

**UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SANTA CATARINA
PROGRAMA DE PÓS-GRADUAÇÃO EM INGLÊS:
ESTUDOS LINGÜÍSTICOS E LITERÁRIOS**

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**ASTONISHING COMICS:
A DISABILITY STUDIES PERSPECTIVE ON X-MEN COMICS**

Dissertação submetida ao
Programa de Pós-Graduação em
Inglês: Estudos Lingüísticos e
Literários da Universidade Federal
de Santa Catarina para obtenção do
Grau de Mestre em Letras.
Orientadora: Prof^a. Dr. Eliana
Ávila

Florianópolis
2013

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Bahls, Gislaine Aparecida
Astonishing Comics : A Disability Studies Perspective
on X-Men / Gislaine Aparecida Bahls ; orientador, Eliana
de Souza Ávila - Florianópolis, SC, 2013.
127 p.

Dissertação (mestrado) - Universidade Federal de Santa
Catarina, Centro de Comunicação e Expressão. Programa de Pós-
Graduação em Letras/Inglês e Literatura Correspondente.

Inclui referências

1. Letras/Inglês e Literatura Correspondente. 2. X-Men.
3. Estudos sobre Deficiência. 4. Estudos sobre Quadrinhos
. 5. Estudos Culturais . I. Ávila, Eliana de Souza. II.
Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina. Programa de Pós-
Graduação em Letras/Inglês e Literatura Correspondente.
III. Título.

Esta dissertação de Gislaine Aparecida Bahls, intitulada “Astonishing Comics: A Disability Studies Perspective on *X-Men*”, foi julgada adequada e aprovada em sua forma final, pelo Programa de Pós-Graduação em Inglês: Estudos Lingüísticos e Literários da Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, para fins de obtenção do grau de

MESTRE EM LETRAS

Área de concentração: Inglês: Estudos Lingüísticos e Literários.

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Florianópolis, 25 de março de 2013.

To mutants.

“(…) in the year 2013 there are **three** classes of people. “**H**,” for baseline human -- clean of mutant genes, allowed to breed. “**A**,” for anomalous human -- a normal person possessing mutant genetic potential... forbidden to breed. “**M**,” for mutant. The bottom of the heap, made pariahs and outcasts by the mutant control act (...). Hunted down and -- with a few exceptions -- killed without mercy”.

“I am Storm, leader of the X-Men. And I suspect this... child is the person who just saved your life. Mutants, like people, are both good and bad. You would do well to remember that, senator, before you condemn us **all**”.

(Chris Claremont, 1988
Comics Storyline *Days of Future Past*)

ABSTRACT

Stan Lee co-created in 1963 the *X-Men*; comics characters who in consequence of developing super-powers at puberty due to natural genetic evolution suffer society's prejudice. In their analysis of the *X-Men* Trilogy – *X-Men* (Bryan Singer 2000); *X2: X-Men United* (Bryan Singer 2003); and *X-Men: the Last Stand* (Brett Ratner 2006); – through a Disability Studies perspective Michael M. Chemers (2004), Ramona Ilea (2009), Martin Mantle (2007), and Jennifer Rinaldi (2008) argue that mutants can be understood as social characterizations of disability. This investigation studies whether this affirmation also holds true for mutants depicted in *X-Men* comics. I will analyze the comics storylines *God Loves, Man Kills* (*Marvel Graphic Novel* # 05) and *Gifted* (*Astonishing X-Men* # 01 - 06) – on which *X2: X-Men United* and *X-Men: the Last Stand* were based respectively.

Key Words: *X-Men*, Disability Studies, Comics Studies, Literature, Cultural Studies.

RESUMO

Stan Lee foi o co-criador, em 1964, dos *X-Men*, personagens de histórias em quadrinhos os quais, em consequência de desenvolverem superpoderes na puberdade, são alvos do preconceito da sociedade. Ao analisar a Trilogia dos filmes dos *X-Men* - *X-Men* (Bryan Singer 2000); *X2: X-Men United* (Bryan Singer 2003); e *X-Men: The Last Stand* (Brett Ratner 2006); – a partir de uma perspectiva de Estudos sobre Deficiência. Michael M. Chemers (2004), Ramona Ilea (2009), Martin Mantle (2007), e Jennifer Rinaldi (2008) argumentam que os mutantes podem ser compreendidos como caracterizações sociais de deficiência. Este estudo investiga se esta afirmação também é válida para os mutantes presentes nas histórias em quadrinhos dos *X-Men*. As linhas narrativas a serem analisadas são: *God Loves, Man Kills* (*Marvel Graphic Novel* 05) e *Gifted* (*Astonishing X-Men* # 01 - 06); nas quais foram baseados *X2: X-Men United* e *X-Men: the Last Stand* respectivamente.

Palavras-chave: *X-Men*, Estudos sobre Deficiência, Estudos sobre Quadrinhos, Literatura, Estudos Culturais.

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CHAPTER I – INTRODUCTION

1.1 ASTONISHING COMICS

1.1.1 Initial Remarks

Kara Sheridan Ayers¹ not only considers *X-Men: The Last Stand* a disability-issue-related movie, but is also astonished by the “parallels” she was able to trace between the issues faced by mutants in the filmic fictional world and the Disabled in real life. She is likewise astonished because the genetic “explanation” which enables mutants to come to be² “match(es)” her own. I, in my turn, was also astonished. I had believed I was the first one to notice that *X-Men* characters could be understood as characterizations of disability. However, besides finding a considerable number of personal accounts, I also found a larger number of scholarly writings on *X-Men* movies from a Disability Studies³ perspective than I expected. I found them in the format of books, journal articles, conference papers and on-line magazines; published in the fields of Philosophy, Cultural Studies, and Disability Studies (G. Bahls *Entre-lugar de Caliban em X-Men*, 06). These facts conjoined, that is, people with disabilities’ awe to see themselves reflected in *X-Men* characters, as well as mine on finding significant and diverse literature on a Disability Studies perspective on *X-Men* when I expected none, partially explain the choice of the word *Astonishing* in the title of this thesis.

Michael M. Chemers (2004), Ramona Ilea (2009), Martin Mantle (2007), and Jennifer Rinaldi (2008) argue that mutants depicted in the *X-Men* universe can be understood as characterizations of disability. There is, however, a small difference between the perception of these authors and my own. While they base their analyses upon *X-Men* movies – *X-Men* (Bryan Singer 2000), *X2: X-Men United* (Bryan Singer 2003), and *X-Men: the Last Stand* (Brett Ratner 2006), – the first parallels I perceived were based on *X-Men comics*. Consequently, the

¹ Kara Sheridan Ayers has a Ph.D. in clinical psychology. She is a writer, professor, speaker, consultant and most important of all, proud mother of beautiful Hannah. Due to osteogenesis imperfecta, which causes bones to break easily, she is a full time wheel-chair user. She is an accomplished swimmer, having represented Team USA in the 2004 Paralympics and 2005 World Cup. She is also a writer for Disability Organizations.

² Mutants, that is, people who are born with super-powers which manifest at puberty, are possible in the *X-Men* universe due to a variation in the genetic code.

³ For definition see Chapter III, subchapter 3.1.2.

main objective of this thesis is to verify if these authors' conclusion is also true for comics, that is, if mutants depicted in *X-Men* comics can also be understood as characterizations of disability.

1.1.2 Procedures

The procedures of this thesis are subdivided into two groups: 1) concepts and 2) conclusions. The first group concerns 1) finding the concepts of Disability Studies used by Chemers 2004, Ilea 2009, Mantle 2007, and Rinaldi 2008 to support their analysis and 2) verify whether these concepts are applicable to *X-Men* comics. The second group concerns 1) selecting specific filmic sequences⁴ analyzed by Chemers et al., 2) selecting comics correspondent sequences to the filmic ones, 3) finding Chemers et al.'s conclusions on the filmic sequences, and finally 4) assessing whether these conclusions are applicable to the comics sequences. The choice of Analytical Tools to guide the analysis will be discussed at 1.2.

The procedures mentioned above were based on the research questions which guided this investigation:

1. What are the concepts of Critical Disability Studies used to support the characterization of the mutants, in the *X-Men* movies, as social stigmatizations of disability in real life?

2. Are the concepts cited above also applicable to the characterizations of mutants, in the *X-Men* comics, as social stigmatization of disability in real life?

3. Are the conclusions based on *X-Men* movies reached by Chemers 2004, Ilea 2009, Mantle 2007, and Rinaldi 2008 also applicable to *X-Men* comics; that is, can mutants in *X-Men* comics also be understood as social characterizations of Disability?

The choice of suitable comics storylines⁵ for the proposed investigation has to consider, firstly, the movies upon which the

⁴ Sequence for this thesis refers to one or more scenes (film) or pages (comics) which condensates a complete event or occurrence. For instance, I call *The Announcement of the Cure Sequence* the speech of Worthington in *X-Men: The Last Stand* cited by Ramona Ilea. In comics the same sequence takes six pages and is three-plotted, that is, there are three different sets of actions happening at the same time.

⁵ A comics storyline refers to the complete development of a plot. As usually *X-Men* comics are monthly comic book issues, a storyline can run in several issues. *The Dark Phoenix Saga* for instance took 8 issues to be completed. A storyline can even run in more than one comics title, as it was the case of the Massacre of the Morlocks (*Mutant Massacre*) which ran in Uncanny X-Men, X-Factor, New Mutants, Power Pack, Thor and Daredevil.

characterization of mutancy as disability was based upon and then assess whether these movies are adapted from specific storylines. Michael M. Chemers (2004), Ramona Ilea (2009), Martin Mantle (2007), and Jennifer Rinaldi (2008) ground their analysis of *X-Men* movies from a Disability Studies Perspective on the *X-Men Trilogy* – *X-Men* (Bryan Singer 2000); *X2: X-Men United* (Bryan Singer 2003); and *X-Men: the Last Stand* (Brett Ratner 2006). Nevertheless, as most of their analysis is grounded on *X2: X-Men United*; and *X-Men: the Last Stand*, the comics' storylines these movies are adapted from are to guide this dissertation. While *X2: X-Men United* is mainly adapted from one storyline: *God Loves, Man Kills* (*Marvel Graphic Novel* 05); *X-Men: The Last Stand* is based on two storylines: *The Dark Phoenix Saga* (*Uncanny X-Men* # 129 - 137), and *Gifted* (*Astonishing X-Men* # 01 - 06). One comics storyline for each movie will be analyzed. *The Dark Phoenix Saga* deals with Phoenix (Jean Grey)'s battle and failure to control her overwhelming power; and *Gifted* deals with mutants' reaction to the *cure* to mutancy. As the *Cure* is a recurrent topic in Disability Studies the storyline *Gifted* seems to be a reasonable choice. Consequently, the storylines *God Loves, Man Kills* and *Gifted* have been chosen to be studied in the analytical chapter.

1.1.3 Organization of the Thesis

This thesis will be divided into five chapters. Chapter I holds the introduction: initial remarks, the procedures and the analytical tools. Chapter II will hold insight on *X-Men* comics, some general assumptions about comics in Brazil, and the interdisciplinary nature of comics. Chapter III will hold the theoretical framework, that is, the main concepts of Disability Studies⁶. Chapter IV will hold the analytical chapter. Chapter V or Final Remarks, will hold the analysis final conclusions: the implications of whether or not the storylines *God Loves, Man Kills* and *Gifted* present correspondent moments to the chosen filmic moments; whether the same Disability Studies concepts are applicable to filmic and comics moments; whether the filmic and its correspondent comics moments may held the same meaning; and finally, whether mutants in comics can be understood as characterization of disability in society at large.

⁶ The selection of these concepts was based on the texts by Chemers et al. cited at 1.1.2.

1.2 ANALYTICAL TOOLS

1.2.1 Initial Remarks

The analytical tools necessary for this thesis were chosen and/or adapted from the grounds set for comics understanding by Scott McCloud (*Making Comics* 2006; *Understanding Comics* 1993) and Will Eisner (*Comics & Sequential Art* 1985). These authors have not been chosen only because they are considered pioneers in their field of expertise, but also because besides being theorists, they are also comics artists. They are well acquainted with all the stages and nuances of creating, and therefore, analyzing comics. Additionally, they have a *close* relationship with and deep understanding of *sequential art*⁷ which I could not distinguish in other authors I considered basing my analyses upon.

McCloud and Eisner agree that the language of comics goes beyond a simple combined language of words and the language (Eisner 7-9, 122; McCloud, *Making Comics* 27). McCloud argues that as “(p)ictures, like words, can be iconic and symbolic to various degrees”, in comics “words and pictures” are “put on the same symbol/icon scale” (27). Similarly, Eisner argues that

In writing with words alone, the author directs the reader’s imagination. In comics the imagining is done for the reader. An image once drawn becomes a precise statement that brooks little or no further interpretation. When the two are “mixed” the words become welded to the image and no longer serve to describe but rather to provide sound, dialogue and connective passages. (122)

In other words, the language of comics, as well as comics itself, is the “blend(ing)” of “words and pictures” to form a third entity in which “verbal and other visual merge(...) together into the same sign” (27); it is “a successful crossbreeding of illustration and prose” (Eisner, 08).

These considerations were necessary before discussing the analytical tools for they provide the basic framework for the analysis of comics as an individual, unique and independent art form. McCloud considers clarity and persuasion key principles for the art of

⁷ As mentioned previously, Sequential Art is a term coined by Eisner.

“storytelling”. While clarity assures the reader will “understand what we (storytellers) have to tell” (*Making Comics*, 08), the “elements” of persuasion will ensure the audience will keep on reading (09). In order for these aspects to be achieved successfully within the spectrum of comics realm, “five basic types (...) of choices” are required (09): choice of moment; choice of frame; choice of image; choice of word; and choice of flow. In the next pages I will discuss choice of frame, choice of image and choice of word.

Glossary

Panel: (Or Frame) One of the containers of comics in which a given scene is portrayed; usually in the format of a square or rectangle.

Border: The outer boundaries of the panel (may be non-existent).

Gutter: The empty space between the panels.

Balloon: One of the containers of comics in which the character's words or thoughts are portrayed; usually a balloon-like format.

Tail: The pointer of the balloon which connects the speaker to the balloon.

Caption: One of the containers of comics in which usually the narrator voice or narrative details like time or location are portrayed. Usually written at the top of or down below the illustrations.

Closure: The imaginative skill required from the reader to complete the action in the gutter.

Flow: The reading direction in which comics are read - from left to right.

Page Pattern - The standard page pattern is 9 (nine) equal sized rectangular or square panels.

Illustration 2.2 Glossary (of Comics Terms)⁸

⁸ Organized and elaborated by myself.

1.2.2 Choice of Frame

Choice of frame concerns all the devices used by the comics artists⁹ to direct the reader's eye (McCloud, *Making Comics* 19, 37). Frames or panels are “the sequenced segments” which “capture(...) or encapsulate(...) the events in the flow of the narrative” (Eisner 38). Comics panels “express the passage of time” and also “undertake(...) the containment of thoughts, ideas, actions and location or site” (38). The aim of the choice of frame is to “show(...) the readers what they need to see, creating a sense of place, position and focus” (McCloud, *Making Comics* 37). Its basics tools are “frame size and shape”; “choice of ‘camera’ angles, distance, (...) and centering” (37).

The first aspect McCloud considers for *choice of frame* is frame size and shape. Comics panels are different from photographs or films, as their size and shape play a role in the composition of the page as a whole (McCloud, *Making Comics* 24). The basic page pattern of a comic book consists of nine equal-sized square panels. The number, size and format of the panels, however, can vary depending only on the artist's imagination and purposes. McCloud makes use of the basic page pattern to measure a panel as double-height (the height of 2 of the 9 panels within a page (44). I will extend this vocabulary in my analysis, using terms like “triple-height” panel; “double-width” and “triple-width” panel. The borders of the panels are not fixed either, they can “bleed¹⁰” or overflow the pre-determined page boundaries, (McCloud *Understanding Comics* 103), be inexistent, blend in with scenario, be used “as a narrative device” (Eisner 46) and so on.

The second aspect McCloud considers for *choice of frame* is choice of “camera” angles (*Making Comics* 37), or “perspective” (Eisner 89). Eisner reminds us that though comics frames are not the same as cinematic ones (38), although some resemblance does exist. The fortunate choice of features like angle and distance makes the difference between a well-focused and a “distract(ing)” narrative (McCloud 20). According to Eisner perspective has two functions, first: “to manipulate the reader's orientation for a purpose in accord with the author's narrative plan”; second: “to manipulate and produce various emotional

⁹ A comics artist is a person working within the comics medium on comic strips, comic books or graphic novels. The term may refer to any number of artists who contribute to produce a work in the comics form, from those who oversee all aspects of the work to those who contribute only a part. Found at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comics_artist

¹⁰ Also known as *fourth wall break* (McCloud 50).

states in the reader” (89). Concerning choice of angle, I will adapt Eisner’s and McCloud’s nomenclature. Eisner uses “birds eye view” and “worms eye view” (163) and also “eye-level view”, “over-head view”, and “ground level” view (89). McCloud uses “eye level”, “worm’s eye view” and “getting above a scene” (*Making Comics*, 21). I have chosen to use “low-angle” instead of “worm’s eye-view” or “ground-level view”; and “high-angle” or “bird’s eye-view” instead of “over-head view”. I also will use “eye-view-angle”; and “extreme-high angle”.

Distance is the third aspect McCloud considers for *choice of frame*. Distance concerns “how closely” the comics artist “decide(s) to frame an action to show all the pertinent details”; or “how far to pull back to let the reader know where an action is taking place... and maybe give a sense of being there in the process” (*Making Comics*, 19). In other words, distance “determin(es) (...) the portion of each symbol or element to be included in the frame” (Eisner 41). To exemplify the possible elements of distance Eisner uses the terms “full figure”, “medium” and “close up” (42), while McCloud uses “close-up panels”, “long-shot panel”, and “middle ground” (22) or “middle distance” (20). I will expand and adapt these concepts to: extreme-long-shot panel, long-shot panel, medium-shot panel, and close-up panel¹¹. McCloud also calls attention to the “establishing shot”, which is one or two panels at the beginning of a narration aimed at establishing a mood and/or “a strong sense of place” (22, 23).

Choice of frame also concerns centering. The comics artist has the power to direct the readers’ eye toward the direction he/she wants to, and a technique to assign more importance to a subject by placing it in the center of the panel (McCloud, *Making Comics* 24). This subject may be a character, for example. The centering concept, however, can be explored further than that. Even the absence of an image in the center of the panel can hold meaning. The “center can also point us toward less tangible ideas, such as the motion of an object ... a mysterious absence.....a distance to be crossed... a distance crossed already...or the unseen object of a character’s attention” (25). These are just some possibilities the use of centering provides.

¹¹ Apart from the borrowing of the expression “extreme-long-shot” this selection was based only on the works of Eisner and McCloud, not on film studies.

1.2.3 Choice of Image

Choice of image concerns all the devices used to “render(...)” the storytelling in the comics “frames clearly.” (McCloud *Making Comics*, 10). The purpose behind the concept of *choice of image* is “clearly and quickly evoking the appearance of characters, objects, environments and symbols” (37). Its “tools” are “every artistic/graphic device ever invented”. Some of the devices available for the illustrator are “(r)esemblance, specificity, expression, body language and the natural world” and also “stylistic and expressionistic devices” which “affect mood and emotion” (37).

Image is the first aspect one considers when thinking about comics, it is its basic component. Discouraging about its importance, therefore, is not necessary. Refined-drawn pages, elaborated by highly-talented artist are the key for a comic book success. Nevertheless, McCloud disagrees with that. When he introduces the five choices which “compelling” comics require (2.2), he affirms that these choices “make the difference between clear, convincing storytelling and a confusing mess” (10). Therefore, if the comics artist draws exuberantly but does not communicate, he/she will have failed (10). Summing up, “the ultimate test of clarity in comics”, as well as of the proper rendering of images in comics, “is in how well it delivers on the basic intent of each panel” (29)¹².

1.2.4 Choice of Word

Choice of word specifically for the comics reality concerns the ability to select “words that add *valuable information* and *work well* with the images around them” (McCloud, *Making Comics* 10). The objective of the accurate *choice of word* is to “clearly and persuasively communicate(...) ideas, voices and sounds in seamless combination with images” (37). Its tools are “every literary and linguistic device ever invented” (37).

Words, in comics, can appear in the format of “balloons, sound effects and word/picture integration” (37) and also as captions. Balloons are “the containers of the text-dialogue spoken by character” and the “pointer” which “lead(s) from balloon to speaker” is known as tail

¹² One such example is the success of *Maus* drawn in a minimalistic way. The former works of Art Spiegelman were more complexly drawn but did not reach the recognition of *Maus*.

(Eisner 163). At the beginning balloons were just “a ribbon emerging from the speaker’s mouth” (27). However, “(a)s balloons became more extensively employed their outlines were made to serve as more than simple enclosure of speech. Soon they were given the task of adding meaning and conveying the character of sound to the narrative” (27). For example, while a normal-outline balloon means direct speech, a cloud-like one means thought and a lighting-strike-like one may mean anger or pain. In comics words can also be integrated into the comics page to add information to the panel by means like of a billboard, a postcard¹³, a newspaper, a cinema poster, etc. Another form of word integration is when the background is mutated to incorporate words (Eisner 10; McCloud, *Making Comics* 139). Caption, which is “the text used in the introduction of a sequence or interposed between panels”, can be used to “deal with the passage of time and change in locale” (Eisner 127). It adds necessary information to the narrative, contain inner thoughts, act as the omnipresent narrator, etc.

1.2.5 The Dynamics of Comics

Taking into the consideration that comics is the “craft of the interplay of word and image” (Eisner 08); one may wonder on the role that each one of them (word/image) play in that dynamics.

Well, the analytical tools chosen for this thesis are *choice of image* – which deals with the significance of image for the storytelling; *choice of word* which deals with the significance of word for the storytelling; and *choice of frame* – which deals with the significance of the positioning of image and word within the panel for the storytelling. In other words, the focus for the selection of tools was on both image and word. In fact, it was the secondary focus. The primary focus of the selection was on the *balance* between image and word (See 1.2.1). McCloud says the following about balance “(c)omics is a medium of *fragments* - - a piece of text here, a cropped picture there - - but when it works, your readers will *combine* those fragments as they read and experience your story as a continuous *whole*” (*Making Comics* 129).

The combination McCloud talks about can be trickier than it seems. For instance, the choice of words for a written text is intrinsically different from the *choice of words* for comics. For the former, the choice is made within a one-dimensional world; the author needs to focus on

¹³ The story *Hoagy the Yogi, Part 2* by Will Eisner, for instance, all the narration and even the credits are made in format of postcards sent to The Spirit. (Eisner 16-23).

one tool to deliver the desired meaning. For the latter, the choice is made within a two-dimensional world, the author needs to focus on two distinct tools to deliver his/her message, that is, *if* he/she is both the writer and illustrator. The plot thickens if the comics is made by three different specialists, the writer or plotter (who writes the plot), the illustrator (who draws the images and panels) and the letterer (who adds balloons and captions)¹⁴. The making of comics can be even more challenging, as not rarely none of these three artists meet during the creation process. According to McCloud “(i)n most great comics, that balance is a *dynamic* one. Sometimes *words* take the lead, sometimes *pictures* do --- but both work *together* to propel the story *forward*” (128 my emphasis on dynamics). Independent of the number of collaborators, and of their area of expertise, the role played by images and words has no favorites. The ultimate goal is to achieve *dynamic* balance

1.3 INTERDISCIPLINARITY

The nature of this thesis is interdisciplinary as it is also the nature of comics themselves. The core of thesis is intertwined by and with Disability Studies, Comics Studies and Literature. The core of comics is intertwined by images (Art) and words (Literature). Comics have been, nevertheless, to use a kind word, misunderstood. Comics are by some considered the bastard child of Graphic Art and Literature. To those, comics can be neither art nor literature. To those the existence of comics is an affront to the pure racial nature of its parents, whom should have never dared to give birth to such an unwanted *mestizo*. Nevertheless, by others this *mestizo* is considered a beloved child whom has inherited and therefore has right to the features of its parents. To those, comics *are* Graphic Art, comics *are* Literature, and comics *are* comics, and comics *can be* even more.

It is neither my intention nor the objective of this thesis to develop argument on this dispute with the purpose to certify either side. I intend to acknowledge this dispute exists, and to establish the position of this thesis within it. As Charles Hatfield argues when he talks about alternative comics, either side at its extremes has its “dangers”. Although he refers to alternative comics when he discourses about these two sides I argue that with some trimming they can be applied to comics

¹⁴ Although I did not include in this list, there are still the art-finalist or inker and the colorist.

in general as well. At one side there are those who believe alternative comics are at its best “an underground art, teasing and outraging bourgeois society from a gutter-level position of economic hopelessness and (...) unchecked artistic freedom”. For Hatfield “at its worst” this view “reeks of willed naiveté or reverse snobbery”. At the other side, there are those who believe that alternative comics needs and deserves cultural legitimatization as a means of artistic expression. (That would include academic legitimizations)”. For Hatfield, “at *its* worse” this view “reeks of status anxiety and over-earnest bidding for gentrification”.

