ROBIN’S ADOLESCENT IDENTITY EXAMINED
THROUGH CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

by

RACHEL MENKHUSS

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Rachel Menkhus

has been approved for the

Department of Communication

By

Christopher Bell, Chair

David Nelson

Maja Krakowiak

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the social identity roles that are typically attributed to the popular Batman sidekick, Robin. This study looks at how each iteration of the character differs within the historical context of the character while also examining the impact social identity has on the character and story within the text. Social identity is how people might see themselves within a group of their peers and their culture (Leary and Tangney, 2012). This identity most often includes a person’s ethnicity, class, sexuality, sex, and gender (2012). All aspects of social identity have significant impacts on the livelihoods of people and their peers; therefore, it becomes important when studying popular culture to be mindful of what these social identities mean within certain contexts.

Keywords: comic books, masculinity, sexuality, ethnicity, gender, class, adolescents
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“I can no other answer make, but thanks, And thanks, and ever thanks.”

William Shakespeare, Twelfth Night

“Maybe I made a mistake yesterday, but yesterday’s me is still me. I am who I am today, with all my faults. Tomorrow I might be a tiny bit wiser, and that’s me, too. These faults and mistakes are what I am, making up the brightest stars in the constellation of my life.”

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Representation in popular media is essential in a growing and diverse market. Since the advent of Jewish illegal alien Clark Kent – also known as Superman – comic books have long been regarded as a progressive medium. At first glance, comic books give off an air of progressiveness, advocating for social change for specific groups of people, with characters such as Wonder Woman, and Captain America and, Captain Marvel. This genre of popular literature has indeed created a name and a niche for itself. Nonetheless, there are discrepancies in how comic books present and develop characters. Characters like Batman and Captain America often get the spotlight, and alongside the spotlight, comes deep character development and multiple story lines. On the other hand, a character like Victor Stone otherwise known as Cyborg, the famous hero based out of Detroit, existed since the 1980s with very little substance in the comic books until he was given a presence in the 1980s Teen Titans comic and the 2003 animated series on Cartoon Network (Alexander, 2017). Due to the increasing popularity of comic books and their media among social and identity groups of all kinds in the United States and abroad, the importance of relevant and accurate portrayals of diverse characters cannot be understated. Thus, the researcher will attempt to understand what social identity traits are represented within four male comic book characters: Dick Grayson, Jason Todd, Tim Drake, and Damian Wayne. Each of these names represent the modern idea of Robin and each have filled the role as the character known as “Robin” some point in their careers.

Robin was introduced as Batman’s faithful sidekick and has since become significant to Batman’s overall story and why he continues to fight crime. The first
Robin was introduced in 1940, with three other iterations of the sidekick introduced after the first Robin, Dick Grayson, retired. Robin is the name which Dick Grayson adopts as a part of his identity as Batman’s faithful sidekick, and this identity and character has since become significant to Batman’s overall story and why Batman continues to fight crime. This thesis examines the social identity of the four canonical Robins: Dick Grayson, Jason Todd, Tim Drake, and Damian Wayne. There are obvious differences in ethnicity and gender between these Robins and the four other Robins that have been excluded from the current canon: Carrie Kelley, Stephanie Brown, Duke Thomas, Helena Wayne. The Robins that have been excluded from the current Batman canon had story arcs that either did not take place in Batman’s “earth” or, in the case of Duke Thomas, were accepted into the family but under completely different hero personas, the key separation from the canon Robin’s and the non, is their social identities.

Social identity, as defined by Leary and Tangney (2012), is a term used to describe an individual’s conception of oneself within a group of peers and culture. This identity may include a person’s ethnicity, class, sexuality, sex, and gender, and according to Leary and Tangney certain aspects of it become fluid and change with life experiences. Gender and ethnicity, as a part of a person’s social identity, have a powerful impact a person’s future and what they, in their roles as social actors, can decide to do with their lives (2012). Alongside both the expansive and limiting impacts that gender and ethnicity can have on social identity, class can likewise affect all aspects of what role a person has in society. For instance, Goodman (1999) claims that the mental health of adolescents is affected daily due to their social economic status (SES) or class.
Additionally, Goodman examines how a parents’ education level, income and occupation define the child’s social economic status and, in turn, affects their quality of life (1999).

This study too looks at what roles sexuality and masculinity play on the social identities embodied by the different iterations of Robin. According to Pascoe (2012), constructs about masculinity and sexuality are perpetuated within predominantly male environments (Pascoe, 2012). Pascoe talks about the students she observed for her research at the school she conducted research at and includes examples of how the students’ conceptions on masculinity played a large part in shaping relationships for the teens. During a play the boys were putting on, a large part of the play was how the young men would be required to save the woman featured and, in the play, an inability to do so proclaimed the inadequacy of the male teen playing the role. Pascoe then posits that, “heterosexuality is central to masculinity” based on several observations on the importance of dressing and talking “like a man” (p. 3). The author refers to several of the teens she examined during this play who were equated to “unmasculine nerds that cannot protect their girlfriends” that were deemed inadequate due to their lack of masculine traits (pg. 3). Pascoe posits that this idea or narrative of the correct or “adequate” masculinity originates in ideas about the male body itself. The boys put themselves on display as they did bench presses in front of their audience, each boys’ proof of physical strength serving as a way for the man to in turn prove his masculinity. However, the idea that these men were emasculated or simply used as the punch line when they were unable to save their girlfriends in the play has deeper implications. Pascoe infers that the deeper meaning behind this simple storyline reinforces the idea that some men are “unmasculine” and that the performance of heterosexuality is at the heart of what it
means to be masculine. This storyline of the “unmasculine” man and his transformation to masculine could not have taken place without the saving of their girlfriends near the end of the play.

Conversely, Pascoe refers to the school the study was conducted at and its sex education. The author notes that sex education at the school was rarely directed towards the women nor the “weak” boys. Rather, male and female teachers often let homophobic and sexist jokes slide while paying special attentions to the boys’ sex drive and their need for condoms rather than teaching any actual sex education (pg. 51). The girls in the class often were given book work where the boys were left to play with condoms and explore the idea of using them (pg. 50). This idea that the socially deemed masculine students need condoms more so or over the women, reinforces several popular partialities about sex and masculinity. First, that sex is for masculine men and second, that women do not need to know about sex or condoms because they should not be having sex unless they are ready to have children. This idea that women should stay away from sex education and condoms reinforces the idea that sex is not okay for women but an undeniable prerogative for men. The class reinforced images of men being the stronger sex with “girls seen as sexual objects or rewards” (pg. 51).

Gender and sexuality produce an interesting and relatable dynamic in popular media. Often, this relatable media, through strong power dynamics, produces common discourses that renders invisible those who fail to perform or embody hegemonic constructs on gender or sexuality. For example, most popular media has typically failed to acknowledge those who identify on the expansive gender spectrum and prefer to use conventionally gendered pronouns to describe people who look or dress in gender
specific ways. Contemporarily, nonconforming sexualities and sexual preferences have been moderately accepted in popular media, if not under some limitations and stereotypes, examples include the sassy gay friend or the butch lesbian trucker. Often, transgender people, gay men and lesbian women are acknowledged and talked about within popular media. Nevertheless, asexuals, bisexuals, pansexuals, and many others that are a part of the broader gender spectrum are not usually a topic of discussion. Due to the lack of representation within popular media, there has been much confusion as to what gender identity spectrum some might fall into on the gender spectrum and not ironically, why there are so many letters in the inclusive “LGBTQIA+” acronym.

Batman is considered one of the most popular comic characters and, depending on the title, sells a significant number of comics every month (Miller, 2018). Because most of the heroes and anti-heroes stemming from the Batman narrative are widely popular characters with extensive readership, it becomes imperative to analyze the diverse social identities that are embodied by these characters. Researchers have critiqued the character Robin for his apparent lack of diverse traits, given that Robin is typically portrayed in the comics as the archetypical, troubled, straight, white American male. White men make up 85% of the characters portrayed in comic books as of 2015, despite the recent initiatives by comic publishers to try and appeal to a more diverse audience (Facciani, et al. 2015, Alverson, 2017). Critics have frequently inquired about the stereotypical nature in which Robin has been and continues to be portrayed, begging the question as to why a character who was born out of the 1940s would exhibit little to no change throughout the years, even with four different canonical iterations of the character (Abad-Santos, 2015).
According to Brooker, a source on Batman comics, Robin is a significant character that not only created a dynamic that was not available to readers at the time of his introduction in the early 1940s, but also changed the entire mythos of Batman (Brooker, 2000). If this is true, then the character holds much more weight than can be assumed. Historically, Batman and Robin have been one of the most successful duos in comic book history. The duo has had several of their own movies and TV series together but Robin as a character has become just as iconic as Batman himself. The character Robin has evolved in a role beyond the typical sidekick role with his own comic titles and TV series. The success of TV series’ such as ‘Teen Titans: Go!’ ‘Young Justice,’ and the original ‘Teen Titans’ show on Cartoon Network speaks volumes on the importance of a character such as Robin. Again, the character’s ubiquity in the Batman legendarium as well as the significant cultural impact he has had raises questions as to how Robin is represented and why the current four canon iterations of Robin have all had similar social identities. By convention, Robin has been a white, adolescent boy, who is presented as straight and typically originates from middle class families in America (Beedle, 2015).

This thesis analyzes the following: firstly, how Robin’s identity as a young adolescent sidekick to Batman is constructed, and how Batman and Robin’s reciprocal relationship is represented. Secondly, this study considers the emancipation of Robin’s identity from Batman’s hegemony and instead analyze Robin’s social identity as an independent character.

Statement of Problem

According to a study done by the Washington Post in 2016, comics are one of the most popular modes of media consumption in the United States, their resurgence being
due in part to a spike in movies based off popular comic books (Andrews, 2016). With their resurging popularity comes the need for researchers to once again study the effects, both positive and negative, comics might have on their increasing readership. DC Comics and other large comic producers have always tried to break the mold of what is deemed “normal” but often seem to perpetuate those norms without intending to. Superman, for instance, represents one of the most politically progressive heroes in DC Comics. In modern America the Superman storyline is like that of what some immigrants face today. He himself is a so-called “illegal-alien” (albeit, he is a literal extraterrestrial) and often fights against the injustices facing minority groups of people (Jurgens, Bogdanovic, 2017). While DC Comics often implies the idea that Superman himself, one of the most successful and powerful beings that exists in the comic world, is often treated the same way as people who are considered “illegal” in the United States, Superman’s continued depictions as “white” has faced much criticism for over 80 years, with no real call to change that (Randsome, 2018). This continued depiction can be problematized because race is an extremely important trait to one’s self-identity and profoundly affects a person’s life experience. While Clark Kent, the alien from another planet, does face similar issues to that of immigrants from other countries to the US, his depicted appearance gives him access to what many call “white-privilege” available to those light-skinned people in the United States.

One reason the world of comics, a seemingly self-proclaimed progressive medium, still has progress to make in areas that concern diversity, such as writing culturally diverse characters without perpetuating stereotypes, may be due to the research done by Fredric Wertham (Devega, 2017). Wertham (1954), a very influential German
American psychiatrist who studied popular comics in the 1950s and wrote the comic
damning book *Seduction of the Innocent*, examined the need for normative comics that
did not feature violence, crude sexual situations, or homosexuality (Wertham, 1954).

Fredric Wertham was a famous psychiatrist in the early 20th century who worked
with the courts in New York and even founded several psychiatric hospitals (Comics
History: Dr. Fredric Wertham). He is well known within the comic community as
someone who condemned comic books and saw media as something that led to violence
among youth and had other perceived negative effects on the young psyche. Wertham
focused on youth’s behavior and media for a large portion of his career. He, likewise,
wrote numerous books about popular culture and the negative effects he perceived it had
on youth. His research into the correlation between media and violence is what led him to
write his famous book titled *Seduction of the Innocent*.

*Seduction of the Innocent* was a result of “seven years of investigation” and was
widely read and accepted by parents when it was written in 1954 (Wertham, 1954). The
historical context of the 1954 release of this book—amidst the McCarthy Hearings and
The Red Scare—holds significance to Wertham’s works’ acceptance by the American
audience. The release of this book and its popularity could only have been fueled by
Senator McCarthy’s investigations into communism in the United States and the Hays
Code or the Motion Picture Protection Code. The Hays Code was a code enacted by big
studio executives to protect their studios from government retaliation. The code itself
censored Hollywood films that were too sexual in nature, too crude, contained profanity,
or depicted bi-racial relationships as well as others (Mondello, 2008).
Many argue that comics stylistically suffered for years because Wertham created an air of falsification around what comics represented (Tilley, 2012, Pruitt, 2016). Tilley claims that Wertham used extreme examples in his research of sexualized women, and the perceived pederasty between Batman and Robin, to represent the entirety of the comic book medium (Tilley, 2012). Pruitt, another Wertham critic, believes some artists and writers were targeted based on their race, and that if Wertham did in fact vilify these people based on his own prejudice, then his research should be considered void (Pruitt, 2016).

After Wertham published his controversial research in 1954, the two large comic publishers, DC and Marvel, began publishing under the Comics Code Authority (CCA) and these two behemoths of the comic book industry were followed by other publishers in the subsequent years. The code provided guidelines that publishers adhered to and ensured that comics were more family friendly. Comics published under the CCA contained less violence, no sexual acts, and grammatically correct language and text (1954). In fact, the code was so prevalent that it wasn’t until 2011 that DC Comics stopped following the CCA (Nyberg, 2017). Though the code is no longer binding, it has had lasting effects on the comic industry and its famous characters. Wertham accused *Batman and Robin* of perpetuating *homosociality* in contrast to homosexuality in their display of love for each other; this forced DC Comics to create several female love interests in the hopes that these rumors would subside.

