

## Article 2

## The Brand and the Bold: Synergy and Sidekicks in Licensed-based Children's Television

Zachary Roman  
College of Communications  
The Pennsylvania State University

Matthew P. McAllister, Ph.D.  
Department of Film-Video & Media Studies  
College of Communications  
The Pennsylvania State University

### Keywords

Children's Television, Synergy, Licensing, Media Brands, Media Promotion, Superheroes, Batman.

### Abstract

This paper examines the animated program *Batman: The Brave and the Bold (BB&B)*, debuting in 2008 on the US cable television Cartoon Network, and related licensing as products of mediated corporate synergy. The program integrates various Time Warner subsidiaries and licensing partners to create a coordinated universe of characters with particular ideological implications for branded character relationships, commodity play, and gender norms. Explored are two elements of *BB&B*: the number and type of guest heroes and villains on the program and in subsidiary licenses, and the role of Batman in the narrative world of *BB&B*. By emphasizing the necessary pairing of large numbers of mostly younger male guest heroes with the older Batman, the brand encourages a "completist" approach toward consumption and a masculine style of play. Implications for the future of children's entertainment in a world of corporate media are discussed.

### Introduction

In 1955 the U.S. comic book publisher DC Comics premiered *The Brave and The Bold*, initially an adventure book featuring knights and Vikings (Daniels, 1999). Eventually the title showcased DC's many superhero characters such as Hawkman, Wonder Woman and the Justice League of America. The comic shifted its focus to Batman beginning in 1966, with each issue pairing him with another DC superhero, often a "second-tier" character such as The Creeper or Deadman, as they battled different supervillains. Together with the competing *Marvel Team-Up*, which featured Spider-Man, *The Brave and the Bold* solidified the long tradition of comic books as a medium that promoted characters through the "cross-over," a strategy used to a lesser extent in other forms such as fictional television (Mittell, 2010).

The switch to Batman was largely due to the character's popularity in television at that time. ABC's primetime series *Batman* became a hit in 1966. On one level, DC's exploitation of that popularity foreshadowed later cross-media licensing strategies (see Hardy, 2010; Meehan, 1991). However, the marketing and licensing of the 1960s comic and its potential tie-in with the television show was very limited. DC Comics was at that time a relatively independent company focused almost exclusively on the comic book medium, not yet being owned by a large media conglomerate (the company that eventually became Time Warner acquired DC in the late 1960s). Reflecting this organizational autonomy, *The Brave and the Bold* version of Batman was darker and less campy than the TV program (Daniels, 1999). Stories almost never referenced other media versions of Batman or the plots in the television show. Little if any subsidiary licensing resulted from the pairings or with the title of *The Brave and the Bold*.

This team-up title has been updated for a more modern era. *Batman: The Brave and the Bold (BB&B)* premiered as a weekly children's television program in November 2008 on cable television's Cartoon Network. Like the 1960's comic, the cable TV version also capitalized on the then-current popularity of Batman, in the more recent case stemming from the grim and violent blockbuster film *The Dark Knight*, the biggest box-office hit of 2008. In *BB&B*, Batman is still joined by an array of guest heroes in defeating guest villains and is still targeted primarily at young males.

However, the differences in the two versions are especially telling about larger trends in millennial youth marketing and media. The new *BB&B* is highly merchandised through branded toys, a comic book, video game and DVD releases, among other ancillary licensing. Exploiting the narrative characteristics of series television, both the number of guest heroes and guest villains are greater in the modern television program. The subsidiary licenses, especially the action figures, focus even tighter on the male market. Batman is often older and almost always more authoritative (and authoritarian) than the guest heroes. And, as a likely driving force behind these changes, the narrative relationships and branding consistencies between the licenses -- including the synergistic integration of toys, action figures and media properties -- are much greater and more strategic.

These elements of *BB&B* -- both unique in their particular blend and indicative in their underlying logics of cross-media commodification -- converge characteristics of the modern media corporation, the history and flexibility of Batman as a commodity text, and shifting emphases in both the comic book industry and children's television. This case study offers insights into the current level of commercial and promotional pressures on children's entertainment, and how such pressures may be manifested in branded and coordinated commodity texts and the potential ideological meanings of those texts. *BB&B*'s combination of the creation of new cross-over relationships among previously established characters, youth-oriented sub-brands, gender-segregated appeals, and coordination of different media licenses illustrates and updates the convergence of different historically developed techniques and the current hyper-marketing orientation of niche-oriented media conglomerates.

Analyzing *BB&B* television episodes, other licensed media such as the *BB&B* video game and comic book, and *BB&B* toys and action figures, this article explores the commodity and licensing nature of *BB&B* as indicative of the corporatization of children's television. After reviewing the historical and current context of children's media and specifically *BB&B*, an analysis of the first season of the program and its licensing highlights the property's symbolism as modern media synergy and its implications for children's mediated entertainment. The article argues that these commodity strategies structure the text to encourage ideologies of "completist" character relationships and masculinist world-views.

## **The Changing Contexts of Children's Television and Comic Books**

The concept of the licensed character used to entertain -- and advertise to -- children existed at the beginnings of industrialized mass media, as exemplified by late-19th and early-20th century examples such as the Yellow Kid and Buster Brown (Cross, 1997; Gordon, 1998). Industrialized comic strips, comic books, books, radio, recorded music and film all helped to define modern children's culture as based upon established characters that could be heavily merchandised. Scholars such as Pecora (1998) and Kline (1993) argued that children's television played an especially key role in the use of licensed characters, as this section explores. Programming based upon comic book superheroes was a large part of this, including Saturday morning cartoons beginning in the 1960s featuring characters from both Marvel (Spider-Man and Fantastic Four on ABC) and DC (Superman on CBS and Super Friends on ABC).

The 1980s was a key decade in the commercialization of children's television and still influences textual and merchandising strategies today. Before the 1980s, children's television programming, although often licensed-based, was restricted by the threat of future federal policy (Kunkel, 1988) and the separation of licensing stakeholders (such as toy companies and television producers). However, industry-friendly policies from the Reagan administration and the new partnerships between the television and toy industries encouraged what Engelhardt (1986) labeled "The Strawberry Shortcake Strategy" (named after

a greeting-card character that was heavily licensed and an early example of the strategy). In this strategy, the licensed property (such as a toy line) came first, with the tie-in television program following. With *He Man and the Masters of the Universe*, for example, co-produced by toy-company Mattel and animation-creator Filmation, the television program -- conceived after the creation of the toy line -- became a de facto ad for the toy. Seventy million action figures of various *Masters of the Universe* characters were sold in the first four years of the character's existence (Engelhardt, 1986), with the cartoon displaying the different toy-based characters and supplementing traditional advertising for the toys.