Already in 1975 Antônio Luiz Cagnin acknowledged that comics were either considered as literature, or were marginalized by the traditional literary studies (21). Although the negative view on comics has been slowly changing since then, “some will nonetheless scoff at the labeling of comics as ‘literature’ – among the scoffers will be some practitioners¹⁵” (Charles Hatfield, Introduction xi). Hatfield argues that the “unfixability” of comics is positive.

Both socially and aesthetically, comics are likely to remain an unresolved, unstable, and challenging art form. This is what makes them interesting. Indeed for the general reader, the collateral benefits of comics study may be found in this very instability: if comic art is some kind of bastard, to recruit a popular metaphor, they maybe bastardly is just the thing – our culture has it for aesthetic purity anyway. (Introduction xiii)

Even though I agree with Hatfield that the discussion around the literary nature or not of comics is productive; I also argue it should not be a central issue. This dispute has been going on since comics were historically understood as comics, and is likely to be going on for as long as they exist. I argue though that the reader should be given all the information necessary on the subject and then make his/her own decision.

¹⁵ One example of a practitioner who is against comics being considered as literature is Paulo Ramos, author of *A leitura dos quadrinhos* (17).

This thesis approaches comics, and especially its corpora, as literature; as it acknowledges and respects its *mestizo*'s nature. I follow Charles Hatfield, who in his book *Alternative Comics*, “views comic art primary as a literary form. This is not the only productive way comics can be viewed but it is an important and neglected way (Introduction iv). My primarily reason for approaching comics as literature comes from the first time I bought an *X-Men* comic book as a teenager. That was long before I came to know the concepts of literature and what makes a work literary; long before I came to know the dispute which surrounds this media. Nevertheless, for me as a teenager, comics were *literature*. The stories were as good as the ones written by favorite writers at the time: Isaac Asimov, Agatha Christie, Alexander Dumas, etc. As I found great resistance to my reading comics by family and teachers I registered them mentally as a kind of second class literature at the time, but literature nevertheless. Again, I say I do not intend to certify comics as literature. I just place, within the realm of possibilities for approaching the analysis of comics, my corpora as literature.

The interdisciplinary nature of comics goes beyond their primary components: images and words, Art Studies and Literature. Cagnin, for instance, suggests eight disciplinary “perspectives” from which “comics could be seen through:” “Literary”; “Historical”; “Psychological”; “Sociological”; “Educational”; “from values”; “Esthetic-psychological”; and “Marketing” (my translation 21-23). The principal fields of expertise involved in this thesis are: Literature, History, Comics Studies, and Disability Studies. Literature provides the literary text. History throws light on the development of Disability Studies, comics, *X-Men* comics, as well as on how society’s perspective on Disability has been developing throughout time. Comics Studies provides the analytical tools. Disability Studies provides the theoretical parameters.

CHAPTER II – COMICS AND X-MEN COMICS

2.1 COMICS

2.1.1 What are Comics?

The term comics is used in this work in the sense of “sequential art” (Will Eisner 07), or its expanded version “juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or produce an aesthetic response in the viewer” (Scott McCloud *Understanding Comics* 17). It encloses “comic strips, comic books, graphic novels, graphic narrative, cave paintings, Grecian urns, tapestry, stained glass windows...” (21). I will clarify the three first ones: 1) comic strips: the extension comprises one line, e.g. newspapers strips, 2) comic books: magazine style, usually periodic, e.g. *Turma da Mônica* monthly titles; 3) graphic novel: written specifically for book format, e.g. *Maus* by Art Spiegelman; or a set of standard periodic comic books reprinted containing a storyline, e.g. *The Dark Phoenix Saga* (2006)¹⁶.

2.1.2 Astonishing Comics

For a long time comics were *persona non grata*¹⁷ in the classroom. I want to explore how this scenario has changed, or has been changing. I must clarify, though, that I do not intend in this sub-chapter to discuss the merits of comics as an educational tool. I consider here the situation of comics in the classroom as a means to make a diagnosis of society’s position, in general, towards comics. After all the way that parents, teachers and education-related-professionals see this media has profound impact on how an entire generation will relate to comics.

To exemplify some past (or still present?) general assumptions about comics I cite: 1) the accounts of writer Scott McCloud’s of his early relation with comics; 2) a qualitative/comparative research about the accessibility of comics in the classroom in the 80s and after the PCNs¹⁸ in Paraná by Taciana Maria Bahls and Cláudia Cabral Rezende (2011). McCloud’s accounts reflects not only his own, but a whole

¹⁶ Originally, *The Dark Phoenix Saga* was published in monthly issues, from Jan.-79 to Aug.-98. The first reprint of this saga in the format of a graphic novel was in 2006.

¹⁷ Fully unacceptable or unwelcome, especially to a foreign government.

(<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/persona+non+grata>).

¹⁸ Diretrizes Curriculares Estaduais

generation assumptions about comics: “(w)hen I was a *little kid* I knew *exactly* what comics were. *Comics* were those *bright, colorful magazines* filled with *bad art, stupid stories* and *guys in tights*. I read *real books*, naturally. I was much too *old* for comics” (*Understanding Comics* 02). As he gave comics a chance and *read them*, he realized that there was more to them than he had thought. McCloud wrote both his books about comics in comics format using images, balloons and captions to make his point through. So that in order to explain people’s reaction to his attempting to explain comics had potential he draws a character laughing out loudly next to a cartoonist version of himself (See next page). (02). In this example three society’s assumptions about comics can be distinguished: 1) comics can not be good, or as good as books; 2) comics are only for children; 3) comics and/or their readers are not to be taken seriously.

Taciana Bahls and Cláudia Rezende, throughout questionnaires given to individuals who were students in the 80s, evaluated these individual’s relation with comics in that decade, especially concerning teachers’ behavior towards them. It was observed that: student(s) were not motivated or were advised not to read comics by teachers; felt prejudice when reading them for they were considered literature for children and/or non-intelligent readers; were advised not to read them by family; were forbidden to read them during class-time-reserved-for-reading; language teachers discarded them as learning tools, especially when characters had characteristic speech¹⁹ (4449). Here, the three assumptions cited earlier can be discerned. Teacher not allowing comics to be read in class, for instance, signals for their not being as good as books. Nevertheless, a fourth assumption can also be discerned here: 4) intelligent people *do not* read comics.

¹⁹ Chico Bento speaks countryside dialect and Cebolinha (Jimmy 5 in comics published in English-speaking countries) has speech impairment (changes “r” for “l” sound).

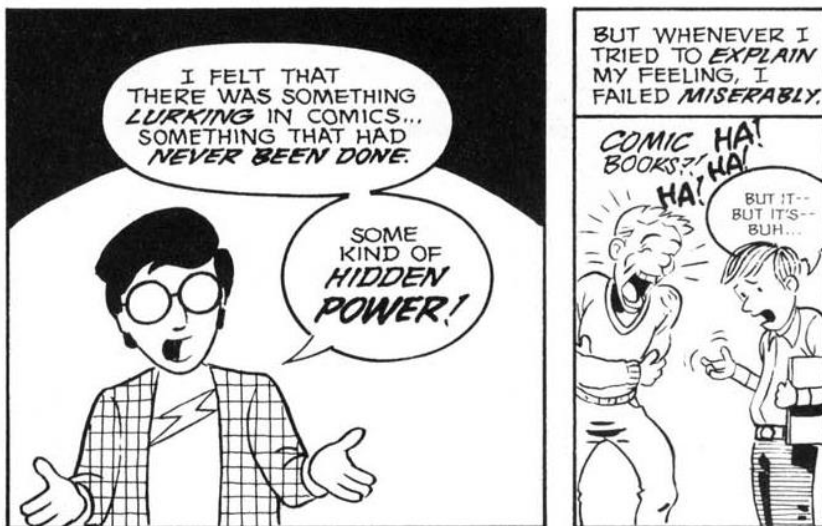


Illustration 2.1 People's reaction at McCloud's Attempt to Explain that Comics Had Potential.

These and other negative assumptions about comics were not formed aleatorily. They have a history. In Brazil the first critics against comics began in 1928 by the Associação Brasileira de Educadores (ABE), and other critics followed by Bishops from São Carlos, in 1939 (Djota Carvalho 32). This negative campaign against comics was not an isolated phenomenon, though. "Similar movements appeared around the world during the same period" (my translation²⁰ 32)²¹. Carvalho adds that, "in Brazil (...) the worst was to come" for in 1944, the Instituto Nacional de Educação (Inep) affirmed that "comics provoke mental slowness²²" (32). The study this affirmation was based upon had a "devastating effect on many parents and teachers", causing "prohibitions" and "generating sentences which were repeated and remembered for many generations, like 'if you read comics you brain

²⁰ With the purpose of conciseness I will not note "my translation" for the forthcoming translations in thesis. I will also add the translated passage in the original language in the footnote.

²¹ "apareciam movimentos similares ao redor do mundo nesse mesmo período."

²² "No Brasil, (...) o pior estava por vir"; "as histórias em quadrinhos provocavam lerdeza mental lerdeza mental".

will have the size of a comics panel²³,²⁴ (32). A commission to evaluate comics ordered by the Congresso Nacional and led by Gilberto Freire in 1949 concluded that comics are not harmful as a means, and can be educational (33-34). However, the hardest blow on comics all over the world happened in 1954. It came in the format of a book called *Seduction of the Innocent*. In it, Carvalho points out, the psychologist Frederic Werthen “affirms - (...) that comics provoke ‘abnormal behavior²⁵, in children” (34). This book caused comics to be burned and the creation of an ethics code²⁶ for comics in the USA; also causing negative repercussion in Brazil (35-36). Werthen’s book was indeed harmful to comics’ reputation around the world. However it can be argued that Brazil had an even more prejudiced and biased piece of work: a study by Inep which accused comics of lessening children’s intelligence. Therefore, comics in Brazil have had a harder battle to fight against prejudice than their counterparts in other countries. The question is, how is the scenario comics/children/classrooms in Brazil nowadays?

According to T. Bahls and Rezende the negative position of comics in the classroom began to change in 1997 with the creation of PCNs, *Pâmetros Curriculares Nacionais*²⁷ (National Curriculum Parameters) (10-11). PCNs which guide the parameters for the teaching of the mother tongue, for instance, cite comics as a reliable didactic tool twice (72, 74). “Nowadays”, thanks to the “implantation of PCNs, which propagates ideas about the association of images and text, processes which help students develop their reading skills” it has been confirmed that “comics can be excellent teacher’s allies in the teaching process²⁸” (T. Bahls and Rezende 4488-4489). DCEs, *Diretrizes Curriculares Estaduais* (State Curriculum Guidelines), which has been regulating teaching approaches in Paraná from 2006 on, also supports the use of comics in the classroom. These authors do not base their conclusions only on the contents of PCNs or DCEs, but also on their

²³ “efeito devastador entre muitos pais e professores”; “proibições”; “gerando frases que foram repetidas e lembradas por muitas gerações, como ‘quem lê histórias em quadrinhos fica com o cérebro do tamanho de um quadrinho”.

²⁴ One of these sentences reached me. As a teenager, one of my teachers was genuinely worried about me, for she was told that comics were harmful to intelligence.

²⁵ Tendency to crime and homosexuality.

²⁶ The comics code.

²⁷ The governmental PCNs which guide the teaching in Brazil for the 1° to 4° grades were created in 1997; for 5° to 8° in 1998.

²⁸ “Hoje”; “implantação do PCN’s, no qual se divulgam ideias sobre a associação de imagens e texto, (as quais) auxilia(m) os alunos no desenvolvimento da leitura”; “os gibis podem ser excelentes aliados do professor no processo de ensino”.

personal experience as students in the 80s and teachers after the advent of those documents, as well as on the research conducted with other teachers²⁹ (cited above). My primary intention is not to praise the functionality of comics as didactic tools here, but to bring to light society's change of heart towards them. They somehow managed to go from persona non grata to well-come invited guests in Brazil's classrooms. This is yet another reason why I consider them *Astonishing Comics*.

2.2 X-MEN

The *X-Men* comics titles, like other classic super-heroes titles like Spider-man, Iron-man, The Fantastic Four, Thor and the Avengers belong to Marvel Comics. In this fictional universe evolution has taken a step further which originates the Homo superior, vulgarly known as mutants. These individuals may be born as normal humans³⁰ however as they reach puberty they develop super-powers. *X-Men* refers to a super-hero team of mutants whose members change periodically. For the purpose of this research, when I say *X-Men* comics I only refer to the Marvel's mainstream continuity for *X-Men*. The range of this continuity extends from 1963, when the comic book *X-Men #1* conceived by Stan Lee debuted, to nowadays in the format of a variety of comic books titles. Titles referent to alternative realities or parallel universes will not be considered. The Marvel universe is inhabited by a considerable number of *X-Men* teams from alternative or parallel realities, like: *Ultimate X-Men*, where the team is revised; *Earth X* tells the adventures of the mutants of Earth-9997; *Exiles* is about Earth-12; and so on.

2.2.1 Astonishing X-Men

The reason why I chose *Astonishing Comics* as part of this thesis title relies, to a degree, on the history of *X-Men* comics as a whole. *X-Men* comics have come a long way from its first comic book issue in 1963 (*X-Men #1*). Since then, the number of mutants in the Marvel Universe has multiplied from six heroes and one villain³¹ to such a

²⁹ Research conducted in the format of questionnaires in the year of 2011.

³⁰ Some mutants are born looking like humans, others are born with distinctive characteristics which betray their mutancy at birth.

³¹ Professor X, Ciclopes, Marvel Girl, Iceman, Angel, Beast and Magneto.

number that even Stan Lee, their co-creator, has lost count of the number of mutants in the Marvel universe. In addition, “(t)he *X-Men* franchise has made billions of dollars over the last forty-five years from major motion pictures, animated television shows, video games, and, of course, the best-selling comic series in American history” (Housel R. and Wisnewski J. 01). Indeed, the adventures of the group of mutants have generated five blockbusters, (*X-Men* (2000); *X2: X-Men United* (2003); *X-Men: the Last Stand* (2006); *X-Men Origins: Wolverine* (2009); and *X-Men: First Class* (2011)); three animated series³² (*X-Men: The animated series* (1992); *X-Men: Evolution* (2000); and *Wolverine and the X-Men* (2007)); and also a considerable number of videogames. My intention citing all of this data is *not* to highlight the commercial success of the *X-Men*, but to inspire curiosity.

After all, there must be something extraordinary, even astonishing about a comics title which was a failure in sales about to be canceled and ends up reaching such success³³. In fact the *X-Men* comics’ *formula* for critic and public approval is so fruitful that other media has been borrowing it. Some examples are the successful TV series *Heroes* (2006-2010) and *True Blood* (2008-...). Even Brazil has its generic version of *X-Men* comics. It combines mutants and soap-opera, Brazil’s favorite media. Not surprisingly the soap opera from TV Record *Caminhos do Coração* (2007) had such a positive public reception that two sequels followed: *Mutantes: Caminhos do Coração* (2008) and *Mutantes: Promessas do Amor* (2009). It is important to point out that on the contrary of American series which gain another season if successful, a Brazilian soap opera very rarely presents a sequel. These two sequels, therefore, are a once in a life time event. Moreover, the themes underlining the *X-Men* universe have been calling the attention of scholars from a varied set of expertise, from which I cite a few: Scott Bukatman (*X-bodies*); Rebecca Housel (*X-Women and X-istence*); Jesse Kaavadlo (*X-istencial X-Men: Jews, Superman, and the Literature of Struggle*); and Max J. Skidmore and Joey Skidmore (*More Than Mere Fantasy: Political Themes in Contemporary Comic Books*). In short, what is *X-Men*’ secret formula for public and academic recognition?

³² <http://marvel.com/comics/>

³³ The comic book, at the beginning, lost to titles like *Spider-Man* and *The Fantastic Four* and for a long time consisted only in reprints (Trushell, John M. 02). When taking over the *X-Men* comic book at issue #93 the comics writer Chris Claremont did not expect the comics book to “reach issue #100” (Andrew Wahl).

Let us take a look at some possible answers to that question. Chris Claremont³⁴ is believed to be responsible for *X-Men*'s successful formula. From 1968 to 1974 the *X-Men*, a group of super-beings who had acquired their powers through natural mutation/evolution had not been a success, as expected. The group only began to arouse interest of the public in 1975, when Claremont began writing their stories. Stan Lee, the co-creator of the group, explains in an interview why that happened:

(O)ne unique thing about your version (Claremont's) of the X-Men is that it is one of the first time in comics when the characterization became the most important part of the story...when I started the X-Men there were six X-Men, but you kept adding to the group until there were so many that we even lost count of them, but you somehow gave each one of them a personality and a character so that they became real fleshed out people and readers cared about them. (Stan Lee)

Understandably, one may argue that the opinion of Stan Lee is not unbiased. Therefore I will cite the article "*Chris Claremont, the real genius behind The X-Men and Wolverine*" from the Los Angeles Times,

But the real driving force behind the continuing success of X-Men (...) was Chris Claremont (...) The most intriguing aspect of Claremont's writing was that he had a true soap opera-style approach to dramatic storytelling, a perfect sensibility for the serial-like nature of comics. (Patrick Goldstein)

Another worthwhile mentioning example is the opinion of Grady Hendrix, "The genius of Chris Claremont was that he made mutants a generic stand-in for all minorities (...) Black, gay, disabled, and Jewish readers could project their own experiences onto the trials and tribulations of the X-Men." Considering that the headline of Hendrix's article is "*I heart Wolverine: How a ridiculous Canadian mutant conquered the world*", it can be concluded that even the people who like Hendrix are not fond of the *X-Men* recognize Claremont's talent. Here, there are possibilities to choose from for the secret of *X-Men*'s formula: "the characterization" (Lee); its "soap opera-style approach" (Goldstein); its appeal to "minorities" (Hendrix); two or all of these

³⁴ Chris Claremont is also largely known for writing the adventures of the *X-Men* for 17 years uninterruptedly. (1975-1981).

characteristics conjoined. What is certain, though, is that *X-Men*'s route from imminent cancellation to commercial success and critical praise is that they are indeed *Astonishing comics*³⁵.

2.2.2 The X-Men/History Connection

Yet another possible piece in *X-Men* success-formula puzzle lies in its close relationship with History. To illustrate this point, let us explore the *X-Men* comics' trajectory alongside the real world History from 1963 to 2001. The first *X-Men*³⁶ super-hero team was composed by six members in their early teens. They were trained by Professor X (Charles Xavier) to learn to use their recently acquired powers and defend humanity from possible threats, and among them, the supervillain mutant Magneto. Traces of Martin Luther King can be found in Professor X and the *X-Men* struggle to be accepted by and live peacefully within human society resembles "moderate elements of the civil movement of the 1960's" (Thrushel 153). Traces of "increasingly radical elements" like "the Nation of Islam whose best-know advocate" was "Malcolm X" can be found in Magneto's and his Brotherhood of Mutants' dislike and discard of any attempt of understanding between mutants and humans (153). Thrushel cites Mondello to explain *X-Men*'s political view: it "stress(es) cooperation among individuals and minorities rather than conflict, moderation in politics rather than extremism, and the right of each American to social recognitions and economic opportunity" (238).

However, as Thrushel points out, the *X-Men* did not reach the popularity of other Marvel titles, and for five years consisted of reprints (1970 to 1975). Maybe that happened because they resembled school kids wearing the same costume³⁷ and being trained by a teacher, later on "their uniforms were replaced by individual costumes" (154). Marvel decided to publish "a radically revised X-Men" (154); "with greater individuality and maturity" in 1975 (155). Aiming at "the foreign marketability of Marvel Comics" as well as "the increasing maturity of

³⁵ Even Brian Singer refused to direct *X-Men* movies originally. However, after reading *X-Men* comics he changed his mind, as he acknowledged there was more to *X-Men* comics than he had thought. He has directed *X-Men* (2000) and *X2: X-Men United* (2003); produced *X-Men: First Class* (2011) and has already agreed in producing *X-Men: Days of Future Past* (2014). http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bryan_Singer

³⁶ The original group was composed by Angel (Warren Warrington III), Beast (Hank McCoy), Cyclops (Scott Summers), Iceman (Bob Drake) and Marvel Girl (Jean Grey).

³⁷ The word *costume* here refers to their super-hero outfit.

comics readership”, the new team consisted of teenagers, adults and middle aged men in a modern Babel Tower³⁸ (155). Also, as the 1970’s were “the ‘me’ decade”, the *X-Men* began to have a “greater emphasis on self-realization”; “their triumphs often were achieved through personal growth” without forgetting their duty to protect the people who hated and feared them (155). In short, the *X-Men* reflected the historical moment they were inserted in. In the 1960’s the group reflected the civil movement, Professor X Martin Luther King and Magneto Malcolm X. In the 1970’s, the *me* decade, the *X-Men* reflected self-realization and personal growth.

During the 1980’s, Trushell tell us, the comic book title *The X-Men* was changed to *The Uncanny X-Men* (#141: January 1981), and new *X-Men* titles were released. The X-titles became not only closer to science fiction than they had been during the golden age of comics³⁹ (157). There is an urban legend, for instance, that the storyline *Days of Future Past*, which depicts temporal displacement, inspired the blockbuster *Terminator*. The *X-Men* titles were also based on “fantasy materials”, for example, when the young Shadowcat⁴⁰ faces alone a demon-like creature – plot which nevertheless has a lot in common with the film *Alien* (155). Additionally the *X-Men* followed the literary tendency of the time: the cyberpunk and its futuristic Middle Ages (156).

The X-titles, in common with “cyberpunk” science fiction of the 1980s, became increasingly concerned with technological and scientific advances that could (Trushell 156) “imperil the very survival of the individual and the human” (Kellner 173): “prosthetics and cosmetic surgery, mind-altering drugs, information technology, virtual reality, artificial intelligence, biogenetics, holograms and surround-sound, miniaturized computer systems and ‘intelligent weaponry’” (Bailey 12)

In short, in the 1980’s the *X-Men* stories not only returned to a more science-fiction style to its stories but also alongside cyberpunk “were roamed by bands of outcasts, mystics, and adventurers” (157).

Due to public positive reception to the *X-Men* stories in the 1980’s

³⁸ Banshee was Irish; Sunfire Japanese; Wolverine Canadian; Storm African; Nightcrawler German; Thunderbird Native-American; and Colossus Russian.

³⁹ American Golden Age of Comics: around 1938 to 1950.

⁴⁰ Kitty Pryde, a mutant codenamed Shadowcat who can pass through solid objects, was only 13 years old and had just joined the *X-Men* when she faced the alien-film-like-demon.

(t)he bands of outcast fragmented and X-titles proliferated in the early 1990s. The X-Men divided in two teams: Gold in The Uncanny X-Men and blue in the revived The X-Men (...) and a further intake to Xavier's academy made a debut in Generation X (Trushell 157).

Trushell explains that in 1995 the Age of Apocalypse, an alternative present in which Professor X had never founded the *X-Men* because he had been, was launched. In this alternative timeline Magneto founded the *X-Men*, Apocalypse took over the world, and mutants "slaughtered" humans.

"The core story occupied thirty-four issues of nine monthly or bimonthly X-titles before Apocalypse was overthrown (...) (and) past events rectified. (...) The commercial merit of such X-title crossover stories was that Marvel was sustained when comics sales (...) declined in the mid-1990s. When, in 1996, Marvel launched a cull of titles, X-titles escaped largely unscathed. This cull was achieved by the depredations of an entity named 'Onslaught' (...), ending in a cataclysm that convulsed the Marvel Comic universe, attracting readership, resolving anomalies, and paring production.

In 2001 the group had a "reorientation"; uniforms now were "paramilitary", "secret identities" were "abandoned"⁴¹. "This reorientation of *X-Men* from superheroic soap-opera toward source science fiction also re-established the original theme of the *X-Men* insofar as homo superior was reemphasized as the unhappy outcast from the oppressive society of homo sapiens" (157-159). In short, from the early 1990's to 2001 the *X-Men* went through major spin-offs, sprouted into new titles and also kept titles when other Marvel titles were pared. In the same period the *X-Men* also went from cyberpunk outcasts to a military-like super-hero team with no secret identity. Abandoning secret identities is a huge deal for any super-hero. That, plus associating the group with an American special-force, well trained army unit in their way to make the world a better place is a major and unique shift in direction not just in the *X-Men* realm of possibilities, but also for any super-hero team.

⁴¹ This framework of the *X-Men* as a military elite group, as well as the re-visiting of the group original theme, can be identified at the storyline *Gifted* (2006), which is part of the corpora of this thesis.

CHAPTER III – THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 INITIAL REMARKS

The objective of this chapter is to establish the theoretical framework that will guide the analytical chapter (Chapter IV). The selecting of theoretical parameters was based on the texts by Michael M. Chemers (2004), Ramona Ilea (2009), Martin Mantle (2007), and Jennifer Rinaldi (2008); texts which approached the *X-Men* Trilogy – *X-Men* (Bryan Singer 2000); *X2: X-Men United* (Bryan Singer 2003); and *X-Men: the Last Stand* (Brett Ratner 2006) – from a Disability Studies perspective. After careful analysis the following concepts of Disability Studies were observed: the concept of Normalcy, Eugenics, the Social and Medical Model of Disability, and the distinction between disability and disease. Before discussing these concepts it is necessary to consider Disability, and Disability Studies.