**Specific Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to look at what types of social identity qualities are attributed to Robin and examine how these have changed over the different incarnations
of the character. This research examines the impact these identities have on the portrayals of Robin within the text, while also referring to how the different iterations are portrayed contrarily in different historical contexts. This study likewise examines the young counterparts’ role in a typically adult comic book which often portrays graphic and gruesome violence. The research examines the following detailed questions:

**RQ1:** What social identity roles are typically attributed to DC Comic’s Robin characters?

**RQ2:** What impact do these social identities have on the portrayals of Robin within the text?

**RQ3:** Are different iterations of Robin portrayed contrarily?

**RQ4:** What impact does historical context have on the portrayals of Robin within different iterations of the character?

**Significance of Study**

This research is relevant to Media Studies scholars because it relates to how popular media have represented children and their social identity in popular and violent comic books. In 2016 alone, there were 25 TV series’ set to air or in development that were based off superheroes or comics and over 50 films likewise based off comic books exemplifying the growing popularity of comic books and comic book media (Cocca, pg. 1, 2016). This study being conducted is not only pertinent to the study of social identity, but also to that of the social identity presented in popular comic books such as *Batman*, *Batman & Robin*, and *Robin*. This study provides insight for future scholars on the topic of how young heroes might be rendered to an adult audience. It similarly offers insight with historical context on comic books and answers the question as to why these young
characters have been presented in these specific ways. This study observes the characteristics considered by researchers to be significant to the growth and development of male adolescents, such as gender identity, the relationship between sexuality and notions of masculinity, ethnicity, and class.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE

Gender & Sexuality

Sidekicks have long been studied due to their controversial portrayals and the roles in which they have been placed in relation to their typically older counterparts; Robin is a character that has been studied extensively for this very reason (Wolf-Meyer, M. 2006). His role beside Batman has been studied extensively due to questions surrounding the nature of their relationship and their age difference. Furthermore, Robin is often portrayed as a teenaged sidekick and is frequently forced into adult situations. Research surrounding Robin and his status as a popular sidekick has focused on questions of his ethnicity, masculinity, class, gender, and sexual orientation. While Robin has been studied extensively, it is typically from the standpoint of who he is to Batman or how he contributes to Batman’s story. The literature referenced supports the need for characters that reflect the comic publisher’s intended audience’s perceived diverse backgrounds. The research expands upon the need for not only diversity in the way of gender, LGBTQ representation, ethnic, race and class diversity, but the need to observe the masculine traits that are forced upon male and female superheroes alike. Tipton (2008) examines several aspects of sexuality within one of the most notable Batman works to date in The Dark Knight Returns.

Tipton (2008) refers to gender stereotypes and homosexuality within the 1986 comic book The Dark Knight Returns by Frank Miller. The author looks at how males who read comics books, during the early ages of Batman and Robin, often perceived the Batman and Robin relationship as homosexual, despite the supposed intended
heteronormativity of their relationship. Tipton provides examples of male comic book
readers talking about how they could not bear to read Batman and Robin comics because
they might end up “queer” (Tipton, 2008, para. 1). Tipton looks at several stereotypes
referenced within Miller’s comic, specifically the stereotypes with which Miller depicts
Batman. Miller’s Batman is often considered the updated version of Batman, separating
him from his early incarnation, where he is proud to fight crime and does not think about
the consequences of running around punching “bad guys” in the face. Tipton perceives
this new version of Batman has “become a lonely, self-loathing homosexual bachelor
whose only solace is found in alcohol” (Tipton, 2008, para 27). Tipton concludes by
saying that though Miller may not have intended for his book to be read how Tipton has
read it, Batman does not exist outside of literary instances, and without this, readers
would have ceased to exist. Thus, Miller could do better to consider the stereotypes he
uses in his writing. While Tipton refers to the effect that Miller’s new version of Batman
had on the reception of previous incarnation of Robin. Brody (1997) refers to specific
gender and cultural stereotypes that often do not fit into the narrative we often invent for
male and females.

Brody, L. R. (1997) examines how gender stereotyping infrequently reflects
people’s culture or their diverse situations. Brody’s research concerns itself with
unraveling gender stereotypes by first addressing the idea that gender stereotypes often
project over-exaggerated traits onto males and females. The author argues that gender
stereotypes are performed by men and women, and “can be traced to social processes
such as dissimilar gender roles, status and power imbalances, and differing socialization
histories” (Brody, 1997). Brody references two different studies to enforce her idea. One
study focused on children in the United States in whose development a father has been present, and how these children eventually grow up fitting more neatly into stereotypical gender roles due to the psychological, developmental, and psychosocial effects that the presence of a male parent has on children’s outcomes (1997). The other focuses on culturally specific data collected from European-American and Asian-American college students (Brody, 1997). Brody’s examination of stereotypes comes from the need to study damaging effects that can occur; Brody uses male aggression through its perpetuation by media as an example of a potentially damaging stereotype. Brody reports that women often present higher levels of anger and for longer periods of time, while men often report fewer moments of anger throughout a typical day (1997). The author attributes anger issues and aggression to a societal misconception that is often placed on men and that is perpetuated in households and the media (1997).

The term “toxic masculinity” has lent its way to become synonymous with acts of violent aggression enacted by men, forms of inherently normative and therefore constrictive stereotypes on men and the inherent rejection of femininity. Salam (2019) wrote about the rising use of the term toxic masculinity and its usefulness in describing men’s modern predicament regarding violence and crime. Though the term is not useful in specifically describing the deeper issues that men face and often paints a picture of men’s daily experience that is stereotypical, it is a term that is not used infrequently and is commonly used in mass media today. Thus, knowing what the general popular discourse of the term “toxic masculinity” means to the American population is important. The term itself refers to perceived inability to see positives in traits outside what is considered normative for men. For instance, a common form of toxic masculinity takes
place in men who completely reject the feminine, often resulting in the alienation of
women and men who are “feminine.” In extreme cases, this form of toxic masculinity has
led to very publicized violent crimes against homosexuals and transgender men and
women. Salam likewise refers to the many disadvantages that men face in modern
America; men have a higher chance of being victims of violent crimes, have higher
health disparities and are overrepresented in prisons (2019). The idea that men do not
face challenges beyond what they inflict on others is a gross misrepresentation of their
experience, though the term toxic masculinity lends itself to the belief that this is the
case.

Posey (2016) in their examination of the term “gender,” its etymology, and its
evolution into the contentious object of cultural debate it has become today, discusses a
shift in the use of gender-specific terms vis-à-vis gender-neutral terms that no longer
reflect a person’s sex but their identified traits. For example, indiscriminate use of “he”
and “she” has since been replaced by ‘they’ and ‘them’ in a socially conscious English
language (pg. 95). The author proceeds to describe how, in a social milieu where gender
identity is no longer limited to a person’s sex, the influence of gender far exceeds the
linguistic realm (pg. 96). Posey refers to several popular definitions of the use of the
term ‘gender.’ The most common and studied definition applies gender as an
overarching term to males and females excluding many gender identities conceptualized
as existing in between and outside of the normative gender binary (pg. 94). Posey
suggests the reason gender as a social identity adjective has become controversial is due
to its previous definition as a term used to describe the biology of a person, while sex is
generally more so used now to refer to the biological sex (male, female, intersex) that a person was born with rather than their own performative gender identity.

While some definitions equate the terms gender and sex, thereby synonymizing them, Posey implies that this represents inaccurate usage of the word. By referring to the origin of the word in etymological terms, Posey implies that using gender and sex interchangeably is erroneous. Rather than focusing on the misconceptions of the word, the definition of the term ‘gender’ that has perhaps been the most notable has implied that society is the one constructing standards based on the sex a person has been born with (pg. 95). In turn, Posey forwards the discussion by referring to masculine and feminine traits that are often required of a person to fit into most societies, traits that are socially convened upon given the type of reproductive organs and capabilities an individual is born with (pg. 95). Whereas Posey focuses on the term “gender” and its definitions and implications in historically and in modern society, Cocca reflects on the lack of female representation in comic books and popular media.

Cocca (2016) gives a personal account of the impacts that the lack of proper superhero representation had on Cocca’s career and academic work. The author notes that most superhero troupes either exclude women altogether or tokenize women within a superhero group. Wonder Woman, for instance, is the single female in her role alongside Batman, Superman, Aquaman, The Flash, and Cyborg. Wonder Woman is a woman with significant power but Cocca argues that within the superhero genre specifically, there seems to be a large gap in female representation (pg. 2). Using Wonder Woman as an example of what comics have done right, the author examines the use of a character who, like Batman and Superman, is “brave, strong, decisive, [a] smart superhero fighting for
truth and justice and protecting the innocent” (pg. 3). What makes Wonder Woman “special” is that she does all those things and more but in a woman’s body. Cocca examines where comics are sold and who is buying them to get a bigger picture of the “world of the mainstream superhero” through a broad examination of the producer and consumer of comic books and comic book media (pg. 2). Cocca likewise, notes the significance of social movements and historical context on who and why specific groups of people are represented in comic book media, stating that the changing environment in comics and other forms of media is very much due to the changing political environment and social movements. Cocca infers that with a slight shift in who is producing comic books, comes with it the change in who is represented in the media. While Cocca may observe femininity in comic books in positive ways, Brown (2004) looks at female heroism and how so-called strong women have been portrayed in films written by men.

Brown discusses “figurative males” by giving examples in film where exaggerated masculine traits are given to women to fashion them into “strong female characters.” Brown claims that the traits that tend to distinguish heroes from ‘normal people’ are simply exaggerated masculine traits, such as power. For example, in a Transporter review that came out shortly after the film was released, the critic claims that the woman in the story was perceived as strong only when she was armed with this transitional condition being culturally associated with men or male heroes (Brown, 2004, pg. 47). Brown critiques the widespread assumption that, in order to be heroic, women need to adopt conventionally masculine traits or behaviors. Though she maintains that such gendered traits can clearly be positive, by portraying woman in such a manner the creators, audience and society “run[s] the risk” of “reinscribing” to normative ideals (pg.
Finally, Brown claims that there is little room for “female heroism” when the female hero is simply enacting stereotypical male traits (pg. 48).

Brown makes the argument that women do not need to be armed or given “manly” – often equated to “tough” – traits to be portrayed as strong by providing several examples of women in film that have been deemed heroes while enacting masculine traits such as Ripley in *Alien* and Sarah Conner in the *Terminator* series. The common factor between these two women is not only the violent situations they are forced into, but they are both portrayed as gun-toting survivors of the typically masculine ‘lone-wolf’ variety. Brown uses these two characters to define “figurative males,” concluding that the only difference between them and other male action heroes, is their sex (p. 48). Nonetheless, Brown does infer that these masculine traits can be positive as well. Ripley has often been a character who acts beyond the gendered binary and has been studied by feminist and LGBTQ+ scholars since the film’s release in 1979 (p. 48). Brown refers to Ripley as a character who due to their masculine traits, their sexuality is assumed, where Brooker (2000) examines how specific traits the comic book character, Batman, has been associated with, led many to believe that the character was a homosexual in the 1950s.

Brooker (2000) describes the milieu of 1950s-era Batman; due to the widespread homophobia of the decade, many were trained to “spot” homosexual traits and behavior in popular media. This historical knowledge led Brooker to believe that Batman was purposefully portrayed with homosexual traits. The author strengthens his argument by referring to various areas of employment or occupation in which the media portrays homosexual men (p. 128). Brooker uses this train of thought to oppose stereotypes that are associated with male homosexuals. Brooker incorporates interviews into much of his
research and cites one such occasion during which the man being interviewed claimed that he was confused by his own sexuality because he never “presented” with the stereotypical traits that were associated with being gay (p. 128). Brooker then makes the argument that Batman may have created a sense of solace for gay males who did not necessarily identify with the image that was depicted of them, claiming that if Batman were in fact a “stereotypical homosexual,” he was also rich and the most popular superhero in the world. If Batman were gay, he would be a positive representation for gay males and one that while occasionally fitting into the gay male stereotype, also defies them through his occupation and superhero status. Brooker posits that, despite the character’s continued portrayal of a role typically associated with the stereotypical heterosexual man, Batman would constitute a positive representation of modern homosexuality if, indeed, he was canonically represented as gay. On a related note, Shyminsky remarks on the blaring lack of any sort of homosexuality in modern comics.

Shyminsky (2011) notes the lack of homosexuality in modern comic books while also observing that male characters are often inherently masculine in comic books. Shyminsky argues that characters are often portrayed as more masculine due to the writers’ need to ensure that there are no misconceptions as to the male character’s sexuality (Shyminsky, 2011). The author claims that superhero comic books are “surprisingly conservative” despite the typically progressive stance that many comic book publishers take (2011). Shyminsky also begs the question that superheroes are not necessarily there to change the world but to continue to enforce “law and order” and maintain the “status quo,” further putting into doubt the progressive nature of comic books (p. 289). Shyminsky examines the enigma of the child sidekicks’ sexuality. The
author says that that sidekicks are often portrayed, or interpreted by the readers, as being asexual or de-sexualized, or come to be attracted to the same-sex hero that they serve with, which would contradict a lot of what writers imply in their comics (2011).

Shyminsky questions the intentions of comic book publishers who seem to want to keep reinforcing societal norms that reinforce the marginalization of specific genders and sexualities.

