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‘Superman believes that a wife’s place is in the home’: *Superman’s Girl Friend, Lois*

***Lane* and the representation of women**

Michael Goodrum

Superman’s Girl Friend, Lois Lane ran from 1958-1974 and stands as a microcosm of contemporary debates about women and their place in American society. The title itself suggests many of the topics about which women were concerned, or at least were supposed to concern them: the mediation of identity through heterosexual partnership, the pressure to marry and the simultaneous emphasis placed on individual achievement. Concerns about marriage and Lois’ ability to enter into it routinely provide the sole narrative dynamic for stories and Superman engages in different methods of avoiding the matrimonial schemes devised by Lois or her main romantic rival, Lana Lang. Marriage is, however, routinely represented in a popular feature of the comic-book, at least in its early to mid-period of publication: the ‘imaginary story’. While all superhero narratives are imaginary, the universes they inhabit are regulated through principles of ‘continuity’, narrative structures that determine what is and is not real – the stories and events that will go toward making up the back history of the character and those that will not. A more complete discussion of continuity can be found below. Even from this brief note, however, it is clear that imaginary stories allow the creative team to explore potentialities that have no impact on the ‘main’ story that exists within continuity. *Lois Lane* therefore engages with real-world concerns facing women through direct representation and indirectly through consideration of problems

with continuity. As a serial narrative constructed through words and recurring visual representations, the comic-book also provides a continuing account of female identity as constructive and constructed, both drawing on and contributing to contested narratives of what it 'meant' to be a woman.

Continuity as a structural device

To understand how *Lois Lane* engages with the challenges faced by women in the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s, it is necessary to understand continuity.¹ In film and television, continuity means that if someone is standing on the left of the shot in a red dress when the shot cuts away, when the shot cuts back to them they will still be on the left and still wearing the same dress. This applies to comics as a whole, but continuity is deeper and more intricate as it constitutes the internal logic that constructs the narrative universes and provides coherence. While it has been more closely observed at times, only really coming to prominence in the 1960s and reaching a crisis point in the 1980s, throughout their history superhero narratives have been contained by the system they have themselves created, with creative teams bound by the work of previous teams as well as other contemporaries working on titles where characters crossover.² There is flexibility within this system but not a great deal; changes must be accounted for plausibly. Richard Reynolds has identified three key aspects of continuity: serial, hierarchical, and structural.³ Serial is the idea that current events in the narrative trajectory of a character must be in keeping with those before them; hierarchical is the fact that the battles that constitute much of superhero comic-books lead to a clearly ordered hierarchy of strength and fighting ability (or romantic preference); structural

is all events ‘inescapably implied by continuity’ but not necessarily represented in the narrative.⁴ Continuity, though, is an unstable system and has been overhauled on several occasions since the publisher DC released *Crisis on Infinite Earths* series in 1985. With nearly 50 years of publication history behind them and some very prolific writers, such as Robert Kanigher, who were remarkably unconcerned with fidelity to continuity, DC found its multiple story universes impossibly unwieldy and set out to streamline them. *Crisis on Infinite Earths* did just this, erasing the multiverse that had grown up to accommodate these differences and making it easier for new fans to begin reading – and for existing creators to keep writing.

Continuity, however, is more complex than the model proposed by Reynolds. A fourth category of continuity theory, an ‘archive of lapsed acceptability’, accounts for stories that fall out of continuity yet, thanks to ever-widening digital access to past comic-books, can still be consulted and interpreted as guides to current events.⁵ Creative teams or publishers might try to erase past events to simplify the continuing present, but access to deleted texts is widened by digital archives and social media provides a platform for discussion about them and their removal from continuity. Continuity can also be considered from the angle of whom, in terms of representation, it benefits. As a system that both shapes and is shaped by contemporary discourse, continuity in comics has often, though not always, worked towards the ascendancy of white male hero figures, the marginalisation of people of colour, and the sexualisation of women. Although there are notable anomalies, both women and people of colour have routinely been created and adjusted to fall in line with governing principles that, more often than not, are representative of white male privilege. This is because, as a serial

form, comic-books exist in a web of intricate relationships with their historically shifting contemporary socio-political conditions of creation and reception. A major shift began in 2013 when Marvel began publishing an ongoing series with Kamala Khan, a young Muslim girl, as the new Ms. Marvel; Thor was also replaced by Jane Foster, and in 2017 America Chavez became Marvel's first Latin-American LGBT lead character (tensions around such developments can be seen in the #comicsgate movement, which parallels similar movements in gaming and science fiction fandom where groups of long-term fans, usually white and male, use social media to protest against the politicisation of the object of their fandom). In the period under consideration in this piece, white male privilege was only just beginning to be decentred by the Civil Rights movement and second-wave feminism. Continuity is therefore more than a system for regulating narratives and creating hierarchies of characters in terms of their abilities – it is also a system that reproduces broader social trends of marginalisation and oppression.⁶ This is particularly evident in *Lois Lane* as despite being the protagonist of the series, her adventures are often positioned outside continuity and explicitly identified as 'imaginary'. Those imaginary stories, however, were an attempt to meet multiple demands that, as letters pages demonstrate, were highly controversial.

Lois Lane and the post-war emphasis on marriage

What, then, was so radical that it proved impossible for comic-book readers to accept? Marriage. Throughout the sixteen year run of *Superman's Girl Friend, Lois Lane*, Lois' desire for marriage provides the main narrative drive of the series.⁷ It had not always been that way for Lois; between 1944 and 1946, 'Lois Lane, Girl Reporter' appeared as a support

strip in *Superman* (#28-42). In this period, many comic-books were a composite of several different parts – *Superman* would usually include two Superman stories, one slightly longer than the other, a support story such as ‘Lois Lane’, and perhaps a short piece of prose, as well as a page or two of gag strips. The Lois of ‘Girl Reporter’ is not the marriage-obsessed character of her later series. Instead, she engages with the contemporary ‘Rosie the Riveter’ brand of female empowerment, providing a model of femininity capable of succeeding without the assistance of men, demonstrating the ways in which contemporary rhetoric, in this case the temporary empowerment of women to help the war effort, can infuse popular culture and its structuring principles. In these wartime and early resettlement adventures, Lois outfights and outwits a host of criminals, always managing to secure a scoop for the *Daily Planet* in the process. Lois is therefore represented as an independent and capable career woman. This follows the pattern set by one inspiration for Lois, Torchy Blane, a female newspaper reporter who appeared in a series of films from 1937-1939; to make the inspiration more obvious, in *Torchy Blane in Panama* (1938), the character was played by the actress Lola Lane. Like Torchy, Lois is a great reporter: the editor of the *Planet*, Perry White, even describes Lois as ‘one of the best reporters I’ve ever worked with’, quite a compliment as the *Planet* is routinely represented as one of the best newspapers in the US.⁸ In these adventures, Lois never fawns over Superman or expresses a desire for marriage – her focus is purely on being successful in her job. For instance, in *Superman* #28 (1944), Jimmy Olsen states that Lois is ‘an elegant reporter but you gotta admit – you wouldn’t get most of your big scoops if it wasn’t for Superman’, after which Lois manages to talk a man out of suicide and get his story – ‘all without Superman!’⁹ Similarly, in *Superman* #32 (1945), Lois captures

some crooks who are using a ventriloquist act to rob people at a zoo, stating, 'I'm so fed up that I won't need Superman!'¹⁰ Lois goes on to remark that she does not need Superman in *Superman* #34 (1945), and then once again demonstrates her self-reliance in *Superman* #35 (1945) when capturing three confidence men trying to swindle a millionaire.¹¹ With the end of the Second World War, however, 'Lois Lane, Girl Reporter' rapidly came to a close, making its final appearance in *Superman* #42 (1946). This resonates with Joanne Meyerowitz's statement that the specific wartime challenges to the 'sexual division of labour' posed by the drive to get women into war work, and with them broader ideas about gender and the place of women, 'vanished from the mass culture' once the war had finished.¹² Wartime shifts may also have been less far-reaching than they initially appear. As William Chafe points out:

The hiring of millions of women did not itself signify that women had gained the right to be treated as equals with men in the job market. Economic equality could be achieved only through a substantial revision of social values and a lasting modification in the nature of male-female relationships.¹³

As indicated by the mass post-war relocation of women from the workplace to the home, women in traditionally masculine trades were no longer lending a hand to support the system in the absence of men: they were denying a returning veteran a job that was 'rightfully' his. Women employed in these roles also found themselves out of step with rapidly shifting constructions of gender roles as the apparent pinnacle of female empowerment, however

complex and conflicted it may have been, was soon subject to a sustained process of rollback. Instead of women's employment being lauded in the press, as it had been during the war, it began to be seen by some conservative commentators as the source of profound social dislocation and rising juvenile delinquency.¹⁴ To put it another way:

When the 'wrong' bodies are in the 'wrong' places – when women walk into male spaces or vice versa – this is often translated into a challenge to norms of feminine or masculine behaviour ... in all societies there is an intertwined reciprocity between space, bodies, and the social construction of both – neither 'space' nor 'bodies' exist independently of a social imprint.¹⁵

Lois Lane routinely challenged these boundaries, ensuring the presence of her body in stereotypically masculine spaces, as part of a masculine trajectory, a career. Although Lois' body bore the social imprint of acceptability, her use of it represented a challenge to dominant rhetoric about women's place and space. While *Lois Lane* repeatedly stresses the desire of its heroine for marriage, demonstrating the development of the character in resonance with dominant discourse aimed at women, Lois' utterances on the topic are made from a masculine space, a career-led space, which demonstrates that Lois could both reinforce and problematise contemporary discourse. Lois Lane exists within similar tensions to Wonder Woman who, according to Joan Ormrod, 'challenged the perceived role of women as reliant on men in family life and the job market' and Lois Lane exists within similar tensions.¹⁶ Lois' desire for marriage is presented in contrast to Wonder Woman who, like

Superman, faces the conundrum of how to continue as a superhero and meet familial duties, problems alien to Lois.

