# DIALECTIC OF FRIENDSHIP: DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF COMMUNICATION AND RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SUPERMAN AND BATMAN IN SUPERHERO COMICS

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# ABSTRACT


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| **Title of Dissertation** | DIALECTIC OF FRIENDSHIP: DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF COMMUNICATION AND RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SUPERMAN AND BATMAN IN SUPERHERO COMICS |
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This study conducted a 2-stage analysis of dialectics in a discourse of a seemingly antagonistic superhero partnership between Superman (Clark Kent) and Batman (Bruce Wayne) while aiming to expand upon our understanding of dialectical relationships, American friendship, masculine-heroism ethics, and the evolution of society. Firstly, the study used Quantitative Content Analysis (CA) in corroboration with William Rawlins's Dialectical theory of Friendship (DTF), to extract themes and patterns shown in communications between the protagonists. Then, the study utilized Critical Narrative Analysis (CNA) in corroboration with Georg W. F. Hegel's Speculative Dialectics to unmask critical implications created from the Superman-Batman dichotomy. The results showed that Superman and Batman have a complex friendship relationship, displaying a dominant frequency of expressiveness, judgment, and affection in communication. Such patterns in communication contribute to the expressive and honest friendship patterns shared between male friends in critical and industrialized reinforcement of opposite relationship, bipartisanship, and peaceful discourse in a rivalry which is a surprisingly common discourse in American culture. By using theories of archetypes, dialectical relations and dialectics to conduct content analyses in several media featuring Superman and Batman, the study argued that Superman and Batman as a complex and globally relative discourse that encourages an ethical hegemony and dialectical tension between fiction and reality that could potentially inspire people to read such media text seriously and adopt lessons from the two heroes to lessen socio-political disharmony improve how we live in reality.

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# ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

| **Abbreviations** | **Equivalence** |
|---|---|
| CA | Content Analysis |
| CNA | Critical Narrative Analysis |
| RD | Relational Dialectics |
| DTF | Dialectical Theory of Friendship |
| SM | Superman |
| BM | Batman |
| C Superman | Composite Superman |

| **Symbol** | **Equivalence** |
|---|---|
| “” | Dialogue |
| <> | Event Description |

# CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Statement of the Problem

The relationship between fictional superhero characters Superman (Clark Kent) and Batman (Bruce Wayne) is simultaneously antagonistic and cooperative. This friendship dynamic can be connected to the concept of dialectic. Dialectic explains the tensions and conflicts created between opposing components of 'thesis' (element one) and 'antithesis' (element two), which interact and subsume the former in a 'synthesis' (element three). Dialectic has been broadly used in studying communication, conflict management, negotiation, and historical evolution in human civilization between oppositions. However, because superhero narratives usually present masculine expressions as entertainment, aggressive and antagonistic relationships between superheroes are usually exaggerated to the point that they are mistaken to be hateful and distrustful toward each other. This has caused superhero authors and audiences alike to misunderstand interactions between superheroes and develop a shallow understanding of dialectic. It is, therefore, an intention of this research to reexamine some of the common debates in the superhero community in order to access the argumentative and antagonistic relationship between superheroes. Superman and Batman are perfect subjects because the two characters tend to display constant antagonism toward one another. Analyzing these characters under the framework of dialectic may help to find or create new understanding or expand existing perceptions about superhero friendships and see the dialectical relationship as a reflection of the cynical, opinionated, and competitive postmodern society.

The modern concept of dialectic originally was a socio-political observation of the French Revolution by German idealists trying to analyze wars, revolutions, or struggles in order to identify how human society functions in a logical and systematic manner (Boulding, 1970; Brenkert, 2010; Cole, 2004; Cortiel & Oehme, 2015; Ollman,

1986). Speculative dialectics, as popularized by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (Hegel, 1977), focused on how abstract knowledge and civilization can be created from a conflict between oppositions without completely discarding either element. Meanwhile, the socialist school of Marxism focused on physical and historical power struggles between the elite, high class 'bourgeoisie' and the lower class 'proletariats' to highlight social injustice and inequality. Marxian belief responds to Plato's 'Allegory of the Cave', which indicated the ugly truth about people being chained up or dominated by the elite social classes. Class discrimination has since been incorporated in critical theories or philosophical inquiries that identify power struggles and political relationships to deconstruct texts, finding faults within the social system in an attempt to rectify them. The definitions of dialectic have evolved over time; however, certain problems emerged in the progress.

The primary issue of dialectic today is how it has been muddily used in socio-political arguments. First, K. R. Popper (2002) and Groisman (2007) indicated that dialectical criticism has become bordered on dogmatism and authoritarian personality. From controversies of right-wing politics, fourth-wave feminism, to social justice warriors (Kellner, 2016; Massanari & Chess, 2018), agenda-driven analyses have been mocked by the tendency of obsessive or politically sensitive analysts who dogmatically abuse critical arguments to stir arguments and controversies. These critiques forcefully criticize the system in order to assert one's own agenda under the pretense that the existing power structure in society is innately incorrect and unjust. Such extremity treats dialectical struggle as a battlefield where opposite factions wage war for domination and absolute victory (Mises, 2008; Papa, Singhal, & Papa, 2006). Second, Bechstedt (2002) suggested that the appeal of emancipation is illusory. Because social activist groups tend to focus overly on pursuing victory with little regard to the consequences of their claims, they usually forget to think of building a secure social structure. Therefore, misguided activists can cause instability and a further spiral of class struggle. Third, not every social system requires a social revolution to exist. Williams (1958) suggests that certain groups of low-class men, such as farmers, do not believe themselves to be oppressed; therefore, they may not have a reason to rebel against the system. Finally, the authoritarian approaches toward the 'us versus them' or 'end justifies the means' philosophies conflict with the changing landscape of postmodern

society where social classes are subjectivized and can no longer be viewed as absolutely good or evil (Boulding, 1970; Papa et al., 2006). Campbell, Markley, and Harman (1982) stated “an image may be appropriate for one phase in the development of society, but once that stage is accomplished, the use of the image… will likely create more problems than it solves” (pp. 4-5). These pieces of literature made a common point that a critical perspective that relies only upon the skewed perception of class struggle and emancipation may have become outdated and potentially cause harm in society.

A need to step away from this dogmatic perception of dialectic is very prominent in popular culture. Recent studies (Malloy, 2008; Michaud, 2016b; Riesman, 2016) have claimed that Superman and Batman are two of the first superheroes in American history written hitherto, therefore they are two flagship protagonists in DC Comics. The characters have attained popularity in both comic books and mainstream media. Various narratives and rhetoric have been contributed to them, and their appearances are significant enough to have altered the entire landscape of the superhero narrative as a genre. Influenced by how the two characters actively engage in interpersonal conflicts, it is very common for fans to debate the physical description, philosophy, and efficiency of the two characters (Riesman, 2016). As examples: Who would win a fight should they fight? Who is a better hero? Whose ideology is correct? What does one’s popularity over another prove about our society? etc. Typically, a character that has grown in popularity (antithesis) would be critiqued to challenge the “enemy” who has held the position of the industry’s alpha hero (thesis) by attaining more cultural exposure and thus being replaced as a new source of profit. This new order is established in order to attract more readers and more money, altering the landscape of overarching superhero narratives in the process (synthesis). In addition, these studies tend to be labeled with snappy titles and were sold as philosophy books easily accessed by fans of superhero media, which invoked an apologist or an antagonistic approach in critical analyses. These studies are dangerous not only because they contribute to the poor overall reputation of popular culture, but they are also capable of influencing audiences to develop egocentrism and hero-worship that fuels an inability to accept differences in social reality (Riesman, Rami, Marcus, Fitz-Gerald, & Shia, 2016). Furthermore, they may contribute to the currently more problematic issues such as risk

society or disruptive society, where the misuses of media, free speech, and subjectivism can create rejection, mistrust, paranoia, and polarization between people with often opinionated and uncompromising ideologies (Cesaire, 1972; Engerman & Kenneth, 2013).

Yet, it seems impossible to reject the traditional image to dialectic in order to conduct an analysis on the topic. The fundamental elements of dialectical struggles, such as class differences and power negotiation, are still required to create an efficient criticism of dialectical movements. However, the researcher is obliged to question the credibility of the previous studies, so that this research may establish new knowledge in communication and media criticism. As speculated, studies with antagonistic or apologist attitudes tend to make it difficult to critically analyze and provide dialectic as a solution that encourages compromise and democracy. We need to understand that there are differences between dogmatism and other forms of dialectics that have been used in current researches about communication, relationship development, and critical reflection of the dialectical relationship. Aside from trying to initially understand why Superman and Batman are usually compared in terms of their popularity as part of literature reviews and to compare and contrast previous research with the result of the current analysis to establish new knowledge, while dialectical materialism is to be avoided as much as possible in the analysis itself.

Instead, this research defines dialectic as a cumulative process of different, but equally relevant, social components engaging in interactions, negotiations, solutions, and changes to reach a dialectical equilibrium in social relationships (Boulding, 1970; Marcuse, 1954; Ollman, 1986; Papa et al., 2006). This research asserts that there is a requirement to analyze popular culture to create a better understanding of trends in narratives and overall perception of dialectic in modern society.

## 1.2 Research Rationales

This study aims to address knowledge gaps related to studies in popular culture and modern literary works. Studies of Superman and Batman tend to aim toward qualitative assessment of the relationship based on speculation. Analyses tended to focus on the more literary significance of superhero characters (Farrall, 2016). For

example, the critical implications surrounding how character popularity throughout history have signified the downfall of Superman's idealism and the rise of Batman's cynicism (Foresman, 2008; O'Neil, 2016; Pevey, 2007; Riesman, 2016). Popular consciousness toward Superman and Batman, supplemented by the 'win at all cost' mentality of the modern critics, have simply been too biased or too competitive toward either character. Fortunately, because of the oversaturation of the 'superhero vs. superhero' narrative trend (Petaccio, 2016) has called for articles and studies that reassess Superman and Batman as friends who have a complex relationship and a dichotomy of contradiction yet are able to coexist in peace (Gilleard, 2016; Malloy, 2008; O'Neil, 2016).

In addition, existing literature related to Superman and Batman were dependent on qualitative and speculative assessments of the narratives and characterizations, leaving a need for quantitative assessment of the phenomenon

Adopting a mixed methodology, this study uses quantitative analysis to provide a scientific and statistical perspective to enhance the quality of the data. Moreover, to expand upon the harmonious interpretation of Superman and Batman, this study involves a mixed-methodology approach that consists of both a quantitative and a qualitative assessment of comic narratives. The usage of quantitative methodology should be able to provide quantitative data sets that can be used to generalize the character's behaviors and attitudes when they interact as friends. Thus, this approach helps expand upon the results of quantitative methodology to cover several critical implications related to popular culture, our current understanding of dialectical friendship, and other additional dialectical criticisms. In addition, each methodology has been constructed around specific frameworks that create concise analysis and generate theory related to dialectical friendship in the American superhero genre. The rationale behind this study is comprised of the following ideas:

### 1.2.1 Popular Heroism as a Site of Struggle

A study of superhero texts-as-dialectic refers to the study of heroism as a part of the framework embedded in the standard of a modern hero in popular narratives. A hero is "a person who is admired for their courage, outstanding achievements, or noble qualities" (Oxford dictionaries online, 2019b). Heroes are people, fictional or

nonfictional, who devote themselves to commit heroic deeds and moral causes in order to improve society. Typically, they are encoded as people who use their expertise to support other people, to protect the helpless, and to inspire others to improve their lifestyles or become heroes themselves.

A study of heroic mythology in popular culture is a multidisciplinary field that aims to magnify the text's power to understand human traditions and beliefs. Heroism study claims that a heroic narrative explores people's common desire to achieve one's true potential in social reality (Campbell, 2004, 2008). According to the book *Handbook of Heroism and Heroic Leadership* (Allison, Goethals, & Kramer, 2017), scholars have encouraged an interpretation of a heroic figure as a positive influence. While critical perspective is normally skeptical of media acting as a powerful platform that dominates and controls human life, critical assessments of fiction must also recognize that literary works reflect humans' conditions and enhance their behaviors and worldviews in order to achieve happiness and more meaningful life (Sartre, 1988). Allison et al. (2017) suggested further that heroes must be studied intricately as part of cultural textuality, so these heroes must be studied delicately as a cultural text. Superheroes are a product of the American cultural definition of heroism, which contains relatable and universal moral values in the current globalized society. Researchers must utilize critical and ethical perspectives to understand how and why superhero characters are worthy role models.

Studies of fictional heroes were typically dismissed for their lack of credibility and practicality in real life mainly because such fictions tended to be viewed as commodities, senseless power fantasy, or propaganda; however, this research suggests that fictional characters have the potential to be more efficient than real-life role models do. Notably, real-life heroes are not commonly praised in a capitalist society, as the criteria of heroism are made up of too many subjective factors. On the contrary, fiction and fictional characters are complete contexts that the researcher can analyze for positive and negative qualities based entirely upon the content, which may provide a complete picture of heroism (Allison et al., 2017). The validity of fictional heroism lies in the idea that popular narratives are globalized media. As a requirement to make products recognized and sold around the world, popular texts amalgamate various elements from different cultures to make a unique text, appreciated by people of various

nationalities, while appealing to wide ranges of people (J. Fiske, 1989; J. N. Martin & Nakayama, 2007). As such, it is possible that heroism in a fictional text is universal and capable of reflecting different social groups, regardless of nationality.

One of the common fallacies in a discussion of heroism is hero-worshiping. Campbell and Moyer (1991), indicated that people of modern society admire celebrities and politicians more than heroes, treating important figures because of their frontal charisma instead of their virtues. The tendency for children and teenagers to worship fictional heroes can be problematic as doing so can encourage bad habits. The audiences run the risk of growing up to become patronizing individuals and of worshipping *self-styled heroes*, or agenda-driven people operating upon the principle of harming other people in real life (Kendrick, 2010). Kendrick defined self-styled heroes as corrupted or ruthless historical 'heroes' such as Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini, who had used flowery rhetoric and false morality to arouse their followers to commit atrocities. Such a tendency of hero-worship and rejection of different perspectives are immediate threats to audiences and researchers who consume popular media.

Efficient analysis of popular heroism should allow the researcher to explore rituals, social activities, and socio-political implications as expressed through communication. The analysis interprets texts as metaphorical constructs that convey moral norms and identity issues (Barthes, 1991; Campbell, 2008; Campbell & Moyer, 1991; Rank, 1990). Superhero comic books can act as a bridge to establish harmony between intercultural ideologies. In addition, a significant number of studies have devoted themselves to exploring the critical and ethical implications of media texts, and of theoretical approaches that allow in-depth analyses of the texts to purportedly solve problems in society in a creative manner.

### 1.2.2 Superman and Batman as Dialectics

Superhero comic books that feature Superman and Batman are a type of text that has a direct relation with the concept of dialectic employed in this study. Superman and Batman have been depicted as adult characters who have complete opposite appearances, personalities, and literary significances. This has caused the heroes to bicker with one another constantly because of their contrasting perspectives. Despite that, the heroes have been depicted in canonical comics as friends with similar goals

and ethics. (Farrall, 2016). The conflicts between Superman and Batman are very broad in nature. Unlike other superhero character pairs such as Captain America and Iron Man from Marvel comics, who were purposely created to be politically divided in the American context, conflicts between the Man of Steel and the Dark Knight exist at almost every level of praxis. Firstly, Superman and Batman have been developed to have opposite personalities and worldviews. Secondly, the two characters actively engage in banters and debates about several subjects in their superhero duties such as friendship, lifestyles, and personal philosophies. They represent a dialectical relationship in contexts that are very flexible and relatable to conflicts held by the public, justifying the reason behind the selection of the superhero partners as an academic topic in communication studies and literary fields.

The need for analyzing Superman and Batman as dialectic stems from the desire to answer a research inquiry concerning how people of different ideological backgrounds should interact in social reality. Despite the glowing notion of subjectivism, free speech, and equality in post-modern schools of thought, people of the 21st century ironically seem to suffer from a difficulty in accepting another person's perspective or the mere existence of people who think and act differently. Subjectivism, free speech, and postmodern paranoia have evidently caused people to abuse personal beliefs and to dismiss ideologies that they oppose (Beck, 2006; C. Fuchs, 2017; Kellner, 2016; Lewis, 1967).

Fortunately, Superman and Batman have provided several contexts that can be analyzed as a solution to these dysfunctionalities. In many comic books and adaptations featuring the Man of Steel and the Dark Knight, the stories would show the two characters engaging in conflicts either between themselves or with a specific villain, forcing them to adapt and cooperate with each other to fight for a common cause. The heroes must learn specific lessons about their dialectical friendship to solve their problems. Communication and social theories become crucial keys to understanding interactions between Superman and Batman as well as their development as a powerful dialectical force. This study suggests that the relationship between Superman and Batman potentially serves as a metaphorical representation of the optimized social relationship, power struggle, and dialectical development reflected in modern literary works (Allison & Goethals, 2015; Henderson, 1964; Ochs, 1997; Sartre, 1988).

Therefore, superhero narratives should be studied critically so that both good and bad aspects of their relationship can be acknowledged and adapted to life by media audiences.

## 1.3 The Scope of the Study

The scope of the study is the superhero genre, an American-originated popular culture dealing with masked crime fighters who combat crimes, corruption and supernatural threats with their own supernatural abilities. The superhero genre has experienced a media boom in recent decades because of the increasing amount of superhero adaptations around the world. With several superhero movies, cartoons, and video games being released in the past decades, studies in superhero narratives as mass media and discourse have increasingly become available.

The particular texts of interest are 'crossover' comic books between the characters *Superman (Clark Kent)* and *Batman (Bruce Wayne).* A crossover refers to a comic that simultaneously features two or more superhero protagonists from different titles. These texts extensively explore character interactions and developments, comparing and contrasting their heroic virtues in order to highlight their friendship. This phenomenon represents the interpersonal struggles of communication and ideology, corresponding to the rationale of the research to explore conflicts and solutions within a dialectical relationship. Using the methodology of dialectical theories and critical narrative analysis has provided an opportunity for the study to connect superhero narratives to the studies in language and communication studies. Superman and Batman have at least two comic book series that are dedicated to their crossovers, in addition to frequent encounters in the mainstream media and their respective comics (Patches, 2013; Riesman, 2016), allowing for sufficient amounts of media to be analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively.

The selected samplings in this study are two series of comic books named *Superman/Batman* published between 2003-2011, and branded under the 'Modern Age of Comic Book'; and *Batman/Superman* published in 2011-2016, branded under the title 'The New 52'. The two selected titles are relevant to this study because they are definitive titles that were created to explore the relationship and communication

dynamics between the two title characters. The focus of the analysis was on dialogue, overall narrative patterns, and the implication of their dynamic love-hate relationship as friends on the narrative and industrialized levels.

## 1.4 Objectives of the Research

This research was conducted to analyze the dialectical friendship between characters Superman and Batman through their interpersonal communications in comic books. This study views 'Superman' (thesis), 'Batman' (antithesis), and 'Superman and Batman' (synthesis) as a systematic relationship in dialectical friendship.

The study utilized two specific frameworks in dialectics. First, the study used *Relational Dialectics (RD)* to identify communication between the characters. RD concerns selections of communicative traits between individuals in order to maintain or develop relationships whereas speculative dialectics focuses on abstract knowledge and wisdom gained from dialectical struggles. Specifically, the researcher used the *Dialectical Theory of Friendship (DTF),* provided by William "Bill" K. Rawlins (2008) to pinpoint the themes of American friendship and interpersonal communication.

Second, the study used *Hegelian Dialectics* to analyze progressivist, idealistic logical negotiation between the two characters. Discourse analysis was committed using *Critical Narrative Analysis (CNA),* consisting of fictional narrative and critical discourse analysis, in order to analyze and interpret industrialized messages suggested by the texts. The study aimed to decipher factors and belief systems that construct how dialectics are constructed in comic book narratives.

## 1.5 Research Questions and Research Hypotheses

RQ1 What is the nature of dialectical friendship between Superman and Batman in the selected comic books?

RQ1.1 Is there a difference between the patterns of dialectical friendship between Superman and Batman?

H01 There is no significant difference between the patterns of dialectical friendship between Superman and Batman.

HA1 There is a significant difference between the patterns of dialectical friendship between Superman and Batman.

RQ1.2 Is there a difference between the patterns of dialectical friendship of Superman and Batman between Modern Age and the New 52?

H02 There is no significant difference between the patterns of dialectical friendship of Superman and Batman between Modern Age and the New 52.

HA2 There is a significant difference between the patterns of dialectical friendship of Superman and Batman between Modern Age and the New 52.

The first research focuses on the friendship dynamic exhibited by Superman and Batman. In this stage, the study proposes that there are definitive patterns of relational communication between the protagonists when they interact in the friend-enemy contexts. This proposal is deemed very specific and must be established first to establish the direction and the development of the studied phenomenon. Despite the fact that there are studies that have provided a fundamental understanding of the relationship between the two characters, not enough raw data were found to use as a basis for this research, so it would be doubtful to assume that the existing literature was sufficient to carry an interpretative analysis on the narratives. In addition, establishing a data set can be useful as empirical evidence to support the overall study.

The hypotheses were made based upon a model of the academic procedure using quantitative research, which can help further categorization and understanding of the studied research materials. Notably, if the first set of data correlated with the second, criticism would be made using both sets together; however, if the data did not correlate, analysis of each data set would be made separately.

RQ2 How can the nature of the dialectical friendship between Superman and Batman explain any institutionalized elements within society concerning communication and dialectics?

The second research question concerns the analyses of comic book dialogues in relation to multiple frameworks of conflicts in communication and dialectical friendship. This construction hypothesizes that Superman and Batman would represent a case where two persons with opposite personalities and a love-hate relationship must sublate their differences into a synthesized dialectical unit. The study aimed to analyze industrialized aspects of superhero comics, ethics, and social identity construction; all of these aspects act as a figurative construct to shape audiences' social identities and perceptions toward interpersonal conflicts. The answers to this research question would be discovered by incorporating communication, as conducted using data facilitated from research question #1, conversation scripts, existing research, and *Critical Narrative Analyses (CNA)* to uncover ethical preaching and hegemonic communication and friendship dynamics imposed by the superhero genre. In addition, CNA allows the research context to understand power relations, dialectical synthesis, and identity construction created in a fictional discourse, which all serve as stepping stones to apply hegemonic construction to solve conflicts in real life and to reorient one's perception of reality.

Both questions serve as a means to obtain data that can triangulate and create sufficient discussion on the nature of friendship between Superman and Batman, as well as the implications underlying the dialectical relationship and a more perspicuous interpretation of the phenomenon. The study ultimately suggests popular culture as a potential solution to the currently uncompromising and highly competitive political climates and chaotic society of the 21st century.

## 1.6 Benefits of the Research

This study expands upon the academic analyses of the superhero genre, popular culture, and fictional heroism. It may also be of benefit to fellow researchers in expanding their knowledge of language, communication, and critical studies using fictions and the fictional genre to generate an understanding of dialectical conflicts embedded in superhero texts, which would further be useful in understanding the institutionalized nature of superhero comic books, modern heroism, popular media and globalization.

With regard to further scholarship, this research hopes to develop more sophisticated or critical approaches toward the studying of modern heroes. Because literary works can be read as a critical representation of real-life conflicts (Campbell & Moyer, 1991; Sartre, 1988), media audiences should consider that popular heroes have more value than simply as entertainment or worship figures. People should thus evaluate them as a relevant part of modern life that can be personally adopted and interpreted in order to help lessen interpersonal or socio-political tensions in real-life society.

## 1.7 Research Framework

In this study, the dialectical study refers very specifically to a study that describes and explains the nature of human interactions, negotiations, and changes through the uses of languages in interpersonal communication. The research uses relational dialectics and speculative dialectics to analyze the data.

### 1.7.1 Relational Dialectics/Dialectics of Friendship

*Relational dialectics (RD)* is a branch of dialectical theory used in analyzing intrapersonal and interpersonal communication. Introduced by Barbara Montgomery and Leslie Baxter (1998), RD proposes that in any relationship, there exists a tension between opposing aspects that are in a constant struggle in order to generate specific types of communication traits. For example, the oppositional forces of ‘independence’ and ‘dependence’ both exist in a person’s psyche. Based on the speaker’s personality and circumstance, the speakers may choose to display independence at certain times and dependence at other times. (Wood, 2004, pp. 172-173). RD also suggests that these conflicting expressions must find a compromise and then co-exist in social and spiritual realities (Papa et al., 2006). A relationship is constant maintenance of dialectical aspects that are always in the struggle in the selection of which personality traits would be best suited to express in communication in fiction in order to highlight the dramatization of the characters (Cattrysse, 2010).

A specific variant of RD that is being used in this study is the *Dialectical Theory of Friendship (DTF).* American researcher William Rawlins expanded the theory of

relational dialectics in the book *Friendship Matters: Communication, Dialectics, and the Life Course* to connect RD to friendship relationships in America culture. According to Rawlins (1989), the relationship between young people in American culture tends to be clouded with conflicts, doubts, and skepticism of each other's values as relational dialectics take center stage in relationship development. Meanwhile, Sivertsen (2003) indicated that DTF is a framework that can be used to analyze American friendship as a voluntary relationship where mutual and moral bonds are established between two or more persons. American friendship operates on an analysis of two components in relationship and communication acts.

DTF is divided into two categories. Firstly, 'contextual dialectics' refers to a distinction between the different contexts of communication in the friendship between public, private, real, and ideal contexts. Secondly, 'interactional dialectics' refers to the possible choices of personality trait or expression a person may use to engage, maintain, and alter the dynamic of the friendship. The latter half of the theory is significant to an in-depth analysis of the communication pattern between friends in fictional, private, and highly idealized context of Superman and Batman. DTF generates data that can be further analyzed to attain knowledge about an idealized image of dialectical friendship in American comic books. Notably, DTF is being connected to the concept of friendship between children, teenagers, adult men and colleagues in workplaces (Adams & Blieszner, 1989; Dafermos, 2018; O'Boyle, 2014; Riegel, 1976).

Because DTF has been used as a research methodology, more detail will be presented in Chapter 3: Methodology.

### 1.7.2 Western Dialectics/Hegelian Dialectics

A study of Hegelian Dialectics in the Western tradition, as suggested in the statement of the problem, concerns the study of progress through conflict or contradiction. Unlike relational dialectics, speculative dialectics concerns itself with historical changes and socio-political evolution in human civilization. Speculative dialectics originated in the Greek tradition by philosophers like Plato and Socrates exploring causal inquiry into the logic of reality (Buckingham et al., 2011). Philosopher Immanuel Kant (1998) further developed this idea as a transcendental concept, detailing how human subjects could conduct philosophical arguments through *a priori*

knowledge or their ability to achieve pure logic and knowledge about the universe through personal experience, logical reasoning, and synthesis of different dialectical components in a scientific manner (Loparic, 1987; Savile, 2005).

Using Kant's ideology as a base, German philosopher G. W. F. Hegel further developed these earlier efforts to the current mode of speculation used in modern studies. Hegel's book, *The Phenomenology of the Spirit* (1977, 2010) has been used as a basis for the construction of the acquirement of knowledge through dialectical struggle. Hegelian Dialectics is arguably the most prominent model in the dialectical study, referred to as a logical, natural, and tripartite process that explains human intrapersonal interactions, interpersonal relationships, and social development (Papa et al., 2006). According to McTaggart and McTaggart (2000), the most common perception of dialectics has revolved around Hegelian philosophy, which is concerned with a clash between opposite historical components that create tension and lead to eventual sublation that serves as a resolution of the perceived problem.

These opposite and synthesized components were originally described as abstract in *Phenomenology*; however, J. G. Fichte used the terms 'thesis', 'antithesis', and 'synthesis' to outline Hegelian's idea (Kaufmann, 1966, 1996). This has caused Fichte to be cited as the creators of the philosophical model of dialectics as shown below:

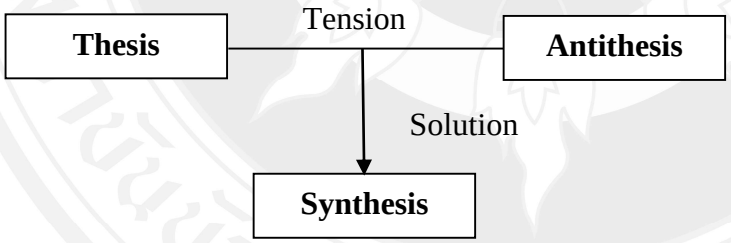


Figure 1.1 Hegelian Dialectics

The historical root of these components was developed to serve as the driving concept to his theory of 'master-slave dynamic'. This idea presents the "life and death struggle" (Estaver, 2013, p. 6) where the 'thesis' and the 'antithesis' each serve as "an unessential, negatively characterized object" (Hegel, 1977, p. 113) toward one another while 'synthesis' is a result of the solution to the dialectical tension. According to deVries (2003), the logic behind Hegelian Dialectics is based on the unity of a couple

of binary components, i.e. ‘being’ and ‘nothing’. He cited Hegel, “Being and nothing are the same; but in their truth, in their unity . . . now remains their base from which they do not again emerge in the abstract significance of being and nothing” (p. 241). The basic idea of dialectics concerns a unifying metaphysical process where both thesis and antithesis must simultaneously exist. For example, Buckingham et al. (2011, p. 182) suggest there is a tension between ‘tyranny’ and ‘freedom’. He states that when tyranny or a crime occurs in a society (thesis), people would seek freedom to counteract such tyranny (antithesis), and the resulting tension culminates in the law that provides people with freedom by limiting people’s potential to cause tyranny, allowing a peaceful civil society to be achieved (synthesis). If there were no tyranny, people would have no need for a law because their freedom would not be threatened, and if there were not a need for freedom, no one would have thought of making a law, because people would be satisfied with tyranny—one variable negates the other in effect. This idea is presented in his idea of the *Historical World Spirit* (Hegel, 2012), as one faction takes over another faction to create a new regime in politics.

However, Hegelian Dialectics may not need to be related to the complete destruction of knowledge. Hegel’s philosophy does not necessarily center itself in a social revolution, but that reality is comprised of a chain of events. In Hegel speculative reason, new ideas are being produced to counteract the formerly flawed shape and therefore to reach the ‘Absolute Spirit’ *(Geist)* or an ideological equilibrium where the optimal and accepted ideas have been made forefront and have moved history as reason forward, to *a telos*, or better future (Buckingham et al., 2011, pp. 184-185). As discussed in *Phenomenology*, the result of the master-slave dynamic is the *mutual recognition* between the opposite fractions. Based on *a priori* knowledge, human conducts logic through personal experiences and has a choice to choose how to embrace different worldviews. In terms of dialectics, this means that any *thesis* and *antithesis* may each have its own set of philosophical assumptions as a part of its overall paradigm. Boulding (1970) wrote that these tensions and cycles are indicated as the systematic nature of a conflict that depicts how human society continuously moves forward as it tries to solve various problems and adjust their equilibrium. Likewise, Ollman (1986) states “dialectics is a way of thinking that brings into focus the full range of changes and interactions that occur in the world.” (p. 42). Dialectic, in particular, Hegel’s

metaphysical theory, has been viewed in this study as the active and ongoing exchanges of shapes of consciousness and by extension, ideologies, where there are ‘moments’ where certain political components may become sublated or subsumed by another.

Overall, Hegelian Dialectics can be used to explore how knowledge and evolution occur between Superman and Batman as the two characters develop a mutual system of relationship.

## 1.8 Organization of the Study

Following this introductory chapter, which has provided details about an overview of the problem, a rationale, scopes of the study, purposes, and benefits of the research, the study continues as follows:

First, ‘Chapter 2: Literature Review’ provides lists of contexts, theories and previous studies deemed necessary to understand the academic background and previous researches relevant to the current study. Next, ‘Chapter 3: Methodology’ describes the research designs, methods, and data selection, data analyses, and measures of validity and reliability that will allow readers to understand the process of the study. Then, ‘Chapter 4: Stage 1 Results’ highlights the results of the research based on the framework of DTF. Next, ‘Chapter 5: Stage 2 Results’ showcases the results of the research conducted using discourse analysis to expand upon the results of Stage 1. Afterward, ‘Chapter 6: Discussion’ integrates the results, literature, and the researcher’s own interpretation in analyzing Superman and Batman as dialectics and illustrating how the findings can be useful in minimizing dialectical conflicts in daily life. Finally, ‘Chapter 7: Conclusion’ summarizes the study and identifies research implications, limitations, and provides recommendations.

## 1.9 Summary

This chapter has outlined the general information about the study. The researcher has noticed the growing problem of dogmatism in the critique of popular culture as the result of growing cynicism and personal bias regarding the perception of conflicts in current studies of mass media and sociology, which have in turn contributed to the

problems of risk society in the post-modern world. Using the standard of subjectivity in post-modern schools of thought, a study of dialectics should focus on viewing various social components as equally valid perspectives in struggling to reach a mutual social and interpersonal understanding.

An efficient material to convey this understanding is the crossover comic books ‘Superman/Batman’ and ‘Batman/Superman’, which directly deal with popular superhero narratives. This research has chosen to analyze the complicated relationship between Superman and Batman, the globally acknowledged adult superhero protagonists known for their oppositional characterizations. This research is to facilitate the expansion of current studies of critical communication and heroism, while allowing casual readers to find heroic figures in popular culture to be more meaningful than simply figures of entertainment, and actively use knowledge learned from heroic hegemony to help lessen societal conflicts and improve how they live in and negotiate conflicts in contemporary society.

# CHAPTER 2

# LITERATURE REVIEW

## 2.1 Introduction

This chapter first reviews previous related research needed to understand the overall context of the Superman-Batman dichotomy.

Firstly, this research cites prior studies that have defined communication and subjects related to conflicts in communication. Doing so is essential in understanding why and how two people with an antagonistic friendship can actively engage in a dialectical conflict on interpersonal and socio-political levels. The study has also tried to understand the nature of friendship and enemies that cover the problems in socio-political conflicts and the nature of Superman and Batman as friends and enemies.

Secondly, this study dwells on the nature of mass media and popular culture. Specifically, it explored narratives and popular culture as media platforms that have globally been appreciated in the 20$^{th}$ and 21$^{st}$ centuries, especially since these media affect audiences' personal awareness and perceptions toward conflicts.

Thirdly, this chapter examines superhero comic books, providing necessary academic background, including a brief history of American comic books, its relation to real-life history as a 'magical realism genre'. In addition, it has explored how narrative movements in superhero history have affected relationship dynamics between superhero characters.

Finally, the study has explored the characters of Superman and Batman as units of analysis. The study dwelled into the development of the two characters as individuals and an integrated unit with the primary focus on the stabilized and canonical versions of the characters as portrayed in the comic books and their adaptations from 1996 to 2019.

## 2.2 Conflicts in Communication

Communication study is an integral part of any understanding of the verbal communication in comic books between Superman and Batman as a representation of conflicting ideas of heroism. This section describes theories related to communication and conflicts, especially when contextualized as a friendship between people with antagonistic attitudes.

### 2.2.1 Modern Studies in Communication

Communication has been defined as the act of using language and symbols to convey information and to invoke the mental process of shared meanings and mutual understanding (Infante, Rancer, & Womack, 2003; Velentzas & Broni, 2014). Modern studies of interpersonal communication and mass media rhetoric tend to gear toward the 'alternative paradigm' or the 'ritual view' as a view in communication that aims to try to understand communication as a shared activity between at least two persons, because they share similar interests, ideologies, or goals (Carey, 2002). The primary focus of the ritual view is on co-orientation and the mutual relationship between communicators. Notably, Servaes and Malikhao (2005, p. 91) suggested that the *participatory-paradigm* view provides the communicator a 'voice' to counter the academically-perceived problems that certain perspectives have been ignored in communication, signifying the importance of audiences as an active and participatory factor in communication. This paradigm corresponds to the themes of postmodernity and multiplicity prevalent in modern research. In this regard, Hall (2006) describes communication as a "meaningful discourse" (p. 165) whereby there is a negotiation between the sender and the receiver to access and interpret meaning in language and communication. It can be said that communication is a form of power struggle that involves conflict management and occurs between the sender and receiver, especially when the two have varying perspectives.

In addition to defining communication as a discourse, Hall (2006) proposes the theory of 'Encoding-Decoding' as a description of the way both the sender and the receiver struggle to create meaning between them. Encoding refers to an act of *assigning meaning* into a sign, language, or image as the message is being sent to the

receiver, whereas decoding is an act of interpreting a sign to message to *acquire meaning* from the message. Encoding and decoding heavily rely on the 'fields of experience' shared by communicators that allow them to understand one another (Schramm, 1954). These fields, according to Hall (1997), include 'framework of knowledge', 'relations of production', and 'technical infrastructure'. He suggests that the sender and the receiver respectively have their own sets of beliefs and knowledge, and they engage in communication as if it is a site of struggle to either accept or reject certain meanings created by their communicative partners. Encoding-decoding is usually depicted as a receiver-centric perspective or the reception theory that depicts receivers as active participants in communication. This means that there would be a greater emphasis being made on their choices to interpret, accept, or reject specific meanings of the texts (Jensen, 1987).

One of the primary claims that support the varying outcome of the ritual view is the belief that communication is culturally determined. First, Adorno, Brunswik, Levinson, and Sanford (1964) indicated that each person develops a different personality consisting of an ideological background and specific beliefs that can cause a person to react differently toward a single text. Schramm's (1954) 'fields of experience' directly responded to this belief because each communicator tends to have various constructs of experience due to personal background, national belief, and cultural norms. Finally, Carey (2002) indicated a need to consider viewpoints of sociologists such as John Dewey and Raymond Williams as relevant elements in communication researches. He proposes that effective communication should not be viewed only based on the process, but also the speakers' personalities, cultures, personal backgrounds, and contexts as crucial parts of communication. This caused redefinitions of language and communication by philosophers in structuralism, post-structuralism, and postmodernism to integrate cultures, personal backgrounds, and contexts as crucial parts of communication.

This idea has been incorporated into current thinking via studying fields in interpersonal and intercultural communication, where communication is treated as a crucial ability for humans to relate experiences and cultural beliefs with one another. Such action deems humans as creatures that are capable of understanding and or empathizing with one another. Studies in communication, therefore, put emphasis, not

on the process of communication, but co-orientation and recognizable meaning interpretation between a sender and a receiver (Infante et al., 2003) as well as a communicator's general desire to narrow the gap in the meaning-making process. In this regard, Hall (2006) proposes that there are three broad possibilities of how a person reacts to a message: "Dominant-hegemonic position" (p. 171), "oppositional position" (p. 173), and "negotiated position" (p. 172).

The 'preferred reading' indicates an act which "decodes the message in terms of the reference code in which it has been encoded . . . viewer is operating inside the dominant code" (Hall, 2006, p. 171). An individual's interpretation of a sign corresponds with the sender's intention. For example, a person who watches an advertisement about patriotism may completely agree with the message presented on television. The dominant-hegemonic is usually associated with the interpretation of the message at an interpersonal or mass level by agreeing with the message sent by the sender. It has been criticized for accepting the value of the text at face value and putting too much focus on the sender, both of which limit a fruitful critique of the message (Carey, 2002; Livingstone, 2007).

On the contrary, the oppositional position or the 'oppositional reading' refers to the moment an audience understand the context of the message. It decides to "decode the message in a globally contrary way . . . retotalizing the message within some alternative framework of reference" (Hall, 2006, p. 173). In other words, the audience purposefully rejects the meaning sent by the sender by completely using one's own view to analyze the message, sometimes to an extent beyond the original intent. For example, it is common in political debates to purposefully reject the speech of an opposing politician by using one's own perspective or logic. However, this oppositional reading was criticized by Kellner (2003) as "there is the danger of the fetishism of the audience in the recent emphasis on the importance of reception and audience construction of meanings . . . in some cases producing a new dogmatism whereby the audience, or reader, alone produces meaning…in which there is no text outside of reading" (p. 37). Blindly rejecting the text runs a risk of the critic being ignorant of the context of the text, which Kellner claims risks conjuring up non-existing issues, while the actual context becomes obscured or obsolete.

Finally, ‘negotiated reading’ refers to the moment where the receiver both accepts and rejects the preferred reading to a varying degree. Hall (2006) states that negotiated reading “contains a mixture of adaptive and oppositional elements: it acknowledges the legitimacy of the hegemonic definitions to make the grand significations (abstract), while, at a more restricted situational (situated) level, it makes its own ground rules-it operates with exceptions to the rule” (p. 172). Negotiated reading happens when the receiver both accepts and rejects the preferred reading to varying degrees. This type of interpretation has become a preferable mode in communication researches, mainly because it provides a balance between skepticism and trust, leading to an efficient interpretation of the message.

The three types of decoding have been discussed in this research because they provide the context needed to understand that communication is a phenomenon in which social people can engage and communication may vary based on the contexts and the intents of the communicators. Zoonen (2002) indicates that the ritual view does not view communication as a scientific and quantified process but as a reflection of modernity and the increasing subjectivity of communication and socialization. Notably, the paradigm has been used to analyze the differences between different people and to improve efficiency in both child and adult communication. Due to the varying possibilities of encoding and decoding in an alternative paradigm (as receiver-centric perspective), disagreements and arguments are inevitable in communication (Nicholson, 1992). There are possibilities of the different interpretations of the communicative message, some of which are made deliberately to reject the message, i.e. an oppositional reading. It is possible that a receiver has different frameworks of knowledge and that the contradicting interpretations of the message lead to arguments and conflicts between communicators. In philosophy, subjectivity in communication contribute to how humans acquire *a priori* knowledge by interacting and exchange fields of experience with each other.

### 2.2.2 Issues in Adult Communications

Typical conflicts between adults and adult-like characters in fiction consist of interpersonal conflicts between friends, rivals, and family. Studies in adult relationships (Adams & Blieszner, 1989; Bauminger, Finzi-Dottan, Chason, & Har-Even, 2008;

Stein, 1986) especially indicated that relationships in professional contexts tend to be sensitive and generally required interpersonal engagements between colleagues in order to effectively solve emerging problems in workplaces and social life. Folarin (2013) stated that conflict occurs when there are conflicting views, stands, or positions in communication on multiple levels. Notably, there are significant differences in communicative conflicts between typical interpersonal conflicts and political conflicts. Stein (1986) suggested that friendships between men appear to be more competitive and contain greater amounts of arguments, compared to those of females. French, Gosling, and Case (2009), Roberto (1989), and Rook (1989) commonly indicated that mutual understanding is a crucial part of developing adult relationships. In short, typically, conflicts between adults are commonplace, although they can be resolved by carefully engaging in communication.

Meanwhile, political conflicts tend to be more intense and more complicated than typical conflicts. According to Coser (1967), a political conflict refers to moments which "exist when two or more groups engage in a struggle over values and claims to status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure or eliminate the rivals" (p. 8). Derrida (1993) indicated that conflicts happening in political contexts involved arbitrary arguments not based upon logic and rationale, but benefits and power. As such, political conflicts potentially lead to blaming and scapegoating people who are politically in opposition to the speaker's own perspective. Political conflicts are also associated with an overly industrialized analysis of a text and run the risk of dogmatism; because the signifier "enemy" is a concept conjured up by competitive and contradicting social groups that wish to encourage conflicts and changes, mainly through class struggle. That said, unsolved political conflicts could easily destroy relationships and stability within society.

Unfortunately, political conflicts have become increasingly intense in the post-modern world and this has leaked into non-political contexts because of the growths of post-modern skepticism, misuses of communication technologies, bias depictions of mass media attributed to the phenomenon known as 'risk society' (Beck, 1992a, 1992b, 2006) and the general insecurity and paranoia caused by the 'disruptive society' (Kellner, 2016; Thielman, 2017). This is partly caused by problems with the more casual and reckless perceptions of the mass media and popular culture.

### 2.2.3 Risk Society, Social Disruption, and Authoritarian Personality

One of the currently prominent criticisms made toward current society is the unstable and aggressive approaches to communication. Risk society is a significant term defined by Beck (1992a, 1992b, 2006) as the misuse of communication technology to invoke conflicts and paranoia between people. Beck's initial criticism was strictly limited to mass communication, where he deconstructed the growth of 20th-century technologies and modernization as follows:

> Modernization means surges of technological rationalization and changes in work and organization, but beyond that includes much more: the change in societal characteristics and normal biographies, changes in lifestyle and forms of love, change in the structures of power and influence, in the forms of political repression and participation, in views of reality and in the norms of knowledge. In social science's understanding of modernity, the plow, the steam locomotive, and the microchip are visible indicators of a much deeper process, which comprises and reshapes the entire social structure. (Beck, 1992b, p. 50)

Risk society concerns the questionable media effects created toward audiences and their dominant habits of communication. Beck (1992b) indicates that because modern media provided the freedom to express personal philosophies and lifestyles, media has been painted as personalized and therefore prone to personal bias. Notably, risk factors can alter social construction and contestation, causing people to constantly struggle for power over mass communication, as well as to constantly develop a fear of being personally attacked by criticism. These risk factors are commonplace in the contexts of science, media, and knowledge, especially in a competitive capitalist society, where successes are built around money and profits. In addition, risk factors are capable of driving political groups to develop paranoia and fear of being overwhelmed by an opposite party, causing their debates or competition to become extreme and illogical in order to reach the end goal of political victory. Beck adds that the struggle in risk society is much more complicated than typical power struggles because the multiplicities of modernity have caused the power struggle to diversify and it can no longer be understood in a binary manner.

Social disruption as a phenomenon is a direct 'successor' of risk society. It shares an identical idea of personal insecurity and the extreme perspective on binary. According to Kellner (2016) and Thielman (2017), social disruption concerns the polarization of opinions, ideas, and people's inability to accept different ideologies. The primary concern about socio-political polarization is the destruction of democracy through the irony of people abusing free speech and human rights to assert dominance upon another. Social disruption also concerns the displacement of humanity with modern machinery and technologies, causing humans to become highly insecure about their jobs and their personal contribution to society. Beck (2006) implied that both risk society and social disruption have been significantly influenced by the terrorist attack on September 11$^{th}$, 2001. The focus has been on the effects the attack had toward economic breakdown, terrorism, false heroism, and extremely opinionated political media. These risk factors have caused people to be overwhelmed by fear, paranoia, and postmodern nihilism. These problems consequently encourage aggressive and unstable communication in the 21$^{st}$ century.

Communication breakdowns and aggressiveness in human behaviors are associated with an 'authoritarian personality', referring to the extreme state of egotism where a person is completely deluded in their own opinions and demands others to submit to them. The term was introduced by Adorno et al. (1964) to describe an authoritarian personality who has developed a "potentially fascistic" (p. 1) personality and attitude in communication. A person who has this personality tends to express aggressive behavior patterns such as feeling self-entitled to their opinions as absolute or factual; viewing other ideologies as wrong, explicitly berating or discriminating against other people, demanding others to obey their will, and being extremely paranoid of being attacked by different views. There are several reasons for the authoritarian personality. Adorno et al. suggest further that desperation, depression, and a need to survive may lead to a person developing patronizing and selfish expressions as a self-defense mechanism to preserve or justify their own ego. Lasswell (1948a) adds that authoritarian personalities may develop from frustration for power and the way such power can cause corruption in the person who is in fear of losing that power. Authoritarian personality has been indicated further as a problem related to human psychology and issues in communication. (Norris, 2005). Notably, several pieces of

research (Farrall, Gray, & Jackson, 2007; Norris & Reeves, 2013) indicated that fear and paranoia of crime and terrorism are a primary cause of authoritarian expressions. Other studies (Dallago & Roccato, 2010; Dean, 1960; Roiser & Willig, 2002) connected authoritarian personalities with a common personality trait held by right-wing politicians in America, expressing apathetic political views as stereotypes and making them the selling points of their campaign. Notably, the rise of Donald Trump as the American president in 2016, communicating populism, Darwinism, and fear propaganda to Americans in order to make them develop hatred toward foreigners.

However, the most worrying issue of the authoritarian personality is perhaps the alarming growth of the aggressive and uncompromised communication within groups of youths, which may be caused by their emulating adults' behaviors or developing such personalities through the abuse of social media technology. The misuses of authoritarianism in socio-political media, especially the internet, have been indicated as a primary reason for narcissism, cyberbullying and alienation (Eksi, 2012; McLeod, Ward, & Tancill, 1965; Menesini, Nocentini, & Camodeca, 2013). Wilcox and Stephen (2012), provided an example of how internet technology has caused users to become insecure in their ideas and to develop an inability to distinguish between friends and enemies due to the level of anonymity in cyberspace. They indicated there is a risk of the users developing paranoia, recklessness, and anger issues in communicating with others resulting in the patronization of others and in the creation of more enemies. Ess (2006) raised concern that the reckless uses of social media have caused teens to develop aggressive behavior patterns as a part of their habits; as such the users may potentially mature into violent and illogical people. Incidentally, teenagers and young adults are also the target demographics of superhero comics, meaning that the superhero narratives and fandom activities on the Internet are part of the many factors that can lessen or worsen communication issues in real life. Overall, authoritarian personalities have contributed dangerously toward risk society and the overall failure in communication between youths and adults alike.

For these reasons, risk society, social disruption, and authoritarianism are perhaps the most dangerous crises we are currently facing in the 21st century as they can blur the line between good and bad relationships and thus create a dysfunctional society. Beck (2006) says, "the more emphatically the existence of world risk society is denied,

the more easily it can become a reality. The ignorance of the globalization of risk increases the globalization of risk." (p. 330). Risk society and social disruption have been indicated as some of the most hazardous crises in a democratic society because free speech and equality have been misused to drive political conflicts and the destruction of equality and the democratic solution.

### 2.2.4 Friendship and Enemy in Communication

An interesting point Derrida (1993) has raised regarding political conflicts is the dialectical conflict between the concepts of friendship' and 'enemy'. The distinction between friend and enemy can become a gateway that leads to mutual understanding for the former and dogmatism for the latter. Having an understanding of the terms can be useful at reducing or solving communication friendship, and political conflicts within society.

#### 2.2.4.1 Friend and Sentimental Views on Friendship

Friend refers to "a person who you know well and who you like a lot, but who is usually not a member of your family" (Cambridge dictionaries online, 2019c). Rawlins (2008) indicated that friendship is a voluntarily and personal relationship engaged by two or more people who operate on a basis of equality, mutual understanding, and non-romantic affection. Friends are crucial parts of human life as social beings (Bauminger et al., 2008; Rawlins, 2008; Riegel, 1976). Aristotle established categorized friendship into three types: 'friendship of pleasure', 'friendship of utility', and 'friendship of goodness' (Walker, 1979).

Firstly, the friendship of pleasure is the most common type of friendship. It is grounded in the idea of a person using a friend as a means to satisfy their emotions and basic needs for happiness (Bennington, 2003). This level of friendship is commonly found among young people and tends to be very passionate, fragile, lustful, and unstable (Dillon, 2004). However, because friendships of pleasure are developed at very young ages, Bennington suggested that pleasure friendship has been used as a foundation to develop relationships for stronger types of relationships, such as sexual partners, married couples, or genuine friends.

Secondly, the friendship of utility operates on the usefulness and practicality of the person. Such friendship blossoms when the partners provide benefits

for each other, and collapse when they were no longer of benefit to each other. Utility friends tended to be viewed as political and the least moral because they have been connected with exploitation and paranoia (Bennington, 2003; Derrida, 1993; French et al., 2009), especially in contexts where the identity of the friend is obscured, such as the internet, causing a friend to have lesser credibility than a true friend (Manzi-Schaed, 2012; Yang, Smola, Long, Zha, & Chang, 2012). However, it should be noted that a utility friend in itself is not a negative concept, because it may be interpreted as a type of friendship that relies on friends being motivated to use their abilities to support each other to achieve common goals (Ryall & Tipton, 2014).

Finally, Aristotle's friendship of goodness refers to the sophisticated and idealistic type of friendship in which friendship is conceptualized as affecting the partners in moral, ethical, and noble ways (Pangle, 2003). Unlike the friendship of pleasure, a friend does not expect happiness in the relationship only for oneself, and unlike friendship of utility, the friend does not expect the partner to provide physical or emotional benefits at all times. Instead, friends who have a virtue friendship realize the advantages and disadvantages of friendship and thus have mutual respect for each other based upon their merits. Interestingly, friendships of goodness may be constructed from pleasure and utility, where the friends have evolved from a basic friendship into a unique and meaningful relationship (Ryall & Tipton, 2014). According to Rawlins (2008), true friends consider each other influences in improving the capacity of oneself and the friend. This type of friendship is idealistic and can be rare. However, it can be often found in popular narratives, where grouped heroes serve as exemplars of people dealing with dialectical conflicts and growing stronger as individuals and collectives (Dector-Frain, Vanstone, & Frimer, 2017; Frimer, 2016; Malloy, 2008). The classical viewpoint on friendship was based around the idealistic depiction of human relationships, which was being encouraged to the highest possible level to attain happiness and maturity.

On the other hand, modern society tends to view friendship in a practical light. McAdams (1988) defines modern friendship as "a recurrent preference or readiness for experiences of warm, close and communicative exchange with others—interactions with others' ends rather than means to other ends . . . energizes, directs, and selects behavior in certain situations" (p. 77). Friendship is an elective relationship

created, maintained, and destroyed based on the interaction between individuals. Research into adult friendships (Adams & Blieszner, 1989; Blieszner, 1989; Roberto, 1989; Tesch, 1989) have claimed that friendship has a strong correlation with personality traits. Erikson (1959) claimed that adult friendship is a psychological development related to a human's expression as a social being. Meanwhile, (Rook, 1989) suggested that friendship for adults stands upon mutual trust and expectation to express self-disclosure, affection, and esteem to keep themselves functioning in reality. Similarly, Riegel (1976) indicated that friendship involves people with different personalities gathering and interacting in various dialectical and transactional manners.

In addition, studies of friendship have been conducted in Eastern cultures. Notably, Kotpooktorn and Shaitaweep (2014) indicated Confucius's teaching regarding friends as an important part of human relationships, where a person should pick a friend who is honest, sincere, experienced, and morally just. Based on these studies, friendship is a globally relevant concept that may solve issues in relationships and improve people's lifestyles in a cynical capitalistic society. Friendship has been considered a crucial social element in a person's life-long sustainability. Recognizing and preserving good friends is a key to achieving success, wisdom, security, and an effective lifestyle in the modern consumerist society. Overall, friendship has been empirically interpreted as a life-long social aspect that provides positive benefits in life.

2.2.4.2 Enemy and Political View of Friendship

The opposite concept of friend is 'enemy' (Cambridge dictionaries online, 2019c). Derrida (1993) indicated the pair as a thesis-antithesis dialectical social construct. An enemy is referred to by Cambridge Dictionaries (2019a) as "a person who hates or opposes another person and tries to harm them or stop them from doing something". As opposed to friendship, developing enemies emphasize antagonistic attitudes, disharmonious relationships, and destructive actions between individuals. In a professional context, an enemy-making mentality decreases cooperation between colleagues and overall working efficiency as constant paranoia between friends are fundamental problems that lead to betrayal and hatred (French et al., 2009). In a political argument, enemy-making mentality invokes problems such as prejudice, racism, and alienation. It can give rise to an authoritarian personality where a person

actively sees other people as wrong or evil, instead of accepting the opposition as different viewpoints (Berger, 2012; Mises, 2008; Schmitt, 1996).

Due to the stark contrast between the two concepts, Derrida (1993) suggested that friends and enemies are innately oppositional and dialectical; therefore, the only solution to get rid of enemies is to destroy friends, thereby erasing their dialectical relationship. This does not respond to the researcher's belief because there is still a need to understand that the dialectical cycle of friends and enemies is a natural process in social relationships in a hope to actualize social improvements. Friends and enemies should not be eliminated but integrated as neutrally correlated terms. At certain times, people can be both friends and enemies, as indicated by the alternative terms 'rival' or 'frenemy'.

2.2.4.3 Frenemy and Friendly Rivals

Frenemy refers to "a person with whom one is friendly despite a fundamental dislike or rivalry" (Oxford dictionaries online, 2019a). It is a type of relationship where individuals engage in a rather ambiguous or unique friendship that is simultaneously antagonistic and cooperative. This relationship has advantages and disadvantages. Negatively, frenemy can be interpreted with a skeptical connotation where "a person pretends to be your friend but is in fact an enemy" (Cambridge dictionaries online, 2019b), which response to utility-based friendship in business and politic (Manzi-Schaed, 2012; Yang et al., 2012). Because frenemy cannot discard the potential for enemy-making mentality, the relationship itself hangs upon the risk of insecurity and the betrayals of potentially fake friends, leading to paranoia, skepticism, and negative views of friendship. Positively; however, while friends with interests supplement each other to reach common goals, Blieszner (1989) suggested that friends with different traits can play off one another by allowing contrasting friends to correct one another, forcing them to learn from each other's experiences.

Frenemies as rivals refers to partners who interpersonally interact as friends in the context where a traditional friendship is not possible. Studies of rivalry-as-a-relationship have become significant in the postmodern world, due to the growing conflicts between people with different but equal perspectives in communication. A good frenemy relationship occurs when contrasting friends may develop respect for people different from themselves. The partners must be capable of reconciling and

becoming effective partners, as their strengths and weaknesses support each other. A healthy degree of competition in this case potentially allows partners to love and respect each other despite their antagonistic fronts.

Studies of rivalry in a relationship have become significant in the postmodern world. Postmodernism focuses on subjectivism where people attain different, yet equally relevant perspectives in communication. One of the subjects emphasized in the conflicts between superheroes is *virtue ethics*. Virtue ethics refers to subjective moral standards and moral character expressed by a person through a set of behaviors and habits (Flannery, 2013). According to Flannery, virtue ethics is based upon the Aristotelian tradition, which posits that morals and virtues are not made relevant because of their existences, but because of the person who uses them. For example, Brenkert (2010) used virtue ethics as a justification for Marxian philosophies to rival capitalism because Marxists have their own worldviews that are different from capitalists. Meanwhile, a study by Miller (2009), highlighted the lack of global traits in morality and suggested that the values of a person should be accounted for by individualized attitudes and actions to support others. Usage of virtue ethics highlights the strength and wisdom of a person using morality instead of the moral standard themselves, showing that despite objectivity of moral standards, humans can subjectively interpret and use them in different manners.

The rise of moral subjectivity would encourage ethical pluralism and a rejection of absolute objectivism in morality. This movement has been appreciated in the 21$^{st}$ century because subjectivity has encouraged acceptance of global relationships and communication between people from different cultures or ethics (Ess, 2006). Similar studies (J. N. Martin & Nakayama, 2007; Rantanen, 2005) have indicated that a basis for intercultural communication should operate on a human's ability to empathize, understand, and accept different perspectives. These researches have made a common point that subjective viewpoints should be treated as equally relevant types of personality and communication traits that work together to reach common benefits, which should be utilized to reinforce communication. Superhero narratives, too, have reinforced this belief through the growing diversity of characters and moral standards. The 'superhero vs. superhero' narratives carry problems with virtue ethics as its critical theme.

## 2.3 Popular Culture

The following literature provides a fundamental framework to understand superhero comic books. It helps to establish an understanding of popular culture, modern fiction, and their influences on the children and teenagers of the 21st century.

### 2.3.1 Defining Popular Culture

Popular culture is a specific type of communication platform, structured and distributed to reach larger audiences similar to television commercials, news broadcasting, charity campaigns, political speeches, etc. Unlike high or local cultures, a popular text associates itself as a 'folk culture' (Nayar, 2006) which concerns casual entertainments that appeal to mass media, designed and distributed by common people to fellow common people. Parker (2011) defined popular culture as a collection of commodities of a capitalist society, created as a product to sell to as many people as possible to make money. Thus, popular media are largely governed and directed by the works and ideas that provide profits to a company. Consequently, the contents of the media must have sufficient quality to attract a large audience, encouraging them to actively pay money for the products. A study of popular culture typically concerns itself with the contexts specific to the media type, including historical development, target demographic, the recurring characteristics (expressed through such media), and the intended effects of the media based on the context (Nayar, 2006). A study of popular culture typically has an aim to analyze contextualized phenomena that in turn aims to identify hermeneutic contexts in the paradigm of both constructionist and critical approaches. The researchers in mass media generally believe that media messages, perceived as socially constructed components, have significant effects on identity and social development (Hall, 1997; Lehtonen, 2000).

Popular culture usually uses a narrative and storytelling as a structure, symbol, and style of mass communication to enhance the efficacy of the communicative act (Chaney, 1972). An American professor, Walter Fisher (1984, 1985), proposes the *narrative paradigm* by suggesting that humans use stories vis-à-vis logical analysis as a means to communicate; and, provided that the story has coherence and fidelity, the stories can be more effective and persuasive than the singular use of logic. Stories can

invoke powerful rhetoric because they create vivid images of certain topics, and emphasize certain content to encourage audiences to develop particular beliefs or to take certain actions (Green & Brock, 2000). The explanation of complex subjects can be made understandable and transmitted to audiences both inside and outside any field of expertise (Branston & Stafford, 2010). Popular culture has rapidly become significant in modern society because it can be taken as a source of information easily accessed in the 20th and 21st centuries through modern technology. A study of popular culture suggests it is a powerful tool that either empowers or subjugates certain groups of people, depending on how it is being framed and interpreted (Lehtonen, 2000).

### 2.3.2 Dominant Paradigm: Media Effects of Popular Culture

Previous studies in mass media theoretically depicted popular culture as platforms containing media effects and the one-way influences that the media have toward audiences. A 'dominant paradigm' is the classical view of communication. Predating the aforementioned 'ritual view', this paradigm describes communication as a process. The emphasis of the theory is toward the intents and the effects that the communication transmits from the sender to the receivers (Carey, 2002; Gitlin, 2002). Initially, Shannon and Weaver's Transmission Model (1949) identified how a message is sent from a source through a transmitter (channel), to a receiver and a destination, with an additional description including noise which acts as an interruption to the process; and a feedback as the sender's response to the message. Berlo's SMCR model (1960) added to such a perspective by listing elements that define sender, message, channel, and receiver, so as to explain what makes communication effective. Osgood and Schramm's circular model (Schramm, 1954) added interpretative acts as a process in which communicators interpret communicative signs in order to make sense of the massages.

Media messages are connected to linguistics and modern structuralism and semiotics, as posited by Ferdinand De Saussure. Thinkers such as Stuart Hall, Jacques Derrida, and Roland Barthes, all of whom have tried to understand how the message can be interpreted through signs and representation, have further developed this theory of hermeneutics. These early models showed a common pattern in that communication was viewed as a process, informing us how and why communication can occur. However, these models had limitations. Chandler (1994) indicated that the transmission

model is limited because of its overgeneralizing the act of communication, whereas Rogers (1978), criticized the dominant paradigm for depicting communication as one-way communication and a one-way response structure. Specifically, the one-way effects of communication and media effects as transmitted to the receiver have been frequently discussed.

Schramm (1954) claims that communication has both positive and negative effects upon the receivers. A communication model made by Lasswell (1948b) indicated the process whereby the sender encodes messages with specific demographics, goals, and intended effects in mind. Lasswell's model can be compared to Aristotle's classical model of public speech, which refers to the field of rhetoric and the uses of language for persuasive purposes. Brummet (2015) indicated that rhetoric can be interpreted as a means to inject messages inside texts, mass media, and popular culture to reinforce certain beliefs in audiences.

Communication has been criticized by Herman and Chomsky (1988) as a selective source of truth and information. According to the Manufactured Consent theory, all social texts are filtered and selected by the senders to manipulate information for desired effects upon media audiences. For example, a common critique has been made of the ways the media portrays terrorists as both sadists and megalomaniacs and these representations have had considerable effects on the audiences developing a sense of fear (Das, Bushman, Bezemer, Kerkhof, & Vermeulen, 2009; MacFarlane, 2014). These theories have raised an awareness that all types of media contain messages that are always encoded for specific purposes. As such, these purposes must be carefully analyzed to understand how communication, as a text, has effects on receivers both inside and outside contexts to construct expected reactions, behaviors, and world views (Chaney, 1972). This proposition is true especially with regards to critiques of popular culture. Overall, the dominant paradigm corresponds with the 'mediatization', or how media have a significant influence on socio-political changes (Hjarvard, 2008).

### 2.3.3 Popular Culture and Globalization

Popular culture can be related to globalization and both the positive and negative developments it brings. Globalization is a process in which communication, culture, and capitalist society integrate and spread to interconnect the entire world through the

flows of knowledge, labor, and migration (Anheier & Isar, 2007; Thompson, 1995). McLuhan and Powers (1989) noted that globalization facilitates the modern world as a 'global village' where information is being shared, learned, and critiqued on a global scale—made possible with the various electronic platforms and mass communicative technologies. As such, studies of mass media have become concerned with the intercultural context, factors, and relationships that exist within specific intercultural subjects (J. N. Martin & Nakayama, 2007). That said, globalization has been controversial in several indigenous cultures. Ganjanapan (2001) held a skeptical view of globalization, suggesting that globalization dehumanizes culture into commodification for capitalist society. However, Thanaphonphan (2001) argued that globalization can be a means to create awareness of 'local' culture around the world. According to Rantanen (2005), the study of media and globalization focuses on three contexts in media: communication, culture, and globalization, which may have two focuses: Cultural homogenization and cultural heterogenization.

Cultural homogenization refers to the study of culture using specific standards to ascertain how mass media has forced foreign cultures to develop a similar identity to the dominant culture (Ismaïl, 2015). Several studies (Gems, 2006; Rowe, 2004) have suggested that the tendency of the American government is to enforce their ideologies to politically judge indigenous countries as primitive or inferior. Van Elteren (2003) added that the uses of American consumerism and English language fetishism have invoked cultural domination by causing non-Eurocentric people to abandon their own cultural traditions and start thinking and acting like Americans. Cultural homogenization and assimilation have been a prominent problem in cultural studies, especially toward nations that have been colonized by the West.

