

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF WOMEN'S AGGRESSION

Kiera M. Gaswint

A Thesis

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

MASTER OF ARTS

May 2018

Committee:

Kim Coates, Advisor

Jeff Brown

© 2018

Kiera Gaswint

All Rights Reserved

ABSTRACT

Kim Coates, Advisor

This project explores women's aggression in superhero, science fiction, and crime film through a close reading of *Wonder Woman*, *Ghost in the Shell*, and *Atomic Blonde*. All based in genres that are traditionally considered 'for boys,' these films are different from other superhero, science fiction, and crime films because they feature female leads with aggressive tendencies. Using Dana Crowley Jack's theory of women's aggression and Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra's definition of postfeminism, I argue that Diana, Major, and Lorraine revolutionize the image of the lead postfeminist character by offering examples of women's aggression that resist acceptable, palatable representations of women's aggression. Whereas in the past there have been many representations of aggressive women, those past representations have been affected by postfeminism in a way that commodifies and limits their ability to be authentically aggressive. I examine how these new films – *Wonder Woman*, *Ghost in the Shell*, and *Atomic Blonde* – play into and ultimately resist postfeminist representations because of their aggression and how that aggression is played out on the female body. In the following chapters I analyze how the heroines in *Wonder Woman*, *Ghost in the Shell*, and *Atomic Blonde* disrupt postfeminist notions and prior images of women's aggression by explicitly examining aggressive women who are not domesticated or justified by rape.

This is dedicated to anyone who has ever believed in superheroes or chose to become their own.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to thank my family for all of their love, quirks, and support. Mom and Dad - thank you for teaching me to be an original, an individual, and for letting me pave my own way. Even through all the doubts about what I want to do with my career, you've believed in my success from the beginning. Levi - you might deny it, but you're a nerd like the rest of us. All of my passion for nerdy things came from growing up with you. To all of you guys, we're three of a kind and I wouldn't want you any other way.

Next, I want to thank Rachel and Lindley, my two best friends in the world. I never expected to make friends like you guys and a lot of times I'm not sure I deserve you guys. Thank you for letting me frequently embarrass you in public, and more importantly for staying my friend when I embarrass myself. What's a superhero without a sidekick? Thanks for being the Robin to my Batman and the Finbar to my Braveheart.

To Simba, Stewart, Ginger, and Baymax for all of the love and support only a four-legged, furry friend can give. Thank you for hunting all of my socks and all of your help with my homework over the years. Marvel and DC have yet to realize that superheroes don't have opposable thumbs.

And finally to my committee, Kim Coates and Jeff Brown. Thank you for all of your guidance and support throughout my undergraduate and graduate careers. It is classes like yours that foster my inner nerd and have made me an all around better person. I'll forever benefit from what I've learned by working with you in and out of the classroom, and your encouragement to embrace my inner Diana, Major, and Lorraine. Thank you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER I. “THE SWORD DOESN’T GO WITH THE DRESS” – THE SUCCESS AND ACCEPTABILITY OF <i>WONDER WOMAN</i>	13
CHAPTER II. “I WASN’T BUILT TO DANCE” –FRACTURED IDENTITIES: <i>GHOST IN THE SHELL</i> AND REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN’S AGGRESSION	37
CHAPTER III. “SPYCRAFT, SENSUALITY, AND SAVAGERY” – WOMAN’S AGGRESSION IN <i>ATOMIC BLONDE</i>	56
CONCLUSION.....	75
WORKS CITED.....	79

INTRODUCTION

In a cultural moment that boasts it is post-gender, post-racial, and post-label, it is baffling that films which include anything but the normative hero –the quintessential white, heterosexual stud – are still considered so progressive and radical. Though long histories of women’s liberation movements and first, second, and third waves of feminism would lead us to believe that society has finally reached a moment when all of that activism has finally paid off, the 2017 United States presidential election and the global Women’s March that followed demonstrate otherwise. The current moment – defined as postfeminist by many – signals a new moment in that it largely harkens back to past feminist movements and uses the gains of these movements for mimesis and critique. Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra define postfeminism as

working in part to incorporate, assume, or naturalize aspects of feminism; crucially, it also works to commodify feminism via the figure of the woman as empowered consumer. Thus, postfeminist culture emphasizes education and professional opportunities for women and girls; freedom of choice with respect to work, domesticity, and parenting; and physical and particularly sexual empowerment. (2)

Most representations of women in contemporary film and television can be read through this definition because they include feminist elements by showcasing empowered female characters. For example, the television series *Two Broke Girls* celebrates the independence and will power of two girls in New York City trying to start their own business. These two characters showcase a mixture empowering feminist traits with stereotypical gender norms, as Max is a rough and tough tomboy and Caroline is tall, slim, and exceedingly blonde. The two girls work together to begin their own bakery by waitressing at a diner – which can be read as empowering – but are

constantly held back by their obsession to shop and their inability to navigate professional business environments. These two characters demonstrate a postfeminist agenda on account of their being “empowered consumers” and because of their naturalized feminist views they express in the work place. Another contemporary example of the postfeminist film representations is the film *Trainwreck*. In this film, Amy Schumer subverts the common commitment-frightened-bachelor trope with her character Amy, the career-driven, commitment-fearing bachelorette. Amy’s subversion of the bachelorette trope clearly stands against the traditional image of the women and empowers her to embrace who she really is. However, the film ultimately leads her to decide to make a commitment to her boyfriend Aaron, similarly rendering this film postfeminist. These women are empowered and celebrate past women’s movements. However, in spite of feminist victories, film and television still actively marginalize women in entire film genres, such as action, science fiction, and superhero films. In these films, while aliens from outer space are attacking New York City, women are standing by, looking pretty, and jabbering to their friends on their cell phones about boyfriends or shoes.

While the women featured in film and on sitcoms are doing good things for women’s representation, embracing feminism in this way seems to perpetuate the problem feminism is supposed to fight against; the empowered female figure is often marketed to specific audiences by commodifying what might be described as hearty, commodified feminism – feminism that endears the character - more than it allows that character to call for a change. These representations insinuate that the feminist fight has already been won and that feminism is no longer needed, evoking feminism’s pastness through mention, mourning, or celebration (Tasker 1). This kind of feminist representation does a disservice to the feminist work that still needs to be completed because it does not offer a place for women’s representation to go. Many scholars,

activists, and critics oppose the insinuation that feminist work is by any means complete. The “post” in postfeminism itself perpetuates this concern; scholars argue over whether we are truly in a period following feminism as the prefix ‘post’ means ‘after.’ It is because of this prefix that interpreting exactly what postfeminism stands for is by no means a simple thing. “While early critics were almost unanimous in their interpretation of postfeminism as ‘anti-feminism,’ the list of significations keeps expanding: Girl Power, ‘anti-feminism,’ ‘power feminism,’ poststructuralist feminism, popular feminism. A simple definition has proven illusive,” Stephanie Genz says (18). Much like the feminist movements before it, postfeminism remains undefined by any specific agenda. However, in order to properly locate my argument it will help to abide by a certain, specific understanding the term. For this thesis, I understand postfeminism as previously defined by Tasker and Negra. According to Tasker and Negra, postfeminism emphasizes female empowerment by means of incorporating, assuming, or naturalizing aspects of feminism and working to “commodify feminism via the figure of the woman as empowered consumer” (2).

In light of Tasker and Negra’s definition, I find it important to also bring attention to another definition of postfeminism that warns against its viable consequences. As postfeminism supposes the success and passing era of feminism, postfeminism uses individual signifiers that represent women’s empowerment in order to market feminism. Angela McRobbie is specifically concerned with this:

[Postfeminism] is marked by a new kind of anti-feminist sentiment which is different from being a question of backlash against the seeming gains made by feminist activities and campaigns in an earlier period. Elements of feminism have been taken into account and have been absolutely incorporated into political and institutional life. Drawing on a vocabulary that includes words like

‘empowerment’ and ‘choice,’ these elements are then converted into a much more individualistic discourse, and they are deployed in this new guise, particularly in media and popular culture, but also by agencies of the state, as a kind of substitute for feminism. These new and seemingly ‘modern’ ideas about women and especially young women are then disseminated more aggressively, so as to ensure that a new women’s movement will not re-emerge. (1)

Representations of independent women who are the agents of their own destiny signify feminist progression and are purposely used to show that progress has been made, that further progression is unnecessary. McRobbie’s concern about the political and commercial use of feminist signifiers asks whether we truly are in a moment ‘after’ feminism. Understanding Tasker’s definition of postfeminism and McRobbie’s concern is paramount to understanding why it is important we continue probing female films and that films continue producing women who do more than reproduce the commercial feminist image.

No critic will deny the malleability of postfeminism’s agenda; what comes from these interdisciplinary and intertwining understandings is postfeminism’s ability to “become the lens through which contemporary discussions of the relationship between popular culture and feminism are most refracted” (Munford 13). McRobbie engages with postfeminism in a similar manner, as she juxtaposes popular culture and postfeminism to determine if the films are effective in undoing feminism “while simultaneously appearing to be engaging in a well informed and seen as a well-intended response to feminism” (11). A postfeminist reading of a film or text asks how feminism functions in the film: does the film maintain feminism to commodify the film itself, or does it use feminism to change women’s representation as we know

it by locating and mimetically reading feminist elements? It is this concept that I engage with by examining the female action film.

A subgenre of the action, science fiction, and superhero filmic genres, the female action movie arguably sells feminism to young girls by articulating progressive ideas on screen, similar to the release of the 1970s feminist magazine *Ms.* (Munford 2). Eric Lichtenfeld defines the action film genre as

A concoction of elements—some a matter of plot, some mythological, some purely cinematic—that creates for the audience a sense of ritual and a host of expectations, [which include] a loner hero; his battles for justice, if not the law; his slain best friend (also cocombatant); a murdered love interest; vengeance; a past he is trying to live down; a burden he must live with, the burden of being "the best;" a governmental bureaucracy willing to betray and sacrifice him; industrial settings; brutal beatings; visually exotic killings; an array of impressive weapons; explosions; one-liners; chases and crashes; and a depraved enemy. (1)

In contrast to this definition, which assumes that the action hero is a male through its use of pronouns, female action films subvert the action narrative by concentrating on a heroine and thereby celebrating female empowerment. This genre was popularized in late eighties and early nineties by films starring gun-toting women like *Thelma and Louise* and *Aliens*. These films approach the female body in a new way by defining masculinity and mapping certain masculine elements onto the female body. Tasker asserts that the female action hero is a response to feminism. It presents an image of the woman that also borrows from images of masculinity. These representations often result in stereotypes such as the tomboy, a characterization that deems "the heroine who is cast as the hero's sidekick [to] be read as a girl who has not accepted

the responsibilities of adult womanhood” and not as a woman who is simply more masculine (15). The tomboy remains a more abstract representation of the female action hero, as most heroines are still characterized as the love interest for the hero. It has been from these representations that some ten years later new female identities have emerged via the superhero, science fiction, and action genre.

While the past ten years has arguably created a new version of the female action hero, it is clear that the contemporary action heroine has ushered in an era that challenges postfeminist ideals and representations. The contemporary female action hero builds off of preexisting heroines from television shows like *Wonder Woman* and films like *Thelma and Louise*, *Hard Candy*, *Kill Bill*, *The Brave One*, and *Monster* by using feminist and action film gender conventions. This combination of conventions has been termed the ‘postfeminist mystique’ by Rebecca Munford and Melanie Waters, which “like the feminist mystique before it – works by mobilizing anachronism...it reactivates modes of feminine identity that were ‘proper to a former age,’ but which seemed ‘out of harmony’ with a present that has – so we are told – reaped all the benefits from the second wave feminism.” Anachronism, or the concept that something is historically or chronologically out of its time, is integral to understanding the postfeminist identity; the past is revisited and “what we thought to be gone returns, confirming its ability to influence the present” (10). Munford and Waters’ postfeminist mystique characterizes how current film derives its current heroines from ones in the past. However, films like *Wonder Woman*, *Ghost in the Shell*, and *Atomic Blonde* make use of anachronous elements in order to pursue new feminist representations by means of the aggressive female action hero.

While close studies have been conducted on the female action hero for some time now, less work exists on contemporary representations of women’s aggression, the primary focus of

this thesis. Aggression can be understood as many things: physical or verbal, methods of intimidation, and acts of vandalism to name a few. Women's aggression in general does encompass these elements, but has traditionally been thought of exclusively in relation to male aggression and the male body. Dana Crowley Jack in her book *Behind the Mask: Destruction and Creativity in Women's Aggression* says, "Almost all of what psychologists have thought and have felt about aggression has been shaped by a male perspective. This means that we understand aggression from the point of view of those who have been dominant" (3). Though each of us experience aggression differently, aggression has been traditionally understood by society to be masculine - "while men are naturally aggressive, women are naturally unaggressive." Crowley Jack understands it is because of this binary that women's aggression has taken specific forms. Crowley Jack lays out the cultural messages that shape women's aggression and its representation:

Several powerful cultural messages affect the meanings women attach to their aggression. [Some are that] women are less competitive; express aggression in indirect, 'sneaky' ways; suppress their anger because of passivity or training; tend toward irrational and overreactive outbursts; need psychological treatment if they are 'overaggressive'; use aggression only in defense of their children; and are commonly motivated to aggression by jealousy. The popular idea that women are more empathetic than men also suggests that they will be less destructively aggressive. (Crowley Jack 18)

These cultural messages are overwhelmingly alive and real today in our cinema. As film and television boast a postfeminist movement, women like Monica from *Friends*, Penny from *The Big Bang Theory*, and Max from *Two Broke Girls* all exhibit traces of these cultural

understandings of aggression: Monica is known for wrestling with her older brother Ross and for being verbally aggressive at the expense of being known as the overzealous friend in the group; Penny frequently talks about her upbringing in Texas and the illegal shenanigans she used to participate in and physically protects her nerdy, and exclusively male neighbors, from being beat up by bullies, but is the primary sexual object of the series; and Max openly insults her guests she waitresses for and references her indulgence in marijuana, but is known for her promiscuity. Each of these characters is aggressive which is extremely important for the visibility of women's aggression on television, however their aggression is predominantly verbal and largely transparent. In spite of the rise in characters that are aggressive, like Monica, Penny, and Max, this transparency still makes aggressive women an anomaly.

However, aggression is much more complex than whether the aggression is verbal, physical, or some other variation. In contrast with Crowley Jack's understanding of aggression via one's actions, Maud Lavin understands aggression as the emotion that ultimately leads to action in her book *Push Comes to Shove: New Images of Aggressive Women*:

While at times manifesting as hate or a desire for destructiveness, [aggression] is not limited to those emotions; it also works with a widely operative libidinal thrust – of all kinds. Kicking goals, grabbing the brass ring, taking a bite out of an apple, shooting hoops, coming. And it all works interpersonally to define boundaries, which in turn are indispensable for coexistence, debate, co-working, love, friendship, and so forth. Like bumper cars crashing – or gentler forms of friction – interpersonal aggression, (ideally) short of harm and violence, keeps spatial boundaries and social flow alive. (9)

Lavin understands aggression as political action because it defines boundaries. One's drive and passion to complete an action defines the boundaries through which society operates. Aggression then can be the reason for searching for, the tool for defining, and the rhetoric for discussing these boundaries. While aggression can be destructive, aggression can also be the desire to make change or take something for one's self. Aggression in this sense changes the understanding of how aggression is mapped physically onto the female body to how aggression can be used to make action.

In this thesis, I juxtapose both Crowley Jack and Lavin's definitions of women's aggression to understand differently from other scholars how aggression is mapped onto female bodies by reading the bodies of Diana, Major, and Lorraine. Specifically, Crowley Jack's definition allows me to read Diana, Major, Lorraine, and their respective films through their aggressive actions by outlining specifically how women's aggression is understood historically, socially, and culturally. By understanding the cultural messages Diana, Major, and Lorraine have been subjected to, I will draw conclusions about the current cultural messages pervading women's aggression. This will also help me understand how their aggression is familiar, how it is mapped onto their bodies, and how this impacts their reactions to aggression. While Lavin's interpretation of aggression is similar to Crowley Jack's, Lavin's approach asks how the actions are political. Lavin's political approach calls for a feminist reading by asking what motivates women's aggression, an approach that will inform how each character must be read differently than the others. I argue that *Wonder Woman*, *Ghost in the Shell*, and *Atomic Blonde* maintain elements of feminism while assuming the characters are postfeminist, rendering Crowley Jack and Lavin's understandings of aggression important.

