THE SUPERMEN OF THE JUSTICE LEAGUE AND X-MEN: COMIC BOOK

REPRESENTATIONS OF MASCULINITY FOR TODAY'S AUDIENCE

by

TREVOR MATTHEW LANIER

(Under the direction of Leara Rhodes)

ABSTRACT

Media representations of masculinity have become increasingly popular in recent academic analysis, but few have considered the medium of comic books. Through the lens of hegemonic masculinity, this project seeks to fill that void using a comparative textual analysis of two of the most popular comic book franchises today, Justice League and Uncanny X-Men. Additionally, it considers how those portrayals have changed through the implementation of relaunches by both of the producing companies, Marvel and DC Comics, through an analysis of the series preceding the current series. Findings suggest the Justice League franchise has remained mostly hegemonic in its representation of men in regards to demographic traits but more non-hegemonic in behaviors. On the other hand, the Uncanny X-Men franchise has transitioned from more hegemonic male characters to more non-hegemonic male characterizations with a variety of demographic and behavioral traits. Opportunities for further research are also discussed.

INDEX WORDS: Masculinity, Hegemonic Masculinity, Media, Pop Culture,
                 Cultural Product, Justice League, Uncanny X-Men, Gender,
                 Textual Analysis, Comic Books, Reboot, Superheroes

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INTRODUCTION

According to Brown (1999), "Classical comic book depictions of masculinity are perhaps the quintessential expression of our cultural beliefs about what it means to be a man" (p. 26). Therefore, it is surprising that only a few studies have considered the cultural influence of comic book representations of masculinity (Lavin, 1998; Palmer-Mehta & Hay, 2005). Of particular interest for this study is the superhero comic book, one of the most popular sub-genres of comic books (Romagnoli & Pagnucci, 2013). This sub-genre is important for analysis of masculinity because "male superhero characters fill stereotypical gender roles that epitomize idealizations of masculinity" (Rosenburg, 2013, p. 75), and characters like Superman and Batman are ''important symbols of 'maleness' in American culture since Superman was introduced in 1939'' (Pecora, 1992, p. 61). Additionally, idealized masculine traits like "heterosexuality, whiteness, hyper-muscularity, attainment of favorable outcomes, increased prominence, and the possession of superpowers" are highly represented through male characters in today's comic books (Thilmony, 2012, p. 125). This project seeks to better understand these comic book representations of masculinity for today's audience through a textual analysis of two of the most popular comic book series in publication, Justice League and Uncanny X-Men.

To further establish the importance of this study, it is imperative to mention the significant changes of the comic book industry over the last few years in regards to sales, content and readership. For sales, estimates demonstrate the comic industry as a whole is certainly growing. In a cooperative study conducted by researchers at The Comics

Chronicles and ICV2.com on the comic book industry, it was estimated that the North American market size for print comics and graphic novels totaled approximately $780 million in 2013, which is a steady increase compared to previous years with $735 million in 2012 and $690 million in 2011 (Comichron, 2013). With the advent of various digital technologies like tablets and smart phones, comic book publishers have partnered with digital technology companies to supply content for applications that support an animated comic reading experience (Cadieux, 2011). Like its print counterparts, digital comics have also seen a steady increase in sales with approximate figures for 2011 at $25 million, 2012 at $70 million and 2013 at $90 million (Comichron, 2013). With these estimates, it is evident the American public has easy access to comic books, they are consuming a great deal of them and sales are growing.

A second important change within the industry is the two largest content producers, DC Comics and Marvel Comics, relaunched their respective titles with campaigns in the last few years (These companies are not the only comic producers, but combined they made up 70.32 percent of the industry's market share in 2013 [Comichron, 2013].). DC Comics rebooted their titles in 2011 with the campaign *The New 52*. In an interview with *USA Today*, Dan DiDo, co-publisher of DC Entertainment, describes the strategy saying, "This was a chance to start, not at the beginning, but at a point where our characters are younger and the stories are being told for today's audience" (Truitt, 2011). Marvel Comics took a similar route in 2012 with their campaign known as *Marvel Now!*. Marvel's Editor-In-Chief Alex Alonso explained the initiative would gradually occur from October through February with new issues starting at #1 that allow easy entry points for current, new and lapsed readers into the Marvel Universe (Morse, 2012). Marvel's

Chief Creative Officer Joe Quesada elaborated saying it will introduce "changes to the character status quos, alter egos, costumes, creator shifts, design shifts, the way that we do our covers, digital shifts and the way we start delivering our books" (Morse, 2012, para. 5). With these new campaigns, it appears the comic book publishers are starting afresh to garner new audiences while also hoping to retain their older demographic. This strategy in updating content has become a common strategy throughout cultural industries, especially media, in order to make their product relevant to their audiences (Romagnoli & Pagnucci, 2013). Therefore, a reboot, or relaunch, is important in light of cultural production because the content of the cultural product is being changed to appeal to the target audience's preferences and tastes.

A third important change is comic book readership has evolved over the last few decades. Earlier demographic research says the industry was comprised of adolescents and young adults from 12-25 years old (Lavin, 1998) and the audience members were mostly male at approximately 90 percent (Brown, 1997). While males remain the main gender targeted by the superhero comic book industry, the age of readers has clearly matured (Romagnoli & Pagnucci, 2013). Nielsen recently conducted a survey of DC Comics readership and found that 93 percent of the 5,366 respondents were male (ICv2.com, 2012). However, the age range is quite interesting: ages 13-17 (1-2 percent), 18-24 (14-22 percent), 25-34 (37-42 percent), 35-44 (27-35 percent), 45-54 (7-11 percent) and 55+ (2 percent). While originally intended for boys, it now seems that superhero comic book readers are mostly young adult and middle age men.

The previously mentioned significant changes, coupled with the importance of the medium for men, make it an optimal time to consider how comic book representations

play into the ongoing social discourse regarding masculinity. To study this, the researcher selected some of the most popular comic books texts that existed before and after their respective company's reboot. According to Baker (2014), the best selling comic book franchises to date, in terms of units sold, include X-Men (#5 with over 270 million) and characters from the Justice League like Batman (#2 with over 460 million) and Superman (#1 with over 600 million). This information has led to the selection of the two comic franchises for analysis, which include the issues in DC Comics' *Justice League of America* (2006-2011) and *Justice League* (2011-present) as well as Marvel's *Uncanny X-Men* (2011-2012) and *Uncanny X-Men* (2013-present).

Grounded in research of social construction and hegemonic masculinity, this study looked at the encoded messages regarding masculinity in the Justice League and Uncanny X-Men comic books. It will not look at the firsthand effects of superhero comic book content on actual readers. Rather, this study is a comparative textual analysis of the selected texts, before and after the reboots, to explore how representations of masculinity have evolved through the reboots. This is important in considering how producers might be changing their content in order to appeal to their audience through various changes, perhaps including gendered ideals. Furthermore, this analysis draws on the concepts of male stereotypes and hegemonic masculinity to evaluate those representations and whether or not they focus on traditional gendered ideals or seek to encourage more diversity of masculinities. The findings of the study are useful in observing the masculine messages communicated to the American people through comic books, the potential implications for society and how those representations have evolved for readers. The following research questions are addressed throughout the project:

RQ1: How is masculinity represented in modern superhero comic books?
RQ2: Do the traits of the characters challenge conventional gender expectations for men? If so, how? If not, in what ways are they not doing so?
RQ3: Have reboot campaigns played a part in the potential changes in regards to the portrayal of masculinity in superhero comic books?

CHAPTER 1

LITERATURE REVIEW

Masculinity: Theory and Practice

Gendered ideologies and representation have become part of the social discussion in recent American history. As early as the 1970s, there has been steady increase of interest for analyzing gender roles of men in the United States (Connell, 2000; Pease & Pringle, 2001) due in large part by the second-wave feminists' challenge of the patriarchal ideology of what constitutes masculinity and the gay rights movement's challenge of heternormativity (Brittan, 1989). With these challenges, there has emerged an entire academic field dedicated to the study of masculinity (Craig, 1992). To define the subject of the field, Moss (2011) describes masculinity as the "socially fabricated patterns or positions embodied by men" (p. 28). With this definition, it is important to note the underlying focus of the definition is on gender, rather than sex. Talbot (2010) describes the difference between the concepts saying, "sex is biologically founded, whereas gender is learned behavior" (p. 7). Connell (1995) expands further on the nature of masculinity saying it is "neither programmed in our genes, nor fixed by social structure, prior to social interaction. They come into existence as people act. They are actively produced, using the resources and strategies in a given social setting" (p. 12). Therefore, the focus of this project is gender identity, specifically masculinity, and how it is constructed through various sociocultural influences. Some of the most prominent influences, as Macnamara (2006) identifies, include "race, nationality, ethnicity, social background,

education, gender, sexuality, religion and interrelationships such as family, peers and occupation or work groups, as well as media content" (p. 69-70).

To better grasp the social construction of gender, it is important to understand how humans learn behavior and establish their identity. Studies have used various social and psychological theories to explain this phenomenon. One of which is social cognitive theory (SCT), which accounts for the "psychosocial mechanisms through which symbolic communication influences human thought, affect, and action" (Bandura, 2001, p. 265). It does so within a series of frameworks, one of which being personal agency. Essentially, this means that humans are active participants within their environment driven by cognitive functioning and are not simply passive bystanders (Bandura, 2001). For media within this framework, it is important to recognize that even though humans are bombarded with incalculable messages they still have personal choice in that they can either accept or reject the messages they receive, and they may or may not choose to act according to those messages.

Another important facet of SCT applicable to gender development is that of observational learning, which means individuals learn through observation from a variety of sources including personal interactions and the media to which they are exposed. This concept becomes particularly important when people begin to conceptualize their gender-roles, and therefore their identities (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). According to Mayes and Valentine (1979), gender-role stereotypes are the series of attributes or traditional customs in society that differentiate the feminine and masculine patterns of behavior. Brown (1999) outlines some stereotypes that separate masculinity and feminity with the juxtaposition of opposite, stereotypical characteristics like "hard *not* soft, strong *not*

weak, reserved *not* emotional, active *not* passive" (p. 26-27). Often, gendered stereotypes become associated with these expectations and collectively indicate the normative standard for a man in a given culture. Research demonstrates that when humans are exposed to media messages consistently over time (Baker and Raney, 2007) or with heavy exposure (Rosenburg, 2013), they can become more likely to develop attitudes and beliefs aligned with gender stereotypes portrayed in media and every day life. Those perceptions manifest in a variety of ways and ideas, but one of the most prominent is a concept known as hegemonic masculinity.

According to Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), the concept of hegemonic masculinity originated in the early 1980s and had its first applications in social behavior of Australian students, the effort to conceptualize multiple masculinities and the purpose of men in Australian labor politics. According to Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), the main premise of the concept is that different cultures create many masculinities and femininities, and that the hegemonic masculinity is held above all the rest. Every male within a society is measured by how well they live up to their culture's hegemonic masculinity, even though it is often a lofty and unattainable objective. Common traits associated with the hegemonic masculinity in industrial societies include "rationality, heterosexuality, hierarchy, dominance, violence, and being 'the breadwinner'" (Talbot, 2010, p. 160). Additionally, it's important to note that to "sustain a given pattern of hegemony requires the policing of men as well as the exclusion or discrediting of women" (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 844). Therefore, one of the main assumptions of this model is that women, girls, men and boys all engage in behavior that reinforces hegemonic masculinity.

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) claim there are three levels of geography of masculinity including the (1) local, interpersonal exchange, (2) the regional, cultural level, and (3) the global, transnational level. Furthermore, the researchers note that the global level influences both the regional and local level, and that the regional level also influences the local level (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Through previous research, it is understood that media entertainment operates at the regional level (Myers, 2012). Therefore, the concept of particular interest for this study would be the regional aspect of hegemonic masculinity, which Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) define as:

> "Hegemonic masculinity at the regional level is symbolically represented through the interplay of specific local masculine practices that have regional significance, such as those constructed by feature film actors, professional athletes, and politicians. The exact content of these practices varies over time and across societies. Yet regional hegemonic masculinity shapes a society-wide sense of masculine reality and, therefore, operates in the cultural domain as on-hand material to be actualized, altered, or challenged through practice in a range of different local circumstances. A regional hegemonic masculinity, then, provides a cultural framework that may be materialized in daily practices and interactions" (p. 849-850).

Based on this definition, the regional level of analysis for this project will be the United States because American media entertainment plays a large part in the social construction of gender ideologies for the people of the American culture (Rosenburg, 2013).

While the regional level is the central focus for this study, it is pertinent to consider the local level of hegemonic masculinity. Several researchers have looked at this level through actual relationships and social behavior among young males. Renold (2007) demonstrated that elementary school-aged boys exhibit behavior to maintain hegemonic masculinity. Most of the preteen subjects in her study distanced themselves from femininity and participated in behavior that subordinated other non-hegemonic individuals. For high school boys, Oranksy and Maracek (2009) found they commonly

withhold their feelings from male peers to avoid being labeled as a "girl." With these findings, it is evident that boys' actions of striving for hegemonic masculinity are not exclusive to any particular age group.

In American culture, heterosexuality is traditionally understood to be a core aspect of hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). With that understanding, boys and men will adamantly defend their sexuality to maintain their social stature, but this often comes at expense of those around them. Korobov (2005) described it well by saying "adolescence is a time when young men in particular begin to routinely practice forms of hetero-normative masculinity that may implicitly or explicitly sanction sexism, homophobia, and 'compulsory heterosexuality'" (p. 228). Researchers have also identified that males use certain language to maintain what they consider the proper form of masculinity. For example, they engage in joking discourse known as "fag talk" (Pascoe, 2005) or use other homophobic language (Ramlow, 2003) to signify the individual targeted by the comment is somehow not manly enough.

