

TREACHEROUS, DEVIANT, AND SUBMISSIVE: FEMALE SEXUALITY
REPRESENTED IN THE CHARACTER CATWOMAN

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis is an examination of sexual and gender representation of the DC Comics character Catwoman throughout her more than sixty-five years. The main goal was to gain insight into America's view of female sexuality through the examination of numerous popular texts involving the highly sexualized Catwoman. This thesis investigates what made the character stay popular for such a vast amount of time. It also examines why the cat motif was chosen and why so many other female characters in the superhero genre embody this animal. In addition to looking at Catwoman, it was necessary to explore her relationship with Batman and see how this strong female character was depicted when placed within the same narrative as Batman, the strong patriarchal figure. Finally, I wanted to see how Catwoman's sexuality was a source of empowerment for her and if this was a legitimate source of power.

This study was a textual analysis of comic books, television shows, and movies that the character Catwoman is in. There were several methods used to study these texts for their sexual and gender representations. The fashion theories of Roland Barthes and Vikki Karaminas were utilized in the first chapter. To explain the popularity of Catwoman, the psychoanalytical theories of Marc O'Day and Jeffrey A. Brown, in addition to Mary Anne Doane's theory of women in film, were utilized. The third chapter's look into the power relations between Catwoman and Batman relied on the psychoanalytical theory of Laura Mulvey and the genre theory of Jane Tompkins. The final chapter utilized Audre Lorde's feminist theory on the erotic as a source of power.

The major findings of this thesis are as follows. The female characters of Catwoman, Blackcat, and Cheetah, and their association with felines, is important in spreading anti-women and feline messages. The connection between the two has been used for centuries to demonize both participants. In the superhero genre, the correlation is used to depict powerful women as evil, treacherous, and sexually deviant. This idea of sexual deviance leads to my second conclusion that Catwoman's popularity is largely due to her hypersexualization, which is the constant core aspect of this ever-evolving character. Connected to this is the relationship between Batman and Catwoman, which is highly patriarchal. Batman has massive amounts of power over Catwoman in their relationship, which is seen through the utilization of language and the emotions of love/lust, stories surrounding the creation of Catwoman, the depiction of access to knowledge and information, looking or "the gaze," manipulation, and the many patriarchal roles that Batman fills. Finally, the use of erotic or sexuality as a source of power, as defined by Audre Lorde, has had a growing effect on Catwoman and lends the character's sexuality to the possibility of a more positive and less patriarchal reading.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis is an extensive look at the sexuality and sexual aspects of the fictional character Catwoman. I chose to study this character for a couple of reasons. One reason being that I have always been intrigued by this character and wanted to gain further understanding of this cultural icon. The other reason comes directly from the last statement; Catwoman is a cultural icon, which most of mainstream America knows about due to her long history of appearances in many media. In addition to her many appearances is her massive popularity: the Catwoman costume is a staple of the Halloween season, she has a long running comic book series, and a multitude of paraphernalia surrounding her. People in America know who Catwoman is. This topic is important because she is not only one of the most prevalent characters in Batman's lexicon, but a pervasive character in mainstream popular culture. The long history of this character gives us an insight into how American society perceives women's sexuality and how this perception has changed and, more disturbingly how things have remained the same.

Women, in the superhero genre, are rarely shown in the most positive light. Since the superhero genre speaks to adolescent male fears and desires, the genre depicts females as untrustworthy creatures with dangerous sexualities. Catwoman is an exemplar of this. The character has been used to demonize female sexuality and power. In this thesis, I examine what aspects of Catwoman establish her as a repressive tool of the patriarchal system; her connection with cats and her relationship with Batman. The final chapter examines an underlying theme of empowerment, which is present in the later versions of the character Catwoman.

This thesis contains four chapters. Each chapter analyzes a different aspect of Catwoman's sexuality. The first chapter deals with the cultural phenomenon of the feline/female hybrids, characters that are female but possess feline traits. The second chapter will discuss how Catwoman's sexuality is the core of the character and how this contributes to the popularity of the character. The third chapter will look at Catwoman's relationship with Batman over the years and the patriarchal nature of it. The fourth and final chapter will discuss empowerment and "the erotic", as defined by Audre Lorde. This aspect of her is absent from the first couple of decades and then present, but contained, throughout the last three decades.

This study is a textual analysis, an examination of over sixty years worth of Catwoman cultural material (This many appearances contribute to her being a cultural icon, a character who is always in the dialogue of popular culture). One of the reasons that I have chosen to study Catwoman is that the character appears in many different types of mediums; comic books, film, television, Halloween costumes, toys, clothing, and video games. This gives me the opportunity to study many different mediums, and proves that Catwoman is a pervasive character. In the medium of television, I will examine the live action television series, *Batman* (1966-1968) and *Batman: The Animated Series* (1992-1995). I will also examine all three movies that the character has appeared in; Batman: The Movie (1966), Batman Returns (1992), and Catwoman (2004). My analysis of comic books will lean towards Catwoman or Batman driven narratives, but examinations of other comic books will be made when examining other related characters such as Black Cat, Cheetah, Wildcat, and Black Panther, who are all discussed in the first chapter.

The first chapter examines the correlation between women and felines in the superhero genre. This correlation is not limited to the superhero genre, but is highly pervasive in the genre. I discuss the long history of the feline/female connection and how the cultural relationship between the two has been perpetuated throughout the centuries in order to oppress women and depict powerful or peripheral women as whores, wicked, and or treacherous. Included in this examination is a discussion of the connotations that link the two together. After discussing the connotations Western culture has with cats, I study three female/feline superhero genre characters and how they perpetuate the negative connotations of treachery and the sexual deviancy that is associated with the relationship between females and feline. In addition to this is the connotation that women connected to felines do not follow the gender norms of that society. My examination will be of three female characters, Catwoman, Cheetah, and Blackcat, and two male/feline characters, Black Panther and Wildcat.

I utilize two theorists in this chapter, Roland Barthes' theory on the semiotics of clothing in his work, The Fashion System and Vikki Karaminas' article, "'No Capes!' Uber Fashion and How 'Luck Favors the Prepared': Constructing Contemporary Superhero Identities in American Popular Culture." as tools for examining the characters. Karaminas uses Barthes as a starting point since his work lays down the fundamentals of fashion theory and he was one of the first theorists to look at fashion. He writes that fashion is important because, "the body cannot signify; clothing guarantees the passage from sentience to meaning" (258). Fashion's main purpose is to express ones' identity and therefore is the perfect tool for comic book writers and artists to express a character's ethos and attributes without actually spelling it out. I say this because I agree with

Barthes when he says “it [fashion] does not suppress meaning; it points to it like a finger” (303). Karaminas utilizes Barthes to examine the superhero genre and discusses how superhero costuming tells the audience what the character stands for (Karaminas 498). More important is her statement that when the writer and artist of the character links that character to an animal, “the superhero ... is a shaman ... whose costumes [complete with accoutrements] endows the earthbound deities to connect with superhuman strength” (499). Connecting this statement with Barthes’ statement that fashion “points to it [meaning] like a finger” establishes the concept that connecting a character with an animal is done to establish meaning and characteristics that have cultural relevance (303).

I use fashion theory because these superhero characters are not actually cat people (except for Cheetah in recent years, although as of Wonder Woman #1 (volume 3, 2006) she has reverted back to her human form). These characters are people who wear feline themed costumes and act in feline like behaviors, except for the male characters, who enact very few cat traits. Through these costumes, the creators draw cultural links between females and felines. Attaching a character to an animal is a common occurrence in the superhero genre. This is done to “capture” connotations that those animals possess in the cultural consciousness of Western society. By examining the feline/female characteristics, I demonstrate how Western society feels about female sexuality and powerful females: it depicts them as treacherous, sexually deviant, and evil outsiders.

In the second chapter, I discuss the ever-changing appearance and ethos of Catwoman and the one constant trait in her depictions, her sexuality. Throughout the decades, Catwoman has changed on a superficial level by having several different hairstyles and costumes. However, she has changed in more culturally sensitive ways.

Western culture is one that likes to think of people and characters in terms of black and white such as either someone is evil or good. This is what makes Catwoman different. Her ethos changes often, not just from good to evil but from caring about the environment, being a thief turned hero, a working girl out for revenge, to flight attendant whose amnesia causes her to become evil. In addition to her ethos change, is a change in the character's race. In American society, race is a relevant issue that causes social turmoil. Because of this, one would think that the altering of a popular fictional character's race would cause controversy or at the very least discussion. This is not the case though, Catwoman's race has been both African-American and Caucasian and no controversy ever stirred. The character, Catwoman, can be altered severely without controversy because the essential aspect of this character is her sexuality

After establishing the sexuality as the core of the character, I utilize psychoanalytical theory to explain her popularity with both sexes. This explanation of her popularity occurs by using the theories of Mary Ann Doane, Jeffrey A. Brown, and Marc O'Day. Doane's theory of femininity as a masquerade is displayed in the character of Catwoman; her sexuality is a performance, both to attract the male gaze and to make her seem more feminine and therefore more vulnerable, usually right before she pounces and attacks. This masquerade of femininity/sexuality is the constant in the many incarnations of Catwoman. This façade can be taken from any back-story and placed into a new version of Catwoman. The use of this theory explains how the many versions of Catwoman can occur, because her back-story and traits do not matter, what matters is her sexuality. Brown's theory of women in the action genre utilizes a new category for these characters, that of the dominatrix. This category of women are hypersexualized, but due

to this hypersexualization are allowed to take on masculine traits such as beating up men, controlling the gaze, and dominating without being seen as too masculine or men-in-drag. If this hypersexualization did not occur, the audience might view Catwoman as intimidating or revolting due to her crossing the gender binary. Brown states that these characters are clearly coded as women due to their highly sexualized manner and costumes; they are given these traits of hyper-femininity in order to compensate for having masculine traits. After explaining how the masquerade and dominatrix category applies to Catwoman to allow relation to the character, I use O'Day's theories of "range of fantasy identification" and "have me/be me" to explain how spectators can actually slip into the role and identify with Catwoman and still desire her, despite the spectator's gender. The ability of the audience to cross gender lines would mean that Catwoman's fan base could include the entire population rather than just one segment of the population. Also their attraction to the character would be for multiple reasons, not simply one gendered side. Before examining the theoretical aspects in depth, a detailed history of the character's ethos, clothing, and appearance happens to demonstrate her ever-changing ways.

The third chapter examines the relationship between Catwoman and Batman and the power dynamics in it. The main traits of their relationship deal with issues of power; such as uses of language and the emotions of love/lust, stories surrounding the creation of Catwoman, the depiction of access to knowledge and information, looking or "the gaze", manipulation, and Batman representing the many facets of patriarchy. Through these different aspects, I discuss how Batman, throughout the decades, continues to hold more power than Catwoman. This is a textual analysis that does not discuss one major theorist

and their approach to power, but since I discuss many aspects of the Batman/Catwoman relationship, I use several different theorists for different aspects, to understand the patriarchal messages that exist in this relationship.

Before I analyze the relationship between these two characters, I first look at their relationship over time in order to find out what the core aspects of the Catwoman/Batman relationship are, so that I can limit what texts I analyze. After determining this, I analyze the power relations. First, I explain Jane Tompkins' discussion and analysis of western genre conventions in her work, The West of Everything. I then state how these conventions have an influence on Batman storylines and power relations between Batman and Catwoman. I do this since the American superhero genre was born out of the western genre. The gendered conventions of the western genre give the male more power through his lack of need for the female and his control of language. The opposite end of this is the female characters that need and desire the stoic male figure and her reliance on language. The reliance on language is important because it shows how power plays out; she needs language because she is not a self-contained person, like the male hero. The reason for this lack of language use is because if the hero "opens up to another person ... (he) becomes vulnerable... by putting word to an emotion (means that one) becomes feminized" (Schwenger 43-44) and "talking may bring up their own unprocessed pain or risk a dam burst that would undo the front of imperturbable superiority" (Tompkins 66-67). The writers give Batman all of the power and make Catwoman reliant on him and an emotional basket case.

In addition to the genre influences, other issues of power occur within depictions of their relationship. The stories surrounding the creation of Catwoman put Batman in a

place of superiority. In many of these tales, Selina Kyle spots Batman and this encounter so moves her that she decides to follow his example. In doing this, the writers of the comic books make Batman a God-like or father figure in the life of Catwoman. The patriarchal role that they place him in is reinforced by several others patriarchal roles, such as doctor and man-in-the-shadows. The writers establish Batman as a powerful patriarchal character in the life of one of the superhero genre's most popular female characters. Following this discussion is an analysis of access to knowledge and handling of information in the relationship of Batman and Catwoman. Secret identities are a major aspect of the superhero genre. This information is, for the most part, top secret. If one character has this information on another, they have a considerable amount of power over the other. He can find her during the non-costuming hours, can check up and gather information on her, and knows something that she is trying to hide. She, on the other hand, cannot do this to him. She is without power. What is more interesting is that he uses this power to manipulate her into doing his wishes. The power dynamics are clear. Batman is powerful; Catwoman is powerless.

Controlling a powerful female character can be done by subjecting the character to "the gaze". Laura Mulvey fully describes the gaze and its importance in her work "Visual Pleasure and the Narrative Cinema" (1975). In this article, she describes how the gaze controls and demeans women by turning them into "erotic object(s) for the characters within the screen story, and as erotic object(s) for the spectator [the audience]" (Mulvey 749). I describe how the creators place Batman and the audience as holders of the gaze onto Catwoman. Not only is the character, Catwoman, placed in a position to be valued for her "to-be-looked-at-ness", but the writers actually depict her as enjoying

being the subject of the gaze. Mulvey discusses this and states the women slowly learn to value themselves in “their traditional exhibitionist role... (which is to be) looked at” (Mulvey 748). The Batman/Catwoman relationship normalizes use of the “gaze” and then diminishes the harmful value of it by having the victim enjoy victimization.

The chapter concludes by discussing all of the different aspects of the Batman/Catwoman relationship and how it is a highly patriarchal relationship, in which, she has little power. Counter-patriarchal messages began appearing in the Catwoman driven narratives of the comic book Catwoman (volume two, 1993-2001). It starts with Catwoman expressing anger and fear towards Batman because he represents patriarchal figures such as father and protector. These fears are often abandoned almost immediately after they are expressed and she gives into Batman’s demands, therefore giving patriarchy legitimacy. The playing field was for the most part leveled in the 1993 film, Batman Returns, and most patriarchal aspects of the Batman/Catwoman relationship were dismissed. This film was not without its patriarchal messages but did bring major changes to the relationship.

The fourth chapter discusses Audre Lorde’s concept of the erotic as discussed in her essay titled, “The Uses of Erotic: The Erotic as Power” (1983). I examine the history of the character's sexuality and the use of erotic in her life and how these depictions have changed over time. Lorde describes the erotic as “an internal sense of satisfaction which, once we have experienced it, we know we can aspire [to]” (286). Once women have tapped into this source of power, which causes them to strive for satisfaction in all aspects of their lives, they will become empowered to change the status quo. She states how patriarchy pushes the erotic into only one aspect of women’s lives, their sexuality.

Once it is there, it is “vilified, abused, and devalued” by patriarchy. So that women who do seek satisfaction via this route are thought of negatively. Once women tap into the erotic resource, they gain a new lens to view life, which opens their eyes to the oppression that they once faced and the problems within the world caused by patriarchy (286).

While discussing Catwoman’s role in the depiction of the erotic as a source of empowerment, I discuss her career paths. I do so because Audre Lorde writes how patriarchy uses capitalism to lock people in a joyless world because it “defines good in terms of profit rather than in terms of human need... it robs our work of its erotic value” (286-87). Upon looking at Catwoman, the few first decades of her appearances lack any depiction of erotic as power, not even in her sexuality. When her sexuality and unhappiness with the status quo begin to appear, they are often expressed through the dominant male in the story line, Batman, and not through her own voice. Later, as women gain more power in Western society, Catwoman is given a voice and sexuality. This new independence is not without restrictions. They often serve as a warning to American society about the evils of liberated women and their monstrous sexualities.

The erotic as a source of power does continue its rise in the representations of Catwoman in the nineties. In the early nineties, Batman Returns and Batman: The Animated Series show the erotic as a major source of empowerment. Both of these characters find themselves being controlled by an outside patriarchal world. They both find pleasure through the Catwoman costume and in doing that escape the shackles of patriarchy to lead satisfying lives. The writers of both of these scripts place Catwoman on the outside of society as a peripheral member, once she finds pleasure. Therefore making

empowerment a double-edged sword; one can have satisfaction, but cannot belong to mainstream culture. The pinnacle of the depiction of the erotic occurs in the 2002 film, Catwoman. This movie shows a fully developed character going from complete patriarchal repression to discovering the erotic and turning her life around. She does this by quitting her spirit-crushing job and seeking satisfaction in the job market then in all other aspects of her life. In doing this, the creators of the film provide an example of how Audre Lorde's vision of an empowered woman can be, minus the costuming of the character, which is sheer pornography. By showing this in a major motion picture, the writers bring to light issues with erotic suppressing patriarchal system.

Catwoman's sexuality does not occur in a vacuum. It gives insight into how American society views women, their sexuality, and empowered women and the view it has is not pretty. In tying her sexuality to felines, the writers, artists, and producers of the character tie her sexuality to a deviant bestial sexuality. This correlation is attached to a number of popular female characters in the superhero genre and thus paints powerful females in a negative light. By examining the relationship between Catwoman and Batman, a clear example of how a patriarchal society wants power relations to be is shown. In displaying one of the most popular female characters as powerless when placed with a man illustrates Western society thinks that women are helpless when compared to men. It also shows actions and emotions tied to femininity as demeaning, weakening, and incapable. Lastly, the erotic element was absent from the character, Catwoman, in early depictions of her to disempower her. It was not until recently, when women have gained considerable more power than before that the erotic element was placed into the character. In doing this, they link satisfaction with quality of life. This desire for

satisfaction becomes a driving theme of the character's narrative empowering her and allowing her to question and battle patriarchy. In bringing the erotic into Catwoman, creators bring a positive spin onto a character that has been used as a patriarchal ideological tool. In the end, Catwoman's sexuality is just not the fantasy of her male creators, but is instead a litmus test to illustrate how America feels about women and their sexualities.

CHAPTER ONE

WHAT'S WITH PUSSY?: FEMALES AND FELINES IN THE SUPERHERO GENRE

In the superhero genre personality, ethos, and credibility are worn on the character's sleeve, literally. The name and outfit chosen by the creators gives the reader a sense of who that character is, what their beliefs are, and how they will conduct themselves. Many times the creator will choose to base the superhero's namesake and outfit themed around an animal and more often than not, enact the characteristics (social and physiological) of that creature; Batman (who is dark and brooding), Robin (who is youthful and chipper), Spiderman (who is a trickster), and Hawkgirl (who is deadly and viscous). Felines are a category of animals that are utilized routinely for this purpose and the gender of the characters that usually enact their traits are women. The connection between the two is nothing new and nothing that should go undiscussed. The phenomenon of assigning an entire species a gender is in fact very common. "When anthropomorphizing animals we often assign them a sex. These sexual assignments are not simply random but are due to our cultural history" (Waddell 75). The connection between felines and women is used as an ideological tool to assign negative traits such as being treacherous, fickle, sexually deviant, and wicked to women.

The female and feline connection has existed since, at least, the times of ancient Egypt. This connection between the two has shifted from being an association of fertility and domesticated life to the current negative associations of being sexually promiscuous and untrustworthy. These later cultural beliefs are apparent in female characters of today's superhero genre, which through costuming and names connote felines. The three

examples that I will be discussing are Catwoman, Black Cat, and Cheetah. I do not want to ignore the fact that male/feline hybrids have and do exist, however their depictions and characteristics are strikingly different than the female characters are. They are also less prevalent and less popular than the female/feline hybrid. To illustrate the difference between the male and female hybrids I will discuss the male characters Wild Cat and Black Panther. Key to this discussion is how the creators of these characters rely on costuming to illustrate the facets of the characters.

Vicki Karaminas writes, “superhero wardrobe speaks to the identities of the wearer and serves to highlight the supernatural abilities and attributes of his/her heroic status” (498). Using this insight, one could tell that a character in a bright, cheerful, and primary color based uniform would symbolize that the character was an official hero, who goes along with societal norms and had an overall pleasant demeanor. A clear example of this would be Superman, the boy scout of the superhero world. A character wearing a darker wardrobe based on the colors of black and grey would have the opposite effect. The character would be darker, grim, and their demeanor would be rather unpleasant, especially when compared with that of the character who is dressed in primary colors. To illustrate this point I will examine the DC character, Batman.

In September 2006, Grant Morrison replaced James Robinson as writer of the comic book Batman. This event may seem uneventful for those who do not know about Grant Morrison’s reputation of drastically altering the attributes of characters that he writes. In an interview with Newsrama.com Morrison says, “I wanted to see a psychologically ‘healthier’ Batman” and turn away from what Newsrama.com calls, the “gritty grim Batman” that has prevailed for the last couple of decades. This change

happens in Batman #655. With Batman's more psychologically sound depiction came a change in costuming, nothing drastic but crucial none-the-less. Batman's costume changes from a black and grey costume to a blue and grey costume. While the difference may not seem catastrophic, it does however demonstrate that character's attitudes are clearly expressed through the costumes that are drawn on them; the darker the costuming the more menacing the Batman.

Beyond color choice, creators of superhero characters decide whether they want to align these super-beings with animals. This is a common happening: "The superhero genre is full of such hybrids; creatures simultaneously human and animal" (Karaminas 500). The nature of these amalgamations may be literally through person-creature combinations (much like a werewolf) or through costuming. When the character's costume resembles an animal then "the superhero ... is a shaman ... whose costumes [complete with accoutrements] endows the earthbound deities to connect with superhuman strength" (499). Therefore, feline dressed characters would "channel" the powers and cultural attributes of felines.

Karaminas bases her discussion of superhero fashion largely on Roland Barthes' The Fashion System. In it Barthes describes how the fashion industry employs words to establish the meaning of clothing and how these meanings are not constructed in a vacuum but are impacted by cultural and historical connotations of the clothing (183-184). In doing this, the fashion industry sets up a code, the fashion system, which allows people or characters to have their characteristics expressed through fashion. In Barthes' words, "the body cannot signify; clothing guarantees the passage from sentience to meaning" (Barthes 258). Fashion's main purpose is to express ones' identity and

therefore is the perfect tool to express a character's ethos and attributes since "it [fashion] does not suppress meaning; it points to it like a finger" (Barthes 303). The creators of the characters discussed in this chapter had this in mind when composing their characters.

In the superhero genre, clothes do the talking through semiotics, which Barthes discusses in depth in his work: The "first, literal message serves as a support for a second meaning, of a generally affective or ideological order" (Barthes 28). The cat suits that adorn the feline hybrid characters in this genre are firstly illustrating their connection to felines. On the ideological level, the costumes signify the attributes that our society has projected onto cats and that the characters embody. So now, the question in the air is what traits and connotations exist in Western society about cats and specifically the connection between felines and females.

In 6,000 B.C., cats were domesticated to control the rodent population in Ancient Egypt. This may have been the beginning of this society's admiration for these creatures; felines were eating the pests that fed on the grain supply, a staple of Egyptian diet (Simon 36). Their admiration for cats and their animal-based pantheon are likely reasons why cats made several appearances in the Egyptian pantheon. Bastet is the Egyptian goddess of motherhood, fertility, the hunt, and guide into the underworld. Her primary symbol is a cat and most representations of Bastet show her with the head of cat and the torso of a woman (Waddell 82). Isis, queen of the Egyptian gods, has numerous realms of responsibility, too numerous for me to attempt listing all of them. The important thing to know though is that she has the ability to transform into a cat. In the same pantheon was Sekhmet, a ferocious lion headed goddess, whose main responsibility was to ward off evil spirits (Simon 52). Due to her connotation with a wilder feline, the lion, and not a

domesticated feline, she is more hostile and violent than the other two goddesses. Note that all three of these major deities are women. This is usually the case, as Clea Simon notes in her book The Feline Mystique, “most such associations between the divine and the feline are... female” (50).

