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English 498

25 April 2017

I Am Wonder Woman Hear Me Roar: A Feminist Analysis of Women in Comics from the Inception of Wonder Woman to the 21st Century

Wonder Woman emerged onto the comic book scene in 1941. During her debut, patriarchy not only oppressed women in American society, it often silenced them in literature as well, and even with the advances made during the Suffrage Movement and the first wave of feminism, women in the 20th-Century were still expected to remain at home performing domestic duties. World War II gave women a unique opportunity to enter the workforce while men fought in the war; however, after the war was over, patriarchy began to force women back into domestic roles, trying once again to revoke their agency. Since then, Wonder Woman has remained an iconic feminist revolutionary, challenging gender roles and surpassing male prowess; yet, many contemporary feminist scholars question whether she is ever feminist enough, even in her debut. By exploring Wonder Woman's role in comics through each wave of feminism, and by utilizing concepts found in Butler's *Gender Trouble*: *Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) and Halberstam's *Female Masculinity* (1998), I seek to show the myriad of ways in which themes of feminism, female masculinity, and gender performativity uncover how Wonder Woman has guided both pro- and anti-feminist readings over time. In so doing, it becomes evident that Wonder Woman must fulfill her role of empowering and guiding the gender perceptions of both young women and men to permanently extinguish the

misogynistic standards of a patriarchal society which continues to silence women in the 21st century.

Review of Literature

Judith Butler is Maxine Elliot, Professor in the Department of Comparative Literature and the Program of Critical Theory at the University of California, Berkeley. She has written several seminal texts including: *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France* (1987), *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (1993), *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories of Subjection* (1997), and *Undoing Gender* (2004), to name a few. Butler argues that "gender [is] an attribute of a person who is characterized essentially as a prerendered substance or 'core', called the person" (*Gender Trouble* 14). In other words, people are born with core attributes that later become culturally influenced by gender roles proscribed by a patriarchal society. By applying this theory to Wonder Woman, her masculine and feminine characteristics undermine society's expectations of gender performance. Her femininity is not diminished by her masculinity, and so she breaks down stereotypes and proves that gender roles are inaccurate generalizations of men and women based on their sex.

J. Jack Halberstam is Professor of American Studies and Ethnicity, Gender Studies and Comparative Literature at the University of Southern California. Halberstam is the author of five books including: *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (1995), *Female Masculinity* (1998), *In A Queer Time and Place* (2005), *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011) and *Gaga Feminism: Sex, Gender, and the End of Normal* (2012). By exploring J. Jack Halberstam's theory regarding female masculinity in her book, *Female Masculinity*, I will reveal that masculinity is not the sole possession of men and patriarchy, and it also does not mean that all

masculine women are lesbians. While Halberstam mostly explores female masculinity and lesbianism, she also brings to attention the unfortunate fact that "the history of masculine heterosexual women…. [is] buried by the bundling of all female masculinities into lesbian identity" (57). This becomes problematic when exploring masculine heterosexual women such as Wonder Woman because they are neither lesbian or male. Halberstam proves this point by arguing that "the masculine heterosexual woman need not be viewed as a lesbian in denial; she may merely be a woman who rejects the strictures of femininity" (59). This is important because Wonder Woman's masculinity is what gives her power and supports her role as a feminist icon through time.

Scott McCloud is a comic book artist and theorist most well-known for his science fiction superhero comic book series entitled *Zot!*, and his comprehensive text called *Understanding Comics* which explores the theory, definition, and history of comics and its various types. Scott McCloud describes the following six steps to creating a work of art: idea and purpose, form, idiom, structure, craft, and surface. From these six steps, comic book creators uncover the answer to the question, "Why am I doing this?" He states that, "'pure' art is essentially tied to the question of purpose – of deciding what you want out of art" (169). When William Moulton Marston first created Wonder Woman, his purpose was to empower young readers, particularly female readers, during a time when women were fighting for equal rights. This vision became diminished as different creators and artists took over writing *Wonder Woman* comics. By exploring concepts developed by Scott McCloud, I will reveal how the feminist vision of *Wonder Woman* comics has both failed and succeeded at representing feminism through the ages.

Feminism

The inception of first wave feminism created a movement that brought women together to fight for the same rights as men. The Women's Suffrage Movement met much resistance from a patriarchal America but after nearly 100 years of fighting, the 19th Amendment to the Constitution was finally passed on August 26, 1920, giving American women the right to vote. The fight for equality did not end there. Even with the advances made during the Suffrage Movement and the first wave of feminism, women in the 20th-Century were still expected to remain at home performing domestic duties. Those who became professionals in the workforce were only allowed to have caretaker-type jobs, such as schoolteachers and nurses. World War II gave women a unique opportunity to enter the workforce as men left their jobs to fight in the war. Women filled various positions that were previously closed to them, and the aviation industry received the largest number of female workers. Empowered by icon "Rosie the Riveter," women filled manufacturing plants to build parts for war machines. The U.S. aircraft industry received more than 310,000 female workers who diligently contributed to the cause. Women not only had important roles in the workforce, they also joined the Armed Forces, pleading with Eleanor Roosevelt to create a women's service branch of the Army. In 1945, Congress launched the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps which later became the Women's Army Corps, or the WAC. Most surprisingly, women were employed as pilots during the war. These women flew nearly every type of aircraft including the B-26 and B-29 bombers. When the war was over, however, women's agency was once again revoked and they were forced back into domestic roles. This was problematic because women, finally on the path to equality, were not ready to relinquish the little power they obtained. It is at this point in the chronology of emerging feminism that Wonder Woman appears onto the comic book scene.

Feminism during this time also had its limitations; for example, it focused primarily on the rights of white, upper-class women rather than all women. Wonder Woman's native background challenges these issues because she is an Amazon from the island of Themyscira. Historically, Themyscira is located near Pontus, a plain located in the Turkish region near the Black Sea. It is also believed that the Amazons had romantic relationships with the Scythians, a large group of Iranian nomads. The Scythians caused the ancient Greeks uneasiness because the roles of men and women were essentially equal. Both men and women were expected to contribute to the tribe's survival in a dangerous land. They trained and practiced warfare together and self-sufficient women were given high statuses. This unsettled the ancient Greeks because it opposed the patriarchal principle that women are meant to serve and obey men. According to Amanda Foreman, author and writer for *Smithsonian* magazine, "*Amazones* [is] a derivation of a, 'without,' and *mazos*, 'breasts'" (*The Amazon Women: Is There Any Truth Behind the Myth?* 2014). "Without breasts" comes from the mythological belief that Amazon women cut and cauterized their right breasts to have better control of their bows. This savage act committed to maximize their combat skills, reveals that women are not the weaker sex. This is significant because Wonder Woman not only defies the first wave conviction that feminism's primary focus is limited only to white upper-class women, it also challenges the patriarchal principle that women are weak, passive, and undeserving of agency.

