Heroic Moments: A Study of Comic Book Superheroes in Real–World Society

Christian Russell
Greensboro College
Faculty Mentor: Paul Leslie
Greensboro College

Abstract

Comic book characters are a pop culture phenomenon. Many characters have been in publication for more than half a century and now star in annual blockbuster films. Many of these characters have enduring popularity, but why? Marvel Comics and DC comics have told Captain America and Batman stories since 1940 and 1937, respectively,. These two characters have only become more popular with the release of Batman's Dark Knight Trilogy *films and* Captain America: The First Avenger *and Marvel's* The Avengers*; These characters were not always this mainstream, however. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the comic book speculation market, wherein comic book were bought by collectors and resellers because of their perceived value, had just collapsed, leaving comic book publishers, vendors, and collectors looking to reformat their business practices. Yet Batman and Captain America stories were still published each month. How did these two characters maintain their fans and keep going into more fiscally-stable climates? People will always need heroes, and by acting like classical heroes, teaching and inspiring their readers to be something more than themselves, Batman and Captain America captured an audience, weathered the post-market collapse storm, and are now multi-billion dollar characters. Using content analysis, I found lessons in universal values that can be taken from the comic books of Batman and Captain America and those lessons were consistent throughout the decade between 1999 and 2009. I believe that these lessons are the reasons that these characters have maintained their relevance over time, and I will demonstrate these findings within this*
thesis.

Introduction

This thesis is designed to show the two types of heroes who are most prevalent in comic books as role models for readers. The two heroes being examined are Batman and Captain America and each of these characters represents the pinnacle of their hero type. Captain America is a typical "Golden Boy" hero with traditional American values, while Batman is a brooding loner whose stories add an element of darkness to his comic books. These heroes are known to many people, even outside of those who regularly read comic books.

The purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate that comic books are a useful literary medium through the occurrence of "Heroic Moments". These Moments indicate that comic books deliver to readers information that they will not only enjoy, but also give them a staging ground from which they can take away something more. The characters examined in this project have been consistently published for nearly seventy years and they have gained mainstream popularity outside of comic book readers. What is it about Batman and Captain America that resonates so strongly with readers?

In order to gather data to measure the "Heroic Moments," I performed a content analysis on a sample of Detective Comics and Captain America comic books published between 1999 and 2009. Content analysis is a method used to draw numerical data from literary sources such as books, magazines, and movies. I believe the use of content analysis for this project is not only necessary, but vital in order to present a credible argument and conclusion. Content analysis is particularly useful in this line of study, where quantifiable data are not readily available. For this project, I have endeavored to gather both quantitative data for analysis, and qualitative data for narrative discussion. To do this I have taken extra care and time analyzing each comic book, first examining examples of the characters portraying a "Heroic Moment," or any of the three types of "Moments" detailed below, and then reading the text for a qualitative view of the plot in order to discuss what those moments mean. This research method is not without limitations. By only looking for specific data, it could be easy to miss more qualitative assessments of the text itself (Babbie, 1992). This situation will be remedied by using a two-fold analysis: first looking for the Heroic Moments within the comic books, and then reading the story around them in order to learn more about the context in which they take place. This second pass at the source material will mitigate the risk of losing context surrounding the moments identified in the first pass.

The Heroic Moments I intended to find were Teaching Moments, Archetypal Moments, and Ideal Moments. This is an original technique I designed to better dissect the latent messages of comic books. During preliminary research for this project, I identified these three types of moments as regular features in Captain America and Detective Comics and I wanted to isolate these moments and show them in a new light. In many instances, these moments seemed to insist on themselves, overtly sending a very clear message, and it was that insistence that allowed me to bring the moments out of the context of their stories and isolate them for analysis.