Of past representations of aggressive women in films like *Monster*, *Hard Candy*, *Aeon Flux*, *Kill Bill*, and *Mad Max: Fury Road*, scholars have sought change in existing characters because of the postfeminist flavor these characters have been afforded and the pervading negative cultural norms they continue to uphold. Whereas the characters are clearly empowered by the feminist movement, they struggle to move women's aggression beyond the rape revenge narrative, the domesticity narrative, or other narratives that result in the aggressive woman's death. At the beginning of Lisa Coulthard's piece "Killing Bill: Rethinking Feminism and Film Violence," she says "In a climate shaped by long-standing concerns about the ill effects of viewing violence, discussions of film violence tend to concentrate less on the violence itself and more on the seeming legitimacy of its presence" (153). While representations of women's aggression are empowering for the female viewer, the violence itself is lent to upholding this sense of empowerment and feminist achievement, commodifying the character instead of identifying social boundaries and resisting those boundaries. However, more attention is being paid to those characters who are pushing against gendered aggression boundaries. Lisa Purse exclusively takes interest in aggressive women who are outside of dominant social norms on account of their anger and she attacks traditionally postfeminist characters because they commodify feminism. Coulthard argues, "In a postfeminist cultural context, sexualized display is often characterized as an active choice made by women who have already benefited from second wave feminism's campaigns for gender equality. This decision is predicated on the assumption that feminism is somehow no longer necessary [and revels] in its white, middle class bias" (188). Aggressive heroines are sold as fantasies of physical and economic empowerment, suggesting women's violence can be justified, but only certain privileged women can afford that choice. Coulthard and Purse's reading of postfeminist aggression ultimately calls for more radical and

less pathologized aggression women. It is women like those in *Monster*, *Hard Candy*, and *Kill Bill* who destabilize gender constructs and move away from unrealistic representations of women's aggression.

Women's aggression in film and television is changing because women are becoming more aggressive and aggression is finally being displayed on the female body in a way that does not victimize that body. These changes are exciting and meaningful for viewers, but are surely of no coincidence given the current cultural moment and the social threat political figures are posing on marginalized groups. Crowley Jack says, "When women stand up to inner or outer authorities, when they hurt someone purposely, when they positively fight for justice – these are critical points of change" (21). Lavin issues a similar call to women: "Women need aggression and need to use it consciously" (9). Women are leaving the home space in pursuit of justice; they are standing up to authority and they are calling for change. Considering Crowley Jack and Lavin's calls to action, one must consider how Diana, Major, and Lorraine are supposed to represent aggression in a way that goes beyond how aggression has been depicted in the past, a central element and question this thesis aims to answer. To what extent can films make women's aggression new? To what extent are representations of female aggression pushing back against postfeminist notions? Diana, Major, and Lorraine are three such characters that will enable me to explore this topic. Throughout this thesis, I will closely examine these characters, their aggression, and what implications are made about the aggressive female. While these characters are from varying film genres, I will use a consistent understanding of women's aggression through Crowley Jack and Lavin's work. Using these definitions I will cultivate a thorough understanding of Diana, Major, and Lorraine's aggression and will enter the conversation about women's aggression by proposing three current films and how they are beginning to differ from

past conversations regarding women's aggression because of how their aggression is constructed and how it is appearing on the body.

It goes largely without saying that the female action hero and women's aggression go hand in hand; however, the aggressive heroine still heavily relies on aggression that past feminist movements have won. Women have been allowed to be aggressive on screen in the past, but their aggression did not feel real as highly sexualized bodies justified women's aggression or the aggression was coded masculine. Until this point, women have been able to deal punches, but they have not been able take them. However, *Wonder Woman*, *Ghost in the Shell*, and *Atomic Blonde* are three films that popularize the image of the aggressive woman and allow women to be more actively aggressive.

CHAPTER I: “THE SWORD DOESN’T GO WITH THE DRESS” - THE SUCCESS AND ACCEPTABILITY OF *WONDER WOMAN*

Wonder Woman was credited as the first superheroine and has been one of the longest consistently written comic book characters to date. In the wake of the 2017 blockbuster film *Wonder Woman* starring Gal Gadot and directed by Patty Jenkins, Wonder Woman continues to be a symbol of feminism and female empowerment. *Wonder Woman* depicts Diana using overt displays of assertiveness and physical aggression that former cinematic representations of Wonder Woman have not. The aggression in *Wonder Woman*, while it is new for representations of Diana herself, can be read similarly to representations of aggression in other films. Much of my argument throughout this thesis will analyze characters that change the way aggression is thought in relation to the female body; in this chapter however, I will focus on Diana as an acceptable and palatable representation of female aggression given the popularity of the film. I will discuss Diana as a symbol of feminine strength by examining her aggression, how her aggression is connected to emotion and trauma, and how this narrative impacts the representation of her aggression. I argue that whereas the acceptability of Diana’s aggression in *Wonder Woman* is maintained and justified by conventional means like her femininity, her aggression is progressive because she does not fold back into gendered narratives. *Wonder Woman* subtly pushes back against traditional gender norms by rejecting domesticity and revenge narratives and by coming to accept rage as a part of her identity.

Wonder Woman was created by William Marston and first published in the 1940s by Detective Comics, or DC Comics. Marston found inspiration for Diana in feminist political activist groups in England and the United States like the Suffragettes. Believing in female superiority, it is not surprising Marston created the first comic book superheroine. He was also is

known for his polyamorous relationship with his wife Elizabeth Holloway Marston and mistress Olive Byrne, both of whom were educated activists and who informed his creation of the character. Wonder Woman's story has been told many ways over the last 75 years, though the core narrative often remains the same: Diana is the Princess of Themyscira, an island hidden by the gods and inhabited only by a group of mystical Amazonian women. Diana is raised to be a formidable fighter with an exceedingly solid moral compass. One day Steve Trevor, an English spy, crashes into their island while trying to escape the Germans. Steve tells the Amazons about World War I and Diana decides to go to the world of men and confront Ares, the god of war. By choosing to leave and fight in World War I, Diana can never return to Themyscira. Following the conclusion of the war Diana remains in the world of men and protects those who cannot protect themselves. This story informs the narrative of the 2017 film *Wonder Woman*, Gal Gadot's second appearance as Wonder Woman. As made obvious by *Wonder Woman*'s success in box offices, Diana continues to be a popular DC character not only as a comic book figure but also as an icon of female empowerment.

Wonder Woman is far from being the first film featuring an aggressive female character. In fact, many female action films have found success in box offices, like *Kill Bill*, *Mad Max: Fury Road*, *The Brave One*, *Charlie's Angels*, *True Grit*, and *Hard Candy*. These films were derived from female characters in the horror genre and worked to bring equality to women's representation in action film. However, while female characters worked their way to leading roles, these female characters became defined by stereotypes that dictated how aggression should be mapped onto the female body. Lisa Purse describes many of these stereotypes in her article "Return of the 'Angry Woman': Authenticating Female Physical Action in Contemporary Cinema." Purse's article describes films' resistance to depicting female bodily harm and their

tendency to justify a heroine's actions as either a reaction to trauma or through displays of extreme femininity (187). Purse's argument specifically examines characters who "are angry transgressors, their behaviors and actions locate them outside the dominant social norms, as well as outside mainstream codes of cinematic female representation" (186). While her arguments might specifically focus on these characters, Purse's arguments are helpful in understanding cinematic representations of women's aggression. Purse argues that films from the 1990s and 2000s undermine a female's potency. In other words, these films work to reinstate archetypal femininity whenever the female becomes threatening. Unfortunately, these films set the precedent for representations of women's aggression.

Diana's aggression is constructed to be specifically a part of the superhero genre, a filmic genre that up until this point has had little to no female representation. In spite of Wonder Woman's lingering popularity as a staple character of the DC universe, Wonder Woman stands alone as one of the extremely few women who have had solo screen time. Other characters like Poison Ivy, Black Widow, and Scarlett Witch have made filmic appearances dating back to the 1960s *Batman* series. Though characters like Supergirl, Cat Woman, and Elektra have all had standalone films, each of these films are known for their terrible audience reception. In contrast, audiences received the 1970s *Wonder Woman* television show starring Lynda Carter warmly. Even more interesting is that this rendition of Diana was actually the second to be aired, as in 1974 a pilot for *Wonder Woman* was released starring former pro tennis player Cathy Lee Crosby. Unfortunately, this pilot failed miserably as Wonder Woman was blonde, dressed in a tracksuit, and without superpowers.

However, it is failed attempts such as the Cathy Lee Crosby pilot that have led to the superhero genre as we know it today. Whereas characters like Scarlett Witch and Black Widow

still have yet to see much solo screen time, these characters pack a punch and play important roles in the filmic universe. Superherione aggression is understood similar to depictions in science fiction film because the location of the film can be temporally and spatially distanced from the spectator's own real-world reality. Purse explains that this distance is necessary because if these characters were placed in the reality of the viewer "[the heroine's] actions might seem unduly threatening to dominant social hierarchies and behavioral norms." Purse explains that distancing the spectator from the film allows the film to explain or justify female agency by using archetypal femininity. Archetypal femininity "carefully and systematically reinstates and enforces femininity" in opposition to these characters' aggression. Archetypal femininity calls for "female heroines to combine their readily apparent strength and skill with a more traditionally feminine, and often emphatically sexualized, physique" in order to justify, or gender, a character's aggression (187). The juxtaposition of a character's strength and extreme femininity explains, qualifies, and actively undermines women's aggression. Unfortunately, superheroines continue to function like this in comic books. While superheroines like Diana have paved the way for more progressive characters, gender constructs and institutions like the 1954 Comics Code Authority have continually marginalized these characters by forcing them into subordinated gendered roles like the sidekick or by domesticizing them. Even today in *Wonder Woman*, Diana rarely takes a physical hit and her violence is justified and feminized by her service to the greater good. The superhero genre continues to limit superheroines because female characters are reaffirmed by archetypal femininity.

Whereas Wonder Woman is an aggressive character, her aggression is not the most interesting aspect about her character. Overall, Wonder Woman's strength and abilities are all things we have seen in male superheroes like Batman or Superman. Diana is without a doubt a

skilled warrior; after years of tough training, Diana is the best fighter on Themyscira. Diana easily transfers these skills to England and in battle, as she is so fast that she can stop bullets using her armor and so strong that she can knock entire buildings down with her body. While these impressive physical displays still function as spectacle within the superhero genre, these are all skills the audience have seen before given the popularity of characters like Batman, Captain America, and Superman. Though Diana is the first female filmic example of super human strength, Diana's aggression throughout the film is exceedingly clean and lacks any grit associated with her fighting style, which does not render her aggression any differently than other superheroes or aggressive women. It could be argued that the film is made less believable because of how clean her aggression is, as she almost never takes a hit herself and her appearance is always perfect even while she is under extreme physical strain.

Diana's aggression becomes slightly more visceral, and less familiar, when she becomes angry in her fight with Ares. Diana physically struggles to keep up with Ares throughout the duration of their fight. Unlike her fights with humans, Diana takes physical blows as Ares uses his powers to throw large pieces of his surroundings at Diana. While trapped by Ares, Diana sees Steve's plane explode, which sends her into a rage. Her rage and extreme emotional turmoil following Steve's death changes the tone of her aggression. She breaks out of Ares' entrapments with ease and begins to take out her aggression on those standing by. She screams with emotion and grits her teeth, holding a tank above Dr. Poison – one of the central antagonists of the film - who's tarnished face has been exposed in the turmoil of battle. While this moment still does not offer representations of Diana being seriously physically damaged, the inclusion of emotion and rage renders a form of aggression that typically only male superheroes like Batman are allowed after losing a loved one. For the first time in the film, Diana's aggression is fueled by rage and

her fighting is not as clean. Mapping aggression like this on a woman's body is still a form of marginalized women's aggression. Purse argues that "Wails, shrieks, guttural groans, and screams do not conform to the stylized phrasing of female screams that have a long tradition in the horror genre, but are untidy, uncontrolled, unpredictable, and communicative of the physical exertions being undertaken and/or endured" (195). The woman's scream, made familiar by the horror genre, is warped by tone, pitch, and expression in moments of female rage. As Diana has not yelled previously, this moment is particularly striking as she loses the cool composure she has maintained throughout the film.

Diana's moment of rage at the end of the film introduces the audience to a different form of women's aggression. Whereas Diana has displayed moments of aggression through her physical action on the battlefield and verbal disgust of the English commanders, this aggression is clearly different as she teeters on the edge of succumbing to blind rage. In spite of the audience's familiarity with the combination of superhero violence and rage narratives like *Batman*, *Venom*, and most famously the *Incredible Hulk*, women's rage remains unfamiliar territory. The moment of Diana's rage offers the audience a less sanitized and comfortable experience because female characters rarely exhibit rage. The raging woman alters the audience's experience of the female body; because of a woman's rage and aggression, the female body becomes a place of trauma and violence instead of titillating spectacle. Diana's body throughout *Wonder Woman* functions primarily as spectacle. However, in her fight against Ares, Diana's body becomes a site of violence more than spectacle, transforming the level of aggression Diana is capable of. This transformation of her aggression in the film functions not only to justify her strength over Ares, but also serves to resist existing representations of women's aggression by depicting this unfamiliar space for women's bodies.

Diana is more interesting because her narrative does not fold back into feminine archetypes similar to films before her. Specifically Diana rejects two popular female action hero narratives: the revenge narrative and the domesticity narrative. Women in superhero films can be driven with similar traumatic narratives. Recent examples of this are featured in Marvel's *The Avengers: Age of Ultron* where Black Widow struggles with her inability to conceive children and Scarlett Witch was subjected to extensive experimental lab testing and mind control, both of which are extremely invasive to the body and coded as feminized traumas. This trauma legitimizes violence by making it more palatable for the audience and acting according to Purse, as an "explanation for female violence and aggression." Purse explains, "the implication is that women would not do 'this kind of thing' except in response to a devastating and physically invasive assault, a hypothesis that does nothing to dismantle dominant binary conception of gendered behavior." In order for space to be made for physically aggressive women, women had to first confront "which female physical actions *could* – at least and at last - be depicted" (193). As more films challenge these gender norms, more diverse representations of women's aggression and more complicated understandings can be considered. However, it is unfortunate that in the meantime representations of aggressive women still follow the revenge route, which offers a reason for and justifies the female character's aggression.

Diana's story does not collapse into revenge and domestic tropes even though it utilizes several of their conventions and themes. Narratives like *Kill Bill*, *Monster*, and *Mad Max: Fury Road* feature female protagonists who pursue justice by the avenging of those in need or revenging lost loved ones. In short, these characters' backstories feature an emotional trauma that justifies the main female character's aggression. As representations of women's aggression in film are still embarrassingly scarce, the examples that do exist often prey on few specific

traumatic events such as rape or losing a child or spouse, both tropes that Purse examines in her argument. Purse describes the evolution of women's aggression in relation to the body and the realism of the violence depicted on that body through revenge and rape narratives. Focusing on the film *Monster*, Purse says that extremely graphic and uncomfortable scenes like the rape scene in *Monster* are

underpinned by an explicit return to the kind of rape-revenge narrative structure generated by early depictions of female physical agency in the exploitation movies, [showing] raped women so traumatized and angered by their experiences that they are driven to kill their rapist (and/or other men), establishing 'the stereotype of the aggressive positive heroine obsessed with revenge.' (193)

Purse's argument links the revenge narrative, specifically the rape-revenge narrative, to violence and the female body. However, as a convention of the superhero comic, 'super' characters are not normally damaged in battle due to their abilities, which alters the understanding of violence on the woman's body. While a 'super' character's attributes often physically keep them from getting hurt – because they have impenetrable skin or heightened endurance - the 'super' character is also rarely hurt on account of the symbolism of the character; if good characters are hurt in battle, the moral message intended for readers does not remain the same. In this way, the genre protects its good characters from physical harm to maintain and enforce specific moral messages.

