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Analysing Gender Through the Transtextual Media of *Wonder Woman* (1942 -2017)

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This dissertation is submitted by the undersigned to the Institute of Art Design and Technology, Dun Laoghaire in partial fulfilment for the BA (Hons) in Design for Stage and Screen. It is entirely the author's own work, except where noted, and has not been submitted for an award from this or any other educational institution.

Signed:

## Abstract

The character of *Wonder Woman* is of interest to me because she can be seen to represent the three waves of feminism in popular form. By analysing a single character who has been reimagined in different eras, it is clear that her representation maintains the same core values she was initially created with. By researching the conditions and history that surround her reimagining for each new stage of media, and focusing on feminist history, I have come to some understanding as to what an acceptable interpretation of a '*feminist character*' is to a mass media audience and how the media produces this character. I have come to understand that *Wonder Woman* is a prime example of '*marketplace feminism*' whose legacy has a larger impact on women's equality than the stories she appears in.

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## Introduction

Feminist literary criticism tends to regard fictional characters as being constructed on the basis of what one knows about human beings (and specifically about the impact gender has on human behaviour, social structures and human interactions). Starting from this assumption it seems possible to regard fictional characters as representing different ways of coping with a range of gender related problems; fictional characters, thus, tend to be read, for instance, as victims of patriarchal oppression or as models of female emancipation.<sup>1</sup>

This dissertation explores the fictional character *Wonder Woman* who has existed and remained popular for the past seventy-seven years, throughout which we have seen massive changes in the views and freedoms of women in North America. She is embedded with the feminist movement because of her core themes and values as well as the feminist movements use of her image as a symbol of female empowerment. The most popular iterations of *Wonder Woman* may tell us what level of feminism is deemed acceptable on a mass media scale where the objective is to please as many people as possible.

*Wonder Woman* is a comic book character, who has extraordinary powers and abilities, written for the Super Hero genre in the Golden age of comic books (1930-1950). The character is originally born from clay on an Island called Themyscira populated only by Amazonian women. When a US air pilot crash lands on Themyscira, *Wonder Woman* competes in a competition of strength to escort the pilot back to America, which she wins. Diana (*Wonder Woman*) is encouraged to stay in America, which is currently engulfed in World War 2, to help the democratic nation by joining the fight. Inspired greatly by Greek and Roman mythology, she is described as “Lovely as Aphrodite. As wise as Athena. With the speed of Mercury and the strength of Hercules”.<sup>2</sup>

*World War 2, Comic Books and Wonder Woman* explores the creation of *Wonder Woman* and the events surrounding the time of her conception. It focuses on the birth of the new media of comics and the influence of World War 2 and the original creator’s affiliation with the

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<sup>1</sup>Eder, Jens, Fotis Jannidis and Ralf Schneider. *Characters in Fictional Worlds: Understanding Imaginary Beings in Literature, Film, and Other Media*. De Gruyter, 2016. Print. p509.

<sup>2</sup> Morris, Charles Moulton. “*Wonder Woman*#1.” *Wonder Woman*, vol. 1, issue no. 1, Dc Comics, 1942. Print.

current women's movement on the discourse of the original comics. *Wonder Woman* came into fruition in 1941, the same decade as other popular super heroes Batman & Robin and Superman at the height of the Comic books popularity. In 1941 America would enter World War 2 which would lead to the production of war propaganda aimed at the American woman and housewife to join the fight on all platforms of popular media. It marked a significant cultural shift in the role of American women, as for the first time they are entering spaces that were dominated by men.<sup>3</sup> *Wonder Woman* began in the Justice league of America as their secretary, but in 1942 and gained her own series with *Sensation Comics* produced by D.C. (*Detective Comics*). She was created by the women's equality advocate William Moulton Marston under the pen name Charles Morris, with artwork created by a suffragette cartoonist, H.G. Peter.<sup>4</sup> Marston wrote the *Wonder Woman* comic series until 1946. In 1947, he died of cancer and the series was taken over by Robert Kanigher. H.G. Peter continued to draw the artwork until his death in 1958.<sup>5</sup>

*Media, The Second Wave and The New Original Wonder Woman* examines how *Wonder Woman* became synonymous with the feminist movement. It focuses on the relationship between media and the second wave feminist movement and how this relationship brought about the reincarnation of *Wonder Woman* as a television series. In 1963 Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique*, bringing to light the societal structure placed on women, that believed that woman was at her most productive both naturally and economically as a housewife and mother.<sup>6</sup> This was integral in the birth of the second wave feminist movement.

In 1968 under the direction of Mike Sekwosky, the *Wonder Woman* comics had a complete rebranding. Known as '*The Diana Prince Era*', the character lost her powers and bought a fashion retail store to appeal to the feminist movement. She was trained by an Asian Kung Fu master, named *Ching li* and fought crime.<sup>7</sup> Gloria Steinem created '*Ms.*' in 1972, a feminist magazine aimed to appeal to a diverse audience, where she would put *Wonder Woman* on

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<sup>3</sup> Honey, M. *Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender, and Propaganda During World War II*. The University of Massachusetts Press, 1984. Print. p22.

<sup>4</sup> Stuller, Jennifer K. *Ink-Stained Amazons and Cinematic Warriors: Superwomen in Modern Mythology*. Tauris, 2010. Print. p15.

<sup>5</sup> Stuller, p15.

<sup>6</sup> Friedan, Betty. *The Feminine Mystique*. W.W. Norton & Company, 2013. Print. p13&27.

<sup>7</sup> Stuller, p33.



the front cover of its first regular issue. Ms. Magazine would successfully petition the writers of the *Wonder Woman* comic to have her powers returned.

Hoping to capitalize on the second wave, Warner Bros. Television produced *Wonder Woman* starring Cathy Lee Crosby in 1974, which hoped to be a pilot for a television series. It was written by John F. D. Black and released on ABC. The character shared the name of *Wonder Woman* but none of her recognisable traits or qualities, so failed as a trans textual character. The television series was not produced.<sup>8</sup> Warner Bros. Television and D.C. comics then produced '*The New Original Wonder Woman*', developed by Douglas S. Cramer and Stanley Ralph Ross in 1975. The show aimed to accurately portray the comic book version of *Wonder Woman* on television. She had super powers and was played by Lynda Carter, a former Miss USA winner. It was a period piece based in World War 2. The first television series was released on ABC. The show was dropped by ABC and picked up by CBS, who moved the setting from World War 2 to modern day 1974. The show lasted for three series in total.<sup>9</sup>

*Social Media, Mass Media Criticism and Wonder Woman 2017* examines the new wave of feminist thought and how it influenced *Wonder Woman 2017*. It focuses on how social media, online mass media criticism and marketplace feminism have shaped the newest iteration and created greater opportunities for women in the film industry. In the 2000s, massive social media sites Facebook and Twitter are created which opens-up an online platform for people to meet likeminded groups and share their thoughts to a large audience conveniently. This leads to a rise in popularity in feminism pushed forward by sites such as Tumblr, which were making feminism "cool". It also became a platform for online harassment and in 2014 an online hate group known as '*#gamergate*' started a campaign directed at women in the gaming industry with the aim of destroying every aspect of the victim's offline life. The overtly sexist industry is put under question and feminist media analysis comes to the forefront of the controversy.

In *Batman vs Superman 2016*, the 2<sup>nd</sup> instalment of the *DC Extended Universe*, *Wonder Woman* makes an appearance for the first time in the series. She is the first female superhero to have a high-budget solo film. The stand-alone film is released in 2017, directed by

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<sup>8</sup> Stuller, p43.

<sup>9</sup> Stuller, p43&44.

*Patty Jenkins* and starring Gal Gadot. Distributed by Warner Bros, the film grosses the largest amount in the *Justice League* series and a sequel is to be released in December 2019.

*Wonder Woman's* discourse has coincided with significant changing attitudes towards women. Each version of the character has successfully portrayed the core values of *Wonder Woman* in each era while adapting to the modern perception of a female Hero. I will analyse the history and production of each iteration of *Wonder Woman*, told in vastly different times as far as women's status is concerned.

