

**You Win Some, You
Lose Some?:
“Increased”
Diversity In DC
Comics’ “New 52”**

**You Win Some, You
Lose Some?:
“Increased”
Diversity In DC
Comics’ “New 52”**

**“Increased” Diversity In
DC Comics’ “New 52”**

Julie Kessler

**Digital Initiatives Press: Rhode Island
College**

Providence, Rhode Island



You Win Some, You Lose Some?:
“Increased” Diversity In DC Comics’ “New
52” by Kessler, Julie is licensed under a
[Creative Commons Attribution-
NonCommercial 3.0 Unported License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/).

This book was produced using
PressBooks.com, and PDF rendering was
done by PrinceXML.

Contents

- [Acknowledgements](#)
- [Abstract](#)
- [Main Body](#)
- [Introduction](#)
- [Literature Review](#)
- [Methods](#)
- [Findings](#)
- [Discussion](#)
- [References](#)
- [Appendix A: List of sampled titles](#)

- [Appendix B: Code sheet for comic books](#)
- [Appendix C: List of sampled television episodes](#)
- [Appendix D: Code sheet for television episodes](#)

1

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Roger Clark for advising me during this research project and for all the support and assistance he provided.

Next, I would like to thank Rhode Island College for allowing me to complete my research.

And thirdly I would like to thank my readers, Dr. Roderick Graham and Dr. Mikaila Arthur, for their feedback on my paper.

Abstract

This study investigates the assertion of increased diversity in DC Comics' "New 52" relaunch by examining visibility of women and people of color in titles published before and after the relaunch. Thirty titles were sampled, fifteen from the month before the relaunch was established and fifteen published specifically as "New 52" titles. The portrayals of these characters were also inspected. Further, animated superhero-themed television shows with the same name as sampled comic book titles were studied qualitatively, looking at connections between the shows and the comic books, as well as amongst the programs themselves. Ultimately, amongst the sampled titles, the "New 52" comics displayed greater visibility of people of color, but less visibility of women. Their animated counterparts also had a stronger relationship to the "New 52" comics than the pre-relaunch titles, likely due to the inclusion of so-called "Legacy Characters" in the latter. As the issues sampled from the "New 52" only included the first issue from each series, visibility will likely change as the continuity progresses.

Introduction

Walk through a supermarket. Undoubtedly, in almost every department you will pass superhero paraphernalia, probably without even noticing. In the Jewelry department you will see Batman dog-tag necklaces and sunglasses; in Health and Beauty you may notice Avengers toothbrushes and toothpaste; move on to Toys and you'll proverbially drown in the Spider-man, Batman, and Avengers-themed action figures, props, and costume accessories. When you arrive in the electronics section, it will be hard to miss the large displays advertising the newest superhero movie (and they are, indeed, released in a steady stream; in 2012 alone, we saw *The Amazing Spider-Man*, *The Dark Knight Rises*, and *The Avengers*, with more promised to come, especially given the Blockbuster success of *The Avengers*). Even when you make it to the grocery section, Avengers characters will decorate the boxes of frozen pizzas, various superhero characters will be featured as chewable fruit snacks, and Superman, Batman, and Spider-Man will be the decorative tops to kids' juice drinks. As you wander by various forms of apparel, you

will stroll past Superman boxers, Batman belts, and (occasionally) a Wonder Woman shirt, all hanging along shelves that you'll walk by without much notice.

These various items that you pass in the supermarket litter various other stores, and the items sold are worn, consumed, or displayed by the masses, viewable by, likely, millions of people, in the U.S. alone. And that is just one instance of comic book culture's subtle propaganda. In many ways, it is an age of superheroes. These characters are icons to many, and heroes to children. And yet, if one were to glance back at that list, the name of only one character was female: Wonder Woman; and, even then, she is featured less prominently than her male counterparts. In fact, of the billion-dollar-grossing *Avengers* film, only four of the main six characters are prominently featured on posters, advertisements, and pizza box covers: Iron Man, Thor, Captain America, and Hulk, making it seem almost as though Hawkeye (a lesser known character) and Black Widow (the only female on the team) play very minor roles, when, in fact, Black Widow is the character who figures out how to prevent more alien antagonists from coming to and further attacking Earth. In the film, her role is actually quite substantial. Yet, from various

endorsements, it would be hard to tell she was even a character.

Lack of diversity (and the visibility of diverse characters) is one of the major drawbacks of the comic-book medium. To continue with the *Avengers* example as it remains one of the highest grossing movies in history and thus was quite universally viewed, of the Avengers team, five out of six are white males, with only Black Widow (Natasha Romanoff) as a female teammate. The only main character of color is Nick Fury, the man who assembles the team. While it may be noted that these characters are presented well, with Black Widow depicted every bit as competently as her teammates (if not more so), and Fury as a man of high political power, being the leader of the government agency, S.H.I.E.L.D., this movie still remains sadly limited in its portrayal of diversity, despite having been written by Joss Whedon, whose stories often have feminist undertones (e.g. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*).

In fact, in the three well-known comic-book-based movies released this year, the titular or most visible characters were white males. In *The Amazing Spider-Man*, Peter Parker is the protagonist, with Gwen Stacy acting as his love interest. And while Stacy is

portrayed as more competent than Mary Jane, the main female character of the previous *Spider-Man* trilogy (from the early-to-mid 2000s), she is still relegated to love interest. *The Dark Knight Rises* deals with this slightly better in its portrayal of Catwoman, but while she is central and ultimately saves Batman, the story focuses on the white male protagonist. Further, to reiterate a point already noted, white males comprise five-sixths of the *Avengers* team.

These movies, far more well-known than the comic books upon which they are based, craft their characters and stories from the foundation of their original print counterparts. It is the comic book narratives that emphasize which characters are prominent, and which ones are worth converting to theatrically-released films or programming for television (be it live-action or animated).

The comics themselves feature various types of diversity; however, the broadness of these depictions is often lackluster. Sometimes these characters are racially diverse, like Black Panther (Black), Batgirl (Cassandra Cain, the second Batgirl, Asian), or White Tiger (Latina). Sometimes the lead character is female, like Batgirl, Wonder Woman, and She-Hulk, or compiled of women like the

super-team Birds of Prey. Increasingly in recent years, characters are displaying diverse sexual orientations: in Marvel, Karolina Dean of *Runaways* is a lesbian, Julie Power (Lightspeed) of *Avengers Academy* is bisexual, and Billy Kaplan and Teddy Altman of *Young Avengers* are gay. DC Comics' recently included an openly transgender character, Alysia Yeoh, as Barbara Gordon's roommate in the ongoing *Batgirl* series. Long before the increased popularity, Marvel introduced the character Northstar, who revealed he was gay in 1992, and who married his partner in 2012, (Associated Press 2012). DC's most prominent lesbian character is Batwoman, who, after an arc as the lead character of *Detective Comics* (Phillips 2012), is the titular character of her own on-going series, as one of the new titles featured in DC's New 52 relaunch.

In 2011 DC Comics relaunched (rebooted) their continuity (i.e. the history of their fictional universe) with what they called the "New 52." Essentially, the company decided to erase the previously established history and start their titles (52 titles) back at "#1," in an attempt to make the characters more modernized and relevant (Truitt 2011). Besides bringing in new readers, the company has also claimed that the new titles

would bring about increased diversity in their characters (Wheeler 2011), likely as part of their gambit to pique the curiosity of potential buyers. While the “New 52” has brought characters like Batwoman to the forefront, it has also eliminated previously diverse characters from continuity, such as Cassandra Cain (the second Batgirl and pre-reboot character Black Bat), who no longer exists. Because of the alterations in continuity, the New 52 has both created and eliminated diverse characters; the question, however, is whether (with the addition of new characters and destruction of previous characters) DC Comics has brought about greater diversity in its stories?

2

Literature Review

Depictions of race in comic books can vary between poignant and stereotypical. In his 2002 article, “‘Black Skins’ and White Masks: Comic Books and the Secret Race,” Marc Singer describes diversity and its façade in various comic books. Singer notes *Legion of Super-Heroes* is a title that serves to undercut true diversity. He writes, “The series *Legion of Super-Heroes* serves as an example of a comic which espouses

platitudes of diversity while actually obscuring any signs of racial difference” (Singer 2002:107). He explains that at one point the team claims, “When it comes to race, we’re colorblind! Blue skin, yellow skin, green skin... we’re brothers and sisters... united in the name of justice everywhere!” (Singer 2002:110). Yet, of these different skin types, blue and green refer to aliens, while the “yellow” refers to a character that is sometimes drawn with Asian features, depending on the artist (Singer 2002:110). Conversely, Singer points to protagonist Black Lightning as a character of color who is depicted in a way that focuses on the social problems for his race; he notes that the plots involving Black Lightning examine a motif of identity, tying to representations of race (Singer 2002:112). Ultimately, he comes to the conclusion that “Comics still perpetuate stereotypes, either through token characters who exist purely to signify racial clichés or through a far more subtle system of absence and erasure that serves to obscure minority groups even as the writers pay lip service to diversity” (Singer 2002:118). However, he allows that “superhero comics also possess a highly adaptable set of conventions; a few titles display the genre’s and the medium’s potential by using the generic vocabulary of the secret identity to externalize and

dramatize the conditions of minority identity in America” (Singer 2002:118). While representation is very important, so is visibility of characters, and often times characters of color are invisible.

With women making up about half of the world’s population, one would think DC Comics would target this vast group as a jackpot of potential buyers. In the 1950s, when “women readers were an important part of the market... a number of comic book genres were available, including romance, westerns, adaptations of popular television shows, crime comics, and horror comics” (Nyberg 1995:206). The mid-1970s change from selling comics in newsstand outlets to private specialty shops altered that demographic (Nyberg 1995:210). Instead, if women wanted to purchase their titles, they needed to frequent specialty shops, which women described as “cliquish,” (Nyberg 1995:211), “offputting,” (Nyberg 1995:211), and permeated with a “male club-like attitude” (Nyberg 1995:211). This alienating attitude is one that has grown since its inception; however, with the increased propensity of online shopping, this trend may eventually dissipate.