This is not to say that messages directed at women all struck the same note; Meyerowitz states that although post-war popular culture ‘rarely presented direct challenges to the conventions of marriage or motherhood, [it] only rarely told women to return to or stay at home’, indicating that American women were exposed to a range of messages.¹⁷ A great deal has been written about these messages, much of it through the prism of the ‘feminine mystique’, an approach outlined by Betty Friedan in 1963. According to Friedan’s landmark book, patriarchal American society at this time declared that:

The highest value and the only commitment for women is the fulfilment of their own femininity ... The root of women’s troubles in the past is that women envied men, women tried to be like men, instead of finding fulfilment only in sexual passivity, male domination, and nurturing maternal love.¹⁸

The ‘fulfilment of their own femininity’ to which Friedan refers entailed a domestic life looking after children isolated from events in the public sphere. *Lois Lane* exists in a problematic relationship to this project as the character’s job as a reporter routinely involves her participation in ‘masculine’ arenas and she remains fiercely ambitious in her career, always trying to outdo everybody else both inside and outside *The Daily Planet*. As a result, Lois is some distance from meeting the necessary terms for successful femininity in the eyes of the patriarchal society of the period. Despite Lois’ career ambitions, she still yearns to

attain domestic ends, to be married and to take up her position as a wife and homemaker. It is within these tensions, these competing visions of what it is to be a woman – independent, successful, and career-focused as opposed to dependent wife and mother – that *Lois Lane* operates; it is important to note, though, that like *The Feminine Mystique*, *Lois Lane* takes white middle class women as the focus of its representational strategies. Friedan elided her earlier history of ‘anti-fascism, radicalism, and labor union activism’ as a deliberate strategy to connect with the largest possible number of women when such radical views were still highly problematic in a time of enforced consensus politics; *Lois Lane* was a representation of the mystique Friedan sought to help others escape and, like the mystique itself, *Lois Lane* was created by men.¹⁹

Industrial impetus for marriage narratives

Dominant values of the feminine mystique were reinforced in comic-books four years before *Lois Lane* began. In 1954, the Senate subcommittee hearings on juvenile delinquency took comic-books in their sights. Their aim was true, and the shots that hit home nearly ended the industry. Comic-books were saddled with accusations that they were ‘cunning device[s] of our enemies, deliberately calculated to destroy the decency and morality which are the bulwarks of society’, associating them prominently with communism (‘our enemies’), juvenile delinquency, and deviant sexuality (attacks on ‘decency and morality’).²⁰ Dr Fredric Wertham was a key witness in the hearings and his scientific credentials helped lend credence to the claims regarding the deleterious effects of comic-books. Wertham saw Wonder Woman, the major female figure in comic-books in 1954, as a ‘frightening figure for boys’

and ‘an undesirable ideal for girls, being the exact opposite of what girls are supposed to want to be’.²¹ The phrase ‘supposed to want to be’ demonstrates how identities are continually constructed, or performed, and how Wertham and those who followed his work viewed assertive female characters at the time. As a result of the hearings, a strict new self-regulatory code was introduced that outlawed the crime and horror comic-books that had attracted the most criticism. It also strongly regulated the ways in which the female body could be drawn across the entire industry; DC’s response to this formalising and imposition of conservative outlooks was to retreat into producing narratives and images that championed contemporary values.²²

Part of DC’s strategy was to expand its most popular, and safest, character into a ‘family’, stressing again the centrality of this concept to the 1950s. This was also a transmedia strategy, with Superman moving to television screens in 1952. In the first season, Lois (played by Phyllis Coates) was a tough and independent reporter who shared top-billing with George Reeves’ Superman. By the time filming began on season two, Coates had committed to another project and was replaced by Noel Neill. From season two, the tone of the show was lighter and Neill played Lois in a less assertive manner. The success of the show fed back into the comic-book. By the third season, cub reporter Jimmy Olsen (who had actually been introduced to the Superman universe by the *Adventures of Superman* radio serial in 1940) had attained such popularity that Neill had ‘dropped down to second on the list [of featured cast], behind Jack Larson’s Jimmy Olsen’.²³ This coincided with the launch of *Superman’s Pal, Jimmy Olsen* in 1954, a series that went on to enjoy strong sales throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Lois’ series had to wait until 1958, and even then ‘executives at DC

were not at all sold on the idea of Lois Lane headlining her own book', when the influential editor Mort Weisinger pitched it to them.²⁴ Skepticism is more understandable in the broader context outlined by Hanley, where 'only 18 *per cent* of the comics released [in March 1958 when *Lois Lane* made its debut] had a female lead, with the large majority, almost two-thirds, of female-fronted titles at this time dedicated to the specifically "female" genre of romance'.²⁵ Romance comics were tremendously popular in the late 1940s and into the 1950s, accounting for 'between twenty and twenty-five per cent of total comic-book sales' in 1949 according to Jeanne Emerson Gardner.²⁶ The implementation of the Comics Code, with an entire section dedicated to the representation of 'Marriage and Sex', meant that 'romance comics were essentially frozen in the morality of the early 1950s' as part of a 'wider popular discourse that reflected, expressed, and helped shape the conventions of postwar middle-class American culture'.²⁷ *Lois Lane*, in many ways, attempts to link the very different genres of romance and superhero titles, bringing a more literal meaning to the idea of a Superman 'family' of titles.

Superman was clearly the patriarch of this family. As Hanley remarks, 'Weisinger knew that a Lois Lane comic book would succeed because Superman was a guaranteed seller, so he tailored the book to the expectations of the audience', making *Lois Lane* a Superman story told from a slightly different perspective.²⁸ Lois may front the title, but Superman is the real star. Correspondents in *Action Comics* or *Superman* requesting romance narratives were directed to *Lois Lane* as an industrial strategy reinforced with adverts.²⁹ A clear strategy of curating audiences therefore emerges, with *Superman* largely reserved for 'superhero' stories (the quota of romance stories in *Action Comics* was met by Supergirl and the three boys

between which she is torn), and *Lois Lane* the vehicle for regular romance. Although many who wrote requesting marriage narratives were women, the extent to which *Lois Lane* was also aimed at a male audience can be found in the description of ‘TV’s Lois Lane’, Noel Neill, within *Lois Lane #7* as ‘a pert, trim bit of femininity ... [who] increases the male population of the Santa Monica Swimming Club every time she takes a plunge there’.³⁰ Instead of empowerment, the character of and actress behind Lois Lane were presented as spectacle for the male gaze. The emphasis of Lois’ appearance over her ability to exercise power in traditionally male spheres also recalls the fact that the ‘disciplinary production of gender effects a false stabilization of gender in the interests of the heterosexual construction and regulation of sexuality within the reproductive domain’, placing the character of Lois firmly into a closely monitored identity where gender and sexuality were entwined.³¹

Whereas *Superman* narratives are often driven by the dynamic of Lois attempting to discover the secret identity of the eponymous hero while Superman goes about his superhero business, *Lois Lane* is driven by the desire for domesticity as both end goal and method of containment for a ‘difficult’ woman. Joanna Connors details the changes in Lois’ character from the 1940s to the late ’50s, remarking that ‘Lois had changed from a smart, tough girl reporter ... into a girl bent on marriage’, a process all the more noticeable as Superman’s personality remained largely the same, even if the nature of his adventures shifted into more fantastic arenas, often through the use of ‘imaginary stories’, which allowed the creative team to test out outlandish scenarios without any impact on continuity, or red kryptonite hallucinations, which caused Superman to act erratically.³² Superman does enter into romances willingly, but only where there is no chance of their success.³³ There is also the

issue of the personality of the woman involved, with Lori Lemaris and Lyla Lerrol, Superman's two 'lost loves', being very different women to Lois Lane and Lana Lang. Lois and Lana are inquisitive and cause problems for Superman, while Lori, a mermaid, and Lyla, a Kryptonian, are more traditionally feminine. Both are also unavailable, as Lori must marry a merman and Lyla is doomed to die by both fatal illness and the impending explosion of Krypton. Potential romances were therefore represented in *Superman* and *Action Comics*, but in quite different ways to *Lois Lane*. Despite Lois' accomplishments, her preoccupations are made clear when Superman gives her a signal ring to summon him when she is in danger (a gift previously bestowed on Jimmy Olsen): Lois calls Superman because the heel on her shoe comes loose and then because she was unable to get to her compact when she needed to apply more make-up. As Lois says, suggesting the all-pervasive nature of her superficiality, 'if that's not an emergency, what is?'³⁴

The dynamics in this early period of Lois' own comic-book are neatly summed up in a letter from Thomas Emory, published in *Lois Lane* #5:

