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Superfriends for Life: An Analysis of the Relationship Between the DC Comics "Trinity" in the "New 52" Justice League

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**Superfriends for Life:
An Analysis of the Relationship Between the DC Comics "Trinity" in
the "New 52" Justice League**

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**SUPERFRIENDS FOR LIFE:
AN ANALYSIS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
THE DC COMICS “TRINITY” IN THE “NEW 52”
JUSTICE LEAGUE**

by

Justin Welty

**Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
of
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to the Department of English Language
and Literature
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Introduction: Super Beginnings

Superheroes have been a fixture in the lives of Americans since 1938. The superhero exists in nearly every medium of popular culture. They adorn everything from food to toys, to clothes, to TV shows, to the silver screen where just having a superhero in your film almost always means box office success. Additionally, since the Frank Miller Batman of the 1980's, the comic book hero has transformed from children's picture books to story-driven literature, where the title heroes finally undergo characterization and have story arcs. In fact, it is the Frank Miller 1980's that heralds the rise of nerd culture. In his book *The Caped Crusade: Batman and the Rise of Nerd Culture*, Glen Weldon points out:

At exactly the same time Batman was becoming an obsessive, a new breed of enthusiast began its rise to prominence. For years they had lurked in the shadowy corners of popular culture, quietly pursuing their niche interests among themselves, keeping their heads down to avoid the inquisitive, judgmental gaze of the wider world. They called themselves fans, experts, *otaku*. Everyone else, of course, called them nerds. (5)

With newfound confidence, backed by great storytelling, the nerd community brings comic books from the fringe directly into the spotlight. Perhaps even more indicative of the rise of comic book culture is the overwhelming success of Tim Burton's highly stylistic *Batman* in 1989, a film that helps superheroes become fashionable to the masses once again.

The era of great storytelling is not the only reason for the popularity of the superhero; though. There are also a myriad of qualities that make them resonate on some

level with nearly every person who has encountered a costumed hero in one, or more, of their many iterations. It is possible some people desire the ability to leap a tall building in a single bound or be more powerful than a locomotive. It may also be that some people long for a world where conflict is almost always easily defined, and they enjoy the escape the comic book provides from everyday reality. Or, the hero may resonate for a personal reason not known to anyone else but the reader. It is Grant Morrison, in his critique *Supergods: Our World in the Age of the Superhero*, who sums up our obsession best, writing:

We live in the stories we tell ourselves. In a secular, scientific rational culture lacking in any convincing spiritual leadership, superhero stories speak loudly and boldly to our greatest fears, deepest longings, and highest aspirations. They're not afraid to be hopeful, not embarrassed to be optimistic, and utterly fearless in the dark ... at their best, they help us to confront and resolve even the deepest existential crises. (xvii)

The help offered by the superheroes to deal with these “existential crises” speaks directly to our souls as human beings; this guidance is even more important to children, the age when most people get their first comic books, who are often dealing with figuring out their place in the world. Perhaps even more importantly, children, who are a large portion of comic book consumers, are also introduced to the axiom of “truth, justice, and the American way,” very early on. With that in mind, one can see that comic book heroes not only can help kids during their developmental phase but also introduce them to heroic morals.

The aforementioned heroic morals are the concrete foundation upon which all superhero stories exist. The superhero, ultimately, is the representation of everything good to which we aspire. Or, perhaps more accurately, the superhero often represents the ideal moral compass, especially in the early years of the medium, in a world that increasingly inhabits the gray areas. Roger B. Rollin takes this aspect of morality a step further, in "Beowulf to Batman: The Epic Hero and Pop Culture," claiming, "the law frequently appears to be too complex or too cumbersome to deal with crises, so the hero, whether he is a real or titular king, becomes a law unto himself" (437). Quite simply, the superhero sees a problem, and then s/he fixes it. There is no red tape, bureaucracy, or lack of physical strength to interfere with "taking care" of a problem. To be a superhero also effectively means to end any victimization: the school bully no longer harms people; the murderer always gets caught; the terrorist's plan fails every time. The comic book superhero grants every reader the ability to fantasize about this power, which is yet another reason for the scope of their popularity.

Every superhero has a fan base, yet some are far more popular than others. There is, of course, no magic formula to create a superhero that resonates with a majority of people; even so, some heroes transcend the comic book page so well that they become a beloved part of the fans' lives. Richard Reynolds, in *Super Heroes: A Modern Mythology*, speaks as to who is at the top of the mountain, noting:

Batman, Superman, Spider-Man, Wonder Woman; among the most widely-known fictional characters ever conceived. Created as comic-book heroes, they remain more widely known through television, the movies and (in the case of Batman and Superman) through a vigorous presence in

American and European popular culture that ensures their recognition by millions who have never read a Batman comic or seen a Superman film. Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman have remained continuously in print and involved in an unbroken sequence of new adventures for over [75] years. (7)

The longevity of Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman make them unique figures in literary history. While there are older characters, Sherlock Holmes, Robin Hood, King Arthur, who are still relevant to today's popular culture, no other characters have come close to achieving seventy-five consecutive years of new adventures; which, really is, what makes them unique amongst both literary characters and their comic book brethren¹.

Upon mention of the former literary heroes, it is important to note why some characters are considered superheroes and others are not. When it comes to judging who qualifies as a superhero, it is first necessary to contemplate what a superhero is. Robin S. Rosenberg and Peter Coogan define a superhero in *What is a Superhero*, claiming:

The word itself gives us a couple of clues. The super part indicates powers or abilities that are significantly greater than those of the average person (though they need not be 'beyond those of mortal men' or women). The hero part indicates that the gifted individual acts heroically – not just on a handful of occasions, but repeatedly. (1)

¹ Marvel Comics did introduce Namor and Captain America around the same time as Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman, but unlike their DC counterparts, the Marvel heroes have not remained in continuous print.

It is easy to make a case for Superman and Wonder Woman, especially when their names seem to qualify them for superherodom even before one learns anything about them. Each of those two characters have fantastic abilities that measure far beyond the average person, from flight to super strength they are hyper-capable. There is a far more complicated case to make for Batman's inclusion as a superhero. However, upon reading a few comics from Batman's vast catalog, it is immediately clear Batman is in a class above the likes of Zorro. While Zorro is grounded in the local villages he tirelessly protects, Batman travels the stars, fights beings that are incomprehensible to the "normal" man, and even wills his broken back to heal after his initial confrontation with the supervillain Bane. Perhaps even more telling about Batman's inclusion in the superhero stratosphere, though, is his place alongside his close friends Superman and Wonder Woman, both of whom are near "gods" when measuring their power against others. Batman belongs with them, and time and again proves it as the three work hand in hand against any adversity.

The history of these three "Supergods," as Morrison calls them, is ripe for exploration. As the founding members of a relatively new genre of literature; where visuals, storytelling, and character continuity combine to create a cultural phenomenon like nothing ever seen before, Batman, Superman, and Wonder Woman deserve high levels of academic interest. Also, the parallel to "gods" is an apt comparison, as Batman, Superman, and Wonder Woman are commonly known as "The Trinity" by not only their publisher DC Comics, but also by the fans who digest comic books on a monthly basis. The reference to the characters as "The Trinity" is so engrained that, as part of the DC Comics Rebirth line, they launched a title called *Trinity* in the latter half of 2016. The

relationship between the three members of “The Trinity” of DC Comics can be just as fascinating a subject to explore as the Biblical Trinity.

"The Trinity" is the foundation of DC Comics, and they set the tone for the company on the whole, as they are featured in, or directly influence, well over fifteen monthly titles as of the 2016 new series launches. In addition, they are also three of the founding members of The Justice League of America (JLA), and as the team evolves, "The Trinity" becomes the unspoken head of the JLA, often having the deciding vote in JLA matters. Their position in the JLA, and in DC Comics overall, makes them stand out amongst a pantheon of extraordinary characters. Therefore, the exploration of the relationship amongst "The Trinity" is a critical aspect when researching the actual impact of their position as the cornerstone of comic book history. To set this premise up correctly it is necessary to look at the history of each character, and also the DC Comics continuity referred to as the "New 52." Looking at these areas establishes a baseline understanding of Batman, Superman, and Wonder Woman. That understanding then helps analyze the actual interpersonal relationships of “The Trinity” in DC Comics’ “New 52” universe, and ultimately show how “The Trinity” evolves from individuals into the core of the Justice League.

Superman jumps onto the scene in *Action Comics* #1 in 1938. He is the genesis; the first super powered hero ever to grace the pages of comic books. Before Superman, nearly every other character is some form of a man with marvelous talents. Many of these characters are excellent fighters, (Zorro or the Green Hornet and Kato); others are men of high intelligence such as adventurer Doc Savage or The Shadow, who is a fantastic detective and a substantial influence on Batman. Once Superman arrives; however, he

changes the genre permanently. The arrival of Superman is the appearance of the flashy costumes and incredible superpowers that are sometimes quite literally out of this world. Les Daniels notes, in, *Superman: The Complete History, The Life and Times of the Man of Steel*, "the innumerable imitators who followed in his wake have acknowledged his primacy by taking on the title of super hero, but Superman did more than start the trend that came to define the American comic. His influence spread throughout all known media as he became a star" (11). It is not just the fact that he is the first that leads to his popularity, though. He is also a compelling character with an incredible and unprecedented backstory. Not to mention, Superman has amazing powers that make him the envy of every child to pick up a copy of *Action Comics*.

Superman is not only alien to the comic book industry, but his character is quite literally an alien from the planet Krypton. When his father sees that their home planet is about to disintegrate, he builds a spaceship to send his only son, Kal-El, to the peaceful planet Earth, where his unique physiology makes him nearly immune to the acts of men. Fortunately for the entire world, Kal-El lands in a remote cornfield near Smallville, Kansas, where Martha and Jonathan Kent find him and raise him as their own, they even give him the earthly name Clark Kent. The fact that he lands in the Midwest also makes sure that the most powerful being to ever walk the Earth has wholesome Midwestern values. From his roots, Superman develops a healthy respect for life, and a sensible reluctance to showboat his otherworldly abilities.

It did not take long for Clark to want something more out of his life, and he quickly goes to the big city of Metropolis. In Metropolis he dons his familiar costume and becomes the infallible force for good the reading public comes to know over the next

seventy-five years. Along the way, he meets his constant companions: Lois Lane, Jimmy Olsen, and Perry White, among others. He also integrates seamlessly as a reporter who is far too clumsy and bumbling to possibly be Superman, despite the fact that he and Superman are never in the same place at once. He also eventually falls in love and marries Lois Lane, completing the transformation from an alien with incredible powers to an Earthling who just so happens to be from out of this world. The humanized characterization comes to define Superman throughout his publication history. He wholeheartedly embraces his life amongst humans; so much so that, in fact, a common theme surrounding his identity is that Superman is the mask, and Clark Kent is the real persona. Perhaps even more indicative of Superman's human nature is how he reacts when a Kryptonian threatens Earth; not only does he always side with humanity, but in the case of General Zod's invasion, Superman also eventually sentences him to stasis within the Phantom Zone, which is a fate worse than death.

Over the years, Superman does almost everything imaginable. He marries; finds a remnant of his home planet in the bottle city of Kandor; and even dies, only to resurrect shortly after, much like the Christ figure in the Biblical Trinity. Superman also travels to the edges of time and even meets multiple versions of himself. Interestingly enough, most times those versions are forces for good, but there are instances when he meets versions of himself who are pure evil. There are even clones of Superman, some are perfect copies, like Superboy Connor Kent, and some are imperfect backward clones like Bizarro.

Superman also has an incredibly diverse pantheon of enemies. Often these enemies take the form of something that Superman is not. His most personal enemy

would be the genius billionaire Lex Luthor. Luthor hates Superman on the principle that he is so immensely powerful it is impossible for any human ever to surpass or defeat him. A fact that galls Luthor due to the notion that Superman did not earn his place of privilege, but was instead born with his abilities. Another notable enemy is the demi-god Darkseid, who fuels the world of Apokolips on the hate for all life and individuality. While he is every bit Superman's physical superior, the Kryptonian always prevails through the sheer desire to protect the innocent. His greatest challenge comes in the form of the rage monster Doomsday who inherently hates all things Kryptonian. Initially, Doomsday is too much for Superman, and they end up bludgeoning each other to death. Superman eventually rises from the dead and since then is always able to defeat Doomsday. Then there is General Zod, an enemy of Superman's father who finds himself frozen in time for crimes committed on Krypton. On Earth, Zod is the physical equal to Superman and wants to erase or enslave the human race so he can either restart Krypton through genetics or rule the weaker species as emperor, depending on the version of Zod. His most dangerous enemy may be the ambassador of pure intellect, Brainiac. He exists solely to catalog the different species around the universe, and Earth happens to be missing from his collection. Superman is also at odds with Brainiac because he is responsible for stealing, shrinking, and bottling the Kryptonian city of Kandor. Since Superman contains otherworldly power, he is often at odds with these otherworldly villains, which helps to distinguish him from many of his DC peers.

Despite his incredibly powerful gallery of villains, Superman is almost always able to overcome any adversary, and that is due to the immense power that he, himself, holds. His standard superpowers are those of super strength, flight, heat vision, super

breath, and near invulnerability. However, the potency of these powers changes many times over the years. At the beginning of his existence, he is only able to leap great distances, and certain types of munitions, like tank or mortar shells, can harm him. Those levels of power do not last long, though. Eventually, his base skills grow in strength; and he starts gaining new powers that tend to border on the fantastical, even for the Man of Steel. At different points he is able to produce a miniature version of himself from his palm; he can split in two, creating a red and blue version of himself; and he is even able to reverse time during his first cinematic outing. However, in recent years his powers seem to return to a more pedestrian level; for a superman that is. Although, he can still fly into space, is nearly invulnerable, can shoot intense beams of heat from his eyes, and perform feats of unparalleled strength.

All of the aforementioned characteristics serve to make Superman an institutional fixture of our culture. He resonates on some level with nearly every American at some point during their lives. Whether it be through a comic book, a movie, or just his set of values, he is a part of us. Morrison has a theory as to why he is so incredibly popular:

Superman was Christ, an unkillable champion sent down by his heavenly father (Jor-El) to redeem us by example and teach us how to solve our problems without killing one another. In his shameless Technicolor dream suit, he was a pop star, too, a machine-age messiah, a sci-fi redeemer. He seemed designed to press as many buttons as you had. (16)

Despite his popularity, in just a short year after his creation, there proves to be room on the top of the pop culture podium for at least one more powerhouse, and this time it comes in the form of a rich orphan with a faithful butler.

Batman bursts onto the scene in 1939, hot on the heels of Superman's success, and fulfilling the need for a superhero who is wholly human and therefore "realistic," as a source of imitation. Batman draws inspiration from a multitude of sources, he is masked like Zorro, has the tendency to strike as much fear as the Shadow, and is as great a detective as Sherlock Holmes. He is also guilty of drawing a heap of inspiration from Superman, although the inspiration is much more discreet than what he draws directly from the figures mentioned earlier. The exact differences are uncanny:

Batman was born of the deliberate reversal of everything in the Superman dynamic: Superman was an alien with incredible powers; Batman was a human being with no super-human abilities. Superman's costume was brightly colored; Batman's was grayscale and somber with mocking flashes of yellow. In his secret Clark Kent identity, Superman was a hardworking farmer's son who grew up in small-town Kansas, while Batman's Bruce Wayne enjoyed life as a wealthy playboy. (Morrison 25)

These differences become institutional, and make up the basis of a perfect, although contentious at times, friendship. Batman and Superman exist as opposites, and as such, they come to define what it means to be a superhero.

Batman also has an incredibly diverse and rich history, with his own unique story that eventually eclipses the popularity of Superman. Batman is the billionaire Bruce Wayne, who loses his parents to street violence when he is just a young boy. This incident sets the tone for every decision Wayne makes from that point forward. He lives a lonely life as a kid until he decides to leave home to train to be the ultimate crime-fighting machine. Upon his return home, he finally takes up the mantle of the bat and

dedicates his life to the sole purpose of ridding Gotham of crime once and for all. The single-minded goal of protecting innocent lives so wholeheartedly consumes him that at times it becomes evident Batman is the real identity, and Bruce Wayne is the mask. His identity issues become apparent within the panels of the Justice League saga, where Wayne makes infrequent and minor appearances while the Batman is on a majority of the pages.

Batman also has a similar history to Superman's, as he too is there for every incredible event to strike the DC universe. Batman travels to the farthest reaches of space; he at one point is a vampire, and he, too, dies and comes back to life. He also has one of the greatest rogues galleries of villains in comic book history. His main villain, the Joker, is almost as famous as Batman himself, as Morrison says, "if Batman was cool, the Joker was cooler. The pair shared the perfect symmetry of Jesus and the Devil, Holmes and Moriarty, Tom and Jerry" (24). The rest of his villains are also a hodgepodge of crazy; there is the dual personality sociopath Two-Face, the criminal overlord Penguin, and the Scarecrow who is the manifestation of every fear imaginable. Again, through his villains one can see the difference between Batman and Superman; Superman needs villains who are otherworldly, and Batman fights terrifying nightmare versions of "real" people.

Perhaps the greatest difference between the two are their abilities. Superman gains powers just by inhabiting a different world. His strength comes from the sun, and as long as it keeps shining, he will remain the ultimate bastion of power. Batman, on the other hand, is entirely self-made. Even though he has billions of dollars to his name, he is still a more-than-formidable-fighter in the rare instances he is without his toys. Batman is also

the perfect human specimen, but his power comes directly from his intelligence and preparation more so than his body. He uses self-determination and years of training to make himself completely adaptable to any situation, and able to overcome any obstacle. He even famously creates the subconscious Batman of Zur-En-Arrh, just in case he is ever driven insane and forgets his real identity. He shows the world that anything is possible if one tries hard enough. Of course, he also has a lot of help. He has the coolest toys on the planet, from the Batarang to the infinitely supplied utility belt, to, the Batmobile, the envy of every man. He has it all.

All of the characteristics above combine to make him the most popular superhero of all time. There is not a medium of entertainment in this world that he is not a part of; from radio to stage plays to the biggest movies, he has a presence. In fact, according to the Comic Vine website, Batman has 12,276 appearances, which, as of 2016, is the most of any comic character to date. Just like Superman, his enduring popularity may not be as completely apparent as the surface level would indicate. However, Morrison has his theory why Batman remains so popular; noting:

Batman was the ultimate capitalist hero, which may help explain his current popularity ... Batman was a wish fulfillment figure as both filthy rich Bruce Wayne and his swashbuckling alter ego ... In a world where wealth and celebrity are the measures of accomplishment, it's no surprise that the most popular superhero characters today – Batman and Iron Man – are both handsome tycoons. (26)

Batman just fits with America; anyone can be Batman through hard work and perseverance. It's even possible to amass the wealth of Bruce Wayne if one is willing to

work as hard as the Wayne family. No one can be an alien, but Batman is the obtainable dream version of all of us.

After the creation of Batman, it takes two more years for the next revolutionary superhero to come along. This hero finally takes the form of a woman, a "Wonder Woman" in fact. Diana Prince sees her first story hit the newsstands in 1941. She is the creation of psychologist William Moulton Marston. His beliefs are perhaps a greater influence on her than the creators of Superman and Batman are on their heroes. Marston is a feminist, into bondage, and also creates an early version of the lie detector test (Lepore). All of these elements make it into the Wonder Woman comics almost immediately. In *Wonder Woman: The Life and Times of the Amazon Princess: The Complete History*, Les Daniels and Chip Kidd note:

Wonder Woman has always been obliged to play a dual role. In addition to keeping a large audience entertained with her exploits, she has also been expected to serve as a representative and an example for her entire gender, and the tension between these two responsibilities has given Wonder Woman a unique position in America's popular culture. (11)

The dual identity serves Wonder Woman well in the beginning. She is immensely popular due to her mix of sexiness and feminism; Wonder Woman never needs a man to rescue her, and her barely-there outfit also helps her look good while saving the world.

Wonder Woman is an Amazon princess, the daughter of the Queen Hippolyta. She is born of clay and given life by the Greek gods themselves. She grows up on Themyscira; an island where no man is allowed to set foot. Aphrodite grants the Amazonians eternal life, as long as they remain on the island, and through the centuries

they become some of the greatest warriors history will ever see. Of course, with her creation taking place in the 1940's, it takes a man to introduce Wonder Woman to the world outside of her obscure island.

When Air Force pilot Steve Trevor crash lands on Themyscira, it is Wonder Woman who wins a physical contest to take Trevor back to the U.S.A. Once there; Wonder Woman takes up the same fight for justice that Superman and Batman champion, albeit with a feminine twist. Her best friends are women, and she integrates into society by going to the all-female Holliday College. Her greatest weakness is when a man wraps her in chains, which makes her incredible strength nearly impotent. Her vulnerability to being chained is a direct reference to the feminist and bondage undertones of her comic book series under the purview of Marston.

Wonder Woman, too, has a fantastical list of enemies who range from the mere mortal Dr. Psycho, who has a deep hatred of Wonder Woman and the ability of mind control to back up that hatred. As well as nearly the entire pantheon of Greek Gods who see her as both rival and outsider. She is also on call for every major event that happens in the DC universe; events often called a "Crisis" by the DC Comics creators. Her involvement in all of these levels of heroism takes her from the streets of American cities to Mount Olympus to the edges of the universe. She is notably the first female member of the first comic book super-team, the Justice Society of America, although the sexism of the time locks her into the position of secretary. Wonder Woman is also a founding member of the Justice League of America, the premier superhero team of all time, a testament to her power and popularity.

The Amazon's abilities also vary over the years. One constant is her golden and unbreakable lasso which compels anyone caught in its loops, to tell the truth. Another fixture of her image is her invulnerable bracelets; which can do everything from stopping bullets to deflecting Darkseid's Omega Beams. She is immortal due to the mythical enchantment of Themyscira, which gives her centuries of combat experience. At the start she has the strength of ten men, and needs her trademark invisible jet to fly; later, however, she has a physicality that rivals Superman and can fly through the air with the grace of a hawk. Wonder Woman carries the honor of being the greatest warrior in all of comics. Trained from birth to be an Amazonian warrior, Wonder Woman's combat skills are even better than Batman's.

Even though her feminist undertones make her a popular figure, she is also popular as both a sex symbol and a role model. She is able to bridge the gap between the two dynamics expertly. She wears some of the skimpiest, sexiest, and most fashionable outfits in comic book history. At the same time, she can dominate any man in a physical contest, proving once and for all that women are the superior gender and can aspire to be anything they choose. Morrison addresses this, writing "Wonder Woman was traditionally sexy – there were pinup shots – but in most panels, she yomped and stomped like some martial arts majorette, outracing automobiles for fun" (41). Wonder Woman completes "The Trinity." She has the same sex appeal as the all-American Superman and the same dangerous physicality as Batman. She is tactically equal to the World's Greatest Detective and physically able to fight Superman to a standstill. With her inclusion the triumvirate is complete, the most powerful and popular superheroes of all time come into

existence a few years apart, and forever stand together as the foundation of the DC Comics universe.