The Egyptian mythology is not the only pantheon whose goddesses were feline/female hybrids. Pantheons from around the world exhibit feline/female hybrids. Around 2,500 B.C., the Babylonian goddess that oversaw life and death was Labbatu (in English it means Lioness). Her imagery was full of lion motifs; lions pull her chariot and she often sits on a lion themed throne (Simon 51). The Norse goddess Freya enlists cats as helpers and sleeps with dwarves to gain power. Sexuality was a way to weaken these male dwarves, a feature of the feline/female characters in the superhero genre (73). The Olmecs of eastern Mexico associated the jaguar with fertility and in Catal Huyuk in Anatolia, Turkey, a statue of a woman giving birth while two giant cats support her body. The statue dates back to 6,000 B.C. Although these later two examples are not actual female goddesses, they do show that fertility historically connected females to felines (53).

During Medieval times, the connection between felines and women became more negative and the association was a tool to persecute both. The leaders of the spreading Christian faith saw non-Christian religions as barbaric and a direct threat to Christianity. One of these religions centered on the Germanic goddess Diana, a derivative of the Ancient Egyptian goddesses of Isis and Bastet. Like her predecessors, she took on the form of a cat. Since the Christian church wanted to demonize these pagan religions, they started linking the pagan symbol of cats to godlessness, carnality, and lack of

restraint (due to the festivals that went along with these pagan gods). Females/felines hybrids began to no longer be thought of as bringers of fertility, patrons of motherhood, or a safe passage into death (Waddell 85). Instead, women who went out wearing lavish dresses were compared to roaming female cats; both thought to be out on the prowl for indecent acts (Roger 169). The demonization of feline/female connotations did not stop there. Due to feline associations with pagan goddesses, cats were also thought to be agents of the devil. Their logic led them to the flawed realization that those women connected to felines, or who have feline/female tendencies, such as independence and sexual promiscuity, must in fact be witches.

In their minds, witches had the ability to transform into cats and use cats as a tool to harness and channel magical power (Waddell 85). During the 1700 and 1800s, people massacred cats and convicted women who did not fit in society's gender roles as witches. One example of a cat massacre is detailed in the work of Robert Darnton is his work, "The Great Cat Massacre". In this, he writes how in the 1730s, a group of Parisian printing apprentices demonized, "tortured and ritually killed all the cats they could find" (Darnton 7). He goes into graphic detail as to how this group and other groups throughout history have massacred cats. People thought that both, females and felines, gave into the "extremes of sexual indulgence and perversion" (Waddell 88). Sex with the devil was a bestial act, this notion convinced people that witches copulated with cats. In the mid-fifteenth century Baldung Grien, an artist, created woodcuts where nude witches had orgasmic faces alongside cats with the same sexual climatic expressions (Waddell 88-89). The cultural history of the female/feline has linked the two through connotations of

perverse or uninhibited sexuality and evil/death. These cultural beliefs are linked to the felines' physiology, their behaviors, and their perceived attitudes.

Feline physiology contributed to the perception of them as sexually deviant and treacherous. Elizabeth Atwood Lawrence in her article "Feline Fortunes" describes aspects of feline reproduction and their cultural ramifications: "The cat's high reproductive rate and solicitous care of young can make it a symbol of regeneration and fertility, or the embodiment of lust and sexual depravity" (Lawrence 633). Additionally, treachery is coded in the fact that one of the cats' most effective weapons are their claws. These weapons are retractable, hidden from plain site. Like a person hiding a knife behind their back with a pleasant appearance, these felines are seen as untrustworthy and "emblem[s] of treachery" (Roger 177).

Felines' behaviors also lead to the negative cultural connotations. Cats do not hunt for food actively or in the open; instead they lie and wait, sometimes stalking their unaware prey. When the prey is in range, the cat suddenly and unpredictably pounces upon the creature, sometimes not eating it for quite sometime, instead toying with it. Toying with ones prey instead of killing it immediately and ending its suffering contributes to Western cultures negative view of this creature. It seems that these feasting felines are gaining pleasure through the torture of a creature. Their way of hunting has been described in three parts; "lure, scheme, and ensnare" (Waddell 80). Although these words are about of felines, the author explains that they are also used to describe women. Katherine M. Rogers, author of The Cat and the Human Imagination, further elaborates this thought by explaining,

Cats conveniently represent what men have long and bitterly complained of in women: they do not obey and they do not love enough. Men who cannot control

women as they would like to associate them with animals that cannot be controlled. Men who expect from women a devotion too absolute within human capacity find coldness and concealed hostility in cats and attribute them to women as well. (185)

Before the 19th Century, in Europe, cats were often associated with attributes of an unruly wife (169). The patriarchal world dismissed and persecuted women and cats in order to oppress both. Many women however have embraced their cultural association with cats, turning it into something positive.

Clea Simon writes about how contemporary women feel external and internal pressures to be highly civilized, polite, and not to step outside the feminine world of passivity. The traits assigned to cats are traits that these women aspire to in order to break these strict gender norms. Cats, in this sense, represent the bolder and aggressive half of women; they are self-reliant, independent creatures, who are unconcerned with what the world thinks about them. Creatures that have confidence to do what they chose to do. Simon describes felines as “the original divas, cats let their companions know what they want- and what they will not tolerate- and as a result, often get what they want” (16).

As I have stated earlier in this chapter, the superhero genre is ripe with human/feline hybrids. Additionally I stated that the majority of these hybrids were in fact female. Here is a short, not comprehensive list, of these characters alongside a list of male characters:

<p>FEMALE CHARACTERS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Catseye (Marvel) • Catseye (DC) • Cheshire (DC) • Tiggra (DC) • Tigra (Marvel) • Catwoman (DC) 	<p>MALE CHARACTERS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cheetah (Marvel) • Black Panther (Marvel) • Puma (Marvel) • Sabertooth (Marvel) • Eosimias (Marvel) • Catman (DC)
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cheetah (DC) • Hellcat (Marvel) • Feral (Marvel) • The Jaguar (DC) • Pantha (DC) • Thorn (Marvel) • Bast (Marvel) • Lynx (Marvel) • Feline (Ultraverse) • Copy Cat (DC) • Catspaw (DC) • Cybercat (DC) • Onyx (DC) • Tigress (DC) • Velvet Tiger (DC) • Vixen (DC) • White Tiger (Marvel) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lionheart (DC) • Lion-Mane (DC) • Saber-tooth (DC) • Tiger (DC) • Tiger-Boy (DC) • Tiger-Man (DC)
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While this is not an exhaustive list, it gives the general impression that feline/human hybrids are quite common. However, there is a difference in how the female and male characters enact feline traits in today's superhero genre. To illustrate this point three female (Catwoman, Cheetah, and Black Cat) and two male (Wild Cat and Black Panther) characters will be discussed.

The three female characters will be discussed not separately but instead by their shared traits. These characters names derive from felines and have been dressed in corresponding costumes in order to illustrate to the audience what creatures they are channeling, and therefore what traits the character possess. The female/feline characteristics perpetuated in the superhero genre are lavishness, people who do not conform to the gender dichotomy of a patriarchal society, indulgent sexuality, and their treacherous untrustworthy tendencies. Before analysis begins, introductions are in order.

Catwoman has been a staple in the Batman's storylines since her first appearance in Batman #1, circa the spring of 1940. Bob Kane said about her creation that he chose a cat because there was "something mysterious about cats and I equate that with women" (Uslan 4). Kane picking the cat as the totem of Batman's major female villain was no accident; it was in fact culturally predictable. Her alias is Selina Kyle in almost all of her appearances, the only time an alteration of this characteristic occurs is in the 2004 movie, Catwoman, where her alter ego was Patience Phillips. Among the feline hybrids, she is the most prominent. Her appearances span over 65 years in comic books of the DC universe, three volumes of comic books featuring her as the main character during the years of 1989, 1993 to 2001, and 2001 to the present, and many limited series. In non-comic book form she has been in a live action television series, Batman, (1966 to 1968), two Batman animated series, Batman: The Animated Series (1992- 1995) and The Batman (2004 to present), and has appeared in three motion pictures, Batman: The Movie (1966), Batman Returns (1992), and Catwoman (2004). She is Batman's love interest, enemy, nuisance, and fellow crime fighter depending on the writer.

Cheetah's first appearance was in 1943's Wonder Woman #6 and since then has been in Wonder Woman's rogues' gallery. There are three women and one man who claim the alter ego of Cheetah. The first is Priscilla Rich, who suffers from a split personality disorder which is brought on by the proximity and/or mentioning of Wonder Woman (Daniels 60). The second Cheetah is Deborah Domaine, niece of Priscilla Rich. In two issues, she is brain washed into becoming the Cheetah and then is quickly disposed of. The third Cheetah is Barbara Minerva, a British archeologist who goes into the jungle to discover a treasure city. She is a power hungry woman, who discovers how

to become the Cheetah and takes the opportunity to be power embodied. This Cheetah is not the result of a split personality, but is the creation of a blood sacrificing ritual by which she gains the power of a plant god, Urzkartaga (Perez “Bloodlines”). The fourth Cheetah is male, Sebastian Ballésteros. He stole the power of Urzkartaga from Barbara Minerva; his stint as Cheetah does not last long and Minerva punishes him for stealing what was hers. The Cheetah is one of Wonder Woman’s most prevalent villains and she is the only feline/female hybrid who faces off against a female protagonist.

The final female character that I will be discussing is Black Cat, who first appeared in the 1979 Amazing Spiderman #197. Her alias is Felicia Harding, a cat burglar following her father’s example. The main goal of Harding in her first appearance is to break her father out of prison. Like Catwoman though, she shares a love/hate relationship with the protagonist; for the Black Cat this is Spiderman and for Catwoman this is Batman. While Black Cat has not been around as long as Catwoman or Cheetah, she is still significant. She has had regular appearances in the many Spiderman comic book series and has been in a couple of her own limited series. Currently, she is in the comic book Heroes for Hire, an ongoing series and a three issue limited series Claws, featuring her and Wolverine.

As discussed above, costuming and accoutrements in the superhero genre illustrate a character’s behavior and ethos. For the most part, the costume that a character is originally drawn with is the costume that they will die in, be reborn in (it happens more often than not), or exist forever in. Minor changes do occur; accessories added and colors altered, but for the most part things remain the same, the exception being Catwoman.

Catwoman has changed costumes more time than any character that I can recall. Alex Ross, an artist in the comic book industry, states, “Catwoman is probably the biggest character in comics for changing her look over time” (“The Many Faces of Catwoman”). Since this is the case, the description of Catwoman’s costume will be on the aspects of it that have appeared most often, for a more in-depth discussion of her ever-evolving fashion read chapter two. The canonical Catwoman costume is either made of black leather or purple/black spandex, boots, and a cat mask with pointy ears. The animal that she is enacting is a domesticated cat; an animal that she is often seen in the presence of.

Black Cat, similarly, is dressed as a domestic cat. Her outfit consists of black boots with white fur around the top, white gloves, a golden collar, and the main piece of her costume is a black spandex outfit with white fur around the collar, which is usually low enough to reveal some cleavage. To conceal her secret identity she wears a black mask over her eyes, similar to a “Zorro” mask. The costume sometimes involves cat ears but they are not always depicted. The white and black color scheme of her outfit connotes a domesticated cat similar to that of President Clinton’s cat, Socks. The codename Black Cat, additionally, points to the domestic cat being her totem.

Cheetah’s name alone gives away what animal she exhibits, a cheetah. If the name did not give away what animal she emulates then the costuming of the character will. When the Cheetah side of Priscilla Rich’s mind would take over, she dresses in a spotted costume, which resembled that of a cheetah’s hide, and a spotted hood with round cat ears on it. It looked as if she skinned a cheetah, cut out its face, and slipped in. This is

very similar to the costume that Deborah Domaine donned after her hypnosis. The third Cheetah, Minerva, actually breaks this mold and becomes half Cheetah (much like a werewolf is half-wolf and half-man) after the blood ritual. Her appearance is beastly with razor sharp claws, a wild mane, spots all over her body, fangs, and a humanoid face with cat features blended in. She walks on two legs but does move on all fours when stalking people or creatures.

Black Cat and Catwoman both share a totem animal, the domesticated cat. It is therefore not surprising that they share similar traits. Cheetah differs wildly from them, the later version, Barbara Minerva, is sometimes more beast than she is woman. The bestial side of the character consumes Cheetah and she is not a woman simply wearing a cat suit. She is a literal hybrid. Another key difference in these three characters is that Black Cat and Catwoman's opposites are male, Spiderman and Batman. Cheetah's opposite is a woman, Wonder Woman, which alters some the connotation of female/feline attributes. For the most part though, these three feline/female hybrids share key common characteristics; they are not trustworthy in the eyes of other characters in the narrative and readers often do not know whose side they are on, they live their lives outside of societal rules for women, and have uninhibited sexualities that veer into perversion.

Terrace Waddell was quoted above as saying that "they (women and cats) lure, scheme, and ensnare" (80). All three of those words have negative connotations; one cannot trust a person that does any of those three actions. It is no wonder that the cat is therefore thought of as "an emblem of treachery" (Roger 177). This belief perpetuates itself in the superhero genre. All three of the characters have in certain storylines

switched sides and teamed up with their nemesis, the hero, or have double-crossed their partners. For example, Catwoman and Black Cat first appear in the comic books as villains, but currently are heroes.

In the current Catwoman, volume three, Selina Kyle is the sole protector of the East End, the poor section of Gotham. She states about this task, “And I will speak for them (the poor). Because no one else will” (Brubaker 78). A sweeping change from the Catwoman who appeared in 1940 and declared herself “the queen of crime” (Finger “The Cat” 22). This may seem rather drastic but is not out of the ordinary for this character. The writers have continually changed the ethos of Catwoman over the years for serious and silly reasons. In Batman #197, she becomes a hero in order to upstage Batgirl and fall into the favor of Batman. According to her thought bubbles, if she eliminates Batgirl then Batman will only have one woman by his side and therefore fall in love with her (Fox). Her allegiance with the side of good only lasts one issue because Batman chose not to love her. The Catwoman of the late 90’s straddles the line between good and evil. In Catwoman #8 (volume 2) she states, “And taking the best is what I’m good at” (Duffy 3). In this statement, she reveals that she is a thief; this however does not stop her from tracking down, for two issues, Zephyr, a fellow thief. Why would a thief waste her time tracking down another thief instead of stealing? The character even notes her dramatically changing ethos in Catwoman #3 when she states, “I think I’m turning into Batman” (Duffy 5).

The altering of her ethos coincides with her ability to easily double cross allies. Batman has been the target of multiple double crosses or perceived double crosses. I say perceived because there is a mystery about where her allegiance stands in Batman

narratives, since the audience receives only his thoughts in these narratives and not hers. In the limited series Batman: The Long Halloween, Catwoman fights alongside Batman to defeat the Mad Hatter and the Scarecrow. Three chapters later, she is standing in a room with Batman, on the opposite side though, with seven other villains from Batman's rogues' gallery. He thinks, "have I lost an ally" and asks her "Whose ... side are you on?" She responds back with a coy look, "The same side that I'm always on..." and then she disappears (Loeb 349). This is a timid example of her double crossing incidents, no one died in this double cross. In Catwoman #4 (volume 2), she tells her ally Leopold to notify Bane, a villain who rules Gotham for a short period, of news that Catwoman discovered about Bane's past. Upon receiving the information, Bane kills Leopold and Catwoman simply walks away while making a sly remark about his premature death. Bane, three issues earlier, is discussing Catwoman and says about her, "She swears she will serve me...but no feline is noted for obedience" (Duffy "Life Lines: Rough Diamonds" 14). Bane's statement is a clear demonstration of Western culture's attitude towards cats. The final example is a clear demonstration of what Bane is saying. Batman directly tells her in the Batman: The Animated Series episode "You Scratch My Back", "I don't trust you Selina" when she teams up with Nightwing, former partner of Batman. Batman was right not to trust her; she double-crosses Nightwing in the end. The examples could continue but the point is Catwoman, to both the audience and other fictional characters, is not to be trusted.

In a recent comic book, Claws #1, Spiderman and Black Cat are combating each other. They fight, not in a viscous way, but in a playful fashion, while still hurting each other. Towards the end up the battle, he states to her "I want you to stay out of trouble."

She responds, “We always want what we can’t have” (Palmiotti and Gray no pg). Despite the fact that she is a hero now, her ethos is always shifting. It is clear from the dialogue that she could easily turn criminal. For the most part the current Black Cat is a hero; she is a member of the team Heroes for Hire. However, she has no problem slipping into some of her old patterns if she deems the job adequate, as the quote above demonstrates. In her second comic book appearance, Amazing Spiderman #195, the writer, Marv Wolfman, explains that she wishes to follow in her father's footsteps. This reveals why she obtained several talents that would aid her in becoming a master criminal. However, these highly honed skills seem unnecessary when her ethos changes from attempting to murder Spiderman to admirer of Spiderman.

Her ethos changes in a short amount of time, from threatening Spiderman's life, “I really don't want to kill you... although I will if you get in my way” (Wolfman “Never Let the Black Cat Cross Your Path” 19). To stating, seven issues later, in Amazing Spiderman #204, “Can't get too many pics of my favorite superhero” (Wolfman 45). Her ethos changes from a willingness to dispose of Spiderman if he gets in her way to a love struck young woman with an unhealthy obsession with a superhero. Clearly, the writers, even within a short amount of time, cannot decide if she is hero or villain. This is not the only time her willingness to break crime is switched. In the first issue of the 2002 limited series, Spiderman and the Black Cat: “The Evil That Men Do”, written by Kevin Smith, Black Cat states, “for the past few years I haven't as much as jay-walked” (no pg). This is not the Black Cat of Claws (2006), who cannot help it if she does bad things; it is simply who she is. While this character is not the double crossing traitor that Catwoman is, she is still not in the category of black or white in the superhero world. For the most part in

recent years, she has been a hero with naughty, not quite evil, tendencies. This still enacts the characteristics of a cat. Black Cat may seem like a heroic character, but she still has claws and a tendency to bend the rules.

Black Cat is on the opposite side of the spectrum from Cheetah in enacting cat traits. Cheetah does not lightly take on aspects of the female/feline connotations; she submerges completely in them. Cheetah starts her existence as a villain, at times a sympathetic villain, because of the mental disorder, but a villain none-the-less. The crimes of Priscilla Rich involve the usual theft of objects and money, but her dialogue with Wonder Woman is harsher than the Black Cat has with Spiderman and Catwoman has with Batman. For example, in Wonder Woman #160, Cheetah kidnaps Steve Trevor, Wonder Woman's love interest, and tells Wonder Woman, "Better Surrender, Amazon! Unless you'd like your boyfriend with a hole in the middle of his forehead" (Kanigher 7). Years later, she slits the throat of a tour guide in order to prove to a group of tourists that she is serious and to draw the attention of Wonder Woman. In order to "lure... and ensnare", Cheetah brutally murders an innocent man (Waddell 80). It should be noted that this is the tamer version of Cheetah. This Cheetah was not pure evil; as Priscilla Rich, she was a pleasant woman, who often times, such as in Wonder Woman #230, attempts to stop Cheetah's evil plans.

Priscilla Rich appears to be an angel when compared to the hellion that is Barbara Minerva. An ancient blood festival creates the Barbara Minerva version of Cheetah. Unlike Rich's Cheetah persona, this Cheetah is actually half cheetah and needs to feast on blood. This lust for blood consumes Cheetah's temperament frequently: "anticipating the warm gush of blood" and "it is time for the blood feast" (Wein "Blood of the

Cheetah” 17). In these incidents, her humanity is nowhere in sight and she is more beast than human. To get this blood, she hunts, stalks, and murders people; an act that for the most part Catwoman and Black Cat veer away from, however Cheetah embraces this act and commits murder regularly, even to her allies.

Black Cat may have a touch of badness to her but she is not known for double crossing people as Catwoman, already discussed, and Cheetah are. Cheetah however makes Catwoman look stable. In two consecutive issues, Wonder Woman #27 and #28, Cheetah double-crosses her allies. In issue 27, she resurrects allies, a race of alien warriors, to steal Wonder Woman’s lasso. When they fail to do so, Cheetah kills them. She hunts the mercenaries she hires in Wonder Woman #28 on the grounds of her mansion estate (Perez). She tears them apart and feeds upon their blood. Allegiance means nothing to this character; she disposes of allies as soon as their use disappears. Discussing her relationship with Wonder Woman further demonstrates Minerva’s untrustworthiness

The battles between Cheetah and Wonder Woman seem to be particularly violent and aggressive. Perhaps this is due to the fact that two women are fighting, a “cat-fight”. A catfight is a brawl between two women and stereotypically these women are extremely cruel and viscous in their attacks. Writers create this girl-on-girl action for a mostly male readership base and this common male fantasy occurs quite often in this genre. For example, in Wonder Woman #31 the narrator describes Wonder Woman’s feelings about Cheetah, “As she gazes into the glaring eyes of the killer cat, she sees the reflection of a stranger... she sees the face of hate” (Perez 14). This feeling of hatred between the hero and the villain is unique among the three characters that I am examining. Spiderman and

Batman do not hate their feline villains; in fact, they often pine after them. The hatred exists between Wonder Woman and Cheetah because they are both women and therefore have their claws out when fighting. This hatred between the two characters surprisingly does not get in the way of the two teaming up together multiple times.

There are two reasons that Cheetah and Wonder Woman often team up. They are to end the enslavement of Cheetah or Cheetah repaying Wonder Woman for rescuing her in the past. Cheetah's enslavement happens twice in a rather short span of time: once by Circe in Wonder Woman #61 and secondly by Drax in Wonder Woman #63. This enslavement leads Cheetah to seek the help of Wonder Woman and to accept her aid. Cheetah sometimes remembers these heroic acts and repays Wonder Woman. Such as in Wonder Woman #63, Cheetah sacrifices herself so that Wonder Woman can live (Messner-Loebs). In Wonder Woman #95 and #96, Cheetah teams up with Poison Ivy and Cheshire (whose namesake comes from the Cheshire Cat in Alice in Wonderland), two other villainesses who embody alluring but deadly feminine attributes, only to double cross them in order to repay Wonder Woman for helping her in the previous encounter. She does this despite the fact that she already sacrificed herself to settle up with Wonder Woman. Yet again Cheetah sacrifices herself to save Wonder Woman and disappears (Messner-Loebs). After this encounter, Cheetah does reappear as a villain.

The fickle ethos of the female characters is in direct correlation with Western culture's perception of cats. We see them as treacherous creatures, which in a few moments can transform from loving attention seeking pets to claws out and swatting monsters that cause injury. This connection between women and cats goes beyond the superhero genre and into everyday life. Women constantly hear that it is allowable for

them to change their minds for no other reason than that they are women. While this seems harmless, it creates a perception of women as people that cannot make up their minds and therefore cannot be trusted or be effective.

In cultural thought, cats are highly independent creatures. This is both due to the women who are historically tied to them, witches and tramps living on the outskirts of society, and the feline's actual behavior. The behavior that they have which brings on this perceived independence is what Rogers calls their "aloofness", their lack of interest in you and whether you pay attention to them or not (4). This translates into the superhero genre by showing the female/feline hybrids as independent woman, who live beyond the usual societal roles for women.

Black Cat, partly because of the animal that she totemizes, a domesticated cat, is the least liberated from societal roles of women, but still demonstrates independent traits. She spouts lines like "I'm not much for waiting" to Spiderman when he tells her to hold on so that he can talk to her. This is in stark contrast to the image of women sitting near the phone waiting for men to call. She also rejects his advances by telling him, "I detest maladjusted, emotionally stunted boys..." (Palmiotti and Gray no pg). Rejection by women is not a common happening in the superhero genre due its underlying premise as a male adolescent power fantasy, in which females should be willing to bow down to men. In Spiderman Unlimited #11, Spiderman grabs her arm in order to stop her from leaving to which she scratches him and states, "Cats prefer to be caressed not grabbed" (Nicieza no pg). Although the last line may have been catty (pun academically intended), this type of straightforward dialogue allows her to reject the advances of a man. This is a source of empowerment for the female/feline hybrid.

