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Jessica Sutton

**Project Revna: A social brand against the
sexualisation and objectification of women in
comic books**

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Project presented to IADE - Faculty of Design, Technology and Communication of the European University, to fulfill the necessary requirements to obtain the degree of Master in Design and Visual Culture conducted under the scientific guidance of the Doctor Eduardo Corte, Professor of IADE.

Keywords

Comics, awareness, sexualization, objectification, women, action.

Abstract

For years comics have been used as a visual language to tell stories using pictures and plays a vital part in our visual culture. What started as political cartoons among newspapers turned into a large industry of comic books providing entertainment to many. The superhero genre in comic books is consumed worldwide and has faced many controversies during its long years of reign. The main controversy focused on within this Project is the sexualization and objectification of female characters in comic books which causes harm on the roles of the women in our society. With research on women in visual culture and their presence among the comic book industry as support, the solution to this issue is the social brand, Revna. Revna uses communication and graphic design to challenge the exploitative ways in which women have been viewed, portrayed, and treated in the history of visual culture. Revna demands change through targeting those who contribute to this issue through newspaper articles. Revna fights for the transformation of a better representation for women in the future.

INDEX

1. INTRODUCTION.....	6
1.1 Introduction.....	6
1.2 Research Problem and Expected Contributions.....	8
2 WOMEN IN VISUAL CULTURE.....	10
2.1 Introduction.....	10
2.2 Women in Western and European Culture.....	10
2.3 Renaissance.....	12
2.4 Baroque.....	15
2.5 Romanticism.....	19
2.6 Impressionism Period.....	23
2.7 Surrealism.....	27
2.8 Pop Art.....	31
2.9 Current Visual Culture.....	34
2.10 Conclusion.....	40
3 WOMEN IN COMIC BOOKS.....	41
3.1 Introduction.....	41
3.2 Female Characters in Western Comic Books.....	42
3.3 Conclusion.....	63
4 PRIMARY RESEARCH METHODS.....	64
4.1 Introduction.....	64
4.2 What Has Been Done and What Could Be Done.....	64
4.3 Questionnaire.....	67
4.4 Conclusion.....	85
5 PROJECT DEVELOPMENT.....	86
5.1 Introduction.....	86
5.2 The Idea.....	87
5.3 Name and Purpose.....	90
5.4 Mission, Vision, and Values.....	90
5.5 Target Positioning.....	91
5.6 Visual Identity.....	91
5.7 News Paper Articles Collection.....	99
5.8 Conclusion.....	107
6 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH.....	108
7 REFERENCES.....	110

INDEX OF FIGURES

- Figure 1. Madonna and Child with Two Angels by Filippo Lippi
- Figure 2. Danae by Titan
- Figure 3. The Rape of The Daughters of Leucippus by Peter Paul Rubens
- Figure 4. The Rape of the Sabine Women by Nicolas Poussin
- Figure 5. The Nightmare Henry Fuseli
- Figure 6. The Death of Sardanapalus by Eugene Delacroix
- Figure 7. The Barque of Dante by Eugene Delacroix
- Figure 8. The Luncheon on the Grass by Edouard Manet
- Figure 9. L'Etoile by Edgar Degas
- Figure 10. Dancers at the Old Opera House by Edgar Degas
- Figure 11. The Curtain by Edgar Degas
- Figure 12. Dancer in Her Dressing Room by Edgar Degas
- Figure 13. The Phenomenon of Ecstasy by Salvador Dali
- Figure 14. The Doll by Hans Bellmer
- Figure 15. The Doll by Hans Bellmer
- Figure 16. The Doll by Hans Bellmer
- Figure 17. The Doll by Hans Bellmer
- Figure 18. \$he by Richard Hamilton
- Figure 19. Photograph of Tom Wesselmann
- Figure 20. Photograph of Hugh Hefner with Playboy Bunnies at the St. Louis Playboy Club
- Figure 21. American Apparel 2012
- Figure 22. American Apparel 2007
- Figure 23. American Apparel 2008
- Figure 24. Honey Bridette Campaign 'Office Party Time'
- Figure 25. Jumbo Comic Sheena Comic Book
- Figure 25. Jumbo Comic Sheena Comic Book
- Figure 26. Wonder Woman 1987. DC Comics. Volume 2. Issue 91

Figure 27. Wonder Woman 1945. DC Comics.

Figure 28. Wonder Woman Tv Adaptions Over The Years

Figure 29. Phantom Lady #17 1948

Figure 30. Storm in her first appearance, Giant-Size X-Men #1, 1975

Figure 31. Star Fire in Tales of the New Teen Titans #4 1982

Figure 32. Catwoman #1 1993 DC Comics

Figure 33. Batman Catwoman Issue 10

Figure 34. Wolverine #62 2003

Figure 35. Black Widow in Amazing Adventures #5 1970

Figure 36. Black Widow in the movie Captain America: The Winter Soldier 2014

Figure 37. How old are you?

Figure 38. How do you identify your gender?

Figure 39. How often do you read comic books?

Figure 40. What genre of comic books do you typically read?

Figure 41. Do you prefer print or digital comic books?

Figure 42. How do you usually discover comic books?

Figure 43. In your experience, how are women typically portrayed in comic books?

Figure 44. Do you believe that female characters in comic books are sexualized?

Figure 45. Do you think the sexualization of female characters in comic books is problematic?

Figure 46. Do you believe that sexualized portrayals contribute to harmful stereotypes?

Figure 47. How do you think the portrayal of women in comics affects young readers?

Figure 48. Do you think there is an adequate representation of women in comic books?

Figure 49. How important is it to you to see diverse representations of women in comic books?

Figure 50. Do you think comic book publishers have a responsibility to address issues of sexualization and representation?

Figure 51. Have you ever stopped reading a comic book series due to its portrayal of female characters?

Figure 52. What change would you most like to see in how women are portrayed in comic books?

Figure 53. Would you more likely support a comic book series that features well-developed and non-sexualized female characters?

Figure 54. Revna Name and Logo

Figure 55. Revna Logo Grid and Dimensions

Figure 56. Revna Logo Typography

Figure 57. Colour Pallet

Figure 58. Revna Logo and Colour Pallet

Figure 59. Revna Logo and Red Colour Pallet

Figure 60. Comic Book Communication Diagram by Randy Duncan, and Matthew J. Smith

Figure 61. Figure 61. Revna Collection of Newspaper Articles

Figure 62. Figure 62. The Cover of Revna's Book Of Newspaper Articles

Figure 63. Revna Posters To Promote Book

Figure 64. Revna's Book of Newspaper Articles First Spread

Figure 65. Revna's Book of Newspaper Articles Second Spread

Figure 66. Revna's Book of Newspaper Articles Third Spread

Figure 67. Revna's Book of Newspaper Articles Fourth Spread

Figure 68. Revna's Book Cover of Newspaper Articles On Shelf

Figure 69. Revna's Book Opened on a Shelf

Figure 70. Revna Poster Mock up

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Before comic books, cartoons had been popular among England and America where it started off as political cartoon strips being printed in newspaper articles. Later a superhero appeared in these comic strips, causing a demand for more which led to the beginning of comic books. In the early years of comics there was little to no female superheroes. If women made an appearance in any comic book, they were often there for a man's benefit and made to fit a stereotype that degrades a women's role in society. The main role of a women in comic books were limited to romantic interests or simple-minded supporting characters. These are factors that contributed to the objectification of women. When looking at female comic book characters, it's clear that the stereotypical depiction of women has been kept and carried through the production of comics over the years.

The sexualisation of the female body is commonly drawn with exaggerated body proportions, mostly enlarged features such as breasts and rears that are usually paired with thin waists and longer legs in revealing costumes. This unrealistic way women's bodies are then illustrated in sexually suggestive poses, making them appear submissive. A main reason as to why comic books in had women depicted in these views was because comics were predominantly created by men and had male readers as their target audience. Women were not considered readers of comic books as it was seen as a hobby strictly for male readers. Because of this, a negative environment was created where women were faced with hostility when wanting to take part in the reading of comics. With men being in control and the target being other men, a main tactic used to sell these comics is the sexualisation of female characters.

There have been recognisable efforts in a change among the inclusivity of women in comic books and how they are represented, thanks to the efforts of feminist movements. However, the sexualized stereotypical depiction remains to this day and continues in the modern age of comics in many cultures. This controversial depiction of women and children causes a chain of other additional problems when being sexualised and objectified such as low self-worth and mental health illnesses such as depression and eating disorders. The sexual objectification of women in media can also influences stereotypes that contributes to gender-based violence, this is because when men are portrayed in the media they are often seen as the more dominant and powerful sex while women are often the submissive beings. This normalizes male supremacy and the violence

against women. Women are directly impacted by these effects both personally and socially. With all these negative impacts in mind there needs to be more solutions towards improving how women are seen and depicted. There are a few that already exist today which involves people who dedicate their lives to dismantling the ill representation of women by bringing awareness to the issue at hand. There are a few books published that write about the history of women in comic books along with illustrated books about women empowerment.

What has brought to one's attention is that there are only a few literatures that are published about the study focusing on the impact comics specifically can have and what methodologies are used. Those that can be found that focus on comics specifically include interviewing, questioning, and observing those that are exposed to this kind of media and take part in it. There is a lack of material that tackles how to make a change in comic book illustrations moving forward. A guide on how a different approach can be made when representing women and both their characters and bodies. In addition to this, there is a lack of accountability among the artists and publishers of comic books. There used to be organisations such as the Comics Code Authority who would approve or disapprove the content of comics, where they would not allow explicit media that negatively influences the audience. Why aren't there any anymore? Why isn't there any acknowledgement for the kind of content people are able to freely have access to, for children to have access to? Even though that information on the topic of female sexualization through visual media's such as comic books is relatively easily accessible through the internet and people are becoming more aware of the dilemma women face in representation, there isn't enough action being taken place to provoke change. People are aware of it but not much is being done.

The approach in tackling this problem is personally creating an organization that not just spreads awareness on female representation in comic books, but target those who allow it to happen so freely and provoke further discussions and protest. Starting with diving into the sexualised female representation in art history, then how female characters were created through the years of comic books, followed by data research to create a foundation the project is strong enough to achieve its goal in making a change. With historical roots in Norse Mythology, a comic book artistic influence paired with a threatening attitude this project is determined to create a more diverse industry of comics.

1.2 Research Problem and Expected Contributions

Sexism is a term that refers to the beliefs, opinions, and systems that treat as though one gender, predominantly male, is more superior (Demarchi, 2014). It is a concept that has prevailed within our societal structures and culture for centuries. Sexism has manifested in multiple ways in our everyday society that effect women, to the extent that they experience economic, workforce and health-care disadvantages along with the struggle of gender-based violence in both their homes and the public (University LT, 2019). A branch of sexism is Objectification. This happens when women are treated as not people but rather bodies that are used for the pleasure of others (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). The way women are objectified is learned through gender-roles that is based on social behaviours (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). This is referred to gender role socialization where implementing pressure on how women are expected to look physically which causes women to be in a constant state of wanting approval on societal standards in fear of being rejected (Mca, 2013). Women are reduced to having their values based on their physical appearances and sexual appeal rather than their intelligence or character. The sexualization and objectification of women can be seen repeatedly throughout our visual culture. The escalation of sexualised images of the female body in mass media is growing at such a rapid rate it has become inevitable to consume it (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). A vast number of different media can be found sexualising women, such as advertisements, movies, television shows, art, and photography. Such negative representation contributes to the dehumanizing attitudes that cultures take part in, making many women around the world suffer. The sexualised way of seeing women and the female body can be traced back to early years of our history. In art history where men were dominantly in control, women were not permitted the allowance of being artists themselves but rather limited to being the subjects and objects of men's desires. This is explored more deeply in the next chapter, *Women in Visual Culture*.

Among the various visual medias that are known for sexualizing women is the comic book industry. The comic book industry is a world of storytelling through the art of illustration and is a very popular source of entertainment. Due to being an industry controlled by and made for men, from the beginning comic books have had a disgusting habit of depicting women as sexual objects. When women are featured in comic books they are often belittled to small roles in the narratives, sidekicks to the male heroes, girlfriends that need saving and are seen in skin-tight revealing costumes that were illustrated to appeal to men (Robbins, 1996). This behaviour towards female

characters has been present during the origins of comic books and has been prevalent ever since. Despite the slight improvements that's been made because of feminist movements along with women taking on the roles of creators and readers, an alarming level of female characters being sexualised and objectified remains.

Regarding the implications of the sexualisation of female characters in comic books, there are several ways it affects the women in our society. The way female characters are seen in these comic books contributes to the harmful stereotypes, causing their value to be limited to their physical appearance and sexual enticement. Having these expectations and specific depictions of female characters puts pressure on women and even young girls who read these stories to try fit into these societal norms. It leads to problems within a woman and girls self-worth when the expectations are not met. Not only can it have a negative influence on young female readers but young male readers too. These portrayals can influence a young boy's perception and the treatment of women. Due to the normalisation of sexualised media among women, it strengthens the idea that women exist to be used and approved by men. The history of comic books and the different ways female characters have been sexualised and objectified is explored among the chapter Women in Comic Books. Overall, the problem lies within the way women continue to be negatively portrayed among the pages of comic books.

After having identified this problem, with the support of having performed research on the representations of women through the history of art and comic books, the project had the goal in providing an initiative driven response to the social issue. By creating a social brand that involves a form of self-expression in the form of newspaper articles, further awareness on the problem is spread achieving the aim in promoting equal gender representation. In addition to this, there is the hopes in changing the stereotypes that are deeply rooted in how women are seen. This contributes to enforcing a new direction in how society can improve its visual culture and allow diversity and inclusivity in the world of comic books.

WOMEN IN VISUAL CULTURE

2.1 Introduction

Visual culture as a discipline, is the study of visual images and artefacts in our society within different cultures. It is an approach to effectively analysing something derived from multiple disciplines such as art, history, humanities, and sciences (Schleimer, 2019). It involves an unlimited range of emotions and expressions communicated through different forms of visual arts such as paintings, photos, comics, movies, design, fashion and even advertising. This field of study dives into how visuals can convey meanings, influence perceptions, and contribute to the foundations of our social and cultural identities. It's a method of assessing how visual elements construct and reflect societal values, norms, and ideologies. Whether we are paying attention to it or not our daily lives are flooded with images of visual culture and these visuals have the power to influence people's thoughts and actions, which is why when trying to understand what role women have in our visual culture, it is needed to go back centuries to navigate the sea of visual media by deconstructing images of women so that we can begin to acknowledge how the society we are living in now was influenced. For this approach, there's an emphasis on the importance of the way of seeing and the visual world in moulding interpretations, creating, and sustaining aesthetic standards, solidifying gender roles, and what the defining power dynamics are within a culture (Mirzoeff, 2002).

To accomplish an understanding of the participation of women in visual culture, or rather how they were depicted and represented, we look at how women were seen in the visual arts as time progressed in the specific cultures of Western and European culture. This is a textual analysis where first, we go through the different art movements in Western and European history, taking a few paintings to discuss the way in which the women were sexualised.

2.2 Women in Western and European Culture

When looking at the beginning of visual culture and the history of art in Western and European culture, it is evident that it was systematically marginalized, or rather obscured, when it comes to the involvement of women in the visual arts. The world of visual culture and its discipline has the habit of dismissing the contributions women have made in the field as either non-existent or simply inferior to those of men. The famous artists of our time are most known to be predominantly white males who had perceived art as a cultivated dialogue, the roots of the various themes and styles

can be traced back to classical antiquity (Chadwick, 2012). The classical antiquity period is a time that had significant developments in many fields such as philosophy, literature, and art. This era helped build the foundations that Western Civilization and continues to remain influential in various fields of study. However, since that time, instead of being recognized as creators, women are often belittled to the role of objects in representation (Chadwick, 2012). Due to functioning on a gendered discourse, art history has taken part in fortifying the socially constructed gender divisions of a patriarchal society. Western tradition took part in justifying the isolation and domination of women among the patriarchal cultures (Chadwick, 2012). Women have been a main subject in the arts such as paintings, often idolised, romanticised, and objectified, but there is a disappointing lack of representation of the women behind the canvas despite their efforts in participating. Western visual culture is flooded with images of the female body. The idea that the objectification of women has historical roots and can be traced back to the nineteenth century. It was within the nineteenth century that a relation between the theory of art and medicine is what brought up the concepts of health and beauty when it comes to the female body (Nead, 2002). In both medicine and art, the making of medical and aesthetic imagery relies on meticulous visual observation, which is what created the ideas of the ‘acceptable’ definitions of what health and beauty are in terms of the body. When placed under magnification of a viewer’s eye the body becomes the site of political and social interpretation where views of what masculinity and femininity are, are forced with the idea of what is considered socially and culturally the norm. The female body has always been an object of display and when put in this position, the female body is treated as a spectacle meant for observation, analysis, and classification (Cronje, 2001). Women are frequently associated with images and being a spectacle, falling under the control and dominance of the male perspective. The simple act of looking, of observing something grants a level of power and authority with visual enjoyment which is what permits a fetishist observation (Cronje, 2001). For men, the female body is linked to eroticism, sexual imagery about women has been made for men’s enjoyment whereas the nude can be seen as an object controlled through the way the body is displayed and posed. When being the subject of artwork, women are admired for their physical form, often through being nude or as a depiction of “purity”, this subject is fully explored by Lynda Mead in her book *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity, and Sexuality* (1992). Lynda Mead explains that when anyone indulges themselves in the history of Western art, they would find themselves drowning in images of the female body. Lynda Nead goes on to discuss

how the female nude is considered a representation of high works of art and goes into the idea that the female nude contributes to the issues of other media where women are exploited such as pornography. Lynda Mead explains her view that the cause of women being idolised in art and society stems from the power men have obtained in a capitalist world, this can be seen as early as in the Renaissance period.

2.3 Renaissance

Starting at the Renaissance period, spanning from the 14th to the 17th century, the Renaissance was a time of rebirth for European culture after the Middle Ages. Here it was encouraged to revive classical philosophy, literature, and art, though it is not surprising the absence of female artists during this period due to the patriarchal power structure that enforced the ideology that women are incapable of creating art. In hopes of demonstrating their skill, the male artists of this time approached their idea of female beauty through eroticism and nudity while still obtaining their religious views where a subject of feminine virtue is often used to depict women as chaste and submissive. During the Renaissance, humanist writings would address the specifics regarding how women should be raised, encouraging the education of women in hopes of improving them as wives and mothers while in the Christian belief system of chastity and obedience (Chadwick, 2012). Yet these ideals were not expected from men. The women in the paintings from this period were widely based on the religious symbol of Madonna, Italian designation for the mother of Christ. The earlier works of the Madonna was a regarded a highly idolized figure, an image of what's seen as womanly and virginal. What's important to understand is that these depictions were influenced by what's considered societal norms of the time, these were often setting unrealistic expectations of femininity (Delturk, 2015). The Madonna was a visual depiction from the Byzantine period and widely used in the Medieval and Renaissance times. For feminists it can be seen as a reference for what is considered a wrong representation of women and who they were made to be. This depiction of women in art was used in hopes of encouraging women to maintain their expected roles in society by wanting them to be what is considered the ideal woman. As Whitney Chadwick (1990) explains, perfection was defined by beauty and the idea of moral virtues.

The idea of an ideal woman of that time was someone who was celebrated for taking on the role of mothers, especially to male heirs. This can be seen in a painting by Filippo Lippi. Filippo Lippi was a Florentine painter born in 1406 Italy and died in 1469 in Spoleto (Mariani, 2019). The painting *Madonna and Child with Two Angels* (Figure 1) is one of Filippo Lippi's most famous paintings from 1460-1465. The painting shows the virgin Mary sitting on a throne with her hands clasped in prayer while facing her son in a gentle way with a look of what can be described as desolation as if knowing what her son will go through in his life. With her attention directed at her son, the Virgin is dressed as an elegant noblewoman wearing blue to symbolise her purity as a virgin (Nelson, 2023). When looking at similar paintings, its noticeable how often the colour blue is used for the mother. The specific blue called Marian blue became known to be the official designated colour when it came to the Madonna (Fiore, 2018). The baby Jesus is being supported by two angels while reaching out for his mother. This painting can be used as example to show the effort of creating an idea of holiness that women were expected to follow. When looking at how this painting can be used as an example where women are objectified, it lies within how they are being reduced to symbols where their worth is based on moral standards rather than humanity and enforcing gender roles. The way her modesty and virginity were controlled in these images can be seen as a reflection of the patriarchal gender roles in the society men made, this was how the view that women are to be sexless and obedient were enforced. This is why religious paintings were used for the purpose of encouraging spiritual growth, mainly portraying women as beings of virtue,



Figure 1. Filippo Lippi. *Madonna and Child with Two Angel*. 1460 – 1465 c. Uffizi Galleries, Italy
<https://www.uffizi.it/en/artworks/lippi-madonna-and-child-with-two-angels>

focusing on the importance of their purity and obedience (Verdon, 1990). If women didn't follow the roles that they were forced to comply to they would potentially suffer humiliation from the church and society. Within the medieval period, the Christian Church had such a significant influence that granted them the power in not just shaping the fields of religion and education, but also controlling the organization of communication and culture in Western society (Chadwick, 2012).



Figure 2. Titan. *Danae*. 1544 – 1545. Capodimonte Museum, Naples. <https://www.nga.gov/press/exh/3951.html>

The Italian painter Titan was born around 1488/1490 in Venice and died in 1576, also in Venice, and was considered one of the best Italian Renaissance painters (Wethey, 2019). Titan had made multiple versions of the same composition of *Danae* (Figure 2), the mythological princess who was locked away by her father after hearing that she would bear a child that would eventually kill him. Titan painted a scene of the princess Danae potentially allowing herself to be seduced and impregnated by Zeus who visited her in the form of a shower of gold. Paintings that referenced

mythology was common during this period. The church had been able to create a Hierarchical system that strengthens the differences between the class distinctions in society, their teachings that encourage the ideology that men are the ones in charge while the women are inferior is rooted in ancient times, like in Greece and the Old Testament (Chadwick, 2012). In the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, Danae was seen as a symbol of what happens when one is corrupt by wealth and used to influence the idea that a woman's virtue can be tainted. Enforcing the idea that if a woman were to stray far from what's expected there will be consequences. These multiple variations of the same scene are considered one of the most sensual paintings of the Renaissance period due to its erotic themes and mythological roots. Danae is shown laying nude on pure white sheets suggesting purity and virginity, the visual of her laying on her back while clutching the sheet and suggesting her other hand is placed in between her legs further emphasises a more sexual feeling the painting. Even though there were still heavy influences from the Church, artists from this era explored the belief that portraying the beauty of women through eroticism and nudity was the most beneficial way to depict a natural world while putting their artistic capabilities on display (Nelson, 2023). It was apparent that the women Titan featured in his paintings were not based on real existing women but rather versions of his idea on what beauty was to him, he does this using eroticism of nudity to portray his ideal standards. During this time bodies were painted with more curves and rounded features, this needed to be viewed more often after having gone through the darker times of Europe. Depicting women with rounder, softer features helped emphasis the maternal quality that women were expected to have while also indicating a sign of good health and wealth (Lara, 2023)

2.4 Baroque

Following the Renaissance period was the Baroque movement. The Baroque art movement began in the beginning of the 17th century in Rome where works of art depicting scenes with emphasized details and exaggerated motions were created. Paintings were created in this manner often due to the term "Baroque" being related to the atmosphere of intense drama and darkness (Loughery, 2002). This style then spread throughout the rest of Europe becoming popular in Italy, Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, Germany, and Poland. The time, Europe had been going through a significant social change, specifically regarding the questioning of the power and dominance of the Roman Catholic Church (Artland Magazine 2021). Within this period, a striking number of

paintings that depict the act of rape had been made, this could be a result of the influence of Roman mythology where rape was a common occurrence within the stories. This theme of rape being a constant narrative can also be found in Greek mythology where the gods would often rape the women they desire. This era of time is a great distance from where we are currently which causes an indifference to the off-putting content of mythological and historical narratives which is only exacerbated by the enduring existence of perceptions of sexual violence against women in visual culture throughout history (Kim, 2023). This had led to a rape culture that was seen as acceptable and prevailed through Roman and Greek art and poetry. Like other ancient and modern societies, in Rome a woman's worth was determined by the men around them such as their father and husband's (McGee, 2022). The Romans took part in dehumanizing woman and celebrated the violence that would occur during the wars. This ideology can be seen in paintings from the Baroque movement where women are displayed being handled by the men who have the inclination to rape them. Elizabeth S. Cohen in her paper *The Trials of Artemisia Gentileschi: A Rape as History* (2000), goes on to explain that it's important to acknowledge the perspective people in early modern Europe had on the body, mind, and social image. She mentions that during that time it wasn't considered that sexual morality wasn't linked to one's psychological wellness but rather focused on the importance of social status and appearances (Cohen, 2000). But regardless of how artists of that time viewed the action of rape, this potentially excuses and minimizes their contributions to the prevalent acceptance of sexual assault and objectified representations of women.

