing and analyzing the fan attachment in a different manner.

Meanwhile, Lefèvre (2010) analyzes terms and categories of image and narrative books (comics, picture books, artist books and illustrated novels). To be brief, Lefèvre mentions how some word and image combinations cannot be called comics or illustrated novels, because they use different devices for intertwining words and images, such as layout design, graphic design or typography. In regard to graphic novels and the term picture books, the author feels that the terms (graphic novels and picture books) are useful for overall image and narrative books, but it already is a category for major literary publications. Yet another study focuses on comic book fans within comic shops (Woo, 2011). To sum up the study, comic books stores are crucial for comic book culture and fans, as they are a part of a community and social practice. Comic book fans are not only consuming media at these stores, but also participating in social interactions that are relatable and even ritualistic. Beaty (2012) examines comic collectors and why they collect comic books. This author seems to believe that comic books are “low culture,” even though he does mention that some comics are sold at auction houses for large amounts of money. He also goes on to discuss how some of these fans have a “fetish” with collecting comics. Beaty describes this fetish of collecting comics as being an economic and nostalgic fetish, as these fans are trying to recapture something that is missing in their lives.

2.11 Comic Book Fans

Comic book fans can be some of the most loyal and devoted fans. Many enter the genre through different means, some through family members who pass on their love of comics to their

children, others through cartoons or films based on the character that then lead them into comics. For children, the first time reading a comic book and entering the world of superheroes is an eye opening experience. Comic book fans want to be their favorite heroes, dress up like them for Halloween by wearing a mask or cape, buy action figures and reenact certain stories or make up their own. As fans get older they either continue to have some form of fandom or lose a liking to the genre. Those that stick to being fans collect comics, along with various other merchandise, and at times even get tattoos of their favorite character(s). Some even choose a career path in the criminal justice field.

A “casual” fan or consumer is a fan of a certain character, although that person is not collecting merchandise, except for a few shirts or clothing items. This example of a fan is more of a supporter, a passive or an indirect member of a fandom (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998; Crawford, 2004; Sullivan, 2013). The casual fan is not a collector of comics or graphic novels, or if so, rarely. Also, this type of fan knows minimal history of the character, most likely based on cartoons, television shows or films based on the character. To the farthest extreme of fanaticism in the comic book genre is the “producer.” For the purpose of this study, the term “enthusiast” will be a semi-attached fan. Enthusiasts are usually in between a consumer and aficionado, in terms of fanaticism.

According to the fan spectrum in Sullivan’s (2013) research, one of the highest forms of fandom is the “super fan” or aficionado. An aficionado is a person who is dedicated to his or her fandom; they are considered to be true or authentic fans. This type of fan is directly associated and is devoted to their favorite character (Crawford, 2004; Sullivan, 2013). A comic aficionado will know all the history of the character and will also be a collector of a great deal of merchandise, sometimes renovating a room in their home into a mini museum or “secret

hideout” based on their favorite character. Some spend their life savings based on various items of that character. The aficionado adapts their lifestyle based on this character’s supposed morals, beliefs and actions. For example, using the famous phrase from the Spiderman comics and movies, “With great power, comes great responsibility,” some fans take this phrase to heart and follow its message through and through as if they were the character themselves. Using that classic Spider-Man quotation, the fan believes that it is their duty to take responsibility for whatever job or duty they might have. Usually, this type of fan will be seen dressed in a costume of this character that they created or bought, at a comic related event or convention. There are instances where some people become like real life costumed “superheroes,” fighting crime and serving justice in their hometown.

In a recent *ESPN Sports Center* special, a young man who is a mixed martial arts fighter becomes a costumed vigilante on the streets of Seattle, Washington (Arruda, 2015). A young man who calls himself “Phoenix Jones” attempts to help people around Seattle at night and fights Mixed Martial Arts to earn money to support his vigilantism. A documentary called *Superheroes* (2011) describes the lives of other people who are similar to Phoenix Jones and also suit up to fight crime (Barnett, 2011). Both of these are examples of extreme fanaticism by fans. These types of fans are known as “producers,” as they create their own superhero identity and actually attempt to fight crime (Sullivan, 2013). This spectrum of fanaticism in fact, leads to parasocial theory. To further the justification of this research, I will now discuss qualitative interviews as a methodology, give examples of qualitative interviews within mass media research and discuss parasocial theory as it informs this research project.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY: Qualitative Interviews and Parasocial Theory

3.1 Methodological Framework

In the previous chapters, I discussed how comic books have taken over popular culture, and how there is a lack of comic book research in communication, thus, establishing the rationale for this research project. Second, I provided a brief history of comic books, and then analyzed various themes found within the published literature on comic studies, such as feminism, queer studies, comic studies as a subject, visual and textual analysis research, historical research, identity, education issues, miscellaneous research, and fandom. Therefore, this next chapter will focus on the methodology and theoretical frameworks that I will employ for this research on comic book fans. The main methodological tool that I will use for this research is qualitative interviews. This section will therefore focus on literature about this methodology and examples of qualitative interviews in research.

A methodology that is commonly used within communication research is qualitative interviews. Many qualitative communication research methods books introduce young scholars to this methodology (Lindolf & Taylor, 2011; Berger, 2014; Merrigan & Huston, 2015; Du Plooy, 2003). The earliest study found focuses on drugs within the newspapers in Brazil, twenty-two journalists who write on the subject matter were interviewed to describe why they focus on those types of stories (Mastroianni & Noto, 2008). A play called *Inside View* is the focus of the next study, as the play centers on prenatal screenings, exploring the problems for women and health professionals of these prenatal screenings (Hundt et al., 2009). Interviews were conducted to engage audiences in debate, in order to get their reactions and reflections on the problems of prenatal screenings. One exploratory analysis uses qualitative interview methods

to find out what the barriers are that health journalists face while covering health disparities in local media in the northeastern part of the United States (Wallington et al., 2009). Another article examines four studies that describe different forms of gratification that can be associated with the experience of emotions that audiences receive from movies or television (Bartsch, 2012). Regarding Bartsch's article, the only section within this study that uses qualitative interviews, analyzes 28 German-speaking participants' emotions, reactions and experiences to various movies.

Tessier (2012) discusses the evolution of data collecting methods through qualitative interviews. The author also describes how combinations of data collecting techniques are a great substitution for basic data collecting through interviews. A different study examines a specific qualitative interview method called "object interviews" (Nordstrom, 2013). It examines objects (e.g., documents, photographs and other artifacts that are used within historical genealogy) as the main focus of study. Vincze & Holley (2013) examine how minority language newspapers develop positive senses of psychological distinctiveness between the minority and minority language groups. Interviews were used to collect data from four minority language newspapers. Meanwhile, Ross (2014) focused on 31 teachers and students of higher education in the United Kingdom are interviewed about their reflective writing for one of three audiences: assessment criteria, their teachers, and a general "Other." Another study uses qualitative interviews to see how men (heterosexual and homosexual) and women respond toward lesbian protagonists in audiovisual fictions within Spain (Soto-Sanfiel et al., 2014).

3.2 Theoretical Framework

Parasocial theory fits under the category of post-positivist epistemology. Post-positivists believe that the goal of knowledge is to describe a phenomenon that we experience (Trochim,

2006). This epistemological standpoint is based on the empirical epistemological point of view that observation and measurement are at the core of scientific endeavor. Those who believe in empiricism believe that experimentation and the attempts to recognize natural laws through manipulation and observation should be the key approach in the scientific method (Trochim, 2006). According to Okasha, empiricists say that all knowledge comes from experience (2002). Therefore, parasocial theory is a type of theory that can be used to observe audience behavior and also use various techniques like surveys (on or offline) and questionnaires or interviews, to research things such as media dependency, identity and the type of relationship that the audience member might have with their favorite media character. Due to the fact that parasocial theory uses observational and measurement techniques like those mentioned above, parasocial studies typically fit within the empirical, post-positivist epistemology.

Furthermore, parasocial theory is based on an interpersonal relationship that viewers or readers develop, bonding with performers or celebrities that they see on screen or with characters in their favorite book (Horton & Wohl, 1956; Lather & Moyer-Guse, 2011). Many refer to the relationships or attachment through parasocial theory as parasocial relationships (PSR) or parasocial interaction (PSI). This theory was inspired by uses and gratification media based research, where audience members formed interpersonal relationships with characters from television (Giles, 2002). Uses and gratification theory is very similar to parasocial theory as both are used to measure the audience. According to Ruggiero (2000) and Cantril (1942), the uses and gratifications theory was developed to study the gratifications that attracts and holds audiences to their favorite kind of media and to content that satisfies their social and physiological needs. Horton and Wohl later fully conceptualized parasocial theory. “They [the audience] ‘know’ such a persona in somewhat the same way they know their chosen friends: through direct observation

and interpretation of his appearance, his gestures and voice, his conversation and conduct in a variety of situations” (Horton & Wohl, 1956, p. 216). Within the five decades of parasocial theory’s creation, it has been used in hundreds of studies evolving beyond the television medium (Brown & Basil, 2010). Horton and Wohl (1956) knew the theory had to expand beyond one mass medium. “One of the most striking characteristics of the new mass media—radio, television, and the movies—is that they give the illusion of face-to-face relationship with the performer” (p. 215).

Parasocial relationships are known to develop over time as the viewer(s) begins to believe that he/she understands his/her favorite character and the character’s personality, behavior and values. Many of the viewers or audience members do understand the difference between a real relationship and a parasocial relationship, although the attachment they have for the character or performer is similar to that of a friend or family member. McQuail et al. (1972) conducted the earliest example of research using parasocial interaction (PSI). They studied how audiences of British television responded to soap operas. The audience members felt like the characters of soap operas were a part of their everyday lives. There were two themes that were identified within the study, companionship and identity (Giles, 2002). These two themes will reoccur in many later studies of parasocial theory (e.g., Annese, 2004; Brown & Basil, 2010). Parasocial interaction (PSI) is measured using questionnaires utilizing the parasocial interaction scale (Auter & Palmgreen, 2000; Schramm & Hartmann, 2008). These questionnaires are employed differently, but are all employed to measure the attachment levels and to discover the intensity of the parasocial relationship that the audience member or viewer has with their favorite media personality.

Numerous studies have been conducted using parasocial theory, especially through mass

media (Rubin & McHugh, 1987; Hataway, ND; Lather & Moyer-Guse, 2011; Obregón, 2005; Young et al., 2013). This first section will focus on how parasocial theory has been used on screen media research. For example, Rubin and McHugh's examined parasocial interaction research and focused on socially isolated elderly viewers, who related parasocially to certain personalities on specific television programs (1987). They also mentioned how there have been many parasocial theory studies on television viewers and newscasters. "People who watched more television news engaged in more parasocial interaction with news personalities. Viewers who found parasocial interaction gratifying, increased their exposure to television news for more contact with the news personalities" (Rubin & McHugh, 1987, p. 281).

Another study used twenty focus groups and thirty in-depth interviews to analyze how young viewers relate to health messages dealing with HIV/AIDs and other sexually related issues in two Colombian soap operas. Parasocial interaction was used within the study to see how the attitudes, behavior levels and active construction of meaning affects young soap opera viewers, and to assess their interpretation of health messages within Columbian soap operas (Obregón, 2005). Hartman and Goldhoorn (2011) also used the theory in their research, recreating and analyzing the tests of Horton and Wohl and adapting it to contemporary audiences.

Meanwhile, Branch, et al. (2013) analyze two studies that use parasocial theory differently. One study focuses on the parasocial relationship with a fictional character, Homer Simpson, and the other study focuses on a non-fictional media personality, Oprah Winfrey. The main point of this study is to distinguish how audiences attach-to or identify with fictional and non-fictional media personalities. Capitalizing on the popularity of the MTV reality show *Jersey Shore* (2009), a study was conducted to investigate the wishful identification from the viewers, and their parasocial relationships with *Jersey Shore* cast members, who then become mediators

in the relationships between the Jersey Shore location and the sexual promiscuity of the cast (Bond & Drogos, 2014). Cohen (2004) examined 381 Israeli adults who were given a questionnaire in order to find out more about their relationships with their favorite television character. The study focused on the parasocial break-up of their favorite television character, once the character is taken off air.

Monk (2002) is another television show that has been investigated, and that has been a subject of parasocial theory research, to measure audience interaction. This study focuses on the parasocial relations and responses to obsessive-compulsive disorder on *Monk* (Hoffner & Cohen, 2012). Another example of the use of parasocial theory within mass media research is based on the book, *Twilight: Breaking Dawn* (2008) and the film franchise, *Twilight* (2008-2012). Emily Reynolds, who wrote a thesis on the *Twilight* franchise, used a survey to gather data to measure the nature of attachments to the characters, the actors and the author (2009). These studies have confirmed that these relationships do have various effects among their audience members (Hathaway, ND). Sood and Rodgers (2000) use parasocial interaction as a variable, with entertainment education being the main theory of choice. The study focuses on soap operas in India, and analyzes the audience letters written to the television soap opera. Meanwhile, Eyal and Rubin (2003) study television viewer relationships focusing on the levels of aggression.

Similar to the Sood and Rodgers study, parasocial theory is not the main theory used in this article. Parasocial theory is more of a variable that is used to see how audiences of an Indian radio soap opera are exposed to and attach themselves to the messages of the soap opera through entertainment education theory (Papa, et al, 2000). In a different study, undergraduate students are the subjects for parasocial research. The relationships of the students' close friends and their favorite media personality are both compared and analyzed using the parasocial interaction scale

(Eyal & Dailey, 2012). Wang et al. (2008) use parasocial theory to measure different types of social loneliness, with gender serving as a mediator of those effects.

Interestingly, parasocial theory adapts and evolves with the time and with different forms of media. For example, one study focuses on how audiences respond to television characters' blog posts and replies on social media (Good & Robinson, 2013). Finally, there has been parasocial theory research that actually uses comic books as the medium of choice. In a psychology study, parasocial theory was used to examine the effects of superheroes on men's body images. The researchers tested men who had a parasocial relationship (PSR) with superheroes compared to those who did not. It also tested those who were exposed to a muscular versus non-muscular image of superheroes (Young, Gabriel & Hollar, 2013). A separate study focuses on parasocial interaction with Wii video game avatars. The author examines video game players' interpersonal interaction and perceptions of their avatar (Jin & Park, 2009). Baek et al. (2013) use parasocial theory to examine various social network website relationships with themes including social isolation, interpersonal relationships and addiction. Finally, talk radio is a subject of yet another parasocial interaction study. The focus of this study is on how listeners are impacted by motivation, attraction and attachment from the talk radio hosts (Rubin & Step, 2000).