Additionally, although less well-known than superhero comics, other comic-book genres

still exist today, and are often more inviting to female readers. For example, Brian K. Vaughan and Pia Guerra's series *Y: The Last Man* takes place in an alternate version of now, in which every male organism on the planet drops dead at the same moment, with the exception of the protagonist, Yorick Brown, and his Capuchin monkey, Ampersand. As they try to survive in this new world and find a way to save the human race from extinction, they are aided by Agent 355 and Dr. Allison Mann. In this story, the latter two central characters are both women of color (Black and Asian, respectively), and Dr. Mann is also a lesbian. While the series could easily be written in a way as to poke fun at women (who comprise the vast majority of the characters), it instead tries to handle the situation with realism, managing to present two prominent and competent women of color, without whom Yorick would not have survived. While less political, another example of a non-superhero comic book popular amongst readers regardless of gender is Bill Willingham's *Fables*, which tells the stories of fairytale characters who have moved to New York City, settling in a small community called Fabletown, after being ousted from their homelands by the Adversary. While less populated with characters of color, *Fables* presents readers

with a more mature take on fairytale characters, and like *Y*, connects to readers outside of the superhero genre. This pattern continues in Vaughan's new ongoing comic (published by Image Comics), called *Saga*, a sci-fi, space-*Romeo and Juliet*, where the two alien protagonists from warring planets runaway and have a baby together (instead of killing themselves like Romeo and Juliet), and must try to keep their small family alive while fleeing the many forces that want them dead. In the reader-response sections of *Saga*, Vaughan notes of a survey from his readers: "We didn't ask about your gender, but a surprising 35% of you volunteered that you were female. A good start," (Vaughan 2012). This differs vastly from the comic book readers surveyed in 1995, 5% of whom were female (Nyberg 1995:205) and the 7% of female readers who responded to DC Comics' 2012 Nielson survey (Pantozzi 2012).

Additionally, portrayals of female characters are alienating to women readers. Nyberg notes:

Market research shows that women do not buy superhero comics. Even the titles featuring female superheroes are intended to appeal to the male reader. One marketing representative

acknowledged this, noting that comics featured “great-looking women in Spandex” and saying there was “nothing for women” in such titles. Another pointed out that women characters are either victims or, if they have special powers, are unable to handle them; or women are tormented characters because of the powers they possess. This sets the female superhero apart from her male colleagues. (1995:208).

Although this varies with each writer, many female characters are not written for the engagement of women, but instead for men’s fantasies. Nyberg explains that “superhero comics are adolescent male power fantasies” (1995:208) but the same is not true for women. A clear example of this is seen in the “New 52” comic, *Catwoman* which Andrew Wheeler sardonically describes in his article “No More Mutants: 52 Problems:”

We’ve known for a while that the cover to the Catwoman reboot has the character lying on her back barefoot with her legs in the air, baring her cleavage and pouring sparkling white droplets over her boobs. It’s very tasteful. It sets the tone. She’s a thief,

you see, and that's what thieves do; at the end of a long day of thieving they lie on a rooftop and throw diamonds away. Erotically. (Wheeler 2011).

He goes on to describe the opening pages of the comic: “The first panel is framed not on the protagonist’s face, but on her brassiered chest. Page two ends on a shot of her derriere... The third page also gives us the title of the issue, ‘And Most of the Costumes Stay On’” (Wheeler 2011). The first pages of any story are meant to set the tone. A first impression of *Catwoman* indicates that the writers prefer to emphasize her appearance – especially her more sexual attributes – rather than her brains. Her characterization differs from that of a sexually liberated character. Catwoman is not half-naked because she enjoys walking around with the zipper to her skintight cat-suit down to her midriff; she’s partially-clothed because that is what the male readers want to see. She is not a character, she is an object. After Catwoman has sex with Batman – a full-spread image on the last page – Wheeler explains, “Catwoman is not trying to please the man in the comic, but she is trying to please the man holding the comic” (Wheeler 2011).



Figure 1: Catwoman #1 cover,
©DC Comics

Red Hood and the Outlaws presents another example of this depicted in the “New 52.” Starfire, an alien from the planet Tamaran, was typically presented as a sexually-liberated character in her pre-reboot characterization. However, with the majority of her history erased, this Starfire “wants emotionless, casual sex with people whose names she can’t remember [which is] very much a departure from her previous incarnation, where she came from a culture that was primarily about love, not being

available for joyless hookups with random dudes” (Hudson 2011). In her article, “The Big Sexy Problem with Superheroines and Their ‘Liberated Sexuality,’” Laura Hudson explains:

This is not about these women wanting things; it’s about men wanting to see them do things, and that takes something that really should be empowering — the idea that women can own their sexuality — and transforms it into yet another male fantasy. It takes away the actual power of the women and turns their “sexual liberation” into just another way for dudes to get off. (Hudson 2011).

Hudson notes that if Starfire were truly sexually-liberated, she would likely prefer to have half-clothed men drawn in seductive poses around her, rather than the image of her, rising out of the ocean in her string bikini, with her back arched, and argues that female characters are only portrayed the way they are — as “barely dressed aliens and strippers” (Hudson 2011) — because someone decided to “make them that way” (Hudson 2011). The characters do not create themselves. These female characters are created to engage male readers, not female readers. Ultimately, Hudson clarifies, “The

problem is not Star Sapphire. Or Catwoman. Or Starfire. Or Dr. Light raping Sue Dibny on the Justice League satellite or that stupid rape backstory Kevin Smith gave Black Cat or the time Green Lantern's girlfriend got murdered and stuffed in a refrigerator. The problem is all of it together" (Hudson 2011). Essentially, the images culminate in the sum of comic book culture's parts.

The way men write and draw female characters has a significant effect on how women are treated, especially inside what could be known as "Geek Culture." Women crave to be considered insiders (Nyberg 1995:215). Nyberg notes that:

As with other comic book readers, the pleasure for these women is found as much in their knowledge about the different titles as in the reading. This knowledge is important if a reader is to be considered an "insider." As one discussant observed, part of the appeal of a long-running series is "being in the know" about various characters and who worked on the titles during which period of the comic's history. (Nyberg 1995:215).



Figure 2: Starfire from Red Hood and the Outlaws #1, ©DC Comics

While Nyberg wrote her piece in 1995, it still holds relevancy today; being versed in “insider” knowledge is necessary to avoid being called a “Fake Geek Girl” (Brown 2012). As such, female readers are expected to be knowledgeable on all comic-related subjects; if they fail to memorize details, they are viewed as interlopers, or Fake Geek Girls. Male readers do not seem to have this problem; there is no such thing as a Fake Geek Guy. In her infamous article “Dear

Fake Geek Girls: Please Go Away” Tara Tiger Brown asserts that “pretentious females who have labeled themselves as a ‘geek girl’ figured out that guys will pay a lot of attention to them if they proclaim they are reading comics or playing video games” (Brown 2012). Brown’s article implies that many women *pretend* to be geeky (e.g. read comic books) in order to attract men, indicating that gaining male attention is the motive, in that attracting men is a woman’s most important goal. Worse is some of the discourse from people who agree with her. The potency of the “Fake Geek Girl” was permeated further by the words of comic book artist Tony Harris, who gave his opinion of women at comic book conventions on his Facebook wall (Johnston 2012). Snippets of his notorious rant (capitalization, poor grammar, and misspellings included) contain:

Hey! Quasi-Pretty-NOT-Hot-Girl, you are more pathetic than the REAL Nerds, who YOU secretly think are REALLY PATHETIC... You are willing to become almost completely Naked in public, and yer either skinny (Well, some or most of you, THINK you are) or you have Big Boobies. Notice I didnt say GREAT Boobies? You are what I refer to as “CON-

HOT”... You have this really awful need for attention, for people to tell you your pretty, or Hot. (Johnston 2012).

Were these the misogynistic ramblings of a no-name, anonymous bigot, they could easily be ignored. Harris, however, is a prominent comic book artist. He is well-known throughout the industry; he works with the writers who create these characters, and is one of the people who illustrates these characters. Yet, there are people who consider his words valid. The idea of the “Fake Geek Girl” is a poison for the geek community, and for society as a whole; it not only alienates potential new female readers and current female readers, but it indicates that men view women as simply craving of male attention, and not as autonomous creatures of their own invention.

But, why does this matter? If superhero comic books are targeted for males and inevitably alienate female readers, then is it still a problem? Yes, it is. Although there is very little literature available on the socialization effects of comic books, what is available demonstrates a relationship between reading violent comic books and responses (by gender) to different scenarios (Kirsh 2002:1160). While this does not

relate to portrayals of gender or race, it does indicate that comic books do matter and that readers can be affected by the content. Further, studies on children's literature show the effects of sex typing on preference and recall, indicating that children better remember stories where the sex-roles are reversed (Jennings 1975:222). As a popular and widely viewed form of media, television viewing can also foster stereotypical views of gender and race (Liebert 1986:47); however, it can also do the opposite and counteract such stereotypical views (MacBeth 1996:56). Regardless, children learn from television – even when programs do not intend for them to – and these messages can be both negative and positive (MacBeth 1996:39).

In that vein of thought, if children grow up viewing positive social images – with women and people of color in positions of power, like those of superheroes – it can impress upon them egalitarian ideals. At the same time, if the presentation of characters is negative, this effort can have the opposite effect. In his book on children's socialization, *Tuning in to Young Viewers: Social Science Perspectives on Television*, MacBeth warns, "Although television can counteract stereotypes, the predominant content may serve to reinforce and maintain

views that women are helpless and incompetent; men are aggressive; most people are white, affluent Americans; and the principal racial-ethnic group members are African Americans residing in situational comedies” (1996:56-57). Ultimately, he notes, “Television as a medium is neither good nor bad; its effects and value depend on the types of programs broadcast and the ways in which they are used by viewers” (MacBeth 1996:57).

One of the flaws of television is its portrayals of persons of color. MacBeth writes:

Most television characters were portrayed positively, but Latinos(as) were almost twice as likely as African Americans to be portrayed negatively. Latinos(as) were also twice as likely as European Americans and four times as likely as African Americans to be portrayed as lawbreakers. Even in local news presentations, African Americans were more likely than European Americans to be presented as physically threatening or demanding. (1996:65-66).

The socializing effect of negative presentations of race can be very detrimental

to the development of ideals, especially in impressionable children. In a similar vein, MacBeth also notes:

Compared with European Americans, Latinos(as) were three times as likely and African Americans and Asian Americans were two times as likely to be cast as lawbreakers. The greater likelihood of visible racial-ethnic groups being depicted as criminals in turn dictates the likelihood and the nature of their ingroup interactions, making them infrequent, mainly formal, and nonfriendly. (1996:66).