The second wave of feminism ascended in the 1960s from the frustration of aggrieved women whose freedoms were once again revoked. Provoked by misogyny and determined to resist being forced back into submissive roles, women took to the streets in protest once again. Despite women making valuable contributions to the war effort and the American economy, gender roles were still forced upon them. Feminist theorist Simone de Beauvoir coined the

notion that, “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (*The Second Sex* 301), introducing the idea that gender is culturally constructed, an idea that feminist theorist Judith Butler later explores in her book *Gender Trouble.* Second wave feminism focuses around issues involving reproductive rights and violence against women. During second wave feminism, the Equal Pay Act of 1963 was passed, giving women equal opportunities to equal pay for the same jobs performed by men. Contraceptive pills were also developed and during this time, the famed Supreme Court case, Roe vs. Wade, granted women the right to have an abortion, and Title IX, which gave female students and athletes equal access to education. The Civil Rights Movement also emerged, calling attention to feminism’s elitist focus on upper-middle class white women and its failure to represent all races, social classes, and sexual orientations. Activist Betty Friedan created the National Organization for Women (NOW), which focused primarily on issues about reproductive freedom, sexual violence, and gender equality in the workplace. The second wave of feminism continued to discriminate against minority and working class women, failing to acknowledge the struggle of black women, who during the 1960s, fought in the Civil Rights Movement. Lesbians also felt marginalized by the feminist movement, having been referred to as the “Lavender Menace,” a term created by Friedan in 1969. Betty Friedan argued that the lesbian community was a threat to the feminist movement and was concerned that feminists could not inspire political change if lesbians were included. In response to Friedan’s homophobic labeling of lesbians as the “Lavender Menace” a group of gay women, led by lesbian activist Rita Mae Brown, organized to promote the inclusion of lesbians into the feminist movement. The group organized an action in response to Friedan’s comments about the lesbian community and the feminist movement. On May 1st 1970, Brown’s group of lesbian radical feminists aimed its action against the Second Congress to Unite Women. The focus of the protest was to peacefully

bring awareness to the lesbian community. The group put together a 10-paragraph manifesto entitled “The Woman-Identified Woman” that they planned to pass around a meeting of the SCUW. They used Friedan’s term “Lavender Menace” as their slogan, printing it on shirts and writing it on signs. They also created other slogans such as "Women's Liberation IS A Lesbian Plot" and "You're Going to Love the Lavender Menace." The peaceful protest used humor to persuade the audience into accepting their message of inclusion. Together, the “Lavender Menace” protest and the printed manifesto “The Woman-Identified Woman” became the stepping stones needed to create change to the feminist movement, inspiring a new focus of inclusion in the third wave of feminism (Jay, Karla. *Tales of a Lavender Menace: A Memoir of Liberation*).

Wonder Woman’s presence during the second wave of feminism reflects the need for intersectionality in the feminist movement. During the 70s, she is known to have bisexual relationships, but even in her debut, Wonder Woman can be read as queer. Golden Age *Wonder Woman* comics feature the Holliday Girls, Wonder Woman’s female companions, who often find themselves needing to be rescued from a bondage-like situation. BDSM is a sexual practice where people find themselves in either a submissive or dominating role. Typically, a Dominatrix is a woman who controls and dominates a man in an erotic fashion. However, the Holliday Girls are women bound by supervillains and rescued by Wonder Woman, and so Wonder Woman becomes a more sexually fluid superhero than her male counterparts. Since her debut, Wonder Woman’s bisexual relationships have been explored in more depth, leading to DC Comic’s announcement that Wonder Woman comics are canonically queer (Santori, Comicosity.com). In the 2016 release of *Wonder Woman #2*, writer Greg Rucka explores Wonder Woman’s relationships with her female Amazonian companions on the island Themyscira, revealing the

possibility that Wonder Woman is bisexual. She has a close relationship with another Amazonian woman named Kasia, with whom she shares an intimate moment on page three. Kasia is intent on convincing Wonder Woman, also known as Princess Diana, to stay on the island. At first glance, the kiss she shares with her appears innocent until the next panel when Kasia says to Princess Diana that if she were to leave Themyscira, it "would break my heart" (Appendix, Figure 1). In a scene on page seven, a small group of Amazons, both male and female, are bathing in a waterfall. The unnamed male character makes a comment about Wonder Woman's beauty, suggesting that he is physically attracted to her. In response, his female companion implies that Wonder Woman is in a relationship with Kasia, to which the man responds with a list of potential female Amazonian lovers Princess Diana is suspected to have (Appendix, Figure 2). Wonder Woman's bisexuality is never outright acknowledged, it is simply suggested in inconspicuous ways. According to Greek mythology, the Amazons were a culture of women who lived isolated from the rest of the world and men. *Wonder Woman* comics leave audiences speculating about what types of relationships these women have with each other. Themyscira is a utopic island where women live peacefully together, without the strict codes of patriarchy. They are free to love whomever they want, and the levels of intimacy shared between them are not rejected by their matriarchal society. The Amazons defy second wave feminism's rejection of marginalized groups, such as bisexuals and lesbians, empowering and representing all women, despite their sexual preferences.