Peter Paul Rubens born 1577 in Germany and died 1640 in Belgium, was a Flemish painter considered a key artist within the Baroque period (Scribner, 2019). Rubens is a famous painter among the Baroque movement known for his large, bold, and detailed expressive paintings. He often created dramatic scenes with an intense use of colour to highlight his ability to depict a strong sense of movement within the forms of his work. Rubens had a fascination with Greek literature which inspired him to base many of his subjects on figures from Greek mythology (Beddard, 2022). One of his famous paintings, *The Rape of The Daughters of Leucippus* (Figure 3), is a scene extracted from Greek mythology where the two women named Phoebe and Hilaera, who are also referred to as Leucippides, being raped by Castor and Pollux before their wedding. This painting exhibits Rubens mastery of the arts through his incorporation and application of characteristic

elements using vibrant colours and the chiaroscuro effect. He has the ability in being able to create high quality works of art that depicts mythological information through a visual media. Although his talent is evident in this painting where we can see Rubens attention to dramatic lighting and his ability in creating fluid movement, the story it tells is unsettling. The two men in the painting, Castor, and Pollux, are seen having ownership of two horses and wearing clothing that mostly covers their anatomy. Men are often painted in a way of authority while women, as seen in this painting, are completely nude in vulnerable positions that suggest that they are in

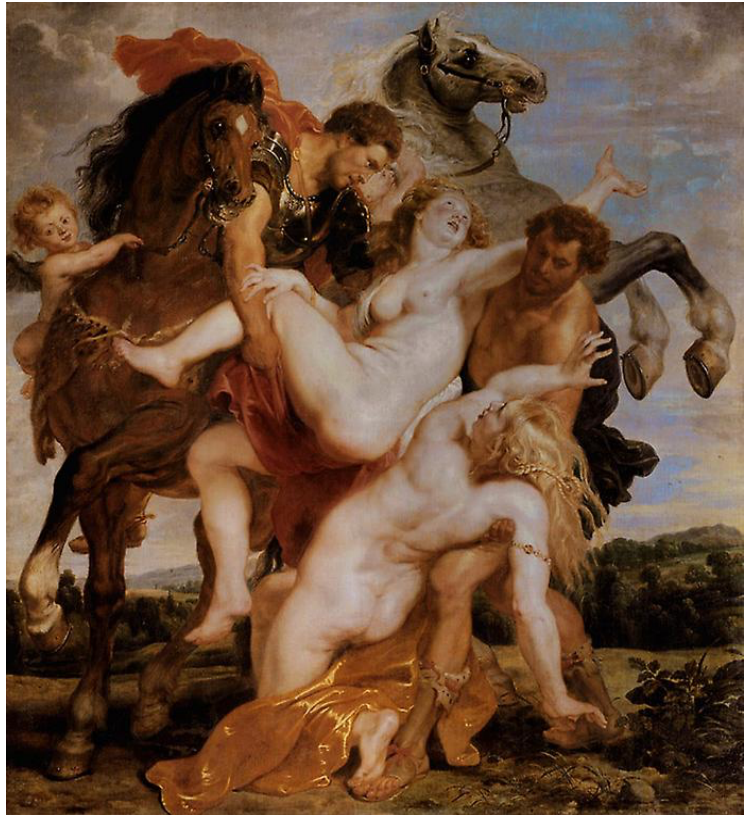


Figure 3. Peter Paul Rubens. *The Rape of The Daughters of Leucippus*. 1617 – 1618. Alte Pinakothek, Munich.

<https://www.fruugo.pt/o-estupro-da-filha-de-leucippus-peter-paul-rubens-50x50cm/p-21583593-47248172>

distress trying to get away from the male subjects. John Berger in his book *Ways of Seeing* (1972) explains that the social value of a woman has vast differences compared to those of a man. Berger clarifies that a man's presence is reliant on the authority he embodies, it is what hints at the things he can either do to you or for you. One of the women is postured in a way that almost mirrors the position of when a woman is lying down on their back in bed, with her breasts exposed and her facial expression looking up with lips being slightly parted, this is common way in which women are depicted to suggest female submission. While the men are looming over them more clothed and physically grasping at their bodies. *The Rape of the daughters of Leucippus* is a demonstration of how artists had often used women as their subjects in their works in a way that portrays the brutality and violation against women while still having them portrayed as a sexual desire for men to have access to.



Figure 4. Nicolas Poussin. *The Rape of the Sabine Women*. 1637 – 1638. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. <https://www.artsy.net/artwork/nicolas-poussin-the-rape-of-the-sabine-women>

Nicolas Poussin born 1594 in Normandy and died in 1665 in Italy was a French painter who was the founder of the French Classical Tradition (Verdi, 2019). *The Rape of the Sabine Women* by Nicolas Poussin (Figure 4) is based on a legendary event that happened earlier on in Roman history when Romans had thought they are low on wives in their nation. The Romans decided to invite their neighbouring communities to a festival called Sabines, hoping for a peaceful interaction it instead turned into a violent outcome where soldiers had captured Sabine women, raped, and planned to make them wives. The painting had been seen as a demonstration of the possible consequences when there is a lack of communication between nations while also being seen as a heroic and patriotic act (Wolfthal, 2000). When examining artists like Nicolas Poussin and their work, while keeping in mind the narrative they are trying to depict, the way they display the act of rape is in a romanticised manner that would have some mistake it as an encounter that was

beneficial for the improvement of society. The artist has demonstrated the scene in a clear way to show these women were being taken against their will (Wolfthal, 2000). The painting is a visual of the revered idea of these crimes, Poussin is showing his acceptance of the notion of raptus, which in ancient Rome meant “carrying off by force” which is something that was used to describe a property crime (Wolfthal, 2000). Women fell victim to being the pawns in men’s political games, objects that would be used as a sacrifice for what’s considered a good cause for society. This idea diminishes women’s worth to an object that can be taken by a man, and by force if needed. In Roman law, the crime of abducting and using a woman is not a crime to the woman it is happening to, but rather the man who is her authoritative figure such as a father or husband (Wolfthal, 2000). The objectification, sexualisation and violation of women had become a legally acceptable aesthetic.

2.5 Romanticism

Continuing to the late 18th to mid 19th centuries, we enter the Romanticism period, an artistic movement filled with artists who celebrated emotion, individualism and had nature play a central role of the canvas. This art movement encouraged the creative thought and expressed interest in nationalism, history and the exotic while taking inspiration from other cultures. The Romanticism movement was seen as an opportunity for artists to explore the uninhibited emotion and imagination of our lives and the world we live in; however, it was evident that this privilege was only afforded to men while women continued to remain constrained (Allen, 2021). Women still find themselves to be distorted when viewed through the eye of men, instead of being recognised as beings with their own individual thoughts, opinions, emotions and aspirations, women are rather seen as just muses, goddesses, and objects of desire. Today, numerous women would contend that historically women who had aspired to be artists, regardless of their talents, were not met with the same level of respect and acknowledgment as men but were instead faced with the misogynistic attitudes that were widespread and continue to be thanks to the patriarchy that remains (Collier-Doyle, 2020). Their role in society at this time remained limited to that of a mother and wife. In the book *A Vindication of The Rights of Women* by Mary Wollstonecraft (1782), Wollstonecraft discusses the developments in women’s rights during the Romanticism period and argues that the education women received would encourage the importance of being a mother and wife, prioritising her husband and family above herself. This notion is what still contributes to the

patriarchal norms for women today, where the female body is an object of admiration when reaching the standards of youth and what's considered the acceptable level of purity.



Figure 5. Henry Fuseli. *The Nightmare*. 1781. Detroit Institute of Arts, Michigan <https://smarthistory.org/henry-fuseli-the-nightmare/>

The painter Henry Fuseli was born 1741 in Switzerland and died 1825 in London (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2019). Henry Fuseli was considered one of the greatest artists of the Romanticism period and was able to create dramatic, theatrical scenes of the mythological and terrifying means of our world (Suffridge, 2020). His works often has a darker twist to them, and it is evident when examining his painting of *The Nightmare*. The painting involves the imagery of a dismembered horse head paired with a mythological creature, known for having sex with women while they slept (Paulson, 2018), sitting on top of a woman laying with her back with her neck

exposed arched over the edge of the bed paralysed in her sleep. Even though she appears clothed, the thin white nightdress she is wearing easily allows the viewer to be absorbed in the curvature of her body, suggesting but not explicitly exposing her sexuality. Another depiction of a woman laying on her back in a vulnerable position while something is above her, restricting her. Why is this such a recurring theme? Can't artists explore other ways to position women in their paintings? Overall, this image is a beautiful but dark and terrifying piece of work that is more disturbing when it comes to its meaning. There are several sexual connotations of this painting. It was discovered that there are traces of a portrait left unfinished behind the original canvas, this created speculation that the artwork is not just a nightmare but rather a physical depiction of a sensual dream Fuseli had with a woman who rejected him, specifically an imagery of a rape fantasy (Suffridge, 2020). When looking at other works done by Fuseli, such as *The Rape of Ganymede*, the topic of rape wasn't just a passing thought for Fuseli. At a first glance many don't make the efforts in indulging deeply into works like *The Nightmare*, its impact on art and women in society are simply accepted or overlooked. This makes one question whether we, as a society, challenge the intentions of those who create these paintings, knowing that women are portrayed in a disregarded manner, do we celebrate the art due to its execution of skill or object its harmful representations?

Originating from Greek sources, the story of Sardanapalus is a narrative that can be found among a numerous amount of art and literature where the tale of the last king of Assyria is told. The story goes that Sardanapalus lived a life of privilege and luxury until he came face to face with an invasion, causing him to demolish his palace and everything else in a pyre. This story is a common subject for many writers and artists such as Eugene Delacroix, born 1798 in France and died



Figure 6. Eugene Delacroix. *The Death of Sardanapalus*. 1827. Louvre Museum, Paris. <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/702196>

1863 in Paris, was considered one of the best French painters within the Romantic era (Huyghe, 2019) and was the person who painted *The Death of Sardanapalus* (Figure 6), creating an image

for one to imagine the final moments of Sardanapalus before his death. When looking at the Death of Sardanapalus painting, the viewers eye is captivated by the depiction of chaos, specifically starting with the nude women presented in the foreground of the painting. Multiple women were put on display and painted in the nude while being handled by men in a violent manner; it showcases the artists repetition of creating a scene of destruction while using the female body for suggesting sexual violence and the desire for it. Women have not only have been seen as mothers, wives, and caretakers but also sexual objects of male desire and control, a theme persistent through the centuries of art history (Schmiesing, 2015). The sexual but violent way women are depicted in Death of Sardanapalus isn't the only painting with this theme from Delacroix, among his work he has multiple representations of it. The women he's painted are exposed, distressed, dishevelled, and often creating the illusion of a rape or sexual activity. This can be seen in Delacroix's painting *The Barque of Dante* (Figure 7), where a nude woman with her breasts exposed is desperately trying to hold onto the boat but is being violently kicked by a faceless male causing her facial expression to be one of torment. In his earlier work there is even more focus on the female body that can be used as an example of how male artists use women as a symbol of gender-based violence, male dominance, and control (Lajer-Burcharth, 2018).



Figure 7. Eugene Delacroix. *The Barque of Dante*. 1822. Louvre Museum, Paris
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Barque_of_Dante

2.6 Impressionism Period

In France during the mid to late 19th century a new style of painting had surfaced where paintings had small, visible brushstrokes done in solid, often unblended colours, that loosely constructs forms while emphasising on the characteristic of natural light. This new style of painting is referred to as impressionism and is often referred as what's considered the first modern movement in painting due to the events that happened around the time, such as the industrial revolution (Sotheby, 2020). Which can be why it inspired the future modern art movements. When it comes to the women of this time, during the 19th century the female population was still struggling for equal rights and remained forced to comply to societies expectations and constraints derived from a patriarchal society, they were made to be submissive and obedient. Women would try get jobs to support themselves and families, however, they were surviving on minimum wage due to the lack of demand for female employees. This caused a drastic rise in women within industrial Paris to turn to prostitution (Dimler, 2017). Although women have been a subject of interest across all forms of art and literature, in the 19th century the Parisian prostitute was often painted as a subject of sexual exchange causing a huge culture shift in society and modern artists. This created the notion that female sexuality was defined by where they stand as members of the classes (Dimler, 2017). Those women considered to be part of the working class were perceived as less moral and highly sexualised due to being associated with being involved in prostitution. Even though women were placed under restrictions regarding sex and their roles in society, all women were targeted in male scrutiny and were objectified, often accused of taking part in sin and encouraging others to do the same. Women were expected to meet ridiculous standards. Women, specifically Parisian women, were expected to oblige to invisibility where they were confided within their households (Dimler, 2017). Yet in visual media such as paintings from this time, women were depicted as sexual beings for a mans desired fantasies, often through showing the romanticised life of prostitution. Paintings were often used to portray the negative connotation prostitutes had. The exploitation of female prostitution through art was also used as a ploy to present the idea of moral reflection; using paintings to portray the women who strayed far from what's expected of them in society as temptresses influencing men into what's considered sinful behaviour (Chadwick, 2012). But isn't this a double standard? Where are the moral reflections for the men who take part in these services? Women were being vilified for having to participate in prostitution for financial stability, while the men who contribute by paying for these sexual services and not met with the same

judgement. Male artists were praised for their depictions of female sex workers, rather than being questioned as to why they are the reasoning for the prostitution demand. John Berger in his book *Ways of Seeing* (1972) mentions that the “moralizing” in these kinds of paintings is hypocritical, claiming that artists paint women naked because they took pleasure in seeing her nude. If you are painting a woman naked yet judging them for it, its textbook hypocrisy. There continues to remain a societal imbalance when it comes to the expectations and consequences of the genders. This kind of difference can be seen in many paintings from the impressionist period.



Figure 8. Edouard Manet. *The Luncheon on the Grass*. 1862 – 1863. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

<https://www.manet.org/luncheon-on-the-grass.jsp>

Edouard Manet was a French painter, born 1832 France and died 1883 in Paris, who painted the painting *Luncheon on the Grass* (Courthion, 2019). *The Luncheon on the Grass* painting (Figure 8) is a still life of two female and two male subjects having a picnic in a forest, what immediately captures the viewers' attention is that while the two men are presented fully and formally dressed, the woman upfront is completely nude. This painting was seen as a very shocking and controversial piece that challenged the French establishments idea of societal norms. It can be said that the depiction of this naked woman challenges the traditional objectification of the female body due to her being painted in a more confident way compared to the usual portrayal of women in art as submissive objects of desire. However, one can disagree and still find the piece to be sexualising the female nude. The presence of a woman has become a sceptical to be looked at (Mulvey, 1975). The composition was painted in a way that had the two women in lighter tones to contrast against the darker background, making them the main subjects to be observed. The main woman sitting among the men is looking over her shoulder with parts of her face slightly out of view while the other women, who appears to be taking a bath or swim, is in a more hunched over position. How does having the main female subject making eye contact with the viewer from the painting make it any less exploitative when she's presented fully nude with clothed men? This painting is still an idea of what men fantasize about, the fact that the woman is completely naked when having a normal picnic with fully clothed men is evident enough that women remain constructed in a way that appeals to the male gaze. The male in authority over a specific visual media, in this case is the artist of this painting, is who formulates his fantasy on the female figure designing her depiction in a way that showcases an erotic feeling (Mulvey, 1975).

Another painter well known for his skill in this era is Edgar Degas who painted a series of art works related to women partaking in ballet. Born 1834 in France and 1917 in Paris (Kendall, 2019), Edgar Degas has a series of paintings (Figures 9, 10, 11, 12) that involve women dancing have an undertone of male fantasy, sexual desires and the female oppression taking place in this time. When looking at his paintings what perks one's interest is the presence of a male figure in every scene



Figure 9. Edgar Degas. *L'Etoile*. 1878. Musée d'Orsay, Paris. <https://www.edgar-degas.net/the-star.jsp>

watching the girls perform. In terms of a feminist theory approach, feminist theory argues that the discourse of the experience of looking is arranged to accommodate a male viewer who can enforce authority on others by visually overpowering his desired objects, in this case its women (Chadwick, 2012). This male figure is painted in either a cropped, shadowed, or distorted manner while the girls' bodies are shown fully showcasing their bare legs. Having a male figure remain on the side lines mostly out of sight while watching women perform creates a predatory atmosphere. The painting *Dancer in her Dressing room* (Figure 12) can be seen as a conclusion to the narrative where in the other paintings while the man waits for a girl to finish her dancing, he then meets her in her dressing room to fulfil his fantasy in watching her undress while he watches. This contributes to the theme of depicting young women as eager to take part in sexual interaction.



Figure 10. Edgar Degas. *Dancers at the Old Opera House*. 1877. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

<https://www.artchive.com/artwork/dancers-at-the-old-opera-house-edgar-degas-c-1877/>



Figure 11. Edgar Degas. *The Curtain*. 1880. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

<https://www.artchive.com/artwork/the-curtain-edgar-degas-c-1880/>



Figure 12. Edgar Degas. *Dancer in her Dressing Room*. 1880. Oskar Reinhart Foundation, Switzerland. <https://www.wikiart.org/en/edgar-degas/dancer-in-her-dressing-room-1>

2.7 Surrealism

After Europe had undergone World War 1, the cultural movement surrealism came to light where visuals of unnerving, unnaturally bizarre but imaginative scenes were painted created. Surrealism was a movement that encouraged artists to allow their unconscious minds to express itself which unlocked images of sexuality, desire, and violence. An art movement that took inspiration from the field of psychoanalysis, psychoanalysis were theories that stem from the studies of Sigmund Freud that involved the examination of mainly female patients with hysteria and came up with principles on “unconscious drives and psychosexual development” (Bottinelli & Laxton, 2018). This caused many surrealist artists to adapt these ideologies of women and reflect these perceptions in their work, causing further prejudice against women. Women remained the main subject of these works, more specifically visuals of their distorted bodies placed in suggestive positions. Male Surrealist artists would often portray the female body in dismantled and disfigured ways that are perceived as violent and erotic objects. This created the narrative that although women are the focus of sexual desire, they are also subjects of disgust and horror. It would often come as surprising if a surrealist artist would illustrate a romantic approach to women given how common it was, they were violated for their own fantasies. At the time no one really questioned this due to the justifications provided by Freud’s theories (Bottinelli & Laxton, 2018). This theme can be seen among the most famous surrealist artists Salvador Dali whose photographs were dominantly focused on women.

Salvador Dali, born 1904 in Spain and died 1989 in Figueras, was a Spanish Surrealist painter (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2023). Dali had shown interest in women clinically diagnosed with hysteria and had seen it as a form of expression. He often idolized the “attitudes passionelles” of these women who were diagnosed, the term “attitudes passionelles” was utilized by Surrealists to refer to the ecstatic experience from hysteria (Lomas, 2000). This behaviour can be seen in the collage of photographs called *The Phenomenon of Ecstasy* (Figure 13). The photographs show multiple women in a state of euphoria, some of the photos were from one women’s case study where she can be seen on a bed performing a series of theatrical expressions and poses. The images were all cropped, appearing to have been in an attempt to get a close-up view of the women’s faces that show them laying down and gazing upwards in a sexual manner with their lips parted. When

looking at how other women were photographed in research like these, it appears to have been common way women were documented for hysteria studies. The way the collection is arranged in a more chaotic way with different colours, sizes and shapes depicts the mental disorganisation these women were suspected to be going through. The enlarged image of the women with her eyes closed is the focal point of the collage, Dali had placed an image of a statue with a similar expression to encourage a comparison between the women, to inviting the viewer to admire their sexualised state (Bottinelli & Laxton, 2018). Women were often painted and photographed laying down in an upright position to emphasise the suggestion that she is a passive, submissive female, an object of desire that is something to be used to satisfy the observers sexual fantasies.

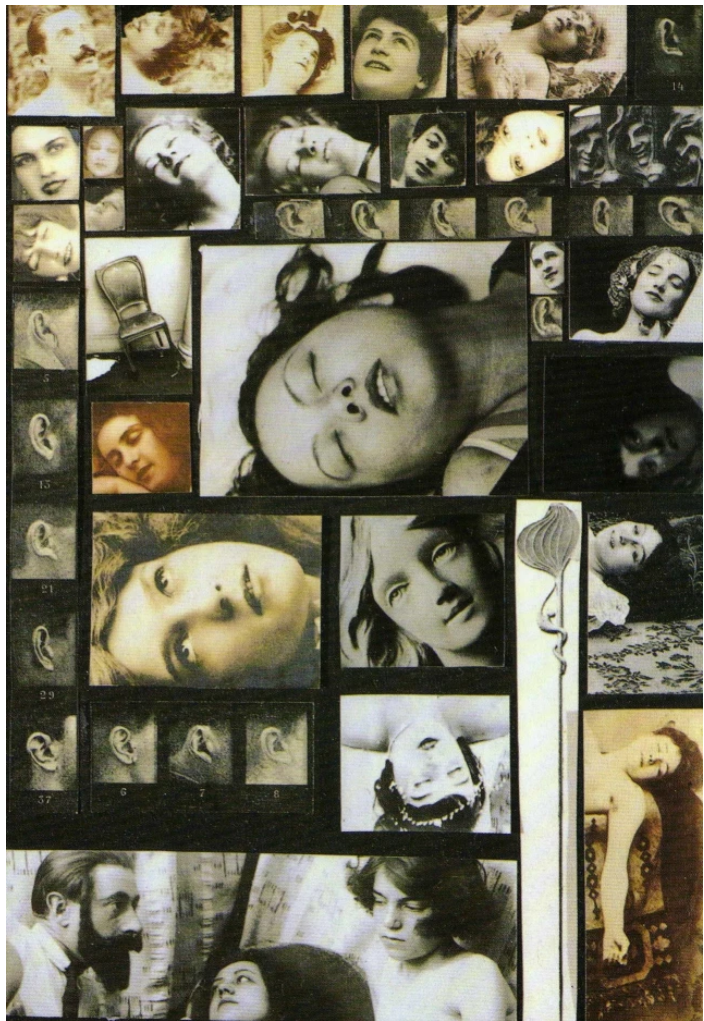


Figure 13. Salvador Dali. *The Phenomenon of Ecstasy*. 1933.

Tate Gallery, London.

<https://cakeordeathsite.wordpress.com/2017/08/06/the-phenomenon-of-ecstasy/>

This has been a common occurrence through history. In European society women were in a particularly vulnerable position, the influence Freud's ideologies on sex and aggression only further encouraged the negative treatment and depiction of women (Bottinelli & Laxton, 2018). The photograph at the bottom left would appear to have been from a pornographic scene where a man is seen with two women, depicting the medical field of men studying women. The male in the photograph has a more assertive dominant stance and expression while the women are positioned on their back almost limp, one looking up in a submissive manner while the other down in a yielding appearance. Women are frequently depicted as sexually submissive beings who come

across as envious of men, this is due to the theories on psychosexual developments that are derived from male scientists (Horney & Paris, 2000). This shows the idea that men still had the control in both the medical fields and the arts while women are just their subjects. Dali had created a prime example of how much Freud had influenced the surrealist movement and encouraged the acceptance of the exploitation of women. These strong beliefs where misogyny was so widely accepted, resulted in the art movement being a difficult period for women to take part in as artists themselves.