Oranksy and Marecek (2009) observed that boys participating in this behavior commonly used "gay" and "girl" as insults at other adolescent males. It is believed that boys participate in this name-calling to reject any association with feminine traits and reinforce their own masculinity (Pascoe, 2005). It has also been shown that older men may participate in homophobic behavior should their masculinity be challenged (Walser, 1997). Additionally, it has been demonstrated that aggression is a method in which men may try to affirm their own sense of manhood in challenging that of other men (Soulliere, 2006). Another study claimed that this aggression among men against other men is much more pronounced than that for women (Archer, 2004).

Due to these negative actions associated with hegemonic masculinity, some scholars have suggested that it would be beneficial to encourage non-hegemonic masculinities (Kimmel, 2006). While this is a noble concept, Renold (2004) has found that strategies to disrupt the status quo often reinforced the dominant male. Boys practicing the non-hegemonic behavior often desired to be "normal," so they began participating in bullying and rejecting all things feminine. Instead of promoting the role of non-hegemonic masculinities, the subjects tended to reinforce the hegemonic masculine norms. Despite this limitation, there is still the desire to promote different forms of masculinity to demonstrate there are other forms of acceptable masculinities. Media and its inherent representations has become a major part of this social discussion.

Masculinity: Media Representation and Comic Books

With the rise of interest in academic study of masculinity has come an area of research focused on media representations of masculinity and what it means for a media rich society where media represent different masculinities (Craig, 1992). Since media have influence on American culture, Hermes (2007) deems it necessary to consider how media represent gender because "constructions of femininity and masculinity are part of a dominant ideology" (p. 191). Gauntlett (2002) explains further saying, "With the media containing so many images of women and men, and messages about men, women and sexuality today, it is highly unlikely that these ideas would have no impact on our own sense of identity" (p15). In another scholarly work, Stam (2000) emphasizes the importance of studying media for their meaning in the "larger cultural and historical context" (p. 223). Perhaps then, we can better understand how the media plays into the

social construction of the different masculinities through an analysis of culturally and historically relevant media texts, like the comic books of the Justice League and X-Men.

Today, scholars maintain the notion that portrayals of gender in media content is one way in which humans learn to construct and maintain their perception of self (Behm-Morawitz & Mastro, 2009), traditional gender roles (Diekman & Murnen, 2004), and gender stereotypes (Ward & Friedman, 2006). Specific to masculinity, Pérez-Jiménez, Cunningham, Serrano-García and Ortiz-Torres (2007) found that male college students in Puerto Rico believed the mass media contains "[i]mages of sex, female voluptuousness, and strong and promiscuous men" and that it encouraged "viewers to be like them or practice similar behaviors" (p. 374). Additionally, physical depictions of muscular men in magazines (Botta, 2003) and television commercials (Agliata & Tantleff-Dunn, 2004; Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2009) have been linked to both boys' and men's feelings of dissatisfaction with their bodies, excessive and extreme exercising and even the consideration of using steroids. Additionally, Moss (2011) discusses that violence and aggression are historically associated with masculinity throughout media and media entertainment, and that violence and aggression have also been praised for men in that it helps to affirm their masculinity. Findings like these emphasize the importance of considering the role that media plays in the construction of gendered expectations and ideologies in American society.

Most of the studies in analyzing media representations of masculinity have focused on television including sports programming (Messner, 1992), adult sitcoms like *Coach* and *Home Improvement* (Hanke, 1998), and various children's programs (Myers, 2013). Other studies have focused on pornography (Simpson, 1994), music (Collins, 2004),

movies (MacKinnon, 2003) and advertising (Dotson, 1999). Through these, researchers have commonly found that characters and role models continue to reinforce Western culture's hegemonic masculinity, and that non-hegemonic individuals are consistently overshadowed by their hegemonic counterparts.

News media has also reinforced negative stereotypes for men by showing them in an unfavorable likeness (Macnamara, 2006). In a study of Australian mass media's portrayal of men, the researcher analyzed 1,799 newspaper, magazine and television news pieces and found that men were portrayed unfavorably 69 percent of the time, neutral at 19 percent and favorably at 12 percent (Macnamara, 2005). In the findings for this study, the top four most prominent profiles or themes included men being villains, aggressors, perverts and philanderers. Additionally, the most covered subject category for the project was violence and aggression (1,178 articles) with the next largest sections being fatherhood and family (361 articles), sexuality (357 articles), work and career (328 articles) and social behavior (260 articles). In each of these sections, the greatest majority of the subjects were portrayed unfavorably. While the study was based on Australian news outlets, the findings have worldwide implications because many of the magazines, newspapers and television programs were distributed on an international scale.

As mentioned in the introduction, there is a lacuna of research about masculinity in the medium of comic books (Palmer-Mehta & Hay, 2005). Despite this fact, there has been an influx of contributions to this area in the last few decades. Thus far, research has identified the comic book industry is clearly male-centric. Morrison (2011) supports this idea saying, "Superhero stories were written to be universal and inclusive, but often they've been aimed, it must be said, at boys and young men" (p. 40). Also, the industry

operates on research that demonstrates boys relate much more often to male characters than they do to female characters (Hoffner, 1996). Therefore, there are substantially more male characters than there are female in superhero comic books. In fact, a recent "gendercrunching" analysis conducted by Hanley (2014) found that male characters continue to dominate the comic books of Marvel (88.4 percent) and DC Comics (87.8 percent). Researchers have also observed how these male characters are portrayed throughout the pages of comic books:

> "Male superheroes are constructed in ways that emphasize strength and power to a heightened, super-human degree that speaks to Western ideas about masculinity and manhood. These superheroes have bodies that are muscled and sculpted; they perform feats of strength and heroism that exemplify the masculine role of the protector and fearless leader" (Rosenburg, 2013, p. 75).

The physical depictions of the characters in comic books are one of the strongest associations of the Western ideals of masculinity and feminity. For example, Taylor (2007) claims that both male and female superheroes are commonly subject to harsh objectified physiques. He specifies the stark contrast in the representation of gender in that heroines are predominantly drawn with voluptuousness, curvaceous bodies while the heroes have a hyper-muscular, bodybuilder physique. Jones and Jacobs (1997) provide more description saying, ''Male characters, with their pin-heads and boulder-muscles and steroid-veins [are] drawn with a deadly earnestness, and with none of the charm of caricature. Females, perpetually bending over, arching their backs, and heaving their anti-gravity breasts into readers' faces'' (p. 340). Rosenburg (2013) labels this ideal physique for superheroes in comic books as a *V-shape* with characteristics like "broad, muscular chest and shoulders with a trim waist" (p. 87). She further elaborates how these representations can affect men's perception of their physical selves in two ways, (1) their

self perception of being physically inferior to the hypermasculine characters that are super muscular and (2) how the men think of themselves as being attractive to the type of beautiful, sexually appealing women as characterized in superhero comic books.

Another concern of the male superhero characterization is that of the demographic and personality representation. Traditionally speaking, Pecora (1992) says that characters in comic books ''have functioned in a world that is male and white, where the women are either young and buxom or old and frail—but never equals'' (p. 61). She continues her discussion saying that, ''Images of racism and anti-feminism are still very much part of the comic book culture'' because those of different races and females are commonly reduced to being secondary, antagonistic or trim characters (p. 76). She maintains this has been upheld since the inception of comic books, the machismo philosophy remains prominent in modern society and that masculinity is strongly associated with aggression. Palmer-Mehta and Hay (2005) acknowledge that most male characters in comics have been predominantly heterosexual. This supports other research by Miettinen (2012), which asserts the dominant form of masculinity in comic books was white, heterosexual and violent. Despite these one-sided realities of masculine representation in comic books, there is a diversity of masculine representations arising throughout media.

Interestingly, a core dynamic of hegemonic masculinity is the idea that cultural masculinities are susceptible to change. As Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) acknowledge, "Children as well as adults have a capacity to deconstruct gender binaries and criticize hegemonic masculinity" (p. 853). However, this is an understudied topic in regards to the regional level of hegemonic masculinity and media representation. Despite this fact, there are studies that show media content has been drifting away from more

traditional stereotypes to more progressive forms of gender representation. For example, Swan (1998) observed that television programs like *The Powerpuff Girls*, *Teamo Supremo* and *Pokémon* have moved away from individual storylines and into group-based narratives including both males and females. Research even shows that males and females are exhibiting similar levels of aggression in children's television, instead of being a trait only reserved for male characters (Baker & Raney, 2004). Still, another study concluded that there is now more equal representation of male and female superheroes in animated television programs (Baker & Raney, 2007).

In the last decade, the comic book community has also seen an increase in diversity of representations. On the issue of race, there has been an introduction of numerous characters of different races; to name a few there is an African-American Nick Fury, an Asian-American Monica Chang as the new Black Widow, a half-black half-Latino teenager Miles Morales as the new Spider-Man, and a Muslim-American Green Lantern known as Simon Baz (Sargent, 2013). While this is positive for representations of race, there is room for improvement with white superheroes continuing to dominate the canon's population at about 80 percent (Sargent, 2013). As for sexual orientation, several mainstream superhero comics, including *Earth 2* and *Astonishing X-Men,* have started to feature plot points centered on male homosexual protagonists (Romagnoli and Pagnucci, 2013). Together, perhaps these small instances indicate a societal shift in the equality of representation in mainstream media, but there is still much room for improvement. However, it may be true what Romagnoli and Pagnucci (2013) say about the legacy of the superhero genre in that it explores "the world in different and unique ways that reflect ever-changing sociocultural landscapes" (p. 147).

Creative Industries and Cultural Products

As mentioned in the introduction, the two major superhero comic book producers, Marvel and DC Comics, have instituted reboots for all of their comic books in the last few years. The companies' rationale provided for the relaunches is that the content needed to be updated in order to appeal to today's audience (Truitt, 2011; Morse, 2012). With this, one of the questions for this project is how the content regarding masculinity is changing through these relaunches within the superhero comic book industry. Therefore, it is important to think about these reboots in context of cultural production. Essentially, media entertainment, including comic books, can be classified as cultural products situated within creative industries (Hesmondhalgh, 2006). These cultural products are defined as "goods and services that are valued for their 'meaning'" and "are consumed in an act of interpretation rather than being used in some practical way to solve some practical problem" (Lawrence & Phillips, 2002, p. 431).

Throsby (2006) expands the cultural product concept further saying the "origins of artistic consumption, product and exchange lie in the behavior of individuals, whether they are consumers who demand cultural goods and services in the marketplace, or producers who supply them" (p. 8). Therefore, the perception of value for a cultural product is a byproduct of both the producers' presentation and the consumers' interpretation. With this, Lawrence and Phillips (2002) say it becomes a manager's task within cultural industries to actively engage in "creating and maintaining an organization that can produce and sell meaning" (p. 431). This becomes an intermittent job when both the creative industry and audience are constantly changing, like media industries.

In seeking to meet the preferences of a changing audience and culture, many media entertainment companies are under pressure to maintain or evolve their product in order to appeal to the greatest majority of their audience's cultural interest (Grego and Atkinson, 2010). This pressure has lead many companies to pursue strategies to make their product more relevant. Sometimes this means making aesthetic changes, repositioning or rebranding (Daly and Moloney, 2004). Through repositioning or rebranding efforts, companies are changing or recreating themselves to appeal to a new audience or to appeal to their audience in a new way, and they are trying to create a sense of value amongst their target audience. More specific to the comic book industry, the aforementioned strategy undertaken by the comic book producers is referred to as a reboot, or a relaunch. This is derived from computer terminology for the action of restarting the computer (Romagnoli & Pagnucci, 2013). Similar to restarting a computer, the reboot process involves starting over by reloading and refreshing the information.

Additionally, Romagnoli and Pagnucci (2013) acknowledge the motivations for instituting reboots include (1) financial opportunity for companies because customers, new and old, enjoy starting comic books at #1 issues and (2) to evolve with the ever-growing and ever-changing American cultural landscape (pp. 74-75). As of the last few decades, these changes in content involved increasing demographic diversity of characters based on gender, race and sexual orientation (Sargent, 2013). However, this is only one way in which content can be updated. While reboot strategies are certainly popular in the comic book industry, other media industries have utilized this strategy to appeal to new audiences. The movie industry has seen a number of rebooted franchises including *Star Trek, True Grit, Batman Begins, The War of the Worlds, The Karate Kid*

and the James Bond movies, just to name a few (Gutiérrez, 2012). Television reboots are quite popular as well with shows like *Dallas*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Bewitched* and *Nikita* (Schneider, 2011). Even popular magazines, like *MuscleMag*, have rebooted to stay in touch with the needs of their reading audience (PR, 2014).

Academic analysis of some of these media franchises across time and through reboots has demonstrated change in the representation of different elements of content. A content analysis of portrayals of women in twenty James Bond movies revealed "a trend of more sexual activity and greater harm to females over time, but few across-time differences in demographic characteristics of Bond women" (Neuendorf, Gore, Dalessandro, Janstova & Snyder-Suhy, 2010, p. 747). In another study, Law and Labre (2002) found that representations of men in male-centric magazines, *GQ*, *Rolling Stone* and *Sports Illustrated*, became more focused on a lean, muscular male physique over time.