3.3 Data Collection

The main purpose of this research project is to find out how and to what extent comic book fans communicate their social identities through their favorite comic book character. It is important to note there is a lack of research on the comic book community the communication field, and the importance of this research is largely based on the fact that comic books, the comic book community and comic book related media are expanding throughout popular culture.

To collect data, I conducted interviews with comic book fans to discover what type of fan they are, such as “casual” and/or “enthusiast.” Following research protocol, the names of the fans involved were changed to keep their identities anonymous. With a goal of interviewing 20 fans, I was able to surpass that and interview 26 comic book fans in total (7 female and 19 male fans between the ages of 23-36). A majority of the fans live in southwestern and central Texas, while other fans come from various parts of the United States and one fan from Australia. Participants for this study were found through flyers distributed at local comic book stores around west Texas, and through social websites like *Twitter* and *Instagram* using the hashtags “#comics” and “#comicbookfans.” The flyers included my contact information and general information regarding a search for comic book fans. Another research that technique I used was snowball sampling. According to Lindlof & Taylor (2011), snowball sampling consists of referrals made among people of a certain subculture or that have certain attributes in common (p. 114).

The interview consisted of 15 questions dealing with attachment, and how they might identify with their favorite character(s). Specific questions are included in the appendix to this study. Most of the interviews were conducted in person or via *Skype*, with the audio being recorded on a Sony digital voice recorder. The recordings were later uploaded to my computer into a password-protected folder following, (again, IRB research protocol at this university). The transcriptions and any other data collected within the study were stored in the password-protected folder. After being uploaded, the recordings were transcribed and separated into various codes in order to examine what the fans had in common.

Questions in the interviews revolved around how the fan became acquainted with their favorite character; how the fan might attach themselves to their favorite character and whether this attachment has an influence on how this fan lives his/her life. This “influence” might be

emotionally, morally, physically or even financially in the fan's life (sutherland559, 2011).

Along with these interviews, in depth textual/visual analysis based on the answers are also provided. Certain story arcs from the comics, television/films and key character moments that the fans mentioned during the interview might relate to them, thus providing further context on how the fan attaches himself/herself to their favorite character. Through these various methods of data collecting and analysis, a better understanding of comic book fans and the various levels of fanaticism involved in comics was acquired.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS: How Comic Book Fans Attach to/or

Identify with Their Favorite Character(s)

4.1 Demographics

Twenty-six participants were a part this study, seven females and 19 males who are between the ages of 23-36. Most of the participants claimed their race/ethnicity to be Mexican, Hispanic or Latino/a. Other races/ethnicities included Italian and Caucasian. Most of the reside in southwest and central Texas, while other fans come from various parts of the United States and one fan from Australia. The language that most of the fans recognize as their primary language was English.

4.2 Early Exposure to Their Favorite Character(s)

In this investigation, a key aspect of each of the fans was that most were exposed to their favorite character around late elementary school/early middle school years. As children, most of them found cartoons or animated series as a gateway to the beginning of their fandom and relationship with the character. The introduction or early exposure to the characters lead the fan to begin his or her parasocial relationship, which later could grow into a stronger or weaker bond depending on the level of attachment that the fan decides to have later in life. For example, *Batman: The Animated Series* (1992) was a common cartoon series that many fans mentioned was their first experience with comic book characters. Other cartoons from the late 1980s and the early 1990s like *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (1987), *X-Men* (1992) or *Spider-Man* (1994) were also mentioned as entry points into comic books.

For other fans, they were introduced to their favorite characters through feature films. A film that quite a few fans mentioned was the 1989 film *Batman*, starring Jack Nicholson as the

Joker and Michael Keaton as Batman. “Victor,” who is a Joker fan, described seeing the film for the very first time: “I saw the very first Batman with Jack Nicholson playing the Joker... I thought it was amazing.” For Superman and Batman fan “Bill,” he described first being a big fan of Batman because of the character’s exposure in cartoons and films. He went on to mention that middle school is when he grew attached to Superman, because of the classic 1978 *Superman* film, starring Christopher Reeves.

In other cases, certain fans were exposed to their favorite character at an earlier age thanks to family members introducing them to the films or comic books. “Sam,” who is a fan of the comic characters Superman and “Superboy,” first experienced comic books with the help of his grandfather at the age of three or four.

My grandpa was really into comic books when I was growing up... He had comic books from the 30s and 40s... He collected comic books and was really into Superman. I wouldn’t say I got into it just to appease him, but he definitely is the reason why I got into comic books... (Sam, 2014)

Similarly, “Liz” mentioned how she learned about Batman because of her uncle. “My uncle would always show me these movies, and we would sit down and watch them. He just kind of got me into Batman.” Liz and “Ashley” both described childhood photographs of themselves dressed as Wonder Woman. These photos were the beginning of a lifelong attachment to the character. As Ashley explains, “I think I was three years old. It was Halloween. My mom picked a Wonder Woman costume for me to wear... I remember looking at those pictures where my sister and I were dressed up, and it just spiked my interest.” Another fan, “Jesse,” described how he was introduced to Magneto: “I was maybe six or seven, and my brother had a couple of comics. Then, I learned about X-Men, but I always liked Magneto. I started to learn about his

story and I was like, ‘Man, this is really cool!’” An interesting and unusual discovery within one of the interviews was that one of the fans was related to a co-creator of the character Aquaman, thus leading to a stronger and more sentimental form of attachment.

When I was in third grade, I found out that my grandfather was one of the creators of Aquaman, and that kind of blew my mind as a third grader. From then on the connection just got deeper and deeper, because I had a connection with my grandfather. (“Linda,” 2014)

These examples of an early introduction of a fan to a character brought not just a closer bond between family members, but also a beginning of fanaticism with comic characters.

A few of the fans did acknowledge that they were exposed to their favorite character(s) in other ways besides the cartoons, films or by family. Some of the comic book fans interviewed acknowledged that they were introduced to their favorite characters directly through the comic books or graphic novels. “Ryan,” a Deadpool fan, said that he first mistook Deadpool for Spider-Man in the comic books, due to their similar looking costumes. In a rare case, one character “Buffy the Vampire Slayer,” first appeared on television before appearing on comic books. “Buffy the Vampire Slayer” is the favorite comic and television character for fan “Victoria,” as she first became attached to the 1997 television series. “Buffy the Vampire Slayer,” was first introduced in a 1992 film which became a television series in 1997 (starring Sarah Michelle Gellar) and eventually, she became a comic book character, due to the popularity of the television series.

4.2 Characters With an Impact

To such fans, these characters are not just stories in a book or in a movie. These characters are a part of the person’s life and having at least some type of impact on them, not

quite as a real life person has but in the sense of who they are and aspire to be (Cohen, 2003; Lather & Moyer-Guse, 2011). Each of the comic book fans that were interviewed mentioned how their favorite character(s) have inspired them or caused some type of impact in their lives. One of the most frequent sources of inspiration and meaning was that of the character's "moral code." Most of these fans mentioned that they admired how their favorite character always does the right thing, regardless of the situation. As "Eric" explains, "I think the core concept of having an alter ego, somebody that can be an everyday citizen and also put on a suit, for the sole purpose of protecting. I think that is the initial concept that drew me into comics in the first place." In addition, "I think Batman sets a standard for helping people in general, because he lost his parents, and yet he still is determined to go and help people."

"David," a Batman and Green Arrow fan agrees and adds that both characters are driven by an inner desire to make a positive difference in their city. Another Batman fan, "Paul" admits to gravitating towards Batman for the same reason: "He has dedicated his life towards helping others. I mean, he is trying to change the entire city by becoming a symbol of good, of hope and change." "Robert," a fan of Spider-Man and Batman recognizes the positive impact that his two favorite characters have made on him: "Reading superhero comics has kind of gave me this mentality to do good in the world, by trying to help people or trying to do things by the books." Superman's morals have also impacted "Bill's" life.

...Superman really helped set my morals. I really didn't drink or do anything crazy. I really followed the rules and did volunteering and tried volunteering to give back to my community... It really helped me with the man I am now and today . . . the Christopher Reeve Superman, he does a lot of good things within that movie. He waited his whole life to meet Lois Lane and that kind of helped me out. The Christian values of waiting for one

person, and waiting until marriage, that movie set morals, to be a good person. (Bill, 2014)

As one can see, Bill based other aspects of his life around Superman's character such as religion and relationships. Bill identifies himself and these various phases of his life with this version of Superman. With regard to parasocial theory, he is attaching to and personifying himself with this media character, or comic book character.

Another interesting connection between fans in regard to character impact was with female fans. Some of the female fans mentioned how they became attached to Wonder Woman simply because she is a female. "I love Wonder Woman, because she's a woman. She can hang with the guys, and she is even stronger than most of them," Liz said. "Alice" adds how Wonder Woman is a strong female character and how more young girls should look up to her instead of Barbie dolls or the Kardashian sisters. Ashley furthers the point by describing how she views the "Amazonian princess:"

I love Wonder Woman. She is my ultimate favorite... She is strong and she can be cutthroat, but I think at the core of Wonder Woman, her personality, she has always loved everybody and she wants to spread love and peace. I think that is something we can all learn from her... (Ashley, 2014)

It is important to note the fact that both Ashley and Liz use the word "love" within their statements to profess their attachment between themselves and Wonder Woman. Though the use of the word love is not the type of love used in a romantic relationship, it is one of admiration, thus supporting the idea that parasocial theory can be applied to comic book fans as they constantly display their attachment towards their favorite character.

One interesting commonality within the group of fans was that they often found the humor or prankster like ways of their favorite character inspiring and/or relatable. For example, “Matthew” and “Victor” are both fans of the Joker, and both mentioned that they admire the trickster like ways of the character. Victor explains the impact that the Joker has had on him:

I think he has most definitely made an impact on me. I do find myself thinking like the Joker at times...I would say I try to be funny like him. He is very, very dark humored. He loves to get a punch line, whether it's killing someone or just hurting, or playing a prank on somebody. I'll say the pranking and the dark humor is what I take from the Joker's personality. (Victor, 2014)

Matthew also likes that Joker is a prankster, who brings what Matthew calls “comedic negativity.” “I do share a lot with the Joker, because he laughs nonstop and that's what I do. I laugh nonstop at my jokes...He laughs at his jokes, he's mischievousness and so do I,” Matthew explains.

Two other fans find the humor and relaxed nature of the character Deadpool interesting and relatable. “Dexter” mentions how Deadpool never takes life seriously, and he also adds that he “regurgitates” quotes from Deadpool comics on a daily basis due to the character's humor. Ryan agrees, describing Deadpool in a very similar fashion:

Most of the time he's funny and having a good time... Again, it really comes down to not taking oneself so seriously and having fun while doing what you do, while it's killing bad guys, like he does, or selling appliances, like I do. (Ryan, 2014)

For “Eddie,” he also loves the humorous aspect of his favorite characters: The Flash and Spider-Man. “I love the fact that they could always have a good time, and not be so serious always. I love that...there is always a witty remark around the corner that is funny,” Eddie

explains. He adds that while at work, he also jokes around and plays pranks and never takes things too seriously. Again, it is important to note that these fans are consciously personifying themselves with their favorite comic book character. They are consciously developing ways to relate to and to identify with the humanistic qualities that these fictional characters have.

Another similarity by which some fans were affected was how some of their favorite characters seek acceptance in this world or from other people. Two such fans are “Sam” and “Jesse.” Sam describes the first time he read about Superboy:

I remember just reading his back story, I kind of related because my dad wasn't around a lot and this specific character is Superman's clone and he's Lex Luthor's clone, so he has two dads that are never present. They are kind of like over arching figures. Those are really big shoes he (Superboy) had to fill, but they were never around, so he never really learned from them, personally. (Sam, 2014)

For Jesse, Magneto's persecution as a youth and mutant, and Superman's origin impacted him:

I think in terms of Magneto, the story of his persecution and being in concentration camps. I thought that was really hardcore. ... I just have never gone through something like that and definitely sympathize with anyone that went through that. ... as far as Superman, he lost his planet. He lost his family. He never knew any of it. ... I think those two stories kind of speak to me, because of personal issues that I've had, and have had to go through. I've been at points where I am very much afraid of am I going to lose my family; am I going to lose my friends? ... Will I be persecuted for being different? (Jesse, 2014)

Both fans, like the fictional characters, are seeking acceptance. Jesse and Sam relate and identify with the humanistic quality of these characters, and are searching for meaning in life and to be

accepted in their world. As Sam mentioned above, Superboy is trying to be accepted by his father figure, Superman. While on the other hand, Superman is trying to blend in with the people of earth, as he is an alien from Krypton with superhuman abilities. Magneto, as a mutant, is trying to fit into a world that doesn't accept mutants and people with his special abilities. Interestingly, themes of equality and acceptance are constantly repeated throughout the X-Men comic books and films. All three comic characters that Jesse and Sam mentioned are considered "outcasts" and trying to seek acceptance in their own way. Comics and the characters within them can be sources of inspiration or positive influence on the reader and fan's life. Sometimes it can be something as simple as being a nice person or something like using the character as a role model. As one can surmise, the fan and character relationship is a stronger bond than that just of a reader and character; at times the fan becomes more like the character than even he/she realizes.

4.3 "I Wish I Had Superpowers!"

Throughout most of the interviews most fans proclaimed that they wanted to have super abilities or to be like their favorite comic characters in some fashion. "I think everyone's dream would be to be Batman. Every little boy's dream is to be a billionaire playboy, who's a night crime fighter," explains "Nick." Nick, who is also a fitness trainer and body builder mentions how he would love to be "ripped" and "jacked" like the characters, while being able to jump and fly. "Of course, I think everyone at some point would say they would want to be a superhero. ... I really think if you ask anyone in a room, all of them or 90% of people would be like, 'I wish I had that power,'" Nick adds.

For "Luis," he loves the idea of being nearly invincible, and to be able to run fast, jump high and be strong like the Incredible Hulk. "Eddie" desires the speed of The Flash.

I don't know what it is about me, but I'm always running late... I'm always finding myself 5, 10, 15 minutes late. It drives me nuts...of all the people that I like, I think The Flash to me would be most attractive... Especially for me, since my life is so busy.

(Eddie, 2014)

The Flash is known to have superhuman speed that allows him to be at places within seconds.