Alternatively, cultural heterogenization has become a more recent perspective on globalization, which has tried to disavow cultural homogenization. Heterogenization, like globalization, involved interaction between multiple cultures and provide a perspective allowing them to adjust, corroborate, and co-exist in peace (Lull, 2000) Instead of depicting the American media as a culturally dominant empire, media heterogenization concerns itself with the conflicts between different cultures, where media impose its messages and social ideologies upon another culture, which either accepts or resists their influence. Rantanen (2005), as well as J. N. Martin and

Nakayama (2007) indicated that a good development in popular media and globalization is a ‘meshing’ of different cultures, where different cultures are compatible with each other and are capable of learning and adapting without a need to resort to violence and imperialism. In this regard, heterogenization and global culture should be studied through intercultural approaches and intercultural frameworks in order to improve intercultural communication, mutual understanding, and empowerment of different cultures as equally relevant in a globalized world. For example, the study of Thai people‘s usage of the internet by Hongladarom (2001) demonstrated that Thai people are still capable of distinguishing good and bad aspects of both global and local cultures, therefore they are capable of embracing both cultures without worry about domination. Unlike homogenization, cultural studies using heterogenization as a framework tend to focus on the audiences as active recipients of the media text by focusing on the accessibility and the power of freedom and choices they have when they are using the text.

In essence, the study of popular culture study has been shifting from a deconstruction of the sender to emphasizing the problems and benefits audiences face when interacting with media texts. With the development of globalization, a study of popular culture should try to treat the researched subject as a nationally neutral text that can affect people of any nationality. An analysis of heroic characters in popular cultures has allowed researchers to explore global rituals, social activities, and socio-political implications as expressed through communication as a symbolic construct that conveys information and educates audiences about moral norms and identity issues beneficial to them (Barthes, 1991; Campbell, 2008; Campbell & Moyer, 1991; Rank, 1990).

Superhero comics, as a popular culture that continues to persist in a globalized world, follows the idea of cultural heterogenization as an integral part of creating compelling narratives. A study of the comic book needs to understand its historical contexts, creations, and developments of the researched subjects, as well as its impact on the global level.

## 2.4 Superhero Comics

The superhero genre is a type of popular culture, which has over seventy years of development globally. It is considered a unique type of media, with dominant types of narratives that can utilize language and communication to affect the audience of its target demographic: male children and teenagers. This section will try to understand in detail superhero narratives and the implications they have for a global society, especially in terms of popular heroism.

### 2.4.1 History of Superhero Comics

The majority of the content reviewed in this section was taken from the documentary *Comic Book Superheroes Unmasked* (Kroopnick, 2003) and *DC Comics Year by Year: A Visual Chronicle* (Cowsill, Irvine, Wallace, & Manning, 2010). Additional information after 2010 was derived from several other sources. Several sources (Coogan, 2006; Cowsill et al., 2010; Petty, 2006) had different categories for defining the contexts or the 'ages' of comics, which defined the scopes of themes of the superhero comics, but in general, the comic has been categorized into five periods: Golden Age (1938-1950), Silver Age (1956-1970), Bronze Age (1970-1985), Dark Age (1985-1996) and Modern Age (1996-present). However, existing literature rarely covers the most recent changes made to DC Comics, namely 'the New 52' massive reboot that happened between 2011 and 2016, as well as the most recent change called 'DC Rebirth' in late 2016.

#### 2.4.1.1 The Golden Age of Comics (1938-1950)

The superhero genre officially began with *Action Comics Vol. #1*, published by National Allied Publications (DC Comics) n June 1938. This comic narrated the story of Superman, a caped alien who fought crimes in 1930s urban America. Superman was an instant success and quickly inspired the second superhero for *Detective Comics #27*. The issue explored a character named Batman, a pulp masked crime fighter who used his detective skills to hunt down murderers in the 1930s. Due to their mutual successes, the two became archetypes, inspiring a 'superhero' narrative to dominate the comic book market.

One of the significant developments of the superhero in this era is the creation of a national superhero. Marvel Comic's *Captain America* was published in March 1941 as an anti-Nazi hero. A few years later, Superman became an icon for American idealism, patriotism, and war propaganda. Other superheroes usually joined World War II to fight against the Nazis or Mussolini. Superhero characters in this period also directly responded to the American Great Depression. These characters were depicted as the "golden boys" (Russell, 2012, p. 112) and saviors of the common people from crimes, corruption, and wars.

2.4.1.2 The Silver Age of Comics (1956-1970)

After World War II, superheroes were no longer needed by general audiences. Worse off, the genre generated concern among moral guardians regarding the moral messages existing in comic books. Psychiatrist Fredric Wertham published *Seduction of the Innocent* (1954), which postulated that superhero comics had caused violence, teen delinquency, and homosexuality. Wertham's criticism encouraged moral guardians to become aware of the negative effects of comic books. In the same year, the Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency established the 'Comic Codes Authority' (CCA), to forbid all scenes of excessive bloodshed, gore, and horror; as well as depravity, lust, sadism, and masochism in comics. Because of the CCA, several genres of comic book genres such as horror and crime were banned. The superhero genre was forced to take more child-friendly approaches to their comic-strips, where stories would deal with minor crimes and magical artifacts instead of combatting social injustices (Adkinson, 2008).

The CCA launched the Silver Age of Comics in 1956, beginning with the revision of The Flash and Green Lantern in DC's *Showcase* comics. Superheroes in this period were motivated by the rising trend of science fiction, responding to American space exploration and the Suez Crisis. However, there were significant differences between the executions of the narratives by two rival companies, *DC Comics*, and *Marvel Comics*. First, DC rapidly integrated science fiction, fantasy narratives, and supervillains. These stories were known for bizarre antics, borderline-nonsensical heroism, and exotic crimes that were passed by the censorship bureau (T. Giddens, 2017). However, aside from well-known characters like Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman, not many titles were successful. Second, Marvel Comics focused on

realistic narratives. Many writers at the time heavily criticized CCA, believing that it limited narrative creativity and blinded audiences from harsh reality (Evans, 1995; Vollum & Adkinson, 2003). As such, Marvel attempted to find loopholes to tell serious and coherent stories. They introduced the monster narratives where superheroes would attain unwanted powers, most of which were psychologically harmful to them. For example, *The Incredible Hulk* was a scientist who was soaked in a gamma-ray, causing him to turn into a giant when he became angry. Another trend established by Marvel was the protagonist-centric narratives, where the narrative would focus on the superhero's personal struggle in daily life. For example, Peter Parker is a relatable everyman who has to struggle in balancing his civilian life and his superhero's role as Spider-Man. His stories would detail his school activities, his job as a photographer and a scientist, his romantic relationships, and his constant doubt and struggle to balance his own life with his heroic lifestyle as Spider-Man. The rivalry between DC and Marvel became a dialectical competition of ideas, where DC Comics suffered from poor sales due to their inconsistent quality while the serious stories of Marvel Comics were more successful. Eventually, DC had to adapt serious narrative techniques, leading both companies to push the CCA even further as they created more stories (Kroopnick, 2003). The Silver Age of comics ended around the 1970s because of political issues that happened at the time (Cowsill et al., 2010).

2.4.1.3 The Bronze Ages of Comics (1970-1985)

As Marvel Comic's serious narratives had dominated the comic book market, DC was eventually forced to adapt serious narratives of their own. Writers in this era discarded silly stories in comic book narratives in favor of serious stories that tackled adult subject matters such as slavery, drug use, and teenage rebellion, while the crime committed by supervillains became increasingly more extreme (Fennell, 2012). One of the most notable changes toward DC was Batman, whose writers decided to return him to the Golden Age root of a serious, scary vigilante. During this time, Batman became significantly more serious as he adopted a sidekick named Jason Todd, the second Robin, who was known to be more aggressive and reckless compared to the previous incarnation. The cynical Batman was seen to have constant conflicts with Superman during the later issues of *World's Finest Comics*, which tackled the themes

of trust in friendship and comradeship and ended with the two long-time friends officially ending their friendship in the wake of the comic's cancellation in 1986.

One of the most notable highlights of the Bronze Age is the downfall of optimistic heroes and their increasing vulnerability to emotional traumas, doubts, and existential crises, making classic superheroes no longer invincible. For example, in *Superman Vol. 1 #247: Must There Be a Superman?*, the main character was prosecuted by the Green Lantern's supporting cast, the Guardians of the Universe, for intervening in human evolution and was forced to question himself as to what extent should he help humanity (D. Wallace, 2013, p. 93). Overall, the Bronze Age was considered to be the precursor to the modern comic books that were no longer aimed at children.

2.4.1.4 The Dark Age of Comics (1985-1996)

The Dark Age, sometimes recognized as an early part of the Modern Age, marked the comic book's entry to modernity. The comic book industry faced another major revision with the DC Comics publication of a book series called 'Crisis on Infinite Earth' in 1985, which detailed an epic story involving all superheroes and ended with the molding of inconsistent timelines and stories into a single, consistent continuity (Friedenthal, 2012). The act of rebooting and the resetting of narrative continuity allowed DC publications to strengthen the modern characterization of iconic superheroes. These works include John Byrne's *Man of Steel* for Superman in 1986, Frank Miller's *Batman: Year One* in 1987, and George Perez's *Wonder Woman: Gods and Mortals* in 1987.

In addition to a stabilization of the mainstream comic of the Post-Crisis continuity, two standalone superhero stories, *Watchmen* and *The Dark Knight Returns*, were hailed as masterpieces and prime examples of providing deconstructionism toward comic book media; exploring and deconstructing superhero tropes and archetypes in the most extreme and explicit manners (Hughes, 2006; Skoble, 2014; Thomson, 2005). The impacts of these two works caused comic books, previously a medium providing entertainment for children, to be reevaluated as graphic novels, featuring serious and dramatized stories depicted with themes worth analyzing philosophically. In addition, stories and characters began to develop more violent and sexually explicit narratives, with antihero characters such as Wolverine, the Punisher, and Blade, who were depicted as psychotic and immoral protagonists.

According to Russell (2012), the Dark Age harmed more than benefited the comic book industry. Because CCA was despised in the industry, many creators decided to abandon mainstream publishers and form independent comic companies in order to sell comics that did not conform to censorship. However, the authors began to rely on violent, immoral antiheroes, hyper-sexualized females, along with unsatisfactory storytelling and artwork in order to attract readers, causing comic book stories to rapidly decline in quality (Kroopnick, 2003). Another problem in the Dark Age was poor marketing tactics. Comics in the 1990s tended to use spectacular hyperbole and overpriced books with variant covers to attract readers, books readers do not want to buy or own. Such a horrible marketing technique nearly led the industry to bankruptcy between 1993 and 1996 (Russell, 2012). Both the problems of antiheroes and the terrible stock market forced the comic genre to become more effective in writing stories and handling comic fans' demands and responses, leading to the modern age of comics.

2.4.1.5 The Modern Age of Comics (1996-2011)

The declining quality of comic books forced writers to become skeptical of antiheroes. They started questioning whether audiences should appreciate these characters. DC Comics published *Kingdom Come* in 1996 as a commentary on the violent nature of antiheroes, where a war between superheroes would lead to the deaths of bystanders and the inevitable retirement of the heroes (Coogan, 2006; Walls & Tallen, 2014). According to Cowsill et al. (2010), the Modern Age has also been regarded as having a lot of variety because the comics have been written and drawn by various talents both in America and in other countries. As such, it seemed that the Modern Age was an idealistic age of superhero narratives, to the point that Coogan (2006) believed that the Modern Age was the renaissance of idealistic superhero comics; however, this idea arguably became nullified because the genre took a sharp, cynical turn following the terrorist attacks on September 11$^{th}$, 2001.

The 9/11 attack was the event that permanently scarred America and robbed its sense of national security, referring back to literature related to risk society and social disruption. Superheroes, being fictional in nature, were powerless at comforting people in the real world, but nevertheless, this was tried. Several comics contributed themselves to the tragedy. The 9/11 attack provided two effects for

superhero narratives. First, there was the idea of promoting the civilian heroes or the real-life professionals who worked restlessly to lessen the damage of the terrorist attack (P. Smith & Goodrum, 2011; Yockey, 2012). Second, superheroes were made more cynical to reflect the cynical American society. Bystanders and superheroes alike became more violent, ungrateful, untrusting, and trying to kill each other (D. E. Levin, 2003). For example, In the DC story *JLA: Tower of Babel* published in 2000, it was revealed that despite being friends, Batman had constructed several failsafe plans to neutralize his fellow Justice League members in case they became evil. However, Batman's plan leaked and was abused by villains to nearly annihilating all the heroes, leading Batman to exile himself from the team. Similarly, in the event comic 'Identity Crisis' published in 2004, Batman helped other heroes in trying to solve a murder mystery but was betrayed by a supporting character, who had his memory erased. Meanwhile, Marvel's 'Civil War' published in 2006 detailed a conflict between superheroes each representing American political factions.

The loss of idealism in the superhero genre was eventually commented on in DC's event comic 'Infinite Crisis' published in 2005, in which an alternative, elderly version of Superman appeared and harshly criticized DC superheroes for having fallen from grace. Modern Age is a very complex era in superhero narrative, for it is the age that cynicism has been challenged by traditional idealism, and idealism is being attacked by cynicism. According to Coogan (2006), the modern Age is "the Superhero Renascence" (p. 1) as the importance of superhero ethics and modern heroism have been emphasized *because* of the philosophical opposition in the continuous struggle between heroes, antiheroes, and villains. For example, while the 9/11 attack has left severe impacts on American fiction, the terrorist attack has also caused the narrative to push a focus of superhero's ethics toward anti-terrorism as well as the importance of cooperation between heroes despite disagreements to defeat common enemies and uphold common values (Dector-Frain et al., 2017; P. Smith & Goodrum, 2011). In addition, superheroes have also been known in this era for rich characterization, expressions, and character developments since they have been presented as struggling greatly with personal trauma, identity crises, loneliness, rejection, and heroic responsibility (Packer, 2009; Rosenberg & Canzoneri, 2008; Waid, 2014; Walls & Tallen, 2014). The Modern Age, like modernity itself, is the age of moral confusion,

where i*dealism* and *skepticism* have struggled to attain their respective position in the popular culture, to dominate and control how superheroes define themselves as ‘good people’. Such struggle is likely to be a key point to understand in the analyzed texts in Jeph Loeb’s Superman/Batman, as the series was published during this era, from 2003-2011.

2.4.1.6 The New 52 (2011-2016)

*The New 52* refers to a period exclusive to DC comics between 2011 and 2016. In early 2011, the story called *Flashpoint* showed the superhero Flash accidentally altering the world’s history and causing the Post-Crisis continuity to disappear. After fixing the timeline, the universe was manipulated into an entirely new setting where several changes toward major characters were made and several minor characters were erased from existence altogether. The scope of the narratives was deliberately altered to suit the themes explored in grimdark superhero narratives of the current age.

*The New 52* was notable for discarding everything published in the *Post Crisis* in order to create new stories and characterizations. For example, Superman’s parents were changed to be killed during Clark Kent’s childhood, forcing him to become Superman in his twenties instead of thirties, whereas Batman was presented as an easily annoyed person with a streak of boastful attitudes instead of a calm detective. These changes altered the character relationship significantly as the character was planned to be gradually developed back into their traditional personalities. However, *the New 52* suffered from sales drops and unsuccessful storytelling due to the cynical tone of the story, the over-sexualized females, inaccurate depictions of the characters, and questionable editorial mandates (Comichron, 2015; Hudson, 2011; McMillan, 2012).

As a result, the continuity was canceled and rebranded under *DC Rebirth* in 2016 to restore the Post-Crisis status quo as additions to *the New 52*’s Prime Earth. The story explained that the depressive creation of Prime Earth was part of an evil plot made by the supervillain Dr. Manhattan from *Watchmen*, who had altered reality and intentionally derailed the DC universe in an attempt to destroy it.

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2.4.1.7 Superhero Crossover (1941-present)

'Crossover' is a subgenre of superhero referring to a story featuring characters from different titles simultaneously appearing as protagonists. The concept was first created during the late-Golden Age where writers were interested in featuring two superheroes in the same comics to boost sales (Daniels, 1995). DC's *World's Finest Comics*, published from 1941 to 1986, was an anthology book that featured Superman, Batman, and Robin on the comic covers. However, the company did not feature the three characters in the same story until *World's Finest Comics #71* in 1954. The corroboration between the characters caused the industry to consider all superheroes to co-exist in a single 'universe' where the characters would occasionally feature in specific books. Superhero universes sometimes intervene with one another and allow for intercompany crossovers between DC and Marvel. *Superman vs. The Amazing Spiderman* in 1976, *JLA/Avenger* in 2003-2004, as well as a promotional comic for real-life sportsperson *Superman vs Muhammad Ali* in 1978, were some of the most well-known crossover comics in history.

The 'superhero team' is a specific type of crossover established during the Silver Age of Comics as an extended concept of superhero crossover in the genre. The focus of these books is to gather multiple heroes to work together to solve various crimes and large-scale terrorist attacks. DC's *Justice League of America* - published in 1960 - was a stabilized narrative expanded from the aforementioned Justice Society of America. Marvel Comics, on the other hand, was known for dramatizing the concept of the superhero team from within. *Fantastic Four* - published in 1961 - dealt with four scientists forming a rather disharmonious family. Meanwhile, *X-Men* in 1963 focuses on a mutant family that has been discriminated against by society. DC then provided an attempt to gather sidekick characters such as Robin, Kid Flash, and Aqualad debuted as a team in *Brave and the Bold #54* in 1964 before forming *Teen Titans* in 1966. The presence of partner narratives and team books have been expanded throughout modern media including television drama, cartoon,s video games, and films.

Studies of the team books (Frimer, 2016; Ryall & Tipton, 2014; Widzer, 1977) claimed that superhero teams serve specific purposes in the narrative. Firstly, it acts as a substitution for friends and family, allowing the 'outcasts' superheroes to form their own community. This narrative theme has been emphasized especially since the

Bronze Age of Comics, where stories decidedly tackle issues of discrimination and maturity while the genre itself was becoming more exposed to foreign media (Cooper-Chen, 2011; MacWilliams, 2014). Secondly, the superhero team centralizes superhero ethics and moral bipartisanship as the individualized superhero standards are being assimilated and integrated into a single status quo and a single moral hegemony (Frimer, 2016; Meggs, 2009). Finally, superhero partnership and teamwork have become significant throughout modern media especially due to issues with multiculturalism and virtue ethics superheroes have to cooperate and adapt to each other.

### 2.4.2 Superheroes as Popular Culture

#### 2.4.2.1 The Nature of the Superhero Genre

'Genre' means kind, type, form, or class of literary composition comprising recognizable tropes or plot devices that create a recurring narrative that can be categorized into a specific grouping of literary work. (Baldick, 2001, pp. 104-105; Childs, Childs, & Fowler, 2006, p. 97). According to Genette (1997), the genre is associated with intertextuality and architextuality as the combination of tropes comprising a specific literary structure which the story shapes and develops. The superhero genre is a literary structure that contains specific characters, patterns, and tropes that allow the author to write recognizable stories with recognizable messages used to create successful narrative functioning as mass communication. Categorizing a superhero as a genre suggests that there are recognizable and accepted patterns that all superhero stories share, which helps the researcher to analyze the text knowing its direction, development, ethical consideration, and critical implications.

A general pattern of superhero genre concerns a person who lives in the modern world, not unlike real life. He/she would develop a supernatural power of some kind either because of genetic modification, scientific experiments, intensive training, or some type of freak accident. This person, having a sense of morality and decency, would choose to use his/her special talent to fight crimes, corruption, and supernatural threats in order to improve society and uphold some specific ideology. Typically, the hero would wear a mask that conceals the real identity to develop a double life: a

mundane persona who lives a normal life, and a superhero persona that partakes in adventures and fights villains.

A superhero narrative is a specific type of heroic narrative that is usually related to the concept of 'magical realism', defined by Franz Roh (Slemon, 1995) as a narrative that takes place in a setting resembling the real world but operating on unrealistic or supernatural characters and plot devices. A magical realism explores the oxymoron and relativity between fantasy and realism where supernatural elements are being applied to the real world, allowing supernatural storytelling that does not require a completely fictional setting. It also allows the story to act as an allegory to the real world. Similar to stories like *Harry Potter* and *Peter Jackson*, a superhero narrative has typically aimed to frame realistic problems and social commentary within the context of a magical story that can appear exotic and intriguing to children and young adults (Mayer, 2011). For example, *Action Comics #1* depicted Superman, a supernatural and unrealistic person, who lived among people in a realistic 1938 American city and fought realistic crimes (Karp, 2009). The superhero genre is a rare type of media that has a very flexible narrative context. Eco (1972) and Kohut (2014) indicated that the superhero genre was not restricted by a specific context due to the flexible roles of the character to modern storytelling techniques. Superman, for example, is a "timeless myth" (Eco, 1972, p. 16) because his orphaned origin has allowed him to be in any situation and at any time period to tell different stories and produce different characters. For example, while the canonical depiction of Superman is an orphan from Kansas, there have been stories written as the *Elseworlds* stories depicting the Man of Steel in medieval European, Soviet Union, classical literary works, distant futures, or even taking over the role of other superhero characters. Similar patterns have been explored for DC superhero Batman. *Elseworlds* stories have allowed superhero narratives to be timeless and full of potential.

Because the superhero narrative is context-relevant, writers usually admit that superhero narratives themselves lack interesting stories and require interesting situations to keep the audiences' interests (Daniels, 1995; Eco, 1972; Karp, 2009). A significant aspect of the superhero narrative genre is its ability to develop and change along with the history of the United States and global society. Aiken (2010) indicated that the character Captain America was written in 1941 as a genetically engineered anti-

Nazi hero and Wonder Woman was created in 1942 as a Greek Amazonian warrior, who was similarly sent to the real world to defeat the Nazis. When the CCA forced characters to be less involved with patriotic acts, they became associated with audiences through other means, notably the personalized teen superheroes and characters that are committed to works that reinforce intercultural peace. Fingeroth (2004) indicated, "the superhero—more than even the ordinary fictional hero—has to represent the values of the society that produces him. That means that what . . . symbolizes changes over time" (p. 17). Such a need to adapt with time has caused the superhero genre to become more relevant to social development and hegemony than other types of fictional media.

As the superhero genre proceeded to the Bronze Age, it was assisted by the writers' protest against the CCA as censorship to realistic crimes (Adkinson, 2008). The scope of comic book narratives became focused on possible drama existing in real life, albeit with fantasy elements being added to the story and an emphasis on moral messages. Some of the most common themes tackled in the superhero genre were teen isolation, racism, and alienation created by a teenager's inability to participate in society or the bystanders being ungrateful of their abilities (Miettinen, 2011). These story elements have been capable of providing drama and emotional connection with audiences around the globe, especially since American comics started to influence similar narratives around the world (Mayer, 2011; Sugawa-Shimada, 2014).

The significance of magical realism in the superhero genre and the lasting effects of the narrative darkening of the Bronze and Modern Ages elevated the superhero story from a typical entertainment for children to legitimate young adult literature aimed at exploring humanistic potentials (Hughes, 2006; Skoble, 2014; Thomson, 2005). Coogan (2006) believed that idealistic outlooks in superhero characters are elements that make them memorable. Likewise, superhero writer Mark Millar (2015) indicated that despite the fact there are enjoyable factors behind writing immoral and deconstructive superhero narratives, the essence of classical superhero narratives are the enjoyment gained from embracing *optimism in life*. Regardless of changes made towards how the characters have been written, traditional superhero narratives must serve as metaphors of hope and light for the people who do not mentally give in to the social problems or despairs of cynical reality.

2.4.2.2 The Superhero Protagonists

Studies of superhero protagonists are associated with the critique of 'myth' and 'mythology'. Mythology refers not to legends or false stories, but the type of narrative that has been indicated as one of the oldest traditions in human history—to communicate and reflect the human condition (Campbell, 2004, 2008; Henderson, 1964; Sartre, 1988). Lévi-Strauss (1955) defines myth as the use of advanced-level oral or written traditions to structurally transmit various parts of messages, which have been bound together into a single coherent and flowing text. Barthes (1991, 2006) added that mythology is an expression of language that is comprised of collective beliefs held by specific cultures that can be interpreted to understand the socio-political implications within various texts. In heroic frameworks, these characters are made based on archetypes and recurring traits inspired by classical heroes and modern characters (Jung, 1964, p. 69). Rank (1990) suggested that a heroic myth is comprised of the ideas that the people and community commonly have defined, interconnected, refined, and accepted as a pattern of bricolage that attains to universal aspects associated with heroism. Such qualities may include courage, compassion, intelligence, wisdom, and selflessness, etc., all of which are considered inherently positive and as having significant effects upon audiences (Franco, Blau, & Zimbardo, 2011; Kendrick, 2010; Kinsella, Ritche, & Igou, 2017; Osswald, Greitemeyer, Fischer, & Frey, 2010). Heroes in fiction are defined as people, (fictional or nonfictional), who devote themselves to specific causes. Typically, they are encoded as people who use their expertise and their heroism to support other people, to protect the helpless, and to inspire others to improve their lifestyles or become heroes themselves.

Superhero protagonists invoke specific images of modern heroism. Typically, a superhero or a superheroine is a person who either genetically, accidentally, or intentionally develops a supernatural power to fight crimes while wearing a domino mask or the alternative, skin-tight costume of various colors as an alternative identity, and fights crime as a profession (Coogan, 2006). For example, Farrall (2016) indicated that superhero characters, (especially Superman and Batman), were modern depictions of knights armed with a code of honor and combat abilities designed to protect the helpless. Regardless of their status as vigilantes, morality and ethics were indicated as a significant part of a traditional superhero's make-up, and they

actively posted themselves as moral guardians that would enable audiences to feel safe and empowered, but also remind audiences of their ethical duties in the real world (Avery-Natale, 2013; Jeffery, 2016; Layman, 2014; Robichaud, 2013; Russell, 2012).

The significance of superhero protagonists is that they, to a certain extent, represent audiences. A common criticism of the superhero protagonist is based on the framework of the heroic journey proposed by Joseph Campbell (2008), which provides formulaic and common roles of the character involved in American popular media and outlines the restrictive 'stages' which represent the protagonist's psychological and social growth. Campbell's format has been used frequently in modern heroic media studies to highlight characterization and character development developments. Winterbach (2006) analyzed the character *Daredevil* as an example of a hero who systematically develops from an everyman to a superhero. He indicates, "The superhero, as a phenomenon of American popular culture, can thus be seen as this reinvention of the major hero myths, and as a re-surfacing of the mythological hero" (p. 132). According to Winterbach, the ultimate purpose of heroic myth is to use stories as a metaphorical journey seeking for a meaning of life. Studies with similar premises have been done on the character Batman (Donovan & Richardson, 2008; Thigpen, 2017), which commonly indicated the character as a relatable or realistic hero born out of tragedies that can happen to anybody, and thus whether or not a person becomes a hero or a villain is based on the matters of choice and willpower to overcome personal crises. These studies corresponded to Rosenberg's (2013) remark that despite the fact that superheroes are unrealistic and supernatural, they have human-like personalities and expressions. Therefore, they are considered realistic in a literary sense and can serve as mentors or role models for audiences.

One of the most iconic concepts in superhero narratives is 'secret identity'. The secret identity is a narrative need for a superhero character to separate their superhero persona from his or her civilian identity. This concept establishes that there should be a clear distinction between supernatural and real lifestyles. Psychological studies indicate double identity as the ultimate form of power fantasy, where audiences are capable of switching between being a normal person and a fantastic hero (Fingeroth, 2004; Gibson, Huxley, & Ormrod, 2016; G. M. Smith, 2009). Unlike the typical hero, superhero characters generally find a need to establish themselves as a balanced

individual, where double identity represents a struggle between professionalism and personal ambition (Yockey, 2012) as well as between social responsibility and power-fantasy (G. M. Smith, 2009). Adapting Freudian psychology, others (Packer, 2009; Thulin, 2013; Widzer, 1977) suggested a superhero's civilian persona represents the 'ego', or a relatable everyman, whereas his superhero persona represents the 'superego' or the idealistic image of human's desire and strength to overcome problems and traumas, serving as a context where one can become empowered with physical and mental might and become comfortable enough to develop a personal identity. In this regard, one of the best examples that shows a demand for a double identity is the character Superman, also known in his real persona as Clark Kent. Superman, as a character with limitless supernatural power, is regarded as a character that is relying the most upon his human life in order to fully embrace and appreciate the mundane lifestyle and family that he vows to protect (Jenson, 2008). Kahn (1995) stated:

> These characters are popular not only because they embody childhood dreams, but because they provide us a way of fulfilling fundamental human yearnings that we carry with us no matter what our age . . . We all embrace the wish that no matter how ordinary we might seem, underneath we are each capable of the extraordinary. (Kahn, 1995, p. 12)

Overall, superhero protagonists are likely to function both as an audience's surrogate and as an idealistic image of adulthood. The character acts as a gateway that allows a person to experience exotic symbols that allow the person to achieve maturity. Heroes are supposed to experience physical, mental, and social changes from the journey. Heroic protagonists help the audience to develop personality and to embrace oneself as a complete human being. (Franco et al., 2011; Rosenberg & Canzoneri, 2008).

2.4.2.3 Superheroes and Communication

Superhero comics and the featured protagonists are iconic parts of American media that are different from films, television shows, radio dramas, and video games. The comic book, as a platform of fiction, is significantly different from films and cartoons because it has multiple usages such as entertainment, propaganda,

advertisement, instruction, and documentation (Eisner, 2008; McQuail, 1994; Nayar, 2006).

American cartoonist Will Eisner (2008), suggests that the comic book is a narrative platform where sound and images integrate to create meaning in sequential storytelling through a series of panels. A good comic must contain four components: 'narrative' (the story that follows conventional storytelling tradition), 'composition' (The panels created to tell a continuous story.), 'characters' (The actors performing actions and thoughts), and 'draftsmanship' (the writer's ability to convey the story). The four components are fundamental parts of all comic book writing regardless of the format—including printed comics, digital scans, and webcomics. A typical comic book can express meaning through words and images. The comic book 'panel' refers to a box wherein the writer draws pictures and sentences to create a 'scene'. Comics can express meaning from both words and images. Barthes (1991, 1993) indicated that both words and images are respectively capable of expressing meaning at both denotation and connotation levels, and in comics express a set of signs and meanings that are utilized to express narrative or characterization. One of the most crucial parts of communication in comics; however, remains the dialogues among the characters.

Typical dialogues in comics are expressed through the uses of a speech balloon. A speech balloon is a circular shape with a pointer emerging from a speaker, indicating the words that are being spoken by the character, either to provide exposition or to encourage responses from other characters. A plain shaped balloon indicates that the character is speaking with a normal level of voice, whereas spiked balloons usually indicate the character is raising their voice or yelling. Communication in comics is depicted as the interlocution taking turns in speaking (Bramlett, 2014). Barthes (1991, 1993, 2006) suggests further that communication can provide multiple levels of expression. At the denotation levels, a text balloon expresses typical communication held by two characters, where they exchange information, which establishes their relationship and their immediate responses to another person's remarks. At the connotation level, however, a dialogue may be interpreted as an exposition of ideologies or an attempt to express a type of discourse used to empower, disempower, or convince readers to develop certain thoughts towards the narratives (Nayar, 2006).

When two characters make an argument, for example, it can be interpreted as a clash of different perspectives, trying to establish authority over one another.

These speech balloons are the primary tool to deliver characterization and narration, both of which contribute to the superhero genre being a prominent source of American popular heroism. Notably, Cawelti (2014) stated that a heroic character is one of the most prominent literary devices utilized in fiction that can satisfy an audience's needs in terms of both enjoyment and fantasy. He added that popular heroism tends to be standardized and formulaic in the media because of the creator's need to invoke profits. Superheroes, as represented and standardized in popular culture, tend to conform to the modern definition as "a person who is admired for their courage, outstanding achievements, or noble qualities" (Oxford dictionaries online, 2017). 'Heroism', meanwhile, is defined by a set of complex and systematic categories of opinions, attitudes, and values that humans spiritually hold onto as a social construct.

2.4.2.4 Superhero Friendship

An issue of friendship between superhero protagonists is usually addressed in stories that feature multiple protagonists working together as a team, including comics that focus on team efforts such as *Justice League, The Titans, Fantastic Four,* and *X-Men.* Studies of idealistic friendships in superhero communication have indicated that the three levels of friendship overlap with one another. Notably, Ryall and Tipton (2014) wrote:

> As we survey all the interactions of the [superhero team], we find that Aristotle's understanding of friendship, along with the idea of family can be viewed as a partnership for living well, can both help us understand [the] superhero team as a vibrant family unit made up of friends who really care about each other, despite their differences and disagreements. Family members, in a healthy relationship, support each other (utility), enjoy each other (pleasure), and care about each other (virtue). (Ryall & Tipton, 2014, p. 126)

A common theme used in a superhero narrative concerns the special bond shared by the protagonists, especially friends as a substitution for a family. Rubin (2006) suggested that superhero families usually consist of people who develop special

powers due to extraordinary circumstances. Meanwhile, Kohut (2014) and Trushell (2004) said that these circumstances, due to the growing cynicism of the narratives, usually paint them as outcasts of the normal society  As such, loneliness and identity crises are among the most common issues the characters have as they develop a need to find a place where they belong. Rubin added that the prominent expression of a superhero family is the ability to express the friendship at all the levels in the most idealistic manner. Notably, the characters find pleasure in spending time with one another, while relying on each other's skills to defeat common enemies, and ultimately, they develop and learn from each other as they mature.

The relationship between superheroes is largely based on comradeship, which corresponds to the afore-mentioned issue of masculinity. Shared masculine ideologies play a significant part in allowing males to engage in comradeship. In this regard, Bauminger et al. (2008) suggested that masculine friendships are being dictated by the traits and norms that belong in a masculine society; thus relationships tend to be limited and formulaic. This corresponds with the limited archetypes of superheroes found in superhero comics including humanoid aliens, human masked vigilantes, technologically enhanced beings, and physically attractive females, all of which are capable of fighting and embracing heroic ideologies. The cooperation between superheroes is a social construction, which is created to emphasize certain modes of heroism. Frimer (2016) suggested that superhero comics featuring character team-ups primarily express ideologies concerning socialization, friendship, and teamwork, where characters with strong bonds are capable of looking past differences between individuals and of trying to work together as a group to protect heroic hegemony, while also growing stronger as moral individuals and collectives. Ryall and Tipton (2014) related the strength of the collective as a reflection of the real-life family, where "any family is strongest if they have a sense of partnership in support of shared values and goals as well" (p. 126). Cooperation and comradeship between superheroes appear to be common despite the narratives also focusing on the individualization of the protagonists.

### 2.4.3 Critical Issues in Superhero Genre

#### 2.4.3.1 Superheroes and Pro-social Hegemony

Considering the function of superheroes as moral figures in popular culture, it has been incumbent upon researchers to take a look at the development of these characters beyond the latent levels. Critical analysis of the superhero protagonists would be useful for understanding the rhetoric of the genre at a critical level.

One of the common perspectives used in this critical perspective is Althusser's (2006) *Repressive State Apparatus (RSA)* and *Ideological State Apparatus (ISA),* which analyze a number of concepts embodied within any superhero character. RSA refers to a platform of a social system that moderate and patronizes the members of the society to conform to a specific standard and develop hegemonic beliefs in real life. This assumption was made by observing the nature of the narrative genre as a form of an anti-crime narrative. The most common theme of the superhero genre that has existed since its inception is the character dealing with the 'evil' of the society, including criminals, and social problems such as bullying, drug trafficking, racism, and terrorism (Blake, 2010; Kroopnick, 2003). According to (T. Giddens, 2017), The Comic Codes limited the scope of crimes and evil deeds in the Silver Age, which consequently forced the depiction of super villains as a plot device to convey fetishized violence and crimes and evil, to be less ambiguous or to be the exaggerated reflection of conflicts in real life. When the censorship was being interrogated in these narratives, supervillains, especially those in thrillers and horror super villains (such as the Joker from the Batman narratives), have become extreme and violent enough to commit atrocities comparable to mass murders and genocides. Consequently, there is very little room for ambiguity in the crimes in superhero narratives, and the moral debates only exist as obstacles or personal flaws that transpire through the character progressions (White, 2008). With regard to the extreme depiction of crimes, Fennell (2012) indicated:

> In short, crime was to be unpleasant and nasty, never profitable, objectively 'evil' and totally unattractive, and there would be no logical reason given as to why anyone should engage in criminal activity. Crime simply happened because it was what 'bad people' did; 'evil' was the compulsion to engage in crime for its own sake. (Fennell, 2012, p. 308)

Superhero narratives have had significant effects on sociological studies. Notably, a number of studies have claimed that heroism has a direct effect upon an audiences' perceptual development of society (Franco et al., 2011; McQuail, 1994; Nayar, 2006; Osswald et al., 2010). The primary rhetoric of superhero comics involves a narrative of a hero who fights criminals and also provides an exposition of why crimes and injustice are incorrect in accordance with social standards. Russell (2012) indicated that comic books usually carried out these qualities by either character monologues, dialogues, or visual cues. These components all contributed to the construction of common sense and hegemony in reality.

Superhero narratives have been seen to be rhetorically effective on at least two levels. First, the audiences may find the narratives easy to appreciate. Aside from the aforementioned characters acting as the audience's surrogates, a superhero narrative usually operates in a realistic-looking world and tackles real-life subjects while the action keeps audiences invested. (Aiken, 2010; Miettinen, 2011). Second, the superhero narrative has an authoritative effect on audiences. In the *New Teen Titans Anti-Drug* commercial published in 1984 (Walko, 2012), the announcer stated that young audiences trusted superheroes who gave them advice and answers toward social problems that they faced. Several studies have suggested that superhero media, especially Hollywood films, have positive and negative effects towards children and teenagers in terms of their physical behavior (D. E. Levin, 2003), moral attitudes (J. F. Martin, 2007) and their selection of role models (Bonneville et al., 2006).

According to Roblou (2012), superhero narratives are being used to relieve stress and empower audiences to be able to cope with real-life problems. It is believed that audiences are attracted to stories that depict strong characters or showcase how good triumphs over evil, and how the characters serve as policemen or firemen to keep people safe and secure from harsh social reality (Maynard, Opgenorth, & Spence, 2009a). As such, the 'status quo' of comic books can be predictable. Regardless of the conflicts happening between 'good guys', they ultimately share a common goal to either control, punish, or clean up the 'bad guys' for the crimes or murders they commit (T. Giddens, 2017).

Althusser's (2006) Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) refers to the platform within a social system, such as schools and churches, that educates and

reinforces certain values, norms, and beliefs in common among people so that they willingly embrace social hegemony. Superhero narratives are associated with the ways superheroes post themselves as moral agents that exposit and preach ideologies about heroism, ethics, and justice, teaching readers to act properly within real-world society. These narratives serve as a governing artifact that reinforces and controls an audience's worldviews and behaviors regarding justice and any anti-criminal regimes. In addition to fulfilling audience power fantasy, superhero characters typically preach information, morals, ethics, and rules that are socially accepted as good. For example, Spider Man's most iconic phrase is "with great power comes great responsibility" referring to the protagonist's moral obligation to use one's own special power for the benefit of others (Robichaud, 2013). Similarly, patriotic characters like Captain America, Superman, and Wonder Woman are known for their strong moral and ethical codes, which are related to truth, justice, and their respective ideologies— involving American society, universal idealism, and feminism (Aiken, 2010; Karp, 2009; Terjesen, 2013b). G. M. Smith (2009), Fingeroth (2004), and Coogan (2006) summarized that in addition to improving oneself, superheroes typically act as social workers and avoid being glory seekers, encouraging audiences to conform to social norms and hard work, while selflessly striving to improve society.

In addition, Darowski (2012) interpreted Superman's 'American Way' as common ideals and beliefs related to ambition, determination, and freedom, which originated in America but are also relevant in other Western cultures. The overarching ideologies in the superhero genre have a strict connection with American-Jewish culture and hegemony (Aiken, 2010; Brod, 2016; Kohut, 2014; Winterbach, 2006). The early development of the superhero story, particularly Superman and Captain America, primarily focused on Jewish cultures and American liberal patriotism (Brod, 2016; D. Wallace, 2013), whereas other characters who do not directly propagate patriotism embraced variants of American values. As examples, Spiderman reinforces teenager's sense of responsibility in response to the Cold Wars, while the X-Men acts as the team that countered racism and identity issues in their own country (Aiken, 2010; Darowski, 2006, 2014; Genter, 2007). A study by Meggs (2009) provided a hegemonic analysis of superhero protagonists from Walt Disney's 'The Incredibles'. She stated:

> It is my assertion that superheroes protect the status quo, the dominant hegemony and power structures of their societies, because they directly benefit from them. As super beings, they do not benefit in the traditional ways of social power, wealth or prestige (or, if they do, these things are not their primary motivators). Instead, protecting the status quo gives them countless opportunities to defend it from attack, and it is this defense that proves to be their true method of fulfillment. (Meggs, 2009, p. 4)

This assessment showed that hegemonic messages of superhero philosophies were not necessarily used to reinforce dominance in society, but to encourage self-restraint and self-improvement for society's greater good. One of the interesting paradoxes used in modern superhero narratives is the patronization of superhero characters, which causes superhero protagonists to embrace cultural hegemony. Modern superheroes are usually concerned with a personal dilemma and identify problems within the society that seems to hate them, but the positive aspects of such societies provide them with enough reason for superheroes to fight to protect their cities and try to 'fit in' with the rest of the people. In terms of Nietzsche's The Overman (*Die Übermensch)*, Meggs has suggested that superheroes' supernatural powers serve not as evidence of an overman's absolute superiority, but as a focal point about a balance between fantasy and social obligation. If a person conformed to society, society would reward audiences with opportunities to highlight their uniqueness. This is common-sense that is readily appreciated by modern audiences, regardless of the amoral and dystopian settings reinforced in postmodern and adult-oriented narratives.

2.4.3.2 Superheroes and Globalization

Certain studies, however, argued that superheroes have been recently developed not as American nationalist propaganda props, but as characters that adapt local cultural values for personal improvement. Despite that superheroes were direct products of Jewish-American cultures, Soares (2015) stated that the *American Way* ideology did not specifically enforce Superman's nationalism, rather, it was a part of the character experience and individual identity. Such *virtue ethics* justified the Man of Steel as an idealistic hero who has operated at a global level. In this sense, Superman was to be interpreted as symbolic icons for heroic lifestyles shared by audiences

regardless of nationality or cultural values (Coogan, 2006; Dantzler, 2009; Karp, 2009). Some other topics related to superhero themes, notably gender and social justice, have been studied as globalized themes and as relative to non-Eurocentric contexts. Specific subjects in modern heroism such as friendship, teamwork, family, power, and responsibility are also relative to all cultures Sugawa-Shimada (2014). As such, Soares (2015) suggested that characters like Superman might have an American nationality, but his heroic service belongs to people all over the world. He claimed that Superman's 'American Way' in modern society is not strictly about American propagated ideologies, but also a guide for a person to decide to contribute oneself to the service of the world, and the American Way has been for many years one choice to transcend patriotism. Notably, certain characters that have been influenced by senior superheroes, such as Dick Greyson, have been known to integrate all experiences they gained from several heroes such as Superman, Batman, and Teen Titans to develop a superhero identity that is free from patriotic implications (Geaman, 2015).

Moreover, the superhero comic creators have realized the scope of heroism from other cultures and the growing demands of culturally understood characters that are not stereotypical, and have changed the modes of writing of the minority from stereotypes to culturally polyglot characters. This was proved possible because a superhero, in-context, operates professionally using a codename, and due to the history of the genre, several characters may have used the same appellation. Typically, these characters were created as a 'gender-flip' or junior counterparts of the popular characters such as Superboy (Superman), Robin (Batman), Kid Flash (The Flash), and Spider-Gwen (Spider-Man) in order to share similar heroic legacies as a senior family member. This development indicates that a superhero's codename becomes an 'icon' and a metonym rather than an identity referring to a specific person (Spanakos, 2008; Terjesen, 2013b). Senior superheroes like Superman, Batman, and Captain America hold legendary status inside the superhero contexts, and it is fairly common for the narrative to have new characters adopt the hero's identity title in a 'passing the torch' manner in both literal and metaphorical senses. The idea of 'heroic heritage' has become a growing tendency in a globalized age of comics, where intercultural studies (Gu, 2016; Priego, 2016; Santo, 2014; Valdez, 2013) have reported the growing demand for postmodern popular markets and non-American superheroes.

Muslims and black people, especially, have become more represented in the early decades of the 21st Century due to the popular responses to Post 9/11 society that has demanded a fairer representation of foreign characters.

Finally, the superhero genre has a transnational quality, where non-American countries have adopted local superhero tales for their superhero stories (Denison & Mizsei-Ward, 2015). This, in turn, has encouraged intercultural trends and knowledge in terms of the commodification and exchanges of local cultures as superhero narratives. Notably, Sugawa-Shimada (2014) indicated that the Japanese-media genre of the superhero team 'Super Sentai' in Japan and Korea has been influenced by American superheroes, which in turn attracted American creators to create its own Americanized counterpart, the 'Power Rangers'. Meanwhile, Thailand's adaption of the superhero was a novel 'Insee Daeng' or 'The Red Eagle' created by Sake Dusit in 1955, detailing the titular vigilante who tackled various problems in Thailand such as deforestation and mafia problems (Ainslie, 2015). These examples indicated further that the superhero as a narrative genre has a global appeal and can be appreciated, adapted, and made interchangeable in terms of intercultural views of moral and ethical heroism.

The significance of superhero as a globalized concept is that it has become possible for audiences to take superheroes as an inspiration or guide to improve the way they live, rather than as a mere object of nationalist propaganda. Robichaud (2013) and Winterbach (2006) each indicated that the positive qualities of superheroes; (including moral and ethical conduct), should be taken as the representations of their personal dreams, ideals, moral, social, and critical dilemma of the real people shared by audiences of any nationality while trying to avoid the implications of American cultural imperialism. Waid (2014) claimed that superheroes, particularly Superman, are not entirely propagandistic figures of the American society, but the group of heroic people who happen to have American citizenship and American backgrounds.

Despite the growth of the superhero narrative as a global phenomenon; however, the exact extent of intercultural superheroes has become a subject of controversy. *Social justice warrior* was an example of postmodernism, diversity, and multiculturalism taking precedence over the quality of the narratives. As evident from several new characters created by Marvel Comics that were not only created as prestige

characters but also as legitimate replacements for typical American heroism narratives. For example, Steve Roger's Captain America was portrayed as a villain, while his sidekick, a black man named Sam Wilson, become a new, alternative, Captain America. Likewise, Thor Odinson, supposedly based on a famous Norse god, lost his ability to use his hammer and became a drunkard, allowing his cancer-ridden ex-girlfriend, Jane Foster, to become a new Thor. The depiction of non-Americans replacing heroes has created controversies in the comic book industry, especially since 2016. Several news articles (Camp, 2017; Shapiro, 2017) state that comic book readers responded negatively to writers reinforcing cultural minorities in comic book narratives because the existing heroes are being depicted negatively in order to promote replacements and politically correct cultural agendas. Worse, the quality of the story has apparently dropped significantly in favor of political injection. Notably, Marvel's most recent event comic title, 'Civil War II' and 'Secret Empire', show the new and old superheroes fighting each other amidst the political conflicts that drove away readers, significantly damaged sales, and caused numbers of arguments and threats over the internet. While globalization plays a large part in superhero narratives, it can be misused to construct poor stories and create a misguided perception of socio-political conflicts.

The implication of this superhero as globalized media is that diversity and the cultural difference has been realized as a sensitive matter corresponding to the idea of risk society and socio-political arguments that operate on dogmatism and highly biased political opinions, which can be traced to problems in masculinity and other critical issues surrounding the actual comic books.

2.4.3.3 Superheroes and Masculinity

Masculinity is defined by Connell (1995) as a type of hegemony imposed by patriarchy and the hierarchical society as a product of a culture that connects images of male physicality and violence to the power and domination of men as a superior class in society, grounded in patriarchic norms. Superhero comic books, regardless of the gender of the title character, are still targeted toward male demographics (Hickey, 2014). Naturally, the issue of masculinity is an important aspect of comic book analysis. Superheroes contribute typically to the reflection and expression of an idealistic image of males as perceived by the American media. Existing articles make several points concerning masculinity in comics.

Firstly, superheroes are known to have exaggerated physical appearances. For male characters, these aspects include bulky muscles, skintight outfits, and masculine personalities. These elements are interpreted as physical characteristics that contribute to masculine power and the dominant image of male heroism (Avery-Natale, 2013; Roblou, 2012). Sexton (1969) suggested that masculine heroes serve as narratives that enforce beliefs related to masculinity. He (as cited in Donaldson, 1993) suggested, "Male norms stress values such as courage, inner direction, certain forms of aggression, autonomy, mastery, technological skill, group solidarity, adventure and considerable amounts of toughness in mind and body" (p. 644). Avery-Natale added that the superhero's hyper-masculinity is usually an intended exaggeration to highlight the superhero's physicality as idealistic and perfect. Superhero masculinity corresponds to a dominant hegemony and common masculine morality, such as the dangers of criminal lifestyles, the triumph of good over evil, the truth, and justice in American society, and certain types of relationships that exist between different heroes in the same team (Vollum & Adkinson, 2003). Male superheroes are usually depicted with legitimate and sustainable jobs for their civilian identities, such as a news reporter, a business tycoon, a forensic scientist, or an intergalactic police officer, which enforces the sense of realism and idea of social responsibility that exists and is acknowledged even in escapist fantasy. This exaggerated appearance of male superheroes signifies patriarchic values in Western and Eastern cultures alike.

Secondly, the exaggerated depiction of masculinity in comics has been debated frequently in a negative light in superhero studies. Initially, Wertham (1954) criticized superheroes for invoking the *Superman Complex* as a phenomenon where children were exposed to a Superhero's invulnerability to criminals as "phantasies of sadistic joy in seeing other people punished over and over again while you yourself remain immune." (Nyberg, 1998, p. 60). Wertham's criticisms have been expanded significantly with the increased extent of violent antihero characters and sexual objectification since the 1990s and the anti-hero trend that has caused audiences to possibly develop more violent attitudes (Kroopnick, 2003). A study in Thailand made by Srichoovong (2013) suggested that young children develop delinquency through reading comic books. This development has been indicated as leading to a problem concerning the superhero narrative as also the rejection of superhero morality. Despite

the growing complexity of narratives, a simplified fight is still the dominant means by which we create actions in superhero narratives, thus it is common that such violence overshadows superhero narratives, causing an audience to justify heroism with violence despite being ignorant of any positive moral messages expressed in the narratives (Hatch, 2012; D. E. Levin, 2003; Roblou, 2012).

Thirdly, superhero ethics carry negative implications related to masculine hegemony and fascism. Costello (2009) suggested that superhero characters tend to express "liberalism with a fascist aesthetic" (p. 215), which was explained further by Pardy (2016) and Sarich (2016) in that superhero characters act as individuals that reinforce surveillance through physical violence and sheer superior force, which, according to Pardy, became increasingly dangerous because of the superhero team concept, where multiple characters become part of a single community. He related such superhero communities to the concept of militarization, defined as "state violence translated into an object of pleasurable consumption" (Stahl, 2009, p. 6), corresponding to critical hegemony and state apparatus. Moreover, Yogerst (2017) indicated the prominent issue of superhero character is through expressions of power whereby certain characters usually force certain ideologies onto villains, using physical violence, while delivering their ideological proselytizing. This corresponds to what in psychology is called a *Superman Complex*: the development of a habit to judge and punish others, often leading to a fascistic personality. The supernatural powers and abilities held by the character also relate them to Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of Overman or *Die Übermensch* (Nietzsche, 2009; Nietzsche & Kaufmann, 1995); A concept which has been commonly touted as an anti-socialist perspective used as a basis for fascist regimes like those of the Nazis and the Soviet Union.

Yogerst (2017), however, argued that the depiction of the superhero as a fascistic character failed to observe the contexts of the story. He indicated that traditional protagonists are characters that strive to be morally just people who uphold personal and social values, as opposed to fascists who were typically borne of a "corrupt morality and ethical code that diminishes freedom and promotes autocracy" (p. 17). The heroes' senses of masculinity are controlled and expressed in such morally appropriate manners that they positively contribute to society. In comic books, exaggeration of masculinity especially is usually seen as a fantastic and symbolic image

that promotes moral exemplars that reinforce a hegemonic society built on peace and mutual understanding instead of fear and hatred. (Kroopnick, 2003; Rhodes & Johnson, 2008; Tajaroensuk, 2013). Taylor (2007), suggested that superheroes' masculinity has the power to attract, inspire, and encourage audiences to develop as morally and ethically good persons. These superhero characteristics tend to be effective with audiences, especially young children, who seek to identify themselves with someone and learn from their actions (Bonneville, Kozar, Hussey, & Patrick, 2006). Researchers, therefore, rejected the idea of superheroes being fascistic.

In the context of this study, where the scope was not to explore masculinity and male exploitation, there is a heuristic requirement to adopt an alternative view of the critical aspects of masculinity. Instead of understanding Superhero media as a sexist media, we need to understand superhero texts as media that posits the dominant hegemony (Vollum & Adkinson, 2003) and that in turn influences how boys and men think and act. Masculinity could also be connected to the nature of friendship between men, which has been previously indicated as more competitive, more political, more physical, and less stable than friendship between females (Pringle, 1995; Rook, 1989; Wright, 1989).

2.4.3.4 Superheroes and Dialectical Conflicts

In the superhero genre, there have been several stories where masculine tropes lead the characters to engage in interpersonal conflicts. These conflicts contain physical combat and high-stakes actions, and this would mean that superheroes are prone to physical violence more than other types of relationships. According to Rubin (2006), superheroes commonly argue with each other when they do not fight villains. A common theme that has emerged in the superhero genre since the 1970s is the idea of superheroes combatting one another. A common story labeled as 'X vs. Y' or 'X/Y' where X and Y refer to the iconic characters featured in the story where superhero protagonists have conflicts with one another. Superhero fights have been recognized as appealing to audiences. (Riesman, 2016) suggested that teenager audiences tend to develop an interest in seeing equally relevant characters compete with one another, but at the same time, they also demanded the narrative to force them to cooperate with one another. The scope of violence in this context tends to be exaggerated for the sake of entertainment (Scott, 2011), yet the degree of moral ambiguity can be very complex.

Unlike super villains, the heroes who engage in combat hold different ideologies and sets of ethics that can be very ambiguous, making it difficult to judge whoever was right or wrong. When the story deals with ethical perspectives, morality is governed and changed in accord with a social consciousness, which provides loopholes for moral slavery, control, oppression, and corruption (Donovan & Richardson, 2008; Granovetter, 2007; Ude, 2016). As a result, superhero conflicts are usually framed as the ongoing ideological struggle between characters to find balance and solution to any perceived socio-political problems.

The issue of superheroes combatting other superheroes at present has been caused by the oversaturation of the 'superhero conflicts' narrative. (Petaccio, 2016) used the term 'twilight of superheroes' to indicate the antagonistic, uncooperative, and paranoid nature of superheroes characters in modern superhero films, whereas villainous characters were written as sympathetic and friendly groups. Moreover, 2017 has been considered a controversial year for Marvel Comics due to the issue of the writers abusing conflicts in narratives to push forward a series of narratives addressing issues of political correctness, which have in turn courted aggressive criticism from audiences (Camp, 2017; Shapiro, 2017). In the former case, superhero adaptations were published using conflicts as selling points to examine the political aspects of popular culture. In the latter case, the conflicts between racially diverse groups have caused the superhero community to be divided into a Eurocentric group and a non-Eurocentric group, resulting in the conflicts carrying a heavy socio-political tone that has radioactively bled into the real world.

The common issue found in the superhero narrative has been the misuse of conflicts as spectacle, instead of the *means* to achieve meaningful development. Iannone (2016) claimed that mainstream superhero adaptations do not understand the appeal of superhero narratives, citing several quotes by creators showing their ignorance toward the superhero as a narrative genre. In addition, there are problems with conflicts, notably terrorism and civil wars in superhero narratives that have been historically improperly depicted in Hollywood movies, and oversimplified and falsified information about terrorism to audiences (MacFarlane, 2014; Riegler, 2010). More recently, studies by Smith and Goodrum (2011) indicated significant increases of conflicts and ambiguous moral grounds contributing to various crises that cannot be

solved in real life (such as 9/11 or terrorism), which affect superhero characters into becoming more aggressive towards each other—even for arbitrary reasons. As a result, miscommunication leads to fatal problems due to the *exaggerated* notions of conflicts in many superhero narratives. This development is problematic because ambiguous ethics can develop into moral skepticism and blind hero-worship, whereby the context of the combat in terms of story and fans following the characters becomes toxic and distorted.

One of the prominent issues with superhero conflicts has been their effects on audiences. Modern risk society's skepticism regarding moral principles and the rationalization of immoral deeds and political agendas that exist in real-life politics and criminal justice have been exaggerated in superhero comics—where the significance of the narrative has become not the potential resolution to the conflict, *but the conflict itself*. This has happened because several stories have been trying to capitalize on the conflicts between characters by focusing primarily on the spectacular instead of moral messages and any resulting implication addressed to audiences, which are in turn subjected to moral decay due to the *spectacular prospects of such superhero narratives* (Hatch, 2012; Shafer-Landau, 2004). Blind hero-worship and a Superman Complex can significantly distort an audience's perception of heroism. From both an audience and an industrialized perspective, the problem of interpreting two fictional characters fighting each other as a reflection of political struggle is the rejection of traditional moral implications and the dialectical perspective.

Recent studies have tended to have implications where writers wanted to promote certain characters as negotiating the status quo in a similar manner to previous studies of class struggles. Analyses of the conflicting forces in dialectics in an antagonizing tone have ignored the fundamental principle of the synthetic in the dialectical relationship: a solution of the dialectic should be a 'harmonic compromise' (*Aufebehen*) and the co-existence of the conflicting forces rather than the complete annihilation of either party (Marcuse, 1954). Such enemy-making mindsets in superhero fandom can be especially intense in works with lower academic standards (and fewer editor mandates from journal articles). Notably, several pieces of literature located in superhero philosophy books (Michaud, 2016b; White, 2013b; White & Arp,

2008), have displayed less professional languages and writing with more subjective and biased information.

Shafer-Landau (2004) has suggested that instead of questioning what is correct in ethical conduct; audiences need to look for ethical objectivism as an intrinsic view of morality. In this regard, ethical objectivism possibly refers to the negative consequences made by those who made moral errors that are not justified by any moral excuses, such as deaths and destruction of lives. Further, the objective morality in superhero war stories is the destruction caused by, and the consequences of the war, which tend to be extreme and apparent (Scott, 2011). For example, both Marvel's *Civil War* and DC's *Kingdom Come* showed that superheroes battling one another caused countless deaths and casualties, forcing a moral message which was that conflicts and violence were ultimately pointless. Instead, common people must peacefully find solutions to problems in order to form stronger bonds and stronger senses of morality (Frimer, 2016; Malloy, 2008). Such objectivity in realizing the deadly consequences of bourgeoisie conflicts must be used to enforce social perceptions to improve interpersonal communication and realize the potential of real-life humanity and to reduce or prevent similar conflicts being repeated in the future (Walls & Tallen, 2014). As such, it can be said that the conflicts between superheroes were usually presented as dialectics that needed to be recalibrated and to reach a balance.

It can be said that issues of morality and heroism have been considered as a significant issue in superhero studies. These moral implications have been reinforced through moral communication to reach a dialectical solution to conflicts. Critical interpretation of comic books can be used as a gateway to understanding the common problems existing within the popular interpretation of the relationship between superhero protagonists.

## 2.5 Crossovers between Superman and Batman

### 2.5.1 History of Superman and Batman Crossovers

As individuals, the Man of Steel and the Caped Crusader have been considered the most popular figures of the Golden Age (Daniels, 1995). As such, it was natural to place them inside the same narrative to drive profits. Superman and Batman first

appeared together as occasional members of the Justice Society of America in *All-Star Comics #7*. The first meeting between Superman and Batman was in 1952's *Superman #76 The Mightiest Team in the World*. In this story, Clark Kent and Bruce Wayne found themselves on the same cruise to tend to their respective businesses. The two were accidentally assigned to share the same cabin. At the time, a diamond thief attacked the cruise. The two heroes quickly identified each other's secret identities and decided to help each other stop the thief. This story was later being reimagined for *Superman/Batman Annual#1 Stop Me if You've Heard This One…* where the diamond thief was replaced by supervillains from an alternative universe.

A significant point of reference of crossovers between Superman and Batman was the book series called *World's Finest Comic*, which was originally a large comic book that functioned as an anthology for various DC comics at the time. *World's Finest Comic #1*, published in 1941, was featuring Superman, Batman, and Robin on the same cover, but Superman and Batman did not appear in the same story. The covers featuring three characters continued in all issues until *World's Finest Comics #71* in 1954, where Superman and Batman met each other again after *Superman #76*, and the two characters famously swapped costumes to combat villains. Ever since then the heroes regularly joined forces on a monthly basis. As the series continued, *World's Finest Comics* started changing from a large anthology book to a regular comic issue that primarily stars Superman and Batman as double protagonists. A significant of the *World's Finest Comics* is the introduction of Superman and Batman as compatible heroes that consistently join forces to fight criminals and supervillains. Both characters were depicted as good friends during the Silver Age. However, their relationship was damaged during the Bronze Age as the stories got darker and more mature. They ended their relationship in 1986's *World's Finest Comics #323*, prior to the *Crisis on Infinite Earths* storyline.

In 1985, a writer Frank Miller published *Batman: The Dark Knight Return* as an imaginary story starring Batman fighting mutants and started a cultural revolution to counteract a corrupted government in Gotham. Superman was depicted as an antagonist who worked for the parliament government as a tool to defeat the remaining superheroes who come out of hiding because of Batman's appearance. The two fought each other during the ending section of the miniseries where Batman famously punched

Superman in the face, cementing the popular image of Superman and Batman as antagonists. This antagonistic depiction of Superman and Batman was significant because it redefined the relationship between the two friends after 1985 as opposite forces of heroism. Notably, their friendship was destined to fail and the two inevitably had to fight each other. Throughout Frank Miller's works, Batman was being depicted as a triumphant hero and the more popular hero relative to the rise of antihero protagonists and the decay of traditional heroism since the Dark Age of Comics.

Despite the changing perception toward the relationship between the two characters, the canonical *Post-Crisis* continuity (created after the event called *Crisis on Infinite Earth* in 1986) maintained the relationship between the two characters as mutual friends even though their friendship was significantly altered to be more skeptical. Superman and Batman met each other in 1986's *Man of Steel #3.* In the story, Superman visited Gotham and interfered with Batman's attempt to capture a terrorist named Magpie. They initially got suspicious over each other's crime-fighting methods. However, they chose to cooperate with one another to defeat the villain. They gradually came to respect each other as time goes by, and so they remain grudgingly respectful friends. Superman and Batman frequently work together and have retained their friendship over many years.

In 2003, DC Comics writer Jeph Loeb published *Superman/Batman*, which lasted until the continuity reboot in 2011. Similar to *World's Finest Comic*, the comics featured Superman and Batman as double protagonists. Interesting, the writers and the editors had a specific goal for the dynamic between the two characters. By the time the books were published, Superman and Batman had already had a fully established and stable friendship. According to the documentary *A Test of Minds: Superman and Batman* (Maynard, Opgenorth, & Spence, 2009b), Jeph Loeb was responsible for introducing a technique called 'dual narration' which would compare and contrast characters' inner thoughts, perspectives, and ideologies, showing that there was a parallel between Superman and Batman. In addition, superhero comic books around this time had developed a trend to divide several issues into a single story arc. This resulted in a story that had clearly defined and consistent narrative structure. Notably, two of the first story arcs, *World's Finest* and *Supergirl,* were adapted into DC animated direct-to-DVD movies called *Superman/Batman: Public Enemies* and

*Superman/Batman: Apocalypse* respectively. In general, the *Post-Crisis* continuity aimed to retain the two character's status quo as frenemies, where most of the time the characters would remain mutually understanding friends, but several conflicts, doubts, and misunderstandings caused them to berate or fight one another. A brief change of such status quo happened when Batman was killed in another event comic called *Final Crisis in 2008*, while Superman had suffered the loss of several of his friends and family. As a result, Superman decided to walk across America during the story arc *Superman Grounded* in 2010 and 2011; other characters tried to ameliorate Superman's self-doubt. Batman, who returned to life in *Batman: The Return of Bruce Wayne*, approached him and successfully cured his friend of his depression. DC's short *Post-Crisis* continuity narrative ended in 2011 after such reconciliation.

In *the New 52* continuity, the relationship between Superman and Batman started over. Here they had become significantly different characters and they started their relationship on a very bad note. *Batman/Superman* was the sequel to *Superman/Batman* published between 2013 and 2016. Written dominantly by Greg Pak, the series aimed to highlight the contrasting characterizations of the postmodern Superman and Batman. Instead of using the existing template of Post Crisis characters, Pak (Egross, 2014) stated that *the New 52* versions of the characters were "very young and very cocky—each guy knows exactly what he thinks he should be doing and knows that the other guy is basically the most dangerous guy on the planet." (para. 3) Unlike the previous crossover title, *Batman/Superman* serves as a narrative that develops alongside the comic book continuity, which suggests significant amounts of character development and a changing status quo as the story progresses, where the two heroes open up to each other and ultimately became best friends. *Batman/Superman* lasted 36 issues and was canceled because Superman passes away in the story arc called *the Final Days of Superman*.

### 2.5.2 Opposite Characterization

The dialectical dynamic between Superman and Batman represents in this study the two social components that have been interpreted as having equal relevance in terms of perspective and moral standpoints. This section describes each character individually then outlines the previous studies related to the two characters.

#### 2.5.2.1 Superman, the Big Blue Boy Scout

Superman was the first known superhero in history. He initially appeared in *Action Comics #1* in June 1938 and established the superhero narrative as the dominant genre in the comic book format. He is alternatively known as 'Man of Steel' and 'Big Blue Boy Scout,' as he is considered the embodiment of the heroic image that empowers male audiences and represents rural heroism and liberal idealism (Demers-Olivier, 2009; DiPaolo, 2011). According to Kroopnick (2003) and Daniels (2004b), Superman was created by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, two poor teenagers who lived in America during the Great Depression. Taking inspiration from classical heroes, Greek gods, bodybuilders, and science fiction, Superman was created as a narrative about a Moses-like figure from outer space who came to Earth and became its champion against crimes and the corruption of America in the 1930s. Superman has been described as physically invulnerable, having an ability to jump and fly, and having an unbreakable sense of ethics (Kroopnick, 2003; Karp, 2009).

