

Depictions of Escapism and Gender Discrimination in Comic Book Industry

By

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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my own original work while completing my degree at BRAC University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I have acknowledged all main sources of help.

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Approval

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Ethics Statement

My major or concentration in the Master of Arts in English program at BRAC University is Literature. During this academic study, I have learned to produce original research work that has not been published before. I have consulted with my supervisor at all times to make sure none of the work in this dissertation has any plagiarism.

Abstract

While television is one of the major sources of entertainment, a massive number of people also entertain themselves by reading comic books. Comic book culture is rapidly becoming mainstream as it includes comics, movies, TV shows, games, trading cards, toys and many more. On one hand, we have the people who are working in the comic book industry and trying to come up with adventurous yet relatable stories so that it can attract the mass. On the other hand, we have the people who spend a lot of money buying comic books just to have the pleasure of temporary feeling that life is not always monotonous and mundane, it is also full of exceptions and miracles which ought to remove all negativities and violence of the world. This directly addresses consumerism. Larger than life characters and magnetic storylines take them to the journey of a fantasy world, where they forget the reality and get surrounded by the imaginative world.

In my dissertation I have stated that with the growing accessibility and popularity of comic books, readers love to read it to see and feel the extravagant lives of the imagined superheroes, escape their fear and frustrations of failure but they often discover depictions of gender discrimination and hypersexualization in the comic books. This dissertation aims to target some of the most significant and unavoidable factors of comic books. The first factor is escapism being the ultimate reason for readers to enjoy comic books. The second unavoidable factor is comic books are financially successful, despite producing childish contents which do not make any sense. The third important factor to focus on is the pattern comic book creators use to touch the hearts of the readers. For example, Marvel comics often use the pattern modeled after warriors and soldiers to give the

readers the glimpse of safety and the power of standing up against injustice. Another important factor is the political and commercial propaganda behind the comic books. From World War to racial profiling, different comic books have displayed different agendas. To support its claim, it will analyse postmodern writing techniques used in comic books to show the comic books focusing on these techniques to create their contents. It will also look into the portrayal of the female characters in the comic books with the factors such as, hypersexualization, gender discrimination, scopophilia to point out a very visible yet less talked about topic which the patriarchal domination in the comic book industry.

Dedication

To my mother, Rokhsana Kabir

Acknowledgement

I am using this opportunity to express my gratitude to everyone who supported me throughout this dissertation.

First of all, I am grateful to Allah and my family for bringing me into this world. Thanks to my parents for their unconditional support, blessings and love. I would like to thank my father who worked in the entertainment industry for more than 15 years. Seeing him work encouraged me a lot. I learned a lot from him. I would also like to thank my husband for his immense support.

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgement	7
Table of Contents	8
Chapter 1: Introduction	9
Chapter 2: Research Methodology	16
Chapter 3: Literature Review	19
Chapter 4: The Major Comic Book Publishers	27
Chapter 5: Reader's approach to Comic Book Culture	31
Chapter 6: Readers leaning towards graphic texts	33
Chapter 7: Business of Adaptation	36
Chapter 8: Conclusion	39
Works Cited	47

Chapter 1: Introduction

What we experience in our lives are often relatable to the concept of comics because the creators of comic books make it so human and natural that the readers connect easily with the characters and their stories as much as possible. Comic books are not only made for children, but also attract adult fans as well. As the legendary mastermind of Marvel, Stanley Martin Lieber, famously known as Stan Lee said, “Comic books to me are fairy tales for grown-ups.” A comic book is a bound collection of pages filled with meaningful images and dialogues, chronologically ordered, basically to tell a story or multiple stories. We have different kinds of superheroes to look up to and to take inspiration from, who transcend many racial and gender stereotypes. From young fans to old fans alike, comic book culture is equally favourite to people and it is growing into a giant industry because the mainstream media is also joining the force. Our culture and society get to impact the storyline of comics as well.

Comic book culture is an inevitable part of popular culture. Although comic book culture was not recognized until Marvel and DC Comics around the 1950s, Comic books began their journey in the early 1900s. Comic book community was small at the beginning and mostly consisted of a few topics. But, slowly it started to gain recognition when companies like Marvel and DC introduced some of the most iconic superheroes who supposedly would save the world from all the chaos and aggression. The comic book culture has two biggest universes: Marvel and DC comics. There were over twenty thousand comic book characters, which would attract young and old audiences. In the early 1960s, the comic book industry was flooded with popularity. Films and TV shows were made with comic book characters. The first Batman show was in 1966 and the first Spiderman show was in 1967. Both of these characters helped to build

the comic book culture as they attracted a huge number of audiences. This popular culture is not only a form of entertainment, but also a movement which touches almost everything existing in this world. However, it has negative connotations as well. According to Haselstein, Ostendorf and Schneck “the ostentatious playfulness of entertainment culture and the dazzling display of much contemporary kitsch offered resources of enjoyment not only for the “masses”, but also for a sophisticated urban intelligentsia” (Haselstein, Ostendorf and Schneck 331). It is an unavoidable factor that despite having childish contents, comic books are financially successful. I think the reason why these comic books are so financially successful is because the mass of people want to see and enjoy fantasies and supernatural things which in reality have no meaning or authenticity but exist in people’s minds and desire.

Comic book culture is an ideal example of postmodernism as it depicts metaphors, intertextuality, symbolism, and references to real events or personalities. While prioritizing on creating hyper reality, it is also reflected by hypersexualization, which is demeaning to women. To be precise, this dissertation will focus on two of the biggest comic book companies, Marvel Comics and DC comics.

While talking about comic book culture, we came across another important thing to discuss. That is postmodernism. Postmodernism was a response to many ways of modernism; which is why they can be considered to be two aspects of the same movement, although there are major differences between them. The main difference between modernism and postmodernism is the way of looking at society and their progress. Basically, both modernism and postmodernism are reactions to the enlightenment period. Enlightenment is the stage of time in European history during the 17th century when science and logical reasons (supposedly) dominated over faith and traditions as the guidance of societal progress. The enlightenment period is often considered to

be the beginning of the modern period of humanity. Soon after enlightenment came modernism; the purpose of which was to examine the obstacles still holding humanity back. For instance, in the visual arts of modernism often rejects realism and depicts deep perceptual truths without being aware of the observed reality¹. Later on came the era of postmodernism, which triumphs of digitalization and technological advancements. Television and computers became dominant in society. Art and literary works began to be copied and preserved by means of digital media. Individuals used to believe that art and literary works carried specific meanings; whereas postmodernists believed in making their own interpretations. Interactive media and the internet led to distribution of knowledge. Architectural forms that were popular during modernism were replaced by a combination of different architectural styles, music that was popular in the modern era became less popular in the postmodern era. Postmodernism was basically influenced by disenchantment brought on by WWII. Postmodernism refers to the state that lacks a central hierarchy and that is complex and ambiguous. Development in society, economy and culture were heavily impacted by postmodernism. Postmodernists, such as, Martin Heidegger, Jacques Derrida and Jean-François Lyotard attacked and criticised modernists beliefs in rationality, objectivity and universalism in favor of relativism; which defines the view that there is no objective truth.