Yet, positive depictions of ingroup communications can have the opposite effect. MacBeth describes, “Television rarely shows ingroup interaction in a social context. Under conditions of friendship and mutual interest, it is possible not only to show positive interaction but also to present positive discussion of difficult issues” (1996:81). One of DC’s animated television programs deals with this matter: *Teen Titans* in the Dwayne McDuffie-penned episode *Fear Itself*. The five-person team consists of two women, and one person of color. The episode includes teachable moments, focusing on the idea of accepting one’s

feelings, and confronting fears rather than burying them.

Although DC Comics began its animation decades ago with *Superfriends*, its dominant, continuity-driven programs were instated in the 1990s, beginning with *Batman: the Animated Series*. Edgier than many animated shows, *Batman* quickly gained popularity, spurring the creators to add another show to their fictional universe: *Superman*. The two shows did something previously rare; they connected plots, having their characters meet, and making the universe that much more substantial. As such, after the two shows concluded their runs, a new show was created in the early 2000s, yet again utilizing the characters: *Justice League*. *Justice League* brought together a team dynamic: Batman, Superman, Martian Manhunter, Green Lantern, Flash, Hawkgirl, and Wonder Woman. Three of the characters were white males, one a green alien, one man of color, and two female characters. The show built off of the previously established continuity, and ultimately integrated various characters from the comic book continuity into its storylines. The show crossed over several times with another animated show, *Static Shock*, which shared a writer, Dwayne McDuffie (who produced *Justice League*

and was the creator of the *Static Shock* comic book). McDuffie also wrote for DC's next animated program, *Teen Titans*, which attempted a relatively diverse cast.

Depictions of diversity and gender egalitarianism are essential for creating tolerance and equality. These images affect how people view women, persons of color, and people in the LGBT community. The mindset of some men in the comic book industry engenders the idea of the "Fake Geek Girl," to the detriment of all women. Indeed, the current mindset also affects the women who want to read comics. In order to satisfy and bring in new readers, Wheeler explains:

First you need to build a diverse landscape. Even with good books like Wonder Woman and Batwoman, DC isn't doing that. It only has seven female-led titles among its new 52. That's a step up from how things used to be (and no doubt a damn sight better than Marvel has ever done), but this was meant to be for new readers. This was DC's best effort to attract a female audience. When you look at it like that, 'they're doing better than Marvel' doesn't seem like much of a boast. (Wheeler 2011).

He goes on to elaborate:

The reboot was meant to help the publisher find new readers, and female comic readers represent a massive audience that DC hasn't successfully tapped in to. Female characters are a good way to reach those readers, because underrepresented groups like to be recognised. Catwoman would have been a smart title to re-engineer to capture those readers. Instead it's the most insular exercise in fanboy pandering this side of Green Lantern. (Wheeler 2011).

It seems as though, if the intention was to bring in new readers, DC actively attempted to fail in the regard of female readers, because although they created more female-character led titles, the titles are not intended to be read by women readers. Instead, characters would be better served to cater to the general public, and to be reflective of race, gender, and sexual orientations. The characters created in comic books impact the characters crafted for their animated counterparts; thus, the more egalitarian their depictions, the better the incarnations on television, and the better the lessons learned by children. Ultimately, these representations are important for reducing

stereotypes, both through the comic medium and the animated medium, to ensure egalitarian messages reach children.

As such, certain questions need to be asked of the rebooted DC Comics: 1) Are female characters more visible after the relaunch? 2) Are people of color more visible after the relaunch? And, 3) How similar is the presentation of gender and people of color in animated superhero-themed programs and the comic books on which they are based?

3

Methods

As indicated by the name the “New 52,” DC Comics launched 52 comic book titles with its reboot. Using stratified sampling, I compared the list of titles published the month before the relaunch to those listed in the first month after the relaunch; from that, I selected titles that existed both before and after the relaunch. For example, titles like *Batman* and *Action Comics* both concluded their pre-reboot runs and were restarted at issue #1 for the relaunch. On the other hand, the comic book *Red Robin* existed before the relaunch, but not after (and was thus eliminated from the sample), and the comic

book *Red Hood and the Outlaws* was created for the relaunch, but did not exist before the reboot (and was, also, thus eliminated). After dropping the books that did not appear before and after the relaunch, 30 comic books remained: 15 titles from before the relaunch and 15 titles from after (see the Appendix A for a full list of the 30 sample comic books). While this made comparisons between the titles themselves easier, it also eliminated titles like *Batwoman*, a title that has only existed after the relaunch, which possesses a lead character who is a lesbian.

My measurement strategy was similar to those employed by Clark et al. (1993) and Clark et al. (2013) in their studies of children's picture books, coding for depictions of gender and race. Strategies for examining gender include: percentage of character images that are of females, centrality of female characters, physical appearance of female characters, and roles of female characters in the story (e.g. hero, villain, civilian). To find the percentage of female images, first I counted the images in the comic book that include characters; from there, I counted the number of images that contained only female characters and the number of images that contained both female and male characters, and divided

each by the total character images in the book. The remaining images consisted solely of male characters (dubbed “male-only images”) and were also divided by the total count of character images to find a percentage. Centrality of female characters indicated whether a female character was central to the story; I coded first for whether a female character was present at all in the comic book, and further for whether she played an important role in the story. How the artist drew the female character determined her physical appearance and whether the image was sexualized; for example, the character Supergirl appeared as a character in five of the sampled pre-reboot books: *Supergirl*, *Batgirl*, *Teen Titans*, *Justice League of America*, and *Action Comics*. In each one, her depiction varied. While her uniform remains mostly unchanged with each version, the art is sexualized in *Action Comics*, and slightly less sexualized in *Justice League of America*; *Teen Titans* and *Supergirl* maintain the same outfit, though the art for the character is less sexualized than in the former titles. Although she appears more prominently in the penultimate *Batgirl* issue, she does make a brief appearance in the sampled issue of *Batgirl* as one of Batgirl’s hallucinations; in this depiction her outfit differs as Batgirl imagines her and her

friends as fairytale princesses fighting off various mythical creatures. The dress in which she is depicted still bares her midriff; however her skirt is much longer than its typical depiction, and is slightly less sexualized than the comparative titles.

For persons of color, I implemented similar measures: percentage of all character images that are of non-White characters, centrality of non-White characters, and depiction of non-White characters. In some instances, there was an ambiguity in determining whether a character was a character of color. In a similar way to how the sexualization of art varies based on the artist rendering the image, whether a character is drawn as a person of color depends on the artist. Singer notes in his article that the character Karate Kid of *Legion of Super-Heroes* was drawn with Asian features by artist Mike Grell, but that subsequent artists drew him as Caucasian (Singer 2002:111). This inconsistency amongst writers and artists still exists today and caused for difficulties in coding characters like Damian Wayne and Kyle Rayner. Damian, who has maternal Arabian and Chinese roots, is typically depicted as a miniature version of his Caucasian father, Bruce Wayne. In the pre-boot issue, all of his depictions portray him wearing a mask. Post-relaunch, we see

Damian in civilian attire alongside several other members of the so-called “Bat-Family” (i.e.

Figure 4: Post-Relaunch “Bat-Family” from *Batman #1*, ©DC Comics

people who work with Batman). With the exception of his father, no one else pictured is related to him by blood; yet, Damian is practically a clone of the other characters (who, like Bruce, are White), and there are no indicators of his Arabian or Chinese roots (see Figure 4). Readers unfamiliar with his heritage – if his heritage is the same as his pre-relaunch origin – would have no way of knowing his history. Kyle Rayner is another character who is depicted as White by the writers and artists, though he is half Mexican. When first reading the pre-relaunch *Green Lantern* comic book, I was unaware of his heritage or of much of his backstory. Based on the issue I read, I coded him as White. It wasn’t until months later when I stumbled across a social media message about Kyle from Giancarlo Volpe, the creator of the recent *Green Lantern* animated series, that I had any inclination that Kyle has Mexican roots (Volpe 2012). A quick Google search verified this

information, though this fact seemed little known, even amongst fans. After much internal debate, I chose to only code characters as non-White if there was some way of knowing – through either the art or through the story itself – that the character was a character of color. It should be noted that the inclusion of either character would not have significantly affected the difference in percentages, which still would have been roughly the same.

As with examination of gendered images, I first counted all of the images with characters; then, I counted the number of images that depicted non-White characters (including but not limited to Black, Asian, and Latino/a characters), and divided the number of images with non-White characters by the total number of character images to find the percentage of the images that contained characters of color. On my codesheet (see Appendix B for the codesheet used for comic books), I noted whether the title possessed any non-White characters, as well as whether the non-White characters were central to the storyline. Finally, I examined how non-White characters were depicted by determining whether they were portrayed in a manner focusing on social problems, in a manner celebrating cultural differences, or in a fashion indistinguishable

from the presentation of White characters (Clark et al. 1993:229).

Further, I examined the animated children's television programs related to several of the titles. Of the fifteen titles to compare, four had animated counterparts: *Batman*, *Superman*, *Justice League*, and *Teen Titans*. I examined three episodes from each of these shows (see Appendix C for a full list of episodes sampled). For both *Batman* and *Superman*, I found disk sets that contained a television-season worth of episodes (*Batman: the Animated Series, Volume 3* and *Superman: the Animated Series, Volume 2*); for *Justice League*, the disk I was able to acquire possessed only three episodes, and thus those were the three I was able to view; *Teen Titans* contained a disk with six episodes. With the exception of *Justice League*, a simple random sample was used to determine which episodes to study. For each series, the episodes on the volume or disk were assigned a number; then three numbers were selected using a random number generator, and the corresponding episodes were the ones examined. *Teen Titans*, for example, only had six episodes: "How Long is Forever?," "Every Dog Has His Day," "Terra," "Only Human," "Fear Itself," and "Date with Destiny." They were numbered 1 through 6, respectively. An

online random number generator selected 3, 5, and 6, and thus “Terra,” “Fear Itself,” and “Date with Destiny” were chosen. The same process was used for *Batman* and *Superman*, though both disk sets contained a greater selection of episodes.