Literature Highlights

In summary, the literature reviewed for this project includes research in masculinity, media representations of gender, comic books and cultural production. In light of the diversity of the literature, there are a few main points to highlight. First, hegemonic masculinity can be problematic in that can make men feel inferior or even unacceptable because they cannot live up to the ideals associated with the hegemonic masculinity in American society. Second, media representations, including comic books, have traditionally represented hegemonic masculine characters in a positive light, while non-hegemonic individuals have been overshadowed and supported the concept of the hegemonic male. However, there have been instances where media have started to include more diversity of gender representations that deviate from the hegemonic norms

and represent more non-hegemonic characters. Third, these media representations play a part in the ongoing social construction of gender ideologies and stereotypes. Lastly, comic book producers have recently instituted campaigns to rework their content and characters for today's audience, and those changes can include alterations in demographic representation. Taken together, this project's interest is how representations of masculinity have or have not changed in comic books through the implementation of relaunch campaigns by the two major producers in the superhero comic book industry. While this chapter has focused on literature previously devoted to masculinity and comic books, the following chapter covers the methodology used to study this research interests, which includes literature on textual analysis, the texts that were selected for analysis as well as issues of authorship.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

A Textual Analysis Approach

This study conducted a textual analysis to evaluate the content related to masculine representations in American, superhero comic books. As defined by Frey, Botan and Kreps (2000), "Textual analysis is the method communication researchers use to describe and interpret the characteristics of a recorded or visual message" (p. 225). This method allows the researcher to dig deeper and go beyond the surface level of denotative meanings to reveal the rich connotative subtext of the content. The sample for this methodology is referred to as a text, or a collection of texts. According to McKee (2003), a "text is a something that we take meaning from" and that can be a variety of objects including "a book, television programme, film, magazine, T-shirt or kilt, piece of furniture or ornament" (p. 4). Upon selection and reading, the texts should then be evaluated as part of the greater social and cultural story in which they exist. For this project, the texts are comic books, Justice League and Uncanny X-Men, and the greater cultural story is the portrayal of masculinity in American media entertainment.

Scholars can utilize this methodology to evaluate the meaning of a text across various fields including "cultural studies, media studies, in mass communication, and perhaps even in sociology and philosophy" (McKee, 2003, p. 1). Textual analysis has been a common methodology used to look at representations of gender in media (Cox, 2012; Birthisel & Martin, 2013; Jacobs & Tyree, 2013). However, only a select few studies

have utilized this method to study comic books in regards to gender. D'Amore (2012) looked at the representation of females and mothers through various comic book superheroines from 1963-1980. Brown (1999) studied the portrayal of black masculinity in the publications of the comic book company known as Milestone Media Incorporated. Franklin (2001) and Palmer-Mehta and May (2005) used the method to study comic book representations, journalistic columns and fan letters about gay comic book characters. This project will take a similar approach as these last few studies in analyzing the selected texts to determine how masculinity is portrayed.

Furthermore, this project considers how these gender representations have or have not changed through reboots of the respective comic book companies. This is important in considering how content has changed as the companies are seeking to appeal to a new audience. In other words, this project looked at how masculinity is represented and if the content is maintaining traditional norms or if it is encouraging more diverse forms of masculinity. As mentioned before, these messages within media entertainment play a part in the social construction of gender ideologies and stereotypes for those who make up their audience (Diekman & Murnen, 2004; Ward & Friedman, 2006). Using textual analysis helped to reveal those encoded messages within the texts that focus on male gender roles or behaviors that play into this ongoing social discourse. The comparison aspect of the research design helped to compare and contrast the gender representations across reboots as well as across the different comic book producing companies.

Selection of Texts

The first step of textual analysis is selecting the sample to analyze. The sample, or "texts," selected for this project are four comic book series, *Justice League of America*

(2006-2011), *Justice League* (2011-present)*, Uncanny X-Men* (2011-2012) and *Uncanny X-Men* (2013-present). The number of completed story arcs determines the number of issues for analysis by the start of this project in August 2013. This includes the entirety of the comic book volumes before the reboots, *Justice League of America* (2006-2011, 10 story arcs, 60 issues) and *Uncanny X-Men* (2011-2012, 4 story arcs, 20 issues). After the reboots, this will include only parts of the volumes because they have not been completed at the time of the study. Therefore, the completed story arcs after the reboots include *Justice League* (2011-present, 5 story arcs, 30 issues) and *Uncanny X-Men* (2013-present, 3 story arcs, 22 issues). With the sample texts established, the total number of comic book issues to be analyzed is 132. The individual publications were purchased using the application known as Comixology on the researcher's iPad 2. This application has a large base of comic books from all the major comic book companies including both Marvel and DC Comics. The comics selected for analysis were purchasable within application's store. Issues were purchased from the application and then downloaded to the device. While this was method used to retrieve the selected texts, the print versions could have been purchased at a local comic book store or through ordering them online.

With the goal to obtain a representative sample from the population, there are various reasons for the selection of these titles. First, each title is an intellectual property of one of the two largest comic book publishers in the United States, with Justice League the flagship title of DC Comics and Uncanny X-Men from Marvel Comics. These companies were selected because they are the two most successful comic book producers in terms of market share and total revenue. Based on market data from 2013, Marvel led with way with a market share of 36.97 percent in terms of units sold and 33.50 percent in revenue

dollars, and DC Comics was close behind with a market share of 33.35 percent for units sold and 30.33 percent for revenue (Comichron, 2013). The next largest producer was Image Comics with 8.49 percent market share of units sold and 8.00 percent of revenue (Comichron: The Comics Chronicles, 2013). Second, these titles were selected because they are narratives based around groups of protagonists and not titles dedicated to a single character. This allows for an analysis of individual characters, how male and female characters interact with another, as well as the physical depiction of several male characters. With this stipulation, some of the most popular titles like *Batman*, *Ironman* and *Superman* were not included in the sample. Third, the selected titles were chosen because they existed before and after their respective company's reboot. This provides the ability to look at how representations of masculinity might have changed because of both companies' reboot and update of content.

Fourth and last, these titles were chosen for their popularity among the comic book reading audience. Before the reboot, the titles were quite popular with the comic book audiences. In a brief analysis of top grossing comics, issues of *Justice League of America* (2006-2011) were consistently ranked in the top 50 comics for the years in which they were published (Comichron: The Comics Chronicles, 2013). *Uncanny X-Men* (2011-2012) was the top rated X-Men comic with many issues in the top 100 for both years of publication (Comichron: The Comics Chronicles, 2013). After the reboots, the comic book franchises have both seen much success. Multiple issues of *Justice League* (2011-present) and *Uncanny X-Men* (2013-present) were consistently ranked in the top 100 comics each year since their beginnings in 2011 and 2013, respectively (Comichron, 2013). This trend continued into 2014 with the two properties, X-Men (ranked #2) and

Justice League (ranked #6), being ranked the highest superhero team books for their respective companies (ICv2, 2014). The other high ranked comic books were those dedicated to individual superheroes. These statistics demonstrate mass appeal to a great majority of the reading audience, so therefore much exposure to their encoded messages.

Authorship

As with any media text, it's important to consider authorship. For the comic book industry, the primary writers, artists and producers have been and continue to be men (Rosenburg, 2013). This holds true for the writers and illustrators of the selected texts. Alan Burnett, Dwayne McDuffie and James Robinson wrote *Justice League of America* (2006-2011) at different times, and Ed Benes, Mark Bagley and Andy Kubert illustrated it. *Uncanny X-Men* (2011-2012) was written by Kieron Gillen and illustrated by Carlos Pacheco, Brandon Peterson, Greg Land, Billy Tan, Dustin Weaver, Daniel Acuna, Ron Garney and Dale Eaglesham. *Justice League* (2011-present) has been written by Geoff Johns and illustrated by artists Jim Lee, Ivan Reis, Jesus Raiz and Doug Manke. As for *Uncanny X-Men* (2013-present), the creative team is writer Brian Michael Bendis and artists Chris Bachalo, Frazer Irving, Kris Anka and Marco Rudy.

With this, we can see that all of the creators for the selected texts are male. This is important for the comic book industry because as Romagnoli and Pagnucci (2013) acknowledge "traditional homogeneity among the genre's creators affects both racial diversity and gender equality with the comics' stories themselves" (p. 133). To further cement this point, Middleton (1992) says that male writers "have written plenty about themselves as men; little of it consciously. When men are conscious of their gender they talk of heroic masculinity, of manhood and its vicissitudes. Writing self-consciously and

self-critically about their gender has proved more difficult" (p. 2). Additionally, Williamson (2001) says that men have had trepidation in venturing into different representations of men and women because in a way that would be distancing themselves from the ideal form of masculinity and aligning with their more "feminine" side, which may lead to a gender identity crisis. More recently, however, Alyahya (2014) found that both male and female writers have started writing in a way that is "useful in correcting several myths and misconceptions in their attempts to use gender as a theme" in their works within the genre of postmodern drama (p. 5). Perhaps then, there is more creative freedom allotted to male writers today in how they write their characters, but it is still important to consider the author's gender in commercial entertainment writing because of the aforementioned reasons regarding idealized gender norms and societal pressures.

Analyzing and Reporting

The theoretical framework known as hegemonic masculinity, outlined in the literature review, was utilized as a concept throughout the execution of this research project. To appropriately study representations of the hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinities, this project drew on previous research to identify those characteristics associated with both forms. The attributes strongly associated with the American hegemonic masculinity include behaviors like being "unemotional, independent, non-nurturing, aggressive, and dispassionate" (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 840) as well as maintaining dominance over others (Pringle, 2005). Other qualities most often associated with the American hegemonic masculinity include being white, heterosexual and sexually predatory (Myers, 2012). Additionally, the idealized physique that is strongly associated with hegemonic masculinity is typically tough, muscular and athletic (Ricciardelli, Clow

& White, 2010). Being the opposite of hegemonic masculinity, non-hegemonic masculinity exists in the characters who embody characteristics like being kind, gentle, emotional, dependent, passionate, passive, a race other than white, homosexual/bisexual and having a physique that is thin or fat, rather than hyper-muscular.

As for process for analyzing these representations, Acosta-Alzuru and Kreshel (2002) cite Stuart Hall in explaining textual analysis involves three stages:

> "(a) a 'long preliminary soak' in the text, which allows the analyst to focus on particular issues while preserving 'the big picture,' (b) a close reading of the chosen text and preliminary identification of the discursive strategies and themes, and (c) interpretation of the findings within the larger framework of the study" (p. 147).

Throughout the initial reading phase, the researcher looked at representations of masculinity through the discourse among characters as well as a breakdown of characters based on race, sexuality, body type and behavioral traits. The researcher then allowed time for the material to sink in and be considered in context of "the big picture" regarding media representation of masculinity. Then, all of the comic books were reread for a closer reading. Throughout this step, certain themes arose regarding the representation of male characters based on demographic and behavioral traits. To help visualize these themes, the researcher created tables that broke down the aforementioned traits for each of the main male superheroes in each of the comic book series that were analyzed. This organization of character attributes aided in analyzing the representation of different masculinities as well as the overarching themes and character dynamics.

With preliminary soak and rereading phases completed, the next step was for the researcher to report the findings. Based on the research design focusing on representation of masculinity across franchise relaunches, the findings and themes were reported in two

different chapters—Chapter 4 focuses on the comparison of the *Justice League* and the *Justice League of America* series and Chapter 5 focuses on the two Uncanny X-Men series. In these chapters, the researcher developed a critical essay of the findings focusing on the comparison of the series before and after their reboots. Additionally, the pertinent masculine themes are discussed and those themes are supported by evidence from the texts regarding the demographic and behavioral traits of the individual male characters as well as social interactions and discourses among the characters. In the conclusion, the researcher discusses the how the themes were similar and different for the two franchises, what that means in context of cultural production, some potential implications of the content for American society as well as some possibilities for further research.

Benefits and Limitations

As with any research methodology, it's important to address its inherent benefits and limitations. According to Lindlof and Taylor (2011), some benefits of this method of document analysis include the richness of information, availability of texts, nonreactivity, and truth value. This allows a lot of freedom to the researcher in gathering a quality sample and fluidity in the methodology process. However, with this freedom comes a lot of responsibility. It involves the researcher's careful interpretation of the texts' place and meaning in regards to its sociocultural context. On another note, due to the large amount of time required to conduct a textual analysis, only so much content can be covered through a study analyzing comic book content. Along similar lines, with such an abundance of comic books and graphic novels, there are only so many books that can be analyzed during one research project. Therefore, the texts need to be selected in a way to represent the population from which they are drawn. Due to these factors, collecting a

representative sample of the population is an arduous and lofty aspiration for this methodology. Regardless, analysis of prominent texts can reveal deep insights about the topic of interest. Phillipov (2012) does well in communicating this primary benefit of this method of analysis saying, "textual analysis can offer creative ways to articulate experiences that would otherwise be inaccessible to empirical research methods, and that the use of text-based approaches can improve, rather than weaken, our understanding of popular media and culture" (p. 209). With the methodology described in this chapter, the following two chapters are the execution of the textual analysis for the selected texts. In Chapter 4, the two Justice League series are analyzed, and the two Uncanny X-Men series are analyzed in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 3

SUPERMEN OF JUSTICE LEAGUE COMIC BOOKS

This chapter focuses on the comparison of the Justice League series including *Justice League of America* (2006-2011) and *Justice League* (2011-present). In the analysis of the two series, it was discovered that there was little change across the reboots in terms of representations of different masculinities. As stated in the methodology section, the change is observed through the analysis of male characters based on demographic and behavioral traits. Through the analysis, it was observed that there was very little diversity in demographics of male superheroes with most male characters aligning with the demographic traits traditionally associated with hegemonic masculinity. These demographic traits include being predominantly white, heterosexual and hyper-muscular. As for non-hegemonic masculinities, there was very little diversity in terms of race, sexuality and body type. The details of these hegemonic demographic traits are further addressed in the following section.