The modern depiction of the character as defined has been reinforced by John Byrne's *Man of Steel* in 1986, Post-Crisis Clark Kent was the adopted son of a farmer couple in Smallville, Kansas. As he grew up, Clark developed supernatural powers that he used to gain unfair advantages in football competitions, causing his father to scold him. Having a good heart, Clark decided to use his power only to help people, while avoiding being seen by others. In his adulthood, the reporter Lois Lane caught him saving the falling plane that she was in and exposed him, forcing Clark and his parents to design an alternative ego to retain privacy while he became a reporter for the Daily Planet, the same newspaper in which Lois worked. By removing his glasses and revealing a blue colorful skintight outfit and a red cape, a mild-mannered reporter Clark Kent donned a secret identity known as Superman and became a protector of the city of *Metropolis*, America, and the world at large (Soares, 2015). In *the New 52* version, he retained his virtue ethics and backstory as a Kansas farmer hailed from Planet *Krypton*, but his backstory was altered so that his parents died in a car crash, while he was at a very young age, forcing him to prematurely become Superman. His personality was revised to be more playful, impulsive, and reckless, causing him to be viewed as naïve and annoying—especially to Batman (Egross, 2014).

Analyses of Superman have been made based on Friedrich Nietzsche's Overman or *Die Übermensch* (Bogaerts, 2013; Terjesen, 2013a), which was defined by Nietzsche (2009) as the idea that a common person has a psychological desire to mature and develop one's own identity beyond the confines of the masses (or "*rabble"*). However, the idea has been framed as a form of Social Darwinism, leading Superman and *Die Übermensch* to be frequently (and falsely) compared to fascism and Nazism (Yogerst, 2017); whereby a person develops a complex in which they believe themselves or their nationality to be inherently superior to another as "the super-man that can do no wrong" (Nyberg, 1998, p. 60). Some scholars have perceived Superman as a superior being who enjoys physically dominating villains. In the same vein, critiques have been made of Superman as a messianic figure, claiming the character as an image for space Moses and a Jesus figure. These allegories have been reinforced in mainstream media, most notably in Hollywood movies (Barkman, 2013; Kozloff, 1981; Kozlovic, 2016). The depiction of Superman as *Die Übermensch* or god-like has caused a common perception of Superman as being naïve, unrealistic, and not relatable to normal people (Foresman, 2008; N. Levin, 2016; Michaud, 2016a).

However, studies have also indicated that the perception of Superman as a god is a fallacy. These criticisms were criticized for conjuring perspectives that look at the character only on the surface level. Superman's arch-nemesis Lex Luthor was an embodiment of a person who purposely misinterprets the Man of Steel as a false god in order to keep antagonizing him (Donovan & Richardson, 2013). Despite being a highly powerful alien, studies have claimed that the character was still considered one of the most human-like characters in the genre (J. K. Johnson, 2010; Kahn, 1995; Malloy, 2013; Waid, 2009, 2014; White, 2013a). This is mainly because both the Clark Kent and Superman personas have been critiqued as heroic figures that are humble and down-to-earth. Superman embodies agrarian ideals and practices related to farmers and the working classes as well as rural immigrants. The creators were Jewish immigrants during the Great Depression, the age when migration and poverty were common (Reich, 2009). In addition, debates have been instigated regarding whether or not Superman can be considered as an *Übermenschen* because Superman, in his traditional depiction, is a very human-like person, who actively describes himself as an American citizen (Bogaerts, 2013; Terjesen, 2013b). That is, Superman only considers his alien heritage

as “curious mementos of a life that might have been” and that “Krypton bred [Superman], but it was Earth that gave [him] all [he is]. All that matters.” (Byrne, 1986, p. 22). In addition, *Die Übermensch* was usually analyzed as a nihilistic concept that was formulated to directly antagonize religions and social constructs, which directly contradict Superman’s characterization as a socially conforming character. Instead, Superman’s connection to religious imagery has been used as personal conflict, being used as a plot device to tackle problems of alienation, isolation and the humanistic theme of embracing one’s own identity (Waid, 2014).

The fallacy of Superman being the un-relatable protagonist is commonly indicated as a mentality held by Superman’s nemesis Lex Luthor, infamously known for being an egotistical and self-righteous person (Donovan & Richardson, 2013). Second, Markina (2014) regarded the alien aspect of his character as being exaggerated due to the integration of science fiction and fantasy into the overall story to create drama. For instance, the fact that Superman is a supernatural alien being with extreme ideals puts all of the modern moral standards in the form of a power-struggle onto his shoulder, causing him to feel isolated from other people, as indicated through a constant personal struggle between Superman’s deity-image and his genuine desire to stay human-like (Anton, 2013; Terjesen, 2013a; Waid, 2014). An analysis made by Donovan and Richardson (2013) suggested that Superman’s constant struggle is an ongoing journey to find a balance between being both a supernatural Christ figure and a humanistic anti-Christ figure.

On the other hand, analyses of Superman’s virtues have been related to Nietzsche’s *Overman* in terms of his personal development. Superman serves as an archetype, a heroic person who embraces and learns from all of his experiences; from his rural childhood and industrial lifestyle; to allowing a farm boy to efficiently shift into a Superman—a person who realizes when to utilize different persona to suit different social situations in life (Kelley, 2009). As a superhero protagonist, the double identity between Clark Kent and Superman is commonly indicated as a form of power fantasy and overall empowerment in direct and indirect manners. G. M. Smith (2009) implied that at a personal level, audiences may personally feel more powerful by projecting themselves into Clark Kent, a stereotypical everyman, as he ‘transforms’ into Superman and becomes the most powerful man in existence. G. M. Smith (2009)

suggested that the difference between the mundane news reporter Clark Kent as a representation of the rhetorical everyman, and the mystical Superman as a representation of an idealistic person is key to understanding the character. Compared to the usual heroic narrative, Lang and Trimble (1988) have compared Clark Kent to the hero at the start of his journey, whereas Superman represents the *telos* or the fully self-actualized state of humanity.

An alternative interpretation of the Superman character has been associated mostly with the intertextuality of philosophies of idealism, related to a human's spiritual potential and innate goodness. For example, Superman as a rhetorical figure in the superhero genre consists of idealism and other philosophies established throughout the Western tradition (Nielson, 2013). These beliefs include G. W. F. Hegel's spiritual teleology, Christian images of The Savior, Immanuel Kant's deontological ethics and maxims, Aristotelean physics, Platonic idealism, and the Classical Liberalism of modern North America, which all culminate in this postmodern, universally virtuous character. Superman, as an ethical and patriotic person, could be compared to Captain America, who had been established with a tendency to express his 'character' through words and verbal expositions (Russell, 2012).

Waid (2014) critiqued the character as being conceptually relative to the general view of human nature, where a person must overcome isolation by embracing one's own heritage and becoming a part of a community (a common Superman narrative). At an institutionalized level of interpretation, this is the glorification of rural lifestyles; a reflection of students and workers moving from the countryside to cities, and an encouragement of both rural people and the industrial proletariat to realize their shared common purposes and to understand their purposes in life amid the betterment of humanity (Brod, 2016; J. K. Johnson, 2010; Karp, 2009; Markina, 2014). Interestingly, a Thai study by Tajaroensuk (2013), proposed Superman as a perfect social person, relating him to Thai Buddhism and Eastern philosophies, critiquing the character as a tolerant and kind person. Superman here also represented maturation based on the heroic myth, where a common person has to become a strong, confident, wise, and powerful person. As such, audiences with a strong sense of idealism or rural background may find appeal in the character and model themselves after him as a role

model. This suggests that despite Superman being an American character, his virtuous traits can be appreciated by foreign cultures.

The idea of Superman being a metaphor for idealism is relative to an interpretation of the character through a collection of abstract and ethical ideas expressed through a number of Superman's dialogues. Among the most common ideas related to Superman are the words 'truth', 'justice', and 'hope', expressed as messages that convey his own agenda. 'Truth' in the context of Superman is largely based on the anti-criminal messages being expressed in the uncorrupted value of his heroism, which is also signified through Superman's wider associates and the city of Metropolis itself, which appears as a sunny, bright city. One of the most important examples of architecture in the city is symbolical, The Daily Planet building where Kent works. The newspaper company is represented by the following motif: "clarity and truth that becomes a symbol of hope" (Spengler & Donner, 1978). Knight (2009), suggested that Clark Kent's job as a reporter is as important as his superhero alter-ego because he functions as a moral agent who conforms to a good journalist's ethics to discover truth and justice in the chaotic society. 'Justice' is usually referred to in the anti-crime rhetoric of the superhero genre, and is considered by White (2014) to be a complicated term with a grey area between the hero's decision to define justice based on 'what is right to do' and 'what is good for society', which is relative to the classical debate between *deontological* and *utilitarian* ethics. Superman has been critiqued as a virtuous character, leaning towards a more deontological person who follows social rules and supports law enforcement, without reducing himself to being an actual judge, jury, or executioner (DiPaolo, 2011; T. Giddens, 2017; Robichaud, 2013; Spanakos, 2008). Finally, 'hope' has been associated with his role as an inspiring superhero. As mentioned, Superman was the savior of the people who suffered from the Great Depression and was considered an inspiration for other people—or as a messianic figure. (Nielsen, 2013) analyzed Superman as a character who has a capacity for inspiring and bringing the best out of other characters by making them recognize the 'self-recognition' and 'external validation,' or the human's capacity of understanding their values in life by observing others or being reminded by other people that their lives are important. Nielson believes that Superman is a character that ultimately believes in the potential of humankind, and Mark Waid, a seasoned writer of Superman,

indicated “Gods achieve their powers by encouraging people to believe in them. Superman achieves his power by believing in us.” (as cited in Nielson, 2013, p. 199). Indeed, Superman is a character that believes in the potential of humankind. He may use his power to help people, but he is not omnipotent or capable of saving all of life. It is usually in his messages that he will do his best to help, but one must also take action to solve one’s own problems in the belief that it is possible for him or her to do so (Nielsen, 2013, p. 201). Superman’s virtue ethics is usually acknowledged by Batman whenever the two characters interact in crossover comics.

2.5.2.2 Batman, the Dark Knight

Batman was the second superhero in American history created by Bob Kane and Bill Finger. The character debuted in *Detective Comics #27* in May 1939. According to Daniels (2004a), his Golden Age and modern incarnations depict him as a vigilante inspired by several pulp magazines and detective stories such as *The Mark of Zorro* and *The Bat’s Whisper*. Batman is alternatively called the ‘Caped Crusader’ and the ‘Dark Knight’ for his black suit and cape—signifying his virtuous character as a determined crime-fighter who posts himself as a dark, cynical, stoic, fearsome and mysterious figure who strikes fear into the hearts of criminals and murderers (Dantzler, 2009; Duncan & Smith, 2013, p. 383).

Post-Crisis Batman is a modern interpretation of the Golden Age Batman. Bruce Wayne is a masked detective who solved murder cases and personally stopped criminals while living a double life as a rich playboy bourgeoisie. Bruce had witnessed his parents being shot to death by a street robber as a child, and he thus became motivated to train himself to human physical and intellectual perfection. He developed Batman as an alter ego after he noticed a bat breaking into his room as an omen. Batman acted as a nightmarish bogeyman who was also an exceptionally cunning fighter and waged war against crime in the highly corrupted, borderline nightmarish, city of Gotham (Duncan & Smith, 2013, p. 383). In the *New 52* continuity, Batman retained his backstory and crime-fighting experiences and was depicted as older than the other characters, but he was also shown to be more arrogant, self-righteous, paranoid, anger-induced, and less patient toward other superheroes, especially Superman (Egross, 2014).

Batman has been depicted as a dark and brooding character since the Bronze Age of Comics, but his image as the Dark Knight is usually cited as being reinforced by the writers Frank Miller and Alan Moore. Modern Batman is categorized as an antihero, being shown as a cynical person who holds onto personal ideology above all else (Croci, 2016; Jones, 2007). With the development of Christopher Nolan's *Dark Knight* trilogy movies, Batman as an antihero served as a deconstructive force and as an exploration into darker and more complex meanings of the signifier 'superhero' and in turn as a more symbolic image of heroism instantiated to combat corruption and the lurking evil and corresponding risk factors in society (Cortiel & Oehme, 2015; V. Johnson, 2014; Skoble, 2014; Winstead, 2015). Notably, Batman in the mainstream comic is a skeptical but highly practical detective who actively combats the nightmarish crimes that super villains commit. Russell (2012) suggested that Batman's method of communication tends to serve as a voice of reason to other characters when needed.

To audiences, Batman is a 'badass' character (Michaud, 2016b). That is, he is usually depicted as brooding and anti-social in a way that attracts young readers, but he is also a heroic and virtuous man at heart. Batman's character is appealing because it highlights the greatest potential of humanity in terms of physical, intellectual, and spiritual powers. The core characterization of Batman as an antihero is as a vigilante, an outlaw who does not conform to the traditional rules of ethics, which stood over and against Nietzsche's Overman (*Übermensch*). However, unlike Superman, Batman appears to conform to Nietzsche's traditional view of an *over-man*, which refers to the evolution of an individual through the anti-religious perspective of identity constructed by both the sadness and the joy of being freed from social and moral slavery—while at the same time looking cool, rebellious, and intimidating. (Nietzsche & Kaufmann, 1995). However, the characterization of Batman as an antihero also serves as a narrative conflict. The struggles of the character Batman in terms of magical realism mainly concern the angst and the tragedies that are caused by the highly corrupted state of Gotham City, as well as the series of tragedies Batman faces throughout his life (Hart, 2008). These aspects contribute to his negative characteristics. Batman's association with street-level crimes has caused him to become imbalanced, and he runs the risk of succumbing to angst, aggression, lack of self-confidence, or obsession over street-level criminals, and his tendency to betray his friends at any slight

indication they are turning evil (Hart, 2008; Jenson, 2008; Kershnar, 2008; White, 2008). In addition to Nietzsche, Spanakos (2008) indicated that Batman is a character who has been influenced by philosopher Thomas Hobbes, whose philosophy is based on a theory of anti-socialism and pessimism (Hobbes & Gaskin, 1998). In *Leviathan,* Hobbes suggested that the creation of society was based on exploitation and chaotic states of government, and furthermore, the human has the bleak nature of mistrusting other people. Hobbes claimed that what normal humans try to do is protect their own self-interest, which leads to acts of wars, terrorism, and political comradeship that inevitably end with betrayals. Batman's issue with isolation and alienation becomes paradoxical as his constant distrust towards others causes them to become reluctant to trust him in return (Morris, 2014). In addition, his tendency to dwell in the evil of the world provide several occasions where his various nemeses, namely the Joker, actively try to convince him that he is insane or evil like them.

However, the overall interpretation of Batman as an evil character is a fallacy. Despite Batman being associated with the inherent chaos and evil of human society, studies indicate Batman as a character operating on an opposite notion to modern nihilism. Three main aspects contribute to his massive popularity as a superhero: first, Batman's tragic backstory functions differently compared to typical melodrama. The original script for Batman's origin story in *Detective Comics #33* indicated "And I swear by the spirits of my parents to avenge their deaths by spending the rest of my life warring on all criminals" (Finger, 1988, p. 3). This statement has defined the core characteristic of Batman, explaining 'why' the character decides to become a hero rather than 'how' he acquires the career in a similar manner to other superheroes, who have usually gained superpowers by accident (Jenson, 2008). This suggests that Batman is the most determined person in the superhero genre as the tragic nature of Batman's backstory has also helped audiences to sympathize and relate to the character, because of his agency in the process itself (Donovan and Richardson, 2008).

Second, the tendency of Batman to being interpreted as crazy or evil is largely a fallacy as Donovan and Richardson (2008) have analyzed. They wrote that Batman's symbol and the motif of bats are used as a connotative image of fear, which Bruce Wayne has *learned to overcome* and then embody himself with. In this regard, one once again sees echoes of Nietzsche (2009), who stated, "He who fights with

monsters should be careful lest he thereby becomes a monster. And if thou gaze long into an abyss, the abyss will also gaze into thee." (p. 146), which refers to the risk to a person who engages with evil situations or phenomena and how this may corrupt one's own psyche—turning him into the very evil he sets out to fight. As such, Batman never becomes a true antihero of the 1990s. His antisocial characteristics are never driven by dogmatism or megalomania, but a strict usage of virtuous ethics and moral codes to pursue truth and criminal justice.

Finally, his contribution to society cannot be deemed as insignificant. A more significant archetype related to Batman is his status as a mentor character. This is instanced through Batman's iconic relationship with his child sidekick, Robin the Boy Wonder, which is a representation to child audiences—as well as a 'Dr. Watson' archetype for a main character's sidekick (McKittrick, 2015). The significance of Robin to Batman's characterization is its consequent establishment of Batman as a mature and parental archetype in the heroism genre, where debates have been made regarding the symbiotic nature of their relationship (DiGiovanna, 2008). Batman's determination and resistance to corruption allows him to be a respectable hero to both audiences and other characters (Jenson, 2008; White, 2008).

Overall, Batman is a representation of modern heroism that prefers practicality to optimism but retains a strong sense of morality. Batman's positive qualities are acknowledged the most by Superman, who understands his position the most whenever the two characters join forces in crossover comic books.

### 2.5.3 Superman and Batman as a Dialectical Unit of Friendship

The relevant literature related to Superman and Batman as a discourse in friendship is related to a viewpoint of friendship that the two attain. As described, Aristotle's view on friendship refers to the three levels of friendship: of pleasure, utility, and goodness. Interestingly, researches have indicated that Superman and Batman each have incomplete views of friendship when they operate in their respective stories as separated units (Egross, 2014; Morris, 2014).

Due to Superman being designed as an idealistic character embodying a knight errant archetype, the relationships and interactions he has with other characters also reflect an optimistic relationship in the extreme. Superman's role in superhero society

is to set examples and high standards of heroism. On one hand, Knight (2009) suggested that Clark Kent's role in The Daily Planet is largely based on a utilitarian view of friendship, as the press demands high standards— and characters such as the press's chief editor Perry White and Clark's co-worker Jimmy Olsen, only associate with him on a professional level. However, other studies indicate that, despite Clark Kent's utilitarian characteristics, his relationship with Lois Lane is the bond that moderates his human spirit, whereas his heroism affects her personality as a feminist character and their relationship is typically depicted as that of love interests in a husband-wife relationship instead of simple friends (Farghaly, 2013). As a superhero, Morris (2014) believes that because he is depicted as an idealistic character with extraordinary achievements and standards, he has a problem finding 'equal' friends, who are not being directly or indirectly inspired by him.

On the opposite spectrum, Batman as an antisocial character with a highly imbalanced personality and socialization. Kershnar (2008) and Morris (2014) suggested that Batman's antisocial personality and hatred for criminals contributed to his personality, his ethics, and his obsession with crimes and criminals. While these factors cause him to excel at his work, he becomes more obsessed with his causes as he becomes in turn more unbalanced, devoting himself to isolation and blocking himself from other people, including his closest friends. However, it has also been an iconic part of the character that Batman has the largest scope of friendship in DC Comics through to various supporting characters within the Bat-Family, which include Batman's pupils, the five Robins, Bruce Wayne's butler Alfred Pennyworth, Gotham's police commissioner James Gordon, James's daughter Barbara Gordon, and the femme fatale love interest Catwoman.

One of the relationships highlighted by Morris (2014) is Batman's relationship with the first Robin, Dick Grayson, which was introduced in *Detective Comics #38* before he later donned the superhero identity Nightwing. Morris suggested that Dick Grayson's friendship can be interpreted as a 'friendship of goodness' because the two characters have mutual respect toward each other and influence each other in various beneficial ways. However, Grayson has been written as a character who wished to get away from Batman and becomes a hero on his own merit. As such, Morris claimed that Grayson rarely interacted with Bruce and only became involved with Batman when it

was necessary. Next, the relationship between Batman and Alfred Pennyworth, his butler, also has the potential to reach the highest level of friendship due to Alfred's status as a surrogate father and a voice of reason, but this perspective is actively rejected because Alfred is considered Bruce's employee; thus a utilitarian friend from Batman's perspective (Drohan, 2008; Kierkegaard, 2006). Lastly, Batman's relationship with Gotham's police commissioner, James Gordon is usually depicted as purely utilitarian, as they only interact during crime investigations, despite Gordon showing a significant amount of trust towards him (Morris, 2014). Aside from certain comrades in Justice that he cannot fully trust, these analyses show that Batman as a superhero has a tendency to push away human relationships.

The extant literature suggests that Superman and superhero friendship were respectively and fairly limited. However, several studies have indicated that the imbalances of the characters' perceptions of friendship are being adjusted to teach Aristotle's highest level of friendship, the 'friendship of goodness', which is explored extensively as a primary selling point and rhetorical aspect of 'Superman/Batman' and 'Batman/Superman'. Superman and Batman, who are the two founding fathers of postmodern superhero archetypes and the superhero genre in general, have been interesting to examine in both cultural and in more philosophical senses (Friedenthal, 2012; O'Neil, 2016).

In the modern era, Superman and Batman have been analyzed in numerous studies as being characters with differences at both personal and philosophical levels (Farrall, 2016; Malloy, 2008; Maynard et al., 2009b; Nielson, 2013). The two characters have been critiqued to be as different as day and night (Coogan, 2006). Superman, the 'Big Blue Boy Scout', wears primary colors to represent hope and optimism. His physical invulnerability represents the unrivaled strength and unshakable morality against corruption (Tajaroensuk, 2013; Terjesen, 2013b). Meanwhile, Batman, the 'Dark Knight', wears a black suit and represents skepticism, sophistication, and awareness of cynical aspects in life, while his status as a human represents a human's physical and intellectual capacities and flexibilities to adapt to changes and dangers (Dantzler, 2009; Hart, 2008). The fundamental difference between the two characters tends to cause conflict, which has been frequently used as a selling point for a crossover, especially in popular adaptations such as the recent *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* in 2016,

which featured the two characters becoming conflicted due to different beliefs and ideologies. The common problem Superman had towards Batman usually concerned Batman's borderline blind cynicism, his self-loathing, and his extreme methods toward crime-fighting, whereas Batman tended to look down on Superman for his innate alien birth, his carefree personality, and his carelessness in battle. These character tensions are what have made it fascinating for writers and audiences to explore the possibilities created from the two characters interacting with one another.

It is worth reminding that despite the tendency of the media to promote fighting between superhero characters, an actual interesting aspect of the superhero crossover in the superhero genre was not simply an ongoing conflict between the characters. Despite Frank Miller's envisioning of Batman and Superman as being destined to be arch enemies in the final years of their careers (Jones, 2007; Skoble, 2014), the canonical depiction of the two characters actively reinforce the different images of dialectic. Scholars have suggested that the relationship dynamic between Superman and Batman must be re-examined in terms of how these characters come to understand each other in order to cooperate and deal with actual problems in the plot. For example, Holdier (2016), Malloy (2008), and Nielsen (2013) suggested that Superman and Batman were considered at their strongest points when they worked together as a single unit, acknowledging one another as friends. As explored in the characteristics of Superman and Batman, it would be fair to indicate that each character is conceptually polarized. This has caused either character to be very unbalancing and incomplete. Superman and Batman needed to interact in order to fulfil and complete each other in terms of how they view their friendship, and that by meeting each other, each hero might use their knowledge and philosophical views to influence one another suggested the nature of *the New 52* counterpart of Batman and Superman works as follows:

> They may or may not actually fill in gaps with each other, but they may just point out the problems. Particularly in the New 52, it remains to be seen how they're going to push each other. The outcome may not always be good. These guys are young, they're dangerous, they're passionate . . . Thematically this is about how two rivals challenge each other to learn how to become heroes, really. It's through this conflict they have with each other that they start working out

> what it is that they're supposed to do. That dynamic is endlessly interesting. (Egross, 2014)

A problem of superheroes in the early 2000s, as Pak indicated, was the personal and ego-driven agenda attained by the heroes, which may reflect the problem of masculine friendship, rivalries, and the ongoing problems of risk society (Rook, 1989; Wilcox & Stephen, 2012; Wright, 1989). Pak's statement implied that each type of relationship was immature and required adaptation and change to learn from each other, which is relative to a conception of adult friendship where friends with opposite characteristics are beneficial for the reinforcement of each other (Blieszner, 1989; Erikson, 1959; Roberto, 1989).

This brings us to the concept of relational dialectics, the theory that has been deployed to critically study the relationship dynamic of conflicting forces that must find a compromise and then co-exist in social and spiritual realities (Wood, 2004; Papa et al., 2006). In terms of relational dialectics, communication between Superman and Batman plays the most important part in allowing the two characters to understand one another and help each other mature in superhero crossover comics. When the two characters clash, it forces conflicts to be played out in terms of how the characters act toward one another as well as how the narrative can be driven forward. Superman and Batman have both differences and similarities, which were specially highlighted by the writer Jeph Loeb to showcase parallel viewpoints between the two main characters, written in order to explore the psychological qualities of both Batman and Superman (Maynard et al., 2009b). Malloy (2008) indicated:

> Fundamental disagreements, even about the nature of friendship itself, don't have to end friendship . . . They [Superman and Batman] know that they view the world, and each other, in incompatible ways, but that does not destroy their friendship- it makes it and them stronger . . . The differences and misunderstandings . . . strengthen their friendship by providing something for them to work through. Certainly, this process is aided by the common ground they share . . . These differences, along with their desire and ability to work

> together in spite of them, make each of our heroes all that much better at what they do. (Malloy, 2008, p. 252)

In a dialectical sense, the study of the relationship dynamic between Superman and Batman fits prominent narrative aspects of the two characters, being both moral duality and the representation of ideas and schools of thought that, despite initial conflicts, must eventually synthesize, bringing about balance to their moral and ethical dilemmas. By studying Superman and Batman as a dialectical unity, it is possible to understand the didactic function of superhero media in the lives of readers and to recognize how this aesthetic helps them improve their lives.

## 2.6 Previous Studies and Knowledge Gap

Previous studies of Superman and Batman have suggested problems related to the nature of comic books with children, teenagers, and young adult demographics. Superman and Batman appeared to have engaged in constant competition in terms of sales, popularity, and the competing market. For example, Pevey (2007) and Shaw (2015), suggested that the popularity of Batman has inherently influenced Superman into becoming mischaracterized to reflect *postmodern cynicism* and *popular consciousness*, whereby the old idealism of Superman is now being viewed negatively. Similarly, Riesman (2016) claimed that Superman and Batman have never been true friends in the extant comic books, as the two usually find themselves fighting each other, which represents the ongoing conflict between idealism and cynicism in America. He stated:

> The Batman perspective has some things going for it, of course: The world can indeed look pretty dark, as our collective anxieties and casually apocalyptic political mood testify daily… If Batman and Superman are going to keep fighting, could we maybe let the Man of Steel win? Because if the political worldview of superhero fiction is going to hang in the balance with each battle, the least we could ask for is a little genuine suspense about which one of the do-gooders is going to come out on top. (Riesman, 2016)

Such a claim implies that Superman and idealism are ‘losing’ to Batman’s cynicism and demands more attention from the fans and industry toward the Man of Steel. The writing implied that the popularities for Superman and Batman operate as dialectics; however, Riesman’s writing tone suggested a need for Superman to ‘win’ against Batman. Such statements carry a sense of competition and bias toward a certain side of the debate. In this regard, Foresman (2008) added that comparisons made by superheroes fans were usually related to power comparison and debates about which protagonist, especially Batman and Superman, were a better hero. He indicated that a comparison of superheroes based on power levels are superficial and opinionated, and instead should be made according to the qualities and achievements of the characters. However, his article ironically contained a highly biased and competitive tone, considering Batman as a superior hero without taking a closer look at Superman. Similar types of researches (Levin, 2016; Michaud, 2016a) followed similar stylistic problems, with the studies trying to defend or attack the character they did not favor. These researches are less practical for academic studies than published journal articles, and more accessible to casual superhero fans; thus, they can be problematic since biased writings do not promote critical studies, but heroic worshiping and opinionated polarization. Supporting the overall views of Hatch (2012), simplistic and casual studies into the superhero genre might have potentially reinforced the risk society in terms of dialectical arguments—rather than actually helping to solve existing conflicts.

On the flip side, there have been a significant number of studies that have tried to view Superman and Batman as integrating units (Egross, 2014; Maynard et al., 2009a, 2009b). Notably, Malloy (2008) suggested that Superman and Batman have fundamentally opposite characteristics, but they are equal in their heroism and highly effective when they work together as a team. Their differences supplement and make them more efficient as heroes. They are usually compared to the concepts of yin and yang (or spiritual dialectics), where their differences have been synthesized to create a harmonic compromise *(Aufebehen)* between conflicting forces, instead of complete annihilation of either party being realized (Marcuse, 1954). In addition, these remarks corresponded with a study by Frimer (2016) who emphasized the significance of superhero groups being a representation of shared, compensated, and strengthened goals and morality. The different personalities of the two characters also responded to

studies in an adult friendship that emphasizes the benefits of friends with different traits, supplementing the strengths and weaknesses of one another (Adams & Blieszner, 1989; Blieszner, 1989; Roberto, 1989). Overall, these kinds of literature provided the opportunity for more research to explore the relationship dynamic of the two protagonists in both latent and critical senses.

Certain research gaps have been identified. First, many cited papers were qualitative assessments of the Superman-Batman friendship. Can a quantitative method establish communicative patterns that pinpoint this hypothesized contrasting, yet complementary relationship? Second, not many articles have specifically connected the Superman-Batman friendship to communication and dialectics. Can qualitative analysis using communication and philosophy provide an extensive assessment of the phenomenon and connect it to our current understanding of the interpersonal relationship? Third, due to the industrialized nature of some critical analyses, the knowledge gap is presented as a perceived issue of the relationship between Superman and Batman; thus, it has not usually been analyzed at the media-contextual level, nor has it been compared to specific discourses and phenomena in real life. This particular study is deemed necessary because more studies should utilize a more dialectical approach to analyze Batman and Superman based on the content of the media and supplemental materials. This study proposes that superhero narratives should function as a more beneficial type of hegemonic discourse.

## 2.7 Summary

This chapter has been comprised of a wide-ranging literature review for the current study. The chapter began by establishing communication as a framework for analyzing conflicts in verbal communication. Communication is typically viewed using an alternative paradigm and dominant paradigm.

The former focused more on audiences' interpretation of a text; dictating varying meanings based upon personal knowledge and a political agenda, which creates contrasting interpretations of the same text by different people (or receiver's disagreements as to the import of the sender's message). These conflicts, if not moderated, can easily reach political and dogmatic levels where people blindly

patronize one another, causing communication to fail to reach a state of mutual understanding. The study; therefore, suggested that an understanding of friendship *or frenemy* relationships can be used to solve conflicts and enhance socio-political communication in dialectical communication.

Next, the study reviewed popular culture as a type of mass media aimed toward casual audiences, including children and teenagers. Popular narrative integrates various types of cultures to appeal to common audiences. It has significant power in influencing audience behavior and beliefs and has global influence. Following on from this, the study then introduced the genre of superhero comic books, including the variously acknowledged ages of the form, which have been used to provide a wider context for the current analysis. The literature review indicated that the discourse of comic book superheroes provides a rich forum through which to closely study the major themes and conflicts in present communication and risk society.

Superman and Batman are ethical heroes defined by opposite foibles and nuances, yet they are an interesting dynamic because this opposition has allowed for ideological conflicts and provided the dialectical potential for the two to become integrated into a complete social unit. This research suggests that the conflicts and communication between Superman and Batman provide significant exemplars of ongoing dialectical conflicts that may provide a narrative structure that helps audiences in developing and improving their perceptions of conflicts in the risk society. However, in doing so, the study must consider existing critical issues related to the superhero genre in order to find ways to overcome such problems.

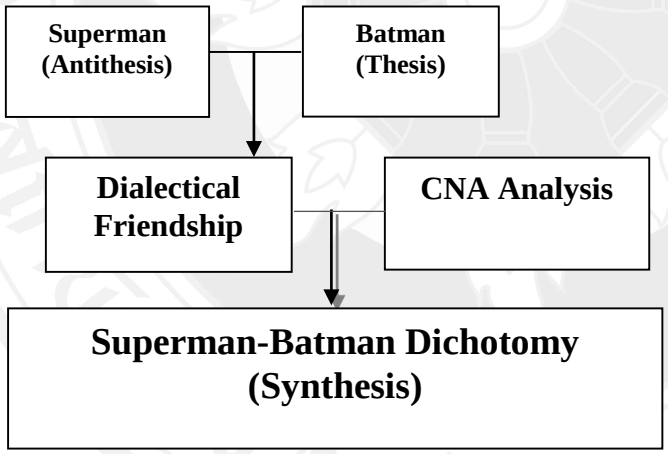
# CHAPTER 3

# METHODOLOGY

## 3.1 Introduction

This chapter explains the methodologies employed for this research, including the details of the relevant philosophical approaches, designs, instruments, samplings, data collections, data analyses, validity, reliability, strengths, and the limitation of the methodology. The methodology is also presented to further justify the existence and importance of the study.

## 3.2 Research Design




**STAGE 1:**
Facilitating data using Media Content Analyses (CA)

**STAGE 2:**
Analyzing comic as discourse using Critical Narrative Analysis (CNA)

Figure 3.1 Flow-Chart of the Research Design

As mentioned in Chapter 2, studies of communication and popular culture in the context of comic book superheroes have in some instances involved a discourse analysis using a dialectical view that has varied depending upon the themes explored within from the general landscape, such as industrialized constructions and effects of the media platform. This research explores the communication and friendship dynamic of superhero characters Superman and Batman developed in 'Superman/Batman'

(2003-2011) and ‘Batman/Superman’ (2013-2016). The analytical goal is to understand the nature of superhero ethics and morality when both characters function as a dialectic. As illustrated in Figure 3.1, there were two stages to the methodology used in this study: quantitative ‘media content analyses (CA)’ and qualitative ‘critical narrative analyses (CNA)’. These analyses were conducted based on comic book pages and the results could triangulate to mutually enhance each other’s validity and reliability.

The first stage evaluated the dialectical relations of the friendship between Superman and Batman. The analysis was made using content analysis (CA) and ‘relational dialectics’ as frameworks. The variant of RD used was ‘Dialectical Theory of Friendship (DTF)’, which categorizes communication patterns in comic books and helps discover empirical pieces of evidence to identify the communication and friendship patterns in a quantitative manner. This approach serves to facilitate the generation of ideas that can be used to support and justify the findings in this particular discourse analysis.

The second stage concerned discourse analysis of the content, responding to the second research question regarding critical analysis and the lack of an analysis of the actual communication that has happened within the comic book contexts. By using Critical Narrative Analysis (CNA) as advocated by Souto-Manning (2014), it is possible to create an analysis that can be connected to the contents and the transcripts of mass media based on the content of the narrative as an additional resource for interpretation.

## 3.3 Research Instrument

With regard to data analysis, the transcript for the research has been created in the emulation of the regular scripting for comic books and was directly adapted from the format provided by seasoned comic writer William Eisner (2008). The basic transcript was assembled from the direct source of digital comic books, with the pages labeled in accord with the actual contents of the comic. The following example was derived from a couple of panels of ‘Superman/Batman #50’:

**String 1, Superman/Batman #50, page 37**

***Abstract:** Superman and Batman express their affections toward each other via their personal inquiries about their fathers' actions in the past, after having realized that their father's contributions to their jobs enabled them to meet as superheroes.

***page. 37, panel 3**

Batman: He used to talk about his vision for Gotham. That was the word he used. His vision for the city Gotham could become someday. Now I know where that vision came from.

***page. 37, panel 4**

Superman: And I always wondered why my father chose Earth. There are hundreds of planets circling yellow suns. He could have sent me to any one of them. Now I know why he chose this one.

Figure 3.2 Comic Script Example

First, 'String' refers to a range of communication that happens within a context whereby a communication continues without interruption or a major scene change. Categorizing communication within a string helps the researcher categorize and manage transcripts and analyses. Second, 'Abstract' refers to a brief explanation about what happened within the selected communication string. Next, 'Page' refers to the page in which the communication piece happens. Finally, 'Panel' refers to the comic panels in which the communication piece happens. Symbols, quotation marks, bold, and italics were made as they appear in the comics. Translation of fictional languages was made using official DC comic guides. The instrument can be viewed further in Appendix A.

## 3.4 Samplings and Collection

### 3.4.1 Media Analyzed

The selected texts used for the study came from crossover comic '*Superman/Batman* and *Batman/Superman*, each issue having a length between twenty to forty pages. Both series were published after the event of September 11$^{th}$, 2001, which helped reinforce the theme of terrorism, paranoia, and issues of trust between superhero characters and friends. In addition, Russell (2012) provided an additional

reason for this style of selection, this being that the comics from the year 2000 onwards tended to have more consistent tones and writing quality. This theory suggested that this study should also only use books published after the year 2000 for the analysis.

The reason for using these comic books as the source materials was the corresponding premise of the books featuring 'Superman (Clark Kent)' and 'Batman (Bruce Wayne)' as partners and equal heroes. The books extensively explored the relationship between the two characters, which reflected the scope of this research. Specifically, the overarching themes of dialectics of friendship, dialectical tension, and solution through communication and the status quo of being 'frenemies' who worked together despite having different ideologies, masculine-driven egos, as well as constant power relationships.

3.4.1.1 Superman/Batman (2003-2011)

*Superman/Batman Vol. 1* (2003-2011) was a series of comic books published monthly by DC Comics from June 2003 through October 2011. The books were supervised under the then executive editorship of Dan DiDio from 2003 to 2010 and Eddie Berganza in 2011. The books published consisted of *92 issues* during the Modern Age of Comics and the *Post-Crisis* continuity. The writers of the books were: Jeph Loeb from issues #1 to #25, Sam Loeb et al for Issue #26, Mark Verheiden from issues #27 to #36, Alan Burnett from issues #37-42, Dan Abnett and Andy Lanning from issue #43, and many others. These various changes would inevitably pose questions with regard to consistency in writing. However, it has been indicated that despite the large variation in textual authorship, *Superman/Batman* as a comic book series has a reasonably consistent quality suitable for analysis.

Despite being written by several authors that sometimes varied within a single-issue, standalone story, and across a multiple-issue story arc, the stories depicted in *Superman/Batman* are usually complete within their own relative contexts. In addition, the narratorial structures were dictated to be consistent and similar to Joseph Campbell's monomyth format (Winterbach, 2006), which would consist of 'departure', where Superman and Batman met each other, 'initiation', where they engaged in conflicts, and 'return', where they engaged in a communication to discuss the aftermath of the event. The consistent and self-contained structures of the stories allowed the stories to be understood without a need to refer to additional comics outside the series,

and therefore allowed for consistent analyses. The premise of the comic books as self-contained stories means that characters must stay within their archetypical appearances and communicative patterns. The existence of the status quo for Superman and Batman also forced the character to be written not only consistently, but also into the structure of a coming-of-age story (Lightfoot, 2004, p. 27). Superman and Batman are characters that were expected to remain stable throughout the series, but can also be more rounded because the characters learn lessons by the end of a particular story arc. The structures of the stories and characters allow for consistent narrative and critical analyses, while also offering the possibility for readers to develop identity and ideology along with the tandem of superheroes.

In addition to the format given by the book, the consistency of the characters was being governed by the idea that the superhero is a *self-governing* concept. Superhero conceptualization demands that writers understand the fundamental essence of heroism in the character in order to write a successful story (Waid, 2014). Similarly, Coogan (2006) suggested that superhero motifs must capture the essential characteristic of a protagonist in order to create successful adaptations that resonate with readers. In this regard, fandom, suggestion letters, interviews, reader comments, and sales figures are a crucial part of quality control for superhero comics, which has become a significant factor made possible by modern technologies (Harris & Alexander, 1998). Audiences would typically demand consistent characterization of the hero, or else they would heavily criticize writers for not doing their jobs properly (Rhodes & Johnson, 2008). For example, Jones (2007) discussed a Batman writer Frank Miller, who has become less popular in the comic industry after his decline in writing ability, his more recent horrendous art styles and racially offensive writing techniques. His extreme expressions in his comics have raised questions of his authorial credibility and have implications for his conception of "image," especially his particular image of heroism in the post-modern society, despite being a comic book revolutionary in the 1980s. This implied that despite being regarded as a figure of popular culture, having been handled by multiple writers, there is a requirement of consistency in the writing of a specific superhero character

3.4.1.2 Batman/Superman (2013-2016)

*Batman/Superman Vol. 1* (2013-2016) is the subsequent book series to Superman/Batman. It was published from October 2013 to July 2016, lasting for *36 issues* under the New 52 branding and the supervision of the executive editor Bobbie Chase. In a similar fashion to the preceding series, the books use narrative structures and techniques to explore the dialectical relationship dynamic between Superman (Clark Kent) and Batman (Bruce Wayne) as superhero characters. However, several environmental factors have made the books possibly different from the preceding series, raising the question of to what extent the changes affect the depictions and popular perception of the two characters and the stories they have featured in.

First, unlike the preceding series, only a few writers were involved in the creative process. 30 of 36 issues of the series were written by an American writer Greg Pak, whose creative influences significantly dictated the image of the relationship between Superman and Batman; and he has also provided supplemental information about how he wrote and developed the characters (Egross, 2014). This means that the writing style and the status quo may provide standardized and consistent narratives that allow, allowing this study to retain its consistency despite analyzing the media from a different source.

Second, unlike 'Superman and Batman', the stories were not self-contained. They proceeded along with the canonical narrative of other superheroes throughout the New 52 initiative. For example, certain story arcs would not be completed within the series because the arc continued in other comic titles. Moreover, certain shifts of status quo have occurred in specific issues with minimal explanation. The poor management of *the New 52's* publication of new issues caused the books to be more difficult to follow. Analysis might provide different narratorial analysis when compared to its predecessor. However, because the narrative evolved alongside *the New 52* continuity, the heroes were progressive, three-dimensional characters that developed along with the status quo. It allowed Superman and Batman to have more potential for character development, especially of the friendship dynamic between Superman and Batman. Unlike *Superman/Batman*, these stories and characters are progressive in nature, and thus more effective to readers as coming-of-age stories (Lightfoot, 2004, p.

27) with possibly more power to dictate to audiences their perception of Superman and Batman as a dialectic undergoing development.'

3.4.1.3 Overall Counts

*All* of the comics in the selected categories were considered in making sure to have a sufficient sample size and a broad collection. Comic books that were qualified to be analyzed must: 1) feature Superman (Clark Kent) and Batman (Bruce Wayne) *of the primary universe*. 2) Superman and Batman must function as *the protagonists* of the issues instead of their protégés or replacements. 3) Stories that featured the two characters in extraordinary situations such as body swaps, mind shifts, and disguises were also qualified, so long as the two characters recognize each other as Superman and Batman. The total numbers of texts analyzed were as follow:

Table 3.1 Samplings

| Category | 'Superman/Batman' (Post-Crisis) | 'Batman/Superman' (The New 52) | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| All Available | 92 | 36 | 128 |
| Subjectable to Analysis | 70 | 25 | 95 |

The study followed a two-stage analytical plan: Content analysis (CA) and critical narrative analysis (CNA). The total available comics were 128 comic book issues. 95 (74.21%) contained the required interactions between Clark Kent and Bruce Wayne of the primary universe as well as sufficient plot elements of dialectical struggle to be analyzed under the subject of the study. This number included 70 issues of Superman/Batman from the 92 available issues (76.08% of the category) and 25 issues of Batman/Superman from the 36 available issues (69.44% of the category). The synopsis of the comic books can be viewed in Appendix A and Appendix B.

### 3.4.2 Source of Data Collection

The media used in the research were collected from issue-based comic books published by DC Comics, which contained around 20-40 pages per book contrary to trade paperback or omnibus collections, which might range between 90-300 pages. Text transcription was made directly from comic book pages. This was being done to be

more efficient at locating specific moments analyzed, writing abstracts and transcripts, and enabling detailed categorization of the studied materials.

### 3.4.3 Units of Analysis

The nature of communication in Superman/Batman and Batman/Superman comics consists of two primary components: the dialogue and the monologue. Dialogue refers to verbal communication that Superman and Batman have with each other, whereas monologue refers to each character's personal thoughts toward a situation or his partner. However, the unit of analysis of this study *would consist only of the verbal dialogues.* Dialogues analysis corresponds to 'relational dialectics' as interpersonal communication between friends (O'Boyle, 2014) and 'Hegelian Dialectics' as interactions that represent dialectical power struggles that affect interpersonal, social, and historical developments (Boulding, 1970; Papa et al., 2006; Riegel, 1976).

## 3.5 Stage 1: Media Content Analysis

### 3.5.1 Analytic Frameworks

#### 3.5.1.1 Content Analysis

'Quantitative media content analysis' refers to the analysis and conversion of the messages in mass media into numerical data that can contribute to the studies in language, meaning, and mass communication discourses (Lasswell, 1948b; Lasswell, Lerner, & Pool, 1952). Content analysis was initially used to study propaganda, later expanded to analyze various types of mass media and popular culture including narrative, films, television programs, brochures, newspapers, magazines, and comic books. In its early development, content analysis analyzed international relations, media effects, and cultural imperialism. This methodology was criticized for being outdated, focusing only on media effects and rejecting the capacity of audiences. This is a contrast to the findings of the 'audience-response' approaches in communication which have indicated audiences as active readers and no longer foolish enough simply to take media messages at face value (Rantanen, 2005). Researchers have expanded upon this particular method in communication analysis during the 20$^{th}$ century to

analyze more advanced communication technologies such as television, films, and radio.

In addition, analyses of films and television programs using the critical perspective were conducted to expose certain themes in the media such as violence, discrimination, and racism in the 1950s (Macnamara, 2005). In the 21st century, advanced technologies, including the internet, have expanded topics and themes in media content analysis to a greater extent (J. N. Martin & Nakayama, 2007). Studies using media content analysis today have explored the usages of language in both social and critical perspectives, including the ways philosophers have made critique on rhetoric, media ethics, media-mediation, violence in the media, consumerism of popular culture, male bias in patriarchal society, discrimination toward women, and political ideology of media producers. The method has been used commonly to 'unmask' or 'reinterpret' certain aspects of the mass media in order to encourage positive changes in how the mass media can be viewed and used in the post-modern and globalized society.

By its nature, content analysis is a reductionist approach (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 2005), condensing certain phenomenon into measurable units for analysis and comparison. Media content analysis is typically done by selecting certain pieces of media 'texts' which may range from newspapers, comic strips, comic books, television programs or films. Lasswell's (1948b) conception of media studies is based on the idea of "who says what, through which channels, to whom, with what effects" (p. 117). In addition, Lasswell et al. (1952) state, "content analysis operates on the view that verbal behavior is a form of human behavior . . . aims at describing, with optimum objectivity, precision, and generality, what is said on a given subject in a given place at given time." (p. 34) As such, the method was primarily considered a 'quantitative' one, involving systematic and measurable analyses.

A common criticism surrounding the quantitative media content analysis, as suggested by Macnamara (2005), is its innately low validity and reliability. Because of the inconsistent amounts of media used in any analysis, inaccuracy and subjective interpretation of the texts may emerge. Overall, content analysis, on its own, may not be effective enough to justify a coherent academic study; as such, researchers suggest that content analysis, at best, should be used as a secondary method to facilitate

inferences to be used to enhance other subjects and topics. As such, it is generally required that a research project have another primary method to triangulate methods and data sets and help ensure the validity and reliability of the analysis. Additional approaches toward media content analyses include integrating qualitative methods into the analysis processes. Media content analysis, with the aid of critical analysis, may help locate how language and communication are being used inside the media, what effects they have toward the audiences, what consequences such media have created in real life, and what changes can possibly be made toward improving societies that consume such media.

3.5.1.2 Dialectical Theory of Friendship (DTF)

Dialectical Theory of Friendship (DTF) is a theory proposed in the book *Friendship Matters: Communication, Dialectics, and the Life Course* (Rawlins, 2008). It analyzes the nature of communication and friendship patterns in American culture. Sivertsen (2003) indicated that DTF is a framework that can be used to analyze patterns and the nature of friendship existing in American contexts as a relationship that is voluntarily engaged to achieve mutual and moral bonds between two or more persons. Similar to relational dialectics, DTF deals with the existing tensions between opposing aspects that are in a constant struggle in order to generate specific types of communication traits. The dialectical tension and expression are emphasized especially in fiction where character conflict is a part of a writer's means to characterize and dramatize the characters, presenting them with challenges and difficulties that must be solved by the end of the story (Cattrysse, 2010). The selection of the communication pattern can be found at both intrapersonal and interpersonal levels. In an intrapersonal level of communication, a friend considers and selects a particular expression to show his traits and personality. At an interpersonal level, Superman and Batman express specific dialectical patterns to communicate, manage, and maintain the friendship relationship in order to progress the narrative. In the context of DTF, the theory is being used to examine how interpersonal conflict may happen when invoked by different perspectives in communication. DTF operates on an analysis of two components in relationship and communication acts: contextual dialectics and interactional dialectics.

Contextual dialectics refers to a distinction between the different contexts of communication in friendship. First, Rawlins (2008) classifies contexts as 'public'

and ‘private’. Public context refers to the situation dictated by public expectations and behavioral patterns. The private context concerns the communication expressed within private communications, which can show the person’s actual moral character. Next, there is a distinction between idealistic and realistic context communication. Idealistic context refers to the expected expressions that should happen in an interpersonal relationship. Realistic context meanwhile refers to what is possible or what actually happens in communication. It is believed that communication between Superman and Batman has a specific context enough to gloss over the analysis of the contextual dialectics. First, the relationship is likely to be *private* due to the nature of their secret identities and the way they communicate to strategize on a battlefield. The context is also likely to be *ideal* because writers and editors would carefully create stories in controlled and specific manners in order to achieve the idealistic outcome of the relationship instead of simulating real-life communication between friends. However, the degrees of idealism and realism discussed within communication themselves may vary among writers.

Interactional dialectics, meanwhile, refers to the possible choices of personality trait or expression a person may use to engage, maintain, and alter the dynamic of friendship during the stages of tensions occurring during interactions between friends. Interactional dialectics are the *key variables* that would be used to analyze the relationship between Superman and Batman because they are being expressed directly in verbal communication. Fortunately, the variables have already been categorized in a way that allows the researcher to conduct the quantitative assessment. Each of the variables has its own definition and pattern of expression that were defined by Rawlins (1998, 2008) as follows:

Table 3.2 Dialectical Theory of Friendship (DTF)

| DTF Framework | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Interactional Dialectics** | **1.1. Freedom to be Independent**<br>A need to pursue goals without the help of a friend | **1.2. Freedom to be Dependent**<br>A need to cooperate with a friend to achieve goals |
| | **2.1. Affection**<br>A need to care for a friend as an end in itself | **2.2. Instrumentality**<br>A need to care for a friend as a means to reach an end |
| | **3.1. Judgment**<br>A need to evaluate failures and weaknesses as worthiness in friendship | **3.2. Acceptance**<br>A need to accept a friend without questioning their quality<br>A need to accept successes, failures, strengths, and weaknesses as part of friendship |
| | **4.1. Expressiveness**<br>A need to reveal personal thoughts to praise or criticize a friend | **4.2. Protectiveness**<br>A need to conceal personal thoughts and criticism to not endanger the friendship |

Rawlins (2008) indicates that, first, the dialectic between 'freedom to be independent' and 'freedom to be dependent' refers to the tension between "the liberty to pursue one's life and individual interest without a friend's help" versus "the privilege of calling on or relying on one's friend in time of need" (p. 16). This is an important aspect of friendship in an American context. Such dialectics occurs when a person expresses a need to be either independent or dependent respectively with a friend in order to achieve a goal, which can take the form of both "choices for self and others" (p. 16). These instances may include moments where a friend says that he needs a partner's help, that he trusts him to do something that he will not interfere with a friend's problem, to direct his friend not to interfere with problems, etc.

According to Rawlins (2008), the tension of 'affection versus instrumentality' refers to the dynamic where the value of friendship where a person either expresses 'affection' or "the interpenetrated nature of caring for a friend as an end in itself" (p. 17). Alternatively, 'instrumentality' or "using one's friend to benefit self" (p. 17) is about how a person can rely on a friend for a utility purpose such as money, reputation, self-esteem, etc. Rawlins added that affection is a genuine expression in the Aristotelian tradition of friendship. Affection refers to a spontaneous reaction to a friend being in danger. Alternatively, it happens when a friend shows affection or praises his partner's appreciable qualities. Instrumentality, meanwhile, focuses more on the reasons behind the appreciation, such as being helpful to him.

Messages that indicated instrumentality tend to be more pragmatic and logical instead of emotional.

The tension of ‘judgment versus acceptance’ refers to a dynamic where a person is conflicted between judging the friend on their flaws, mistakes, or undesirable behaviors, whereas ‘acceptance’ refers to a person letting go of the friend’s flaws, mistakes, or undesirable behaviors. According to Sulivan, (as cited in Rawlins, 2008), “Evaluation requires criteria. A friend invokes certain standards by communicating either judgmental or accepting messages to another . . . Interaction with a friend is widely and duly celebrated for its potential to validate one's self-concept and enhance one's self-esteem.” (p. 20). These instances may include a friend verbally criticizing another for his mistakes or ignorance. The opposite happens when a friend says he forgives his friend or tells him not to worry about his mistakes.

Lastly, ‘expressiveness versus protectiveness’ refers to a dynamic where a person needs to either be expressive or protective about friendship. First, a person may be expressive by “developing and maintaining a friendship conversationally involves revealing personal thoughts and feelings and commenting on the messages and actions of one's friend,” (Rawlins, 2008, p. 22) or be willing to openly say what he thinks about his partner, which is not limited to criticism. A friend can also be protective when “[d]isclosing private concerns reveal areas of personal vulnerability, and unrestrained comments on the friend's ideas or actions may uncover areas of great sensitivity. Each friend tries to curb self-discourses that render him or her too vulnerable, preserve the other's confidences, and exercise restraint in commenting on touchy issues.” (Rawlins, 2008, p. 22). These expressions may include an attempt to change subjects, stop talking during a sentence, comforting the partner during bad news, etc.

### 3.5.2 Methodological Justification

The uses of CA and DTF as a research methodology directly corresponded with the core themes of friendship, reconciliation, and relationship development dictated by both relational and speculative dialectics. CA allowed the researcher to gather data governed by DTF in order to view communication and relationships that consist of antagonistic components adjusting to reach an equilibrium, with the primary goal being

to interpret dialectics as a discursive activity to encourage synchronization and meaningful changes in sociological and critical senses. Rawlins (2008, p. 8). In this study, DTF was used to analyze the manifestation level of the message's meaning, which can be seen through detonative events and recurring patterns of communication between Superman and Batman. A limitation of DTF was that DTF itself is an interpretative framework, utilized more commonly in qualitative analysis (Sivertsen, 2003), which could be problematic due to the ambiguity of the various ways language itself is being used. Therefore, CA was used in the first stage as a methodology to facilitate ideas instead of primary results. The reductionist results of the CA analysis must be incorporated with the qualitative analyses, which would be examined after the statistical analyses.

### 3.5.3 Procedure and Analysis

The first stage of research was made to facilitate the theme and materials of the research analysis to be used further in critical discourse analyses. It responded to the first research question concerning the quantitative media content analysis in accord with comic book analysis frameworks (Riffe et al., 2005) and theories in the communication and friendship fields.

The common type of quantitative content analysis in media texts required the uses of 'coders' (Riffe et al., 2005; Russell, 2012) as the selector of specific 'moments' that are used to analyze media text to attain specific 'themes' containing sufficient validity and are related to the subject. In this regard, the researchers adapted the interpersonal theories about Relational dialectics by DTF (Rawlins, 2008) as the coders to measure the pattern of communication and implied characteristics and relationship dynamics between the characters Superman and Batman. Captions were treated primarily as monologues, but may be treated as dialogues based on the context of the comic as follows:

Table 3.3 Quantitative Analysis Coders

| Coders Defined | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Theme** | **Definition** | **Example** |
| **1. Dependence**<br>(The need to cooperate with a friend to achieve goals) | Dialogue, captions, and/or imagery showing the character's declaration or suggestion to his partner that he needs his partner's help to achieve certain goals | SM: I've resigned myself to what's coming. And I'm not here in search of hope or sympathy, Bruce. **I'm here because I need you to find someone.**<br>BM: Who?<br>SM: Kara.<br>- *Batman/Superman #31* |
| **2. Independence**<br>(The need to pursue goals without the help of a friend) | A string of dialogue, captions, or imagery showing the character's declaration and/or suggestion to his partner that he does not need his partner's help to achieve certain goals | BM: Then why are you?<br>SM: I figured you could use a hand. Plus, now. The day job.<br>**BM: I don't need help. This is my city and my problem.**<br>- *Superman/Batman #85* |
| **3. Affection**<br>(The need to care for a friend as an end in itself) | Dialogue, captions, and/or imagery showing the character's praising or caring for his friend, with embedded reasons related to the character's humanity or love to the partner. | BM: To see the people of Earth the way they see them. Weak. Petty. Driven by hate and greed.<br>**SM:** Some humans, perhaps. There are always those who hate. A few willing to succumb to their basest instincts—**but not all. And never you.**<br>- *Superman/Batman #32* |
| **4. Instrumentality**<br>(The need to care for a friend for instrumental reasons) | Dialogue, captions, and/or imagery showing the character's praising caring for his friend, with embedded reasons related to the partner's utility | SM: Sorry I'm late.<br><Batman throws Batarangs at robots><br>**BM:** Don't worry. **You make a good diversion.**<br>*Superman/Batman #64* |
| **5. Judgment**<br>(The need to evaluate failures and weaknesses as worthiness in friendship) | Dialogues, captions, and/or imageries showing character criticizing the mistakes or flaws of the partner | **BM: You idiot!**<br>SM: What—<br>**BM: Mongul feeds off everything we do down here! If you're in the game, you'll just make him stronger!**<br>- *Batman/Superman #7* |
| **6. Acceptance**<br>(The need to accept a friend without questioning their quality) | Dialogues, captions, and/or imageries showing character accepting mistakes or flaws of the partner | SM: I'm sorry about the crack I made about Jason.<br>**BM: It's forgotten, but…**<br>- *Superman/Batman #16* |
| **7. Expressiveness**<br>(The need to use spontaneity, directness, and honesty to speak with the partner) | Dialogues, captions, and/or imageries showing character using honest or blunt expressions to the partner. | **SM: You know what I get sick of, Bruce? You kicking the crap out of me with your *toys.* When you're nothing but a *man.* A man who got to stay alive only because I *let* you.** |

| Theme | Coders Defined Definition | Example |
|---|---|---|
| | | - *Superman/Batman #15* |
| **8. Protectiveness** (The need to use indirectness, strategy, and rhetoric to speak with the partner) | Dialogues, captions, and/or imageries showing character using honesty or indirectness expression to the partner in an attempt to preserve the partner's feeling. | SM: What about the drone? Someone was watching. What if they came looking for us?<br>BM: I'll make a call. I won't leave anyone unprotected.<br>**SM:** I thought you didn't like asking for help. **Maybe we should come up with a code to make it easier for you? Something obscure you can say, so no one else will know you're admitting you need help. Like, oh, I don't know… "Banana muffin."**<br>- *Superman/Batman #29* |

'Dependence' or the 'freedom to be dependent,' referred to sentences that were showing how a character expressed that he himself was in need of his friend's help, or that he needed his friend to cooperate with certain tasks. On the contrary, 'Independence' or 'freedom to be independent', showed a character's rejection of having a friend's help, or a suggestion that a friend needed to accomplish his goal without his help.

'Affection' referred to sentences showing a friend's admiration for a friend's quality with embedded reasons of their humanity and strength that pleases, amazes, or surprises the character. Affection was more humanistic in nature compared to 'instrumentality', which referred to sentences that expressed how a friend cared for the partner because of the embedded benefits granted by the partner.

'Judgment' referred to sentences displaying how the character expressively judged or mocked a partner's actions or behaviors. It was usually followed by an explanation of the friend's faulty actions in his viewpoint. On the flipside, 'acceptance' referred to sentences that showed how a character acknowledged or deliberately ignore the partner's faults, either because he has come to understand the partner's behavior or he wishes to preserve his friend's feelings.

'Expressiveness' referred to sentences showing how the character bluntly or directly express his thought about his partner. The expressive dialogue could be ambiguous due to how it could overlap with dependence, independence, judgment, and affection. Therefore, statements that were deemed relevant to expressiveness must not

overlap with other coders. An opposite of expressiveness was ‘protectiveness’, which refers to statements where a character refrained from saying something or stopping saying something mid-sentence—because he realized his statement may hurt the partner. Protectiveness might also refer to sentences that were expressive of why he believes his statement may hurt the partner’s feelings.

Each of the comic-book ‘instances’ that had been analyzed using DTF were reported using the form designed to analyze media content analysis (See Appendix B), which would then define the communication pattern between the heroes. The interpretation of the comic page would be supported with documents and evidence that theoretically confirm the viewpoints of Western writers, philosophers, or audiences. Once analyzed, the number of themes and the patterns of dialectical friendship would be sorted into a table that counts the various communicative patterns that occur between the characters.

Inputting the frequency into a statistical program, the following variables were relevant to the analysis process. First, two variables were input to define the issues being analyzed. The first one defined the age of the comic book, to separate the results of ‘Superman/Batman’ and ‘Batman/Superman’, whereas the second variable defines the name of the issue. Next, the third variable distinguished the character who expresses the instant: either ‘Superman (Clark Kent)’ or ‘Batman (Bruce Wayne)’. The fourth variable defined whether an instant was a ‘dialogue’ or a ‘monologue’. The fifth variable characterized the ‘dialectical pattern’ to label the instance as one of the eight DTF components. Finally, the sixth variable counted the particular instances of the dialectical pattern happening to the assigned character in a specific issue, which was being examined to take the numbers as solid data instead of frequencies.

The statistical analysis of the six variables was made using a custom table, referring primarily to the total counts of each character in terms of each communicative pattern, and within a particular category of the book series. A mock table is displayed below:

Table 3.4 Mock Table (Cross Tabulation Frequency)

| | | Dialectical Pattern | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Dependent | Independent | Affection | Instrumentality | Judgment | Acceptance | Expressiveness | Protectiveness | Total |
| SM | Count | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? |
| | % | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? |
| BM | Count | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? |
| | % | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? |
| Total | Count | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? |
| | % | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? | ? |

Table 3.5 Mock Table (Chi-Square)

| Chi-Square Tests | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Value | df | Asymptotic Significance (2-sided) |
| Pearson Chi-Square | ? | ? | ? |
| Likelihood Ratio | ? | ? | ? |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | ? | ? | ? |
| N of Valid Cases | ? | ? | |

‘Superman’, ‘Batman’, and ‘Total’ refer to the row percentage of dialectical patterns within the same book series. The table was designed in this way for the purpose of comparing the differences in communicative patterns between the characters and the book categories.

Chi-Square was calculated from a statistical program to compare the difference and similarity between the two objects. The asymptotic significance (2-sided), or the .p value, was cited as an indication that answers research questions 1.1 and 1.2 regarding whether there are differences between multiple variables. Chi-Square and .p value; however, were not used to evaluate specific hypotheses or theories, just to make simple comparisons between the two characters and two book series in order to commit precise data analyses.

Once research question #1, as well as its sub-questions, have been analyzed and answered, this data will be used to conduct the research in ‘Stage 2’ as further empirical evidence to support the latent interpretation of the media texts.

## 3.6 Stage 2: Critical Narrative Analysis

### 3.6.1 Analytic Frameworks

Critical Narrative Analysis (CNA) was first devised by Souto-Manning (2014), who defined the framework as an interplay of media content analysis and critical discourse analysis. She indicated the problem in discourse analysis lies in the fact that despite the proposition that language, communication, and everyday life practices should be connected to the complex, inescapable institutionalized systems that contribute to power and domination. The focus of discourse analysis has frequently been about either power or institutional aspects of discourse, with researchers deliberately ignoring the actual usage of language and communication as evidential factors in an analysis. While Fairclough's traditional framework of critical discourse analysis (CDA) entailed an analysis of power relations and other industrialized aspects that have emerged from the media text as a dialectical practice (Fairclogh, 2009), narrative analysis is, in addition, an analysis of how to interpret stories. Souto-Manning has indicated that CNA would allow researchers to learn how the content of the narrative, especially dialogues and transcripts, create alternative or extensive interpretations of the specific social phenomenon that has been analyzed using CDA. She added that CNA could increase critical meta-awareness where a story is often a site for problem-solving. Through an analysis of narrative from a critical perspective, researchers realize the immediate effects narrative has toward audiences at the micro-level, and the institutionalized effects these narratives have on society at the macro-level.

CNA requires an exploration of the actual transcript of the media analyzed, accompanying it with latent interpretation and supportive pieces of evidence and literature to support the critical claims. As a part of identifying an analysis, the study of media text communication requires the researcher to identify how a transcript would be made, and how certain marks were being defined. The framework requires a delicate look at how words were used in relation to ideology and how the whole construct of communication contributes to the personality of the speakers and the intended effect the speaker had toward audiences. The analysis was also interested in how dialogues and stories were structured. Communicative turns, response patterns, visual cues, and

expressions all contributed to critical aspects of communication and power relations established within the context of the story, along with the message they provided for the audience. Souto-Manning (2014) believes that “listening to and analyzing the everyday stories people tell”, is an important step to invoke “positive social change” (p. 177). If media content analysis positions itself as a quantitative methodology, using a specific framework to count the recurrent amount of a communicative pattern, then CNA is the qualitative analysis where the content of the analyzed was being interpreted and compared to the wider social context and its attendant problems.