The animated programs were examined in two ways. A modified version of the codesheet used for the comic books was implemented (see Appendix D); further, detailed notes were taken throughout each episode and searched through for patterns. The codesheet implemented varied from the one used for the comic books, though many of the inventories remained. Through this form of qualitative analysis, an exact percentage of female images were incalculable; instead, the notes taken on each episode took care to describe the gender of the characters in each scene to give a rough estimate of how prominent female characters and characters of color were. Centrality of female characters and of people of color remains as inventories, determining first whether the episode contained said characters, and whether these characters were central. The appearance of female characters is also a variable coded for, and descriptions were taken of the outfits female characters wore. As well, inventories remained for noting the

depictions of race in the animated television programs, continuing to note whether the portrayals focused on social problems, whether they celebrated cultural differences, or whether their depictions were indistinguishable from White characters. As the shows were released in varying years (with *Batman* in the early 1990s, *Superman* in the mid-to-late 1990s, *Justice League* in the early 2000s, and *Teen Titans* in the mid-2000s), the programs could be compared amongst themselves, as well as to their comic book counterparts.

4

Findings

The New 52

To answer our first research question, pre-relaunch comic books displayed more female visibility than post-relaunch comic books. Table 1 shows that for female-only images (or character images in which only female characters were displayed), 24.4 percent of the pre-reboot comic images were said images, while 15.9 percent of post-reboot images were of these images (a difference that is both substantial and significant). Similarly, the pattern continues

for character images depicting at least one female character (including images where there are both female and male characters, as well as images with only female characters), with 62.3 percent of all pre-relaunch images being of such images, while only 45.3 percent of post-relaunch images being of them (an even more substantial and significant difference). This pattern of gender visibility continues for male-only images (character images depicting only male characters), as 37.2 percent of all pre-relaunch images were of such images, while 54.2 percent of all post-relaunch images were of such images. An example of the changes in gender visibility is evident on the covers of the pre-reboot and post-reboot *Justice League* titles. On the cover of the pre-relaunch *Justice League of America* cover, four of the seven protagonists are female (Supergirl, Donna Troy, Jennie, and Jesse); starkly contrasting this is the cover of the post-relaunch *Justice League* cover, which features a sole female character, Wonder Woman, amongst its seven heroes.

Table 1: Visibility of Gender and Race in Comic Books

	Gender Visibility	Racial Visibility
--	--------------------------	--------------------------

	Pre-Relaunch ^f		Post-Relaunch ^g		Pre-Relaunch	Post-Relaunch
	F/O ^a	F/A ^b	F/O	F/A		
Justice League	27.0	82.5	0.0	5.3	0.0	20.0
Teen Titans	10.8	73.5	10.8	53.9	15.7	9.2
Legion of Super-Heroes	13.7	61.6	11.1	59.3	4.1	35.8
Green Lantern Corps	30.4	48.1	10.3	55.2	1.3	58.6
Green Arrow	6.5	50.0	7.7	39.7	33.9	34.6
Action Comics	8.1	50.0	1.8	30.4	4.8	12.5
Superman	17.6	61.2	5.2	39.0	23.5	15.4
Supergirl	36.3	83.3	87.0	100.0	36.3	8.7

Superboy	8.2	41.9	15.3	72.9	22.5	18.7
Detective Comics	12.7	38.0	2.3	8.7	0.0	0.0
Batman	2.6	40.3	2.0	11.8	11.7	5.9
Batman and Robin	1.4	27.4	0.0	4.0	0.0	0.0
Batgirl	49.2	90.5	28.0	75.0	7.9	32.0
Birds of Prey	39.5	79.0	42.0	80.3	0.0	49.4
Wonder Woman	95.4	100.0	49.5	86.1	8.0	26.7
Total	24.4^c	62.3^d	15.9^c	45.3^d	12.2^e	20.9^e

Notes:

^aF/O represents the percentage of images that depict only female characters

^bF/A represents the percentage of images that depict at least one female character (though these images may depict male characters as well).

^cIndicates this percentage is different than the post-relaunch female-only percentage, where $p < .001$.

^dIndicates this percentage is different than the post-relaunch female-any percentage, where $p < .001$.

^eIndicates this percentage is different than the post-relaunch racial visibility, where $p < .001$.

^fTotal pre-relaunch images: 1181

^gTotal post-relaunch images: 1274

The results differed in terms of characterization of female characters. From the comic books sampled, females were drawn slightly more often in over-sexualized ways in the post-reboot comics (21.2 percent) than in the pre-reboot comics (18.8 percent). However, the costumes worn by the female characters were more practical in the post-reboot comics (78.8 percent) than in the pre-reboot comics (62.5 percent). As

discussed earlier, artists render their characters in a variety of ways despite the protagonist's costume remaining unchanged, such as our previous example, Supergirl. As seen in Figures 7 through 11, Supergirl's costume remains the same. However, how the costume is depicted varies with the artist. In Figure 7 (from the pre-relaunch *Supergirl* title), Supergirl's costume comes down to just above her belly-button; if the image captured the full outfit, the skirt would fall to about halfway between her knee and her hip. The depictions of Supergirl in *Justice League of America* and *Teen Titans* (figures 8 and 9, respectively) hold true to this image. However, her costume in *Action Comics* (figures 10 and 11) differs. In this rendition, the top half of her uniform (which usually falls to just above her belly-button) rests just under her breasts, revealing the majority of her torso. In this image, her breasts are emphasized much more than the other depictions. Further, it shows her skirt to be much shorter, appearing to be only a few inches of material. Although her costume remains the same in all of her pre-boot appearances, she is portrayed with varying levels of sexualization. This is true of other characters, as well. So while a character may be wearing a tank top and jeans (a typical ensemble for many women), if her outfit is drawn with excessive

emphasis on her breasts and cleavage the image may be considered more sexualized than a picture of Supergirl in a short skirt, depending on how the artist portrays her. Ultimately, while female characters experience less visibility after the relaunch and are portrayed with art that is slightly more sexualized than the pre-relaunch art, the costumes they wear are now more practical (i.e. more feasible for combat, mobility, and everyday activities, as opposed to outfits that would expose the character if she moves the wrong way).

While images of female characters are less prominent after the relaunch, these results do not hold true for racial visibility. In fact, Table 1 shows that post-reboot titles featured greater visibility of non-white characters (20.9 percent) than pre-reboot titles (12.2 percent), a difference that is both substantial and significant.

In the context of the issue, I examined whether the characters were depicted in ways that focus on the social problems for that race, in ways that celebrate cultural differences, or in ways that are indistinguishable from Whites. None of the pre-reboot or post-reboot titles focused on presenting social problems. Both groups presented celebrations of cultural differences

with the same amount of frequency (13.3 percent). An example of once such character is Kiran Singh (Solstice), an Indian teenager from Teen Titans, who appears to be proud of her roots (Figure 12). However, post-relaunch titles were more likely to portray melting-pot images (86.7 percent) than pre-relaunch titles (66.7 percent). In some instances characters embodied both categories, and in some titles there were multiple characters, with some fitting into one category and some fitting in another. The differences in depictions may be due, at least in part, to the greater percentage of non-white images in post-relaunch books, as their increased number of images gives them more opportunities to portray the characters as melting-pot.

Of the comic book titles sampled, four animated television programs possessed the same name and titular protagonists: *Batman: The Animated Series*, *Superman: the Animated Series*, *Justice League*, and *Teen Titans*. These series share likenesses with their print counterparts.

Batman: The Animated Series made its debut in the early 1990s, acting as the first program in the DC Animated Universe (which also includes *Superman: the Animated Series* and *Justice League*,

amongst others). When the series began in 1992, the only character to have taken up the mantle of “Batman” was the original, Bruce Wayne. However, in comic book continuity, Dick Grayson (the first Robin) reluctantly becomes Batman in 2009. As such, the pre-reboot Batman titles (*Batman*, *Batman and Robin*, and *Detective Comics*) feature Dick Grayson as Batman with Damian Wayne (Bruce’s son) as Robin. With the relaunch, Bruce Wayne returns to the role of Batman, with Damian as Robin (and Dick Grayson returns to his former title, Nightwing).

Within the Batman series, the pre-relaunch titles displayed greater visibility of character images containing at least one female image (35 percent, averaged amongst the three pre-relaunch Batman titles) than the post-relaunch titles (8.5 percent, averaged amongst the three post-relaunch Batman titles). The animated series falls somewhere in between. Because the number of images is difficult (if not impossible) to quantify in an animated television program, an estimate is all I am able to provide. One episode of *Batman* (“Read My Lips”) contains no female images at all. However, in the episode “Harlequinade,” the character Harley Quinn stars alongside Batman. She receives a decent amount of airtime beside the Caped Crusader; I would estimate that

roughly 40 percent of the images are of Harley (and that another 5 percent consist of unnamed background images of females, calculating to approximately 45 percent of the shows' images including females). Finally, in the episode "Bane," I would estimate that the character Candice makes up approximately 25 percent of the images. If we divide 45 by 3, then the female images in the episode "Harlequinade" make up 15 percent of the total female images amongst the three shows. When we do the same to the percentage of images of Candice (25), the images in "Bane" make up 8.3 percent of the female images amongst the three shows. Ultimately, that would leave approximately 23.3 of all of the images from the sampled episodes of *Batman: the Animated Series* as images of female characters, which falls almost directly between the percentage of images of female characters of both the pre-reboot and post-reboot comics.

Indeed, gender is characterized similarly in the animated series and in the pre-reboot Batman series. In the two episodes female characters appear in in *Batman: the Animated Series*, the two featured female characters are antagonists. Although Harley helps Batman and Robin stop the Joker, her loyalties lie with him, and she betrays the heroes to aid him until discovering that he

was planning to leave her for dead in his goal to decimate Gotham. Harley ultimately takes the Joker down, going as far as to pull the trigger when aiming a gun toward him; but when the gun sounds, a little flag pops out of the end and Harley frowns, and the Joker glares, and Harley shrugs, and the Joker laughs, and the episode concludes with her jumping into his arms and him swinging her around. Ultimately, Harley chooses the Joker; and though she's a complex character, more often than not she aligns herself with the "bad guys." The only other female character central to a storyline is Candice from the episode "Bane." Whereas Harley's characterization is far from simple, Candice's goal is straightforward: to take out Batman. It is unclear whether Candice truly cares for Bane or whether she is using him as a means to an end; regardless, while Bane battles Batman, Candice fights Robin. In all three *Batman* episodes, Harley and Candice are the only named female characters to appear, or to play a role in the plot, and in both cases they are antagonists.