Kvaran (2017) looks at how in the Batman franchise as directed by Christopher Nolan, Bruce Wayne and his father were far closer to each other than Bruce was to his mother, Martha. The author, Kvaran, thus implies that Nolan, the director of the Dark Knight trilogy, had little regard for this important female character. Kvaran implies that Martha Wayne’s biggest contribution to the Batman narrative was her death (2017). Kvaran examines the relationship of Bruce’s memory of his father and mother and his need for “justice,” referring to how Martha Wayne’s death fueled his need for vengeance, while the memory of his father, Thomas Wayne, served as his guiding sense of “morality and justice” (p. 218). Kvaran focuses heavily on women within the context of the superhero movie and interrogates why Bruce Wayne’s father created a bigger impact in the wake of both Martha and Thomas Wayne’s death. While Kvaran looks at how women seem to be excluded to create a more masculine narrative, Klein focuses on the masculine form and how it applies to how superheroes are portrayed.

Klein (2007) focuses on two aspects of hegemonic masculinity as represented in comic books. The first pertains to the inherent “body-builder” body that most heroes – including women and young sidekicks – display, while the second emanates from the subculture of bodybuilding itself. The author observes the relationship between feminine
versus masculine and male-insecurities relative to the American sense of masculinity (2007). Klein refers to the use of a strong male body as a display of masculinity, but also the attitudes that are often asserted by men in American society. Klein argues that masculinity versus femininity is a social construction born out of society itself, and that this often defines sex roles and creates a “fracturation of self” (p. 12). While this article also deals with the sport of body building, it provides a critical analysis of masculinity as it pertains to the male form and attitudes.

Hanke, R. (1998) asserts that masculinity is currently the “dominant cultural identity and an invisible norm (Hanke, 1998, p.1). Hanke maintains that alongside the studies of feminism and gay and lesbian studies that the subject of masculinity is an important focus as it pertains to half of the population (p. 1). Hanke, citing de Lauretis from their own book titled Technologies of Gender (1987) also argues that within media studies, masculinity is simultaneously a “product” and “process” of male representation in popular media (1987, p. 5).

Facciani, M., Warren, P., & Vendemia, J. (2015) analyze several aspects of contemporary American comics, including the lack of diversity and how comics often reinforce negative stereotypes. This study looks at main and background characters within comic books. The two authors looked at the diversity of the characters and found that overall, white males make up most of the characters represented (Facciani, et. al 2015). This article provides an adequate narrative on how women, specifically, are often utilized in comics. The article points out that women are indeed there, but they are often just serving to reinforce gender stereotypes or ways that are often reflective of existing gender norms. This article addresses the need for better representation in comic books
ranging from how men of color and gender minorities are represented to persons of the LGBTQ+ community. While white men seem to make up most comic book readers, the lack of diverse storylines for women, the LGBTQ+ community and other ethnicities may have some correlation to the lack of a more diverse group of readers interested in comic books.

**Class & Race**

Wolf-Meyer (2006) examines the use of capitalistic ideals in *Batman and Robin* regarding their class status. Wolf-Meyer looks at Bruce Wayne and his class versus the class and agency of other popular heroes, such as those featured in *The Avengers* comics, like Iron Man, Captain America and so forth. The author makes the argument that Bruce Wayne and Robin—whichever iteration of the Robin character may be featured—are outside of the “norm” when it comes to class. Bruce Wayne may be rich, but he has little desire to follow laws that do not work to his crime fighting agenda. Only through the Justice League, and through association with other adult heroes, does Batman or Bruce Wayne become a part of a typical class design (2006). The author goes on to say that because Robin comes from an atypical level of class and has been adopted by Bruce Wayne, Bruce Wayne therefore becomes a part of Robin’s class level. In short, Robin is the dividing figure between Bruce Wayne’s wealth and his status because Robin does not fit into the Wayne’s wealthy archetype.

Rishikeshav (2010) refers to ethnic cultures and how they are important to a person’s social identity. The author alludes to shared experiences and attitudes, physical traits and behaviors that might shape a person’s social identity. These characteristics are important to an individual’s identity, as they work to inform how they might interact with
others in the world. Not only is a person’s culture important, but the cultural values an individual share with others in their environment shape how a person speaks and in which of many linguistic registers they do so, which is consequential to how they may navigate other cultures. Rishiekshav talks about how this ethnic identity shapes how a person may fit into other sociocultural contexts in which their own cultural values and attributes are not often represented. The author further asserts that a feeling of cultural and social alienation could have significant negative consequences on an individual’s social development and their interaction with external social groups. Indeed, this is the case in the United States where individuals and groups from worldwide cultures are represented, albeit unequally due to historical and contemporary inequalities. This leads to an overrepresentation of certain identities and cultural groups, in detriment to others in popular media. The author then discusses the implications of this over representation or lack thereof and speculates what its implications signify for the affected groups, while Rishikeshav refers to ethnicity as the way a person identifies themselves within other cultures, Spencer (2014) investigates how race and racial stereotypes fracture the identities of people of various races and continue to divide individuals in many of aspects of American culture.

Spencer (2014) refers to Marx’s ideas about race and the separation of the working class in the United States. Using these ideas Spencer explains what he believes is the reality of race in America and its bearing on the working class, explaining that race should not be a term used to divide people within a nation and outside of it. Spencer’s argument rests on the idea that race, a distinction made on little other than superficial attributes such as skin color, merely exists to separate people within a society (Spencer,
2014, pg. 107). Spencer agrees with Marx on multiple levels when it comes to race, arguing that race and racial stereotypes serve the “ruling class” by normalizing racial hierarchies which mimic class structures (pg. 107).

**The Other Robins**

Because the researcher is examining social identity, it is important to note the characters who at one point in their careers as heroes in the DC Universe also wore the Robin costume. DC Comics itself never fully committed these heroes to the Robin title and often introduced these characters in “other earths” or alternate universe storylines that would never allow for the character to have as long of runs as some of the other Robins. Alternate universe storylines typically run shorter than canon ones because their settings are often otherworldly, “far-fetched,” or simply experimental storylines for writers to play with.

Caroline Keene, otherwise known as “Carrie Kelley,” is a character who has been controversially excluded from the current Batman narrative. Despite her origin, as Robin, in one of the more popular comic books, Frank Miller’s *The Dark Knight Returns* and its sequels – which inform the current personality of Bruce Wayne – she was not included in this version in favor of Dick Grayson and Jason Todd, the current Robins at the time. Since Carrie’s inception in 1986 she has garnered a lot of controversial attention from scholars and fans alike. Tipton (2008) analyzes Kelley’s introduction as a way for DC Comics to ensure that Batman was no longer misconstrued as being gay with his typically male counterpart, Robin. Tipton notes that while Carrie is drawn as a female, she portrays Robin as you might see him being portrayed by Dick Grayson or Jason Todd. While Tipton notes that creating a female Robin was reasonable, Tipton also claims that due to
the way Carrie was portrayed by Miller, her character seems to exist solely to remove Batman from any “awkward” homosexual context that he may have had with a younger male Robin.

The identity of Helena Bertinelli, or Helena Wayne, is somewhat confusing when looking at the current canon of Batman. She is a popular character whose name and superhero identity changes depending on the timeline that she is being written in. Helena is a character that was created in response to the perceived lackluster character of Batgirl in 1977 (Huntress (Wayne), 2017). Helena Wayne is a character that is somewhat of a conundrum when looked at in the context of Robin. Helena’s hero persona is typically “Huntress,” but in Earth 2 of the DC Comics universe, she fights crime alongside Batman as his sidekick, Robin (2017). Helena in this Earth is the child of Selena Kyle and Bruce Wayne and was raised to be Robin in the alternate version of the Batman comics. She was raised with the purpose of becoming Batman when he retired or died. This storyline is not a new one and resembles that of Dick Grayson’s in the current canon of Batman (2017).

Stephanie Brown is another Robin-like character. Though she was created by Chuck Dixon and Tom Lyle, and originally introduced in the Robin comics as a love interest for Tim Drake (the third canon Robin), she did act in the role of Robin for two issues. She is widely considered to be the fourth Robin, but this storyline does not exist within current canon of Batman. Though DC Comics seemed to want to utilize the character herself outside of Robin, she has been included in various controversial storylines that limited her appearances. In Robin Volume 2 issue #58 Stephanie revealed that she was pregnant to Tim Drake; she eventually had the child with no support from
Batman or Robin (Reid, 2012). The controversial story led to a rift between her storyline and Batman and Robin’s. Stephanie Brown appeared as Robin for seventy-one days before DC Comics removed her temporary story as Robin from their lineup and brought Tim Drake back. Though her role as Robin was “unofficial,” her meager appearance as Robin created several issues for DC Comics. DC ran the risk of making fans of the male Robin angry by taking away the name of a beloved male character and giving it to a woman and ultimately, DC Comics pulled the female Robin’s story after two issues. Stephanie Brown was not completely put aside by DC Comics; she became Batgirl for some time after portraying Spoiler in the Robin comic books.

Finally, Duke Thomas’s first appearance is in Batman: Zero Year issue #21 (2013) after his creation by Scott Snyder and Greg Capullo. He became a notable character when he was reintroduced in a weekly title called, We Are Robin, a title that highlights the need for not only Robin, but the youth in struggling cities such as Gotham. In the comic Duke is thrown into the leader role and negotiates between Robin and other famous Batman vigilantes. What made We Are Robin unique as a title within the Batman universe, was the portrayal of the teenagers and children in the book. The book itself does not concentrate its depictions on the four conventional white and male Robins, but rather on the struggling, poor, and neglected minority youth of the beleaguered Gotham City.

Duke Thomas is a young male teenager whose mother has been infected with the Joker Toxin, a situation which has essentially removed her from a parental role in Batman Endgame (Snyder, 2013). Duke is likewise a black teenager who experiences the city’s great injustices and has resolved to make a difference after watching the hero,
Robin, attempt to do this every day, resembling many black males’ experiences in inner cities. In the current Batman narrative, Duke is living with Bruce Wayne in Gotham City, though his role as Robin did not continue. Despite Bruce Wayne having taken Duke into his home to train him, his role has remained quite limited until recently. In fact, in the Dark Knights: Metal series, many of the other Batfamily members asked about Duke and when he would be fighting with them, but Duke seemed to be kept away by Batman, like a dirty little secret. The obvious difference between Duke Thomas and the four other Robin’s is that Duke is black, changing or adding to the racial profile of the stereotypically white Robin would anger a loud minority in comic book readers, thus, DC Comics let the dream of him becoming Robin die. That being said, his role in the Dark Knights: Metal (2018) monthly series, started shortly after he was introduced as The Signal, Duke now has his own mini-series titled The Signal and had a limited series Batman and The Signal (2018).

**Historical Context**

The aspects being examined cannot be discussed without looking at the historical context for the time periods of the comics released. Due to the sample size being taken and the date range between the comics that could have potentially been sampled, the dates and historical context are another important aspect of examining the comics sampled. Detective Comics’ first issue featuring Robin was published in 1940 and the most recent issues featuring current Robin’s Damian Wayne and Tim Drake were published in 2019.

For the four comics examined for Dick Grayson, the eras span over thirty years. Despite the gap in the years the character seems to have stayed much the same as far as
how he is drawn. While the researcher was unable to fully grasp how the character might have changed mentally, it was clear that over the span of 30 years, Robin stayed relatively the same. When Robin was introduced in April of 1940 the US was on the brink of World War II as much of Europe was entering war and many were looking for a way to escape the realities of the world. New comic books and their characters, like film and television, have often been introduced during times in history where people might need the stories to serve as a distraction the most. For instance, with World War II on the horizon, Marvel Comics introduced Captain America. On the cover of Captain America’s first cover he is seen fighting Hitler, a very real enemy to the Americans of the time. Another instance of this can be seen in modern heroes such as Kamala Kahn as Ms. Marvel, a young female hero who happens to be Pakistani-American in The United States during a time when “Middle Easterners” are being openly vilified and marginalized.

Jason Todd’s Robin came at an interesting time in America right near the tail end of the Cold War. Todd was introduced to audiences in 1983 to a world on the brink of nuclear war, only one year after the Tehran, Iran US Embassy crisis that began in 1979. With the USSR’s shooting down of the Korean Airlines Flight 007 on its way to Seoul killing all 269 passengers, both incidents informed the high tensions already felt during the time and created both anti-Soviet and anti-Communist sentiment in the early 80s.

Tim Drake was introduced in 1989, the same year the Berlin wall “fell,” and the Cold War ended with the fall of the Soviet Union. From a media perspective, Drake seems to be more of a detective than the last two Robin’s and this may be associated with the need to be critical during a time of a Cold War when technology and mental fitness were perhaps more important than manpower.
Damian Wayne was introduced to the DC Comics universe as a bi-racial, abused child in 2006. Damian was introduced during a time when more and more media companies, such as DC Comics’ parent company Time Warner, were concerning themselves with the lack of diversity in their media. Although Damian remains represented as male, he is an example of Time Warner and DC taking the initiative that many companies took to have their media reflect the United States as it stands today.

**Canonical Robins**

In the long-winded history of Robin there is also a longwinded story behind each incarnation of the heroic sidekick. Created by Bill Finger and Bob Kane, Robin was first introduced to audiences through the young Dick Grayson in Detective Comics #38 in 1940 (Finger, 1940). According to Beedle, Robin was introduced as a way of creating a draw for children to pick up the vigilante, Batman’s, origin comic, *Detective Comics* (Beedle, 2015). The character became popular with youth around the globe and is now considered one of DC Comics’ most iconic characters. Since Grayson, DC Comics has had three other incarnations of Robin that help make up what today is called the “Batfamily.” Dick Grayson was the first to be adopted by Bruce Wayne and shown the vigilante lifestyle but Jason Todd, Tim Drake and eventually Damian Wayne all wore the iconic red, yellow and green outfit alongside Batman.