Wonder Woman narrowly avoids becoming a revenge narrative through her sense of loyalty to her duty in two different moments: when her aunt is killed in the beginning and when Steve is killed at the end. Diana's aunt Antiope is the Amazonian general who trained Diana against Queen Hippolyta's wishes. Hippolyta, Diana's mother, believed that keeping Diana from

fighting would keep the god of war from finding Diana. Antiope argues with Hippolyta for Diana to train, vouching not only for Diana's interest but also for her safety. It is through her aunt's faith and this training that Diana is able to see the full extent of her powers and physical capabilities. Tragically, Antiope steps in front of Diana to protect her and is fatally injured in battle when the Germans attack Themyscira. Diana holds Antiope in her arms as she dies and it is clear Diana feels a sense of responsibility for her aunt's death. The trajectory of the film hinges on this moment, which is reminiscent of when other female leads are emotionally unhinged because of a tragic death. Diana could have become hell bent on avenging her aunt's sacrifice by setting out to exterminate all Germans as a result of her aunt's death. Instead, Diana becomes passionate about ending World War I after hearing Steve's account of the "war to end all wars" - so passionate that she argues to the Themyscira council that "stopping the god of war is our foreordination. As Amazons, this is our duty." For Diana, ending the war was not washed with her aunt's blood - ending the war was about her duty as an Amazon to protect the world from Ares. This stoic sense of duty enables Diana to resist seeking exclusively for revenge.

Similarly, Steve's death at the end of the film offers a familiar revenge narrative motif because Diana watches her lover's death. However, when Steve tragically and heroically dies at the end of the film, Diana resists becoming bent on seeking revenge. As she fights Ares, Steve flies a plane full of active bombs into the sky and detonates them, saving millions from harm. Diana sees Steve's plane blow up and dramatically cries his name in agony, writhing in emotional turmoil as her lover is blown up with the plane. The power of her emotion unleashes the full extent of Diana's powers. In this moment Diana teeters on the edge of justifiable anger and violence. This bout "unladylike" violence – smashing all German soldiers around her to

smithereens - distances her from the warm, loving woman the film as framed Diana to be until this point (Purse 190).

In order to make up for this moment of violence and rage, Diana must re-inscribe her femininity in some way; as a convention of the superhero genre, Diana's character must rely on archetypal femininity in order to be aggressive. Shortly after she breaks free, Ares tells Diana that the humans are not worthy of the gods' perfection. Dr. Poison runs feebly from Diana and falls, her facemask blowing off revealing her scarred face underneath. Ares says that Dr. Poison is the example of all humanity, "unworthy of your sympathy in every way." At this moment, rage blazes in Diana's eyes, and her aggressive is unmitigated by her femininity. Whereas the shot of the scene gazes up at Diana and particularly accentuates her long, slender legs, the camera is angled from Dr. Poison's view, depicting Diana more as a force to be reckoned with. As she holds the tank above her head, Diana recalls Steve's last words and in a sudden change of heart, and Diana tells Ares that he is wrong about humans: "They're everything you say, but so much more. It's not about deserve, but what you believe." Diana finally understands what Steve told her after she faced Ludendorff; that even though the war did not end and people were undeserving of help, if one believes the war should stop, they should try to stop it. Diana's change in attitude rejects revenge motifs as Diana's anger results in her understanding her love of humanity, not in the peril of Steve's killer. This moment resists becoming a revenge narrative because Diana continues the mission she has carried throughout the film and only neutralizes a single threat instead of lashing out at others or becoming bent on revenge. Continuing her mission to kill Ares does not change in spite of Steve's death, negating the possibility of this becoming a revenge narrative.

Though *Wonder Woman* uses revenge motifs as plot points, the film does not fold back into the traditional female revenge narrative. Revenge does not justify Diana's aggression and is not the catalyst for moving the narrative forward. Instead revenge reinforces the goals Diana is already in pursuit of. Diana's discovery of her true strength after Steve's death does align with the existing revenge dynamic because most characters find strength in the memories of their lost loved ones. However, Diana's strength comes from more than her love for Steve; it also comes from her love of humanity and her desire to protect it in Steve's name. Diana is able to destroy Ares out of her love of humanity and moral superiority instead of succumbing to revenge fantasies and the cathartic release of destroying those who killed Steve. The extent of Diana's love pushes back against the revenge narrative because she realizes that though humanity might not deserve her protection or perfection, she believes in humanity's redeemable qualities, an ultimately different approach from the revenge narrative.

In a similar fashion, this film is not folded back into the other narrative common of aggressive women: domestication. The domestic role is not a new role for Wonder Woman considering Diana's multiple story arcs in the comic books. The way the film refuses to result in Diana's domestication could be read as tragic, as with Steve's death their relationship can never play out. However, Diana's lack of interest in and refusal to be domesticated is also progressive for women because so many female characters either seek domestication or end up domesticated anyway. In "The Mother of All Superheroes: Idealizations of Femininity in *Wonder Woman*" by Sharon Zechowski and Caryn E. Neuman, Zechowski and Neuman explore Diana's progressivism over the years. They note "as the 1954 code for comics required romantic stories to emphasize the value of the home and sanctity of marriage, Wonder Woman became just another female character, albeit one with a strong right hook" (134). They go on to say in "the

middle of the 1980's Diana is finally disempowered through her marriage to Steve Trevor and restored to her appropriate role within the 'man's world'" (136). Zechowski and Neuman argue that Wonder Woman comics are more progressive only when real-world women are not fighting for their rights. For example, Wonder Woman sought marriage in times that the authors, who were predominantly men, felt that women were pushing too much for rights and women's empowerment. In historical moments like these, Diana's varying attitudes reflect the attitudes of the authors, which depending on the cultural moment were extremely sexist. However, *Wonder Woman* pushes back against this trend as the film advocates directly for the empowerment of women and was directed by Patty Jenkins.

Wonder Woman deconstructs the trend, which dictates that female lead characters must abide by stereotypical narratives and characteristics in order to justify their aggression. In a study of "violent female action characters," or VFACs, Katy Gilpatric's "Violent Female Action Characters in Contemporary American Cinema" found that "VFACs engaged in masculine types of violence yet retained some feminine stereotypes due to their submissive role and romantic involvement with a dominant male hero" (734). In several instances of Diana's past, she supports Gilpatric's findings as she is eventually employed as a secretary and only ever finds herself in subordinate positions. In addition, Gilpatric found

VFACs were most likely to be submissive in terms of being protected by the male hero when they were romantically linked to him. Further, those VFACs that had no romantic involvement were most likely to be main heroines and least likely to be protected by the male...the more submissive a VFAC was to a male hero, ie protected by rather than assisting, the more likely she was to be romantically involved with him, thus linking the feminine traits of submission and affection.

The results also showed that main heroines were less likely to exhibit these feminine traits than were other types of VFACs. (739)

Gilpatric's point here is more directly exhibited in *Wonder Woman* because of the nature of Diana and Steve's relationship. Though Steve protects Diana from violating gender constructs and social norms, Diana is not physically protected by Steve given his inability to do so. The limit of Steve's physical ability to protect Diana from physical harm disrupts the normative relationship between men and women, calling different kind of relationship.

As supported by Gilpatric's findings, Diana's independence from Steve deconstructs the traditional understanding between male and female protagonist. Carolyn Cocca references a similar understanding of Steve and Diana's relationship in her piece "'The Sexier the Outfit, the Fewer Questions Asked': Wonder Woman." Cocca argues that the dynamic between Diana and Steve deconstructs gender norms: "Steve is a heroic military man in love with a beautiful woman. But he is shown as interested in romance and marriage, and with someone who is clearly stronger than him and in no way submissive to him. [In fact,] Diana rescues him frequently" and she refuses to marry Steve because she would have to pretend to be weaker than him in order to make him happy (4). Though Diana and Steve do play into superhero conventions and gender roles as they fall for each other, Diana and Steve's relationship ruptures gender boundaries by reversing gender roles in action films: she is the protector and he the damsel in distress; she is the voyeur and he the sexual object. This deconstruction is unprecedented by other films featuring aggressive women, as women are innately considered biologically weaker than men. Diana however is not a human - she is an Amazon formed from clay and destined to be the god killer. Diana's superhuman strength offsets the gender status quo of her relationship with Steve, but this is one of many subversions. While Steve is in Themyscira, Diana walks in on him showering.

The camera lingers on Chris Pine's body in an extremely familiar way, as in most films this situation is played out with the man finding the woman naked. However, whereas the man would have been gazing the female body up and down with the viewer of the film, Diana is largely uninterested. Though she does ask him if he is "an example of his sex," she quickly changes conversation. This fantastic moment in the film subverts their relationship from the very beginning of the film. However, in order to correct this status quo Diana must be exceedingly beautiful and feminine and Steve more rugged and knowledgeable about how the world works.

More important than the rupture of gender norms is how the film specifically references marriage, yet refuses to result in marriage. Diana and Steve's conversation about marriage is much different than the conversation the audience would expect in film. Without knowing it, Diana asks Steve and the audience to consider a social and cultural institution that normally is taken for granted. As Steve and Diana sail from Themyscira, Diana tries to wrap her head around marriage. When Diana asks what marriage is, he tells her "you go before a judge and you swear to love, honor, and cherish each other until death do you part." Without prior experience with gender constructs and marriage, Diana asks this because she fails to understand why people get married and why they would make these promises if they do not keep them. Diana's unfamiliarity creates space for a discussion to be held about marriage that is unfamiliar. Diana's inquiry pushes against the institution of marriage itself but because she is unfamiliar with social constructs she is able to ask this question without being reprimanded. Diana inquires "And do they? Love each other until death?" Steve answers, "Not very often, no." "Then why do they do it?" Diana asks. "I have no idea," Steve says. Diana's response to Steve is interesting because it does not indicate that Diana seeks to ever be married. Throughout the rest of the film, the topic of marriage is not breeched again, indicating that Diana has no interest in a domestic life after

defeating Ares. Whereas the suggested sex scene between Diana and Steve indicates that their relationship would have been extended had Steve not sacrificed himself, she violates the expectation society has of women that they should want a domestic life.

Unfortunately for Diana, she will never have the chance to marry Steve on account of his death. In spite of this tragedy, it is important that this film does not result in marriage, and in the 1960s Wonder Woman comics, Steve and Diana do marry. However, their marriage takes Diana's superpowers and agency. Diana's superheroineism is directly linked to her freedom to pursue that heroism independently. In many cases, films that begin with a woman who must leave the domestic sphere resolve by her return to that sphere - the status quo with improved circumstances and cathartic release. This is unfortunately no different with action films like *Kill Bill*, in which the Bride returns home after accomplishing her mission. Diana, however, shows no interest in a domestic life while she and Steve are discussing marriage on the boat. Further, she is denied a domestic life as Steve's plane explodes in a chivalric attempt to "save the world today" so Diana can "save it tomorrow." Diana is denied domesticity on two fronts, as Diana loses her lover and also is unable to physically return home to Themyscira. Her inability to conceptualize domesticity and the suggestion that she finds the institution and its expectations ridiculous suggests that even if she was given the opportunity of marriage, Diana would not have chosen to be marry.

Wonder Woman's resistance to becoming a domestic or revenge narrative is extremely important as a film that has acquired so much attention and success. While all narratives that depict physically aggressive women are important to the representation of women's aggression, creating characters that must be sympathized with to justify their aggression can be read as regressive. As more films follow the revenge or domestic narrative, these narratives become the

normalized frameworks of the aggressive woman's narrative – frameworks that are only successful because of genre conventions like archetypal femininity. By pushing back against these narratives, Diana affords the action heroine genre, and by extension the superhero genre, space to resist becoming a genre with inflexible to conventions that marginalize and strip certain characters of agency.

It comes as no surprise that Diana's aggression is gendered given that she was created in the 1940s. The first comic book superheroine, Diana set the precedent for visual representations of female empowerment through physical aggression. Diana's message of female empowerment and action was threatening to the existing social constructs of the time, as demonstrated through the accusations Fredric D. Wertham's book *Seduction of the Innocent*. In this book, Wertham accused Diana and the Amazons of lesbianism and of subtle bondage themes throughout the series. Wertham's work incited the superhero comic book scare of the 1950s, throughout which Diana suddenly began to reflect core social ideals of heteronormative femininity. These social ideals not only changed Diana so that she more avidly supported gender constructs and advocated for a domestic lifestyle, but also moderated her displays of aggression by juxtaposing them with moments of hyper femininity.

Unfortunately, the ramifications of Wertham's critique are still felt today and continue to impact representations of Diana by trying to domesticize her. Whereas *Wonder Woman* takes steps to create Diana as a figure of self-empowerment, there are only two other notable women in the film to compare to Diana: Dr. Poison and Etta Candy, Steve's secretary. The film maintains a dynamic that makes Dr. Poison and Etta foils of Diana. This dynamic arguably places Etta, Diana, and Dr. Poison on a spectrum of femininity, rendering Etta as the most acceptably feminine on one end of the scale and Dr. Poison as the least acceptably feminine on

the other. By examining Etta and Dr. Poison as foils to Diana, we can more clearly understand how the film simultaneously domesticizes Diana while also allowing her to successfully push back against previous representations of aggression.

Etta is a bubbly, slightly overweight woman who embodies and understands what a woman is supposed to be in the 1950s. Her concept of fighting is based on social constructs, contrasting with Diana who fights physically. While buying Diana clothes, Diana asks how women are supposed to fight wearing dresses. Etta responds, “Fight? We [women] use our principles. I mean, that’s how we’re going to get the vote. Although, I am not opposed to engaging in a bit of fisticuffs, should the occasion arise.” Etta’s understanding of fighting contrasts with Diana’s and is a representation of how women were able to fight during World War I. This understanding of fighting is reminiscent of figures like the Suffragettes who would create picket lines or chain themselves to buildings for women’s rights. In contrast, Diana’s aggression is primarily physical. When Diana said she wanted to stop the war, she meant she wanted to head directly to the Front in order to stop the fighting herself.

Etta’s understanding of the war and her participation in it are coded as acceptably feminine by 1940s standards; she advocates that boys go to war to become men and understands that there is no physical place for her in the Front, unlike Diana. Cocca argues that Etta functions similarly in the comics. Etta is Diana’s foil, “as her body type contrasts completely with Diana’s and thereby constructs the latter as the more ‘normal.’” In addition, Cocca evaluates Etta’s involvement in the comics, stating that “Etta’s women’s college world, in which she and her friends are seen talking only about having fun and subduing male criminals, can be read as ‘properly’ female or ladylike or heterosexual” (3). Etta’s involvement in the film is to counteract Diana’s misunderstanding of the world around her. In contrast, Etta’s absence from the bulk of

the film is symbolic of women's involvement in the war: invisible and minimal. However, Etta's role in the film is important to understanding constructs of the 1950s, as Etta comes equipped with principles that Diana violates because of her revealing battle armor, assertiveness, and overall misunderstanding of how a patriarchal world operates.

As Diana's foil Etta references societal expectations of femininity at the time. Etta's brief appearances throughout the film are also symbolic of looming gender expectations during World War I. Diana tries to uphold these expectations upon arriving in the world of men by dressing according to Steve and Etta's instructions; however, Diana struggles to abide by these rules as she continues to voice her opinion when deemed socially inappropriate. Interestingly, Diana removes her 'appropriate clothing' in favor of her battle armor before charging across No Man's Land. In this moment her clothing symbolically represents acceptable femininity, communicating that femininity is a social construct that can be taken off. Diana's choice to shed these constructs lends to her strength and individuality while also pushing back against the standards that Etta so strongly believes in and reinforces. Diana's clear rejection or misunderstanding of social constructs set her apart from Etta. However, this rejection of femininity does not push Diana to deviant ends like Dr. Poison, the only other female figure in the film and Diana's other foil.

Contrasting both Diana and Etta to an extreme, Dr. Poison creates gaseous weapons for the German army and is described as a psychopath by Steve. Dr. Poison's thick accent marginalizes her on account of her foreignness and "constructs her as un-American and nonwhite," according to Cocca (3). This otherness establishes Dr. Poison as Diana's foil, as Diana is also foreign and speaks with an accent. However, Diana contrasts with Dr. Poison drastically because Diana still upholds a normative feminine appearance. Dr. Poison on the other hand is rendered genderless not only on account of her disturbing actions but also on account of

her distorted face. Dr. Poison is pathologized because of her lack of femininity, her love of gases and poisons, and partnership with Ludendorff. Throughout the film, Dr. Poison serves Ludendorff and at no point desires independence from him or their work. In contrast, Diana and Steve's relationship focuses on Diana's struggle to do things her way and to maintain her independence. Using Dr. Poison as a foil, Diana's deviance from Etta's acceptable femininity is rendered more acceptable than Dr. Poison's masculine cruelty.

While Dr. Poison's fighting style is cruel, it is more accurately described as militant. Diana, being the morally superior, godlike figure of the movie, deems militant battle despicable. This is made clear when Diana finds out that a British General is planning to send troops into battle knowing they will be killed. Diana is outraged and yells, "Where I come from, generals don't hide in their offices like cowards. They fight alongside their soldiers! They die with them on the battlefield! All of you should be ashamed!" Diana's fighting style upholds honor, integrity, and the sanctity of each human life; Dr. Poison on the other hand understands war through strategy and cruelty, similar to the British general Diana accused.