The Batman comic books continue this pattern. In the pre-relaunch issue of *Batman and Robin*, one of the antagonists is a woman called Sister Crystal. She is the only named female character to appear in the

issue, and not much is said about her. Along with her cohorts, she attempts to take down the dynamic duo (and their assistant for the issue, Nightrunner, the French Batman). Similarly, in the pre-relaunch *Batman*, Batman finds himself shot by Gilda, Two-Face's former love. Though Batman rushes to rescue her when Two-Face aims his gun at her, she chooses to shoot Batman instead in an attempt to save the man she loves. Two other named female characters appear in that issue in subplots: Enigma (who is working with the Riddler) and Kitrina Falcone (former Catgirl). While Enigma acts as an antagonist, Kitrina appears to be an ally, and leaves a note for Batman telling him that she's decided to attend the school he signed her up for, but that she'll eventually be back. The only pre-relaunch *Batman* title in the sample that does not possess female antagonists is *Detective Comics*, in which we see Dr. Leslie Thompkins and former-Batgirl/current-Oracle, Barbara Gordon. While Leslie believes that the antagonist James Gordon (Jim Gordon's son and Barbara's brother) has changed, Barbara sets out to discover the truth behind the man (who she believed as a child murdered a girl their age); after testing a pill her father stole from James, she discovers that the pill isn't the nutritional supplement it's supposed to be. Instead, it would act as a suppressant of

the chemicals that promote empathy, essentially turning the children who are intended to take the medication into psychopaths like him. Ultimately, about half of the female characters who appear in the comic books are antagonists, while all of the named female characters who appear in the animated series are.

Very few non-white characters appear in any of the sampled Batman comic books, and those that appear are not named. With the exception of the episode “Bane,” this pattern is true of the animated series, as well. Bane, a Hispanic character, is portrayed in a way that celebrates his culture, in that he speaks with an accent and his mask resembles those of a Mexican Lucha Libre.

Several years after *Batman*'s premiere, another series in the same fictional universe was created: *Superman: the Animated Series*. In comparison to its comic book counterparts, the mythology of Superman remains relatively unchanged; he still has an alter ego, Clark Kent; still is an alien from the planet Krypton; and Lois Lane remains the love of his life. Unlike the Batman comics (in which all three series are comparable to the animated series), the comparability of the Superman comic books varies depending on if the issue is from

before or after the relaunch. For the pre-reboot comic books, only *Action Comics* contains the character Superman; despite the title “Superman,” the *Superman* comic book from before the reboot actually stars the character The Guardian. However, this differs for the post-relaunch titles in that Superman acts as the protagonist for both *Action Comics* and *Superman*, and thus both are comparable to the animated series.

In terms of female visibility, the pre-relaunch title *Action Comics* contained a reasonably high number of female images. Of the character images in the comic book, 50 percent contained at least one female image; post-relaunch, the average between the two is 34.7 percent (30.4 percent for *Action Comics* and 38.9 percent for *Superman*). Like with the percentage of female images for *Batman: the Animated Series*, the percentage of female images for *Superman: the Animated Series* is an estimate. In the episode “Action Figures,” reporter Lois Lane and a little girl named Sarita make up about 40 percent of the images. Both characters play large roles in the story. This is the same for the episode “Ghost in the Machine,” in which Lois appears various times throughout the episode, and Mercy Graves (Lex Luthor’s body guard) aids Superman in rescuing Lex.

Like “Action Figures,” in “Ghost in the Machine” Lois and Mercy appear in roughly 40 percent of the character images. Finally, in “Bizarro’s World,” Lois also appears often, volunteering herself as a hostage to buy time for Superman to arrive. She and police officer Maggie Sawyer make up approximately 25 percent of the character images of the episode. When calculated in the same way as the *Batman: the Animated Series* images, about 35 percent of the character images are of females, which aligns itself closer to the post-relaunch gender visibility.

The post-relaunch comic books are also closer to the animated series in terms of gender characterization. While in the pre-relaunch *Action Comics* several heroes (including Supergirl) come to Superman’s aid, in the post-relaunch titles, female characters are more often civilians. This is true of the animated series, in which Lois Lane and Sarita are civilians, and Mercy Graves (though she works for an antagonist) also lacks superpowers.

Likewise, the post-relaunch books are similar in racial characterization. The animated series presents characters as though from a melting-pot, in that characters of color are not depicted differently than

White characters (such as Sarita, her brother Bobby, and their father Dr. Felix). Although the images in the pre-relaunch *Action Comics* depict characters in a similar way, those of the post-relaunch title vary, portraying characters in a combination of way, with some as if from a melting-pot, and others with seeming to celebrate differences. However, the latter characters are depicted as such through the art, and are thus unnamed (with few even speaking any lines of dialog).

The *Justice League* animated series builds upon the established continuity of *Batman: the Animated Series* and *Superman: the Animated Series*. In fact, the majority of the first episode consists of Batman and Superman, with a brief glimpse of Wonder Woman and a short introduction in the last few minutes of the episode to the Martian Manhunter. Like both the pre-relaunch and post-relaunch comic books, *Justice League* ultimately has a cast of seven: Batman, Superman, the Flash, Green Lantern (John Stewart), Martian Manhunter, Hawkgirl, and Wonder Woman. Of this team, two of the seven members are female. The post-reboot comic bears a closer resemblance in this regard; of its seven members, the only woman is Wonder Woman. The rest of the team is made up of: Batman, Superman, the

Flash, Green Lantern (Hal Jordan), Cyborg, Aquaman, and Wonder Woman. However, in the pre-relaunch *Justice League*, four of the seven members are female. This is likely due to the way history has progressed in the comic books. Wonder Woman, Batman, and Superman have all served their time with the League; instead, so-called “Legacy Characters” take their place. A Legacy Character is just what the name implies: a character who carries on a legacy. Instead of Superman, this Justice League has Supergirl. Rather than Wonder Woman, her younger sister Donna Troy (also known as Troia) steps up to the plate. The League still has a Batman, but Bruce isn’t the one wearing the mantle: it’s Dick Grayson, his first protégé. Because of the development of continuity in the pre-relaunch comics (and thus the inclusion of Legacy Characters), the sampled episodes of the animated series bear little resemblance.

While a whopping 82.5 percent of pre-relaunch character images are of at least one female image, the post-relaunch character images only include 5.3 female images. This is a stark contrast. Meanwhile, the number of female images in the animated television programs comes to approximately 21.7 percent of all images. Part one of “Secret Origins” possessed very few female images

(with only a glimpse of Wonder Woman and various background characters), and is thus equated about 5 percent. Both the second and third parts of “Secret Origins” (the other two episodes sampled) showed females in about 30 percent of the images. Although Hawkgirl and Wonder Woman are central to the show, they share the spotlight with their five male teammates, and thus appeared to comprise about 30 percent of the images. Thus, about 21.7 percent of images in the three shows contained women. If anything, this is closer to the post-relaunch *Justice League* comic book, which makes sense because the episodes sampled were the first three created for the series and the issue of *Justice League* sampled was also the first, and thus both stories served as introductions to the characters. As opening episodes, they are more likely to focus on the characters who the creators believe fans will be more drawn to; in this case, the first episode of the animated series primarily deals with Superman and Batman, who both headlined shows in the same fictional universe and who therefore already have a fan-following. Similarly, the *Justice League* comic spotlights Batman, who was featured recently in the blockbuster Christopher Nolan trilogy, and who is currently very popular amongst both avid comic book readers and casual fans, thus being more

likely to draw readers than a character like Aquaman, Cyborg, or Wonder Woman, who have not been recent foci of media attention.

The pre-relaunch comic book does not contain any non-white characters (in a racial sense; it does, however, contain characters with blue skin and red skin). Post-relaunch, the comic book reintroduces Cyborg (Victor); but he only appears in two pages of the title, and is thus only seen as melting-pot. Similarly, what is seen of Green Lantern (John Stewart) in the sampled episodes of the animated series involves only melting-pot characterizations.

Teen Titans does not exist inside the same fictional universe as the other series sampled. It was produced by a different creator, with different animation, and different depictions for the characters. For example, Robin is portrayed differently in *Teen Titans* than he was in *Batman: the Animated Series*. In *Batman: the Animated Series*, Robin is very much a sidekick character in the episodes he appears in; although he assists Batman well, he is kidnapped and used as bait in “Bane” and likewise also bound in “Harlequinade.” In *Teen Titans* he is the leader of the team and on equal ground with his teammates; in this version he is characterized as the “cool

guy,” as evidenced by the materialistic Kitten’s desire to date him for status in the episode “Date With Destiny.” This animated series connects more to the pre-reboot *Teen Titans* comic book than the post-reboot, at least in terms of character inclusion. From the sampled issue, at least two characters are the same as those in the animated series: Beast Boy and Raven. In fact, if we were to go back to the first issue of the same pre-relaunch series we would see Starfire and Cyborg, as well, and a younger version of Robin (Tim Drake, the third to take the mantle). As with *Justice League*, most of the characters in the sampled issue are Legacy Characters: Wonder Girl, Superboy, Supergirl, Robin, Red Robin, Speedy, and Kid Flash (amongst others); this issue saw the return of the majority of their allies to take down one of their greatest threats. The post-relaunch comic book differs in this regard. Unlike the pre-relaunch title, in this one we do not see any of the characters from the animated series.

While gender visibility for this animated series is much higher than those of the others, it is lower than the visibility in both comic books. In the pre-relaunch *Teen Titans*, 73.5 percent of all character images included at least one female character; of the post-relaunch character images, 53.9 percent

included at least one female image. In the animated series, about half of the images (50 percent) were of females. Like all of the preceding programs, the percentages are approximations. Each of the episodes focused at some point on a female character. As such, in all three episodes (“Terra,” “Fear Itself,” and “Date with Destiny”), about 50 percent of the images were female images.

The sampled issue of the post-relaunch comic book possessed only a few non-white characters, and those characters were depicted as if a part of a melting-pot. Similarly, Cyborg, who appears in all three of the sampled episodes, is also depicted as if part of a melting-pot, with no cultural or apparent societal differences from his teammates. The pre-relaunch comic book, however, includes the character Solstice, an Indian teenager, whose culture seems to be celebrated.