Similar to the demographic traits, the findings show there was also very little change in regards to the behavioral traits of male characters. However, the findings demonstrate that behavioral traits for both series gravitate more to non-hegemonic representations of masculinity, counter to the mostly hegemonic demographic traits. There were three main themes that arose for the non-hegemonic behaviors of male characters across both series. First, there were male characters that were dependent on their teammates, both male and female, for support and help. Second, many of the male characters expressed their

emotions as they opened up about their feelings, limitations and failures. Third, the texts emphasize the negative aspects of violence in showing the connection between the violent or aggressive action and the often-destructive consequences. Moving forward, the first section in this chapter will discuss the hegemonic demographic traits while the latter three sections will discuss the non-hegemonic behavioral themes for the two series.

Hegemonic Demographic Traits

At one point in the *Justice League of America* series, Martian Manhunter said, "for all its change--the league never really changes" (*Justice League of America #12*, October 2007, p. 30). Interestingly, this textual analysis found this to be quite accurate with the homogeneous representations of masculinity in regards to demographic traits across both series. Findings demonstrate that there is little diversity in regards to demographic representations of men as most male characters were white, heterosexual and hyper-muscular, which are all historically associated with superheroes and hegemonic masculinity in American society. According to Romagnoli and Pagnucci (2013), the "lack of diversity in superhero comics is an extremely large issue" even today (p. 134). While the emphasis of the authors' statement is on race and the portrayal of women, this lack of diversity holds true for representations of men and different masculinities in the Justice League franchise. While there is some diversity for representation of men based on race, there is very little to none in regards to sexual orientation and body type (See Table 1 and Table 2, p. 27-28).

In this franchise, demographic diversity is certainly still an issue. There is some diversity of race in the series before the reboot with four black superheroes, an android, a human-turned-gorilla and a blue-skinned alien from a planet called Talok III. However,

for the series following the reboots there is far less diversity with only two black men alongside eight white men. However, these characters of different races are given their opportunities to shine as the heroes (discussed in following section). Another lack in diversity comes for representations of men in regards to sexual orientation with almost all characters in both series being heterosexual. The only exception was Starman, who was represented as homosexual, in the series before the reboot. This character was introduced late in the series, but did have a prominent part on the team in winning victories against Starheart and Eclipso. The most lack in diversity was the representation of men's body types with all but one of the main male protagonists in both series being hyper-muscular.

With the aforementioned details, the representation of men in terms of demographic traits has remained mostly the same with little to no diversity in race, sexual orientation and body type. It shows that most of the diversity existed in the series preceding the reboot, rather than the series following the reboot. Also, the demographic traits most prominent are those associated with the American hegemonic masculinity. Therefore, this franchise maintains the demographic representation of men that has existed since the inception of the medium, and it has not grown to better reflect the true diversity of the American people and culture. However, the behavioral traits of the male superheroes demonstrate a shift away from ideals associated with hegemonic masculinity. Many of the characters, in both volumes, gravitate towards more non-hegemonic characterizations like being dependant on teammates and sharing their emotions. The texts also demonstrate the realities of aggression that are strongly associated with hegemonic masculinity. The following sections will explore each of these themes based on the superheroes' traits as evidenced in the art, narration and discourse.

TABLE 1
Male Superheroes in *Justice League of America* (2006-2011)

Main Male Characters	Race	Sexuality	Body Type	Behavioral Traits
Batman (Bruce Wayne)	White	Heterosexual	Hyper-Muscular	Intelligent, aggressive, unemotional, distant, secretive, dominant
Batman (Dick Grayson)	White	Heterosexual	Hyper-Muscular	Intelligent, caring, team-oriented
Black Lightning	Black	Heterosexual	Hyper-Muscular	Intelligent, aggressive
Congorilla	Gorilla	Undeterminable	Hyper-Muscular	Aggressive, kind, emotionally expressive
Cyborg	Black	Heterosexual	Hyper-Muscular	Kind, intelligent, emotionally expressive
Firestorm	Black	Heterosexual	Hyper-Muscular	Young, intelligent yet inexperienced, fearful
The Flash	White	Heterosexual	Hyper-Muscular	Emotionally expressive, kind
Geo-Force	White	Heterosexual	Hyper-Muscular	Royalty, quiet
Green Lantern (Hal Jordan)	White	Heterosexual	Hyper-Muscular	Emotionally expressive, aggressive
Green Lantern (John Stewart)	Black	Heterosexual	Hyper-Muscular	Strong, kind, diplomatic
Plastic Man	White	Heterosexual	Thin	Cocky, flirt
Red Arrow (Arsenal)	White	Heterosexual	Hyper-Muscular	Young, competitive, cocky, emotionally expressive, sexually predatory, defensive
Red Tornado	Android	Heterosexual	Hyper-Muscular	Unsure, kind, gentle, nurturing
Starman	Talokian	Homosexual	Hyper-Muscular	Kind, emotionally expressive, brave
Superman	White	Heterosexual	Hyper-Muscular	Strong, intelligent, leader, kind, honest, aggressive

TABLE 2
Male Superheroes in *Justice League* (2011-present)

Main Male Characters	Race	Sexuality	Body Type	Behavioral Traits
Aquaman	White	Heterosexual	Hyper-Muscular	Intelligent, strong, aggressive
Batman (Bruce Wayne)	White	Heterosexual	Hyper-Muscular	Intelligent, secretive, more team-oriented
Cyborg	Black	Heterosexual	Hyper-Muscular	Intelligent, emotionally expressive, team-oriented, brave
The Flash	White	Heterosexual	Hyper-Muscular	Kind, intelligent, team-oriented
Firestorm	Black	Heterosexual	Hyper-Muscular	Young, emotionally expressive, unsure of himself, confused
Green Arrow	White	Heterosexual	Hyper-Muscular	Arrogant, cocky,
Green Lantern (Hal Jordan)	White	Heterosexual	Hyper-Muscular	Reckless, sexually predatory, mostly self-oriented
Shazam	White	Heterosexual	Hyper-Muscular	Young, bold, reckless,
Superman	White	Heterosexual	Hyper-Muscular	Patient, kind, strong

From Baseball Player to Football Team

From the old series to the new, male and female members of the team transition from being independent to realizing the importance of working as a team. For men, this deviates from hegemonic masculinity in that independence is a trait strongly associated with it (Collier, 1998). This is important because masculine cultures, like that of the United States, have not only traditionally valued independence but also have praised it (Fernández, Carrera, Sánchez, Paez, & Candia, 2000). The negatives with this emphasis on independence is that men can perceive needing help as weakness, and weakness is not something a "man" is supposed to have (Murphy, 1998). That is where this franchise deviates from that stereotype in its representation of men needing others is shown as strength and that extreme independence is crippling and, at times, even a weakness.

This theme was certainly present in the series before the reboot with characters that relied on each other and one in particular that didn't. The focus to start with for the *Justice League of America* series is the negative aspects of isolation. In this series, Bruce Wayne, the first Batman in the series, is the character that most embodies hegemonic masculinity. This limited number of hegemonic men is common considering very few men ever achieve hegemonic status (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). Throughout *Justice League of America*, he possesses the most hegemonic male characteristics than any other main protagonist—he is dominant and acts independently from the team. His dominance and isolation is exemplified through several plot points throughout the series.

At one point, he blatantly defies the orders of female leadership. This occurred when he chased Joker in the skirmish with the Injustice League after Black Canary ordered teammates not to pursue after any runners from the scene (*Justice League of America*

#15, January 2008). He later justifies his actions in a conversation with Superman and Wonder Woman saying, "She's still developing. An occasional challenge to her authority will help season her" (*Justice League of America #21*, July 2008, p. 8). However, Wonder Women isn't convinced of Bruce's argument. She claims Bruce was chasing after the Joker because he feels personally responsible for this villain when he is on the loose and engaging in violent behavior. With that, Batman is seemingly justifying his undercutting of Black Canary's authority while trying to make it seem like it was benefitting her. Through this, it is inferred that Batman is trying to maintain his dominance and position within the group through maintaining face.

Also, Batman was dominant in other ways. John Stewart, a Green Lantern, described his teammate saying, "Batman was brilliant, but inflexible. He used people like chess pieces. That's okay with soldiers, but the JLA is made of uniquely gifted individuals. Batman *chafes*." (*Justice League of America #32*, June 2009, p. 9). Furthermore, Batman has high authority because of his position as one of the founding members of the Justice League, and he exercises that power freely. He doesn't give Firestorm an option of whether or not to join the Justice League. Firestorm declines saying he has too much going on, but Batman denies that reasoning and says Firestorm is too powerful to be unsupervised (*Justice League of America #15*, January 2008, p. 22). Essentially, Batman is imposing his will on Firestorm as he considers his power too great to be unmonitored.

Batman's disconnectedness and insensitivity is expressed again when he would rather replace The Flash for his absences rather than trying to understand the reasons for him not responding to the team's distress calls (*Justice League of America #20*, June 2008). The other Green Lantern, Hal Jordan, mentioned how much he didn't care for being

around Batman, Bruce Wayne, later in the series (*Justice League of America #42*, April 2010). In maintaining his dominance like this, it is clear the other team members didn't enjoy working with Batman. Essentially, he separated himself from the rest of the team through his words and actions. Also, his clandestine behavior further alienated him from the team. The following dialogue between Batman and Superman details this point:

> BATMAN: J'onn was going to be corralled with villains who'd have his head if he was found out. The fewer people who knew, the better.
> SUPERMAN: Even me.
> BATMAN: You don't have to know everything, Clark.
> SUPERMAN: Y'know, Bruce, as much as you take Amanda Waller to task for her covert ways, she doesn't hold a matchstick to you.
> (*Justice League of America #19*, May 2008, p. 3).

With this, Batman's need for control is clear. He believes that he should know everything, while another leader, of the same status, doesn't need to know the details of the missions at hand. This creates a tension between the two characters that lasts for many issues. Taken together, it is apparent that this Batman, Bruce Wayne, had many tensions in his relationships because of his exemplified dominance and independence. Even after his death, Batman's teammates wrestle with how they thought about him. In remembering him, Superman says, "He barely tolerated me," but Wonder Woman encourages him to reconsider (*Justice League of America #31*, May 2009, p. 17). Superman remembers a time when he, Batman, was kind as they talked about missing their fathers who had both died. Yet, Wonder woman acknowledges that Batman "didn't really want that to get around, though" (*Justice League of America #31*, May 2009, p. 18). Perhaps, it was because he wanted to keep that side of him secret, so that he was thought of as a strong man without weakness. Therefore, those who wanted to hurt him would have less of an advantage in not knowing who or what he cared about.

For this series before the reboot, the transition from the individual to the team mindset didn't come about through a change in personality of a character. Rather, it was through one character dying and another one rising up to take his place. After Bruce Wayne dies, Dick Grayson, the former Nightwing, takes up the mantle as Batman. His approach to working as a team is much more inclusive and people-oriented than his predecessor. In several instances, Dick Grayson stresses the importance of openly working as a team, through the good and the bad. This is shown in the battle against Eclipso when he says, "'Kay, we've got each other's backs. Means if we fall, we fall together" (*Justice League of America #56*, June 2011, p. 17). He even acknowledges the successes of the team as a whole rather than as an individual win. This is shown after a battle when he acknowledges, "*All* of us did it together" (*Justice League of America #52*, February 2011, p. 16).

This transition of being a solo player to being part of a team is also a recurring theme throughout the series after the reboot, *Justice League* (2011-present). In one scene in the first story arc, they battle the villain known as Darkseid. To start, each protagonist attacks the villain alone. Before too long, they have exhausted every idea they could imagine to defeat this villain. However, they have all tried going at it individually, rather than as a collective force. This leads Batman and Green Lantern to have a conversation as they regroup about their battle strategy. In this dialogue, Batman says:

> "This is *bigger* than I am. And it's *bigger* than you are. Get out of your own way. Focus on what's important here: everyone *else*. So far it's been *batter up*, but we need to stop playing *baseball* and start playing *football*. We need to be a *team"* (*Justice League #5*, March 2012, p. 20).

Green Lantern then encourages to rest of the group to work together. They eventually come up with a unified strategy—taking out both of Darkseid's eyes and pushing him

back into a portal into his home world. As they return to battle, Green Lantern's battle cry has transitioned from "Green Lantern's got this!" (p. 13) to "We got this!" (*Justice League #5*, March 2012, p. 23). In essence, they accomplished this task through teamwork, but it was only after trying individually did they realize they needed one another. This solidarity is further demonstrated elsewhere in the new series including when the team unites to save their government correspondent, Steve Trevor, after he is captured and tortured by Graves (*Justice League #11,* September 2012). They offer their assistance again when Wonder Woman is on a mission to save her friend Barbara, aka Cheetah (*Justice League #13*, December 2012).