In an interview with *The Guardian*, comic guru Alan Moore said, "It looks to me very much like a significant section of the public, having given up on attempting to understand the reality they are actually living in, have instead reasoned that they might at least be able to comprehend the sprawling, meaningless, but at-least-still-finite 'universes' presented by DC or

¹ Examples of modern arts: Guernica, Picasso (1937), Fin du travail (The End of the Working Day) - Jules Breton, WheatField with Crows (1890)- Vincent van Gogh.

Marvel Comics.” (“Superheroes”). So, comic stories are often based on the human experiences and there is a correlation between fantasy and reality in comic book stories. In comic books, we get to see powerful and attractive superheroes, who are mostly human. The superheroes become the savior of the nation who pull people out of their misery. If we look at the timeline of some of the comic books, we will clearly see the superheroes were created to fight against the great depression of a nation. Captain America was created to depict a character who fights against Hitler and his Nazi army. The Captain America comics were created when WWII was happening. Not only mere entertainment with childish contents: comics do have political and commercial agendas.

This paper will analyze the history of the Marvel comic universe and DC Comics and how these two companies became two of the world’s biggest entertainment companies displaying comic books as commodities. A brief discussion of the history of how these two companies were created is necessary to have an overall study. So, this dissertation will look at Marvel and DC’s history through segments such as, the formation, difficult times, overcoming the gaps and becoming millionaires. My dissertation will then depict different techniques of postmodernism such as, escapism, magic realism, Irony, playfulness, black humor, intertextuality that are being used in comic books to understand the psychology of the creators towards the story and character creation. The first point of analysis is escapism as the driving force of American comic book creators to create comic book stories which are mostly white male dominated. In this culture, we have the people who spend a lot of money buying comic books and tickets, CDs DVDs to watch the superhero movies, to get the value of pleasure of the temporary and magical world full of adventures, which can be missing in the real world. Escapism is defined as the intentional detachment from the real world. Reality is often very difficult. People facing these difficult

realities often choose to avoid reality and go into a place where difficulties are nowhere near them. Escapism is about a momentary reprieve from real circumstances. The idea of using this essence (escapism) is a smart move made by the comic book content creators. But, it is unfair to use it to glorify only some specific communities rather than making it universal. Marvel, DC, Dark Horse Comics, Image Comics often make the mundane move of making white male superheroes as their central characters and sexually objectifying women. Escapism in essence is beneficial, but anything extreme can become dangerous. When escapism appears too many times it becomes avoidance. But, when does escapism become avoidance? Escapism is a very complicated thing. Imagine degrees of escapism on a scale. In the past, there existed two steps of escapism; which are: reality and fantasy. These two steps had a prominent line between them. But, technology in our lives has reshaped the steps of escapism. Now, it has become fantasy and avoidance. This will be discussed more in the later part of the dissertation.

The second point of analysis is to look at why comic books are financially successful, despite producing childish content which does not make any sense. Comic books often have major drawbacks which, as a result, they lose their credibility as quality work. Continuity is one the things comic book creators often do when it comes to making progress in the character arc, it defines respect to the character and keeps the background story of the characters, unchanged. Continuity is something which requires special attention. Content creators can neither be too respectful nor be too much of a slave too. When a comic book is too much dependent on continuity, it becomes very heavy and descriptive and to keep up, readers need to know a lot of backstories too. On the other hand, lack of continuity also makes a story vague and uninterested. Exposition is another mistake that makes comic books not entertaining readers. It is about having tons of explanations to project a story. Exposition is basically about telling a story, instead of

showing; which often disrespects the purpose of visual comic books. The idea of a well thought out comic book is to represent the entirety of the vast majority of the story visually.

Unfortunately, the vast majority of the comic books make these major mistakes and thus they do not serve quality full comic books. Having said that, the comic books are always making tons of money because it is visually attractive to the audience and the readers can get what they could not enjoy before, the pleasure of visuals. Comic books are specifically targeting the ultimate inspirational stories of people awarded with great power, taking matters into their own hands, fighting over evil and dealing with power and responsibilities. Majority of the audience, often tired with the negativity of the world, desperately seek hope in these motivational stories. Which is why instead of noticing the lack of elements that make comic books quality full, they become satisfied with the silver lining. This silver lining is often followed by the pattern of superheroes as the savior of humanity; which serves hope to the audience that just like the superheroes of comic books, we might also have our saviors who will protect the world. This glorified pattern is often used for the promotion of the comic book industry and satisfying the interests of the mass consumer groups.

Another important point in this dissertation to analyse is Marvel and DC's business of turning comic book stories into film adaptations. But, what is an adaptation? It means to take a written text and make it a visual demonstration, mainly movies. It is about taking the concept or idea and without changing much, making a movie. "In the twenty-first century, an adaptation may originate from any sector of the creative industries (conceived broadly) and migrate to any other sector or sectors, frequently simultaneously." (Murray 124) Adaptation is about transferring an already existing work such as, a book, novel or play, in this case, comics and made into a film. Adaptation films take the essence of the original book, novel or text. The story in an adapted

comic book movie is the very same and the other things such as, the characters, the costumes, timeline, even the title remain untouched from the book or novel. For example, the Marvel universe has made their movies based on their comic books. Captain America, Ironman, Thor, Hulk, Guardians of the Galaxy are the adapted versions of their comic books but with slight modifications. Even most of the scenes and dialogues in the movies are exactly the same with the comic book scenes.

This dissertation will then move onto another important aspect of comic book culture, which is the portrayal of women in comic books. Objectification theory, Freudian analysis of sexuality and sublimation, scopophilia and fetishism theories will be used to depict how the female body is presented mostly as a product for the male readers. Objectifying women means to view and treat women as objects or products that can be used. Women in comic book culture have been displayed in a demeaning way. They are mostly not given the central platform, they have been mocked and joked with tons of passive aggressive and sexual contexts. Rather than giving accurate representation, comic book creators depict female characters as a desirable and achievable deal. This indicates the social and political struggle of women, not being able to take control of their own representation in the media, rather they have men to decide how the world will see and think of them. The representation mostly leads to the obsessed and fetishized views that men have over women. This aspect will be discussed in detail in the later part of this dissertation.

Chapter 2: Research Methodology

This chapter provides an outline of the research method or approach used to complete this dissertation. The research methodology is used to approach and answer the research questions set for the dissertation. This section also briefly talks about the research rationale and limitations.

There are two types of methods used to analyse data- qualitative and quantitative methods.

Quantitative methods define systemic and numeric investigation by collecting measurable data.

This method is mostly used to find patterns, make predictions and indicate general results which deal with a large number of people.

Qualitative methods define the type of method which collects and works with non-numerical data and investigates meanings, interpretations and attributes. Qualitative researchers need to be observant and focused on the non-statistical data collected from reliable resources.

This dissertation uses a qualitative archival method which involves collecting and investing data that are already present as hardcopies or digital copies. These data is usually collected from archival records. This method is used to answer the research questions mentioned below:

- a. Why do people read comics or watch fantasy films?
- b. How is class/race/gender/ideology connected with comic readership?
- c. Do comics always show positive values? What about objectifying women?

