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The University of Southern Mississippi

“Forget the Old . . . The New Wonder Woman is Here”: *The New Wonder Woman* and
the Feminist Movement, 1968-1972

by

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Abstract

In 1968, Wonder Woman gives up her powers and embraces her human identity as Diana Prince. Powerless, she learns martial arts and continues to fight. The majority of discussion surrounding the Diana Prince era—*Wonder Woman* #178-204—argues for the period as embracing anti-feminist sentiment. This analysis of the Diana Prince era argues that the portrayal of Diana Prince without her superhero persona aligns with the ideals of the 1970s feminist movement. By incorporating general themes and ideas of feminism, the comic portrays Diana Prince in a feminist light throughout the comic. Even though her powers are striped, she is able to be an empowered, human woman who can still fight alongside Superman and Batman. She learns karate, like many feminist magazines encourage during the 1970s. She is able to defend Batman and Superman when they are not in their superhero costumes. Also, she is able to embrace her emotions, often stereotyped as feminine, and is often seen crying, but that does not hinder her ability to fight. This research concludes that the current conversation surrounding this era needs to consider these feminist elements of the comics and embrace the possibility that she presented a truer, feminine superhero that has not been seen since Wonder Woman's powers were reinstated.

Key Words: Wonder Woman, Diana Prince, Feminism, Superheroes, Comic Books

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Introduction: “Because not all females are helpless!”—Diana Prince

In July 1972, a Godzilla-sized Wonder Woman stormed through a city street on the cover of the first independent issue of *Ms.*¹, the magazine created under the direction of feminist activist Gloria Steinem with the hopes of nationalizing the feminist agenda. At the same time in comics, Wonder Woman was on the back burner, however, and Diana Prince, her alter ego, was the “New Wonder Woman” without any superpowers. In *Ms.*, Diana Prince was criticized by Joanne Edgar, who wrote that the problem with Diana Prince as the “new” Wonder Woman was that “[r]ather than proving her superiority over men, she became more and more submissive...she became a female James Bond, but without his sexual exploits. The double standard applied even to her” (Edgar 53). Wonder Woman’s surrendering her powers, in this view, was seen as her submitting to men despite the feminist movement, which promoted women’s gaining equal rights. Through the analysis of *The New Wonder Woman*² in the context of second wave feminism, I argue that Diana Prince’s portrayal actually embraces the ideals of the feminist movement, despite claims to the contrary by some feminist critics.

When Wonder Woman was originally created in the 1940s, her creator, William Moulton Marston, believed that the comic books lacked well-rounded female characters, claiming, “not even girls want to be girls so long as our feminine archetype lacks force, strength, power” (Marston 42). Those three traits, he thought, were only found in the

¹ Prior to this point, *Ms.* was an insert in the *New York Times*.

² These comics encompass the time period when Wonder Woman receives a makeover in *Wonder Woman* issue 178 (released in 1968), in preparation for Wonder Woman losing her powers in issue number 179, and ending when she gains her powers back in number 204. *Wonder Woman* never officially changed name, but the cover title became *The New Wonder Woman* from issue 179 through 195, and *Diana Prince: Wonder Woman* from 196 through 203. For the sake of consistency and clarity, I will refer to *Wonder Woman* issues 178-204 as the period of *The New Wonder Woman*.

male characters. The ideal woman of the 1940s was defined as a woman who was both beautiful and submissive. Marston sought to change this when Wonder Woman, “a feminine character with all the strength of Superman plus all the allure of a good and beautiful woman” (42-43), first appeared in *All Star Comics* #8 in December 1941. Starting off in an isolated back insert, Wonder Woman soon joined the Justice Society (which featured superheroes like Superman and Batman), initially as their secretary while the league fought against Axis forces in World War II. Eventually, Wonder Woman would have a more prominent role in the Society and garner enough attention to warrant the lead role in her new showcase *Sensation Comics* starting in January 1942 (Daniels 31). By the summer of 1942, a year after her creation, the *Wonder Woman* comic was created, “making the Amazon one of only a handful of characters considered strong enough to carry an entire publication” (37).

In the first issues of *Wonder Woman*, Marston expands on Wonder Woman’s origin myth. On an island without men, Queen Hippolyta was unable to produce a child through natural means. She molds a child from clay and prays to Aphrodite to grant the statue the gift of life. As the child grows up the reader is able to see how Diana has “the beauty of Aphrodite, the wisdom of Athena, the strength of Hercules and the speed of Mercury” (Marston & Peter 7A). When American Army officer Steve Trevor crashes his plane in the waters near Paradise Isle, it is Diana who rescues him and nurses him back to health. However, he is forced to return back to “the warring world of men” (8A), though he is not well enough to travel alone. “A young Amazon must take the Captain back to America—she must remain there to fight war and evil,” Aphrodite instructs. A championship is waged to see which Amazon is worthy enough to accompany Trevor

back to America and help combat evil. Diana, of course, wins. She is given her uniform and renamed Wonder Woman.

During her time as a superhero, Wonder Woman evolves from her Amazonian roots into a modern day feminist icon, inspiring women like Steinem at a young age to break free from common stereotypes like the ones that Marston described. However, for some, her feminist status was compromised in the 1960s when the character was de-powered (Stanley 154; Robinson 82; Walowit 35; Steinem; Edgar). In 1968, Wonder Woman has a problem: the Amazons (of which she is descended) need to leave this world because their power is depleted, but that means Wonder Woman must leave humanity behind. Instead, she leaves her Amazonian sisters and gives up her powers and her Wonder Woman persona to stay with humankind, embracing her identity as Diana Prince. She buys her own business, a fashion boutique, and begins to learn martial arts under the training of a martial arts master I-Ching. Over the next several issues, Diana and I-Ching work together in order to overcome various world threats, with Diana normally taking the lead in the fight, even when assisted by men.

By issue number 203, Diana Prince addresses women's liberation head on by joining a women's "lib" group and protesting the unfair treatment of female workers. The plan backfires and hundreds of women lose their jobs, and there is no resolution to the women's liberation issue. Feminists like Gloria Steinem campaigned in the early 1970s to get Wonder Woman—and not a powerless Diana Prince—back on the cover of the comics; by issue 204, Diana Prince is granted her powers and is once again Wonder Woman (Daniels 133-134).

While few scholarly texts focus on Wonder Woman, there are some that address Wonder Woman's history or the issue of female superheroes. Les Daniels's *Wonder Woman* provides an encyclopedic resource on the various stages of Wonder Woman, detailing not only her comic book life but also her social impact. He provides background on Marston's scholarly life, the beginning life of the Amazon, and the way she changes over time. Most importantly, he points out that the change Diana Prince undergoes in 1968 impacted the character in ways never expected: "it transformed the Amazon into a political symbol of national significance and exposed her to an ideological scrutiny that she has never entirely escaped" (Daniels 123). He pinpoints this period as the point that Wonder Woman became a feminist icon and began to experience intense scrutiny from comic fans, scholars, and even the general public. Daniels also provides insight into the comic's creators and the reasoning behind their actions. Mike Sekowsky, the original artist for the era, viewed the change as creating "a super female in the real world," someone relatable (125). Dennis O'Neil, the comic's writer, thought stripping Wonder Woman of her powers made her more independent, "making her thoroughly human and then an achiever on top of that" (126). Also, Daniels highlights how Gloria Steinem and *Ms.* were integral in making Wonder Woman the new face of feminism. The goal was to get Wonder Woman back on the cover of the comics, which later occurred, but not with the female editor some feminist hoped for (Edgar 53). Instead, Robert Kanigher took over the comic, but Daniels points out that for some feminists the return of the original Wonder Woman in "the star-spangled outfit" was probably enough (Daniels 132).