The notion of intersectionality became the emphasis of third wave feminism, focusing on race, culture, religion, and class. Third wave feminism took shape in the early 1990s in response to a sexual harassment lawsuit between Anita Hill and Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas. The third wave of feminism also inspired the Riot Grrrls, a feminist punk rock

movement lead by bands such as Bikini Kill, Babes in Toyland, L7, Pussy Riot, Skinned Teen, and Sleater-Kinney. The Riot Grrrl movement explored issues such as rape culture, domestic violence, ageism, and homophobia. In the song "Daddy's Li'l Girl," the band Bikini Kill divulges a tragic story about the molestation of a child by her father, a shockingly common atrocity fueled by rape culture:

> I have no desire
>
> I can't feel a thing
>
> I just want to make him happy
>
> Daddy's little girl
>
> Daddy's little girl
>
> Daddy's girl don't wanna be
>
> His whore no more

L7 vocalist Donita Sparks wrote a song entitled "Can I Run," and its lyrics explore an abusive relationship through powerful images of domestic violence:

> Switch to paranoid from having fun
>
> Will he use his hands, knife, or a gun
>
> Knuckles are white, wrapped around my mace
>
> Comes from living in a terrorist state
>
> Can I run

Furthermore, third wave feminism's commitment to overcome violence against women inspired a new type of feminist icon, the exceedingly feminine, yet incredibly fierce, "girlie girl" who fights back against violent offenders while preserving her femininity. The quintessential "girlie girl" feminist icon of the 90s is the blonde and bubbly cheerleader-by-day, demon-killer-by-

night, Buffy the Vampire Slayer, who captivated audiences with both her extraordinary combat skills and her unique sex appeal.

Buffy challenges female stereotypes as well as exposing the misogynistic belief that women who are strong and powerful tend to be masculine and unattractive. Buffy's character is a dramatic twist to the typical female role within the horror genre. Women in horror are commonly portrayed as victims, and not particularly smart victims as they walk right into the hands of a homicidal manic with a chainsaw. Buffy manages to hunt down demons and drive stakes through their hearts without breaking a nail or smearing her mascara. In so doing, Buffy the Vampire Slayer challenges patriarchal stereotypes of women and femininity. Like Buffy, Wonder Woman challenges the typical role of women, defying stereotypes of femininity in the comics genre. Comics mostly target male audiences, meaning that many writers, both male and female, create female characters who always need rescuing and who are designed to attract the male gaze. Women in comics are generally oversexualized, having large breasts and wearing clothes that leave no room for the imagination. Female superheroes have not had major roles in comics except to help propel the stories of male protagonists, often dying to make the story more interesting. Ironically, during the third wave of feminism, Wonder Woman becomes a more sexualized character in comics. She is voluptuous and slender, curvy and tall; however, her tone and muscular body make her even more sexually appealing. Wonder Woman is a "girlie girl" who, while wearing star-spangled hot pants and a gold bustier, fights male villains with super strength and agility. Like Buffy, Wonder Woman is skilled in the art of combat and goes around kicking supervillain ass in high heeled boots, looking sexy as ever; therefore, her power and her agency are not diminished by her femininity. In fact, she is even more attractive to male audiences, who during this time, became attracted to the "girlie girl" superhero. The "girlie-girl"

label is problematic, especially for third wave feminists who argue that, to be feminist, a woman should not fall victim to gender construction and stereotypes, such as wearing dresses, shaving their legs, and getting breast implants; however, having feminine desires and characteristics does not mean women are weak and emotional. Simone de Beauvoir argues that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (*The Second Sex* 301). This statement highlights the misogynistic expectations of male dominance, exposing how women are forced into gender roles and expected to behave and perform a certain way. A woman can be strong and powerful in stilettos and a mini skirt. She can also do these things in a plain t-shirt and blue jeans. Patriarchy has created the expectation that women should not only behave feminine but they should also look feminine, which only makes it more difficult for feminists to associate powerful women with a "girlie girl" aesthetic. Women are expected to discard their femininity to truly be feminist, reinforcing the problematic notion that, even though women are exercising their right to make individual choices, they are not feminist because they are too "girlie."

Third wave feminism closely examines differences between women and the construction of gender. It also seeks to break through feminist party lines that dictate how feminist women should behave and dress. Second wave feminists perpetuated a belief that a woman could not be feminist if she wore makeup, shaved her legs, wore dresses, or celebrated her femininity. Although the current wave of feminism seeks to dispel these strict expectations, women are still being criticized for defying them today; for example, Emma Watson was recently criticized for claiming to be a feminist while posing for a magazine in a revealing dress. The feminist community erupted with a fierce backlash against Watson, claiming that she fails at representing female empowerment by objectifying her body for a magazine spread. This becomes troubling within third wave feminism which seeks to represent and include all women, giving them the

freedom to choose. Another problem with third wave feminism is that radical feminists scorn women who work in the sex industry, such as prostitution, the escort business, pornography, and exotic dancing. Their belief is that these sex-oriented jobs revoke women's agency because the goal is to please men and be controlled by them. While third wave feminism strives to be accepting of all races, classes, and genders, they often seem to reject feminists for their individual choices, thus resulting in a post-feminist concept that criticizes the failures of second and third wave feminism.

The proposed fourth wave of feminism is a movement with conflicting definitions, mainly because there is no major event that fourth wave feminism is built on. Instead, fourth wave feminism is linked to technology, social media campaigns, politics, spirituality, and psychology. Fourth wave feminism focuses primarily on transgender issues, plus-size fashion support, and sex work acceptance, such as prostitution and exotic dancing. The fourth wave of feminism also explores ways in which women can be feminist while celebrating their femininity and sex. It is often referred to as the "pro-sex" movement. It also seeks to erase the stigma feminism gained as an anti-man movement. By focusing on social media, the fourth wave of feminism explores ways to engage in online discourse about gender equality and social justice. When women are criticized on social media for misrepresenting feminism despite their freedom to make personal choices, it becomes obvious that there is still a need for feminism. Women are still fighting to remain in control of their bodies, struggling to hold onto their reproductive rights. Even though women have powerful roles in television, they remain silenced in film and other media such as comics, literature, and online.

Post-feminism claims that prior generations of feminists established the idea that women are victims and anti-men. During the 1980s and 1990s, the goals of third wave feminism came

into question as people began to wonder if there was anything left for feminists to fight for. The concept of post-feminism was on the rise, challenging the role of feminism in modern times. There has been much debate over the exigency of feminism and whether its objectives are still necessary since women can now vote, have control over their bodies, and have equal opportunities in the workplace. Post-feminists criticize third wave feminists for perpetuating the idea that women are victims and that feminism has become a pro-woman and anti-man movement. While post-feminism highlights problems with second and third wave feminism, it too has its own drawbacks. By believing that feminism is no longer relevant, the concept of post-feminism becomes problematic because it implies that not only do we live in a post-feminist society, but that society is also post-racist, post-classist, and post-sexist. Many would argue in 21st Century society, that racism, classism, and sexism burn just as fiercely as they did in the past, and with these issues still on the rise, feminists are beginning to ponder the need for a fourth wave of feminism or the requirement to restructure and define feminism for modern times. Regardless of the choice, the argument that we are post-feminist is problematic at best.