A few things about superheroes in the DC Comics Universe, and most comic companies as a whole need addressing before the actual analysis of the “New 52” Justice League begins. One common issue hanging around the genre is the problem of sexism in comic books. Most of the criticism focuses on how writers and artists treat women characters in the panels of the comics. The first and most visible problem is the superhero costumes women wear. Wonder Woman is one of the best examples, as she is usually fighting in thigh high boots, star-spangled panties, and a breast boosting bustier. Another prime example is Power Girl. She is a version of Superman’s cousin, Kara Zor-L, who goes by Power Girl rather than Supergirl. Her costume covers her entire torso, except it features a cutout window, so her cleavage is on display at all times. There are a few exceptions, though, many of the female Green Lanterns are fully clothed, both Batwoman and Batgirl also enjoy a full costume. However, all of the superheroes mentioned above have clothes that are made to be so skin tight that none of their exaggerated curves go unimagined. The costumes aren’t the only issues the female characters have to overcome in the genre.

Another obstacle for the female characters is how they often appear in a manner that only serves to further the plot line of the main character, which is usually a male superhero. Perhaps the most famous example is the 1994 comic, Green Lantern #54, where Kyle Rayner’s girlfriend is murdered and stuffed in their refrigerator so Rayner can eventually confront her killer and thereby find a power battery for his ring. Another troubling issue is the lack of compelling female characters taking prominent places in

their respective comic book universes. One example is Wonder Woman being the sole female character on the Justice League until Atom and Element Woman join the team many issues into the comics run. Another such issue would be the lack of female creators involved in the industry. The problems mentioned above are not the only issues but are some of the more prominent ones that plague the comic book industry as a whole.

While recognizing the above concerns, this analysis aims to look at the role of “The Trinity” in the “New 52” universe. The challenges the comic book genre faces indeed appear in the pages of this version of the Justice League, but they will not influence how this analysis looks at the team. Instead, the focus here is the interpersonal relationships of “The Trinity,” and the Justice League as a whole. Fortunately for the advancement of the comic book genre, Wonder Woman will take a prominent role in the pages of this Justice League story, and help show why “The Trinity” is so immensely popular within the DC Comics continuity.

“The Trinity” keeps their spot atop the mountain when, in September of 2011, under the creative vision of Geoff Johns and Jim Lee, DC Comics reboots the continuity of their entire line of comics, now calling this version the “New 52.” They update both costumes and origins and start over at issue #1. This universe also has a multitude of changes to the aforementioned characters. Now, Superman is younger and still learning how to control his powers. He is no longer married to Lois Lane, and he eventually has his secret identity of Clark Kent outed; all of this at the same time his powers start to wane. Superman's exposed identity and reduced strength put him in a position where he is both vulnerable and unloved, a first for him. Additionally, Wonder Woman, no longer made of clay, is now a real Greek God in her own right. She is still the daughter of

Hippolyta but is now also the offspring of Zeus. She becomes the Greek God of War after she mercifully kills Ares during a raid on Hades. She also forgoes the relationship with Steve Trevor for one with Superman, thereby forming a literal power couple in the DC universe. Batman, on the other hand, is the sole character to keep the majority of his continuity. He still trains all the Robins, has the longstanding history with the Joker and even returns from the dead just like his pre- "New 52" self. The only drastic changes to Batman is a regression in age: all characters in the "New 52" are around the age of twenty-seven, and writer Scott Snyder also adds the extremely dangerous Court of Owls to Batman's already impressive cast of villains.

The Justice League also sees changes. For one, the team comes together to face the incursion of Darkseid's forces, instead of the 1960's origin where they fight the mind controlling Starro. The roster is also updated; the original seven are now Flash, Aquaman, Cyborg, Green Lantern, and of course, Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman. The new version of the League replaces the Martian Manhunter with the more contemporary Cyborg. The "New 52" version of the League tests each other's abilities at the beginning, and only then do they grow into a more recognizable version of a team. Eventually, they face off against an enemy linked to the very creation of the universe.

The role of "The Trinity" in this continuity is once again to serve as the bedrock of the DC Universe. However, in this era, "The Trinity" is in a position they have not been for decades, that of a rookie unit still feeling each other out, while at the same time they strive to understand what type of heroes they are becoming. Their place as the cornerstone of this modern comic book movement makes the relationship amongst "The Trinity" ripe for research. Furthermore, looking at the interpersonal relationships amongst

the three makes for a fascinating character analysis of comic book legends who find themselves adapting to each other, and to modern standards of entertainment. With in-depth analysis, it becomes evident that the three are not only codependent upon each other, but that Batman's role is to mediate the distinct personalities in "The Trinity" as the unspoken leader. In fact, Batman acts as the fulcrum in the balancing act between Wonder Woman's brash warrior spirit and Superman's incessant need to be the ultimate force for good.

It is necessary to break the research up into distinct chapters in the "New 52" run of comic books. The first chapter encompasses the origin story of the Justice League. Here is where Batman, Superman, and Wonder Woman first meet, and they deal with an enemy who is pure evil and bent on the destruction of life on Earth. During this iteration, it is interesting to observe how the three interact before they come to know each other, before they become friends, and, most importantly, before they trust each other. The second chapter focuses on how they react to threats on the smaller scale, and how they deal with the repercussions of their actions. This section also sees "The Trinity" help out another member of the team, a task that requires both diplomacy and strength. "The Trinity" also starts to show signs of growth as the elite members of the Justice League, and begin to develop their intimate relationship with each other.

The third and fourth chapters focus on how absence affects the members of the Justice League, and how "The Trinity" deals with being handicapped. During this section, the team goes up against other super-powered teams, fights doppelgangers from another, evil dimension, and reacts to a virus that makes the team come to grips with functioning without some members. This section sees "The Trinity" carry the load of the Justice

League, and they each deal with times when one or both other members of "The Trinity" are out of commission. The fifth chapter focuses on the final evolution of the characters. In this storyline, "The Trinity" finds themselves becoming literal gods; all while they confront a threat as powerful as the fabric of reality. This version of "The Trinity" may be the most fascinating iteration yet, as Batman becomes the God of Knowledge, Superman the God of Strength, and Wonder Woman remains the God of War. During their godhood, their relationship faces the ultimate test as they see newfound power start to infect their personalities. Not always is it a positive experience.

To properly evaluate the relationship amongst "The Trinity," it is necessary to look at the team from a myriad of perspectives. First, the histories of each character are in play as the baseline for who the character is at their very core. Second, one must look at how superheroes function as a modern mythology, and how "The Trinity" fits that mold. Third, "The Trinity" is evaluated by looking at how they affect team dynamics in both times of high stress and during the periods of brief respite. Finally, the interpersonal relationships amongst the team is a critical way to evaluate how they change and evolve as members of "The Trinity" during the different events they face.

By the end of this evaluation, "The Trinity" has come full circle as both distinct heroes and a team. Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman, individuals who come together to form a group out of necessity, step away from the team to return to their lives due to personal needs. The narrative also sees the Justice League go from a loosely grouped gathering of like-minded heroes to a seasoned group of friends. Finally, through this analysis, it becomes clear why "The Trinity" is not only central to the success of the

Justice League, but also to the success of DC Comics and the greater fan culture as a whole.

Chapter 1: The Origin Story

Every great superhero tale begins with an origin story, some event that impacts the hero's life, and catapults that person into action. The Justice League is no different, and in the winter of 2011, they updated their origin as part of the "New 52" relaunch. With the relaunch, the Justice League is again central to the DC Comics universe, and with that goal in mind, Geoff Johns, who is DC Comics Chief Creative Officer, takes the helm as the writer. In addition, the penciler on the series is Jim Lee, who serves as the Co-Publisher at DC Comics ("About DC Entertainment"). With these two heavyweights on the series, the Justice League shows how important they are to the DC Comics Universe.

The updated version of the Justice League starts five years behind when the other DC Comic's titles take place, approximately 2006 and 2011 respectively. The superheroes in this book are not the polished and experienced heroes they eventually become, instead, they are merely rumors that people talk about as they would urban legends. In fact, the first words of this comic are "there was a time when the world didn't call them its greatest superheroes. There was a time when the world didn't know what a superhero was" (Johns, *Justice League: Origin* 1). In this iteration, the Green Lantern is more of a space cop who is wanted by the U.S. Air Force. Cyborg has yet to gain powers and is still a high school football player named Victor Stone. Aquaman is nothing but a rumor who lives under the sea, and Flash's local police department wants him for questioning. As far as "The Trinity" goes, Wonder Woman has just arrived in America, serving as a diplomat for her island home of Themyscira. Superman is an alien whose intentions do not seem clear at this point. Finally, Batman is nothing but a ghost story to

the other heroes, and those who do know he exists, the Gotham City Police Department (GCPD), hunt him as a vigilante. *Justice League: Origin* is the story of how these individual superheroes become the greatest superhero team of all time.

The graphic novel tellingly opens with the Batman, who is flying across the rooftops in pursuit of a mysterious hooded figure. Close behind Batman is the GCPD attempting to apprehend both people. This pattern continues until the timely arrival of Green Lantern, who upon first meeting Batman, exclaims, “YOU’RE REAL?” (Johns, *Justice League: Origin* 8). While his surprise at first seems like an honest reaction to meeting an urban legend, it does tell a little bit about Batman’s character. Michael Spivey and Steven Knowlton write in, “Anti-heroism in the continuum of good and evil,” about Batman as the anti-hero noting, “Batman’s reputation as an anti-hero comes almost solely from his preference for striking from the shadows, using fear as a weapon against his enemies, and willingness to work slightly outside the law in order to catch villains” (55). So, the fact Green Lantern, and presumably most other people, have no idea Batman exists plays into his shadowy persona. Batman would not be able to fight crime effectively if his visage was splashed all over the media. His existence as myth is something that will appear throughout the series.

The scene continues when the GCPD’s helicopters accost Batman and Green Lantern; Green Lantern uses his power ring to create willed constructs of oversized S.W.A.T. team shields to protect them while they continue speaking. Green Lantern gives another clue as to Batman’s character when the two exchange dialogue, saying:

Green Lantern: I know the drill. They don’t like us.

Batman: The world’s afraid of us.

Green Lantern: You say that like it's a good thing.

Batman: It's necessary. (Johns, *Justice League: Origin* 9-10)

Batman thrives on fear, and this extends not only to villains, but also to any law enforcement officials, or even other superheroes. In her article, "Holy Morality, Batman!" Siobhan Fitzgerald writes about why Batman would seek this image, saying "by taking the law into his own hands he seeks to right wrongs one at a time. It is harder to judge who is the 'good guy' and who is the 'bad' in the corrupt world of Gotham. Batman works from the premise that everyone is suspect and he alone is capable of judging the best way to proceed" (72). Batman's desire to punish wrongdoers is why he is perfectly ok with people fearing him, including other superheroes. He has no desire to make friends; and if everyone fears him, it plays into his image as something more than a man. When he is feared, he becomes "The Dark Knight," capable of taking on any challenge no matter the size. Batman says as much early on in his life in *Detective Comics* #33, "criminals are a superstitious cowardly lot. So my disguise must be able to strike terror into their hearts. I must be a creature of the night, black, terrible .. A . A ... A bat!" (Santos 77). Batman wants to strike fear into criminals, and that is no different for the early version or the modern version of his character.

Batman is a creature of the night, and that works for him. People fear the night, the moving shadows, the bumps, and Batman is more than happy to be the bump to the criminal element. In his work, *God on the Streets of Gotham: What the Big Screen Batman Can Teach Us About God and Ourselves*, Paul Asay writes about Batman that "he flies into a dangerous, dreamlike world that at times can resemble an acid trip gone terribly awry. And he has the almost unthinkable impression that he can somehow make

this nightmare landscape *better*" (2). For Batman to accomplish the goal Asay assigns him; Batman needs to be more than a nightmare to change the landscape he inhabits. His need to scare the nightmares that haunt the average person helps to elevate Batman from a mere vigilante to the level of The Dark Knight; where he can do some actual damage to those who would terrorize others. So, when the Green Lantern is unsure that Batman exists, it shows how he has elevated himself to a mythic status which only serves to help him achieve his goals.

At this point in the story, the two heroes escape the attacking police force and go underground in the sewers. While they spend their time attempting to find the original perpetrator, the parademon Batman is pursuing, Green Lantern tries to figure out just what are Batman's superpowers. He goes through the usual suspects, flying, and strength, and Batman responds with the negative. Then Green Lantern puts it together, saying "Hold on a second ... You're not just some guy in a bat costume are you? Are you freaking kidding me?!" (Johns, *Justice League: Origin* 13). The fact Batman is a human also says a great deal about his eventual place on the team. Travis Langley goes into detail about the psychology of Batman in, *Batman and Psychology: A Dark and Stormy Knight*. Langley says about his humanity, "he's smug, he's sly, he's so intimidating that he can enter a room full of people who can fly, read minds, cast spells, or run faster than light, and yet they're the ones daunted by him" (6). The large shadow of the bat that overpowers his peers is especially impressive when understanding that the Justice League almost solely deals with beings of immense power, even so, Batman stands with his team no matter the danger.

Up next, the team recovers a piece of the alien technology left by the parademon; who, moments before, explodes in hopes of taking out Batman and Green Lantern. Since the equipment is alien, it drives the duo to head to Metropolis where they intend to investigate any possible connection to the only other alien they know of, Superman. The plan to investigate Superman leads to another exchange between Batman and Green Lantern, where the first hint of other people's perception of Superman comes into the story. This time it is Batman who starts the discussion, saying:

Batman: It doesn't look like a bomb. More like some kind of alien computer.

Green Lantern: Alien ... Maybe this is all connected to that guy in Metropolis.

Batman: Superman?

Green Lantern: They say he's an alien.

Batman: He is. And he's dangerous.

Green Lantern: You've met Superman?

Batman: No. But I've ... researched him. His power levels – (Johns, *Justice League: Origin* 17)

The exchange between the two heroes gives some insight into both Batman and Superman. As far as what the exchange between the two says about Batman, David M. Hart addresses this in, "Batman's Confrontation with Death, Angst, and Freedom," writing "in the pantheon of comic book superheroes, few characters are more focused and determined than Batman ... Batman seems to devote every moment of his life to his personal war on crime, an endeavor that he takes to be his very reason for being" (212).

The determination Batman shows to fight crime at every level, with his entire being, is one reason why he has already looked into Superman. It is also why Batman sees Superman as a possible threat; an unchecked power that could take over the world at any time based on his own whims. Batman, of course, sees this superpower as someone he should keep his eye on; so, if Superman ever does go criminal, Batman can be there to exact justice.

The above quote also tells a little bit about Superman as a hero. He is both an “alien,” and “powerful.” Their assessment is, of course, a correct observation. Throughout times in his history, Superman has near unlimited power; perhaps the most famous show of Superman’s power came in the 1978 film *Superman* where he flew around the world so fast that he reversed time. However, in the “New 52” universe Superman is much more pedestrian in his speed, here he is much slower than the Flash, and can no longer manipulate time. Even so, Superman is still the heavy hitter in this universe, with nearly unmatched strength and invulnerability; he is also someone whose motivations are not entirely understood. Not only does Superman have incredible power, but also, he’s not afraid to use that power in a confrontation, as Green Lantern and Batman soon find out.

As the story progresses, the team of Green Lantern and Batman find themselves face to face with the alien from Krypton, and he is not happy about their incursion on his territory holding the same type of device the parademons carry. Superman quickly dispatches Green Lantern with a single punch that throws him out of the field of battle, proving rather easily that Green Lantern could not “handle” (Johns, *Justice League: Origin* 22) Superman as he claims. Upon seeing Batman, he says, “I don’t handle easy.

So ... What can you do?" (Johns, *Justice League: Origin* 23-24). Batman then proceeds to dump everything he has at Superman; from batarangs to tazers, to light explosive charges, nothing has an effect. So it is once again up to Green Lantern who tries to chain Superman with one of his constructs, to which Superman replies, "Chains? You're funny Green Lantern" (Johns, *Justice League: Origin* 31), and then proceeds to shatter Green Lantern's will construct, effectively putting Green Lantern and Batman on the defensive for the remainder of the fight.

This battle shows a different side of Superman that is not always a part of his canon, an air of superiority. Usually, we see Superman as a humble hero who tries to avoid a fight at all costs. However, in this instance, we see a brash young Superman who is just learning the extent of his powers, and as of yet, has not been challenged. So, when he meets these two, and it is easy for him to dispatch their efforts, he keeps his sense of superiority. In her article, "Superman's Personality: From Krypton, Kansas, or Both?" Robin S. Rosenberg takes a look at Superman's personality and makes some comparisons to gifted children. "Gifted students, like all of us, compare their abilities to those of people around them, and they use these comparisons to create their self-concept – their view of themselves. When around people who are less able, their self-concept will be higher" (36). In the pages of the comic books, Superman knows he is the greatest power on Earth. So, when he defeats the urban legend Batman and a member of the legendary Green Lantern Corps, his self-concept could not be higher. Furthermore, this encounter only serves to strengthen Batman's fears of Superman and his near unlimited power.

As the fight continues, it is now a battle for Green Lantern and Batman to survive the Kryptonian's onslaught. To improve their chances, Green Lantern calls in the Flash.

Even though the Flash temporarily turns the tide by using his superior speed to hit the Man of Steel, Superman quickly learns the attack pattern and knocks him down to regain the upper hand. The one-sided fight continues until Batman can finally get in-between everyone and stop the fight, pleading, “Stop, Superman. Please. We’re not working with those fire-breathing monsters. We were attacked just like you. Green Lantern’s ring said they were alien. We thought maybe you would know what they were” (Johns, *Justice League: Origin* 39). The interjection in the fight becomes the first instance of Batman starting to position himself as the compass of the team. He may not be the moral guiding figure or the strongest member of the team, but he serves the purpose to keep everyone on point when the mission is in danger of going off the rails.

The reason Batman can successfully stop the fight has to do with how people with similar values interact with each other. Jean Keller looks at interpersonal relationships in, “Dialogue Among Friends: Toward a Discourse Ethic of Interpersonal Relationships,” and how friends can resolve conflicts amongst themselves. She uses an example where two brothers are having a disagreement, and notes, “abstracted from particular situations and conceptions of the good life, universal principles, such as those of fairness, equality, and protecting the vulnerable, can serve as a bridge between the brother’s contrasting worldviews and allow them to negotiate a mutually acceptable solution” (169). Even though Batman and Superman are not brothers, they do share a common pursuit of justice. Those beliefs in justice are why, as soon as Batman can explain the situation, Superman stops fighting and is ready to work toward solving the parademon problem. As far as why it was up to Batman, and not Green Lantern or Flash, has to do with his

aforementioned single-minded determinism. Batman knows fighting Superman will not solve anything, so it is time for him to step in and get things back on track.

While the Green Lantern is responsible for adding the Flash to the Justice League, it is Batman who adds the second cornerstone of “The Trinity,” when he implores Superman to join them while they continue to investigate. Batman does his convincing by drawing parallels between Superman and the rest of the group. Their first step toward becoming friends happens right after they bond through their mutual dislike of Lex Luthor. Batman asks Superman to join them, saying:

Batman: Come on.

Superman: Why should I come with you?

Batman: Because you’re like us.

Superman: No one’s like me.

Batman: That’s not what the rest of the world thinks, Superman. (Johns, *Justice League: Origin* 40)

Batman drawing parallels between all the heroes as having an outsider status is an important distinction for Batman to make about the team in general. All of these heroes are vastly different people. However, in the eyes of the world, they are all these fantastic beings of power. Keller puts this quite simply, saying, “we must remember that social-scientific research indicates that we often choose to be friends with people who are similar to ourselves” (178). It makes complete sense that, in times of crisis, they would all find each other, and come together to fight problems only beings similar to them could handle. In a world where titans like Superman and Batman exist, it is nearly fate that they

would eventually come together and be friends, despite their different location and many contrasts.

Now that the group is up to four members, it is easy to see how the rest of the Justice League will fall into place. These characters slowly come together because of a shared mission, but ultimately, they stay together because of who they are. In their article, “Determinants of Friendship Choices in Multiethnic Society,” Eric Fong and Wsevelod W. Isajiw study friendship choices, and conclude "that almost all individual characteristics significantly influence the choice of friendship choice with the majority group" (260). Not only do the superheroes of the Justice League share an obsession with protecting the innocent, fighting for justice for every person alive, good or bad, and have the will to engage in the endless struggle against evil, but they are also the best of the best. Superman is the Man of Tomorrow, Batman is the World's Greatest Detective, Flash is the Fastest Man Alive, and Green Lantern is the Emerald Knight. With these four already together it is no wonder they eventually attract the Amazon Princess, the King of Atlantis, and the cybernetic marvel Cyborg. They are all like-minded in their pursuits, and they are also standouts amongst the vast pantheon of superheroes. Their friendship is destiny.

As a group, they convene in a safe place underground to discuss their next move. The foursome is basically at a standstill, Superman is not familiar with the parademon or the strange box they took from it, there is no information on Green Lantern's ring about either thing, the Flash wants to take the box back to his lab, and the trail Batman is following is now cold. At this point, the project is in danger of being derailed, despite Batman's best effort to “keep us on point” (Johns, *Justice League: Origin* 45).

Fortunately for the investigation, this is when things get serious, and the parademons launch an assault on Earth, which gives the heroes something to do, fight for their lives. At this point, the story shifts to show us the next, and final member of “The Trinity.”

The narrative moves to Washington, D.C., with the introduction of U.S. Air Force Captain Steve Trevor. In this continuity, Captain Trevor accidentally crashes his plane on Themyscira and then the Amazonian Princess Diana finds him. So, Diana must take Trevor back to America, where she becomes more commonly known as Wonder Woman. Once upon American soil, she serves as a diplomatic dignitary from Themyscira, and Trevor takes on the role of her liaison.

The story continues with Trevor entering Wonder Woman’s room, only to find her gone, and a Wonder Woman sized hole in the wall. One of the attending guards asks him if he is worried about her, to which he replies “I’m worried about everyone else! Diana’s always looking for a fight! And she always finds one” (Johns, *Justice League: Origin* 51). The fact her introduction talks about her looking for a fight is a nod to her Amazonian roots and it lets the audience know she is very much a warrior in this iteration. The idea that Wonder Woman is always looking for a challenge, and is willing to knock over a bunch of soldiers while crashing through the wall to find one, shows just how different the Amazonian is from everyone else.

Showcasing the differences Wonder Woman has with the rest of the Justice League is a good way to show just how important she is to the team. Flash and Green Lantern are basically cops, bound by a moral code, and Superman is the ultimate Boy Scout. Batman, on the other hand, works from the shadows and believes in vengeance over justice. Wonder Woman, though, has an entirely different perspective that is

informed by her warrior heritage. Chuck Tate, in, “The Stereotypical (Wonder) Woman,” takes a look at the characteristics that make Wonder Woman who she is, claiming:

‘Wonder Woman’ is actually a title donated to Diana ... by the society’s governing body for being the best warrior in the land and a diplomat to the rest of the world. Accordingly, Diana would have all the confidence and self-reliance that comes with being the best of the best (as a warrior) and the shrewdness and even-tempered judgment of a trained delegate. Three major psychological attributes follow from her two roles: swagger, cultural perspective, and warrior-mentality. (152)

The previous quote nearly perfectly captures the essence of Wonder Woman in the modern continuity of the "New 52." She sees a threat that needs neutralized and then rushes off to save the day. Her dual role as warrior and diplomat means she not only relishes the opportunity to fight but also is motivated to show what an ambassador from Themyscira can do for the rest of the world.