Linda wishes she had the ability to live underwater, like one of her favorite characters Aquaman. She also adds how great it is to be Batman or Batgirl by having all their gadgets and technology. Alice likes the accessories and the vehicle that Wonder Woman has: "I know Wonder Woman had an invisible jet. That would be pretty sweet to have. Lasso of Truth... I wish I could have that, because more people than not are lying about things." Likewise, Ashley and Liz want to be like Wonder Woman for her gadgets, and because "she kicks ass." In addition, Ashley also adds that Wonder Woman is so smart, loving, caring and assertive. All are traits that she wants to have and work on. With regard to Buffy fan Victoria, she wishes that she had the super strength that Buffy has to take on bullies, and she also mentions how she wants the power of slayer-healing factor. The slayer-healing factor consists of regenerating or healing wounds or broken/disfigured body parts.

A few fans did not go as far as wanting superhuman powers or the gadgets that they use, but they wished they had more realistic characteristics. Fans like "Eric," "David," "Joseph" and "Robert" wish they had the admirable personality traits that these heroes have. For example, Eric had this to say:

Whenever it comes to facing a challenge, whenever it comes to facing your fear, I

try to think about my favorite characters, Batman and Green Lantern...

Sometimes it is hard to find that courage in yourself, but if you can think of a

character that has that courage, you can kind of allow yourself to let them lend you inspiration... (Robert, 2014)

Likewise, Magneto and Superman fan Jesse, said that he wants to be as assertive as Magneto; in regard to Superman, he wishes he could set an example for those around him and be a good role model.

David jokingly admits that he desires Bruce Wayne/Batman's money, but he goes on to add that he wishes, and even tries to live his life by putting others before himself: "Oliver Queen (Green Arrow) and Bruce Wayne put people before themselves. They are heroes, but they have made huge sacrifices to do what they do." For Joseph, he admires Batman's determination, and the fact that he never gives up, regardless of the situation. Robert wants Batman and Spiderman's determination. As he explains, "I do find myself wishing I was more like them... No matter how much of a beating they take they keep getting back up and won't stop until they complete what they set out to do." Robert goes on to add that he wishes that he could leave a positive impact on someone's life: "If you could save one person, it doesn't even have to be in the physical sense of saving them from a bus or something. Just actually helping them in some way. That to me is a life well spent."

In "Ted's" case, he also wants to be able to help others. "I mean, I wouldn't say I want to become a big green monster... I would want to feel like somebody that people can count on, and that I can come through for them." This even led to a career change in nursing for Ted.

I'm going into a field where you may not be the hero of the day, but maybe you might guide them in that direction... Feeling like you're worth it to somebody even if it's keeping them alive for five more minutes with their relatives there. (Ted, 2014)

Ryan, Deadpool fan, wishes he could learn martial arts, how to fight with swords, and learn how to be an expert marksman, all of which are key traits for Deadpool. For Spider-Man fan “Mark,” he hopes to be smarter and maybe become a scientist like Peter Parker is in the comic books. Finally, Dexter notes that he never wished to be like his favorite characters, because they already have been a part of who he is.

Superpowers, I don't wish for that. It's not realistic. The human part of each character that I have mentioned, they have molded me into the person I am today. I'm trying to teach my son the influences that were brought upon me. I'm trying to introduce him to that, so that he can see and he can become his own little superhero, as he gets older.

(Dexter, 2014)

By wanting to be like these characters or at least wanting to have their powers or characteristics, these fans demonstrate at least a small level of attachment toward their favorite characters. Most notably, attachment is shown by the fans who outright admit that they wish they were more like these characters. Attachment is also shown by fans who seek a deeper meaning of the character by examining the character and wishing that they had the some characteristics of their favorite character.

4.4 Heroic Similarities

From the beginning of this analysis, it became rather obvious that some of these fans expressed similarities with their favorite comic characters. One fan who particularly stood out during his interview was Bill. Throughout Bill's interview he mentions various similarities, such as dressing in plaid shirts (similar to a young Clark Kent, Superman's alter ego), or the fact that he went to study journalism and business (characteristics he personally simulates and compares to Clark Kent and Bruce Wayne). He even compares his tall and athletic stature to Superman.

I'm a tall guy and kids looked up to me and said, 'oh wow!' like if I was super or whatever...it always came back around to Superman, because even though I would like to say, 'no, I'm done with comic books. I'm not going to live my life vicariously through that.' There would be kids or people who said, 'Oh, you remind us of Superman or Clark Kent with the way you act. (Bill, 2014)

The term vicarious fits this analysis perfectly. As most of these fans in one way or another are vicariously living through these characters.

For fans like Eddie, Linda and Dexter, their similarities tie into family. Eddie describes the way he relates to one of his favorite characters:

...but again I find myself very similar to like The Flash, because I don't really have my dad around anymore. As a little kid, I never really had him around; it was just me and my mom. So I kinda relate to some of these characters to that. They don't have a mom or they don't have a dad and so your kind of doing things on your own a lot or by yourself. (Eddie, 2014)

Eddie mentions The Flash due to the fact that "Professor Zoom" or the "Reverse Flash" killed Barry Allen/The Flash's mother. It is a common cliché within comic book origins that the parents of the main character were in a tragic accident, thus leading to the character becoming hero or in some cases a villain. On the other hand, Dexter finds an interesting similarity between himself and Wolverine, one of his favorite comic characters.

I think it has a special meaning where Wolverine took the role of a parent watching the Jean Grey School for the kids. As opposed to him being a badass all these years, that doesn't really pertain to me, because it's just for show. I really like when his character

grew... He was in charge of all these kids... I guess, take on the parent role and watch out as a parent. (Dexter, 2014)

Throughout the interview, Dexter mentions his son and the impact he wants to have and leave on his son. Several times, Dexter compares his lifestyle as a father to that of Wolverine's or Batman's. "I like when all the Robins see him (Batman) as a father... I've always loved Damian (Batman's biological son) and Bruce's interaction. I really liked it, because it reminded me of my son, how he reacts," explained Dexter. He also added, that he feels like he is like Bruce Wayne and his son is his Damian Wayne. Aquaman fan Linda proclaims that she always loved being in the water: "...I've always been swimming and been in water. My mom always said that I've been a fish." All three fans find a connection to their favorite characters, because of family relations. Some similarities are more positive than others, but nonetheless, all are important for their parasocial relationship with their favorite comic characters.

Other fans described having similar issues of anger like their favorite character(s). "Vivian," a Wolverine fan, quickly admits to having a bad temper and short fuse similar to the *X-Men* character. Vivian had this to say about her and Wolverine's anger issues: "We are easy to set off, and I feel better after hitting something or throwing something across the room. Breathing doesn't really help me. I deal with my anger in negative ways." Similarly, Wolverine fan Joseph also described having anger issues like the character. "Just how Wolverine gets angry. I get that from him. I relate to that. Or how he deals with that too... I just see how he gets angry, and how he just walks away angry." Ted also compared his tolerance level to that of the Hulk: "People say, 'Don't Hulk out, Ted. Don't go green.' Just because, I have that short fuse." He added that he usually "hulks out," because of what he believes in and stands for.

Another similar trait that Ted has in common with the Hulk is that both are muscular men. “Hulk Smash!” is a something The Hulk says in the comics and movies. Ted, however, uses it as tool for motivating himself at the gym: “I’m trying to do something, and I don’t think I can do it and people tell me, ‘Come on! Hulk smash!’ Stuff like that to push me.”

In a very similar fashion Nick, who is a body builder and fitness trainer, admits that he wants to look superhuman.

I think the image complex I developed from superheroes. You see heroes now, and you see muscles. Especially in the 90s they were over exaggerated. ... Wolverine looks like a body builder. ...I’ve developed that body complex and I’ve always wanted to look above average. I wanted to look superhuman. (Nick, 2014)

Likewise, David sees himself using a superhero mentality to motivate himself in the gym: “I am striving to be the best I can be in the gym. So Batman, Arrow and I have some common traits,” he explains. Batman and the (Green) Arrow are both known to be in top physical shape, so they must exercise constantly to keep their athletic figure. David identifies himself with these two characters by exercising, and striving to be in peak physical form, similar to his heroes.

Alice and Jesse continue this trend in seeing themselves with their favorite superhero through health motivation. “My idea of Wonder Woman is that she is this woman who empowers other women to be strong, to be healthy, chase dreams. So, I feel like I identify with that in my life,” Alice said. In Jesse’s case, losing weight has gotten him plenty of Superman comparisons. “It’s funny, because I went through this whole weight loss thing, and I started working out and started lifting weights. Different people would just joke around, ‘Whoa! Watch out, Superman!’ or, ‘He’s in shape like Superman.’” This idea of a person connecting to characters in this type of way may seem far-fetched to some, but again, as scholars note, these characters are a part of who

these fans are, which is very similar to how fans might connect with celebrities or other characters in other forms of media (Horton & Wohl, 1956; Rubin & McHugh, 1987). That embodiment of the character becomes a part of the fan's life and personality.

4.5 Literacy and Literature

As mentioned throughout this study, comic books were historically considered lower forms of art and culture. Also, they are considered to be an unacceptable or cheap source of literature. In this study, all 26 fans believe comic books are a wonderful source of literature. Five of the fans said that they not only consider comic books to be a great source of literature but also a way for children to improve reading and language skills. "I think they are really good for second language learners, because I think it helps them to introduce them to the language. ... It's not as intimidating to read a comic book as opposed to trying to read a novel," explains Linda.

Ashley agrees:

I'm constantly telling parents, especially for my English language learners, buy some comics... I always encourage them. It's just enough text and it has the visual aids to go with it, which is awesome for learning English...I don't think it gets enough credit as it does. (Ashley, 2014)

Both Linda and Ashley are educators, so it is interesting seeing this educational point of view being mentioned. These fans are relating comic books to their profession. For instance, it was noted that both women use comic books in their professional line of work, by recommending comic books as an educational learning tool. For Alice, her experiences in babysitting have her agreeing that comic books can help improve children's literacy and imagination skills. "I think they are good for kids or anybody to improve your imagination. Kids especially will eat that up," Alice mentioned.

Another fan who agrees that comics can help children with reading is Bill. Bill goes on to say, “Kids gravitate towards that, because they get burned out with testing... They are drawn into the comics, but they know it’s an 8th grade reading level. They are bold ideas.” Finally, Liz also agrees: “Yes, I think especially for kids. I think they like reading about their favorite superhero. It kind of just makes you want to read more.” While these fans believe that comics could help children with their reading skills, others feel that comic books should be considered acceptable literature that should be placed on the same level of such classics as *The Invisible Man* (1897). For example, Ted had this to say:

I think they should be enforced just like *The Invisible Man* or *The Time Machine* and all these classic novels that they put into literature for kids. They should allow them to pick a superhero and read about it at a young age. People just underestimate comic books...

(Ted, 2014)

Similarly, Nick also agrees that people could learn a lot from comic books, and he also mentions how they do not get the respect that they deserve.

Even today, they don’t get the respect they deserve. It could be from real uppity people that are like, ‘no that doesn’t count.’ Why not? Who is to say that you’re a master’s degree reading *Moby Dick* and whatever. Why does that make you better? It’s the same amount of effort writing. And it might even go into more detail, because you get older stories and you’ll appreciate the value, the literature and time it took into it, but they are boring. (Nick, 2014)

Another common notion from fans is that comics should be accepted as literature, if not more so because they also incorporate art.

Fans like Victoria, Tom, Robert, James and Victor all believe that comic books should be considered a great source of literature due to the fact that comics include textual and visual narratives. Victoria proclaims that comic books are not as boring as other literature, because they feature artwork. According to her, the visual narrative of comics can engage readers' young and old, pushing them to read more. She concluded by saying that comics are not trash. They have great storylines and some even teach good moral values like being a better person or respecting one another.

Calvin and Hobbes fan "Tom" agrees with Victoria: "Yes, it's an art form." Tom adds how expressionist art like Jackson Pollock's hangs in museums, when all he sees is "a bunch of splatters," in comparison to the artwork featured in *Calvin and Hobbes* or any other comic book, which he considers art. Robert also recognizes comic books as art by saying, "That's not even a matter of debate for me. The way people describe literature, it has to have some artistic value. For me, comics do have artistic value." Similarly, Daredevil fan James also acknowledges the artistic aspect of comics: "Yeah, it's a very good source of literature. It takes art and writing, and combines them together into one medium." Finally, Victor, who also considers comic books an artistic form of literature, believes that both the text and the artwork balance each other out to make great pieces of literature. "Absolutely! The stories, the plot twists. Everything involving a comic book, if it is well written and the illustrations are wonderful, that's all you really need," said Victor.

It is important to note how scholars argue that some comic book artists are some of the most talented artists and storytellers of all time (Cronin, 2014). Artists like David Mack, Dustin Nyguen, and Chris Ware are some of comic books' top artists who use fine art skills to illustrate the artwork in comic books. While writers like Alan Moore, Stan Lee, Scott Snyder, and Grant

Morrison are considered to be some of the greatest storytellers to several generations of comic book fans. Unfortunately, as many of these fans mentioned, comic books are still undervalued and unappreciated by many who still feel that they are just for children, “low culture,” or a medium just not suited for scholarly analysis. As one can see here, all of these fans identify comic books as a valuable source of literature, thereby demonstrating further of their attachment and their parasocial relationship(s).

4.6 Sexism in Comics

Another major criticism within the comic book community is about over sexualized characters. From their bodies to their costumes, comic book characters have been over sexualized to fit the fantasies of both men and women. Interestingly, many fans within this study point out that this is a major problem within comic books. For example, as Robert explains, “...the majority of writers and artists in the comic book industry are male.” Not only are the creators of these comic books mainly male, but also, the comic book community is mainly a male demographic. According to Brett Schenker, a blogger who conducted a demographic study on comic book fans, there are about 25% of female fans of the medium (Schenker, 2011, figure 1). Thus, Linda believes that these comic book publishers are just selling to their demographics: “I don’t really think they are terrible. I just think they are hitting demographics, because they are trying to sell merchandise. I understand that.”

When asked whether their favorite characters are over sexualized, some fans felt that the characters are over sexualized, while others said that they were not. In some cases, the topic changed to sexist imagery in comic books overall. Alice had this to say on the matter: “I feel that a lot of characters put on these tight shorts and tiny little booty shorts. I mean, that said my Halloween costume was over sexualized.” Alice was referencing a Wonder Woman costume that

she made for herself for Halloween. By saying this Alice is contradicting herself, realizing that female comic book characters are portrayed in a sexist fashion, yet she becomes a part of the problem by portraying a sexualized version of Wonder Woman for Halloween. She also adds how she feels that all forms of media, not just comics, are hyper sexualized.

