

WHAT DOES PSYCHOLOGY KNOW AND
UNDERSTAND ABOUT THE PSYCHOLOGICAL
EFFECTS OF READING SUPERHERO COMIC
BOOKS?: AN EXPLORATION STUDY

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2013

Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate College of the
Oklahoma State University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
July, 2017

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am so very grateful for all those who sacrificed so that I may have this opportunity. Your sacrifice and support through these years has been so very special to me. I am thankful for my loving wife Katie and my darling daughter Penny Lane. You are my best accomplishments to date. I'm so blessed that you are here with me on this journey. Thank you to my wonderful parents for all the opportunities you gave me through your sacrifices. I hope to carry your legacy with grace.

I would like to thank my committee for their guidance and support during this journey. It has been an honor to work alongside you all and learn.

Lastly, thank you superheroes. Thank you for always being there.

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Date of Degree: August 2017

Title of Study: WHAT DOES PSYCHOLOGY KNOW AND UNDERSTAND ABOUT
THE PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF READING SUPERHERO
COMIC BOOKS?: AN EXPLORATION STUDY

Major Field: EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY, OPTION: COUNSELING
PSYHOLOGY

Abstract: Superheroes in comic books have been recently used in psychological interventions (e.g. Superhero Therapy, Geek Therapy, Comic Book Therapy, etc.). Previous research has placed focus on the effects of, the experiences of bibliotherapy, cinema therapy, video game effects or “media effects” among other forms of when used in psychological intervention. However, little research has been conducted on the effects of and experience of superhero comic books on mental health. The present study looks to gain understanding of the effect and experience of superhero comic books using qualitative phenomenology. Self-Determination Theory of motivation was used as a guide in interpreting the data. A sample size of 15 participants were selected and interviewed. Phenomenological thematic analysis yielded physiological & emotional reactions, nostalgia, source of coping, moral guidance, social utility, relating to characters, and building knowledge as common themes reported by participants. The essence of experiences or overall experience of participants who read superhero comic books was a form of psychological coping & escape.

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INTRODUCTION

WHAT DOES PSYCHOLOGY KNOW AND UNDERSTAND ABOUT THE PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF READING SUPERHERO COMIC BOOKS?: AN EXPLORATION STUDY

Positive appraisals of media objects, events, characters, stories, etc., can lead to positive feelings of happiness, whereas negative appraisals of media objects, events, characters, stories, etc., typically lead to negative feelings like sadness or stress. Branch and Wilson (2010) discuss the process of applying meaning to our perceptions. They state “meaning you attach to any sort of event influences the emotional responses you have to that event” (p.13); the way we interpret events has an effect on our psychological state/well-being. This gives rise to the importance of understanding the meanings people place on media objects when providing psychological intervention and treatment.

Using forms of media has long been documented by mental health researchers, practitioners, educators, community service workers, etc., as having utility and producing beneficial effects in mental health treatment. For the past few decades, psychological research has attempted to explore and understand the relationship between and effects of pop culture on the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of individuals who follow or immerse themselves in cultural entertainment. The impact of pop culture media on our psychological states is termed *media effects* (Lee & Peng, 2006). Within psychological

research, forms of media have been described as television, movies, video games, websites/social forums, and books/printed media. Since the year 2000, thousands of publications have focused on media effects. Topics such as body image (Eyal, & Te'eni-Harari, 2013; Ferguson, 2013; Hayes, & Tanteff-Dunn, 2010; Tiggemann, 2014), violence (Friedlander, Connolly, Pepler, & Craig, 2013; Gentile & Bushman, 2012; Warburton, 2013), impulsivity (Gentile, Swing, Lim, & Khoo, 2012), among other psychological themes have been recently studied in relation to media effects on mental health. Books, poetry, auditory and visual arts, comic books, television/movies, etc. are all representative forms of popular culture media and can be used as therapeutic teaching concepts for clients. Mental health practitioners have shown support in using pop culture interventions in therapeutic settings (Pardeck, 1993). Some research has focused on types of therapies using media such as bibliotherapy, cinema therapy, video game play, and superhero comic books as therapeutic interventions.

Bibliotherapy: Beginnings of Using Media in Therapy

Bibliotherapy has long stood as a useful intervention in accessing and altering human emotions (Jack & Ronan, 2008). Through the 1930s, therapeutic reading was prevalent in treating mental health (alongside traditional therapeutic interventions) as, practitioners and patients, praised bibliotherapy as a powerful intervention (McKenna, Hevey, & Martin, 2010). Bibliotherapy, coined by Samuel Crothers (1916), consists of fictional and nonfictional narratives or stories that may allow therapy clients to process, internalize, parallel with own narratives, and reflect on. In other words, by identifying with certain characters or events in books, periodicals, comics, etc., readers can gain insight about their own issues from a different perspective in viewing associated

characters' issues playing out in print. This can be cathartic for clients and possibly give hope and validate emotional tensions, reduce stress (Cohen, 1993), leading to change (McKenna, Hevey, & Martin, 2010). More recently, bibliotherapy has received empirical support in addressing and/or treating self-harm (Evans et al., 1999), sleep issues (Morin, Mineault, & Gagne, 1999), emotional disorders (Den Boer, Wiersma, Van den Bosch, 2004), eating disorders (Ghaderi, & Scott, 2003; McAllister, Brien, Flynn, & Alexander, 2014), obsessive-compulsive disorder (Leininger et al., 2010; Lovell et al., 2004), anxiety disorders (Febbraro, 2005), depression (Morgan & Jorm, 2008; Smith, Floyd, Scogin, & Jamison, 1997; Wilson, Mottram, & Vassilas, 2008), and substance addiction (Apodaca, & Miller, 2003).

Psychological Impact of Cinema & Cinema Therapy

Another form of media that has received support in mental health intervention is Cinema Therapy. Orchowski, Spickard, and McNamara (2006) denote the impact that movies have mental health treatment, with movies typically depicting mental health and therapists in a negative tone. Though this topic may not surface in the therapy room, it is important to acknowledge how movies can impact our clients' perceptions of selves and of mental health treatment. Weakland (1975) supports the use of movies in therapy. He indicates that movies act as documents of cultural meaning and can be useful for investigating multicultural aspects of our clients. Dumitrache (2013; 2014) indicates that using movies in therapy can be an attractive means of providing perspectives, appraisal, and understanding in clients. As noted in Lampropoulos, Kazantzis, and Deane (2004), after sampling a group of psychologists, approximately 88% of the sample acknowledged that they had successfully used movies in aiding clients' improvements/therapy work.

Movies may serve as an externalization (much like Michael White's Narrative Therapy technique of externalizing the problem) of clients' issues, allowing clients to safely gain self-understanding and addressing therapeutic goals (Christie, & McGrath, 1987; Hesley & Hesley, 2001). Research has indicated that movies and television, when used as a therapeutic tool, can reduce anxiety (Dumitrache, 2014; Schiappa, Gregg, & Hewes, 2004), allow clients to safely process and address personal issues through movie/TV characters (Christie & McGrath, 1987), and gain self-understanding (Hesley & Hesley, 2001). Furthermore, movies/TV impact clients on cognitive, emotional, and behavioral levels, allowing for clients to transcend his or her issues into a safe realm of fiction and imagination (Dermer & Hutchings, 2000).

In regards to superheroes on television, Levin and Carlsson-Paige (1995) conducted an exploration of teachers' concerns regarding the Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers television show and the effects on children in the classroom. The teachers voiced concerns regarding themes of violence, aggressive play, confusion about reality and fantasy, and obsession over the power rangers. Generally, the teachers feared that the children would use the Power Rangers as role models for social interactions and behavior exchange. Though the teachers provided perceptions of superheroes' impact on students, the study did not actually focus on the experiences of those who engage in the behavior: the students.

Video Game Research as a Model of Comic Research

Psychological research on the effects of the pop culture medium, video gaming, has received much focus in the literary world, with many theories resulting from conflicting results. Some research has suggested that video games increase aspects of

cognitive functioning (Ferguson, 2007; Toril, Reales, & Ballesteros, 2014), increased positive feelings of power, gaining social interaction, serving as coping strategies (Olson, Kutner, & Warner, 2008), and promoting prosocial behavior (Greitemeyer & Osswald, 2010). Ortiz de Gortari, Aronson, and Griffiths (2011) found that video game players reported integrating content from the video game into his or real own life as a means of socializing, learning from character experiences, and serving as an escape from the stresses of reality. Sherry, Lucas, Greenberg, and Lachlan (2006) suggests that intrinsic motives for playing video games consists of engaging in competition and challenges (achievement), social interaction, diversion from reality, fulfilling fantasy/daydreaming, and increase of arousal. Other areas of research support the idea that video game play can lead to short-term and long-term aggression in game players (Anderson et al., 2010; Huesmann, 2010). No clear link or prediction equation between playing violent video games and aggressive behavior (Ferguson, 2007) is well documented.

Oswald, Prorock, and Murphy (2014) provide a qualitative research framework in which the participants (video game players) gave responses that captured the meanings and motivations attributed to game-play. The authors conducted a qualitative study in attempt to gain insight into the experiences of game players rather than use a post-positivist approach (e.g. measuring observable behavior, etc.). The results of content analysis revealed that gamers play video games to obtain social support, individual coping mechanisms, and to relieve stress. Six themes were observed: emotional responses, game play, social, outcomes of game play, goals, and personal qualities. These findings suggest that people play video games due to emotional enjoyment as well as social and individual gain/achievement. Qualitative research can allow researchers to

understand the impact and effects of playing video games from the game-players' perspectives. Research has traditionally avoided subjective research in this area, yet more focus should be warranted in understanding possible motives for playing all genres of video games. With regards to this study, similar methods may uncover themes related to the motivation and meanings individuals place on comic book reading.

Research for Superhero Comic Book Therapy

Historically, comic strips have dated back as early as the 1880s in Germany (Bender & Lourie, 1941). Superhero comic books began as early as Superman in the 20th century (Wright, 2003). During the 1950s, the controversy over the impact of superhero comic books on youth developed (Rubin, 2007). At the time, parts of society protested superhero comic books and even observed mass-destruction of superhero comic books during local rallies/protests. This controversy culminated to a Congressional intervention in which Fredric Wertham and other anti-superhero comic protestors testified that superhero comic books were “selling our next generation mind-poisoning fantasies” (Rubin, 2007, p. xx). Wertham reported that comic books had negative behavioral and psychological implications on children. Meanwhile, Dr. Laretta Bender opposed Wertham, testifying that comic books fulfilled the “psychological needs of the child” (Rubin, 2007, p. xxv). After testimony, Congress ruled in favor of superhero comic books, ultimately concluding “it appears to be the consensus of the experts that comic-book reading is not the cause of emotional maladjustment in children” (U.S. Senate, 1955, p. 16). Though superhero comic books initially received resistance by some lawmakers and religious groups (Bender, 1944; Rubin, 2007), consumers of pop culture

media have embraced superhero comic books as reflections of culture and current societal trends (Peterson & Gerstein, 2005; Wright, 2003).

Superhero comic books have received some empirical support as being incorporated into educational (Jee & Anggoro, 2012; Rahman & Zeglin, 2014; Sobel, 1980), health (Archer, 1997; Branscum et al., 2013; Coyne et al., 2014; Nelson & Norton, 2005; Sobel, 1980; Springer, 2013), social/cultural (Seidler, 2011; Wright, 2003), and psychological (Bender & Lourie, 1941; Rubin & Livesay, 2006; Widzer, 1977) interventions and change. Research has also provided focus on the negative effects of comic books on people. Kirsh and Olczak (2000) implemented the comic books in a study to observe the impact of reading violent comic books. Results suggest that reading violent comic books influences participants' (males) perceptions of ambiguous behaviors as being more hostile. Kirsh and Olczak (2002) also found that reading violent comic books led participants perceived more hostility in people. While the effects of other media such as books, movies/television, and videogames have earned empirical focus in treating mental health, superhero comic books in therapy have not yet received as much attention, empirically.

Aspects of Mental Health and Superheroes in Comics

Since the congressional ruling (U.S. Senate, 1955), pop culture has embraced the phenomena of the superhero. In psychology, academicians and practitioners strive to understand why media phenomena occur in hopes of understanding associated behavior and even attempting to predict future behavior. But has psychology been able to fully understand why people cherish and appreciate with superheroes in comic books? Author Bradford W. Wright provides some insight into why people remain so enamored with

superhero comics. Wright (2003) recognizes comic books as reflections of generational experiences such as politics, culture, audience tastes, and economic state (reflected in Captain America storytelling during the World War II era). These experiences help to “frame a worldview and define a sense of self for the generations who have grown up with [comic books and superheroes],” (p. xiii) Wright added. Dr. Robin Rosenberg (2008) discusses the psychological experiences of superheroes and how these experiences relate to fans of pop culture media. These psychological experiences of superheroes may provide insight as reasons why people continue to be drawn to superhero comics. Dr. Rosenberg states that “the sagas of superheroes bring us out of ourselves and connect us with something larger than ourselves, something more universal” (p. 2). This type of perspective further supports the idea that people may be able to relate to the struggles and emotions of beloved superheroes. For example, the psychological nature of superheroes, such as Batman, the Incredible Hulk, and the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, is not too far-fetched for audiences to relate to. Regarding these respective examples, people can relate to the superheroes’ experiences of grief and loss, self-regulation, and group cohesion among many more humanistic themes. Dr. Rosenberg also discusses that topics or themes such as societal discrimination (racism, able-ism, sexism, age-ism, etc.), group/family cohesion and mental illness are all evident in multiple superhero narratives. Spieldenner (2013) indicates a trend of homosexual men that report associating and gravitating towards Wonder Woman based on common traits such as a same-sex society, fighting against intolerance and social justice, finding one’s identity in society, etc. Also, Seidler (2011) shows how using comic books to battle disability stereotypes (able-ism) can be helpful in producing social change.

Comic books may be able to provide simulated experiences in which people can interpret and evaluate meanings as well as learn about our own traits, power of choice, ethics and morals. Psychologist, writer, and researcher Dr. Robert Sternberg (2013) speaks of the essence of superheroes. He states that “the essence of a superhero is in his or her wisdom and ethics, not in the superpowers...” (p. 160). He indicates that a hero’s use of one’s skills and powers for the common good is a trademark of wisdom. He adds “we have a lot to learn from superheroes. Most of all we can learn that when things are not as they should be, we have a choice...we can act if only we choose to” (p. 173). Using our favorite superheroes as a teaching tool, we can learn from others and apply new knowledge and insights to ourselves. People can develop morals, social skills, strategies for coping and problem solving based on our interpretations of superhero experiences and attaching meaning.

The psychological implications that superheroes have on people can be very meaningful. Gaining insight and understanding of underlying perceptions and appraisals of people using comics and superheroes can be beneficial in psychological treatment. Though using comic books and superheroes as psychological treatment may still exist on the fringe of psychological practice and treatment, the impact can be highly meaningful with clients. Ahead of their time, Bender and Lourie (1941) began implementing comic books into therapy with children. Bender and Lourie’s article discussed the use of superheroes in play and imagination. In addition, the children participants were observed using superman-based play as a means of protection against antisocial behavior, development of the moral self, and problem solving. Bender is also the same clinician who provided testimony in the usefulness of superheroes and comic books in therapy

(U.S. Senate, 1955). Rubin and Livesay (2006) provide clinical applications of using superheroes in play therapy, while citing scarceness of current empirical support in using superheroes and comic books in mental health therapy.

Siskund (2014) explores the developing trend (though still on the fringe of evidence-based treatment) of treating mental health with unorthodox approaches in using superheroes and comic books. Superhero/Comic book therapy has received some support from the American Counseling Association (ACA). Suskind adds that the American Psychological Association (APA) does not recognize Superhero/Comic Book Therapy as evidence-based treatment due to the lack of empirical support of its use. Whether the treatment is called Superhero Therapy, Geek Therapy, or Comic Book Therapy, using superheroes in therapy is currently not recognized as evidenced-based treatment in psychology. Numerous studies must be conducted to provide support in the theory of and utility of using superheroes in therapy. To date, only a handful of studies report the beneficial aspects of using comic book superheroes in health interventions (Archer, 1997; Branscum et al., 2013; Coyne et al., 2014; Nelson & Norton, 2005; Sobel, 1980; Springer, 2013).

Psychological research still does not know the extent of how much superhero comics impact readers. Building our understanding of the effects of superhero comic books on readers, Anderson (2013) suggests that researchers return to the experience of the superhero phenomenon. In this case, research should approach this topic with a phenomenologist mindset and focus on people's experience of reading super hero comic books. Anderson states that researchers of the phenomena have to return to the idea of the superhero ideal and find the gut experience one has when reading super hero comics.

He adds that the context of the experience is key in understanding the event or phenomenon, suggesting that researchers recruit from the source: comic book stores. In this case, more research is required in understanding the phenomenon of reading superhero comic books.

Statement of the Problem

While video games, television, movies, books, and social media have all received literary consideration regarding media effects on people, there is minimal research focusing on the effects of superheroes comic books on people. Psychological research has historically focused on the “media effects” (cause and effect / stimulus-response) associated with other forms of media, excluding superhero comic books. No current research has focused on the experiences of reading superhero comic books, limiting full understanding of the experience of superhero comic book readers. Psychological research has yet to extensively explore, quantitatively or qualitatively, the impact of superhero comic book reading on mental health as well as the meanings people attach to it. However, some recent qualitative research activity has begun to surface regarding the inclusion of comic books and superhero therapy in psychological treatment. With current psychological research yet to provide understanding of the comic book reading phenomena, the purpose of this exploratory study is to gain insight into others’ interpretations and experiences of reading superhero comic books. Specifically, this study hopes to provide insight regarding the meaning and description of experiences that readers ascribe to reading superhero comic books.

As Anderson (2013) suggests, research should dedicate attention to the experiences of consumers of the superhero comic book “phenomenon” (the popularity of

the superhero genre and its effects on people's lives). Research needs to be able to understand (using qualitative phenomenology methods and, eventually quantitative methods) the essence of readers' experience when reading superhero comic books. Using a phenomenological approach, analyzing superhero comic book readers' experiences will develop our understanding of the effects of superhero comic books on comic book readers. In addition, mental health professionals, psychologists, counselors, etc., will gain an understanding of how to use superheroes and comic books in treatment settings. In order to fully understand how comic books impact readers, recruiting participants who engage in comic book reading on a frequent basis are preferred in being able to fully provide insight into their experiences. This can lead to theoretical development regarding the gut experience or essence one has when reading super hero comics.

Theoretical Framework

In addition to gaining phenomenological insight regarding the act of reading superhero comic books, this study also hopes to further motivational theory. The Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2000) of motivation served as a guide in analyzing the data as well. The SDT proposes an understanding of intrinsically motivated behavior (autonomy, competence, and relatedness). We are able to make sense of levels of motivation (e.g. how much motivation) and orientation of motivation (e.g. what type of motivation). It is within this theoretical framework that we are able to understand intrinsic motivation (inherently interesting or satisfying) comic book readers have for engaging in the phenomenon. Psychological needs such as competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000) may shed some form of understanding what may facilitate intrinsic motivation for comic book reading.

Reading motivation is defined as “the individual's personal goals, values, and beliefs with regard to the topics, processes, and outcomes of reading” (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000, p. 405). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000) serve as a theoretical model for understanding participant experiences in reading superhero comic books. Specifically, intrinsic and extrinsic reading motivation provide the motivational focus of this study. Intrinsic reading motivation consists of one’s interest, enjoyment, and curiosity in reading (Atkinson, 2009; Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000) that resides within an individual rather than being a function of external pressures (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Ryan and Deci (2000) add that the act of intrinsically reading serves as a satisfactory reward/reinforce itself, being accompanied by positive emotional experiences. Becker, McElvany, and Kortenbruck, (2010) state that “intrinsic reading motivation include positive experience of the activity of reading itself, books valued as a source of enjoyment, the personal importance of reading, and interest in the topic covered by the reading material” (p. 774). Extrinsic motivation may also provide framework as to what external feature motivate others to read comics. Extrinsic reading motivation highlights external contingencies and outcomes such as attention from, recognition and incentives provided from others (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Using extrinsic motivational understanding can shed light on features such as introjection (focus on self or others, self-endorsement, and congruence with goals).

METHODOLOGY

Research Questions

This study was conducted in hopes to answer questions regarding how long-term superhero-themed comic book reading affects readers' morals, behavior, identity, and emotions/mood. The following research questions guided the current study: What are the experiences people have when reading superhero comic books? What themes are commonly experienced by superhero comic book readers? How have superhero comic books impacted readers' lives? Further analysis through interviews will provide much needed insight into the effects of reading comic books on mental health and associated motivations.

Phenomenology is defined as a way in which "one perceives and interprets events and one's relationship to them in contrast both to one's objective responses to stimuli and to any inferred unconscious motivation for one's behavior" (Phenomenology, n.d.). Smith (2007) described Edmund Husserl's approach to phenomenological research as studying the essence of one's consciousness, experiences from a first-person account. Husserl furthered phenomenological inquiry or understanding strives to be rigorously assumption-less by the use of phenomenological reduction (Husserl, 2012) or "bracketing" (researchers setting own experiences aside in order to make fresh perspectives towards the phenomenon of interest; Moustakas, 1994). In addition, phenomenology research serves to reduce individual (participants') experiences of a

phenomenon and gain understanding of more universal experiences (Creswell, 2006). Max van Manen (1990) furthered that phenomenology acts to “grasp the very nature of the thing” (p. 177) by identifying a phenomenon or “object” (p.163) representing human experience (e.g. sadness, anger, grief). Data is collected to gain insight of the phenomenon and describe the essence of the experience for all individuals sampled; what and how participants experienced it (phenomenon) are the focus of phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994).

Research Design

While philosophical differences have been prevalent through the development and implementation of phenomenological research (Creswell, 2006; Lopez & Willis, 2004), this study will utilize the Van Manen (2014) approach to phenomenological data collection and analysis. Participants who actively experience the phenomena are recruited and interviewed. Once the data and themes are identified, the researchers compile a description of the “essence” of the phenomenon. The essence reflects commonalities among the participants who have experienced the phenomenon of inquiry. It is worth mentioning that this study acknowledges “experiences” as “the act or process of directly perceiving events or reality” (Experience, n.d.). To explore these experiences, a phenomenological, qualitative approach, using thematic analysis of phenomena was utilized. Specifically, this study hoped to gain insight and explore individuals’ descriptions of experiences and perceptions regarding the impact of comic book reading and superheroes in his or her life. The role of the phenomenological researcher was to “describe as accurately as possible the phenomenon, refraining from any pre-given framework, but remaining true to facts” (Groenwald, 2004, 5). Welman and Kruger

(1999) suggest that researchers using phenomenological methods should be focused on understanding social and psychological from participant perspectives. Using phenomenology in research allows the researcher to focus on the lived experiences of participants (Kruger, 1988; Maypole & Davies, 2001). Polkinghorne (1989) furthered that the researchers should be able to describe the phenomenon in a way that the public can better understand “what it is like for someone to experience that” [phenomenon] (p.46).

Thematic analysis is defined as using analytical techniques in searching through the data for themes and patterns (Glesne, 2011). Once descriptions are identified, the data becomes coded and themes may begin to emerge. Gibbs (2008) stated that once codes are identified and agreed upon, the researcher can “explore...thematic ideas represented by the codes...” (p. 48). Thematic analysis requires explicit codes, in which a list of themes is developed. Once a theme pattern is found, Boyatzis (1998) wrote that a theme “at the minimum, describes and organizes possible observations or at the maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon” (p. vvi). Though this approach is not widely agreed upon as a method of analysis, Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that thematic analysis should be acknowledged as a common method of analysis, citing that “a lot of analysis is essentially thematic...but claimed as something else” (p. 80).

Thematic data analysis will allow researchers to gain insight into common themes of experience and meaning reported by participants. Given the limited understanding of comic books from a psychological and emotional standpoint, qualitative research methods are appropriate. Learning about people’s interpretations, experiences, and attributed meaning warrants the use of qualitative methods in an inductive manner

(Patton, 1990). In other words, using people's experiences of a phenomenon can help researchers gather specific data and look for commonality, eventually building evidence or support in a theoretical formation. Participants construct social meaning as reality is socially constructed. As Schwandt (2007) stated, there is no specific understanding of the world. The world is interpreted through our minds and meaning is attached. As a researcher, it is beneficial to access and assess others' interpretations of social phenomena and how they interpret themselves (Glesne, 2011). This study gained access to comic book readers' interpretations of the content and of their experiences while reading. As Creswell (2006) points out, "knowing some common experiences can be valuable for groups such as therapists, teachers, health personal and policymakers..." (p.62).

For the purpose of this study, operational definitions of both superhero and comic book are provided for replicability of the study. Using Merriam-Webster's definition, superhero is defined as a fictional character that has amazing powers. Superheroes (Superhero, n.d.) can be considered human, mutants, and/or extraterrestrial with unique powers. Comic book(s) is defined as a magazine or book containing series of comic strips (Comic Book, n.d.) which depicts a series of drawings that read as a narrative, arranged together on the page (Comic Strip, n.d.).

Setting and Selection

This study was conducted at in a mid-western region at two local universities and local comic book stores, in two separate cities. One university is stationed in a more rural region and the other university is located in an urban area with a higher population. The two universities combined served approximately 25,939 students in fall of 2013, of which

48.23% identified as female, 51.77% as male (Oklahoma State University, 2013). Of the total student population, 69.5% of the students identified as White, 6% African American, 6% Native American, 6% Hispanic/Latino/Latina, 2% Asian, 6% Multiracial, 0.03% Pacific Islander, and 0.8% Other. The average age at the two universities was 32.75 and 25.7 in combining both undergraduate and graduate student populations. The local comic book stores were asked for participation. After consent was gained, paper flyers were placed at each comic store to recruit participants.

Participants

Phenomenological research requires smaller sample sizes (Creswell, 2006; Patton, 2002). Polkinghorne (1989) recommends that anywhere from 5 to 25 participants, all of who experienced the phenomenon of research interest, are proposed as a sample size for phenomenological research. Creswell (2006) states the importance of selective appropriate candidates for participation. He furthers that researchers should utilize sampling strategies such as criterion based sampling order to obtain qualified candidates that will provide the most credible information to the study. All candidates were expected to be previously or actively experienced with the phenomenon.

In order for participants to be included in analysis, participants had to meet specific criteria. Participants had to be 18 years old or older to be included in the study in order to assure proper consent to study. Participants were also required to read superhero comic books at least 15 or more minutes per week to be included. Participants that met criteria were scheduled for an interview directing participants to describe experiences related to comic book reading (Appendix C). This study recruited 16 participants total, with a sample size of 15 ($n=15$). One participant was excluded due to not completing the

interview process and no follow-up contact was successful. Demographics (age, ethnicity, sex, salary, etc.) were collected for all remaining participants in addition to descriptive data such as frequencies of comic book reading (e.g. time allocated to comic book reading on a weekly basis, type of comic book, years of comic book reading, etc.). Upon data collection, each participant was provided a different pseudonym to help with the reading flow of data analysis and interpretation. Participant pseudonyms include John, Billy, Clark, Jonah, Bruce, Harley, Peter, Scott, Wayne, Kent, Anakin, Tony, Albert, Kal, and Carol.

Data Collection

This study focused on collecting data from multiple venues, including two universities, and local stores (e.g. comic book shops and entertainment stores). Clearance from the Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) was obtained and flyers, recruiting participants to the study, were posted around both campuses and comic book retailer shops. A flyer was created to recruit comic book readers. The flyer contained information regarding the purpose of the study and information on how to contact the researcher as well as contact information of the researcher (email). Participants were asked to provide consent to the research study. Participants were also provided a copy of informed consent and the researcher will discuss participant rights. Participants consented to being interviewed and also being audiotaped for data collection purposes (e.g. transcription). Once participant consent was obtained, the researcher conducted a semi-structured interview with the participant. Interviews ranged from 23 minutes to 83 minutes, while lasting approximately 39 minutes on average. Participants were provided ample time to reflect and take time in producing responses to the

interview's prompts. Participants answered open-ended, closed-ended questions, as well as multiple choice questions regarding demographics and comic book reading behaviors. During the initial part of the interview, participants completed a written form asking for demographic information (age, ethnicity, sex, scaled questions regarding comic book reading frequency, etc.). After completing the interview, participants were de-identified and coded with a pseudonym (e.g. *John*), maintaining anonymity and confidentiality. To maintain HIPAA standards, participant data is currently maintained behind two locked contraptions at all times when not being analyzed.

Compensation was provided to each participant (\$5 gift card electronically emailed). Interviews and observations were conducted at both campuses. A total of 16 participants were interviewed which consists of a semi-structured questionnaire. One participant was excluded due to a lack of follow up contact.

Data was collected from multiple sources for this study. Data was obtained from a transcribed interview, completed demographic intake forms, video-recorded interviews, and researcher field notes.

Interviews

Interviews are frequently used by qualitative researchers to obtain information regarding facts and personal experiences (Creswell, 2006; Fontana & Frey, 1998). Turner (2010) suggests that interviews provide in-depth information regarding participants' experiences and perceptions of a particular topic. Qualitative interviews act to elicit participants' stories of experiences (with the identified phenomenon), allowing researchers to gather information about meanings, emotions, facts, relationships, and experiences which may not be easily observed (Baxter & Babbie, 2003; Weiss, 1994).

Rossetto (2014) considers the therapeutic implications that the researcher must be able to address when interviewing participants about internal experiences. This study utilized an interview model consisting of more standardized, open-ended questions and highly structured formatting, in regards to the wording of the questions (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). The interview consisted of open-ended, neutral, concise questions that were asked diligently, allowing participants to fully answer the prompts (McNamara, 2009). In this way, participants were asked identical, open-ended questions to promote some replicability & reliability of this study. Participants were able to answer open-ended questions in as much detail as she or he desires, expressing viewpoints and experiences (Creswell, 2006). Researcher asked follow-up questions as well.

For this study, one-on-one interviews were conducted with each participant. Each interview was audiotaped and videotaped for later data analysis. Observations by the researcher were noted on separate documents as well (both verbal and nonverbal observations of behavior and verbal articulation). Interviews were held in isolated rooms on both campuses where the participant may be able to share his or her experiences in a safe (nonjudgmental) environment with minimal distractions.

Data Analysis

Using phenomenological thematic analysis as discussed by van Manen (2014), the researcher analyzed transcriptions of data and sought significant statements that highlighted an understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon. In order to analyze the data effectively, the researcher used the three-step process provided by Van Manen (2014). Transcripts, video recordings, and field notes were all analyzed for significant data and themes. Using the three-step process of coding and thematic

analyses, the researcher utilized wholistic, selective and detailed reaching approaches. *Wholistic reading* had the researcher observe the data (text & video) as a whole. A main significant meaning of the piece of data was the formulated. *Selective reading* consisted of rereading the text and watching video of the interview several times, highlighting significant statements and/or phrases of experiences, which helped capture the overall understanding gained by the interview. These phenomenological descriptive-interpretive statements were then utilized to help develop themes of understanding. *Detailed reading* included reading each sentence and statement, trying to see if it revealed any other information about the phenomena. Upon completing this process of reading and coding, themes, clusters of responses, repeated responses, and unique/significant statements by participants were examined, developing codes into themes. Using the van Manen (2014) phenomenological thematic analysis approach, participant experiences (data) were interpreted and assigned codes, with as little researcher bias as possible. Boyatzis (1998) describes using a data-driven code, meaning themes are not predetermined in advance but are developed as data is analyzed.

Data analysis was conducted simultaneously with data collection, allowing the researcher to focus on the study. Data analysis consisted of three researchers independently reviewing the data and analyzing/applying codes. All researchers have qualified competence to examine qualitative data. Each has engaged in graduate coursework and other research, which requires advanced skills in qualitative inquiry. Furthermore, each reviewer has met ethical standards for research based on IRB training and competency. Three doctoral students and an external reviewer served as data analysts. The doctoral student reviewers, as stated, completed doctoral level coursework

in a qualitative research methods course (e.g. course department & number: SCFD 5913). This course required each student develop an independent qualitative research proposal as well as study multiple methodologies and theories within qualitative research. In addition to this previous exposure to qualitative coursework, each doctoral reviewer met with the primary researcher for additional qualitative training. On three separate occasions, doctoral reviewers met and were provided examples of qualitative data, asked to code it, and discussed their findings and the process with the primary researcher. Each reviewer was provided documentation from academic worksheets, articles, and packets regarding methodology in conducting thematic analysis of qualitative data. After meeting and discussing the process of thematic analysis of qualitative data, each doctoral student reviewer then began coding the data independently.

Data was coded in attempt to identify unifying themes and differences (conceptual factor analysis). Coding was initiated as soon as data was collected and interviews had been transcribed allowing researchers to observe evolving themes and analyze data simultaneously. After careful independent review, researchers compared analyses and developed themes into categories. Researchers acknowledged themes in which all agreed upon. All researchers agreed on codes and themes, accepting those data points into results. Themes were then organized. This is completed by clustering themes into categories. Upon initial independent coding analysis, data was sent to an external reviewer for additional coding who was able to determine which codes were pertinent or warranted. The external reviewer for this study's data is a faculty member at a regional university who has documented experience with and conducting qualitative research. The external reviewer has expertise with qualitative research and, data interpretation. In

addition, she serves on psychology doctoral student dissertation committees and oversees academic research with regularity. As the external reviewer, she was provided field notes, transcribed interviews, and a master list of codes. The external reviewer then evaluated all articles of data analysis and was able to confirm the initial findings.

Utilizing thematic analysis of the data, the researcher compiled the data into a composite “essence” or “essential, invariant structure” (Creswell, 2006, p. 62). The essence allowed the researcher to acknowledge the common experiences among participants. The essence of participant experiences became a description of the phenomenology (Creswell, 2006).

Validity and Trustworthiness

Using Creswell (1998), contributions to trustworthiness were applied. Procedures such as peer reviewing, negative case analysis (incorporating un-confirming data that may contradict hypotheses), transparency in revealing researcher bias (e.g. member checking), and prolonged engagement were considered to improve credibility within this study (Glesne, 2011). Using Moustaka’s (1994) bracketing and Patton’s (1990) approach, researcher bias was minimized as much as possible. Approaching phenomenological research with a sense of wonder and openness to the world, while being aware of one’s own presuppositions, is ideal (Finlay 2008). Interpreting the participant experiences, with reduced bias, was implemented to improve credibility of the data analysis. The data was reviewed independently by three researchers and then results were discussed and agreed upon. After recruiting participants, the purpose of the study was provided in short narrative on the flyer / study sign-up sheet.

Ethical Considerations

After IRB approval, APA confidentiality guidelines were implemented into this study. Data was collected and stored by the primary researcher. In order to meet the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) regulations, the data is being kept and stored behind two locking mechanisms (a locker door and locked file cabinet). In addition, participants were not identified and did not provide a name during or after participation. Informed consent was provided prior to completion of the survey. This indicated to participants that they did not waive any rights by participating and provided the option to drop out of study at any time. Again, participants were de-identified and remained anonymous upon completing the surveys and publication. No form of deception was utilized in this study as the researchers want to be transparent with the purpose of the study with participants. Participants were assigned number identification and then a de-identified pseudonym (first participant was coded *John*).

Researcher Reflexivity

Schwandt (1997) states that researchers must reflect on how influences and interacts with participants based on the researchers own bias (regarding the topic). The benefit of including researcher reflection during the study can be meaningful in data analysis (Creswell, 2006; Schwandt, 1997).

The primary researcher of this study has a storied experience with reading superhero comic books. I have read comic books since the age of six. It is with the assumption and my bias that reading comic books creates a release from reality, decreasing stress, and putting one's mind at ease (overall a positive experience). The characters associated in comic books have served as a model of behavior, moral guides, and problem-solving for me. I cannot assume my experience is generalizable to others.

However, in conducting this study, I hoped validate some of my own experiences in addition to learning the other effects that comic books and superheroes have on other readers. I cannot assume that all experiences of reading comic books are positive. Yet, this study attempted to capture the essence of comic book reading.

Summary

This research study used phenomenological thematic analysis (van Manen, 2014), a form of qualitative inquiry, to explore experiences related to superhero comic book reading. This study was conducted at two large universities in the mid-west region and a couple of local retailers/comic book shops. The participants were recruited at both campuses to obtain a sample size of 15. Participants met criteria (e.g. minimum of 15 minutes per week reading comic books) in order to be considered for the study. In order to understand the essence or common experiences of superhero comic book reading, psychological phenomenology (van Manen, 2014) was used to provide an understanding of the experiences in comic book reading. This three-step phenomenological approach follows a structured approach in identifying, defining codes, developing themes and discovering the essence of comic book reading. Psychological research has historically focused on the impacts of other forms of media (e.g. cinema, video games, bibliotherapy, etc.). Thus this study served to provide insight into the experience of reading comic books by frequent comic book readers. The following study was approved by the Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board prior to data collection.

RESULTS

Each participant was provided proper documentation (e.g. informed consent) and clarity (answering questions) prior to engaging in the interview. Once consent was obtained, participants completed the demographic sheet, which provided information about age, sexual orientation, income, relational status, and comic book reading behaviors and preferences. As the interview began, participants were allowed ample time to process and answer each of the questions. Interviews were conducted individually between the primary investigator and participant. There was no time limit set for the interview. Participants were given the amount of time he or she needed to answer the questions to his or her preference. The interview consisted of 19 questions, which asked participants to expound on experiences while reading comic books. Appendix C details each question that was asked during the interview. At times when participant answers were minimal, follow-up encouragers such as "...tell me more about that" were utilized to gain additional data. Upon answering the final interview question, participants were debriefed and then exited the interview.

Participants ranged from 22 to 51 years of age ($M=34.5$). On average, participants reported reading superhero comic books roughly 30-60 minutes per week. The average span of years that participants reported reading comic books was 19.3 years (a range of 1 year to 43 years). Participants endorsed reading a range of comic book types: Superhero, Horror, Humor, Science Fiction, Crime, Adult, and Other. All

participants endorsed Caucasian ethnicity. Four participants indicated that they were either Gay/Lesbian or Bisexual. One participant identified as female and the remaining sample identified as male. A majority of the participants reported as living in the United States. While this study obtained mostly male participants, there are some similarities to the comic book reading population demographics. Graphic Policy, an online research organization focusing on comic book data, reported some data collected from comic book readers on Facebook. According to the data, women comprise approximately 39.02% of US individuals on Facebook who report being active comic book readers (Graphic Policy, 2016). In addition, African Americans attribute 15.85%, Asian Americans cover 8.75% and Hispanics account for 26.83% of comic book readers. This confronts previous assumptions that suggest White males comprise a larger portion of comic book reader demographics. Yet, our sample was unable to incorporate much diversity (e.g. race, gender) into the study.

Phenomenological Themes

Physiological and Emotional Reactions

At a basic level, all participants expressed various levels of both positive and negative experiences while reminiscing about reading certain comic books. Overall, the participants reported more positive reactions. There were instances where participants also provided negative reactions in which he or she disclosed a critique, displeasure, or negative emotional reaction to a character, story, etc. Some statements are provided below regarding some of these experiences. Participants were directly asked how comic books make them feel emotionally after reading. In addition, participants were asked if he or she noticed thoughts and emotions present while reading comic books.

John indicated that “I just like being scared I guess a little bit” when reading certain comic titles. He also added “it just kind of leaves me wanting more. There’s this kind of excitement.” He reported being excited in waiting to continue to read comic books as they are released every month or so. Billy reported experiencing being “amazed,” “fulfillment,” love, pumped, feeling “so bad for [character],” “emotionally exhausted,” “happy,” and the “[comic book] made me cry.” Other participants shared mixed reactions as well. While indicating “satisfaction” in that comic books are “fun to read,” Clark mentioned “comics today don’t do much for me...” regarding recent character writing and development (regarding Superman’s killing of an enemy). Jonah recalled a story “that was pretty emotionally affecting.” Harley reported that he generally feels “satisfied even if something bad happens.” Recalling one reading experience, Harley stated his experience: “The spark of so much emotion from [comic]...I always feel strong emotion to that. Uh, so usually just kind of sticks in my head.”

Peter acknowledged one negative experience during his comic book reading experience, citing “I’m always going to love Spiderman but the creative teams and the direction that that character has gone is especially the last 10 years is infuriating.” The participant followed up that he has experienced reactions such as finding it “fascinating,” “exciting,” “astonishing,” crying, getting “tight in chest,” feeling “furious” or “let down” by certain stories. Scott reported experiences such as feeling “frustrated,” “accomplishment,” “sadness,” “excitement,” and experiencing “fun.” Kent reported experiences of being “fascinated,” catharsis, feeling pissed off, “frustration,” “sadness,” crying, being “anxious,” “accomplishment,” “fun,” “rewarded,” and “happiness.” Anakin reported feeling “relaxed” and experiencing “enjoyment,” while Tony also added

experiences states of being “inquisitive” and being “fascinated.” Albert also acknowledged experiencing “entertainment,” “shock,” and “humor” while reading superhero comic books. Kal indicated that he has experienced physiological reactions to certain comic book events, stating, “I honestly felt physically ill. Like that was such a shock.” He also added that he even experienced “nausea” and “sadness” due to the aforementioned even. He also reported experiences such as “thrill,” “excitement,” “surprise,” and feeling “satisfied.” Finally, Carol reported mixed experiences in reading comic books. While endorsing positive experiences such as being “interested,” she also indicated that she also experiences feeling “bored,” “sad,” “anxious,” and stated “the make me cry” due to sad story.

Nostalgia

Nostalgia appeared to be a common theme amongst participants. As defined by Routledge (2016), nostalgia is defined as “past-oriented experiences focused on fond memories, often associated with childhood and youth” (p. 14). Furthermore, Routledge states that nostalgia consists of “memories we hold dear and these memories are typically social in nature” (p. 17). The field of psychology appears to understand nostalgia as a positive state or feeling (Routledge, 2016) that can be somewhat generalized across cultures (Routledge, Wildshut, Sedikides, & Juhl, 2013).

Numerous participants both directly and indirectly described nostalgia as an experience while reading superhero comic books. Some significant statements provided in data collection are as provided: Clark was asked about his thoughts and emotions when reading older comics. Abstractly, Clark responded “I mean, it’s a piece of my childhood...” while later adding “they’re a part of my childhood.” Jonah stated “these

are my link to my childhood and I can be forever young if I can keep those” when asked what comic books mean to said participant. Billy and Anakin directly mentioned “nostalgia” as an experience when consuming superhero comic books.

Source of Coping

A theme that was resoundingly present across the sample of participants was the use of reading comic books as an outlet or an “escape” from life stressors. For many participants, reading comic books served as a form of self-care.

When asked how reading superhero comics have influenced your life, John replied: “you know it’s really helped with self-care.” Billy reflected that comic books are “something I can look forward to when I have a bad day...crack open comic book and feel something.” Billy further discussed that comic books “give me hope.” One particularly powerful mention from Billy was when he provided a “powerful” quote from a comic book he read to the primary researcher. Upon stating the quote, Billy said “I actually said that as eulogy at my grandma’s funeral.” For Billy, comic books appeared to be utilized as a means of coping with his grief and loss of a loved one. Clark mentioned that comic books are a form of “escape...it’s a break from real life.” Jonah also mentioned that reading comics is “my escape.” The researcher asked how comics impact Jonah’s current life in which he replied: “comic books impact current life in that they are my number 1 form of relaxation and recreation and almost to the point of vacation.” He furthered that a comic “brings me peace of mind really like nothing else does.” Bruce stated that “reading is a stress reliever...it’s both a mans to escape and a way to figure out uh or to see them [superhero characters] dealing with same kind of pressures that I do in certain way.” When asked how reading superhero comics have

influenced his life, Harley suggested that it “definitely helped me uh, coming out” with regards to coping with the coming out process as a gay male. He added “[it] helped me kind of cope and go into a different world after I came out or while I’m working on it.” Harley furthered that he perceives his favorite characters having high resilience, thus leading to his statement: “they can survive being hunted, I can survive a few bad words [from others].” He later mentioned that comics help “overcome whatever stressors I’ve had in life’s path, past or current.” Peter reflected “I’m reading comic books through my personal crisis you know” after being asked how comic books impact one’s current life. Scott mentioned that “I think that at times comic books uh also inspire a little bit of a sense hope for me.” Scott talked about his coping process by making a statement of “being able to read a comic book and to sit there like you know let everything else go” as well as being a form of “self-care.” When asked about attraction to certain comics, Wayne stated “Um, I guess it’s because it’s an escapism. It just kind of gives me something to – just an outlet to kind of get away from the realities of just everyday life.” Kent made that statement that reading comic books is “kind of cathartic experience.” In terms of escape, Kent had this to say: “It gives me a chance to step back from life...” Furthermore, Kent mentioned that comics “give me hope in the context of a world where comic book heroes can continue to be more flawed, more sexually and gender diverse, more representations of all of society instead of what for a long time they were this, this personification of like white mainstream society.” Another quote from Kent discusses an essence of comic book reading experiences: “comics can um I think it kind of can have a healing effect...” Anakin mentioned that “comic books are a way to be able to kind of separate myself from that [stress]” when asked why he continues to read comics. He also

stated that reading comics is “an escapism thing.” After being asked what comic books mean to him, Albert also added that comics serve as “an outlet. An escape.” Kal acknowledged that comic books “are definitely my escape... if I’m in a bad mood I can read something that would make me happy.”

Moral Guidance

The theme of *moral guidance* became a prevalent thematic experience after conducting the interviews. Moral Guidance is considered a concept in which participants reported admiration of and being influenced by comic book characters on a moral and ethical level. Participants generally appeared to express comfort in using stories and characters as models of behavior for problem solving. It appeared to me that superhero comic books influence people on various levels. Throughout data collection, participants acknowledged that stories and characters have an impact on participants’ behaviors. A majority of the influence by characters consists of prosocial and positive self-directed behavior.

During the interview, each participant was asked, “Tell me how reading superhero comic books have impacted your morals, beliefs, etc.” Billy stated, “I always wondered what Spider-Man would actually do and it helps me get a little bit farther.” Clark stated, “I mean you could learn what was right and wrong from reading a Superman comic book.” These two pieces of data support the idea that superhero comic book characters offer some form of role model guidance in the development of moral behavior. Jonah reported that he is so drawn to one character’s morality that he named his son after the character, stating “I like what he stands for.” Jonah also mentioned that through reading comic books, one can “learn what some people should aspire to be.” Peter stated that he

reflects on “how would Wolverine handle this or how would Hawkeye handle” certain types of problems. This again signifies that characters may indeed model certain moral behavior in which readers may refer to when approaching his or her own issue. Peter also made the statement “I mean all of these characters help, help the idea of you know of what it is of decision making and, and all of that.” Scott mentioned that he focused reading about superhero characters that identify as gay, observing the struggles they faced. He stated that he read these stories “at the time I was still going through a lot of my coming out process” which he later cited helped him “deal with moral ambiguity a lot better. Wayne followed with saying “I try to help out where I can and emulate the heroes that I grew up reading” when asked how characters impact his morals. Kent provided that certain characters serve as “role models” for him. Anakin stated that superhero characters and stories “maybe have supported values that I was raised with.” Albert provided “I think that comics could influence you in a good way.” Kal indicated, “superhero comics gave me a base for my life on how to act... It gave me a good base for treating people well.” In another instance, Kal reported that he thinks about how superheroes would handle problems. He stated, “I think of as whatever character in that situation thinking what would they do. You know, would they do the same or how would it be different.”

Social Utility

The theme of *Social Utility* was observed across numerous interviews. This theme consists of remarks indicated aspects of social bonding, engaging in social activities, developing relationships, and any form of social interaction including comic books. With regards to the interviews, multiple questions elicited data surrounding social

expression and experiences. The responses can be separated into both concrete and abstract experiences. While many participants' experiences consisted of building and maintaining relationships, a resounding number of participants indicated that reading comic books is currently still perceived as an immature or negative behavior. Clark provided insight into how he began reading comic books. He suggested that his parents approved of the morals and lessons provided in comic books. Specifically, he stated "I suppose it's the reason why I my dad bought me a Batman comic book...." He also indicated that his father shared this experience, which facilitated their relationship growth. Jonah indicated that he involves his family (partner and children) in his comic book collecting. With regards to how comic books may impact his future, Jonah stated that "I'm passing down something I love to [children] and they're going to carry it on in their own lives." Comic books appear to facilitate aspects of relating to and bonding with others for Jonah. Bruce suggested that he reads with his child, "talking to him about what heroes do and how they protect." Peter indicated that he has made and maintained multiple friendships via a common interest in comic books. He also states that it is a "shared experience" with his son. Scott reported that his relationship with his previous boyfriend introduced him to comic books, citing he was "dating someone who was into comics and he helped me get into the realm of comics." In addition, he mentioned that comic book reading, like previous participants, is "something that I would like to share with [children]" in the future. Wayne indicated that comic books have "influenced everything from [his] familial relationships, to my, relationship with my wife, to the relationship of my, with my child." At this point, the data suggests that many people who read comic books, may share this experience with one's nuclear support system as well as

additional social groups. Kent indicated “I think overall connecting with comic books has made me feel in touch with a culture....” This also suggests that there is a culture that has been developed surrounding comic book reading. The parameters for belonging to such culture are not quite understood clearly. Anakin also reported that he tends to surround himself with people who either have the “shared experience” or understand the culture. Albert indicated that he and his spouse share the experience, stating “most of our vacations are centered around going to conventions, meeting other people.” For Albert, social engagement via the comic book reading community has a large influence on his life (e.g. making and maintaining relationships). Kal reported that comic books have “given my wife and I something to do together.” He furthered, “We gear our lives around comic book conventions, um, taking trips to the comic book store.”

Regarding negative social perceptions, Billy made a comment about what his family perceives comics as: “you know, they just think it’s a childish thing.” Harley mentioned that his support system “thought it was kind of childish and a little nerdy.” Peter suggested he has received feedback for reading comics such as “comic books are for kids. That’s what they always said. You go to a comic book convention, you’re some kind of weirdo you know. It’s not like that anymore.” Scott mentioned, “My family thinks it’s kind of weird.” Albert shared his thoughts, acknowledging people perceive comic book reading as “probably immature, or probably mostly negative stuff if they have never read one or don’t know that it’s as wide spread as it is.” Kal stated, “I have definitely gone through those periods of my life where my parents, my girlfriends, friends, whatever look down on it for sure. Uh, that I was immature, um, must not be very smart, that I’m immature, that I don’t want to deal with reality.”

On a social level, comic book reading has impacted readers on multiple levels. On a positive note, comics appear to facilitate relationships and bonding with others. On multiple occasions, participants who had or are expecting to have children someday highlighted that they enjoyed sharing this experience with their children. Another aspect of social experiences participants reported was the social stigma or prejudice that readers may face. The trend appears to be that comic book reading is getting more support and acceptance in the mainstream culture, yet negative judgments are still prevalent to those who read superhero comic books.

Relating to Characters

A major trend in participant responses consisted of the connections participants experienced to certain characters and character experiences. The results consisted of emotional reflections, validation of participant experiences, as well as social belongingness. During the interview, participants were directly asked about the types of comics and characters they read about, who his or her favorite hero was and why. Lastly, participants were asked how he or she related to a favorite superhero. As reported, participant responses signifying some experience in relating to characters on various levels are provided below.

John acknowledged relating with his favorite comic book character. On many levels, John described shared experiences with his preferred character. He mentioned that the character struggles with turmoil in which John stated, “he always tries to find stability but realizes that it doesn’t always happen, whether it’s where he lives or whether it’s you know with um you know a relationship that he has or with a friendship that he has.” This response was in reference to being asked how John relates to his favorite

character. Billy responded to prompting by stating that “Well when it comes to Captain Marvel, I always want to be better or stronger to myself you know... try to be the best version of myself.” Jonah suggested “I do relate to them in that if you have a chance to do right, *you* should do right. And it bugs me when it doesn’t happen.” He later related characters’ struggle with loss, stating “in real life when you lose someone in your core cast, there is a big hole there and it felt big when Barry Allen was losing his wife who had been a character in that book since they’ve revived him in the Silver Age.” Jonah appeared to relate to a character’s loss and ways of handling grief. When asked how he relates to his preferred characters, Bruce shared “when I read like Superman stuff, what I identify most with Superman is like his struggles as an alien...how is he dealing with it, how is he coping with being someone who is maybe unwanted uh and his identity.”