Beyond just working as a team, more themes emerge from the texts in regards to relationships among teammates. One of which is that men can support each other through their big challenges and weaknesses. The examples for this aspect are specific to the series before the reboot. It first occurs in a heart-to-heart conversation between Green Arrow and Green Lantern. Green Lantern has confronted Green Arrow about his solo missions and undertaking dangerous tasks on his own because he is filled with anger. Green Arrow challenges Green Lantern saying, "What, Hal? What do I do that'll make the *rage* burning within go away?" (*Justice League of America #41*, April 2010, p. 27). With affection for his friend, Green Lantern responds, "Well, for starters, don't go down this road again. You do it every time things go south…'Green Arrow. Man Alone.' *Every* damn time. You need your *friends* around you, Ollie. Your teammates" (*Justice League of America #41*, April 2010, p. 27). Essentially, Green Lantern doesn't want Green Arrow to go down the same destructive path he always does, and he is willing to help him through that. Second, the support occurs between Red Tornado and Cyborg. After Red

Tornado's body has been destroyed, Cyborg is more than willing to help him get into his new body so that he may return to his family and his role as superhero. When Red Tornado inquires as to why he is so obliged to help, Cyborg responds, "We're teammates now, and teammates help each other" (*Justice League of America #42*, April 2010, p. 17).

For both series, another theme of importance is that women are no longer simply damsels in distress or subordinate to men (Sharp, 2010), and men are not just the knights in shining armor (Alemán, 2005). Rather, there is much more equality of male and female characters in having an essential part in the battle, saving the day and needing to be rescued. Before the reboot, there are several instances where the female members save their male teammates from being captured by villains: Hawkgirl saves the day against Kanjar Ro ("Sanctuary: Part 3," 2008); Wonder Woman saves a plane from crashing (*Justice League of America #20*, June 2008); Hawkgirl saves Red Arrow from burning to death and caught the bank robber known as The Human Flame (*Justice League of America #21*, July 2008); Zantana takes out Amazo with her whirlwind spell and returns Red Tornado's soul to his body (*Justice League of America #24*, October 2008); and Vixen wins in the battle against Anasi (*Justice League of America #26*, December 2008). After the reboot, this theme arises when Superman is the one that needs saving after having been bitten by the Cheetah and turning uncontrollably violent (*Justice League #14*, January 2013).

In addition to being saved by women, the men also respect them and value their contribution to the team. The following examples are for the series before the reboot. Flash highly respects of Wonder Woman for all she stands for ("Sanctuary: Part 3," 2008). More than just battle, men are willing to serve under female leadership. For

example, Vixen takes a role as leader during the skirmish with the Royal Flush Gang and the male characters adhere to her orders and follow according to her expertise and vision (*Justice League of America #36*, October 2009). The men also acknowledge how much they need what the female characters bring to the team. At one point a hypermasculine supporting character, Mr. Terrific, requests the help of Power Girl and Supergirl to construct a device to counteract Starheart's possession of metahumans. In seeing the women working on the device, Mr. Terrific thinks to himself, "I watch them…*blurs* of motion. I *don't* often say this but…wow" (Justice League of America #48, Robinson 2010, p. 6). The women further prove their value to the team when Jade saves her father, Alan Scott, who is commonly referred to as "the most powerful human alive" (Justice League of America #48, Robinson 2010, p. 22); Batman needs the help of Supergirl and Jesse Quick to break a machine, and he needs Jade to contain the energy from escaping into the world (*Justice League of America #51*, January 2011). These examples demonstrate the importance of women's contributions to the team, and it shows the men are willing to follow female leadership and to ask for help knowing they have limitations where the women have strengths.

This theme also carries over into the volume following the reboot. At first, Batman and Green Lantern agree that they don't need new members (*Justice League #8*, June 2012). However, after Aquaman, Wonder Woman, Superman and Batman are captured and are sent undersea by King Orm of Atlantis, Cyborg sends a call out to metahumans to come and help with the battle against Atlantis (*Justice League #16*, March 2013). Many characters, both male and female, come to the aid of the Justice League. With this, the team realizes they need new troops to help them in their battle against evil forces. They

therefore invite three members to join the league: Element Woman, Firestorm and The Atom to join their ranks, two of which are female. (*Justice League #18*, May 2013). Wonder Woman also proves her worth in the series as she uses her strength and intellect to defeat villain after villain (*Justice League #19*, June 2013).

In addition to women being valuable parts of the team throughout the volumes, non-hegemonic male characters are also given the opportunity to shine and be the heroes, especially the African-American superheroes. Before the reboot, Black Lightning saves Superman, Vixen and Black Canary (Justice League of America #13, December 2007). Additionally, Firestorm saves Superman from Lex Luthor's clutches using his powers of transmutation (*Justice League #14*, November 2007). After the reboot, Cyborg is a true champion for his team in two different situations. First, Cyborg calls upon the help of heroes outside of the Justice League and organizes the battle strategy in the battle with Atlantis (*Justice League #16,* March 2013). Second, Cyborg comes back from losing his body to The Grid, seeks the help of his father and the Metal Men and it is his plan that leads to defeat the Crime Syndicate (*Justice League #27*, March 2014). With this, it is demonstrated the heroism is not just a trait reserved for the white, dominant male leaders. Rather, it shows that all types of men and masculinities, especially non-hegemonic, have the capacity to be superheroes.

Revisiting the baseball player and football team analogy, the narratives of the Justice League volume highly reflect this transition to work as a team. These Justice League narratives are not just a white male superheroes saving the day and being superior to their teammates and villains. Rather, there is more of a balance of gender in that men and women are working together as equals for the greater good. There is even more diversity

of race with African-American heroes holding prominent positions in both series of the Justice League. However, this superhero football team is still highly underrepresented across both volumes with very little diversity of male characters in terms of more races, sexual orientations and body types. Despite this limitation, there are others ways in which non-hegemonic masculinities are positively represented in the Justice League franchise.

Expressing Emotions: The Good, Bad, Happy and Sad

Another way in which the male characters in the Justice League represent non-hegemonic qualities is through expressing their emotions, both to each other and to women. This deviates from hegemonic masculinity in that one of its core components is that men are expected to be unemotional and have it all together. It is as Montes (2013) explains that men in masculine cultures, like the United States, have "traditionally internalized rigid emotional expressions and have been conditioned not to feel anything or, at least, not to show those feelings" (p. 471-472). Additionally, Oranksy and Maracek (2009) demonstrate that men hide their feelings from their male peers so they are not considered feminine or less than a "real man." Therefore, having representations that deviate from these rigid stereotypes help to promote more emotionally open ideals for boys and men to emulate. Fortunately, that seems to be the case for the men in the Justice League. Most of the male superheroes` are not confined by this stoic expectation, as many of them are open about their emotions, fears and relationships. Also, the series before the reboot details the troubles of one character that bottles up their emotions.

Before the relaunch, this theme of emotional expression comes to life most strongly in the character of Red Tornado, also known as Reddy. Red Tornado is a kind, gentle, wise and affectionate character. Throughout this volume of *Justice League of America,* he

continually demonstrates his love for his wife, daughter and fellow teammates. Yet, he feels he has a massive limitation—that he is an android. With this, he doesn't feel he can do everything that a man should be able to do, and he continually wrestles with this self-concept in various situations. However, he doesn't feel the need to conceal these emotions in order to maintain his status as a man. In talking with Deadman, a magical being who could transfer Reddy's soul into a human body, Red Tornado expresses his concerns about the limitations of being in android. He even feels he is being selfish in that he wants a human body. Deadman encourages Reddy saying:

> "Reddy, I'm a zombie permanently trapped in a circus outfit—I've seen truckloads of whacked-out nonsense in my lifetime. But the one thing I know is, whatever you are, it's more than just some stubborn artificial intelligence created by some mad scientist named Morrow. Maybe you were accidentally trapped in that android body…maybe your true shell was taken before you could inhabit it…maybe you *are* just an elemental wind creature from across the galaxy. But if you didn't have a damn real soul capable of love and hate and pain, there's no way you and I would even be having this conversation. You have a soul, Reddy. And as long as that's the case, there's nothing saying we can't put you in a place that's better than some, no offense, hollow metal robot" (*Justice League of America #1*, October 2006, p. 18).

Through this, Deadman is taking the emphasis away from the Reddy's body and saying that he is real man because of his soul. As they finish their conversation, Red Tornado is put into a human body of someone who had recently died. With this, Red Tornado is excited as he can now feel the sensation of the five senses, of holding his wife and the array of pleasures that life has to offer. However, these pleasures are short-lived as the problems with Reddy's body are just beginning.

As the story progress, Reddy loses his body and is put elsewhere several times throughout the narrative. First, it is when Solomon Grundy destroys Red Tornado's body and tears his right arm off, and he is put him back in his old metallic body (*Justice

League of America #6, April 2007); Red Tornado's new body that was built by scientists is taken over by Amazo before Red Tornado can be transferred into that body (*Justice League of America #22*, August 2008); and his artificial body is torn apart again in the confrontation with the zombie-like Black Lanterns (*Justice League of America #39*, January 2010). Throughout these examples, he also battles with feelings of not having a body, not feeling a true member of his family and feeling limited as a man. Fortunately, Red Tornado doesn't keep all these emotions inside. He talks about his issues with his family and team, and finally he has good fortune. Since Cyborg knew that Red Tornado wanted a body, he created him a new one that would make him a "complete man in *every* way, made of artificial organs and tissue" (*Justice League of America #47*, September 2010, p. 24). Reddy expresses his sincerest thanks saying, "*Victor*! Vic, *my friend*! *How* can I ever thank you for this? (p. 25), and Cyborg answers his question, "You *just* said it, John, we're *friends*. *No* thanks needed" (*Justice League of America #47*, September 2010, p. 25). This story emphasizes friendship and the fragility of the human body, even the male one that is supposed to be unbeatable and indestructible.

Red Tornado and Cyborg are not the only characters to express their emotions in the series before the reboot. The Flash, Wally West, cries with Jay Garrick upon his return to Earth and hugs his male teammates (*Justice League of America #10*, August 2007). The Flash is also shown to be an affectionate and caring father as he cooks breakfast for his family, gets the kids ready for school, makes dinner and tucks the kids into bed (*Justice League of America #20*, June 2008). Black Lightning is also a dad and tries to spend more time with his wife and daughter (*Justice League of America #25*, November 2008). Superman expresses being upset when The Flash didn't respond to his distress call

(*Justice League of America #20*, June 2008). Also, the team leaders emphasize the importance of being friends rather than just co-leaders of the Justice League (*Justice League of America #21,* July 2008). Starman and Congorilla were introduced in "Team History, Part Two" and are portrayed as really good friends. Perhaps, it is the mutual loss of a man they were close to. For Congorilla, he lost his good friend Dominic Mndawe, Freedom Beast (*Justice League of America #60*, October 2011) and Starman lost his boyfriend, Tony (*Justice League of America #49*, November 2010). Other characters are even free enough to talk about their failures. Green Arrow opens up to Green Lantern about his shortcomings as a mentor to Red Arrow, and he has learned how to sacrifice things he enjoys for the people he loves (*Justice League of America #7*, May 2007).

Another character that touches on this theme of emotions is Red Arrow. After being invited into the league and accepting, Red Arrow has a monologue in his head where he discusses how appreciative he is for Black Canary, and proceeds to embrace Black Canary and Green Lantern for how they have cared for him (*Justice League of America #7*, May 2007). As the story progresses, it is revealed that Roy is a single, loving father. When trapped underneath a collapsed building he thinks of his child and that encourages him to get out with the following thought, "We all fight for different reasons. But we all still fight. I'm coming Lian. Everything we need is within us" (*Justice League of America #11*, October 2007, p. 23-24). In addition to being a father, he also goes to help at local mission's soup kitchen to feed the children at Christmas and interacts with the people there (*Justice League of America #16*, February 2008).

Yet, when it comes to his romantic relationship in the series, it seems he has a bit harder time. It is through this character that the series addresses the difficulties associated

with bottling emotions. It all starts when Roy falls for one of his fellow teammates, Hawkgirl, whose real name is Kendra. She resists at first, but after seeing how good he is to his daughter she opens up to the idea. The two get together and eventually have sex (*Justice League of America #12*, October 2007). This romance continues throughout the series, and it seems like it is going well as Roy contemplates what to get Kendra for Christmas. However, things start to regress when Hawkgirl thinks Roy is not over the mother of his child. This tension between Hawkgirl and Red Arrow is shown when they are sparring in the training room (*Justice League of America #22*, August 2008, p. 11). They fight with each other and they end up parting ways after the session and not talking about it. However, in the same issue, Superman and Red Arrow talk about their feelings and relationships with women:

> SUPERMAN: You know, Lois and I once had a huge fight about the dishes.
> RED ARROW: Really? She use Kryptonite, or--
> SUPERMAN: *Verbal* fight, Roy. The thing is, the dishes weren't really the problem. They were just something safe to fight about. We couldn't *begin* to solve things until we started talking about what was really on our minds. If you have real feelings for Kendra, you should tell her.
> RED ARROW: I haven't necessarily admitted it to myself yet.
> SUPERMAN: You should admit it, and tell her. When you find the right person, you don't play games. You go get them, period.

The two end up not talking, and Hawkgirl even mentions how Roy won't open up about how he feels (*Justice League of America #25*, November 2008). Then, their relationship comes to an abrupt stop after sleeping together one night. Hawkgirl has a sensual dream about her previous lover, Carter, and shouts his name in her sleep. Roy hears and grows very upset. He then tries to appear as emotionally invincible saying, "You can't hurt me, Kendra. I'm a superhero" (*Justice League of America #27*, January 2009, p. 7). He hides behind this facade to avoid the notion he has genuinely been hurt.