### 3.6.2 Methodological Justification

The use of CNA was useful because it integrates content and critical analysis, which cannot be done using traditional conversational analysis, narrative analysis or critical discourse analysis. Due to the nature of comic books being dominated by a conversation-like structure, narrative analysis (NA) was useful at facilitating fundamental rules and functions of analysis, but cannot dig into the essence of the analysis because of the simplified format of the texts and the interpretative nature of the method. Conversation analysis (CA) usually focused more on the structure and communicative timing of the conversation but was ill-suited to analyze the meaning that resided inside the texts. CDA was limited due to its heavy focus on the industrialized level of analysis of the texts, which got in the way of analyzing the text based on the actual content of the works. CNA was the most suitable for this research since it can extrapolate data created from Stage 1 as well as an analysis made directly from the communication transcripts as a part of building a case for the validity of the data.

According to Souto-Manning (2014), “If we are to engage in positive social change, we must start by listening to and analyzing the everyday stories people tell.” (p. 177). Fiction is made of several layers of narratives that research could explore and analyze. Firstly, the fictional narrative itself has a context that highlighted the literary work’s relevance to society. Fisher (1984, 1985), Sartre (1988), as well as Daiute and Lightfoot (2004) suggested that literary works display the writer’s intentions and critical perception of society. This is because stories have usually been written from the writer’s experiences and attitudes toward certain issues in society. The superhero genre

has been known specifically to represent, interpret, and critique historical elements in modern society. The characters and the situations usually reflect the writer's belief and attitude toward certain subjects (Aiken, 2010). In this case, writers of Superman/Batman and Batman/Superman had been assigned to interpret the dialectical relationship between the two characters, which might include which type of situation they should be in or what kind of interaction and reaction they should have. Overall, the researcher asserts that the stories and character development exhibited in the comic books suggest the writers' and editors' attitudes toward dialectical conflicts.

Secondly, character interactions serve as another layer of critical reflection. A properly written character would have definable personalities, attitudes, as well as believable actions and reactions within the stories. Good writers have a responsibility to depict how fictional characters seamlessly interact with each other as if they are real people interacting and reacting to one another within the world they live in. For example, even though the television show *Friends* featured characters acting according to scripts, conversations between characters were natural, believable, and capable of representing American friendship (Sivertsen, 2003). Superhero comics operate similarly. Superman and Batman, meeting each other during their shifts as superheroes, would interact with each other in a similar manner to colleagues holding conversations in the workplace. In addition, both Superman and Batman are iconic characters who have specific characterization and virtue ethics restricted by *status quo* and *popular consciousness*. Instead of writers and editors manipulating their characteristics, the characters are challenged to construct conversations that *make sense* in accord with their personalities and virtue ethics. This suggested that consistent quality is an innate requirement for writers and editors developing superhero protagonists.

Both of the above reasons explained and justified how critical narrative analysis was needed. The researcher believes that comic books were a reliable representation of the 'stories' Superman and Batman respectively tell as individuals and a collective. Overall, CNA was a justified methodology that would help to expand the understanding of the friendship discourse between superhero characters.

### 3.6.3 Procedure and Analysis

The second stage of research was made to answer research question #2: “How can the nature of the dialectical friendship between Superman and Batman explain any institutionalized elements within society concerning communication and dialectics?” Applying the results of the Stage 1 and critical narrative analysis to the contents of comic book texts, the research aimed to convey that the uses of semiotics and semantics in comic books are discourses related to several existing ideologies both inside and outside of texts that influence how the texts were written and how the texts have been received. These aspects may also influence succeeding works. Concerning the study’s main dialectical focus, the analysis was being made in order to partly understand and apprehend the operative elements that contribute to Superman and Batman’s relationship as viewed through speculative dialectic.

By utilizing CNA, several points can be made. First, messages and ethical preaching in narratives may be considered a part of hegemony and legitimizing common sense regarding human communication and the relationship dynamic, where popular culture platforms act as an institutional tool related to influence culture, ideology, power, and identity. Second, it allows the research context to be taken as a site of struggle where the casual view of antagonistic dialectics can be challenged by dialectics. CNA allowed the perspective to become more relevant to a critical study where communication is being analyzed in terms of power relations, the relationship dynamic, and identity construction created in fictional discourse. The analysis would serve as a metaphorical construction that inspires discourses in real life.

Corresponding to the interdisciplinary nature of discourse analysis, CNA conducted at this stage is divided into sections describing several important themes related to comic book heroism and dialectics, which are as follows:

#### 3.6.3.1 Narrative Structure as Dialectics

Chatman (1980, pp. 23-24) described the narrative structure as a system of semiotics that signifies expressions, forms, contents, and substance of the story. Superhero crossover narratives tend to be recurring narrative patterns as well as use recognizable tropes and characters. (Frimer, 2016). Such structure is connected to the core theme shared between the ‘Superman/Batman’ and ‘Batman/Superman’ comic books, which were about why Superman and Batman retained the status quo of

friendship (Maynard et al., 2009b). This heroic relationship was believed to be attained through rhetoric, hegemonic messages, and the innate narrative structure held as a tradition in the superhero genre and in superhero morality, which, in accord to Hegelian Dialectics, must be understood through the seemingly chaotic natures of conflicts and physical confrontations.

The goal of the analysis in this section is to find recurring structure, themes, and plot points that serve as entry points from which dialectics can be asserted as an alternative mode of perceiving the text in a critical manner while allowing for the potential to expand the texts of foreign dialectics into further research possibilities. Overall, the analysis in Stage 2 is being used to support the data obtained from Stage 1 as well as to facilitate ideas that can be used to form a discussion in Chapter 6—the discussion.

3.6.3.2 Friendship Development as Dialectics

Superman and Batman are being critiqued as characters with opposite traits and personalities. These polarities have been used as a primary selling point of the comic book series 'Superman/Batman' and 'Batman/Superman' in which the extent of the conflicting archetypes are explored within the context of them working as partners. Notably, the narrative techniques employed by the writers were being used to highlight similarities and differences the characters have attained as the story has progressed. However, due to the historical implications existing around the characters in real life and in the comic book canon, there have been constant changes regarding how the stories and characters were portrayed. Specifically, the framework must be able to analyze how the main character's communication and relationship dynamic plays out, especially in the wake of *the New 52* comic reboot, which reset and updated elements of the characters to fit post-modern perceptions of superhero protagonists. Further to this, the research examined how the power struggle was altered and became either unbalanced or rebalanced in accord with these changing dialectical frameworks.

CNA would select pieces of dialogues related to the frameworks of 'communication', 'heroism' and 'adult friendship' provided in the literature review as a guideline to conduct an analysis of the nature of the conflicting relationship between Superman and Batman. It would also provide an explanation of historical influences that may be helpful to understand the nature of the struggles faced by the two characters.

3.6.3.3 Hypermasculinity as Dialectics

The perception of the superhero comic as a source of conflict stems from the masculine nature of comic books in which violence and brutality were being critiqued as a source of violent behaviors relative to masculinity and a source of antagonistic, opinionated problems relative to superhero fandom and the competitive capitalist society. The study proposes that the problems of masculinity conflicts and ideologies are an innate issue that has been embedded in the superhero narrative, setting, and tone. Many times, these ideologies overwhelm some of the other intended messages. Notably, the issues of conflicts, arguments, and fist-fighting between superheroes may craft an incomplete perception of adult friendship and dialectics, should the audience stop looking beyond the masculine aesthetic and the 'risk' issues surrounding the masculine media.

This section would aim to select pieces of dialogues related to the frameworks of 'mass media' and 'masculinity' (as defined in the literature review) as a guideline to conduct an analysis of the issues of masculinity and risk society embedded in the texts.

## 3.7 Research Validity and Reliability

Overall, the research was formulated with the aim of contributing to expanding upon current knowledge in fields such as communication theory, heroism, and the field of socio-political science. This section establishes the detailed the validity of this study.

### 3.7.1 Research Validity

Research validity identifies the accuracy of the research instruments and designs in the way they have been intended for application. A valid methodology provides the answer needed for the study in order to ensure that subject matter and theoretical frameworks are compatible. 'Stage 1' dealt with the concept of communication and friendship and the analytic procedure of communication, as well as the recognizable communication pattern made by fictional characters. 'Stage 2' expanded upon such patterns with critical theories to analyze the dialectical nature of Superman and Batman.

Taken together, these aspects require an explanation to justify the study's validity and reliability.

3.7.1.1 Face Validity

Face validity asks whether the usage of frameworks make sense. In this regard, the perceived problem as seen in some recent studies of communication and dialectical tensions, especially those clouded by dogmatism, has been the development of skepticism and the act of antagonizing specific groups of people in order to invoke 'emancipation' where a social group is encouraged to overthrow certain agenda to be replaced with a new one. This can partly be attributed to the growth of 'risk society' or the abuses of modern communication, moral skepticism, and personal distrusts in communication, relationships, and the highly competitive capitalist society. Casual hero-worship is possibly a root cause of the negative habit of an 'enemy-making' viewpoint in political and historical development.

The concepts of 'friend' and 'enemy' were identified as antitheses. The former was interpreted as beneficial and the latter was identified as harmful to adult relationships. The studies of friendship have been considered a major part of relational and speculative dialectics as well as the development and maintenance of friendship as a practice grounded in interpersonal communication. Considering that an important aspect of any relationship starts in communication, analyzing communication within the bonds of friendship may be the starting point to facilitate ideas that lead to changes in the larger picture.

An interesting proposition about friendship indicated by the critical perspective is that it functions as a dialectical component in a struggle with an enemy, and it has consequently been suggested that the way to get rid of the concept of 'enemy' is to also get rid of 'friendship' (Derrida, 1993). This was not consistent with the researcher's belief since the concept of 'friend' still contains positive connotation and is desired over 'enemy' and the contradiction between friends and enemies is not necessarily a black and white matter. In fact, colleagues may simultaneously have supportive and antagonistic types of relationships in certain contexts such as being 'rivals' and 'frenemies'. The healthy rivalry has reinforced the idea that conflicts and arguments are mere parts of social development and human relationships. By lessening the dialectical gap between the way we understand the terms 'friend' and 'enemy', we

may be able to change how we view the relationship dynamic. The ‘frenemy’ as a synthesis aimed to explore evidence of higher idealistic relationships wherein a person does not need to agree with everything the partner says, but where they are still able to live with each other in a peaceful, compromising manner.

The research proposed that applying these concepts to Superman and Batman comics was a valid choice. These protagonists are perhaps some of the most famous heroic figures in modern popular culture. As suggested in the literature review, the characters Superman and Batman have been characterized as opposite archetypes of the same coin ever since the stabilization of the comic book story made in 1978’s *Crisis on Infinite Earth* and later the 1990s economic comic crash. This allowed them to function on the same principle of modern heroism but hold opposite worldviews and philosophies. With comic book narratives being simplified as communication, it was believed that analyzing the relationship dynamic between Superman and Batman made sense for both detonative and connotative senses. In a detonative sense, communication between two fictional characters would represent superheroes with interesting characteristics and entertainment values. In a connotative sense, the study might be useful at looking at a possible pattern of communication in both metaphorical and ideological senses. The study also examined the genre as something that can facilitate or inspire people to develop a certain outlook in communication, relationships, and the nature of reality.

In ‘Stage 2’, the research proposed that communication could be used to indicate the hegemonic and critical space of dialectics, as expressed in popular culture and globalization. CNA would allow the researcher to analyze the media text for the surrounding factors and implications that contribute to the comic book narrative. Studies of Superman and Batman books have been numerous, and the comparison between the two characters has been commonplace. Studying the dynamics of the two characters using the actual dialogues from the comic books in which they featured would strengthen existing research and encourage further studies in several subjects mentioned throughout this study.

Overall, the face validity of the research makes sense because of the connection between the research subject, theoretical theories, and social issues. Validity was further magnified once we look at the content and methodology.

3.7.1.2 Content Validity

Content validity is a requirement for studies in social science to make a connection between the contents analyzed to any theoretical concepts surrounding the content. Roberts, Priest, and Traynor (2006) stated, “Fundamentally, content validity depends on the extent to which an empirical measurement reflects a specific domain of content." (p. 20). In other words, the theory and the result from the measurement have more validity when they accurately reflect the content they explored and the measurement should be able to link abstract concepts to empirical results and the exploration of underlying concepts. For example, the friendship theory is valid when analyzing contexts where the characters are being framed as 'friends'. This is related to the contents being studied, the ‘Superman/Batman’ and ‘Batman/Superman’ comics which corresponded to the current research.

The fundamental aspect of content validity in ‘Stage 1’, referring to the uses of the Dialectical Theory of Friendship (DTF), is the degree to which the theory directly responded to the subject of friendship dynamic explored in the ‘Superman/Batman’ and ‘Batman/Superman’ comic as a form of entertainment, popular culture, and as heroic hegemony. DTF would explore the possible patterns that may happen between friends including the degree of dependence and independence, as well as the characteristics of the communicative partners as different archetypes in the friendship relation. One of the measured aspects of friendship that DTF evaluated was the tension between affection and instrumentality, which according to Sivertsen (2003, p. 6), was in accord with the idea that the characters of Superman and Batman have always been interesting to both comic writers and philosophers. The two characters could be interpreted in both a denotative manner (where they have been forced to be a couple of ‘odd’ friends with highly contrasted personalities), and connotative manners (where the cooperation between the two characters refers to the integration of metaphorical constructs and different schools of thought, particularly classical idealism, and skepticism). The ‘Superman/Batman’ and ‘Batman/Superman’ comics, as a medium, were designed specifically to explore the extent of such friendship dynamics, where Superman/Batman’ represented the veteran friendship of the two contrasting units following the restoration of comic book idealism after 1996’s *Kingdom Come* and the comic book’s industrial breakdown from anti-heroism and its

newly perceived lackluster narrative quality. Meanwhile, ‘Batman/Superman’, as a part of the 2011 reboot or reintroduction of the concept for new comic fans to the narrative, represented the *starting point* of the conflicting relationship between the characters, who had no prior history or relationship, and were at the time being portrayed as highly unstable because of bias and prejudice.

The measurement of communication patterns using DTF was to be used as empirical evidence to connect communication patterns to the latest interpretation of the two characters as patterns that have allowed contrasting yet cooperative archetypes. Moreover, the measurement related to the possible statistical difference between the data set from the analyzed comics could be used to enhance the correlation between the different ‘contexts’ of the superhero characters.

The content validity of ‘Stage 2’ has been related to the latent-level interpretation of communication relative to heroic archetypes and hegemony. The uses of Critical Narrative Analysis (CNA) are particularly useful for analyzing the content of the two sets of comic series because the books were designed to have specific qualities and rhetorical patterns to enforce themes that may be glossed over in other books. Dialogues help to identify and reinforce the friendship of Superman and Batman as people and concepts. The communications and relationship contributed to a popular heroic message reinforcing ideologies where audiences do want to believe in the triumph of the ‘good’, the exploration of a human’s capacity as a social being, and an idealistic image of the society we desire to live in. CNA required the researcher to look at the communication of the characters themselves in order to identify the rhetorical and critical techniques used to enforce these ideas. Thus, it can be useful at connecting the content to existing researches and theories. Communication in the comic book has provided a research context to access themes of friendship and relationship dynamics between fictional characters as a reflection and a metaphorical image of an ideal relationship. The text itself, the theories of communication, the exploration of the heroic images, and the ethical hegemony were all connected.

Overall, the content validity of the research design and methodologies concerned the nature of the comic book analyzed ‘Superman/Batman’ and ‘Batman/Superman’ to have sufficient quality for the analysis. The use of communication in the content allowed the researcher to access themes of friendship and

relationship dynamics between fictional characters as a reflection and a metaphorical image of an ideal relationship. The book and the theories of communication, heroic archetype, and ethical hegemony are connected and create a strong construction that can be studied and applied in real life.

3.7.1.3 Construct Validity

Construct validity is a required assessment of validity by social science, mainly because face and content validity has often been perceived as too weak to justify the respective research (Heale, 2015; Riffe et al., 2005; Roberts et al., 2006); furthermore, criterion validity tends to be difficult to locate given the interpretative nature of abstract concepts such as friendship and heroism. Construct validity refers to the establishment of a connection between theoretical constructs, the instruments, and the general goal of the research as an accurate measurement of the data analysis. The connection of theories and procedure concerns four themes: communication, heroism, popular media, and globalized discourse; each of which corresponds directly to specific analytical frameworks and indirectly to others. However, they all contribute to a common end goal.

First, communication directly corresponds to DTF frameworks in which the original concept was relative to the study of interpersonal relationships and communication patterns found in either real life or media texts. DTF as a framework is defined by four sets of 'intentional dialectics' in communication referring to the communicative technique or tensions between patterns used by a person to convey feeling to the communicative partner in an attempt to maintain friendship at healthy and satisfying levels (Sivertsen, 2003). The other relationship between DTF and 'Stage 1' was related to a number of conceptual links around a superordinate idea. Heroism is the most connected concept, mainly because the construction and perception of the heroic protagonists are expressed through a communicative pattern signified by Superman and Batman's monologues and dialogues, and friendship has a direct correlation with personality traits and archetypes (Blieszner, 1989). The popular media framework was relative because the comic book as a platform is a medium emphasizing communication, verbal cues, and character gestures. Globalized discourse is relative to communication because communication is a tool used in a hegemonic manner to assert certain ideologies over and toward foreign cultures, and analysis of this communication

can be useful in influencing society in both positive and negative ways. The goal of this research; therefore, was to analyze communication as a tool that positively improves how people view relationships between people from within the praxis of different ideologies.

Secondly, heroic friendship was considered relative to popular media at the institutionalized level. Globalized popular media, as mentioned in the framework, concerns the commodification of people and concepts. Superhero characters are characters created and governed as commodities and their concepts have become recognizable symbols that represent specific types of people and contain specific values for audiences. The respective archetypes need to remain consistent in order to connect with the audiences, and their values as heroes must have the power to connect to audiences at the intercultural levels and the critical hegemonic levels as defined by CNA. As such, heroism and popular media also respond to the globalized discourse, social frameworks and the ability of the media to reinforce the image of heroic protagonists. This type of investigation helped raise awareness in order to reduce social problems regarding conflicting ideologies—as well as hatred and distrust created by postmodern philosophies, risk society, and social disruption.

The themes and frameworks established in this research are all connected, and they support each other as interconnected stages of methodology, which can be depicted through the following diagram:

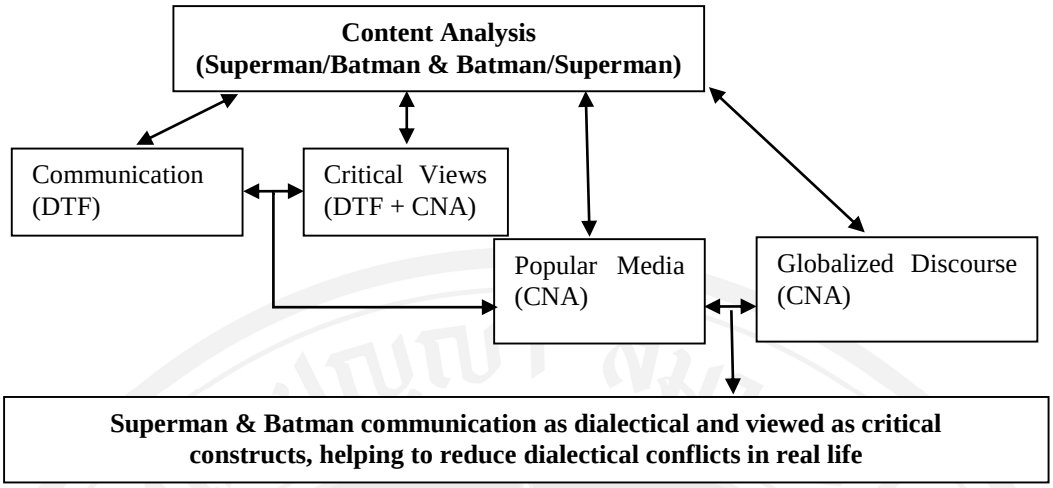



Figure 3.3 Theoretical and Methodological Construct

### 3.7.2 Research Reliability

Research reliability concerns the *consistency of measurement*, which refers to "the extent to which an experiment, test, or any measuring procedure yields the same results on repeat trials" (Carmines & Zeller, 1979, p. 11). Reliability, therefore, concerns how an instrumentalized test or procedure produces consistent or correlated results.

The majority of issues in reliability concern the statistical problems that can happen when using quantitative analysis; in this case, 'Stage 1' of the research methodology. The analysis of content was being dictated by a specific selection of books that were not randomized. According to this particular research design, all the books, except those that did not conform to the minimum requirements of the analysis, were to be analyzed. Consequently, with no randomization and selection of comic books out of the available sources, there should not be an issue regarding reliability, provided that all available conversations were analyzed in a consistent manner. In this case, a string of continued communication was analyzed as '1 frequency' based on the theme dictated by the DTF and the character who expresses such a theme. As a result, this means that the frequency and percentages were determined by the frequency of the communicative turns—rather than the number of comic issues.

However, the aspect of reliability for this research could be problematic due to the *qualitative* methodology of 'Stage 2'; and it was difficult to find reliability within an interpretative analysis—given that previous researches in qualitative methods vary

in both contexts and focus. Regardless of this factor, it was possible to secure credibility with the combination of the overall theoretical construct, the supplemental theories of previous research projects, the transcription of the contents and the quantitative data provided by ‘Stage 1’ to improve the quality of the research.

## 3.8 Summary

This chapter has described the research methods used in this research. The study used mixed methods of content analysis and critical narrative analysis. First, the study started with the identification of language and communication patterns produced by Superman and Batman when they interact as either friends or enemies. In light of this, the Dialectical Theory of Friendship (DTF) has been utilized to create quantitative data that it is hypothesized will suggest the nature of the two characters as representative of two individuals sharing a close relationship, despite the external differences between the two. This data would serve as a foundation on which to base the second stage of assessment. Such communication data was evaluated again using CNA during the second stage to understand the narrative at an institutionalized level, producing a meta-awareness, whereby the contextual apprehension of Superman and Batman as populist ethical hegemony can aid in understanding.

# CHAPTER 4

# STAGE 1 RESULT

## 4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides examples of the results conducted using the methodologies covered in Chapter 3: Methodology to conduct the first stage of the analysis. In the first half of the result, this study aims to quantify the communication pattern between Superman and Batman using content analysis (CA). The researcher adapted the 'Dialectics of Friendship' (DTF) proposed by Rawlins (2008) to analyze the comic book contents into data.

DTF identifies instances of relational dialectics based on the dialogues expressed in communication between the two characters into four pairs of eight possible instances: 'Freedom to be dependent or freedom to be independent', 'affection or instrumentality', 'judgment or acceptance', and 'expressiveness or protectiveness'. Each pair represents the tension that happens within the expression of friendship. Each item also suggests the dialectical patterns expressed by Superman and Batman, which show how they engage in friendly communication.

The data analyzed was entered into a statistics program to calculate total frequencies for the dialectical patterns as well as the Chi-Square and p. value that could indicate the communication patterns that answer the sub research questions. RQ1.1 asks, "is there a difference between the patterns of dialectical friendship between Superman and Batman?", which requires Chi-Square to determine whether the communication patterns for Superman and Batman are statistically similar or different. In a similar vein, RQ1.2 asks, "is there a difference between the patterns of the dialectical friendship of Superman and Batman between Modern Age and the New 52?", which requires a similar analysis to indicate whether the writing styles of the two series are similar or different. In both cases, Chi-Square and p. values were not used in the analysis to support a specific hypothesis or theory, but to determine whether

communication patterns between characters and between book series must be analyzed separately or if they can be generalized. If the p. values signified there were significant differences, the study would make separate sections for the analyses. Otherwise, the study would not separate the data.

The results of the p. values comparison would lead to an analysis of DTF and Hegelian Dialectics. These frameworks were being used in this part of the study to summarize, describe and predict communication patterns seen in superhero comic books.

## 4.2 Communication Patterns (Post Crisis)

An input of five variables in the statistical program yielded a result as a table showing the percentage of communicative patterns expressed through friendship, as seen in the Post Crisis continuity, as follows:

Table 4.1 Communication Patterns (Post Crisis)

| | | Dialectical Pattern | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Dependent | Independent | Affection | Instrumentality | Judgment | Acceptance | Expressiveness | Protectiveness | Total |
| SM | Count | 5 | 2 | 6 | 1 | 9 | 1 | 68 | 3 | 96 |
| | % | 100% | 50% | 50% | 16.7% | 40.9% | 14.3% | 48.6% | 37.5% | 46.1% |
| BM | Count | 0 | 2 | 6 | 5 | 13 | 6 | 72 | 5 | 110 |
| | % | 0% | 50% | 50% | 83.3% | 59.1% | 86% | 51.4% | 62.5% | 53.9% |
| Total | Count | 5 | 4 | 12 | 6 | 22 | 7 | 140 | 8 | 204 |
| | % | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% |

Table 4.2 Communication Patterns (Post Crisis – Chi-Square)

| Chi-Square Tests | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Value | df | Asymptotic Significance (2-sided) |
| Pearson Chi-Square | 11.674[a] | 7 | .112 |
| Likelihood Ratio | 14.194 | 7 | .048 |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | .635 | 1 | .425 |
| N of Valid Cases | 204 | | |

a. 10 cells (62.5%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.84.

The results from the Superman/Batman comics show that ‘freedom to be dependent’, Superman attained five instances (100%) while Batman showed none (0%). Next, both characters exhibited two instances of ‘freedom to be independent’ (50%). For ‘affection’, both Superman and Batman showed six instances (50%) For ‘instrumentality’, Superman showed one (16.7%) instance whereas Batman displayed five (83.3%). Meanwhile, Superman displayed nine instances of ‘judgment’ (40.9%) whereas Batman exhibited thirteen instances of ‘judgment’ (59.1%). Superman showed one instance of ‘acceptance’ (14.3%) while Batman showed six instances in this category (86%). Superman and Batman displayed dominant instances of ‘expressiveness’ at sixty-seven (47.9%) and seventy-three (52.1%) respectively. On the other hand, Superman only showed three instances of ‘protectiveness’ (37.5%) while Batman showed five instances in the category (62.5%). Surprisingly, Batman attained more expressions compared to Superman despite him being an antisocial character. Overall, the tension between the two variables had a mixed result. However, there was no significant difference in how Superman and Batman communicated (.sig = .112, df = 7, p. value = .999997 > 0.05).

The tension between ‘freedom to be dependent’ and ‘freedom to be independent’ was defined as the instances where “each friend grants the other a pair of contradictory prerogatives” (Rawlins, 2008, p. 16). As summarized by Sivertsen (2003), “freedom to be dependent is the privilege to rely on a friend for support or help in times of need” (p. 6). ‘Freedom to be dependent’ concerns a declaration or a statement where a friend holds a reservation or a right to make his partner do something for him, whereas ‘freedom to be independent’ demands an opposite notion. This indicates how Superman or Batman gives a statement or a declaration to reserve or use a right to rely or not rely on a friend to complete a specific mission.

In the *Post-Crisis* continuity, Superman is the only person who expresses such a need to be dependent. At the beginning of the *Chapter K* arc (*#44*), Superman approaches Batman to ask him to help get rid of all Kryptonite in the world. The following dialogues happen:

**Superman:** ***Lana*** once joked that I should just superspeed around town and collect it all. Stick it in a garbage truck and pitch the load of it into the ***sun.*** I was thinking… maybe we ***should.***

**Batman**: You mean… clean up the ***whole*** world? ***All*** of it?

**Superman**: I can only save as many people as I can be there for. I don't want to ask you this, Bruce. But I have to. Will you ***help*** me?

**Batman**: You'll need a reinforced lead-lined suit… Then we'll need a ***map.***

(Superman/Batman #44, p. 20)

The above statement clearly shows Superman's desperation and a dialectical tension occurring between intrapersonal independence and dependency, as he "don't want to ask" Batman for help, but he "have to". Ultimately, he chooses to depend on Batman's intelligence and gadgets to help with his quest. The word "we" emphasizes the agency of Superman desiring Batman to help. This response to the aforementioned privilege of friendship, although the struggle also suggests that freedom to be dependent somehow conflicted with Superman's pride.

Superman also displays the freedom to be dependent as he is giving his partner a choice to cooperate with him to defeat an enemy. In *#33*, the Blackrock aliens, having been convinced that humans are evil, are ready to purge Earth's population. However, Superman convinces the aliens to reconsider their decision. The Blackrocks notice that Batman has a bomb that he will use in an attempt to kill them; therefore, they decide to observe his action. As a result, Superman convinces Batman to disarm his bomb in order to make peace with the aliens. The dialogues go as follows:

**Batman**: They're not ***listening.*** If we don't stop them ***now—***

**Superman:** They're ***listening*** in their own way. But they're conflicted. If they can see into my mind… They can also see into yours. Despero told them that the human race wasn't worth preserving. Luthor ***confirmed*** it.

Now it's up to ***you.*** They ***know*** your intentions. They're waiting to see if you ***act*** on them.

**Batman**: You're asking me to make a leap of faith. To believe they're capable of change.

**Superman**: And maybe you've been fighting in the ***dark*** so long you forgot there can be ***light.*** They were ***misled.*** Give them a chance to make this ***right.***

**Batman**: You **trust *them.*** Like I ***trust you?***

<Batman disarms his bomb.>

**Batman**: If you're wrong—God ***help*** us.

(Superman/Batman #33, pp. 20-21)

Providing freedom of cooperation and trust is a crucial part of the friendship between colleagues (O'Boyle, 2014). In this instance, there is an immediate threat that the protagonists need to defeat. Superman *chooses* to provide Batman a choice between cooperating with him or risk destroying the world. This freedom of dependent conflicts with Batman's own freedom of independent. This responds to Rawlins' (2008) statement claiming that freedom to be dependent "engender choices for self and others" (p. 16). Interestingly, Rawlins added that freedom to be dependent naturally conflicts with the partner's freedom to be independent. As such, Superman's dependency and Batman's independency become a form of dialectical struggle in seeking the best possible solution to end the conflict.

Another form of dependency occurred as Superman highlights his trust in Batman in *#49*, where Superman *chooses* to rely on Batman to keep one last piece of Green Kryptonite regardless of how dangerous it is to him. This instance shows Superman was engaging in a friendship activity where Clark provides Bruce a privilege to use Kryptonite to chase his own goal, using Kryptonite as a backup weapon to defeat Superman.

On the flip side, Superman shows 'freedom to be independence' as a form of negotiation that happened in dialectical friendship (Rawlins, 2008, p. 16). In *Superman/Batman #22*, Superman and Batman are held captive in a prison. The following dialogue happened:

**Batman**: Are you ready to do this?

**Superman:** I still think we should stay together.

**Batman:** We need better intel. My way is more effective.

**Batman:** Go.

**Superman:** One hour, Bruce.

**Batman:** Just do your job.

**Superman:** One hour or I swear, I will tear this building down around them.

(Superman/Batman #22, pp. 2-3)

Similarly, the following dialogue from *#69* shows Superman and Batman planning an attack on an alien disguising as a businessperson named Anderson Gaines:

**Superman**: Right. Well, if he wants another shot at me, then I'll make it easy for him to—

**Batman:** ***No—!***

**Superman:** Pardon—? What do you mean "no"?!

**Batman:** Just hear me out. Openly going after what the world thinks is a benevolent philanthropist is not the smartest move. He's become too visible and probably too well protected for any kind of ***direct*** attack. Now… we know Anderson Gaines is the Durlan terrorist. But think for a moment… He doesn't know ***we*** know about it. That's the kind of strategic advantage I like.

**Superman:** So now what?

**Batman:** Well, you're probably right about ***one*** thing: This is Durlan versus Kryptonian. It may be just as simple as that. Terrorists aren't typically multidimensional thinkers. This is guerrilla warfare. We have to fight ***dirty*** if we're going to effectively draw him out.

**Superman:** Fine. We'll play it your way for now. But if he really wants to restart an ancient war fought and settled a

> millennium ago… I'll be more than happy to ***finish*** it for him.
>
> (Superman/Batman #69, pp. 21-22)

Both instances share a pattern in which Superman is stopped by Batman in his actions, suggesting that the "direct" attack does not work against the alien and Superman has to fight "dirty" to win. There exists a tension where Superman has to deal with an urge to depend on Batman to solve his problems, but there is also an urge to "finish" the fight and to act on his own accord if Batman's plan does not work. This form of negotiation was contradictory freedoms and verbal banters between the two characters. As such, this pattern corresponds with DTF's notion of dependent/independent as a power struggle. It provides an answer to the question that asked: "who has more freedom to be constrained by the other's choice." (Rawlins, 2008, p. 16). In these two cases, Superman compensates his ego to give freedom of cooperation to Batman, although he makes sure he is only willing to tolerate Batman's plan to a certain extent before he stops giving him such privilege.

Batman's display of a need for independence occurs sometimes in the comics. In *#28*, Superman and Batman tangle in a battle against a giant gorilla, prompting Batman to say to Superman that he would "better not wait for you!" This is seen as a tension between freedom to be dependent and freedom to be independent because Batman had a choice to get Superman's help during the battle, but decides not to. Freedom of independent, as framed by Rawlins (2008), tends to focus on the uses of independency to fulfill the individual's end goal. Batman's independency implied he adheres to the perceived benefits of working alone over the benefits of working with a partner.

In another case, Batman shows an absolute statement of his freedom to be independent in *#55*. Batman has acquired Superman's power and developed an obsession with fighting crimes around the world. Meanwhile, a mugger shoots the depowered Clark Kent and puts him in a coma. Clark's friends bring him to the JLA Watchtower to be treated. The heroes remark Batman's absence and the possible effects Kryptonian superpowers had toward his mind. Batman, overhearing the conversation, approaches, and yells at them. Observe the following dialogues:

**Batman:** Go ahead, Diana, ***say it.*** It's what you're all thinking. The power's gone straight to my head. A little ***clichéd,*** don't you think?

**Superman:** Bruce, no. We're your ***friends.*** We just want to know you're okay.

**Batman:** ***I'm fine.*** I've never felt ***better.*** You haven't seen me because I've been busy. Working, training, ***honing*** these new powers. ***Making the most of them.***

**Superman:** And I know how hard that must be.

**Batman:** Don't ***patronize*** me, Superman. You don't get it. For me, it's not hard ***at all.*** You're always talking about not being human. About how your gifts are a ***curse.***

**Superman:** Batman… ***Bruce…*** Listen to me, just listen—

**Batman:** ***To what?*** More whining about being ***different?*** Your powers aren't a ***curse.*** They're what ***I've always wanted.*** To never have to stop. To be everywhere, anytime. To save ***everyone.*** I never realized it until now. The ***responsibility*** you have. And all you want is to be ***normal?***

**Wonder Woman:** You're not making any sense. You need to ***calm down…***

**Superman:** Let us ***help you***, Bruce.

**Batman:** I didn't come here for ***help.*** I came here to tell you ***not to come after me.*** As long as I have these powers I'm not stopping. I ***can't.*** The responsibility is too ***great.*** The chance to fix ***so much.*** Not just in Gotham. Not just in one place. ***In all of them.*** The rest of you can handle the daytime. You're more than capable. When you find Banshee, we'll make the switch back. But until then… I'm staying in the ***night.***

(Superman/Batman #55, pp. 9-11)

The excerpt shows Batman rejecting Superman's offer for help coping with his newfound Kryptonian superpowers. Rejecting offers and giving reasons alone may suggest expressiveness instead of independency, however, what distinguishes this particular statement from the similar rejection happening in *#85* is the degree to which freedom to be dependent and personal agency are being expressed. The statement "I came here to tell you not to come after me" provides a distinctive declaration to establish Batman's "freedom to be independent" as well as a borderline threat to his friends. This particular statement has a common tone to the classical "You are either with us or against us" statement used in political contexts to decide whether someone is a friend or an enemy (Zaal et al., 2015). This particular statement serves two purposes. First, it emphasizes Batman's personal belief and agency. Second, it limits the freedom of other people to be dependent on Batman, responding to the idea which independency conflicts and struggles with another person's rights (Rawlins, 2008, p. 17). Indeed, Batman's insanity eventually leads him to attack and cripple Superman and all his friends who try to stop him. These instances show a danger of the tension between dependency and independency being taken too far and invoke negative consequences. This also damages their friendship to the point the two need to reconcile their friendship.

'Affection' and 'instrumentality' are behaviors selected to highlight whether a friend cares for his partner either genuinely or as a means to serve other goals (Rawlins, 2008, p. 17). This, specifically, determines how one structures sentences and how one approaches a friend in addressing his problems or issues. On the one hand, instrumentality shows a friend caring for a partner only to benefit oneself. On the other hand, affection displays spontaneous or genuine acts of caring that a friend has toward his partner without implications related to benefits in friendship. Unlike instrumentality, the context and the tone of the speech provide a sense of emotion, urgency, and humanity.

From the results, both Superman and Batman have shown more affection than instrumentality. Both characters have displayed similar behaviors in terms of genuine care for each other. On the basic level, affection was being used to express immediate care or worry for the partner. Batman's affection occurred in *#1*. Metallo shot Superman with a Kryptonite bullet and threw the hero into a hole, prompting Batman to rush to

his side to heal him despite that so doing causes him to be attacked by the villain afterward. Similarly, Superman's affection occurred as an immediate concern over Batman's well-being. In *#2,* Batman saves Superman from Metallo using an explosive, which sends him down the sewer where he nearly drowned. Superman, in response, panics and worries that his friend might die. A similar type of affection appeared in #75, where Superman is injured and Batman insists most here while Batman and the Legion of Superheroes travel through time to hunt down the villains. During the *Absolute Power* arc *(#14-#18),* Supervillains from the future change history by killing Superman and Batman's parents, then adopt the two as their own. This causes the protagonists to develop a sibling-like relationship. Both characters are actively expressing affection toward each other. Superman and Batman's expressions are an immediate and spontaneous reaction to the partner being injured and do not hold any sign of instrumental reason. As such, it was likely that their expressions were genuinely based on the context of the story.

In other instances, affection was commonly used as a voluntary or obligatory expression in friendship. In *Superman/Batman Annual #2*, Batman is cursed by a villain and must face his worst nightmare and is driven to despair. However, Superman comforts him and restores his sanity. Observe the following conversation:

**Batman:** It's all for nothing… it's all for nothing…

**Superman:** ***…Bruce… Bruce… Batman.*** Batman, listen to me. The work you do… the war… It's won ***every time*** you save a life. ***One life.***

**Batman:** Win… I can win? A life like ***mine.***

**Superman:** I thought… I was ***finished***. That I had lost my ***purpose…*** But… because of you, I know a ***man*** can be anything he wants to be. ***You*** gave me ***hope,*** like you do so many others. ***Please…*** let that count for something. Come back.

<Bruce Wayne recovers his consciousness>

**Batman:** I… Thank you.

(Superman/Batman Annual#2, pp. 36-37)

The conversation showed one of the clearer examples of affection shown by either character. Affection, as a form of caring, was usually dictated by sincerity and humanity (Rawlins, 2008). Superman expresses both as the experiences that he cited truly happen, and Batman's virtue is a well-established characteristic acknowledged in their friendship. An interesting aspect of this quote is how Superman framed his sentence to show affection. An emphasis on "you" signifies the importance of Batman playing a key role in solving dialectical conflict despite Batman's insulting him throughout the book. He also cites Batman's utility as a means to show his own affection toward the Dark Knight.

According to Rawlins (2008), affection is both a voluntary and obligated dialectical pattern. When a friend's affection conflicts with another's agenda, it can "sour" a relationship (ibid, p. 19). Throughout *The Enemy among Us* story arc *(#28-#33),* Superman and Batman took a turn being controlled by alien monsters to attack one another. Observe the following conversation:

**Batman:** Look at you, ***alien.*** Fighting for a world that's ***terrified*** of your power.

**Superman:** Bruce—It's ***controlling*** you. ***Warping*** your mind! These thoughts, they're all lies, all—***Mmpph!***

**Batman:** ***No!*** They're only giving me the same chance they gave you. To see the people of Earth the way ***they*** see them. Weak. Petty. Driven by ***hate*** and ***greed.***

**Superman:** Some humans, perhaps. There are always those who hate. A few willing to succumb to their basest instincts—but not ***all.*** And never ***you.***

…

**Batman:** You think you can scare the rock into ***abandoning*** me… but the ***aliens,*** they've been inside your ***mind.*** They know you better than yourself—They understand your vaunted morality… They know you would never ***kill.*** know you would never kill.

<Superman punches Batman>

**Batman:** ***Nghhh!***

**Superman:** In any other situation, they'd be ***right.*** But I know ***you.*** And I know the Batman would prefer ***death*** before losing his ***soul.*** I'll do whatever it ***takes*** to bring Bruce Wayne back. Or to give him ***peace.*** I ***forced*** you to turn to the Blackrock—just to ***survive!*** The aliens turned us against ***each other.*** That's over. I want my *friend* back—I want it to let you—***GO!!***

(Superman/Batman #33, pp. 5-7)

In *Superman/Batman #33*, Batman is possessed by Blackrock the aliens. Superman expresses his affection while The Man of Steel punches Batman repeatedly in order to free him from the mind control. The same type of affection has been used to cure depression and doubt. In this case, superhero narratives are filled with dangers as well as frequent instances where friends were being forced to fight each other. Obligation to express care for a friend seems to be a natural reaction Superman and Batman have when they find a need to protect or save each other.

Batman displays instrumentality when he finds a need to express care for Superman primarily to guide himself and his partner to achieve a specific goal. In *#33*, Batman expresses care for Superman in a way that emphasizes instrumentality over affection. Observe the following conversation:

**Superman:** They knew they needed an army, so they ***created*** one. Using the people of ***Earth.*** The controlling intelligence is in the ***ship*** that appeared over Metropolis.

**Superman:** That's the key. I have to get ***inside.***

**Batman:** I'll go ***with*** you. You're not going in ***alone.***

**Superman:** You still don't ***trust me.***

**Batman:** These creatures have shown no ***mercy.*** The fate of the world is at stake. They got to you once. It could happen ***again.***

(Superman/Batman #33, p. 11)

This statement serves as a counterpart to the mentioned affection exhibited by Superman. It is rather clear that Batman cares for Superman, but his statement is structured to emphasize the instrumental reasons and consequences for caring instead of humane affection: fearing that Superman might lose to the aliens and fail in their common goal to save the world. From the result, Batman displayed more 'instrumentality' counts than Superman partially because he does not want to outwardly show affection to his partner, seeking to save his façade as a cynical pragmatist.

Instrumentality was also being used to express positivity in friendship. A conversation in *#50* shows an interesting pattern of communication created intentionally in comic books where friends are talking and reflecting upon the benefits they had provided for each other.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Batman:** | If your father hadn't sent that probe, Wayne Enterprises would never have developed the technology it needed to survive. And I wouldn't have the means I need to be Batman ***today.*** |
| **Superman:** | If your father hadn't been the one to find that probe. My father might have spent me somewhere else. I would have been raised on another world, and Earth would never have heard of Superman. |
| **Batman:** | He used to talk about his vision for Gotham. That was the word he used. His ***vision*** for the city Gotham could ***become*** someday. Now I know where that vision came from. |
| **Superman:** | And I always wondered why my father chose Earth. There are hundreds of planets circling ***yellow suns.*** He could have sent me to any one of them. Now I know why he chose this ***one.*** |
| **Batman:** | Sun's up now. I should get back to the cave. Dinner's getting cold. |

**Superman:** I just heard Lois's alarm clock. I'll be home just in time to make breakfast.

(Superman/Batman #50, pp. 38-39)

In this conversation, Superman and Batman talk to each other about the benefits of the Pa Kent and Thomas Wayne's first meeting on Krypton as the reason they existed as superheroes. While the utilities were directed at friends' parents rather than the friends themselves, they expressed it in a manner that showed affection toward one another through such benefits, which is significant as Rawlins's (2008) proposal that instrumentality can be used as a focal point to generate affection between the partners. This is proven true as their statements are accompanied by caption boxes that display internal thoughts, where the characters are thinking of each other "like a brother". Interestingly, expressions are used as internal monologues as the two characters choose to talk about each other's utility instead.

The tension between 'judgment' and 'acceptance' explored how "friends evaluate each other and how this was expressed." (Sivertsen, 2003, p. 6). Judgment happens when a friend chooses to criticize his partner's actions, attitudes, ideas, or feelings openly. In contrast, acceptance happens when a friend accepts or turns a blind eye toward a friend's mistakes (Bensman & Lilienfeld, 1979; Rawlins, 2008). Acceptance, however, expands beyond being ignorance of friend's mistakes and covers the way the friend learned to accept the other's worldview and perspectives as the result of maturity and friendship development where each accepted the other's differences (Rawlins, 2008; Smollar & Youniss, 1982). Both judgment and acceptance are fundamental aspects of dialectical friendship. Friends are obliged to show varying degrees of affection toward each other (Sivertsen, 2003).

In the *Post-Crisis* continuity, characters appeared to develop a pattern for judgment as the two characters criticized each other in a parallel manner. On a basic level, a character may judge another either because he is frustrated about his friend's unwanted behavior or because he was in a bad mood. For example, *#28* shows Batman reacting poorly toward Superman for X-raying his body for damages caused by the fake Martian Manhunter. Likewise, observe the following quote from *Superman/Batman #30:*

**Batman:** Superman! What's he ***doing*** to you?

**Kilowog:** The truth of his alien nature has been ***inside*** him all along. All they've done is force him to ***face*** it.

**Batman:** What truth? Dammit, ***talk to me—***

<Superman's eyes glow red>

**Superman:** No more ***questions.*** I'm tired of the way you look at me. Like I don't ***belong.*** Sick of the ***fear*** in your eyes.

**Batman:** What are you ***talking*** about?

<Superman grab Batman's neck>

**Batman:** *Uhkkk—!*

**Superman:** Look at the way you attacked the ***Martian Manhunter.*** All the times he's risked his ***life*** for the people of this planet… But even now when you see him, you want to look away.

**Kilowog:** Every time he sees ***any of us.*** They're ***all*** afraid. Do it. Show him ***real*** strength.

**Batman:** *Strength—tempered by truth—justice—*

<Superman throws Batman off>

**Superman:** No! Batman, get away. Now.

**Kilowog:** You're weak. Refusing to accept what you've always known. You and I. We're better than these humans.

(Superman/Batman #30, p. 5)

The dialectical tension between judgment and acceptance operates upon a struggle between a need to be expressive toward friend's undesirable actions and a need to accept such undesirable actions in order to preserve friendship (O'Boyle, 2014; Rawlins, 2008). Such tension is presented in-context to be manipulable by external influences such as mind controls or possession. In *Superman/Batman #30*, a Green Lantern named Kilowog is infected by the Blackrock aliens and spreads his suppressed hatred and prejudice against humanity to Superman. Superman then proceeds to criticize Batman for his unjust attack and rude behaviors toward Martian Manhunter. However, Superman quickly regains his sense and tells Batman to escape. In this scene,

judgment is presented as a repressed emotion bursting out as a form of an extreme variant of ‘expressiveness’ to attack a partner. Using fictional elements as such mental manipulation, *#30* is one of the most significant examples that shows judgment and acceptance as conflicting components, which happens when a person seeks to negotiate and maintain a dialectical friendship.

Another form of judgment seen in *Post-Crisis* involves violent arguments held by the two characters. Compare these two sets of conversation had between the characters in *#2* and *#10*:

**Superman:** Bruce? What is it…?

**Batman:** How could you not tell me?

**Superman:** I tried…

**Batman:** It took ***Oracle*** less than five minutes to get through S.T.A.R. Labs’ Firewall. Another two minutes to download ***John Corben’s*** encrypted file. Less than half that to break the code and tell me what I needed to know.

**Superman:** ***I tried to tell you…*** It's ***why*** I came to Gotham—looking for you!

**Batman:** How long has S.T.A.R. Labs known?

**Superman:** I don't know if that information is ***accurate.*** It could have been left there for ***you*** to find. To stir up ***exactly*** the reaction that it's brought about. Someone wouldn't have to know ***Bruce Wayne*** and ***Batman*** are one and the same—

**Batman:** ***Then that's for me to find out!***

(Superman/Batman #2, p. 7-8)

**Superman:** What is it the two of you expect me to say? That I’m all right with Diana ***ambushing*** Kara and me in Metropolis, short of kidnapping her? Or that you,

Bruce, ***cooked*** up that plan to make it look like an attack as some kind of ***test*** to see what she would do?

**Batman:** Not just what ***she*** would do. What ***you*** would do as well. Were you really going to snap Artemis's neck just then?

**Wonder Woman:** Bruce—

**Batman:** —No, Diana, we have tiptoed around this long enough. Clark, I've watched you ever since this girl came into **our** lives. You've let your guard down, exposed your secret identity—when ***common*** sense should be telling you to take this slower. How long was it before you let ***Superboy*** this far into your life?

**Superman:** Superboy wasn't from ***Krypton.***

**Batman:** And how do you know ***she*** is?

**Superman:** How do you know she ***isn't? Unlike*** you, Bruce. I don't look for the ***bad*** in everyone. Maybe that makes me ***naïve*** in your eyes—but ***every*** instinct I have tells me this girl is my cousin. She's done ***nothing*** to show otherwise

(Superman/Batman #10, p. 8)

The two sets of conversations parallel in terms of how judgment and opinionating attitudes are being played out between the two characters. In *#2,* Batman yells at Superman for not telling him crucial information that leads to his parents' murderers while in *#10,* Superman criticizes Batman for being skeptical and paranoid of his cousin's appearance. Both are being entitled to their own emotions and trying to prove oneself as correct or righteous over others. This is a classical form of judgment where a friend has to remind another person to be aware of the actions that may cause harm to themselves and others (Rawlins, 2008), Judgment is used within conversation as an extended form of banter, as seen in *#10,* where Batman judges Superman in return because Superman is patronizing him. The degree of conflicts can escalate very quickly

as a storyline progresses and their relationship is being challenged in dialectical manners.

Acceptance was the lesser pattern seen in the tension dialectical between judgment and acceptance, but the element appears to have a rather precise pattern. Once again, Superman and Batman have similar approaches in expressing acceptance. First, the instances tend to appear when a friend accepts an apology from a friend. In *#54,* Batman suddenly develops Kryptonian powers while Superman loses his. Clark trains Bruce to use his power at the Fortress of Solitude, where Batman destroys most of the Kryptonian robots. Batman apologizes and Superman accepts his apology. In *#20,* Superman uses Heat Vision to kill one of the Maximums and promptly apologizes to Batman for breaking the no-kill code. Batman accepts his apology knowing he, the Boy Scout, has no choice. Similarly, Superman accepts Batman's apology for unnecessarily trashing Kryptonian robots after he has switched power with Superman. In *#64,* Superman arrives late to assist Batman on his investigation of an abandoned spaceship and Batman accepts his apology, saying that he "makes a great diversion" from robot attacks. These instances have similar tones where a person chooses not to mind the partner's actions, especially since the partner acknowledges the mistakes and apologizes. The more complex pattern of acceptance occurs as the character is learning to accept the partner's perspective at the end of a specific arc. For example, in the Supergirl arc (*#8-#13*), Batman becomes sympathetic to Superman's overprotectiveness toward Kara-Zor El, relating the experience to his relationship with Dick Greyson the first Robin. This specific instance corresponded with Smollar and Youniss (1982) who believe that acceptance of a friend's worldview is an end goal of the dialectical argument between friends.

Lastly, the tension between 'expressiveness' and 'protectiveness' showed a very dominant result of expressiveness. The two friends would express themselves openly to each other without fear of hurting each other's feelings. Similar to judgment, the characters tended to comment on friend's actions or statements without regard to their feeling. The degree of aggressiveness in expressiveness vary. On one hand, the comments could be sarcastic or playful banter on the partner's action. For example, in *#1,* Batman commented "faster than a phone call. We'll have to put that to a test sometime" as a response to Superman flying in on him without calling him first. In *#3,*

a group of villains surrounds Batman and Superman, Batman states, “I think we can take them. Do you think we can take them?” to which Superman makes a slight joke at his confidence as a response. Expressiveness can be used to show surprises to the partner. For example, in *Superman/Batman #35*, Batman is skeptical of Superman having a “super brain” and his tendency to use super speed to bring supervillains into the Batcave.

Under socio-political implications, expressiveness is being used as a method to debate philosophical views held by the two characters. Expressiveness serves as a primary tool for characters to assert personal opinions with each other. For example, in *Superman/Batman #50*, the two trade banters on the identical dream they have after touching a Kryptonian hologram device. However, the degree of this attitude can lead to the characters having an argument with each other. For example, at the beginning of *Supergirl* arc *(Superman/Batman #2),* Superman and Batman interpret Kara Zor-El’s appearance in different ways, with Superman holding an optimistic view with Batman holding a pessimistic view.

This type of philosophical struggle existed throughout *Post-Crisis* narratives, but some of the clearest examples appeared in *#71,* which showed the fallout of Anderson Gaines’s suicidal attempt to kill Superman leading to Superman and Batman discussing the nature of Gaines and the ancient Kryptonians. The following exchange occurred:

**Batman:** A soldier till the end.

**Superman:** So utterly ***senseless.*** I just don’t…

**Batman:** To try to apply ***your*** beliefs to ***this*** creature’s would be ***pointless.*** We all are what we are.

**Superman:** I don’t believe that, Batman. That point of view… it leaves no room for enlightenment. It’s clear that my ancestors were more than capable of ***war.*** Perhaps they even ***reveled*** in it. But we can be ***better*** than those who came before us… We can ***evolve.*** We can ***learn*** from our past mistakes and ***rebuild*** ourselves when we have to. We can never ***forget*** that.

**Batman:** Maybe so. But I can't ignore that hint of ***naivete*** I hear in that statement. It's ***that*** kind of thinking that leaves us vulnerable to the ***darkness*** that lies in the soul of ***all*** sentient creatures. I can't live that way. One thing to remember about the ***past…*** It will ***always*** come back to haunt us.

(Superman/Batman #71, pp. 21-22)

An important implication of expressiveness as a dialectical counterpart to protectiveness is the openness and honesty shared between friends that may hurt one another (Rawlins, 2008, p. 22). The statements made by each character in the above excerpt emphasized his own philosophy and worldview. Superman refuses to accept Gaines's warrior lifestyle and the possibility that Kryptonians have barbaric ancestors, whereas Batman argues that Superman's worldview does not respond to his own view. These two views are conflicting with one another. Thus, they operate as a conflicting aspect of friendship. Notably, Batman uses the word "naiveté" to criticize Superman's optimistic perspective. The word naiveté was a negative term typically used in a competitive context by a cynic to reject an opponent with a perceived unsophisticated or foolish worldview (Tsay, Shu, & Bazerman, 2011). Despite that, Batman's statement "maybe so" indicates his acknowledgment of Superman's ethical standpoint, but he ultimately does not accept it. Such an exchange of worldviews is an exemplar of the dialectical struggle between two persons.

Expressiveness covered the emotional aspect of the characters. This usually involved the character expressing their personal thoughts to the partner. Superman, especially, appeared to exhibit sentimentality more than Batman. For example, at the end of the *Supergirl* arc *(#13),* Superman apologizes to Batman over his overprotectiveness of Kara Zor-El while citing his experiences with Pa Kent to support his rationale. In *The Big Noise* arc *(#64; #66),* Superman discovers several corpses of ancient Kryptonians and talks to Batman about his feeling toward his legacy and his loneliness. On the other hand, Batman's sentimentality occurred in *Superman/Batman #13* as he considers Superman's overprotectiveness of Supergirl to be comparable to his own relationship with Dick Grayson. Emotional bias and expressiveness through

dialogues and conversations are some of the most common ways humans maintain and expand friendship (Collins, 2002; Tillmann-Healy, 2003).

Contrasting with expressiveness, both characters exhibit very few instances of protectiveness. Protectiveness happens when a character brought up a subject that can seriously hurt the other's feelings or destroy the conversation. For example, in *#60*, Superman decides to use rhetoric and change the conversation subject as Batman tries to accuse one of Justice Titans' members as a traitor. Meanwhile, in *#47,* Superman realizes that the government has secretly collected Kryptonite weapons to dispatch him. The tension between the dialectic happened when Batman directly explains the government's paranoia, but then quickly ensured that he believes accusation was not true and that he trusts in his friend. Rhetorical approaches in communication were seen in *#1* where both characters traded banters in battle. Notably, Superman makes a joke, leading Batman to tell him to "lose the joke" then Superman asks Batman to "buy a joke" in return.

Another interesting usage of protectiveness occurs as Batman expressed a specific pattern of speech to disguise his need for help. In *#28*, the alarm goes off in Gotham, causing Batman and Superman to rush off to investigate the city. The following exchange occurs:

**Superman:** ***Attack*** alert. Status red five. That means the ***military's*** being called in.

**Batman:** And it's coming from ***Gotham…*** I have to get ***back.*** Clark—I flew here by private jet. It's fast—But you're faster. Hiro Okumura put this friction pod together last year. Self-contained oxygen supply, fully pressurized… heat shields designed to handle the temperatures of orbital reentry.

**Superman:** Bruce, if you need a ***lift…*** Just say so!

(Superman/Batman #28, p. 11)

According to O'Boyle (2014, p. 185), protectiveness covers a tendency for friends to use a rhetorical statement to protect their own feelings. In this case, Batman, who is

known for his antisocial personality, briefly mentions that Superman is a fast person before right away beginning to boast of the performance of a friction pod he had brought with him. This sentence holds multiple possible interpretations. There is a degree of 'freedom to be dependent' where Batman expresses a need for Superman's assistance, but it is challenged by the simultaneously existing freedom to be independent though Batman refuses to express such agency in a straightforward manner.

## 4.3 Communication Patterns (The New 52)

The following section described results obtained from an input of five variables in the statistical program to analyze the dialectical friendship pattern seen in *the New 52* continuity, which was as follows:

Table 4.3 Communication Patterns (the New 52)

| | | Dialectical Pattern | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Dependent | Independent | Affection | Instrumentality | Judgment | Acceptance | Expressiveness | Protectiveness | Total |
| SM | Count | 3 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 5 | 1 | 31 | 2 | 45 |
| | % | 60% | 0% | 20% | 66.7% | 45.5% | 20% | 53.4% | 66.7% | 49.5% |
| BM | Count | 2 | 1 | 4 | 1 | 6 | 4 | 27 | 1 | 46 |
| | % | 40% | 100% | 80% | 33.3% | 54.5% | 80% | 46.6% | 33.3% | 50.5% |
| Total | Count | 5 | 1 | 5 | 3 | 11 | 5 | 58 | 3 | 91 |
| | % | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% |

Table 4.4 Communication Patterns (the New 52 - Chi-Square)

| Chi-Square Tests | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Value | df | Asymptotic Significance (2-sided) |
| Pearson Chi-Square | 5.823[a] | 7 | .561 |
| Likelihood Ratio | 6.478 | 7 | .485 |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | .602 | 1 | .438 |
| N of Valid Cases | 91 | | |

a. 12 cells (75.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .49.

The results from the *Batman/Superman* comics showed that for 'freedom to be dependent', Superman attained three instances (60%) while Batman showed two instances (40%). Next, Superman showed no 'freedom to be independent' while

Batman displayed one instance (100%) in this category. For ‘affection’, surprisingly, Superman showed one instance (20%) while Batman displayed four(80%). For ‘instrumentality’, Superman shows two instances (66.7%) while Batman shows one instance (33.3%). Meanwhile, Superman displayed five instances of ‘judgment’ (45.5%) whereas Batman showed exhibited six instances of ‘judgment’ (54.5%). Superman showed one instance of ‘acceptance’ (20%) while Batman showed four instances in this category (80%). Superman and Batman displayed dominant instances of ‘expressiveness’ at thirty-one (53.4%) and twenty-seven (46.6%) respectively. On the other hand, Superman only showed two instances of ‘protectiveness’ (66.7%) while Batman showed only one instance in the category (33.3%). Overall, there was no difference between Superman and Batman (sig = .561, df = 7, p. value = .999191 > 0.05).

Concerning the tension between ‘freedom to be dependent’ and ‘freedom to be independent’, the results were mixed. New 52 Superman only showed freedom to be dependent. Superman’s dependence came from his liberty to rely on a friend to do a job for him. For example, in *#6,* Superman claims, “People are in danger. This looks like a job for you” before throwing Batman down the building, relying on Batman’s acrobatic ability to save bystanders from dangers while he himself continues to hunt down Mongul. Similarly, in #19, Superman tells Supergirl that Batman would be the person who woke up imprisoned Kandorians as they should focus on stopping Xa-Du the Phantom King, choosing to rely on his friend to do a task for him. In both cases, Superman shows a significant degree of agency and privilege where he has a specific mission for Batman to do. ‘Freedom to be dependent’ displays a significant degree of trust for the partner to carry out a specific mission, which responded to both Gidden’s (1992) and Rawlins’s (2008) definitions of the pure form of friendship where trust and intimacy would allow friends to operate for each other. Similar to several instances of dependency in *Post-Crisis*, Superman acts as if he has the privilege to ask for Batman’s assistance whenever needed.

A unique form of dependency appears in *#31, Final Days of Superman Part 2,* where Superman and Batman have an interesting exchange and the struggle between characters as follow:

**Batman:** The fire of Apokolips. Battle with Rao. A.R.G.U.S. Kryptonite chamber… a perfect storm, Clark…

**Superman:** That I've found myself smack-dab in the middle of.

**Batman:** Your fortress tests—did you run—

**Superman:** Terminal. Plain and simple.

**Batman:** Nothing's simple, Clark. I brought Damian back from the dark, damn it… and you're ***still*** here with us. With everything we have at our disposal—

**Superman:** Look, if I thought there was a chance to fix this, I'd take it, but there's not. This… ***Kryptonite malignancy*** eating away at me… is different. With all the crazy battles we've fought—we should have died a thousand times over. I've resigned myself to what's coming. And I'm not here in search of hope or sympathy, Bruce. I'm here because I need you to find someone.

**Batman:** Who?

**Superman:** Kara.

**Batman:** Supergirl.

**Superman:** I've tried to locate her over the last several weeks but have come up with nothing.

**Batman:** I'll get on this, but what about helping you? I can at least try—

**Superman:** Time's chasing me, Bruce. Finding my Kryptonian cousin, knowing she's safe… that she can carry on after I'm gone will help me. In the end, it's all about peace of mind.

**Batman:** I'll do everything I can.

(Batman/Superman #31, pp. 7-8)

Prior to *Batman/Superman #31*, Superman was infected by a lethal blood poisoning during a fight with a supervillain. Without a hope to recover, Superman rushed to Batman to request him to look for Supergirl, who had gone missing. Similar

to the other instances of freedom to be dependent, Superman establishes his agency to rely on Batman to do something. One difference is the complex interaction between the two characters. The conversation shows Batman's affection for Superman's well-being, but Superman insists that Batman accepts his request. Superman's 'freedom of dependence' overrides Batman's care and desire to heal Superman from his illness, which once again responds to Rawlins's (2008) idea that the 'freedom to be dependent' can conflict with the partner's interests. However, instead of dependency conflicting with a friend's independency, this is a case where freedom to be dependent conflicted with a friend's affection by altering the friend's method and goal to provide assistance.

Similar to Superman, Batman displayed more need for dependence than independence. First, in *#18*, Batman comes up with a scheme to draw out a mysterious Joker-like enemy for Superman by inviting Lois Lane to make up a story of her romance with Superman to lure out the enemy to kill Superman's loved one, hoping for Superman to acknowledge his plan and rescue the woman. When prompted if he has a plan to protect Lois Lane from danger, Batman states, "That was always your job." This statement showed Batman's trust toward Superman as well as the freedom to rely on Superman to fulfill his goal. Superman and Batman's dependency respond to the primary definition of the pattern where a friend attains "the privilege to rely on a friend for support or help in times of need." (Sivertsen, 2003, p. 6).

Meanwhile, in *#27*, Superman seemly dismisses Jimmy Olsen falling from a building to destroy the falling asteroid in Gotham. Batman saves Olsen. Afterward, the two characters talk to one another. The following dialogue occurs:

**Superman:** Thanks.

**Batman:** No problem.

**Superman:** I knew you were ***close.*** But I didn't think you had time to ***reach*** him. The machine was about to ***hit.*** I couldn't—

**Batman:** You've got nothing to explain. You didn't have a choice. I'd have done the same thing. And you'd have been there for me.

(Batman/Superman #27, p. 7)

This statement provided at least two patterns for Batman. First, he expressed ‘acceptance’ of Superman’s failure in his attempt to save Jimmy Olsen, which corresponds to the character sympathizing with a friend’s situation as well as an ability to put oneself in the partner’s shoe. Batman also claims that Superman would have helped him as well should he have been in the same position. This instance shows a classical case where a friend ‘reserves’ a right for relying on Superman to support him whenever he needs him, corresponding to how dependency is “the privilege to rely on a friend for support or help in times of need.” (Sivertsen, 2003, p. 6). A significance of all of the dependency expressed by Batman is to emphasize the mutual relationship between the character through trust and dependency.

Only Batman shows freedom to be independent during *the New 52* continuity. In *#5,* Superman notices something strange happening around Gotham and keeps contacting Batman via radio, as shown in the following dialogues:

| | |
|---|---|
| **Superman:** | *Are you okay, Bruce?* |
| **Batman:** | We're on the ***job.*** Don't call me ***Bruce.*** |
| **Superman:** | *You designed these comm units. I assume they’re entirely* ***secure.*** |
| **Batman:** | They ***are.*** But that’s not for you to ***assume.*** |
| **Superman:** | *But you’d be offended if I* ***didn’t,*** *wouldn’t you?* Okay, look, I’m about to leave the stratosphere. Just tell me… are you okay? |
| **Batman:** | Why wouldn’t I be? Stop ***bothering*** me |
| **Superman:** | *Fine.* |

(Batman/Superman #5, p. 1-4)

*Batman/Superman #5* opens with Superman constantly teasing Batman via radio communication, but at the same time, he is suspicious of something happening around the city. Batman quickly becomes irritated by Superman and asks him to stop calling. This instance shows the significance of freedom to work without interference from a friend (Rawlins, 2008).