Another text that offers a general narrative history of Wonder Woman is Kelli Stanley's "Suffering Sappho!': Wonder Woman and the (Re)Invention of the Feminine Ideal," which analyzes Wonder Woman based on set time frames: the 1940s, the 1950s, the 1960s and 1970s, and the 1980s and 1990s. She discusses how each era sees new changes to *Wonder Woman* that "reflect nothing less than the confusion, fear, and constant reformation of American ideals and American women" (Stanley 145). Stanley believes that the loss of Wonder Woman's powers represents the loss of a feminist icon (154). She focuses on cover portrayals and how each one "reinforced not only her dramatically decreased physical strength and sense of helplessness, but even a 1950s' style concentration on romantic plot entanglements." However, if Stanley were to go past the cover and into the comics, she might not have felt so strongly about the anti-feminist nature of the Diana Prince era.

Similar to Stanley, multiple researchers focus on how Wonder Woman has changed throughout time. Mitrac Emad studies the way the depiction of Wonder Woman's body has changed in "Reading Wonder Woman's Body," which focuses on Wonder Woman's body as a cultural representation of femininity and nationalism. Lillian S. Robinson's *Wonder Woman: Feminisms and Superheroes* take Emad's study a step further. Instead of just focusing on how Wonder Woman's body has been depicted over the years, Robinson provides an understanding of how Wonder Woman as a whole has been portrayed and how her reception has changed through the portrayal. Robinson argues for understanding Wonder Woman as a feminist icon. However, she views the Diana Prince era as Wonder Woman's "nadir" and "decidedly 'not'" feminist (Robinson 82).

Robinson was not the first, or only, to speak of Wonder Woman as a feminist icon; Gloria Steinem's "Introduction" to *Wonder Woman*, the anthology of the earlier comics that Steinem compiled, explains Steinem's views on Wonder Woman as a feminist icon, mentioning how Wonder Woman embraced the negative feminine stereotype when she gave up her powers. In the first issue of Gloria Steinem's feminist magazine *Ms.*, Joanne Edgar's "Wonder Woman Revisited" appeared. This article details how Wonder Woman inspired her as a young girl through the superhero's strength and then seemingly betrayed Edgar with Wonder Woman's submissiveness when she gave up her powers.

Wonder Woman's transformation into Diana Prince during the late 1960s was especially disappointing to feminist comic readers because *The New Wonder Woman* was published during the "second wave" of feminism in the United States. Les Daniels refers to Joanne Edgar's and Gloria Steinem's statements that Wonder Woman is superior with her powers as a "campaign to establish the red-white-and-blue image of Wonder Woman as the emblem of feminism" (Daniels 132). Lillian Robinson says that Wonder Woman's reestablishment in issue 204 was in response "to evidence (including, certainly that of *Ms.* itself) that there was a wide audience for an empowered female hero" (Robinson 83). It was because of the feminist movement, and women like Gloria Steinem and Joanne Edgar, that Wonder Woman regained her powers; thus, the "second wave" of the feminist movement played a key role in *The New Wonder Woman's* publication from 1968-1973 and after.

Before the Second Wave, the first English translation of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* was published in 1954 (originally published in French in 1949). In it,

Beauvoir critiques the historical concept of women as inferior to men, attributing the concept of womanhood to society, not nature. In 1963, Betty Friedan furthers Beauvoir's critiques in *The Feminine Mystique*, where Friedan questions the general unhappiness of housewives and claims it is due to the fact that women have become trapped in their own homes because of societal pressure to remain confined to the domestic sphere.

This literature helped to inspire organization, and numerous women's liberation and women's rights groups began forming across the United States. The groups published magazines and leaflets in an attempt to get feminist ideas spread to a broader audience. One of the more famous articles began as a memo that was eventually published in *Notes From the Second Year*, a compilation of radical feminist writings published in 1970. In the compilation was Carol Hanisch's "The Personal is Political," which quickly became one of the most prominent phrases of the movement. Hanisch defends group meetings as not being "therapy" sessions. The women come and discuss questions, answering with personal experience, but to Hanisch, this analysis is political because "personal problems are political problems. There are no personal solutions at this time" (Hanisch 76). She also discusses "the pro-woman line" of thinking, which is the idea that women are not as terrible as they have been portrayed. In fact, all these terrible portrayals "are either myths (women are stupid), tactics women use to struggle individually (women are bitches), or are actually things that we want to carry into the new society and want men to share too (women are sensitive, emotional)" (77). Her final point is that "women have left the movement in droves," and she pleads for feminists to realize that these women have reasons. It is the job of feminists, she argues, to try and understand the reasoning.

Also in *Notes From the Second Year*, Ellen Willis's "Consumerism and Women" similarly links personal and political decisions, only her discussion involves women and fashion. The "consumerism theory" states that mass media's depictions of products cause consumers to want to buy more and more goods; the depictions are especially targeted at women who "do most of the actual buying, their consumption is often directly related to oppression" (Willis 72). However, Willis does not argue for women to forgo shopping for material items because "[s]hopping and consuming are enjoyable human activities and the marketplace has been a center of social life for 1000s of years" (73). Instead, she focuses on the idea that a movement cannot be successful if every personal decision is treated like a large political gain. She says that in order for a mass movement to be successful, "we must recognize that no personal decision, like rejecting consumption, can alleviate our oppression. We must stop arguing about whose life-style is better." Like Hanisch argued for understanding non-movement members, Willis argues for acceptance and understanding, especially among women within the movement.

During the 1970s, a common theory applied to feminist action was gynocentrism, which emphasized "the importance of gender as an organizing principle of individual identity and social organization" (Nicholson 147). Originally, the differences between men and women were focused on the negative, focusing on oppression and victimization. However, the argument for differences turned positive, focusing on how women naturally view the world different because they are different. One difference is how women generally "define themselves in relation to others and to judge themselves by their ability to care" (150). This ability to care, to empathize, is seen positively.

In the 1990s, Joanne Meyerowitz's "Beyond the Feminine Mystique" recreated Betty Friedan's research for *The Feminine Mystique* by reading multiple magazine articles from the 1960s. Meyerowitz found that almost every article promoted both the domestic and nondomestic despite Friedan's findings that society influenced women to stay in the domestic sphere. Her work reopened the analysis of the 1960s portrayal of women, showing that the depiction was not one-sided.

