

## Female Supervillains



## Antiheroes

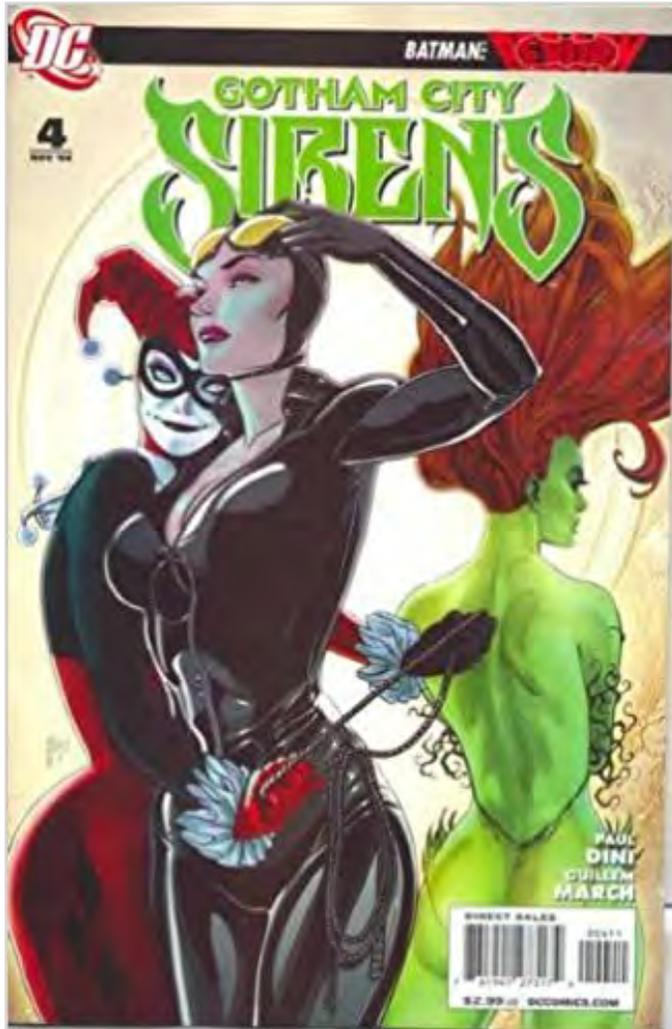


A zine on the bodies of antiheroes and supervillains by:  
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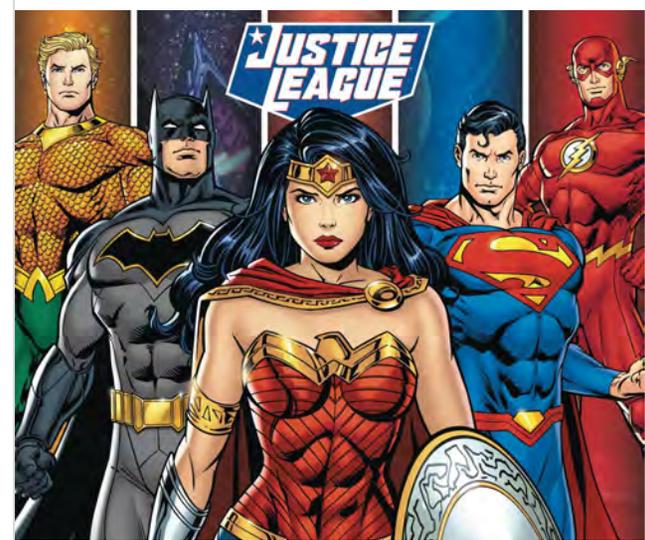
## Heroes' Testament: Primal Urges

Beyond appealing to the male demographic of comic books, making female villains so seductive tests the morally pure superhero if they can separate their morality from their primal urges. An "ideal superhero is a man of reason and therefore should be able to separate their hero mind from their bodily urges. However, Batman's ego is shown struggling between his Id and superego despite the fact that a hero should favor the righteous of the superego.



Batman is seen to fall victim to the seductive nature of these ladies, especially Catwoman, who he has an affair with and eventually marries. This makes Batman's character more relatable to viewers as Batman is one of the few superheroes that is human; however, his humanistic urges do not prevent him from saving Gotham, thus proving that a person doesn't need to have superpower or abandon their humanity to be a superhero.