Despite the empowerment of female superheroes in comics and Wonder Woman's claim to feminism, women remain controlled by men. The best way for Wonder Woman to have a voice and fulfill her role as a feminist icon of revolution is to have a woman tell her story. There have been a few female writers of Wonder Woman comics, but they have almost always been supported by a team of men. Despite the power Wonder Woman wields, she is still the puppet of men, an object of desire, something to be possessed and controlled. By exploring the concepts of feminism and female masculinity and by applying modern feminist ideologies to comics, the role of Wonder Woman as an empowered woman in control of her own destiny can be fulfilled.

Do These Muscles Make Me Look Fat

Masculinity and femininity are a binary which forces men and women into strict categories that control maleness and femaleness. In her book, *Female Masculinity*, J. Jack Halberstam argues that "masculinity is not maleness" (1), meaning that masculinity is not the sole possession of men and that women can be masculine as well. She also asserts that "the history of masculine heterosexual women…. [is] buried by the bundling of all female masculinities into lesbian identity" (57), meaning that masculine people are either men or lesbians. Based on this flawed logic, feminine people are either female or gay men. Masculinity and femininity are both problematic because they fail to represent both heterosexual women and men who display traits that are contrary to strict, binary notions of gender traits. An example of a heterosexual man who exhibits feminine traits is Patrick Bateman from the movie *American Psycho*. Patrick Bateman is a wealthy New York investment banker, a playboy, and a homicidal maniac. When he is not having sex with multiple women or out murdering people, he is following a very strict beauty regimen where he applies several different types of oils and moisturizers to his skin. He also hyper-focuses on aesthetics including the details of his clothes and the type of card stock his business cards are made on. On the other end of the spectrum, we have Wonder Woman who epitomizes strength and masculinity in various ways including not only her physical attributes but also her personality. Due in part to being born into a culture without men, Wonder Woman possesses a variety of masculine traits: she is skilled in the art of combat, she opposes male villains and she is a dominating force rather than a submissive one. On the other hand, she is neither a man or a lesbian; she is a powerful woman from the utopic island Themyscira, home of an all-female race known as the Amazons. Wonder Woman disproves patriarchy's belief that masculine women are exclusively lesbians. Masculine heterosexual

women like Wonder Woman struggle to fit into society's notion that gender is a binary with strict codes that determine how a specific gender, either exclusively male or female, is expected to perform. This concept is referred to by feminist theorist Judith Butler as gender performativity. Butler suggests that the body has three distinct characteristics, "anatomical sex, gender identity, and gender performance" (*Gender Trouble* 187). Wonder Woman is anatomically female and identifies as a woman; however, she performs her gender as male because she is strong, is empowered, and is always coming to the rescue of Steve Trevor, her damsel in distress. In other words, humans are born male or female and expected to perform as such: if you are born a female, you are expected to be fragile, feminine, submissive, and your sole purpose in life is to become a wife and mother. If you are born male, you are expected to be strong, masculine, and controlling. But Wonder Woman is born female and raised to be strong and brave, and so she upends the patriarchal theory that humans are born to follow strict gender codes.

Female masculinity has caused great anxiety in a patriarchal society whose paradigms of power have primarily been focused on the oppression of women. Patriarchy imposes the idea that masculinity equals power, thus the transference of power to a masculine female causes men great anxiety, threatening their stranglehold over the agency of women. Wonder Woman is not only given super powers that alone make her more powerful than the average man, she also has strength and possesses a vast variety of skills in the art of combat. This is important because Wonder Woman defies proscribed gender roles which would normally make her weak and defenseless. Patriarchy has contributed female masculinity to homosexuality, implying that if someone has masculine attributes or tendencies, they are either a man or a lesbian. Masculinity is not the sole possession of men and patriarchy, also it does not mean that all masculine women

are lesbians. While Halberstam mostly explores female masculinity and lesbianism, she also brings to attention the unfortunate fact that "the history of masculine heterosexual women…. [is] buried by the bundling of all female masculinities into lesbian identity" (*Female Masculinity* 57). This becomes problematic when exploring masculine heterosexual women such as Wonder Woman because they are neither lesbian or male. Halberstam proves this point by arguing that "the masculine heterosexual woman need not be viewed as a lesbian in denial; she may merely be a woman who rejects the strictures of femininity" (*Female Masculinity* 59). There is a plethora of heterosexual women who are more comfortable with masculine gender codes; examples of such women are: female athletes including bodybuilders, young women whom society deems tomboys, and what Halberstam refers to as "rural women" who typically work in agriculture, farming, and ranching (*Female Masculinity* 57).

Let's Go Window Shopping

Sensation Comics #1 fails to introduce Wonder Woman as an icon of feminism because it points out the ways Wonder Woman fits into gender roles; for example, by making her character window shop for dresses as she struggles to find a way to fit in without being noticed, the writer enforces traditional notions of female identity. A panel on page two reads, "Always the woman, Diana goes window shopping" (Appendix, Figure 3). Gender performativity suggests that despite the masculine attributes Wonder Woman possesses, her gender dictates her performance, meaning that although she likes to get dirty and fight villains, she also likes to go shopping and wear dresses. This becomes clear when onlookers notice she is not wearing much clothing or clothes that would be deemed appropriate for the time. During the 1940s and the first wave of feminism, women were expected to wear modest clothing. Wonder Woman's defiance of this expectation comes in the form of a star spangled mini skirt and shiny bustier. Wonder Woman's

decision to wear provocative clothing, challenges society's standards forced on women and reinforces her role as a feminist icon. Despite the comics' failure to discard sexist stereotypes such as window shopping, Wonder Woman is using her agency to decide what to wear, whether it is a mini skirt or a turtle neck dress.