Foiling Diana with Etta and Dr. Poison "circulates dominant "American" ideas about gender, race, and class" (Cocca 4). On the one hand this assertion remains true of the film, as Diana certainly plays into gender, race, and class roles. On account of Diana's foil with Dr. Poison however, Diana reinforces the normativity of beauty and gender constructs. Diana is given the opportunity to kill Dr. Poison for her role in Steve's death. However, Diana chooses to forgive Dr. Poison and instead pursue Ares in order to protect humanity. Her forgiveness at the end of the film restores Diana's femininity and redeems her from how close she was to becoming like Dr. Poison. Using Dr. Poison as a foil also allows for the film to establish dominant cultural

norms in a way that Etta's establishment does not; Etta establishes what a normal woman should do, but Dr. Poison establishes what a woman should not do.

Comparing Diana, Etta, and Dr. Poison on a broader scale, we are able to see how Etta and Dr. Poison bring out distinct elements in Diana. However, each woman perceives aggression differently. As the three women who appear in *Wonder Woman*, these standards of aggression create a scale of female aggression in the film, with Etta's understanding of violence on the soft extreme, Dr. Poison's understanding on the hard extreme, and Diana's understanding falling in the middle. This scale justifies Diana's aggression as more transgressive than Etta and normative women at the time. However, it is not so transgressive that the audience is uncomfortable or questions Diana's morality, like Dr. Poison's cruel actions do. Using Etta and Dr. Poison in this fashion provides reassurance that Diana's aggression is acceptable and necessary for the story. These perceptions of aggression provide useful lenses to examine women's aggression. These three understandings of women's aggression frame the acceptable forms of female aggression in the film, by providing the purely sanitized form (Etta) and a psychopath (Dr. Poison) as two extreme ends of the spectrum to which the viewer must situate Diana's understanding, the physical yet morally good, in the middle.

It is interesting that Diana's femininity must still justify her aggression even though Etta and Dr. Poison justify Diana's aggression as foils. Diana's femaleness, a characteristic that neither Etta nor Dr. Poison have, acts as a force that drives the action of the film. For example, Diana and Steve go to an important political gala in order to catch Ludendorff, the German general Diana suspects to be Ares. Steve is easily able to gain access to the gala by wearing an officer's uniform whereas Diana must steal a dress in order to break in. Interestingly enough, these outfits play up Steve's masculinity and Diana's femininity respectively. This image is

interesting considering Crowley Jack's understanding of aggression, that women's aggression has been constructed in relation to male aggression. Whereas men are associated with aggression and it is therefore acceptable to display aggression, such that Steve can wear a war uniform, women must hide their aggression under the threat of death. "As a matter of survival," Crowley Jack argues, "women have learned to appear unaggressive" (20). Even though Diana is wearing a dress, she must hide her sword in order to pass at the gala. Further considering Diana's concern when trying on clothes earlier in the film ("How is one expected to fight in this?"), the moment at the gala supports Crowley Jack's point. Diana's femaleness keeps her from the action of the film because she cannot wear her battle armor, a getup that is simultaneously hyper feminine and aggressive, to the gala and is forced to locate more acceptable clothing. The dress that Diana is able to find is beautiful and non-threatening to the gender rigid society, but does not serve a practical role in the film aside from barring Diana's entrance to the gala.

Though Diana's dress might not be threatening, it is notably eye catching, which creates a subversive moment shortly after her entrance that actually starts the action of the film back up. Steve, trying to seduce Dr. Poison, loses focus when he sees Diana, surprised because she was not supposed to go to the gala. Dr. Poison notices Steve's preoccupation with Diana and dismisses him, blowing Steve's cover. Diana's femaleness undoubtedly stops the action of the film: Steve is struck by her obvious beauty and fails to complete the mission at hand. This moment calls upon the viewer to gaze at Diana the same way Steve does - as the spectacle of the shot - recalling conventions of male led action films like *James Bond* in which the plot is stopped when a woman walks into the room. In contrast to these conventions, Steve in this moment is again subverting the traditionally gendered narrative as he is trying to use his sexuality to seduce

information out of another character. This convolution of gendered images generates tension in the scene aside from the pressure the characters are under to perform their covert task.

This scene continues to be interesting because moments after, the notion that a woman's femininity only stops the action is also subverted. While making her way to Steve, Ludendorff sweeps Diana up in a waltz on account of her beauty. It is because of her beauty that this action took place in the film, which contrasts with the way the plot was stopped just moments before. Steve again subverts gender roles because he is the one who stops the final action of the scene. After an exchange of words and a brief dance, Ludendorff turns to walk away from Diana. She tries to pull her sword to kill him, but Steve stops her. "I can't let you do this," Steve tells her, grabbing her wrist and physically stopping her from harming Ludendorff. Whereas stopping the narrative action is notoriously common of female characters in film, this moment mirrors Diana's gala entrance. Similar to how Diana stopped the action with her femininity, in a reversal of gender norms Steve physically stops the action by restraining Diana and preventing her from striking Ludendorff. Much like Diana's femininity interrupted Steve, Steve physically stopped Diana from killing Ludendorff. As physicality is traditionally related to masculinity, this moment directly mirrors Diana's gala entrance because Steve used his masculinity to stop the action of the film.

In addition, the moment upholds a construct associated with maleness: it does not make sense that a human could physically restrain Diana, who is so strong the comics deem her to be stronger than Hercules. Though she might have let Steve restrain her physically, Diana breaks from the norm by not letting him restrain her spirit, and continuing the action moving forward. Diana looks Steve in the eye and states, "What I do is not up to you," before pushing him aside and rushing after Ludendorff. However, before Diana can reach Ludendorff, the bombs go off

and set the weaponized gas upon the town Diana and Steve's troop saved. The brief moment Steve restrained Diana resulted in catastrophic events. Diana rejects gender norms by asserting herself against Steve and continuing the action instead of following his wishes. Diana's decision and use of aggression is progressive in a very subtle and acceptable sense while it also upholds regressive stances on gender.

While in the past Diana has problematized representations of women's aggression by being equally progressive and regressive by advocating for female agency and empowerment as well as domestication, Diana in the contemporary filmic landscape certainly calls for women to fearlessly stand up and fight back. Though *Wonder Woman* calls on tropes of the revenge and domesticity narratives, the film maintains the glamor of the superhero genre while subverting typical female narratives to send empowering and realistic messages about femininity and aggression to girls of all ages. Diana's aggression itself could be considered typical of the superhero genre given previous representations like Batman and Superman; however, the level of attention *Wonder Woman's* success has drawn to female aggression is arguably the most important and interesting part about Diana, because though this is not her first appearance, it could be her most popular. As a continuing symbol of female empowerment, the attention Diana drew to women's aggression clearly had valuable repercussions through global events like the 2017 Women's March. While this event was composed of people from all races and genders, the action itself could be considered an aggressive act by Maud Lavin's definition of aggression as political statement. During this event, Wonder Woman's image was used to enforce women's integrity and empowerment. While the aggressiveness of this event and Diana herself are much different, Diana as a representation of women's empowerment and as an agent of female aggression in a landscape that still says women cannot be aggressive is important for the current

political moment. Overall, *Wonder Woman's* popularity draws on many factors that result in her success, but it is this success that stimulates the production of more movies starring aggressive female leads which thus results in better, healthier, and more realistic representations of women's aggression in the box offices and in real women.

CHAPTER II: “I WASN’T BUILT TO DANCE” - FRACTURED IDENTITIES: *GHOST IN THE SHELL* AND REPRESENTATIONS OF WOMEN’S AGGRESSION

Major Mira Killian finds beauty in the flaws of humanity, but does not understand that she herself - a cyborg - is by Western standards, beautiful. Throughout Paramount Picture’s 2017 film *Ghost in the Shell* she fights for justice and her humanity as part of an anti-cyber terrorism squad. Major offers a much different representation of women’s aggression than Diana in *Wonder Woman*. *Ghost in the Shell* was written by Masamune Shirow and first published as a comic book in 1989 by Kodansha Comics, one of the leading publishing houses in Japan. The comic was adapted into several cartoon films, television series, and video games using similar story lines and characters, and in 2017 the series was rebooted as a live action remake. The film suffered from many bad reviews and poor audience reception as several of the main characters of this notably Japanese film, Major, Batou, and Cutter, were cast as white individuals, and they were accused of white washing its cast. In addition, critics responded negatively to the vague, overarching plot and confusing storyline. Though I will not be focusing on these critiques in this chapter, the poor reception of this film is important to understanding Major’s aggression. I argue that *Ghost in the Shell* forefronts gender as construct by juxtaposing feminist cyborg theory and elements of science fiction, changing the approach of women’s aggression and the way the film’s post-gender society is understood.

The 2017 adaptation of *Ghost in the Shell* maintains the general plot of the comics: Major Mira Killian became the first fully functioning cyborg after her brain was put into a robot body with super strength and agility. Major works for Section 9, an anti-terrorist squad that protects Tokyo in the distant future, and they are tasked to hunt down a cyber terrorist. Along the way she discovers her memories were actually fabricated by Hanka Robotics, the company who made her

a cyborg. Major struggles to regain and situate her humanity in a robotic body. This struggle to regain her sense of self signifies her existence as a cyborg – a fractured, inorganic being - and makes Major an important part of understanding contemporary representations of women's aggression.

Despite anxieties surrounding the evolution of technology, the cyborg remains a popular character archetype. Cyborg and post-humanist theory predates the superhero film genre and has long been a consideration of academic interests. The cyborg has been used as a metaphor to better understand technological anxieties and fractured experiences. Sharalyn Orbaugh explains, "Cyborg narratives allow us to personify, condense, and displace the anxieties and hopes raised by the breakdown of the distinction between the mechanical/technological and the organic/biotic" (436). Carl Silvio agrees with Orbaugh's point: "The figure of the cyborg represents an imaginary projection into the realm of popular fiction, a trope invested with cultural anxieties and beliefs about contemporary technology" (55). The cyborg as metaphor allows a confrontation of the organic/biotic binary, a binary that causes many people anxiety as technology quickly becomes more advanced. Of these anxieties, the speed at which technology advances perpetuates people's fear of being replaced, such as in factory jobs, as well as a fear of constantly watched and monitored. Donna Haraway famously and more abstractly understood the cyborg as a political feminist figure. In comparison to the traditional science fiction figure, Haraway's metaphor of the cyborg metaphorically represents a figure that rejects rigidly defined social boundaries. As the cyborg is both human and robot, the boundary between the two are compromised; similarly, Haraway recognizes the differences between various feminist identity politics but urges for a removal limiting boundaries and for union through affinity. Gill Kirkup explains "Haraway's cyborg, like a Rosetta Stone, bridges the language of material feminists

working on issues of gender and technoscience, and postmodern feminists working with cultural studies and textual deconstructions. It is a theoretical creature that has more currency, and popularity, ten years after it was described by Haraway as a ‘manifesto’ for ‘socialist feminists’” (5). While Major is primarily a character who physically is a cyborg in *Ghost in the Shell*, she also communicates “material feminist working issues of gender and technoscience,” by breaking gender binaries and struggling to understand why people would want to be fragmented between human and machine like she is.

The distance *Ghost in the Shell* puts between itself and the viewer as a science fiction film creates a space in which social boundaries can be tested and broken. Though there have been female writers and readers since before the 1930s, the science fiction genre has largely remained a landscape for boys as “Science fiction is popularly conceived as male territory,” Sarah Lefanu says in her introduction to *Feminism and Science Fiction* (2). Similar to defining postfeminism, defining what exactly science fiction is has been up for debate for a long time. Lefanu argues that while the definition does concern itself with the whims of editors and publishers, but also on the reader and where how they want to read the text: “Science or society? Satire or speculation? Credibility or critique?” However, Lefanu generalizes a definition which is useful to understanding not what science fiction is, but what it does, an element important for this chapter: “By borrowing from other literary forms, [science fiction] lets writers defamiliarize the familiar, and make familiar the new and strange. Science fiction narrative can be used to break down, or to build up” (21). Science fiction adapts elements from other genres and political concerns into narratives that are strange and new. The adaptive nature of the science fiction film is important and relevant to women’s aggression because feminism calls for representations that identify the boundaries of women’s aggression and push back against those boundaries.

In this sense, *Ghost in the Shell* abides by science fiction conventions by integrating an overwhelmingly technological landscape based in the future. This allows for the story, and the cyborg, to function on the level it does and to be read as distanced from the real world of the viewer. In comparison to the superhero genre, which puts similar space between the viewer and film, science fiction encourages viewer interaction with the unfamiliar and the unknown in a way that tests boundaries. However, it is this space that makes texts like *Wonder Woman* and *Ghost in the Shell* important. Similar to feminism's use of the metaphor of the cyborg, the science fiction and superhero genre are able to critique social and political systems in a way that films set in the real world are unable to do. The science fiction film's ability to make the familiar strange sets the stage for these films to challenge and resist rigid identity boundaries.

Ghost in the Shell is by far not the first science fiction film to feature an aggressive woman. Whereas popular films and television series like *Star Trek*, *Star Wars*, *Firefly*, *Battlestar Galactica*, and *X-Files* all feature a strong female character among a group of other characters, it is films like *Alien*, *The Hunger Games*, *Prometheus*, *Aeon Flux*, and *Barbarella* that stage the film around a single aggressive female protagonist. Linda Purse specifically discusses the aggression in *Aeon Flux* at length and takes stock in that one of the main reasons that Aeon is able to be so aggressive is because in her world technological advances are commonplace. While Aeon might be a technological marvel, "these are *invisible* upgrades, meaning that her conventional femininity does not have to be disrupted by naturalistic evidence of exertion or strength" (Purse 186). Of this genre, many of the independent female leads are depicted in a similar landscape: a technologically advanced, post-gender society in which they must save society from whatever out of this world threat society might be facing while also teaching a strict and important moral lesson. *Ghost in the Shell* also follows these norms; however, this film in

particularly pushes back against these past representations because Major is a notably more aggressive character - she was literally created to be a weapon. This film was cultivated in a moment that many other representations of women were becoming more aggressive, as I have argued in chapter one, which makes *Ghost in the Shell* important and relevant to discuss.

Though Major was not received as well as Diana, *Ghost in the Shell* uses techniques similar to *Wonder Woman* to represent women's aggression. While Major is played by Scarlett Johansson and therefore meets Westernized beauty standards, she also perpetuates gender norms because she is subordinate to some higher male power. However, she subverts the traditional narrative because her partner Batou is a male; whereas she is the lead character, Batou is merely her sidekick. In comparison to other films, *Ghost in the Shell* as a science fiction film engages in more unusual representations of individuals as the film is set in a presumably post-gender society bent on enhancing people's bodies with technology. Major is composed of a mixture of filmic conventions from aggressive female and science fiction characters. This mixture creates a new representation of the aggressive woman because she is an aggressive cyborg in a world of docile cyborgs. It is through this that *Ghost in the Shell* is able to sustain Major as a complicated, yet progressive, character.

One of the biggest similarities between Diana and Major is the evolution of their aggression throughout the film. As Major rediscovers her humanity, Major's aggression evolves from calculating to passionate. Each scene that showcases Major's aggression is different in its own way. For example, comparing the scene where Major jumps through the window at the beginning of the film to the scene where she fights Cutter's robot demonstrates that she had experienced a change of heart throughout the course of the film. The beginning scene shows Major's strength as a cyborg by showcasing her fantastic ability to subdue the perpetrator and

eliminate threats through abilities unobtainable by a human. As she jumps from a building more than 30 stories tall, invisibly busts through the glass, and runs up the walls while shooting ten bad guys, Major is cold, calculating, and performing a duty to protect the people at the conference. When she is reprimanded for her actions, Major replies “I will find him [Kuze], and I will kill him. That’s what I was built for, wasn’t it?” Major only understands her existence to be a weapon of Section 9. As she regains her memories and forfeits Hanka’s control over her life, Major pushes back by embracing her abilities; whereas her shell was constructed to be a weapon, her ghost – her soul and ability to be an autonomous being - makes her human. Upon reclaiming this humanity, Major becomes passionately aggressive. For example, in the fight against Cutter’s robot, Major is fighting for her right to her humanity. Whereas she sacrifices her body like she has in past fights, here she does so out of rage and the desire to end Cutter’s control over her life. Major’s reclamation of her sense of self is visible through her growing rage; whereas she is inherently a violent being - a being that Cutter namely brought into existence to be a weapon - Major claims this violence as her own and as a mode of protecting and establishing her identity by the end of the film.