Dick Grayson is the first Robin in “Batman canon.” He is the first character to carry the title of being Batman’s young sidekick. Grayson, as stated above, was created by Finger and Kane in 1940 as a response to comic publisher, Detective Comics Inc.’s desire to appeal to younger audiences (Burke, 2013 p.5). Grayson’s story, much like Bruce Wayne’s, is one filled with tragedy. To ensure that it would make sense for a
hardened man such as Batman to take in a child he did not know, Batman and Robin needed to have similar “origin stories.” So, Grayson lived a happy life with his parents as they all worked hard as circus performers and Bruce Wayne happened to be there the night Grayson’s parents fell to their death at the hands of Boss Zucco and his men. Bruce felt a connection with Dick Grayson, who likewise witnessed his parents’ murder, asks Grayson to become his ward. After becoming his ward Grayson is trained up to be ‘Robin’ a name he chose for himself. Dick Grayson held the Robin title for 44 years until he was introduced as Nightwing in Tales of the Teen Titans in 1984.

Jason Peter Todd is the second of the canon Robins. Todd comes from a harsh background, like Grayson, but his class differences are often reflected in his mannerisms (trying to steal the wheels off the Batmobile) and his storyline. Before Todd’s subsequent death, he was presented as an angry, violent and resentful character. Due to his mother’s drug addiction, Todd was left relatively alone for most of his adolescent life until Wayne finds him. He seemed to have grown up poor, unhealthy, and under no adult care. He, as Grayson did later in his own story arcs, seem to begrudge Bruce Wayne for introducing him to the vigilante lifestyle at such a young age. Jason Todd was voted out of the comics by fans in 1988 through a fan interactive telephone poll. In the comic, A Death in the Family, Todd was brutally murdered by the Joker in what has been deemed one of the most iconic superhero deaths in comic history according to a fan poll on Geeks.com. Despite his death, eventually Todd was reintroduced as the widely popular “anti-hero,” or “the main character of the story that lacks heroic qualities—often a little villainous,” The Red Hood, the Jokers’ previous villainous persona (Vocabulary.com, 2019).
Timothy Drake, the third Robin from the Batman comics, was introduced in 1989 shortly after Jason Todd’s death. Drake, unlike Grayson and Todd, came from a wealthy and seemingly happy family. While he did come from wealth, he was a perfect fit to become Robin because he has been one of only a few people who have discovered Batman’s identity. Tim Drake is introduced to the universe as the obsessed fan of Batman and Robin and when Todd is murdered, Drake deduces the Robin has died only through Batman’s unusually vindictive behavior. Drake becomes one of the first to discover Batman and Robin’s secret identities only by watching their behavior through his camera. He deduces that Dick Grayson was Robin based on Grayson’s younger acrobatic appearances at Haly’s Circus with the Flying Grayson’s. Tim Drake is set apart from the previous Robins in several ways: he was born to money, his parents are alive for a good part of his canon, and his intellect rivals that of even Batman. The introduction of Tim Drake after Todd’s death revitalized the idea that Batman needs a Robin. In the same comic that Tim Drake is introduced in it is again reestablished that Batman does not excuse murder. The introduction of Tim Drake acts as a sort of rebirth to Batman especially at the start of a new decade. Drake is Robin until 2011 when Damian Wayne takes off in a hasty transition and the title is simply ripped from Drake’s hands and he is left grappling with losing his title and what to do with himself after losing that part of his identity. He later becomes Red Robin, and goes on to lead the Teen Titans, much like Grayson did as Robin and Nightwing for a short time. As of 2019 there are two present Robins, Tim Drake and Damian Wayne, Tim Drake is the leader of the Young Justice squad in the recurring comic series *Young Justice*. 
Damian Wayne’s origin marks the start of what can be considered the modern Robin. Wayne is on the current Robin’s and the only blood related son to Bruce Wayne. He was introduced in an entirely different way and is the most controversial Robin to date. Although Damian’s true conception has been muddled by various story arcs one of the more popular versions written by Grant Morrison involved Talia drugging Bruce Wayne in order to conceive an heir. The more updated versions imply that Damian was simply made through cloning. Either way, unlike Drake, Todd or Grayson, Damian Wayne’s story starts with some controversy behind it. Damian is introduced at the age of ten and starts off by feeling threatened by the existence of the current Robin fighting alongside Batman, when he is introduced to Tim Drake, he tries to assassinate him. Throughout the entirety of Damian’s existence as Robin he feels the need to prove his worth and superiority to the previous Robins. It is later revealed the Damian Wayne was trained up this way by his mother Talia Al Gul and her League of Assassins. Damian’s story as Robin is particularly compelling because it depicts a child learning how to enact less vulgar violence against his perceived enemies, additionally, the story involves him learning how to exist within a family that is welcoming and loving. While growing up with Talia and The League, Damian was often beaten and punished for his mistakes, and the comics often deal with the repercussions this may have for a child. Damian often comes off as a snobbish and arrogant child, and he truly is, but the deeper implications of his behavior makes his run as Robin different from the three prior Robins’ runs.
Retroactive Continuity & Other Earths

Retroactive continuity, also referred to as “retcon,” is a term used to describe an event that occurs within a comic book storyline that is later removed. Similarly, a different story is introduced and later the prior canon is played off as if it had never happened (Retroactive Continuity, 2019). For instance, Jason Todd has two introductions as Robin, one of which is very similar to that of Dick Grayson. He is introduced as Robin when his family is killed during a circus act, the exact same way that Dick Grayson was introduced into the Batman mythos. This was later retconned to provide variety in the Robins’ background stories. Retcon serves a very valid purpose in comic books as it can help to realign storylines and histories within massive comic book universes and story arcs. For instance, Batman and Superman both have existed for over eighty years and over multiple decades; clearly, many of their stories were written and set in eras when views on race, femininity and homosexuality were skewed differently. Most comics born out of the 30s and 40s have been retconned by more recent authors due to blatant racist and sexist storylines or jokes. Another, much more recent example of a story that was retconned, is the story of how Damian Wayne was conceived; in the earlier version of the story, Bruce Wayne is drugged and then raped in his sleep by Talia al-Ghul. This story was retconned relatively quickly, as it painted a horrible picture of a popular female villain and tainted the origin story of Damian Wayne, the fourth Robin.

Retcon does seek to cover up or to erase faulty writing that often takes place in larger comic studios such as DC Comics. Procedurally, writers and artists often are only given a short run of a comic (typically around seven or so issues) before they are no longer a part of the project. This can often cause story arcs to appear staggered or
introduce internal inconsistencies in the story. Unfortunately, retcon can only do so much and be used so often without fans getting confused or losing interest in the comic, so lackluster writing or storylines are often left untouched and thus left as canon. One such instance that is likely to not to be retconned, such as that of Jason Todd, is the origin story of the popular new character, Duke Thomas. Duke Thomas was introduced in *We Are Robin* as a character fighting for the livelihoods of the minority youth in Gotham City. Duke was quickly welcomed into what is referred to as the “Bat Family” and was shaping up to be Robin in almost every way. He was taken in by Bruce Wayne, accepted by the prior Robin’s, trained by Batman; DC Comics hyped up his reveal until the very last minute when he was revealed to be “The Signal” a vigilante that fights crime during the day. While comic fans are happy to see Duke introduced as a new hero, the disappointment of him not being introduced as Robin could be felt throughout the “fandom.”

Fans were led to believe that Duke Thomas was not only going to be among the first black heroes fighting alongside Batman, but one that fought alongside Batman in his iconic sidekick role. Scott Snyder, the author who created the character and ultimately decided he would become The Signal, likely knew all the theories about how the character was going to be utilized in the future would lead to the audience assuming Duke would become Robin, thus the controversy behind the decision remains. This is where the problem lies, one author was able to decide exactly what happens with such a sensitive issue as race, thus for DC Comics’ remainder of its existence will let it stand that despite all the training, the care and acceptance that Duke Thomas received, he was still not good enough to be Robin because he was black.
Duke Thomas’s example is one reason DC Comics utilizes the idea of other experimental storylines or, “earths.” DC Comics has fifty-four earths in what is called the Multiverse. The Multiverse consists of fifty-two “positive matter” earths, one negative matter earth and one Limbo. In these earths, DC is free to use their characters however they please and introduce wild story arcs that would never happen in the main earth referred to as Earth 0. Using different earths to explore character changes such as that of the introduction of Helene ‘Wayne’ Bertenelli as Robin in Earth 2 or Frank Miller’s rendition of the tortured Dick Grayson as The Joker in Earth 31.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The researcher used Critical Discourse Analysis as the method to examine what types of social identity traits characterize and identify the canonical Robins. Using this methodology, the author was not only able to examine what traits these characters are portrayed with, but how these traits may be a contributing factor into why these four characters are exclusive to the Batman mythos. Using an illustrative sample, the researcher examined twelve comic books for the study, or three comic books per character. Among those sampled, eight feature the Robin characters as Robin while four of the comic books featured the characters’ origins, whether they portray “Robin,” or whether the book took place before the character became Robin.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis, as defined by van Dijk (1993), in literature is a method of examining power abuses and the injustices that often stem from these abuses (van Dijk, 1993, p. 252). This method of analysis is significant when examining who is present within the canonical “Robin” narrative and who is not present within the narrative. Using this method of analysis, the researcher examines what social traits these characters have and in turn how each of the characters mentioned above have perpetuated the narrative of the white-straight masculine male as heroes. The author looks at institutional discourses implemented by comic creators and what impact these popular discourses have on the creation of and the continued writing of the popular DC Comics character, Robin.
Critical Discourse Analysis stems from “a critical theory of language which sees the use of language as a form of social practice (McLoughlin, L. 2017, pg. 5).” Social practices are tied to historical context and the means by which they exist is largely dependent on who these social practices benefit (pg. 5). Discourse, according to Fairclough (2012) is “meaning-making as an element of the social process” and “a way of constructing aspects of the world associated with a particular social perspective (Fairclough, pg. 11).”

Van Dijk wrote about “common sense” and how this terminology is another form of power abuse based on “reasonable” ideas that become popular and are rarely challenged (pg. 5). This idea of common sense gives way for power abuses based on what is inherently “natural.” For instance, women’s reproductive rights and gay marriage historically have been heavily debated and controversial topics based on the idea that having an abortion or getting married to the same sex is seen as “unnatural.” Critical Discourse Analysis looks at how these “common sense” ideas come about, from whom these ideas rise and then to who these ideas of “common sense” then benefit. Conversely, Norman Fairclough describes Critical Discourse Analysis as the perceived realities and values that are “fundamental for fair and just societies, likewise, Critical Discourse Analysis seeks to examine the ways in which people perceive these “realities” based on multiple factors (pg. 9).

**Sampling**

To obtain unobstructed results for the study, the researcher used partially random sampling to obtain their sample. Due to the type of questions being asked, the researcher used the origin comic book of the character as an illustrative sample, and another three
comics were randomly sampled for the study out of the comics that the character was featured. Excluding the comic that features the origin of the character, the researcher randomly sampled three other comic books that featured Robin. Due to the expansive number of years each of these characters feature as Robin, the comic books were chosen at random to ensure the dates in which the comic was written were broad. This process was repeated three times for each iteration of the character allowing for sixteen comic books to be examined.

**Coding**

The researcher coded for masculinity and sexuality, ethnicity, class, and gender identity using several previous studies. Masculinity is a social category that is constructed to define actions, deeds, behaviors, attitudes, and internalized processes culturally attributed to men, and used to differentiate between men and women and explain why these two identities act within certain constraints based on individuals’ gender, ethnicity, and sexuality (Pascoe 2012, p. 9). All character traits that indicate any form of social identity will be observed through written dialogue and images as presented in specific scenes from the sampled comics chosen.

Masculinity and gender were studied through the character’s physical appearance, and expressions of toughness. Physical appearance and gender were coded by how the character may be dressed within the selected comic books. Toughness was examined through crime fighting, unwillingness to show “unmanly” or feminine emotions, anger, risk-taking behavior, and disobedience all traits that in modern American culture, are indicative of “masculinity” (Pascoe, 2012).
Sexuality similarly was examined by the character’s social relationships, engendered bodies, and, like masculinity, their physical appearance (Pascoe, 2012). Social relationships were examined in the comics looking at any sort of bonds formed by Robin. While, engendered bodies were observed by how the character’s physical body was portrayed by the art of the comic book. Physical appearance was discerned by how the character being examined was dressed, as well as their hair is drawn; whether it was long, short cropped or what hairstyle the character was given. These are traits which are typically attributed with a characters’, sexuality and gender.

Race was assessed through how the characters are physically drawn within the comic. Ethnicity was discerned by evaluating where the character may be from, and any indications of the characters’ heritage, if indicated.

As for class, this was examined by observing the attributes of the character’s family as well as their own background, if it is presented in the comic. If it is not presented in the comic book, then that was noted as well.

**Emerging Themes**

Due to the type of research conducted and the sample for which was taken, there were multiple unaccounted-for themes that emerged while examining the comics chosen, the themes that emerged were violence and youth. Violence was unaccounted for but surfaced as a major theme in every comic read and was imperative to the Robin’s storyline and identity in most cases. The topic of violence as it was applied to youth played a role in how Robin was perceived by villains and even by Batman himself. Discussions on the topic of Robin’s youthfulness took place as a key theme in story arcs and almost always presented itself when Robin was fighting or encountered people who
were deemed villainous. Youth, in most instances, seemed to serve as a benefit to Batman and Robin’s fighting style and even as a distraction Robin used to his advantage.