Bruce also discussed his identifying with Marvel’s character Wolverine: “...identify with him as a young adult, a teenager, um and even up through college. I remember identifying with him as the new movies would come out because he’s – I think I had a temper so I could identify with that like a short tempered nature.” Harley indicated that he specifically related to characters that struggle with discrimination. He reported reading X-Men comics “definitely helped me uh, coming out. Um, maybe not help me with coming out, but helped me kind of cope and go into a different world after I came out or while I’m working on it. Because with X-Men, they’re born with a gene that makes them uh, who they are: mutants...which I make that pretty applicable to the gay gene.” Peter shared that “...Spidey has been always somebody I can identify with. I was [him] for a while, you know...I like the idea that once I figured out who I really was a person, I developed my self-confidence.” On a more holistic scale, Peter identified with

Spider-Man as a civilian. Scott shared his experiences in relating to characters. First, he indicated “I think I share [perseverance] with [Rogue] and it’s nice to read that about her.” Later he added that he relates to sexual minority characters’ struggles as well. Specifically, he stated “early on I read a lot of arcs of people who were LGBT orientations and identities and things like that. And that was really good because at the time I was still going through a lot of my coming out process um and kind of learning more about my identity.” Wayne indicated, “...I really like Spider-Man because he’s just very relatable as a character to me. You know he’s...when I was younger he was a student who, you know, had score of responsibilities that had to do stuff with his family and then as the character progressed, and I’ve progressed, he’s a grad student, I was a grad student. I could relate to Peter Parker.” On a developmental level, Wayne was able to identify with the ever-changing demands in life that his preferred character endured. Kent shared that he relates to Green Lantern due as the character “was the first mainstream, long standing comic book character that was gay. And so that was the connection for me. Like I immediately realized now this character is – I’m able to relate to it.” Kent furthered his relation to the character by describing an example where the character tragically lost his partner / lover. For Kent, this was an emotional event that he could relate to his own experience of tragically losing his boyfriend previously. He provided “it solidified that character and those plot lines for me so heavily...because it was, in some ways, *my* experience. And [it] helped me as an entry point to begin to identify with a lot of the other struggles and successes and complexities of that storyline.” While some participants relate to the wholeness of a character, this specific event paralleled Kent and Green Lantern’s shared experience of loss. Anakin identified a trait

within himself that he identified with Luke Skywalker. “Being an outsider, being not like everybody else. Having difficulty finding where I fit in and seeing somebody else like [Luke Skywalker]...watching [him] be able to grow and learn and become somebody important.” Anakin was able to relate to his preferred comic character on a more social issue. Kal added that he related to Superman based on the character’s moral traits such as “Always [being] fair, not prejudice... I’d like to think that I’m fair to people....” Carol indicated that she identified with a specific author of a novel. She stated, “I consider myself a pretty staunch feminists and I think it started there” in the graphic novel. She added, “So, that really stayed with me and I think changed a part of who I am. And I continued to read her books when they come out.”

Building Knowledge

Participants articulated that aspects of comic books have influenced his or her obtainment of knowledge and understanding in some form. As aforementioned, comic book characters and stories appear to influence readers’ morals and behavior. It may be apparent that comic books may influence readers’ knowledge as well. This theme includes comments regarding form of building perspective, understanding, learning, and adjustment. Some significant participant responses are listed below:

When asked how reading comic books may impact his future, John stated they “can maybe help you see things differently as you go forward in life, looking at an event from a different perspective.” Billy indicated that comics helped him learn in an academic sense. He stated “I had trouble paying attention in school when we were reading or listening. They showed us comics and it was just an upgrade really...really tuned me in better.” In response to how comics have influence his life, Billy stated that

reading “Makes me understand stuff of the human condition a little better here and there.” Clark reported, “I learned a lot from reading them. Uh, I learned to read.” He later added that his vocabulary was positively influenced, as he would look up words used in comics that he didn’t know. Jonah also stated, “I remember that [experience] because it taught me what the word annihilate means.” Jonah mentioned he obtained a “better vocabulary than some of the kids because I’ve seen Batman use words when talking about how Two-Face, uh, does his business. And I felt like, uh, I had a better grasp of the language than other kids at a small age” when asked how comics have impacted his life. Bruce indicated that he uses comic books as a teaching tool for his classes. He stated “I think a lot of what I look at superhero stories is how...how I can think about them in terms of their social impact and commentary on social issues. Because I always want to use them in classes.” He acknowledged the utility of comic book in teaching others about social issues reflected in comics, bringing understanding and awareness to students. Regarding his career aspirations, Peter reported that comics helped facilitate his writing style, stating the “way [authors] told that story, defined aspects of how I wanted to write my own stuff.” In essence, comics helped Peter refine and understand how to improve his writing style. Asking how reading comics has influenced his perceptions of others, Scott replied “it helped me kind of expand my view of certain populations I guess... expanding my world view of different populations. They’ve definitely had an impact on that.” This may suggest that comic books might help readers gain understanding and perspective of other cultures. Wayne commented that comics “just made me more open minded and more willing to accept other people’s viewpoints and things.” Kent reflected “at the end of the day, what comics do for me is

they help me to access emotions that I otherwise wouldn't bring to consciousness." Kent made reference numerous times to his struggle with understanding and accessing his emotions. In a way, comic book reading has helped Kent learn of his suppressed emotional states and process them. In addition, Kent indicated that he perceives comics as "agents for change," furthering that comics reflect social issues and ways in which they may be addressed. Albert mentioned "Um, if I'm reading something that I have no idea what the word means, or what they're talking about, I'll look it up. So, that's kind of a continued education." In addition, Kal provided an additional instance of using comic books as a learning tool. He indicated, "I used to teach English and I would throw comic book stuff in to classes and I'm influencing my wife to do that in her art classes all the time." Also, Carol stated, "I taught an English classroom for four years and I really liked using graphic novels and comic books especially for my struggling readers and English language learners." She furthered that comics "influenced the way I teach and taught a lot...understanding other cultures, it really helps me in that aspect."

Through many facets, comic books appear to facilitate methods of gaining understanding and knowledge. Many participants shared experiences in which they gained understanding of other cultures, ways of thinking, and different perspectives. On a more academic level, participants indicated that comics may serve as an educational source. A handful of participants stated that he or she used comics as learning tools while teaching students or interacting with others. Comics may also facilitate and maintain an academic learning experience for some readers.

DISCUSSION

The current study stood to provide psychological understanding of superhero comic book reading. Using phenomenological thematic analysis (Van Manen, 2014), this study attempted to provide information regarding readers' experiences when reading superhero comic books. First, the question of what experiences people have when reading superhero comic books was addressed during the interviews. Questions from the interview (APPENDIX C) highlighted a focus on this research question including: "what types of comic books and superheroes to you read about and why," "do you ever notice your thoughts and emotions while reading comic books," and "how do comic books make you feel after reading." These questions allowed participants to explore and report ways that comic book reading impacts him or her on a descriptive level.

Secondly, participants were asked "how have comic books and superheroes influenced your life," "tell me how reading superhero comic books have impacted your morals, beliefs, etc.," "what do comic books mean to you," "what have you learned about yourself from reading comic books," "how do comic books impact your current life," and "how can comic books impact your future." This set of questions attempted to explore specific and general ways in which comic books have influenced and/or affected readers in a more experiential and existential way.

In addition to the previous research questions, the final research question asking about what themes are commonly experienced by superhero comic book readers was

interpreted through thematic analysis. Phenomenological thematic analysis yielded seven phenomenological themes: physiological & emotional reactions, nostalgia, source of coping, moral guidance, social utility, relating to characters, and building knowledge, as commonly reported by participants. Participants shared many significant statements, which highlighted direct and/or indirect experience of the phenomenological themes. Overall, the essence of superhero comic book reading, from a psychological standpoint, is a form of coping / escape for participants. Reading superhero comic books, at its base, is reported to be a stress relieving intervention. Individuals are motivated to read superhero comic books for a variety of reasons. This brings into question, what does motivational theory suggest about these results.

The self-determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2000) may provide theoretical understanding regarding the results obtained by this study. From an intrinsic motivation standpoint, participants were more likely to read superhero comic books due to personal interests, values, and satisfaction. As Atkinson (2009) stated, intrinsic motivation resides within an individual and is not dictated by external forces. A majority of participants' reported interest in reading comic books was mostly based on a form of reward, coping, emotional experiences, and satisfaction. Also, Ryan and Deci (2000) mentioned that intrinsic reading consists of satisfactory reward and positive emotional experiences, also consisting of an interest and enjoyment (Becker, McElvany, & Kortenbruck, 2010). As participants responded to interview questions, it became apparent that the sampled participants were more intrinsically motivated to read, in comparison to extrinsic motivation. Data gathered describe positive affective and pleasant physiological experiences for participants. From an external standpoint, a couple

of participants indicated that reading superhero comic books consisted of extrinsic forces such as social engagement with peers, maintaining and facilitating relationships, and bonding with others. Overall, results suggest that comic book reading was mostly reported as an intrinsically motivated behavior. In addition there were also aspects and situations that also indicated extrinsic motivations were present with participant experiences.

Limitations

Given the design and nature of this study, the results of this study are not generalizable. While this study gained understanding of experiences that individuals have while reading superhero comics, these findings are unique; therefore, results may not be applicable to everyone that reads superhero comic books. As Polkinghorne (1989) stated, qualitative researchers attempt to describe the phenomenon so that the general population can better understand what it's like to experience regular reading of superhero comic books. To the best of ability, this study attempted to obtain as much data as possible to describe this experience. Van Manen (2014) further stated that a group of people with lived experience will not match others who also experience the same phenomenon. In addition, while the procedures of this study are provided, there will always be confounding variables such as participant difference, researcher bias, external reviewer subjectivity, and demographic sampling differences. It is assumed that replicability of this study is not feasible.

This study hoped to limit researcher bias, which can be difficult to address (Van Manen, 1990). Eliminating personal bias completely was not possible since the primary researcher directly has experience with the phenomenon of reading superhero comic

books. Though interviews provided more interactions and observational data, the researcher may not be aware of all that may be occurring during the interview. Given the demographic nature of the research setting, the small sample of participants may also not fully reflect all comic book readers. Specifically, all participants were of Caucasian heritage, which is not representative of the general populations. In addition, 14 of 15 participants were male. Some populations were unavailable to the researcher upon recruitment and data collection. Moving forward, it would have been helpful to have a larger sample size with much more diversity represented.

Implications: Why This Matters!

Psychological research has produced a plethora of studies focusing on other forms of media, yet this study is breaking ground on a void in psychological literature (e.g. studying the psychological impacts specifically related to comic book reading). While bibliotherapy has empirical presence in current psychological literature, there is currently limited research and understanding specifically regarding comic book reading. Therefore, this study serves as a future model and reference for psychological research on superhero comic book reading and associated phenomenological effects. This study also provided insight regarding media effects (Lee & Peng, 2006). Adults who reported reading comics at least 15-30 minutes per week endorsed overwhelmingly positive experiences. While psychological research of other mediums (e.g. video games, movies, social media) have had conflicting data (e.g. suggesting that the promotion of increased aggression and violence), this study provided qualitative data supporting more positive experiences, behaviors and thought processes. Participants in this study reported themes of increased pro-social behavior and more open-mindedness towards others.

Furthermore, participants reported experiencing catharsis, reduced stress, and validation of internal experiences (e.g. emotional, identity traits, etc.) with characters in reading material (Cohen, 1993; McKenna, Hevey, & Martin, 2010).

Comic book reading falls under the umbrella as a specific area of bibliotherapy. Research supports the use of bibliotherapy as a therapeutic tool in addressing a vast array of psychological struggles such as self-harm (Evans et al., 1999), sleep issues (Morin, Mineault, & Gagne, 1999), emotional disorders (Den Boer, Wiersma, & Van den Bosch, 2004), eating disorders (Ghaderi, & Scott, 2003; McAllister, Brien, Flynn, & Alexander, 2014), obsessive-compulsive disorders (Leininger et al., 2010; Lovell et al., 2004), anxiety disorders (Febbraro, 2005), depression (Morgan & Jorm, 2008; Smith, Floyd, Scogin, & Jamison, 1997; Wilson, Mottram, & Vassilas, 2008), addiction and substance addition (Apodaca, & Miller, 2003). From a bibliotherapeutic standpoint, reading superhero comic books may help individuals identify with similar characters, obtain validation of his or her self and experiences, and develop vicarious coping strategies from characters. McKenna Hevey, and Martin (2010) suggest that clients who read therapeutically, were able to become active participants in his or her road to recovery. In addition, children who experience adverse conditions (e.g. cancer, being orphaned, bullying, losing loved one, low SES, etc.) have been able to experience empowerment and develop resiliency as a result of being exposed to comic book superheroes' life parallels (Fradkin, Weschenfelder, & Yunes, 2016). Thus, comic book superheroes appear to be an untapped resource for helping at-risk youth in gaining empowerment and resiliency. Radley et al. (2015) also found that superheroes can help children with autism learn and adapt social skills training. Martin (2007) reported a relationship between

children's perceptions of self, superheroes, and pro-social behavior. This is based on notion that children can learn moral values and become educated about broad social issues from superheroes (Dyson, 1997; McCrary, 1999). Though the data of these articles consist of children participants, one may be able to draw some similarities in adult development as well. Not only can adults and children benefit from processes and identifying with character experiences, these stories are fairly continuous and readily available for the past 60 years. In this study, participants reported reading comics as a way to cope with experiences as well as evaluate themselves (e.g. values). Practitioners can discuss and collaborate with clients on certain comic book characters in which the client can attach oneself too. Clients may be able to find meaningful experiences in reading comic books and possibly learn other methods of coping with or conceptualizations of issues. Participants in this study provided data in which he or she was able to learn coping strategies from certain characters and adopt problem-solving techniques. In addition, participants also made reference to positive changes in "black and white thinking" or improvement in understanding others (empathy).

Future Research

This study raises additional questions to be answered from additional qualitative and quantitative analyses. This study did not measure the quantitative level of impact that superhero comic book reading has on readers. Though this study has provided some insight as to what readers experience, further research can focus on quantifying the experience as well as understanding statistical relationships between the provided factors such as amount of reading and stress level. Constructs such as hope, self-compassion, mental well-being, and life values can be defined empirically and analyzed in relation to

comic book readers' experiences. One specific area of research interest moving forward would be to investigate the apparent relationship between LGBTQ readers' *coming out* experiences and reading about characters who are also socially isolated and prejudiced against (e.g. X-Men). Some participants in this study, who identify within an LGBTQ identity, made reference as to how reading comic books with characters sharing similar struggles (e.g. feeling socially isolated, biased against) helped them to cope with their identity as an LGBTQ individual. Furthermore, participants in this study provided data suggesting that comic books and characters helped them accept aspects of themselves. Moving forward, it can be beneficial to help understand these relationships and interactions on a quantitative level.

Practice and Application

Creswell (2006) suggests that phenomenology can be helpful for therapists and other health professionals. Knowing common experiences of comic book readers may aid in developing meaningful and pertinent therapeutic interventions relating to superhero comic books. Comic book characters are grounded in human experiences of thought and emotion. Though most of us don't have superpowers at our discretion, we can connect with certain characters based on similar experiences (e.g. childhood development, personality traits, vicarious living experiences, etc.). While stories are typically fantastical, characters can allow individuals to relate to and experience positive aspects of themselves as well tap in to improving their understanding of the world surrounding them (providing insight & empathy). Introducing the concept of superhero therapy can be somewhat ambiguous. However, practitioners can begin discussing this topic by bringing up a client's thoughts about personal role models (past or current) and/or individuals who

may have served as inspiration for a client. This can begin discussion regarding the attachment to and preference for certain types of characters and people in one's life narrative. Using narrative therapy can be helpful in opening discussion to developing positive narratives to overcome problem-saturated stories. There have been some resources developed, focusing on the implementation of superheroes into psychology and therapeutic intervention. While some of these resources focus on the use of superheroes in working with youthful populations (e.g. Rubin, 2006), these characters are being reported as having impacts through adulthood as well. Reading through websites such as GeekTherapy.com and Superhero-Therapy.com, readers can immediately see how superheroes and comic books can impact individuals of all demographics and actively serve to improve quality of life. These resources provide regular information in the form of academic articles, newspaper columns, pertinent blogs, and societal trends that address aspects of superheroes in the daily lives of others. GeekTherapy.com offers articles over various topics including the use of superheroes in working with disabled veterans, technological advances resulting from superhero comic ideology (e.g. new prosthetics designed from technology supporting Iron-Man). In addition, these resources provide access to specific therapeutic topics that are found in current or past comic book archives. A practitioner can select a topic (e.g. alcoholism) and be taken to comic book panels that show certain characters confronting said topic (e.g. 1968 Marvel Iron-Man comics where Tony Stark battles alcohol dependence). In digital age where people have more access to digital comics versus actual in-hand comics, these resources can be quite helpful in providing some immediate discussion with certain topics being easily available due to websites like the aforementioned.

The results of this study show that people, including practitioners and clients, can refer to superhero comic books to address mental health concerns (e.g. coping). Mental health professionals can refer to this data to gain insight regarding the types of experiences people may have when reading about his or her favorite characters. This leads to further evidence in supporting bibliotherapy as well as certain pop-culture / superhero therapies that have yet to be accepted in modern psychological practice guidelines (e.g. accepted by American Counseling Association; not accepted by American Psychological Association).

Summary

In recent history, superhero movies made over billions of dollars in 2016 alone, with more movies on the way over subsequent years. Currently, movies associated with the Marvel Cinematic Universe have earned approximately \$10,229,355,685 at the worldwide box office since 2008 (Box Office History for Marvel Cinematic Universe Movies, 2016). Superhero comic books and graphic novels were reported to have record numbers in sales during 2013, reaching \$870 million (Lubin, 2014). Merchandising also assuredly sees multi-million dollar profits from superhero sales. Wearing specific clothing such as t-shirts are important mediums in which people engage with his or her favorite superheroes (Gordon, 2016). This trend suggests that many individuals consume aspects of superheroes in our current society, on various levels. With superheroes widely displayed in our modern culture, utilizing these ideas, narratives, and characters can help people access resources outside of the therapeutic room in a meaningful way. People who can relate to superheroes may be able to discover aspects of his or her own identity, obtain some validation of self, and find a source of coping. Superheroes can allow

people to emulate or vicariously learn behavioral strategies when facing high stress situations. Superheroes can also validate that we all have weaknesses in which we can embrace rather than devalue. The results of this study may provide some support for the use of superheroes in the therapeutic room. From superheroes, we can learn how to face our own battles and become our own heroes when faced with adversity.

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APPENDIX A

EXTENDED LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction of Superheroes in Comic Books to Society

Comics can be traced as originating in Germany during the 1880s in local newspapers, serving as comical and funny pictured narratives (Bender & Lourie, 1941). Fast forward to 1934 in the United States, the explosion of superhero popularity began to develop with two teenage boys in Ohio. As documented by Wright (2003), the two teens developed the idea of a common, unappreciated man who, in the threat of danger, can take his glasses off and change into a super human who is praised and adored by those he protects. The notion of being able to act and look like “just another mild-mannered reporter for a great metropolitan newspaper” (p. 1), being able to change appearance, and become recognized as a demi-god among earth’s citizens fueled the idea behind developing the Superman narrative. Superman’s traits, ironically, counteracted the teens’ own insecurities of their physical appearance and shy personalities. In his common form as a reporter, Clark Kent shared some of the same traits as the two teenagers. However, when Clark Kent became Superman, he was outgoing, exhibited god-like physique, and was able to express his morals and values to all who would appreciate him. The teenagers incorporated their traits into Clark Kent and fantasized aspects that they may idolize and wish to have in Superman.

With the development of iconic superheroes, comic book consumption began across the country and world. Historically, comic books were not always interpreted and perceived positively. In fact, comic book roundups and burnings were held by organized groups such as the Catholic Legion of Decency, among other groups (catholic students burn up comic books, 1948, p. 18) years after comic books became popular. At one point in time, comic book superheroes found themselves in a public policy forum. In the 1950s, debate began regarding the controversial impact of comic books on youth development (Rubin, 2007). Fredric Wertham testified in representing U.S. senators during the 3 days of the 1954 Kefauver hearings. During the forum, the notion of “selling our next generation mind-poisoning fantasies” (p. xx) was proposed, in which Wertham indicated was the obvious, negative impact of comic books on youth. He testified that comic books had psychologically and behaviorally dangerous implications for youth, calling for an eradication of superhero comic books. In contrast, Laretta Bender testified that comic books fulfilled the “psychological needs of the child” (p. xxv). She furthered that comic books allow readers “continuity by a central character who...invites identification,” and solving “problems of the relationship of the self to the physical and social reality” (Bender, 1944, p. 160). After testimony, Congress sided with Bender and other supporters of comic book utility, ultimately concluding “it appears to be the consensus of the experts that comic-book reading is not the cause of emotional maladjustment in children” (U.S. Senate, 1955, p. 16).

Aspects of Mental Health and Superheroes in Comics

Since the congressional ruling in favor of superheroes and comics (U.S. Senate, 1955), pop culture has embraced the idea of a superhero. In psychology, scholars and

practitioners strive to understand why things occur in hopes of understanding behavior and even attempting to predict future behavior. But has psychology been able to fully understand why people cherish and appreciate superheroes in comic books? Author Bradford W. Wright provides some insight into why people remain so enamored with superheroes in comics. Wright (2003) recognizes comic books as generational experiences such as politics, culture, audience tastes and economic state (reflected in Captain America storytelling during the World War II era). These experiences helped to “frame a worldview and define a sense of self for the generations who have grown up with [comic books and superheroes],” (p. xiii) Wright added. Dr. Robin Rosenberg (2008) discusses that the psychological experiences of superheroes and how these experiences relate to fans of pop culture act as reasons why people continue to be drawn to superhero comics. She reports that, as she read superhero stories as an adult, she became aware of themes in the stories such as morality, loyalty, self-doubt, and conviction. She furthers that “the sagas of superheroes bring us out of ourselves and connect us with something larger than ourselves, something more universal” (p. 2). Rosenberg’s work supports the possibility that people may be able to relate to the struggles and emotions of beloved superheroes. For example, Dr. Rosenberg suggests that the psychological nature of Batman is not too far-fetched for audiences to relate to. The Batman character, known for embracing a dark path of justice towards criminals, was based on an early-childhood trauma Batman/Bruce Wayne experienced. Batman’s alter ego, Bruce Wayne, tried to make sense of this trauma and decided to allocate his focus and energy into protecting the innocent so these types of traumas may be prevented. This leads to the notion of superheroes serving as models for moral behavior.

Well known psychologist, writer, and researcher Dr. Robert Sternberg (2013), mostly known for his work involving human intelligence, speaks of the essence of superheroes. He states that “the essence of a superhero is in his or her wisdom and ethics, not in the superpowers...” (p. 160). He indicates that a hero’s use of one’s skills and powers for the common good is a trademark of wisdom. In his essay, Dr. Sternberg highlights a superhero named Lamont Cranston, better known as The Shadow. The Shadow, Sternberg says, is interesting in that he attempts to accomplish the most of good with his limited powers. There are many iterations of The Shadow in comics and radio programming. Dr. Sternberg highlights on Lamont Cranston as a criminal psychologist who obtained special training in martial arts, detective work, and hypnotism, in which he uses to get criminals to confess to their crimes. Sternberg finishes his essay in discussing the vulnerabilities of superheroes and how we as mortals can relate to them. He finishes in stating “we have a lot to learn from superheroes. Most of all we can learn that when things are not as they should be, we have a choice...we can act if only we choose to” (p. 173). Characters like the Incredible Hulk can resonate with people on a different, emotionally humanistic level. Bruce Banner represents the normal side of human behavior, problem-solving and rationality. However, after he is confronted with a highly stressful situation or trigger, Bruce Banner becomes highly emotional, transforming into a giant, green monster that possesses rage, limited empathy, and minimal rationality. Once Banner turns into the Hulk, he can cause devastating amounts of destruction to the immediate surroundings and possibly cause harm to innocent, collateral people or objects. After danger subsides, the Hulk begins to transform back into Bruce Banner. Once Bruce Banner becomes rational and cognitively aware again, he observes the

devastation he caused as the hulk, realizing that his rage can lead to hurting other people and causing damage. Sayers (2007) highlights the *Incredible Hulk Syndrome* by using the four stages of anger (Potter-Efron & Potter-Efron, 1995) and how anger can negatively impact emotional literacy or emotional intelligence (e.g. the ability to quickly identify one's emotions and expressing them adaptively). People can also experience rage and observe the aftermath he or she may have inflicted as a result of a period of aggression and rage. The parallel processing between the Incredible Hulk and people, in general, can show an emotional range of disappointment, guilt, sadness, sorrow, and possibly annoyance. As a result of Banner's curse, he implements behavior changes (avoiding triggers) that decrease the possibility of re-experiencing another Hulk episode as well as practicing stress-reduction techniques. In the lore of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, a group of four mutated turtles develop distinguishable personalities and are forced learn ways to effectively interact and battle evil together or face defeat. Regarding these examples, people can relate to the superheroes' experiences of loss, self-regulation, and group cohesion among many more humanistic themes.

Dr. Rosenberg furthers that topics or themes such as societal discrimination (racism, able-ism, sexism, age-ism, etc.), group/family cohesion and mental illness are all evident in multiple superhero narratives. Spieldenner (2013) discusses Wonder Woman and the homosexual men who associate with her. The author explains that Gay men may associate with Wonder Woman based on common traits such as a same-sex society, fighting intolerance/social justice, finding one's place in society, and learning how to thrive in transformation. Seidler (2011) shows how using comic books to battle disability stereotypes (able-ism) can be helpful in producing social change. Comic books may be

able to provide simulated experiences in which people can interpret, evaluate meaning, and learn. Sternberg (2013) mentioned that superheroes' wisdom and ethical traits can serve as models or guidelines for people to strive for and go by. Using our favorite superheroes as a teaching tool, we can learn from others and apply our new knowledge to ourselves. People can develop morals, social skills, and strategies for coping and problem solving based on our interpretations of superhero experiences and attaching meaning.

The psychological implications that superheroes have on people can be very meaningful. Gaining insight and understanding of underlying perceptions and appraisals of people using comics and superheroes can be beneficial in psychological treatment. Though using comic books and superheroes as psychological treatment may still exist on the fringe of psychological practice and treatment, the impact can be highly meaningful with clients. Ahead of their time, Bender and Lourie (1941), both psychoanalysts, began implementing comic books into therapy with children in reaction to the congressional hearing by U.S. Senate. Bender and Lourie's (1941) article discussed the use of superheroes in play and imagination. In addition, the children participants were observed using superman-based play as a means of protection against antisocial behavior, development of the moral self, and problem solving. Bender is also the same clinician who provided testimony in the usefulness of superheroes and comic books in therapy (U.S. Senate, 1955). Rubin and Livesay (2006) provide clinical applications of using superheroes in play therapy, while citing scarceness of current empirical support in using superheroes and comic books in mental health therapy. Josué Cardona, a licensed counselor, developed Geek Therapy and created an online resource discussing Geek

Therapy. Cardona describes Geek Therapy as form of mental health therapy that incorporates video games, comic books, technology, and pop culture narratives. In addition, Dr. Janine Scarlet (Scarlet, 2015) maintains a website discussing Superhero therapy (using superheroes in addition to Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy).

Siskund (2014) explores the developing trend (though still on the fringe of evidence based treatment) of treating mental health with unorthodox approaches in using superheroes. Suskind acknowledged the work of Dr. Patrick O'Connor, Josué Cardona LPCA, Dr. Robin Rosenberg, Dr. Lawrence Rubin, Steve Kuniak, and Dr. Lauretta Bender in using comic book superheroes in psychological intervention. At some level, all aforementioned mental health practitioners support the use of superhero comic books in therapy. Suskind also reports insight regarding the current state of "superhero therapy" in relation to bodies of mental health accreditation such as the American Psychological Association (APA) and the American Counseling Association (ACA). Superhero/Comic book therapy has received some support from the ACA while being unrecognized as an evidence-based treatment/practice by the APA. Suskind furthers that the APA does not recognize Superhero/Comic Book Therapy as evidence-based treatment due to the lack of empirical support of its use. Sackett et al. (1996) defines evidence-based practice as "the conscientious, explicit, and judicious use of current best evidence in making decisions about the care of individual patients" (p.71). Generally, in the health care fields, randomized controlled trials (RCTs) are utilized to test for treatment efficacy. However there does not yet appear to be a unanimous, agreed upon approach to using superheroes in therapy, limiting the ability to test for treatment effectiveness.

Numerous blogs, peer-reviewed articles, book chapters, and lectures highlight the importance and beneficence of using superheroes in mental health intervention. However, our current understanding of how superheroes' directly impact mental health is relatively unknown in the empirical world of psychology. Whether the treatment is called Superhero Therapy, Geek Therapy, or Comic Book Therapy, using superheroes in therapy is currently not recognized as evidenced-based treatment/practice in psychology. In order to be supported as an evidence-based treatment/practice in psychology, numerous studies must be conducted to provide support in the theory of and utility of using superheroes in therapy. To date, only a handful of studies report the beneficial aspects of using comic book superheroes in health interventions (Archer, 1997; Branscum et al., 2013; Coyne et al., 2014; Nelson & Norton, 2005; Sobel, 1980; Springer, 2013). Of the studies, the results have shown some support in using superheroes in healthy intervening. Yet, we still do not know the extent of how much superheroes in comics impact readers. How do participants of superhero therapy perceive the intervention?

In hope of building psychology's understanding of superhero comic books, Anderson (2013) suggests that researchers return to the experience of the superhero phenomenon. In this case, research should approach this topic with a phenomenologist mindset and focus on people's experience of reading super hero comic books. Anderson furthers that researchers of the phenomena have to return to the idea of the superhero ideal and find the gut experience one has when reading super hero comics. He furthers that the context of the experience is key in understanding the event or phenomenon, suggesting that researchers recruit from the source: comic book stores. In this case, more research is required in understanding the phenomenon of reading superhero comic books.

Historical Aspects of Understanding Psychological Phenomena

Thomas S. Kuhn (1922-1996), who coined the term *paradigm shift*, spoke of scientific shifts of understanding and knowing in a non-linear fashion. In psychology, these shifts produce different ways of exploring and understanding human behavior and information processing. The field of psychology has observed a handful of paradigm shifts over the past decades, adjusting to updated knowledge and insight in understanding societal and individual interpretations of phenomenology. As the field of psychology adopted science as a tool, psychological research and theory now attempt to make predictions, build theories, and discover more efficient psychological treatments. However, psychology still maintains a variety of constructs, dueling theories, and between-group incongruities regarding how psychological researchers should interpret and collect data. Currently, psychology mainly utilizes the scientific method (e.g. post-positivism) for obtaining quantitative knowledge. The reality is that current psychological research may be unable to validly provide an understanding of all phenomena, variables, and participant perspectives. In order to conceptually understand the purpose of this paper, developmental aspects of psychological research (leading to current data collection in psychology) is to be discussed.

The Importance of Perception in Psychology

Beginning with Plato (428-348 B.C.), his discussions regarding perception of objects (via our physical senses) set the foundation for how we understand or perceive and how things are processed within the mind (our mind organizes and processes information from the senses, adding meaning). John Locke believed that ideas or *ediolas* represent a copy of an object captured by the senses (Coren, 2003). In other words, the

mind can then build ideas from the senses, which leads to interpretation and appraisal of an object. Branch and Wilson (2010) discuss the process of applying meaning to our perceptions. They state that the “meaning you attach to any sort of event influences the emotional responses you have to that event” (p.13); the way we interpret events has an effect on our mood. Positive appraisals of objects normally lead to positive feelings of happiness, whereas negative appraisals of objects typically lead to negative feelings like sadness or stress. This gives rise to the importance of understanding the meanings people place on objects when providing psychological intervention and treatment. Morals, problem-solving, coping strategies, and social interactions can be learned based off of our experiences of perception, interpretation and the meanings we attach to them. Given a brief background of psychology research’s development, focus is now turned to research efforts in gaining an understanding of the impact of subjective interpretation of meaningful objects, specifically superheroes in comic books.

Pop-Culture Media & Psychology

For the past few decades, psychological research has attempted to explore and understand the relationship/effects of pop culture on the thoughts, feelings, and behavior of individuals who follow or immerse themselves in cultural entertainment. “Media effects” is the term that refers to the impact that pop culture has on people, both positively and negatively (Lee & Peng, 2006). Since the year 2000, thousands of publications have focused on media effects. Within psychology research, media can consist of television, movies, video games, websites/social forums, and books.

Themes such as body image (Eyal, & Te’eni-Harari, 2013; Ferguson, 2013; Hayes, & Tantleff-Dunn, 2010; Tiggemann, 2014), violence (Friedlander, Connolly,

Pepler, & Craig, 2013; Gentile & Bushman, 2012; Warburton, 2013), impulsivity (Gentile, Swing, Lim, & Khoo, 2012), among other psychological themes, have been recently studied in relation to media effects. In regards to superheroes and television, Levin and Carlsson-Paige (1995) conducted an exploration of teachers' concerns regarding the Power Rangers television show and the effects on children in the classroom. The teachers voiced concerns regarding themes of violence, aggressive play, confusion about reality and fantasy, and obsession over the Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers. Generally, the teachers reported fears that the children would use the Power Rangers as role models for social interactions and behavior exchange. Though the teachers provided perceptions of the superheroes' impact on students, the study did not actually focus on the experiences of those who engage in the behavior: the students. The teachers' perceptions were relatively unfounded regarding students' future actual acting out behaviors from the Power Rangers show. This illustrates that some psychological research of media effects has yet to study the full effect and essence of media effect phenomenon. Psychology has focused on media effects (Lee & Peng, 2006) over the years. Research has focused on types of therapies using media such as bibliotherapy, cinema therapy, video game research, and clinical implications of superhero comic book therapy interventions. Books, poetry, visual arts, comic books, art, television/movies, etc. are all representative forms of popular culture and can be used as therapeutic teaching concepts for clients. Mental health practitioners have shown support in using pop culture interventions in therapeutic settings (Pardeck, 1993).

Bibliotherapy: Beginnings of Using Media in Therapy

Books have been used to alter behavior and alter human emotions such as distress since the middle ages (Jack & Ronan, 2008). During the 1930s, therapeutic reading was beginning to show up into psychological practices (Rubin, 1978). Bibliotherapy, coined by Samuel Crothers (1916), can consist of fictional and nonfictional narratives in which clients can process, internalize, parallel with own narrative, and reflect on. In identifying with certain characters in the books, periodicals, comics, etc., readers can gain insight about their own issues from a different perspective in viewing associated characters issues playing out in the book. This can be cathartic for clients and possibly give hope and validate emotional tensions, reduce stress (Cohen, 1993) leading to change (McKenna, Hevey, & Martin, 2010). Research over the past few decades has shown support for the use of bibliotherapy in treating mental health. Bibliotherapy has been reported as being useful in addressing self-harm (Evans et al., 1999), sleep issues (Morin, Mineault, & Gagne, 1999), emotional disorders (Den Boer, Wiersma, & Van den Bosch, 2004), eating disorders (Ghaderi, & Scott, 2003; McAllister, Brien, Flynn, & Alexander, 2014), obsessive-compulsive disorders (Leininger et al., 2010; Lovell et al., 2004), anxiety disorders (Febbraro, 2005), depression (Morgan & Jorm, 2008; Smith, Floyd, Scogin, & Jamison, 1997; Wilson, Mottram, & Vassilas, 2008), addiction to substances (Apodaca, & Miller, 2003). Effect sizes from some of these studies have yielded significant impacts of bibliotherapy on the aforementioned issues.

McKenna, Hevey, and Martin (2010) conducted a qualitative study to gain perspectives of practitioners' (e.g. general practitioners, therapists, psychologists, & counselors) and clients' perspectives of using bibliotherapy in therapy and primary care treatment. With a sample size of 11 clients (those receiving bilbiotherapy) and five

general practitioners (e.g. general health practitioners, counselors, therapists, and psychologists), reported themes included feelings of empowerment (having control in this or her treatment), removal of barriers (allowing cheaper access to therapeutic intervention), flexibility of use in clinical settings (using bibliotherapy in adjunct to regular therapy, a supplement to therapy, etc.), negative reaction and experience (one participant cited that reading a book would not facilitate his issues), and stigma (e.g. asking librarians for books regarding mental health themes). In addition participants revealed the theme regarding factors of change (identification with the literature, individual/personality characteristics, and generation of insight into condition or personal issue). Overall, clients were able to become active in their road to recovery and decrease symptoms of isolation. Participants reported positive experiences with bibliotherapy, with some reporting negative experiences (stigma and requesting mental health books from librarians).

Psychological Impact of Cinema & Cinema Therapy

Movies and film have been a large predominant component of many cultures. Each year movies bring in billions of dollars in currency in the United States alone (some movies even gross over one billion dollars alone). When the *Iron Man 2* film was released, the movie grossed \$52.4 million on opening day (Brix & Connor, 2011). Film festivals and award shows garner viewer ratings and discussion annually. Going to or renting movies appears to be appealing and rewarding to many people across the world. People discuss his or her favorite movies in general conversations, quoting the best lines from each film. For such a large industry, it is only apparent that movies found their way into the psychotherapy room. On the other end of the continuum, Orchowski, Spickard,

and McNamara (2006) suggest that movies can show psychologists, mental health, and psychotherapy in a more negative portrayal. Therefore, it is imperative that mental health practitioners consider the portrayal of psychology in movies when using cinema therapy. Weakland (1975) provided support the notion that movies serve as documents of cultural meaning. In addition, movies can have an important therapeutic role in enhancing the attractiveness of therapy when integrated with a counseling framework (Dumitrache 2013; Dumitrache, 2014). A mere 88% of participating psychologists who were interviewed in the study, when questioned, indicated that using movies in therapy was either somewhat helpful or very helpful (76% & 12%, respectively; Lampropoulos, Kazantzis, & Deane, 2004). Hesley and Hesley (2001) highlight many advantages of bringing movies into therapy sessions (referred to as “videowork”). The authors describe using movies in therapy: “videowork is a therapeutic process in which clients and therapists discuss themes and characters in popular films that relate to core issues of ongoing therapy” (p.4). This suggests that movies in therapy may allow clients to indirectly gain self-understanding and address therapeutic goals/issues. Cinema therapy is said to have parallels to bibliotherapy in “sharing aims, advantages, and limitations” (p. 7).

Using movies can be helpful in having clients evaluate family concerns, culture, class, gender, power, and sexual orientation (Lappin, 1997). Dumitrache (2014) found a significant drop in anxiety among participants in a cinema-therapy program group in comparison to a control group. The author furthers that movies aid in personal developmental processes such as modeling ethical values, behavioral and emotional aspects of human behavior. Though not considered cinema, television has even been

shown to change participants' perceptions of anxiety provoking material such as death (Schiappa, Gregg, & Hewes, 2004). Using movies in teaching both students and clients shows many benefits. Similar to Narrative Therapy techniques (e.g. externalization of the problem), movies allow clients to externalize their problems in a nonthreatening manner and process alternatives and behavior change safely, without the possibility of judgment (Christie & McGrath 1987). This form of intervention allows clients and learners alike to maintain attention for a short amount of time (can conveniently be done outside of therapy and the classroom), emotionally engage to relatable situation in the movie, and apply family system theory concepts such as differentiation, genograms, cross-cultural factors, family coping, etc. (Alexander & Waxman, 2000; Blumer, 2010). Hesley and Hesley (2001) discuss how videowork or cinema therapy combines realism and imagination of any given situation a client may be facing or struggling with. The authors state that clients have internal conversations with movie characters and reflect on the relationships they are viewing in the movie. After reflection, the clients may use the observed interactions in movies as possible components to client's own actions. The authors developed a step-by-step approach in bringing movies into sessions resulting in clients developing action steps and incorporating learned lessons from the movie into one's life. In a small amount of time, a movie can impact the client on a cognitive, emotional, and behavioral level, allowing the movie-watcher to transcend his or her issues and "enter into a world of unlimited possibilities" (Dermer & Hutchings, 2000, p. 168).

Video Game Research as a Model of Comic Research

As books have been available for thousands of years, technology has adjusted and seen advances over the last few decades. As movies were not prevalent until the 1900s, it was only in the late 1900s until video games were born. As computers developed and updated, so too were video games. Now, video games can be played and experienced on personal computers, cell phones, handheld devices, tablets, gaming/console systems, web sites, etc., (Chatfield, 2010). Psychological research has been forced to adjust to these technologies advance. Video game research has seen much debate regarding the effects or “media effects” (Lee & Peng, 2006) of playing video games. Naturally, homeostatic tendencies in research trends have shown support for both positive and negative aspects of playing video games. For example, contrary to initial headlines and studies suggesting that video games decrease cognitive functioning, numerous some studies support the use of video games in enhancing general cognition (Toril, Reales, & Ballesteros, 2014) and positive social behavior (Greitemeyer & Osswald, 2010). Support in using video games to enhance cognition in older adults is recommended as video games can serve as a pertinent intervention for aging clients. Ferguson (2007) also conducted a meta-analysis of the effects of video games on game-player psychology. Results found that publication bias played a role in skewing data to show unfounded associations between aggression (e.g. aggressive cognition and behavior) and video game play. Meta-analytic results did not produce a definitive link between aggressive behavior and violent video game play, though there was a correlation between violent video game play and enhanced visuospatial cognition (Ferguson, 2007). On the contrary, Anderson et al. (2010) and Huesmann (2010) both support the notion that violent video games do increase and promote the risk of both short-term and long-term aggression in violent video game

players. Though many studies serve to debate the negative effects of videogame playing, research also supports positive effects of videogame playing on positive, prosocial behavior (Greitemeyer, & Osswald, 2010).

As a tradition in psychological research, a majority of the studies on video game effects focuses solely on the games (genre, violence, etc.), test scores, and observable behavior. Essentially, a large group of studies focus on laboratory behavior (not in a natural setting) and make assumptions about participant behavior outside of the research laboratory. Most studies, thus far, have yet to ask the participants about subjective experiences in playing video games. Oswald, Prorock, and Murphy (2014) addressed video game research with focus on the video game players' self-reported experience of the playing video games. The authors provide a framework in which the participants in pop culture (video game players) provided responses that captured the meanings attributed to game-play. Six themes were observed: emotional responses, game play, social, outcomes of game play, goals, and personal qualities. These findings suggest that people play video games due to emotional enjoyment as well as social and individual gain. With regards to this study, similar methods may uncover themes related to motivation and meanings individuals place on comic book reading. Similarly, Olson, Kutner, and Warner (2008) found that young males were attracted to violent video games in attempt to obtain feelings of power fame, and social interaction, as well as dealing with negative emotions (e.g. anger, frustration, etc.). The participants were actually able to work on lessening negative emotions when playing violent games, as opposed to increasing violent cognition and behavioral tendencies. Ortiz de Gortari, Aronson, and Griffiths (2011) collected interviews from frequent gamers in attempt to document

“Game Transfer Phenomena (GTP).” After completing thematic analysis, results revealed a large sum of players, integrated content from the video game into his or her real lives (interpersonally/socially, behaviorally modelling game-content, daydreaming/fantasizing about the game, & amusement). Sherry, Lucas, Greenberg, and Lachlan (2006) also suggest that motives for playing video games consists of engaging in competition and challenges, social interaction, diversion from reality, fulfilling fantasy/daydreaming, and increase of arousal.

Qualitative research allows researchers to begin to understand how video games impact and effect of playing video games from the game-players’ perspectives. Research has traditionally avoided subjective research in this area and more focus should be warranted in understanding possible motives for playing all genres of video games.

Research for Superhero/Comic Book therapy

Comic books and comic strips are another form of media that have been documented since the 1880s in Germany (Bender & Lourie, 1941). Superhero comic books began as early as Superman (Wright, 2003). Though superhero comic books initially received resistance by some lawmakers and religious groups (Bender, 1944; Rubin, 2007), pop culture media has appeared to embrace comic books as reflections of culture and current societal trends (Peterson & Gerstein, 2005; Wright, 2003).

Up until now, this paper has provided a brief summary regarding the effects of and use of other media such as books, movies/television, and videogames in treating mental health. With these other forms of media (e.g., books, movies/television, video games, etc.) garnering empirical support as possible forms of psychological intervention, superhero comic books have not yet received this acknowledgement, research-wise.

Superhero comic books have indeed received some support as being incorporated into educational (Jee & Anggoro, 2012; Rahman & Zeglin, 2014; Sobel, 1980), health (Archer, 1997; Branscum et al., 2013; Coyne et al., 2014; Nelson & Norton, 2005; Sobel, 1980; Springer, 2013), social/cultural (Seidler, 2011; Wright, 2003), and psychological (Bender & Lourie, 1941; Rubin & Livesay, 2006; Widzer, 1977) interventions and change. For example, comic books have been researched and show support in aiding learners in school (Hammond & Danaher, 2012). Rahman and Zeglin (2014) incorporated comic book superheroes into teaching an undergraduate abnormal psychology course. Citing constructivist theory, the authors found that students who conducted diagnostic evaluations of comic book superheroes actually performed slightly better on a course pop-quiz than students who participated in course lectures. The sample size was small and could have altered the significance of the results. However, this gives light to the idea that superheroes can hold diagnoses in a similar way that mental health clients exhibit, possibly leading to client identification with select superheroes. Sobel (1980) reports that comic book superheroes can serve as social models for troubled boys (ages 9-12). The author furthers that comic book superheroes help provide troubled boys some form of retribution and self-reparation, while also allowing boys the chance to compensate for previous trauma (e.g. loss, rejection, etc.). As Seidler (2011) points out, comic books have also been useful in battling stereotypes such as disability (able-ism), leading to social change. Additionally, research has also provided focus on the negative effects of comic books on people. Kirsh and Olczak (2000) implemented the comic books *Curse of the Spawn* (“violent comic book”) and *Archie & Friends* (“mildly comic book”) into study to observe the effects of reading violent comic books. Results suggest

that reading violent comic books influences individual's (males) perceptions of ambiguous behaviors as being more hostile. The authors indicate that hostile attributional bias may be facilitated by gender trait hostility, and reading violent comic books. Kirsh and Olczak (2002) found that reading violent comic books perceived more hostility in people. The authors conducted a study in which they assigned participants into experimental groups prior to reading and discussing a case vignette. Some participants read an extremely violent comic book or a mildly violent comic book. After reading the comic books, group participants read a vignette (e.g. a provocateur acts out an aggressive behavior with no backstory provided). Those who read the extremely violent comic book associated more hostile intent with the provocateur, with some suggesting retaliation was warranted. The authors suggest that participants reading violent comic books, leads to more attribution of negative intent, negative mood, and hostility in the provocateur. Thus, extremely violent comic books affect people's judgment of and social perceptions of relational interaction/aggression.

Up to this point, superhero comic books have received some support for use in psychological intervention and therapy. As early as Bender and Lourie (1941), superhero comic books were implemented into therapy with children. Superhero comic books have received more support integrated into child play-therapy (Rubin & Livesay, 2006). Widzer (1977) indicates that comic book superheroes allow people (especially children) to identify with them and address age-related and general conflict.

Though some research has been provided in support of the utility of comic book superheroes in psychological treatment, there remains to be a gap in our psychological understanding of how comic books affect comic book readers. As Anderson (2013)

suggests, research must dedicate some attention to the experience of the comic book superhero phenomenon. Using a phenomenological approach, analyzing comic book readers' experiences will develop our understanding of the effects of superhero comic books on comic book readers. In addition, mental health professionals, psychologists, counselors, etc., will gain an understanding of how to use superheroes and comic books in treatment settings. As in this case, research needs to focus on the experience of the phenomenon (e.g. super hero comic book reading). In order to fully understand how comic books impact readers, recruiting participants who engage in comic book reading on a frequent basis are preferred in being able to fully provide insight into their experiences. Anderson (2013) furthers that research needs to identify (through a qualitative, phenomenological approach) the gut experience or essence one has when reading super hero comics.

APPENDIX B

IRB APPROVAL FORM

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: Tuesday, January 19, 2016 Protocol Expires: 10/6/2018
IRB Application No: ED15124
Proposal Title: What does Psychology know and understand about the Psychological effects of reading superhero comic books? An exploratory study
Reviewed and Processed as: Exempt
Modification
Status Recommended by Reviewer(s) **Approved**
Principal Investigator(s):
Parker Shaw Tonya R. Hammer
434 Willard Hall 700 N Greenwood Ave
Stillwater, OK 74078 Tulsa, OK

The requested modification to this IRB protocol has been approved. Please note that the original expiration date of the protocol has not changed. The IRB office **MUST** be notified in writing when a project is complete. All approved projects are subject to monitoring by the IRB.

- The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

The reviewer(s) had these comments:

Mod to add Skype as an interview option and to give each participant a \$5 Amazon gift card rather than randomly drawing 2 - \$15 gift cards.

Signature :



Hugh Crethar, Chair, Institutional Review Board

Tuesday, January 19, 2016
Date

HANDWRITTEN FORMS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED
Application for Review of Human Subjects Research
Appendix A

Request for OSU System Email Addresses for Human Subject Research Recruitment Purposes

The purpose of this form is to obtain approval to access OSU-System faculty, staff or student email addresses for purposes of recruitment to human subject research conducted by Oklahoma State University researchers. **Please include a copy of this completed and signed form with your IRB application.**

Protocol Title: WHAT DOES PSYCHOLOGY KNOW AND UNDERSTAND ABOUT THE PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF READING SUPERHERO COMIC BOOKS?: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY
--

SECTION 1 – Principal Investigator/Advisor Information

Primary PI Name: Parker Shaw		Advisor Name (If PI is a student): Tonya Hammer	
Department: SAHEP	E-Mail: Parker.shaw@okstate.edu	Department: SAHEP	E-mail: Tonya.hammer@okstate.edu

SECTION 2 – Study Description

Purpose of Research: Gaining insight and understanding of underlying perceptions and appraisals of people using comics and superheroes can be beneficial in psychological treatment. Though using comic books and superheroes as psychological treatment may still exist on the fringe of psychological practice and treatment, the impact can be highly meaningful with clients. Psychological research still does not know the extent of how much superhero comics impact readers. With current psychological research yet to provide understanding of the comic book reading phenomena, the purpose of this exploratory study is to gain insight into others' interpretations and experiences of reading superhero comic books. Specifically, this study hopes to provide insight regarding the meaning and description of experiences that readers ascribe to reading superhero comic books.

Description of Research: (A brief description of what participants will be expected to do and or types of information to be requested) **Please note that due to the many requests for research and the large volume of email to university users, OSU Communications/IT allows only one follow-up email to be sent after the initial recruitment email. Any request for additional emails will be handled on a case-by-case basis and should be directed to the Office of University Research Compliance.**

1) This study will be conducted in a mid-western region at two local universities and local comic book stores, in two separate cities. In addition, this study will also incorporate the use of Skype for collecting data as well. The local comic book stores will be asked for participation. If consent is gained, paper flyers will be placed at each comic store to recruit participants. Polkinghorne (1989) recommends that anywhere from 5 to 25 participants, all of who experienced the phenomenon of research interest, are suggested for phenomenological research. This study will recruit participants for a sample size of 15 - 20. Demographics (age, ethnicity, sex, education, etc.) will be collected in addition to descriptive data such as frequencies of comic book reading (e.g. time allocated to comic book reading on a weekly basis, type of comic book, years of comic book reading, etc.). Creswell (2006) states the importance of selective appropriate candidates for participation. This study will focus on collecting data from multiple venues, including **online forums**, two universities, and local stores (e.g. comic book shops and entertainment stores). A flyer will be created to recruit comic book readers. Copies of the flyer will be placed at local comic book retailers and on two University Campuses (Oklahoma State University-Stillwater and Oklahoma State University-Tulsa). Clearance from the university publication offices will be sought and flyers recruiting participants to the study will be posted around both campuses. The

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board
 219 Cordell North, Stillwater, OK 74078
 405-744-3377

Oklahoma State Univ.
 Approved 1-19-16
 Expires 10-6-18
 Version 05/2015
 2015-124

flyer will provide information regarding the purpose of the study and information on how to contact the researcher. The flyer will have contact information for the researcher (email). Once participants contact the researcher and are determined to meet criteria for this study, he or she will be contacted by the researcher to set up an interview. Upon closure of the study, select participants will be contacted to claim an award or participation (e.g. random raffle drawing).

