THE MODELS OF EMPOWERED FEMININITY WE OFFER YOUNG BOYS:
AMERICAN ANIMATED ACTION TEAMS AND THE TOKEN FEMALE

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A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate College of Bowling Green
State University in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

MASTERS OF ARTS

May 2007

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ABSTRACT

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The very nature of a hero is to stand as a cultural ideal. The heroes we produce for our children are meant to function as their idealized cultural models, teaching them the positive value of specific embodied traits. This extends to gender: the gendered ideological statements made by these heroic characters promote a gendered cultural ideal.

Traditionally, academics interested in female gender representation and children's television have focused on shows targeting young girls. However, it is just as important to examine the representation of the heroic women in television shows aimed at young boys. Young boys grow into adult men and, in our patriarchal society, male expectations of women play largely into their expectations of themselves. Therefore, the heroines of series marketed at young boys represent the ideal cultural models of empowered femininity, influencing the expectations and criteria these boys will have for "strong" women as they grow into politically powerful men.

With all this in mind, it then becomes important to examine these models of ideal empowered femininity. By examining the token females in American animated action/adventure team-based television series marketed toward young boys over the past 30 years (starting with *Super Friends* in the late 70s, *He-Man and the Masters of the Universe, ThunderCats,* and *G.I. Joe* in the 80s, *Where on Earth Is Carmen Sandiego?, Gargoyles,* and *X-Men* in the 90s, and *Justice League* and *Teen Titans* in the 00s), this study examines a string of token females, teasing out the ideologies of ideal empowered

femininity each promotes and discussing it within the cultural context of the time period in which it was produced. By utilizing textual analysis, gender studies, and psychoanalysis, this study shows a movement from flat, two-dimensional characters restricted to traditionally feminine encoded powers and overshadowed by hypermasculine heroic leaders to complex, powerful, highly masculinized women often reigned in by a reinforcement of female bodily signifier, finally ending with a nod toward the rising cultural neo-conservatism, reflected by a return toward heroines that enact more traditional gender expectations.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

Women's studies scholars often examine children's shows targeting young girls, shows like *Totally Spies* or *The PowerPuff Girls*. While I recognize the value in this approach, I find it is a grave oversight to ignore shows that target young boys. The models of femininity we offer our girls can and do shape their development, but the models of femininity we offer our boys help to mold their expectations, and in a world where patriarchal domination is a commonly accepted understanding of our gendered power structure, the expectations men have for women are largely influential in what developing women strive to become. Thus, when women's studies scholars overlook the models of femininity America sells to its young males, they ignore a key influencing factor in the development of young women. Having grown up in a time when token diversity (particularly in children's television) was all the rage, I've been exposed to these models of femininity my entire life. And now, having been trained in the academic arts of popular culture theory and women's studies, I am equipped to address my concern for this blindspot in the women's studies approach to children's television.

Of course all of this academic posturing is an excuse. When I was a young boy growing up in the early 80s, I absolutely loved *Thundercats*. Cheetara was my favorite. She had super-speed, agility, and a bowstaff; I always wanted a bowstaff. In the 90s, when I was a wee young man of 10 or so, I was absolutely obsessed with Fox Kids' animated show based on the comic *X-Men*. Jean Grey was my favorite; she could use her telekinetic powers to float herself and objects, she could contact people telepathically, and she could channel the unstoppable (and corrupting) Phoenix force when danger got too troublesome; I always wanted a Phoenix force. And up until this year (when the

powers-that-be at Cartoon Network cancelled it), I religiously watched *Justice League Unlimited*, forgoing such traditional favorite heroes as Batman and Superman for the less well known but far more awesome Hawkgirl, with her wings, her surly attitude, and her electrified mace (the spikey-ball kind, not the less empowering pepper-spray kind). I love animated action teams and tend to pick the strong females as my favorite characters. While I'm sure there's some Freudian explanation for my psychological impetus to look up to these women, I can't deny that I'm drawn to them. And the recent trend toward "TV to DVD" releases of old series in box sets, I had to drum up a good reason to spend my time and money collecting and watching all of these old shows. An academic interest in the token models of femininity we offer to young boys sounds a lot more convincing to my bank account than "because I want it."

But again, it's not all as selfish as it sounds. I have a seven year old nephew. He, much like I was at his age, is very interested in this style of animated action. As I watch him grow and formulate his opinions about life, liberty, and ideal femininity, I find myself wondering what kind of influences he's being exposed to. Have the advances in the feminist movement over the past 30 years altered the way in which female action heroes are being portrayed? Are we selling more empowered female models to our young male children then we did in my youth? And, for that matter, how empowered *were* Cheetara and Jean Grey; were they really the paragons of female empowerment I remember them being, or was Wonder Woman stuck answering the bat-phone while all the men went out and busted some criminal lips? These are the questions I tackle in this study: what models of femininity do we market to our young males as female ideals (assuming that heroes are meant to constitute cultural ideals), how

empowered/disempowered are they when held in comparison to their male counterparts, and how have these models changed over the past 30 years? By tracking the evolution from the blank and unempowered Wonder Woman of the 70s *Super Friends* to the character-driven and highly masculinized Wonder Woman of the 00s *Justice League*, in the upcoming chapters I will follow the progression of the token female characters and thus the models of ideal femininity marketed at young boys (and the girls that are exposed to this boy oriented television) as it passes through the decades, examining models that function as both descriptive of the attitudes toward women during the time in which they were aired as well as proscriptive of the attitudes of the rising generation watching and being influenced by these cultural ideals.

THE SOURCE MATERIAL

For this examination, I have been very specific in terms of the subgenre of shows I wish to compare; I'm utilizing American animated team-based action/adventure shows for children. Before delving into theory, I want to first establish my reasoning for the parameters behind this body acting as my source material.

First, I have chosen to study only American-produced television. While the Japanese produce large quantities of quality animated television for both adults and children, I wish to focus specifically on American ideological constructions; inclusion of shows produced originally for Japanese audiences by Japanese companies would give insight into the Japanese ideological feminine models, but would not prove specifically helpful in understanding American conceptions and trends.

Secondly, I have chosen specifically to use only animated shows. Although there were live-action action/adventure shows for children (specifically in the 70s), I feel that,

in an attempt to limit the scope of my study, they could easily be lumped into a separate category (plus, few of them functioned with the "team" dynamic key to my criteria). I have also stuck solely with animated television because the freedom of animated creations allows for more freedom in ideological constructions; the producers are not limited by reality when creating female models. With the creative freedom of an animated medium, producers can create gravity-defying 44 double Fs and stuff them into nothing more than a pair of suspenders (which happens, but more so in the Japanese market). This freedom allows for full-on ideological fantasy play; uninhibited by reality, the models of femininity produced in animated television allow insight into true conceptions of what a woman "should be" without being mucked up by what a woman "is."

Thirdly, I have chosen to use action/adventure animated dramas as opposed to animated comedies; the shows I'm examining may at times go for a laugh but are more heavily influenced by dramatic themes than by comedy. Because of this, I have excluded the Disney "action" programs such as *Aladdin* and *Chip and Dale's Rescue Rangers*; although these shows contained elements of drama, they were often light-hearted and played for laughs. I wish to stick particularly to dramatic animated programs in part as a way to narrow the possibilities on the number of shows I will be studying, but also because the comedic dynamic complicates the already complex interplay of gender and power. In an attempt to contain as many variables as possible, I am sticking to drama-oriented texts.

I have chosen to use "team" shows specifically because it is within this team dynamic that the true ideological constructions of the female characters really play out.

The most fruitful place for discussion of gender dynamics in these shows is within the interplay between the male and female team members: who gets to lead missions, who saves who, who gets to do a lot of speaking, who gets relegated to the background, etc. Because of the importance of this criterion, in choosing the shows for my source material I have developed a very strict definition of what constitutes a "team:" I am looking for a group of heroes that function as a unit. There may be a leader, but the team as a whole must represent the battling squad. I'm holding this in opposition to a single hero functioning on his or her own and also to a single hero backed by sidekicks. The single hero obviously doesn't work within the realm of group dynamics and thus his or her treatment of gender could prove useful, but in a different way, and should perhaps be the topic of another paper. And the hero with sidekicks has a built-in power differential that will skew concepts of power and gender. Thus, I'm working only with action/adventure "teams." (Often, there is a blurry line between what constitutes a "team" and a "hero/sidekicks" relationship. In most cases, I have chosen to exclude shows named after one specific hero, even if that hero has helpers. This, to me, is indication that the show is not about a team but about a single hero. I have made an exception, however, for *He-Man* because he does work with his friends on a more egalitarian, team based level.)

Finally, for my last criterion, I am avoiding shows that specifically market themselves toward young girls. Shows like *Totally Spies*, while fulfilling the other criteria, are marketed toward and consumed by a heavily female audience. Because of this, these shows pay particular attention to how they present their female characters and are aware of possible critiques that could arise from their representations. Because the female representations are so deliberate, these shows will skew my data. Thus I focus on

action teams *not* specifically marketed toward girls, instead using shows marketed toward an ungendered or male audience (in a genre as heavy with masculine cultural connotations as action/adventure, even the "ungendered" shows have an audience presumed by the marketing departments to be male).

Working within these parameters, I've found four main waves of popularity for this action/adventure team in American animated television. The first wave comes in the form of *Superfriends*, a show featuring both flagship and unknown DC Comics' superheroes working together as a team. This show, which took numerous incarnations and went through various name changes during its 13 year run from 1973 to 1986, stands as the first popular use of a gender-inclusive crime fighting team. The second wave comes in the early 80s, spurred by the relaxing of FCC regulations inhibiting the creation of animated series based on toy lines (Erickson, 404). The success of the cartoon series/toy tie in of *He-Man,* "the first animated series to benefit directly from the relaxing of FCC rules" (Erickson, 404), created an explosion in the team-based action show market, producing a number of popular series such as *Thundercats* and *G.I. Joe*. This wave, however, petered out with the influx of the Disney style comedy show in the late 80s (*Ducktales, Chip and Dale's Rescue Rangers,* etc). The third wave came in the early 90s. Ted Turner's attempt to hop on the politically correct eco-friendly bandwagon gave us the 1990 *Captain Planet and the Planeteers,* and Fox's attempt to placate the FCC by including educational television gave us the 1994 *Where on Earth is Carmen Sandiego?* Fox also went a darker direction, releasing the very successful 1992 *X-Men*. The success of this darker more character-driven style led to Disney's attempt at mimicry: its 1994 hit series *Gargoyles.* In the late 90s, however, there was a thrust toward imported Japanese

television. *Pokemon* and its legion of copycats quickly permeated the airwaves creating a lull in the American action-team market. Finally, however, there was a mini-resurgence in 2002 with Cartoon Network's popular *Justice League* series, reviving much of the original *Superfriends* team to again fight animated injustice. Also in this wave is Cartoon Network's similar *Teen Titans* (begun in 2003) which also utilizes an established DC Comics' team. (While a few other shows did exist using this multi-gendered team format, I have tried to choose the most popular and representative from each time-frame, attempting to limit my study to a manageable level.)

These four waves represent my four chapters. For each wave, I will discuss trends in models of token femininity, stressing in particular six main categories: powers/skills, team dynamics, physical presentation, and backstory, personality, and overall heroic effectiveness. By examining these particular points of interest in regard to gender relations and power, we can see how the ideologies fluctuate over time but remain fairly consistent within each wave. Finally, I link each of these waves to the general political climate of the time, examining possible factors that influence the development of each particular ideological construction.

<p style="text-align:center">THE THEORIES</p>

While most of my work in the upcoming chapters will be strict gender-oriented textual analysis, there are a few basic theories and theorists that will become a recurring motif throughout this examination, theorists on whom most of the scholars working in realm of female media representation (particularly in action oriented genres) base much of their material. Thus, in an attempt to make sure all my readers are on the same page, I

wish to give a basic rundown of these theorists and their work (or at least the pieces of their work that will be popping up in my discussion).

First and foremost, we must take a look at Laura Mulvey's pivotal article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." Originally published in *Screen* in the autumn of 1975, Mulvey's article focuses is on the "structures of looking in the conventional cinematic situation" (26). According to Muvley's analysis, there are two possible structures of looking when watching a film: scopophilia and narcissistic identification. For Mulvey, scopophilia involves "circumstances in which looking itself is the source of pleasure" (24). The act of enjoying something for its visual aesthetic alone objectifies the entity been watched. This objectification, which Mulvey asserts is active, exerts power over the object, "subjecting [it] to a controlling and curious gaze" (24). According to Mulvey's model, this scopophilic pleasure involves the looker (or voyeur) exerting control over the object through erotic fixation on the visual. The power, here, lies in the eye of the beholder.

Mulvey's second structure of looking, narcissistic identification, involves the identification of the looker with the image on the screen. Utilizing Jacques Lacan's theory of the mirror phase, Mulvey argues that the ego of the looker attempts to see its own reflection in the image being viewed, thus creating an ego-identification with the image (or character) on screen. Unlike the active scopophilia, which is a "function of the sexual instincts" (26) to objectify, eroticize, and control, narcissistic identification is a function of the "ego libido" (26).

Mulvey's use of the structures of looking proves most useful when she places it in the context of patriarchal domination. Mulvey argues that because the world is

unbalanced in terms of gender-power relations, those power relations play out in film through these structures of looking. She refers to the filmic gaze as "the determining male gaze" (27), indicating that in a world of male power domination, the gaze is assumed to be active and male while the recipient of the gaze, the disempowered fetishized object, is female. This cultural assumption that the female object is the eroticized focus of the male's controlling gaze is referred to by Mulvey as her "to-be-looked-at-ness" (27), a term she coins in this article. The woman's too-be-looked-at-ness, to Mulvey, functions both within the narrative (she is the object of the gaze of the men within the film) and outside the narrative (she is the object of the gaze of the camera and thus of the audience).

In terms of narcissistic identification, the presumably male audience has, in theory, two options of characters to identify with: the looking male or the objectified female. The male character, being a subject rather than an object, is not relegated to the two-dimensional status of the female object and is fully three-dimensional, providing a proper locus for narcissistic identification (28) which allows for easy male identification with an objectifying male gaze, reinforcing the status quo of male power and female objectification. The female character, according to Mulvey's article, poses too much of a threat (with her representation of sexual lack) for proper identification, thus the presumably male audience chooses to not identify with her, instead viewing her as an erotic object valuable only for her visual appeal, a process Mulvey calls fetishistic scopophilia. The female object represents a purely visual spectacle, existing for the scopophilic pleasure of the male both as observing audience member and vicariously through the male protagonist.

The importance of this theory lies in the discussion of the power dynamic involved in the control of the gaze. Mulvey's key contribution to the study of gender and film lies in the discussion of the way in which by controlling the gaze, the presumably male spectator controls the female by objectifying her and making her a fetishized and eroticized passive spectacle, emphasizing her "to-be-looked-at-ness" rather than her power.

The second theorist I wish to address here is Marc O'Day. O'Day's article "Beauty in Motion: Gender, Spectacle, and Action Babe Cinema" was written in 2004, 30 years after Mulvey's article was first published. O'Day continued the tradition Mulvey began by discussing the use of gender, fetishized spectacle, and power. O'Day proves useful to me because he utilizes Mulvey's concepts specifically for the study of the action/adventure filmic genre. He argues that women in this action role transgress gendered binary oppositions "which structure common-sense understanding of gender in patriarchal consumer culture" (202). He goes on to establish that action heroes and heroines alike transgress these binaries, the male heroes being fetishized for their on-display masculine physique much like the fetishized female physique discussed by Mulvey.

While O'Day's discussions of transgression prove insightful, the most crucial part of his work for my analysis is the set of gendered binary oppositions he uses as the basis for his argument:

> a more or less overt set of patriarchally defined traits and qualities equating men and masculinity with hardness, strength, muscles, activity, rationality, decisiveness and power, and women and femininity, in opposition, with softness, weakness, curves, passivity, intuition, indecisiveness and powerlessness (203).

O'Day, in this quote, summarizes a number of the accepted binary oppositions our patriarchal culture attributes to the gender-divide, creating a nice, succinct set of stereotypes that have been built into gender representations over the course of our culture's development. By using these specific accepted gendered attributes in reference to the women I will be examining, I can directly address moments when these token females are able to transgress cultural expectations for their roles, expressing or incorporating masculine power and thus becoming the gender transgressors that O'Day discusses in live-action adult oriented action cinema.

CHAPTER I

SUPERFRIENDS AND THE 70S:

"THE MOST BEAUTIFUL AMAZON ON PARADISE ISLAND"

Over thirty years ago, *Super Friends* hit the animated Saturday morning scene with heat vision, supersonic batarangs, and golden lassos of truth. As the show progressed through a number of incarnations (*Super Friends, All-New Super Friends Hour, Challenge of the Super Friends, The World's Greatest Super Friends, Super Friends Hour, Super Friends: The Legendary Super Powers Show,* and *Super Powers Team: Galactic Guardians*), it marked a shift in the conceptualization of animated action television[1]. No longer were the heroes of Saturday morning solely white, American, and male. The social changes of the 60s and 70s created an atmosphere demanding social diversity. Thus, the birth of *Super Friends* ushered in the era of the diverse animated super-team. Along with a number of token racial minorities, *Super Friends* was among the first animated action teams to include a token female hero: Wonder Woman. This animated incarnation of Wonder Woman provides the young *Super Friends* audience with a stepping-off point for the inclusion of positive female role models in animated action teams marketed at boys (with her ability to defeat a number of difficult monsters) but at the same time has a number of signifiers and limits that restrict her power, reinscribe her as female, and subjugate her to her more idealized masculine counterparts.

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[1] Despite the constant name changes of the series, I will refer to the series as a whole as *Super Friends* in order to minimize confusion. Also, the renaming of the series, the shifting of the episodes, the deeming of certain episodes as "lost" episodes, and the general disagreements as to the order of the episodes makes labeling episode numbers in citations difficult. Therefore, in the episode citations for this chapter, I shall only refer to the title of the episodes where in later chapters with more linear show production, I shall refer to title and episode number both.

Unlike the following chapters in which I will be dealing with a number of different shows and characters, I will only be dealing with one series here (and for the most part, one character). This is because, unlike the future eras I will be covering, *Super Friends* was the only major show in its era (the 1970s) to contain all the elements I have described as being necessary for an American animated action-adventure team series that contains at least one prominent female member. Thus where I will be comparing a number of examples from a hand selected set of representative shows in my future chapters, here in the era of the 70s, *Super Friends* stands alone.

<p style="text-align:center">CONTEXT</p>

In order to discuss the ideological implications of a character like Wonder Woman in the *Super Friends* era, it's important to first mention the peripheral influences on the creation of her animated character. According to Heather Hendershot, author of *Saturday Morning Censors*, increased television news coverage of violence in the years leading up to 1968 created a social and moral anxiety in the minds of the American public (31). This, coupled with President Johnson's claim that television violence played an influencing factor in the assassination of Robert F. Kennedy in 1968 (27), inspired a public outcry against televised violence and for some form of censorship, an outcry which led to the 1969 Senate Subcommittee on Communications' study of televised violence led by John Pastore. The hope was that if censors removed violent images from television, then the violence in the real world would lessen. As a result of this pressure (and fear of impending governmental censorship), television producers began imposing self-regulatory policies on television in general, but most specifically on children's television "in the name of a greater good: the safety of children" (Hendershot, 22). The

self-regulation against violence on children's television was so heavily imposed on shows

like *Super Friends* that "animators were…advised that they couldn't show anyone

shaking a fist at anyone else on *Super Friends*—and if a fly was swatted, it couldn't be

killed!" (Erikson, 804).

The self-regulatory agencies (the standards and practices departments of the

individual production companies) not only policed violence, but also issues of

representation. Coming on the heels of the civil rights movement of the late 60s and in

the midst of the 70s women's movement, positive racial and gender representation

became a key aspect of the censors' jobs. This proved to be a daunting task since,

according to Hendershot, American animation had a notoriously sexist history (37).

Interestingly, after the surge of self-regulation, most of the employees of the standards

and practices departments of children's television production were (and continue to be)

female (while the majority of the creative staff was male) (Hendershot, 42). But despite

the industry's history, there was an outcry for strong female characters: "[Wonder

Woman's] inclusion on the cartoon series' lineup was as a balm to critics who'd

complained about the paucity of self-reliant female characters on Saturday morning TV"

(Erikson, 803).

Although my analysis of the female models on television is based on the textual

factors rather than the extra-textual influences contributing to their creation, it's

important to keep the contextual "whys" in mind while examining the actual models

existent in the text. The gender of the censor staff, the notorious sexism of the male

creators, the zeal of the initial self-regulation process, the push of the feminist movement,

and the public outcry against violent television creates a context in which to view the

adventures of the *Super Friends*. I establish this contextual basis for three reasons: firstly to give an explanation for the lack of physical violence in the show as a whole, secondly to give a context for the tokenism of the 1978 season, and thirdly to make it known that there were women involved in the ideological construction process of the *Super Friends*' gender representation.

<p style="text-align:center">THE SHOW</p>

Super Friends, for those not familiar with the show, is an offshoot of DC Comics' *Justice League of America* comic book title. The comic (and thus the show) took a number of DC's most recognizable characters and put them into a team setting, having Batman, Superman, and Wonder Woman (as well as others) working together as a team. The show changed drastically between seasons, originally aligning the Super Friends with a set of *Scooby-Doo*-esque non-powered teens (complete with a talking dog) that followed the team around and fulfilled the "teen-sidekick" role. Later, the non-powered teen fanclub was ditched for the 1977 season's inclusion of Zan and Jayna (the Wonder Twins) and their blue space monkey, Gleek (also, a *Scooby Doo* style comic relief animal character). After that came the 1978 season (titled *The Challenge of the Super Friends*) which included a cast of 11 multicultural heroes (including Black Vulcan {African-American}, the Samurai {Asian}, and Apache Chief {Native American}) going toe to toe with the 13 members of the nefarious Legion of Doom. Later incarnations from the early 80s had a revolving door of heroes (including Cyborg and Firestorm) until the show finally fizzled out in 1985. The show's focus is animated superheroism promoting familiar DC characters. In an attempt to belay negative criticism, most of the shows battles were against dehumanized monsters (such as tar beasts, alien dragons, and "anti-

matter" monsters). The 1978 *Challenge of the Super Friends* season is particularly

interesting, however, in its departure from this format, creating a legion of recurring

humanized villains for the heroes to fight, including such big name baddies as Lex

Luthor, Solomon Grundy, and Brainiac.

      For my examination, I focus specifically on two seasons: the 1977 *All New Super*

Friends Hour with the Wonder Twins and the 1978 *Challenge of the Super Friends* with

the Legion of Doom. This is largely motivated by convenience (these two seasons are the

only seasons that have been released to DVD: the 1978 season released as "Volume 1"

and the 1977 season as "Volume 2"), but also because the 1977 season is the only one

that contains a recurring second female super-hero (Jayna of the Wonder Twins), and the

1978 season pits the heroes against recurring female villains.

      Over the course of its total existence, *Super Friends* featured two female heroes:

Wonder Woman and Jayna, the female member of the Wonder Twins. You'll notice

throughout my analysis that I focus heavily on Wonder Woman's character and only

peripherally on Jayna's. This is based on the fact that Wonder Woman is a staple

throughout the entire run of the show and the Wonder Twins are only on for the 1977

season. Also, the Wonder Twins, being depicted as the monkey-owning alien teens in a

group of serious adult superheroes, function as the rarely utilized comic relief characters;

they are almost always relegated to the Hall of Justice to observe the battle from the safe

distance of the Justice computer, make occasional commentary, and throw in a poorly

executed joke at the end of each episode. So while Jayna offers something of a female

model, her model is also conflated by its relegation to "teen comic relief sidekick."