Lois Lane is always getting into impulsive scrapes so that Superman is kept busy rescuing her from danger. Also, she keeps trying to find out his secret identity and pin it on Clark Kent. On top of it all, she is always trying to get Superman to propose and marry her! If you ask me, Lois is a big headache for the Man of Steel. Why doesn't she simmer down?³⁵

This letter is revealing in several ways. First, Emory completely captures, at an abstract level, the narrative thrust of the series at this time. As a reporter, and a close associate of Superman, Lois routinely finds herself in dangerous positions and, instead of relying on her own ingenuity, regularly depends on the Man of Steel to save her; Lois usually treats this as an excuse to kiss her saviour and on more than one occasion, Superman suspects Lois is deliberately endangering herself to facilitate close contact with the object of her affection. Second, it engages with both aspects of Lois' character – the desire for domesticity and the fact that her work as an investigative reporter is dangerous. Lois is not afraid of peril, something that could be seen as a masculine trait, but her attempts to use danger as a means of soliciting contact and ultimately marriage can be seen as more stereotypically feminine, an attempt to cultivate protective feelings in Superman that can be turned to her romantic advantage. Third, Emory's letter demonstrates a contemporary male attitude to Lois. Some male readers it seems, read *Lois* not for its female title character but for Superman, and expected to encounter the same kind of adventures found in *Superman* and *Action Comics*; although Lois' actions provide narrative drive, some male readers wanted the Man of Steel to be tackling larger, more important, issues than simply looking after one woman in Metropolis.³⁶ Superman, even in *Lois Lane*, routinely spends a great deal of time on alien worlds (removing him from the narrative), so running around after Lois may have seemed rather dull in comparison; perhaps unconsciously, *Lois Lane* reproduced tensions related to the role of housewife in its narrative structure as Superman's world was to some extent being narrowed to his 'home' and caring for Lois, limiting access to myriad other possibilities. In this way, Superman was affected by discourses about women to almost the same degree as

Lois Lane when he entered the 'female space' of the comic that bears her name, though in a far less constrictive way. Although Lois enjoys greater freedom of movement than housewives in reality, being able to travel through time and space in search of adventure, her travels always produce an opportunity for domestic pressures to impose themselves on the narrative, for the disciplinary production of a gendered and sexualised identity to assert itself on creative decisions regarding the character; when Superman travels anywhere, he does not automatically find himself part of an inevitable courtship and, if he does, it is not necessarily any more welcome than the attentions of Lois Lane or Lana Lang. Lois' first thought on arriving somewhere tends to be that, as she is stuck there, she may as well get married.

In addition to Thomas Emory, the same letters page also contained a female perspective. Mrs Jane Anthony wrote to say that she liked to 'sympathise with Lois' problems', and this indicates that reader opinion was divided over Lois, although not necessarily strictly along gender lines. Some people found Superman's caring relationship with Lois restrictive, perhaps even claustrophobic, and these readers were mostly men or boys unused to, or at least unwilling to accept, the demands imposed by a position of care. Others sympathised with Lois' attempts to negotiate, and improve, the limits of her sphere, and this position was more equally divided between men and women; others, such as Judith Stevens, took the creative team to task, stating that 'I think it's awful the way you insult women', and the editor did nothing to contradict this, except to say that this was being taken 'out of context'.³⁷ Thomas Emory's injunction that Lois should 'simmer down', however, resonates with the repeated attempts to 'teach Lois a lesson', to effectively put her in her place and reinforce gender stereotypes prevalent in the US of the late 1950s. *Lois Lane* tries

to balance the competing tensions of the desire of some readers to see action narratives unfettered by the demands of a relationship and the desire of others to see precisely that: a story where those demands, and their negotiation, are the predominant feature. The advent of the 'imaginary story' resolved some of these tensions, turning some of the comic-book over to the consideration of domestic relationships and freeing up the rest for narratives more in keeping with those found in *Superman* or *Action Comics*; through the 'imaginary' tag, however, hierarchies are reinforced as domesticity is relegated to being unofficial or 'not real' and therefore unimportant in the eyes of those comic-book readers who value the concept of continuity and its implications. There are even hierarchies within the 'imaginary' stories as while those in *Lois Lane* almost universally deal with marriage, those in *Superman* explore a range of events with significant consequences for the universe Superman inhabits: the female-centred narrative is limited to different marital combinations and outcomes, whereas the male-centred narrative is free of such domestic limitations.³⁸

Containment and its discontents

Although domesticity is marginalised through the imaginary story, discipline remains firmly on the agenda; the instructive act of disciplining Lois is often frustrated, though, and usually by Lois herself. In fact, after Lois has worked out another complex scheme designed to put her in her place, Perry White laments, 'will anyone EVER teach her a lesson?'³⁹ Lois' ability to repeatedly frustrate the disciplinary procedures of Perry White, Jimmy Olsen and even Superman demonstrate that she is capable of outwitting patriarchal attempts to confine her, even using stereotypical ideas of femininity as a means of resistance. It may well be that

Lois' intelligence poses as much of a threat to Superman as her desire for marriage. For instance, the creative team show Lois being flattered, or vacuous, and then use this as cover to weave a complex plan to demonstrate her intellectual ability. For instance, in *Lois Lane* #2 (1958), criminals try to trick Lois so they can get to Superman, stating that if you 'flatter a dame like I did, she'll believe anything', but Lois, far from being taken in by their scheme, turns it against them and ensures that they are captured by the police.⁴⁰ In *Lois Lane* #6 (1959), Lois claims to have accepted bribes and, after being arrested, allows the gang of criminals who had blackmailed her to break her out of prison. The whole thing, however, was a ruse developed by Lois and the District Attorney in order to capture the gang.⁴¹ *Lois Lane* therefore opens spaces for female power but this cannot be read purely as feminist empowerment. The creative team behind Lois routinely show her as longing to be contained, to be married off as 'Mrs Superman' and retreat to the domestic sphere. It is this that inspires most of the plans that Superman has to foil, or for which he feels he has to teach Lois a lesson. It therefore also has to be questioned to what extent this engages with a masculine reluctance to be married, or whether it was supposed that a marriage between Lois and Superman would be the end of the comic-book. Editorial attitudes toward marriage were neatly summed up when, in response to a request to see Lois try her hand at a range of other careers such as 'a spy, a model, a big-game hunter, an ambassador, a daredevil, an heiress and a queen', the editors state that 'we'll admit our versatile Lois can handle all the professions you suggest, but we think the career she prefers most is being a housewife for Superman!'⁴² Lois Lane is capable of succeeding in any of these careers, readers are told, but given the choice she would renounce them all in favour of marriage and the domestic sphere.

The fact that Lois was capable of success in all fields, though, recalls concerns that in the late 1950s ‘educated and talented women who, having taken up careers as full-time homemakers, were denying their talents to the country’, particularly in the traditionally female areas of education and nursing.⁴³ Perhaps in an attempt to rectify this, and to give Lois a feminine sheen that was called into question through her job as an investigative reporter, Lois took up a position as a volunteer nurse.⁴⁴

The problem Lois faces in her marital endeavours is that any permanent union has to be factored into continuity. If she marries anyone besides Superman, the tension as to whether she will marry the Man of Steel is removed from the narrative; if she marries Superman, then that has to be factored into every Superman adventure from that point onwards, and a marriage is not the kind of thing that can be easily ignored. It entails domestic responsibilities and, in the socio-political climate of the 1950s and early ’60s, those almost inevitably include children. Such developments sound like a recipe for destroying, or at least fundamentally altering, the structures that made the comic-book popular. It was therefore a decision the editor and creative team were unlikely to take, especially given the angry letters they received on the topic, such as that from Thomas Emory.

Desire in *Lois Lane*

Given the frequent narratives regarding marriage or the wish for it, desire – sexual desire, as well as desire for the continuation and reinforcement of patriarchal social arrangements – is a routine fixture in *Lois Lane*. It is heterosexual desire that most frequently drives narratives, and it is this that necessitates the plethora of imaginary stories. A permanent union between

Superman and Lois was impossible from a creative perspective despite the fact that letters attest to a strong demand for it on the part of some readers. Other readers, however, felt differently, and it was this split that made the imaginary story such an attractive creative solution. One example of a dissenting voice can be found in a letter from F. Twill, who wrote to complain that:

Lois Lane is constantly, to put it bluntly, messing up things for Superman. I love Lois, but I think she needs to be taught a lesson she won't forget for a while. The next time Lois fouls up Superman's plans, why doesn't he bend her over his knee and give her a super-spanking?⁴⁵