SECTION 3 – Sample Population Description

Indicate which campuses of the OSU System Population you wish to sample: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OSU-Stillwater Campus <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OSU-Tulsa Campus	Indicate which segments of the population you wish to sample: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Faculty <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Undergraduate Students <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Graduate Students <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Staff
Total Sample Size Requested: 5000 Expected Response Rate: 15-20 Total Number of Responses Needed: 15	Please specify any sample inclusion and/or exclusion criteria (e.g. junior and seniors only) and how the sample should be distributed (e.g. proportionately, specified numbers, etc.) Please note that OSU Communications/IT not allow more than one follow-up email to be sent after the initial recruitment email. Participants must be 18 years old to be included in the study. In addition, participants must meet minimum comic book reading (e.g. reading superhero comic books at least 15 minutes per week) criteria to be included. Participants not meeting these criteria will be excluded.

SECTION 4 – Approval Signatures

Obtain the signature of your department head first then submit the form to OSU Communications Services for review and signature. **A copy of the fully signed form should be submitted with your IRB application.**

PI 's Department Head:	Date:	OSU Communication Services:	Date:

Oklahoma State Univ.
 IRB
 Approved: 1-19-16
 Expires: 10-6-18
 Version 05/2011 ED 15/17

HANDWRITTEN FORMS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED
Application for Review of Human Subjects Research
Appendix A

Okl. State Univ.
IRB
Approved 10-7-15
Expires 10-6-18
IRB # ED 15 24

Request for OSU System Email Addresses for Human Subject Research Recruitment Purposes

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Protocol Title: WHAT DOES PSYCHOLOGY KNOW AND UNDERSTAND ABOUT THE PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF READING SUPERHERO COMIC BOOKS?: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

SECTION 1 – Principal Investigator/Advisor Information

Primary PI Name: Parker Shaw		Advisor Name (If PI is a student): Tonya Hammer	
Department: SAHEP	E-Mail: Parker.shaw@okstate.edu	Department: SAHEP	E-mail: Tonya.hammer@okstate.edu

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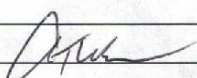
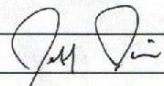
The flyer will have contact information for the researcher (email). Once participants contact the researcher and are determined to meet criteria for this study, he or she will be contacted by the researcher to set up an interview. Upon closure of the study, select participants will be contacted to claim an award or participation (e.g. random raffle drawing).

SECTION 3 – Sample Population Description

<p>Indicate which campuses of the OSU System Population you wish to sample:</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OSU-Stillwater Campus</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OSU-Tulsa Campus</p>	<p>Indicate which segments of the population you wish to sample:</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Faculty</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Undergraduate Students</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Graduate Students</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Staff</p>
<p>Total Sample Size Requested: 2000</p> <p>Expected Response Rate: 15-20</p> <p>Total Number of Responses Needed: 15</p>	<p>Please specify any sample inclusion and/or exclusion criteria (e.g. junior and seniors only) and how the sample should be distributed (e.g. proportionately, specified numbers, etc.) Please note that OSU Communications/IT not allow more than one follow-up email to be sent after the initial recruitment email.</p> <p>Participants must be 18 years old to be included in the study. In addition, participants must meet minimum comic book reading (e.g. reading superhero comic books at least 15 minutes per week) criteria to be included. Participants not meeting these criteria will be excluded.</p>

SECTION 4 – Approval Signatures

Obtain the signature of your department head first then submit the form to OSU Communications Services for review and signature. **A copy of the fully signed form should be submitted with your IRB application.**

PI's Department Head:	Date:	OSU Communication Services:	Date:
	8/24/15		8/25/15

O'kla. State Univ.
 IRB
 Approved 10-7-15
 Expires 10-6-17
 IRB # EDB-121

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 405-744-3377

Version 05/2011

APPENDIX C

DEMOGRAPHIC SHEET & INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Demographic Information

Directions: Please answer each question by filling in the blank, checking the blank, or circling the number that best describes you.

Name: _____

Email address (for compensatory reasons) _____

1) Age: _____

2) Gender:

_____ Female

_____ Male

_____ Transgender (Male to Female)

_____ Transgender (Female to male)

3) Describe your relationship status

_____ Single

_____ Never Married

_____ Committed relationship

_____ Married

_____ Separated/Divorced

_____ Other

3) Are you:

_____ Heterosexual

_____ Gay/Lesbian

_____ Bi-sexual

_____ Other

4) What is your race/ethnicity? (Check all that apply)

_____ a) Caucasian/White/European American

_____ b) African American/Black

_____ c) Hispanic/Latino

_____ d) Asian/Pacific Islander/Asian American

_____ e) Native American/American Indian/Alaskan Native

_____ f) Other (Please Specify) _____

5) Level of education:

_____ a) High School / GED

_____ b) Associate Degree

_____ c) Bachelor Degree

_____ d) Master Degree

_____ e) Doctoral Degree

_____ f) Other (please specify): _____

6) How much time do you spend reading superhero comic books per week?

___ a) 15-30 minutes per week

___ b) 30-60 minutes per week

___ c) 60-90 minutes per week

___ d) 90+ minutes per week

7) What type of comic books do you read (select all that apply)?

___ a) Adult

___ b) Superhero

___ c) Horror

___ d) Science Fiction

___ e) Crime

___ f) Humor

___ g) Other _____

8) Approximately how many years have you been reading superhero comic books? _____

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

- 1) How often do you read comic books?
- 2) When did you begin reading superheroes in comic books?
- 3) What draws you to continue to read comic books?
- 4) What types of comic books and superheroes do you read about and why?
- 5) Who is your favorite superhero(es) and why?
- 6) How do you relate to your favorite superhero(s)?
- 7) Do you ever notice your thoughts and emotions while reading comic books?
- 8) How do comic books make you feel (emotionally) after reading?
- 9) In reading superhero comic books, what do you learn about others?
- 10) What was your most memorable comic book event/battle, character, etc.?

- 11) What made it memorable?
- 12) How have comic books and superheroes influenced your life?
- 13) Tell me how reading superhero comic books have impacted your morals, beliefs, etc.
- 14) What do comic books mean to you?
- 15) What have you learned about yourself from reading comic books?
- 16) How do comic books impact your current life?
- 17) How can comic books impact your future?
- 18) What does comic book reading say about you?
- 19) What do you think others (ex. family, friends, peers, community) think comic book reading says about you?

APPENDIX D

RECRUITMENT FLYER

THIS JUST IN:

BAM!

POW!

We Want to Interview You

Superhero Comic Book Readers!

- **Purpose:** Gain insight into participants' interpretations and experiences of reading superhero comic books. This study hopes to provide academic knowledge regarding the meanings and descriptions of experiences that readers ascribe to reading superhero comics.

We want to interview you to hear about *your* thoughts and experiences regarding superhero comic books.

- **Interviews:** Interviews with interviewer will last approximately 20-60 minutes. No follow-up interview required. Participation is voluntary.

Contact Parker at
parker.shaw@okstate.edu

Must actively read superhero comic books at least 15 minutes per week

Participants must be at least 18 years old to participate

Qualifying participants will receive a \$5 Amazon gift card after participation

1-19-16
10-6-18
ED-15-124

APPENDIX E

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION & INFORMED CONSENT

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY

Title: WHAT DOES PSYCHOLOGY KNOW AND UNDERSTAND ABOUT THE PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF READING SUPERHERO COMIC BOOKS?: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

Investigator(s): Parker Shaw, M.S.
Tonya Hammer, Ph.D. (Academic Advisor)

Purpose: Using forms of media has long been documented by mental health researchers, practitioners, educators, community service workers, etc., as having utility and producing beneficial effects in mental health treatment. For the past few decades, psychological research has attempted to explore and understand the relationship between and effects of pop culture on the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of individuals who follow or immerse themselves in cultural entertainment.

The psychological implications that superheroes have on people can be very meaningful. Gaining insight and understanding of underlying perceptions and appraisals of people using comics and superheroes can be beneficial in addressing psychological treatment. Building our understanding of the effects of superhero comic books on readers, Anderson (2013) suggests that researchers return to the experience of the superhero phenomenon. In this case, more research is required in understanding the phenomenon of reading superhero comic books.

With current psychological research yet to provide understanding of the comic book reading phenomena, the purpose of this exploratory study is to gain insight into others' interpretations and experiences of reading superhero comic books. Specifically, this study hopes to provide insight regarding the meaning and description of experiences that readers ascribe to reading superhero comic books.

Participants must be 18 years old to be included in the study. In addition, participants must meet minimum comic book reading (e.g. reading superhero comic books at least 15 minutes per week) criteria to be included. Participants not meeting these criteria will be excluded.

What to Expect: This research study is administered in an in-person interview with the primary experimenter. Participants may provide consent to be included in this research study. Once consent for study participation is given, participants will be provided a copy of the informed consent and the researcher will discuss participant rights. Once participant consent is obtained, the researcher will conduct a semi-structured interview with the participant. It is approximated that the interview can take anywhere from 20 minutes to 60 minutes. During the initial part of the interview, participants will complete a written form asking for name, email address, and demographic information (age, education, ethnicity, sex, questions regarding comic book reading frequency, etc.). The second part of the interview will ask you open-ended questions in which you can respond to. Participants will be able to reflect and take time in producing responses to the interview's prompts. Participants will answer both open-ended, closed-ended questions, and multiple choice questions regarding demographics and comic book reading. After completing the interview, participants will be de-identified and coded (e.g. #001), maintaining anonymity and confidentiality.

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Risks: There are no risks associated with this project which are expected to be greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.

Benefits: There are no direct benefits to you. Indirect benefits of this study include: 1) providing information on the effects of superhero comic book reading on mental well-being, 2) helping researchers better understand the experiences comic book readers have when reading superhero comic books, and 3) providing data to further understand the psychological impact of superhero comic books for potential therapeutic intervention.

Compensation: Upon completion of this study, you will receive a \$5 Amazon gift card. You will be emailed with instructions to redeem the gift card within 2-10 days.

Your Rights and Confidentiality: Your participation in this research is voluntary. There is no penalty for refusal to participate, and you are free to withdraw your consent and participation in this project at any time.

Confidentiality: All records of this study will be kept private and confidential. Any written results will discuss group findings and will not include information that will identify you. To maintain HIPAA standards, participant data will be maintained behind two locked contraptions at all times when not being analyzed (endorsed informed consent documents, demographic information, and transcripts will be stored in a locked file cabinet behind a locking door). Digital files (prior to data analysis) will be saved onto a locking-USB which will be carried in a locked travel case.

The interview will be audio/video taped on a device and stored in a locked container until data analysis. During data analysis, data will be stored on a password protected computer in a password protected file. Participant data will be de-identified and coded as Participant #001, Participant, #002, etc. Data analysis consists of qualitative content analysis, which entails identifying key themes in participant statements. Once themes are identified, the data will be interpreted for the overall effects of reading superhero comic books on mental well-being.

Only approved researchers will have access to the data. Approved researchers includes the primary and secondary researchers as well as a graduate assistant. All Data will be destroyed 5 years after the study has been completed.

Contacts: You may contact any of the researchers at the following addresses and phone numbers, should you desire to discuss your participation in the study and/or request information about the results of the study: Parker Shaw, M.S., 434 Willard Hall, Dept. of School of Applied Health and Educational Psychology, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK 74078, 405-880-6307, parker.shaw@okstate.edu OR Tonya Hammer, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Counseling Psychology, Oklahoma State University-Tulsa, 210-863-0785, tonya.hammer@okstate.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer, you may contact the IRB Office at 223 Scott Hall, Stillwater, OK 74078, 405-744-3377 or irb@okstate.edu

If you choose to participate: Complete the Demographic information sheet and place it in the yellow envelope. Seal the yellow envelope and hand it to the interviewer.

119-16
10-6-18
ED-15-121

CONSENT FORM
OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY

PROJECT TITLE: WHAT DOES PSYCHOLOGY KNOW AND UNDERSTAND ABOUT THE PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF READING SUPERHERO COMIC BOOKS? AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

INVESTIGATORS:

Parker Shaw, M.S. Primary Investigator (Student Researcher)
Tonya Hammer, Ph.D. (Academic Adviser)

PURPOSE:

With current psychological research yet to provide understanding of the comic book reading phenomena, the purpose of this exploratory study is to gain insight into others' interpretations and experiences of reading superhero comic books. Specifically, this study hopes to provide insight regarding the meaning and description of experiences that readers ascribe to reading superhero comic books. Participants must be 18 years old to be included in the study. In addition, participants must meet minimum comic book reading (e.g. reading superhero comic books at least 15 minutes per week) criteria to be included. Participants not meeting these criteria will be excluded.

PROCEDURES:

This research study will be administered in an in-person interview with the primary experimenter. Signing this form provides your full consent for this study. You will be provided a copy of the informed consent. The researcher will discuss your rights with you prior to obtaining consent. Once your consent is obtained, the researcher will conduct a semi-structured interview with you. It is approximated that the interview can take anywhere from 20 to 60 minutes. After completing the interview, your responses will be de-identified and coded (e.g. #001), maintaining anonymity and confidentiality.

RISKS OF PARTICIPATION:

There are no known risks associated with this project which are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.

BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION:

There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study. Indirectly, this study also hopes to: 1) provide information on the effects of superhero comic book reading on mental well-being, 2) help researchers better understand the experiences comic book readers have when reading superhero comic books, and 3) provide data to further understand the psychological impact of superhero comic books for potential therapeutic intervention.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

All records of this study will be kept private and confidential. To maintain HIPAA standards, your data will be maintained behind two locked contraptions at all times when not being analyzed (endorsed informed consent documents, demographic information, and transcripts will be stored in a locked file cabinet behind a locking door). Digital files (prior to data analysis) will be saved onto a locking-USB which will be carried in a locked travel case.

Interviews will be recorded using audio/video tape and dialogue will be transcribed into computer documents which will be password protected. After transcription, data files will immediately be deleted. During data analysis, data will be stored on a password protected computer in a password protected file. Your data will be de-identified and coded as Participant #001, Participant, #002, etc. Data analysis consists of qualitative content analysis, which entails identifying key themes in participant statements. Once themes are identified, the data will be interpreted for the overall effects of reading superhero comic books on mental well-being. Any written results will discuss group findings and will not include information that will identify you.

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ED-15124

You will not be identified individually; we will be looking at the group as a whole.

Only approved researchers will have access to your data. Approved researchers include the primary and secondary researchers as well as a graduate assistant. All Data will be destroyed 5 years after the study has been completed.

COMPENSATION:

Upon completion of this study, you will be awarded a \$5 Amazon gift card. An email will be sent with instructions to redeem the gift card.

CONTACTS:

You may contact any of the researchers at the following addresses and phone numbers, should you desire to discuss your participation in the study and/or request information about the results of the study: Parker Shaw, M.S., 434 Willard Hall, Dept. of School of Applied Health and Educational Psychology, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK 74078, 405-880-6307, parker.shaw@okstate.edu OR Tonya Hammer, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Counseling Psychology, Oklahoma State University-Tulsa, 210-863-0785, tonya.hammer@okstate.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer, you may contact the IRB Office at 223 Scott Hall, Stillwater, OK 74078, 405-744-3377 or irb@okstate.edu.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS:

Your participation in this research is voluntary. There is no penalty for refusal to participate, and you are free to withdraw your consent and participation in this project at any time.

CONSENT DOCUMENTATION:

I have been fully informed about the procedures listed here. I am aware of what I will be asked to do and of the benefits of my participation. I also understand the following statements:

I affirm that I am 18 years of age or older.

I have read and fully understand this consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy of this form will be given to me. I hereby give permission for my participation in this study.

Signature of Participant

Date

I certify that I have personally explained this document before requesting that the participant sign it.

Signature of Researcher

Date

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ED-15-724

APPENDIX F

PARTICIPANT INTERVIEWS

1/29/16

Participant 001

“John”

PI: Alright. Basically there are nineteen questions. Some of them are a little more, um, close-ended but feel free to elaborate if you'd like to. Um, with that being said let's just jump right in.

John: Sure.

PI: Alright, how often do you read comic books?

John: Um, I probably read comic books in some form or another at least once a day. Um, for maybe we'll say an hour total - sometimes more, sometimes less. Right now, um, I'm reading it's a graphic novel um "From Hell" there's the movie from like years and years ago. Alan Moore and so I'm reading it and it takes me probably about an hour to get through a chapter, but other times I might sit down and read one or get my iPad out and read one or two a night or something.

PI: Okay. Alright. So, the next question is when did you begin reading superheroes in comic books?

John: I got interested in comic books when Constantine um the TV show uh came out um for NBC which ya know it only had like 12 or 13 episodes I think it was cancelled.

PI: Yeah

John: But, um, it kind of interested me and so I did (laughing) I did some illegal stuff and I downloaded um the full like 300 issues of Hellblazer and I have about 50 issues left. And so I guess that was about um probably like September/October probably of 2004. And so, I've just kind of been slowly going through them. Um, and that's - that's how I got started.

PI: Cool. Alright. So the next question is what draws you to continue to read comic books?

John: Um, well I think at first it was like the story um because all I read was Hellblazer. Um, and it was just interesting you know it was kind of a cult, like there was kind of some sexiness to it a little bit um a little bit of magic um it wasn't really superhero like bam, pow kind of stuff, you know. Um, and then as I kind of – you know well I was like I kind of want to read beyond this a little bit. Um, then it kind of turned into definitely story but it also turned into like art as well. Um, you know so I read – I read some things like one comic book The October Faction like....

PI: Oh yeah

John: Totally not a really good comic book but I really liked the art. It's really dark in it. And so, um, but yeah I would definitely say it's turned more into not just a story but an art thing now as well.

PI: Ennis Crane has some beautiful art. I love. He did issues of Ghost Rider and I just loved it. It's just beautiful. The story, the art.

John: I'm obsessed with Outcast right now.

PI: Okay.

John: Um, it is coming out on Showtime, not Showtime, but Cinemax which I didn't even think existed. But they're going to run a show of it. And um the last issue had quite a few of just like full page kind of things and it was just gorgeous so.

PI: Okay. So you kind of touched on this but let's go ahead and ask it anyway. What types of comic books and superhero do you read about and why?

John: Um, well I like kind of like paranormal um sort of occultish maybe supernatural type stuff. I just like being scared I guess a little bit. Um you know...

PI: Okay

John:like demons, possessions kind of stuff like that. But not like real gory like crazy looking made up creature looking kind of stuff you know. Um, and I don't know – I always – I mean I like scary movies, not gory movies just scary movies kind of....

PI: Thriller type?

John: Like very kind of gothic sorts of things like The Others. You know, I don't need there to be an like an actual ghost or for me to jump out of my seat but just like that gothic, that sort of anticipation of whats going on. And that's kind of what I look for in comic books. Um, so that kind of – it kind of pulls me away from kind of more mainstream kinds of publishers. I have to go like IDW or Dark Horse or like Vertigo you

know part of DC or something like that. But yeah that's – that's kind of I'm after and so. I like a good ghost story.

PI: Okay. Alright so with this one, who is your favorite superhero, or heroes, and why? As of right this second.

John: I'm kind of like looking through my box trying to like ok um

PI: Yeah, understood.

John: I mean I don't know. I started out with Constantine – John Constantine so I mean there's something that's kind of twisted about him. You know like he has – he has this past and you know I think it very interpersonally you know like it just keeps recapitulating or whatever. And you know when you read – when you read it's like he's not just – he's not just an ass and he doesn't just hurt people and stuff deliberately, like he really is trying to really work for like equality and social justice and – and that kind of thing. It's just he maybe doesn't do that with physical strength. Um, so I'd probably say yeah him.

PI: Okay

John: Um, yeah I just – I don't know, yeah.

PI: So, let me ask this then. How do you relate to your favorite superhero which would – we would say Constantine at this point?

John: Um, I think that he always has a lot of turmoil going on in his head. Um, he always tries to find stability but realizes that it doesn't always happen, whether it's where he lives or whether it's you know with um you know a relationship that he has or with a friendship that he has. Um, yeah there is always kind of other forces that are kind of pulling him away from that for whatever reason from finding that stability.

PI: Alright. Anything else?

John: No.

PI: Any other way you feel like you relate to him?

John: Not really. I mean I think that is just what gets me the most is there's just always this you know he's always trying to find this sort of state of you know um consciousness and for whatever reason something always ends up making it dissonant for him again. There never seems to be like sort of that sigh of relief.

PI: Okay. So, like take yourself back to kind of when you're actually reading one of these books. Do you ever notice your thoughts or emotions while reading comic books?

John: Yeah, um, maybe - probably not so much with a lot of the ones that I read. Um, but definitely with like Constantine, I remember when – well it would have been Hellblazer um when I first – when I first started reading it. Um, you know during kind of like those first hundred you know maybe like fifty/hundred issues even if that long. It did. It got real psychological and real kind of emotional. Um and I felt it difficult to read those. You know because I knew that going into it – it’s kind of like – it’s kind of like when you watch (laughing) like watch a drama like a movie or something especially when you know there is going to be somebody sick and somebody’s going to die like you know already going into it, “your like oh god” there’s going to be all these emotions and I kind of felt like that each time. It’s like “oh no” you know here’s part three of four uhhh um. So, yeah I mean there were a lot of emotions often times.

PI: Okay. So, the second part of that would be how do comic books make you feel kind of emotionally after reading them just generally speaking?

John: Gah, I really don’t know. Um, its just –I guess it’s just more - I don’t think it necessarily has anything to do with the content of it.

PI: Right

John: Um, but it does always leave me wanting more you know. Um, I definitely understand why people wait for like trade paperbacks because you can just go, go, go as oppose to just like the serial. But um – but yeah there’s something – there’s something much different also I think. I enjoy reading paper – you know physical comic books more than I enjoy the stuff on my iPad. Um, and so uh yeah it just kind of leaves me wanting more there’s this kind of excitement you know of getting of oh what’s next or whatever.

PI: Okay. Alright. Here’s a different question. In reading these superhero comic books, what do you learn about others?

John: Um, well I think of things like lock and key um and again back to like Hellblazer and - well I mean and even Outcast and – uh a lot of times people the stuff that they endure isn’t always a consequence of their own doing at least not 100% you know what I mean. Um, you know it – it’s a dark force or its some injustice or um you know it’s you know a relationship with somebody else um and I think that kind of reflects just life in general you know. The stuff that happens to us isn’t always I mean kind of like back up to the other question you know that you asked earlier you know how do I relate, well I mean I kind of have – I mean yes I chose to pursue a higher degree but nonetheless there’s still a lot of stuff that’s keeping me from doing a lot of the things I want to do with my life you know I’ve had to put a lot of things on hold, I’m kind of stuck in a place that I don’t really like living but it’s just a necessary part of it. And so I kind of feel the

same way, it's you know something happens to person X and it's not always their fault. It's the consequence of maybe something else.

PI: Alright. Excellent. Alright. Here's more of a specific – so what was your most memorable comic book event, battle, character, essentially what's the thing that really stuck out to you the most so far in reading comic books that you always can think of?

John: Hmm..[pause]...hmm, I think there was – I mean it always goes back to Constantine doesn't it...

PI: Sure

John: Um, there was one point when – it wasn't really a battle necessarily...

PI: Sure

John: ...but it was more result of...

PI: Yeah

John: ...a battle for him. Um, and I don't even remember specifically what it was but he – he ended up just like losing everything. I mean there was just nothing left in his life and it was – I remember this was – it was just a very – this one of those really emotionally charged comics like you know he just became – he became homeless and there was just a lot of him outside being homeless and just you know unshaven, unkempt, and you know seeking solace in whatever and a lot of rain, a lot of darkness and you know and him contemplating you know suicide and you know even though you know if he would – if he were to die what would happen to his soul in hell and him sort of you know contemplating um you know is – is what I'm experiencing right now on Earth any different or you know better than what I would be experiencing given all the debts and all the people that – all the demons that I have screwed over. Um, so I think that was – that was interesting. There was also another time in uh Hellblazer too uh you know demons coming for a soul you know (laughing). Um, and I remember him creating another self and sort of taking all of the bad stuff, all of the stuff that he didn't want – be that emotions, thoughts, you know habits, physical things, medical things, and sort of creating kind of the worst of himself. And then that's what ended up you know that part of him is what ended up going to hell. Um, I thought that was interesting.

PI: That is interesting.

John: You know, I mean – I think I probably even screened shotted it but you know it was something like taking all of the muck and all the - I don't even remember what the words were but you know and piecing you know those things out of yourself. It was – that was interesting I thought.

PI: That is really interesting.

John: It's kind of a way to – you know we always talk about you know trying to disconnect from those thoughts and those feelings and sometimes um and I just thought that was a good example of I guess diffusing you know that stuff.

PI: Perfect. Alright. So this is really a follow-up – we kind of already hit on. But the question was what made it memorable? So, is there any more specificity that you can think of with that event or do you feel like we covered that?

John: Not really. Yeah I think – you know I just thought it was a really neat example of you know when we talk about you know separating you know sort of ourselves from you know all of these thoughts and feelings that constantly run through our heads that we really don't have much control over you know and it can end up causing us you know psychological distress you know be that anxiety, depression, or whatever. I just thought it was a really good sort of kind of acted out way of what that's like.

PI: Okay. So this question is a little bit deeper. How have comic books and superheroes influenced your life?

John: (laughing) Well, I don't know if it's – I don't know if it's anything quite so deep but um you know it's really helped with self-care.

PI: Okay

John: Um, I mean I read a lot. I mean books, articles...

PI: Sure.

John: ...I'm always reading. Um, but it kind of gave me more of a hobby because there was sort of a collecting aspect to it. A need to hunt for you know the books or whatever or you find something that is interesting maybe you read you know an issue of it digitally and your like "oh, we need to find these" so you know you either get on eBay or try to hunt it down or you know it's like "oh I'll get the trade paperback," but it's really helped I think more than anything with self-care. Um, I don't think it's like reading somethings changed my life or anything like that.

PI: Sure.

John: But uh its – it's more of a self-care hobby kind of thing.

PI: Okay. Alright. Now this question it may or may not apply just let me know. But tell me how reading superhero comics have impacted your morals, beliefs, etc. that sort of kind of framework on any level. And if not, that's okay.

John: Well I think mostly - will you state the question one more time to make sure I get it.

PI: Sure. Yeah. It says tell me how reading superhero comic books have impacted your morals, beliefs, etc. Just kind of under that realm of thinking.

John: I don't know if it has changed my morals or my beliefs or anything like that. And it could just be a result of - I mean I choose the comic books that I read. They aren't forced upon me.

PI: Right.

John: But um I so often hear the argument it's like well without religion or a higher power or something like that you can't be moral. And I think that the stuff that I've read confirms that you don't have to have a belief in a greater whatever or religion or anything like that. To be a moral person, you can still do good in the absence of a higher power you know. You know I'm agnostic um and so I don't go out and murder people and stuff like that because I know better. It's not good to do that to other people. So I think that this is just one other way that you know an example of you don't have to have a belief system or whatever to still be a moral, socially just person.

PI: Okay. So what do comic books mean to you?

John: Gives me something to do. Its novel. Um, I get a little ADHD sometimes you know um so it's nice because you can just sit and read a comic book and your done with it in 10 to 15 minutes or something like that. Um, which is nice. Its - it's a sensory thing I think for me. Like I said I enjoy reading physical comic books more than I enjoy reading digital and um you know of physical comic books. I prefer an actual comic book not a trade paperback if possible. Um, and so there is something about like the tactile sensation and like the smell because it depends on....

And it's like depending on the publisher like even the paper, and pages feel different, and the ink and they smell different. Then there's art and there is also reading. And so I get a lot of different sensory things all at the same time. Um, yeah. It's kind of neat to see you know your box of your stuff.

PI: Yeah.

John: They all have boards and their bags. And they have you know the dividers there's just something cool about that too. So, I don't know.

PI: Okay. Alright. We're almost done here. So, let's finish up here. This question again is a little bit different but still kind of in the same house we've been answering. It's just another way of asking essentially. What have you learned about yourself from reading

comic books. You started back in September 2014 so have you learned anything about yourself through this process?

John: (laughing) I can get really obsessed with it. (laughing)

PI: (laughing)

John: It's never ending. Um, no I don't – like I said I don't really know if I've – I've branched out to something that I didn't think I would ever branch out to.

PI: Okay

John: A different way of - of you know reading. Um, and I also thought to well I'm not going to read a graphic novel. I'm going to stick with comic books. Then I actually read one and I'm like this isn't bad it's just another way of conveying a story you know. Um, so I guess it's just sort of opened my horizons in terms of you know the literature and the different stuff that I read. Um, you know it's given me something to do um in terms of hobbies. I'm a pretty introverted person so I don't really go out a whole lot and stuff. So, it's something that I can do on my own time and you know like I said before sometimes I'll read a whole bunch in a day or week or something. Other times I don't do much.

PI: Yeah

John: So it's something I can pick and choose. Yeah I don't know. I can't really think of much else.

PI: Okay. Alright. This is kind of a looking forward question. How can comic books impact your future?

John: Um, I think – I don't know if it can impact – well maybe it can impact in some ways. I don't know. Um, it depends on the comic book like some more than others. But you know a lot of comic books reflect the kind zeitgeist of the time, or current events something like that. Um and not all comic books necessarily take place in the same world that we're living in or whatever but again back to Hellblazer like I think of that like it definitely - some of the story lines definitely reflect current events that were happening at the time. You know Margaret Thatcher, and you know John Major, then Tony Blair as Prime Minister, 9/11, terrorism, you know all that kind of stuff. It plays out um in those books. Um, and so I think that by doing that it just you know the – the authors will provide their own insight or whatever. Um, and that can maybe help you see things differently as you go forward in life, looking at an event from a different perspective. And not to say that you can't get that by reading....

PI: Sure

John: ...a news article or something. Um, you know again it just happens in another sort of media – or medium I guess.

PI: Okay. Alright. What does comic book reading say about you?

John: Um, (laughing) that I'm nerdy. Um, I don't know. Um, I don't know like I don't feel super nerdy because I don't read superhero comic books like...

PI: Like me

John: yeah...yeah I'm not your kind of nerd. But nonetheless I do read comic books so I don't know but it says something - but it says I just need a lot of stimulation when I'm reading a story I don't know

PI: Okay.

John: Um, that I'm seeking something different. Uh, that I like to collect things. I like to spend money on paper I don't know. Yeah.

PI: It's a large market

John: Yeah. God knows it's going to be one more box that I have to move so.

PI: It'll be heavy too

John: Oh yeah.

PI: Okay. Here's our final question. What do you think others for example family, friends, peers, community think comic book reading says about you?

John: Um, I don't know. It's probably that its – it's probably more of a reflection how they view comic books themselves because they're going to project that onto you I think. But um like Im sure my mom thought I was pretty like what in the hell is he gotten himself into. Um there was a series and there were like five or six different – you know I've read like the first issue and um I didn't have my ebay log in stuff so I just – she buys and sells stuff on eBay quite a bit so I was like hey can you – can you order this for me or whatever because I don't have my you know my thing and she was probably like what. Um, but I don't know. I think of like my friend Jen she is just like you know when I first - I kind of gotten into comic books and she kind of gave me like the what you know kind of look. Um she's like "what's next, world of Warcraft?" Um, like my friend Jeff you know it's like whatever we can talk about them or...yeah I don't know. I mean I don't think people necessarily have negative impressions of people who read comic books

PI: Okay.

John: You know it would just be like making fun of somebody who reads biographies or you know watches dramas. You know.

PI: Alright. Okay. And this is the last question um per se but this is kind of just a follow-up so we've already talked about this a little bit but how do comic books impact your current life? Just in essence

John: They keep me busy. It gives me something to do. It helps to – you know like with the self-care kind of thing again. Um, there is something neat about collecting and looking at that collection and that kind of thing. Um, I'm always looking for a good story especially if it's you know supernatural kind of related, paranormal related. So,

PI: Okay. Well that's it.

<End of interview>

1/29/16
Participant 002
"Billy"

PI: Okay. Let's jump into this then. Um, I've got a total of 19 questions. You know, I'm going to make some notes just so I can remember. But, with that being said, I'm going to ask you questions, feel free to elaborate as much or as little as you want to. Um, and if you need any clarification we can work through that too. But, that being said, here's the first question: how often do you read comic books?

Billy: Hmm, I'd say read about three hours a week.

PI: Okay

Billy: That's new and old issues.

PI: Okay, when did you begin reading superhero comic books?

Billy: I'd say around first grade. Probably about 18...16 years ago or so. I had trouble paying attention in school when we were reading or listening. They showed us comics and it was just an upgrade really...really tuned me in better.

PI: Okay.... And then the next question, what draws you to continue to read comic books?

Billy: The stories, the characters, the nostalgia, you know just being amazed with what they can do with the medium. You know, for better or for worse. And just grow with it I guess.

PI: Okay. What types of comic books and superheroes do you read about and why?

Billy: I'd say recently more magic based characters.

PI: Okay

Billy: John Constantine, Dr. Strange, Santana. But my favorite all time superhero of all time, who I've been reading for a while now, is Captain Marvel aka Shazam. Just gives the ultimate wish fulfillment, you know, as a child. I still read it to this day. He was one of the first people I've read.

PI: Okay. So kind of the magic based comic books, kind of superheroes is that kind of you currently you're at now?

Billy: Yeah right now, Hellblazer, Fable, stuff like that.

PI: And why those? What is it that draws you about those?

Billy: Well, I like the places they go with those books. Like new universes, new ideas, deeper meaning to stuff you know, and also just history in general and some type of – some social satire here and there, mostly Captain Marvel and just being amazed by the imagination on paper. Like world building...you know, a lot of depth.

PI: Okay. Do you - you just kind of mentioned this earlier, but who is your favorite superhero or superheroes, and why?

Billy: First, it's Captain Marvel.

PI: Okay

Billy: I love his transformation from Billy Batson into Captain Marvel. Like if you weren't strong or powerful enough you can say magic words and turn into a guy that's equal Superman in might which is up to debate I'm not going to lie.

PI: (laughing) it is.

Billy: Yeah. I'd say number 2 would be Captain America.

PI: Okay

Billy: Just that even though he didn't have superpowers in a traditional sense he still fights every super villain on/under the sun. And every titanic ruler ever. You know just he stands – even though he doesn't have much powers as the avengers, he still stands.

PI: Sure.

Billy: And can I have one anti-hero, maybe?

PI: Yeah, they can be that type of character as well.

Billy: It's a –It's a mix between Deadpool and Dr. Doom. I'd say Dr. Doom most likely.

PI: Okay.

Billy: I don't see Dr. Doom as a villain.

PI: He's misunderstood.

Billy: He's misunderstood. He's got the mask and all that. He's got all these bad a-powers, but he's got so much depth it's insane, you know?

PI: mhmm

Billy: I love how it's not really black and white to him like literally. And there is a big story line why that it is but that's not the point. I just love how over the top he is. No resolve, but he also goes toe-to-toe with anyone and still wins.

PI: Yep. Okay. So the next question is kind of playing off of that. How do you relate to your favorite superhero or superheroes?

Billy: Well when it comes to Captain Marvel, I always want to be better or stronger to myself you know. Reach a Zenith. You know, try to be the best version of myself. Same with Captain America, always in peak, even in physical conditions and all that, and still have the humanity despite being near superhuman you know?

PI: Okay

Billy: And Dr. Doom, just to be a conqueror and be a forerunner, you know a fighter...never giving up. Because can – can – can I quote a line right quick? Does that matter. One of my favorite lines from him.

PI: Yeah, no that would be perfect.

Billy: Okay. Dr. Doom said – I remember one time he said in a comic book, can't remember the exact one or anything that it's for, somebody asked him what he would do against these Gods? He said, "I'm Doom, the destroyer of the world. What gods dare stand against me?" and I'm like "uhm," blown - mind blown.

PI: (laughing)

Billy: Love forever right there. Tattoo on my back if I had the chance.

PI: (laughing)

Billy: I just thought that's him in a nutshell. No matter how big or tough you are, he'll still most likely think he'll get on top.

PI: Captured the essence of the character that they have written essentially.

Billy: Yeah. Yeah, beyond or all that he stands against these most powerful gods and foes and still takes them down. He'll use a little trickery, or cheating, but a win all in the same in his mind to be nice.

PI: Yeah, in his mind, sure. Okay.

Billy: I just love how much depth he goes and how far.

PI: So kind of building of that, in any other ways that you relate to these characters at all personally?

Billy: Strength

PI: Okay. Tell me more

Billy: Always wanting to stand up for what's right or doing what needs to be done at all cost. And follow – follow my own dreams.

PI: Good. Okay. Alright, do you ever notice your thoughts and emotions while reading your comic books?

Billy: Oh, yeah.

PI: Tell me about that.

Billy: I see a fight scene and strong will you know and not really crazily I feel pumped, the testosterone like even during death of Superman – I read – I read that about once a month on my iPad. I still feel the chills down my spine when I see Doomsday and Superman are fighting each other. Seeing the buildings crack around them you know. Just – I feel the weight of the fight. Not the punches thank goodness, but –

PI: (overlapping) Yeah (laughing)

Billy: I feel the weight like this is a battle for the Earth. I can believe that. I can get on that. That's totally understandable. If I was on the ground, I'd be scared. I imagine I'm in that crowd you know, seeing and hearing it is just –

PI: mhmm

Billy: Being around the epicenter of it. And when it's really like sad you know and somebody is crying like when in the Avengers during I think Hickman's run said that - the Vision who is a newish character to the Marvel Universe movies said –

PI: (overlapping) Yeah.

Billy: that an Android can't cry. I felt so bad for, you know, the vision at that point... you know on how down he was, he even cried, and all that. Seriously, that – it's a nice read. It doesn't matter as much as it did a long time ago.

PI: (laughing) Well you got guys like Galactus that he wrote so that's always a bad deal.

Billy: Galactus is pretty cool but he's just there anymore. He's okay

PI: (overlapping) In background now.

Billy: Yeah, he's powerful there is no doubt about that. But it's like "ehh," "cool."

PI: Okay. So, let's build off that question. How do comic books make you feel like emotionally after reading them, generally?

Billy: If it's a really sad or depressing comic, or it really got intense, like after Witches we talked about. I felt emotionally exhausted several times after that book. Just how deep and heartfelt like I could really imagine what this teen girl goes through. I felt emotionally like exhausted, you know?

PI: Okay.

Billy: Well, like really terrified of this monster or something like that or the unknown in horror comic books.

PI: Okay. Any other feelings or anything after you read comic books?

Billy: Happy, happiness.

PI: Okay. Tell me a little bit more.

Billy: Like seeing the final fight between a group of foes or take over the world you know and the justice league or the avengers winning through the skin of their teeth you know. Just firing everything they got. And just...yeah.

PI: Okay. In reading superhero comic books, what do you learn about others?

Billy: I've learned that the world is fundamentally gray. Like you can see in the Punisher that's he's doing – he's doing for reasons that are not great, but they're valid you know. He got dissed by the mob. And Dr. Doom the same way, you know, they got hurt by the world. They want to help it. The way they go about it might be a little different but there's not really anymore that good and bad people. People do good things, people do bad things, making mistakes, you know? You got to live with them you know. We all make our choice – being our choices make us kinds of thing. It's where you learn to think of things a different way. Like why would somebody do this? What's the real reason?

PI: Yeah.

Billy: Not just superficial up-top stuff, you know? Like what's the context.

PI: Okay. What was your most memorable comic book event or battle, character, etc.? What sticks out the most for you?

Billy: There's two. They're kind of the same thing.

PI: Okay.

Billy: Civil War, which is about to be the movie. I've read it way before that movie came

–

PI: (overlapping) Yeah –

Billy: It's about to come out this year and I am not a hipster like that. I read it before – before it was hipster. And just seeing the idea of Iron Man vs Captain America you know how they both think they are both doing the right thing, and just clashing and BOOM. You know it just blows both of their faces off. Like, Captain America dies at the end of the comic book – shocker. That leads up to other stuff where Bucky becomes – the Winter Soldier becomes Captain America, which I wasn't 100% sold and still kind of not but a little closer. But still! And then X-Men vs Avengers.

PI: Okay.

Billy: And the idea that the X-Men are always alone and how the mutants are treated, like a whole... like maybe what – when did the – what the 80s, the 90s or so...when they accidentally stepped into power with, you know, the Wolverine stuff? I think that the idea of being different, being objectified down to the base level finally came out. All the rage, all the anger. And then the Phoenix Sword came around which gave them the, you know...

PI: mmhmm

Billy: And then she came ahead about who's doing what. Detain mutants down to you know just – who is doing the right thing: Cyclops or Captain America about their teams?

PI: mmhmm

Billy: So yeah.

PI: Okay.

Billy: I just like that whole gray area. I've read both those comic books tons of times. I still don't know who are the good and bad guys are honestly.

PI: It's hard to discern. Yeah.

Billy: Yeah, I see them do bad things, but then you see other people do some bad things and have a moment, but I never quite think either one is like absolutely good or bad.

PI: Yeah.

Billy: They got to do what they can, it's war. But still it doesn't make it right but still it's how it is.

PI: Alright. Let's go to the next page. So, with regards to those two events, what was it that really made it memorable for you?

Billy: Seeing heroes against heroes. Some villains against villains. Mostly the heroes and how they think about how much depth they had. How they figured on being registered for being a hero and possibly being caught you know by villains, you know, that could hack into *something versus humanity* (the next generation of being and stuff), and what they felt all this time coming to a head. It's just the hilarity of how different they were, how objectified it was...just amazing. That's pretty good too. But yeah I'd just say the end fights where Captain America, Iron Man force-fighting each other and Captain America gets dragged by his people because he's lost – he's lost the will of the people. He gives up, beaten nearly to death by Iron Man and when Cyclops finally takes the full...I don't – I don't know if it's supposed to be regular, takes five of the five people of Namor, Colossus, Magik, Emma Frost, and Cyclops . He takes all of it and you know it's just Cyclops versus everybody you know at the end of the day. Him versus several teams of Avengers, and the X-Men he tried to protect you know thinking he's wrong it's just he's by himself. It's just him against everybody with this massive power.

PI: Okay. That leads me to my next question. How have comic books and superheroes influenced your life?

Billy: I always try to give 100%.

PI: Okay, tell me more.

Billy: Well, I see these people – I see these comic book characters go through so much. You know losing friends, family, fighting even though it's probably not easy – it's not the easy thing to do, but it's the right thing to do. That kind of idea. You should be good for goodness sake. You shouldn't be – try to be something you're not. At the end of the day, a hero really does sacrifice everything for everybody else.

PI: Okay. So, with this kind of ideas is there anything specifics or anyway that's really influenced you developing into who you are today?

Billy: I've sacrificed a lot of stuff. I believe that being here about – being hero is not what you want to happen. Or being famous. So I do with the right thing even though – even though it's not the easy thing to do, it's not making a difference is what I believe.

PI: Okay.

Billy: I try to do that.

PI: Okay. Leads to this one then. So tell me how reading superhero comic books have impacted your morals, beliefs, etc? Those sort of – that sort of realm.

Billy: I believe that being good shouldn't be that hard, but comic books have shown me different ideas you know people being bullied, or hurt, and forced to do stuff, then break or turn into a hero. And how close that the idea of good and bad are really are, you know.

PI: mmhmm

Billy: How one can end up like the other just as easily if as not as hard? And just trying to go the extra mile you know. Try to be the – be better.

PI: Okay.

Billy: I work out constantly. And that really helps me out. I always match myself as the Flash when I run. Or as the Hulk, as I lift weights that really helps. Just imagine my power as that being and just going ahead. I always wondered what Spider-Man would actually do and it helps me get a little bit farther.

PI: Okay. Awesome.

Billy: So yeah. AKA I hate - PS, I hate *One More Day* so much. That comic book sucked.

PI: (laughing)

Billy: Know what I mean? That comic book sucked. I love nearly every other Spider-Man story I've read no matter how cheesy, stupid, or weird it was. I could even like the Clone Saga. Don't put any of that in there. They might come after me.

PI: (laughing) Yeah they may

Billy: But anybody that likes *One More Day* can go – it's just – it just screams what I hate about the world you know, at all times. How Spider-Man just gave in and just uh – I don't know what Marvel was thinking that time!

PI: They've dropped the ball a few times here and there recently that's for sure.

Billy: Oh, yeah.

PI: So, this is kind of really an open ended question. Um, take some time for you to really think about it. What do comic books mean to you?

Billy: Good question. Well, some of my favorite more than sticker price. Some of those can go really high.

PI: That's true.

Billy: I believe it's just something that I could live with. Something I can be an ideal for you know. Something I can look forward to when I have a bad day is crack open comic book and feel something. If I had to really, really justify it, I wouldn't just fun, wouldn't say sadness, or – I'd say something I love. I love comic books. I read them every day nearly. Every couple – if I have time. It just it means – it just means what I – it just means about my beliefs that there is a real – there is a real idea people can strive for. Gives me hope.

PI: Okay. Good.

Billy: It's all about giving me hope when I can see heroes do the impossible deeds or the impossible things. Can I bring up another one?

PI: Absolutely!

Billy: Can I bring up another one – a comic book that I read?

PI: Yeah.

Billy: That made me cry? I mean it was so freaking sad! I remember – there – in the whole comic book, he used to jump around the world pretty frequently even though he ends up in a new town kind of thing. Town of the week kind of thing in comic books. He met this one guy who was – who stole – who was down on his luck like, and had 8 other brother and sisters you know, poor. He stole a purse then he gave it right back to the lady. He had a candy bar in his hands, that's all he had. The Hulk jumps out of the sky, lands near him, Hulk's *Hulk* and you know being sad, scared, angry and he wants half of it. Well, he gives him half. He says bye. I think they had some type of story that that guy attacked and saved him but then I think it jumps like 10 years later and he goes see him. I think his name is Jim Hawkins or something like that. He goes in there and his friends dying of AIDs. I – it was amazing. I see this beast of a guy in the bed dying and you know just raggedly, wrinkly, you know not old but like just from all the treatments and stuff.

PI: Yeah.

Billy: and just like dying. This close to death to where I can see the Hulk just up there towering 8 feet tall, lift , breath under water, jump into the sky, andhe couldn't do anything. He can't punch a disease is what I learned.

PI: Right.

Billy: Or hunger and all that. It just really hit hard, you know. You couldn't fight everything. Kind of also Green Lantern and Green Arrow comic books when they deal with the thought of Green Lantern being a racist.

PI: Yeah.

Billy: And also Roy Harper becoming a junky.

PI: mmhmm that was....

Billy: Those were some really pivotal things. They just really taught me that you can't punch – say what you want to learn – there's not – there's not always going to be happy endings. Not even in comic books. And I really like the writers and people that did those that really went that far.

PI: Yeah.

Billy: And not try to make it cheap either. Like make it real as they could. Just amazing how...

PI: realism

Billy: How Hulk could be this most – one of the most powerful superheroes in existence and still could do nothing.

PI: Right.

Billy: Yeah.

PI: That's deep.

Billy: I was just – it made me cry. I've seen this guy fight monsters, armies, lift mountains, smash holes through the universe, rip open black holes, which now that should be impossible.

PI: (laughing) yeah.

Billy: even getting close to it anyway. That's beside the point. And he couldn't do anything.

PI: Right.

Billy: And just – it just hit me. That's life. No matter how powerful, or smart you are, sometimes that's just how the world works.

PI: Sure.

Billy: And if the Hulk has that problem, I can't say I don't either.

PI: Yeah, exactly.

Billy: It really – it really just like hit me. I actually said that as eulogy at my grandmas funeral.

PI: Really?

Billy: Yes. Part of it

PI: Wow.

Billy: So, I thought it was that powerful.

PI: That is powerful!

Billy: I can do strong man stuff that really helps me out, but –

PI: (overlapping) yeah.

Billy: - flip tires. I can throw – I can grab trucks and pull them and put 40lb weights in my bag, but I can't fight with an aneurysm though, you know.

PI: Exactly.

Billy: Just makes you remember how human you are. How even in some scenarios or how big, tough they are still human. Still their flaws. Still their weaknesses.

PI: Absolutely. So let me ask you then, what have you learned about yourself from reading comic books?

Billy: I like – I like superheroes. I like the idea of right and wrong being that plainly seen. We don't have that a lot these days, not any more so you know. And I just like how even though it's simple, it's still so complex you know the idea of good and bad and the ideas is what formed them you know the satire of young people.

PI: mmhmm

Billy: Like I just got done reading Ms. Marvel, the newest one with a Muslim.

PI: Yeah, I've read that one.

Billy: Well, it's with a Muslim main character. One of the first ones in comic books. And it was called Generation Y and how my generation or so is pop – is over populated the world. It's our fault we're here and stuff. They had to tread lightly but they did – they did, they said that my generation was that bad and stuff but yeah just – just amazing. Probably played it right, you know.

PI: Yeah.

Billy: So we're being told jerks and say we are a bunch of basement builders and all that, you know. But nope, give me hope. That's something life doesn't do a lot for me, honestly.

PI: Sure

Billy: Not going to lie.

PI: Yeah. So let me ask this then. How do comic books impact your life currently?

Billy: Well I feel tired, battered, broken, just you know just wanting left alone. I can read a comic book. I can enjoy the worlds. Enjoy the time I spent with it because in about three years I'll never have a summer again. It'll always be work, work, work, you know.

PI: Absolutely.

Billy: It just gets me back to a place where I can live. With all the demons, monsters, galactic world, conquer aliens, it still seems funner. Almost better. I say it gives me hope. Makes me understand stuff of the human condition a little better here and there when getting a good work of fiction.

PI: How can comic books impact your future?

Billy: (sigh) I hope I have time reading them in the future.

PI: Okay

Billy: But, how they impact me in the future be that times changed you know because they always flip the stats on comic books these days.

PI: They do

Billy: For DC case mostly the worst, my opinion, but things change and I have to accept that, you know. For better, some of these case the worse. I have not legitimately picked up a DC comic book in years besides Vertigo. I'll read Vertigo.

PI: Okay.

Billy: But, just that, you can always have fun. You can always have some joy. You can always crack open a \$5 comic book and enjoy yourself. It won't – and most times it won't judge you for liking it.

PI: That's very true.

Billy: And, I get called a lot by as a kid you know twenty – a twenty three old man playing video games tell him to – (sigh) you know just have to live with. It's just a stigma.

PI: mmmhhmmm

Billy: I'm just saying. I'll probably get out of games one day, possibly, maybe, not comic books.

PI: Sure.

Billy: Even if it's a page – if I have only a page a day or even a sentence a day, if its that bad I will read me a comic book.

PI: Okay. So, what does comic book reading say about you?

Billy: I like creativity.

PI: Okay.

Billy: I like action, or story. Can probably say story, not every comic book that I read is high action, not going to lie.

PI: Sure.

Billy: I read a lot of action. I read *One Punch Man* but I also read some panel comic books, you know. That maybe all the entertainment to move, you know. I like the deep - complexity of it. You know, how far people can take the medium. And respect to the nerds. It's not just for kids. Everybody can do it if they just give it a shot.

PI: Okay. Here's my last question for you. What do you think others for example family, friends, peers, community, what do you think they think about comic book reading? What do you think that they think it says about you?

Billy: I kind of touched on this a minute ago.

PI: Mmmhhmmm

Billy: My family hates me spending money on it. Now can I tell you something about me?

PI: Sure.

Billy: I get Social Security.

PI: Okay

Billy: So yeah. It's going to stay in here right? It's going to stay in this room?

PI: Oh, yeah.

Billy: I use some of that money to buy comic books off and on. Mostly to pay my truck and stuff, but yeah. They really don't like me doing that. But, it's only like maybe \$20 a week, maybe. I don't ever go like super hardcore on it, you know.

PI: Yeah. I kind of get what you're saying.

Billy: No, no I barely spend a \$100 on comic books a couple of months and that's with cash.

PI: Yeah.

Billy. You know, they just think it's a childish thing. I still watch cartoons, they think the same thing it's just they don't seem to respect me.

PI: Okay.

Billy: But I think they are missing out. I honestly do. Friends, not all of them are into it. They always ask me questions about comic books but they don't ever go get them themselves, you know.

PI: Right.

Billy: Communities call them nerds.

PI: Okay

Billy: A lot. I don't mind. Like I said they are missing out. These stories are good. Not all of them.