Superman in *the New 52* expressed affection in *#12* as a response to Batman failing to use his single chance to save Earth-2 to defend Alfred from a para demon. He says to Batman, “I kind of like it when my friends turn out to be human,” This is interesting as Superman appears to appeal to Batman’s flaws and his failure to fulfill a part of their mission instead of criticizing him. This means there is no benefit or instrumentality coming from caring for Batman. Meanwhile, Batman surprisingly showed more instances of affection in this continuity: twice in *Annual #2* and twice in *#31*. In *Annual #2,* Batman displays affection toward Superman as he temporarily loses his power and has to take care of himself, whereas in *#31*, Batman expresses affection for Superman as he is dying from blood poisoning. The context of the storyline where Superman became vulnerable to harm caused Batman to show his humane personality more often than usual.

Superman and Batman each show only one instance of instrumentality in *The New 52* continuity and they happen in the same issue. In *#4*, Superman accidentally touches a magical crystal in Earth-2, causing the surrounding environment to fall apart. Superman and Batman then proceed to stop Earth-2 Lois Lane and Catwoman from crashing their plane. The following exchanges happen:

**Batman:** Kent! He’s killing your ***double!*** We’ve got to break through time ***shielding!***

**Superman:** ***No!*** You’ve got no chance against that kind of power—You've got to save ***Lois!***

(Batman/Superman #4, p. 12)

**Catwoman:** Clark! Hurry!

**Superman:** I can't—I can't change the ***trajectory!***

**Batman:** You've got to fly, Kent!

**Superman:** ***Fly?*** You dummy. You just said it yourself. I can't—

**Batman:** You're ***Superman***, dammit! You do the ***impossible!***

(Batman/Superman #4, pp. 14-16)

Both conversations show Superman and Batman worrying about each other's limitations in battle. However, the expression focuses more on what the partner should do at that particular moment (Batman has to save Lois Lane; Superman has to fly. By framing the statement in such a manner, the comics imply that Superman and Batman need a partner to fulfill each other's tasks. These instances respond to Rawlins (2008) in that instrumentality may generate affection and other benefits.

The tension between 'judgment' and 'acceptance', similar to the *Post Crisis* continuity, dominantly geared toward the former. Superman and Batman would criticize each other heavily during the opening arcs of *The New 52.* In *#1*, the two characters meet for the first time and hold negative first impressions in common:

**Superman:** So you were just going to sit there and watch a little kid get beat up?

**Batman:** Not so sure if he wanted the help.

**Superman:** Heh. Didn't expect ***Bruce Wayne*** to be so ***street smart.***

…

**Batman:** Okay. You caught me. Rich boy slumming on the east end. How much for you to walk away and pretend this never—

**Superman:** I don't write the ***gossip column***, Mr. Wayne. I'm just curious if you have any comment about ***these***. Three ***Wayne Enterprises*** employees have been ***murdered*** in ***Metropolis*** in the last eight hours. Any idea what this might be about?

**Batman:** You'll have to excuse me, Kemp.

**Superman:** ***Kent.***

**Batman:** Honestly, I'm still a little ***drunk.***

**Superman:** People are in ***danger,*** Mr. Wayne. Or don't you ***care?***

**Batman:** And you think ***you*** can help them? Like you help that kid?

**Superman:** Well, I—

**Batman:** Thanks to ***you,*** that bully'll probably come back ***tomorrow*** and beat up ***twice*** as hard. Go back to ***Metropolis***, Kent… or ***wherever*** you come from.

(Batman/Superman #1, p. 3-7)

The first meeting between the two characters begins with the two heavily criticizing one another for their differing actions and attitudes, which is a case of the philosophical difference between the heroes. Batman believes Superman prevents a child's coming of age by saving him from bullying while Superman believes Batman is neglecting to be a good person. Different approaches toward the same situation cause the characters to develop negative views upon each other that quickly escalate into an immature quarrel in *#3* as the two characters start yelling at each other as they physically fight:

**Superman:** Hello, again.

**Batman:** You're insane!

**Superman:** *Psh*. You're the ***billionaire*** in the ***bat costume***.

**Batman:** You figure that out ***yourself*** or did your ***double*** have to tell you?

**Superman:** They talked about ***Gotham,*** called you ***Bruce***. I put it together.

**Batman:** Right. Intrepid reporter ***Clark Kent***. Human after all.

**Superman:** I wouldn't go ***that*** far.

(Batman/Superman #3, pp. 17-18)

A tendency of the friends judging each other is indicated by Rawlins (2008, p. 21) as an initial part of an antagonistic friendship where the characters struggle to understand each other. This includes the characters irrationally attacking one another and judging each other based mainly on opinionated attitudes. The relationship between the two continues very roughly as Batman continues to judge and criticize Superman. In *#5,* Batman yells at Superman and slams a phone on him as the latter accidentally let his villain escape. Batman criticizes Superman twice in *#7.* Firstly, he comments on

Superman letting himself ‘die’ so that the humans possessed by Mongul can take command of his body. Secondly, he calls Superman an idiot for risking the world by depending on the gamers to fight back against Mongul and further comments that Superman trusts other people too much. Right afterward, Batman criticizes Superman in *Annual #1* that Superman is imposing himself as a judge and jury for imprisoning Mongul in the Phantom Zone. Afterward, in *#8,* Superman criticizes Batman for doing things on his own despite the conflict at hand involved his cousin from Earth-2. Interestingly, the degree of judgment has reduced significantly as the two characters stop judging and criticizing one another. The only exception is in *Batman/Superman #15,* where Superman has amnesia and judges Batman as a crazy person.

Surprisingly, Batman appears to be the person who displayed acceptance more than Superman. On the basic level, Batman usually accepts Superman’s mistake whenever the latter makes an apology. Firstly, *#15,* Batman accepts Superman previously attacked him while he temporarily lost his memory. Secondly, Batman accepts Superman’s action of using a solar flare power, getting rid of his own superpower and disrupting telecommunication signals. Finally, in the previously mentioned *#27,* Superman seemingly dismisses Jimmy Olsen falling from a building to destroy the falling asteroid in Gotham while Batman is the person who saves Olsen. Afterward, the two characters talk to one another. In the more complex case of acceptance, there is a clear tension between judgment and acceptance in *#7.* Batman firstly criticizes Superman for endangering the world, but Superman reminds Batman that his plan to take down Mongul worked and that Earth people did the right thing to control the heroes to take down the villain as he calculated, causing Batman to accept Superman’s mistake. Superman’s single instance of acceptance occurred in *#12*, where he accepts Batman’s apology for wasting his one chance to save Earth-2’s from impending catastrophe in order to save Alfred Pennyworth from a random para-demon attack. Batman’s acceptance of the apology corresponds to the character sympathizing with a friend’s situation as well as an ability to put oneself in the partner’s shoes, showing development in terms of maturity in friendship in contrast to his highly opinionated attitude mentioned in *#1-#5.*

An interesting notion of judgment and acceptance in *The New 52* is the significant reduction of judgment over the course of the continuity. As suggested, Superman and

Batman aggressively criticized each other and called each other insane or dangerous. However, after halfway through the series. Superman and Batman develop trust and cares for each other to the point they are willing to accept each other's failures. This corresponds to the classical view on interpersonal relationship development that friendship of teenagers and young adults tend to start with heavy criticism before the partners grew mature and started to accept one another's points of view (Rawlins, 2008; Smollar & Youniss, 1982).

The tension between 'expressiveness' and 'protectiveness', like *Post-Crisis*, showed the former as a dominant pattern in communication. In *The New 52,* Superman and Batman show numerous instances of direct or opinionated expressions. Incidentally, Superman has a tendency to act alone when fighting enemies or dealing with villains without Batman's consent, notably during *Boss Fight, First Contact,* and *Siege.* However, these instances are not 'freedom to be independent' because Superman's dialogues tend to show him resisting Batman instead of seeking the freedom to work independently. Meanwhile, in *Batman/Superman #29*, Superman playfully addresses Batman's tendencies to be independent and to be tampering with other heroes' tools without their permission.

Aside from examples shown above in *#1,* where conflicted opinionated attitudes lead characters to criticize one another, a typical expression of conflicted morality has occurred throughout *The New 52*. For example, conflicted worldview is a plot point in the *Game Over* arc, where the heroes debate the effectiveness of Superman's solution to Mongul's attack, with Superman being entitled to his optimism of mankind and is satisfied with the end result while Batman insists Superman's attitude is naïve and reckless.

Protectiveness was shown in *#24.* Superman, as Jon Clark, approaches the amnesiac Bruce Wayne to recruit him back to being a superhero. He refers to Bruce as "You're a man of special talents" and that "I imagine you've got friends who could really use—[a help]". This is interpreted as an indirect approach to talk about him without referring to Batman or Superman in order to preserve Bruce's feelings and his unstable condition. Meanwhile, in *#27,* Superman uses protectiveness to cover his mistake of not saving Jimmy Olsen. On the other hand, Batman showcases protectiveness in *#16.* Superman talks with children at a hospital to gather information

about a villain, and Batman becomes frustrated. A tension occurs as Batman could have directly told Superman to leave the hospital, but instead, he states, “Maybe we should get back to…” which is a mild attempt to break him away from the children. This is possibly done to preserve Superman’s or the children’s feelings.

## 4.4 Superman and Batman as Relational Dialectics

Chi-Square was being applied in order to check whether there were differences between the analyzed components between the two characters and the book series. Please note that the p. value was not being used to prove any specific theory. However, it was being used to facilitate ideas and directions for further analyses, mainly whether there is a need to separate analysis into multiple parts or that all of the dialectical patterns throughout the book series can be generalized and analyzed in one section.

First, the first sub research question “Is there a difference between the patterns of dialectical friendship between Superman and Batman?” was tested through the uses of Chi-Square by assigning variable ‘Character’ to ‘row‘ and the variable ‘Dialectical Patterns’ in ‘column’ in a cross-tabulation analysis, which yields the following result:

Table 4.5 Character * Dialectical Pattern Crosstabulation (All Continuities)

| | | **Dialectical Pattern** | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Dependent | Independent | Affection | Instrumentality | Judgment | Acceptance | Expressiveness | Protectiveness | Total |
| SM | Count | 8 | 2 | 7 | 3 | 14 | 2 | 99 | 5 | 139 |
| | % | 80.0% | 40.0% | 41.2% | 33.3% | 42.4% | 16.7% | 50.0% | 45.5% | 47.1% |
| BM | Count | 2 | 3 | 10 | 6 | 19 | 10 | 99 | 6 | 156 |
| | % | 20.0% | 60.0% | 58.8% | 66.7% | 57.6% | 83.3% | 50.0% | 54.5% | 52.9% |
| Total | Count | 10 | 5 | 17 | 9 | 33 | 12 | 198 | 11 | 295 |
| | % | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |

Table 4.6 Character * Dialectical Pattern Crosstabulation (All Continuities)

| Chi-Square Tests | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Value | df | Asymptotic Significance (2-sided) |
| Pearson Chi-Square | 10.776 | 7 | .149 |
| Likelihood Ratio | 11.518 | 7 | .118 |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | .039 | 1 | .843 |
| N of Valid Cases | 295 | | |

a. 5 cells (31.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.37.

The result showed that with a Chi-Square value of 10.8 and seven degrees of freedom the level of significance was .149 (df = 7, p. value = .999989 > 0.05), meaning that the study accepted the first null hypothesis "there is no significant difference between the patterns of dialectical friendship between Superman and Batman," thus forcing rejection of the alternative hypothesis. This result suggested that despite the different characteristics of the characters, they are being written to deploy similar communicative patterns, providing significant similarities between the two in terms of dialectical communication. This suggested that Superman and Batman should be analyzed together during the discussion on the dialectical patterns expressed in the comics.

The second sub research question "Is there a difference between the patterns of dialectical friendship of Superman and Batman between Modern Age and the New 52?" is tested through the uses of Chi-Square by assigning variable 'Issue Type' to 'row' and the variable 'Dialectical Patterns' in 'column' in a cross-tabulation analysis, which yielded the following result.

Table 4.7 Issue Type * Dialectical Pattern Crosstabulation

| | | Dialectical Pattern | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Dependent | Independent | Affection | Instrumentality | Judgment | Acceptance | Expressiveness | Protectiveness | Total |
| Post Crisis New 52 | Count | 5 | 4 | 12 | 6 | 22 | 7 | 140 | 8 | 204 |
| | % | 50.0% | 80.0% | 70.6% | 66.7% | 66.7% | 58.3% | 70.7% | 72.7% | 69.2% |
| | Count | 5 | 1 | 5 | 3 | 11 | 5 | 58 | 3 | 91 |
| | % | 50.0% | 20.0% | 29.4% | 33.3% | 33.3% | 41.7% | 29.3% | 27.3% | 30.8% |
| Total | Count | 10 | 5 | 17 | 9 | 33 | 12 | 198 | 11 | 295 |
| | % | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |

Table 4.8 Issue Type * Dialectical Pattern Crosstabulation Chi-Square

| Chi-Square Tests | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Value | df | Asymptotic Significance (2-sided) |
| Pearson Chi-Square | 3.082 | 7 | .877 |
| Likelihood Ratio | 2.941 | 7 | .890 |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | .828 | 1 | .363 |
| N of Valid Cases | 295 | | |

a. 6 cells (37.5%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.54.

The result showed that with 7 df, the calculated value for Pearson Chi-Square is .877 (p. value = .99998 > 0.05), meaning that the study again accepted the null hypothesis "There is no significant difference between the patterns of dialectical friendship of Superman and Batman between Modern Age and the New 52," and rejected the alternative hypothesis. This suggested that despite the different characteristics of the characters, they are being written to deploy a similar communicative pattern.

The results of both Chi-Square tests showed that despite observed differences between the character Superman and Batman as the characters of opposite archetypes (J. K. Johnson, 2010) and communicational patterns, both provided similar communicative patterns that stayed consistent throughout the comic book series despite the different writers and time periods.

Interestingly, while the results of Table 4.1 and 4.3 indicated some differences between communicative patterns, such as 'independent', 'instrumentality', 'judgment', and 'acceptance', these differences are considered 'minor', dependent on the story contexts, and not significant enough to change the general behaviors of the two characters that overtly express 'expressiveness'. This means that *Post-Crisis* and *The New 52* should be analyzed together during the discussion of the dialectical patterns expressed in the comics.

The most dominant dialectical pattern expressed by Superman and Batman regardless of the continuities and writers was 'expressiveness', which dominated 'protectiveness'. One of the main reasons for this result was because of the definitions

of expressiveness, as provided by Rawlins (2008), and used here, that “impulses to be open and expressive . . . of self and/or other while communication in relationship” (p. 22). Sivertsen (2003) indicated this as a tendency for a friend to respond to a friend's actions, comments, and ideas with spontaneity and honesty. Without specific categorization aside from instances of opinionated attitude and direct statements made when protectiveness was possible, expressiveness covers very broad ranges of communication patterns including spontaneous reactions to friend’s actions, small talks, emotional expressions, and philosophical debates. In general, both characters expressed expressiveness in three ways. Firstly, the most common types of expressiveness are immediate reactions to the friend, banters, and small talks. It is very common for the characters to address the partner’s statements, actions, characteristics, and qualities directly without regarding his feelings. Secondly, expressiveness appears as a common expression that emphasized the differences between the two characters. Superman and Batman, as indicated by previous researches, are defined by different characteristics. Such characteristics are being displayed frequently in comic books to compare and contrast the two characters. Typically, Superman displays optimism while Batman displayed pessimism. Such characteristics allow the characters to compare and contrast their similarities and differences, as they attempt to adjust themselves to each other. However, this banter can also lead to a critical assessment of each other. Finally, expressiveness allows the characters to provide additional information about themselves as influenced by either personal opinion or a reaction to a friend’s statements. This type of expressiveness was common with Superman, who has an issue with personal legacy and innate loneliness (Waid, 2014). Similarly, Batman tends to be expressive because of his personal belief to be an outcast despite his money (Dantzler, 2009). Both characters have common ground in terms of lonely backgrounds, which explains their similar approaches in communication.

The overt usage of expressiveness is interesting as it was a unique depiction of friendship within the American context. Kim, Pan, and Park (1998) defined America as a low-context culture, where communication was defined through the directness and importance of individuality. Uses of openness and directness in communication may contribute to the common belief of how modern men speak to one another. Expressions made by Superman and Batman cover the basic form of communication that provides

banter, comedic routines, and dramatic moments. Expressiveness emphasized the intimidate relationship between two characters, which carried both positive and negative implications. Communication between Superman and Batman allowed the partners to reveal more information about themselves, allowing readers to understand how the two characters interact and develop their friendship as a means to "reciprocal disclosure necessary to achieve intimacy" (O'Boyle, 2014, p. 173). This made the seemingly antagonistic friendship having an extraordinary level of intimacy and mature respects for each other on a meaningful level. (O'Boyle, 2014; Rawlins, 2008; Roberto, 1989). However, because of the higher level of interactivity between friends, there were various changes where the characters hurt each other's feelings. The idea that opposite friends would refuse to take each other's action on the surface level led to arguments and relationship that is more complicated than typical friendship.

Secondary to expressiveness was 'judgment'. This behavioral pattern indicates how the character would directly criticize a friend's mistakes and undesired qualities without taking regard to the partner's face and dignity. Judgment could be seen as an extended part of the character being opinionated as their statements could be linked to the character's worldview and their perception of the conflict at hand, which caused judgment as an extreme form of expressiveness. Some of the most common types of judgments involve the characters criticizing one another based on their perceived mistakes and flawed perspective in morality and heroism. Certain types of judgment appear when a person is being brainwashed into forgetting their friendship. Judgment is being used as a narrative tool to express Superman and Batman's negative impressions of each other. This pattern is exaggerated even more due to their conflicting personalities and personal philosophies. On the one hand, Superman is a character that put extreme emphases on idealism, optimism, rural virtues, and Christian viewpoints of humanity to the point of exaggeration (Anton, 2013; Barkman, 2013; Demers-Olivier, 2009; DiPaolo, 2011; J. K. Johnson, 2010; Kozloff, 1981; Robichaud, 2013; Terjesen, 2013b; White, 2013a). On the other hand, Batman represents cynical beliefs about humanity such as human tragedy, angst, guilt, skepticism, cynicism, and paranoia (Cortiel & Oehme, 2015; Dantzler, 2009; Donovan & Richardson, 2008; Hart, 2008; Kershnar, 2008; Morris, 2014; Nichols, 2011; Skoble, 2014; White, 2008). These conflicting personalities allow the characters judging one another and express

annoyance or verbally challenge each other whenever their actions do not correspond to their beliefs.

The measure of judgment was very similar to expressiveness. It signifies the direct, honest, and opinionated attitudes held by the characters (Sivertsen, 2003). According to Rawlins and Holl (1987), friends judge each other because they have intimate care for one another. Judgment also signifies a struggle between friends to adapt and accept each other's perspectives. According to Sivertsen (2003, pp. 6-7), conflicts occurred when there was a lack of clarity or some level of disagreement about the source of evaluative standards for criticizing friends. However, learning and adapting to each other's perspectives is a foundation of a mature relationship, allowing the friends to develop a highly intimate relationship operating on trust and mutual respect (O'Boyle, 2014).

An interesting aspect found in the statistic is that while 'expressiveness' and 'judgment' appeared to dominate the narratives, other dialectical patterns do vary slightly based on the contexts of the story. 'Dependence', 'independence', 'affection', 'instrumentality', 'acceptance', and 'protectiveness' were not frequently shown, attaining fewer than 15 counts for each character in each continuity, which appeared to have no significant impacts to the overall statistics. These different patterns, therefore, are dictated by the contexts or the narratives of the stories instead of a significant indication of relationship, as dialectics by itself is very flexible and situational.

The analysis of the communication of Superman and Batman is highly expressive, direct, and caring. The conflicting variant of relational dialectics conveniently painted the relationship between the two characters into a typical form of opposite friendship between two adult males, or at least, a representation of adult relationships for comic book readers.

## 4.5 Summary

The analysis of the result has shown that Superman and Batman, in both *Post-Crisis* and *The New 52* continuity to be dominantly expressive. Both characters highlighted openness, directness, and honesty in communication where both characters were being very opinionated and very critical of each other. This caused the characters

to become prone to arguments and confrontations. However, their openness lets the characters express a very intensive relationship that leads to a very intimate bond between two antagonistic friends. Such development of friendship allowed Superman and Batman as a representation of Hegelian Dialectics, where characters developed tension and solution as a means to solve the narrative conflicts and to develop themselves as individuals and collectives. One type of narrative seen in the series was character-driven narratives where Superman and Batman develop interpersonal conflicts due to conflicting worldviews and ethics in heroism. Another type of narrative was the story-driven narratives, which emphasized supervillain's attack and the heroes' attempt to cooperate to defeat the villain. In this case, there tended to be negotiations on the intrapersonal and interpersonal levels regarding heroic methodology and worldview. These developments provided an exemplar of how dialectical conflicts were being constructed and being solved in a superhero crossover story.

# CHAPTER 5

# STAGE 2 RESULT

## 5.1 Introduction

This chapter displays the results of the qualitative critical analysis with the theory called Critical Narrative Analysis (CNA) proposed by Souto-Manning (2013) as a tool to analyze the underlying critical implications within speeches and conversations heavily based on the content and the context surrounding the texts.

As indicated through the finding of Chapter 4, the relationship between Superman and Batman was dominantly expressive. Such a pattern serves as a means for the two characters to interact and adapt to one another's perspective, creating a strong bond of antagonistic friendship and specific forms of dialectics. This chapter will expand upon such findings by re-examining dialogues and interactions between Superman and Batman to invoke an industrialized level of analysis. This includes how dialogues are being constructed and expressed to represent adult male friendship, masculinity, the superhero genre, and an image of idealistic (male) human relationships. The ultimate goal of analysis at this stage is to create results that can lead to a discussion on which part of superhero friendship hegemony is benefitting or damaging to our understanding of friendship and our perception of dialectic in socio-political contexts

## 5.2 Narrative Structures as Dialectics

An analysis of the superhero narrative pattern was done in order to expand upon a dialectical overview of story and character development as shown in the dialogues within the narratives. The dialectics were a crucial part of the narrative to express story progression and character development. Superhero crossover narratives tend to have very strict formats with recognizable tropes and characters related to teamwork and cooperation amidst conflicts (Dantzler, 2009). Analyzing Superman and Batman for

such structures was the starting point to understand crossover as a critical representation of human relationships and dialectics.

### 5.2.1 Comic Book Structure

Comic books, similar to other types of fiction, require a narrative to be input that stays within the bounds of the medium. A typical comic book story analyzed per issue has around twenty to forty pages—divided mainly into two types. On one hand, narratives may be structured to finish within a single issue. Comic books that were supposed to be 'one-shot' (e.g. *Superman/Batman #50 Big 50th Issue and Superman/Batman #75 Super Sized Special!*) or an annual publication (e.g. *Superman/Batman Annual #1-5 and Batman/Superman Annual #1-2*) tend to have more pages but a self-contained storyline or multiple small stories that emphasize the theme of the series. On the other hand, comic books usually divide a story into multiple-issues in order to run create a story arc or a 'mini-series' that contains a narrative long enough to be put into a book-size graphic novel (Lavin, 1998).

Regardless of the analysis, a typical dialectical struggle contains four narrative acts: *the beginning, the middle, the end,* and *the cycle.* The structure has been discovered through communications between Superman and Batman as an indication of developments. The following analyses have been made from a story called *An Unexamined Life (Superman/Batman Annual #2)* which is believed to be a good example for this section:

#### 5.2.1.1 The Beginning

The *beginning* refers to the plot point that initiated the 'rising action' in order to invoke story conflicts, narrative stakes, and showcased characterizations. The rising action symbolized a disturbed relationship where dialectical tension emerges. Consider the following conversation:

| | |
|---|---|
| **Bruce Wayne:** | I take it you got one of these. |
| **Clark Kent:** | *Mm.* Seems like a smart idea. |
| **Bruce Wayne:** | You're kidding. "Superhero club" is a "smart idea"? |

**Clark Kent:** Well, no… I mean it sounds dumb if you call it a "club"… but the threats we're facing are getting bigger and nastier every day. Pooling our resources is smart.

**Bruce Wayne:** It's inane. This is the equivalent of forcing a dozen pop-star divas to share one dressing room… Only each one has a nuclear missile strapped to their back.

**Clark Kent:** That's some analogy. The last sixteen hours must have been slow to cook that up.

**Bruce Wayne:** Green Arrow is Oliver Queen. He's a womanizing idiot of privilege. He drives an "Arrow Car" for pity's sake.

**Clark Kent:** Think of the good we could do as a group—

**Bruce Wayne:** Think of all the damage we could do.

**Clark Kent:** We'd have safeguards?

**Bruce Wayne:** Really? Name one that would work against you. I've been trying to come up with one for weeks.

**Clark Kent:** No, you haven't. Have you?

**Bruce Wayne:** …I'm just saying, one day you're juggling elephants for charity and the next—

**Clark Kent:** You have a problem with my charity work?

**Bruce Wayne:** Making an orphan's day brighter seems a bit "light" for a man who could hunt down everyone on the FBI's most wanted list in a week.

**Clark Kent:** Interesting… coming from a man who uses his wealth to forward a near-pathological "war on crime" rather than feed the homeless in his own city.

**Bruce Wayne:** Oh, so I should just throw money at Gotham's problems? You're more ***naive*** than I thought—

**Clark Kent:** Look, Wayne, I came here because I thought ***maybe*** we should work more ***closely*** together, considering we know one another's ***secrets.***

**Bruce Wayne:** Oh, you mean like how you spend half of your day playing ***reporter*** when you could be saving ***lives****?*

**Clark Kent:** This is who I am! I was Clark Kent before I was Superman.

**Bruce Wayne:** They call you “Clark” on Krypton?

**Clark Kent:** Who are you to judge me?

**Bruce Wayne:** Me? I am a ***man***. A man out there every night wallowing in the filth and human garbage ***alone***, you—? You’re ***power***, sheer power. Nothing else.

**Clark Kent:** I—

**Alfred Pennyworth:** Gentlemen, as much as I enjoy seeing two men I deeply respect attempt to verbally castrate one another… the Gotham financial district is hemorrhaging money… literally…

(Superman/Batman Annual #2, pp. 8-9)

The *beginning* part of *An Unexamined Life* shows an argument between Superman and Batman over their participation in the superhero group called Justice League. As seen from the increasing amounts of bolded texts; however, what starts as a philosophical debate quickly spirals out of control, when Batman starts verbally attacking Superman, calling him naïve who has only been able to build his reputation because of his superpower. The general idea held in these examples is that Superman and Batman have a different interpretation and opinion on the same thing: Superman is holding an optimistic view toward superhero cooperation while Batman is holding a cynical view, leading to a quarrel among the two superheroes.

Conversation between Superman and Batman is an important piece of evidence that indicates dialectical conflict in at least two ways. Baxter and Scharp (2016) suggested that communication is the factor that constitutes dialectical tension between two incompatible dialectical units. Supposedly, dialectical tensions are “competing systems of meaning (discourses) that were constituted in and through communication” (p. 1) that is “understood as the process of interplay between competing systems of meaning (or discourses) out of which meanings are wrought” (p. 2). The ‘interplay’ refers to how characters engage and develop in a dialectical conflict where multiple ideologies and identities compete for their position of privilege in

society (Pleck, Sonenstein, & Ku, 1993a, 1993b). In addition, the discourse tries to understand how dialectical components seek to find a solution to conflicts and invoke evolution to socio-political stances. *Superman/Batman Annual #2* overall depicted dialectics as a difficult process because of how easy the argument can escalate into bickering. Da Costa and Wolf (1980) highlighted this development as follows:

> The study of dialectical logics, on the other hand, is the study of those logics which formalize theories based on the ideas and principles introduced by Hegel and Marx and their followers. Such study intersects that of paraconsistent logics. The two only intersect, and do not coincide, as either one might hold that the Hegelian or Marxist notion of negation or contradiction has little in common with the notions of negation and contradiction utilized in logic or one might formulate a dialectical theory using temporal concepts in such a way that a contradiction never obtains within a given situation at a given time, but only between situations at different times. (Da Costa & Wolf, 1980, p. 190)

*Paraconsistent logic* concerns an idea of a person's need for recognition of oneself and others, which is a response to dialectical frameworks. Hegel (1977). indicates, "Thus the relation of the two self-conscious individuals is such that they prove themselves and each other through a life-and-death struggle." (p. 114). Dialectical arguments operate upon the struggle between the opposing individuals, each trying to establish itself as superior logic by deconstructing or destroying an opposing logic. Within the excerpt, not only did Batman swiftly argue against everything Clark is saying, but also he explicitly ridicules and puts himself above others ("Green Arrow is Oliver Queen. He's a womanizing idiot of privilege.", "making an orphan's day brighter seems a bit "light" for a man who could hunt down everyone on the FBI's most-wanted list in a week.", "you're more ***naive*** than I thought", etc.). It is clear that neither party is willing to give in to an alternative logic and willing to allow the conflict to escalate to the point Batman chooses to criticize a friend's mere existence instead of using logic and staying on the topic. This development falls into a common pitfall in the politics of friendship where each faction tried to deconstruct and gain advantages over another (Derrida, 1993). Despite the conflict; however, aggression, arrogance,

patronization, and dogmatic tone of argument in the excerpt is likely to lead to further development in power struggle and balance between the two characters as the story continued.

The reason there is an argument and ideological contrasts between the two characters in the first place can be traced to the work of Bakhtin (2008; Baxter & Scharp, 2016), who claimed that communication itself is a cause of dialectical tension because of contradictory interpretations of meaning made by different individuals. There were different meaning-making processes that caused Superman and Batman to hold different attitudes toward the Justice League. Superman calls it a "good idea" and provides a description of the benefits of the team, saying that cooperation would help the heroes pool their resources and become better at fighting against villains. On the flipside, Batman calls the group a "superhero club" to berate and look down on the concept, believing they will be raising an army of superheroes that will be difficult to moderate and control. Clark Kent's statement, "Think of the good we could do as a group", and Bruce Wayne's statement, "Think of all the damage we could do", serve to exemplify the opposing attitudes. The possible reason behind this conflicting communication stems from a common trend that Superman and Batman are written to be the opposite. According to Abes, Jones, and McEwen (2007), different interpretations of words are contributed by different dimensions of 'identities' that consist of different individual personalities: family background, social status, life experience, personal attribute, characteristics, etc. Batman's statement, "I am a man. A man out there every night wallowing in the filth and human garbage alone" provided an explanation of Batman as a skeptical and aggressive person due to his backstory as a highly traumatized orphan who had to fight crime alone in a highly corrupted city before he met Robin and Superman. On the contrary, Superman has been living a relatively healthy farmer's life before he became a superhero, meaning he tends to hold positive and optimistic worldviews. Interestingly, the 'bantering' between the two characters was an expected trope in superhero writing due to the different perspectives and the highly antagonistic attitudes the two characters used to drive their relationship and dialectical evolution forward. A common usage of expressiveness and judgments in superhero banters corresponded with Jeph Loeb's remark that characters such as

Superman and Batman, who have an intimated friendship, tended to be written as honest and blunt toward each other (Singh, 2003). Greg Pak furthered his argument as follows:

> Each guy is always going to do what he knows in his gut is the right thing to do. Maybe the other guy is going to push him in a certain direction, because the other guy thinks he knows exactly what has to be done which could be different from the first guy. They make each other better, but they also push each other in ways that may not be right. (Egross, 2014)

Both Superman and Batman are respectively driven by a personal belief to be 'absolute' based on personal philosophy and bias. Each believed oneself to be 'in the right' and therefore tried to force the partner into thinking or acting the same way. As indicated, Superman and Batman have an excessively direct and open relationship, which carried an implication of such struggle because of its highly expressive and conflicting nature of the friendship. While the intimate relationship between characters tends to achieve amity, trust, and traditional definition of true friendship (Rawlins 2008), conflicts and arguments serve as a focal point for Superman and Batman to improve their friendship. Such dialectical development is made to achieve the 'spirit' within Hegelian philosophy (Hegel, 1977) where the initial conflict is being developed further by story and environment that invoke maturation to both characters.

5.2.1.2 The Middle

*The middle* part of the story referred to the process in which dialectical tension and struggle shifted and developed naturally through the course of the narrative.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Bruce Wayne:** | Giving up? |
| **Clark Kent:** | I… No… Just resting. |
| **Bruce Wayne:** | *Mm.* This is where you grew up? |
| **Clark Kent:** | "World's Greatest Detective…" It's no mansion— |
| **Bruce Wayne:** | It's beautiful… It's beautiful. Here, I hate lemonade. |
| **Clark Kent:** | Ma's home? Surprised you got away without drinking it in front of her. |

**Bruce Wayne:** Alfred ran defense. Complimented her on her stitchwork. I think she's knitting him an Afghan right now. She didn't know… who I am…

**Clark Kent:** "Mind tour B, hold your T, do your work, then you're D…"

**Bruce Wayne:** What does that mean?

**Clark Kent:** "Cornpone teachin'." It means I know when a secret's not mine to share. Why are you here, Bruce?

**Bruce Wayne:** …To see how you are.

**Clark Kent:** That almost sounded sincere.

**Bruce Wayne:** I might have a lead on Mr. Socrates. He seems to have some sort of… ***fate***-altering ability. Like he can influence the laws of probability… But I think he needs a ***focal point***. So he targets wealthy men who are struggling with meaning in their lives.

**Clark Kent:** Fascinating… Maybe I can ***interview*** Socrates while you Batarang him into a confession.

**Bruce Wayne:** Superman…

**Clark Kent:** It's ***"Clark"…*** Unless you have the ***cure*** to whatever was in that dying ***astrodite*** when I shoved it back into space!

**Bruce Wayne:** Hiding under your "Ma's apron" won't make your powers come back—

**Clark Kent:** What am I without those power?! ***Nothing! YOU SAID SO YOURSELF!*** Didn't you?

(Superman/Batman Annual #2, pp. 18-19)

**Clark Kent:** Black is definitely your color. You should stick to it… Red and blue make your butt look big.

**Batman:** Hence the cape.

**Clark Kent:** Seriously, Bruce. Thank—

**Batman:** Planning on staying?

**Clark Kent:** …If you'll have me.

**Batman:** Why?

**Clark Kent:** I'm not finished. Powers or not… I can't just turn my back on it. Or ***them… It isn't over…*** but I need help.

(Superman/Batman Annual #2, p. 25)

**Clark Kent:** ***Yeaaaaaaaaagh.***

**Dick Grayson:** Come on, two more. You can—

**Bruce Wayne:** Five more. Unless Mr. Kent's done playing "hero…"

…

**Bruce Wayne:** You don't have super-strength anymore. Next time I tell you to hit me for real, do it or go home.

**Clark Kent:** *>urrrrkt<*

…

**Clark Kent:** S-Stop… I… Wait…

**Bruce Wayne:** Okay, you can quit here, ***Clark.*** I'll have Queen send the ***Arrow Car*** for you. Get you some hot cocoa.

**Dick Grayson:** Man, you are cold…

…

<Clark throws a Batarang at Joker's poster but misses>

**Bruce Wayne:** Again.

**Clark Kent:** If I had Pa's old rifle this wouldn't even be a contest—

**Bruce Wayne:** No guns, ever.

**Clark Kent:** Why not?"

**Bruce Wayne:** …No guns, ever.

…

**Bruce Wayne:** The computer will randomly choose two seconds of footage from one of sixty Gotham Traffic cameras… Tell me everything you see.

**Clark Kent:** *Umm…*

…

**Bruce Wayne:** One visible license plate TTS552. There are six people in the image. The woman in the lower left corner has had foot surgery.

**Clark Kent:** Come on…

**Bruce Wayne:** Two men seated outside of pomodoro are drunk and arguing. Based on their body language. They are romantically involved.

**Dick Grayson:** Where? *Ohhhhhh…*

…

**Bruce Wayne:** You can quit anytime, farmboy.

**Clark Kent:** Shut up.

…

**Batman:** You're used to aerial combat. Even with the learning curve, this will make you a stronger asset.

**Clark Kent:** It's just… It feels like cheating. Okay. Let me get on my "work clothes" And we can go.

**Robin:** Don't get mad… you think he's ready?

**Batman:** What do you think?

(Superman/Batman Annual #2, pp. 26-27)

**Batman:** Hate me if you want, but you had to ***feel*** it. You're a hell of a student, Clark… But ***truth*** and ***justice*** are just words when some maniac sticks a knife between your ribs. I needed you to ***know*** what it feels like to ***fight for your life. Vulnerable, helpless—***

**Clark Kent:** I was terrified. Terrified. I lashed out blindly. I would have killed him if you weren't there.

**Batman:** It's because you were ***scared***, Clark. Scared of ***death…***

**Clark Kent:** So how do you do it? How do you get past it?

**Batman:** There's only one way… but I can't teach it to you. Socrates called a meet. One hour. You call how you play it.

**Clark Kent:** What? I don't get it… Bruce? I don't think I can do this.

(Superman/Batman Annual #2, p. 30)

**Bruce Wayne:** It's all for nothing… it's all for nothing…

**Superman:** ***…Bruce… Bruce… Batman.*** Batman, listen to me… The work you do… the war… It's won ***every time*** you save a life. ***One life.***

**Batman:** Win… I can win? A life like ***mine.***

**Superman:** I thought… I was ***finished***. That I had lost my ***purpose…*** But… because of you, I know a ***man*** can be anything he wants to be. ***You*** gave me ***hope,*** like you do so many others. ***Please…*** let that count for something. Come back.

<Bruce Wayne recovers his consciousness>

**Bruce Wayne:** I… Thank you.

(Superman/Batman Annual #2, pp. 36-37)

These several excerpts from *Superman/Batman Annual #2* show the progression and dialectical development between Superman and Batman. In the first excerpt, a supervillain Socrates has cursed Superman into losing his superpower, causing Clark Kent to retreat to Smallville. Batman refuses to let Clark retire and convinces him to overcome the curse. In the second and third excerpts, Superman decides to beg Batman to train him as a non-powered superhero. However, he must endure many difficulties during his training. In the final excerpt, Batman is then cursed by Socrates and fell into despair. Superman sees his friend in danger and rushes to help, recovering his superpower in the process. He convinces Batman to believe in himself, allowing Batman to break Socrates' curse as well.

Superman's loss of power is an indication of the 'death of the opponent' or negation of a specific dialectical faction (Adorno, 2003; Da Costa & Wolf, 1980). Firstly, Clark tells his father "Superman is gone" (Superman/Batman Annual #2, p. 15) as he is forced to revert to a farm boy who is completely powerless in fighting a

supervillain. Secondly, Superman decides to be trained by his antithesis to retain his superhero job under a new alias of Supernova. The ‘death’ of Superman corresponds to the base idea of the dialectical perception of the overturning power balance of the oppressed. In this case, the unpowered Batman is usually seen as an underdog in the relationship and therefore being ‘oppressed’ by Superman. Such a paradigm shift provides a typical reaction where Batman is superior to Superman because of his lack of resources (Foresman, 2008). Power struggles and paradigm shifts are common aspects of historical evolution and master-slave dynamic (Cole, 2004; Estaver, 2013; Horkheimer, Adorno, & Noeri, 2002).

*An Unexamined Life* showed that Batman was ‘in the right’ as Superman is forced to abandon his own methods in the search for his own value as a superhero and unhappily take a new identity of “Supernova” to fight crime in Gotham. In terms of ideological struggle, this would signify Batman’s ‘victory’ and Superman as a ‘loser’, as evident from Superman’s need to beg Batman to be trained to retain his career as a superhero. The narrative requires Superman to be sublated to Batman’s crime-fighting method and ethical philosophy. In the fourth except, Clark Kent is ineffective in Batman’s hellish training and starts begging for an easier training method. Notably, he asks Batman for an alternative way to complete a shooting course, claiming, “If I had Pa's old rifle this wouldn't even be a contest”, only to be immediately stopped by Batman as he disallowed all guns in the Batcave. Similarly, Excerpt 5 shows Batman is able to prove his ideologies correct and is successful at condemning “truth” and “justice” to be useless if Superman no longer has super strength. These instances allow Batman to dominate his friend and forces Superman to sublate into his worldview, embracing fear, death, and a need to fight for survival.

However, during the climax of the story, the ideological struggle becomes overturned by the event of the comic and the ultimate resolution of the storyline. Excerpt 6 showed the power balance between Superman and Batman is being altered significantly by events inside the narrative. Batman, previously ‘in the right’, is now under a curse that made him completely powerless, believing that all of his ethics were pointless. Despite being called “sheer power and nothing else”, Superman starts using his innate strength and idealism to save Batman from the curse. Not only Superman is being revived from his ‘death’, but his own idealism also had become the one ‘in the

right' and Batman later apologizes to Superman for previously looking down on him. The structure of dialectics struggle, power balance, and the character being ethically 'corrected' is switched constantly throughout the stories. This development, then, shows that power struggle is not as static or clear-cut as one would think. This is complemented further by the common belief by writers that Superman and Batman are equal in terms of powers and perspective relevancy (Malloy, 2008; Singh, 2003). Dialectical development, instead, concerns the humane relationship where the main characters engaged in an ongoing tension that forces themselves to adopt a solution to a problem (McTaggart & McTaggart, 2000).

5.2.1.3 The Ending

*The end* referred to the final part of the story where the dialectical struggle reached a conclusion, creating a 'synthesis'. Consider the following exchange:

| | |
|---|---|
| **Batman** | …A T.I.A., A "mini stroke" in the center of the temporal lobe. Hence the hallucinations. Whatever chain of events "Mr. Socrates" sets in motion ***breaks***, once his victims pass through their crucible. |
| **Superman** | Any doubt I had… about who I am disappeared when I saw you lying there… Boom. Super again. |
| **Batman:** | Super—Clark. I just wanted to thank you again. Underestimated you as a ***man***, and for that I apologize. You aren't going to hug me, are you? You seem like a "hugger." |
| **Superman** | No… not until the second major emotional upheaval. How about instead we track down the money you tagged— |
| **Batman** | —and I can give it to the homeless? |
| **Superman:** | Don't start. Let's talk about this "Justice League" idea. |
| **Batman** | Two words. "No way." |
| **Superman** | How about two other words? "Reserve status"? |
| **Batman** | … Keep talking… |

(Superman/Batman Annual #2, p. 38)

After Superman defeats Socrates, Batman and Superman meet on a rooftop. Bruce states that he has underestimated Clark's humanity and then apologizes for his misbehavior. Superman forgives him and convinces him to join the Justice League. This particular type of 'aftermath' sequence is a recurring scene where the two characters settle down and discuss the outcome of the story. This particular scene served multiple purposes. An aftermath scene serves primarily as a summary of the story, to show the conclusion to the dialectical conflict caused by the particular event, and to show dialogues that develop mutual friendship between the protagonists. An aftermath scene occurs in many stories in both *Superman/Batman* and *Batman/Superman.*

The aftermath sequence served critically as an observation of how friendship was perceived by Westerners to develop despite that it was clouded by conflict. First, according to Baxter and Simon (1993), "All relationship efforts can be viewed as problem-oriented repair activity designed to achieve equilibrium between two opposing forces in their dynamic and ongoing struggle." (p. 226). Eurocentric's perception of the dialectical inter-personal relationship, especially in an adult relationship, hinged upon conflict management and acceptance of different perspectives (Roberto, 1989; Rook, 1989). This is signified through how the two characters communicate in the excerpt. Batman thanked Superman for the rescue then said, "underestimated you as a man, and for that, I apologize." The words "thank you" and "apologize" are prominent words used in relationships to express gratitude and regret respectively in English language discourses to maintain the relationship (Lytvyn, 2007). Batman's understanding of Superman's humanity; on the other hand, is a result of Batman growing to accept Superman's personal characteristics. As established in the beginning, the highlighted word "man" according to Bruce refers to a person who was "out there every night wallowing in the filth and human garbage alone" (*Superman/Batman Annual #2, p. 8-9*). However, the ending shows the definition being shifted toward the human-like characteristics of Clark Kent, a man who has no tragic past but is capable to standing for oneself through sheer willpower and worry for a friend. This is interpreted as both a dialectical power shift and dominance created with Superman emerging as a victorious unit in the dialectical development (Derrida, 1993). Interestingly, the synthesis is contradictory to the typical perception of dialectics. Instead of the 'death' of either party, the conclusion allows Superman and Batman to

retain friendship and status quo as partners, responding to Marcuse's (1954) 'harmonic compromise' (*Aufebehen)*. Unlike historical examples of socio-political dialectic in real life where one faction completely overwhelms the opposition, sublation occurs toward both characters. Both friends must spontaneously learn about something by observing the partner's attitude and action so that they both could adjust and sublate into the partner's perspective to solve the conflict at hand. The dialectical struggle between the two characters leads to strengthening oneself. According to Pak (Egross, 2014), Superman and Batman are written to heed each other's advice or warning because they can fill each other's weaknesses. A superhero is required to adapt to differences but at the same time embrace one's own identity to create a perfect self, which resembles a more idealistic view of dialectic where synthesis, a perfect 'self', occurs because of the integration of the coexistence between thesis and antithesis.

The interaction between Superman and Batman instead seems to carry the more humane depiction of relationship growth involving the transformation of the characters as the result of the heroic struggle. Firstly, Batman's change of opinion concerned *perspective transformation* (Tennant, 1993) or the shift of worldview as a result of a dialectical development in an adult relationship. Studies of narratology indicated the importance of the personal growth of the protagonist. Particularly, studies indicated that superhero protagonists act as a representation of the reader's role models and better selves while showing that they are as mortal and as subjected to character developments and moral potentials as real people (Bonneville et al., 2006; J. F. Martin, 2007). Campbell's framework of the 'pathway to bliss' (Campbell, 2004) concerned the usage of literary myths and symbols as a rite of passage into the personal and psychological developments of the audiences. Myth, a story that metaphorically represents humanity's need for narrative and heroism (Campbell, 1968; Campbell & Moyer, 1991), also responds directly to Barthes's (1991, 2006) definition of mythology as a symbolic representation of human's cultural expression.

In addition, Smollar and Youniss (1982) believed a friendship between conflicting people required exposure over time in order to achieve mutual understanding. Conflicts between adult colleagues with opposing but equally relevant perspectives, especially, are expected to be developed into mutual trust for a very strong professional bond, or else the relationship was at risk of severe breakdowns (French et

al., 2009; Roberto, 1989). Mutual respect is a part of Superman and Batman, which represented an ideal image or hegemony of adult friendship that must operate on mutual respect, compromises, and trust in spite of conflicts and disagreements. “Expressive” is being used as a tool for both characters to express themselves. In this case, both characters summarize what they have learned throughout the journey and negotiate the outcome of their conflict. Due to the different perspectives and the highly antagonistic attitudes held by the protagonists, it is plausible to interpret the communication pattern as a recurring form of ideological struggle and sociopolitical argument. The power struggle and paradigm shift appear to be contextualized in comic books where a specific socio-political factions trade positions as the person in authority and power in order to advance social growth and perceptions on human civilization (Estaver, 2013; Kaufmann, 1966).

However, not every story ended with the smooth transition of a dialectical struggle. Certain stories intentionally have characters reluctantly agree with the partner’s viewpoint. Consider the following excerpt:

| | |
|---|---|
| **Batman:** | You idiot. |
| **Superman:** | Nice to see you’re back to normal, anyway. How’s it feel, to have a heartbeat again? |
| **Batman:** | The golden fury blossoms? |
| **Superman:** | Died after twenty-four hours in our atmosphere. |
| **Batman:** | Those satellites— |
| **Superman:** | Smashed. |
| **Batman:** | And Mongul? |
| **Superman:** | Speak of the Devil… |
| **Batman:** | *Hnh.* He can’t get out? |
| **Superman:** | No. No one escapes from the ***Phantom Zone.*** |
| **Batman:** | Until they ***do.*** You endangered the whole world. |
| **Superman:** | It ***worked.*** |
| **Batman:** | If those gamers had gone the other ways— |
| **Superman:** | But they ***didn’t.*** They came ***together*** and did what had to be done. |

**Batman:** This is why you ***scare*** people, Clark. You ***trust*** them too much.

**Superman:** Bruce, it's over. We did it. All of us. Together. For once in your life… enjoy the victory.

**Batman:** …All right, Clark. All right… *but you know*… I'm not as ***ignorant*** of these ***games*** as you'd like to ***think.*** And one thing I'd be noticed is… right when you think you've ***won***… the ***real*** boss fight's just ***started.***

(Batman/Superman #7, pp. 41-44)

In *Batman/Superman #7*, Batman approaches Superman and calls him out on Superman's reckless method to defeat the supervillain Mongul. In the narrative, the supervillain Mongul and his underling had unleashed a spore that controlled players involved in a virtual reality fighting game. A superhero who is knocked out would become a puppet to be controlled by civilians. Batman is controlled by the brainwashed civilians to fight Superman. Unable to break into Mongul's spaceship, Superman decided to let himself get 'killed' by Batman in order to be selected by the players as a game character and begged the players to use this opportunity to free themselves from Mongol. The players, having become convinced by Superman, control both Superman and Batman to defeat Mongul and saved the day. Batman, being a cynical person, believes this method is too risky because Superman was so nice to the people that he scared them. This is one of the instances where Batman show himself to be highly self-opinionated and antagonistic and shows resistance to accepting the result of the dialectical conflict.

5.2.1.4 The Cycle

Dialectics by its nature is a diachronic and repetitive development for long-term effects as the situations demand. Baxter and Simon (1993) stated, "Thus, maintenance in the sense of prevention stability is non-existent from a dialectical perspective; even temporary periods of equilibrium are only punctuated moments in a broader pattern of ongoing dialectical flux" (p. 226). An important aspect of Hegelian Dialectics also concerns dialectics as the ongoing tension that happened throughout historical development, as proposed via the master-slave dynamic and the idea

concerned that socio-political conflict was a continuous process that changed its form and its power relation throughout history to find perceived an optimal solution to the nation-state (Boulding, 1970; Estaver, 2013). While the relationship between Superman and Batman were limited by the status quo and the predetermined image of superhero friendship, the tension between the two characters was a constant and continuous plot point that emerged throughout the book series. Stories such as *Supergirl* and *The Unexamined Life* might solve conflicts between relationships that made their friendship stronger, but other stories soon follow that causes the friendship conflict to reemerge between Superman and Batman. Therefore, the tension-solution cycle in dialectics must be repeated as long as the writers are capable of writing the relationship dynamic between the two characters. Superman and Batman are destined to navigate through dialectical conflicts by engaging in tension and adapt to each other's views so that they could achieve a solution to their differences and strengthen the relationship. As such, Superman and Batman are destined to be friends; however, they were also destined to engage in a cycle of dialectical development because the equilibrium attained after any single story is only a temporary truce that would be challenged again when a new story was written and would likely repeat in accord to the analyzed pattern.

The continuous struggles and power shifts in Superman and Batman stories were highly flexible. Consider the difference between the following excerpts in terms of the conclusion of the dialectical struggle:

**Batman:** They're not ***listening.*** If we don't stop them ***now*—**

**Superman:** They're ***listening*** in their own way. But they're conflicted. If they can see into my mind… They can also see into yours. Despero told them that the human race wasn't worth preserving. Luthor ***confirmed*** it. Now it's up to ***you.*** They ***know*** your intentions. They're waiting to see if you ***act*** on them.

**Batman:** You're asking me to take a leap of faith. To believe they're capable of change.

**Superman:** And maybe you've been fighting in the ***dark*** so long you forgot there can be ***light.*** They were ***misled.*** Give them a chance to make this ***right.***

**Batman:** You **trust *them.*** Like I ***trust you?*** If you're wrong—God ***help*** us.

(*Superman/Batman #33*, pp. 20-21)

*The Enemies Among Us (Superman/Batman #28-#33)* features an alien race called the Blackrock passing judgment on humanity because it has perceived human's negative morality and were ready to destroy Earth. Superman presents his idealistic view as an alternative solution, telling Batman to do the same to convince the alien to leave in peace ("Now it's up to you. They know your intentions. They're waiting to see if you act on them… they were misled. Give them a chance to make this right."). Because the context of the story demands more idealistic ideology as a solution to a supervillain attack, Superman's ideals of truth, justice, light, and trust takes a center stage and forces Batman to abandon his cynicism in favor of Superman's methodology in order to solve the problem.

**Batman:** Anderson Gaines is the shape-shifter. A Durlan. Not an exact match of the data we've got on that race, but I'd chalk that up to ***evolution. Hh.***

**Superman:** ***Anderson Gaines?!*** I just interviewed him for the Planet not a week ago…!

**Batman:** And tonight he showed up at the fundraiser in Gotham. This from a man who ***never*** sought public attention before. Doesn't take a great deal of sleuthing to pinpoint such a change in behavior. Obviously, he's behind enemy lines and he's gathering intel.

**Superman:** Right. Well, if he wants another shot at me, then I'll make it easy for him to—

**Batman:** ***No—!***

**Superman:** Pardon—? What do you mean "no"?!

**Batman:** Just hear me out. Openly going after what the world thinks is a benevolent philanthropist is not the smartest move. He's become too visible and probably too well protected for any kind of ***direct*** attack. Now… ***we*** know Anderson Gaines is the Durlan terrorist. But think for a moment… He doesn't know ***we*** know about it. That's the kind of strategic advantage I like.

**Superman:** So now what?

**Batman:** Well, you're probably right about one ***thing***: This is Durlan versus Kryptonian. It may be just as simple as that. Terrorists aren't typically multidimensional thinkers. This is guerrilla warfare. We have to fight ***dirty*** if we're going to effectively draw him out.

**Superman:** Fine. We'll play it your way for now. But if he really wants to restart an ancient war fought and settled a millennium ago… I'll be more than happy to ***finish*** it for him.

(Superman/Batman #69, pp. 21-22)

Alternatively, *#69* shows Superman having to conform to Batman's methodology from the middle toward the end of the story in order to defeat a supervillain who is at the time was trying to hunt down Superman. The heroes find out the alien is disguised as a chief officer of S.T.A.R. Lab named Anderson Gaines and the two must find a way to lure the alien out for a battle. A dialectical tension and confrontation between two ideas represented the interaction between the two characters as they try to seek a solution to a problem. On one hand, Superman wants to 'play fair' by using brute force and attacking Gaines head-on. On the other hand, Batman wants to 'play dirty' by using strategies, lies, and deceptions to lure Gaines to the abandoned spaceship outside Earth. The apparent solution is Superman backing down from his opinion and complying with Batman's method up until the plan no longer worked ("But if he really wants to restart an ancient war fought and settled a millennium ago… I'll

be more than happy to finish it for him."). This solution allows the two characters to cooperate and use the conjoined knowledge and idea to combat the aliens.

The differences between the two excerpts show the flexibility of the dialectical power struggle, essentially how the story might pander toward either character. The concept of master-slave and modernized dialectical patterns also hinged upon the exchanges and negotiations of power for an optimal historical solution (deVries, 2003). Adult male friendship tends to be more sensitive and strained than other relationships because they operated on equality, trust, and competition (Roberto, 1989; Rook, 1989). Repeated conflicts can lead to constant mistrust or betrayal that damage or even destroy the relationship (French et al., 2009; Silver, 1990). However, the context of a superhero narrative always shows an idealistic situation where no matter what type of conflict appears, adult friends must work together and be able to cooperate and adapt to different situations in order to achieve the most efficient solutions.

One of the additional critiques toward the cycle of modern superhero narrative concerned the Monomyth, i.e. the *Hero's Journey*. The monomyth is a framework by Campbell (2008) which details the journey taken by a protagonist into the unknown, ultimately resulting in self-development, growth, and maturity. Monomyth and cycles of heroic stories were a prominent part of Eurocentric narrative civilization. The monomyth is relevant to this analysis because the superhero is considered an American myth that has an ongoing and indefinite narrative. Umberto Eco (1972) describes the superhero narrative as follows:

> The 'civilization' of the modern novel offers a story in which the reader's main interest is transferred to the unpredictable nature of what will happen and, therefore, to the plot invention which now holds our attention. The event has not happened before the story; it happens while it is being told, and usually even the author does not know what will take place. (Eco, 1972, p. 15)

Eco's interpretation of the modern "civilization" of superhero media is an ongoing narrative. Unlike the traditional myth that highlighted a specifically described story that already happened, or in the case of Norse mythology, happened at an

undetermined time, superhero stories have been made by different writers to feature different types of plots and characters. While Eco's interpretation was made toward Superman, his proposition holds true for all major superhero characters, including Batman and his ongoing antagonistic partnership with Superman that had existed since World Finest Comics during the Silver Age of Comics and would continue onward even after *The New 52* ended. This would suggest that the struggle between Superman and Batman, as a part of the canonical DC stories, were destined to continue until the concept of Superman/Batman partnership is diminished, which is highly unlikely due to the popularity of the characters. Overall, the cycles ensured Superman and Batman as characters that were destined to engage in dialectical conflicts, which started with arguments but ended with mutual understanding and efficient integration, sublation, and assimilation.

### 5.2.2 Story Contexts for Dialectical Struggles

In an attempt to magnify the dialectical pattern between Superman and Batman, further exploration of narrative contexts were made. Overall, there were two main types of stories: conflicting friendship conflicts, where the protagonists initiated the struggle, and supervillain conflicts, where external conflicts initiate the struggle.

#### 5.2.2.1 Protagonists Conflicts

The first type was a character-driven story that directly addressed the relationship between Superman and Batman as antagonistic friends. The examples of this type of story included *Supergirl (Superman/Batman #8-#14), The Secret (Superman/Batman #85-87), The Unexamined Life (Superman Batman Annual #2), Cross World (Batman/Superman #1-4),* and *The Final Days of Superman (Batman/Superman #31-#32).* The common pattern of the stories is divided into three sections: the initiation of conflict (a specific event happens, causing the two characters to develop a conflict with one another), the journey (the two characters argue or even fight one another), and the solution to the conflict (where solution is discovered).

One of the initial patterns that indicated dialectical tension between Superman and Batman can be found in certain conversations showing conflicts between the characters. Consider the following conversation:

**Batman:** *"This vessel carries my daughter,* ***Kara Zor-El*** *from the now dead Planet* ***Krypton****. Treat her as you would your own child for you will see the treasure she will be for your world."* Do you think we've translated the word *"treasure"* properly?

**Superman:** For the fortieth time, yes. It means *"treasure."* Not *"terror."* Not *"trouble."* What is ***wrong*** with you just accepting her?

**Batman:** You can start with I find how she says she got here to be a little too ***convenient.*** And if we ***are*** to accept it, you realize now that ***Luthor*** wasn't insane. The ***navigation system*** on board this craft ***was*** bringing the asteroid to Earth. Specifically… to ***you.***

**Superman:** Luthor would have no way of knowing that.

**Batman:** But ***Darkseid*** would. The point is… what did you just do?

**Superman:** I turned something on. It feels like… ***sunlight.*** Well, that explains how her powers manifested themselves so quickly.

**Batman:** How… convenient.

**Superman:** ***Kara*** has done nothing to warrant your concerns.

**Batman:** We don't even know of her name ***is*** Kara!

**Superman:** Look, call it instinct. She's been here nearly a month cooped up in this fortress and hasn't done anything—

…

**Superman:** Go talk to her. She's obviously upset.

**Batman:** Doesn't it bother you ***at all*** that the dog hates her?

**Superman:** His job is to protect the Fortress when he's here. Besides… the dog hates ***everybody.***

(Superman/Batman #9, pp. 1-6)

*Supergirl* concerns the mysterious appearance of Kara Zor-El from Krypton causing an argument between Superman and Batman: Superman is willing to accept Kara as his long lost cousin whereas Batman is skeptical toward the event. Batman mistrusted Superman's overprotectiveness toward Kara, causing the teenager to run away from home. This allows the supervillain named Darkseid to abduct her. Superman and Batman then had to cooperate to bring Kara back. After defeating Darkseid, Kara decided to become a superheroine under the identity Supergirl while Superman and Batman rekindled their friendship. Similar to *Superman/Batman Annual #2*, Superman and Batman initially held different opinions about the same subject, which initiated the plot and their personal differences that were discussed in the aftermath sequence after the conflict was solved.

The primary theme highlighted in a protagonist-driven conflict is the difference between the two characters, who start viewing each other as enemies and opposite factions and both try to either point out each other's flaws to correct their behaviors or to discredit one another's standpoint. In the case of this excerpt, Superman has an issue with Batman intentionally interpreting the word" "treasure" as "terror" while Batman uses the word "convenient" twice to describe Kara's appearance. In addition, the characters are extremely opinionated in their stands, with both characters trying to counter-argue each other's statements from their respective viewpoint ("Luthor would have no way of knowing that."; "But ***Darkseid*** would."; "***Kara*** has done nothing to warrant your concerns"; "We don't even know if her name ***is*** Kara!"). The dialogues show a clear and aggressive argument and struggle between two different perspectives. This is primarily connected to the competition between contrasting worldviews, and the respective flaws of the protagonists highlighted as the selling point of the story. This is especially prominent given that opinionated attitudes, especially, are treated as a prominent aspect of adult males in Western culture (Kanner, 1976) while the selling point of the relationship between Superman and Batman is their capacity to be blunt and honest with one another (Singh, 2003). In the documentary *A Test of Minds: Superman and Batman* (Maynard et al., 2009b), comic writers and editors commonly suggested that Superman is optimistic, kindhearted, and is willing to get people a benefit of a doubt, but is extremely emotionally vulnerable to family issues whereas Batman's antisocial personality causes him problems despite his practicality.

Additional studies (Farrall, 2016; Malloy, 2008; O'Neil, 2016) supported this notion by saying that the emphasized conflicts between the two characters help attract readers and highlighted the eventual cooperation between the two characters.

This type of relationship was reminiscent of a common trope of 'cop-buddy' fictions in the police, detective, or action stories where partners are depicted as adults with opposing perspectives who must adapt and work through their differences to become efficient (C. J. Fuchs, 1993). According to Fuchs, the partnership between cop buddies is representative of the system of hegemonic male image and gender anxiety where the 'male bond' is being highlighted as the partners progress from conflicts toward solutions that emphasize the close bonding between the partners (Ryall & Tipton, 2014). Antagonistic friendship is also considered a prominent aspect of friendship in all ages. The relationship between children may be hindered by their inabilities to accept differences between individuals while adults tend to be entitled to their perspectives to accept differences. According to Rawlins (2008), American culture paid great attention to how this type of conflict occurs and how different people encounter it and how they must be able to cope with conflicting friendship.

5.2.2.2 Supervillain Conflicts

The second type of narrative in the analyzed text was the supervillain conflict. In this type of story, Superman and Batman did not develop conflicts with each other, but they are being challenged by a specific villain, which forced them to cooperate to defeat the enemy. The examples of this story style included *World's Finest (Superman/Batman #1-#6), Absolute Power (Superman/Batman #14-#18), The Big Noise (Superman/Batman #64, #68-#71), Compound Fracture! (Superman/Batman Annual #3), Game Over (Batman/Superman #5-#7), Superman's Joker (Batman/Superman #16-#20), Universe's Finest (Batman/Superman #28-30),* and *The Arena (Batman/Superman Annual #1*). Unlike protagonist-driven narratives, supervillain stories provide heroes with a concrete challenge where Superman and Batman unanimously decide to join forces to defeat the common enemy. Because these stories provide the two main characters with a common motive and goal, the narrative would downplay character differences in favor of straightforward cooperation. As such, these stories tend to depict Superman and Batman to be capable of conversing with one another in a friendly manner. Interaction, expressiveness, and affection become

important tools that carry the story along as both characters work together to achieve the same goal. For example, the story arc *The Universe's Finest (Batman/Superman #28-#30)* shows a context where characters are voluntarily offering each other help. The focus of the narrative would be less about comparing and contrasting Superman and Batman's different takes on heroism, but about the common banter and the conjoined attempt to defeat an enemy. However, character conflicts may occur in the context where the two argue about the most effective methods to deal with a specific enemy.

For the clearest possible example, the analysis revisited the conversation held in *Superman/Batman #69* as follows:

**Batman:** Anderson Gaines is the shape-shifter. A Durlan. Not an exact match of the data we've got on that race, but I'd chalk that up to ***evolution. Hh.***

**Superman:** ***Anderson Gaines?!*** I just interviewed him for the Planet not a week ago…!

**Batman:** And tonight he showed up at the fundraiser in Gotham. This from a man who ***never*** sought public attention before. Doesn't take a great deal of sleuthing to pinpoint such a change in behavior. Obviously, he's behind enemy lines and he's gathering intel.

**Superman:** Right. Well, if he wants another shot at me, then I'll make it easy for him to—

**Batman:** ***No—!***

**Superman:** Pardon—? What do you mean "no"?!

**Batman:** Just hear me out. Openly going after what the world thinks is a benevolent philanthropist is not the smartest move. He's become too visible and probably too well protected for any kind of ***direct*** attack. Now… ***we*** know Anderson Gaines is the Durlan terrorist. But think for a moment… He doesn't know ***we*** know about it. That's the kind of strategic advantage I like.

**Superman:** So now what?

**Batman:** Well, you're probably right about one ***thing***: This is Durlan versus Kryptonian. It may be just as simple as that. Terrorists aren't typically multidimensional thinkers. This is guerrilla warfare. We have to fight ***dirty*** if we're going to effectively draw him out.

**Superman:** Fine. We'll play it your way for now. But if he really wants to restart an ancient war fought and settled a millennium ago… I'll be more than happy to ***finish*** it for him.

(Superman/Batman #69, pp. 21-22)

The central theme of an antagonist-driven story, unlike the antagonistic friendship narrative, is not about the conflicting relationship between Superman and Batman in itself, but how the two characters adapt to each other in order to work together as an integrated dialectical unit. The context of the story arc *The Big Noise* concerned a warrior alien race trying to attack Superman. The heroes find out that this alien had been disguising itself as a chief officer of S.T.A.R. Lab named Anderson Gaines and the two try to lure the alien out for a battle. A dialectical tension and confrontation between two ideas represented by two characters occur. On one hand, Superman wanted to 'play fair' by using a brute force and attacking Gaines head-on. On the other hand, Batman seeks to 'play dirty' by using strategies, lies, and deceptions to lure Gaines to the abandoned spaceship outside Earth. The apparent solution is Superman backing down from his opinion and complying with Batman's method up until the plan no longer works. This solution allowed the two characters to cooperate and use their combined knowledge and idea to combat the aliens.