"Superhero" has become a catchall term for fictional heroes who wear costumes or masks, and may or may not have superhuman abilities like flight or super-strength. This group has even come to include aliens and robots too. In spite of the wildly varying traits and abilities of these characters, they are all inherently good, and fight for justice. The general term "superhero" can be divided into several categories: humans with superhuman abilities, costumed vigilantes, gods, goddesses, aliens and robots.

Humans with superhuman abilities are characterized by having some sort of innate ability above that of normal humans. Examples of these abilities are flight, invisibility, telekinesis, and super-strength. The way these characters gain their abilities varies greatly, but the most common methods are genetic mutation (The X-Men by Marvel), irradiation

(Spider-Man, The Incredible Hulk, both by Marvel), or they are given powers by mystical beings (Ghost Rider by Marvel, DC's Captain Marvel). Heroes with these types of abilities are typically the most powerful overall, using their abilities to dwarf the power of other heroes without superhuman abilities.

The next category of superhero is the costumed vigilante. These characters do not have any superhuman abilities, but typically have some sort of skill or great athletic abilities that are useful to crime-fighting. Examples of this type of superhero are Batman and Green Arrow, both published by DC, and Iron Man, published by Marvel. Also included in this category are humans who are given objects that grant them temporary abilities that can be deactivated with the removal of the object. The primary example of this is the Green Lanterns, published by DC. These heroes operate with a great regard for justice and what is right, often taking to the streets only after they have seen their local law enforcement fail time after time.

The third category is a sort of "everything else" category. This includes various gods and goddesses (Thor, Ares, both by Marvel), aliens (Superman, Martian Manhunter, both by DC), and robots (DC's Red Tornado, Marvel's The Vision). These heroes also have widely varied abilities and origins, but they most commonly have powers or abilities equal to the superhumans. This group must also put in extra effort to blend in with society when not operating in their hero guise.

Another important concept in the fictional section of this project is the identification of the time periods during which the stories examined take place. The history of American comic books is commonly divided into the Golden Age, the Silver Age, the Bronze Age, and the Modern Age (Ryall 2009). All of these need to be adequately defined in order to understand the common motifs in comic books during these time periods.

The Golden Age of comic books began in 1938 with the debut of Action Comics #1 and lasted until 1950 (Ryall). During this time period, the superhero archetype was formed and came to be defined as a nearly-mythological figure who, though superpowered, could integrate themselves into a fictional society very much like our own. One of the greatest strengths of a superhero story was the basis of the character and their powers in reality; even early on in comic book history, superheroes saw their stories set in a world that was essentially the real world, grounding their adventures in plausibility. This set the groundwork for more comic book stories in the future. Many popular superheroes debuted during this time period, including Superman, Wonder Woman, Batman, Captain America, and Captain Marvel. The Golden Age was the first time comic books had become a mainstream art medium, with some comic books printing 1.4 million copies per issue (Lavin 1998).

In the real world, the Golden Age covered post-World War I, the Great Depression, and ended with World War II and the atomic era. Though World War II was at the end of the Golden Age, it had arguably the greatest impact on comic book stories during that time. After the atomic bombings of Japan in 1945, superheroes with radiation-gained powers began to emerge; various superheroes fought Nazis and caricaturized Japanese soldiers (Magnussen). Comic books sold even more copies during war time because the stories within them reflected events happening in the real world, thus giving their audience a way to relate to the war effort; though Americans left at home, especially children, were not able to participate on the field of battle during the war, the war stories told in comic books allowed them to feel closer to their fathers, husbands, and friends who were fighting in Europe. In this way, comic books provided readers with vicarious participation in the war through the superhero characters. Within the context of sociology, this is important because of the close ties readers were able to form with the comic book heroes. By associating these heroes with their own, real-life heroes, a psychological tie was formed between the two, perhaps causing a "bleeding" effect between superheroes and military

personnel serving overseas.

After the war, comic sales declined, and in order to retain readers, comic book companies began to diversify their stories from superhero comics. New comic genres that emerged during this time were western, horror, romance, and jungle stories.