Like Meyerowitz did with Friedan's research, Philip Sandifer, an independent scholar, reanalyzed the Diana Prince era, which he refers to as the "I-Ching era" in *A Golden Thread: An Unofficial Critical History of Wonder Woman*. Sandifer points out two main objections to the era: the feminist critique and the fan critique "that suggests the character's lack of superpowers made her boring and generic" (Sandifer 104). He spends time discussing the merits of the period for its entertainment qualities, but he also breaks down the feminist objection, citing it as "ridiculous." He points out how one of the great feminist qualities of the period was how "[t]he removal of Wonder Woman's powers didn't weaken the character; it refocused her on the concerns of real women, a strong turn from the endless treadmill of absurd action stories" (113). Diana Prince did not "fight generic space invaders;" she fought real world villains without the aid of superpowers.

Following Meyerowitz and Sandifer, I hope to restart a scholarly conversation on this era and on the depiction of Wonder Woman specifically. Despite Diana Prince's not having supernatural powers, she still manages to be portrayed as "an empowered female hero" (Robinson 83). My research focuses on paralleling the 1960s and 1970s feminist movement—both theories and events—with *The New Wonder Woman*, published

between 1968 and 1972. I argue, like Sandifer, that *The New Wonder Woman* depicts strong feminist qualities in the dialogue, captions, and artwork.

Losing Powers, Gaining the Fight

By the November-December issue in 1968, the Amazonian “magic is exhausted” (O’Neil, Sekowsky, & Giordano 1:37), and they have to leave “man-kind” behind in order to restore their powers. Living on an isolated island was no longer enough for the “Amazon” women; they had to completely leave man’s world behind. Wonder Woman must come with them if she wishes to remain powerful, but she chooses to stay because “Steve Trevor desperately **needs**” her (emphasis in original). Wonder Woman lays down her uniform, her cuffs, and her lasso of truth and gives up her powers (1:38). No longer an Amazon, no longer Wonder Woman, Diana Prince no longer lives apart from men. She equalizes the playing field and goes back to man’s world where she chooses to live her life like an Amazon, just without her former powers.

During the 1940s, the world was at war, and this was reflected in the Wonder Woman comics. She fought Hitler, battled Nazis, and helped the troops. Just like the millions of other women in America, Wonder Woman went away from home to help America, and just like the rest of the women at the end of the war, Wonder Woman was pushed back into a domestic role: “Unmarried women were told to marry; married women were told to have children. Working women went to the altar and to the maternity ward” (LePore 271). Fighting bad guys took a backseat for Wonder Woman; “[she] became a babysitter, a fashion model, and a movie star.”

During the 1950s, the comics’ focus turned to “glamour and romance, with Steve playing an increasingly dominant role in the stories” (Walowitz 33). Under Marston, the comic feature, “Wonder Women of History,” depicted a prominent female historical figure, explaining their significance to society (LePore 221). After Marston’s death in

1947, Robert Kanigher took over, replacing this section with “such features as ‘Wedding Forecast,’ ‘Romantic Notions,’ Marriage a la Mode,’ and ‘Jerry the Jitterbug’” (Walowitz 33). As the title suggests, these sections, which functioned as page fillers and entertainment outside the actual story line, were focused on women’s staying in the home, finding good husbands, and breeding healthy babies. Women’s lives were depicted as revolving around romance or men, whereas the original “Wonder Women of History” filler promoted female accomplishments. As women in America were being encouraged to hang up their working hats and turn to the wedding alter, so were the women in the comics. In fact, Robert Kanigher, the writer for *Wonder Woman* from 1947-1968, has been noted for his aversion to the feminist movement particularly because of his portrayal of Wonder Woman/Diana Prince during the 1950s (Lepore 289). He returns to Wonder Woman in 1972 in issue #204, the last issue in the Diana Prince era. He restores Wonder Woman’s powers and famously kills a recurring character named “Dottie Cottonman, Woman’s Magazine, Editor” (O’Neil, Giordano, & Heck 4:153), who represents Dorothy Roubicek Woolfolk (Lepore 289). Woolfolk was a comic book editor during the 1950s and a hopeful for the next *Wonder Woman* editor. In the first issue of *Ms.*, Joanne Edgar predicted the return of Wonder Woman’s powers under editor Dorothy Woolfolk, but Woolfolk did not get the job; Kanigher did.

In 1969, after twenty years of Kanigher pulling Wonder Woman further and further into the home and away from feminist ideals, Kanigher left *Wonder Woman*, and Dennis O’Neil took over. Under his direction, Wonder Woman got a makeover, quite literally. First, Diana Prince throws aside her army uniform to go undercover at a “hippie club” (O’Neil et al 1:15). In a panel that consumes the whole page, there is a whirlwind

of colors, patterns, and multiple figures of Diana Prince trying on clothes, getting her hair done, and driving away in a brand new car. Now, she looks the part of a mod 1960s woman.

In a way, she receives a makeover by giving up her powers as well. No longer can she don the Wonder Woman uniform (red boots, blue shorts with stars, a red top with a golden eagle embossed on it, a golden crown with a red star, red earrings) or use her accessories (invisible plane, lasso of truth, and her bracelets). She kneels—dressed only in white—between two pillars of flames before the sacred Amazon alter (1:38). In the ceremony of the “Amazon Rite of Renunciation,” she lays down her uniform, bracelets, and lasso upon the alter, saying, “I hereby relinquish all mystic skills! I lay upon the sacred altar the glories of the Amazons and willingly condemn myself to the travails of mortals! May the Gods be merciful to me!” (1:38). She bids her mother and her “home” goodbye to return to the United States where she “shall be truly alone . . . an orphan . . . without friends . . . without a home . . . a stranger and alone . . .” Both she and her mother shed tears in their farewell, and then she returns to the United States to restart her life.

There are significant things to note in this ceremony. First, Wonder Woman is renouncing her special abilities, making her a mortal woman. She no longer can rely on superhuman abilities to fight villains. It is only with her human skills that she will be able to conquer her enemies. Second, she takes off her bracelets. Every Amazon must wear these bracelets. Originally, Aphrodite saves the Amazon women from enslavement and binds their wrists as a constant reminder of “the folly of submitting to men’s domination” (Marston & Peter 5A). If men ever chain the bracelets, the Amazon loses her strength. If the bracelets are ever removed, she becomes too powerful. In her

dissertation on Wonder Woman, Karen Walowit explains their significance to all women: “Just as Wonder Woman is powerless in her chains, so any woman becomes helpless and weak when she submits to male domination” (Walowit 77). The bracelets serve to contain Wonder Woman’s power, but they serve to remind her of the downfall of submitting to men. While they serve as a reminder to never to submit to men, they are the only means that men have to depower Wonder Woman. By removing the bracelets, she removes the one way that men have to bind her. By not having them, there is no longer a direct threat of enslavement.