Supervillain conflicts correspond to the more traditional superhero narrative where protagonists joined forces to take down villains. Superhero characters have been analyzed in several studies (Coogan, 2006; Meggs, 2009; Sarich, 2016). These studies indicated that the duty of a superhero was to protect a system of status quo from what society considers external threats - criminals, gangsters and the concept of injustice. Recently, Fennell (2012) indicated the supervillain as one of the most

common and effective tropes in the superhero narrative to emphasize such a notion. While exotic enemies appeared throughout the superhero narratives, Fennell recognized supervillains as a common trope created after the Comics Code Authority (CCA) enforced the 'exotic' villains including aliens, robots, and monster combatants for the heroes. As the Silver Age of Comics was ending, however, there were demands for the return of the realistic and brutal depictions of crimes as previously depicted during the *Golden Age of Comics*. Supervillains became more ruthless, unsympathetic, and deadly. Most prominently, supervillains were being interpreted as the antitheses of their respective nemeses. For example, several studies (Fennell, 2012; Nichols, 2011) and writer Alan Moore (Stone, 2001), based on *Batman: The Killing Joke*, claimed that a recurring antagonist, the Joker, has been revised from a typical gangster into a psychopathic monster who craves the never-ending chaos as opposed to Batman's never-dying rationality. Therefore, supervillains represent irrational, unsupervised, or uncivilized entities desiring for chaos, disorder, and destruction of social values. Superheros, on the opposite spectrum, act as entities who are capable of adapting to social norms by setting aside a personal matter and selflessly fighting for social good (Coogan, 2006).

Coogan's claim was especially supported in a story with heroic group efforts. Referring back to statements in *Superman/Batman Annual # 2*, Superman said "the threats we're facing are getting bigger and nastier every day. Pooling our resources is smart" (p. 8-9), referring to the escalating supervillain attacks as a justification for cooperating and teaming-us. The idea of superhero crossover is a very old concept in the genre, providing an idea that the group effort should be used to strengthen the hero's relationships and to create a stronger unit to defend social norms (Frimer, 2016; Ryall & Tipton, 2014; Widzer, 1977). The concept was comparable to real-life where professional context reinforces different individuals' ability to communicate and work together. Batman responded to Superman, Batman described Justice League as "the equivalent of forcing a dozen pop-star divas to share one dressing room," which is a skeptical outlook toward a group effort filled with different people and possible different worldviews. Batman's remark corresponded to a common trope in American superheroes where each character was depicted to have a personal agenda and worldview, leading to constant conflicts and arguments. With Eurocentric ideas of

conflicting friendship and family (Adams & Blieszner, 1989), superhero teams were more sensitive to arguments and unstable relationships than other types of fictional heroes (Frimer, 2016; Malloy, 2008). However, Ryall and Tipton (2014) also suggested that because superheroes argued with each other frequently, their expressions and developments of friendship were also more apparent than other types of fictional heroes. Supervillain conflicts allowed Superman and Batman to work together and develop conflicts and dialectical struggles along the way.

## 5.3 Friendship Development as Dialectics

An analysis of the overall structure of Superman/Batman and Batman/Superman so far has yielded a result that Superman and Batman actively engaged in a cycle of dialectical conflict. Such a cycle of conflict had a primary aim to 'adjust' the power balance and to achieve equilibrium where the two characters sublate or assimilate upon one another to the point they become an integrated and synthesized unit to solve a particular conflict. Such cycles; however, provide many benefits. Because of the cycle of learning and respecting one another, it was speculated that the two characters would grow closer as the result. This section of the analysis may prove such speculation because there are pieces of evidence of the characters growing closer as friends due to the interactions between the two.

The development between characters could be divided into three stages based on the overarching view of the relationship development: *initial meeting, dialectical tension, and synthesis.*

### 5.3.1 Initial Meeting

The initial meetings between Superman and Batman were written to have similar critical implications despite different contexts. The first meeting held by Superman and Batman in the New 52 continuity in Batman/Superman #1 displayed the antagonistic first impressions between the protagonists. Consider the following conversations:

**Clark Kent:** So you were just going to sit there and watch a little kid get beat up?

**Bruce Wayne:** Not so sure if he wanted the help.

**Clark Kent:** Heh. Didn't expect ***Bruce Wayne*** to be so ***street smart.***

**Bruce Wayne:** ***Bruce Wayne?*** I look like a ***billionaire*** to you?

**Clark Kent:** Clark Kent, Metropolis Daily Star. Fun night, *huh?*

**Bruce Wayne:** Okay. You caught me. Rich boy slumming on the east end. How much for you to walk away and pretend this never—

**Clark Kent:** I don't write ***gossip column,*** Mr. Wayne. I'm just curious if you have any comment about ***these.*** Three ***Wayne Enterprises*** employees have been ***murdered*** in ***Metropolis*** in the last eight hours. Any idea what this might be about?

**Bruce Wayne:** You'll have to excuse me, Kemp.

**Clark Kent:** ***Kent.***

**Bruce Wayne:** Honestly, I'm still a little ***drunk.***

**Clark Kent:** People are in ***danger,*** Mr. Wayne. Or don't you ***care?***

**Bruce Wayne:** And you think you can help them? Like ***you*** help that kid?

**Clark Kent:** Well, I—

**Bruce Wayne:** Thanks to ***you,*** that bully'll probably come back ***tomorrow*** and beat up ***twice*** as hard. Go back to ***Metropolis,*** Kent… or ***wherever*** you come from.

(Batman/Superman #1, pp. 3-7)

**Superman:** Hello, again.

**Batman:** You’re insane!

**Superman:** Psh. You’re the ***billionaire*** in the ***bat*** costume.

**Batman:** You figure that out ***yourself*** or did your ***double*** have to tell you?

**Superman:** They talked about ***Gotham,*** called you ***Bruce.*** I put it together.

**Batman:** Right. Intrepid reporter ***Clark Kent.*** Human after all.

**Superman:** I wouldn't go ***that*** far.

(Batman/Superman #3, pp. 17-18)

At the beginning of 'Crossworld', Clark Kent is assigned by his newspaper to look for information about the murder of Wayne Tech employees in Metropolis. Clark wanders into Gotham, being uneasy because of its gloomy environment. In the middle of a park, Bruce Wayne disguised as a hobo sat on a bench observing a Muslim boy being bullied. Bruce does nothing in response to the boy being kicked around, expecting him to stand up on his own and fight back. Clark, on the contrary, rushes to the boy's defense as soon as he noticed the bullying. This causes Wayne to call Clark's "big man, playing hero" attitude while Clark is offended by Bruce's refusal to help other people when needed. Bruce refused to give Clark any information he needs about the murders and told him to go back to Metropolis. However, these ideological differences soon devolve into a typical quarrel and physical fight between the two.

Despite the fact that both 'Superman/Batman' and 'Batman/Superman' are written in different eras using different writers, both series have used the similar premise of the two protagonists initially developing prejudice and hatred toward one another. In the first set of dialogue, Clark Kent and Bruce Wayne, having come from different towns and having different backgrounds, develop a different view on how one should react to a child being bullying. Clark believed Bruce to be an uncaring cynic while Bruce believed Clark to be a naïve do-gooder. Worse off, *Batman/Superman #3* shows the two characters physically fight and call each other names out of presumably anger and hatred. The prominent belief that dialectical struggles correspond with Hegelian's initial stage of master-slave dynamic concerns incompatible dialectical components that "the pure undifferentiated 'I' is its first immediate object" (Hegel, 1977, p. 110). Dialectical relationship assumes that the conflicting forces are inherently entitled to their own positions, unable to bend themselves to comprehend or accept another. The opposite factions would be driven by egotism. Different personalities and

worldviews ensured the tension and conflicts that dominate the initial stage of relationship development.

The antagonistic first meeting is believed to be something that was related to modernism. While the *Silver Age* and *Bronze Age* depicted Superman and Batman as traditionally close friends. The end of the *Bronze Age* saw the two characters arguing with one another and broke their friendship before the event of Crisis on Infinite Earth. The 'first meeting' between Superman and Batman in the *Post-Crisis* was depicted in 1986's *The Man of Steel Vol. 1 #3* where the two characters, while much less violent and hateful to one another, were depicted to methodologically oppose one another. The additional influence was possibly Frank Miller's *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns #3* and *#4*, published a few months prior, which infamously depict Superman and Batman antagonizing and eventually fighting each other. *The New 52* took the idea further and made it so that the prejudice and bickering between the protagonists would be the selling point of the initiative (Egross, 2014). The pattern is clearly not a coincidence; that people become interested in writing and reading the 'bad first meeting' between Superman and Batman is a possible indication of our society's depiction of friendship. According to Beck (1992a) and Bewes (1997), modern and postmodern societies were both operating on cynicism. Despite fewer wars and more promotion of world peace, America and several other countries have developed a more cynical outlook toward life and the people around them. First, Beck (2006) indicated the accesses of technology and information being misused to drive competition and invoke conflicts, paranoia, mistrust, and betrayals. In addition, cultivation theory (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 2002) indicated that the swift flows of news and information allowed people to become exposed to dreadful imageries related to the war, terrorism, and social injustice, causing anxiety and insecurity.

Next, the 'realist' approaches to human history, morality, and government have caused people to develop a skeptical outlook toward life. For example, the negotiation of the class system enforces the idea of social slavery and an inescapable system of elitism (Althusser, 2006; Marx, 1977; Sharp, 2017). Cynical schools of beliefs typically paint the human race as violent, exploitative, and innately evil (Baumeister, 1996; Hobbes & Gaskin, 1998) and emphasize issues in prejudice, discrimination, and segregation of the 'others', especially in light of the rises of right-wing extremists,

authoritarian personality, and fascist-like dogmas (Broudy et al., 2007; C. Fuchs, 2017; Kellner, 2016).

Finally, postmodernist perspectives focus on the abstract reality as well as subjectivism causing either a decline or a changed perception of morality from social-based into individual-based (Bennett, 2001; Hookway, 2015; Lewis, 1967; Shafer-Landau, 2004). In addition, economic breakdowns, losses of jobs, and implications of slavery in workplaces have caused civilians to live their everyday lives in fear and paranoia (Castells, 1980; Kanter & Mirvis, 1989; Read, 2008). These issues ironically contribute to the fetish in dark stories and skeptical characters, for writers and audiences as evidence of the landslide popularity of Batman and the continuous decline of the cultural significance of Superman since the 1980s (Pevey, 2007; Riesman, 2016; Shaw, 2015). There has also been a general acknowledgment from creators that grimdark and chaotic relationships are a part of current society (Thielman, 2017). *The New 52* continuity cemented on the idea that superheroes were more preferable being written to actively antagonize one another. However, the writer seemed to have another idea.

Interestingly, the antagonistic first impression has also been parodied in modern times. The 'reimagining' of *Superman #76* made in *Superman/Batman Annual #1* in 2006 also followed the same pattern where Clark Kent and Bruce Wayne's meeting on the cruise went badly, but the of the story had a very comedic tone. Consider the following excerpt:

**Clark Kent:** Um… excuse me, I—

<Bruce gives Clark his bag.>

**Bruce Wayne:** Right, thanks, gopher. There's an extra twenty in it for you if you press the silk boxers in the side compartment… they got ruffled on the ride over.

<Clark gives Bruce back the bag.>

**Clark Kent:** If you don't mind, I was here first, Wayne.

**Bruce Wayne:** I'm sorry… if you aren't carrying a drink tray or happen to be a gorgeous blonde, why are you speaking to me, Mister…?

**Clark Kent:** Kent. Clark Kent. Money doesn't entitle you to be rude, Mister Wayne.

**Bruce Wayne:** Spoken like a true pauper.

**Manager:** Um… gentlemen…? We have a minor issue.

**Bruce Wayne:** I should say so—

**Manager:** No… I mean… Oh lord…

…

**Manager:** It's the blasted computer system. Infernal machine! All other cabins are completely booked, and you two—were accidentally assigned to a single room. I am mortified—

**Bruce Wayne:** I'm certain that Mister Kent understands he'll have to find other accommodations. I'll even throw in something for his trouble…to spruce up that wardrobe, Kent.

**Clark Kent:** I'll remember that kind offer in my article. It should fall in between my description of the shoddy service and your reprehensible behavior—

**Manager:** Please, gentlemen, surely you understand my position… a generous and influential businessman… a reporter for a prestigious newspaper… Surely, one of you can relinquish?

**Bruce Wayne:** I'd rather fly coach.

**Clark Kent:** Then it's settled… roomie.

**Lois Lane:** And I thought this was going to be boring…

(Superman/Batman Annual #1, pp. 6-8)

**Clark Kent:** I'm surprised you aren't falling down after that magnum of champagne, Wayne…

**Bruce Wayne:** It isn't exactly like drinking Moonshine out of a pumpkin.

**Clark Kent:** Especially when you can afford to buy a hollow leg to match a hollow head—

**Lois Lane:** Ooookayy, I know when I'm a third wheel… I'll leave you two sailors to play "who has the bigger mizzenmast…

**Bruce Wayne:** But—

**Clark Kent:** Wait—

**Lois Lane:** Hasta mañana chicos…

**Bruce Wayne:** Until morning, Miss Lane…

**Clark Kent:** Okay, 'night, Lois.

**Bruce Wayne:** I will give you one million dollars to throw yourself overboard.

**Clark Kent:** Up yours, rich boy.

**Bruce Wayne:** And if you think I'm sharing that room with you, farm trash, you're dumber than you look.

**Clark Kent:** My thoughts exactly.

**Bruce Wayne:** Been saying that one since dinner…?

**Clark Kent:** Try the second I met you.

(Superman/Batman Annual #1, p. 11)

In *Superman/Batman Annual #1,* Clark Kent and Bruce Wayne get on the same ship and are forced to share a cabin. Because the two do not recognize each other's superhero identities, Bruce mistook Clark as a gopher while Clark believed Bruce to be a spoiled millionaire. The negative implications shared between the heroes is significant because *Superman/Batman Annual #1* was written as a reimagining of *Superman #76,* where the two superheroes first met and worked together to stop criminals. The fact that Clark Kent and Bruce Wayne hate each other as 'strangers' highlights a modern perception that two persons from different classes and upbringing are bound to dislike one another. However, both Clark and Bruce stop bickering with each other once the villains start attacking the cruise and they finally figure each other's identities. This switch in attitudes signifies that prejudices against strangers with contrasting

personalities can be diminished through acquaintance and friendship such as that established and developed through the protagonists' common role as superheroes.

Similar to the aforementioned Batman/Superman, the first meeting between Clark Kent and Bruce Wayne saw the protagonists developing a poor impression toward one another. However, the context of the story did not depict the conflict in a serious light. Notably, Lois Lane's reaction to the situation ("And I thought this was going to be boring", "Ooookayy, I know when I'm a third wheel… I'll leave you two sailors to play "who has the bigger mizzenmast.") Lois's sarcastic tone toward Clark and Bruce's immature attitudes implies that the interactions are not meant to be taken seriously. Indeed, as soon as the villains attack the cruise and the two heroes recognize each other as superheroes, they stop bickering and work together.

Greg Pak, the leading writer of Batman/Superman provided a lengthy interview regarding his direction toward the writing of the series. The following citation provided some of the most interesting ideas about the initial stage of the relationship between Superman and Batman, particular in *The New 52* continuity:

> These guys are young, they're dangerous, they're passionate. The first story I did with them was set five years ago when they were meeting each other for the very first time. They were very young and very cocky – each guy knows exactly what he thinks he should be doing and knows that the other guy is basically the most dangerous guy on the planet. So you've got huge conflicts there. Even now, in the present day DC Universe, they're young. This isn't "Uncle Batman and Uncle Superman." They haven't been around forever, each guy is ridiculously confident in what he does, but they're still raw, still figuring out exactly how to do what they do and are facing certain kinds of challenges for the first time. When they have conflicts, it's not always guaranteed that it's going to be a Super Friends ending where everybody is going to be shaking hands and smiling . . . Thematically this is about how two rivals challenge each other to learn how to become heroes, really. It's through this conflict they have with each other that they start working out what it is that they're supposed to do. That dynamic is endlessly interesting. Neither one of these guys has all the answers, even though he thinks he might. Then you put them together and

> bounce them off of each other and see them help and hinder each other. (Egross, 2014)

Superheroes in *The New 52* are intentionally created to be less mature and experienced in order to invoke darker interpretations of superhero characters. Throughout the *Crossworld* arc, Superman and Batman attacked and talked trash toward each other. On one hand, Superman says that Batman is a "billionaire in the bat costume", thinking of it as a silly concept. On the other hand, Batman calls Superman "human after all", which insults Superman's holier-than-thou mentality despite being weak and mortal. The conversation corresponds to Pak's claim on the characters being "young", "dangerous", and "passionate" and the depiction of the immature relationship exhibit by heroes, especially since they were speaking and acting almost like children by judging, criticizing, insulting, and resorting to violence as a solution to solve the hatred. Aggression, especially, is considered a common problem exhibited by adolescents and young adults. Despite the conflicts, however, Crossworld depicted the antagonistic impressions between Superman and Batman as immature. Within the story, there exists the older variants of the protagonists call Earth-2 Superman and Earth-2 Batman, possibly the reference to "Uncle Batman and Uncle Superman" who are older, more experienced, and were capable of interacting with one another peacefully. Pak emphasized the youthfulness of the two characters with the narratives that are to invoke "two rivals challenge each other" or to engage in the continuous cycles of conflicts. Interestingly, he also states, "Neither one of these guys has all the answers, even though he thinks he might". Conflicts and power balance are motivated by the character's ethical perspectives; however, surrounding narrative factors also dictated how the dialectical situation plays out. Pak himself seemed to believe that this type of storytelling was full of potential for character interactions and developments. The idea of different contexts and different solutions acting as a reflection of real-life conflicts was innately dynamic and unpredictable. Despite the arguments between the two characters; however, the overarching narrative of *The New 52* would show character development for the two protagonists as the narrative progressed. These comic books would suggest that it was fine for people to develop bad first impressions of each other, for the relationship may develop further and become more mature and respectful.

### 5.3.2 Dialectical Tension

After the initial meeting between the two heroes, they are destined to engage in a dialectical relationship. Several factors are contributing to the tensions. Some of the most common factors include class differences, cultural differences, and ideological differences.

#### 5.3.2.1 Class Struggle

Class struggle and prejudice between different social levels provide some of the most common critiques within Hegelian Dialectics, and Superman and Batman exhibited these struggles at a certain point in their relationship span. The following excerpt came from *Superman/Batman Annual #1:*

**Clark Kent:** Um… excuse me, I—

<Bruce gives Clark his bag.>

**Bruce Wayne:** Right, thanks, gopher. There's an extra twenty in it for you if you press the silk boxers in the side compartment… they got ruffled on the ride over.

<Clark gives Bruce back the bag.>

**Clark Kent:** If you don't mind, I was here first, Wayne.

**Bruce Wayne:** I'm sorry… if you aren't carrying a drink tray or happen to be a gorgeous blonde, why are you speaking to me, Mister…?

**Clark Kent:** Kent. Clark Kent. Money doesn't entitle you to be rude, Mister Wayne.

**Bruce Wayne:** Spoken like a true pauper.

**Manager:** Um… gentlemen…? We have a minor issue.

**Bruce Wayne:** I should say so—

**Manager:** No… I mean… Oh lord…

…

**Manager:** It's the blasted computer system. Infernal machine! All other cabins are completely booked, and you two—were accidentally assigned to a single room. I am mortified—

**Bruce Wayne:** I'm certain that Mister Kent understands he'll have to find other accommodations. I'll even throw in something for his trouble… to spruce up that wardrobe, Kent.

**Clark Kent:** I'll remember that kind offer in my article. It should fall in between my description of the shoddy service and your reprehensible behavior—

**Manager:** Please, gentlemen, surely you understand my position… a generous and influential businessman… a reporter for a prestigious newspaper… Surely, one of you can relinquish?

**Bruce Wayne:** I'd rather fly coach.

**Clark Kent:** Then it's settled… roomie.

**Lois Lane:** And I thought this was going to be boring…

(Superman/Batman Annual #1, pp. 6-8)

Bruce calls Clark “pauper” and later “hayseed” as an attempt to look down on his farmer background. This causes Clark to look at Bruce in return as a spoiled billionaire. Some of the most interesting aspects that surrounded the characters are the differences in terms of classes. The classical study of Gramscian hegemony in masculine society was highly connected to class struggles and intercultural dominances (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) Superman and Batman are canonically and widely accepted to be depicted as men of different classes. Clark Kent was a farm boy from Smallville who moved to Metropolis to become a low-middle class reporter. In contrast, Bruce Wayne was a wealthy detective and a businessperson who utilized money, resources, and connections to create a large network of masked crime fighters while trying to act like a spoiled playboy in the public. As such, it seems natural for the two characters to compete in a dialectical conflict. Within the excerpt, Clark tells Bruce, “Money doesn’t entitle you to be rude”, “Up yours, rich boy”, and claims that Bruce a drunkard and a hallow head. Meanwhile, Bruce called Clark “a true pauper”, “farm trash”, and says that Clark had a poor wardrobe.

According to Hoover and Nash (2016), class negotiation was an integral part of American culture. Because such culture depends on the interaction between several types of people coexisting in the same society, it was inevitable that conflicts arise between people of different classes. Strangers, especially, were prone to this problem because the perceptions were dictated by first impressions and possibly a stereotypical image of the 'other'. In this case, stereotypes of classes and social status have been a part of issues within Eurocentric literature, particularly American culture (S. T. Fiske, 1998; Selden, 2016). Prejudices and discriminations are common perspectives held between strangers in modern and post-modern society especially in a disruptive society where racial and class differences had become an increasingly sensitive subject (Kellner, 2016; Thielman, 2017). In this regard, Superman and Batman are willing to judge each other based on appearances and social classes, which was a common problem of class discrimination that disrupts interpersonal communication. However, it is worth reminding oneself that the issue related to class was very brief and is portrayed as comedic. Once the two characters recognized each other's identity, the relationship dynamic quickly stabilized.

5.3.2.2 Cultural Differences

Relating to social class was the different cultures, which is partly constructed by such social classes. Modern sociology, from cultural determinism theory (D'Andrade & Strauss, 1992; Littlemore, 2003), modern paradigms of communication theories (Carey, 2002; Infante et al., 2003; Lull, 2000; Wood, 2004), as well as concepts in globalization and culturalism (Anheier & Isar, 2007; Held, McGrew, Goldblatt, & Perraton, 1999; McLuhan & Powers, 1989) all emphasize the varying personal beliefs and philosophies based on cultural influences. Superman and Batman were characters that were noteworthy for their cultural differences. The settings of Metropolis and Gotham provide an insight into the characterization of Superman and Batman as well as the meta-assessment to the struggle in American culture to balance the idealistic and cynical prospect of American society in real life. A story arc *The Secret* in *Superman/Batman* showed a conflict that was involving Metropolis and Gotham being used as a representation of incompatible cultures and people. The following excerpts come from *Superman/Batman #87*:

**Martin Mayne:** Have you looked outside? Have you seen this city? Have you seen what your pal over there has ***done*** to it? This city is about ***fear.*** Nothing I say or do is going to change that. I wish Falcone was still running the streets; at least then there'd be some… some logic! I'm sorry, Mr. Kent, that I didn't live up to some absurd journalistic standard of yours. And I'm sorry Garrett got killed. That's an awful thing. You want to admit I took a payoff? That I gave up you and Remington? I didn't do nothing that I didn't have to, and you can't prove I did anything other than put a slip of paper in a mailbox. I saved this newspaper, Mr. Kent. I made sure the light stayed on and the stockholders stayed happy.

**Clark Kent:** I guess you haven't read the paper. Wayne Enterprises just purchased this paper, Mr. Wayne's first act as C.E.O. was to fire you. He asked me to deliver the message personally. If I run this story, it kills your paper. It poisons everything it stands for. And what Remington stood for. Hiding the truth, Mr. Mayne, is sometimes a necessity. The problem is, you can never hide it from yourself.

**Martin Mayne:** …Metropolis guys, right? All righteous anger and indignation. We all know that's not the real world. That's not Gotham. Right, Bats?

<Batman disappears>

**Martin Mayne:** Batman? >sigh<

(Superman/Batman #87, pp. 15-18)

*The Secret* concerned the murder of Garrett Remington, a senior reporter of the Gotham Gazette who had discovered Batman's identity as Bruce Wayne. Martin Mayne, Remington's boss, feared that the truth about Batman being Bruce Wayne would send Gotham into chaos as the mysteries surrounding the Caped Crusader no

longer frightened criminals. Mayne sends a letter in a secret mailbox to hire a killer to scare Remington and later Clark Kent, who is also investigating Garrett's case, into giving up their assignments. However, Mayne accidentally hires the Joker, who immediately kills Remington and then tries to poison the entire building of Daily Planet. Clark cooperates with Batman in order to expose the villain's corruption. However, because of the lack of evidence, Mayne escapes the court and he is only fired from the newspaper with a retirement fund as a punishment. Superman laments the injustice as Batman encourages him to move on.

5.3.2.3 Ideological Struggles

The issue of 'Metropolis versus Gotham' must be connected to a literary interpretation of what the cities metaphorically represent and how they create dialectical tensions within these representations. Existing critics indicated both Metropolis and Gotham, Superman and Batman's turf, respectively, to be the critical representation of New York or Manhattan (Reckner, 2002; Sanderson, 2007). Burrows and Wallace (1998) described the two cultures as follows:

> Gotham is New York's noirish side—"Manhattan below Fourteenth Street at 3 A.M., November 28 in a cold year"—whereas Superman's Metropolis presents New York's cheerier face, "Manhattan between Fourteenth and One Hundred and Tenth Streets on the brightest, sunniest July day of the year". (Burrows & Wallace, 1998, p. xiv)

Metropolis and Gotham symbolically represented two extreme belief systems that co-exist within the same hegemonic American society, particularly, the eternal debate between 'realism and idealism'. Gotham's "noirish side" refers to the realistic view of humanity and Batman's narrative tropes associated with crime fictions, thriller and horror genres (Brunsdale, 2010; Daniels, 2004a; Dantzler, 2009) whereas Metropolis's "cheerier face" refers to the idealistic and hopeful view of humanity and Superman's association with science fiction and messianic tones of the story (Daniels, 2004b; Eco, 1972; Kozloff, 1981). Graebner (2002) provided definitions of realists and idealists as follows:

> Realists tend to accept conditions as they are and to define the ends and means of policy by the measures of anticipated gains, costs, necessities, and the chance of success. Idealists tend to define goals in ideals, often visionary, forms, and presume that the means for their achievement lie less in measured policies, relying on diplomacy or force, than in the attractiveness of the goals themselves. (Graebner, 2002, p. 311)

Graebner's definition of realists and idealists corresponded with the arguments held by Martin Mayne and Clark Kent in Superman/Batman #87. Mayne's justification for his crime is that Gotham City is a corrupted place governed and controlled by fear. The argument that 'the world is already rotten, so I should be rotten as well' responded to the idea of fear propaganda and policies being used as a tool to create surveillance, order, and patriotic harmony (Altheide, 2006; Kellner, 2016; Norris & Reeves, 2013). Batman, as a character who operates in black cape and cowl, was a figure of contradiction. According to (Nietzsche, 2009), "He who fights with monsters should look to it that he himself does not become a monster. And if you gaze long into an abyss, the abyss also gazes into you." (p. 146). Despite being framed as a person whose intelligence and wisdom was rated above darkness and corruption of Gotham, he himself embraces and embodies himself with the tropes associated with them and therefore embodies himself with issues related to modern and postmodern cynicism (Cortiel & Oehme, 2015; Hart, 2008; Kershnar, 2008; Spanakos, 2008). As such, it is very difficult to separate Batman and the 'society of evil' that he resided in aside from the fact that Batman never subscribed to Mayne's philosophy and the idea that it is justified for a person to submit to the 'real world' of Gotham City. Superman, on the other hand, highlights another problem. As a civilian of Metropolis, a highly idealized city, Clark Kent is a restricted, by-the-book journalist who mistakenly expected all people must conform to what Mayne called "absurd journalistic standard" and, because of the highly opinionated attitude, refused to understand the cynical modern or 'realistic' situation where not all murderers are punished for their crimes. Mayne also calls Clark one of the "Metropolis guys" who were "All righteous anger and indignation." Stereotypes and prejudices related to class and cultural background were an integral part of the narrative that contributes to the 'real versus ideal'. Superman

complaining over the injustice over Remmington's death provided a context where ideological struggle happened because of these environmental and cultural differences.

All of the mentioned characteristics and developments in Superman and Batman were a form of dialectical struggle of contradicting society trying to assert its place within a real-world context. *Superman/Batman #87*; therefore, shows a specific form of ideological sublation created between cultural differences. In this regard, Superman's idealistic culture is ill-suited to deal with the problem of Gotham City, therefore he was forced to accept Batman's perspective. Batman told Superman to "let it go" which is deemed a logical solution within the context because of Batman's experience, knowledge, and urgency toward the superhero duties being more important than moaning over a single loss. Different stories show that different characters hold a different power balance in terms of cultural struggle. While *The Secret* showed the cynical side of the superhero business, stories such as *World's Finest (Superman/Batman #1-#7), The Enemies among Us (Superman/Batman #28-#33), Super/Bat (Superman/Batman #53-#56),* and *The Fathers (Superman/Batman #50)* lean the power balance toward Superman because Metropolis is depicted as an idealistic city even if it was being attacked. The implication made toward the first part of the excerpt is the idea that different cultures operated differently and a person is required to adapt himself to such an environment. The friendship between people in a different environment can provide useful information and insight that can help one cope with a culture shock and other intercultural miscommunication.

The competition of ideas is one of the most common types of conflict between Superman and Batman's interaction was related to different ethical interpretation toward a specific subject. Consider the following conversation:

| | |
|---|---|
| **Batman:** | A soldier till the end. |
| **Superman:** | So utterly ***senseless.*** I just don't… |
| **Batman:** | To try to apply ***your*** beliefs to ***this*** creature's would be ***pointless.*** We all are what we are. |
| **Superman:** | I don't believe that, Batman. That point of view… it leaves no room for enlightenment. It's clear that my ancestors were more than capable of ***war.*** Perhaps they |

even ***reveled*** in it. But we can be ***better*** than those who came before us… We can ***evolve.*** We can ***learn*** from our past mistakes and ***rebuild*** ourselves when we have to. We can never ***forget*** that.

**Batman:** Maybe so. But I can't ignore that hint of ***naivete*** I hear in that statement. It's ***that*** kind of thinking that leaves us vulnerable to the ***darkness*** that lies in the soul of ***all*** sentient creatures. I can't live that way. One thing to remember about the ***past***… It will ***always*** come back to haunt us.

(Superman/Batman #71, pp. 21-22)

The context of the story followed the death of an alien monster from Planet Durla, who has a deep-seated grudge against Kryptonia since the ancient war between the two races millennia ago. The monster appeared to hold a strict warrior code. Upon being defeated, the alien refused to surrender to Superman and immediately committed suicide. Superman laments the monster's death while Batman argues that it was not appropriate for Superman to use his own standard to judge the alien.

An exchange between the two characters regarding the philosophy of a supervillain showed the different perspectives held by the two characters. Similar to the 'realist versus idealist' argument mentioned previously. A focus of analysis is made upon multiple bold words used by Superman and Batman. These bold words used by the characters are useful indicators of different ideologies. Starting from the second dialogue, Superman judges the enemy's philosophy as being "utterly senseless". The way he used the expression "I just don't…" suggests that his failure to understand such philosophy as he tries to project his own standard. Batman calls him out. Interestingly, he uses the expression "We all are what we are," which emphasized individuality when it came to personal philosophy, but this statement contradicts what comes after. As the comparison is made, it is clear that Superman and Batman's dialogues correspond to their respective character traits, Superman tended to associate himself with the ideas that humans could "evolve", "learn", and "rebuild" from their past mistakes whereas Batman is associated with ideas that humans were plagued by "darkness" and that past

mistakes would always haunt them. In addition, the dialogue claims are filled with phrases such as “I don’t believe that”, “I can’t ignore that” or “I can’t live that way” as well as using the word “we” to assume generalization of humanity. The tone of the expression suggested that both characters projected themselves to justify or discredit other people’s lifestyles. As such, the argument is not actually about the alien’s warrior ethics, but the competition between personal philosophies held by Superman and Batman. As the issue ended, no definite answer is provided. The philosophical debates are deliberately left as an unsolved argument.

### 5.3.3 Synthesis

#### 5.3.3.1 Stabilized Friendship

As the cycle of dialectical struggles repeats itself, the overarching relationship between Superman and Batman improves. The ultimate solution to the power struggle between Superman and Batman appears to be connected to a specific type of common ground that allowed the two characters to solve dialectical conflicts. Synthesis acted the ‘eventual’ development created from a dialectical struggle between thesis and antithesis. In this section, it is proposed that Superman and Batman as an integrated and inseparable part of the same system.

As indicated by Greg Pak (Egross, 2014), the ultimate goal of the relationship between Superman and Batman is the mature relationship between the two protagonists. The heroes progressed in a way that emphasized this development. Starting from *Batman/Superman Annual #1*, Superman and Batman began to work together civilly as partners in order to deal with supervillain attacks as the series progressed. During the temporary period when Batman died in #21, Superman constantly bemoaned the loss of his best friend. *In Batman/Superman #24*, Superman, under the new disguise of Jon Clark, reunited with Bruce Wayne who had settled at Gotham orphanage because he had lost his memory. There, the following exchange occurred:

**Jon Clark:** Hey.

**Bruce Wayne:** Hey.

**Jon Clark:** Sorry… are you… are you ***Bruce Wayne?***

**Bruce Wayne:** Do I… know you?

**Jon Clark:** We met a few years ago. I used to be a reporter. Interviewed you at some charity event, I think. Jon Clark.

**Bruce Wayne:** Jon. Hi.

**Kid:** ***Hey! Back off!***

<Bruce Wayne stop kids bullying each other>

**Jon Clark:** *Heh.*

**Bruce Wayne:** What's so funny?

**Jon Clark:** Nothing. It's just… The Bruce Wayne I remember would have ***yelled*** at me for doing what you just did.

**Bruce Wayne:** Really? Why?

**Jon Clark:** "Kids have to figure out themselves," he'd say. "can't fight their battles for 'em."

**Bruce Wayne:** *Huh.* Had to figure stuff out when you're getting the crap kicked out of you.

**Jon Clark:** That was always ***my*** point.

**Bruce Wayne:** What are you here for, Mr. Clark?

**Jon Clark:** I… happened to be in Gotham. And I did a little poking around. Billionaire loses his ***fortune,*** takes up a new job working with kids in an ***orphanage.*** Pretty good story. But you always seemed like a man with a… ***bigger*** mission. I wonder… if you ever think about getting back into the ***fight?***

**Bruce Wayne:** There's no story here for you, Mr. Clark.

**Jon Clark:** You're a man of… ***special talents.*** I imagine you've got ***friends*** who could really use—

**Bruce Wayne:** If you write about ***me,*** you'll end up writing about the kids I work with. And they don't need your attention.

…

**Bruce Wayne:** I know you're trying to help. Write an article. Shine a light. Save the world. But these kids have had enough

trouble in their lives already. They just need ***time*** and ***space*** and ***quiet*** to become the people that they could be.

**Jon Clark:** I guess… we all could use a little of that.

**Bruce Wayne:** "Nice to meet you, Mr. Clark."

**Jon Clark:** "Likewise, Mr. Wayne."

(Batman/Superman #24, pp. 18-19)

The conversation between Superman and Batman in this section was an interesting take on the relationship growth between Superman and Batman because it took place in the same location as the book series starts. *Batman/Superman #1* starts with Superman visiting Batman in a gloomy park in Gotham and ended up antagonizing Batman. However, *Batman/Superman #24* shows Superman reentering the same park of Gotham, now considerable cleaner and brighter and meeting Bruce Wayne, who reenacts Clark Kent's attempt to stop bullying in the first issue. The irony of this scene is the symbolic act of Batman beginning to accept Superman's point of view. This development was intended to suggest to audiences the idea of friendship and where friendship can be developed from an antagonistic relationship into a mature and respectful one. In this case, respect for a friend's personal space and life decision.

As the two heroes were becoming close enough to have an intimate relationship, analysis of the communication between Superman and Batman show specific patterns of how the two protagonists expressed affections as a synthesis created from the dialectical tension between the two characters. Dialectical friendship, as framed by several researchers (Rawlins, 1998; Riegel, 1976; Sivertsen, 2003; Smollar & Youniss, 1982) also emphasizes an extended period of exposure between friends with different perspectives. In addition, the cooperative nature of Superman and Batman was referred to as a framework of 'unity of opposition' by Baxter and Montgomery (1996, p. 9) who referenced the possible instances where dialectic produced synthesis through the unification of the two opposite units. Suppose we believe that Superman and Batman are opposite, antagonistic friends who would typically start out immature and competing with one another before they adjusted to the partner's perspective and developed a strong, intimate, and flexible friendship based on mutual respect and trust.

Such development would signify several aspects related to how Hegel defines dialectics as a philosophical approach that seeks knowledge and perfection of unified ‘spirit’ and ‘self’ which is created from the never-ending struggle between the two protagonists.

First, while Superman and Batman have been critiqued as opposing parts of the dialectic, the two heroes typically share moments that allow them to empathize and cooperate during the courses of their cycle of dialectical struggle, altering the power balance and pushing it toward synthesis. Throughout *The New 52* narrative, Batman originally believed himself to be an invincible hero, being perfectly focused and the focus could not be altered by any distractions. However, *Batman/Superman #12* show that Batman fails to live up to his standard, significantly altering his relationship with his partner. Compare the two following strings of conversations:

**Batman:** They can’t hear you. We’re ***intangible,*** here. And they’re ***not*** your parents. This is the ***other*** world.

**Superman:** I… I know. But you have no idea what it ***feels*** like. If my folks had ***lived…***

<Explosion>

**Martha Kent:** Oh, lord.

…

**Jonathan Kent:** Don’t worry, Clark’s always on it. Clark’s always on it.

**Superman:** Yes, I am.

**Batman:** Superman, wait! Think this through.

**Superman:** I ***have.*** Kaiyo said we each had ***one chance*** to affect this world—

**Batman:** But she’s a ***demon!*** A goddess of ***chaos!*** And she sent us back in time where we could ***disrupt*** everything that’s ever happened ***since!***

**Superman:** But those are Darkseid’s parademons! This is what we came here to stop!

**Batman:** It’s a ***rigged*** game, Superman!

**Superman:** So we just ***stand here*** and ***watch?***

**Jonathan Kent:** I love you, Martha.

**Martha Kent:** I love you, Jonathan.

**Superman:** Is that what you'd do to ***your*** parents, Bruce?

(Batman/Superman #12, pp. 5-7)

**Superman:** Where were you?

**Batman:** The… the ***demon*** took me to ***Gotham.***

**Superman:** What happened?

**Batman:** Nothing good. What's going on?

**Superman:** They're planning their final assault.

**Batman:** Just ***three*** of them?

**Superman:** Helena and Karen are out there, too, standing by.

**Batman:** That's still a pretty small army.

**Superman:** So it's a good thing we're here. They're planning a three prong attack. We have to figure out how we fit in. Kaiyo said we each have ***one chance*** to intervene. We have to choose carefully. Millions—maybe billions of lives are at stake.'

**Batman:** You'll only have a few ***seconds*** in the tactile world once you ***commit.*** Have to make it ***count.***

**Superman:** How do you know that?

**Batman:** You were right. In Gotham… When the time came… I ***cracked*** just like ***you*** would have. I'm… I'm sorry.

**Superman**: Don't be. I kind of like it when my friends turn out to be human.

**Batman:** ***I*** don't.

(Batman/Superman #12, pp. 15-16)

The two pieces of conversation act as a mirror to reflect Batman's characterization as a part of the dialectic. Bruce Wayne, who claims to have a practical view, has easily succumbed to the villain's trap to turn tangible and saves a version of

Alfred that does not belong to his world. As he failed to live up to his word, he had acknowledged to himself that he was not above Superman in terms of ethics. However, Superman is willing to forgive his mistake. This showed the progression of the relationship where the two characters were beginning to be able to understand each other. Superman's claim that "I kind of like it when my friends turn out to be human" was an ironic message considering that Batman is biologically human. The implication made is that Batman was a human because he still had a feeling for and attachment to his relatives. The theme of humanity was used in the narrative as a tool that allowed the two characters to share character traits and get closer as friends.

In a sense that superheroes can empathize with one another, similar instances also showed that shared sentimentality also allowed the two characters to solve dialectical tension and reach mutual relationship. Consider the following excerpt from the end of *Supergirl*:

**Batman:** Are you going to be all right?

**Superman:** Hardest thing I've ever had to do.

**Batman:** The beating you gave Darkseid?

**Superman:** Do you know when he thought he'd killed Kara, he showed no remorse at all? After all that, he made it easy.

**Batman:** Then… what is it?

**Superman:** I remember when I started college, my dad wrote me a letter. He described how he and my mom had done their job. They'd brought me up right. And how all that meant to him the morning I left was their only son was old enough to say "goodbye". I didn't raise Kara. The truth is, we were only just getting to know each other. But I was so hellbent on keeping her close to me… so thrilled to have someone who didn't make me feel alone… that I did exactly the opposite of what I set out to do. I made it so she couldn't choose her own life, her

own destiny. I didn't know until it was too late that she already was old enough to say “goodbye”.

**Batman:** Clark. Since the night I found Kara in Gotham Harbor, I've been trying to understand your behavior. You've been overprotective—even hostile to anyone who might harm her. The only thing I could find in my life to compare it to was how I would react if Jason Todd were suddenly alive.

**Superman:** I'm sorry about the crack I made about Jason.

**Batman:** It's forgotten, but… I now don't believe this is like Jason. It's more like Dick Greyson… when Dick decided he'd outgrown being Robin and chose to be Nightwing… separating Batman and Robin, I had trouble letting go.

**Superman:** Kara is safe on ***Paradise Island***. Whatever life she chooses…

(Superman/Batman #13, pp. 16-17)

The ultimate outcome of the *Supergirl* story showed that Superman turns out to be the one ‘in the right’ and that Kara Zor-El is a harmless person. As such, Superman was allowed to keep his cousin while Batman adjusted his own cynicism and accepted the girl and became her mentor in *Superman/Batman #19.* However, Superman must also comply with Batman’s methods; becoming less protective over Kara and he ultimately apologizes to him for yelling at him, (“I'm sorry about the crack I made about Jason.”). Batman, meanwhile, is capable of doing so because of his experiences with Dick Greyson (“It's more like Dick Greyson… when Dick decided he'd outgrown being Robin and chose to be Nightwing… separating Batman and Robin, I had trouble letting go.”) However, Batman is also ‘in the right’ in describing Superman’s irrational behaviors throughout the story, which lets Darkseid capture the girl in the first place. As such, the relationship between Superman and Batman is likely to become stronger after the story ended. Ultimately, a dialectical solution allows an opportunity for both characters to adjust attitudes, philosophies, and behaviors to achieve further ideas and

knowledge, personal maturity, and better friendship. The synthesis of the *Supergirl* story was presented in *Superman/Batman #19*, where Superman and Batman, based upon the Man of Steel's plight, agreed to work together to surveil Supergirl's training to become a heroine, although Superman and Batman are not the focus of that particular comic book.

The themes of loneliness and desire to find a home or a family member are an integral part of literary texts and social values in American culture since the creation of an American-exclusive literary genre in the 1800s. Particularly, these pieces of literature expressed the struggles and difficulties of Jewish people, immigrants, minorities, and slaves. For example, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* narrated the issue of slavery, discrimination, and torture in early American society. Similarly, *The Grapes of Wrath* showed the struggle of people in the face of depression trying to find a new home to rebuild their lives, despite the possible deaths of family members. The superhero genre had a significant record for being related to the theme of personal struggles and family. Firstly, Superman and Batman were originally created by Jewish people and were a power fantasy helping to relieve the tensions from the Great Depression and, in the modern and postmodern perspectives, cynicism (Brod, 2016; Coogan, 2006; Rosenberg, 2013). Secondly, the characters are operating upon the universal ideas of humanity, kindness, and compassion, allowing them to empathize and cooperate with other people. Finally, superhero characters are innately designed to contain a degree of tragedy in life, whether from the fact they are orphaned and have experienced family deaths, or that they have personal problems that require them to seek to socialize with other fellow superheroes (Fingeroth, 2004; Genter, 2007). Superman and Batman, especially, are being depicted as lost souls with similar dilemmas. Batman is usually depicted as a character with severe trauma due to the deaths of his parents and his friends, whereas Superman is usually depicted as a lonely alien who yearns for a family and a place in the world (Terjesen, 2013a; Waid, 2014). Such common sentimentality allows the superhero to be surprisingly accepting toward sentimental aspects of personal struggles, and cause the two to work together in harmony.

5.3.3.2 Voluntary Sublation

While some of the analyzed texts have shown that Superman and Batman's relationship concerns the power struggle and philosophical sublation. As such, the dissolution of either party did not seem to be the answer to Superman-Batman dialectics. After all, the 'death' of the dialectical component never truly happened in *Superman/Batman* nor *Batman/Superman*. Instead, the crossovers between Superman and Batman showed plenty of evidence that indicates the higher levels of dialectical struggle and sublation.

Dialectical dissolution is being weaponized as a tool to fight against supervillains. Superman and Batman utilize it to transform them at will to solve specific conflicts. For example, Superman has experienced multiple instances when he required Batman's assistance or even adapted the Caped Crusader's worldview and mentality to solve his problems. Similarly, the story arc *Superman's Joker (Batman/Superman #16-#20)* is a prominent example of this development:

**Batman:** I know a little something about this kind of thing, Clark. You're not dealing with a rational person. There's… nothing here to make sense of. You've got yourself a ***Joker.***

**Superman:** A… ***Joker…***

**Batman:** A remorseless, obsessive, insane ***murderer*** who's playing a game you'll never ***understand.*** But it gets ***worse***. ***My*** Joker could poison the city. But ***yours…*** with this lethal technology even ***Superman*** can't find? I don't see a ***limit*** to what he or she is capable of.

**Superman:** …So how do you handle it? How do ***I*** handle…

**Batman:** You do everything you can possibly think of to prepare. So we start by monitoring ***every person*** the enemy might know who has a personal ***connection*** to you. And so you ***win*** a few. But of course you can't think of ***everything…*** So ***you*** lose a few. And maybe you start

to go a little crazy. But you never, ever give up. And when the time comes, you do what you have to do.

**Superman:** Did… did you kill the Joker?

**Batman:** No. And I tell myself… again and again… that I ***won't.*** But someday…

**Superman:** I… I don't want to be like you, Bruce.

**Batman:** Neither do I.

(Batman/Superman #16, pp. 16-19)

In this story, several attacks had been made toward people who were related to Superman, including Supergirl, Steel, and a bystander who was wearing a Superman costume while visiting children in a hospital. Due to the bystander's death, Superman seeks to avenge the murder victim and asks Batman for help. Batman, who realized the attacking pattern, speculated that the killer is acting as the Joker. Batman prompts Superman to begin acting like him in order to deal with the threat. Superman reacts with resistance, saying that he does not want to become a skeptical loner like his friend.

The absolute opposing nature of dialectical faction is analyzed in this particular study throughout the 'Comic Book Structure' section. However, it seems the dialectical process does not end there. Hegelian Dialectics analyzes historical evolution where the new regime should build upon the remains of the old instead of completely eliminating it, and that the power balance can be altered as the situation demanded (Boulding, 1970). Indeed, the struggle of Superman being assimilated into Batman is shown in the above excerpt. In this conversation, Batman convinces Superman he has developed a supervillain, who was "a remorseless, obsessive, insane murderer who's playing a game you'll never understand" similar to the Joker. Batman then proceeds to explain his own experiences with his nemesis. Apparently, Batman wanted to establish himself as an experienced and well suited to deal with such type of villain and Superman has no choice but to rely on him or adapt his fighting techniques. Superman's statement "I… I don't want to be like you, Bruce." He clearly shows resistance to what has become an ideological struggle for Superman, for the experience with this particular enemy may destroy his sense of ethics or his identity forever. Batman claims "Neither

do I," which shows an agreement with Clark's mindset and an agreement to support and assist him in defeating the enemy. Throughout the *Superman Joker* arc, Superman repeatedly expresses his need to adapt to Batman's perspectives. For example, *Batman/Superman #19* shows Superman saying he needs to "think about the bigger picture" (p. 15) and therefore abandons his ideals in a favor of a more appropriate way of fighting supervillains.

The idea of being turned into a Batman has been considered a significant issue in *The New 52* continuity due to the commercial successes with Batman causing the company to revise all superheroes to have dramatic backstories and moral ambiguities. Superman, especially, became stereotyped by lesser skilled writers, casual fans, and in-universe villains, who tended to interpret the Man of Steel as a naïve or stupid hero who only relied on brute strength to defeat an enemy (DC, 2015; Donovan & Richardson, 2013; Foresman, 2008; N. Levin, 2016; Michaud, 2016a). The general incline toward modern and postmodern cynicism has caused writers to develop for Superman a cynical outlook to life. This issue of identity is a part of the dialectical struggle within a person. The issue of sublation and assimilation is a significant indication of 'The Great Melting Pot' theory and its development that serves as a critical assessment of American culture. Originally, the melting pot refers to a belief that America was a country that allowed people of different races, nationalities, and religious beliefs to co-exist in peace. Zangwill (1914) provided the following remark:

> America is God's Crucible, the great Melting Pot where all the races of Europe are melting and re-forming! Here you stand, good folk, think I, when I see them at Ellis Island, here you stand in your fifty groups, with your fifty languages and histories, and your fifty blood hatreds and rivalries. But you won't be long like that, brothers, for these are the fires of God you've come to-these are fires of God. A fig for your feuds and vendettas! Germans and Frenchmen, Irishmen and Englishmen, Jews and Russians-into the Crucible with you all! God is making the American. (Zangwill, 1914, p. 33)

The United States has primed itself to be the land of opportunity and freedom where different people, especially the troubled souls who have migrated from

different places to find a home or a family. The theme of immigration has been expressed throughout the literary texts and social values in American culture since the creation of the American-exclusive literary genre in the 1800s. For example, Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* in 1983 features a discriminated black American who struggled yet managed to find happiness in life. Superman and Batman themselves embodied this trope because they are both originally created by and therefore represent Jewish people (Brod, 2016; Duncan & Smith, 2013) who had formed a friendship to fulfill their needs of kinship in superhero careers. However, several views from modern perspectives have been skeptical about this promise (Gleason, 1964; Hirschman, 1983; Kallen, 2017; Steinberg, 2014). Hirschman claimed that Zangwill was ignorant of social conflicts and racial discriminations that may occur when many types of people interact with one another. Specifically, he claimed that American was instead related to an idea of assimilation, power struggle, and discrimination. The basic idea of the Melting Pot is that people of different races are bound to compete for positions of power and privilege as they are being assimilated or reduced into the part of the great, singular, and homogenous American culture. This is true to an extent with the movement of modernism and cynicism in comics forcing certain characters to conform to the modern images of heroism. Superman and Batman frequently have to engage in conflicts and negotiate the power balance to see which character superior, which is ever-changing in tone, theme, and narrative direction.

However, 'the melting pot' has also been criticized and reinterpreted multiple times. Glazer and Moynihan's analysis in *Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians, and Irish of New York City* (1970) claimed that melting pot as in an attempt to force a person of a specific racial group in America to be reduced to a new race that never existed in New York. Instead, interaction and assimilation between different people in America was a voluntary process, where people of different races manage to conform to society yet stay separated and unique. Likewise, Grey (2011) stated that the notion of the melting pot was too simple to describe modern American culture because American assimilation is not supposed to be an instant process and there are instances of multiculturalism that keep sub-cultures in America from being completely fused into a single entity. Instead, the idea is replaced by the issues of multiculturalism and how people of different races adapted

themselves in a different environment for individualistic survival and collective successes (Grey, 2011). At the end of the story in *Batman/Superman #20*, the murderer is revealed as a Kryptonian scientist named Xa-Du, who had brainwashed the people of the miniature city of Kandor to attack Superman's relatives. In the climactic battle, Batman is seemingly vaporized by the villain, but Superman surprisingly remains calm about his friend's death and continues to fight the villain. It turns out that Batman has deliberately faked his death in order to use the Atom's shrinking machine to grow Batman back to a normal size. When Xa-Du is distracted, Batman uses a Phantom Zone projector to banish Xa-Du into the Phantom Zone. When Supergirl asks how Batman is still alive, this exchange occurs:

**Supergirl:** Batman—***alive?*** How?

**Superman:** Dr. Palmer ***shrank*** him just as Mara-Van's blast hit him.

**Supergirl:** You ***knew?***

**Superman:** We faced an enemy like the ***Joker.*** I had to think like Batman. And I knew Batman wouldn't turn his back on an enemy unless he has a ***plan.***

**Batman:** You're learning… But I wish you didn't have to.

(Superman/Batman #20, p. 18)

The conversation shows Batman using a specific strategy to allow him to defeat the villain while Superman instantly acknowledges Batman's plan and supports him. The idea of Batman having a contingency plan is a staple of the characters in all their incarnations, and this particular backup plan is foreshadowed in Batman/Superman #18, where Batman is ambushed and survives a Kandorian attack. Interestingly, Superman said, "I had to think like Batman. And I knew Batman wouldn't turn his back on an enemy unless he has a plan". Superman finding a need to express himself to "think like Batman" is interesting because it suggests the character actively learned to accept or respect a friend's perspective. The most interesting aspect of 'Superman becoming Batman's argument as shown in *Superman/Batman #20* is the fact the Man of Steel never changes completely from the experience. While Superman

is being challenged with an identity crisis by a Batman-Esque enemy and must adopt Batman's ideology by the end of the story; however, he remained as Superman afterward. Instead, he only borrows Batman's perspectives by putting himself in the Caped Crusader's shoes in order to keep concentrating in battle. Superman does not find a need to sacrifice his own identity in order to sublate his consciousness into Batman's methodology. In doing so, Superman has developed new tactics and knowledge which is based on both Batman and Superman, an impregnable mind enhanced by the invulnerable body.

Similar instances of temporary sublation occur in other stories including *The Big Noise (Superman/Batman #68-#71)* where Superman agrees to use tricks to lure supervillains out of a city. On the other hand, *Universe's Finest (Batman/Superman #29-#31)* shows the two heroes switch costumes in order to fool a space pirate into capturing 'Batman' and takes the heroes to a villain's stronghold. Superman and Batman switching costumes are one of the most symbolic and memorable actions shared by the two characters. This tactic first appeared in *World's Finest Comic #71,* where Superman and Batman join forces for the first time in *DC Comics,* and the concept is repeatedly used throughout the *Silver Age of Comics.* In the modern context, Superman and Batman switching costumes is a symbolic act that shows the flexibility of ideology and maturity shared by the two characters. Superman's ability to assume Batman's role signifies the Man of Steel as an exemplar of a person who is capable of voluntarily doing a 'paradigm shift' and switch between different sets of ideologies to deal with difficult situations. However, the eventual outcome of the struggle is not the complete destruction of either Superman or Batman. Instead, the protagonists are required to rekindle their friendship and maintain the status quo. An important aspect of Hegelian Dialectics is the sublation and adjustment of dialectical components to reach a compromise as a solution for a historical evolution. This means that there is a perceived 'best' solution for Superman and Batman, which pushes their friendship forward. Both friends must spontaneously learn about something by observing the partner's attitude and action so that they both could adjust and sublate into the partner's perspective to solve the conflict at hand. Superhero stories adore these ideas of superheroes trading and sharing traits and abilities, which is significant because, in superhero comics, the character's identity is treated as an iconic symbol with

recognizable values (Coogan, 2006). As evident from *Superman/Batman Annual #1,* Clark Kent's 'Supernova' can only exist temporarily because Clark Kent overcomes his personal issues and quickly reclaims the Superman persona. For this, despite the intense power struggle and negotiation, complete assimilation between superheroes could not occur. Instead, they acquire knowledge and wisdom from the negotiation to improve upon their identity, creating a depiction of dialectical negotiation between Superman and Batman as heterogeneous beings.

One of the most prominent arguments is that they had the ability to work seamlessly well despite their differences:

**Superman:** Thanks.

**Batman:** No problem.

**Superman:** I knew you were ***close.*** But I didn't think you had time to ***reach*** him. The machine was about to ***hit.*** I couldn't—

**Batman:** You've got nothing to explain. You didn't have a choice. I'd have done the same thing. And you'd have been there for me.

(Superman/Batman #27, p. 7)

*Batman/Superman #27: Trust* was a particularly interesting issue that captured the essence of the systematic relationship between Superman and Batman. Due to a shift of status quo in the continuity, Superman was robbed of his superpower while Bruce Wayne temporarily died and let the police commissioner, James Gordon, fill the role of Batman. The context showed both characters' nostalgia toward the 'real' Clark Kent and Bruce Wayne helping each other defend Metropolis. Superman's best friend Jimmy Olsen got knocked off a building and was about to die while Superman himself had no choice but to abandon Olsen to destroy a falling death giant machine that could have killed millions of people. Fortunately, Batman is around the area and quickly rescues Jimmy. Superman rushes back to Jimmy after the fight and approaches Batman to thank him.

The primary prospect of the Superhero's relationship is an ability for the heroes to look after one another and to act as if they are one single unit. Gregory Noveck, the SVP Creative Affairs of DC Comics in 2009, said, "What appeals to us about the story, I think, when we started developing it was to really just make that crash and that contrast of these two guys who ultimately had a very similar goal but just radically different ways to go about it." (Maynard et al., 2009a). In the same video reference, Bruce Timm, a senior director of Batman the Animated Series, added that Superman and Batman were cooperating as best friends and that they complemented each other in ways that they could not if the friendship didn't exist. It was apparent that despite the differences between the two characters, they were capable of seeing the good aspects of the partners and appeal to these traits. Responding to the depictions of Hegelian and the master-slave dynamic, it was required that the current relationship be interpreted in itself as a form of system that exists and operates because there were conflicting forces. This Superman-Batman dichotomy, from the overall speculation and initial analysis, corresponded to the socio-political conception of dialectics where conflicts and argument drives the relationship to the perceived 'better' stances.

The ability to create a new form of knowledge consisting of both thesis and antithesis plays a significant part in the social development of an individual. A comment by Batman, who said "You're learning… But I wish you didn't have to." paints the discourse as a form of forceful character development where the situation dictates changes and growth within the character to manage dialectical tension between a need to stick to one's own ideology or to shift into a different mode to solve everyday problems. A theory of 'perspective transformation' (Tennant, 1993) signified a sociological learning process where an individual accepted and adapted oneself to other people's worldviews, transforming oneself into a proper adult where one learned to accept and adapt to another person' perspective. The idea of learning from each other and gaining mutual respect in adult friendship commonly manifests itself in the 'aftermath' section of every major story arc. The idea that the static character, bound by status quo and brand name recognition, is able to adapt and integrate one's own belief with another character signifies the surprising degree of moral flexibility of superhero characters acting as a moral exemplar to the readers. While a person has to struggle to adapt oneself to the society's viewpoint, the comic books encourage the

reader to have a compromising approach to the social collaboration, although one must also keep reminding oneself of an original identity. Doing so would allow the reader to stay inside a culture without sacrificing one's own self-worth.

5.3.3.3 Superman-Batman as a System of Virtue Friendship

The analysis of the overall narrative in this excerpt shows a dynamic and growing relationship between Superman and Batman in New 52, which corresponded to the writer's original intention for writing the story. Greg Pak (Egross, 2014) emphasized that his Superman and Batman were not the same characters as the *Post-Crisis* counterpart. However, they were meant to develop and get closer as friends. It is possible that Superman and Batman act as antitheses to a common perspective of the modern world. They are victims of postmodern cynicism for they perceive each other as opponents and enemies when they first meet, but they were capable of cooperating and bonding with one another to develop oneself and partner as mature adult superheroes, as recognized by fans of the Post-Crisis continuity. This development was shown during *Batman/Superman #27* as a reference to a strong friendship Clark Kent and Bruce Wayne has developed by the time Commissioner Gordon tried to replace Bruce as a new Batman. Gordon himself described Superman and Batman's relationship as "total trust" (Batman/Superman #27, p. 3), which signified the 'friendship of goodness' or the highest form of friendship operating on trust and intimacy according to Aristotle (Malloy, 2008). Regarding the Aristotelian tradition of friendship, Annas (1977), claimed that true friendship focused on the degree of mutuality between friends and the underlying implication behind the formation of friendship. As analyzed, Superman and Batman fit into the base category where the two characters had attained mutual recognition for each other's strengths, perspectives, and ethical standpoints in various situations. Aristotle had categorized friendship in three levels: the friendship of pleasure, the friendship of utility, and the friendship of goodness. The two first categories are friendships that existed to provide benefits to self. That said, friendship is formed in order to satisfy a person's basic need either for socialization or for perquisites and rewards gained from the relationship. The third type, perceived as the highest and the 'true' form of friendship, shifts a focus from the benefit of friendship to a requirement and commitment of friendship. Morris (2014) claimed the third level of friendship is the one that best corresponds to Superman and Batman's

partnership for several reasons. First, the friendship of goodness requires an "other-focused" attitude where two friends actively provide for and look after one another out of virtuous or affection "for the sake of the friend alone, and not with any selfish concern for residual benefits." (p. 105). Within this context, Commissioner Gordon's narration is meant to reflect the opinions of comic writers and fans. Examining the relationship between Superman and Batman beyond the obvious differences between the characters allows the researcher to understand how comic books depict antagonistic friendship as a gateway to reach mutual relationship.

In addition, Morris (2014) referred to the relationship as being comparable to Aristotle's conception of friendship as follows:

> It's possible to interpret the Aristotelian categories of friendship as valuing equality even more as we ascend to higher forms of friendship—the complete friendship—that, in the report of ancient historian Diogenes Laertius, Aristotle famously characterized as "one soul in two bodies". (Morris, 2014, p. 105).

Equality is arguably one of the most important aspects to critique in terms of the friendship between Superman and Batman because it serves as a baseline for the relationship itself and the complexity of the interaction between the characters. First, because both Superman and Batman are being inspired or mentored by one another, they are in a position to evaluate and judge one another (Morris, 2014). Because the characters have no obligation to save each other's faces, they were not afraid to criticize or remind one another of any possible fault exhibit. This causes aggressiveness and arguments. However, the pattern also produces more chances for the characters to learn the 'harsh lessons' in order to develop themselves as a better person individually and collectively. This idea of 'one soul in two bodies', especially, is a concept that corresponds to the Hegelian conception of dialectics as a cooperative system where thesis and antithesis coexist simultaneously to create and improve the functionality of the current social system.

One of the good examples of 'two bodies, one soul' appeared in *Superman/Batman #4: World's Finest*. On page 8, Superman and Batman fought Captain Marvel and Hawkman respectively. Batman mentions the word "castling"

which prompts Superman to switch an opponent with him. Castling refers to a special maneuver in a chess game, where a play switches the King piece and one of the two Rooks in their initial positions on the chessboard, which brings the King to a safer position while bringing the selected Rook to the center of the board (Edwards, 2007, p. 33). Castling is an interesting word to use in this context partly because its definition does not entirely fit the action, and the writer could have used simpler words to indicate the plan. Instead, Jeph Loeb used this term as a synonym for the act of switching opponents, which likely serves as a symbolic action where the partners can cooperate and commit certain actions that the characters cannot individually do. This cooperation is further supported by certain issues including *Superman/Batman #3: World's Finest, Superman/Batman #15: Absolute Power,* and *#25: With a Vengeance* where Leob repeatedly depicted Superman and Batman fighting large numbers of opponents while also providing narrations showing Superman and Batman's trust toward each other. In the meantime, Superman and Batman found a need to challenge one another by asking if the partner is ready to fight the villain. Jeph Loeb was known for depicting fight scenes where Superman and Batman took down extraordinary numbers of enemies at once. These fight scenes indicate masculinity and the uses of violence that are being framed as justified because fight scenes are being used to emphasize character relationships.

Other instance of cooperation appeared in *The New 52* continuity wherein *Batman/Superman #29,* Superman jokes that Batman rarely called for help and tried to come up with the code "Banana Muffin" (p. 3) to substitute a call for help, resulting in Batman glaring at him in disagreement. Afterward, Batman is attacked by the space pirate Lobo, and Batman resorts to using "Banana Muffin" to ask Superman for an assist, showing that Batman accepted Superman's antic. The affectionate relationship is emphasized even further in the finale of the series. In *Batman/Superman #31 'The Final Days of Superman',* Superman was infected by a blood poisoning, which would surely kill him as time passed. The Man of Steel rushes to Batman to ask him to look for the abducted Supergirl. In this issue, Batman shows a surprising amount of affection for Superman, asking about his health, offering to find him a cure, assuring Superman he will find Supergirl and complementing Superman on saving three thousand people from a volcano eruption the following day.

By *Batman/Superman #32,* Batman outwardly and uncharacteristically expresses a very positive attitude toward Superman by congratulating him for getting back together with his girlfriend, which surprises Wonder Woman. As a response, Superman called himself, Wonder Woman, and Batman as "Super-Friend", both as a reference to the old Justice League cartoon during the 50s, which was during the *Silver Age of Comic,* when superheroes were extremely friendly toward one another. IT also referenced the idea that the three characters had a unique, supernatural, and idealistic relationship. All of these instances show the contexts of these comic book narratives emphasize the contrasts between the two characters, which led to the characters rekindling the friendship and resolving dialectical tension for a stronger friendship. Other instances of cooperation between the two characters were commonly found throughout the book series, such as *Superman/Batman Annual #1 and Batman/Superman #20,* where the two characters rely on each other to distract villains and defeat them. In this regard, a supervillain conflict is likely to serve as a reflection of how a person should let go of interpersonal differences in order to cooperate with a friend or a partner to achieve a common goal. Rook (1989) believed that that friendship between antagonistic people, despite increased strains in the relationship, tends to yield more productive results than friends who get along all the time.