The artist Hans Bellmer, born in 1902 and died 1975 (Dupecher, 2021), was known for his creation of multiple fragmented, distorted and frankly disturbing doll structures of women. When glancing at some of his work (Figure 14, 15, 16, 17) there are also themes of sexualising young girls where some of his dolls appear to represent children given how they are seen wearing little white socks and school shoes. His work is an example of how male artists used women as disruptive, erotic, and fetishist objects that men can place their sadistic fantasies upon. Due to the surrealist art movement being involved in the Freudian psychoanalytic studies, women are considered the object



Figure 14. Hans Bellmer. *The Doll*. 1935 – 1937. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

<https://artblart.com/tag/guy-tillim-bust-of-agostinho-neto/>

of a man's sexual desires causing representations of women being the root of erotic satisfaction but still being seen as repulsive (Cramer, 2020). Bellmer would photograph his sculptures in suggestive poses and angles in different scenarios where a female's breasts and genitals are emphasised. In his writing Bellmer would also express his obsession with young girls which makes it even more clear that his work has paedophilic influences (Wetzel, 2021). Artists who take part

in using adolescent young children, or rather subjects that suggest the presence of a child in erotic and sexualised scenes, contribute to the issue of the exploitation of children. Male surrealist artists had followed closely with Freud's misogynistic ideas where women were controlled by their sexual reproductive functions (Horney & Paris 2000). The strong influence Freud had on not just art, but also other fields such as medicine is still something women are struggling with. In an interview with Donna Stewart, M.D., professor, and chair of women's health at the University Health Network in Toronto, she expresses her concern regarding the academic and hospital committees because it was revealed that even within recent years the gender stereotypes continue to undermine the career of women (Lehmann, 2001).



Figure 15 & 16. Hans Bellmer. 'Untitled' from *The Doll*. 1934. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

<https://feralfeminisms.com/uncanny-erotics/>



Figure 17. Hans Bellmer. *The Doll*. 1935. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

<https://fansinaflashbulb.wordpress.com/tag/hans-bellmer/>

2.8 Pop Art

As time went on, artists started to realise they had lacked relatability with the art they were taught in school and the methods they'd see showcased in galleries causing many to start turning to the artistic media found in the cinema, advertisements on billboards and on television, product design, pop music and comic books (Tate, 2017). This is what brought on the Pop art movement. It was in the 1950s that pop art had surfaced and continued to thrive through the 1960s and 1970s (Tate, 2017). Pop art is an artistic movement that can be seen as a time where it challenged everyone's idea of what art is and encouraged ideas of self-expression outside of fine art. When thinking about pop art our minds often think of *The Marilyn Diptych* silkscreen painting or *Marilyn Monroe* by Andy Warhol, the *Campbells soup tin design*, and scenes of a cartoon romance. Although these are famously influential works of art in this era, they were created by male western artists that contributed to the traditional male culture that widely excludes women from the arts. In the 1950s,

women remained restricted to play any roles other than being the wives and mothers of the home. Society had created a world of influence when it came to identifying the roles of women in society. Whether it was on the television or in magazines, advertisements from the 50s had been mainly directed towards women to encourage their expected roles by exhibiting women happy with being the typical wife and mother of the house (Lehman, 2023). This resulted in female artists being disregarded and unconsidered, having their requests for equality being seen as a threat to the patriarchal society women were forced to be restricted and excluded unless they are the main subjects of male artists' creations. Women in pop art shows the continuation of the objectification of women through the centuries.

Before Pop art, art was seen as something that needs to remain distinct from commercial influences, until the artist Richard Hamilton who was seen as a visionary a pop artist initiated the concept that artists are participants and contributors to mass culture (The Art Story 2011). Richard Hamilton, born in London in 1922 and died in 2011 (Mugan, 2021), encouraged artists to explore the ranges of visual culture without excluding themselves from the commercial realm. He was among a group of artists, architects and critics who would engage in conversations about visual culture and how artists can break free from the traditional teachings of art (The Art Story 2011). Although he strived to break from the traditional art forms from the past centuries, Richard Hamilton remained as one of the artists who would reduce the female figure to her sexual components, her breasts, eyes, and hips while highlighting the restriction women face

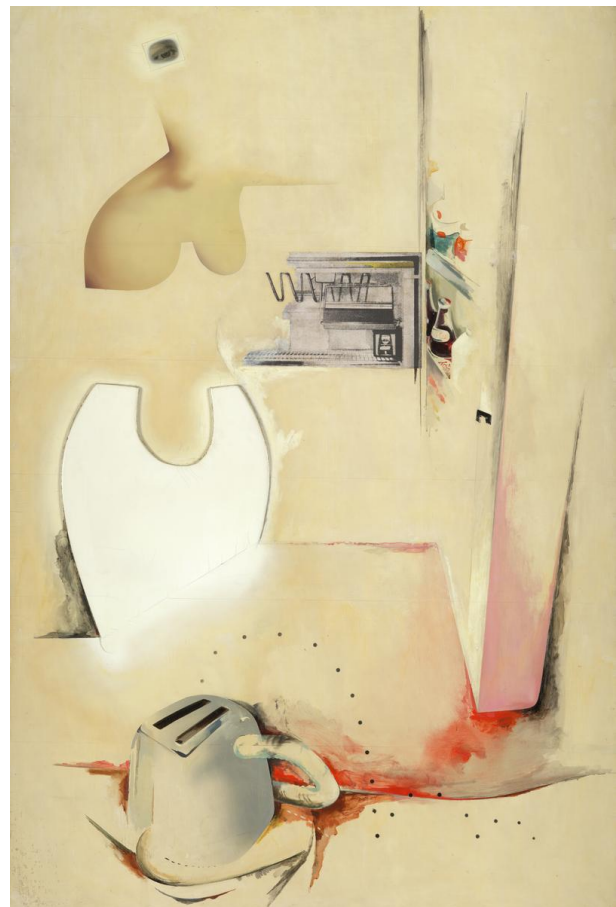


Figure 18. Richard Hamilton. *She*. 1958.

Tate Gallery, London.

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/hamilton-he-t01190>

with domestication. His artwork *She* (Figure 18) is an exploration of how society has linked consumerism to the female form, he did this by combining household appliances with emphasised clippings of a woman's sexual and seductive body parts. This paired with kitchen ware suggests that a woman's place is within a domesticated setting and can be used as a sexual object, the title 'She' with the S being a dollar sign further emphasises the idea that the woman is for sale. In Hamilton's work women are depicted as either objects of desire for men or an accessory (Allen, 2019). Women continue to be seen as an object of desire or accessory in the way they are portrayed and are bound by their representations in these art works. Throughout pop art women were often found to be used as a symbol of consumerism because as Steve Allen stated in his article *Gender and Pop Art* (2019), Sex is what sells.



Figure 19. Tom Wesselmann. 1950 <https://www.casterlinegoodman.com/artists/105-tom-wesselmann/>

Tom Wesselmann, born in 1931 and died in 2004 was an American Artist (McCarthy, 1990). The artist Tom Wesselmann is a well-known pop artist for his neon erotic collage interpretations of the female nude (The Art Story 2011). Throughout his career, his work was influenced by the advertising culture, and he mainly focused on either material goods or specific female body parts.

It was evident that Tom Wesselmann was more interested in a woman's sexual functions than the study of women (Figure 19). Feminists often criticised his work due to how he commercialised the female body where the nude was paired with consumer objects and took part in the sexualisation of a domesticated woman at home (Tarasoff, 2016). He had created paintings of women suggesting she is giving oral sex to a male, close ups of a woman's breast, women laying down naked on their backs with an excited facial expression while their legs are up in the air. Some paintings the women's eyes are not present, but her mouth is painted in a way that suggests erotic activity. It makes one question how exactly does this contribute to art? Or rather, why is this depiction of women allowed to continue throughout our history? A minority sympathise with Wesselmann where some reviews of his work argue that his work were used to praise sexuality instead of objectifying. In the article *Tom Wesselmann at Almine Rech* by Sabrina Tarasoff (2016) she goes on to say its closed minded to call his work dehumanising to women and claims these opinions are an internalization of patriarchal values. However, in her own article she herself mentioned how the artist pairs the female nude to consumer objects and in his paintings depicts women putting on a performance for sexuality. Isn't this what female objectification is? Limiting a woman's body to sexual pleasure and minimizing her form to a consumer object as if she can be bought? If he was trying to empower the female nude, then the approach to it wasn't received well and interpreted incorrectly due to how explicit his paintings were. People are less likely to believe that a male artist was wanting to empower woman through erotic artwork given the lack of change in how women are objectively represented over the years.

2.9 Current Visual Culture

In the 1960s and 1970s the second wave of feminism came in with a strong demand for a change in the issues of equality and the discrimination of women (Gale, 1970). What influenced this need for a change was the criticism on the post war idea that women are only fit to be a housewife and mother, women were beginning to take a bigger stand. When the feminism movement took off with a force, they pushed to address a boarder rage of injustices compared to the nineteenth-century suffragists who primarily focused on achieving political equality. This second wave of feminism pushed to expose and address the systematic issues of the patriarchal society such as sexual assault, rape, reproductive rights and after having recognised the connections between women's suffering through all the different cultures, sought out to reveal the racism (Gale, 1970). They had the goal

in achieving social equality, emphasising on the sexuality and reproductive rights within the liberation movement. This was when women who have been forcibly excluded from male-dominated fields started to involve themselves more and more. Women began finding jobs in male-dominated occupations such as pilots, construction workers, soldiers, lawyers, doctors and finally artists. People started to challenge stereotypes, dismantle the traditional ways of a patriarchal society, and evaluate how women have been portrayed as an object through the entirety of art history instead of seen as individuals who are just as capable as men. Around this time, within the 1970s, contemporary art emerged and extends all the way through to present day. Contemporary art refers to the art and artists of 'today' where people operate within a widely diverse, technologically advanced and multifaced environment where unlimited media has become attainable for everyone (Getty, 2019). This is where artists take part in experimenting with various mediums in mass culture and often use their explorations as a way of expressing their opinions on the complexities of present-day society. Most artists disregarded the realistic representations, they pushed to reject the styles and movements seen in previous art history and was increasingly more interested in abstraction (Getty, 2019). This movement encouraged a more intricate world of art criticism where artwork was challenged and under analysis to identify if its good or not and if it's aesthetically pleasing. Even though women are now able to be included in male dominated fields and are getting more involved in the arts, contemporary art is no exception when it comes to objectifying women (Vancouver, 2021). Female artists have begun to take up space in art history, but people are still needing to be mindful that sex remains to be seen through a patriarchal lens, the male gaze. Whenever a sensual and sexual work of art is made, whether it's done by a male or female artist, it is very difficult to find one that wasn't constructed under the influence of a male's fantasy. The erotic portrayals of women where their physical traits are the focus point, cater to the audience's enjoyment and is the cause of the narratives that a woman's societal value is reliant on her physical appearance (Vancouver, 2021). Due to so many centuries where women being sexualised is the normal, even women tend to sexualise themselves. There's internal sexualization and misogyny. Female artists can sometimes be found to be taking part in the sexualisation of women due to women in visual culture having always been depicted in a way that's considered the ideal beauty standard and how women should feel and behave (Vancouver, 2021). Today these ideas are widely spread at a more rapid pace through the technology we heavily involve ourselves in, such as advertising and social media, that subconsciously manifests the way that we view

women in our society. Over time the sexualisation of women through advertising, photography and other medias has increased promptly, where like earlier works in art history, women are depicted as submissive and inferior to men which causes the tolerance of sexual harassment and violence against women in society. Advertising with a sexualised female body is a recurring tactic in the advertisement industry, its derived from the idea that ‘sex sells’ and women are used to do just that. Women are seen more often than men in revealing sexual clothing and being dominated or depicted as objects (Shequal, 2023). It’s now common for visuals of women to have undergone through editing processes where their ‘imperfections’ such as blemishes are erased and have their sexual characteristics, hips, breasts and bottom exaggerated (Shequal, 2023). This provokes the male gaze and continuation of the negative depiction of women.



Figure 20. Hugh Hefner with Playboy Bunnies at the St. Louis Playboy Club.

<https://losttables.com/playboy/playboy.htm>

In the 1950s Hugh Hefner wanted to create an American man's lifestyle and entertainment magazine, his first issue was published in 1953 featuring Marilyn Monroe on the cover (Times, 2017). From that point on, the playboy magazine became a world-wide sensation. Hefner is considered the first to have mass marketed porn in a way that makes it out to seem more respected in society due to his 'fun' approach in photography and marketing. Before the global circulation of playboy, men would have the idea of masculinity influenced by the classic western image of a rough man (Dines & Silverman, 2022). The playboy magazine reinvented the idea of what a man is supposed to be by creating an atmosphere like James Bond where success looked like a lifestyle surrounded by expensive cars, suits, accessories, and naked women as trophies. Consumerism created this idea that Playboy was dismantling and reconstructing the moralistic pressures women had been put under regarding their involvement in sex, however it was only continuing the harmful misogyny we still see today. The women in these magazines were described as 'playmates' and 'bunnies' presented in nude or hypersexualised outfits serving men (Figure 20). In some cases, these photographs were published without consent, for example, the premiere issue of the magazine has a photograph Marilyn Monroe who never consented to be involved in the magazine (Dines & Silverman, 2022). He is a prime example of sexual control where he would profit from dehumanizing women and showcasing them as his property and uses his influence to normalise this kind of power over women.

American Apparel is a North American clothing retailer founded in 1989 by Canadian Dov Charney until the late 2000s. The brand had been successful over the years where they had become one of the largest garment manufacturers in the United States but ended abruptly due to bankruptcy in 2015. The bankruptcy was a result of the company facing a multitude of sexual harassment, racism, and sexual assault lawsuits against the founder Dov Charney, he had been accused of sexually harassing his employees as young as 17 (Adams, 2011). When looking at the advertisements the brand had publicized it's not a surprise that the company had a habit of

oversexualising women, often young girls. The creator's history of sexual allegations where such young women were involved in his work implies the darker theme behind the way he created these advertisements, a theme of exploitative conduct, autoreactive dynamics and the sexualization of underaged girls (Fox, 2021). Photographs of women laying on their backs with their legs open in underwear looking up at the viewer (Figure 21), views of their lower parts from behind (Figure 22) and photographs that have the women suggesting sexual pleasure through their facial expressions fits in the category of how women are sexualised in the expense of selling products (Figure 23). Young girls with tempting expressions depicted as objects used for the pleasure of the consumer who seeks out the desire they are advertising.



Figure 21. American Apparel. 2012.

<https://www.esquire.com/style/mens-fashion/g2442/american-apparel-ads/>



Figure 22. American Apparel. 2007. [https://www.esquire.com/style/mens-fashion/g2442/american-apparel-](https://www.esquire.com/style/mens-fashion/g2442/american-apparel-ads/)

[ads/](https://www.esquire.com/style/mens-fashion/g2442/american-apparel-ads/)

Tights.



American Apparel®

Figure 23. American Apparel. 2008. <https://www.esquire.com/style/mens-fashion/g2442/american-apparel-ads/>



Figure 24. Honey Bridette Campaign 'Office Party Time' 2017. <https://www.bandt.com.au/honey-birdette-throws-wild-office-party-part-new-campaign/>

Honey Bridette is an Australian lingerie brand that began in 2006 with the idea of creating luxuriously provocative bedroom accessories. Their whole visual identity gives an expensive feel to their flirty and playful approach when promoting their items, their website and social media come across as almost too high class for many consumers. When promoting lingerie for women in hopes of bringing in more sales, one would assume the company would specifically target women in their promotional campaigns and emphasise how it can benefit them, however in 2017 Honey Bridette published a campaign called 'Office Party Time' (Figure 24) where women were seen photographed in lingerie while being surrounded by men who are fully clothed in suits and ties. This has been seen often through history where women are wearing less clothing compared to the male subjects. This kind of representation, where women are on a sexual display, suggests that it's not the lingerie that is for purchase but rather the women wearing them (Shequal, 2023). Having women in a room full of men in that way is similar to the photographs in playboy where her purpose is to serve and arouse men, to be their object of desire and play toy. Ads like these sexualise and objectify women and what makes it worse is these ads can be seen by anyone of any age, meaning young girls observing this behaviour start perceiving themselves as sexual beings for men's benefit while also pressuring themselves to fit into the idea of what's considered desirable thus impacting oneself body image. It's proven that the sexualization and objectification of women have been verified to have a negative impact on women's body image (Shequal, 2023).

2.10 Conclusion

Starting from the virgin Mary inspired women paintings in the Renaissance period to the pornographic photography in Contemporary art, it's clear the sexualization of women has remained a consistent theme throughout history. Instead of being acknowledged for their capabilities or even just as human beings, they were instead used as objects of desire purely to please male gaze. This section highlighted some famous works of art and presented some examples of how women have been negatively portrayed through the years and how it's a reflection of the societal attitudes towards gender and sexuality. Despite the minimal shifts within the arts and cultures, women are still under the control of a patriarchal power dynamic within society. This issue is not limited to Western and European culture but can also be seen strongly in other cultures such as in Japan.

WOMEN IN WESTERN COMIC BOOKS

3.1 Introduction

According to the Oxford dictionary the word 'comics' is derived from the Greek words 'Komos', 'Komikos' and is used to describe a periodical containing comic strips that are initially for children (Oxford English Dictionary, 2023). Graphic novels are a powerful influential visual medium that has the capability of reaching many people in numerous cultures. Due to its debated backstory of origin and its dependency on what one classifies as a comic, it's difficult to pinpoint the exact time, place or culture that began comic books and graphic novels (Bond, 2018). When one hears the word 'comic' their mind often goes to the popularised comics in the west but are unaware that the field is broader than that. For years comics have been used as a visual language to tell stories using pictures and plays a vital part in our visual culture. Images could communicate without words and can be understood by many people regardless their different cultures and languages. When taking a brief look at comic books and graphic novels from different parts of the world, it is evident that the role women play in the industry is the same as in art history. Like the art world, men have held authority over the comic book industry as both creators and consumers excluding the consideration of women (Turberville, 2016). Because of this, women in comic books are sexualised, objectified and this theme can be found among many cultures. Comics are a visual representation on the perspectives men have on women where they are portrayed as illustrated sexualised objects for the male targeted audience (Turberville, 2016). Women are put under pressure to fit a patriarchal stereotype that degrades their roles in society and even though progress has been made with the feminism movements and a small quantity of women are picking up comic books, the poor representation is still present today. In the book *Comic Book Women* by Peyton Brunet and Blair Davis (2022) through their research it's explained that the comic book industry remains predominantly controlled by men, while women regardless of their efforts for validity, are poorly represented and disregarded without acknowledgement and this occurs to the women who were not just portrayed as characters, but also those involved in comic creations and those who are readers. Peyton Brunet and Blair Davis (2022) goes on to elaborate that regardless of the improvement of the female presence in the industry, the better representation of feminism continues to fall short.

To identify and study this problem, in hopes of expanding the awareness, it's important to analyse the history and progression of women in comic books. This study is a textual analysis starting from Western and European comic book histories through the years and taking a dive into specific characters from famous comic books.

3.2 Female Characters in Western Comic Books

Starting in the 19th century, it was a time where technology began to grow rapidly which caused an exponential growth in how fast information is spread globally (Chapman, 2019). Newspapers at the time were the main media that would aid in transmitting information, with that it came journalism. However, just before the letter press printing in newspapers were a global phenomenon, illustrations were at first lithography and later etched. An example of this is a magazine from the 1800s called *The Glasgow Looking Glass* where the political and social life of Scotland was discussed, illustrated by William Heath, it can be considered as the first comic magazine (Glasgow University, 2005). The magazine is an early example of graphic journalism which is something that got popular within this century. During its few published issues there were illustrations of a variety of scenes laid out like a contemporary newspaper where other news and advertisements could also be published (Glasgow University, 2005). Later these illustrations started to become more popular and were being referred to as cartoons. In the 1920s and 1930s these cartoons picked up even more popularity while many countries had been feeling the effects of the economic downturn of The Great Depression, especially the United States. Cartoons were well known since the end of the 19th Century, but it wasn't until after The Great Depression that cartoons had gained a significant amount of popularity when appearing more frequently among the newspapers, gaining attention for bringing humour to political issues in newspaper articles. These drawings are considered to have played a part in influencing culture. They are reflections of the principles and social changes of that time which includes gender roles and how people handled racial issues (Spaceman, 2023). These cartoons were mostly political, but it had begun the growth of a whole new industry, the birth of a new medium.

People started to look forward to the humorous cartoon strips in newspapers and in the late 1930s a superhero appeared causing to the burgeoning desire of comics. That first superhero appearing in the newspaper comic strips was the all famous character Superman created by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster (PBS, 2014). The triumph of Superman was followed by the emergence of spin-offs

about his world and those in it which caused the creation of a new category of characters with narratives involving secret identities, superhuman abilities and vibrant costumes which we now identify as the superhero genre (comicbookhistory, 2018). Well known characters today such as Batman and Robin, Green Lantern and the flash were some of the characters that brought in more attention to the growing industry. The high demand of interest in these comics inspired the growth of this new media. This expansion developed further during the second World War due to how relatable some of the stories had seemed to be to people when going through these hard times that they were going through at the time, the comics also seemed convenient due to their affordability and portability. This era is what's known as the Golden Age of comics, where comic books were at their best. Characters such as Captain America is a good example of why these developments were so well loved, Captain America wore the American stars and stripes while battling against Hitler in his first comic book issue, giving people a sense of hope that good will prevail during the nations war endeavours. The government supported the growth of these comics due to them being able to be used for propaganda enhancing the anti-Japanese and anti-Nazi ideals in a less forcible way while also encouraging recruitment into the army among the younger audience who were captivated by these books. The comics would encourage the idea that America is a worthy home of protection, and that people wouldn't be able to find better while also helping those who read them identify the possible threats to the country (Scott, 2011).

Running alongside the growth of the superhero genre, horror and crime also gained a keen interest. Comics such as Archie who was seen as a typical American Teenager navigating his life in high school surfaced and became a very popular comic that is still ongoing. Outside the superhero, horror, and crime genre there were also comics such as Peanuts featuring a group of children led by the Character Charlie Brown and his dog Snoopy who became an icon. There were many comic books that had emerge during this golden era however, none reached the level that superhero comic books did. They achieved a level of acknowledgment that allowed them to be recognizable among everyone. Although, there is a notable issue during in the early years of comic books, during the golden age. Very few of the characters were female leads. It can be seen in a more blatant way among the superhero genre where the superheroes were dominantly male characters targeting its male audience. The industry is described as a medium developed by men for men, telling narratives about male characters (Brunet & Davis, 2022).

When a woman is present in these stories she was often dismissed as an inferior side extension for the male characters benefits and were frequently used as plot devices created to bring emotional drama and a deeper backstory for the men. Women rarely had any roles to play in these universes other than being a stereotype that degrades a woman's role in our culture and society by using them as romantic interests often seen as the damsel-in-distress or simple-minded supporting characters who were objectified. The reasoning for how women have been portrayed in these comics is due to the gender role framework that is rooted in American culture (Gablaski, 2020). If they were the main character of the comic book, they were heavily over sexualised, and this theme has remained consistent through the different eras of comics.

After the Golden age of comics, in 1956 the silver age of comics begun where the comics included highly sexual and violent content. The level of crudity in the media inspired the psychiatrist Fredric Wertham to write the book *Seduction of the Innocent* (1954) to try bringing awareness to how the comic books that almost every child of America has free access to, is corrupting their minds (Kowalski, 2008). The book goes on to explain that comics were influencing children in such a negative way that would cause youngsters to turn into delinquents, causing issues in how young girls see themselves in society and enforcing "homosexual thoughts". This caused a panic among parents of young children which lead to many comic book companies discontinuing some of their highly praised titles outside the superhero genre. The industry was in danger of completely crashing so a code of some sort of censorship was in the works. An organisation called The Comics Code Authority founded in 1954 is what promoted and enforced censorship among comic books. The Comics Cde Authority was developed as a way for the industry to regulate their content (Kowalski, 2008). The Comic Code Authority was seen as a seal of approval placed on comics and was strict to the extent that it limited the appearance of sex, drugs, cursing and nudity. If the publishers didn't fall under the guidelines of these rules and obtained the stamp of approval, the comics wouldn't be sold in comic bookstores.