During the 1910s, chained women were frequently drawn by feminist cartoons, including Lou Rogers. One of the most famous cartoons shows a woman tearing off the ropes of her confinement. From this, Marston concluded, “Wonder Woman had to be chained or tied so that she could free herself—and symbolically, emancipate herself” (Lepore picture insert). In a way, Wonder Woman has been confined to these bracelets, restricted in her abilities for the fear that a man might bind her. However, by giving up her bracelets, she gives up the only way men have ever been able to bind her.

Without the powers associated with Wonder Woman, Diana Prince is allowed to return to Earth and focus the majority of her fighting on humanity³, since she is now, inherently, human. Diana Prince returns to the United States where she buys her own business, a mod fashion boutique, and comes into contact with I-Ching, a martial arts master. It is while assessing the space for her boutique that she sees some “hoodlums” (O’Neil et al 1:39) behind the building “attacking that poor blind man” (1:40). She runs

³ While she does still fight various gods in the Amazon realm, the majority of the comic line focuses on her fighting other humans. Previously, the comic had an emphasis on supernatural enemies.

downstairs with the intent to “frighten them off” since there is “no time to call the police.” When she reaches the alley, she is greeted with the “hoodlums” flying through the air from the force of I-Ching’s hits. Even though he is blind, he recognizes Diana Prince as Wonder Woman and requests her assistance (1:41). However, she “lost strength, swiftness, and magic” when she gave up her powers, leaving her feeling less equipped to save Steve Trevor, the whole reason she gave up her powers. Knowing of her loyalty to Steve, I-Ching uses him and humanity as the main reasons for her assisting him in defeating his enemy, Dr. Cyber. He says, “I pursue Dr. Cyber for love! I love humanity—and if Doctor Cyber’s plans of conquest are realized. Men and women will be reduced to living automatons—slaves to do his bidding!” They immediately begin training in “a course in simple fighting—karate” (1:42). It is worth noting that up until this point the human race has been referred to as “man-kind” for much of the comic series. However, I-Ching refers to the world population as “humanity” and argues for saving “men and women.” In his initial argument, he equalizes the sexes.

Also, he is not casually stating this; he is arguing to fight and defend both sexes through “love” and “not hate,” much like the feminist movement utilized non-violent social and political tactics; however, that does not mean feminists were left physically vulnerable. During the late 1960s and the 1970s, women were encouraged to learn karate for a variety of reasons. Feminists learned karate “[i]n order to defend themselves from male oppression that takes the form of physical violence” (Carden 51). The association between feminism and karate was seen in feminist publications when they promoted women learning to fight. According to Maren Carden, one publication, *Cell 16*, encouraged women to learn karate “to discipline misogynist speech and the male

body...[and] to discipline women and feminism” (Pearson 164). *Ain't I a Woman*, another feminist publication, furthered *Cell 16*'s argument, “challenging a logic that assumes a monolithic understanding not only of karate, but of its relationship to the female body, and ultimately, feminism” (164). Like the other women of this time, Diana Prince studies karate to defend herself and others. In fact, the comics were so inclined to the idea of learning karate that multiple advertisements during the Diana Prince era aimed to sell karate lessons to the readers (*Wonder Woman* #179, #180, #200). By portraying Diana Prince as practicing karate—and mastering it within only a page—alongside advertisements promoting karate lessons, the comics seem to reflect the feminist association with karate. In 1968, when the first issue was published, karate and feminism would have still had a positive relationship. Thus, it would not have the mocking anti-feminist tone that many people seem to associate with this era.

Furthermore, Diana Prince is learning karate from an instructor who believes in the practice of fighting for love and not hate. In this philosophy, I-Ching shies away from the hyper-masculine stereotypical gender role, and he takes on characteristics of love and acceptance, traits more associated with classic feminine stereotypes. William Moulton Marston's original intent in *Wonder Woman*'s creation was to create “a feminine character with all the strength of a Superman plus all the allure of a good and beautiful woman” (Marston 42-43). To him, the feminine characteristics there were often portrayed represented women as “tender, submissive, peaceloving.” To Marston, these were “[w]omen's strong qualities,” but they were historically ignored because of women's lack of physical strength. *Wonder Woman* always possessed masculine traits (like strength), but often times her femininity was left lacking. Diana Prince manages to

embrace masculine traits without sacrificing “feminine” qualities such as her compassion, sensitivity, and empathy. She is able to work alongside men and physically overpower them without compromising this “feminine” side.

Also, the Diana Prince era shows men taking on feminine traits. I-Ching, a male character, embraces Marston’s original ideas on creating an ideal female character through the combination of female and male strengths. He also embraces the idea held by some feminist that men take on feminine traits (Carden 14; Hanisch 77; Klein 14). Diana, of course, still appears “tender, submissive, peaceloving,” but she no longer was Wonder Woman. She lacks “the strength of a Superman,” which is where I-Ching is fundamental. I-Ching is able to reestablish Diana Prince as commanding the strong characteristics of both sexes without having to have super human abilities. She does not have super strength or magical gadgets to help her capture her enemies. She is a mere mortal, but that did not stop her from being an empowered hero.

The text seems to be suggesting that an everyday woman can be equal to a man; equality does not require supernatural abilities. Despite losing her powers, Diana Prince manages to stay as the lead focus of all fight scenes in the text. Throughout the comics, Diana Prince fights mainly men, often while I-Ching and another man watch. Even when she receives help, Diana Prince still takes the lead in the majority of the fighting sequences. Often, she is targeted, loses, retaliates, and wins. She repeatedly is captured and chained, but she still manages to escape. Because Diana Prince is the lead fighter against mostly male opponents and the main villain in the story arc is female, Diana Prince is not insignificant without her powers and is capable of demonstrating physical equality with men, even when a woman challenges her ability to do so.

By making Diana Prince the lead fighter against male opponents, the comic parallels the feminist movement's fight for equality. Moreover, her defeating male opponents represent defeating the male-privilege that dominates politics, economics, and social thought. One example of this is when she goes to Cyber's lair. There, she is faced with poisoned toys, one of which is a large, male version of Frankenstein's monster. In Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Dr. Frankenstein pieces together pieces of dead male bodies in order to bring this corrupted form of a human into existence. The monster grows more manipulative and deadly as the story progress; he kills everyone Frankenstein loves in order to get what he wants. A man created the monster to be something special, but he was corrupted by man's greed for power and inability to show compassion towards something different from himself. By making the first real opponent a monster composed of various male bodies, the comic parallels the physical fight between the monster and Diana Prince with the political fight between the feminist movement and the government for equal rights. Even when she removes the head, the body is still fighting. Like the political movement, it is not enough to change ideas, as symbolized by the head. The whole body must be defeated in order for Diana Prince, and the feminist movement, to succeed. Diana is able to defeat him by kicking the "engine in [his] solar plexus" (O'Neil et al 1:48). Since Diana Prince is capable of defeating Frankenstein's monster, it gives hope to the feminist fight and the ability to lobby for women's equal rights.