The next period of comics was the Silver Age, which began in 1956 with the introduction of the second Flash, Barry Allen (Ryall). This period lasted until 1970, and was characterized by the many renowned and influential artists and writers who came to prominence during this time. Stan Lee, Gil Kane, Steve Ditko, and Jack Kirby all started their careers in the Silver Age, and their stories and characterizations are still in existence today. The Silver Age also had a new Comics Code Authority, a regulatory organization that monitored and controlled violent or questionable content in comic books. Of particular infamy was an incident with a Spider-Man comic involving an anecdotal lesson about the effects of alcoholism. According to the Code, comic book characters could not be seen consuming alcohol, so when Marvel Comics wanted to show a supporting character going through the wringer of alcoholism in order to demonstrate that alcohol addiction was a clear and present danger, they did not gain approval from the CCA. Breaking with tradition, Marvel elected to publish the story anyway, even without CCA approval. This led to the subsequent revisions and eventual abandonment of the Code altogether.

Though there is no unanimous consensus on the end of the Silver Age, Ryall and Tipton (2009) state that the Silver Age ended with The Amazing Spider-Man #121 in 1973, with the death of Gwen Stacey, Spider-Man's girlfriend. Never before in the Silver Age had such a significant character been killed and certainly not as violently as she was. Though this event can be interpreted as an end to the idyllic stories of the Silver Age, it can also be interpreted as a harbinger of the violence and grittiness that was to come in the Bronze Age.

The Bronze Age of comic books followed the Silver Age and lasted from the 1970s until 1985. The primary characteristic of this time period was the darker storylines that dealt with real-world issues like drugs, violence, and alcoholism. Superheroes from minority backgrounds were first featured during this time period. The common art style changed to incorporate more realism, rather than the stylistic art from the Gold and Silver ages. Characters appeared in other comic books that were not their own more often than ever before (Ryall), and even entire comic book companies crossed over their characters for the first time. The most prime of these events are 1996' DC vs. Marvel Comics, which resulted in a temporary alliance between the companies called Amalgam Comics, and 2003's JLA/Avengers, which saw the two superhero teams fight against each other, and then together to defeat an enemy more powerful than either fictional universe could defeat alone.

The Modern age began in the mid-1980s and continues to the present day. At the beginning of this period, the primary storylines were much darker than ever before, especially in the case of the market-changing graphic novel, Watchmen. The modern age also brought company-wide crossover events that rebooted or refreshed continuities every 5-10 years; examples include Civil War, Blackest Night, and Infinite Crisis. Though these types of events have become commonplace, their effects on stories and characters last for several years after the event takes place. This means that even though company-wide crossovers are now commonplace, they are not a one-trick pony where after the crossover is over, the status quo is back to normal. The story elements introduced in these crossovers have ramifications on storylines later on as well.

Setting the stage for my time period of study, the 1990s saw the fall of the comic book speculation market. Since the Silver Age, comic book collecting had become very profitable, and the first appearances of characters, or significant story lines had become valuable. Speculators began to purchase

comic books that they thought would be valuable. Comic book companies responded by printing many "collectable" issues and memorabilia, like incentive covers, foil-stamped covers, and special extended issues. In order to fulfill the collector demand for these special items, comic book companies began to manufacture them on a much larger scale. Because the supply of these items skyrocketed, the aftermarket prices plummeted, and the comic book market crashed. Without the speculation market, comic book companies were forced to scale back their operations because of decreased revenue. After becoming used to the sales that the special-edition comic books had brought in, the sharp decline in revenue was a shock to comic book companies and their vendors. Nearly twenty years later, comic book companies still have not regained the fiscal confidence that they once had.