This slightly improved the extent of female nudity and sexualisation but only by a fraction. Female characters remained as additional plot enforcers to further the role of the male characters around them. Most female characters were created simply as love interests, for example, the character Batwoman was created for Batman, like how Lois Lane was made for Superman, to diminish the idea that Batman was a homosexual (Madrid, 2010). These two characters main roles and purpose was to be the wives of the male superheroes and to cater the male gaze where they're heavily

sexualised. The creators of these characters and those who were illustrating these adventures were predominantly white men which causes a lack of diversity in the minorities, many characters fell under the influence of the patriarchal norms of society where the media caused confliction in the depiction of what female empowerment is for those who read the books (Brunet & Davis, 2022). Female characters continued to be put in harmful situations in the narrative to then be saved by the men of the story while also falling short in any character development with the same depth as their male counterparts. The censorship of the comics during this era might have lowered the nudity women faced in the comic books but they remained to be additional accessories for the male audience.

For a while the censorship had been the acceptable process for publishing and selling comic books, if they had failed to submit their content for approval from the Comics Code Authority, they were not granted permission to sell their comics in stores (Rittenberg, 2021). It was until the 1960s and 1970s where the organization was forced to adapt to the more relaxed rules of society in regarding sex, drugs, and graphic images. This was because of a request for a review on a comic book of Spiderman that had included the dangers of drug use which potentially is what caused The Comics Code Authority to become more limited over time (Rittenberg, 2021). Eventually publishers started to figure out how to avoid the seal of approval all together by selling comic books to shops that didn't necessarily care. Over time comic books had the unlimited freedom of using sex, drugs, and nudity regardless of who's reading them. Anyone of any age can read whatever kind of comic book they want even if it has harmful content. Why wasn't something similar revisited later given the influence comics still have in our society? The effects of the content didn't just cease to exist. In the 1970s, comics entered the Bronze age where the censorship wasn't much of an issue anymore which encouraged authors to explore their freedom in creating comics with more mature issues. Unlike the Silver age where comics had a goofier approach to their narratives to appeal The Comics Code Authority, comics from The Bronze age produced stories that peaked older readers interests a lot more than before. The Bronze age is known for its approach to incorporating reality and adult issues into the superhero genre, it got to the point where it achieved the label of The Dark Age of Comic Books.

From the 1980s till the early 1990s, the expansion of anti-heroes, characters with a darker twist to them became the most popular (Kowalski, 2008). This era was the era that sexuality was starting to be presented to the extremes where body proportions of characters were drawn vastly

unrealistically, and costume designs were even more erotic than before. Religion and political issues made a comeback in the appearance of comics which hadn't been seen since The Golden Age. It was during The Bronze age, the darker age of comics, that had female characters increase significantly in the industry due to the feminist movements as well as non-white superheroes. The principles of feminist criticism towards media such as comic books have the goal in confronting not just the gender norms but also the issues of race, in hopes of dismantling the authority of the white male population in America but even with this effort women in comics were and remain represented as sexual objects (Gablaski, 2020). The new female superheroes started to appear as more confident, assertive, and independently taking on more active roles in their narratives. However, the sexualized stereotypical depiction remained. The female body had become even more exaggerated when being illustrated where body parts were drawn more enlarged such as breasts and rear, paired with thin waists and longer legs in their revealing costumes while then often seen in more sexually suggestive poses. The way women are illustrated in these comics had continued into the Modern Age of comics which started around the late 1990s and is the current time.

To accurately see the visual evolution of how women are depicted in Western comic book media, including some of their film adaptations, and to identify if there has been a significant enough of a change or not, we take a number of female comic book characters and discuss their portrays.

Sheena

In 1942 one of the first female characters to achieve recognition in the comic industry was Sheena (Figure 25), an orphaned blonde girl raised in Africa who later became queen of the Jungle. Sheena was the first female character to have her own comic book with her own name as the heading on the cover (Walston, 2018). However, Sheena was created in a male-dominated industry and can be used as one of the many examples of how these female characters embodied the male fantasy. Sheena was illustrated in a way most, if not all female comic book characters are designed where they are shown wearing very revealing clothing that leaves nothing for the imagination. In her comics she's seen wearing tight, short, torn, and revealing leopard print dress paired with long blonde hair and drawn in a way that showcases her enlarged easily seen breasts. Female characters like this were designed for a male audience that would suggest sexual encounters in the comics narrative and having them displayed in this way is what helps promotes the sale of the comic

books. As Ingalls explained in her article *Sex Differences In Hero Characteristics* (2012) when seeing it from a male perspective, a male hero is required to have a vast amount of power while female heroes should portray signs of fertility and a narrative that suggests the possibility of a sexual experience (Ingalls, 2012).



Figure 25. Jumbo Comic Sheena 1946 #92 <https://comicbookplus.com/?dclid=47271>

Wonder Woman

Another comic book character that is just as famous as Superman even today and was released around the same time as Sheena was the beloved Wonder Woman. Wonder Woman (Figure 26) is considered the most popular female superhero of all time and is often viewed as a representation of feminism due to being a strong female character with great abilities to help her achieve her goals. It was during World War II in 1941 when Wonder Woman was created, women were encouraged to contribute to the war efforts in both physical and economic support through the labour force (Turberville, 2016). In the beginning she was often seen showing strength against the male villains she faces, even though she was presented wearing revealing clothing this was finally a female character worth admiring. However, when the war ended, women were compelled to returning to their

usual places at home so the men coming back from war can reclaim their jobs, this shift for woman can be seen in Wonder Woman where her role changed to a more domesticated narrative showing her owning a flower shop and being in a relationship with a man (Turberville, 2016). Even though this character surfaced around the time women needed more representation and despite being a character of a considerable amount of power, she will still be viewed as inferior to male characters in comparison. Like other female characters, she is shorter than the men surrounding her, her physical appearance is slim and is seen wearing revealing clothing to appear attractive to the viewers. When looking at frames from wonder woman comics they usually involve a display of her body, specifically her curves and breasts along with a various number of suggesting posing

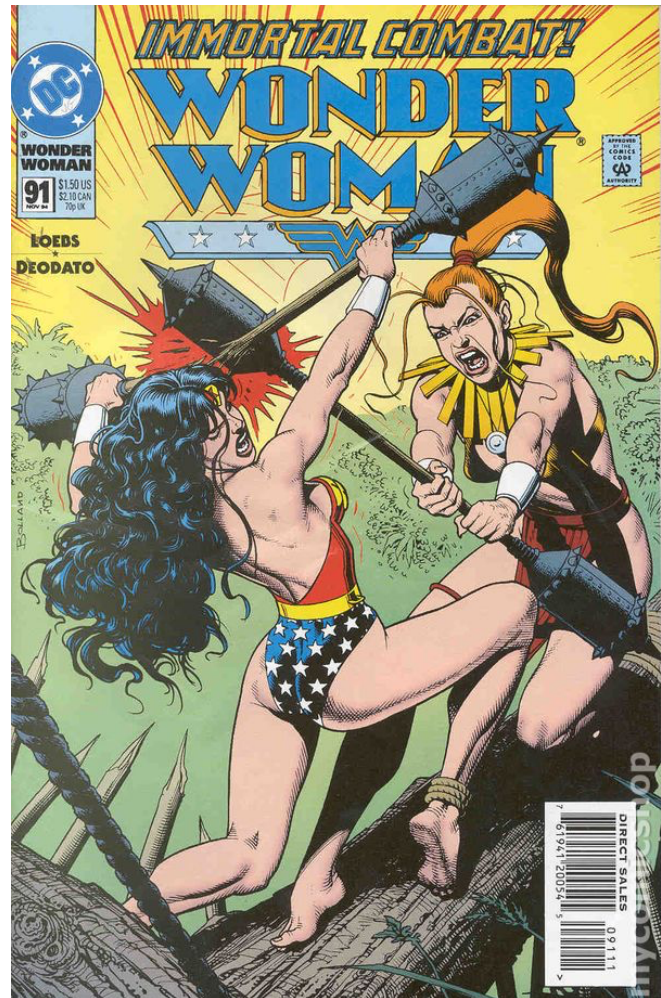


Figure 26. Wonder Woman 1987. DC Comics. Volume 2. Issue 91. Cover Artist Brian Bolland.

<https://viewcomiconline.com/wonder-woman-1987-issue-91/>

positions she is put in. Besides her physical attributes that are sexualised, Wonder Woman's creator William Marston and the artist Harry Peter did not hesitate to implement heavy explicit content into the comics. Wonder Woman's character was heavily influenced by the sexual experiences and personal life of her creator William Marston who was a person living a controversial life being in an open relationship with his wife and living with another woman (Gablaski, 2020).



Figure 27. Wonder Woman 1945. DC Comics. <https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/HoYay/WonderWoman>

In the early issues of the comics from the 1940s various pages of very activities can be found, including bondage (Figure 27), erotic sorority rituals, spanking, foot fetish play, and a numerous number of other sexual kinks and activities were illustrated. Marston received a considerable amount of backlash for his consistency in using sexual symbolism and having Wonder Woman getting captured by men in majority of her comic books (Lepore, 2015). The author was believed to be a feminist in the way where he supported the strength of woman and wanted to use his character to emphasis woman's erotic power but regardless of the intentions, sexualisation through

the kind of depictions he created based on his own fantasies are still sexualisation. He contradicted himself in explaining that the act of bondage represents submission, sexual submission and he uses this imagery as a metaphor for being submitted (Hanley, 2014). How is portraying women in a way that always has them bonded and submissive towards the men who capture her? Many other characters were similarly sexualized.



Figure 28. Wonder Woman Tv Adaptions Over The Years <https://www.platformmagazine.co.uk/culture-and-entertainment/the-evolution-of-wonder-woman/>

In 1974 an attempt at a live action of Wonder Woman (Figure 28) was created, where wonder woman was played by Cathy Lee Crosby who dressed in a more covered attire but had failed in being picked up by any broadcasters and faced harsh ratings. Two years later the actress Lynda Carter picked up the role of Wonder Woman in a tv series that was a rating of success due to being well liked among the audience, but this was shortly lived due to it not being renewed for a third season (Troy, 2017). When comparing the first two wonder woman adaptations, the 1976 show has a more comic book feel to it where the character came across as a superhero, while the 1974 show felt more like a story about a spy. But what's more noticeable is the difference in costume design and appearance of the two actresses who played wonder woman. Cathy Lee Crosby, a

blonde tennis player who wore a more conservative version of the wonder woman attire was criticised for not fitting the role according to the male audience's expectations. Instead of being brunette, Crosby was blonde, lacked comic accuracy and had no superpowers, she instead fought villains with her combat skills (Thapa, 2024). Lynda Carter was a dark-haired actress who wore a more revealing design that is more recognisable as wonder woman from the comics. Lynda Carter was praised by the audience for her beauty and performance, so much so that it's hard not to question how much of an influence wearing less clothing is on film ratings and feedback. Fans of the character express that she is considered the most important version of the character that's ever been done (Piatti-Farnell, 2021). As seen before, it's a common tactic to use physical attraction and sexual desire to persuade audiences, especially within a male dominated field. This was a time women were disregarded as contributors to the film industries, it's unlikely the popularity was based on a woman's performance but rather her appearance. When one tries to argue against this judgement, the question "Can the way women are portrayed in these films be justified?". Young girls who look up to the few female characters they can watch and absorb this idea that what gives a woman worth is her physical appearance and supports the ongoing narrative that women are objects for men to display their fantasies upon. If a woman meets the idea of what's considered attractive, she is deemed worthy. However, if a woman doesn't meet the standard, due to the focus of a woman's physical appearance, she is viewed as less than a human being (Heflick, 2011). In 2006 activist Tarana Burke created the #MeToo movement, an awareness movement revolving around the sexual harassment and abuse of women in the workplace which kicked off after actress Alyssa Milano came forward about the sexual abuse she faced from the film producer Harvey Weinstein (Brown, 2022).

Many years later Lynda Carter had come forth during the woman's #MeToo movement and shared her story on being sexually harassed in her career including the filming of wonder woman. In an interview called *Wonder Woman This is my #MeToo Story* by Teeman (2018), Lynda Carter shares her experience with sexual assault among the film industry, she mentions her view that in contemporary culture, women are used for sex by heterosexual men. There are many other women in the industry who have come forth with the same issue, there are many women in other workplaces who suffer the same fate. The women who had tried working in the comic book industry had the same experience. The history of woman's contribution to comics ignores the predatory dominant behaviour in publishing organizations, it's the main reason as to why so many

women were discouraged when trying to pursue a career in the field (Brunet & Davis, 2022). The sexual way women are portrayed in film and comics, where they are used as objects for sexual exploitation reflects the real lives of women in the workplace and society.

After the two Wonder Woman adaptations, there were a few attempts at other female characters from comic books such as Supergirl in the 1980s, Black Scorpion in 2001, Birds of Prey, Catwoman and Elektra but all were major failures and highly disapproved. This caused a lot of discouragement in making any female lead superhero movies for a few years afterwards, but that was until the production of Jessica Jones and Supergirl in 2015 that had successful ratings and reviews which put more female superhero movies in motion. The appearance of the tough female lead Jessica Jones got praised for her portrayal and is what helped shift the cultural landscape (Miller, 2015). This was when the ground-breaking Wonder Woman Movie came out in 2017, played by Gal Gadot, and was the highest grossing origin film among the modern superhero genres (Hughes, 2017). Although this was an enormous step in the right direction of female superheroes being successful as the main role in a film, this film did not fall short of old habits in how women are portrayed. Gal Gadot faced similar issues that Lynda Carter faced when playing the Wonder Woman role. When it was revealed that Gal Gadot was to take on the role, heavy criticism and hatred was directed towards her physical appearance. The actress was body shamed and claimed to not have the physique to fulfil wonder woman, more specifically many critics would target her breast size and express they were not big enough (Herman, 2017). It's not uncommon for actresses to undergo body shaming in the superhero film industry, even in interviews actresses playing comic characters would be asked sexist questions regarding their bodies and nothing further about the characters themselves. Is this a result of the unrealistic depiction of the female body in comic books? Did comic books set such a high unrealistic expectation of how a woman should look that now one can never be good enough? Even though Wonder Woman felt empowering to many women and helped redirect the narrative on how a woman can be strong while still being feminine, Wonder Woman was still sexualised in this modern movie where despite being in a cold environment during the war no less, she remained wearing the revealing costume design seen in the comics. Wonder Woman is meant to be a symbol for feminism but as previously discussed, her glorified sex appeal though her body still dismantles the supposedly empowering symbol she's ought to be.

Phantom Lady

The phantom lady is a female comic character who was published around 1941 and was among one of the first and longest-lived female superheroes. She is considered to have been the first official successful female superhero (Schneider, 2016). Phantom Lady is a character who was part of the group known as the Freedom Fighters and fights crime using her martial arts skills and high-tech gadgets. One of her most noticeable characteristics is how her costume design became more and more revealing over time, and paired with that was the excessive growth in her breasts after each issue being published. From the beginning of her appearance, she is often seen dressed in a very revealing and short costume leaning backwards against a wooden pillar tangled up in rope (Figure 29). Like Wonder Woman, she is seen captured and put in bondages on numerous occasions. Putting her body on

this type of display suggests the sexual atmosphere that was created to sell this comic. When one thinks of bondage the mind wonders towards the relation to Bondage and Discipline, Dominance and Submission, Sadism and Masochism which is the acronym for BDSM and is rooted in sexual role playing (Hanley, 2014). Even though she is supposed to be a capable leading female character, she is still depicted as a submissive sexual being. Like other female characters, over time her appearance had gotten more and more sexualised and objectified to please the male audience.



Figure 29. Phantom Lady #17 1948 Fox Feature Syndicate,

Cover Art by Matt Baker

<https://gocollect.com/comic/phantom-lady-17>

Storm

From the mid 1960s and early 1970s Women of colour were the foundation of the civil rights movements but were disregarded and continued to struggle for their rights in a white patriarchal society (Penrice, 2022). Black women had been fighting a battle to be recognised for a very long time, it was very uncommon for people of colour to receive any recognition or representation among media, especially women of colour. Throughout history, black women have been seen as objects of sexual exploitation which is a perception that stems from the slavery times where the notion of rape was not acknowledged as a significant issue. The sexual health of African American women has endured hardship due to the issues of racism; this grew from the history of slavery and continues into and through the post-Civil Rights period (Alonso, 2018). White women face hyper sexualisation and objectification, but when depicted in media they can be viewed a symbol of sexual morality while women with darker skins are fetishized and stereotyped. There is a particular stereotype called the Jezebel where white people, predominantly white men, view Black women as hypersexual being who have the availability for sexual activity and this perception can be traced back to early days of enslavement (Hall, 2020). Black Women are portrayed as people in society living in the lower-class performing sex work, as mothers to children with an absent father or lack of knowledge on who the father is, and the wives of gangsters in poorer parts of cities.



Figure 30. Storm in her first appearance, Giant-Size X-Men #1, 1975 Marvel Comics

https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Storm-in-her-first-appearance-Giant-Size-X-Men-1-197514-Copyright-C-1975-Marvel_fig1_279245486

There was and still is a lack of representation of black characters in the comic book industry, it was a white male dominated field and for decades the absence wasn't recognized. It was in the 1970s that more diverse characters started to slowly make a minute appearance. One of the first female of colour was the character Storm appearing in an issue of the x-men comics (Figure 30). However, it wasn't a complete breakthrough of a revolution because the way Storm was illustrated can be seen as one of the most considered examples of how over sexualised women of colour are. She was drawn wearing nothing but bracelets, anklets, a belt and two pieces of cloth to cover her sexual organs front and back. Her breasts, torso, arms, and legs were completely exposed and the first frame she is seen is of her in a floating position where she is positioned laying forward. She is naked due to having been among the homeland of a tribe of people and later was confused as to why she had to wear clothing. As a character she was written to have a vengeful and angry persona which contributes to the idea that black women are unapproachable. Some comic book publishers had the motive of creating characters of colour simply because they didn't want to upset the society at the time who were becoming more and more aware of racism and sexism but the false depiction and sexualisation still contributes to those issues, this can still be seen today where people refer to an appearance of a diverse group in media as "politically correct". According to the oxford dictionary the term politically correct is when one complies with the current more popular liberal or radical view while being careful not to do or say something that can cause hurt or an exclusion of a group of people who are part of the discriminated minority (Oxford English Dictionary, 2023). This is often done regarding groups such as people of colour and those part of the LGBTQ+. Even though organisations make the effort in including these minorities they still contribute to the negative depiction of them which still cause harm.

When a group of people is shown in negative, disrespectful, or inaccurate ways, it can have long-lasting effects on how they view themselves and how others perceive them. If fictional stories frequently portray someone's culture, race, or gender in a demeaning or incorrect manner, it's hard to change those stereotypes. Over time, if these portrayals are repeated frequently, negative beliefs can become deeply ingrained in society. As Peyton Brunet and Blair Davis mention in their book *Comic Book Women* (2022); when it comes to portraying a specific group of people in a negative or inaccurate way it can have enduring effects on how they and others perceive them, if narratives like the ones we find in these comic books continue to depict someone's culture, race, or gender in a degrading manner those stereotypes remain and become a part of society.

Starfire

The female superhero character Starfire is one of the most sexualised comic book characters (Staff, 2017). Her first costume design that was then used for several years after first publication was not much more than a few pieces of fabric being held together by straps which puts her exaggerated proportions on display for the male viewers (Figure 31). This costume design is excused by the claim that because she obtains her abilities from the sun through solar radiation, it's imperative that she exposes as much skin as possible. This

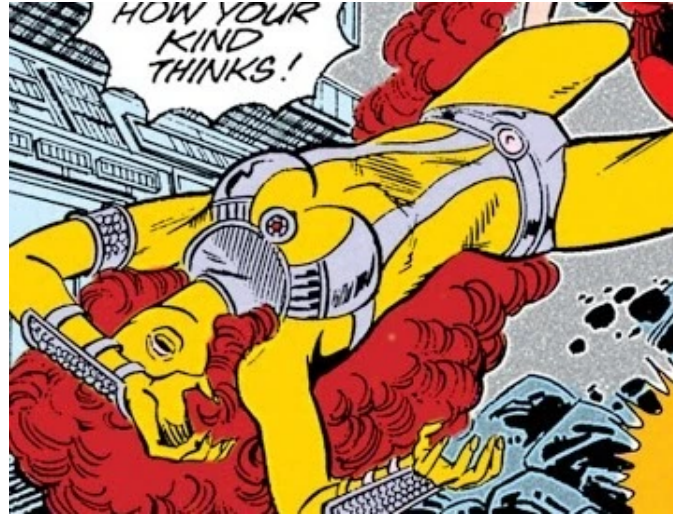


Figure 31. Star Fire in Tales of the New Teen Titans #4
1982 Art by George Perez

<https://warriorword.com/2022/06/03/wonder-woman-tied-up-how-women-in-comics-are-hypersexualized/>

could be somewhat of an explanation if it weren't for the fact that there are other male characters such as Superman who also gains power from the sun yet doesn't have to wear a revealing costume, he is seen fully covered. This can be used as an example regarding the inequality of how men and women are portrayed in visual media. There is no logical reasoning behind her revealing character design besides it being for the male audience. Even though Starfire as a character has a well-developed narrative where she has an interesting backstory, she is still an example of how overly sexualised a female character is compared to the male superheroes regardless of the process the feminist movements have made. A story of this character worth mentioning is how she came to the television screen. In the comics Starfire is seen with a more darker orange complexion, so it is fair to say that she is another female character of colour. Even though she is clearly not a white woman in the comics, there was a wave of disagreement when it came to the actress chosen to play her on screen. In 2018 there was a television adaption of the DC comic Teen Titans, involving Starfire who was to be played by the actress Anna Diop. When this was announced hateful comments were directed towards the actress's body and physical appearance, all taking offence to the character being played by a Black Woman (Stanger, 2023). This shows that even in 2018, 40 years after the character was created people involved within the comic book industry have an issue when it comes to a woman of colour taking part.

Catwoman

Catwoman is arguable the most recognized comic female character (Figure 32), she is a cultural figure who has an extensive history in mainstream America where she has appeared in a diverse number of media (Lecker, 2017). This character alone can give us a look into how a woman's sexuality is perceived in the eyes of an American society and how things have both changed and continued to stay the same (Lecker, 2017). This is a character who has been villainized for her sexuality and power. According to the research executed by Lecker (2007) in his paper *Female Sexuality Represented in The Character Catwoman*, there is a historical link between women and felines that has been used throughout history to oppress women and to discriminate the women with any trace of power by labelling them as evil and deceitful. When looking at media such as comic books, it is common for comic creators to have their characters based off an animal where their personalities and appearance mirrors the animal's behaviour. For example, Batman is a dark and broody character who fights crime only at night and Spiderman crawls on walls and is considered a trickster. When it comes to female characters the animals associated to their narrative are often felines, besides Catwoman there's the characters Black Cat, Cheetah, Tigra, Wildcat, Hellcat, Jaguar, She Cat, Kitty Pop, Puma, the list goes on. The admiration for cats can be dated as far back as Ancient Egypt where the Egyptian Goddess Bastet who was depicted as a woman with the head of a cat, Isis the queen of Egyptian Gods who can turn into a cat and Sakhmet a lion headed Goddess were highly worshiped (Lecker, 2017). Even though these feline Egyptian Goddesses were a symbol of positive worship among their culture, those who were part of other religions such as Christianity wanted to demean those ideas and demolish pagan relations. Anything outside of Christianity is labelled as pagan or heathen and deemed the wrong path. According to the research done by Conrad Hackett and David McClendon (2017) Christians remain the largest religious group in the world where Christianity makes up more than 30% of the population. With this much influence on our culture that has been consistent through history, the negative symbolism that the church identifies is rooted in our culture. A Study by Hwang & Sin (2023) suggests that among the church cats were seen as a symbol for paganism and due to cats roaming streets and having a high reproductive rate, they were often associated with women accused of being witches. This caused the appearance of any cat like symbolism or behaviour to be turned into a label for women who are considered dark sexually deviant beings. Catwoman is a prime example of this because since creation she has been overshadowed by her sexuality.