Female comic characters, however, are usually the first characters to be over sexualized. Their costumes are usually skin tight and show a lot of skin and cleavage, while their bodies are drawn with large breasts and curvy hips. Unfortunately, fans expect their character to look a certain way and to fit a certain body type. A perfect example is given by Liz: "...with Gal Gadot playing Wonder Woman, a lot of people gave her [a bad response], because she is so skinny and she doesn't have big boobs..." Victoria feels lucky that her character looks and dresses normally: "It's not tight, and it's not showing her cleavage. It's just a normal girl wearing her clothes in her 30s. I'm not reading or seeing boobs in every other page." In some cases, costumes of female characters begin wholesome, then evolve into provocative outfits:

You know, Harley Quinn when she originally started she wore a full body suit. Yeah, kind of the way she was drawn and moved was still sexualized, but not to the point where it's obscene, but now they slutted her up a bit. (Robert, 2014)

Robert also mentions how men are not as over sexualized as women, but then realizes that male comic characters are usually portrayed as hyper-masculine, fit, and muscular specimens.

There were plenty of fans who felt that not only are women over sexualized, but male comic characters are as well. "Superman, definitely. ...the Halloween costumes are padded with stuffing and cotton and over the top. ...There is this unreachable goal aspect to all these characters," Sam says. He mentions how male superpowers represent masculinity, as they are usually powers based on strength. Sam added that, "I definitely think it's unachievable and

unrealistic to normal people.” Likewise, Jesse feels the same about Superman: “Literally, he’s called Superman. You would probably think Superman and he’s probably a fucking strong guy. He’s probably in shape.”

Other fans like Matthew and Eric describe how most of these male characters are drawn as tall, athletic and muscular figures. In few instances, there are characters like “The Blob,” “Toad,” or “Modok” who do not fit the stereotypical look of a comic book character. In Eric’s case, he said that he tends to put this idea of over sexualized characters to the side and just focuses on their actions and what they do. Wonder Woman fan Ashley mentioned how she was hesitant about getting into comics because of the fact that the characters are hyper sexualized.

Just any [comic book character] really and even men. I really don’t think men consider the way that the male characters are drawn. Beefed up, like if they are on steroids and their crotch areas. It’s like REALLY?! It’s like really big or it’s like drawn in a way to draw attention to it. So it’s not just the women. It’s for both the male and female superheroes too. I think it’s a huge problem. I really think it deters me from buying certain comics. (Ashley, 2014)

Paul on the other hand, feels like this has always been the case for fictional characters. Society idealizes comic book characters to be in peak shape for humans. He also goes on to mention that both genders are sexualized, but that happens to women more. Paul concluded by saying that, “The primary readers of these comic books are men, so of course women are going to be objectified and over sexualized, rather than the men that are more badasses and stuff.”

In a few cases, fans felt that the characters, although sexualized through comic books, could be more inspirational than sexist. For example, Eddie feels that since they are sources of inspiration, why not look up to them in this aspect.

So I want to look up someone who I could potentially be like. I could be as fit as Spider-man, I could be as fit as The Flash, I could be as fit or good looking as those guys and that's why I look up to them. I don't know if it's necessarily a bad thing that they look the way they look. (Eddie, 2014)

In a similar thought, Batman and Wolverine fan Nick agreed. Nick believes that these comic characters can push both genders to become healthier versions of themselves. He uses examples of how some heroes can become bodybuilders and how some heroes might even influence a young boy to get fit. For example, He changed his life to lose weight, and he is motivated to run, to workout and to get that body.

If you get this heavy kid, over weight, never had a problem in his life reading Captain America, and he falls in love with the story, falls in love with the hero, falls in love with the concept. He changes his life to lose weight, and he is motivated to run, to workout and to get that body. Whether he does it or not, it has influenced him in a positive way. Of course, you might never look like the guys in comics. Shit, I might not. But I'm going to try my hardest to get there. (Nick, 2014)

This was an unexpected find within the research. It was expected that fans would note how female characters, and even male comic characters are often overly sexualized. The fact that some fans reject this idea of sexism helps to motivate the fan to work towards a similar body type of their favorite comic book character(s). This is not to say that sexism in comics or any other medium is a good thing, because it is not. Sexism in comic books should be something that more fans speak up about and criticize.

4.7 Fan Classification

All of the subjects within this analysis did consider themselves fans in one way or

another. Based on attachment levels, there were more fans that were strongly attached to their favorite comic book characters than expected. Out of the 26 fans interviewed, 12 comic book fans fell under the “strongly attached” category or aficionados. There were eight semi-attached fans or enthusiasts. Seven fans were less than average or even casual with their attachment to their favorite character, thus, categorizing these casual fans in the role of “consumers”. Based on the interviews, fans’ attachment levels were established through three connections: merchandise, knowledge and enthusiasm.

For example, merchandise has a big part to play within determining the attachment level of each fan (Woo, 2011). Fans who have the most merchandise and continued to buy more merchandise tend to have a stronger attachment towards their favorite character(s). Financially, these fans will go out of their way to buy clothes, action figures, statues, comic books and graphic novels, and other collectible merchandise featuring their favorite character. For some fans, they collect any merchandise pertaining to their favorite character(s). In some cases, other comic characters are lesser known, and have less merchandise and appear in fewer forms of media (television, film, etc.) in comparison to well-known characters of comic books.

In terms of measuring knowledge, fans explain their favorite issues, certain story arcs or scenes from the animated series or films that had a specific meaning for them. Most notably, fans that were more knowledgeable about their favorite character gave specific storylines, some even down to the print issue number. Another notable and key aspect to knowledgeable comic book fans was that the fan mentioned specific quotations from their favorite character. The enthusiasm was much stronger than was expected, because the fans had such a strong form of fanaticism towards their favorite character. When fans spoke about their favorite character, they expressed great passion and awe for these comic characters. The fans who had a stronger attachment level

with their favorite character(s) talked a lot longer in their interviews in comparison to those who were not as strongly attached. Other forms of enthusiasm were the facts that a majority of the strongly attached fans made costumes of their favorite characters or dressed up as their favorite characters. Some even owned professionally made replica costumes. In a few cases, the fans memorize lines from their favorite comic book character.

The 12 aficionados or fans who were strongly attached to their favorite character(s) fell into this category because they fit all three or most of the categories. The eight enthusiasts or semi-attached fans had some qualities that fit the categories, but not as many as the others. These fans did not have as much merchandise as those who were strongly attached. Also, they were not as insightful as those strongly attached fans who knew more about their favorite character. Some of these semi-attached fans knew certain story arcs and knowledgeable facts, but lacked in either amount of merchandise or the enthusiasm shown.

Finally, six of the fans that were casually attached to their favorite characters lacked enthusiasm in comparison to the aficionados and enthusiasts. Their interviews were much shorter and their answers were very brief, even when asked follow up questions. Some of these fans have never even read a comic book; they are fans due to other forms of media such as cartoons, television shows or the films. A few fans outright admitted to never reading a comic book, and they said that they just liked the character, because they thought he/she was cool. When it came to merchandise, some fans had a couple of t-shirts or other collectibles, but it was very scarce in comparison to the enthusiasts and aficionados.

Overall, this chapter discussed the demographics of the fans involved in this study, how these fans were exposed at an early age to their favorite comic book character(s), how the characters have had an impact on the fans, how these fans wish they had similar superpowers

and/or characteristics based on their favorite character(s), commentary on whether comic books are considered a good source of literature or not, criticism of sexism in comic books, and finally, fan classification. Furthermore, I submit that the sections within this chapter demonstrate how parasocial relationships are a relevant concept for comic book fans research, since this research illustrates the various forms of attachment levels that these fans have toward their favorite comic book character(s). Through my analysis I was able to conclude that the stronger the attachment the fan has, the stronger the fan will identify with his/her favorite character(s). Fans that are strongly attached to their favorite comic book character(s) consider these fictional characters as if they were a part of their group of friends or family members. In other cases, fans personify traits from their favorite character(s). It is also important to note that based on the interviews that merchandise, knowledge, and enthusiasm are all key factors of measuring a fan's attachment level as they all are contributing to the fan's identity and parasocial relationship. By collecting merchandise, being knowledgeable and showing strong enthusiasm the fan will have a greater attachment level and have a more obvious parasocial relationship with his/her favorite comic book character(s).

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION: Concluding Remarks About Comic Books, Fandom, and Communication Research

5.1 “Until Next Time True Believers”

In chapter one of this research project, I explained several important facts about how comic books are more visible than ever in popular culture, and the fact that comic books are understudied within communication is part of the rationale this study on comic book fan identity and attachment. The community of comic book fans was once known as a sub-culture, but has grown significantly since the 1960s and has become a mainstream form of popular culture. Comic book characters have now saturated various forms of popular culture and media including: clothes, toys, television, film, video games and comic books. Current television shows like *The Flash* (2014) and *Gotham* (2014) are some of the highest rated shows on their channels. The first episode of *The Flash* had 4.8 million viewers, making it *The CW*'s best debut in five years (Mitovich, 2014). For *Gotham*'s premiere there were approximately 22 million views across various media platforms, including television and streaming websites (Magilo, 2014). Meanwhile, comic book related films continue to succeed at the box office. For example, *Guardians of the Galaxy* was one of the highest grossing films of 2014, earning \$722,257,316 worldwide (“2014 Domestic Grosses,” 2014, Fig. 1).

Another great example of comic characters infiltrating popular culture is an artistic take on classic music album covers featuring comic book characters (Arrant, 2015). Classic album covers are being reinterpreted with comic characters from both Marvel and DC Comics and posted on social media sites. An example of this trend is reinterpreted artwork of the album *Blood Sugar Sex Magik* (1991), by the Red Hot Chili Peppers, now featuring Spider-Man,

“Venom,” “Carnage,” and “Toxin.” Conversely, DC Comics recently dedicated a month of comic book covers that featured artwork inspired by classic movie posters like *Bill & Ted’s Excellent Adventure* (1989), *The Matrix* (1989), and *300* (2006), just to name a few (Beedle, 2014).

In another example of popular culture trends, comic book conventions are now held in many major cities in the U.S., highlighting comic book and science fiction media found within popular culture. In 2014, the biggest comic book and popular culture convention *Comic Con International: San Diego* had over 130,000 attendees with festivities inside and outside the San Diego convention center (“About Comic-Con International,” N.D., para. 4). Not only are these conventions continuing to grow and spread throughout the country, but so are academic conferences dedicated to comic book studies. Conferences like the Comic Arts Conference, which is held every year at *San Diego Comic Con*, or the University of North Texas comic studies conference, both highlight up and coming scholars of the comic studies field. Moreover, it is also important to reiterate the growing fan base of about 24,000,000 comic book fans in the United States, according to Schenker (2014, para. 3). Therefore making my research project relevant to communication research as it not only focuses on comic book media, but more importantly, the audience, who makes this research possible.

In chapter two, I provided a brief history of comic books, discussing the various historical eras of comics such the Golden Age (1938 – 1950), the Silver Age (1956 – 1970), the Bronze Age (1970 – 1985), the Dark Age (late 1980s and early 1990s), the Renaissance Age (late 1990s – 2011) and the Digital Age (2012 – present). I also discussed various themes found within comic studies and comic book fandom research. Themes found within the literature in comic studies include feminism, queer studies, comic studies as a subject, analytical research, historical

issues, identity, educational issues, miscellaneous research and fandom. Scholarly literature on comic book fandom provided categories for levels of fandom, such as consumers, enthusiasts, aficionados and producers. Despite all the existing research that I found, there is still a lack of scholarly research in communication, making this study a need for further research for communication scholars.

In chapter three, I discussed the application of qualitative interviews as a methodological approach in communication research and in this study. Furthermore, I explained the utilization of parasocial theory as the theoretical framework in communication research and in this research project. Additionally, I described the data collection process in which I recorded comic book fans interviews to assess their level of fandom. Participants of this study were found through the use of flyers in local comic books stores and through social media, and snowball sampling was also used as a selection process for recruiting comic book fans. I also mentioned how the identities of the participants of this study will remain anonymous by changing their names and keeping all sensitive materials in a password protected folder, and how I otherwise followed the IRB research protocol at this university.

In chapter four, my analysis described various common themes found within the 26 interviews of comic book fans such as the demographics of the fans involved in this study, early exposure to their favorite character(s), how the characters have had an impact on the fans, how these fans wish they had similar superpowers and/or characteristics based on their favorite comic book characters, critiquing sexism in comic books, criticism on whether comic books are considered a good source of literature, and finally, fan classification. Through my analysis, I demonstrated how parasocial relationships exist between comic book fans and their favorite character(s). Through these parasocial relationships, I categorized fan attachment level and how

much they identified with their favorite character. These categories include consumer, enthusiast and aficionado. In the process, this study allowed me to combine my knowledge of comic books with my understandings about fandom, and to learn about the variety of comic book fans that there are in the comic book fan community.

To conclude, I hope that communication and comic book studies scholars can learn that parasocial relationships through comic books and comic book characters are relevant research, and that this study can contribute to further research on comic book fan identity. In this study, it is evident that comic book fans had an attachment to their favorite characters, but parasocial attachment can also relate to any form of media, whether it is television, literature, music or sports. Moreover, if there are fandoms involved within that particular medium, most likely those fans have an attachment involved, thus demonstrating parasocial theory at work. People have attachments to various forms of media (television, literature, music, sports, and comic books), as it becomes a part of who they are and how they identify themselves. Leading to a certain level of attachment, just as it was shown in this study's analysis, the stronger the level of attachment, the stronger the fan identifies with his/her favorite comic character(s).

According to research, the three main factors that led to the strongest attachment levels were merchandise, knowledge and enthusiasm. The impact of the characters on the fans was a lot greater than originally expected. Most of these fans truly look up to these fictional characters as sources of inspiration and good morals. For example, an interesting case is that of Dexter, who keeps referring to a connection that he has with parent/child relationships in comic books, comparing it to that of himself and his son. The fact that Dexter is comparing himself as a father with comic book characters, such as Batman and Robin, is a fascinating connection that the fan has with his favorite characters. Dexter's connection was simply unforeseen, yet this is a deeper

form of attachment than was expected.