Black Cat/Felicia Harding is one of the few women to have dated Spiderman/Peter Parker. The others are Gwen Stacey, who is dead, and Mary Jane Parker, who is now the wife of Peter Parker and mother to their child. Felicia is by far the least conventional female of the three. In one of the few encounters between Mary Jane and Felicia, in Amazing Spiderman #371, Mary Jane seems to resent Felicia because she lives out of society's reach. In Peter and Mary Jane's apartment, Felicia shows up in Black Cat apparel to show Peter her new costume and gadgets. During the conversation M.J. states, "I'm nauseous" with a disgusted look on her face as Peter and Felicia discuss her new claws (Michelinie 2).

The freedom that female characters who take on the persona of Catwoman is directly spelled out by the character Ophelia Powers in the film, Catwoman (Note the name of the character, Ophelia, an allusion to the character from Shakespeare's Hamlet and a character who has been appropriated by women's movements. The last name of Powers is semiotically obvious.). This character explains to Patience Phillips what has occurred to her and what it means; "Catwomen are not contained by the rules of society. You follow your own desires. You will often be alone and misunderstood but you will experience freedom other women will never know" (Catwoman 2004). Patience goes on to confront people who have before her transformation caused her nothing but grief including her noisy neighbor and her over bearing rude boss, who because she was a woman repeatedly ignored her and walked all over her.

In the comic books, Catwoman is often considered the female version of Batman. In Catwoman #0, which is a retelling of her origin story, she is said to have always been a girl who "just won't obey the rules" (Moench 2) and "she is a loner, a thief, a woman...a

cat” (23). The dialogue throughout this comic book connects her actions back to that of a cat and because she enacts those qualities, the rules cannot contain her. At the end of the comic book, she sits in her apartment and tells the stray cats who have made her apartment home, “Make yourself at home... but whatever you do... don’t depend on me” (24). Not only is Catwoman a loner and therefore rejecting the social tendencies that women are supposed to have, but she is also rejecting motherhood by telling her cats that they can stay here but she is not the nurturing and dependable type.

Catwoman’s rejection of what she perceives as weakened femininity is very apparent in Tim Burton’s film, Batman Returns. After her boss pushes Selina Kyle out of a window for knowing too much, she dies, and then is reborn. After her resurrection, she changes her gender performance 180 degrees. Her apartment decorations consist of stuffed animals, ceramic knickknacks, and a dollhouse. Additionally the walls are pink. She is polite and courteous. She realizes that she is not living up to the standards that women must live up to but she is still striving for them, at least until the rebirth. What sets her off after the fall is an ad for perfume telling her if she wears a certain perfume her boss will be asking her to stay at work late. Two patriarchal messages are in this perfume ad. One is that women desire men, who are more powerful than they are and so they should remain powerless in order to have more men who would seek them. Second is that these men will magically complete them. This sets her off. She jams the stuffed animals into the garbage disposal, pink items are spray painted black, a dollhouse is smashed, and the sign “hello there” is broken to say “hell here”. In this one scene, the character is shown discarding the feminine pink for masculine black, the nurturing and domestic attitudes that stuffed animals and dollhouses represent, and courtesy. “Hell

here” is abrasive and not as inviting as “hello there”. In the end of the film, Bruce Wayne/Batman makes a plea with her, “We can go home together. Selina, don’t you see, we’re the same. Split right down the middle.” Her response is a clear rejection of our society’s concept of the feminine goal, “Bruce, I would love to live with you in your castle forever just like in the fairytales. I just couldn’t live with myself, so don’t pretend this is a happy ending.” She gets her revenge and survives. In the last seen she is shown looking out over the Gotham, completely free and alone.

The original Cheetah, Priscilla Rich, has a split personality disorder. One personality is the proper and bourgeois debutante and the other is Cheetah, “the suppressed part of Priscilla Rich...the aggressor... the predator” (Pasko 5). Cheetah is a response to Priscilla’s constant pressure to be the perfection of Western culture’s idea of femininity and she is not allowed to step outside of the rigid confines of what a female is supposed to be. Cheetah slashes throats, steals from charities, and despises Wonder Woman for being popular. She wants more power and does not feel bad for grasping at it; she is everything that a woman is not supposed to be. Barbara Minerva never has the split personality of the previous Cheetah; her dominating and cruel personality (non-feminine traits) is what led her to become the Cheetah. Wonder Woman describes her as, “A woman motivated by greed and power” (Johns 22). During her search for the city of the cat god she tells her companion, “Compassion only wastes time, doctor. I came to find my treasure city” (Perez “From Day into Night” 17). She rejects compassion, a trait that is assigned to the feminine side of the binary, a motherly emotion. Instead, Minerva takes charge of the situation and tells her companion, “I don’t let it (bad things happen)” (Perez

“Bloodlines” 9). After which she kills him and uses his blood in the ritual that makes her even more powerful.

The powerful side that Minerva possesses appears in almost all of her appearances. Control of self seems to be paramount to what we believe it is to be feminine in our culture. Minerva rallies against this and refuses to control her actions. While imprisoned she does not admit defeat but yells, an empowering act for women since they are supposed to take up less space in all aspects of life, including vocally; “No one talks that way to Barbara Minerva” (Perez “Secrets in the Sand” 7). She talks to a police inspector in the same manner telling him, “Shut up! I call the shots around here” (Perez “To Avenge an Amazon” 3). In Wonder Woman #222, Wonder Woman questions Minerva’s crimes, “Did you have to kill them, Barbara?” Responding to this, Minerva states, “No... I wanted to” (Rucka no pg). Societal rules do not control what she can or cannot do. She refuses discussion of her actions. She steps out of the gender binary in a way that few female villains do.

As stated above, cats represent sexuality through positive (fertility goddesses) and negative (witches and prostitutes) correlations. Waddell states that cats represent the “extremes of sexual indulgence and perversion” (88). This holds true for the female/feline characters of the superhero genre. Sexuality is a fundamental component of these characters. Their sexuality is not normal sexuality; instead, it is a bestial manner of sexuality. Flirting and expressing their desires are only a small part of what these characters do. They are shown clawing, scratching, or harming their male protagonists and then turning the fight into a sexual situation. After or during a lull in the battle they will lick their protagonist; this is similar to the actual actions of feline, who lick other

animals clean or in areas in which they have been injured. Although licking and scratching may be normal and healthy sexual habits to most Americans, at least I hope they are considered normal; it is not the norm for these behaviors to exist in mass media. These types of sexual activities lie outside of the normal range of depicted behaviors and fall under the other category of sadomasochism. Therefore, while it is important for representation of female sexual desire to exist in mass culture, when it is connected to felines the sexuality becomes marginalized due to its bestial and abnormal nature.

As usual, Black Cat is the tamest of the three characters; that is until Kevin Smith writes this character. In his series, Spiderman and Black Cat: "The Evil that Men Do", he has Black Cat describing her relationship with Spiderman not as dating but "doin' the nasty-- nothing more, nothing less" and then thinking, "I can feel him staring at me from behind his mask. Twenty bucks says he has a mad on" (Smith no pg). I do not want to be accused of reading into things too deeply but this comment is clear allusion to the fact that she believes Spiderman has an erection from looking at her. This is out of the norm for typical superhero dialogue, but then again she is just expressing her sexual desires, which, overall, is healthy. The perverse part of this is that Black Cat and Spiderman are witnessing one of Peter's students being taken out of a building on a stretcher because he died of an overdose. Peter is not thinking about sex; Peter is upset that his student just died, as a normal character would be. Later in that book she kisses Spiderman, but not in the conventional fashion, which is depicted in the 2002 film, Spiderman, in which Mary Jane lifts his mask and kisses him. After the kiss with Black Cat in the comic, Spiderman remarks, "No one's ever tried to french me though the mask" (Smith no pg). This simply demonstrates that she is more sexually aggressive than most female characters.

Kevin Smith was not alone in the sexualization of Black Cat; he just made it more apparent and made that the main trait of her character. She has always been sexual. In Claws #1, she slaps her ass, tells Spiderman to “pucker up” (Palmiotti and Gray 3), then knocks Spiderman to the ground, and straddles him with her hands on her hips. She is ordering him around and then physically dominating him, straddling him therefore giving her more power. Another example is from the time in the Marvel universe when Peter Parker's clone, Ben Reilly, replaced him and encounters Black Cat in Spider Unlimited #11. In order to pay attention to solving the crime at hand and not on the Black Cat's body, he has to distract himself by saying horrific things repeatedly, “Atom bombs. Cancer. Galactus (a planet eating character).” eventually he fails, “the way she fills out that costume” (Niecieza no pg). The only thing he can focus on is her, thinking, “she makes the women of Baywatch look like sand crabs” (no pg). The only fashion that he can view her in is a sexual one. The issue ends with them kissing; evidently, this is one of the only ways to end a storyline featuring Black Cat. Although these portrayals were not as perverse as Smith's depiction of Black Cat, they still show a rampant sexual energy about the character. She is walking sex.

Catwoman's sexuality, which is the focus of the rest of my thesis, is even more prevalent than Black Cat's. The costuming of Catwoman should reveal that she is about sex. Her outfits in all incarnations (comic book, films, and television) mimic the costumes of a dominatrix. The dominatrix costume falls into the larger category of sadomasochistic garments, which is outside the model of heteronormative sexual behaviors. Her costuming is all about power and having access to her body. The actions of the character contribute to the bestial and abnormal sexuality that go along with her

costuming. In the 1960's television show, Batman, Catwoman ties Batman down and drugs him so that he will obey her. The narrator asks the audience, "Will Batman be reduced to a handsome robot, fit only to serve Catwoman?" ("The Cat's Meow"). The tying down of a person is a practice associated with sadomasochism in that one person is clearly dominating another. The other aspect of this scene is the threat that Batman will become a "robot, fit only to serve Catwoman". This is heavily off the beaten trail of heteronormative activities. It is reminiscent of master/slave sexual relationships in sadomasochism, which one person is very submissive to the other. I find it important to bring up the fact that that this show's target audience was families and was meant to be good clean fun. Although slightly coded by using the term robot, the implications become quite clear with a second glance; Catwoman's sexuality is deviant.

These sexual deviations are also apparent in the film incarnations of Catwoman. In Catwoman, Patience, the alter ego of Catwoman has sex with the male love interest, Tom. After sex, he looks in the mirror and notices the scratch marks that now cover his entire back. Although this is only a slight deviation to the norm of sexual activities in Western culture, it is still a clear depiction of Catwoman's sexuality as being bestial. She claws away at his back, giving pain at the same time as giving pleasure. In Batman Returns, the same representation of bestial/sadomasochistic sexuality occurs. In one of their many confrontations, Catwoman is feeling up Batman's chest and cuts him deep with her claws. A face of satisfaction and pleasure appears on her face. Later in the movie after Batman takes a hard fall, she climbs on top of him, and states, "Your catnip to a girl like me, handsome, dazed, and to die for." She then licks his face after telling him "a kiss can be even deadlier (than mistletoe) if you mean it." Again, a feline/female character is

climbing on top of her male counterpart reversing the heteronormative concept of sex, which has the man on top and in control. The sadomasochistic theme of master/slave is also alluded to in this scene as she states she likes a man that is “handsome, dazed” very similar to the “handsome robot, fit only to serve Catwoman”. The licking of the face is reference again to the fact that her sexuality is that of a beast not a human. The bestial lick replaces the more Western appropriate kiss.

Cheetah’s main adversary is Wonder Woman and due to not wanting to portray either characters as lesbians, there is little sexual bantering between the two. However when Cheetah is teamed up with a male villain, Zoom, in a Flash/Wonder Woman crossover story, her sexuality is shown to be similar to Black Cat and Catwoman’s. In Flash #219, she beckons Zoom, “come out my love...come out and play” (Johns 8). After releasing him, she is stroking his chest and explains, “I want you” (Johns 12). Zoom resists due to his status as a married man, but Cheetah’s sexuality is not easily contained. Implication are made later in the story arc that they do in fact have sex. In the conclusion of the storyline in Wonder Woman #214, Cheetah fights Flash. She has gained speed from Zoom and is pummeling Flash while cutting him with her claws and biting at him. Cheetah licks the blood off his mask and states, “Hunterr tasted good... but you taste so much betterrr....” (Rucka 43). After beating him a bit more, she crawls on top of him and pinning his arms down states, “Married men are more always more fun. Mmmm I don’t mind...” and then kisses him on the mouth while he is almost unconscious (48). Scratching, biting, and the licking of blood all fall into the realm of sexual otherness. It is clearly bestial. The sadomasochistic themes and bestial acts cross over in biting and scratching but clearly sadistic actions do exist, such as her holding Flash down and

forcing him to kiss her while he is barely conscious and still resisting. Cheetah's sexuality is the most bestial but the other two female characters are totemizing through costuming tamer animals and therefore have less deviant sexualities.

I do not want to ignore the fact that there are male characters that appropriate through fashion and name feline attributes in the superhero genre. However, the way that the characters act is very different from the feline/female characters. This is because of two major reasons: the history of males and felines is very different from that of females and felines and that male characters, in the superhero genre, are depicted radically different than female characters. Since a large portion of the audience base is male, the superhero genre panders to male fantasies of hypersexual and sexually deviant women. Male characters, on the other hand, must fight off these deadly sexualities, while the audience enjoys the scene of women fighting to conquer men sexually.

The history of feline and male connection is much shorter than the connections between felines and females. In the extensive research that I did on the subject matter, only three examples surfaced. The Olmecs of Pre-Columbian Central America believed that their ancestors were jaguar-human hybrids. These hybrids were solely male. In Ancient Egypt, depictions of the pharaohs were sometimes as half lion and half-human, the most prominent example of this is the Sphinx. The last example and most interesting is that of Heracles, who is often depicted wearing the skin of a lion that he has slain. There is a clear message in the way that this particular male interacts with a lion that is different from the female depictions. Heracles has beaten and triumphs over the wild animal; he is not in harmony or enacting the traits of the creature but he tamed its savageness and wears it as a symbol of domination over nature (Simon 53-54). My

argument for male characters in feline costumes is similar to how Heracles appropriates the lion skin. While they may not have defeated the beasts, they are simply wearing the costume. The female/feline hybrids seem burdened with cultural history that they share, but due to the lack of cultural comparison between males and felines, the men enact very few cat traits. To illustrate this I have chosen Black Panther and Wild Cat, two of the most prominent characters out of a rather obscure list of male/feline hybrids in the superhero genre.

Black Panther is a superhero in the Marvel Universe. His costume is an all-black head-to-toe tight outfit complete with nubs on the top of the head alluding to cat ears. Like Hercules though, it seems that the outfit is more of a representation of man defeating the beast than enacting the traits of the panther. The Black Panther's non-superhero identity is T'Challa, the King of Wakanda, a fictional African country. This country, due to abundant and rare natural resources, is highly civilized, technologically advanced, and wealthy. In comparison with the rest of Africa, which is depicted as war torn, a savage jungle, and poor (Hudlin "Jungle Boogie" and Lee "The Black Panther"). Here is a man who wears a Black Panther costume, a symbol of nature and the untamed, who is a highly civilized man in the middle of the jungle. The costume is more about defeating nature than a link to the feline. In the storyline, the explanation of the costume is that the dominant religion of Wakanda is the Black Panther Cult (Lee). Jeffrey A. Brown has a different explanation of the name and costuming of this character in his book Black Superheroes, Milestone Comics, and Their Fans, "the character's name was a hip reference to the struggles of black American culture" (19-20). The reference that Brown

indicates is to the African-American political action group the Black Panthers, not a referent to the animal.

Black Panther is not totally devoid of feline tendencies though. His powers have been described as “feline speed and power” (Englehart "A Traitor Stalks Among Us!" no pg), he is said to have a heightened sense of sight and smell ("With Two Beside Them!" no pg), and “superb agility” (Kirby 8). Therefore, his power is sometimes comparable to that of a cat’s but his character is one that has almost nothing to do with the cultural connotations of felines. He is not thought of as treacherous, even though he did spy on the Avengers; he did so to make sure their intentions were honorable (Hudlin “Holiday in Latveria” no pg). He is not even considered as crossing the border between hero and villain despite the fact that he invites the Fantastic Four to his country and then attacks them. In fact, in that same issue Mr. Fantastic says, “A man such as Black Panther does not give his word lightly” (Lee no pg). The issue of his trustworthiness is brought up repeatedly, but as a positive, “you possess more credulity than any human” (Hudlin “Fly Me to the Moon” no pg). The nobleness of his character reaches into his sexuality. In Black Panther #17, he is preparing for his marriage and his friends want to throw him a bachelor party. His response is “why would I want to show up on my wedding day with the smell of another woman on me?” (Hudlin “Bachelor Party” no pg). This is in extreme opposition to the female/feline hybrids who have uninhibited sexualities, double cross their teammates in a moment’s notice, and are untrustworthy.

Wild Cat, like Black Panther, is a hero, but a hero in the DC universe. Although he has never had his own title like Black Panther, he is a staple character in the comic book titles JSA and Catwoman. His alias is Ted Grant, an ex-champion boxer who uses

his boxing skills to fight crime. He has trained Batman, Catwoman, and her sidekick Holly. For the most part writers create him as a good person who has a “superhero complex”, meaning that he does not have super powers and is easily irritated by those that do (Conway 3). Due to this complex he is, at times, surly. In the 1970’s series, All Star Comics, he punches a television set, fights with his teammates, and often feels abandoned by them because they fly off to fight the villain and he is stuck walking to the battle. Despite all of his negative attributes, he has always been a hero and as seen as one by other characters. The only time that he crossed the line of the law is when he fought in illegal meta-human brawls in the recent animated television show Justice League Unlimited and the reason that he was fighting was due to his “superhero complex” (“The Cat and the Canary”). He needed to know that he could still K.O. meta-humans. In his appearances with Catwoman, he is always making sure that she sticks to the “right” side of the law. No double crossing and no bestial rage (minus punching a television set) for the most part he is just a boxer in a black cat suit.

Unlike the Black Panther, writers depict Wildcat with a sexuality, at times, and at other times depict him as asexual. In the depictions mentioned above, he is shown with no sexuality. However, in the 2002 Wonder Woman #185, he has a relationship, of sorts, with Wonder Woman’s mother Hippolyta. During the issue, Hippolyta calls Ted Grant (Wildcat’s alias) for a favor. Upon receiving this phone call, he states, “Hey dollface! How you been? When do I get to squeeze on that beautiful bodice of yours?” (Jimenez 11). Wonder Woman overhears her mother flirting with Ted and later ask about the relationship between the two. Hippolyta responds, that he is “a wonderful companion, when I need one... you’re not going to make me explain that to you, are you...?” (11).

The statement above leaves the reader with the impression that the relationship that they have is largely based on sexual needs, in fact the issue ends with Hippolyta and Ted lying in bed together. This is not the Wildcat depicted in the previously mentioned appearances. He does have several other “relationships”, such as with Catwoman, but most other characters he “relates” with are minor characters or nameless women. The fact that his sexuality comes and goes though, speaks to the nonessential nature of it to the character. Unlike, Catwoman, Black and Cheetah, writers depict him as nonsexual at times.

An odd fact about this character is that there seems to be no reason for him to be in a cat costume. His origin is that he was a boxer whose best friend was murdered. The murderers tried to pin the crime on him. He became a hero to solve the crime and find the real killers, which he did. Nothing cat themed there. The only hint of how he received his namesake does not come from a comic book. While reading The DC Comics Encyclopedia, I noticed that it mention that one day Ted Grant showed up at the JSA offices “claiming to have nine lives [the number of lives that it is said cats’ possess]” (Jimenez 329). The numerous Wild Cat origin stories that I read never mention this, but it is the only hint of how he received his name.

Wild Cat appears in the first five issues of Catwoman, after the “One Year Later” event that occurred in 2006. In this story arc, he teams up with Holly, Selina Kyle’s sidekick who has stepped in as Catwoman while Selina raises her child. While Holly and Ted fight a group of burglars, she compares him to Catwoman: “she glides though a fight, diving and flipping... he uses his own strength against them” (Pfeiffer “The Replacements: Part Three” no pg). While she is thinking (thoughts are readable in comic

books) about Ted, the panels show him using boxing moves and headlocks on the criminals, not like the graceful and catlike Catwoman. With this said, it is my contention that he really is not taking on any cat traits at all, he is simply a boxer in a cat suit, who happens to be grumpy.

I want to address quickly a rather unusual happening in the comic book world; an archetype character switching genders. The Wonder Woman villain, Cheetah had three women assume the alter ego in the D.C. Universe. However, the fourth incarnation is a man. Sebastian Ballésteros is a “powerful financier and corporate raider” (Jimenez 11). Ballésteros convinces the god Urzkartaga to give up on the “useless female (body to) be a conduit for his ancient power” and give the more powerful male body a try (13). His two main appearances in the Wonder Woman comics are rather uneventful; he serves as a minion of Circe and as the target of Barbara Minerva’s revenge. He is quite viscous and cruel, as a corporate raider would be and is, but he lacks the sexuality and untrusting nature that female/feline hybrids have. Not one mention of sexuality occurs and he serves as Circe’s lap dog, not so much as questioning her once, let alone double cross her. His run as Cheetah is cut short because Minerva caught up with him, reunited herself with Urzkartaga, and drank Ballésteros’ blood while calling it “the blood of the pretender” (Johns 11). The male body, in this story line and in the examples provided above, seems to fail as a conduit for relating the cultural viewpoint that Western culture has about cats.

In Elizabeth Atwood Lawrence’s introduction to Hunting the Wren, a discussion of the symbolic nature of the wren, she states, “In everyday thought and conversation animals appear as repositories of shared concepts and values” (2-3). I take this further by saying that their connection to a specific segment of the population speaks volumes as to

how we feel about both the animal and the population. It is not a coincidence that some of the most important female villains/heroes in the superhero genre have connections to felines. It speaks volumes to how our society views women. All of the writers of the mediums in which they appeared have been men. These male fantasies tell us that women who possess power are untrustworthy backstabbing bitches.

I do not want to chastise entirely this correlation, for many women find empowering messages in these female/feline characters. These women do not have to follow the normal route of females in comic books. They are not just knockoffs of male characters and appear to be in control of their own sexuality. However, their sexuality is bestial and outside of the norm, not one has what I would consider a “normal” sex life. The message seems to be that powerful women in control of their own sexualities are freakish whores and villainesses who will always be on the outside and never belong, especially if there are felines involved.

CHAPTER TWO

FEELING YUMMY: THE ALLURE OF CATWOMAN

Ever since I was eleven years old, I have been attracted to the character and icon of Catwoman. Released in 1992, Tim Burton's Batman Returns depicts Selina Kyle, one of the alter egos of Catwoman, as a woman done wrong by the patriarchal world in which she lives, the main culprit: her corporate boss, Max Shrek. She seeks revenge against the patriarchal system that destroyed her, all while strutting around in a tight leather cat suit and wearing her overt sexuality on her sleeve. This was the Catwoman that captivated an eleven-year old boy, and still captivates him today, I still buy the comic book every month and any limited series that the character graces with its presence. The latest comic book version of Catwoman is not the same as the Catwoman that I fell for; she is less ruthless and she is a hero. The fact is that over the decades there have been numerous versions of Catwoman throughout her lengthy existence in and out of the comic book world; each time she appears, she captures the attention, admiration, and desire of viewers, both male and female. If the image is always changing then what is the constant that popularizes Catwoman? The answer appears to be her sexuality; her overt sexuality has remained a key and constant component to the character.

Her popularity with both sexes can be explained by using the theories of Mary Ann Doane, Jeffrey A. Brown, and Marc O'Day. Doane's theory of femininity as a masquerade is displayed in the character of Catwoman; her sexuality is a performance, both to attract the male gaze and to make her seem more feminine and therefore more vulnerable. This false masquerade usually causes her opponents to drop their guard, giving her an opportunity to attack. Brown's theory of women in the action adventure

genre is that they cannot be contained by the usual gender binaries. He uses the category of “dominatrix”. Brown states that these characters are clearly coded as female due to their highly sexualized manner and costumes; they are given these traits of hyper-femininity in order to compensate for them having masculine traits (beating up men, controlling the gaze, and dominating). After explaining how the masquerade and dominatrix category can be applied to Catwoman to allow the audience to identify and relate to the character, I will use O’Day’s theories of “range of fantasy identification” and “have me/be me”. These theories will help explain how spectators can actually slip into the role, identifying with Catwoman, and still desire her, despite the spectator’s gender. The ability of the audience to cross gender lines would mean that Catwoman’s fan base could include the entire population rather than just one segment of the population. Before we examine the theoretical aspects in depth, the history of the character must first be examined. Her numerous appearances must be looked at because she has not remained a static image; throughout time her career paths, origin, ethos, appearance, and even her alias have been altered.