**Procedure**

Using Critical Discourse Analysis, the researcher observed the traits that have been attributed to each iteration of Robin. To do so, the researcher coded accordingly based on all traits that were examined. The researcher looked for any indications of masculinity, sexuality, ethnicity, class, and gender, each as defined by previous studies and authors. The researcher then analyzed the collected data-set using an interpretive, thematic, and illustrative approach through Critical Discourse Analysis. Examining all the relevant images and dialogue attributed to the specific iteration of Robin, the researcher used previous research and interpretations to compare the Robins and their historical and sociocultural context. Strengths and limitations of the study were discussed and observed throughout all procedures.
CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

Dick Grayson


*Detective Comics #38*

In Dick Grayson’s introduction to the Batman universe in *Detective Comics #38* (1940), the comic starts with two gangsters talking to Mr. Haly of Haly’s Circus about payment to their “boss” and protecting the show from any “accidents” (page 1). Meanwhile, Dick is listening in on the entire conversation, but before he can warn anyone about what he heard, his parents are performing their usual tricks in front of the audience and their son when the ropes they are hanging from snap. Like all superheroes in the making, Grayson needed a reason to want to fight “villains” and his parent’s death was the catalyst for his wanting to be a hero. In the comic, Bruce Wayne happens to be in the audience, watching the entire event of John and Mary Grayson’s death (page 1). Grayson, realizing what has happened, exclaims that he is going to the police but before he can do that Batman stops him and tells him who was behind his parent’s murder, Boss Zucco. He then shares the story of his own parents’ death, creating a connection between the two. The newly orphaned child then asks Batman to take him with him without knowing anything about the man. Dick is then “sworn in” by Batman as his crime fighting ally.

“—And swear that we two will fight together against crime and corruption and never to swerve from the path of righteousness (page 2).”
After being sworn in as Batman’s trusted sidekick, Grayson first appears as Robin. He is wearing what is typical of a tightrope performer which is what he did with his parents as part of the “Flying Graysons” for Haly’s Circus. He is wearing a brightly colored green and red leotard, a yellow cape, green colored pixie boots, and a small “R” emblem on the breast pocket of his leotard. He is also wearing a black eye domino mask over his eyes and green gloves. Robin wields a single weapon, a small slingshot used to fight violent gun-wielding gangsters.

One thing worth noting is that Grayson, as a child, is useful to Batman in many ways. Though his age is not explicitly stated, Grayson is portrayed as one through the art in the comic and referred to as “kid” throughout. Grayson’s presence as a child as stated above is practical for DC Comics itself but also useful for the character Batman. For instance, in *Detective Comics* #38, he goes undercover as a poor newsie who needs protection from the corner’s bullies (page 3). He is smaller and seems to go unnoticed despite his brightly colored costume.

*Detective Comics* #161

Grayson’s portrayal in the second comic examined was slightly different than the first comic. The comic was printed ten years after Robin’s first appearance as Robin and though his age and the way he looks have only changed slightly, he seems to be portrayed as if he has been Robin for the same amount of time that the character has existed. Despite his exposure to murder, violence and crime, this single issue provides Robin as a crimefighter who is well versed in the business. He does as he is directed by Batman and they fight alongside each other like they have been for years, which is not untrue, yet Robin is still stuck in a twelve-year old’s body. It is not abnormal for comic books to
mature a character without having the physical characteristics of the character age themselves, but it is interesting to note the lack of change even ten years later.

Despite the character not growing in height or stature, Robin seems to have become slightly hypermasculinized. Though no mention of his age, Robin still stands at the stature of a small child, yet his thighs, chest and arms all seem to be indicative of a man much older than Robin himself is portrayed.

*Detective Comics #316*

*Detective Comics #316* provided the researcher with her first glimpse of Dick Grayson at home. Instead of wearing his somewhat provocative crime fighting costume, he is wearing a red sweater with a button up underneath. He is talking with Bruce about the escape of Dr. X and actively engages in the conversation. Despite Dick’s age, he seems to be considered equals with Bruce Wayne, indicated by the small conversation the two have about Dr. X. They openly discuss the news with each other, something not many pre-teens necessarily do with their father figures. Likewise, Robin’s maturity level comes into question not only when he is openly discussing the news with Wayne but when Batman gives him permission to drive the Batmobile to find the villain Dr. X.

*All Star Batman & Robin #4*

*All Star Batman & Robin* takes place in Earth 31 and is only considered canon to that universe; however, the comic features canon Batman and Robin therefore was included in this thesis.

*All Star Batman & Robin* starts off with longtime female reporter Vicki Vale shown half naked and beat up, fighting for her life in the ER. After the dramatic images of Vale being stuck by a hypodermic needle and then her eyes rolling into the back of her
head, Grayson and Batman are shown entering The Bat Cave. Robin is shown with cuts on his face and his domino mask removed. He offers Batman advice about the upcoming rocks in the way of the Batmobile where Batman responds with “you don’t know anything (Miller, 2005 pg. 3).” Robin looks at Batman like he has lost his mind. Within the context of the speech bubbles Robin responds casually but in the narrative boxes surrounding the page, Robin is seemingly perplexed by Batman as a person altogether.

Batman has thrown me into a car that turns into an airplane and a submarine. Batman’s completely nuts. He kidnaps a kid. He knocks the snot out of cops. He tries to sound like Clint Eastwood. He’s out of his mind. And I’ve just signed on with him. To fight crime. How lame is that? (pg. 3)

While Grayson does say that he signed on to fight crime, even in the very first few pages of the comic he seems to give an air of regret for “signing on” to fight crime with Batman. On the next page the inner dialogue transitions from Grayson to Bruce Wayne. Wayne has a lot to say about taking on a pre-teen as his side kick, Wayne knowingly took him on as his “responsibility” even though he knows that as an adolescent he is not exactly ready to fight crime.

The next scene has Grayson being shown the Batcave for the first time he is amazed by how endless the cave seems to be. He wanders around the cave and ends the scene with a joke about how impossible it must be to heat the cave itself.

Batman gets a call from the emergency room signaling that Vicki Vale is in the hospital and that her condition is not good. Batman’s happy exterior changes and Grayson becomes intimidated. The changes he has experienced within the last few days, his parent’s death and then being taken on by the Batman, seem to be finally wearing on him. He gives himself a pep talk as Batman approaches telling himself to “keep moving, it’s the only way. You won’t start crying or yelling if you keep moving— Be brave.” In
that moment, Grayson asks for new clothes (he’s still in the leotard he was wearing during his parents’ death) and Batman seems to get emotional as the question brings back memories of his own parents’ death but instead of helping the child that he has just taken on as his self-proclaimed responsibility, he leaves Grayson alone in the cave even after Grayson tells him he is hungry. Grayson sits there for a while shivering and crying “until the snot’s running down [his] chin (pg. 23).”

Finally, Alfred Pennyworth, Batman’s butler, finds the newly orphaned 12-year-old boy on the floor of the cave and provides him with silk pajamas, a blanket and some food Batman, unfortunately, does not take kindly do this. He claims that he had to scrounge for food at the bottom of caves and so should Dick. Pennyworth disagrees entirely claiming that Dick Grayson did not choose this life and Bruce Wayne did (pg. 26).

Class

Dick Grayson by no means seems to have lived the better half of his life wealthy, of course that changed and as he becomes Robin and Bruce Wayne takes him in. However, before this, his situation does not reflect a child who lived a prosperous upbringing. He grew up with both parents performing as in a circus act for Haly’s Circus. Although not much was deliberately said about his upbringing a lot can be observed from this idea of him coming from a family of circus performers. Being employed at the circus, his parents were likely not wealthy.

Race/Ethnicity

In Detective Comics #38, Dick Grayson is clearly portrayed as white. Often the character is not even shaded and, when he is, the peach tones used are typical for white
characters in comic books. The character has no discernable facial features that delineate any type of ethnicity beyond that of white. His eyes are big and blue, his hair black. Both of Dick Grayson’s biological parents were revealed early on in his storyline and both represent distinctive white characters in the comic.

Due to the type of violence Robin is asked to take part in and his willingness to perform said violence, he could be perceived as inherently masculine. This is a plausible interpretation considering the year the comic he was introduced in was released 1940. Often, Batman refers to Grayson as “ole’ chap” and there never seems to be any misconceptions of who the gangsters and bad guys are fighting as they refer to Robin as typically male gendered terms such as “buddy” (Kane, 1940, pg. 9).

In the comics the researcher analyzed, Grayson does not show interest in others aside from Batman himself and the villains portrayed in the comic books. Specifically, in Detective Comics #38, Dick Grayson asks Batman, without knowing who the person behind the mask truly was, if he would take him with him after his parents’ death (Kane, pg. 2). Conversely, he apparently has no idea who he is in the Earth 31 alternate universe of Allstar Batman & Robin #4. In Detective Comics #161, Robin seems to compliment Batman and does as he is told frequently. This behavior could be indicative of several aspects of sexuality but given the time period all four comics were written in, it is likely the more heteronormative reason for the attention Robin pays to Batman. Likewise, Robin in all four of the comics examined is wearing exponentially less than Batman who is covered in black and gray from head to toe. Robin, however, is wearing a leotard and pixie boots with his legs and arms left completely bare in all three comics examined.
In conclusion, within the comics examined there is no indication of his sexuality other than his relationship with Bruce Wayne and Batman himself, therefore it would be excessively speculative to make conclusions regarding the characters’ sexuality and is therefore inconclusive.

Another topic worth discussing when analyzing young characters fighting as vigilantes, is the amount of violence these children are exposed to and take part in. Robin as a character is threatened relentlessly with violence and likewise takes part in threatening violence against others. Robin, depicted as a prepubescent child, tends to have his life threatened daily. Obviously, when taking into consideration the characters’ desired occupation this is bound to happen. Nonetheless, in the comics observed not once is it mentioned that Robin himself is affected by the violence he is surrounded with. Of course, due to the small sample size of the comics selected it is unreasonable to assume this topic does not come up in the comics nor to assume that the characters themselves do not show some sort of push back or further desire to commit violent acts. In *Detective Comics* #161, Robin and Batman are looking for a murderer and Robin, at this point in his career, despite still being a child, seems to be completely desensitized to dead bodies’ outlines on the floor (Kane, 1950, pg. 3).

**Jason Todd**

The researcher examined the following comics for the character Jason Todd:


Though Jason Todd’s first appearance took place in *Batman* #357 his second appearance takes place in *Detective Comics* #526. However, this comic does not fall in line with what is considered “canon.” In *Detective Comics* #526, his origin comic, he is
introduced similarly to Dick Grayson; as a child from a circus act with his parents who are eventually murdered. Ultimately, both of those origins were “retconned,” a term originating in retroactive continuity. That means “adding or altering information regarding the backstory of a fictional character or world regardless of whether the change contradicts what was said before (Urban Dictionary, 2019).” In *Batman #408*, Jason’s current “canon” origin, Jason Todd was caught by Batman trying to steal the tires off the Batmobile to sell them. This action seemed to soften Bruce Wayne’s tough exterior and allowed him to accept the second Robin, after thirty years of having Dick Grayson as his sidekick.

*Batman #408*

In the first glimpse the audience is given of Jason Todd in *Batman #408*, he is returning to the Batmobile to steal the last tire, after having stolen the three others (Collins, 1987 pg. 17). He runs directly into Batman who is staring at his prized possession in wonder as he watches the young Todd return to the vehicle. After ending up in a fight with the small child, Batman follows the young boy home only to find that he is living alone and fending for himself. Todd’s story is completely unlike the previous Robin’s story, as it is rather mature for a character that was previously used to draw the attention of children. When Batman walks into Todd’s tiny room in an abandoned apartment building, he finds not only his missing tires but young Todd smoking on a mattress on the floor. Batman does not bat an eye and only remarks that “those will stunt your growth” (pg. 19). While Todd helps Batman put the tires back on the Batmobile, he questions the child’s upbringing. It is here where he reveals that he has to scrounge for food to feed his mother to keep her alive while she is sick (pg. 21). Batman asks Todd
about his schooling where Todd replies that he “graduated a long time ago from the streets of Crime Alley” (pg. 21). At the end of the comic Batman has convinced Jason that he would be better off living at a “Ma Gunn’s School for Boys.” As soon as the door closes at Ma Gunn’s, four boys surround Jason and point various weapons at him, and the comic ends with a “To be Continued…”

*Batman #411*

In *Batman #411* (Collins, 1987) the comic follows Jason’s first night out as Robin. Batman returns from talking to Commissioner Gordon only to meet Alfred Pennyworth in the Batcave. He becomes concerned when he does not see his “new” Robin in the cave alongside Alfred (pg. 6). When Alfred tells Bruce that Jason has been sleeping all day, Bruce becomes concerned and goes to check up on the boy. When he finds Jason, he finds that he has been lying in bed all day after his first night serving as Batman’s sidekick. The reader is given a glimpse of Jason’s face and rather than looking peaceful or like he has been sleeping, Jason looks angry. However, Bruce cannot see Jason’s face so he asks if he would like to join him on patrol as Robin. Rather than answering, Jason sits up and suits up (pg. 7). Throughout the comic, Bruce Wayne and Pennyworth are left questioning Jason’s odd behavior.

“What’s wrong with the lad, Master Bruce?”

“I don’t know, Alfred—He’s never been like this...Listless. Almost pouting—”

After this scene, Batman and Robin run into Two Face, who has been robbing establishments throughout the comic. In this scene, Robin gets ahold of Two Face and violently attempts to strangle him while murmuring “You lowlife slime ball...You murdering...” and “I’ll kill you...I’ll kill you...” (pg. 12). Batman questions Jason after
Jason is heard spouting the words, which go entirely against Batman’s “no kill rule.”

Later, Jason is screaming at Bruce for hiding the fact that Jason’s absent father was killed by Two Face. Jason tells Batman he does not trust him and is angered by the fact that Bruce tells him that he kept the information about his father a secret to “protect him,” despite taking the teen into “combat (pg. 17).”