The early 2000s provided comic book companies one last chance to get back in the good graces of readers and become marketable again. After focusing on collectability for so long, writers and artists had to tell better stories to get readers purchasing their books again. After this market crash, it was almost a surprise that the 2000s existed in comic book history at all. This decade was perhaps the most exciting of all for many reasons. First, both story and art styles were adjusting to a new audience and a new century; gone were the hard-edged technopunk drawings of the 1990s, and more classic stories were told in their place. Second, the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks had a great effect on superhero comic books, in that the stories became more focused on "American" values and images of American protection.

Literature Review

The best way to demonstrate the central pieces of this project is to illustrate the fictional concepts of the Heroic Moments, and then define the methodological concepts of content analysis. Perhaps the most critical concepts of this project are the fictional concept of "superheroes" and methodological concept of "archetypes."

The study of heroic archetypes is a well-established field of research. The most influential research on archetypes was perhaps done by Carl Jung in the early 20th century. His work is the basis of my own research on the evolution of the superhero archetype.

According to Jung, archetypes are "ancient or archaic images that derive from the collective unconscious" (Jung 1968). An example of a Jungian archetype is that of the Shadow, the mental image of the darker traits that lie within, a darker version of our own selves. Jung's work on archetypes was a revolution in and of itself; he rejected the tabula rasa theory of human consciousness of his time, and instead theorized that archetypes were evolutionarily common to all people, forming a sort of predestination for an individual. Jung described these archetypes as primordial images. This means that they would be similar among all people, making them universal ideas. Jung came up with hundreds of different archetypes. Archetypal events are birth, death, and marriage; archetypal figures are mother, old man, trickster, and child; and archetypal motifs are the Deluge, the Apocalypse, and the Creation (Jung). One of the more popular archetypes and one that appears in multiple guises is the hero archetype.

While Jung provides the basis for the concept of archetype, Max Weber supplies an application for these ideas in the form of gleaning intelligibility from social behavior. In the study of human behavior, Weber posits two simultaneous orientations, one towards historical significance of events, and one towards sociological events. The sociological perspective is most relevant to this project because the sociological orientation is meant to mentally reconstruct social institutions and their functioning with the help of concepts (Aron 1970). These concepts, within the context of this thesis, are the Jungian archetypes of heroes as shown in the stories of Batman and Captain America. Raymond Aron summarizes Weber's work as being "defined…by an effort to understand and explain the values men have believed in, to understand the

works produced by men" (228). The values people assign to their heroes, and how superheroes function as role models in real world society are the primary focus of this project; therefore Weberian analysis will be instrumental to the overall quality of the thesis in order to adequately discuss the real-world effects Batman and Captain America have on people.

Before a Weberian analysis can take place, however, I will focus in on one subgenre of the hero archetype. Though there are many types of heroes, including child heroes, romantic heroes and tragic heroes, I have focused on a relatively new type of hero: the superhero. Superheroes have only existed in their current form for just over eighty years, but the superhero is based upon heroic figures from classic mythology. The work of LoCicero (2008) supports the argument for the relationship by drawing specific comparisons between modern superheroes and mythic heroes (LoCicero 2008). Since that research is well-established, I will be focusing on the presentation of the superhero archetype alone.

The work of Mark and Pearson (2001) demonstrates the importance of any archetype in marketing products to an audience. In addition to Jung's work, their research operationally defines archetype as it applies to a "real" practice, rather than an abstract concept. This means that this work shows the real world significance of archetypes, rather than just defining them in literature. Because this work is extant, I will not be going into great detail about how archetypes can be important to an individual's everyday life. This work served to bridge the fictional subjects of my research to analytical application in the real world, allowing the reader to form a practical basis from which to understand my project.