Figure 32. Catwoman #1 1993 DC Comics <https://screenrant.com/catwoman-best-costumes-dc-comics/>

Catwoman showcases the idea of a feline prowess when a main character being in the male-dominated environment of Gotham. However, her abilities don't reflect or bring depth to her character compared to the male characters around her. Her love interest Batman is depicted as someone with immense strength as well as intelligence and the villain The Joker is written with genius levels of criminality while Catwoman's strength lies more in her physical attributes and how she uses it in seducing those near her. Her capabilities rely on the manipulation she executes when the men she encounters fall vulnerably with lust. Not only does this further objectify women, dismissing them as sexually driven beings but it limits a woman's capabilities to her physical form, prioritising the idea that a woman's worth and abilities is based on her body while also villainising women for supposedly using their bodies to seduce men for negative purposes. When she first came into comic book history in *Batman #1* (1940) she was met with Batman threatening her with the phrase "Quiet of Papa spank!", proving that for every time a strong female hero or powerful female villain would make an appearance, there were more cases of unmistakable sexism (Brunet & Davis, 2022).

It is inevitable that a female character in comic books will be drawn in a way that hypersexualises women. When trying to identify the specific approaches and techniques artists use for the female superheroes that are repeated through decades, what surfaces is the alarming realisation of the vast differences in which how the male subjects are drawn in comparison to the female subjects. Male characters are usually illustrated in a way that asserts power and dominance in how they stand or use their abilities by usually being drawn facing fully forwards to elaborate their muscular physique, while the women are drawn in a disproportionate way standing at odd positions. This can be seen easily if one were to pick up the first few comics they can find in a store. Female characters can be seen drawn in an unrealistic twisted manor to accentuate their body parts, such as to the side with their back arched and chest at an angle to draw the viewers' attention to their breasts and size of their rears.

In an article where a *Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis of Portrayals of Women in Mainstream Superhero Comics* was done by Carolyn Cocca (2014), she explains that comics are known for their drawings portraying women in revealing clothing with idealised objectified bodies, putting them in sexualized and unrealistic positions for appeal. Cocca (2014) performs a test she refers to as the “*Broke Back Test*” where multiple comics were analysed to identify how often a female character’s body is drawn in an unnaturally distorted way to put her curves on display compared to male characters. Cocca (2014) finds in her research that in almost every edition she examines, women are sexualized, objectified, and underrepresented. This comparison can be seen such as in the Batman and Catwoman comic issues, when a fight scene is being



Figure 33. Batman Catwoman Issue 10 Art by Tom King <https://viewcomiconline.com/batman-catwoman-issue-10/>

illustrated its often found that the male characters can be viewed using their upper body and fists to take down their opponent while the women tend to use their lower body and legs, this allows the artist to draw women in more sensual poses that depict their idea on what strong femininity is while putting their body on display. When a male character is paired with a female character who is potentially a love interest in their narrative, the male is often drawn in a dominant position with a facial expression of either seriousness or aggression to give off a sense of jurisdiction, while the women are depicted as erotic sexual beings with submissive and seductive tendencies. This can be seen in the batman and cat woman comic issue (Figure 33) where Batman is drawn relatively much larger to fit the frame, kneeling on one knee and clenching a fist while frowning deeply, while Catwoman is on all fours in front of him with her back arched and breasts exposed suggesting a sexual position. Even when the female character is positioned behind the male like the Wolverine comic issue (Figure 34), she has a seductive expression while positioning her body to suggest further sexual fantasies while the male remains depicted in a more masculine assertive stance. This objectification where the female character is always put in a sexual demonstration further influences the idea that women are accessories for men to perform their desires on and support the continuation of the harmful traditional gender roles women have had to undertake for centuries.



Figure 34. Wolverine #62 2003 Marvel Comics

<https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x6rookx>

Black Widow

Another comic book character that had faced the same fate as Wonder Woman in both the comic book and film industry is a personal favourite, Marvels Black Widow (Figure 35). Like other female characters, Black Widows backstory is rooted in sexuality. Her character was created by Stan Lee and first appeared in the comics in 1964 Tales of Suspense, dressed up wearing furs and a veil with a small role to seduce Tony Stark, Iron Man. Later she returns as the love interest for the character Hawkeye then in 1965 in Tales of Suspense #64, she wore her first costume. Her first costume was a black leotard, belt, cape, and a mask that was mentioned to be a relation to Hawkeye. Like other female comic characters, she was often left on the side-lines as a supporting character and has many love interests through the years. She was also a female character who often joined alongside groups of male superheroes, leaving her the only women among them. Even though she played a small role, after her first appearances people took an interest in her character which led to further developments in her backstory. She was trained to be a spy and deadly assassin for the Russia and her abilities involved combat but, like Catwoman, she relied on her ability to seduce and manipulate men by using her body. Her character never got further development beyond her rough Russian past where she's always seen as someone who's cold, calculating and goes for the kill. Her physical appearances mainly remain her being in a skin-tight suit leaving no room for imagination and is often illustrated with her neckline very low to accentuate her cleavage. When reading her comics, it's hard not to find a frame or two showcasing her half naked body in sexual scenes. But it's not just her physical appearance that is the main concern in how she's sexualised and objectified, although it plays a huge part in it, it's more how she is flaunted among the male audience and those around her that make her another object of desire.



Figure 35. Black Widow in Amazing Adventures #5 1970. Artist John Romita

<https://mycomicrelief.wordpress.com/2020/02/04/black-widow-a-comic-book-retrospective-the-60s-and-70s/>



Figure 36. Black Widow in the movie Captain America: The Winter Soldier 2014.

<https://www.phonandroid.com/black-widow-date-de-sortie-histoire-acteurs-tout-ce-que-lon-sait-sur-le->

Black widow first appears on the screen in the Iron Man 2 movie 2010 where she is undercover as an assistant for Tony Stark. Throughout the film she is used as an object of desire where she gains Tony Starks attention within the first glance and sexual side remarks are made about her appearance and there's a scene of her stripping to change clothes. In 2012 the Marvel movie The Avengers was released and caused an uproar of fame for the universe, in the movie Black Widow was the only female character on the team, the team consisted of Thor, Iron Man, Captain America, Hawkeye and The Hulk. Even though it was inspiring for many younger girls to see a female character fight alongside a team with the objective of saving the world, Black Widow was hypersexualised in the way she was depicted in the film. Her appearance in the film mirrors her appearances in the comics (Figure 36), she wears her skin-tight costume with the zipper on her chest brought down very low and the camera shots through the movie would film her in angles that would put her curves and backside on display. Like most female superhero characters, she would be used to suggest a relationship between her and the male characters while also being a damsel in distress, in one scene she is physically locked in a cage waiting for help. When she is in a fight

scene, it's her legs that are used in the physical combat. She thrives when men underestimate her because that's when she can use her manipulative abilities, this was seen when she was interrogating the villain Loki by acting weak and naïve to attain information out of him. When on movie posters she is positioned with her body twisted in a way that emphasises her physical appearance, this mirrors how women are illustrated on comic book covers. This depiction of Black Widow in film carried on for years until in the movie Endgame released in 2019 where she was killed off. Many fans of Black Widow were enraged by her death, it was seen as unnecessary and sexist to some. People expressed their disappointment because for years female characters are used as a plot point for the male characters to continue, Black Widow died so Hawkeye could finish the mission. For many young girls Black Widow was often their favourite due to being the only main female superhero on screen for so many years, countless had followed her performance as they grew up and admired her as a character. However, disappointment often occurred regarding how her character was handled, and in the end removed completely. When having a character such as Black Widow, who is admired by so many and is a figure that hold a lot of influence over a younger generation, it is imperative to ensure the characters depiction and portrayal is done in a way that gives a positive impact on not just how young girls see themselves in this society but also influence young boys to not only see a woman as an object of desire through her visual appearances.

3.3 Conclusion

To conclude, comic books is a form of visual language that has been, and still is, used for storytelling among many cultures and languages of the world. Comic books are a form of visual media that plays a crucial part in our visual culture due to how relative they are to each point in history and how our society has shifted and changed over time. Even though they are an impactful source of material that allows immense creativity, through the textual analysis written in this chapter what can be seen is how comic books consistently follow the theme of sexualization and objectification of women. The authority and control men have had historically in both the art and comic world has created an industry that evokes the exploitation of women for the male audience. Even though some progress has been made in how women are viewed and how they have started to gain some acknowledgment in society, there is still a huge amount of work that needs to be done regarding achieving true equality in media such as comic books. By studying what's happened in the past we can navigate how to better improve our steps for the future.

PRIMARY RESEARCH METHODS

4.1 Introduction

The conversation about the exploitation of women and the female body, along with how their roles are depicted in society within visual media is not a new field of discussion. There is a much wider spread of awareness on this topic that can be supported by the exponential growth of studies on the sexualisation of women and the repercussions that follow. As the years go by more and more research is being conducted due to a lot of people becoming more conscious of the issue and wanting to factualize the problem to conduct a possible change in the future. This is mainly due to the fast progression of technology and widespread media consumption that has become so easily accessible for people of all ages everywhere in the world. This can make it challenging to clearly identify the great extent media has in influencing how someone can perceive both the world and them. When it comes to collecting data to support the project that hopes to improve the depiction of women in comic books, many approaches can be made to reach a sufficient foundation. Many methods are discussed within this chapter. However, it's the questionnaire that was published that brings a deeper insight on the audience's opinions, thoughts, and attitudes regarding the sexualization of women in comic books. This questionnaire along with the research other authors have conducted is what gives the project a direction in how to approach this matter in the best way.

4.2 What Has Been Done and What Could Be Done

There are multiple studies where data has been collected on how the use in media can affect the perception someone has on their body image, self-worth and how it can cause various other mental health issues such as depression and eating disorders. Within a thesis written by Moncrief, Madelyn, *Media sexualization and its impact on college aged women* (2022), many studies are mentioned that revolve around the negative effects women experience from the influence of media and more importantly the self-sexualisation that it causes. While all genders can be acknowledged in being victims of sexualization, its women who are more specifically targeted for sexualization in media (Moncrief, 2022). Moncrief's study was conducted with the aim in finding out if there is a higher level of internalized sexualization in college women who spend time on both social media and traditional media. To perform this study a survey was provided to individuals to get an insight on their background, such as race, gender, age and what they identify their sexuality and was paired with two scales to measure their media consumption and internalized sexualisation. The first scale

used to measure media consumption was grasped from another study on *The Relationship Between Media Consumption and Eating Disorders* conducted by Kristen Harrison and Joanne Cantor (2006) where the person participating in the study is asked the amount of time spent watching television and tv shows that have specific depictions of the female body along with magazines. The second scale was a modified version of a scale from the study done by McKenney's (2010) *Measuring Internalized Sexualization Among Pre- and Early Adolescent Girls*. The Internalization Sexualization Scale (ISS) in that specific study consists of a series of very specific and carefully worded questions presented within six subscales that measures different categories of the internalization of a sexualized environment: Media, Peers, Clothing, Power, Sexualized Attitudes about the Body, and Self-compromise (McKenney, 2010). It had a 5-point scale rating between strongly agree and strongly disagree. By combining all these methods Moncrief's research was able to determine that those who tend to be more involved in social media platforms was found to have a more increased amount of internalized sexualization which also had a connection when associated with the internalized sexism from one residing in television watching, specifically when immersing oneself in the genre of romance (Moncrief, 2022). With the help of The Internalization Sexualization Scale it gave a much deeper and better understanding of what young girls could be thinking when it comes to the sexualization of themselves because of the influence of the world around them. The combination of these multiple methods is what strengthened the collection of data to support the researched topic and was a good approach to use regarding looking at sexualization in different media while still having the focal point being on female objectification and how it can affect someone's perception. Using these methods provide a series of primary resources to use as support.

When looking at the sexualization and objectification of women in media overall, there can be a good sum of studies and research found. There is also a lot of work going into the importance comic books have in terms of art, history, politics, and culture but when specifically searching for supportive literature focusing on the sexualization and objectification of women in graphic novels and looking for methodologies that are used to conduct this research, not a lot can be found. What was found was a research paper by Crawshaw, Trisha L, *Truth, Justice, Boobs? Analysing Female Empowerment and Objectification in the Graphic Novel Genre* (Aug 2015), where it's discussed that there is a lack of investigation in how the female body is used as a selling point in these visuals. There is a bit of a gap within the literature where few have even thought about questioning the

influences these images have on the readers in the comic book community (Crawshaw, 2015) and Crawshaw decided to conduct research to explore how women are represented. Crawshaw's methodology and approach was to use the time spent working at a comic bookstore as a point of observation to analyse people's behaviour in the environment and gather data through notes taken at the time followed by detailed interviews with people who read comics. By working in the physical environment where comic books are being sold, it provided a first-hand insight on comic book culture where one can immerse themselves in different perspectives and helps gain an understanding of how women interact within a male dominated space. Along with seeing the behaviour of men in an environment that is stereotypically seen as their field and how they interact with women who try participating. By engaging and being present in said environment, there's opportunity for a better "understanding of how graphic narratives contribute to the social constructions of gender difference, sexual stereotypes, and body objectification" (Crawshaw, 2015). The knowledge gained from the personal experience in being in a comic bookstore is what also further supports the questionnaire, allow better preparation in what specifically can be asked, identify focal points, and provide the ability to view the different perspectives people have on the representation of women in comics.

There was an article found about teaching young kids to correctly analyse comics and learn how to find the meanings and valid applications for comics along with taking part in discussions about misrepresentation (stereotypes, gender, race, ethnicity, and sexuality) in our society (Cook & Frey, 2017). It was an opportunity to guide youth into rethinking the stereotypes that they heavily consume from the society they now live in and hopefully reshape what they've been told and rather create their own visuals of what they would like to see as a representation for a superhero. To do this they selected four comic books with various characters that they felt had a diversity of background and held some discussions. They were also presented with a series of images and asked the kids to answer a few questions about what they see and what thoughts those images bring to their minds. This method is promising due to the direct connection that can be made between what a younger viewer thinks as a result to being exposed to specific images of media, which can further show how something like comic books can influence someone's views on diversity in race, gender, sexuality, and even themselves. What's also a positive outcome of this study is the ability in inspiring the younger audience in possibly being creators of graphic novels and applying the learnings they were exposed to about diversity.

With what was learned from analysing how other studies had gathered their data kept in mind, the methods used when gathering research to support the project focuses on including surveys. There are many reasons as to why using surveys and questionnaires are beneficial to gathering data. Surveys are an inexpensive and time efficient way that can provide a very broad analysis of the many characteristics of the individuals who are involved in the field. The survey provides a range of flexibility when asking questions to collect the information, with a few specific questions that provides some general knowledge of the population, or it can be a more detailed approach that give an idea of the thoughts and behaviours of a great sum of people. They can also come in many different forms such as on paper, an e-mail, a webpage or simply on their phones. It gives the individual multiple options for the choice in how they want to participate in the study. The survey used for this project was made to have the ability for many people to have access to it, whether it's a physical form or made in digital format for mobile phones and computers the goal is to be able to reach a lot of people. It involves a combination of simple targeted questions and a few psychological ones that would need a bit of more thought to answer. For example, the basic questions of what peoples age and gender are, where they are from, their age, their likes and hobbies give a generalized idea on their profiles and it would follow into the type of media they mainly partake in whether it be social media, television, reading or watching cinema to make note on their media consumption. The more detailed questions were used to gain more concentrated information on aspects such as their opinions on the portrayal of men and women in different kinds of media and questions that can provide an insight on their own perception on themselves that could have possibly been influenced by the media they consume.

4.3 Questionnaire

The performance of this survey can be used as an influential asset in the goal of reinforcing the depth of understanding the gender representation and sexualization in the comic book industry. By having a personal interaction with the responses of the survey, where different perspectives, attitudes, personal experiences and positionings on the topic is shared, a better insight on the complexities of this field can be explored. This approach not only gives one the data to support the project but also allows the opportunity in taking note on the prevailing themes and direction of the views that are currently relevant among comic book enthusiasts while also still being aware of how

many prefer the older ways. This allows one to discover if there are any patterns that can be identified, along with getting a glimpse of assumptions made on different opinions and perspectives that are considered the most recent. It can help identify If enough change has been made of is even though there’s awareness, it’s still a problem not being solved efficiently enough. Each question has a specific motive behind it that played a part in the contribution of a better research. The research gathered from this kind of research helped define the next path to take in how to approach the project to accomplish its goals.

How old are you?
50 responses

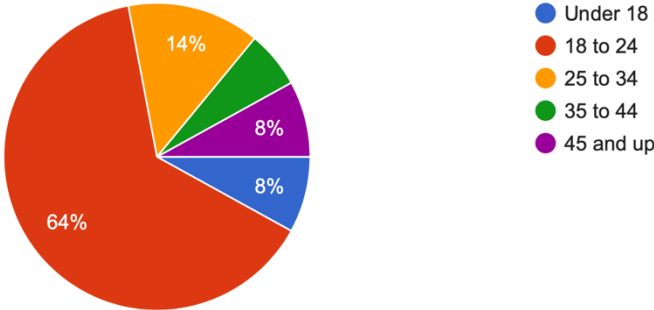


Figure 37. How old are you?

Question 1 – How old are you? (Figure 37)

Question Justification: Asking the responders age can help understand how age can play a role in the generational differences. Looking at age demographics of respondents provides an analysis of how peoples way of thinking may vary among age groups. Knowing someone’s age can then help improve the understanding of what a desired age of target audience can be for the project.

Question Results: When looking at the results, the most answered age range was within the “18 to 24” options. This category made up 64% of the data which reveals that majority of those who answered the survey are young adults. This is a good age range to have due to these participants are more likely to be highly involved in the current media trends which can provide more guidance on the project’s developments.

How do you identify your gender?

50 responses

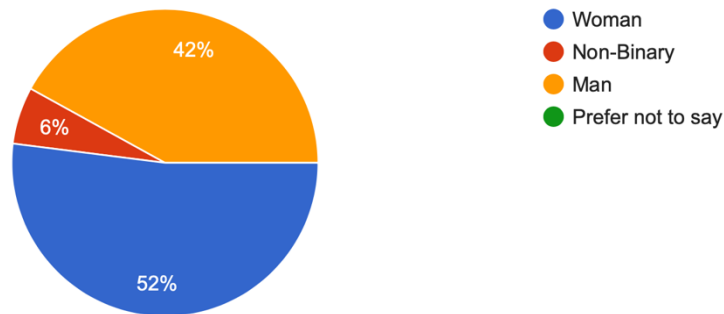


Figure 38. How do you identify your gender?

Question 2 – How do you identify your gender? (Figure 38)

Question Justification: Asking a question based on gender identity is an important insight when it comes to researching about a topic that is based around the perception on a specific gender. In this case the project is focused on women. Gender identity is an influential factor in how different individuals perceive and resonate to gender representations in visual culture. There is a need in understanding the differences in perspectives between men and women in this topic, finding out how aware they are compared to the other in terms of the sexualization issue. Adding the extra options such as “non-binary” shows acknowledgement and respect for the diverse perspectives and experiences within the comic book audience. It’s also an approach to showing open mindedness which is a characteristic wanted for the project.

Question Results: There was a slightly higher number of “women” (52%) respondents compared to the “men” (42%), but this still offers a good amount of insight that can help navigate through the differences in opinions on sexualization between the two genders. Due to the project being based on a gender representation issue, where it’s been men with the more influential power of how women are viewed, having a generally equal number of men and women is very beneficial. Paired with a few individuals who selected “non-binary” (6%), it gives an indication that there is a diversity in the audience and supports an analysis on how different gender identities respond to the portrayals of women in comic books.

How often do you read comic books?

50 responses

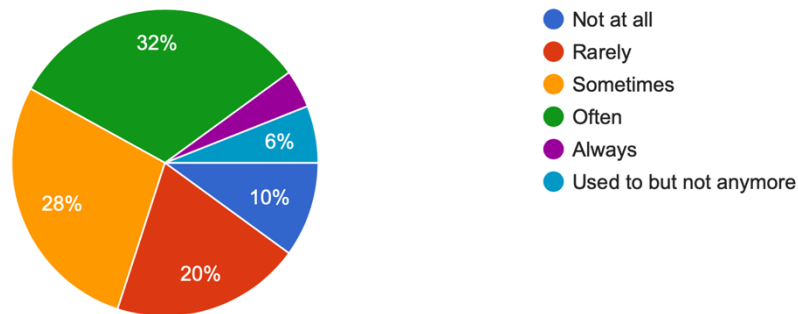


Figure 39. How often do you read comic books?

Question 3 – How often do you read comic books? (Figure 39)

Question Justification: When it comes to asking people their level of comic book consumption, this can help one indicate the amount of people that are involved in comic books while also trying to understand the level of exposure they have. It gives the opportunity to navigate the degree of comic book interaction and to clarify if it is something that is still as popular as it once was or if it's a dying art.

Question Results: The amount of comic books each participant showed a variation of engagement. The majority selected that they read comic books “often” (32%) which clarifies that those who answered have taken part in the world of comic books. The next highest group was the option “sometimes” (28%), suggesting some would occasionally participate. Both groups have had interactions with comic books, this indicated the possibility of informed perspectives on gender representation in comic books. The following group indicating those who read “rarely” (20%) or “not at all” (10%) still provide a valid opinion in how those who are not as involved might differ in opinion compared to those who are. It can help identify later in the questionnaire whether those who are not involved in comics have some awareness on the issue or not. There was the option of those who “always read (2%),” even though very little had selected this it still offers a deeper insight on those who are considered dedicated fans. This diversity in level of engagements from the participants provides a broad scope of attitudes regarding the representation of women in comic books.

What genre of comic books do you typically read?

49 responses

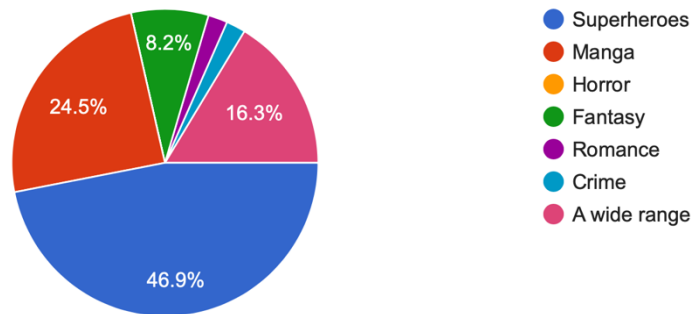


Figure 40. What genre of comic books do you typically read?

Question 4 – What genre of comic books do you typically read? (Figure 40)

Question Justification: The different genres of comic books can reveal different patterns and tropes when it comes to gender representation and the exploitation of women. Understanding the audience’s preferences of genre can qualify the examination of how portrayals differ among the multiple genres and how people’s interpretations may influence their idea of what is considered sexualization. There is also a specific curiosity for if most of these responses prefer superhero comic books compared to the other genres.

Question Results: In this question one out of the fifty who responded had skipped the question, this could have been a mistake or a lack of interest but either way it is the reasoning for the percentages to not have been whole numbers. As suspected when developing the questions for the survey, nearly half of those who answered had picked “superhero” comics (46.9%) as the genre that they mostly read. As discussed in earlier chapters, this is a genre that is known for having negative depictions of women in comic books. This statistic supports the significance on discussing how women are seen in these superhero narratives.