## Chapter 1:

### World War 2, Comic Books and *Wonder Woman*

The new medium of the comic book was the perfect vehicle for William Moulton Marston to create a female hero that had not been seen before. This chapter explores how World War 2, the Suffragettes and Margaret Sanger played their part in the creation of *Wonder Woman*. In April 1930, the Gulf Oil Company printed *Gulf Comic Weekly*, a four-page spread containing nothing but original comic strips. It became an overnight sensation and by the fifth issue, three million copies were being sold every week. Harry I Wildenberg, sales manager of *Waterbury Connecticut's Eastern Color*, utilized comic books to sell commodities other than newspapers.<sup>10</sup> From 1930 to 1933 the reprinting of syndicated comic strips had created a new medium.<sup>11</sup> The 'pulp' industry, which produced low budget mass publishing of fiction, began to publish comics book on a large scale.<sup>12</sup> From 1936 to 1939, The comic magazine had been integrated into American popular publishing with thanks to three factors; 'an increase in the number of themed magazines, a simultaneous increase in the number of publishers, and, crucially, the appearance of Superman, the first superhero'.<sup>13</sup> In 1938 *Fiction House*, the largest publisher of pulps, released '*Jumbo Comics*'. It featured stories inspired by the genres of its pulp line. This included '*Sheena of the Jungle*', a female version of *Tarzan* that was widely popular amongst male readers due to her revealing outfit.<sup>14</sup> 'From all points of view, the comic book came of age as a cultural industry in 1939'.<sup>15</sup>

On 7 December 1941, Japan lead a surprise air attack on the navy base Pearl Harbour. This attack would cause America to join World War 2. Advertisers projected a loss of 80 percent of their business over the course of the war. To sustain they began a sales campaign that used advertising to boost public morale, with the hopes of gaining financial backing from the government at a time when sales were down.<sup>16</sup> In November 1941 the 'War advertising

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<sup>10</sup> Gabilliet, Jean-Paul, et al. *Of Comics and Men: a Cultural History of American Comic Books*. University Press of Mississippi, 2013. Print. p6.

<sup>11</sup> Gabillet, p8.

<sup>12</sup>Gabillet, p11.

<sup>13</sup> Gabillet, p11.

<sup>14</sup> Gabillet, p13.

<sup>15</sup> Gabillet, p16.

<sup>16</sup> Honey, M. *Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender, and Propaganda During World War II*. The University of Massachusetts Press, 1984. Print. p31.

Council'(WAC) was formed.<sup>17</sup> 'Its purpose was to enlist advertisers, companies, and the government in a drive to get the issues of the war before the public.'<sup>18</sup>

Advertisers would use the same techniques that were developed for selling products to promote ideas that would support government aims.<sup>19</sup> Chester La Roche, the chair of the WAC, began a campaign of 'psychological warfare' by implying, that to not support government aims was to risk losing political freedoms.<sup>20</sup> 'In this way he hoped to "create a background for the specific directives of the government" that would "clear up misunderstandings, overcome irritations, disarm unreasonable criticism, and thus condition the public not only to make required sacrifices willingly but to make more than are actually asked."<sup>21</sup>.

The WAC's propaganda campaign included advertisements encouraging women to enter the labour force and armed services throughout the war reaching its height in distribution in early 1944, when the Office of War Information'(OWI) and WAC created the national '*Women in the war*' program.<sup>22</sup> This campaign, intended to last throughout the year, aimed to recruit women into civilian work and military service.<sup>23</sup> '*We Can Do It!*' is one of the most recognisable images of this era and shows clearly the type of images that were being created to push this agenda often known as '*Rosie the Riveter*'(Fig. 1).

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<sup>17</sup> Honey, p31.

<sup>18</sup> Honey, p34.

<sup>19</sup> Honey, p33.

<sup>20</sup> Honey, p34.

<sup>21</sup> Honey, p34.

<sup>22</sup> Honey, p34.

<sup>23</sup> Honey, p34.



Fig. 1: 'We Can Do It!', 1942

The Bureau of Campaigns contacted each media Bureau with material that could be adapted for specific audiences. Dorothy Ducas was the chief of the Magazine Bureau.<sup>24</sup> In July 1942, the Magazine Bureau published the *Magazine War Guide*. It was used to communicate clearly between the *OWI* and magazine industry. The guide was sent to more than Nine hundred employees in magazines and over one thousand free-lance writers.<sup>25</sup> The recruitment campaign was a central concern to the magazine bureau and a special effort was made to involve fiction writers. 'Dorothy Ducas's central argument in her ultimately successful appeal to enlarge her staff was that magazines were ideal vehicles for shaping public opinion because they published fiction, which could subtly generate desirable attitudes. She made a point of contacting fiction writers and asked them to write stories that would make war work sound attractive to women readers..<sup>26</sup>'.

The guide would encourage fiction writers to incorporate suggested plots into their own fiction. 'By creating characters who served as models of good behaviour and spirited cooperation, writers could foster appropriate attitudes toward domestic conditions'<sup>27</sup>.The deputy director of the *OWI*, Leo Rosten shared the same point of view with Pulp editors. "Pulp

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<sup>24</sup> Honey, p31.

<sup>25</sup> Honey, p39.

<sup>26</sup> Honey, p42.

<sup>27</sup> Honey, p42.

magazines reach one of the largest and most important audiences in America. Propaganda is aimed to hit the readers of pulp magazines more than any other group'<sup>28</sup>.

Pulp publishers willingly accommodated these directions as they feared that pulps would be forced to fold as they were not considered imperative to the war economy. By 1943, definite instructions for plots were eased into general guidelines so that stories would still have authenticity while still promoting war agendas.<sup>29</sup>

In 1910 John Reed, a senior at Harvard University, formed The Harvard Men's League for Woman's Suffrage. The group invited Emily Pankhurst, a prominent Suffragette in the United Kingdom to lecture at the University. Harvard denied allowing her to speak, leading to the Detroit Free Press editors asking, 'Is Harvard Afraid Of Ms Pankhurst?'. The lecture was held on 6 Dec 1911 and was open only to Harvard and Radcliffe students. The venue had a capacity to sit 500 people but on the night of the lecture was filled with 1500 students, one of which was William Moulton Marston.<sup>30</sup> Marston would remain an avid supporter of women's equality throughout his life.

Marston was in a polyamorous relationship with his wife Elizabeth Holloway Marston and Olive Byrne. Holloway had three degrees and produced most of the income and Byrne was a writer, and niece to Margaret Sanger.<sup>31</sup> Sanger was a prominent feminist of the time who pushed for the introduction of birth control and wrote *Women and the New Race*. Marston declared Sanger as the second most important figure of their time in a press conference in 1937.<sup>32</sup>

Marston and Byrne orchestrated an interview about the relatively new phenomena of comic books in 1941 for the women's magazine *Family Circle*.<sup>33</sup> The article discussed the possible effects that comics were having on children, where the psychiatrist encouraged their use and

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<sup>28</sup> Honey, p43.

<sup>29</sup> Honey, p33/34.

<sup>30</sup> Lepore, Jill. *The Secret History of Wonder Woman*. Alfred A. Knopf. 2014. Print. p26.

<sup>31</sup> Stuller, Jennifer K. *Ink-Stained Amazons and Cinematic Warriors: Superwomen in Modern Mythology*. Tauris, 2010. Print. p18.

<sup>32</sup> Lepore, p208.

<sup>33</sup> Lepore, p206.

dismissed any harmful effects they may have. M.C. Gaines, the head of *DC*, read the article and decided to hire Morris as an editorial advisor and writer for the company.<sup>34</sup>

In 1941, the same time Morris joined *DC*, the comic book medium came under scrutiny due to the level of violence depicted in them. Marston pitched the idea of a female superwoman to *Gaines* to combat the reputation the comics were gaining but *Gaines* noted the failure of previous attempts to sell comics with female characters. *Morris* insisted *that* a woman that was stronger than any man would be the remedy.<sup>35</sup> *Marston* was an 'essentialist feminist' who saw a clear distinction between men and women. He believed women were naturally more loving and maternal and personally believed they were superior to men.<sup>36</sup> 'Women's strong qualities have become despised because of their weak ones. The obvious remedy is to create a feminine character with all the strength of Superman plus all the allure of a good and beautiful woman'<sup>37</sup>.