## Bodies of Classic Superheroes



A majority of the iconic line-up of superheroes do not bear any drastic physical deformities that could suggest any appearance other than an attractive one. A few of these superheroes do wear masks, but for the purpose of concealing their identity instead of concealing any facial defect. A common motif among these iconic heroes is being conventionally attractive. Being attractive to the public is an echo of the perfect heroic profile -- having the physical qualities of gods and goddesses.



## Antiheroes - Deviation from the Classic Hero

Anti-heroes are a delineation from the “ideal” hero as they are not always morally upright or as righteous. Anti-heroes possess flawed traits as they possess moral compromises like unwarranted violence and have vices such as drug abuse or alcoholism. Antiheroes blur the lines between black and white ethics into shades of gray as they explore the flexibility of realistic morality.



The existence of antiheroes is a response to the fact that traditional heroes are not relatable to the public. **How can a righteous hero exist in a cruel world where events like 9/11, the Boston Marathon Bombing, and Sandy Hook take place?** Given the tragic events that have occurred, morally pure characters are not reflective of ourselves or the people that surround us. Hence, we turn to antiheroes, who serve as a beacon of hope as they find honor in redemptive acts while lacking the moral perfection of “ideal” heroes.

## Negative Connotations of Being Ugly

As written in Jeffrey Cohen’s *Monster Theory*, “Dark skin was associated with the fires of hell, and so signified in Christian mythology demonic provenance” (Cohen 10). Throughout history, physically different qualities such as skin color were regarded as monstrous attributes that “malformed their bodies,” and were demonized in association with negative connotations (Cohen 10). Thus oftentimes in society, unattractive bodies or deformed appearances are associated with having evil intentions or impure morals.

However, the looming presence of antiheroes in media is a direct contradiction to the notion that evil is inherently connected to unruliness and unattractiveness. Our antiheroes are canonically ugly and possess horribly deformed bodies, yet they carry out heroic missions using albeit morally suspicious methods. While these antiheroes may not hesitate to commit monstrous acts like murder and torture, they are intrinsically motivated by heroic and honorable purposes.

In addition, popular female villains are another instance in which the partnership between ugly bodies and evil is weakened. Female villains adhere so tightly to the overarching beauty standards in society with their attractive bodies and faces, but their morals and goals directly clash with their physical perfection. Instead of having a hideous body to accompany their equally hideous sense of morality, these villains are hypersexualized and drawn as extremely sexual entities.

## Catwoman

In comics and in movies, Catwoman is beautiful, seductive, and carries herself mysteriously with an attractive fluid body. Catwoman is portrayed with a feline demeanor: sly, deceptive, and agile. While her cat-like beauty earns her the name Catwoman, her depiction is often hypersexualized.



Catwoman is often illustrated in a tight, curve-hugging bodysuit that enhances her sexual appeal. Her suit gives the appearance of something plastic or latex-like, which is reminiscent of popular BDSM apparel. Furthermore, Catwoman carries a whip as her main weapon, amplifying her connection to BDSM culture and her sexual overtones. Her hypersexualized BDSM-like clothing also further emphasizes sexual deviancy.

## Bodies of Antiheroes



Many well-known antiheroes are distinguished by their unique deformity that sets them apart from the perfect physique of “ideal” heroes. These physical deformities are occasionally a manifestation of an internal conflict that the antihero must overcome on their path to becoming righteous. For example, Zuko (pictured on the top left) has his iconic burn on his left eye that is the punishment of his hubris during his youth before being banished from his kingdom. The deformation of their bodies serves to show that they are not perfect and indeed have vices that prevent them from being “ideal” heroes.



## Venom: A Man & Symbiote

Venom is an antihero duo that consists of Eddie Brock, a journalist, and Venom, an alien symbiote. Originally portrayed as the arch-enemy of beloved superhero, Spiderman, Venom's character has shifted to a hero of two minds, reminiscent of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.



The duo align with the conflicted psyche of an antihero. Eddie is a severely flawed individual as he has strained social relationships, an unstable job and home, and is borderline alcoholic. Likewise, Venom is extremely impulsive and has a looser sense of morality than Eddie, representative of the Id. However, the duo are truly heroes at heart as they protect Mrs. Chen by eating a robber and protect the city from Carnage.