ANALYSIS

Personality

In terms of personality, Wonder Woman is pretty weak. This, however, is not to be seen as a sign of misogynistic denial of female personality, but instead a symptom of the show in general. *Super Friends*, despite its thorough camp-enjoyability, is extremely bland in terms of characterization; there is little to no character development throughout the entire series. The heroes aren't given personalities beyond their basic functions: the closest thing Superman has to a personality is a sense of leadership, Batman is made out to be the clever one, the Wonder Twins are the wacky ones, but beyond that, everyone else just exists to fight crime. Character-building banter is excluded. The shows don't tell a serial narrative beyond a two episode arc spread. We have no sense of love, of desires, of pain, of anger, of hate, or of any emotion in general. We lack the essential elements of a good literary character creating a series of non-characters. This makes the analysis of Wonder Woman both very difficult and very easy; difficult because there is no actual character to examine as a functioning female model and easy because, without dimensions to her character, Wonder Woman's character model is solely dependant on the literal proclamations of the show's creators—there is no subtext involved. All the characters (Wonder Woman included) are dry, their only discussion is related to the matter at hand or the moral involved, and they are neither weak nor overly capable. Almost every character (with the exclusion of the comic relief characters, Superman, and Batman) is completely interchangeable with any other's line of dialog—they're all the same.

Jayna, being one of these comic relief characters, has a bit more of a personality. She is depicted as having far more stereotypical "female" personality than Wonder Woman. Largely, this plays itself out in her facial reactions. Often, when something worrisome happens, the camera cuts to a shot of Jayna covering her eyes or putting her hand to her face in a "shocked and horrified" pose ("Battle at the Earth's Core"). Jayna is also displayed as having stereotypically feminine-aligned nurturing characteristics, being depicted at times carrying Gleek (the monkey) on her hip like a toddler ("The Demons of Exxor"). But other than these few brief feminizing moments and the occasional bid for comedy, Jayna is just as devoid of characterization as the others.

Backstory

Without actual characterization developing through the actions or the dialog of the characters, our insight into the character models portrayed by these female heroes comes largely through explicitly explained background detail. Jayna's background detail is scant and boring: she and her brother come from a planet where everyone is just like them, hoping to learn how to be heroes from the Super Friends.

Wonder Woman's background, told as 1/3 of an episode involving the origins of Super Friend members ("The Secret Origins of the Super Friends"), provides a little more insight into her feminized character model. In "The Secret Origins of the Super Friends", Lex Luthor formulates a plan where members of the Legion of Doom will go back in time and eliminate members of the Super Friends before they become superheroes. This scheme by the writers creates an integrated storyline that is able to tell the audience the origin stories of three of the show's heroes (without making a flashback episode). Through this device, we are given a direct view of Wonder Woman's background story, a

view not provided in most of the other series I will be studying. Thus, I will go into some detail.

        In the telling of Wonder Woman's history, her beauty is noted numerous times as providing a contribution to her development as a hero. For example, when the audience is first given a glimpse of the island Wonder Woman comes from, the narrator describes it as "Paradise Island, home to the eternally young and beautiful Amazons" immediately stressing the link between youth and beauty and establishing both as obvious components of the warrior tribe of women. Hippolyta, the queen of the Amazons, is then shown molding a naked young girl from clay. She takes a step back from her creation, looks at it, and proclaims "How beautiful! I love this little girl as if she was my own." Hippolyta prays to Aphrodite, "goddess of beauty and love," to bring the clay statue to life. Aphrodite complies, naming the girl "Diana." The narrator then enthusiastically informs us that Diana, the "child of the gods" is strong as Hercules (she lifts a tree out of the ground), swifter than Mercury, (she outruns a deer), and "the most beautiful Amazon on Paradise Island." It's particularly interesting that the writers place this statement within this context: by putting these three descriptions within the same sentence/montage, the implication is that her stunning beauty is in fact on the same level as her strength and speed, effectively positioning it as a super-power all its own.

        When Aphrodite tells Hippolyta that she must find the most able Amazon and send her to America to fight evil, Diana asks to be in the tournament. Her mother, however, denies her this: "No, my daughter. I forbid it. The winner of the tournament must to leave Paradise Island—she will have to give up her birthright of eternal youth and beauty!" Her mother is not afraid of the danger that would await her daughter in

either the tournament or in the outside would should she win, but is concerned that if she wins, she will lose her youth and beauty. Diana, however, masks her face to compete in the tournament despite her mother's orders. In this version of her origin story, Cheetah (a member of the Legion of Doom) steps in and, by cheating, defeats Wonder Woman in the tournament. However, before the end of the episode, the Flash (a male hero with super-speed) goes back in time, stops Cheetah's cheating, and restores Diana to her rightful place as Wonder Woman.

I point out all of this specific episode information to illustrate the stress that the writers place on the beauty of the female hero. Superman and Green Lantern, the two other heroes whose origin stories are described in this episode, are not lauded for their beauty; it isn't even mentioned. In fact, the male characters are never described as being physically or sexually appealing. However, it is obviously important in Diana's development into a hero. This focus on the sexual appeal of strong female heroines is not uncommon in the realm of females in action genres. As gender and film theorist Sherri Inness points out in her book *Tough Girls*, having strong, ass-kicking heroines simultaneously function as sexualized/beautiful objects "[diffuses] the threat posed by Second Wave Feminism" (Inness, 35). Rather than a strong heroine representing a threat to masculine domination through her power and her blurring of the gender binaries that define men as active and women as passive, she is reinscribed back into the traditional gender roles by focusing on her feminine sexual appeal; the threat of her adoption of "masculine" strength is abated by the focus on her "feminine" characteristics of beauty and sexuality. This kind of sexualized watered down feminist heroine was not

uncommon during the 70s; this was, of course, the era of *Charlie's Angels*, a show known more for its bouncing breasts than for its masculinized action women.

However, Princess Diana (before she is granted the title of Wonder Woman) does strike out against this focus on beauty. By competing in the competition despite her mother's warning that she would be forced to sacrifice her "eternal youth and beauty," Diana strikes out against this beauty; she is more concerned with becoming an agent of justice than she is with maintaining her sexual appeal (on an island full of women). Here, Diana makes a masculinizing statement against the traditionally feminine values embodied by her mother and offers the audience a defiant and untraditionally de-feminized moment of characterization. (Although, oddly, her reasoning for competing in the tournament is never explained. She expresses desire to compete, her mother says no, and in the next scene, she puts on a mask. Seemingly, her desire to rebuke her mother comes more from her desire to prove herself the best Amazon through competing in the tournament rather than an altruistic desire to save the outside world.)

However, this character-defining investment in power over beauty doesn't change the fact that Diana is, in fact, the most beautiful of the Amazons. We don't have an unattractive female character defying the logic of beauty—we have the most beautiful character defying it. While rhetorically (and in other concurrent cultural manifestations, such as her cover spot on the first issue of *Ms.* magazine) Wonder Woman is held up as an icon of the ideals of second-wave feminism, she is still objectified by her beauty in her animated incarnation.

Finally, I would like to note that Wonder Woman is a princess. This in itself is not so damning: there is a strong tradition of valorizing princes and princesses in tales of

adventure, granting them abilities that aren't necessarily available to the peasantry. It is, however, interesting to note because the royalty of Princess Diana functions in contrast to her male counterparts. Superman, Batman, and Robin are all orphans. Most of her male counterparts are regular men who have had either traumatic lives or have worked to become paragons of justice. Aquaman, who is king of Atlantis, is the only other royal figure in the show, and his royalty is more empowering than hers (the king actually rules the land while the princess is just the child of the ruler). Having Wonder Woman as a princess (a iconic facet of her character not to be specifically associated with the animated incarnation, but with all of her incarnations starting with her earliest comic appearances), a symbolic figure highly associated with extremely feminized aspects of little-girl culture such as pink gowns and fancy balls, Wonder Woman is once again stripped of empowering masculine traits. Where Superman, Batman, and Robin had to start out as socially disempowered orphans and raise themselves up, and self made characters like Green Lantern had to earn his powers through a commitment to doing good, Wonder Woman started out as a highly feminized royal figure with beauty and power, lacking the traumatic backstory to define her as a "self-made" woman provided to a number of her male counterparts.

Physical Presentation

Wonder Woman's physical presentation is a bit tricky; to discuss her physical attributes and her costuming as an ideological construction specifically of the 70s era would be problematic. The Wonder Woman character was created and designed decades before her Saturday morning debut. But, while recognizing the pre-women's lib 40s influence on her physical presentation and thus realizing that Wonder Woman as we

know her in *Super Friends* is not strictly an ideological construction of the 70s, it doesn't change the fact that this physical presentation is still what was offered up at the time as the token female model in this male dominated children's television show and thus worth studying as though it is.

Wonder Woman of the *Super Friends* dons the traditional Wonder Woman costume: essentially, it's a strapless one-piece bathing suit. The bottom part is blue with white stars; the top half (from the waist up) is red with a gold eagle, its wings outlining her breasts. The outfit is rounded off with a pair of knee-high red high-heeled boots, two metal bracelets, a tiara, and a pair of earrings.

In terms of physical dimensions, Wonder Woman's image in *Super Friends* is tame compared to the slew of comic book double-D vixens that Scott Bukatman describes in his 1994 article "X-Bodies: The Torment of the Mutant Superhero" as having become the superheroic norm since the 1990s (Bukatman, 65). From head on, she is pictured with a fairly androgynous shape (except with a slight inclination toward feminine hips). Her waist is small, but not *usually* impossibly disproportionate (at times, though, the drawing changes and she has a ridiculously impossible hourglass figure). In a full frontal view, her breasts are not overly defined. From the side, of course, there is indication of breasts, but they are small and unobtrusive enough to be realistic. Wonder Woman (usually) has a vaguely realistic figure compared to her more outlandish comic-book progeny of the future, but it still isn't exactly relatable to the majority of the female American population. "I always loved Wonder Woman's outfit," says Wendi McLendon-Covey, comedian and actress featured on the *Pajama Rama Super Friends Retrospective* included in volume 2 of the *Super Friends* DVDs. "Of course what girl

didn't want to go as Wonder Woman for Halloween? But I've got a big butt and I can*not* wear stars below the waist."

Also of note is the fact that while Wonder Woman isn't necessarily vulgar in her proportions, she does represent a heroic body-type quite different from that of her male counterparts. For the male members of the team, the heroic body is heavily muscled. Their biceps bulge, their pecs are visible through their costumes, and their legs are big enough to lift cars. Wonder Woman, however, represents a more "feminine" heroic body type. Rather than being depicted with the muscles she would require for her heroic feats, Wonder Woman has a thin body with no drawn-in muscle definition. The ideal female hero as established by Wonder Woman maintains a feminine, soft body rather than edging dangerously close to the gender binary by displaying masculine musculature.

In comparison to the other members of the team, Wonder Woman has (arguably) the most suggestive and scant costume. Hawkman and Robin provide her only rivals, Hawkman wearing only a pair of pants and a harness and Robin wearing a full top/tunic/cape combo with only a pair of green briefs at the bottom (unless he's supposed to be sporting a pair of flesh colored tights, which is possible but unlikely). But Wonder Woman is the only character to have a costume revealing on both the top *and* the bottom. What is interesting, though, is how rarely she is pictured having cleavage. Unlike later animated incarnations that give Wonder Woman large breasts and cleavage, the Wonder Woman of *Super Friends* often has nothing sticking out of the top of her low-cut costume, no lines to define the top curve of breasts. This is likely the result of the self-regulatory censors.

But while she isn't drawn with hyper-sexual cleavage, she is still given a number of less-obvious signifiers of fetishistic sexuality. Her knee-high high-heeled boots, her metal manacles, and the ubiquitous golden-lasso that always hangs by her side position Wonder Woman as in the realm of fetish object, a position that can function as both empowering and disempowering. As Valerie Steele, author of *Fetish: Fashion, Sex, and Power* tells us, these fetish fashions "make women look powerful" (184), but this power does not come without the price of inherent sexualization and thus fetishistic objectification.

Other, more subtle (and less sexual) feminizing aspects are also encoded into the *Super Friends'* female character presentation. Wonder Woman and Jayna are the only two characters to have colored lips—Jayna's purple and Wonder Woman's red. The indication is that the female characters are wearing lipstick (which would seem to be the only make-up they're wearing) or that they have full, luscious lips that need accentuating by the artist with lines of color. Also, Wonder Woman has long, manicured nails and red earrings. And it can't be ignored that, for no apparent reason, Princess Diana of Paradise Island wears her tiara to battle which, as noted by Wendi McLendon-Covey "I don't think had any powers other than holding that bouffant back" (*Pajama Rama*). The logical impracticality of these beautifying accoutrements for fighting crime is staggering; they exist on Wonder Woman not to aide her in her quest, but to reinforce her femininity. As Marc O'Day discusses in "Beauty in Motion: Gender, Spectacle, and Action Babe Cinema," traits such as hardness, aggressiveness, physical strength, and effectiveness function to code a character masculine according to our culturally established gender binary. By making sure to establish Wonder Woman visibly as stereotypically feminine

through feminine signifiers, the producers counteract her transgressions onto the masculine side of O'Day's gender binary, reestablishing her as acceptably feminine.

Jayna, on the other hand, has less feminizing aspects of her physical presentation. Her costume, made to match her brothers, is no more sexually revealing then the male heroes' costumes. She wears a purple long-sleeved unitard with matching purple gloves and boots. However, I would argue that this reinforces my statement about the use of the feminizing details to reign in Wonder Woman's masculine power: Jayna, who is characterized as less capable, less strong, and less independent than Wonder Woman does not need to be reinscribed on the feminine side of the gender binary with these de-masculinizing features because there is no fear of her crossing it in the first place; her incapability as a hero already denies her threatening masculinity.

Finally, I'd like to point out the artist interpretation of the way the female characters stand. All female characters (Wonder Woman, Jayna, Cheetah, and the female civilians) have hip-oriented stances. Often when pictured standing around, the women have one hand on their hip which juts out toward one side. This creates a solid, feminine S-curve; the effect produces a highly stereotypically feminine and visually submissive stance. This is juxtaposed to the stance of the male characters. Male civilians often stand in a regular posture, body straight up and down, hands hanging limp. The heroes, however, usually stand in very domineering postures with their hands on their hips and their legs spread shoulder-width. When the *Super Friends* are pictured standing in a line, the obvious submissiveness built into that feminine pose stands out like a sore thumb amongst the domineering heroic poses of the male figures.

Powers/Skill

Traditionally, in the world of super-powered beings, women always get the crappy passive powers. As Scott Bukatman notes in the article mentioned above, "X-Bodies: The Torment of the Mutant Superhero" (written in 1994 about the superhero body, focusing a bit on the tradition of gender, sexual fetishization, and gendered superpowers in the genre) the women often end up with psychic powers (usually telekinesis or telepathy) or invisibility, both of which make them passive and remove them from the actual danger of an active fight (reinforcing O'Day's gender binary) (Bukatman, 65). For years, though, in the comic book world, Wonder Woman was the exception to this rule. Wonder Woman has always been the physically capable heroine, the one that can hold her own in a fight. As noted in the origin story described above, Wonder Woman has super strength and great speed. The show, however, takes a departure from the strength and power of Wonder Woman and drops her to the level of the feminized invisible telekinetics.

While the television series recognizes the fact that Wonder Woman has physical powers in the narration of the origin story, the series (apart from the montage accompanying the origin narration) never shows her using it. This, in part, is probably because of the proscription against violence in general on the show. Wonder Woman never throws a punch, but then again, neither does anyone else. However, that does not exclude her from the possibility of running fast or doing some heavy lifting. These tasks, however, are instead delegated to her male teammates: Superman does all the heavy lifting and Flash does all the speed work. Wonder Woman only uses two skills in the series: the ability to fly her invisible jet and the ability to telekinetically control her

golden lasso. Other than these, all the powers that she supposedly was granted by the gods of Olympus seem non-existent. All the masculinizing strength and the effectiveness of her abilities are stripped from her and she is, in essence, left with the ability to fly something invisible (and thus be undetectable) and the ability to telekinetically detain bad-guys.

Jayna, however, comes out a bit more positively in terms of power distribution. While Wonder Woman is stripped of her most effective powers, Jayna is given the Wonder Twin ability to morph when in contact with her brother. Jayna is able to become any living beast while her brother, Zan, can become water products (yes, water products). Thus, while Jayna is incapable of using her power effectively because she is, in general, an ineffective comic relief character, her power is arguably more impressive, versatile, and useful than her brother's.

Team Dynamics

In terms of leadership opportunities and chain of command, Wonder Woman takes third place to Superman and Batman respectively. While this sounds like an accomplishment on a team of 11 heroes, it only places her slightly above everyone else. Because of the absolute lack of character development and the interchangability of the majority of the characters, Wonder Woman just barely stands out as a leader of the pack.

Superman, not surprisingly, is the undisputed leader. Often, Superman orders everyone to stay behind while he takes care of the threat by himself: "This looks like a job for Superman!" ("The Anti-Matter Monster"). He barks out orders far more often than any other character and is always obeyed. As Paul Dini, writer of *Lost*, points out in the *Pajama Rama* special, "He could kinda do the whole job on his own, but I think

because he doesn't want to get that, you know, demi-god rap, he lets the other guys in"

(*Pajama Rama*).

When Superman is captured, incapacitated, or otherwise unavailable to take charge, leadership is passed down. Usually, Batman takes the helm. Batman, functioning inseparably from his sidekick, Robin, acts as the in-house detective. He has most of the ideas and solves the majority of the mysteries. If Superman serves the function of strong-man and leader, Batman serves as the brains of the operation. Wonder Woman, along with everyone else, gets to state the obvious and occasionally formulate a plan or two. Everyone listens to her, no one calls mutiny because a woman is giving the orders, but it's obvious that she does not serve a function in the same capacity as Superman and Batman.

Jayna, conversely, doesn't ever bark out orders. This is more a result of her function as teenager/comic relief than a result of her function as woman; Zan is just as devoid of leadership opportunities because he, too, only exists to do something silly, do something stupid, or be captured.

Effectiveness

Regardless of how powerful a character is, the true mettle of a paragon of justice can only be determined by how effective she is in battle. Jayna, obviously, is ineffective as a heroic character. As with most of the other sections in this chapter, the fact that she is both a teenager and a comic relief character inherently makes her *ineffective*; she exists to be funny and to get captured.

Wonder Woman, however, proves to be fairly effective. In what seems to be an attempt to foster a sense of equality, all the characters get into a fairly equal amount of

trouble and they all do a fairly equal amount of rescuing. Wonder Woman's most effective techniques for rescuing teammates come in the form of her feminized psychic abilities. In the first episode of the 1978 season entitled "Wanted: The Super Friends," the entire team is hurtling toward the sun in a jet-powered cage. Wonder Woman uses her telekinetic control over her golden lasso to alter the direction of one of the rocket boosters, sending the cage off course and avoiding contact with the sun. In the 1977 "Invasion of the Brain Creatures," the entire team becomes possessed by brain shaped creatures from outer space. "Using her own incredible mental powers, Wonder Woman struggles to free herself of the brain creatures' hold." While the entire team remains trapped under the control of the brain creatures, Wonder Woman, with her feminine psychic abilities, is the only one able to wrestle herself free and rescue the team. Wonder Woman does get a few chances to rescue the boys, but it's always through the use of these feminized powers (as we have seen, her powers coded masculine seem to be denied to her).

While the producers of *Super Friends* seem comfortable with Wonder Woman's feminine abilities being used to rescue her male counterparts, they are not so comfortable pitting a woman directly against a man in battle. In the 1978 season, the Legion of Doom contains 2 female villains: "the cunning cheetah" and "the feminine yet ferocious Giganta" ("Wanted: The Super Friends"). Giganta does very little in the show; usually she is just a female face in the background. However, throughout the season, whenever individual heroes are pitted against individual villains, Wonder Woman is always put up against Cheetah. In "Wanted: The Super Friends," she lassos Cheetah; in "Trial of the Super Friends" while guarding a chemical plant, she is lured away and attacked by

Cheetah while the male heroes fight male villains; in "Secret Origins of the Super Friends," Princess Diana must fight Cheetah for the right to become Wonder Woman; in "The Final Challenge," Wonder Woman must compete with Cheetah to cap a volcano in a bizarre sporting event set upon them by interdimensional aliens; and in "Fairy Tales of Doom," "Doomsday," and "Super Friends: Rest in Peace" Wonder Woman only fights against Cheetah. Wonder Woman is never pitted directly in one on one battle with a male character in the 1978 season; Cheetah exists in the Legion of Doom solely so Wonder Woman has another woman to battle, so that she won't be shown in battle with a man. This speaks to a wariness with Wonder Woman's character, a fear of depicting a strong woman defeating a human male character rather than robotic space poachers or tar beasts as she did in the previous seasons.

<div align="center">**Conclusions**</div>

Despite the heavily policed and watered-down animated television of the sanitized 70s, we still come out with an interesting if not conflicted model of femininity being marketed toward the young boy of the time (and the young women, such as Wendi McLendon-Covey, that also enjoyed the male-marketed show). While Jayna of the Wonder Twins provides nothing more than light female stereotyping and comic relief, Wonder Woman provides something of a strong, capable woman. She is a respected member of a team of powerful men and allowed to give orders and lead (although she definitely does not function as the team leader). She is capable of defeating dinosaurs and brain creatures and is able to rescue her male counterparts. Unfortunately, she is also dressed in a one piece bathing suit, heavily marked with feminizing symbols, devoid of characterization, stripped of her masculine-coded powers, and forced into combat with

only female supervillains. Wonder Woman, while providing a stepping off point for

strong female models in masculine, boy oriented power teams, falls flat in terms of

positive female representation and becomes little more than a two-dimensional

feminized, disempowered token female. Perhaps the 80s, with its female power suits and

slanted Reaganomics, will have a better influence on super-powered feminine models…

CHAPTER II

THUNDERCATS, HE-MAN, G.I. JOE AND THE 80S:

"WORTH HER WEIGHT IN GOLD"

As we can see by the solitary example of *Superfriends* from the 70s, the animated

action/adventure mixed gender team wasn't an especially popular convention. The early

80s, however, saw the first wave of production focused specifically on this subgenre.

This sudden interest came as a direct result of the relaxing of FCC regulations by FCC

chairman Mark Fowler during the early part of the Regan administration. Prior to

Fowler's intervention, it was illegal for a television series to be based on a line of toys;

the goal was to keep the shows from becoming half-hour commercials for the

merchandise. However, after Fowler's intervention, it became legal to create shows

based on toy markets if the toys weren't advertised during the show itself (Erikson, 405).

With this change in regulation, it makes sense (from a marketing standpoint) to create

shows with a large cast of stable heroic characters; the more characters the children see

and "interact" with on a daily basis, the more toys can be sold. Thus, the early 80s saw a

boom of these group-oriented action/adventure series. While a number of shows fitting

these criteria were produced during this time period, I shall focus on the women of *He-

Man and the Masters of the Universe* (1983)*, ThunderCats* (1985), and *G.I. Joe: A Real

American Hero* (1985) (arguably three of the more influential shows of the time) to show

the ways in which token representation of idealized femininity has shifted from the *Super

Friends* predecessor of the late 70s and to explore how the hypermasculine values of the

80s intermingle with the cultural foothold of second wave feminism to create these ideal

female models.

THE CONTEXT

Aside from the financial and regulatory concerns of the time, it's important to note the cultural climate of the early 80s and the popular culture this climate produced when discussing the trends of the heroic action/adventure subgenre. James William Gibson writes in his article "Warrior Dreams" that in the wake of the disaster of the Vietnam War, our American culture (which prides itself on this established sense of rugged and superior masculinity) was feeling generally threatened and emasculated. In an attempt to fight this sense of symbolic castration, our popular culture began to take on a hyper-masculine warrior focus. Gibson cites the rise of popularity of authors such as Tom Clancy and the blossoming of the *Rambo* films as evidence of our culture's desire to ideologically compensate for this feeling of powerlessness. This masculocentricity is highly evident in the shows I will be examining; *G.I. Joe: A Real American Hero* is obviously directly about the success of military combat, and both *ThunderCats* and *He-Man and the Masters of the Universe* tout themselves as team-based shows when their main ideological focus and concern is on one hypermasculine male leader character.