Do you prefer print or digital comic books

50 responses

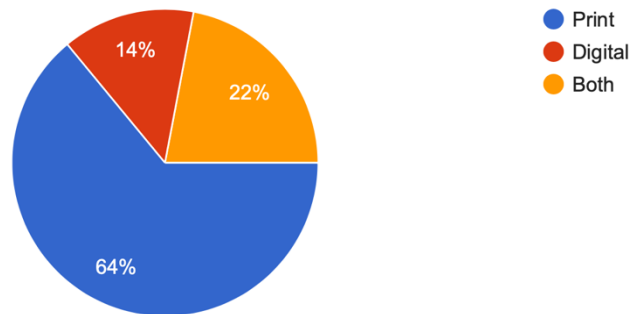


Figure 41. Do you prefer print or digital comic books?

Question 5 – Do you prefer print or digital comic books? (Figure 41)

Question Justification: The preferences of how people read these comic books could have an influence on the level of accessibility and amount of consumption. Lately things are easier to access due to the progression in digital media. However, some people prefer the physically feel of objects such as books or listening to a record player instead of online music. Additionally, it helps wanting to understand the possible trend of preferences. Understanding the different and preferred preference can help identify a different road to take when creating an original project for people's interests. For example, if the project would go towards a social media approach or an older approach and use something such as printing?

Question Results: As previously suspected, even though we live in a digital age, most people who answered chose the option of "print" (64%), meaning many prefer the physical copy of comic books instead of reading them on a screen. This shows evidence of an old attachment to the traditional way comic books were first sold. This can influence what approach is taken for the project. The following larger portion chose the option of "both" (22%) showing an opportunity of flexibility in their comic book format preferences. For the project this can suggest that people are open to the idea to both kind of approaches, whether the organization takes a more social media path or physical.

How do you usually discover comic books

50 responses

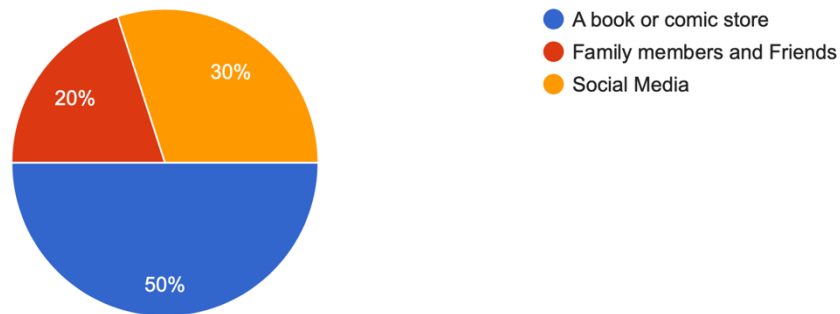


Figure 42. How do you usually discover comic books?

Question 6 – How do you usually discover comic books? (Figure 42)

Question Justification: When asking how someone usually discovers a specific visual media, it helps identify the different discovery channels, and which of them are most encountered. The way people come across comic books, could also influence the types of comic books they are exposed to. This small detail influences the level of interaction an audience has had with different gender representations. Identifying the main sources of expose not only allows us to get an insight on how sexualised characters can be more likely encountered, but also support the approach made for the project.

Question Results: Due to us living in the digital age it comes as a surprise that the main channel people discover comic books through is bookstores or comic books. Half of the participants of the survey chose the option of a “bookstore or comic store” (50%). Like how majority chose “print” (64%) in the previous question, people seem to stick to the more traditional approach when coming across comic books. The next most chosen option comes as no surprise, many selected “social media” (30%) which underlines the influence of digital media and how it can have an impact on what kind of comics readers are exposed to. The least chosen was the “family and friends” (20%) but still a significant amount to take into consideration the importance people have when receiving recommendations to the people around them.

In your experience, how are women typically portrayed in comic books?

50 responses

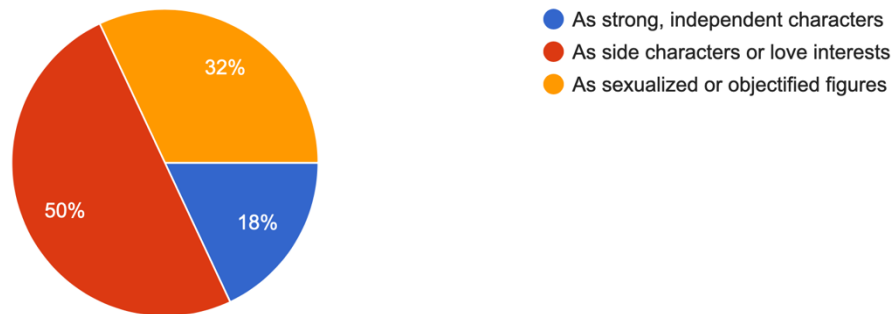


Figure 43. In your experience, how are women typically portrayed in comic books?

Question 7 – In your experience, how are women typically portrayed in comic books? (Figure 43)

Question Justification: This question directly helps with identifying the different respondent’s apprehension on how the female characters are represented in the type of comics they read. It also could give a brief insight on the measure of awareness. If a respondent clicks the option “as sexualised or objectified figures” it’s a clear indication of both awareness and exposure to the issue.

Question Results: The results to this question, although diverse, supports the opinions of criticism towards the negative gender representation in comic books. Majority of the respondents had selected the option “side characters or love interests” (50%), this acknowledges the awareness of the inequality of representation of the genders. People seem to have taken note on how female characters are written off as a plot for romance or supporting characters instead of being allowed to be central protagonists with depth to their character and narratives. The next major group was the option “as sexualised or objectified figures” (32%), this showcases that there is a significant amount of awareness among people on how women are viewed in the comic book medium.

Do you believe that female characters in comic books are sexualized?

50 responses

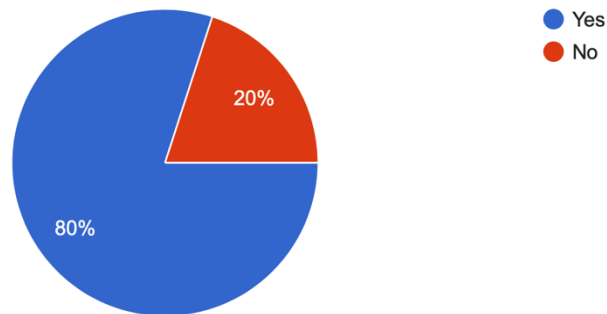


Figure 44. Do you believe that female characters in comic books are sexualized?

Question 8 – Do you believe that female characters in comic books are sexualized? (Figure 44)

Question Justification: Similar to the previous question, it is a more direct approach to the respondent's opinion on the sexualization of women in comic books. Getting different opinions on this topic allows an understanding of how many others are informed of the situation. This helps the comprehension of the discourse surrounding the representation of women in comic books.

Question Results: Most of the audience had selected "yes" (80%) which showcases a high level of recognition of the issue on gender representation in comics. This indicates a trace of concern from those who read comic books. Controversially the rest of them had selected "no" (20%) indicating their disbelief on the topic discussed. Understanding both views is crucial for addressing the different opinions of gender in comic books. Those who answered "no" (20%) would be part of the target audience regarding the project due to wanting to educate people on the existence of sexualization of women.

Do you think the sexualization of female characters in comic books is problematic?

50 responses

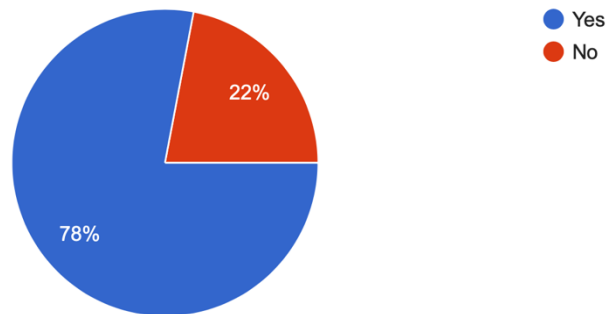


Figure 45. Do you think the sexualization of female characters in comic books is problematic?

Question 9 – Do you think the sexualization of female characters in comic books is problematic? (Figure 45)

Question Justification: Asking peoples opinion on if the sexualization of female characters in comic books is problematic or not examines the different attitudes towards the topic. Asking for this opinion can reveal if they think a serious issue is right or wrong. Discovering this opinion can also disclose the amount of people who are knowledgeable of the negative implications of how women are depicted.

Question Results: Many had chosen “yes” (78%) and although it’s a high number it was concerning that the rest of the individuals had chosen “no” (22%). This reflects on the still remaining majority that disregards the harmful portrayals of women, even though it’s easy to find sources explaining the impact these problematic portrayals have on the women in society. Taking into account both of these perspectives will indicate how to collect and share research and other knowledge on the topic, in hopes of educating those lacking an understanding in how much of an issue the exploitation of women is.

Do you believe that sexualized portrayals contribute to harmful stereotypes?

50 responses

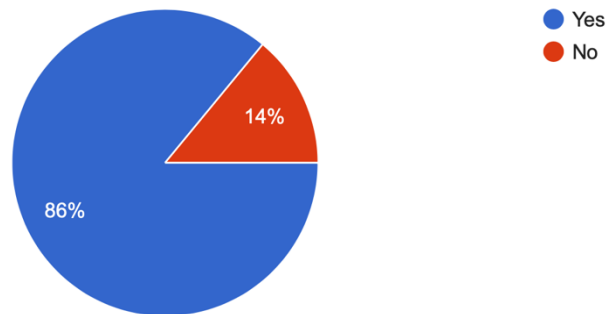


Figure 46. Do you believe that sexualized portrayals contribute to harmful stereotypes?

Question 10 – Do you believe that sexualized portrayals contribute to harmful stereotypes? (Figure 46)

Question Justification: This question simply explores people’s views on if the way women are depicted effects stereotypes that can cause potential harm. It’s another question that can measure the amount of awareness someone has on the topic of gender stereotypes that are negative. Understanding these perspectives on sexualization gives a background on why it’s important to advocate for more responsibility in how stories are told within the narratives of the industry.

Question Results: Most participants had answered “Yes” (86%) showing a positive amount of belief in that the stereotypes in comic books are a result of the sexualization of women. Earlier on in this paper, it was mentioned that there is no doubt a decent amount of awareness on the issue at hand. The focus point is to not just reinforce the amount who are knowledgeable oof this issue but also encourage action to take place. Due to having primary data that supports the statement that many are mindful of the problem, the project can work with creating a line of action in highlighting how it can move past the awareness stage and into a motion that causes change. The respondents who had chosen to say “No” (14%) show that there is still a remaining group who are ignorant. This can indicate the chances of conflicts and disagreements against the project but offers a boarder angle in how to improve the way these people are informed about the facts in this field.

How do you think the portrayal of women in comics affects young readers?

49 responses

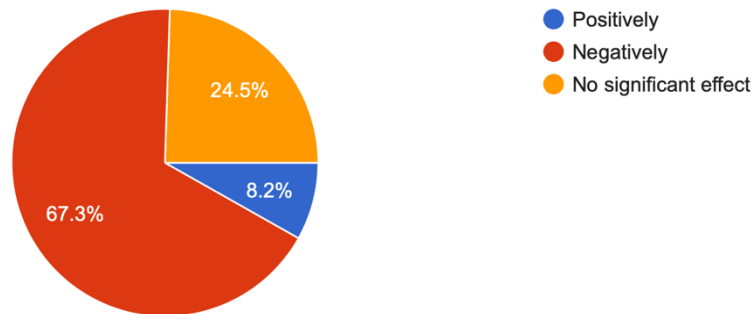


Figure 47. How do you think the portrayal of women in comics affects young readers?

Question 11 – How do you think the portrayal of women in comics affects young readers? (Figure 47)

Question Justification: This question dives into the beliefs people have when it comes to the way comic books influence children. It guides us to a better understanding on the consequences of the way media can influence people’s way of thinking and their beliefs among the younger audience. It provokes specific discussions regarding how much of a role comic books play in establishing the foundations of what’s defined as the norm among young people.

Question Results: Most people taking the survey can comprehend that the way women are sexualised in comic books impacts young readers “Negatively” (67.3%). Showing a wariness on the consequences of these narratives. A considerable number of participants had selected “No significant effect” (24.5%) indicating a perspective where people don’t believe that a medium like comic books can have a noticeable effect on a younger generation. This, however, possibly shows the lack of information people have on both the influences of media in children, and what has happened in the past when another organization tried censoring the content that affects them. A small quantity had chosen “Positively” (8.2%) which could be viewing these perspectives of female characters as empowering, rather than sexualised. Knowing these statistics can support the projects steps in encouraging the creation of more positive and diverse characters for younger readers to admire and look up to.

Do you think there is adequate representation of women in comic books?

50 responses

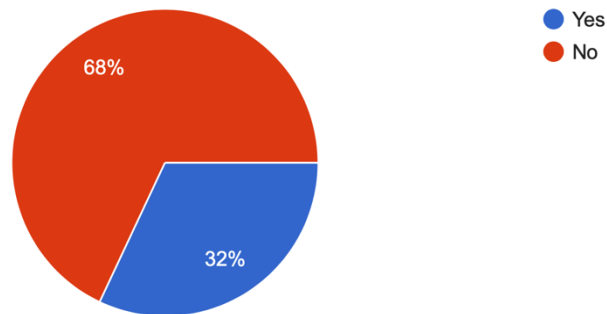


Figure 48. Do you think there is an adequate representation of women in comic books?

Question 12 – Do you think there is an adequate representation of women in comic books? (Figure 48)

Question Justification: This question aids in identifying any gaps or disparities when it comes to the representation of women in comics. It can help support the need for further discussions on how comic books can elevate its level of diversity and inclusion of the minorities. While also questioning if there is a real need for more or not. The question helps navigate if there has been as much of an improvement as people believe over the years, or if its still something that needs to be addressed with our full attention.

Question Results: More than half of the participants had answered “No” (68%) regarding the belief that there is a lack of sufficient representation of women in comic books. This high statistic highlights that many have the opinion that there is an insufficiency of diversity regarding these characters and can be paired with the concern shown about the currency of stereotypes and sexualised imagery. A substantial amount had selected “Yes” (32%), this could be a sign of recognition for the steps in improvement within the medium. Having these two perspectives helps identify the gaps remaining in the field while also underlining the better effort needed to reach full satisfaction in how women are portrayed.

How important is it to you to see diverse representations of women in comic books?

50 responses

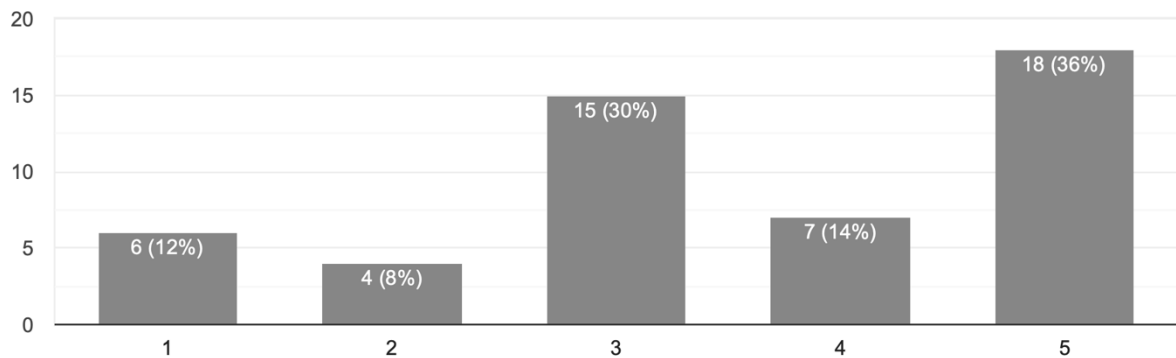


Figure 49. How important is it to you to see diverse representations of women in comic books?

Question 13 – How important is it to you to see diverse representations of women in comic books? (Figure 49)

Question Justification: It's important to gauge the level of importance of female diversity among different people. It provides a scope of who it's more relevant to, who it's not while also supporting the cause of a project that wants to change the narrative. It encourages the evaluation on the expectations and preferences of the audience as well as how much of an influence a better diversity would have on a reader's engagement.

Question Results: There was quite a diversity in responses regarding this question. The results provide a better look on the level of significance an improvement would make, and the mass had chosen "5" (36%) on the scale. Paired with those who selected "4" (14%) further proves the importance of diverse characters for people, and the strong desire for them. Selecting the middle option can also show those who are neither for nor against the suggestion, given the level 3 is presented in the middle of the scale. In contrast, the other selections of "1" (12%) and "2" (8%) represent those who have no worry or interest regarding the representation of women in comics and indicate that the absence doesn't concern them. When specifically looking for the attitudes of those who selected the low numbers of importance on the scale, by inspecting each participant's answer, it was discovered that majority had been men with the lack of interest. This underlines the differences in perspectives and level of importance of an improved representation of a gender.

Do you think comic book publishers have a responsibility to address issues of sexualization and representation?

49 responses

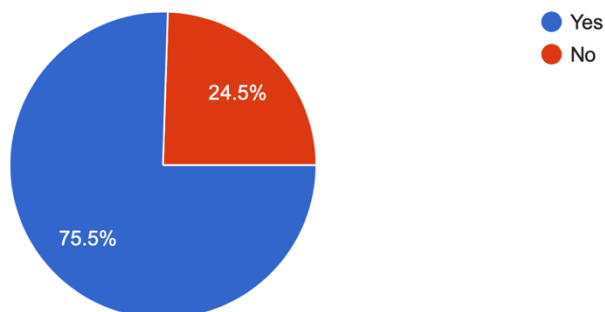


Figure 50. Do you think comic book publishers have a responsibility to address issues of sexualization and representation?

Question 14 – Do you think comic book publishers have a responsibility to address issues of sexualization and representation? (Figure 50)

Question Justification: Given that the only way comic books make it into the hands of its readers are by being approved by publishers, personally it makes sense why there should be a level of responsibility on the publishers who approve its contents. An issue that is potentially coming from them the artists, writers, and publishers should be acknowledged. The questions address the obligations of comic book publishers, and it can encourage discussions about the possibility of systematic change in the industry.

Question Results: Most had agreed and chosen to respond “Yes” (75.5%), this brings in another dynamic of awareness within the industry. Answering yes shows recognition in knowing how those who are in control of what’s published, and allowed for easy access, plays a crucial role regarding the influence on social norms stemmed from comic books and should strive for better representation. The remaining participants expressed their different opinion in this question by selecting “No” (24.5%) which could suggest that the responsibility might belong to someone else and not the publishers. For the project that wants to involve targeting publishers, the results show the need for more discussions about the policies and guidelines among these industries.

Have you ever stopped reading a comic book series due to its portrayal of female characters?

50 responses

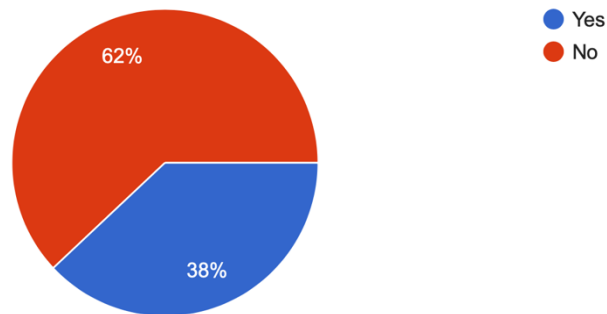


Figure 51. Have you ever stopped reading a comic book series due to its portrayal of female characters?

Question 15 – Have you ever stopped reading a comic book series due to its portrayal of female characters? (Figure 51)

Question Justification: This is a question that can identify just how much of an impact gender representation has on the reader. It helps indicate the level of influence this factor has on the readers engagement with comic books. Getting insights on this topic provides an understanding on whether people have been greatly affected by how negatively female characters have been portrayed, to the point of complete disengagement. The data collected from this question could help show authors and publishers how they are potentially affected by the negative content they’re exposing to people. Perhaps the fear of lower reviews based on explicit content could cause a potential change. However, due to a lot of popularity, the popularity of a comic can sometimes be based on its sexual content, is there enough people to disengage from it to enforce this fear?

Question Results: According to these results, even though a good amount of people has selected “Yes” (38%), claiming they have stopped reading the comic based on how women were used in its narrative, the rest had chosen “No” (62%). This shows that yes, there is concerns surrounding the issue, but also an absence in direct action regarding not showing support of the comic books that exploit women. This is where the project is hoping to use enough drive and force to persuade people to make a stand against the demeaning content.

What change would you most like to see in how women are portrayed in comic books?

50 responses

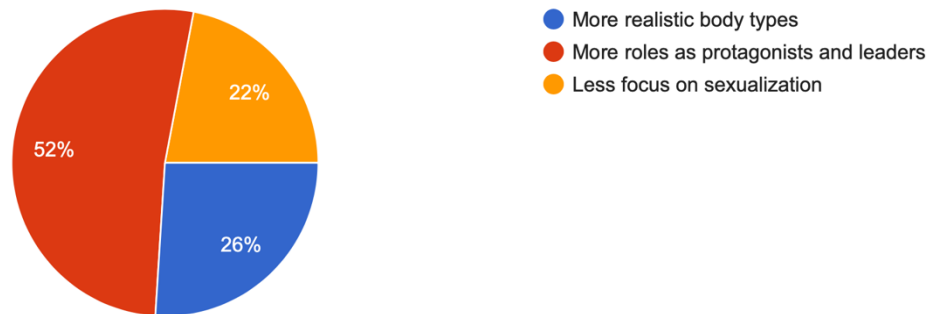


Figure 52. What change would you most like to see in how women are portrayed in comic books?

Question 16 – What change would you most like to see in how women are portrayed in comic books? (Figure 52)

Question Justification: This question can help identify the specific change people would most want to see regarding women in comic books. This is another question that indicates what the audiences' possible expectations and desires are for the potential books they want to read. If the industry is willing to take note and make a change on the representations in the media, it could have a positive influence and improvement in the audience's satisfaction. By previously asking the gender of the respondents, it can help navigate what the aspirations of the women who answered. It's important to fully consider what women are wanting to see a change in, because they are part of the project's focus.

Question Results: Most had selected the option for "More roles as protagonists and leaders" (52%) which showed the specific desire for that category which indicates a positive ideal in what could be possible if more change is made in the industry. The next had answered "More realistic body types" (26%) recognising the importance for exploring outside the typical superhero way of drawing inaccurate body proportions. The remaining had selected "Less focus on sexualization" (22%) which brings hope of people willing to support something that encourages industries to move away for the exploitation of women.

Would you be more likely to support a comic book series that features well-developed and non-sexualized female characters?

50 responses

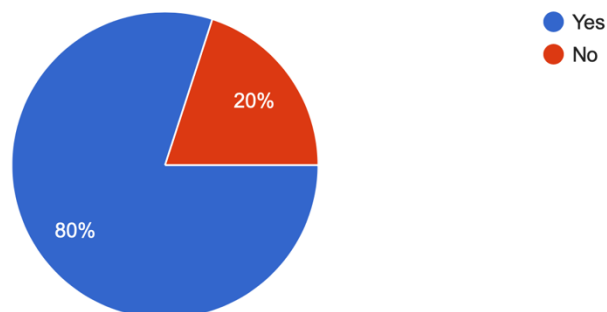


Figure 53. Would you more likely support a comic book series that features well-developed and non-sexualized female characters?

Question 17 – Would you more likely support a comic book series that features well-developed and non-sexualized female characters? (Figure 53)

Question Justification: This question gives an idea on how willing people would be to support a comic book that would potentially have a much more improved depiction on women compared to the way it's been happening in the past. It's an indication on if comics that focus on well developed on-sexualised female characters would be something worth pursuing. If there is a potential market of demand for this specific preference, it can encourage creators and publishers to engage in the societal change and prioritize positive representation for women.

Question Results: Ending the analysis on a positive note, almost all the participants had selected "Yes" (80%), showing enthusiasm for supporting a comic book series that focuses on a better perspective on women who have depth in their character development and isn't sexualized. This is proof that there is a market for comic books with a more diverse and better gender representation, this can support the questioning of why there isn't more improvements then there should be. The remaining who had selected "No" can show the differences in priorities among what content is preferred. It's understandable that some people are more willing to engage in comics with explicit content, however majority who had answered no were among the younger and older male audience.