*Batman #422*

*Batman* #422 has an interesting exposition, with two clear villains in Karl and his “friend” Vito. Karl, the clear shot caller of the two seems to be aggressively annoyed with his friend Vito. They are introduced as they are having a conversation about how their implied killings will eventually lead Batman to them. What is most interesting about their conversation is that it heavily involves Karl referring to women in an extremely derogatory and negative way. Karl implies that women and male “wimps” are to blame for their near capture, claiming that “no one what it means to be a real man anymore (Starlin, 1988 pg. 3).” Karl then claims that his killing of ten women, was a political statement and should not be punished (pg. 3). The crime against women described at the beginning of the comic seems to be used as a rationale for Batman to go through a phase of being “judge, jury and executioner,” as phrased by Commissioner Gordon (pg. 4). Robin wordlessly sits on the side of the commissioner’s desk as Batman is scolded by the commissioner. Batman and Robin go off on a rampage looking for the two men who have been “butchering” women in Gotham.

Eventually, the villain Karl has Batman and Robin on his tail and decides he must kill his partner, Vito to ensure he is not caught. After stabbing his friend to death, he hides the murder weapon under his floorboards and goes out for drinks with the “boys
(pg. 8).” Batman finds the weapon and Karl in Karl’s own apartment and Karl goes on the defensive, as he goes to punch Batman square in the face his inner dialogue claims “I’ll tear this wimp apart with my bare hands (pg. 9).” When the trial begins, the weapon has gone missing and Karl gets off with little more than a warning and starts preying on women again. Again, the issue puts a lot of emphasis on the violence against women that takes place in Gotham. Jason Todd, is seen following a pimp who is harassing one of his “girls.” He stops the man before he can assault the woman he had been harassing. Robin picks a fight with the man and threatens him, asserting, “you can’t seem to handle anyone, but a woman, can you?! How do you like being on the receiving end for a change, huh (pg. 14)?” His brutal assault on the man is stopped by Batman who asks what is wrong with Jason and if he was trying to kill the man, Jason responds that nothing is wrong and that the man deserved it. Eventually, Karl finds another victim and approaches her, but she is not like the other victims, as she is prepared for what Karl wants to do. The woman fights back against Karl and slits his throat with a switchblade, killing him. Before Karl dies, he sees all the women he has killed standing above him. When the woman confesses, she tells the commissioner she did not kill a “man” but a “dog (pg. 21)”

Batman is telling the story to Robin who agrees that the woman had every right to “put down” the serial killer Karl. Of course, Batman finds fault in this line of thinking as it does not “operate within the legal system (pg. 22).”

*Batman #428*

*Batman #428* titled *A Death in the Family*, is the third book of four in the series with the last appearance of Jason Todd as Robin. The issue starts with Batman running
towards a burning heap of brick and wood screaming “Jason!? Where are you?! (Starlin, 1988 pg. 1)” Batman starts the issue off by blaming Jason for running off and trying to fight the Joker by himself, then he blames himself for ever getting a child involved in crime fighting. It seems that Jason has gone off to fight the Joker by himself and Batman has come to find Robin too late to save him.

Batman is left scrambling to search for the body of his adoptive son in the wreckage of a bomb Joker has set off as he recalls precious memories of he and Jason together. Batman recalls the moment as mentioned above in *Batman* #411, of he and Jason in the Batcave where Jason finds out that Two Face had been employing his father and then ultimately killed him, spurring on Jason’s violent streak. While Bruce continues to look for his child, his inner monologue explains how violent Jason had gotten and how Bruce had wanted to ignore the signs of his worsening temper. Eventually, Batman happens upon Dr. Shelia Haywood, Jason Todd’s real mother who was caught and taken by the Joker to lure Jason to come to him. After some time, Batman finds a beaten and bloody Robin, as he had thrown himself in front of the blast to save Haywood. Batman takes one look at his son and reveals he does not even need to check for a pulse (he does, anyway) because he knows he is dead. The rest of the issue includes Batman trying to find the Joker and seeking revenge for the fallen Robin.

**Sexual Orientation/Gender**

In all four comics examined the audience is told very little about Todd’s sexual orientation. It is worth noting the posters hanging on his apartment room walls: one, “Rebel Kind,” has four silhouetted figures on it while the other presumably depicts a man with cowboy hat and a gun (Collins, 1987 pg. 20).
Much like the previous Robin, Jason Todd’s Robin is dressed in very little compared to Batman. He is wearing a red and green leotard, a yellow cape, and green pixie boots however, his legs and arms are left almost entirely exposed. He is also drawn as very muscular despite his age and the short amount of time he has been playing the role of Batman’s sidekick.

**Race/Ethnicity**

Jason Todd is represented as a white character in all the comics examined. Though his father is only shown once in *Batman #411* in a picture, he is likewise, white. Jason’s mother, though referred to throughout the four comics examined, was never revealed so it would be hard to determine if Jason represents another ethnicity.

**Class**

Jason Todd reflects a different side of Gotham than the previous Robin. He states that his mother is dead and that his father is likely doing “time” again but does not know his whereabouts. He also states that he had to scrounge for food for his mother before she passed away (Collins, 1987, pg. 21).

Jason’s apartment before living with Bruce Wayne is incredibly telling of his class status. There are holes all over the walls, a mattress for sleeping on the floor, beer cans scattered around the room and a single lantern hanging from the ceiling. Jason was clearly living as a poor child in Crime Alley before he became Robin. He was not educated and only speaks about “graduating from the streets of Crime Alley” as any form of education. He has no idea of his fathers’ whereabouts and his mother seems to have
died from a serious illness with only her son to be able to “buy her food and stuff (pg. 21).”

After Jason Todd is adopted by Bruce Wayne his class status changes. Although it does not change where he came from as a child on the streets, after his adoption, he ultimately takes on Bruce’s status and wealth. He is no longer scrounging for food nor having to live on his own; Jason now lives in a mansion and is served by a butler.

Youth

Jason’s situation is reflective of what a lot of children who grow up in the United States face. The story of the child fending for themselves on the streets is not a foreign one. The comic appears to want to deal with more mature themes than the previous Robin without giving the air that the themes are trivial, much like the previous Robin’s origin does. The severity of what this Robin has faced as a child weigh on his character as Robin as his attitude towards violence and assault are present in every punch he throws.

Violence

Jason’s violent behavior could be attributed to his violent upbringing. However, stealing tires off a car to sell and his struggle with Batman when he gets caught are not necessarily indicative of a child likely to commit violent acts. In fact, in Batman #411, when Jason starts to act out against Two Face, Bruce and Alfred question his actions and his unusual behavior. In Batman #411 it seems as if this is the audiences first glimpse into what the effects that working as a vigilante as a child can do to affect their behavior.

Batman #422 is a lot more telling into Jason’s violent tendencies as he is caught by Batman beating up a pimp on the street. Batman asks if Jason was trying to kill the man and Jason is silent, giving Batman the answer, he needs (Starlin, 1988). As Batman
#422 is only eleven issues after #411 mentioned above, it is clear the writers intended to take Jason Todd down a path much different than the previous Robin. Jason seems to be actively affected by both his upbringing but also the new lifestyle he leads as Batman’s sidekick.

**Tim Drake**


*Batman* #436

Created by Marv Wolfman in 1989, Tim Drake’s first appearance takes place in *Batman* issue #436 or *Batman: Different Roads*. *Batman* #436 takes place some while after the death of the previous Robin, Jason Todd and shows Bruce Wayne struggling with the death of the young man that he adopted as his son (Wolfman, 1989 pg. 8). In the beginning of the comic, Batman is shown going after a violent criminal that ends up getting murdered. He is shown taking the blame for the crime bosses’ death when speaking to Gotham’s commissioner, Commissioner Gordon (pg. 5). This scene works as a segue into Batman’s need for a “Robin” as later Dick Grayson, the first Robin, thereafter, reflects on how much Bruce Wayne seemed to truly regret the way he treated Jason Todd. Grayson is shown to be reflecting on Bruce Wayne’s “use” of Jason as his sidekick and questions whether having a child on the streets fighting crime was appropriate (pg. 8). Grayson is shown in the Bat Cave looking for any evidence of Jason Todd in the cave and finds no relics of Bruce’s son. He finds a trophy case with all his
own achievements but none of Jason’s, leading Dick to believe that Bruce was trying to erase all memory of Jason and “refusing to acknowledge Jason’s death (pg. 20).”

Tim’s introduction takes place somewhat secondary to the main story of Batman #436, as Boss Zucco, the man responsible for the first Robin’s, Dick Grayson’s parents’ death, is up for parole. As lawyers fight over whether he deserves any time for the crimes he committed, namely for killing the innocent parents of Dick Grayson, a lawyer tells the story of their last day alive. When Tim Drake is introduced, he is shown at his first circus where he is about to watch the “Flying Grayson’s” do their famous circus act. He is shown sitting on Dick Grayson’s lap in a photo that comes to be known as the “very last photo of the Grayson’s together (pg. 13.)” Thus, it is revealed that Tim Drake, alongside Bruce Wayne, was also in the audience when Dick Grayson’s parents fall to their death at Haly’s circus.

Robin #3

Robin #3 (Dixon, 1991) shows a Robin without Batman. In this arc Robin is off with Lady Shiva, a master martial artist, to train Drake on becoming a better fighter. Shiva makes Tim believe they are looking for a villain named “Lynx,” but it is quickly revealed that she is in fact in charge of the operation Robin and Shiva were going to investigate. Drake has a conversation with a black man named Clyde and he claims that she is not what she seems, but that Drake has an infatuation with her based on her beauty (pg. 4). Drake later claims that he is embarrassed about the trust he gave her, implying that he may have believed her based on reasons other than her capabilities as a fighter. Drake and Clyde are caught up in a gun fight in a tunnel they find, explosions go off and Shiva confronts Drake. She mocks him for believing in her, but he gets away. Clyde tries
to back Robin up by using a gun to ward off gunfire aimed at Robin, but Drake seems to have everything under control and refuses to let Clyde help him use the gun. Robin, firmly believing in the no-gun, no-kill rule Batman put into place, knocks the gun from Clyde’s hands. Finally, after a long gunfight in the tunnel, Robin and Clyde make it out to follow Shiva and her men. Clyde proclaims, rather ironically, that he “is going to get himself killed hanging out with that crazy white boy (pg. 14).” Much later, as Drake and Clyde are on a plane speaking more intimately, Drake reveals to Clyde that his mother was murdered and that his father is still alive “if you can call it that (pg. 21).” The comic ends on the same plane with Drake revealing to his temporary partner. Clyde, that the man they are searching for and whom Shiva was working for, has a strain of the bubonic plague.

Robin #173

In Robin issue number 173, also called Girl Trouble, the female character Spoiler is introduced. The comic takes place right after Tim Drake becomes Tim Wayne after he is adopted by Bruce following his father’s death. He shows up to his friend Martin Ive’s front door and is greeted by his mother. Martin’s mother jokes about how she is having a hard time remembering that Tim is no longer a Drake. Tim goes to his friend’s room where he starts joking with him about getting out and seeing his friends, then pulls off his friend’s beanie to reveal that Martin is bald. He then asks, “how bad is it?” to which Martin replies, “Follicular Cancer (Dixon, 2008 pg. 7).” The next few pages have Tim talking about how he feels the need to get out and patrol to destress. As he flies through the air in the middle of a night rainstorm, Tim runs into two detectives who want help on their recent case on counterfeit money. It’s clear the relationship between Tim and the
two detectives is not a good one, as he lets them know he was happy to help on their last case, but that he was done. The detectives do not take kindly to that and threaten Tim’s friend in the police department. Eventually, Tim relents and promises to ask Batman for help on the detectives’ case. He hops in his red car, which notably features a Robin insignia on the front and starts working on the case. Tim then finds a warehouse where heaps of money are being stored and gets into a fight with “Violet.” While he and Violet fight, Spoiler shows up and Tim’s reaction is immediate. Spoiler was a hero that worked with Batman and was created by Stephanie Brown, someone who Tim loved deeply. He believes that someone has taken her identity and takes insult by it. He starts to fight the hero and eventually grabs Spoiler by the throat in his anger.

*Batman #652*

In *Batman #652* Drake is first seen crouching inside a windowsill staring at the dead body of “The Ventriloquist.” Batman and a detective on the scene are engaging in a discussion about how hateful the person who killed him must have been to accomplish something so heinous. Batman claims that “all evil is evil. I don’t have a sliding scale” to which the detective replies, “I don’t buy that. Joker is the worst (Robinson, 2006 pg. 1).” Tim, who comes to be known as the “smart Robin” by his family, uses his detective skills and his apparently superhuman eyesight. From where he is sitting, he sees a “smear of grease” on The Ventriloquist’s hand (pg. 3). The next scene shows Batman exercising while Drake sits at the massive computer in the Batcave working on the case. As Batman works out, he reflects on Tim’s future and the impact that Batman has had on Tim’s life. Bruce reflects on the fact that without Batman, Tim’s father who was killed by Captain Boomerang in *Identity Crisis* (2004), would be alive (Robinson, 2006). Suddenly, Bruce
sees something on the monitor that catches his eye, after cleaning up the image somewhat he sees the figure called “Orca” pictured. Batman and Robin head out to the sea to follow Orca’s trail and find the fingerprint of Harvey Dent otherwise known as Two Face (pg.12).

In this comic, Drake is shown using gadgets or looking for clues, not using his fists to inflict violence. A conversation takes place as Batman and Robin take flight over Gotham. While Bruce is caught musing about the wellbeing of his sidekick, Tim tells Bruce as they track the small-time villain and that he is a “big boy” and despite the loss Tim has recently faced, can continue to fight crime. Batman agrees with Tim and lets him fight the villain while Bruce talks with Harvey Dent. The comic ends with Tim winning the fight against the so-called small-time villain and Batman and Harvey being caught in a bomb on the top floor of Harvey’s building.