THE SHOWS

Hal Erikson in his book *Television Cartoon Shows*: *An Illustrated Encyclopedia* cites *He-Man and the Masters of the Universe* (referred to as just "*He-Man*" for the remainder of the chapter) as the first series to directly benefit from the relaxing of the FCC regulations mentioned above. Through the introduction to each episode, we find out that *He-Man* tells the story of Prince Adam, the prince of a land called Eternia. Prince Adam (prior to the beginning of the series) somehow was given a magic sword that transforms him into the hypermasculine and super-powerful He-Man. He fights the evil

of a skull-faced megalomaniac named Skeletor. By his side is a band of fighters: Man-

At-Arms (also known as Duncan) who is some kind of inventor in the employ of the

royal palace; Teela, the (female) captain of the royal guard and Duncan's adopted

daughter; Orko, a flying interdimensional comic-relief wizard; Battle-Cat, He-Man's

ferocious feline mount (that speaks English); and the Sorceress (occasionally referred to

as Zora) who doesn't really engage in the battles, but is still introduced in the opening

sequence. As a unit, these ladies and gentlemen fight evil and, in an attempt to appease

the censors, learn very important life lessons while peddling their action-figure wares.

The show proved very successful with the target market and with toy sales (Erikson,

404). I, for the purposes of this study, will focus on Teela and the Sorceress[2].

 ThunderCats, which had been kicking around in pre-production limbo for years,

finally got the green light after the networks saw the financial benefits of *He-Man*. Thus,

in 1985 we saw the first adventures of the ThunderCats, a group of humanoid feline

aliens. The *ThunderCats* team (which, unlike *He-Man* actually contains a serialized

backstory) consists of Lion-O (the ruler of the ThunderCats), Cheetara, Tygra, Panthro,

WilyKit, WilyKat, and Snarf. The ThunderCats, warrior aristocrats from the planet

Thundera, crash on Third Earth after their home planet is destroyed. They spend the run

of the series attempting to interact peacefully with the inhabitants of their new home and

fight the evil forces of Mumm-Ra and the mutants from the planet Plundarr. Eventually,

new threats arrive (such as the interstellar criminals, the Lunataks) and new members join

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[2] At this time, I'd like to address *He-Man's* spinoff *She-Ra: The Princess of Power*. *She-Ra*, while it focused on the team dynamic and had important female characters, was also specifically marketed to and directed at young girls (it was meant to be to young girls what *He-Man* was to young boys), and thus it will be excluded from the shows I am studying.

the team, but as she is the only consistent (adult) female character, I will focus on

Cheetara as the show's example of token femininity.

      G.I. Joe: A Real American Hero began in 1985, the same year as *ThunderCats*,

but unlike *ThunderCats* which was a duel toy/series marketing venture, the *G.I. Joe* series

was based on a pre-existing toy line. The G.I. Joe line of action figures has existed since

1964. Perhaps because of the pre-existing mythology (or perhaps because of shameless

capitalistic marketing purposes), *G.I. Joe*: *A Real American Hero* contains far too many

characters to list here. Each episode features between 4 and 12 characters, often

introducing new soldiers to the ranks. The vehicles for both the good and bad guys have

individualistic names which are stated often (perhaps so they could be recognized in store

packages). The *G.I. Joe* revolving door of characters, while numerous, only containes

three females: Lady Jaye, Scarlett, and CoverGirl. These three ladies and their bevy of

male counterparts work for a governmental Special Forces unit called the *G.I. Joes* that

battles an evil terrorist organization called C.O.B.R.A. (led by the bumbling Cobra

Commander). The show chronicles this ongoing battle. Obviously, I will focus on Lady

Jaye and Scarlett, only mentioning CoverGirl occasionally (her appearances are

extremely rare).

<div align="center">ANALYSIS</div>

<div align="center">**Personality**</div>

      Much like Wonder Woman of the previous chapter (and decade), the female

characters of *He-Man*, *ThunderCats*, and *G.I. Joe* remain pretty uninteresting and two

dimensional. However, while the female characters aren't especially infused with

individualized identity, they are a bit more characterized than the complete blank slate of

Wonder Woman, giving them a vague sense of individual character.

Cheetara of the *ThunderCats* is among the least characterized of the bunch. The

show is so focused on Lion-O that Cheetara and other secondary characters don't even

appear in many of the episodes. On the rare occasion that Cheetara is focused upon, it is

usually to inscribe her character as stereotypically feminine. In a disturbingly telling

episode (Episode 17, "All That Glitters"), Panthro finds a deposit of gold attached to a

rock he needs to fuel the team's base. Referring to the soft metal as "junk," he intends to

throw it all away. Cheetara, however, is entranced by the beautiful metal and begins

hoarding it secretly: "Junk? Why it's beautiful! See how it glitters! I love it! All of it."

She makes jewelry out of it and wears it for the rest of the episode. Interestingly, this

behavior is reinforced when, at the end, the ThunderCats find out that they need a supply

of gold to reforge Lion-O's powerful sword; thanks to Cheetara's secret stash, they are

able to save the day. At the end of the episode, Lion-O praises Cheetara for her hoarding:

"If she hadn't saved some of [the gold], the sword and I would still be trapped inside the

volcano." He then lifts her up, she giggles, and all the men yell "Hail Cheetara, worth

her weight in gold!"

This trend toward Cheetara's only characterization being through traditional

female vices appears again in episode 33, "Dimension Doom." "Dimension Doom"

features an ancient wizard named Wiz-Ra who is trapped in another dimension. His only

window into the real world is through Cheetara's bedroom mirror. Through this mirror,

he watches and admires her beauty (I'll discuss the application of Laura Mulvey's "male

gaze" as it applies to *ThunderCats* later in this chapter). When Wiz-Ra is freed from his

interdimensional prison, Cheetara helps him complete a quest, becoming romantically involved with him (in a very vague and kid friendly way) that ends in his emotional departure. Cheetara's investment in this man and her submissive function within her budding relationship with him (as his sidekick and as the object of his gaze through the mirror) again inscribes her with feminizing stereotypes. Other than these two feminine foci (the love of gold and stalkers), Cheetara is left effectively without characterization.

The Sorceress of *He-Man* is even more devoid of personality. The writers have attempted to depict her as mysterious by making her understand the mystical realm, giving her a breathy accented voice, and inexplicably granting her all the answers whenever the team is in trouble. However, other than as some kind of metaphysical information bank, the Sorceress is so devoid of character building screen-time that she ends up being a non-character. She is sought out in times of trouble to answer vague questions, but is otherwise ignored.

Teela, being characterized as both mouthy and impetuous, shows more consistent characterization than either of the characters mentioned above. In a number of episodes (and particularly, episode 21 "The Royal Cousin"), Teela comes off as a pesky, preachy, bossy older sister type to Prince Adam (who, I'd like to point out, is by far the most feminized male character in the show with his long, girlish blonde hair, his high whiney voice, his pink tunic, and his clumsy ineffective nature, creating an obvious juxtaposition to his alternate hypermasculine He-Man identity). She is far less assertive, aggressive, and bossy to the more masculinized male characters like Man-At-Arms (her father) and especially to He-Man, but her aggressive nature toward Prince Adam at least shows a masculinizing character trait uncommon to her contemporaries.

Teela is also characterized with a strong streak of rebellion. This is, perhaps, her most empowering feature. While she often obeys her father's orders, she also disobeys him when she strongly disagrees with his decision. For example, in episode 5, "The She-Demon of Phantos," Teela is ordered by her father to stay behind while the men go to the planet of Phantos. Angry at her father's decision, Teela follows anyway, eventually saving the men from a giant plant creature. Her disobedience, though, does not go without admonishment:

> Man-At-Arms (Teela's Father): "Teela! You disobeyed my orders"
> Teela: "But Father…"
> He-Man: "You shouldn't have disobeyed…but thank you."

And at the end of the episode, Teela's disobedience is punished when she is forced to peel potatoes for the castle guards (which is particularly insulting as she is their ranking officer). This theme plays out again in episode 13, "Like Father, Like Daughter" where once again Man-At-Arms orders Teela to stay behind while the men go on a mission. Teela, angry at being left out, follows anyway and once again saves the day. While this act of female empowerment and rebellion to a male restraining force is made positive by Teela's rescue of the male heroes (like the one in episode 5), it too is shown to be negative; in the requisite moral minute at the end of the episode, Teela gives the kids at home a lesson on the importance of obeying your parents. All in all, the fact that Teela rebels against her father when he gives her orders (regardless of his anger) shows an empowering sense of agency, but the fact that a woman probably made to be in her 20s is still being ordered around by her father in the first place, along with the verbal undercuts and the moral lesson she herself tells the kids about the importance of obedience, undermines this empowering function.

The women of *G.I. Joe* are also not especially defined in terms of characterization or personality. Lady Jaye comes off as vaguely bold and courageous; her voice is confident, and she jumps into trouble without fear, sometimes to the chagrin of Flint, her commanding officer and pseudo boyfriend. Scarlett, in opposition to Lady Jaye, has even less characterization. She is in quite a number of episodes, but she does nothing to stand out from the myriad of other non-descript characters. Scarlett doesn't back down from a battle, but she doesn't express the occasional bold, take-charge personality traits of Lady Jaye.

One of the more disturbing character traits of the lady Joes is one that proves to be a heavy trend in all of the shows of the era: heavy heterosexualizing flirtation. Cheetara offers out-of-place and unnecessary sexualized comments regarding Lion-O a couple of times, especially at the beginning of the series, referring to him in a flirtatious manner as "handsome" and "courageous" (Episode 1 "Exodus" and Episode 2 "The Unholy Alliance"). Teela occasionally expresses an out-of-the-blue sexual interest in He-Man, making it explicit in episode 24 "Wizard of Stone Mountain." In this scene, He-Man teases Teela about the wizard being in love with her. She responds in a flirtatious manner by saying "Actually, there's someone I've been working with that I've grown rather fond of" and smiles at him. She also expresses a vague romantic interest in Prince Adam (He-Man's alter ego) during episode 18 "Creature from the Tar Swamp" when Prince Adam's vampish cousin Edwina offers a bizarre incestuous flirtation: "Just look at the way you've grown," Edwina tells Adam, "I swear if we weren't cousins…*giggle*." At this point, the camera cuts to a close-up of Teela's irritated looking face, indicating jealousy at the ensuing flirtation.

Lady Jaye and Scarlett, however, have the most obvious and consistent flirtation scenes. These scenes, like the ones for the characters above, also tend to come out of nowhere. The show has a pattern of throwing in without context (at the very end of episodes) heterosexualizing flirtations. At the end of episode 5 ("Knotting Cobra's Coils"), the show ends with Flint asking Lady Jaye on a date to the Joe's food hall. At the end of episode 9 ("Cobra Stops the World"), Duke (Scarlett's commanding officer) says "May as well get back to base," to which Scarlett replies "May as well. Or you could take me to dinner and a movie." Duke responds with "Now you're cooking with gas." At the end of episode 12 ("The Funhouse"), Lady Jaye approaches the group of male soldiers she's been fighting alongside platonically for the entire episode (Flint is among them) and asks "So, does someone here want to take me for a stroll on a moonlit beach?"

These moments are interesting for a number of reasons. First, I would argue that these moments are more obvious and prevalent in the *G.I. Joe* series because they work to dispel fears that the female characters will be read as too masculine and thus as lesbian, a stereotype associated with females in our military already (and at the same time, reinforcing the heterosexuality of the man in a largely male saturated domain like the military). These moments are especially strange because of their lack of context; although there are very occasional romanticized moments between these characters, it usually only plays out in these final, overt, and seemingly pointless heterosexualizing moments. It should also be noted that both women are only consistently involved with the men that function as their commanding officers. Duke is eventually defined as the leader of the Joe force and Flint as second in command; these men both outrank the

females. The women only show interest in the men that, throughout the entire series, are constantly ordering them around. Because of this power component, the objects of their flirtations prove interesting and problematic.

Backstory

Character backstory was apparently unimportant in the 80s. Cheetara has no more background than the other ThunderCats; they all fell to this planet together. Lion-O is the only one granted a preordained destiny or a family lineage. The women of *G.I. Joe* have absolutely no backstory whatsoever. They, like all the other Joes, apparently live solely in the present. The Sorceress of *He-Man* is bound by destiny to remain the guardian of Castle GreySkull. Other than that, there's no backstory on her. Teela is the only character given any backstory characterization.

In episode 6 "Teela's Quest," Teela sets out to find the truth about her family. She (as well as the audience) is aware of the fact that Man-At-Arms is not her real father, but Teela decides to set out on a quest to some fabled oracle to find the truth about her parentage. In her quest, Teela is led to the Sorceress for answers. There, she finds out that the Sorceress is actually her mother, but after she was attacked and young Teela was placed in danger, the Sorceress gave her infant daughter to Man-At-Arms. With this, we find that Teela will one day have to replace the Sorceress as guardian of the castle. After telling her all of this, however, the Sorceress (for some inexplicable reason) erases Teela's memory so that she is unaware of her destiny, and the Sorceress then swears He-Man (who saw the whole thing) to secrecy.

This background tale is interesting because it links the two women together in a mother and a daughter role. It also binds Teela to the same confined destiny as her

mother, a woman who can't leave the castle she is sworn to protect for any length of time. Here, we find out that our rebellious and independent Teela will one day be chained to a musty old house, cleaning it, maintaining it and protecting it from evil skeleton men, just like her mother.

Physical Presentation

The physical presentation of these 80s animated heroines is one of the more interesting areas of discussion of this era, but for unexpected reasons. Traditionally in media studies, we've faced a problem of female hypersexualization. Often, as Scott Bukatman discusses in "X-Bodies: The Torment of the Mutant Superhero," female action heroines are oversexualized male fantasies in skimpy outfits (65). And in the case of these shows, the women's costumes, as could be expected, are often skintight and somewhat revealing. But what proves interesting about the costuming of this batch of characters is that regardless of how revealing the women's costumes are, the men's are even more so. Cheetara wears a skintight orange leotard with yellow tights and calf-high boots, but Lion-O wears something akin to a light blue wrestler's uniform with the stomach cut out to show his rippling abs. And Panthro, one of the other male ThunderCats, wears a pair of shorts, some boots, and a leather harness. Teela wears a sleeveless leotard and Sorceress wears a long sleeve leotard, but both are out-objectified by He-Man in his short animal-skin briefs and his metallic harness. Lady Jaye wears fatigues, albeit in a more fashionably disheveled way then the men, and Scarlett has a skin-tight diving suit number, but both are more covered up than characters like Gung-Ho, a Caucasian male character wandering around with his shirt undone to show off his

muscular chest or the shirtless Quick Kick, an Asian-American stunt man and martial arts expert that joins the team in episode 4 "Chaos in the Sea of Lost Souls."

The fact that the men's outfits are more revealing than the ladies' is less an indication of a sexualizing trend for male heroes and more a nod to the desperate push for ideological hypermasculinity I mention above, a push visible through such concurrent on-display bodies as those of Arnold Schwarzenegger, Jean-Claude Van Damme, and Sylvester Stallone. Rather than functioning to establish these men as something sexual to be desired, the revealing aspect of their clothing elicits our cultural connection between large muscles and obvious powerful masculinity. Thus, where women are often represented as scantly clad to establish them as sexual objects, the men (at least in this time period) are more likely scantly clad to prove how masculine and strong they are through the display of masculine signifiers. This reading is reinforced by the general lack of sexual objectification of the masculine leads in the hypermasculine adult film counterparts like *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (1985), *Commando* (1985), or *Bloodsport* (1988). Therefore, because the revealing costuming crosses gender lines and creates space for ambiguity as to whether or not it's objectifying and disempowering, I will refrain from making any arguments regarding female objectification through costuming during this era.

There are still a number of important facets of the physical presentation, however, that deserve mentioning. For one thing, much like Wonder Woman, these women (who are supposed to be very physically tough) have very slight builds. Teela, a woman that is supposed to be adept at physical combat, has tiny stick arms. The same is the case for the women of *G.I. Joe*; they lack any physical signifiers that indicate bodily strength. This

points back to the above discussion of muscularity denoting masculine power: in an attempt to separate the men from the women through visual signifiers, the men are given the "hard" muscular bodies (recall O'Day's gender binary discussed earlier) and the women are given the "soft" non-powerful bodies. Cheetara offers an exception to this. While she isn't drawn to be Ms. Universe, she is drawn with vague lines to define bulging triceps as well as small rounded areas where shoulder muscles should be. Cheetara offers our first slight attempt to allow musculature to encroach on the animated token female.

But this does not mean that our heroines are without other feminizing accoutrements. While Cheetara has a bit of masculinizing muscle, she also has a ubiquitous and whorish amount of blue eyeshadow. Teela, despite the fact that she isn't royalty, is always wearing a tiara (similar to Wonder Woman's); Teela also has strange golden Cinnabuns on her leotard that cover while accentuating the area where her breasts should be. Both Teela and the Sorceress wear high heeled boots and the Sorceress has brightly painted red nails. The women of *G.I. Joe* have fewer feminizing accessories; Lady Jaye sports her slightly sexualized army fatigues and Scarlett has heeled boots on her skintight suit. And of course, as is the convention, all the characters have thick, colored lips that contrast with the men's thin mouth line, indicating either full, luscious lips or the use of lipstick (the Sorceress's lips match her nails perfectly). As was the case with Wonder Woman and Jayna, the women in all the shows often have a submissive standing posture, forming an S-curve with their bodies, usually having a single hand on a hip or having both hands behind them, while the men maintain a more dominating arms-at-the-side facing forward and standing straight posture.

Less direct aspects of presentation function to set power dynamics as well. For example, the Sorceress is often depicted as a nothing more than a disembodied floating head. Her power as a character is so minimal that her body is unnecessary; she's only useful as a voice that progresses the story by telling the actual adventuring characters what they need to know and therefore, her whole animated self is unimportant.

Another indirect issue of physical presentation affecting the power dynamic is the function of Laura Mulvey's concept of the male gaze in *ThunderCats*. *ThunderCats* repeatedly reinforces the power advantage granted by the ability to watch while unseen*:* one of Lion-O's abilities with the mystical Sword of Omens is "sight beyond sight" which allows him to see almost anything by looking through the hilt of his sword. The symbolic weight of this ability is accentuated on numerous occasions when Lion-O loses the sword and expresses concern about his disadvantage caused by losing the "sight beyond sight" function. Also, "the cat's lair," the team's hideout, has the ability to see telescopically. This aspect is focused upon in episode 5 "Pumm-Ra" when Panthro and Tygra are creepily spying on Cheetara with the cat's lair viewing screen while she's out for her morning run. The power the narrative places on the gazer is noticeable, and the fact that the cinematic gaze is commonly turned toward Cheetara is important. This use of the gaze is evident most explicitly in the opening theme-song sequence. Each character is focused upon for a few seconds, using their skills to defeat a few enemies. Cheetara is the only ThunderCat that acknowledges the camera; if you slow the introduction down, you can see that during a very fast close-up, she looks at the camera flirtatiously and winks. None of the other characters even acknowledge the camera's

existence. *ThunderCats* even within its own narrative recognizes the power of the gazer and here, in the opening sequence, Cheetara panders sexually to that power.

Powers/Skills

These animated shows of the early 80s seem to consciously attempt to break the traditional power dichotomy of the previous generations pointed out by Bukatman in the previous chapter (of aggressive male powers and passive female powers). Cheetara of the *ThunderCats* possesses super-speed and, on the rare occasion, utilizes her "intuition," a sixth sense that allows her to communicate telepathically, see the past or future, or do whatever else the script seems to call for that week (of course the effectiveness of this sixth sense is undermined by the fact that using it could kill her {episode 11 "The Ghost Warrior"}). Obviously, these powers are still of the passive variety Bukatman describes as being traditional within the gendered separation of power. However, Tygra (a male character) has the power of invisibility, a passive ability Bukatman recognizes as traditionally female (65). So while the producers of *ThunderCats* maintain the traditional passivity of female powers, they do not confine this passivity to female characters alone.

He-Man's Sorceress also has passive powers. The show indicates to the audience that the Sorceress has a variety of mystical abilities. In fact, in episode 25 "Evilseed," the Sorceress claims to be one of the three greatest powers on Eternia (along with He-Man and Skeletor); the strength of her magical abilities is touted numerous times throughout the run of the series. However, despite the characters' claims of great power, Sorceress never actually does anything noticeably powerful: she answers questions that He-man poses, she morphs into a bird, and she telepathically projects an image of her head to He-Man whenever she's in trouble or overwhelmed (which tends to be quite often). On one

of the rare cases where she actually attempts to use her powers to fight against the evil onslaught (episode 3 "The Shaping Staff"), she is easily overcome and turned into a tree (in her defense, Skeletor tricked her into stepping 10 feet away from the castle, and her power is greatly weakened when she leaves her house, reminding us all that a woman's power truly resides in the home). For all the mystical and devastating power she's said to possess, the Sorceress seems to be relegated to the passive abilities of answering mystical questions and telepathically calling for help.

But the Sorceress is juxtaposed with Teela whose abilities are purely physical. Teela, being the captain of the royal guard, is trained at a number of hand to hand combat skills as well as ranged weapons (such as laser blasters). Teela is shown a number of times either training with Prince Adam or mentioning that she is supposed to be training with Prince Adam. She uses sword and shield combat in her training lessons but sticks mainly to blasters when in the field. Obviously, unlike her Sorceress counterpart, Teela is not simply relegated to the realm of passive abilities. Of course, the masculine power of her fighting skills is curbed by the fact that she usually ceases to fight the minute He-Man, the more effective and proper fighting body, arrives on the scene. And her masculine power is undercut by the revelation that she will be called by destiny to be the next Sorceress, eventually bound to the passive abilities stated above and trapped within the castle for the rest of her life. But regardless of those undermining problems, the fact that she's a trained swordsman and gunner gives her a masculine push denied to other female characters.

G.I. Joe, attempting to be a show based in a realistic world, doesn't grant its women actual "powers." Instead, each Joe has a skill or special training that causes him

(or her) to stand out from the others. These skills are quite often made explicit through the nickname attributed to the Joe in question: Shipwreck is a sailor, Roadblock is the large heavily muscled guy, Bazooka uses large ammunitions, Quick Kick is the martial arts expert, Blowtorch uses flame weapons, Ripcord is usually seen jumping out of planes, Airborne is a pilot, and the list goes on. The women, however, seem to lack these immediately defined skills. The only "skills" that differentiate them from the unnamed (all male) Joe plebeians are their weapons of choice: Lady Jaye, rather than using the blasters used by most of the other Joes, uses a quiver full of javelins she keeps on her back, and Scarlett has a tiny crossbow affixed to her arm. The fact that the men are often named for their function brings the names of the women into an interesting light: Lady Jaye is not referred to as "Javelin," she's "Lady Jaye," indicating that her main function or defining factor is not her fighting skill but her femaleness. Scarlett, whose crossbow is only used on very rare occasions, is given a nickname to match her hair (plus, the color scarlet is one of those shades of red we as a culture often specifically associate with sexuality). The only female who actually receives an appropriate nickname is CoverGirl. In one of her very rare appearances, CoverGirl is defined as being a make up expert, but her skills in this highly feminized department are never displayed or highlighted (episode 19 "Lights! Camera! Cobra!"). Thus while the women of *G.I. Joe* (particularly Lady Jaye and Scarlett) are capable fighters, their masculine power is somewhat usurped by their lack of useful specialized skills and the insinuations made by their nicknames.

Finally, I'd like to point out a trend in the weapons used by the women of this animated era. Cheetara's main weapon is an extending bowstaff. The staff, which is about 6 inches long, hangs from her belt. When she's in trouble, she grabs it in her hand,

holds it aloft, and it extends to about 6 feet. This same ability appears in the 1983-1985 series *Dungeons and Dragons* (which I've chosen to omit from this study for time and space purposes) where Diana, a scantly clad teenager, has a bowstaff that extends in her hand. The sexual psychoanalytic connotation of this staff that grows in the hand of a beautiful female warrior is unmistakable. That, mixed with the phallic nature of Lady Jaye's javelins, points to a larger trend in not-so-useful sexualized phallic weaponry for female warriors of the era, begging the question of whether these women are being offered the chance to appropriate the phallus through its symbolic use as weaponry granting them masculine power, or if there is a fetishization of these strong women exemplified by their handling of these phallic staffs.