The writers of Batman and various other DC comics have taken Selina Kyle’s career paths all over the map. In the comics, it is more likely that whatever career she has outside of the costumed alter ego of Catwoman is a short-lived experience or simply a façade for something more sinister. In the January 1954 issue of Detective Comics # 203, Selina Kyle decides to go on the straight and narrow path and gives up her life of crime. Instead, she opens a pet shop, an all too fitting career choice, that does not last too long before she reverts to her criminal beginnings (Hamilton). In the March 1969 issue of Batman #210, after her release from prison, the character of Ms. Kyle becomes an

entrepreneur and opens a slenderizing salon. Of course, this is just a farce to deceive Batman into believing that she has turned good, instead she actively builds a team of nine Catwomen (Robins).

The career as a front phenomenon was a constant theme in the 1966-68 television series, Batman; in episode 37, “Hot off the Griddle”, Catwoman owns a restaurant/dance club called “The Pink Sandbox” and in episode 63, “The Cat’s Meow”, Catwoman enters show business with her band Catwoman and the Kittens. In that very same episode, she impersonates a dance teacher from Duncan’s Dance Study to kidnap Dick Greyson, the alter ego of Robin. In episode 83, “Catwoman goes to College”, her final phony career path is that of a college student, she uses the fake decision towards higher education as a way to use a sorority as a base of operations and steal a life size statue of Batman to create an imposter Batman. All of the career paths that appear in this television show are simply hideouts or part of a larger plan in order to dupe or capture Batman and sometimes in order to kill Robin. After these campy false careers, the character took a turn for the bourgeoisie.

During the 80’s and 90’s the writers must have realized that Selina Kyle no longer needs to work, the character has been stealing jewelry from the start and might as well cash in on the stolen goods, and cash in she did. Careers fade into the background as something she no longer cares about (Batman #392 (Moench 1986), Catwoman #54 (Grayson 1998), and Batman: Gotham Adventures #4 (Templeton 1998)), environmental activism, love, and being a socialite are now more important. In this rendition of Catwoman, she is able to transcend class categories through selling stolen merchandise and using them to purchase commodities that allow her to rub shoulders with Gotham’s

elite; rising from her prostitute origins to being able to outclass any bourgeois and even attempts a candidacy as mayor of New York City. In movie appearances, which will be discussed in the origins section, Catwoman's alias tries her hand at secretarial/administrative assistant work for a major corporation (Batman Returns) and as an artist in the marketing department of a cosmetics company (Catwoman).

The origin of Catwoman has been rewritten numerous times and is completely different in every attempt to do so. For the first ten years of her existence, an explanation of her origin is not even discussed. It was not until December of 1950, in Batman #62, that a discussion of Catwoman's origin occurs. The revealing of her origin happens when she saves Batman's life by pushing him out of the way of a collapsing building, an altering of ethos from criminal to savior. While saving his life, a brick hits Catwoman on the head and knocks her unconscious. This brick knocks her out of her amnesiac state and back into her normal self, a flight attendant. Selina Kyle becomes Catwoman after she bumps her head in an airplane crash. This concussion somehow causes her to give up her life of travel, handing out tiny packages of peanuts, and playing in-flight movies for cat burgling (Finger). This origin story is exposed as a falsehood in The Brave and the Bold #147 (1983). In this comic book, Batman discovers that Catwoman has lied to him about having amnesia because she does not want him to think that she is a horrible person. Her real origin is that she was the wife of a very wealthy man, who beat her. When she left him, he used his connections to try to destroy her economically, physically, emotionally, and professionally. The only thing he cared about was material items, so that is how she decided to get back at him and how she would survive. She started to steal from him and then began to steal from others. The character felt that stealing is not

morally reprehensible because she is simply taking everything that she deserved to have and would have had if it was not for her abusive husband.

There are two versions of the current Catwoman's origin story. The first was written by Mindy Newell in the first volume of Catwoman (1981) and the second is explained by writer, Jordan B Gorfinkel, in Catwoman Annual #2 (1995). In the former, the story begins with a beaten Selina Kyle lying in a filthy alley. She is taken to the hospital where she refuses to give the name of her pimp, the man who beat and left her for dead, to a cop. The cop hands her a card with Ted Grant's (a.k.a. Wild Cat, see chapter one) phone number on it. Ted trains Catwoman to defend herself. After learning some fighting techniques, she attacks Stan, her pimp, and takes her young friend Holly with her, away from a life of prostitution. Stan and Catwoman have a confrontation, which leads to Stan's death. The cause of his death is left ambiguous: it may have been an accident or deliberate. The volume ends with a battle between Batman and Catwoman, including plenty of sexual banter. Catwoman wins the battle and flees the scene (Newell).

In Catwoman Annual #2, Selina Kyle is an orphan, who lives on the streets and steals in order to get by. Her transformation into Catwoman starts out when a heist goes wrong and she jumps out of a window in order to escape security guards. Selina lands unconscious in the river. She washes up on shore and is taken into a truck by men, who sell her to a pimp, who makes her become a prostitute. She stays a prostitute in order to lie low and avoid being tracked by the police. Slowly she begins cat burgling again. During one of her heists, she runs into another thief who is trying to steal the same item. After a confrontation, he runs away and she pursues him into a dojo, where he is the head student. The sensei of the dojo takes her in and teaches her his hybrid style of martial

arts. She becomes the lead student and defeats Hellhound, the original star pupil. After defeating this villainous character, she then leaves the dojo. This is when she assumes the identity of Catwoman. She beats up her former pimp and vows never to prostitute herself again (Gorfinkel).

The origins of Catwoman in the movies tend to deal with women trying to get ahead in the patriarchal corporate world and being killed for knowing too much. In Tim Burton's Batman Returns (1992), Selina Kyle (perf. by Michelle Pfeiffer) is a secretary/administrative assistant trying to get ahead in a man's world and never allowed to advance. At a meeting, she raises several suggestions and questions, which her boss, Max Shreck (perf. by Christopher Walken), ridicules and laughs at in front of the executives in attendance. He dismisses her ability to think, but praises her for knowing how to make a good cup of coffee. Later on, she learns about her boss' evil plan for a power plant that steals energy from Gotham rather than creating and storing energy for future times of need. For gaining knowledge and therefore power she is pushed by Mr. Shreck out of a rather high window; her limp body is then resurrected by a group of cats through licks and bites. Selina stumbles home and destroys all signs of traditional femininity. She smashes, spray paints, or shoves down the garbage disposal all pink items, dollhouses, and stuffed. She creates and then dresses in a black leather cat suit, transforming herself into Catwoman, feeling a whole lot more sexy, and sets upon seeking revenge on the patriarchal world that destroyed her.

The character's next cinematic appearance is in Catwoman (2004) directed by Pitof. The movie centers on the character of Patience Phillips (perf. by Halle Barry), notice the change of the alter ego of Catwoman. Patience is a mousey, apologetic, and

unsure woman who designs ads for the fictional Hedare cosmetics company. While working late one night, Patience goes to drop off her design for the new advertising campaign for Beau-line at the Hedare Labs. The front doors locked so she goes through the back door. This is when she overhears information on the damaging affects of this new product. She is discovered, chased into, and then flushed out of a drain pipe and into a river. She dies in the river and washes up on the shore. Here an ancient cat power has chosen her to be the next Catwoman. In both movies, the female character was the victim of a major corporation and the gaining of knowledge caused their premature deaths. After their death, both gain insight and strength, seek revenge, and leave their oppressive lives. This recurring convention is the topic of the fourth chapter.

The numerous television series that Catwoman appears in do not give ample discussion to her origin. This is most likely due to the nature of the medium; a television program only last for twenty some odd minutes. There is not sufficient time to discuss complex origins. Sometimes however, the discussion of origins does briefly occur. In the 1967 episode of Batman, “Catwoman Goes to College”, Catwoman reveals that the reason she turned to crime is the fact that she dropped out of college. This and only this is the reason that the audience receives regarding Catwoman’s wayward actions in the 1960’s television program. During the 1990’s Batman: The Animated Series, her origin is never revealed, but her reasons for being the Catwoman are quite clear; she has concern over the environment. The origin is ever changing; this goes hand in hand with her altering ethos.

While discussing the history of Catwoman it is important to note that her ethos, her reason for fighting, has changed numerous times, unlike her sexuality. In her first

appearance in Batman #1 (Finger 1940), she is a jewel thief looking to heist a diamond from the wealthy Mrs. Travers. Her goal in these early stories is simply stealing sparkly expensive items that always have some odd connection to felines. In Batman #197 (Fox 1967), Catwoman decides that jewels may come and go but her new goal in life is to make Batman her husband. She does so by turning into a crime fighter in order to upstage her perceived competition, Batgirl, who actually has no interest in becoming Batman's lover. Her ethos changes from that of a major criminal to a man crazy woman with a heroic façade.

Her ethos of the late eighties and nineties is one of walking the fine line between good and evil. In Batman #392 (Moench 1986), she fights crime alongside Batman, the heroic façade is replaced by a belief in fighting evil to save the innocent while still stealing bobbles that catch her fancy, like in Catwoman #1 (1993). Although after this, her motivation alters into something different from before, a protector of Mother Earth and her creatures, specifically animals of the feline persuasion. In Batman: Gotham Adventures #4 (1998), Catwoman aligns herself with an extreme animal rights organization and frees cats from a laboratory which is testing cosmetic products on the animals. Catwoman tracks down and maims the female CEO of the cosmetics company, who was well aware of the animal testing. This ethos is first developed during Catwoman's appearance in Batman: The Animated Series. Catwoman's first appearance in this series, "The Cat and the Claw", involves her and her alter ego, Selina Kyle, desperately trying to preserve land outside of Gotham by turning it into a wildlife refuge for mountain lions. If she does not save this land then it will be developed by a terrorist

group disguised as a company that is going to build a resort outside of Gotham. Of course, she does save the day with the help of Batman.

In the current comic book rendition of Catwoman, who appears in the third Catwoman volume (2002), she is a vigilante and the protector of the East End, the poorest section of Gotham. A section not even the police will protect. This is done not alongside Batman, but with his consent. When several prostitutes show up murdered, she is the only one that attempts to track down the killer because the police could not care less. In fact, the police regularly beat and steal from the prostitutes that Catwoman is now protecting. About this, Catwoman states, "I will speak for them. Because no one else will" (Brubaker "Anodyne: Part 1-4" 78). While being this vigilante type hero, if she runs out of money she will steal from the rich in order to continue her mission of defending the poor. In essence she is good, but unlike most heroes she is not concerned with maintaining the current status quo (Brubaker). There have been plenty more motivations behind Catwoman's actions, however in my brief outline it is clear to see how fickle Catwoman's motivation is.

The appearance of Catwoman has been constantly fluctuating, as opposed to the iconographic images of male characters such as Batman, Superman, and Captain America, just to name a few. In her first appearance, Batman #1, she is drawn as pale with long black hair. This image lasted for a while, minus inconsistencies in her hair color. Her costume is however always varying, but I will address later. There is not a major paradigm shift in the appearance of Catwoman until Eartha Kitt played Catwoman in the 1967 television series Batman; Catwoman was now of African-American descent, with dark hair, brown eyes, and brown skin. Within this television series, two different

women played the character of Catwoman; Julie Newmar, a Caucasian, with black hair, and pale skin, and Eartha Kitt (Brode 177). Lee Meriwether, a Caucasian, with brown hair and pale skin, played Catwoman in the 1967 film, Batman: The Movie. The fact that three different women played one character in such a short span of time contributes to the understanding that Catwoman, unlike most superhero genre characters, can undergo major changes without any problem or controversy.

Since the late 1960's, her appearance outside the suit has been fairly stable until the late 1980's and 1990's when Catwoman's alter ego's appearance changes so frequently it is difficult to keep up. In 1992's Batman Returns, Selina Kyle was played by Michele Pfeiffer; Ms. Kyle had medium length curly blonde locks and a fair complexion. In the comic books, as can be seen in Catwoman #1 (1993) and Catwoman #54 (Grayson 1998), she was back to her original image of a pale woman with black long hair, except this time she was quite a bit bustier, it being the style of the time. She then becomes a blonde-haired person in Batman: The Animated Series (1992). Her long blonde hair is chopped off to a short haircut in the comic Batman: Gotham Adventures #4 (1998). In the newest comic book rendition of Catwoman, which can be seen in Catwoman Secret Files #1 (Brubaker 2002) and the third volume of her comic book, she is back to dark hair but it remained close to the short haircut of her appearances in Batman: Gotham Adventures. In the latest movie, Catwoman (2004), African-American Halle Berry who wore her hair short and spiky plays Catwoman. This was just a quick description of how Catwoman's alter egos have physically appeared through her many incarnations; it is not an exhaustive description.

Catwoman is an ever-changing, always altering character, however in every incarnation she acts in the same overtly sexual demeanor. This is the one static trait of this always-evolving character. In her first appearance in Batman #1 (Finger 1940), Catwoman is identified by Batman when her disguise as an old woman is foiled when Batman catches a glimpse of her nice legs. Catwoman's hot body ends up getting her caught. After her capture, she struggles to break free and Batman tells her "Quiet or Papa Spank!". Knowing that she has been defeated she gives up by saying "I know when I'm licked!" (21). This is just a small taste of the sexual banter that happens throughout the older comics books. At the end of the whole ordeal, Batman decides to let her get away because of her pretty eyes. Her sexuality and attractiveness are what get her caught, and what saves her in the end. In Batman #197 (Fox 1967), Catwoman's main goal is to get Batman to be with her; the entire plot of this story line revolves around Catwoman's desire to force Batman to be her husband. Her sexuality is the main drive for her actions. In Batman #392 (Moench 1986), when they fight crime together Batman says to her "Maybe later you could scratch my back?" To which she replies, "What's the matter? No scratches in the front." His innocent statement transformed into a discussion of possible sexual acts. This happens because her sexuality is the essential core of Catwoman. The relationship of these two characters will be discussed further in the third chapter.

Writers depict Catwoman as a character that attracts sexual attention and desires this sexual attention; she wants to be longed for. A clear demonstration of this happens in Catwoman #54 (Grayson 1998), when she states, "Whether they want to kiss you or kill you, it's nice to have people thinking about how to get their hands on you day or night..." (144). In the 1992 film, Batman Returns, the Catwoman that first caught my attention,

Selina Kyle after being resurrected, makes and puts on the Catwoman costume and states “I don’t know about you Miss Kitty, but I feel so much yummier.” The character’s sexuality does not appear until she dresses in the leather cat suit.

Even in the television series aimed at children, Batman: The Animated Series, Catwoman is a highly sexual person. She attracts whistles from Batman, blows him a kiss, and later actually kisses him for a prolonged period of time. After kissing him, she tells him that there is an attraction between them; he rejects her for being on the wrong side of the law. Like any rational human being, she knocks him off a building and tells him to “never trifle with the affections of a woman” (“The Cat and the Claw”). This scene demonstrates that Catwoman’s sexuality is so salient to her identity that rejection at that level causes irrational behavior. Since Catwoman’s sexuality is the only constant and most prevalent trait, it can be assumed that this is the most salient aspect of who she is.

In Batman Returns, she uses her overt sexuality and femininity to make her seem vulnerable. During a fight scene on a roof, Batman hits her making her fall to the floor of the roof. While lying helpless and hurt, she states, “how could you I’m a woman.” He apologizes and helps her up. In the middle of his rescue, she kicks and backs him off a ledge and holds him there by her whip and states, “Like I said I am a woman and cannot be taken advantage of. Life’s a bitch and now so am I.” Her perceived vulnerability is also demonstrated when two security guards stop her while she’s destroying the Shreck Department store, owned by the boss who pushed her out of a window. The two security guards state that they do not know whether to “open fire or fall in love.” She then tells them that men always confuse “their pistols with their privates” and uses her bullwhip to

scare them away. Her sexuality is a weapon and, as demonstrated above, a very effective one.

What the character is demonstrating by having hyper-sexuality is a masquerade to project perceived weakness. The masquerade of sexuality that Catwoman puts on can be explained through Mary Ann Doane's theory of femininity as a masquerade; Doane states, "Womanliness is a mask can be worn and removed." Doane explains that when women take on masculine characteristics or spectatorship they put on a mask of femininity to hide the lack of identity they have and her masculine traits. In the case of Catwoman, these masculine traits are numerous but include independence, the ability to control the narrative, her ability to defeat male oppositional forces, and to, in general, be active. Most of these traits belong to later incarnations of Catwoman; a comparison between versions of the character and their amount of empowerment will be done in chapter four. To assume male characteristics, the writers of Catwoman must apply ample femininity, for this character, it is fetishistic sexuality, in order to be coded as clearly female and not threaten gender roles. Doane points out that women can enact different viewpoints when they need to get ahead. The aspects of Catwoman that have been easily altered through out her history are either filler or different viewpoints that the character puts on in order to get ahead in a logical manner according to the thoughts of the writers (138).

Doane's argument gives us insight into how the masquerade of Catwoman is removable; it can therefore be taken off any back-story or woman and placed on another, creating a kind of instant Catwoman. The masquerade makes it easy for anyone to put on this masquerade and feel as Tim Burton's Catwoman said "a whole lot more yummier",

in the literal and spectator sense of putting on a masquerade (Batman Returns). This may explain why the sexy kitten outfit is a popular costume at Halloween time. It is a simple way to look and feel more attractive and as explained in chapter one, cats have been tied to sexuality and womanhood for quite some time. In the comic book, other women becoming Catwomen is represented numerous times.

Here are two clear examples from the comic books of women taking on the Catwoman masquerade. In Superman's Girl Friend Lois Lane #70 and #71, Lois Lane assumes the identity of Catwoman after Catwoman performs hypnosis on her. Lois Lane puts on the cat suit and acts as devious and sexual as the real Catwoman. She even goes as far as capturing Superman in a kryptonite cage. Superman escapes and discovers with his X-Ray vision that Lois is in the cat suit. Later in the issue, he thinks he is kissing Lois in the cat suit, but Selina takes her place and steals the kiss intended for Lois Lane (Dorfman). Proving anyone can be a convincing Catwoman, but I guess no one out trumps the original. The second example is in Batman #210 (Robins 1969), Catwoman enlists a group of female ex-convicts and explains to them that anyone, fat or skinny, can indeed be Catwoman. She prepares them and sure enough by the end of their training, there are nine Catwoman. (Robins 187).

The importance of this sexual and liberating masquerade is important to the character. When Catwoman does not have on the cat suit for a long period, she questions her identity; she does not know who she is. These concerns depart as soon as she puts on the cat suit. In one such instance, she states how it "Feels good to be apart of it again" and later, in the same graphic novel, she explains how it feels fantastic to wear the mask again (Brubaker "Anodyne: Part 1-4" 56). In the 2004 film Catwoman, Catwoman's

original alias is not even present; the person that dons the sexual masquerade is that of Patience Phillips. In addition, it must be remembered that three different women played Catwoman from 1967 to 1969, while all the other actors kept on playing the same characters. All of these examples further prove that the essential being of Catwoman is the masquerade. The masquerade's ability to be placed on any person makes it easy for anyone to assume the role of Catwoman. This explains why Catwoman is popular. Since there is no solid description of her, anyone who acts overtly sexual can role-play as Catwoman. This may explain same-gender popularity; however, it does not explain the attraction of males to Catwoman.

Laura Mulvey is known for developing the gender binary system that is currently applied to mass media; she states her theory in her revolutionary work "Visual Pleasure and the Narrative Film". Mulvey explains that in film to be female is to be passive, to stop the narrative in order to be an object, and to be eroticized; to be male is to be active, powerful, the center of the narrative, and be in control (27). This gender binary is useful in setting up the basic societal characteristics that are ascribed to both genders, what is considered feminine and what is considered masculine, but as a whole this theory cannot be applied to Catwoman due to its limitations. Mulvey's theory states that in order for a female to assume the male stance or characteristics a woman must be either narcissistic or a masochist. Catwoman's dominating attitude and control of the narrative by having her own series means that these terms are not applicable to her, if anything Catwoman is a sadist. In order to apply gender coding to Catwoman, we must move onto theorists who have taken Mulvey to the next level.

Jeffrey A. Brown wrote “Gender, Sexuality, and Toughness: The Bad Girls of Action Film and Comic Books” in order to address the issue of tough action women and the feminine and masculine characteristics that they possess. Brown’s theory allows strong masculine attributes to exist within the action adventure women, while having them still being able to be seen as women to the audience. She is still able to be coded feminine due to her being overtly feminine or sexual. This allows physical toughness to coexist with sexuality and not have it seen as unnatural or a monstrosity to the audience. His new gender code for the women of the action genre, who fit into this category, is “dominatrix”. He does not mean this literally, although sometimes, as with Catwoman, it can be seen as literal (49). This figure of dominatrix is transgressive because as Brown states, “not because she operates outside of gender restrictions but because she straddles both sides of the psychoanalytical gender divide. She is both subject and object, looker and looked at, ass-kicker and sex object.”(52). Brown goes on to state that these dominatrix have “Toughness combined with overt sexuality that makes them dangerous in a way that male characters can never be” (65). They are more dangerous due to the technique of seduce and destroy that they can utilize; a technique that Catwoman is guilty of using when fighting.

Catwoman clearly falls into the category of dominatrix. In Batman #1, Catwoman’s main masculine trait is being the leader of a crime ring, where she gives orders and takes action. Her femininity and overt sexuality counteracts these masculine behaviors; when they are used, she is able to escape Batman (Finger 22). During the 1960’s television series Batman, in the episode “Scat! Darn Catwoman”, Catwoman crawls on top of Batman while he is tied down. During this scene Douglas Brode, author

of Sinema: Erotic Adventures in Film, describes Catwoman as having an expression that shows an “inability to decide whether she wanted to kiss him or kill him.” While Batman has a look of enjoyment, in the scene he mutters, “Now do with me as you like” (“Scat! Darn Catwoman.”). It is clear here that he is the masochist, and she the sadistic dominatrix (179).

In Batman Returns, Catwoman’s character is also clearly coded as a dominatrix. In the first action sequence that features Catwoman, she confronts a man who is mugging a woman with the line “Be gentle it’s my first time”, a phrase which is said when people experience sexual relations for the very first time. In stating this phrase, she is projecting a false sense of innocence and vulnerability. After stating this, she pummels the mugger, scratches his face up, then uses the slightly altered famous lines, “I am Catwoman, hear me roar”; not so vulnerable after all. All of this is done while wearing a suit that shows no skin. The spectator is allowed no direct access to her body, but there is nothing left to the imagination. In this scene, it is clear that Catwoman is superior to the mugger, however she does not become masculine mainly due to the overt sexuality that she portrays. In the eyes of the audience, she is still feminine.

Later in the movie, she uses her sexuality to get close to Batman. Catwoman places her hand on his chest and states “Who are you? Who's the man behind the bat? Maybe you can help me find the woman behind the cat.” These words and actions make it seem that she may allow him some access to her. Of course this is a ruse, she feels him up in order to find a weakness in his armor. Upon finding it, she strikes, cutting him badly with her claws, instead of pleasure Batman gets pain, something a dominatrix might do. In this scene, she clearly uses her sexuality as a weapon. This is what Brown

calls “power of seduction”, a weapon that gives her the edge over Batman (66). As demonstrated Catwoman can clearly be coded to fit the category of dominatrix that Brown lays out, but codes are not really needed to see Catwoman as a dominatrix, simply looking at her outfit would suffice.