Another example is Bill, who constantly refers to the 1978 *Superman* film and describes how the film set an example of what good morals are to him. He compares Superman's morals to Christian religion by stating that Superman waited his entire life to meet "Lois Lane." Bill then relates this situation to himself by mentioning how he waited for "the right girl" and delayed having sexual intercourse until marriage. In addition, Bill compares himself to both Superman/Clark Kent (a journalist) and Batman/Bruce Wayne (a businessman) describing how he is similar to both because of the college degrees (journalism and business) that he has earned. Finally, he mentions how he lives vicariously through Superman as many people compare his tall and athletic stature to the comic book hero.

Based on other fan related research that I analyzed, it was somewhat expected that there is a connection between the amount of merchandise the fan purchases and collects, and the knowledge of their favorite comic book character that places the fan into a stronger type of fan classification. It was expected that a large amount of knowledge and a collection of merchandise would signify a fan with a stronger attachment. The most unanticipated connection of them all was that of enthusiasm or the amount of emotion these fans have for their favorite character(s). One assumption was that most fans have a strong passion for their favorite character(s), but there were several instances where I found that this was not case, because certain fans did not show as much enthusiasm or emotional attachment as other fans did towards their favorite comic book character(s). Aficionados and enthusiasts expressed a large amount of enthusiasm and emotion, vocally and through their body language, as if they were talking about a respected family member or their best friend. Throughout the interviews, it became clear that the strongly attached fans are passionate about their favorite characters, compared to casual fans or consumers.

Another unexpected find within the research is the fact that most fans feel that both sexes are over sexualized within comic books, not just the female characters. On this subject, it is interesting to find how some fans idealize their own bodies to try to be like comic book characters. For example, Nick describes using comic books as a source of inspiration for bodybuilding, and developing an image complex in the process. Nick's answer makes great deal of sense seeing how most of these comic characters are in top physical shape.

On the other hand, it was not anticipated that all 26 fans believed that comic books are an acceptable source of literature. I expected at least one or two fans to disagree, based upon pre-existing notions of educational teachings or cultural understandings of comic books. Yet, all of the fans interviewed agreed that comic books should be considered a great source of literature. Two fans that are in the education field provided an unexpected result from the analysis. Linda, a librarian, and Ashley, a teacher, both mentioned how comic books could be helpful for children who are learning the English language. Both described that comic books help these children with learning to read and write, while developing the new language.

Additionally, the fact that some fans consider comic books an art form was an interesting result, due to the fact that both critics and scholars often consider comic books a low form of art. Historically, comic books have had a bad reputation, as many dismiss comic books as children's books, an insignificant form of popular culture that is not worthy of scholarly research, and an example of low or trashy culture. Such assessments are all based on standards set forth by scholars such as Theodore Adorno and other media scholars from the Frankfurt School, and media scholar Matthew Arnold (Arnold, 2009; Adorno, 2009). Authors like William Shakespeare or Edgar Allan Poe are taken seriously in comparison to comic books or graphic novels. Yet, comic book authors like Alan Moore, Art Spiegelman and Chris Ware have all

received critical acclaim for their literary work in the comic book field (Grossman, 2010; “Art Spiegelman,” 2014). Thus furthering the great debate on whether comic books should be considered a higher form of popular culture since they are currently not held to the standards of literary critics. An irony of this debate is that many classic novels have been adapted into graphic novels or comic books (Habash, 2010; Green, 2012). Books like *The Jungle* (1906), *Fahrenheit 451* (1953) *The Divine Comedy* (1555), *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), and even The Christian Bible have all been adapted into comic book/graphic novel format ("The Bible").

Also, it is important to note that those fans who are enthusiasts and that are aficionados lead a ritualistic cultural process and lifestyle. Communication and media scholar James Carey (1989) described “ritual communication” as “participation,” “association,” and “the process of common faith.” Other definitions have more to do with identity such as, “commonness,” “communion,” “community” and “communication” (p. 240). Carey also defined ritual views of communication as being a “representation of shared beliefs” (p. 240). Interestingly, fans lead ritualistic lives by routinely buying and reading comic books or graphic novels, or buying merchandise to add to their collection. They also share their knowledge and “love” of their favorite character(s) with other members of the comic book community, which is similar to a sports fan, who ritualistically attends or views the sports game, while wearing his or her favorite jersey, chanting and rooting for their favorite team. Such ritual communication behavior defines who these fans are because they identify with their favorite character(s), and because the characters traits become a part of the fans personality.

Additionally, in much comic book research, a majority of the work was based on the assumption of transmission views of communication through comic books. Again, I refer to

James Carey's (1989) landmark study in which he defines a transmission view of communication as the "transmission of signals or messages over distance for purpose of control" (p. 240). This means that messages or signals given to the audience or receiver are understood in a specific fashion. Most researchers are focused on analyzing the textual and visual aspects (the transmission view) of comic books and comic book media. For example, scholars Tobe (2006), Casey & Hall (2006), Teiwes (2011) have all used the transmission view to analyze comic book media within comic studies research. Tobe (2006) and Casey & Hall (2006) both textually and visually examine comic books to identify issues of gender with the title character of a specific comic book series. Teiwes (2011) investigates various Superman and Superman-like interpretations from writer Alan Moore, comparing and contrasting various traits these comic characters have. Psychiatrist Fredric Wertham, who wrote *Seduction of the Innocent* also analyzed and criticized comic books through the "transmission" point of view. As he believed that comic books would corrupt children's minds by promoting violence, influencing minors to become homosexuals or sexual deviants, according to his critical analysis (Wertham, 2004; Heer & Worcester, 2009). These studies are just a few examples of transmission view at work in comic book research that focuses on analyzing text, imagery, characters and story arcs.

This research, on the other hand, presents a different point of view, that of emphasis on the audience. By examining comic book fans, this project emphasizes the ritual point of view, which focuses on fan behaviors and how they attach and identify themselves with their favorite comic book character(s). Woo (2011), who also wrote a study on comic book fans, believes that fans practice ritualistic behaviors by attending their local comic book store weekly to buy comic books or other comic related paraphernalia. In addition, comic book fans participate in "ritual behavior" by socializing with other fans within the comic book community at their local comic

book stores. It is also important to note that by presenting the ritual point of view in this study, fans describe how their favorite character(s) have an influence on their morals and ideals. Throughout the analysis, I provided examples of comic book fans mentioning how they believe that their favorite comic book character(s) have taught them how to become a better person by depicting good morals. These two examples (Carey and Woo) serve as justification to the communication research I have conducted within this study.

Furthermore, I submit that through identifying with comic book characters, fans have more power than they realize by resisting various subject matter within comic book media. According to John Fiske (2009), for example, fans have the power of resistance, not just by opposing power, but also by creating their own meanings and voicing opinions. Fiske also mentions that there are two types of resistances corresponding to social power: the first is the power to construct meanings, pleasures and social identities, or semiotic power; the second is the power to construct a socioeconomic system, or social power. Two examples of such resistance, which comic book fans have created, are in the form of a Netflix television show and a comic book that features social commentary on Indian culture. *Daredevil* (2015) is an original Netflix series that is based on a blind superhero from Marvel comics. A recent article from *National Public Radio* mentions how many fans demanded that Netflix should provide audio assistance and accessibility for the visually impaired so that they would be able to enjoy a television show along with everyone else (NPR Staff, 2015). Meanwhile, the other article discusses a new Indian female superhero that was created to fight against rape and violence against women in India (Chatterjee, 2014). This comic book character “Priya” was created to provide social awareness about rape and violence against females in India and all over the world, while also providing a strong female character that uses her intelligence as her superpower.

Consequently, the history of comic books displays important events and subject matter that is reflected within an evolution of comic books' story arcs. Not only are the story arcs evolving, but comic book creators develop a contemporary take on the character(s) that reflect the particular time period. In some cases, a few of comic books most established characters are later revealed to be gay or lesbian. For example, one of the original members of the X-Men, "Ice man," was later revealed to be homosexual (Burlingame, 2015). Comic books are a medium that will always be adapted to the time, thus furthering identification between comic book fans and their favorite character(s). This study is just the beginning of what could possibly be a new trend of communication research, as it not only focuses on comic book media, but also, the fans.

5.2 Limitations and Implications

A limitation within this research project was the number of participants involved. In future studies and research, a larger amount of comic book fans would be preferable as the variables and connections might change. Thus, leading to new connections or findings of attachment, within comic book audiences. Perhaps conducting a quantitative research, in comparison to qualitative research, could also lead to a larger and more diverse comic community. Using an online questionnaire with the parasocial interaction scale could help identify the attachment level that the fans will have with their favorite comic book character(s). Yet, a positive aspect of conducting a qualitative interview is that the researcher is able to meet with the fans. By meeting with the fans, the researcher can ask them follow up questions, and see first-hand how enthusiastic and passionate they are for their favorite character(s).

Another important limitation to mention is the limited amount of female fans in this study. It would be ideal to have a 50/50 ratio between both sexes. Unfortunately, that was not the case in this study. With the majority of comic book fans and creators being male, some scholars

believe that comic books are produced to represent male fantasies by illustrating over sexualized women (Emad, 2006; McGrath, 2007). Fortunately, things are changing within the comic book industry, and both female comic characters and fans are increasing. A similar demographic limitation was the variation of ages among the fans that participated in this study. Unfortunately, my study was unable to include fans over the age of 36, and due to IRB guidelines, it is difficult to survey individuals who are younger than the age of 21. It would be ideal to discover what type of attachment levels fans of all ages have with their favorite comic character(s).

With regard to the questionnaire (see appendix), it can be beneficial to include more questions on other comic book media, such as cartoons, films and video games. Not all fans are readers of the comic books, so this is an important consideration for future research. Another factor to consider is that some of these fans identify with characters that are not as well known, that lack merchandise, or that have not appeared in other forms of media. In some cases, the fan might be strongly attached to a lesser-known comic book character. The fact that this character has less merchandise than other popular comic characters and that the character does not appear in any forms of media (e.g., television, films or cartoons), might affect the results of fans that choose lesser-known characters.

As for the actual interviews, I felt that some topics could have been discussed further, such as issues of gender, race, or LGBT comic characters. Such topics are worthy of discussion in scholarly research due to the importance of these issues within contemporary comic book culture. As a final point, comic book media continue to infiltrate into many forms of popular culture and generate revenue through blockbuster films, comic books and graphic novels, clothing, toys and other collectibles. Despite this fact, comic studies and the comic book community are still understudied in communication research. As a result of this communication

study about comic book fans, I was able to demonstrate how fan attachment levels can be measured through parasocial theory and qualitative interviews. Comic book fans were categorized into three sections: consumers (casually attached), enthusiasts (semi-attached) and aficionados (strongly attached). Fans with stronger attachment levels identified with their favorite comic book character(s) as if the fictional character(s) were best friends or members of the family. In other cases, fans identify with their favorite comic book character, embodying similar traits from the character.

Furthermore, through conducting this study I also learned how to think more critically about comic book media by identifying such issues as culture, feminism, race, and the lack of racial and female diversity in comic books. It became more evident that characters of racial minority and major female characters are not as visible or as popular as Caucasian and male comic book characters. I also became more informed on the lack of comic book research within communication studies. As a result of this study, I also became more familiar with theoretical differences on communication and behaviors by members within the comic book community. For example, attending their local comic book store regularly to buy comic books, comic book merchandise, and to socialize with other members of the comic book community.

In addition, this study contributes to both comic studies and communication research, as I was able to determine comic book fan attachment by way of parasocial theory through qualitative interviews. Furthermore, this research provides justification that parasocial theory is a viable form of measurement towards comic book fans as I was able to categorize the 26 participants into three separate sections of fandom. As a final contribution, this study also provides further awareness for audience and fandom research, as it focuses on a specific sub-genre of fandom within popular culture. Specific genres of popular culture, such as comic books,

are able to unite fans of all ages into one community. I submit that this study provides further knowledge about comic book fans that might be unknown to scholars as well as the general public.

REFERENCES

- 2014 Domestic Grosses*. (2014, September 12). Retrieved September 12, 2014, from <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/yearly/chart/?yr=2014&p=.htm>
- About Comic-Con International. (n.d.). Retrieved October 25, 2014, from <http://www.comic-con.org/about>
- Adorno, T. (2009). On Popular Music. In *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader* (4th ed., pp. 63-74). London, England: Pearson Education Limited.
- Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.: Season 1. (2014). Retrieved December 30, 2014, from <http://www.rottentomatoes.com/tv/marvel-s-agents-of-s-h-i-e-l-d-/s02/>
- All time box office*. (2013). Retrieved from <http://boxofficemojo.com/alltime/world/>
- Abercrombie, N., & Longhurst, B. (1998). Fans and Enthusiasts. In *Audiences: A sociological theory of performance and imagination* (pp. 121-157). London, England: Sage Publications.
- Aldama, F. L. (2013). Mood, mystery, and demystification in gilbert hernandez's twentieth-first-century noir stand-alones. *ImageText: Interdisciplinary Comics Studies*, 7(1).
- Annese, S. (2004). Mediated Identity in the Parasocial Interaction of TV. *Identity: An International Journal of Theory and Research*, 4(4), 371-388.
- Arnold, M. (2009). Culture and Anarchy. In *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader* (4th ed., pp. 6-11). London, England: Pearson Education Limited.
- Arrant, C. (2015, April 9). Famous album covers get a DC and Marvel remix - Robot 6 @ Comic Book Resources. Retrieved April 21, 2015, from <http://robot6.comicbookresources.com/2015/04/famous-album-covers-get-a-dc-and-marvel-remix/>

- Arrow: Season 3. (2014). Retrieved December 30, 2014, from <http://www.rottentomatoes.com/tv/arrow/s03/>
- Arruda D. (Producer) (2015). *SC Featured: Phoenix Rising* [Television Clip]. United States of America. ESPN. Retrieved from <http://espn.go.com/video/clip?id=12432820>
- Art Spiegelman. (n.d.). Retrieved January 10, 2015, from <http://barclayagency.com/spiegelman.html>
- Asselin, M., Schwartz-Barcott, D., & Osterman, P. (2013). Exploring reflection as a process embedded in experienced nurses' practice: A qualitative study. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 69*(4), 905-914.
- Auter, P. & Palmgreen, P. (2000). Development and validation of a parasocial interaction measure: The audience-persona interaction scale. *Communication Research Reports, 17*(1), 79-89.
- Babaian, C. S., & Chalian, A. A. (2014). "the thyroidectomy story": Comic books, graphic novels, and the novel approach to teaching head and neck surgery through the genre of the comic book. *Journal of Surgical Education, 71*(3), 413-418.
- Baek, Y., Bae, Y., & Jang, H. (2013). Social and Parasocial Relationships on Social Network Sites and Their Differential Relationships with Users' Psychological Well-Being. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking, 16*(7), 512-517.
- Balinisteanu, T. (2012). Goddess cults in techno-worlds: Tank girl and the borg queen. *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion, 28*(1).
- Barnett, M. (Director) (2011). *Superheroes* [Motion picture]. (2011). United States of America: Docurama Films.
- Bartsch, A. (2012). Emotional Gratification in Entertainment Experience. Why Viewers of