*The Fight Against Women: Comparing the Portrayal of Diana Prince and Dr. Cyber to
the Division of Beliefs in the Feminist Movement*

One of the seemingly anti-feminist components of the comic is the fact that Diana Prince's main opponent is a female. By making the main villain a woman, the writers seem to villainize all women and all women's actions, a particularly meaningful idea in the midst of women fighting for equal pay and equal treatment in the work force. Dr. Cyber is introduced in the first issue when I-Ching uses defeating Dr. Cyber as an incentive for Diana Prince to train with him. She reappears throughout the Diana Prince era until one of the last issues, #200.⁴ Dr. Cyber's plan involves the reduction of "men and women...to living automatons—slaves to do his bidding" (O'Neil et al 1:42). In this, I-Ching is originally introducing Dr. Cyber as a "him;" he is a male who wishes to enslave women. So soon after giving up her bracelets that served as reminders to not become a slave to man, Diana is faced with a man who wants to enslave both sexes. However, I-Ching and Diana agree to fight against the enslavement, which aligns with feminist ideology of equality.

At the end of the issue 180, Dr. Cyber's face finally appears in a panel, and it is revealed that Dr. Cyber is actually a woman (1.76). Cyber threatens to destroy the world using "earthquake machines" (Sekowsky, Giordano, Kanigher, & Novick 2:130) unless she is declared the "**Supreme Ruler** of Earth!" The comic presents Cyber to be Diana Prince's arch-nemeses, but she also serves as an opposing view to Diana. Cyber is drawn nearly identical to Diana. The first time Cyber is introduced, the facial similarities are

⁴ This was the second to last issue for which Dennis O'Neil served as the lead writer. O'Neil's first issue was issue 178 that set up Diana Prince as a capable fighter with her powers before stripping the powers in issue 179. When writers leave, the story line often changes and continuity is hard to follow. This is part of the reasons issue 202-204 are discontinuous with the previous stories and character development.

apparent: black hair (although a different cut); dark, arched eyebrows; full, pink lips; small, barely defined nose; blue eyes; long, full lashes (O’Neil et al 1:76). In the first panel she appears in, she is also wearing a long red cape with a high collar. In the next issue, Diana Prince is wearing a similar red cape. In fact, reading the two comics back to back, it is very easy to mistake Diana for Cyber.

By establishing Cyber as a slightly morphed version of Diana Prince, the comics represent multiple approaches to feminism. While both are promoting women, only one will truly win. Violence is not the answer—Cyber shows no compassion when killing others (Sekowsky et al 2:121)—but Diana cries when she accidentally kills Cyber while trying to escape (O’Neil et al 4:53). Cyber represents the radical feminist, the type of feminism men feared: she wants to overpower them, kick them out of positions and power, and replace them with a woman. Surrounded by Diana Prince, an unconscious I-Ching, and his daughter, Cyber kills the male leaders of a Hong Kong gang, the Tong of Tigers. She reasons with Diana, saying “they have done **worse** to others...and even **I** shudder to think what **our** fate would have been had I not struck first” (Sekowsky 2:121). She rationalizes killing men because of their history, killing men in order to protect women. By making her Diana Prince’s enemy, the comic dismisses this type of feminism as destructive and inappropriate for seeking equality. Instead, the comic praises a more compassionate, understanding feminism, which promotes for equality with men through legal and social means.

*Fighting Together: Diana Prince's Appearance in Relation to Other Superhero
Comic Characters*

What makes a superhero a superhero? By stripping Wonder Woman of her powers and making her Diana Prince, did the writers make Diana Prince less of a superhero than Wonder Woman? According to Peter Coogan's definition of a superhero, no, but neither would Batman. According to Coogan, a superhero must have some form of powers, an identity other than their every day one, and a general purpose (Coogan 30-39). By Danny Fingeroth's definition, however, Diana Prince does fit into the superhero mold: she has a strong character, a strong set of values, a willingness to defend those values, and a need to accomplish good deeds (Fingeroth 14). Of course, the comics obviously still view her as some type of hero, since she repeatedly appears along other superheroes throughout the era. Implicitly, she is defending her ability to be considered a superhero like many other superheroes have done in the past and present (Buffy, for example) (O'Reily).

If gaining powers as a superhero can be considered the equivalent of women gaining equal rights⁵, a superhero losing her powers could be considered as encouraging women back into the home. However, if Diana Prince still manages to be a superhero—equal in ability to her superhero friends—then the comics cannot truly be seen as anti-feminist. Instead, the comics can be read as demonstrating female power independent of supernatural realms. Women's worth is not diminished in an everyday setting, without

⁵ The Invisible Woman of the Fantastic Four also underwent changes during this time. However, the Invisible Woman gained more powers and became more significant to the Fantastic Four team: “[Her] value to the Fantastic Four increased dramatically at the same moment that women in America gained more equality in the workplace” (D’Amore).

super powers. By comparing Diana Prince to Superman, Batman, and Lois Lane (Lane is not a superhero, but she has her own comic that features Superman and Diana Prince in this issue), it is evident that she is no less a superhero or a woman.

In *The Brave and the Bold* issue 87, Batman and Diana Prince “co-star” (Sekowsky 2:78) in an issue involving car races. Bruce Wayne, who is secretly the Batman, enters as a racer, but he becomes the target of a fellow racer when he has the best qualifying time. Bruce walks in on the masked men tinkering with his car and is attacked, but Diana Prince and I-Ching are there to intervene, coming to his aid. Diana saves Bruce from the man wielding the knife while I-Ching takes on the other gentlemen. Bruce’s “fighting” is seen when he takes a masked man’s elbow to his face as he thinks, “I can’t let a **woman** and a **blind** man rescue me” (2.85). He mentions his “male ego” (2:86) before he is knocked out. By thinking of Diana and I-Ching as less than himself, Bruce is letting his “male ego” overpower his thinking, and the comic responds by having Bruce be knocked out, as if that type of thinking would not be allowed.

However, Diana’s saving Bruce does not stop there; during the race, Diana Prince races ahead of Batman (Bruce Wayne had decided to race as his superhero self for the official match). She knocks out a man with a gun, who is going to shoot out Batman’s tires (2:92), and the man with the bale of hay to drop in Batman’s way (2:93). Unfortunately, she gets a flat tire, and while she is changing it, a man holds her and I-Ching at gunpoint, forcing them to watch the race. She uses the distraction of Batman’s winning the race to knock the man with the gun off balance and ties his hands. The issue ends with Diana Prince’s being escorted to jail by police officers because she accidentally stole a man’s car when she chased after the men trying to kill Batman (2:99).

While Batman is able to maintain his standing during the race and fight off the other racer, it is Diana Prince who manages to eliminate the deadly obstacles and ultimately save his life. It is also significant that she does not just save Batman; she also saves his persona Bruce Wayne. By being able to maintain her footing in a fight alongside both men, she is eliminating her need for a second persona, since Diana Prince is able to do better in a fight than both men in this issue. She is seen changing a flat tire, a typically “manly” task (2:96). She is also arrested for accidentally stealing the car. Even though she had no real intention of stealing the car, she is still forced to pay for her crimes. She willingly accepts her punishment because that is what is expected. She does not use her “feminine wiles” to her advantage, manipulating the men. Instead, she stands equal to them as they haul her to jail.