The Shortcake Strategy affected both the narrative structure and gendered qualities of children's entertainment. A key part of the strategy was to integrate large groups of licensed characters that all worked in teams and each with a special look/function. Bainbridge (2010) points out that each *Masters of the Universe* action figure had a specific articulation that exaggerated and exemplified the character's specific trait. As Engelhardt (1986) argued, "The whole point is to get the child to buy whole teams of good guys and teams of bad guys" (p. 90). So while a toy line such as Barbie depended upon different versions of a relatively individualistic and long-established central character (and her accessories) to generate sales (Rogers, 1999), *Strawberry Shortcake* created many newly developed characters and their mediated relationships for their appeal. Similar licensing also occurred in film during this time as *Star Wars* expanded available action figures to include many variations of storm troopers, rebel fighters, and cantina aliens; by the late 1980s, more than 90 different *Star Wars* action figures existed (Cross, 1997; see also Gray, 2010). As Cross noted, having the complete set of movie characters as toys allowed children to reenact even crowded scenes from the movie.

Although Seiter (1993) argues that such commercialization of children's entertainment can create spaces for historically under-recognized groups such as girls (assuming they are perceived as a viable market), both the programming and merchandising of children's television are highly stereotyped and segregated by gender (Aubrey & Harrison, 2004; Johnson & Young, 2002). Ads targeting boys are more likely to feature "destruction" language whereas girl-oriented ads use more "nurturing" language (Johnson & Young, 2002). With programming, physical aggression is more likely to be the act of boy characters whereas social aggression is more associated with girl characters (Luther & Legg, Jr., 2010). Superhero cartoons tend to feature male heroes and male leaders, and female heroes tend to be overly emotional and concerned with appearance (Baker & Raney, 2007). Gendered tendencies arguably are exacerbated by the Shortcake Strategy -- with its many resulting licenses -- and the increased emphasis on niche marketing (the latter discussed by Turow, 2006). While *Care Bears* and *My Little Pony* licenses would target girls, *He-Man* and *GI Joe* would target boys. As will be illustrated, *BB&B* combined the character-relationship and niched-gender strategies with the comic book cross-over in a unique synergistic manner.

After the 1980s, the Children's Television Act of 1990 restricted "program-length commercials," but the definition was a narrow one: the advertising of licensed characters during programs that feature the same licensed characters. U.S. television programs based on licensed characters, including toys, are still permissible, and commercials for those characters may be placed during other programs. In addition, children's television in the 1980s and 1990s became increasingly integrated with corporate "synergy," in which programming is based on the licenses owned by distributors or multi-media conglomerates. Time Warner (owner of Cartoon Network), Disney (owner of ABC and the Disney Channel) and Viacom (owner of Nickelodeon) were especially aggressive in using their owned networks to promote corporate controlled subsidiary licenses. As a result of the above, in licensing-based children's television, the programs, program promotions and commercials for licensed toys and media commodities become stylistically and iconographically similar, making earlier regulations ineffective (McAllister & Giglio, 2005). Such trends are reinforced by the continued attractiveness of the modern children's market through the 2000s (Linn, 2004; Schor, 2005). Linn (2004) notes the tendency to create versions of media brands targeted for the very young, including *Winnie the Pooh Baby* software designed for the nine-month-old, with the idea that as the child ages, his/her love for those brands will graduate to the older versions.

The comic book industry is a significant part of the emphasis on licensing and corporate synergy. Both DC and Marvel -- the two largest producers of comic books in the United States -- position themselves as more in character licensing and as brand managers than as medium-based comic book companies. With a large backlist of characters, DC and Marvel see revenue in both the toy market and the filmed entertainment market. As one Warner executive noted, "The sheer volume of the DC Comics property portfolio lends itself to an incredible array of consumer offerings" ("Warner Bros. Consumer Products," 2010, p. 161).

In line with the licensing orientation of the two largest U.S. comic book publishers, they have also been further integrated as corporate-media subsidiaries in the 2000s. Disney announced its purchase of Marvel in 2009. Around the same time, DC Comics changed its name to DC Entertainment, essentially restructuring it under corporate-owner Time Warner's film division (Itzkoff, 2010) and signaling a move away from comic books toward the development of TV/film and character licensing interests. Such moves result in the increased production and distribution of large-scale comic book-based movie blockbusters like *The Dark Knight* and *Iron Man* (McAllister, Gordon & Jancovich, 2006). Another result is the added presence of comics-based characters in children's television. And consistent with a Shortcake Strategy legacy, superhero cartoons are more often team-based instead of the lone hero (Baker & Raney, 2007). Alternatively, the de-emphasis on comic book sales as a revenue source for DC and Marvel may mean that although there is a large backlist of existing characters, new comic book characters are more difficult to establish given the uncertain future of comic books, traditionally the main "incubator" for superhero characters.

As has always been the case in the television era, superhero-based programming is popular with children (especially with boys who also consume action figures and video games). This encouraged the creation of younger superheroes to which children can (purportedly) identify with more easily than adult heroes, a version of the "cradle-to-grave" strategy indicative of modern marketing. This "youthification" strategy of comics goes back at least to the 1940s, with the creation of "sidekick" characters like Robin (for Batman) and younger versions of established superheroes like Superboy. Arguably, the use of superheroes in more adult-oriented forms of entertainment (such as movie blockbusters and graphic novels) encourages media conglomerates to use children's outlets to encourage brand loyalty to such characters at young audiences. Younger superheroes appear on children's television including child-like versions of Marvel characters in *The Superhero Squad Show* and teenaged DC characters on *Teen Titans* and *Young Justice*, and serve to promote older versions of characters. In discussing promotion of the 2011 movie release *Thor*, Marvel Editor in Chief Joe Quesada stated, "We've already got plans to get Thor's name out within a younger group of kids. I think the upcoming 'Super Hero Squad' and 'Avengers Animated' shows are going to do wonders to get that across" ("Marvel Chief," 2009, para. 13). This basic marketing strategy also includes the text that is the focus here, *Batman: The Brave and the Bold* (BB&B).