*Batman #652* features a Robin that is much different than the previous iterations. Tim has slightly longer hair and is wearing a Robin suit that is not typical. Drake’s suit is mostly red with a black cape, black boots, black domino mask and black gloves. His “R” emblem is yellow but surrounded by red with no hint of the typical Robin green to be found.

**Sexual Orientation/Gender**

Like the previous Robins, Tim Drake is young. His age is not stated directly but in the first comic he makes an appearance, Drake is seen reflecting on the first Robin’s parents’ death. He is young but the writers do not take their time in confirming his sexual orientation. In *Robin #3* the writers imply that the reason he trusted the woman Lady
Shiva was because he thought she was attractive; he does not bluntly confirm this accusation. Conversely, he becomes nervous but does not deny it.

Drake is clearly represented as a male in the comic books. The writers consistently have the characters use he/him pronouns and he is clearly drawn as a male with short cropped hair and wearing gendered male clothing. Aside from his costume, Tim’s selected attire was often blue jeans and a primary colored shirt.

**Race/Ethnicity**

Tim Drake is drawn as a white character. He has pale skin and black hair. Not once in the comics examined is his race or ethnicity made explicit to the audience.

**Class**

In Tim Drake’s introduction he is shown with his parents, who are dressed similarly to Bruce Wayne who is sitting next to them. Wayne is wearing a suit to the circus and those around him are likewise wearing refined clothing (Wolfman 1989, pg. 16). While the first comic examined does not give much detail into what type of class level the Drake’s fit into, given the company they are keeping at the circus and the clothing they are wearing one could infer that they are an upper-class family.

**Youth**

Given the way Tim Drake is introduced, youth seems to have a strong connotation within the beginning of his storyline. Drake is introduced as a young boy watching the worst moment of the first Robin’s, Dick Grayson’s, life. This moment that Tim Drake becomes privy to, is the moment that Grayson went from being a youthful and innocent boy to the crime fighting sidekick to Batman (Wolfman, 1989).
Drake is also introduced in a somewhat controversial way when Dick Grayson looks through the Batcave and finds no evidence that Jason Todd, the previous Robin, ever lived in the same home as the Batman. Jason Todd died at the age of thirteen and was once considered a son to Bruce Wayne. Grayson is angry when he finds that all evidence of the adopted son of Bruce Wayne has disappeared from the Batcave. Tim Drake being introduced into the comic book universe in a comic that depicts Wayne in this way implies something deeper. One can infer that, if Bruce Wayne is not completely heartless, and thus that the loss of his son was profoundly meaningful for him, that Wayne rid the Batcave of Jason’s memory because the memory of his son and the way in which he died, were too painful. Dick is angry because he believes the lack of belongings mean that Jason did not matter to Bruce. Again, if one is to assume Bruce Wayne is acting as a grieving father who does not know how to cope with the loss, then this is the perfect introduction to Tim Drake as the third Robin, who will then act in a role that will fill in for the loss of the previous Robin.

**Violence**

Drake like the others, is exposed to extreme amounts of violence. In the comics examined, Drake seems so desensitized to the violence and even seems to enjoy it. He is consistently making jokes and runs around in joy as he fights villains. He has fully embraced his role as Robin and the violence that must take place as a sidekick to Batman.

Drake does not seem to lose his cool in three of the four comics examined but, in *Robin #173*, he has a hard time holding back his anger at believing Spoiler’s costume is being worn by an imposter. Tim is so angry that he grabs the person by the throat and
pushes them against the wall. This type of violence implies that he was so angry he was willing to possibly take this persons’ life.

**Damian Wayne**


*Batman #655*

*Batman #655* (Morrison, 2006) the origin comic of the current Robin Damian Wayne starts off with Batman taking down the Joker. After the Joker goes on a crime spree and ends up poisoning Commissioner Gordon, Batman beats the villain so gruesomely he is considered “defeated (Morrison, 2006).” The comic shows Bruce trying to come to terms with the utter boredom that comes from the Joker being out of commission. Tim Drake, the current Robin in this comic, is shown leaving the cave to go somewhere in the mountains the last thing he says to Bruce is to call him if he needs him and with that Tim Drake’s story in the issue ends.

Damian’s first appearance is when he is standing next to his mother, revealed later to be the infamous Talia al Ghul, Ra’s al Ghul’s daughter, as they finally track what seems to be one of Batman’s planes. As Bruce goes to a function to benefit a charity in Africa, Talia and Damian are seen behind the scenes watching him interact at the party. Talia asks Damian to deduce, based on body language, which one of the many men at the party is his father. He immediately points to Bruce Wayne, saying “that’s him. That’s my father. What do we do now Mama?” to which Talia responds, “Now we shall say hello (pg. 22).”
Batman and Robin #14

_Batman and Robin_ #14 (Morrison, 2010) also titled _Batman and Robin Must Die part. 2_, starts with Robin holding the ever-symbolic crowbar towards an already bloody and beat up Joker. Damian claims that he will not hesitate to “inflict severe brain damage” on the Joker if doesn’t start telling him the truth (Morrison, 2010 pg. 1). The Joker starts to plead with Damian, but it is all an act as he acts blind for a moment and then attacks the young Robin head on scratching his face and infecting him with Joker Venom. Joker Venom causes whoever is infected to act similarly to the Joker, often doing very violent things while laughing. He grabs a now infected Damian and seeks to escape the cell that he is being held in and uses him as leverage to escape. While Damian is with the Joker, Batman is with Commissioner Gordon passed out after getting into a massive fight. After getting him and the commissioner out of a mob full of people who want them dead, Batman wakes up on a table looking for his son who is nowhere to be found. The Joker dispatches into Batman’s radio frequency and tells him he has his son and what he wants from Batman.

Robin: Son of Batman #1

When Damian Wayne is first shown in _Robin: Son of Batman_, this Robin’s first very own spin off, the setting is unclear, but he is shown with a disgruntled looking face and his Robin outfit’s hood pulled over his head. He is shown looking up at a man who Damian calls an “oaf” and negotiating getting his large hairy, red, friend Goliath back. Goliath is a “bat-dragon” who, with a nose ring hanging from his nose, is about twenty-times the size of Damian Wayne. When the man, named Abush, calls Goliath “man-bat” he defends him telling him to call Goliath by his name, sticking up for his large traveling
friend. Eventually, Damian can get Goliath back from the man after Goliath is found to have eaten several “sacred cows” from Abush’s stock. When Robin gains the upper hand by threatening to use Goliath against Abush, Abush starts to flee but asks “who do you think you are, boy?” to which Damian replies, “I am Robin. Son of Batman. That’s all you need to know (Gleason, 2015 pg. 4)” After the events with Abush, Damian is found training in the Batcave. During a moment of recklessness Damian, an animal lover at heart, nearly steps on his cat’s tail. For Damian to avert hurting his precious pet, he swerves, but ends up falling into one of the wells in the cave. In a rather symbolic portion of the comic, Damian falls directly down the well next to the skeleton of a dead bat.

Damian, presumably using his skills learned as both Robin and a trainee for the League of Assassins, finds his way out of the pit in the cave and to his room. Once there, he finds a table with an ice cream sundae on it with a note from Bruce Wayne telling his son he was sorry for going on patrol without him, but that he needs rest. Damian is clearly upset after reading the note and finds himself scrambling after his buddy Goliath has gotten out. Damian flies to the island where Goliath is typically kept and uses a whistle to try and tame Goliath, but some enemies of Damian and his beast show up. Abush, from the beginning of the comic, has shown up to make Goliath pay. Of course, the plan is defeated by Damian and his beast but as Goliath tries to get away, he flies too high in the sky, cutting off Damian’s oxygen and causing him to pass out. As Damian is passed out, he has a dream of the day of his mother’s funeral. It starts with Dick Grayson, the first Robin approaching Damian and making jokes about ghosts, which Damian does not find funny. Then, Bruce appears and starts yelling at Damian about not being worthy. Then, he and his father are both stabbed through the chest. When Damian wakes up, he
takes the dream as a sign to atone for his past mistakes, as the violent child of Talia al Ghul. At the end of the comic Damian starts his one-year atonement.

*Batman and Robin #25*

*Batman and Robin #25* (Winnick, 2011) is a comic that features three of the four Robin’s present during the duration of the comic. Dick Grayson as Batman, the newly resurrected Jason Todd as The Red Hood and Damian Wayne as Robin, sit in the Batmobile when Jason loads his gun and blows the top off the vehicle and escapes. Much of the comic features Jason Todd as he tries to save his one and only friend, Sasha. As he finds her and her capturers, he removes all his clothing and prepares to give himself up in her stead, fortunately, Batman and Robin appear as his backup. Jason redresses and pulls out his guns only to have Batman pin him down. Grayson as Batman tells him to keep his weapons away and that when Batman is there Jason would not be killing anyone. Finally, Robin saves the girl Sasha and starts to fly away on one of the Bat helicopters when Jason shoots the rope Damian is holding onto making Sasha fall into his arms and Damian to the ground. Damian is furious that Jason got away with Sasha but there is nothing left to do but to let Jason Todd get away and for Batman and Robin to return to the Bat Cave (2011).

**Sexual Orientation/Gender**

In the comics mentioned above, Damian’s sexuality does not get any discussion. He is not seen giving any persons any romantic affection or attention.

Damian’s gender as displayed by the writers is male. Damian has short crop-cut hair and wears dark or primary colors. Damian’s Robin suit consists of a red cape, a basic red vest and with outlines of green, and yellow. He wears green boots with black Kevlar
pants and black and green gloves. Nothing about Damian’s outfit suggests he identifies by anything other than male. Another thing worth noting is that Robin trains without a shirt on with other males, such as Alfred Pennyworth and Bruce Wayne, around. In these instances, it is reasonable to assume this is appropriate because, although he is a child, he also identifies as male like the other men in the room when he is underdressed.
Race/Ethnicity

Damian Wayne is the first Robin to be notably be of a different ethnic group than the Robin’s that came before him. Damian Wayne is of Chinese-Arab decent on his mother’s side, whereas Bruce is racially white and ethnically British on both of his parent’s sides.

In *Robin: Son of Batman* #1, the artists clearly tried to emphasize his racial features by clearly coloring him darker than other characters and noting a more crescent shape to his eyes.

Class

Even in the first comic Damian appeared in, he seems to have grown up with money. He is surrounded by large TVs in a highly technical looking room. Although in the comics examined Damian’s class is not discussed, it is worth noting how Damian talks as well, often referring to Bruce Wayne as “father” and the other Robins by their last names. He sits and stands at perfect posture and seems to think he is suitable for the Batman cowl based on his upbringing alone.

Youth

In *Robin Son of Batman* #1 Damian, while talking to the Indian man he calls an “oaf,” the man calls Damian a “boy,” a term to which Damian takes offense. The man says, “someone obviously needs to teach you how to respect your elder’s, boy,” with Damian responding to the man saying, “do not call me ‘boy’ again (pg. 1).” This portion of the comic is interesting because clearly the man calling Damian a boy was meant to be an insult or jab at Damian’s age, with Damian rebuking the term and calling attention to it one could assume that he is not proud of his youthfulness.
Damian seems to have an issue with grasping that he is indeed a child. After being called a boy he is insulted and when his father went on patrol without him, he takes personal offense to not being able to work.

**Violence**

Damian Wayne is a special case when it comes to violence. Although, in most of the comics he is merely thirteen, he is well versed in what it means to be “violent.” In the comics above, Damian is unafraid of using violence to get what he wants, even in extreme cases. He threatened the Joker with his life and had already beaten the man with a crowbar seemingly without second thought. Damian was raised until the age of ten by the League of Assassins, a group run by Ras al Ghul, one of the most violent of Batman’s enemies.

**Robin as One Unit: The Bigger Picture**

*This study posed the following research questions:*

**RQ1:** *What social identity roles are typically attributed to DC Comic’s Robin characters?*

- Overall, until 2006 when Damian Wayne was introduced, Robin was a white male, whose class varied between iterations. Robin’s class ranged from very poor to rich with Jason Todd and Dick Grayson coming from poorer class backgrounds and Damian and Tim coming from richer families. Ethnic background could not be observed for any of the Robins studied. Sexuality could not be deduced based on the comics examined alone; thus, Robin’s sexuality was inconclusive. Each iteration of Robin was coded to be around the pre-teen age range based off the characters’ illustration as a younger, smaller male as well as off linguistic markers such as the use of terms like “kid,” “buddy,” and “pal.”
**RQ2:** What impact do these social identities have on the portrayals of Robin within the text?

-Class, as it pertains to the character’s background seemed to be the only social identity trait that had any impact on the character’s story or portrayal.

**RQ3:** Are different iterations of Robin portrayed contrarily?

-Each Robin is portrayed slightly different from the other, especially regarding their class status. The first two Robins came from poor backgrounds with loving parents who died, the next two came from very rich backgrounds with either absent or abusive families. Damian Wayne’s race does vary from that of the prior three Robin’s as well as he is portrayed as Chinese-Arab on his mothers’ side.

**RQ4:** What impact does historical context have on the portrayals of Robin within different iterations of the character?

-Though not explicitly stated in the text, historical context likely played a hand the way Robin was portrayed until 2006 with the introduction of the first non-white Robin, Damian Wayne. It likely has played a hand in the role of why Batman does not and likely will not ever have a female Robin sidekick.