Table 2 provides one instant glance at how closely related the presentation of female characters (in terms of visibility) is related in the animated series and the comic books on which they’re based. The Spearman’s rho for female visibility in the post-relaunch comics and the relevant animated series is a perfect 1.00. The rho for female visibility in

the pre-relaunch comics and the relevant animated series is a positive 0.40. One might think it odd that the correlation with the pre-relaunch series and the animated series is lower than that with the post-relaunch series. After all, weren't the animated series based upon pre-relaunch comics? Recall, though, that the pre-relaunch comics had evolved over time and that, for instance, the Justice League comic (the outlier among the late pre-relaunch comics) had many fewer female characters at the beginning of its history. The earlier pre-relaunch continuity (the *Justice League of America* series from the mid-1990s) presented a team almost identical to that of both the post-relaunch *Justice League* comics and the *Justice League* animated series: Batman, Superman, Wonder Woman, Aquaman, Flash, Green Lantern, and Martian Manhunter. The success of the mid-1990s *Justice League of America* comics likely had some impact on the development of the *Justice League* animated series, which was created mere years later and featured a similar team, with six of the seven characters as the comic book. Consequently, the early post-relaunch comics probably provide better indicators of the way things stood in the early pre-relaunch period than late-pre-relaunch comics. If this is so, then Table 2 provides

strong evidence that the visibility of female characters in the animated series is strongly correlated with their visibility in the comics on which they are based.

Table 2: Viability of Gender in Comic Books and Animated Superhero Programs

	Pre-Relaunch Gender Visibility (Female-Any Images)	Post-Relaunch Gender Visibility (Female-Any Images)	Approximate Percentage of Female Images in Animated Television Programs
Batman¹	35.0	8.5	23.3
Superman²	50.0	30.4	35.0
Justice League	82.5	5.3	21.7
Teen Titans	73.5 ³	53.9 ⁴	50.0

Notes:

¹Includes averages of Batman titles. For both pre-relaunch and post-relaunch titles, this includes *Batman*, *Batman and Robin*, and *Detective Comics*

²Includes averages of Superman titles. For pre-relaunch, only *Action Comics* is used, as the pre-relaunch *Superman* stars the Guardian. For post-relaunch, this average includes *Action Comics* and *Superman*.

³Spearman's rho relating female visibility in pre-relaunch comic books to animated television programs = .40

⁴Spearman's rho relating female visibility in post-relaunch comic books to animated television programs = 1.00

The Animated Series Compared

The four animated series sampled revealed interesting patterns. Of all of the programs, *Batman: the Animated Series* (created in the early 1990s) was the only show containing a sampled episode that omitted female characters (the episode "Read My Lips"); the sampled episodes of

Superman (late 1990s), *Justice League* (early 2000s), and *Teen Titans* (mid-2000s) all have at least one female image in the episode. Concerning centrality of females, only the same episode of *Batman* (“Read My Lips”) and an episode of *Justice League* (“Secret Origins #1”) lack such characters. Every episode of each series in the sample possessed at least one image of non-white characters; however, centrality of these characters was lacking, with non-white characters becoming more visible over time in the sample. Non-white characters are only central in one episode of *Batman* (“Bane”) and in one episode of *Superman* (“Action Figures”). Two of the three episodes of *Justice League* featured central characters of color (“Secret Origins #2” and “Secret Origins #3”), but all of the episodes of *Teen Titans* possess such characters. In this sample, non-white characters are more likely to play a prominent role in the story when they are part of the on-going cast in shows that focus on teams (like *Justice League* and *Teen Titans*). Of all of the sampled episodes, only one contained a portrayal that celebrated a culture (“Bane” from *Batman*); the rest of the characters from the sampled episodes were depicted as though part of a melting-pot.

The character-type female characters embody (e.g. hero, villain, civilian) seems to change over time. In *Batman*, female characters played the role of antagonist. While Harley attempts to aid the Joker in “Harlequinade,” Candice (from “Bane”) seduces Bane in a play for power. Although Harley assists Batman and ultimately stops the Joker, her allegiances still lie with the psychotic criminal; Candice operates differently – with her own goals in mind – but still acts as Batman’s enemy. Of the four shows, *Batman* was the first. Next was *Superman*, in which the female characters took on different roles. Lois is mostly a civilian, though she acts heroically in the face of danger. Sarita, the little girl who co-stars with her brother in “Action Figures” also plays the role of a civilian. Mercy, however, is a bit different. She appears in the episode “Ghost in the Machine” as Lex Luthor’s body guard. In this episode, she expresses her loyalty to Lex and works alongside Superman to save him, claiming that Lex was the first person to give her a chance and was the person who made her who she is. Although Lex is an antagonist, in this episode they were up against a greater threat to the world than him – Braniac – and Mercy acts as a neutral character, fighting alongside Superman to save her boss (and ultimately being left for dead by said boss).

In *Justice League*, a solid transition is made from civilian to hero. Both female characters who star in the series fall solidly into the superhero category, working alongside their male teammates to save planet Earth from destruction. Similarly, in *Teen Titans*, the main characters Starfire and Raven are easily distinguished as heroes; unlike *Justice League*, however, there are also more female characters to classify, and various different female characters are civilians, antagonists (like Kitten in “Date With Destiny”) and unclassifiable characters like Terra from “Terra.” Terra is a bit unique in that she is attempting to be a hero in the sampled episode, but not only does she inadvertently cause destruction at every turn, she also flees at the end of the episode, leaving her fate inconclusive (though viewers who watch outside of the sampled episodes find out that she ultimately joins the antagonist, Slade, who promises to train her to use her powers, and nearly kills her former Titan friends, but finally ends up sacrificing herself to stop Slade when she realizes her mistake). The episodes sampled from more recent times tend to possess more “heroic” females than those from farther back.

Further, in three of the four series studied, at least one episode possessed a story of a female character returning to a hurtful

boyfriend. The *Batman* episode “Harlequinade” concludes with Harley throwing herself happily into the Joker’s arms, despite his attempts only moments earlier to destroy Gotham with her still there. She aims her gun at him and he tells her that she wouldn’t dare; her finger presses on the trigger and out of the end comes a little joke-flag. They glare at each other. He smiles. She shrugs. And he spins her around, laughing. It’s meant to be amusing, though in reality Harley was so very close to finally leaving the man who constantly ridicules and abuses her (who moments earlier was quite content to let her die). The exchange between Mercy Graves and Lex Luthor in the *Superman* episode “Ghost in the Machine” is similar. Mercy does everything she can to save Lex, whom she clearly cares about deeply, but when the roles are reversed, Lex leaves her for dead unapologetically. Still, in the final scenes (after Superman has saved her), we see her opening the limousine door for Lex and stepping into the drivers’ seat. Superman watches her somberly from a distance. This drama is played less amusingly than that of Harley and the Joker in *Batman*, though it still shows a female character remaining devoted to a man who couldn’t care whether she lived or died. The last instance occurs in the *Teen Titans* episode “Date With

Destiny.” In this story, the antagonist Kitten blackmails Robin into taking her to prom after her boyfriend, Fang, dumps her. This differs from the previous examples in that Kitten is the one in control – literally, she has the control to destroy the city in her hand. She is also the character doing the manipulating. When Fang crashes the prom in a fit of jealousy, she is pleased, happily accepting the stolen jewelry he gifts her. Although he hurt her emotionally, she rekindles their relationship when given the opportunity. *Teen Titans* presents this paradigm much more innocently than its predecessors; still, it is troubling that between 1994 and 2004, the same type of story remains.

5

Discussion

Ultimately, the “New 52” manages to both fail and succeed in increasing diversity in their new titles. After the relaunch, I found that the titles sampled depicted less visibility of female images; however, while the art is more sexualized, the post-relaunch characters are more likely than their pre-

reboot counterparts to be depicted in functional costumes. It should be noted that only the first issue of each post-relaunch series was sampled; therefore, it is possible that this could change and that female characters (and more images of female characters) could become more prevalent as new issues are released.

However, while the post-relaunch comics fail to increase diversity of gender, they do possess greater diversity of race. Of the titles sampled, post-reboots series possess more images of non-white characters. With that said, the vast majority of these images appear to have come from a melting-pot, meaning that these characters are depicted as no different than their white counterparts. There are various reasons this could be so. The mostly likely is related to an underlying ethnocentrism. That is, because white-culture (American culture) is viewed as superior to others by much of the American population, non-white characters are written as though they are identical, with only their skin colors to differentiate them; the lack of cultural diversity is likely intended to be a compliment, to indicate that non-white characters can be 'just as good' as white characters. This depends on how the writer chooses to depict them. For example, Kiran Singh (Solstice) a member of the Teen

Titans who is from India and is depicted in a way that celebrates cultural differences, but at the same time still proves herself as a valuable member of the team. Alternately, books like *Legion of Super-heroes* are populated with alien characters who often, like Superman, resemble humans. They possess non-white characters, like Chemical Kid (also known as Hadru Jamik) from *Legion of Super-Heroes*, but, as he is from the homeworld Phlon, he does not seem to embody cultural diversity.

One animated series that that sought to exemplify differences in culture and that focused on social problems for people of color was the early 2000s animated series, *Static Shock*, which existed in the same fictional universe as *Batman*, *Superman*, and *Justice League*. Unlike the other series, *Static Shock* (based on the comic book of the same name) headlined a non-white character, the African-American Virgil Hawkins, who, along with other Dakota City youth was affected by the “Big Bang,” a chemical gas explosion, giving him electric-based powers. Dwayne McDuffie, a main writer for *Justice League* and the writer of the sampled *Teen Titans* episode “Fear Itself,” co-created Static (the character) as well as *Static Shock* (the animated series). One episode that focuses on social problems

is the episode “Sons of the Father,” in which Virgil finds out that his best friend Richie’s father harbors a deep prejudice against African-Americans. When Virgil overhears his racist attitudes, he decides to go home; and Richie, embarrassed and ashamed of his father, runs away from home. In order to find his son, Richie’s father is forced to work alongside Virgil’s father, and his bigotry is confronted. The episode culminates in both father’s together finding Richie (who had ultimately been kidnapped by a super-villain named Ebon) and teaming up with Static to save him. Richie’s father apologizes and acts far more respectfully toward Virgil at the end of the episode, indicating his attempts to change.

Indeed, this episode is laced with powerful language. The writer never shies away from stating outright that Richie’s father (Mr. Foley) is racist. When Mr. Hawkins, Virgil’s dad – social worker at the local youth center – speaks with Virgil the next morning about Mr. Foley’s words, Mr. Hawkins explains to him that that type of hate feeds in on itself, breeding a “cycle of intolerance” (Riba 2000); he also notes that Richie does not align himself with his father’s opinions, and has therefore broken that cycle. Further, Mr. Hawkins discusses this with Mr. Foley himself as they search for Richie. When Mr.