### **The Textual and Corporate Contexts of BB&B**

Batman has a long history as a popular icon adaptable to changing times and a lucrative media property targetable to different markets. There is, then, no one "Batman" but rather a series of "Batmen" who range from child-friendly versions to the dark and violent (for histories, see Brooker, 2005; Daniels, 1999; Pearson & Uricchio, 1991). Batman has both gone it alone and partnered with other superheroes. In his loner version, he can be intimidating to other heroes: "I don't play well with others," Batman told his fellow heroes in the animated series *Justice League*. But other versions are more sociable including his role in the earlier discussed *The Brave and the Bold* comic, and his team-ups with Superman in the comic book *World's Finest*. He also has a history as a superhero mentor, most notably with Robin but also in comic books like *Justice League International* and *Batman and the Outsiders*. In *Batman Beyond*, an animated series debuting in 1999, he even teamed up with himself, as an aged Bruce Wayne mentored a younger version of Batman in the future. As a solo or partnered character, these various versions also have appeared in different media, including comic books, comic strips, radio, television and films, but, until the 1980s, such efforts could be characterized as haphazard and involving multiple business partners.

Meehan's (1991) analysis of the 1989 film *Batman* highlighted the key role that the character played in refining large-scale media synergy strategies. Batman at this time illustrated both the movement of a popular license through various media and other venues and media conglomerates' incentives to own as many of the outlets for popular licenses as possible (for an updated analysis, see Owczarski, 2009). Scholars have argued that the movement of characters into different licensed versions may alter the ideological meanings of such characters, as in the examples of Harry Potter (Waetjen & Gibson, 2007), the Matrix (Proffitt, Tchoi, & McAllister, 2007), Wolverine (Johnson, 2007), the Powerpuff Girls (Van Fuqua, 2003) and Batman himself (Terrill, 2000). Other scholars such as Jenkins (2006) have interpreted the coordinated movement of licenses through multi-media more positively, discussing the aesthetic potential of "transmedia storytelling," in which narratives are continued and developed in different mediated outlets. Jenkins argues that the transmedia nature of media licenses facilitates narrative complexity from both professional media talent as well as fans in user-generated efforts.

Like Batman in the late 1980s, *BB&B* is a product of a specific corporate context and synergistic strategy for the 2000s and was separate from marketing plans for other versions of Batman (Lisanti, 2010). DC Entertainment -- the owner of Batman, *The Brave and the Bold* title, and the various guest characters featured in the program -- is itself owned by Time Warner. *Batman: The Brave and the Bold* the television program debuted in 2008, with a third season airing in 2011. In the United States, the program is labeled with a TV-Y7 rating, intended for children 7 and older. Time Warner apparently considered the original airing of the program to be a hit, with one division boasting that the program "dominated the ratings" (Lisanti, 2010, para. 33). DC also debuted in 2008 a tie-in comic book, *Batman: The Brave and the Bold* (the top of the cover of the first issue announcing, "Straight from the new hit cartoon!"). Time Warner owns the production company for the *BB&B* series, Warner Bros. Animation, and the cable network that distributed the program, Cartoon Network, an especially brand-assertive cable network that is central to much of Time Warner's synergy strategy (Sandler, 2003). Another subsidiary, Warner Home Video, made episodes available on DVD beginning in 2009, and Warner Brothers Interactive Entertainment released the video game in 2010. Such internal licenses were in addition to partnerships of *BB&B*-specific merchandise with those not owned by Time Warner, including Mattel for action figures and play sets and companies who specialize in licensed back-to-school supplies and sleepwear (Lisanti, 2010).

## Method

The following analysis focused on several *BB&B* licensed artifacts. One central text is the first 22 episodes of the television series, airing from November 2008-June 2009 in the United States and appearing in the same order on DVDs sets. Episodes were viewed in both contexts, with analysis focused on the narrative structure of episodes, dialogue, the number and qualities of superpowered characters and the relationship of Batman to those characters.

Flowing with the call to study dolls and action figures as texts (Bainbridge, 2010; Gray, 2010; Valdivia, 2009), the licensed *BB&B* action figures were also analyzed. In January 2011, the e-commerce site Amazon.com was used to gather this data, specifically utilizing the site's pull-down menu for "Toy Figures and Playsets." Entering the search term, "Batman the brave and the bold," in Amazon's search function, a list was constructed of all items and their descriptions, using care to avoid duplication. The first issue of the official tie-in comic book was also examined, focusing especially on the cover. Finally, reviews of the various formats of the video game were gathered to understand the nature of how the games were played, and what characters appeared in the game and which ones could gamers play as.

The multi-media data were then compared to understand what characteristics and themes were consistent across media and sub-licenses. The following sections focus especially on the nature of the licensed guest characters in the TV program as well as subsidiary licenses, and the relationship of these cross-overed guests to the main license, Batman.

## A Crowded Universe of (Mostly Male) Characters

*BB&B* the television program is characterized by a lighter tone than in many other modern animated versions of the character, especially 1990's *Batman: The Animated Series*. A representative plot teams

Batman with a younger, more inexperienced superhero -- one from DC's existing backlist of characters -- who jointly battle a menace. Occasionally the cross-over may involve a team (such as the Outsiders) or additional guest heroes. One guest hero/team is usually featured in the main narrative, but many episodes also feature a pre-credits teaser sequence (or "cold open") that is its own mini-narrative featuring a different hero with Batman only for that short opening sequence. The guest heroes and villains in both the teaser and main story typically change from week to week.

The first 22 episodes paired Batman with 43 different guest heroes. The pre-credit teasers featured 23 separate guest heroes, and the main story offered 32 separate guest heroes. Rarely did the same guest hero appear in both the teaser and the main story of one episode although 14 guest heroes did make repeat appearances during the 22 episodes. In this way, then, structuring the teaser as a narrative separate from the main story increased the exposure of character licenses in what was routinely offered as a matter of the program's format.