Question 18 – Is there anything else you would like to add out the sexualization of women in comic books?

Question Justification: Providing the responders an open-ended question at the end of the survey gives people the opportunity to voice any additional thoughts, opinions, experiences, insights, and any extra supporting extra knowledge that is related to the sexualization of female characters in comic books. Part of creating a project that is based around activism is giving people a voice to be heard, especially those part of the minorities due to having been marginalized so often in the past.

Question Results: Some had fully used the opportunity to express their thoughts, concerns, and opinions. Some had written paragraphs expressing their passion for the topic that is being discussed. A good number had had shared that they acknowledge the changes the comic book industry has made over the years but mentioned that there's still a lot of work to be done which is exactly what the project is meant to express. Another participant stated something that compliments this view, claiming that pop culture is meant to be open to adapting to new audiences, have the ability to make the change that involves the diverse desires of changing how women are portrayed in entertainment. In contrast there were the few who claimed they don't understand the need for change, that its unnecessary for women to get involved in by saying "Why do women have the need to bring their feminist views into everything". This shows the level of narrow mindedness of some within the industry.

4.4 Conclusion

This survey and the results received was essential in discovering important insights regarding the views, opinions, attitudes, and experiences of gender representation in the comic book industry. It was needed to understand people's concerns or even lack of concern about the sexualization and objectification of female characters in our culture. After having discussed each question and analysing the responses, what can be stated is that there is not only awareness of the issue the project is addressing, but also a strong desire for wanting a more diverse and female empowering representations of women. Even though there were a few negative statistics, there was a higher score that proves that there is a demand for this kind of shift within comic books and even other mediums such as cinema. Meaning there shouldn't be a reason behind not making more of a change. The data gathered confirms the awareness among the audience, now the project will be an effort made to provoke a more hostile improvement in comic books.

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

5.1 Introduction

As seen in the previous chapters, within the vast creativity of humankind, art can be viewed as a physical record of how our culture, ideologies and societies have changed and grown over time. Although rich in traditions, there is an unmistakable consistent pattern in how women are represented. The women of our visual culture are depicted as sexualized and objectified beings, and this has yet to be abolished from our societies. From the halls of museums to the vivacious comic book pages, the perception of female characters has often been overshadowed by stereotypes and exploitation due to the industries being in control of the men in a patriarchal society. After having done a textual analysis of the women in the various artistic movements in history, from the Renaissance to Contemporary art, followed by the investigation of the creations of female comic characters, one now has a foundation to work on when it comes to approaching a solution to the issue of female exploitation. As mentioned before, by studying what's happened in the past we can navigate how to better improve our steps for the future. As time goes on people seem to be generally aware of how women are being depicted in our visual culture, there have been efforts in making a change, however when it comes to targeting the issue within comic books specifically there seems to be a lack of motive and urgency. When it comes to how these female characters are brought to our television screens, people are not afraid to make excessive noise with their opinions on the wrongfully portrayed characters but for comic books and illustrations its often quiet. Why isn't a change in the comic book industry as important as in the film industry? Why isn't there enough noise for how women are being drawn alongside men? Why aren't others angry? With these questions in mind, the project consisted of developing something that can evoke not just emotion out of people but a reaction to encourage a change. The energy going into this project stems from the kind of energy people feel from creating art that is considered controversial, art similar to illegal graffiti and art from the Anarchy society where it's encouraged to break free from government authority. With the intention of creating something with deep historical roots and empowering relations to positive female figures in Mythology with artistic traits, what was created was a social brand, an organisation with the goal of exposing the publishers and artists who continue to contribute to the exploitation of women in comic books while also stimulating and motivating the readers to act and do more than just being aware of the situation.

5.2 The Idea

What usually inspires the creation of a brand is the start of an idea. An idea based on personal opinions and enjoyment. In this case the drive to create something to do in relation to comic books is based on a personal love and devotion of the industry. Having grown up reading comic books at every chance one gets, it's hard not to become passionate with the worlds and the multitude of characters illustrated within the panels. However, as a woman, the realization of how negatively women are being depicted in this visual media, where they are so heavily sexually objectified came at a full force during early teenage years while watching my favourite female comic book character be brought to life on screen by Marvel. As someone who is easily angered by the discrimination against minorities based on their gender, race, and sexuality, it feels imperative to bring into being a contribution to the improvement of the quality of life for those who are part of the world of comic books. The aspiration was to create an original female comic book character, or rather a persona that would represent an organisation that can seek out those doing injustice to the marginalised groups of people who are under the authority of a patriarchal society. The goal is to create a creative approach to raise awareness with enough of a sufficient and threatening force that it pressures the importance of change on the issue at hand. To approach this, one starts at the basic steps when creating a visual identity that would be the backbone of a campaign or another form of media that can influence a better modification of the perception of women in male dominated industries.

Like other artists from history and graphic novel creators, inspiration started from admiring methodological tales. More specifically Norse Mythology, due to the individual deep interest in the many narratives and the strong personas in the lore. There is a personal preference when it comes to admiring Norse Mythology compared to others such as Greek. Regarding this project, the reasoning is based on the treatment and perception of women and their roles in the different cultures. Personally, there is a clear representation of strength when it comes to the women in Norse Mythology and the Viking Age, a simple example being the Valkyries and the women in history who have taken part in the Viking raids and wars. With this in mind, it was decided that the visual identity would have Nordic roots with mythological symbolism.

When one mentions Norse Mythology some would think about Thor God of Thunder, and his brother Loki who have become popularised over the years due to having been a leading character in the Marvel Universe, in both Comics and films. But for those who have a little more of a broadened insight on the myths they'd think of the God Odin. Odin is the highest of Gods in Norse

Mythology, not only is he the God of all Gods but he's also the god of wind, death, aristocracy, magic, writing, poetry, knowledge, skills, advancing culture and intellectual endeavours (Flom, 1939). All these qualities are in his favour in making him the father of all Gods. However, besides some of his attributes being based on creativity and artistry which would make an understandable contribution to a project about art and illustration, there are three characteristics of him that were the main sources of inspiration for this project specifically.

The first being how Odin is considered a God in mythology who favours and offers support to outlaws – the outlawed warrior-poets who were disinterested in the established norms of society (McCoy, 2012). Regardless of where they stood in society, whether they were kings or criminals, Odin took a liking to both the men and women who are defined by their intelligence and creativity (McCoy, 2012). This specific detail in the God Odin felt relevant to the systematic oppression women face in many cultures and societies. Women are not acknowledged for their intellectual capabilities due to the history of being disregarded and made to fit the role of a wife, mother, or care giver. Women are seen for their physical contributions to a patriarchal society. However, it is apparent that Odin is a figure who doesn't discriminate against gender but rather considers one's capacities in skill and knowledge. This characteristic of Odin can also be a good resemblance to how those who make a stand with an organisation who is going against the societal norms, in hopes of making a positive change, would be favoured by him. The thought of taking part in a movement that is going against the normalized negative representations of women while having the idea that a god like Odin would approve, can feel rather empowering.

The second detail about Odin, is his army of Valkyries. In Norse Mythology the Valkyries are powerful women who are often depicted as warriors riding to battle carrying spears on horseback, they are the ones who have the authority in choosing the fate of those who die in war and carry the dead to Valhalla (Mark, 2021). Valhalla is the place, like the idea of the afterlife, where chosen warriors celebrate while waiting for when they will fight alongside Odin in Ragnarök, the war of the Gods. In Norse lore, the Valkyries were once thought to have had the form of dark demons who would feed on the dead among the battlefields, but they were later transformed to highly powerful beings who were the embodiment of both feminine beauty and masculine strength (Mark, 2021). The tale of their transformation can be seen as a reflection of what can be when it comes to changing the depiction of women in visual culture. It's important for women, a marginalized group of individuals in other societies, to have such an impactful representation like the Valkyries from

Norse Mythology. In Norse Mythology women can be seen as equals fighting alongside men in battle and female Gods are held at a similar regard to their male counterparts. These female warriors that are held in such high regard of the father of Gods Odin it feels fitting to have inspiration taken from them when creating a brand meant to help the injustice of women.

The third and final root of inspiration that mainly gave the vision of a brand identity is Odin's two Ravens. The two ravens Hugin ('thought'), and Munin ('wisdom') take flight across the world obtaining knowledge and gathering news so that when they make their way back to Odin's shoulders, they can share everything they discovered and he can know all that was going on (Groeneveld, 2017). These ravens can be described as Odin's eyes. An animal that can help him stay aware of what's been going on in the other worlds so he can act on anything accordingly. When it comes to the symbolism of ravens, they appear to come up in many different cultures, myths, and stories of the past but also still have connotations with people in modern days. There have been adequate studies on the Mythologies of different cultures but when it comes to the specific range of representation of Ravens, the research on their associations falls short in depth and is often conflicting (Talvitie, 2017). These birds often have two paths of associations. One path is related to their scavenger tendencies where they are often present in the time of death, feeding on diseased corpses, sitting on tombstones in cemeteries and being among the battle fields of war. The other path is a rather different association, which is their relation to intellectual levels that's based on their problem-solving skills and their highly intelligent minds. A raven can embody all these associations in both a positive and negative way that is beneficial for the approach wanted for the project. The goal was to create an organisation that is similar to what Odin's Ravens do, have the mission in seeking a wider knowledge and awareness across all realms of art and culture while highlighting and exposing the issues of representations of women in comic books. The project is built on knowledge, intelligence and problem-solving skills while also wanting to come across as threatening and be associated with consequences of battle. This is what led to the idea and brainstorming of having a logo consisting of Odin's two Ravens to be used as a symbol for what the project is trying to communicate while also wanting to use it as a base for the possibility of an original character.

Even though mass inspiration was wanted to be taken from Norse Mythology, it needed to also be considered that the industry that this project is based on is the Comic Book Industry, specifically the superhero genre. This means that an artistic approach had to be taken regarding the identity in

hopes of reaching the desired target audience in the field. This was where a lot of brainstorming and searching for design inspiration took place to get a general idea on what the possibilities could be and thus Revna was created.

5.3 Name and Purpose

Having been heavily inspired by Norse Mythology, a deep search went into how to incorporate Nordic roots into the organization's identity. It was needed to find something with the capability to have a relation to the ravens of the God Odin in Norse Mythology. This is because the project having the goal in seeking out injustice and spreading awareness on the sexualization of women in the comic book industry. A search for Nordic and Viking names most suitable had begun. Many names from old Norse are usually very hard to pronounce or use at all, and what was discovered is that many were more masculine than feminine. But among all the historical Viking names, one specifically perfect for this role had stood out. The name Revna is a female given name from old Norse. The word Revna translates to "Raven" and can be seen as a direct reference to the ravens of Odin (Johnson, 2021). The name has the purpose in portraying the qualities of vigilance, intelligence, knowledge, defiance, and transformation. These characteristics are key factors in promising the success in addressing and battling against the violation women face in the comic book industry.

5.4 Mission, Vision, and Values

Revna is an organization, a social brand derived from the ideas of feminism, mythology, and the authenticity of comic books. Revna succeeds in using communication and graphic design to challenge the exploitative ways in which women have been viewed, portrayed, and treated in the history of visual culture. With the attentive motive in going against discrimination of any kind, Revna's mission focuses on speaking up against the way women in comic books have been the objectified, sexualised, and given unprejudiced representation. Paired with mythological roots inspired by the ravens of the God Odin, Revna seeks out to expose and confront those who are responsible for contributing towards the degradation of women and children in media. This includes all the artists, writers, creators, and publishers within the comic book industry. Revna's vision is creating a revolutionised environment in comic books where character representations are full of diversity and empowerment to show a high guard of respect towards everyone involved.

Paired with Norse Mythology symbolism, Revna values the importance of the communication in spreading awareness on the people who are marginalized in our cultures, while also demanding those in the wrong to take accountability. The goal is to defy what has been deemed the normal in society throughout the history of art and visual culture, and fight for the transformation of a better representation for women.

5.5 Target and Positioning

The organization Revna focuses on targeting the whole comic book industry, wanting to encourage those involved to take issue with the way women are represented in comic books. This audience includes not just the creators and consumers of the media but also the publishers who allow them to be released. By targeting the publishers and artists, the source of the problem is put on full display and from there, the aim is to pressure them into a reevaluation of their content. As mentioned during the analysis of the survey, data supports the need for more discussions about the policies and guidelines among these industries. When targeting the consumers of these comic books, based on the survey results, most of the focus is towards young adults, and those who are aware of the exploitation of women and are willing to demand diversity. Having this age range within the target audience provides an advantage due to this group being heavily involved in existing media trends, which offers a boarder scope of influences. Revna has quite an extensive range of targets and because of this Revna uses its disruptive and creative characteristics to ensures the target audience is reached effectively.

5.6 Visual Identity

Revna is an organization that is involved in the comic book industry, an industry filled with various cultures and a field that's rich in art. Comics are medium with its own language, a medium with varied ways of communicating. In the book *The Power of Comics: History, Form and Culture* by Randy Duncan and Matthew J. Smith (2009), it is explained that the reasoning behind the existence of comics is because someone had ideas and it succeeds when it grabs the attention of an audience who acknowledges those ideas. Everything regarding a comic has a reasoning behind it, not just its narratives or illustrations but also the size of the panels, frames, order of the sequences and compositions. All these structures that have a specific detailed purpose are organised according to the different messages of the art. These elements accomplish this way of communication through

signs (Duncan & Smith, 2009). Comic books are filled with visual elements that aid in its storytelling, because of this, comic books and graphic novels are filled with symbolism (Greathouse & Miller, 2022). Many of these symbols are within the images used in comic books which are dependent on the readers having the ability in deciphering the ideas and themes, as well as the skill in figuring out the meanings that are trying to be communicated (Greathouse & Miller, 2022). The different symbolisms that can be found in comic books is what is essential in aiding readers to comprehend the meanings among the visual storytelling (Greathouse & Miller, 2022). Because Revna is an organization associated with this industry, its identity incorporated the same method of approach when it comes to the symbolism and the language of signs. The drawings in comic books can be identified as icon signs, meaning they are visuals that represent what they are directly (Duncan & Smith, 2009). However, many visual elements within these books are index signs meaning things are used as a way of suggesting or hinting the existence of something while not revealing itself directly, for example, an emotion or sensation (Duncan & Smith, 2009). Revna incorporates the communication tactics of both an icon sign and index sign to achieve the best transmission of meaning to the audience while still staying within the theme of superhero comic books.



Figure 54. Revna Name and Logo

Revna's logo (Figure 54) consists of having the letter V from the name as the main element, paired with two raven heads on each side, it reaches the goal in resembling a superhero symbol for the organization. The two raven heads on either side are used as an icon to resemble Odin's ravens Huginn and Muninn from Norse mythology. Using the two ravens as an icon symbol directly relates the branding to its roots in Norse Mythology. However, unless someone is very familiar with the suggestion, the logo serves as an index due to the indirect indication towards the characteristics and meanings behind the representation of Odin's Ravens. As previously mentioned, Odin's Ravens in Norse Mythology play the role in seeking out knowledge on behalf of Odin, the logo mirrors Revna's purpose in bringing to light the oppression of female representation in comic books.

The reasoning behind the details found in Revna's logo is as complex as its meaning. Some would argue that when approaching the design of a logo, a key element is usually simplicity within the design (Chen, 2015). But how simple does a logo have to be to be deemed a good logo? When it comes to comics, there's an excessive range of artistic techniques and expression. It's a world where artists are free to explore their styles, and within art there is also activism and radical art. The Author T. V. Reed explains in his book *The Art of Protest* (2019) that the arts have been heavily involved within societal protest movements. The arts that are based around the ideas and themes of such movements differ in practices and motives (Reed, 2019). Art involved in protest can have different approaches, one being more forward and practical with the goal in making ideological facts (Reed, 2019). Others can be more intricate in expressing ideas, feelings and perspectives that makes it difficult to limit it to simple designs or phrases (Reed, 2019). So can the rules of simplicity for logo designs be bent when creating something that represents such a diverse concept? Revna is an organization that stands against the exploitation of women, hoping to create a visual culture that sees a future of a better representation. Revna's visual identity is not just wanting to be labelled as a protest movement, but a radical piece of work that's wanting to inspire change. As Robin Kelley noted in his book *Freedom Dreams* (2002), "The most radical art is not protest art, but works that take us to another place, envision a different way of seeing, perhaps a different way of feeling." (Kelley, 2002). Revna's logo is 'simplistic' in a way that allows it to be adaptable to its environment. Not only was the idea to create a logo resembling a superhero symbol linking to mythology, but also create a logo that isn't limited to having a plain aesthetic when trying to communicate the intricate and extensive meaning behind its message.



Figure 55. Revna Logo Grid and Dimensions

The logo (Figure 55) was able to reach its goal in communicating the meaning due to having followed the visual language of the different design principles. A design can be split among two categories: the content and the composition of the design (Davis, 2016). The content of a design is related to the subject of the matter, while the composition is its visual impact (Davis, 2016). It's important to take note on not what is being said but how it's being said (Davis, 2016). To accomplish this, 5 design principles from the book *Attractive Layout using Design Principles* by Hendi Hendratman (2023) were used as gentle guidelines for Revna. These principles include Balance, Sequence/Rhythm, Emphasis/Focus, Unity, and Proportion. Revna's logo design is equal on both ends, the letter V with the two raven heads are mirrored among axis lines, creating a symmetrical balance. Designs that are Symmetrical offer easier digestion among its viewers and provides the feeling of professionalism (Hendratman, 2023). The logo not only have strong vertical lines but also circular components between the Raven heads, offering a sense of radial balance. Although similar in the sense of symmetrical balance, radial balance draws the viewers' attention to the centre of the design, creating something strong enough to catch their eye (Hendratman, 2023). In Renva's logo within the curved path, between the letter V and the ravens, there is Rhythm in its flow of repetition. Repetition is structured because of its curved path, making it alluring to

the eye creating an artistic feel (Hendratman, 2023). To have a main quality of the design be the ultimate focus, the object that is most important is required to be the Dominant, while the rest that's less focused on is referred to the Sub Dominant (Hendratman, 2023). In this case the letter V is the Dominant element of design in the name and logo while the rest of the name is the Sub Dominant, this is because the Dominant element has more power in representing the brand completely due to its imagery. Having the V in the centre of the logo being the Dominant characteristic puts emphasis on communicating the organizations message in the most direct way. Unity is considered the main content of composition (Hendratman, 2023). Unity creates a sense of consistency within a design and can strengthen the theme of the project. For Revna to create its logo composition, it relies on its alignment that offers a balance that gives a strong foundation of a design structure. Proportion refers to the sizes of the elements used in the format of the design and how their relationships work together (Nordling, 2017). It's a principle that is focused on the relationship between the different sizes, for Revna there is a clear size difference between the main image of the logo and the name of it. The logo of the letter V is considerably much bigger than the name, the reasoning for this is like the other design principles such as focus and balance. The V logo is essential to have a contrast in size, it suggests the visual of a superhero symbol while emphasising its importance within the element's hierarchy.

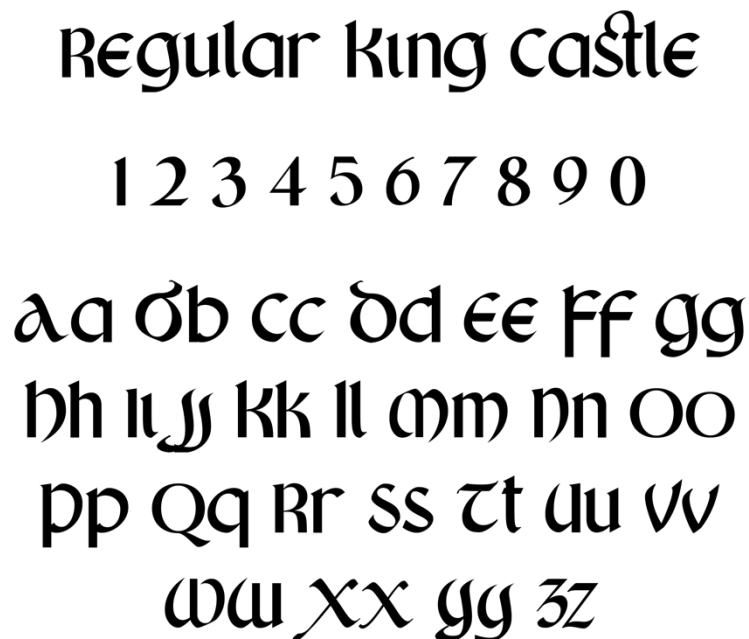


Figure 56. Revna Logo Typography

One of the most powerful elements of design in visual communication is typography due to its ability in evoking associations within one's subconscious as well as having the ability in influencing an audience's moods and attitudes (Vladimirova, 2017). When choosing a font to use, it's essential to evaluate how its characteristics represent the specific message and feelings the brand wants to communicate. With the right approach, a font has the capability to have an impact on how to motivate the viewer to make a decision and take action (Vladimirova, 2017). The typography chosen for Revna is called Regular King Castle which is a serif typography. The reasoning for this choice was primarily based on how it's important to take into consideration a font's speed and comfort in reading (Vladimirova, 2017). Serif fonts are typically easier and faster to read due to having a smoother movement between the letters (Vladimirova, 2017). The typography in the Revna logo is written in lowercase letters, mainly due to the comfortability of the image but also because people can read lowercase letters faster than upper case (Vladimirova, 2017). This serif typography is not only a good choice for readability but also for representing what the brand is about.

The reasoning for choosing the font Regular King Castle to characterize Revna is based on the opinion that it has the ability in relating to its history of inspiration from Norse mythology. The construction of the font, among its curves and shapes of the different letters creates a movement of flow in the viewer's eye. The freeing motions of the font and can be loosely associated with old rituals in Nordic art. Additionally, the font has a way of incorporating a modern aesthetic feeling that is appealing to the eye. There is an undertone within the shapes and angles of the fonts that hints towards the raven theme that's consistent throughout the brand, creating a further connection to the Raven God Odin. This font has the ability in making the logo more legible, approachable, memorable but also versatile which are required traits when a brand has a broad target audience in the intricate world of comics. The Regular King Castle brings forth a medieval feeling to it given its historical Viking inspiration, while also being able to be applied in a contemporary manner that's more relatable to the younger audience from this generation. Combining these different characteristics ensures the typography represents the diverse artistic creativity that can be found in the comic book industry.