Catwoman’s outfit throughout the decades has changed from a simple green dress (Batman #1, Finger Spring 1940), to a purple dress with a green cape and a cat mask (Detective Comics #203, Hamilton Jan. 1954 and Batman #392, Moench Feb. 1986), to an outfit that could be purchased at a Halloween store with the label sexy cat on it (Batman 210, Mar. 1969), to the leather skin tight outfit (Batman, 1967-1969, Batman Returns, 1992, and Catwoman: The Dark End of the Street, 2002), and finally to the pieces of leather that barely seems to cover Halle Berry (Catwoman, 2004). All of Catwoman’s outfits, minus the first outfit adorned by Selina Kyle, are clearly outfits that could easily be mistaken for a dominatrix costume.

Valerie Steele does an extensive history of fetish gear in her book Fetish and in this book, all of the components of Catwoman’s outfit are accounted for. The mask that Catwoman wears implies deviance since it is usually associated with torture, executioners, and thieves; the mask also implies anonymity of the sexual partner giving a heightened level of risk and power over the dominated, she has anonymity (169). The whip that Catwoman utilizes first appears in the fifties, the earliest appearance that I have found of it is in Detective Comics #203 (Hamilton 1954), and since its initial appearance Catwoman is rarely seen without it. According to Steele, a whip implies that sexual happenings will occur and someone will dominate; her psychoanalytical approach states that a whip connotes that someone will be beaten, if the female is holding the whip, then

the penis will be punished (171). Although this statement seems rather stretched, it cannot be denied that Catwoman's whip is a weapon of punishment. It cannot easily kill someone, instead it inflicts massive amounts of pain and injury. She inflicts pain and punishment much like a dominatrix. The rest of her outfit, the cat suit, either allows limited access to her skin or no access to her skin. This falls in line with the usual outfits of dominatrixes'. The one exception being to this is Halle Berry's costume in the 2004 film. This costume consisted of leather pants with rips in them, a leather bustier, and two leather straps that wrap around her torso. However, this costume is clearly part of the larger genre of S&M gear, which dominatrix gear would also fall under. Catwoman's usual outfits act as a second skin, which "draws attention to the sexual aspects of the body, while simultaneously restricting access to it." (Steele 193). The costumes that do not cover the entire body of Catwoman are still similar to the scheme of what a dominatrix is, since according to Steele the dominatrix is allowed to sometimes show limited amounts of skin (169).

It is important to note that Catwoman can be coded and seen as a dominatrix because it needs to be established that the gender binaries work in order to make an acceptable character. If Catwoman was not perceived as gender normative, it is not likely that she would have had any initial popularity, let alone a sixty-five year period of popularity. As a dominatrix, she is not as threatening to men as a woman who was thought of as purely masculine, such as Sarah Connor from Terminator 2: Judgment Day or Ripley from the Alien movie series. The fact that she has not abandoned her femininity allows female viewers to see her as someone who is clearly female in gender. Females may also be attracted to Catwoman's ability to take charge and control the narrative.

Characters in the dominatrix category are a refreshing alternative to the usual damsels in distress, a type of woman that Catwoman dislikes, but saves. In the film Batman Returns, she fights a mugger off a woman and then tells the victim “You make it so easy, don’t you, always waiting for some Batman to save you. I am Catwoman here me roar.”

Catwoman is written here as a woman who fights for herself, which can be an empowering characteristic for anyone. Steele states, “[the] image of a women who is both strong and sexy obviously appeals to many women (as well as men).” (34). To see how the spectators truly identify with Catwoman, I will use Marc O’Day’s theory of “range of fantasy identification” and “have me/ be me”.

Marc O’Day’s theory as stated in his article “Beauty in Motion”, started out as a contention to Laura Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure and the Narrative Film”. He states that the action-adventure genre is based on crossing the gender categories for both heroes and heroines. Heroes bodies are usually on display (feminine trait) as muscular adonises, but abate this feminization by adorning muscles and increasing the amount of action and heroines’ are more active and powerful (masculine traits) than in most other genres so they must stress their sexuality and femininity in order to avoid the title of being just a man in drag (203). Building upon this insight into the action genre O’Day challenges Mulvey’s theory of the male gaze.

O’Day uses Mulvey’s psychoanalytical approach to film and combines it with a sociological approach. O’Day believes that watching a film is more fluid than what Mulvey would have us believe; no one is stuck “within the Mulvey dynamic of active, sadistic ‘male’ gaze and the passive, masochistic ‘female’ gaze.” (204). These gazes are broken and interrupted by the spectators’ own gender, history, race, ethnicity, age,

economic status, sexuality, and many other roles and identities that they might have.

O'Day already established that the action-adventure genre allows for fluidity of gender in characters making the experience of watching an action-adventure movie more likely that the audience would be able to identify with a person of a different gender; O'Day calls this the "range of fantasy identification". This "range of fantasy identification" according to O'Day can "both confirm and question our gendered identities and they may be, however fleeting, sadistic and masochistic, cross gendered..." (204). This phenomenon makes it possible for one person to identify with any gender and to cross gender lines at the same time that the character takes on more masculine or more feminine traits. In other words, a male audience member would be able to identify with the male character while he is assuming feminine characteristics and with the female characters as she is assuming masculine attributes (204).

To further explain this O'Day established the "have me/be me" axes of desire; "have me" according to O'Day is the "desire to 'have' (read sexually) in fantasy" and "be me" as the "desire to 'be' her in fantasy" (204). Using clear-cut binary oppositions, of the Mulvey persuasion, one could say that heterosexual boys and men are attracted to female characters because they want to possess them sexually and they are attracted to male characters because they have the desire to be them. Connecting this to Catwoman, we can state that they are attracted to the character of Catwoman due to their sexual desire to possess her. Oppositionally, women are attracted to male characters for their desire to sexually possess them and are attracted to female characters due to their desire to be them; according to this half of the theory women are attracted to Catwoman due to their desire to want to be her (204).

This is only one half of O'Day's concept of "have me/ be me" axes of desire. Utilizing his "range of fantasy identification", he opens the axes up for alternative identification of these textual characters beyond the usual gender binary. He states that queer men and heterosexual males may identify with the masculine attributes of a female action-adventure character, such as her ability to win at combat and dominate the narrative, and thus may identify with the female character and desire to be her during those action-oriented situations. This desire to be the character may in fact happen at the exact same time as the desire to sexually possess the character does; men doing so would fall on both sides of the "have me/be me" axes of desire. According to the same mindset woman could identify with the beauty and objectification of the action woman, wishing that she could be desired in the same fashion as the action-adventure woman, and at the same time want to take on masculine traits of being sexually assertive, dominating men and kicking ass in combat. O'Day ends this argument by explaining that these axes of desire may only be partial, meaning that full wanting to have or be the character may not occur, and that is may not be obvious or conscious to the audience member who is enjoying it (205).

The axes of desire can clearly be applied to Catwoman. On the "have me" side, heterosexual males and queer females are clearly presented as having an attraction to Catwoman due to the overall sexual appeal and overt sexuality that she portrays. Heterosexual females and queer males can want to have Catwoman due to their attraction to masculine traits. On the "be me" half of the axes, women are clearly on this side; they can identify with her on a strictly gender level and have the desire to be empowered.

Males could use the gender transgression and have fantasies about wanting to be as physically assertive and able to dominate like Catwoman does.

O'Day then further investigates action heroines and comes up with a less sexualized third category, outside of the traditional two, than Brown. His category, titled "action babe heroines", is the selective merging of Mulvey-esque binaries. These "action babe heroines" are a combination of traditional female characteristics of to-be-looked-at-ness, vulnerability, passivity, and sexually available and traditional male characteristics of being active, strong, and commanding the narrative. This combination makes a character that has intuition, charm, sexuality, and the ability of fight all in a hard body (205). When applied to Catwoman this theory is useful because it is yet another theory that allows for Catwoman to enact masculine behaviors and not to be coded as masculine.

Now that all three major theories have been explained and tied to Catwoman, I can demonstrate how these concepts lead to the popularity of Catwoman. Utilizing Doane, I demonstrated how Catwoman uses the masquerade of femininity, in her case with a key focus of the sexual aspect of femininity, in order to be an acceptable and non-status quo threatening character. Doane also helped tease out the reality that no true Catwoman exists, since her origin, appearance, name, costume, and ethos have all changed so often and that the character has only one main consistency, the masquerade of sexuality, her most salient feature.

Brown's theory of the dominatrix added the next layer to providing an answer to why Catwoman is so popular. Using Brown's theory it was established that she was not coded as mainly due to her masculine features, instead she would be coded in a third category, that of dominatrix. Using Brown's theory it was established that she was not

coded as manly due to her masculine features, instead she would be coded in a third category, that of dominatrix. She performs behaviors that have been ascribed to masculinity, but remains feminine by adding overt sexuality, this solidified her as feminine. This is important because the American audience would most likely not remain infatuated with a character that made them uncomfortable by outlandishly breaking gender roles; it solidified a heteronormative audience.

O'Day's theory of "have me/be me" brought in the rest of the audience, mostly queer people and also doubled the amount of allure that Catwoman would have on people. His theory explained how queer men, who really would have no reason to be attracted to Catwoman due to them being outside of the strict gender binary and in some cases not being attracted to females, could be attracted to Catwoman. O'Day's "have me/be me" also states that heterosexual men and women can be drawn to the character for two reasons, wanting to be dominative and powerful like her and for her sexuality.

Catwoman has been compared to the female version of Batman; both with their dark sides, just on opposite sides of the law. It is odd however that her character has changed so often and his has remained more than less similar. Uricchio and Pearson examine the iconic character that is Batman in their article, "I'm Not Fooled by That Cheap Disguise." Batman's attributes have remained the same since his existence, he has always either had or been "wealthy; physically prowess; deductive abilities; and obsession." (186). Although, these all together do not make a stable character, they do at least create a sense of stability. His origin is that both of his parents were killed by a criminal in a dark alley and young Bruce Wayne witnesses the whole ordeal. He swears to avenge his parents' death and spends years and a fortune of money developing his

skills. He returns to Gotham and fights crime in his parents' memory (194). I will admit that Batman has slightly altered over the year, his attitude has changed from the joyful and campy Adam West's Batman to Frank Miller's gritty vigilante Batman; he still however has had the same origin and back-story, something that Catwoman can never claim. Batman is not just one item, since he is not valued for his sexuality alone and does not need a masquerade to abate gender rules; he is allowed to remain stable. The character of Catwoman on the other hand was able to change from Caucasian to African-American to Caucasian and back again without anyone batting an eye. If Batman were to change races then there would most likely be an uproar from the audience. If not an uproar, there would at least be a dialogue about this happening. However Batman is simply not a sexual masquerade.

Catwoman's sexuality has been with her since the beginning and it has remained with her since. It is her essence and without it she would not have become the cultural icon that she is today. Take her counterpart of Cheetah, who is not as overtly sexual as Catwoman (partly due to her being the antagonist to a female), who has had only a single one-shot comic ever and practically no paraphernalia. I would even go as far as saying that Catwoman is the most popular female villain in the DC Universe and that she is also the most sexually overt. Michael Uslan states that she is "Batman's number one femme fatale and kinkiest love interest" and the "supreme super-villainess of comicbookdom" (4). The masquerade made her able to become a highly adaptable character, whose back-story could be changed, but still not change the essence of whom she is. If not for her sexuality, she might be seen as too manly and become an unpopular character. If not for her sexuality, the "have me/be me" equation would not have made her a viable cultural

icon for most of America, who sometimes, like me, just wants to feel a whole lot more yummiier than we usually do.

CHAPTER THREE

“I WILL SUBMIT TO YOU”: THE PATRIARCHAL RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN BATMAN AND CATWOMAN

Decades have passed since Catwoman and Batman laid eyes on each other in Batman #1, but how much has changed since 1940? The answer is, not a whole lot. Some aspects of the characters differ, but for the most part, the patriarchal themes that were present then are still there today. This is due, in part, to the storylines remaining true to the conventions of the superhero and western genres. The gender conventions of those genres directly correlate to issues of power within Batman and Catwoman story arcs. In addition to the influences of genre, the power issues within their relationship reveal themselves through the stories surrounding the creation of Catwoman, the depiction of access to knowledge and information, looking or “the gaze”, manipulation, and Batman representing the many facets of patriarchy.

Trying to analyze this relationship would be next to impossible if I did not place limits on what I was examining. I say this because of the long history of the characters and the many authors that have and are contributing to the story arcs. I will construct a list of what I believe are the core characteristics of their relationship and will only examine depictions of the characters’ relationship that fall within this core. William Uricchio and Roberta Pearson tackled this problem when discussing Batman in “I’m Not Fooled by That Cheap Disguise” (1991). They state, “Unlike some fictional characters, the Batman has no primary urtext set in a specific period, but has a plethora of equally valid texts constantly appearing over more than five [now six] decades” (185). This is an identical problem when studying the relationship between Catwoman and Batman; there

is no single story arc that is the exemplar of their relationship. Instead, Uricchio and Pearson “privileged the lowest common denominator of long lasting and recurrent components” (186).

After reading and viewing an extensive amount of Batman and Catwoman comic books, graphics novels, films, and television episodes, I flushed out the lowest common denominators of Batman and Catwoman’s relationship. The most prevalent characteristics of Batman and Catwoman’s relationship are as follows: Catwoman’s alter ego is Selina Kyle and Batman’s alter ego is Bruce Wayne; Catwoman is single and not a mother; additionally, she is not the sidekick of Batman, but instead her own separate person, not on a team, but a loner. I am also not looking at any Elseworlds, which are either one-shot comic books or limited series that depict alternative versions of the DC characters; they are non-canonical and often depict extreme “what-if” situations. Appearances of these two characters that fit within this paradigm are the only ones examined.

American superheroes did not emerge in a vacuum but developed out of the American tradition of cowboys in the western genre. For this reason, I utilize the conventions of the western genre to examine the relationship between Catwoman and Batman. These conventions are extremely important because they affect how gendered characteristics and interactions occur within narratives. Their influence is most apparent in the expression of emotions, reliance of the characters on each other, and how the characters use language or action. Analyzing these occurrences reveals power struggles over who holds the power in different relationships.

Outside of these genre conventions are several other factors that contribute to the patriarchal themes perpetuated in these depictions. One is the creation of the character of Catwoman. The power issues that revolve around this moment are important because Selina Kyle's inspiration for becoming Catwoman often comes from Batman. In Batman #406 (1987), written by the famous (or infamous) Frank Miller, she witnesses Batman fleeing from the police in a colony of bats. After viewing this, she puts on a cat-suit and beats the hell out of her pimp. This story is retold through Selina's point-of-view in the first volume of the comic book, Catwoman (1989). In issue one, upon seeing Batman flee the police she states, "he'll escape... by using the costume" (Newell 20). She notes that he can get away by using people's fear of the costume. With the inspiration from Batman, her own affinity for cats, plus the fact that her pimp is not fond of felines, she dons the Catwoman costume, which is an altered version of the sadomasochistic cat suit her pimp gave her. In the second volume of the comic book (1993-2001), Catwoman, the story slightly differs but the results are still the same. Her origin is told in Catwoman #0 (1994), the illustration shows a cat burgling Selina Kyle spot Batman from a rooftop; the text box reads, "One night she actually saw him—admiring his decisive action and envying his disguise. Stirred by his dark power, she was inspired. If he could be a bat, her choice was obvious" (Moench 22). After her Batman sighting, she starts wearing the Catwoman costume.

In the Catwoman origin stories, Batman has the power of creation. If not for his appearance in Selina's life, Catwoman would have never existed. As the creator of the character, he is in a position of authority; the writers place a godly or fatherly authority upon him and Catwoman is his subservient. In these tales he is the originator of her; she

is just a spin-off. Her existence is dependent on his. It takes agency away from the character, Catwoman. This spin-off concept is reiterated through the covers of Catwoman comic books. In all but three covers of the third comic book volume, Catwoman (2002-present), an emblem with an outline of Batman's face with glowing eyes appears. The same emblem occurs sporadically on the covers of the second comic book volume (1993-2001). Almost like branding cattle, one must not forget that this female character is not completely independent; Batman is responsible for creating her.

Power is extremely unequal in the amount of information that characters have and the type of communication they use. If knowledge is power, then Catwoman is completely powerless most of the time. The two ways that the writers deny Catwoman of knowledge are by giving Batman knowledge of her secret identity and not vice-versa and by limiting Batman's speech. Knowledge of a person's secret identity in the superhero genre gives the bearer of this information access to a part of the character that they wanted to remain a secret, hence why they wear a costume. The second aspect of information and communication is a well-established genre convention in American masculine heroes. In West of Everything (1992), a book analyzing the western genre, Jane Tompkins writes, "For the really strong man, language is a snare; it blunts his purpose and diminishes his strength" (51). The reason for this lack of language use is because if the hero "opens up to another person ... (he) becomes vulnerable... by putting word to an emotion (means that one) becomes feminized" (Schwenger 43-44) and "talking may bring up their own unprocessed pain or risk a dam burst that would undo the front of imperturbable superiority" (Tompkins 66-67). The stoic male façade would

shatter and the ideal masculine hero would become fallible and feminized in Westerner's eyes if language was relied upon by the male hero.

The fact that Batman knows Catwoman's secret identity gives him a considerable amount of power over her. He can find her during the non-costuming hours, can check up and gather information on her, and knows something that she is trying to hide. The desire to keep her secret identity hidden comes through in the graphic novel, Catwoman: When in Rome. At the beginning of each chapter, Catwoman/Selina has a nightmare, usually involving Batman. In the chapter "Wednesday", she has a dream that she is on a surgical table, unable to move, and Batman is operating on her. The first thing he wants to do is remove her mask. She shows anger at this and yells about him "trying to dissect every little part of who I am" (Loeb no pg). In these panels, the author illustrates that having her secret identity revealed is damaging to her. It allows access to her and the ability to analyze and "dissect" her. This is an unfair access because the authors give her no knowledge of his identity.

There are times, such as in the current DC storylines, that Catwoman does know that Batman is Bruce Wayne, but an overwhelming amount of the time, this is not the case. Throughout the entire 1960's television show, Batman, Batman knows that Catwoman (the Julie Newmar version) is Selina Kyle. However, she never knows his secret identity. Always giving him the ability to collect information on her, spy on her, and receive an edge when fighting her. Oddly enough, Eartha Kitt's version of Catwoman never has a secret identity. The same happening occurs in the 1990's television program, Batman: The Animated Series. The main difference in this series is that Catwoman/Selina Kyle is in love with Batman, and Batman rejects the advances of Catwoman, but

Bruce Wayne openly courts Selina Kyle. This happens while the identity of Catwoman is a matter of common public knowledge. Again, he uses this information to track down and spy on Catwoman while she is in her apartment as Selina Kyle.

The comic books fluctuate back and forth about whether Catwoman knows the secret identity of Batman. The history of comic book characters can be a rather confusing tale. This is because every writer develops a story line that they have in mind and if past story lines contradict their vision then they simply ignore it, make up some far-fetched story to explain how things are now different, or completely start the entire universe over. Due to this, it is hard to pin point when Catwoman knows Batman's identity and when she does not.

More often than not though, Catwoman does not know Batman's secret identity. Nevertheless, like most villains, she would like to know. An exemplar of this situation occurs in Batman #197. In this issue, Catwoman is desperately in love with Batman (as is the case in most comic books before the 1980's and in the 1960's television series). These incarnations of Catwoman depict female sexuality as dangerous to all men; Catwoman wants to possess her man, and if she cannot, then no one can have him. On page one of Batman #197 Catwoman states, "My fate is in your hands, Batman! Am I to be your bride or burglar? Before you answer, I must warn you that if you refuse my proposal of marriage you doom yourself, but Robin and Batgirl as well" (Fox 71). Later on in the issue, Catwoman and Bruce Wayne are in the same room and Bruce thinks, "Oh Selina—Catwoman! If only you realized you were in the presence of your beloved Batman!" Demonstrating that Batman/Bruce knows who she is and she is left in the dark (Fox 85). Later, while Catwoman has Batman locked up and unconscious she realizes her

desire to look upon his face: “I can’t resist seeing what Batman really looks like! I don’t want my boys around—for none but I must see Batman’s unmasked face” (Fox 88). Of course, her plan fails because Batman knew in advance, “what woman does not want to look upon the face of her beloved?” (Fox 91). He paints his face to conceal his secret identity. Batman’s secret is safe and he still has an advantage and power over her.

There are times when Catwoman does know that Batman is Bruce Wayne. During these periods of time, the writers and artists of Batman and Detective Comics still give Batman more power than Catwoman. The use of masks by the artists demonstrates this power relation. For the most part, when they are dashing across the rooftops of Gotham, both Batman and Catwoman wear their masks. However, situations occur in which one of them is not. In all but one situation, Catwoman is the one who is not wearing the mask. She is the one revealing and exposing herself, and he is the one that is still contained and in control of his secret identity. In addition to the use of masks, his attitude and reactions to her place him a position of power.

For the most part, Batman “never has an abiding relationship with a woman” (Lawrence and Jewett 43). However, his longest on-again-off-again relationship is with Catwoman. The relationship never lasts long because Batman usually calls it off or puts Catwoman in a position where there is no other choice then to call it off. These situations usually happen because of a convention of the western genre hero, his unwillingness to communicate and to open up and share his feelings. An example of this is in Batman #398. In the previous issues, Batman declares his love for Catwoman, but only after she is struck by lightning and laying unconscious in a hospital room. In this situation, she is completely powerless, before this, he did not declare his love for her because she was

unmanageable. In this unconscious state, she is the perfectly docile damsel-in-distress. After she recovers though, he clams up and does not trust her anymore. She tells him, “It doesn’t matter that this cat saved your life, does it? You’ll never trust me!” Batman responds, “It wasn’t anything personal!” She replies, “Between you and me; it’s never personal” (Moench no pg). He is still the stoic male, who feels that he cannot let emotions get in the way of the action in his life, and she is the emotional woman, who always allows emotions to influence the actions she takes in life. A similar situation happens in Detective Comics #569, where Selina confronts Batman, “Why don’t you and I discuss that [whether or not they can be a couple], Bruce... back at my place, alone.” To which he responds, “Please, Selina... not in front of the boy” (Barr 6). In refusing to show emotion, he asserts his masculinity (as defined by the conventions of the genre), and in the tradition of the genre rides off into the sunset, without the woman and the emotional weakness she is perceived to embody.

In a recent comic book storyline, Hush, Batman actually allows Catwoman a considerable amount of access to his life. It seems that the writers may actually be evolving their relationship and Batman out of the genre conventions that have bound him for so long. It begins with a kiss, Catwoman’s way of saying “thank you for saving me” (Loeb Hush: Volume One 73). This is such a monumental event that the writer, Jeph Loeb, and artist, Jim Lee, devote the complete next page to the kiss. Batman keeps imagining this moment through several pages and thinking, “stay focused. (Try) Not to think about ...Selina” (75) and “I kissed her” (77 and 91). A miracle happens, Bruce Wayne/ Batman shows emotion and not just any emotion, it appears as if he is head-over-heels for Catwoman. He finally expresses to Selina how he feels in Hush: Volume Two;

“Like you. I have two lives. I want you to be a part of both of them” and with that statement he allows Catwoman/Selina access to all of him, even allowing her to go into the Batcave, which is in his words is “my most private place” (Loeb no pg). Everything seems to be going on perfectly and progressively, that is until the end of the story arc. Batman clams back up and Catwoman does most of the talking. Batman learns Scarecrow has used a mind-altering drug on him, allowing Poison Ivy to take control of both Catwoman and Batman. Due to these revelations, Batman believes that revealing himself to Catwoman and allowing a relationship to blossom began while he was not in the right state of mind. He even states, “Was she part of this...? Can I take that chance?” (no pg). In the end, he does not; he rejects Catwoman. She leaves angry and with a broken heart, while he continues, “his lone battle, against the evil forces of society” (Lawrence and Jewett 43). The affirmation of the western genre stoic masculine hero occurs and he rejects the feminine side of himself, attributing his “giving in to the weaker side” to the effects of mind-altering drugs.