Team Dynamics

The team dynamics of this era again harkens back to the cultural climate of the decade in general. The focus on hypermasculinity as a response to the cultural emasculation of the Vietnam War of course produced a heavy focus on hypermasculine main characters. In *ThunderCats*, the show is *about* Lion-O; everyone else, while playing the part of a fairly egalitarian team, functions as secondary characters. The same can be said for *He-Man*; the show is about the paragon of hypermasculinity himself— everyone else is just there to set up the pins for him to knock down. Therefore, obviously, these two shows each have an extremely explicit leader figure to rule over them all.

In *ThunderCats*, there is an established hierarchy: Lion-O is the leader and Tygra is defined as the second in command. On top of this, Tygra is named to be the architect and often functions as the wise consult of the leader, Lion-O. Panthro, the other adult

male character, is defined as the tech and munitions expert, driving the tank and building the weapons. Cheetara, however, is not granted an explicitly defined team function. She is the fast one with the very rare psychic abilities; she doesn't serve an overtly useful function and is therefore often left out of episodes or tactical discussions. Her main function (much like how WilyKit and WilyKat function to be the team's "children" characters) is to be a woman. This vague purposelessness indicates a low rank on the totem pole, establishing her with less intellectual abilities than her male counterparts and less decision-making power.

He-Man creates a similar but more complex environment. He-Man, as you can tell by the title, is the main focus of the show. Where the characters of *ThunderCats* are all aliens sharing a common heritage and thus actively form a family unit, *He-Man* establishes an insider/outsider dichotomy which makes for a noticeable power differential. In the opening title sequence, He-Man does a voiceover explaining a bit of his story: in this voiceover, he identifies his secret identity (as Prince Adam) and explains that "only three others share this secret: our friends the Sorceress, Man-At-Arms, and Orko" (episode 1 "The Diamond Ray of Disappearance"). Already, Teela is identified as an outsider. Teela is the only member of the fighting squad kept in the dark about He-Man's true identity; she's denied the knowledge that would put her on equal footing with the rest of the team. The Sorceress, on the other hand, while aware of He-Man's secret identity, is kept physically separate from the others; she is forced to remain alone in the walls of Castle Greyskull while the others live at the nice castle in the city. Her physical absence explains both the rarity of her involvement in the lives of the other team members and the lack of power she has regarding the team in general. So by denying the

Sorceress physical proximity and involvement and by denying Teela the fundamental knowledge valued by the rest of the team, both women are made outsiders to the group, giving them secondary roles to the insider males (He-Man, Man-At-Arms, and Orko) who have both.

The women of *G.I. Joe* have to face the strangest team dynamic. In some ways, the team dynamic is empowering: the women aren't saddled with the hypermasculine idealized main character of the other two shows, so they're given more opportunity to be in charge. In fact, Lady Jaye almost always takes a commanding role when Flint (her superior/love interest) or Duke (her superior/Scarlett's love interest) isn't around to outrank her. The other men of the team seem to respect and listen to her, allowing her to take charge. Scarlett, however, is used a lot as a character, and the majority of the time she's used, it's in missions with Duke, putting her in a subservient position to her commanding officer/ love interest. Scarlett doesn't give *a lot* of orders, but the other, similarly ranked men don't balk when she does (nor do they refrain from ordering her around as well). Only one episode features two women on the same team: episode 20 "Cobra's Candidate." This episode involves a situation in which all the men on the mission team are captured, devolving to the conventional "girls night out" episode. The female members work together to confront a female gang leader and her mother. Other than this one instance, however, there are no strike teams with more than one woman— the men on the team can be countless, but the women are relegated to singular token status.

Another positive aspect of the *G.I. Joe* team dynamic is the way in which the shows producers include outsiders that question the capability of female combatants,

allowing the male team members a chance to act supportive of women's rights. In episode 2 "Rendezvous in the City of the Dead," an old fashioned naval admiral asks to have Lady Jaye removed from his ship, pointing out that women are bad luck at sea. Lady Jaye then points out that this is an old myth. The captain persists with his sexism later by warning Flint the upcoming battle is no place for a lady. Flint replies with "She not just a lady, Admiral Ledger, she's my teammate. Yo Joe!" ("Yo Joe" is the Joes' all-purpose battle cry). By pointing out the sexism and rebuking it, the creators of the Joes reinforce a positive mixed gender military environment.

But *G.I. Joe* also contains some highly problematic team dynamics as well, particularly ones with strange sexualized overtones. As I mentioned above, there is often an out-of-context scene at the end of an episode in which the woman attempts to approach a man for a date, usually occurring between Scarlett and Duke (episode 9 "Cobra Stops the World") or Lady Jaye and Flint (episode 5 "Knotting Cobra's Coils," episode 12 "The Funhouse"). At times, these moments are used to express a weird intermingling of power and sexual interest. In "The Funhouse" when Lady Jaye asks the large group of men who wants to "take [her] out for a stroll on a moonlit beach," Alpine's positive response of "I'll take you" is met with a "You do and you'll be scrubbing toilets for a week" from Flint. Lady Jaye responds with "You sure know how to keep a girl single." In both episode 8 "Satellite Down" and episode 15 "Haul Down the Heavens," Flint denies that he is romantically involved with Lady Jaye but at the same time stakes a romantic claim on her to other soldiers. Lady Jaye's pursuit of Flint (oddly, in most cases, the women are the aggressors) and his combination of desire and denial creates an odd and unbalanced power dynamic.

The most disturbing aspect of the sexualized team dynamic of the Joes plays out in a scene in episode 16 "The Synthoid Conspiracy Part 1" in which Shipwreck, the sailor, blatantly sexually harasses Scarlett, and she just laughs it off. "C'mon dollface. I know a little café in port where the spaghetti is great and the lights are dim." At this point, Shipwreck grabs her by the waist and pulls her toward him, saying "Let's you and I get together and…" but he's cut off when she pushes him away, giving him a light slap, and saying "Let's not and say we did." About 2 minutes later, however, they're working together as though nothing happened. Shipwreck, in a non-playful way, sexually harassed Scarlett both physically and verbally, yet the show makes absolutely no acknowledgment of this. This moment in which the sexual harassment of a female officer is ignored and accepted creates a very disturbing overtone to the sexualized team dynamic of the Joes.

<div align="center">**Effectiveness**</div>

General effectiveness as a useful team member also necessitates a reminder of the cultural climate of the time; because the focus is so heavily placed upon the success of the hypermasculine main characters, the other characters, male and female alike, often take secondary positions, getting themselves into situations they can't get themselves out of to highlight the skills and courage of the masculine main character. This proves to be a disempowering factor for a number of the characters in both *ThunderCats* and *He-Man*. Therefore, because of the general cultural value of the time placing emphasis on this singular Rambo-esque super character, the women of the 80s already begin with a disadvantage.

Cheetara, of course, is subjugated as a character to Lion-O. But beyond that, she proves herself to be a fairly capable fighter: she can fire mounted laser cannons, use her bowstaff to vault over mutants and kick them from behind, and use her speed powers to distract electronic defense grids or tie up the baddies. While she proves fairly successful at all of these tasks when she's called upon to do them (which isn't especially often), her effectiveness is undermined by a number of other factors. For one, she has a strange tendency to pass out, a problem none of the other ThunderCats seems to suffer from and one that is never really addressed within the confines of the show's narrative. In episode 5 "Pumm-Ra," Cheetara, while being spied upon by the other ThunderCats during her morning jog, inexplicably passes out, leading to her capture by the mutants. The show offers no explanation for why Cheetara passes out. In episode 11 "The Ghost Warrior," when it is revealed that Cheetara first uses her sixth sense, it drains her so much that she again passes out. And in episode 26 "The Sixth Sense," her psychic powers are hijacked by a spaceship and she passes out twice. None of the other ThunderCats suffer from this fainting problem, a problem which places Cheetara in a position of "damsel in distress" on a number of occasions, undercutting her effective power.

Cheetara is very rarely focused upon for an entire episode. However, one episode offers her the chance to be the hero; in episode 12 "The Doomgaze," a hyperfeminine hypersexualized evil princess is freed from her interdimensional prison by Mumm-Ra. After Lion-O is enslaved by the evil princess's hypnotic "gaze" that allows her seductive control over all men, it is up to Cheetara to single-handedly defeat all the mutants and fight back the princess. The princess attempts to bring Cheetara under the hypnotic spell of the doomgaze, but upon failing, Cheetara announces "Your mystical powers have no

effect on me. You may mesmerize men with your evil beauty, but I am a woman! You hold no mystery for me!" Cheetara's crowning moment of the show involves her defeating an evil seductress, winning solely because of her femaleness and understanding of the "mysteries" of women's seductive powers but denying the possibility of her being swayed by them. Her chief effective moment comes at a time when the show is promoting an ideology that instates female sexuality as an evil and dangerous force, and Cheetara, the domesticated team female, as the positive alternative while at the same time reinforcing a denial of the possibility of same-sex attraction.

Teela, while proving to be adept at both swordplay and gunplay, is also disempowered by the masculine empowerment of He-Man. When she does get to fight, she's fairly successful, although she does fall into the "damsel in distress" role in a number of episodes (such as when He-Man must save her from the fish demon in episode 6 "Teela's Quest," a particularly disempowering moment because as the title of the episode tells us, the whole adventure is supposed to be *Teela's* quest). But there are moments, such as when she disobeys her father, that Teela pops in to (for example) shoot lasers at a giant plant to save the men (episode 5 "The She-Demon of Phantos"). But the fact that she automatically plays a subservient role to the idealized He-Man largely undercuts her effectiveness. In fact, she often just holds off the enemy until He-Man arrives, cheers him along ("Thank goodness He-Man showed up" {episode 3 "The Shaping Staff"}) and tries to get in a shot or two when the time is right.

There are a few moments, however, where Teela's shown to be both horribly incompetent and idiotic. For example, in episode 32 "Search for the VHO," the team spends the entire episode trying to deliver a device to some stranded scientists that will

calm the wild animals in the area. At first, the episode seems as though it will empower

Teela: the invention seems to be hers, and she plans to take it to the scientists all by

herself. However, her father destroys this potential for empowerment by telling He-Man

to follow her: "Why don't you go along? You never know when Teela might need the

help of He-Man." Her father's anticipation of her incompetence proves accurate as she is

captured by one of Skeletor's minions in an attempt to steal her invention. He-Man, of

course, saves her and returns the invention to her. As they are both floating in the water,

Teela praises He-Man and makes an announcement, "That takes care of Merman. But I

dropped the VHO!" After never engaging in the battle, Teela just drops the invention

into the water for no reason. So, of course, He-Man must dive in and retrieve it for her so

they can deliver it to the scientists. The idiocy of her character in this instance

completely undermines the potential of an empowering storyline.

A final note on Teela's effectiveness comes in regard to her station. Teela has a

very empowering political position: captain of the royal guard. However, she never

actually uses this. In a few very rare episodes, she mentions that she is going to warn the

guards or gather them to help out in some impending battle; it is even rarer to see her

actually doing any leading. For one with such a powerful position, she almost invariably

ignores her station altogether and waits for He-Man to show up and save the day.

The Sorceress, as I've already established in discussions of her powers, is horribly

ineffective. Her only role is to disclose complicated plot details. Whenever she even

attempts to actively use her powers, she fails; in episode 30 "The Taking of Greyskull,"

He-Man saves the captured Sorceress from Skeletor, allowing her to use her powers to

bind the evil menace. However, the very moment he leaves the castle (3 or 4 seconds

later), she telepathically tells him that her power is failing and that she needs his help. In episode 23 "Orko's Favorite Uncle," the Sorceress tries a number of times to stop a dragon creature approaching her castle and fails every time, forcing her to call He-Man for help. The Sorceress is grossly incompetent at everything she tries, always immediately failing and necessitating the help of her big, strong, hypermasculine He-Man.

It should come as no surprise by this point that the most empowered and effective women are the ladies of *G.I. Joe* (that is, of course, if we ignore CoverGirl, the Joe with the girly name, the girly job, and the tendency to wander around aimlessly). In terms of effectiveness, the women of *G.I. Joe* are by far the best portrayals. Lady Jaye in particular leads troops, enters battles, fights with guns and javelins, and proves to be an overall successful soldier. Scarlett, while being slightly less commanding, still keeps herself out of the "damsel in distress" role most of the time. When the women *are* trapped, they're usually trapped with other team members, making it an ungendered sense of distress rather than one based in traditional forms of female disempowerment. Of course, this effectiveness for the women could largely be a result of the shift away from the hypermasculine heroic character that absolutely must be seen saving the day in both *ThunderCats* and *He-Man*, but regardless, the women of *G.I. Joe* are good soldiers with solid aim, an ability to stay out of trouble, and the ability to successfully lead a campaign and save lives without relying on strong, powerful men to jump in and save them.

Conclusions

With the FCC relaxing its policies during the Reagan era, a new wave of large-cast team adventures burst onto the animated scene. This, in conjunction with the

cultural climate of the time which created a need for ideological masculinization, gave us hypermasculine heroes such as Lion-O and He-Man who worked in conjunction with mixed gendered teams (a result of the inclusive politics of the 60s and 70s visible in the racial and gender tokenism of *Super Friends* discussed in the previous chapter) but still functioned to dominate and prove most effective. Cheetara, Teela, and the Sorceress gave us female characters who could hold very powerful positions and could, at times, be effective and save the day. Of course, because of the push for masculine reinvigoration in our cultural scene, these "powerful" women were reinscribed with feminine characteristics and made less effective, less powerful, and subservient to their masculine paragons. The women of *G.I. Joe*, however, were able to escape this subservience. Of course, this could be attributed to the fact that they were already members of a highly masculinized organization run by and dominated by men. Their heterosexual status as objects of male interest was reinforced and, at times, sexual harassment seemed to be condoned within the institution. The world of the Joes was obviously a masculine one, but the women (despite various undermining aspects) have proven to be fairly empowered in their fighting and leading abilities, offering up more empowered models then the other three. Of course, it should be noted that none of the women actually hold leadership positions (except for Teela, whose leadership position is peripheral, rarely depicted, and does not give her power over any of the main male characters). These animated models of the 80s, despite their faults, can be viewed as especially positive when one stops to consider that the majority of women in adult oriented action films of the early 80s (like *Rambo: First Blood II* and *Terminator*) were depicted as far more feminine either functioning as love interests or damsels in distress that are removed from

the action, functioning almost solely to reinforce the masculine heterosexual traits of the Stallone or Schwarzenegger type of hypermasculine heroes. Perhaps the next wave of this genre (in the 90s) will be able to push boundaries even further, offering more empowered female characters without the emotional masculinizing baggage of Reagan era post-Vietnam America in the 80s.

CHAPTER III

WHERE ON EARTH IS CARMEN SANDIEGO?, GARGOYLES, X-MEN AND THE 90S:

"SO BEAUTIFUL YET SO STRONG"

As the 80s marched forward, more and more temporal distance was forged from the symbolic emasculation of Vietnam, the tensions of the Cold War began to decline, and the focus on military supremacy began to wane. This created a cultural climate far less invested in the ideological reinforcement of America's hypermasculine militaristic values, bringing an end to the *He-Man* inspired wave of action/adventure team-based animated television and giving way to Disney's powerhouse of film related talking animal shows. In the late 80s, Disney, recognizing this new cultural climate, took a chance and invested an unprecedented amount of money (20 million dollars for the 1987 season) in creating "quality" syndicated comedic animation with its 1987 *DuckTales*. As Hal Erickson puts it, the risky investment "[paid] off in spades" and led to a major shift toward the comedic fantasy genre (Erickson, 201). The militaristic and ideologically masculine heroic team drama was replaced with lighthearted Disney comedies like *DuckTales* (1987), *Chip and Dale's Rescue Rangers* (1988)*, and *Talespin* (1990), all based on pre-existing Disney characters and franchises, and Warner Bros. attempt to capitalize on the market shift, *Tiny Toon Adventures* (1990).

The market shifted again, however, in the early 90s. Perhaps as a reaction to the cultural and material opulence associated with the late 80s, the cultural climate and the cultural products of the early 90s had a darker, more angst-ridden tone. In live-action television, shows like *Twin Peaks* (1990), *Picket Fences* (1992), and *The X-Files* (1993) were overtaking the sugary sitcoms of the late 80s. Animation followed this cultural

trend with Fox's 1992 introduction of the dark and angsty *Batman the Animated Series* and *X-Men* to its animated lineup. The positive reception and acclaim of both *Batman* and *X-Men* (with their darker tones and more adult themes) led to a rise in similar heroic, somewhat angst-ridden children's television. Within a few years, a number of darker animated shows were in production, one of the most notable being Disney's (1994) *Gargoyles* ("a 'serious' half hour cartoon that [was intended to] match the success of Warner Bros.' *Batman: The Animated Series*" {Erikson, 361}).

On top of this new cultural style, *X-Men* and *Gargoyles* attempted another risky move for animated series: the adoption of a serialized format. Prior to this, animated children's television maintained a very episodic format, each episode usually having little to no bearing on an overarching storyline. This serialized format, a new concept in children's television, allows for much greater character development and more complexity in storylines (Erikson, 363). The serialization of children's television, I would argue, speaks to a movement toward offering children more difficult texts with which to engage. Serialized shows that tackle issues such as racialized hatred (as in *X-Men*) or isolation and betrayal (as in *Gargoyles*) indicate that, as a culture (or at least as producers of children's culture), we began in the early 90s to see children as able to follow complex storylines and multifaceted characters. This argument is reinforced by the larger dollar amounts production studios such as Disney began sinking into these animated programs, placing more importance on their value to the corporation and thus implicitly deeming their audience more valuable, offering them both higher quality writing and animation (which at the same time makes the series more palatable to an adult fanbase as well).

In addition to this trend of complexity in children's television, cultural producers were also offering children overt learning tools using the revitalized popularity of the team-based action/adventure format as a way to sugar-coat the educational pill. Ted Turner, for example, produced *Captain Planet and the Planeteers* to promote ecological awareness (*Captain Planet* predates *Batman,* having originally aired in 1990. While it maintains the team-based format, it does not harbor the influence of the angsty complexity visible in later, similar shows). And Fox produced in 1994 the Emmy award winning *Where on Earth is Carmen Sandiego?* based on the popular geography-based video game series. Both shows utilized the inclusive mixed-gender team based action/adventure format to offer kids an educational message in a format they'd be willing to swallow.

With this new trend in animation offering more complexity in storyline and character as well as a parallel attempt to create a more integrated style of edu-tainment and the demise of the hypermasculine early 80s, we are offered an interesting array of female models. Largely, as we will see, this new complexity creates a space for three-dimensional female characters and the relinquishing of the cultural need for hypermasculine ideals creates a space for empowered women. For the most part, the women of the 90s wave of animation are able to take advantage of this space, but as we shall see, at times this female strength proves too much of a threatening stretch from the patriarchal norm and must therefore be reigned in.

<div align="center">THE CONTEXT</div>

In terms of cultural climate, the 90s obviously represented a much different time than the 80s. In terms of gender, the culture had distanced itself from the remasculinizing

trends of post-Vietnam popular culture. *Terminator 2* (1991) was making buzz with audiences and with cultural theorists for its depiction of physically violent female heroes. The scene was being set for the controversial third-wave feminism girl-power philosophy, often characterized by the sexualized "empowering" messages of the *Spice Girls*. As Scott Bukatman points out in "X-Bodies: The Torment of the Mutant Superhero," the mid-90s was also the heyday of hyper-feminized/sexualized violent action heroines in the world of comics (65). Obviously, the cultural climate of the 90s was ready to accept physically powerful heroines, but how badly did the sexualizing downside of the "girl power" movement undermine this power? And how powerful were the women in the first place?

<div align="center">THE SHOWS</div>

My analysis for the wave of mid-90s action-team heroines will be focused on the shows mentioned above: *X-Men, Gargoyles,* and *Where on Earth Is Carmen Sandiego?*. While *Captain Planet* fulfilled the vast majority of my requirements for inclusion (including recognizability and popularity), I'm excluding it from analysis because of its enduring commitment to the 80s ideological approach: *Captain Planet and the Planeteers*, despite having been made in 1990, still functions under the same ideological guidelines as the shows of the early 80s, featuring a singular hypermasculine character (Captain Planet) who all the other characters submit to and rely upon to swoop in and save the day. In every episode of *Captain Planet*, the planeteers (who have power rings giving them the abilities of the elements) try for a brief time to save the world, only to eventually combine their powers to form Captain Planet, a blue, heavily muscled, scantily clad man with a mullet who flies around and saves the day. Despite their powerful rings,

the planeteers lack the ability to finish foes on their own. Their submission and

dependence upon Captain Planet is made even more explicit by the fact that when they

summon him, their power rings cease to function until he leaves: the planeteers literally

become powerless in his presence. The show's ideological message harkens back to the

likes of Lion-O and He-Man, retaining this investment in the all powerful

hypermasculine male, and because of this lack of progression, I've chosen to exclude this

show from my examination[3].

       X-Men, which ended its first season as Fox's number one animated series

(Erikson, 926), features a team of "mutants" gathered together and commanded by the

wheelchair-bound Professor Charles Xavier. The show, which was based off of Marvel's

successful comic franchise of the same name, takes place in a world where naturally

occurring mutations in the human genome have begun to cause random teenagers to

develop superpowers. Xavier, a closeted mutant telepath, establishes a school for these

"gifted youngsters" where he can train them in the use of their powers. These students,

with Xavier at the helm, form the secret super-team "the X-Men" and fight threats from

both inside the mutant community (i.e. the Brotherhood of Evil Mutants) and from the

racialized hatred expressed by the unmutated humans. The animated series features eight

mutants in addition to Xavier: Cyclops, Wolverine, Gambit, and Beast (the male

members) as well as Jean Grey, Storm, Rogue, and the young Jubilee. For the purposes

of my study, I will focus on Jean, Storm, and Rogue—Jubilee I will largely remove from

my analysis because she is established and reinforced as the child of the group (much like

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[3] One may also notice my exclusion of another very popular mixed gender team-based action/adventure
show: *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. I've chosen to exclude TMNT largely because it exists in a nebulous
era between waves of the genre, having started right around the demise of *He-Man, Thundercats,* and *G.I.
Joe* (beginning in 1987) and ending (in 1990) a few years before the *X-Men*, *Gargoyles,* and *Where on
Earth is Carmen Sandiego?* wave.

WilyKat from *Thundercats*) and thus her limits, her treatment by other characters, and her characterization are largely built to reflect a token "child" model rather than a token "female" model.

Gargoyles is noted by Erikson as being one of the most "literate" children's series to date with its constant use and reference to Shakespearian characters and motifs (363). Its storyline is based around a clan of gargoyles from 10th century Scotland. During the day, these gargoyles are familiar stone statues, but at night, they break free from their stone skin and becoming living, breathing, winged humanoids sworn to protect the humans that live within the castle's walls. The clan around which the story revolves is led by Goliath, a male gargoyle established as strong, loyal, and authoritative. After Goliath is betrayed by the humans he protects, most of his clan is destroyed: only Goliath, four male friends (that are not given names), Goliath's female lover (also not given a name), and a gargoyle dog remain. Lost in their sense of betrayal and loneliness, Goliath asks the castle sorcerer to turn his remaining clan into stone indefinitely. After spending 1000 years in stone, the clan is awoken in New York City by a wealthy businessman and borderline megalomaniac. Once awoken, the unnamed clan members take names, the only female gargoyle (now named Demona) is revealed to be evil, and Goliath and the rest befriend a NYPD female police officer named Elisa Maza. Much later in the series (around episode 35), Goliath meets up with his daughter Angela on a mystical island and she, too, joins the clan. Although Demona's character is extremely interesting, she falls outside the range of this study (as she is almost immediately defined as a villain rather than a hero), therefore for this study, I will be focusing on the characters of Elisa Maza and Goliath's daughter, Angela.