*Gaines* reluctantly supported *Morris's* pitch and in February 1941 Marston submitted the first script for *Wonder Woman*, then titled '*Suprema, the Wonder Woman*'.<sup>38</sup> Marston was lenient when it came to changes to much of the content in the comics but was adamant that the feminist themes were not interfered with, so he allowed the editor Sheldon Mayor to change the title to *Wonder Woman*.<sup>39</sup> From its onset it is evident that the feminism in the comic is what Marston was focused on.

He hired Harry George Peters as the artist for the comic, who did not have much experience working with comic books. Marston believed that there was a current movement underway in women's equality and insisted that *Wonder Woman* would embody the characteristics associated with the independent modern woman and cited Margaret Sanger as an influence.<sup>40</sup> Peters had experience creating pro-suffrage cartoons and had previously worked with noted suffragette cartoonist Lou Rogers, when submitting artwork to be shown in the *Judge* for the pro suffrage feature 'The Modern Woman'.<sup>41</sup> For her costume he suggested she

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<sup>34</sup> Stuller, p14.

<sup>35</sup> Robinson, Lillian S. *Wonder Women: Feminisms and Superheroes*. Routledge, 2004. Print. p27.

<sup>36</sup> Robinson, p27.

<sup>37</sup> Lepore, Jill. *The Secret History of Wonder Woman*. Alfred A. Knopf. 2014. Print. p209.

<sup>38</sup> Lepore, p208/209

<sup>39</sup> Lepore, p210.

<sup>40</sup> Lepore, p216.

<sup>41</sup> Lepore, p218.

wear a tiara inspired by the Miss America pageant and would wear the patriotic colours red, white and blue, like her peer Captain America. Gaines insisted that her outfit be revealing to sell more magazines.<sup>42</sup> All parties are male and have conceived the idea that beauty is power. Its initial producer would push for a revealing costume to reach a larger demographic possibly taking cues from *'Sheena of the Jungle,'* a strategy that will continue to be used in each iteration.

*Wonder Woman* made her debut appearance in *AllStar Comics 8* on December 1941 at the same time America was entering World War 2.<sup>43</sup> Five days after the attack on Pearl Harbour, *Marston* offered his services in psychology, and the lie detector he had invented, to aid the military during World war 2, but was never asked to do so.<sup>44</sup> This is a key indicator that *Marston* was more than willing to support the war effort and would use his new comic to do so.

In 1942 the *'Magazine War Guide'* began to give plot suggestions to fiction writers such as:

An Amazonian economy might trace its inception to this war enforced change in our mores. A story of the supernatural might be woven around a woman locomotive engineer, for instance, or a feminine bus driver meeting with eerie adventure in lonely streets. ... [There might even be] stories of utopias in which public health setups [are] administered by the descendants of nurses of our day''<sup>45</sup>.

We can see influences of this kind of plot in the first issue of the *Wonder Woman* series. *Aphrodite*, the Goddess worshipped by the Amazons, would ask them to send a warrior to America to fight for the 'last free democracy'. *Wonder Woman* would escort Steve Trevor back to America and take up the secret identity of Diana Prince, who was employed as *Steve Trevor's* military secretary.<sup>46</sup> Her first identity would be a brief appearance as a nurse as the comic introduces *Wonder Woman* to her new career (Fig. 2).

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<sup>42</sup> Lepore, p218.

<sup>43</sup> Lepore, p224.

<sup>44</sup> Lepore, p223.

<sup>45</sup> Honey, p48.

<sup>46</sup> Morris, Charles Moulton. *"Wonder Woman#1."* *Wonder Woman*, vol. 1, issue no. 1, Dc Comics, 1942, p.1.





Fig. 2: *Wonder Woman* nurses Steve Trevor. *Wonder Woman*#1, 1942

The *Wonder Woman* comics contained several panels encouraging children to remind their parents to support the military effort including *Wonder Woman* talking directly to children (Fig. 3). During the War she would continually fight for the allies in World War 2, including a story in the second issue where she comes face to face with Hitler. Racist portrayals of Japanese were encouraged by the WAC and in the first story of *Wonder Woman* in America she takes on a group of Japanese spies, called 'Japs' in the comic.<sup>47</sup> The racism in *Wonder Woman* may be considered 'of the time' by some, but there's a crudeness in the design of Japanese characters who would always speak very poor English (Fig. 4). Most antagonists, including those that were non-American, are being blackmailed by Nazis or by the Japanese.<sup>48</sup>

The WAC suggested that "Villains should be characters who selfishly thought only of their own troubles and failed to share their skills, resources, and energies with others"<sup>49</sup>,

<sup>47</sup> Honey, p50&51.

<sup>48</sup> Robinson, p38&39.

<sup>49</sup> Honey, p51.

characteristics that are noted in the villains in *Wonder Woman*,<sup>50</sup> as well as their disdain for Women's equality.<sup>51</sup>



Fig. 3: Supporting the military effort. *Wonder Woman*#1, 1942



Fig. 4: Capturing a Japanese Spy. *Wonder Woman* #1, 1942

The first issue contains a historical account of Florence Nightingale in a separate segment called '*Wonder Woman of History*'. This segment would be included with every issue of the comic, with each story containing a prominent figure in women's history.<sup>52</sup> Many of the stories referenced real-world historical moments in women's history reimagined with *Wonder Woman*.<sup>53</sup>(Fig. 5) These stories would also reference iconic images of the suffragettes such as Inez Milholland Boissevain leading the suffragette parade in 1912(Fig. 6). Peters included a panel of the Amazons revolting against their male captors (Fig. 7), that is reminiscent of Lou Rogers' pro suffragette cartoon '*Tearing of the Bonds*'(Fig. 8). The war had a huge influence in the initial years of the comic, but the feminist themes would be consistent in the comic<sup>54</sup>.

<sup>50</sup>Lepore, p241.

<sup>51</sup> Lepore, p243.

<sup>52</sup> Lepore, p249.

<sup>53</sup> Lepore, p237&240.

<sup>54</sup> Robinson, p56.

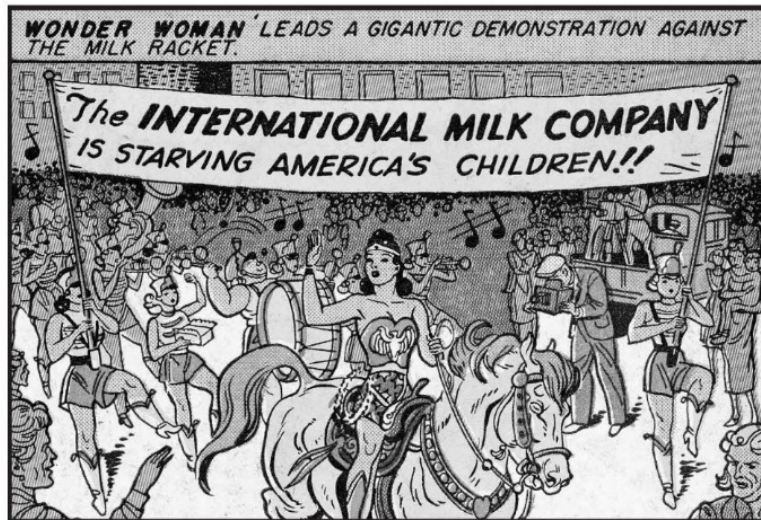


Fig. 5: 'The Milk Swindle', Sensation Comics#7, 1942



Fig. 6: Inez Milholland Boissevain, leading a suffrage parade in Washington, 1913