Few of these guest heroes in the first 22 episodes were DC's highest profiled heroes: those with a history of their own movies or prime-time television programs. Superman, Wonder Woman, and the modern Flash are all missing (the most well-known Green Lantern -- Hal Jordan -- does make a brief appearance). Instead, heroes were what might be considered second-tiered (Green Arrow, Aquaman, Plastic Man, Blue Beetle, Robin), the lesser-known versions of superheroes (The Green Lantern Corps, Golden-Age Flash) or relatively obscure characters (Red Tornado, Deadman, B'wana Beast, Wildcat). DC also created its own versions of classic heroes who appeared with Batman (Merlin, Sherlock Holmes). In one case, the Joker was the de facto guest "hero" as he and Batman battled a common adversary, Owlman.

In an indication of the licensing and young-male marketing focus of the program, 12 percent of the guest heroes, five of 43, were female: Fire, Black Canary, Huntress, Katana and Big Barda. Only two of these appearances -- Fire and Katana -- occur in the first 15 episodes. And just Black Canary appeared solo with Batman, during a pre-credit teaser (for "Night of the Huntress!"), not a main storyline. The others were paired with at least one other male guest hero: Fire with Plastic Man, Huntress with Blue Beetle, Katana as a member of the superhero team the Outsiders, and Big Barda as Mr. Miracle's wife (in a teaser). Two of the female characters -- Black Canary and the Huntress -- are especially flirtatious, and another, Big Barda, is a nag. Female heroes, then, appear infrequently and when they do they tend to be marginalized and represent familiar gender stereotypes. Their relative non-presence and stereotyped nature will be revisited in the next section.

In addition to the cross-over heroes, there were also 51 villains or teams (such as the Royal Flush Gang). Twenty of these appeared in teasers, and 40 in the main story, including repeat appearances and main stories with multiple villains. Similar to the makeup of heroes, few of them are marquee characters. Two might be considered high profile by being featured in multiple movies (Joker and Catwoman), and several others "second-tier" villains (Bain, Scarecrow). However, most are even further down the status list (Chemo, Fun Haus, Clock King).

Adding costumed heroes and villains together, then, the first 22 episodes present 95 different superpowered characters: 43 guest heroes, 51 villains and Batman himself. In this way, the licensed-character dynamic of the program combines and extends the earlier comic book cross-over, "Shortcake," "Star Wars," and synergistic commodity intertext strategies. Although most of the characters were pre-existing licenses owned by DC, they also were fairly obscure and likely new to the majority of younger viewers. Batman's presence (following the wake of *The Dark Knight* film) is a major draw of the cartoon. The title of the program changed from the original comics-based *The Brave and the Bold* to *Batman: The Brave and the Bold*, signals this. Batman, then, becomes a publicity magnet for 43 other superheroes who may become more popular with their exposure in the program. This goal was expressed by a *BB&B* producer: "every episode is almost like a pilot for a new show" (Siuntries, 2010).

As in programs created with the Shortcake Strategy, none of the heroes act alone. Shortcake emphasized the importance of groups and teams; in the *BB&B* version, the guest heroes were partnered with one key character, Batman. Contrasted, then, to the version of Batman that presents him as a lone avenger (as in the Robin-less film *The Dark Knight*, for example), the *BB&B* Batman is in fact very much a networker in the DC character universe. He works with everyone! As is later argued, the specific role that Batman plays in the program's narrative privileges his presence and creates a specific mentorship relationship with other characters.

This partnered aspect of the program also incentivizes merchandising purchases and play by again highlighting Batman. Many of the versions of the characters featured in *BB&B* were available for purchase as licensed merchandise. Comic book characters are especially "toyetic" media properties (Bainbridge, 2010; Cross, 1997; Wasko, Phillips, & Purdie, 1993), given their distinct and colorful costumes and often bizarre physical characteristics. Scholars such as Gray (2010) also argue that toys and other forms of licensing are "paratexts" that do not simply reflect the meanings of media texts, but also generate meanings for media texts. In the case of *BB&B* action figures, the large number of characters and their relationships (especially to Batman) are reflected in the toys, but the toys also crystalize specific forms of character violence and masculinity.

As of January 2011, 90 different action figure-based commodities were available for purchase under the *BB&B* brand label. These figures visually matched not only their distinctiveness as pre-existing characters, but also their specific *BB&B* versions. Green Arrow's action figure, for example, resembled the *BB&B* clean-shaven Green Arrow rather than the modern goateed comic book version. As a labeled *BB&B* product, Batman's name and logo appeared on all 90. With specific *BB&B* merchandise, Batman also dominated as an action figure or clearly designated recipient of an accessory (such as the three versions of *BB&B*-designated Batmobiles): 27 different figures or accessories centered on Batman alone. Like Barbie, then, there were several *BB&B* Batmen toy figures, not one Batman. Many of the different versions of Batman and his vehicles/devices were featured in specific episodes, such as the Batsub appearing in "Evil Under the Sea!" and Batman's "Battle Cycle" (with sidecar for guests) in "The Color of Revenge!" In this way, the Star Wars "completest" merchandising strategy is increased even more, as individual television episodes, not just whole films or series, become licensing bonanzas. This is further enhanced by offering for sale both heroes with their own accessories, and Batman-targeted accessories that are necessary for Batman to exist in episode-specific guest-hero narrative settings/contexts. Batman toys, then, came in different versions that foregrounded his relationship to particular characters (and their toys). So just as the Batsub toy ties in with its appearance in Aquaman-featured episodes, "Sky Shot Batman" presents Batman in a Green Lantern force field as featured in the episode, "The Eyes of Despero!"

Guest characters and their accessories were also prominent as action figures, an expansion from earlier TV-based Batman toys (such as with 1990's *Batman: The Animated Series*) that mostly featured tie-in versions of Batman or villains. Nineteen *BB&B*-branded guest heroes appeared as figures available for purchase, as did 18 *BB&B*-branded villains. Of these 37 characters, 14 were available as stand-alone figures. However, indicative of a crowd-oriented Shortcake Strategy, figures also may be purchased in pairs or groups: 27 different multiple-figure play sets could be purchased, featuring 33 characters. Batman appeared most often in these multi-figure sets: 19 play sets, including six with other heroes, and 15 with villains (two had both). One particular set features six action figures bundled together: "Batman The Brave and The Bold Exclusive Mini Figure 6 Pack" includes Batman, Aquaman and Blue Beetle as the heroes, and Gentleman Ghost, Black Manta and Kanjar Ro as the villains. The particular combination of Black Manta with Aquaman and Blue Beetle with Kanjar Ro reflects their matchups in specific episodes.