- Movies and Television Series Find it Rewarding to Experience Emotions. *Media Psychology*, 15, 267-302.
- Beaty, B. (2012). Introduction: Out of the Historical Dustbin – Comics and the Hierarchy of Genres. B. Beaty (Ed.). In *Comics versus art* (pp. 3-14). Toronto, Ontario: University of Toronto Press.
- Beaty, B. (2012). What If Comics Were Art? Defining a Comics Art World. B. Beaty (Ed.). In *Comics versus art* (pp. 17-48). Toronto, Ontario: University of Toronto Press.
- Beaty, B. (2012). On Junk, Investments, and Junk Investments: The Evolution of Comic Book Collectables. B. Beaty (Ed.). In *Comics versus art* (pp. 153-182). Toronto, Ontario: University of Toronto Press.
- Beaty, B. (2012). Highbrow Comics and Lowbrow Art? The Shifting Contexts of the Comics Art Object. B. Beaty (Ed.). In *Comics versus art* (pp. 131-151). Toronto, Ontario: University of Toronto Press.
- Beedle, T. (2014, December 12). The Complete DC Comics Movie Poster Covers, Part 1. Retrieved April 20, 2015, from <http://www.dccomics.com/blog/2014/12/12/the-complete-dc-comics-movie-poster-covers-part-1>
- Beineke, C. (2010). "her guardiner": Alan moore's swamp thing as the green man. *ImageText: Interdisciplinary Comics Studies*, 5(4).
- Berger, A. (2014). Interviews. In *Media and Communication Research Methods: An Introduction to qualitative and quantitative approaches* (pp. 157-178). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.
- Bernard, M., & Carter, J. B. (2004). Alan moore and the graphic novel: Confronting the fourth dimension. *ImageText: Interdisciplinary Comics Studies*, 1(2).

- BmSt32. EDITORIAL: Why I Believe Superheroes Are An Inspiration. (2013, June 12). Retrieved September 6, 2014, from <http://www.comicbookmovie.com/fansites/BmSt32/news/?a=81401#MtFcMUFJ6XO00y4Q.99>
- Bond, B., & Drogos, K. (2014). Sex on the Shore: Wishful Identification and Parasocial Relationships as Mediators in the Relationship Between Jersey Shore Exposure and Emerging Adults' Sexual Attitudes and Behaviors. *Media Psychology*, (12), 102-126. Retrieved November 24, 2014.
- Botzakis, S. (2009). Adult fans of comics books: What they get out of reading. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 53(1), 50-59.
- Botzakis, S. (2011). 'to be a part of the dialogue': American adults reading comic books. *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics*, 2(2), 113-123.
- Botzakis, S. (2013). Why i teach comics in higher education: Finding truth, justice and literacy with graphic novels. *Knowledge Quest*, 41(3), 68-70.
- Bouzereau, L. (Producer) (1986) *Releasing The Duck: The Making of Howard the Duck* [DVD]. (2008). Universal Home Entertainment.
- Branch, S., Wilson, K., & Agnew, C. (2013). Committed to Oprah, Homer, or House: Using the investment model to understand parasocial relationships. *Psychology of Popular Media Culture*, 96-109.
- Branscum, P., & Sharma, M. (2009). Comic books an untapped medium for health promotion. *American Journal of Health Studies*, 24(4), 430-439.
- Brody, M. (2004). Batman: Psychic trauma and its solution. *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 46(2), 171-178.

- Brown, K. (2013). Musical sequences in comics. *The Comics Grid: Journal of Comics scholarship*, 3(1), 1-6.
- Brown, L. (2006). Yorick, don't be a hero: Productive motion in y: the last man. *ImageText: Interdisciplinary Comics Studies*, 3(1).
- Brown, W., & Basil, M. (2010). Parasocial interaction and identification: Social change processes for effective health interventions. *Health Communication*, 25, 601-602
- Bukatman, S. (2011). Why i hate superhero movies. *Cinema Journal*, 50(3), 118-122.
- Bukatman, S. (2014). Sculpture, stasis, the comics, and hellboy. *Critical Inquiry*, 40(3), 104-117.
- Burlingame, R. (2015, April 21). Original X-Men Member Comes Out As Gay In New Marvel Comic. Retrieved April 21, 2015, from <http://comicbook.com/2015/04/21/original-x-men-member-comes-out-as-gay-in-new-marvel-comic/>
- Camus, C. (2013). The "outsider": Neil gaiman and the old testament. *An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies*, 29(2), 77-99.
- Campbell, E. (2004). Comics on the main street of culture. *ImageText: Interdisciplinary Comics Studies*, 1(2).
- Cantril, H. (1942). Professor quiz: A gratifications study. In P. F. Lazarsfeld & F. Stanton (Eds.), *Radio research 1941* (pp. 34–45). New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce.
- Casey, J., & Hall, S. (2006). The exotic other scripted: Identity and metamorphosis in david mack's kabuki. *ImageText: Interdisciplinary Comics Studies*, 3(1).
- Carleton, S. (2014). Drawn to change: Comics and critical consciousness. *Labour/Le Travail*, 73, 151-177.

- Carey, J. (1989). A Cultural Approach to Communication. In *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society* (pp. 13-36). New York, New York: Routledge.
- Carney, S. (2006). The tides of history: Alan moore's historiographic vision. *ImageText: Interdisciplinary Comics Studies*, 2(2).
- Cates, I. (2011). On the literary use of superheroes; or, batman and superman fistfight in heaven. *American Literature*, 83(4), 831-857.
- Chambliss, J. C. (2012). Superhero comics: Artifacts of the u.s. experience. *Juniata Voices*, 12, 145-151.
- Chatterjee, R. (2014, December 16). India's New Comic Book Hero Fights Rape, Rides On The Back Of A Tiger. Retrieved April 21, 2015, from <http://www.npr.org/blogs/goatsandsoda/2014/12/16/371209381/indias-new-comic-book-hero-fights-rape-rides-on-the-back-of-a-tiger>
- Cohen, J. (2003). Parasocial Breakups: Measuring Individual Differences In Responses To The Dissolution Of Parasocial Relationships. *Mass Communication and Society*, 6(2), 191-202.
- Cohen, J. (2004). Parasocial Break-Up From Favorite Television Characters: The Role Of Attachment Styles And Relationship Intensity. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 21(2), 187-202.
- Cohn, N. (2012). The winding, pot-holed road of comic art scholarship. *Cognitive Science: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, 34, 413-452.
- Cohn, N. (2013). Navigating comics: an empirical and theoretical approach to strategies of reading comic page layouts. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 4, 1-15.

- Condis, M. (2010). The saga of the swamp thing: Feminism and race on the comic book stand. *ImageText: Interdisciplinary Comics Studies*, 5(4).
- Constantine: Season 1. (2014). Retrieved December 30, 2014, from <http://www.rottentomatoes.com/tv/constantine/s01/>
- Coogan, P. (2009) The definition of a superhero. In J. Heer & K. Worcester (Eds.), *A comic studies reader* (pp. 78-93). Jackson, Mississippi: The University of Mississippi Press.
- Crawford, G. (2004). Conceptualizing sport fans. In *Consuming sport: Fans, sport and culture*. London: Routledge.
- Cronin, B. (2014, December 27). 2014 Top 100 Comic Book Writers and Artists Master List - Comics Should Be Good! @ Comic Book Resources. Retrieved April 24, 2015, from <http://goodcomics.comicbookresources.com/2014/12/27/2014-top-100-comic-book-writers-and-artists-master-list/>
- Crutcher, P. A. (2011). Complexity in the comic and graphic novel medium: Inquiry through bestselling batman stories. *Journal of Popular Culture*, 44(1), 53-73.
- Culp, B. (Director) *Legends of the knight* [Motion picture]. (2013). USA: Brett Culp Films.
- D'Amore, L. M. (2012). The accidental supermom: Superheroines and maternal performativity, 1963–1980. *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 45(6), 1226-1248.
- Da-Silva, E. R., Coelho, L. B. N., Mueller de Campos, T. R., Carelli, A., de Miranda, G. S., dos Santos, E. L. D. S., Boa, T., & Silva, N. R., dos Passos, M. I. D. S. (2014). Marvel and dc characters inspired by arachnids. *The Comics Grid: Journal of Comics scholarship*, 4(1), 1-14.
- De Castro, R. (2015, February 4). Mariachi Batman? Mexicans reinvent the Dark Knight in their own image. Retrieved March 16, 2015, from

- [http://fusion.net/story/43825/mariachi-batman-mexicans-reinvent-the-dark-knight-in-their-own I
mage/?utm_source=facebook&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=fusionnetwork](http://fusion.net/story/43825/mariachi-batman-mexicans-reinvent-the-dark-knight-in-their-own-image/?utm_source=facebook&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=fusionnetwork)
- Deazley, R. (2014). Comics, copyright and academic publishing. *The Comics Grid: Journal of Comics scholarship*, 4(1), 1-12.
- Debnath, N. (2014, October 20). Gotham, episode 2 - TV review: A darker installment that brings new life to the Batman franchise. Retrieved January 3, 2015, from <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/reviews/gotham-episode-2-review-a-darker-instalment-that-brings-new-life-to-the-batman-franchise-9806264.html>
- DiCicco-Bloom, B., & Crabtree, B. (2006). The qualitative research interview. *Medical Education*, 40, 314-321.
- Dittmer, J. (2005). Captain america's empire: Reflections on identity, popular culture, and post-9/11 geopolitics. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 95(3), 626-643.
- Dittmer, J. (2007). "america is safe while its boys and girls believe in its creeds!": Captain america and american identity prior to world war 2. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 25, 401-423.
- Dittmer, J. (2007). Captain britain and the narration of nation. *The Geographical Review*, 101(1), 71-87.
- Dittmer, J., & Larsen, S. (2007). Captain canuck, audience response, and the project of canadian nationalism. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 8(5), 735-753.
- Doran, M. (2014, September 18). The New Full Comic Book Superhero Movie Schedule. Retrieved September 19, 2014, from <http://www.newsarama.com/21815-the-new-full->

comic-book-superhero-movie-schedule.html2

- Du Plooy, G. (2003). Collecting Data by asking questions. In *Communication Research: Techniques, Methods and Applications* (3rd ed., pp. 134-144). Juta and Company.
- Duncan, R., & Smith, M. J. (2009). *The power of comics: History form and culture*. New York: Continuum.
- Ebert, R. (2003, October 23). Superman III Movie Review & Film Summary. Retrieved October 27, 2014, from <http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/superman-iii-1983>
- Edidin, R., Garcia, A., Collins, E., & Ellis, S. (2014, April 26). We Are Comics. Retrieved September 6, 2014. from <http://wearecomics.tumblr.com>
- Emad, M. C. (2006). Reading wonder woman's body: Mythologies of gender and nation. *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 39(6).
- Eyal, K., & Rubin, A. (2003). Viewer Aggression and Homophily, Identification, and Parasocial Relationships With Television Characters. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 47(1), 77-98.
- Eyal, K., & Dailey, R. (2012). Examining Relational Maintenance in Parasocial Relationships. *Mass Communication and Society*, (15), 758-781.
- Fawaz, R. (2011). "where no x-man has gone before!" mutant superheroes and the cultural politics of popular fantasy in postwar america. *American Literature*, 83(2), 355-388.
- Fenty, S., Houp, T., & Taylor, L. (2004). Webcomics: The influence and continuation of the comix revolution. *ImageText: Interdisciplinary Comics Studies*, 1(2).
- Fisher, M. (2006). Gothic oedipus: subjectivity and capitalism in christopher nolan's batman begins. *ImageText: Interdisciplinary Comics Studies*, 2(2).

- Fiske, J. (2009). The Popular Economy. J. Storey (Ed.). In *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*. (4th ed., pp. 562-580). London, England: Pearson Education Limited.
- Franklin III, M.E. (2001) Coming out in comic books: Letter columns, readers, and gay and lesbian characters. In M.P. McAllister, E. H. Sewell Jr., I. Gordon (Eds.), *Comics & ideology* (pp. 177-194). New York, New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.
- Frederiksen, H., Kragstrup, J., & Dehlholm-Lambertsen, B. (2010). Attachment in the doctor–patient relationship in general practice: A qualitative study. *Scandinavian Journal of Primary Health Care*, 28, 185-190.
- Friedenthal, A. (2011). Monitoring the Past: DC Comics' Crisis on Infinite Earths and the Narrativization of Comic Book History. *ImageText: Interdisciplinary Comics Studies*, 6(2). Retrieved February 12, 2015, from http://www.english.ufl.edu/imagetext/archives/v6_2/friedenthal/
- Gardner, J. E. (2013). She got her man, but could she keep him? love and marriage in american romance comics, 1947–1954. *The Journal of American Culture*, 36(1), 16-24.
- Genter, R. (2007). “With great power comes great responsibility”: Cold war culture and the birth of marvel comics. *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 4(6), 953-954.
- Relationships. *Mass Communication and Society*, (15), 758-781.
- Giles, D. (2002). Parasocial Interaction: A Review Of The Literature And A Model For Future Research. *Media Psychology*, 4, 279-305.
- Glaser, J. (2013). Picturing the Transnational in Palomar: Gilbert Hernandez and the Comics of the Borderlands. *ImageText: Interdisciplinary Comics Studies*, 7(1). Retrieved February 13, 2015, from http://www.english.ufl.edu/imagetext/archives/v7_1/glaser/
- Goodrum, M. (2013). ‘friend of the people of many lands’: Johnny everyman, ‘critical