Twill's anger here demonstrates the strength of feeling about the place of women in 1960. Twill also misses the point of *Lois Lane*, as virtually every story is driven by Lois 'messing up things' for Superman – though even the extent of 'messing up' can be called into question, as quite often Lois' actions contribute to the solution of whatever problem is faced in a particular narrative. Twill's letter therefore is not so much about individual stories as about the role of women, or this particular woman, and the idea that Superman would be able to function more efficiently without Lois getting in his way. Even if Twill's letter is intended as a tongue in cheek response to the narratives on offer, it engages with themes of the comic-book, teaching Lois a lesson, and broader debates about acceptable roles for women. Alternatively, it could be that Twill is advocating the spanking of Lois Lane as a means of extracting erotic enjoyment from the comic-book.⁴⁶ Superman did, however, spank Lois by

proxy when she stayed overnight in his Fortress of Solitude. When she investigates something Superman has told her to leave alone, she is spanked by an apparently malfunctioning Superman robot.⁴⁷ Although Lois thinks the Superman robot is spanking her accidentally, she still interprets it as a result of her indiscretions; readers are subsequently told by Superman that he had instructed the robot to give Lois ‘a well-deserved spanking’ because of her problematic nature.⁴⁸ That it is a robot means there is a lack of sexual desire on its part, which is reinforced through its impassive face – though the question of Superman’s vicarious enjoyment remains. Lois’ expression can be read as both pain and sexual enjoyment, though the text and remainder of the image clearly reinforces the former as the dominant interpretation. The action of Superman’s robot triggered a lengthy debate. Spanking was mentioned in the letters pages of *Superman’s Girl Friend, Lois Lane* #21, 24, 26, 27, 30, 32 & 34, a debate spanning three years that was overwhelmingly in favour of seeing Lois spanked.⁴⁹ The letter writers might have been children accustomed to spanking as a means of punishment and control; a different explanation may be found in a 1954 article from *Ladies’ Home Journal*, where Marlene Dietrich promotes complete subservience as a way of being alluring to men. Dietrich states that ‘some women could do with a bit of spanking to answer their complaining’.⁵⁰ Rather than quieting women, Dietrich’s advice elicited a fierce response from the *Journal*’s readers. It is not outside the realms of possibility that some women attempted to follow Dietrich’s advice and submitted themselves to such punishment, and while the degree of overlap in readership between the *Journal* and *Lois Lane* is unclear, what is clear is spanking’s prominence in contemporary American culture as an erotically charged practice of containment. Tensions in what was expected of women, and

how those expectations should be policed and enforced, are clearly evident. The scopophilic desire to see Lois spanked poses questions about sexuality that must be more carefully considered. While children might have wanted to see her punished as a 'pest' to Superman, others used the images in different ways – this was, in fact, a major part of Wertham's arguments on how comic-books were read.

Spanking is only one element of the complex question of sexuality in *Lois Lane*. Desire drives many narratives as Lois is routinely connected to a suitor, not necessarily Superman, and the possibility of marriage is always present; desire for Superman also fuels the rivalry between Lois Lane and Lana Lang, generally driving them apart but occasionally bringing them together to resist the overtures of a third candidate for Superman's affections. Desire flows in both ways, though, so within the narrative there is also the question of what Superman wants. In *Lois Lane*, the enigma is not, as Freud posited, what a woman wants, as it is perfectly clear that both Lois and Lana want to be married to Superman; it is, rather, the desires of Superman. He routinely demonstrates affection for Lois and Lana but does not take the step to actually formalising that affection into a recognisable monogamous relationship. Clark Kent is an additional complicating factor as, although readers know he is Superman, his autonomous existence as a potential love interest for Lois, usually spurned, raises questions about the nature of masculinity in this period, and what made men attractive. Vibiana Bowman Cvetkovic argues that 'Lois is attracted to Superman's hypermasculinity but ... Clark Kent represents the safer and less sexually threatening choice'.⁵¹ A related drawback of this is that 'because he is less dangerous he is also less sexually desirable', and this stresses the tensions inherent in postwar gender and gender relations.⁵² Sexuality was a significant

interest at the time, as evident through the Kinsey Reports – *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948) and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (1953) – and the work of William Masters and Virginia Johnson on sexual responses, which began in 1957.⁵³ Tensions in masculinity were dramatised at the time in books such as *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (1955), which proved so successful on its release that it was adapted into a film starring Gregory Peck the following year.⁵⁴ *Lois Lane* was not the only one that posed these questions at this time, then, but it was certainly the most insistent comic-book questioner at a time when comic-books were already under scrutiny following the hearings of 1954, Wertham's allegations regarding Wonder Woman and lesbianism, and that Batman and Robin represent 'a wish dream of two homosexuals living together'.⁵⁵ The latter may have been responsible for the introduction of Batwoman as a love interest for Batman in 1956.⁵⁶

Desire is not restricted to the pages of the comic-book, though – as the spanking debate indicates, there is also the question of the audience. Diversity of desire is to be expected, given the size of the audience (fans may recall Lois Lane's erotically charged question to Superman in the 1978 film – 'how big are you?') but ascertaining precise information on audience desires is difficult. Letters pages were controlled spaces that only included correspondence that met editorial conditions; these excluded anything that featured desires outside normative heterosexuality. David Galloway has written about how Superman in the 1940s comic-books 'remained my own tender, indigo-haired ravager', and of how he was traumatised by the 1949 wedding of Superman to Lois Lane (which, in a twist that would lose all of its unexpectedness in *Lois Lane*, turned out to be a dream and therefore outside continuity).⁵⁷ Such clear expressions of homosexual desire were, however, absent from the

letters pages of *Lois Lane*. There are potential ways of discovering their traces, though. The use of pet names for Superman, such as ‘Supie’, and suggestions for changes to Lois’ appearance to help her win Superman, may, although by no means necessarily, be suggestions of desires that were largely viewed as deviant at the time. It is also entirely possible that more overt expressions of desire for Superman attributed to women could have been written by men under assumed names. Indeed, the repeated phrase ‘please do not refuse my request’ in letters forming part of the spanking debate in #24 and #30 suggest that one person could be writing letters under multiple names; that the letter in #30 was written by ‘Lorraine Lertura’, with the ‘LL’ common to all of Superman’s romantic interests reinforces this.⁵⁸

Desire in Lois Lane is a complex network not easily negotiated. Complications, though, are a means of exploring contemporary attitudes to sexuality and gender roles. Lois Lane constantly struggles with ways of making herself more attractive to Superman. In #27, Lois despairs at becoming ‘the smartest woman in the world’ as the increase in the size of her brain gives her a domed, bald head – she remarks ‘any girl would prefer her own pretty face to having a super-brain – if she’s really smart!’⁵⁹ In #10, after finding some wrinkles, Lois decides she is too old because ‘every man, even Superman, appreciates a fresh, girlish appearance!’⁶⁰ This indicates the pressure on women to ‘stay young and beautiful, if you want to be loved’, a pressure to which Lois bows when she decides to experiment with some regenerative equipment and becomes progressively younger every day; the only thing that can halt this process is for Superman to fix her with his x-ray vision. The term ‘fix’ is used deliberately here to imply two different senses of the verb – ‘to repair’ and ‘to attract and

hold' Superman's visual attention. Lois wants Superman to see her, to really notice her, but her attempts to make herself visible always end up in Superman having to rescue her from some hazard. In the instance of the youth ray, Superman allows Lois to become a baby before he reverses the process – conveniently through a serum rather than through fixing his gaze on the body of the infant Lois – in order to teach her a lesson. Instead of desire on the part of Superman, Lois only elicits punishment. Lois, and indeed many of her readers, therefore explicitly engage with what Laura Mulvey refers to as the male gaze, the idea that women are looked at and objectified by men. In so doing the male, as 'bearer of the look', is coded as active and the female, the object, is interpreted as passive.⁶¹ Lois complicates this slightly because she is more active than a fixed image that serves 'to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation', which is, according to Mulvey, the function of women in conventional Hollywood films.⁶² The comic-book form, although enjoying some similarity to cinema through the process of framing, is a succession of frozen moments; the question in comic-books is the way in which people are drawn within the panels. The series also explores the question of the female gaze in *Lois Lane* #16 (1960), where it is rendered as explicitly harmful.⁶³ When Lois cannot resist temptation and touches some rocks that Superman has told her not to, she develops 'kryptonite vision'. Green beams shoot out of her eyes and, when they strike Superman, he says, 'look away from me! I can't stand the pain!'⁶⁴ Woman as the active bearer of the gaze is explicitly positioned as an assault on masculinity. This is emphasised through the construction of the image in question, which occupies a privileged position as it is the front cover of *Lois Lane* #16. Lois dominates the image and Superman cowers before her, trying to block her gaze using his arm and telling Lois to 'take your eyes

off me'. In another story in the same issue, Lois takes the initiative and kisses Superman causing him to flee from her. Readers are therefore aware of the sexualised nature of Lois' gaze, and Superman's reaction to it recalls Gardner's assertion that romance comic-books acknowledge female desire but also 'the equally strong taboos against its expression [that] create a painful conflict' in the bodies of the desirer.⁶⁵ Lois is eroticised as the subject of the reader's gaze but, in an apparent diversion from the orthodoxy of the diegetic gaze, so is Superman. As such, the gaze in *Lois Lane* cannot be seen as travelling in simply one direction – though Superman informs the reader that the kryptonite vision was all a hoax and that 'I wanted to teach her that reckless curiosity is dangerous', a statement that might apply equally to Lois' sexual interests as well as her investigative ones.

Both Lois and Superman are objects of eroticised gazes, as are Lana Lang and Lois' host of suitors – and that is just within the confines of the comic-book. Characters look at each other but readers also look at the characters and can choose to identify with a range of different perspectives, interpreting them in their own way. They could even write to the comic and offer potential story ideas to both the editors and other readers; as correspondents' addresses were published with their letters, some readers might in turn write to them, raising the potential for other channels of debate and the formation of interest groups who correspond with each other and the comic-book in order to promote their interpretations. This can clearly be seen in *Lois Lane* as pro-Lois and pro-Lana factions wrote to the editor about both characters' respective romantic prospects with Superman. In this way, comic-books with ongoing narratives are far more complex than films, and continuity becomes a more contested concept as it is subjected to scrutiny from multiple perspectives. One of these is desire.