Wonder Woman herself reinforces this perception of her as a warrior-diplomat in the ensuing pages. Trevor finally catches up to Wonder Woman, only to chastise her in a desperate attempt to get her to understand why she needs to return to safety. However, the young woman has a different idea, telling him, “Steve, this place, your home, is filled with so many wonderful things. Ice cream and rock and roll and ... Many wonderful things. But there is also a darkness that lurks here too. One I’m going to fight. That’s what I’m here for. That’s why I’m staying. To Fight” (Johns, *Justice League: Origin* 54). After years of isolation, Wonder Woman is ready to contribute to the world in a positive manner. She does not have the same need for vengeance as Batman, nor does she feel the

moral pressure Superman feels to do good. Instead, Wonder Woman lives a world that is peaceful, Themyscira, and hopes to help the rest of humanity fight for a similar life, free from the tyranny of others.

The story then travels back to the other four superheroes who are battling against the waves of parademons coming through portals from another world. Everyone is doing their best, desperately attempting to stem the tide against the hordes of parademons, but the assaulting forces are still able to take away many civilians before the heroes can stop them. It is first Superman who realizes that the parademons don't seem to be intent on pure wanton destruction, and instead, are kidnapping people. Batman, true to form, focuses on the bigger picture when he agrees, “the people. Superman’s right. They aren’t trying to kill anyone. So what do they want with us?” (Johns, *Justice League: Origin* 59). Batman, the detective, sees more to the story, he knows there is a mystery here to solve, and wants to make sure the rest of the team focuses on not only stopping the parademons but also protecting the innocent.

Wonder Woman finally arrives to meet the other members of the team. When she vaults into the scene, she immediately wreaks havoc, slashing at parademons with her sword, and she temporarily knocks them off guard. Green Lantern and the Flash are especially dumbfounded by her appearance, standing slack jaw, and doing a little leering, as she continues to fight. Batman's reaction is out of the scene. It is Superman, however, who has the most significant response, and also the first interaction with Wonder Woman. It is a simple exchange:

Superman: You’re strong.

Wonder Woman: I know. (Johns, *Justice League: Origin* 62)

The exchange between the two is actually a foreshadow of the future of the two icons, where they eventually form a romantic relationship. In, “The Positive Psychology of Superheroes,” Christopher Peterson and Nansook Park address the relationship amongst superheroes, noting “given the talents and abilities of superheroes, with whom could they have an equitable relationship? Other superheroes are the obvious answer, but the field is narrow, especially for romance and marriage” (11). The lack of available understanding partners pertains to not only Superman and Wonder Woman’s flirting, but it also serves to foreshadow how the team will eventually become great friends. It is evident that they need each other, Batman doesn’t even tell his friend Jim Gordon his identity, the Flash is the nicest of the bunch, yet he too, hides his identity even from those he trusts. So it becomes serendipitous that this group of super individuals becomes super friends. They create a team dynamic where they can all confide in each other, all the while knowing their secrets are safe because everyone has something to lose if they happen to be exposed.

Eventually, the parademons run away, and the group uses this short moment to take a breath. During the respite, Wonder Woman takes the time to introduce herself to the other heroes. She says, “Greetings warriors. I followed these things from your capital city. I saw you and saw you needed help” (Johns, *Justice League: Origin* 64). Her quote not only fits with the personality traits mentioned earlier, but it also fits in with her creation. In her accounting of *The Secret History of Wonder Woman*, Jill Lepore says this of Wonder Woman’s creator’s intent, “Marston liked to say that Wonder Woman was meant to be ‘psychological propaganda for the new type of woman who should, I believe, rule the world’” (190-191). The Amazonian not only feels right at home mixing in with

the other heroes but also feels like she is the one who can save the day. She has no shame whatsoever upon mixing in with these other incredibly powerful beings, and instead rightly takes her place as the third pillar of “The Trinity.”

Now that the parademons are flying off toward the sea, a giant tower comes rising out of the ocean, however, with the intrusion of the water, comes the arrival of Aquaman. He is instantly a disruption to the team as he has the arrogant attitude befit the King of Atlantis. In fact, his first concerns are establishing a leader, which does not sit well with some others. Thus a dialogue over leadership ensues:

Aquaman: You’ve obviously gathered together to fight them.

Flash: I guess we ... kinda did?

Aquaman: But I don’t see a leader.

Batman: Then you’re not looking at me.

Green Lantern: Give me a break.

Aquaman: I’ve got some experience with leadership. I’m the rightful heir to the throne of Atlantis. I’m their king.

Green Lantern: And I’m the mayor of Emerald City. (Johns, *Justice League: Origin* 76-77)

The initial disagreement is important as it establishes a few things about the team, one being that they are starting to recognize themselves as a team against the invasion. The other is an underlying aspect of a successful team. “As demonstrated, ample room exists for disagreement and respecting one’s friend as different from oneself within these constraints. Indeed, such differences are an important source of moral growth” (Keller 177). Obviously, in the fetal stages of the team, each person can see themselves as a

leader, but no clear winner emerges from the discussion. However, the disagreement is quickly forgotten, and the team moves on to fighting the reinvigorated parademons attacking their position once again.

Even though Aquaman first appears to want to establish himself as the leader, and then Batman chimes in as a challenger, their instant dismissal of the topic is one of the reasons they become a successful team later. When evaluating power and control in organizations in, "Issues of Power, Control, and Status in Group Interaction: From Ferenczi to Foucault," Arnold W. Rachman notices, "group interaction that is leader-driven is often characterized by the exercise of power, control, and status. When the focus is on the leader, sight is lost of the democratic ideal in the treatment process. Group members become secondary to the function of the leader" (95). So, the initial refusal to promote a leader actually helps them both long-term, and in this original encounter. At this fragile stage of team building, brushing their egos aside for the larger goal is a good sign. Not only that, but their ability to gloss over disagreement is a positive development for the team as well.

The fact they just let that leadership argument pass also becomes a cornerstone of the team's foundation. Despite "The Trinity's" prominence as the flagship members of the team, and in many cases they represent the de facto leadership, even so, the Justice League has never officially designated a leader. In many instances, it is whoever's plan that is best at the moment. Wind Goodfriend talks about why this is positive for the team in her article, "The Social Psychology of the Justice League of America," noting, "in this way, every member of the League feels equal, promoting a truly supportive and empowering atmosphere" (26). Having each member be an equal part is something that

helps serve the team in many encounters, as there are often rotating members, or when they split into smaller teams. With every member capable of leading, the team is always on solid footing when it comes to confronting any challenge.

The group continues the fight against the parademons, when the last member of the original seven, Cyborg, joins the fray. He is truly a rookie to the scene as he obtains his powers just moments before arriving. Before gaining new abilities, he is nothing more than star high school football player Vic Stone. Unfortunately, when Stone is visiting his father in his lab, the parademons attack, and Stone is critically injured. It is a last ditch effort by his father to subject him to an experimental cybernetic healing process that turns Stone into the Cyborg. In addition to Cyborg, there is another new arrival to the scene, the actual mastermind behind the waves of parademons invading the Earth, the demi-god Darkseid. It is this moment when things start to go poorly for the super team. Green Lantern gets a broken arm, Superman is missing, and the Flash is exhausted from running so fast, without rest or nutrition. Fortunately, Batman is not out of the equation, and he has a plan for the group to retake the upper hand.

The first part of his plan is to get Green Lantern back in the game. To accomplish this goal, he decides to reveal his secret identity, telling Green Lantern, “We’re alongside an alien, an Amazon, a human lightning bolt, a cyborg, and an Aquaman. As far as I can tell, you and I are the only normal people here” (Johns, *Justice League: Origin* 107). When Batman levels with Green Lantern he makes this connection with him on the level of regular human to regular human. Despite Green Lantern having a ring that powers his every willed desire, he is very much a human who has no inherent powers. Batman also knows what he wants Green Lantern to do next. Batman understands “there’s actually

quite a bit of research showing that if you took the added efforts of ten individuals working alone and you compared this to the total work of ten people working together, the work of the individuals would be both bigger and better” (Goodfriend 21). So, knowing they must split up their efforts, he implores Green Lantern to get back in the fray, and this time lead the group. By splitting up, they can eventually combine their singular efforts and ultimately accomplish more than if they all rush Darkseid at once. Batman gives a good speech, saying:

This is bigger than I am. And it’s bigger than you are. Get out of your own way. Focus on what’s important here: everyone else. So far it’s been batter up, but we need to stop playing baseball and start playing football. We need to be a team ... You’re loud. They’ll listen to you if you’ve got something to say, try to at least sound smart. Keep them alive and keep Darkseid busy until I get back. (Johns, *Justice League: Origin* 109)

Batman then leaves to enact the second part of his plan; get Superman back in the game. At this point, Batman is seeing Darkseid fight Earth’s most powerful heroes to a standstill all by himself. Darkseid is nearly invulnerable, he shoots Omega Beams from his eyes that are fast enough to catch the Flash, he breaks Green Lantern’s arm through his willed power shield, and even the mightiest strikes from Wonder Woman and Aquaman barely phase the demi-god. Batman knows the Earth stands no chance without their biggest gun, Superman.

While Batman is off trying to rescue Superman, the rest of the team does their best to cripple Darkseid. One of his greatest sources of power is the Omega Beams he shoots from his eyes; so naturally, Wonder Woman and Aquaman gouge out his eyes.

However, Darkseid is still too physically powerful for the remaining team members to overcome. That is until, Batman reaches Superman, and frees him from captivity. Batman has no idea what kind of superhero Superman will eventually become, but he does know he's "assertive, and can dominate situations (even among his superhero colleagues in the Justice League)" (Rosenberg 35). That is why it is so important for Batman to risk his life to save the stranger, whom he thinks has too much power, anyway. Upon setting Superman free from his torture, Batman utters a few words Superman will hear time and again throughout his life, "we need you ... We need Superman" (Johns, *Justice League: Origin* 127). Batman's plea gives Superman the strength he needs to reenter the fight, and he streaks back to the battlefield. Cyborg can use the Apokoliptian technology to open a Boom Tube back to Apokolips, and with Superman back, the entire Justice League concentrates their efforts to batter and push Darkseid through the portal back to his home world of Apokolips. The Justice League wins the day.

As part of a successful first outing for the group of heroes, the story ends with the President handing out accolades for their efforts to save the planet. There is much discussion among the members of the team about if they even are a team, and if they will remain so. It is once again left up to Green Lantern and Batman to get the final say on the matter:

Green Lantern: That's not the point. We all have other things we need to do. We're not friends. We're not a team. This was just a one-time thing, okay?

Batman: What if something like this happens again? (Johns, *Justice League: Origin* 137-138)

As if on cue, the President tells the team their talents are needed again, although they never reveal why, and the team is effectively born.

Of course, the team is together for many years to come. They have members who add to the team (Shazam, Power Ring, Lex Luthor), and they have members who leave (Green Lantern, Aquaman). The challenges to the team only continue to grow larger and deadlier as time goes on. One thing keeps them together through everything, though, and that is, “friends are more likely to share a common conception of the good life than are strangers or citizens in a modern, highly diverse, global society. The values of friends are less likely to be so alien to the other” (Keller 167). While they may disagree, or “have other things to do,” they are all interested in justice, and protecting the weak from those who would wish to do them harm. Furthermore, the team only continues growing closer as friends as a result of their shared experiences during future missions; experiences that serve to shape the team in new and exciting ways.

Chapter 2: Super Friends

The next two chapters chronicling the lives of the Justice Leaguers take place in Geoff Johns' *Justice League: The Villains Journey* and *Justice League: Throne of Atlantis*. While the first volume of the series focuses on the formation of the Justice League, which takes place five years before the current comic timeline². The next two volumes take place in present day 2012 and pick up with a team that is a much more cohesive group; who are focused on helping each other and taking down the bad guys as efficiently as possible. At this point, they are all intimate friends, as well; some closer than others, like Superman and Wonder Woman who are starting a romantic relationship, or the Flash and Green Lantern who are friends from before the Justice League. Keller sums up the Justice League's friendship dynamic noting, "friendship is a chosen relationship between more or less equal parties, characterized by mutual affection and regard, commitment, intimacy, trust, sharing, and caretaking (161). Due to the closeness of the seven heroes, they are also a closed off group who choose not to allow any new members for fear of upsetting the balance. All of the aforementioned characteristics are on display in these two chapters of the Justice League's adventures. They show genuine care and concern for each other in these volumes, and strive to work together no matter the circumstances or the involved attitudes.

In the first volume, *Justice League: The Villains Journey*, the heroes are in one of the rare lull periods between the world level threats that they usually deal with, and now find themselves reacting to minor threats. The story opens with a horde of mindless

² DC Comics restarted their continuity timeline in 2011 with the introduction of the "New 52" universe.

biological “seed” creatures, who appear to be amorphous gray beings with excessively large teeth, rampaging through Baltimore. The creatures seem to have no purpose other than to terrorize the populous, and they keep saying “stay away” (Johns, *Justice League: The Villains Journey* 1), though it is not yet clear what they are protecting. The locals of Baltimore do not fare well with the seed creatures, but once the Justice League shows up, they quickly clean out the area in one fell swoop. After they break up the first group of creatures, the team takes a minute to regroup in hopes of finding the real threat. In this small pause, the power dynamic of the team is on display. Once Cyborg locates the source of the seed creatures, by tapping into local surveillance video, a mutated Dr. Samuel Street. Batman once again starts laying out the plans, a position he finds himself inhabiting ever since their first encounter. “Then we need to work fast, before we’re even more outnumbered. Flash, draw the seeds’ attention away from any people still in the streets. Superman and Wonder Woman, you –” (Johns, *Justice League: The Villains Journey* 7). At this point, Green Lantern interrupts him by rushing off with the Flash to confront Street. Tellingly, the more mature members of the team, Superman, Wonder Woman, Cyborg, and Aquaman, stop to look at Batman before they move a muscle. For his part, Batman grumbles, “Just go” (Johns, *Justice League: The Villains Journey* 8). On cue, the remaining members of the team rush off, to catch up to the already overwhelmed Green Lantern and Flash.

The interaction between the members as they work through their plan of attack says a lot about how their relationships function, and how they work as a team. While it looks like the team is not working together in this scene, it does give a sign of how each member's personality works within the team dynamics. P. Christopher Earley and Elaine

Mosakowski speak to team dynamics in, “Creating Hybrid Team Cultures: An Empirical Test of Transnational Team Functioning,” writing:

Team member characteristics influence the emergence of a shared culture in two general ways. First, team members’ personal characteristics shape their expectations of appropriate interaction rules, group efficacy beliefs, and group identity. Second, these personal characteristics affect team members’ expectations of how other members should act within the team.

(27)

So, it makes sense when the brash and impulsive Green Lantern interrupts the stuffy leader Batman and rushes off. Flash, who is always the nice guy and jokester, leaves with Green Lantern, his closest friend, but not before he apologizes to the group for leaving. Cyborg and Aquaman stay, as they are some of the more serious members of the team who often put League responsibilities over their personal lives. Finally, “The Trinity” stays put until Batman approves the plan; which makes perfect sense as they are the closest members of the group, and wouldn’t do anything to go against each other.

After defeating Darkseid, the Justice League is flush with confidence in their abilities. They have been together for the last five years, and now feel they can trust in each other as well. In their article, “Consequences of Differentiated Leadership in Groups,” Joshua B. Wu et al, relate this supreme confidence to how “members’ individual self-efficacy beliefs will shape their group’s shared collective efficacy perception. When highly efficacious people work together with confident peers, they tend to develop positive perceptions of their group and a shared positive collective efficacy perception” (94). In this group, the self-efficacy perception is at an all-time high. So,

when Green Lantern and Flash rush away, they are confident the rest of the team can catch up. Furthermore, even Batman in his low-key leadership role is not completely perturbed or aggravated by them leaving first, as he has faith those two will be fine, for a little while at least.

As the story progresses, the team reunites and quickly dispatches the seed creatures again; although Wonder Woman does have to save Green Lantern with her lasso. As soon as they come across the mutated Street, the fight is effectively over. Even though he boasts that he is tough to take down, it only takes a simultaneous punch from Superman and Wonder Woman to finish him. From here, the team returns to the Watchtower. Meanwhile, back on Earth, there is an interaction between Steve Trevor, now the Justice League liaison, and a congressional committee. Trevor is defending the team for their actions during missions, which often include a lot of destruction, and hopes to keep them free from further governmental oversight, or even worse if the committee has their wish, regulatory control. Once his debriefing is over, he goes to video chat with Wonder Woman.

While Trevor and Wonder Woman attempt to have a private discussion, the other members of the Justice League keep interrupting the former lovers so they too can talk to Trevor, and ask about needed supplies for the Watchtower. In the background, Batman is once again chastising Green Lantern over the finer points of the mission details.

Green Lantern: We stopped the freak, we saved the city, what else do you want?

Batman: We could've done it cleaner. Less property damage. Less risk.

Green Lantern: Risk? Risk is in the job description. I like risk.

Flash: He does like it.

Green Lantern and Batman: Stay out of this. (Johns, *Justice League: The Villains Journey* 18)

In this iteration of the Justice League, Batman and Green Lantern are almost always at odds. However, they do seem to work well together during their many fights with supervillains. Also, even though the two are arguing, when the Flash butts in, they instantly get on the same side to rebuff him, so their differences aren't as stark as they first appear on the outside.

The confrontation between Batman and Green Lantern serves to show how each of the heroes act in social settings. The way they continue to challenge each other, even after a successful mission, speaks to their personal identities. As shown in the origin story, Batman and Green Lantern started their contentious relationship in their very first meeting when Batman tells Green Lantern to “take your flashlight and go home. Gotham’s mine. Coast City’s yours” (Johns, *Justice League: Origin* 12). John R. Hepburn, in, “Violent Behavior in Interpersonal Relationships,” goes in depth regarding how disagreement works in friendships, noting, “it is through interaction that a person acquires and maintains a series of public identities that relate him to others. In routine encounters the individual must socially locate himself, and others in the situation must agree that the identity acquired is the proper or acceptable identity” (420). So, it makes sense that Batman feels the need to chastise Green Lantern, as it helps him promote his self-identity as the team leader who accepts no mistakes when the mission is on the line. For their part, Green Lantern and Flash are also using this encounter to protect their social identities. The Green Lantern must continue to be the carefree hero, and the Flash

has to be the one who tries to defuse the tense situations through humor. At this point, it is not yet a physically violent encounter, only a verbal altercation the heroes use to uphold their carefully crafted personal images.

Again, the story goes back to Trevor in front of the congressional committee, where they are trying to convince him to help them get a plant on the team, so they can have an eye on everything the Justice League does. The matter is left unresolved, when the story moves to the Justice League shortly after they are done defeating the power-mimicking android Amazo. The topic goes back to whether they would let a new member on the team, as the Green Arrow has arrived and attempts to help the team as they take down Amazo. With Green Arrow only seeming to contribute one arrow in the fight against the android, the rest of the team is unimpressed, to say the least. However, Superman shows his true colors when he at least leaves a glimmer of hope for Green Arrow's membership push, saying:

Superman: Underdogs tend to surprise you. I wouldn't discount Green Arrow so quickly, Lantern.

Batman: There's a very good reason we don't bring other people into the team, Superman. You already know that. (Johns, *Justice League: The Villains Journey* 31)

Superman, ever the optimist, actually wants to see the potential in Green Arrow, and give him the hope that he may one day be able to join the team. Although, at this moment, Batman is correct about possible expansion. The seven original members of the League have so far been able to handle any threat they encounter, and additionally, there is five

years of history between everyone making them all very close, and also wary of expansion that may upset the team chemistry.

A few pages later in the story, there is another subtle hint as to why Batman does not currently want to add any more members to the team. The discussion takes place back on the Watchtower, where Superman is still pushing the idea that it may be a good idea to add members, saying "I think we should consider it ... There are a lot of people out there who could help this team" (Johns, *Justice League: The Villains Journey* 41). However, Batman does not share the same willingness to entertain the idea that Superman does, in fact, he effectively puts the lid on the discussion when he reminds them, "we can't take any risks. We all know what happened when we let someone else onto this satellite and into the Justice League. It ended very badly" (Johns, *Justice League: The Villains Journey* 41-42). Finally, in the next panel, we see the Justice League in a fight with the Martian Manhunter; unfortunately, there is no explanation for the fight given, and there is no reference made again during the "New 52" run of comics. So, with the new arrival of the "Rebirth" universe, it is likely there is no explanation forthcoming.

When it comes to Superman, compassion is something that infects him on nearly every level of his being, and this compassion is something that is just as much a part of him as is his red and blue costume. That quality is why he is the first to open up to the idea of having new members. Leonard Finkelman, in, "Superman and Man: What a Kryptonian Can Teach Us About Humanity," addresses Superman's optimism, and how it relates to his humanity. He says:

None of us can be all that fit without getting a little help from our friends
... Even though we may bring each other down, we also have to hold each

other up, because no one else will. As Superman himself sees things, 'it's all just us in here, together. And we're all we've got.' It's this view that serves as the source of Superman's compassion, and that same compassion will inevitably break through whatever metaphorical chains we may place on each other. (177)

Therefore, while the rest of the team, Batman included, is ready to write off Green Arrow as a possible candidate for membership, it is Superman that holds out hope. He is the one that realizes all heroes must stick together, because there is no telling when they might need one another. Even though Green Arrow looks like just a man with some arrows, it is in the back of Superman's mind that another un-powered member of the team, Batman, is one of the flagship members despite his perceived "handicap" as a mere human.

The story moves forward by showing a few more encounters with some of the lower level villains. In example, Batman and Superman work together to take out Clayface and Key, who are both hiding in Arkham, running from someone named Graves. Flash and Green Lantern work to defeat Weapon Master, with a little help from Wonder Woman, who then admits he was helping a man named Graves figure out how to hurt each member of the Justice League. Finally, the story checks in with Aquaman, who is finishing up helping a sinking cruise liner when there is a call for everyone to head to the Watchtower.

The reason Cyborg and Batman recall the team to the base is because of the mysterious Graves, who is rounding up the Justice League's enemies to figure out each member's weaknesses. It is up to Cyborg to clue the team in on what exactly Graves knows about each of them. Finally, he gets to Batman, and it is in his telling of Batman's

weakness that the team learns more about his relationship with Superman, and just how close "The Trinity" is becoming.

Cyborg: Graves also knows Batman doesn't trust anyone on this team.

Green Lantern: I'm sure we're all in shock.

Superman: Graves doesn't know everything. Batman trusts me. (Johns, *Justice League: The Villains Journey* 77)

Then, there is a further dialogue between Batman, Superman, Green Lantern, Flash, and Cyborg, when it comes to light that Superman is also a reporter. Superman's day job is something that does not go down well with the more secretive members, who have concerns about whether or not he reports about them. Once again, Green Lantern turns the conversation toward Batman:

Green Lantern: Batman's got that look on his face again. You already knew all this, didn't you.

Batman: Superman and I work together outside of this team.

Superman: Except I don't steal his girlfriends.

Green Lantern: That's funny, Superman, but you still haven't answered the Flash's question. Do you write about us?

Cyborg: He doesn't. (Johns, *Justice League: The Villains Journey* 78-79)

The conversation between the team highlights how the power distributes within the group. Green Lantern is ever the one to challenge authority, the Flash is on his side, while Batman and Superman stand firm in the other corner. It is once Cyborg steps in that the tension diffuses. However, it is important to note that Batman is never directly challenged during this exchange. Green Lantern has already made peace with the idea that Batman

seems to have all the details about each member, so he only directly grills Superman, who could appear as the easier target. Green Lantern may be okay with challenging Batman on the field of battle, but he does not challenge Batman in this instance, as he knows it is a losing battle to argue with the World's Greatest Detective about collecting data. Instead, Green Lantern chooses to focus his energy on Superman so he can ascertain if there is any danger to the secrets of the team members, and ultimately to himself.

The conflict between the members, however innocent it seems, could easily be something that turns into a larger issue. When it comes to the matter of keeping personal information secret, it is one of the few dangers a superhero faces that affects not only the hero but everyone they know, which means it is perhaps one of their utmost priorities. In, "Interpersonal Conflict and Cohesiveness in Dyadic Relationships," Blair Wheaton speaks to how conflict affects people in groups, claiming:

Most of the strong negative effect of principled conflict seems to be accounted for by arguments over internal principles. A possible explanation of the difference between principled-internal conflict and principled-external conflict may be that, besides the immediacy of internal issues, tolerance of principled differences is easier when the issues are not directly personal. (346)

So, while something like Batman's arrogant perfectionist attitude, or Green Lantern's almost juvenile approach to combat, may irritate members of the Justice League, these annoyances quickly pass because of their impersonal nature. On the other hand, when Green Lantern worries that Superman is giving away personal secrets, the conflict intensifies. If they were to find Superman is publishing team secrets, then it is easy to see

how this minor encounter could evolve into something that would threaten the team. Fortunately, that is not something Superman does, and Cyborg is there to confirm his innocence.

Graves interrupts the minor dispute by infiltrating the Watchtower, which serves to push all differences to the side. Unfortunately, the team learns Graves has Trevor and is using torture to trick him into giving away his Watchtower code, this causes Wonder Woman to fly off the handle and charge Graves. However, he has the power to harness energy from the dead and stops Wonder Woman in her tracks. The rest of the team fares no better, and they all end up writhing on the floor reliving the loss of loved ones. Graves then leaves to enact his plan to show the rest of the world how the Justice League "killed his family," who he believes all died of cancer from the Darkseid attack, as they were traveling in Gotham during the events in *Justice League: Origin*, and fell ill shortly after.

After the team recovers, they head to Trevor's home to look for clues. It is at this time the team undergoes an altercation that changes them for the foreseeable future. The confrontation starts because Wonder Woman feels personally responsible for the safety of Trevor, as they were past lovers. So, she decides to leave the others secretly to both fight Graves herself, and avoid putting anyone else in harm's way. Her plan becomes evident when Batman asks her where she is going:

Wonder Woman: I'm going to find him – I'm going to cut off his head – and I'm going to bring Steve home.

Batman: This is a league mission not a Wonder Woman one. And we don't cut off anyone's head.

Wonder Woman: I do. (Johns, *Justice League: The Villains Journey* 96-97)

From this point, things devolve rapidly as Green Lantern steps in to stop Wonder Woman by containing her in a force field powered by his ring. When he refuses to let her go, she smashes him, and his force field, flinging Green Lantern across the street violently. Now, Green Lantern flies back into the fight, Superman tries to intervene, and for his efforts, a massive kick from Wonder Woman knocks him out of the panel. Finally, Batman realizes there is a recording device nearby, and the entire world can see their dissension. Knowing that image is everything, Batman gets Cyborg to teleport everyone out of there, away from prying eyes, and to Graves' cabin so they can continue searching for him. The change in scenery effectively ends the fight, but, the team's image and psyche are already bruised.

Even though the team had a violent outburst, once they are back on mission, everything is business as usual. While the fight looks bad, especially to the adoring public, it is a normal reaction when groups are as close as the Justice League is at this point. In fact, it is a healthy cycle for close friends, Brett Laursen et al, explain conflict among peers, in, "Towards Understanding Peer Conflict," writing:

Negative affect is often the result of an unwelcome interruption to organized behaviors. Close relationships, by virtue of their pervasive interdependencies, contain considerable potential for evoking negative affect. In response to this threat, participants in close relationships develop strategies to avoid interruptions and ameliorate disagreements; exchange

equity and emotional investment are thus maintained through
interdependent interactions that balance positive and negative affect. (83)

The Justice League has five years of related experience by the time of the events in *Justice League: The Villains Journey*. Of course, tensions can run high during moments of extreme duress, but, it is also true that they can weather these few moments. Of course, they get help with a pressing need to save the world from the evil machinations of Graves.

Furthermore, the ability of the team to get back on track shows a lot about the team's cohesion as a whole. As Keller notes, when:

Friends find, to their great surprise, that they don't share the same
fundamental convictions and this poses a challenge to maintaining their
friendship as a shared form of life ... we encounter an unexpected tear in
the fabric of the friendship that must be repaired – not only if the
friendship is to continue but also if it is to continue with the same degree
of intimacy and trust that governed it previously. (165)

So, while the team is upset with Wonder Woman, both over the willingness to strike out on her own and to behead someone, once the mission comes back into focus, the team works to repair the damage. For her part, Wonder Woman attempts a circuitous apology:

Wonder Woman: Superman, I was –

Superman: Worried. I get it. But we only want to help.

Green Lantern: How come when I said that, she wouldn't listen? (Johns,

Justice League: The Villains Journey 105)

All is fine between Superman, Wonder Woman, and Green Lantern, and things appear to be back to normal. Even Green Lantern seems to be ok with Wonder Woman's mea culpa to Superman as a surrogate for an apology to everyone on the team. Although, true to form, Batman is seemingly indifferent to the altercation, and is already tracking down Graves' whereabouts, the Valley of Souls.

While in Graves' cabin, the team finally learns his location, and they leave to take him down once and for all. Once they teleport to where he is, they again battle the souls of those left behind, including the apparent ghost of Trevor. The team almost faces defeat, until the real Trevor shows up and shoots at Graves. Now that the team sees the "spirits" assaulting them are not their actual loved ones, the team combines their powers to easily defeat Graves. Wonder Woman, who is poised to take off Graves's head, even realizes at the last moment, that Graves is just a man who longs to see his family again. So, she spares his life; which shows she is moving away from her Amazonian warrior roots and moving toward the ideals of the Justice League where killing is never an option.

Unfortunately, even though the team has solved their disagreement, the footage of the Justice League infighting is already out in the world. Their altercation has Graves' desired effect; the world is now questioning if the Justice Leaguers really are the paragons of virtue they portray publicly. Sadly, it is up to Green Lantern to sacrifice himself, and save the rest of the team from the added scrutiny the shameful altercation is bringing upon the League. He decides to leave the team, finally saying, "keep it on me Batman. Blame me. The Justice League needs a scapegoat" (Johns, *Justice League: The Villains Journey* 135). The Flash and Aquaman tell him he doesn't have to go, but Green Lantern insists that he must. Even Batman chimes in:

Batman: You don't, Lantern.

Green Lantern: But I should, Batman. (Johns, *Justice League: The Villains Journey* 135-136)

Finally, Green Lantern steps onto the teleporter and bids his farewell saying, "I'll be rooting for you" (Johns, *Justice League: The Villains Journey* 136). Green Lantern's willingness to leave the team when they need someone to take the fall shows how much he values his peers on the Justice League. Samuel Scheffler breaks down "Relationships and Responsibilities," stating:

As long as people attach value to their interpersonal relations, they will inevitably see themselves as having special responsibilities. And as long as they have good reason for attaching value to those relations, we must allow that they also have good reasons to see themselves as having such responsibilities. (206)

After the events with Graves, the Justice League needs someone to take responsibility for the inter-team fighting, so they can appease the public outcry and get back to protecting the world. So, Green Lantern takes that "special responsibility" in the hopes that his friends can continue the good work they have been doing since they all came together as a team. Even though it is the Green Lantern who takes the blame this time, it is easy to make the argument that any other member of the team would do the same to protect the others.

At the end of his tenure in the Justice League, the Green Lantern shows that he is a real hero who is willing to put others before himself. In his article, "Why are Superheroes Good? Comics and the Ring of Gyges," Jeff Brenzel has this to say about

superheroes and their stories, saying, “great superhero stories are therefore riddled with personal quests to determine how a person can best live with great powers” (160). Before the defeat of Graves, Green Lantern felt the best way to use his powers was to help the Justice League protect the world. After the altercation, Green Lantern needed to change his superhero story, and to help the Justice League best; he knew he would need to live with his powers elsewhere. For now, Green Lantern’s story takes place in the stars where he patrols his assigned sector. Green Lantern’s reassignment is not the first time the heroes make a change to their story, the most notable example being when they all come together as teammates.

The final moments of the story show Wonder Woman telling Trevor that he needs to stop working with the team, for his safety. While the two are forever linked, the reality is that for the moment, Wonder Woman feels the best way to protect Trevor is to remove him from the situation. Understandably, she is a little depressed from the interaction and heads outside to be alone. However, Superman sees that she may need someone to talk to, and the two speak on the rooftop:

Wonder Woman: We’re not like Zeus, but we’re not like them, either.

Superman: We’re not like anyone.

Wonder Woman: People like us are really alone aren’t we? Do you ever feel alone?

Superman: Of course, I ... do. (Johns, *Justice League: The Villains Journey* 139)

Perhaps predictably, the two most powerful members of the team share a kiss. Even though they are different from each other, one an Amazon and one a Kryptonian, they

share a special bond as the only inhuman, nearly invulnerable beings on the team. Furthermore, Superman often draws parallels to a “god,” and Wonder Woman is a Greek God in this iteration, so it makes sense they see each other as equals. Their new relationship is the next step for “The Trinity,” as “friendships tend to evolve over time, as we engage in shared activities and experiences” (Keller 164). Superman and Batman already work together outside of the team, and now Superman and Wonder Woman appear as though they are making a change to the nature of their relationship. The interpersonal relationships of the three only serve to elevate further “The Trinity” above the rest of the team. With Batman serving as the de facto leader, Superman is his closest friend, and now Wonder Woman is much closer to Superman, “The Trinity” is now fully formed. Furthermore, “The Trinity” consists of the two most physically powerful members of the Justice League, and the one person who can strategically outthink all the other members of the team. This power dynamic will set up how the Justice League ultimately functions for the rest of the series.

If *Justice League: The Villains Journey* centers on how Batman runs the team, then the next volume, *Justice League: Throne of Atlantis* is the story of how Superman and Wonder Woman start to evolve as a new “power” couple. In fact, the story opens with the two of them finishing their kiss on the rooftop, only for Wonder Woman to dash away in confusion. The next scene flashes forward and sees Wonder Woman confront her nemesis Barbara Minerva, the Cheetah, who is Wonder Woman’s first American friend. In this encounter Cheetah gets the best of Wonder Woman, knocking her out until Flash and Cyborg come to collect her. After the Cheetah fight, Wonder Woman ends up back

on the Watchtower with the rest of the Justice League. The team approaches her out of concern:

Wonder Woman: I'm fine.

Flash: We know you're fine. We've just never seen you, uh, knocked down before.

Superman: Wonder Woman was obviously holding back, Flash. (Johns, *Justice League: Throne of Atlantis* 8)

In this conversation two things happen, one Superman rushes to defend Wonder Woman, and two, you learn that Wonder Woman has a soft spot for Cheetah. While it is true that Superman usually leaps to the defense of any person, he appears extra quick to defend Wonder Woman when she has a perceived weakness. More than likely, though, this willingness to hop to her aid comes from his new feelings toward her.

It is rare and almost uncharacteristic, to see Wonder Woman in a moment of vulnerability. As seen with her care for the well-being of Steve Trevor, she is often quick to show how much her friends mean to her when they are in danger, but she is usually using her strength and power to do so. It is, of course, no surprise that Wonder Woman would be quick to defend others with force. In her article, "Pretty Fierce: Amazon Women and Art Education," Heidi Jo Davis-Soylu says, "the Amazons exemplify the combination of female independence and power – offering an ancient example of girl power" (115). Wonder Woman is the Princess of the Amazons, and she shows it in nearly every panel in comic book history where she appears. So, when she shows a moment of tenderness toward her very deadly nemesis, it comes as a surprise to those around her. Her reluctance to hurt a former friend does allow for her to show a different side to her

character, one that gives her layers and serves to make her a more complex character than the one seen in the preceding volumes.

After some talking amongst the team, and a moment alone with Superman, Wonder Woman agrees to let the League help her confront Cheetah, and soon, they are off to the jungle with the hopes of capturing her. Unfortunately, Cheetah is in her natural habitat, and takes down the team while also infecting Superman with a cheetah disease via bite; she also stops the Flash by cutting his calf muscle. She runs away from the conflict, leaving the rest of the team to deal with an out of control Cheetah-Superman. Once they subdue Superman with a sound ray from Cyborg, the remaining members of “The Trinity,” start to show their concern:

Batman: Cyborg stays with me. Everyone else bring Minerva back here.

...

Wonder Woman: I’m not leaving Superman like this. He came here to help me. I have to help him.

Batman: The best thing to do that is to find the Cheetah. If we’re going to get Superman back, we might need her. (Johns, *Justice League: Throne of Atlantis* 26)

After Superman's injury, Wonder Woman is quick to come to his side, much like he did for her when she was incapacitated, earlier. However, Batman sees that the best way to help Superman is to capture Cheetah, so he takes the time to rearrange the priorities of everyone else to do so.

When a member of the team is down, any other member of the team is always concerned with the well-being of their fallen comrade. However, Wonder Woman is in a

unique position on the team. She is not a human, and she is powerful enough to challenge any other member of the League, and as such, she is a bit of an outsider. In their article, “Greek, Roman, or American? Wonder Woman’s Roots in DC’s New 52,” John Darowski and Virginia Rush take a look at Wonder Woman in the “New 52,” noting “Diana shows that family, whatever an individual’s interpretation of that might be, is worth fighting for” (228). For Wonder Woman, given her thoughts of loneliness she shared with Superman in the last volume, she could easily see the Justice League, and more specifically Superman as her extended family. For that reason, she is more than willing to stay and help Superman in any way she can, especially as she feels like it is her fault for dragging everyone into this predicament in the first place.

Luckily, a lost jungle tribe arrives to help the team, and they claim to have a cure for Superman. In the meantime, Flash, Aquaman, and Wonder Woman subdue the Cheetah by driving her through the jungle toward a pool where Aquaman, along with the aid of some piranhas, subdues her. Back to Superman, the tribe is preparing to heal the Kryptonian, when Batman makes it clear how important he is, telling them, “Superman is one of the most important people in the world. This man is my friend. Tell me this will work” (Johns, *Justice League: Throne of Atlantis* 28). It is not often that Batman allows someone to get close to him as a friend, and it is even less often that he makes a public declaration of said friendship. So, for him to not only admit this, but to do it out loud, shows how dire Superman’s situation is, and just how close the two legends are becoming.

Once the team is safely back on the Watchtower, they learn that Barbara Minerva is a thief and has been the whole time she’s known Wonder Woman, and is using her to

steal artifacts from the world over. Wonder Woman is, of course, crestfallen and begins to question her personal naiveté. Once again, it is a solo conversation with Superman that starts to console her:

Wonder Woman: If I can't trust my own instincts, I can't trust anyone.

Superman: You have an entire team of people you can trust. You can trust me.

Wonder Woman: I don't know that much about you, Superman.

Superman: Let's change that. (Johns, *Justice League: Throne of Atlantis* 37)

To accomplish his goal of opening up to Wonder Woman, Superman takes her to his hometown of Smallville. First stop is his favorite diner to eat pancakes, and then they are off to his parent's farm, which he explains he kept after they passed away. This moment is an intimate look into Superman's life that he shares with very few people. Being in Kansas, and learning about Superman's upbringing leads to them a kiss, and they effectively become a couple at this point. Next, the comic switches to a satellite feed showing them kissing, and then it shows Batman is actually watching their romantic actions.

Superman taking Wonder Woman back to Smallville shows just how much he wants like this relationship to work. Clark Kent is Superman, and his Midwestern roots are directly responsible for who he is as a hero. Randy Duncan, in, "Traveling Hopefully in Search of American National Identity: The 'Grounded' Superman as a 21st Century Picaro," sums up Superman's identity perfectly, saying, "in all versions, he is Clark Kent before he creates the identity of Superman. In all versions the moral examples and

guidance of Jonathan and Martha Kent mold his character" (223). So, when Superman shows Wonder Woman his childhood farm and talks about his parents with her, he is quite literally showing her the place where he feels he comes from, not Krypton, just Kansas. For her part, Wonder Woman understands the gravity of his confession, and her fears of not being able to navigate the good and bad of the world melt away. Once she finally embraces his advances, she opens up and shows a vulnerability she doesn't normally show to other people. Darowski and Rush note this moment, "serves as one of the ultimate couplings of ancient and modern mythology; the Amazon Princess of myth and the Man of Tomorrow" (230). Now that they are together, their life becomes so much more complex than a normal relationship between two people. Instead, their time together has implications that they have yet to consider.

The narration then follows two different paths, as we see Superman and Wonder Woman continue on their whirlwind of dates. In the meantime, there are also a bunch of mysterious events happening around the sea. The turmoil in the sea draws Aquaman out into the open, and soon he asks Batman for help in figuring out why a Navy ship bombed Atlantis. The Navy attack causes Atlantis to retaliate by flooding Boston, Gotham, and Metropolis. Fortunately, Superman and Wonder Woman work together to save Metropolis, which leaves Batman, Aquaman, and Mera, Aquaman's girlfriend, to take care of Gotham. Once the water settles, the team learns that Atlantis is actively attacking the United States under the direction of Aquaman's brother Ocean Master.

During the confusion of the mass flooding, a stranger exits the water and saves Lois Lane. When he gets her to safety, Superman and Wonder Woman confront him, and he strikes a huge blow on Superman. The attack rankles Wonder Woman, so she puts her

sword at his neck and says "take a swing again and so do I" (Johns, *Justice League: Throne of Atlantis* 76). It seems that once again, when Superman is under attack, Wonder Woman is ready to go to great lengths to make sure he remains unharmed. They soon discover this man is an Atlantean named Vulko, and that he is there to warn Aquaman of the impending attack; he also appears to be on their side for the moment. Meanwhile, Batman and Aquaman rush to meet up with the rest of the team, along with the new Atlantean, so they can figure out what they need to do to respond to the challenge from Atlantis.

Once the team is together, they learn Atlantis believes the missile strike from the Navy ship is an act of war, and they plan to mount a full-scale assault. Most members of the Justice League believe Ocean Master is now a war criminal, and they want to bring him to justice to answer for the flood victims. However, Aquaman believes this is all a misunderstanding and diplomacy will solve the problem. The rest of the team does not agree, that is until Batman steps in:

Aquaman: You have to give me a chance to bring my brother in peacefully.

Batman: You have it.

Superman: But, Batman –

Batman: One chance Arthur. (Johns, *Justice League: Throne of Atlantis* 83)

While initially, you would think Batman is going to side with his closest friend, Superman, that turns out not to be the case in this instance. Fortunately for Aquaman, Batman always sides with what is right, no matter whose toes he steps on. Batman also

steps in for Aquaman because he too is a friend. In her article, “Friendship, Virtue, and Impartiality,” Diane Jeske gives an account of friendship that explains what is happening here, saying, “friendship is a complex relation between two persons that involves mutual attitudes of affection and behavioral dispositions to promote each other’s well-being” (53). Batman backs Aquaman’s plan because, as his friend, he is concerned for his teammate, and respects him enough to allow him the chance to deal with his family on his terms. Also, such is the respect for Batman’s leadership, there is only a minor and unsuccessful challenge from Superman, and then Aquaman leaves with Batman’s, and by extension the League’s, blessing.

Once Aquaman is with his brother, it quickly becomes evident that Ocean Master, who is now the ruler of Atlantis, after Aquaman abdicated, is very angry about the attack on his people. In addition, Ocean Master has other grievances towards humankind, such as the pollution of the oceans. Now that it looks like Ocean Master does not want to comply with Aquaman’s pleas for peace, “The Trinity” shows up to take down Ocean Master and end this war. Unfortunately, Aquaman does not appreciate the intervention, and instead chooses to fight back against “The Trinity,” hoping to make them see the error in their ways. Aquaman’s Atlantean physiology makes him a formidable force when fighting the Justice League heavyweights, but things quickly change once Wonder Woman has him wrapped up in her unbreakable lasso. The momentary lapse in fighting allows the two to converse, and Aquaman warns Wonder Woman that each Atlantean soldier will fight to the death. Not at all fazed by a pending battle, Wonder Woman replies, “so will I” (Johns, *Justice League: Throne of Atlantis* 97). Her response once again is indicative of Wonder Woman’s status as a warrior who is unafraid of a difficult

fight. Fernando Gabriel Pagnoni Berns, in, “War, Foreign Policy and the Media: The Rucka Years,” equates her response to her origin as a character, noting, “Diana is princess of the Amazons, mythological creatures whose very existence is war ... On the other hand, Diana is continuously depicted like a superhero who tries dialogue before engaging in a fight with the enemy” (194). Her origin quite literally makes her ready to do battle with whatever enemy is in front of her. However, her time with the other members of the Justice League is wearing off on her, and she at least attempts peace before the fighting starts. Her willingness to talk is also due to her relationship with Aquaman, who is a friend, and a person she normally fights to protect.

As the battle rages on, it becomes clear that Ocean Master outmatches the members of the Justice League. He uses his staff to shock Batman into unconsciousness, and then raises the oceans, flooding the area, before calling on magical lightning to swallow up and subdue Superman, Wonder Woman, and Aquaman, who is again on the side of the League. Once the Justice League is incapacitated Ocean Master completely removes them from the fight by banishing them to the Dark Waters.

Cyborg saves the banished members of the Justice League by transporting to the deep ocean and collecting everyone, he then teleports the team back to the field of battle. Now invigorated by the sting of the last defeat at the hands of his brother, Aquaman faces his brother head on. With the combined might of the original members of the Justice League and some called in reserves, they push the Atlanteans back toward the sea. At the same time, Aquaman, now filled with rage, is much more powerful than his brother and quickly ends the fight. Not only that, but Aquaman then retakes his mantle as the King of Atlantis. Once the fight is over, and the rest of Atlantis heads back into the sea, Aquaman

decides Ocean Master must stay above water to face justice for the mass deaths of the drowned victims.

Finally, the story concludes with Aquaman saying goodbye to Mera, who does not wish to return to Atlantis, as he prepares to leave and retake his place as the ruler of Atlantis. As far as the rest of the team goes, they find themselves facing the prospect of once again losing a member of the League. At this point, Aquaman feels he must leave the Justice League, much like Green Lantern did in the last volume, because the attack of Aquaman's people once again shakes the world's trust in the team. As the story concludes, the team is back on the Watchtower, now down to only five members. It is once again Batman who must say what everyone is thinking, “we need to do what we haven’t done before. We open our ranks” (Johns, *Justice League: Throne of Atlantis* 168).

Batman faces no direct challenge when the discussion of new team members again comes to the table. The conformity is due to the events in the preceding two volumes, and the fact that the team lost two very powerful members. In their article, “Social Support, Group Consensus and Stressor-Strain Relationships: Social Context Matters,” Paul D. Bliese and Thomas W. Britt explain how this consensus is a good indicator of a healthy team, saying, “groups characterized by high consensus are presumed to be well-functioning and to have low levels of internal conflict and stress. We consider such groups to have positive social environments” (427). The Justice League may have minor disagreements, but once there is a decision, they all stand by that decision. Furthermore, even when there is a disagreement, the team sees no real dissension, and through it all, they remain friends. There are no harsh feelings after

altercations, even when one member strikes another out of anger, as did both Wonder Woman and Aquaman. Ultimately, the team gets along well, and as Bliese and Britt say, have a “positive social environment.”

The two volumes in this chapter focus on a few things, such as watching how the team grows, especially when it comes to team leadership, strengthening their interpersonal relationships, and how they deal with external political pressures. Time and again, you see the members constantly standing up for each other whenever one of them faces adversity. The members of “The Trinity” are also getting closer. Now, Batman and Superman are close friends who work together outside of the team, and know each other’s secret identities. On the other end of “The Trinity,” Wonder Woman is now in a romantic relationship with Superman, a secret Batman chooses to keep, further cementing the close personal relationships of the three heroes. Additionally, the team is now down to five members. Next, the Justice League not only needs to recruit new people to their ranks, but they also face some of their toughest challenges yet, and even see some of their more powerful members taken out of the equation for extended periods. So, while the first three volumes focus on forming the team, and then how they become actual friends, the remaining volumes now focus on adversity, and how internal conflicts threaten to wreck the team.

Chapter 3: Membership Drive

So far, the volumes covered look at the formation of the Justice League, and how they deal with crises both large and small. Amidst all the chaos that surrounds a superhero team, one thing remains constant, and that is the steadfast presence of “The Trinity.” Moving forward, the next volume, *Justice League: The Grid*, focuses on how “The Trinity” grows from the most powerful members at the center of the team to an inseparable group of friends whose relationship is now almost familial. Furthermore, they continue to establish themselves as the unspoken leaders of the team, all while combatting a threat that is not immediately apparent to the group. By the end of this chapter, the team deals with drastic membership changes, that ultimately lead to a betrayal; they see their most powerful member go rouge, and they once again are in the position of needing to add new members.

Justice League: The Grid opens with the remaining members of the Justice League in the Watchtower debating admitting new members. After the events in *Justice League: Throne of Atlantis*, the team is down to five full-time members: Flash, Cyborg, Batman, Superman, and Wonder Woman, with Aquaman attempting to help on a part-time basis. However, at this point, it is clear that his attention is on Atlantean affairs. Additionally, Batman recognizes the core members can’t be there all the time, so he lays out a plan to relieve the pressure; he says of the scope of potential new members, “that depends on what we go up against, be it the Cheetah or Atlantis. We all have our own commitments so I suggest we find some new members who are willing to dedicate to the League full time” (Johns, *Justice League: The Grid* 6). As for the other members of the team, it seems that Superman and Wonder Woman want a more conservative approach,

while Cyborg appears to be on Batman's side of having a larger reserve, and Flash is just excited to meet new heroes. However, once Batman makes it clear they need to seriously consider adding new members, the conversation switches from debating adding more heroes, to how they plan to vet the potential additions.

When Batman speaks to a position, it almost always signals the end of the matter at hand, which perfectly illustrates his position of respect on the team. While he is not technically in charge, the team feels as if they can trust his judgment. In his article, “Leadership Group Coaching in Action: The Zen of Creating High Performance Teams,” Manfred F.R. Kets de Vries speaks to trust’s role on a team, claiming “if trust is honored and protected, it flourishes and bears good fruit. Trust makes for constructive conflict resolution; constructive conflict resolution makes for genuine commitment, and commitment makes for accountability” (70). As is seen from Batman's previous encounters with Green Lantern, accountability is something Batman does not take lightly and is a standard he holds for every member of the team, including himself. So, when Batman is pushing for new members, or giving direction in the heat of battle, the rest of the team knows they can trust his judgment because they are aware Batman does not make decisions without first weighing his options. Batman established his ability to put the interests of the team first during their initial encounter with Darkseid. Batman, knowing he would need to retrieve a kidnapped Superman to finally defeat Darkseid, chooses to undertake the incredibly dangerous mission of rescuing him on Apokolips; rather than send someone else in harm’s way. Meanwhile, Batman delegates leadership responsibility to Green Lantern who must rally the team back on Earth in his absence.

When the team reconvenes, they have ten potential members aboard the Watchtower for an initial interview. Unfortunately, many of the candidates don't want to join due to their own missions; the magician Zatanna is still busy looking for her father, Blue Devil and Black Lightning feel their loyalty lies elsewhere. Batman's protégé, Nightwing, blatantly says "no," and that leaves them with few options. Ultimately they choose to add the relative rookies, Atom, Element Woman, and Firestorm. Batman sums the choice up, saying "there's not a lot of experience with these three, but they're ready to commit to the League full time" (Johns, *Justice League: The Grid* 17). As the team finishes introducing their final choices, the monitor screen in the Watchtower flashes a skull and crossbones. From here on out, the team knows someone is playing a game with them.

The story moves forward and picks up with Superman and Wonder Woman basking in the sunrise of the war-torn Kahndaq; a nation with closed borders to the rest of the world. The romantic moment between the two takes place directly after they liberate a group of hostages from terrorists. Needless to say, Superman and Wonder Woman should not be there, but Wonder Woman can't help but try to convince Superman they should further assist the people of Kahndaq.

Wonder Woman: The people rebelled. Then the country was divided by civil war. And it's never gotten out. We could save them, Clark. Not just the hostages, but the entire country.

Superman: It's not up to us to change the world, Diana.

Wonder Woman: Why not?

Superman: I made that choice a long time ago and it was the right choice. I

use my powers to inspire, not interfere. (Johns, *Justice League: The Grid* 35)

Their exchange is one of the passages in the book that captures the spirit of both characters quite well, Wonder Woman is a woman of action, and when she sees a problem, she wants to handle it as directly as possible. Superman, on the other hand, has a whole different approach to his powers. Tom De Haven, in his work, *Our Superman on Earth*, explains Superman's approach to life, noting "whatever he does, he does philanthropically ... but always, too, for the common good" (70). At his core, Superman would love to intervene in every conflict across the globe, but he knows his actions would have dire consequences for America, as he appears to be their champion, therefore he would be an American citizen meddling in the affairs of other nations. So, Superman often has to hold back in these instances, despite the fact that the inherent goodness inside him must be in great anguish.

It is at this moment that Batman silently arrives through a boom tube, and he feels he must intervene here as a disciplinarian. He has deep concern, both about an item taken from the Batcave, and Superman and Wonder Woman interference with the hostage crisis. Batman chooses to tackle the latter first. He starts the conversation by chastising them, "you kicked a hornet's nest today. Kahndaq is threatening to retaliate against U.S. interests. Americans have been banned from entering Kahndaq for decades" (Johns, *Justice League: The Grid* 36). Of course, Wonder Woman and Superman feel the need to defend their actions by rightly stating they did not act as the Justice League, and that they also saved lives today. However, Batman is not having it, and reminds them, "when you and she are together, Clark, you represent the Justice League. You cannot do this to us"

(Johns, *Justice League: The Grid* 37). It is true the new lovers are defensive, but through further discussion they come to their senses.

For their part in the encounter, both Superman and Wonder Woman do not seem to enjoy getting admonished by Batman, so they initially get defensive about their actions once confronted. From their perspective they were doing the right thing, Wonder Woman makes it clear that inaction “would’ve cost lives. We had no choice” (Johns, *Justice League: The Grid* 36), which is entirely reasonable for the duo, as they both abhor seeing innocent lives lost. Additionally, Superman doesn’t quite believe their actions are a representation of the Justice League as a whole, he says, “It wasn’t the Justice League that came here, it was Diana and I” (Johns, *Justice League: The Grid* 36). However, Batman makes it clear they are the Justice League, and they need to be cognizant of their actions when together. Of course, Superman comes to his senses and reminds Batman: “you know we’d never do anything to purposely upset you, Bruce. We’re your friends” (Johns, *Justice League: The Grid* 37). It is important to note that Superman’s words encapsulate the relationship of “The Trinity,” no matter what happens in the outside world, any mistakes made, or how angry they may get, they will always come back to their base of friendship.

Then Batman lets the other shoe drop, and he tells them he knows about their secret relationship. At first, they are quite defensive, but Batman assures them he is happy for them, although, he is worried about how the rest of the world may react. Finally, Batman starts to tell them about the incident in the cave:

Batman: You’re the two most powerful beings on Earth. They’re going to be gunning for you.

Superman: Who will?

Batman: Whoever's afraid of what you two could do. Someone broke into the Batcave last night. And they didn't do it to get at me, Superman. They did it to get to you.

Wonder Woman: What's in the Batcave that can hurt Clark? What did you do Bruce? (Johns, *Justice League: The Grid* 38)

The entire exchange is a pretty dense encounter between "The Trinity," and it hammers home how they deal with each other even when they are not very happy with the events taking place. Even though Batman has to occupy the disciplinarian role here, he still treats his friends with respect, and when he opens up about his own mistake, he chooses to be candid and honest.

There is a theme at the center of any conflict happening between "The Trinity," and that is one of acceptance of the flaws of each other. In a group like this, they can expect disagreement, especially when tensions are high from conflict and other adversities. However, they are also excellent at clearing the air when they disagree. In, "Laws of Friendship," Peter Goodrich looks at friendship and explains "there is, in other words, a contract at the root of friendship in which a double equivalency is spelled out, namely that friends are alike, or bound by resemblance, and act alike, or in reciprocity" (27). On the surface Batman, Superman, and Wonder Woman couldn't be more different, one is a human, one an alien, and one an ancient Greek half-deity. However, they all share strong morals, belief in the good of humanity, and the preservation of all life, good or bad. So, when there is a conflict, eventually their commonality takes over, and their friendship resumes as if nothing happened.

Here there is a brief interlude, where the story changes to catch up with Element Woman, the Atom, and Firestorm. They are all on Watchtower duty when Despero, an incredibly strong villain, who can also attack psychically, shows up looking for the rest of the Justice League. Surprisingly, at first, the rookie members of the team do a decent job of holding him off. Eventually, though, Despero separates the two people who combine to make up Firestorm, rips Element Woman in half, and eats a shrunken Atom.

The story then rotates back to “The Trinity,” and they fill in the final piece of the puzzle about the stolen item from the Batcave.

Wonder Woman: You had a kryptonite ring in the Batcave that was stolen?

Batman: By someone who obviously knows my identity, Diana. And they knew I had the ring. They went right to it.

Wonder Woman: What were you doing with kryptonite, Bruce?

Superman: I gave it to him, Diana. (Johns, *Justice League: The Grid* 50)

The fact Superman gave his one true weakness to Batman shows how close their friendship is at this time. So far, Superman has yet to encounter a force that can damage him irreparably, other than kryptonite. So, when Superman does trust Batman with the only known item that can decimate him, he certainly does not do this lightly.

Additionally, Superman’s willingness to provide someone with kryptonite shows just how strong of a moral compass is inside Superman. He is aware of how excessive his power can be, and Superman knows exactly how much damage he could inflict if he either, went rogue, or was controlled by some evil entity; knowing his potential for destruction is ultimately the reason he would pass out his only instrument of demise.

When writing about an earlier Superman story, *Kingdom Come*, in, “Superman: The Myth Through the Christ and the Revelation,” Carl Boehm compares Superman to Christ, saying “Superman becomes an ideal hero in the image of Christ in *Kingdom Come*, where violence equates with evil, and valuing human life above all else represents truth, justice, and the American way” (241). At the core of Superman is his need to be a moral person, and protect others, and, as Boehm notes, human life takes precedence over everything. So, if Superman ever went against those principles, then it only makes sense that he wants someone like Batman to stop the violence Superman is wrecking on innocents.

To fully understand these three, it is important to look at the entire exchange in Kahndaq; which shows just how deep the respect runs amongst “The Trinity.” No matter what happens between them at this point, compromise and understanding are the core tenets of their relationship. In his article, “Commonplace Forgiveness: From Healthy Relationships to Healthy Society,” Giacomo Bono claims “decisions to forgive emerge when victims are no longer motivated by the natural reactions of righteous indignation and hurt-perceived attack, but by a desire to restore goodwill or community with their transgressors” (84). Initially, Batman’s confrontation of the two heroes is met with indignation from them as they both feel they are in the right. However, it does not take them long to realize some things are more important than hurt feelings; as Superman is quick to remind Batman, they are friends, and they have no desire to do anything wrong toward each other on purpose. Seconds later, when Batman admits an intruder stole the kryptonite hidden in his cave, he tells them as his friends. It is evident from this interaction that at this point in the life of the Justice League their friendship is first and foremost the priority. Even when Wonder Woman finds out why Batman has kryptonite,

she is calm and rational about it, never once threatening Batman for his perceived transgression. “The Trinity” is truly a cut above the rest of the League when it comes to the level of respect and honor they give each other.

Luckily for the team on the Watchtower, the Martian Manhunter shows up to help with the fight against Despero. He swiftly takes down Despero in a psychic battle taking place solely within their minds. The Atom escapes Despero's body, and slowly both Firestorm and Element Woman start to reform themselves. Unfortunately, the Watchtower is nearly destroyed and is plummeting to Earth. Back in Kahndaq, Cyborg tells Superman he must stop the Watchtower from crashing into the East Coast or a multitude of people may die. Superman, who is always confident in his abilities, replies “I can Vic. That’s what I do” (Johns, *Justice League: The Grid* 53), as he streaks off in the distance. True to his word, Superman stops the Watchtower from crashing into the coast, and as the team arrives, they find the missing kryptonite ring on Despero's finger. However, to the team’s dismay, they soon discover a microscopic sliver of the kryptonite is missing from the ring. They also realize Despero is too large to be the person who broke into the Batcave, which leaves the team with two mysteries they still need to solve.

The first half of the story concludes back in the Batcave with Superman and Batman having a discussion about Batman's secret cases. Here, Batman discloses his reason for keeping all the countermeasures and his one big fear:

Batman: You want me to tell you why I’m so concerned about your relationship with Wonder Woman? (Batman hands Superman the Wonder Woman box)

Superman: I thought you already did.

Batman: Open it.

Superman: It's empty.

Batman: Because Wonder Woman doesn't have a kryptonite, Clark. The hard truth is that if she ever crosses the line, you're the only one who could stop her. You're the box. (Johns, *Justice League: The Grid* 61)

After this, Batman also hands Superman the box that has the Bat logo on it, in the hopes that if he ever loses control, Superman will take care of him as well. This moment between the two is a time of extreme vulnerability for both men. Superman is just learning he may need to take out his closest friends if the occasion ever arose, and Batman has to admit that he has a weakness. From this time forward, the two icons are forever indebted to each other. They are both their brother's keepers.

Of course, it would be Batman who thinks of a way to dismantle the League in case the occasion ever arose. He has always been the Dark Knight, the superhero who lives in the shadows and believes darkness can always creep into the light. That is why Batman has to have a Superman, or as Philip Bevin says, in, "Batman Versus Superman: A Conversation," that "Batman needs Superman as one of the key counterpoints against which his character can be defined and clarified. The troubled traumatized Batman and the dynamic, edgy DC Universe both require Superman to function as a sunny contrast to their darkness" (131). With Superman existing as the lightness to Batman's darkness, it is pretty clear why he charges Superman with taking him down if that time ever comes, and also why Superman entrusts Batman with the kryptonite, only darkness can counter the light, and vice versa.

As the story advances, the mystery surrounding the Watchtower hack starts to unravel. First, Madame Xanadu, a psychic, tries to help a woman with sleepwalking issues only to see a glimpse of the world on fire, and "The Trinity" right at the center of the devastation. Next, Pandora, from the myth, tracks down both Superman and Wonder Woman. Her intent is to get Superman to open Pandora's Box once again so that all sin can be put back in place. Then, Madame Xanadu has a vision of Steve Trevor and Amanda Waller forming a Justice League of America with the sole intent of being able to counter and take down the original Justice League. Unfortunately, Pandora's plan goes horribly wrong. As she hands Superman the box, it immediately infects him and turns him evil. Luckily, Wonder Woman knocks the box away, and Superman seemingly returns to normal. As they start to recover, Batman interrupts to tell them the team is needed in Kahndaq to retrieve an errant superhero, Shazam, who is hoping to scatter Black Adam's, Kahndaq's former ruler, ashes. However, the new Kahndaqi government does not appreciate the incursion.

Quickly the team arrives in Kahndaq, and Superman flies in to subdue Shazam; however, the magically imbued interloper is able to knock Superman down. Shazam seems to be both surprised and delighted by his show of strength against Superman. He even gloats about it, which ultimately does not go well for him.

Shazam: You aren't so tough, Superman!

Superman: You haven't seen me be yet. (Johns, *Justice League: The Grid*

86).

Superman ends the fight with one punch, while the rest of the League stands by waiting to interrogate Shazam. Of course, with an unknown player on the field, Superman has to

be the first person to confront him, as he is the most powerful member of the team and the least likely to be hurt permanently. Before the team left for Kahndaq, they recall that Shazam's powers are rooted in magic, and they regret they don't have much experience with magic as of yet. In his article, "Action Comics! Superman and Practical Reason," Brian Feltham explains why Superman was the first to engage, noting "Superman is of course, the Man of Steel. Not only can he perform great physical feats, but there is usually very little risk to him in doing so" (19). Due to his near invulnerability, Superman is always taking one for the team. Even in the instance of fighting the magical Shazam, Superman still rushes in first even though magic is one of his weaknesses. This willingness to take the hardest hits is one reason Superman is always at the center of the Justice League, the rest of the team knows Superman always has their backs, even to his own detriment at times.

Furthermore, as one pillar of "The Trinity," Superman inhabits one of the de facto positions of leadership on the team. As such, Superman would take his elevated position quite seriously and ultimately would never ask anyone to do something he would not do himself. In their article, "Leading-by-example and signaling in voluntary contribution games: an experimental study," Jan Potters et al, conclude that their "experiment strongly supports the theoretical prediction that leading-by-example improves group performance in the presence of asymmetric information ... When an uninformed follower can observe the choice of an informed leader, he tends to copy the leader's decision" (180). In the instance of the fight with Shazam, the group does not have much information on magic. However, Superman is aware of how dangerous magic can be, as it is one of his few weaknesses, so he charges in to face the threat head on, thereby saving the others from

danger. Ultimately, if he is successful in his efforts, he shows them how to defeat Shazam in any future confrontations. If he is not successful, then at the very least, the team knows what not to do moving forward. Additionally, by rushing in to confront Shazam first, Superman also sets the precedence that he would never send someone into a danger he would not face; which shows that his position of leadership does not elevate his interests above those of the other members of the team.

Things go south for the original Justice League shortly after that, when the Justice League of America shows up to stop yet another incident within Kahndaq's borders. At first, the two teams just talk and posture against each other, but when Dr. Light gets involved, Superman's cells start sucking up Dr. Light's energy, causing the doctor to overload and blast Wonder Woman. Superman freaks out, screams, "DIANA! GET AWAY FROM HER!" (Johns, *Justice League: The Grid* 93), and then proceeds to disintegrate Dr. Light's head with heat vision. After this, both teams erupt into violence; and, even though it is clear that something is wrong with Superman, the Justice League of America still blames him for the death of their teammate, regardless of any ailments affecting the Man of Steel. In addition to the death of Dr. Light, back in her shop Madame Xanadu realizes something is horribly wrong and that Superman is not responsible. Unfortunately, her client turns out to be the supervillain Plastique, who proceeds to blow up the place with Madame Xanadu inside, effectively covering up any evidence of Superman's innocence.

As this story concludes, the narration moves forward in time to another conflict between the Justice League, the Justice League of America, as well as the Justice League Dark. Each team is now obsessed with controlling Pandora's Box; because the energy it is

putting out plays to each person's fears of what would happen if anyone else were to possess the box. At this point, Superman is a pale color with green veins running up his face; it is evident something is poisoning him. The fight reaches a climax once Batman has control of the box, and in his twisted rage Superman believes Batman is trying to woo Wonder Woman away from him. Luckily for Batman, Wonder Woman steps in and stops Superman from killing him. The resulting concussion from their clash makes Pandora's Box go dormant, which puts everyone back in the right frame of mind.

Additionally, Superman is now down for the count, and he is quite visibly sick. Wonder Woman, who is cradling Superman, looks to get some answers and finally asks, "Why is the box hurting Superman physically, but not us?" (Johns, *Justice League: The Grid* 118). The task to subdue, and then attempt to rescue Superman, would, of course, fall on the capable shoulders of Wonder Woman. Physically she is nearly his equal, and she also cares for him romantically. The power couples' relationship dynamic goes back to the Amazon's roots, and to her creation at the hands of noted feminist William Moulton Marston. Marston, who, in, "William Marston's Feminist Agenda," Michelle R. Finn notes, "hoped that Wonder Woman would inspire a real and permanent change in the social-sexual order" (8). In, *Wonder Woman Unbound: The Curious History of the World's Most Famous Heroine*, Tim Hanley also speaks to Wonder Woman's place in comics, saying "in a genre that enforced typical gender roles and relied on a very narrow view of femininity, Wonder Woman shattered these expectations" (41). As Hanley states here, Wonder Woman is not your typical female, nor your typical superhero. She has no boundaries when it comes to playing with the big boys, and even though Superman is her lover, she does not hesitate to stop him if the need arises. That is not to say that she is not

without her femininity, though, as she does rush to his side once the conflict is over.

Wonder Woman is also the first to start trying to figure out what is wrong with Superman, and to make a plan to help the Man of Steel recover.

Finally, they learn the secret of who is behind all of this when the Atom explains she put the missing kryptonite sliver in Superman's brain; which served to trigger the heat vision blast that killed Dr. Light. Also at this moment, all of Cyborg's cybernetic parts separate from his body becoming a sentient robot named Grid. The final piece of the puzzle is put in place when a strange man shows up and uses Pandora's Box to open a portal, out of which comes The Crime Syndicate. The new arrivals are the evil version of the Justice League from Earth-3. The new team is Ultraman, Superwoman, Owlman, Johnny Quick, Power Ring, Deathstorm, and the Atom, who reveals herself as the supervillain Atomica. The only remaining stranger is the evil version of Alfred Pennyworth, in this version Owlman's butler, which explains why he was able to use his retina to break into the Batcave and steal the kryptonite ring. *Justice League: The Grid* concludes with the villains rushing forward to fight the remaining members of the Justice League.

What is important to take away from the previous graphic novel is how "The Trinity's" relationship evolved from a trio of cautious teammates to incredibly close friends, and as such, they have entrenched themselves as the central leadership of the Justice League. Even the King of Atlantis, Aquaman, defers to Batman when he makes a decision. In their article, "Relation of Collaborative Interpersonal Relationships to Individual Satisfaction and Organizational Performance," John D. Aram et al, have studied how interpersonal relationships affect team culture. They find this about

organizational structure, claiming "a secondary orientation implies collaboration and consensus, with mutual agreement on goals, self-control, mutual exchange with leaders, and confidence and trust among members" (290). This trust and confidence in the leadership of "The Trinity" actually makes the team run quite smoothly. As seen when one member of "The Trinity" gets out of line, the others step up to pull them back in, practically making the trio a contained self-disciplining entity. This type of intervention happens when Batman reminds Superman and Wonder Woman that they are the public face of the League, and in turn, it is Superman and Wonder Woman whom Batman confesses to about the loss of the kryptonite ring.

Furthermore, when it comes to adding new team members, Batman has both the first and the final say. Despite the clear power dynamic that "The Trinity" represents, they are all open to working with, or helping the other members whenever they can. Batman is often conversing with Cyborg about important matters, including setting up the database of potential members. You can also find Superman and Wonder Woman working alongside Aquaman in the rare instances he needs help with a water based mission. Additionally, "The Trinity" is often seen as the ones responsible for keeping the team on track, this is a role that Batman relishes, and both Wonder Woman and Superman do their fair share of as well. Most notably, Wonder Woman steps up after defeating Superman and immediately starts trying to figure out how to cure his poisoning. Superman on the other hand often keeps the team on track by leading by example; he is the first to rush off and save the Watchtower or fight Shazam, even when the rest of the team may not be able to help. These exceptional qualities make "The Trinity" the heart and soul of the team, and are the reason they garner so much respect from the other

members that they are allowed to make most of the decisions concerning the overall governance of the team.

Thus concludes the story for this chapter. Up next the Justice League has to deal with the repercussions of the fight with The Crime Syndicate. Also, they come to terms with adding a new member to the team who is so controversial; no one wants him to join at all. They also come face to face with a virus that gives ordinary people superpowers, while it takes the powers of the metahumans who already have them. Also, the team feels the need to start preparing for a new threat to Earth, one they know nothing about, except that it is so powerful it destroyed the world where The Crime Syndicate formerly lived. As far as “The Trinity” is concerned, they become even tighter as a group, as they are the only ones who remain uninfected by the Amazo Virus, which leaves them as the sole heroes left who can save the day.

Chapter 4: Members Down

Coming out of the events of *Forever Evil* the Justice League is back up to full strength. Green Lantern is still out of the picture, but the young hero Shazam is here to take his place, bringing the team up to seven members again. Fortunately for the team, volume six, *Justice League: Injustice League*, starts with the League on the hunt for Lex Luthor; instead of once again fighting some potential world-breaking event. However, the peace does not last long; and once Luthor finds the Justice League, his actions send the League into a crisis of conscience. Eventually, the Justice League tries to stop a virus created by Luthor that turns regular humans into metahumans, and in turn, causes metahumans to go comatose before they ultimately die.

As the story opens, the world is now enamored with the once villain Lex Luthor; newspaper articles credit him for saving the world, and he is praised on televisions all over the world. Ever since engineering the defeat of the Crime Syndicate, he has built up some goodwill with the public; a situation that does not sit well with Superman and Batman. When Superman overhears a TV broadcast ask Luthor if he will be the “new Superman,” he tells Batman “If I could get sick, I would be” (Johns, *Justice League: Injustice League* 5). Carsten Fogh Nielsen says of Superman, in, “World’s Finest Philosophers: Superman and Batman on Human Nature,” that he “believes that human beings are fundamentally good, that the human race possesses a natural capacity for moral self-improvement, and that human society is a force for good” (195). It is important to note Superman's attitude toward Luthor. Superman may believe that the rest of the world can be good, but he does not extend the same courtesy to Lex Luthor. For his part, Batman is there for Superman to hear his concerns. Additionally, they both have the

same attitude toward Luthor, and Batman serves as a trusted ally for Superman as they attempt to unravel Luthor's end game together. The untrusting attitude Superman displays toward Luthor's conversion to hero is a theme that carries through all the events moving forward.

Superman and Batman are not alone in their disdain for all things Lex Luthor. The rest of the Justice League is busy trying to track him down to make sure he was not somehow involved with the Crime Syndicate. At the moment, Wonder Woman and Flash are teaming up to see if Metallo, a known Luthor associate, has any idea of his whereabouts; and they are doing their best to beat a location out of him. Wonder Woman is especially angry, and seems to side with Superman, saying, "Luthor doesn't deserve accolades for anything Flash. He deserves my sword in his throat" (Johns, *Justice League: Injustice League* 9). Fortunately for Metallo, Wonder Woman doesn't use her sword on him, and instead uses her lasso to draw out the truth about Luthor's location, the only issue being that Metallo doesn't know, so the heroes are back to square one.

In the "New 52," Wonder Woman is always the warrior first. She grew up on an Amazonian island and is also the physical embodiment of the God of War. So, when she threatens to kill Luthor part of her means it. Fortunately for Luthor's well-being, the Flash is there to talk some sense into her, "Uh, No. He deserves to be tried and if convicted sentenced to an appropriate punishment, which does not involve swords in this country. Or century" (Johns, *Justice League: Injustice League* 9). In their article, "Capitalizing on Diversity: Interpersonal Congruence in Small Work Groups," Jeffrey T. Polzer et al, look at culturally diverse teams, and note "the net effect of high interpersonal congruence may be that group members express their unique task-related ideas with little

accompanying friction or frustration, effectively dispelling the conflict that so often erupts between people with discrepant ideas” (303). The Flash knows that deep down Wonder Woman would not kill Lex Luthor, and he reminds her of that in the heat of the moment, which, at this time, seems to calm things down. His words work because of the closeness of the team, and she responds without conflict because the Justice Leaguers all respect one another’s opinions on most matters, including stabbing villains. Of course, Wonder Woman would not kill Lex Luthor, in addition to being an Amazon, she is also a hero, and in this world the hero rarely kills. Although, there is a sense that if someone needed to die, Wonder Woman would be the one who would do the killing for the League.

Up to this point, the team is unable to track down Lex Luthor; so they all gather in the Batcave to talk over the next steps. Batman seems to be confident they will find Luthor soon, even going so far as to boast, “he’s an insect. But bats eat insects” (Johns, *Justice League: Injustice League* 11). However, the search abruptly ends when the team receives an invitation from Luthor to join him on the rebuilt Justice League Watchtower. Once they arrive, Luthor starts to explain that he now considers himself a hero and that he would like to join the League as a full-fledged member. Superman has no intention to listen to him and keeps trying to get him to admit whatever scheme he has planned. Despite Superman's unflinching attitude, Luthor adamantly proclaims his remarkable change of heart; he even passes Wonder Woman's lasso of truth questioning. Even though Luthor seems to pass muster, Superman still isn't buying the hero act and ends up making Luthor leave the Watchtower.

A common theme in this iteration of the Justice League is the discussion of expansion. Earlier, Green Arrow unsuccessfully tried to join the team; shortly afterward they let Firestorm, Element Woman, and the Atom on the team only to have them fail to pass muster rather quickly. Luthor, however, is a different matter entirely, as he is not someone the team feels they can trust. Not to mention, Luthor is already showing that he can be a disruptive force, as he went behind their backs to secretly build another Watchtower after the destruction of the last one; and also invites Shazam to join the team without anyone's permission. Ultimately, this disruption may prove to be the biggest issue for the Justice League moving forward. As Anit Somech et al, claim in, "Team Conflict Management and Team Effectiveness: The Effects of Task Interdependence and Team Identification," that "organizational teams that rely on cooperative approaches to conflict seem to be good candidates for making effective use of their teamwork for themselves and the organization" (374). At this point, the team is working well together. "The Trinity" sits firmly in place as the unofficial leaders of the Justice League, and the rest of the team follows along, nearly without question. The leadership balance on the team and the respect all members have for each other serves the Justice League well, and they are very successful in protecting the Earth as a result. However, adding a presence like Lex Luthor could upset the entire balance, and throw the team into disarray. Batman and Superman, as demonstrated by their disdain for Luthor's membership proposal, understand that they should not take Luthor's intent at face value and that caution should be exercised moving forward.

Ultimately, at least for the time being, it does not appear Superman plans to entertain the idea of Luthor joining the Justice League, so Luthor decides to change

tactics by visiting Bruce Wayne when he is back at Wayne Manor. Luthor uses his time alone with Wayne to let him know he is in on Batman's secret identity, and that his secret is safe. Luthor claims his willingness to protect Batman's identity is proof that he wishes to do the League no harm, and that he should be allowed to join. Despite Luthor's assurances, Wayne still has doubts, and he tells Luthor a version of the frog and scorpion parable, only in his version, a bat scoops in and saves the frog from being stung. Finally, Wayne tells Luthor "I'm not going to let you kill the frog, Luthor. The answer to helping you get in the League is no. Now get the hell out of my house" (Johns, *Justice League: Injustice League* 42). Once Luthor leaves, Superman and Wonder Woman immediately summon Batman as they need his assistance in tracking down the old Power Ring's missing ring.

The fact that the confrontation between Lex Luthor and Batman takes place in Wayne Manor, with both men wearing civilian clothes, is an important distinction about how the relationship between the two plays out over the remaining pages, as a battle of wits rather than one of strength. Of course, Batman is more than capable of using his intellectual side as much as his fists. In his critique, *Batman Unmasked: Analyzing a Cultural Icon*, Will Brooker notes, "Batman is not merely a strongman but a detective who uses his deductive mind and resourcefulness to fight crime" (47). Even though Brooker is referencing Batman's first few years of publication, his resourcefulness is a trait that still rings true for "The World's Greatest Detective," and one of the reasons the rest of the Justice League trusts Batman's judgment. Rarely does Batman's intelligence ever fail, and he is almost always able to put that to good use; which is another reason why Batman can fit in on the Justice League even though he is the only non-powered

hero. However, when it comes to Luthor, he is also supremely intelligent, so, it takes Batman flexing all of his mental muscles to figure out what exactly is Luthor's Justice League endgame.

As previously stated, the team is off to find the ring left over from the death of Power Ring. Once the Justice League arrives on the site of a recent green energy discharge, not only do they find the new Power Ring, Jessica Cruz, but they also come across the Doom Patrol, and Lex Luthor, all of whom want to help Power Ring in their way. The ring that is attached to Jessica Cruz, and to a large extent controlling her, is similar in nature to Green Lantern's ring. Only the power ring does not work on will. Instead, it exploits the fears of the ring bearer and uses that fear to lash out against any perceived threats or enemies. The Green Lanterns are chosen for their bravery and become a partner with the rings. As the new Power Ring, Jessica Cruz gets her powers because of her fearful demeanor, which is so bad that she barricaded herself in her room after an aggravated assault. As a result, she is constantly trying to fight the control the ring has over her. She is less a villain, and more a victim at this time.

Up to this point in the skirmish, nothing the Justice League tries is working. The Doom Patrol is keeping the strongest members of the League busy, while Cyborg is unable to connect to the ring and shut it down. Shazam's magic lightning is unable to stop Power Ring as well. While the fight continues, Batman and Luthor are off to the side debating what to do, Luthor thinks he has a plan but needs Batman and the League to distract everyone while he disrupts the ring's connection to Jessica Cruz. Unfortunately, he fails and it falls on Batman to make a last ditch attempt to stop Power Ring from destroying everything.

Due to the distraction created by the Justice League with Doom Patrol, and Luthor being busy fighting Power Ring's constructs, Batman is able to get up close to her and make his case for her to stop fighting. She is still frightened, and the presence of Batman is not helping. It is not until Batman speaks to her that things start to change:

Only criminals should be afraid of me. And you're not a criminal. You're a victim. I was a victim too. I watched people I love die in front of me. I had no way to save them. I was afraid. And I wanted to hide, too. Because I was afraid of the darkness out there. The Darkness will consume you, Jessica. But you can find strength if you face it. If you stand up to it. Even if you embrace it. (Johns, *Justice League: Injustice League* 83-84)

His gambit works, and Jessica Cruz overcomes the ring's influence and stops the fighting. Batman then carries her away while he chides Luthor, and lets him know that the Justice League doesn't need him after all.

Batman is not often one to deliver dramatic speeches; that is one reason why, when he does choose to speak, his words carry a lot of weight. In the act of helping Cruz overcome the ring's influence, Batman does not throw a single punch and instead uses his words and humanity to win the fight. In the article "Batman – An American Mr. Hyde," Andreas Reichstein says this of Batman:

Using his dark side to fight the dark, he can always change back from bat to man. He is the American answer to the Victorian fear of losing control. Wayne/Batman is control. Bruce Wayne can control his evil side. He can turn the light off and become the shadow, but he can also turn the light back on again. (347)

When Batman approaches Cruz, it is not as the Dark Knight. Instead, he chooses to approach her as another human who has also felt like they were a victim, and perhaps more importantly, was also able to fight back and take control of his fear. To stop her torment, Cruz needs to hear that she is still in charge, and there is hope for her to overcome the fear. To help Cruz make that realization, Batman turns off the shadow and become Cruz's light.

Additionally, Batman's dual-existence between the light and dark is another reason why he fits so well as unofficial team leader. Batman fills the gaps in the Justice League perfectly. When it comes to the other two members of "The Trinity," Superman and Wonder Woman, he is the perfect counterweight to their distinct personalities. Superman exists solely on the light side of heroism. He always strives to do the right thing, and he has an unfailing belief in the human race. Batman, on the other hand, knows in some cases rules need to be broken, and he also knows first-hand some people cannot be redeemed. Wonder Woman is ever the warrior; she is the dynamic hero who backs down from no challenge. Batman, however, is the master tactician who can take a step back and compliment Wonder Woman's skills with his battlefield vision. As such, Batman sits in the center and helps guide the Justice League through all their decisions by bending his skills to compliment those of the other heroes.

Even though Batman makes it explicitly clear the Justice League does not need Lex Luthor, once "The Trinity" is back aboard the Watchtower, the topic once again goes to Luthor's admittance to the team. This time, things are a little different, as Batman is now advocating adding Luthor to their ranks. For their part, the rest of "The Trinity" is a little skeptical, especially Superman.

Superman: We don't need him here. We were able to contain the Doom Patrol. And you were able to shut down Power Ring.

Wonder Woman: And we all know Luthor's going to show his true colors at some point, Bruce.

Batman: I know he is, Diana. But until that happens Luthor's going to be out there. So we have a choice here. We can either refuse him again and let him go to do whatever it is he's going to do – or we can agree to bring him into the league – where we can keep our eye on him. (Johns, *Justice League: Injustice League* 88)

Despite the fact that Batman almost always seems to have the final say on the team, when it comes to Lex Luthor, he insists all three of them agree. They do, of course, and on the very next page of the book, you see a smiling Superman welcoming Lex Luthor to the Justice League.

As has been seen earlier in this volume, every time Lex Luthor is in the picture, Superman is angry about his presence. Due to their long history together, Superman will never trust Luthor, nor will he ever believe he has turned over a new leaf. So, with that in mind, it speaks volumes about the interpersonal relationship amongst “The Trinity,” that Superman even listens to Batman's proposal of membership. Keller chalks this respect up to the strength of friendship, writing:

Engaging in ethical-political and moral-practical discourse can be emotionally and intellectually challenging. Thus willingness to engage in such discourses is a good indicator of how committed one's friend is to the relationship. At the same time, successful completion of such discourses

can bring friends closer together, both because of the depth of sharing they require and because they can serve to reinforce each parties' commitment to the relationship. (170)

When it comes to strength of friendship, there is nothing like the friendship of the members of "The Trinity." By this point in their history, each member trusts each other completely, and that is why when Batman suggests they bring Luthor into the fold, Superman is willing to listen. Furthermore, Superman can put aside his reservations and see that Batman is right, and by keeping Luthor close, they can watch his every move.

Once he is a part of the team, Luthor spends time with the Justice League not only fighting villains but also helping out in a humanitarian capacity. He sees how the League interacts with the outside world and even learns that respect is not always about power and money. In fact, during a relief mission with Wonder Woman, a young girl brings him a flower and gives him a hug, he turns to Wonder Woman for guidance.

Lex Luthor: What do I --?

Wonder Woman: Just say thank you, Lex. (Johns, *Justice League: Injustice League* 105)

It is interesting that, even though Wonder Woman is one of the most physically imposing members of the League, she takes Luthor out not to punch something, but rather learn about the other definitions of a hero. Hanley sees this as an attribute to Wonder Woman going all the way back to her origins in the Golden Age of comics. Hanley sees that "while the Golden Age Wonder Woman was impressive, there was more to her than just fighting crime. Her adventures, from helping a bullied child to saving the world from alien invaders, gave her a range Superman and Batman didn't have" (43). It's true that

Batman could not be out in broad daylight delivering supplies, it would take away from his Dark Knight mystique, and Superman could do it, but there is a contentious relationship between him and Luthor that overshadows any attempt at authentic learning. So, the burden to show Luthor the human side of the world falls to Wonder Woman, and she does it because she always strives to make humanity better by appealing to their collective hearts.

Another aspect of the deal to bring Luthor into the fold is a partnership between Lexcorp and Wayne Enterprises. Of course, this is just a ruse by the Justice League to allow Batman to gain access to Lexcorp's private labs. The team is so confident there will be a problem, that they are waiting to ambush Luthor once Batman completes his initial inspection of the labs. Even Superman and Wonder Woman are in disguise in the crowd waiting to move to action. It is here that Wonder Woman expresses her reservations:

Wonder Woman: So you think this is a good idea Clark?

Superman: This could provide us with evidence to finally put Luthor away, Diana.

Wonder Woman: Don't you think Lex will hide whatever he wants to keep from us?

Superman: You can't hide anything from Batman. (Johns, *Justice League: Injustice League* 119)

Once the press conference is over, Wayne and Luthor head inside for the tour. Batman cuts right to the chase and asks to see both the cloning lab where he made Bizarro Superman and Luthor's private labs. Despite the lab containing some weapons that could

potentially harm Superman, they expected those from the once villain; everything is above board at this juncture.

It is no accident that “The Trinity” is claiming responsibility for vetting Luthor before his membership is approved. As the leadership of the team, they feel personally responsible for any decision that ends poorly. Matthew Baggetta et al, writes about leading teams in, “Leading Associations: How Individual Characteristics and Team Dynamics Generate Committed Leaders,” that “leaders who are more motivated and whose goals align well with an organization should be more behaviorally committed to leadership activity” (548). There is no doubt the goals of "The Trinity" align with the aims of the Justice League, everyone who is on the team is there to protect humanity, and fight against evil. On the other hand, when it comes to being committed to being the natural leaders of the team, that is where the process of bringing Luthor on to the team starts to show their character. Luthor is an above average threat, he has no powers like Darkseid, but he does have an intellect that matches any hero on the team. Furthermore, Luthor shows time and again that he can pit himself against the most-powerful of heroes on the Justice League. So, “The Trinity” takes his potential addition very seriously. Additionally, it is the closeness of “The Trinity” that makes them come together here as the three responsible to either catch Luthor or approve him. Once again, the dynamic of the Justice League is in the hands of “The Trinity,” in addition to Luthor’s fate.

However, before the tour concludes there is an attack on Lexcorp by an unknown person who blows a massive hole in the side of the building, directly into Luthor's private labs. At first, the concern is for the safety of civilians, including Luthor's sister Lena, but quickly Luthor sees that a secret room breached and a canister containing Luthor's

Amazo Virus is sitting open. Once the virus is released, it decimates that portion of Metropolis within twenty-four hours and starts to give regular humans "meta-manifestations" of superpowers. On the flip side, once any of the metahumans on the Justice League become infected they go into a coma that threatens to kill them. The explosion and infection of the virus leave just the Kryptonian, the Amazon, and surprisingly Batman and Luthor who are able to get into containment suits before the virus can affect them.

With so few members of the Justice League remaining, it falls on them to try and keep everyone safe, while also looking for a cure to the virus. So, Batman and Superman head into Metropolis to see if they can stop people from getting hurt, or hurting each other. Meanwhile, Luthor is working to try and halt the virus and keep the rest of the Justice League members from dying. Wonder Woman is pulling triple duty, working with Luthor to make sure her friends are safe, coordinating with the government's quarantine forces, led by Steve Trevor, and finally, she lends muscle to Batman and Superman when they need it. Even though it would seem like Batman is the one in the most danger, he plans to stay right in the middle of everything, despite any of Superman's concerns.

Superman: The virus can't affect me. I'm not human. But you are, Bruce, and this disease is unlike anything we've ever encountered. If you get infected, you'll die.

Batman: If the roles were reversed, you wouldn't run. You'd stay no matter the risk. Because our friends need us. (Johns, *Justice League*:

Injustice League 149)

Batman's unwillingness to leave even the most dangerous tasks to the other more powerful members of the team goes to show why the Justice League works so well together. Goodfriend once again speaks to the team's strengths, noting "each member of the JLA takes individual responsibility for contributing to every task put before them" (21). To Batman, it does not matter how dangerous any task is, it is his duty as a member of the team to stand tall with the others, and that is a sentiment shared throughout the roster. Not to mention, Batman is right, Superman would do the same exact thing if the reverse situation took place, and so would Wonder Woman. Their willingness to take any challenge head on is what elevates "The Trinity" above the others, and allows them to lead by example.

As Luthor continues to research a cure, he makes it clear that he needs to find the blood from Patient Zero before he can complete his vaccine. This task falls on the shoulders of Batman and Superman who are able to find Patient Zero, a now mutated Doctor Armen Ikarus, right at the end of a massive trail of destruction. Unlike the rest of the infected humans, Patient Zero manifests any power he sees, like heat vision or flight. With Patient Zero's ability to mimic powers, he wards off Batman and Superman and returns to Lexcorp where he runs into Wonder Woman. Fortunately, she is more than happy to join the fight, and with a smile on her face, she lassos him saying "YOU'RE A BIG ONE AREN'T YOU? So here is how this is going to go. You're going to fight me, which I can handle, but while you do you're going to answer some questions" (Johns, *Justice League: Injustice League* 173-174). She tries to get him to explain his infection, but at this point, his mind is too far gone, and he believes he is not sick, and instead is merely evolved.

Wonder Woman racing in to save the boys is typical of her character in both her early years and in the "New 52." In modern continuity, she is a warrior, and all too willing to rush in to combat. Finn also notices:

Wonder Woman was unlike any who had come before her in American popular culture. Most women who appeared in comic books in the early forties were secondary characters – sidekicks at best, but usually helpless victims in need of the male hero's rescuing. Wonder Woman, in contrast, took center stage. She did not require men to rescue her; she rescued herself and whoever else needed her. (10)

The theme of saving others is central to Wonder Woman's characterization in the Justice League. She is often one of the heavy hitters along with Superman, and many times, she is the one who rushes in to help turn the tide of the battle. In this volume, it is not until Wonder Woman arrives on the scene that the fight against Patient Zero swings for the Justice League, allowing them to force Zero down so they can draw his blood finally.

Unfortunately, Patient Zero does not stay down long, and he hits Batman with a blast of heat vision, which cracks the seal on his "Haz-Bat" suit, exposing him to the virus. However, Batman's "meta-manifestation" is a blast of sound-waves he uses to put Patient Zero down for the time being. With Batman and Patient Zero down, Superman and Wonder Woman carry each of them back to Luthor's lab, in the hopes he has a cure now that he has the blood of the first person to be infected. Even though Luthor now has what he asked for, he quickly realizes that the blood from Patient Zero will be of no help. Instead, Luthor must confess that the antibodies have been in Superman the entire time. As it turns out, Luthor infected Superman a while ago, but it failed to affect his

Kryptonian physiology. So now, Luthor needs Superman's blood in the hopes that he can create a cure.

Before Superman can give over any of his blood, the rest of the Justice League reanimates and becomes a hive mind with Patient Zero, and they all have the common goal of eradicating anyone who cannot be infected, which pits Superman, Wonder Woman, and Lex Luthor against the rest of their friends. Amidst the chaos, Wonder Woman approaches Luthor hoping they can still find a cure:

Wonder Woman: If we're to have any hope of stopping this, you still need a sample of Superman's blood, correct?

Superman: You're not suggesting we trust Luthor after he lied to us, are you?

Wonder Woman: You two working together is our best chance, Superman. So we give him one more. Am I clear, Lex? One more chance.

Lex Luthor: I'll do it, Diana. I will.

Wonder Woman: I believe you. (Johns, *Justice League: Injustice League* 211)

Begrudgingly, Superman acquiesces, and gives Luthor his blood before he rushes off to join Wonder Woman in the fight. The two are quickly overwhelmed, and it is not until Captain Cold, now Luthor's head of security, and the rest of Steve Trevor's forces arrive that they are able to hold the hive of metahumans back.

The tension that permeates the room whenever Superman and Luthor are together is tangible throughout the entirety of Johns' *Justice League: Injustice League* story and gets even worse when the two are forced to work together. The reaction Superman has to

Luthor is understandable given their antagonistic relationship only recently changed to a cooperative relationship. Hepburn again talks about relationships and how one of the “most volatile, perhaps, is routine interaction within a pretense awareness context, a situation in which the participants are fully aware of the identities and the views held toward those identities but pretend not to be” (422). When the typical situation for the members of the Justice League is fighting off massive threats, it is easy to see how the relationship between Superman and Luthor can grow volatile. Each of them must spend their time pretending that Luthor does not want to kill Superman and that Superman believes Luthor can change, despite their shared understanding of each other. In this instance, since the two are not allowed to fight as members of the Justice League, the two are always bickering with each other, and posturing threatening behavior toward the other person.

Now that Luthor has the blood from Superman, he quickly makes a vaccine, but the problem is manufacturing, according to his calculations, it will take days to make enough of the vaccine, even with the Justice League's help. During the fight, Wonder Woman figures out that Patient Zero does not manifest any of the freezing abilities he sees from the heroes, so, armed with this knowledge, Superman and Captain Cold team up to freeze him. Once he is frozen solid, the rest of the infected fall to the ground, and they begin treatment. With the Justice League now revived and using all their power to manufacture vaccines, they save most of the victims of the virus. However, there are casualties and Superman does not let Luthor forget. As things wind down from this adventure, the world still sees Luthor as a hero. However, Superman still blames him for this outbreak happening.

The final interaction between the two does restore some of Superman's optimism that has been missing since Luthor came aboard as a member of the team. We then learn that the cure for the virus did not work on Patient Zero, and his fate rests with Luthor who the President orders to study the patient's physiology. Superman tells him that "whatever's been asked of you, Luthor, I'm not ready to give up on this man. If there's a chance he can still be saved –" (Johns, *Justice League: Injustice League* 223). Of course, one thing that makes Superman great is his willingness to believe in everyone and to put himself in danger to help anyone, even the bad guys. Feltham explains that "Superman is virtuous in his exercise of practical reason. He is a hero, yes, but he acts to help others as a matter of instinct. Being a virtuous agent, his emotions pull him in the direction of right action" (23). So, it makes sense that Superman is first and foremost concerned with the well-being of Patient Zero. Even though this foe is a dangerous monster, Superman still believes the Justice League can help him. This blind optimism is another reason why Superman is able to put his personal feelings aside, as much as possible anyway, and allow Luthor onto the team he helped build.

In the last few panels of the graphic novel, you learn that Patient Zero does not want a cure and has now evolved into the more familiar visage of long-time Justice League antagonist Amazo. In a bit of good news, it appears that Jessica Cruz, Power Ring, is in a tentative spot on the team and that Green Lantern is back to help her learn control over her ring. With the addition of Cruz and the return of Green Lantern, the League is now their largest with a total of ten members.

The preceding volume watches the League open their ranks to two colleagues who they once considered villains, Lex Luthor and Power Ring, and sees them deal with

the incapacitation of most of their members. In this storyline, there is also heavy involvement of "The Trinity" in all of the decision-making. In fact, "The Trinity" was solely responsible for allowing Luthor to join the team, and they were the only members left standing when the Amazo Virus hit. The heavy burden did not turn out to be too much for "The Trinity," as they were able to work together almost seamlessly, even though they disagreed with each other over Luthor's status at the outset of the story. What is perhaps most interesting about "The Trinity" at this point, is how well they work together. They have indeed become central to the success of the team, and you get the sense as long as they survive, the Justice League will survive no matter who is in the surrounding cast.

Moving forward, the story of the "New 52" version of the Justice League concludes with *The Darkseid War*. In this story, most of the members of the Justice League experience some form of Godhood, and some do not deal with the newfound power as well as some others. Additionally, the team squares off against two of the most powerful beings in the DC Universe in Darkseid, and the Anti-Monitor, both of whom are easily capable of destroying worlds single-handedly. At the conclusion of this event, the Justice League changes forever, and some actions are not so easy to reverse.

Chapter 5: Gods Among Us

The final chapter of the "New 52" version of the Justice League focuses on what would happen if the members of the team were to become real gods. At this point in their history, the team is already full of legends, so godhood appears to be the only task yet left for the Justice League to tackle. The League figures out how to handle their newfound statuses as gods in *The Darkseid War*. The last saga is again by Geoff Johns, who fittingly chooses to end the saga where it began, in a confrontation with Darkseid. While Darkseid is the titular villain in this installment, he is not alone, as the "war" mentioned is against the Anti-Monitor. The Anti-Monitor has not yet appeared in the "New 52" universe but is the principal antagonist in the 1995-96 major event *Crisis on Infinite Earths*. This event was groundbreaking at the time, as it appeared DC Comics killed the Flash, Barry Allen, and Supergirl, Kara Zor-El, for good; although both would later reappear. In addition to the deaths of major characters, the event also destroyed the "multi-verse," and streamlined the pantheon of the DC Comics Universe of heroes into one shared continuity. However, since the reboot of the timeline, this effectively acts as the first appearance of the Anti-Monitor, who now exists as the avatar of the anti-life equation, and as Darkseid's hoped for conquest.

For their part, the Justice League finds themselves directly in the middle of the war between these two titanic gods; with little hope of stopping them from killing each other, and destroying all life in the universe. By the time *The Darkseid War* takes place, the Justice League is now the stuff of legends. Each hero knows and understands their place on the team, and they continue to face down great threats both on the team and in their respective comic book titles. Not only is the team very efficient, but they are also so

close they would not hesitate to die for each other. The team is ultimately tested to their limits when some members obtain godhood, an act that changes some teammates for the worse. As the Goddess of War, and the senior god on the team, Wonder Woman sits at the center of this event and serves as the story's narrator.

Justice League: The Darkseid War Part One opens the narrative with a flashback to the night of Wonder Woman's birth on Themyscira. While there are some moments chronicling the birth of Wonder Woman, most of the exposition focuses on the secret birth of another child. As it turns out, the other newborn girl, now named Grail, happens to be the daughter of Amazonian assassin Myrina Black and Darkseid himself. Next, the story shows two of Darkseid's assassins killing everyone they can find named Myrina Black in an effort to find his old paramour and stop her, and the now grown up Grail's, plan to kill Darkseid. Once the Justice League learns of a boom tube opening in the latest victim's apartment, they head off to investigate the death of an apparently innocent human.

As the team investigates the murder, it starts to become evident just how well the team works together now. Everyone on the team has a place, and as a result, the investigation is progressing rapidly. Wonder Woman serves as the liaison between the team and Steve Trevor, who represents the government in this event; Green Lantern and Power Ring are using their rings to find any microscopic clues, and Shazam is working with Cyborg to trace the destination of the assassin's exit boom tube. Finally, as narrator, Wonder Woman notices "processing evidence, Bruce and Barry put their egos aside. Not that Barry has one" (Johns, *Justice League: The Darkseid War Part One* 42). Even though Batman acts as the de facto leader, at this point, he is confident enough in the

abilities of the other members to let the team work at what they do best; including allowing the Flash to run the DNA samples on the murder. Batman, who may be the least trusting person on the team, ultimately knows where the strengths of the team members lie. He says as much when he tells the Flash, “you can analyze that faster than it takes me to –” (Johns, *Justice League: The Darkseid War Part One* 43). Just as Batman was saying, the Flash does already have the evidence processed, and the two are able to move on to the next part of the investigation. The fact that Batman is at a point where he is okay with the Flash doing a job he would normally do is indicative of how comfortable Batman is with his teammates. On the whole, Batman is now able to trust his team enough that they can work together with some degree of autonomy, and still accomplish the mission, without the need for constant input from a leader.

Furthermore, the continued lack of having a defined leader is an aspect of the team that only serves to strengthen the bonds between the members. Together, the League can approach a task with a fluid sense of who is in charge, the duty often falls to Batman, but at times other heroes take on that role. In their article, “Board Team Leadership Revisited: A Conceptual Model of Shared Leadership in the Boardroom,” Martin Vandewaerde, et al. claim, “shared leadership in the boardroom can thus be conceptualized as a mutual and fluid influence in which directors continuously switch between ‘leader’ and ‘follower’ roles based on desired capabilities and expertise given the situation at hand, in order to lead the team to outcome achievement” (408). The idea of shared leadership is something seen time and again on the Justice League. In the early stages of the team, we see Batman cede his leadership role to Green Lantern while he leaves to accomplish another mission. There is also a brief moment in the battle with

Atlantis, that sees the team bow to the wishes of Aquaman. Currently, it appears Wonder Woman is in charge of the team as she coordinates the investigation while the other members search for clues. The way the team leans on the situational expertise of each member contributes to the overall effectiveness and happiness of the team and thereby creates a group of equals who can put aside differences to accomplish any mission.

Additionally, at this point, the team works together so well that the personality clashes marring their early years are almost entirely gone. The newfound respect and understanding of each member's strengths and weaknesses is a large part of the reason why the team can work together and stay friends. In fact, Aram et al, claim, "it is the internal relationships in organizations, the secondary adaptive processes, that may lead to satisfaction of individual members as well as promoting the goals of the organization" (289). The crime scene mentioned above is a perfect example of how the organization of the Justice League lends itself to a happy, cooperative environment, and at this point in their history, it is easy to see how natural some of the relationships tend to be. As mentioned, the Flash and Batman are poring over the scene to find clues, and even sharing responsibilities. Green Lantern is showing Power Ring how to use her ring to find evidence, and Shazam and Cyborg are looking for technological or magical interference. Even Superman is working on a different lead with his one-time nemesis Lex Luthor. It should also be noted the members of "The Trinity" can pair off and work with other teammates; despite how close the three of them are in their personal lives they still seem to enjoy working with the other heroes.

While the team continues to work on a trail for the murder suspect, they are caught off guard when the Flash starts to convulse and then Grail explodes from his

mouth, using his connection to the Speed Force to teleport to the area. The resulting energy release knocks everyone but the Batman away from the area, and Grail instantly engages with him. Before they fight, Grail decides to taunt the Batman, saying “you are the human among the others. Even still, you could cause me serious trouble. So you hurt first” (Johns, *Justice League: The Darkseid War Part One* 55). Her attitude toward Batman speaks volumes about his reputation amongst the villainous masses. Grail, as a child of Darkseid coupled with her Amazonian heritage, is an incredibly powerful foe for the Justice League; one who is on par with, or perhaps even stronger than, Wonder Woman, yet here she chooses to deal with Batman first.

The respect he garners from a villain he has never met has a lot to do with who, or what, Batman represents at his core. When Batman becomes a vigilante, he picks the bat as a symbol to scare the criminals he wishes to stop. This lore has been a part of his story since the early days of his inception. William Uricchio and Roberta E. Pearson in, “I’m Not Fooled by That Cheap Disguise,” speak to Batman’s long shadow, saying “the Batman’s hegemonic position seems unassailable, triply reinforced by his definition of an obsessive crime fighter, his superhero status, and the narrative centrality/authority granted him” (207). Uricchio and Pearson are indeed speaking about his position at the top of the DC Comics food chain, but the sentiment still applies to the position Batman holds within the DC Comics Universe. Grail attacks Batman first because up to this point; he is “unassailable.” No villain, including her father Darkseid, has stopped the Batman. Grail is aware that Batman’s prowess and “obsessiveness” helps him be a key figure in the fight against all the threats facing the Justice League; a role he inhabits ever since the very creation of the League when he notably went to Apokolips alone to save

Superman. His status as a "superhero" is also unquestionable, otherwise, how could he even pretend to be on the Justice League in the first place? Finally, the "narrative centrality/authority" is also a key factor in who Batman is, as he is always central to the team's struggles, and early on establishes himself as the leader of a team of super-powered heroes. So, it is easy to understand why Grail sees him as a huge threat and attempts to subdue him first.

Grail is actually able to back up her talk, as she quickly defeats Batman. She then goes on to incapacitate both Cyborg by ripping off his armor, and Shazam by shoving her ax through him. Finally, Wonder Woman is able to get her hands on Grail, but even Wonder Woman is stunned by Grail when she uses her omega beams to shatter Wonder Woman's bracelets. At the same time, Superman and Lex Luthor, back at Lexcorp, receive the distress call from Wonder Woman. However, right before they gear up to leave, Luthor is shot by his sister, who then uses a boom tube to send the pair to Apokolips. It is at this point that Grail captures Power Ring and uses her ring to call the Anti-Monitor to their position.

The scene above shows something that has not happened to the Justice League for a long time, swift and utter defeat at the hands of a single combatant. It is fitting, however, that it happens by the hands of Darkseid's daughter, as he is the last lone villain to wreck them. Luckily for the team, they use these adversities to become better at their jobs and to become better teammates. In his article, "Better for It: How People Benefit from Adversity," J. Curtis McMillen looks at the effect of trauma and notes, "traumatic events offer opportunities to enhance self-efficacy through the experience of successfully managing new tasks and through a favorable social comparison with others who have

experienced similar events” (459). Fortunately for the team, adversity is something they face often, and always overcome one way or another. The Justice League also deals with internal conflicts that causes the temporary dismissal of members; they fight wars with sovereign nations, and a group of doppelganger villains disbands them at one point. Through it all, they have only become better warriors and better heroes. So, when an enemy like Grail appears to have quickly defeated them, it is just another trauma soon to be overcome and used to motivate themselves further; and this time it is Wonder Woman leading the charge.

On Apokolips Superman uses his heat vision to heal Luthor from his gunshot wounds, and the two start exploring the world to find a Mother Box to transport them home. On Earth, Wonder Woman appears to be the last hero standing, and as such, she prepares herself for battle. As the narrator, Wonder Woman explains why she chooses to rush into battle against the forces of Grail and the Anti-Monitor, "I am Diana. Daughter of the Amazons. As Wonder Woman, I protect humanity from the gods and monsters that would destroy it. If there's a way to prevent war, I find it. But this one's already started" (Johns, *Justice League: The Darkseid War Part One* 80). Wonder Woman knows this may be a losing battle for her; but, the duty of protection is what drives her in a moment like this one. She may not be able to overcome the massive threat facing the Earth, but she does know she has a better chance than most, so she takes action.

The sentiment Wonder Woman expresses in her narration is also a nice way to link her modern attitude to her creation. During her creation Wonder Woman is set up as the equal, or better, to all men; and as someone who can also resolve conflicts without necessarily engaging in mindless violence. When writing about the origins of Wonder

Woman and her Amazonian sisters, Hanley explains, "when these women worked together, they were unstoppable. Although they regularly used force to stop villains, violence wasn't the only option. Wonder Woman frequently tried to talk to criminals and show them that another path would be a better choice" (21). Unfortunately, in the fight against Grail, she is not afforded the opportunity to attempt a peaceful solution, so fighting is the only recourse left to her. However, this is a role she is meant for as well, as Hanley notes, "Wonder Woman completely eschewed a damsel in distress role by instead being a superhero of unparalleled skill" (29). She knows that it is her responsibility to take action with the other members of her team already down, and that means that Wonder Woman will do everything in her power to protect not only the human race but her teammates as well. From Wonder Woman's inception, it was always her place to rescue the men in the world, and in *The Darkseid War*, she finally sees that role realized once the Anti-Monitor arrives.

Fortunately, Wonder Woman and the rest of the team are secretly whisked away from the fight and hidden by Metron, who uses the Mobius Chair to travel time and space to observe the universe. To learn how to stop Grail and the Anti-Monitor, Wonder Woman uses her lasso to ascertain the truth about what Metron knows of this threat. However, she learns that Metron does not have the answers. Instead, the chair is the source of all knowledge. Once they understand that the chair is the actual source of Metron's power, Wonder Woman uses her lasso to remove him from the Mobius Chair. Before the chair vanishes, Batman jumps onto the seat and takes control; thereby gaining the knowledge they need to defeat the Anti-Monitor. Once Batman is in the seat, he effectively becomes the God of Knowledge and is able to know everything that is

knowable. Understandably, everyone is concerned for Batman's safety, but he shrugs it off saying "I'm a God now" (Johns, *Justice League: The Darkseid War Part One* 96). Wonder Woman seems to be willing to trust Batman's control for the time being but does remind herself that you cannot trust a God.

Back on Apokolips, the slaves of the world, who have been promised freedom if they can kill Superman, are still hunting Luthor and Superman. During one of their encounters, Superman does his best not to hurt the slaves as he tries to escape, but Luthor notices Superman is now bleeding, and getting weaker by the minute, because of the lack of a yellow sun. Superman, ever the optimist, attempts to get Luthor to reason with the slaves.

Superman: We need to talk to them.

Luthor: And what if you can't get them on our side, Superman? We can't fight them all, and in a matter of hours you'll be --

Superman: Human.

Luthor: You'll be powerless. You'll never be human. (Johns, *Justice League: The Darkseid War Part One* 114)

In an effort to recharge Superman, Luthor uses his armor to fly Superman to one of the fire pits on Apokolips, which, he explains, are pure solar radiation and should recharge Superman. However, when Superman bursts out of the fire pit, he is now glowing white with solar power and is also furious with Luthor.

Once Superman takes care of the advancing Parademons, he turns his attention back to Luthor, and Superman expresses his anger at Luthor; saying "why don't we finish our earlier conversation? You said even if I lost my powers, I wouldn't be human. That

I'd never be. I suppose biologically that's true. We're very different, you and I" (Johns, *Justice League: The Darkseid War Part One* 133). Superman explains to Luthor that he knows Luthor is afraid, and that this time, Superman will not hold back when they fight. Of course, having his powers supercharged in the Apokolips fire pits starts to corrupt Superman, and the fact that once Superman is back up to full strength, he immediately brings up his perceived "humanity," shows that Luthor has hit a nerve this time.

Luthor's comment about Superman never being a human is a slight against how Superman ultimately sees himself when he looks in the proverbial mirror. To Superman, he feels like he is as much human as Kryptonian because human parents raised him on Earth. In fact, his human persona, Clark Kent, is a large part of who he is. In "Alter Egos and Their Names," David Pitt explains why this type of insult may effect Superman so deeply, claiming:

Neither Superman nor Clark Kent is, I claim, an alter ego of the other.

Rather, they are *both* alter egos of the Kryptonian Kal El. Although Kal El was named 'Clark Kent' by his adoptive parents, in Metropolis he has two distinct personae, the Milquetoast reporter and the Man of Steel, and goes by 'Clark Kent' when inhabiting the former and 'Superman' when inhabiting the latter. (536)

Although Pitt is claiming that Kal-El is the real persona of Superman, he does explain that both Superman and Clark Kent are distinct parts of his persona. So, when Luthor tells Superman he will never be human, it stings on a deeply personal level, because to him, being his human avatar Clark Kent is as much a part of him as Superman. Superman, drunk with ultimate power, decides the indignity suffered from Luthor's

human comment is something that he cannot abide; and finally, Superman makes an attempt to end Luthor's life, something he has held back from doing for years, as his "humanity" always stays his hand. Unfortunately, Superman is not the only member of the Justice League who appears to be struggling with their humanity after gaining godlike powers.

Batman is also having personality issues, as he is finally in possession of all the answers, he decides to split from the rest of the Justice League and head off to find out the origin and any possible weaknesses of the Anti-Monitor. However, Green Lantern does not completely trust the Mobius Chair and talks Batman into letting him tag along. Throughout the Justice League series, these two have had a contentious relationship, and now that Batman does know everything, their relationship is getting worse. In fact, the two eventually have words with each other over Batman's new powers.

Batman: Unlocking this forbidden knowledge is important.

Green Lantern: Are you sure you're seeing clearly, Bruce?

Batman: I see everything more clearly than I ever have. Including you.

...

Batman: Examining all you are and have been, it's becoming quite clear to me sitting here. The chair knows. I know.

Green Lantern: You know what, Sherlock?

Batman: You're not the hero, Jordan. The ring is the hero.

Green Lantern: Guess that chair doesn't just give you answers. It makes you kind of an ass. (Johns, *Justice League: The Darkseid War Part One* 126-127)

Much like Superman, in his way, Batman is also being corrupted by receiving ultimate power; at this point, it appears Wonder Woman is the only member of “The Trinity” who is not affected by godhood. In his exchange with Green Lantern, Batman uses his new power in a way that the regular version would not, even though Batman is often gruff, he typically only chastises someone when they need it, and never as an unprovoked attack on character.

Although again very similar to the way Superman has some of his deepest characteristics magnified, Batman also is affected by having all knowledge at his fingertips. Of course, the newfound power is a welcome addition for the World’s Greatest Detective, and true to form, the first thing he does is confirm his parent’s killer to be Joe Chill, and then he asks it the identity of the Joker. Fitzgerald talks about Batman’s role as the detective, saying:

By taking the law into his own hands he seeks to right wrongs one at a time. It is harder to judge who is the ‘good guy’ and who is the ‘bad’ in the corrupt world of Gotham. Batman works from the premise that everyone is suspect and he alone is capable of judging the best way to proceed. Although arrogant, he is well aware that he is despised by many in Gotham who judge him as being as amoral as the criminals he strives to incarcerate. (72)

With Fitzgerald's take on Batman in mind, it is easy to see why Batman relishes having all the power of knowledge at his fingertips. He is now able to be sure about the criminals he seeks to stop. A long time ago, Bruce Wayne took up the mantle of Batman so that no one else has to suffer the way he did when he lost his parents. It is then no surprise when

Batman finally gains the ability to judge all criminals, his arrogance skyrockets to an all-time high; and now he is not only alienating the criminal element, but also his friends, whom he may feel he no longer needs.

From this point in the story, the rest of the Justice League goes back to fight the Anti-Monitor hoping to stop him from destroying the Earth. However, upon arrival, they also find that part of the plan is to lure Darkseid to Earth for an all-out confrontation between the two, with the victor earning the power of the other. In between the two titans, the Justice League frantically works to contain the devastation from the war, but they quickly find themselves overwhelmed. The two warring monsters are somewhat at a standstill when Darkseid decides to summon the Black Racer, a stand in for Death, as his last gambit, and then has him deal a severe blow to the Anti-Monitor. However, the Anti-Monitor is able to take control of the Black Racer, and merge it with the Flash, and once the two merge, the Anti-Monitor directs him toward Darkseid effectively killing him and scattering his energy. The death of Darkseid ends the first part of *The Darkseid War*.

For the Justice League, everything looks dismal at the end of part one. Superman is flush with power. However, since he is still stuck on Apokolips fighting against his ally Lex Luthor, his newfound strength cannot help the team. Batman and Green Lantern are still looking for answers about how to stop the Anti-Monitor, and it is possible Batman's relationship with the Mobius Chair is harming him. The Flash is now the new avatar of Death; and the remainder of the Justice League is nearly powerless to stop the Anti-Monitor from destroying all life. From this point forward the Justice League continues to fight the most powerful being in the universe, while at the same time, grappling with their own new powers that are dividing the team on principle.

As *The Darkseid War* concludes, the story starts to trend more toward the war aspect of the series, and as such, there are few opportunities for moments of characterization from the members of “The Trinity.” Instead, the final six issues focus on how the Justice League defeats both the Anti-Monitor and then ultimately, a power hungry Grail. First the team continues to fight with the forces left behind after Darkseid’s death, eventually, with the help of Mister Miracle and his wife Big Barda, the team is able to stop the remaining warriors. Superman finally returns to Earth; after having stranded Luthor on Apokolips. Wonder Woman is able to use her lasso to remind Superman of his humanity, and as a result, he returns to his usual self. Then, the team decides to involve the remaining members of the Crime Syndicate, Superwoman, Owlman, and Ultraman, as they have faced the Anti-Monitor before. After much posturing between the two factions, they decide to team up in an attempt to stop him from destroying another world. So, the newly formed team heads off to Gotham where they square off against the Anti-Monitor who is now reverted to his original form, Mobius. The only goal left for Mobius is to retrieve his chair from Batman; and kill as many people as he can in the process.

Fortunately for the heroes, Lex Luthor also returns from Apokolips and now seems to contain the massively powerful Omega Effect that once belonged to Darkseid. As a result, Luthor is able to buy the League some time as he is powerful enough to stand up to Mobius. Grail is also back with Steve Trevor in tow as the new holder of the Anti-Life Equation; whose first act is to vaporize Mobius. At the same time, Superwoman gives birth to a child who has the power to absorb other celestial powers. So, they use the baby to suck out the godlike powers from Superman, Lex Luthor, Shazam, and also

separate the Flash from The Black Racer. In the process of the battle, Grail kills Superwoman and then uses the baby to take back the Anti-Life Equation from Steve Trevor. The resulting mixture of the powers sees Darkseid reborn from the infant, only this time he is firmly under the control of Grail. As the destruction mounts and the Justice League nears defeat, Wonder Woman and Myrina Black team up to stop Grail. The two choose not to fight her, however, instead, they appeal to her Amazonian side in the hopes that she will ultimately pick peace over death. In the end, Myrina Black convinces Grail that she can be more than hate; but first, she needs to do one last evil act. Grail uses her Omega Beams to kill her mother who is standing in front of Darkseid, the result of this action scatters the energy powering Darkseid; reverting him to his infant form, and transporting all of the Apokoliptian forces away from Gotham, leaving only the Justice League behind.

It is in this last chapter that each member of “The Trinity” once again embraces some of their most defining characteristics. Wonder Woman uses her roots as an Amazonian to finally convince Grail to stop the fighting. In fact, the end of the war begins with a conversation between Grail and Wonder Woman.

Wonder Woman: There’s no more reason to fight, Grail. You are an Amazon. You are my sister. We can --

Grail: I am no one’s sister!

...

Grail: You seek the truth with the Lasso? Is that what you both want?

Wonder Woman: The truth is you are an Amazon. And you can do the right thing. It’s not too late, Grail.

Grail: It is! It's too late for me. I am darkness! I am evil!

Wonder Woman: You can choose not to be. (Johns, *Justice League: The Darkseid War Part Two* 171)

Wonder Woman is no stranger to sisterhood as a core belief of hers. She has been holding up the strengths and abilities of other women since her creation. Recently, in Gail Simone's run in the late 2000's, it was once again emphasized as an essential characteristic of Wonder Woman. Allison Mandaville writes in "Out of the Refrigerator: Gail Simone's Wonder Woman, 2008-2010," about Simone's run, and Wonder Woman as a character overall, saying:

Women characters in Simone's *Wonder Woman* stand on their own and in relationship to other women: sisters, friends, mothers and daughters, co-workers, citizens. Diana is far more upset when her good friend Etta Candy is captured and tortured than when she has to choose her mission over her relationship with Tom. (219)

In the waning moments of *The Darkseid War*, Wonder Woman only shows concern for her Amazonian Sister Grail and hopes to help her to do the right thing. At this moment, Wonder Woman does not call out to Superman for help; she is not rushing to help her ex-boyfriend Trevor. Instead, she chooses to empower a fellow woman, and that is the exact purpose for Wonder Woman's creation.

As just seen, the actual conflict in this story begins and ends with Wonder Woman in the captain's chair. Grail was born on Themyscira, and as such, she is an Amazonian problem. Furthermore, with many of the other members incapacitated, or corrupted by gaining ultimate power, the burden falls on Wonder Woman's shoulders to

guide these new gods, and ultimately save the day. As a woman in a leadership role, Wonder Woman does need to differentiate herself from the others. In her article “Women and Leadership Style,” Phyllis Wright states, “women in leadership positions need to be willing to seize the moment and take risks” (252). As such, Wonder Woman has to be a different type of leader than Superman and Batman. Each of those heroes adamantly insists that murder is never the solution, yet as the warrior on the team Wonder Woman often holds a different view of conflict. She proves her style has its merits at times, like when she allows Grail to kill her mother as part of the solution to stop Darkseid and end the threat to humankind. Any loss of life is not a choice that Superman or Batman would make, so it falls on Wonder Woman to take that risk. As a warrior, she is the one who is expected to make these tough choices, and as a woman, she sets herself apart from the other members of “The Trinity” as a different type of leader.

Superman also returns to his former self. Most of his extra power is gone, and he again remembers why he chose to become Superman, thanks to the help of Wonder Woman and her lasso. However, it does seem the Superman and Luthor saga is not over just yet. Since Luthor returned to Earth with the Omega Effect powering him, the desire to save the world from disaster all by himself is consuming him, and to do that he is willing to kill. So, when Luthor is ready to rip off Steve Trevor’s head to stop the destruction, Superman steps in: “no Luthor. This isn’t how the League works. Ever. No matter the stakes, we find a way” (Johns, *Justice League: The Darkseid War Part Two* 151). For Superman, it is always about the protection of everyone, from the innocent to the villains who threaten safety, whenever you are in a conflict with Superman his ultimate goal is to see everyone leave with their life intact. Now that Superman is back to

normal, he is once again enforcing that tenet on the Justice League, to include the actions of their uneasy ally Luthor. Superman's moral return to form finally makes him the real Superman once again. Stefan Buchenberger explains in, "Superman and the Corruption of Power," why Superman's morals are important, noting "Superman has to adhere to his basic moral code. Superman can neither be god nor devil without ceasing to be himself. (He embodies) core American values, such as individual freedom and equal rights for all human beings" (197). Buchenberger does miss one thing in his phrase, Superman will fight for equal rights for all sentient beings, he makes no distinction here between human or Amazonian or Apokoliptian, he will protect all. The fact that he returns to his moral roots at the end of *The Darkseid War* is a subtle reminder that everything will be ok. The heroes on the page will continue to fight for their beliefs, no matter the size of the challenge facing them, and that is why Superman chooses life; even when the Anti-Life Equation imbued Steve Trevor is begging for death. Superman, and the Justice League by extension, find a way.

Finally, after everything is over, the story shows Batman back in his cave, now removed from the Mobius Chair, staring at pictures of the Joker. Green Lantern, who is responsible for getting Batman out of the chair by giving him his ring to use to will himself out, is here to check on the Batman. Now that he is back to his old self, Batman does tell Green Lantern that he was wrong, stating "The ring isn't the hero" (Johns, *Justice League: The Darkseid War Part Two* 180). The moment is brushed off as Green Lantern sees the pictures of the Joker and asks what Batman found out when asking the chair who is the Joker.

Batman: It said there were three.

Green Lantern: Three? Three Jokers? What the hell does that mean?

Batman: I don't know yet... But I'm going to find out. (Johns, *Justice League: The Darkseid War Part Two* 181)

The image of Batman and Green Lantern in the cave is the last appearance of Batman in this story and a very fitting end for him. For Batman, it is never job over, nor is it ever the time to celebrate, he is always on to the next crime or mystery; and now he has the biggest mystery of his career to focus on, the identity of the Joker. Brooker states about the Batman, “there is, I would argue, potentially no limit to the many lives of the Batman” (25). To the Justice League, Batman is often their leader, and one of the smarter members who is usually central to figuring out how to overcome whatever threat they face. On the other hand, to Gotham, Batman is “The Dark Knight,” who does everything he can to keep their streets safe from crime. To the criminals, he is “The World’s Greatest Detective,” who always foils their schemes. At the end of *The Darkseid War*, Batman is back to being a mixture of the last two, and it appears he intends to use all his skills to find the Joker, a quest that will be deeply personal to him, and will doubtless take place away from his friends in the Justice League.

The Darkseid War is both a departure from the formulaic characterizations of “The Trinity,” and also a final nod to the inherent core personalities of each of these superheroes. During this chapter of the “New 52” Justice League’s story, many of the heroes, Superman and Batman included, become gods who see ultimate power corrupt their character. In addition, some of the characters fundamentally change, Power Ring Jessica Cruz actually loses her ring only to become a real Green Lantern in the process. Shazam has the six original gods he draws his power from abandon him, and he is forced

to take on six new dangerously powerful gods to keep his role as a hero. Finally, Superman learns that his time in the solar pit contributes to the problem of his body cells starting to disintegrate. Eventually, in his self-titled series, the "New 52" version of Superman will die from his recent abuses of power.

That all being said, the Justice League will continue to serve as Earth's protectors. The team may be scarred, or permanently damaged, by their most recent skirmish, but there is no sense that the team is over. In fact, the saga ends with Wonder Woman watching a sunset, and in her final duties as narrator, she says "in all of this, I do have hope" (Johns, *Justice League: The Darkseid War Part Two* 181). When it comes to the Justice League, hope is what they embody as a team. Any time that a massive threat, such as Darkseid, or the Anti-Monitor threatens to destroy Earth, the Justice League is there; fighting to their final breaths if need be. All so the rest of humanity can have hope that tomorrow, everything will be ok.

Conclusion: The End is the Beginning

In May of 2016, DC Comics released a comic they called *Rebirth*; this comic effectively signaled the end of the “New 52” universe to be replaced by the aptly named “Rebirth” universe. As such, the Justice League saga in the preceding chapters stands alone as a self-contained moment in the DC Comics publication history. What is perhaps most interesting about the “New 52” universe is how it endeavors to retell some of the older stories with a new modern feel; for example, a new origin story for the team now exists featuring Darkseid as the main antagonist, whereas their 1960 debut saw them face off against Starro. Furthermore, the “New 52” version of the Justice League heavily centralizes the DC Comics “Trinity” in their storytelling. The unique role of “The Trinity” in the DC Comics Universe is to serve two purposes, one is to drive sales, as Batman, Superman, and Wonder Woman have long been amongst their most popular characters, if not their most popular. Second, they often serve as the driving force in their storytelling. The latter is the position “The Trinity” occupies in the “New 52” version of the Justice League, which was the focus of this analysis.

“The Trinity” is first introduced in *Justice League: Origin* where the team initially forms and grows to know each other. At times in the initial meeting, the team is contentious, and it often looks like they will ultimately not be able to work together. However, “The Trinity” is able to step in and hold things together throughout the altercation with Darkseid. Batman takes the initiative to motivate and lead the team despite the fact that he is the sole non-powered human. Superman uniquely serves as the team’s wild card; his excessive amounts of power help the team when there are moments

of doubt as to their victory. Finally, Wonder Woman brings a much-needed harshness to the team through her warrior mentality.

The next two volumes *Justice League: The Villains Journey*, and *Justice League: Thrones of Atlantis*, see the group of heroes starting to grow into an actual team. They do still face some growing pains, however, often they rush into battle without a plan, and many of the heroes continue to see themselves as individuals in combat situations. Fortunately, at this point “The Trinity” is exerting their influence on the group. Between the leadership of Batman, and the examples set by Superman and Wonder Woman, they shape the members into the more cohesive version of the Justice League seen in the final issues of the series.

By the time of the events of *Justice League: The Grid* and *Justice League: Forever Heroes* the core members of the team are all entrenched as indispensable to the team’s success. Unfortunately, both Aquaman and Green Lantern step away due to the perception that they are directly involved in creating some of the threats the team faces. As a result of those two stepping away, the Justice League has to add some new members to the roster. Ultimately, the decision to add heroes comes down to the approval of “The Trinity,” further cementing their status as the de facto leadership of the Justice League. However, the decision to add new team members proves to be a disastrous choice, and once again, “The Trinity” is left dealing with a world class crisis.

During the *Justice League: Injustice League* storyline, “The Trinity” finds themselves as the only team members left to fight off the Amazo Virus. They also deal with the addition of one of their greatest enemies, Lex Luthor, who now sees himself as a good guy, and is petitioning to join the League. Even though “The Trinity” happens to be

the only members still standing, they are still able to cure the Amazo Virus and revive their sickened teammates. For their part, “The Trinity” is able to function in whatever capacity the mission needs, and they are also able to cement their friendship further.

Finally, when the team finds themselves embroiled in *The Darkseid War*, they have to deal with what happens when the team is deconstructed. Both Batman and Superman see significant changes by the events of the war, as they ultimately become gods flush with even greater powers. Through the rest of *Justice League: The Darkseid War*, the team deals with new powers, and entirely new enemies. Eventually, “The Trinity” gets a handle on their godlike statuses and come up with a viable solution to save Earth, and end the war. However, once *The Darkseid War* is over, it appears that, for the time being, each member of “The Trinity” is going to go their separate way to deal with issues in their individual lives.

When it comes to the impact of “The Trinity,” their fingerprints are all over the “New 52” Justice League series. From the beginning, Batman establishes himself as the leader of the group; a position he holds for the entire series. Superman is always there as the prime example of a moral hero. Wonder Woman serves as the team’s heart; often using her position on the team as a way to look for a peaceful solution whenever possible. Together they are able to act as the core of the team, and they are often the responsible party for making the tough decisions. Not only that, but the three also balance each other out, as Superman’s light usually offset the darkness of Batman, and Wonder Woman sits in the middle as a sort of tiebreaker between the two extremes. As a result of their privileged position, “The Trinity’s” relationship grows into one that shapes every major event in the DC Comics Universe.

Not only does “The Trinity” grow throughout the story arc, but the individual members of the group also go through an evolution. In the case of the Batman, he starts as a bit of an urban legend, so much so that upon their first meeting, Green Lantern cannot believe he is real. In his work *Hunting the Dark Knight: Twenty-First Century Batman*, Will Brooker also addresses Batman’s identity, writing “to insist that Batman is one thing is, finally, to ignore the fact that Batman is more than a character, more than a brand: he is myth” (217a). Brooker’s understanding of Batman helps to see how The Dark Knight fits on the Justice League, as anything they need him to be at any given time. As such, Batman starts out as an outside force who pulls strings by motivating the team from the sidelines. In fact, it is a speech to Green Lantern, rather than his ability to fight, that helps turn the tide in their first fight against Darkseid. Not too long after their first meeting, Batman steps out from the shadows and fully entrenches himself as the leader, or at least chief strategist, of the Justice League. In the end, Batman, who notably is the only non-powered person on the team, becomes indispensable to their success.

When it comes to Superman’s growth as a character, it is Batman who frames the discussion. At the beginning of the Justice League, Batman refers to Superman as the “alien.” You can also see Superman’s outsider status in the team’s first encounter with Darkseid and his Parademons when Superman sits back for most of the encounter to let the other people direct the action. Eventually, Superman grows into both the powerhouse of the team and a symbol of their moral compass. Audrey L Anton sums up Superman quite well in, “The Weight of the World: How Much is Superman Morally Responsible For?” writing “Superman is virtuous; he is a *responsible* person. He takes care to make himself the best version of himself that he possibly can, all the while improving humanity

writ large... one thing's for certain: when the chips are down we can count on him" (166). The Justice League as a whole knows this to be true as well; they can always rely on Superman to be there in the toughest of battles. Additionally, Superman is often the one who makes sure the team values all life, no matter how bad the villain they are fighting. By the end, Superman is Batman's best friend, and he no longer refers to him as the "alien," choosing to call him Clark instead.

For her part, Wonder Woman happens to be a unique hero even amongst the other members of the Justice League. She serves the team as both warrior and sister. Wonder Woman is also incredibly powerful; nearly on par with Superman, she is often the first to put herself in danger. At the same time, she also hopes to help many of the villains the team fights, rather than go straight to the punching. In her article, "A Most Thrilling Struggle: Wonder Woman as Wartime and Post-War Feminist," Donna B. Knaff says of the hero, "Wonder Woman is strong, but her aggressive, tough qualities are balanced by her concern for others and for fairness" (25). Throughout the "New 52" Justice League story, Wonder Woman lives these values; she is always concerned about the other heroes well-being, and as a result, she is often willing to fight the most dangerous battles to keep others from harm. She also does her best to work for a non-violent solution whenever she can. At times she is able to achieve the peaceful goal, but no more so than when she is able to talk down Grail to end *The Darkseid War*. Wonder Woman's willingness to negotiate and her immense power ultimately is what gives her great value as a member of the Justice League.

Above all else, the members of "The Trinity" exist as the premier superheroes by which to judge all others. Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman have all inspired

"clones," and they all have a global presence in everything from popsicles to billion-dollar films. Christopher Knowles writes in, *Our Gods Wear Spandex: The Secret History of Comic Book Heroes*, about the impact of superheroes, stating "we have, in fact, witnessed the emergence of a strange kind of religion here. Indeed, superheroes now play for us the role once played by the gods in ancient societies" (16). When it comes to "The Trinity," they are the gods of Olympus, while the rest of the superheroes can be considered as their offspring or demi-gods; and as such, they loom largely over the comic book domain. It does not matter if it is DC Comics, Marvel Comics, TV, Movies, or academia, Batman, Superman, and Wonder Woman have always been, and always will be, at the center of the conversation.

As talked about in the introduction, one such conversation has to do with how the "New 52" Justice League does lead to a few moments where the genre's problems as a whole appear. Wonder Woman's costume is the prime example, but there are also subtle moments that readers should be aware of as well. One such moment arrives when Superman and Wonder Woman find themselves in a relationship. While the pairing of the two seems like a no-brainer from the outside, with them being the two powerhouses of the Justice League; however, their relationship is also a bit problematic for Wonder Woman especially given her strong history of feminism. Certainly, the two fit together, but, one has to be curious as to why it takes a "super" man to be the ideal partner for Wonder Woman. Ultimately, it should be acceptable for her to be in a relationship with whoever she so chooses, or for that matter, be entirely happy as a single independent woman. Of course, this is just one example that appears in the "New 52" texts. Surely a

good direction for further study would be to provide an in-depth analysis of how not only Wonder Woman but all women operate in the adventures of the Justice League.

A further issue for future consideration has to deal with the Batman and Bruce Wayne dynamic. On the one hand, Batman is the detective who fights against evil with near impunity. When it comes to whom Batman views as a problem, there is very little leeway involved. However, when he is Bruce Wayne, he exists as the ultra-wealthy capitalist who controls the vast empire of Wayne Enterprises. His billionaire status and successful capitalist business can be at odds with his image as a strict crime fighter. If for nothing else than the game of capitalism can be messy, smaller businesses fail against the larger companies; there is often shady political gamesmanship involved or in the case of Lex Luthor's empire outright criminal activity. DC Comics' solution for this dual identity is to make Wayne Enterprises a pure business, one that may have been corrupt before Wayne took over, but is not once he is back in charge. The dynamic presented here is also another avenue for future research. Taking a look at how Wayne manages to be a good capitalist in a genre where being a billionaire is just as likely to make you a villain, such as Lex Luthor or Ra's al Ghul, as it is to make you a hero.

Another fascinating new avenue regarding the members of "The Trinity" and their interpersonal relationships is how they continue to evolve moving forward. Recently, DC Comics released the "Rebirth" universe, where the "New 52 Trinity" is adjusting to life without the Superman they know from the last 52 issues. The version of Superman seen in this analysis of the Justice League is dead, and the "pre-Flashpoint" Superman takes his place. Certainly, the introduction of a new corner of "The Trinity" is an avenue to explore as the dynamic between the three will surely alter from what occurred in the past.

Furthermore, as the superhero film continues to dominate the box office, the influence these heroes have on culture will only continue to grow; and as such, their exploration deserves merit. In his book, *Bending Steel: Modernity and the American Superhero*, Aldo J. Regalado says “Superheroes, however, have a life beyond the comic book industry, and their future seems to be tied to their presence in the other media, most notably television and film” (225). As Regalado says, the live action or animated versions of these characters will come to define the superhero for the foreseeable future. These adaptations will not only serve to broaden the superhero audience, but also introduce new iterations of familiar characters. “The Trinity” will not be immune to adaptation either, as they all recently made their big screen debut together in Zack Snyder’s *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* (2016). In this film, Batman, Wonder Woman, and Superman all meet each other for the first time, and as their relationship continues to unfold on the screen, they will come to define “The Trinity” for a whole demographic of people who do not regularly read the comic books. As such, the cinematic versions of the comic book heroes will be critical to fully understand what the members of “The Trinity” mean to each other, and also to the superhero genre as a whole.

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