Hawkins reminds him that Richie wasn't the only boy who ran away from him the night before, Mr. Foley tells him his words weren't about him specifically, causing Mr. Hawkins to retort:

No, you were talking about his *kind*, that's all. Well, I know your kind, Foley. I've seen your kind all my life. The fine, upstanding bigot. His nose so close to the grindstone he can't see anything else. Meanwhile, the world changes and grows, and he's blind to it! Ignorant! And proud of that, too! And you know the worst part?.... You've got a terrific son. One of the best and brightest around. And because of the way you are, you'll never really know him. (Riba 2000).

The way this episode is depicted certainly spells it out for child viewers: kind Mr. Hawkins (portrayed as a loving father who respects his children and helps others) is the righteous hero against Mr. Foley's prejudice; and ultimately, his words (and Mr. Foley's love for his son) prompt the man to adjust his attitude. The social problems surrounding persons of color are indicated to the viewership, and challenged both in the show and outside of the show, as it teaches children to strike back against the cycles of intolerance that linger in society.

While *Static* promotes positive messages, others are more problematic; the propensity of women returning to and staying loyal to bad men is one such issue. This pattern occurs at least once in three out of the four animated series sampled: *Batman*, *Superman*, and *Teen Titans*. Each instance is meant to elicit a different response. Harley's return to the Joker in *Batman* is meant to be comedic, despite his willingness to leave her for dead. In *Superman*, Mercy's loyalty to Lex Luthor results in Superman (the protagonist and moral voice of the show) watching her with sadness. *Teen Titans* portrays the teenage antagonist Kitten's manipulative attempts to coerce the criminal ex-boyfriend (who dumped her before Prom) to return to her. While in Mercy's case the relationship seems platonic, the others follow the stereotype that girls are attracted to the "bad boy;" in Harley's instance, she was, in fact, corrupted by the "bad boy," leaving her profession as a clinical psychologist to join his crime crusade. Indeed, all three depict women returning to men who treat them poorly, implying that these women believe such treatment is acceptable. Further, all of these women are morally ambiguous, at best. Harley Quinn often assists the Joker in his schemes (under the claim that it's all just a big joke), despite the harm that comes to

civilians. Mercy Graves works for Lex Luthor, one of Superman's main antagonists, as a bodyguard and personal assistant, with seemingly no qualms about his questionable morals. Kitten, the daughter of a super-villain, who is trying to compel her criminal ex-boyfriend Fang to return to her, threatens to destroy the entire city if her demands are not fulfilled. In these programs, it is the antagonist females who are depicted in unhealthy relationships, indicating (in a way) that only the "bad" girls are willing to allow such treatment, while the "good" girls, like Starfire, are in happy, healthy relationships, platonic or otherwise.

Although the general presence and high occurrence of these situations is problematic, they do not appear to glamorize or condone the action. Even Harley's relationship with the Joker, which in many instances is depicted as humorous, portrays the pain endured when a girl stays with a fiendish boyfriend; this, however, would have been accomplished far more effectively if, at the conclusion of the episode, she had left him, rather than jumping into his arms (and thus continuing her spree of criminal activities). Mercy's example is the clearest in terms of messages; Superman, the hero, wants her to sever ties with Luthor, while Mercy insists that he cares about her. At the

end of the episode, after he leaves her for dead, Superman views her sorrowfully, indicating to the audience that staying loyal to a person who hurts you is frowned upon. In *Teen Titans*, the audience is meant to dislike Kitten, and is meant to see her desire to take back her old boyfriend as pathetic. The episode does not seem to promote the notion that girls should want to reclaim boys that hurt them; instead, they are supposed to relate to Starfire, who arrives to protect the boy (Robin) who she has feelings for. The issue in these episodes is not, necessarily, the message that they are trying to portray; it is more the messages they aren't trying to show; the ones that are unintentional, like the juxtaposition of villainesses in abusive relationships versus noble female characters being in healthy ones.

A tendency found in the sampled *Batman* comic books and television episodes is to portray women as antagonists. In all of the episodes that featured named female characters, these characters were antagonists: Harley Quinn from “Harlequinade” and Candice from “Bane.” Similarly, with the exception of the pre-relaunch issue of *Detective Comics*, each comic that featured a named female character featured female antagonists: Sister Crystal from pre-relaunch *Batman and*

Robin and Enigma and Gilda from pre-relaunch *Batman*. In fact, like Harley Quinn in the animated series, Gilda's antagonistic nature is prompted by her love for her former husband, Two-Face; she attacks Batman to save him, despite the fact that Two-Face was seconds away from killing her. Further, each of these female antagonists appears to be defined by the men in their lives. Harley is forever associated with the Joker, Candice wants Bane to kill Batman for her, Sister Crystal works alongside her lover, Enigma appears to be the Riddler's daughter, and Gilda is the former wife of Two-Face. With the exception, perhaps, of Sister Crystal, these characters assist their male partners, and are almost always secondary to them. Even the *Batman* episode named for Harley Quinn, "Harlequinade," is focused on the Joker, with Batman using Harley as a means to catch him. *Batman* as an animated series aired in the early 1990s, before cartoons like *Kim Possible* and *The Powerpuff Girls* headlined female characters as series protagonists, and may have taken its cues from the classic *Batman* comic femme fatales – like Catwoman, Poison Ivy, and Talia al Ghul – for female characters. As far as the comics are concerned, female protagonists do appear prominently in *Detective Comics* and neutral characters

appear and are alluded to in *Batman*; thus, that many of the female characters appearing are villains may be an attempt at visibility by trying not to limit antagonists to male characters. As *Batman* focuses on a male protagonist, there may be fewer opportunities to portray female characters (unlike a title like *Teen Titans*, in which several of the protagonists are female). *Detective Comics* does, however, occasionally spotlight other characters besides Batman, such as the issues in which Batwoman is featured; however, whether this connects to its greater likelihood in the sampled issue of portraying protagonist female characters is unknown.

Within the superhero genre, female heroes are often secondary to their male cohorts. Women appear as superheroes in the sampled episodes of only two of the four animated series. In *Justice League*, Wonder Woman is barely mentioned in the first episode, put on the backburner in favor of Superman and Batman; it isn't until she and Hawkgirl appear in the other two episodes that they receive comparable airtime to their five male teammates. However, in the sampled episodes of *Teen Titans*, the females are the main characters of the stories. Newcomer Terra (who, for that episode at least, can be considered a hero) is

the main focus of the episode “Terra.” Meanwhile, “Fear Itself” centers around Raven learning to accept her emotions and her fear, teaching the message that it is okay to feel fear, and that it needs to be felt in order to be fought and overcome. “Date with Destiny” stars Kitten as the antagonist, but also focuses on Starfire, who wishes to protect Robin on his forced date with Kitten. In the comic books, the roles of women are similar. In the pre-reboot team books (with the exception of the all-female *Birds of Prey*), super-heroines fight alongside their male counterparts, like they do in the *Justice League* animated series. For the most part, the only time they are main characters are in their own solo titles (or titles that focus on one character), like *Wonder Woman*, *Batgirl*, and *Supergirl*. Otherwise, they act as assistants to the male heroes, like they do in *Action Comics*, *Detective Comics*, and *Superman*. Post-relaunch, women act as aid less often, though that is likely because they appear less often. Further, because the post-reboot universe is younger (e.g. the previous history was compressed to take place in a shorter period of time, and many aspects were flat out omitted), many of the female characters who were prominent pre-relaunch either no longer exist or are restarted as new heroes. This is true of characters like Supergirl, who, in her New 52 title, is new

to Earth and has not yet begun her career as a superhero. Similarly, characters who previously led their own titles, like former Bat-family member Stephanie Brown from the pre-relaunch *Batgirl* series, no longer exist, which decreases the pool of superheroines to draw from for assistance. With the exception of the *Superboy* title, which focuses on a Superboy through the lens of a female researcher, the only titles that focus on female characters are the characters' own solo titles.

Very few of these female characters, hero or villain, could be considered “prime movers;” that is, less than a handful made a significant impact on their surroundings via their own autonomy, without external influences. The majority of the animated females were motivated by outside forces, usually the men in their lives: Harley Quinn by her love for the Joker, Mercy Graves by her loyalty to Lex Luthor, Terra out of fear of her powers, and Kitten by the desire to win back her boyfriend; even Hawkgirl and Wonder Woman were, initially, psychically summoned by the Martian Manhunter to aid the other heroes. Antagonist Candice could, potentially, be seen as a free agent, as her actions were motivated by her own self-interest, though she uses Bane as her means to achieve them. Indeed, Starfire and Raven

are mostly autonomous actors, though in “Date with Destiny,” Starfire’s actions are motivated by her jealousy of Kitten and her protectiveness of Robin, and in “Fear Itself” Raven’s suppressed emotions almost destroy the team because of her childhood training to control herself at all times. The character that most embodies the role of a “prime mover” is Lois Lane, who acts based on her own objectives and will not let anything or anyone deter her; this, however, often puts her in harm’s way, prompting her rescue by Superman. Regardless, as a news reporter, her work affects a large number of people, and she is motivated by her own curiosity, rather than external forces. In the comic books, Wonder Woman is always motivated by her own interests, saving people by choice. Similarly, both pre-relaunch Batgirl (Stephanie Brown) and post-relaunch Batgirl (Barbara Gordon) fit this mold, though the latter, at times, hesitates due to lingering Post Traumatic Stress Disorder after being shot and paralyzed years earlier. Pre-reboot Supergirl seems to be acting of her own accord in the issue sampled; post-relaunch, however, she had not, in the issue sampled, begun acting as a superhero, having only just landed on Earth. Further, in both issues of *Birds of Prey*, the female characters are driven by their own goals, rather than external forces. Thus, women seem more

likely to be “prime movers” when they are the leads of the text they appear in, rather than secondary characters.