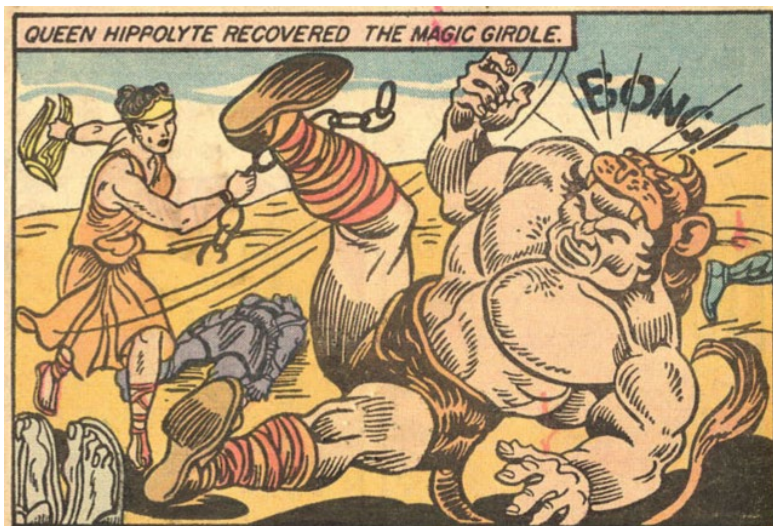


Fig 7: Hippolyte using the chains she was shackled in to fight Hercules. Wonder Woman #1, 1942

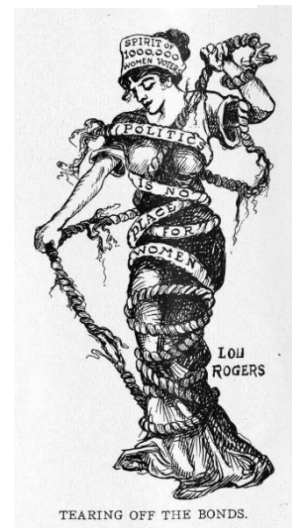


Fig. 8: 'Tearing off the Bonds', 1912



*Wonder Woman* became a new sensation and by her third comic was selling more than five hundred thousand copies.<sup>55</sup> After the war, comics book dwindled in popularity<sup>56</sup> and the new image of women entering the work force was no longer popularized. Women's newfound position was considered temporary and most were laid off once the American Troops had returned.<sup>57</sup> The new image now depicted women heading back to the home.<sup>58</sup> However, *Wonder Woman* would remain popular<sup>59</sup> and the feminist themes in her comics would continue, until the departure of William Moulton Marston in 1946.<sup>60</sup> *Wonder Woman* quickly began to lose aspects of her character that she is recognised for and would soon follow in line with most popular comic books aimed at young girls at the time<sup>61</sup> and focus mainly on her romance with Steve Trevor (Fig. 9). Though her popularity amongst readers began to dwindle the series would continue to be produced, partly due to a condition in Marston's contract that would give full ownership of the character to his family once production had ceased.<sup>62</sup>



Fig. 9: Front Cover of *Wonder Woman*#94, 1949

<sup>55</sup> Lepore, p249.

<sup>56</sup> Gabillet, p26.

<sup>57</sup> Honey, p23.

<sup>58</sup> Honey, p52.

<sup>59</sup> Gabillet, p21.

<sup>60</sup> Stuller, p23.

<sup>61</sup> Gabillet, p29.

<sup>62</sup> Gabillet, p41.

Marston was savvy, orchestrating the interview with Byrne to gain work in the industry and incorporating a clause that would force the continuation of the comic in his original contract. He was evidently patriotic, so it can be surmised that he would have had little issue incorporating directions from the WAC into the *Wonder Woman* comics. D.C. is originally a pulp publisher which the WAC would have taken great interest in. *Wonder Woman's* affiliation with the war is obvious as she is fighting in World War 2 in the comics. What is interesting is the influence of the *Magazine War Guides* direction on the stories. *Wonder Woman* is more involved with the propaganda initiative that appears at surface level. The guide clearly influenced the character's origins, motives and the villains she comes up against. All non-white characters are portrayed as racist caricatures, but none are as deviant as the Japanese and most villains depicted in the comics during the war are Nazis or Japanese. Marston and Gaines may have seen the propaganda initiative as an opportunity to promote the character and the propaganda initiative may also have contributed to the massive popularity of the comic book itself. Marston evidently used this opportunity to spread his feminist message, but the lack of women involved in the production of the comic book begs us to question Marston's genuine confidence in women as a superpower. The comic does take great effort in showing real life examples of influential women of history with the '*Wonder Woman of History*' segment, showing readers that the idea of *Wonder Woman* is not purely fiction. The original comics are progressive and feminist for using real life stories of women's progression, looking to the Suffragettes for influence and citing prominent activist like Sanger as an inspiration. '*Rosie the Riveter*' was an ideal while *Wonder Woman* was real. The *Wonder Woman* comics would eventually dwindle in popularity which would lead DC to make drastic changes to her character to entice the modern audience of the sixties. This decision would capture the attention of the second wave feminist movement whose endorsement of the original comics would breathe new life into the character and cement her as feminist icon, which will be the subject of the next chapter.

## Chapter 2:

### Media, The Second Wave and 'The New Original Wonder Woman'

The second waves relationship with mass media outlets would evolve *Wonder Woman* from a symbol of female strength to a feminist icon. This chapter will explore *Wonder Woman's* influence on the second wave and the second waves influence on *Wonder Woman*. The Civil Rights Movement, which protested the discriminatory conditions that persons of colour experienced in America, began in the 1950s and continued throughout the 1960s. It aimed to bring equality to all Americans through law. White activists who tried to aid in the movement were rejected, which led many of them to move to the Anti-war movement.<sup>63</sup> Students began protesting the war in universities around the country through peaceful demonstrations of sit ins and takeovers.<sup>64</sup> The Anti-war movement protested the Vietnam war which began in 1955 and ended in 1973. Female anti-war activists began discussions on the similarities of the status of oppressed people and women in 1964.<sup>65</sup>

Book publishers began to view books as a product to sell to a market in the 1960s. Endorsing radically new ideas was a risky and a potentially damaging move by most mass media producers of the time,<sup>66</sup> but niche markets and specialised interest led publishers to try capitalize on audiences that had yet to be reached.<sup>67</sup> The female suburban audience was a desirable target for publishers, who would look for inspiration from Women's Magazines in what to publish.<sup>68</sup> On 19 February 1963, W.W. Norton published Betty Freidan's *The Feminine mystique* which is often seen as a defining factor in sparking the second wave feminist movement.<sup>69</sup>

*The Feminine Mystique* is written in an accessible writing style thanks to Freidan's extensive experience writing articles for women's magazines such as *Charm Magazine* and *Good*

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<sup>63</sup> Bradley, Patricia. *Mass Media and the Shaping of American Feminism, 1963-1975*. University Press of Mississippi, 2003. Print. p53.

<sup>64</sup> Bradley, p53.

<sup>65</sup> Bradley, p52.

<sup>66</sup> Bradley, p14.

<sup>67</sup> Bradley, p5.

<sup>68</sup> Bradley, p7.

<sup>69</sup> Bradley, p15.

*Housekeeping*.<sup>70</sup> She marketed herself as a typical suburban housewife<sup>71</sup> and spoke to the reader on a personal level, by pointing to individual resolution as the remedy to the systematic issue's women faced. These would all be contributing factors to the book's popularity.<sup>72</sup> The book is criticised for not pointing to political activism and ignoring issues of class and race.<sup>73</sup> Though it did not incite systematic change as the solution it did point to media institutions as the prominent reason for the current cultural view point.<sup>74</sup>

The success of *The Feminine Mystique* showed feminist activists the importance of the role of media in the second wave movement and would lead many to use the media to spread their own message.<sup>75</sup> The media would easily adopt stereotypes which would negatively impact the representation of feminism,<sup>76</sup> so the strategic understanding of journalistic practices became imperative to feminist utilizing the media as a tool to share their viewpoint.<sup>77</sup> Friedan who was seen in many feminist circles as a central activist to the movement<sup>78</sup> quickly became characterised by the media as a strident feminist.<sup>79</sup> Gloria Steinem had begun making a name for herself as a writer while working at *Esquire* magazine in 1963. The magazine was marketed towards young male readers,<sup>80</sup> which would lead Steinem to express her voice elsewhere as she would not be considered a crucial player in the magazine due to her sex.<sup>81</sup> By 1969, Steinem's interest in writing and politics would bring her to feminist activism.<sup>82</sup>

Steinem initially wrote articles that would appeal to an inclusive feminism for both men and women.<sup>83</sup> The general media began to push Gloria Steinem into the position of feminist leader and in 1972, *Mc Calls Magazine* appointed her 'Woman of the Year'. This led to her completely over taking Freidan in the mass media spotlight.<sup>84</sup> As it was largely the medias decision to appoint Steinem in a leadership position, she was at the mercy of the media to continually

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<sup>70</sup> Bradley, p7.