PI: (laughing) yeah not all of them

Billy: Some of them are bad like *One More Day*, anything by DC anymore, well 90% of DC. But, there are some classics. And just yeah mostly...like a child reads that stuff which annoys me. Because yes, some comic books totally go to bad. I'm not going to defend every one of them.

PI: Sure, yeah.

Billy: Like these days with DC and their controversial drawings of one of my favorite heroes of all time, Star Fire. I'm like "aahhh." If I see my kids ever read – if I ever have kids and I see them read Teen Titans now or anything around this era, I'm going to burn their comic books right in their face.

PI: (laughing)

Billy: Like no. Here's the 80's.

PI: Absolutely

Billy: Yeah Teen – yeah, Robin is wearing a weird costume – yeah it's knightly, he's wearing a real costume. But, it's better, just trust dad on this one, you know.

PI: (laughing) Refer to dad on this one.

Billy: Yeah don't- don't get that new 52 stuff because I swear to God, if I see 52 in this house, I'm going to burn it. And you're grounded. Why? Because I love you. And I won't let you read that garbage. Like I said there are some comic books that are so bad or badly drawn they just go for lowest common. They are on their own. Like everything I read isn't just A-quality, or I don't end up liking it. Sometimes I get through half way through a series and I'm like I don't care but most of the time I'll defend them. For what it is. The good ones that deserve a chance in the ring of fictional realm I guess.

PI: Yeah like with Captain America you still defend what's right.

Billy: Always. Play video games as well. I want to have a life after comic books. I can't draw with a darn and making stories up is a lot harder than people think.

PI: It is.

Billy: And I respect them – the people who can do it, but still.

PI: Alright, let me go ahead and stop our stuff and we'll chat for a second.

<End of interview>

1/29/16
Participant 003
"Clark"

PI: Let's get started. Participant Clark. Okay, the first question will be, how often do you read comic books?

Clark: I usually do it when I go to bed. That's the only time when I am....

PI: So if you were to say on a weekly basis, about...

Clark: Every night. That's how I fall asleep.

PI: Okay. So an hour...about?

Clark: It's less than an hour. Probably about half an hour to forty minutes in the evening.

PI: Okay.

Clark: Before I go to bed. Until I fall asleep. When you fall asleep in the middle of a comic book it's time to go to sleep.

PI: (laughing) That's right. Especially with all that's going on in them.

Clark: To be honest, I'm not really reading currents anymore. I'm reading collected editions.

PI: Yeah, yeah. I got you. I like to get the trades and sort of stuff, too. I like collecting those, but it gets tough. Alright, here's the second one. When did you begin reading superhero comic books?

Clark: When I was 10.

PI: Okay.

Clark: My dad made the mistake of buying me a Batman comic book. Actually it was Detective Comics.

PI: Right.

Clark: I could bore you with the issue number and the date.

PI: That's not a bore at all. That sort of stuff is -

Clark: (overlapping) – Off the top of my head I don't quite remember it. It's like 413 or 313. Yeah Death Flies the Haunted Skies was one of those Detective comic hundred pages they did about 1972 to 1975

PI: Mmhmm

Clark: 60 cents for a hundred pages.

PI: (laughing) That's a good deal back then. Alright, so what is it that draws you to continue to read comic books throughout your life now?

Clark: Habit. (snicker)

PI: Okay.

Clark: You know, I don't have to think much when I read them.

PI: Okay.

Clark: Let's put it this way, I've never had to think much when I read them.

PI: Sure.

Clark: If I had to think much to read them, I'd changed and gotten rid of them.

PI: A lot of brain power use might not be what you're looking for. Okay.

Clark: That was 1974.

PI: Alright.

Clark: And I mean, I grew up in Chicago so, I mean my earliest memory of it was watching the Batman T.V. show.

PI: Right.

Clark: The reruns and the Superman show in reruns. They used to show them before Cubs games.

PI: Oh, really? I didn't know that.

Clark: Superman, Batman, and the Lone Ranger started about 11 o'clock before Cubs games.

PI: Well I'll be darned.

Clark: I think that was my dad's effort to show me what he had read when he was a kid. My dad read Batman and Superman during the war.

PI: Oh, yeah the...

Clark: World War II not.....

PI: Not the other war. Okay. Let me ask you, what types of comic books and superheroes do you read and why?

Clark: Now or?

PI: Yeah, just currently.

Clark: Superman, Batman, I mean right now I'm reading archive editions. The really old stuff.

PI: Yeah.

Clark: The Golden Age stuff is kind of fun to read. Can be a little racist but (laughing)

PI: (laughing) It's a little -

Clark: (overlapping) It's a little snapshot of life in the 40s and 30s.

PI: Yeah. It was a little less sensitive of that.

Clark: But, I'm also reading Silver Age archives too. So, I haven't bought a new comic book in probably two years.

PI: Okay. So specifically with Superman, Batman kind of the older stuff, why are you drawn to that kind of age and those characters?

Clark: Superman and Batman, or superheroes?

PI: Superman and Batman.

Clark: It's what my dad bought me. I mean I discovered there was Marvel later and there was less with reading them. Yeah, I quit reading Marvels about 1991-1992.

PI: Okay.

Clark: And of the comic books that I have stored in my garage there is like 19,000 of them.

PI: The boxes, oh yeah

Clark: About 2000 are Marvel. So, I mean, you know when they are cheap and you can afford to buy a lot of them, you know and as they get older they get more and more expensive you get a lot more selective.

PI: That's right.

Clark: And once they started hitting \$4 an issue and it was taking me 10 minute to read them, like...nahhh.

PI: All the advertisements in between as well.

Clark: Well, when DC revamped their line a few years ago.

PI: They are getting ready to do that again.

Clark: It was when I became a little bit of a prick, I was like ehh this isn't Superman. I don't know who this guy is. Batman was still interesting, but it was kind of like...(sigh)

PI: Yeah, the new 52 and now they are revamping again it sounds like. So, yeah.

Clark: And to be honest, I don't miss them much because I have a 100 DC archives that I haven't read. I'm like, hmmm okay...I'm good for a while.

PI: Yeah, absolutely. If you had to pick, who is your favorite superhero and why?

Clark: Superman. Oh, and why?

PI: mmhmm

Clark: Oh you know when your 10 years old and – and you can do all the things that he can do, that was just cool. You know, so I can remember walking home from school and pretending to be Superman because, you know you got to walk a mile home and what else are you going to do when you're 10, an overactive imagination. I mean he's always a good guy.

PI: mmhmm.

Clark: There was no gray area with him. I suppose in terms of character, he always did the right thing.

PI: Yeah, absolutely. The one you'd want to be there if all else fails.

Clark: Yeah, well I mean, it's like that's why I didn't like the last Superman movies. Like, *no*, Superman wouldn't have killed the bad guy. He would not have killed.

PI: (overlapping) Yeah, that was a giant controversy.

Clark: Unfortunately, it's not 1974.

PI: Okay. So this question goes a little further into what we were just talking about. How do you relate to Superman?

Clark: (overlapping) how do I relate...?

PI: Yeah, how do you relate to – do you relate to him at all?

Clark: Now?

PI: We kind of talked a little about that.

Clark: Well, (laughing) since the movie not much. But, I mean...

PI: In terms of like – think back to like the Silver Age that you've been reading. That sort of stuff. What is it about the character? Do you relate to that character?

Clark: I don't think you can relate to a character like Superman in terms of what he can do that you *can't* do.

PI: Right.

Clark: But, I suppose to the point that – I never looked at him as a role model.

PI: Okay.

Clark: But, I mean, he's certainly provided an example of the way you *should* be.

PI: Okay

Clark: To kids in my generation...so, I mean you could learn what was right and wrong from reading a Superman comic book.

PI: Okay. So, this is really good that you have had so much experience with this. So, maybe this question you can expand on a little bit. Have you ever noticed like your thoughts or any emotions that you have while reading some of these older comic books?

Clark: Other than just fun-ness, and like...oh yeah I remember this...thirty years ago. I mean, why do I still have them and read them? I mean it's a piece of my childhood.

PI: Yeah.

Clark: And – and I don't have toys. But, I have every comic book I have ever owned. And so from a certain sense you know 19,000 comic books is - you know I wouldn't part with – and you know I have them catalogued –

PI: Oh, absolutely.

Clark: You know, a comic book older than um 1980, I wouldn't get rid of for all the money in the world.

PI: Sure. Okay. Now this one might – may or may not pertain...you say you read them before you go to sleep, so other than tired how do comic books make you feel after reading them?

Clark: (laughing)

PI: Do you notice any reaction to some of it?

Clark: Well I can take them like satisfied.

PI: Okay, that's – that'll work

Clark: I mean, you know, they're simple stories.

PI: Yeah

Clark: They're not preachy.

PI: Right

Clark: They're not complicated. You know, I told you that I don't necessarily like to think about heavy weighted issues. If I wanted to –

PI: (overlapping) Right.

Clark: If I wanted to cogitate on the world problems, I'd just read the newspaper, or watch T.V.

PI: Yeah, there are different mediums you can do.

Clark: So comic books to a certain extent for me were kind of an escape, even at 51. I may not be buying new ones, but you know the old ones...

PI: yeah.

Clark: I got thousands of comic books published before 1980 I've never read.

PI: Oh, absolutely! That's really awesome.

Clark: And, the old, old Golden Age stuff, you know, that's the stuff my dad read.

PI: Yeah.

Clark: And so it's almost a certain bond with him trying to imagine what it was like to be him as a 10 year old during World War II and my grandmother would buy a comic book every week at the store and bring it back home. And so I read these stories that you know were published when he was 10 years old and I, you know, being in history, I'm really, you know a minor in history but I like to put myself in the mindset of people that lived at that time. You know which is why when I read an issue of a comic book published in 1940 and you see the terrible depiction of Japanese or Germans during the war, it's like well you know yeah that's awful in 2016 issues but at the time that was the way they were portrayed and so we learned from it. Just don't do it again.

PI: Excellent. Okay. So you've already just started talking about this but I'll go ahead and throw this question in there and see if you have anything else to add. In reading these superhero comic books, what do you learn about others? Or, have you learned anything about other people?

Clark: Well, I, you know, I learned a lot from reading them. Uh, I learned to read.

PI: Yeah I did too.

Clark: (coughing) So you come across a comic book that had a word you didn't know when I liked libraries even at the age of 10 but I also knew where the dictionary was so I wasn't too bashful about going and looking something up.

PI: Yeah.

Clark: And, you know, the comic books were not, um, particularly worldly. It's not like you had, um, Superman having an adventure in Iraq.

PI: Right.

Clark: I'd say but – because I don't recall any um stories that touched on cultural differences. Now there could have been, I just don't recall them.

PI: Mmhmm

Clark: And so, I don't know if that's giving you what you were interested in or –

PI: Oh, yeah cause earlier you just kind of mentioned that reading –

Clark: (overlapping) One of the problems with comic books in the early 70s and really up until the last 10-15 years, it's (coughing) – they were all white guys.

PI: Yep.

Clark: So you didn't have diverse – diversity in comic books and so I don't know that when I was 10 years old – yeah um I don't remember I mean Green Lantern, Green Arrow, you know in 72/73 had that landmark stories where they were dealing with realism and racism and things but I wasn't reading them then. I read them since and, you know, when you read them 5 years later you see the prism under which they were created I'm like "oh yeah now I get why this was important."

PI: Yeah.

Clark: Um, but those are the only things that (coughing) I tend to think of.

PI: Okay. Yeah, cause earlier you mentioned you kind of looking at stuff from other people lenses at that time. That's kind of where I was –

Clark: (overlapping) and when I think about you know the comic books over the last 10 years, you know when they're dealing with, um, cultural issues that always kind of seemed almost pandering to me in some respect.

PI: Sure.

Clark: We have to do this, so we're going to do it. I'm not – I don't want to sound racist when I'm not

PI: No, no, no. I get where you're coming from.

Clark: (overlapping) It always seems like it was genuine or it was trying to appeal to –

PI: Forced. That's what I call it.

Clark: Yeah, exactly.

PI: So, let's kind of turn this a little bit different. What was your most memorable comic book even, battle, character, etc? What sticks out most for you? Out of everything you've read.

Clark: You know I still remember the first comic book.

PI: Okay. Tell me something about that.

Clark: Um, you know I remember a legion of superheroes story probably about that time with Superboy.

PI: Okay.

Clark: I don't remember the title of it. I know what the cover looked like but it had a villain with a gun for a hand and it was kind of a canon type thing and so they managed to stop him. I remember that because it taught me what the word "annihilate" means.

PI: (laughing) Sure.

Clark: And, and it's easy to say things like "crisis" too. But I mean, I was in college when that happened and so you remember it for different reasons.

PI: Mmhhh. You have been kind of saying, you know, some of the artwork, and some of the experiences, some of the representation of the times. Is there anything else that made that specific issue memorable for you?

Clark: Ehh, it's just the drama.

PI: Okay.

Clark: I mean, Superman's stories always struck me as being very vanilla. You know he had great powers and he could do stuff but it never was like he took, um – he never took a boulder and just split it in half.

PI: Yeah.

Clark: It was always whatever it took to stop the bad guys. And it always seemed very nonviolent and the villains usually made the mistake that led to their downfall so you know the – would the villain have been caught without Superman in it at all? (laughing) Probably.

PI: (laughing)

Clark: Um, there was never really a threat.

PI: Sure.

Clark: And that- that can be a complaint but also it doesn't happen much anymore.

PI: Sure. Okay. Now here's the next question. How have comic books and superheroes influenced your life? Or, have they?

Clark: Well, I think as a kid, like I was touching on earlier, like they kind of give you that model. I mean, my parents...I always had a strong relationship with my parents so, I mean, certainly my parents were the role models.

PI: Right.

Clark: But you could read a Superman comic book and, like I said, learn right from wrong. And so, you know, I never recall saying *what would Superman do* in any case like that. But in hindsight, I'm sure I probably did.

PI: Okay. And again this may be kind of redundant but tell me how reading superhero comic books have impacted either morals, beliefs, etc.? You kind of just talked about that just no....

Clark: It played into the morals I already had.

PI: Okay.

Clark: I mean my parents raised me. I knew what right and wrong was. I suppose it's the reason why I my dad bought me a Batman comic book for the first one...he liked Batman probably more than Superman. Or maybe I had my eye on that one and that's the one I wanted. After 40 years I don't quite remember.

PI: Yeah that would be tough.

Clark: But I know I was there in the drug store when we bought it. Um, so he may have let me go pick one out. So, the cover probably did it for me. But, you know, I was raised in a way where, you know, they taught me what was right and wrong. And so Superman and Batman were both ethical, moral, you know, models that my dad wasn't too worried about...“what I was learning when I read a Superman comic book?” Probably more influenced by classmates. But, whether they read comic books, I don't know.

PI: Yeah. Okay. This is kind of a more broad question. What do comic books mean to you?

Clark: It's an escape.

PI: Okay.

Clark: You know, you can read it and forget about it. I mean what's going on outside of it. You know, I like to kind of immerse myself into it. I used to be able to sit and read comic books for hours in the evening...as I got older and started working.

PI: Yeah.

Clark: You know, time became precious. You know, towards the end of buying floppys, I had about three years' worth of comic books in a pile that I just couldn't keep up with.

PI: Right.

Clark: And I have since gotten through that pile, but I had to quit buying them to get through it. (coughing) So now, I have a luxury of being able to read what I really want to read.

PI: Sure.

Clark: And I don't know if I answered the question or I totally went off on a tangent.

PI: No, no that's fine. It's kind of-

Clark: (overlapping) What did you ask again?

PI: Just basically what do comic books mean to you.

Clark: Oh, yeah yeah. Entertainment.

PI: Yeah, that's totally understandable.

Clark: I mean, I'm not one of those guys that could eat, live and breathe them.

PI: Sure

Clark: And...and being an introvert, I really didn't want to talk to anybody about them.

PI: Right.

Clark: And when you contacted me about wanting to talk about it, I'm like *yeah okay I'm going to help the grad student out.* (laughing)

PI: (laughing) I appreciate it!

Clark: (coughing) I'm not doing it because I feel some strong need to talk about my comic books.

PI: Sure. I know, I understand it. No, I absolutely appreciate it though. Alright...got a few more to go. So here is this one. What have you learned about yourself from reading comic books? If anything.

Clark: Learned about myself?

PI: Yeah.

Clark: I don't know that I'm that deep. (laughing) Um, its – its entertainment and escapism and you know it's that real break from real life.

PI: Okay

Clark: I mean – I don't know if I have a good answer on that one. I can't think of anything that – make up anything that sounds any more believable.

PI: Well yeah, I don't want you to. Alright.

Clark: I mean they were never my life's blood. You know, it was a habit and I engaged in it for...it'll be 40 years and *still am*, to a point.

PI: More busy now but...

Clark: Now I'm just – I've checked out on 2016 comics and much more interested in 1950 and 1980 and 1960.

PI: Yeah, absolutely. Alright so –

Clark: (overlapping) And I read them differently, than when I was 10. You know they're little time capsules on – I'm reading the Flash archive right now and just last night as I was opening up another volume to start reading. You know, you read the introduction, which is kind of the summary of what was going on when these stories were created and the creators involved...and you flip through the table of contents and it lists when those issues were published in 1962, which was before I was born. But, not so far enough in advance that it wasn't kind of like it.

PI: Right. Still relevant.

Clark: So I read it almost like a historian.

PI: Okay.

Clark: You know just kind of trying to understand, you know, what life was like at that time. And they're really simplified. It's not like 1961, like, there weren't any problems and they certainly weren't dealt with in comic books.

PI: Right. Okay. Alright. Four more questions. Here we go. How do comic books currently impact your life?

Clark: Currently?

PI: mmhmm.

Clark: Well the current ones don't. I still like to read them, because habit.

PI: Right.

Clark: (Coughing) and when you consider the world of stuff I haven't read, I can – I have money and the ability to read very selectively in what I'm interested in. You know, I may

have checked out on 2016 Superman but that doesn't mean I don't want to read 1945 Superman.

PI: Right. So looking forward now, how can comic books impact your future?

Clark: Well, I don't know. At some point I'm probably going to run out of stuff to read. (laughing) (coughing) I mean, I don't – I don't like buying collected editions of stuff I already own. But I've been known to do that just because I don't want to figure out what long box it's buried in.

PI: Yeah.

Clark: And figure out where it's at. They are all in there. I don't know what's in any given box though.

PI: Sure.

Clark: Although they are sorted, but there *is* a lot of boxes to look at. And if I could get rid of them, I probably would but I'm not going to throw them away.

PI: Hmm, yeah.

Clark: And collected editions kind of allow me to read selectively stories and eras that I really enjoy...whether it's a hardcover or softcover. You know, I can be – you know, and I don't buy all of them. I mean if there was a collected edition from prior to 1980, I'd probably read it and buy it. I think I have. I mean, I've bought some stuff from the 70s – I said prior to 80 right?

PI: Mmhmm

Clark: Yeah, yeah. About 1980.

PI: So can you see yourself, in another 10 years or so, still reading?

Clark: Oh, I might read them until I'm 80.

PI: Okay

Clark: Whenever I run out of stuff to read or if I just completely lose interest in the old stuff too, which I doubt but...It's kind of like I was telling you, you know, 10 years ago, 20 years ago, I could sit and read in the evening, I used to lay down on my bed at my parent's house and read for two to three hours and get through a good chunk of them. When time becomes precious, and so not that you're living on your own. I got stuff to do. I got a dog, I got yardwork to do. That's why reading at bedtime is nice because I'm trying to find something that doesn't make me - get me too wound up.

PI: Right.

Clark: And as I said, you don't have to think too much to read the ones I read.

PI: Okay. So two more questions. What does comic book reading say about you?

Clark: (laughing) You're only young once, but you can immature forever.

PI: (laughing) Okay.

Clark: Like I said, they're a part of my childhood.

PI: Okay.

Clark: And so perhaps there's this certain latent desire what is the Peter Pan syndrome "I don't want to grow up" you know. It's a piece of my childhood that I can still engage in and I mentioned the escape. Well, for an hour in the evening, in bed I can be a 10 year old again.

PI: Absolutely.

Clark: It's kind of like watching, you know, the Simpsons on TV. Kids that are 10 years old can watch it and see a certain level of entertainment. The adults that watch it are like *oh I get that*.

PI: (laughing) Yeah. "Oh, I get that joke now"

Clark: I think the comics I read are the same way. Can read them on two different levels.

PI: Two different frames of understanding.

Clark: (coughing; nodding)

PI: Alright. This is a follow-up to the last question. What do you think others such as family, friends, peer, community, etc. think about comic book reading and what that says about you?

Clark: I think it's different today than what it was 20 years ago.

PI: True.

Clark: I think the movies have made a difference in terms of acceptance...interest, um, and I think that also is part of the reason why the comics today don't do much for me is because I think they're writing and drawing comics today for those movie goers and not the, for lack of a better word, purists. And so they're – they realize that the people that

spend \$10 for movie are probably their primary market. People have been reading them for 40 years I'm not sure they are trying to write them for me anymore.

PI: Okay. Excellent answer.

Clark: Whereas, you know, I've...you know, I've talked to – I went to a couple of comic cons in Chicago in the mid-80s about '85/'86 right around the Crisis. And I had a conversation with Julius Schwartz and, you know, he was talking about, you know, the comics today at that time, Crisis, for example, which is really where he stepped aside. He says “you know we – we assumed our readers change every five years” which is why you never saw Superman continuity.

PI: Right.

Clark: And realized that they had to appeal to a broader, diverse, older market which is why they made the changes they did.

PI: Mmhmm

Clark: And I thought that was just fascinating. Fascinating, man.

PI: Okay. Alright. Well that will conclude our interview then. Appreciate it

Clark: Get enough to use?

PI: I did.

<End of interview>

2/5/2016
Participant 004
"Jonah"

PI: Jonah. Alright, let's go ahead and begin the interview. Alright, so let me ask you, how often do you read comic books?

Jonah: Um, not every day because I don't have spare time every day. But, I would say any day that I have disposable time. Then I try to read some comic books.

PI: Okay. Can you put a timeline, roughly, I don't know, weekly base hourly...just on average?

Jonah: I would say on, uh, a weeknight...or a weekend when I have more time, uh, I might just carve out, you know, an hour or two at a time and just get through a big stack if I can.

PI: Okay. Alright, when did you begin reading superheroes in comic books?

Jonah: Uh, they cost 20 cents so there is a hint! Uh, it'd be early 1970s. I'd say '71/'72, 1971/1972. They were on the spare racks for 20 cents. I learned to hate sales tax because you couldn't get 5 for a dollar. The stupid sales tax kept you from getting the fifth.

PI: (laughing) My goodness. Okay. So what draws you to continue to read comic books today?

Jonah: Um.... Part of it is loyalty in that uh – I mean there is a passion of mine and I wanted to remain loyal to the passion. But also, I think there is still good stories, uh, to be told. If you know where to look for them. A lot of comics are kind of, uh not good, but -

PI: (overlapping) Right

Jonah: - there are also good ones if you know where to find them. And so it's like uh, people who don't get it, don't understand...that it is like a movie. But you go as fast as you want to go. You can speed through the movie or you can slow down and look at one movie panel at a time.

PI: Mmhhh. Okay, so let me ask this then. What types of comic books and superheroes do you read about and why?

Jonah: Uh, for the most part it's superhero comics because that is the more so, the standard fare when you think of comic books - when people think of comic books, they think superhero comics.

PI: Cape and cowl

Jonah: Right. And the – those are primarily what I grew up with over the years. I like the moral of it, in that the good guys always, always win. In fact, it bothers you in real life because in real life it often doesn't happen. The good guy doesn't always win. And so I kind of - I'm warped and then I think that life should be like the comics and the good guy always win.

PI: Okay. Who is your favorite superhero, or superheroes, and why?

Jonah: I named my son after Superman so I feel almost feel obligated to say Superman.

PI: That is pretty awesome!

Jonah: His name is Kal. I couldn't go with the full Kal-el like Nicolas Cage did, but I went with Kal. Uh, Superman, because I like what he stands for. Uh, he has a line that he doesn't and shouldn't cross. Nevermind the Man of Steel movie. Uh, Batman because uh, it's a great character and more great Batman stories have been written in DC than any other character.

PI: Absolutely.

Jonah: Uh, Flash just because it is someone I attached myself to when I was way younger. Oh, I was always the slowest person, maybe I felt attracted to the fastest character.

PI: Okay.

Jonah: Um, as an adult, Jonah Hex even though he's not a "superhero." He's an old western character. I just think that those are just – the story – anymore, the stories are not people stories. They tend to be big event stories that are really complicated and you needed a translator to help understand this big event. But, the Jonah Hex comics are just...here's a guy in a predicament and he's not really a good guy but uh, he tends to do the right thing and he's going to find a way out of this. So Jonah Hex from the DC side. From the Marvel side, uh Spiderman. It's just impossible to not like Spiderman. He's basically Charlie Brown, all grown up. Because the dude just can't catch a break. Or, at least that's how he started. So it's impossible to not empathize with the problems that Stan Lee gave him. He's got – he had girl problems, and he got work problems, and bus problems, and Aunt Mae problems, and oh by the way villain problems, and money problems, and you...you empathize with him. So if anybody doesn't like Spiderman,

there is just something innately wrong with that person. And also from the Marvel side, uh Captain America because I always liked what he stood for in terms of – he’s even given up his costume at times because he disagreed with being manipulative. Uh, Iron Man I always loved as well. Uh, not sure what the appeal is exactly but I just like that character. And uh Conan the Barbarian. Marvel had that title kind of for the same reasons that I like the Jonah Hex stories, they’re just uh, easy to understand, stories of *here’s a guy in a bad spot and he’s not really a hero but he’s going to do the right thing.*

PI: Great! So, kind of talking about that. How do you relate to your favorite superhero or superheroes? You kind of mentioned this earlier. But, can you elaborate more on that?

Jonah: How do I relate to them?

PI: Yeah, how do you relate to your favorite superhero or superheroes?

Jonah: I uh, I’d like to think that in real life I sometimes walk in their shoes in that, if you have a chance to help somebody, why wouldn’t you? Nothing drives me more crazy than a selfish person who is all about themselves. Uh, even if it’s as simple as a we’re in line at QuikTrip and people can’t figure out you know the, the – you can have a line here and line there and you have people that walk in and cut in front of everybody else. Just drives me batty. Like, just treat people the right way and the way you want to be treated. And in that way I kind of relate – I don’t imagine I have super powers and I just jump off buildings.

PI: Sure

Jonah: But I do relate to them in that if you have a chance to do right, *you* should do right. And it bugs me when it doesn’t happen.

PI: Sure. So, here is the next question. Kind of going in a different direction now. Do you ever notice your thoughts and emotions while reading these comic books?

Jonah: Um, a good one will make you have emotions. Um, I’ll give you an instance of the Walking Dead. I mean, I was a late comer to the comics and I’ve only seen one episode of the show ever.

PI: Oh, really?

Jonah: Yeah. But, I wondered what the buzz was all about so I started buying the trades of the comics. And it’s so good of getting you into the story that I honestly had to stop myself from allowing myself – they’re just drawings on a piece of paper but they’re so good at making those people human and, and the people treat each other so bad. I mean they’re – if you’ve read the Walking Dead you know there’s time you say “wow!” I can’t

believe that just happened to that person. Uh, like the poor guy I forget his name...the Asian character-

PI: (Overlapping) Glenn

Jonah: - who gets beat up with a baseball bat by the bad guy. You just saw that image and you think "oh, this is the most horrible thing I've ever seen in my life." But, uh, yeah from not all but the vast majority cause you to have emotional reaction.

PI: Sure

Jonah: But some, the ones that are really well done. I do mean when Jerry Conway killed Gwen Stacey, the guy got death threats because it was so emotional in Spiderman.

PI: It did. Yeah. This is kind of a general question, but playing off that, how do comic books make you feel emotionally after reading? So, maybe not on a deeper level but just generally.

Jonah: It – it's my escape. I mean everybody has their own escape whether it's movie or TV. But uh, some people have gardens or they mow their yard every day. And that's how they get away from the clutter of the real world. And uh my garden is - are my comics. Uh, and I found that taking care of my garden you know, the comics, is often as relaxing as reading the comics because sometimes if they pile up too high it feels like work to get to the bottom of the stack. If you're not enjoying the comics.

PI: Right. Okay. Now here's this question. In reading superhero comic books what do you learn about others?

Jonah: Others meaning the characters in the comics or other? – what do you mean by others?

PI: Kind of open for interpretation. I mean just kind of other people in general, I guess, if that would work. Or, the humanness that we all experience socially.

Jonah: Could you repeat the question once more?

PI: Sure. In reading superhero comic books, what do you learn about others?

Jonah: You learn what some people should aspire to be.

PI: Okay.

Jonah: Because uh I mean, a lot of those superheroes they don't – there's nothing to gain by what they do. I mean uh, very few have done it for the money, or even tried to. Most

of them are just out there for their own – to do well. You would hope that others would aspire to be what some of these characters are.

PI: Okay. Alright, what was your most memorable comic book event, battle, character, etc.?.

Jonah: Most memorable...I'm not pausing because it's a bad question. I'm pausing because it's a good question.

PI: That's good. I want you to think about it.

Jonah: Um, most memorable.....it uh, comic book deaths are so temporary that they shouldn't have an effect on you but when – sometimes when you read it and you think they're dying in that moment it does have an effect on you like uh, Barry Allen and the Flash's wife was temporarily killed which was unfathomable - I can't speak to, but you know what word I'm trying to say.

PI: Mmhmm

Jonah: Uh, for that to happen. There was an issue of the Avengers. The Korvac Saga which I think, is the best Avengers story. Better than other stuff. There was a time in an issue of the Korvac Saga and the Avengers basically – a bad guy kills basically all the Avengers. And brings them back to life. And even said to Captain America, of all the people, "Here! I really hate to do this to you but you got to go too." And he brings them all back but in *that* moment it felt like a really big thing. Like "oh my gosh, this guy is killing all these heroes right here in front of me."

PI: Alright. Let's move to our second page.

Jonah: Who is the deadest character in comic books anymore? Is it Uncle Ben? Everybody else has come back.

PI: (laughing) Yeah it seems to rotate between him and a few others that they just kill off pretty commonly. Alright, so, sticking kind of that theme, the question is: what made it memorable?

Jonah: hmm?

PI: For you, what made it memorable?

Jonah: Well uh it's memorable because the main characters are never going to pass away because you need publish the next month.

PI: Right.

Jonah: So what stories can you tell in their lives that are still significant stories. And you can't kill somebody every month or it loses its impact. But uh, I mean just like, in real life when you lose someone in your core cast, there is a big hole there and it felt big when Barry Allen was losing his wife who had been a character in that book since they've revived him in the Silver Age.

PI: How have comic books and superheroes influenced your life?

Jonah: Huge!

PI: Tell me about that.

Jonah: Uh, it was – comic books were probably why I have the job that I have in journalism because I was uh – I loved stories. I don't really care where they come from whether they're comics, or books, or movies, or TV shows, or even there are great songs that are stories. I just love stories. Greek mythology and Norse mythology. But uh comics were one of the first stories and I attribute, not just my love for stories, but to having at an early age, maybe a better vocabulary than some of the kids because I've seen Batman use words when talking about how Two-Face uh does his business. And I felt like uh I had a better grasp of the language than other kids at a small age. And I grew up wanting to tell stories because I love stories.

PI: Alright. So now tell me how reading superhero comic books have impacted your morals, beliefs, etc? Kind of on that line.

Jonah: I love the movie Superman 2 because it tricked you to thinking "he's not going to win this. He's fighting three guys from Krypton and he doesn't have his powers. No way can he win this." But he wins. And uh I'll just refer back to what I said earlier in that the moral is uh, if you do right, things work out for you in the end and the good guys do win. And we need more examples of that in real life.

PI: Okay. What do comic books mean to you?

Jonah: Um, I mean I have a family so I can't rank comics above my family but I would say below my family. That would be the next thing I would hate to lose. I mean uh I worry about them like they're my kids almost. Uh, I mean if a criminal came to uh, you know, find where I had my comics stashed at my rental facility, I would rather they come to my house and steal everything in my house except the comics. I mean they – but that's whether emotional or financial these are, these are my link to my childhood and I can be forever young if I can keep those. So uh just – I don't want to part with them.

PI: Excellent. Alright, we got a few more questions left. So what have you learned about yourself from reading these comic books?

Jonah: I've learned that uh, your tastes change over the years. I mean what you enjoyed in uh when you were 6, 7, 8 years old often doesn't age well. And you go back and for whatever reason something captured your attention when you were at that age but you go back and read it and it's uh...doesn't have quite the same splash it once did. But, uh so you learn that your taste change and uh as you get older you'll find that uh something more to your liking, you know, stories that appeal to you instead of stories that appealed to you as a kid.

PI: So we kind of hit on this next question a little bit. But just coming back to it to finalize it. How do comic books impact your current life right now?

Jonah: Uh, comic books impact current life in that they are my number 1 form of relaxation and recreation and almost to the point of vacation. On my vacations I will look and see well what's going on that week that I can go to and bring my family and we can anchor a really good weekend around uh for the kids to do things while I can still do things I want to do, which is go treasure hunt for comics or scavenger hunt for comics at some comic show. I'm taking my family to one here pretty soon where will find area comic conventions and will go there and make a weekend of it. And that sort of thing.

PI: Cool.

Jonah: It uh, it brings me peace of mind really like nothing else does. I mean, if I go hunt for comics somewhere – did it last weekend at the flea market at the fairgrounds - Then that's a good weekend for me. You can't drag me to Target on a weekend because I don't want any part of it. It's a wasted day. But if you drag me to a comic book place where I can go dig through boxes of old comics, that's not a wasted day.

PI: So, here is the second part. How can comic books impact your future?

Jonah: Um, comic books can impact my future because I'm passing it on. My daughter, who is 14, was kind of raised on Archie and uh and has tons of Archie digest and became a big reader and lover of books as well. And my son, who is 10, whether it's my fault or not has gravitated toward the Harvey comics of the 1970s - Richie Rich, Sad Sack, Casper, and loves those - and when he goes with me to the shows and looks for comics and typically getting more than I get which is not really fair. But uh I know it impacts my future in that I'm passing down something I love to them and they're going to carry it on in their own lives.

PI: Alright. Two more questions.

Jonah: Okay

PI: What does comic book reading say about you?

Jonah: Well, it used to say there's a stigma to it. At one point in high school, I stopped reading because I was just scared of, you know, people might find out "oh my gosh you read comics!" But that stigma has disappeared because now it's uh, for the first time in any of our lives it's the cool thing to do because of the television shows and the movies, and all that sort of thing. So, what reading comic books say about me now is that uh I really like this and I enjoy this and in 2016 you don't have to apologize for whatever you like. You can like anything you want without apology.

PI: Okay. Playing on that, what do you think others such as family, friends, peers, and community think comic book reading says about you? You kind of touched on this.

Jonah: Yeah. I think uh everybody has to have a thing. What's your thing? I mean everybody has a job. Everybody eats and sleeps. But what's your thing that uh gets you fired up beyond what you have to do. And I think that people who know me uh feel good knowing I have a thing that I love comics and reading comics and uh other people have things too, you just have to dig and find out what that thing is. Generally that thing is pretty cool because it's their own. It identifies a part of their personality.

PI: Yeah.

Jonah: Its uh I mean at one point people who had a bad opinion about comics might uh give you the stink eye and say "I can't believe uh you like uh comic books" but honestly uh as things evolved I think that everybody appreciates when you have a passion that you love.

PI: Alright, well that concludes the interview. Thank you so much.

Jonah: Sure.

<End of interview>

2/12/2016
Participant 005
"Bruce"

PI: Alright. Let's go ahead and jump right into this. So, tell me how often do you read comic books?

Bruce: I tend to read comic books um - in terms in like comics read or time?

PI: Both.

Bruce: Okay. Then typically most of my comics are read digitally.

PI: Okay.

Bruce: If I'm reading single issues and I'll wait until, you know, Wednesday morning when they're released and I'll go through and there's some titles that I read regularly. I'll try out Image Comics, uh...anything they release. Their number 1's so it varies. But I spend probably an hour or two hours reading...um, either single issue comics or working on a larger graphic novel type a week. So, it might be – depending on the Wednesday with what's being released - I might have 10 comics downloaded. Some other weeks, just one or two.

PI: Okay. So on average 1 to 2 hours a week?

Bruce: I'd say so, yeah.

PI: Okay. When did you begin reading superheroes in comic books?

Bruce: In – I can't really remember what grade it was but I remember the events happening in the comics.

PI: Okay.

Bruce: So, whenever Batman had his back broken by Bane. Superman was killed by Doomsday. And Professor X died. Um, I remember that Jim Lee cover of X-Men #1 so I think I was 5th to 7th grade, 5th-6th grade maybe?

PI: Okay.

Bruce: I really enjoyed Batman, Superman, and X-Men. I, at that point, got into Image that was just coming out, so Spawn and Todd McFarlane stuff. Uh, and that lasted for a couple of years before I think, you know, just too many other distractions...sports and

band and dating and that kind of thing. And so yeah early, relatively early on, I guess, before that, maybe some encounters with like Archie and uh things you just find on the newsstand at the drug store. But never really being a regular reader who was interested in a storyline. More of a “can I get this, take it home and just read a single issue?” Um, and then there was that...that gap between 6th, 7th grade whenever up to when I was just getting out of grad school so 26 or 27. Um, and then looking at becoming a library director and a guy I work with was into comics and graphic novels. He was an artist himself. And so he got me kind of back into it and I’ve just been relentless since then.

PI: Okay.

Bruce: So that’s been the past 6, 7 years.

PI: Great! Alright. So jumping into this now. What draws you to continue to read comic books?

Bruce: Um, it really is uh – there are a few factors. One that immediately springs to mind is I have two kids at home. One’s an 8 month old, one is a 4-year-old. And when my 4-year-old was born is really when I hit the digital comics interest. And having something that was um...because I love to read, but having sleep deprivation and attention span issues with a new baby, I wanted something that I could still read but get something in in a small dose. And so really looking at comics as a way to get a storyline that’s pretty compact and I can read, read pretty quickly. Um, I do read both – it’s primarily for story and writing. Um, but art is a big part of it. Um, like my friend that got me back into comics, I think I tend to follow writers more than a title and like Scott Snyder who writing Batman, anything that he writes I like to try out. Um, and so I’ll follow an author and try their new stuff. Typically – it depending on the artist, I’ll read any of their new stuff as well. Um, but if the story sucks, I can’t, I won’t stick with it. Story comes first. Um, and I’ll take any kind of art with a good story. But only a good story with – if I have bad art I have to have a good story. Guess that’s the way to say that.

PI: Fair enough.

Bruce: Um, so just finding something that interests me. Typically, it’s science fiction, crime stuff, occasional horror title. Um, and then just kind of the more mundane stuff if it’s got, if it’s written well and has an engaging storyline, good characters I’ll stick – I’ll really try anything. I like to have a nice sampling.

PI: Okay. So, this kind of spills into this then. What types of comic books and superheroes about and why?

Bruce: Uh, some of the, the superhero titles that I read I think are interesting because I don’t actively avoid superhero titles but I don’t want to mess around with drawn out

continuity. I don't want to mess around with um some of the types of writing superhero comics have been associated with. Um, you know just more action based at times. What I tend to gravitate toward are um kind of the misfits, the off shoots, so I really loved um Matt Fraction's Hawkeye, uh Miss Marvel, Daredevil, Mark Wade's recent run. I really enjoyed that. And then kind of back tracking with looking at uh Bendis and his work on that Brubakers work on Daredevil. Um, and I like Batman; I've always loved Batman. That's kind of my superhero.

PI: Okay.

Bruce: Um, I think I, I like him because he's a regular guy. Well, he's a billionaire but he's, he is a human being. He doesn't have super powers and he uses his intellect and his money which I guess in unfair but um the grittiness of it of like the uh the darkness of it that's been around since um – I didn't know this at the time but now knowing that Frank Miller and stuff in the mid-80s with Batman becoming dark again. Um, that really appeals to me I guess and then the crime aspect of it, and the psychological aspects of it. So it's how he's overcoming his struggles. Um, and that being said you know when I read like Superman stuff, what I identify most with Superman is like his struggles as an alien. How is he dealing with it, how is he coping with being someone who is maybe unwanted uh and his identity. So that's, that's all character based for me. I'm not – action is fun sure but story, character, uh some mystery, um and I like long storylines. I like a lot of dialogue. Um, so Scott Snyder stuff. I think he tends to like a 12 page run or a 12 book run or a 12 book issue run on a storyline.

PI: Mmhmm

Bruce: And uh I like the exposition and so that's what I tend to, to enjoy. So, again with a yeah, I tried some of the new X-Men and Avenger titles but there is just too much back story continuity. I don't want to have to jump into it and all the technical details before I can really appreciate the story.

PI: Right. Understandable.

Bruce: So, that's, that's what frames my superhero title anyway.

PI: So you kind of hit on this already, but I'll ask anyway. Who is your favorite superhero or superheroes and why?

Bruce: Batman has always been my traditional favorite. Um, it's interesting because I don't – the darkness of it is appealing for some reason. Um, that grittiness again. Thinking about um his actual actions and like his violence towards criminals is not something I personally like I don't identify with that. Um, the vigilante nature I'm not necessarily in agreement with but for whatever reason I – it appeals to me. I enjoy

reading it. I would be upset seeing like that in real life. Um, and so it's something I haven't – I really don't know why I'm attracted to that.

PI: Okay.

Bruce: But uh Superman when I was a kid. X-Men, well Wolverine I guess was another.

PI: Okay.

Bruce: One that I really liked...Um, I think I even started to identify with him as a young adult, a teenager, um and even up through college. I remember identifying with him as the new movies would come out because he's – I think I had a temper so I could identify with that like a short tempered nature. Um, the fact that he is really hairy and aggressive, I identify with that as well.

PI: Okay.

Bruce: And so I remember at work um we'd mow lawns in the summers and during breaks or whatever, I'd have either a beard or long side burns or something and I'd be moving around the air hose and I'd be all sweaty. I'd spray my hair because you know the Wolverine has that distinctive look and we'd spray our hair like that and just goof around.

PI: (laughing) That's funny.

Bruce: And uh paint sticks uh paint stirrers. I'd take the paint stirrers and use them as the claws as a kid. Um, I don't know if I was ever Batman or even a superhero for any Halloweens or anything like that. But uh now I'm remembering when I was even younger, when the first Batman came out uh Tim Burton's Batman with Michael Keaton.

PI: Yeah

Bruce: And getting the comic book adaptation of that and being really fascinated. And so that might actually have been the start of my enjoyment of Batman although I watched the old uh um TV series on TV as well. I can't remember what order that happened in. But uh but yeah I think having some of that – I know that the campy kind of 1960s Batman I enjoyed that to some degree but when I saw dark Batman that was really what was engaging.

PI: Okay. Alright. So, I want to go a little bit deeper with that. You've really provided some rich dialogue with that. So, how do you relate to your favorite superheroes?

Bruce: I think I get really caught up in – you know you start thinking about mass shootings, campus shooting, stuff like that, how would I react in a scenario like that. I've

never been in the military, never had any formal like self-defense training, and I've never been in a situation like that. So, I don't know how I would react. So you kind of look to people of fictional and real life people in terms of in figuring out how...

PI: (overlapping) Yeah

Bruce: ...what the model of your behavior. So I think to some degree seeing how superheroes react when under pressure uh at least has had some, some influence on me. Even thinking about I mean like walking through scenarios in your mind of what would I do in this situation. What am I capable of doing? How could I protect someone? I think with Batman being a – and I keep referring to him as a regular but he's really not. Because he's got the money, the resources, these, these crazy tools that no one else has. These things really don't exist maybe except for in maybe experimental stage in some military lab.

PI: Yeah.

Bruce: Um, and so comparing myself, or not even comparing, but thinking of myself in terms of what would Batman do which I don't consciously do.

PI: Alright

Bruce: But I'm sure that plays some, some role in it. Uh, you know I don't know when that really started. But I think as a kid playing, I was never a big like soldier kind of guy. I didn't want to do that um role playing type of thing. Uh, but I remember I would wrap a cape around me. I would pretend I was a superhero running around the house.

PI: Okay. So, do you ever notice your thoughts and emotions while reading comic books?

Bruce: Yes, um and what, what did I read the other day? Oh ok. And it wasn't a superhero book. When I read superhero books I don't...I don't get like a deep emotional connection. Um, it's some of the other stuff. And I was reading uh Killing and Dying and it's...Adrian Tomain maybe's his last name. I never read anything by him before. And it's just a series of short stories and reading a story about uh what tends to impact me most emotionally is stories about families. And reading a story about uh a family, a husband, a wife, and daughter and the daughter who was kind of awkward and uh didn't have an outgoing personality and trying new things. She wanted to try stand up classes and her dad was pissed off because he didn't want to pay for these classes. He thought it was a waste of money. He thought she wouldn't get anything out of them. And watching that struggle in that family and watching that, that girl uh initially succeed only to find out that her dad found out that she didn't write any of the material that she succeeded with. Uh so he was initially proud and then it kind of back fired and then this wife dies of

a disease. And then watching the father and daughter interact um that kind of stuff uh especially now with kids, I'm thinking more of about my own mortality.

PI: Mmhmm

Bruce: And how my actions and uh examples and reactions to them to my kids will affect them and who they become. And so at this moment it's that kind of story that is more impactful um but at the same time stuff I share with my 4-year-old, um he's, he's interested in Batman and Superman, and superheroes. He'll read comics with me. Um, when he was an infant, we got some pictures of me reading uh the Gotham Central comics, and so it's looking at the Gotham PD instead of just at Batman, looking at their point of view. And it's just me laying on the ground with my little 2-month-old, first son and uh reading those books to him. And so wanting him to be interested in them and seeing that he is interested is nice. Um, talking to him about what heroes do and how they protect. Um, has been something we, we've talked about and that bleeds over to every morning when he goes to school, we talk about you need to learn something today, you need to take care of someone, uh I don't use the word protect, but take care of someone, um help someone, and that whole mentality I think is part of why I want him to read superhero comics.

PI: Sure.

Bruce: And, and I think more now more than ever you're seeing things like Ms. Marvel, which is, you know, young teen girl of color um experiencing both life as a teenager, a minority, a woman, and watching her struggles, I, I think that's a really valuable text for anybody to read and uh I want my kids to read that kind of stuff as well. See the examples that are put out there.

PI: Okay. Here's the second part of that question. So, this is kind of more general base. But, how do comic books makes you feel emotionally after reading? First part was during, how about after?

Bruce: Nowadays I don't have – there's not a lot of time for reflection.

PI: Sure.

Bruce: Because I often end up reading um at breakfast time. And usually the kids wake up and I have to wrap it up as I'm eating. Or it's at the end of the night after they've gone to sleep and I'll go right to bed.

PI: Right.

Bruce: Um, so really it's on, it's on the weekends where I can have maybe a little more space and think about it. And I think it just depends on the comic. Uh, there was a recent

issue of Batman. Kind of a side story that fed back into the main storyline that dealt with, with race and police brutality. And it was a little deeper level than the normal storyline and so I thought more about that one. I thought about how I can use it in, in any classes I taught.

PI: Mmhmm.

Bruce: Um, I thought about how it, its summed up um the emotions of people within a storyline. But, typically after a superhero story, I'm not usually reflective.

PI: What about comics, some of the comics you read in general?

Bruce: Yeah, um again with I remember I told my wife after I read the one about the family and the stand-up comic I told her, I think this is a verbatim quote, "that was the most emotionally effecting comic I've ever read." And uh and she said oh wow okay tell me about it. And then the kids interrupted and I couldn't tell her anything about it. Um, and that's how most of this – I can't share most of it because it's really tough to talk uh I'm not going to talk to the kids about it. Talk to my wife, she's always busy by the time we both have time to really talk its – we'll talk about something more important. Um, so a lot of its not, not really shared. Just kind of kept inside. Um, trying to think of something, something else I've read recently that's – oh uh Chris Weir. I had avoided Chris Weir for a while. I don't know if you're familiar with his stuff. Primarily because the small illustrations, small text um and building stories was just a jumble of stuff and I didn't want to mess with finding all these different, different pieces. And finally I just uh – I requested through general library loan, we got a copy of it from the University of Arizona and I took it home and started working my way through. And uh the main character that and there are a few characters but really the main one is uh a young woman – I guess young through but it shows her up through middle age, who's missing lower half of a leg, struggles with self-confidence, and uh, and knowing there is no real plot in there, it's just kind of glimpses of her life at different stages. And that was, that was stuff I thought, I thought about afterwards. Um, there's a lot about how we live and how we choose to, choose are deaths I guess, or choose to deal with deaths. Uh, and that was pretty emotionally affecting. But like I said I think that the overall theme of thinking about uh who I am, how I'm dealing with my family, what are they going to do when I'm gone. That affects what I'm looking – what I'm trying to read anyway.

PI: Okay.

Bruce: And what I'm looking for in reading. So um most recent issue of Batman, he is a, spoiler alert, he has – the previous storyline he and joker were fighting in this battle um Bruce Wayne lives but he can't remember who he is. Uh, he can't remember that he is Batman. And so in this past issue, uh there's some machine that can reboot him

essentially and Batman has lost all the trauma. He doesn't remember the death of his parents so Batman doesn't exist. So, anyway it's a way to like to reboot this trauma and make him into Batman again. And uh Alfred is really upset because he's finally got his Bruce Wayne there who uh is his boy. It's the kid that he raised. The man that he always wanted him to be. He's safe, he's in love. Uh, he wants to protect him so he refuses to do this reboot so seeing that struggle there um kind of father-son interaction was um not hugely impacting but that's something that I identified with.

PI: Yeah. Oh, for sure.

Bruce: Um, Daredevil, um seeing how – I think a lot of what I look at superhero stories is how, how I can think about them in terms of their social impact and commentary on social issues. Because I always want to use them in classes.

PI: Mmhmm

Bruce: Um, in different ways and it's tough to fit them in um with uh the stuff I do in the library, for the library. But uh seeing how uh disability uh plays into our daily lives, um seeing how people react to someone who is disabled. You can see that in Daredevil. So I think that's really what I gravitate towards. The father-son kind of mortality stories and how social issues are addressed in the pages of a comic.

PI: Okay. So segwaying a little bit. In reading superhero comics, what do you learn about others? In general...or, is there anything to learn about others?

Bruce:..Hmm, I don't know...Let me think...I think they can provide a nice window on society you know this pop culture take on society. Um, because people are creating - maybe a single writers creating this whole fictional world and allowing their own politics, their own understanding, uh their expression to take form in that. I know something – many times there are constraints that are put in place by the universe they are working under because it's not their own.

PI: Yeah.

Bruce: Um, but still seeing how you know Batman would address issues of police brutality and uh racial unfairness uh is really interesting to see how a character that is well known and um exists as this icon that everyone thinks they know and seeing how they react to something. I think that – and then seeing how people will respond to that, that version or that take because fanboys are notoriously uh upset when you know something changes that they don't, they don't think is right, if there is a plot twist that they don't agree with uh and seeing kind of the upheaval that happens uh.

PI: Okay.

Bruce: and the backlash against that as well. That kind of conservatism I guess so seeing more, seeing more young women interested in superhero comics. Both of male and female characters but giving them a voice and uh and seeing what they have to say about these characters that may misrepresent them. You know how are women portrayed in superhero comics, whether they're the heroes or uh what's the uh is it Spiderman when she ended up in her fridge. Uh, you hear that women in fridges –

PI: I haven't heard that.

Bruce: it's a way to and see I never read the comic itself, itself but I think it was Spider-Man and he ends up finding his girlfriend dismembered in her fridge. And so that kind of idea of women in refrigerators – women are just stand-ins for you know for them to be manipulated and harmed.

PI: Like a railroad track.

Bruce: Yeah. Gives the heroes something to react to and gives him a reason to be fighting. And so seeing less of that. Um and when you do see that having a response to it um seems more real and fully fleshed out of characters of all genders and backgrounds. And uh so I think that's something that's pretty uniquely American is superhero. Seeing how that has progressed and become something that's for everyone. It's not just uh for a small crowd. It really is becoming more representative. I like – I think that superhero comics nowadays tell me a lot about our readers, our country, the world I guess at this point because its – you really can get superhero comics uh digital stuff everywhere. So telling us what people want to see, what people understood, just kind of continue that social improvement. I think that's as weird as it is to say I think you see that in many superhero books. There are still some that are pretty, pretty caught up in their past.