Major is only able to reclaim her identity and body because in the film she is able to be exceedingly aggressive. However, this aggression is only made accessible by first compromising it using her extreme femininity or sexuality, as suggested by Coulthard. Coulthard says, “each fight places gender (that of the heroine and of her opponent) at the forefront” (154). As there are notably few examples of women throughout the film, it is no surprise that Major is the ideal female – average height, thin, and overwhelmingly Americanized - in *Ghost in the Shell*. However, in comparison to these other women, Major is the only one who uses physical violence. Every other woman in the film is an employee of Hanka, a nameless person on the

street, or robots that we are led to believe are non-autonomous. For the most part, this film places women on the periphery of the narrative, in almost exclusively in subservient positions. Major's beauty signifies not only that she is a main character of the film, but also it is what allows her to push back against the stratified political system the world of the film abides by.

What makes Major's femininity complicated is that for the most part she is unaware of her beauty and her ability to weaponize it. Whereas she primarily does not use her femininity, during the Yakuza club scene she does make a conscious choice to use her femininity as a weapon. Major and Batou go to the Yakuza club to seek more information about the cyber terrorist. They enter the club separately with the intentions that Major can access one of the back rooms by manipulating some of the men using her femininity. Major tells Batou as they split ways, "I'm gonna have to draw some attention." Entering the club, Major catches the eye of two men without really having to try and the men approach her. "Why don't you come have some fun with us? We will have some privacy," the men tell Major. Looking the men up and down, Major agrees and follows the men into a separate room, a space in which would be sexually threatening if Major was human. This scene is the only moment Major consciously acts more feminine in order to obtain information. In contrast with this moment, throughout much of the film Major's movements and clothing hide the fact that her body, a body created by a male organization, codes her as female. Her choice to be more feminine in the Yakuza club foregrounds her femininity as a construction – she chooses to be more feminine here for her own personal gain. Major's awareness of her body, its effect on other people, and her knowledge of how to use it to her advantage suggests that gender is a construct because she makes a choice to perform gender.

Major manifests this notion on a physical level through her powers of invisibility. Much like any woman can choose when and how to play up her own level of femininity, Major can

decide when and where she becomes invisible. However, it seems like no coincidence that her powers of invisibility are only accessible when Major does not have any clothes on; in other words, Major is only able to become invisible when she is most feminine, namely when she is naked. Her invisibility is a function that can be turned on and off and used as a weapon. By extension, her gender, a construct mapped onto her body by her creator and those who understand her as a female, can be used in a similar manner.

Ghost in the Shell offers an interesting reading of the construction of femininity because we see the process of Major's femininity being mapped onto her body through its creation. During the opening sequence her naked robotic body is depicted before her ghost was paired with it. The camera skims up and down the entire body as it is moved throughout the shelling process and dripped off a liquid that soon becomes her skin. This scene deems Major's body as spectacle from the opening moments of the film. However, given that this body is created by a corporation, and a corporation run by a man at that, the attention to feminine perfection and the beauty of Major's body is extremely important because it has been physically constructed by specific choices that deem this body a female body. Cutter, the CEO of Hanka Robotics, undertook creating Major's body as a secret project and made the decisions regarding her body. This moment shows that even in a post-gender world, there are still constructs that deem bodies either male or female.

Ghost in the Shell codes Major's body as overwhelmingly female in order to confound constructs of gender because Major does not inherently code herself as a female being given her cyborgness. As Major struggles to identify her humanity aside from her cyborgness, she finds herself navigating gender norms and struggling to understand beauty. Whereas those around her see a technologically enhanced body that cannot feel pain and that can live forever, Major seeks

to understand humanity and finds beauty in its flaws. It would seem as though Major does understand gender politics enough to be able to use it to her advantage, but for the majority of the film she chooses not to and instead uses the incredible skills her body allows her. The very construction of her body as the ideal female signifies that there are preconceived notions about femininity, but ultimately it is her choice to weaponize her femininity, which makes gender a construct throughout the film.

The metaphor of the cyborg allows for varied interpretations of gender as construct because the cyborg can be physically broken differently than a human body. *Ghost in the Shell* features several scenes in which Major's body is either disassembled or battered to bits because of physical combat. It is common for movies to avoid depicting the figure of the woman fractured or broken; however, if the film does show the impact of violence on the female body the woman's face almost always remains "the perfectly made-up, untouchable female face" (Purse 192). *Ghost in the Shell* ruptures this notion directly and is able to because of the metaphor of the cyborg. When Kuze ties up Major and he is explaining how they are related, he removes a panel from her face, revealing the working technology underneath. Kuze says, "I was conscious while they dismembered my body, and discarded me like garbage...and they had to move on to you. Morning beauty, you are. They have improved on us so much." As Major's face is broken apart, the image of perfect femininity is ruptured, revealing the machinery that underlies her beauty. This moment is highly symbolic: underneath the layers of femininity are all of the constructs, systems, and machines that keep femininity in place, and by rupturing this image Kuze is revealing femininity and beauty as a fiction. As Kuze removes part of Major's face, he ruptures the illusion that Major is human while simultaneously rupturing constructions of beauty reinforced throughout the film.

It is interesting that this scene not only physically breaks the woman's face, but that she is also tied up while this is happening. An image suggestive of bondage themes, this moment is aggressively sexualized on account of the bondage imagery. Even though this scene is not sexualized, gender is brought to the fore in this moment by themes of bondage. However, this scene is further complicated because though Kuze would appear to be reinforcing physical beauty as a construct, he is actually admiring the beauty of Major's perfect body in comparison to his own, malfunctioning and incomplete robotic body. Kuze's admiration of Major's body, similar to the praises she receives from other characters throughout the film, is derived from her robotic perfection and is reminiscent of the message the holographic advertisements in the streets reinforce: beauty is created.

Deconstructing the female body in this way is only made acceptable because of her ideal femininity and because she is a cyborg. The film distances Major from the viewer by making her an element of fiction. It is through this distance that Major and the female face are justified being broken into pieces. The film uses this metaphor to engage in a conversation about beauty and gender, and clearly shows that beauty and gender are constructs by literally showing the construction and deconstruction of Major's body. In comparison to other similar films like *Aeon Flux* and *Ex Machina*, Major's body is deconstructed regularly throughout the film because of her aggression. As a part of the anti-cyber terrorist squad, Major consciously sacrifices her body over and over again to protect her clients, subjecting the audience to the deconstruction of the woman's body over and over again until it is no longer uncomfortable to see.

Whereas this evokes the image of the woman as protector, Major's conscious decisions to become the protector and to be battered signify perfect control of her body, a control that women have traditionally been striped of because of images of rape. According to Orbaugh, this control

is traditional of classic science fiction robotic bodies, which are the “ideal version of the modernist conception of the body/self” (443). Major is in perfect control of her body even though it is entirely robotic, and “nothing goes into or out of it except what/when/how she wishes” (445). The perfect control of her body signals agency in a way that the other robots, cyborgs, and women in the film are not given, as they work for and are subjected to the decisions Hanka makes, or their bodies are permanently damaged like Kuze’s. The control that Major has over her body perpetuates her fascination with the imperfect body. In the film there is a moment where Major approaches a woman on the street, likely a prostitute. Major asks, “Are you a human?” and asks the woman if she is able to take off her face enhancement. The woman removes the enhancement and Major stares in wonder at the woman’s human face. “It feels...different,” Major states as she strokes her face before scene ends, lending a sexual charge to the scene before cutting out. This moment of intimacy unmasking Major’s confusion about humans’ willingness to get rid of their flaws. Major finds beauty in humanity and its flaws. The perfect control she exhibits over her body singles her out as it can be argued that all humans have imperfect control over their own bodies – things grow where we do not want them to, we struggle to get them to look or act a certain way, etc. Though she is not the only cyborg, she is the only sentient being with perfect control of her body.

However, Major’s control of her body and destiny are challenged throughout the film because of Hanka’s influence. As an experiment created by Hanka Robotics, Major’s body is the property of Hanka. When Cutter orders Major’s placement in Section 9, Dr. Oulett argues that Cutter is “reducing a complex human to a machine.” Cutter coldly responds that Major is a weapon, and “the future of my company.” Hanka owns Major’s body: she either respects Hanka’s wishes or they have the right to take away her body and terminate her. Whereas Major’s

enrollment and exceeding performance in Section 9 is important to upholding a society free from cyber terrorism, this action is dictated by Hanka and colors Major's understanding of her own existence ("That's what I was built for, wasn't it?"). Hanka's dictation of how she must spend her life renders her ghost and shell - mind and body - government property, a complex human being reduced to a weapon. The terms by which the company refers to Major's mind and body, ghost and shell, extend this control because they dehumanize her. 'Ghosts' are understood to be otherworldly, sentient beings with no actual physical control, while 'shell' connotes an inhabitable controllable space. Hanka's control of her shell – control as such that they can take it away if she disobeys – ultimately governs the actions of her ghost. In other words, while Major has perfect physical control of her body, at the beginning of the film she by no means has perfect control over what she does with it.

Ghost in the Shell literally depicts the female body breaking free from government control. Major's sense of perfect control and Hanka's power over it evoke heated political discussions about controlling the female body via birth control, etc. Hanka took Major captive and forcibly turned her into a cyborg, a being notably void of the faintest possibility of reproduction. Not only did the company erase her memories and weaponize her, actions that are safely under the veil of the science fiction genre, Hanka also sexually limited her, which is reminiscent of real world government and religious programs. *Ghost in the Shell* purposely evokes these images as a political statement regarding the control of a female body and overturns them as Major is able to escape Hanka's control at the end of the film and ultimately put an end to the corporation.

While the film certainly sustains a theme of freeing female bodies from government limitations, it is interesting that the degree of women's aggression is limited by gender norms.

The Yakuza club scene specifically genders Major's aggression through images of bondage and female stripper themes. Major is pulled by two men into one of the rooms and handcuffed to a stripper pole. One of the men realizes she is a cyborg and touches her face, to which she retaliates by hitting him. Using a Taser on her they try to force her to dance, but unfortunately for them Major says, "I wasn't built to dance," and begins to beat up the both of them while cuffed to the pole. Films that feature women's aggression and violence often use violence as a spectacle of gender, which is an argument Lisa Coulthard sustains in her article. Using a close reading of *Kill Bill* as a focal point for her argument, she notes that each fight in *Kill Bill* "places gender (that of the heroine and that of her opponent) at the forefront...the fights between women occupy more screen time and are more developed in terms of choreography and style." Each moment Major is aggressive she is also made notably more feminine. In the Yakuza fight club scene, Major beats up the two men that sexually assault her while being tied to a stripper pole, which is charged symbolically and sexually as an accessory of sexualized femininity. Foregrounding violence as a spectacle of gender simultaneously deflects and invites critical attention to gender, race, power, authenticity, and tradition. Coulthard continues to note that fight scenes also included moments of female bonding that are juxtaposed with violence, offsetting violence with themes of femininity like friendship, motherhood, or sexuality (160). Though *Ghost in the Shell* does not offer any instances of female bonding in contrast to Coulthard's piece, the film does offset particularly violent moments by drawing attention to the fact that Major is a robot; the film allows Major to be an aggressive being, but only after impressing to the audience that she is not a (real) woman. After the strip pole fight, Major chases an aggressor into an explosion and her body is literally torn apart, demonstrating that she is not a woman but a cyborg.

What is interesting about *Ghost in the Shell*'s use of violence throughout the film is that it directly impacts the same body over and over again. Lisa Purse examines contemporary representations of female violence. She describes the film *Aeon Flux*, and how Aeon is depicted after blowing up a zeppelin and throwing herself to safety:

Aeon does not display biological traces of her recent dramatic and extended physical exertion, such as a flushed face, perspiration, heavily labored breathing, or the facial scrapes and dirt she might be expected to have picked up in the circumstances. The physical work of action has been elided, and leaves no traces on the body of the actress. (185)

Though Purse does see Aeon as progressive, she calls this an 'invisible' upgrade, as Aeon's "conventional femininity does not have to be disrupted by naturalistic evidence of exertion or strength" (186). Similar to Aeon, Major fails to display physical exertion because she is a robot. Major's inherent cyborgness negates the toll physical altercation would play upon a human body.

The film's ability to negate physical remnants of aggression lead the viewer to question not the aggression, but the physical capabilities of her body. Major's fighting style demonstrates this uncertainty as it showcases her body as a robot. When the conference at the beginning of the film is taken hostage by the cyber terrorist, Major jumps off a building and comes crashing into the room, shooting the hijackers and malfunctioning robots to save the day, all before the remainder of the Section 9 unit even hit the elevator. Coulthard's argument that the fight scene becomes spectacle in woman's aggression does not necessarily apply *Ghost in the Shell*. Major must be read in a different way because her aggression does not exclusively focus on foregrounding her femininity. In comparison to other films featuring women's aggression, Major's body and its capabilities because it is a robot fit into a new space. In other words, the

audience does not question that Major is an aggressive character; the audience is called to question if a body that looks so similar to a human could perform this way. Major's cyborgness puts distance between her character and her aggression. Other aggressive females must mitigate the amount of aggression they display because to be too aggressive would mark the character "outside of mainstream codes of cinematic female representation" (Purse 186). Major on the other hand is made questionable because of her body's capabilities: Can a female body scale buildings and jump through glass? The cyborg changes the image of the female body because it does not question that a female can be aggressive; instead it questions the body's ability to portray exceeding displays of violence and aggression.

Major's ability to be invisible undermines the realness of her body's actual abilities to do these things. As humans are incapable of becoming invisible at will, her invisibility most clearly renders her body different from the other characters fighting around her. The other actions she performs while in pursuit or fighting, like jumping off of a building, running up walls, and deadly accuracy, are all physical actions the human body could theoretically perform. However, invisibility is a physical ability that we have yet to figure out in reality, and therefore compromises the realness of Major's aggressive displays for the audience.

Her cyborgness therefore negates Major's body as the typical female body. Major's invisibility is gendered because she must not have clothing on in order to be invisible; in order to become invisible, she must first make her body fully visible. The scenes where she becomes invisible "stand out in a way that both reinforces and ironically critiques the eroticization of victimized, powerless, and silent female bodies" (Coulthard 161). Major's ideal femininity is perpetuated by her beauty, but undermined by her cyborgness. Her cyborgness, namely her ability of invisibility and her inability to properly code herself as feminine, distances her from

preexisting notions of femininity and negates Major as the typical female body. It is primarily these elements that signal to the audience that she is not a (real) woman and justifies her aggression and the repeated deconstruction of her body.

By rendering Major as a non-typical female body – which is capable of feats like becoming invisible and jumping off of buildings – the film must justify her using gender constructs and conventions of women's aggression for the sake of keeping her character sympathetic, realistic, and a representation of womanhood. Major is not a woman - she is a cyborg who was assumed to be a woman because her body was constructed a certain way. By all exclusive purposes, the only reason Major considers herself a woman is because Hanka tells her she is. Hanka erased her memory of when she was a human and was a woman. The memories that replaced them were fabricated. There is no reason aside from the appearance of her body that Major needed to be coded as female, as it is never explained why it was important that she was made female in the first place. Since she was, the film must justify her actions of aggression as a decidedly female entity by making her the ideal female.

The importance of the ideal female image throughout the film is reinforced by how often it is destroyed and how often it is put back together. This film depicts the destruction and repair of Major's body – of femininity - on several occasions. "Major is infinitely repairable – as long as her brain is intact, her body can be reconstructed, in whole or in part, as often as necessary, and she will still be Major," Orbaugh explains (446). As Dr. Oulett can repair Major's body after a fight, physical violence lingers on Major's body only for brief periods of time. However, the audience is subjected to the battering of Major's body over and over again, whether that is by her own choice or in order to finish the mission. Though Major is repairable, this does not downplay the level of violence Major's body is subjected to in order to achieve an end. At the end of the

film, when Cutter's robot is trying to kill Major and Kuze, Major jumps atop the robot and pulls on the paneling of the robot until one of her arms comes off. The scene, spanning about fifteen seconds, is slow and painful to watch as she grunts with effort and we see the skin, muscle, and machine peel apart before the panel, and Major's arm, dislodges. This scene's physicality is similar to the rape scene Purse describes in *Monster*, in which a woman's body is being brutally ravaged and invaded. Scenes like these force us into "uncomfortably close proximity with the female body as a site of violence and rage" according to Purse (193). In these films, the invasion and destruction of the woman's body push understandings of woman's violence and aggression to uncomfortable places for the audience. Even though Major is not being raped, the disintegration of her body while she dismantles the robot is nevertheless hard to watch.