Much like Diana Prince saves Bruce Wayne and Batman, she aides Clark Kent and Superman, saving him on occasion. Two important things happen in issue 204 of *World's Finest*: first, Diana Prince fights off three male attackers while Clark Kent stands by and watches; and second, the student riots at a university are occurring for “equal rights,” paralleling the Kent State Riots in 1970 (O’Neil et al 3:141). Clark Kent and Diana Prince get matched for a computer generated blind date. As they are walking down an alley, three men attack them. Clark asks the “gentlemen” not to harm them, calling his portrayal the “coward act” (3:133). He finds his inability to take action against the three men cowardly. However, Diana Prince does not act in the same manner. Instead, she pushes Clark behind her and attacks the three men. Clark leans against the wall and watches, thinking, “Guess I was **wrong** worrying about Diana! The lass doesn’t **need** super-powers! With that mastery of judo...karate...kung-fu...she’s doing

beautifully! In fact, it's a pleasure watching her move! She's a true artist!" (3:133-134). While Diana Prince is displaying that she is perfectly equal to men in her ability to fight and Clark Kent is admiring her abilities, he undermines both characters when he takes joy in "watching her move." He sees her as entertainment as opposed to his equal. Even though he views her as an "artist," acknowledging her expertise in fighting, he still associates her with beauty and pleasure as opposed to force and ability.

While Clark's thought undermines Diana Prince fighting, gender equality is embraced here, as seen in the *Brave and the Bold*. Both Bruce Wayne and Clark Kent have to rely on Diana to save them because they are not in their "superhero" form. However, Diana is able to save them because she has no dual identity. There is only Diana Prince: she owns a boutique, she goes on dates, and she fights the bad guys. By embracing the feminine side of Diana Prince, filled with emotions and real-life problems, Diana Prince frees herself from having to have a dual identity, from having to struggle with which side will be able to accomplish specific tasks. There is only one. She does not have to change who she is. She is able to master the situation, whereas Clark Kent and Bruce Wayne are only qualified when they are Batman and Superman.

Furthermore, this issue of *World's Finest* not only portrays Diana Prince as equal to Clark Kent/Superman, it also gives comic representation to civil rights demonstrations going on during the 1960s and 1970s. The main story line for *World's Finest* is that "the killing of a student in a campus riot in 1971—cause[s] the death of everyone on Earth 200 years later" (3:128). Throughout the issue, the images of the student signs protest for equality: "Left out!" (3:128), "Student power" (3:129), "Equal Rights" (3:141). The protest has the students pitted against "those 'pigs'" (3:148), or cops. The peaceful

protest turns violent when one of the students intends to throw a “cocktail” (O’Neil 1:149) at the police. However, Diana intervenes, and the glass bottle with a flame coming from the top—a Molotov cocktail—hits “a parked automobile” as opposed to any people. The car bursts into flames, and Diana warns, “Down—everyone! When the fire hits the gas tank—.” However, this is all the instigation the police need to open fire into the crowd. Someone calls for a doctor, but it is “too late—he’s gone! Shot in the heart” either from “a stray bullet—or a bit of steel from the explosion” (O’Neil et al 3:150). This scene is reminiscent of other student protests during 1970 and 1971, like the Kent State University riots in which four students were killed on campus by the National Guard. The riots at Kent State University occurred on May 4, 1970. In an article published in the *New York Times* in 1970, “Four students at Kent State University, two of them women, were shot to death this afternoon by a volley of National Guard gunfire. At least 8 other students were wounded” (Kifner). The article goes on to discuss riots occurring during the same time in New York City, led by a chant of “Pigs off campus.” This instance seems to parallel the unrest portrayed a year later in *World’s Finest*. However, this time, the students were not protesting “American involvement in Indo-China (Casale x); in *World’s Finest*, they are protesting for equal rights, but it is unclear for whom.

Diana Prince’s appearance in *Superman’s Girlfriend Lois Lane* serves as an example of how women were being treated in other DC comics during the period. *Superman’s Girlfriend Lois Lane* stars Lois Lane in her daily life. While the only comic being studied is issue 93, the title suggests the comic revolves around Lois Lane’s love affair with Superman. In fact, looking at the cover of the comics published previous to

this issue, Superman appears on every cover, and there are multiple instances in which Lois appears in a wedding dress, showing her concern to marry Superman, or anyone. In this issue, Lois is obsessed with her worry over Superman and Diana Prince's relationship. She dreams of their getting married (O'Neil et al 2:56), and she is so worried about their time spent together doing interviews and pretending to be a couple that she begins training to fight Diana Prince (2:60). She challenges her to fight for Superman's heart, and Diana easily wins, flying off with Superman (2:62-63). However, it is revealed that someone is posing as Diana Prince, and the real Diana is jailed. Lois ends up next to her in the cell, and it is up to Superman to save them both.

First, it is important to note that the men who write and draw for the comic are not the same men who draw the *Diana Prince Wonder Woman* comics. As noted earlier, Robert Kanigher, the lead writer for *Superman's Girlfriend Lois Lane*, wrote for *Wonder Woman* from 1947-1968; this is the period that drew Wonder Woman further and further into the home and made her a symbol of beauty over a symbol of power. This theme is seen in *Superman's Girlfriend Lois Lane*. Lois's only concern is getting Superman to marry her over Diana Prince/Wonder Woman. It consumes her thoughts and inspires her actions. She does not learn to fight in order to defend herself; she learns to fight so she can win over Superman. Even though Diana Prince is portrayed equally poorly—she is consumed with Superman, she willingly fights for Superman's love, she comes off as power hungry and egotistical, she is caged, she has to be saved by Superman—she still manages to hold some semblance of independence because of the fact that the majority of her actions in the comic are not actually her, but someone posing as her. Needless to say,

the portrayal of Diana Prince in *Superman's Girlfriend Lois Lane* does not stay true to the character's portrayal throughout the rest of the comics at this time.

Despite the blip in her portrayal with Lois Lane, Diana Prince manages to maintain some form of credibility with her superhero counterparts despite no longer having powers. She is able to save Bruce Wayne, Batman, and Clark Kent even though she possesses no superpowers. However, she is still a superhero. Because she can still be classified as one, and the fact that she is usually able to hold equal footing with her male counterparts, Diana Prince is not portrayed as a weaker, lesser woman than Wonder Woman. Instead, she is represented as embracing gender equality through her own humanity, without the need of superpowers to aid her.

The Emotional Superhero: Diana Prince's Expression of Emotion as Empowering

The Diana Prince era gives the first real “feminine” version of the superhero; instead of a woman embracing her emotions, Wonder Woman, before she loses her powers, is a stoic female who rarely cries. Masculinity, as performed to the classic American standards, allows for little emotional display. Too much emotional expression leaves room for vulnerability, a trait often associated with weakness. By making Wonder Woman stoic, writers depict her as portraying masculine ideals. Diana Prince, in contrast, is seen crying numerous times, unafraid of emotional expression.