PI: Not letting go. Alright. We touched kind of on this question too. Um, lets kind of jump into a different realm now. What was your most memorable comic book event, battle, character, etc.?

Bruce: Um, I always return to and I still have the trade paperbacks for uh Bane and Batman so the Nightfall series uh in Batman. And then the uh the death of Superman when he fought Doomsday. And I'll go back every couple of years and read those but uh that Nightfall series especially. Um, just tearing through that as a kid um and seeing Batman at his weakest, seeing him having to fight all these criminals that Bane has released, and uh seeing him really struggle with uh what he normally finds to be uh an easy job right. It's just easy to take out one or two of these guys at a time and seeing him struggle with this whole army of uh criminal masterminds and otherwise knowing at the end of this he has to face this beast of a man and uh and watching him struggle, watching him fail, and seeing his colleagues support him and then seeing him with his back broken

and completely unable to do anything and then sidelined him. He goes off story for a while. I can even – I remember skipping over those parts because he goes off and he's trying, he's investigating Bane's background or something, but I see I still can't even tell you what Bruce Wayne is doing after his back is broken. He goes off and does his own thing. I know he's not Batman anymore, I care about this story. Jean Paul taking over as Batman and watching Tim Drake, Robin uh deal with that and can see an ultraviolet you know someone who is willing to kill, willing to go the extra step and having to deal with that. And that's where all the drama is. Because it's Batman, and you're thinking it's not Bruce Wayne. It's this what's this idea of Batman and what is Batman all about. What is Batman willing to do, what are Batman's boundaries?

PI: Good. So, sticking with that. Um, I think that's really important to get a little more with this. So, you describe kind of that scenario, what made it memorable?

Bruce: I think that the drama of it.

PI: Okay.

Bruce: Um, I think even uh I love the covers of the books uh, very exaggerated. I can't remember the artists name uh who worked on a lot of those comics. Um, kind of a tangent here, I think it's interesting because I don't see this so much anymore but you know going through like detective comics Batman, you go through all these Batman titles and the story goes through all the titles. So, you had to read every one of these titles to get the whole story.

PI: Right.

Bruce: Um, so sometimes you'd have different artist but one artist in particular whose abs when he would draw abs it was you know you think of a six pack this was literally a 100 pack. There were all these little grapes

PI: I know what you're talking about

Bruce: Yeah and the finding that fascinating. I think he's actually doing Swamp Thing now. But uh kind of a grotesque uh vision almost and being intrigued by those and then the Batman the final issue of the Nightfall story was uh, a foil cover with um Batman in a whole new mechanical get up. Um, very shiny. And being intrigued by that. And, and any other the foil X-Men had some of those covers. X-Men had some holograms. Any type of gimmick like that that would get me as well. So I can remember those pretty vividly. Um.....

PI: Okay.

Bruce: But yeah the drama of it and knowing you know at the time I wasn't thinking of it and its deep terms like oh Batman's struggling here this is incredibly difficult for Bruce Wayne because he's always winning. Um, its more just the kind of the thrill of it and seeing, seeing what was going to happen next.

PI: Alright, yeah. Perfect. Alright. So, moving into this now. How have comic books and superheroes influenced your life?

Bruce: They've definitely influenced my you know the – my pop culture intake. Um, my income because I spend a decent amount of money because I'm interested in staying in touch with some of these characters or developing new connections to these characters. Um, they've kind of inspired – you know I always want to tell more stories or tell stories. I'm really interested in narratives. Um, and so seeing how people can take these well-known characters and fit them into uh a new and surprising story. How can they make them new? Um, so my love of storytelling um I think comics really appeal to that both superhero and other lines. So just being able to tell a dynamic story um something that is interesting, engaging, mysterious at times. Um, and like I said they've given me something to go to now as a uh busy father who wants to have some entertainment that's easy to consume in the sense of it being fairly small packages. Not in the sense of well this is just uh you know um this is just junk food for me you know just so you consume mindlessly. Yeah, it's more of this, this is a small container of something really valuable and enjoyable. Um, so they've really been there for me as – because I don't think could – reading is a stress reliever and so having something to go to um has been really beneficial and uh as a newish dad.

PI: Understand the new dad very well.

Bruce: Yeah. It can be pretty rough at times.

PI: (laughing) yeah. Alright. So, you've touched on this, too, but I want to come back to it. So, tell me how reading superhero comic books have impacted your morals, beliefs, etc.?

Bruce: Well you think of superheroes as having a code. You know a way of working that's pretty well known. Um, you know Superman is kind of a boy scout. He's going to be honest. He's that upright American, even though he's an alien. And uh he's always going to make the right decision even if it pisses people, even if it uh – or let me rephrase that. He's always going to be honest even if that ends up hurting. And I'm almost positive there's a story, or multiple stories where that comes in and I can't actually think of the actual storyline. But, you know his honesty backfires essentially and uh it ruins a relationship or hurts the people he's trying to help. That kind of thing. And Batman won't kill um but he'll be incredibly rough with people. So, you think about those icons as

having a pretty strict code and that's, that's what drives a lot of stories are you know how, how that code is tested.

PI: Right.

Bruce: Um, I don't think you see a lot of that with the new superheroes. I'm thinking of like Miss Marvel and it's just her dealing with life.

PI: Yeah.

Bruce: And doing her best. Um, Daredevil you know he's been a defense attorney.

PI: Right.

Bruce: And now with the new storyline he's on the other side. He's a prosecutor and so seeing how – it's not as much of a code but uh just a switch of view point. A change of pace. Um, Hawkeye what I really enjoyed about Hawkeye uh Matt Fraction's Hawkeye was he's just kind of regular dude with – he's got a really great talent. He's got some cool tools but he's a guy whose living in a um in an apartment building with a bunch of other people. And he sees it as his duty, he's an avenger, um to protect the people that's in his apartment building, the regular people there and team up with them. And uh its him just kind of dealing with the, the mundane realities of uh day-to-day life in New York City. Um, so I really like that where they've, superheroes butt up against the mundane and seeing how they deal with you know every day people stuff. Um, you know I can look pass – there's this suspension of disbelief that you have to have when you read superhero comics. Kind of sort of like well I don't think Batman uh or Superman's uh uniform can stand up to the, the uh heat generated by him re-entering the atmosphere. Well, you're okay with him flying but you're not okay with him having some type of Kryptonian resistant some type of super spandex.

PI: Yeah.

Bruce: So, I just go with it and I know that it has to be internally consistent but uh looking pass that and uh the extraordinary just accepting whatever they tell me that's extraordinary. I want to see how they deal with, with the problems that I encountered. The problems that I face. Um, so it's both of a means to escape and a way to figure out uh or to see them dealing with same kind of pressures that I do in certain ways. Maybe they're on a different level but um identifying with um their struggles.

PI: Okay.

Bruce: I think that's why maybe I don't like Superman as much. Because I feel that he's too, too perfect. Um, in what I've read. I know there's stuff out there but I think my

exposure just has been...yeah he can do some cool stuff, he's just a goody-goody. He's got it all made. He doesn't make mistakes.

PI: Boy scout as you pointed out.

Bruce: Boy scout, yeah. And it's not a bad thing. It's just not as appealing. It's not what I'm seeking in my entertainment.

PI: Sure. Alright, so then there's this question. What do comic books mean to you? On that level, what do they mean to you?

Bruce: I think they provide this is historically as well it's a cheap way to see some amazing stories that could not be told in any other medium. Or not told easily. And it really allows your brain to work on a different level than if you were watching movie or just reading uh a text. Letting you fill in the blanks. Letting you build that action in your own head and controlling the pace of it. Um, but I think really being able to and, I guess, I wouldn't separate what I've done with it at work because we've built some of these comics and the same kind of value I've find in the creation of them is what I enjoy and being able to tell um a story in doing things that you couldn't do um on your own with a limited budget or limited time. So telling a story about our library which zombies are attacking.

PI: Yeah.

Bruce: Because initially we wanted to do a video like do a little video tour of our library and have a zombie attack and we're like well we are going to have find all these students, we're going to have to do makeup, we're going to have to do all of this stuff, let's do a comic. And uh we can stage this full scale zombie attack on our campus, we have flame thrower in the library, we're cutting off zombies' heads with records, um all this fun stuff that we could not do on our own. And allowed us to express ourselves um in a very unique way. It's something we're proud of and even if you don't have the opportunity to create one um I think seeing someone else's vision just like viewing any type of art.

PI: Yeah.

Bruce: Can be very inspiring. And with you thinking about the process that went into it and how detailed someone had to map out in some cases, sometimes just bullet points for script.

PI: Sure.

Bruce: But um thinking about the process of the work that went into it and recognizing it as um a real piece of art and uh in some cases you know just like everything. When I try to tell people when they ask me um how'd they say that or I asked them if they read

comics and they said no I'm not interested in that genre. Oh, genre, let me explain really what that means.

PI: Medium, genre

Bruce: Yeah. And so explain to them yeah there's crap out there, there's art in anything, and just knowing that you have to jump in and figure out on your own and go from there.

PI: Okay. Excellent. What have you learned about yourself from reading comic books?

Bruce: There are things that I don't, I don't get. Just like art. I missed out on whatever experience they're trying to share and I don't get it. Um, and so admitting to myself that um there's stuff out there within the medium that some people still call low brow or adolescent, there's stuff out there that's that I don't understand and I won't or I don't care to. And so um not being afraid to admit my own ignorance. I think that applies in everything, teaching as well. Thinking you know everything doesn't do anyone any good. And then admitting your ignorance will allow you some, some room for growth.

PI: Okay.

Bruce: Um, I've learned to appreciate more about that process and the time that it goes into especially from the art aspect. Um, seeing my friend work on stuff and knowing the time that it takes and uh seeing how he gets, he's been screwed over by people who are just like well you do this art, it'll be fine just do this art and give it back to us and we'll pay you whatever we decide is fair. And it's usually an eighth of what he's thinking. And so seeing the struggles of the people that do this for a living.

PI: Right.

Bruce: Um, and people that I think are um in some circles um elevated as heroes you know these authors and artists and realizing they're just people as well. And many times they're struggling to make ends meet. And so that's um just another way to connect with – realize there's different layers and things we don't see in society and finding something you're interested in and investigating a little leads us to these paths where we'll say oh well I didn't know, I didn't know that you guys were suffering. Like Marvel and DC are making all the money off you guys. You guys aren't making, making anything.

PI: Right.

Bruce: You didn't get any royalties from selling that story for a new Captain America movie. I'm sorry. Yeah. Everyone assumes like oh Rebecca you got rich off of Civil War. No you guys, you got paid for the writing and that's it.

PI: So, how do comic books impact your current life? You touched on this again, but is there anything to add to that? You mentioned stress reliever, escape, is there anything else how they impact your life?

Bruce: Um, with work there's always stuff that's going on that we've done in the past as well as the book that I co-authored um and hopefully that's going to lead to uh students using that in classes, in library scenarios, figuring out how to use, use information. Um making it easier, making it more accessible so that's how I kind of taking – oh we translated my love of that into these kind of creations. And um and making stuff easier for students to deal with, or giving them another option I think is that way to say it. Because kids will look – students will learn in different ways. Some will just want your lectures, some will want you to show them what to do, some will want their regular textbooks, watch a video, some will want a comic and I don't think many of them have had a chance to learn from a comic in a formal setting. And so that's a big part right now. Um, from the work aspect and then at home I just continue to try find um find things I'm interested. Try new things. So, I've got four um four books that are interlibrary loan right now, different kind of titles, graphic novels. None of those superhero but some European stuff, um just general drama type of stuff. And so just experimenting, feeling out what I like, what I enjoy, what I want to find more of and um continue having that there as a comfort. Because that's really what it is.

PI: Okay. So, how can comic books impact your future?

Bruce: Well eventually you know having my kids uh see my collection at home. See what kind of interests they have in it. I remember you know my dad didn't collect comics or anything but seeing his bookshelf at home was always a curiosity to me. And uh wanting to browse his shelves and see what he had and so that same kind of feeling of well I want to have something that they want to look through and see what's out there and experiment with. Um, things that I can talk to them about, share those connections. That's how I – a lot of what I get now or actually purchase because I'm getting more digital stuff which it's great for convenience but it doesn't – it's weird because problem with the digital stuff is probably more permanent than my physical stuff. But, the permanent, what feels permanent is the hard copy.

PI: Tactile piece.

Bruce: Yeah and that feels more valuable as a keepsake so what I tend to purchase now is stuff I want to have for a while. Um, and have that there for the boys to look at a later time. So that's kind of dictating what I'm actually buying. And uh thinking consciously about what I want that collection to look like for them. Is it something that I would want them to read eventually.

PI: Awesome. So I have two more questions for you and we'll be done here. So, what does comic book reading say about you?

Bruce: I think this is – it's less like this, every day but with the stereotype out there about comic readers, I think it shows people that I'm not afraid to read comics. That shows people I'm willing to talk about what I enjoy. Um, I think if people know and respect me and think I'm an intelligent person and they see me reading it, they might think that oh this is worth taking a closer look at. Um, that's another reason why I like the hard copies. Being able – it's just like with a book you know part of the serendipity, the social aspects of having a hard copy where people can see a title and ask you questions as oppose to you got a tablet and it would seem to be prying to ask what you're reading. Um, just having that out there. Showing people hey this is what I read and come ask me about it. That's I think people – hopefully seeing me as being open and accessible and wanting to share.

PI: Okay. And here's the last one. What do you think others for example family, friends, peers, and even community think comic book reading says about you?

Bruce: My brother whose younger than me and I don't think ever really got into comics as a kid like I did. Um, and now who will read some based on my recommendations. Um, at Christmas he gave me an Amazon gift card and he supposedly said do not buy comics with this, you have enough comics. Um, you know it's something think they just kind of deal with because I don't have anyone other than my friend Mike who drew those early comics with me um who reads them on a regular basis you know. Um, it's something not – it's kind of put up with. It's not that its seen as a bad habit or anything. They're just like Matt's interested in comics. Let him do his thing. Um, and my mom I think is a little more interested now that I've written one but uh with my friend Mike when we lived in Kansas together um we drive up from Emporia to Topeka every Wednesday and just go to the comic book shop and browse around. It's a social event and I don't get to have that anymore. It's – anything I do is kind of on my own or my wife will wait in the car or come in with the kids and I have to make it quick. So it's not as enjoyable of a social experience as it was. So yeah I think that's it for the most part

PI: OK! That is the end of the interview.

<End of interview>

2/12/2016
Participant 006
"Harley"

PI: I'm glad you're here today. Let's go ahead and get started. So, let me just start off the bat. How often do you read comic books?

Harley: Uh, on there I put about 60-90 minutes per week so I usually spend about 3 days. Um just kind of either through the comic books that I collect or the app I have where I can just read old comics.

PI: Yeah the digitals is really popular now.

Harley: Yeah

PI: Saves space.

Harley: Yeah, yeah it really uh my collections gets a little out of control. But. (laughing)

PI: (laughing) ...the boxes, I understand.

Harley: uh huh. I still haven't upgraded to the nifty like long boxes that that you can actually keep them organized. I have them in like they in the little wood - it's not good they all get bent.

PI: Um, I completely understand. Alright. So, when did you begin to reading superheroes in comic books?

Harley: I got my first comic book on my uh 15th birthday. So about 10 years now.

PI: Okay. So what draws you to continue reading comic books?

Harley: Um, I first – I think I just really had a good experience with my first comic book that I just kind of got addicted.

PI: Okay.

Harley: Um, my first one was by Joss Whedon. It was the Astonishing X-Men. And then I got into the Runaways which is also a Marvel comic book about teenagers so I just kind of kept with it and uh kept finding good story lines that were addicting. And I always loved the movies and TV shows growing up as a kid and the video games. So to actually get to read it made me feel like I was actually getting to know the real characters and stuff.

PI: Mmhmm

Harley: So they're just kind of a fun thing.

PI: Okay. So, what type of comic books and superheroes do you read about and why?

Harley: I like Marvel. I stick with like X-Men, uh because I always had a big connection with them. Uh, DC I like Batman and Suicide Squad or anything with Harley Quinn in it. So I'm super excited about the movie coming out. And then Dark Horse. I usually follow whatever TV show that like...Buffy or Angel or something like that. But, start off with X-Men and it kind of trickles down to other teams that are lesser known. Uh, a lot of my comic books I love keep getting cancelled though. So uh (laughing)

PI: (laughing) Oh no!

Harley: But uh, I loved the ones that are usually around...set around teenage heroes. Uh, like Teen Titans for DC or the Runaways, um, where young justice - or anything like that. And then I love X-Men because, I mean, I got a tattoo of them on my arm. Um, for the M that Bishop has over his arm and over his eye.

PI: I'll be darn.

Harley: So, I identified with being gay and they're usually associated as being outcasts.

PI: Okay.

Harley: I really liked reading them along that time of coming out and feeling pretty cool with that. And of course, you get to see cool powers being used to blowing things up

PI: Well, of course.

Harley: But then with Batman, I also like it because it's just a lot of psychological things that are involved that. Makes the reading a little more fun.

PI: Okay. So, who is your favorite superhero and why?

Harley: Uh oh...gosh I was afraid you were going to ask that question! (laughing)

PI: Superhero or superheroes.

Harley: Okay. Pretty much the X-Men. And I like,...and a lot of people judge me for this. I like Scott Summers, uh Cyclops. I love Emma Frost. Um, anything with her in it I'll read. I said Harley Quinn. I like the if they're kind of an antagonist or some sort of anti-superhero like Deadpool and stuff like that. I really, I really enjoy them because usually

they're funny and witty and they also are the outcasts of superheroes. And I like Cyclops because I just don't know. I have a thing for Boy Scout guys.

PI: (laughing) Boy Scout guys. How do you relate to your favorite superheroes?

Harley: Well depending on which one it is. Uh, I like Emma Frost because she doesn't give a shit really. She just kind of knows that she's, you know, good at what she does and she doesn't let other people bring her down. I like cyclops because he's a leader and I've been in a lot of leadership roles so I kind of relate to that and understand like the hard decisions he usually has to make. And I like Harley Quinn because she is just chaotic and sometimes I – I don't know just, I really like chaotic characters. Both the movies and the comics. So, I like to kind of pool in on the – whenever I read them, kind of read myself in the alternate personality.

PI: Absolutely. Who doesn't?

Harley: (laughing) Yeah.

PI: (laughing) That's awesome. Okay. So do you ever notice like your thoughts and emotions while reading comic books?

Harley: Yeah. Uh sometimes I'll have thoughts of how I can relate it to my life. Sometimes the emotions of something happening in it that I didn't agree with. I'll get angry or get excited. Um, especially when they kill characters off. Usually that kind of sparks some sort of emotion. Or, if it's more like a political thing, like uh I read – I got into after Astonishing X-Men. I got into the Ultimate X-Men. Uh so I was able to really start it from the beginning because it was pretty new still. And even though it was alternate timeline, different telling of the stories still gave me a general idea of the characters.

PI: Right

Harley: And a lot of it I got to for the X-men, I get to read back from like - from when they were hiding to when they were being hunted, when they had to register uh to the government. So sometimes reading it, you're just like "huh that can be you know applied to this thing that is happening in the world right now."

PI: How do comic books make you feel emotionally after reading them?

Harley: Usually satisfied even if something bad happen. I feel pretty good. Um, just reading other people's lives, reading other fantasies. Reading. So I'm just like "oh that counts."

PI: Yeah. Okay. In reading superhero comics, what do you learn about others?

Harley: Learn about others? I don't really perceive others when I read it. I usually – I guess I could like the Emma Frost way just not let others get to me. So I can adapt certain type of personalities that help me better to lessen the views of others. But nothing real. I don't really bring other people in my life into comic books. Usually just stick to me.

PI: Fair enough.

Harley: I do like playing the game with my friends of what comic book character do we think the others are. So that's the only time probably. (laughing)

PI: (laughing) Alright. What was your most memorable comic book event, battle, character, etc.? Kind of in that realm. What was most memorable thing?

Harley: I would have to say in Astonishing X-Men. I think it was the giant size Astonishing X-Men where Joss Whedon was ending his kind of role with that. And they're trying to save earth of course and uh, I think Kitty Pride had to sacrifice herself, sorry spoilers, had to sacrifice herself. And um Emma Frost was uh, telepathically linked to her and said to her "I can make you not afraid if that's what you want. I can take that away from you" and she said "no I want to feel the way I feel" and kind of just let her go. So something like that always sticks with me or phrases from Emma Frost after she betrayed everybody. Uh and she is able to turn her skin to diamond. She goes by the definition I am my own best friend. For girls, a best friend are diamonds. So things like that, like uh, kind of cold, uh like one-liners. You walk away from them and kind of drop the mic.

PI: Yeah. (laughing)

Harley: (laughing) Yeah, that's cool. So, things you wish you could say in life and not have anyone actually rebuttal.

PI: Sure

Harley: But stuff like that. That was a good battle that I liked. Um, brought in a lot of outside heroes for that too.

PI: Yeah it did. Okay. So, lets stick with those example then. What really made those memorable for you?

Harley: Memorable – I just – I don't know. The spark of so much emotion from it. Uh someone, anyone who's self-sacrificing. I always feel strong emotion to that. Uh, so usually just kind of sticks in my head.

PI: Okay. You kind of touched on this a little bit earlier, but how have comic books and superheroes influenced your life?

Harley: So it definitely helped me uh, coming out. Um, maybe not help me with coming out, but helped me kind of cope and go into a different world after I came out or while I'm working on it. Because with X-Men, they're born with a gene that makes them uh, who they are: mutants. And their tagline is people fear what they don't understand. Which I make that pretty applicable to the gay gene. Uh, and people usually not having have views on them. But I keep it still fun because they are able to bounce back. They have high resilience. So I just kind of keep that with me too.

PI: Okay. Excellent!

Harley: So yeah. High resilience development from it saying "oh they can survive being hunted, I can survive a few bad words." (laughing)

PI: (laughing) Interesting take.

Harley: (laughing) A little extreme but you know.

PI: No, it's good. It's not good that you get the bad words.

Harley: Well that's rare but I prep myself for it too. Just pull an Emma Frost one liner and walk away.

PI: (laughing) There you go. Okay. So, this is the second part of this. Tell me how reading superhero comic books have impacted your morals, beliefs, etc.?

Harley: Morals and beliefs, I guess just helping develop the personality of sometimes there are hard decisions um and I think in the cartoon and movies it's kind of very linear to like uh you have to do the good thing. But in the comic book it kind of stretches on that theory and its more so sometimes the good things still has bad outcomes to other people. Sometimes the world isn't fair. So it just kind of developing that kind of you know you the best you can. You're just trying to survive. Of course trying to have the happiest life you can.

PI: Sure.

Harley: But not everything ends up – at the end of the episode not everyone walks away you know happy, alive, and rich. (laughing)

PI: (laughing) Yeah, exactly.

Harley: And then they can kind of help broaden that aspect to my mind.

PI: Mmhmm okay. What do comic books mean to you?

Harley: Comic books mean to me that it's just a kind of way to leave what's going on, normal day and just kind of get a good story that maybe I can bring something out of and relate to. And just kind of follow along characters that you develop – or start developing some sort of tie to or emotion to. And just seeing how they live. So I think of them a little bit more than books. Because I like to read just regular books too but uh I think with this once you kind of have to wait weekly for or whenever, not weekly, monthly for it. It'd be awesome if it was weekly. It's a little bit more commitment than TV show. You can't really binge unless you start a whole new series and so that dedication within time develops a little bit stronger connection for me than other stuff.

PI: What have you learned about yourself from reading comic books?

Harley: Um, I think I can learn how to be a stronger person, look to characters and pool what I like from them. Uh, and even though most characters get a back story you see some sort of struggle they've had and they've overcome that. So, I think it kind of helped me with that. Overcome whatever stressors I've had in life's path, past or current. Uh, and just kind of see how to become an overall well rounded person. Kind of going back to that increasing my resilience to whatever stress or anything like that.

PI: Right. Okay. How do comic books currently impact your life?

Harley: Currently, I'm not doing very good job keeping – going to the comic book store and getting my new ones. But, I have the apps so I read all the old ones. Uh, so here – I read the – I do pick and choose what I want to read now. Uh, I was trying to read all the old X-Men but now depending on how stressed I am or how upset I am about anything that's happened to me I try to find issues that I remember reading, either the character has dealt with or gone through the same thing. Uh, so I'll usually read those as kind of an outlet of oh that's what I'm going through right now. (laughing)

PI: (laughing) Okay. Have a few more questions.

Harley: Yeah, no problem.

PI: How can comic books impact your future?

Harley: I think to kind of go back to the last question on how I can search for what I'm looking for now and can be applied in the future too. Because I know what I'm feeling now either won't be applied or there will be different stressors or there will be different events that different characters are dealing with. And I can still use that as an outlet of kind of just seeing – maybe not advice but just kind of getting a different perspective of how writers write around that issue. So it can definitely be some sort of outlet for just trying to find some, some source of or method of solving a problem.

PI: Okay. Here's two more questions. What does comic book reading say about you?

Harley: What does comic rating say about me?

PI: Reading

Harley: Oh, okay. Um, probably that I'm geeky or nerdy.

PI: Okay. Tell me more

Harley: But I love that aspect of me or that personality of me. I don't shame that. I think just certain people when they hear comic books which I know now can be – they think of the superhero ones which are the ones I read. But there are a lot more uh either adult or uh mystery ones, things like that. Or they follow movies which is same plot just with the pictures. Um, so I think people still go back to that you read the either the newspaper or comics or the superhero comics which I do um that usually the persona of being like a little geeky and nerdy but I like that. I mean I don't hide that about me to students, friends, family. Uh, so...

PI: Well that's the second part of this question. So what do you think others like family, friends, peers, community think about, think comic book reading says about you?

Harley: They usually – at first they thought it was kind of childish and little nerdy. Uh, or that I'll probably grow out of it. Uh, I think my mom especially thought that whenever I asked for my 15th birthday she thought that's something that would probably happen earlier in my life but then she met with co-workers whose husbands in their 40s were still reading it and stuff like that. Uh, so starting out people kind of thought there. Now, they just know it's a part of me. They don't really think anything less of it. They just kind of think of it as me watching some certain TV show I guess. But now I center myself with so many friends who do it that's very normal so people who are outside of that little social norm then they maybe at first think it's a little odd but I think the way you present it which I do its just normal. I don't care then they just kind of just drop it.

PI: Okay. Alright that does it for this portion. We'll go ahead and stop here.

<End of interview>

2/26/2016
Participant 007
“Peter”

PI: Alright. Let's start here. Let me just ask you this. So how often do you read comic books?

Peter: Uh several times a week for sure.

PI: Okay. Can you approximately put that in time? How much a week would that be?

Peter: Oh boy. Um, depending on how busy I am with work and other things.

PI: Right

Peter: You know there are factors. I would say really I devote maybe 90 minutes a week to actually reading but there are so many ancillary aspects of comic books that probably take up a lot more of my thought space and time.

PI: Mhmm Sure

Peter: So yeah.

PI: So when did you begin reading superheroes in comic books?

Peter: I think when I was probably 10 or 12 um because there were – alright kind of remember my – I don't know. Do you want stories? Or do you want (laughing) just information?

PI: I can be both.

Peter: I mean I just remember about the Todd McFarlane era when he started on Spidey because uh of my little brother who was three years younger. He had a friend that had all kinds of little pull outs and posters and things like that. We would go play at his house and he'd come over and suddenly there was like – there were Spidey related things, constantly popping up around the house and we suddenly got into Dark Hawk of all things. And which turned into one of the books we really both come to admire a lot um and then of course there were some kids on my bus in about the – probably the fifth grade I remember always – they were reading Spidey and whatever else. There was like this – which Spidey book was better and I'm like it's all Spidey but not like getting it. But then I think uh for some reason one of the other neighborhood kids was into Robotech and I wanted to find those books. I felt like it was tough around Stillwater to get comics but I

would go see Darren at Comic Connection when he was on Main. And uh so it was – it was weird just trying to figure out what I wanted to get.

PI: Yeah.

Peter: And how I wanted it.

PI: How to start.

Peter: Accumulate it.

PI: Absolutely. So what draws you to continue to read comic books now?

Peter: Honestly, I'm going to say some with titles brand loyalty. No kidding. Like why do you buy the same Nikes or whatever.

PI: (Overlapping) Yeah

Peter: I mean I'm always going to love Spiderman but the creative teams and the direction that that character has gone is especially the last 10 years is infuriating. Since I grew up with Spidey being one way and now you got a guy who 6-10 years older than I am who knew how Spidey was when he was a kid and has like has changed the entire thing back to the way it was when he was young but he's got the creative power. And I'm fascinated by that aspect of things. How – and that's one of the things that keeps me reading is paying attention to the corporate side of uh of these franchises. Like I don't really get into DC Comics for any number of reasons and I think that's also brand loyalty. So I stuck with Marvel especially since it's something I can wrap my head around since I been in it all these years.

PI: Sure.

Peter: So there's that. And then like I get really – I'm really excited right now that like the Star Wars title is back in Marvels licensing especially that's all a Disney thing. So on a corporate level I'm fascinated by watching all that happen. Especially since that laces into my career being a – since Disney and Marvel Cinematic Universe and all that ties into film making which is what I do. I – so there's that and additionally I just like good fiction.

PI: Okay.

Peter: And uh I've said that for at least 10 years. When I was living in Los Angeles I was working for uh CBS Viacom doing a giant Star Trek auction and a buddy of mine that worked with me, we always kept trying to wrap our heads around why it was that we were so into the stories that we like and why we like Star Trek so much and it was

because we liked good fiction. So, I – I mean nonfiction is a great deal and I'm doing – I do a lot with that all the time.

PI: Sure.

Peter: Like somebody writing consistent fiction with a backlog of things you can go back to if you want to check it out. And I feel like I'm on the inside of a story line going back and just being like "oh wait I can refer back to issue 361 or something because I remember that story arch" and does that play into this thing right now. And uh I get suckered too. I mean that's – if I – if there's a third reason, I get suckered into it. Like I like the play hero clicks the table top game.

PI: Oh, yeah. I've heard of that.

Peter: And uh yeah I mean it's you got a new set coming out every so often an expansion on the game. They retire older figures uh and they introduce the same guy with the updated rules or with a new rule set and it's fascinating trying to come up with a team that you can compete against another guy's team with.

PI: Sure.

Peter: And it's like okay this Spidey works better than that Spidey but if I'm playing against this guy and oh he's going to come out with you know robots or androids or I don't know what you know mystical characters. And so maybe I need us – maybe I need this iteration of that character so you get into that and suddenly you're like I remember why they made this version of this character and I want to go back and reread those stories.

PI: Cool

Peter: So it's never been a lot about just whatever is brand new.

PI: Right.

Peter: I always wanted to go back – I like back issues you know.

PI: So, that kind of takes us to now. So what types of comic books and superheroes do read about and why?

Peter: Um, let's see. Um, I mean yeah like I say easily Spidey has been always somebody I can identify with. I was Peter Parker for a while you know. And uh I like – I like the idea that once I figured out who I really – who I really was a person I developed my self-confidence. I always felt like Spidey – he puts on a mask, he goes out and punches up on some thugs and he occasionally has to nail somebody who can equal him in power. And

that's a different thing you know. I think about that and you never see this character talk about his self-confidence. But then you get these cool moments where like Tony Stark will hire him and he's like dude I know who you are and you can be so much better. You don't have to be out there doing this. Those things fascinate me. And that kind of things sticks with me. I like uh I like Daredevil because I feel like it's a really realistic attempt or realistic take on uh just like crime fighting. It's the crime the aspect there. Getting guys, you know? You have different superheroes who are tackling different types of problems or different types of people. And uh I'm drawn to people – drawn to characters that do more realistic things sometimes. But then you get away from that too. I mean the Avengers are tackling time traveling guys from the future.

PI: Yeah.

Peter: Or, they're you know – I never like the Avengers until maybe 2003 or something when I finally could wrap my head around what it was that they did as a team. And, hey we're kind of state sponsored superhero team. When I wrap – when I realized that – I think that's also when the Ultimates came out which is you know is the alternate take on – and so looking at that just being like imagine if we had these things going for us. And that was post September 11. And thinking about God if only we had Captain America you know. So I gravitate towards things that that I think are contemporary. Which is weird to say when I'm talking about liking to read books from 1968 you know.

PI: Mmhmm

Peter: So there's the vintage appeal when it comes to that because I like going back and looking at how is Ronan the Accuser different in one issue of Fantastic Four from 1972 than he is in the War of the King storyline where he's side-by-side with the Inhumans you know.

PI: Right.

Peter: I like and I think I'm still probably answering this question but I mean I like also uh characters that aren't forefront people. Which is weird now because licensing comes into play again. The X-Men like Marvel is not going to get the X-Men license back from Fox.

PI: Right.

Peter: Even though they have all the money in the world. And so now instead they're a big deal out of the Inhumans. Which is kind of a weird selfish thing to me. Because I'm looking at the Inhumans going like no these are my guys and I know all about them. And now suddenly It's like every, every sorority girl who is watching Agents of Shield knows

something about the Inhumans and I'm going we haven't even had a flag ship movie that involves these characters yet.

PI: (laughing) yeah.

Peter: So it's very odd out there. It's – It's kind of one of those things that like I – I gravitated something that I can call my own.

PI: Yeah. They'll have Black Bolt lunchboxes before too long.

Peter: Exactly! I'm looking forward to a Black Bolt costume shirt and I'm going I'd love to be able to walk around in one right now and no one would know what I was wearing. It would just be some strange geometric thing.

PI: That's right.

Peter: So stuff like that. Yeah, things that I can call my own.

PI: Okay.

Peter: I get – I like – I like superheroes that I can wrap my head around. But things can be completely fantastic too you know. I uh you can get into something like Grant Morrison writes and it's, it is like being in a, in a wake dream. You're never going to know what it's all lacing up to until he finishes this master work. And it's just the way he writes. So, it's not always about the characters, sometimes I'm following the writer.

PI: Sure.

PI: Yeah. That's perfect. So, diving a little bit more into that. Who is your favorite superhero or superheroes and why? Kind of touch on this a little bit earlier.

Peter: I mean it's hard to say that I don't - it's hard to say that Spidey isn't my favorite. It's just that he's been like for the last quarter of his existence the story that we all knew has been ripped off I feel like. Like the rug got pulled out from under us. Because of the new editor in chief insisting let's do this. You can see it so it's rough. It's like I wanted that character to be Spidey but that's you know you look at, you look at these characters and what it does to you. You have not a mytho so you don't have a – I'm trying to think of the right thing – a ritual. Somebody talked about this in the aspect of when gas prices went through the roof several years ago. I feel the same way about comic books. We have a ritual. We go to the store. We're picking up our books. If you're- if you're not a casual just like hey I go to the movies and I watch these characters. If you're buying the comics every week, because you're invested in that character and you're invested, that's a good word to think word to think of here.

PI: That is good.

Peter: You're, you're, you are keeping up with something that monthly, bi-monthly, whatever, whenever they release the book. And when you get there, and they're just like you got a new creative team that changes the look of the characters or whatever. Or something else. Every, every so often like a Guardians of the Galaxy like for a while that was my favorite book. And now they changed the team every six weeks it seems. And there is a new number 1 constantly coming out. And it's just hey we're all separated and we've all been captured and now we're all getting all back together and running away. And it's just like this is the same story over and over and over again. So it's hard to know who my favorites are any longer because even the characters who have been consistent for 30 of their 40 years of something have got, have got totally "yoinked." You know just so I mean I've got – just the other day I like – Dr. Strange I mean rarely you think about the guts that some of these guys have to have not the characters but the writing teams on we're going to do this and it's going to change everything for this character and like is that what you want because I quit reading Amazing Spiderman you know. I was heavily into, into Amazing Spiderman until that the Clone stuff. I didn't like Mark Bagley drawing it. Things change in comic books. You think that they're the same thing for all these decades, and I can't even imagine what it was like for kids when they were in like only doubly digit you know issues.

PI: Oh, sure.

Peter: I – you go back and read that and you're just like wow you know yeah the lizard is a tough opponent and now it's not something you really even pay attention to.

PI: Right.

Peter: Then hey let's bring back a character. You know I mean what it really dials down to uh I, I can't say who my favorite is but I'll tell you what, I love the entire 155 issue of Marvel's GI Joe.

PI: Okay.

Peter: And that's not even the same characters. You know that is a rotating you know it's just like hey here's – it's – I don't know if you can. For a guy like me, I'm more about the promise of the premise. As oppose to just the character. They killed Namor the Submariner in Squadron Supreme #1 like this month. Namor! The arguably first Marvel character was beheaded by Hyperions Eyebeams and I'm just like that's astonishing. But I don't feel anything about it.

PI: Expendable

Peter: That's the thing. How does – how does expendable – how do you make the world's first mutant get killed like that. Because they don't – that's another thing – I'll – in, in – like I say I'm a sucker I'm going to keep going and buying comic books but they are going to keep killing characters and bring them back in six months to a year to kill Captain America, back in 6 months less to kill Wolverine. Yeah there still Wolverine books.

PI: You did touch on this earlier when we were talking about I – you were Peter Parker – The question is how do you relate to your favorite superheroes? So, if you don't necessary have a favorite superhero, how do you relate to some of these characters?

Peter: I think that it uh boiling it all off and getting down to it, I think feeling different.

PI: Okay.

Peter: I don't know how different I feel anymore as a 38-year-old adult, you know.

PI: Sure.

Peter: But, I do feel different sometimes because I know that my mind works differently than other people's and I'm proud of that. It's how I solve problem and it's how I wrap my head around situations and things like that. Having interpersonal relationships with people and knowing I'm going to do this with this person versus doing something with you know the same or different, with a different person. But like looking like I love – I don't know. I mean it's finding the multiple personalities that must exist within each of us. I felt like Peter Parker as a kid. Even though I couldn't wrap my head around what it was. You know because Peter Parker was an adult when I was reading him.

PI: Right.

Peter: Like in 1990 or '92. And uh that was the 30th anniversary of Spidey about right when I was starting and getting those you know holographic covers and stuff like that. But going back and looking at them I'm going I'm not a Spiderman fan, I'm a Peter Parker fan. When you go in and you look at, I can read this book, this particular title in that franchise and this is more about Peter and his problems and yeah he's still web slinging and you know busting up on people and whatever he's doing, solving problems. But it's about his life choices with Mary Jane and you know whomever else, any of his friends, and then I go in and I'm like I love Magneto. Like I found – I, I went on a tear going through all of the Magneto appearances I could come up with because he is the ultimate at being different. He's a leader of people who are different, you know.

PI: Mmhmm

Peter: And since – and then he you know – is it a weird deal to think that everybody's different. Everybody-

PI: Sure.

Peter: different but everybody's the same. So you get older, you get to a point and your just like these characters who've villains you know Magneto is quantifiably one of the villains. He's on the cover of all the villainy, you know. Like if you know what I mean.

PI: Yeah. Absolutely.

Peter: (overlapping) I mean how can he not be. What does – that's the thing I do admire because if there's anything that's consistent the idea that he should grow beyond it you know. He's been a good guy, he's been a bad guy, all those things. Everybody's been a good guy and everybody's been a bad guy. It's situational. I've done the wrong thing.

PI: Sure.

Peter: Did I feel like it was the bad guy thing to do? Sometimes. Sometimes I would like hey yeah no I'm purposely choosing to do the wrong thing here because it's going to change the circumstances. And in my professional world it's something you have to do sometimes. Other times you're like I have to be the bad here so I can get this drunk person to chill out or something. You know you got to do strange stuff like that. And I – you – I take cues from these characters you know.

PI: Yeah, okay.

Peter: You really see them and you think about the grandiose aspect and you think about – when I look at what I do you know you see someone put a camera low and it makes an actor look huge and it's a big deal when you're looking at a movie screen. But like in a comic book, they're always in these statuesque poises and stuff like that. Inevitably that kind of like I say grandiosity I don't know if that's the appropriate word.

PI: That works.

Peter: I – it builds to like this how I'm going to solve this problem because this person is being childish. I'm going to make myself bigger and I'm going to start speaking in theatric fashion and boom things change.

PI: Absolutely.

Peter: You take cues from these characters that are heroes or villains or whatever and it's not like they aren't – they're not, you know they're not Bible characters but they're still it's still mythological characters still a pantheon of good guys and bad guys and stuff.

PI: Okay.

Peter: So, yeah. I mean characters have problems. Those are the characters that I like. Characters who have life problems, characters who have problems they can tackle. And it's amazing because you can go in uh one of my best friend and I, he brings this up over and over again talking about Spiderman and Captain America and Venom. There is some situation and I think it was in the Ultimate or the Maximum Carnage story.

PI: Oh okay.

Peter: And oh it's you know it's old as I am. It's old as I'm talking about way back there in like it's Carnage just got out of the institution and recruited a team of awful villains and they're literally killing people 10 at a time in New York and Spidey feels responsible for that and he teams up with Cloak & Dagger, he teams up with Nova for a little while, anybody who can help. You know and he ends up having to team up with Venom because Venom also feels responsible for Carnage. And so what it boils down to is Venom is like you help me eliminate Carnage then I'll help you do whatever I can. And Captain America gets involved at a certain point. And they end up not only capturing Carnage you know like his weakness is sonic stuff. Nailing it that way and what to do they do? Spidey turned that same Sonic weapon on Venom and captures Venom. And Venom is furious. He's like you broke your oath to me you know you broke a promise to me. Captain America would never have done that. And Spidey's like I'm Spiderman. Captain America is a living legend. Captain America would have always been able to find a way to solve a problem but I'm just Spiderman. And I'm like that brings a lot of things into focus you know. There are these lessons to be taken from these stories and they pop up constantly.

PI: So, do you ever notice your thoughts and emotions while reading comic books?

Peter: Oh, totally!

PI: Tell me about that.

Peter: I mean you can be – I don't know if this is as much being suckered like I was talking about but this is just like being directed. The same thing with films, same thing with music. I'm easily approached by those things and made to feel the way I'm supposed that they want me to. You put on music and you're just pounding while I'm like music is better than coffee sometimes for helping me through the type of work I do, like getting to some place in a car. You know I'm not reading comics while I'm driving but like the – you can be emotionally uh directed by the comic books too because of the you know the frames, the panels get bigger and there's less information in them. I go back and I think about like the Ultimates Volume 1 uh there fighting in Arizona, there's this

alien invasion you know and there's, there's a Nazi shape changing alien that's, that was antagonizing Captain America in World War II and here's this guy still alive who is involved with these aliens and it's all a plot to I don't know what to destroy the Earth or take over the world thing. They never exactly explained what those aliens were doing but then Captain America has beaten this alien half to death and it's not making any difference. He's like separated his torso from his legs with his shield of all things. Crashed a jet into it and the guys, the aliens is like you can't, you can't tell me that you can defeat me you know. It's whatever. Why don't you just surrender and you get into that next splash page and Captain America says does this A stand for France and I'm like that, that moment was so emotionally exciting for me that like I remember where I was when I read that. It was as exciting a moment as – I mean nobody died but it was like the Challenger exploding or it was like any other weird disaster. I remembered that so well. I remember almost wanting to leave – I was at an IHOP in Norman and I just got there and I'm reading it and I'm eating and I'm reading it and I got to that and I just like – I made a noise and I, I thought people were going to turn around and look at me but nobody cared. Everybody was talking about what they were doing. You know yeah that stuff like gets very exciting. I cried in uh reading um All Star Superman. There was a moment in that where I mean through that entire storyline Superman knows he's dying. He's done – he did something, some super feat that got him really close to the sun and it hyper activated his molecules and of course gets power from the sun and he knows that he's dying. He goes and he talks to somebody about it and they said yeah this is the scientific reason why you're dying. But there is some other weird prophecy going on. And it says that Superman will do uh like 12 miraculous things before he dies. And so there you know through the whole story you're figuring out what those are. And one of them, one of them he got all this stuff to do, and his mortality he's finally mortal you know and in the mist of all that there's this little goth kid standing on the top of – standing on a tall building and he's thinking of about jumping. And you keep seeing Superman doing normal stuff.

PI: Sure.

Peter: Normal stuff for Superman and he takes this timeout to land behind this kid and give him a hug. And that kids fall into him and you're like this kid would never like Superman and there he is suddenly like I'm here to save your life. And it doesn't matter because you know as a reader he didn't have to save him from falling. He just was there at this critical moment and the kid changed his mind because somebody cared. And I mean that made me weep because it was such, it was symbolic of what Superman is.

PI: Absolutely.

Peter: It's not – I was telling my little, my 6-year-old boy about this the other day and it's not, even when it's not necessary reading the comic books it's the idea of the characters that are so important that makes me and yes I get emotional for real.

PI: Absolutely.

Peter: I mean you have to see like the trailer for Superman Returns when you've got that – those trailers are just like boom you, you want – you feel what they want you to feel because they want you to go pay to see the movie.

PI: Mmhmm.

Peter: Some people are just going to do it. But like the avenue that they went for that trailer when Jor-el, Superman's father, is voice overing and it's Marlon Brando which was oh so thank you you know lacing things into stuff that we were already well aware of. And he says uh oh there are great people Kal-el they wish to be. They only lack the light to show them the way. And it for this reason above all else that I send you my son and that's like I mean it's Christ. The- in that- you know that's the greatest story ever told.

PI: Sure.

Peter: And to think about that that every time I think about that yes I get tight in the chest. Even then you know in Thor, the Thor movie was the same thing. Thor had to die. Thor gave up his mortality or gave up his life, he was immortal essentially and he was – it was taken away from him. Then he gets smacked by the Destroyer and dies. And he comes back and it's Jesus. And I mean that part is astonishing. Yes, you feel things when you get to those moments with these characters.

PI: Sure, absolutely.

Peter: Of course.

PI: So, on a general level, how do you – how do comic books make you feel emotionally after reading them?

Peter: Um, oh boy. Sometimes furious.

PI: Okay.

Peter: I mean you – because that's like what we talked about. Generally, you get something you absolutely love and somebody comes along and ruins. You had the Ultimates, the Ultimates Volume 2, oh thank goodness you know this is, this is something I really I'm into. The arts the same from one 12 issue arch to the next. And the

characters, the characters are consistent then Ultimates 3 came out we, me and my guy, you know cause comic books are a communal thing to people.

PI: Absolutely.

Peter: Of course for the benefit. But like I mean I remember I was, I was living with a guy we talked about comic books every single day. We went to the store at the same time every week, we got our books. We'd be like hey it's Saturday let's go to a different store and check it out. Yeah comic books were huge to us when we lived together. And then we had a buddy that had worked at a comic book store with me a few years prior and he was now writing for DC at the time.

PI: Oh, cool.

Peter: So, a friend of mine that was working for DC and knew the guy who was writing the Ultimates Volume 3 and I was just like dude I want to go to dinner with you guys so I can throttle him because everything was so completely horrible, you know. You get those moments where you're like this has gone completely the wrong direction. You get in there uh it's like you know you get all these new number ones, you get all these just this constant relaunch or they're killing off a character that you really like. My buddy calls me up and he's like awe man they just killed Nightcrawler in X-Men it was really awesome. And I'm like yeah I just don't think I can care. Because they, they – death means nothing in these storylines. I think about it and I'm like I want to get in involved in writing comics so I can build my way up to going to comic con as the editor in chief at Marvel and saying death will not be deceived any longer, you know. Death is a personified character in Marvel comics.

PI: Yeah, it is.

Peter: And they, they constantly kill characters that show up again in no time. And I'm like there are only two or three of them that should be able to do that. Okay Jean Gray, we got that handled. But, so yeah I mean you get let down. That's something that I feel a lot of times. I'm let down that this is happening again.

PI: Okay.

Peter: And then now I don't feel anything. Namor, I love Namor. And he's been killed and I'm like how well how long is it going to be before he's brought back, you know. If they can write a way to make it make sense, it is the coolest thing ever. Grant Morrison like I say will do that. This is you know you get in there and you're just like I can't believe they reset this so well. But when it's good and you know it's good and you can't wait to get the next issue, that is a big feeling. That's a big deal. Uncanny Avengers I really, really, really liked that one because it was – that's some seriously like that's

seriously a gutsy book. You got some of the world's most powerful heroes trying to stop alternate reality earths.

PI: Sure.

Peter: From physically colliding. To the point where they have to destroy whole other worlds with duplicate populations. And they just can't do it but then this guy can for this reason or whatever.

PI: Sure.

Peter: That was a great book and every time I read that I was like this is worth more to me than what I'm paying for because this is bringing me a great story. The Walking Dead with all their surprise, all their shocks you know and now I'm getting to the point that their you know are mutual comics proprietor is like hey man if you want to sell those off right now I mean the story is starting to plateau with the prices and everything. And I got a buddy who's like no don't do it. And I'm like I know but I don't want to, I don't want to touch the thing because I feel like I'm devaluing every time I look at them. But I mean yeah.

PI: Okay.

Peter: You feel those things and now I feel even more like I'm reading, I'm rereading all my Marvel Masterworks Spidey stories.

PI: Yeah.

Peter: From the beginning with my son and we're never going to forget that in our lives.

PI: Absolutely. That's awesome

Peter: That's, that thing is – that's rad. You just get in there and like craven the hunter trying to explain a character like that to a 6-year-old and I'm like oh man how much do I like this guy anymore. All this taxidermy or something you know.

PI: (laughing) yeah

Peter: You wrap your head around that and like what are the motivations of these characters. Well this guy's stealing diamonds just so he can create a device to make him young again. Why would he want to do that? That's, that's a whole new thing of feeling.

PI: Absolutely. So when reading superhero comic books what do you learn about others?

Peter: Others what? Other people, or?

PI: Yeah.

Peter: Other comics?

PI: Just in general, others. Other people.

Peter: Um, I – along those lines one thing that gets me in constantly thinking about just civilians.

PI: Okay.

Peter: You know, you read those old 60s, the Silver Age Spidey and stuff like that and there – or even, even the old Avengers and Iron Man and they're just cops trying to do their jobs and some of them don't like the vigilantes, some of them do, some – you know it's always fascinating when a char- when one of these heroic characters talks to someone who is legitimately doing the job you know. And like oh this guy comes along and you know we had evidence to collect, we have a judiciary process. That stuff. I think about that and I think about that more now I mean I've got a project that I'm working on.

PI: Sure.

Peter: And it's all about evidence and blah, blah. That's I mean it's – when I think about, when I think about others I mean you think about the X-Men and it's barely – it is, it is – X-Men is a banner title for anyone who (deep breath) in that time period was different. So if you were not white, if you were not a male, the X-Men was probably your book. If you were gay, if you were black, if you were not I mean even women I don't know. I mean if you were not mainstream America as the world was marketing things to you then that was your book. And it's – you think about when that came out and now and oddly enough you know I, I over the years before I even knew what – I grew up pretty sheltered I'd say. And you know you're reading comic books and I'm reading all these stories about the X-Men and I'm just like okay they're cool and not wrapping my head around why are these – why is this remotely possible. Why this a thing that these characters. Where did they get these powers and what's it all about and they're being mutants. I never – I don't know why in all those books I never picked up on A: nobody knew that they were mutants, B: They were mutant superhero team going out to protect other mutants and everybody. And C: that people did not like mutants. They didn't – I just don't think that really came through to me until I was reading X-Men in the mid-90s. Because I think that the author started making a big deal out of that you know.

PI: Sure.

Peter: And then it was fascinating because as I got to be a teenager and more people were figuring out if they didn't know already they were gay, the X-men was their book if they

liked comics at all. And it was always like – and it was strange for me feeling different. Looking at these, these other kids and going these kids are totally open about liking comic books because they're really caging themselves about this other thing. And that, that's, that's fascinating. I couldn't articulate that until I don't know.

PI: Absolutely.

Peter: I couldn't figure out. I never got it you know. But you think about now and I'm just like that, that was, that was pretty interesting to me.

PI: Excellent.

Peter: It is now anyways. It's interesting I just didn't understand it at all then.

PI: Yeah. Perspective comes in after a while.

Peter: Yeah and you start thinking about it and I was like oh that guy he was gay, that guy was gay, that guy was totally gay. And we all knew it but he still liked the you know – because when I was a teenager liking comics was occasionally like oh that's nerdy. I'm like dude the nerds have inherited the earth. It is everything's nerds. Everything is – I remember the popular kids when I was in – because I mean a cliquish elementary school. I remember the popular kids – I could have talked about Star Wars and I would've got ruffed on real like oh of course you do. But like you know some kid who was playing soccer and whatever else I remember a particular guy like hey I was watching Return of the Jedi last night and I'm like how come he gets to talk about that and ya'll think it's the coolest thing in the world.