The excess of bodily harm in the film renders an excess of spectacle. The feminine ideal – Major – is constantly interlocked in a struggle against the patriarchal, governmental standard. As Major stands apart from the other women of the film not only as the main character, but also as the only woman with the agency to physically fight, Major's body is made as spectacle over and over again because in order to use her abilities she must shed her clothing. "Sexual objectification and the perpetuation of dominant class and ethnic hierarchies are just some of the representational tropes that are regularly present when depictions of female physical empowerment are 'permitted'" (Purse 189). In *Ghost in the Shell*, female aggression is permitted at the expense of her femininity. What makes Major stand apart from previous representations is that she is unaware of her femininities' role in her aggression; for most of the film she fights only using the abilities her robotic body has allowed her instead of using her femininity. Even in scenes like the Yakuza club where it would appear that she does use her femininity, the narrative

uses her gender as a tool more than she does. The men are attracted to and approach her instead of her intentionally seeking them out.

This characterizes her aggression much differently from other films featuring women's aggression. In films like *Kill Bill* and *Hard Candy*, femininity is used as a spectacle intentionally by the character. Major, however, struggles to comprehend what beauty is and therefore does not resort to using her femininity intentionally as spectacle. This struggle characterizes her aggression as void of intentional gendering, which is characteristic of Johansson's portrayal of the character. Major's style of fighting locates her on the same playing field as the men who fight around her – she shoots to kill and uses her fists until someone, usually Batou, must pull her off the victim. Instead of gendering her fighting using her femininity, *Ghost in the Shell* depicts Major's fighting the same way other films depict the male protagonist's fighting. However, this film also sets itself up so there are few other notable fighters to compare her to, as usually Major arrives to the scene ahead of everyone else or is alone. Because she alone has the most screen time fighting, Major's aggression only really needs to be justified on account of her gender. Unlike Diana in *Wonder Woman*, the film does not compare Major to other aggressive women but clearly recognizes that she is not a woman. Major's aggression might be reaffirmed using gendered elements, but her aggression and the form her aggression takes is justified by the reoccurring cyborg motif throughout the film.

As gender is a construct in this film and Major is a direct representation of a gender constructed identity, each time she is destroyed and rebuilt the film is destroying and rebuilding the construction of femininity on the body. When Major's face is taken apart, when we see her arms detach themselves from her body, and when we see her body blown to shreds in an explosion, her body is symbolically dislodging gender constructs because we see aggression

played out on the woman's body in the most disastrous of ways. The film's reaction to these moments is to repair her body, constantly destroying and rebuilding the image of femininity as mapped onto Major. As the film boasts that its version of Tokyo is post-gender, I would argue that the film itself is still bent on preserving the constructs it claims to not have. Though the film does acknowledge gender's social and political presence, the excess of bodily harm that Major is subjected to can be read as a perpetual struggle to eradicate the gender hierarchy in a society that constantly works to repair it.

The image of the ever-returning robot woman also hints towards posthumanist anxieties; each time Major is struck down and more of her outer, human shell is stripped away, the robotic inner self is revealed, and each time she is able to stand back up. While posthumanist concerns were not a central point of this chapter, Neil Badmington's introduction to his collection *Posthumanism* remains important to this discussion as well. Badminton states that "In science-fiction films – as in their literary counterparts – Man faced a threat from an inhuman other: 'his' position at the centre of things was at risk. 'They' were ready to take over, to subject 'us' to 'their' rule. The debate about the end of humanism, in other words, was not the exclusive property of critical theory: it pervaded everyday life" (8). Much like Badmington demonstrates the anxiety of the posthumanist other as it is played out in science fiction film, so too does the aggressive female threaten the traditional and dominantly male social hierarchies. Major is a convolution of the posthumanist other and the threatening female figure, a character that not only identifies binaries of organic/inorganic and male/female boundaries, but also a character that breaks those boundaries by negating gender norms and symbolically destroying gender constructs through the destruction of her body.

CHAPTER III: “SPYCRAFT, SENSUALITY, AND SAVAGERY” – WOMEN’S AGGRESSION IN *ATOMIC BLONDE*

Charlize Theron’s performance of aggression in *Atomic Blonde* is visceral and authentic in a way that Diana, Major, and many other heroines fail. Whereas representations of women’s aggression in *Atomic Blonde* are similar in many ways to those in *Wonder Woman* and *Ghost in the Shell*, *Atomic Blonde* must be read differently because unlike Diana and Major, Lorraine is a human and lives in a context that represents ‘the real world.’ Lorraine’s narrative takes place in Berlin during the Cold War, locating the film’s reality and the audience’s reality extremely close together. This closeness calls for a much different reading of aggression than *Wonder Woman* and *Ghost in the Shell* because Diana and Major function in fictional worlds and with fictional powers. While *Atomic Blonde* is also clearly a fictional text, it is focused in the real world and resists the preexisting notions of women’s aggression because of the extent of Lorraine’s physical combat skills and the damage her body receives. In comparison to *Wonder Woman* and *Ghost in the Shell*, *Atomic Blonde* disturbs constructions of women’s aggression because while Lorraine is a highly sexualized character, the film does not further sexualize her for the benefit of the plot or to justify her actions. I argue that *Atomic Blonde* revolutionizes the representation of the aggressive woman because of Lorraine’s authenticity and how realistic her fighting – and its lingering impacts this violence has on her body – is throughout the film.

Atomic Blonde tells the story of undercover MI6 agent Lorraine Broughton. Two weeks before the fall of the Berlin Wall, the KGB killed MI6 agent James Gascoigne while he was carrying a list of undercover agents and their identities. The film is framed by a debriefing session in which Lorraine tells MI6 agent Eric Gray and CIA agent Emmett Kurzfeld the events that happened during her time in Berlin. Throughout the debriefing session, Lorraine’s

descriptions of what happened are portrayed as flashbacks of the mission. On the mission she works with MI6 agent David Percival and a French spy named Delphine Lasalle. She is warned of a double agent – codename Satchel – before heading to Berlin, and suspects Percival who sets her up to be killed by the KGB and confirms her suspicions. Burning his safe house to the ground, Percival kills Delphine and Lorraine catches up with him and kills him before he is able to escape, taking the list from him. Posing as Satchel, she delivers the list to the KGB boss Bremovych and kills him, keeping the list for herself. In Lorraine's recollection, she tells Gray and Kurzfeld that she does not know where the list is following the events she describes. They let her go from the debriefing a free woman, and as the film closes Lorraine boards a plane with the CIA and hands over the list, revealing herself as Satchel, a triple agent.

A narrative full of espionage, crime, and glasses of vodka, *Atomic Blonde* alludes to the crime film genre in many ways, a genre that is exceedingly masculine. Whereas the crime film does include women who are part of the investigation team, it is more rare to see women working the grittier parts of the profession; while men run through the streets in pursuit of the bad guy, women are involved in the office dealing with law - a right won by second wave feminism. Nearly all of the women who were involved on the teams – be it pursuing the law or part of the police force – looked more like models than they did cops. In her piece “Dressed to Kill: Postfeminism Noir,” Linda Mizjewski states that these characters were “no longer anything remarkable, not because of Title VII but because she was already a marketable product in popular culture” (123). Women in examples like *CSI*, *Law & Order*, and *NYPD Blue* functioned as token feminist characters in a genre that was nearly exclusively composed of men. Unfortunately, these characters were often only granted these rights at the expense of voyeuristic and sexually charged scenes featuring these women.

Mizjewski critiques the crime film by understanding postfeminism as a character trope instead of a theoretical approach. “‘Postfeminism’ by now accurately describes how filmmakers, audiences, and the media may conceptualize certain characters and narratives” (123).

Mizjewski’s interpretation of postfeminism asserts that postfeminism can be read as a trope mapped onto characters in various popular culture mediums because of this genre’s tendency to use traditionally feminist characteristics in order to sell the character or series to targeted audiences. The crime film genre is most likely to “expose both the limitations of the postfeminist heroine and the nasty sex and gender issues that her presence supposedly precludes” (125). Using postfeminism as character trope, Mizjewski asserts that token feminist or postfeminist characters render the boundaries of these characters. The crime film is then made into a space in which characters like Lorraine can be critiqued not only on account of their role in the film as the leading or supporting character, but also how they function in the parameters of a genre that largely aims to ignore women or exploit their bodies.

Lorraine does suffer the limitations of postfeminist representations considering *Atomic Blonde* with Mizjewski’s understanding of the postfeminist, crime film heroine. Lorraine is the epitome of ideal female representation; she is thin, white, and blonde. In addition, we discover at the conclusion of the film that she is American, which justifies her strength and independence. Throughout the entire film she is only made comparable to one other woman, the French spy Delphine, who is soft, dependent, and emotional. Comparing the two women, Delphine is only moderately beautiful in comparison to Lorraine. Lorraine’s striking blonde hair stands apart from the other characters in each scene and her height, which is always accentuated by heels, makes her the most noticeable part of any crowd. However, the film resists treating her body as an object because it avoids gazing at her body like a voyeur: notably, there are no long, sweeping

shots of her body throughout the film. Postfeminism marks Lorraine because she is strong, cold, and calculating - all of which are traits afforded to her by feminism.

Lorraine could also be read as postfeminist because of the film foregrounds how she is dressed throughout the film. Lorraine is always clothed well in her stunning and sexy black and white mini skirts, revealing dresses, and pant suits, playing up consumerist motifs. These motifs are important to the consumerist element of the film, and “the overtones of the hardboiled, high-heeled heroine fade when the heels are Manolo Blahnik rather than femme masquerade. The availability of the commodity posits an egalitarian utopia in which sexual, racial, and ethnic differences among consumers recede – supposedly one of the pleasures of the postfeminist aesthetic” (Mizjewski 123). While it is empowering to see such a sexy female character, these elements also ultimately serve a postfeminist purpose – she is only able to dress this way because of past feminist movements. Lorraine’s awareness of her clothing supposes consumerist elements, which imposes limitations on Lorraine.

These postfeminist elements – Lorraine’s beauty and style –both attribute to her sexual capital. In Anne Helen Peterson’s article “Charlize Theron is Not Here to Make Friends,” Peterson discusses beauty as capital by relating it to Theron’s career in Hollywood. Peterson argues that “Theron has only been able to refuse niceness, on and off screen, because of her beauty: it’s capital she keeps cashing in in order to get interesting roles that deemphasize, or at least trouble, the privileges that attend being a thin, white, straight woman in today’s society.” Theron, beginning her career as a model, is familiar with using her beauty as capital in Hollywood to protect her private life. Theron had to earn this Hollywood capital, which Peterson reasons “might be why Theron keeps appearing without pants on the covers of magazines: it’s the obligatory payment of dues that liberates her to do whatever she wants.” Theron’s portrayal

of Lorraine functions in a similar manner: throughout the film Lorraine's dress is overtly sexual and feminine, even in scenes where it does not make sense to be sexualized. Lorraine is then able to take certain amenities – like being so out rightly aggressive - as a female character without becoming an aberration. Lorraine ultimately satisfies a requirement of the crime film genre and postfeminist standards by representing ideal femininity and consumerist values more than it is able to help her throughout the film.

In addition to exposing the limitations of the postfeminist character, the crime film also creates a space in which Lorraine is able to break gender boundaries. According to Mizjewski the “transgressive woman has long served as a register for anxieties about female sexuality and power” (125). These spaces rupture existing constructs and binaries like gender and allow characters to be more feminist than postfeminist. Theron, who played a large role in the creation and direction of the film, used this transgressive space to ultimately change how women are written into crime film. Theron says, “Writers are always giving women dead husbands or kids to make you emotionally invest. Men go on a fun journey, women get a long backstory so you're already forgiving them for what they're about to do” (qtd. in Dockterman). As there is nothing for the audience to sympathize with her about such as a lost loved one or a traumatic rape experience, Lorraine is immediately cast as a cold character. However, by intentionally not giving Lorraine a back story, the producers of *Atomic Blonde* code Lorraine similarly to her male crime and action film counterparts like James Bond, which is a large part of what allows this film to move representations of women forward.

In addition to having no traumatic, sympathetic backstory, Lorraine's disillusionment with humanity invites little sympathy to her character. As Lorraine is human, Lorraine also does not find herself infatuated with humanity like Diana and Major. Whereas Diana and Major

express a certain love for humanity and its imperfections, Lorraine has never known anything but humanity and she is clearly disenchanted with it. Lorraine's disdain for humanity and the systems she is forced to work in are translated through her sarcasm and straightforwardness. At the beginning of the film, Lorraine asks if the CIA has to be present during the debriefing. When setting up the tape recorder for the session, Lorraine mutters a direct insult at Kurzfeld, the CIA agent. The men ask Lorraine what she said, and in reply she plays coy with them. "Did you hear me say something? What? Well, do you want to play the tape back?" Similarly, the level of disgust Lorraine exhibits when interacting with Percival shows that she is not there to play games. "Yes, I've read your file. I've also read your dog file. So let's cut the crap, shall we? This whole hung over, show-up-late, don't-know-which-way-is-up act, I'm not buying it. I trust you about as far as I can throw you," Lorraine tells Percival. Lorraine's attitude towards Percival, Kurzfeld, and Gray can be described as nothing less than impatience with their arrogance, authority, and entitlement.

Whereas Diana and Major are enamored by humanity's shortcomings, Lorraine has long been sick of the flaws of humanity and society at large, and makes that clear through her body language, sarcasm, straightforwardness, and outright physical aggression. "Women have been so often cast as mothers, potential mothers, caretakers, and servants, assistants, and handmaidens of all sorts that it's become a conscious but also unconscious expectation that anyone who isn't – at least some of the time – must be inherently unnatural" (Hurley 111). Because Lorraine is cold and opposes preexisting norms pervading images of femininity, she is unlikeable and therefore unsympathetic. Of the many elements that make Lorraine one of a kind, it is her unlikableness that distinguishes her from other representations of women in the crime genre and of women's aggression. In conjunction with not knowing her back story, Lorraine's apparent disregard for

human life or humanity at large presents a conflicting image of womanhood when juxtaposed with the preconception that “women should be nurturing and their presence redeeming” (Hurley 112).

In addition to Lorraine’s unlikeable qualities and distance, Lorraine’s character is informed by Charlize Theron, an actress who not only has used her sexual capital to succeed in Hollywood, but who is also personally familiar with aggression. Growing up in South Africa, Theron watched as her mother shot her abusive and alcoholic father. This moment was certainly a turning point in Theron’s life as her mother told her that they could either choose to sink or swim because of it. “I am not fearful of the darkness. If anything, I am intrigued by it, because I think it explains human nature and people better,” Theron says. She resists that she chooses to play aggressive characters like Furiosa in *Mad Max: Fury Road* because of her past, but because characters like Furiosa and Lorraine offer a new kind of heroine for Theron: “I like women who can struggle, and win the struggle, and get out of their situations. They’re not victims, but they’re also not superheroes” (qtd. in Buckley). Theron’s past informs her interest and investment in creating characters like Lorraine who explore their dark sides without making a traumatic story necessary.

The affinity between Theron and Lorraine depicts an overwhelming authenticity of women’s aggression, rage, and all around bad-assery, a concept that is unfortunately still new to cinema and that Theron understands all too well. In 2015 Theron was interviewed at the Cannes Film Festival for her role in *Mad Max: Fury Road*. She was asked where all of this rage came from, to which Theron responded “Uh, surprise. Women have that” (Baillie). Theron’s understanding of rage transfers to her portrayal as Lorraine; Lorraine is not held back by trauma and is not victimized throughout the film, even when she is covered in bruises and her eyes

blackened. Lorraine overcomes the limitations of postfeminist representations because she is able to visibly sport these bruises and because her representation of aggression is crafted to parallel that of previous representations of aggression in men. The bruising and battering of the female body in long, drawn out fight sequences in *Atomic Blonde* is new and uncomfortable. However, the fighting itself in the film is easily comparable to popular male action heroes like James Bond. What is troubling about Lorraine's comparability to Bond lies how the comparison implies that a aggressive woman must be compared to a man, which continues to reinforce that aggression is defined as a man's trait, as outlined by Crowley Jack and Lavin's arguments about the construction of aggression based on gender. In spite of this comparison, Lorraine's authenticity does render women's and men's aggression equivalent.