The friendship between Superman and Batman, therefore, is depicted with the levels of mutual trust that is difficult to achieve by a normal person's standard. In the *Post-Crisis* continuity, which features Superman and Batman as already developed and mature superheroes. One of the highlighted themes is the privilege to rely on each other to fulfill a specific task. Sometimes, this included handling a friend's secret. The following exchange in *Superman/Batman #49* shows an interesting theme of affection and trust between the heroes:

| | |
|---|---|
| **Batman:** | That's it. We ***did*** it. Every shard. Every scrap. Those known to man and those not. |
| **Superman:** | Not ***all*** of it. There's still ***one last piece.*** I want you to keep it. |
| **Batman:** | Are you ***kidding?*** After all we went through to keep you ***safe*** from Kryptonite? |

**Superman:** When we started this, a lot of people don't want us to succeed. ***Enemies, friends, governments.*** Maybe they're not entirely wrong. There were times when we were collecting Kryptonite that… I went too far. I saw a side of myself I didn't like. I made ***mistakes.*** You said it when we began—Kryptonite is what makes me ***most human.*** And to be human means to have vulnerabilities. To know there's always—***always*** an ***end.*** If I don't allow for this… some possibility… for ***death…*** it's only a ***mask.*** Playing at humanity. Mortality… the fear of death and its imminence… it's as fundamental to the human condition as ***breathing.***

**Batman:** You don't breathe either***.***

**Superman:** Now I can. Take it. The last piece of Kryptonite in the world.

**Batman:** I'll keep it ***safe.***

**Superman:** I know you will… I know I can always ***trust*** you, Bruce.

(Superman/Batman #49, pp. 20-22)

At the end of *K*, Superman and Batman successfully get rid of all Kryptonite in the world. However, Superman intentionally leaves one of the pieces in a lead box, hands it to Batman, and expresses that he needs at least one piece of his weakness to exist in the world because he believes Batman should be the one who held onto the ore. In the excerpt, not only Superman spent an entire paragraph talking about his need to retain his sense of mortality, but also appeals to Batman to do a task for him. The word "trust", as seen from the excerpt, is being highlighted by the writer, which signified the theme of the story. *Superman/Batman #49* is not the first time that Superman entrusts Batman with a piece of Kryptonite as a safety measure. In the post-Crisis continuity, Superman previously gave Batman a Kryptonite Ring in *Action Comics #654.* Similar to this particular issue, Superman asks Batman to hold onto a piece of Kryptonite, claiming Batman to be a person he trusted with his life. It is clear

that this particular scene in the excerpt is not a standalone context, but a significant reference to a standard of the relationship between Superman and Batman.

Utility in friendship is always a significant part of Eurocentric friendship that can emerge even in a genuine relationship. According to Rawlins (2008), “Persons derive utilitarian rewards from friendships regardless of the original purposes for engaging in them. Even Aristotle admits that pleasure and utility could be byproducts of a friendship of virtue” (p. 18). These benefits may stem from personal needs for security, general inquiries of socialization, or a specific request. Male relationships, especially, tend to carry coalitional and political connotations where utility is an innately expected part of friendship (Pham, Barbaro, Mogilski, & Shackelford, 2015). However, the differences between a utility from virtue relationship and a typical utilitarian relationship are the degree to which the utilities are the focused part of the relationship. Mutual friendship is strictly relative to the level of moral obligation and respect that friends have toward each other when asking for utilities (Rawlins, 2008). The utilitarian implication in a virtue relationship carries a win-win situation where friends were willing to be happy to give and take benefits of the friendship, unlike a pure utilitarian friendship where benefits are being used as a forefront of the relationship, which could easily break due to paranoia or betrayal caused by breaches of conditions and trusts. Overall, the utilitarian assumption of friendship is not a negative aspect in mutual friendship provided that the friends’ consent to the utilitarian relationship and the friends acknowledge a requirement to maintain friendship at a healthy level.

In addition, Hegel’s (1977) concept of ‘Mutual Recognition’ (*Anerkennung)* in the dialectical struggle is suggested to be directly relating to the overarching development of the relationship between Superman and Batman. *Mutual recognition* in the Hegelian tradition refers to the final stage of the dialectical development of self-conscious development that is invoked as a result of repeated cycles of master-slave dynamic. An analysis of Hegel’s critique of the master-slave dynamic (Hegel, 1977) indicated the following:

> Separate consciousnesses re-enact at a higher level the action of mutually soliciting forces which, in soliciting each other, in effect only put themselves forth. Each uses the other as the means by which it achieves self~consciousness. To mutual solicitation mutual recognition here corresponds, as well as the recognition of mutual recognition. (Hegel, 1977, p. 521)

*Mutual recognition* is a type of dialectical development that is supposed to evolve with time, which can be related especially to how the character relationship grows in *the New 52* continuity. (Hegel, 1977) indicates that there are three *moments* in a dialectical development. First, "the pure undifferentiated 'I' is its first immediate object" (p. 110), referring to a tendency of the two factions being absolutely at odds with one another, refusing to conform or bend toward another. In *Batman/Superman #1-#4 'Cross World'*, Superman and Batman absolutely hated one another, thinking of each other as a monster and a mad man that must be eliminated at all costs. This allowed the supervillain Kaiyo, the goddess of chaos, to manipulate the two heroes into fighting one another. The second stage of Hegelian Dialectics posits, "But this immediacy is itself an absolute mediation, it is only as a supersession of the independent object, in other words, it is Desire. The satisfaction of Desire is, it is true, reflection of self-consciousness into itself, or the certainty that has become truth." (Hegel, 1977, p. 110). This referred to the cycle of dialectical struggle where Superman and Batman take turns superseding each other in order to develop the bond between one another. Greg Pak (Egross, 2014) stated, "Thematically this is about how two rivals challenge each other to learn how to become heroes, really. It's through this conflict they have with each other that they start working out what it is that they're supposed to do."

As analyzed in the study, expressiveness, judgments, affections, and freedom to be dependent were the primary modes of relational dialectics between the two characters, allowing them to exchange and trade banter and try to supersede and to appreciate one another. In addition, the narrative tension heavily relies on the verbal and philosophical exchanges between Superman and Batman where a specific situation enforces a specific direction of the dialectical struggle. Finally, yet importantly, Hegelian Dialectics indicates "But the truth of this certainty is really a double reflection, the duplication of self-consciousness . . . is equally independent in this negativity of

itself; and thus it is for itself a genus . . . it is a living self-consciousness" (p. 110). This statement referred to the mutual recognition that both thesis and antithesis are equally as important in terms of how the contradicting factions are equally relying upon each other to create the system, even if they were not physically, socially, or philosophically equal. The dialectical opposition acts as a 'reflection' for the component to compare, contrast, and improve them as a means to reach mutual recognition and respect.

In general, *Superman/Batman* and *Batman/Superman* were comic book series that used dialectic either as a means to create tension between the two heroes or to invoke character development, which correspond with the literary theme of the book series about friendship dynamic between Superman and Batman (Egross, 2014; Maynard et al., 2009b). The antagonistic friendship between Superman and Batman was being used as a process that would diachronically develop characters from being hateful to one another into a refined and mutual type of relationship. The constant cycle of power balance where the characters switch places in being 'in the right', as well as the shared sentimentality, allowed the two characters to earn respect from each other and realize that they have equal socio-political stances despite the characters are being judgmental and very opinionated toward one another. *The New 52*, especially, emphasized this development. Superman and Batman both hated each other when they first meet, but they gradually learned to accept one another and develop trust and respect for each other. Superman and Batman, as a dialectical unit, served as a moral exemplar of friendship between young children who struggled to adapt to each other's moral standards and learn about differences in each other in order to reach mature relationships (Smollar & Youniss, 1982). Despite being static characters, the relationship between modern Superman and Batman thieved from the active and dynamic development of mutual trust and respects, which were, ironically, created from arguments and occasional superseding of the two characters (Malloy, 2008).

5.3.3.4 Composite Superman: The Dialectical Abomination

The rather positive depiction of dialectical synthesis between Superman and Batman is being emphasized more due to the conflicting concept that acted as the opposition of the healthy relationship. *Superman/Batman Annual #3 'Compound Fracture!'* had a rather bizarre narrative concerning a monster called Composite Superman that was made of a half of Superman and a half of Batman sewed together

down the middle. Within the story, Superman and Batman discuss the nature of this monster as follows:

**Batman:** Well. ***This*** can't possibly be right.

**Superman:** Why ***not?***

**Batman:** According to the ***test results,*** the trace DNA we gathered reads as ***both*** of ours.

**Superman:** All that ***proves*** is that we were both at each ***scene,*** which we ***were.***

**Batman:** You're not ***getting*** it. The DNA trace reads as both of ours ***together,*** not separately—almost as if the DNA was that of a ***child*** we'd had together.

**Superman:** Okay, now that's just ***creepy.***

**Batman:** There are also traces of various other, ***unidentified*** DNA in the mix as well. A real ***smorgasbord***.

(Superman/Batman Annual #3, pp. 14-15)

Composite Superman is a character with an interesting history in DC Comics. The original Composite Superman was as a couple of Superman and Batman haters, both died and disappeared from the comics. The Composite Superman as seen in *Superman/Batman Annual #3,* on the other hand, was a completely new character created solely for the narrative of the story, meaning that the character was created purposely to explore the Superman and Batman dynamic and is suitable to be analyzed critically. In this regard, Composite Superman is a literal fusion between the two characters, sewn down the middle with two halves of the heroes' rotten flesh. The creature is created by a mad scientist, Dr. Ivo, to fight Superman and Batman, but the doctor was dissatisfied with the result and buried the creature in a cemetery. The creature escapes, showing signs of being mentally handicapped and believing it is simultaneously Superman and Batman.

A Frankenstein's monster archetype has been associated with a specific type of fear in Eurocentric culture. According to Moretti (1988), the original monster from Mary Shelley's novel was " Like the proletariat, he is a *collective* and *artificial*

creature. He is not found in nature, but built" (p. 67). A common Marxist's interpretation of the creature (Baldick, 1990; Shaviro, 2002) centered around the idea that the fear toward the creature reflects the bourgeoisie's fear toward the collective and the dialectics between what society considers good and evil. Humanity was seen as a group of healthy, civilized, and properly functioning bourgeois whereas the creature is depicted as the 'product' of the bourgeois built of masses of unidentifiable flesh and organs that not only were disproportionate and incompatible with one another but also discarded as a failure of society. In this case, Composite Superman is not only being made with a literal integration of Superman and Batman's DNA but also "traces of various other, unidentified DNA in the mix", causing the monster to be called "A real smorgasbord". While Marxian philosophy is not likely relevant to the context of *Superman/Batman Annual #3,* the basic contrast between humans and monsters still applied. The real Superman and Batman, representing healthy superheroes and dialectical friendship, were destined to survive the conflict whereas Composite Superman is depicted as an abomination and a perversion of such friendship. Therefore, the creature must be destroyed.

Batman claimed, "According to the test results, the trace DNA we gathered reads as both of ours… The DNA trace reads as both of ours together, not separately—almost as if the DNA was that of a child we'd had together" is a significant indication of Composite's state of being. The creature's existence points to the idea of a melting pot at its most homogeneous stage where all components related to Superman, Batman, and unknown superheroes are being fused into a single being. This literal integration and instant assimilation are depicted in the context as an undesirable result. Composite is an extremely irrational character, thinking of itself as both Superman and Batman and becoming emotionally unstable when meeting either of them. Incidentally, dialectical tension does exist within Composite Superman as it became conflicted about its own identity. Such confusion within the Composite is worsened by the appearance of the real Superman and Batman. At the climax when the protagonists cornered the creature, the following conversation happened:

**C Superman:** ***NO!*** It can still ***work!*** If you're both dead, I can be you! This is all I know how to ***do***—what I was ***born*** to do!

**Batman:** Which is ***what?***

**C Superman:** Being a ***hero…*** Protecting the ***planet…*** there's only room in the world for ***one*** Superman, ***one*** Batman…and I'm ***him!***

**Batman:** You want to be ***The Batman?*** Go right ***ahead. The Joker*** is robbing the ***Gotham Circus*** even as we speak. Oh, and there's a really nasty ***mugging*** going down in ***Crime Alley.*** And let's not forget the ***armored truck*** being hijacked in the Waterfront District.

**Superman:** Are you ***serious?***

**Batman:** ***Work*** with me.

**C Superman:** S-so many ***Emergencies…*** Wh-which do I stop ***first?***'

**Batman:** Your ***call.*** That's what it ***means*** to be The Batman.

**C Superman:** So ***hard…*** so hard to ***decide… Superman*** wouldn't have these ***problems.***

**Superman:** Really? There's a ***7.6 earthquake*** about to occur in ***Chile.*** An ***avalanche*** is threatening several villages in ***Nepal.*** Oh, and ***Bizarro*** is trying to turn the ***Rocky Mountains*** into the ***Rocky Valley.*** If you want to ***be*** us, then feel what it's ***like*** to be us.

**C Superman:** ***—Aaarrrhhh!!***

<Composite Superman splits in half.>

**Superman:** ***Stop*** him!

**Batman:** Too ***late.***

(Superman/Batman Annual #3, pp. 36-38)

After Composite Superman abducts Lois Lane and Robin, the real Superman and Batman make haste in hunting the creature down. Superman and Batman chased down Composite to its hideout, where Composite starts having a breakdown and a rant about his identity as Superman and Batman. Batman pressured the creature into

choosing between several duties committed by both heroes. Composite Superman cannot handle the pressure and commits suicide by splitting itself in half.

The primary issue for the failure of Composite Superman was its naivety and its inability to understand the complex conditions of the dialectical relationship between Superman and Batman. Composite stated, “There’s only room in the world for one Superman, one Batman… and I’m him”. The word ‘him’ is singular, which suggests the degree to which Composite believes Superman and Batman are a single identity, a product of a melting pot and an inseparable dialectical unit. The monster had a severe identity crisis and could not understand the nature of Superman and Batman as a conjoined unit in adult friendship. Superman and Batman, while usually being critiqued as a perfectly combined unit, are still individuals. Each has a different identity, different beliefs, different roles, different skillsets, and different goals in life; however, the two are able to become partners because of their experiences as colleagues as well as mutual respect for one another. Composite Superman, who is haphazardly put together like Frankenstein’s monster, is unable to attain the ideal relationship between his two sides. Worse, the creature refuses to understand or accept a real superhero’s mission, opting to push away responsibility as soon as things sound difficult and are not willing to accept the burden and the reality of being a superhero. It failed to grasp the ethical implications surrounding either character. The creature cannot grasp the concept of a dialectical friendship shared by Superman and Batman and it failed to engage in sublation and assimilation the way the real heroes have. The depiction of Composite Superman and his eventual fate served as a representation of what comic book writers perceive as an unrealized and immature understanding of how a ‘fusion’ between Superman and Batman should be, which, in accordance with the comic book narrative, results in a disastrous downfall of such naivety. Morris’s (2014) claim about “one soul in two bodies” (p. 105) is in direct contrast to the forced integration of Composite Superman. The friendship between Superman and Batman, as influenced through the friendship of goodness and mutual recognition, is currently an ultimate image of vitreous friendship and Hegelian Dialectics where mutual recognition and respect created from what seems to be an eternally antagonistic relationship.

Overall, a significant development between Superman and Batman appears to have a consistent pattern that emphasizes the dialectical struggle that relied

upon banter, confrontation, and the characters attempting to adapt to one another's ethical perspective. Such developments would start from the series' beginning where the characters despise one another to the series' ending where they can civilly and mutually respect one another. Such character growths were a natural and voluntary process.

## 5.4 Dialectics toward Hyper Masculinity in the Superhero Genre

One of the most prominent subjects about superhero media is its overt displays and its innate connection with masculinity. The study of masculinity was made by Connell (1995) as the study of men's bodies, expressions, and representations within a patriarch society. Masculine hegemony becomes a study about how these depictions of masculine friendship and power struggle to justify and create normative values describing how men act and develop within society and correspond to how Superhero media are defined as a form of narrative that emphasize social and ethical roles of men as labor and prosocial role models (Coogan, 2006; Cruz, 2014). This analysis of masculinity is being presented in the critical narrative analysis of Batman and Superman's relationship because its executions, its contexts, and its implications contain several notions about masculinity that can be connected to how dialectical relationships are depicted in the modern Eurocentric society.

### 5.4.1 Comradery and Male Friendship

Some of the most intriguing results of Stage 1 were the way Superman and Batman both used expressiveness and other direct communication patterns such as judgment and affection to express their relationship. This finding is interesting because it contrasts the stereotypical image of masculinity which usually convicts men to be associated with stoicism and emotional repression while emotional and open expressions are more associated with females (D. G. Williams, 1985). However, the result shows that the expected expressions of men are more different and complex than stereotypes.

The system of relationship between Superman and Batman takes into account how friendship is being expressed between the two during its stable state. Notably, the

interactions are associated with the macho culture or the stereotypical representation of muscular men. One of the first things to consider is the degree of expressions made between the two characters. Superman and Batman are already coded as opposing characters, which encourage conflicts and combat. Consider the following excerpts:

**Batman:** Superman! What's he ***doing*** to you?

**Kilowog:** The truth of his alien nature has been ***inside*** him all along. All they've done is force him to ***face*** it.

**Batman:** What truth? Dammit, ***talk to me—***

**Superman:** No more ***questions.*** I'm tired of the way you look at me. Like I don't ***belong.*** Sick of the ***fear*** in your eyes.

**Batman:** What are you ***talking*** about? *Uhkkk—!*

**Superman:** Look at the way you attacked the ***Martian Manhunter.*** All the times he's risked his ***life*** for the people of this planet… But even now when you see him, you want to look away.

**Kilowog:** Every time he sees ***any of us.*** They're ***all*** afraid. Do it. Show him ***real*** strength.

**Batman:** *Strength—tempered by truth—justice—*

<Superman throw Batman off>

**Superman:** ***No!*** Batman, get away. ***Now.***

Superman/Batman #30, pp. 5-6

**Batman:** Look at you, ***alien.*** Fighting for a world that's ***terrified*** of your power.

**Superman:** Bruce—It's ***controlling*** you. ***Warping*** your mind! These thoughts, they're all lies, all—***Mmpph!***

**Batman:** ***No!*** They're only giving me the same chance they gave you. To see the people of Earth the way ***they*** see them. Weak. Petty. Driven by ***hate*** and ***greed.***

**Superman:** Some humans, perhaps. There are always those who hate. A few willing to succumb to their basest

instincts—but not ***all.*** And never ***you.*** The Blackrock will ***release*** you if it believes it's in ***danger.***

<The Heat Vision hits a gas tank>

**Superman:** Right now, all I can think of is something you said to me at Luthor's. When you were ***forced*** to confront me.

**Batman:** At ***Luthor's?*** Wha—

**Superman:** You said "I'm sorry"—

**Batman:** You think you can scare the rock into ***abandoning*** me… but the ***aliens,*** they've been inside your ***mind.*** They know you better than yourself—They understand your vaunted morality… They know you would never ***kill.***

<Superman punches Batman>

**Batman:** ***Nghhh!***

**Superman:** In any other situation, they'd be ***right.*** But I know ***you.*** And I know the Batman would prefer ***death*** before losing his ***soul.*** I'll do whatever it ***takes*** to bring Bruce Wayne back. Or to give him ***peace.*** I *forced* you to turn to the Blackrock—just to *survive!* The aliens turned us against ***each other.*** That's over. I want my *friend* back—I want it to let you—***GO!!***

Superman/Batman #33, pp. 2-7

Throughout *Superman/Batman #32-#33,* Superman is mind-controlled by the Blackrock alien, forcing Batman to sacrifice himself by allowing himself to be consumed by the invader in his partner's place. After he is freed from the mind control, Superman returns a favor by tracking down the runaway Batman. He helps Batman overcome the alien by keeping physically beating down his partner and scaring the alien away.

An ironic development is evident in the excerpt as violence was being used to solve problems and to show affection between superheroes. It would be an indication of masculinity in comics and expresses how superheroes express themselves to each

other. Mosher and Tomkins (1988) suggested that the hyper-masculinity society was defined by three prospects: a callous sexual attitude, violence seen as manly, and danger as excitement. The superhero genre positions itself in the way that actions and violence are being used as the selling point of the comic books. Crossovers between Superman and Batman, especially, are usually promoted because of their conflicts and arguments (Riesman, 2016).

First, both Superman and Batman expressed a callous attitude toward conflicts. While Superman and Batman exhibited great amounts of expressiveness and to a lesser extent affection, they tend to have a very strong display of traits related to masculinity and craving for violence. Violence is usually depicted as a manly activity and is suitable for any situation, even in a context where the best way to free his partner from mind control was to continue pummeling him. Third, Superman and Batman are usually placed in a dangerous situation where their friendship is being challenged. Conflicts are considered normative in a superhero narrative, which can drive drama and emphasize the intimate relationship between the protagonists.

Despite that, Superheroes also expressed qualities that went against the assumption of hyper-masculinity. For example, *Superman/Batman #1* shows Batman rushing into a grave to heal Superman after the latter is shot by a Kryptonite bullet. Meanwhile, the *Super/Bat* arc shows that Batman is mentally corrupted by a curse and several other instances where either character is being mind-controlled. Finally, Superman has a mental breakdown after Batman's temporary death during *Superman/Batman #76. Post-Crisis* continuity shows this type of affection very often due to the relationship between Superman and Batman which is already at a mature stage when the first Superman/Batman comic is published in 2003. Some of the extreme cases of affection are shown when either Superman or Batman was being endangered or mind-controlled by the villains so that a fight can occur without actually endangering the relationship dynamic.

Despite the constant conflicts between the two characters, writers and audiences usually interpreted Superman and Batman as true comrades who have an intimate relationship appreciated and respected. In a conversation between the executive creators of the *Superman/Batman*: *Public Enemies* cartoon adaptation (Maynard et al., 2009a), Bruce Timm, the executive producer, indicated that despite the clash between the two

characters, the focus of the story was in a way, similar to police developing as partners. Meanwhile, Andrea Romano, the voice casting director, added to Timm's remark that the relationship between Superman and Batman was comparable to siblings, where the characters would express deep care toward one another despite their constant bantering and rivalry. Romano's claim was supported in *Superman/Batman #14-#18 'Absolute Power':*

**Superman:** What could I possibly wish for? Bruce is like a brother to me. The ***three*** of you are the best parents anyone could ask for. We're a ***family.*** And nothing can ever change that

(Batman/Superman #14, p. 18)

**Superman:** I… Bruce, I hope you know I would never let anything happen to you. You're' more than just my partner. You're my brother.

**Batman:** I know. We're family.

(Batman/Superman #15, p. 9)

Absolute Power was an interesting context of sibling rivalry as the two characters are reimagined as adopted brothers who have been raised together by the Legion of Supervillains. In the excerpts, words such as "brother" and "family" are being used to highlight the intimate friendship between the two characters. While the brotherly relationship was depicted as a false memory in the story, it is shown that the two characters retained a close relationship after their memories had been restored. *Superman/Batman #50* once again showed the themes of family and kinship. In *'The Fathers'*, it was depicted that Thomas Wayne, as he met and acknowledged the certain doom of Planet Krypton, expresses a wish to adopt Kal-El if he and Bruce meet. The set of narrations from pages 38 and 39 show each character considered his partner like a brother he never had.

The status quo between Superman and Batman, as seen through the perspectives of the writers, appeared to be something that is celebrated. Not only were the protagonists actively written to embrace comic book hegemony, but several elements in the comic book narrative are being altered to enhance the relationship between the two characters. In *Superman/Batman #50,* the history of Superman and Batman are rewritten by comic writers so that Superman's biological father, Jor-El and Batman's father, Thomas Wayne, once met on Planet Krypton. Thomas takes Jor-El's probe technology to be developed as the foundation of WayneTech. Following the revelation, Superman and Batman develop a greater appreciation for one another. The following exchange occurred:

**Batman:** You understand why I didn't believe it at first.

**Superman:** I'd be disappointed in you if you ***did.***

**Batman:** If your father hadn't sent that probe, Wayne Enterprises would never have developed the technology it needed to survive. And I wouldn't have the means I need to be Batman ***today.***

**Superman:** If your father hadn't been the one to find that probe. My father might have spent me somewhere else. I would have been raised on another world, and Earth would never have heard of Superman.

**Batman:** He used to talk about his vision for Gotham. That was the word he used. His ***vision*** for the city Gotham could ***become*** someday. Now I know where that vision came from.

**Superman:** And I always wondered why my father chose Earth. There are hundreds of planets circling ***yellow suns.*** He could have sent me to any one of them. Now I know why he chose this ***one.***

**Batman:** Sun's up now. I should get back to the cave. Dinner's getting cold.

**Superman:** I just heard Lois's alarm clock. I'll be home just in time to make breakfast.

(Batman/Superman #50, pp. 5-6)

An attempt to rewrite the history of comic book characters is commonly known in popular culture as a retcon. Retcon is a shortened form of 'radioactive continuity', which refers to a "literary device in which the form or content of a previously established narrative is changed" (Merriam Webster, 2018). Superhero comic was an indefinitely ongoing narrative. Stories were not being planned in the long term and characters have unpredictable fates as they are being written and controlled by several writers to feature in different types of stories. The idea that Jor-El and Thomas had met each other before the destruction of Krypton, up until Batman/Superman #50, was not a part of the history of either Superman or Batman and therefore was an exclusive story created by the writers to emphasize the close relationship between the two protagonists. Similar to the Batman/Superman example, an implication made in the story is that the partnership between Superman and Batman is predestined. This idea helped to reinforce the idea of Superman and Batman being antagonistic friends as an accepted image of relationship to the readers.

The relationship dynamic between Superman and Batman as both sibling and sibling-like friends corresponds to a traditional way sibling rivalry is used in Western literature, as discussed earlier. Superheroes, especially, usually found a need to socialize with each other by establishing a kin-like relationship. According to Carney, Dunbar, Machin, Dávid-Barrett, and Silva (2014), an expression of brotherhood in the superhero narrative was related to the concept of kinship as follows:

> In the present context, the relevance of these ideas relates to the suitability of the superhero as an enforcer of social norms. Specifically, any concern with the maintenance of social solidarity on the part of the superhero should be concomitant with the promotion of pseudokin. That is, the superhero should signal kin-like behaviors (maternal, paternal, avuncular, etc.) to the reader, thereby validating his or her position as a trustworthy member of the social

network. (Carney, Dunbar, Machin, Dávid-Barrett, & Silva, 2014, pp. A203-A204)

Pseudokin refers to a mocked-up relationship where people form and perform in an intimidate relationship despite that they do not actually have such a relationship (i.e. two male colleagues exhibiting a brother-like relationship). According to Carney et al. (2014), this is a form of condensing and simplifying relationships into concepts that pander to the theme of family and friendship, which are some of the most emotionally sensitive tropes in drama. Pseudokin is significant to readers because it invokes the feeling of collectivity between the readers and their peers. Superheroes tend to be very sensitive toward family and kinship as it is believed that their relationships are operating on the high risk-high reward paradigm where strong bonds and true friendships are created from constant conflicts (Frimer, 2016; Malloy, 2008; Ryall & Tipton, 2014). In superhero media, especially, sibling rivalry is considered the second most common narrative next to an orphan's story (Packer, 2009, p. 162). In a modern American society, rivalry between siblings is a common and expected familial pattern studied in research and believed to have lifelong influences on the development of the siblings (Buhrmester & Furman, 1990; Donovich, Puschmann, & Matthijs, 2014; Furman & Buhrmester, 1985; McHale, Updegraff, & Whiteman, 2012). Positively, sibling rivalry motivates the siblings to compete with each other for affection and achievement, allowing the siblings to develop more confidence in how they control their lives. In addition, siblings also learn to compete and at the same time express care of other human beings (Cicirelli, 2013). Negatively, sibling rivalry can escalate into jealousy, aggression, violence, and abuses that break down relationships (Felson, 1983).

The idea of Superman and Batman being partners as a status quo is also a common belief held by fans as depicted in *Superman/Batman #78 'Who Would Win'* which parodies the concept of superhero combat. The following exchange happened at the end of the story:

**Kid A:** And then—

**Kid B:** Then—

**Kid A:** There's no winner really, is there? They both sort of…

**Kid B:** I… no. They'd never give up, either one ever until… both of them were…

**Kid A & B:** Dead.

**Kid A:** Which is why it's a stupid game, because it wouldn't ever happen.

**Kid B:** Right… They're like… partners. Got each other's back.

**Kid A:** Any time, any place…

**Kid B:** They're always gonna be friends. Words. Later.

**Kid A:** See ya.

(Superman/Batman #78, p. 14)

**Superman:** So, what do you think?

**Batman:** I think you just wasted five minutes of my time.

**Superman:** Oh, come on. I thought they were clever.

**Batman:** Mm. Except for one thing… I would win.

**Superman:** Without Kryptonite?

**Batman:** Without Kryptonite. Have to say, the kid actually had a lot of it right. How I'd beat you.

**Superman:** What part?

**Batman:** …

**Superman:** Batman? I know you're just messing with my head. …Seriously, what part?

(Superman/Batman #78, pp. 14-15)

*Who Would Win?* depicted two children arguing whether Superman or Batman is a better hero. The two children cited various traits and abilities to push Superman and Batman into fighting one another. However, as their roleplaying approached a point where the two heroes were likely to fight to the brink of death, the children stopped and settled on the idea that Superman and Batman would work better as partners. After the two children left, Superman and Batman, who had been eavesdropping, casually discussed the situation.

In a traditional depiction of Superman and Batman, both characters uphold specific moral values and are capable of understanding that such moral values are being shared by each other despite apparent differences (Maynard et al, 2009a, 2009b). The implication is made that while people may have different personal values in life, they were required to adapt and cooperate in order to work together as a team. This is consistent with what society perceived to be a mature relationship. The conversation made between Superman and Batman was presented in a lighthearted tone and without any ill intent from either character other than to brag about oneself. Using the context of the conversation, Batman's claim that "the kid actually had a lot of it right. How I'd beat you" is a response to clichés that usually appear when fans compare the two characters, especially how Batman as a normal superhero tends to use gadgets, contingency plans, and Kryptonite weapons to overcome the Man of Steel. This type of comparison is a common trend in popular culture, which affected not only the fandom itself but also the writers. In the interview concerning the then-upcoming *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* movie, several comic writers provided different opinions on Superman and Batman as follows (Riesman et al., 2016):

> **Greg Pak (comics writer, Batman/Superman)**
> It depends on what the best story's gonna be, in the moment. If there's a great story to be told where Batman wins, and if there's a great story to be told where Superman wins, that's it. Any character in comics can beat any other character in comics under the right circumstances.
> **Scott Snyder (comics writer of Batman and Superman Unchained)**
> I would say neither one would win if they fought. But, of course, Batman wins. I always say, "If the Hulk and Spider-Man fight, who wins? Batman wins." Batman always wins.
> **Mark Waid (comics writer of Superman: Birthright)**
> Superman. There's no question that Superman would win. Superman has heat vision. Heat vision trumps everything. If you can stand in low-Earth orbit and stare at someone and turn them into a skeleton, Superman wins.

**Alan Cumming**

You know, I don't really care. I wish they'd both injure themselves and shut up. Because this whole Batman vs. Superman thing, I just don't get it. I think it's weird to have superheroes fighting because aren't they all supposed to be for the common good? It seems to be counterintuitive. (Riesman et al, 2016)

Each superhero character was treated as an individual in comic book narratives. As such, each hero has a significant number of cult followers and worshippers. The 'debates' on the subject of Superman and Batman; therefore, were being significantly influenced by their preferences as well as their writing or reading experiences instead of logical comparison, which was impossible due to the fictional and flexible nature of comic book narratives. In this case, Scott Snyder, who mainly wrote Batman, had a preference toward the Dark Knight whereas Mark Waid, who was a famous Superman writer, had a preference toward the Man of Steel. Meanwhile, Greg Pak, who wrote Batman/Superman, held an objective and neutral view. Alan Cumming, who was a celebrity, chose neither character partly because he did not understand the context of the competition. From these interviews, it could be deduced that the comparison between superheroes in terms of strength and abilities in the seemingly juvenile manner is a common norm of the superhero fandom even among professional writers. However, it was to be understood that such a comparison was made primarily with no ill intent. What *Superman/Batman #78* suggested in terms of masculine hegemony was the idea that superhero debate was an accepted norm where the male demographics are encouraged to enjoy the dialectical struggle between Superman and Batman, but audiences must understand that a fight between superheroes inevitably ends with a truce between the fighters.

Based on these assumptions, the superhero relationship expressed conflicts and violence that were being embraced as the most intimidating relationship between men and has been painted as an accepted and idealistic norm. This means that dialectics is possibly an innate nature of modern males, and violence was believed to be a common method to express friendship as they seek to mature over time. Superman and Batman are masculine adults, whose friendship is usually limited by their firmly established personal beliefs, therefore these heroes are usually being opinionated or stubborn to

maintain their respective worldview and philosophies, creating strains in communication and relationship (Rook, 1989; Sivertsen, 2003).

### 5.4.2 Competitions and Social Development in Men's Society

One of the most common ideas related to superheroes is the competition between named characters, which has appeared several times in the texts. A specific piece of communication from *Batman/Superman #7* that reflected the nature of superhero combat:

| | |
|---|---|
| **Batman:** | *You idiot!* |
| **Superman:** | What— |
| **Batman:** | *Mongul feeds off everything we do down here! If you're in the game, you'll just make him **stronger!*** |
| **Superman:** | But. There are millions of ***actual people*** playing this game, tight? |
| **Batman:** | *Yes, all hopped up on this **golden fury pollen** that **Mongul** spread. Right, Hiro?* |
| **Toymaster:** | Yeah. |
| **Batman:** | *And now that they've got you. The **strongest man** on the planet. You're about to **kill** us all.* |
| **Superman:** | Hey, no offense, man… but have you ever ***played*** one of these games? |
| **Jimmy Olsen:** | Seriously, everyone else around here knows what happens next, right? |
| **Janice Everson:** | Yep. It's a ***trope*** 'cause it ***works.*** After the heroes ***fight…*** |
| **Alfonso Champion:** | They ***team up.*** And then… they take on the ***real*** villain. |

(Batman/Superman #7, pp. 29-30)

The *Game Over* arc showed a child engineer named Hiro Okamura creating a virtual reality fighting game that expands itself around the City of Metropolis, but the game is hijacked by supervillain Mongul to conquer Earth. After a frustrating mission

with Superman, Batman accidentally came across a fake Nightwing generated by the game and fought him. Later on, Superman and Batman worked with each other to defeat Mongul, but Batman is ‘killed’ during the battle and become controlled by the brainwashed video game players to attack Superman. As a result, Superman intentionally lets himself be ‘killed’ by Batman in order to convince people around the world to free them from Mongul’s control and then had these people control him and Batman to defeat the supervillain.

Superhero combats, aside from being used as an emphasis on superhero’s expressions of friendship, was being used as a trope that encourages competition and the nature of superhero combat. According to O'Neil (2016), competition between superheroes and the competition of different ideologies and popularity has always been the selling point of the crossover comics. An interesting aspect of conflict and competition was that it was considered an accepted norm in the superhero genre. The three supporting characters in the excerpt, Olsen, Everson, and Champion, were representations of normal people who played the game and observed superhero combat in a meta-narrative. They described the idea that superheroes who initially fight one another would team up to defeat a villain as a “trope” that “works”. The comic book suggested that superhero combat was a desirable activity, which had a predestined goal. Indeed, the superhero fight between Superman and Batman was one of the selling points of the crossover media between Superman and Batman.

The analysis of critical implications responded to the surprisingly positive outlook on the ‘superhero versus superhero’ phenomenon. Sims (2015) claimed that Superman and Batman are perfect contenders for superhero dueling, for that “when you have characters and all you see them doing is winning, it's natural to wonder who would win harder if they ever had to compete against each other.” Riesman (2016) similarly indicated, “Who would not want to see them fight? Every comic geek’s inner adolescent is perpetually asking. What is the point of having two heroes if you are not also going to game out who would win?” Riesman reminded us that the fight between the two characters needed to “mean something” in that it has to lead to characters interacting in meaningful ways. Meanwhile, Holdier (2016) believed that regardless of a favorite character, readers should acknowledge that the interactions between the two should be appreciated for how they eventually sort out their differences and cooperate. Some of

the most common pitfalls in the superhero reading experience are that readers may enjoy character fights for the sake of the fights in themselves, causing them to become blind to the overall structure, moral message, and intention of the narrative.

However, stories such as *Batman/Superman #7* actively tried to warn of such a limited perception of male competitions. The setting of the *Game Over* arc constructed the competition to resemble a sport. All the players and members of the community were expected to follow the rules and to show sportsmanship between one another. The context of the online game suggested the nature of a similar fight to be non-lethal in nature and can be compared to the internet gaming community in real life. In these environments, heroes were being arbitrarily put into combat as a way different players can interact and bond with one another within a community. Examples of this competition including online videos and other male-oriented media such as *Death Game, One Minute Melee* or fighting games that feature multiple characters such *as Street Fighters, Tekken,* and the customizable fighting games such as *Mugen.* Online games have been frequently critiqued as a new method of socialization between different cultures which yield both positive and negative effects on players (Szell & Thurner, 2010). Shen and Williams (2011) suggested some negative and positive aspects of online gaming. On the one hand, gaming could be promoted for violence and hatred, cyberbullying and prolonging negative effects are almost inevitable. On the other hand, gaming could also be used to positively encourage players to attain growth in morality and social ability. The purpose of gaming has been brought up as a response to a difference between how Mongul and Superman approach the online game within the context. The supervillain used gaming to fill players with hatred, anger, and desire for violence, which potentially led the world to destruction. However, Superman, Olsen, Everson, and Champion all used gaming as an opportunity to rally people to solve conflicts and create a better future for themselves. Overall, *Batman/Superman #7* acted as a meta-narrative that explored the nature of superhero combats within the superhero genre as well as a perceived hegemony reinforced by superhero writers and fans. Superhero crossover, while focusing on the competition and dialectical struggle between protagonists in both physical and ideological combat, superheroes are expected to come to a common understanding and become capable of working together to achieve a common goal.

The theme of superhero combat within a competition is further expanded in the sequel to the *Game Over* arc called *the Arena*. *Batman/Superman Annual #1* showed the context where Superman and Batman were sending representatives of the 'Superman Clan' and 'Batman Clan' to take part in gladiatorial combat to save Earth. The use of the arena as a setting showed a continuation to such a story arc and responded to the masculine ideologies relating to competition and superhero genre's superhero combat theme, as suggested in the following dialogue:

**Superman:** Don't worry, Steel and Batgirl will get it done… But in the meantime, we have to make these aliens think we're really going to fight.

**Batman:** No. We really ***have*** to fight. Like you said… too many ***innocents.*** The stakes are ***too*** high. No matter what… until Steel and Batgirl tell us that ***gun*** is ***dead…*** You can't hold back.

. . .

< Batman knocks Superman down with a Kryptonite>

**Batman:** Superman! Get up!

**Superman:** You can't hold back!

**Batman:** Fine.

<Batman knocks Superman down.>

**Jochi:** That's it! ***Kill him!*** Do it ***now…*** And save ***both*** worlds.

**Supergirl:** ***NO!***

**Superman:** You… can't… hold… back…

<Batman punches the ground>

**Batman:** ***No.***

**Superman:** Bruce—

(Batman/Superman Annual #2, pp. 26-29)

*Batman/Superman Annual #1* took place in a gladiator arena, where Superman and Batman were conveniently sorted into a different team and must fight each other

without hesitation in order to fool the villains while their friends stop them from destroying the world.

It was likely that the writers wanted to put superheroes into fighting one another under a context where they are not actually enemies. The sentence “you cannot hold back” was repeated throughout the dialogues as the heroes are arbitrarily being placed to fight one another to death. In context, the heroes fight each other to distract spectators while Batgirl and Steel disable the Warworld’s planet-destroying cannon. From a narrative standpoint; however, this scene may be used as a means to allow audiences to read and enjoy Superman and Batman fighting one another. Combat arena and gladiator are common narrative tools that have been utilized in many stories in popular culture. Japanese media, especially, tended to feature anime and video games which feature fighting and combat tournaments as they are aimed toward the young male demographic as popular culture (Cooper-Chen, 2011). Cooper-Chen added that these plot elements have been analyzed to have a significant impact on American pop culture, especially superhero media, which attracts similar male demographics and emphasizes similar themes of honorable combat, bravery, friendship, and modern heroism. A narrative strength of the combat tournament plot, similar to online gaming, referred to combat as a form of sport and competition where different characters are being able to highlight different abilities and compete as a means to communicate and bond in a certain community. Superhero combat continues to be depicted as an integrated part of Superman and Batman crossover comics.

The overall analysis of sport, gaming, and gladiatorial competition in the superhero genre can be connected to the critiques of how such activities contribute to masculine society. ‘Masculine melodrama’ was a Eurocentric discourse that describes emerging conflicts and tension in male-oriented sports and games that emphasized men’s personal and interpersonal struggles and desires for power, glory, wealth, and social recognition (Vaczi, 2015). Brittan (1989) indicated that competition was an innate part of capitalist society, for the competition encouraged men to seek power and influences related to social and power struggles.

However, it is interesting in the analyzed context that sports and combat activities were being treated as a positive activity. Recent studies concerning sports had encouraged the idea that sport could encourage social activity and emotional

engagement within the participants and the audiences. Wrestling, for example, was a violent speculative sport in America that has been critiqued as the genre which emphasizes men's toughness and spirit in the competition (Diffrient, 2017; McDevitt Jr., 1961). Similarly, sports and male competitions carried a significant implication toward men's psychology and social development. Psychologically, Deci and Ryan's self-determinant theory (2008; 2000) indicates male sports as a source of determination and motivation to development of skill and self-esteem. Similarly, Psychologist Roy Baumeister (WORLD.MINDS, 2012) suggested that men were genetically designed to seek competition in seeking of power and social recognition, which results in a generally high level of competition in the patriarchy and capitalist society. In addition, sports have been critiqued to reinforce cooperation between different people. McDevitt Jr. (1961) claimed that wrestling is a sport that has promoted males to develop a need to survive independently. Japan's depiction of sport in the media targets male children, emphasizing a narrative of violence as positive because 'good fights' allowed individual warriors to strengthen themselves physically and mentally and achieve their highest potential (Cooper-Chen, 2011; MacWilliams, 2014). A competition where rules and moral ethics are being imposed is effective at attracting male readers because it is a discourse that satisfies men's desires to see actions, entertainment, and struggles for power, recognition, and ideological superiority. The genre responded to a person's need to relieve 'id' by seeing or committing brutal fights without actually harming anyone (Riesman, 2016).

There has been an increasing trend of critiques that try to interpret male sports as a discourse to promote morality, comradery, and peace between different cultures. (Arnold, 1994; Gruneau, 1983; Kidd, 2008; Young & Okada, 2014). Because the scope of violence and competition are low and competitors usually used sports as a means to socialize and make friends with different types of people. Bandura's social cognitive theory (1977, 2002) provided a framework that humans develop social learning through experience and the agents that act as gateways to real-world society. Sports idols and heroes on television have been considered moral exemplars for children to learn how the values of socialization, good competition, and other prosocial activities (Bonneville et al., 2006). Men's competition is a universal concept. For example, the Chinese's Wuxia genre also emphasizes action, violence, and melodrama created within men's

society (Chang, 2017). The Japanese's depiction of sport in the media targeted with male children, meanwhile, emphasized narrative of violence as positive things because 'good fights' allow individual warriors who seek to physically and mentally strengthen themselves and to socialize with one another through combats, a concept that is admired even in America (Cooper-Chen, 2011; MacWilliams, 2014). Competition is also considered an efficient way to teach the audiences about cooperation between humans. Baumeister (WORLD.MINDS, 2012) claimed that humans are a unique species that are able to cooperate for reasons other than personal survival and competition in a male society that serves as a means to exchange information, knowledge, and cooperation, and allows humans to develop efficiently. The intense degree of competition has been considered a good thing in a male hegemonic society because it motivates and drives social evolution forward. Superhero combat, as a part of a male-oriented media, has contributed to the sea of male hegemony that idolizes competition and emphasizes moral goodness out of seemingly violent acts.

Overall, the relationship dynamic between Superman and Batman, as a representation of masculine media, may provide a depiction of male relationships and masculine ideologies in modern society where competition and arguments are being treated as positive things because they motivate dialectical development and social evolution.

### 5.4.3 Superhero Genre as Pro-Social Obligation

The integrated system of relationship between Superman and Batman must take into account whether or not the friendship is representative of the superhero genre. Stories and characters are being written to serve a hegemonic standpoint where the narrative dictates what is considered common for male people in society. Superheroes tend to have similar ideologies and end-goal purposes during their heroic careers that they share and exchange between one another. According to Coogan (2006), traditional superheroes are characters that have similar basic ideas of truth, justice, and the universal appeal of goodness. This idea allows the two characters to cooperate despite frequent disagreement, as displayed during *Batman/Superman #3* and *#4* as follows:

**Earth-2 Superman:** Sorry about that. But the grownups are talking. You all right?

**Earth-2 Batman:** Yeah. But my three hundred million dollar plane isn't.

**Earth-2 Superman:** Maybe you should have thought about that before you shot me with your quarter million dollar Kryptonite missiles. What's going on, Bruce?

**Earth-2 Batman:** The military has rigged up the crystal to a ***weapons system*** that's activated by an ***S-level*** event.

**Earth-2 Superman:** That "S" doesn't stand for ***"hope,"*** *huh?*

**Earth-2 Batman:** I'm sorry, Clark. I had to stop you before you ***reached*** them. They could actually ***kill*** you. But I promise you, I didn't know about the ***big*** crystal. I didn't learn what they were up to until—

**Earth-2 Superman:** It's all right. Let's just—

**BM & SM:** ***Don't trust him!***

**Earth-2 Superman:** Ha. This has been strange and kind of ***fun,*** hasn't it? But now it's time to be serious. We grew up on different worlds in different ways. But I know you, Bruce. And I ***definitely*** know you, Clark. You're wearing those capes because you want to ***help*** people. And that's exactly what we're going to do. Now the ***shard*** is the most ***dangerous*** thing on this planet. Who's going to help me destroy it?

**Earth-2 Batman:** We're wasting time. Let's do this.

**Superman:** You first.

**Batman:** *Psh.*

(Batman/Superman #3, pp. 19-20)

**Earth-2 Batman:** Careful, Clark.

**Earth-2 Superman;** I know. What's on your mind, son?

**Superman;** You want to ***destroy*** this crystal?

**Earth-2 Superman:** That's the plan. It's too powerful. Beyond us all. Tell them, Bruce.

**Earth-2 Batman:** It ***magnifies energy*** like nothing else in the universe. At a certain point, it ***defies physics.*** It's ***magic.***

**Earth-2 Superman:** I hate magic.

**Earth-2 Batman:** And the military's rigged it up as a ***weapon.*** Like Clark said… it's just too dangerous.

**Batman:** But the ***Goddess*** said we'd need it to defeat ***Darkseid.*** She said that our worlds could be ***destroyed.*** If you don't want the crystal, give it to us. We'll take it back to our world.

**Earth-2 Batman;** Relax. You can handle whatever's coming without it. Your ***friend*** there. You've got a ***Superman*** too.

**Batman:** *Psh.*

**Superman:** What's ***that*** supposed to mean?

**Batman:** He doesn't even ***fly.*** He ***hops.***

**Superman:** What are you talking about? I ***leap.***

**Batman:** Whatever.

**Earth-2 Superman:** Give him time.

**Batman:** We don't know if we ***have*** time.

**Earth-2 Superman:** Look, we're all pretty smart guys. But none of us can predict the future. Not even ol' Bruce here.

**Batman:** *Hmp.*

**Earth-2 Superman;** We'll take care of the next threat when it comes, but for now…

(Batman/Superman #4, pp. 5-6)

Within the context of 'Cross World', Earth-2 Superman and Earth-2 Batman were the alternative versions of Clark Kent and Bruce Wayne. Earth-2 heroes had been childhood friends who were willing to forgive one another despite a mistake. They were also depicted as older and more experienced than the protagonists, who were reckless, violent, and inexperienced as if they were still in their 20s, for Superman was written

to be 25 years old according to *Batman/Superman #3*. Earth-2 Superman who grew up in the more idealistic world where he and Bruce Wayne had been friends since childhood, is more capable of engaging in a mature friendship. As a result, the character had a clearly defined view of heroism that he shares with Batman. Earth-2 Superman used the word “cape” to explain how the protagonists have a common belief in helping other people. This corresponds with *Superman/Batman #17,* where the word “the cape” is being used to describe superheroes who have either been killed or branded as an outlaw. By the supervillain Ra’s al Ghul. Because Batman is not around to defeat Ra’s al Ghul, Superman is forced to remind Bruce Wayne of his tragic past in order to get Batman to help him fight the villain and fix the timeline. The prominent idea of “cape” and superhero lecture presented in this dialogue concerned the representation of a superhero.

According to Coogan (2006, pp. 30-33), a superhero genre was constructed with four elements: costume, identity, powers, and missions. Costume refers to a trend of character design, which is directly connected to the “cape” remark in the excerpt referring to common equipment used by Superman and Batman. Coogan indicated that the superhero's costumes are designed in response to Scott McCloud’s theory to create “amplification through simplification” (p. 33). Instead of creating complex clothes, the characters use similar ‘uniforms’ that consisted of spandexes, wrestler’s trunks, superhero icon, and capes, all of which are differentiated among characters through different colors, palette swaps, and a unique character logo that creates iconicity. Instead of standing out, the superhero genre uses repetition in costume design to emphasize different characteristics, personalities, and personal philosophies held by the characters as unique identities among the characters. Coogan referred to identity as “codename and the costume” (p. 32), which consisted of a secret identity and other tropes used in superhero media. However, identity also dwelled in the critical assessments of heroism, including the heroes’ identities and virtue ethics. For example, Superman’s blue-red-yellow costume and the “S” shield signify his identity as bright idealism and hope that embodies rural ideologies and the American Dream (Demers-Olivier, 2009; Terjesen, 2013b). A cape is a piece of long cloth worn from the shoulder that is a symbolic property used to identity masculine heroism. Aside from being associated with clergy and religions, capes and cloaks are related to magical powers,

royalty, and people in a position of power (Nozedar, 2008). Knights during medieval Europe were usually depicted wearing capes while heroic male protagonists and elder wizards in classic literature such as King Arthur, Robin Hood, and the Lord of the Ring feature a cape as part of their heroic garments. Superheroes, as modern knights, use a cape as a symbolic act to display and to conform to the notions of the codes of conduct, the personal oath of heroism (Farrall, 2016). The use of similar outfits signifies conformity and acceptance to social roles and obligations. In addition, superhero characters also uphold other symbolic values such as truth, justice, idealism, and a number of other forms of heroic hegemony that have persisted through years of American comic book history (Helvie, 2013; Meggs, 2009; Vollum & Adkinson, 2003).

The third aspect Coogan (2006, pp. 30-33) writes of superheroes was ‘power’. He defines power as a very flexible and malleable pattern of supernatural powers held by superhero characters. These powers vary among different heroes and may represent many different aspects of the characters; however, they are all connected to the final aspect of ‘mission’. Coogan defines mission as a statement of superheroes to become "champion[s] of the oppressed” who combat “evil and injustice" (p. 30). He claims that superheroes are characters who commit themselves to selfless and pro-social activities that combat events that are considered by society as threatening and conflicting with the universal definition of good morality. Superhero’s mission statement is an integrated part of masculine heroism, which concerns the romantic depiction of knighthood, masculine honor, compassion toward fellow human beings and most importantly self-surveillance (Farrall, 2016; G. M. Smith, 2009).

Coogan’s final statement, ‘mission’ ties all the previous three attributes together to create a true superhero character and ultimately contribute to the reason Superman and Batman should cooperate as colleagues. The earlier excerpt claims a Superman and Batman are “wearing those capes because [they] want to help people”, which refers to a social obligation and the superhero’s code of conduct. Coogan stated, "The superhero’s mission is prosocial and selfless, which means that his fight against evil must fit in with the existing, professed mores of society and must not be intended to benefit or further his own agenda.". Such an idea of virtue has been a classical depiction of heroes in Eurocentric culture. Similarly, these ideas can be tied to research related to superhero characters and labor made by G. M. Smith (2009) which claimed that

superheroes are required to follow social mandates despite having been provided power and freedom to express themselves. On the other hand, Farrall (2016) drew a connection between modern superheroes and chivalrous knights as “Superman and Batman have literary roots in the knightly romances of the Middle Ages . . . it required a heroic philosophy, a code of honor. And for the medieval knights, that was the code of chivalry” (p. 41). The ‘knight’ has been used in the superhero genre both literally and symbolically. Farrall claimed that Batman has an alternative name of a ‘Dark Knight’ while Superman maintains a heroic image similar to a knight in shining armor who carries an ‘S’ shield as a representation of his coat of arms for the House of El and his determination to protect other people. Superhero characters symbolically represent the most idealistic form of knighthood in terms of ethics, morality, and personal determination in making their contributions to society.

In a modern tradition, characters are also usually provided personal reasons for their heroic attitudes. For example, Stan Lee procures the famous ethical dilemma “With Great Power Comes Great Responsibility” (Coogan, 2006, p. 112; Genter, 2007) to characters like Spider-Man because of his personal guilt of letting his uncle being killed by a mugger he could have stopped. It is a very common trope held by DC superheroes that a hero who is handed a supernatural power is expected to develop a great amount of responsibility and social obligation to selflessly provide for the society. Therefore, he must set aside his own personal benefits, happiness, and problems in order to fully devote himself to social causes, which include setting aside differences between himself and his cohorts. The superhero genre emphasizes cooperation between different characters regardless of physical, mental and ideological differences. One of these propositions is how superhero media are being depicted with a specific set of tropes and narratives that controls the heroes’ behaviors and relationships between characters. Superhero teams act as a collective unit of moral exemplars who can manage conflicts in mature manners in order to improve themselves and society.

The primary reason for such a structure is to enforce hegemony and pro-sociality. According to (Frimer, 2016), the end goal of superhero cooperation is the strong moral group where people of different agendas are working together to strengthen morality and to defend social norms and values. It signifies that people must be able to cooperate despite frequent disagreement. This notion was being emphasized through the depiction

of Earth-2 Superman and Batman in contrast to their primary counterparts. The two characters were older and more experienced than the protagonists, who were reckless, violent, and inexperienced as they are still in their 20s (Superman was 25 years old according to *Batman/Superman #3).* In addition, they were depicted as close friends willing to forgive one another despite a mistake. The heroes of Earth-2 had an interesting reaction to the protagonists' attitudes. Earth-2 Superman brings up facts about Superman and Batman as the characters, claiming to "know them" and describe themselves according to their classical superhero images. In addition, Earth-2 Batman claims that the primary version of Batman has Superman as a "friend" and tells him to "give him time". This dialogue of Earth-2 heroes was significant to the relationship between New-52 Superman and Batman because it tries to force them to conform and embrace a specific image of heroism and a status quo that defines a popularly accepted depiction of Superman and Batman as best friends. This is interpreted as a form of hegemony as the dialogues suggest there are specific norms that govern or direct the traits and behaviors of the characters which; in this case, refer to what it means to be Superman and what it means to be Batman. For example, The Man of Steel is a representation of 'truth', 'justice', and 'the American Way' which are assumed by writers and critics to be idealistic and are nobler than mindless superhero brawls (Karp, 2009). Meanwhile, Batman has been known as a 'Caped Crusader' and an avenger of the night who, despite being cynical and paranoid, centers himself on wisdom and intelligence and is too wise to blindly antagonize others (Dantzler, 2009; Klaehn, 2014). According to Greg Pak (Egross, 2014), Superman and Batman were purposely written to be weak, angry, and vulnerable, as they respond to realism in postmodern fiction where supernatural beings are extremely troubled and flawed in order to generate character growths. Pak added that this portrayal of the characters is considered different and inefficient, which is reflected on page 19 showing the opposite development of the same argument where the older versions of the characters easily solved conflicts through a simple discussion. The imposing of the superhero status quo ensures industrial surveillance. *Batman/Superman* has an overall narrative structure that carries a sense of meta-narrative where the writer and the traditional and mature versions of the protagonists criticize *the New 52* Superman and Batman. Mainly, they addressed

the narrative ‘problems’ of *the New 52* depicting heroes as violent, angry, and unheroic (McMillan, 2012).

The status quo of the superhero is connected to the way superheroes are being framed in popular culture. Notably, writers and audiences alike have been determined to present superheroes as idealistic and continue to provide images of humanity that are capable of inspiring readers to grow up to become better people (Kohut, 2014). This status quo forces the mature friendship of Superman and Batman to be both desirable and predestined. The imagery of masculinity shown in the book series appears to be that of a developing friendship that is restricted both by the status quo and the relationship development between the two characters. This development becomes apparent in *Batman/Superman #12*, the direct sequel to *Cross World*, which takes place five years later. As the narrative progressed, the two characters have become friendlier with one another while the villain accuses them of becoming softer and less aggressive. This characterization implies to the audience that they need to stop antagonizing other people and work with them in order to reach common goals. Earth-2’s Superman’s statement, “give him time”, may refer to the cycle of dialectical tensions. The friendship between antagonistic friends is likely to require time and a developing willingness to understand and cooperate than typical friendship (Rook, 1989).

One of the prominent themes about pro-sociality is related to the heroic depiction as an antithesis to modern cynicism. An implication made by Pak in relation to Superman and Batman in the postmodern era, corresponding to the current climate of a globalized risky and disruptive society, was the unpreparedness of the adults of the new generations. They had to struggle in a postmodern society filled with risks, fears, uncertainties, self-inflicted cynicism, and a dogmatic sociopolitical environment (Bewes, 1997; Haferkamp & Smelser, 1992). In addition to the sublation of ideology based on intercultural context, the ending to *Superman/Batman #87* suggested another point of intercultural struggle. Consider the following conversation:

**Superman:** So that's it? That's how it ends? A good man dead, the bad guy gets a severance package and his 401k and we… we what?

**Batman:** We have to move on to the next one.

**Superman:** How? How do you just… let it go?

**Batman:** No choice. Last night while you were paining over this. There were nine murders in Gotham. Six of them remain unsolved. You're an architect, Clark. You're building a future. I'm a fireman. I put out fires as best as I can, and then move on to the next one. Go build the future, Kent. I've got work to do.

(Superman/Batman #87, pp. 19-20)

As a response to Martin Mayne's crimes, the Secrets ended with Batman reminding Superman that he had a different skill set and goals in crime-fighting than Batman. Instead of chasing endless crimes like a "fireman" who chased after arsonists and react to crimes, Superman was supposed to act as "an architect" who was responsible to design, inspire, and create the future.

An allegory made was that Superman and Batman were characters with a different set of characteristics and different scopes of duties and different types of villains that differentiate them from being the same despite both being superheroes. The roles of 'fireman' and 'architect' refer to different types of occupations and roles that different people take in a complex modern society. In this regard, Role Theory (Biddle, 2013) describes "a science concerned with the study of behaviors that are characteristic of persons within the contexts with various processes that presumably produce, explain, or are affected by those behaviors." (p. 4). According to Bibble, 'role' is a social category or a set of behaviors that a person takes to differentiate himself from other people, a tool that is being used to emphasize that different jobs have a different set of traits and responsibilities that contribute to the overall social development. The theory was a tool that can efficiently analyze Batman's statement. In modern society, there are expectations that a specific group of people attains different roles or even sub-roles within the same career, enforcing different people to behave differently to conform to social hegemony.

According to Haen (2002), superhero roles were being regulated by four main elements: *Experiences of separation, autonomy, self-regulation,* and *hierarchy*. Experiences of separation referred to the experience in life, especially influenced

through personal tragedy and moral training, allowing heroes to separate from social protection and develop differing identities. Autonomy referred to the superhero's freedom and independence to act in accordance with personal beliefs and personal methods of contributing to society. Hierarchy refers to an acknowledgment toward social status and responsibility. Role conflicts are related to the problems of identity and the ability to cope with situations that do not correspond with one's own set of superhero expectations. However, despite the conflicts, it is required for the superheroes in these roles to operate in their fields and mind 'their own businesses'. Such different roles, however, exist in order to not only categorize people but to put the focus on people's contributions to society. Despite different heroes behaving differently, it is required for them to sort out their differences and focus on their strengths in order to work together to promote prosocial activities, to uphold social value, and to inspire audiences to work in collaboration to improve society. Male superheroes act as role models who can empower male audiences (Haen, 2002)

Superhero's 'job' as a whole is likely a representation of social obligation and workplace responsibilities. Not only are colleagues expected to complete their tasks, but they are also expected to get along with one another in order to cooperate and create a strong group.

## 5.5 Summary

An analysis of conversation between Superman and Batman, as well as additional conversation that supports the partnership between Superman and Batman, have shown the specific pattern of dialectics as depicted in modern popular culture. Superman and Batman were depicted as characters who have different personalities, worldviews, and cultural backgrounds. As such, they are frequently engaged in dialectical conflicts. Two types of conflicts have been identified.

Firstly, the structure of the comic book narrative indicated the beginning, the middle, the end, and the cycle of dialectical struggle. Two types of stories were analyzed. A protagonist driven story showing Superman and Batman developing antagonistic attitudes because of their innate differences, which causes them to interpret the same situation differently. The focus of these stories was on the way the two

characters try to adapt to and understand each other, sublating oneself into another to strengthen their friendship in a mature and respectful manner. Secondly, the supervillain-driven narrative was based on the cooperation between Superman and Batman despite their innate differences and the disagreements that they may develop during the story. Both types of narratives provided a common theme of adult friendship that relies on mutual understanding between antagonistic and intercultural friends to create a mature relationship. The structure of the story, both the protagonist-driven and antagonist-driven ones, were being dictated by the shifting power balance, causing Superman and Batman to interact and engage one another until the conclusion of the story and the result of the dialectical struggle was determined.

Superman and Batman had generalizable and recognizable patterns of dialectical development. Firstly, the characters had antagonistic attitudes with one another. Superman and Batman, being different in nature, were expected to develop bad impressions and treat each other as enemies. The antagonistic attitudes would allow the character to develop skeptical attitudes toward each other, in turn allowing a person to be more critical and insightful when analyzing a friend. Secondly, Superman and Batman actively engaged in a dialectical struggle based on their class, cultural, and ideological differences. Thirdly, the synthesis between the two characters was created as the narratives progressed toward the climaxes. Three types of synthesis were identified. Common ideology referred to an idea that Superman and Batman, despite having a different belief set, had the identical purpose as superheroes. Therefore, they were able to cooperate with one another to achieve a common goal and to strengthen their friendship bond. Shared sentimentality referred to an idea that Superman and Batman shared emotional empathy and sentimentality that allowed the two to connect and befriend each other. Voluntary sublation refers to the ability where Superman and Batman can shift the paradigm and take each other's role because they fully understand and appreciate each other's perspectives.

As the syntheses were being made, Superman and Batman were actively developing an affectionate friendship with both a unique relationship and communication patterns. Superman and Batman became capable of looking after each other's wellbeing. They did not hesitate to be expressive toward each other, especially when either person was being endangered by villains. With each passing story arc,

Superman and Batman grew closer as true friends. Despite that, however, Superman and Batman continued to be defined as a dialectical conflict that had an ongoing and arguably never-ending development of friendship.

Superman and Batman are a representation of a masculine superhero relationship. From the contexts of the comic, dialectical conflicts usually emphasize conflicts and solutions in socio-political terms. Firstly, superheroes frequently engaged in ideological competition, where different ideas were being compared, contrasted, and evaluated for the best possible ideas. These different ideas were based on both character personalities and the cultural backgrounds that have different merits. Despite the competition, however, it was suggested that different ideologies are not treated as absolute, since differing situations may require different ideological approaches to solve the problem. It is also suggested that people with different ideologies are inherently made to fulfill a different socio-political function. Therefore, holding different ideas should allow them to cooperate to improve the world in their own ways. Secondly, competition between men was emphasized in terms of combat and physical competition, which correspond with the common trends of modern popular culture. Violence between men was promoted mostly to attract readers. However, the contexts of the fight were usually being manipulated to avoid encouraging senseless brawls. Instead, fighting tended to be treated either as a sport, where superheroes were expected to respect one another and work together to improve the world after they have finished fighting. Alternatively, the competition was presented as tournaments where specific themes of heroism such as bravery, comradeship, and sacrifices are being used to highlight the virtues of Superman and Batman as antagonistic friends.

Overall, the relationship between Superman and Batman was portrayed very positively by both writers and fans. The two protagonists tended to be interpreted like siblings as well as brothers-in-arms. Finally, the relationship between Superman and Batman was being used as a critical assessment of the status quo of the superhero genre as used in prosocial media. Despite being innately antagonistic and incompatible, the friendship between Superman and Batman was predestined and inevitable. The writers and audiences perceived their friendship to be influential toward audiences in real life to be able to socialize with people of different personalities and beliefs other than one’s own.

# CHAPTER 6

# DISCUSSION

## 6.1 Overview of Superman-Batman Dichotomy

This chapter discusses the results presented in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5. It compares, contrasts, and evaluates the concept of Superman and Batman crossover as a discourse with previous researches. The primary goal is to make a comparison with other researches in order to expand upon existing information. Before beginning this discussion, however, it would be helpful to summarize the analyses done so far.

The analysis of Stage 1 aimed to answer research question #1: "What is the nature of dialectical friendship between Superman and Batman in the selected comic books?" It yielded a result that shows the main characters using specific communication patterns based on relational dialectics. Both characters, regardless of book series and continuities, expressed similar communication patterns that rely on expressiveness, judgment, and affection, with an emphasis on the characters' contradicting personalities and the characters sharing personal information. Further discussion on the topic will be made in 6.2.