The tension grows thick between Red Arrow and Hawkgirl and it continues for many issues. In the team's skirmish with Shadow Thief, Red Arrow responds to Hawkgirl's insistence to help him saying, "That's the last thing I need from you. Why don't you go see about Carter?" (*Justice League of America #30*, April 2009, p. 12). Essentially, Red Arrow is still mad about the incident in the bedroom, and he is avoiding the situation by responding with quick, harsh retorts at Hawkgirl. Perhaps, he is even trying to maintain face with the team, so he doesn't look bad as they know what is going on. Their relationship eventually ends after a heated exchange between the two lovers following the defeat of The Fadeaway Man (*Justice League of America #30*, April 2009). Red Arrow is frustrated that Hawkgirl can't let Carter go, and he leaves. Through Red Arrow bottling his emotions and never expressing them, he distanced himself from his lover and it eventually ended on bad terms.

This theme of emotional expression holds true for the volume following the reboot. The male characters in the *Justice League* series that most represent this non-hegemonic behavioral trait are Superman, The Flash and Cyborg. For the latter two, it is most apparent in their relationship with one another. In the same way that Red Tornado struggled with being an android in the previous volume, Cyborg struggles with being a cyborg, a being that is half-human and half-machine. He divulges these concerns to The Flash, and he assures Cyborg of his humanity telling him, "You're not a robot, Vic. Robots don't *laugh* at jokes or talk about their favorite television shows or worry that they are robots" (*Justice League #13*, December 2012, p. 13). In a later issue, Cyborg also reveals to the team that he is dealing with attention problems due to the "endless influx of data steaming into my system" (*Justice League #18*, May 2013, p. 6). Later,

Cyborg and his dad talk out their issues with one another, and his dad apologizes for ignoring him and his football games and for turning him into a cyborg in the first place (*Justice League #27*, March 2014). As for the male-female emotional exchange, Superman and Wonder Woman talk about their feelings and the difficulty of being close to anyone for fear that they may be hurt (*Justice League #12*, October 2012).

A younger hero also represents this emotional theme throughout the story. Billy Batson is an orphan kid who is adopted by a family with several other foster children ("A Villain's Journey," 2012). He also has the magical powers of lightning granted to him by a wizard. Yet, he feels like he is the only one to protect himself, and he doesn't think anyone else cares for him; therefore, he doesn't care for anyone else. With this, he doesn't want to be a part of the new family and denies invitations into it by the other foster kids (*Justice League #9*, July 2012). Yet, this is just a mask he wears. He really does want to be part of a family. This is shown as he protects his foster siblings from neighborhood bullies (*Justice League #9*, July 2012, p. 26). Then, when Billy turns into the hero Shazam, he shows emotion when Black Adam has his foster siblings in his grip and is threatening to kill them. He physically cries and pleads with Black Adam, "Don't hurt anyone! Don't hurt them, okay?" (*Justice League #21*, August 2013 p. 6). Billy releases his power to his family and they all become Shazams. With their combined effort, they take down Black Adam. This scene emphasizes the mutual connection that comes through the expression of emotion and because of that connection the foster siblings were able to defeat Black Adam and save others.

Aggression and Violence

More traits strongly associated with hegemonic masculinity and represented in the Justice League comic books include aggression and violence. However, this is not surprising considering these volumes exist within the superhero genre, in which violence is a common theme throughout the narratives because it involves the protagonists frequently battling their villains. However, it is important to consider the context of aggression and competition and what it means for those who are involved in the situation at hand, especially for media representations. According to Soulliere (2006), aggression is a method in which men may assert their manhood or challenge the manhood of other men either physically, verbally or some amalgamation of the two. With this, it is important to look not just at violence, but also its relation to masculinity (Miettinen, 2012). Adhering to reality, both series of the Justice League show that aggression most often resolves nothing and can even lead to negative ramifications.

In the series before the reboot, there are several instances of men engaging in competitive language and aggressive behavior. For example, Batman and Black Lightning threaten to use torture techniques to extract information out of members of the Shadow Cabinet, but their efforts are thwarted when members of the opposing team show up and interrupt the exchange (*Justice League of America #28*, February 2009, p. 3). In the same issue, John Stewart, exchanges heated words with the character known as Icon over who has authority in the situation at hand. Even intelligence is a topic worthy of competitive dialogue in another scene where Green Lantern, Firestorm and a character named Hardware argue over intelligence and how to proceed with the mission. Vixen eventually has to break up the argument saying, "Okay, guys. I'm sure you're *both* very

macho. Can we get back to helping Dr. Light?" (*Justice League of America #33*, July 2009, p. 13). In each of these situations, it is important to note that nothing productive was achieved through the use of competitive language or aggressive behavior. Rather, it just creates unnecessary tension between the characters involved and resolves nothing.

However, another important battle between superheroes and villains demonstrates the downsides of impulsively acting on aggression and rage. In the battle with the Injustice League, Lex Luthor pushes Black Lightning and Superman to the point of rage and violence (*Justice League #14*, November 2007). Lex expects that Black Lightning will resort to force, but he can't seem to take Superman's threats seriously because he is such a nice guy. Lex Luthor is proven right with Black Lightning when he uses his powers to attack Lex one panel further. Building on the tension, Lex continues on in his hostile dialogue with Superman saying, "I want your *rage*. Your blind unthinking *anger*. I want you *filled* with righteous indignation, so distracted by outrage that your carelessness will cancel out the advantage of your *power*" (*Justice League #14*, November 2007, p. 4). He succeeds in enraging Superman by showing him he had captured his teammates.

Normally, Superman embodies kindness, hope, peace and cooperation. However, influenced by Lex Luthor's capturing his teammates, Superman acts carelessly upon his rage and takes Black Lightning down with him. In a blind rage, the two superheroes venture to the Injustice League's lair to save their teammates. Upon entering, they seem victorious in knocking out a few of the villains, but the villains eventually overtake them due to the superheroes' carelessness. This resulted in almost all the team members being captured and even a few of them being close to death as Lex Luthor was about to stab Superman with a Kryptonite knife. Fortunately, Firestorm comes in at the last moment

and saves Superman from Lex Luthor's Kryptonite blade. With this, it is made clear that aggression and violence can lead to detrimental circumstances. However, in real life there might not be someone always there to save the victim at the last minute.

After the reboot, the act of aggression is once again proven to be detrimental to the league. There is one scene in particular that demonstrates this point. It all starts when Green Lantern tries to control Wonder Woman by encasing her in a green bubble (*Justice League #11*, September 2012). Essentially, he is trying to save her from going off to face David Graves on her own, but he is also taking away her free will. This leads to an all out fight and a few heated words between the two superheroes. They battle for several blows, and Superman steps in to help. Wonder Woman ends up kicking him and sending him flying backwards. While this is going on, Batman, Cyborg, The Flash and Aquaman work to keep the nearby pedestrians safe as they were in the way of danger because of the recklessness and intensity of the battle.

They eventually stop fighting after The Flash intervenes and Cyborg teleports them to another location. After a brief but heated conversation, the members agree to work as a team to save Agent Steve Trevor and defeat David Graves. However, the ramifications of that skirmish are later realized. Since the battle amongst the teammates was recorded and broadcast worldwide, the public became weary of the team. This led Green Lantern to leave the team so he would be the scapegoat for people to blame so the world could maintain their respect and trust for the Justice League (*Justice League #12*, October 2012). Therefore, it was this brief act of aggression and violence that lead to the loss of a character for the team. This re-emphasizes that exercised aggression and violence has negative consequences for those involved.

To further stress the problems with aggression and violence, the two Justice League volumes depict male villains as frequently exhibiting aggression and engaging in violent behaviors. Perhaps the quintessential expression of this idea is Ultraman in the series after the reboot. Essentially, Ultraman is the antithesis of Superman and is characterized as his complete opposite. Originating from another Krypton in separate dimension, Ultraman comes from a place that praises violence, being the strongest of the species and proving their worth through physical combat. In establishing a background for the character, Geoff Johns writes about Ultraman's early years (*Justice League #24*, December 2013). It flashes back twenty-five years to a scene of immense destruction and violence as Krypton in his universe is being destroyed. His father, Jor-Il, exclaims "Only the strongest will survive" as he shoots his adversaries to be able to send his son away to another world, likened to Superman origin story. However, his personality is much different than Superman's father. He engages in following conversation with his wife, Lara (*Justice League #24*, December 2013, p. 4):

> JOR-IL: Our son is our only chance at *revenge* on the *being* that's *destroyed* Krypton. He better not *fail* us. He better not fail *me*. The house of Il is the house of *strength*.
> LARA: Yes, it is, Jor-Il. And the power he gains on Earth, he *will rule* over the humans.
> JOR-IL: But look at him *now,* Lara. I can *barely* stand the *sight*. He's so *frail.* Be the *strongest* there is, Kal-Il--or be *nothing* at all.
> LARA: This is all *your* fault, Jor-Il.
> JOR-IL: Shut up and die, Lara.

Consistent with these expectations in the present, Ultraman is a highly aggressive and violent character that has the need to constantly prove himself in battling other adversaries that he deems worthy. This is demonstrated in his battle with Black Adam when Ultraman says, "I have been looking for an example of this world's strength. Let

me see how long it takes to kill this one" (*Justice League #24*, December 2013, p. 21-22). This endless violence leaves him in constant state of discontentment because he feels he insatiable needs to battle someone. Additionally, he is not even liked by the people with whom he is aligned. His wife, Super Woman, speaks ill of him and even has an ongoing affair with Owlman. At the end of the Forever Evil story arc, Ultraman and his team are defeated and sent back to their dimension (*Justice League #24*, May 2014). This once again proves that uncontrolled aggression and violence can lead to destruction and loss.

These examples are important in showing that competition and aggression have certain ramifications. Since violence is so highly represented in media, it's important to consider its context and how it relates for its audiences, especially a male-centric one (Moss, 2011). The narratives of the Justice League do well in presenting the negative aspects associated with the competitive and aggressive themes. It does so by closely relating the violent actions with the negative repercussions for individuals as well as the group. Throughout the comparison of the two Justice League series, the negative aspects of aggression, along with the aforementioned non-hegemonic behaviors of emotional expression and relying on teammates, do well to promote different masculinities in showing that men don't have to fit the stereotypical roles of masculinity and it even shows the dangers of extreme adherence to these ideals. These themes, along with others, are also present in the comparison of the two X-Men series, which will be analyzed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

SUPERMEN OF UNCANNY X-MEN COMIC BOOKS

This chapter focuses on the comparison of the X-Men series including *Uncanny X-Men* (2011-2012) and *Uncanny X-Men* (2013-present). Contrary to the Justice League franchise comparison, the two volumes of the X-Men series demonstrate a greater change in the diversity of masculine representation. To elaborate, findings show that male characters in the series following the reboot are much more non-hegemonic as compared to the characters before the reboot, which is true for both demographic traits as well as behavioral traits (See Table 3 and Table 4). Additionally, the non-hegemonic characters are not portrayed as inferior to the hegemonic masculinity. Rather, the non-hegemonic characters are superheroes in their own right and are paramount to the success of the team. The following paragraph touches on the overarching themes and comparison of the series while the following sections explore the representations and issues more in depth.

Before the reboot, all four of the main male characters are white, older, heterosexual and hyper-muscular. As for behavioral traits, the male characters were highly aggressive, emotionally detached, mostly independent and sexually predatory. The rebooted series saw a lot of change in both the returning characters as well as the introduction of new non-hegemonic characters. The returning characters, Magneto and Cyclops, exhibited more instances of sharing emotions and relying on someone beside themselves for help. The new characters are young, inexperienced, often scared and representative of men from different races, sexual orientations and body types. The following sections in this

chapter provide an in-depth analysis of the hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinities as represented in the two volumes of the Uncanny X-Men. The first section discusses the mostly hegemonic traits of the series before the reboot and how returning characters have seemingly evolved to more non-hegemonic masculine figures. The second and final section in this chapter will cover the introduction of new non-hegemonic characters in the series following the reboot and suggest how these new representations are making great advances for the representation of non-hegemonic masculinities.

TABLE 3
Male Superheroes in *Uncanny X-Men* (2011-2012)

Main Male Characters	Race	Sexuality	Body Type	Behavioral Traits
Cyclops	White	Heterosexual	Hyper-Muscular	Leader, tactician, dominant, encouraging Under possession: aggressive, destructive, unemotional, independent
Colossus	White	Heterosexual	Hyper-Muscular	Kind, passionate, emotional Under possession: aggressive, destructive, unemotional
Magneto	White	Heterosexual	Hyper-Muscular	Intelligent, unemotional, insensitive
Namor	White	Heterosexual	Hyper-Muscular	Aggressive, arrogant, sexually predatory, impulsive

TABLE 4
Male Superheroes in *Uncanny X-Men* (2013-present)

Main Male Characters	Race	Sexuality	Body Type	Behavioral Traits
Benjamin Deeds	White	Homosexual	Thin	Young, kind, fearful
Cyclops	White	Heterosexual	Hyper-Muscular	Intelligent, arrogant, opens up emotionally, becomes more independent
Goldballs	Hispanic	Heterosexual	Thick/Fat	Young, kind, fearful
Hijack	Asian	Heterosexual	Thin	Arrogant, careless
Magneto	White	Heterosexual	Hyper-Muscular	Intelligent, violent, opens up emotionally, becomes more independent
Triage	Black	Heterosexual	Thin	Young, romantic

Out with the Old, In with the New

Before the reboot, most of the male characters embodied hegemonic masculine traits with very few non-hegemonic traits (see Table 3, p. 49). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, this holds true for the demographic traits as well as the behavioral traits. Since the demographic characteristics have already been addressed in the introduction of this chapter, the following sections will detail the behavioral traits of the main protagonists across the reboot. This section will specifically look at the characters existing only in the volume before the reboot, and the characters that are presented in both series. The next section will look at the introduction of new non-hegemonic characters.