Here, however, I would like to note an issue with *Gargoyles* that I will reference quite a bit throughout the chapter: the ideological shift between the first and second seasons. The success of the 13 episode once-a-week first season led to a four-days-a-week 52 episode second season, and as we will see, the focus of the series shifts drastically between seasons. Season one focuses on the gargoyles as lost and confused; they are relics from the 10th century lost in the 20th, confused by the technology and the ways of its people. In this situation, Elisa plays a large role, helping the confused and vulnerable gargoyles navigate their new world. Their adaptation and Elisa's role as guardian and sage is featured heavily in the first season. However, in the second season, the focus shifts toward the heroism of the now acclimated gargoyles. Where they had been depicted as vulnerable in the first season, protected by their female friend, they are now the fearless protectors of the city and the people in it (including Elisa). This shift is drastic and very noticeable and while I have yet to find any explanations in my research for why this ideological shift took place, I can postulate. The first possibility is that this was just the trajectory the writers intended to take; the whole time, Elisa's empowerment as a mentor and a guardian was meant to be temporary, and after the gargoyles were acclimated, she would immediately fall into the periphery as love interest. The second (and, I'd argue, more likely) postulation is that in this already risky venture (as an expensive-to-produce serialized show unlike anything else Disney had ever produced), the shift from once a week to four days a week and the extra risk this entailed prompted a cutting back of other risks taken by the show. At this time, having a powerful female character (one arguably higher-up than the most masculine character, Goliath) would have been a stretch from the accepted patriarchal masculine leader the genre was used to.

Thus, in the move from one day a week to four days a week, it would be logical to remove the risk associated with such an ideological departure from the accepted norm, scaling back the risk to the more tried and true acceptable conventions of the genre, i.e. the masculine lead being the strongest, the smartest, and the one in charge (and the women being the most vulnerable and in need of rescue).

Finally, Fox's *Where on Earth Is Carmen Sandiego?* is based (much like the video games and the PBS game show) on the misdeeds of the infamous Carmen Sandiego, a grandiose, over-the-top fictional female superthief. While Carmen provides the core of the show, the episodes themselves center around two teenage detectives (Zack and Ivy) that have teamed up (along with the disembodied head of the detective agency's "chief," who seems to be a computer construct that only speaks to them through video windows) to stop Carmen's ubiquitous crime-spree. Week after week, the brother-and-sister detective team solves riddles based on classical music, knowledge of world history, and geographically based clues left by Carmen as she dares them to stop her from such ridiculous nefarious tasks as drawing her logo on the moon with stolen rockets and resurrecting dinosaurs to keep as pets. Every week, Zack and Ivy are able to stop Carmen's scheme and return the stolen merchandise, but at the end of the episode, Carmen always escapes, flying away on a hoverjet and leaving taunting messages to the "player," a live action kid shown at the beginning and end of each episode sitting in front of a computer screen. While it seems that Zack and Ivy function independently of the player, they do ask him for help periodically for researching various world facts. I will be focusing on Ivy's character.

ANALYSIS

Personality

The shift to more serialized and complex storylines in the wave of 90s animated television allows space for much greater character development. Because of this format shift, the women of the 90s prove to be far more interesting in their personalities than the women we have seen thus far.

Ivy from *Where on Earth Is Carmen Sandiego?* has the least in terms of character defining personality development. This stems from the fact that, unlike our other two shows of this wave, *Where on Earth Is Carmen Sandiego?* is episodic rather than serialized. But even though we don't get complex, drawn-out storylines to give insight into her personality, Ivy is still given some distinct personality traits that differentiate her from the completely flat characters we've seen in some of the previous shows.

Ivy is depicted as slightly pushy and a bit overbearing. She tosses out orders quite a bit and expects them to be followed. Because of her career, her success at it, and the number of geographical and historical facts she can spout at any given time, she's depicted as being very intelligent and capable. She prefers "old fashioned leg work" to her younger brother Zack's reliance on hi-tech surveillance equipment for detective work (episode 11 "Split Up"). She is a woman of action, doing the vast majority of the acrobatics and the hand-to-hand combat while her brother does the heavy intellectual labor, focusing on technology and language skills. Beyond these bits of established personality traits, we don't get the kind of insight into her hopes, fears, and desires that make for complex character development. The only major desire we're made privy to is the constant desire to capture the elusive Carmen Sandiego, a desire that she seems to feel

a bit more strongly than her brother. Overall, despite her lack of *complex*

characterization, Ivy is characterized as an intelligent woman of action who is focused on

success at her career and is a natural leader.

Gargoyles, being a serialized show, offers a bit more in terms of character

development. In the first season, Elisa is a much larger focus of the show than she is in

subsequent seasons. In the first season, the gargoyles wake up in Manhattan and are at a

loss for what to make of the new city and the new world that surrounds them. Elisa, who

is characterized as a very strong, capable, and authoritative police officer (established

early on through her very firm handling of a dangerous crowd scene in episode 2

"Awakening Part 2"), takes these confused beasts under her proverbial wing and attempts

to protect them from the callous outside world, teach them who they should and should

not trust, and help them understand their new surroundings. Elisa is also shown to be

very committed to her work as a detective and willing to break the law when she finds

such recourse necessary to find the truth (in a few of the early episodes, she, without a

warrant and having been denied entry, sneaks into David Xanitos's tower, the wealthy

entrepreneur that awakens the gargoyles and proves to be one of their most persistent

enemies.) Even when Elisa is not on police duty but is investigating trouble with her

gargoyle friends, she retains the demeanor of a cop, making it clear that her personality is

indistinguishable from this police officer role, and this role is integral to understanding

who she is.

In the second season, however, the authoritative, powerful Elisa Maza is

undermined by a new subservience. As I will discuss more in the "team dynamics" and

"effectiveness" portions of this chapter, the second season shifts the focus of the show

toward a *Beauty and the Beast* fantasy. Not only is Elisa's role in the show diminished for much of the beginning of the second season (often, she only appears in episodes to inform the gargoyles where a robbery is happening or give them technological gadgets), her character is shifted from that of authoritative autonomous being to one that depends on Goliath to solve problems, figure things out, and save her from the many perils that plague her second-season life. Also, with this shift in characterization and focus to reflect Disney's successful *Beauty and the Beast* animated film, a flirtation between Elisa and Goliath that was only hinted at in the first season is made more explicit. In episode 20, "Eye of the Beholder," Elisa, during a Halloween parade, takes Goliath for a walk on the street, holding him by the arm and leaning on him like a lover. Here, Elisa has traded her sensible detective gear for the long, yellow ball gown that Belle wears during Disney's animated feature *Beauty and the Beast*. The ideological shift from strong, empowered female character to "needs-to-be-rescued," disempowered romantically focused woman is made explicit by this costume change. So while Elisa is made out to be a very strong, authoritative woman capable of and desiring to take care of herself and others in the first season, this characterization is diminished (but not completely eradicated) by the shows shifting toward romance and a powerful male lead in the second season.

Angela, Goliath's daughter, comes into the show in episode 35, midway through the second season. Angela's characterization is heavily focused on the concept of her childlike naivety. She is presented during season two as incapable of independent function. Granted, the storyline has her entering late into this new world that the other gargoyles have had a season and a half to become used to, but rather than attempt to deal

with and understand the world the way Goliath had, Angela is characterized as confused and lost. She functions as an impetuous child, often fighting with Goliath in regard to their relationship as father and daughter and pouting.

The women of *X-Men* offer the most complex characterizations. Perhaps because the show had a wealth of history to draw from through its 30 year comic franchise, it's inclusion of detailed backstory, love interests, and fears creates deeper, more sympathetic characters than we've seen thus far. Of the three, Jean Grey represents the most patriarchally stereotypical female model. She functions as a sort of nursemaid/surrogate daughter to Charles Xavier, often depicted following him around, standing behind his chair, and doting on him. Jean has a tendency to agree with what other people suggest. She is very submissive, especially toward the men that desire her (Cyclops and Wolverine). Her submissive and passive tendency not to act but to *re*act with gasps or yelps often leads to her capture. She is the most kind and sympathetic to people, seemingly acting as the sensitive (and thus stereotypically feminine) one. Until the "Phoenix Saga" (episodes 29-33) and the "Dark Phoenix Saga" (episodes 37-40), Jean is the least developed in her characterization—she functions as a fairly blank female object of affection for Cyclops and Wolverine.

Storm, on the other hand, is a highly developed character. She has a powerful voice and a commanding presence. She is depicted as both strong and merciful (in episode 5, "Captive Hearts," Storm defeats the leader of a band of rogue mutants called the Morlocks in a battle to the death, but instead of killing the leader, Storm allows her to live and restores her to the station of leader in Storm's absence). This strength is exemplified by the fact that Storm is characterized as having very crippling

claustrophobia (in the example mentioned above with the Morlocks, the battle takes place in the sewers, and Storm is able to defeat the Morlock's leader while actively struggling with her phobia). She is characterized as completely devoted to her friends and to her role as an X-Man, willing to sacrifice herself to save others (such as in episode 3 "Enter Magneto" when Storm is willing to kill herself to stop missiles from reaching their target, or episode 16 "Whatever It Takes" when Storm offers her body to the spirit entity Shadow King in order to draw him out of her godson). Storm's character is imbued with an overriding sense of strength, mercy, and honor.

Despite her devotion to her friends, Storm is also characterized as being distant and aloof. This distance is dealt with directly in episode 34, "Savage Land, Strange Heart Part 1." While riding horses, Rogue gives an emphatic "Yeehaw" and tells Storm, "A gal's gotta let loose now and again. You oughta give it a try," to which Storm replies, "I admire your spirit, Rogue. But unlike you, I must keep my emotions in check lest my powers rage out of control." Because of her powers, Storm is required to remain constantly in control of her emotions, a control that appears as aloof distance. This distance is especially evident in her lack of a romantic love interest. While the Jean/Cyclops/Wolverine love triangle is made explicit in the first episodes of the series and the Rogue/Gambit connection is a running motif, Storm's only brush with romance doesn't come until episodes 69 and 70, "Storm Front" parts 1 and 2, where she is abducted by an otherworldly king and manipulated into being his bride so that she will stabilize the weather on his planet (eventually, after her fiancée tries to kill her friends, Storm is forced to leave him and return home).

This lack of a love interest is sharply juxtaposed to Jean's double love interest. Where Storm, the (African-American) authoritative and powerful leader, is only desired as a romantic companion by a manipulative king, Jean, the demure submissive (Caucasian) stereotype, is desired and fought over by two of the heroic male characters. This leads to an obvious ideological statement: the demure submission represents a more appealing romantic partner than the strong, authoritative woman that could perhaps threaten the masculinity of other authoritative characters like Cyclops and Wolverine. (The lack of a stable love interest could also reflect a concern with depicting a biracial couple, as Storm is the only black character on the team, although the king that eventually manipulates her into being his bride in "Storm Front" is white, making this tension seem possible but less likely.) While the producers of *X-Men* offer a progressive and positive model of an empowered female character, they also encode into this character recognition of the masculine threat she provides.

Rogue is masculinized in her personality as well as her powers (which I'll describe in the "powers/skills" section). She is loud and boisterous. She is flirtatious and sexy, but often in an aggressive rather than a passive manner: when she is forced to give Cyclops mouth to mouth resuscitation in episode 4, "Deadly Reunions," Rogue tells him with a smile "We'll have to do it again sometime." She's masculinized by her southern, country-gal mannerisms and sayings, combining a sarcastic southern bell persona ("Don't you rednecks know how to treat a lady?" while being attacked by an angry mob in episode 20 "Time Fugitives") with a masculine country-girl toughness ("I could spit on him if I wasn't a lady" {episode 12 "Days of Future Past Part 2"}). Rogue is characterized as troubled by her inability to touch people (a byproduct of her power that

will be discussed in the "powers/skills" section below), creating a lingering motif of veiled despair in her character. Her cocky, masculine, flirtatious attitude is shown to be a mask when in episodes like episode 9 "The Cure" or episode 22 "A Rogue's Tale," we see insight into her difficult childhood and the pain that comes from the inability to experience skin-to-skin human affection; this knowledge explains the occasional sadness the producers put into her otherwise energetic character. However, in episode 9 "The Cure," when Rogue is given the chance to give up her power, she keeps it, arguing that the value her power represents to her team is more important than her own internal demons. Rogue is made out to be strong, hard, and masculinized while maintaining a seductive femininity, kindness, and loyalty, all within the context of tragic overtones.

<h2 align="center">Backstory</h2>

Much like the shows of the 80s, the shows of the 90s are light on backstory. Ivy, for example, is only given a few brief tidbits of backstory information: she has a brother (obviously), she attended the Acme Detective Agency's international flight training program at some time in her past (Episode 3 "Dinosaur Delirium"), and she took eight years of piano (Episode 9 "Music to My Ears"). Beyond these bits of overt information, Ivy is left without a background.

Elisa's backstory is scant but interesting ideologically. While we aren't given much information about Elisa's life before her run-in with the gargoyles, we are introduced to her parents: a Native American police officer named Peter and an American of Nigerian descent named Diane. Although her biracial minority heritage isn't discussed as an issue within the show, by introducing her parents in the second season and showing their connection to their minority heritage (Episode 47 "Mark of the Panther" and episode

54 "Cloud Fathers"), *Gargoyles* is able to retroactively establish its "strong" female character as a minority character, creating ideological groundwork for the inclusion of a main biracial female character.

Angela is given almost no backstory at all. She, along with her rookery brothers and sisters, were smuggled out of the castle after the big massacre of 994 A.D. when Goliath and his clan requested to be cast into stone indefinitely. She was raised on the magical island of Avalon by those that smuggled the eggs out. Other than that, her parentage (Goliath and the now evil Demona) represents her only backstory, making her the child of two main characters, but not really affecting her character profile in any defining way.

The women of *X-Men* are given the most detailed backstories, although they're still not extremely flushed out. Jean, in fact, is given no backstory at all. Storm is given a bit of background information: she was an orphan as a child in the streets of Cairo where an evil entity called the Shadow King enslaved her and used her as a pickpocket (Episode 16 "Whatever It Takes"). Although it's never made clear in the animated series how she escaped his control, guilt and anger over this forced life of thievery seems to be part of her strong sense of honor as an adult and her adamant disgust at being controlled. Although Storm's backstory is scant, it gives insight into her character as one of honor, perseverance, and personal strength.

Rogue is given the most extensive backstory of the X-Women; Episode 22, "A Rogue's Tale," is devoted entirely to her origins. As a teenager, Rogue kissed a boy, Cody, for the first time. While their lips were touching, Rogue's ability to drain people's energy through physical contact suddenly engaged, sending Cody into a coma. Having

been outed as a mutant through the incident, her father kicked her out of the house. She was (purposefully) discovered by Mystique, a shapeshifter who offered to be her foster mother. While in this guise, Mystique inducted Rogue into "The Brotherhood of Evil Mutants," a mutant terrorist organization. At Mystique's demand, Rogue absorbed the energy of the mutant superhero Ms. Marvel and, despite Rogue's protests, Mystique encouraged her to hang on when draining her victim's energy longer than she ever had before. This incident caused Rogue to permanently absorb Ms. Marvel's powers of superstrength, invulnerability, and flight and sent Ms. Marvel into a persistent vegetative state. The memories of Ms. Marvel's that Rogue absorbed began to drive her insane, so Rogue ran away from the Brotherhood, joined with Xavier, and Xavier helped Rogue bury Ms. Marvel's memories in her subconscious to keep her from losing control. Obviously, Rogue's backstory is fairly complex, but it functions to establish Rogue as a three-dimensional character, showing a strength garnered through a number of very troubling hardships. The writers of *X-Men* work this troubled past into Rogue's character while giving her a smiling, positive outlook on life, making her seem both tragic and extremely strong-willed.

<div align="center">**Physical Presentation**</div>

Male physical presentation during this era reflects to a certain extent the shift away from the hypermasculine 80s. The male characters for the most part aren't as on display as they are in shows like *He-Man* (although most of the gargoyles on *Gargoyles* are wearing loin-cloths similar to He-Man's); most of the male characters of the 90s are more covered by their costumes. Also, while the male bodies continue to reflect a heavily muscled masculine ideal, they aren't as over-the-top muscular as the

hypermasculine men of the 80s shows (Goliath of *Gargoyles* again represents the character most reflective of this hypermasculine body with his massive height, biceps, and broad shoulders).

In terms of the women's physical presentation, Ivy and Elisa are extremely similar. Ivy wears a pair of somewhat baggy khaki cargo pants, a white V-neck tee-shirt (which retains a moderately high neckline), a bomber jacket, and what appears to be a pair of green Chuck Taylors. Elisa has on a pair of fairly tight (but not excessively revealing) blue-jeans cuffed at the bottom with a waist line above where her belly button should probably be. She wears a loose-fitting black tee-shirt and what appears to be a burgundy bomber jacket over top. Her shoes are sensible, black, and without a heel. Neither woman is sporting makeup (beyond the conventional colored lips that may or may not represent lipstick) nor do they wear jewelry or possess inexplicably long fingernails. Elisa, who is ambiguously olive-complected, has long, dark, controlled hair and Ivy, who is fair-skinned, sports a tuft of somewhat wild red hair. Their bodies do not showcase overly defined musculature, but instead (on the occasions where their limbs *are* visible) reflect the conventional "thin but not especially muscular" visual style of females we've seen in the genre so far. Overall, both Ivy and Elisa are presented modestly and dressed functionally.

These presentational similarities are especially interesting when viewed in light of all the other shows/characters we've examined. With the exception of the women of *G.I. Joe*, Elisa and Ivy are the characters most representative of real-world females. Like Lady Jay and Scarlett, Elisa and Ivy do not have superpowers nor do they exist in some fantasy land like Eternia; they are acting as realistic women with realistic jobs

functioning in a recognizable world (even if this world is teeming with gargoyles). While the women of *G.I. Joe* are a bit more sexualized in their presentation than Ivy and Elisa (Lady Jay's army fatigues are worn in a slightly suggestive manner and Scarlett's uniform is skin-tight), as a unit they still represent a far more modest physical presentation than the superheroines that make up the rest of the genre. Perhaps the fantasy elements that accompany fantastical details like superpowers give creators a sense of fantasy in the physical presentation as well, and thus when trying to reflect "realistic" heroines, the creators tone down the impossible dimensions or oversexualized costumes to reflect a more modest woman. But on a similar note, perhaps it also stems from a lack of need to overcompensate. As was mentioned above and as we will see a bit later, the trend of the 90s was to create physically strong superpowered heroines but to compensate for this symbolic masculinity through hyperfeminization through sexualized means. These women, lacking superpowers that give them masculinized abilities beyond those of normal men, perhaps do not necessitate this symbolic reinscription into the realm of female sexuality. In either case, Ivy and Elisa represent our least sexualized female heroes in terms of physical presentation thus far.

Before moving on, however, I would like to point out that there are a few episodes where Elisa changes her clothes. In episode 32, "Protection," Elisa goes undercover as a crooked cop to catch a mob boss named Drakon. Here, Elisa wears a bright blue bodice that shows off both her stomach and her cleavage. She wears low-riding tight black pants that dip well below her belly button. On top, she wears a black blazer-type jacket cut short at the bottom to stop where her bodice stops, revealing her stomach and lower back. She also wears black boots with high heels. In episode 60,

"Turf," Elisa also goes undercover as a thief to catch another mob boss. In this episode, she wears a purple sweater that, although the neck goes all the way to the top, prominently features her breasts. She wears a blonde wig, a choker collar, a short skirt, thigh-high boots, and a long purple trench-coat. These two instances represent the only times Elisa gets racy in her physical presentation. Ideologically, I find this interesting: the fact that good Elisa wears conservative clothing while Elisa-playing-bad wears sexually revealing clothing points to an ideological statement that morally good girls and morally bad girls can be separated by the way they dress and the amount of sexuality they promote through their clothing choices.

Angela, the female gargoyle introduced as Goliath's daughter in episode 35 "Avalon Part 2," is not especially interesting in her physical presentation. Being a humanoid rather than a human, her physical presentation allows for a lot more ideological leeway. She is drawn with far more muscle definition then either of the women above. Her clothing is scant, only a tattered white tank top dress that splits at her legs and hangs down in the front and back about a foot below her crotch, but all the male gargoyles (except Hudson, the rotund elderly male) wear nothing but hotpants made of animal-skins, so while she's scantly clad by outside definitions, she's no more on display than the male gargoyle bodies. While her musculature is drawn harder and stronger than the human women above, she's also feminized with a few distinct markers such as prominent breasts, earrings, and a gold bracelet.

The women of *X-Men* represent a different approach to the female superhero body. Jean, Storm, and Rogue are drawn with far more muscular physiques than any of the women we've encountered thus far. With the exception of their arms which remain

small and sticklike (juxtaposed with the male *X-Men*'s huge biceps), the women have

solid musculature drawn into their legs and especially into their abdominals. This "hard"

physique shows a trend toward transgressing into the male side of O'Day's gender

binary, a trend avoided by the previous characters we've examined. The costumes

donned by these superwomen create a double-bind of representation common to the

superhero genre in general (in representations of both men and women): while the

costumes in each case cover the whole body (excluding the head), they're so "skintight"

that the character almost appears nude. Therefore, instead of the legless unitards sported

by Wonder Woman and Teela, the women are fully covered, but much like Scarlett,

everything is still fully visible. Along with a masculinizing hard muscled body, the

women of *X-Men* have very large breasts and out-of-control sexy hair, both aspects

pointed to by Scott Bukatman (65) and Jeffrey A. Brown (62) as trends in the

sexualization of masculinized action heroines during the 90s, attempting to compensate

for transgressive masculine traits with exaggerated sexualized feminine signifiers.

Interestingly, however, this refeminization takes place only on a bodily level: unlike

characters like Wonder Woman from *Superfriends*, Cheetara from *ThunderCats*, or even

Angela from *Gargoyles*, these women aren't given accessories like bracelets, high heels,

long nails, or makeup to feminize them—Storm has on a pair of lighting bolt earrings, but

other than that, the women are without such feminine accessories. So while the

producers of *X-Men* are able to step beyond these accessory-signifiers of femininity and

produce masculinized bodies, they refeminize them through sexualizing specifically

female body parts such as hair and breasts.

Interestingly, Rogue is the only character of the entire bunch whose beauty is mentioned explicitly, especially by villains. In episode 9, "The Cure," Mystique (disguised as a doctor) tells Rogue, "You have great strength as well as great beauty." In episode 26, "Reunion Part 2," the evil Mr. Sinister tells Rogue she's "so beautiful yet so strong." This verbal reinforcement of Rogue's physical beauty (which apparently isn't necessary for any of the other characters) gives insight into what appears to be a tension for the producers: Rogue is so masculinized by her dominating physical strength that her female beauty must be verbally reinforced so as not to be missed in all the masculine signifiers. Also, Sinister's comment "so beautiful *yet* so strong" indicates an underlying assumption that the two should be mutually exclusive; the use of the word "yet" implies surprise in the combination of both attributes. Therefore, Rogue's beauty is the only one focused upon overtly because she is the most masculinized and thus the one whose beauty is most likely to be undercut by her masculine characteristics—some kind of reinforcement of this feminine characteristic of "beauty" must be forced-fed to the audience in order to keep Rogue from being seen as symbolically male.

Powers/Skills

The women of this mid-90s wave of shows build upon the pattern of masculinized powers that we began to see in the 80s. With a focus on physical contact and fighting ability, we see the trends of active rather than passive abilities that began with Teela and the ladies of *G.I. Joe* reflected and amplified in both the human and superhuman women of the 90s.

The human characters have masculinized, active, and plausible skills and abilities. Elisa Maza, being a trained police officer, has highly honed detective skills, solid aim

with a revolver, and some very useful hand-to-hand combat skills (which she showcases numerous times, but which is highlighted most during episode 4, "Awakening Part 4," where she must protect the stone Goliath from would-be kidnappers).[4] Ivy, our teen detective from *Where on Earth Is Carmen Sandiego?*, also, lacks paranormal abilities. Her skills include acrobatics and well honed martial-arts skills (most notably showcased when she wrestles an angry alligator to protect her whimpering younger brother in episode 4, "Moondreams"). It's interesting that both of these non-superpowered heroines, the ones that most closely mirror real life women, are trained in physical hand-to-hand combat skills, adding what many would see as a masculinizing influence to their characters while in some cases the male counterparts (Ivy's brother Zack, for instance) are given non-combative passive (and thus seen as feminizing) abilities such as linguistic talents and technological skills.