Robin holistically depict a group of dysfunctional young boys who were taken in by millionaire Bruce Wayne to fight crime alongside his superhero persona, Batman. Each iteration of Robin comes from backgrounds that are often deemed unsuitable for children in a modern American society: a circus, homeless and without family, neglected by rich but absent parents, trained and brainwashed to be an assassin. Bruce Wayne seemed to be the best option for all these children who were often left without a choice other than to join Wayne on his escapades across Gotham City. Each one of these
children grasps at Bruce Wayne’s conscience in one way or another. Grayson saw his parents die right before his eyes, as did Bruce Wayne. Jason Todd was poor and without a family; Bruce Wayne no longer had a Robin to fight by his side and had plenty of money to take care of the child. Tim Drake was a rich kid neglected by his working parents. Damian was a child that knew nothing more than violence and Bruce took him in to provide him the love he never received. The relationship of the Robins to Bruce Wayne are reciprocal; for them to continue to survive as young children, they had little option left than to run off with Batman into the night fighting crime. Even in Tim Drake’s case—although he had wealthy parents—he was an only child who rarely saw them. Drake followed Batman and Robin to dangerous rooftops and crime scenes to feel close to those he looked up to.

The violence that the character is exposed to seems to weigh heavily on each iteration in different ways, with the most extreme cases being Damian Wayne and Jason Todd. Jason Todd and Damian have many similarities; Jason grew up on the streets using violence as a survival mechanism, whereas Damian was raised thinking violence was the solution to all issues. Grayson and Drake tend to be less violent based on the comics analyzed. Although each characters’ violence levels vary, all four characters must defer to violence alongside Batman to carry out missions and take down the “bad guys.” At such a young age, these characters are exposed to violence that could potentially scar someone for life and lead to hugely negative psychological trauma and in Jason’s case it does. Jason becomes increasingly violent towards those whom he deems deserving, in the case of Two Face in *Batman #411*, where Jason threatens to kill the villain. The threat of violence towards grown men from children positions these characters into a
David versus Goliath archetype that may seem attractive to a younger audience. This archetype makes the conversation regarding the nature of the violent situations these characters are exposed to much more compelling since historically, Robin was a character created to attract children to the comic books.

All the Robins studied are presented as male. Each Robin is drawn to be indicative as a male character and have no obvious sexual characteristics that would indicate otherwise. Each Robin, when introduced, has short hair and wear clothing “boyish” clothing, meaning they are never seen in dresses/skirts or anything gendered as feminine. In the issues examined, there is an argument to be made about the Robin costume, specifically Dick Grayson’s iteration alongside Jason Todd’s. These two costumes often show the Robin wearing leotards, with no coverage on his legs. Not only are these outfits impractical, one could give them the same critique as many women superheroes’ outfits. These two costumes provide the hero no real protection in very violent situations and the costume seems to only serve the purpose of dressing Robin down. For women, dressing them down in such an instance provides men the outlet to gaze at these heroes as they fight crime. Robin’s dressing down possibly serves the same purpose. Not only is Robin Batman’s smaller, younger sidekick but he is dressed down to appeal to an audience that is likely interested in this sort of content. Robin historically was meant to appeal to children, yet this type of dress does not seem indicative to that historical statement.

Due to the type of media being examined, typically violent vigilante Batman comics, toxic masculinity was observed frequently. Robin as a young adolescent boy often perpetuated the idea of what it is to be the idea of a “toxic” and violent male. In the
comics, the character was rarely shown that violent behavior should not be rewarded and
often the behavior was encouraged, yet only in Jason Todd’s story was the violence the
young sidekick ever not rewarded. Often the fights ended with a cocky young side kick
knowing that he had just beat a grown man in a fight. However, in the case of Jason
Todd, his violence and aggression did have an impact on the story that lead up to his
ultimate death, but Jason’s story did not end because of his aggression. Rather, Jason
Todd died trying to save his mother giving Jason the chance in his story to redeem the
aggressive character archetype he often fell into. Although, one could also assume that
Todd’s death exemplifies toxic masculinity in that killing oneself or dying for others is
often what men are conditioned to do.

Damian Wayne is the most violent out of all the Robin’s at the very beginning,
but he is also the character that has most to gain by unlearning his violent tendencies. His
character is introduced as someone who grew up as an assassin and must adapt to life
outside of doing the bidding of the violent crime organization he grew up under.

The *Batman* comics condone violence by portraying Batman and Robin
performing it against other characters whom Batman himself has deemed “bad” but in the
same vein too much violence or aggression leads to a character being shunned by Batman
himself. In the case of Jason, Bruce Wayne finds it incredibly concerning that Jason’s
logic leads him to believe that some of the people they fight might deserve death.
However, Batman condones all other forms of violence, some of which could potentially
disable someone for the remainder of their life. This has been a constant critique of the
Batman comics for years. Jason and the other Robins are all exposed to unimaginable
crimes daily and they are expected to not let it affect how they view fighting criminals.
After being exposed to so much violence for hours a day as sidekick to one of the most violent heroes that exists today it should not be surprising that Jason might feel strongly about the need for a harsher punishment against these criminals.

The researcher examined gender as it was presented and performed, and all four characters performed as males based on their clothing, hair and physicality. On top of those traits that were clearly drawn, the researcher interpreted ideas about masculinity through the type of violence and toughness the characters exhibited. Often, the characters engaged in combative missions with Batman or by themselves. The comics rarely showed the character to be regretful in their violence as mentioned above. In two instances Batman showed remorse for introducing children to violent vigilante life with Tim Drake and Jason Todd.

Although sixteen comics in total were examined, Robin’s sexuality overall seems to be ambiguous. Robin’s typical age was around twelve to thirteen, thus it is not unreasonable for the researcher to not be able to conclude the sexuality of each Robin. The researcher believes that age plays a factor into discussing Robin’s sexuality in the comics; only once was any indication of sexuality given and that was in the instance of Tim Drake and Lady Shiva. Even so, the comments made came from a secondary character and were not reciprocated by Drake himself.

Until Damian Wayne’s introduction into the DC Universe all Robins were considered white and any ethnicity was not discussed within the comics examined. The characters, aside from Damian, are drawn as white characters, each with dark hair and blue eyes. Damian Wayne, however, has dark eyes, darker skin and almond shaped eyes, which are frequently taken to imply some other racial profile other than white. His
mother, Talia al Ghul, is of Chinese-Arab descent and his fathers’ background is
ethnically British.
CHAPTER V
LIMITATIONS

Rejecting Empiricism

The researcher acknowledges their empirical biases that may be related to this research. Being a woman there are oppressions the researcher has experienced that some people will not experience. The researcher acknowledges that they won’t fully understand any perspective outside of their own; this includes that of white men, black men, gay men, black women, and any minority group to which they do not belong. Nevertheless, the great breadth of traits and behaviors represented within even a single comic book character form a great intersecting matrix of social identities, and each reader will identify with and focus on one or various of these social identities based on their lifestyle, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, class or other category. The researcher being a white, aromantic, asexual, middle class woman in the United States observing male comic characters such as Dick, Jason, Tim and Damian will provide just one view of these characters and what they represent. The researcher’s choice to study these characters contributes to the biases.

Strengths and Limitations

The strengths of this study are that the researcher was able to observe the character Robin in a way that has been done by few in the communication field. The research looked at how adolescents are represented as a popular comic book character in Batman in the year they originated and then randomly examined three other comic books to study the scope in which each Robin is represented socially. The study also looked at all canonical Robins as one unit and looked at nearly all aspects of their representation in
the comic books including violence as an effect on a child’s social identity, class, race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, age as it is represented in the comics. While the study examined the Robin’s as one unit, analyzing what the data might actually imply, each canonical Robin was also looked as a single entity set apart from the previous Robins unless they were otherwise represented in a way that included one of the other iterations of Robin. Another strength was the studies’ ability to adapt to newer or important topics that could possibly influence social identity such as the social identity trait of “youth” as presented in the comics and what effects violence may have on them as well.

Due to the importance of this character to the Batman franchise and DC Comics, there is an extensive number of comics to analyze that were not looked at for this study. This, of course, excludes many important characteristics and stories where Robin is featured that may have an impact on the results of this study. Another obvious limitation to this study is the lack of study of Robin outside of the comics; for example, how Robin is portrayed in TV shows, movies, video games and books. Limitations to this study are that the study will not be able to observe any sort of impact, including on Batman himself, that may come from these characters and their social identity, which of course, leaves room for this study to be continued in the future. Given the general US centrism of comic books, another limitation to this study is the lack of discussion regarding the experiences of people who fall under some of the same social identity traits and their inability to identify with the same experiences, for example white males in Spain do not necessarily identify with the experiences of white men in the United States do. Therefore, the way in which Robin is portrayed and therefore studied, cannot represent nor reach all audiences. Likewise, the study could be broadened to include translations of these comic
books to other languages and to study any of the language or cultural differences that might be portrayed within the translation.

Another limitation to this study was the unforeseen effects that some forms of social factors may have on the social identity of these characters such as youth and violence. Although, the comics follow an adolescent character who is exposed to violent situations daily, the author did not account for the clear effects these two aspects may have on the characters developing social identity.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Continued research is crucial in the portrayal of groups of people who have been historically rejected and excluded from representation in comic books and denigrated by Wertham’s and others’ research and who have only in recent times been reflected positively in the mainstream. This study would have an impact on how Media Studies scholars research comic books and the adolescents presented. Thus, it is important to continue to study and observe how publishers present these characters to a broadening audience. This study includes extensive examination into the social identity of Robin, an imperative character to DC Comics. He is the main character in TV shows such as *Teen Titans GO!* and the TV show *Titans*. His importance to one of the largest comic universes that exists today makes him an important character to study. Although other iterations of Robin exist outside of the canon of Batman and Robin, their lack of storyline as a featured Robin made them hard to study in the same way that the canon Robins could be studied. With over eighty years of Robin storylines to follow and examine, the character was accessible but due to the many storylines and the plentiful amounts “retconning” that take place, the battle to examine enough comics to get a full picture was a challenge. Background research and historical context led the researcher to feel comfortable in their research and the foreseeable analysis of the comics selected for examination.

Three of the four current canonical Robins have become superheroes. Each have had their own dedicated series with dedicated storylines and villains. Each one of these characters are major players when it comes to the Batman mythos and canon. Although DC Comics does not stray from approaching serious topics in the previously Robins’
comic books, the character’s social identity has stagnated to previously regarded stereotypes. Within comic producers and massive story worlds like Batman, it is not unusual to do some soul searching and change a character’s origin, death, and even name. Batman himself has changed extensively over the years from a man with little to no emotion but anger to one that can take care of children, one that feels a desire to protect with his love and care rather than just his fist. Batman has gone from only wanting vengeance for his parents’ death to wanting to better the world, and to wanting to protect his children and friends. DC Comics has certainly embraced the need for change in how beloved characters are represented and while DC Comics is not afraid to broach sensitive topics, they tend to do so with characters that have less of a following and audience. Unfortunately, DC has almost exclusively made their female characters lesbian or bi. Huge household names such as Wonder Woman, Harley Quinn and Batwoman are all considered either bisexual or lesbian. Conversely, the largest names for men are Midnighter and Apollo who are both gay and John Constantine, who is bisexual. While these characters are still widely popular, they do not quite have the fame that characters like Wonder Woman, Batman and even Robin, do. Thus, the importance of having widely popular comic characters represent a variety of marginalized groups is lost when most of the characters are either often overly sexualized women characters or side characters.

Although this study was not an examination on DC Comics itself, the way Robin and has been portrayed for nearly eighty years is somewhat contradictory. DC Comics clearly cares about trying to produce comic books that represent a growing and diverse audience. If DC Comics did not care about adding diversity to their comic books
characters they wouldn’t introduce characters like Batwoman, a woman who is bisexual and often leads the story over Batman in *Detective Comics*, Duke Thomas who is introduced as a poor black kid from Gotham and is now a crime fighting sidekick to Batman, or Midnighter the openly gay man who can see events right before they happen. Damian Wayne as Robin is positions DC Comics in a positive direction, as he is a biracial child who was born out of wedlock, abused by his mother and grandfather and now fights crime with a father who he feels he cannot please. Damian constantly fights with himself over his self-worth and his place in the family just at the age of thirteen. Although only four comics for each iteration of Robin were analyzed and then discussed, DC Comics has visibly taken steps to ensure the iconic character is more ethnically diverse but also has a more realistic storyline.

To DC’s credit, Robin, originally portrayed by Dick Grayson, has been a character since 1940 and historical changes must be noted. It would be unrealistic to have the Robin of 2019 depicted the same as the Robin of 1940. Damian’s storyline as Robin deals with the repercussions of being a child sidekick and even in the four comics read, there is a focus on how his social identity impacts his storyline. Similarly, where he fits into his father’s universe alongside three other Robins is crucial. While no media company can truly capture the essence of the cultures or realities they are trying to represent, the step that DC Comics has made to include Damian Wayne as Robin in their Batman franchise has positioned DC Comics and the Batman universe in a positive direction regarding representing more diverse social identities.
Prior Knowledge

The author chose to leave prior known context that existed outside of the scope of the study from the paper. As a reader and admirer of Batman and comics, the researcher had prior knowledge of the comics and characters examined. Had the researcher incorporated this prior knowledge into their analysis, it would have biased the study. This partially motivated the researcher to utilize a random sampling of the comics. For instance, prior to conducting research on the comics sampled, the author knew age, race, gender, class and sexuality for many of the characters outside of the comics sampled. The author also had prior knowledge of storylines and instances of retconning that took place for some of the comics examined, specifically Dick Grayson’s earlier storylines. The author alludes to specific themes that predated the major retcons that were determined by writers and artists alike. Such instances include suggestive sexual themes involving Batman and Robin. These themes were purposeful and in response to Fredric Wertham and other critics on Batman and Robin’s relationship. Despite the researcher’s prior knowledge of the Batman mythos, the researcher sought to approach Robin’s social identity with the greatest amount of neutrality and academic rigor.
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