Guest characters that appeared most often in action figure toys were Blue Beetle (in four stand-alone figures and three playsets), Green Arrow (three stand-alone, one playset), and Plastic Man (three stand-alone, one playset). This matches their prominence in the television program, as all three characters made multiple appearances in the first 22 episodes, in various teaser/main story combinations. Other action figures were of the more obscure guest-heroes and villains, including B'wana Beast (available as

both a stand-alone and in a play set), Rex Mason the Element Man (also known as Metamorpho), Clock King, and Starro.

As Valdivia (2009) argues, mediated doll lines can display synergistic marketing strategies that intersect with ideologies of gender and ethnicity. As befitting the label “action figures,” the thrust of the toys focuses on physical conflict and violence, or play based on “clash,” as Cross (1997, p. 204) labels it. Batman accessories offer various sub-branded versions of Batman by a specific tool and articulation (reminiscent of the early Masters of the Universe) and are especially gruesome: Battle Saw Batman, Taser Batman, Shock Suit Batman, Spine Buster Batman (all, again, specifically branded with the younger-age targeted *BB&B* logos). The disemboweling effects of such weapons are not shown in the television program, but these products seem to encourage such imaginings given that the toys are promoted by the weaponry or even the possible results (i.e., “Spine Buster”).

The weapons and other gadgets are also integrated in the “team-up” ethos of the program to encourage multiple purchases; many of the Mattel-manufactured figures feature a “snap and switch” capability that allows certain figures to exchange components -- mainly weapons -- through plug-in sockets on each figure. For example, Batman’s “Deluxe Chainsaw Attack” and B’wana Beast’s machete can snap onto the compatible Plastic Man or other figure. This characteristic may encourage an interesting if also grisly hybridity in children’s play even with the purchase of only a couple of the action figures. But it also creates an incentive to buy an action figure for *both* the character and his weapon.

Echoing the observation that subsidiary licenses may remove even minimal alternative gender ideology found in original media texts (Van Fuqua, 2003) and heightening the masculinity of the merchandise, none of the licensed action figures are female. Fire, Katana, Black Canary, Big Barda, and the Huntress, despite their appearance in the early episodes, are not available as toys, and thus removed from the *BB&B* team in the plasticized part of the “transmedia” story. In Katana’s case, although both of her teammates in the Outsiders (Black Lightning and Metamorpho) are available as *BB&B*-branded toys, she again is not. Similarly, none of the action figure villains are female.

Other synergistic media emphasize a large quantity of series-matched characters and an emphasis on masculine representation. The *BB&B* home videogame was released in fall 2010 and offered by Nintendo in both console Wii and handheld DS platforms (“Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment,” 2010). The videogame allows gamers to play as many as 11 different heroes. However, only Batman and Blue Beetle are playable in both platforms: most of the playable heroes are exclusive to a platform (such as Hawkman in Wii; Green Arrow in DS), encouraging the purchase of both platforms to have the complete set of playable heroes. Solidifying this incentive is the playable character Bat-Mite, who is only accessible if a player has both versions of the game. In addition, “jump-in” heroes appear who are not playable, but can be evoked by gamers to help save the day. The game also allows characters to use in-game earned credits to “buy” useful gadgets from the Bat Cave, modeling for consumers the purchasing of licensed accessories and turning Batman into a helpful merchant.

Elements of the game serve to solidify the cohesiveness of the brand across media in other ways. The voice actors for the television series are used in the video game. Seven of the 11 playable characters are available as *BB&B* action figures, appeared in the first season, and appeared on the cover of the first tie-in comic book (discussed below). Similarly, many of the villains in the game appear both in the series and as action figures, including Clock King, Scarecrow, and Gentleman Ghost. Furthering the marginalization of the few female heroes who appeared in the early episodes, all of the playable characters are male heroes. However, although no female villains are available as action figures, in the video game Catwoman and Morgaine Le Fey make appearances; both are villains in the first season as well.

The official *BB&B* comic book produced by DC also emphasizes the quantity of guest heroes and villains. The cover of the first issue (May 2009) offers a full-figure drawing of Batman in the center, surrounded by the *BB&B*-stylized heads of 21 different guest heroes. These include the most prominent

guest heroes of the television series (Blue Beetle and Plastic Man) and obscure ones (Kamandi, the Demon). Three of the 21 are women: Katana, Wonder Woman and the Huntress. Thirteen are available as *BB&B* action figures. One who is not, Jonah Hex, was featured in a motion picture released the next year. Copying the format of the TV program, early issues of the comic book used a teaser+main story narrative structure, again maximizing the number of cross-overs and further connecting the comic book to the television program.

### **Batman as Adult Mentor**

A synergistic characteristic of the guest heroes is that they seem to be designed to serve as vehicles for identification for the young, mostly male viewer. This is signaled by a largely consistent personality and demographic type among the heroes in that first season, especially when contrasted to the anchor character, Batman. The guest heroes are almost always less serious, more sarcastic, more joke cracking, and, not coincidentally, younger than Batman. Some of the characters that team-up with Batman began their comic book lives -- and are largely known -- as youthful: Kamandi and Robin are examples. But in other cases, although the characters began as adults in their comic book biographies, in the program they are "youthified." Blue Beetle, Plastic Man, and the Outsiders appear and act younger than in most, if not all, of their previous comic book incarnations. In the specific case of Plastic Man and Metamorpho of the Outsiders, the younger version seems unique to *BB&B*. And even in cases in which the age of the guest character is adult, the "cartoony" drawing style of the program emphasizes a youthful appearance and the personality of the character is often decidedly quirky, fun-loving and wise-cracking, as in the case of competitive Green Arrow and self-aggrandizing Aquaman, when many previous versions of the characters were more serious.