Angela, the daughter of Goliath in *Gargoyles*, has the requisite gargoyle strength, speed, and flight. However, the fact that every gargoyle in the clan has these abilities and that others (such as Lexington, the gargoyle trained with technology) have individualizing skills make these abilities, while somewhat masculinizing, otherwise unimpressive.

The women of *X-Men,* prove to have the most interesting and most psychoanalytically telling powers. Jean Grey's powers represent a throwback to what Bukatman describes as the passive and traditional powers of female heroines (65). Jean's main powers are her telekinesis and telepathy, abilities that make her most valuable for communications and reconnaissance. The passive nature of these powers keeps her out

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[4] Unfortunately, these skills that prove so useful in the first season seem to drop away the second season: instead, Elisa develops the skills to get kidnapped and yell Goliath's name in the face of danger.

of the majority of the actual battles. However, she develops new abilities in episode 29, "The Phoenix Saga: The Sacrifice Part 1," when she is possessed by the cosmic entity known as the Phoenix. The Phoenix, which both possess Jean and acts in tandem with her, gives Jean a multitude of new powers, such as control of fire, teleportation, superstrength, near invulnerability, and the ability to fly into the sun (among many others). Unfortunately, this massive power eventually refuses to leave Jean's body, desiring to revel in human sensation, and she goes insane, devouring stars, threatening Jean's friends, and eventually having to be confined and then killed (by killing Jean) to contain its dangerous power.

Storm, while she proves to be far more involved in combat situations, is also granted feminine coded powers with her control over nature. Along with her ability to control wind, temperature, rain, and snow, Storm can fly (allegedly held aloft by the wind) and shoot lightning. These powers, all related to the cycles of the Earth and its weather, are symbolically coded feminine through the "mother nature" or "Earth mother" archetype association. This is balanced in her character, however, with the physical fighting skills she proves to wield (without her powers) in the episode mentioned above (episode 5 "Captive Hearts") where she defeats the leader of the Morlocks in a bowstaff and hand-to-hand battle.

Storm's powers make an interesting ideological statement on their own. In episodes 34 and 35, the "Savage Land, Strange Heart" storyline mentioned above, Storm is hypnotized by an evil mutant and told to remove her inhibitions, to feel her emotions fully and freely. This is done in an attempt to let the weather rage with her emotions: "Deep within this weather witch lies untold power…one need only release her self

control and boundless life energy will surge!" This encounter leaves everyone in her wake awed and humbled by the amount of power Storm wields. I point this out for two reasons: first, to note the ideological nod toward the dangers of women with too much power (something I will be discussing in a moment), and secondly to point to the fact that unlike most of the "strong" women we've looked at, the strength in Storm's abilities comes from their unrestrained coded feminine power rather than the inscription of a power traditionally defined as masculinizing such as strength or savage hand-to-hand combat abilities. Storm is the only immensely powerful character whose force comes through symbolically feminine expression.

Finally, Rogue is by far (again) the most masculinized of the characters under scrutiny. Rogue's base power is her ability to absorb the energy, the powers, the memories, and the life-force from anyone she comes in skin-to-skin contact with. As mentioned above, this power denies her much human affection and causes a lot of turmoil both from its use (her possession by Ms. Marvel) and by fear of its use. Beyond this, Rogue has Ms. Marvel's powers of immense strength, invulnerability, and the ability to fly. Rogue's strength and invulnerability make her the X-Men's most powerful physical fighting member, an interesting position for a woman, one that we haven't seen in any of the shows we've scrutinized thus far. Unlike Storm whose ultra-powerful capabilities come strictly from symbolically female realms, Rogue crosses gender boundaries with her immense masculine strength, making *X-Men* fascinating and progressive for its use of both feminized and masculinized female powerhouses.

Rogue's power, of course, offers a different ideological message as well. Rogue's sexualized persona coupled with her killer touch promotes an ideological message of the

dangers of female sexuality. Here, the audience is exposed to a character who is very

sexualized in her dialogue through teasing flirtation, has verbally reinforced beauty, a

number of sexualized female signifiers, but is absolutely deadly in a sexualized physical

situation. Gambit's constant pandering for a kiss flirts with this danger, but in episode 14

"Till Death Do Us Part Part 1" when Gambit actually takes this kiss, he's knocked

unconscious after only a few brief seconds. Rogue's power takes on an ideological

"castration" element when coupled with her dangerous sexual appeal.

Despite the progressive strides *X-Men* makes in its female representation through

the powers (and the amount of power) the producers grant the women, this power is also

reigned in and placed within an ideological context of "danger" outside of a purely sexual

context. As I mention above, when Jean is possessed by the Phoenix, the entity that

grants her nearly absolute power, she is corrupted by it. The Phoenix uses Jean's body,

destroying star systems, attacking her friends, and endangering countless lives, in order to

have a gluttonous feast of human emotion and sensation: "I've already been freed. Free

from the constraints of sympathy and morality that bind ordinary human beings. The

Phoenix Force inside me aches for sensation!" (Episode 38 "The Dark Phoenix: Inner

Circle Part 2") (note the fact that in its bid for power, the Phoenix rebukes the

stereotypical good-girl female emotions of sympathy and morality, making her

transgressive and thus dangerous). Jean's access to untold power acts as a corrupting

force when unrestrained passion comes into play. Similarly, Storm's formidable powers

necessitate keeping a lockdown on her symbolically feminine emotions (and as a logical

extension, her sexual passion), "lest [her] powers rage out of control" (Episode 34

"Savage Land, Strange Heart Part 1") and she becomes an unfettered force of destruction.

In this situation as well, Storm links this unrestrained access to both her powers and her passionate emotions as freeing: "I liked letting go. Never before have I felt so free" (Episode 35 "Savage Land, Strange Heart Part 2"). And while Rogue never has a time when she lets go of her passions and it almost destroys the world, her expression of passion is bound as well—were she to act upon her feelings of lust, loneliness, or romantic desire (as she did with her boyfriend, Cody), her powers will function as a destructive force, draining (read castrating) and possibly killing the recipient.

This setup creates a disheartening ideological message for a show as seemingly progressive as *X-Men*. While the women are granted quite a bit of power, the message promoted here is the danger of that power. In both Storm's and Jean's cases, they are given a neutral ultimate power source but are unable to wield it without becoming corrupted by it. In essence, the fact that the women of *X-Men* are unable to control the destructive powers they are given and that they are corrupted by it creates an ideological message that women should not wield immense power; they aren't capable of handling it—they'll only end up eating star-systems and trying to kill their friends.

Team Dynamics

In terms of team dynamics, Ivy, while positive, is also the least interesting representation. The team roles are well defined: the disembodied head of the chief plays comic relief and informant, Ivy is the action star, and Zack is the techno-guy and the linguist. Zack and Ivy treat each other with a teasing sibling antagonism, but it always has a net of support and fondness beneath it. While the two function in a highly egalitarian fashion, Ivy seems to be a bit more authoritative and thus the leader. Overall, they respect each other's opinions, and they correct each other quite a bit without anger

or resentment. They both function as sounding boards for learning geographical and world history facts; one is not always right and one is not always wrong.

As for the women of *Gargoyles*, in the first season, as mentioned above, Elisa is a very strong, useful, and independent character. Her authority is respected by the male gargoyles, and they turn to her for help. She takes charge, tells them what they should and should not be doing, and can throw a punch or aim a gun (with authority). As the second season rolls around, the dynamic shifts from one of Elisa as a guide/protector to Elisa and Goliath within a beauty and the beast fantasy. Her power and authority as a knowledgeable guide and advisor is diminished by the developed worldliness of the gargoyles, she plays a much smaller role in the action/adventure elements of the show, and she gets relegated to a "go to for favors" kind of character rather than the strong team-member she is in the first season. In the second season, Elisa spends many of the early episodes as a convenient informant, popping in early in the episode to give the gargoyles the location of a robbery and then disappearing. The romantic elements of her relationship with Goliath become more pronounced during this season, although Elisa is the one to shut Goliath down when he tries to have a romantic moment with her, reminding him of the impossibility of their interspecies love (Episode 57 "The Gathering Part 1"). But mostly, especially during the 20 episodes that focus on a side-odyssey involving only Goliath, Angela, Elisa, and the dog Bronx, Elisa functions solely to be captured, giving Goliath someone to save and protect.

Angela essentially spends most of her time on the show filling the team role of "Goliath's daughter." The vast majority of her screen time is spent on her determination to get him to treat her like a daughter and on her quest to reform her mother, Demona.

Otherwise, she is given absolutely no leadership roles nor is she respected for any particular skills. She just serves the function of "childlike woman." (Interestingly, she seems to fill the naïve role the other gargoyles filled in the first season.) Angela can fight, but she doesn't serve any greater "team" style purpose beyond "possible love interest," a role that proves more to distract and incapacitate the other male gargoyles in their fight for her attention than it does serve a useful team function (Episode 60 "Turf"). During the side-quest with Elisa and Goliath, Angela, much like Elisa, functions largely to get captured and give Goliath someone to save, making Goliath during that 20 episode run a throwback to the all-powerful heroic hypermasculine male character of the 80s. All in all, despite the positive role Elisa plays in season one of *Gargoyles,* the women of season two have notably disempowering roles.

The women of *X-Men* serve a range of roles on the team. Jean is the stereotypical doting woman and the lackey of Xavier, constantly following a step behind him in his chair, taking care of him and doing what he tells her. Otherwise, she usually gets herself into trouble and requires saving. Her relationship with Scott and her feelings for Wolverine make her the object of a lot of ingroup fighting (she functions as a distraction). Rather than being in charge of her sexuality (which would prove to be the real threat to the male-dominated patriarchal team dynamic), she seems a slave to male desires for her, seemingly standing aside aghast while the men fight for her hand. Only occasionally (such as when she's possessed by the Phoenix) does Jean actually become actively involved in combat; she's often at home with Cerebro (the X-Men's psychic supercomputer) or being captured. Overall, she's the stereotypically feminine woman that either necessitates saving from the big strong men that fight over her or functions as

team den-mother (she goes as far as to bake cookies in episode 8 "The Unstoppable Juggernaut").

Storm, on the other hand, is a leader; she's third-in-command after Xavier and Cyclops. She is given a number of chances to lead field teams, and she does so successfully. Everyone treats her with respect both in battle situations (respect as a leader) and outside (respect as a person). She often fulfills the role of sage, offering wise philosophical advice to those that are troubled (such as Jubilee in episode 1, "Night of the Sentinels Part 1"). The other characters do treat her with a bit of emotional distance, but still with affection and reverence. The only person that ever refuses to obey her commands is Wolverine, the hot-headed hypermasculine male that plays the loner and rebukes most leaders' orders.

Rogue is the team's resident sex-pot. She's full of piss and vinegar, but she is well treated by the rest of the team. She doesn't have the aura of awe and respect that Storm has as a leader, but she's seen as a trusted and beloved member. Gambit makes sexualized comments to her quite a bit, but she almost always rebukes him with snide sarcastic remarks. And while she and Gambit are involved in this sexualized back-and-forth that in some cases could be seen as sexual harassment, this sexual harassment instead comes off as a teasing flirtatious rapport with the disturbing "harassment" aspects undermined by the obvious existence of a true (frustrated) loving relationship between the two. Rogue is not given leadership roles, but she is also seen neither as incompetent (like Jubilee) nor untrustworthy (like Gambit).

Effectiveness

By far, the women of these 90s teams prove to be the most effective action/adventure female team members that we have seen thus far. Where the women of the 80s wave of shows were automatically subjugated to the hypermasculine heroic character, the women of the 90s wave (for the most part) are able to shine, proving their capability without being forced to cater to disempowering masculine power fantasies.

Ivy's single-handedly wrestles an alligator; it doesn't get more effective than that (Episode 4 "Moondreams"). But beyond that, both Zack and Ivy are highly effective team members. They make mistakes, but by working as a team, they overcome their mistakes. In fact, they work so closely as a team, and almost every puzzle is solved by their combined effort and brain power that it's nearly impossible to tease out individual effectiveness. They're both highly ineffective in their attempts to catch Carmen; she escapes in every episode. But even then, Carmen is the first female head of a villain cartel we've seen, so her incessant ability to outsmart the detectives doesn't prove as disempowering to Ivy's strength as a woman as it would be if she was male.

The effectiveness of the women of *Gargoyles* is sharply divided between the first and second season. In the first season, Elisa is highly effective as a detective, an advisor, and a fighter. As mentioned above, she single-handedly fought (unarmed) a number of armed mercenaries to protect Goliath in episode 4, "Awakening Part 4." Elisa is the only team member whose instincts tell her not to trust the nefarious Xanatos; she warns the gargoyles, but Goliath refuses to listen to her, so she goes around his authority and convinces the other gargoyles without his consent (Episode 9 "Enter MacBeth"). When Demona enslaves Goliath with a mind-control spell in episode 7 "Temptation," Elisa is

the only one creative enough to find a way around the lack of a counter-spell (she orders the tranced Goliath to act for the rest of his life as though he was never placed under a spell). In the first season, Elisa is brilliant, authoritative, and a highly effective fighter.

Of course, as we've seen with the rest of the sections, this all changes in the second season. When the focus shifts to the gargoyles (and most especially Goliath) ideologically reverting to the tried-and-true 80s model of the empowered masculine hero and the disempowered female victim, Elisa's effectiveness drops off sharply. She goes from being an in-group respected advisor to being an outsider with only a minor ambassadorial function. Her effectiveness as a team member gets undermined by her role as damsel-in-distress and love interest. While she still gets to draw a gun or throw a punch on occasion, it usually backfires or she is overpowered and thus, again, she necessitates saving.

Angela, who came into the show in the second season, is never portrayed as effective. She helps with the hand-to-hand fighting periodically, but she's never especially successful. On the occasions where she does help in a fight, it involves her tackling minions, but she is almost always tossed aside by the main bad guys if she goes in for an attack; the main villains are almost always reserved for Goliath to defeat. And like Elisa, her effectiveness is completely undercut by her function as whiny daughter, fight-inducing love interest, and easily captured bait.

For most of the series, Jean is by far the least effective of the women from *X-Men*. Of course, in the end, she proves to be *the* most powerful and most useful character by single-handedly saving the entire universe as the Phoenix (Episode 33 "The Phoenix Saga: Child of Light Part 5). Naturally, this power corrupts her and she has to kill

herself, detracting a bit from the effective power of her actions (Episode 40 "The Dark Phoenix: The Fate of Phoenix Part 4"). Before the Phoenix possess her, however, her telepathy and telekinesis prove somewhat useful; she uses her psychokinetic energy to short out a control panel, freeing her friends in episode 24 "MojoVision" and she proves extremely useful in stopping the physically unstoppable Juggernaut in episode 8 "The Unstoppable Juggernaut" by attacking his mind. However, overcome by the strain of stopping Juggernaut, Jean faints, establishing a strongly disempowering pattern of either fainting or collapsing. Jean either faints or collapses from over-exertion in episodes 8, 19, 20, twice in episode 21, and episode 28. This is especially copious when taking into account that Jean is one of the least utilized characters, so these 5 episodes represent a large number of the episodes prior to the introduction of the Phoenix Saga in which Jean is featured. And beyond this tendency to be overcome by her power and collapse, Jean's telepathic abilities are often noted as being secondary to the more powerful telepathic abilities of Charles Xavier, thus subjugating her effectiveness even more.

Storm, unlike Jean, is highly effective both as a fighter and as a team leader. Her powers are used in a variety of very effective fashions, at times functioning to create subterfuge (by creating fog), slowing down enemies (with either wind or ice), and at times used for violent purposes (by shooting bolts of lightening). Her powers prove to be the most useful on a number of occasions, especially her ability to freeze enemies (her freezing powers prove to be the only recourse in battling both Nimrod, an unstoppable robot, in episode 11 "Days of Future Past Part 1" and Omega Red, an unstoppable Russian war machine, in episode 17 "Red Dawn"). As mentioned twice before, Storm single-handedly defeats Callisto, the leader of the Morlocks, and is made their leader

while both combating her crippling claustrophobia and refusing to use her powers.

However, despite all of these testaments to her effectiveness, she is a bit undercut by a

tendency similar to Jean's to faint when she "overdoes" her powers. Storm's fainting

spells aren't nearly as frequent as Jean's (especially proportionally, considering that her

character is utilized far more often); Storm only faints a few times, once after stopping

approaching missiles in episode 3 "Enter Magneto," and once after creating a huge storm

to destroy a dam in episode 7 "Slave Island." Overall, despite the occasional moments of

over-exertion, Storm proves to be a *highly* effective, powerful, and capable character.

Rogue, too, is extremely effective. Unlike her female *X-Men* counterparts, Rogue

does *not* have a tendency to pass out when she's overexerted. Often times, Rogue is the

only one left standing (as in episode 4 "Deadly Reunions"). Her strength and

invulnerability make her one of the major action players, proving to be perhaps *the* best

fighter on the team. Her ability to absorb makes her versatile, not only to disable villains,

but also to steal and use their powers or to absorb troublesome influences (she absorbs

the evil control Apocalypse placed on his slave Archangel in episode 10 "Come the

Apocalypse," also pointing to her self-sacrificing and internally strong nature by saying

"I took the evil away when I touched you. It's part of me now"). While it's rare that

Rogue's abilities are the *only* way to stop a villain (as with Jean and Juggernaut or Storm

and Omega Red), her ability to fight in all situations, her strength and invulnerability, and

the versatility of her powers make her perhaps the *most* effective female character we've

examined thus far.

Conclusions

The cultural distance that had been made from the hypermasculine 80s allowed

for the 90s to finally begin to move beyond the manliness neurosis and begin to feature

more prominent and powerful women. By creating a deeper complexity in children's

television through implementing a serialized format, space for more complex, prominent,

and powerful women with deep personas and personalities was created (although, as we

can see with the second season of *Gargoyles*, just because this space for complexity

exists doesn't mean feminist progression will automatically occur). These two cultural

developments establish the 90s as an era of doubly positive possibilities for the creation

of female action/adventure heroines in a team based setting. For the most part, this

positive climate was taken advantage of: the 90s gave us by far the most powerful and

effective female team members yet. In some cases, however (as with *Gargoyles*), the

break from the previous format of hypermasculine hero and damsel-in-distress

subservient heroines was too great a departure from the accepted norm, necessitating a

return to roots. Others (as with Ivy from *Where on Earth Is Carmen Sandiego?*) maintain

a very strong, positive, notably feminist portrayal of a capable, intelligent, and physically

formidable female model even outside a serialized format. Others still (as with the

women of *X-Men*) dealt with this tension between powerful (read masculinized) heroines

by reinscribing them with bodily feminine sexual markers such as large breasts and wild,

long hair. Regardless of how this tension between the desire for strong female characters

and the culture's changing but still lingering concern with maintaining masculine

dominance is dealt with, the 90s gave us very strong, powerful, complex, interesting

female models for our young boys (and girls), indicating a trend toward female

empowerment as the decade wanes. Finally, in the next chapter, we will look at the

heroines of the new millennium to see if this trend indeed holds true, perhaps progressing

the female empowerment to a more stable level without these enmeshed tensions.

CHAPTER IV

JUSTICE LEAGUE, TEEN TITANS, AND THE 00S:

"SUBLIMATING HER FEELINGS TO THAT HUGE HONKING MACE"

The prevalence of the American animated action team waned in the late 90s, giving way to the Japanese marketing tour-de-force of the *Pokemon* invasion of 1998. The overwhelming popularity of this cutesy Japanese animated import led to a number of similar shows flooding the market, driving out the majority of the American produced series. While the past ten years have maintained this influx of Japanese produced and stylized series (usually in the form of marketing behemoths like *Digimon* and *Yu-Gi-Oh* offering concurrent products such as video games, card-battle games, toy lines, etc. based on the show in question), market forces have influenced the landscape of animated television to a point where a number of changes have occurred, the most pivotal of which is the rise in popularity of cable television, sliding animated television into the realm of niche marketing and largely removing it from the hands of the major networks.

Turner Broadcasting originally began to air Cartoon Network in 1992. At this time, it was largely stocked with old Hanna-Barbara shorts. It wasn't until Turner Broadcasting merged with Time Warner in 1996 that Cartoon Network began producing much of its own original programming. Largely, these in-house productions were collections of comedic shorts (*Johnny Bravo, The PowerPuff Girls, Cow and Chicken,* etc.), but this merge with Time Warner allowed Cartoon Network access to another of Time Warner's subsidiaries: DC Comics. Therefore, characters like Batman, Superman, Wonder Woman, and many less recognizable names became possibilities for animated revival under the Cartoon Network Studios moniker.

At the same time, network television's traditional Saturday morning cartoon block began to reflect the recent corporate mergers with the companies behind the rising cable powerhouses. ABC's merger with Disney produced ABC's "One Saturday Morning" lineup of recycled or cross-promoted Disney Channel productions. Time Warner's duel ownership of the WB and Cartoon Network allowed for a similar cross promotion of in-house productions. At the same time, the major networks (CBS, NBC, and ABC) were cutting back on their amount of animated programming on Saturday mornings, instead including live action teen-oriented shows (i.e. *Saved By the Bell* and *California Dreams*) or weekend editions of their soft news programs (i.e. *Good Morning America* and *The Early Show*). Fox and WB, the hold-outs on traditional Saturday morning programming, cut out their weekday afternoon blocks of animated programming in the early 2000s. The animated series, with the rise of popularity of cable television, began to be relegated to the niche market filled by specialty cable channels like Toon Disney, Cartoon Network, and (to a lesser extent), Nickelodeon (which features a number of live action kids shows).

Why is this all important? This is important because all of these factors led to the creation of a powerful niche network (specifically Cartoon Network) which pulls in a number of viewers that at one time flocked to network television. These viewers bring in advertising revenue that allows for the production of well made shows, and the merger with Time Warner gave the production company a number of Warner Bros. and DC characters to draw from. On top of this, the 24-hour cartoon format of a niche channel allows for the production of animated television for different kinds of audiences (such as a prime time adult/adolescent audience as opposed to the early day young child audience). Because of these market factors, Cartoon Network and Warner Bros. Studios

began to produce two very different popular American animated action adventure teams from DC characters: *Justice League* (later reimagined and renamed *Justice League Unlimited*) and *Teen Titans*.

THE CONTEXT

It should also be noted that the cultural climate of the time (the early to mid 2000s) was one of post-*Spice Girls* third-wave feminism. After the hypermasculinity of the men in the 80s and the masculinization of heroic women as a trend of the 90s, the third-wave feminism movement toward "girl power" exemplified by the message of the *Spice Girls* created a scene where strong women could and should be both sexy (in a traditional feminine way) and powerful. Third-wave feminism focused on the idea that a woman's choices should not be hindered by anyone, including second wave feminists that attempted to push women away from traditional gender roles. The arguments of third-wave feminism state that women should be able to choose those roles if they so desire, thus creating space for the girly-yet-powerful sexy heroine. What we find in this new batch of shows is a reflection of this, giving us both masculine beautiful heroines and girly feminine heroines. (For a more detailed discussion of the precepts of third-wave feminism, see Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake's *Third Wave Agenda: Being Feminist, Doing Feminism.*)

THE SHOWS

Justice League debuted in 2001 on Cartoon Network in a primetime time slot (and later rerun during the more youth oriented "Miguzi" programming block of the mid afternoons). *Justice League* was produced by Bruce W. Timm, one of the producers of the highly successful *Batman: The Animated Series* of the early 90s. The show

(originally) features seven superheroes: Batman, Superman, Wonder Woman, Green Lantern, Hawkgirl, the Flash, and J'onn J'onnz (known in the comics as Martian Manhunter). After the second season of *Justice League*, the producers began a reimagining, a reformatting, and a renaming, changing to *Justice League Unlimited* and bringing in a multitude of lesser known DC heroes. The original seven heroes remain part of the team as the group leaders, but have a much smaller role in the reimagined series.