The analysis of Stage 2 aimed to answer research question #2: "How can the nature of the dialectical friendship between Superman and Batman explain any institutionalized elements within society concerning communication and dialectics?" Several topics were covered. First, the recurring structure of the Superman-Batman narratives was divided into two main types: protagonist-centric narrative, which highlighted the power struggle between the protagonists; and villain-centric narrative, which focused on the protagonists' combined efforts to defeat a common threat. An analysis of their relationship showed them to be highly masculine and that many writers and researchers react positively to the relationship, which corresponds to Eurocentric and American cultures, which emphasize individuality over collectivity (Egross, 2014; Malloy, 2008; O'Neil, 2016; Patches, 2013; Sims, 2015). This Superhero relationship

psychologically and sociologically encourages readers to become prosocial individuals and compete with one another in the ethically correct ways in order to improve oneself, others, and society (Coogan, 2006). Further discussion on these topics will be made in 6.3.

As a follow up to the analysis, the discussion aims to understand the positive and negative influences that popular culture has toward our perception of conflicts and friendship development, so that we can utilize comic books as the tool to enhance our interpersonal communication and socio-political relationship.

## 6.2 Nature of Dialectical Relationship between Superman and Batman

Section 6.2 details the analyses from Stage 1 and Stage 2 and provides further explanation of the nature of the dialectical relationship between Superman and Batman. The goal is to compare and contrast these findings with previous research on several topics to help clarify arguments in this research field.

### 6.2.1 Narrative Structure and System of Dialectical Relationship

#### 6.2.1.1 Episodic Contexts

As established, communication and narrative patterns are vital parts of the Superman-Batman dichotomy. From the analyses, the study has found that Superman and Batman have developed specific patterns in communication. In the episodic context, both ‘Superman/Batman’ and ‘Batman/Superman’ had similar narrative patterns that were repeating themselves. Namely, Superman and Batman were being challenged by external conflicts, causing them to develop tensions between them. The detail of the conflicts and the degree of arguments held by the two characters varied in the text, but the gist of the dialectical structure remained the same. The premise of the story is a cycle of events that emphasized the dominant characteristics of the two characters. This structure resembled Flaytag’s dramatic structure (Cohn, 2013; Freytag, 1896; Ochs, 1997) and Hegelian Dialectics (Papa et al., 2006). When both theories are fused together, an interesting model is created to describe the cycle of dialectical conflicts between Superman and Batman as follows:

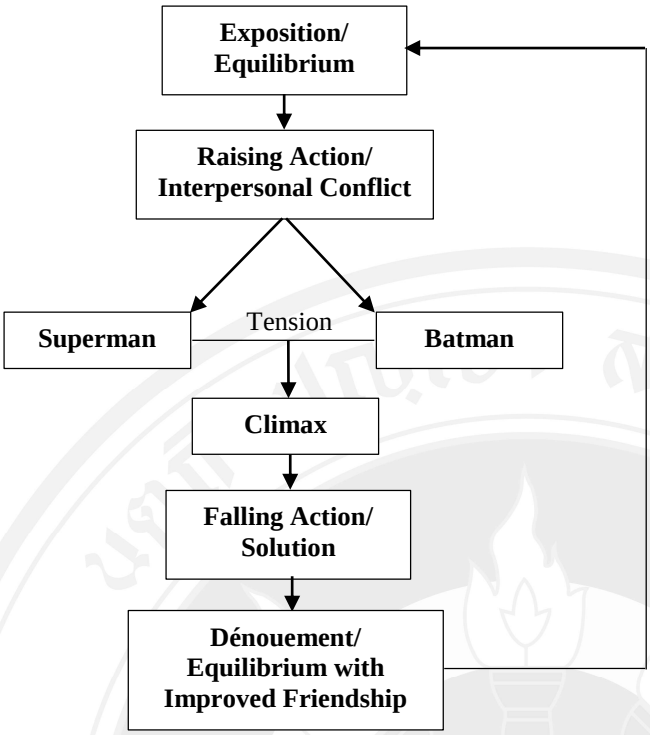



Figure 6.1 Narrative Patterns for Dialectical Conflict

*Exposition*/*equilibrium* refers to a peaceful state shared by the two characters at the different stages of their relationship. The first part of the exposition describes a moment where the characters either do not interact or tend to remain in a healthy relationship. *Rising action/interpersonal conflict* explains a plot element that happens in the story that causes conflict or drama. Within this model, raising action is an event that disturbs the relationship between the two protagonists, causing dialectical *tension* to happen between *Superman* and *Batman*. This tension contains a very complex narrative progression with the rapid shifting of melodrama and power shifts. Regardless of the tension, however, Superman and Batman will eventually solve their disagreements and work together toward the *climax* of the story where the two characters help each other solving narrative conflicts. Afterward, *falling action* shows the two characters settling down and talking to one another. *Solution* summarizes and evaluates the characters' experiences, leading to the final scene (*dénouement)* as well as the return of *equilibrium*. At this point, the two characters have gained benefits from the journey as they have learned to respect one another to a greater extent and therefore

become closer friends than at the beginning of the story. The structure then repeats itself as a new story is being told.

The dialectical tension model has been added to the middle of the traditional narrative model that highlights story progression. Dialectical tensions between Superman and Batman are notably the highlight of crossovers between the two characters since the two characters are deemed so different that conflicts are considered natural, especially due to the rise of subjectivity in virtue ethics (Lewis, 1967) and an unstable political climate between different factions (Derrida, 1993). Essentially, the addition of the dialectical model is to emphasize the importance of dialectical struggle as experienced in reading superhero comics. Power struggle allows Superman and Batman to negotiate and share information, leading to strengthened friendship and moral lessons required in each story arc. Based on the previous research which emphasized the need for Superman-Batman argument to have meaning and purpose (Holdier, 2016; Riesman, 2016), this research argues that appreciating the Superman-Batman dichotomy solely for their apparent conflicts would provide readers an incomplete reading experience. Figure 6.1, especially, argues that for a climax of any kind to occur, Superman and Batman must resolve their difference and start working with one another to solve the conflict at hand.

6.2.1.2 Communicative Contexts

Dialectical struggle, by its nature, concerns intense negotiation between the two conflicting forces. A discussion on communication between Superman and Batman would deal with what is commonly debated within the contexts of the struggle. This section allows the researcher to analyze the structure of storytelling in comic books and how Superman and Batman can be connected to the concept of dialectics.

As predicted in the literature review, communication between Superman and Batman as a whole can be categorized within the ‘ritual paradigm’ or ‘alternative view’ of communication. According to Carey (2002), the ritual paradigm concerns a shared activity between communicators who have similar interests, which correspond to the concept of crossover between superheroes. As evident from the reinforcement of the status quo (Coogan, 2006; Meggs, 2009) and superhero ethics (Sarich, 2016), it can be said that Superman and Batman have intensely been engaging in a ritual communication to find the most effective perspectives in heroic acts. A study

appropriately named *How Heroes Argue* by Tim LaBauve (2016) tried to analyze how Superman and Batman organize their rhetoric to debate their philosophical standpoints. LaBauve claimed that there are four main prospects to govern superhero communication: pathos (emotional responses), logos (logic), ethos (speaker's credibility) and mythos (mythical/symbolic virtues of the character). All four elements contribute to unique images of how superheroes create rhetoric.

One of the highlighted publications in this regard is Russell's (2012) conception of the 'heroic moments' which was defined as how a superhero's personality contributes to their rhetoric in dialogues and images. Russell's study has partly covered the rhetoric of Batman, which he claimed are moral lessons about the importance of justice, the psychological implications behind criminal acts, the issues of karma, and the idea that vigilantism and law enforcement usually have different definitions of justice. In expanding his research, this current research project suggests that Batman has significantly higher numbers of Teaching Moments, Archetypical Moments, and Ideal Moments in dialogues in crossovers. Because Superman and Batman were skeptical of each other's rhetoric, both characters must express their standpoints more frequently than usual in order to convince each other to cooperate. Superman's pathos and rhetoric, especially, are similar to that of Captain America, who was indicated by Russell in the same work to be sentimental and exceptionally preachy about idealism. However, Superman's mythos tends to rely more on heroic heritage and the inherent goodness of human morality instead of American values (Karp, 2009; Soares, 2015; Tajaroensuk, 2013; White, 2013b). Responding to Russell's claim on Max Weber's theory of Social Construct (Joosse, 2014; Weber, 2017), the researcher believes that the 'heroic moments' are likely emphasized even more when the characters clash with one another. The instrumental and value judgments held between the two highly charismatic characters and the dialectical development must ensure that the opposite protagonists can adapt and coexist in peace.

6.2.1.3 Friendship Contexts

The current study has found that the ongoing nature of the Superman-Batman relationship is a dynamic and ongoing process that allows for the stabilization of friendship as a dialectic and a system that exists and operates because of its contradiction. Because the relationship between Superman and Batman have been

compared to recurring elements in media such as cop buddies, knights in arms, and true partners, it is clear that American writers and audiences have positive perception toward such antagonistic relationships. The argumentative relationship between Superman and Batman is considered a common sense or a naturally appreciated reflection of social growth. Indeed, readers who are willing to appreciate the relationship between Superman and Batman are likely going to attain knowledge about social relationships from their exposure.

An issue related to such an argumentative relationship however, is how the audiences interpret the friendship. While the protagonists are friends, their argumentative relationship makes it inevitable that their friendship conforms to Derrida's (1993) definition of friendship which is based heavily on politics, the utilitarian view, and constant competition between friends. In a political sense, Superman and Batman individually try to assert their respective worldviews and virtue ethics. Both characters are iconic and charismatic enough to fit Max Weber's theory of social construction, which indicated that highly charismatic spokespersons use rhetoric and persuasion to reshape the world in their images. The 'heroic moments' of both characters ensure that what they say will have weight and relevancy both in-universe and create a conflict resembling real-world politics. Incidentally, the book *Batman, Superman, and Philosophy: Badass or Boyscout*? (Michaud, 2016b) has collected articles that compared and contrasted the virtues of Superman and Batman. Articles such as *What We Talk About When We Talk about Batman and Superman* (Riesman, 2016), and *Who would win in a fight, Batman or Superman? Celebs and General Zod weigh-in* (Riesman et al., 2016) would either compare characters on the surface levels or loosely use classical theories to understand the values of the protagonists. Such activities conform to the casual views of the Superman-Batman dichotomy as beneficial and promote information sharing and passionate engagement in the superhero community as the readers wait for the eventual cooperation that will emerge from their dialectical conflict. Several writers and audiences consider this phenomenon 'fun'. This research suggests that readers must be able to identify the dialectical values that were created from the combats between Superman and Batman.

The virtues of Superman-Batman dialectic positively respond to researches in recent years that have attempted to paint the protagonists as mutual friends. As

indicated, Superman and Batman are occasionally antagonistic, but willing to adapt to one another. Several points should be addressed. First, the question of positive attitudes of the relationship being connected to the glorification of a conflicting relationship is connected to Eurocentric culture which is known for emphasizing individuality (Kim et al., 1998). Modern and postmodern ages, especially, have brought up issues of subjectivism, diversity, and virtue ethics that have been emphasized as a part of social reality. In friendship contexts, conflict management between people with different beliefs is a life-long skill. The friendship reflects American's philosophy of dialectical integration as seen through the *Melting Pot.* Superman and Batman, as role models, serve as exemplars of what modern Americans consider ideal friendship. Such a depiction of a progressive and stable relationship between Superman and Batman has a significant impact on how writers and audiences have perceived superhero media throughout the modern and postmodern eras.

Yet such views of friendship clearly contradict what common people perceive to be negative aspects of modernism and postmodernism. The Superman-Batman dichotomy betrays the history of how the genre used to depict their relationship. From the literature review, we have acknowledged the impact of modern cynicism toward revisions of the superhero status quo by noting how Alan Moore's *Watchmen* and *Batman: Killing Jokes* revolutionized comic book narrative to focus on political instability, personal traumas, and the grey area in heroism and villainy. Many stories tried to depict the superhero community as a dystopian society where Superman was turned into villain and Batman considered him an enemy to defeat. In the main continuity, however, Superman and Batman not only have been depicted as best friends but also actively disavows the idea of them being enemies. In addition, the relationship is predestined and cannot be broken down because of the persistent status quo and the fact that Superman-Batman comic books have operated over 50 years championing such strong faith in dialectical friendship. Such a phenomenon calls for a reconsideration of how the friendship between Superman and Batman should be interpreted in current society. As this study stands, the researcher argues that friendship between Superman and Batman provides a hopeful insight showing how modern and postmodern eras try to reinforce a mutual relationship despite having constant arguments and facing temptations for friends to betray one another.

Therefore, it can be stated that the relationship between Superman and Batman has provided an insight into how friendship is being written and presented to reflect America's idealistic form of friendship. The researcher argues that the dialectical relationship can be expanded to increase our understanding of how postmodern researchers should perceive communication and relationships between people with apparent differences.

### 6.2.2 Redefining Dialectics

The introduction has already elaborated that the primary theoretical framework was to be built on relational dialectics and Hegelian Dialectics as they address the results of the research in relation to previous research and common pitfalls in dialectical analyses.

#### 6.2.2.1 Traditional Views of Dialectics

The historical root of speculative dialectics was connected to the questionable use of dialectics and critical theories. Common interpretations of *The Phenomenology of Spirit* and Hegelian Dialectics attempted to paint dialectical struggle as 'us versus them' conflicts. For example, Marcuse (1954) associated dialectics with alienation and a need for a hereditary monarchy while Estaver (2013) used 'slave morality' as an idea that dialectical components are being taught to conform to the state of being oppressed. While these interpretations were fitting for real-life history, they do not fit the current result of Superman-Batman dichotomy or the implications the relationship makes subjectively in both communications and interpersonal relationships.

The nature of Superman-Batman dichotomy differs from typical power struggles because the two characters are innately equal in terms of power and social authority unless the status quo was altered and there was unfair bias from writers (which as shown, existed primarily in non-canon spinoff materials). This result is a response to a study by (LaBauve, 2016), who claimed that Superman and Batman have an equal amount of rhetorical power and followers that allow them to argue with one another on an equal term. Equality in the Superman-Batman relationship seems to reject the previous perception in this Superman-Batman dichotomy that their relationship is discriminative and that one ideology is superior to another (Foresman, 2008; Pevey,

2007; Shaw, 2015). While *Batman: Dark Knight Returns* dogmatically painted Superman as a governmental pawn and Batman as a revolutionist hero (Croci, 2016; Thigpen, 2017), such characterization was extremely outdated as the writers and critics commonly believed that Superman and Batman had more potential to develop as friends instead of enemies (Egross, 2014; Malloy, 2008; Maynard et al., 2009b).

Analyzing Superman-Batman dichotomy purely based on materialistic and political views may cause severe problems to our current understanding of dialectics. Stern (2012) indicated that misuses of Hegelian Dialectics can lead to solipsism where arguments are being made for the sake of antagonizing and destroying the opponent instead of finding a mutual solution in a synthesis. The fascistic and authoritarian undertone in these critiques encourages readers to ignore the underlying implications of friendship in favor of egotism battle, which severely limits the potential of a Superman-Batman dichotomy analysis. Indeed, if we force ourselves to understand the relationship merely under the impression of inequality and oppression, it would be impossible to understand the virtue of Superman and Batman. Refusing to understand the context of their relationship would cause the study to be severely limited, ineffective or useless because it cannot produce an effective analysis of superhero dialectics.

Instead, Boulding (1970) and Stern (2012) argued that Hegel's philosophies should be viewed as the negotiation of power, the mutual respects of different social classes, and most importantly, the impermanent status of power. This study argues that it is crucial to reestablishing our understanding of Superman-Batman dialectics that can maximize our understanding of this love-hate relationship.

6.2.2.2 Current Framework of Dialectics

As a response to Hegelian Dialectics, the current analysis of Superman and Batman repeatedly suggests the power struggle that exists on a level far beyond domination. First, Superman and Batman, regardless of what popular culture believes, are depicted in context as equal in terms of heroic achievements and philosophical relevancy. Second, 'complete death' and eradication of the thesis, according to the master-slave dynamic, can never happen to the protagonists due to the restrictive status quo and the basic requirement of Superman-Batman partnership as an iconic relationship in the superhero industry.

Some of the most important aspects of the dialectical relationship are represented by the idea of equality. Superman-Batman dichotomy greatly differs from the traditional social construct in that there is no clear oppression happening inside the relationship even though it is clear from the analysis that Superman and Batman are openly antagonistic and judgmental toward one another. They are also expressive and honest with each other in terms of personal matters and relationship management. Honesty between antagonistic heroes works in both positive and negative manners, which results in a highly aggressive and risky but highly dramatic and rewarding relationship. The writers treat this as an idealized image of dialectical friendship. The relation between Superman and Batman, therefore, should encourage us to reconsider our definition of dialectical relationship. Instead, one of the highlighted themes in the analysis is how Superman and Batman can enhance the idea of cooperation in the workplace. In this regard, dialectical friendship and synthesis serve as character developments, innate benefits, and the progression of Superman-Batman dialectics as a useful indication of adult friendship in professional contexts as an ongoing development. Petrie (2011, 2014) indicated there are two types of leadership development: 'Horizontal development' and 'vertical development'. Horizontal development is the growth in skills and knowledge that allows a person to perform multiple tasks. It defines 'what' a person can do in the professional field. Meanwhile, Vertical development refers to the complexity of how a person can think, adapt, and solve complex and rapidly changing problems. It dictates 'how' a person thinks in the professional field. Petrie added that there has been a requirement for vertical developments, and the study of Superman and Batman may help to encourage these developments. Regarding horizontal development, Superman and Batman are individually limited by their respective methods and ethical mindsets. By working together; however, they are able to expand their abilities to a significant extent. Common instances include Superman and Batman switching costumes, exchanging perspectives, and adapting each other's crime-fighting tactics. The expansion of skills and the exchanges of knowledge allow the characters to solve problems that they individually cannot solve on their own.

More interestingly, Superman and Batman help encourage vertical development. Superman and Batman, despite being opposite characters, are actively

capable of adapting, learning, and accepting the partner's perspective. The characters have a common ability to voluntarily sublate themselves with the partner's methodology and worldview, and ultimately an ability to work seamlessly as a single unit where two characters protect and support one another to achieve identical goals. The ability to accept and appreciate another person's philosophy causes a person to accept that there are multiple ideologies as relevant as one's own, and therefore no longer view problems as completely black and white. Both characters become more mature as they become capable of solving problems through complex thinking processes as seen in the adaptability and assimilation shared by the two protagonists. Dialectical struggles have influenced Superman and Batman's attitude, perspectives, and behaviors in ways similar to how people in real life develop maturity and complex morality from personal experiences and desires (Soto & Tackett, 2015; Thomas, Chess, Birch, Hertzig, & Korn, 1963).

Because of mutual recognition, superhero friendship ultimately develops to meet the criteria of the concept shared leadership, defined by Ensley, Hmieleski, and Pearce (2006) as a context where there is no real position of leadership within a superhero team. However, the narratives take turns highlighting different members. Incidentally, mutual recognition in dialectical critique also referred to the importance of understanding and respect of the contradicting forces despite the constant and everlasting struggle. In a traditional socialist sense, dialectical mutual recognition creates a hegemonic implication where master and slave subject themselves to common sense and justification and acceptance of dominance and oppression. What comic books suggested is the idea that dialectics does not end merely after the critique of the master-slave dynamic. The fact that the position of power between Superman and Batman is constantly shifted throughout the crossovers suggests the enforced equality and adaptability between different socio-political platforms.

Finally, the mutual integration between Superman and Batman is being emphasized through the icon of Superman/Batman itself, as follows:

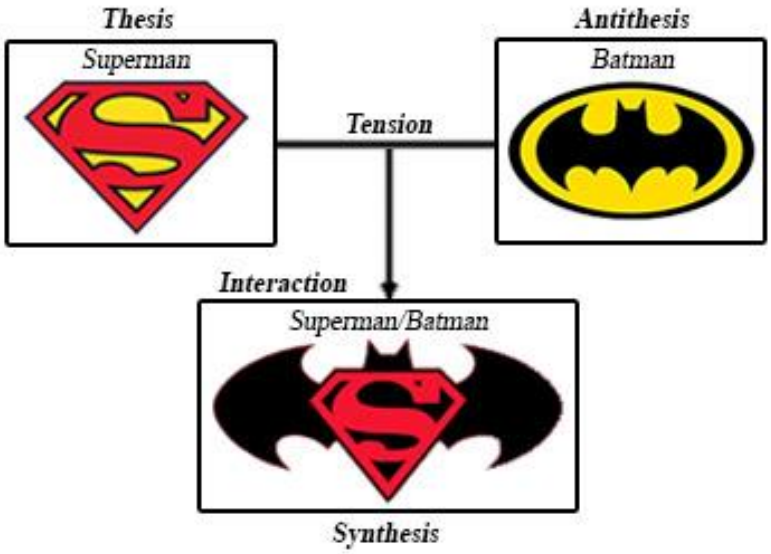



Figure 6.2 Superman/Batman Dialectics

Superman/Batman Logo is comprised of both Superman's 'S' shield and Batman's logo. It is a symbolic representation of Superman and Batman as dialectics. This logo was designed for the comic book 'Superman/Batman' and signifies the writers' common goal to explore and highlight the relationship between Superman and Batman as an inseparable unit of friends instead of enemies (Maynard et al., 2009b). From the study, this dialectical pattern is defined as the friends that rely on each other to survive, adapt to each other's perspectives, and learn from each other to grow more mature as people. Future researches that focus on literary criticism or mythology should consider the Superman/Batman logo as an important symbol that summarizes and generalizes the pattern of communication and dialectical relationship between the two characters.

## 6.3 Institutionalized Elements of Superman-Batman Dialectics

Section 6.3 will wrap up the analyses from Stage 1 and Stage 2 to provide an explanation of the nature of the dialectical relationship between Superman and Batman. It summarizes and answers research question #2: "How can the nature of the dialectical friendship between Superman and Batman explain any institutionalized elements within society concerning communication and dialectics?"

### 6.3.1 Superman-Batman and Masculinity

Some of the most common critiques of Superman and Batman as partners rest under the subject of masculinity and macho culture, which has proven to be interesting in the way masculinity is being portrayed and how it affects readers. It is a common assumption that superhero media are being made to respond to male demographics (Hickey, 2014) which therefore emphasizes the importance of superhero media and the protagonists portrayed as a critical representation of male expressions and hegemony.

#### 6.3.1.1 Simulacra, Simulation, and Male Power Fantasy

An analysis of the masculine representation by Avery-Natale (2013) suggested the use of images that emphasize gender-specific traits and characteristics that are related to the concept of *simulacra* and *simulation.* Both concern the use of symbols and signs to create an alternate reality as a sort of meaning construct. Simulacra, simulation, and hyper-reality were originally a set from the postmodern theory proposed by Jean Baudrillard (1994) suggesting the tendency to replace reality with specific signs or symbols that create a specific meaning. In essence, it suggests that modern media tends to replace reality with the specific, usually imaginary, set of unrealistic or fictional signs to simulate an alternative reality. Simulacra is being used to create environments different from real life that exist as fictional elements such as fantasy, science, horror, and supernatural powers. For example, common critiques of Disney World (Arnal, 2001; Baudrillard, 1994; Wang, 1999) concerned the theme park as an idealistic ‘another world’ being coded and presented as a separated place that contains its own environments, rules, as well as narratives and characters that exist alongside reality. The writer Jeph Loeb stated in a Superman-Batman documentary (Maynard et al., 2009b), “Comics books are escapism. Fair, you do buy them for the basic reason which is that good will triumph over evil.” As a result, the superhero genre operates on the similar notion under its genre that a superhero universe is an exotic, magical and unknown part of realistic world depicting idealistic side of macho culture: The simulated reality where overtly masculine, powerful, and attractive men utilize their post-human conditions to bravely fights against supernatural threats (Jeffery, 2016). The superhero genre is effective as it grants readers an idealistic sphere of alternative reality that a reader can submerge into to gain entertainment, to find possible

role models, or to learn a moral lesson to be used in real life to cope with real problems (Bonneville et al., 2006; J. F. Martin, 2007).

What this suggests in the current study is that the Superman-Batman dichotomy carries a significant degree of being an ideal image instead of the real. The main characters reflect what male audiences *desire* or *wish to emulate*. *Superman/Batman #78*, especially, showed a situation where two non-powered children existing inside the superhero universe as representatives of real-life readers who debate about Superman and Batman. Simulacra and simulation are a significant part of the communication field that may expand our understanding of the male superhero genre. In addition to physical appearance, (Avery-Natale, 2013) has critiqued common behaviors and attitudes held by superheroes as being explicitly male. This idea corresponds to the current study of communication. That the Superman-Batman dialectic uses directness and aggressiveness in relational dialectics likely suggests how men in society perceive an idealistic way of how conflicts between different social persons solve their differences, which from the analysis, is related to the negotiation of masculine power (Brittan, 1989), constant competition, and an acknowledgment of the common goals. This suggestion creates positive and negative implications for male audiences.

Positively, the Superman-Batman dichotomy influences moral and ethical messages regarding communication and interpersonal differences. That Superman and Batman are ideologically opposite serves as a depiction of how extreme opposition has the potential to cooperate and coexist in peace. It shows that arguments and relationship breakdowns are not necessarily bad. Moreover, Superman and Batman are responsible for influencing good ethical standards concerning dialectical management. As several studies indicated that superhero comics positively help to enforce social orders, professional ethics, and maintaining universal concepts of good and evil (Coogan, 2006; J. F. Martin, 2007; Sarich, 2016), it is likely for readers to adopt moral lessons to be used in real life. S. Popper (2013) suggested that the theme of friendship and cooperation between superheroes are influential toward children, allowing them to develop as mature and socially-prepared individuals. The superhero's expression of friendship would lead to the healthy development of a child in terms of social life and maturity in a competitive capitalist society.

Negatively, it is possible that superheroes can be bad role models because their innately violent nature has encouraged readers to emulate their violent actions. One of the very glaring issues is the over-reliance on aggression and violence, which is an innate flaw of the superhero genre as a narrative about crime-fighting and cop partnership. After all, the spectacular nature of comic books as a subject being analyzed in studies of communication has a problem in terms of, perhaps, getting audiences acting like delinquents or 'missing' the moral message intended by writers (Hatch, 2012). The hegemonic reinforcement of highly strict masculine standards, especially, has been associated with 'toxic geek masculinity' or the exaggeration of masculine standards that have led audiences to develop violent actions and extreme attitudes (Salter & Blodgett, 2017). Aggression and disagreements can also lead to needless conflicts and betrayal, mistrusts, and relationship breakdowns as sometimes found in an adult relationship. The positive and negative implications of masculinity are more complex than superhero punching each other for fun.

6.3.1.2 Masculine Saviors and Moral Exemplars

The idea that Superman and Batman are such influential moral exemplars in modern American media can be related to how the characters have been depicted and interpreted. Specifically, the characters are being treated as savior figures. As suggested by Campbell and Moyer (1991), the concept of multiple heroes creating a group has its roots in classical mythologies, especially Greek heroes who existed to protect and provide for the population. These mythological characters exist to inspire and 'save' audiences indirectly by being figures of worship, inspiration, or moral exemplars in order to let the audience face and adapt to social reality. Superhero protagonists operate in the same manner as the characters' actions and behaviors heavily influence masculine traditions as well as how male audiences would perceive the real world.

Superhero characters, as indicated in the documentary *Comic Book Superheroes Unmasked* (Kroopnick, 2003) showed that golden age superheroes, e.g. Superman and Batman, were created as savior archetypes, of which subjects are being used in some part of dialectical arguments within the comic book context. Superman, as indicated in the literature review, is a Christ-like figure. His creation can be associated with Christianity and the way modern human reflects upon the classical image of savior and hero. The classical piece, the *Merton Thesis* (Cohen, Duffin, &

Strickland, 1990), originally drew upon the idea of Protestantism being created along with the rise of the scientific revolution and the use of science to justify the existence of God. Superman, despite being an allegory to Moses or Jesus Christ, is being justified to modern readers of his existence and powers because of scientific explanation. Meanwhile, Batman is the opposite type of savior from Superman. While Superman is depicted a God of Light from another planet, Batman is a figure of darkness created from childhood trauma and cynical environment. Studies (Crutcher, 2011; Hock-Koon, 2016; Thulin, 2013; Tsao, 2008) have identified Batman as being the ultimate empowerment of a human's capacity—specifically, his creation has been based upon the human-figures, the traditional view of a modern antihero protagonist who is troubled by personal issues but nevertheless overcomes them. Writer Paul Levitz summarized the appeal of the characters as follows:

> Superman is a fantasy of what it would have been like to be born with incredible gifts. Batman is the fantasy of 'if I went through that set of circumstances, could I have done that, could I have made that choice', and people tend to respond to one or the other more strongly. (Maynard et al., 2009b)

Two factors have contributed to the effectiveness of Superman and Batman as the moral indicators of dialectical saviors. First, superheroes innately have duties and a moral agenda to teach readers about masculine hegemony. Typically, 'saviors' need focal points or common issues in society in order to save other people. Some of the most common themes in Superman-Batman books analyzed here concern relationship management, sentimentality shared between the heroes, moral debates, and the anti-terrorism ethics, all of which act as vehicles to develop the relationship between such saviors hence making them a patron of the modern heroes. Status quo, especially, is being used as a tool to reinforce the idea of dialectical synthesis. The relationships between heroes are predestined by the history of the genre and the heroes should submit to the dialectical format that has existed in superhero history for over fifty years.

Second, the heroes' positions as saviors and heroes have caused audiences to follow the protagonists' preaching and gather themselves to worship these heroes in a cult-like manner. Such attitudes and behaviors from fans are not new to Eurocentric

culture due to the pre-established notion that humans are innately hero worshippers. What truly matters concerns the knowledge and wisdom audiences can obtain from worshipping the protagonists. Superhero masculinity, as indicated by previous research (Aro, 2016; Best, 2002; Roblou, 2012) is responsible for providing social knowledge about masculine standards and, in the case of this research, how the dialectical relationship is constructed and developed. The dialectical unison between the two saviors, then, is a very interesting phenomenon to ponder for modern audiences of modern popular media. Superman-Batman dialectics act as a unified identity consisting of opposite heroes that 'lead' followers to cooperate and work in peace regardless of the differences in class, race, and nationality.

Such hegemony has the potential to lead audiences to positive and negative consequences. Positively, masculine dialectics can cause men to develop maturity and complex morality to exist in social reality. Negatively; however, audiences may overlook the moral implications of the relationship in favor of the surface-level aggression and violence shared between the characters. It is essential for audiences to distinguish which aspect of the Superman-Batman dichotomy is good and bad so that they can consume Superman-Batman media efficiently. Regardless of the raging debates in the community, it is the researcher's position to claim that superheroes, like mythical figures, are not real. Ever since the beginning, superheroes have operated as escapism. While superheroes occasionally tackle subjects in the real world, they can only interfere with real-life to an extent. For example, none of the superheroes in Marvel Comics could stop the 9/11 terrorist attack from happening. Many writers (Egross, 2014; Singh, 2003) have acknowledged this limitation, and therefore suggest that the heroes are not omniscient or omnipotent. Superheroes should not be taken as absolute saviors, but inspirations or role models that encourage them to save themselves from real-life problems.

6.3.1.3 Equality in Masculine Friendship

The Superman-Batman dichotomy is very masculine oriented regarding the expression of the dialectical relationship and America's ideal of unity. It is possible to interpret this relationship as an Americanized collective ideology, compared to the traditional views of Western countries that tend to focus on individuality and personal achievement (Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai, & Lucca, 1988). However, once we

reexamine Eurocentric culture carefully, it is possible to find indications of a significant degree of collectivity. The concept of multiple heroes working can be traced from classical mythologies such as Greek patrons or Norse deities, consisting of several gods, goddesses, and heroes who join forces to commit certain deeds. The history of America actively emphasizes the unification of different people. American revolutions, for example, emphasize the power of the people as a construct of nationhood. The idea of a Melting Pot (Gleason, 1964; Hirschman, 1983) is being used as evidence of an American and a patriarchic society where men of different classes, nationalities, and races work together as a single unit. Superheroes, as an action genre aimed toward men, is comparable to American wrestling, where Diffrient (2017) indicated that there are multiple variants of 'masculinities' that differentiate characters. The idea of collectivity in America is significantly different from Eastern culture. According to Triandis et al. (1988), collectivism in Eastern culture is formed by individuals discarding individuality in order to contribute themselves as a single unit, however, American's perspective of collectivism concerns the highly differentiated individuals brainstorming their differences in order to create a unit. This is clearly shown in the relationship dynamic between Superman and Batman. While they are willing to sublate into each other, both characters are highly individualized and are not willing to sacrifice personal identities to create a homogeneous unit. Instead, they rely on using each other's strengths and weaknesses to protect and support one another. Such a dynamic is a critical reflection of America's culture where the individual traits are important to the cultural belief.

The conflicts between different classes and cultural groups were referred to in critique of collective masculinity by Brittan (1989) as a form of power and class negation. However, unlike Brittan, this analysis has shown that the dynamic between Superman and Batman is not based on the pure competitive or dogmatic view of masculine competition. While characters are known for conflicts and disagreements, superheroes still operate under mutual respect and understanding of each other's ethics. According to Adams and Blieszner (1989), Rawlins (2008) and Sivertsen (2003), equality and freedom of expression are some of the most valued aspects of American friendship. Therefore, mutual respect and trust between friends granting them the freedom to be dependent and independent are some of the most common factors in maintaining the adult relationship. Based on the results of the research, Superman and

Batman are capable of empathizing and understanding the opposite viewpoint, integrating the ‘other’ into consideration and therefore adapting to each other as the situation demands. The Superman-Batman dichotomy fully embraces an Americanized idea of friendship and transforms this idea into a concept that can cover multiple subjects, including moral subjectivity, equality between social groups, and synthesis made from the integration of several ideas to create a single unit.

Such an idea of dialectics contributes to the idea of masculine collectivism critiqued. The effect of equality is upon readers who use the lesson in the real-life management of friendship. As indicated in the book *Older Adult Friendship: Structure and Process* (Adams & Blieszner, 1989), mutual recognition shared between individuals is one of the key aspects in maintaining older and professional friendship relationships. Superman and Batman can reinforce equality between dialectical conflicts in socio-political levels. Therefore, the partnership is potentially responsible for solving issues of ideological differences.

### 6.3.2 Dialectical Relationship in Risk Society and Social Disruption

#### 6.3.2.1 Issues in Fandom

One of the most prominent obstacles to understanding Superman and Batman as a mutual dialectical unit is the problem of the ‘debate’ between the characters. As stated previously, the character’s mythos provides superheroes with charisma and rhetorical power enough to convince audiences to become a follower of the character’s virtue ethics (LaBauve, 2016) and it is in a fandom’s nature to conduct debates regarding who is a better hero (O'Neil, 2016; Patches, 2013; Riesman, 2016). While the study has indicated so far that these phenomena are positive, it is possible that the comparison is being taken too far. Because Superman and Batman are so contrasting, audiences may respond only to one dialectical component and reject another. The conflicting interests and perspectives in the two savior figures create tension within the fandom as the two groups of fans who worship one hero but dislike another. Typically, these debates suggest that Superman and Batman are not true friends because of the underlying political as well as frequent contests between the characters. Studies such as *Darwin in Metropolis* (Springett, 2016), *Gods are Overrated* (Michaud, 2016a) and *Superman the Super Dick* (N. Levin, 2016) are examples of how superhero

fans use name-calling tactics or inappropriate words to construct arguments to protect their chosen savior figure. In terms of modern fandom, these are the examples of how the ‘fun debate’ of Superman-Batman dichotomy ended up creating a toxic community instead of reinforcing positive aspects of the masculine media.

As fandom’s impression of the Superman-Batman dichotomy was parodied in *Superman/Batman #78*, the narrative suggests that there is a limit to a direct comparison between heroes because the two protagonists are innately designed to be friends instead of enemies. It also heavily implied that writers actively reject the idea of the protagonists being enemies as interpersonal conflicts tend to create unwanted problems within the story. In terms of fandom, the idea of a literal ‘life-and-death’ struggle in such a master-slave dynamic is pointless and a disservice in the superhero context because it is considered childish or silly. This is especially a significant problem in the age of the internet because of cyberbullying and blind cultism in a materialistic and capitalist world (Menesini et al., 2013; Napier, 2006; Thompson, 1995; Tucci, Mitchell, & Goddard, 2007). In the most extreme interpretation, these dogmatic behaviors are comparable to a cult-gathering activity or an act of initiating conflicts such as Crusade Wars where battles are being carried out in the names of the God, leading to losses of innocence, tragedies, and deaths. As such, Hatch (2012) has warned of the danger of audiences overlooking the moral messages intended by the writers because of the spectacular effects created from violence in superhero actions. To appreciate Superman and Batman as dialectics, it is required for audiences to overcome such a potential dogmatic pitfall.

6.3.2.2 Dialectics and Power Balance in Social Disruption

Expanded from the fandom problems come the sociopolitical issues concerning risk society and social disruption. It is speculated by the anti-dialectical movements that these issues represent a serious threat that could lead to the destruction of civil society and democracy. Polarization and encouragement of polarization are some of the most problematic issues that exist in global politics where the public mass is being used to rally political movements instead of rationality and foresight. Some of the most relevant issues include socio-political debates in the 21st century, Donald Trump’s political regime since 2016, civil wars between people supporting different politicians, protests for rights in the LGBTQ community, etc. Many of these movements

exhibit the use of narratives to invoke emotional responses in sympathy, anger, and irrational hatred toward different social classes (C. Fuchs, 2017; Kellner, 2016; Thielman, 2017). The 'I am in the right' mentality concerns a problem related to virtue ethics and subjectivism. Lewis's (1967) critique on subjectivism concerns the destruction of universal good whenever anybody's immoral actions can be justified from certain perspectives. Biased media channels are comparable to superhero comics and casual critiques. Superman and Batman individually have comic book titles in their narratives, which is expanded or reduced because of the changing popularity of the character. For example, Batman has been known to be a favorable character and has affected comic book writing since 1985 while Superman has been condemned by modern readers as outdated or boring (Pevey, 2007; Shaw, 2015). This development has especially been noticed when Superman emulated Batman's antisocial behaviors in *the New 52*, *The Man of Steel* movie, and a bizarre action spinoff book, *American Alien* where Clark steals Batman's cape and temporarily wears it as a costume. It is clear that the popularity of one superhero has the power to push American's perception of dialectics in specific ways. Riesman (2016) was commenting upon the issue of the power balance between Superman and Batman as follows:

> If Batman and Superman are going to keep fighting, could we maybe let the Man of Steel win? Because if the political worldview of superhero fiction is going to hang in the balance with each battle, the least we could ask for is a little genuine suspense about which one of the do-gooders is going to come out on top. (Riesman, 2016)

To expand upon Riesman's (2016) and other similar claims, which were based on specific adaptations of the stories instead of source materials, the analysis in Superman/Batman and Batman/Superman books have shown several instances where Superman and Batman have equal chances of being the 'winner' and 'loser' in the ethical debates. In addition, despite adapting to one another, both characters must maintain their respective iconography and recognizable characterizations in order to be commercially successful among fans. As such, current research believes that the shifting power is a matter of dialectical shift of narrative that naturally changes

periodically. Based on the dialectical theory, synthesis is an incorporation of both elements, thesis, and antithesis as it continuously shifts its power balance. While studies show that Batman's grimdark approaches in superhero narratives have gained control in the industry over decades, recent claims have shown that the cynical trends have begun to die out. Instead, it has been implied that the more optimistic characters like Superman and Wonder Woman become the forces that react to the postmodern narratives where their optimism overcomes modern 'realistic' and cynical stories, which in itself is a new movement different from the narratives used in the 1960s. The altering history in the superhero genre influenced by the relationship between Superman and Batman, therefore, is a matter of dialectics and the effects of dialectical evolution changing the genre for the better and for the worse.

The ever-shifting power in a socio-political context is an extremely important idea that can reinforce democracy by encouraging mutual negotiation of power through voting and power-sharing. The power balance in a democratic country, typically the struggle between Democrat and Republican in the US, depends on the opposite factions taking turns holding power over the government. The representative of politics is chosen by the majority, which signifies the 'dominant' voice within the system, and must be respected. No matter which political group wins, both the winner and loser must still work together by pointing out each other's flaws and supporting one another to achieve a common goal in improving society. Triandis et al. (1988) claimed that America is made of multiple individuals in American culture contributing collectively to strengthen its economics and social movement. Similarly, Bhattacharya and Groznik (2008) have a more positive view on American culture, calling it a 'salad bowl' rather than talking about American people as one single race. Meanwhile, Crul (2016) indicated the new theory of 'super-diversity' where the theory of assimilation has been questioned because of the shifting power from white America toward diverse people of different races and genders. Superman and Batman in the comics embrace these American ideals. Their struggle can be interpreted as a representation of such a dialectical system as in America. As such, the research argues that Superman and Batman can possibly be used to access the issue of subjectivism and skepticism in postmodernism. While stories and characters have been darkened by the popularity of

Batman in modern society, the researcher believes it instead is a historical process in Superman-Batman dialectics.

6.3.2.3 Superman-Batman as American ideal

One of the primary roles of Superhero comics is to act as a tool for social criticism. As the chronological study of the history of comic books has reflected American history, especially since superheroes act as saviors and moral exemplars for the helpless, it is agreeable that Superman-Batman dichotomy serves as the industrial perception of the current view of socio-political dialectics in America.

According to Coogan (2006), some of the most common themes of 'superhero renaissance' modern and postmodern comic books involve the philosophical struggle between idealism and cynicism. Typically, classical protagonists in comic books stand against the cynical threats in darker narratives that have been consuming and corrupting mainstream media. However, the analysis shows that such an assumption is wrong. Superman and Batman are depicted as either mutual friends or antagonistic partners that are underdeveloped in a dialectical relationship. Status quo, utilized in comic book narrative in conservative manners to keep characters and readers under social obligation (Meggs, 2009; G. M. Smith, 2009), reinforces the 'responsibility' that Superman-Batman must become mutual friends despite their constant arguments.

The conflicting depictions of Superman-Batman dichotomy in comics and popular consciousness likely stem from the increased narrative stakes and the growing skepticism among modern people. As the history of the crossover indicated, Superman and Batman had a healthy and cooperative relationship during the Silver Age but became more distant and argumentative during the Bronze and Dark Age. This change has been used frequently as an indication of modern superhero narratives striving for stories featuring antiheroes, interpersonal struggles, and moral ambiguity (Neimneh, 2013). The common desire for such chaotic relationships is a reflection of the modern and postmodern societies where American people have become more skeptical of American ideals, religious beliefs, and personal insecurities caused over the years because of risk society and social disruption. All these contribute to American people having a more cynical viewpoint toward other people, believing that humans innately conflict with one another. It has also contributed to the audiences' need for more

complex narratives in fiction that emphasize character flaws as well as character development. As such, it is natural to believe that Superman and Batman's relationship had to be more conflicting and more dramatic as well in order to keep readers' interests. Yet Superman and Batman constantly try to place themselves above issues of dogma and mistrusts. *The New 52* has depicted Superman and Batman as having the potential to form a mature and strong friendship despite their negative first impressions, while *Post-Crisis* shows that Superman and Batman are capable of horizontal development in friendship despite the constant obstacle that tries to tear them apart. This research argues that Superman and Batman, as depicted in the comics, are prominent examples of American ideals and their struggle against cynicism.

6.3.2.4 Bipartisan and American's Anti-Terrorism

Further analysis of Superman/Batman comics shows that dialectics respond to American ideologies and their depiction of global crimes and crises. Jeph Loeb's Superman/Batman was published in October 2003, only a few years after 9/11. During that time, two major issues arose in American society. George W. Bush produced two important speeches as a response to the 9/11 attack. One of them was made at the Oval Office as follows:

> Today, our fellow citizens, our way of life, our very freedom came under attack in a series of deliberate and deadly terrorist acts. The victims were in airplanes or in their offices: secretaries, businessmen and women, military and federal workers, moms and dads, friends and neighbors. Thousands of lives were suddenly ended by evil, despicable acts of terror. The pictures of airplanes flying into buildings, fires burning, huge—huge structures collapsing have filled us with disbelief, terrible sadness, and a quiet, unyielding anger. These acts of mass murder were intended to frighten our nation into chaos and retreat. But they have failed. Our country is strong. (Eidenmuller, 2006, p. 1)

The essence of the speech concerned the insecurities held by the American government and people. The idea that American freedom and justice have been being 'attacked' by outsiders was being used to reinforce the socio-political unity among the collective "American people". Despite being the world's superpower, American

institutions have a dubious reputation around the world (Huntington, 1982; Jennings, 1976; P. L. Martin, 2017; Van Elteren, 2003). The 9/11 attack further damaged American's demonization of foreign terrorism as "evil" while placing an emphasis on how "strong" the American nation was. Regardless of varying opinions on George Bush's rhetoric, a specific movement was been created from the 9/11 attack. Observe the concluding remark to Bush's speech:

> This is a day when all Americans from every walk of life unite in our resolve for justice and peace. America has stood down enemies before, and we will do so this time. None of us will ever forget this day, yet we go forward to defend freedom and all that is good and just in our world. (Eidenmuller, 2006, p. 2)

The 9/11 attack gave rise to a movement called the *Bipartisanship* policy. Bipartisanship concerns the cooperation between different political groups in America (Orentlicher, 2013). Bipartisanship also operates in superhero narratives in interesting ways. First, Gilleard (2016) indicated that bipartisanship in comics is being used as a paradigm shift in America from preferring a single, powerful head of the state into a group of multiple political figures equally relevant in status and power. The nature of the partnership between Superman and Batman concerns the two characters' ability to correct each other. As suggested by the writer Greg Pak (Egross, 2014), neither Superman nor Batman was in the complete right in their philosophical points, and both did not know the best solution to their problems. However, the two characters' strengths could complement other's weaknesses and push each other toward an optimal solution to their problem, especially because they fight together to combat terrorism. This belief in bipartisanship is being supported by the rejection of a centralized government ruled by a single person. President Lex Luthor, as depicted in *Superman/Batman* premiere story arc *World's Finest* was a highly corrupted politician who rose into power due to political instability. He was interpreted as an analogy of George W. Bush himself (Conners, 2007), That Luthor was painted as 'evil' while the cooperative force of the Superman-Batman dichotomy was depicted as 'good' has created an implication that modern American culture no longer supported a government ruled by a single individual.

This study overall highlights that the relationship dynamic has a direct connection with the *Bipartisanship* in both its strengths and flaws. The theme of anti-terrorism is a focal point of the relationship dynamic due to the usages of supervillains, those psychopaths or aliens who are capable of conducting global scale terrorist acts. Meanwhile, the dialectical development allows Superman and Batman to evolve both friendship and mutual respect in order to achieve effective methods to defeat such supervillain. However, the dialectical movement causes a risk of assimilation, especially in stories such as *Superman's Joker* where a character's identity was being challenged to be altered to resemble Batman's identity.

## 6.4 Summary

The discussion of Superman-Batman shows a lot of potentials when the study can relate to or expand upon prior research. First, the dialectical relationship in the comic book can be established as a unique model that incorporates traditional narrative with a dialectical framework for the precise and recognizable narrative pattern. Such a pattern helps readers understand and acknowledge the dialectical relationship which is significantly different from political perspectives on dialectical evolution which mostly focuses upon power struggle and domination. Instead of class marginalization or a popularity contest, power struggle shared by Superman and Batman conforms to Hegelian Dialectics as a system where *equally relevant* dialectical components compete and power is negotiated in order to find the optimal solution and continued fostering of long-term relationship development. Such a proposal is very significant in the postmodern era where virtue ethics and subjectivism are being used in society to justify different cultures.

This research believes the implementation of dialectics is a likely development because America culture, and the globalized world, has already welcomed the Superman-Batman dialectical relationship. The debates in masculinity show that superheroes are surprisingly compromising and understanding in regards interpersonal relationships, which helps readers in achieving a mutual friend because of the superhero's attractive universe and the heroes' status as saviors, role models, and moral exemplars. The debates also show that superheroes are surprisingly feminine in

expressions, as the homosexual implications allow the characters to embrace both masculine and feminine aspects of human nature. In terms of socio-political issues, Superman and Batman represent the political ideal of *bipartisanship* and unison of different political parties, social classes, races, and people with different interests in fiction.

However, the Superman-Batman dichotomy represents certain undesired aspects of the dialectical relationship. Because of the innate problem with violence and vigilantism in the superhero genre, it is possible that readers - especially casual fans - will emulate violence and arguments shown at the forefront of the relationship instead of acknowledging the underlying essence of their dialectical relationship. The strict use of Superman-Batman dialectical models can also suffer from a fragile relationship because the readers may assume that arguments are innate elements in a masculine relationship.

Overall, the current study positively contributes to the complex relationship between Superman and Batman in order to encourage mutual communication and relationship in real life. However, readers must be aware of the underlying implication of the relationship instead of blindly enjoying the antagonistic fronts of the relationship.

# CHAPTER 7

# CONCLUSION

## 7.1 Summary

This chapter summarizes the research from Chapter 1 through Chapter 6 to provide a conclusion to this study. It seeks to magnify the research results and discussion in order to crystallize a theory that can describe and predict friendship between Superman and Batman and readers' perception toward modern dialectics, which may help guide researchers into further research in the study of comic book characters, communication, philosophy, and popular culture.

The study opened with a statement that provided an overview of this research. Studies of dialectics in communication and the philosophical field have tried to provide an explanation of how the human relationship and civilization develop through the negotiation of conflicts and solutions. However, studies in the antagonistic friendship between Superman and Batman have been severely obscured. There has been an overemphasis on the 'superhero versus superhero' debates which has generated an underwhelming interpretation of the Superman-Batman dichotomy. This work up to now has scratched the antagonistic front of the relationship or might even have misled the phenomenon into subjects of dogmatic class struggle and populism in ways not intended by the writers. As such, an alternative approach to analyzing the dialectical relationship is required.

Fortunately, as studies in popular cultures evolved, researchers began to reconsider the friendship between Superman and Batman as a complex representation of dialectic that emphasized mutual understanding and idealistic American friendship. This study seeks to expand upon those studies by establishing communication patterns between Superman and Batman. This study has analyzed comic books using critical theories and proved to an extent that the dialectical relationship may be a critical reflection of how modern society views antagonistic friendship as a complex

relationship that leads to mutual understanding and bipartisanship in interpersonal and socio-political levels of relationship. This study also maintains an objective claim that comic readers who read or study superheroes must do so in a way that they can apply the moral messages or critical views of masculine hegemony in order to enhance their senses of humanity in terms of conflict management in communication and how to deal with antagonistic opposition.

An analysis of the reviewed literature has shown that the Superman-Batman dichotomy is related to communication, popular culture, masculinity, and socio-political issue in real life. According to the alternative paradigm of communication and the postmodern philosophy in virtue ethics, communication between humans is *subjective* in nature. Cultural theorists such as Wilbur Schramm (1954), Stuart Hall Hall (1997, 2006), Raymond Williams (1958), and James Carey (2002) believed that communication between humans is determined by varying cultures, social classes, personal fields of experience, that lead to humans interpreting signs and understanding meanings in different manners. This ultimately caused humans to struggle when trying to reach mutual understanding. The conflicting cultures and interests in communication lead to issues in socio-political fields such as antagonism, prejudice, and construction of the friend-enemy dichotomy. The issues of risk society and social disruption in the 21st century are the results of communication dysfunction and an abysmal interpretation of dialectics being taken to its extreme ends. People with differing beliefs no longer listen to or adapt to another perspective out of fear or insecurity and therefore actively seek to hurt one another.

A study of the Superman-Batman dichotomy; therefore, is believed to be a key to lessen these problems in communication and socio-political relationships. As a discourse, comic books are an extremely prominent type of media that can influence or alter people's perception of social reality and globalized culture. The superhero genre acts as the writers' critiques of American culture in order to reinforce masculine hegemony, idealism, and universally accepted morality upon readers. Superhero characters themselves have been indicated as heroes, saviors, and role models that respond to psychological assessments of mythology, literary works, and heroism (Avery-Natale, 2013; Cruz, 2014; Fingeroth, 2004). Albert Bandura's (1977, 1991, 2001, 2002) social learning theories further proposed that the heroes' rhetoric is

extremely important toward fans. In this regard, the major theme of the book series ‘Superman/Batman’ in 2003-2011 and ‘Batman/Superman’ in 2013-2016 which were crossover comics featuring two of the most famous superheroes engaging in the antagonistic and dialectical frenemy relationship. While the opinions about the Superman-Batman dichotomy varied among writers, the common intention of the writers of these comics, as well as the current study, is to provide critiques on the previously studied perception of Superman and Batman being arch enemies and critically reflective of political struggles.

Analyzing the data from a total of 95 comic book issues of the aforementioned ‘Superman/Batman’ and ‘Batman/Superman’ comics, the researcher initially used Content Analysis (CA) to elicit communication patterns shared between Superman and Batman in the comic book narratives. Using the carefully defined and quantifiable framework of the Dialectical Theory of Friendship (DTF) by Rawlins (2008), the study discovered that the frequently expressed communication patterns were ‘expressiveness’, ‘judgment’, ‘affection’, and ‘freedom to be dependent’ and there was no significant difference between the two characters regardless of all of the differing characteristics and continuities. Expressiveness showcased characters’ different personalities and moral viewpoints, as well as their personal experiences, heroic heritages, and personal traumas. It proved that Superman and Batman shared tragedies, senses of loneliness, and personal sentimentalities in order to empathize and understand each other. Judgment was indicated as an innate representation of masculine heroes who did not hesitate to criticize one another. The high frequency of affection was an unexpected result that seemingly contradicted the measures of judgment and masculinity. However, it showed that despite the fact that the heroes frequently argued with one another, they were capable of complementing each other. Affection also showed that honesty in superhero relationships existed in both criticism and praises. Lastly, Freedom to be dependent indicated the heroes being dependent on each other. All four dialectical patterns signify a unique relationship where communication is direct and aggressive, but also genuinely caring and dependent.

A critical assessment of the Superman-Batman dichotomy has been made in Chapter 5. Following the establishment of the communication pattern, the study observed the overall structure of the narrative. The study found that narrative structures

and themes were conforming to Hegelian Dialectics as described in *The Phenomenology of the Spirit*. Superman and Batman, especially in the New 52, had started their relationship in absolute opposition, with both characters refusing to acknowledge each other's perspective because of different social classes, different cultural backgrounds, and different virtue ethics. However, the two characters gradually open up to each other and grew more willing to sublate themselves for the benefits of the other, while not completely destroying either. Eventually, the two characters developed mutual and affectionate friendship by actively look after one another and depending on each other as if they act as a single superhero unit. Responding also to dialectics was how the tension between Superman and Batman could repeat indefinitely as the narrative demanded. In addition, dialectical developments corresponded with studies in friendship by Rawlins (2008), Smollar and Youniss (1982), and Tennant (1993) where the definition of maturity in American friendship is a gradual development concerning human's ability to grasp perspective transformation and accept the values of 'others'. In comic book contexts, such mutual respects as dialectical synthesis was invoked by common pro-social and ethical responsibility shared by superheroes.

The contradictory yet complementary nature of friendship was significant because this affection was normally associated with femininity despite the characters being actively portrayed as macho men. The Superman-Batman dichotomy reinforces several specific images of masculine relationships such as brotherhood (E. Wallace, 2012), police partners (C. J. Fuchs, 1993), and sport rivals (Gems, 2006; Kidd, 2013), all of which rely on masculine drama, interpersonal tensions, physical and ideological competitions, and mutual respects.

The discovery of a dialectical friendship between Superman and Batman has led to several interesting discussions. First, the dialectical model can be integrated into the narrative model, causing the dialectical development to be taken as a formula that can be repeated as needed by the writers. The nature of dialectical communication responds largely to studies in modern communication that communication is a *negotiation of experience and knowledge*. It paints American friendship as a ritual and a rite of passage where partners who have equally relevant ethical viewpoints actively try to achieve *mutual understanding* despite the never-ending cycle of dialectical struggle. Because

Superman and Batman are effective role models and saviors of America and many other nations in a globalized society, it is important for readers to realize the heterogeneous nature of their partnership. Readers should acknowledge that despite constant arguments and endless cycle of dialectical struggle this 'superhero vs superhero' debate is not necessarily a bad thing, but the acknowledgment should be made with an awareness that Superman-Batman dichotomy ultimately conveys an idealistic exemplar of friendship where even the extremely different rivals have the potential to become the greatest of friends.

In addition, the dialectical discourse of Superman and Batman reflects American's unique ideologies in friendship, the 'melting pot', and the 'salad bowl' (Bhattacharya & Groznik, 2008). American culture encouraged different social classes to join and share their respective strengths and weaknesses as a united and heterogeneous state. Such a concept is especially important as it may help lessen problems related to risk society and social disruption. Because Superman and Batman operate in a system of dialectic where the two characters mutually respect and are willing to sublate one another, the relationship reflects the bipartisanship and the cooperation of multiple political figures to solve common problems. It also encourages democracy because the two characters take turns solving narrative problems and influencing one another. The relationship suggests that one needs to set aside prejudice and political or philosophical biases in order to coexist with another person and that every socio-political faction needs to contribute to synthesize optimal solutions to social problems.

## 7.2 Research Implications

This study of the Superman-Batman dialectic has covered several subjects related to communication, human relationship, and socio-political dialectics in American and perhaps globalized culture. As such, it has implications for several groups of people.

First, the dialectical nature of superhero communication supports the *alternative paradigm* in communication studies. The relationship between Superman and Batman emphasizes subjectivity where interpersonal and socio-political communication requires humans to adjust and adapt to each other. Researchers in communication may

use studies related to Superman and Batman to further arguments and dialectical negotiation of communication to reinforce a better understanding of relational dialectics and conflict management in order to achieve mutual understanding and successful communications. This idea is significantly prominent in a postmodern and globalized world where varying types of people are interacting and engaging in dialectical conflicts with each other on a daily basis.

Dialectic in comic books highlights the integration of concepts that were believed to be completely incompatible. For example, idealism and cynicism are typically on the opposite ends of any moral philosophy whereas political groups such as left-wing and right-wing politics cannot coexist. However, the dialectical integration of Superman-Batman has suggested a possibility that these polar binaries may not be as incompatible to one another as one may believe. The relationship thrives on conjoined knowledge and collective power created from the synthesis where *both* concepts can coexist and negotiate a power balance. Such a form of dialectic is key to solving polarization issues in the 21st century. For example, while idealism and cynicism represent polar opposite interpretations of reality, they both are categorized within a philosophical framework that ultimately allows a person to develop complex morality, and also allow different people with different experiences to cope with social reality. Similarly, the left-wing and the right-wing interpret political issues differently, but both factions seek to understand social issues and try to establish suitable solutions based on their differing belief systems. A compromising mindset encourages people to understand that despite subjectivism in postmodern perspectives, there are objective truths and purposes that these subjective perspectives share. Understanding dialectics may help opposite fractions try to understand one another and work together instead of bickering and trying to defeat one another.

In addition, this study has implications for readers of superhero comic books. Following the establishment of dialectic, friendship, and compromise between opposite factions, the study proposes that comic book readers should understand that the subject of dialectics can be applied in personal philosophy to enhance how one may improve interpersonal communication and lifestyle. Popular culture is a significant part of modern society, where American comics influence readers from all over the world. By reading Superman-Batman dichotomy in a careful manner, it is possible for them to

realize, appreciate, and try to find the way to apply these moral lessons to help improve how humans communicate and engage in socio-political relationships.

Finally, this research may have an additional implication on Thai society. While superhero studies are usually based on Eurocentric frameworks and context, some studies were specifically made for Thailand. For example, Tajaroensuk (2013) interpreted Superman as an ideal person based on Buddhist teachings and Thai customs. As a modern popular culture, the superhero genre has qualities that are universally appreciated. Superman and Batman can post themselves as moral exemplars to Thai people and teach Thai readers about interpersonal communication in a manner similar to foreign readers. Thai researchers should consider relating the Superman-Batman dichotomy to Thai contexts, frameworks, and ethics in order to make the subject more applicable to Thai people. The friendship between Superman and Batman can encourage Thai readers to maturely deal with difficulties in communication and interpersonal conflicts in order to create a better understanding of one another.

## 7.3 Research Limitations

Due to the innately interpretative nature of dialectical frameworks, the interpretation of Superman and Batman in this study is not absolute. Further studies may be required to find alternative methods, which can strengthen these data or justify usages of subjectivity in this type of research, allowing additional evidence that can be compared and contrasted to the current study for stronger interpretations of Superman-Batman dichotomy as dialectics.

The current study has been limited by the accessibility of physical copies of the analyzed contents. The researcher had to rely on online sources, which, while providing equal details to physical copies, may have inaccurate page numbers. The lack of access to the physical copies also means that the researchers have been missing the trade paperbacks, which collected multiple storylines and provided additional remarks and comments made by writers that might have helped with the analysis. In addition, due to time constraints and doing the analysis in Thailand, the researcher was unable to conduct face-to-face interviews, collect questionnaire data, or other forms of methodologies that provide in-depth information about Superman and Batman from the

writers or executives of DC Comics. Researchers who have access to more resources should consider further data collection to bolster this research where it may be lacking.

## 7.4 Research Recommendations

Due to the ongoing nature of superhero narratives, there have always been opportunities to expand upon this study in terms of study materials. During the time this research has been submitted, DC comics have continued to release new comic books. *DC Universe Rebirth* is the current status quo that has been existing in the mainstream comic universe since 2016. While the continuity has yet to release another Superman/Batman comic series, comparable titles that deal with the dialectical relationship have been released. For example, *Trinity* was a comic book that featured DC's flagship character Wonder Woman as an addition to Superman and Batman's partnership. A study using feminist perspectives to study Wonder Woman's existence and power negotiation, as she becomes a part of a highly masculine friendship is a possibility. Meanwhile, *Supersons* was a successor series to Superman/Batman that featured the teenaged sons of Superman and Batman developing a dialectical relationship. The study of Superboy (Jonathan Samuel Kent) and Robin (Damian Wayne) may bring issues related to children's communication and social development created from childhood friendship development, responding to Rawlins's (2008) critiques on childhood friendship and developments. Researchers may also be interested in studying superheroes from different sources. For instance, the comparison between Captain America and Iron Man in Marvel comics or movies may provide a similar or different perspective of dialectical development compared to DC characters. The superhero genre has a very rich history, and the quantity of study materials is plentiful.

Future researchers may study the relationship further using communication theories. Relational dialectics, as analyzed in this particular study, only scratch the surface of the dialectical concept in communication study. Theories related to communication and sociology such as dialectical theories by Baxter and Montgomery (1996) may also be used for further analyses of the superhero relationship. The expansion of alternative paradigms and other communication and relationship theories

can certainly be helpful at understanding modern fiction as a reflection of modern humans. While the superhero genre is considered a globalized phenomenon, a study of the genre may cause the result to be heavily weighted toward Eurocentric and American cultural values. Additional study of the genre using national-specific frameworks or popular culture can help to expand the understanding of Superman-Batman dichotomy into a universal concept.

Similarly, the current use of Hegelian philosophy associated with *The Phenomenology of Spirit* is only one theory that has been used in critical analysis. Hegel has several ideas that are worth studying further. As examples, Hegel's *Anerkennung,* Marcuse's *Aufebehen,* and the modern idea of shared leadership are very prominent arguments against the cliché that Superman and Batman hate each other. The dialectical model of Superman and Batman as analyzed from the comics, ultimately, is the one that actively rejects solipsism in a favor of mutual negotiation of power and identity for the long-term development between different humans and socio-political factions. This cycle of eternal struggle ironically serves as a form of mutual respect where the dialectic is taken as a valid definition of the relationship between the two characters. The relationship between Superman and Batman acts as an exemplar of a mature and efficient unit of dialectics in a professional context worthy of analysis in further research.

In addition, different variants of dialectics could be used to describe the duo protagonists. For example, Johann Gottlieb Fichte's own concept of dialectics. According to Kaufmann (1966), Fichte's dialectics is significantly different from Hegelian's philosophy because Fichte's belief focused more on an integration of the dialectical units instead of struggle, sublation, and assimilation between the opposites. In addition, relational dialectics as summarized by Maybee (2016) suggests "a synthetic concept that unifies the results of a dialectically-generated contradiction does not completely cancel the contradictory sides, but only limits them." Studying dialectics based on Fichte's concept or any other philosophers' may help researchers understand the dialectical relationship between Superman and Batman in various other ways, which may provide ideas on interpersonal and socio-political relationships other than those of Hegelian philosophy that is worth exploring.

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# APPENDICES:

# Appendix A

## Issue Summary

Issue Type: ☐ Modern Age (2003-2011)
☐ The New 52 (2011-2016)

Issue: ……

Author(s): ……

Date: ……..

Page(s): ……

**Issue Summary:**

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**Note:**

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# Appendix B

## Content Analysis (CA)

Issue Type: ☐ Modern Age (2003-2011)
☐ The New 52 (2011-2016)

Issue: ……

Author(s): ……

Date: ……..

Page(s):…… Panel(s): ……

Abstract: ……..

Panel x

Superman: “”

Batman: “”

Frequency Count:

| Superman: X | Batman: Y |
|---|---|
| Dependence: ☐ | Dependence: ☐ |
| Independence: ☐ | Independence: ☐ |
| Affection: ☐ | Affection: ☐ |
| Instrumentality: ☐ | Instrumentality: ☐ |
| Judgment: ☐ | Judgment: ☐ |
| Acceptance: ☐ | Acceptance: ☐ |
| Expressiveness: ☐ | Expressiveness: ☐ |
| Protectiveness: ☐ | Protectiveness: ☐ |

**Note:**

# Appendix C

## Critical Narrative Analysis (CNA)

Issue Type: ☐ Modern Age (2003-2011)
☐ The New 52 (2011-2016)

Issue: ……

Author(s): ……

Date: ……..

Page(s):…… Panel(s): ……

**Context & Interaction Critique:**

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**Related Theme and Theories:**

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**Note:**

# BIOGRAPHY

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