In *Sensation Comics #1,* Wonder Woman makes her official debut by dominating a room filled with male villains, deflecting bullets with her metal bracelets, and protecting her charge and eventual romantic partner, Steve Trevor. The first panel describes Wonder Woman's masculine traits while highlighting her feminine features:

> Like a crash of thunder from the sky comes the Wonder Woman, to save the world from the hatreds and wars of men in a man-made world! And what a woman! A woman with the eternal beauty of Aphrodite and the wisdom of Athena – yet whose lovely form hides the agility of Mercury and the steel sinews of Hercules! (1)

The panel reveals how a beautiful, masculine woman in a short skirt and high heels will rescue society from patriarchy. Her character is compared to the qualities of Greek deities, two of which are female and the other two are male. This becomes problematic when exploring Wonder Woman through a feminist lens because she has the beauty and wisdom of two Greek goddesses and the agility and strength of two Greek gods, one of which is the enemy of the Amazons, Hercules. Wonder Woman would not be pleased to discover that she was compared to the god who enslaved her people. The male ideal is to possess a powerful woman that is both beautiful and smart and Wonder Woman is the epitome of that ideal. If *Sensation Comics* was to successfully create a powerful feminist icon from an entire culture of women, then she would be compared to an all-female cast of Greek goddesses, such as Artemis the goddess of the hunt and

Nemesis the goddess of retribution. Archery and hunting are masculine skills comparable to agility because it takes a significant amount of skill and strength to hunt and use a bow, proving that women can be strong and athletic, thereby challenging gender construction and "maleness." Nemesis is a powerful goddess who passes out judgment and executes punishment to evil sinners. If creators were to compare Wonder Woman to Artemis and Nemesis instead of Mercury and Hercules, she would easily fit into the role of feminist revolutionary, reflecting power and control without the characteristics of male gods. Wonder Woman's introduction in the opening of *Sensation Comics* #1 also conceals her masculinity beneath a feminine façade, indicating that female masculinity should be hidden beneath a feminine aesthetic. Even though she is strong and powerful, she is "lovely," a misogynistic characteristic designed to dispel men's fear of powerful women. Later issues reveal a more physically powerful Wonder Woman with bulging biceps and strong thighs. This is significant because earlier renditions of Wonder Woman expose the patriarchal fear of masculine and powerful women, finding it necessary to disguise their manly power behind femininity and grace.

In *Sensation Comics #1*, Wonder Woman exhibits her masculinity by coming to Steve Trevor's rescue. This is a prime example of gender role reversal as Trevor plays the damsel in distress and Wonder Woman is the hero. Scooping him into her arms, Wonder Woman realizes how she needs to be discreet and avoid notice by the public who would shame and criticize her for not conforming to the construction of her gender. She is relieved to find the streets are deserted early in the morning because this way that no one can see her carrying her male charge like a groom would carry his bride over the threshold (Appendix, Figure 4). This exposes the patriarchal fear of masculine women and how they need to hide their strength and power so as not to overwhelm the delicate emotions of men and their fear of powerful women. When trying

to understand what defines masculinity, Halberstam realizes that "studies in male masculinity are concerned to detail the fragilities of male socialization, the pains of manhood, and the fear of female empowerment" (*Female Masculinity* 19). This realization exposes patriarchy's control over masculinity and how it is the sole possession of men.

Wonder Woman was not born from man. Her mother, Queen Hippolyta of the Amazons desired a daughter but had no man to procreate with. Instead, she created a daughter from clay, praying to the gods to make her wish come true – Wonder Woman was born. She grew up in a society without men, influenced by female warriors who once had been prisoners of the god Hercules who bound them in chains, enslaving and controlling them. These women warriors, freed by the Goddess Athena, devoted their lives to combat, turning their shackles into bracelets and creating a training game where they deflected bullets from the metal rings around their wrists. Wonder Woman's debut reveals a strong woman who fights predominantly male villains. This causes uneasiness amongst male critics because women are expected to behave like proper ladies, always remaining submissive and never opposing men. Uneasiness over masculine women and feminine men emerges from the patriarchal fear of homosexuality and the loss of power controlled by the Empire. Critics became uneasy over Wonder Woman's masculinity and her resistance to patriarchy and oppression. Readers can see that Wonder Woman is obviously masculine because she is strong enough to carry a man in her arms while fending off villains except that her body does not reflect masculinity because she has no bulging biceps as seen in later issues. During this time, Wonder Woman's body also is not even entirely sexualized like we see in comics today. Her breasts do not pour out of her bustier, and her costume does not give her a perpetual atomic wedgie. Wonder Woman's physical appearance is feminine; however, her masculinity emerges from her strength and her sense of empowerment over male characters.

Why Wonder Woman Doesn't Wear Pants

Comics are notorious for over-sexualizing and objectifying women despite their super powers and strength. Female superheroes often have large breasts, tiny waists, and wear costumes that leave no room for the imagination. By examining visual narratives in Wonder Woman, the objectification of female superheroes becomes voluptuously clear. While female superheroes are powerful, their power belongs to men. Male authors of comic books direct their content toward a male audience, tailoring their visual narratives to attract the heterosexual male gaze. Women in comics become accessories or objects to be stared at. The male gaze most often slides over the length of long muscular legs that lead up to a round and firm butt. For example, a panel from the 2007 issue of *Civil War* guides reader's eyes to look upon a scene from the view of a female superhero's buttocks (Appendix, Figure 5). The gaze will often look down upon a scene in a panel from a view above cleavage exploding out of a bikini or crop top. When there are scenes like these, the women tend to not have faces or heads. An example of this can be found in Wonder Woman comics as well. In the 2007 issue of *Wonder Woman: From the Flames*, readers look upon a scene on page 14 where Wonder Woman is in another room with an older gentleman. In the top panel, readers look upon the scene from behind Wonder Woman's star spangled rear end (Appendix, Figure 6). While it can be argued that Wonder Woman uses her sexuality to exhibit agency and control, her power is in fact obsolete because her body is drawn to attract heterosexual male desire and because she is ventriloquized by male writers and artists.

Wonder Woman's costume has caused uneasiness amongst critics over time, especially during her debut when clothing for women were modest. During the 1940s, women began to challenge strict clothing standards by wearing knee length skirts and slacks. Wonder Woman's

debut revealed an Amazon warrior in a star-spangled knee-length skirt and bustier. Only half of her clothing was underwear compared to today's female superheroes who appear to be wearing nothing but their underwear. In *Sensation Comics* #1, two older women in modest clothing criticize Wonder Woman's clothing choices saying, "The hussy! She has no clothes on!" (3). This panel supports the theory of gender construction and the expectation that women should dress and behave accordingly. When a woman decides to dress outside the gender specific parameters society has created, she is not perceived as an empowered feminist, she is instead judged by others, including women, who compare her to and shame her for being a slut.