One of the key components of the *Justice League* animated series is the focus on the individuality of the team members; they work together, but often their personalities conflict. In this series, the team is composed of seven people used to working alone; internal conflicts abound as egos are pushed, opinions differ, and heroes refuse to follow orders. Relationships spring up between various members, specifically Hawkgirl and Green Lantern (who is African American in the animated series but not {usually} in the comic books), creating deeper levels of emotional conflict. *Justice League* is written to be a show that appeals to a wide age range, providing adult complexity in the characters' personalities and conflicts, but appealing to youngsters as well with its traditional heroics and battle sequences (the appeal to youth can be seen through its popularity on the weekday afternoon youth oriented Maguzi programming block). Despite the inclusion of a number of female minor characters in the shift to *Justice League Unlimited*, my study will focus on Wonder Woman and Hawkgirl.

Teen Titans, which debuted in 2003, provides a very different text. Aimed at a younger demographic than *Justice League*, *Teen Titans* includes kid-heroes (heroes that are meant to be teens but look even younger), heavy comedic elements, and a number of

anime (Japanese animation) stylistic components such as "bulging, elasticized heads whenever the characters were angry, enormous popping eyes whenever these same characters register fear or surprise, pie-shaped mouths that merrily flapped away out of synch with the dialog, Three Stooges-style sound effects, screen-filling closeups, perpetual-motion backgrounds, and montage-like jumpcuts…during the action sequences" (Erikson, 832). The show focuses on characters from the DC comic of the same name: Robin (Batman's old sidekick), Starfire (an orange female alien), Beast Boy (a green kid that can shapeshift into animals), Raven (a gothic occult telekinetic), and Cyborg (half man/half robot). These kids live in Titans' Tower and fight crime. Between missions, they play video games, argue, and eat pizza. The focus of *Teen Titans* is friendship and togetherness rather than *Justice League's* more adult themed emotional conflict and drama. I will be focusing on Starfire and Raven, the two female members of the Titans team.

ANALYSIS

Personality

Unlike the completely flat personality of the Wonder Woman in *Super Friends*, the *Justice League* Wonder Woman is given a very strong (and strongly masculinized) personality. First, she is made to be a character that is powerful, proud, and authoritative ("I am Diana, princess of the Amazons. I won't be denied" {episode 10, "Paradise Lost Part 1"}). She immediately responds to threats in an aggressive and decisive manner (when a very large security guard lays a hand on her in episode 20, "A Knight of Shadows Part 1," Wonder Woman looks at him, calls him a "stupid little man," and throws him across the lawn), and she refuses to allow anyone to challenge her skill or

authority without countering and reinforcing her masculine coded power (when she first appears to the team in episode 2, "Secret Origins Part 2," Green Lantern is wary of her going into entrenched battle, "This is no job for amateurs," to which a threatening Wonder Woman replies "We Amazons are warriors born. Want to test me?" and stares him down). On top of this, her naivety toward the ways of the world (specifically those of feminized women) reinforces this masculine streak (in episode 10, "Paradise Lost Part 1," Wonder Woman first sees a mall, noting that it's like some kind of temple and questioning how "any female [could] wear such ridiculous garments.")

This masculinization is different, however, from the masculinization we see in Hawkgirl. Where Hawkgirl has a very physically aggressive masculinity (which we will see in a moment), Wonder Woman's masculinity manifests in more of a controlled, defensive manner. Being a princess from a foreign land, she is a foreign dignitary and behaves with the composure expected of one in such a position, offering her a sense of emotional distance and aloofness; B'wana Beast describes her as "kinda stuck up" in *Justice League Unlimited* episode 6 "This Little Piggy." While this emotional distance and collectedness functions as a masculinizing agent (as emotional outpourings are associated with the feminine side of the gender binary), it is different from the masculinizing passionate aggression of Hawkgirl.

The masculine quality and emotional distance of Wonder Woman's character is specifically pointed out in episodes 33 and 34, "Maid of Honor" parts 1 and 2, Wonder Woman befriends and protects a Paris Hilton style party-girl and princess of a fictional Eastern European country. After much goading and an attempt on her life, Audrey (the princess) talks Wonder Woman into acting as her bodyguard for the evening. Wonder

Woman attempts to discuss political issues and assassination plots with the princess, but Audrey refuses such menial conversation, instead whisking Wonder Woman off to night clubs. The function of this two part episode is to allow the otherwise distant, masculine, and diplomatically minded Wonder Woman to have fun, something her character is not apt to do otherwise, while also emphasizing her masculinized personality through juxtaposition with the hyper-girly personae of the party-girl princess and reinscribing Wonder Woman as a "woman" who is able to enjoy these types of acceptable womanly activities.

Finally, I must note the way in which Wonder Woman's problematic relationship with men plays out in her character's sexuality. Being from an island decidedly inhabited only by (man-hating) women, Wonder Woman is inscribed with a cultural history that makes her a threat to masculine power. Wonder Woman's people are the archetype of the castrating lesbian, being hateful of men, purposefully usurping their power, and proudly living without them. This stance plays out a number of times throughout the series, specifically when Aresia (a woman from Wonder Woman's island) escapes into the outside world and engineers a plague to kill all of Earth's men (episodes 16 and 17, "Fury" parts 1 and 2). Wonder Woman's character displays a tension with this position, being wary of men through the first season. This tension plays itself out in a conversation between Wonder Woman and Hawkgirl after all the men in the city have been incapacitated by the plague in episode 17, exemplifying their two differing stances on sexuality:

> Wonder Woman: "It almost reminds me of home."
> Hawkgirl: "Yes, but who wants to live in a world without men?"
> Wonder Woman: "They can't possibly be that essential to your life."
> Hawkgirl: "Don't knock it till you've tried it, Princess."

Her enculturated distaste of men is challenged for the first time (in a direct manner) by

this conversation with Hawkgirl. After this, Wonder Woman's character becomes less

castrating and more open to sexuality, willing to both use it as a means to an end (episode

21 "A Knight of Shadows Part 2") and to open up to flirtations with men (Steve Trevor in

episodes 24-26 "The Savage Time" and Batman later on in the series). Her stance

remains largely skeptical of men as the tension between her castrating upbringing and her

experience with men come into conflict, but she eventually becomes involved in

relationships of respect and affection with men.

       Hawkgirl, as I said above, is also highly masculinized. Unlike Wonder Woman

who is emotionally reserved, distant, and defensive in her masculinity, Hawkgirl is highly

and passionately aggressive. She is often the first to jump into battle with mace

swinging, preferring action to talk (numerous examples, but specifically episode 2

"Secret Origins Part 2"). She speaks her mind often, refusing to censor her aggression.

She's very confident in herself and her abilities, refusing to apologize when others point

out what they deem incorrect about her behavior. She often refuses to follow orders,

especially if they're orders that she stand down. She takes pride in being the "bad cop"

(episode 41, "The Terror Beyond"). She loathes being forced into traditionally female

roles, a position illustrated by the producers (and juxtaposed with the gendered

dichotomy of golden-age superheroes) in episode 18, "Legends Part 1," when the team is

moved to an alternate reality protected by stereotypical 50s superheroes.

> Black Siren (The "Justice Society's one female member): "I think I have some freshly baked
> cookies. Let's let the men talk."
> Hawkgirl: "They can talk all they like!" *folds arms*
> Green Lantern: "Will you excuse us?" *they walk into a corner*
> Hawkgirl: "I will not be patronized!"
> …(Eventually, she agrees to do it)…
> Hawkgirl (As sarcastic as possible): "So, you fight crime and bake cookies? How do you do it?"

And she likes to start bar-fights (episode 12 "War World Part 1") on Christmas (episode 47 "Comfort and Joy").

While her personality is as aggressive as her approach to fighting, it's not usually abrasive (she doesn't pick fights like Teela did) except to Green Lantern, the man it eventually becomes evident she is in love with. This proves especially interesting because the fact that her character is inscribed with love should be feminizing, but her approach to his pursuit is so masculinized that it supersedes the feminizing influence. Hawkgirl's feelings for Green Lantern usually manifest in her picking fights with him. During the two part episode "Wild Cards" (episodes 48 and 49), the Joker is broadcasting the fight between the Royal Flush Gang and the Justice League to thousands of home viewers and commenting on the action. After Hawkgirl and Green Lantern start fighting, Joker cuts to his commentary: "Whew! Is it just me or is something going on between those two? Will Green Lantern ever admit to his feelings? Will Hawkgirl ever stop sublimating her feelings to that huge honking mace?" (episode 48). This question about Hawkgirl's mace is a good one; in a way we often associate with men, Hawkgirl sublimates her feelings with violence, refusing to admit to them, and instead taking the third-grade-boy approach of picking fights to show romantic interest. This combined with the statements of seemingly aggressive sexuality expressed in the above conversation with Wonder Woman about men indicates a woman with a highly masculinized sexual self.

These personalities function somewhat in parallel to the girls of *Teen Titans*. Like Wonder Woman, Starfire is an outsider to mainstream Earth culture. However, Starfire's personality is devoid of the masculinizing influences of Wonder Woman. Instead of

being authoritative, proud, strong, and confident, Starfire is insecure, excessively sweet, sentimental, and highly emotive. First, it must be understood that the producers have a high investment in the idea of Starfire as a naïve and childlike alien. Being new to our world and eager to learn, her speech patterns are often strange and her sense of Earth customs is often shown to be very poor. This puts Starfire in an already feminized and infantilized position as the naïve child, the one that constantly needs things explained to her (usually by Robin). Beyond this, Starfire embodies a number of feminine stereotypes: she functions as the group peacekeeper, attempting to mediate arguments so that everyone will get along (for example in episode 1 "Divide and Conquer" she tries to mediate the arguments between Cyborg and Robin and "initiate a group hug" and in episode 14 "How Long Is Forever?" she's thrust into the future and must reunite a team that fell apart in her absence), she often cooks for the team (although they usually refuse to eat the alien dishes), and eventually she gets a giant pet silkworm (named Silky) that she treats like a baby. Periodically (specifically when cute boys are around, like Aqualad in episode 8, "Deep Six"), Starfire gets the anime staple of hearts jutting forth from her eyes, a highly feminizing convention, and she does a lot of shrieking and yelping when danger pops out of nowhere. She is shown interested in girly activities, trying to talk the uninterested Raven into a girls' day out: "Conceivably it could be fun. We might journey to the mall of shopping or perform braiding maneuvers upon each other's hair!" (episode 7 "Switched"). Where Wonder Woman (Starfire's adult outsider counterpart) embodies a number of masculine traits, Starfire instead largely reinforces traditional feminine gender norms.

Raven, similarly, parallels the surly attitude of Hawkgirl. Where Starfire is the

cheerleader, Raven is the sullen goth. She is often shown reading ancient tomes while

the other team members are playing video games or watching trashy movies. She makes

sarcastic jokes at the expense of her friends (especially Beast Boy, the comic relief

character). She's easily annoyed by the exuberant antics of Starfire. She pointedly acts

anti-girly, functioning as a counterpart to Starfire's obvious femininization (in episode 18

"Fear Itself," she denies that she is capable of feeling fear, a denial that leads to

unexpected manifestations of her power). She isolates herself from the rest of the group,

her distance commonly popping up as an object of debate for the other team members

(Starfire states in episode 6 "Nevermore" that "Raven is complicated. There is much

about her we are not meant to understand"). Unlike Wonder Woman whose emotional

distance and aloof pride function to masculinize her, Raven's emotional distance seems

more a result of insecurity, undermining the masculine power that would deem it

independence and instead pushing it to the realm of fearful self-imposed isolation. She

fears what her friends think of her and feels too different to fit in; when Beast Boy refers

to her as "creepy," she hides in her room and ruminates: ""I am not creepy. I'm just

different. I wish there was someone who could understand that. Someone I could talk to.

Someone more like me" (episode 32 "Spellbound"). Her powers (which I'll discuss in a

moment) and her "dark side" (which she inherited from her father) require complete

control of her emotions at all times, causing her to appear stoic and apathetic. This lack

of emotion often makes her the sage voice of reason, adding another non-girly-but-not-

quite-masculine component to her character. She's wise and calm, but still insecure and

isolated, creating a mix of vaguely masculine and feminine qualities that give Raven a

dynamically gendered character.

Backstory

Wonder Woman's backstory, as always, places her as a princess on the island of Themyscira (formerly known as Paradise Island), an island of immortal Amazon warriors. Unlike the *Super Friends* origin story for Wonder Woman which involves her deceiving her mother with a tiny and not-really-concealing mask during a tournament, this time around, Wonder Woman rebukes her mother who demands she stay on the island, steals the legendary weapons, and leaves Themyscira to save a world she sees as being in peril (episodes 1 and 2, "Secret Origins" parts 1 and 2). While the accepted tale is that Wonder Woman was sculpted from clay by her mother, it is indicated in *Justice League Unlimited* episode 18 "The Balance" that she is perhaps the daughter of Hades, a one time lover of her mother Hippolyta.

Where Wonder Woman is the feminized (and highly conventional) "alien" princess, Hawkgirl's origin is, again, highly masculinized. Hawkgirl comes from the hostile planet Thanagar ("My home Thangar is a warlike world. There one must strike first or die" {episode 2 "Secret Origins Part 2"}), a culture that is pointedly atheist (as opposed to Wonder Woman's highly religious society, constantly praying and appealing to the Greek gods). She claims to have been a detective on Thanagar (episode 4 "In Blackest Night Part 1") that was teleported to Earth by a particle beam trap set by some criminals she was pursuing (episode 27 "Twilight Part 1"). She claims to have no idea where Thanagar is located in relation to Earth or how to contact it. This story proves to be a lie, however, when the Thanagarian army appears to destroy Earth in episodes 50-52 "Starcrossed." During "Starcrossed," it is revealed that Lieutenant Shayera Hol (Hawkgirl) is actually an advanced scout for the Thanagarian army sent to gain the trust

of Earth's mightiest heroes and learn their weaknesses. While Shayera was unaware that the Thanagarian army intended to destroy Earth, she still decieved the league, her friends, and the people of Earth in her mission. In the end of "Starcrossed," Hawkgirl stops her own people, saving her friends and the Earth she has come to love, and she voluntarily leaves the league, ending *Justice League* and ushering in *Justice League Unlimited*. During *Justice League Unlimited*, she is brought back into the team, but still, because of her past, is not especially trusted. Despite her deceit, Hawkgirl's backstory establishes her as a masculinized military woman (or detective), juxtaposing her with the traditional and feminized role of "princess" donned by Wonder Woman (even if she is princess of a race of warrior women).

Little is discussed of Starfire's backstory. What we do know again parallels Starfire with Wonder Woman (to a certain extent)—she too is a princess of a race of warrior people. Starfire's people, the hardy and violent Tamaranians, hail from the planet Tamaran. Starfire arrives on Earth after escaping from a prison ship on which she was being held (episode 62 "Go!"). After a very violent battle with the emerging Titans ("Go!," despite its lateness in the run of the series, is the flashback episode to the first meeting of the Titans), the bound and hostile princess kisses Robin (an act that allows her to instantly learn his language) and informs the team that she was captured by a rival planet and was going to be offered up as a prize to its leader. Impressed by this unfamiliar kindness she is being exposed to on Earth, Starfire decides to stay as a member of the Titans. Interestingly, in doing this, she shifts from a highly masculinized violent and aggressive character to the highly feminized emotional girly character we come to know throughout the series.

Raven's backstory is far more complex. While her character remains shrouded in mystery through the majority of the series, it's revealed in "Birthmark" (episode 42), "The Prophecy" (episode 46), and the three episodes that comprise "The End" (episodes 49-52) that Raven comes from a dimension called Azarath. We find out through these episodes that Raven is the child of a human (seeming) mother and an all powerful interdimensional evil demon named Trigon. Trigon states during this run of episodes that he sired Raven to use her as a portal to enter Earth's dimension and take it over. The influence of her father (as a manifestation of evil) manifests itself early on (episode 6 "Nevermore") as her uncontrollable rage, which takes on his form. The darkness she presumes she inherited from her father plays a large role in her fear of her own abilities and the emotional stoicism she must keep at all times.

Raven's backstory mirrors Hawkgirls in a similar way to how Starfire's mirrors Wonder Woman's. Raven, like Hawkgirl, represents a threat of betrayal. Her history establishes her with a dangerous secret; she, like Hawkgirl, is destined to be the downfall of her friends. These parallel backstories create an interesting ideological position: none of the male characters are written as a threat to their friends. The parallels between Raven and Hawkgirl indicate perhaps a wariness of women and the threat of their unspoken motives.

On a more empowering note, Raven's battle with her father and resistence to this "destiny" that is imposed on her represents a stronger ideological statement than just the resistance of evil. Trigon repeatedly refers to his daughter throughout this run of episodes as "the gem" and "the portal." Raven, in fighting against this, is not only fighting against the impending doom, but is also fighting against the objectification that

this represents. Trigon wants to dismiss his daughter as a person and establish her solely as an object he can use to establish his goals (which would, in theory, destroy her human self). Raven, of course, wants to retain her humanity and agency, and therefore fights against this patriarchal domination. In the end, Trigon does objectify her and uses her as a portal, but luckily for the Titans, this does not destroy her. It infantilizes her, making her a child again, but when faced with a fight against Trigon (the oppressor whose objectification devolved her to this state), Raven grows to full power and defeats him, thereby defeating his paternal control over her and overcoming the objectification he imposed on her.

Physical Presentation

The physical presentation of these post-millennium heroines speaks to a sexualization and objectification of the women's bodies not present for the men's. Of all the characters in both shows, only the women bare skin. The male characters (with the exception of Cyborg who has no costuming beyond his metallic body) all have skintight costumes that stretch from neck to wrist to toe. The degrees of visible skin in the women, however, vary between the characters. Wonder Woman and Hawkgirl have nothing above the breasts, their shoulders and arms bare. Raven's long sleeved leotard is legless (as is Wonder Woman's bathing-suit style costume). And Starfire is wearing a sleeveless belly-shirt, a miniskirt, and thigh high boots. All of the women are baring a fair amount of skin. The men, of course, bare nothing beyond head, neck, and hands. This creates a visual objectification of the female bodies by the producers of the images, one not present in the male bodies.

This feminization through objectification becomes more complex, however, when we look at the characters in more detail. For example, Wonder Woman's character is written to be oblivious to the sexual nature of her exposed body and the show's writers poke fun at both this obliviousness and this objectification in the series. In episode 39 "Eclipsed Part 1," Gordon Godfrey, the host of a television talk show, is criticizing the league. In his rant, he turns to Wonder Woman (and her costuming) in particular:

> Godfrey: "Role Models? Look, I've seen showgirls with more modesty than this so called Wonder Woman."
> (Wonder Woman punches a hole in the television)
> Wonder Woman: "I will not tolerate this!...And what's wrong with the way I dress!?!"
> Flash (to Green Lantern): "You want to take that?"
> (Wonder Woman flashes him a dirty look)

Obviously, the producers are self-consciously aware of the fetishized objectification of Wonder Woman and the sexual nature of her costuming. This internal criticism of Wonder Woman's costuming choice as a reflection of her quality of role model brings up an interesting possibility: perhaps the choice of the traditional Wonder Woman costume, the same starred and striped one-piece strapless swimsuit she wore in *Super Friends*, was used because of its iconic and traditional nature and this internal criticism is used by the producers of *Justice League* to criticize the sexual nature of this iconic staple. This possibility is reinforced when the internal criticism of the costuming continues in *Justice League Unlimited* episode 12, "The Once and Future Thing Part 1." After being flung into the past, Wonder Woman, Batman, and Green Lantern beat up some cowboy bandits and steal their clothes:

> Wonder Woman: "These shoes are killing me."
> Batman: "You usually fight crime in high heels."
> Wonder Woman: "High heels that fit."

Here, again, the producers of *Justice League* internally criticize their own costuming choices; they're mocking the established staple of Wonder Woman's high heeled boots

(and the high heeled boots of most animated heroines). One could imagine that perhaps the producers were bound to the traditional iconic costuming and found this to be the only subversive way to critique it, but then again, it's also possible that the writers are just poking fun at their own sexualization of a strong women, inscribing her as the "virgin-whore" archetype by making her a sexual object but unaware of her own sexuality (and perhaps a little of both).

The high heeled boots bring me to my next topic: refeminization through traditional visual female signifiers. As we've seen in some of our previous shows (and as was the trend in the hyperfeminized but superpowerful heroines of the 90s), it's not uncommon for producers to attempt to reign in the gender bending by covering masculine women with empty feminine signifiers. This, again, is the case with the strong women of *Justice League*. Wonder Woman (as is tradition) has on high heeled knee high boots, a tiara, earrings, large breasts, a very slim waist, long flowing hair (although not in that bizarre bouffant from *Super Friends*), and thick lips that indicate lipstick. Hawkgirl's original costume has bare shoulders (although her legs are covered) and when she finally removes her hawk mask in episode 49 "Wild Cards Part 2," we see that she has been wearing earrings beneath her head covering this whole time. When she changes her costume after the events of "Starcrossed," she wears a matching sports-bra/sweat pant combination with a visible midriff, and she still has her earrings. She, too, has tinted lips.

These empty feminine signifiers don't exist in the girls of *Teen Titans*. Raven, who wears a dark blue long sleeve leotard and a matching hooded floor length cape, has short lifeless hair, no earrings, cloth boots with absolutely no heel, and her only pieces of jewelry are the gem that holds her cape closed and a rope belt. Starfire, whose costume is

a bit more feminine in that she's wearing a skirt and thigh high boots, also has no jewelry, straight flat hair, and no heel on her boots. The girls, while they have breasts, do not have prominent breasts, instead displaying more of a boyish figure. But most importantly, the girls of *Teen Titans* are the first female characters we've seen that haven't had tinted indication of either lipstick or full lips. Instead, Starfire and Raven have the same thin-line mouths the boys have (while one could argue this is a result of the anime art design, regardless of its purpose it proves to be a big difference in terms of feminine signifiers).

This lack of signifiers exists because the girls of *Teen Titans* do not require this feminine reinscription. Unlike almost all of the other shows we have examined, *Teen Titans* openly and self-consciously attempts to make the girls girly (and the boys boyish). Starfire, obviously, is interested in these stereotypical feminine interests like shopping, caretaking, and cooking. Raven, although she isn't walking around in a pink halter top, still keeps from really pushing any gendered boundaries. Instead, she represents a different type of acceptable female model: the isolated smart girl exemplified by such animated predecessors as Daria and Lisa Simpson. In a post-*Spice Girls*, post-*PowerPuff Girls* world, we embrace women who are both strong and stereotypically girly, so these young women, girls that aren't really pushing themselves into masculine space, don't necessitate reinscription through empty feminine signifiers—their lack of masculinity is feminine enough.

Powers/Skills

While in theory, Wonder Woman has essentially the same powers she had in *Super Friends*, in reality, her use of these powers comes out much different. Although

she still has her invisible jet and her golden lasso (which is not controlled telepathically in this series), they play far less prominently in *Justice League*; the focus in *Justice League* is on Wonder Woman's physical strength, durability, and flight (an ability she didn't have in the older series). (Also of note are her bullet reflecting bracelets and her tiara, which finally proves useful when she uses it as a boomerang in episode 38 "A Better World Part 2" and when it deflects a sword to the head in episode 40 "Eclipsed Part 2.") The series' focus on her super strength, her brute fighting ability, and her physical stamina position Wonder Woman as a very different character than she was in *Super Friends*. These abilities all reflect gendered masculine concepts of hardness, aggression, and physical prowess, establishing a sharp contrast to her telepathic lasso. Along with her aggressive demeanor, her powers reflect a heavy masculine overtone to her character.

Hawkgirl is very similar. Her only real "power" is the ability to fly with her birdlike wings. Beyond that, she is a very aggressive fighter with alien military training. She carries an electrified mace made of mysterious "Nth metal" that can disrupt magic in any form. She has a very strong will that emphasizes her physical durability; in episode 37 "A Better World Part 1," the others are paralyzed by an electrified room set as a trap for them by their other-dimensional counterparts. While the other heroes are writhing on the ground, Hawkgirl stands (with much difficulty) and uses her mace to knock a wall out of the room. Her skills and powers, like Wonder Woman's skills and powers, are gendered masculine, reinforcing her masculine characterization.