C: 0%	C: 75%	C: 7.44%
M: 0%	M: 68%	M: 98.77%
Y: 0%	Y: 67%	Y: 96.12%
K: 0%	K: 90%	K: 0.79%

Figure 57. Colour Pallet

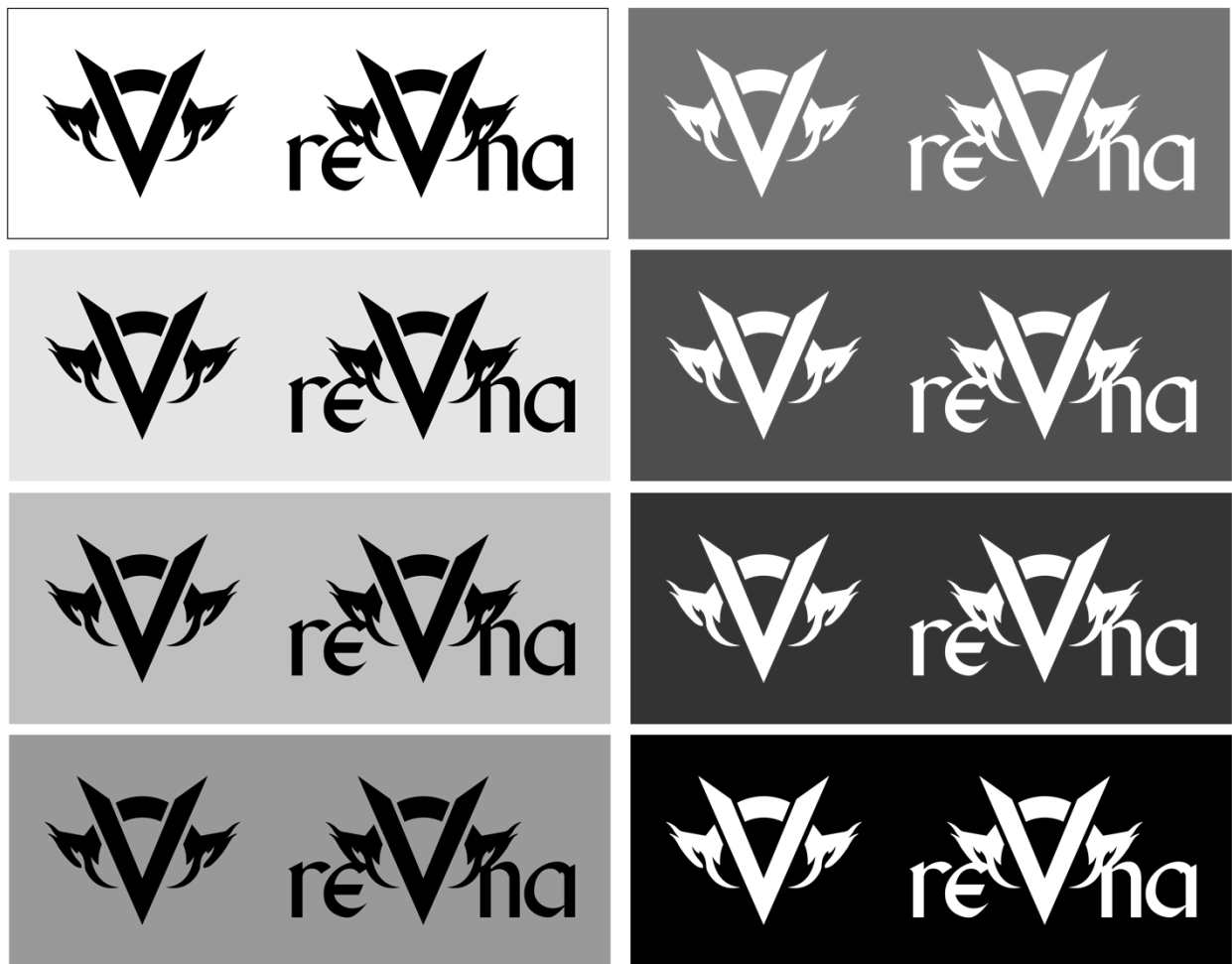


Figure 58. Revna Logo and Colour Pallet



Figure 59. Revna Logo and Red Colour Pallet

When it comes to colours, people perceive colours differently to others and can associate them with their own thoughts and feelings. Giving a colour pallet to a brand offers personalisation to its visual identity, providing characteristics that can attract groups of people. However, it's an important thing to consider how the brands personality is perceived by others. Specifically, how different characteristics are perceived between the genders. Due to people associating different personality traits to brands, it opens the possibility of relating different characteristics to levels of masculinity and femininity (Lieven, Herrmann, Landwehr, Van Tilburg, 2011). Gender is something that effects the way we perceive the world around, which makes it a factor that has influence on how people view products and brands (Ulrich, 2013). For Revna, no room for any doubt is wanted in how people see the organization. Any judgement based on people's ideas of masculinity, femininity or gender is preferred to be avoided. Some may turn away if they misunderstand this project as something only for women. Even though it's a brand standing up

against how women are represented in comic books, it wants to influence as many people as possible regardless of gender. This resulted in wanting the brand to have as much of a neutral colour pallet as possible but also have a striking visual identity. Which is why that from the beginning, Revna was designed primarily with just black and white. By choosing black and white for the design of a visual identity, it provides the opportunity in exploring different ways of experimenting with the space, texture, and composition of elements (Aparaschivei, 2021). A black and white approach offers simplicity where colours are not a leading factor in causing a distraction from the message that's wanting to be communicated. After having kept everything minimal and exploring the contrasting effects of black and white (Figure 58), it had felt like something was missing. The visuals had looked flat, didn't seem like they made enough noise. It is essential to have a characteristic that created uproar when creating an organization that wants to emphasise the anger felt towards how women have been viewed in society. This is where the colour red came into play (Figure 59). A deep dark, angry, blood red. Depending on the setting, red has the power to evoke strong feelings and reactions both negative and positive (Hurlbert & Ling, 2017). It's a colour that captivates one's attention and evokes activity primarily due to how it's been received in the past (Hurlbert, Ling, 2017). It's a colour seen on danger signs, it's the colour of an injury, associated with anger and many other objects that forces awareness and reaction (Hurlbert & Ling, 2017). Red was the perfect choice for the splash of colour to add among Revna's visual identity, creating a huge contrast against the black and white that was already a strong element. It's a colour that grabs people's attention in such a clear-cut manner that it will elicit the emotions Revna wants to promote. Among these emotions are threatening, fear, anger, adrenalin, and anything that feels like a warning because it's representing the end of how women are exploited in comic books.

5.7 Newspaper Articles Collection

Based on what has been discussed previously within the research, and the primary data collected, it clear that there is a general level of awareness on how female characters are represented in comic books. Most know the extent of this issue but there is no formidable action being taken place. It's a common approach to create social awareness campaigns when one wants to bring light to a problem among our society. Contributions such as making posters and crating social media accounts are beneficial in spreading information. However, for tackling something within an industry such as comic books, one can get creative with how to draw attention to what's being

said. Comic books were something that started during a time where it wasn't accessible through digital media, it was rather a visual media that the audience physically engaged with. While having the history of comic books in mind, the idea of creating a physical book of something similar came to mind. Comic strips started among newspapers, where people would have the freedom to write and publish their political opinions. For the project, the idea was to design and put together a book of old styled newspaper pages with articles created by Revna containing writings about female characters being exploited and sexualised in comic books. By doing this, it allows the opportunity of freely expressing one's opinions while spreading further awareness and reaching all groups of the target audience. The articles are like the previous chapter 'Female Characters in Western Comic Books' where specific well known female characters are featured on a page and discussed, fully identifying the issues, and calling out those who are contributing to the problem of sexualisation. It's a logical approach when wanting to use similar communication methods as used in Comic Books. When it comes to the way of communication and using all the signs and symbols in comic books to convey the messages within, the authors Randy Duncan, and Matthew J. Smith had created a model that shows the ways of comic book communication in their book *The Power of Comics: History, Form and Culture* (2009). They had based this comic book model on the communication act created by mathematicians Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver. The model they created helps fully understand the relationship of communication between all those involved in the industry and it's what helped inspired and structured the project. The model will be referred to during the explanation of the project.

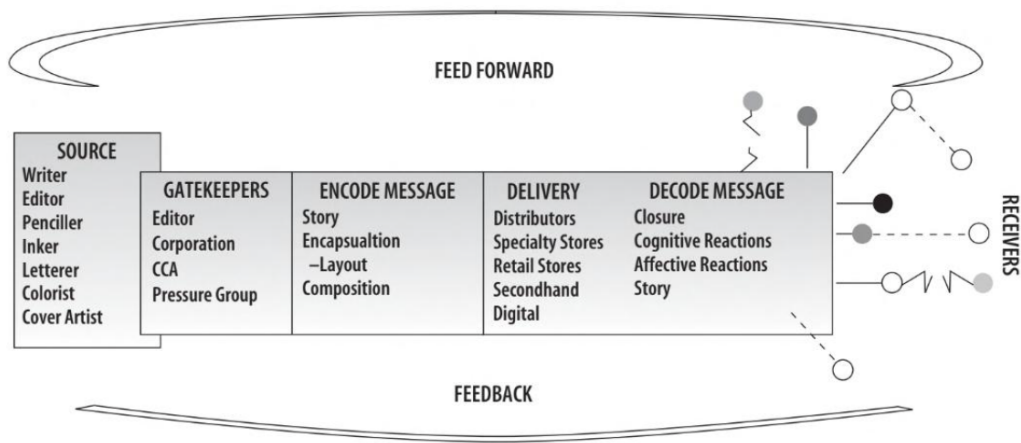


Figure 60. Comic Book Communication Diagram by Randy Duncan, and Matthew J. Smith. *The Power of Comics: History, Form and Culture* 2009

As seen in the diagram (Figure 60), to effectively reach a sufficient level of communication between Revna and the receivers (the Audience), there is a guided process. Both the Source of this project and Gatekeepers is Revna itself, the writer, editor, letterer, colourist, cover artist and self-publisher.

The section of the model Encoded Message refers to the specific way in which the messages in comic books are communicated through the medium (Duncan & Smith, 2009). This Encoded Message portion describes how all the elements within a comic book has a means of communication. Elements such as the size of the panel, the sequence, and composition can have an emphasis on its meaning (Duncan & Smith, 2009). For the project, the newspaper article layout had been organized in a way for a more image dominant theme due to it being commonly used in newspapers. Dominant images in the design of a layout have often been found in newspapers and magazines, where an image would be placed as the focus to bring in the attention (Hendratman, 2023). The images used in the articles are directly related to the text of the page. These images are of female characters being sexualized in the comic book industry in hopes to not just catch the audience's eye, but to specifically have it as a reference for the text to further emphasis on the problem. Pairing visual aid with the written articles can provide a better understanding of the extent of what's being discussed. Vertical columns within the layout also refer to how it was previously done in newspapers (Hendratman, 2023).

In hopes of creating an aesthetic design that efficiently communicates the words needing to be expressed, the visual composition within a grid must be considered (Hendratman, 2023). Using a grid while creating a layout design allows a view of the whole page as one unit (Hendratman, 2023). For the project a basic grid system was followed and mainly applied through all pages. The grids helped create a layout that sectioned the different vertical and horizontal elements that can be adjusted according to the different image sizes and amount of text. The margins, borders and top part of the grids had stayed the same to allow consistence in the Revna newspaper headline. Within newspapers, there are columns that usually vary in sizes, the sizes of the Revna columns depended on the amount of important information that had to be communicated to allow full adjustment according to level of importance. All these elements are what support the best way to communicate the Encoded Messages of the project. As mentioned before, the topics discussed in these columns are about the objectification of women in comics. Covering different areas of debate such as the poor representation of women of colour, using women to depict males desired kinks

and fantasies on their narratives and comparing the difference between how men and women are illustrated.

The 5 ways of delivery among the comics communication model can affect the levels of interaction among the receivers and is what can offer a process of feedback communication (Duncan & Smith, 2009). Because the project is following similar roots as a published and printed comic book, and not just being digitally released, Revna can reach all chains of communication with these methods of deliverance. It provides extra help in reaching all those who are interested in not just comic books, but female representation in general. In addition to this, those involved in those ways of distribution often take part in engaging in dialogue with the audience involved such as other artists, writers, and stories from other comics (Duncan & Smith, 2009). Not only will these methods of distribution allow access to Revna's broad target audience but also give insight to people's thoughts and opinions on the project. This leads to the understanding of the section Decoded Message of the model. Regarding the way of communication, the way its interpreted relies on the receivers (Duncan & Smith, 2009). For comic books, one of the most important things that's taken into consideration is whether the artists and writers communicates the message well enough to be understood, but it doesn't only mean understanding it but rather what it means (Duncan & Smith, 2009). All the different categories of the communication process model are what defines and affects what the receivers will interpret (Duncan & Smith, 2009). To know how the messages are received among the audience of the comic book community, Revna had closely followed the process of comic book communication ((Figure 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70).



Figure 61. Revna Collection of Newspaper Articles



Figure 62. The Cover of Revna's Book Of Newspaper Articles



Figure 63. Revna Posters To Promote Book

FROM HERO TO BEC



Art by Don Cockburn: Marvel Comics Giant Size X-Men #1

Exposing the Exploitation: Women of Colour Fight for Justice

Throughout history, black women have endured the dehumanizing perception of being seen as objects of sexual exploitation, a perception deeply rooted in the legacy of slavery. During the era of slavery, black women were subjected to horrific acts of sexual violence and exploitation, yet their suffering was often overlooked and dismissed. In contrast, white women also face hypersexualization and objectification in media, but they are often positioned as symbols of sexual morality and virtue. This stark dichotomy reflects the racialized and fetishized lens through which black women are often viewed, perpetuating harmful stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes. In media representations, black women are frequently categorized as sexual and inter-racial roles, reinforcing oppressive narratives of inferiority and subservience. They are often depicted as individuals living in impoverished communities, engaged in sex work to survive, or as single mothers struggling with absent fathers or uncertain parentage. Additionally, black women are often portrayed as the wives of gangsters or criminals, reinforcing damaging stereotypes about their supposed associations with crime and violence. The lack of representation of black characters in the comic industry has perpetuated the erasure of black experiences and voices from popular culture. Historically dominated by white male creators and publishers, the comic book industry has long marginalized black characters and creators, further perpetuating the invisibility and marginalization of black women in media. Overall, the intersection of race and gender compounds the sexualization and objectification experienced by black women, perpetuating harmful stereotypes and reinforcing systems of oppression. Challenging these harmful narratives, centering the voices and experiences of black women in media representation, and advocating for greater diversity and inclusivity in the comic book industry are crucial steps towards dismantling these systems of oppression.

Storm's Sexualized Image and What It Did To Women of Colour

One of the first female characters in comic books was the character Storm appearing in an issue of the X-Men comic. However, it wasn't a groundbreaking revolution due to the way Storm is illustrated. Storm can be seen as one of the most sexualized examples of how women are depicted in comic books. As a character she was confined to a sexy look that was written to have a sensual and seductive appeal. Storm's character design, from her braided hair to her boots, was the character Storm appearing as an asset of the X-Men comic. However, it wasn't a groundbreaking revolution due to the way Storm is illustrated. Storm can be seen as one of the most sexualized examples of how women are depicted in comic books. As a character she was confined to a sexy look that was written to have a sensual and seductive appeal. Storm's character design, from her braided hair to her boots, was the character Storm appearing as an asset of the X-Men comic. However, it wasn't a groundbreaking revolution due to the way Storm is illustrated. Storm can be seen as one of the most sexualized examples of how women are depicted in comic books. As a character she was confined to a sexy look that was written to have a sensual and seductive appeal.

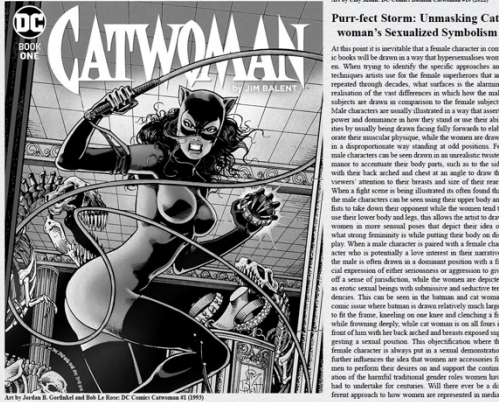


Art by Don Cockburn and Sam Geppi: Marvel Comics

CLAWS OF EROTICISM

Catwoman Comics and the Dark History of Feline Symbolism

It is common for comic creators to have their characters based off of animals where their personalities and appearance mirror the animal's behavior. For example, Batman is a dark and brooding character who fights crime only at night and speaks in a low, gravelly voice. He is considered a vigilante. For female characters, the animals associated with their narratives are often felines. The seductive feline cat can be dated all the way back to Ancient Egypt where the Egyptian Goddess Bastet was depicted as a woman with the head of a cat, but the queen of Egyptian Gods who can turn into a cat and seduce a lion-headed Goddess were highly worshiped. From through these feline Egyptian Goddesses were a symbol of positive sexuality among their culture, those who were part of other religions such as Christianity wanted to distance these ideas and demystify pagan relations. Among the church cats were seen as a symbol for paganism and due to their roaming streets and having a high reproductive rate, they were often associated with women accused of being witches. This caused the appearance of any cat-like symbolism or behavior to be treated as a label for women who are considered dark seductresses. Catwoman is a prime example of this because since creation she has been overshadowed by her sexuality. Catwoman obscures the idea of a female power when being a main character in the male-dominated environment of Gotham. However, her abilities don't reflect to seduce men for negative purposes, but rather to have depth to her character compared to the male characters around her. Her love interest Batman is depicted as someone with immense strength as well as intelligence and the villain The Joker is written with gross levels of criminality while Catwoman's strength lies more in her physical attributes and how she uses it seducing those near her. Her capabilities rely on the manipulation she exerts when the men she encounters fall vulnerably with her. Not only does this further objectify women, diminishing their as sexually driven beings but it limits a woman's capabilities in her physical form, preventing the idea that a woman's worth and abilities is based on her body while also vilifying women for supposedly using their bodies to seduce men for negative purposes. Aren't you tired of this?



Art by Jordan B. Corff and Bob Layton: DC Comics Catwoman #1 (1993)

FEELING SEXUALIZATION



Art by Matt Baker: Fox's All Top Comics #12 (1948)

Phantom Lady's Roar: Comics' Guilt Exposed & Analyzed

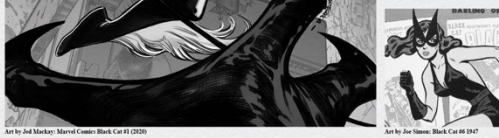
The Phantom Lady, a pioneering female comic character introduced in 1941, stands as one of the earliest and enduring symbols of female empowerment in the superhero genre. As a member of the illustrious Freedom Fighters, she valiantly combats crime with her formidable mental acumen and cutting-edge gadgets. However, despite her formidable abilities and heroic endeavors, the most striking aspect of Phantom Lady's portrayal lies in the alarming trajectory of her costume design. With each subsequent issue, her attire became increasingly revealing, accompanied by a disproportionate emphasis on the enlargement of her breasts. This deliberate escalation in sexualization not only objectified Phantom Lady but also perpetuated harmful stereotypes and reinforced damaging ideas of femininity. The sexual imagery of her clad in scanty attire, provocatively positioned against a backdrop of entangled ropes, sets a troubling precedent. Instead of a narrative that promotes her physical allure over her formidable intellect and powers. By presenting her body as a spectacle to be consumed, the comic industry perpetuates a culture of sexual objectification, reducing Phantom Lady from a symbol of strength and agency to a subservient object of male desire. Moreover, the relentless pursuit of sexual imagery not only undermines the character's agency but also sends a damaging message to readers, particularly young women, that a woman's worth is contingent upon her sexual appeal. This relentless pursuit of sexualization not only undermines the character's agency but also sends a damaging message to readers, particularly young women, that a woman's worth is contingent upon her sexual appeal. This relentless pursuit of sexualization not only undermines the character's agency but also sends a damaging message to readers, particularly young women, that a woman's worth is contingent upon her sexual appeal.

Phantom Lady not only betrays the potential for nuanced storytelling but also perpetuates harmful narratives that hinder progress towards gender equality. The sexualization of female characters in comics, exemplified by the trajectory of Phantom Lady's portrayal, represents a troubling manifestation of entrenched sexism and misogyny within the industry. It is imperative that we recognize and challenge these harmful narratives, demanding more nuanced and respectful representations of women in comics. Only through concerted efforts to dismantle patriarchal norms and promote gender equity can we hope to create a more inclusive and respectful comic book landscape for future generations. To do this you need to get up and spread the word.



Art by Matt Baker: Phantom Lady #22 (1976)

FATALES OR FESSES?



Art by Joe Simon: Black Cat #8 (1947)

Black Cat: Another Victim of Comic Book Sexualization

Another female comic book character that is based on and related to a feline is the well-known Black Cat. When Black Cat made her first appearance all the way back in the 1940s, like other female characters, she is seen wearing a very tight revealing costume with a low neckline to show a view of her breasts and cleavage. As the years went by she got more sexualized. The neckline of her costume is meant to be a zipper and this zipper is seen to be able to go all the way down to her crotch. What is the reasoning for designing a costume for a superhero/villain that potentially utters all the way and wouldn't be able to combat? Why does it use male characters have this kind of costume design? Simply, it's an address to Black Cat's sexual objectification as a female character. This along with other typical approaches were used when including Black Cat in Spider-Man comic books such as illustrating her in movements and positions that would be too uncomfortable to perform to accentuate her body physique which is not done the same for male characters. She is notorious for being a desirable villain and one of Spider-Man's possible love interests which limits her to be sexually. One of her key features is using a sexual aura to manipulate the men in the narrative. Do the men of the comic book industry see her as a love interest? There's something particularly off putting women really finding those men drawing them for other men to get excited about, but not many look at it from this perspective. Even though her sexuality and her design has potential, Black Cat never seems in a non-sexual light when she appears in comic books and this constant sexualization of female characters is one of the reasons comics historically struggled to attract women. In promoting this of the men's year?

Figure 65. Revna's Book of Newspaper Articles Second Spread



Figure 68. Revna's Book Cover of Newspaper Articles On Shelf



Figure 69. Revna's Book Opened on a Shelf



Figure 70. Revna Poster Mock up

5.8 Conclusion

With an influence of Gods from Norse Mythology, Revna is a brand and organisation with a promise in not just addressing the violation women must endure within the comic book industry but also taking action in changing it. By targeting all the artists, writers, creators, and publishers within the comic book industry, Revna demands the comic environment to be dismantled and rebuilt with an improved diversity of positive representation. To accomplish this, Revan had created a strong visual identity using inspiration from Norse Mythology symbolism and design approaches that offer clear interpretation of its goal. By putting together a book of newspaper articles that address and discuss the issue, while also targeting those who contribute to the poor representation of women, it encourages a demand for a change.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

Given what has been discussed in the previous chapters, it's clear that there is a long, deep-rooted history of the sexualization of women in visual culture. The exploitation of women and the female nude can be seen through the centuries among art dating as far back as before the Renaissance period. Women have been the subject of many works of art through history where they are painted in the nude, placed in sexual positions, domesticated, depicted as submissive and were denied the opportunity for the chance of being artists themselves. Women are seen as objects of desire, subjects that reflect the male fantasies. The same can be seen in the comic book industry where female characters are either limited to insignificant role such as love interests, seductresses, damsel in distresses or highly sexualised figures illustrated in unrealistic proportions to satisfy a male audience. The world of art and comic books had for so long been male dominated fields. Over the years there has been a considerable amount of evolution in how women are viewed and treated within society, thanks to the feminist and woman's rights movements. However, there are still societal norms that follow patriarchal views as a result from the remaining stereotypes and discriminatory behaviour. Although acknowledgement is needed for how far we've come in equality, there is still a long way to go in how to improve women's roles in our society.

Research had been conducted on the ways women have been represented in visual culture to support a more efficient way of communicating the subject in an impactful way. Understanding the origin, the leading factors, and contributions towards the exploitation of women builds a foundation for a change. Studying what has been done in the past can help identify the steps to take for a better future. The reasoning in choosing to create a social brand was more than just to spread awareness on the sexualization of women in the comic book industry. The reasoning was more specifically to do with targeting and exposing the publishers and artists who continue to contribute to the exploitation of women in comic books. In addition to this, the project highlights further information on the damage this does to women in society, while also promoting and motivating the readers to act and do more than just being aware of the situation. The goal was to demand change in a more aggressive and assertive manner in hopes of getting a reaction to take action. Revna offers a creative solution to an important problem in society.

In addition to what has already been created for this project, there are a lot of possibilities in growing its ideas and strategies. Regarding its positioning within the comic book industry, the newspaper articles were just a starting point. Future contributions to the project can be carried out, such as writing and illustrating a comic book with an original character based on the brand Revna's characteristics and goals. This idea had been thought of in the first stages of development, however due to the time and resource limitations it's a task in need of more time. In the future, a superhero character design of Revna can be created in a similar way too how Marvel had involved Norse Mythology in their stories. Revna would be a female character written into the history of Norse Folklore where she has similar power to the God Odin, having the ability to use ravens to seek out any injustice within the different worlds and realms that she can then put a stop to. Other projects such as illustrating a book on the different approaches on how to realistically draw the female body can be made. Starting an independent publishing house that focuses on releasing artists work that has a positive impact on the groups of minorities in society can create an environment to promote diversity. Proposals to the education systems can offer a new way of how to integrate the teachings of positive reinforced gender roles and navigating the societal norms.

Revna has the ideas and capabilities to close the doors from the past and open new doors to a better future in both society and visual culture.

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