Unfortunately, *The New Wonder Woman* does little to break the stoic stereotype for men, since only women are seen crying. Does the comic’s portrayal of women as the only ones who cry reaffirm women as the “weaker” sex? I argue that it does not. In fact, comics empower women through their teams because it embraces strong female characters who do not dismiss their femininity. The comics embrace gynocentric ideology and agree with many feminists from the period. Gynocentric critics see the differences between men and women as inherent and fundamental. Women have the ability to empathize, to care. Carol Hanisch, an active feminist in the 1960s and 1970s, says the ability to possess and express emotion is a trait that “[feminists] want to carry into the new society and want men to share too” (Hanisch 77). Ideally, as feminism moves forward, men and women will take the best traits that divide the genders and embrace them all, like men having the freedom to openly express emotions.

The majority of instances in which Diana Prince cries involve loss—the loss of the Amazons, the loss of Steve Trevor, and the loss of I-Ching. Diana Prince’s tears never hinder her ability to return to the important task at hand, which is often fighting. Thus,

Diana Prince uses tears to express her emotion, a characteristically feminine trait, but she never lets it “weaken” her to the point that she is incapable of providing protection to those around her.

The first main cause of Diana Prince’s tears involves the loss of the Amazons, her family. As Diana lays down her Wonder Woman persona and says goodbye to her Amazon ties, she is seen crying in two panels: the first, as she embraces her mother—who is also crying—and says goodbye to her. In the second, she cries as she flies away, looking back on Paradise Island. She says, “Gone...Everything that sustained me...my childhood...my family...all gone!” (O’Neil et al 1:38). In this instance, Diana Prince is crying over the loss of relationship ties. She is mourning the loss of her past, of the family and life she has always known in order to go out and face a new life without that shield. In a way, this is how women stepped out of the protection of their homes to fight for equality in work and pay. They were faced with hardships and hatred, not with the warm comfort of home. However, Diana’s tears dry quickly and she is seen on the next page shopping for her own business. She goes from attachment to home to a position in the workplace, establishing herself as a sole business owner.

Diana spends most of the comics on her own, until her mother, and the Amazons, are threatened, and she must go back to Paradise Island to help save them. When she arrives, her mother is laid on a bed of flowers, unresponsive. Diana’s first assumption is that she is dead, so she collapses next to her, holding her in her arms. When the panel shows her face, there are tears streaming down her cheeks as she asks, “Why—Who did this to her?” (1:131). Her mother has been put in “an enchanted sleep” because “her father, Ares, God of War...wants from [her] the secret of dimensional travel. He, with

his equally bloodthirsty sister Eris, and his loathsome sons Deimos and Phobos have gathered together a mighty army and they wish to bring war to earth,” but Hippolyta, Diana’s mother, refused to tell them the secret. Then, the curse begins, and Hippolyta begins writhing in pain as Diana lies over her, crying for Hippolyta to tell her what to do. This goes on for multiple panels until she hears her mother’s answer: “No” (1:137). With a new purpose, a dry-faced Diana stands between Ares and her mother, refusing to allow Ares to take Hippolyta’s body. Her feet are splayed apart, her arms down, but away from her body, her hands in fists. Her body is postured for a fight, mimicking the male warriors that stand before her. Even though she was recently (only a few panels back) crying over her mother’s condition, she has put that behind her in order to fight for her mother to stay with the Amazons. Even though she is facing off against Ares, God of War, she still stands tall, ready to fight him without powers, sword, or shield (all of which he possesses). Even though she is physically smaller and lacks the advantages that Ares has, she is willing to fight. This image depicts a woman who is willing to confront and fight a privileged male god, just as women were standing, ready to fight for equal rights.

Other than the Amazons, the most instances of crying panels are associated with Diana Prince’s dealing with her feelings over Steve Trevor. The first comic, 178, grouped into volumes from this era has Wonder Woman still with her powers. It is not until the second comic, 179, that she sheds her dual identity. Still, 178 is significant for Diana Prince because she sheds her Wonder Woman identity to try to help Steve as Diana Prince after Steve is found guilty for murder because of what Wonder Woman said on the witness stand (1:11). Alone and distraught, Diana Prince is troubled over her dual identity and what it has cost the man she loves. She throws away the army uniform she

wears as Diana Prince, calling that version of herself a “nobody” (1:12). Crying, she declares “But you think I’ve failed you as **Wonder Woman!** So—so it’s as Diana Prince that I must try and save you! I pray to Venus for guidance—I swear, oh Goddess, I will make any sacrifice to save my love!” (1:13). These two panels foreshadow Diana’s giving up her powers in issue 179. She is upset over her loss of Steve, upset at having to lead two lives, so she tries to only live one, willing to give up anything—which will eventually be her identity as Wonder Woman—to save Steve. Again, these panels are symbolic for the beginning of the second wave of feminism in which women are having to live multiple lives—the homemaker, the mother, the wife, and, if they have their way, the worker.

After Diana gives up her Wonder Woman persona, the only times she cries over Steve is when he gets shot and when he dies. When he is shot, he requests that Wonder Woman save them from Cyber even though Diana is in the process of learning karate to fight (mainly men, as seen in the previous page of panels). Also, Diana is afraid of losing Steve because he is the last thing she has that ties her to her previous life. She says, “Am I to lose everyone--? Everyone who means...love...to me?” (1:45). In order to survive as an independent woman, she wonders whether she must sacrifice everyone and everything she loves to do so. She cannot find balance as an independent figure not associated with marriage and home without losing the ones she loves in the process. Steve dies because he becomes a pawn in a trap to capture Diana and I-Ching. She declares, “without family...without Steve...my life is worthless” (1:73). However, I-Ching tells her that she is talking “foolishness.” The idea that a woman’s life cannot have meaning without a family and a male companion is pure “foolishness,” and Diana

realizes this because she throws herself into fighting Cyber and rescuing her friend, Tim. She never cries over the loss of Steve, or her family, again.

The last time the comic shows Diana Prince crying is in issue 204, the same issue in which her powers are restored. A sniper shoots I-Ching while he and Diana are at a restaurant. Dying in her lap, he calls her the “**daughter I never had**” (4:156); Diana repeats the sentiment by clutching him to her chest, tears streaming down her face, and says, “Farewell...father...I never had...” Even though she cannot be seen crying in the panel when I-Ching says farewell, it is implied because he tells her to “weep no [more].” In the two panels, she is crying over the dying body of the man who trained her as a fighter. He gave her the strength and courage to continue saving lives through her karate training, and he also served as a helpful reminder that her life does not have to exist solely for her family and a man. He was one of the few male characters who did not turn to violence easily; instead, he usually turned to love. He served as an equalizer of gender roles and a reminder for Diana that she did not always have to incorporate only one sole stereotype. He also offers hope for feminist future in which the fight for feminism was not just by women. In feminist writings, there is hope that men and women will one-day work together to achieve equality. For example, in “The Personal is Political,” Carol Hanisch, mentions how she hopes that men will embrace emotions as the feminist movement moves forward (Hanisch 77). In the feminist future she describes, men are alongside women, equal. I-Ching stood as an example of a man fighting beside an empowered female without having the need to overpower her. Not once is he depicted as fighting Diana. Even when they are training, she always fights other men, never I-Ching. She was allowed to embrace both masculine and feminine traits. However, his death was

not an end to Diana's ability to embrace both roles; instead, she continues to fight, show incredible strength, and shed no more tears.