During the silver age of comics and the second wave of feminism, Wonder Woman's costume and physical appearance change. She is further feminized and redesigned to attract male audiences. Her features are softened and she wears lipstick. Instead of wearing a modest knee-length skirt and bustier, she wears a one-piece costume that resembles a bathing suit or leotard, and her boots are replaced with gladiator sandals (Appendix, Figure 7). This costume change may appear to be empowering because Wonder Woman uses her agency to choose her outfit; however, the fact remains that writers created her costume to seduce a male audience, therefore Wonder Woman's agency does not exist. If Wonder Woman were to dress according to gender construction based on her performance as a masculine character, then she would most definitely not look like a beautiful goddess in knee-high go-go boots and a skimpy leotard. Instead, Wonder Woman would look more like a butch lesbian, as defined by J. Jack Halberstam as, "women who are more comfortable with masculine gender codes, styles, or identities than feminine ones" (*Female Masculinity* 120). While Wonder Woman comics are meant to empower young women, it is male audiences who take precedence. Their desires come before the needs of

female audiences; therefore, *Wonder Woman* comics fail to represent and empower women during the Silver Age.

The Pink-Collar Critique

Wonder Woman's femininity and masculinity erase the lines that create a binary between genders. She is a "girlie-girl" superhero who challenges gender codes by celebrating her femininity while showing off her masculinity. This is crucial to the third wave of feminism where radical feminists believe that women who claim they are feminist are expected to behave like one. According to third wave feminism, women who are feminists should not perform according to their gender. For example, women should not shave their legs or wear sexy clothing. This is incredibly problematic because based on this logic, feminists should also not become wives and mothers or make the decision to stay at home with their kids or become housewives.

Butler's theory explores the performativity of humanness and through this lens, readers can see how Wonder Woman's alter-ego, Diana Prince interprets the performance of women in a patriarchal society. By exploring gender construction and performativity, Wonder Woman's critique of the modern-day woman reveals how she feels about the construction and politics of gender which typically revoke female agency in a patriarchal society. When Steve Trevor crashes his plane into the island of the Amazons, he first lays eyes on Wonder Woman who is not fascinated by him being a man as much as she is intrigued by his culture. Wonder Woman's mother, Queen Hippolyta decides to have a contest to determine who is the strongest of the Amazons so she may go back to the United States with Steve Trevor and fight for democracy. Despite her mother's orders to refrain from participating, Wonder Woman wins the contest and is chosen to accompany the stranded soldier back to his country. To blend in, Wonder Woman

takes on the identity of an Army nurse and disguises herself as Diana Prince. So that she may stay close to her charge, Steve Trevor, she becomes his secretary and follows him around everywhere. While Diana Prince lusts after Steve Trevor, Wonder Woman almost completely ignores him unless she is rescuing him. Wonder Woman's priority is not romance as much as it is democracy and freedom for all.

Wonder Woman's pink collar critique emerges when she creates a human alter-ego named Diana Prince, finding a way to become employed first as Steve Trevor's nurse then later as his secretary. In so doing, Wonder Woman explores the role of women in a male dominant society. By becoming employed as both a nurse and a secretary, Wonder Woman explores the misogynistic belief that women are meant only for caretaker-type jobs. Diana Prince exhibits a plethora of female stereotypes, exposing patriarchy's expectations of women in society. While Steve Trevor chases after Wonder Woman like a love-struck puppy, Diana Prince chases after him. She gets a job as his secretary so she can remain close to him, which also serves a different purpose for Wonder Woman who needs to keep an eye on him so that she can keep him out of trouble or come to his inevitable rescue. In the meantime, Wonder Woman's romantic feelings for Steve Trevor are peripheral because her main objective is to protect American society and fight for democracy.

Wonder Woman's provocative costume and her role as Diana Prince explore gender performance with overt femininity. Psychoanalyst, Joan Rivière explores exaggerated femininity, arguing that it is a mask adopted by women "to hide their possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if she were to possess it" ("Womanliness as Masquerade" 38). Wonder Woman's costume choice and her role as Diana Prince are both tools used to ease the minds of male audiences who find themselves uncomfortable with masculine and powerful women. If

romantic feelings for Steve Trevor solely inspired Wonder Woman to leave her home on Themyscria, her role as an icon of feminist revolution would be tarnished. However, without Steve Trevor, Wonder Woman's masculine presence would make readers uneasy and *Wonder Woman* comics would not be the success it is today.

Women in Refrigerators

"Women in refrigerators" is a trope founded by comic book writer Gail Simone who noticed that women were being killed off in comics as a plot device used to motivate male superheroes into being heroic and interesting. The trope was discovered in 1994 when the Green Lantern, Kyle Rayner, found his girlfriend's dismembered body stuffed inside a refrigerator (Appendix, Figure 8). Unfortunately, this is a common trope found in many popular comics; for example, Spiderman's girlfriend Gwen Stacy dies at the hands of the Green Goblin. No one really knows the actual cause of her death because readers only see her falling toward the ground. It isn't clear if she dies from a broken neck or from the shock of the fall. This ambiguous death makes it seem like Gwen Stacy isn't worthy of a good death scene. This example is important not only because it highlights the women in refrigerators trope, but also because it exposes how women are oppressed and objectified in comics, even in death. Therefore, even in death, women are marginalized. Comics are notorious for killing off important characters and often resurrecting them later down the road. If an important male character is written out of a comic, it is done epically. He is most likely given a two-page spread about his grisly, yet heroic, death. There usually is a major battle and an obvious struggle between good and evil. Contrary to heroics, the deaths of several female superheroes and female characters are detailed in a single panel where the body is found. Women in comics are not even given a proper death scene, signaling the silencing and dismissal of women because they are merely objects to be possessed and

sometimes lost. Wonder Woman challenges this misogynistic trope when she dies in a few issues of DC comics and cross-overs, including the following two comics that debuted during the peak of third wave feminism: *Crisis on Infinite Earths* #12 (1986) and *Wonder Woman* (Volume 2) #125 (1997). In issue #12 of *Crisis on Infinite Earths*, Wonder Woman joins forces with a plethora of superheroes from many different DC comics in a crossover attempt to save the world from the destructive powers of a supervillain called the Anti-Monitor. Wonder Woman appears in more than one panel in this issue, but she is not fighting in any of them. The actual death of Wonder Woman happens in one panel where the Anti-Monitor destroys her with an explosive ray of antimatter (Appendix, Figure 9). In the next panel, readers see that Superman is tortured by the death of Wonder Woman, and he vows to destroy the Anti-Monitor (Appendix, Figure 10). Superman's declaration of vengeance exposes how Wonder Woman's death serves as a catalyst for men to do great things, a classic characteristic of the women in refrigerators trope.