<sup>71</sup> Bradley, p15.

<sup>72</sup> Bradley, p12.

<sup>73</sup> Bradley, p12.

<sup>74</sup> Bradley, p22.

<sup>75</sup> Bradley, p18.

<sup>76</sup> Bradley, p4.

<sup>77</sup> Bradley, p16.

<sup>78</sup> Bradley, p166.

<sup>79</sup> Bradley, p28.

<sup>80</sup> Bradley, p146.

<sup>81</sup> Bradley, p149.

<sup>82</sup> Bradley, p152.

<sup>83</sup> Bradley, p152.

<sup>84</sup> Bradley, p158.

create content which was palpable to the general American reader.<sup>85</sup> “She is highly photogenic, she associates with the people the media likes to photograph, and she is careful to push for the liberation of women in unstructured, non-philosophical ways that Americans like”<sup>86</sup>.

In early 1971, Gloria Steinem would conceive the idea of *Ms. Magazine*, a magazine that would push for feminism to take its place in the general consciousness of America.<sup>87</sup> The magazine was to be a national publication that would target women across class and ethnicity, with ‘diverse editorial content’<sup>88</sup>. It aimed to join the fragmented point of views of feminism that had previously been portrayed in the media by pushing for solidarity and sisterhood amongst the movement.<sup>89</sup> It would fundamentally spread the ideology of American Liberalism, in overcoming prejudicial thinking to combat societal inequalities.<sup>90</sup> Clay Felker, who worked at *New York* magazine, had the magazine back a sample issue to be packaged with their end of year double issue, giving the writers at *Ms.* full editorial freedom.<sup>91</sup>

In the late 1960s, the *Wonder Woman* comics fell in popularity. To combat this, D.C. completely rebranded the character to appeal to the current feminist movement. The Diana Prince era caught the attention of Steinem and many of the writers at *Ms.*, who were childhood fans of the comic book and unsupportive of the new storyline.<sup>92</sup> The first issue of *Ms.* featured an illustration of the original *Wonder Woman* on the front cover with the headline ‘*Wonder Woman for President!*’ (Fig. 10). The illustration is true to the original comic and it is strikingly easy to recognize the character as she takes up most of the page. The magazine writers then successfully petitioned the new writers of the comic to have her powers returned.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Bradley, p153.

<sup>86</sup> Bradley, p165.

<sup>87</sup> Bradley, p171.

<sup>88</sup> Bradley, p176.

<sup>89</sup> Bradley, p182.

<sup>90</sup> Bradley, p177.

<sup>91</sup> Stuller, p38.

<sup>92</sup> Stuller, p37.

<sup>93</sup> Stuller, p38&39.



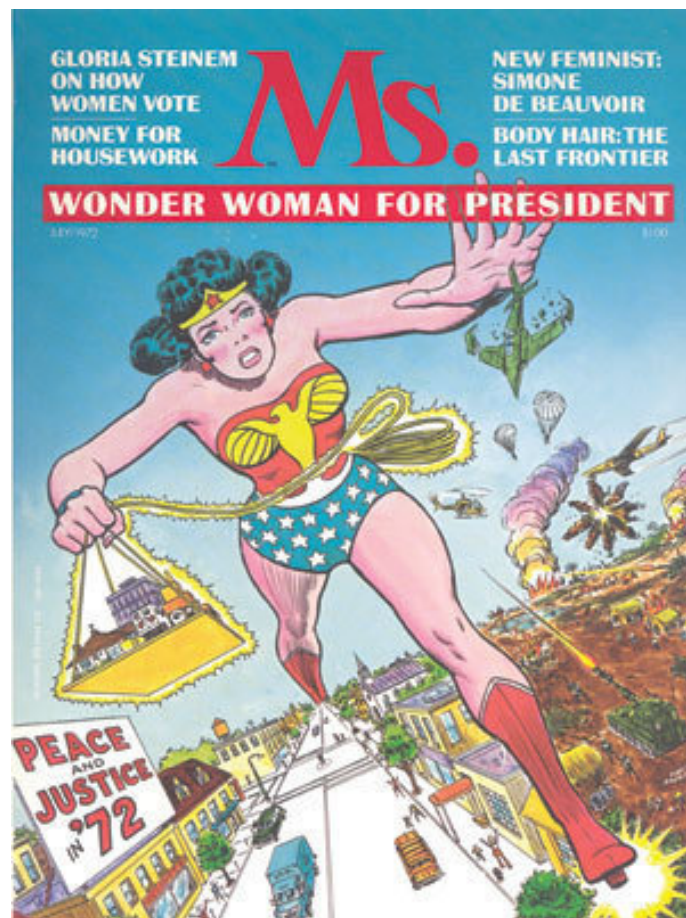


Fig. 10: *Wonder Woman* on the cover of *Ms.*#1, 1972

The television industry differed to magazine or book industries as it needed to appeal to both male and female viewers.<sup>94</sup> In her book Bradley argues that ‘The commercial base of media was not an iron curtain erected against the postwar feminist impulse; rather, the commercial base allowed for—even demanded—the inclusion of post war feminism as part of a mix that aimed to please and to please as many as possible’<sup>95</sup>. The 2nd waves use of mass media to spread their message caused media outlets to try and use the wave to create content that would appeal to both women and men of the time.<sup>96</sup> What producers wanted was a character that ‘women want to be and men wanted to be with’.

In 1961, a British television series called *The Avengers*’ was produced by ABC and ITV network. The show’s only female spy, Emma Peel, was largely popular amongst male and female

<sup>94</sup> Bradley, p9.

<sup>95</sup> Bradley, p11.

<sup>96</sup>Bradley, p10.

viewers which started the trend of the female spy with sex appeal (Fig. 11). Her own name alludes to this as it a play on words. Emma Peel is M. Appeal, standing for male appeal. This new trend inspired George Perez to write the 'Diana Prince Era' of the *Wonder Woman* comics.<sup>97</sup> The influence is easily recognised as the two characters show an uncanny resemblance, even in their stance (Fig. 12). It could be said that Perez truly believed he was appealing to the second wave by incorporating Diana owing a fashion boutique<sup>98</sup> due to the stereotype the media portrayed of the 'careerist feminist'<sup>99</sup>. This new version of the comic is credited as the inspirations for the Television movie, 'Wonder Woman' starring Cathy lee Crosby in 1974 which failed.



Fig. 11: Diana Rigg as Emma Peel, 1961



Fig. 12: Wonder Woman#178, 1968

<sup>97</sup> DiPaolo, Marc. *War, Politics and Superheroes Ethics and Propaganda in Comics and Film*. MacFarland, 2011. Print. p79.

<sup>98</sup> Daniels, Les, and Chip Kidd. *Wonder Woman: the Life and Times of the Amazon Princess: the Complete History*. Chronicle Books, 2004. Print. p126.

<sup>99</sup> Bradley, p15.

*Ms.* released a book containing fourteen comic books that they considered to be positive feminist portrayals of *Wonder Woman* in her original comic in 1973, which they used to promote subscriptions to the magazine.<sup>100</sup> The use of *Wonder Woman* by *Ms.* may not be viewed purely as a bid to revive her original feminist character but also to use her popular image to help sales and promote '*Ms.*'<sup>101</sup>. Gloria Steinem's previous experience with shaping her image to be a positive one in mass media outlets caused her to come under fire by radical feminist and *Ms.* was criticised for appealing to a capitalist market.<sup>102</sup> Steinem's ability to recognize the original *Wonder Woman* as a popular image to sell magazines and the failure of the 'Emma Peel' inspired character would have been large indicators to producers to not delve too far from the original source material when creating '*The New Original Wonder Woman*'.