There have been numerous studies of comic books (Lavin (1998), LoCicero (2008), Magnussen (2000)), though none have taken the route that I took during the course of my thesis. There have been numerous character studies done on superheroes, like Anthony Kolenic's Madness in the Making, a study of The Joker and Batman from the film, The Dark Knight. That project compared the Joker's complete unpredictability and madness to the persona created by Seung-Hui Cho, the student who opened fire at Virginia Tech in 2007, killing 32 people and wounding 17 others, eventually taking his own life as well (Kolenic 2009). The basic design of Madness is of similar design to my own project in that attributes of a fictional character can be observed in real-world situations. Kolenic was able to demonstrate that the shooter, though seemingly unpredictable like the Joker, was given by the media an easily-understood persona for the benefit of the viewing audience. The audience needed to understand the shooter as a person with a mental condition, having a cause for what he did; the Joker in The Dark Knight was made more villainous because there was no verifiable cause for the violent acts he committed.

My own research relates to Kolenic's research but is not quite of the same form. By analyzing the character traits of the Joker, and comparing them to character traits attributed to the Virginia Tech shooter, he creates a parallel from the comic book world to the real world. Kolenic's character analysis allows for the reader to see the need for a real person to have an identifiable persona versus the lack of that need for a fictional character.

Methodology

Keeping in mind Jung's work on archetypes and Weber's methodology for applying those types of concepts to the real world, the key questions of this project are as follows:

1. Can the Heroic Moments defined in this thesis indicate a relationship between the comic book superheroes and their audiences?

2. Do Batman and Captain America follow traditional heroic archetypes?

To answer the questions above, the methods of this project include content analysis of two superhero comic book titles from the

2000s. Content analysis will be the primary research device for my thesis, in the form of observing occurrences of certain attributes within selected comic books in the 1999-2009 decade. This decade is important for two primary reasons. First, this decade was a rebuilding time for the comic book industry; after the collapse of the comic book speculation market during the 1990s, comic book companies were trying to regain the trust of their readers by improving the quality of their stories and internal artwork, rather than relying upon limited-edition book covers. This time period was also significant in the real world; how comic books dealt with the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and the rise of terrorism paranoia in the United States is a very interesting topic that is potentially culturally significant.

Items for analysis will include the aforementioned "teaching moments," defined as moments where the heroes act in a manner that is obviously aimed to teach a lesson, "archetypal moments," wherein a hero acts in a very traditionally heroic way, based on the Jungian "hero" archetype, and "ideal moments," when a hero appears to act in a manner that is meant to inspire the reader to act in the same way.

I analyzed every fourth issue of Batman, and Captain America comics from January 1999 through September 2009. While this percentage does not include every issue, a 25 percent sample will be an adequate representation of the general stories being told during this time period. That sample accounts for a total of sixty-six comic book issues for the observed time period, with thirty-three issues for each series analyzed.

This observed decade was chosen because of the conditions the comic book industry and the primary audience were in during the 2000s. After the comic book speculation market crash of the late 1990s, it was an uncertain time for comic books: publishers had to scale back their ventures and become more focused on what readers wanted to buy, initiating a new relationship between entertainment producers and consumers. In a way,

publishers were trying to get into the "good graces" of their readers again, and that practice was radically different from the business practices of the 20th century. Secondly, post 9/11 America saw comic books turn to a different group of villains. DC Comics went with more fantastic villains in order to perhaps give readers a villain they could understand as evil, but one who was not necessarily real. Marvel, on the other hand, confronted terrorism in a more realistic way. Whereas the Avengers previously fought supervillains, they began fighting terrorists in the homeland and abroad and later delved into such contemporary issues as personal privacy and corporate greed. This difference in corporate story policy was a large contributor to my analysis of one character from each company. Even though Batman and Captain America fought very different kinds of villains during this time period, they both continued to appear in stories that resonated with their audiences. How Batman and Captain America were presented during this time period is an especially interesting topic, ripe for the study of the function of superheroes.