The death of Wonder Woman in *Wonder Woman* (Volume 2) #125 is the result of her soul becoming incinerated by a satanic supervillain named Neron. Once again, there is no epic battle between heroine and villain. Her demise is described as happening rather quickly, "But in rapid order he had tortured Diana…played cruel mind games with Helena Sandsmark…and blasted the demon Etrigan out of his human host Jason Blood" (4). In a single panel, Wonder Woman is bound by ropes and tortured by a demonic foe with no means to defend herself; no battle ensues between them. It is also important to point out how the female character, Helena Sandsmark meets her demise without the opportunity to fight her enemy. She is instead tortured with mind games that do not involve physical combat. As if torturing her is not enough, Neron delivers one final blow to an already unconscious Wonder Woman, destroying her soul. The next panel reveals Wonder Woman's body "dead at our feet," but she does not appear to have any

outward injuries (Appendix, Figure 11). Wonder Woman's body takes up almost the entire panel and the angle in which her body is drawn directs the audience's gaze across her breasts and up the length of one of her legs. Wonder Woman's death is more of an opportunity for creators to objectify her character.

The Girl Version

A misogynistic paradigm of patriarchy can be found in the infantilization of women. Women in society are often referred to as "girls," a term that denies a woman her adulthood, her maturity, and her power. Batgirl and Supergirl are examples of the infantilization of women in comics. When analyzing tropes, Wonder Woman takes a firm stance against patriarchy and the expectations of women in comics. The name "Wonder Woman" is not patriarchy's attempt to infantilize her character. If that were the case, she would be called "Wonder Girl". Wonder Woman also is not a girl version of a male superhero, not even Superman. Her superpowers are not gender determinate; she has super strength and controls villains by capturing them with her lasso of truth which controls her captives, forcing them to tell the truth. During Wonder Woman's debut, she flew an invisible airplane, which was unheard of for women to pilot planes. In later issues, she gained the ability to fly without a plane. Her flying skills aren't primarily used to flee intense situations, rather, they are used to enable her to come to the rescue or to find and defeat villains. Every one of Wonder Woman's super powers mirror masculinity and therefore defies the patriarchal preconception that men are powerful and the only ones allowed to have masculine traits.

Women in comics are generally given super powers that are meant more for defending themselves rather than attacking their opponents. Examples of women with these types of super powers can be found through the different eras of comics; for example, the Black Canary during

the Golden Age of comics was known for her psychic abilities. The Silver Age of comics birthed superheroines like Susan Storm from Marvel's *Fantastic Four* and Jean Grey from *X-men*. Susan Storm's super ability is invisibility, a defense mechanism associated with hiding and a metaphor for the patriarchal principle of silencing women. Jean Grey is telepathic and telekinetic, two types of defensive powers designated to female superheroes; however, amidst the rise of the Women's Liberation Movement of second wave feminism, she transforms into the Phoenix. None of Marvel's male superheroes or supervillains could stand up to the power of the Phoenix, a symbol of the rising power of women in a patriarchal society.

During the Bronze Age, female superhero Ms. Marvel emerged onto the comic book scene as an empowered woman who does not possess superpowers. Ms. Marvel, also known as Carol Danvers, enlists in the Air Force and becomes a female pilot, a concept that was unheard of during the late 1960s. Even though she was empowered by her intelligence and her role in the CIA, she remained in Captain Marvel's shadow. It was not until the Modern Age of comics when Ms. Marvel finally received superpowers; however, her powers remained gender-determinate because she possessed the power of precognition and she could fly. This is important because even during the Modern Age of comics, female superheroes remain silenced and oppressed. By applying Judith Butler's theory of gender construction, the designation of defensive rather than offensive superpowers to female superheroes follows the patriarchal principle that women are not allowed to wield their powers against men and if they do, there are consequences to their actions.

While Wonder Woman defies female stereotypes and challenges the definition of masculinity, her character remains ventriloquized by men. Despite having had a few female writers who became her voice, she remains silenced in a patriarchal world. In the recent 52

series, Wonder Woman's origin story is altered so that she comes to the awful realization that she was never born from clay, instead, her mother Queen Hippolyta had an affair with Zeus, resulting in the conception of Wonder Woman. This completely eradicates her feminist message because a man was involved in her creation. It appears that even after the progress feminism has made in society, women remain controlled by men. For Wonder Woman to be an icon of feminist revolution, her origin story needs to remain untouched and her voice needs to remain female. Men should no longer draw or trace her or be the voice that speaks for her. Until then, Wonder Woman remains a puppet of men. Her body, her voice, and her masculinity remain controlled by men. Even with the recent resurrection of Wonder Woman in film and her title as Ambassador of Feminism, she fails to represent women and feminism in comics today. Wonder Woman, a figure meant to lead women in the battle against patriarchy is not feminist enough to fulfill this role. Feminism and female empowerment remain challenged by misogynistic paradigms of patriarchy, therefore emphasizing the need for feminism today, disproving the post-feminist belief that society no longer needs feminism.

Wonder Woman vs. Patriarchy

Wonder Woman comics have three different eras that scholars and readers know and understand; they are called the Golden, Silver, and Bronze Ages. The Golden Age of Wonder Woman is the era where Marston's concept of matriarchy and female power resonated the most. During this age, *Wonder Woman* comics included a special feature known as "Wonder Women of History." This feature was often four pages long, detailing the lives of powerful women in History. *Wonder Woman #1* featured its first "Wonder Women of History," covering the story of Florence Nightingale, the English social reformer and statistician who founded modern nursing during the 1860s. "Wonder Women of History" covered several different careers and professions

including nurses, doctors and medical researchers, and highlighted real-life female role models from each profession. After Marston's death in 1947, his friend and colleague Robert Kanigher took over as writer of the *Wonder Woman* comics, leading into the Silver Age. Kanigher revamped *Wonder Woman* and changed her almost completely, creating pro-domesticity propaganda. Aside from changing the history of Greek mythology, Kanigher also eliminated "Wonder Women of History" and replaced it with shorter essays about love, marriage, and starting a family (Appendix, Figure 12). During this time, *Superman* comics featured stories about how to lend a friendly hand to refugees, a stark contrast to the paradigms of patriarchy found in *Wonder Woman*. "Wonder Women of History" and Kanigher's pro-domesticity propaganda ceased to exist before the Bronze Age. There were no more featured stories about empowered women or articles about the latest wedding trends.