*The New Original Wonder Woman* had to attract female and male viewers to succeed. To attract male viewers Lynda Carter, former Miss World USA was cast in the leading role. The decision to cast a former beauty queen could be an indication of the producer's lack of concern for the second waves total approval due to a previous protest of the *Miss World USA* by a feminist group, which made headlines across all of America and became synonymous with the second wave.<sup>103</sup> Her costume in the show is often criticised due to how revealing it is. The criticisms are not unfounded as the costume resembles a patriotic swimsuit rather than Amazonian armour (Fig. 13). Lynda Carter herself said it "felt like a second skin. I really didn't feel too self-conscious oddly. Maybe I should have but, you know, don't forget, this was the 'ban the bra' time, this was sexual freedom, this was bikinis and midriffs and that was the timing and I really wasn't thinking of being sexy either."<sup>104</sup> Steinem disapproved of the casting of Lynda Carter, who is often credited by critics and fans as a crucial reason the show was a success, due to her accurate and genuine portrayal of the character.<sup>105</sup>

A pamphlet created by the radical feminist group *The Redstockings* appeared in 1972 accusing Steinem of being an undercover *CIA* agent planted in the second wave to dismantle the

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<sup>100</sup> Lepore, p221.

<sup>101</sup> Munford, Rebecca, and Melanie Waters. *Feminism & Popular Culture: Investigating the Postfeminist Mystique*. Rutgers University Press, 2014. Print. p7.

<sup>102</sup> Munford&Waters, p2.

<sup>103</sup> Bradley, p59.

<sup>104</sup> Dipoalo, p80.

<sup>105</sup> Stuller, p43.

movement from the inside. It contained a caricature of Steinem dressed as *Wonder Woman* (Fig. 14). The same article denounced *Wonder Woman* claiming that she perpetuated the idea that a woman has the power within herself to overcome discrimination and that it is not the fault of systematic oppressions.<sup>106</sup> In the television series the Amazons are all white young and beautiful. Her costume is revealing. The cast is not diverse, and *Wonder Woman* does not incite systematic changes. *'The New Original Wonder Woman'* would have been viewed by the second wave as a sell-out.



Fig. 13: Lynda Carter as Wonder Woman, 1976



Fig. 14: Redstockings Pamphlet, 1975

Though the show was popular, ABC sold the series to CNN where the character was brought from World War 2 to modern day 1976. Diana would remark on how women’s equality has not moved forward more than it had in this series but would not use her powers to bring about change. The second season stayed loyal to the original comics core themes<sup>107</sup> but the third season would make changes to *Wonder Woman’s* principles making her more violent and threatening. These changes lead to a decline in viewers which would ultimately cause the show to be cancelled in 1978.<sup>108</sup> *The New Original Wonder Woman* left a legacy of dispelling

<sup>106</sup> Lepore, p327.

<sup>107</sup> Dipoalo, p60.

<sup>108</sup> Lepore, p226.

the myth that a female lead could not carry a television series causing the creation of famous television series like the *'Bionic Woman'* and *'Charlie's Angels'* <sup>109</sup>.

*The New Original Wonder Woman* is the first successful live action interpretation of the character. Steinem's ability to utilize the media as a tool to spread her feminist message and identifying the original *Wonder Woman* comic character as a fictional feminist icon may be the defining factor in the show's choice to stay true to the source material. It is criticized for pandering to a male audience with the characters revealing costume and the casting of a former *'Miss USA'* pageant winner. The show did not incite systematic change or hold any political themes and is not ethnically diverse, particularly in the Amazonian race. Though the costume is revealing, it is often noted that Carter does not sexualise the character when portraying her. It is apparent she had little concern with the costume and was more focused on giving an accurate portrayal. So, though the costume may resemble a swimsuit she does not incorporate sexuality as a form of power. Its biggest contribution is showing a female character displaying strength in a way that had not been seen before on television. *Wonder Woman* would only appear in animations and comic books for the next 30 years apart from a failed tv pilot in 2011. The internet gives a new platform to share feminist thought in the 2000's and after a succession of films with male leads dominating the genre, *Wonder Woman* is the first high budget superhero film with a female lead to be produced in this wave, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

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<sup>109</sup> Stuller, p44.



## Chapter 3

### Social Media, Mass Media Criticism and *Wonder Woman* 2017

Social media and mass media criticism have given rise to a new outlook on feminist media analysis due to accessible and easily digested formats of sharing feminist thought. This chapter explores how the controversy and accessibility of this new platform and the rise of marketplace feminism has influenced the *Wonder Woman* 2017 film in front of, and behind the camera. In the mid-2000s social media sites such as Tumblr, Twitter and Facebook grew in popularity on an international scale. By 2008, the online persona of an individual had become embedded with their offline life<sup>110</sup> and in 2013, it was suggested 99 percent of 17-year olds with internet access would use social media sites.<sup>111</sup>

The anonymity and accessibility of social media sites lead many people to see the internet as a safe space that they could express their individuality<sup>112</sup>, with many young people feeling they can be their true selves online more than offline on anonymous sites such as Tumblr. These sites would also allow people of various interest to connect with others with similar points of views.<sup>113</sup> The internet became increasingly accessible due to the availability of mobile devices which allowed women who are discriminated against in marginalised areas to join in on the feminist conversation.<sup>114</sup>

Online spaces are also an easy platform for bigotry and harassment<sup>115</sup>, with cybersexists relying on anonymity to confidently express their opinions.<sup>116</sup> 'Trolling', a form of online harassment used to irritate an online activity, was used to describe the online persecution of several women which had serious consequences to their offline life.<sup>117</sup> The first case of abuse

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<sup>110</sup> Dobson, Amy Shields. *Postfeminist Digital Cultures: Femininity, Social Media, and Self-Representation*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. Print. p42.

<sup>111</sup> Dobson, p43.

<sup>112</sup> Dobson, p46.

<sup>113</sup> Dobson, p48.

<sup>114</sup> Poland, Bailey. *Haters: Harassment, Abuse, and Violence Online*. Potomac Books, 2016. Print. p206.

<sup>115</sup> Poland, p1.

<sup>116</sup> Poland, p22.

<sup>117</sup> Poland, p25&26.

reaching a level that interfered with someone's personal life was with Kathy Sierra in 2007, where the threats on the game developer's safety put her career on hold for six years.<sup>118</sup>

In August 2014, Eron Gjoni an unknown game developer wrote a scathing post about his ex-girlfriend Zoe Quinn. Quinn had recently gained notoriety in the gaming community for developing the computer game *Depression Quest*. Gjoni made defamatory claims about Quinn in this post, that had no evidence of being true and incited revenge on her through online harassment. This post would make its way onto multiple forums including the largely unmonitored forum known as 4chan<sup>119</sup>.

Known as '*#gamergate*', the community formed an online hate group that aimed to destroy every aspect of the game developer's life.<sup>120</sup> The online group, also known as a *cybermob*, would escalate from using sexist slurs to threats on her safety, doxing: the practice of leaking personal information about an individual and swatting: calling a fake warning of danger to get a SWAT team to storm the individual's home.<sup>121</sup> The cybermob would soon target other women that caught the attention of the gaming community.

Anita Sarkeesian created the popular *YouTube* channel *Feminist Frequency* which consisted of video essays detailing various forms of feminist media analysis. In 2014, she launched a kickstarter to raise funds to produce a video series titled '*Tropes vs Women in Video Games*.' In it she would apply feminist media analysis to the overwhelmingly male dominated industry. *#gamergate* saw this as an attack before the series was even released and began to harass Sarkeesian in the same way they had Quinn.<sup>122</sup>

Participants of *#gamergate* began to attack anyone that they perceived as a threat to the 'boys club' and focused their attention primarily on women.<sup>123</sup> The abuse gained the support of right-wing activist Milo Yiannopoulos<sup>124</sup> and first amendment lawyer Cernovich who would go so far as to hire private investigators to get information on the mob's targets.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Poland, p56.

<sup>119</sup> Poland, p141.

<sup>120</sup> Poland, p142.

<sup>121</sup> Poland, p144.

<sup>122</sup> Poland, p147.

<sup>123</sup> Poland, p146.

<sup>124</sup> Poland, p46.

<sup>125</sup> Poland, p153.