It was essential to narrow down the qualifications for any given scene in the story or frame or artwork within an analyzed comic book for it to be considered a "moment". Therefore, I determined that any "moment" had to be performed by Batman or Captain America, with the exception of one notable instance described in the Findings section. This meant that observed moments could not be performed by alter ego Bruce Wayne or Steve Rogers; only when the character was in his superhero persona could a moment be observed. During the course of the story for each of these characters during the observed decade, both Batman and Captain America were killed and had other heroes rise to take their mantles., These new versions of Batman and Captain America were also included in Moment recognition as well, as long as they were in the Batman or Captain America personas.

Images were included in moment recognition because comic books are such visual

media that relying on speech and text alone would have made my analysis incomplete. The internal artwork of a comic book is perhaps the most important part of the book as a whole. A story and script are also necessary, but those items cannot be conveyed as effectively without the artwork; the artwork is meant to draw readers in and keep them there for the duration of the story. Simply looking at dialogue would have meant missing perhaps the richest and certainly the most unique area of comic book research.

A Teaching Moment occurs within dialogue or narration when the text is written to imply a life lesson. This lesson can be simple or complex, ranging from mundane tasks to ethical values. As long as there is a textual indication that a lesson should be learned in that moment, it was counted.

An Archetypal Moment can occur within text or artwork when the hero observed does or says something that is in line with the traditional heroic archetype of Carl Jung. In text, an Archetypal Moment can occur if the hero says that he will save someone or do something heroic, or the same moment could occur within the artwork of the hero actually carrying out that action. An Archetypal Moment can also occur solely in the artwork by showcasing the traditional heroic physique of large muscles, square jaws, and heroic posing that goes beyond "normal" depictions of these heroes.

An Ideal Moment can also occur within text or artwork, and may be related to the Teaching Moment in that lessons are to be learned in both. However, whereas the Teaching Moment tells or shows the reader what is to be learned directly, the Ideal Moments are usually more nuanced. Ideal Moments are meant to give readers inspiration and aspirations of greatness.

The search for and cataloging of these moments served as the primary research of this project.

Findings

Through the analysis of thirty-three comic books from Detective Comics and Captain America (sixty-six comic book in total), I found that Detective Comics had eight Teaching Moments, six Archetypal Moments, and four Ideal Moments. Captain America had six Teaching Moments, eight Archetypal Moments, and two Ideal Moments (see Figure 1 below)

Batman's archetypal moments primarily emerged from imagery. This reinforces elements from Batman's own origin story wherein he designed his costume in order to intimidate his enemies. To show just how visual Batman's "moments" are, five out of his six Archetypal Moments were visual, and one out of four Ideal Moments was visual. Typically, these images involve Batman appearing out of nowhere to confront a villain (issues 732, 760, 836, and 844). Sometimes, however, these images are reserved for something more profound. In issue 788, after a particularly devastating rampage by that issue's villain du jour--a wrongly-accused and now superpowered man named Eddie Hurst--Batman is seen carrying an injured policeman to a medical center. Though Batman and the Gotham City Police Department do not always get along, he recognizes that they essentially have the same mission: protecting the people of Gotham City.

The rest of Batman's "moments" are lessons in justice and/or why people do bad things. In issues 736 and 800, the issues of bad childhoods and religion are brought up. The stories suggest that growing up badly does not give someone the right to be a criminal later in life, and that religion cannot protect someone from justice. It can be further extrapolated that one is always accountable for his or her own actions, no matter the cause. If the characters addressed in these issues willingly commit a crime, they must be willing to face the consequences. Unfortunately for them, in Gotham City, the consequence is often Batman, the Dark Knight. This suggests that justice and the law enforcement system may not always be the same entity despite having the same goal.

Captain America's moments are much more about dialogue than Batman's imagery.

Of the 16 moments observed in Captain America, only three of those moments were based purely on images, while all of the rest, barring one notable exception, were based on dialogue. For example, Volume 5, Issue 13 has three quotable moments on its own: two teaching moments involving the discussion of morality among a backdrop of heroes and villains and a mention by Captain America that he would prefer to face his opponents fairly in battle. The same issue also features an Archetypal Moment, wherein Captain America can be seen lamenting the loss of freedom of speech which was then being suppressed in the story. These moments were singled out in my research because of their perceived significance to the reader.