3.1.1 Disability and People with Disabilities

The definition of disability will vary according to the field of expertise it is embedded in. A random dictionary definition will be different from the one found in a Medicine book aiming on diagnosing disability, which will be different from the one found in a Law book aiming at explaining disability as applicable for benefits. This thesis focuses on disability as a social construct which restrains the lives of people with disabilities. Therefore, a definition of disability from the field of Disability Studies is paramount. I chose the one from Finkelstein and French: “(d)isability is the loss or limitation of opportunities that prevents people who have impairments from taking part in the normal life of the community on an equal level with others due to physical and social barriers (26)”

Likewise, the definition of people with disabilities fluctuates according to the perspective used as point of departure for analysis. The Americans with Disability Act (ADA), for instance, defines

an individual with a disability (...) a person who: (1) has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities; OR (2) has a record of such an impairment; OR (3) is regarded as having such an impairment”; whereas “(a) *physical impairment* (...) any

physiological disorder or condition, cosmetic disfigurement, or anatomical loss affecting one or more of the following body systems: neurological, musculoskeletal, special sense organs, respiratory (including speech organs), cardiovascular, reproductive, digestive, genitourinary, hemic and lymphatic, skin, and endocrine.⁴²

The British government defines a person with disabilities “under the Equality Act 2010, if” she/he “ha(s) a physical or mental impairment that has ‘substantial’ and ‘long term’ negative effect “on the) ability to do normal activities”⁴³. The American Social Security site defines as a person with disabilities (for claiming of benefits purpose) a person “who cannot work because (he/she) ha(s) a medical condition that is expected to last at least one year or result in death”⁴⁴.

This study will rely on the definition of people with disabilities grounded on Disability Studies. People with disabilities are “impaired people” whom are “physically disable(d)” by society; upon whom “disability is something imposed on top of (their) impairments by the way (they) are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation on society” (Michael Oliver 33). However, “(i)n the process of disabling people with disabilities, ableist society creates the absolute category of disability. ‘Normal’ people tend to think of ‘the disabled’ as the deaf, the blind, the orthopedically impaired, the mentally retarded” (Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy* 7-8). Or else, society tends to consider people with disabilities *the other*, to whom they may feel sorry for, but never themselves. Even when disability comes knocking at their door, for instance, in the format of kidney failure, bipolar disorder, hearing and mobility problems due to aging, even then people tend to deny belonging to the disabled category.

But the fact is that disability includes, according to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, those who are regarded as having a limitation or interference with daily life activities such as hearing, speaking, seeing, walking, moving, thinking, breathing, and learning. Under this definition, one now has to include people with invisible impairments such as arthritis, diabetes, epilepsy, muscular dystrophy, cystic fibrosis, multiple sclerosis, heart and respiratory problems, cancer,

⁴² Found at <http://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/disabilities/physical/definition.htm>.

⁴³ Found at <https://www.gov.uk/definition-of-disability-under-equality-act-2010>.

⁴⁴ Found at <http://www.ssa.gov/pubs/10029.html#a0=1>.

developmental disabilities, dyslexia, AIDs and so on (Davis 08).

For a final consideration, let us remember that the term person with disabilities is not static. It is a fluctuating phenomenon. The two-way-road nature of Disability is easily forgotten. Anyone can become disabled, as following Disability activists' nomenclature for the "abled" reminds us: "temporarily abled" or "currently abled"⁴⁵.

3.1.2 Disability Studies

This thesis follows Sharon L. Snyder's definition of Disability Studies:

(It) functions as the theoretical arm of disability rights movements. As an interdisciplinary field of study and scholarship, disability studies analyzes the meanings attributed to human corporeal, sensory, and cognitive differences. Participants examine the role that disability serves in expressive traditions, scientific research, and social science applications. They study the status of disabled persons, often by attending to exclusionary scholarly models and professional structures. (478, 479)

The history of Disability Studies brings to mind the *Chaos Theory* and its concept of the *Butterfly Effect*, "Does the Flap of a Butterfly's Wings in Brazil set off a Tornado in Texas?"⁴⁶ As Debora Diniz explains, Paul Hunt had no idea which phenomena he was putting in motion when he wrote a letter to *The Guardian* in 1971, inviting disabled people to form a group aimed at bringing their forgotten reality up to the Parliament (14). The formation of this group, named UPIAS (The Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation) (14) took four years, due to difficulties in communication as the Disabled at the time lived in institutions which controlled their lives (16). Presumably, the process would have taken a few weeks or months to non-disabled (16). Nowadays Disability Studies literature can be found on periodic

⁴⁵ <http://disabledfeminists.com/2010/02/03/guest-post-temporarily-able-bodied-useful-but-not-always-true/> --- by Laurie Toby Edison and Debbie Notkin 3 February, 2010

⁴⁶ Philip Merilees concocted *Does the flap of a butterfly's wings in Brazil set off a tornado in Texas?* As the title of a talk he was to present at the 139th meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in 1972.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chaos_theory.

publications, specialized magazines, books, undergraduate and graduate courses just to name a few. The literature on Disability Studies is just part of the tornado Paul Hunt put in motion with a simple letter he wrote – just a butterfly flapping his wings and proving that the Chaos Theory is possible.

The greatest achievement of UPIAS was the redefinition of disability. Previous to that, the term *disability* as well as the lives of people with disabilities had been defined and guided by the medical perspective of it. As well intentioned as doctors had been their view was of the outsider; in other words, not all the needs of people with disabilities were being expressed, nor heard, nor attended to. People with disabilities needed an insider perspective on disability, an insider definition of disability, one which would give voice to their needs. The first people with disabilities definition of disability *made* for people with disability was “(d)isability is the disadvantage or restriction caused by a contemporary social organization which takes no or little account of people who have [physical] impairments and thus excludes them from the mainstream of social activities” (UPIAS 1976). Disability Studies, therefore, opposes society’s perspective of disability as a personal tragedy, and declares, instead, that disability is a social construct. The problem, therefore, is not the disability itself, but society’s prejudiced perspective on disability.

3.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.2.1 The Social Model and the Medical Model of Disability

This definition of disability was the beginning of a revolution as well as the propeller of or cornerstone for the concepts of Disability Studies. The UPIAS, besides being “the first political organization about disability formed and managed by the disabled”, also consisted in a “political and intellectual resistance to the (...) medical model of disability⁴⁷” (Debora Diniz 15). The Medical Model’s “thinking is enshrined in the liberal term ‘people with disabilities’ and in approaches that seek to count the number of people with impairment or to reduce the complex problems of disabled people to issues of medical

⁴⁷ “a primeira organização política sobre deficiência a ser formada e gerenciada por deficientes”; “uma resistência política e intelectual ao modelo médico (...) de deficiência”.

prevention, cure or rehabilitation” (Shakespeare 199). Diniz argues that this kind of thinking still predominates in Brazil,

mainly because disability is still considered a personal tragedy, not a matter of social justice. The challenge is to claim disability as a style of life, and also recognize the legitimacy of distributive actions and reparation of inequality as well the necessity of biomedical care⁴⁸ (11).

Most importantly when UPIAS established its definition of disability (See 3.1.2) it also proposed a new approach to the medical model. Consequently, the responsibility for the oppression was taken away from the person with disability and transferred to the “society’s incapacity in anticipating and incorporating the diversity⁴⁹” (Diniz 15-16). This redefinition of disability became the precursor of the social model of disability, which “mandates barrier removal, anti-discrimination legislation, independent living and other responses to social oppression” (Shakespeare 199). “For the Social Model of disability the causes of segregation and oppression” are not in the disability, but “in the social barriers⁵⁰” imposed by society (Diniz 19).

3.2.2 The distinction between Disability and disease

The main problem with society considering disability as a disease is that, Lennard Davis argues, this kind of thinking generates the assumption that the disabled can only live a fulfilling life if “cure(d)”; and that every disabled wishes “to be cured” (*Crips Strike Back* 503). Davis explains to us that “(t)he medical model treats disability as a disease in need of a cure while the rehabilitation model sees disability as in need of repair, concealment, remediation, and supervision” (506). Davis makes use of *Madame Bovary* by Flaubert to illustrate the imperative of the Medical/ Rehabilitation Model to cure/fix the disabled as if disability were a disease. In this book the doctor Charles decides on fixing the disabled Hippolyte even when the young

⁴⁸ “principalmente porque a deficiência ainda é considerada uma tragédia pessoal e não uma questão de justiça social. O desafio está em afirmar a deficiência como um estilo de vida, e também em reconhecer a legitimidade de ações distributivas e de reparação da desigualdade, bem como a necessidade de cuidados biomédicos”.

⁴⁹ “incapacidade social em prever e incorporar a diversidade”.

⁵⁰ “Para o modelo social de deficiência, as causas da segregação e da opressão”; “nas barreiras sociais”.

man does not neither wish it nor need it as "... his disability has not interfered with his performance in the community under traditional standards his disability is seen as a disease which needs to be cured or "repaired"" (*Constructing Normalcy* 20). Furthermore, Davis observes that "Hippolyte seems to use his club foot to his advantage" and also that, as the stableboy's disabled foot seems stronger than the non-disabled one, "Hippolyte's disability is in fact ability, one which he relies on, and from which he gets extra horsepower, as it were". When approached for the surgery the stable boy is strongly against it. After a lot of talk he is convinced that his "problem" interferes with his work and undergoes surgery. The procedure firstly seems to be effective but ends up with the amputation of the leg (20). Davis cites the village's old doctor reproachful words to the young doctor Charles "(w)e are practitioners; we wouldn't dream of operating on someone who is in *perfect health*" (my emphasis Flaubert 131); the old doctor, therefore, does not see a disability as a disease (*Constructing Normalcy*, 21). The consideration of disability as a disease, generates the assumption that every disabled wishes "to be cured". It may be presumed that the Disabled sees their condition as a burden, from which they would be happy to be relieved from. The Deaf community, for example, is proud of their language and culture, and often, do not consider there is anything "wrong" with them; as exemplifies a research conducted by the *Deaf Life* magazine, "8 out of 10 deaf people said they did not want cochlear implants to help them hear" (*Crips Strike Back* 503).

The constructionist model, differently from the medical model, Davis explains, "sees disability as a social process in which no inherent meanings attach to physical difference other than ones assigned by a community" (*Crips Strike Back* 506). In this model the distinction between impairment and disability is stated: "(a)n impairment involves a loss or diminution of sight, hearing, mobility, mental ability and so on. But an impairment only becomes a disability when the ambient society creates environments with barriers – affective, sensory, cognitive, or architectural" (506-507). Thus, while the rehabilitation model focuses on the repairing of disability in order to solve "the problem", the constructivist model argues that, for example, "...a Deaf scholar is only disabled if there is no interpreter provided at a conference; a blind scholar is disabled in the absence of large-type or Braille texts, or a computer and scanner" (507).

3.2.3 Concept of Normalcy

The concept of Normalcy is a key concept for Disability Studies. I have chosen the definition from Rosemarie G. Thomson, “(...) the concept of a normative, ‘generic type’ against which all corporeal variation is measured and found to be different, derivative, inferior, and insufficient” (281). One who reads *Enforcing Normalcy* by Lennard Davis will get to know that on the contrary of the collective unconscious assumption, the word *normal*, as well as the imperative to comply with its standards, has not always existed⁵¹. The term *normal* as we know it nowadays is a product of the industrialization era, of the science known as statistics. Due to needs of the industries at the beginning of the industrialization era Statistics created the bell curve: a bell-shaped-graphic which shows the characteristics shared by most of population. It was and still is a highly necessary resource to know the height, weight, size of feet and hands, etc, of workers and costumers in order to precise the size of new machinery and merchandize. In short, the idea of average man, the standard and especially of the *norm* was created, to which any deviance or extreme is an error (10-20).

THE BELL CURVE

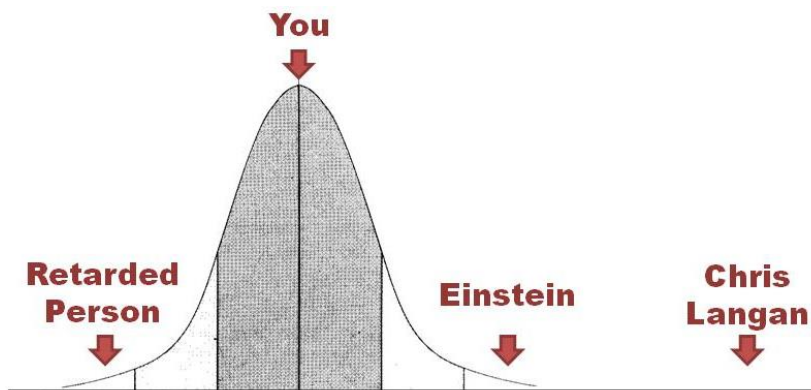


Illustration 3.1 – Bell Curve – in spite of being a joke this image well illustrates how statistics created the term *normal* as we know it nowadays. The grey area refers to the *normal* portion of the population.⁵²

⁵¹ The word *normal* entered the English language in 1840 (Davis, *Constructing Normalcy* 10).

⁵² Found at <http://geniusmen.blogspot.com.br/>.

According to Davis (*The Rise of Disability Studies* 504), the “obsession with being normal has a history...”, or else, not always in human history people struggled to achieve society’s ideal of being normal. In fact, “the use of the word normal in reference to physical bodies appears in English merely 150 years ago”, before then “in Western culture the concept of the ‘ideal’ in relation to bodies was the regnant paradigm, and so all bodies were less than ideal” (504). Nowadays such understanding of ideal has become ironically inverse as Garland Thomson explains:

...the iconography and language of contemporary cosmetic surgery presented in women’s magazines persistently casts the unreconstructed female body as having ‘abnormalities’ that can be ‘corrected’ by surgical procedure which ‘improve’ one’s appearance by producing ‘natural looking’ noses, thighs, breasts, chins, and so on. This discourse casts women’s unmodified bodies as unnatural and abnormal while the surgically altered bodies become normal and natural” (.....) “these changes are imagined to be choices that will sculpt the female body so it conforms to a feminine ideal . (287)

The article was written in 1997, since then the idealization of the normal body as surgically mutilated body has stretched to the male universe as well. If the natural unmodified body is far from the ideal *normal* body, where does the disabled body stand? How does society conceive of a missing limb, motionless legs, or sightless eyes? With “Repulsion”, according to Davis for it “is after all the personal, internalized version of the desire to repel, repress, extroject, annihilate the object (.) Repulsion is the learned response on an individual level that is carried out on a societal level in actions such as incarceration, institutionalization, segregation, discrimination, marginalization, and so on” (*Introduction*, 13).

3.2.4 Eugenics

As stated above, Lennard Davis links the birth of the word *normal* and the concept of *normalcy* to the needs of the industrialization era, to the birth of statistics and eugenics. (*Enforcing Normalcy* 10-20). Sadly, though “(in) a society where the concept of the norm is operative, then people with disabilities will be thought of as deviants (13); and what if this society decides to get rid of its errors? In this case, society created eugenics, whose aim was “to attempt to norm the nonstandard”

(14); “the elimination of ‘defectives’ a category which included the ‘feebleminded’, the deaf, the physically defective, and so on” (*Enforcing Normalcy* 15).

The controversial subject known as *Eugenics* has left hard-to-look-at scars in the History of humankind, as well as given science-fiction writers a lot of material to dig plots from like the movie *Gattaca*; the series *V*, *Visitors* and *X-Men* comics storylines. Basing his rationale on the theory of evolution of his cousin Charles Darwin, Sir Francis Galton created a science aimed at improving the human genome. The science he named as Eugenics Andrew Burnett defines as Galton’s “project of taking control of human evolution” (59). Galton argued that humanity would benefit from procedures aimed at improving *Homo sapiens* genetic pool by trying to increase *superior* traits and eliminate *inferior* ones; even if “(t)here exists a sentiment, for the most part quite unreasonable, against the gradual extinction of an inferior race ...” (Galton 198). Coincidentally enough, Galton’s “identification of superior and inferior races (...) just happened to coincide with the prejudices of his audience” (Burnett 61). In spite of Galton’s intentions of “eugenics to proceed gradually and as humanely as possible” (61), not all of those who inherited his ambitions proved to be so kind-hearted. Therefore, “(e)ventually, the track record of eugenics carried by fascist regimes discredited the cause completely”(60).

Wie stehen nicht allein



Illustration 3.2 "We do not stand alone": Nazi propaganda poster supporting their Law for the Prevention of Hereditarily Diseased Offspring (compulsory sterilization law)⁵³.

The public in general acknowledges that groups like Jews and Negroes were targeted by the regimes cited above in their ideals of racial hygiene. What escapes the popular empirical understanding of Galton's science, however, resides in the fact that among the *specimens* used by those governments for eugenics experiments are the members of another minority group: the disabled. Nazi Germany is the most famous advocate of eugenics. However, the Germans were not the first ones to adopt Eugenicist measures. They followed "the theories of British and American eugenicists" (19); and the USA "forcibly sterilized (...) twenty thousand people" in the 1930's on the claim that they were "feble-minded" (Ramona Ilea 181).

⁵³ Found at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eugenics_in_the_United_States.

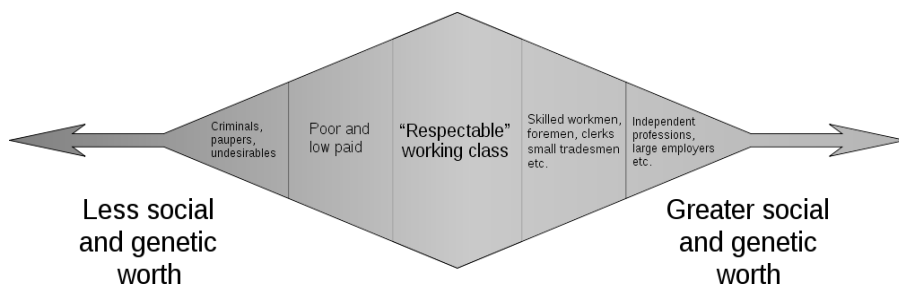


Illustration 3. 3 Galton's eugenicist chart. Those to the left of "respectable working class" belonged to the category of undesirables.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Found at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Galton_class_eugenics.jpg.

CHAPTER IV – ANALYTICAL CHAPTER

4.1 A DISABILITY STUDIES PERSPECTIVE ON X-MEN COMICS

The purpose of this chapter is, first, to identify *X-Men* filmic sequences⁵⁵ which have been analyzed from a Disability Studies perspective (Michael M. Chemers 2004, Ramona Ilea 2009, Martin Mantle 2007, Jennifer Rinaldi 2008, and Kara Sheridan Ayers⁵⁶ 2006). Second, to verify if these sequences can be found in the comics from which the *X-Men* films were adapted. As most of the literature found is guided by *X2: X-Men United* (Bryan Singer 2003) and *X-Men: The Last Stand* (Brett Ratner), the storylines from which they were respectively adapted, *God Loves, Man Kills* (Marvel Graphic Novel # 5), and *Gifted* (Astonishing X-Men # 1-6), were chosen for this analysis. Third, to analyze these comics sequences from a Disability Studies perspective in order to verify if the conclusions reached by Chemers, Ilea, Mantle, Rinaldi and Ayres hold true for films and comics. I will begin with *X2: X-Men United*, then proceed to *X-Men: The Last Stand*, wherein I have identified three sequences which have been read from a Disability Studies perspective for each film⁵⁷. In this chapter, for clarity purposes, I will refer to the *X-Men* by their superhero codenames.

⁵⁵ Sequence for this thesis refers to one or more scenes (film) or pages (comics) which condensates a complete event or occurrence. For instance, I call *The Announcement of the Cure Sequence* the speech of Worthington in *X-Men: The Last Stand* cited by Ramona Ilea. In comics the same sequence takes six pages and is three-plotted, that is, there are three different sets of actions happening at the same time.

⁵⁶ Kara Sheridan Ayers' enthusiastic article on *X-Men* from a Disability Perspective, published at *Audacity Magazine: The Disabled Magazine for the Abled Mind*, had a profound impact on the elaboration of this thesis. Seeing a person so passionate about the connections between disability and the *X-Men* universe I could not help but to feel passionate as well. In other words, her enthusiasm infected me. That's why, in spite of her article not being officially academic (published in a recognized academic source) it could not go without being used to enlighten the analysis of at least one sequence (See 4.3.3; Beast's reaction to the cure).

⁵⁷ The referred literature presented various sequences to be chosen from. I wished for a selecting tool which would, at the same time, narrow down and not let any personal preference interfere on the search for significant moments. Therefore, this selecting tool consists on finding sequences cited for at least two writers.

4.2 X2: X-MEN UNITED

The purpose of this section is to analyze whether the comics storyline *God Loves Man Kills* (*Marvel Graphic Novel # 05*) can be read from a Disability Studies perspective at sequences which correspond to those previously analyzed by Chemers et al. regarding the film *X2: X-Men United* (Bryan Singer 2003). This procedure follows three steps.

Step 1: Selection of three sequences from the film *X2: X-Men United* (Sequences selected: 1) Stryker's reasoning behind the persecution of mutants; 2) Have you tried not being a mutant?; and 3) Because we shouldn't have to) (See Chart below).

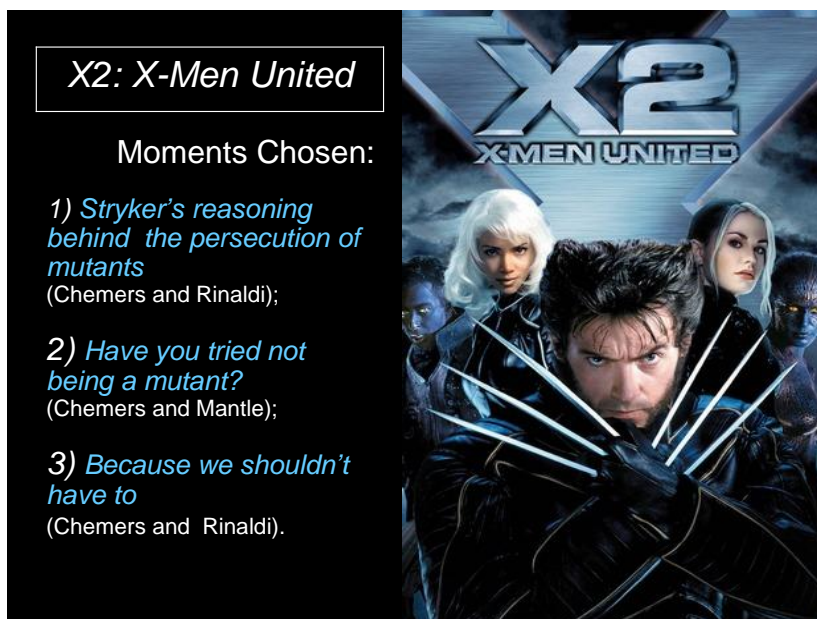


Illustration 4. 1 Sequences chosen for the movie *X2: X-Men United*.

Step 2: Searching for correspond sequences in the comics storyline *God Loves, Man Kills*, on which *X-2: X-Men United* was based (See Chart on the next page).

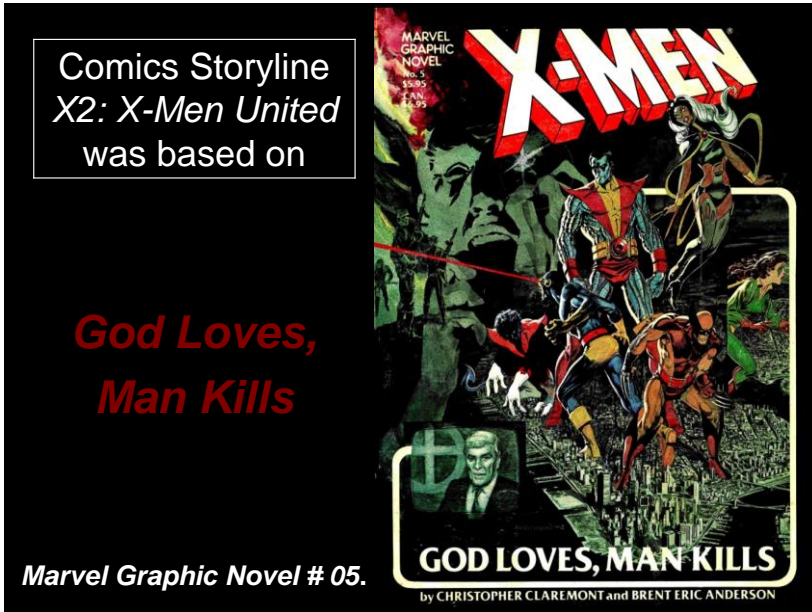


Illustration 4.2 *God Loves, Man Kills*. Comics storyline on which *X2: X-Men United* was based.

Step 3: Verifying if the conclusions reached by Chemers, Mantle and Rinaldi concerning the filmic sequences chosen at Step 1 are also valid for the comics sequences found at Step 2.

As the storyline *God Loves Man Kills* runs in one comic book issue (*Marvel Graphic Novel # 5*), it may sound to the general public that it is a pretty short narrative. At least, that is the opinion of Antônio Luís Cagnin, who affirms that “in those cases (comic books) the extension of the narrative is limited, and even the longer ones do not go beyond the simple structure of a short story⁵⁸” (207). However, much has changed in the world of comics since then. *The Dark Phoenix Saga* storyline, for example, runs from *The Uncanny X-Men # 129* to *The Uncanny X-Men # 137*, in a total of eight issues. Likewise, graphic novels originally written to act as independent novels like *Maus* and

⁵⁸ “nesses casos a extensão da narrativa é limitada, e mesmo as mais longas não ultrapassam a simplicidade estrutural de um conto”.

Persepolis, have room for non-limited⁵⁹ narrative. Furthermore, as Charles Hatfield points out,

(...), Art Spiegelman's two volume family memoir *Maus*⁶⁰, recipient of a special Pulitzer in 1992, constituted a signal moment in the emergence of book-length comics from obscurity – a major intervention in the history of the form and its attendant criticism. Spiegelman's achievement, unprecedented in English-language comics, served to ratify comic art as a literary form; the reception of *Maus* suddenly made serious comics culturally *legible*, recognizable, in a way they had not been before. (Introduction xi)

Thus, while in 1975 the plots of comics had to comprise the limited numbers of pages of a standard comic book issue (Cagnin 207), nowadays comics artists do have the possibility to expand plots as they wish thanks to the advent of graphic novels⁶¹ and several-issues-long storylines. That is the case of the storyline *God Loves Man Kills*, which is narrated in the *Marvel Graphic Novel # 5*. While the standard Marvel comic book has around 22 pages, this graphic novel has 65 pages.

Before beginning the analysis, let us explore briefly the film and comics plot. Both plots are clearly eugenicist. Both filmic and comics Strykers are fathers of a mutant son and are not able to cope with this fact. Both Strykers decide to exterminate all mutants on the face of the Earth. Both Strykers brainwash Professor X in order to deceive him into using his mental powers and Cerebro, a super computer built to locate mutants all over the globe, to achieve their goals. However the reasons they give to support their acts differ. Filmic Stryker (whom will be referred as Colonel Stryker from now on), who has a high position in USA Army and government, argues that his son and therefore all mutants are a disease. Comics Stryker (whom will be referred as Reverend Stryker from now on), who is a former USA Army sergeant and turns to religion after being discharged, argues that his son and therefore all mutants are monsters as well as abomination. Both in film and comics storyline two strongly opposed mutant sides come together

⁵⁹ When I say non-limited I mean that the comics writer is not bound to a number-of-pages restriction like the writer of a standard periodic comic book issue.

⁶⁰ The first comics ever to receive this prize.

⁶¹ Although the issue of whom has originally conceived the term Graphic Novel is discussible, it is certain that Will Eisner is the one who popularized it. He used it for the first when he needed a better description for his work *A Contract with God* than comic book. Graphic Novel meant at the time a long-format comic book; nowadays it also refers to a set of periodic standard comic books containing the complete plot of a storyline reprinted as a single issue.

due to the serious threat to mutantkind; that is, Professor X and his archenemy Magneto join forces. Both in film and comics storyline the opposed sides in the war in which the future of a whole race (Homo superior or mutants) is at stake are clearly established: at one side there are the *X-Men*, Professor X and Magneto; at the other side there are Stryker (Colonel or Reverend) and his followers.

4.2.1 The motivation behind Stryker's persecution of mutants

Stryker's persecution of mutants is mentioned by Chemers and Rinaldi. In the filmic version Colonel Stryker sends his mutant son, who has the mental power to control people, to Professor Xavier's School for the Gifted. He becomes highly frustrated and disappointed for he expected his son to be *cured*. Charles Xavier, though, helps his students to accept and develop their unique gifts. Unable to change his son, Stryker decides to kill not only his son, but all mutants. He keeps his son drugged to be able to use the young man's gift to control other people in order to accomplish his objectives. As a result Professor X, in spite of being the most powerful telepath in the world, is unable to resist Stryker's son mind control and is about to locating and exterminating all mutantkind when the *X-Men* come to the rescue. Now, I will access Chemers and Rinaldi arguments on the motivation behind Stryker's decision to destroy all mutants. Next, I will analyze the correspondent moment found in the comics' storyline *God Loves, Man Kills* (*Marvel Graphic Novel # 5*) from a Disability Studies perspective. Finally I will compare Chemers' and Rinaldi's conclusions to my findings.

Chemers and Rinaldi perceive disability-related issues in *X-2: X-Men United*. Chemers affirms that "(t)he film (...) present(s) (a) disability-related discourse" and that "(t)he horrors of eugenics, genocide, and 'normal' society's fear of the 'abnormal' provide major themes for (it)" (02). Rinaldi affirms that "the mutations" presented in *X-Men* movies "can be fairly assessed as disabilities, for they are genetic differences which the social context fails to accommodate and instead treats as deviance from what is normal" (02). Furthermore, she also perceives a eugenics approach in the film which can be related to disability:

Magneto, a main character in the X-Men films, compares the Mutant Registration Act frequently to initial practices carried out in Nazi Germany, when undesirables⁶² were forced to

⁶² Among the undesirables are the disabled.

register with the government and this system of identification was eventually employed for the purpose of genocide. His fears are realized in the second film, when Colonel William Stryker develops a surveillance system that he intends to use to destroy all mutants in the world. He regards human variation as dangerous and believes that the only way to deal with this danger is to identify the threat and to annihilate it. (05)

Summing up, both authors agree 1) that the concept of Normalcy is central to the characterization of mutancy as disability in *X-2: X-Men United*; 2) the theme of the plot is predominantly eugenicist.

Chemers and Rinaldi also speculate on the motivation behind Colonel Stryker's decision to annihilate mutants. They build their argumentation, though, on Colonel Stryker's treatment of different characters; Chemers builds his on Jason, Stryker's son; and Rinaldi on Wolverine⁶³. In spite of the mentioned authors basing their analysis on different characters and scenes I consider nevertheless them as one sequence or complete rationale, that is, the treatment of these two characters conjoined express *Stryker's reasoning for his persecution of mutants*.

Chemers considers Colonel Stryker's frustration at his son's condition being irreversible as point of departure to discuss the Colonel's rationale behind his persecution of mutants:

Stryker sent his extremely disabled mutant son, Jason, to Xavier years previously, but was unhappy with the result: "You wanted me to cure your son," says Xavier, "but mutation is not a disease." "You're lying!" screams the scientist. This discourse evokes one of the most provocative debates in disability studies: the effects of socialization on the defining line between "disease" and "difference." Stryker has dehumanized his disabled son, who is now voiceless and identified by number like the inmates of Nazi death camps. (02)

Chemers distinguishes the line between disease and difference as well as the dehumanization of mutants (and consequently of people with

⁶³ Logan possesses similar characteristics to the Canadian wolverine he adopted his codename from. Both are short-tempered, tenacious and never give up. His superpowers are wolf like senses, the capacity to heal almost instantly from injuries, and razor-like-claws which sprung from his knuckles.

disabilities) in Stryker's discourse. Rinaldi considers Colonel Stryker's unjust treatment of Wolverine as basis for her analysis: "...Colonel Stryker justifies the human experimentation that took place by claiming that Logan was always an animal, that is, inferior to human beings and therefore deserving the kind of treatment he endured" (07). Rinaldi distinguishes, thus, dehumanization as Stryker's rationale for persecution of mutants. The concept of Normalcy is fundamental in their argument, for both Jason and Wolverine are ill-treated because they do not conform to Colonel Stryker's ideal of normalcy. Whereas only Chemers discerns the distinction between disability and disease, both he and Rinaldi discern dehumanization of mutants as Stryker's rationale. This last result comes as a surprise for me, as the mentioned authors based their analysis on different characters.

I will analyze now the corresponding sequence in the comics storyline *God Loves, Man Kills*. Reverend Stryker's rationale for the persecution of mutants is solely based on his mutant son whom in the comics remains nameless as he is killed by his own father at birth. The sequence occurs in the time/space of pages 34 and 35 of *Marvel Graphic Novel # 5*. These two pages will be referred from now on as Illustration 4.3 and 4.4 This sequence is a flashback, which begins with Reverend Stryker answering Cyclops⁶⁴ inquiry of why he persecutes mutants with the sentence "Because you exist". He was a proud military man, who unable to deal with his son being born what he considered a *monster*, turns to drinking and fighting to give escape to his frustration. Because of this erratic behavior he ends up discharged from the army. His finally finding out that his son was in fact a mutant does not present any improvement to his state of mind. He still can not cope with fathering what he calls an *abomination*. He ends up not only blaming his wife for it but also concludes he was the chosen one to lead a campaign against mutants, which he calls The Stryker Crusade.

⁶⁴ Scott Summers, codename Cyclops, is a founding member of the *X-Men*. On the contrary of the films, in which he is a weak member, in comics he is known by his leadership skills and strong personality. His codename is due to the ruby-quartz visor he has to wear at all times because of his somehow disabling power: his eyes fire energy blasts capable of exploding walls or anything at their path instantly.



Illustration 4. 3 - Stryker's Reasons for the Persecution of Mutants. Part 1

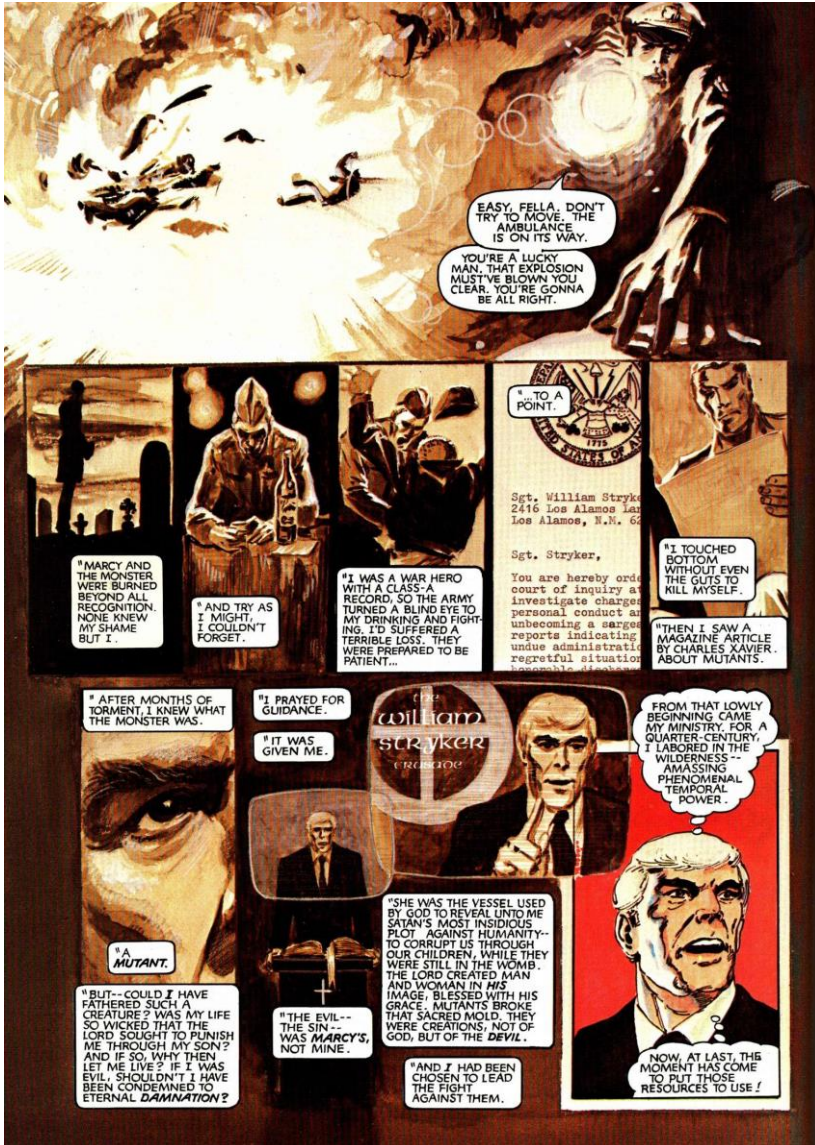


Illustration 4. 4 - Stryker's Reasons for the Persecution of Mutants. Part 2

Illustration 4.3 is a “full page frame” (Eisner 63) or a “superpanel”⁶⁵ (70). In the first panel of Illustration 4.3 Stryker explains to Cyclops why he persecutes mutants. Panel 1 is a color close-up of Stryker’s fierce face right after ordering a 14-year-old mutant girl to be killed.



Illustration 4.5 – Panel 1

The other panels on the page, in monochromatic shades of brown, portray Stryker’s recollections. Panel 2 will be analyzed later. The standard flow in comics is from left to right. Panels 3-5, however, are ordered in the inverse direction, from right to left. Panel 3 shows a long-distance perspective. It has the format of a very long and low rectangle. It shows a car far away in the desert landscape whose driver, the two following panels will make clear, is beginning to lose control of his vehicle. As the rolling car approaches, Panels 4 and 5 become higher and shorter, focusing on the car which ends up stopping upside-down. Panel 5 is at the same time the last in the sequence 3-5 and the first one in the sequence 5-7, when the flow returns to the standard direction. The inversion of the flow and the gradual close-up of car give the visual impression that the car is indeed getting closer and closer of the reader. Also, this inversion of pre-determined standard guidelines reflects on the approaching dislocation of the course of Stryker’s life. His expectations of having a standard and *normal* family, of being a

⁶⁵ A superpanel, as defined by Eisner, refers to the using of a whole page as a frame.

successful and proud sergeant in ascension are about to change into a disaster way worse than the wrecked car in Panel 5.



Illustration 4.6 - Panels 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7.

Panel 6 shows Stryker assisting his wife's labor. In Panel 7, distance as well as panel size and format are used to maximize the terrified look on Stryker's face when he sees his newborn son. The distance in Panel 7 is an extreme close up. The panel is a small rectangle, which has the standard height, but half the width of most panels used in this sequence. In Panel 8, similar tools are used to emphasize the dramatic decision of Stryker to kill his son. Also an extreme close-up, Panel 8 is a small square showing Stryker's hand holding a dripping-blood knife. Somewhere between Panel 7 and 8, hidden from the reader, Stryker takes and carries a shocking decision: to kill his newborn son. This is an example of closure. The reader is the one who decides how hard and how many times the father stabs his baby son. Closure for a media like movies is an *especial* occasion technique. For comics, it is their essence, their cornerstone. As Scott McCloud explains

(i)f *visual iconography* is the *vocabulary* of comics, *closure* is its *grammar*. And since our *definition* of comics (see 2.2.1) hinges on the arrangement of elements – then is a very real sense *comics is closure!* (...) Every act committed to paper by the comics artist is *aided* and abetted by a *silent accomplice*. An *equal partner in crime* is the *reader*. I may have drawn an axe being raised (See Illustration 4.8) (...), but I'm not the one

who left it drop or decided how hard the blow or *who* screamed or *why*. (*Understanding Comics* 67-68)



Illustration 4.7- Panel 7 and Panel 8 (Example of Closure)



Illustration 4.8 – Closure: The Hidden Contract in the Gutter

Reverend Stryker's deciding and killing his son somewhere between panels is, therefore, "closure", the unwritten contract between author(s) and reader (68). In the gutter, the blank "space *between* the panels" (...) "*human imagination* takes two separate images and *transforms* them into a single idea" (66). The closure between Panels 7 and 8 adds speculation to the moment for the baby is never shown. How *abnormal* is, in fact, the baby? Reverend Stryker is far from a sensible or reasonable man. He orders his followers to murder children; brainwashes Professor Xavier into killing his best friends firstly and then all mutantkind. Close to the end of the storyline he reveals his intentions to destroy all mutants and kills his most dedicated assassin and follower when he finds out she is, in spite of looking normal, a mutant, all of this and in front of a large crowd and live on TV. The baby may have had a major visible mutancy. But he also may have had a minor one. He may have had a non-usual skin color, wings instead of arms, eyes bigger than the average, in other words, nothing as serious or as *monstrous* as Stryker has considered. The absence of the baby's image gives the reader the possibility to wonder on the role that *prejudice* and *pride* played on Stryker's decision⁶⁶. Likewise, prejudice and pride have interfered in the decision over life and death of disabled children in real life (this issue will be addressed again with examples). Furthermore, Panel 7 and 8 are the climax of the "inversion" or "dislocation" announced at Panels 3-5. The shocked face of Stryker (Panel 7) evidences that life is not going to be as he had planned – and his drastic decision (Panel 8) shows he is unable to cope with the change of direction his, up to then, predictable life would be taking. Likewise fathers of children with disabilities not rarely abandon their families when their children do not conform to their pre-conceived notion of what a *normal* baby should be⁶⁷.

Panels 9 and 10 break the color patten as they present lighter shades; the technique highlighting this moment on the page. Panel 9 shows concerned Stryker holding his wife with care, the caption reads "... (I) took her in my arms, held her close...". This panel has the effect

⁶⁶ Obviously, the issue of how abnormal the baby being does not justifies his death. This moment though gives the opportunity to wonder on society's prejudice on the disabled and its justification for mistreating or killing them.

⁶⁷ This topic was addressed by the speaker and participants of a lecture on disability (*Inclusão Social de Pessoas com e sem Deficiência*) held by UFSC in 2011. To my surprise, while one of the participants said she had been left by her husband; other said she was lucky it did not happen to her as if it were a normal procedure. The speaker not only said it often happens, but also showed a documentary on a famous case in which the father left wife and triplets because the girls were born disabled.

of characterizing one of tenderness. This is the artists' intention; image and captions working together to evoke from the viewer's subconscious a caring moment of a loving husband tending for his wife.



Illustration 4.9 – Panel 9: A Tender Moment

The mood is prepared for Panel 10, where an unexpected and distressing event takes place. The image shows a distressed Stryker, his wife's lifeless body on his knees, the caption reads: "...and broke her neck". Here, intensity and surprise add variety to the storyline. This effect maximizes the characterization of Stryker's cruelty as the expectation was created for what seemed to be a caring moment of a loving husband caring for his wife. In Panel 11 the figure of a kneeling Stryker is framed by the window of the wrecked, upside-down car. The car symbolically represents the quick succession of events in Stryker's life. The inversion of the car's trajectory is also the inversion in Stryker's life trajectory. The accident reflects the unexpected event which ended up both the car's and Stryker's route. Neither will arrive at their planned finish line. Both Stryker's life and the car are upside-down, both are wrecked beyond repair - at least in Stryker's opinion.



Illustration 4.10 – Panel 10: Unexpected Turn of Events

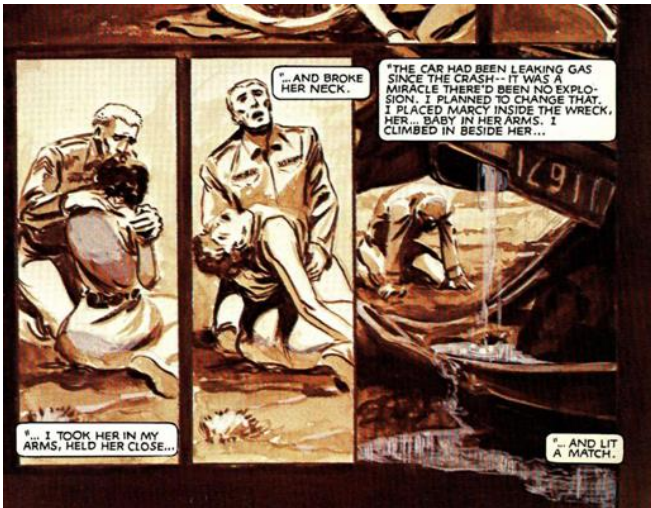


Illustration 4.11 – Panels 9, 10 and 11

Illustration 4.3 (the first page of the sequence named *Stryker's reasoning behind his persecution of mutants*) presents balloons, and captions. Balloons appear only on Panel 1. This panel is a close-up of the fierce and emotionless face of Stryker, in which he, through two speech balloons, explains to Cyclops why he persecutes mutants⁶⁸. There are two types of captions in Illustration 4.3: one kind represents the narrator voice, the other Stryker's inner thoughts. Different attributes were used to differentiate these two types. The narrator's voice is represented by words in italics and without inverted commas. Stryker's inner thoughts are represented by regular words between inverted commas.

Besides italics, another narrative device is text in bold. The only moments when bold letters are used in Illustration 3.1. are when Stryker mentions the members of his family. While Stryker thinks of himself as "Master-Sergeant William Stryker, US Army Rangers". His wife is just "Marcy" and finally he defines his son as "monster". The effect of this choice of bolding is significant. Stryker's emphasis on his position betrays the high consideration he has for his rank, while the emphasis on his wife's name suggests that it was all she was for him, just "Marcy", nothing more important than that. These two pieces of information help to explain why he thought of and emphasized that his son was a "monster" while recollecting his decision to kill his family and himself: pride played a significant role in that decision. Further on I will discuss how Stryker builds up a twisted logic in order to regain this lost pride; and also that this kind of logic has been applied to people with disabilities.

Furthermore, Stryker's awareness of his offspring (See Illustration 4.7, Panel 7) presents three levels. His precise words are "He...it...was a **monster!**" (the bold was maintained to highlight the analysis). On the first level, Stryker's gives his son the designation of *he*, in other words, he considers the baby, even if only for some seconds, a human being. On the second level, he reduces the designation to an *it*, or else, he reduces the baby's category from *human* to *animal*. On the third level Stryker finishes his analysis and concludes that the newborn is neither a human being nor an animal, but something much worse, his son was a "**monster!**", his certainty of the correct diagnosis determined by the bold letters and exclamation mark. In the filmic version Stryker "dehumanizes (both) his son" (Chemers 02), and Wolverine; going even as far as referring to the latter mutant as an animal in order to justify his

⁶⁸ He has just ordered young Shadowcat (Kitty Pryde) to be killed.

acts. In the comics' version he firstly dehumanizes his son, from the human reference "he" to an animal reference "it". But then he goes further, he concludes that his son and all mutants likewise are less than animals, they are *monsters*, and therefore, he "did what had to be done". Let us see now how this representation of monstrosity can be understood from a Disability Studies perspective.

Examples of the association of disability to monstrosity can be found in History. *The Encyclopedia of Disability* has a chapter dedicated to this subject entitled *Monsters* (1114-1116), in which Katherine Park clarifies that

For most of Western history, the monster exemplified one extreme form of what is now known as disability, the departure from expected physical type. Monsters included a variety of people and animals with dramatic and obvious congenital anomalies, such as conjoined twins and intersexuals, beings with too many or too few members. (1114)

Concluding, Stryker's son in *X-Men* comics, as seen in the analysis of the *X-Men* storyline *God Loves, Man Kills*, and some disabled children, as exemplified by Park above, have been labeled as monsters because they do not fit the concept of the norm as conceived by society at large.

Moreover, Park adds that in Greece, Rome and medieval Europe "some (disabled children) were even killed at birth out of fear that they might harbor demons" (1114). Spartans also disposed of disabled babies as they would not make worthy warriors⁶⁹. Thus, the storyline of Stryker's baby draws on the historical fact that Stryker's baby in the storyline *God Loves, Man Kills* and some disabled children have prematurely faced death as they have been born different from what the society they were born into considered as *normal*.

Illustration 4.4 (the second page of *Stryker's reasoning behind his persecution of mutants sequence* (See page 50)) like Illustration 4.3 "employs the page as a superpanel" (Weisner 76) where

... the panel is subordinated to the totality of the narrative. The panel, in the conventional configuration, used only sparingly. A synthesis of speed, multi-leveled action, narrative and the dimensions of the stage is attempted. (...)

⁶⁹ If they considered it (the baby) "puny and deformed", the baby was thrown into a chasm. This was, in effect, a primitive form of eugenics (Found at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sparta>)

The problem is to employ the panel so that it will not intrude on the segment of the story encompassed by the page frame. Thus for most of the story, the ‘hard frame’ is not the individual panel but the total page. (63)

Also, the layout of Illustration 4.4 is designed as to contain three units; each one carrying a narrative focus. In fact, “(o)ne important facet of the full-page frame (or superpanel) is that planning the breakdown of the plot and action into page segments becomes the first order of business” (63). The first unit concerns the miraculous survival of Stryker after he set the car in fire; the second unit concerns his downfall, ending when he reads Professor X’s article on mutants; the third unit concerns his crusade against mutants.



**Illustration 4.12 - First Unit of the Superpanel in Illustration 4.4
(Also Panel 12)**

The first unit contains one triple-width panel, divided into two narrative levels. On the second level, at the right side of the panel, from a low-angle perspective there is the point of view of Stryker who blurrily sees a policeman telling him everything is all right. On the first level, there is the big car explosion the future Reverend had initiated in an attempt to kill himself and destroy all evidence of the brief existence of his child. Stryker’s blurriness is entwined with the car explosion in such a way that it is not possible to tell where one ends and the other begins. This blurriness has the purpose to connect the two levels. Also, the blurriness reflects Stryker’s state of mind; which is as shaken up as his nebulous vision. His son being dead is not enough for Reverend Stryker. He can not even accept the baby once existed. Similarly,

society has at times stood shaken when facing difference in the format of babies with disabilities.

The second unit is divided into five equal shaped and sized rectangular panels. Their format, size and sequence are intended at speeding up the action. Panel 13 shows Stryker from a low-angle perspective on his family funeral. Panel 14 presents, from a slight-high angle, Stryker's drinking in a bar. Panel 15 shows him angrily hitting a man who is falling down due to the hard blow he has taken. Panel 16 shows part of the dismissal letter Stryker receives from the USA Army. This letter is an example of word/image integration which adjoins meaning to the storytelling: if removed, significant part of the narrative would be lost; or else, there could not be known why Stryker "touched bottom" (Panel 17). Stryker's reaction to his dismissal can not be seen, giving opportunity for the reader to imagine the former Sergeant's anger and disillusionment. Panel 17 shows Stryker reading, from a low-angle view, an article about mutants. From Panels 13 to 17 Stryker is unable to understand or accept his baby being born in the category of what he defines as *monstrosity*. His whole world is completely shaken up. He is also looking for *any* possible explanation to soothe his sense of inadequacy and hurt pride. In Panel 17 he finds a possible explanation which he distorts. Similarly, society looks every and any possible place for an explanation; too often not to understand what happened, but to find something/someone to blame for; or even a possible excuse to exterminate children with disabilities.

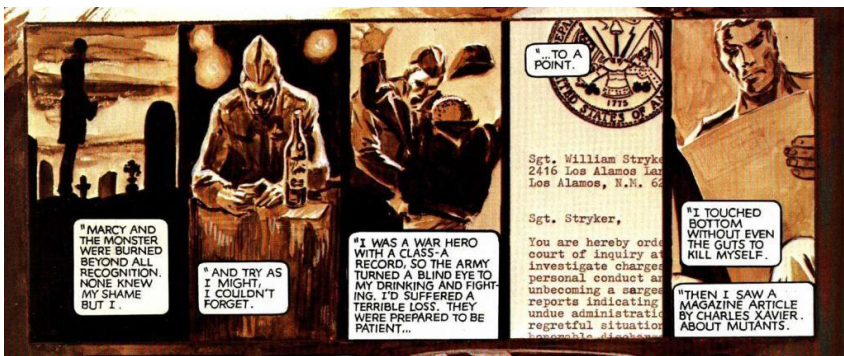


Illustration 4.13 - Second Unit of the Superpanel in Illustration 4.4
(also Panels 13 to 17)

The third unit is divided into four panels. Panel 18 is an extreme close-up of half Stryker's face, the emphasis given to his eye highlights the moment of enlightenment he believes he is having: he had finally understood what "the monster" was (Illustration 4.3. Panel 7). As hinted above, Stryker's search for an explanation was not rooted in his need to understand, but to have something/someone to blame for his baby having been born different; motivation that is reinforced by his continuing addressing his child as "monster". In this unit the reader can accompany the development of the twisted logic of Stryker which backs up his persecution of mutants. Before fully addressing this topic, I will return to Panel 13, Illustration 4.4 (See previous page) to demonstrate that pride acts as a catalyst for Stryker's actions. Likewise, pride and prejudice, I will discuss later on, have served as a catalyst for the persecution of people with disabilities.

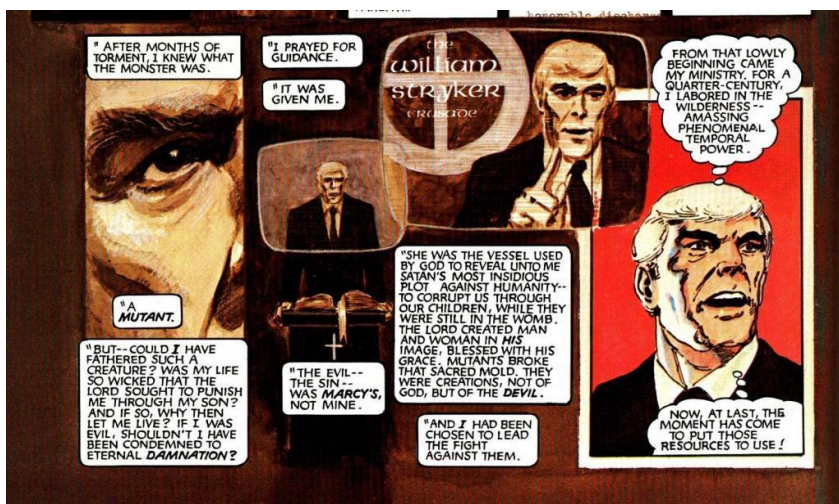


Illustration 4.14 - Third Unit of the Superpanel in Illustration 4.4 (also Panels 18 to 21)

Pride plays a major role on Stryker's decision to eliminate mutants as demonstrated when analyzing Illustration 4.3. The role pride plays is reinforced on Panel 13, Illustration 4.4. This panel shows the dark silhouette of Stryker in a cemetery; hat in hand, head slightly down, on his family burial. If only by the image, it can be inferred that his sorrow comes from the loss of his beloved ones. However, the caption, which depicts Stryker's inner thoughts, elucidates that his

sorrow comes from a very different source: “None knew my *shame* but I” (my emphasis). He does not mention sadness, remorse, or the pain of losing his wife. He only mentions his *shame*. It is not shame for having killed Marcy and his son; that “had to be done” (Panel 8, Illustration 4.3) like a duty call. The reason why nobody “knew (his) shame” is because “Marcy and the monster were burned beyond all recognition” (Panel 13, Illustration 4.14). That is, as the non-normal nature of his baby could not be detected, nobody knew he was the father of, as he insisted in calling his son, a *monster*. Having fathered a son his pride could not cope with was Stryker’ shame. As we will see he will find an escape-goat to throw all his frustration at (mutants which he will consider as undesirables) as well as a tool to wrongly use in the name of his pride. Now, let us bestow a Disability Studies perspective on this issue: Do excuses been made up to masquerade society’s pride, pride which was, in fact, the paramount reason for the persecution, and even death of people with disabilities?



Illustration 4.15 - Panel 13 “None Knew my Shame but I”.

Spartans, for instance, have disposed of babies with disabilities arguing it was necessary measure for the general well-being of the nation; as the disabled were not fit to fight at war society might suffer because of it. In fact, the real reason for the infanticide was Sparta society's ultimate pride of the perfect body. I will focus now on a more updated example: the Nazis⁷⁰ wrongly using science as tool (or excuse)⁷¹ for the euthanasia of the German disabled: human race should be improved and moreover, as people with disability obviously suffered, killing them was a merciful act. One may argue the Nazis had other reasons for doing so. I argue that pride is the main reason, or one of the main reasons for such. It is relevant to remember that the Germans were not the creators of eugenics, or the racial ideal, or the first ones to begin eliminating those considered *undesirables*. The birth of eugenics is due to "the introduction of the concept of normality" which "created an imperative to be normal" (Davis, *Crips Strike Back* 504). "(T)he eugenics movement proved" the concept of normalcy as being paramount "by enshrining the bell curve (also know as the 'normal curve') as the umbrella under whose demanding peak we should all stand" (504). "British and American scientists" developed a "(t)he state-of-the-art eugenics"; whose ideas Hitler just put in practice (504). Furthermore, eugenics "became the common practice of many, if not most, European and American citizens" (Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy* 17). The individuals classified as *undesirables* - or abnormal - were incarcerated into institutions; forcibly sterilized; and even killed – all of that with government and the population in general approving eye. The ones apparently normal but which might carry some considered undesirable trait were also considered *unfit* to bear children (19). Furthermore, America's eugenics frame was the basis for the one used by Nazi Germany:

⁷⁰ At a first glance, it may be considered that Nazi's agenda had no connection with the Disabled. At least, so would believe the population at large. The first focus of the Nazi eugenics agenda, however, were not "the Jews or gypsies", but the "deaf and the disabled people" (Davis, *Crips Strike Back* 505).

⁷¹ The misuse of science to justify racism has a name: scientific racism. "Scientific racism denotes the use of scientific, or ostensibly scientific, findings and methods to support or validate racist attitudes and worldviews. It is based on belief in the existence and significance of racial categories, but extends this into a hierarchy between the races to support political or ideological positions of racial supremacy. (...). Such theories, and associated actions, have been strongly denounced since World War II and the Holocaust, in particular by a 1950 UNESCO statement, signed by an international group of scholars, known as *The Race Question*". Found at: <http://www.websters-online-dictionary.org/definition/Scientific+racism>.

Nazi eugenics quickly outpaced American eugenics in both velocity and ferocity. In the 1930s, Germany assumed the lead in the international movement. Hitler's eugenics was backed by brutal decrees, custom-designed IBM data processing machines, eugenical courts, mass sterilization mills, concentration camps, and virulent biological anti-Semitism—all of which enjoyed the open approval of leading American eugenicists and their institutions. (Edwin Black, Introduction)

Hitler defines as *unfit* to breed offspring those who have or carry the gene of some so considered abnormality by eugenicists, condemnation which is endorsed by the United States, England, and other European countries. Yet another example of the ones who might carry genetic *defectiveness* being considered as unfit to breed is given by Black, “(l)eaders of the ophthalmology profession conducted a long and chilling political campaign to round up and coercively sterilize every relative of every American with a vision problem” (Introduction). In opposition to the treatment received by the two mentioned groups, the third group, the ones classified as *normal* were considered the glorious future of the human race and were even given prizes for their ideal eugenics-like physical constitution⁷². Thus, the first step which culminated into the killing of people with disability in Nazi Germany was the eugenics ideals of British and American scientists. The second step was the introduction of eugenics in the USA in the format, for example, of the forced sterilization of over 60 thousand people⁷³ (See Eugenics, Chapter 3). The final step was the introduction of eugenics in Germany sponsored by the USA.

After two years of exhausting research on documents related to eugenics in the USA Edwin Black wrote *War against the Weak*, “the (...) chronicle documenting how American corporate philanthropies launched a national campaign of ethnic cleansing in the United States, helped found and fund the Nazi eugenics of Hitler and Mengele -- and then created the modern movement of ‘human genetics’”. In consequence, he has, inarguably, an expert perspective on the issue:

⁷² For example, “(i)n Kansas, in the 1920 state fair held a contest for ‘fitter families’ based on their eugenic family histories” (Davis, *Constructing* 19).

⁷³ According to Paul Hunt over 60.000 people were forcibly sterilized in the USA from 1927 to the 1970s due to the famous *The Buck v. Bell* court case. This law, adopted by German Nazi was the basis for over 350,000 forced sterilizations. Found at Eugenic Sterilization Laws, <http://www.eugenicsarchive.org/html/eugenics/essay8text.html>.

Again, I ask how did this happen in a progressive society? After reviewing thousands upon thousands of pages of documentation, and pondering the question day and night for nearly two years, I realize it comes down to just one word. It was more than the self-validation and self-certification of the elite, more than just power and influence joining forces with prejudice. It was the corrupter of us all: it was *arrogance*. (Black, xxv)

Taking into consideration that arrogance can be defined as “overbearing pride” and “excessive pride”⁷⁴; it can be concluded that pride was a catalyst for the persecution and death of both mutants in the storyline *God Loves, Man kills*; and people with disabilities. As seen above, science was misused to support the persecution of those *society* considered undesirables. In short, pride has been a key factor behind the persecution of mutants in the comics storyline *God Loves, Man Kills*; in the killing of Spartan disabled babies; and in the persecution, sterilization of the disabled in the USA; and the persecution, sterilization and killing of the disabled in Nazi German. But, what are the implications of the analysis of this storyline through a Disability Studies perspective bringing out these historical facts? The implications are that those historical facts, which began with a simple and seemingly innocent scientific concept ended up, filled by pride, in persecution, injustice, sterilization, and even assassination. The implications are that these historical facts *must not be forgotten* so that they *will never be repeated*.

I will address now what Stryker uses to support the persecution of those *he* considers undesirables. Lost pride and *shame*, as Panels 14-16 (Illustration 4.4) show, lead Stryker to “touch (...) bottom without the guts to kill (him) self” (Panel 17). He was attempting almost in desperation to find some explanation which could, in his proud view, restore his honor when he comes across Professor Xavier article on mutants (Panel 17). Before further addressing this topic, let us finish analyzing this page’s panels. Panel 19 is the most imaginative of the chosen moment; in which Stryker is presented through two different points of view at the same time. On the first level, there is the point of

⁷⁴ Princeton University defines arrogance as “overbearing pride evidenced by a superior manner toward inferiors” (<http://wordnetweb.princeton.edu/perl/webwn?s=arrogance>); the Dictionary.com as “offensive display of superiority or self-importance; overbearing pride”; <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/arrogance>; and NTC’s American English Learner’s Dictionary as “an offensive air of superiority; excessive pride” (46).

view of the people in the same room as Stryker's, where there can be seen a pulpit and Stryker waist up.



Illustration 4.16 – Panel 19 (two-leveled view of Stryker)

On the second level, there is the point of view of television spectators, represented by a transparent rectangular TV monitor-like rectangle placed over the same image, which shows only the bust of Stryker. Panel 20 is a magnified version of this TV monitor-like box; the bust of Stryker on its right side, the emblem *The William Stryker's Crusade* on

the left. Word/image integration gives this important piece of information to the narration. Stryker not only persecutes mutants openly, but also chooses a strong slogan to head his campaign⁷⁵. Panel 21, a colored one, is a close up of Stryker. All other panels on the page are monochromatic; the colorfulness of Panel 21 therefore indicates that Stryker's flash back is over. From Panel 18 on the construction of Stryker's twisted logic is presented; while in Panel 17 he had "touched bottom" on Panel 20 he has not just fully regained his lost pride but has managed to reach an upmost messianic level of self-importance and arrogance.

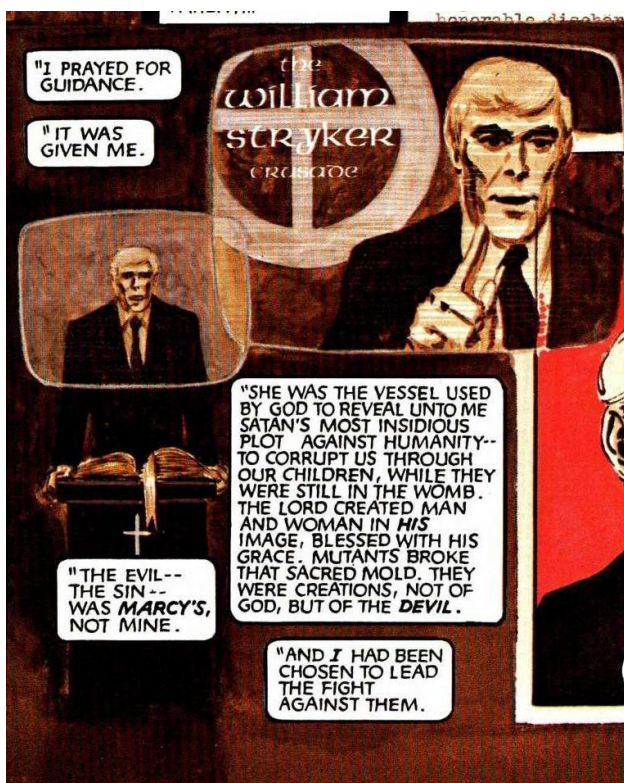


Illustration 4.17 - Panels 19 and 20 (from Complete Shame to Complete Pride)

⁷⁵ Nazi Germany also launched a campaign like that, trying to get public acceptance of the euthanasia of people with disabilities. See Chapter 2, Eugenics.

Choice of Words (See Analytical Tools) helps to build up Stryker's logic. Bold words are used five times in Illustration 4.4, on the words *mutant*; *I*, *damnation* (Panel 7), *Marcy's* (Panel 8), *His*, *devil*, and finally on another *I* (Panel 9). The choice of bolding aimed at highlighting key points on the third unit.

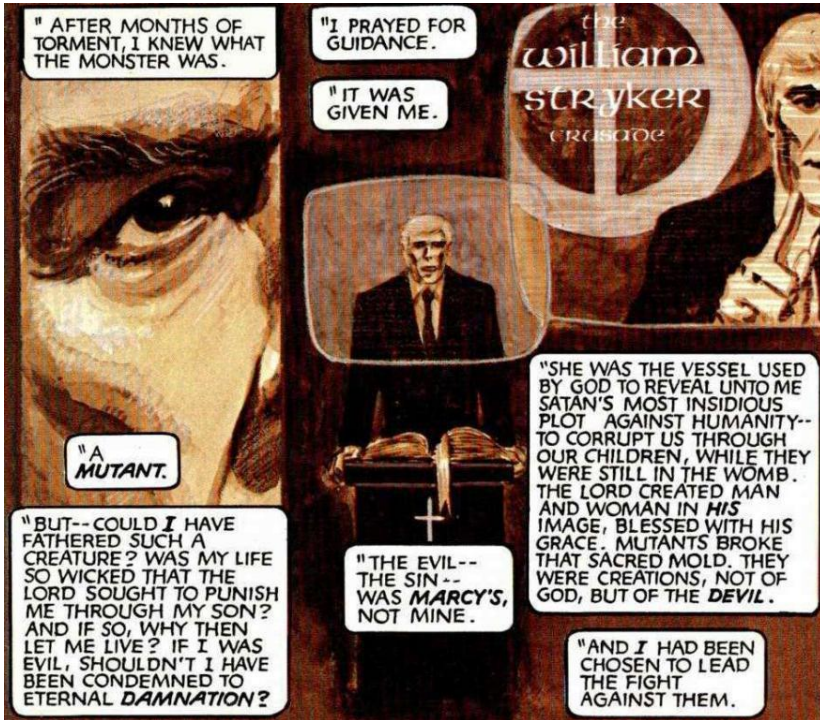


Illustration 4.18 – Choice of Words (The Use of Bold) Panels 18-20

The first bold word appears, when he finds out his son was a *mutant*. He does not understand mutancy as part of human diversity, though. The scientific explanation of natural evolution altering genes and thus generating people with super-powers did not process in his mind. Thus whenever he came across the word mutant his mind translated it as *monster*. His twisted conclusion was that he was being “punish(ed)” by God through his son (Panel 7). Likewise,

Medieval European writers derived the word *monster* from Latin verb *monere*, which means to “warn”. In Christian

Europe, as in the ancient world, monsters were originally understood as signs of divine displeasure, by which God informed human communities of His anger at their misdeeds and warned them of misfortunes to come if they did not mend their ways. (Park 1114).

This thinking is not shared only by Christian Medieval Europe, or the only sign of disability being considered as divine wrath: “For Greeks and Romans, as for medieval Europeans, monstrous births were one type of portent or prodigy, a category that included celestial apparitions, comets, earthquakes, and unusual meteorological phenomena” (Park 1114). In other words, Stryker’s misuse of religion to approach mutancy observed from a Disability Studies perspective reveals that this kind of thinking has also been applied to people with disabilities:

Future Reverend Stryker’s sense of pride is reinforced by the second bold word in this unite: “(b)ut... could *I* have fathered such creature?” (Panel 18). He concludes only an evil person could have a mutant offspring, so that he should be “condemned to eternal *damnation*” (Panel 18); the third bold. Stryker is striving to find someone or something to blame for his sense of inadequacy, and also something to be proud of again. As he has survived, he concludes that, here comes the fourth bold word, “(t)he evil... the sin... was *Marcy’s* not (his)” (Panel 8). This piece of conclusion is full of irony, irony which those acquainted with the *X-Men* historic outline and/or main themes in Science-fiction will promptly perceive. I will analyze that on the next paragraph. The fifth and sixth bold words are *His* and *devil*. Following his twisted argumentation, Stryker concludes that humans are made in the image of God (*His*) and mutants are made in the image of the *devil*. It is pertinent to point out that Stryker was not a minister before the accident (Illustration 3.1. Panel 3). He only turns to religion as a means to regain his pride. The last bold word appears in the sentence “(a)nd *I* had been chosen to lead the fight against them (mutants)” (Illustration 3.2. Panel 9). Stryker’s twisted logic has completed full circle, from the father of a monster to the chosen one; from complete *shame* to complete *pride*.

Now I will discuss why Stryker’s affirmation that his wife is to be blamed for their mutant baby is profoundly ironic (Panel 19). In order to fully comprehend this irony, a closer look at Illustration 4.3, Panel 2 is required. The order of the images on this panel is loaded with meaning. From left to right, the reader can see the explosion of an

atomic bomb, Stryker, and only then his wife. This order indicates cause and consequence, almost as in a mathematic equation: “atomic test + Stryker = genetic altered Stryker with potential for mutant offspring”, so that, “genetic altered Stryker + Stryker’s wife = mutant pregnancy”.



Illustration 4.19 - Irony in Stryker’s Blaming His Wife for the Birth of a Mutant Son (Panel 2, Illustration 4.3)

Furthermore, the panel does not show the full figure of the couple, but the necessary to enable the reader to see Marcy’s pregnant abdomen between her and her husband. In other words, the choice of distance gives emphasis to the result of this equation: a mutant baby. Any possible doubt about the meaning the atomic bomb image disappears by the captions which show the following inner thoughts of Stryker: “(...) on special assignment to the military nuclear test program. The brass told us the danger was minimal. We believed them”. *X-Men* readers are well aware that parents exposed to atomic radiation will be likely to bear mutant offspring. Even if that is not the case, the reader may deduct that from the clues given in Panel 2. Furthermore, genetic-altered-babies born to radiation-altered-parents is a recurrent theme in science-fiction. The responsible one for generating a mutant baby was not Marcy, it was Stryker. Maybe, deep inside, he knew it, for he read Professor Xavier’s

article. Most certainly the professor explained which conditions were necessary to breed mutant offspring. Furthermore, in the third unite of Illustration 4.4 (See Illustration 4.14) the former sergeant becomes the Minister Stryker; or else, he was not religious before. He only turns to religion as an escape from his inability to deal with and accept his own imperfection; so that he can delegate this imperfection to an escape-goat⁷⁶, in this case, mutants whom he considers as monsters and also as abomination.

While Chemers supports his analysis of Colonel Stryker's motivation through a Disability Studies prism on the concept of normalcy and the distinction between disability and disease, Rinaldi supports hers only on the former. Likewise, my analysis of Colonel Stryker's motivation is supported by the concept of normalcy. Both authors distinguish eugenics in Colonel Stryker's decision to kill all mutants; the same conclusion is true for Reverend Stryker. Rinaldi argues that Colonel Stryker's motivation in the filmic version uncovers the distinction between disability and disease; and the dehumanization of people with disabilities; motivations which leads to his eugenicist agenda. The former conclusion is not applicable to the comics' version, but the latter is. In fact, Reverend Stryker's logic is deeper and more troubling than the Colonel's. While Colonel Stryker (film) goes as far as dehumanizing mutants by comparing them to animals, Reverend Stryker (comics) goes further. He reduces mutants from humans (when he addresses his son as *he*) to animals (when he addresses his son as *it*) and then finally to abomination (when he addresses his son as *monster*). In addition, the analysis of Reverend Stryker's reasoning in comics offers some bonus material. It uncovers the role that pride may take on society's approach to people with disabilities; the misguided search for explanations to back up the persecution of people with disabilities when the real motivation is pride (and/or arrogance); society's prejudicial categorization of disability as Divine warning or wrath; and the historical labeling of people with disability as *monsters*.

⁷⁶ This kind of plot is not new to the literary world. It can be found, for instance, in the *Crucible* by Arthur Miller.

4.2.2 Have you tried not being a mutant?

The sequence in which the young mutant Iceman⁷⁷ reveals to his family that he is a mutant is cited by Martin Mantle and Michel M. Chemers in their analysis of *X2: X-Men United* from a Disability Studies perspective. He had been hiding his mutancy from his family who believes that the Xavier Institute, the school he attends, is a regular school. The mutant did not plan neither want to tell his family the truth but feels obligated to as he and his friends are in a difficult situation. He, Wolverine, Rogue⁷⁸, and Pyro⁷⁹, after escaping Colonel Stryker's attack to the Institute, seek for refuge in his family's house. His perplexed mother asks "Have you tried not being a mutant?" His father, mother and brother believed he was a *normal* young man, dating a *normal* girl, studying at a *normal* school. Yet, he is able to create ice with a thought, dates a mutant girl whom he can not touch (Rogue), and the Xavier Institute is in fact a school for mutants.

Mantle and Chemers establish a connection between this sequence and disability issues. Mantle argues that "this moment (...) marks a wider social concern about otherness, including disability, and its attendant social exclusion" (02). Chemers argues that it "rings chords for disability aesthetics while Bobby's (Iceman) fellow mutants, Rogue and Logan, rush to Bobby's defense" (02), after all both mutants and people with disabilities are urged to become *normal*. He also argues that this sequence "raising the possibility that that disability might be a 'gift' seems to many nondisabled persons to be a celebration of disease" (02). Right after making the connection between this scene and disability, they reach the same conclusion:

The scene if familiar to anyone who has 'come out' with a disability: the disabled is often met with denial, disbelief, or disgust, especially if the disability is one not widely recognized as 'disability', but as some sort of character deficiency, like depression or obesity (Chemers02).

...this moment reasserts the paradigm of effort that underlies anxieties about deviation from the norm: Iceman could have

⁷⁷ Robert Drake or just Bob Drake as the codename Iceman suggest has the power to create ice. In comics he is a founding member of the *X-Men*. In the X-Men trilogy he is a young student of the Xavier Institute, a school aimed at helping mutants to accept and develop their unique gifts.

⁷⁸ Marie in the movies, Anna Marie in comics, (last name yet unknown) the mutant codenamed Rogue has the power to absorb people's vital energy or in case of mutants their powers as well.

⁷⁹ Saint-John Allerdyce, codename Pyro, has the power to control fire, but not to produce it.

been normal if only he had tried harder, had a different girlfriend, remained at home, sought more knowledge, or had better counsel (Mantle 02).

These conclusions are the ones which are more alike in all the comparative analyses made for this dissertation. As meaningful as this fact is, unfortunately this sequence could not be found in the comics storyline *God Loves, Man Kills*. The main conclusion Chemers and Mantle reached, that is, that disability may be considered by society as a matter of personal will, could not be distinguished in any of the sequences analyzed in this thesis either.

In fact, I have never encountered this sequence in my readings of *X-Men* comics in all my years as a fan. I have been asked by a professor if there may be a reason why this sequence can be found in the film but not in the storyline on which it was based. My interpretation relies on the director of the *X2: X-Men United*, Bryan Singer, relating to the *X-Men* the same way people with disabilities do. The *X-Men* stands for all those who are ill-treated for being different or/and belonging to a marginalized group like Jews, afro-descendents, and homosexuals. As Bryan Singer is openly gay he may have wanted to include in the movie a sequence which reflected society's assumption that homosexuality is connected to personal will⁸⁰.

4.2.3 Because we shouldn't have to.

When the blue skinned and yellowish-eyed shape-shifter Mystique is questioned why she does not pretend to be *normal* all the time, she replies "(b)ecause we shouldn't have to". This sequence is cited by Michael M. Chemers and Jennifer Rinaldi. The question is asked by Nightcrawler⁸¹ whose demon-like appearance explains why he would like to look like differently and why he thinks Mystique should always pretend to be human. The villainess Mystique can look like whoever she wants to. She uses her special powers for the mutant cause, and though her means are questionable, she does so that one day mutants will not have to pretend to be *normal* anymore.

Both Chemers and Rinaldi are enthusiastic about Mystique's pride of her mutancy, even when a fellow mutant thinks she should

⁸⁰ I formulated this reading when I found that "this (sequence) has been read as an expression of anxiety about homosexuality" (Mantle 02).

⁸¹ Kurt Wagner, codename Nightcrawler, has teletransportation powers. His body is covered in dark blue fur, he has three-fingered hands, three-toed feet, pointed ears and a long tail.

always pretend “to look like everybody else” (*X2: X-Men United*). Chemers is so enthusiastic of Mystique’s response that he confesses having “shouted” in the movie theater “You go, girl! Crips strike back⁸²” (03). He accounts his reaction on “the enthusiasm and the affirmative message of the film” which are “contagious, providing a disability-positive aesthetic paradigm that borders on the liberation of the ‘abnormal’ body envisioned in the writings of Mikhail Bakhtin” (03). Rinaldi argues that Mystique’s

appearance and her role as a villain might render her ill-equipped to be an inspiration to disability studies, for often, in film people with disabilities are portrayed as inhuman, unlike ‘us’ because of their differences. Mystique however, has a firm purpose for being startlingly different. She is proud of her mutation. (...) she disrupts our common conceptions and definitions. She compels us to open up the boundaries we place around humanity and also to question how diverse humanity might be (08).

Although these authors found Mystique’s affirmation positive, this sequence could not be found in the comics’ storyline which *X2: X-Men United* was adapted from.

At least, it could not be found *directly*; not in one specific panel or page, not at one specific sequence, sentence or image. Nevertheless the careful eye can trace the *because-we-shouldn’t-have-to* attitude in Nightcrawler’s positive approach to his unusual appearance in the comics storyline *God Loves, Man Kills*. On the contrary filmic Nightcrawler he believes mutants should not pretend to be or to look normal. While filmic Mystique pretends to be normal around humans - especially if that will help get accomplish her goals - comics Nightcrawler refuses to do that, no matter what. Three years before this storyline he strongly affirms that *he would not pretend to be normal not even for the X-Men (The Uncanny X-Men # 130 34)*. Since then, therefore, he has not been using the image inducer which enabled him to look like a *normal human*. Since then, and including in the storyline analyzed in this subchapter, he has been walking around, among mutants and humans alike, just like himself – no matter how startled people may get.

⁸² *Crips Strike Back* is an article on Disability Studies written by Lennard Davis.

4.3 X-MEN: THE LAST STAND

The purpose of this section is to analyze whether the comics' storyline *Gifted* (*Astonishing X-Men* # 01-06) can be read from a Disability Studies perspective at sequences which correspond to those previously analyzed by Michael Chemers, Martin Mantle, Kara Sheridan Ayers, Jenifer Rinaldi and Ramona Ilea regarding the film *X-Men: The Last Stand* (Brett Ratner 2006). In other words, I will verify if their conclusions based on the film are also valid for the comics. This procedure follows three steps.

Step 1: Selection of three sequences from the movie film *X-Men: The Last Stand* (Sequences selected: 1) The Cure is announced; 2) Storm's and Rogue's reactions to the cure; and 3) Beast reaction to the cure) (See Chart below).

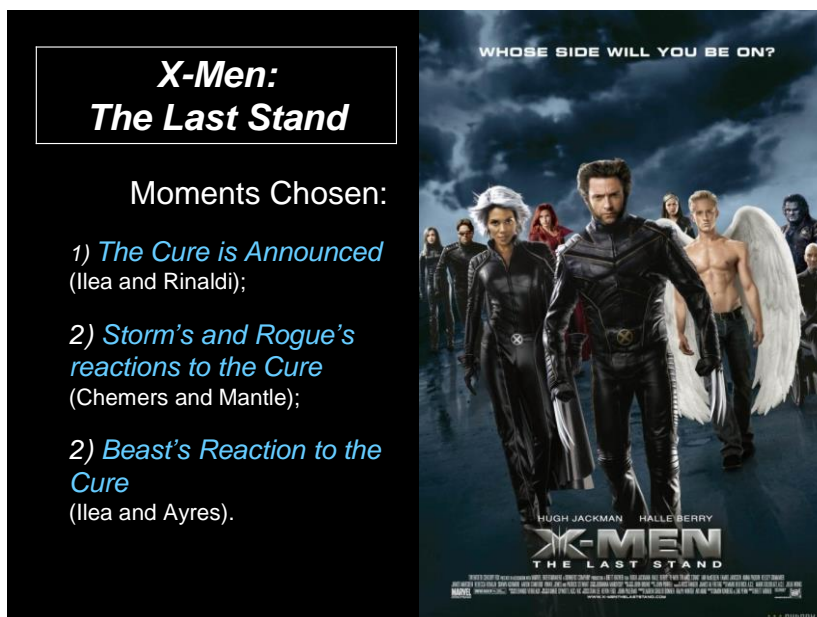


Illustration 4.20 - Sequences chosen for the movie *X-Men: The Last Stand*

Step 2: Searching for correspond sequences in the comics storyline *Gifted*, on which *X-Men: The Last Stand* was based (See Chart on next page).

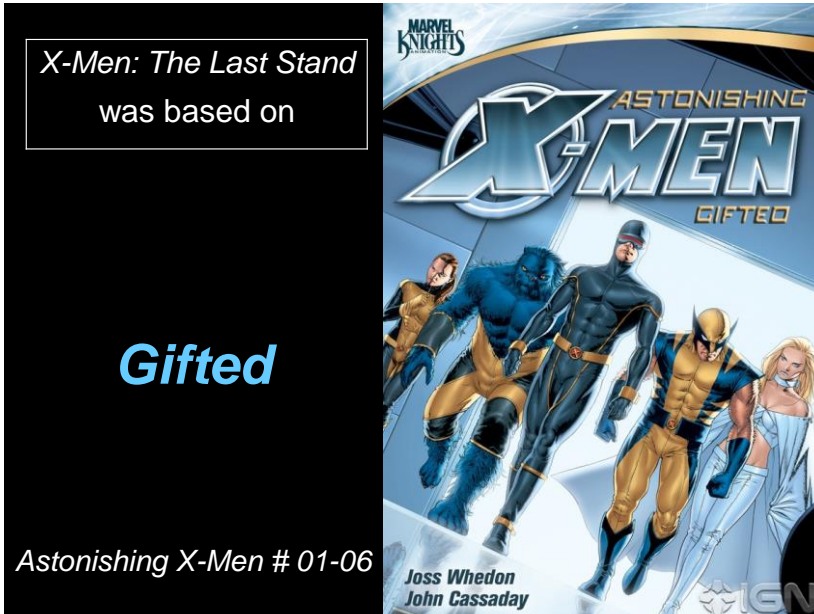


Illustration 4.21 - Gifted. Comics storyline on which *X-Men: The Last Stand* was based.

Step 3: Verifying if the conclusions reached by Ayers, Chemers, Ilea, Mantle and Rinaldi concerning the filmic sequences chosen at Step 1 are also valid for the comics sequences found at Step 2.

Before beginning the analysis, let us briefly the film and comics plot. Both plots revolve around the recent announcement of the discovery of a cure for mutancy. Both plots present different reactions to the cure from the mutant community: some are for, some against it, and others are afraid it may be used against mutants. Both in the film and in comics mutants form long lines to wait for the cure. In the film the cure is announced by Warren Worthington II. He is a millionaire and concerned father who dedicated his fortune and time to cure Angel⁸³, his winged mutant son. However in the end Angel refuses to be *cured* arguing that the father wanted the cure but not him. In comics the cure is announced by renowned geneticist Tavita Rao. In spite of having gotten attached to a child mutant girl her primary interest in the cure is scientific. In the film the cure is gotten by the blood of young mutant

⁸³ Warren Worthington III, codename Angel, is one of the founding members of the *X-Men*. His mutancy consists in his having angel-like wings which enable him to fly.

Leech whose powers consists in inhibiting mutant powers. In comics the cure was processed by experimentation on the mutant Colossus⁸⁴ who had been resuscitated, incarcerated and experimented on to the point he begged to be killed. In the film the *X-Men* go to the rescue of Leech and the scientists responsible for cure as Magneto and his Brotherhood of Mutants invade Alcatraz, the place where the cure is being processed, with the intention to kill all in there. In comics the *X-Men* invade the labs to look for answers because they had found out that Colossus was being experimented on; fight the security guards and the super-villain Ord, and save Colossus; but due to the fight the samples of the cure are destroyed.

4.3.1 The Cure is announced

The announcement of the *cure* is discussed by Jennifer Rinaldi and Ramona Ilea. In the third movie of the *X-Men* trilogy the *cure* to the mutant condition is announced on TV by Warren Worthington II. What follows are different reactions from the mutant community; some are for, others against, still others are afraid it might be used against them. The Warren Labs are attacked by mutants against the *cure*; and the *X-Men* come to the rescue. In the end, the *cure* is used as a weapon; the *X-Men* beat the villain mutants; and the *cure* is available to mutants who choose it. A person acquainted with disability issues will “notice(..) nearly every twist and turn of the action-packed movie symbolically portray issues that disability activists fight today with equal fervor” (Ayers, 01).

The words disease and *cure*, present in the announcement of the cure in *X-Men: The Last Stand*, stand out for those acquainted with the Disability Studies; this is certainly the reason why Ilea and Rinaldi cite part of or the whole speech of Worthington in their analysis of X-Men movie(s) from a Disability Studies perspective. Ilea opts for employing all the words used in the announcement to illustrate her point:

These so-called mutants are people like us. Their affliction is nothing more than a disease, a corruption o healthy cellular activity. But I stand here today to tell you that there is hope. This site, once the world’s most famous prison, will now be

⁸⁴ Peter Rasputin, codename Colossus, has the power to transform his body in organic metal with a simple thought. He used to be Shadowcat boyfriend. He sacrificed himself (died) to save the world from the Legacy virus.

the source of freedom for all mutants who choose it. Ladies and gentlemen... I proudly present the answer to mutation. Finally, we have a cure. (*X-Men: The Last Stand*)

She argues, then, that Worthington is not the only one who believes the *cure* will bring “freedom” (172). “(S)cientists” in the real world “have tried for a long time to find a cure for deaf people...”, so that “the ‘cure’” will “enable the deaf to hear and finally be ‘normal’”; thinking which is embedded in the Medical Model of disability. Like mutants, however, “many deaf people” decided not to have the cure (172), as they believe there is nothing wrong with them and are proud of who they are. Here can be discerned the discussion around the distinction between disability and disease. Rinaldi, on the other hand, opts for some trimming in the speech: “These so-called mutants are people like us. Their affliction is nothing more than a disease, a corruption of healthy cellular activity. But I stand here today to tell you that there’s hope...I offer a cure” (05). Careful not to skip the key words mentioned previously, she selects only the fractions necessary to make her point through: “for Worthington, mutants can be fully human once they have been cured of their affliction. Here, as it is in the real world, anomaly is portrayed as a personal tragedy, a burden that ought to be lifted, an illness requiring an antidote” (05); or else, for her Worthington’ speech is also based on the Medical Model of disability. The concepts used to support the analysis are the concept of Normalcy (mutants must be cured so that they can be free, fully human, normal) and the defining line between disability and disease. Both authors perceive at the announcement of the cure the Medical Model of disability.

The sequence which displays the announcement of the *cure* in the comics storyline *Gifted* takes six pages to be delivered (*Astonishing X-Men* # 01 18-23), from the first to the last line of Doctor Rao’s speech (Illustrations 4.22 to 4.26). These pages display three different events happening at the same time: 1) in a press conference: the announcement of the cure ; 2) at a upper class party, a hostage situation held by heavily-armed, aggressive men; 3) at the X-Mansion; the *X-Men*⁸⁵ get ready to go to the rescue of the hostages. All the panels on this moment are triple-width; the pages mostly have from 3 to 5 strip-like panels. While two sets of actions occurring simultaneously can be found now and then in comics, three sets of actions are a rarity. The use of a three-

⁸⁵ The formation of the group for this storyline is Cyclops, (the leader), White Queen, Beast, Wolverine and Shadowcat.

sided set of action is not intended only at keeping the reading of this storyline interesting. It also aims at carefully 1) exposing two different sides of mutancy and/or society's conceptions about mutancy; and 2) to question these conceptions.

Illustration 4.22 (See next page), the first page of the sequence of the announcement of the *cure*, has only three panels. Considering that the standard format of the comics page has nine equal-sized panels, three panels is a considerable low number - a break of pattern. Due to the unusual page pattern, attention is drawn to the big middle panel - while a regular page is 26 cm high; this panel is 20 cm high. Also, its width boundaries bleed, that is, its boundaries go beyond the regular comics' panel pattern. Compared to the huge panel (20 cm high), Panel 1 and 2 are tiny (4 cm high). These two narrow panels overlap the big one. Panel 1 is the close up of a Hindu woman with glasses, who had been established to be, one page before, "Kavita Rao, renowned geneticist doctor" (*Astonishing X-Men* # 01 17). The many microphones in front of her and round spectrum of a light projector at the blue curtains hint she is the speaker of a press conference. She asks: "what is a mutant?" On Panel 2, great action is going on. A high class party has been broken by a group of masked men with machine guns. A man is firing in the air in the center of the panel while there many people in panic at the background; the extreme close-up of a girl in panic down left the panel adds intensity to the scene. The red stripe around the firing man's balloon indicates he is shouting loudly; another man at the right threatens a hostage, a machine gun on his head. The tilt and low-angle perspective add a sense of chaos and threat to the scene. Panel 3 is the close up of the profile of a man who looks concerned, head slightly down, a hand on his eyes. Possible interpretations are that he is one of the hostages, or someone worried about a loved one's safety (being held hostage). The lightening-like-pattern around the caption indicates that the announcement this man listens to of the hostage situation comes from an electronic device, probably a radio. The reader's attention is drawn to the middle panel, not only because of its centered position within the page and its large dimensions compared to the other two panels, but also because of the intense action being portrayed in it. The stage is ready for the announcement of the *cure*.



Illustration 4.22 – Announcement of the Cure – Part 1
(Panels 1, 2 and 3)

This page is secondary “splash’ page” (Eisner 62); the opening page of a particular segment of the storytelling, the announcement of the cure. Although it is not “the first page of the story,” it does possess all the other attributes Eisner considers necessary for a “properly employed” splash page. “It is a launching pad for” this segment of “the narrative,” (...) and “it seizes the reader’s attention and prepares his attitude for the events to follow. It sets a climate”. Illustration 3.3., thus, “functions as an introduction,” (62) where three distinct sets of actions are presented with no obvious correlation among them. On the next page on, though, it will be clear that one set of action (Dr. Rao speech) has the goal to guide the presentation of the other two sets of actions (two allegedly sides of mutancy as seen by society in *X-Men* fictional universe).

Illustration 4.23 is composed of four panels. Panel 4 is a close up of the man in the preceding panel, the special glasses he wears now indicates he is Cyclops, the leader of the *X-Men* getting ready for action; his speech balloon reads “now or never”. This Panel is the first one to hint that the X-Men will be representing the *good or positive side*⁸⁶ of mutancy. Panel 5 is a long-distance panel of the woman from the opening panel, the stage and the heads of spectators can be seen. The chosen point of view is from someone at the back of the seating audience. She continues her speech on mutants; the speech balloon on her left reads “(t)hey’ve been called angels, and devils... they’ve committed atrocities, and been victim to atrocities themselves. They’ve been labeled monsters, and not without reason”, and the one on her right reads “(b)ut I will tell you what mutants are”. Now Dr. Rao has assumed her role as mediator of the other two sets of action. Panel 6 places the point of view directly behind the leader of the (most probably) terrorists, the back of his head and shoulders can be seen as well the faces of the terrified hostages. The twin speech balloon on his right reads “(n)o doubt you’re wondering what it is we want” and “(y)our money, your daughters. Your flesh, peeled and roasted”. The speech balloon on his left reads “(m)aybe we’re fanatics”. Panel 7 shows a close-up of the leader, his face is green, the smile on his lips is cynic, his speech placed on a small balloon on his right “(o)r maybe we’re just bored”. As the comics’ reading flow for occidental culture is left to right, the reader will first see the sinister expression on the villain’s face, and only then get acquainted to his disturbing remark.

⁸⁶ This is a rough designation used to represent the dichotomy present in the storyline.

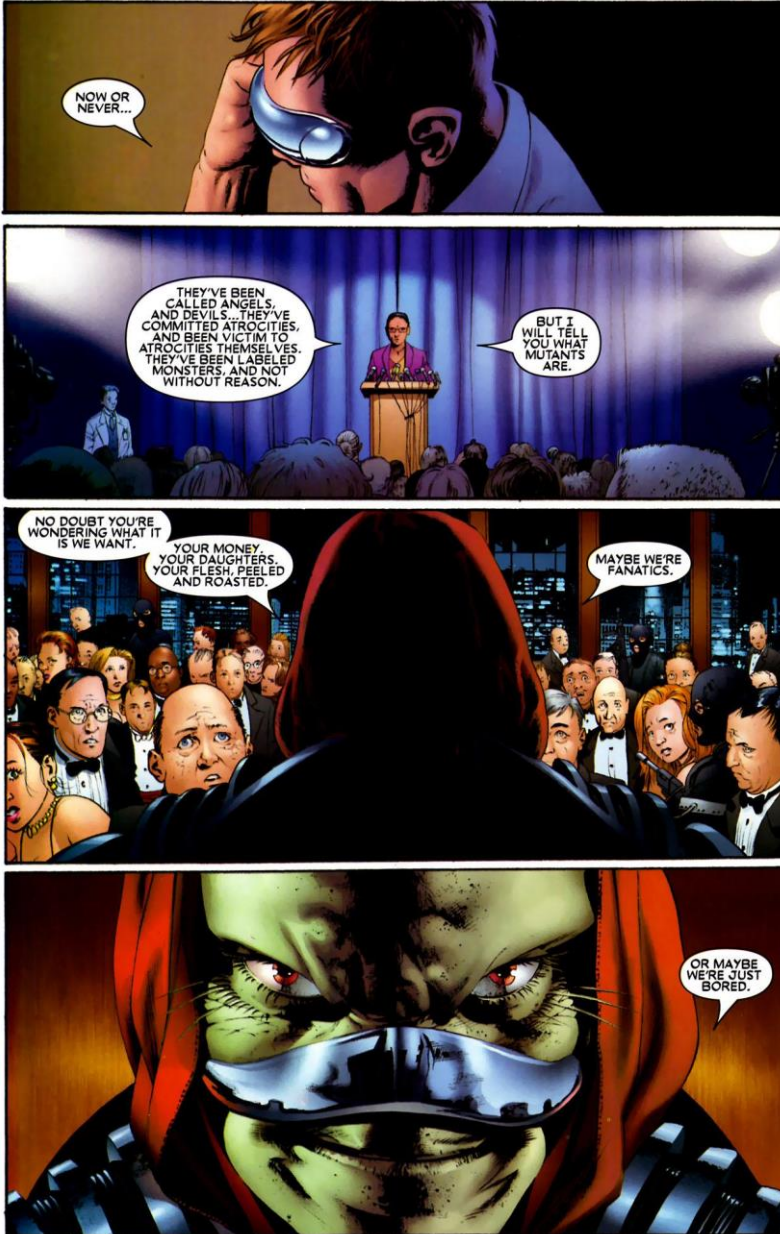


Illustration 4.23 – Announcement of the Cure – Part 2
(Panels 4, 5, 6, and 7)

This remark adds meaning to the image, for his face does look like someone who has found diversion after a period of boredom, or else, if the speech balloon were placed on the left the panel would not have been as impacting. The color of the leader of the bad guys (Panel 7) indicates he may be a mutant, like the leader of the good guys (Panel 4). This assumedly green mutant and his group represent the *bad or negative side*⁸⁷ of mutancy. On this page the roles of each set of action has been clarified. The panel containing the *connecting device* (Dr. Rao's speech) has been carefully placed between the *good or positive side* of mutancy (the X-Men: "angels"; "people who have been victim to atrocities") and the *bad or negative side* of mutancy (terrorists: "devils" "people who have committed atrocities"; "monsters") in order to maximize the visual understanding of role of each one of these set of actions. Coincidentally, at the chapter 3.2.1 of this thesis it was explored that people with disabilities have been victim to atrocities and have been considered devils and monsters.

Illustration 4.24, a five-panel page, contains two sets of actions. The perspective of Panel 8 is from behind Doctor Rao. There can be seen her head, part of her back and shoulder, the outline of the crowd in front of her as well as the flashes of cameras being shot. Panels 2-5 show the *X-Men* getting ready for the rescue. In the middle of Panel 2 White Queen⁸⁸ and Shadowcat change clothes in what seems to be a gym locker room. Panel 3 is the close up of the blue-furred hand of Beast⁸⁹ putting away his glasses in a locker. In the middle of Panel 4 is the extreme-close up of Wolverine's adamantium⁹⁰ claws; the yellow "snikit" drawn at its right, a visual sound effect, indicates they have just come out. At the left of Panel 5 is an extreme close-up of the masked face of Cyclops (Summers).

⁸⁷ This is a rough designation used to represent the dichotomy present in the storyline.

⁸⁸ Emma Frost, codename White Queen, is a telepath. In this storyline she is the lover of the leader of the *X-Men*, Cyclops. She is a former villain, reason why there is a lot of tension between her and Shadowcat. The first time they met White Queen had locked the *X-Men* in bird-like cages. At the time Shadowcat was just a scared 13 years old girl who had just acquired her powers.

⁸⁹ Hank McCoy, codename Beast, has highly advanced athletic skills and sharp intelligence. He is one of the founding members of the X-Men, when he had a human-like appearance. Since then his external appearance has changed a lot: firstly he acquired blue fur and his face got slightly features, later his face became cat-like resembling Disney's Beast. One theory at this point is his mutation is gradual and yet not completed.

⁹⁰ Adamantium (fictional) is the toughest, hardest metal in the Marvel Universe which has been implanted into Wolverine skeleton and three-pointed retractable bone-claws through medical intervention. If it were not by his healing power he would have died in the process.

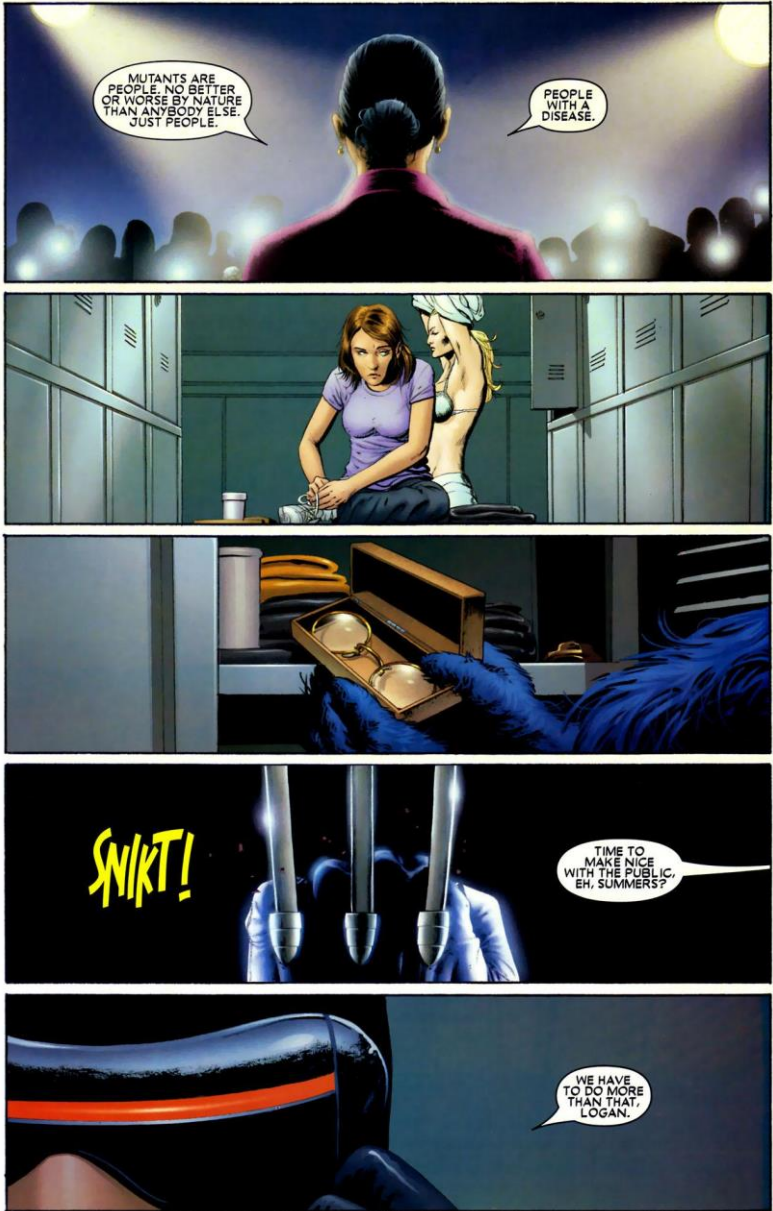


Illustration 4.24 – Announcement of the Cure – Part 3
(Panels 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12)

This page has three objectives: 1) to increase expectations on the doctors' announcement over mutants; 2) to slowly prepare the reader to be astonished on the next page(s) (See next paragraph); 3) to contrast Doctor Rao's words (Panel 8) and the *X-Men* (Panels 9-12). The balloon at the right of Doctor Rao has an affirmative tone: "Mutants are people no better or worse by nature than anybody else, just people". The balloon at her left which holds her definition of mutants, though, does not: "People with a disease". The positioning of four panels depicting known and beloved characters to X-Men fans getting ready to unselfishly risk their lives to save completely strangers immediately after their being defined as "people with a disease" invites to pondering: Is it all that the *X-Men* (people with a disease) are? Does that definition really suit them? Aren't they extraordinary people doing extraordinary deeds? Of course, the mutant community is diverse. In it there are the ones who are villains, the ones who do not make a difference in the world, the ones who live ordinary lives, *and* there are the ones like the *X-Men*, who do the extraordinary. Taking into the consideration that human portion of the population is equally diverse, does doctor Rao's dividing the inhabitants of Earth between people without a disease (humans) and people with a disease (mutants) justifiable? Can't humans and mutants do extraordinary deeds not mattering their possessing or not mutancy? All these considerations can be applied to the reality of people with disabilities as society often sees disability as a disease, not as difference - a frequent subject in Disability Studies. (See 3.2.2 The distinction between Disability and disease).

In her autobiographic book, *I know Why the Caged Birds Sing* (1969), Maya Angelou tells of her disabled uncle Willie. Dropped as a baby he became crippled and even standing straight was hard for him. One day, as a child she is surprised because she comes into the house unexpectedly and finds her uncle talking to two strangers and pretending not to be disabled. She could see it took him some effort to stand straight. Her uncle wanted to be seen not as a person with a disability because society tends to consider disability as a disease, not as part of human diversity. He did not want to be seen as a *disease*, but just as a person, even if for just some minutes. This example illustrates the problematic of society's considering disability as a disease and not as difference, not as just part of human diversity. If society did not perceive a person with disabilities as a broken object in need of repair but as a person whose potential is the same as of an abled person, then Uncle Willie would not have felt like pretending to be *normal*.

A function of Illustration 4.24 is to prepare the reader for the next two pages (Illustration 4.25 See next page). On Panel 11, at the left of Wolverine's claws, there is a speech balloon which points to the right end of the panel - it indicates that his face is somewhere off the page. Wolverine says, "(t)ime to make it nice to the public, eh, Summers"⁹¹. On Panel 5, Cyclops replies "(w)e have to do more than that, Logan (Wolverine)". The two following pages (Illustration 4.25) portray a giant panel – its size comprises the total space of a two pages. This panel is as big as one can possible be in a comic book. This super-sized-panel portrays the team in uniforms entering the hangar towards their aircraft: Cyclops on the lead, the other four *X-Men* following. Cyclops answers Wolverine question: "(w)e have to astonish them". Although Cyclops refers to the general public in his fictional universe this two-page super-panel is primarily intended at *astounding*⁹² the reader. Besides the unnatural size of this panel, another tool used to add intensity to the scene and as consequently enhance the *astounding* nature of the *X-Men* is the tilted angle. All of this reinforces the questioning of Dr. Rao definition of mutants on the previous page: are the *X-Men* just people with a disease, nothing more?

The last page of the announcement of the *cure* (Illustration 4.26) begins with a low-angle, light tilted, long-distance panel (Panel 14). The blue sky is in the center, the black silhouette of the *X-Men*'s aircraft far in the distance on the right, the close-up of a basketball basket on the left. The inverted commas at the beginning of the sentence placed in the caption on the right signals it is not a narrator speaking, but someone's speech: "Mutants are not the next step in evolution". That is all the reader needs to know that this is the continuation of Doctor Rao's speech. The low-angle perspective of the green-faced assumed terrorist adds a sense of threatening to Panel 15; a sense of displacement and insecurity reinforced by the tilted angle. In front of the menacing man the city skyline can be seen through a window, at his feet a man and woman hostages, behind him there is an armed masked man. The caption which says "They are not the end of the humankind" does not seem to fit this scenario, as the color of the man's face indicates he may be a mutant, and he is certainly a menace. This panel goes back to the two sides of mutancy representing the *bad or negative* side of mutancy.

⁹¹ Summers refers to Cyclops, leader of the X-Men in this storyline. His real name is Scott Summers.

⁹² Another level of this intention to *astonish* is the comic books' name: *Astonishing X-Men*.



Illustration 4.25 – Announcement of the Cure – Part 4
(Panel 13: Its huge size - two pages - aims at maximizing the intended effect, that is, that the *X-Men* are astonishing)

Panel 16 shows the interior of the *X-Men* aircraft. In second plane, Cyclops, Wolverine and the White Queen look ahead; on the first plane, Shadowcat is looking through the window in front of which the reader is placed. This panel contains three captions, which contrast dramatically with the images of these mutant heroes. The two captions on the left say “(t)he mutant gene is nothing more than a disease” and “a corruption of healthy cellular activity”. The layout of Panel 16 was also carefully chosen. Before reaching the third caption, which is at the left far side of the panel, the eyes of the reader must see first Shadowcat’s face; which gives the impression of looking straight at the readers. There is a slightly sad look in her eyes, as if she were listening to Doctor Rao’s words. The invitation to questioning the words of Dr. Rao which began at Illustration 4.24 reaches a climax here. Instead of focusing on the group, this panel focus on the most likeable member of the *X-Men*, the young, ethic-oriented, strong-minded woman whose adventures fans have been following since she joined the group at 13 years old in 1981 (*Uncanny X-Men* #14). The changing of focus from the whole group to the most likeable character is aimed getting a personal response from the reader. Is Shadowcat just a person with a disease? Doctor Rao defines mutant a mutant as a person having a gene which “is nothing more than a disease”. Shouldn’t Shadowcat be defined instead as an extraordinary person, doing something extraordinary? How can she be defined as a person who possesses “a corruption of health cellular activity”? Isn’t she just different? This questioning seen from a Disability Studies perspective is embedded in the distinction between disability and disease. The caption on the right of Panel 17 reads “and now, at last...”.

Panel 17 is an extreme close-up of the Hindu woman’s face, emphasis being given to her eyes behind straight angle glasses lenses, as she announces “...we have found a cure”. Her almost fierce expression determines she is sure her point of view is the correct one, that is, mutancy is a disease, a problem to which she has found the ultimate solution. Or else, Doctor Rao subscribes to the *Medical Model of Disability* is. Mutancy is just a problem (disease, corruption of cellular activity) which needs to be solved (cured). The main goal of the *X-Men* in this storyline is to be seen as a trustworthy group of super-heroes in an attempt to change society’s perception on mutants in order get a greater acceptance for mutants within society. In other words, on the contrary of Dr. Rao, the *X-Men* subscribe to the *Social Model of Disability*.



Illustration 4.26 – Announcement of the Cure – Part 5
 (Panels 15, 16, 17, and 18).

A person not acquainted with Disability Studies may see no harm in Doctor Rao's speech and general attitude towards mutants - after all, she is just a concerned scientist doing her best to help. Like Doctor Rao in the imaginary *X-Men* universe, doctors and scientists share a similar attitude towards disability. The problem with this kind of thinking (consideration of disability as disease and the Medical Model of Disability) is its unilateral approach to Disability: before being cured, people with disabilities are unhappy and miserable, the only possible life they can possibly live; after being cured they will live happily ever after - end of the story. Obviously "biomedical care" and new treatments are necessary, however this viewpoint forgets that "distributive actions and reparation of inequality" are equally necessary (Diniz 11). Mainly, what is necessary is a shift of definition of disability from *disease* and *personal tragedy* to "style of life" (11).

In order to illustrate happily-ever-after-if-cured belief of the Medical Model of Disability, I will cite the article on Anaplastology (Revista Corpore, Thássia Pires 56, 57). The article says that a 19 year-old girl "recovered", after the surgery, "her vanity and confidence in herself"; the mother accounts that "(b)efore (the surgery) she (her daughter) did not let anybody get close to her, now her mood is better, she is even more confident and caring"; the girl says, "(n)ow, I even accept to have photos taken of me"; and finally the doctor finishes by stating that "a lot of people are beginning to smile again, live, get out and take many photos (...) (t)hanks to this technique^{93,94} (57). In this example the problematic principle of the Medical Model of Disability being the final solution to the *problem* of disability is more evident. What message does this article send to the blind, the deaf, the amputee, the crippled? That they can not "smile (...), live, get out and take many photos" (57). Those are privileges only the normal can possess - "and now, at last, we (doctors who perform this procedure) have the cure" (*Astonishing X-Men* # 3 23).

⁹³ The mentioned procedure consists in the implant of artificial ears, procedure which may or may not improve one's hearing.

⁹⁴ "recuperou"; "sua vaidade e confiança em si mesma"; "antes ela não deixava ninguém chegar perto dela, agora seu humor está melhor, e ela está até mesmo mais confiante e"; "muitas pessoas estão começando a sorrir de novo, viver, sair e tirar muitas fotos (...) graças a esta técnica".

Complete darkness follows in Panel 18, in the format of a black panel with the names of the issue contributors in white. As the *X-Men* are about to face two battles, one physical (the rescue operation) and another moral (their reaction to the cure) this issue ends with an atmosphere of anticipation and apprehension. The blackness on Panel 18 reinforces this atmosphere as it recalls the lack of light, the night, the unknown, the possible threat in the darkness. The future of mutants, as of people with disabilities is still uncertain.

The concepts used to support the analysis of the announcement of the cure in *X-Men: The Last Stand* through a Disability Studies perspective were the distinction between disability and disease (Ilea) and the concept of normalcy (both Ilea and Rinaldi). The concepts used for the analysis present in this subchapter were the same, however, special emphasis was given to the defining line between disability and disease, as I will address later on. The conclusions reached by these authors concerning this moment are valid for comics as well, that is, the Medical Model of disability can be discerned in both announcements. The main concept of Disability Studies present in Dr. Rao' speech, however, is the defining line between disability and disease. In order to maximize the presentation of the argumentation behind the binomial disability vs. disease issue, there has been presented a debate symbolized by a connecting device or mediator (Dr. Rao' speech); good/positive aspect of mutancy/ disability (*X-Men:*); and bad/negative perspective of mutancy (terrorists). As a result there is more opportunity to ponder about the mutant condition; the argument behind the cure; and the objects of the *cure* and therefore to develop a critical perspective on the subject. Especially the negative words of Dr. Rao concerning mutancy (monsters, end of the world and the most unjust-sounding, disease) directed at the *X-Men* incite the questioning of the reference of this group of super-heroes (and consequently people with disabilities) as *disease*. In fact I argue that this moment possesses potential for further research in the field of Disability Studies. Whereas in Ilea's and Rinaldi's analysis the distinction between disability and disease represents a supporting concept, for the comics' storyline it represents the main conclusion.

4.3.2 Storm's and Rogue's reactions to the cure

In their analysis of *X-Men: The Last Stand* from a Disability Studies perspective, Ilea and Mantle mention the sequence in which Storm's and/or Rogue's reactions to the cure are portrayed. When learning of the cure, Storm is angry at the consideration that something is wrong with her; while Rogue is excited about the possibility of becoming a non-mutant. In the film this sequence takes place immediately after Beast speaks of the cure to Professor Xavier, Storm and Wolverine; and immediately after Worthington announces it live on TV, when Rogue alongside the rest of the world learn of the cure. In comics the *X-Men* learn of the cure immediately after a successful rescue mission. The sequence which shows the first reactions of the *X-Men* in comics, however, occurs when they return to their headquarters, the Xavier Institute. Although this sub-chapter aims at looking for correspondent moments in the *Gifted* comics storyline, to the filmic reactions of Storm's and Rogue's, the theme of 4.3.3. (Beast's reaction) will also begin to be addressed here. In spite of the storyline revealing the blue mutant's reaction only 21 pages ahead, a glimpse of it can be detected at this sequence.

Ramona Ilea makes use of Storm's and Rogue's reaction to the cure as point of departure in her analysis of *X-Men: The Last Stand* from a Disability Studies perspective. When learning of the cure, "Storm angrily asks, 'Since when have we become a disease?'" (171). Ilea identifies in Storm's reaction the Social Model of disability, according to which "the problem is not physical. Rather society in which the disabled/mutants live is to blame for the difficulties they encounter". The Social Model, she continues, "highlights the need for social change – legal protection, increased access, more social support, less prejudice" (171). On the other hand, Ilea identifies in Worthington's effort to create a cure (170) as well as Rogue's eagerness to be subjected to the cure (175) the Medical Model of disability. In this model "disability (or being a mutant) is seen as an undesirable and painful condition that needs to be fixed". In other words, "the medical model assumes that what is needed is more money and support for research into cures for disability (170-171). Ilea uses the concept of normalcy and the distinction between disability and disease to support her analysis. She clearly discerns in Storm's and Rogue's reactions moments in which the Social and Medical Model of disability are depicted.

Martin Mantle cites Rogue's reaction to the cure to illustrate his argumentation over "Marvel superhero films", and among them, *X-Men* movies. Among the issues he raises are: the use of "genetic mutation, as an error in a bio-chemical code, as a key narrative device"; "the way the film(...) explore(s) the social exclusion of characters who acquire super-abilities"; and on how "the impaired body (...) becomes a larger trope for any deviance from the 'normal' body and gives rise to the anxieties about deviation" (01). After all, "impairment and illness" throughout History have been considered "a blessing or a curse" so that the premise "hate the sin, not the sinner" has been replaced by "eradicate the impairment, not the impaired" (02). Rogue, he argues, unable to enjoy human physical contact due to her power to steal life-force, "seeks to have her genetic code resequenced in order to be able to touch others, and thus by implication have a 'normal' life" (02); in other words, she wants to become human or normal so that she can be accepted⁹⁵. Mantle perceives in Rogue's decision the burden that the concept of normalcy bestows on mutants, for those who acquire superpowers suffer society's prejudice because they are not what society conceives as normal. Likewise people with disabilities, in consequence of being considered deviances, face society's stigmatization. In conclusion, Mantle uses the concept of Normalcy as a supporting concept and as a conclusion.

The first reactions of the *X-Men* to the cure in the comics storyline *Gifted* are revealed on pages 17 and 18 (Illustrations 4.27 and 4.28) of *Astonishing X-Men* # 02. The *X-Men* face two challenges in this storyarc: 1) to obtain positive public opinion on mutants by fighting crime in uniforms which resemble military ones; 2) to teach and supervise the students of the Institute Xavier while Professor X⁹⁶ is taking some time out. The *X-Men* have just returned to the school from a rescue mission, after which a reporter told them about the cure. The students, children and teenagers, have learned of the cure through Doctor Rao's announcement on TV. The tension resultant from the advent of the cure is shared by teachers and students.

⁹⁵ Rogue's decision to become *normal* is so polemic that the director filmed two different endings to her dilemma before deciding which one should go to the big screen. In the final version she returns to the Xavier Institute cured; in the deleted version she tells her boyfriend she could not do it.

⁹⁶ The codename of Professor Charles Xavier.



Illustration 4.27 – Storm’s and Rogue’s Reactions to the Cure – Part 1 (Panels 1, 2, 3, and 4)

Illustration 4.27 possesses four stripe-like panels. In fact, with a few exceptions, this pattern of horizontal or stripe-like panels predominates throughout the storyline *Gifted*. The three first stripe-like panels have the same size while the fourth one is a little shorter. Panel 1 portrays the reaction of thirteen students from the Institute Xavier from a tilted high-angle perspective; perspective which reinforces a sense of chaos, tension and confusion. The inverted commas present in the caption up left “(t)he kids are freaking out” indicate it is not a narration, but part of a character’s speech. Shadowcat’s speech balloon on Panel 2 summarizes their range of reactions “(t)hey’re terrified, confused... some of them are ecstatic. They don’t know how to deal with this”. The students’ reactions are varied. As there can be seen on Panel 1, some are fighting (certainly because of contrary opinions); some seem desperate (teen on the wall and the one facing the left off-side of the panel); some are hugging each other (probably happy at the possibility of being normal again); and others still seem to be in shock as if they have not been able to process the news yet (the ones watching TV).

Panel 2, which aims at setting the mood for the individual *X-Men* reactions, shows a room where the five super-hero mutants are, a big window can be seen at the background. This panel presents three planes. On the first plane there can be seen a close-up of part of Wolverine’s arm, hand in fist and claws projected out. His claws are retractable, he usually only let them out when they are needed in battle. The fact that the claws are in sight is significant. It is relevant to mention that Wolverine is as short-tempered and aggressive as the arctic wolf-like carnivore his name was originated from; that is, as he is not about to fight his claws being out means he is furious. On the second plane, from left to right there can be seen White Queen, Shadowcat and Cyclops. Shadowcat, her back to the window, directs her words (already cited) to the leader, Cyclops. He and White Queen are turned to Shadowcat direction, and look dissatisfied with the situation. The telepath White Queen, her hand on her forehead complains of a “migraine” caused by the “psychic tension”. On the fourth plane, Beast appears to be in a non-illuminated part of the room. There can be seen only his dark silhouette looking out of the window, or else, the impact the *cure* has had on him is yet unknown. His being in the shadows is a hint to his reaction to the cure, though, which will be analyzed in 4.3.3.

Panel 3 contains only two characters. On the left there is extreme close up of Cyclops looking towards left. He wonders if Doctor Rao can be trusted. On the right, still with his back to his teammates, Beast clarifies that she is “one of the greatest geneticists alive” and that

he believes “there is a very good chance” that “she can reverse mutation”. Although the image of Cyclops seems huge compared to Beast’s silhouette due to the extreme close up, the layout of the page directs the viewer’s eyes to the latter. Visual hints are being given to suggest that there is a secondary set of action going on.

Panel 4 is an extreme close-up of White Queen’s fierce face, her speech balloon depicts “(t)hen I guess I’ll have to kill her”. At first instance the fierceness in her eyes, highlighted by the shorter panel and the black background around her face, infers she is irritated with the cure. However, unknown to the non-telepathic *X-Men*, something else is bothering her. Subtle hints of the deeper source of her annoyance are given on the following page. However, this source will only be fully revealed pages ahead (See Subchapter 4.3.3).

Illustration 4.27 begins with a general (students’) than focuses on an individual (each X-Man’s) viewpoint on the mutants’ reaction to the cure. The reader already knows that the students, according to Panel 1 and Shadowcat’s reference, have not yet figure out what to think of the cure. White Queen, on the other hand, has made her position clear: she is strongly against it. Shadowcat is worried with the students, whatever impact the cure has had on her she remains calm and centered in order to help to control the situation. Cyclops is rational, as a leader should be. He wants to have more information about the subject before acting. To the reader rests to know the other Wolverine’s and Beast⁹⁷’ standpoints.

On the left, Panel 1 of Illustration 4.28 presents a close-up of Shadowcat’s and Wolverine’s face. The young heroine is looking to the left off-side of the panel, where presumably White Queen is. Shadowcat’s face expression and attitude betrays her disapproval of White Queen’s comment, her speech balloon reads “(w)ell there’s a thoughtful plan”. On the right side, there is the face of Wolverine who seems to agree with the former villainess White Queen’s murder desire: “(a)nd I say ‘amen’ to it”. Of course, neither of them really means to kill the scientist. They are just expressing out their dissatisfaction with the cure; reaction which can be traced to Disability Studies in the format of the Social Model of Disability, model to which these two characters subscribe.

⁹⁷ Although Beast is being analytical and rational, his face can not yet be seen so that his reaction can be fully assessed.



Illustration 4.28 – Storm’s and Rogue’s Reactions to the Cure – Part 2 (Panels 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9)

Panel 2 portrays Wolverine and Shadowcat. Wolverine's body positioning is the same position as Panel 2 of Illustration 4.27. (See page 91). This time, however, besides hand in fist and claws there also can be seen the furious expression on his face; his speech balloons read: "(w)oman called me a disease. You know how that feels to me? I can't even sheathe. My claws won't go back. She said we were a disease". He is so infuriated he can not think straight, or relax. His body is aggressive mode, prepared to attack. He not only strongly believes there is nothing to be cured, he is also revolted at any connection between his mutancy and disease. Taking into consideration that "the medical model treats disability as a disease in need of cure" (Davis, *Crips Strike Back* 506) Wolverine is unmistakable against this Model and for Social Model of disability. As a result, it can be concluded that Wolverine's reaction is the counterpart of Storm's as analyzed by Ilea; both character's reactions reflecting the Social Model of disability. In addition, yet another concept of Disability Studies can be discerned at this comics' moment: the distinction between disability and disease.

Continuing the analysis of Panel 2, Shadowcat replies "(s)he said the mutant *strain* was a disease." The expression on her face changed from annoyance, when she replied to White Queen's comment, to genuine concern, when she talks to Wolverine. She understands how hard the situation is on him and is trying to calm him down. He replies "(t)hink she knows the difference?" Panel 3, the shortest one, shows an extreme close-up of the face of White Queen. Her speech balloon says "(y)ou think the *government* will? If this mutant 'cure' does exist then they will get hold of it. And they will line us up... don't you see where this is heading?" The look in her eyes betrays she is somehow angry, somehow suspicious; look which the layout of the page was used at its utmost to highlight. Illustrations 4.28 has five stripe-like panels; which present a pattern symmetry: Panels 1: short, Panel 2 high, Panel 3: the shortest; Panel 4: high; Panel 5 short. Only four panels will be analyzed, as only they relate to the chosen moment to be analyzed. The fifth panel, in spite of not belonging to this moment, was kept because of its role on the composition of meaning of the page as a whole. This pattern aims at maximizing the Panel in the middle (Panel 3), as mentioned before, the panel in which irritated face of the telepath White Queen is displayed. The subtle hint that something else than the cure is bothering her is given on the next panel.

Panel 4 has two planes: the close-up of Beast's face and upper shoulders on the first plane, closer to the reader; Wolverine, White Queen and Shadowcat respectively a bit further from the reader, are seen

bust up. The distance is the first clue the panel's arrangement gives. Often, the closer the object or living being to the reader, the bigger the meaning attached to it/her/him. However, Beast is completely quiet. All the conversation is being held by the other three *X-Men*. To Shadowcat remark "(y)eah, to *murder*, the professor would be so proud" White Queen replies "(a)s usual your naiveté is neither cute nor useful. Suppose it's not the government that gets it? Suppose it's some anti-mutant terrorist?" Wolverine completes "(o)r our new buddy from another world?" he seems to be looking at the girls. Shadowcat, her back to the reader, seems to be looking at White Queen. The former villainess nevertheless directing her speech to Shadowcat, directs her eyes to another person, to Beast and she does not look happy with what she is sensing. This is the first time at this moment that the panels shows, instead of Beast's back, his face. The reader does not need to be a telepath like White Queen to guess what Beast is feeling. His cat-like ears are down, the way a dog does when being reprimanded. His forehead is frowned, his eyes are sad. There are two sets of actions happening in this moment: the first or the general one shared by all the *X-Men* and the reader; the second one or the secretive one shared only by White Queen and the reader. (This issue will be addressed further at Subchapter 4.3.3).

Ilea concluded that Storm's and Rogue's reactions to the cure represent, respectively, the Social Model and the Disability the Medical Model of Disability. However, a counterpart to Rogue's positive could not be discerned in *Gifted*, or else, no member of the *X-Men* is enthusiastic for the cure; the Medical Model of disability could not be detected at this sequence. On the other hand, as the counterpart to Storm's reaction in comics is found in Wolverine's, the Social Model of disability was detected. Mantle distinguished the concept of Normalcy as crucial in the construction of Rogue's decision to be cured. However, as a counterpart to her reaction was not found, his conclusion can not be applied. Thus, the comics' version of the chosen moment reflects the Social Model of disability, but not the Medical Model as approached by Ilea; nor the concept of Normalcy as approached by Mantle (this concept is applicable, but as supporting concept).

4.3.3 Beast's reaction to the cure

Beast's reaction to the cure is discussed by Ilea Ramona and Kara Sheridan Ayers. I chose Beast to be studied in a sub-chapter apart from Storm and Rogue for two reasons. First, Storm's and Rogue's reactions are interconnected. Much of their representation of the pros and cons of the cure would be lost if analyzed separately. Beast's reaction presents an independent aspect to be approached by Disability Studies. Second, Storm and Rogue belong to a different mutant group from Beast. The heroines are human-like mutants, or else, they can mingle into human society without being detected. Beast, on the contrary, presents visible mutancy. Covered in blue fur, four-fingered, with cat-like eyes and face, for Beast going unnoticed is impossible.

In the film, the sequence which portrays Beast's reaction to the cure consists in two scenes: 1) his dialogue with Storm when he tells of the cure to the *X-Men* in the Xavier Institute, and 2) when he meets Leech and he has his blue-furred hand momentarily transformed into a human-like hand. In comics this sequence consists into two moments: 1) it begins when the *X-Men* learn of the cure and Beast remains silent pondering about it (See Subchapter 4.3.2), and 2) it is completed when angrily Wolverine confronts him when he learns that Beast is considering the cure. As the first part has already been discussed (Subchapter 4.3.2) I will analyze the second part in this subchapter. I will refer to this second part as *Beast's reaction to the cure* nevertheless for it will be more practical. Also, in this subchapter the pattern of analysis followed so far will be changed. I will begin by analyzing the comics' moment. Then, when the moment is more appropriated, I will bring out and discuss the analysis performed by Ilea and Ayers concerning the filmic moment.

Beast's reaction to the cure in comics comprises pages 15, 16 and 17 of *Astonishing X-Men* # 03; from which I will analyze pages 15 and 17 (Illustrations 4.29 and 4.30).



Illustration 4.29 - Beast's Reaction to the Cure. Part 1.
(Panels 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5)

Illustrations 4.29, the first part of the sequence, has five horizontal panels; its Venetian-blind-like pattern reinforced by the Panels 1, 2, 4 and 5 having the same rectangular size and format. Panel 1 depicts an extreme close up of the face of perplexed Beast – he has been just told by Wolverine to destroy his sample of the cure; the problem being, nobody knew of this sample. There are three balloons on the panel. The balloon at Beast’s right which reads “Emma⁹⁸” has deeper significance: White Queen has read his mind. The one at his left reads “She had no right to...” The fractioning of the sentence in two balloons aims at: firstly, to increase expectation to get to know what White Queen has done; secondly, to induce the reader to pass through Beast’s astonished face before reaching the end of the sentence. The particle “(s)he had no right to...” therefore is not a new piece of information, it complements Beast’s facial expression. The positioning of Wolverine and White Queen was clarified at the Subchapter 4.3.2, now, the positioning of Beast, which began to be inferred at 4.3.2 will be made clear.

The third balloon of Panel 1, which points somewhere off-panel, reads “She said she couldn’t help it” belong to Wolverine. Panel 2 depicts the back of Wolverine at the right, the bust of Beast at the left. Wolverine’s being in the shadows signifies that his standpoint on Beast’s thoughts is still unknown. His three interconnected balloons read: “(s)he said you were like a billboard”; “like neon”; “big neon sign flashing.” Beast’s cat-like ears are down, the way a feline does when irritated. This disposition matches the angriness in his eyes and the frowning on his forehead. The brief astonishment shown on the previous panel has given way to annoyance. Any doubt has been swept away; White Queen has indeed read his thoughts – as there have been visual hints previously (See Subchapter 4.3.2) – in spite of ethics forbidding her or Professor X to read people’s, and specially friends’ minds without consent.

Panel 3 portrays a shift in the order: Beast on the left, Wolverine on the right. It is an eye-level, long-shot panel. Beast is sitting behind a desk, head slightly down, back curved. His cat-like ears are down, the way a dog does when reprehended. His body language expresses defensiveness. Wolverine is standing, his body is straight, his hands in fist. His speech balloons have been subdivided in three interconnected balloons: “I wanna get off”; “I wanna get out” and “(i)s that how it goes, McCoy? You’ve had enough? You wanna see how the

⁹⁸ Emma Frost is the real name of the telepath White Queen.

other half lives their half-lives?” Their body language, the dialogue and the fact that one is sitting while the other is standing indicates the balance of power: Wolverine has the upper hand. Finally the position of Beast is revealed. He wants to be cured: the main aspect to be considered here is not his willingness for the cure, but instead *why* he wishes so. He wants to be *normal* so that he will not have to face society’s prejudice on a daily basis – or else, the concept of Normalcy is fundamental to understand Beast’s motivation. The most instigating aspect of this sequence and probably of all the sequences analyzed so far is Wolverine’s deconstructive perspective on the Concept of Normalcy. Lenard Davis affirms that “Disability Scholars want to examine the constructed nature of concepts like ‘normalcy’ and to defamiliarize them. (*Crips Strike Back* 504). The concept of normalcy rules that the normal body is complete, “whole(...), ideal (a) totality of systems” (*Enforcing Normalcy*, Lenard Davis 14); while the disabled body is “deformed, maimed, mutilated, broken, diseased” (05), incomplete. Yet Wolverine turns that “telling glance directed toward people with differences” (*Crips Strike Back* 501) to, instead, normal people, who live not fulfilling but only “half-lives” – lives that are not complete, whole or entire (Panel 03). The normal now is deconstructed into the incomplete, the unfulfilled, the broken one.

Panel 4 displays the bust of an increasingly annoyed Beast at the center, part of the back of Wolverine’s bust and head at the right. The balloon subdivided in two reads: “(t)he truth is that I don’t know what I want”, and “and that is none of your damn business”. These words reveal that Beast is still pondering on the pros and cons of the cure. Panel 5 shows, on the right side, an extreme close-up of part of Wolverine’s face, which highlights the angry look on his eyes when he says: “(w)rong answer”. He is famous by his aggressiveness and short temper. A brief fight follows, commenced by Wolverine, which was skipped for concise purposes (page 16 of *Astonishing X-Men* # 03). The anger Wolverine felt about being considered a disease (Illustrations 4.27 and 4.28) now is directed to his teammate who is just considering the cure. Beast and Wolverine belong to two different groups within mutants. They represent completely different realities. Wolverine possesses invisible mutancy; or else, he will be considered normal by the normal portion of society, unless he decides to reveal himself. He stands for people with disabilities who can go unnoticed as their disability is not visible. Beast, on the other hand, stands for visible disability (like people with missing limbs, people who rely on wheelchairs, wear dark glasses and canes, etc); or else, he has to put up

with normal people's gaze and the possible prejudice wherever he goes. It is clear now that Beast's anguished face at Panel 4 of Illustration 4.27 (See Subchapter 4.3.2) was due to the possibility of his being normalized. His dilemma has been presented slowly, so that the reader has plenty of time to think over the blue mutant reasons. We live in a society in which even those able-bodied, who possess whole, undamaged bodies go through painful and unnecessary surgeries to comply with the ideal of the norm. If *normal* people go through those and other procedures because of the society's demands of what an ideal normal body should look like, how strong is the pressure on people with disabilities to get normalized?

Illustration 4.30 (See next page) has five rectangular panels; three vertical ones and two horizontal ones; from which the first two panels will be analyzed. The three vertical panels break this comic book visual pattern where most of the panels are horizontal. This break of pattern highlights the content of these three panels. Furthermore, Panel 6 and 8 were drawn as to highlight the content of Panel 7, Panel which represents the climax of Beast's dilemma. Panel 6 presents the close up of Beast's face seen from a low-angle perspective. Panel 6 presents the following dialogue between Beast and Wolverine: "(d)on't push this Logan⁹⁹"; "I aint letting you..."; and "*I don't know what I am*". Beast's anguish concerning his not knowing what kind o mutation he has is expressed by the last line being written in bold. When his powers first manifested he looked like a normal human being, but as time passed his appearance has been gradually changing, moreover, he has been becoming more aggressive so that it has been difficult for him to control himself at times. Beast's mutancy can be traced, therefore, to some kind of progressive disability like muscular dystrophy, Fuch's dystrophy¹⁰⁰, Alzheimer, etc.

⁹⁹ Logan is Wolverine's real name.

¹⁰⁰ The holder of this dystrophy progressively loses sight, until getting blind.



Illustration 4.30 - Beast's Reaction to the Cure. Part 2.
(Panels 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10)

Panel 7 presents a significant teamwork between image and words, in which one reinforces the meaning given by the other. Part of Beast's back, right arm and hand are seen from a high-angle perspective. Due to its position in the center of the panel, the attention of the viewer is drawn to Beast's flurry, blue, four-fingered hand; at which he himself is looking. The first balloon on the panel reads: "I used to have fingers. I used to have a mouth you could kiss. I would walk down the street and..." His not finishing this line of thought holds more meaning than if he had completed it. Beast used to have a human-like appearance, his remembrance of times in which he could go unnoticed on the streets is so painful he prefers to change the subject. Furthermore, his girlfriend has just broken up with him, probably due to mutating having recently given him a cat-like head. This panel (Panel 7) represents the climax of Beast's dilemma; which has been building up since the announcement of the cure (See 4.3.2.).

The filmic adaptation of the storyline *Gifted* reserves a scene for this moment (Panel 7, Illustration 4.30); the one Kara Sheridan Ayres also found significant. In *X-Men: The Last Stand* Beast is the representative of mutants within the government, and is "strongly opposed" to "the notion of cure" (02). The cure in this adaptation is obtained from the blood of Leech, a mutant boy, whose power consists in inhibiting mutant powers. According to Ayers "one of more subtle, yet poignant, moments in the film occurs" when these two characters meet:

A simple handshake temporally morphs the representative's hand into normal function and appearance. Without speaking, the character's gaze at his now normal hand brings about the question of whether even the most hard core of our activists might at least temporarily waiver on the same question were it to actually be raised in our world. (02)

The question Ayers asks is not only directed at disability activists, but also to the reader of *Audacity Magazine: The Disabled Magazine for the Abled Mind*, the magazine her article was published on. "One of the first questions rose in the movie" she argues, is if the cure were available in the real world for any disability, "would you seek to acquire it?" (02). In fact, one of the points she considered positive in the film consisted in its raising questions "instead of" presenting "a forced persuasion" (03).

It can be concluded that the moment in which Beast gazes at his hand and ponders at the pros and cons of normality, both in comics and in the film, holds the same possible interpretation. The filmic version depicts the scene with more intensity: while in it Beast actually sees his hand transformed into a normal hand, in the comics he only imagines how that would feel like. The comics' version reserves more time to develop Beast's dilemma. In both cases, anyway, Beast is an advocate for mutant rights, an example for the mutant community, whose actions will reflect upon this community. In both cases, Beast disapproves what the *cure* represents for his community. However, in both cases, as Beast gazes at his hand, he has his strongest resolutions shaken, even if for some moments. This moment reflects, as Ayers points out, the personal decision each person with disabilities would face if the cure for his/her disability were available; as well as to which extent it is worthwhile to "sacrifice" his/her identity for "greater acceptance within society"(01). One example of such internal dilemma is within the Deaf community where many refuse the notion of the cure arguing that there is not wrong with them. However, even within this community, some who "have initially dismissed" the cure in the format of cochlear implants, later on "warmed up to them" (Ilea, 172).

Ramona Ilea begins her analysis of Beast's reaction to the *cure* in *X-Men: The Last Stand* with the following:

When the cure is first introduced, Storm asks, her voice filled with dismay and anger, 'Who would want this cure? I mean, what kind of coward would take it just to fit in?' Hank/Beast gives the answer that many parents of children with disabilities would give: 'It is cowardice to save oneself from persecution?' Later, Hank, who is covered in blue fur, points out to the beautiful Storm, 'Not all of us can fit in so easily' (178-179).

According to Ilea, this moment depicts the prejudice that not only mutants, but also people with disability are subject to (179). In fact, as Storm and Wolverine consider seeking for the *cure* as lack of courage, it implies that being mutant is a hard task, which all mutants should be brave enough to accomplish. It may not be instantly spotted by the reader/watcher though, that the real problem is *not* the cure or whether a mutant/person with disabilities opts for it or not. The real problem resides in how society perceives mutancy/disability. "Like many disabled people, the mutants are not well understood or well liked by

their fellow human beings” (179). So, many mutants/people with disabilities and/or parents of those, the *cure* “represent(s) the opportunity to save themselves and their children from the persecution that comes with being different” (179). The conclusion Ilea’s reaches concerning filmic Beast’s reaction to the cure, that is, that the conception that society has of the concept of normalcy leaves people with disabilities with no way out of persecution but being cured, is also applicable to Beast’s reaction in the comics.

Two more concepts of Disability Studies can be applied to Beast’s reaction in *Gifted*: the Medical and the Social Model of disability. While filmic Beast has only been tempted for fractions of seconds when he sees his hands metamorphosed into a human-normal hand, comics Beast is tormented by the possibility of the cure throughout five issues of the comic book *Astonishing X-Men*. Part of Part of Beast’s anguish is based on the kind of life he will lead if he opts for being normalized – argument which prompt doctors and scientists like Dr. Rao, who are advocates of the Medical Model of disability, to send the message that mutancy (or disability) is a one-sided problem to which the cure is the final and only solution; viewpoint which society at large adheres to. Yet another part of Beast’s anguish is based on the fact that he is an activist for mutant rights. He has been fighting since he first joined the *X-Men* to change public opinion so that one day mutants will not be stigmatized by society. However, it is a too great a temptation not having to face society’s prejudice on a daily basis. In other words, he is an advocate of the Social Model of disability; his normalization would have a great impact on his students, on his community, and on society in general. That is why that, in the end of the storyline, he decides that, as there is too much going on, to wait.

Summing up, analysis of Ayers and Ilea concerning filmic Beast’s reaction to the cure are applicable to comics Beast – the differences concerning intensity (more vivid in the movie) and timing (more time and slower pace at comics). Both versions enable the questioning as if even the most enthusiastic disabled activists would not at least ponder if a cure were available (as exposed by Ayers); the dilemma imposed by society’s prejudice on people with disabilities (Ilea). In addition, Beast’s reaction to the cure in the comics storyline *Gifted*, presents the Medical and the Social Model of Disability. The concept used to support these analyses, both in film and comics, is the concept of Normalcy.

CHAPTER V – FINAL REMARKS

“I am a mutant.” This sentence summarizes all the analysis conducted on this thesis. It is also a short answer to its research questions. It represents the main core of all analyses conducted by Chemers 2004, Ilea 2009, Mantle 2007, and Rinaldi 2008 even before they were conducted. While working on this thesis I focused on Disability Studies for theoretical parameters and on Comics Studies for analytical tools. Doing so, I may have lost sight of this main core. It came to me; nevertheless, unexpectedly. My forgetfulness of this main core can be represented by the categories of participants I expected for a lecture based on this thesis (G. Bahls *A participação*). I expected them to be either interested in comics or in Disability Studies and after a short investigatory talk with the participants I concluded my assumption was correct. I was mistaken, though. There was a third category of participants who had been attracted by the nature of my lecture. The first category was perplexed to find out *X-Men* comics could hold deeper significance. The second category seemed to agree with the interpretation of *X-Men* comics within a Disability Studies frame. After waiting patiently while comics’ fans talked to me long after the lecture had finished, this participant came to me and said: “Now I know why I like *X-Men* so much. Not that I didn’t really know...but you made it clearer to me. I am a mutant.”

The main objective of this thesis, to assess whether mutants depicted in comics can be understood as characterizations of disability, has been verified and confirmed. Let us discuss the final considerations which will be approached within three groups: Group 1) concepts of Disability Studies; Group 2) conclusions reached by Chemers et al; and Group 3) general conclusions. The first group will discuss the concepts of Disability Studies used by Chemers et al. to support their analysis of the movies *X2: X-Men United* and *X-Men: The Last Stand* from a Disability Studies perspective, and if these concepts can also be used to support the analyses of the *X-Men* comics storylines *God Loves, Man Kills* and *Gifted*. The second group will discuss the conclusions reached by Chemers et al. concerning the movies and whether they are applicable to comics as well. The third group will discuss the final conclusions.

Group 1: After a close analysis of the texts from Chemers et al. the following concepts of Disability Studies were distinguished: concept of Normalcy; the distinction between disease and disability; the medical

and the social model of Disability; and Eugenics. All these concepts were also used to support the analysis of *X-Men* comics. However, not always the same concepts used to analyze a filmic sequence were present in the correspondent comics sequence; and at times a concept used to support the analysis of the comics sequence was not present in the filmic analysis. More importantly, the analytical chapter disclosed one expected event: the *Concept of Normalcy* has been used as point of departure for every analysis conducted by Chemers et al. (*X-Men* films) and in my thesis (*X-Men* comics). At the beginning I was surprised. Then, I concluded it just makes sense. This fact confirms Lennard Davis arguing that in order

(t)o understand the disabled body, one must return to the concept of the norm, the normal body. So much of writing about disability has focused on the disabled body as the object of study, just as the study of race has focused on the person of color. But as with recent scholarship on race, which has turned its attention to whiteness, I would like to focus not so much on the construction of disability as on the construction of normalcy. (*Constructing Normalcy* 23)

Sadly, it also confirms another statement from Davis “(t)he problem is not the person with disabilities, the problem is the way that *normalcy* is constructed to create the ‘problem’ of the disabled person”(09).

Group 2: But for the exceptions that will follow, the conclusions by Chemers et al. concerning *X-Men* movies are also applicable to *X-Men* comics. Movies and comics are different Medias, each one with its unique tools to take full advantage of for a compelling storytelling. Comics, for instance, rely heavily on closure (See page 61) as a storytelling tool. These unique characteristics are responsible for the different nuances of intensity within the moments studied. For instance, on the announcement of the cure, the comics version possesses more time to expose the allegedly two sides of mutancy than the filmic version, whereas the need to condensate a thorough plot in the minimal possible time is paramount. On the other hand, on Beast’s reaction to the cure, the comics version where the mutants gazes on his blue-furred hand has not as much impact as in the filmic version, where he sees his hand momentarily transformed into a human-like hand.

The exceptions cited above concern two themes: 1) sequences not found and its conclusions; 2) different conclusion to sequence. The

first theme concerns the sequences – specifically the fact that not all the sequences selected from the texts from Chemers et al. could be found in the comics storylines on which the movies were based. While all the sequences selected from *X-Men: The Last Stand* could be discerned in the comics storyline *Gifted*, only one sequence selected from *X2: X-Men United* could be discerned in *God Loves, Man Kills*. The sequences which could not be found are: 1) *Have you tried not being a mutant?* and, 2) *Because we shouldn't have to*. The conclusion for the first sequence reached by Martin Mantle and Michel M. Chemers is that disability, especially if not acknowledged as a disability by society at large like depression and obesity, is considered a matter of personal will – or else, if the person with disabilities tries harder, he/she will automatically become normal. This conclusion could not be detected or reached in any other moment analyzed in this thesis. The conclusion for the second sequence reached by Michael M. Chemers and Jennifer Rinaldi is that people with disabilities should not have to pretend to be normal to accepted by society. This conclusion was based on the shapeshifter Mystique's answer to the questioning of why she does not pretend to be normal all the time: *(b)ecause we shouldn't have to*. Although *God Loves, Man Kills* does not present a correspondent meaningful sentence which impact can be immediately felt, the storyline does present a character who shares Mystique's attitude; about whom the same conclusion can be reached. Nightcrawler refuses to pretend to be normal. For a while he used an image inducer which made him look like a regular human being. Some issues prior to this storyline he refused to do it any longer. He walks on the streets like himself in spite of the uproar he causes due to his inhuman appearance¹⁰¹. In short, concerning the sequences, from the six selected from cited *X-Men* movies, two are not present in the cited *X-Men* comics storylines. From the conclusions reached by Chemers et al. concerning these six sequences, only one conclusion could not reached when analyzing the correspondent storyline.

The second exception concerns different conclusions to a sequence. One of the sequences, Stryker's reasoning after his persecution of mutants, seems to have different conclusions for the filmic and comics version. While filmic Stryker (the Colonel) relies on science to justify his acts, comics Stryker (Reverend) relies on

¹⁰¹ He has dark-blue fur all over his body, has pointed ears, three fingered hands and three toed feet, and a pointed tail.

religion¹⁰². According to Chemers and Rinaldi Colonel Stryker, in order to endorse his eugenicist agenda, 1) reduces mutants to *disease*; 2) *dehumanizes* mutants. The analysis conducted in this thesis demonstrates that comics Reverend Stryker 1) *dehumanizes* mutants, 2) then reduces them to less than human, to *monstrosity*, to *abomination*. While filmic Stryker misuses science to justify his acts (*scientific racism*), comics Stryker misuses religion. However; the real reason is the same: *prejudice* and *pride*. Therefore, the conclusion which seemed to differ at first instance, in fact is the same for film and comics: both Strykers' true motivation is prejudice and pride.

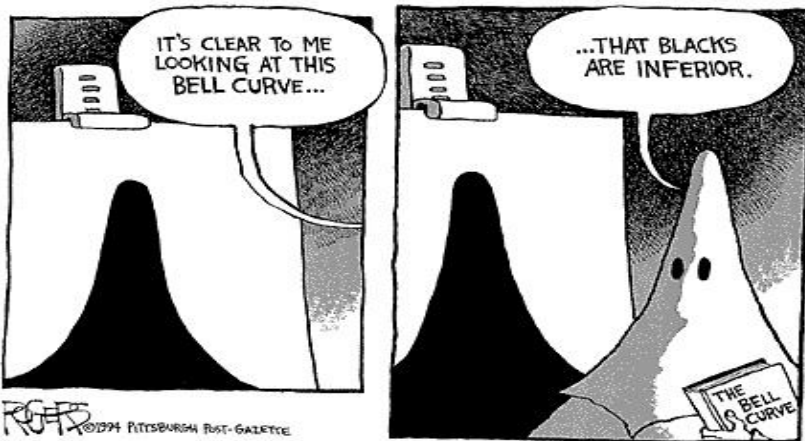


Illustration 5.1 Eugenics, the Bell Curve and Prejudice. By Rob Rogers¹⁰³.

The comics strip from Rob Rogers above exemplifies the mishandling of science to justify the prejudice and pride¹⁰⁴ of a person or organization. The first panel depicts what at first glance seems to be a graphic displaying the Bell Curve (See Eugenics, Subchapter 3.2.4). The speech balloon above the chart reads: "It's clear to me looking at this bell curve....". Up to this moment the comics strip looks coherent and logical: a Bell Curve on a chart and someone about to make a scientific reading of the graphic. The second panel discloses an unexpected

¹⁰² I do not, at any moment, imply that neither science nor religion are ill-intended institutions. However, ill-intended people can make use of any institution to support their misdeeds.

¹⁰³ Found at Rob Rogers Gallery: Archive - Best of 94 <http://www.robrogers.com/gallery.html>.

¹⁰⁴ Pride in one's high consideration of one's race, normality, sex, religious beliefs, nationality, etc.

disclosure. What seemed to be a Bell Curve is, in fact, the projected shadow of the Ku Klux Klan pointed hood the speaker is wearing; his final words are "...that blacks are inferior". Yet shocking, these words are not unexpected considering he is unmistakably racist. His holding a book entitled *The Bell Curve* signifies he is using a probable vast knowledge on the subject to support his argument. It is obvious now that statistics and science are being used to back up his prejudice; and that the Bell Curve is in fact just a *projection* of his racism and prejudice. Similarly, Colonel Stryker's scientific rationale and Reverend Stryker's religious rationale for the persecution of mutants are just projections of their prejudice and pride. They could not care less for science and religion. These are just means for them to accomplish their intents.

Clearly, based on the moments analyzed at the analytical chapter, the conclusions reached concerning *X-Men* films by Chemers et al. are applicable to the *X-Men* comics storylines *God Loves, Man Kills* and *Gifted*; or else, mutants in both media can be understood as characterizations of disability. But, what does this conclusion say about *X-Men* comics? In their way to a rescue operation, Wolverine remarks "(t)ime to make nice with the public, eh, Summers?" (*Astonishing X-Men* # 01 21) referring to the group new mission statement: changing the public's perception on *X-Men* from freaks to a super-hero team. Cyclops objects: "(w)e have to do more than that, Logan. We have to *astonish* them" (my emphasis 21-23). Maybe that is what *X-Men* comics are doing. They are astonishing people with the social issues they tackle, and among them, the issues people with disabilities want to raise awareness of. This is yet another reason why they are *Astonishing Comics*¹⁰⁵.

¹⁰⁵ Other reasons for the choosing of *Astonishing Comics* at the title of this thesis were given throughout the thesis.

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¹⁰⁶ I adapted the guidelines for Graphic Narrative given by the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, 7th edition, 2009 for the specific needs of this dissertation. I opted to write first the title of the comics storyline, and then the name of the writer, for clarity. People who read the drafts of this thesis kept on mistaking the writer of the storyline for some researcher analyzing the storyline, when the analysis was mine.

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