To start, it's paramount to consider the character known as Namor, arguably the most hegemonic masculine character of the *Uncanny X-Men* (2011-2012) series. He is arrogant, competitive, hyperheterosexual and sexually predatory. As Renolds (2007) argues, hyperheterosexuality is one of the most common traits of hegemonic masculinity. Namor can certainly be classified as a hyperheterosexual as he pursues and sleeps with many women. Additionally, he is also an extreme narcissist who often refers to himself in third person and has his trademark battle cry, "Imperius Rex," which is Latin for "Commanding King." In this series, one of his most arrogant and narcissistic moments is demonstrated in his conversation with Hope Summers. She asks, "You're not just a pretty face, are you?," and Namor responds "No. A complete compilation of Namor's virtues would be a far lengthier list" (*Uncanny X-Men #5*, March 2012, p. 10-11). He also adds that his "great abs" would be present on that list.

However, the most prominent trait the text emphasizes is Namor's sexual prowess with women, a trait very strongly associated with hegemonic masculinity. To make a

peace treaty with the undersea creatures and the X-Men, it is established that he has sexual relations with the queen of the underwater creatures in Tabula Rasa. When Hope Summers inquires about this sexual adventure, Namor answers, "A mere *gentleman* does not tell. A king is far more discreet" (*Uncanny X-Men #8*, May 2012, p. 10-11). Yet, Namor clarifies that he is only interested in women of cosmopolitan tastes, and he makes it abundantly clear he will not pursue young girls and, jokingly, not redheads (*Uncanny X-Men #8*, May 2012). In a later issue when Namor is coming out of the water with the underwater queen, he again explains that he doesn't speak of his conquests, again using third person (*Uncanny X-Men #11*, June 2012, p. 9). He also flirts with another female mutant, Hephzibah, as they talk about relaxing together later and that it would involve nudity (*Uncanny X-Men #12*, July 2012, p. 5).

The woman he chases most after in the series is Emma Frost, who is in a relationship with Cyclops. It is evident early on in the series that the two have a mutual interest for one another. It starts when she summons Namor to help in the situation in the park when Mr. Sinister takes over the resting celestial being. Emma telepathically invites Namor because the team needs his strength to defeat the villain. Without hesitation, Namor confirms with "Yes, my queen…So…are you saying I'm desired?", and Emma responds with a definitive "Yes…" (*Uncanny X-Men #1*, January 2012, p. 18). His flirting continues throughout the story with Emma denying Namor on several occasions, but at the same time he intrigues her. Later, Namor and Emma commence to making out and groping one other when Unit unleashes a barrage of generalized pheromones (*Uncanny X-Men #10,* June 2012, p. 9). Unit then insults Cyclops saying, "Now, that is interesting. It doesn't normally work that well. She's meant to be with you isn't she, Cyclops? This

must be embarrassing" (*Uncanny X-Men #10*, June 2012, p. 10). Cyclops didn't seem too affected by this, as it was the pheromones that caused the two to lust after one another.

However, as the story progresses, Emma reveals to Cyclops that she had a telepathic affair with Namor after being taken over by the Phoenix Force (*Uncanny X-Men #18*, November 2012). Through the couple breaking up and Emma going through an identity crisis (*Uncanny X-Men #2*, February 2013), she is shown to reap the negative consequences of her infidelity. Yet, Namor seems to be valorized because he slept with Emma Frost, who is depicted as very attractive and desirable. Considering it wasn't addressed in the series and Namor is not present in the reboot, the ramifications of this affair are nonexistent for Namor. However, Emma's relationship with Scott has ended, and she is trying to pick up the broken pieces of her life. This is a bit disconcerting in that Namor's actions go on unchecked, and he doesn't have any ramifications for his sexual conquests. Additionally, it shows women fawning over and attracted to an extremely narcissist and self-obsessed character. Both of these aspects should give pause to the reader as they are promoting very negative attributes for men that are portrayed as appealing (Pérez-Jiménez et al., 2007).

Another male character in the series that deserves attention is Magneto, a villain turned superhero. In the series before the reboot, he embodies two specific traits associated with hegemonic masculinity including not showing weakness and being emotionally disconnected. The first trait is demonstrated when Cyclops inquires about his status in performing a very difficult task with his powers. Magneto responds that he is doing "Terribly, but I'm not going to show it when I'm on this large a stage. The world is watching…I hate to disappoint" (*Uncanny X-Men #3*, February 2012, p. 19). The second

trait regarding emotional detachment has two manifestations in the series. The first is when Dr. Nemesis had been hit with a neurotoxin dart, and Magneto makes a joke saying, "To be honest, Storm. I don't see much difference" (*Uncanny X-Men #13*, August 2012, p. 5). While Dr. Nemesis is clearly delirious, Magneto jests at his misfortune at being hit by the dart. He does it again in a conversation with Psylocke saying, "So…in effect, you swapped 5,000 human lives for one mutant one. That's regrettable. But when there's less than 200 mutants on the planet, I can live with that" (*Uncanny X-Men #5*, March 2012, p. 19). Essentially, he justifies Psylocke's actions in that they saved on mutant's life. This is the extent of Magneto's discourses to his teammates. At no point does he ask for help or talk about how he really feels with his fellow teammates or any other character.

Another character before the reboot that embodies hegemonic traits is Cyclops. He is the team's leader and strategist, and he is also dominant and heterosexual. While he is mostly characterized as hegemonic through his leadership, he does have non-hegemonic moments like encouraging his teammates and being passionate about preserving the mutant race. However, he is taken over by the Phoenix Force, along with four other X-Men. Under the influence of the Phoenix Force, he becomes more destructive, violent and arrogant. Even though his goals include solving immense problems like world hunger, ending war and preserving the mutant race, he is doing it through force and violence. Magik, also a vessel for the Phoenix Force, describes the influence saying, "Our flaws were magnified. Our flaws blotted out the sun. We are flawed. We are poor vessels for infinity" (*Uncanny X-Men #18*, November 2012, p. 7). They even obliterate Mr. Sinister under Cyclops leadership, even though he is normally against killing (*Uncanny X-Men #17*, October 2012).

Then, the three of the other phoenix vessels lose their power and it is all transferred into the remaining characters, Cyclops and Emma. After Emma reveals that she had a telepathic affair with Namor, Cyclops attacks Emma and steals her portion of the Phoenix Force (*Uncanny X-Men #18*, November 2012, p. 21). This leaves Cyclops with all the power and all alone in his fight against the other X-Men and Avengers. Towards the end, he kills Professor X in a fit of rage, and then the X-Men and Avengers defeat him. Through the possession of the Phoenix Force, the worst parts of the Cyclops were emphasized. He exerted his dominance, he destroyed and he killed, and at last he was alone. In the last issue in of the series, it is revealed that Cyclops is not sorry for his crimes he committed while consumed by the Phoenix Force. He says it would even do it all over again, so that mutants could live on (*Uncanny X-Men #20*, December 2012, p. 21). This loss of the Phoenix force also leads to Cyclops powers being broken in that he cannot control his optic blasts. This again touches on the negative ramifications of engaging in violence. Through this character, the most extreme and negative aspects of hegemonic masculinity are emphasized.

Lastly, there is Colossus whose circumstance is very interesting to consider in the context of hegemonic masculinity. Normally, he is a very kind, passionate and tranquil character. It is demonstrated when he appreciates the beautiful butterfly bushes in Tabula Rasa (*Uncanny X-Men #5*, March 2012). However, external forces of power overshadow his true non-hegemonic nature. Since he came under the influence of Cytorrak, a mystical demon of rage and power, he craves power and exercises extreme aggression. At times, Colossus is able to control the urges to destroy. In the battle against Red Hulk under the ocean, and ends up conceding the duel so that he didn't kill his opponent (*Uncanny X-*

Men #11, June 2012). At other times, he is not so fortunate. In the battle with Phalanx, Magik claims that he doesn't need the power just yet, but Colossus adamantly responds, "I don't *need* the power. I *want* it" (*Uncanny X-Men #4*, March 2012, p. 17). With the power, he ends up attacking the character known as Phalanx.

Later, Colossus is also possessed by another external force in the series, the Phoenix Force. His true nature is once again hidden under the lust for power and control that the Phoenix Force desired. He did many horrible things under the influence of the Phoenix Force. As he describes it, "We dripped souls into the mouths of demons. I tried to create…but only made abominations" (*Uncanny X-Men #18*, November 2012, p. 7). After Colossus loses this power, his true nature is revealed once again as he expresses his remorse for the things he had done while under the influence of the Phoenix Force. Then, the Cytorrak takes back over. Even though Colossus is non-hegemonic in nature, the forces that possess him overshadow those characteristics. Therefore, even though there are glimpses of it, his true non-hegemonic masculinity is not given a chance to shine throughout this volume as he is perpetually battling the external possessive forces.

While the characters before the reboot exhibited predominantly hegemonic traits, the returning characters, Cyclops and Magneto, become more balanced in their representations. This is demonstrated in that they exhibit more non-hegemonic traits as opposed to predominantly hegemonic ones. While Cyclops is still ready to fight to the death in order to protect his fellow mutants (*Uncanny X-Men #3*, May 2013), he is much more dependent on his teammates and open to them about his troubles. On the emotional expression side of things, he and Emma talk to one another about the difficulties of losing control of their powers after the Phoenix Force left them. Cyclops elaborates, "We have

to retrain ourselves…we need to examine it. We have to start from scratch. We need help. No one will help us. We'll help each other" (*Uncanny X-Men #2*, April 2013, p. 5). He even talks with Magik about her struggles and tries to help her (*Uncanny X-Men #3*, May 2013). However, his dependence on fellow teammates comes through much later and after much hardship.

At the start of the series, Cyclops is reluctant to disclose the extent that his powers are broken. Essentially, Cyclops has fully lost control of his powers, and he has not told anyone how bad it has become. In the battle with the sentinels, he released a large optic blast, but he was lucky in that he hit only the sentinels. Magneto describes the situation to Agent Maria Hill saying, "He hit them with everything he had but he had no idea he was doing it until it was done. He could have easily killed everyone in the parking lot. Humans and mutants alike" (*Uncanny X-Men #1*, April 2013, p. 16). Later, Magneto and Cyclops have a conversation to work out their differences. Magneto reveals that he is still very angry with Scott, but he has faith in him and wants to see him work through his grief. Then, Scott reveals that his powers are broken, and that he needs help. He requests that they help each other to retrain and to fix their broken powers (*Uncanny X-Men #8*, September 2013). In that same meeting, they start their retraining. It is through this exchange that it is first demonstrated both characters are growing and exhibiting more non-hegemonic traits as they disclose their emotions and work together.

With this previous scene, it is apparent that Magneto is becoming a more balanced character rather than just abrasive as he was portrayed in the previous series. He still battles with his aggression and with being violent. This is demonstrated when Magneto gets into a fight with mutant hoodlums after they attacked him (*Uncanny X-Men #16*,

March 2014). He doesn't kill them as he was merely defending himself. He also attacks his former comrades, Mystique, Sabretooth, Blob and Silver Samurai after hearing the Madripoor is being funded by mutant gene enhancing drug (*Uncanny X-Men #16*, March 2014). He did this to escape the situation he was in and he did not agree with their methods for funding the island. At the same time though, he tries to help his fellow mutants. In the first issue, Magneto requests Agent Maria Hill's help to help detain Cyclops. His argument is that Cyclops is "a murdering monster. You need to get Scott Summers to reveal himself to the world. You need him to self-destruct in public so that he can heal and retrain himself" (*Uncanny X-Men #1*, April 2013, p. 18-19). Despite the fact that Magneto is revealing secrets about his team, his true concern is the well being of his teammate, Cyclops. Later in the series, he rescues Dazzler who has been captured and drugged by several mutants in Madripoor (*Uncanny X-Men #21*, July 2014). With this, there is progress for the Master of Magnetism in that he is demonstrating more non-hegemonic behaviors even though he still battles with his aggression.

Taken together, the actions for these returning characters indicate that they are not just portrayed as strictly hegemonically masculine anymore. This implementation of different behaviors makes sense for these established characters. Making drastic changes to characters all at one time would be an abrupt shock and would potentially upset many fans of those characters (Romagnoli & Pagnucci, 2013). However, incorporating these changes over time could be a better way to integrate more non-hegemonic qualities into the characters, and therefore help to increase the diversity of masculine representations. Also, this balance of hegemonic and non-hegemonic qualities is consistent with reality in that most men don't exhibit only hegemonic traits (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Therefore, audiences might even be more accepting of these character changes as they wrestle with different ideologies and expectations. While the two returning characters have shown some shift towards more balanced representations of masculinity, the new characters introduced in the rebooted title clearly represent non-hegemonic masculinities. These new characters are examined in the following section.