Love and lust are important emotions that play out in the relationship between Batman and Catwoman. The writers use both of these emotions to illustrate weaknesses within the characters, but the emotions usually correlate with just one character. Catwoman is usually the person in love and Batman is usually the victim of lust. The attachment of these emotions to these highly gendered bodies occurs for a reason. Love is attached to the feminine Catwoman because it is an emotion which usually corresponds with the expression of feelings; in the western genre and in Western culture, language is “always associated with women” (Tompkins 54). The writers attach lust, an emotion with few words and more action, to the masculine Batman. This lust does not last long;

emotions are not supposed to be a large part of the hero's repertoire, but are momentary lapses of judgment, which make him weak. Again, this supports the gendered conventions of the western hero; "doing, not talking, is what it [the western genre] values" (50). Love is the devalued emotion in this genre and thus it is assigned to the female character.

Love is the emotion that "cripples" Catwoman, turning her into either an ineffectual villain or an insane woman. The theme of the love of Batman causing Catwoman to be an ineffectual villain comes up constantly throughout the 1960's television series, Batman. An excellent example of this is in the episode, "The Bat's Kow Tow". During one scene, Catwoman knocks Batman down and has a gun pointed at him. She could murder him, but instead, she hesitates stating, "Can't you see how I feel about you, Batman? How I want you on my side..." She cannot follow through with her villainy. In return, he rejects her and turns her over to the police. Her love for him never gave her a fighting chance.

Love conquering Catwoman also occurs in comic books. In Detective Comics #203, one of her gang members is about to shoot Batman. Catwoman screams, "No don't shoot! I couldn't bear to see him killed!" (Hamilton 33). This desire to save her enemy's life leads to her pushing him out of harms way and injuring herself in Batman #62 (Finger). Batman notes her weakness when she leaves a means for him and Robin to escape the bonds that she has placed them in: "Sentiment is her weakness—and that's why we'll catch her next time!" (Hamilton 27). The writers make it so that her expression of emotion and inability to control her emotions make Catwoman weaker. She cannot follow through with masculine coded behaviors such as fighting because she becomes

distraught due to the “feminine” act of feeling. This reinforces a clear dichotomy, if one wants to exceed, then emotions are out of the picture and feminine attributes cause a person to become weaker and ineffectual.

In addition to ineffectual, Catwoman’s overwhelming emotions turn her into a convention of the western genre; she becomes the woman who needs rescued from her own feelings. Tompkins writes about this conventional character: “she falls apart before our eyes, a helpless creature who has completely lost control of herself and has to beg a man to stop her” proving that, however strong she was, she must “surrender to the hero’s superiority” in order to compose herself (61). An extreme example of this occurs in Batman #355, where Bruce Wayne/Batman is out on a date with Vicky Vale. Catwoman runs the happy couple off the side of the road and into a body of water in an attempt to kill them both. Catwoman, in a monologue, states, “Two days I’ve hid here—wanting you and hating you. Afraid to move because of you! My life is in ruins because of you!” (Conway 21). In the end, she cannot completely follow through with murdering Bruce Wayne/Batman. He calms her down, but tells her that they cannot be together. The gateway to insanity is paved with Catwoman’s emotions. The empowered woman, who the writers allow to take on some masculine attributes, crashes to the level of a psychopath in need of a rescuing by the male lead. The writers reinforce the superiority of masculinity and its privileging of action before emotion and talking as the sane and legitimate route.

Batman, on the other hand, ignores love completely. The narrator, at the beginning of Batman #323, explains that, “Tonight he is on his way to arrest a woman he has come to love” (Wein 1). Later in the comic book, Catwoman swears her innocence;

however, Batman does not listen. Words mean nothing to him because he cares about and trust actions. He still attempts to take her in and she flees. In Catwoman #94 (volume 2, 1993-2001), Catwoman pleads with Batman to try to attempt a relationship between the two of them. He believes that “we’ve had this conversation before” (Moore 15). In reality all they have done according to Catwoman is “flirt and fight and chase each other” (Moore 15). Throughout the entire dialogue heavy page (15) Batman only says eleven words, Catwoman talks nine times more than he does. This iconic relationship perpetuates the American mythology of the stoic male, who does not need emotion or the use of words, and the concept of the overemotional woman, who needs to be rescued or, as Julie Newmar’s incarnation of Catwoman states, “I need what everywoman needs: the love of a good man.” Catwoman needs him; it is not the other way around. The message is clear, masculinity can stand on its own, but femininity needs the support of a man.

Batman does not fall for expressive emotions like love; instead, more action-oriented emotions prove to be his Achilles’ heel. Catwoman’s sexual allure has power over Batman. He becomes sexually attracted and gives into his lust for her. This is when he is most vulnerable to Catwoman. Dan Didio, vice-president of editorial at DC Comics, says about Batman’s weakness to Catwoman, “Here’s a character, who could easily take out anybody physically, but on the sensual side, she is able to overcome him” (“The Many Faces of Catwoman”). Upon their first encounter, in Batman #1, he allows her to escape and foils Robin’s attempt to recapture her. He then states, “lovely girl! What eyes! ... Maybe I’ll bump into her again some time” (Finger 33). He allows Catwoman amnesty based on his sexual attraction to her.

Many times, Catwoman uses her sexual allure to get close to him; this close contact makes Batman drop his guard for the promise of future physical pleasure. Each time he does, she either knocks him out, punches, kicks, or scratches him. Catwoman even comments on this in Batman: The Animated Series; “You know what’s wrong with our relationship, you always let me get too close [physically]” and then she kicks him and runs off (“Catwalk”). This aspect of their relationship is present in every medium. The message is pervasive and it is clear; female sexuality is dangerous. It is something terrifying because women use it to lure men in and ultimately defeat them.

One way of controlling female sexuality is to submit women to “the gaze”. The power of looking or the gaze is culturally, a very salient source of power. Laura Mulvey fully describes the gaze and its importance in her work “Visual Pleasure and the Narrative Cinema” (1975). The gaze is a power that belongs to men on two levels: they produce female characters as “erotic object(s) for the characters within the screen story, and as erotic object(s) for the spectator” (Mulvey 749). Through this cultural phenomenon, women grow used to “their traditional exhibitionist role... (which is to be) looked at” (Mulvey 748). Through this, women learn to take pleasure in objectification and desire to be valued for their “to-be-looked-at-ness”; Laura Mulvey describes this as exhibitionism (748). The male readers of these texts, in essence, gain power through objectifying Catwoman, “by means of identification with him [the male character, in this case Batman], thought participation in his power, the spectator can indirectly possess her [Catwoman] too” (Mulvey 753). The ramifications of this will be described below, but first an examination of looking or “the gaze” in the relationship between Catwoman and Batman.

The power of looking is prevalent in the Batman/Catwoman relationship. In this manner, he has all the power. It is important to note that the eyes are a prominent feature of Batman's appearance. In all of the Batman's logos that appear on the volume three (2001-present) comic book covers of Catwoman, all features except for the eyes are indistinguishable; glowing slits on his dark mask. His eyes are ever watching and ever prominent. The continual highlighting of the eyes by the artists of the comics is not by accident. They are reinforcing the cultural norm of the power that one gains through looking. His eyes are also one of the only things visible when he is lurking in the shadows.

Lurking in the shadows and keeping a constant eye on Catwoman is one of Batman's top priorities. In "You Scratch my Back", the entire episode revolves around Batman surveying Catwoman while she is teamed up with Nightwing, one of Batman's crime fighting partners. Batman suggested the team of Nightwing and Catwoman, so that he and Nightwing could deceive Catwoman into leading them to stolen merchandise. Nonetheless, Batman never takes his eyes off her. He often warns her, "The minute you step out of line..." (Templeton "The Last Batman Adventure." no pg), as if he is a parent telling her he has an eye on her. The writers of these comic books demonstrate his ability to watch her undetected by his ability to sneak up on her. Batman approaching from behind undetected happens often, especially in Catwoman driven narratives. This represents an invasion of her privacy, a power denied to Catwoman. It also allows for a normalization of gendered actions. The viewing of women, while they are unknowing becomes mundane.

His ability to watch her and sneak up on her actually strikes fear in Catwoman, as demonstrated by the cover of Catwoman #45 (volume three 2005), which shows a

terrified Catwoman (with no mask on) being approached from behind by Batman. A more detailed example of this occurs in the chapter “Tuesday” of the graphic novel, Catwoman: When in Rome; Selina Kyle has a nightmare where Batman is lurking in the shadows of her bedroom while she is sleeping naked. He is a fully dressed man, awake and ready to attack, while she is a fully exposed woman, barely conscious or aware of the situation. These scenes conjure images of women attacked in the dark by aggressive male assailants. The women are victims of both the male’s power to look and physically harass women. Catwoman’s oppression by Batman’s gaze is disturbing, yet artists and writers create these scenes and they pass as acceptable. Due to the normalization of the gaze, it is perfectly acceptable for a hero to conjure up such images.

At times, his power to gaze petrifies the character, but more disturbingly, at other times Catwoman gains pleasure from knowing that he watches her. Laura Mulvey’s assessment that women learn to enjoy objectification accurately describes the relationship between Batman and Catwoman. In Batman: Gotham Adventures #4, the power of looking and the pleasure of objectification are very apparent; the mortifying aspect of this is that the target audience for this comic book is children. The issue begins with Batman stating, “You’re looking well” and Catwoman responds with gratitude towards him for noticing (Templeton 168). This is a little provocative, but harmless enough. It then turns disturbing. Batman establishes that he will be subjecting her to “the gaze”: “Stay out of trouble, Selina. I’ll be keeping an eye on you to make sure you don’t step over the line” (Templeton 170). In addition to this is her thought, “I turned and looked back. I was thrilled to see he’d kept his word... Batman couldn’t take his eyes off of me” (Templeton 170). This brings her pleasure. She is enacting what Mulvey states; she is gaining

satisfaction from being the object of Batman's gaze. Later, after a confrontation with Batman, she flees the scene and looks back once again stating, "He never looked at me once. And my heart broke a second time" (Templeton 186). Her heart breaks because he does not subject her to the gaze. The message sent to children is horrific. It normalizes "the gaze" which establishes a clear gender dichotomy placing all power in the hands of men. In addition, it illustrates to the child audience that for girls, to be looked at is to be loved and boys, to look and objectify is to love.

Batman uses his influence and abilities in ways to manipulate Catwoman into doing what he would like. Instead of telling the truth, he uses deceitful actions. By doing this the writers take any perceived agency that Catwoman may have away from her. The writers instead give Batman the ability to control her, stripping her of power. She does not go on adventures by her own accord; the man in charge is pulling her strings. This situation turns Catwoman into one of Charlie's Angels and Batman into Charlie, the man with the power. In the multiple comic book crossover storyline, "War Games", a massive gang war is tearing Gotham City apart. Batman cannot cover the entire city alone. In Catwoman #35 (volume 3, 2001-present), he uses Oracle, an information and technical savvy character, who helps Batman maintain his panopticon, to manipulate Catwoman into going where he wants and fighting who he says; she becomes a pawn on Batman's chessboard. He uses Oracle in a similar manner in Catwoman # 72 (volume 2, 1993-2001). He places a fake artifact in a museum that tempts Catwoman to steal it. Once she has, the item turns into a transmitter, which allows Oracle to relay Batman's message to Catwoman of when and where she should meet Batman. Oracle questions whether this manipulation will work. To which Batman responds, "I know her psychology. She'll

show” (Ostrander 5). The writer establishes that he has gained massive amounts of intelligence from watching Catwoman and that he has the ability to control her like a puppet.

The roles that Batman/Bruce Wayne fills throughout the series help exacerbate his representing of an authoritative patriarchal figure. A superficial reading of the character illustrates this. Bruce Wayne is a white elite class male. He runs his own corporation, Wayne Enterprises, which he inherited from his father, and he rarely works there. The only thing he seems to do for them is cash his check, which pays for the mansion that sits outside of and above the city. William Uricchio and Roberta E. Pearson state in “I’m Not Fooled by that Cheap Disguised.” that one of his four most salient traits is his wealth and describe him as an “heir to a large fortune, estimated at nearly 100 million dollars” (186). In most depictions, he is in his early to mid thirties; he is in his prime. If I replaced the words, Bruce Wayne, with the phrase “the man”, no one would notice. He represents the quintessential patriarchal repressive force in today’s society. Further exploration reveals that this patriarchal representation is only one of the many patriarchal roles the writers place him in, especially in his appearances with Catwoman.

In addition to “the man in the shadows” and “love interest” roles that Batman fills are the patriarchal roles of father figure and doctor. From their first encounter, a reverse Oedipus complex is established; she is in love with Batman and, at times, he represents a fatherly figure. In Batman #1, while Batman captures Selina Kyle, then simply known as “the Cat”, she squirms and yells. To her resistance, he says, “Quiet or papa spank” (Finger 21). Their flirtation begins with that statement and so does the establishment of him as fatherly. This theme of Batman’s role as Catwoman father figure is highly

apparent in the graphic novel, Catwoman: When in Rome. It begins, innocently enough, with Batman catching Catwoman stealing from Falcone's, a Gotham city mob boss, residence. She has her hand in the safe and he states, "Put it back" (Loeb no pg). The scene is reminiscent of a father catching a child with their hand in a cookie jar. The father/daughter theme is, in the same chapter, simply laid out on the table. In a dream sequence, Batman's rogue gallery joins forces and attacks Catwoman. Batman saves her and then starts flirting with her, telling her they should "Take off the masks. No secrets" (Loeb no pg). This is right before Batman takes off his mask revealing the face of Carmine Falcone, the mob boss she suspects is her father. She inquires, "Daddy?" and he says, "You wish" and shoots her (Loeb no pg). One does not need to be Freud to analyze this cultural artifact. The writers' have put forth the idea that Catwoman's desire and constant longing for Batman is driven by her need for an authoritative father figure in her life. She does not want an egalitarian relationship; she wants patriarchy. What is odd about this is, while she flirts with this desire, she also fears it at the same time; I discuss this occurrence later.

The role of Batman as protector and provider of "father knows best" attitude perpetuates the father figure theme. In Catwoman #4 (volume 3, 2001-present), she defeats a villain, but does not know what to do with him after. Instead of turning to the authorities, she goes to Batman, who lectures her about her inappropriate use of the Bat-signal (Brubaker 19). His lecturing at her is a common occurrence in the comic books. It occurs when she is both a hero and a villain. In the instances when she is a hero, it is Batman telling her how she is not able enough to pull off the scheme she plans or defeat the enemy that she fights. Two prime examples to this are in the story arcs in and

surrounding, Catwoman #30 and Catwoman #48 (both volume 3). In each of these situations, Batman gives her the “you are not good enough” speech and each time she does not listen. The writers make Batman right in both situations; she is almost killed in one, luckily, a male ninja saves her; and in the other situation, she is murdered, only to reappear the next issue with no explanation. In these situations, Batman is the provider of advice and tries to protect Catwoman from the big bad world of villains. In having Catwoman be defeated in both of these situations, the writers have set Batman up as the authority figure and Catwoman as the illogical woman who gets in way over her head. In addition, throughout volume three of the comic books series, Catwoman, she is protecting the East End, the poor section of Gotham, with Batman’s approval. If he takes this away, the rest of the heroes will consider her an outlaw. In doing this, the writers give complete control to Batman. This role of being a father figure is reinforced by the logo that appears on her comic books that were discussed above. The logo serves as a family name; she belongs to him.

The fourth authoritative role that the writers create for Batman is the role of doctor. This authoritative role is interesting because Batman’s own father was a doctor. This makes the role even more patriarchal in this narrative because the patriarch of the patriarch filled this role. Our society gives medical doctors a large amount of power. They give us advice, protect and fix our bodies, and define the symptoms that label individuals as diseased or not. Even though, Batman in the role of a doctor only occurs twice, it does reveal power dynamics between him and Catwoman. In the comic book, Legends of the Dark Knight #48, the panels show Catwoman lying unconscious on a sterile looking medical table in the middle of the Bat-cave. She is there because in the

previous issue the Cat-Killer, a serial killer, who in her opinion has stolen her motif, defeats her. At the end of issue 47, Batman saves her and brings her into his sanctuary (Moench). The writer gives Batman the power to care for her and protect her body from harm. He has control over what happens to her body because he is in a position of authority over her.

A more horrific version of the last scene is a nightmare that Catwoman has in the graphic novel, Catwoman: When in Rome. This dream sequence was discussed earlier but needs to be revisited under this lens. In the panels, Catwoman lies on an operating table in the Bat-cave. Again, she is in his realm and under his care. All power is stripped from her, she does not have the ability to fight back, “I ... can’t move my arms ... legs” (Loeb no pg). Jeph Loeb, the writer, places her in the position of an anesthetized patient, who cannot move and places her life and body in the hands of the doctor. Batman is in costume, but additionally wearing a surgical mask and holding a scalpel. He is standing above her about to cut off her mask, which as discussed before connotes a power relation. This sequence of images and words yet again put Batman in a position and role, which gives him power over Catwoman; he is above her, he is in a position of power, he has the ability to remove her mask, and she has no power to resist him.

The fear of patriarchy that Catwoman expresses in this last scene does open up the dialogue on questioning patriarchy. In Catwoman-centered texts that appeared in the 1980’s, this fear of patriarchal figures and Batman as the representation of patriarchy emerges. The comic books in the 1990’s and 2000’s are when this theme becomes prevalent. In almost every chapter of Catwoman: When in Rome, Catwoman has a nightmare about Batman in different patriarchal roles: father; doctor; strange assailant in

the night; and powerful lover. Writers have given her this fear of patriarchy before, best demonstrated in Catwoman #60 (volume 2, 1993-2001). In this issue, the Scarecrow (a major Batman villain) has exposed Catwoman to a large amount of fear toxin, which make her hallucinate and see her worst fear. Throughout her trials, Batman appears and becomes, in her words, “her savior” (Grayson 9). She realizes after all of this that her fear is being dependent on a man and losing control of her own agency. While this appears to be a crack in the monolith of patriarchal representation in this relationship, it quickly reverses this stance only five issues later. In Catwoman #65 (volume 2, 1993-2001), the Joker is attempting to murder Catwoman. Batman tells her the safest place for her is in prison. She scoffs at that idea and tells him, “I won’t submit to Blackgate (the prison), but I will submit to you” (Grayson 8). How quickly she overcomes her worst fear of being submissive to a man and not just any man, “the man”. So while patriarchy is something that should be feared, one must “submit” to it in order to be safe. The authority and legitimacy of patriarchy is firmly intact. Her submitting to him also alludes to her deviant sexuality, which was discussed in chapter one. She submits to him. This act connotes sadomasochistic sexual acts, which are outside of the norm in sexual representation.

Not all representations of this relationship are extremely patriarchal. Tim Burton’s Batman Returns allows for a more egalitarian reading of their relationship. The major progressive component of this film is that it points out the evil that occurs under patriarchy and a patriarchal figure becomes the villain. Although there are aspects of this film that deter me from labeling it as completely gender progressive, it is by far the most progressive interpretation of the relationship between Batman and Catwoman.

Before discussing the actual relationship between Catwoman and Batman in this film, I would like to talk about how the other characters contribute to the vilifying of patriarchy. Max Shreck, played by Christopher Walken, is Selina Kyle's boss; she is his secretary. He is an unappreciative sexist murderer. He mocks Selina Kyle when she attempts to speak up and contribute a comment at a business meeting. He does so by telling the members of the committee, "I'm afraid we haven't properly house broken Ms. Kyle. In the plus column she makes a hell of a pot of coffee." In this movie, Max Shreck is representing corporate America, where women are not allowed to gain significant influence and instead work diligently and competently, but must remain submissive, in their dead end pink-collar jobs. Selina goes beyond the call of duty for Max Shreck twice in this movie. How does he repay her? He does so by pushing her out of a very high window. While working late one night, she discovers that his proposed power plant will actually be sucking power out of Gotham City. This will give him power and control over Gotham City and, more importantly for him, he will be able to pass down this power and control to his son, Chip. Murder is an option, for nothing will stand in the way of maintaining his patrilineal legacy.

Max Shreck ends up being a major villain in the movie despite the presence of two other well-established Batman villains, Catwoman and Penguin. In fact, Max is so manipulative and evil, that Catwoman and Penguin want him dead; he has wronged them both. Max Shreck becomes the ultimate villain of the story. He is a corporate leader, political powerhouse, father, and boss; since he represents many aspects of patriarchy, he makes patriarchy the main villain. In this movie, patriarchy is questionable and corrupt. Other characters within this movie contribute to the anti-patriarchal reading.

The Catwoman's interactions with a mugger in the alley and security guards in Shreck Department Stores also contribute to the patriarchy as being fallible. These two types of figures are on complete opposite sides of the law but both represent aspects of patriarchy. On her first adventure out as Catwoman, she runs into a man in an alley attacking a wealthy looking woman. Catwoman tells the mugger, "I just love a big strong man, who's not afraid to show it with someone half his size." She then pummels the would-be assailant. The role of men in the shadows was discussed above, only this time the man in the shadows is not Batman. This scene is important though because Catwoman is attacking and winning the battle to "take back the night" from violent men. On a different night, she is attempting to destroy a department store owned by her boss when two security guards confront her with the line, "I don't know whether to open fire or fall in love." Catwoman replies, "You poor guys, always confusing your pistols with your privates." The writers are pointing out the connotation that exists between masculinity, power, violence, and sexuality. The men's penises are tied to their guns. By confronting these men over it and defeating them, she brings it into the dialogue and renders it powerless.

Batman's dialogue and fight scene with Catwoman on a roof contributes to the dialogue surrounding the movie's discussion of the weaknesses of patriarchy. She is a villain and as a villain should be treated as such. However, Batman treats her differently because she is a woman and he pays for this. At one point, he knocks her down to the ground. She yells, "How could you? I'm a woman." He apologizes and offers a helping hand. She uses his outdated chivalry and treatment of women as delicate creatures to her advantage. She knocks him off the roof and holds him there with his whip stating, "As I

was saying, I'm a woman and can't be taken for granted. Life's a bitch. Now so am I." In this statement, "anymore" should have been placed after granted because people have been taking advantage of Catwoman/ Selina and now she will not let it happen anymore. Although this is a minor infraction on Batman's part, it still brings to the surface an additional way that women are demeaned in Western culture because they are seen as delicate creatures and are taken advantage of.

Batman and Catwoman's relationship in this movie is less patriarchal than any other text that I have found. To prove this, the same angles used above to look at their relationship will be used again on this text – the use of the gaze, the use of knowledge as power, patriarchal roles, and the use of language to discuss sexual attraction and interest between them. Through these lenses, the movie is more progressive in its portrayal of gender; however, it does fall back and lose its progressive edge due to Catwoman's deviant sexuality, her motivation, and her status at the end of the movie.

The phenomenon that Laura Mulvey termed "the gaze" still occurs throughout the movie. Catwoman often reclines or poses in such a manner that characters and the audience can take in her body and objectify her. The main difference between this text and the others is that she is not gaining pleasure from this; in fact, at times she seems annoyed, especially when the Penguin is the gazer. Attracting the gaze is more of a strategic move than anything else because the male assailants lower their guard when sexually distracted. Another major difference is that Batman does not have the ability to be constantly watching her. This lack of constant observation makes the controlling panopticon that he usually has non-existent.

With the panopticon out of the picture, Batman does not have the information that he usually has on Catwoman. Instead of spying on her to gain knowledge, he actually must talk to her, which does happen. The happening of a dialogue between the two is important because it breaks with the usual tradition of Batman being a non-communicative western gendered character, which would rather do than discuss. In talking to her, he allows her some access to him and him to her. He is not a walled off individual that attempts to keep everyone out, but instead expresses emotion and talks things through. Along with him no longer having a large amount of knowledge on her and her having none on him, is the equality in the knowledge of identities. Although the characters interact with each other in their non-costumed and costumed lives, neither knows the other's alternative identity. It is towards the end of the movie when both characters realize who the other is; this revelation comes for both of them at the exact same time. There is never a time when Batman has access to a part of her life that she does not have similar access to his. They are equal in this notion.