Mulvey's approach has more to offer to an analysis of *Lois Lane*. Mulvey writes:

The spectator identifies with the main male protagonist, he projects his look onto that of his like, his screen surrogate, so that the power of the male protagonist as he controls events coincides with the active power of the erotic look, both giving a satisfying sense of omnipotence. A male movie star's glamorous characteristics are thus not those of the erotic object of the gaze, but those of the more perfect, more complete, more powerful ideal ego.⁶⁶

This poses several questions for an analysis of *Lois Lane*. As already mentioned, audiences were divided along multiple lines, including vociferous male and female voices advocating a range of different approaches to the characters and narratives, and individuals within those audiences directed their erotic gaze at multiple targets. *Lois* also complicates matters. Ostensibly, she is the main attraction in *Lois Lane* but she is not able to effect change on the scale she desires; she can secure scoops, she can frustrate attempts to teach her a lesson, but she can never permanently enter a state of matrimony with Superman. It is Superman who is the ego ideal – he is by definition ‘more perfect, more complete, more powerful’ – and readers are certainly offered his commanding gaze as a point of identification. However, readers are also offered Superman as an erotic object, as a nexus of homo- and heterosexual desire that the character is unable to escape. The creative team do not only direct *Lois*' gaze at Superman, though – *Lois* nearly marries a string of other men from a wide variety of backgrounds, some reluctantly, some with apparent relish: prehistoric men, Oriental(ist)

sheikhs, wealthy businessmen, criminals, and a healthy dose of aliens, amongst others. Lois may well be the object of some gazes, but she is the character who most routinely eroticises her narratives.

As a potential marriage object, romantic conquest of and by Lois is a recurrent theme. Outside any relationship with Superman, Lois is inevitably entangled in a love triangle; her relationship with the Man of Steel must be factored into the consideration of any possible marriage. Lois' attitude to these marriages is the determining factor in how Superman approaches them: if she is positive about them, Superman appears heartbroken to have lost Lois to another man; if she is trying to escape them, Superman generally takes an unsympathetic stance, using Lois' discomfort as a means of engaging in his favourite activity of teaching her a lesson. The frequent appearance of marriage as a narrative dynamic demonstrates the extent to which it loomed large in the lives of women, and girls, in the 1950s and throughout the 1960s. In *Lois Lane* it is pursued, and resisted, with desperation as for a time Lois seems to at least consider marriage with any eligible man. As an example, in 1961 Lois marries, or nearly marries, Superman; Clark Kent; Roger Warner (a double of Kent); a Rajah with a harem of fifty wives; Lex Luthor; and Superman again. In the single issue that year where Lois was not the centre of matrimonial attention, Lana married Superman and the story tracked the impact of that on both Superman and Lois.⁶⁷ To prove 1961 was not unusual, 1962 saw Lois heartbroken at what she thinks is Superman's secret family on an alien world; date a string of USAF pilots; marry Superman; be projected into the Phantom Zone so that Lana could marry Superman; agree to marry a Roman after she was sent back in time; marry Luthor; nearly marry Clark Kent; appear in an imaginary story about

Lois and Superman's married life; and marry Clark Kent.⁶⁸ Marriage, and the children that inevitably result from it in this comic-book, are the focus of almost every story right into the early 1970s. Up to this point, the frequency with which Lois is married or nearly married, and the ongoing popularity of the stories in which these matrimonial near-misses occur, suggests a great deal about what was expected of women in the US at this time – especially given the enduring popularity of the series.

The (fictional) reality of marriage

Lois' adventures in matrimony engage with a key point made by Meyerowitz. In her survey of 1950s magazines, she found a common assumption that all women wanted to marry and 'that women found being wives and mothers rewarding', a position called into question in the same magazines by articles that represented domesticity as 'exhausting and isolating'.⁶⁹ *Lois Lane* reproduces these tensions, balancing portrayals of happily married couples with young children (twins, a boy and a girl, are the ideal in the comic-book) against fractious couples where the wife is removed from society and feels it keenly, engaging with Friedan's argument that 'people developed a healthy identity not through housekeeping, but through commitment to purposeful and sustained effort' to professional work outside the home.⁷⁰ A division that helps to explain the difference in the nature of relationships is whether or not they are 'imaginary'. It is obvious that all the content of comic-books is imaginary, but some is regarded as more imaginary than others, and *Lois Lane* specialised in exploring these extra-fictional realms. As seen in the list above of stories from 1961 and 1962, this allowed Lois to repeatedly marry and for readers to see the nature of that married life. It would come as little

surprise to the readership of *Lois Lane* that her marriage to arch-criminal Lex Luthor, even after his reform, ends badly: although happily married, their son becomes a juvenile delinquent and, resenting his father's reformation, kills him and becomes a galactic criminal.⁷¹ Lois later tries to rescue her son and almost dies in the process, prompting the boy to reform, dedicate himself to good, and marry Joan, the daughter of Superman and Lana Lang.

More surprising are the representations of Lois' marriages to Superman. These are rarely happy and often reproduce in stark detail the isolation and frustration of the housewife so keenly etched by Friedan. The dilemma Superman and Lois always face in their imaginary lives together is how to protect Lois from Superman's enemies. In a four-part story running in *Lois Lane* #23-5, this problem is resolved by Lois going to live in the Fortress of Solitude, Superman's Arctic retreat. Removed from society, unable to keep her job and with her daily round of chores reduced by Superman's labour-saving machines, Lois feels useless and frustrated, remarking, 'now that I've achieved my heart's desire, I ... I'm miserable!'⁷² This is hardly a ringing endorsement of married life. Concerns for Lois' safety had also prompted the couple to marry in secret; in the final part of the story, Lois urges Superman to make their wedding public. He does, 'despite [his] better judgment', and Lois is subsequently threatened by criminals; Superman and Lois also move into a house, to end Lois' isolation, but this house is very quickly destroyed. Lois is ultimately forced to live inside a bulletproof bubble, relegating her forcefully to a very literal private sphere. Lois' frustrations at this development, however, are instantly removed by 'several blissful kisses' from Superman.⁷³ An earlier snapshot of married life was similarly problematic. In #20 (1960), Lois and

Superman are married and adopt Supergirl. To ensure the adoption is approved, Lois has to give up work as ‘because of your job as a reporter ... you would be unable to give Linda the full attention every child should get from her mother’.⁷⁴ When Supergirl and Superman do the household chores at super-speed, Lois feels like she is not needed, and ‘her days and nights become a mixture of unhappy thoughts and secret tears’, making the lot of women in marriage a distinctly unhappy one, even with the removal of tiresome chores.⁷⁵ Both stories reproduce many of the tensions already identified in the lives of housewives, such as isolation and frustration. Lois’ anger boils over when a robot double of Linda, built by Superman to conceal the fact that she is frequently on adventures, malfunctions when a screw in its posterior comes loose. Lois is seen by an adoption inspector ‘spanking’ the robot double of Linda (actually fixing it by knocking the loose bolt back into place), which means that Linda is taken back to the orphanage. Superman shows how little attention he had paid to his desperately unhappy wife by saying ‘Lois! How could you have spoiled such a perfect set-up?’ Rather than telling him how sad she was, Lois simply asks how she can make it up to him.⁷⁶ As Gardner remarks of romance comics, ‘the solution to every marital problem ... was for the wife to fully rededicate herself to her marriage’, not for a renegotiation between equals that acknowledges the wife’s grievances.⁷⁷ Lois’ other marriages to Superman are equally tortured; that marriage is routinely represented as the basis of identity for Lois, rather than an equal partnership, suggests why this is the case, given its conformity to the strictures of the feminine mystique. Admittedly, some marriages were happy, just as some marriages in reality were happy, such as the one between Superman and Lois in *Lois Lane* #36, but this is because Lana Lang is the focus of the story; Lana finds the marriage so depressing she goes

to live in a different time period. Children are often the cause of marital problems as unions with Superman always produce super-babies with powers far beyond those of the mother, and who are therefore beyond her control and make her life miserable.⁷⁸

Whether it meant to or not, in its depiction of children *Lois Lane* engaged with long-running concerns about juvenile delinquency. Even though Lois always gives up her career to be a homemaker, her children usually prove to be beyond her control. Superpowers often play a part in this but not always, as seen in the case of Lois' son with Luthor. The question, then, is why a comic-book so heavily invested in the idea of marriage and children represents them so negatively. The answer may well lie with Lois and her embodiment of tensions in mid-twentieth-century American women. Meyerowitz, Harrison, Katherine Turk, Carl M. Brauer and Chafe all discuss the forces driving women into the home and others simultaneously urging them out of it to make best use of their talents.⁷⁹ Lois is clearly capable of success outside the home as she is a journalist at a top newspaper able to not only survive but thrive in a male-dominated work environment. Her domestic abilities, however, are more frequently questioned; she is regularly shown as incapable of cooking a good meal for Superman, and this simple point may indicate the reasoning behind her failures as a mother. Lois' abilities outside the home exist in inverse proportion to those inside it; her ability to function in a masculine environment imply that she has lost, or never had, some 'natural' femininity that equips all women for lives as homemakers. Harrison, discussing the presidential commission on women in American society authorised by President Kennedy and chaired by Eleanor Roosevelt, describes how 'conflict between the desire and/or need of women to work and the ideal of women at home as wives and mothers resulted in ambivalence ... about a woman's

right to define her role', a factor that ultimately restricted the recommendations the commission felt qualified to make.⁸⁰ The presidential commission advocated freedom of choice for women, but within a context that continued to stress their importance as homemakers and effectively limited their range of acceptable choices. In this context, Lois finds herself constantly pulled in two directions, yearning for domesticity yet fearing the potential isolation it brings and her ability to be as successful in that sphere as she is told she should be purely by virtue of her gender.