*#gamergate* would gain the general populations attention, with celebrities and politicians condemning their acts.<sup>126</sup> Support for the victims came in response to the cybermob. Sarkessin's kickstarter aimed to raise nine thousand dollars for '*Tropes vs Women in Video Games*'. She surpassed that goal and the series raised over one hundred and fifty thousand dollars and went into production.<sup>127</sup> The hyper sexist attitudes of the gaming community brought feminist media analysis into the modern-day conversation. Advertisers would soon realise the implication of this and would begin to apply marketplace feminism to their campaigns.<sup>128</sup> This however might be perceived as progressive but much like the second wave would only portray the most appealing aspects of the movement.<sup>129</sup>

The internet would also give rise to media criticism in the forms of blogs or vlogs.<sup>130</sup> Blogs like '*Women in Hollywood*' would share stories on every aspect of the film industry. With freedom to post anonymously, the stories revealed truths of sexism perpetuated by the industry.<sup>131</sup> Fan sites for various television shows, movies and computer games began to increase in numbers, leading to a higher rate of criticism being applied to all forms of media.<sup>132</sup> 'We're at a place now where we almost can't consume pop culture without breaking it down, even as we are entertained by it; even as we're watching *Orange Is the New Black*, we're not just watching it as this really great, funny show, we're thinking about, 'What does this scene say about rape?' and 'What does this scene say about relationships between white and black women?'<sup>133</sup>.

The 2013 Sundance/Women in Film study asked fifty-one independent female filmmakers how their gender had affected their careers in films. 'In their answers, five key challenges stood out: "gendered financial barriers," "male-dominated networks," "stereotyping on set," "work and family balance," and "exclusionary hiring decisions'.'<sup>134</sup> If a movie was not a box office success, producers would often blame the female presence, not considering the quality

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<sup>126</sup> Quinn, Zoe. *Crash Override: How Gamergate Nearly Destroyed My Life, and How We Can Win the Fight Against Online Hate*. Perseus Books Group, 2017. Print. pX.

<sup>127</sup> Kickstarter

<sup>128</sup> Ziesler, Andi. *We Were Feminist Once*. New York: Public Affairs, 2016. Print. p19.

<sup>129</sup> Ziesler, p56.

<sup>130</sup> Ziesler, p19.

<sup>131</sup> Ziesler, p23&24.

<sup>132</sup> Ziesler, p80.

<sup>133</sup> Ziesler, p80.

<sup>134</sup> Zeilser, p31.



of the overall film.<sup>135</sup> As high-budget blockbusters were being produced in greater numbers, women's roles in these films decreased causing the already segregated industry to shun women both in front of and behind the camera.<sup>136</sup> "Studio executives believe that male moviegoers would rather prep for a colonoscopy than experience a woman's point of view, particularly if that woman drinks or swears or has a great job or an orgasm"<sup>137</sup>.

In 2016, *Wonder Woman* made her first appearance in Zack Snyder's *Batman vs Superman*. It was soon announced that Patty Jenkins would direct the solo *Wonder Woman* film where she would be the first woman to direct a film whose budget was higher than one hundred million.<sup>138</sup>

For the series '*Tropes Vs Women in Videos Games*', Anita Sarkeesin published 'Lingerie is not Armour' on the 6 June 2016. The YouTube video has over three hundred thousand views and is the 3<sup>rd</sup> episode of the second season. In the video essay Sarkeesin discusses the stereotypical attire that female protagonists wear in video games. She notes that though the situations the characters are in require protective and practical clothing, 'when we look at the types of clothing female characters wear we can see that they are both sexualized and completely absurd'<sup>139</sup>. She uses examples from various video games where the sex appeal of a female character is her most important characteristic and how games and other media frame this sexualization as a form of power. She states that this is not empowering as the 'sexuality these characters exude is manufactured for, and presented as existing for, the presumed straight male player.'<sup>140</sup> Stating although characters are fictional that 'we live in a culture where women are often valued primarily on their sexual desirability to men. So, while characters like this are incredibly powerful in the physical sense, able to slay entire army's and bring down gods, that there is nothing empowering about the fact that they are sexually objectified'<sup>141</sup>. She points to real life examples of women in marital arts or combat roles that developers could draw inspiration from and that 'It is important to note that it is not the

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<sup>135</sup> Zeisler, p24.

<sup>136</sup> Zeisler, p24.

<sup>137</sup> Zeisler, p37.

<sup>138</sup> Robehmed, Natalie. "'Wonder Woman' Director Patty Jenkins On Her Superhuman Box Office Triumph." *Forbes*, Forbes Magazine, 11 Jan. 2018.

<sup>139</sup> Sarkeesin Anita. "Lingerie Is Not Armor - Tropes vs Women in Video Games." *YouTube*, feministfrequency. YouTube, 6 June 2016. 03:30 -

<sup>140</sup> Sarkeesin, "Lingerie Is Not Armor - Tropes vs Women in Video Games." 05:30-05:38.

<sup>141</sup> Sarkeesin, "Lingerie Is Not Armor - Tropes vs Women in Video Games." 07:30-07:41.

amount of skin shown that is the crux of the problem. Many female athletes wear minimal from fitting clothing because its more conducive to their activities. However, their outfits are not designed with the primary goal of sexualizing the athletes for the benefit of the spectators<sup>142</sup>.

In a 2016 interview with *Fashionista*, Lindy Hemmingway, the costume designer for *Wonder Woman*, discusses how she designed the costumes for the Amazons taking inspiration from current trends in women's sports ware, saying that she 'wanted [the Amazons] to look like they were sporty and strong and they were able to ride horses.'<sup>143</sup> She looked at historical examples of female leaders and in an interview with *Grazia* magazine she identifies Greek male armour as a source of inspiration. 'We knew the legs were going to be exposed, so we didn't want to have the breasts on view: why wear armour if so much of your body is vulnerable? We wanted to allude without revealing, not taking an underwear-as-outerwearpath.'<sup>144</sup>

The language that Hemming uses is in-line with the massive complaints being made about the gaming industry's sexist designs of characters. It could be said that she was aware of the criticisms being made when designing for a superhero which would have a similar demographic to gaming. *Wonder Woman's* costume has been critiqued for how revealing it is, but it is noteworthy that the character's costume made her debut in '*Batman vs Superman*' under Zack Snyder's direction. Interestingly Snyder was hugely criticised for the stark changes he made to the Amazonian costumes by dressing them in more revealing clothing, when the same characters appeared in the '*Justice League*' film.<sup>145</sup> When we look at the *Wonder Woman* costume (Fig. 15) and compare it to a member of the Amazonian army in the same film (Fig. 16) we can see a significant difference. If we fully appreciate Sarkeesin's criticisms, it would make little sense for *Wonder Woman* to wear less than that of her peers as she heads out to fight in a war alone. We can also concur that the final decision on the *Wonder Woman* armour was made by a man while the Amazonian armour was decided by a woman.

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<sup>142</sup> Sarkeesin, "Lingerie Is Not Armor - Tropes vs Women in Video Games." 12:50-12:58.

<sup>143</sup> Hoo, Fawnia Soo. "The '*Wonder Woman*' Costumes Are a Celebration of Female Empowerment." *Fashionista*, Fashionista, 5 June 2017.

<sup>144</sup> Rosseinsky, Katie. "*Wonder Woman's* Costume Designer On Dressing 2017's Standout Superhero." *Grazia*, *Grazia*.

<sup>145</sup> Murray, Daisy. "Has Male-Directed '*Justice League*' Made The Amazon's Outfits More Revealing Than In '*Wonder Woman*'?" *ELLE*, *ELLE*, 16 Feb. 2018



Fig. 15: *Wonder Woman* poster, 2017



Fig. 16: Extra displaying Amazonian Costume, 2017

Sarkeesin published another video titled '*All the Slender Ladies: Body Diversity in Video Games*' on the 8 September 2016. In the video, which has more than four hundred thousand views, she discusses the lack in variety in female body types versus that of their male counterparts. She notes that though there are slight variations that 'not one of them represents a notable departure from the slender body type that has been established as the standard of conventional female attractiveness'<sup>146</sup>. She points to the harmful effects these representations have for women saying 'It links our value as human beings within the culture to our desirability to men, and it reinforces our culturally influenced ideas about who gets to be considered desirable and who doesn't'<sup>147</sup>. She goes on to discuss the lack in variety in the ages of female characters noting that the majority are depicted as young.<sup>148</sup>

In an interview with *entertainment weekly* Patty Jenkins discussed the difficulty in creating the scenes of Themyscira and creating the Amazon army. She states that 'it was really important to me and a lot of us, to find real athletes to do these different things as we needed

<sup>146</sup> Sarkeesin, Anita. "All the Slender Ladies: Body Diversity in Video Games." *YouTube*, feministfrequency, 1 Sept. 2016. 01:40-01:46.