To answer the questions, I have collected data and information from various articles, narratives and theoretical texts. I have also taken data from different discussion interviews that are present on the internet. The theories to support my dissertation and answer the research questions are briefly discussed below:

Postmodernism: Postmodernism can be understood largely as a reaction to modernism's certainty of science and reality. It rejects any specific value and absolute meaning of anything in the world; rather focuses on relativism (which denies any claim of having an absolute truth) and pluralism. Some postmodern literary works are: Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse five* (1969), Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* (1974) and Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire* (1962)

Feminism: Feminism movement advocates the idea of social, political and economic equality of all sexes. The feminist ideologies are concerned with issues of gender inequality, difference and misrepresentation. It fights for the justice of women and aims to end sexism in the world. Some of the renowned feminist works are: *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood (1985), *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott (1868), *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker (1982) and *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison (1970).

Fetishism: Fetishism is defined by the replacement of desire and fantasy onto objects or body parts, in order to ease out a subject's conflicts with unconscious sexual anxiety. According to Sigmund Freud, this fetishism is a fixation and distortion that is restricted to men alone.

Rationale for Research:

With this research, I want to specifically point out that despite comic book culture being widely accepted and loved for its glorious works, it has some of the major drawbacks; which are- the lack of quality textual works, racial equality and respect and appropriate gender representation.

Limitations:

One of the limitations I have faced is that this research is based on qualitative data which are limited and not easy to access. The ideas and evidence can be misinterpreted and generalized. I had to use extra attention to make sure that the data I use are not misinterpreted and are not subjected to any personal biases as this dissertation is highly subjected to the interpretation of the findings.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

Stephen E. Tabachnick (2007) addresses a very prominent question about comic book culture in “A Comic-Book World”. He asks whether this culture is an instant trend which will soon pass or will it have a deeper impact on our culture. In this article, he talks about many graphic novels and comic book stories that have been made into movies. However, he says that comic book stories often lack logic and reality because of their lack of serious content. He states, “In a child’s imagination, the line between the physically possible and the physically impossible is blurred, as it is in comics, where a man can leap tall buildings in a single bound and creatures may metamorphose into other creatures at will” (Tabachnick 27)

Comic books are now an inseparable part of consumer culture. Like any other commodities, these are bought and sold in the mass market. According to Jennifer Wicke, “Consumers consume in modern society are commodities – that’s why ‘commodity culture’ is often a substitute phrase for mass culture” (2006). Wicke in her article *Joyce and Consumer Culture*, talks about commodity culture which represents a vast range of products starting from ordinary things of everyday use to products related to entertainment .

Matthew Facciani, Peter Warren and Jennifer Vendemia in their article “A Content-Analysis of Race, Gender, and Class in American Comic Books” claim that in the modern age American comic books, race, gender and class often play vital roles in influencing the content and the characters. While doing their content analysis, they observed that most of the characters of the American comic books are white and the few characters who are non-white, usually have either a low sociopolitical backgrounds or have understated character profiles. According to them, “White characters were represented by 86% of all comic book characters and were more likely to be represented than all other races combined” (Facciani, Warren and

Vendemia 221). The comic books are simplified and modified giving priorities to white race. It is most likely because the writers themselves are white and they want their race to be presented with the highest honour and pride. This article mainly focuses on the sexism and racism in American comic books.

Superheroes often represent many values and ideologies of a culture, such as heroic activities, emotions, and human nature. But, very prominently, they are famous for their physicality. Unfortunately, comic books are often celebrated for these overrated factors which ought to be very important to the comic book creators to engage the readers. Richard Landon addresses this topic in his article, “A Half-Naked Muscleman in Trunks: Charles Atlas, Superheroes, and Comic Book Masculinity”. According to him, “From insecure child to confident hero, from vulnerable boy to physically imposing man, from unappealing wimp to desirable stud- is one that anthropologist Alan Klien has described, appropriately enough, as comic book masculinity” (Landon 200)

Escapism is the process by which one tries to avoid uncomfortable feelings, general sadness or depression. Humans very easily tend to avoid unpleasant events and seek hope and positive energy. When we are feeling down, sad or any other unpleasant emotions, our initial reaction is to seek a result in which the feeling goes away. In our world today, this is very easy to do. Usually, this emotional result is caused by dopamine, which is the feel good chemical of the brain. And this dopamine is usually from TV, alcohol, graphic novels, comic books and basically anything which makes the sadness disappear even for some time. Comic books are often very much covered with escapist contents. Lee Behlman in his article “The Escapist: Fantasy, Folklore, and the Pleasures of the Comic Book in Recent Jewish American Holocaust Fiction” talks explicitly about escapism in comic book stories. He states that “Escapism is a prominent

characteristic of American popular art forms, and this quality, when it is found in Hollywood entertainment, episodic television, or mass-market fiction, is often dismissed by critics as essentially shallow or trivial.” (Behlman 62). Escapism is one of the most vital reasons why readers love comic books so much.

In his article, “American Heroes” J. M. Tyree talks about the financial successes of the American comic books. “The frenzy of comic book movies unleashed by Hollywood in 2008, then, was nothing new, yet the box office receipts for these films were staggering. IronMan brought in 100 million during its opening weekend and was not the biggest movie of the summer. That honor went to The Dark Knight, which broke the record previously held by SpiderMan 3.” (Tyree 28). He also states how the superheroes are depicted in the most heroic ways. This shows that the comic books follow a pattern, which is modeled after heroes and warriors. He discusses the similarities of the three super heroes: IronMan, Hulk and Spiderman stating that they have a similar origin story and character graph but different supporting characters and plotlines.

Kirsten Clemens wrote a significant article targeting young female readers of comic book culture, named “Graphic Novels and the Girl Market”. She talks about the involvement of the teenager females in the comic books and the position of the female characters in most of the comic books. She writes, “Publishers such as Marvel and DC have held to the “conventional wisdom in comics...that female characters can’t succeed in their own books” (Cadenhead 42). These publishers have “resigned themselves to the fact that their largely male audience largely wants to read about large males” (Cadenhead 42)”

Laura Mulvey a British feminist theorist, is well known for her essay on *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*. In the essay, Mulvey explains specifically the “male gaze” which is the

process of objectifying women on screen as sexual objects by male viewers. Extended from screen to reality, male gazes as a patriarchal practice is now a part of contemporary consumer culture and its direct influence is quite evident in the comic books. In her essay, Mulvey questions gender inequality and asks why the issue still exists after so many years. Mulvey takes her stand against the patriarchal ideologies. Mulvey stresses on scopophilia which manifests, “men do the looking, and women are to be looked at.”

We cannot separate Marvel comic books from the Marvel films. The comic book world and the movies are interrelated with each other. In many cases, the movies have played a vital role in a character’s success. Starting with *Iron Man*, the franchise Marvel Cinematic Universe is formed mainly of films independently made by Marvel Studios. Most of the film adaptations are perfectly similar to the comic books. Even the take on gender representation is also significantly similar in both the comic books and the films. Jocelyn Nichole Murphy (2015) talks about the films and their representation of both genders. He says that “While movie screens have always been overtly dominated by white males, there is a possible cultural explanation for the surge in popularity of hyper-masculine superhero and action films in the last decade”. (Murphy 11) *The Yellow Kid in McFadden’s Flats, published in 1897* is considered to be the first comic book in the world. Since then male superheroes are seen having a victorious and glorious time while female superheroes were rather facing a difficult time.