- internationalism' and liberal post-war us heroism. *Social History*, 38(2), 203-219.
- Gonzalez, C. (2013). Turf, tags, and territory: Spatiality in jaime hernandez's "vida loca: the death of speedy ortiz". *ImageText: Interdisciplinary Comics Studies*, 7(1). Retrieved February 13, 2015, from http://www.english.ufl.edu/imagetext/archives/v7_1/gonzalez/
- Goode, J., & Robinson, J. (2013). Linguistic Synchrony in Parasocial Interaction. *Communication Studies*, 64(4), 453-466.
- Gordon, I. (2001) Nostalgia, myth, and ideology: Visions of superman at the end of the "american century". In M.P. McAllister, E. H. Sewell Jr., I. Gordon (Eds.), *Comics & ideology* (pp. 177-194). New York, New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.
- Gotham: Season 1. (2014). Retrieved December 30, 2014, from <http://www.rottentomatoes.com/tv/gotham/s01/>
- Green, A. (2012, November 1). From Classics to Graphics: 6 Literary Masterpieces Turned Into Graphic Novels. Retrieved April 20, 2015, from <http://mentalfloss.com/article/12962/classics-graphics-6-literary-masterpieces-turned-graphic-novels>
- Greenblatt, J. (2010). I for integrity: (inter)subjectivities and sidekicks in alan moore's v for vendetta and frank miller's batman. *ImageText: Interdisciplinary Comics Studies*, 4(3). Retrieved February 11, 2015, from http://www.english.ufl.edu/imagetext/archives/v4_3/greenblatt/
- Griffo, M. (2014, August 1). Little Boy Inspires Dad to Create Comic Book Character With Down Syndrome. Retrieved January 5, 2015, from <http://themighty.com/2014/08/little-boy-inspires-dad-to-create-comic-book-character-with-down-syndrome/>

- Grossman, L. (2010, January 1). Is Watchmen one of the All-TIME 100 Best Novels?
Retrieved December 27, 2014, from <http://entertainment.time.com/2005/10/16/all-time-100-novels/slide/watchmen-1986-by-alan-moore-dave-gibbons/>
- Gunning, T. (2014). The art of succession: Reading, writing, and watching comics.
Critical Inquiry, 40(3), 36-51.
- Habash, G. (2010, August 20). Breathtaking Adaptations: 13 Classic Books Transformed Into Graphic Novels (PHOTOS). Retrieved April 20, 2015, from
http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/08/20/classic-book-to-graphic-novel_n_688270.html
- Hataway, J. (n.d.). *Audience-media figure relationships: A critical review of parasocial interaction*. (Unpublished master's thesis). University of Alabama. Tuscaloosa, AL.
- Hartmann, T., & Goldhoorn, C. (2011). Horton and Wohl Revisited: Exploring Viewers' Experience of Parasocial Interaction. *Journal of Communication*, (61), 1104-1121.
- Hayton, C. J., & Albright, D. L. (2012). The military vanguard for desegregation: Civil rights era war comics and racial integration. *ImageText: Interdisciplinary Comics Studies*, 6(2). Retrieved February 12, 2015, from
http://www.english.ufl.edu/imagetext/archives/v6_2/hayton_albright/
- Heer, J., & Worcester, K. (Eds.). (2009). *A comics studies reader*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.
- Hermanowicz, J. (2013). The Longitudinal Qualitative Interview. *Qualitative Sociology*, 36, 189-208.
- Hoffner, C., & Cohen, E. (2012). Responses to Obsessive Compulsive Disorder on Monk Among Series Fans: Parasocial Relations, Presumed Media Influence, and Behavioral

- Outcomes. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 56(4), 650-668.
- Hogan, J. (2009). The comic book as symbolic environment: The case of iron man. *ETC*. 199-214
- Horton, D., & Wohl, R. R. (1956). Mass communication and para-social interaction: Observations on intimacy at a distance. *Psychiatry*, 19, 215-229.
- Howard, Y. (2012). Politically incorrect, visually incorrect: Bitchy butch's unapologetic discrepancies in lesbian identity and comic art. *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 45(1), 79-98.
- Howes, F. (2010). Imagining a multiplicity of visual rhetorical traditions: Comics lessons from rhetoric histories. *ImageText: Interdisciplinary Comics Studies*, 5(3). Retrieved February 12, 2015, from http://www.english.ufl.edu/imagetext/archives/v5_3/howes/
- Hundt, G., Bryanston, C., Lowe, P., Cross, S., Sandall, J., & Spencer, K. (2010). Inside 'Inside View': Reflections on stimulating debate and engagement through a multimedia live theatre production on the dilemmas and issues of pre-natal screening policy and practice. *Health Expectations*, 14, 1-9.
- Jacobs, D. (2007). More than words: Comics as a means of teaching multiple literacies. *The English Journal*, 96(3), 19-25.
- Jacobs, W., & Jones, G. (1985). *The comic book heroes: From the silver age to the present*. New York, New York: Crown Publishing Group.
- Jin, S., & Park, N. (2009). Parasocial Interaction with My Avatar: Effects of Interdependent Self-Construal and the Mediating Role of Self-Presence in an Avatar-Based Console Game, Wii. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, 12(6), 723-727.
- Kantor, M. (Director) (2013). Truth justice and the american way [Television series

- episode]. In Kantor, M. (Executive Producer), *Superheroes: A Never-Ending Battle*. Arlington, VA: Ghostlight Films. Retrieved from <http://www.pbs.org/superheroes>
- Kirtiklis, K. (2011). Not by Communication Alone. Epistemology and Methodology as Typological Criteria of Communication Theories1. *Outline of the Philosophy of Communication Sciences*, 42-55.
- Keating, E. M. (2014). The female link: Citation and continuity in watchmen. *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 45(6), 1266-1288.
- Kendrick, B. (2014, October 29). 'Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.' Ratings Improve; 'The Flash' Drops Slightly. Retrieved December 30, 2014, from <http://screenrant.com/agents-of-shield-season-2-ratings-flash-show/>
- Kirsh, S. J., & Olczak, P. V. (2001). Rating comic book violence: Contributions of gender and trait hostility. *Social Behavior and Personality*, 29(8), 833-836.
- Kirtiklis, K. (2011). Not by Communication Alone. Epistemology and Methodology as Typological Criteria of Communication Theories 1. *Outline of the Philosophy of Communication Sciences*, 42-55.
- Kissell, R. (2014, December 4). Ratings: CW's 'Arrow' Hits Series High in 'Flash' Crossover Conclusion. Retrieved December 30, 2014, from <http://variety.com/2014/data/ratings/ratings-cws-arrow-hits-series-high-in-crossover-conclusion-with-the-flash-1201370983/>
- Kondoljy, A. (2014, December 29). L 7 Ratings: ABC's 'Marvel's Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.' Emerges as Tuesday's #1 Broadcast Series in Adults 18-49. Retrieved December 29, 2014, from <http://tvbythenumbers.zap2it.com/2014/12/29/17-ratings-abcs-marvels-agents-of-s-h-i-e-l-d-emerges-as-tuesdays-1-broadcast-series-in-adults-18-49/344267/>

- Kraver, J. (2013). Reinventing the composition classroom, or how making comics can clarify the composing process. *SANE journal: Sequential Art Narrative in Education*, 1(3), 30-46.
- Kremer, N. (2010). This is not your father's thor: Using comics to make mythology meaningful. *SANE journal: Sequential Art Narrative in Education*, 1(1), 1-24.
- Krueger, R. (2008). Abstraction, trauma, and the orphan in brian michael bendis and david mack's daredevil: Wake up. *ImageText: Interdisciplinary Comics Studies*, 4(2).
- Labio, C. (2011). What's in a name? the academic study of comics and the "graphic novel". *Cinema Journal*, 50(3), 123-126.
- Lather, J., & Moyer-Guse, E. (2011). How do we react when our favorite characters are taken away? an examination of a temporary parasocial breakup. *Mass Communication and Society*, 14, 196-215.
- Lederman, L., Stewart, L., Golubow, M., Goodhart, F., Powell, R., Laitman, L., & Cattafesta, J. (2001). Using Debriefing Interviews to Collect Qualitative Data on Dangerous Drinking: A Case Study. *Qualitative Research Reports in Communication*, 73-80.
- Leferve, P. (2010). Intertwining verbal and visual elements in printed narratives for adults. *Studies in Comics*, 1(1), 35-52.
- Legazcue, J. (2014, March 28). Using comic book characters to identify your true self: Comicbookgirl19 at TEDxClaremontColleges. Retrieved September 6, 2014, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LGtNFHtM81A>
- Lent, J. A. (2010). The winding, pot-holed road of comic art scholarship. *Studies in Comics*, 1(1), 7-33.

- Lewis, A. D. (2010). The shape of comic reading. *Studies in Comics*, 1(1), 71-81.
- Lieberman, D., & Andreeva, N. (2013, November 7). Netflix Picks Up Four Marvel Live-Action Series & A Mini Featuring Daredevil, Jessica Jones, Iron Fist, Luke Cage For 2015 Launch. Retrieved September 14, 2014, from <http://deadline.com/2013/11/disney-netflix-marvel-series-629696/>
- Lindlof, T., & Taylor, B. (2011). Producing Data II: Qualitative Interviewing. In *Qualitative Communication Research Methods* (4th ed., pp. 170-216). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.
- Low, D. E. (2012). ‘‘spaces invested with content’’: Crossing the ‘gaps’ in comics with readers in schools. *Children's Literature in Education*, 43, 368-385.
- Magilo, T. (2014, November 10). How 'Gotham' Became Fox's Fall Season Ratings Hero - TheWrap. Retrieved December 29, 2014, from <http://www.thewrap.com/gotham-fox-david-madden-tv-ratings-nielsen-joker-batman-ben-mckenzie/>
- Mallia, G. (2007). Learning from the sequence: The use of comics in instruction. *ImageText: Interdisciplinary Comics Studies*, 3(3). Retrieved February 13, 2014, from http://www.english.ufl.edu/imagetext/archives/v3_3/mallia/
- Manthei, J. (2011). How to read chico bento: Brazilian comics and national identity. *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture*, 29, 142-163.
- Maslon, L., & Kantor, M. (2013). *Superheroes!: Capes, cowls, and the creation of comic book culture*. New York, New York: Crown Archetype.
- Mastroianni, F., & Noto, A. (2008). Newsmaking on Drugs: A Qualitative Study with Journalism Professionals. *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*, 40(3), 293-300.

- Mazza, E. (2014, August 25). 'Action Comics' No. 1, First Superman Appearance, Sells For \$3.2 Million In eBay Auction. Retrieved September 27, 2014, from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/08/25/action-comics-superman-ebay_n_5707081.html
- McAllister, M.P. (2001) Ownership concentration in the u.s. comic book industry. In M.P. McAllister, E. H. Sewell Jr., I. Gordon (Eds.), *Comics & ideology* (pp. 177-194). New York, New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.
- McCloud, S. (1994). *Understanding comics*. (1 ed., Vol. 1). New York, New York: Harper Collins.
- McCloud, S. (2000). *Reinventing comics: How imagination and technology are revolutionizing an art form*. New York, New York: Harper Collins.
- McCloud, S. (2006). *Making comics: Storytelling secrets of comics, manga and graphic novels*. New York: Harper Collins.
- McGloin, M. (2014, December 25). Guardians of the Galaxy Top Grossing Film In 2014 In U.S. Retrieved December 29, 2014, from <http://movies.cosmicbooknews.com/content/guardians-galaxy-top-grossing-film-2014-us>
- McGrath, K. (2007). Gender, race, and latina identity: An examination of marvel comics' amazing fantasy and araña. *Atlantic Journal of Communication*, 15(4). 268-283.
- Mealer, M., & Jones, J. (2014). Methodological and ethical issues related to qualitative telephone interviews on sensitive topics. *Nurse Researcher*, 21(4), 32-37.
- Medley, S. (2010). Discerning pictures: how we look at and understand images in comics. *Studies in Comics*, 1(1), 53-70.

- Merrigan, G., & Huston, C. (2015). How to Construct Survey Research. In *Communication Research Methods* (3rd ed., pp. 261-290). New York, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Meskin, A. (2007). Defining comics?. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 65(4), 369-379.
- Milberg, A., Wählberg, R., Jakobsson, M., Olsson, E., Olsson, M., & Friedrichsen, M. (2012). What is a 'secure base' when death is approaching? A study applying attachment theory to adult patients' and family members' experiences of palliative home care. *Psycho-Oncology*, 21, 886-895.
- Mitchell, W.J.T. (2009) Beyond comparison. In J. Heer & K. Worcester (Eds.), *A comic studies reader* (pp. 78-93). Jackson, Mississippi: The University of Mississippi Press.
- Mitchell, W. J. T. (2014). Comics as media: Afterword. *Critical Inquiry*, 40(3), 255-265.
- Mitovich, M. (2014, October 8). Ratings: The Flash Hits the Ground Running, CW's Best Debut in 5 Years; ABC Sitcoms Tumble, POI Slips. Retrieved December 29, 2014, from <http://tvline.com/2014/10/08/the-flash-premiere-ratings/>
- Morrison, G. (2011). *Supergods: What masked vigilantes, miraculous mutants, and a sun god from smallville can teach us about being human*. (1st ed.). New York: Spiegel & Grau.
- Murray, C. (2011). Denise mina's hellblazer and the triumph of scottish schadenfreude. *Gothic Studies*, 13(2), 78-97.
- Murray, P. R. (2013). Behind the panel: Examining invisible labour in the comics publishing industry. *Publishing Research Quarterly*, 29(4), 336-343.
- Ndalianis, A. (2011). Why comics studies?. *Cinema Journal*, 50(3), 113-117.