PI: (laughing) yeah

Peter: That stuff – I mean that kid was flash Thompson you know. (laughing) I mean you think about it and it's like that's, that's how I thought about others man. I mean I wished for superpowers every time I blew out candles because I wanted something that would take me away from it. Because others made me feel poorer you know as a person. It, it – I – that's the difference I had growing up. I felt very much sequestered from everyone else. I don't know how it would have been any different you know I know what my background was. I'd say I had a better background, a better upbringing than most people.

PI: sure.

Peter: And at the same time in the middle of and I can't believe it formative years goes to the third grade but like we went on sabbatical like my, my father had a different, had a job to go away to do. And we did it and, or he did it and when we came back everything was different. That may just be the caddy kids from my side of town.

PI: Yeah.

Peter: Treating me and my brother like that but for whatever reason it was just like that.

PI: So let me ask you this then. You touched on this a little bit earlier with a few examples but what was your most memorable comic event, battle, characters, etc.? Most memorable.

Peter: Oh man. There are a lot. But like dialing it in I mean.

PI: yeah.

Peter: Really that, that issue of the Ultimates with Captain America that I talked about. I guess that's probably Ultimates Vol 1 #10 or 11 something like that. I think that's a 12 issue story I can't remember. That was huge because it was just so – it was amazing. Uh one of the first comic books I ever read I found a copy of Batman - it was an annual. Batman Armageddon 2001 so it was probably like the 1990 annual. And I remember being at one of these – I just found it. It was blowing around in the wind and it was wet.

PI: (laughing) Really?

Peter: Yeah, yeah. I was walking around over by the old Walmart over on the east side of town. And somebody just lost it I guess. Flew out of somebody's car window. I don't know. And I picked up that thing up and I was like oh a comic book. I dried it out. Separated the pages. And then I read that thing. And that story was astonishing. Because it was a sci-fi story in a Batman which is pretty much based in crime solving you know.

PI: Sure.

Peter: But uh it was awesome because it was the near future and Batman had been framed for, for the murder of the Penguin. And so he turned himself in on his principals alone. And then he realized I got to get out of here and solve this crime. And he does and it's a time loop because a character from the future had come back to find out if Batman was going to end up being the world's greatest super villain. And that was the reoccurring cross genre theme for all of DC Comics in that year. But that – but the way they told that story defined aspects of how I wanted to write my own stuff.

PI: What made it memorable for you?

Peter: It was just – it was like uh like Star Trek does it all the time they, they you know hey it's the – it was like, it was like somebody just plugged a gift out of the sky and handed it to Batman you know. Batman by the way - we just shared this possible future experience and you're never going to become that thing you fear and despise the most. And at that beginning of that story he was feeling like – he says this time is always

against me, I know it's only a matter of time before something happens to me. I'm getting older. I won't be able to do this or take a major injury. Something bad is going to happen. It was like Fight Club. The statistical probability that something is going to happen over so much time leads to blah blah blah.

PI: Sure.

Peter: And at the end of it, he felt completely different you know.

PI: Mmhmm.

Peter: It's Kirk at the beginning of Star Trek 2 and at the end, he feels young for some reason because of that entire experience. I've never been able to peg that one down exactly.

PI: Yeah.

Peter: But they didn't elaborate on it. I mean that's a major book. And like – and GI Joe #21 the infamous the silent issue like that was one of the first books we ever had. My dad picked that one up for my little brother just because he wasn't reading much yet and it didn't have any words. And that defined erroneously for me what comic books for years before I ever ended up buying my own stuff.

PI: So, let me ask you. How have comic books and superheroes influenced your life?

Peter: Oh, man. I mean

PI: If you can put it all into a –

Peter: (overlapping) by now you must know I can't put it all in little thing but man.

PI: The best that you can. How have they influenced your life?

Peter: It's almost as corny as people wearing what would Jesus do.

PI: Okay. Tell me more.

Peter: You know things. It's like – how do I...every situation has a different outcome and they all have probable outcomes. You think about it and you know I'm not usually thinking about it along the lines of specifically what would – how would Wolverine handle this or how would Hawkeye handle it.

PI: Yeah.

Peter: Or something like that. But it's the essence of the idea that, that comes into being at that moment I know how to handle this because I've seen someone attempt to tackle a

similar situation in 7 issues of blah blah blah or something like that you know. And that's not ex – and, and, and it can – it's the medium too.

PI: Yeah.

Peter: The comic books give you the medium. Television episodes do the same thing. Movies. It's about character you know. It's cross media opportunities to tell a tale just like people sitting around campfires in the dark ages telling stories or singing songs or reciting poetry.

PI: Yeah

Peter: These are short character plays, character studies and you know these, these characters help you develop a character. Something that laces into who you are. I mean I see a guy – I used to see a guy around. He'd come in and buy comics and he had a tattoo from GI Joe on the inside of his whole forearm. And I'm like I know how that guy handles situations. And I mean you know you see somebody with a – see somebody on a Hawkeye jacket and you're – how am I going about things. Just that kind of stuff.

PI: Yeah. So tell me how reading superhero comic books have impacted your morals, and beliefs, etc.?

Peter: Oh, man. I mean there's no greater thing to be said that with great power, comes great responsibility. I'm already a responsible person. I'm an Eagle Scout. I'm a Tai-Kwando black belt. Those things add up. You gravitate towards characters who are doing it right you know. You gravitate – when you're, when you're a guy that thinks about the consequences of their actions you want to read about people who are confronted with things that you can easily wrap your head around. Or you want to see the complicated things get solved. Even through major duress. Whatever it costs your hero. So you got your Spidey and your Captain America. And you got guys that are just like yeah I, I never kill. I never kill anybody you know. And then you go like okay what if I did kill people? Well you're reading the Punisher, Wolverine, and whatever else. Where – what if they were you know – you think about - those things dictate what it is you know. How am I – and then I think like you mentioned Dr. Strange a minute ago. I love Dr. Strange. I would love to be Dr. Strange. I – because the idea of what Dr. Strange is to me is the idea that this guy is sacrificing so much of his human mortality by cloistering himself. Spending his time gathering in, in an insane amount of arcane knowledge to defend us from demons that exist on other planes of reality that want to be here for whatever reason. And I'm like oh man. What a sacrifice you know. Daredevil has his little neighborhood that he protects.

PI: Mmhmm

Peter: I'm like that's admirable. Yeah he gets out and he does things in the city. He occasionally gets out there and has to go to a – I was like why does he in Latveria. Like recently he was in Latveria and I'm like what is Daredevil in Latveria? Like his stuff is confine you know.

PI: Mmhmm

Peter: Yeah, I mean all of these characters help, help the idea of you know of what it is of decision making and, and all of that.

PI: Okay.

Peter: All of these guys.

PI: What do comic books mean to you?

Peter: What do they mean? Um...

PI: Yeah, what do they mean to you?

Peter: Obviously, a lot. But like putting that into perspective – I never been a “comic books for investment guy.” Like money is clearly is not the issue. Why am I dropping \$4 per book or why am I going in and buying expensive– you know \$10 back issues sometimes. Because the story, the character, the idea is worth way more to me than some dollars. Because I can just – you know I can just keep making money. If I'm not making money, I'm not buying anything. And then I go back and I'm really reading stuff. But like – and, and oh man, it's a whole new thing now being a dad. I mean little – you know it's in – it's only seconds before a little kid is going to be like oh yeah I'm into that and they're like well you're into that well tell me about it I mean. I've been showing my son Star Trek episodes lately and I've been like I said we're reading Spiderman one book after another. And I'm like clearly he's not going to be nearly into Nick Fury agent of shield as much as he would be Spidey or the Avengers or something. And I'm, I'm like he's 6 so these simpler, less convoluted storylines from when the books were brand new are something he really digs. So that's, that's something it is a shared experience.

PI: Perfect.

Peter: When you, when you know like I said I lived with, lived with a guy who was one of my comic book customers from when I worked with the, at the store. And then we had our buddy who was actually in writing and you know it's a shared experience. It is an opportunity. It's just another thing to get together with somebody. I'm not going to lie man. I, I think pretty much broke up with one of my best girlfriends because we had plenty to talk about but we didn't have this to talk about. I'm like – I felt like in a city the size of L.A. I damn out to be able to encounter and strike up a good relationship with

somebody that I can talk about something that was that important to me about as much as I wanted to talk about it, you know. And now I'm in Oklahoma again and it's not like that you know. You got to take what you can – it's just not the same. The dating thing is not the same. But now it's like every 20-year-old girl is reading comics. (laughing) And it's just okay what are you reading. Harley Quinn and I'm like yeah you and everybody else. Okay. Pass! (laughing)

PI: (laughing)

Peter: You just – I'm like what are you reading? Oh I, I really like you know. I like Grant Morrison. Interesting let's sit down. Let's get a – let's have a beer. Let's get a coffee. Let's talk about that you know. Yeah. It's strange. I'm like oh yeah here's a girl who is 23 that I should, that I have nothing else in common with but she reads uh gah I don't know you know oh I'm reading the Walking Dead. Well alright you're reading it at least you know.

PI: Something

Peter; Maybe we should talk I don't know. LA it'd be like cool we're going to be friends and you're going to be friends with all these people now. And we're going to hang out and blah blah blah you know. I mean it, it's a social – it's a gigantic comic – comics are a giant social thing. More than they've ever have been especially because of the success of the feature films.

PI: Oh, absolutely.

Peter: You know, I mean Iron Man. God bless Jon Favreau for, for uh casting the best possible guy, Robert Downey Jr. And that's another thing that like when it comes to feeling about stuff I mean I feel proud of Robert Downey Jr because he took that the right way. He's like man thank you, you made me Hollywood A-lister. I will never screw this up. A guy who had drug and alcohol problems all through his youth who got up there and could I mean – yeah that man I mean – suddenly the actors are as important to us as the characters. What would it do to have to suddenly recast Samuel L Jackson as Nick Fury, you know.

PI: (laughing) Yeah

Peter: What would it do to have to recast Chris Evans, I mean. You know that's a horrible prospect. Please you know.

PI: It'd be tough.

Peter: Bring Shane Black into Iron Man 3 who cares just don't – it was frustrating personally for a guy. I liked Terrence Howard a lot from, from other shows and then War

Machine. I never got to see him suited up as War Machine. It was Don Cheadle instead like man you're killing me people. Can we just not get this stuff together.

PI: Absolutely. So what have you learned about yourself from reading comic books?

Peter: Oh, man. Without any just silly, funny answers um (laughing) I cant help some or silly answer. Organization, man.

PI: Okay.

Peter: I mean I don't have a key –I know how to take care of my stuff.

PI: Okay.

Peter: Because of comic books. I know how to create metaphors with some people you know.

PI: Sure.

Peter: It's hard for me clearly to be concise about stuff. And you know you sit there boring people with long tales of things like you know I'm sitting there with my mother at dinner or something and I flip the channel and we hit the X-Men. Oh yeah she likes Hugh Jackman. And it's like okay so what this is all about and blah blah blah and whatever and she's like yeah I'd rather just watch the movie. Okay. I mean stuff like I mean it's just

PI: Yeah.

Peter: It's – that's really abstract but

PI: that's good.

Peter: I mean I, I – one of the things that gets me is character story arcs and stuff like that. The patience of telling a story properly. Not only do I work on films, I'm writing them and I'm trying to – I mean I'm writing a comic book or at least a superhero themed story literally like 2 days ago I was working on it.

PI: cool.

Peter: And I'm like this is something that would make a comic book. It would make a kickass comic book T.V. series. Here's what I'm doing with it. Here's where it's going. Being able to see past two or three episodes, or two or three issues, and being able to uh orchestrate an appropriate work flow to get my character from this point to that point where I can change the entire story and then in the next season do this, you know. It's, it's being – it's like, like some of my – it's like they say, if you want to write scripts you got to read scripts.

PI: Mmhmm

Peter: Like well I'm not writing comic books exactly but I can – I'm reading the heck out of what I like and at this point I feel like I can put together something that is original in content and do something with it. So, I feel like on a creative level comic books help.

PI: Really?

Peter: In that regard, a lot. I, I kind of traded out of being able to like when I was in high school I was pretty reasonable artist. I never got to be a good sketch artist because I traded out of it. I felt like I traded it for a bit of music and then whatever and I got away from that and now I'm really focus – I've been focusing on writing for years. So, I mean seeing, seeing the appropriate story beats is something that comics have done for me for sure.

PI: So, how do comic books impact your current life now?

Peter: Oh, man. Financially. (laughing)

PI: (laughing) Okay. What else

Peter: I mean for real. I mean I, I – they're there for me. When I don't have – I've been, I've been broke twice in the last couple of years because the jobs haven't come up. Like, I, I just feel terrible. I don't want to leave because my son's here. He needs me. He doesn't just need me to come up with money. He needs me. He lives in another city an hour away and I'm just like I live half way between him and where my work is in another city another hour away. So it's like what am I supposed to do. Do I leave and go to another market and not see my boy anymore. I have a hard enough time getting him on the phone now you know. And I've gone out of town. I think about that stuff and I've done it and I think about it and I'm like – when I'm sad – when I'm upset I mean I'll just go, I'll go look at back issues you know or – when I was in New York working on a movie and I, I would just – where are the comic book stores. I had a great time while I was there but I wanted my son and I missed him and I needed something familiar. Walk down the street oh there's a guy with like 6 long boxes and he's just selling comics on the street. Awesome! And you go and you want to flip through it and I'm like yeah I want to buy all of these. But I'm barely breaking even on this job and the trips I'm not doing it. But then you know you get home and oh great now I can finally afford that Warren Ellis Doom 299 trade or whatever, some random thing that I saw a month ago you know. I was broke a while back and like I say it well I got probably like 3000 comic books in boxes upstairs, organized under my bed. And I'm like I'll pull something out and I'm like I'm going to read this storyline right now. Hey, here's 10 issues of blah blah blah and you go on this journey, and it's, it's like - you see people just smoking cigarette through their work. One cigarette after the other until they get out and I'm like yeah but I'm reading

comic books through my personal crisis you know. Here's – I get up in the morning and I'll read up a comic while I'm having coffee if people will leave me alone long enough so I can read it and uh and then I feel like okay cool. I feel like I've read something. It's fired something up in my mind. I can go get a shower in that dark, in that time that nothing happening. My mind focuses in on what I want to write you know.

PI: Yeah

Peter: These things are like – they're the steering wheel sometimes.

PI: So, how can comic books impact your future?

Peter: Honestly, if I could get anything more out of comic books it would be authentically to be writing. And to have a property that could be uh developed into some kind of teleplay, or screenplay for real. I mean that is definitely a goal. I'm not one of these – there's a lot of guys who read comics and I'm like man I can't wait for my comic blah blah and I'm just like yeah but at least I know how it's done. So I'm going to do it and take its time but I still have to report to jobs you know. These guys just pound out stuff and I feel like I at least got a realistic prospect going on. I feel like in the future, honestly I am probably going to sell off some of my stock and you know the opportunity is to spend that into something that has a better growth, the investment value over time. If I get rid of my Walking Dead now, while it's in it's appropriate condition and even some of the most recent books are still going for like \$40 or \$50 on ebay it's just kind of wow while that show is hitting, I mean cool, I'll still have the reader copies because that's the deal I'm going to make with who, whoever I move them with.

PI: Mmhmm

Peter: And then uh you know if an issue 1 of something like that is going for 1 to 4 grand then I'm probably going to sit that aside. And I'm like cool I'm going to get other books that I like more that will continue to accrue over time in a different graph. That's something that I feel like I'll get into a little bit. But I never wanted to sell off anything.

PI: Sure. So what do comic book reading say about you?

Peter: Uh, (laughing) that I'm a long enough timeline. It I mean on a long enough timeline, if you got something that you like, if you love it that at some point it doesn't matter what anybody else thinks you know. Like I said growing up I think that comic book reading was something that was even for kids. Comic books are for kids. That's what they always said. You go to a comic book convention, you're some kind of weirdo you know. It's not like that anymore. I was always mainstream even when I was different. Maybe that's what it means. I don't know. I don't know if that's mutually exclusive. Uh (laughing) what else I mean...(pause)...

PI: What do you think others for example family, friends, peers, community think comic book reading says about you? You kind of just touched on this a little bit.

Peter: Yeah

PI: Tell me a little more

Peter: I mean really I feel like some people, my mother maybe, he latched onto something that he's always loved and he stuck with it, and there's nothing wrong with that you know. That's probably her mentality. I wonder about my little boy's mom. I don't know what she thinks exactly. Are those too violent for your son? Are those too – are those stories too complicated for him? Which tells me a lot about her. My son just whatever time I'm spending with him, he absolutely loves it and he's a kid too so it's one of those things where it's like, he's going to flip from wanting to play you know Star Wars to Spider-Man to something every five minutes when we're playing together. These characters dominate you know especially a little kids mind.

PI: Okay.

Peter: And you got all these other people you know people who don't read the books they're like "oh hey here's a guy we can actually ask question about a comic book without you know getting some crazy answer." Here's a guy who can explain why that's

PI: Alright, we're all done.

<End of interview>

2/26/2016
Participant 008
"Scott"

PI: Let's go ahead and begin the interview.

Scott: Okay

PI: So starting off, how often do you read comic books?

Scott: Um, it varies. Um, I'd say if it's likely a weekly average, I would probably say no more than like an issue or two a week. Um, but if I'm traveling I read a lot more (laughing). That's when I do the vast majority of my reading actually.

PI: Okay. So, when did you begin reading superheroes in comic books?

Scott: When?

PI: Mmmhmm

Scott: I would say around 2010 I think is when it was. I was a Sophomore in undergrad when I first got into it actually. Um, yeah. At the time, I'd been interested in comics for a little while but uh I hadn't like – I didn't know how to start. So, I actually started dating someone who was into comics and he helped me get into the realm of comics a little bit more and like find shops and gave me tradebacks of arcs that I could start with and things like that which was really helpful. So, around 2010.

PI: Okay. So what draws you to continue to read comic books?

Scott: Oh, it's a release. I mean, it's nice to just get out of the academic world I mean as a doc student you know you're always go, go, go, go and it's just nice to uh still be able to kind of take in something that's just enjoyable and that's colorful and bright. And like I specifically read a lot of X-Men because there's such a diversity of characters and whether it be their powers, or their personalities, or just the way they look, and um they've gotten really into like different diversity like social issues kind of fairly recently and I feel like they're always kind of uh a nice way to sit by the real world while still not just taking in crap (laughing). It's not like realty TV or anything like that. I'm not watching the Kardashians.

PI: (laughing) Yeah. Alright. So, what type of, you kind of hinted on this earlier, but what type of comic books and superheroes do you read about and why?

Scott: So, like I said most of the things that I read are X-Men related. I love kind of the never ending struggle that they go through even though it's kind of bleak at times. Um, there's a whole lot on there about like not giving up which is something I prescribe to a lot. Um, there's also – I mean I love diversity of the characters whether it be their races, their powers, their ethnicities, their sexualities, their religions, I mean it's, it's really cool to see all these different people come together and work as a team. Not perfectly all the time.

PI: Sure.

Scott: Because we all know that Scott Summers is a real dick right now (laughing).

PI: (laughing) Just a little bit.

Scott: Um, but you know to see it work. Um, the other things I read are actually really similar. Um, they're other team oriented things. I read some of the Avengers stuff, but typically the Avengers stuff ends up incorporating mutants or Inhumans. Um, I don't typically just read the Avengers that are just like the traditional Avengers.

PI: Sure.

Scott: Um, I don't know if I read anything now actually that's not like a team oriented comic.

PI: Okay.

Scott: Um, I really have gotten into A-Force recently because I love the all-female Avengers crew. I think that's really neat. Um, you know, it's cool to kind of see them step out of the men's shadows and it's nice that the writers and the creators are finally allowing that to happen. (laughing)

PI: Allowing, yeah. (laughing)

Scott: So, yeah.

PI: Who is your favorite superhero or superheroes and why?

Scott: Oh God. Oh, that's tough. Yikes.

PI: It could be a few of them.

Scott: Okay. I'm going to go with – I have three. Can I go with three?

PI: Okay. Perfect! Let's do three.

Scott: Alright. One, I love Rogue from the X-Men. She is such a badass. Um, I love the beauty and the turmoil of her power. It's so cool that she can do pretty much anything that she wants, but the struggle that she has to go through to get it. And for a while you know she got full control of her powers and wasn't hurting people when she touched them unless they consented to it, but it was neat. Um, but she recently lost control of that again when she absorbed Wonder Man. Uh, so it's like super, super neat kind of see her like go through this and all of her backstory as a villain and becoming a hero and she's not like one of those that becomes a hero and goes back to being a villain after like a day and a half. She's been like a hero for like four years now.

PI: (laughing) Yeah.

Scott: And so I think she's really, really cool. Um, I also love Gambit who is ironically her love interest of course. I think his powers are really neat. I love that he's kind of a bad, a good person with like this kind of like bad boy streak. Um, I think it's super, super neat, and who doesn't love a good Cajun. (laughing)

PI: (laughing)

Scott: Um, and then I think the other one that I would have to go with is I really like the Scarlett Spider. The Kane version not the Richardson I think was his last name or something like that. Um, he was the most recent incarnation of the Scarlett Spider. And I loved that art because um it was like all the power and none of the responsibility that's what it was like the theme of it was.

PI: Mmhmm

Scott: But it was – he was so interesting because again villain turned hero and also he had this whole new life where like after I think it was Spider island or something like that. He uh no longer looked really disfigured and things like that because he was a clone that was imperfect.

PI: Sure.

Scott: But he looked like Peter Parker after that. He like looked actual Peter Parker not you know melty face Peter Parker. (Laughing) And so like just to see him go through like actually learning how to be a human was really, really interesting. And the fact that like his whole arc was set in Houston was really neat because I was like that's kind of like okay we have most are on the east coast and we have a couple on the west coast.

PI: Mmhmm

Scott: And it's like he's in Houston. But I...I loved that like just see the tale of humanity grow from him. And he still had a lot of the humor that Peter Parker had with a little more edge. So, really enjoyed. I really liked the Scarlett Spider.

PI: Okay. So how do you relate to your favorite superhero or superheroes?

Scott: Oooh, let's see. I don't really know if I really relate to Gambit. I just think that Gambit's cool.

PI: (laughing) Okay.

Scott: Uh, like I don't see aspects of myself in him at all. I, I don't necessarily resonate with any particular part of his story besides that it's just a really interesting story. Um, let's see. Rogue. I think there's the whole like um wanting to connect without being able to kind of thing.

PI: Okay

Scott: At times, I do, I do feel that way in certain aspects. Whether it be tied to my family or you know to potential relationships and things like that. But I also really like the perseverance side of that story. Um, because you know I'm not one to like really toot my own horn but I am pretty tenacious I would say. So, um I think I share that with her and it's nice to read that about her. Um, Scarlett Spider. Gosh, um I do live in the middle of nowhere. No I'm kidding (laughing)

PI: (laughing)

Scott: No, let's see. I guess it's, it's kind of similar to Rogue. It's almost like a redemption story and a tale of person's perseverance. So, um I would say some of the same reasons that I resonate with Rogue are the reasons why I resonate with Kane as the Scarlett Spider.

PI: Alright. Do you ever notice your thoughts and emotions while reading comic books?

Scott: Um, let's see. I guess in the moment I don't necessarily recognize my emotions. Like if I think back on it, I can think of times I get excited reading about it and I really want to pick up the next issue like because I typically read in chunks. Like I'll buy and then read in chunks.

PI: Right.

Scott: Um, so um, yeah I can think of times that I get sad and at times that I'm like super frustrated reading them because I'm like this is a crappy arc like what are you even thinking. (laughing)

PI: (laughing)

Scott: You know, or, or even times when I'm frustrated because like some of my favorite characters are like going through some tough times you know. Um, I really love like I really do notice that at the end of the, at the end of the bigger arcs when they finally come to closure there's like this kind of like mix bag of emotions where it's like this sense, this sense of like accomplishment because I finished it finally. Uh, but there's also this kind of like a little bit of sadness that it's over but then it's really a bit of an excitement to see what comes next. So, like in Marvel they just did the Secret Wars arc where they merged the

PI: Oh, yeah.

Scott: Yeah, they just merged the Marvel Universe with all those other universes or whatever. You know there's this collision or whatever. And um without giving any spoilers away, it was just really neat to see how that resolved itself and what's going to happen in the future um from there.

PI: Cool.

Scott: Because they're still really in the, in the early stages of the being done with that. So, um.

PI: So, you just kind of talked about this next question a little bit but maybe there's a little more you want to add. How do comic books make you feel emotionally after reading? Is there anything else that you want to add to that?

Scott: Um, yeah sorry I kind of skipped to that instead of the current.

PI: No, no, no that's totally fine.

Scott: Yeah, um, let's see. I think that at times comic books uh also inspire a little bit of a sense hope for me.

PI: Okay.

Scott: Um, and typically that's tied to some of the diversity issues. Uh, because I think that they bring in minority populations to the forefront of some people's lives um, which are really, really important um and it's kind of sad to actually see the lack of that translated onto the big screen. Um, yeah the closest we've gotten is Deadpool because he openly flirted with guys and things like that in the movie because in the comics he's pansexual, or omnisexual or something like that. Like he'll fuck anything that moves basically. (laughing)

PI: (laughing) Pretty much.

Scott: Yeah. I mean so it was neat to some of that uh in Deadpool, but it's also a little bit sad that it took an R-rated risqué film to finally do something like that. Um, say that would be the other way I would feel I guess is that it's a little bit of a tinge hope.

PI: Perfect. In reading superhero comic books, what do you learn about others?

Scott: Hmm, what I learn about others. Hmm, like other people in my life?

PI: It's open to interpretation. However you want to answer it.

Scott: That's tough. I would say like early on it helped me break some of those controlling images of what other people can be. Um, so like for that I would go to, to dust from the X-Men who was one the first you know Muslim superheroes.

PI: Uh-huh

Scott: Um, and it's not that I didn't think of a Muslim person could be a superhero but I had never really thought of it. (laughing) Normally, they're villains in people's real worlds.

PI: Sure.

Scott: Or, they portrayed as villains I should say. Portrayed as villains. Um, so that was really, really neat. It helped, helped me kind of expand my view of certain populations I guess. Um, interpersonally I can't think of anything specific.

PI: Okay.

Scott: I mean uh yeah. But in terms of things like that, it just expanding my world view of different populations. They've definitely had an impact on that.

PI: Alright. Good. What was your most memorable comic book event, battle, character, etc?

Scott: Oh! Oh! That's tough. I may have to take a second to think.

PI: Take your time. Most memorable.

Scott: So, I think what I'm going to go with is the Schism Arc in X-Men. Um, which is where Wolverine and Cyclops butted heads and split off. This what we're going with like a story arc or something like that?

PI: What – it may be an event, battle, or just a character, whatever you think.

Scott: Yeah, I'm going to go with this arc then.

PI: Okay, sure.

Scott: Yeah, because that's when Wolverine and Cyclops really butted heads and split off into two different factions of the X-Men and different people took sides. And I remember reading that epilogue and it was set like uh it was really neat, it was set like a tribal war around a fire kind of and you saw different people like just kind of like going around the fire a little bit and like they would go to their different sides. It was really, really cool. Um, so you had this but the significance of it is you had this separation of the X-Men into two factions and some people that were just like no go the hell away we're not joining any of ya'll. Um, but that really set-up so many arcs down the road. I mean it set up kind of the fall of Cyclops and the rise of Wolverine. Um, you know it helped the uh catalyst for the Avengers vs the X-Men um in which you know Wolverine's kind of fighting between his X-Men and his Avengers identity. And Cyclops ends up going bat shit crazy and killing every uh killing Professor X you know um and then from there it kind of like you know from that and all the disagreements you have the emergence of like the separate schools and uh you get into like pretty much where they were before this battle world, secret wars thing happened where you have Cyclops as a leader. It's more like a mutant revolution and Wolverine's before he died which was more of the traditional kind of school that you see in Xavier's world. And it was very interesting to see those scripts flip from what you would think they could potentially be. Um, so I just think it was very well done and like it was led up to really well and it was built upon afterwards really, really well. So, I think that will always be a big significant thing in my realm of comics.

PI: Okay. What made it memorable?

Scott: Well it just the I think the amount of attention to detail.

PI: Okay.

Scott: Because whether they planned it or not, they have used that event in the development of a lot of characters from there on. And like I said that epilogue really, really memorable because it was such a cool way to close that. And there were like characters in there that I had not thought about in years. Like one of the people around the fire was Danny Moonstar like I can't even think of the last time I thought of Danny Moonstar. Uh, you know you had like Cannonball there and I was just like "what is this? Who? What, I've forgotten about you? Where's Boom-Boom?" (laughing)

PI: (laughing) What in the world?

Scott: I know right. It was, it was, so it wasn't just like okay Rogue and Storm choose their sides okay. It was like everyone chooses.

PI: Third party chose.

Scott: Yeah. And then they go – it's so funny though because they go to the X-Factor folks and they're just like fuck off. (laughing)

PI: (laughing) Nope.

Scott: No, Jamie Madrox was like get the hell out of here. (laughing). And I love Jamie Madrox so um I actually love all of the X-Factor but that's beside the point.

PI: Sure.

Scott: Yeah, so I just think the attention to detail and it – some of arcs seem like they change characters' personas and it's forced um this one felt very organic and natural.

PI: Okay. Alright. So, let's switch gears here a little bit now. How have comic books and superheroes influenced your life?

Scott: Mmm, it definitely influenced my finances. (laughing)

PI: Sure

Scott: I pay a lot of money to keep up my habit's. I think though.....my life....they've definitely helped me grow to accept parts of myself that I may not have otherwise. Um, you know early on I read a lot of arcs of people who were LGBT orientations and identities and things like that. And that was really good because at the time I was still going through a lot of my coming out process um and kind of learning more about my identity as well as a bisexual person. Um, and so that definitely really impacted me a lot. It was really cool to see like there's not a huge bi representation in comics, but it was neat to see like some of the gay characters go through their identities um or um even if it was mentioned in passing that someone wasn't fully straight that was neat. I remember sitting – I read the second, I read both volumes of Young Avengers but the second volume and ended not too, maybe like a year and a half ago like the last issue was pretty much devoted to like them all acknowledging that not one member on that entire team was straight. And the one that thought she was like there was only one person was that was straight, there was one person that the token straight but like it was so funny because the last line was like this woman, this one girl bi or lesbian I can't remember said Honey I seen the way you look at me, you're not straight. And that was the last line of the entire series. (laughing). And so like that really, it was really neat to see those identities represented and that really made me feel good about who I am. Um, which was really, really cool. And I think on a less like identity level, it's also just a nice form of self-care. Um, you know they – whenever I'm feeling overwhelmed or whenever I'm feeling like I need some just me time uh I can read one quick comic and that's, it doesn't take a lot of

time, but it's a little time to unwind. Um, you know and that is a good way that I kind of help myself wind down from my life.

PI: So, tell me how reading superhero comic books have impacted your morals, beliefs, etc.

Scott: Oh, that's interesting. Um....

PI: If at all.

Scott: Yeah, uh let me think.

PI: Take your time.

Scott: Morals, beliefs.....hmm, I would say that if I had to pinpoint one thing um I would say that a lot of the arcs that I read help me deal with moral ambiguity a lot better.

PI: Okay.

Scott: Um, so they haven't helped me to define my values I would say or anything like that. But, there is a lot of living in that gray area that I feel like goes on in the series and arcs that I read and it's really neat to see how people play that out because for a lot of the aspects of my life I try to not be a black/white thinker but when it comes to my existence I often am a black/white thinker you know. Um, and so it's nice to see even if they're fictional people like people who exist in the gray and deal with that. Because I am very good at applying that to other people's lives. I'm not good at applying to my own life. (laughing) So, yeah.

PI: Okay.

Scott: That would be something.

PI: So, I guess what do comic books mean to you?

Scott: What do they mean to me.... You know comics are really important to me um because they allow me, they allow some of my creativity to come out even though I'm not designing it. It's nice to – even in my mind like piece together things that I think are going to happen. Um, or consider different stories that might be or that are and just think them over and things like that. So, to me like they're a way to kind of like help me develop in a way without feeling the pressure of like what would be an academic style of development. Not that there isn't academic discourse on comics.

PI: Sure.

Scott: Because there is. But like I don't see them that way. Like to me they remind me that it's okay to take care of myself at times. And so they're really important to like who I am and you know at times I'm like "oh I bet people just think that I'm a big weirdo for reading comics because I'm like a man-child." (laughing) But then I'm also like yeah and if I am that's okay, I really enjoy it.

PI: Sure.

Scott: Yeah, so I don't know.

PI: What have you learned about yourself from reading comic books? You've kind of touched on this here and there.

Scott: Yeah, I have. I'll go back to that for that. Like um it's really helped me in my identity development as a bisexual person. Um, but I also think it's – they've helped show me um that at times I can, like this is something that I forget, at times I can let go of my anxiety and my uh like checklist lifestyle and just do something for fun. Um, and that wasn't what I learned from my arc or anything like that. It was just learned from the process of being able to read a comic book and to sit there like you know let everything else go.

PI: Sure

Scott: Uh, and so I've learned that even like even though I do live my life by task list a lot of times, I can sometimes break that which is nice. Um, I think I've also learned that I can be a creative thinker from reading comics. And that goes from the selection of what I read to the ways I pay attention because typically I'm one that I read all the little blurbs on the page and then I go back and look at the pictures. And then I read all the little blurbs on the next page and go back and look at the pictures. Because I get developed in the story and then I need to know about the details of that story. (laughing)

PI: (laughing) Absolutely.

Scott: Yeah, so like you know it just kind of the different creative ways that I can imagine these stories and think about them is really, really neat.

PI: Okay. Getting towards the end here.

Scott: Okay.

PI: How do comic books impact your current life? Now you've mentioned self-care earlier.

Scott: Yeah.

PI: Um, would that be fair to add that to this question?

Scott: Yeah, yeah self-care is definitely a part of it. Um, they are one of my primary needs to self-care. I mean I think my other ones are like racquetball and Netflix and comics. Those are the three. (laughing)

PI: Not bad.

Scott: Yeah. Um, so uh I think you know I kind of have an unique take on this too because they also do impact my work that I do.

PI: Okay. Tell me more.

Scott: Uh, as a counselor sometimes I do use them in my counseling work whether I actually have clients read arc or look at an arc or something like that. I'm more so like look for familiarities with characters um with them and I do that with comics and movies and books and tv because there is so much power in like even if it's a fictional person resonating with the story and seeing how they deal with it. So, that's kind of a unique um way comics impact my life right now.

PI: Okay.

Scott: I use them in my work.

PI: Awesome. How can comic books impact your future?

Scott: Oh, I can continue to use them in my work obviously. That's one thing. Um, you know I think that comics will – how do I want to say this, I think they'll continue to help reveal um how do I want to say it....

PI: Take your time.

Scott: Yeah.... I'm going to think about how I want to say that.

PI: Sure.

Scott: I think I'll – they'll continue to reveal aspects of my identity and also some of my biases which is important to me um through various character developments and story arcs and things like that. Like I mean even one of the most recent things was Iceman coming out as gay like I was like what he is so bro-ish and then I was like wait gays can be bro-ish. (laughing)

PI: (laughing) True, yeah.

Scott: So like I think that I'll continue to like have some of my stigmas attacked by comics. Um, I also think that one day not anytime right now or in the near future probably but like one day it's something that I would like to share with my kids you know. Um, I do want to have kids one day and I think that it's such a good release that it's something that I would like to share with them.

PI: Absolutely.

Scott: Yeah, I think that's it's really neat when people are like – when you hear stories of like comic book reader friends who do have kids and like their kids are like can I see your old stuff. Yes, yes you can child. (laughing)

PI: (laughing) Unless it's golden age, then no.

Scott: (laughing) Right, right. I'm sorry I've burnt them in the fireplace.

PI: (laughing) Or they just got

Scott: It was a cold, cold winter.

PI: Alright. Here is the last two questions. What does comic book reading say about you?

Scott: What does it say about me?

PI: Mhmm

Scott: It's says that I'm a big nerd.

PI: Okay tell me more.

Scott: And I'm okay with it. (laughing) I like to describe myself as geek-sheik sometimes (laughing)

PI: (laughing) Love it.

Scott: Yeah um I think uh honestly everyone kind of like make jokes about me being a big hipster or whatever but I think they're actually one of the most hipsters portions of my identity and I'm okay with that. It's one of the aspects of I guess hipster life that I really like. Um, yeah so they definitely say that I'm a super nerd, but I'm comfortable with it.

PI: Okay.

Scott: I think they also um they also show people that like I'm not one dimensional. They're a demonstration of that. Um, because it's just another thing that I'm interested in that maybe people wouldn't expect it. Or like you know because people know that I like

sports, people know that I'm a counselor, people know that I'm bi, well people can also know that I'm a comic book reader and it becomes a part of my identity and part of the diverse human that I am.

PI: Sure.

Scott: Um, yeah.

PI: And lastly, what do you think others for example family, friends, peers, community think comic book reading says about you?

Scott: Well, again that I'm a big nerd (laughing). Uh, I think my family thinks it's kind of weird but they're just like oh that's Colton. (laughing) Um, in terms of my community um like when I think of community I think of like my immediate I guess community like my friends and the people that I interact with in life uh it's kind of interesting I think that they just they probably don't really think about it a whole, whole lot but when I bring it up I think that they like kind of laugh because they see that I kind of light up when I talk about it and that I'm really excited about it. Um, like I'll sometimes I know that it'll be just completely like you know like passed off as nothing but sometimes I'll mention something that happened around my friends and they're like okay. (laughing) But they get to at least tell that I'm super excited about it.

PI: Sure

Scott: So they know that it's something that I'm passionate about.

PI: Okay

Scott: Um but yeah um I don't know if they necessarily say anything about me as a person beyond that with the people I interact with.

PI: Okay. Alright. That is the last question.

Scott: Cool. Thanks.

<End of interview>

2/26/2016
Participant 009
"Wayne"

PI: Okay. Let's go ahead and start. Let's start off with how often do you read comic books?

Wayne: I typically read comic books at least four times a week.

PI: Okay. What about time wise? What would you guesstimate that to be?

Wayne: Time wise it varies. Sometimes it'll be 30 minutes. Uh, sometimes it can go up to an hour, hour and a half.

PI: Okay. When did you begin to reading superhero in comic books?

Wayne: I began um I was reading superhero comic books just off and on uh when I was 5 or 6 you know.

PI: Okay.

Wayne: You know go to the supermarket, you'd see one. And I started reading comics probably seriously.

PI: Yeah, you can keep going.

Wayne: Okay. I was going to say I started reading comics seriously um about the time I was 12. I started collecting uh them and reading them a lot.

PI: Mmhmm. Okay. What draws you to continue to read comic books?

Wayne: Um, I think it's because a unique part of American culture.

PI: Okay.

Wayne: That I've – It's one of the few mediums that you can read and it just keeps continuing and there is no really end to it. So, I started reading Batman comics seriously when I was 12 and you know I still continue to read them today because you know things change but you know it's something constant in my life.

PI: Sure. Okay. So, you just kind of touched on this a little bit. What type of comic books and superheroes do you read about and why?

Wayne: I have a pretty wide variety. I like the more grounded stuff like Batman. Um, I like the X-Men comics, um ever since the Marvel movies started coming out I've been going back and reading stuff about Iron Man and all that you know characters that I really didn't know about earlier.

PI: Sure

Wayne: Uh, Walking Dead. I've been – I put my toe to the comics a little bit after watching the show.

PI: Mmhmm

Wayne: It's kind of how it goes for me. Usually if there's an adaptation of it, I'll watch that first then I'll try to go back to the source material.

PI: Okay. So, you've kind of – like you have the wide variety, can you tell me a little bit more about why you are attracted to these kind of like superheroes and comic books?

Wayne: Um, I guess it's because it's an escapism. It just kind of gives me something to – just an outlet to kind of get away from the realities of just everyday life.

PI: Sure. Okay. Who's your favorite superhero or superheroes and why?

Wayne: Probably uh a tie between Batman and Spiderman.

PI: Okay.

Wayne: I like them for different reasons. So, it's – I like Batman because you know the world and the character is dark and driven and a very psychological advanced. And I really like Spider-Man because he's just very relatable as a character to me. You know he's – you know when I was younger he was a student who you know had score of responsibilities that had to do stuff with his family and then as the character progressed, and I've progressed, he's a grad student, I was a grad student. You know I could relate to Peter Parker.

PI: So, that's kind of the next question then. Let's dive into that a little bit more. How do you relate to your favorite superhero or superheroes?

Wayne: Um, like I was saying about Parker um I relate because you know he's just the every man, just like me, you know, just has to deal with family issues, work issues, and then on top of that he actually gets to be a superhero and kind of, kind of blow off those responsibilities for a little while. In reading those stories, vicariously I get to do the same thing. Um, Batman is just – I don't know I'm not this dark driven person so it's like oh

that's kind of nice to read about something different than my life. So, I mean who doesn't like you know the Batmobile and...

PI: Oh, I know right.

Wayne: and all that stuff.

PI: I'm absolutely with you on that. Okay. Do you ever notice your thoughts and emotions while reading comic books?

Wayne: Yeah, um when I read, when I read comics that are really or dramatic or dark aspects, I notice that I can project some of my own you know insecurities and just stresses and issues and I can kind of – it helps I guess reading those and with my own personal feelings I can relate to what the story is trying to tell me more. And you know it's like if I'm, I'm in a particular bad mood or something I try to read something lighter and that does tend to lighten my mood up as well.

PI: Okay. So, how do comic books make you feel emotionally after reading?

Wayne: Uh, usually pretty good. Um, I'm, I'm kind of an odd person and I'll dwell on a story or something for a long time and just kind of nitpick it a part so sometimes I'm happy about it and sometimes for literally days I'll be just like why did that, why did they do that. That didn't make any sense. (laughing)

PI: (laughing) I know.

Wayne: It's like what was the writer thinking. So, nothing else it leaves me in a better mood or it leaves me in an inquisitive mood I guess.

PI: Okay. Alright. So let's shift gears here a little bit.

Wayne: Okay.

PI: In reading superhero comic books, what do you learn about others?

Wayne: Oh, um....

PI: Take your time.

Wayne:I guess one thing I've kind of noticed, due to the fact that I read superhero comics and when I interact with people who really don't, I kind of see the, I don't know, the nobility of humanity somewhat. And I can appreciate that. And then to people who don't really read the material they just kind of think it's funny, funny books you know it's, it makes me appreciate that I have different taste than people and that's fine but you

know I, I can at least take something from the art and the stories and that helps me feel better.

PI: Okay. What is your most memorable comic book event, battle, character, etc.?

Wayne: The Batman Nightfall storyline. That was the one that actually got me into reading comics in the first place. Um, I remember vividly I was about 11 years old or so and I was in Wal-Mart of all places and they had this, they had the issue where Bane breaks Batman and I've known for years from TV and cartoons and such and I was just like oh my gosh what is this. And so from that point forward I bought that issue and I went back and bought all the other parts of it and you know they got my money for a couple of years on that one.

PI: (laughing) What made it memorable?

Wayne: Just I mean you know this before I really knew a lot about you know marketing and demographics and salesmanship, but just the fact that a company would do that to one of their flagship characters and take such a risk I just, I was just like oh my gosh I can't believe they are doing this. And you know I, I heard about the whole Superman, death of Superman event that happened a few months earlier, but I was never a Superman guy really so I was just like oh well, that's sad. But Batman really, really shook me up.

PI: Sure. How have comic books and superheroes influenced your life?

Wayne: Oh, well I'm not sure at what point we kind of build our own identities but the longest time I mean, I, I, that's what I relate to. It's like I, I don't think a day goes by that I don't read comics or watch a comic book related film, or movie or talk on the internet with people about it, or talk to people my, my personal life about it. Um, it's influenced everything from my familial relationships, to my, relationship with my wife, to the relationship of my, with my child. It's not just uh just something that I go read books and that's it. You know I actually you know I decorate with the stuff in my house pretty extensively and you know my little girl it's like she probably knows more about superhero comics and characters than some little boys do which, which is actually believe it or not a parenting choice that we made early on that we weren't going to gender buy these books. It's like you know anyone can enjoy these characters.

PI: Yeah, absolutely.

Wayne: Try to expose her to that.

PI: Cool. So, kind of digging a little bit more with that. Tell me how reading superhero comic books have impacted your morals, beliefs, etc.?

Wayne: Oh, um I try to conduct myself with integrity. And um especially with working academia it's uh it's one of our guidelines. Uh, I don't know. I try to, I try to be a good person. I try to help out where I can and emulate the heroes that I grew up reading. And um some of the more advanced or adult comic books they have a lot of morality choices and things like that. That's really shake me to think more about you know – early superhero comics of course you know there was a right and a wrong, there was no gray matter in between, but you know it's made me grow up thinking about you know the wider angle on things. The bigger picture. So, I guess it's just made me more open minded and more willing to accept other people's viewpoints and things.

PI: Okay. What do comic books mean to you?

Wayne: I think comic books are a form of cultural identity. One that I associate myself with. It's uh – I think that to me at least they've been very important in me becoming who I am today. So, I think of them fondly. I, I really couldn't imagine uh who I would be today without that kind of influence in my life and continuing to have it.

PI: Kind of sticking on that path. What have you learned about yourself in reading comic books?

Wayne: Well I've learned that I am not uh I'm definitely not endowed with all the physical and mental properties my favorite characters are for sure. (laughing)

PI: (laughing) Aren't we all?

Wayne: Um, one thing um I learned early on from reading X-Men comics was they're – every single character in those stories are so flawed in their not because they're mutants but just because they are humans.

PI: Right.

Wayne: and you know it made me realize you know early on when I was reading you know it's okay to not be perfect. It's okay to be different than other people. And it's okay to just admit to yourself that you know that no one is perfect so you just do the best that you can.

PI: Mmhmm

Wayne: That's something I carried with me for a long time because it you know we all inspire to be something better than we are but at the end of the day we are what we are. Might as well try to be content with it.

PI: How do comic books impact your current life?

Wayne: Current life. Oh, well we have a lot less money because of my...

PI (laughing) That's a theme I've noticed

Wayne: Yeah.

PI: Myself too

Wayne: Um, I've noticed that it's brought out a lot of the um more obsessive uh tendencies in my personality. And gratefully it's actually replace some of the more destructive things that I did when I was younger. I would actually uh I used to smoke when I was in my 20s and uh you know when my wife finally said you probably need to stop doing this and I did and I haven't, I haven't started back ever again but you know it's like oh I can go buy some more comics with this money or I could uh I can buy some collectibles. I can do this, I can do that. And you know it's just, it's been a much better way to spend my pastime.

PI: Sure.

Wayne: Then you get to the point where you get too much stuff and you have to figure out what to do with it.

PI: (laughing) Oh, yes.

Wayne: Not that any of us have problems with that.

PI: No. Just a few boxes that's all. Alright. Got three more questions for you.

Wayne: Sure.

PI: How can comic books impact your future?

Wayne: Hmm, well I use, like I said I use comic books as a kind of a constant for me to keep me grounded in my own life and uh you know being a young professional there's change everywhere in my career, in my family life, um you know my child is growing up and that's uh a world wind process. So it's just, it gives me something to kind of center myself on and kind of retain my own identity in the midst of all those changes I have to go through. So it helps me in that regard.

PI: Okay. What does comic book reading say about you?

Wayne: Well 10 years ago it probably would have signified that I was uh a nerd or dork or you know someone on the outside, outside social frame.

PI: Outsiders. Yep

Wayne: Yeah. But today you know we live in a world where it's common place. So, I don't know. I mean like I said earlier I, I really associate it with my identity and for me it just kind of says I am who I've always been even though you know people who never knew anything about comics you know – I don't know it's just something about having that knowledge that I've been there from not from the beginning but early on.

PI: Yeah absolutely.

Wayne: You know it just – I don't know it kind of – it makes me feel good that that's part of my identity and that I can relate to people on that level.

PI: okay. You, kind of, hit on this. But this is the last question. What do you think others for example family, friends, peers, community, whatever think comic book reading says about you?

Wayne: That's a difficult question because everyone has their own thoughts.

PI: Sure,

Wayne: I've dealt gambit of responses to it. Some people you know who know me know where I'm coming from and what my life is like they just recognize that's just something he's interested in and uh something that he enjoys. Some people have who have no background in comic books or anything, some have seen me as incredibly immature or seen me as a juvenile. Um, some people I think they think that it's just normal you know. Oh he's a young guy that's what young guys do now days. So, I'm not sure if they, uh most people think positive or negative about it but I, I've kind of hit a point in my life that I really don't care what other people think. It's why I project you know my interests to anyone who, anyone who takes the time to get to know me is going to figure it out pretty fast.

PI: Okay. That's it.

Wayne: Okay!

<End of interview>

3/9/2016
Participant 010
"Kent"

PI: Alright. Let's go ahead and begin here. Alright. So let me start off with how often do you read comic books?

Kent: Um, about once a week.

PI: Okay.

Kent: Once every two weeks.

PI: Okay. When did you begin reading superheroes in comic books?

Kent: Oh my God. Um, it's probably three, three and a half years ago. It would have been before I started my PhD but not too much. So probably three and a half. Almost four. Oh my god. Yeah.

PI: Time flies.

Kent: Sorry. It does. Geez.

PI: Okay. So what draws you to continue to read comic books?

Kent: Um, oh my gosh. I think I've always been into like Sci-Fi, Fantasy. Um, I think a couple of things about comic books in particular are I really like the illustrations. I, I'm a lover of art and I think that the illustrations themselves are so precise. I really feel like the comic artists put so much thought and so much investment into the illustrations and so I really consume them as much as the text in some cases.

PI: Okay.

Kent: Um, but the storylines also are fascinating to me. So, um I think the relationships between characters because they're so like in the case of Batman or in the case of uh Superman they're so emotionally elated and they're so like brooding and invested you know and they care but they don't always do the right thing quite the right way. So, it's really I guess because too I was really into mythology and religion and not as connected to that now. As I'm talking to you that the mythology and the interpersonal relationships of comics, the failings, and the attempts, and the um the resolution that you always I mean they always somehow pull it out at the end and atone for their shortcomings and uh correct the ills. Um, all of that is – it's kind of cathartic experience.

PI: Alright.

Kent: I'm able to live through it in a way that um I find kind of rewarding I think. So, yeah. And also (laughing) they got super powers which I also would love to live through as well. You know I mean.

PI: (laughing) yeah.

Kent: The ability to do things.

PI: So let me ask you what types of comic books and superheroes do you read about and why?

Kent: So, primarily I've always had a fixation on Green Lantern. Um, and I really got into Green Lantern. I'd always been fascinated with the character but it was when um Geoff Johns I think was the guy who started to or decided to make um the Green Lantern in Earth 2, which is an alternate universe, gay. And then that's when he was the first mainstream – X-Men has some gay characters but they're always like these sort of side characters. And this was the first mainstream, long standing comic book character that was gay. And so that was the connection for me. Like I immediately realized now this character is – I'm able to relate to it. Um, and I really extended that into the Green Lantern universe um that's almost completely unrelated from Earth2. Um, but just became really fascinated. I think with the emotional representation of like the Red Lantern as being anger, and um you know green being will, and all of these like sort of philosophical pure emotional uh so I connected with that. Um, and that's kind of rippled out to um in Earth2 there is a sort of justice league set-up. And so um aside from Green Lantern, I've started really connecting with the Flash and enjoying that character.

PI: Okay.

Kent: Um, and it's kind of acquainted me with the flexibility of these superpowers and the complexity of the characters because I always saw the Flash as just oh it's this guy that can run fast. Like how much could you do with that.

PI: Yeah.

Kent: Or you know Batman is just this brooding guy with a bunch of grappling hooks like what can you do with that. Um, to seeing the more the real creative ways that these superpowers can be capitalized on. And um so the short answer to your question as far as superheroes that I'm interested in definitely Green Lantern um but also the Flash, Batman, DC just in general even though they make shitty ass movies um and Marvel makes all the good movies. Uh I really, really invested in just the DC universe. For sure.

PI: Okay. So then kind of jumping on that then. The next question is who is your favorite superhero or superheroes and why?