Conclusion: Who Needs Superpowers?

When Dennis O'Neil and Mike Sekowsky decided to strip Wonder Woman of her powers, they never expected to receive such feminist backlash. They believed they were creating a more "independent" woman to whom the comic readers could easily "relate" to (Daniels 125). However, feminists and scholars rarely believe this period aligns with Wonder Woman's feminist identity, mainly because Wonder Woman disappears. By becoming human, Diana Prince has to form her own feminist identity, outside of Wonder Woman.

Wonder Woman relied on her Amazon powers and tools to fight; Diana has to learn to use her own, human, body and mind to defeat her opponents and protect people. She serves as an example for everyday women who do not possess superpowers, showing that equality with men can be established without having Amazon powers. She manages to balance femininity and masculinity. She cries, but she often is seen fighting in the next instance. She lacks superpowers, but she is seen saving other, male superheroes. She is not seen confined to the home; in fact, she owns her own business. The depiction of Diana Prince during this period embraces women leaving the home and gaining social and political equality.

However, there is a reason why multiple scholars have acknowledged this period as Wonder Woman's feminist low-point: there are anti-feminist qualities in the text. Not only are there anti-feminist moments within the plot, text, and artwork, the depiction of Diana Prince on the cover frequently undermines her status as a feminist icon. As Kelli Stanley notes, "cover after cover reinforced not only her dramatically decreased physical strength and sense of helplessness, but even a 1950s' style concentration on romantic plot

entanglements” (Stanley 154). Just glancing at the comic, there are multiple instances in which her feminist potential is overshadowed by blatant anti-feminist sentiment.

First, the main villain is a woman. She wants to conquer all of the men in the world, and enslave both men and women. By making the villain a woman, the comic seems to dismiss all women as evil. However, the fact that Cyber, the stereotype of feminism that men fear, is defeated, the comic shows the feminism that women were actually practicing can overcome the criticism and unjust portrayals through persistence. Before Wonder Woman loses her powers, she receives a makeover. Even though the purpose of the makeover is to go undercover to help Steve Trevor, the emphasis on her clothing and appearance make her seem shallow. She says “**Wow!** I-I’m gorgeous! I should have done this ages ago” (O’Neil et al 1:15) as she drives off in a brand new car. Even though she fights crime and helps save lives as Wonder Woman, she receives extreme gratification from her appearance. This would have more significance if it had come after her loss of powers. Perhaps this would have made her seem confident in herself as a regular woman, rather than the shallowness that is actually conveyed. However, the makeover comes the issue before she hands over the Wonder Woman persona, resulting in a makeover that focuses on her appearance and beauty over her abilities. Some feminists, like Maren Carden, argued against makeup and tight clothes, finding them to come “at the cost of personal comfort and time” (Carden 54). However, Ellen Willis in “Consumerism and Women” argues that shopping is fun, and it is not women who should be blamed for consumer culture, but the consumerist industry (Willis 72). She goes on to say that one lifestyle choice, like the rejection of consumerism, is not

better than any other choice; and if the movement is to ever progress, feminists cannot be hung up on judging others for their personal choices.

Although every analysis leaves room for opposing arguments, I believe that by reading *The New Wonder Woman* closely, we can note the feminist possibilities throughout the graphics and text. Of course, there are numerous examples for anti-feminism in the text, from the over-sexualized covers to Diana frequently wishing that she were not just a regular, powerless woman. However, by having a dialogue between both versions, the comic acknowledges the setbacks political movements face.

While no comic or text is ever fully feminist or not (even in today's market), there is feminist potential in *The New Wonder Woman*. In fact, I believe that this version of the comic creates a unique version of the female superhero not often seen. She manages to have emotions other than anger, and she expresses them frequently, sometimes in the form of tears. Diana Prince embodies a feminine superhero who does not embrace or rely on masculine traits at the expense of her femininity.

Currently, *Wonder Woman* portrays Wonder Woman/Diana Prince embracing more masculine attributes and disregarding the classically feminine ones, like extreme emotions. In *Wonder Woman* #36 from January 2015, Queen Hippolyta, Wonder Woman's mother, is reduced to a dead pile of clay. However, Wonder Woman does not even cry. When Diana Prince finds Queen Hippolyta prostrated across a bed of flowers during the Diana Prince era, Diana has tears streaming down her face as she asks "Why?" (O'Neil 1:131). The new version does not cry, she does not question it. She simply says, "Mother..." before the comic ends. In the next issue, #37, Wonder Woman begins the comic in battle. A few pages in, she is training with Clark Kent/Superman when he tells

her that he thinks they need to talk about her feelings regarding her mother's death. However, she avoids the subject, unwilling to acknowledge her own pain. Instead of focusing on her emotions, she only wants to focus on continuing fighting. Further, the character seems to be heading towards a path of intense violence. Recently, Wonder Woman has been named the God of War, taking over Ares' former position. Diana sits at a diner with her friend, as the friend expresses her concern: "You've become the physical personification of violence, bloodshed, and death. You are war now" (M. Finch, D. Finch, Banning, & Oback). In this new role, there is little room for Diana Prince's femininity.

While making Wonder Woman become the God of War might make for a more entertaining and bloody story line, *Wonder Woman's* writers neglect their obligation to one of the original female superheroes. Instead of creating a genuinely feminine superhero that is separated from the men, the writers have created a female superhero that is no different than her male counterparts, except her overtly sexualized, female body. As previously noted, feminists from the 1960s and 1970s desired a society in which men and women embrace the best traits that divide the genders (Hanisch 77). However, this Wonder Woman neglects the strength that can be found in a woman's ability to express emotion. Instead, Wonder Woman seems to only take on the strength and stoicism that is attributed to masculinity, leaving femininity behind. This might be congruent with modern trends in feminism, but the 1970s feminists never wanted women to reject their emotions. Diana Prince was a truly feminine superhero that managed to be empowered in every action, whether it be defeating multiple men in a fistfight or crying over her mother's unconscious body. Instead of being considered Wonder Woman's "nadir"

(Robinson 82), maybe the Diana Prince era should be considered an example for how female superheroes can be portrayed in future comics: the compassion, sensitivity, and empathy of “a feminine character with all the strength of Superman plus all the allure of a good and beautiful woman” (Marston 42-42). Instead of the anti-feminist version of Wonder Woman, Diana Prince establishes her feminism as a woman who finds strength in her mortal body and her femininity.

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