The third aspect that makes this interpretation of Batman and Catwoman's relationship more egalitarian is that Batman's patriarchal roles are limited. He only plays the essential "man" that Batman always embodies and the law. He is not given the role of doctor, man in the shadows, the western genre concept of lover (which will be discussed further), or the creator of Catwoman. Batman does not make or inspire the creation of Catwoman. Although her creation is not the most empowering of stories, at least Batman is not given a position of power above her. However, at the end of the movie, she stands on the top of the building with the Bat-signal above her. This is the only type of branding that occurs in the movie. The Bat-signal above her does code her as beneath him and give

him a presence; it is less obtrusive than the usual occurrences of this. It is important to note that all merchandise outside of the movie relating to Catwoman did don the Batman logo.

Lastly, the use of language and sexual attraction between the two is equal and the roles established by the Western genre and the traditional depictions of Batman reverse. It is obvious throughout the movie that Catwoman is attracted to Batman, stating phrases like, "You're catnip to a girl like me". The same is true of Batman, although it takes him awhile to come around. Throughout the movie, one can tell through body language and use of the eyes that he is attracted to her, but he does not verbalize it until the end. This verbalization is however a large step for gender relations within the usual depiction of this relationship. This does happen in the comic books once, when Catwoman is completely helpless because lightning struck her, rendering her unconscious (Moench "About Faces"). In the comics, Batman only expresses his feelings when Catwoman plays the damsel-in-distress; in all other instances, she is too active to give her access to his feelings. In Batman Returns, he states to a conscious and violent Catwoman, "Let's just take him [Max] to the police and then we can go home... together." Batman then takes off his mask and exposes himself, while Catwoman is still in her costume. A twist happens though, Catwoman rejects him; "Bruce ... I would love to live with you in your castle ... forever, just like in a fairy tale... I just couldn't live with myself." Instead of fulfilling the typical societal goal that tells women they must have a man in their life to be happy, she rejects this concept, and goes through with her goal of seeking revenge. The western genre gender conventions are broken; Batman tells Catwoman about his

feelings and she rejects him with the practicality of the situation and with more action-oriented goals.

While the movie does make strides against patriarchy, fundamental aspects of the film keep patriarchy in place. Catwoman's connection to an animal is highly problematic. As discussed in chapter one of this thesis, when cats and women are together in the superhero genre, several negative connotations come into play. Her highly sexual nature does not become typical sexuality; it becomes tied to a deviant and bestial sexuality that is outside the typical depictions of sexuality, which are shown in popular culture. Her sexuality ties itself to nature (not the masculine civilization), promiscuity, savageness, and treachery. Catwoman's sexuality here is not safe, but dangerous and uncontrollable.

In addition to this is Selina Kyle's motivation for becoming Catwoman. Although, Batman was not behind the creation of her alter ego, another man was. Revenge motivates her, which is a cliché among female characters in action-adventure films. She is fighting against patriarchy, but she did not take up this fight until complete victimization occurred. Max Shreck murdering her was the act that crosses the line and makes her stand up for herself and become empowered. If Max never "murdered" Selina, would she have remained in her dead end pink-collar job while being mistreated by her misogynistic boss? It seems very likely that she would have remained in that abusive situation.

In addition to this, she does not seem to want to fix the system that created her, just get revenge. Earlier I discussed the scene where she attacks the would-be mugger. After she disarms and defeats the man, she turns to the female victim and states, "You make it so easy don't you. Always waiting for some Batman [read man] to save you."

Through this scene, one gets the message that she is not concerned for other women or she would have given the woman some advice, took her under her wing, or just sent her on her way. Instead, she startles the woman and lectures her about how the woman is weak. This is a concern because it makes patriarchy seem like a person-to-person based issue rather than a systemic problem. She is just out for revenge, not to fix the system.

Additionally, Tim Burton denies Catwoman a place within the system or within the patriarchal society. She can only exist as a peripheral member. This is the clear message in the last scene of the movie where she pops up on the rooftop by herself while Bruce Wayne drives away in a car with Alfred and Selina's cat. By taking Selina's cat, he is able to possess a small part of her. Catwoman on the other hand, is alone on the wintry rooftops of Gotham City. A powerful woman is the outcast. This outsider position also falls within the connotations that exist with woman and felines. Woman who have been tied to these animals have been seen as peripheral members of society, i.e. prostitutes and witches. Additionally, Catwoman places herself on the outside and as abnormal by calling herself a "bitch". She does not say anything like, "I am a woman looking for equality" or "I am treating you the way society treated me." She uses the word bitch, which sets her outside of social norms and cast herself as evil. Her position in the final scene and her own label set her outside of the male dominated world.

Batman Returns offers a critique of patriarchy but does not fully break with the tradition of patriarchal power being a major player in the Batman and Catwoman relationship. This just means that not much has changed since the first time these two characters met because the gaze and conventions of the western genre conventions are still apparent. The only major difference now is critiques of the patriarchal system are in

existence and Catwoman is allowed to fear the power of patriarchy. Although this allows critiques to exist in the dialogue, Batman and his patriarchal avenues of power are always written to come out on top. Patriarchy affirms itself as being the righteous and only pathway.

The hegemonic message of patriarchy and male domination have always been present in the depictions of this relationship. From the words “Quiet of Papa Spank!”, it was established that Batman was the one in charge and his authority was tied to patriarchy. The tradition and conventions of patriarchal power persisted throughout the past six decades. The depictions of patriarchal power extended and grew throughout the decades as Bat-technology increased and the western genre conventions influence grew. In the late 1990’s, a crack in the patriarchal depictions occurred and it was questioned. The questioning was, however, laid to rest rather fast and patriarchy reaffirmed.

CHAPTER FOUR

“EROTIC AS POWER”: THE PROGRESSION OF CATWOMAN’S
EMPOWERMENT

Throughout my thesis, I have discussed the sexuality of Catwoman through a variety of lenses. In this chapter, I will be discussing her sexuality as a source of power, the erotic aspect. When using the term erotic, I am referring to it as defined by Audre Lorde, “an internal sense of satisfaction which, once we have experienced it, we know we can aspire [to]” (286). The erotic element of Catwoman has continually increased throughout time, leading to the most erotically empowered depiction of Catwoman in the 2004 film, Catwoman. The increase in the erotic element of this character brings into the dialogue the ability for an increase in the empowerment of all people. Seeking satisfaction and pleasure in all aspects of one’s life leads to empowerment because one does not settle for the status quo. This erotic element, however, must not be read as purely sexual in nature or the empowerment is superficial.

Power and access to pleasure are key elements of Audre Lorde’s groundbreaking article, “The Uses of Erotic: The Erotic as Power” (1984). In it she states, “The erotic is a resource with[in] each of us” (285). The feeling of erotic is tied to finding satisfaction in all aspects of one’s life. Patriarchy suppresses the use of erotic as a source of empowerment in Western society because it teaches people, especially women, to find fulfillment and passion in only one aspect of our lives, our sexualities. Once it is contained there, it is “vilified, abused, and devalued” (society considers women who achieve pleasure and fulfillment in this realm as whores) and “superficial erotic has been encouraged as a sign of female inferiority” (Lorde 285). Pushing the erotic into this

aspect of one's life causes satisfaction to not be pursued in all aspects of one's life, leading to the continuation of the status quo. The passion is placed into a containable outlet, which then is vilified by patriarchy if women chose to find pleasure through this culturally learned source of satisfaction. Another contention that Lorde discusses is that often, Westerners believe pornography to be erotic, when nothing could be further from the truth. Erotic is "an internal sense of satisfaction" and pornography is sensation without the feelings of fulfillment (286).

When the word erotic is used, Western people automatically think of connotations relating to sexuality or sexual acts. Audre Lorde writes that this correlation needs to be broken and that the feeling of erotic must extend into all aspects of our lives. We should be as passionate about sex as we are with every other aspect of who we are and what we do. Once this is done, it will cause people to strive for happiness, excellence, and satisfaction in all aspects of their lives and "to encourage excellence is to go behind the encouraged mediocrity of our society" (Lorde 286). Western society teaches people complacency with the current situation and toleration of mediocrity and the status quo. A sense of erotic in people's lives would make them examine the status quo and strive for more, strive for pleasure and complete satisfaction in all aspects of their societal roles. To find ecstasy in every aspect of life because "the erotic connection function is the open and fearless underlying of my (everyone's) capacity for joy" (Lorde 288).

One major tool of suppressing the use of erotic in everyday life is through capitalism, where capitalism "defines good in terms of profit rather than in terms of human need... it robs our work of its erotic value" (Lorde 286-87). A capitalist society's concerns lie not with the pursuit of creating a society where fulfillment and satisfaction

come from one's career. Instead, capitalist ideology defines people as commodities and assets that need to be used to their highest worth and the main concern is with profit. In western society, people's jobs and careers are more about putting food on the table, buying new products, and paying the bills than finding pleasure. Finding pleasure happens outside of the confines of the work place. Lorde states that this is a travesty and "the lack of concern for the erotic root and satisfaction of our work is felt in our disaffection from so much of what we do", especially because in American society, people spend a large portion of their lives working or striving to hold a better occupation (Lorde 286). What individuals in Western society should do, according to Audre Lorde, is strive to have a career which satisfies them and in which they have the same passion for as they do, currently within the sexual aspect of their lives. Once this is complete, they will be happier people.

The result of encompassing the erotic into all segments of one's life is an egalitarian society. "The erotic knowledge empowers us, become a lens through which we scrutinize all aspects of our existence" (Lorde 288). In such a place, disempowered people denied the sense of satisfaction in all aspects of their lives realize through the erotic that they have the right to become passionate about all aspects of their lives. They refuse to accept the status quo and question it in order to find their blissful state. Lorde states, "In touch with the erotic, I become less willing to accept powerlessness" (288). If all people strived towards the erotic, and refused to settle, then the world would in fact be a more positive and egalitarian place.

One cannot deny that Catwoman is sexual, but is she using the erotic as a source of pleasure or is she a pornographic fantasy of her male creators? The answer is not a

simple cut and dry resolution. As was discussed in the second chapter, Catwoman has changed an astronomical amount in her sixty-plus years of existence. Due to the frequent changes of Catwoman, there is no one answer. Instead, the progression of Catwoman's sexuality and the use of erotic as power has changed and become more evident through the decades.

Catwoman's first appearance in the 1940's issue of Batman #1 depicts her as a crime boss, who is interested in the theft of jewelry. She is not shown in a cat suit, but is known as "the Cat", and will later don a cat suit. Her sexuality is rather apparent for it is what gets her caught and what allows Batman to let her escape from him and Robin. The Cat is disguised as an old woman, but Batman spots her "nice legs" when she runs away. The sexy legs of this young woman are her downfall (Finger 20). Later, Batman and Robin take her onto the Bat-boat, where she finds a way to flee. Robin then attempts to recover the lost captive and "the Batman clumsily 'bumps' into him" (Finger 22). Robin accuses Batman of letting her get away. Batman states, "Robin, my boy, whatever gave you such an idea! Lovely girl! What eyes! ... Maybe I'll bump into her again some time" (Finger 22).

The writer, Bill Finger, only expresses Batman's sexuality. It is through his sexuality that he discovers who the jewel thief is. The Cat is simply the object of his gaze and desire. Her sexuality is not expressed by her, but is instead the aspect of her that gets her noticed, and achieves benefits from male characters. Batman asserts his sexual dominance over her with the phrase, "Quit or Papa spank", after she struggles with him during her initial capture (Finger 21). Catwoman is simply a flat character, who has a sexual body and persona, but does not express this in her own words. The voice of

sexuality is given to Batman again in the last page when he asserts his desire to “bump” into her again. In this depiction of Catwoman, there is no use of erotic as a source of power. Female sexuality in mainstream media was too taboo.

In the 1954 comic book Detective Comics #203, Selina Kyle, Catwoman’s alter ego, owns and operates a pet store, but is not happy doing this. Batman comes and expels a pair of thugs, who have come into her store to harass the disempowered and unsatisfied Selina Kyle. After leaving the store, Batman states, “She misses the old excitement, the daring that made her so dreaded in crime!” After his departure, Selina Kyle does go back to her old ways because in her words, “No one laughed at me when I wore this [the Catwoman outfit]! And I’ll wear it again” (Hamilton 26). Batman and Catwoman have a showdown, they fight, and she loses, but gets away.

A change occurs from the 1940’s Catwoman to the 1950’s version of the character. She gains a small amount of erotic as power and the issue of work as a source of pleasure slightly surfaces. Batman states how Selina Kyle misses being Catwoman because of “the old excitement”. This brings to light her desire to be Catwoman because in the normal everyday world she has no excitement and no passion for what she does. The Catwoman costume and role is a way out of the everyday, it is a way for this woman to find pleasure in her what she does. While the statement is a step forward, it is problematic because Batman, her adversary and an agent of patriarchy (as discussed in the third chapter), says it. Selina Kyle is not the one who voices her desire to be Catwoman. In addition, she does not resume the role of Catwoman due to the pleasure she finds through it. Instead, her reasoning is because of outside sources laughing at her, not due to “an internal sense of satisfaction” (Lorde 286). It is, however, a step towards

erotic as power because of the mention of her displeasure in the status quo and work being a major source of the deterring of pleasure.

The late 1960's was a time of liberalization of the definitions of deviancy in the minds of some segments of American culture. The birth control pill allowed women to have more control over their sexuality and decide when they wanted to have a child or if they wanted to have a child. The loosening of norms surrounding sex correlates with the rise in Catwoman appearances compared to previous decades. The 1960's Catwoman is highly sexual, but is a tool of a hegemonic patriarchal force that shows female sexuality as dangerous. She uses her sexuality to lower men's guards, and then she attacks.

The 1960's featured many appearances of Catwoman. The use of erotic as power is an element of this character during this time, but this power is confined to her sexuality. The 1960's television show, The Batman, starred the sexualized actresses Julie Newmar and Eartha Kitt as Catwoman. In these depictions of Catwoman, an alter ego rarely appears; in the case of Eartha Kitt's depictions, no alter ego exists. As a result, Catwoman never deals with a world outside of fighting Batman and Robin and displeasure with the mundane work world or the status quo is never in the dialogue. Sexuality is, however, rampant. In the television show, Catwoman has a passion for sex and the object of her passion is Batman. For the time, her sexuality is unabashed. Her sexuality seems to be for herself. She even has passion for her career as a criminal. In the episode, "Hot off the Griddle", she withers in delight as she realizes that she has captured the caped crusaders.

Catwoman's sexuality is present, but it is not completely positive. This is due to her sexuality being dangerous and a tool to capture the man, which she desires. With

phrases such as “You’ll be mine, forever, Batman” (“The Cat’s Meow”) and “It appears she [Catwoman] has the ability to cloud men’s minds” (“That Darn Catwoman”), one can see how dangerous female sexuality is in this show. Catwoman did have a passion, but her passion is not to be trusted and is vilified. Eartha Kitt, who is African-American, was sexual, but never desired to possess Batman as Julie Newmar’s incarnation of Catwoman did. The most likely reason for this is that African-American sexuality was dangerous enough, if she also desired to possess the white Batman, it would have gone too far and seen as too dangerous for the times. In addition to the vilification of Catwoman’s sexuality, is the isolation of the erotic to only one aspect of her life, her sexuality.

Catwoman in the comic books, during the late 1960’s, was similar to that of the television series, Batman. Often depicted as controlling, Catwoman is a love hungry woman, who wants to possess Batman. In Detective Comics #197, the writers have her believing that the young Batgirl and Batman will soon become a couple. Catwoman decides to upstage Batgirl and therefore win the affections of Batman. After Batman rejects her advances and discusses his pleasure with the status of their relationship, she states, “He’s satisfied, but I’m not” (Fox 86). She then goes insane because she cannot possess him and locks up Batman, Batgirl, and Robin in a cell. The whole ordeal will be over if Batman will marry her and “make her the happiest girl in the world” (Fox 89). The group of heroes breaks out of their cell and Catwoman is defeated.

The idea of female sexuality as dangerous perpetuates in this depiction. The message is that if American society allows female sexuality to grow and be expressed then it will become monstrous and will want to subvert men. These depictions of Catwoman are a conservative backlash against the growing power women gained in this

decade. In comic books, Catwoman does speak on behalf of her own satisfaction when she is talking about how she needs Batman and he does not need her. In this, though, there is a power dichotomy (which was discussed in the third chapter), where she is powerless and he has all the power because he does not need her. The mentioning of this desire is a dynamic change from the 1950's version of Catwoman. The writers allow the character to have her own voice, to speak out about her own dissatisfaction with the status quo of her relationship with Batman, however, not the status quo of society, but instead with a personal relationship. The writers delegate the erotic only to her sexuality and the erotic is treacherous.

Not much changes in the incarnations of Catwoman during the 1970s. The same themes of her trying to control Batman are present, but her appearances do dwindle, perhaps because the television show, which boosted her popularity, was no longer on the air. While Catwoman and Batman fight, in Batman #266, he tells her "Still trying to whip me into line, Catwoman? You've been attempting that for years- unsuccessfully" (O'Neil 18). Again, reiterating the common theme of female sexuality as dangerous because it is trying to control men and the pushing of the erotic only into the realm of sexuality.

In the late 1970s, Selina Kyle reforms for a brief amount of time and gives up her persona of Catwoman: she gives up the life of excitement and her love of Batman. She settles in for a life of sitting next to the phone, waiting for Bruce Wayne, her new love interest, to call. When discussing her past life with Bruce Wayne, he asks, "Why did you do it?" She responds, "Partly for thrills—and to attract Batman's attention... now I'm in love with life... and freedom! I want to start over... if you'll help me" (Wein "Two for the Money!" 5). The erotic source of power is completely pushed out of the picture. She

is stripped of all the power and pleasure that she once had, and instead turns the somewhat-empowered female into a dotting woman, who waits by the phone, making stereotypically weak feminine statements like, “Till tomorrow then, I’ll be waiting... breathlessly.” (Wein “The Ghost who Haunted Batman” 5). She not only has no power, but also relies on another person, Bruce Wayne, for happiness. This depiction of Catwoman feels like she should be in a television show such as Leave it to Beaver, where gender norms are strict and female desire is a non-issue. Her only concern is over a man and the only way she can get help is through him.

During the early 1980’s, Selina Kyle goes back to the alter ego of Catwoman, and with that comes her sexuality, depicted as dangerously as before. Her tapping of erotic power in the sexual/romantic aspect of her life is depicted as insanity inducing. The exemplar of this phenomenon happens in Batman #355. In this issue, she attempts to kill Bruce Wayne because he denies her love, something, which she has in abundance for him. Bruce’s love interests lie with Vicky Vale, which upsets Catwoman so much that she forces Bruce’s car off the road, almost killing him and Vicky Vale. The erotic power is dangerous, as dangerous as it ever has been. This depiction comes at a time when women in the United States were gaining considerably more power within the work place. This is a time when Catwoman’s alter ego is not depicted, so there is no work place and the aspect of her life that does cause a small amount of pleasure, her sexual side, is depicted as insane. When this female character steps into a more powerful role, they depict her as emotionally incapable, giving the message that women cannot have power because they cannot control power without having their feminine emotions get in the way.

The Catwoman of the late 1980s is when erotic as power is finally brought into the light as a major source of empowerment; this incarnation of Catwoman is not without its major problems, though. Frank Miller in the 1987 Batman #404, created this new version of Catwoman. Selina Kyle, Catwoman's alter ego, is a dominatrix prostitute, whose pimp beats her on a regular basis. Batman drives the narrative in this series, so elaboration of Catwoman's story does not occur. Mindy Newell takes on the task of elaborating the origin of Catwoman in the first volume of the comic book, Catwoman. The volume begins with a beaten and battered Selina Kyle lying half-dead in an ally. After recovering in a hospital, she goes back to her pimp, who gives her a sadomasochistic leather cat costume, which she says is "disgusting" (Newell 10). He insists, and she dons the costume for a customer in order to prove her love and devotion to him. She realizes the possible power of costumes after spotting Batman fleeing from Gotham City police and decides to use her own costume to frighten her pimp, who detests cats. In issues two and three of this series, she beats up her pimp twice and in the second battle, he dies. Whether his death is her fault is unknown.

This new ability to stand up for herself and the ones she loves, her nun sister, Maggie, and her friend, Holly, frightens her. This feeling reveals itself in the dialogue between her and her sister in Catwoman #4. Selina begins by stating, "I've got to get rid of her (Catwoman) ... she's me...that's not just a costume... I put it on. And something happens... Everything crummy that life throws at her, she just throws right back—and it does not faze her" (Newell 9). Catwoman is tapping into her erotic as power when she wears the costume. Before this, she was in a horrible work situation, which flowed into a horrible life in general. This is directly what Audre Lorde states when she discusses the

happenings of an oppressive job: “the lack of concern for the erotic root and satisfaction of our work is felt in our disaffection from so much of what we do (Lorde 286). After Catwoman taps into the erotic, she refuses to settle for the status quo of her life. This is the first time that she fully commands the narrative and the audience gets to feel the range of her emotions. She was powerless, but through the costume, through the erotic, she gains access to empowerment, starting with the end of her abusive relationship with Stan. This is a tiny step forward because we get to see Catwoman passionate and going forward with her life. She changes her work situation and the erotic is the key to this.

The major issues that bring down the level of empowerment is the direction of her erotic as power in her sexual life. In these depictions, her sexuality is not an outlet for her to seek satisfaction. It is instead a way to serve men. She is a prostitute who must do what her customers demand of her, sexually. Although she is the one who is perceived to be in charge since she dominates the sexual situations she is in, in reality, she plays out the fantasies that her clients tell her to perform. She is in fact shown being highly disinterested in her profession while she is in the act of performing it. Her erotic power is not for herself, until she uses it to remove herself from an abusive pimp.

The 1990’s versions of Catwoman begin to depict the idea of erotic as power more than any other incarnation before. The writers have Catwoman begin to question the gender constraints that have led her to an unfulfilling life and she actually takes actions to remove herself from oppressive situations. Erotic as a source of power spreads to other aspects of the character’s life for once. The most progressive examples during the 1990’s are found in the film, Batman Returns, and the television series, Batman: The Animated Series.

In Batman Returns, directed by Tim Burton, Selina Kyle is a mousy secretary, who has little to no joy in her life; she hates her job; and her overbearing patriarchal boss, Max Shreck, mistreats her on a daily basis. After working a long day at a dead end pink-collar job, she opens the door to her dreary apartment and states, “Honey, I’m home. Oh, I forgot, I’m not married.” She says this not with a smile or in a sarcastic way, but in a sad exhausted voice. This tone connotes that her not being married is a disappointment and she is not satisfied with it. She further illustrates displeasure with her life when she converses with her cat. “Miss Kitty, back from more sexual escapades... What... how can anyone be so pathetic [talking to herself, but as the cat]... I’m a working girl, got to pay the rent.” She then realizes that she has to go back to work to bone up for Shreck’s meeting with Bruce Wayne. While there she discovers information her boss does not want anyone to know, so he decides to kill her. Right before her boss kills her, she states, “How can you be so mean to someone so meaningless.” This reveals that the character feels as if she has no worth. This is the situation, which Audre Lorde states patriarchy has created because she considers her worth in terms of the job, which she hates.

Before her death and resurrection, Selina Kyle has no power or joy in her life. She goes by unnoticed. Her apartment is drab and she seems to have no things in her life that bring her pleasure. The only thing she focuses on is her work, which “pays the bills.” This ties in to what Audre Lorde writes about work in a capitalistic economic system. That it causes people to worry about the material aspect of gaining more capital and objects than the human need for finding satisfaction in one’s work because capitalist ideology “defines good in terms of profit rather than in terms of human need... it robs our work of its erotic value” (Lorde 286-87). This need goes by unnoticed. Selina Kyle, in the

first couple of scenes which she appears in, goes by unnoticed; she is a gnat in the meeting of male superiors, there to serve them coffee. Her love life is nothing, her happiness is missing, and in her own words, she is “meaningless” because she has no passion, no joy. This is a life devoid of the erotic.

After the death of the unerotic Selina Kyle and rebirth as a woman in touch with her erotic power, she gains vast amounts of pleasure. She destroys all aspects of her former self, through the destruction of material items that she has gained through her job, and creates a new persona. Catwoman is a vehicle for Selina Kyle to get in touch with her erotic power. Once she steps into the costume, which connotes the new persona, she tells her cat, “I don’t know about you Miss Kitty, but I feel so much yummier.” She expresses joy and a sense of loving herself for the first time in this movie. This is her first step towards embracing other erotic aspects of herself. Her work, for the most part, is ignored throughout the rest of the film, but there is one short work place scene, which shows Selina at work after the tapping of erotic resource. She is shown smiling the whole time and even tells her boss, who asks her to “please, show out, Mr. Wayne”, “with pleasure.” She begins to receive pleasure from working, but for just a brief amount of time.