Kent: Okay. Green Lantern. Um, and I know that's not as easy of an answer because the Green Lantern on Earth is different than like Guy Gardener or – so I know that Green Lantern is like a whole slew of characters.

PI: Mmhmm.

Kent: I think if I had to pick one it would be Guy Gardener because he, he's like kind of circulated through some of the different lanterns and I think his cocky sort of character is really particularly appealing to me. Like repugnant and also attractive (laughing) at the same time.

PI: (laughing) Sure.

Kent: At the same, I'm like shut the fuck up but then at times I'm like you are a badass.

PI: (laughing) Yeah.

Kent: Um, so him in particular I think would be my one superhero.

PI: Okay.

Kent: Yeah.

PI: How do you relate to your favorite superhero?

Kent: Um...yeah. How do I relate. God! I guess I haven't really thought about that um particularly. But uh I think the first word that comes to mind for the dynamic is like role model. Like um as far as...hmmm.

PI: Take your time.

Kent: Yeah...yeah okay so then, so then aside from role model like just kind of watching what the character does and doesn't do I guess it's also cathartic because I feel very, I feel to be honest with you restricted in some ways like by social norms.

PI: Sure.

Kent: And by social expectations and making people happy and my OCD. Like I have a lot of things containing me or demanding what I feel like is an achievement or a perfection.

PI: Mmhmm.

Kent: And, and my characters that character in particular doesn't have to. Like he can just in a lot of ways and he does. Guy Gardener is himself. Like unapologetically you know he doesn't – he flies in the face of the guardians, he generally pisses them off. He you know and he doesn't care. And ultimately it works out for him. Like no matter how bad he screws up or works in his own favor it, it ultimately benefit's humanity. And I wish so much that I could do that. (laughing) I could fly in the face of authority figure and not care about what I'm supposed to do. Only do what I want to do and you know every once in a while be virtuous and come to the rescue of my friends but even be cocky about that. He gives me a way to live through someone else. The life that I would like to live without apology and um and to witness that and to imagine what it would be like even if at the end of the day I kind of lack the gumption or the ability to do it myself.

PI: Sure.

Kent: So....

PI: Do you ever notice your thoughts or emotions while reading comic books?

Kent: I get pissed off a lot.

PI: (laughing) Okay. Tell me more.

Kent: (laughing) Well I get pissed because like especially if the hero is just really – sometimes I feel like comic book writers like they have to make the character impotent at sometimes right.

PI: Mmhmm.

Kent: Because they can't just win all the time immediately. But sometimes I get really frustrated with that. Like I want to reason with the character and say you know and I know that you know that this is not working (laughing)

PI: (laughing)

Kent: (laughing) You know what I'm saying.

PI: (laughing) yeah.

Kent: Like come on really. And you don't see that or you really – so sometimes their characters become so saturated or so they become such a caricature of the character that's been written into them or assigned to them that I want them to break outside of that so I get a little bit frustrated. Or I'm like come on really and then you threw in another bad guy just to make it that much harder like let's back it off a little bit and make it at least somewhat manageable. Um, so, so sometimes a little bit of frustration but that's so much

fun. Like I think I sign up for that because of the catharsis. Because there's it does get remedied or the character does have a flash of insight about the dumb mistake that he's made or whatever within reason um that, that ultimately makes it incredibly satisfying that the chips were down in the first place.

PI: Okay.

Kent: Um so I definitely experience a catharsis when I'm reading comics. Um, yeah and then what other emotions would I experience. Um, sadness. I hate to get off the one character but um I bawled my eyes out when Earth2 Green Lanterns um boyfriend died. Like I probably cried I seriously did and this is so sad but through the first three comics of that series I cried. And then I gifted them to everyone I knew. (laughing)

PI: (laughing)

Kent: I bought so many first issues and like handed them out as gifts and presents and Christmas gifts because I just I was so moved by the loss and how it mirrored so much my personal experience. I mean it really did. It was in so many ways a presentation of experiences that I have had in life and it really allowed me to connect with my own emotions. It allowed me to kind of feedback into a place in my own experience that because it was presented to me it gave me that kind of depth. It gave me that ability to access something.

PI: Okay.

Kent: So, yeah. And maybe that's at the end of the day what comics do for me is they help me to access emotions that I otherwise wouldn't bring to consciousness. You know.

PI: Alright.

Kent: Being put out about the unfairness of the world or being pissed off about the way I've been treated like then I see somebody else live it and I get to, get to experience it through that. Yeah.

PI: So this kind of – you've kind of touched on this already, but how do comic books make you feel emotionally after reading them? You've kind of touched on this a little bit.

Kent: Yeah I mean and as much as they're cathartic I feel better about life. Um, I feel like I've gotten something out or I've experienced something even if it's crying. Um, it depends because I'm a little bit OCD so it's hard for me. The serial nature of comics is a little bit difficult because sometimes the plot will just drop off at the end. They want you to buy the next one. And so I'll be deeply unsatisfied for a week where I'm like this is an amazing story. I would really like to know what happens next so sometimes that can be a little bit frustrated or a little bit anxious about the next comic coming out. Um, sometimes

then I'll like save them up and then read them in rapid succession. Um, but I also and I don't think this a – I'm sure this wouldn't be on an emotion list but I feel adventurous. I feel like I've had an adventure. And I really value that like I go camping as much as possible. I watch movies that are adventure style because I find it so satisfying to have ventured out into an alternate universe into something that parallels life but isn't really life you know.

PI: Yeah.

Kent: Um, so, so that's aside from catharses another satisfying emotion that when I walk away from a comic book I feel like I've accomplished something in a way which is helpful for my achievement orientation and OCD.

PI: Okay.

Kent: You know whereas like other literature it doesn't feel like as much of an accomplishment or uh a process so.

PI: Sure. So, in reading superhero comic books, what do you learn about others?

Kent: Oh, God. Um, uh, God. I think...I think comic books have been an indispensable part of realizing other people are flawed. I used to have a real baseline assumption that everyone else was good and I was flawed or mistaken or you know troubled in some way.

PI: Mmhmm.

Kent: Um, and I like to project on other people my feelings or like negative opinions of me. But comic books partially because the villains sometimes personify mistakes and failures so purely. Um, it helped me kind of identify people in my life or in my surroundings that mimic or mirror that. And it's hard for me to be critical of other people but when I'm critical of a villain or a struggling hero or a complex character in a comic book and I can parallel that to another person, it makes it easier to critique their behavior to be aware of the complexity of their behavior or their feelings. It also helps me to be a little bit more forgiving because comic book villains are in some ways a product of their environment or their poor – just as much as the superhero kind of fell into their ability in some ways I mean even Superman comes to Earth and just falls into the ability to fly because he absorbs the sun.

PI: Yeah.

Kent: You know like he didn't earn it. The villains didn't in some cases don't really earn it either. They just got dealt a really bad hand and they decided to do some – they're compensating. And I guess that's helped me see people in the world as compensating too. You know that not only are they flawed and it's helped me to see people as just as flawed

as I am or just as human as I am. It's also helped me to see that in a lot of ways we're products of our environment and even when people aren't doing right by they're doing the right – they think they are doing right.

PI: Sure. Yeah.

Kent: Like they, they – so it's, it's really humanized people which is weird to say about comic books because they're so not human sometimes but they teach me something about human nature or teach me about how environments and how events shape people and change their lives um in a way. So, yeah.

PI: Perfect. What was your most memorable comic book event, battle, character, etc.?

Kent: Oh, my god. So, it'd have to be Green Lantern and his partner and like when they're yeah. It just that, that, that ability to identify with a character that opportunity because comics prior to that point in my experience were so hetero. I mean it was always for a woman or always to get the relationship on track. Um, Green Lantern breaks outside of that a little bit just because it happens in space so there's rare moments when they come back to Earth and, and – but it's still so, so hetero and with Green Lantern it was a departure from that. It was an ability to make a superhero more than just that dynamic and I deeply and profoundly connected with that. And I think it was really a pathway into embracing comics more in general.

PI: Okay.

Kent: In a way that I haven't before

PI: Alright. So, in kind of talking about that event. What was it that really - and you kind of talked about this now but if you can kind of put in an essence what made it memorable? Like what really made that whole

Kent: (overlapping) I don't know if this an appropriate answer so kind of guide me but it was the um it was the (laughing) this is so stupid. It was the love. Like it was it was the emotion of the exchange between Green Lantern and his boyfriend. It was the emotion of the loss. I mean just the soul shattering. In the story, the train they're on crashes. Everybody dies except for um the guy that becomes Green Lantern and he I mean he's just devastated. But, but the pictures to you know I talked to you about how the art is so precise and so meaningful to the storyline and seeing the wreckage and seeing the terror and all of that. It solidified that experience for me. And um my uh the first guy that I dated and really um we had about a year and a half relationship. We were very close also died and so the parallel story of that and being able to see and identify with some of the grief and the interaction between those characters over the loss really – I think that's why I cried about it so much and why it solidified that character and those plot lines for me so

heavily was because it was in some ways my experience and, and helped me then as an entry point to begin to identify with a lot of the other struggles and successes and complexities of that storyline.

PI: Yeah. So, coming back a little bit. Um, by the way that was great. Um, how have comic books and superheroes influenced your life?

Kent: Um, (laughing) I think in a variety of ways. One even though it's kind of geeky to collect comic books and when I tell people that I collect them they're like really that's awesome. (laughing)

PI: (laughing) Much respect

Kent: You actually literally have a membership at the comic store and you go see the guy and he knows your name and he pulls your comics and sells them to you.

PI: (laughing) First name basis.

Kent: Legitimately and he does. And it's probably a good business model. We've already talked about how he's going to mail these to me long distance when I'm on internship so. Um, so aside from I think they've done a variety of things for me. One I think overall connecting with comic books has made me feel in touch with a culture and with an identity um that was prior to that unavailable to me. I think growing up gay and feeling in some ways isolated from like a masculine I wouldn't say that that comic book collecting is the masculine culture but it's definitely a culture uh populated by like in my estimation and from my perspective guys that are kind of like nerdy, cute and like sort of there's an aesthetic, there's an ethic to it, there's a aesthetic to it. Um, it allows me to participate in that or at least to identify in some way with that. And I really appreciate that. Um, so that's kind of more globally. More specifically um connecting with comic book characters...-it's given me – I've always been interested in novels and mythology and religion and literature. Um, comic books have given me a way to participate in that in a digestible daily way. Um...but it's something for me like it's something I get to do and I don't need to share it with other people. Like religion you have to go to a church you know some of those other pieces of media like what are you binge watching on Netflix. But for me comic book reading is – I'm realizing this as I'm saying this it's kind of a personal experience. Like I don't talk to a bunch of people about oh my god did you see the latest issue of Earth2 or it's been discontinued so you wouldn't but it's more of a personalized experience in something that I find really gratifying. Um, so that's one of the things that's given me. It's given me an outlet for something that's very congruent with who I am but probably otherwise wouldn't be satisfied at this point.

PI: Okay.

Kent: If that makes sense.

PI: Yeah. Absolutely.

Kent: Okay.

PI: So tell me you've kind of mentioned this a little bit earlier about kind of a role model in a way so I want to come back to that real quick. So, tell me how superhero comic books have impacted your morals, beliefs, etc.?

Kent: Okay. Okay. Um, I think that I've been able to be a little bit more self-forgiving.

PI: Okay.

Kent: Um, in that when you see someone who is like elevated like Superman is the moral character you know like he is America. (laughing)

PI: (laughing) Yeah.

Kent: He's 'Merica

PI: (laughing) 'Merica!

Kent: Like Batman is 'Merica! These are like American heroes. Um, even with Captain America who's Marvel.

PI: Yeah.

Kent: You know you've got this like pure distillation of all that is good and virtuous in the world that can still struggle like they can still in some ways almost be so virtuous that they're flawed. You know like these virtues get in the way. They're so compassionate that they let the bad guy go when it ends up being destructive or costing lives. You know and you're like man if you can be so good you're bad like it's kind of freed me up to be more compassionate and to forgive myself when I make mistakes. So, it's kind of given me a framework for that. Um, aside from that I think it's given me in some ways a little bit more faith in humanity. And I say that because religion is kind of dark. It's like you've failed and you can't get away from it and you know people are fallen. And it seems like in general society these days is getting this increasing negative view of, we're getting this negative view of each other. You know we're leeching off of society and nobody – the good old days when people did things they were supposed to do. I think comic books give me a framework for – it gives me an opportunity to step back from life because I'm so entrenched in politics in the worlds. It gives me a chance to step back from life and observe a world that's been constructed in which people are doing their best

with what they have in relationship with one another regardless with that means. And so um since I can't step back into space and view this world.

PI: Sure.

Kent: I can at least step back and view another world in which life goes on as normal you know and I think it grounds me. I think it gives me a framework for being a little bit more understanding about the world I live in like you know people are doing their best. And it goes back to the villain thing and it's really salient for me like even the villain had circumstances that brought them there. Like there's always a backstory for the villain. They don't just drop out of space and they hate everybody. Like you get to know that. For instance, with the you know the Red Lantern, I can't recall his name immediately but um uh and not that I could pronounce it if I did but the main Red Lantern that like starts it all, he lost his wife and kids. Like he's fucking pissed you know and, and when you see the backstory that humanizes why he rages and why he's connected with this in himself and tried to spread it in the universe. You get an understanding for the fact that people really do act in ways that makes sense to them. They really do even when they're doing wrong, do wrong with conviction and I think that helps me especially as a counselor who sees people who are doing wrong with conviction on a regular basis. (laughing)

PI: (laughing) Yeah.

Kent: It does. It gives me an opportunity to be compassionate to those around me and to see a client and to still find the humanity in them or the desire to do good in them um regardless of how good they are at actually doing that.

PI: What do comic books mean to you?

Kent: Um, they mean fun. (laughing)

PI: Okay.

Kent: I mean they mean a break sometimes. Um, oh god. That's such a hard question to ask because I feel like it's so much deeper than I can actually....

PI: Hard to put words to.

Kent: describe. It's really hard to put words to the meaning what they mean to me. Um, I think what they mean to me is hope. I think comics give me hope. They give me hope in the context of a world where comic book heroes can continue to be more flawed, more sexually and gender diverse, more representations of all of society instead of what for a long time they were this, this personification of like white mainstream society.

PI: Sure.

Kent: They're – they give me hope for society. That we can continue to perpetuate and participate and enjoy stories that are deeply personal and very and that have power for social change. Um, and then not only that but even within the comic narrative itself that's exercised in a way that I think informs us. I think, I think more people than just me will read the Earth 2 storyline or they'll read Green Lantern comics and see more compassionate, more grounded people that they can identify with and emulate. And I think that changes individuals and I think it changes society as a whole when comic writers are willing to push the envelope and represent uh the full scope of human experience. So they really, they really possess the hopefulness to me and that's why I got into comics in the first place because it you know it connected with that kind of social justice, I want to support something that I believe in and I (laughing) this is kind of silly but I believe in comics. And that's why I put my money into them because I want to perpetuate something.

PI: Same here.

Kent: Just as much as I would donate to uh political organization or a social engine for change. I intentionally put my money there in comics.

PI: Yeah reinforce that behavior.

Kent: Yeah, yeah. And they'll continue to be created if they continue to be purchased and I want that to happen.

PI: Right. What have you learned about yourself from reading comic books?

Kent: Um, I've learned I'm more emotional than I – I don't experience a lot of emotions with other people to be honest with you.

PI: Sure.

Kent: Like I'm a pretty defended person but I experience a lot of emotions with comics. And so I definitely realize that I have more dimensions to me than even with like a Netflix show or whatever that's so just candy. But with comics I get like I said I get pissed.

PI: Sure. Yeah

Kent: Or I get excited. Or I feel rewarded. Or I feel you know um defeated. Or trapped you know when, when things aren't going the character's way that I just want them to. So, I've learned that I'm a very, that I'm a very feeling person. And I knew that as a kid but I lost it somewhere along the way because that wasn't acceptable, crying over Old Yeller and all of that wasn't what boys do.

PI: Yeah.

Kent: But here with comics, I can do something that boys do and also be emotional and I like that. Um, so I've discovered that and then I guess I've also discovered with all this self-compassion and forgiveness rhetoric that I've been using.

PI: Yeah.

Kent: Sometimes I'm a little bit I don't know what the words for it would be but like retributive or retribution has a value for me because when the villain gets punished or when the universe is set right I also kind of feel a little bit of happiness that the bad guy got it in the end. (laughing)

PI: (laughing) yeah.

Kent: You know what that says about me as a person but um that I do I guess it's yeah, no, I think it's justice orientation that I really – my need for justice and my desire to see right done is very uh it's something that I've discovered as I've gone through this process because it really, comics touch that part of me. And allow me to feel that there's some stability to the world around me. Um, yeah.

PI: Awesome. Alright. Four more questions and we'll be through.

Kent: Okay.

PI: So, let me ask, how do comic books impact your current life?

Kent: Um, well financially right.

PI: Sure.

Kent: Um, so there's that. Um, they – I do a lot of work and comics are one of the things that I can do for me. Um, I still feel I'm accomplishing something as I said like I even took up knitting because I needed to do something for self-care that also felt like there was a product. And with comics for some reason it feels like I've accomplished something like I've, I've journeyed. Um, so, so they allow me to sort of take time for myself to do something for myself that doesn't feel like a complete waste of time. Um, they also give me a little bit of break from reality. I mean the reality that I live is pretty pressured and pretty exhausting um at times. And so being able to connect to an alternate reality that is removed enough from the present reality and even in Earth 2 it's like a post-apocalyptic Earth and Green Lantern it's so removed. Even with Batman it's Gotham you know like it's not New York. It's kind of like New York but it's another world. And so being able to participate in another world then come back to this one. Uh, it's that what – that's how I used to connect with literature even like Bridge to Terabithia

and books like that. You get to go somewhere else for a minute and be there and participate in it but then you get to come back here and I think um on a daily basis in my daily life they give me that escape. I don't like to call it an escape. I honestly feel a little bit like I'm minimizing it to do that because I don't think comics are escapist. I don't think they're you know again sort of this trivial joke but um they do. They offer me a little bit of a reprieve from the daily grind.

PI: Okay. Then how can comic books impact your future?

Kent: Hmm, globally again I think they're agents for change. Um, you know as I think about what I get from them for instance the catharsis of crying over lost relationships or feeling anger about injustice. I think those, those moments of catharsis bring me to more emotional balance and more emotional health. And I think because you know when my ex died there was very little processing that was able to go on. It happened back before gay marriage in society and with his parents and with my parents being people that, that wasn't a legitimate relationship anyway and so the grief wasn't legitimate and the process wasn't there.

PI: Hmm

Kent: To get through it. So, I mean to be honest with you seeing it and reading it in a comic book and being able to cry some tears over a dynamic that was validated then allowed me to move on in some ways. And I think that it's not always that. I don't sit down with a comic every time and have these cathartic moments.

PI: Sure.

Kent: Or, or always identify with a character. Sometimes I'm like okay this plotline is cool but if we can get through this then maybe the next one will be amazing or whatever. Okay cool. Um, but in the moments that it does break through and allow me to exercise some part of my emotions or some experience that I've had that it validates or grounds it in a way that comics can um I think it kind of can have a healing effect or it can have a um you know down the road – because it's a part of my experience because I don't read comics in isolation. They become a part of my narrative or they become a part of my understanding of, of even human nature or struggles or difficulty. They then either free me up to live differently or they even become illustrations I mean with clients sometimes I find it beneficial to take a plot line or storyline or piece of that narrative and offer it as an example or as a way to sort of exercise a test pilot for you make decision making – so I think - I feel like I being kind of nebulous but overall they create case studies, they create um experiences, they create cathartic venting that, that allows them for, um in some ways a better quality of life or being able to have lived in light of some of those experiences or some of those recognitions or understandings. Because a lot of what you

asked about is, is how do they impact you and I think that if I am in fact impacted by my experiences at times with comics that they can't help but have reverberations into my future.

PI: Sure.

Kent: Or to have changed my present in a way that it impacts my future.

PI: Mmhmm. What does comic book reading say about you?

Kent: What does it say about me?

PI: Mmhmm

Kent: Um, I like to think that it says that I'm a little bit like delightfully nerdy. And sometimes I do throw out there that I collect and read comics um just for the reaction. Like I like that people go "oh really." Um, I think it says that I have a vivid imagination. Um, and I always have but you know comics really connect with that. They really give me that a way to enjoy that. So I think that it says that I have an imagination. I like to think that with the fact that I read comics also says that I have an intellectual uh capacity. Because I think that comics get so philosophical man.

PI: Very much.

Kent: And they sound out the complexities of the universe and sometimes they even stand as like these case studies for what happens if this gets destroyed or if this gets taken away from humanity. You know like what happens if the president dies or uh if Russia takes over. You know you get a way to exercise these broad philosophical uh overlays and I think that it takes an intellectual capacity to be able to participate in that. And to really get to the full richness of what comics are.

PI: Sure

Kent: Because they are not these monolithic. Um, sometimes the storylines are entwining and you're being taken from this one and you're, this one is being reinserted.

PI: Mmhmm

Kent: You have to remember what just happened in that storyline five pages ago or in the last episode or the last comic that came out.

PI: Yeah.

Kent: In order to connect with when it gets reintroduced in light of. So, and when god when I was reading Green Lantern universe, all of those stories are entwined so what's

happening with the Red Lantern has reverberations for what's happening as the Blue Lanterns are forming and you have to, you have to have a mental capacity to keep all of that together in a way that you know what's going on so I think it says that I have a memory. I think it says that I have an intelligence. I think it says um that I engage with literature because comic book reading is not a passive exercise. It's a very engaged process. Um, so yeah I think it says a lot about me. And then I think it also says uh that I have an emotional availability that I can empathetically connect even with these characters. You know I can – I have empathy. I can put myself in the shoes of this well flashed out complex character and feel a lot as that character is progressing through a storyline.

PI: Yeah. Alright. Here's the last question. What do you think others for example family, friends, peers, and even community think comic book reading says about you?

Kent: That I'm a nerd.

PI: Okay.

Kent: Um, that you know I don't think my parents or society understand it. Um, I think my parents probably just kind of laugh it off as like well it's one of my obsessions. You know like he's got a fucking million of them. Um, my friends generally don't understand me anyway so I don't expect them – I try to get one of my friends into reading them. Like I was really selling him on Earth 2 and you know um I just think they have this dismissive like well that's just his thing or um well that's just not something that I get into. I don't ever – I certainly don't get the sense that I'm like affirmed for it.

PI: Sure.

Kent: Or anybody's like whoa this guy you know like how deep. It's more I guess in a few words it's like uh something that you either connect with or you don't and people who connect with it understand it and they validate it and they get excited oh my god. Because I've had, I've known people that haven't been close friends but like we've talked about how with especially with series that we are very invested in because I've actually – Earth 2 – so the DC universe I'm not trying to waste your time.

PI: No.

Kent: But the DC universe when they transitioned to the new 52 started introducing and pulling out comics pretty rapidly seeing what worked and what didn't. And so they were rapidly introducing storylines and Earth 2 became this receptacle for storylines that they wanted like for instance they jettisoned Mr. Terrific. And it was only a comic that last for 8 uh paperbacks but it was actually really good but it ended up overlapping into Earth 2 so I bought all of the back issues of that one and read through. And so when it was

introduced with the crossover it would make sense. And um so as I was going through that process, there was a woman who um collects Batgirl comics or Bat-Woman, Batgirl um and she's into a couple of others but we were talking about how (laughing) this is a little bit obsessive but like it's not fun to read the paperbacks because the oil from your fingers and you like might crinkle the pages and so they're really not something you want to just you know tear apart and read and so those go in and I have like individual bags and boards for all of course the paperback ones.

PI: Good.

Kent: And then you buy the paperback collection of the issues that is more of like a sort of a what you read and digest and interact with and then you buy the hardback books so that you can have like a more durable but that's not exactly the one you just interact with so we were talking about this and it was so crazy because we shared a perspective on which ones you interact with and which ones are the collections that you possess and which ones – and we had a similar method for the ways that we collected these things. And we got it. Nobody else in the room got it and everybody else thought we were weirdos and we were huddled in the corner kind of like processing this is what you do and she was like taking them out and showing me like oh my god. So um people who get it, get it. And they get it and they sometimes you're really on the same page. And then people who just haven't gotten into it, just don't get it and in my experience no matter how much I talk to them about how cool it is or how much you can connect with it, they just don't. And I don't think that's a good or a bad thing, they just when you talk about it or you get excited about it they just kind of do this little pat on the head like oh that's cute. (laughing)

PI: (laughing)

Kent: Like not my thing. Um, so I guess I feel a little bit misunderstood. But also I think it's kind of cool so I don't care.

PI: Awesome. Alright that will complete the interview.

<End of interview>

3/26/2016
Participant 011
“Anakin”

PI: Alright. Let's just go ahead and jump in here real quick.

Anakin: Sounds good.

PI: So let me just start off with this. How often do you read comic books?

Anakin: Um, almost nearly weekly. It basically depends on how often I get to the comic book store to pick up my subscriptions.

PI: Right. Okay. And I think you checked on your form about 15 min, 30 min weekly about?

Anakin: Yeah if you average out yeah.

PI: Yeah. I usually just read all in a lump. When I go to the store, I'll just read it all and then – so I don't know that I get even 30 minutes a week but I lump it all for a few hours at a time.

Anakin: Yep.

PI: Okay. I'm just writing down some of this so bear with me...alright. When did you begin reading superheroes in comic books?

Anakin: Um, comic books in general when I was around 13 or 14 years old uh which would be late 70s or early 80s. Um, I started with the Marvel Star Wars comic line that came out after the movie was out.

PI: Yeah.

Anakin: Actual superhero comics uh came into play – actually I read a couple of comic books when I was a kid. My grandmother for some reason had some in the closet. When my sister and I were visiting, she had like one Batman and one Superman that she'd picked up somewhere and I'd always reread those. Um so I guess you could say I started even younger but that wasn't any kind of regular thing.

PI: Sure.

Anakin: Um, in adult like superhero comics I started in college. Uh a friend got me into the X-Men line from Marvel and I got into several of those titles for a couple of years.

PI: Okay.

Anakin: And then took break and started again kind of recently in the last couple of years a new Star Wars line came out from Dark Horse so I started with that.

PI: Yeah.

Anakin: And started picking up some of the Marvel stuff in conjunction partially because of the movies, partially because they just had some interesting things coming that I kind of wanted to get back into it.

PI: Yeah, absolutely. Awesome. So, let me kind of expound on this a little bit then. What draws you to continue to read comic books?

Anakin: Uh, it's kind of two-fold. One is the escapism factor. You know I, I have a rather hectic work life working in computers and reading science fiction, fantasy, and comic books are a way to be able to kind of separate myself from that. Turn off the thinking part of my brain and just turn on the imagination and let that flow. Um, the other aspect of it is, you know I like the artwork. I like the stories that are being told.

PI: Okay. So let me ask this then. What type of comic books and superheroes do you read about and why?

Anakin: Um, well I'm reading, again it's a theme you might not be surprised to hear. Uh, the Star Wars comics that Marvel's putting out now.

PI: Yeah. Absolutely.

Anakin: Uh, and again as for me Star Wars came out in such a time of my life that I just latched into and it's been, it's always been there. It's a part of who I am. So, reading more of those stories is, is always a joy. Um, the superhero comics that I read now are again all tied into the Marvel line because I liked the characters in the past. There is some reminiscing of the guy who kind of got me really started in the comic books in college is a friend who passed away actually about a year ago.

PI: Oh, no

Anakin: And uh so there's a little bit of that nostalgia that I'm reading something that he started me on. Um, and again it's, it's liking the characters. It's liking some of the interplay of stories and uh enjoying the ongoing artwork,

PI: Absolutely. I love a lot of the like uh Jacob Crain and some of their artwork and stuff. I just love all of the computer artwork as well as handwritten and drawn too. So, I guess I just want to make sure you know superhero is not necessarily cape and cowl. It can be

some of the characters from Star Wars too. I mean I kind of subsumed all of that into this superhero theme. So feel free to kind of use that too if you'd like.

Anakin: Okay.

PI: I don't want to limit that from you. Because the next question is who is your favorite superhero or superheroes and why?

Anakin: Uh wow.

PI: You can have multiple.

Anakin: I...yeah. I, I, I generally hate "what's your favorite X" questions because it always seems – it varies based on what, what the current mood is. Um, right now what's, what have I seen most recently? Um the Star Wars ones. I probably wouldn't actually list them right now as my current favorite because they're just kind of, they're not doing stuff that's new to the characters. They are doing new stories and continuation but there's not really – it's characters I know and I'm very familiar

PI: Yeah.

Anakin: They aren't rising as big stars in that regard. Um, it's – wow it's tough. I, I guess I would have to say probably my favorites presently are the X-Men

PI: Okay.

Anakin: Uh, because of what they're doing with Marvel's, you know, recent reboot of their universe if you will. Um, so I'm kind of watching that interplay. Uh, I'd almost have to say if I had to pick a single character it might be a toss-up between the Old Man Logan and the uh new Wolverine uh which is a female character.

PI: Yeah. Uh-huh.

Anakin: Uh, and they're both kind of up there because they're – the Old Man Logan is the original character but you know advance so many years a long and having gone such different paths from everybody else.

PI: Yeah.

Anakin: It's a completely new twist on the character and the new Wolverine is again a lot of the same abilities that made the original character so much fun to watch but a completely different personality.

PI: Yeah. Absolutely. I've actually started reading the Old Man Logan. I guess I just kind of waited for it to build up so I can read it all at once. But yeah it's actually a really unique twist on the character all these years past.

Anakin: Yeah.

PI: Okay so you've kind of made the statement earlier about you know it's kind of a part of you. How do you relate to your favorite superhero or superheroes?

Anakin: Um, well looking over the broader stretch of light uh for me the in that regard I go back to the old standby Star Wars.

PI: Mmhmm

Anakin: Uh, when it came out first in '77, I was 11 years old so I was the perfect age for something like that to come in and fire my imagination and let me identify with stuff um in a broader worldview and in that regard Luke Skywalker has always been one that I closely identified with because he was in the original movie and reading the original novelization of it that George Lucas wrote, there's a lot more to the character than what you see on the screen and a lot of it spoke to the difficulties that I was just starting to get into in my own life. Being an outsider, being not like everybody else. Having difficulty finding where I fit in and seeing somebody else like that and having watching them be able to grow and learn and become somebody important, it's – uh like I said earlier, it's an escapism thing.

PI: Yeah.

Anakin: I can sit there and try to pretend that I could be that someday.

PI: Yeah.

Anakin: Um, and with the more modern current favorites like in the Wolverines since again the that's more of a – and I actually draw a parallel to a movie that I saw when I was 18 called Red Dawn.

PI: Yeah.

Anakin: It was. That's the first movie that I saw that I said "what would I do if that actually happened and I was in their shoes."

PI: Mmhmm

Anakin: And I think I do a lot of that now with characters that I read as I'm going along and getting invested into the character. I kind of look at it as like if I was in that position,

if I had those abilities and was in that situation would I have done the same thing or would I have picked a different path.

PI: Sure. So let me ask you now about kind of the process of reading the comic books. Do you ever notice your thoughts and emotions while reading comic books?

Anakin: Um, sometimes but not to the degree that um other media can do for me.

PI: Sure. Yeah. Tell me a little about that.

Anakin: Music, TV, movies you know will have, will generally get me more directly emotionally engaged.

PI: Right.

Anakin: The comic books are *that* removed because it's static.

PI: Right.

Anakin: Um, and again right now the ones that I've been reading the last couple of years haven't had some of the really big emotional impact kind of stuff. They've had, they've had interesting scenes and what not but their story building. So, there hasn't been like the "oh my god I can't believe you just killed this character that I love."

PI: Right.

Anakin: There hasn't been that yet.

PI: So, some of the thoughts that you have are a little more, um, what's a good word...that we could use for that? Um not necessarily shocked or anything but like some of the thoughts that have like static thoughts maybe, or how would you describe those?

Anakin: Um, well it's mostly just uh, just general enjoyment of the...of the story in the medium.

PI: Sure.

Anakin: It's, you know, it's like watching a sitcom and you don't get, you know, hugely, emotionally involved. It doesn't lift you to great heights or drive you to the terrible "ohs!"

PI: Right.

Anakin: It's just there. It's, it's – I don't want to say mindless fun but it's mindless fun

PI: Yeah. No, it is.

Anakin: You don't have to spend forever trying to figure out what the hell they just meant by that. You know you can just sit there, enjoy the art, enjoy the story and the dialogue, and not have to think too deeply about it like I'd probably go back and reread stuff later and then go what the hell did they actually mean by that.

PI: (laughing) Yeah. Absolutely. So you've kind of hit on this already, but I'm going to ask anyway. So how do comic books make you feel on an emotional after you read them?

Anakin: Um, usually relaxed.

PI: Okay.

Anakin: If the comic book works well for me, I get that escapism. I get to turn my brain you know the worry part of my brain off and just enjoy something different that you know I can enjoy without having to invest myself in it. You know like going to hang out with friends or playing a board game or something like that.

PI: Yeah.

Anakin: You have to put some of yourself in it to get something out. Comic books...all I have to do is put my eyeballs into it to pull the images off of the page.

PI: Sure. Alright. So this is an interesting question. So I just kind of want to leave it for your interpretation. In reading superhero comic books, what do you learn about others?... Take your time

Anakin: In by that I guess you mean what I learn about other people I know.

PI: Just I guess kind of in general about other people.

Anakin: Um...

PI: ...If at all.

Anakin: Yeah I'm not sure that I, I, I really learn anything about other people so much because usually the writers of comic books are putting different aspects of different people in and they're not, they're generally not creating you know new people out of old cloth there. Different things are getting into it so you're seeing aspects of different stereotypes.

PI: Sure.

Anakin: It's, it's – I don't find a lot of parallels of that to people I know. Um, yeah I guess, I guess that's all I have to say about that.

PI: Okay. Fine. That's good.

Anakin: Interesting question though. Now, now you're going to make me think the next time I read them.

PI: Yeah that's right. Kind of jog it a little bit and make it go from just a mindless reading to uh process.

Anakin: You realize if you spoiled comic books for you, for me I'm going to come hunt you down.

PI: (laughing) I'll give you my address if you need to. Alright so let me ask this. What was your most memorable comic book event, battle, character, etc.?

Anakin: Oh! Wow! Um, hmm, most memorable. Um, wow so I'm sitting here thinking about it I'm like having different images from, from the old Marvel line popup.

PI: Okay.

Anakin: Um, I, I can remember one particular scene from that Batman comic my grandmother had. Um, what would I call the most memorable...um you know probably the most, I think the most memorable is uh was a Star Wars comic um back in the '80s and the story line was a bounty hunter that had been um going after Skywalker and I, I think the storyline was probably post-Empire Strikes Back so we had that whole bounty hunter thing already being brought into play.

PI: Mmhmm

Anakin: And the character kept showing up across a couple of, a couple of issues and it was discovered that the character himself was a cyborg and there was a lot of apparently negative feelings about cyborgs in that, in that universe. And when he discovered uh or when he was discovered by in that regard somebody was looking to take him down for being a cyborg and he was kind of conflicted at the time whether or not to actually capture Skywalker and take him in. And because of this person going after him for being a cyborg he kind of, it kind of flipped him to say okay that's it I'm backing Skywalker. And um you know things change and then at that kind of stuff would be on and off because of the, the redemption factor you know which then of course got much bigger play when the Return of the Jedi came out. We saw the redemption of Darth Vader.

PI: Yeah. A big one.

Anakin: That's, that's probably, definitely – I don't know if that's the most memorable but it's definitely up there.

PI: That's the one that popped in up the most significant for you though so we'll go with it.

Anakin: Yep.

PI: If you want to add to it later let me know. Alright.

Anakin: Will do.

PI: Okay. How have comic books and superheroes influenced your life?

Anakin: Um, I don't know that they, that's there's been a significant influence.

PI: Sure

Anakin: Um, I said there was some friendships, well there was a friendship that was you know closely cemented because we, we, we had a shared enjoyment of comic books. Um, there's been some um yeah no I would say I don't think comic books have really had any kind of major life direction impact on me.

PI: Right. Sure

Anakin: I mean it's – there's some music that I would has had that. There's been some movies that had that, but comic books I don't think they quite touch me that deeply.

PI: Sure. So kind of the maybe a little bit socially they've had some impact, maybe not significant but had...

Anakin: (overlapping) I wouldn't even say significant. Like I said there was one friendship um which is more and that's more relevant now because he's passed away then without.

PI: Sure.

Anakin: If he was still around, I probably wouldn't rate it that high.

PI: Right. Okay. So this question, we may already know the answer but I'll ask. So tell me how reading superhero comic books impacted like your beliefs, morals, etc.? If at all. Maybe on any sort of level.

Anakin: Um, I, again, I don't think that they've changed anything. They maybe have supported values that I was raised with.

PI: Okay.

Anakin: Just by following the heroes and the you know and to quote the Captain America bit from the movie ‘throw yourself on the grenade to save others’ kind of where I’ll do the right thing.

PI: Yeah.

Anakin: The old Spider-Man quote “with great power comes great responsibility.”

PI: Mmhmm.

Anakin: A lot of the books that I like usually support that kind of, those kind of morals that we tend to be raised with.

PI: Okay. So this is an abstract question. What do comic books mean to you?

Anakin: Um, what do comic books mean to me.

PI: Yeah. What do they mean to you?

Anakin: Uh, probably touched on it a number of times in different ways. I think they mean – to me they mean a way to be able to step outside of myself to step away from the troubles that I may have with the world at any given point in time.

PI: Okay.

Anakin: They also mean for time to time significantly lighter wallet.

PI: (laughing) yeah. That’s true. They don’t cost 50-60 cents anymore

Anakin: 50 or 60 hell the original Marvel Star Wars I was getting was 25 cents.

PI: Yeah. Alright. So I have a few more questions for you and we’ll be done with the interview. Have you learned anything about yourself from reading comic books?

Anakin: Um...uh nah I don’t think so. Not really.

PI: Okay. So other than the, kind of, averaging out of 30 minutes a week or so and financially that you mentioned...Is there any other ways comic books impact your current life?

Anakin: Uh no not really.

PI: Okay. So looking forward. How can comic books impact your future?

Anakin: Um, not really sitting outside of you know the same thing. It’s a way to escape. I don’t see them becoming an all-consuming passion.

PI: No, sure. And I don't want to feel that's where I was leading you with the question.

Anakin: No, I just – they're just like you know buying paperbacks to read or picking up a magazine. It's entertainment.

PI: Yeah.

Anakin: And I don't – where comic books are and when, how I approach them I don't see them having any significant impact on me going forward.

PI: Sure. So when we first started talking and this concept came up. So, let me ask about it. So what does comic book reading say about you?

Anakin: Um... well there's what I think it says about me and then there's what society seems to think it says about me.

PI: What do you think it says about you?

Anakin: They both kind of have the same answer, I'm a geek.

PI: (laughing) okay.

Anakin: And, and to society that's well used to be a fairly negative thing. It's becoming less and less of negative and more of a positive as pop culture become more prevalent.

PI: Right.

Anakin: Uh, for me I've never minded being a geek. Um, it's part of who I am.

PI: Sure.

Anakin: I've, I've, as I've mentioned before, Star Wars has been a huge part of my life um you know and what I enjoy, what I really you know what can emotionally touch me and that has never, that has not always been a good thing. And uh you know science fiction and fantasy in general has been there you know since before Star Wars ever came out. I was into sci-fi and fantasy. Um, so it's a stamp of who I am. I'm that kind of a geek. And I'm proud of it.

PI: Okay. So you kind of touched on this already. But this is the last question. And I'll see if you have anything else you want to add to it. So this question is what do you think others such as family, friends, peers, community think comic book says about you? You kind of mentioned it's somewhat of a negative thing at some point.

Anakin: Yeah. Well you know family uh they've, my family would probably would turn up an eyebrow on that. Um, I don't associate with my family a whole lot so I'm not 100%

certain about that. The uh friends, most of my friends if they're not actually comic book readers, understand comic book readers. Um, so most of them don't probably wouldn't don't really care one way or the other. Society in general, in general I could care less what society thinks.

PI: (laughing) Good for you.

Anakin: Uh, and, and I've never been great at being able to figure out what other people think about me. And the only thing I would know about what society has to say about comic book readers is what you know what news media would say about it and news media isn't really very trustworthy source these days.

PI: Yeah.

Anakin: You know I think there's a large enough culture of people who read this that it's obviously...it's a growing industry. Marvel, yes they got bought by Disney but they're certainly still turning out comic books. DC is still turning out comic books. There's independents that are bringing out stuff and new ones pop up all the time. It's there. People have to deal with it. You know just like when rap started becoming big there was people against rap. It's still out there. You know, maybe not as big as it was but there's still likers of that.

PI: Sure.

Anakin: You know it's – comic books are a form of art. And art is liked by some people and not by others.

PI: Okay. Alright that's all the questions that I had for you man. Um,

Anakin: Okay

PI: I'll go ahead and stop my audio recorder.

<End of interview>

3/26/2016
Participant 012
"Tony"

PI: So let's go ahead and begin. I'll ask you your first question. Again take your time if you need to and just think about things. It's not in any hurry. So, first question is how often do you read comic books?

Tony: Uh, probably I mean do you mean full comic book or just like?

PI: Just engage in the action of reading.

Tony: Yeah, probably um whenever I can find time. So, it's probably you know once every couple of days.

PI: Yeah. Alright. When did you begin reading like superheroes in comic books?

Tony: Um, that's a great question. I mean honestly I started pretty recently.

PI: Okay.

Tony: Um, probably around last year.

PI: Okay.

Tony: One of my friends introduced me to comic books. So, I mean I haven't been doing it very long.

PI: Sure. That's fine.

Tony: Yeah.

PI: Okay. So, this kind of builds off of that. What draws you to continue to read comic books?

Tony: Um, I think there are a couple of different reasons.

PI: Okay.

Tony: Um, I really like the artwork in a lot of cases. Um, I mean it – I think that's the main reason. I,..I, I really enjoy exploring sort of the universe that they've sort of built around these characters and these characters in general. Um, I think that's the best way that I can explain it.

PI: Okay.

Tony: I can't very well um vilify my enjoyment of it for some reason.

PI: Okay. So, let me ask you. What types of comic books and superheroes do you read about and why?

Tony: Yeah um I really like um Iron Man um and I think uh part of that is probably shaped on my um experiences with the um like the cinematic, the, the you know

PI: Yeah.

Tony: the movie's been established since what? 2008? So like 8 years now. Um, I you know Robert Downey Jr's portrayal but um I don't know there's something about that character that I really find fascinating. You know sort of the whole uh – I, I don't know. I don't know. It's something about his personality. But I also really like uh Batman. That's another really big one. Uh, as you can see I haven't followed too far down into...

PI: (overlapping) No, that's perfectly okay. Well, they're both good choices. Alright. So, you've kind of named some of the uh superheroes you read about, who is your favorite superhero or superheroes and why? So, if you had to pick a favorite or a couple of favorites who would they be?

Tony: Um, so I would go with those two. I mean familiar with more than just those two.

PI: Yeah. Sure.

Tony: Um, I mean I would definitely go with those two. Primarily because of, once again, their personalities and being able to explore that through the comics. I mean they're both very flawed characters and because of that uh I think they're, they're more relatable than some others.

PI: Okay.

Tony: Once again this is me speaking from a limited experience so.

PI: No, your experience is just as valid as anyone's. Okay. So, and you just touched on this which is great because my next was how do you relate to those two superheroes?

Tony: Certainly. Um, I mean I certainly see uh....

PI: Take your time.

Tony: It's uh oh sorry.

PI: No it's alright. Just take your time. If you got to think about it, that's okay.

Tony: Yeah, no. Um, that's another really good question that I don't – I don't have a really clear answer for. Uh, I would say that I, um, I don't know. I don't know if I necessarily relate to them as much as because I don't if there is a whole lot that I can relate to with Iron Man, but I do find him fascinating and sort of, um, with his personality. I hope that makes sense.

PI: Yeah.

Tony: Um, and the same with Batman. I certainly can't relate to most of the, uh, the character elements that he displays, but at the same time I find him fascinating as well.

PI: Okay.

Tony: And sort of, um, once again his personality as explored. And his values and belief system I find very, um, very interesting. Why he believes the things that he does.

PI: Mmhmm. And earlier, you kind, of mentioned both were kind of relatable because they both had I think you used the term "flaws," um, is that kind of something on the same path or is that – can you kind of tell me more about that.

Tony: Yeah, I mean, um, I can certainly see with Iron Man. He very clearly displays, uh, a level of narcissism about himself.

PI: Sure.

Tony: Uh, and with Batman, I mean it's just – I don't – once again I don't know that I can necessarily relate to these things, um.

PI: Sure. Yeah.

Tony: But at the same time, within that I think you, um, you certainly can see elements of yourself potentially. And see a little bit of yourself reflected. I, I guess you could say that about any sort of literary, um, or you know most characters that you come across in...

PI: (overlapping) Sure.

Tony: ...um, film, or you know literature, but I don't know. It is interesting – I, I...I guess I do find it a little bit interesting that, and this may be a little bit off topic, I find it interesting that our characters that we've seen, um, sort of reiterated over and over and over again over the last, you know, 50-60 years in some cases. 70 years, um, in the case of Batman, I think. Um, and – or 80 years. And, uh, I just find it really interesting that something about that has captivated, um, our attention for so long that, you know, uh, and um, really, really spoken to us. Because, I mean, if you look at Iron Man from when he originally came out, Iron Man is, um, basically a symbol of capitalism, you know.

PI: Okay.

Tony: And you can really see when he first comes out – when he was, you know, with his early comics, uh, and in the 60s...you see, um, him as this agent against the forces of say communism as, you know, embodied by the Mandarin.

PI: Right.

Tony: So, and yet we don't really see that today with our interpretations of Iron Man. We don't – it's that Iron Man is still a symbol of capitalism but he doesn't seem to be, you know, it doesn't seem to be this dichotomy. But there *are* still elements of Iron Man that we find interesting.

PI: Absolutely.

Tony: Or find, um, reflect something that we've seen in the world.

PI: That's a really good statement.

Tony: Thank you.

PI: Okay. So let me ask – kind of take me to the experience of when you're reading because this question is: do you ever notice your thoughts and emotions while reading comic books?

Tony: Certainly. Um, yeah sometimes, sometimes I do, um, I get hung up on plot troops if that make sense.

PI: mmhmm

Tony: Um, sometimes I'll notice those and that can be somewhat, um - but borrowing that I think most of my attention sort of goes to the artwork. Um, when I'm reading, um, that's one of the things that I really focus on most is the expressiveness of, um, comic book art, you know. I find that really fascinating. Um, and then – so usually I'll catch myself hanging around on a page or two just, you know, sort of going back through and analyzing the frames and I, I really would like to put myself into the position of the person's actually creating it when I'm doing that, you know, and so start going through, um, what they thought. Uh, what was their analysis of the frame that they were trying to create and how that led them to eventually, you know - does that make sense.

PI: Yeah, yeah it does. So, in terms of your thoughts, you kind of focused your thoughts on kind of almost the what if type, you know, what would it be like if I was working with some of these frames type thing?

Tony: Exactly.

PI: Okay. In terms of an emotional level kind of, what is some of your experiences as a result of that?

Tony: Um, that's a good question. I mean, I, I, I'm really impressed the work done.

PI: Okay.

Tony: I'm like fascinated by it. Um, I think that – I think that my impression is I get kind of caught up in the idea that these people do this work, um, that is gorgeous in a lot of cases.

PI: Mmhmm.

Tony: And yet, um, when you read a comic book, it seems like often if you try to actually just read through the comic books, um, then all of that is lost. Like all of that attention to detail and so, um, I guess I wonder sometimes because I'm not established in the community. Um, I don't know. I don't know. I just find that really fascinating.

PI: Okay. So, the question now is how do comic books make you feel kind of more on an emotional level after you read them? Like after you've read a comic, how do you feel?

Tony: Um, I guess it would depend on the comic.

PI: Yeah, tell me some more about that.

Tony: Um, well I mean like I don't know that I've felt and this is once again reflecting my inexperience with the medium even though I've been working on it.

PI: Sure. Yeah so far what have you experienced?

Tony: I would say that I haven't ever felt incredibly or deeply moved.

PI: Right.

Tony: Um, I know that there are, you know, works out there that I'm sure would do that. Um, and that is kind of where I'm trying to move out at this point and branch out to different comics. Um, where I've been in the past, uh, has primarily been – once again it's been more of instead of an emotional level, I mean once again I get that emotional feeling that I'm enjoying doing this.

PI: Okay.

Tony: But I think a lot of that enjoyment comes from, once again going back to what I said earlier of analyzing sort of the thought process in design of the comic books itself

and being sort of cognizant of what's going on here. I'd like to explore that a lot more, too.

PI: Absolutely.

Tony: I'd like to go through and – but you know I, I don't think that I've really ever had, um, a very visceral react to a comic book.

PI: I would say most people don't. Um, if more of anything it's just, you know, kind of the, you know, you mentioned enjoyment that I kind of stuff like what you feel after you've read a comic book. That's kind of the jest of –

Tony: (overlapping) Which, which I suppose is a little bit disappointing to me in a way.

PI: Okay.

Tony: Because I, I look at this and I go, you know, there's so many people who drive so much pleasure from this. Um, and I want to experience that, too, you know what I mean?

PI: Sure.

Tony: Yeah.

PI: Okay.

Tony: So, I, I'm aware that my – I don't know. My experience is different, um, and I would – I don't know.

PI: Okay. Now this is kind of an interesting question and it's kind of an open ended, so it's kind of up to your interpretation. But, in reading superhero comic books, what do you learn about others?

Tony: Certainly. Um, I don't know that I really...I don't know that I necessarily learn things about other people so much as – I mean I...I think, uh, a way of describing this is I was having a conversation with my co-worker the other day about the way that I enjoy music and it, um, once again I feel like my answer goes back to what I said earlier about trying to put myself in the mindset of the people who design comic books. I feel like a learn a lot about, um, have learned on some level how they go about that if that factors into your answer. I don't know that, um, I necessarily have learned a lot about, you know, people.

PI: Sure.

Tony: Um...

PI: And that's fine.

Tony: And again I think – once again, I'm sure there are - this is, you know, my comic book experience and it's just so much, you know, it's just one small portion.

PI: It's just as valid as anybody else's though. No, that's good. Um, so over the past year that you've been reading comic books, what's the most memorable, you know, comic book issue, event, battle, character, what's the thing that sticks out the most for you since you've been reading?

Tony: Certainly. Well, I always really liked, um, the Mandarin and Iron Man. And so the first actual comic book that I got to read was, uh, this, I think it was from the 2000s, but it was this - I'm trying to remember the title of it. Uh, but it was basically Iron Man and the Mandarin, um, and I think that sticks out to me primarily because of, once again going back to what I was talking about earlier, the actual thought that went into, um, the symbolism behind both of those, um, and the sort of the ongoing story with the U.S.S.R. that we had when the Mandarin actually came out. Um, and sort of, also because that was sort of my first experience with, um, comic books I think. My first real experience, um, both of those together. I mean I read comic books since that, you know, but I just kind of, uh, I don't know.

PI: Okay.

Tony: I don't know. I hope that answers your question.

PI: Yeah, everything is great. Yeah. Um, since you've been reading comic books and maybe this will be applicable, it may not be, but I'll ask anyway. How have comic books and superheroes influenced your life?

Tony: Um, I don't know that they really have. Uh, but...I don't know that they really have.

PI: And it doesn't have to be in a very significant giant way. It can even be something small. Anything, if at all.

Tony: Yeah. Oh, okay. No, I mean I guess I should say I don't think they've really impacted my worldview necessarily.

PI: Yeah.

Tony: Or, look at I don't know. But, I do think that, um, I certainly appreciate, um, - I think one thing that have, you know, shown me is I can look at a piece of music, or something, or um, you know, uh I don't know poster or something I can go – I go in my head. I rationally realize that this isn't the case. I don't have the skill to do this, but in my

head just for a second, I feel like if I were to go out and do this I, you know, I could potentially do this, you know. I could build up some skill and, you know, I could potentially, you know, make music or design poster for a living.

PI: Mmhmm.