Ana Calvete, in her article, “I object to your position: hyperreal decontextualizing of objects” theorizes about hyperrealism being the offspring of technological advances and mass consumption. She gives her own interpretation of hyperrealism in this article. She claims that “in a postmodern era, hyperreality produces a decontextualization of cultural objects”. She analyzes

the impact of decontextualization on the objects and their interpretations. She divided her essay into four sections, which are surrounded by the study of hyperrealism.

Simone Murray, Associate Professor at Monash University, wrote an article called, “The Business of Adaptation: Reading the Market.”, where she talks about elements of the adaptation industry, geographies and scopes of adaptation and the possible socio economic approaches to adaptation. “In the twenty-first century, an adaptation may originate from any sector of the creative industries (conceived broadly) and migrate to any other sector or sectors, frequently simultaneously.” Murray states that adaptation may happen when one creative text or content is reformed into any other sector of the creative industries. This includes written texts to films or any other visual media. She also explains the adaptation theories in the business of film and its commercial success.

Fahad Alzahrani wrote a paper called “The portrayal of Women and Gender Roles in Films” which is about the particular themes used in movies which depict gender representation. This paper also talks about movies controlling how people view themselves in terms of their gender. “Gender representation in media influences how people perceive gender issues since some specific gender roles uplift and strengthen the images of men. These movies clearly show the gender power structure where men are depicted as the stronger sex.” The direct influence of white male supremacy controls the portrayal of women everywhere, including comic books. This is why films adapted by Marvel also project that men are more powerful than women and women always are the side-kicks or the helping hands.

Carolyn Cocca in “Negotiating the Third Wave of Feminism in "Wonder Woman"” discusses the third wave feminism movement and its influence on the DC comic book character Wonder Woman. Third wave feminism basically questions and redefines the ideas of gender,

objectification, sexism, femininity and masculinity. In this article, she explores the politics of gender present in Wonder Woman by analyzing the different groups, agendas of the morals of the third wave, which are- “equality, diversity, complexity, inclusivity, individualism and structural critique-both enabling the reinscription of traditional articulations of gender as well as creating space for the production of new gender possibilities.” (Cocca 98)

Sarah Nicolas, a recovering mechanical engineer, library event planner, and author, published an article named “THESE ARE THE BOOK AND READING STATISTICS THAT SHOW WHO READERS ARE” in a website called “BOOKRIOT”, where the writer talks about the statistics of people most likely to read books and vice-versa. She states that “While 24% of U.S. adults surveyed in 2018 hadn’t even read part of a book in the past year, the Pew Research Center investigated which ones were the most and least likely to pick up a book. The richest adults are three times more likely to read than those with a household income lower than \$30k.” It seems like those who have financial stability and advantages are more likely to enjoy books than the people who are constantly working.

Fine and Kleinman in their article “Rethinking Subculture: An Interactionist Analysis” discuss subculture and several problems in their research on subculture. They talk about the confusion between subculture and sub society, the lack of subcultural materials and the lack of connection and unity in subculture. “Subculture is treated as a membership category in which the criterion for belonging is structural or network based rather than dependent on a system of beliefs and practices.” (Fine and Kleinman 2). Comic book culture being a culture within a culture is considered to be a subculture because the people under this subculture share similar tastes and interests and they find peace in it.

Author Haselstein, Ostendorf and Schneck have done a thorough research on popular culture in their article, "Popular Culture: Introduction". They claim that popular culture is becoming one of the most overpowering cultures impacting the "mass" and also the intellectual people. They talk about the "High" and "Low" culture with the concept of popular culture. They state that one of the major factors of popular culture is its process of replacing old local traditions and communities with its loosely based notions of "ethnicity, race and gender (rarely of class)" (Haselstein, Ostendorf and Schneck 333)

Hagley and Harrison in their article "Fighting the Battles We Never Could: The Avengers and Post-September 11 American Political Identities" talk about the mass appeal of the superhero genre and raise the question of why people see hope and victory in big budget superhero movies. "Numerous cultural critics have long appreciated the psychological catharsis that the "hero" myth provides people and in the long days following America's wounding, the country witnessed the manifestation of its pain, desire for revenge, struggles with its principles, and thirst for the use of its awesome military power in several super heroic cinematic experiences from Thor to X-men: First Class to Iron Man and Captain America." (Hagley and Harrison 120). Soldiers are our real life heroes and we feel safe and victorious around them. So, Marvel used that likability of soldiers and military power and made hyperactive and strong built superheroes who will be the suit of armor around humanity. Marvel follows a pattern here, where it promotes the power and heroism of warriors and soldiers.

Martin Zeller-Jacques in his article "Adapting the X-Men Comic-Book Narratives in Film Franchises" talks about different aspects of comic book stories that are being made into films. He states that "The enduring popularity of superhero narratives all but guarantees financial safety,

and the critical success of films like Christopher Nolan's *Batman Begins* (2005) and *The Dark Knight* (2008) has proven that such films can aspire to the highest aesthetic standards."

Popular culture and comic book culture have one prominent thing in common, that is propaganda. Propaganda is communication which deliberately attempts to influence the opinions or actions of others. In her journal article, "The American Wartime Propaganda During World War II: How Comic Books Sold the War" author Mia Sostaric talks about America's propaganda during World War II and demonstrates how American comic books depict WWII. She claims that the American comic books represented white supremacy by every way possible. "The creators of *Captain America* and *Wonder Woman* also cast racial minorities as "other" and "less qualified" compared to white citizens" (Sostaric 19)

Chapter 4: The Major Comic Book Publishers

As discussed earlier, the comic book industry is growing into a giant industry, we must talk about the major comic book publishers which are making it possible. There are numerous companies, big-time companies and smaller ones, which are willing to take more risks to make the industry greater than ever. In terms of popularity and profit, some of the major companies are: Marvel Comics, DC Comics, Dark Horse Comics, Image Comics, IDW Publishing, Valiant Comics, Archie Comics, NVM Publishing, Antarctic Press and many more. However, Marvel Comics and DC Comics have been the two most widely known names in the industry.

4.1 Marvel Comics

Martin Goodman is the founder of Marvel comics. After working in other publications, Goodman created the Timely Comics Publications in 1939. Goodman basically created Timely Comics seeing the success of DC comics. Under Timely Comics, Goodman published its first comics “Marvel Comic: Issue 1”, which featured its first superman heroes Original Human Torch, an android² which can produce fire and Namor³, who is half human and half superhero. Almost nine hundred thousand copies of this single issue were sold. Goodman hired his brother-in-law Stanley Martin Lieber (famously known as Stan Lee) in Timely Comics when he was 17 years old, along with Jack Kirby and Joe Simmons⁴. In Keeping the in mind, Kirby and Simon created a patriotic soldier and superhero, who fights against Hitler and his Nazi Army. That superhero is Captain America. Captain America was first featured in the comic series “Captain America: Issue 1” in March 1941. Almost 10 hundred thousand copies were sold.

² Android is a robot with a human appearance.

³ Namor the Sub-Mariner is a fictional character in Marvel comics.

⁴ This information is mentioned in the Fair Observer.

Slowly, the craze for superheroes started to vanish and Timely Comics other books were flopping at that time. In 1960, Goodman changed the name of his company from “Atlas Comics” to “Marvel Comics”. In 1961, Stan Lee created “Fantastic Four”, a group of superheroes. After the success of “Fantastic Four” Marvel started creating other superheroes such as, Hulk, Thor, Spiderman, Ironman, Dr. Strange, Ant-Man, Black Panther, Daredevil, X-Men and so on. Eventually Stan Lee became the President of Marvel Comics. But, difficult times were again coming back for Marvel. At a time when the demand for comic books was going up, the contents of the comic books were losing their quality. Marvel tried to produce a huge amount of comic books within a short period of time. This fact shifted the priority of Marvel from creating great contents to produce more printing materials. So, the comic books were flopping. Seeing the huge amount of debt to pay, Marvel decided to sell their shares and merge with Toy Biz Company so that they can make a film studio and make their own comic character’s movies instead of selling the copyrights of the characters.

For the last ten years Marvel Universe itself has become one of the most successful companies in the world, after it released the successful movie “Iron Man” starring actor Robert Downey Jr. After the movie “Ironman” Marvel never looked back again. Marvel began to shine again with the release of Iron Man (2008), which was a huge success. This movie alone made around 585 million dollars⁵. The millions of profit of this movie saved Marvel from its financial crisis. It re-created its other superheroes into movies and the superhero ensemble movies such as “Avengers” and its sequels. Marvel began to reintroduce its other comic book characters into movies such as, Incredible Hulk (2008), X-Men origin: Wolverine (2009), Iron Man 2 (2010),

⁵ Iron Man’s gross collection- Domestic (54.4%)- \$318,604,126, International- (45.6%) \$266,762,121, Worldwide-\$585,366,24. Source: www.boxofficemojo.com

Thor (2011), Captain America: The First Avenger (2011), Avengers (2012), The Amazing Spider-Man (2012), The Wolverine (2013), Thor: The Dark World (2013), Captain America: The Winter Soldier (2014), The Amazing Spider-Man 2 (2014), Guardians Of The Galaxy (2014), Avengers: Age of Ultron (2015), Ant-Man (2015), Deadpool (2016), Captain America: Civil War (2016), Doctor Strange (2016), Logan (2017), Thor: Ragnarok (2017), Black Panther (2017), Avengers: Infinity War (2018), Deadpool 2 (2018), Ant-Man And The Wasp (2018), Captain Marvel (2019) and Avengers: Endgame (2019).

4.2 DC Comics

DC Comics was founded by an entrepreneur and pulp writer Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson in 1934⁶. When DC Comics was founded, it was called “National Allied Publications”. What made DC Comics very different from other mainstream comic books was its vision, which was to create new and original materials instead of reprinting old comic strips. In the beginning years, Wheeler-Nicholson published America’s first all new and original comic book, *New Fun*. In 1936, National Allied Publications was changed into the title, Detective Comics, in short DC Comics. Later on, Malcolm was joined by Harry Donenfeld, as an experienced partner, who will make the most out of his experience in DC Comics. A lot of drama happened after Harry Donenfeld and Accountant Jack Liebowitz joined DC. One year after their partnership, Donenfeld arranged a cruise trip for Malcolm and his wife, so that Malcolm can think up some ideas about how to resolve their financial decline. But, when Malcolm returned, he found out that his office locks had been changed and Donenfeld sued him for non-payment, which made him end up with the loss of his own company. Malcolm left DC comics after all of the drama. Eventually, all of the ownership was transferred to Donenfeld and Liebowitz. DC Comics went

⁶ Source: www.fundinguniverse.com

through a lot of things, such as, changing titles, lending character copyrights to other related companies, differences of personality and opinions, which eventually left Donenfeld to control three companies, National Allied Publications, All American Comics, and Educational Comics. Donenfeld merged the three companies, with the name, National Comics Publications, in short NCP. DC Comics introduced some of the most iconic and beloved characters, such as, The Flash, Wonder Woman, Green Lantern and many more. Though DC Comics faced lots of ups and downs, it kept on introducing many iconic comic book characters. The most noteworthy comic book characters of DC are: Superman (Kal-El or Clark Kent), The Flash (Barry Allen), Batman (Bruce Wayne), Wonder Woman (Diana Prince), Dick Grayson, Joker, Aquaman (Arthur Curry), Lex Luthor, Catwoman (Selina Kyle), Green Arrow (Oliver Queen) and Shazam (William "Billy" Batson). DC has enlisted a total of 211 characters in their official website. The characters includes: Black Adam, Killer Frost, Harley Quinn, Deathstroke, Amanda Waller, Poison Ivy, Lobo, Cyborg, Atom, Batwoman, Bumblebee, Heat wave, Jessica Cruz, Lois Lane, Krypto, Lucifer, Martian Manhunter, Robin, Titans, Trigon, Vandal Savage, Vixen, Veronica Cale, Zatanna and many more. Similar to Marvel, DC has also introduced most of their characters into movies as well. Some of the recent and popular DC movies are: Batman Begins (2005), The Dark Knight (2008), Watchmen (2009), V for Vendetta (2006), Wonder Woman (2017), Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice (2016), Batman & Robin (1997), Suicide Squad (2016), Green Lantern (2011), Constantine (2005), Justice League (2017), Man of Steel (2013), Aquaman (2018), Shazam! (2019), Birds of Prey (2020), Joker (2019) and many more.

Chapter 5: Reader's approach to Comic Book Culture

A question can come into our mind: why do people read? What are the reasons or purpose of reading? There are several reasons for it: gaining and exploring knowledge, to know about cultures, get enlightened, enhancing cognitive skills, entertainment and spending leisure. When it comes to reading written texts or books, the readers believe that reading enhances their analytical reading ability. They say when they read deeper and indulging texts, the knowledge makes their mind open for more mature verbal intelligence and creative skills. Because the in-depth description of a story helps readers to have their own imagination circulate in their brain. Many classic book readers say that the complex language makes their vocabulary richer and the complicated storyline provides them to think more, be creative and be more focused. Words have more power in storytelling than just images and fewer dialogues. The readers have the opportunity to breakdown the emotion of the story and interpret it through the writer's lens. When reading a book, it is like taking a glimpse at the author's mind. Not only have the readers decoded the language of that story but also activated the other parts of the brain that are associated with the story. By reading a book or a novel, readers basically live through the story in their minds. Many studies show that reading a complex and difficult novel actually escalates the functionality of the human brain. But, in this time consuming world, a huge number of people are drifting away from books. One article in the BOOKRIOT website mentions that "While 24% of U.S. adults surveyed in 2018 hadn't read even part of a book in the past year, the Pew Research Center investigated which ones were the most and least likely to pick up a book. The richest adults are three times more likely to read than those with a household income lower than \$30k." It means that the rich people are most likely to have a higher tendency to read books than the lower income people. The reason why lesser economic people tend to read less is because

they do not have sufficient time due to heavy duty and time consuming jobs, mental stress of meeting deadlines and maintaining family responsibilities. Difficult language, complicated plot, strange ideas often demotivate readers of lower economic status to prefer comics over serious works of fiction, which is less time consuming and easy to read and understand. Depending on the preference of literature, there are different kinds of readers in this world. Some of the readers prefer novels, written texts. On the other hand, others prefer easy language and visual narratives (comic books).

Chapter 6: Readers leaning towards graphic texts

Easy to read language, compelling stories and variation of stories are the top three reasons why people are getting more attracted to read comic books now-a-days. The impact of comic books is so prominent that it is becoming a subculture. "Subculture is treated as a membership category in which the criterion for belonging is structural or network based rather than dependent on a system of beliefs and practices." (Fine and Kleinman 2). Subculture is a culture within a large culture. It is often understood as a particular taste or demand of ideas, work of art, way of life and many more which makes a minor group sharing interest in that taste. Apparently, this comic subculture is becoming a massive deal worldwide. Thousands of people come together in Comic-con every year, to share their love and support for comic books and characters. They perform cosplay and celebrate their favorite characters in comics.

But the question remains, why do people love comic books so much? It is the fantasy comic book stories created by using images that could actually talk through a scenario. Multiple images ordered in chronology would create a fantasy story which makes the readers escape the reality and move into an imaginative world. Images or graphics replace heavy words and long, descriptive and complex sentences. People in a postmodern consumer culture do not have much time to think over a complex novel. Instead, they want a short and easy way to understand the context in their very busy and time consuming lives. A comic with graphics makes the reading task much easier and less time consuming. The interpretation of the contents are done graphically for the reader, which has made it so easy for the readers to enjoy comic books. All they need to do is look and enjoy and If necessary, they can read the captions. The readers do not need to pay much attention to the language nor need to read much of a description. They just have to see through the images and little conversations in the comic books. Comic books are

easily accessible and it's also cheaper than any big fat books or novels. Lot of readers who face difficulties in their reading skills, also enjoy a comic book because it provides them with intense visuals and focuses more on the active characters and their conversations. They see through the story by the easy descriptions not by thinking much.

“Numerous cultural critics have long appreciated the psychological catharsis that the “hero” myth provides people and in the long days following America’s wounding, the country witnessed the manifestation of its pain, desire for revenge, struggles with its principles, and thirst for the use of its awesome military power in several super heroic cinematic experiences from Thor to X-men: First Class to Iron Man and Captain America.”(Hagley and Harrison 120)

Marvel comics and DC comics have become the two most popular publishers of the comic world. Spiderman is so popular to the young generation because of the catchy storyline which could be described easily by visual presentation and a teenage superhero is bound to be loved by the young fans. Speaking of Marvel comic books, X-Men comics were not that much of a success at the beginning because X-Men comics depict the story of some strange mutants who are less likely to be human. Although the story is really well written, people find it less connecting. People less familiar with comic books may not exactly know what the mutants actually like or what they represent. Although the idea for comic books is to make readers see a fantasy world, it needs to be close to human imagination. Readers need to believe the story before they live through it. Readers, while enjoying the story willingly allow the writers to play with their imagination.

Batman of DC comics is so loved by millions of people. The readers say that Batman is loved because he is so humane. He is a living human, who fights against evil. The human related

storylines also play a huge role in the success of these comic books. Comic book writers are usually seen to create humans becoming superheroes and saving the world. Batman is considered one of the most realistic superheroes. By reading Batman stories people can actually believe that they are similar to Batman. Values and morals shown by superheroes are what make them widely loved cultural icons, even though not real. This happens when an ordinary person cannot think of fighting the injustices in a society, a society that is conditioned by the jungle of the law known as capitalism, corporate greed, and a total disregard for fellow human beings. This inability and frustration of that ordinary person is what the comic writer capitalizes and makes money from. Although Joker is a villain, his character arc and devotion to motives make him one of the greatest characters of any comic books. The vast majority of comic book writers follow the path of villains having more power than heroes. But, Joker was created in an unconventional way. In the Batman series, Joker has no money or resources to beat and dominate Batman. He has absolutely no power at all, yet he is one of the best villains of all time. A conventional comic book writer would give his villain a massive army and dangerous power. Joker has power just not in the way we are accustomed to. His power comes from his ability to attack with great intelligence and cunningness. Joker's motivation is another ability of his to make him so great. He has great motivation to attack and dominate the world.

Chapter 7: Business of Adaptation

A commodity is an object of trade which is transferred from sellers to buyers. All cultural materials which have a culturally constructed demand, can be also considered as commodities. Comic book creators make their trades by creating a product (comic books), creating the demand within the comic book fan's communities and then selling their products. "What consumers consume in modern society are commodities – that's why 'commodity culture' is often a substitute phrase for mass culture" (Jennifer Wicke, 2006). Wicke pointed out in her article that in this contemporary society and culture, anything holding entertainment purposes, which is accepted by the consumers is categorized as a commodity.

But, Comic books were created for many reasons. Not only to earn money, but also to convey social and political messages. Since comic books are created often to entertain and display social and political contexts in front of the mass reader and it has been a continuous process since then, we can call Comic book culture as "Commodity Culture ". But, how comic books are used to convey social and political messages. What I believe is that comic book contexts are mostly designed to show a graph or pattern of political propaganda, intentionally or unintentionally by the creators. Comic book writers write what they believe is authentic and as comic books are not real, they create their characters with their highest conviction; which is usually influenced by social and political events. WWII, in that case, was highly publicized through comic books as comic books could not only reach children but also their parents (adults). The comic books personified the value of fighting against evil during World War II and even today it personifies the same value. Today, in our world, poverty, corruption, sexual harassment, violence, aggression and injustice have made devastating impact in the world. These are the evils that people urge to

fight and win. Unfortunately, ordinary people cannot fight against the evils. We, the ordinary people cannot remove the evils in the society and cannot even raise our voice against it. These injustices frustrate and anger the people. Comic books provide the stories of hope and courage; it shows people standing up against injustice and evils and winning. It gives a sense of relief and an opportunity to let go of all the anger, frustration and rage. Comic books tend to cover up the negativities controlling our world and it shows that no matter how big and dangerous the villains (or the evils) are, with courage, integrity and sincerity, they can be defeated.

Comic books are now being made into movies so that people can also see the evils being defeated by common people. "The enduring popularity of superhero narratives all but guarantees financial safety, and the critical success of films like Christopher Nolan's *Batman Begins* (2005) and *The Dark Knight* (2008) has proven that such films can aspire to the highest aesthetic standards." (Zeller-Jacques 143) The safest bet for Marvel and DC is to make movies based on their comic book stories because it guarantees an already made audience, the readers of that particular comic book who will surely watch their favorite superhero live in action. This guarantees the financial profit of the film maker before even releasing the film. The film makers as a promotional strategy are sure to cast highly renowned actors to attract as many viewers as possible. Starting from high profile actors such as, Hugh Jackman, Jeff Bridges, Robert Downey Jr., Angelina Jolie (in an upcoming Marvel movie), Scarlett Johansson, Bradley Cooper, Samuel L Jackson, Paul Rudd, Mark Ruffalo, Jeremy Renner, Gwyneth Paltrow to heartthrobs such as, Chris Hemsworth, Chris Evans, Ryan Reynolds, Tom Hiddleston, Sebastian Stan, Brie Larson, Tom Holland, Marvel made no mistakes in hiring the appropriate actors who could do justice to their roles. "Deadpool" starring Ryan Reynolds, earned 783.1 million dollar at the box office, "Guardians Of The Galaxy" starring, Chris Pratt, Zoe Saldana, Dave Bautista, Bradely Cooper

and Vin Diesel earned 863.8 million dollars, “Captain America: Civil War” starring Chris Evans, Robert Downey Jr., Scarlett Johansson, Jeremy Renner, Sebastian Stan, Paul Rudd earned 1.153 billion dollars, “The Avengers” earned 1.519 billion dollars, “Avengers: Infinity War” starring Robert Downey Jr. Chris Evans, Chris Hemsworth, Chris Pratt, Scarlett Johansson, Mark Ruffalo, Benedict Cumberbatch, Tom Hiddleston, Elizabeth Olsen, Paul Bettany, Sebastian Stan, Anthony Mackey, Zoe Saldana, James Brolin, Tom Holland earned 2.050 billion dollars and the recent Marvel movie “Avengers: Endgame” starring more than 90 actors earned 2.795 billion dollars which surpasses the two all-time highest grossing movies “Avatar” (2009) and “Titanic” (1997) and has now become the highest grossing film of all-time in Hollywood. DC’s production company Warner Bros. Pictures also gathered various renowned Hollywood superstars for their films. Stars such as Robert De Niro, Gary Oldman, Christian Bale, Heath Ledger, Henry Cavill, Amy Adams, Michael Shannon, Ben Affleck, Gal Gadot, Joaquin Phoenix and Chris Pine are lead actors of some of the biggest DC films.

“The enduring popularity of superhero narratives all but guarantees financial safety, and the critical success of films like Christopher Nolan’s *Batman Begins* (2005) and *The Dark Knight* (2008) has proven that such films can aspire to the highest aesthetic standards.” (Zeller-Jacques 143) These two companies have been making tons of money with their comic books, films and other endorsements. Marvel’s film “Avengers: Endgame” had a production budget of \$400,000,000 and it alone made box office collection of \$2,797,800,564 and DC film “Joker” had production budget of \$55,000,000 and the film made \$1071,739,764.⁷

⁷ Source: the-numbers.com and boxofficemojo.com

Chapter 8: Conclusion

In my research questions, the first question is why do people read comics or watch fantasy films. In my dissertation I have shown that most of the readers love to read comic books to see and feel the extravagant life stories of the superheroes. This happens in many ways. Readers usually empathize with a single character and get connected. Seeing the background struggle of the characters makes them sympathetic. Reader's mind is convinced that his/her favourite character has gone through a lot to achieve something significant in life and this boosts the confidence of the readers and makes him/her inspired that dreams do come true. Readers can put themselves in the place of the characters and associate with them. To lessen or forget about reality, frustration, anger and rage, people seek the distraction of hope and positivity, which is found in comic books. They can imagine themselves in the situations that they are reading and converse with the characters. I have shown connection in my dissertation with escapism; which “is a prominent characteristic of American popular art forms, and this quality, when it is found in Hollywood entertainment, episodic television, or mass-market fiction, is often dismissed by critics as essentially shallow or trivial.” (Behlman 62). Critics dismiss the suitability of comic books as reading materials for readers as they are unreal, do not make any sense, shallow, lacks conviction and excluded from any social or political messages which could have made a difference in the world and thus could have given service to the world.

I have also shown in my dissertation that people who read comic books try to escape their fear, anxiety and harsh reality because it affects their mental and physical health and they cannot get unaffected by their bitter realities. Thus, escapism comes into play. Escapism is basically the feeling associated with the willingness to leave, forget about the monotonous environment.

Mechanic life of working non stop and having no social life impacts human beings a lot. Kids do

not have a productive and positive life as their parents are working 9 to 7 daily and also the parents are becoming frustrated and alienated as they are excluded from any leisure and resting time. The glamorous and positive feelings present in the comic books evoke the feeling of leaving reality and living a positive and problem free life. The lavish and extravagant lifestyles of Tony Stark, very sophisticatedly molded Bruce Wayne, the kingship and luxurious kingdom of Thor, the super powerful soldier Steve Rogers as known as Captain America and having the perfectly defined physical structure and God-like ability, Superman are fan favorites because the readers can forget the monotonous reality and for sometimes just escape into the magical and larger than life stories of comic books. Readers can see through the lives of their favorite characters and have an adventurous journey in their imagination.

I have pointed out the fact that readers are prone to read texts which make them think deeply about unanswered questions, unpredictability and mysteries. While reading the comic books, the readers love to think about the mystery and possibility of magic and adventure and of the same happening to them just to entertain themselves. Most of the Marvel and DC super heroes are majestic looking, better than other humans, and have the attitude of living life like a king.

Human brain is usually attracted to mysteries and riddles that they cannot solve easily. Mysteries and unanswered questions make us think more deeply and we spend quite a lot of time solving them. The unpredictability and mysteries of superheroes and their actions make them very desirable to the young and adult readers. The readers are left wanting to know more about them.

I have stated another reason why ordinary people like superheroes: Superheroes possess what they do not have. Physical ability, moral courage, unshakable judgment, lofty ideas, and an unbeatable desire to bring about positive change in the society. An ordinary person in his unconscious desires all these. This desire is enacted and fulfilled by the superheroes. The same is

applicable to super villains. So, I believe the readers find the superheroes such as, medical experimented Captain America, born with perfect face and body Superman, gamma radiation exposed Incredible Hulk, rich and powerful Bruce Wayne or Batman, coming from a distant father son relationship but super rich Ironman, super built, extremely good looking and King of a magical planet Asgard, Thor, very attractive and readers try to connect with them. In this regard, readers become fans of the super villains, such as, Loki:the God of mischief (Marvel), Doctor Doom:The ruler of Latveria (Marvel) , Magneto: the Master of Magnetism (Marvel), Mad Titan Thanos (Marvel) , Red Skull(Marvel), Galactus (Marvel), General Zod (DC), Deathstroke (DC) , Reverse Flash (DC), Brainiac (DC), Darkseid (DC), Joker (DC) and Lex Luthor (DC). As discussed earlier, comic book creators use escapism as the driving force to attract mass audiences. With the help of technology, there remains a fine line between fantasy and avoidance. Fantasy is considered intentional, but avoidance is considered as a subconscious rejection of reality. Now, escapism has become the state in which people reshape their reality around their fantasies and ignorance.

Another reason why people love to read comics or watch fantasy films is to enjoy the aspect of heroism. “There was an idea. The idea was to bring together a group of remarkable people, see if they could become something more. See if they could work together when we needed them to, to fight the battles that we never could”, Nicholas J. Fury states about the avengers. The Avengers manifest human heroism and victory. The Avengers save the world by defeating bad people who try to harm the world. Though readers love Marvel’s greatest villain Thanos, they hate his bizarre ideology of removing half of the population of the planet to have a clear sky and safe world. Because of his bizarre vision of wiping out half of the population of the planet, he was called “Mad Titan”. In one word, Thanos offered genocide to have a grateful universe. In the movie

version of Avengers: Infinity War comic, Thanos defies genocide as a “small price to pay for salvation”. He even addressed the genocide as the “correction” that the universe required, in the movie “Avengers: Endgame”. Thanos is considered one of the greatest villains in the history of comic culture. His giant 8 feet self, immense talent, crazy genius, mutant power and controlling ability makes him near to unbeatable. Even giants of Marvel such as, All Father Odin, Wolverine, Silver Surfer, Thor, The Annihilators, Mangog, Mephisto and Phoenix could not beat Thanos. Eventually, to depict the victory of heroism, Marvel Universe created a storyline, where the Avengers, with the help of Guardians of The Galaxy, Doctor Strange and other Marvel superheroes, finally beat Thanos.

DC comic books and characters are also very impactful to the mass. Both superheroes and villains are displayed with so much power which can control and destroy the world, hypothetically. DC superhero Superman, known as Clark Kent, who is from another planet follows the rule of being close to human nature, yet very powerful and he acts like a normal American, which makes him more predictable and safe.

The second major research question in my thesis is how is class, race, gender and ideology connected with comic readership. Although reading was limited and accessed by the upper class people from the very beginning of humanity, it has been widely spread to all now without any class boundaries. The gradual growth of readership is significantly noticed in the world as the written form of education and entertainment is easily accessible and most of the texts are very inexpensive due to many reasons. Books, novels and other written texts were created with limited copies and the materials were expensive. Hence, books were difficult to get for less economic people and at present too, the first editions are quite rare and expensive. Fortunately,

the publishers started to make a large number of copies with easily accessible and cheaper paper materials. That is why not only economically sufficient people, but also people with lesser economic privileges can also afford to buy and read their favourite books. In the past, a limited group of scholars and publishers were there to produce books, novels and other written texts. Resources of cultural, social, political and economic knowledge were not easily found. So, there was less content on culture, society, politics and other aspects of the human kind. Gradually, with the help of science and technology, a wide range of research and exploration started to happen and the content of written texts started to become culturally rich with vast knowledge and value. The last major research question in my thesis is do comics always focus on empowering women or do they constantly try to establish that objectifying and hypersexualizing women is the right thing to do? I have pointed out that hypersexualization of women is one of the major wrongdoing happening in the patriarchal comic book culture. The hyper-sexualization of women in comic books began in the 1990s, solely because at that time most of the comic book writers and artists were mostly male. The comic books very much got reflected by that and the readers were reading the books through the lens of the male comic book writers. Laura Mulvey named this lens of male as “male gaze”. The purpose of women on screen or on other entertainment platforms is to be looked at by men. Men are acting in a sense of scopophilia; deriving an erotic pleasure from seeing the presence of women. Laura Mulvey points at Freud’s ‘scopophilia’ theory which manifests the pleasure of looking and having pleasure of being looked at. Scopophilia “continues to exist as the erotic basis for pleasure in looking at another person as object. At the extreme, it can become fixated into a perversion, producing obsessive voyeurs and Peeping Toms, whose only sexual satisfaction can come from watching, in an active controlling sense, an objectified other.” (Mulvey 835). Scopophilia refers to the narcissist process of looking

at human bodies as erotic objects. In the world of comic books, the comic codes about nudity and sexualization started to fall very quickly when sexual posing was no longer banned in comic books. On one hand, we see super athletic and genius male superheroes saving the world while on the other hand we see hyper-sexualized females. This raised huge questions by feminism and female critics. The influence of male supremacy in society controls how comic book readers see gender issues. Because most of the comic book writers were male and white, it was pretty obvious to see that the male superheroes were more powerful and stronger. For women as readers, it was really uncomfortable and insulting to even read those hyper sexualized female characters. Comic books were mainly designed to attract male readers, mostly teenagers and adults. Although there are some of the female characters which are major, most of them are created as the side-kicks of the male superheroes. Black Widow, Captain Marvel, Jane Foster, The Wasp, Scarlet Witch, Gamora, Nebula, Pepper Potts, Mantis, Agent Sharon Carter, Maria Hill, Valkyrie and many more are the female superheroes. But, most of them are known for their supporting roles to their male superheroes ``While movie screens have always been overtly dominated by white males, there is a possible cultural explanation for the surge in popularity of hyper-masculine superhero and action films in the last decade'' (Murphy 11). In the patriarchal industry, women are downgraded to secondary status. It is normal for the readers to think that female characters are meant to support their male counterparts and they always need to be rescued. On the other hand, if male characters are shown in exaggerated sexual ways or as secondary characters, the readers often think it is ridiculous because the readers are not used to seeing men being downgraded much. In the comics, Black Widow, as Natasha Romanoff, is a dangerous assassin who is super smart, intelligent and can kill anyone without even blinking. But she becomes the backup for Tony Stark and the sidekick for Steve Rogers in many stages. She

also becomes the love interest for Bruce Banner, also known as, The Hulk. Carol Danvers or Captain Marvel is supposed to be the guardian of a planet, and is also subjected to being beautiful and sexy. The Wasp being abused by her husband, Stephanie Brown being raped and murdered, Gwen Stacy being murdered just to stop and beat Spiderman, Valkyrie being a leading figure but still not ruling Asgard because Thor is supposed to be a worthy king, are some of the evidences which proves that female characters are just the supporting characters for the male superheroes and despite their potential they are falling behind. Another issue is the hypersexualized images of female characters. The female superheroes are considered as the eye candy to the readers and the viewers. Explicit clothing, curved bodies, pencil thin legs are designed to make the female characters sexier. I believe that comic book artists are assigned to portray women like this. And we, the readers, accept it. Marvel was not releasing female superhero characters who are stronger than their male counterparts. Wonder Woman of DC Universe is another example I can give of the hypersexualization of women in comic books. Wonder Woman is one of the most iconic characters that helped found DC Comics. Unfortunately, Wonder Woman is created and displayed as a sexual object made by men for men. Creators made her look like a pin up girl who was only there not to fight against evil but also to please men. DC has also been demeaning to female characters in other comics as well. In the DC Universe, the Green Lanterns are the members of an outer space police force who are armed with power rings that can turn their willpower and thoughts into solid objects made of light. Apart from Arisia, none of the characters were shown as a troubling character. In her first appearance, Arisia is a young teenager. After she gets assigned to Earth, her crush on Hal Jordan leads her to subconsciously use the ring to reshape herself into a sexy adult body with revealing costumes. As a female reader myself, it bothers me to see women being misrepresented, misjudged, misused and

downgraded like this. When I did my research about the history of comic books, one thing that came across constantly was the glorious promotion of white male and degradation of all females. I believe and expect comic books or any other form of entertainment and education to be universal. As a reader, I do not want to feel excluded or insulted just because I am not white American male.

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