This project investigates comic book discourse. Specifically, I investigate how comic
narratives provide readers with an interpretation for how they should discern and assess
“appropriate” behaviors for women. The artifact of analysis included in this project is DC
Comics Gotham City Sirens (2009). This text features popular female superheroes, Catwoman,
Harley Quinn, and Poison Ivy. Because comic books utilize both textual and visual means to
disseminate a message, this project evaluates the visual rhetoric of these characters within the
narrative. Walter Fisher’s narrative paradigm is used to provide an understanding to how these
visual means contribute to the meanings assigned in the narrative. Using the narrative paradigm and visual rhetoric as
organizing principles, I argue that Gotham City Sirens provides readers with an specific
interpretation of gender expectations and gender related social issues like Intimate Partner
Violence (IPV). Specifically, I argue that Gotham City Sirens provides readers with an
interpretation of women that upholds traditional gender expectations while also providing an
interpretation to IPV that upholds prevalent socio-cultural domestic violence myths that
denigrate the seriousness of the issue. In terms of gender, these characters experience a tension
between their gender expectations and the expectations derived from their roles as superheroes. The way in which these characters resolve this tension influences the meanings they are assigned based on their experiences with IPV. Ultimately, Catwoman and Harley Quinn are assigned meanings of “non-victimhood” that diminish the significance of the issue and blames these women for their abuse. Superheroes have skyrocketed in popularity over the past fifteen years and their narratives are extending to individuals that are not necessarily comic readers. This cultural significance of superheroes suggests that comic books appeal to a wide audience who has the potential to be influenced, even implicitly, by these messages.