Lois cannot expect any help from her husband, and when help is forthcoming, usually through the invention of machines that do the household chores, Lois feels increasingly useless, her already narrowed world being reduced even further. The narrative never considers the fact that, as a writer, the time Lois saves in chores provides her with an opportunity to put her skills to use. Instead of an equal partnership, in these coddled existences Lois' role is reduced purely to sex object, though the Comics Code ensured this was never directly represented and, in fact, the married couples in comic-books and other media at the time generally sleep in separate beds. Any anger Lois directs toward Superman is always impotent given the clear power hierarchy between the two and the fact that although the series has Lois as its main protagonist, Superman is the one many readers really want to see. *Lois Lane* therefore partially engages with the antifeminist position put forward by Dr. Marynia Farnham and Ferdinand Lundberg who collaborated on *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex*, published in 1942. In this book, Farnham and Lundberg argue that the neurotic nature of 'modern woman' was caused by a retreat from her natural domestic and maternal function. Lois' frantic attempts to marry, her pursuit of danger to court her man – both of

these things could be seen to reinforce such a judgment. Farnham and Lundberg went on to state that education and a job outside the home was detrimental to ‘the ability of the woman, as well as her husband, to obtain sexual gratification’, arguing that any attempt to take women out of the home divorced them from their own bodies and rendered them unable to please their husbands, or at least made them less likely to fit a model of feminine passivity held up as the ideal at this time.⁸¹ The antifeminist position was by no means a dominant voice in postwar culture, but it was one that had some influence, influence against which Friedan railed in *The Feminine Mystique*.

Friedan saw this ‘mystique’, this set of practices and body of discourse encoded in popular culture and official political rhetoric, as a new way of making old realities seem attractive to a younger generation of women. *Lois Lane*, however, does not necessarily fit with the mystique in any coherent fashion. Marriage is championed and yet represented as a stifling, depressing experience for the wife; children are elevated and yet cause only problems with no guaranteed reward; and Lois routinely seeks out new romantic interests, positioning herself as agent and her suitor as spectacle, inverting the conventional romantic binary, although Lois is always offered as spectacle by being in the comic-book. Frequent letters relating to her hair and clothes and their impact on other characters attest to this. The mystique comes under increasing, if one-dimensional, attack from the early 1970s when *Lois Lane* abruptly, and jarringly, switches to a publication championing women’s liberation and dealing with issues of social relevance.⁸² This move begins in *Lois Lane* #105, from late 1970. Lois protests the story she has been allocated, claiming that Perry White is ‘discriminating against me because I’m a woman’ when he gives a more dangerous

assignment to Clark Kent.⁸³ However, Lois' challenge to sexual discrimination reproduces the very problems it seeks to tackle as she describes her desired assignment as 'a woman's story', calling into question her commitment to equality.⁸⁴

Lois Lane and women's liberation

Lois' increasing involvement in the politics of the period, no matter how ham-fisted, denote a departure from the feminine mystique that had exercised such a profound influence over her earlier adventures. Its influence lingers on, though, as demonstrated by Lois' continuing desire to be a married mother. In *Lois Lane* #110, Lois is sent by the *Daily Planet* to interview a group of mothers as part of a 'Mother of the Year' story, but is rejected as she is not a mother and so has no experience of the matter herself. This leads Lois to sob that 'I would be a mother if Superman would marry me', indicating the return of tensions from an earlier period.⁸⁵ This can be at least in part attributed to the return to writing duties on *Lois Lane* of Robert Kanigher, who had been in charge of *Wonder Woman* from 1948-1968 before being replaced by Denny O'Neil in order to try to create a more contemporary feel to appeal to modern women. Kanigher and O'Neil failed for different reasons. In 1972, however, *Lois Lane* came under the control of Dorothy Woolfolk, the first female editor of the series, who had been scheduled to write *Wonder Woman* but was reallocated to *Lois Lane*. In the first issue edited by Woolfolk, #121 (1972), Lois quits her job at the *Daily Planet* and goes freelance to write the stories that matter to her, moving in with a newly acquired circle of female friends as she can no longer afford the rent on her old apartment.⁸⁶ Under the stewardship of Woolfolk, a 'mystery columnist' was added to the magazine (#125, 1972) to

‘deal specifically with the new image of Lois’.⁸⁷ This may seem like a sensible provision but it serves to dramatically complicate matters: in what can only be a deliberate editorial strategy, the new columnist is provocatively misogynistic. This new columnist, Alexander the Great, describes how Lois has:

Always been such an obnoxious dame – is it possible for anyone – superhuman or not – to deal with such a personality? I don’t think so. Women should know their place.

Lois has never known hers. Superman should take a stand and put Lois in the place she deserves to be put in.⁸⁸

This may have been an attempt to appease readers opposed to the Women’s Liberation movement, but if so this calls into question *Lois Lane*’s commitment to the cause it had only recently begun to espouse. It may have been a commercial concern, as there were certainly a number of complaints about the preoccupation with Women’s Liberation in the letters pages; it may have been an attempt at humour; it may also, as Jacque Nodell argues regarding a similar column in another Woolfolk-edited title, have been a deliberate attempt to provoke pro-Women’s Lib letters in response.⁸⁹ Regardless of its origins, it did not last very long, and #126 marked its last appearance. It is not surprising that Lois’ feminist turn happened under a female editor, but Woolfolk only lasted in post from #121 until #127.⁹⁰ From #128 until the demise of the series at #137, there was a general retreat from more overt engagement with Women’s Liberation and social relevance and an attempt to reconcile this brief period of its ascendancy with some of the more fantastic adventures that had previously characterised the comic-book. To make the return to earlier interests abundantly clear, #128 had a cover featuring Superman mourning Lois, who had been ‘killed on our honeymoon’.⁹¹ By #133,

Robert Kanigher shattered any illusions that the series was still committed to Women's Liberation by informing a critical female correspondent that 'as the creator of Rose and the Thorn, I know that she's unique because she's unpredictable ... the irresistible charm of a woman, which it's obvious you've been cheated of. So sorry'.⁹²

The key test of DC's commitment to women's liberation was keeping *Lois Lane* in print, as well as pursuing stories of empowerment. Old hierarchies can be seen to re-emerge in decisions taken on this front. In 1972, the last year circulation figures were published for *Lois Lane*, it had an average paid circulation of 232,067.⁹³ *Superman* was down to 317,990 (dropping to 285,634 by 1974) and *Batman* was languishing at 185,283 (with a slight rally to 193,223 by 1974).⁹⁴ *Lois Lane* was therefore outperforming Batman, one of DC's major characters, yet was still rolled into the composite title, *Superman Family*, which also featured the *Supergirl* series that had only made it to #9 before cancellation. This decision can only have been taken to cut costs amid the 50 per cent rise in the price of paper in 1974 as a result of the strike in Canadian paper mills.⁹⁵ Industrial costs continued to rise, as did prices, and readership declined. Editorial decisions were made to back the major properties that had been successful in the past, and had apparently greater chance of success in the future.⁹⁶ Titles starring, and increasingly only read by, men were retained as the pillars of the industry as comic-books began to leave general retailers and, through direct market distribution, relocate to specialist shops that more often than not became 'male spaces'. Even today, women as readers and creators of comic-books still occupy a problematic space as the industry once again faces crisis.⁹⁷ It would seem that the apparent curation of female audiences into female spaces as a deliberate editorial strategy, in combination with wider industrial problems,

contributed to the decline of female readers and the continuation of female characters being written and drawn to appeal to a core audience of men.

Conclusions

No matter which period of *Lois Lane* is examined, the comic-book is rife with tensions. Whether championing marriage and yet simultaneously presenting it as an institution characterised by misery, or promoting Women's Liberation and offering a platform for anti-feminist rhetoric, *Lois Lane* is intimately connected to the debates informing the period of its creation. The fact that the character of Lois is always problematic and is never settled goes some way to explaining the unrest felt by women during the time it was being published. Not that the comic-book itself was directly responsible, but that it acknowledged, engaged with, and contributed to debates about women and their role in society. The short-lived reign of Dorothy Woolfolk also provides an opportunity to engage with women attaining positions of authority and their precarious hold on them. The failure of the feminist *Lois Lane* occurred at a time of experimentation amid declining DC (and industry-wide) readership, experimentation that came to an abrupt end when it failed to reverse comic-book fortunes and broader cost-cutting measures had to be imposed.⁹⁸ Feminism in *Lois Lane* may, then, have simply been a commercial device that failed to secure the hoped-for ends and, as a result, was dropped by a male-dominated business hierarchy intent on appealing to their core fan base of white, adolescent males. Lois is problematic whether she is appealing to or questioning existing conditions and, while there are elements of her characterisation that run contrary to a

positive depiction of women, in all of her guises, her adventures and attitudes provide a means of engaging with the contemporary discourses featuring, and directed at, women.