As stated above, Detective Comics had eight Teaching Moments, six Archetypal Moments, and four Ideal Moments while Captain America had six Teaching Moments, eight Archetypal Moments, and two Ideal Moments. Because this is a 25% sample of all of the issues of Captain America and Detective Comics from 1999-2009, it can be extrapolated by multiplying the observed results by four that Detective Comics featured roughly thirty-two Teaching Moments, twenty-four Archetypal Moments, and sixteen Ideal Moments for a total of seventy-two moments during the ten-year observation period. Using the same reasoning, Captain America should have had twenty-four Teaching Moments, thirty-two Archetypal Moments, and eight Ideal Moments for a total of sixty-four moments.

Assuming these estimates are roughly correct, the data above suggests that Detective Comics had a 60% rate of "moment" occurrence during the ten-year observation period. Captain America's rate of "moment" occurrence came to 53%. This suggests that 60% of Detective Comics issues and 53% of Captain America issues from 1999-2009 probably contained a Heroic Moment.

To gain intelligibility from these findings, a researcher like Max Weber would apply these data to the real world and mentally reconstruct what these heroic concepts mean to the people who observe them. With the observed moments occurring with such frequency, it seems that the stories observed in Detective Comics and Captain America are ones that are important to teach and the stories that readers want to learn. That these moments happen at all suggests that people assign values to these heroes and think they are important enough to engage at a basic level. Since the three types of moments were observed with such high frequency, it can be inferred that Batman and Captain America serve as role models for their audiences.

Conclusions

What does this research mean within the realm of established knowledge? I believe that the rates of moment occurrence that I observed can be used to suggest a relationship between the way these characters act in their stories and the way their readers can interpret these Teaching Moments, Ideal Moments, and Archetypal Moments.

The number of Archetypal moments observed shows a strong relationship between Batman and Captain America and the Jungian hero. By perpetuating this hero type, a large percentage of society has shown that it is important to have these heroes in the collective consciousness. Weber endeavored to explain the works of men, from literature and art to governmental policies, and to find the reasons behind recurring concepts. Weber's conclusions assist in the interpretation of the significance of various intangible aspects of works. By understanding the origins of the concepts, it is possible to understand the significance of their continued recurrence. Within the context of this thesis, these concepts were the heroes themselves and their importance to much of the larger society. By continuing the heroic tradition, Captain America's and Batman's continual popularity suggests that there is a desire by much of humanity to keep the heroic archetype alive in popular literature.

The Teaching and Ideal Moments are both meant to convey a message, and following from Weber's theory of social constructs, it

is evident that these messages are embraced by many consumers of popular culture. The primary message within the observed comic books is what it means to be a hero. The dedication, self-sacrifice, and vigilance of Batman and Captain America suggest to readers that being a hero does not necessarily mean having superpowers or wearing a costume. Instead, being a hero can simply mean being a good person. Without this deep meaning, these comic books and characters could not have existed for as long as they have.