This youth orientation of guest stars was established in the teaser of the debut episode, "Rise of the Blue Beetle!" In this opening, Batman and Green Arrow battle The Clock King. The action cuts to the bedroom of two teenaged boys, in a room surrounded by Batman merchandise, who watch the conclusion of the fight on the news. Jaime Reyes asks his friend Paco, "Think you could ever see me being a hero, you know like on a poster in some kid's bedroom?" When Paco leaves, it is revealed that Jaime is the new Blue Beetle. We see him touch the enchanted scarab on his back, which activates the Blue Beetle costume. He hops out of the window and begins to fly, but he cannot quite control his body in the suit, not unlike an awkwardly changing teenager. With this opening scene, the program establishes a connection with the combination of youthful connections between the target audience and the guest heroes. Although their names and skin tone indicate Latino origins, other aspects code them as "ethnically ambiguous," a not-uncommon trope for dominant media's representation of Latino/a identity (Molina-Guzmán, 2010, p. 165). Jaime and Paco's vocal qualities and manner of speech signal solid white, middle-class male youth (a Caucasian actor voices Jaime, for example). While in costume, Blue Beetle's speech (calling Batman "Dude") and behavior later in the series are stereotypical teen. The *BB&B* version of Plastic Man reworks that character's origin to make him seem young and Batman-centric. Originally a character created in the 1940s and not by DC, Plastic Man's origin story is one of criminal redemption and the value of charity. A hardened adult criminal, Patrick "Eel" O'Brian, while trying to escape a robbery, is shot and acid enters the wound. In his escape, he stumbles upon and is rescued and healed by a group of monks. Upon waking he is moved by the monks' compassion and rejects his life of crime. He then learns that the acid in his bloodstream gave him the power to stretch his body in impossible ways. In the *BB&B* version, the character is younger, humorously greedy and in need of further guidance. Batman now plays a key role in Plastic Man's new origin story, being the hero who foils the original robbery and inadvertently drops O'Brian in chemicals that give him powers. In this way, the ties between the characters are strengthened in the *BB&B* intertwining universe.

The guest heroes' youthful age and attitude and the series' typical narrative impose a specific role upon the *BB&B* Batman, a role that flows nicely with the ideology of children's marketing and enhances the attractiveness of the guest heroes for a young male audience. Batman is not only arguably DC's most popular character, but, as described earlier, also one with a flexible history involving different versions. The *BB&B* version is a hybrid of at least two of these versions. The look of the character is reminiscent of the 1960's Batman: more cartoony, with a black shadow on the front of his cowl framed by a blue cowl, cape, gloves and boots -- a style that characterized the comic book drawings from the 50s

and 60s and the *Super Friends* version. Similarly, his costume offers the bat symbol in his chest with a bright yellow border and a yellow utility belt. In this friendly version, Robin was nearly always by his side. However, there is also a more intimidating and uncompromising version of the character that is referenced. The *BB&B*-Batman is not the campy or smiling Batman, but instead functions in the program as a relatively no-nonsense mentor and stern father figure. *BB&B* combines Batman's unique history as a mentor/leader to characters like Robin, but also the more intimidating Batman of the Christopher Nolan films.

The adult mentor/teen-mentee dynamic is evident in several episodes. In the very first episode, Blue Beetle concedes to Batman: "You teach, I learn." In a later episode, when Blue Beetle ignores Batman's warning about rushing into a situation, Batman mutters, "Teenagers" and grumbly (if insincerely) muses, "From now on no more kid partners." He drills the Outsiders with battle simulations, scolding them for their carelessness. Characters often refer to Batman's parental role. In his attempt to curtail the greedy attitude of Plastic Man in "Terror on Dinosaur Island!," we have this exchange -- difficult to imagine with the original 1940's Plastic Man -- between the reprimanding Batman and the petulant guest hero:

Batman: I stuck my neck out for you O'Brian: with the judge, the parole board, the league...

Plastic Man: How long are you going to hold that over me? Ya know, I didn't ask you to help me out. What are you my dad or somethin'? You're not the boss of me. Batman, if I wanted to feel guilty I could just call my mom.

This dynamic is especially evident with Robin in the episode, "The Color of Revenge," the theme of which is Robin asserting his independence from Batman. One typical exchange is,

Batman: It could be a trap, stay behind me Robin.

Robin: If you're worried about my well-being maybe I'd be safer back in the cave, rotating tires on the Batmobile. Ya know, like old times.

Batman: Speedy had to sharpen arrows. Aqualad had to scrape barnacles. Everyone earns their stripes.

Even the villain of this episode, Crazy Quilt, notes Batman's authoritarian role: "Batman, always ordering people around."

As is indicated by Plastic Man's "guilt mom" quote above, the relationship is often prominently coded as male. One way this occurs is by talking to and about the female heroes in a sexual way. In the very first appearance of a female hero, Fire assisting Batman and Plastic Man in the "Terror on Dinosaur Island!" teaser, Plastic Man essentially hits on her in front of Batman: "Ooh, hello sugar," he says as he stretches his arm around her.

Batman's advice to his sidekicks sometimes focuses on gender, and nearly all reinforce traditional male views. At one point, after developing a crush on the Huntress, the Blue Beetle asks Batman "about girls," to which Batman replies, "Listen, Beetle, women are a tricky, tricky business. You have to decipher nearly incomprehensible code, push the right buttons, get past their firewalls. Only if you can do all that will you find what you're looking for."

In Batman's world, women are mysterious objects to be decoded. They are also domesticating pains. When Big Barda, the spouse of escape artist Mr. Miracle, nags him about not cleaning the garage, Batman smugly observes, "Guess there's one trap you can't escape from."

In addition, the speech patterns of some of the male heroes are especially masculine. The most petulant of the Green Lanterns, Guy Gardner, tells Batman to “Eat my toe nail clippings” and torments captured villains by blowing a raspberry (simulating of course fart sounds), signaling a male orientation with both gross humor and put downs.

The adult Batman/child-like (or childish) guest hero may be interpreted in different ways. As mentioned earlier, it encourages an identification of young viewers with the lesser-known guest heroes, a (male) identification especially valuable for the future licensing of those characters with that audience, as well as the viewer ratings of the program for repeat appearances. It also flows well with the representation of youthful fun and adult authority throughout children’s television, including the commercials as well as the programming. Schor (2005) notes that in children’s advertising, adults “enforce a repressive and joyless world” (p. 53) and are framed as oppressing kids; in such commercial narratives, brands come to the rescue, supplying kid-centric fun. Similarly, the “kids rule” promotional ethos of cable networks such as Nickelodeon and their programming reinforce the image of adults as too serious and authoritarian (Banet-Weiser, 2007; Schor, 2005). Batman’s relationship with his guest heroes is consistent with these commercial and promotional messages that are embedded in the episodes when they are cablecast on Cartoon Network. Admittedly, Batman is not as serious as the recent film version and often lightens up in his banter with villains or at the end of episodes as the guest heroes prove themselves.