Introduction of Non-Hegemonic Characters

While the volume before the reboot was replete with male characters that embodied hegemonic traits, the series following the reboot is characterized by change and the introduction of several new non-hegemonic males (see Table 4, p. 48). These non-hegemonic characters represent various masculinities with a diversity of demographic and behavioral traits. Furthermore, the new non-hegemonic characters are not just support, reinforcement or a comedic tool for the hegemonic characters (Myers, 2012). Rather, these new teenage boys are an integral part of the *Uncanny X-Men* (2013-present) series following the reboot. Their worth is demonstrated through their battle with the villains, working through difficult situations and learning to use their powers for the greater good. This section details these new non-hegemonic characters, their personalities and explains their vital role on the team.

In the first issue, Fabio Medina, codenamed Goldballs, joins the team. His codename is given based on his powers with which he projects gold balls from his body that pack quite a punch (*Uncanny X-Men #3*, May 2013, p. 9). As for character description, he was a Hispanic, young, non-athletic, food-obsessed, overweight and often scared. In fact, he was so terrified after the encounter with demons in Limbo and The Avengers in Australia that he decided he wanted to quit the team (*Uncanny X-Men #7*, August 2013). Without

making him feel guilty about leaving, Emma and Cyclops honor his wishes and return him to his home in San Diego (*Uncanny X-Men #8*, September 2013). However, after seeing his family's reaction to him being a mutant, Fabio decides to return to the Uncanny X-Men. Upon his return, he certainly proves his worth to the team. In the battle with Blockbuster Sentinel, Fabio unleashes a barrage of gold balls and the sentinel knocking it back (*Uncanny X-Men #11*, October 2013). Through this, Fabio protects his fellow teammates and sets up Magik to attack the machine with her sword. He also performed well in the training session in Tabula Rasa in using his powers to stop one of attacking creatures (*Uncanny X-Men #17*, April 2014).

There is also Christopher Muse, codename Triage, who is a mutant that can heal people who have been physically hurt, and he is also highly intuitive (*Uncanny X-Men #1*, April 2013). He is characterized as thin, black, respectful, encouraging and romantic. Also, he tries to seem confident at times, but he is often afraid. However, he too overcomes his fears. After transporting back from Limbo, he revives Benjamin Deeds since he was hurt upon the return (*Uncanny X-Men #7*, August 2013). He steps up and heals a female's leg, revives Tempus and heals others in the battle with the Blockbuster Sentinel (*Uncanny X-Men #11*, October 2013). He also heals Dazzler after Magneto rescued her from the drug-induced comma she was under in Madripoor (*Uncanny X-Men #22*, August 2014). His efforts were integral in maintaining the health of the team, and some characters might not be functioning or even alive if it wasn't for Triage.

Another new character is Benjamin Deeds, codename Morph. His chameleon power allows him to change his appearance in order to adapt for different situations, and also makes people feel comfortable around him (*Uncanny X-Men #4*, June 2013). He is thin,

white, un-athletic, gay and often unsure of himself. At first, he doesn't see how he can be a valuable member of the team with a power set that is very subtle and passive. The team leader, Cyclops, shares the same concern when Deeds complains about the team training being too difficult. Cyclops says, "You need this training more than anyone, Mr. Deeds…. It means, how would *your* powers even *help* you today? Your power set is *passive* at best" (*Uncanny X-Men #14*, January 2014, p. 6). This comment was not intended to demean Deeds. Rather, it was said to stress the importance of training so he could be prepared to defend himself in the field. Yet, it seemed to resonate with Deeds that his powers were passive and maybe not as useful as some of his teammate's powers.

Acknowledging Deeds' perceived limitation, Emma Frost steps in to help him learn how to best his powers in the field. With this, Frost and Magik take Deeds to a bar in Atlantic City to learn how to use his powers. While very fearful at first, he works on initiating conversation with random people and making them feel good about themselves (*Uncanny X-Men #14*, January 2014). Once Frost feels he is ready, she takes him on a covert field operation to deliver a note to Mr. Timothy Dugan in a S.H.I.E.L.D. compound. He succeeds in his mission of delivering the note after passing the guards and Dugan's office assistant. After Benjamin is extracted, Cyclops praises him in that he did a good job with the mission and that he is learning to use his powers. Cyclops even refers to Deeds as an "X-Man" which signifies that he is a valuable contribution to the team (*Uncanny X-Men #14*, January 2014). Even with a passive power set, Deeds is given the opportunity to be a superhero but in a different way than on the traditional battlefield.

The last new non-hegemonic male character is David Bond, codename Hijack. His power set allows him to control technology. As for characterization, he is Asian, thin, a

computer artist and a single 30-year-old. He is introduced in a scene in which his girlfriend breaks up with him (*Uncanny X-Men #6*, July 2013). The X-Men then recruit him after a confrontation with the local police force. Later, he performs well in the some of the field operations and in an early training session. However, he defies the orders of Cyclops in bringing his cell phone on a training mission in Tabula Rasa, which their enemies can use to track their location (*Uncanny X-Men #17*, April 2014). After they return, Cyclops throws him off the team for putting the whole team in danger and revealing his power set to the enemy (*Uncanny X-Men #19.NOW*, May 2014). He is taken hostage by S.H.I.E.L.D. in the next few issues, but he never reveals anything about the location of Cyclops and the other team members. Upon release from interrogation, Hijack returns to the team in their moment of need. In the battle at the Jean Grey School, Hijack shows up and saves the day using his powers to take over the ship run by the villain known as Dark Beast and by stopping the bomb that was set to explode in a matter of seconds (*Uncanny X-Men #22*, August 2014). Despite being kicked from the team, Hijack was still dedicated to his friends and ready to help out where he was needed.

Additionally, in the battle at the Jean Grey School against Dark Beast and his machines, Cyclops tells Magik to gather the others and bring them to the battle (*Uncanny X-Men #22*, August 2014). This means he valued the new members enough to bring them to fight, as he knows they could bring something valuable to the situation. With this, it is demonstrated that the non-hegemonic male characters are not portrayed as being inferior to the more traditionally hegemonic characters like Cyclops and Magneto. In fact, they are an essential part of the group. Furthermore, these non-hegemonic characters were crucial in saving these hegemonic characters on more than one occasion.

Additionally, it is important to note the range of masculinities these new characters represent. Demographically speaking, each of them represents a variety of different races, sexual orientations, body types and personalities. For race and sexual orientation, the literature review demonstrated that more diversity has been given to these groups over the last few years (Sargent, 2013; Romagnoli and Pagnucci, 2013), so it is positive to see the diversity being continued through this series. Additionally, a particular interest of representation for this series is the inclusion of different body types, both thin and overweight, because traditional superheroes have almost always been hyper-muscular (Rosenburg, 2013). Branching out of these boundaries helps the diversity of male characterizations, and it provides audiences with more characters they can relate to (Romagnoli and Pagnucci, 2013).

Additionally, these new mutants are overcome with their new situations and exhibit a range of emotions including fear, uncertainty and even hope. Not only do they have these emotions, they also have the freedom to verbally express them with one another. That separates them from the ideals of hegemonic masculinity and aligns them with more non-hegemonic masculinities (Montes, 2013). As mentioned in the Justice League chapter, these representations of emotional expression are important in showing that men can have the freedom to express their emotions rather than the cultural norms that tell them they shouldn't for fear of being considered feminine (Montes, 2013). With this, the Uncanny X-Men franchise is seemingly breaking the cycle of sameness in representation of men in the superhero comic book genre that has existed for many years.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This final chapter revisits the important findings from the previous two analysis chapters and discusses what they mean for modern representations of masculinity in superhero comic books. The two comic book franchises that were analyzed, Justice League and Uncanny X-Men, offered a variety of masculinities for reading audiences. Interestingly, there are some distinct similarities and differences between these representations of masculinity. The *Justice League* franchise remained homogeneous in their representation of male characters across reboots with mostly hegemonic demographic traits but more non-hegemonic based on behavioral traits. The two series also highlight the negative consequences of aggression. In the Uncanny X-Men franchise, there are some distinct changes across the reboot. The series before the relaunch features more hegemonic characterizations, and the series after the reboot introduces and promotes non-hegemonic characters that have prominent roles in the series. Through these findings and themes, there are several issues, implications and future possibilities to discuss about the representation of masculinity in comic books.

On a positive note, the franchises promote the non-hegemonic characters rather than valorize the hegemonic masculinity. More specifically, both of the series portray the characters as deviating from the traditional stereotypes associated with the hegemonic masculinity with behaviors like being unemotional and stoic to having more freedom to express their emotions and rely on their teammates for help. These findings parallel other

studies in which mainstream media narratives are transitioning to more team based stories and situations including both male and female characters, in which they are treated as equals (Swan, 1998). Also, it is a positive that non-hegemonic characters are given the opportunity to be the leaders and superheroes and not subordinate to male characters that are represented as more hegemonically masculine. Rather than hegemonic male characters policing the non-hegemonic characters, the non-hegemonic characters in the texts were more proactive in that their role within the narrative was to represent non-hegemonic masculinities rather than to reinforce the hegemonic masculinity (Myers, 2012). This deviates from the common theme in which the non-hegemonic males reinforce the hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Through this, the texts demonstrate that men don't have to feel they need to affirm their masculinity by acting dominant to women and non-hegemonic masculinities, but characters of different genders, races, sexual orientations, body types and backgrounds can work together and be part of a productive team.

Another positive finding is that both franchises featured some of the negative ramifications associated with aggression and violence. With such a strong association between masculinity and violence in comic books (Pecora, 1992), it's important to show the negative consequences associated with aggression and violent actions. This is especially important with a medium specifically targeted to men because research shows that men are more prone to aggression and violence actions than women (Archer, 2004). Therefore, since audiences are made aware of these consequences and can potentially incorporate them into their ongoing social construction of violence and better understand the ramifications of engaging in aggressive and violent behavior. This is positive in that it

shows the negative realities of violence where so much other media has glorified and promoted the relationship between masculinity and violence (Moss, 2011).

While there are many positive representations regarding masculinities in these comic books series, there are still some points of concern with both franchises. For the Uncanny X-Men franchise, the issue lies in the series before the reboot. The issue is the glorification and female adoration of a man that is sexually predatory and highly narcissistic through the character of Namor. Like other research has found, this valorizes the sexual prowess theme of hegemonic masculinity as an ideal that women find attractive and that men could potentially emulate to appeal to these women (Rosenburg, 2013). Fortunately, though, the rebooted series doesn't represent this idea. However, romantic and sexual relationships haven't been featured as plot points in rebooted series at the point of analysis, so it can't be known if or how sexual and romantic relationships will be addressed. Hopefully, as the series moves forward, it will put less emphasis on sexual prowess and more on healthy and productive relationships.

Another concern is for the Justice League franchise and its lack of diversity in representation of masculinity based on the demographic traits. To compare the franchises, Uncanny X-Men had more demographic diversity of male characters, while *Justice League* had much less. These findings are quite interesting in light of cultural production. As mentioned in the literature review, cultural products are consumed for their perceived meaning and value, and they may need to be changed over time to maintain the audience's interest (p. 12). In recent years, it seems increasing diversity is a prominent motive for media entertainment companies making these changes for their audiences (Sargent, 2013). That is what makes the findings regarding the comparison of the series

very interesting. While Marvel Comics has been much more intentional about integrating more demographic diversity in the Uncanny X-Men franchise, DC Comics has not integrated much demographic diversity into the Justice League franchise. Consequently, it seems Marvel Comics is much more dedicated to increasing diversity in its *Uncanny X-Men* reboot, than DC Comics is with the Justice League reboot. Based on these findings, it cannot be said for certain that reboots have altered representations of masculinity for the comic book industry overall. While it appears true for the Uncanny X-Men franchise, it doesn't hold as true for the Justice League franchise. However, this is only the case for these two series that were analyzed. A larger, more quantitative analysis of superhero comic book would better describe the changes in demographic diversity for the industry as a whole. However, this study shows that diversity is still a major issue in the comic book industry, which is consistent with other academic literature (Romagnoli & Pagnucci, 2013).

As mentioned previously, limitations of this study are that the findings are for only four comic book series and two franchises. With this, these findings cannot be readily generalized. While the themes and issues raised in this paper are important, the question of how the comic book industry represents gender overall still remain unanswered. Fortunately, that is where future research can continue with the study of how different masculinities are represented. With comic books and masculinity being both relatively young areas of study, there is still much that can be learned through research on these topics. Future research could take the themes and issues identified in this paper and conduct a large-scale content analysis of superhero comic books to better understand masculine representations for the industry as a whole. This could focus just on issues

after the reboot considering there has been significant change, or it could further explore how representations have changed across the reboots.

Studies could also focus on the audience side of the industry. Qualitative methods, like interviews or focus groups, could be conducted to better understand how fans feel about these content changes in the superhero comic book genre. This could illuminate more of what changes fans are excited to see, what they don't like and what else they would like to see change. Even quantitative methods, like surveys, could also be implemented to help identify these issues on a larger scale. With a cultural product like comic books, companies could utilize this data to better inform their content creation and how they choose to move forward with their representation of characters in the ongoing universe. However, these are just a few ideas that future research could explore. There are so many avenues that could be taken, and there is still so much to learn about the comic books and media representations of gender, race, sexual orientation and the male and female body. Hopefully, future research will pick up where this project ends, so that the world can better understand the comic book industry and its place in social construction as well as the ever-growing and ever-changing media entertainment market.

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