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¹ I have considered the gendered implications of continuity in another article. See “‘Oh c’mon, those stories can’t count in continuity!’ Squirrel Girl and the problem of female power”, *Studies in Comics* 5 (2014), pp. 97–115.

² For instance, in the period under consideration, narratives in *Action Comics*, *Superman*, *Adventure Comics*, *World’s Finest Comics*, *Superman’s Pal, Jimmy Olsen*, *Superman’s Girl Friend, Lois Lane*, and *Justice League of America* routinely featured Superman, and he made guest appearances in other titles across the DC universe. Each title bound Superman to certain occurrences and regulated his future interactions.

³ Richard Reynolds, *Super Heroes: A Modern Mythology* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1992), pp. 38–52.

⁴ Reynolds, *Super Heroes*, p. 42.

⁵ Goodrum, “‘Oh c’mon,’” p. 99.

⁶ These issues are explored in more detail in Osvaldo Oyola, '(Re)Collecting Identity: Popular Culture and Narratives of Authentic Self in Transnational America'. (Unpublished doctoral thesis, Binghamton University, 2014).

⁷ See also J. P. Williams, 'Transformations and Projections: Constructions of Femininity in 'Lois Lane'', *Studies in Popular Culture* 17.1 (1994), pp. 45-53.

⁸ Don Cameron (w) & Ed Dobrotka (a), 'Lois Lane, Girl Reporter', *Superman* #31 (New York: DC Comics, 1944), unpaginated.

⁹ Don Cameron (w) & Ed Dobrotka (a), 'Lois Lane, Girl Reporter', *Superman* #28 (New York: DC Comics, 1944), unpaginated.

¹⁰ Whitney Ellsworth (w) & Ed Dobrotka (a), 'Lois Lane, Girl Reporter', *Superman* #32 (New York: DC Comics, 1945), unpaginated.

¹¹ Whitney Ellsworth (w) & Sam Citron (a), 'Lois Lane, Girl Reporter', *Superman* #34 (New York: DC Comics, 1945), unpaginated; Don Cameron (w) & Ed Dobrotka (a), 'Lois Lane, Girl Reporter', *Superman* #35 (New York: DC Comics, 1945), unpaginated.

¹² Joanne Meyerowitz, 'Beyond the Feminine Mystique: A Reassessment of Postwar Mass Culture, 1946-1958', *The Journal of American History* 79 (1993), pp. 1455-1482, here p. 1479.

¹³ William Chafe, *The Paradox of Change: American Women in the 20th Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 152.

¹⁴ Chafe, *The Paradox of Change*, p. 156.

¹⁵ Mona Domosh and Joni Seager, *Putting Women in Place: Feminist Geographers Make Sense of the World* (New York: Guilford Press, 2001), pp. 111-2.

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¹⁶ Joan Ormrod, 'Cold War Fantasies: Testing the Limits of the Familial Body', in Joseph J. Darowski (ed.), *The Ages of Wonder Woman: Essays on the Amazon Princess in Changing Times* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2014), pp. 52–65, here p. 52.

¹⁷ Meyerowitz, p. 1480.

¹⁸ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 38.

¹⁹ Daniel Horowitz, *Betty Friedan and the Making of The Feminine Mystique: The American Left, the Cold War, and Modern Feminism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000), p. 7.

²⁰ James Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage: America's Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 75.

²¹ Fredric Wertham, *Seduction of the Innocent* (London: Museum Press Limited, 1955), p. 34.

²² For a history of the Comics Code, see Amy Kiste Nyberg, *Seal of Approval: The History of the Comics Code* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994). The 1954 Code can be found online here: <http://cblbf.org/the-comics-code-of-1954/>.

²³ Tim Hanley, *Investigating Lois Lane: The Turbulent History of the Daily Planet's Ace Reporter* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2016), p. 41.

²⁴ Hanley, *Investigating Lois Lane*, p. 57.

²⁵ Hanley, *Investigating Lois Lane*, p. 58.

²⁶ Jeanne Emerson Gardner, 'She got her man, but could she keep him?': Love and Marriage in American Romance Comics, 1947-1954', *Journal of American Culture* 36 (2013), pp. 16–24, here p. 16.

²⁷ Gardner, 'She got her man', p. 23. See also Jeanne Emerson Gardner, "'Dreams may end, but love never does": Marriage and Materialism in American Romance Comics, 1947-1954', in Matthew Pustz (ed.), *Comic Books and American Cultural History: An Anthology* (London: Continuum, 2012), pp. 94–109.

²⁸ Hanley, *Investigating Lois Lane*, p. 60.

²⁹ See for instance a letter from Anne Zeek, a regular appearance in the letters pages of DC at this time, in *Action Comics* #269 (1960), and a letter from Ilene Kayne in the same issue; there was an advert for an imaginary marriage in *Lois Lane* in *Action Comics* #276 (1961). These editorial selections and responses in #269 correspond with *Superman's Girl Friend, Lois Lane* #19 (1960), which features the first imaginary story of a marriage between Lois and Clark.

³⁰ Unknown author, 'Meet TV's Lois Lane', *Superman's Girl Friend, Lois Lane* #7 (New York: DC Comics, 1959), unpaginated.

³¹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 135.

³² Joanna Connors, 'Female Meets Supermale', in Dennis Dooley & Gary Engle (eds), *Superman at Fifty! The Persistence of a Legend!* (Cleveland: Diane Publishing Co., 1987), p. 113.

³³ To give just a few examples, in *Superman* #94 (1955), Clark Kent accidentally carries a girl over 'marryin' rock' and has to find a way to get out of the marriage; in #120 (1958), Superman marries Perry White's niece, only for it to turn out to be a hoax to trap a gang – the niece turns out to be a robot and the gang 'kill' it, prompting Superman to state 'it also

demonstrates what might be your fate, Lois, if you ever became Mrs Superman!'; in #121 (1958), a time traveller from the future tries to trick Superman and Lois into getting married; in #129 (1959), readers are given an untold story of Clark Kent in college, where he falls in love with a mermaid from Atlantis, Lori Lemaris, who cannot marry a human; Marriage narratives outside *Lois Lane* become far less frequent after 1960, when *Lois Lane* began its series of imaginary marriages.

³⁴ Mort Weisinger (w) & Kurt Schaffenberger (a), *Superman's Girl Friend, Lois Lane* #16 (New York: DC Comics, 1960), unpaginated.

³⁵ Thomas Emory, 'Letters to Lois', *Superman's Girl Friend, Lois Lane* #5 (New York: DC Comics, 1958), unpaginated.

³⁶ Women were so often portrayed as causes of difficulties in *Superman* that Susan Anne Howalsky wrote to #129 (1959) to say that 'girls are sometimes helpful, you know, and not always trouble-makers!' The editorial response directed Susan to *Action Comics* #252 (1959), which features the origins of Supergirl, Superman's younger cousin.

³⁷ Judith Stevens, 'Letters to Lois', *Superman's Girl Friend, Lois Lane* #16 (New York: DC Comics, 1960), unpaginated.

³⁸ Otto Binder (w) & Kurt Schaffenberger (a), *Superman's Girl Friend, Lois Lane* #14 (New York: DC Comics, 1960).

³⁹ Bill Finger (w) & Kurt Schaffenberger (a), *Superman's Girl Friend, Lois Lane* #6 (New York: DC Comics, 1959), unpaginated.

⁴⁰ Mort Weisinger (w) & Kurt Schaffenberger (a), *Superman's Girl Friend, Lois Lane* #2 (New York: DC Comics, 1958), unpaginated.

⁴¹ Weisinger (w) & Schaffenberger (a), et al, *Lois Lane* #6, unpaginated. Each comic-book contained three stories, often written and drawn by different teams, hence the different team from that listed in footnote 26.

⁴² Ethel Guinness, 'Letters to Lois', *Superman's Girl Friend, Lois Lane* #7 (New York: DC Comics, 1959), unpaginated.

⁴³ Cynthia E. Harrison, 'A 'New Frontier' for Women: The Public Policy of the Kennedy Administration,' *The Journal of American History* 67 (1980), pp. 630–646, here p. 631.

⁴⁴ Leo Dorfman (w) & Kurt Schaffenberger (a), *Superman's Girl Friend, Lois Lane* #43 (New York: DC Comics, 1963), unpaginated. The hospital subsequently provided Lois with several romantic adventures.

⁴⁵ F. Twill, 'Letters to Lois', *Superman's Girl Friend, Lois Lane* #21 (New York: DC Comics, 1960), unpaginated.

⁴⁶ There is a point of interest here as Craig Yoe argues that the artist Joe Shuster, Superman's co-creator, worked on sadomasochistic comic-books in the 1950s. See Craig Yoe, *Secret Identity: The Fetish Art of Superman's Co-Creator Joe Shuster* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2009).

⁴⁷ DC refused permission to reproduce images in this piece. However, this image is available online here: <https://www.cbr.com/dont-send-me-no-more-letters-no-if-superman-spanked-lois-lane-would-it-send-her-traveling-through-time/>

⁴⁸ Binder & Schaffenberger, *Lois Lane* #14 (1960).