Atomic Blonde uses elements from the crime film genre to further transgress Lorraine through her sexuality. The crime film heroine has been typically included to titillate and accessorize the male protagonist. Lorraine disrupts the representation of the titillating female protagonist because there are no lingering, objectifying shots of her body throughout the entire film. While she is clearly sexualized, almost every encounter she has with a man is either professional or violent, leaving no room for the male characters to objectify her. Instead of objectifying her, the film gives Lorraine the space and agency to entertain possibilities aside from common heteronormative narratives, like hooking up with the male partner or the male serial killer (Steenburg 225).

In complete contrast with the film, the graphic novel *Atomic Blonde* was based off of, titled *The Coldest City*, does uphold the heteronormative gender status quo in the graphic novel. Interestingly enough, one of the key differences between the graphic novel and the film is that in *The Coldest City* Delphine's character – a woman in the film - was actually a male French spy

named Pierre LaSalle. The graphic novel romanticizes their relationship to some degree; while Pierre does rescue her from the bar similar to Delphine in the film, Lorraine meets Pierre for a quiet dinner before heading back to Pierre's room. The film purposely transgresses Lorraine's character while the graphic novel purposely keeps her more feminized by only including one fight scene and using the surrounding characters to constantly put her in her place. Pierre specifically patronizes Lorraine with his chivalry and pointedly sexist quips: "The game of spies is a man's job, Mademoiselle." Lorraine cleverly and cheekily responds, "No, Monsieur...let me show you what a man's job is" before the panel blacks out and switches to the debriefing room, suggesting an intimate scene between the two. In juxtaposition, the film and the graphic novel are doing much different things with the French spy character. While they each maintain Lorraine's impressive spy skills, the film is distinctly more transgressive than the graphic novel.

This difference between the graphic novel and the film points to how crime film is able to create a new sexual space for the postfeminist aggressive heroine. The film deliberately codes Lorraine as bisexual by depicting two primary sexual encounters: the relationship of Delphine and Lorraine, and when Lorraine remembers an encounter with Gascoigne. Though she is never explicit about this moment with Gascoigne, there is a brief moment when the audience sees only his face under what looks like sheets in the background, implying a sexual relationship even though she claims she only knew him "well enough to say hello." The convolution of Lorraine's sexualization and her apparently fluid sexuality complicates how the film presents Lorraine as simultaneously being apart of - yet transgressing - the crime genre. While it could be argued that Delphine and Lorraine's relationship exists to titillate the viewer, their relationship functions on a more practical level for Lorraine, as she obtains information Delphine as well. Comparing the

graphic novel and the film, Lorraine's relationship with Delphine is just one of several elements that makes this film different from preexisting female crime films.

In addition, Lorraine's bisexuality functions on a technical level to characterize her differently and further distance her from other, postfeminist representations of women in crime film. Closely analyzing Delphine and Lorraine's relationship, Lorraine primarily functions as the independent, more masculine partner. The couple's body language demonstrates this independence as Delphine lies against Lorraine while she is sitting up and smoking a cigarette. As the main character of the film, Lorraine departs from typical representations of women in crime film because she is the lead role and because of her independence from other characters. Katy Gilpatric's found that in a survey of the top twenty action films with women characters, the main female characters were less dependent than supporting female characters. Gilpatric explains, "Main heroines were less likely to be romantically linked to the male hero, and therefore less likely to assist or be protected by him. Main heroines took on the role of the central hero figure and therefore were less likely to exhibit feminine stereotypes of submission and affection" (743). *Atomic Blonde* supports this reading of the aggressive woman, as Lorraine is vastly different from Delphine, who is extremely dependent on Lorraine. Delphine foils Lorraine because she is a representation of the conventional female spy: she admits to being worried about the stresses of being a spy, is unable to protect herself, and only truly functions to titillate the audience and complicate Lorraine. If Lorraine were attracted to and sought a man who understood her, she would come across as an emotional being and the relationship would feminize her. In contrast, her relationship with Delphine highlights Lorraine's masculine and independent tendencies, which is much different from the ditzy blonde female characters of the past.

Lorraine's bisexuality is particularly transgressive because it evokes past feminist movements differently than many postfeminist characters do. Postfeminist characters are often feminist because of the rights that have been won for them in past feminist movements. Conventions like hyper sexualizing the character, putting that character in places of relative power, and giving her agency suggest that the film assumes that women are powerful and that these conventions are "an active choice made by women who have already benefited from second wave feminism's campaigns for gender equality" (Purse 188). While these conventions do render an empowered female character on screen, they fail to actually change women's representations. Lorraine's bisexuality on the other hand directly harkens back to radical feminism and the sex controversy that questioned the importance of the phallus which divided the feminist movement. Lorraine is a more dynamic and empowered character because her sexuality is allowed to be complicated and deviates from the crime genre standard, a standard that was previously reinforced by *The Coldest City*.

While Lorraine's bisexuality does recall past feminist movements and the rights those movements have won her, her sexual preference is ultimately transgressive because the film does not punish her for it. In the past, bisexual female characters have overwhelmingly been characterized as the femme fatale, a character who is dubious in nature and whose sexuality is excessive. While certainly progressive, these characters' sexual behavior "can be read as a gratuitous attempt to pander to the heterosexual male gaze," undercutting the progressiveness of the character (Farrimond 139). Alternatively, the narrative often punishes characters who are not meant for the male gaze. For instance, in *Basic Instinct* Catherine is a psychotic murderer. Though she is not locked up for her crimes, as they never catch her, throughout the film her deeply manipulative mannerisms ostracize her. Eerily enough, *Atomic Blonde*'s debriefing

scenes are reminiscent of the scenes where they are interrogating Catherine in *Basic Instinct*. While clearly referencing this scene, *Atomic Blonde* portrays its deviant female character in a totally different light; though Lorraine deviates from heterosexuality, Lorraine's mentality is stable and her life is ultimately not impacted by her deviance. The aggressive situations that do arise in the film are apart of her job as a spy – not as punishment for breaking heteronormative boundaries.

Lorraine's transgression and deviation from normative structures are just the surface of what makes this film transgressive for representations of women and women's aggression. Her bisexuality and masculine tendencies might be justified by her hyper sexual appearance, but it is these characteristics that push back against gender structures and make her different from other women's representations. However, it is because of the transgressive space made by the crime film genre that Lorraine is able to be unlikeable and bisexual. As the main character Lorraine is able to embody features that are not traditionally associated with women and not be pathologized or killed off.

Atomic Blonde does more with its transgressive space than limit itself to gender and sexuality: Lorraine is also extremely aggressive. While aggression is apart of being a spy, the film's representation of aggression is unlike previous representations of women's aggression because of how authentic and visceral it is. Lorraine's fighting is much different from Diana and Major's, especially since *Atomic Blonde* is based in a reality so similar to our own. Both *Wonder Woman* and *Ghost in the Shell* use familiar geographic locations but incorporate supernatural elements or to create another reality aside from the 'real world.' Diana and Major - a god and a cyborg – are only able to function because of the space between their physical aggression and the viewer's reality, which justifies their aggression. Each film's efforts to separate the reality of the

film make these characters more acceptable as aberrations of aggressive women. However, Lorraine contrasts from Diana and Major in the most fundamental way: Lorraine is a human. Lorraine's humanity distinguishes her from other representations of women's aggression; she does not have to have superpowers, a traumatic past, or motives for revenge, but instead is simply doing her job. Though Lorraine's humanity is called into question because she is so cold and unlikeable, Lorraine's skills are purely human and the most closely representative of those sitting in the audience. The similarity between the viewer and Lorraine is what truly jars the viewer while watching fight scenes like the staircase scene, as Lorraine has no super human ability for endurance, to resist pain, or to heal, like Diana and Major. The viewer is able to relate to Lorraine's bodily experience and physical pain on a personal level as humans themselves, which is an important element that reaffirms her authenticity. The relatability of Lorraine's character draws sympathy from the audience differently than other action heroines; Lorraine is not sympathetic because of a tragic backstory, but she is sympathetic because the audience does not want to empathize with the pain she is subjected to.

As Lorraine is located in a historical reality assumed to be similar to the 'real world,' Lorraine's fighting style is unable to be revolutionized with super powers and incredible abilities like Diana and Major. However, *Atomic Blonde* does successfully change how women's aggression is approached because of how Lorraine uses her femininity. Women in crime film, similar to the superhero and science fiction genre, largely use their femininity to fight by luring men unsuspectingly into their grasp via flirtation or use of sexuality. *Atomic Blonde* reimagines how a woman can use her femininity to fight. Upon arriving in Berlin, Lorraine is picked up by two men who she assumes are her escorts. She realizes they are actually the KGB and she calmly pulls off her heel. A second later, she begins to stab the man sitting next to her with her heel.

Lorraine's use of her femininity here is much different than other representations of women's aggression. Lorraine not only uses her heel for its original functional purpose, as a shoe, but also as a weapon. In contrast with other aggressive women, Lorraine did not use her heel to seduce the men to their doom, but used it – a symbol of her femininity and an oppressive symbol of femininity as a whole – as a weapon to stab her perpetrator. She is then able to wrestle him out of the car and take the steering wheel from the driver, ramping the car up on a concrete road barrier, flipping the car, and knocking her second perpetrator unconscious. The first moment of Lorraine's aggression in the film is huge, disastrous, and shows that Lorraine's physical skill set is impressive to say the least. Not only can she beat up fully equipped men without being armed herself, she can do so while wearing stilettos, tights, and a dress.

Similar to how she used her heel directly as a weapon, *Atomic Blonde* plays with gender conventions and aggression by putting objects symbolic of domesticity and femininity into contact with her aggression. As she is searching Gascoigne's apartment for clues about his murder, a group of four KGB enters the apartment with the intention of killing her. Lorraine fights the four men using items available around the apartment, such as a hose from outside, a pan in the kitchen, and the door of the refrigerator. Notably, each of these items are distinctly domestic, as the final moments of the scene are shot in the kitchen. However, the way in which Lorraine uses them vastly differs from other representations of women in the kitchen: whereas we are used to seeing women use the items for their intended purposes, she uses the hose to hit and snap the men with, the pan to knock out two different men, and the refrigerator door to knock out a third. She then takes one of the men's police sticks and begins to hit him with it, before tying the hose to one of the men and jumping out the window, using the man's body as a counterweight for her fall to another floor.

The way Lorraine uses these resources to subdue a team of men codes her aggression much differently than other examples of aggressive women. For example, in cartoon films women commonly have weapons that are disguised as feminine projects, like Lucy's lipstick Taser in *Despicable Me 2*. In superhero films we see a similar affect, as for instance Catwoman's goggles in *The Dark Knight Rises* turn into the iconic Catwoman ears and her tail becomes a whip, a weapon that is inherently sexualized. These examples demonstrate how gender and aggression were juxtaposed in the past to mitigate a character's femininity with her aggression. The femininity of the accessory - even if it was a weapon - justified the image of the aggressive woman. Lorraine does not do this. While the items she uses are notably domestic or feminine items, the items themselves were not created for fighting like a lipstick Taser would have been. The items Lorraine uses are domestic because she is fighting in domestic spaces, such as inside of a taxi or an apartment. However, when Lorraine fights in other places, she is not limited to domestic or feminine items; for example, when fighting the two KGB in the staircase she uses her physical strength, the gun she brought with her, and the gun she picks up from the men who were unconscious. At the beginning of the film, Lorraine was not given any tools or weapons that specifically are made to code her feminine. While receiving specialized weapons from a government lab is largely considered a convention of films like *James Bond*, Lorraine's not receiving purposely feminized weapons is a part of what makes her unique from other characters.

Lorraine remains the most feminized aspect of the room because her weapons are not fantastic or overly feminized, drawing attention to her physical skill and not how her gender is being reaffirmed. Most crime and action films transcribe concepts of masculinity through the use of accessories. Judith Halberstam's work on female masculinity prescribes that masculinity extends outward into patriarchal structures, family, and through the surveillance of certain

bodies. Halberstam then concludes, “if what we call ‘dominant masculinity’ appears to be a naturalized relation between maleness and power, then it makes little sense to examine men for the contours of that masculinity’s social construction” (936). By translating Halberstam’s method of analysis into studying women’s aggression, the objects women use aggressively function define their femininity. By feminizing the women’s weapons, the aggressive action does not unbalance the gender status quo prescribed on female bodies by social construction, as “men are naturally aggressive, and women are naturally unaggressive” according to Crowley Jack (18). Even though these tools are not hyperfeminized, Lorraine’s character is not compromised because her appearance is feminized. By not hyperfeminizing the tools Lorraine uses in addition to her looks, *Atomic Blonde* draws more attention to the physical skill that Lorraine possesses instead of to the tools she uses. As the female body is sexualized according to the expectations of the crime genre, the viewer is able to look past her appearance and focus on the action at hand, foregrounding Lorraine’s impressive physical skills.

Lorraine’s physical skills, though impressive, are believable and not something the audience has never seen before. However, I would argue that amount of damage Lorraine takes is unprecedented by other representations of women’s aggression. The violence that Lorraine’s body takes is not only real, but also it is relatable and extremely visible, two elements that are largely absent from other films. Whereas characters like Furiosa from *Mad Max: Fury Road*, Diana from *Wonder Woman*, Major from *Ghost in the Shell*, and the Bride from *Kill Bill* at some point all receive blows, these blows are beautified, are not sustained upon the female body, and are highly unrealistic. Lorraine’s body on the other hand does not follow these rules: when she fights, she is sweaty, her hair is messed up, and she struggles to breathe; when she is hit, she

calls out in pain, bleeds, and bruises – all of which are repercussions that remain on her body throughout the rest of the film as she limps, sports black eyes, and loses her voice.

In spite of the visual damage on her body, Lorraine is not victimized by the residual marks left on her body, which an extremely new representation of women. Lisa Purse asks on what terms contemporary mainstream cinema is prepared to show active female physicality. According to Purse, these films display little to no physical markers of exertion or injury upon the female body (190). If damage is done to the female body, Purse asserts that it is to victimize that body through rape and to evoke the rape-revenge narrative (193). The damage Lorraine takes throughout the film does not victimize her. Aptly stated by Buckley, “Her face is bruised because she’s done her job, not because she has been victimized.” However, the damage Lorraine’s body takes goes beyond a bruised face, as we see in the first moments of the film when Lorraine gets up out of a ice bath covered with bruises and scars. As she turns on the light at her make up table, the light deeply contrast her bruises with her extremely pale complexion. The marks covering Lorraine’s body display what other films in the crime genre do not – the bodily repercussions of fighting and violence, regardless of gender. This is a move that the crime, science fiction, and superhero genres as a whole fail to include in their representations of aggression.

Atomic Blonde not only pushes against boundaries of how much violence can be comfortably shown on the body by keeping the damage visible, but it also depicts exactly how she got those injuries. The most aggressive scene of the film is when two men attack Lorraine on a staircase while she is trying to cross the Berlin border. Throughout the scene - which lasts an uncomfortable length of about ten minutes - the intense fighting and violence takes a physical toll on Lorraine and her perpetrators. While they are fighting, there are no sounds other than the

fight at hand. The absence of non-diegetic music makes the scene uncomfortable and more painful as the shouts of pain and labored breathing of both characters is more prominent. The length of the scene allows for the characters to display an authentic fight scene by allowing time for exhaustion to be played out. Whereas both Lorraine and her assailant are bleeding profusely, it is more uncomfortable to watch each of these characters struggle to stand and continue fighting one another.

Whereas “depictions of female agency come at a price, frequently including titillating nudity and sexualized characters,” it is interesting that this specific scene is one of the few in which Lorraine is not overly sexualized as spectacle, as Lorraine is wearing a pea coat, sweater, black pants, and boots (Purse 193). In comparison to other scenes, this moment does not bolster Lorraine’s femininity to maintain a status quo with the level of her aggression. Lorraine’s aggression is unsightly, unruly, and untamed as she beats her assailants to a pulp trying to protect Spyglass. This scene – the most aggressive in the film - ruptures the gender status quo because Lorraine’s body is not spectacle - her physical skills are. While this rupture makes the scene unfamiliar and uncomfortable to watch, it is this disavowal of postfeminist notions progresses representations of women.