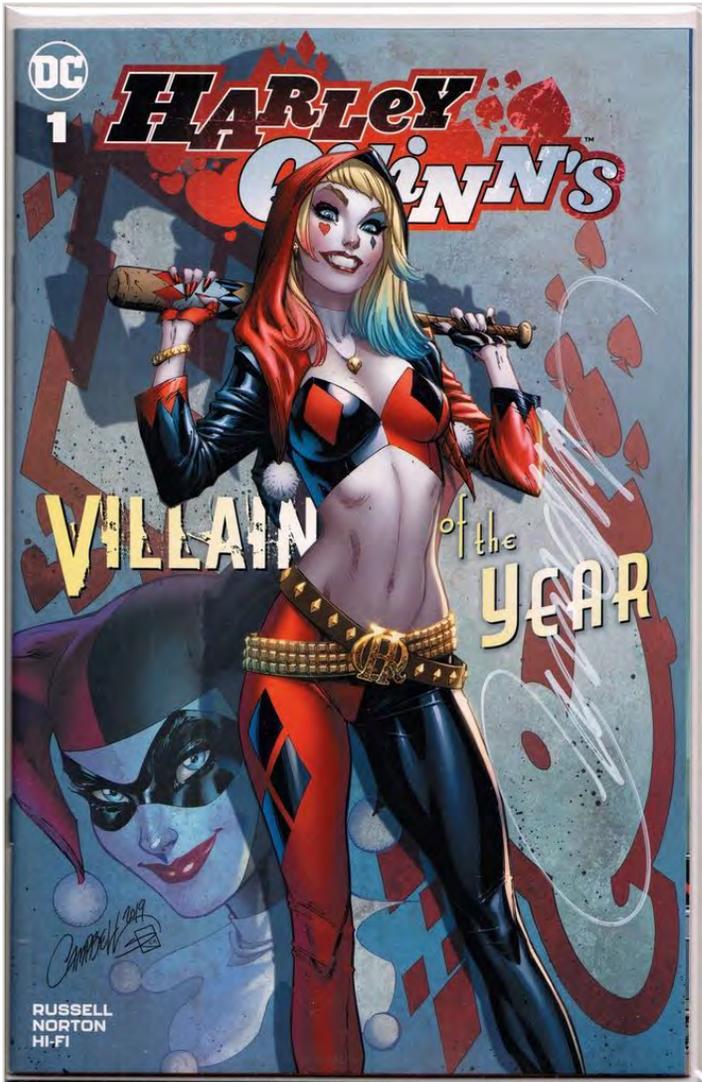
## Poison Ivy: Bi-panic Botanist



Poison Ivy's basic body profile is similar to many female characters villain or hero: beautiful, seductive, and a conventionally attractive body with curves in all the right places. However, Poison Ivy is often written in comics as a sexual entity that entraps men and women with her vines that are an extension of her body. She is canonically bisexual or lesbian and therefore demonstrates her comfort with exploring and exploiting the sexual nature of the male and female body. Thus, Poison Ivy in her self is a character that embodies the most humanistic poison: lust.



## Harley Quinn: Psycho Lover



Dr. Harleen Quinzel was a former psychiatrist who worked at Gotham City's Arkham Asylum before falling in love with the Joker and turning into the supervillain she is today, Harley Quinn. Throughout her depictions Harley is wearing skin-tight leather, often exposing her midriff. Additionally, one of Harley's favorite weapons is her baseball bat.

Harley's character is a hypersexualized psychotic girlfriend as she's depicted as head over heels for the Joker, exhibits a flirtatious personality and carries her bat, a phallic object, demonstrating that she's constantly seeking or controlled by male authority.

## Venom as a Deformity



Although Eddie's body itself doesn't possess any physical deformities, Venom in himself is a deformity as he is a symbiotic alien with jagged teeth, veins running throughout his body, and an immense stature. The internal conflict between Eddie and Venom mimics Jekyll and Hyde as Eddie's morality is sacrificed for the physical capabilities of Venom to help people. Eddie provides the body and Venom provides the enhancements to carry out their desires. Venom and Eddie often share the same motivations and desires, but Venom is often the one egging Eddie to act on their impulses without considering the consequences. Venom is truly the nagging voice in Eddie's head that Eddie can't get rid of. Their conflicting dynamic could allude to a nuanced form of neurodivergent conditions. Seeing a person like Venom portray such honor despite their hardships is enheartening in a society of flawed people.



## Venom vs. the Public in Scene

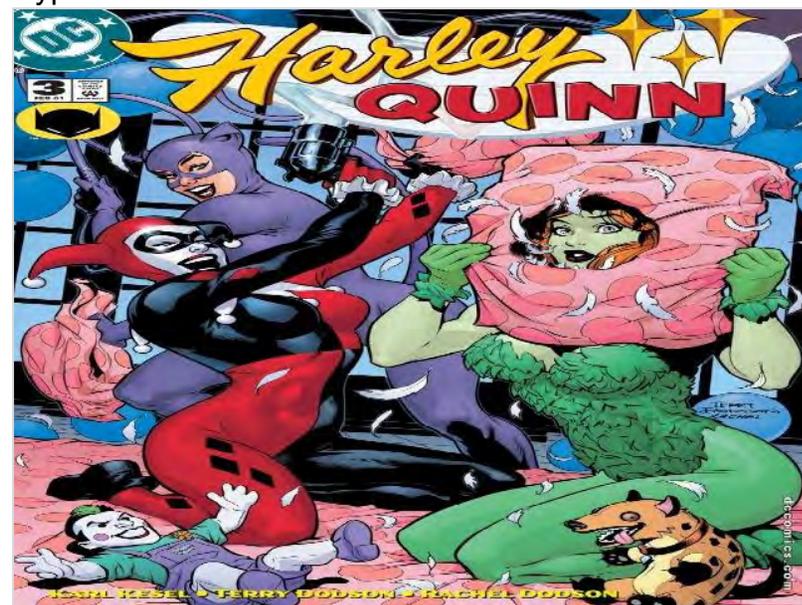


In this scene, Venom has recently had a fight with his host, Eddie Brock, and has decided to leave his body and live his life jumping from host to host in order to survive. During his time with Eddie, Venom is often hidden by his own will or by Eddie preventing him from surfacing. This is as a protective measure as Venom is a giant alien creature with large eyes and jagged teeth. Now that Venom has left Eddie, he is no longer suppressed from showing his true form; however, the humans that see Venom in his true form assume that he is simply a creature and congratulate him on his “amazing costume”. This shows the natural tendency for humans to perceive threats as simply fake in order to protect themselves from the fear that something so hideous and dangerous can be standing right in front of them and posing a genuine threat to their physical safety and schemas.

## Sexualization of Female Villains



While popular antiheroes are canonically unattractive despite their heroic qualities, it is interesting to see that this is not the case with female villains who are unapologetically evil. Despite embodying crime and carnage, female villains are nonetheless extremely attractive and are often portrayed with a hypersexualized demeanor.



## Handsome Actors Playing Not-So-Handsome Antiheroes

Deadpool is played by Ryan Reynolds who was named the Sexiest Man Alive in 2010. He was also named the Sexiest Dad Alive. Eddie Brock is portrayed by Tom Hardy who is an increasingly famous actor starring in iconic franchises such as the Batman storyline. Wolverine is played by Hugh Jackman who was named the Sexiest Man Alive in 2008. All three of these well-known actors are physically attractive by conventional Hollywood beauty standards. They are tall, muscular, and handsome men bearing a sexy rugged aesthetic.

**But why are conventionally attractive men playing seemingly monstrous characters?**

Many of today's most popular and sought-after actors are extremely attractive, such as the actors that play our beloved antiheroes. However, in transforming these actors into these physically flawed characters, this unattainable attractiveness is made less so as they portray deformed and monstrous characters. This demotion in bodily appeal serves to bring the antihero closer to the audience, showing them that even actors that have been chosen to be the Sexiest Man Alive can be regarded as unattractive and almost monster-like as they portray their respective antiheroes. Casting physically attractive actors could also help influence the audience in making the antihero's body and appearance more palatable. While an ugly hero can be relatable to the audience, someone that is "too ugly" can lean too far into the monstrosity aesthetic and have the opposite effect on the audience.

## Deadpool: Merc with a Mouth

Deadpool or Wade Wilson is one of the most notable antiheroes. Known for his witty fourth-wall breaks, Deadpool presents himself as a raunchy, sexually explicit mercenary turned that reels the audience in with his vulgar jokes.



As a result of his cancer and the accelerated healing factor, Deadpool's skin is horrifically disfigured. Wilson's psyche was also affected by the healing factor, plaguing him with psychosis and mental instability. Compared to other antiheroes, Deadpool is extremely flawed mentally and physically and he is often struggling through life. However, despite his goofy nature Deadpool has morals albeit nontraditional that motivate his heroic acts.

## Deadpool's "Burns"



In the above photo, Wade Wilson is wearing a hoodie and hiding under an umbrella in broad daylight to hide his face. Deadpool's skin is mottled with scar-like lesions that gives him the appearance of an acid burn all over his body. The condition of his skin is what makes Deadpool so unattractive in this storyline. Typically, heroes wear masks for the purpose of concealing their identity from the public, but Deadpool is forced to wear a mask because the sheer sight of his disfigured face is so disgusting and repulsive to passersby. Deadpool is canonically one of the ugliest heroes in the MCU. Nevertheless, Deadpool is increasingly popular amongst fans. This could partly be due to his unique personality, but having a character that is iconically ugly doing all the honorable acts a hero does brings solace to the audience. Not everyone can be as handsome or attractive as traditional superheroes are, so seeing Deadpool gain respect and fame despite his "monstrous" aesthetic is inspiring and hopeful to the audience. Deadpool serves as an example of not needing to be physically attractive to earn the love of the public.

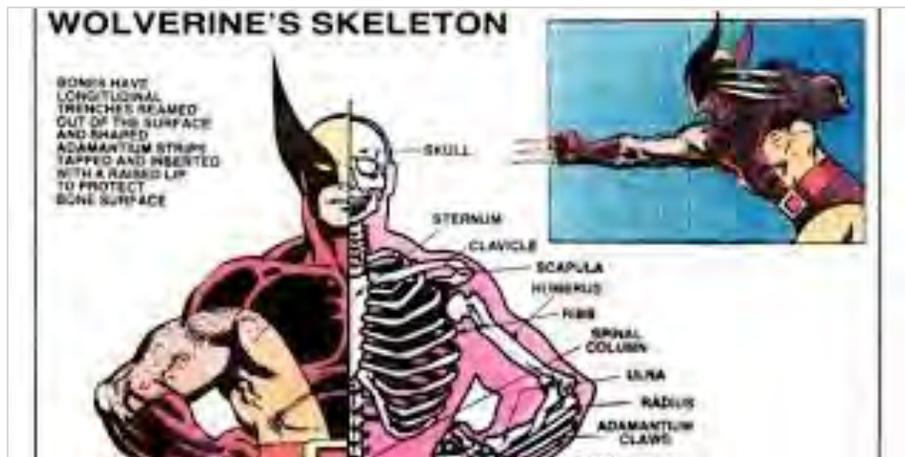
## Actors vs Characters



## Wolverine vs Audience



Out of the three antiheroes, Wolverine is the most physically palatable as he doesn't have to hide his face unlike Venom and Deadpool. Wolverine's main deformities have less drastic effects on his overall face. However, Wolverine does have to hide his principle deformity which are his claws by retracting them as his skeletal deformity and abnormal regeneration are already hidden within his body. Wolverine's physical mutations are animalistic in nature rather than monstrous as seen with Venom, which influences our preference to accepting Wolverine as a hero and not a monstrosity.



## Deadpool vs the Audience



Deadpool requires a full body suit to hide his monstrous scars, yet Clark Kent only needs to put on fake glasses to camouflage his striking good looks. Superman has the superhero equivalent of "pretty privilege." Deadpool's greatest insecurity being his appearance is not a sentiment unique only to him. Much of the audience can find Deadpool's weakness relatable being as not everyone finds themselves looking like a Greek god such as Henry Cavill as Superman. Deadpool's success as an ugly hero actively breaks the beauty standard instilled by traditional superheroes. Deadpool stands to represent the notion that good looks don't make a hero, it's what you do with your abilities that defines your heroism.



## Wolverine aka Logan

James “Logan” Howlett’s mutant abilities were induced when his father was shot by Thomas Logan, his estranged biological father. His new abilities made him a partial amnesiac. His abilities give Logan an animalistic and monstrous persona including enhanced senses, agility, and six retractable claws. He is often known to go “berserk” in uncontrollable rage.



Wolverine grew up with extreme neglect and suffered trauma in his upbringing which affects his overall psyche with the add-on of his partial amnesia. Wolverine has the basic morals that motivate his heroic missions, but his lack of hesitancy in spilling blood and killing those who stand in his way lead him astray from the profile of traditional hero.

## Wolverine Deformities: An Unstoppable Force



Wolverine’s deformities stem from his extreme durability and strength. Wolverine was born with the genes of a wolverine, allowing him to develop bone claws, which he eventually used to kill his biological father and childhood friend, Rose. Wolverine’s deformities are eventually exacerbated when adamantium is forcibly fused with his bones when he is kidnapped by Project X. Thus creating a nearly indestructible superhero with animalistic rage and immense healing potential. Wolverine’s deformities make him the embodiment of unruly mania.