Despite such moments, Batman maintains his primacy in the various licensed relationships. The heroes do not just team up with Batman: they are taught by Batman. Put another way, they *need* Batman, both for the specific narrative arc of the episodes and their redemption. Most of the guest heroes have a character flaw -- often (but not always) a result of their youth -- like Plastic Man’s greed, Red Tornado’s lack of emotional intelligence, Booster Gold’s self-promotion, and Bronze Tiger’s pride. Along with their appearance/powers, these flaws distinguish them and places Batman in the role of corrective. This, then, reinforces the relational logic between Batman and other characters throughout the *BB&B* licensing. Each guest brings a unique deficiency, and Batman is necessary to correct each character/deficiency. Batman also encodes a heightened degree of masculinity as reinforced both by the more no-nonsense “drill sergeant” role the character often serves in the program, one who is at the forefront of many of the fights, and the various weaponized Batman accessories. Although it is wise to remember that children may often play with toys in ways that manufacturers did not intend, it also could be argued that in this case the program does model for children how their Batman toy should relate to the other toys. He should boss them around. They can rebel or acquiesce. But, either way, they need each other in the character logic of the narrative in which the toys and other merchandise are embedded.

## Conclusion

*BB&B* adapts marketing concepts from comics (the cross-over among existing characters) and merchandising tie-ins from past eras (group-based Strawberry Shortcake and Star Wars stories and toys). These are anchored to a strong central character (not unlike Barbie), with integration between television, toys, video games and print (similar to the 1989 Batman movie). The emphasis on gender- and age-based niche marketing influences the look and personalities of the characters. Finally, the strategies are coordinated by a dominant corporate presence (Time Warner) owning several of the key subsidiaries. What results in the television program and the subsidiary licensing is an emphasis on a high quantity of merchandised characters, the assumption of multiple licenses working together, and the primacy of a narratively necessary character, in this case Batman, with a relationship with other youth-like characters consistently coded as that of stern male mentor.

The goal of the creators of such merchandising strategizing is not to dull the playful imagination of children or to limit the transmedia possibilities to especially violent or masculinist orientations. What Horkheimer and Adorno (2006) said of the culture industries in the late 1940s still stands today: “Their ideology is business” (p. 52). But even so this business-oriented ideology is also not neutral, and leads to a celebration of consumption and ideologies influenced by other inequitable social relations.

The industrial context of and corporate strategies embedded in cartoons such as *Batman: The Brave and the Bold* reinforce the idea that children's entertainment must fulfill economic directives first and foremost. Admittedly, original licenses held by media companies may need to be altered to fit the new licensing and marketing contexts (hence the emphasis on youthful appearances and personalities), but this is symbolic of the flexibility of the characters as brand licenses. Characters who offer the most flexibility to be moved from one licensing venue to another, including their "toyetic" qualities, are especially valuable.

So if 2008 was the Year of the Bat License for DC and Time Warner, 2011 was the Year of the GL License, as the character Green Lantern appeared in a summer blockbuster movie; a Cartoon Network program, *Green Lantern The Animated Series*; and a direct-to-DVD/Blu-Ray/On-Demand animated movie, *Green Lantern: Emerald Knights*. Although it was likely that a hero like GL --whose power ring allows him to physically manifest anything in his imagination and has many distinctive alien comrades -- had to wait for special effects CGI technology to develop sufficiently for a non-cheesy live-action film version, the character also offers significant licensing activity. The theatrical movie ultimately was an underperforming stinker (as an 18% rating by top critics on the review website Rotten Tomatoes indicates). But as one producer of the Green Lantern film promised, "The potential is there for amazing toys and merchandise because Green Lantern's ring can create anything the imagination can conjure. From space stations and vehicles to alien action figures, the possibilities are just endless" ("Warner Bros. Consumer Products," 2010, p. 161). Viacom and Disney are likewise looking for and actively shaping such endless and coordinated merchandising possibilities. A Marvel executive said about the younger-skewing *Superhero Squad* television program, "We wanted to create a series that would drive merchandise" (Phillips, 2009, p. 56).

And although this essay focused on masculine licensed properties, franchises like Bratz also combine merchandising logic and mediated depictions of consumption-based relationships that are framed as celebrated versions of "girl power." In the case of Bratz, not only are specific Bratz licenses cross-promoted and integrated in various Bratz-oriented media, but shopping as a form of friendship building is routinely portrayed (McAllister, 2007).

Jenkins (2006) and Buckingham (2007) argue that how individual children use, interpret and re-appropriate the meanings of corporate and commercial culture are not completely determined by this culture's economic origins, and certainly there is creativity and polysemy in programs like *BB&B*. However, this does not let off the hook the calculating marketing orientation and the resulting ideological implications of products of large media corporations. They hold significant power to influence the direction of creativity in children's entertainment and, with their massive coordination, can be assumed to have some influence on children's subjectivity. We must not only ask, what stories are being told by corporate entertainment and what characters are prominently promoted by them? We must also ask, what stories are not being told because those stories do not fit in with a marketing plan? If those stories are not found in our society's major commercial and mediated storytellers, can we simply "outsource" our children's imaginations to create them?

## References

- Aubrey, J., & Harrison, K. (2004). The gender-role content of children's favorite television programs and its link to their gender-related perceptions. *Media Psychology*, 6(2), 111-146.
- Baker, K., & Raney, A. A. (2007). Equally super?: Gender-role stereotyping of superheroes in children's animated programs. *Mass Communication & Society*, 10(1), 25-41.
- Banet-Weiser, S. (2007). *Kids rule!: Nickelodeon and consumer citizenship*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Bainbridge, J. (2010). Fully articulated: The rise of the action figure and the changing face of 'children's' entertainment. *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, 24(6), 829-842.