This movie does offer up a questioning of the patriarchal capitalistic system, which oppresses erotic power, but it does not give much follow through. Catwoman is shown having joy only a couple of times, such as the examples above and when destroying her boss’ department store. Throughout this scene, she jumps rope and smiles when doing so. Beyond that, the tapping of the erotic power rarely occurs in the other aspects of her life where the erotic power could take hold. This is partly because she is not the one driving the narrative. There are three other characters in the plot of the movie,

which also need development. The movie did step up the level of erotic as power, but left it for the most part undeveloped.

The small step forward for the depiction of erotic as power that occurred in Batman Returns was followed by a large step forward for this source of empowerment in Batman: the Animated Series. Debuting shortly after the film, the writers of the television series wrote the character of Catwoman into an empowering role, whose erotic power connects to all aspects of her life. This version of Selina Kyle is never shown as a prostitute. She is an extremely wealthy woman who steals for thrills and is a rampant environmentalist. The theme of her receiving pleasure from everyday life is extensive, and is most prominently displayed when the patriarchal court system takes away her ability to tap into her erotic power, as seen in the episodes “Cat Scratch Fever” and “Catwalk.”

In “Cat Scratch Fever”, the court system charges Selina Kyle for the crimes that she committed while donning the Catwoman costume. For her crimes, she receives five years probation with a stipulation that she is not to wear the Catwoman suit. If she does put on the costume, she will go straight to jail. The subsequent episode, “Catwalk,” begins in a museum with a bored Selina Kyle staring into an exhibit on the Black Panther, musing, “Poor baby. I used to be like you, a child of the night, wild and free.”

While she is saying this, images of Catwoman running across the rooftops of Gotham City flash across the screen. “I was a cat who walked by herself and the city was my hunting ground. I’d prowl through Gotham each evening. Going where I liked and taking whatever I wanted... Until I met him.” This jumps to a scene of Catwoman and Batman fighting, taking the place of her running through Gotham. “I put up my best fight,

but in the end, Kitty got her claws clipped. Had to promise I'd be a good little pet and walk on a leash... even if it killed me." The daydream now brings her to a darkened room, where a judge is sitting high above her. He is without a face, banging his gavel and pointing a finger at Selina Kyle.

Selina leaves her own personal thoughts and interacts with Bruce Wayne. She tells him, "Extinction. I can relate to that," referring to an exhibit on extinct animals and her own experience of not being able to be Catwoman. "You're in a cheery mood" replies Bruce. "Giving up Catwoman hasn't been easy, Bruce. I miss the excitement, the danger." "Even though you'd be risking prison?" "Tell me I'm not in a cage now," Selina replies.

After getting into a huge fight with the host of the party over animal rights, she leaves, saying to Bruce, "I don't fit in here. Sometimes, I feel like I don't fit in anywhere." Following this exchange, Scarface, a crime boss, has his thugs push Selina into a car where he proposes she get back in the game. She cannot resist and begins to plot with Scarface. In the end, Batman foils their plot and asks, "Why did you do it, Selina?" She tells him, "I have to be who I am. I realize now I can't change that. It's just the cat in me."

Several themes are important in this episode. First, Selina Kyle is a wealthy woman who, according to the capitalist system, should be happy with what she has in life because of her substantial amount of money, which she has gained with a minimum amount of effort. However, she is not happy; she does not have pleasure in her life. She is bored with the mundane life and confining gender roles. This directly relates to what Audre Lorde writes, that our economic system measures "good in terms of profit rather

than in terms of human need... it robs our work of its erotic value,” thus leading to unhappy people who are not satisfied (286-87). This incarnation of Selina Kyle is not happy because money cannot satisfy all of her needs. Selina Kyle dismisses the mundane world and goes into a role where she can receive pleasure, the role of Catwoman. Catwoman is her key into the erotic. She was able to “go where she liked” and jump across the rooftops. She tapped into pleasure and was enjoying life.

Patriarchy got in the way, though. The judge and Batman take the pleasure away from her. They force her back into the mundane world of complacency and the status quo, a life of boring cocktail parties. She equates these parties and the loss of her erotic as a “cage.” She cannot live in this world because she has tasted freedom and has tapped into the erotic as source of empowerment. The erotic for her is putting on the Catwoman costume and escaping the gender roles and docility that bind her as Selina Kyle. Nevertheless, as Catwoman she taps into the erotic by running across the rooftops, saving the environment, and fighting for environmental and animal rights. Selina Kyle refuses the “powerlessness” that Audre Lorde says one will resist once they tap into the erotic. In the end, she goes back to her Catwoman days because “I have to be who I am.” Once she has tasted freedom she self-actualizes and realizes what makes her happy and refuses to live a life of mundane mediocrity. This depiction of Catwoman tapping into her erotic is a clear metaphor for what everyone should do in his or her everyday lives, according to Audre Lorde.

Catwoman’s erotic power is present in her sexuality in the way that she has sexual feelings for Batman; however, these feelings are represented in a more progressive way than before. Her sexuality is not as bestial as it is in other incarnations, and while she

uses it as a weapon, it is not as overt and present as in other versions. What is important is that the erotic spreads into other aspects of her life, which makes her fight against the patriarchal capitalist system which attempts to subjugate Selina Kyle and not allow her access to pleasure and passion outside the superficial sexual power aspect of patriarchal erotic power. The message here is not to settle for being complacent, but to strive to gain the most pleasure you can out of life, and not to let other people get in your way.

The theme of seeking satisfaction occurs in the comic books of the 1990s as well. Satisfaction is paramount to the concept of erotic. If one has tapped into this source of power, then they seek satisfaction in all aspects of their lives. In the comic book, Catwoman-Wildcat #1, Selina Kyle states, “There’s nothing I hate more than to be unsatisfied” (Dixon and Smith 15). This gives her power because she is refusing to settle and is striving for more, which is what the erotic is all about. However, the statement is slightly problematic due to the drawing of Selina Kyle that corresponds with the declaration. Her posture, dress, and demeanor connote sexual eroticism. She is only speaking of this satisfaction in sexual terms; nevertheless, her seeking satisfaction is still important. In Batman: The Long Halloween, Batman catches her spying on him and Commissioner Gordon. This reversal of “the gaze” is important to note, but it does not hold the same amount of power that Batman’s gaze does. One reason is that she does nothing with the power she gains and secondly Batman interrupts her “gaze” and tells her “curiosity killed the cat”. To that threat, she replies that, “satisfaction brought her back” (Loeb 49). This discussion of satisfaction has nothing to do with the sexual side of Catwoman; she is simply investigating. She, like the Selina Kyle of Batman: The Animated Series, is a member of the elite class who is not satisfied with the life of

cocktail parties and gender constricting roles. She puts on the Catwoman costume and finds a way to get satisfaction.

The 1990's version of Catwoman made huge strides from previous depictions of Catwoman. This Selina Kyle is seeking satisfaction in more areas of her life and using Catwoman as a tool to escape the oppressive system in place. They reveal the problems with the system, and a few actually seek out solutions, such as finding new passions and becoming satisfied with what they do. The next decade's versions of Catwoman take it to another level. The writers and producers create texts where she controls the narrative more and elaborate more on the passions of her life.

The comic book, Catwoman, (volume three) began in January of 2002. The first issue of the series deals with a Selina Kyle who has not put on the Catwoman costume in six months. Because of this, her mind is going stir crazy and she has to visit the resident Gotham City hero physician and psychiatrist, Dr. Leslie Tompkins. In her attempt to understand what is going on with her life, she explains the beginnings of Catwoman. She states, "That had been one of the reasons for the mask, initially. To help provide [financially, for her and Holly]. That and the excitement... the adventure" (Brubaker 9). Catwoman is a way for Selina Kyle to provide for herself, but in an erotic way, satisfy her need for excitement and for adventure. She did not seek a job in the mundane world, but sought a job, which will fulfill more than just her monetary needs.

Once she decides that she should get herself out of this depression and seek satisfaction, she becomes happy again; "the mask is part of who I am now... It feels good to be a part of it again" (Brubaker 15, 17). She recognizes that the part of herself she was denying was the part of herself which gave her satisfaction. Recognizing and embracing

that side of herself leads to positive feelings. The Catwoman that appears in this volume is by far the happiest of them all. She surrounds herself with friends, loves her job, and helps the poorest community in Gotham City, the East End, by building a community center, and keeping crime in check. She has joy in all aspects of her life because she taps into the erotic and has passion for all aspects of her life.

A Catwoman, which appears in non-Catwoman driven texts, continues this trend. In Gotham Girls #1, a non-canonical comic book that was devoted to the villainesses of Gotham, the narrator describes what Catwoman is doing:

Her heart pounds, her skin tingles, and she can feel the electric adrenaline rush running through her veins. It's funny how much breaking and entering feels like being in love. She was born Selina Kyle, but when she became Catwoman, she was reborn. (Storrie 1)

The sense of erotic that is usually associated and limited to the emotions of love and lust extend into other aspects of Catwoman's life, her everyday actions. This is a clear example of the erotic being used in different aspects, other than sexual, of one's life. The writer describes Selina Kyle before the rebirth as the oppressed version of this character. Reborn as Catwoman is when the erotic is introduced into her life.

Seeking satisfaction (the erotic) as a way of finding out who she is and as a tool for self-discovery is a major theme in the 2003 graphic novel, Hush: Volume Two. In this graphic novel, the Huntress questions Catwoman's past stating, "You've changed costumes through the years. Even changed sides ... if some of those stories are true. Was it worth it?" Catwoman explains, "... yes. As long as you're doing it for yourself... and not for what someone else thinks of you" (Loeb no pg). This directly correlates with Lorde's assessment that satisfaction, if erotic in nature, must be "an internal sense of

satisfaction” (286). It also establishes that she is an agent character whose actions are based off her own freewill. The concepts of Audre Lorde’s continue to become more apparent in the comic books, but the 2004 film, Catwoman, takes the concept to a higher level.

The progression of Catwoman’s use of the erotic as power peaks in the 2004 comic book to movie adaptation, Catwoman. The movie stars Halle Berry, and despite the bad reviews, horrible dialogue, and weak plot, the depiction of empowerment is quite impressive. Erotic as power is the main source of Patience Phillip’s (the alter ego of Catwoman) transformation into Catwoman. The movie begins with the death of Patience Phillips; she is floating face down in a body of water. She narrates the scene telling the audience, “If there had been an obituary, it would have described the unremarkable life of an unremarkable woman.” This statement makes it clear that this is a woman with no self-respect and no joy or source of pleasure in her life. This is similar to the Batman Return’s version of Catwoman. As the film progresses we discover why.

Her work is at the center of her existence and she is more concerned with this job than any other aspect of her life. However, this concern for her work is not because she finds it pleasurable, but because she is a good hard-working person. The capitalistic doctrine of settling down in a well paying job instead of pursuing one’s passion permeates through the character’s actions. She describes her work as “days blended together, thanks to the practical version of my passion.” Throughout her statement above, she navigates through the rat race that is the nine-to-five world. People in the crowd either push her around or just ignore her; she is insignificant to them. She further states, “I was supposed to be an artist by now, instead I was designing ads for beauty cream”. In

taking the practical and more capitalistic option, Patience gives up on happiness and instead settles for a mediocre life, where she does not attempt to better herself or make life more satisfying. She works long hours selling a product that she does not use and deems unnecessary. Her boss pushes her around and abuses her; in return, she apologizes profusely despite the fact that she has done nothing wrong.

After her death, she has life breathed into her by a cat, which awakens senses and confidence that she has never had before. This rebirth allows access to the erotic power. When she shows up to work the next day, her boss screams at her for not making a deadline on time and for being clueless about the project's whereabouts. She does not pay attention and finally when she speaks up for herself she tells him, "I'm sorry for every second I wasted working for an untalented, unethical, egomaniac like you." In doing this, she cuts herself off from the everyday capitalistic world, which has people more concerned about profits than satisfaction. She leaves this world and embraces her true passion of painting. The audience realizes that she has gone after this passion in the last few frames of the movie, where Ophelia Powers (the woman who enlightens Patience about what has happened to her) receives a painting of a figure free falling gracefully with a note attached from Patience. Patience is now using the erotic as a source of power in the type of labor she does and this new labor is painting. She has become empowered in an important way and this affects her everyday life.

Audre Lorde states that, because "the erotic connection function is the open and fearless underlying of my (everyone's) capacity for joy" (288). This statement means that everything in our lives should have the ability to cause us joy if we allow the erotic into that aspect of our lives. There are plenty of examples of this phenomenon occurring

throughout the movie. Before allowing the erotic a place in her life, there is nothing exceptional about this character, other than her painfully mediocre life. After the introduction of erotic, she eats with a passion, makes love with passion, and even plays basketball with a passion. The later one is most applicable to Lorde's assessment of how to empower our lives. She writes that one should find pleasure in everyday tasks, while basketball is not an everyday task, playing-one-on-one hoops is not extremely atypical. During this basketball game, her face shows utter happiness and she yelps with laughter several times. Satisfaction usually known only through sexuality is found through a simple game of basketball.

By allowing the erotic passion into other aspects of her life, she finally finds a love interest. Her friend, Sally, tells her that she always finds something wrong with a man and sabotages the relationship before it even begins. Her love interest, Tom Loan, a detective at the police department, shares some of her newfound passion and is sometimes the object of this passion. Despite her allowing him into her life, in the end, she cannot be with him though because he "live[s] in a world that has no place for me." This is one of the two problematic occurrences in this film. Because she embraces her inner erotic power and seeks satisfaction in all aspects of her life, this places her in the position of an outcast. A powerful female character, who finds happiness, is not allowed a place in the society portrayed in the film.

The major theme of the movie is summed up by the lectures that Ophelia Powers gives Patience when she seeks her out in order to find out what is going on in her life. She explains, "Catwomen are not contained by the rules of society. You will follow your own desires...you will experience a freedom other women will never know." In this

statement, she describes a society where women are being oppressed and not allowed to have freedom, through Catwoman, Patience is allowed to follow her own passions, desires (the erotic) and be free. Ophelia continues by saying “Accept it child, you have spent a lifetime caged. By accepting who you are you can be free and freedom is power”. Audre Lorde’s concept of erotic as power is the key theme of this movie. One must follow your own desires, in doing this you will discover your true self. By doing this one will have the freedom to not be bound by societal rules because one can oppose those rules and opposing those rules leads to a crack in the patriarchal and capitalist system.

Above I stated that one negative aspect of this depiction of Catwoman is her inability to belong to society due to her being a powerful woman. Another disempowering component of this film is Catwoman’s wardrobe change halfway through the movie. The first outfit that Patience wears while embodying Catwoman is an all-leather outfit of pants and a long sleeve shirt. She battles in this for a few scenes. Then halfway through the movie, Catwoman shows up on a roof wearing a leather bra, sliced up pieces of leather where pants were, and two leather straps that cross each other on her chest. This is not empowerment. She had a perfectly fine outfit, which gave a sexual twinge to the character without turning it into pornographic. The producers used this outfit to advertise the movie and placed this more than half-naked Halle Berry on all of their products. Their reasoning for this action was, more likely than not, that they believed this would bring in a larger section of the male population into this action-adventure film featuring a woman. This costume change disempowers the character. The outfit change occurs outside of the narrative, unlike her first costume, which was a gift from friends. Instead, it serves as an image to stir up sensations of lust for the audience

and no real reason for the character. So while the character is allowed access to the erotic, she is also shown in a pornographic manner.

The progression of the influence of the erotic as a source of power has grown as women are allowed more access to power in Western society. Before the 1980s, erotic as power was only tied to the sexual aspects of Catwoman and when it was her sexuality was depicted as dangerous. From the 1980s to today, there has been an increase in a number of areas the Catwoman transformation and tapping into the erotic as power affects. Not only does it affect the sexual aspects of her life, but her everyday life as well. The Catwoman transformation is a powerful metaphor for the change that women and men in this society need to have. We need to stop being driven by profit, which causes unsatisfying lives, and pursue the erotic in everyday events.

CONCLUSION

Sexuality in popular culture has interested me since I was a preteen, who saw the movie Batman Returns. Michele Pfeiffer's Catwoman oozed sexuality and caught my attention. As my academic career began, I started to see how society shapes who we become, including our sexual selves. As a queer male, this area sparked my interest since the majority of queer representations available to me while I was coming of age were from popular culture. After studying many texts with queer characters in it, to investigate how they shaped queer people's ideas about themselves, I began to wonder how depictions in popular culture affect my view of others' sexualities. This led me to the study of Catwoman. This character captivated me at a young age, and after asking around I found that I was not the only one. I wanted to know what about this highly sexual character caught my attention, what the character was telling me about female sexuality, and more important, what it was telling women about their own sexualities.

The concept of tracking America's hegemonic ideology on female sexuality is a daunting task; however, through studying popular culture one can gain great insight. Catwoman is an exemplar of a piece of popular culture that can be looked at to study such a phenomenon. I say this because she has been around for more than sixty-five years, appears in many media, and enjoys immense popularity as discussed in chapter two. In addition, the unchanging core of the character is her sexuality, which is heightened by her connection to felines. Catwoman over the years has been a hegemonic tool used to suppress and demonize female sexuality. However, there is room for audience reception and appropriation of this character as a strong female sexual character.

Catwoman, throughout the years, has been a patriarchal tool used to depict female sexuality as dangerous and deviant. By connecting a sexualized female character to felines, the writers and artist connect her with the numerous cultural beliefs that Western society has about the correlation between felines and females. The sexuality of the hybrid characters codes deviant because of the bestial nature and high promiscuity that go along with the feline/female connections. The cultural correlations do not end there. Highly sexual and powerful feline/female characters exhibit treachery, the inability to choose, and moral instability. Not only are sexual women deviant, but they are also dangerous. Writers of these narratives demonstrate this further when they depict the feline/female hybrids with other characters.

When Catwoman interacts with Batman, the patriarchal messages only increase and female sexuality becomes less about women and more about men. Often, he is the one who expresses desires and she is the object of those desires. He also places her in the position of object by subjecting her to “the gaze” as defined by Laura Mulvey. By having Batman doing this, female sexuality becomes an object to watch, therefore normalizing voyeurism. The more disturbing aspect of this phenomenon is that Catwoman derives pleasure from being a sexual object and becomes upset when Batman does not objectify her, not just normalizing the voyeurism, but now promoting it as something the victim wants. In addition, Catwoman usually desperately longs for Batman, while he is fine with how their relationship is currently going. This, connected to the fact that her empowered sexual self only fully develops due to Batman’s involvement in her life, gives him full power. Her sexuality is fully dependent on him.

The hegemonic messages that condemn female sexuality are plentiful within the narratives that surround Catwoman. However, the patriarchal images that reinforce patriarchal norms can be ignored, and Catwoman can be appropriated by women and men who wish to find positive female characters within these narratives. Suzan Colón's book, Catwoman: The Life and Times of a Feline Fatale, demonstrates this phenomenon. A segment of the book (93-111) is devoted to how Catwoman is an empowering character and how one can be more like her. It begins with this introduction:

Being a Catwoman means being confident, even when you're so freaked out you could fall off a building. It's about being fierce when you need to be. Or soft. And knowing when to be which. It's about not being one of those nice little mice who aspire to blend into the background. (93).

This sets the tone of the next nineteen pages and establishes that to Colón (and to the many other people who find Catwoman to be inspiring and empowering) the patriarchal messages that permeate the texts can be ignored and positive aspects of Catwoman can be highlighted instead.

The appropriation of the feline by women is part of this counter-hegemonic reading of Catwoman. Clea Simon writes about how women love cats because they are "the original divas, cats let their companions know what they want- and what they will not tolerate- and as a result, often get what they want" (16). The feline/female hybrid rather than being a negative aspect is instead for them a way to code individuality and the ability to break gender norms into the female/feline characters. This is apparent in Colón's book, where she has several statements surrounding the concept of breaking gender norms being associated with Catwoman (and the actual women who take on Catwoman's traits, referred to as Catwomen) and how this is a positive occurrence. For example in Colón's book, a scene from Batman Returns appears, where an angry

Catwoman is straddling Batman. Colón writes beneath the image, “Catwoman DON’T PUT UP with being STOOD UP” (99). Another example, shows four panels of Penguin and Catwoman interacting (in the panels he is flirting with her and she rejects his advances with physical violence) with these sentences written underneath, “When dealing with men in business, boundaries can become blurry. While a little flirtation is harmless, it’s best to put a stop to such shenanigans QUICKLY and FIRMLY” (102). Both of these examples depict Catwoman stepping outside of the gender binary as positive. This aspect of the feline connotation leads to her popularity, as discussed in chapter two.

To aid in this positive interpretation of the character is the questioning of patriarchy by Catwoman, which begins to appear in the late 1980’s. Although Catwoman usually negates the questioning of patriarchy, the fact that it occurs is still important. This discussion brings anti-patriarchal messages into the dialogue. In addition to this is the use of Audre Lorde’s concept of erotic as a source of power in depictions of Catwoman. This “internal sense of satisfaction which, once we have experienced it, we know we can aspire [to]” causes people to strive for satisfaction in all aspects of their lives (Lorde 286). In doing this, a more egalitarian world for people who strive for the erotic will occur. The questioning of patriarchy in conjunction with the rise of the erotic as a source of power leads to more counter-hegemonic aspects of the character.

Before I conclude this examination of Catwoman, I wanted to touch upon recent events in the third volume of the comic book Catwoman (2002-present). Two major happenings have occurred. One is the revelation of how Catwoman turned from being a villain to becoming a hero. The second occurrence is the new role for Selina Kyle (Catwoman) as a mother. These two events have affected the storylines and readings of

the third volume, but were not discussed in the main body of my thesis because the storylines are still occurring and therefore cannot be fully analyzed.

In the DC Universe, select members of the Justice League of America, a superhero team, mind-wiped several villains in order to erase the villains' knowledge of some of the superheroes' secret identities. Zatanna, a magician, is the person whose abilities allowed the team to do this. In Catwoman #50, written by William Pfeifer, Zatanna reveals they she altered the mind of Selina Kyle's in order to change her ethos from master criminal to a vigilante who defends the poor section of Gotham. In doing this, all agency is stripped away from the character. She did not choose to be good, but was forced to do so. Catwoman reflects on this, "I've never felt so violated. She was inside my mind ... Changing things. Changing Me... I was only doing that (saving people)... Because someone told me to" (Pfeifer no pg). This is a troubling development. The writers have ignored this issue for over a year, which is not uncommon, but hopefully it will be addressed soon. If this issue goes unresolved then one of the most empowered characters in the DC Universe has been stripped of her free will.

The second major development is the new role of mother for Catwoman. This happens in the first four pages of Catwoman #53, where Selina Kyle gives birth to a baby girl. This development is both positive and negative, although currently the writer, William Pfeifer highlights the negative aspect of the character's motherhood. The positive aspect of Catwoman being a mother is that the character is embracing a very feminine role while continuing to be a strong female character. This gives the message that one can perform femininity while continuing to be effective. In opposition to this is that motherhood, and therefore femininity, is a liability. In Catwoman #56, this occurs

when two of Catwoman's lamer villains, Film Freak and Angle Man, kidnap her daughter. These two villains have been trying to take down Catwoman and the only way they could, after several failed attempts, was to attack her child and liken her femininity to her greatest weakness. Patriarchy is shown as the dominate source of power, yet again.

The audience's background, ideological standpoint, and expectations of the texts can have an enormous impact on how they decode Catwoman. This however, does not minimize the importance or the force of the hegemonic patriarchal messages that lie within the texts. Younger audiences and people not adept at decoding texts will not have the analytical insight to read against the grain. Additionally, the depictions of Catwoman reinforce patriarchy to those who already subscribe to it. Because of these reasons, the negative depiction of Catwoman and, therefore of female sexuality and empowered women, have serious consequences.

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