In comic books, there appears to be a patriarchal collusion between the authors, artists, and readers that allows female characters to be portrayed as often oversexualized and underrepresented. While not all titles fall into this mindset, many do, and in order to do this there needs to be some form or unwritten agreement between the producers and consumers that such renderings are acceptable. Likely, this occurs because both the majority of writers and authors and the majority of buyers are male (Hudson 2011a); thus, it is considered normal, if not encouraged. The heterosexual male readers likely prefer to see female characters with model-like proportions dressed in form fitting, low-cut costumes, giving them no reason to complain; and, in order to make a profit, publishers likely wish to meet those demands. In titles that focus on male characters, the writers often likely want to keep the story centered on the lead, therefore making female characters backdrops. This is the way comic books have been for decades; if this tendency is not pointed out to the producers of comics, they have no reason to think there is a problem. It seems that even when the subjection of

female characters is pointed out, such criticisms are often ignored. If heard, these complaints may be infantilized under the assertion that comic books are just a form of entertainment and that female readers are overreacting. When such controversy emerges, these companies point to their few female-led books, saying that their existence fixes the problem, and that readers should be happy with what they receive. Further, many female readers likely don't want to admit their discomfort for fear of being ostracized by the male-dominated fan community. It is a vicious system, in that such depictions and attitudes alienate female readers; yet, without more female readers, this tendency will continue. As women make up approximately half of the world's population, one would think that if the goals of these companies are increasing sales, then encouraging females to read comic books would benefit all parties; however, this has not happened. Creating a more diverse fictional universe seems like a simple solution to these problems, but only time will tell if this will come to pass.

Regardless, this study focuses on visibility of gender and race, not characters. While it demonstrates that DC Comics lacks female characters and characters of color, it does not qualitatively examine the relationships

between characters. A more in-depth examination into how women and non-White characters are portrayed could examine the titles in full story arcs, rather than single issues to better understand the dynamics of the plot and whether the characters develop in any meaningful way. Further, a look into whether female characters compete for male attention may be beneficial, as the idea of girls in competition for male attention – embodied in the notion of the “Fake Geek Girl” – seems to be dominant in the comic book fan community, as well as society as a whole. Comic books, as a medium, have the potential for presenting stories with both positive messages and harmful ones. The characters they create are the inspiration for children’s role models; making these characters more diverse will teach children messages about egalitarianism. Further, these stereotyped images are harmful to the current readers and promote damaging messages about women and people of color. The way in which characters are presented matters to readers of all ages, and to viewers of comic book related media; as such, future research about how these characters are depicted could prompt publishers to finally make the change that seems so sorely needed.

References

Associated Press. 2012. "Marvel Comics Plans Wedding for Gay Hero Northstar." *CBSNews*.

Retrieved December 9, 2012.
(http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-31749_162-57439386-10391698/marvel-comics-plans-wedding-for-gay-hero-northstar/)

Brown, Tara Tiger. 2012. "Dear Fake Geek Girls: Please Go Away." *Forbes*.
Retrieved November 30, 2012.
(<http://www.forbes.com/sites/tarabrown/2012/03/26/dear-fake-geek-girls-please-go-away>).

Clark, Roger, Rachel Lennon and Leanna Morris. 1993. "Of Caldecotts and Kings: Gendered Images in Recent American Children's Books by Black and non-Black Illustrators." *Gender & Society* 5: 227-245.

Clark, Roger, Allyssa Coon and Julie Kessler. Forthcoming 2013. "Who Envisions the Distaff Side?: Female Visibility in Children's Picture Books over Time and by

Authors' Race, Ethnicity, Sexual Sympathies and Gender." *International Review of Modern Sociology*.

Hudson, Laura. 2011a. "Answering Dan Didio: The Problem With Having Only 1% Female Creators at DC Comics." *Comics Alliance*. Retrieved April 23, 2013. (<http://www.comicsalliance.com/2011/07/28/dc-dan-didio-female-creators>)

Hudson, Laura. 2011. "The Big Sexy Problem with Superheroines and Their 'Liberated Sexuality.'" *Comics Alliance*. Retrieved November 30, 2012. (<http://www.comicsalliance.com/2011/09/22/starfire-catwoman-sex-superheroine>)

Jennings, Sally A. 1975. "Effects of Sex Typing in Children's Stories on Preference and Recall." *Child Development* 46(1):220-223.

Johnston, Rich. 2012. "'Hey! Quasi-Pretty-NOT-Hot-Girl, You Are More Pathetic Than The REAL Nerds'- Tony Harris." *Bleeding Cool*. Retrieved November 30, 2012. (<http://www.bleedingcool.com/2012/11/13/hey-quasi-pretty-not-hot-girl-you-are-more-pathetic-than-the-real-nerds-tony-harris>)

Kirsh, Steven J. and Paul V. Olczak. 2002. "The Effects of Extremely Violent Comic Books on Social Information Processing." *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 17(11):1160-1178.

Liebert, Robert M. 1986. "Effects of Television on Children and Adolescents." *Journal of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics* 7(1):43-48.

MacBeth, Tannis M., ed. 1996. *Tuning in to Young Viewers: Social Science Perspectives on Television*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Moore, Alan, Brian Bolland, and Richard Starkings. 1988. *Batman: The Killing Joke*. New York: DC Comics.

Nyberg, Amy K. 1995. "Comic Books and Women Readers: Trespassers in Masculine Territory?" Pp. 205-26 in *Gender in Popular Culture: Images of Men and Women in Literature, Visual Media, and Material Culture*, edited by Peter C. Rollins and Susan W. Rollins. Cleveland: Ridgmont Press.

Pantozzi, Jill. 2012. "DC Comics Nielsen Survey Results Are In, They Are Interesting." *The Mary Sue*. Retrieved

December 9, 2012.
(<http://www.themarysue.com/dc-nielsen-survey-results/>)

Philips, Dan. 2009. "Batwoman Takes Over Detective Comics." *IGN*. Retrieved December 9, 2012. (<http://www.ign.com/articles/2009/06/11/batwoman-takes-over-detective-comics>)

Riba, Dan, director. 2000. "Sons of the Father," *Static Shock*. Warner Bros. Animation. 12 March 2013.

Singer, Marc. 2002. "'Black Skins' and White Masks: Comic Books and the Secret of Race." *African American Review* 36(1):107-19.

Truitt, Brian. 2011. "DC Comics Ready for a Risky Yet Relevant Publishing Change." *USA Today*. Retrieved December 9, 2012. (http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/life/comics/2011-06-01-dc-comics-why-the-change_n.htm)

Vaughan, Brian K., and Fiona Staples. 2012. *Saga*. Berkeley, CA: Image Comics. Issue #5, pg. 23.

Volpe, Giancarlo (Giancarlo_Volpe). 8 December 2012, 6:27 p.m. "@Darth_Joe27

Good point – but I understand Kyle Rayner is half Mexican. Would people freak out if we brought up that side of his background?”
Via Twitter. [https://twitter.com/Giancarlo_Volpe/status/277555142927187968]

Wheeler, Andrew. 2011. “No More Mutants: 52 Problems.” *Bleeding Cool*. Retrieved November 29, 2012.
(<http://www.bleedingcool.com/2011/09/22/no-more-mutants-52-problems-by-andrew-wheeler>).

2

Appendix A: List of sampled titles

Pre-Relaunch:

Justice League of America #60

Action Comics #904

Wonder Woman #614

Teen Titans #100

Batman and Robin #26

Supergirl #67

Batgirl #24

Batman #712

Birds of Prey #15

Detective Comics #879

Green Arrow #15

Superman #692

Superboy #11

Legion of Super-heroes #16

Green Lantern Corps #63

Post-Relaunch:

Justice League #1

Action Comics #1

Wonder Woman #1

Teen Titans #1

Batman and Robin #1

Supergirl #1

Batgirl #1

Batman #1

Birds of Prey #1

Detective Comics #1

Green Arrow #1

Superman #1

Superboy #1

Legion of Super-heroes #1

Green Lantern Corps #1

3

Appendix B: Code sheet for comic books

Pre Reboot or Post Reboot:

Title:

Author(s):

Artist(s):

Creator (if listed):

Does this title have a female character?

Does this title have a central female character?

Do the female characters pass the Bechdel test?

Percentage of images of females:

If female characters are present:

Is her uniform: Modest/practical,
Skimpy/implausible, or Neither modest
nor skimpy

Do other characters make comments on
her beauty?

Is she a: superhero villain
civilian

Is she involved in a battle?

If she is in a battle, does she win the fight with assistance?

If yes, is the assistance male or female?

If the assistance is male, was the character “saved” in a Damsel-in-distress fashion, or was it simply assistance?

Does the series feature a team?

If the series features a team, what proportion of the central characters are female?

Does this series depict non-white characters?

Are the non-white characters central:

Percentage of images of non-white characters:

Are these depictions socially conscious, culturally conscious, melting pot, or other?

Does this series depict homosexual characters?

Does this series depict central homosexual characters?

Do any of those categories overlap? (i.e. is there a black lesbian, or an Asian female?).

If yes, which categories overlap?

What is the apparent socioeconomic class of the main character? (if applicable)

What are the apparent socioeconomic classes or supporting characters? (if applicable)

Central
Character
Central Character

(Opposite
Gender)

Is the character:

Dependent

Independent

Incapable (i.e. Damsel in Distress)

Capable

Intelligent

Strategic

Brave

Reckless

Other notes:

4

Appendix C: List of sampled television episodes

Batman: The Animated Series

“Read My Lips”

“Harlequinade”

“Bane”

Superman: The Animated Series

“Action Figures”

“Ghost in the Machine”

“Bizarro’s World”

Justice League

“Secret Origins #1”

“Secret Origins #2”

“Secret Origins #3”

Teen Titans

“Terra”

“Fear Itself”

“Date With Destiny”

Appendix D: Code sheet for television episodes

Title:

Episode:

Writer:

Date:

Creator (if listed):

Does this title have a female character?

Does this title have a central female character?

Do the female characters pass the Bechdel test?

If female characters are present:

Is her uniform: Modest/practical,
Skimpy/implausible, or Neither modest
nor skimpy

Do other characters make comments on her beauty?

Is she a: superhero villain
civilian

Is she involved in a battle?

If she is in a battle, does she win the fight with assistance?

If yes, is the assistance male or female?

If the assistance is male, was the character “saved” in a Damsel-in-distress fashion, or was it simply assistance?

Does the series feature a team?

If the series features a team, what proportion of the central characters are female?

Does this series depict non-white characters?

Are the non-white characters central:

Are these depictions socially conscious, culturally conscious, melting pot, or other?

Does this series depict homosexual characters?

Does this series depict central homosexual characters?

Do any of those categories overlap? (i.e. is there a black lesbian, or an Asian female?).

If yes, which categories overlap?-

What is the apparent socioeconomic class of the main character? (if applicable)

What are the apparent socioeconomic classes of supporting characters? (if applicable)

Central
Character
Central Character

(Opposite
Gender)

Is the character:

Dependent

Independent

Incapable (i.e. Damsel in Distress)

Capable

Intelligent

Strategic

Brave

Reckless

1. Other notes: