




2019

Poison Ivy's green screen debut: A rhetorical criticism on erasing identity on screen

Jennifer Baney
University of the Pacific

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarlycommons.pacific.edu/uop_etds

 Part of the [Broadcast and Video Studies Commons](#), [Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons](#), [Film and Media Studies Commons](#), [Gender, Race, Sexuality, and Ethnicity in Communication Commons](#), and the [Rhetoric and Composition Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Baney, Jennifer. (2019). *Poison Ivy's green screen debut: A rhetorical criticism on erasing identity on screen*. University of the Pacific, Thesis. https://scholarlycommons.pacific.edu/uop_etds/3630

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in University of the Pacific Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact mgibney@pacific.edu.

POISON IVY'S GREEN SCREEN DEBUT: A RHETORICAL CRITICISM ON ERASING
IDENTITY ON SCREEN

by
Jennifer Baney

A Thesis Submitted to the
Graduate School
In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS

College of the Pacific
Communication

University of the Pacific
Stockton, California

2019

POISON IVY'S GREEN SCREEN DEBUT: A RHETORICAL CRITICISM ON ERASING
IDENTITY ON SCREEN

by
Jennifer Baney

APPROVED BY:

Thesis Advisor: Marlin C. Bates IV, Ph.D.

Committee Member: Teresa Bergman, Ph.D.

Committee Member: Qingwen Dong, Ph.D.

Department Chair: Teresa Bergman, Ph.D.

Dean of Graduate School: Thomas Naehr, Ph.D.

DEDICATION

With all of my love, adoration, and gratitude, I dedicate this work to my parents, Jim and Darla Baney. Through them, I learned the meaning and value of hard work, adaptability, perseverance, humility, and loyalty. My academic career would have taken much different path if it were not their love and support to push me towards achieving my goals. This thesis is also to Christine Fountain who has been my partner for six wonderful years with many more to come. Her everlasting patience, love, and sacrifice has given me the necessary tools to take on any challenge and succeed.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks are due to my committee – first my chair Dr. Marlin Bates who read draft after draft and continued to make me a better writer each time. Your patience with this writing process did not go unnoticed and will leave a lasting impact on my academic career. In addition, the other two members on my committee: Dr. Teresa Bergman, and Quigwen Dong for their thoughts and input. Special thanks are also due to Steven Farias, it would be impossible for me to repay him for the guidance and knowledge he imparted to me. I am thankful for his kind nature and willingness to discuss ideas. Additionally, thank you Griffin Cheek and Qiana Moore for your support, kind words, and friendship. It is impossible for me to thank everyone who has helped and influenced my life in so many ways. Instead, I will end by extending a thank you to my family and friends, my fellow grad students, and the faculty and staff at the University of the Pacific.

Poison Ivy's Green Screen Debut: A Rhetorical Criticism on Erasing Identity on Screen

Abstract

By Jennifer Elizabeth Baney
University of the Pacific

2019

This project investigates the loss of power on screen for female comic book characters. Specifically, I investigate how scenes create narratives using heteronormativity and over-sexualization of female characters. The artifact of analysis included in this project is *Batman and Robin* (1997). This text focuses on Poison Ivy, including the background of the character before dissecting her role in the film. Turning to Sonja J. Foss (2009) and her feminist critique as a guide to understanding the implications of this research. Using feminist criticism, I argue that Poison Ivy was put in a lesser position, removed of her power, and was made dependent on men more than she is in comics. Poison Ivy was created from the feminist movement, and *Batman and Robin* (1997) create tension between the comic book representation and the expectation of gender. Superheroes have skyrocketed in popularity over the past fifteen years, and their narratives are extending to individuals that are not necessarily comic readers. This cultural significance of superheroes suggests that comic books and therefore their characters appeal to a wide audience who has the potential to be influenced, even implicitly, by these messages.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER

1. Introduction.....	7
The Problem.....	7
Purpose of the Thesis	14
Research Question	15
Definitions of Key Terms	15
Justificaiton of the Study	15
Outline of Subsequent Chapters.....	16
2. Literature Review.....	17
Feminist Theory	17
Queer Theory	18
Subjective Reality	19
Heteronomrativity	23
Gender and Sexuality Performance	27
Othering and Objectification.....	29
Summary.....	31
3. Method.....	32
4. Description and Analysis	35
Hollywood Description.....	35
Movie Synopsis.....	36
Analysis.....	38
Conventional practices.....	39
Hegomoinc state.....	49
Women ignored or erased.....	52
5. Discussion and Conclusion	55
Implications of the Study.....	55
Limitations of the Study and Future Research.....	56
Conclusion	57
REFERENCES	59

Chapter 1: Introduction

The past few years has acted as an interesting juxtaposition between women demanding their voices be heard through protest such as the Women's March versus White Supremacists attempting to reposition themselves as the "right side of history." In the middle of it, all are popular media trying to capture the tensions of our time. Media is influenced by the people, and conversely, the media influences the people. Popular culture uses characters to send a message about how we should conduct ourselves. For example, during WWII, when comics entered the Golden Age, comics focused on American ideals with the first issue of *Captain America* showcasing Captain America punching Adolf Hitler (PBS, 2014). This was one of the ways America worked to frame the narrative around the war and a person's patriotic duty.

During the Silver Age of comics, the characters were influenced by the counter culture of the '60s and '70s. Artists began to focus on moods and themes that were taking place outside of the comics including answers to the feminist movements, civil rights, LGBTQ movements, the '80s AIDS epidemic and many more (Strausbaugh, 2003). Comics influence individuals and representation within comics leads to a particularly constructed reality (Schmidt et al., 2015). Because comics are both influenced and representative of outside forces, it may fall victim to reoccurring themes such as heteronormativity and othering of characters. Specifically, this influence, in turn, shapes how individuals look at comics both in text and on screen.

The Problem

Comics may be progressive on the page, however, when they are translated to the screen, directors can choose to remove the past of radical characters, such is the case with Poison Ivy's female empowerment and identity. By removing Poison Ivy's identity, comic fans are limited to a specific set of characters that can feed that heteronormative culture to sell their storyline.

Representation within popular culture is continuing to use heteronormativity to sell seats and isolate audience members (Robehmed, 2015). Because representation is up for sale, it leads to the overall research question: how does the cinematic portrayal of the female comic book character, Poison Ivy, remove her power by simultaneously sexualizing and heteronormalizing the character? To answer this question, I will use a feminist rhetorical criticism along with various theoretical investigations of gender and sexuality to analyze Poison Ivy's characterizations in comic books and the cinematic portrayal of her in the 1997 movie, *Batman and Robin*.

To contextualize this question, it is important to briefly outline the history of Poison Ivy and her transition from a feminist character to the objectified, sexualized character of cinema. Poison Ivy is a scientist villain in the DC Comic Book Universe who fights against Batman and eco-terrorizes Gotham. Poison Ivy was created in 1966 by Robert Kanigher and Sheldon Moldoff in reaction to the feminist movement (Magnett, 2018). The two creators were inspired by *Rappacini's Daughter* written by Nathaniel Hawthorne in 1844. The comic tells the story of a temptress that is obsessed with dangerous plants and immune to poison, similar to Poison Ivy (Magnett, 2018). Poison Ivy, following a similar storyline, did not gain the recognition as a harmful villain until Batman #181, which established her as Batman's most dangerous new villainess. At the beginning of Poison Ivy's comic debut, she operated primarily through seduction and mental manipulation through the use of plant pheromones (Checkett, 2001). Poison Ivy exhibited few physical powers, causing her to lean on her looks rather than other comic book troupes of superpowers or super technology (Magnett, 2018). During the Silver Age of comics (1956-1970), Poison Ivy became more sympathetic and became an anti-hero, who advocated protecting the environment, and was less of a villain. This push for the environment

also led to new powers such as controlling plant life and a strong desire to protect that life (Magnett, 2018). Ivy, in this version, is still fully human and maintains a normal flesh-tone to her skin. However, as her character is developed, her skin will turn green (Checkett, 2001). In order to provide an adequate representation of the source material that the 1997 *Batman and Robin* film had to build this character, this paper will only evaluate Poison Ivy up to the Bronze Age of comics. Bronze age comics ended in 1985 and therefore will not use the later development to the characters such as her romantic relationship with Harley Quinn or her relationship with anti-hero group, *Birds of Prey*. The Bronze Age comics are the comics which would have been used to write screenplays because of the time they came out in addition to already having a set base for people who read the comics.

The Bronze age comics which ended in 1985, is not the first look at Poison Ivy but it is the most relevant around the time of the film *Batman and Robin* (1997), but her interactions on screen were a far cry from the empowered female in the pages. Poison Ivy's interaction with male characters within the movie and the way creators use her illustrates heteronormativity within popular culture, specifically, leads to her identity being erased in popular fiction. Although Poison Ivy is not explicitly confirmed as a lesbian until 2016, she still fits under the definition of queer. According to the UC Davis LGBTQIA center, queer is defined as “manifestations of oppression within gay and lesbian movements such as racism, sizeism, ableism, cissexism, transmisogyny as well as assimilation politics, [which] resulted in many people being marginalized, thus, for some, queer is a radical and anti-assimilationist stance that captures multiple aspects of identities” (LGBTQIA Center, 2018). Although Poison Ivy fights against assimilation politics in her comics, she becomes a marginalized member in the *Batman and Robin* (1997) movie. One of the ways that Poison Ivy queers the gender and sexual

expectations of her as a character is through identifying herself as more plant-like than human. This non-normative identification places Poison Ivy on the outside of heteronormative. “And for those of us who find ourselves on the margins, operating through multiple identities and thus not fully served or recognized through traditional single-identity-based politics, *theoretical conceptualizations* of queerness hold great political promise” (Cohen, 1997, p. 76). Even though she may not explicitly identify as gay/bisexual, her identity is outside the normalized identity structure creating the queer identity (Checkett, 2011). Queer identity is tied to more than just sexuality, Poison Ivy transitioning to have plant characteristics queers the character by exhibiting nonheteronormative traits.

Through the overt sexualization of Poison Ivy, her queer identity is erased, and she thus becomes more palatable to comic-book readers, however within the comics she retains her power through over-sexualization, and uses it as a tool rather than an identity. In later sections, the role of U.S. American culture in influencing comics enables me to elaborate further on how the characterizations of comic book characters hail particular audiences attuned to broader societal trends. In this way, movies reflect what society will buy/consume on a mass scale rather than the intent of a comic’s message. Poison Ivy was initially intended to challenge societal norms surrounding female characters in comics (Checkett, 2011). Contrasted with the damsel in distress, Poison Ivy is a powerful woman inspired by the feminist movement and later used as a queer icon for particular fans. By transferring her into the mainstream, cinematic culture, she is otherized for the male gaze and consumption of tickets (Robehmed, 2015). Relocating to the mainstream through the use of sexualization to sell tickets creates access to the material by a particular audience. Including the use of over-sexualization for acceptance as a result of the comic book culture’s primary audience--white, straight men (Shyminsky, 2011). Because the

comics are positioned to oversexualize women in the market, this representation positions females who enjoy comics to feel othered.

This form of othering can lead to further othering committed by those who read comic books aimed at women and lead to a form of seclusion. In addition to over-sexualization, comics often take on issues that are then ignored on the screen, which removes access to comics that would otherwise help their readers be included. As Kubowitz (2012) describes, readers will deviate from the default reader, that is the expected consumer expectation of heteronormative, to one of queerness until it becomes part of the canon. In 1992, two characters in *Marvel Comics Astonishing X-Men* came out as gay. The characters subsequently married in 2012 (Volack, 2012). Also in 2012, the most recent iteration of superhero Green Lantern, Alan Scott, came out to readers as gay (Gregorian, 2012). How readers identify with characters on the page is similar to how people identify with characters in movies, television programs, or in the pages of a novel. Women begin to experience seeing images on screen that do not line up with who they are as outlined by Sara Boboltz and Kimberly Yam explain in their article *Why On-Screen Representation Actually Matters*. They offer a quotation from Nicole Martins, “There’s this body of research and a term known as ‘symbolic annihilation,’ which is the idea that if you don’t see people like you in the media you consume you must somehow be unimportant” (2017, para. 6). There are varying extremes that a person to be persuaded by a comic and their need to identify with it. If the character is never more than used as an object, the women reading will not connect because the comics are filtering out female experience to fit the male gaze rhetoric, and reducing them down to sexual objects rather than fans.

Although the comic itself may provide women empowerment through the powers the characters have, or even the relationships they hold, it is because of the interpretation of those

storylines. For example, Burke's (1966) theory of identification suggests that readers often identify with media that they look at as better because readers are rotten with perfection, which will cause individuals to associate and dissociate with a group. Poison Ivy is accessible by females and queer individuals through her comic book presence, thus making comics accessible in a new way. Because individuals mirror their appearance to comic characters, individuals look at comics and read comics that they identify with as a part of their reality. Furthermore, Adrienne Shaw (2014) in her work *The Internet Is Full of Jerks, Because the World Is Full of Jerks: What Feminist Theory Teaches Us About the Internet* builds on why it is so important to use a feminist lens when looking at mass media due to the use of sexism on these platforms that stem from a systematic privilege and patriarchy that exudes masculine culture. Due to the masculine culture in the U.S. that exists both in the real world and in the virtual one those who fall outside of the top seat experience seclusion. Again, looking to Shaw, who offers the following quotation "...dominant discourses remain because marginalized voices are excluded, histories of outsiders are forgotten, and those with access to the means of cultural production define culture" (Shaw, 2014). This addresses how those who hold power will create the hierarchy in their image creating a culture that without a feminist lens could go missing. For instance, Poison Ivy is a strong, queer, feminine female in the comics, which is empowering to those reading comics. If someone were to be rotten with perfection, they might see Poison Ivy through the comics as an idol. However, if individuals see Poison Ivy on screen, they will reduce that perfection to sexual objectification. However, othering takes hold of this character by becoming sexualized strictly for the male gaze, surrounded by men, depicted as helpless, and heterosexual, she suffers from othering on multiple levels. She is otherized because she is the only female villain in *Batman and Robin* (1997) while being surrounded by powerful male

villains. Additionally, Poison Ivy is othered from her comics' depiction by removing her plant like characteristic thus her queer identity. Those who are engaging with the comic world identify with characters by the sense of hierarchy, one that through comics is drastically different than on screen. However, according to Burke, we have to identify, and the persuasion will only take place if the readers have something in common with the characters. If a character is portrayed as queer or interpreted as queer, then that provides a connection for the queer reader.

However, when the movies do not translate pivotal storylines, members of the communities that are erased are unable to feel that sense of inclusion created by an in/out-group (Beauvior, 2010). This study will take into consideration the amount of emotion, ideas, and motives that create an in-group/out-group filtering the audience that the makers reach to adapt their ideas and who is supposed to view the material as accessible. Othering female and LGBTQ comic readers remove the ability for the institutions to challenge sexist costuming and character development. Through othering, the people within the in-group see the female and LGBTQ readers as being against them and silencing any concerns. Movies that remove key plot lines on the screen remove the access from comics, and the audience is positioned to believe that this is not somewhere that is accessible for all. Removing what makes characters inclusive is particularly harmful when creating the in/out group because there is already a complexity of who reads comics (Beauvior, 2010). Men primarily make the comic book industry for men, or at least the mainstream storylines that are picked up by Hollywood. While this is changing in recent history, with the editor-in-chief of Marvel Comics working to diversify the industry, even he admits that comics were a hobby for white men (Thielman, 2016). Within the mainstream comic book universes, Poison Ivy is explicitly a challenge to whom comics are for and changing her removes the progress made by comics.

Poison Ivy, as a strong female lead, turns the concept of sexuality within comics away from the normal, oversexualized and heteronormatized, while simultaneously checking off all the objectification boxes. She uses her sexualized appearance as a power play to defeat her foes (Schmidt et al., 2015). The sexualization takes place within the superhero movies and comics, and comes through due to costumes and re-writes while ignoring what makes a character so compelling. Over-sexualizing removes females' access to comics as well as bolstering the current misogynistic culture surrounding comics. By making all the female characters sexualized, the overall view of women to be sex objects for men regardless of their abilities becomes the focus. Poison Ivy is best understood using the feminist rhetorical perspective with an accompaniment of queer theory to look at oversexualizing and lack of variety within its female characters. This includes ignoring critical aspects of the characters' story and the way that characters who make it on screen depiction. There is not an overweight female, all the females have a disproportionate body with the perfect hourglass figure. Females in comics bodies are limited to including things like having small arms, a tight core, large breasts, and broad hips compared to their body size (Schmidt et al., 2015). Oversexualization leads to women potentially feeling otherized. Otherizing women through sexualization potentially stops women from being part of the comic community. Additionally, female characters often work with other female characters and create a productive female bond. However in *Batman and Robin* (1997), the female relationships built for Poison Ivy are removed, and, instead, she is accompanied by men and later taken down by Batgirl altering the comic's message that girls should stick together.

Purpose of the Thesis

This study seeks to understand how the cinematic characterization of comic book characters has the potential to entrench heteronormative ideologies while simultaneously erasing the progressive politics of the source text-comic books.

Research Question

How does the heteronormative, cinematic portrayal of the female comic book character, Poison Ivy, simultaneously sexualize the character and otherize audience members?

Definitions of Key Terms

The following list of definitions are offered to clarify the key terms of this study:

1. Comic: Comics are a “juxtaposed pictorial and other images in a deliberate sequence” (McCloud, 1993, p. 9).
2. Queer: Queer is an umbrella term for sexual and gender minorities who are not heterosexual or cisgender (LGBTQIA Center, 2018).
3. Heteronormativity: Heteronormativity is denoting or relating to a world-view that promotes heterosexuality as the normal or preferred sexual orientation (Checkett, 2011).
4. Silver Age: The Silver Age is considered to cover the period of comics from 1956 to circa 1970 (Strausbaugh, 2003).
5. Bronze Age: The Bronze Age of Comic Books is an informal name for a period in the history of American superhero comic books usually said to run from 1970 to 1985 (Strausbaugh, 2003).
6. Modern Age: The Modern Age is considered to cover the period of comics from 1985 to present (Strausbaugh, 2003).

Justification of the Study

The significance of this study relates to three major communication issues: one addressing a practical problem, which is the representation of the comics is widely understudied, and the research is mostly about the interaction with the creators forcing roles onto fictional characters. Additionally, this study highlights the presence of heteronormativity in mass media through communication and character presentation. Finally, this study looks at how the heteronormative narrative within a mass media reinforces the patriarchy.

Outline of Subsequent Chapters

Chapter Two of this study provides a review of the literature appropriate for examining the artifact selected for this thesis. The chapter reviews literature including comics, readers' reality, heteronormativity, gender and sexuality performance, and objectification.

Chapter Three outlines the method employed by this study. Specifically, the chapter discusses the procedures and recommendations provided by Foss in undertaking a feminist criticism. The chapter also discusses the scavenger approach to collecting data as outlined by Halberstam.

Following chapter three, chapter four gives a description of the artifact and provides an analysis that answers the research question posed for this investigation.

Finally, chapter five provides implications, limitations of the study in addition to suggestions for future research and a conclusion.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Comics create access to a type of entertainment which is often used to challenge public opinion. Comics being cheaper to produce means that they can introduce controversial characters without long-lasting repercussions (Thielman, 2016). However, reading is a more secluded form of media consumption, and comic consumers are further limited. Although the range of comics is growing with the popularity from Hollywood blockbusters, it is when comics become more accessible and into the mainstream media (watching/listening/gaming) that their impact as primary texts become relevant (Schmidt et al., 2015). In this literature review, I detail how the following schools of thought can help to understand this phenomenon and its effect on audiences: feminist theory, queer theory, subjective reality, heteronormativity, gender & sexuality, as well as othering & objectification. With an understanding of these topics, I will be able to show how Poison Ivy's story is manipulated and erased. This rhetorical critique will use feminist criticism and allow for the influence of a queer lens consisting of the following categories: the subjective reality, heteronormativity, sexuality & gender performance, and objectification & othering. Comparing the comics to the movie will underline how the cinematic characterization of comic book characters has the potential to entrench heteronormative ideologies while simultaneously erasing the progressive politics of the source text-comic books.

Feminist Theory

The feminist theory allows the critic to look at different social structures within society, Ott and Mack (2013) describe the importance of a feminist lens in their work *Critical Media Studies: An Introduction*, "There are many kinds of feminism that each stress particular aspects of social power and difference over others" (p. 194). In holistic terms, they argue that feminism is a form of criticism that seeks to "reveal and eradicate socially ingrained systems ... that harm

all individuals in some way” (Ott and Mack, 2013, p. 178). Bell hooks, in *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Centre*, discusses the use of putting women in a one down position and the importance of a feminist perspective because it aims to move towards equality. hooks (1984) argues that the reason more people should understand feminism is that it can move society away from the imperialism of the patriarchal view that dominates western culture. The patriarchal view would position Poison Ivy lower in the hierarchy because she is a woman; however, it is important to include the cultural power that she experiences, and for that it is important to include queer theory in this research.

Queer Theory

Queer theory allows for a deeper understanding of cultural control, exclusion, and the use of binaries to control the population, specifically Poison Ivy because she is used to challenge binaries within U.S culture. Queer theory was influenced by Michel Foucault’s call to look past binaries and see sexuality as a spectrum to understand its power within society (Sedgwick, 1990). Turner (2000) discusses Queer Theory as a way to combat “the predominant modes of intellectual and political activity in western culture during the late twentieth century [which] not serve the needs and interests of queers” (p. 10). By framing this research using Queer theory, there is a hope to look at the LGBTQ community as an individualized identity that rejects binary views. Queer Theory was first coined by Teresa De Lauretis (1991) in their book titled *Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities*, which discuss how society thinks about sexuality and privilege to conforming to society's sexuality conditions. Arlene Stein and Ken Plummer (1994) relate this in their work in which they state that Queer theory began as an elite academic movement in prestigious U.S. institutions while it was a way to relate to the ever-growing visibility of queer politics and is meant to give a broader understanding of what it means to have

a queer identity. Although feminist theory assists analysis of social structures and queer theory helps to understand control, exclusion, and binaries, their application to comic books could be augmented with an understanding of reality as a subjective reference point.

Subjective Reality

Comic books much like other forms of media do not exist in a vacuum: the real world influences comics just like the comics affect the reader and therefore the real world. The impact of comics is created with specific values and beliefs to connect with its audience. Shannon Austin (2015) outlines in her article, *Batman's female foes: The gender war in Gotham City* that comics bridge the gap between fantasy and reality and creates the imagined space known as the here and now. Austin allows the readers another lens to analyze issues plaguing the world. In addition to Austin's work discussing the use of comics Dr. Marlin Bates, highlights in his article, "More real than Real: The ur-reality of World of Warcraft," that video games fall somewhere in between being real and virtual creating the ur-real. Being in the ur-real is created, as Dr. Bates argues, when reality affects how we create our virtual reality and that our identity is not just real within the "real" world. How an individual is socialized affects the way, they play the game and create their reality within the game creating meaning and functioning as an extension of their identity. Humans are continually using language and therefore, creating reality.

Dr. Bates may focus on the use of video games, but his findings can also apply to the world of comics. Much like video games, comic books also create a culture that has a hierarchy of values and reflects life in the real world, which is shaped by the individual. It is essential to understand that the two realities, virtual and real, can never be separate because the reader is continuously reading into the text in order to be captivated by the storyline. The reader is able to

compare the movie, comics, and their real life to the comics. Connections, that when made, remove the separation from the reader and the virtual reality creating the ur-real for comic book readers as well. Understanding how the media we consume impacts daily perceptions of reality is pivotal to situate the comics discourse with that of its Hollywood counterpart.

Individuals are positioned to see themselves in the characters that they choose to read about within the *Detective Comics* (DC) or watch on screen because those connections change what they see and how they interact with others. The reality created in one comic does not stay trapped inside of that comic, it is transferred from comic to comic because it shapes the reality of the reader. As the reader then creates a new reality through each new comic, it teaches them what it means to be a comic book reader. This point is reiterated by *In The Power of Comics: History, Form, and Culture*, when Duncan and Smith (2009) state, “Comic books are acts of communication. They exist because someone has a set of ideas to share, and they thrive when an audience takes note of those ideas” (p. 7). As a result of these ideas being shared, there is an affirmation that takes place as individuals buy comics. Just as in any market, the comic book industry understands the strategy of supply and demand (Casadesus-Masanell, 2014). Thus, they are going to cater their products to their dominant market. The key to understanding the lack of diversity which continues the cycle of excluding women from comic book culture in order to place comic books into the mainstream culture. With each new comic book turned into a film, the comic book culture becomes part of mainstream culture, which means fitting to the current narratives of women being sex objects. Women being reduced to sexual objects removes their voice, and another way to remove their voice is by removing female representation within comics. Removing representation normalizes removing voices of those who are not in the comics because they are unable to present their own rhetoric within the space.

The parallels between reality and fiction blur through the use of rhetoric, specifically, the reality is altered because of the actions by directors to silence female characters and fans. Lloyd Bitzer writes in *The Rhetorical Situation* (1968) "... rhetoric is a mode of altering reality by the creation of discourse which changes reality through the mediation of thought and action" (p. 4). Bitzer looks at the situation to decide the rhetorical strategy, comics also create a sense of inclusion. Kenneth Burke's (1969) theory of identification describes how someone would act, "[Y]ou persuade a man [*sic*] only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your ways with his" (p. 55). Through this identification, comics create a sense of understanding and are thus no different than other forms of media because to sell comics there has to be a connection and realism to pull the reader into the storyline. Wolk (2007) remarks that comics give readers "an us-against-the-world sense of kinship with other people who do feel that pleasure" (p. 53). That is identification which allows others to adapt to set ideals created by comics because individuals strive to be the comic characters that are deemed perfect will be used as a model. Although this can be looked at as positive such as Superman #17 where Superman is shown holding Adolf Hitler and General Hideki Tojo by their collars, other things take place in comics that are less desirable. As Edwin Black (1978) describes: "Rhetorical discourses are those discourses that, spoken or written, which aim to influence men" (p. 15). In other words, the discourse has the purpose of moving people in some way. The framing of women as second-class heroes, both mimics and reinforces the concept of women as a second class outside of comics in reality.

Looking at the way that comics send a message is vital because comics specifically use text and images to indicate dialogue. Kaitlin Schmidt (2015) describes the unique use of text and images in conjunction with telling the stories inside of comics. The images influence how the

story is understood leading readers to the preferred storyline and limits the amount of interpretation for readers. How the text is presented within a comic helps shape the story as well: there are thought bubbles, text boxes, different texts and colors all presenting different interpretations. Comics are subjective. Comic books can convey tone, body language and other forms of communication that are not strictly based on what is written. In this way, comics are much closer in means of consumption to movies than books because of the use of images and scenes in order to guide the reader. The over-sexualization within comics, more specifically in the Batman series of its female characters, creates an othering effect on women. Specifically, Poison Ivy in *Gotham City Sirens* is mostly posed lying down with her curves accentuated, and Schmidt et al. (2015) argue that these types of images provide a sexualized meaning to Poison Ivy's personality/appearance. The imagery of comic books as an undebatable meaning thrust onto the audience, and the over-sexualization is unable to be argued like in traditional texts. Often the images are very explicit drawing the readers to look at the intimate areas of female characters resulting in objectification and removing empowerment through exploitation.

Additionally, looking back to Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz and Dana Mastro (2009) the repeated interaction with characters and action sequences increases the retention of the messages provided through engaging in fiction. Although comics and action films are labeled as low-brow or for children, they act primarily as educators for the public which consumes them because of the increased retention (Strausbaugh, 2003). Cross-referencing Berrin Beasley and Tracy Collins Standley *Shirts vs. Skins* (2002) children begin to base their ideas of appropriate gender performance through accumulated experience within the fictional world. The effects of exposure to these sex-stereotyped characters increase the tolerance of the heteronormativity that is able to influence the ur-real. Looking to Karen E. Dill and Kathryn P. Thill in their work *Video Game*

Characters and the Socialization of Gender Roles: Young People's Perceptions Mirror Sexist Media Depictions (2007) male gamers often do not understand the impacts that harmful media content can have and why these are detrimental effects because they are engaging with it on a typical day to day basis, becoming numb to the effects. By becoming numb to the effects, audiences are positioned to normalize gender roles and accept them outside of virtual reality.

Similarly, the way individuals interact with comics and media around comics is because characters are on multiple platforms, allowing fans to connect with characters in a number of ways. Reality and fictional reality are consistently feeding into one another. To have a better understanding of this effect, we should look at comics from a feminist perspective, which will allow the audience to have a better understanding of how the non-fiction has real effects on the fiction including how individuals are treated within those spaces that reflects society at large.

Heteronormativity

Critical to understanding the feedback loop of reality and fiction, then, is an understanding of U.S. American culture's systematic framing of male and female characters through heteronormativity. Marcus Herz and Thomas Johansson (2015) define heteronormativity in *The Normativity of the Concept of Heteronormativity*, which discusses the power of heteronormativity when applied to our everyday lives, and how it creates an ability to critique not only gender divisions and hierarchies, but also the way in which characters are portrayed in fiction to reflect everyday lives including organizing family, sexuality, and lifestyle to mirror the real world. Smith and Shin build on the damages caused by heteronormativity when they comment on how no one oppression is less impactful than another. Microaggressions are a prime example in which heteronormativity, and other more commonly known oppressions such as racism, converge to create harmful conditions for the oppressed groups (Smith & Shin,

2015). Any aspect of reality is only based on the performance or “to the extent that it is performed” (Butler, 1990, p. 527). The individual's identity can be understood as a series of identities that they perform, which is guided by social control (Bayart, 2005). Society limits options for identity through the way in which individuals are represented on the screen. By giving queer characters: in this case, Poison Ivy, limiting performance and encouraging heteronormativity a person's identity performance is limited.

Focusing beyond the idea of heteronormativity surrounding gender and sexuality the authors explain the implications of family structure and lifestyle modeled on heterosexual ideals. Heteronormativity is connected to power, this connection affects who is included or excluded. (Herz & Johansson, 2015). The need for heteronormative assimilation is retroactively a survival mechanism, and a way to succeed in the current American discourse. Heteronormative images within comics promote the dominant structure of American society.

Lotte Vermeulen and Jan Van Looy (2016) use their article *I Play So I Am? A Gender Study into Stereotype Perception and Genre Choice of Digital Game Players* to discuss stereotyping as a mechanism to split groups and creating symbolic boundaries as a power play. Power plays are not just limited to video games and affect other forms of “geek” culture. Although this article deals with video games specifically, the use of virtual reality is mirrored within comics. Often women who engage with media in this way are put down in both the “geek” community and mainstream society leaving women to be pushed out of the culture. Women are pushed out of comics and looked at as “fake geeks” whenever they attempt to engage in the material. Even when the comic book industry includes women, it does so in a way that reproduces stereotypical ideas of women thus reinforcing gender binaries (Vermeulen & Van Looy, 2016). Stereotypes act to simplify things that people are unwilling to learn or question

about society. Although some positives come out of stereotyping, it does far more harm than good. As Royal (2012) explained: “To put it bluntly, comics – by necessity – employ stereotypes as a kind of shorthand to communicate quickly and succinctly. This being the case, it is up to the comics artist to tell her or his story as effectively as possible without slipping into the trap, even inadvertently, of inaccurate and even harmful representations” (p. 68). Comic characters use reality to fulfill presumed stereotypes, perpetuate ideologies in our culture, or otherwise appeal to readers, including the way that Poison Ivy was sexualized to meet American cultural standards for women.

Regarding American cultural standards the use of queer identity in comics is often a tool of masculinity rather than a rally for LGBTQ inclusion. To understand that idea, Neil Shyminsky (2011) discusses in “*Gay*” *Sidekicks: Queer Anxiety and the Narrative Straightening of the Superhero*, the condemnation of the superheroes and their sidekicks being queer read by comic book consumers. Shyminsky breaks down the idea that meaning can be read into a superhero. While traditionally heroes are supposed to promote normative culture, the very presence of a *superhero* is deviant. Particularly focusing on how a hero must live their lives in both regular society and save the day scenarios queers the heteronormative standard. This queering is often through the role that the sidekick plays in a hero’s life. A sidekick is often portrayed as someone much younger than the hero, according to Shyminsky, already places a queer lens on the character. Youth is often understood as “not-yet straight,” and thus they can reflect homosocial tendencies for the hero. Although nothing is romantic, the relationship that they share is a homosocial, as defined by Shyminsky as same-sex bonding aimed at enabling solidarity and interdependence (Shyminsky, 2011). This homosocial relationship is mirrored in the homosexual relationship of Poison Ivy and Harley Quinn. However, this character

development in the comics is lost within the movie as Poison Ivy is just a sex symbol to highlight the masculinity of Batman and Robin, whose homosociality is also glossed over to preserve their masculinity.

Poison Ivy is one of the first major female villains that challenged gender expectation which worked to liberate herself from gendered roles in society (Checkett, 2011). Her challenge in society can be attributed to her feminist beginnings, which sought to liberate woman as well as empower others. To understand the way that gender is treated in comics, it is essential to look at authors that outline what gender expectations are in the United States. Gender within society has its own set of rules. Shannon Austin explains that “as the patriarchal era takes hold, femaleness, animality, sexuality, nature, death, and darkness are increasingly seen as something abject, chaotic, ‘dirty,’ to be feared and controlled if not eradicated” (Austin, 2015, p. 317). A character like Poison Ivy, for example, who first appears as a sort of divine goddess of nature, quickly reverts into a creature of evil. Within the Batman comics, the female supervillains Batman's faces defy gender norms, and because of this, they are often seen as monstrous because they crave and fight for power (Austin, 2015). Fighting for power is challenging gender roles set by society, and they can face scrutiny. Lotte Vermeulen, Elena Nunez Castellar, and Jan Van Looy (2014) *Challenging the Other: Exploring the Role of Opponent Gender in Digital Game Competition for Female Players* highlight the way that women who do interact with digital media are often labeled as masculine and encounter even more harassment because they do not accept their feminine role. These same type of traits are given to the women in Gotham as they act violent and therefore unnatural compared to the stereotypical roles outlined for a woman (Schmidt et al., 2015). Women avoid discrimination and oversexualization, by playing as male characters causing female gamers to become further isolated by removing their voice when it

comes to changing gamer culture. These women, being unable to change gaming culture, often causes them to fall into stereotypical female roles when a male gamer is present such as becoming a caregiver or avoiding playing games altogether. The women surrounding Poison Ivy fall into the same tropes. In *Gotham City Sirens*, Catwoman and Harley Quinn both become secondary characters to their love interest with Batman and Joker. Rather than continue their fight for the power, they will often conform to their feminine roles. However, Poison Ivy feeling less human and more plant does not fall into these same roles (Schmidt et al., 2015). In addition to not following the roles based on her plant like features, the movie portrays her performance that fits the heteronormative role including how she should conduct her gender and sexuality.

Gender and Sexuality Performance

Although heteronormativity operates to reaffirm straight identities while erasing queer characters, its machinations are only understandable within the broader context of gender and sexuality performance. Judith Butler (1999) in their work *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* outline that gender is a performance that one is forced into by cultural norms. Cultural norms cause those within society to understand what genders should and should not do, outlining the performance and creating gender roles. Poison Ivy creates her image on the screen and in the comics through subtle messaging of gender performance by using her body. According to Butler (1999), a strict belief that a “truth” regarding sex makes heterosexuality the only proper outcome because of its strict performance rules of how genders work if the performer buys into the idea of feminine and masculine roles. Sexual identities are performed selectively and mirror the relationship that individuals have with the metaphorical closet. How “out” a member of the LGBTQ community is in the space directly relates to their performance. This is best understood with Performance theory because it looks at all actions and interactions

as performing a socially scripted identity. Butler (1999) explains this as “Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (p. 139). Comics use their distinct form of writing, images and stylized writing to support these repeated acts and to create oversexualized women as the natural performance.

Identities have meaning through a performance, which is repeated by the performer to communicate a reality which is directly related to the context of the situation. However, performance is built on interactions the performer has witnessed in the past. Stuart Hall (1973) in *Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse*, developed a way to look at the encoding/decoding model of communication that plays out in our everyday interaction. The audience is not just taking what is happening in the fictional world at face value, but instead are actively attempting to interpret the message based on their personal experiences (Watney, 2000). Individuals mirror what society expects of them buying further into the context of the situation and gaining access to power or in some cases acceptance. Gayle Rubin (2011) in *Thinking Sex* addresses the hierarchal form that is placed within society, and the way to gain access through it was a sexual expression. If individuals plan to navigate a heterosexual space, then it is essential to perform their sexuality in a heteronormative way. Rubin argues that sexuality is performed as an expression, but also as a tool for acceptance which could be why female characters are oversexualized. Central to the study of performance is communication which will “stress the cultural organization of communicative processes” (Bauman & Briggs, 1990, p. 61). Society still emphasized the depiction of characters in media such as comics and movies to support overall ideals. It is essential to understand those roles for this research and the emphasis that it causes so that as readers we can understand the impact of each decision.

Othering and Objectification

Poison Ivy was created in response to the feminist movement: she was strong, smart, and supportive of other females in comics leading to her form of othering and objectification (Schmidt et al., 2015). Othering and objectification work as one within this study because of the othering that is taking place within comics. Othering is a way to study the construction of roles based on who is in the majority and who is placed in the minority, which is often broken down into the in-group vs. outgroup. Simone de Beauvoir (2010) in their book *The Second Sex* outlines what women face as being part of the out-group:

The same vicious circle can be found in all analogous circumstances: when an individual or a group of individuals is kept in a situation of inferiority, the fact is that he or they are inferior. However, the scope of the verb to be must be understood; bad faith means giving it a substantive value, when in fact it has the sense of the Hegelian dynamic: to be is to have become, to have been made as one manifests oneself. Yes, women, in general, are today inferior to men; that is, their situation provides them with fewer possibilities: the question is whether this state of affairs must be perpetuated. (p. 12-13)

Simone de Beauvoir, Constance Borde, and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier in *The Second Sex* (2010) look at how women are put into a one down position and, therefore, makes them inferior because they do not have the same access as their male counterparts. Objectification leads to othering because of its creation of a hierarchy. Objectification then puts men over women. Maja Mikula (2003) explains in their work *Gender and Videogames* that the popular characters will experience objectification in two ways, first the players, often men were treated as the subjects looking at the character as an object. This objectification continues in the second point: gamers find ways to sexualize characters through fanfiction such as Lara Croft being changed to “Nude Raider” which changed the already limited clothing to nude coloring to expose the character. Both cases of objectification have not been applied to male video game characters. Comic characters are subjected to this form of objectification as well including being drawn in unnatural

contortions to show off both their breast and their butts. Again, looking to Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz and Dana Mastro (2009) in their work previously cited these idealized images of the female body lead to adverse effects on both girls' and women's general feelings of self-worth, specifically, self-esteem and self-efficacy. A lack of self-worth leads to these women who see the issues to not take a bigger stand and therefore continues the cycle of objectification. Poison Ivy within *Gotham City Sirens* is a prime example of this, as Austin describes how Ivy uses her sexuality as a weapon in an attempt to turn the objectification on its head. Although Ivy is fully aware of the female objectification that is happening, she is in full control and only allows the men to have and see what she wants them to see (Austin, 2015). Schmidt et al. also argues that Poison Ivy and the other two Sirens cannot be completely objectified because they are not represented only as objects and to view them in this manner takes away from the textual aspects of the comics (Schmidt et al., 2015). Objectification of the Sirens including Poison Ivy allows for othering to take place and to erase Poison Ivy's feminist roots in favor of a heteronormative replacement, specifically, when the character is removed from her comic book representation because she then becomes an object by removing her thoughts but keeping her body.

The heteronormative replacement then leads to individuals creating a hierarchy of ideologization. Carolyn Cocca (2014) discusses how the idolization of superhero bodies often turns into objectification as men are drawn to show muscle and no depth and women are drawn in the body breaking positions to show all the sexualized attributes of their body. "When an underrepresented group of people is repeatedly reduced to objects and when a narrative's point of view is consistently 'at' that group instead of 'from' that group, the objectified group's story is not being told, empathy for the group is less likely, and the group's power is subverted. In the case of comics, the divide between groups –the line between subject and object – is greatly

gendered” (p. 412). Male gaze allows for objectification to turn into othering because it leads to male and female comic book readers to internalize that message. This message positions individuals’ acceptance of the in/out group as well as acceptance that women are allowed to be objectified with men centered culture. This representation also removes any ability for people to voice what is wrong with the system leading to more otherizing and objectification because it normalizes the rhetoric.

Summary

The review of the literature around feminist criticism, queer theory and the following categories: the subjective reality, heteronormativity, sexuality & gender performance, and objectification & othering create an understanding necessary for this analysis. Including an understanding of feminist theory, which calls the patriarchy into question, the queer theory that questions the binary put in by Western culture onto characters. Subjective reality discussing the impacts of removing progressive politics of comics in order to follow the mainstream culture and the line between what is fact and fiction becomes blurred positioning heteronormativity and oversexualization as desirable. Subjective reality lays a foundation of how heteronormativity, sexuality & gender performance leads to objectification & othering.

Chapter 3: Method

The method that forms my procedure is feminist criticism and ideological critique. According to Foss (2009), this critique is used to fight the oppression that goes on within the current system. By using the feminist critique, I can focus on the heteronormative state, which allows the objectification of women. Feminist criticism provides a system and set of tools to challenge the dominant system, including the fundamental assumption that there is order and hierarchy to everything that we do. This assumption allows us to access how people who are persuaded by this rhetoric continue to use the status quo and therefore the ideology that puts women in a one down position. Feminist criticism consists of three tenets disrupting conventional practices, decolonize hegemonic actions, and finally discussing how women are ignored or neglected. Through the use of feminist criticism, I address the character Poison Ivy who is both female and queer. Foss's (2009) three tenets work well in conjunction with Queer Theory so that all aspects of Poison Ivy can be analyzed in relation to the issues that take place with *Batman and Robin* (1997) and the perception of female characters on screen.

The first tenet by Foss (2009) in feminist criticism is to disrupt conventional practices. Comics can take part in disrupting conventional practices by empowering women. Strategies of disruption can include generating multiple perspectives, cultivating ambiguity, reframing, enacting, or juxtaposing incongruities. The use of disruption in this paper takes place through enacting because of its ability to challenge a situation that is typically accepted, in this case, the way that comic media are looked at as an outlet for men but not for women (Foss, 2009). This critic is explicit when addressing the movie depiction of Poison Ivy, which falls into the American convention of what female characters should be. Throughout this paper, I discuss the

use of Poison Ivy as a method to preserve conventional practices in her Hollywood debut took the screen in 1997's *Batman and Robin*.

According to Foss' (2009) second tenet, this critique is used to fight the hegemonic state of oppression presented by removing Poison Ivy's power on screen. By using the feminist critique, I use the tools that focus on the heteronormative state in America that allows creators to objectify female characters and female fans. One principal use of this tenet is the ability to challenge the fundamental assumption that there are order and hierarchy in everything that we do. Feminist criticism allows for an assessment of the hegemonic state that puts women in a one-down position through the heteronormative hierarchy, including how we look at social issues like women being over-sexualized or "othered" for the male gaze.

The final tenet by Foss (2009), discusses how women are ignored. The final tenet allows for this study to analyze the way Poison Ivy is mishandled and female fans are ignored. Females being ignored include removing the power that Poison Ivy has as a character, the group of females that Poison Ivy works with to help other women, and the reduction of Poison Ivy as a sex symbol for men rather than as a powerful symbol for women. Overall, Poison Ivy's lack of screen time creates a missing narrative and when the narrative is displayed it is used to continue oversexualizing characters to support heteronormativity.

Additionally, this paper uses a similar method to collect data as outlined in *Female Masculinity* (1998) by Judith Halberstam, which uses a selective process labeled as "scavenger methodology" because of the various authors, reimaginings, and millions of stories that either mention or display the character. By using Foss (2009) to perform the analysis and the "scavenger method" as outlined by Halberstam (1998) to collect data, this study is able to have a specific focus on Poison Ivy without removing the details of the character. The scavenger

model works well with feminist criticism because it allows for the focus to narrow and select a variety of pieces that discuss Poison Ivy's identity. Comics create an endless amount of material because of the variety of authors. Therefore, in order to perform this study there has to be a random selection process. Judith Halberstam argues that a "queer methodology attempts to combine methods that are often cast as being at odds with each other, and it refuses the academic compulsion toward disciplinary coherence" (1998, p. 13). Applying this method to the research study allows for medium to be explored and selected based on a random sample in addition to allowing queer theory and feminist theory to be discussed at the same time.

I believe the scavenger method supports the contextualization of Poison Ivy because I am able to preserve the notion of Poison Ivy while still understanding the presence on screen. Due to the use of multiple forms of media, the feminist lens must include aspects of queer theory for a character that is queer in nature and falling victim to practices that demand a feminist lens. Additionally, there is permanence to referencing a pop culture version of Poison Ivy, as this depiction is often the most memorable and universal because the ability to change a character in the comics is easier than changing them on the screen (Shyminsky, 2011). Due to the number of individuals who have shaped this character, I look at how the character has changed between significant points in comic history and then compare this to her major on-screen appearance.

Chapter 4: Description and Analysis

This chapter focuses on describing *Batman and Robin* (1997), the film under examination in this study, and then outlining the culture of Hollywood at the time. After describing both Hollywood and the film, this research applies Foss' (2009) procedures of feminist criticism to the film, specifically, focusing on the presentation of Poison Ivy in relation to the removal of her power through over-sexualization and heteronormativity.

Hollywood Description

The 1990s were saturated with Batman imagery, during the ten year period from 1989 to 1999 there were four live-action movies made about the caped crusader. The early 90's Batman movies were darker in storyline and imagery, partly credited to the director Tim Burton. The Tim Burton movies headlined Michael Keaton as the hero starring opposite Jack Nicholson as The Joker in *Batman* and Danny DeVito as The Penguin in *Batman Returns* (IMDb, 2019). These movies stand in stark contrast to the next Batman franchise directed by Joel Schumacher. Schumacher's movies toted a much lighter tone and visuals as well as a different actor playing the lead in each movie of the franchise, Val Kilmer and George Clooney. Also, they contained high profile actors for the villains: including Tommy Lee Jones as Two-Face and Jim Carey as Riddler. *Batman and Robin* was the final and most underperforming Batman film to come out of the 1990s grossing a mere \$107.33 million (IMDb, 2019).

However, among the super-stars of 1990s Hollywood was Arnold Schwarzenegger, who had starred in some of the biggest action hits of the decade including *Total Recall* and the *Terminator* franchise. His Hollywood success made him the highest billed actor in *Batman and Robin*. Schwarzenegger's success allowed him to dictate several aspects of the film including choice of positioning in credits and promotional materials (Dirks, 2019). This included dictating

the final poster for the movie. While the villain played by Arnold Schwarzenegger, receives less screen time than the hero, he is still the first name on the opening credits and largest pictured on the poster (Dirks, 2019). Overall, *Batman and Robin* was created primarily as a marketing campaign to sell action figures to children and collectors. The movie was created with a Pg-13 rating in mind in order to appeal to the younger audience.

Movie Synopsis

In Gotham City, Batman and Robin attempt to stop Mr. Freeze who is robbing the Gotham's Museum of Art of a large diamond. This leads to a chase around Gotham. However, Mr. Freeze escapes as Batman must defrost Robin.

Meanwhile, in South America, Dr. Pamela Isley is working under Dr. Jason Woodrue, a mad scientist who is using Dr. Isley's experiments to create a super soldier who will be sold to the highest bidder. The creation of the super soldier, Bane, is in Dr. Woodrue's secret lab which creates conflict between Dr. Woodrue and Dr. Isley, specifically about, how the venom should be used. As the two argue over the use of the venom, Dr. Woodrue dismisses Dr. Isley's opinion and attempts to kiss her, but is rejected. Dr. Woodrue then shoves Dr. Isley into a desk where she falls over and then breaks various toxins onto her. Dr. Woodrue believes she is dead.

The Dynamic Duo is now in the Batcave where they learn that Mr. Freeze was once a scientist named Victor Fries. His alter ego of Mr. Freeze was created as he was working on a cure for his wife, Nora Fries, who has MacGregor's Syndrome, a debilitating terminal disease. However, during his experiments with cryo-sleep there was an accident which caused him to become dependent on a diamond powered sub-zero suit.

The scene cuts back to the lab in South America. The scene includes the introduction of Dr. Isley, Bane and the transformation of Dr. Isley into Poison Ivy who then kills Dr. Woodrue.

The scene with Poison Ivy kissing Dr. Woodrue with her now poisonous lips, after her transformation, reveals her power. Moving on from the scene with Dr. Woodrue, it is revealed that Wayne Enterprises funded the project. As a result, Poison Ivy is off to Gotham with the accompaniment of Bane.

The movie shifts back to Gotham where the butler, Alfred Pennyworth's niece, Barbara Wilson, is knocking on the door, making a surprise visit. Barbara is greeted by Dick Greyson and is invited by Bruce Wayne to stay at Wayne Manor until she goes back to school. During her stay, Barbara sneaks out to make money by motorcycle racing against different gangs. The illegal racing is to pay back Alfred who is revealed to have taken care of Barbara and who is now suffering from MacGregor's Syndrome.

Meanwhile, Poison Ivy interrupts a Wayne Enterprises press conference to propose a project that would save the environment while removing humankind. Bruce Wayne declines her offer, labeling her as mad and leaves the press conference. Poison Ivy and Bane then find a hideout of their own within Gotham. The pair commandeers the hideout from the same gang that Barbara has been racing against; however, the building is too industrial for Poison Ivy's liking, and she plants seeds to create a garden.

Batman and Robin later that night use a charity event held by Wayne Enterprises to lure Mr. Freeze into a trap. However, Poison Ivy shows up and releases pheromones into the audience, captivating everyone in the room. Poison Ivy works to seduce the dynamic duo and pin them against each other. Freeze busts into the room and steals a diamond from the event, which was donated by the Wayne family. While he is there, Poison Ivy attempts to seduce Mr. Freeze, but is left empty-handed.

Mr. Freeze is unsuccessful in his getaway and is captured. Mr. Freeze is sent to a prison cell in Arkham Asylum but escapes with the help of Poison Ivy and Bane. Mr. Freeze and Poison Ivy return to his hideout to retrieve his diamonds, which power his suit and his wife. However, at the hideout, the escaped villains are met with Batman and Robin as well as Gotham Police. Poison Ivy and Bane attack Batman and Robin while Mr. Freeze takes care of his suit. Poison Ivy finds Mr. Freeze's wife suspended in cryosleep and deliberately cuts off her life support. Poison Ivy leaves her to die and blames Batman, which enrages Mr. Freeze and leads to the two officially teaming up to end humankind.

Batman and Robin go after Poison Ivy and, in doing so, Robin is affected by Poison Ivy's pheromones becoming obsessed with Poison Ivy and rebels against Batman. Batman goes to save Robin and is subdued. During this time Barbara enters the Batcave and learns Bruce Wayne and Dick Grayson's secret. The fight continues, and Robin is pulled deeper into Poison Ivy's pheromones. It is not until Batgirl shows up, in complete costume, that Poison Ivy is defeated. Batman, Robin, and Batgirl then team up to go after Mr. Freeze, who has frozen Gotham. Robin and Batgirl defeat Bane, while Batman and Mr. Freeze fight. Batman wins and thaws Gotham.

After the fight, Batman reveals that Poison Ivy was the one who attempted to kill Nora, who is Dr. Freeze's wife. Batman asks Mr. Freeze for the cure to MacGregor's Syndrome for Alfred and Mr. Freeze complies. Mr. Freeze is allowed to keep his suit and share a prison cell with Poison Ivy, who is having a mental breakdown. The film closes with Batman, Robin, and Batgirl running in front of the Bat-signal to triumphant music.

Analysis

The following three sections will be an analysis of the film, *Batman and Robin* (1997) understanding three tenets as outlined by Foss (2009) including conventional practices, hegemonic state, and women being ignored in the film. Through each section, the analysis will outline how Poison Ivy's power is erased through heteronormativity and objectification.

Conventional practices. The following paragraphs exemplify how the movie *Batman and Robin* is a victim of conventional practices. The movie does not even have to begin to show the use of heteronormativity. For instance, the positioning of male and female characters as shown in Figure 1. The female characters are placed below the male characters. The placement uses heteronormativity in a literal interpretation. Heteronormativity acts as a perpetuation of social norms by defining what is considered normal and acceptable. The dominant United States culture places privilege on those who strictly identify with normalized concepts of self. This includes sexuality, gender identification and even gender performance. The United States places emphasis on the nuclear family: male head of household, subservient female and children (Smith, 2017). Thus, the movie poster providing imagery of women in a lower position than men, perpetuates the heteronormative ideal, which is a theme that holds for the entire film. Placement of roles onto men and women within the film are explicit and work to show over-sexualization and heteronormativity.



Figure 1. *Batman and Robin* movie poster. (1997)

The movie opens with close-up shots of Batman and Robin's bodies such as butt, chest, arms, legs, and genitals all of which are positioned to demonstrate their power and emphasize their muscle and masculinity rather than their sex appeal. Strength and power are signaled with the use of powerful music, posing, and the use of quick jump cuts rather than panning up their bodies. Although this is done to position the men in a place of power, this is still objectifying their bodies. Male objectification often acts as a way to tell men the "right" way to be a man (Smith, 2017). Heroes of the story are white, cis-gendered, able-bodied men which places them at the center of the heteronormative standard.

The positioning of male bodies for power and female bodies for sexuality are in the use of camera angles and costume. The most obvious example of this is the difference between a jump cut and a camera pan. Because of the editing the audience is not allowed much time to view the male body, thus eliminating much of the sexualization that comes from viewing intimate areas such as the groin and the chest. The women, however, are introduced through the use of panning camera angles. This type of shot mimics that of a human gaze, beginning from one part of the body and slowly moving to take in the rest of the shot. Jennifer Reinhardt helps to contextualize the act of gazing by defining gaze as more than just a look but as a look with intent. The intent behind the gaze is important because as she describes "... the gaze is used as a vehicle for communication and transmits information and assumptions about the viewer/viewed" (2019, p. 2). As mentioned previously the film was created as a tool to sell action figures to children and collectors, during this time the most common comic book consumer is male (Schmidt et. al, 2015). The intent behind the camera's gaze provides the audience (men) a form of guilt-free objectification. One example of this comes from the party scene in which Poison Ivy strips out of her gorilla costume. The shot continues to look at her body from behind, and it is important to note that the camera does not watch Bane undress out of his gorilla costume. The camera uses the pan effect, which regulates the gaze of the audience to objectifying the female body and not the male one.

Interestingly, each male suit has nipples including the two male villains Bane and Mr. Freeze. Nipples are not typically on display on superhero outfits. However, in this movie, they are used as a gender power play. This power play is because the gendering of nipples is unequal. Although the men's nipples are shown and are very obviously nipples, the women's costumes have either no nipple or the breastplates on the costume come to a comical point. Gender is used

to justify treating bodies differently has created a taboo around women's nipples, suggesting that the viewing of male nipples is appropriate, but female nipples are meant to be hidden. The movie would have been positioned differently had Poison Ivy had nipples on her costume because of gender roles. This is because breasts/nipples are seen as a secondary sexual characteristic and within mainstream Western culture is sexualized (Smith, 2016). This again ties to the theme of intent, in order to keep a PG-13 rating the intent of nipples being shown cannot be sexual, once it is sexualized the rating is bumped up to an R (Worgaftik, 2018). Instead, the movie works to normalize the use of male bodies and its demonstration of power and masculinity while the female bodies are used to demonstrate sexuality.

Although Poison Ivy's sexualization is the focus of her character, she is not unique because, the audience sees multiple instances of women in this type of shot including Barbara Wilson. Barbara, coming to be with her Uncle Alfred Pennyworth is shown from behind in a schoolgirl uniform. Then, as she stands on a ledge to look into a window of the house, Dick Grayson opens the door and camera mimics his gaze. The camera angle begins at her ankles and then pans up her legs slowly to the edge of her skirt. The shot is only interrupted to cut to Grayson saying "Please be looking for me" Barbara's introduction into the movie is one filled with objectification as it focuses on her body rather than the camera staying on her face. As previously outlined by Reinhardt, the camera is used to objectify and sexualize female members by focusing on their bodies before giving them a line.

Poison Ivy's introduction takes place roughly fifteen minutes into the movie after the main male characters have already been established including Mr. Freeze, Batman, and Robin. Poison Ivy is introduced as Dr. Pamela Isley, a crazed scientist, who is talking to herself on a tape recorder about her intentions of giving an animalistic defense to plants. During this moment

of exposition, it is also revealed that she is not allowed in her male colleague's lab, Dr. Jason Woodrue, because he has deemed it too dangerous for her. However, because he has been taking her plant venom samples, she decides it is finally time to investigate. This ends the initial introduction of Dr. Pamela Isley and begins the introduction of her counterpart within the film, Bane. The Geena Davis Institute Gender in Media study found that between 2006-2009 movies rated G, PG, or PG-13 noted there were 2.42 males for every female character (Scott & Dargis, 2014). This breakdown holds true with the *Batman and Robin* movie as well with the inclusion of Bane and Poison Ivy's story being told in unison.

The other lab is full of men surrounding a known homicidal maniac, Antonio Diego, as he is strapped to a table, placed in a luchador mask, and subjected to the previously mentioned toxins. Dr. Jason Woodrue explains to those in the room how Antonio Diego will become a killing machine, and that he, and others altered to be like him, will be available for purchase. The military men who want to buy a "supreme weapon of mass destruction" or Bane, gather around to watch the transformation happen. The transformation of Antonio Diego into Bane symbolizes the creation of toxic masculinity. Toxic masculinity is "a set of behaviors and beliefs that include the following: suppressing emotions or masking distress, maintaining an appearance of hardness and violence as an indicator of power" (Salam, 2019). The *Batman and Robin* film takes a very literal approach to display these characteristics similar to the way it embodied heteronormativity on the promotional poster. As the toxins are administered, Diego's muscles grow to enormous sizes and he becomes increasingly aggressive, maintaining the appearance of hardness. Once the transformation is complete, the audience is introduced to Bane, a masked strong man who shows no other emotion outside of anger and destruction, suppressing emotions and literally masking expression/distress. His destruction is amplified through the push of a

button on his chest which then releases more toxins into his body, and violence is an indicator of his power. The fact that Bane will later be introduced as Poison Ivy's henchmen/sidekick illustrates two things: one that toxic masculinity is a normalized part of male life and two that while it is normal, it is deemed as a bad quality. Salam (2019) describes how the cultural lessons of toxic masculinity lead to men being at higher risk for prison and health issues and that the American Psychological Association has guidelines for how to deal with these traits in boys.

The theme of toxic masculinity is carried through to the next scene in which Dr. Woodrue plays out the concept of "owed intimacy," which is a type of sexual coercion. He expects Dr. Isley not only to join him professionally, but also to be romantically involved with him. He first attempts to bribe her with power if she complies and then he tries to use his authority over her. The Office on Women's Health (2019) outlines both examples as classic iterations of sexual coercion. This ties back to the reference of toxic masculinity and the power of a woman's right to say no. Julie Feng discusses the embedded misogyny of Western societies and how women are systematically removed of the power to say no because of implied violence. She lists cases of women being caused bodily harm because they said no to men's unwanted advances (Feng, 2018). Isley was punished for rejecting Woodrue, taking all of the power away from her saying no. As he attempts to force himself on her and she rejects his advances, he becomes angry and lashes out at her pushing her into and over a table. Then as she is helpless on the floor, Woodrue makes the conscious decision to push shelving full of the same type of plant toxins that created Bane onto Isley. She then begins to be pulled into the earth as Dr. Woodrue says "Let the poisons and toxins burn a grave for you, deep into the Earth you love so much! Bye, bye dear!" The transition of Dr. Pamela Isley into Poison Ivy begins under the narrative that her work turns on her or that that she never had control of her work in the first place. This is

a powerful nuance that carries through to the end of the movie when her creations once again turn on her and cause her demise.

Although Freeze is only interested in his wife, the women around him are enamored with him. Within Mr. Freeze's sub-freezing temperature headquarters there is another woman, Ms. B Haven, who is in love with him. She is represented sexually, grabbing at Mr. Freeze and suggesting that they go "warm up", which in this case is an innuendo for sex. Ms. B Haven is dressed in the very revealing clothes of, lingerie with a plastic skirt and coat over the top, even though all the henchmen are dressed like Eskimos. Even her name, Ms. B Haven is a pun for misbehaving, showing that she is a "bad girl" who is interested in the villain of the movie because she is morally corrupt. However, her advances are quickly dismissed with Freeze addressing her as silly or just another henchmen. As Freeze was faced with the same type of advances that Dr. Isley experienced, he was able to say no and Ms. B Haven respected that refusal. The positioning of this scene, taking place directly after the transformation, exemplifies the heteronormative gender roles prescribed to these characters.

When Dr. Isely is resurrected as Poison Ivy, she rises from the soil underground. We see her rise from the ground dancing seductively and in a manner similar to that of a belly dancer, while pulling vines off of her body. The camera again focuses on her body as it pans up her rear, legs, back and then pans out to show the entire body. Her first "words" are just sexual moans. However, when she does speak, her voice has changed, and it is more sensual, helping to portray her as a femme fatal, defined as "1: a seductive woman who lures men into dangerous or compromising situations. 2: a woman who attracts men by an aura of charm and mystery" (Merriam-Webster, 2019). She later exhibits both attributes and her voice changing is the first non-visual cue to her transition. In addition to the voice change, the first act that she commits

as Poison Ivy is giving Woodrue the kiss of death. There is sensual music playing when Poison Ivy is in a scene positioning the audience to view Poison Ivy sexually. The use of sound in the movie attempts control over the audience and the way the audience should accept a specific position such as the case for outlining Poison Ivy in a sexual way.

Poison Ivy's body is given more time in the movie than her intelligence, positioning her looks over her intelligence. Such is the case when Poison Ivy is acting as Dr. Isley, she reverts to her voice pre-transformation, which positions being attractive and intelligent as opposing ideas. This is reinforced when she is talking to herself, and she uses the sensual voice of Poison Ivy to control Bane. Her control of Bane is one of the key markers to her character identity as a femme fatal. Her being able to control Bane, who is described as a killing machine, shows the power of her seduction. The duality of Poison Ivy is best displayed when she is trying to gain an audience with Bruce Wayne to tell her plan to save plant life. When she is in the car, being driven by Bane, she is hiding the qualities that physically make her Poison Ivy rather than Dr. Isley. Choosing to hide her new identity, specifically her hair and voice, is an attempt to present the science without the chance of her looks to distract. This attempt to once again make herself look "ugly" includes tropes often used in Hollywood. Most notably that glasses and an updo are ugly and once those two items are gone a person is truly beautiful. The sexualization of key parts of her body reduces her to an objectified plot point because as her intelligence is removed her body is placed on display (Schmidt et al., 2015). The scene with Bruce, as Poison Ivy presents her ideas, and positions her to seem crazy. The choice to have her race up to Wayne during the middle of a press conference removes any validity that her quest to save the planet could hold. Poison Ivy is leading with emotion which is shown to be irrational and disruptive and as observers of the situation Bruce nor the crowd understand the emotion behind the action

(Baddeley, 2010). In addition, Bruce consistently refers to Dr. Isley as a doctor in a satirical manner after he is corrected that her title is a doctor. He does this by initially scoffing and then placed unnecessary emphasis on the word doctor. This removes even more of her power from the situation again by being painted as the irrational woman. The final removal of her power from this situation comes after she gives her impassioned plea to help save the planet, and the entire audience of the press conference laughs at her, and the reporter states “Batman and Robin protect us, even from plants and flowers” providing foreshadowing to how the movie will end. As she leaves the “meeting” with Bruce Wayne and is once again in privacy, she removes her wig to display her now full and long hair and reverts to being sexual.

Another significant difference in how the villains are positioned in Batman and Robin is the actions taken by Poison Ivy being positioned as emotional and reckless compared to Mr. Freeze. Mr. Freeze who, although emotional, is positioned to be in control of his emotions and meaningful in his destruction as it serves a redeemable purpose. An example of this is when the audience is introduced to Mr. Freeze and Bane. Both characters actively destroy their surroundings to demonstrate their power and achieve their goals. Bane in his desire to be free and Mr. Freeze with his desire to save his wife. In addition, Batman and Robin, when pursuing villains, use destruction to their advantage to stop the villain, but this is represented as okay because it is just collateral damage for the larger good. While the hero may cause destruction the villains to cause more or are prevented from causing more by the hero (Chan, 2015). Images of destruction are typical in male-centered media because of the theme of toxic masculinity (Salam, 2019). Each action taken by Poison Ivy’s male counterparts is because they have a larger goal at hand, and those watching are reminded of those goals. However, Poison Ivy’s goal to save the planet is either diminished or pushed aside because of how she is represented in the movie, her

looks outweigh what she is saying. Poison Ivy's passion for nature and dissatisfaction with mankind is framed as reckless, and her emotions control her instead of being able to control her emotions. Mr. Freeze, Bane, Batman, and Robin are all in control of their emotions, and it is when they are faced with Poison Ivy's reckless behavior that they have pulled away from that control. The first time we see her use intelligence over her sexuality is when she is interacting with Mr. Freeze and wants to use him to plot revenge and end humanity.

Poison Ivy's relationship with Bane is heteronormalized with pet names and the acting out of stereotypical gender roles. Bane is forced to do the grunt work while Poison Ivy keeps clear of hard labor. The movie uses this to represent gender roles with, Poison Ivy as the homemaker and Bane as the provider. There are little nuances throughout the movie that use heteronormativity as character points, such as Bane doing the manual labor of creating their lair while Poison Ivy gives life to some of her plants. This again depicts the nuclear family ideal of heteronormativity: the male provides while the female nurtures. The division between them does not just use gender stereotypes but also uses heteronormativity in order to use their relationship as a standard and to reduce Poison Ivy and Bane to a gatherer and hunter relationship. This is not the only time Poison Ivy is represented as helpless: for example, Poison Ivy breaks Mr. Freeze out prison and would be unable to complete the mission without Bane's strength and protection. However, as they enter into the prison cell and take down the guards, Bane is unable to break through the wall, and in turn, has to be saved by Mr. Freeze. Mr. Freeze freezes the water pipes, and they bust out of the wall. Poison Ivy continues to be the damsel in distress trope. Again, at the end of the film, she attributes some of her powers to a man Bane with the phrase "Every Poison Ivy Action Figure comes with a Bane." The movie places Poison Ivy's power in part in her relationship with Bane and again places her in a one down position

(Beauvoir, 2010). This reinforces the concept that she has no autonomy and that she is a product of a heteronormative standard.

The movie itself uses women as a tool for sexual satisfaction including the scene where men are openly bidding on females who are dressed up as flowers. The men are naming their price based on the name of the flowers rather than the name of the person thereby reducing them to their looks as the bidding is not prefaced by any description of the characters or given a name. Additionally, when these women are bid on, they wave, laugh, and get back in line. During this scene, the audience stops bidding with the entrance of Poison Ivy who makes her appearance dressed as a gorilla. However, the audience is unaware that it is her until Poison Ivy begins to undress out of gorilla costume and releases pheromones into the room, which puts each male in the room into a trance.

Hegemonic state. The following section analyzes how the use of a hegemonic state allows men in the movie to flourish while leaving women behind. The hegemonic state is built on heteronormativity and uses over-sexualization of women as a tool. As comic book culture is built by and for men, and they are the in-group who dictate how the out group's story is told. Thus, women, as part of the out-group, are defined from the view of men and are removed of power (Cocca, 2014). The use of framing and how the story is told in regards to each character creates their power on screen. The use of a hegemonic state begins to diminish Poison Ivy.

Batman and Robin first meet Mr. Freeze, the main villain in the movie, as he attempts to steal a diamond from the Gotham Museum to complete his final freeze gun. Much like the protagonist, Mr. Freeze is highlighted using quick-paced shots on his costume accentuating his massive muscles. His power is on display through his easy defeat of Batman and Robin as well as his power over his henchmen who follow his every order. Mr. Freeze is initially framed as a

madman whose sole desire is destruction, until the audience is taken back to the Batcave, where they learn more about his history. During the debriefing between Batman and Robin, Mr. Freeze, now known to be Dr. Victor Fries, is reframed as having redeeming qualities. Rather than diabolical, he is depicted as an intelligent man who is blinded by the grief of losing the love of his life. The loss of his wife, to the incurable MacGregor's Syndrome, is the reason he is trying to freeze the city is so that he can get enough money to continue his research for the cure to save his wife (which we find to be frozen to prevent the spread of the disease rather than just dead). Freeze is reframed to be an anti-hero or at the very least a man pushed to the extreme. This allows the audience to connect to his story and gives a reference for his bad deeds. At the end, he is labeled as a “good guy” because he gives an antidote to Batman that will save Alfred.

Freeze is not just framed as a hero, he is also framed as a love interest for Poison Ivy. After she tries to use her love pheromones on him and they are ineffective, Freeze becomes the only man who receives her affection. This represents Poison Ivy as someone only interested in someone who is not interested in her. This “unattainable trope” is a convenient plot device, where women are framed as only wanting the men they cannot have. The fact that Freeze can resist Poison Ivy’s advances makes her want him more. The story takes it a step further framing Poison Ivy as jealous of Nora Fries and wanting her out of the competition pool for Freeze’s affection. She goes so far as to kill Nora uttering the line: “I have never been good with competition. Who needs a frigid wife anyway?” This line places Freeze in a dominant position over Poison Ivy by showing that she wants his full affection, and it is also the first of many examples of women being pitted against one another in this film. Poison Ivy also harms the relationship between Bruce Wayne and Julie Madison who is, his longtime girlfriend.

Poison Ivy is depicted as a homewrecker, who destroys all types of relationships, and not just romantic ones. This includes Batman and Robin, who are framed as having a father-son/familial relationship. These heroes must live their lives in both regular societies and save the day scenarios and Robin's role as the sidekick plays into a queer narrative. Dick Grayson, being so much younger than Bruce Wayne, places him in an in-between space between childhood and adulthood. Because youth is often understood as "not-yet straight," it reflects homosocial tendencies for the hero. Although nothing is romantic, the relationship that they share is a homosocial one, defined by Shyminsky as same-sex bonding aimed to enable solidarity and interdependence (Shyminsky, 2011). The first lines in the movie, however, erases any notion of a homosexual relationship between Batman and Robin as Robin states "I want a car. Chicks dig the car." To which Batman responds, "This is why Superman works alone." One of the main conflicts of the movie is the pairs' inability to work together, and this is only threatened more by the introduction of Poison Ivy. The mentorship relationship is threatened because they are fighting against each other rather than working with each other. The queer narrative, even an unintentional one, is at direct odds with a heteronormative standard (Herz & Johansson, 2015). The movie consistently works to dismiss queer undertones by placing the duo's relationship in a hyper-masculine context.

Poison Ivy shares a queer narrative as she transitions to become more plant-like than human. When she rises from the earth, she does so in a similar way to a flower sprouting from the ground. The twists and turns she makes with her body mimick that of a stem growing over time by twisting and turning to find the sunlight. During her description to Dr. Woodrue of her transition, she states "They replaced my blood with aloe, my skin with chlorophyll, and filled my lips [pauses to kiss Woodrue] with venom." Because the toxins were animal-plant toxins, Poison

Ivy is now a plant-animal hybrid. The first sign of her new autonomy comes from her kissing the man who assaulted her and turned her into Poison Ivy. Poison Ivy uses her new powers to kill Dr. Woodrue through a kiss. She then states that she is poison, this is the first mention of her new persona as Poison Ivy. She also describes herself as mother nature and that the “plants need to take back life as *ours*.” Framing Poison Ivy as mother nature and using this language to display her motives shows she identifies more with plants than people. While Freeze was reframed to be given redeemable qualities, under her queer framing as a plant, the audience is given no justification for her obsession with plants. The audience is not given a heart-warming reason for her wanting to save plants over humans, and she is deemed as irreprehensible because of it. The act of defying her prescribed gender role is something seen as radical and wrong. Austin describes this as the patriarchal hold that paints women who seek power as evil (2015). Thus, Poison Ivy breaking from heteronormative standards means that she is seeking the same power as a male needs to be controlled.

Women ignored or erased. The following paragraphs will shed light on how *Batman and Robin* ignore women by erasing female empowerment. Although the movie has two strong females they are often reduced down to heteronormative tropes instead of giving them a redeemable back story. Once again, women are represented in this film construct as over-sexualized and heterosexual.

The movie uses political correctness as a joke poking fun at how individuals interact within heteronormativity. The first example is Batman and Robin’s emphasis on Poison Ivy’s gender. Robin states “I can’t believe we were fighting over a bad guy!” to which Batman retorts “Bad- yes. Guy? No.” This also helps signal that they are not homosexuals using heteronormativity to justify their infatuation. They end the conversation by Batman stating

“Great stems, though...” and Robin replying “Buds, too.” This again acts as a bonding for the men and reduces Poison Ivy down to a point of desire in which Poison Ivy’s power over Batman and Robin acts as a plot device for their relationship. Again, gender is discussed as a joke when Barbara introduces herself as Batgirl and Batman says “That’s not very PC. What about Batwoman, or Batperson?” Reducing political correctness to a punchline takes away the power it can have in framing a person’s identity.

Poison Ivy’s role in the movie is often as a plot device for other characters. Her lack of significance and that of all other women characters cause them to be two dimensional and easily erased. The only exposition that Poison Ivy receives is through talking to herself. It is through her lunacy that the audience is able to learn about the character. However, because it is framed through talking to herself, any knowledge the audience gains is tainted with her craziness, meaning that her story has zero validity. The only time the audience is able to witness her character development is in connection with a man, Dr. Woodrue. It is during their fight about the misappropriation of her plant toxins and trying to defend herself that she is given a sane voice. Her voice is only assumed as sane when compared to the lunacy of Dr. Woodrue’s perspective. His easy dismissal of her accusations shows how little concern he has for stealing her work for his own gain. This is a common theme throughout history, in which men take credit for the work of women, with some of the most prominent examples being within the sciences (Pak, 2019). Isley is continuously discredited as a scientist and as a character within the movie. Dr. Woodrue, although an inferior scientist to Dr. Isley, holds a position of power over her and no one questions if the work he is presenting is his own (Herz & Johansson, 2015). Again, prescribing a heteronormative standard of men having total control.

Poison Ivy's first defeat takes place back at her lair. However, this must be inferred by the audience because it is never explicitly stated. The only clue to the final scene taking place in her lair is the fact that it is covered by her hybrid plants. Her commandeered lair being the only place in which she planted them within Gotham means that this is the most logical place for this scene to be taking place. The fact that the movie explicitly confirms the other hideouts and lairs, but fails to do so with Poison Ivy's, is another way in which her agency has been revoked. The audience cannot appreciate the work that went into her creating this lair, and her notoriety as a scientist is erased. Freeze, who was also a scientist, has the technology and extravagant tools, while Poison Ivy is reduced down to having a green thumb. This also places her in a position of domesticity.

In summary, this chapter has provided a description of Hollywood, the film, and examined *Batman and Robin* (1997) through Foss's (2009) three tenets in relation to the overarching research question: how does the cinematic portrayal of the female comic book character, Poison Ivy, remove her power by simultaneously sexualizing and heteronormalize the character? This analysis has outlined the way that Poison Ivy's power on screen has been removed through heteronormativity and over-sexualization by the tools that preserve others' power including conventional practices, hegemonic state, and ignoring women.

Chapter 5: Discussion & Conclusions

In this chapter, four significant sections are examined: a discussion of the implications, the limitations of the study, future research, and conclusions.

Implications of the Study

The discussion of the implications of this research provide tools for understanding the bias produced in everyday media. The research begins encouraging others to look into media as something that may affect everyday perceptions and begin to question why characters are represented the way they are. It is imperative that scholars understand how gender representations change in different types of media and the implications of those changes. This project offers a way for understanding how gender is appropriated in the comic when translated on screen, the messages of those representations, and their implications are vital particularly, because comics and their character have a wide audience. Understanding how messages and narratives are changed to fit a wider audience to remove the dynamics of comics and its revolutionary undertones. Diversity being erased to sell to a wider audience is harmful because it normalizes so many of what comics are attempting to eradicate, and such is the case with characters such as Poison Ivy being a strong female, who is also queer in original. Heteronormativity and oversexualization within media that is preserved by society are unable to be changed if no one is talking about them.

Additionally, the research hopes to add to the discussion around how to fight those biases in an academic setting so that it may reach a wider audience and preserve societal validity. Through analyzing a popular Hollywood version of a comic book character there are two types of audiences that are potentially being reached. Those who read comics and those who teach although those two may cross understanding that these groups do not always overlap is key.

Reducing the harms of heteronormativity starts from understanding where it takes place and reaching individuals who have the power to change it both in buying power and in creation. Including looking into how mediums which are often ignored, in this case geek culture, and their underlying messages of heteronormativity and oversexualization. Comic books fit into the larger framework of 'geek culture' with individuals collectively identify as fans to comic books, video games, films, and television, among others. If comic readers are drawing on these interpretations to make real-world decisions, their attitudes about women could be informed by these texts. By understanding the implications of this research, I hope others will have a better understanding when consuming the media of how characters are represented.

Finally, the implication of this research is that academic writing can be produced from any medium and this study is used as an encouragement to learn from every form of medium and understand the meaning behind it. Communication is unique in that it exists everywhere and gives tools to those who study it the ability to go into multiple types of media and the messages within them. However, once we start to mindlessly enjoy items as simple as movie thoughts that are harmful to other groups begin. Researching Poison Ivy has the ability to show that entertainment is not mindless and doesn't exist within power structures. Characters presentation matters and sends an overall message, and it is important to understand that those messages are not equal and often have other goals in mind, such as heteronormativity or over-sexualization of female characters. However, Poison Ivy is not unique in the way she is treated because of that it is important to outline the limitations of this research.

Limitations of the Study and Future Research

The limitation of this study is addressed in conjunction with recommendations for future research due to the specificity in the study. First, this study has a limited scope, it is one version

of Poison Ivy in one movie. The decision to analyze one version was intentional because comics tend to have multiple universes that all interact at the same time. The author of this study suggests other forms of Poison Ivy, media, and storyline universes should be conducted because it allows for a deeper understanding of the material in addition to interacting with different struggles in other forms of media.

Second, this study intentionally excludes other female characters that have had interaction with Batman, specifically, out of the 1989 to 1999 decade in order to focus on Poison Ivy in *Batman and Robin* (1997). Future research within this movie alone could analyze the way Barbra Wilson, Nora Fries, and Julie Madison were objectified and put down throughout the movie around heteronormativity as well as gender roles. Women are not the only take future research could have on this film. Other aspects such as the men experiencing objectification could be developed and while mentioned this idea is not entirely explored in this study.

Third, the study focuses on the implications of heteronormativity and gender roles, but this is not the only take on this movie. For instance, one could study the lack of diversity in the cast because it is predominately white and should be studied and the way that individual's bodies are policed by race to tell a story. The author of this thesis encourages others to look beyond rhetorical criticisms and into other forms of analysis in order to study and understand the audience's reaction to the movie and the way their positionalities affect that perception.

Conclusion

Up to this chapter, there has been a look into the way that Poison Ivy has been treated in relation to heteronormativity, gender roles, and objectification during *Batman and Robin* (1997). The study shows the positioning of Poison Ivy in relation to the other cast members. Additionally, the study demonstrates how feminist theory and feminist criticisms interact with

text in order to understand the hegemonic state as well as disrupt it. Throughout the study, there has been a call to study a widely underrepresented medium, comic book characters, particularly narratives create roles onto fictional characters. Additionally, this study has highlighted the presence of heteronormativity in mass media through communication and character presentation. Finally, this study has looked at the effect of heteronormative narrative within mass media, gender roles, and how over-sexualization is re-enforced in media.

References

- Austin, S. (2015). Batman's female foes: The gender war in Gotham City. *Journal of Popular Culture*, 48(2), 285–295. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jpcu.12257>
- Baddeley, J. (2010). On the irrationality of women (and men). *Psychology Today*. Retrieved from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/embracing-the-dark-side/201011/the-irrationality-women-and-men>
- Bates, M. (2008). More real than Real: The ur-Reality of World of Warcraft. Chaney, J.R., Ruggill, J.E., & McAllister, K.S. (eds.) *Computer Culture Reader*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Cambridge, UK.
- Batman & Robin*. (2019). IMDb. Retrieved from <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0118688/>
- bell hooks. (1984). *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center*. Print
- Beauvoir, S., Borde, C., and Malovany-Chevallier, S. (2010). *The Second Sex*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Bauman R. & Briggs, C. (1990). Poetics and performance as critical perspectives on language and social life. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 19, 59-88.
- Beasley, B., and Collins-Standley, T. (2002). Shirts vs. Skins: Clothing as an indicator of gender role stereotyping in video games. *Mass Communication & Society* 5, no. 3: 279-293. SocINDEX with Full Text, EBSCOhost (accessed February 27, 2018).
- Behm-Morawitz, E., and Mastro, D. (2009). The effects of the sexualization of female video game characters on gender stereotyping and female self-concept. *Sex Roles* 61, no. 11-12, 808-23. doi:10.1007/s11199-009-9683-8.
- Bitzer, L. (1968). The rhetorical situation. *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 1, 1-14.
- Black, E. (1978). *Rhetorical Criticism: A study in method*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin

- Boboltz, S., & Yam, K. (2017). Why On-Screen Representation Actually Matters. Retrieved from https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/why-on-screen-representation-matters_us_58aeae96e4b01406012fe49d
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble: feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1999). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Burke, K. (1966). *Language as Symbolic Action*. Berkley, CA: University of California.
- Casadesus-Masanell, R. 2014. Introduction to strategy. HBSP #8097-HTM-ENG.
- Chan, C. (2015). Who causes more destruction in superhero movies, heroes or villains? *Gizmodo*. Retrieved from <https://gizmodo.com/who-causes-more-destruction-in-superhero-movies-heroes-1727004338>
- Checkett, J. (2001). The green goddess returns Batman's poison ivy as a symbol of emerging ecofeminist consciousness. <http://libproxy.usc.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.libproxy2.usc.edu/docview/304701747?accountid=14749>
- Cocca, C. (2014). The “broke back test”: A quantitative and qualitative analysis of portrayals of women in mainstream superhero comics, 1993–2013. *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics*, 5(4), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21504857.2014.916327>
- Cohen, C. J. (1997). Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?. *GLQ*. 3 (4): 437–465. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-3-4-437>
- De Lauretis, T. and Schehr, L. R. (1991). *Queer theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities* Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

- Dill, K. E., and Kathryn P. Thill. (2007). Video Game Characters and the Socialization of Gender Roles: Young People's Perceptions Mirror Sexist Media Depictions. *Sex Roles* 57, no. 11-12. 851-64. doi:10.1007/s11199-007-9278-1.
- Feng, J. (2018). "We belong to ourselves: On male entitlement and women's right to say no." *The Body is Not an Apology*. <https://thebodyisnotanapology.com/magazine/we-belong-to-ourselves-on-male-entitlement-and-womens-right-to-say-no/>
- Foss, S. K. (2009). *Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and practice*. Fourth ed. Long Grove, IL/USA: Waveland Press.
- Goodale, G. (2015). Gamergate: Video game war over women spills into real life. *Christian Science Monitor*, October 29. N.PAG. Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost (accessed February 10, 2018).
- Gregorian, D. (2012). DC Comics Green Lantern relaunched as a gay superhero. *New York Post*. Retrieved from http://www.nypost.com/p/news/national/dc_comics_green_lantern_to_be_revealed_Yt2uNktuzmrrWSbkIRIDbO
- Halberstam, J. (1998). *Female masculinity*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Hall, S. (1973). *Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse*. Birmingham: Centre for Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham, 507-17. Print.
- Kubowitz, H. (2012). The default reader and a model of queer reading and writing strategies or: Obituary for the implied reader. *Style*, 46(2), 201-228. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.libproxy1.usc.edu/stable/10.5325/style.46.2.201>
- Magnett, C. (2018). A Beginner's Guide to Poison Ivy. Retrieved February 01, 2019, from <https://comicbook.com/comics/2018/03/05/poison-ivy-batman-guide/>
- McCloud, S. (1993) *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*. New York: HarperPerennial.

- Mikula, M. (2003). Gender and Video games: the political valency of Lara Croft. *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 17, no. 1: 79. Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost (accessed February 10, 2018).
- Merriam-Webster. (2019). Femme fatale. *Merriam-Webster*. Retrieved from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/femme%20fatale>
- Office on Women's Health. (2019). Sexual coercion. *U.S. Department of Health*. Retrieved from <https://www.womenshealth.gov/relationships-and-safety/other-types/sexual-coercion>
- Ott, B. L., & Mack, R. L. (2013). *Critical media studies: An introduction (2)*. Wiley-Blackwell
- Pak, E. (2019). Alice Ball and 7 female scientists whose discoveries were credited to men. *Biography*. Retrieved from <https://www.biography.com/news/alice-ball-female-scientists>
- Reinhardt, J. (2019). Gaze. *The Chicago School of Media Theory*. Retrieved from <https://lucian.uchicago.edu/blogs/mediatheory/keywords/gaze/>
- Robehmed, N. (2015). Study Reports Too Few LGB Characters, No Transgender Roles In Movies. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/nalierobehmed/2015/08/06/study-reports-too-few-lgbt-characters-no-transgender-roles-in-movies/#6b93b3f3627f>
- Royal, D. (2012). *Drawing attention: Comics as a means of approaching U.S. cultural diversity*. Academia.
- Rubin, G. (2011). *Deviations: A Gayle Rubin reader* Durham, NC. Duke University Press, 2011. Print.
- Salam, M. (2019). What is toxic masculinity? *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/22/us/toxic-masculinity.html>

- Schmidt, K., VanderHaagen, S., Conley, D., Guthrie, J., & Nagelhout, E. (2015). Siren song: A rhetorical analysis of gender and intimate partner violence in "Gotham City Sirens." ProQuest Dissertations Publishing. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1710460617/>
- Scott, A. O. & Dargis, M. (2014). Sugar, spice and guts. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/07/movies/fall-arts-preview-representation-of-female-characters-in-movies-is-improving.html>.
- Shaw, A. (2014). The Internet Is Full of Jerks, Because the World Is Full of Jerks: What feminist theory teaches us about the internet. *Communication & Critical/Cultural Studies* 11, no. 3: 273-277. *Communication & Mass Media Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed December 27, 2018).
- Shyminsky, N. (2011). "Gay" sidekicks: Queer anxiety and the narrative straightening of the superhero. *Men and Masculinities*, 14(3), 288–308. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X10368787>
- Smith, M. (2017). Heteronormativity: What is it and why it's a problem. *Entity*. Retrieved from <https://www.entitymag.com/heteronormativity-meaning-problems/>
- Smith, M. (2016). No, you're not hardwired to stare at a women's breasts. *The Conversation*. Retrieved from <https://theconversation.com/no-youre-not-hardwired-to-stare-at-womens-breasts-53449>
- Stein, A., & Plummer, K. (1994). "I Can't Even Think Straight" Queer Theory and the Missing Sexual Revolution in Sociology. *Sociological Theory*, 12(2), 178.

Strausbaugh, J. (2003). ART: 60's Comics: Gloomy, Seedy, and Superior. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/12/14/books/art-60-s-comics-gloomy-seedy-and-superior.html>

The Golden Age Of Comics. (2014). Retrieved from <https://www.pbs.org/opb/historydetectives/feature/the-golden-age-of-comics/>

Thielman, S. (2016). Marvel editor-in-chief: 'Writing comics was a hobby for white guys.' Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2016/may/26/marvel-editor-in-chief-axel-alonso-civil-war-x-men>

Turner, W. (2000). *A Genealogy of Queer Theory*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press

UC Davis. (2018). LGBTQIA resource center glossary. *LGBTQIA Resource Center* (accessed February 5, 2019).

Vermeulen, L., Elena Núñez Castellar, and Jan Van Looy. (2014). Challenging the Other: Exploring the Role of Opponent Gender in Digital Game Competition for Female Players. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior & Social Networking* 17, no. 5: 303-309. Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost (accessed February 27, 2018).

Vermeulen, L., and Looy, J. V. (2016). "I Play So I Am?" A Gender Study into Stereotype Perception and Genre Choice of Digital Game Players. *Journal Of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 60, no. 2: 286-304. Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost (accessed February 27, 2018).

Volack, J. M. (2012). Gay Marvel superhero plans to tie the knot. ABC News. Retrieved from <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/entertainment/2012/05/gay-marvelsuperhero-plans-to-tie-the-knot/>

Watney, S. (2000). Chapter 4: Queer epistemology: activism, 'outing,' and the politics of sexual identities. In, *Imagine Hope* (pp. 50-62). Taylor & Francis Ltd / Books.

Wolk, D. (2007). *Reading comics: How graphic novels work and what they mean*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo.

Worgaftik, G. (2018). The key to securing a PG-13 rating is ensuring that no one looks like they're enjoying anything. *AV News*. Retrieved from <https://news.avclub.com/the-key-to-securing-a-pg-13-rating-is-ensuring-that-no-1825958482>