- NPR Staff. (2015, April 18). After Fan Pressure, Netflix Makes 'Daredevil' Accessible To The Blind. Retrieved April 21, 2015, from http://www.npr.org/2015/04/18/400590705/after-fan-pressure-netflix-makes-daredevil-accessible-to-the-blind?utm_source=facebook.com&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=npr&utm_term=nprnews&utm_content=20150418&fb_ref=Default&fb_source=message
- Norlund, C. (2006). Imagining terrorists before sept. 11: Marvel's gi joe comic books, 1982-1994. *ImageText: Interdisciplinary Comics Studies*, 3(1). Retrieved February 12, 2015, from www.english.ufl.edu/imagetext/archives/v3_1/norlund/
- Nordstrom, S. (2013). Object-Interviews: Folding, Unfolding, and Refolding Perceptions of Objects. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 237-257.
- North, C. (2013). Black Cat: Fighting Gender Stereotypes through Motorcycling. *International Journal Of Motorcycle Studies*, 9(2), 1.
- Obregón, R. (2005). Hiv/aids, soap operas and young viewers: Exploring the intersection of media effects and reception analysis and its implications for health communication. *Investigación Y Desarrollo*, 13(2). 250-251.
- Okasha, S. (2002). Explanation in Science. In *Philosophy of Science: A Very Short Introduction* (p. 51). Great Clarendon Street, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Palmer-Mehta, V., & Hay, K. (2005). A superhero for gays?: Gay masculinity and green lantern. *The Journal of American Culture*, 28(4), 390-404.
- Papa, M., Singhal, A., Law, S., Pant, S., Sood, S., Rogers, E., & Shefner-Rogers, C. (2000). Entertainment-education And Social Change: An Analysis Of Parasocial Interaction,

- Social Learning, Collective Efficacy, And Paradoxical Communication. *Journal of Communication*, 31-55.
- Parasecoli, F. (2014). Gluttonous crimes: Chew, comic books, and the ingestion of masculinity. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 44, 236-246.
- Pearce, R., Jones, D., & Newton, J. (2011). Development of an Evidence-Based Patient Information Medium: Empowering Newly Diagnosed Patients With Primary Biliary Cirrhosis. *Journal of Visual Communication in Medicine*, 34(1), 4-13.
- Petrovic, P. (2010). The culturally constituted gaze: Fetishizing the feminine from alan moore and dave gibbons's watchmen to zack snyder's watchmen. *ImageText: Interdisciplinary Comics Studies*, 5(4). Retrieved February 12, 2015, from www.english.ufl.edu/imagetext/archives/v5_4/petrovic/
- Posch, L., Wagner, C., Singer, P., & Strohmaier, M. (2013). Meaning as Collective Use: Predicting Semantic Hashtag Categories on Twitter. *WWW 2013 Companion*, 621-628.
- Pratt, H. J. (2009). Narrative in comics. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 67(1), 107-117.
- Prince, M. J. (2011). Alan moore's america: The liberal individual and american identities in watchmen. *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 44(4), 815-830.
- Reynolds, E. (2009) *Screams, Vampires, Werewolves and Autographs: An Exploration of the Twilight Phenomenon*. (Master's thesis, Brigham Young University)
- Rivera, L. (2007). Appropriate(d) cyborgs: Diasporic identities in dwayne mcduffie's deathlok comic book series. *MELUS*, 32(3), 103-127.

- Romero-Jódar, A. (2013). Comic books and graphic novels in their generic context. towards a definition and classification of narrative iconical texts. *Journal of the Spanish Association of Anglo-American Studies*, 35(1), 117-135.
- Ross, J. (2014). Performing the reflective self: Audience awareness in high-stakes reflection. *Studies in Higher Education*, 39(2), 219-232.
- Roth, L. (2012). Innovation and orthodox comic books: The case of mahrwood press. *MELUS*, 37(2), 131-156.
- Royal, D. P. (2011). Jewish comics; or, visualizing current jewish narrative. *An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies*, 29(2), 1-12.
- Rubin, A., & Step, M. (2000). Impact of Motivation, Attraction, and Parasocial Interaction on Talk Radio listening. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 635-654.
- Rubin, L. (2012). Superheroes on the couch: Exploring our limits. *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 45(2), 410-431.
- Rubin, R. B., & McHugh, M. P. (1987). Development of parasocial interaction relationships. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 31, 279–292.
- Ruggiero, T. (2000). Uses And Gratifications Theory In The 21st Century. *Mass Communication and Society*, 3(1), 3-37.
- Sabeti, S. (2011). The irony of ‘cool club’: the place of comic book reading in schools. *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics*, 2(2), 137-149.
- Sandifer, P. (2008). Amazing fantasies: Trauma, affect, and superheroes. *English Language Notes*, 46(2), 175-192.

- Saunders, B. (2011). *Do the gods wear capes? spiritually, fantasy and superheroes*. (pp. 36-71).
New York, New York: Continuum International Publishing Group.
- Saxey, E. (2006). Desire without closure in Jaime Hernandez. *ImageText: Interdisciplinary Comics Studies*, 3(1).
- Schramm, H., & Hartmann, T. (2008). The psi-process scales: a new measure to assess the intensity and breadth of parasocial processes. *Communications*, 33, 385-401.
- Schedeen, J. (2014, December 3). Arrow: "The Brave and the Bold" Review - IGN.
Retrieved January 3, 2015, from <http://www.ign.com/articles/2014/12/04/arrow-the-brave-and-the-bold-review>
- Schenker, B. (2011, April 27). Who Are the Comic Book Fans on Facebook? *Graphic Policy*.
Retrieved April 28, 2014, from <http://graphicpolicy.com/2011/04/27/who-are-the-comic-fans-on-facebook>.
- Schenker, B. (2014, February 1). Facebook Fandom Spotlight: Who are the US Comic Fans?
Retrieved September 12, 2014, from <http://graphicpolicy.com/2014/02/01/facebook-fandom-spotlight-who-are-the-us-comic-fans-5/>
- Scott, C. (2007). Written in red, white, and blue: A comparison of comic book propaganda from world war ii and september 11. *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 40(2), 325-343.
- Scully, T., & Moorman, K. (2014). The rise of vigilantism in 1980 comics: Reasons and outcomes. *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 47(3), 634-653.
- Shannon, E. A. (2010). Something black in the American psyche: Formal innovation and Freudian imagery in the comics of Winsor McCay and Robert Crumb. *Canadian Review of American Studies*, 40(2), 187-211.

- Sharkey, R. (2008). 'Being' decentered in sandman: History, dreams, gender, and the 'prince of metaphor and allusion'. *ImageText: Interdisciplinary Comics Studies*, 4(1).
- Shaw, A. (2009). Women on women: Lesbian identity, lesbian community, and lesbian comics. *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 13, 88-97.
- Siegel, L. (2014, October 15). Warner Bros. Unveils DC COMICS Film Slate - WONDER WOMAN, THE FLASH, GREEN LANTERN, AQUAMAN, CYBORG, More. Retrieved October 25, 2014, from <http://www.newsarama.com/22447-warner-bros-unveils-dc-comics-film-slate-wonder-woman-the-flash-green-lantern-aquaman-cyborg-more.html>
- Simon, R. (2012). "without comic books, there would be no me": Teachers as connoisseurs of adolescents' literate lives. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 55(6), 516-526.
- Smith, G. (2010). Comics arts conference at the san diego comic-con. *Cinema Journal*, 49(3), 88-92.
- Söderström, K. (2012). Mental preparation during pregnancy in women with substance addiction: A qualitative interview-study. *Child & Family Social Work*, 17, 458-467.
- Sood, S., & Rogers, E. (2000). Dimensions of Parasocial Interaction by Letter-Writers to a Popular Entertainment-Education Soap Opera in India. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 386-414.
- Soto-Sanfiel, M., Ibiti, A., & Palencia Villa, R. (2014). Identification with lesbian characters: Reception processes of heterosexual and homosexual audiences from a mixed method approach. *Revista Latina De Comunicación Social*, 69, 275-306.

- Sullivan, J. (2013). Media Fandom and Audience Subcultures. In *“Media Audiences: Effects, Users, Institutions, and Power”* (pp. 189-212). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.
- Stolz, J. (2011). "All Things Are Possible": Towards a Sociological Explanation of Pentecostal Miracles and Healings. *Sociology of Religion*, 72(4), 456-482.
- Struthers, W. M. (2014). Comic books, mock trials, and zombies: Engaging integrative biopsychology themes in the classroom. *Journal of Psychology & Theology*, 42(1), 188-199.
- Tessier, S. (2012). From Field Notes, to Transcripts, to Tape Recordings: Evolution or Combination? *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 11(4), 446-460.
- Teiwes, J. (2011). A man of steel (by any other name): Adaptation and continuity in alan moore's "superman". *ImageText: Interdisciplinary Comics Studies*, 5(4).
- The Bible*. (n.d.). Retrieved April 20, 2015, from <http://www.dccomics.com/graphic-novels/the-bible>
- Thomas, P. L. (2011). Adventures in genre!: rethinking genre through comics/graphic novels. *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics*, 2(2), 187-201.
- Tilley, C. L. (2012). Seducing the innocent: Fredric wertham and the falsifications that helped condemn comics. *Information & Culture*, 47(4), 383-413.
- Tipton, N. G. (2008). Gender trouble: Frank miller’s revision of robin in the batman. *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 41(2), 321-336.
- Tobe, R. (2006). Architectural grounding in miller's elektra: Temporality and spatiality in the graphic novel. *ImageText: Interdisciplinary Comics Studies*, 3(1). Retrieved February 10, 2015, from http://www.english.ufl.edu/imagetext/archives/v3_1/tobe/

- Trochim, W. (2006, October 20). Positivism & Post-Positivism. Retrieved December 2, 2014, from <http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/positvsm.php>
- Trushell, J. M. (2004). American dreams of mutants: The x-men—"pulp" fiction, science fiction, and superheroes. *Journal of Popular Culture*, 38(1), 149-167.
- Usoz, M. (2013). Sex and the city: Urban eroticism in rodrigo muñoz ballester's manuel series. *Hispanic Research Journal*, 14(5), 394-408.
- Vincze, L., & Holley, P. (2013). Making News Between Cultures: Ethnolinguistic Identity and Journalism in Four Minority Language Daily Newspapers. *Communication Reports*, 26(2), 61-72.
- Walker, D. (2014, September 16). 'The Flash:' Fall 2014 TV preview. Retrieved January 3, 2015, from http://www.nola.com/tv/index.ssf/2014/09/the_flash_fall_2014_tv_preview.html#incart_story_package
- Wallington, S., Blake, K., Taylor-Clark, K., & Viswanath, K. (2010). Challenges in Covering Health Disparities in Local News Media: An Exploratory Analysis Assessing Views of Journalists. *Journal of Community Health*, 35, 487-494.
- Wang, Q., Fink, E., & Cai, D. (2008). Loneliness, Gender, And Parasocial Interaction: A Uses And Gratifications Approach. *Communication Quarterly*, 56(1), 87-109.
- Wanzo, R. (2009). Wearing hero-face: Black citizens and melancholic patriotism in truth. *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 42(2), 339-362.
- Wegner, P. E. (2010). Alan moore, "secondary literacy," and the modernism of the graphic novel. *ImageText: Interdisciplinary Comics Studies*, 5(3). Retrieved February 10, 2015, from http://www.english.ufl.edu/imagetext/archives/v5_3/wegner/

- Wertham, F. (2004). *Seduction of the innocent* (Revised ed.). St. Charles, Missouri: Main Road Books.
- Wilmington, M. (1987, July 27). Film Review: A Simple, And Skimpy, 'Superman' *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved October 27, 2014, from http://articles.latimes.com/1987-07-27/entertainment/ca-4091_1_superman-iv
- White-Schwoch, T., & Rapp, D. N. (2011). Comprehending comics and graphic novels: Watchmen as a case for cognition. *SANE journal: Sequential Art Narrative in Education, 1*(2).
- Woo, B. (2011). The android's dungeon: comic book stores, cultural spaces, and the social practices of audiences. *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics, 2*(2), 125-136.
- Worcester, K. (2011). New york city, 9/11, and comics. *Radical History Review, 111*, 138-154.
- Wright, B. (2008). From social consciousness to cosmic awareness: Superhero comic books and the culture of self- interrogation, 1968–1974. *English Language Notes, 46*(2), 155-174.
- Young, A., Gabriel, S., & Hollar, J. (2013). Batman to the rescue! The protective effects of parasocial relationships with muscular superheroes on men's body image. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 42*(2), 173-177.
- Yui Kwan Chow, M., Morrow, A., Booy, R., & Leask, J. (2013). Impact of children's influenza-like illnesses on parental quality of life: A qualitative study. *Journal of Paediatrics and Child Health, 49*, 664-670.

APPENDIX

Appendix A Questionnaire

Anthony R. Ramirez
University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP)
Department of Communication
Thesis Research: Comic Book Fans and Attachment

Initials and year of birth:

Gender:

Age:

Occupation:

Ethnicity:

Education:

Income level:

Primary Language:

Do you speak any other languages?

Residence? (inner city, suburbs, country/rural, small town, etc.)

- 1. Who is/are your favorite comic book character(s)?**
- 2. What is it about this character that makes you interested in him/her?**
- 3. Explain, at what age you gained interest in your favorite character?**
- 4. Has this character had an impact (positive or negative) on you as a person? If so, how?**
- 5. Do you think you share any personality/characteristic traits with this character? If so, explain? Or, do you ever imitate characteristics or behaviors of one or some superheroes?**
- 6. What depiction of this character (comic, film, cartoon, video game) best idealizes this character for you? And why that specific depiction?**
- 7. Is there a particular story or action this character has done that has influenced your life? Or that has some other special meaning in your life?**
- 8. Have you ever used any quotes or phrases based on this character? Ex. Spiderman's (Peter Parker's Uncle Ben) "With great power comes great responsibility"**
- 9. Do you see yourself similar to this character now or later in life? Or, do you ever find yourself wishing that you were more like this character?**

10. How would you classify yourself as a fan or what type of fan are you?

11. Do you have any collectibles or merchandise of your favorite character? If so, what do you have? (clothing, statues, toys/figures, etc.)

-11a. How much money or other kinds of investment have you spent on comics, clothing, toys or other merchandise?

-11b. How much time do you think you spend or have you spent on comics books, TV shows, movies or other media related to your favorite character(s)?

12. Have you ever dressed (cosplayed) as your favorite character in regular life? If so, where and how was your experience? Also, if you have dressed like your favorite character, how often do you dress like the character?

13. Would you consider comic books to be a source of literature?

14. As a fan of that particular character, do you find yourself wanting to be like him/her in real life? In what way(s)?

15. Do you think your favorite character is over sexualized or influenced by physical expectations that society has?

VITA

Anthony Robert Ramirez was born in El Paso, Texas. He graduated from Thomas Jefferson High School in the spring of 2007. He earned his Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Drawing at the University of Texas at El Paso in the spring of 2012. Anthony has worked for the website DCComicsNews.com as a writer and historian, while also being a freelance artist and graphic designer on the side.

His artwork has been displayed in local art shows, *What's Up Magazine* and in the *El Paso Times*. He was also featured in an article in the *Borderzine* website discussing Latinos gaining influence in comic books. In the fall semester of 2013, Anthony began his graduate work in Communication Studies. He is expected to graduate in May of 2015.

His research interests include: comic books, popular culture, fandom and identity

This thesis was typed by Anthony Robert Ramirez.