Lorraine as a representation of women’s aggression offers a visceral authenticity that Diana, Major, and many other heroines fail to do. As detailed in the chapter, this representation and its success are based on the decision to exclude a traumatic backstory in Lorraine’s narrative. This exclusion revolutionizes Lorraine’s narrative by disallowing the audience to initially forgive Lorraine for her violence on account of rape trauma or the loss of a loved one. Though there are other films that display viscerally aggressive female characters like *Hard Candy*, *Mad Max: Fury Road*, and *Kill Bill*, each of these films focuses on a traumatic backstory, such as rape, avenging

a loved one's death, correcting a personal injustice, or rescuing a loved one. In comparison, Lorraine's narrative lacks all of these things: she does not seek revenge or to avenge, but simply does her job. Though Lorraine is sexualized as spectacle, Lorraine is able to use her sexuality as espionage and as a weapon. The practicality of sexualizing Lorraine renders this sexuality not as a bolstering of femininity to maintain a status quo, but an end to a means. Lorraine's sexuality is a tool by which she is able to perpetuate her skills but she does not rely on it in order to access her skills. Of *Wonder Woman*, *Ghost in the Shell*, and *Atomic Blonde*, *Atomic Blonde* offers the most progressive representation of women's aggression through Lorraine's lack of a backstory and the level aggression shown throughout the film.

CONCLUSION

Diana in *Wonder Woman*, Major in *Ghost in the Shell*, and Lorraine in *Atomic Blonde* are all violent women in each of their own rights. In comparison to the preexisting action hero, these three women resist postfeminist gender boundaries by using tools won by feminism while also stepping outside of these boundaries to make their representations new. While Diana, Major, and Lorraine certainly enjoy some of the rights won by feminism like being able to speak their mind and having the agency to be the stars of movies, they also continue to fight for feminism by making their representations grittier, feelings uglier, and aggression more violent. Their acts of aggression and violence are particularly interesting as the “physically active female protagonist is, for the most part, a figure whose ‘unladylike’ bouts of violence are framed in ways that locate her at a distance from real life” (Purse 190). The aggression of these women abides by the rules of the superhero, science fiction, and action genres, all genres dominated by male roles. Thus, they are able to embrace violence as not only a means for survival, but as part of their occupation as well. We have seen aggression like theirs in male characters like *Batman*, the *Matrix*, and *James Bond*. *Wonder Woman*, *Ghost in the Shell*, and *Atomic Blonde* not only subvert the gender of the main character to be female, but also allow women the platform to show what female aggression really looks like.

The struggle Diana, Major, and Lorraine face in regards to how they are perceived on account of their gender is ongoing throughout each of the films and perpetuates societal gender norms and expectations. Society at large has naturalized the male/female binary. This binaries act like an “ideology that goes far since [women’s] bodies as well as [their] minds are the product of this manipulation,” or the understanding that male is privileged and female is not (Wittig 266). But unlike most representations of women, *Wonder Woman*, *Ghost in the Shell*, and

Atomic Blonde resist these expectations by making the characters on some level aware that gender is a construct. The physical shedding of Diana's acceptable clothing at the Front, Major's choice to gender herself in the Yakuza club, and Lorraine's awareness of her clothing in hostile situations all point to these women's understanding of their gender as something that can be played up or turned off. Generally speaking, gender is prescribed to a person by societal expectations surrounding that person, such that if a person is physically aggressive they are automatically considered more masculine or are otherwise pathologized. As viewers of any given film, we expect the men to act certain ways and the women to act certain ways based on these structures and genre conventions. As I have explained in chapters one, two, and three, Diana, Major, and Lorraine are aware of these structures and expectations, and use them to their advantage or chose to remove these symbolic power structures that inhibit them, empowering them differently than other postfeminist heroines.

Women's aggression is justified using the gender and sexuality of a character, which makes Diana and Major's symbolic removal of these expectations complicated. Where these films fail is that even though they remove their symbolically gendered accessories, Diana, Major, and Lorraine all still function as the representation of ideal femininity in the film, a construction built and normalized by patriarchy and mapped onto their bodies by society. Stephanie Genz's says, "in some cases, the promotion of a 'new' femininity camouflages the return to conventional modes of feminine behavior" (11). Each of these characters are placed in contexts where they are singled out because of their looks; in addition, as the lead character they more dominantly uphold Western femininity ideals. Diana, Major, and Lorraine are whiter, more beautiful, and notably more American than any other character in their respective films. As these characters are the most normalized female characters in each of the films – even though they might have super

powers or a robotic body - it is through these characters exceeding femininity that they are able to access progression and to be more violent. “Femininity becomes available for a deconstructive practice that uses simulation in ways that challenge the stable notion of gender as the edifice of sexual difference” (Genz 14). It is unfortunate that filmic representations of women continue to adhere to beauty standards in order to manifest as the active heroine, but it is ultimately this beauty that justifies action.

In the case of *Wonder Woman*, *Ghost in the Shell*, and *Atomic Blonde*, this action manifests in the attention drawn to the aggressive female form and the physical damage their bodies take. If Lorraine’s face were not so beautiful, the physical damage being done to it would not be so shocking. Representations of women’s aggression have taken advantage of the agency that feminist movements have won them; more and more films and television are calling women to be aggressive. However, the ramifications of a “post” feminist mindset can be seen in representations prior to the contemporary moment: the women are allowed to hurt others, but rarely are hurt themselves. Feminism has won these women the right to fight, but postfeminism stops them from being hit in return, and ultimately stops them from being full participants in the action of the film. “The physical work of action has been elided, and leaves no traces on the body of the actor” (Purse 185). The 2017 films examined in this thesis, *Wonder Woman*, *Ghost in the Shell*, and *Atomic Blonde* reject this notion. To vary degrees, these women are put in positions to not only to engage in fisticuffs, but also to receive blows. More than this, we see the physical tolls taken on each of their bodies as they fight tooth and nail to protect humanity, their country, or their life.

The blows Diana, Major, and Lorraine take have been felt all over the world in the face of the 2017 political moment. In a time where people boast about equality and claim society is

post-racial, postfeminist, and post-label, the meager filmic representation of marginalities begs to differ. *Wonder Woman*, *Ghost in the Shell*, and *Atomic Blonde* all offer unique representations of women, and the success of each film has drawn attention to women's aggression in a new way – a way that depicts women as subjects, agents of their own narratives, human, and strong enough to not only take hits but to deal them. These films are not suggesting that women must be physically aggressive in order to surpass sexism, but are showing that it is okay to be strong and to have a voice in a society that still casts women as accessories or supporting characters. The popularity of the superhero, science fiction, and action genres and the exceedingly popular representations of Diana, Major, and Lorraine signal that a new era of women's representation is on the horizon, and we can be sure that whereas they might be any type of woman - a mother, sister, girlfriend or simply a woman - they will be angry and packing a punch.

Works Cited

- Aeon Flux*. Directed by Karyn Kusama, performances by Charlize Theron and Frances McDormand, Paramount Pictures, 2005.
- Aliens*. Directed by James Cameron, performances by Sigourney Weaver and Michael Behn, Twentieth Century Fox, 1986.
- Atomic Blonde*. Directed by David Leitch, performances by Charlize Theron and James McAvoy, 87Eleven, 2017.
- Badmington, Neil. *Posthumanism*, Palgrave, 2000. Print.
- Baillie, Katie. "Charlize Theron has an Amazing Response to the Question 'is Mad Max a Feminist Movie,'" *Metro*, Metro UK, 15 May 2015, <http://metro.co.uk/2015/05/15/charlize-theron-has-amazing-response-to-the-question-is-mad-max-a-feminist-movie-5199063/>.
- Barbarella*. Directed by Roger Vadim, performances by Jane Fonda and John Phillip Law, Marianne Production, 1968.
- Basic Instinct*. Directed by Paul Verhoeven, performances by Michael Douglas and Sharon Stone, Carolco Pictures, 1992.
- Bochco, Steven and David Milch. *NYPD Blue*. Steven Bochco Productions, 1993.
- Buckley, Cara. "Charlize Theron's Sick Work Ethic." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 25 July 2017, www.nytimes.com/2017/07/25/movies/charlize-therons-sick-work-ethic-atomic-blonde.html.
- Carrie*. Directed by Kimberly Peirce, performances by Chloe Grace Moretz and Julianne Moore, Metro-Goldwyn-May, 2013.
- Carter, Chris. *X-Files*. Ten Thirteen Productions and Twentieth Century Fox, 1993.

- Charlie's Angels*. Directed by McG, performances by Cameron Diaz and Drew Barrymore, Columbia Pictures Corporation, 2000.
- Cocca, Carolyn. "The Sexier the Outfit, the Fewer Questions Asked: Wonder Woman." *Superwomen: Gender, Power, and Representation*, Bloomsbury, 2016. pp. 25-55. Print.
- Coulthard, Lisa. "Killing Bill: Rethinking Feminism and Film Violence." *Interrogating Post-Feminism*, Duke, 2007. pp. 153-175. PDF.
- Crane, David and Marta Kauffman. *Friends*. Warner Bros. Television, 1994.
- Crowley Jack, Dana. *Behind the Mask: Destruction and Creativity in Women's Aggression*. Harvard University Press, 1999. Print.
- Cummings, Whitney and Michael Patrick King. *Two Broke Girls*. Michael Patrick King Productions and Warner Brothers Television, 2011.
- Despicable Me 2*. Directed by Pierre Coffin, performances by Steve Carell and Kristen Wiig, Universal Pictures, 2013.
- Dockterman, Eliana. "Charlize Theron Invents a New Kind of Badass in Atomic Blonde." *Time*, Time, 26 July 2017, time.com/4874478/charlize-theron-atomic-blonde/.
- Dozier, William and Lorenzo Semple Jr. *Batman*. Twentieth Century Fox Television, 1966.
- Ex Machina*. Directed by Alex Garland, performances by Alicia Vikander and Domhnall Gleeson, Universal Pictures International, 2015.
- Farrimond, Katherine. "'Stay Still So We Can See Who You Are': Anxiety and Bisexual Activity in the Contemporary Femme Fatale Film." *Journal of Bisexuality*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2012, pp. 138-154.
- Genz, Stephanie. *Postfeminities in Popular Culture*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. Print

Ghost in the Shell. Directed by Rupert Sanders, performances by Scarlett Johansson and Pilous Asbaek, Paramount Pictures, 2017.

Gilpatric, Katy. "Violent Female Action Characters in Contemporary American Cinema."

Women on Screen: Feminism and Femininity in Visual Culture. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. PDF.

Goldeneye. Directed by Martin Campbell, performances by Pierce Brosnan and Sean Dean. Eon Productions, 1995.

Halberstam, Judith. "Female Masculinity." *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, Blackwell Publishing, 2004. pp. 935-956. Print.

Haraway, Donna. "A Cyborg Manifesto." *The Cybercultures Reader*, 2000, pp. 291-324. PDF.

Hard Candy. Directed by David Slade, performances by Patrick Wilson and Ellen Page, Lions Gate Films, 2005.

Howe, Sean. *Marvel Comics: The Untold Story*. Harper Perennial, 2012. Print.

Hurley, Kameron. "In Defense of Unlikeable Women." *The Geek Feminist Revolution*. New York: Tom Doherty Associates, 2016. Print

Johnston, Antony. *The Coldest City*, Oni Press, 2012.

Kill Bill: Vol. 1. Directed by Quentin Tarantino, performances by Uma Thurman and David Carradine, American Cement Building, 2003.

Kirkup, Gill. "Introduction to Part One." *The Gendered Cyborg*, Routledge, 2000. Pp. 1-13. Print.

Larson, Glen A. *Battlestar Galactica*. Glen A. Larson Productions, 1978.

Lavin, Maud. *Push Comes to Shove: New Images of Aggressive Women*. The MIT Press, 2010. Print.

Lefanu, Sarah. "Introduction." *Feminism and Science Fiction*, Indiana University Press, 1989.

Pp. 1-10.

Lichtenfeld, Eric. "Introduction: A Little Violence Never Hurt Anyone." *Action Speaks Louder: Violence, Spectacle, and the American Action Movie*, Wesleyan University Press, 2007.

Violence, Spectacle, and the American Action Movie, Wesleyan University Press, 2007.

Pp. 1-8.

Lorre, Chuck and Bill Prady. *The Big Bang Theory*. Chuck Lorre Productions and Warner Bros,

2007.

Mad Max: Fury Road. Directed by George Miller, performances by Tom Hardy and Charlize

Theron, Warner Bros. Pictures, 2015.

McRobbie, Angela. *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture, and Social Change*. Sage,

2009. Print.

Mizejewski, Linda. "Dressed to Kill: Postfeminist Noir." *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (2005).

Pp. 121-127.

Monster. Directed by Patty Jenkins, performances by Charlize Theron and Christina Ricci,

Media 8 Entertainment, 2003.

Munford, Rebecca and Melanie Waters. *Feminism and Popular Culture: Investigating the*

Postfeminist Mystique. I.B. Tauris, 2014. Print.

Orbaugh, Sharalyn. "Sex and the Single Cyborg: Japanese Popular Culture Experiments in

Subjectivity." *Science Fiction Studies*, vol. 29, no. 3, 2002, pp. 436-452. PDF.

Petersen, Anne Helen. "Charlize Theron Is Not Here To Make Friends." *BuzzFeedNews*, 29 July

2017, [www.buzzfeed.com/annehelenpetersen/charlize-theron-is-not-here-to-make-](http://www.buzzfeed.com/annehelenpetersen/charlize-theron-is-not-here-to-make-friends?utm_term=.nkY0yzKO1Z#.hpEkm7ANVZ)

[friends?utm_term=.nkY0yzKO1Z#.hpEkm7ANVZ](http://www.buzzfeed.com/annehelenpetersen/charlize-theron-is-not-here-to-make-friends?utm_term=.nkY0yzKO1Z#.hpEkm7ANVZ).

Prometheus. Directed by Ridley Scott, performances by Noomi Rapace and Logan Marshall-

- Green, Twentieth Century Fox, 2012.
- Purse, Linda. “Return of the ‘Angry Woman’: Authenticating Female Physical Action in Contemporary Cinema.” *Women On Screen*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, pp. 185-198.
- Roddenberry, Gene. *Star Trek*. Desilu Productions, 1966.
- Silvio, Carl. “Refiguring the Radical Cyborg in Mamoru Oshii’s *Ghost in the Shell*.” *Science Fiction Studies*, vol. 26, 1999, pp. 54-72. PDF.
- Star Wars*. Directed by George Lucas, performances by Mark Hamill and Harrison Ford, Lucasfilm, 1977.
- Steenburg, Lindsay. “A Pathological Romance: Authority, Expert Knowledge and the Postfeminist Profiler.” *Women On Screen*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, pp. 225-236.
- Tasker, Yvonne, and Diane Negra. “Introduction: Feminist Politics and Postfeminist Culture” *Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture*. Durham: Duke UP, 2007. 1-25. Print.
- Tasker, Yvonne. “Women Warriors: Gender, Sexuality, and Hollywood’s Fighting Heroines.” *Spectacular Bodies: Gender, Genre, and the Action Cinema*. Taylor & Francis [CAM], 2002. Comedia. EBSCOhost.
- The Avengers: Age of Ultron*, Directed by Joss Whedon, performances by Robert Downey Jr. and Scarlett Johansson, Marvel Studios, 2015.
- The Brave One*. Directed by Neil Jordan, performances by Jodie Foster and Terrence Howard, Warner Bros., 2007.
- The Dark Knight Rises*. Directed by Christopher Nolan, performances by Christian Bale and Tom Hardy, Warner Bros, 2012.
- The Hunger Games*. Directed Gary Ross, performances by Jennifer Lawrence and Josh

Hutcherson, Lionsgate, 2012.

The Matrix. Directed by Lana Wachowski and Lilly Wachowski, performances by Keanu Reeves and Laurence Fishburne, Warner Bros, 1999.

Thelma & Louise. Directed by Ridley Scott, performances by Susan Sarandon and Geena Davis, Pathe Entertainment, 1991.

Trainwreck. Directed by Judd Apatow, performances by Amy Schumer and Bill Hader, Universal Pictures, 2015.

True Grit. Directed by Henry Hathaway, performances by John Wayne and Kim Darby, Willis-Hazen, 1969.

Wertham, Frederick. *Seduction of the Innocent*, Main Road Books. 1954. Print.

Wittig, Monique. "One is Not Born a Woman." *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory*, Routledge, 1997. Pp. 265-271. Print.

Wolf, Dick. *Law & Order*. Studios USA Television, 1990.

Wonder Woman. Directed by Patty Jenkins, performances by Gal Gadot, Chris Pine, and David Thewlis, Warner Bros, 2017.

Zechowski, Sharon and Caryn E. Neumann - "The Mother of All Superheroes: Idealizations of Femininity in *Wonder Woman*." *Heroines of Comic Books and Literature: Portrayals in Popular Culture*, 2014. Print.

Zulker, Anthony E. *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*. Alliance Atlantis Communications, 2000.