⁴⁹ Correspondence on this topic lasted so long that it warranted a mention in a book about the life of long-term *Lois Lane* artist, Kurt Schaffenberger. See Mark Voger, *Hero Gets Girl!*

The Life & Art of Kurt Schaffenberger (Raleigh: TwoMorrrows Publishing, 2003), p. 49. As late as #121 (1972), when Superman thinks he sees Lois falling from a building, he thinks ‘I’ll give her a good spanking for making me worry!’ As this was the first issue edited by Dorothy Woolfolk, it was probably a knowing reference to the earlier controversy.

⁵⁰ Marlene Dietrich, ‘How to be Loved’, *Ladies’ Home Journal* 71 (January 1954), as cited in Meyerowitz, p. 1473.

⁵¹ Vibiana Bowman Cvetkovic, ‘Feminine Mystique: Superman’s Girl Friend, Lois Lane in the ‘Silver Age’ of Comics’ in Nadine Farghaly (ed.), *Examining Lois Lane: The Scoop on Superman’s Sweetheart* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013), pp. 39–60, here p. 43.

⁵² Cvetkovic, ‘Feminine Mystique’. p.43.

⁵³ A good summary of more recent academic debates on this topic can be found in Martin Fradley’s review of books by Stella Bruzzi and Mike Chopra-Gant in *Screen* 47 (2006), pp. 379–385.

⁵⁴ Fascination with the topic is such that the Todd Haynes film *Far From Heaven* (2002) addressed masculinity, femininity, and sexuality, as well as racism in a 1950s context. Masculinity in the 1950s is also explored, through a particular lens, in Russell Meeuf, *John Wayne’s World: Transnational Masculinity in the Fifties* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2013).

⁵⁵ Wertham, p. 190.

⁵⁶ Edmond Hamilton (w) & Sheldon Moldoff (a), *Detective Comics* #233 (New York: DC Comics, 1956).

⁵⁷ David Galloway, 'Pop Goes the Hero', in Dooley & Engle, p. 120. The 1949 marriage happened in the Superman newspaper strip. In 1955, Superman and Lois married in *Action Comics* #206 where, once again, it was a dream. [Lois and Superman also married in a dream in *Adventures of Superman* S4 E8 \(1956\) after Lois fell asleep while answering letters to the *Planet's* lovelorn column.](#)

⁵⁸ I am indebted to Tim Hanley for drawing this to my attention. His book, *Investigating Lois Lane: The Turbulent History of the Daily Planet's Ace Reporter* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press 2016) is a tour de force of Lois scholarship.

⁵⁹ Mort Weisinger (w) & Kurt Schaffenberger (a), *Superman's Girl Friend, Lois Lane* #27 (New York: DC Comics, 1961), unpaginated.

⁶⁰ Jack Schiff (w) & Kurt Schaffenberger (a), *Superman's Girl Friend, Lois Lane* #10 (New York: DC Comics, 1959), unpaginated.

⁶¹ Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', in E. Ann Kaplan (ed.), *Feminism and Film* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 34–47.

⁶² Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', p. 40.

⁶³ As with Lois being spanked, DC refused permission to reproduce the relevant image. It can be found online here:

http://dc.wikia.com/wiki/Superman%27s_Girlfriend,_Lois_Lane_Vol_1_16

⁶⁴ Weisinger (w) & Schaffenberger (a), *Lois Lane* #16, unpaginated.

⁶⁵ Gardner, 'She got her man', p. 18.

⁶⁶ Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', p. 41.

⁶⁷ *Lois Lane* was the fifth most popular series of 1961, with an average paid circulation of 515,000. For the full table, see <http://www.comichron.com/yearlycomicssales/1960s/1961.html> last accessed 16 November 2016.

⁶⁸ In 1962 the series was even more popular in terms of ranking, coming in third, but there was a drop in circulation to 490,000 amid an industry-wide drop in circulation thanks to a price rise from 10 to 12 cents in 1961. For the full 1962 table, see <http://www.comichron.com/yearlycomicssales/1960s/1962.html> last accessed 16 November 2016.

⁶⁹ Meyerowitz, p. 1470.

⁷⁰ Horowitz, p. 206.

⁷¹ Jack Schiff (w) & Kurt Schaffenberger (a), *Superman's Girl Friend, Lois Lane* #34 (New York: DC Comics, 1962) and Jack Schiff (w) & Kurt Schaffenberger (a), *Superman's Girl Friend, Lois Lane* #46 (New York: DC Comics, 1964).

⁷² Jack Schiff (w) & Kurt Schaffenberger (a), *Superman's Girl Friend, Lois Lane* #25 (New York: DC Comics, 1961).

⁷³ Schiff & Schaffenberger, *Superman's Girl Friend, Lois Lane* #25.

⁷⁴ Jerry Siegel (w) & Kurt Schaffenberger (a), *Superman's Girl Friend, Lois Lane* #20 (New York: DC Comics, 1960), unpaginated.

⁷⁵ Siegel & Schaffenberger, *Superman's Girl Friend, Lois Lane* #20.

⁷⁶ Siegel & Schaffenberger, *Superman's Girl Friend, Lois Lane* #20.

⁷⁷ Gardner, 'She got her man', p. 20.

⁷⁸ Except in *Superman* #166 (1964), where an unidentified mother (though one that looks remarkably like Lois) and Superman have two sons, only one of whom has superpowers.

⁷⁹ Meyerowitz, p. 1463; Harrison, pp. 630–1; Katherine Turk, ‘Out of the Revolution, into the Mainstream: Employment Activism in the NOW Sears Campaign and the Growing Pains of Liberal Feminism’, *The Journal of American History* 97 (2010), pp. 399–423, here p. 400; Carl M. Brauer, ‘Women Activists, Southern Conservatives, and the Prohibition of Sex Discrimination in Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act’, *The Journal of Southern History* 49 (1983), pp. 37–56, here p. 56; Chafe, p. 134.

⁸⁰ Harrison, p. 643.

⁸¹ Marynia Farnham & Ferdinand Lundberg, *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1947), as cited in Friedan, p. 37.

⁸² For a broader discussion of this trend, see Bradford W. Wright, *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003) and Michael Goodrum, *Superheroes and American Self Image: From War to Watergate* (London: Ashgate, 2016), chs. 6–7.

⁸³ Robert Kanigher (w) & Ross Andru (a), *Superman’s Girl Friend, Lois Lane* #105 (New York: DC Comics, 1970), unpaginated.

⁸⁴ Kanigher & Andru, *Superman’s Girl Friend, Lois Lane* #105.

⁸⁵ Robert Kanigher (w) & Dick Giordano (a), *Superman’s Girl Friend, Lois Lane* #110 (New York: DC Comics, 1971).

⁸⁶ This issue, and #122, is analysed in Jennifer K. Stuller, ‘Second-wave Feminism in the Pages of *Lois Lane*’, in Matthew J. Smith & Randy Duncan (eds), *Critical Approaches to Comics: Theories and Methods* (London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 235–251.

⁸⁷ Cary Bates (w) & Don Heck (a), *Superman’s Girl Friend, Lois Lane* #124 (New York: DC Comics, 1972).

⁸⁸ Bates & Heck, *Superman’s Girl Friend, Lois Lane* #124.

⁸⁹ Jacque Nodell, ‘FOR or AGAINST Women’s Lib with Romance Comic Villain – Marc!’, *Sequential Crush* <http://www.sequentialcrush.com/2012/03/for-or-against-womens-lib-with-romance.html>. I am indebted to Tim Hanley for bringing this to my attention.

⁹⁰ After Woolfolk’s departure from DC she became a successful writer of children’s books, most notably the Donna Rockford series, which ran to ten individual titles, with the first appearing in 1974.

⁹¹ Bob Oksner (cover artist), *Superman’s Girl Friend, Lois Lane* #128 (New York: DC Comics, 1972).

⁹² Robert Kanigher, ‘Down Lois Lane’, *Superman’s Girl Friend, Lois Lane* #133 (1973).

⁹³ ‘Statement of Ownership, Management, and Circulation’, in *Superman’s Girl Friend, Lois Lane* #130 (1973). *Detective Comics* was also rolled into the composite title, *Batman Family*, in 1975.

⁹⁴ For *Superman* figures, see <http://www.comichron.com/titlespotlights/superman.html>; for *Batman*, see <http://www.comichron.com/titlespotlights/batman.html> Both last accessed 2 August 2017.

⁹⁵ Jason Sacks, *American Comic Book Chronicles: The 1970s* (Raleigh: TwoMorrows Publishing, 2014), p. 124.

⁹⁶ Dean Trippe proposed a series, *Lois Lane, Girl Reporter*, to DC at some point in the mid-late 2000s, an idea that was rejected. For more on the series, see <https://www.themarysue.com/lois-lane-girl-reporter/> In February 2019, it was announced that DC had commissioned a Lois Lane TV series that will launch on DC's own streaming platform in 2019. This draws on the pattern of *Gotham* (2014), another prequel set in a fictional universe before the arrival of the major male protagonist.

⁹⁷ See, for one example among many, the treatment of Heather Antos, a Marvel editor, who posted a picture of herself drinking a milkshake with other female Marvel employees. Adam White, 'Female Marvel editor harassed online for milkshake selfie', *The Telegraph* first published 31 July, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/books/news/female-marvel-comics-editor-harassed-online-milkshake-selfie/>

⁹⁸ For a further discussion of this trend across the entire industry, see Wright, *Comic Book Nation*, ch. 8.