<sup>147</sup> Sarkeesin, "All the Slender Ladies: Body Diversity in Video Games." 03:50-03:60.

<sup>148</sup> Sarkeesin, "All the Slender Ladies: Body Diversity in Video Games." 05:00-05:09.

to represent all of different kinds of strength<sup>149</sup>.' On the website Italian 'Sasslive' on 6 February 2016 a casting call for Amazons was put out asking 'We are looking for women between the ages of 18 and 60, elegant, lean, natural, of different ethnic groups, with a height of at least 174 centimetres. It is preferable to dress in tight-fitting clothes, such as leggings and tank tops, to assess whether they can interpret the required role'<sup>150</sup> (translated from Italian with google translate). Actors were sourced from different backgrounds such as Boxers, CrossFit champions, Archers and horse riders for specific roles to give the society authenticity.<sup>151</sup> The film is aware of body diversity and displaying different types of strength so much so that it uses its casting as a form of promotion (Fig. 19). Gal Gadot the actress who plays *Wonder Women* is widely known for her experience working as a personal trainer for the Israeli army, as well as winning Ms. Universe 2004.



Fig. 17: A tweet announcing the casting of female heavy weight boxer *Ann Wolfe* as '*Artemis*' the Amazon, 2017

<sup>149</sup> Mavity, Anne. "Wonder Woman Interview with Patty Jenkins, Connie Nielsen and Lucy Davis." *YouTube*, YouTube, 29 Aug. 2017, 14:10-14:15

<sup>150</sup> In Matera, the shooting of the film *Nightingale (Wonder Woman)*: casting for Amazons from Blu Video, Sasslive, Feb 2016.

<sup>151</sup> Gaudette, Emily. "DC Made Radical Changes to the Amazon Army in 'Wonder Woman'." *Inverse*

What we can take from this is the effort was made to display body diversity, but the creators hypothesized that all the Amazons would be physically fit so limitations are still applied when casting, giving a lesser variation in body types. The Amazons are not average, so it is unlikely to see an average female body type.

*Wonder Woman* broke box office records taking in over 200 million internationally under Patty Jenkins' direction, outperforming any of the *Justice Leagues'* previous films before its release. Jenkins is currently directing the *Wonder Woman* sequel which will be released in December 2019, where she will be the highest paid female director to date<sup>152</sup>. In an interview with *Variety* she stated "Yes I'm aware of the money, of course. But I've never been more aware of a duty than I was in this deal. I was extremely aware that I had to make sure I was being paid what the male equivalent would be"<sup>153</sup>.

The *Wonder Woman* production team are aware of the conversations occurring in media when dressing women in armour and 'not taking an underwear-as-outerwear path' was a massive conversation in designing for female characters in 2016. The character of *Wonder Woman* is still criticised for her own superhero costume being too revealing but that may not have been Jenkins' call and when we look at the other Amazons' armour we can guess that *Wonder Woman* may have looked more combat ready had it been up to her. For the first time the Amazons are cast from different ethnicities, backgrounds and ages and many of the actors genuinely embody the characteristics and strengths that the characters they are playing would have. But the inclusion of 'elegant' and 'lean' in the casting call and the request for 'tight fitting clothing' indicates that producers were not as open to body diversity as the film would have you believe. Though opinions differ in how successfully the film combats stereotypical female representations, a huge effort was undertaken in creating Themyscira and creating an Amazonian race that is authentic. Casting Gal Gadot, who was a soldier in the Israeli army is an indicator that the film pushes boundaries under the guise of 'popular feminism' by appealing to as many as possible. The most noteworthy effect *Wonder Woman 2017* has had is dispelling the idea that a woman cannot direct a successful high budget block buster.

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<sup>152</sup> Setoodeh, Ramin, and Ramin Setoodeh. "'Wonder Woman' Director Patty Jenkins on Equal Pay, Hollywood Sexism and James Cameron's Nasty Words." *Variety*, *Variety*, 11 Oct. 2017

<sup>153</sup> Setodooh

## Conclusion

William Charles Marston conceived of the idea of *Wonder Woman* before America entered World War 2. He wanted to create a character that would change the way we see women and the new medium of the comic book was the perfect vehicle to tell his story. Marston was not as concerned with equality amongst the sexes as he was with the setting the world up for an oncoming matriarchy, but the struggles *Wonder Woman* would help women overcome in the comics were empowering. World War 2 would cause advertisers and fiction writers to conceive of similar characters but with much different motivations and agendas. The new image of Women doing men's work was temporary, but *Wonder Woman* was not. Though the character endorsed the war effort her feminist message was not lost throughout Marston's life. The influx of the image of women in the workforce may have helped *Wonder Woman's* popularity but the new image of women in the home did not cause her to fade into obscurity. Though her powers were reigned in and she began to focus more on romance, a reality for many women after the war, her original comics would stand the test of time and her image would be the face of a new feminist movement over thirty years after the first comics release.

Gloria Steinem's recognition of *Wonder Woman* as a positive and popular incarnation of feminism would cement *Wonder Woman's* allegiance with the feminist cause. Though it may have been motivated to help sales with *Ms.*, what she did recognise was that a feminist character existed who was widely liked. She had the support of many of the feminist writers at *Ms.*, who all had positive feelings towards the character. They did petition to have her powers returned and they were successful. It's clear that however she became affiliated with *Ms.* that what her original character represented meant something to them. The television series learned to stay true to the feminist themes by its failed previous attempt and by looking to Steinem, who knew what she was doing when it came to media popularity. However, a woman with the power to overcome any obstacle through her own efforts was problematic for a movement that was challenging systematic oppressions, so it understandable why some feminist circles rejected the character.

Today *Wonder Woman* is a cultural icon who is widely accepted as a symbol of female empowerment so *Wonder Woman 2017* can't help but be analysed under a feminist spotlight. So, the questions change from 'Is this feminist?' to 'How feminist is this?'. The creators are aware of the conversations happening in feminist media analysis and the connection *Wonder Woman* has with feminism, so the film is an interesting example of marketplace feminism. The film has body diversity with restraints and accurate and protective armour for the Amazon army. But *Wonder Woman* wears the least amount of armour when heading into war. *Wonder Woman's* looks have always been important in her creation with her original character's tiara taking inspiration from beauty pageants. This aspect is the most consistent, but a slight change has been added to the newest version. Both Lynda Carter and Gal Gadot have won beauty pageants but Gadot has spent time in military service.

Who's behind the camera and who is playing the character are the important questions for the most recent iteration. So, we are not only asking 'how feminist is this?' but 'who is telling this story?' and for the first time a woman is telling us the new story of *Wonder Woman*. The success of the 1975 show is credited for the creation of several action series with female leads by dispelling anxieties that men won't watch female action heroes. *Wonder Woman's* 2017 success has calmed the same anxieties about high budget super hero films. More importantly though, *Wonder Woman* has shown that a female director can create a high budget action film that will sell tickets. Understanding the history of *Wonder Woman*, we can see that she has become an icon through opportunity, coincidence and endorsement. *Wonder Woman* shows us what is a widely accepted portrayal of female strength and each iteration has had positive real-world influences in greater representation in front of the camera and higher-powered positions for women behind the camera. The significant problems of each iteration are addressed in its newest rendition. *The New Original Wonder Woman* does not contain racist stereotypes like the original comic. *Wonder Woman 2017* shows diversity amongst the Amazonians and takes great effort to display a real Amazonian army with accurate armour unlike the television series. A significant marker on female representation in the future may be when *Wonder Woman* is no longer viewed under a feminist lens and is seen purely as another super hero.

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