- Brooker, W. (2005). *Batman unmasked: Analyzing a cultural icon*. New York: Continuum.
- Buckingham, D. (2007). Selling childhood?: Children and consumer culture. *Journal of Children and Media*, 1(1), 15-24.
- Cross, G. (1997). *Kids' stuff: Toys and the changing world of American childhood*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Daniels, L. (1999). *Batman the complete history: The life and times of the Dark Knight*. San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books.
- Engelhardt, T. (1986). The shortcake strategy. In T. Gitlin (Ed.), *Watching television* (pp. 68-110). New York: Pantheon.
- Gordon, I. (1998). *Comic strips and consumer culture, 1890-1945*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Gray, J. (2010). *Show sold separately: Promos, spoilers and other media paratexts*. New York: New York University Press.
- Hardy, J. (2010). *Cross-media promotion*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Horkheimer, M., & Adorno, T. W. (2006). The culture industry: Enlightenment as mass deception. In M. G. Durham, & D. M. Kellner (Eds.), *Media and cultural studies: Keywords* (Revised Ed.) (pp. 41-72). Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Itzkoff, D. (2010, February 20). Heroes of DC Comics get ready for closeup. *The New York Times*, p. C1.
- Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence culture: Where old and new media collide*. New York: New York University Press.
- Johnson, D. (2007). Will the real Wolverine please stand up?: Marvel's mutation from monthlies to movies. In I. Gordon, M. Jancovich, & M. P. McAllister (Eds.), *Film and comic books* (pp. 64-85). Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi.
- Johnson, F. L., & Young, K. (2002). Gendered voices in children's television advertising. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 19(4), 461-480.
- Kline, S. (1993). *Out of the garden: Toys and children's culture in the age of TV marketing*. London: Verso.
- Kunkel, D. (1988). From a raised eyebrow to a turned back: The FCC and children's product-related programming. *Journal of Communication*, 38(4), 90-108.
- Linn, S. (2004). *Consuming kids: Protecting our children from the onslaught of marketing and advertising*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Lisanti, T. (2010, June 1). Warner Bros. Consumer Products rings in new superhero era. *License! Global*. Retrieved from <http://www.licensemag.com/licensemag/Fashion/Warner-Bros-Consumer-Products-Rings-in-New-Superhe/ArticleStandard/Article/detail/673237>

Luther, C. A., & Legg Jr., J. (2010). Gender differences in depictions of social and physical aggression in children's television cartoons in the US. *Journal of Children & Media*, 4(2), 191-205.

Marvel chief drops Thor movie hints. (2009, June 16). Cup O' Joe. Retrieved from <http://www.comicbookresources.com/?page=article&id=21619>.

McAllister, M. P. (2007). 'Girls with a passion for fashion': The Bratz brand as integrated spectacular consumption. *Journal of Children and Media*, 1(3), 244-258.

McAllister, M. P., & Giglio, J. M. (2005). The commodity flow of US children's television. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 22(1), 26-44.

McAllister, M. P., Gordon, I., & Jancovich, M. (2006). Art house meets graphic novel, or blockbuster meets superhero comic?: The contradictory relationship between film and comic art. *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, 34(3), 108-114.

Meehan, E. R. (1991). 'Holy commodity fetish, Batman!': The political economy of a commercial intertext. In R. E. Pearson, & W. Uricchio (Eds.). *The many lives of the Batman: Critical approaches to a superhero and his media* (pp. 47-65). New York: Routledge.

Mittell, J. (2010). *Television and American culture*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Molina-Guzmán, I. (2010). *Dangerous curves: Latina bodies in the media*. New York: New York University Press.

Owczarski, K. A. (2009). Reacting synergistically: Batman and Time Warner. In R. C. Sickels (Ed.). *The business of entertainment: Movies* (pp. 55-76). Westport, CT: Greenwood.

Pearson, R. E., & Uricchio, W. (Eds.). *The many lives of the Batman: Critical approaches to a superhero and his media*. New York: Routledge.

Pecora, N. (1998). *The business of children's entertainment*. New York: Guilford.

Phillips, S. (2009, September). What's hot at Brand Licensing Europe. *License! Global*, pp. 56- 62.

Proffitt, J. M., Tchoi, D. Y., & McAllister, M. P. (2007). Plugging back into *The Matrix*: The intertextual flow of corporate media commodities. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 31(3), 239-254.

Rogers, M. F. (1999). *Barbie culture*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Sandler, K. S. (2003). Synergy nirvana: Brand equity, television animation, and Cartoon Network. In C. A. Stabile, & M. Harrison (Eds.) *Prime time animation: Television animation and American culture* (pp. 89-109). New York: Routledge.

Seiter, E. (1993). *Sold separately: Children and parents in consumer culture*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Schor, J. B. (2005). *Born to buy*. New York: Scribner.

Siuntries, J. (2010, January 19). Batman: The Brave & Bold producers go forth. *Word Balloon*. Retrieved from <http://wordballoonpodcast.wordpress.com/page/6/>

Terrill, R. E. (2000). Spectacular repression: Sanitizing the Batman. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 17(4), 493-509.

Turow, J. (2006). *Niche envy: Marketing discrimination in the digital age*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Valdivia, A. N. (2009). Living in a hybrid material world: Girls, ethnicity and mediated doll products. *Girlhood Studies*, 2(1), 73-93.

Van Fuqua, J. (2003). 'What are those little girls made of?': The Powerpuff Girls and consumer culture. In C. A. Stabile, & M. Harrison (Eds.) *Prime time animation: Television animation and American culture* (pp. 205-219). New York: Routledge.

Waetjen, J., & Gibson, T. A. (2007). Harry Potter and the commodity fetish: Activating corporate readings in the journey from text to commercial intertext. *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, 4(1), 3-26.

Wasko, J., Phillips, M., & Purdie, C. (1993). Hollywood meets Madison Avenue: The commercialization of US films. *Media, Culture, and Society*, 15(2), 271-293.

Warner Bros. Consumer Products. (2010, June 26). *Entertainment and Travel*, p. 161.

Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment. (2010, September 25). *Leisure and Travel Week*, p. 49.

### About the Authors

**Zachary Roman** earned a Master of Arts in Media Studies at Penn State.

**Matthew P. McAllister** is a Professor in the Department of Film-Video & Media Studies at Penn State. This article is derived from the first author's MA Thesis, completed in Media Studies at Penn State under the supervision of the second author. The authors wish to thank Professor Barbara Bird for her insights on an early version of this project. Our dear mentor and colleague, Dr. Jeanne Hall, also contributed significantly to the project. She will be greatly missed.

**Corresponding email address:** mattmc@psu.edu