The girls of *Teen Titans* again don't transgress the gender binary the way the women of *Justice League* do. Starfire has a few masculine powers: she has superstrength

("I'm sorry to disappoint you, but I'm stronger than I look" {episode 1 "Divide and

Conquer") and her race is known for its durability, exemplified by her body's ability to

withstand "the harshness of space" (episode 45 "Troq"). While she has these

masculinizing powers, her masculine strength is undermined by the fact that these powers

are rarely focused upon. Instead, Starfire's main powers are her "star bolts" (green

energy projectiles she fires from her hands or eyes) and her ability to fly. Not only do

these main powers often keep her on the periphery of the fight, they're directly associated

with feminine power because, as we find out in episode 7 "Switched," they're a result of

her emotions. To activate her power of flight, she must feel "the joy of flying," to

activate her star bolts, she must experience the sensation of "righteous fury," and to

utilize her alien strength, she must feel "boundless confidence." By linking her powers

directly to the realm of emotion, a realm already feminine in the collective consciousness,

even abilities like her "alien strength" take on a feminized bent.

Raven's powers are left much more undefined than the other characters,

reinforcing her character's sense of mystery. Her most prevalent powers include

telekinesis (by enveloping objects in a dark energy she can control), the ability to open

dark portals that teleport her through walls, levitation, and protective dark energy shields.

Her powers are also directly linked to her emotions ("My powers are driven by emotions:

the more you feel, the more energy you unleash" {episode 7 "Switched}), but unlike

Starfire's powers that necessitate her feelings, Raven's necessitate control over them lest

her powers rage out of control. This, along with the "dark side" that she inherited from

her father, becomes evident in episode 6 "Nevermore." In the first scene of this episode,

the Titans battle with Dr. Light. He angers Raven to the point that she loses control of

her rage, her face becomes more angular, her eyes glow red, and she sucks Dr. Light into her cape. When the Titans finally calm her down, Dr. Light emerges from her cape scarred and catatonic. When Raven's emotions are unleashed, the result is destructive.

Not only does this linking power with emotion feminize Raven's already passive (and thus read feminized) abilities, it also speaks to the dangerous ideological association we place on women and power (much like Storm and Jean Grey from the previous chapter). Again, we have a woman with massive amounts of power and again, the key danger is that this power will be able to corrupt her through the conduit of female weakness, her rampant emotions. Thus, because these women are so in danger of being corrupted by this power through their connection to "feeling," it is unsafe for them to have access to this power in the first place. Only through self-control and the castration of these emotions (i.e. femininity) can a woman be trusted with these abilities.

This reading is combated a bit by Starfire's positive connection between emotion and power. Feeling and emotion effectively create her powers; they don't overpower her. Interestingly, though, Jean Grey, Storm, and Raven all gain access to mysterious powers with *female associations* through this emotional connection (Jean's telekinesis, Storm's control of the weather, and whatever dark truths lie within Raven's cloak) and the emotions that cause them to unleash this torrent of uncontrolled chaos stem from a sense of female *passion*. Starfire's emotional connection is not female passion, but safely confined cheerleader-style joy and enthusiasm. Also, the powers that these emotions give access to are largely masculine or gender neutral powers, thus creating less mysterious danger. The dangerous emotional connection with Raven's abilities reinforce an ideological fear of the intensity and danger of female passion, offering instead a positive

connection between emotion and innocent childlike female joy and enthusiasm as a connection to contained and acceptable masculine power.

Team Dynamics

As Erikson points out in his article (and as I noted above), the producers of *Justice League* wanted to maintain a sense of individuality among the gathered heroes. Thus, a number of conflicts arise from the fact that none of these heroes are especially willing to follow the orders of another, and as a recognition of this trend of individuality, decisions are often left to individual team members. However, despite this, there is something of a pecking order. Superman is the undisputed figurehead of the team, and Batman (although he refuses to be involved at times) functions as a leader in a number of situations. In *Justice League Unlimited*, the opening sequence ends with Batman, Superman, and Wonder Woman silhouetted against an orange background, a multitude of small silhouettes flying in the sky behind them. The indication here is that these three constitute the leading body of the larger team; the other four original members still rank highly, but they are not on par with the top three. This indicates that Wonder Woman, in terms of group leadership, ranks among that upper echelon.

Orders are occasionally granted, but as Wonder Woman is a proud, confident, and masculine heroine, she doesn't always find it necessary to follow them. In *Justice League Unlimited* episode 12 "The Once and Future Thing Part 1," Wonder Woman expresses interest in breaking a man out of prison. Batman responds that the situation is bigger than one man and he should be left to his own devices. Wonder Woman responds, "Then it's settled. We'll break him out after sundown" and walks away. Despite the fact

that Batman gave a direct order, Wonder Woman disagrees with and overrides it (which

leads to Green Lantern snickering at Batman's symbolic emasculation).

The team treats Wonder Woman with respect, although they seem to keep the

same emotional distance from her that she keeps from them. They often refer to her as

"Princess" rather than "Wonder Woman" or "Diana" illustrating this distance. There is

an ongoing sense of Wonder Woman as the "too perfect" character, a sense reinforced by

everyone calling her "Princess" and by B'wana Beast's reference to her as "kinda stuck

up" (*Justice League Unlimited* episode 6 "This Little Piggy"). Hawkgirl, the outspoken

one, is the one to point out this goody-two-shoes perfection:

> Hawkgirl: "Aren't you cold in that outfit?"
> Wonder Woman: "Not really."
> Hawkgirl: "Of course not. The princess doesn't get cold. The princess doesn't even sweat in the pits of Tartarus."
> Wonder Woman: "I do too sweat!"
> Hawkgirl: "Please. You glow." (*Justice League Unlimited* Episode 18, "The Balance")

This situation brings to light the number of personal conflicts Wonder Woman has with

Hawkgirl. One could read these conflicts as a form of female rivalry, but it seems more

appropriately ascribed to ideological differences in their approach to situations: Wonder

Woman prefers emotional distance and diplomacy while Hawkgirl prefers passionate

violent aggression (although the exchange above does seem to have a ring of jealousy to

it). Despite a number of moments where they butt heads, they finally reach a balance in

their relationship during the aptly named *Justice League Unlimited* episode "The

Balance" (episode 18):

> Wonder Woman: "Are we good?"
> Hawkgirl: "Like oil and vinegar. We go together, but we don't mix."

Despite her distance from most of the team, Wonder Woman does develop a bond with

Superman, bringing him a present on his birthday (*Justice League Unlimited* episode 2

"For the Man Who Has Everything") and unleashing an ultra-violent swarm of attacks on Toyman when she thinks Superman has been killed (*Justice League* episode 45 "Hereafter Part 1"). Eventually she also develops an ongoing flirtation with Batman (made most explicit in *Justice League Unlimited* episode 6 "This Little Piggy"). All in all, Wonder Woman is highly respected, independent, unwilling to follow orders, but largely emotionally distant from the majority of the team.

Hawkgirl's relationships with the team members are a bit different. While everyone is in awe of the perfection of Wonder Woman, everyone seems to be made nervous by the boundless aggression of Hawkgirl. Her character seems to takes pleasure in defying orders, and she always speaks her mind, often mouthing off to Superman, the team's figurehead authority figure (Hawkgirl to Superman: "Do you ever get chaffed straddling the fence all the time?" {episode 41 "The Terror Beyond Part 1}). She forms a close relationship with J'onn J'onnz based on their mutual isolation from their homeworlds (episodes 27 and 28, "Twilight" parts 1 and 2) and eventually has a (brief) relationship with Green Lantern (described above). Otherwise, the rest of the team is wary of her approach to life and keeps their distance. While she's low on the command totem-pole, she functions as the team's loose cannon and revels in her role of "bad cop" in an ultra-heroic team of good cops (episode 41 "The Terror Beyond Part 1").

The Flash, the team's resident speedster, provides an interesting dimension to the team dynamic affecting both women. Flash is written to be very flirtatious. In almost every episode, he makes flirtatious comments to both women asking Wonder Woman in her first appearance to the team "Where have you been all my life?" (episode 2 "Secret Origins Part 2") and asking Hawkgirl if there's a Hawkboy back on Thanagar (episode 4

"In Blackest Night Part 1") (the examples of these flirtations abound; I've only included two here). What's interesting is that this constant flirtation takes on an innocent quality; the fact that the women shut him down every time and the fact that he keeps trying (but always in a non-threatening way) combined with his mischievous but heroic personality make his flirtations seem completely harmless. The women seem to treat him and his flirtation as a mild amusement, always turning him down with a smile and perhaps a roll of the eyes. His relationship with the women, despite the flirtation, appears completely non-sexual; he takes on a "little brother" playful scamp-type role (in fact, Wonder Woman even musses his hair in a very affectionate but non-sexual way when she sees him for the first time without his costume in episode 51 "Starcrossed Part 2").

Unlike *Justice League* which is self-consciously produced to focus on individuals trying to work together, the focus of *Teen Titans* is on the team dynamic itself. Like many shows aimed specifically at younger children, the key message encoded into *Teen Titans* is the power of friendship and unity. Being more of a cohesive team, the *Teen Titans* have a defined leader: Robin. Robin gives all of the orders, makes all of the decisions, and when he disappears (which happens in a number of episodes, but specifically in episode 3 "Final Exam"), the team is often at a loss, bickering or sulking until he returns. Robin's obvious role as leader establishes the other characters (including the girls) as submissive to him.

This having been said, the team dynamic of *Teen Titans* is highly stereotypical in terms of shows about groups of teenagers aimed at teens/kids. In essence, the team roles follow the *Breakfast Club* model: a jock, a dork/nerd, a beauty, a weird girl, and a leader (or rebel). Similar versions of this model are visible in other teen based shows like *Saved*

by the Bell. Following this model, Robin is obviously the rebel/leader, Starfire is the girly beauty (the Molly Ringwald), Beast Boy is the nerd (although rather than being a smart nerd, he's a silly nerd), Cyborg is the Jock, and Raven is the emotionally troubled weird goth girl. The dynamic of the team and the ways in which the kids interact very much follow this established formula.

Going deeper into these roles, Starfire is, as mentioned above, the team caretaker and cheerleader. She has no leadership roles and, in her naivety, she is highly infantilized and made further submissive to Robin through her dependence on him for explanations of Earth customs, a dependence which grows into an obvious but unstated romantic entanglement. Despite her physical strength, the role of "powerhouse" is left to Cyborg, as he is the team jock. Starfire, instead, is left with more stereotypically feminine roles.

Raven, as the weird goth girl, is the team outcast. She doesn't identify with the interests of the rest of the team; they are often wary of her and unsure how to talk to her, and she makes sarcastic remarks mocking them, specifically Beast Boy and Starfire. She never functions in a leadership role, but being the brainy outcast forced to keep her unbalanced emotions in check, Robin often approaches her for sage advice. Her only romantic involvement in the series comes during episode 32 "Spellbound," but her love interest turns out to be a deceitful evil dragon intent on tricking her into freeing him from a book in which he had been imprisoned. Despite Raven's isolation and emotional distance from the other members of the team, she is still willing to sacrifice herself for their safety (episode 50 "The End Part 1"). In the end, she needs their friendship as much as they need her wisdom, because without them, she is doomed to become a recluse (episode 14 "How Long Is Forever?").

Despite their personal differences, the team goes out of its way to ensure group cohesion—as is the case with a number of shows of this "teen grouping" ilk, the friend group is the number one priority. They stand up for each other in every episode, putting themselves in danger to save one troubled member. When they suffer from in-fighting, they always make up in the end. Any perceived betrayal of the group unity seems to be a key offense, being the subject of a number of season-ending story arcs. Overall, while the team has a number of key dynamics, the focus of the group dynamic is on the importance of in-group unity, the key focus of all the *Breakfast Club* style teen media productions.

Effectiveness

Much like the highly capable women of the 90s *X-Men* wave of teams, the women of *Justice League* are more than capable of taking care of themselves and their teammates, and they are extremely effective in dangerous situations. This is most visible when Wonder Woman, having succumbed to a spell, gets into a physical scuffle with Superman, the most powerful man in the world (episode 10 "Paradise Lost Part 2"). The fact that Wonder Woman holds her own in this fight, both withstanding Superman's blows and subduing him with strikes of her own proves that, within that universe, she is an exceptionally capable physical force. Her strength and fortitude are reiterated when she physically holds off the exceptionally powerful Mongul inside Superman's Fortress of Solitude while Batman attempts to free Superman from Mongul's hypnosis (*Justice League Unlimited* episode 2 "For the Man Who Has Everything"). Batman, incapable of holding off a powerhouse like Mongul, leaves it to the more physically effective Wonder Woman.

It's not just physical aggression that makes Wonder Woman an effective character: she's also crafty. In episode 51 "Starcrossed Part 2," it is Wonder Woman who is able to lure a guard into her cell, bite his hand, grab his knife with her teeth, and fling it with her mouth at the electronic containment control system, freeing herself. She then frees Batman and holds off the guards while he frees the others. She also proves to be an effective protector: when the guards attack the team in Atlantis in episode 7 "The Enemy Below Part 2," Wonder Woman yells for the men to "get down" while she protects them from the bullets, reflecting them with her armbands. Not only is Wonder Woman an effective warrior, an imposing personality, and a physical powerhouse, she's also resourceful and an effective protector.

Hawkgirl, perhaps, proves to be even more effective, particularly in physical battle. While she never squares off against Superman, she is often shown in group battles incapacitating far more villainous minions than the other members of the league. Her fighting skill is showcased in episode 5 "In Blackest Night Part 2." Angered that the Green Lantern Corps members (the intergalactic police force of which our Green Lantern is a part) do not support Earth's Green Lantern (Jon Stewart, her later boyfriend) when he is being falsely accused of a crime, Hawkgirl picks a fight with a gang of them in the interstellar courthouse cafeteria. Holding her mace aloft, she is threatened by the owner of the cafeteria: "No weapons!" She tosses her mace aside and proceeds unarmed to kick the butts of 4 Lantern Corps members. She only stops when one of the members agrees to help her find the true culprit in the Green Lantern case. Her effectiveness as a warrior is again evidenced in her defeat of two separate gods in two separate instances throughout the run of the series: the first of which comes when she must fight Ichtulu, an

interdimensional being that was once the god of her Thanagarian people. With the help of Solomon Grundy, an undead former enemy, she is able to kill the god (episodes 41 and 42 "The Terror Beyond" parts 1 and 2). And later, in *Justice League Unilimited* episode 18 "The Balance," Hawkgirl and Wonder Woman defeat the Greek god Hades, not destroying him, but driving him back to the underworld. Obviously, both of these women are extremely capable and effective in terms of successful heroism.

The girls of *Teen Titans* are a bit more difficult to discuss in terms of effectiveness. Because they don't function individually the way the members of the *Justice League* do, their victories tend to be more communal. In almost every battle, all five of the members are given someone or something to fight, or they're each given a scene where they land a blow to the individual bad guy. If they succeed, they tend to succeed as a group, and if they fail, they do so as a group as well. The only character that proves specifically more effective than the others is, of course, the leader Robin. The fact that the team falls apart without him and the fact that he usually takes point in the battle speaks to his dominance of the group and his ideological importance in the landscape of the show. The others, both boys and girls, are devalued slightly by his importance and the focus on his effectiveness, but the emphasis on teamwork and unity helps reign in his ideological weight in a way that was not evident in previous shows with obvious male leaders like *He-Man* or *Thundercats*. Overall, the girls are about equally as effective as the other second tier male players, having a number of mistakes (often linked to adolescent angst), but having quite a few more successes. In the end, it's almost never about an individual victory with the *Teen Titans*, but about the team functioning as a successful familial fighting unit.

Conclusions

The 2000s gave us two very different female models. The adult women of the *Justice League* are highly masculinized through their powers and fighting skills. They are given a number of sexualizing female signifiers to reinforce their femininity in the face of this masculine characterization, but for the most part, they remain light on female reinscription. This female sexualizing harkens back to the trend of the 90s (visible in *X-Men*) of having very strong, masculine, effective fighting powerhouses that are objectified through their sexual appeal. While this model does prove slightly disempowering through the demand for sexy heroines, the characterizations of the female models provide good models of female strength and capability for the (presumed) young male viewers.

The girls of *Teen Titans* follow another formula. Coming in the wake of the girl-power movement of the *Spice Girls* and the *PowerPuff Girls*, Starfire and Raven represent the stance that one can be both powerful and stereotypically girly. Specifically through Starfire's character, the *PowerPuff* model of strong young girls that enact stereotypical young female norms reinforces gender roles by allowing this dualism in character traits.

The fact that these two shows are produced by the same company, aired on the same station, and connected through their characters' common origins provides a problematic ideological message. To superimpose these two universes on top of each other, the female model comes off thusly: as a young girl, it is expected that gender roles will be maintained. Boys will be leaders, more serious, and involved in traditionally masculine activities. Girls will be girls, enjoying cooking, boys, caretaking, and

squealing when they are excited. Hearts may also jut from their eye sockets. These models of heroism, while enacting a few masculine traits, must still be reigned in with the positive values of these established norms. As adult women, however, the model of heroic femininity must abandon these feminine characteristics. They must be sexy, but not sexual, and they must be cold, aggressive, and masculine. This disconnect between gendered concepts of heroism creates an odd ideological stance, indicating that it is preferable for the teen heroes to reinforce gender stereotypes through girl-power interests, but to be a true adult hero, girl-power must be exchanged for masculine power.

CONCLUSION

As the decades ticked by and the cultural attitudes toward feminism and masculinity changed, so did our cultural representatives of ideal femininity; as we have seen, there is a progression to be marked.

In the 70s, a time infused with ideals of inclusion and non-violence, young boys (and the girls that watched these "gender neutral" shows alongside them) were given a fairly flat model of femininity; Wonder Woman offered little character complexity. She did, however, represent a positive feminine force by her very inclusion, giving the young male target audience a "powerful" female heroine, even if that power was limited by her inability to use powers coded masculine, her feminizing accessories, and her inability to battle male supervillains. And Jayna, the other female Super Friend offered little more than comic relief and traditional gendered behavior, rarely even venturing outside the Hall of Justice to engage in battle.

The 80s offered a bit more in terms of character complexity: while the women of the 80s weren't focused on as complex, three-dimensional characters, they were usually given distinct personalities that granted them a unique individualism denied by Wonder Woman's flatness. However, the cultural focus on masculinity in the 80s pushed these female models into the periphery of most of the shows, making the focus on the extreme masculine effectiveness of the male leaders. Characters like Teela and Cheetara were feminized, objectified, or infantilized to function in juxtaposition to and admiration of the masculine ideal. Lady Jaye and Scarlett of *G.I. Joe* instead offered a surprisingly capable pair of heroines, especially for a show with such masculine military overtones. Of course, the lady Joes had problems of their own: in a move to underscore the

heterosexuality of a homophobic yet homoerotic group like the military, the female Joes were romantically involved with their military superiors, creating a potentially disturbing connection between rank and romance. The women in these relationships were ordered around by men, ideologically reinforcing subservience and masculine power. While the women of the hypermasculine 80s functioned with more capability, complexity, and individualism than Wonder Woman in the 70s, their creators pointedly subjugated them to their male leaders, functioning (like most other cultural products of the time) to reinforce masculine dominance while still allowing for the development of stronger, more independent women.

The 90s, developing an emotional and temporal distance from the hypermasculinized 80s, offered even stronger animated heroines. Through the adoption of a serialized format, shows created the potential for complex, three-dimensional characters. While not all shows implemented this serialization to pro-female ends by creating strong complex female characters (i.e. Elisa from *Gargoyles*), the writers of *X-Men* used this format to bring unprecedented complexity to its female characters, expressing their joys, fears, desires, and shortcomings through developed personalities. Along with deeper complexity, the cultural trend toward powerful women adopting masculine strength also played out in these characters: Ivy proves to be physically formidable and mentally sharp, and Rogue is the X-Men's physical powerhouse, proving to be physical strong and essentially invulnerable. Storm, on the other hand, offers another ideological message, displaying the great potential in power that is coded feminine. But while these strong women represent very positive models of the potential of female strength through the adoption of power coded both masculine and feminine, the

texts of this period also expressed a wariness of this ideological message. The women of *X-Men* all had a tense connection between their female passion and their potent abilities: if they gave in to their female passion and emotion, the world suffered by their unfettered destructive power. This (and the focus on large breasts and wild hair) functioned to reign in the feminist potential of the X-women, but in no way eradicate it. Despite the drawbacks of Disney's *Gargoyles*, the 90s era of shows provided its young viewers with very powerful, capable, strong, intelligent models of ideal heroic femininity, models much more complex and capable than had been previously witnessed.

The 00s offered two related but branching models. The first, visible in *Justice League*, was that of the highly capable masculine model. Wonder Woman and Hawkgirl are both extremely masculinized in personality and power, both highly respected for it, and both extremely effective because of it. The other model, exemplified by *Teen Titans*, was more reflective of the third wave feminism movement of the late 90s and early 00s. The "girl power" model that became the center of much of the third wave debate has led to a reinforcement of the gender dichotomy with the argument that power can come through the enactment of these traditional roles. This line of argumentation led to "empowering" girly girls like the *Spice Girls* and *The PowerPuff Girls*. The teen heroines of *Teen Titans* are reflective of this reinforcement of girl-culture usually aimed at tweens and young teens, reinforcing the traditional gender dichotomy while inscribing it with effective heroic possibilities. Also, unlike all the other shows that had been produced thus far, *Teen Titans* focused on the lives of teenage superheroes, dealing with issues relevant to teens and preteens rather than the adult minded moral dramas of all the

other series.   So while both models prove effective in their own ways, they represent ideologically different approaches to what makes a powerful woman.

We have a trajectory of development: the shows reflect the cultural climates of the time, passing from women as flat token characters, through a period of heavy subjugation to hypermasculine ideals during a period of threatened cultural masculinity, into a period of strong women ripe with ideological tension over their masculine-coded strength intermingling with their delicate feminine-coded emotions, and finally into a branching between adult heroines that enact effective masculinity and teen heroines that reflect this girl-culture stance that heroines can be both girlish and effective.

As we edge toward the last part of the 00s, the *Justice League/Teen Titans* wave has come to a close (both shows were cancelled by Cartoon Network after their 2005/2006 seasons). Since their cancellation, however, a new show has arisen. *Legion of Superheroes* has taken their place on Saturday mornings. This new show, which began in the fall of 2006, follows a model similar to that of *Teen Titans*: the team is made of all teenagers led by a young Superman. The heroines are all young and very feminine. Their powers are all passive (psychic abilities, the ability to pass through objects, and the ability to multiply oneself), and they screech "Eww!" when they have to go into the sewers. Obviously, the genre and the representation of heroic femininity is heading in the younger, more feminized direction, reinforcing traditional gender roles for the upcoming generation.

I find this problematic and disconcerting. Perhaps my sense of heroism is outdated and I'm too attached to masculine-coded power to appreciate the girl-power heroine as a paragon of positive femininity, but I see this direction as disheartening.

While I recognize the importance of the third-wave precept of female choice, the fact that this choice seems to come largely as the option to be traditionally feminine through associations with passivity, being grossed-out, going to the mall, and a focus on physical beauty concerns me as a feminist, an academic concerned about gender representation, and a fan of children's television. By phasing out "masculine" heroines for these more feminized version (all of which, in both *Teen Titans* and *Legion of Superheroes,* are very submissive to the teams single male leader), the ideological push for ideal femininity is just reverting back to the traditional view of women and attempting to make these traditional views seem empowering. In a cultural climate with a heavy neo-conservative push, the ideological trend toward a repolarization of gender norms and expectations seems to be a giant step backwards for feminism, for equal rights, and for gender relations in general.

So there we have it: Cheetara and Jean Grey may not have been the paragons of female empowerment I wanted them to be, but they, along with their contemporary counterparts, offered a number of positive attributes and models for female heroic characters. And the trend for 30 years pushed these representations in a more and more positive direction. While I'd argue that the women of the 90s were the most empowered, adopting both masculine and feminine power in very effective and capable ways, I also found the agency and leadership ability of the women of *Justice League* to show a very positive and progressive development of the genre. Although the current trend is a neo-conservative return to accepted gender norms and Disney Princess girl culture, I can only hope that the progress made in powerful representation remains in the collective popular

culture consciousness long enough to push through this neo-conservatism and give our young boys more of what Hawkgirl, Storm, and Ivy represent.

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