These stories perpetuate the hegemonic ethos of a dominant cultural association by reinforcing the existing social constructs of the Jungian hero and teaching readers what it means to be a hero. As a serial media, comic books must be tied into the trends of the larger culture and often must rapidly adapt to changing social conditions . That Batman and Captain America comic books have been released in this monthly fashion for so long is indicative of their social significance. The moments that I found are important because they are the moments that much of the larger society seems to value. With that in mind, comic books will continue to have Heroic Moments, and readers will continue to appreciate them.
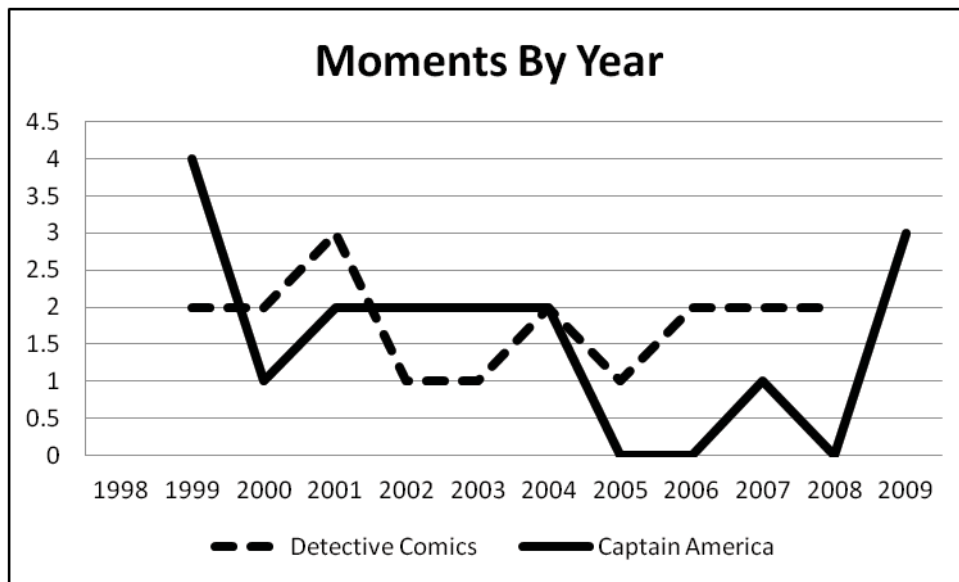

Figure 1

Works Cited

Aron, Raymond. "Max Weber: The Conception of Science." *Main Currents in Sociological Thought II*. Trans. Richard Howard and Helen Weaver. Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1970. 219-28. Print.

Babbie, Earl. *The Practice of Social Research*. 6th ed. Belmont, California: Wadsworth, 1992. Print.

Cohen, Louis, Lawrence Manion, and Keith Morrison. *Research Methods in Education*. London ; New York: Routledge, 2007. Google Scholar. Web. 8 Dec. 2011.

Feist, Jess, and Gregory J. Feist. *Theories of Personality*. Boston: McGraw Hill Higher Education, 2009. Print.

Holsti, Ole R., Robert C. North, M. George. Zaninovich, Dina A. Zinnes, and James A. Robinson. *Content Analysis: A Handbook with Applications for the Study of International Crisis*. Evanston: Northwestern Univ., 1963. Google Books. Web. 8 Dec. 2011.

Kolenic, Anthony J. "Madness in the Making: Creating and Denying Narratives from Virginia Tech to Gotham City." *The Journal of Popular Culture 42.6* (2009): 1023-038. Print.

Jung, C. G. *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968. Print.

Lavin, Michael R. "Comic Books and Graphic Novels for Libraries: What to Buy." *Serials Review 24.2* (1998): 31-45. Web.

LoCicero, Donald. *Superheroes and Gods: A Comparative Study from Babylonia to Batman*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland &, 2008. Print.

Magnussen, Anne, and Hans-Christian Christiansen. *Comics & Culture: Analytical and Theoretical Approaches to Comics*. Museum Tusculanum Press. 2000 Google Scholar. Web.

Mark, Margaret, and Carol Pearson. *The Hero and the Outlaw: Building Extraordinary Brands Through the Power of Archetypes*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2001. Print.

Morrison, Grant. *Supergods: What Masked Vigilantes, Miraculous Mutants, and a Sun God from Smallville Can Teach Us about Being Human*. New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2011. Print.

Rhoades, Shirrel. *A Complete History of American Comic Books*. New York: Peter Lang, 2008. Print.

Ryall, Chris, and Scott Tipton. *Comic Books 101: The History, Methods and Madness*. Cincinnati, OH: IMPACT, 2009. Google Books. Web. 25 Feb. 2012.