Tony: But, then I look at comic books and I go this is something, um, that I doubt I would be able to do. And I realize that, um, in particular isn't necessarily the case. I mean if I spent maybe 10 or 11 years actually working at this and, you know, sort of, um, developing a, uh, you know, doing some sort of actual practice then yeah I mean I could probably develop some skill, you know. But, considering I'm applying zero percent of my time to that, I'm just about as good at that as I am music. However, I find interesting that I see this sort of dichotomy between looking at music and going I could potentially do that, and comic book art, which because of its technical nature in a lot of cases, I go oh I probably can't do that. So, I do find that interesting.

PI: Okay. You kind of mentioned appreciate was kind of the word that you used a little but ago. Okay. Alright. Winding down here now. Um, you've already answered this, but I'll ask it to see if anything else pops up. The question is: tell me how reading superhero comic books have impacted your morals, beliefs, etc. Impacted you in any level.

Tony: Um, they really haven't.

PI: And that's okay.

Tony: I'm really looking forward to, you know, getting into deeper into the, uh, sort of the gray area of superheroes in comic books.

PI: Yeah.

Tony: I would really enjoy that, you know.

PI: It'd be interesting if at some point for whatever reason we did this interview maybe 5 years from now and you've been reading for longer what your answer might be and how they might be different.

Tony: Exactly.

PI: Yeah. It'd be really interesting. Everybody's would be different. Alright. So let me ask you, what do comic books mean to you? On any level.

Tony: On any level?

PI: Yeah.

Tony: Um, I would say comic books are to me an art form that I greatly admire and respect, um, and I really admire the people who put in work into comic books.

PI: Okay. Absolutely.

Tony: Um, and I'm always – to me comic books are an unexplored territory or an excited about the future and seeing what actually exists there. You know, what actually has been done so far and watching it mature from that point.

PI: Alright.

Tony: Um, it's a lot of material that I'm really excited to be able to experience for the first time, too, you know.

PI: Yeah. Awesome. So, since you've been reading, what have you learned about yourself from reading comic books? Anything at all?

Tony: Um....

PI: Notice anything about yourself since you've been reading that you really weren't attenuated to before?

Tony: Certainly. Um, that's a good question. I don't know that I'm necessarily as – I think my self-awareness when it comes to reading comic books extends about as deeply as, um, what I mentioned earlier about noticing the differences between how comic books and other forms of art are, um, sort of my what I imagined the emotions of the artist would, I'd say the emotions of the artist, the focus and the attention of and thoughts of the artist there working on this. Um....

PI: Okay.

Tony: I, I don't know.

PI: Okay. That's fine. Alright. Four questions left. So this one is, how do comic books impact your current life on any level?

Tony: On any level. Um, well currently I mean they're really great way to relax.

PI: Absolutely. Tell me more.

Tony: Um, I mean like I said whenever I get some free time, you know, that isn't being eaten up by other things.

PI: Sure.

Tony: Um, I, you know, we actually have a couple of, uh, at our university library, we have a very small selection of comic books. Like we have The Walking Dead, um, like in the bound editions.

PI: Yeah.

Tony: So, I mean...whenever I get free time, that's kind of – I'm losing my train of thought here. What was the question again?

PI: Oh that's okay. I just kind of wanted to know how they currently impact your life, and it sounds like if you get free time, they're relaxing.

Tony: Yeah.

PI: I don't know if any other aspect of them, but that's what I've gotten from you so far.

Tony: Yeah. And once again, like I said I'm really excited to, you know, explore this more.

PI: Sure.

Tony: And see more, you know. Something that will really make me think.

PI: Yeah. So, let me ask you then, how do you perceive comic books impacting your future?

Tony: Um, I can see me devoting a lot of time to them, if that makes, you know. Um, that's all I can really see at this point is I'm going to – what I'm probably going to end up doing is I'm probably going to, uh, I suppose what I should do and for some reason I've never really thought too hard on it, but um what I should do is, I should just, um, go online and do actual research into, uh, and I guess if I did that then, um, I could probably find stuff I'd be more in tune with.

PI: Okay.

Tony: In which case, I would definitely be spending a lot more time.

PI: Yeah. Okay. Alright two more questions. What does comic book reading say about you?

Tony: Comic book reading says about me, um, that.....that's a good question. That's really good question. Um, I would say that – I don't know what it says about me. I have no idea. No idea. I think it sort of says – most of my answers I think sort of feed into that question of, you know, what does it say about me. I don't know much about the field.

PI: Sure.

Tony: And I'm very inquisitive.

PI: So, let me ask you, if we're not really sure what it says about you, can you put maybe kind of a label or group on it maybe? Like kind of an overall essence of what it may say?

Tony: Sure.

PI: Like a positive, negative I mean.

Tony: Yeah, um, I mean I think it says – I don't think.... I don't know that it says anything. I mean except that I enjoy it I guess.

PI: Okay. Alright. Here's the last question, then we'll talk for a little bit after this. Alright. Last question. What do you think others for example family, friends, peers, community think comic book reading says about you?

Tony: Um, I don't know that, I mean my sister would probably make fun of me for it. Um, but I don't think anyone else would care. I don't think that it really registers to them, if that makes sense. Like it's not something that they really have an opinion on.

PI: Okay.

Tony: Um, in terms of the community, I mean I don't know. I mean I just don't so far I haven't really gotten to the point where I'm actually going out and discussing this with other people besides, you know, friends who happen to, uh, pursue comic books to some degree.

PI: Okay. Alright. Well, that will conclude our interview.

<End of interview>

4/9/16
Participant 013
"Albert"

PI: Alright, so let me go ahead and ask you the first question. The first one is pretty easy. How often do you read comic books?

Albert: Uh, weekly. Daily, usually. Daily. Usually get my order of monthly comics in and then read them for a week or so straight until I'm done with them.

PI: Yeah. Okay. So, when did you begin reading superheroes in comic books?

Albert: 15.

PI: Okay.

Albert: Read a few before that, but nothing like on a regular basis or anything.

PI: Yeah, not like a pull list or anything like that.

Albert: Yeah.

PI: So, what draws you to continue to read comic books?

Albert: Stories.

PI: Okay, tell me more.

Albert: Uh, I like to write stuff.

PI: Okay.

Albert: I've written – creative writing class and stuff like that. So, um, I really like artwork and doing artwork myself. So, artwork in the comics. I'm in it for that as much as I am in the writing. Um, when I also – often as I'm reading the stuff, I'll have ideas what I think the story is going or what I would do if I were writing it. Um, and sometimes it goes that way and I'm like "aha! I knew it!" Or, it'll go a different and I'll be like "oh, didn't see that coming."

PI: Yeah. Alright.

Albert: I just like the stories, I guess.

PI: Okay. That'll work.

Albert: I read all sorts of different kinds.

PI: That's what I was about to ask you. What types of comic books and superheroes do you read about and why?

Albert: Uh, like I read the normal like Spider-Man, stuff like that. Um, just to keep up with what's going on in the new ones. Uh, really got into Image Comics when they came out. That's what started the whole thing.

PI: Oh, yeah.

Albert: And I really like that because of it was characters that weren't established yet. So, I was getting in on the ground floor. Uh, you know, didn't have thirty years worth of backstories to try to catch up on and all that.

PI: Yeah, that's kind of costly to do that.

Albert: Yep. I read Conan when it comes out.

PI: Okay.

Albert: I just like the different, you know, like the, uh, magical, like the I don't know the, uh, totally different than the normal stuff I read.

PI: Sure.

Albert: With, uh, being cast back in long time ago and stuff like that. So, uh, I like his attitude.

PI: Cool. Alright. So, here's the hard question. Who's your favorite superhero or superheroes, and why?

Albert: Uh...

PI: You can pick a couple.

Albert: Yeah, two of the favorite that I like are Spawn.

PI: Okay.

Albert: And Savage Dragon. Both from Image. Um, because I really liked both artists that were on the book originally.

PI: Okay.

Albert: And again the whole getting on the ground floor and collecting it from the start, and knowing everything that there is to know basically about the characters and all that stuff. Not my daddy superheroes.

PI: Yeah. No, not the Golden Age fighting the World War II stuff.

Albert: Right.

PI: So, let me ask you, and it can be those two, or it can be different, but how do you relate to your favorite superheroes?

Albert: I don't know. Weird question.

PI: Yeah. It's kind of one of those questions that makes you kind of that you don't really think about.

Albert: Yeah, uh...well, I think I'm a do-gooder, you know, I guess.

PI: Okay.

Albert: Help people out if they needed it. That really doesn't relate to those characters all that much, I guess.

PI: Okay.

Albert: Superhero sense.

PI: Yeah, sure. Essence of superheroes.

Albert: I mean I didn't die and come back from the dead.

PI: You're not all burnt up like Spawn.

Albert: Right.

PI: That might be a bad time. So, let me ask you since you read comics almost on a daily basis, do you ever notice your thoughts and emotions while reading them?

Albert: Do I ever notice my thoughts and emotions?

PI: Yeah.

Albert: Uh, during The Walking Dead maybe reading that comic.

PI: Well, I would imagine.

Albert: See someone out of the blue get, you know, killed or something like that and totally unexpected, it's "No!" kind of a shocker. Uh, I find myself laughing out loud at a lot of stuff that, you know, is unexpected. Not necessarily on *The Walking Dead*, but just other stuff. Usually, humor is what catches me a lot on the comics.

PI: okay.

Albert: Just something like off the wall that, you know, will make me chuckle and tell my wife, "hey, look at this."

PI: Yeah. Well, sometimes it's serious stuff that kind of comes off as funny, too.
(laughing)

Albert: Yeah. Exactly. (laughing) I think the last one I really laughed out real loud at was during the *Savage Dragon*. There was, uh, one of the characters, one of the dragon's son got a girl pregnant and they were warning her that the baby was too strong that she had to go get help to have it taken care of because if it grew, it could punch its way out of her stomach.

PI: Yeah.

Albert: So, then she ends up telling them that she was just lying, that she wasn't pregnant. She was just doing that for publicity. And then toward the end of the comic book, like three issues later something like that, I'm reading through it and she's sitting on subway and hearing these other people talking about her like, "oh, that's the girl that was with Malcom Dragon," and all of this. And then the next thing you know, the baby rips out of her stomach and still attached with the umbilical cord dragging her across the subway floor and then like rips itself free, and the girl is laying there dead and the baby just walks off. (laughing)

PI: (laughing) Oh my gosh.

Albert: Completely unexpected and I was just like, "oh my God."

PI: That is bizarre.

Albert: So, it was one of those like pushing the envelope of what's like supposed to be like stuff kids are reading and whatever.

PI: Yeah.

Albert: Freaked out over still dragging her by the umbilical cord when she's dead for blocks, and I'm like "oh my God."

PI: Yeah. That is funny. That is a bad time. She didn't have fun. So, let me ask you, you kind of mentioned humor, so how do comic books make you feel kind of on an emotional level after you read them?

Albert: Like after I'm done reading them?

PI: Yeah.

Albert: Um....

PI: Yeah, how do you feel usually after you read them?

Albert: Um, well I read them on the way to work.

PI: Okay.

Albert: Uh, my wife drives to work while I read and then I drive home. So, when I'm done reading one, I'm at work so I hate it.

PI: Well, that's true.

Albert: Normally, I, uh – you know, a lot of them if I save up a few I'm ready to get to the next one. Uh, want to see where the story goes. Thinking about what's going to be happening next kind of thing.

PI: Yeah. Alright. We kind of talked about weird questions, here is another one for you. So, in reading superhero comic books, what do you learn about others, if anything?

Albert: Well, how so? Like what do you mean? Like how to relate to people or what?

PI: Is there anything from those comic books that you've taken away that kind of informs you about others? Or, kind of makes you think of other people differently? Not specific other people, but just in general.

Albert: No, I think with me like I guess like Spider-Man's written from like a teenager's point of view.

PI: Right.

Albert: And like it's supposed to be like, uh, how you relate to other people and stuff that he goes through and all that stuff. With me starting to read them when I was 15/16 years old, you know, I didn't need Spider-Man to help me through stuff so.

PI: Sure.

Albert: Generally, looking at it that way I was kind of – I’m different from most of the comic books readers where a lot of them are sheltered and, you know, shy and all that stuff. I’m not really like that at all, so I don’t take that much from it really.

PI: Okay.

Albert: With, you know, how to relate to people or thinking about how, you know, I’ve kind of flipped that I guess for people have no idea that I read comics because I’m outgoing and, you know, stuff like that.

PI: Mmhmm

Albert: And then they’ll be like, “oh, you’re not like the typical person that sees somebody and runs.” (laughing)

PI: (laughing) Runs the other way through a window.

Albert: I learned it from the comics so yeah.

PI: Well, I’m sure The Walking Dead at least made you think what it’d be like with people during that time.

Albert: That’s true.

PI: What was your most memorable comic book event, battle, character, etc.?

Albert: Uh, one of my favorite one’s was again Savage Dragon.

PI: Okay.

Albert: Um, I think issue 150 or something like that. Uh, there’s some storylines he does some time traveling, stuff like that throughout alternate timelines and stuff. And there was part of the book where I think where these dudes that was like – it was just a bunch of storylines that kind of paid off all on one thing. Um, and it was so well done with all the you know twenty years’ worth of stories that kind of accumulated and all tied up in one thing where I think somebody got the main character got killed. Um, and then the other guy got killed so they couldn’t undo the whole thing that they did like Marvel does all the time.

PI: Yeah.

Albert: Uh, so that’s kind of a shock that it happened, but also like a, you know, putting in all of those twenty years of reading it, it was like that’s the way you do it like a good thing like that so. And I really liked the, uh, back when 9/11 happened, a lot of like Spider-Man and all that stuff. They had a really nice issue that was kind of just, you

know, really mellow and touching on all that stuff that was going on in New York and everything.

PI: Okay.

Albert: So, to see that and them taking a departure from other stuff to hit real world events.

PI: Was there anything else that made, uh, those two examples memorable that you can think of?

Albert: You mean from those two specific comics.

PI: Yeah those two experiences you just talked about. Is there anything else that you can think of that made it more memorable for you?

Albert: No.

PI: Okay. So, let me ask this then, how have comic books and superheroes influenced your life?

Albert: Uh...lots, I would say. Um, my wife and I both collect a lot of stuff and have met, like you yourself, tons of people that we would have never met.

PI: Yeah.

Albert: Have we not been into collecting toys, comics, whatever. Most of our vacations are centered around going to conventions, meeting other people that like friends we know from England or wherever.

PI: That's cool.

Albert: Yeah, we all went to California together, met George Lucas together, so there's big thing. Ran into George Lucas.

PI: That is kind of a big thing.

Albert: Yeah.

PI: Yeah, that's actually probably one of the coolest things I've heard. I'd love to do something like that.

Albert: He was going to travel around to like seven different cities and meet up with a bunch of us, um, like went to California and met like five people that lived local there, and went and saw the movie with them. Then went to I think Oregon saw like three

people that lived there. Went to Chicago had like five of us there and that's where I went because I'm in Indiana.

PI: Yeah.

Albert: And so on. The one where we went to Chicago, we just happened to go to some AMC Theater randomly to go see Star Wars. Uh, he was like I just got off the plane so I want to get something to eat, so instead of going to the theater we held out in the lobby to get snacks. And he goes, "I'm going to go back and get some candy." So, we are waiting there in line and he's like, "come here." So I run over there and he's like, "look who is standing next to us." And I turn around and George Lucas is two people from me.

PI: Oh my.

Albert: And I'm like Terminator vision looking and I'm like standing and I'm like okay yes. Right shirt, right beard, right height, body guard, okay it's Lucas.

PI: Yeah.

Albert: So, I ran back and grab my other friend, and then we run up and they had both gotten a picture with him. So, I ran up real quick and I'm like I'm with them. Got a picture.

PI: Oh, that is awesome.

Albert: Then we talked to his body guard a little bit. Um, but it was just by that him wanting to go hang out with us and go to different cities to see the movie with us, ended up running into George Lucas randomly in Chicago.

PI: (laughing) That's so cool.

Albert: Yeah.

PI: Alright. So the last question we just kind of talked about. So, this one's like tell me how reading superhero comic books have impacted your morals, beliefs, etc.? Anywhere in that realm.

Albert: Well, uh, not really. (laughing)

PI: Okay.

Albert: Uh, I was brought up in a Christian home so I'm a good boy anyway. I don't randomly kill people.

PI: Yeah, that's a good trademark to have.

Albert: I don't think that – I think that comics could influence you in a good way.

PI: Okay.

Albert: But, I don't think they can take someone like me and make me a bad person. Uh, unless I'm not reading the right stuff.

PI: Sure. You're not Dexter.

Albert: Yeah, there you go. I have a good moral grounding to start with.

PI: Sure.

Albert: So, what I read in comics just would maybe either, you know, cement that moral be good to others. But, I don't see it turning me against anything that I believe in and so.

PI: Okay. This is kind of an open question for you then. What do comic books mean to you?

Albert: Less space in my basement. (laughing)

PI: (laughing) Less money.

Albert: Uh, I don't know. An outlet. An escape, I guess. You know, much like TV or video games, same kind of thing. Good form of entertainment.

PI: Yeah.

Albert: Um, I think they're also good for, you know, I'll be talking to someone and mention something and they'll be like where you know about that, where'd you learn about that, you know. All the different comics that I read and stuff there's wide variety of vocabulary and history and everything put in there. Um, if I'm reading something that I have no idea what the word means, or what they're talking about, I'll look it up. So, that's kind of a continued education.

PI: Yeah, absolutely.

Albert: My brother a lot of times will be like, "how do you know about that. It has nothing to do with anything." And I'm like well because of blah blah blah.

PI: Yeah I find myself doing that, too. It's kind of a nice continuing education unit. Like what we have in psychology. We have to do those so comics kind of help me with that sometimes. What have you learned about yourself from reading comic books?

Albert: Uh, that I'd be a decent writer if I put my mind to it.

PI: Okay. Do you write much at all?

Albert: Uh, no not much anymore. High School I wrote short stories, poetry, stuff like that. It's more so that I've learned talking to professionals and stuff like that that I got a decent paying job so. I talked to one guy about getting into art. Doing the art of it, but I know I'm not up to where I could one monthly.

PI: Yeah.

Albert: I was looking into doing inking and talking to a guy about.

PI: Oh, cool.

Albert: And he had asked me if I had a good paying and asked me what I made per year and I told him, and he was like yeah don't do it. He's like you're either going to have to bust your ass doing it. Because a lot of them have to do side jobs of advertising and stuff like that, you know. So, I'm looking at doing it as a hobby or something like that, and he's like yeah if you're doing good don't think you're going to do as good.

PI: Or, just do covers. You can just do variant covers.

Albert: I'm too lazy to do that though.

PI: Alright. So, I got four more questions for you, man.

Albert: Alright.

PI: How do comic books impact your current life?

Albert: Uh, on a positive level I guess.

PI: Any level. Even negative if possible.

Albert: All positive levels I would say. Um, like I said I met tons of great people from that experience of reading comics that I wouldn't have ever met had I not started.

PI: Sure.

Albert: Um, question was how it has affected my life right?

PI: Yeah, how have they impacted your life currently? In any fashion.

Albert: Okay. Uh, more up to date on stuff. Um, and again with the education stuff you keep current on what's going on in some of them. Learn new stuff. Meet new people. It's also a way, you know, you collect some stuff, you can turn around and make some money from that. Uh, you get out of one book and turn around and sell it you know. I'm

not one of those people that let it affect me to where, you know, I spend way too much on it and can't pay the bills or anything like that.

PI: Yeah. I know of somebody like that actually.

Albert: Am I looking at him?

PI: Well, if I had a lot of money. How can they impact your future?

Albert: Uh, by retirement I guess. I could sell a lot of what I got.

PI: Okay. Any other way you think they may be able to impact your future?

Albert: Is this a question like how could they?

PI: Yeah, how could they. Just kind of thinking about it. How do you think they may be able to impact your future?

Albert: Uh, I mean there's all sorts ways they could. I could, you know, start spending all my money on them, lose my house.

PI: Yeah, you could go bankrupt.

Albert: Uh, I don't know. Meet more people.

PI: Okay. That's fair. Alright. What does comic book reading say about you?

Albert: I don't think they talk, so they don't say anything. No, I'm just kidding. Uh, lame. (laughing)

PI: No, that was good. I liked it. Well received.

Albert: I would say that not all comic book readers fit into one mold I guess.

PI: Okay. Cool.

Albert: Like there's ton of different lifestyles and personalities that read comics. They're not just for kids.

PI: And here's the last question. What do you think others for example family, friends, peers, and community think comic book reading says about you?

Albert: That I'm immature. (laughing)

PI: Okay. What else do you think they think it says about you?

Albert: Read the question one more time.

PI: It says, what do you think other people generally think comic book reading says about you?

Albert: Uh, yeah probably immature, or probably mostly negative stuff if they have never read one or don't know that it's as wide spread as it is.

PI: I think you're right about that.

<End of interview>

4/10/16
Participant 014
"Kal"

PI: Appreciate you for helping me with this.

Kal: Oh yeah, no problem

PI: Alright, so let me go ahead and we'll just go ahead and start this. So, the first question is how often do you read comic books?

Kal: Uh, every week. Almost, literally, almost every day. I read before I go to bed, so.

PI: Me, too.

Kal: I always knock a couple out before I go to bed.

PI: Yep. So, let me ask you then, when did you begin reading superheroes in comic books?

Kal: Uh, grade school.

PI: Okay. So, what draws you to continue to read comic books?

Kal: Uh, that's a good question. (laughing)

PI: (laughing)

Kal: Um, I think part of it is, uh, it's been a part of my life for so long, um, that regardless of what they do the characters. Uh, I still want to know what's going on with them. Um, even when the stories are bad.

PI: Yeah.

Kal: I know that if I, I push through it, it'll get eventually circled around where there is something that I like with them. Um, but comics have been a big part of my life forever. Um, I mean I literally – my mother used to give me comic books to read to get me to read.

PI: Yeah.

Kal: Because I could follow along with it with the pictures and it made it more interesting than Dick and Jane books, or whatever. Um, and I think that's what I think initially got me hooked was, uh, it was something that as I was reading I could understand what was going on because I could see it.

PI: Okay. Awesome. So, what type of comic books and superheroes do you read about, and why?

Kal: Uh, probably – it's changed as I've gotten older.

PI: Sure.

Kal: When I was younger, it was mainly Superman, Batman, X-Men, G.I. Joe. Now, those are still there for sure, but still big on Superman, Batman. As the Avengers have gotten thrown in everybody's face so I'm kind of getting those, too. You know from the movies.

PI: Yeah.

Kal: Um, they're starting to get me, but I've gone towards a lot more, uh, independents, too. Um, if anything, just for the more mature stories, you know, that they – you know the fun popcorn stuff is in Marvel and DC, and then the little bit deeper stuff I think are getting taken over by the independents.

PI: Yeah, I agree with that. Alright. So, here's a really hard question for you. Who is your favorite superhero, or superheroes, and why?

Kal: Uh, Superman, by far. Um, and that I think is from a young age because I was born in '75, so Superman movie was the first big comic book movie.

PI: Yeah.

Kal: Of my young life, all of those companies had underoos. You know, I mean like all that stuff geared towards kids that my mom and dad bombarded me with, you know. I don't know how many times I went as Superman for Halloween. Um, you know, just that. It's like I equate it with my nephew now is 10 years old and he loves Iron Man because Iron Man was that one big movie when he was young that hooked him in as Superman was out for me.

PI: Awesome.

Kal: So, regardless of any storyline even, you know, as horrible as some of them have been, Superman has always my #1 go to.

PI: Awesome. So, let me ask you now, how do you relate to your favorite superhero?

Kal: Uh, not as much as I'd probably like to aspire to. (laughing)

PI: Sure.

Kal: But, I've just always liked that regardless of who you are, or what you do, that there is a being like that would be there for you. You know, regardless. Always fair, not prejudice, not – like there is so many things growing up, um, especially in Oklahoma.

PI: Yeah.

Kal: You know, there's stuff left and right. You know, religion, race, everything. I liked that idea of somebody that is alien to here, but was raised by humans and embraces more of that humanity than most humans.

PI: Is there any way you can think of that you might be able to relate to him in some way?

Kal: Um, I'd like to think that I'm fair to people, um, until I get to know them. (laughing)

PI: (laughing) Yeah.

Kal: I like to think that I give everybody a fair shot until they give me a reason not to.

PI: Sure.

Kal: And, uh, I like to help whoever I can, if I can, I want to help someone. I want to help people if I can. If it's within me to do it.

PI: Sure. Alright. So, let me ask this, do you ever notice your thoughts and emotions while reading any of these comic books?

Kal: Uh, yeah. There are some, um, and this is just because it is topical now.

PI: Yeah.

Kal: But I remember reading, um, The Walking Dead #50 when, spoiler alert, Glenn gets bashed in and that I honestly felt physically ill. Like that was such a shock, but it was also so graphic like if that, if I was going to watch somebody do that, that's how they put it on the page. Um, they didn't – no holds barred.

PI: Yeah.

Kal: Yeah, that was pretty affecting. And, uh, I just remember being a kid and the build up to Superman dying in the comics. Um, you know, it's a one thing that I never, ever thought would happen. Um, never thought anybody would ever kill off Superman in the comics and the way that build it up with, you know, him providing the ultimate sacrifice after every other hero wasn't able to stop Doomsday.

PI: Yeah.

Kal: You know, that – the way they built it up, I remember, you know, just thinking my God. Like that's not that I thought they would truly let him die forever.

PI: Yeah.

Kal: But that's an end of an era feeling from reading those.

PI: Mmmhmm. So, if you could put a couple of words to like some of the feelings that you had after Glenn getting bashed and Superman dying, what could you articulate those as?

Kal: Uh, I would say shock.

PI: Okay.

Kal: Um, a little sadness.

PI: Okay.

Kal: Uh, yeah, I mean, um, and that like nausea. Or like with Glenn, nausea. (laughing)

PI: (laughing) Yeah.

Kal: It really did. Like I really – I still remember through this day that just really, really, affected me.

PI: Okay.

Kal: Um, and I would say still after decades of reading, um, I still get a little thrill from the storylines.

PI: Okay.

Kal: You know what I mean? Still that little bit of excitement when I see. Uh, when they redid, when DC redid the Universe with the new 52, um, I was surprised at how much I really enjoyed Superman and Wonder Woman getting together. Like I actually really, really enjoyed it. I mean that was, uh, when they did the Superman-Wonder Woman, um, comic book, um, I really – that's one of those that I couldn't wait to get the next time. Um, I like the back and forth. I like the idea of those two powerful people being together.

PI: Mmmhmm

Kal: The fear that come off of others. Just that kind of like he finally found someone on his level.

PI: Yeah.

Kal: That can understand him. You know what I mean?

PI: I got you.

Kal: Like I still get a thrill out of that.

PI: Awesome. Yeah, I remember when that was going on. That people were out- crying.

Kal: I didn't think I'd like. I really didn't. I thought they were going to force it together, you know. And I thought that I just – I didn't really think that it was going to work and it really surprised me.

PI: Yeah.

Kal: And I've gotten to now where even in that last Batman v. Superman movie, um, when I see Lois, you know, like in the first one, it was like okay fine there's Lois. But, once they introduced Wonder Woman into it, seeing her, seeing them standing together, I was just like "man, they better go that way." Like I want to see them in that movie go that way. Get rid of Lois and just do it.

PI: That'd be pretty awesome if they did do that. So, let me ask you kind of on a general level, how do comic books make you feel kind of emotionally after reading generally?

Kal: Um...

PI: If at all.

Kal: I would say, generally, I would say satisfied.

PI: Okay.

Kal: Um, I still like, even as I've gotten older, I still think that I have a pretty good base enjoyment. Want more out of it, I mean there definitely are some comics that leave me. But, generally I think like I'm still pretty satisfied overall.

PI: Okay. Alright. In reading superhero comic books, what do you learn about others?

Kal: Um, I think I compare. This probably shows how much I read comic books. I think I compare people in my life to comic book characters.

PI: I do, too.

Kal: Or, I see – I also see situations with and this probably is with more with independent comics, um, that the stories are a little more grounded.

PI: Yeah.

Kal: But, I think I see more, um, situations in real life being told by comic books and I always kind of put the people that I think of as whatever character in that situation thinking “what would they do.” You know, would they do the same or how would it be different. And some of them, some of the writers I think where if I think one character is, or one person in my life is this character, they’ll write something another way where that character might not do it the way that the real person would have done it.

PI: Yeah.

Kal: But, there’s still enough similarity, you know, where I’m like yeah that’s still that character. You know what I mean?

PI: Yeah.

Kal: Um, I think that’s probably the biggest. I have a lot of relationships with people where I think of them - while I’m reading comics, I think of them as the people I’m reading.

PI: Okay. What was your most memorable comic book event, battle, character, etc.?

Kal: Oh man. Um...

PI: The biggest one.

Kal: The biggest one. I think – I was going to say really the death of Superman probably, but I still remember like I mean I was reading Civil War, not Civil War, Secret War when it came out and the changing of Spider-Man’s costume.

PI: Yeah, Secret War #8. Yeah.

Kal: #8 yeah that was a big one back then because that was really one of the first big changes. Um, I think another probably that I, that I appreciate more because I’m older, so this might be a bigger one is, um, Kingdom Come with Alex Ross. Uh, it was probably one of my bigger because the art blew me away. Um, I like Elseworld stories and so I liked the way that it brought it, brought all the characters out was more interesting to me I think than some other people might have just let it go. But I really do like Elseworlds. Just like Superman’s red sun and some of those. I liked seeing how they take those characters and do them differently. But, this while kind of Elseworlds was technically looking into the future, you know, of them.

PI: Yeah.

Kal: So, I kind of liked – I think that’s probably the biggest one for me because of the art and seeing Superman give up. Uh, that was a big one for me. Um, because it’s not

something I would ever expect to read in a comic book would be Superman completely giving up and isolating himself.

PI: Yeah.

Kal: Yeah, I mean sure there's probably 50 that I could tell you about.

PI: Yeah, absolutely. Of course.

Kal: That's probably a pretty big one.

PI: Sure anything else that made it memorable other than the kind of Superman going off character a little bit and giving up and the art? Anything else stick out for you?

Kal: I liked that at the core those characters didn't really change. Even with Superman giving up, he came back and everything that he stood for was, you know, them fighting for that and all the old heroes coming back together. And I think it really is a good example of how the later generations how everything's got to be quick and easy.

PI: Yeah.

Kal: You know, like that kind of thing. I thought they did a really great job showing how the different generations, um, have a lot to look up to and where they can go if they don't take history into account.

PI: Yeah. I'm with you, man. So, let me ask you then, you kind of referred to this earlier and I want to get at it. How have comic books and superheroes influenced your life?

Kal: Um, it's my life. I mean I am 40 years old and I've got a whole room full of stuff dedicated to superheroes.

PI: Yeah.

Kal: I've got 30 long boxes of comics. You know, if I ever stop reading, I can't make myself get rid of. I think that superhero comics gave me a base for my life on how to act, um, reading those old school comics, you know. It was a lot different than it is now.

PI: Yeah.

Kal: It gave me a good base for treating people well. Um, you know doing what can for others if they need help. I think that it's probably a little different now because they, it's not Golden Age, Silver Age anymore.

PI: Yeah

Kal: And they don't all have meaning like they kind of used to. Um, so I think – I mean I'm glad that I started reading them when I did. Um, I'm glad I'm the age that I am so I could experience those first hand.

PI: Yeah. That's so cool.

Kal: And I tell people now I mean anybody, you know, 20s and younger, I tell them read those old stories. You'll get way more emotion out of them than a lot of the ones that are – you know now it's about the art.

PI: Yeah.

Kal: There's a lot about the art. It's whatever shock value. It's what's going on in the movies has to apply to the comic books now. There's a lot more fingers in pie than there used to be. So, I think they used to be able to tell more pure stories that would give you a better meaning and a moral to the story. You know, something to look up to, something to live by.

PI: So, and you said it kind of gave you, superheroes kind of gave you a guide of how to act, so tell me how reading superheroes comics have impacted your morals, beliefs, etc.?

Kal: Um, I think probably the best way is I grew up Catholic, in a Catholic household. Um, never really got into it or believed it.

PI: Sure.

Kal: Um, comics kind of were my religion I would say.

PI: Okay.

Kal: Um, I mean I think I got much more – I think I got a lot more out of the stories and characters in comic books than I did out of religion. I think part of that is as I've grown older is I think I see religion as, and it pisses off a lot of people around here, but I see religion as mythology.

PI: I bet that does piss off a lot of people.

Kal: It's changed. Other religions have taken bits of other religions and made them their religion.

PI: Yeah.

Kal: So, I see it as, um, as mythology and I think superhero comic, I think comic books are 20th century mythology. I think it's kind of, and not that they're just American, but American mythology.

PI: Sure.

Kal: You know, most of the Batman, Superman, and all these, they were created in America. And, um, the stories and all that are my mythology. Um, my religion. I think that and it probably goes back to the Golden Age, Silver Age where they were imparting messages in the comics. Even old school Captain America fighting Hitler.

PI: Yeah.

Kal: Stuff like that. These are the good guys, this is how they act. These are the bad guys, this is how they act. It was very black and white.

PI: Yeah.

Kal: Um, it's a lot more gory now which isn't a bad thing. But, uh, I think growing up with that black and white, uh, gave me a much better guideline on how to act towards people. Much more welcoming I think. If there's anything because like I said with religion, it's very I'm Baptist your Catholic but you're wrong still.

PI: Somebody's wrong, yeah.

Kal: Yeah there's still that prejudice. There's still that, you know, you can be friends but a part of them is thinking that person is still wrong. I just like the idea of Superman showing up and if someone is having a bad day, someone's doing something, he's there. He's there to support. He's there to help if he can. Um, doesn't matter if you're black, Muslim, white, Irish, Asian, none of that matter.

PI: Yeah. That's awesome dude. Alright I have a few more questions for you. So let me ask you, what do comic books mean to you?

Kal: Uh, they are my escape. Um, they are definitely my escape. I, I like – I honestly like reading comic books more than going out to the movies. I would rather sit down and read a trade paperback and just immerse myself in it, be able to do it in my own home, than go out and watch a movie. Um, they are I think with a variety too that we have now that no matter what mood I'm in, if I'm in a bad mood I can read something that would make me happy. If I'm in a contemplative mood, I can read something a little smarter. Um, you know, they are definitely, and as many books as I read, I always like I said I will read at night before I go to bed even if I'm reading a book, I read a couple of comics before I fall asleep.

PI: Yeah, absolutely.

Kal: It's kind of like my pallet washer.

PI: Yeah. That's awesome. We have a lot of similarities. So here's the next one. So, what have you learned about yourself from reading comic books?

Kal: Um, that I can still be surprised.

PI: Okay.

Kal: Um, as cynical as I think that I get with a lot of TV shows and movies and stuff where you think something is going to happen and it usually does because they're formulaic. Um, comics as formulaic as they can be can still surprise you, uh, with, you know, considering how many stories has been told.

PI: Right.

Kal: In the past, and how many stories have been told every month, you know, and now you're getting authors writing comic books like book authors writing comic books.

PI: Yeah.

Kal: You know, I think that, uh, it's nice to be able to read something and still get surprised. Um, I would hate for the day where every time I open up a – even if I don't like the story, every time I open up a Superman comic I know exactly what's going to happen. You know, if they introduce some character, oh well that one's going to die. You know, I'd hate to get to that point where the stories are – and it happens every now and again. But, it's still – Superman, Wonder Woman surprised me. I didn't think I'd like it, and I did. And what they did with that really, really shocked me.

PI: A lot of people.

Kal: Yeah, I think a lot of people.

PI: I think a lot of people were shocked. Alright. So, how do comic books impact your current life? You've kind of touched on this with reading.

Kal: Yeah, um, like I said we're going to three comic conventions this year.

PI: Yeah.

Kal: I mean we, my wife – and my wife's the same way. I mean I've gotten, I started her reading comic books which she never did. She's – we go now to comic book stores and she's all in it. She's, you know, rifling through the boxes just like I do. Um, I think they have made – they've given my wife and I something to do together. Um, it's impacted her enough to where like this vacation, I mean I'm using my vacation to go to San Diego Comic Con.

PI: Yeah.

Kal: You know, and she's perfectly fine with it. But, we do. We gear our lives around comic book conventions, um, taking trips to the comic book store. Uh, if I read something that I think she'll like, I tell her and give it to her, she surprisingly does the same.

PI: Wow!

Kal: Um, it surprised me with that.

PI: Yeah, talk about surprise.

Kal: Yeah, um, I mean it's kind of, uh, it's pretty interesting that something that is so simple as a comic book, um, that I started reading in grade school, uh, probably I don't know 2nd or 3rd grade. 35 years later, 34 years later, I'm still reading every day. Um, yeah I mean it's – I would say that they definitely, I definitely gear my life towards getting comic books, reading comic books, learning about comic books, you know, the art, everything.

PI: Awesome. Alright, man, I have three more questions for you. How can comic books impact your future?

Kal: Um, the way that they have now, I mean recently and I think will is with, uh, - we don't, my wife and I don't have any kids. Um, but I've got a nephew and she's got a nephew and a niece and a lot of my friends are having babies and kids, and I find myself thrusting comic books at every turn on any kid, any kid that I know.

PI: Yeah.

Kal: So, when my nephew was getting to the point where he was reading, I gave him comics. Um, when my niece and nephew will, I'm going to give them comics. My friends, it's the same thing. Um, all my friends know that whether they want it or not they're going to end up with some comics around the house.

PI: (laughing) Yeah.

Kal: Or, for as long as those kids want. If they tell me they don't like them anymore, I'll stop. But, for the future, I will always try to get as many kids as I can. And with my wife, she – I used to teach English and I would throw comic book stuff in to classes and I'm influencing my wife to do that in her art classes all the time.

PI: That's so cool.

Kal: Um, so I mean it's not necessarily be the future, but it will keep happening.

PI: Sure.

Kal: It's going to keep going.

PI: Keep going. That's the way. Yeah. Alright. Here's the second to last one. What does comic book reading say about you?

Kal: Uh, I think, I think it's the opposite of what a lot of people think, um, of someone that reads comics. I think a lot of people think that – well it may be changing now because it's more mainstream. But, used to be if you read comics, then you weren't a good reader. You must not be very smart. Uh, you know, to need pictures to go with your words kind of attitude.

PI: mmmhmm

Kal: Um, but I have found myself, uh, throughout my life being opened up to other experiences and different types of books and movies and art because I've been introduced to them through comics.

PI: Yeah.

Kal: Um, you know, so I think – when I was trying to think of a language to take in high school, I picked German because Nightcrawler from the X-Men. I mean because they would write, they'd have little bits of German written in the comics. It'd say mien kampf or whatever in the comic books. And it made me want to learn German. (laughing)

PI: (laughing) That's so awesome.

Kal: I think it's definitely – I think reading comic books has made me more well-rounded.

PI: Okay.

Kal: I think as a person and just through everything. Through literature, art, everything.

PI: And here's the final question. What do you think others such as family, friends, peers, community, etc. think comic book reading says about you?

Kal: Um, it is – I have definitely gone through those periods of my life where my parents, my girlfriends, friends, whatever look down on it for sure. Uh, that I was immature, um, must not be very smart, that I'm immature, that I don't want to deal with reality. Uh, because I want to escape to these comic books and things.

PI: Yeah.

Kal: Um, as life has gone on, uh, a lot of those people have gone to the way side. Um, I mean really. A lot of the people that realized that reading comics is just a part of who I am. It's never going to go away. If it hasn't gone away by now then I'll be doing it 'til the day I die. Um, you know, so those people - and my family finally has come around. (laughing) My mom cuts out articles from the newspaper if there's some comic book something going on. Just because I might be interested in it. Um, I don't get as much fun of as much for - shoot I used to carry trade paperbacks with me all the time.

PI: Oh, sure. Who didn't?

Kal: I'd be sitting around somewhere and pull one out and start reading it and see the looks and all that. But, um, I'm just - it will always be a part of my life. And I've ended up surrounding myself with people that understand that.

PI: Sure.

Kal: And are okay with it. If I can convert them, fine. And if not, then fine. As long as they understand that it's a part of my life, a part of who I am, then it's all good.

PI: That's awesome. That's the last question. So, I'll go ahead and stop this and talk to you for just a second.

<End of interview>

4/16/16
Participant 015
“Carol”

PI: Alright. Let's go ahead begin. First question is, how often do you read comic books?

Carol: Uh, probably really just once a month. Just when something comes out that I seem interested in or a new, um, comes out in a series.

PI: Okay.

Carol: Um, I'm always reading something, but it's not always comic books.

PI: Okay. But you do a lot of reading.

Carol: Yeah.

PI: Okay. So, when did you begin reading superheroes and comic books?

Carol: Honestly, when The Walking Dead came on AMC I started getting interested in comic books. Um, and that was the first – well besides some graphic novels I read in my English classes in high school, that was the first one I read on my own.

PI: That was 2003-ish when that started coming out right.

Carol: Um, not on AMC. It was when I was in undergrad, so it was like at least 2009.

PI: Oh, that's right. Comics came out in 2003 then.

Carol: Right like the show on AMC.

PI: I got ya. Okay. So, what draws you to continue to read comic books?

Carol: Um, well I tend to read comic books that are, um, nonfiction so less superhero comic books. Um, so I really like, um, the illustrations that connect to my life in others in a different way. Um, I taught an English classroom for four years and I really liked using graphic novels and comic books especially for my struggling readers and English language learners.

PI: Cool. You just kind of touched on this but I'll ask it. What kinds of comic books and superheroes do you read about, and why?

Carol: Um, besides like the nonfiction graphic novels, probably the only series that I've fully, completed is Y: The Last Man.

PI: Okay. Tell me why.

Carol: Um, I can't remember who recommended it to me. Um, but I thought it was just really interesting, uh, to look at the last man on Earth and, um, just kind of how they portrayed women in that graphic novel. Oh, um, and I think – and I've probably read about half of The Walking Dead, but I kind of got bored with it. Um, and I read all of Watchmen and I really liked it. I bought the – I got the like spin-off ones or whatever, um, but I haven't read those. Um, I read Black Hole which is like a big graphic novel and it is fiction about like, someone recommended it to me, have you read it?

PI: No.

Carol: It's about, um, like this STD that was, but it was like not a superhero, but the STD was like, um, you know when the, like the nuclear plants.

PI: Oh, like....

Carol: I can't think of the word.

PI Yeah, I'm trying to think of the word, too.

Carol: But, um, so it gave them like weird powers.

PI: Radioactive.

Carol: Right. It made them radioactive. Um, and I like to read young adult graphic novels.

PI: Okay.

Carol: Because I like to recommend them to my students. Um, recently I gave a graphic novel, um, a young adult graphic novel that was nonfiction about looking back on the adolescents written by a gay man and I gave it to a kid that is struggling with his gay identity.

PI: Cool

Carol: In 8th grade so I found it. I can't always be there so I found a good way to help kids.

PI: Cool.

Carol: I don't know if I'm supposed to do that, but his parents don't speak English.

PI: So, they wouldn't know. So, let me ask, who is your favorite superhero or superheroes, characters, and why?

Carol: Um, so I really did like Y on Y: The Last Man.

PI: Okay.

Carol: Um, just because he would – I don't know if he's considered a superhero, probably not. Um, because he was like not heroic at all. Um, but I really liked that.

PI: What's it about him that you really was drawn to?

Carol: Um, I like that he wasn't heroic and he was just kind of like all of his anxieties were just kind of like out there about being the last man and all this pressures and just trying to make decisions that he just didn't know how to make. Um, and he was just kind of concerned about himself the whole time even though he was the only one that could repopulate. So, probably pretty realistic.

PI: Okay. So, how do you relate to your favorite character?

Carol: Um...

PI: If at all.

Carol: Well, I'm trying to think of the comic book I related to the most and, um, it's a nonfiction graphic novel called Blankets. Um, and it's about this – he wrote it about when he was in high school and just like his religious upbringing, um, and I just thought it was just beautifully written and I guess like there was a lot of struggle between like if this is so then how can this be so and such and such. And so I think probably related that comic book character out of the ones that I've read.

PI: Did you kind of relate to the kind of weighing the rational type stuff?

Carol: Yeah. Or, um, being influenced by others in that area.

PI: Okay. Do you ever notice your thoughts and emotions while reading comic books?

Carol: Well, yes. Um, because sometimes they make me cry.

PI: Okay. Tell me more.

Carol: Well, okay, so I don't know if this is considered a graphic novel, but my favorite book in the history of the world is called A Monster Calls and I don't think it's considered a graphic novel, but it's a young adult book and is filled with illustrations.

PI: Mmhmm

Carol: And there's illustrations that like go with like this monster comes and tells stories to this kid and there are just illustrations on every single page. And every time someone

buys it, they have to buy the hard cover because some of the illustrations have disappeared.

PI: Oh, no

Carol: Yeah. Um, and that book – every single year I taught I read it to every single class and I just cried in front of them every single time. Um, so I'm definitely aware when they make me sad.

PI: Okay.

Carol: But, also, I get like really like ones like Watchmen and stuff I get really anxious when there is tension and like fighting. I'm not like a passive reader.

PI: Sure. So, how do comic books make you feel on an emotional level after you read them?

Carol: Um, it depends.

PI: Okay.

Carol: Um, The Monster Calls book is about, um, this kid whose mom is sick like she has terminal cancer, um, and so I felt really, I don't know, funky after it because it just hit really close to home. Um, and so it just kind of depends on how it relates to my life on how I feel after I read them. The less it relates to my life, the less that it affects me.

PI: Good. In reading superhero comic books, what do you learn about others? If anything.

Carol: Um, I think in comic books and stories like that, um, it really shows like faith in human kind because someone always steps up to the plate to help the situation. There is always someone random that is like helping to be the hero that is not the actual hero of the story.

PI: Alright. What was your most memorable comic book event, character, battle, etc.?

Carol: Um...

PI: What sticks out the most when you hear that question?

Carol: Um, well I think of that book The Monster Calls.

PI: Okay.

Carol: I don't know if it's considered a graphic novel.

PI: That's alright.

Carol: Um, but I mean it's just the most personally close story to me. Um, and I just recommend it to everybody. So, the first time I read it, it really sticks out in my mind.

PI: Okay. So, as much as you want to go into that, what made it memorable?

Carol: Um....

PI: You said that you kind of relate to some of it, but is there any other things that make it memorable?

Carol: Um, I know there was a lot that was said that I remember feeling when my mom was sick that I couldn't put into words, or I probably would never put into words even thinking about it.

PI: Mmhmm.

Carol: Um, even though I was 20/22, it was like a 12-year-old boy in the book.

PI: Yeah. Okay. So, you related to some of the stuff that was said.

Carol: Yeah.

PI: Okay. So, how have comic books and superheroes influenced your life?

Carol: Um, well it influenced the way I teach and taught a lot. And sometimes the way I do counseling because, um, in school counseling I just don't have a lot of time with my students.

PI: Right.

Carol: And, so, um, I can give them books and graphic novels, um, that I think relate to them. Um, so if anything it's – outside of my life it's influenced my career and how I relate to students and kids the most. Um, I was just in a meeting after school with parents who were really concerned that, um, that their son was on a really low reading level. Um, but he was just bringing home graphic novels, and I talked to them about it and hopefully I made them feel better, but it was very appropriate for his reading level and if that can get him to read then that is what we will do.

PI: Is there any other ways that it's influenced your life? Kind of career life. Any other way?

Carol: Um, well when I did my internship and practicum I used a superhero therapy book.

PI: Yeah.

Carol: Um, and less in therapy when I did it in schools and more when I was working with kids at Lauradester, younger kids.

PI: Right.

Carol: Um, and so I use that a lot. And it was really great.

PI: Okay. So, on a general level, tell me how reading superhero comic books have impacted your morals, beliefs, etc.? If at all.

Carol: Um, I think pretty much no matter how, even if it's fiction or nonfiction, the book ends there is always some kind of moralize to like mankind is ultimate good. Um....

PI: Okay. What do comic books mean to you?

Carol: Um, I think it mostly means a way of relating and socializing with others. Um, I don't think there is anything that I read that I haven't talked to someone about that was a comic book. There's books that I read that I don't talk about with people. Um, but comic books have always come up somewhere, or suggested to me by someone, or I suggested to them. Um, I just can't think of one comic book that I read by myself and didn't tell anybody about.

PI: Sure. What have you learned about yourself from reading comic books?

Carol: Um, hmmm...that's a tough one.

PI: Yeah, take your time. Have you made any discoveries about yourself when reading some of these stories?

Carol: Um, well I think in like high school or even though I've always been a really big reader, it took me I mean until I was 18/19 to actually read and enjoy comic books and graphic novels.

PI: Mmhmm.

Carol: Um, and so I think just discovering that I even liked those was big which doesn't sound big, but I've read – I've been a big reader my whole life and just didn't explore that genre.

PI: Right.

Carol: But I can't think of anything – oh, um, we read a graphic novel when I was in undergrad I took a feminist in space and time class, and I was like 20 and I had no idea what anything was about and I just wrote really stupid papers, but we read a graphic

novel by Allison Bechdel, um, but that kind of, I consider myself a pretty staunch feminists and I think it started there. Not in the class, but with the book.

PI: Mmhmm.

Carol: So, that really stayed with me and I think changed a part of who I am. And I continued to read her books when they come out.

PI: Okay. Got four more questions for you and we'll be done. How do comic books impact your current life? You mentioned using them as a teaching tool.

Carol: Yeah, a teaching tool, uh, counseling tool. I have one student who I've been working with for three years and he is like incredibly obsessed with Batman and I will use that to like no end. Um, I've used getting him tickets to comic con to keep him out of trouble, um and I have like superhero and comic book figurines in my office and it never falls to strike up conversation for a kid that doesn't want to talk. Um, so that's been good.

PI: Okay. Any other facets outside of school that they impact your life at all?

Carol: Well, just socially I think it's, um, it's always a good social thing to talk about or like try to date and it's something that is a really good topic.

PI: It is a great topic.

Carol: Trying to go through those things although usually I'm reading different graphic novels than most people that I know.

PI: Okay. How can comic books impact your future?

Carol: Um, I think as I get older, um, and try to stay in touch with the middle schoolers, um, it can be really helpful if just reading about their experiences and reading about – I really like – I don't like historical fiction. I have a really hard time reading historical fiction, but if it's in a comic book form or graphic novel I don't have a hard time. So, understanding other cultures, it really helps me in that aspect. So, kind of the same question.

PI: Alright. What does comic book reading say about you?

Carol: Um, hmmm.....well, I like to think that it says that I'm not to snotty to read comic books even though I'm a really big reader. Um, I have an undergrad degree in English, but I still read comic books. I think the types of comic books that I choose say a lot about me because they're really, um, like if I tell people the types of comic books that I read like last time I did they were like, "oh, you'll really like this book by Arthur

Miller.” And I looked it up and it was about Jack the Ripper the serial killer and they were right. I think the types that I read say a lot about me.

PI: So, kind of ask a little bit more. What do you think that type says?

Carol: I don't know. I mean a lot of it is psychological type of comic books which I could look at that personally or I can display my own counseling.

PI: Okay. So, kind of the type that really make you think and experience the narrative kind of.

Carol: Yeah, yeah.

PI: Okay.

Carol: And more about the like the neuro – I can't say that word. Like the processes of the brain and why people are different and behave differently. Um, and how you can maybe understand them better.

PI: Okay. Last one. What do you think others such as family, friends, peers, and community think comic book reading says about you?

Carol: Um, well I think there's a big misconception that when I say I read comic books, um, people think that I'm a bigger nerd than I actually am. Um, because I do read comic books and graphic novels, but if they hear that they talk about things I just don't know about. So, I think that they – it's just too broad like it's just a really broad term that they put on like people who go to comic con which is fine, but that's just not the umbrella that I fit under. So, like because I do like couple of things like that I have like one co-worker who is always like, “oh did you see this come out? Did you see this come out? Did you see the new extension on Magic the Gathering?” and I'm like no I don't like that. But he thinks that every single – everything that comes out, I must know about. Or, it's just really annoying too because there is a lot of like oh you're a girl and you read comic books. I'm like well I don't – it's just really off putting to be surprised by that fact.

PI: Okay. So, is there anything else that I haven't asked you that you felt might be helpful for this, or informative? You're pretty thorough.

Carol: You think so? Okay. I just want to help.

PI: Absolutely appreciate.

<End of interview>

CURRICULUM VITA

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