Reading Between the Lines

Scott McCloud describes the creative process in six steps, and the first two steps are what propel an artist to create a work of art, answering the question, "why am I doing this?" These two steps are fueled by emotions and philosophies which create a purpose. William Moulton Marston's feminist philosophies inspired him to create *Wonder Woman* comics so he can empower women. McCloud talks about how sometimes the purpose of a work of art can be lost when money and status become more important than the message (181). This has proven to be the case throughout Wonder Woman's history of writers. After Marston died, his friend Kanigher was more concerned with the job rather than the message, which led to the massive failure of Wonder Woman as a representative of feminism. Even when Greg Rucka and Gail Simone took over as writers during the Bronze Age, Wonder Woman's feminist purpose was diminished. Both writers allowed Wonder Woman to be objectified.

When comparing how Wonder Woman was drawn through each of the ages of comics, the objectification and over-sexualization of Wonder Woman emerges (Appendix, Figure 13). Scott McCloud explores a concept known as amplification through simplification where in comics, characters are drawn in an iconic fashion, simplifying their appearance so they may become more relatable to audiences. He says that, "by stripping down an image to its essential 'meaning,' an artist can amplify that meaning in a way that realistic art can't" (30). After Wonder Woman emerged during the Golden Age, artists designed her in a simple fashion, which meant that readers, especially young females, could easily identify with Wonder Woman and feminism. Her body wasn't overly sexualized with exploding cleavage and long shapely legs. Her masculine presence dominated the pages, not her physical appearance.

Wonder Woman's character during the Silver Age evolved into something more detailed. The 1958 *Wonder Woman* reboot softened her looks, giving her a more feminine appearance; however, she remained simplistic in other ways. This became problematic because Wonder Woman's simplicity made her appear weak and less powerful. This is a good example of McCloud's argument that, "when art becomes a job or a matter of social status the potential for confusing one's goals goes up considerably" (181). Wonder Woman's pro-feminist message during the Silver Age of comics was entirely erased because Kanigher and other Silver Age writers were more concerned about the job rather than Wonder Woman's pro-feminist message.

During the Bronze Age of comics, Wonder Woman was once again recreated and even though she remained a simplified character, she became more sexualized. Her costume got smaller and her breasts grew larger. Despite artists' attempts to incorporate simple iconic drawing styles with sexy lines and curves, they once again artists once again failed to create a character that female audiences could relate to. The Modern Age of comics reveals a more

muscular and detailed Wonder Woman, giving her a sense of power and control but failing at empowering her. McCloud argues that characters who are drawn more realistically become objectified, "emphasizing their 'otherness' from the reader" (44). While Wonder Woman appears to have more bulging muscles that reflect her power and her strength, she remains objectified in readers' eyes. The Modern Age exposes more faceless female characters with giant breasts than the previous eras. The muscles only succeed at further objectifying female characters, making it more difficult for readers to identify with her.

We Need Wonder Woman Now

Over the years, Wonder Woman has faced many challenges as a feminist icon. Through each era of comics and its coinciding wave of feminism, Wonder Woman has both represented and misrepresented women. Her character reflects both the failures and successes of each feminist wave, exposing the issues women in real life face every day in a male dominant society. Men and women are forced to fit into a gender binary that leaves no room for those who don't quite fit in. Masculine women and feminine men struggle to conform within the construction of gender roles.

The comics genre also neglects to recognize the needs of female audiences, thus, writers who remain in control of the female voice continue to create characters that attract male audiences. Patriarchy dictates that men desire to possess powerful women and that by controlling them, men no longer need to fear masculine women; therefore, masculinity and women remain the possessions of men. Wonder Woman as a feminist icon, needs to rise above the control of patriarchy so she can find her voice. By adapting feminist concepts into their work, writers can create an empowered female character who can be both masculine and feminine and remain the sole owner of her agency. It is also important that Wonder Woman remains relatable to young

audiences so that she can successfully represent women and feminism. Audiences could easily identify with Wonder Woman if she ceased to fall victim to gender roles and stereotypes. Since gender roles are still enforced today, it is necessary for feminism to remain a movement of liberation, representation, and empowerment. We need Wonder Woman now more than ever.

Appendix

(Figure 1)

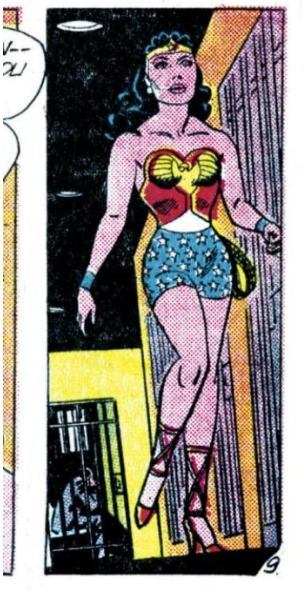
(Figure 2)

(Figure 3)

(Figure 4)

(Figure 5)

(Figure 6)



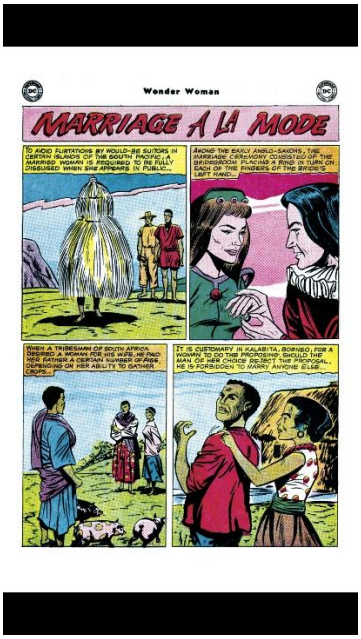
(Figure 7)

(Figure 8)

(Figure 9)

(Figure 10)

(Figure 11)



(Figure 12)

(Figure 13)

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