WOMEN IN COMICS–POST GOLDEN AGE

Anita K. McDaniel

601 South College Road

Wilmington, NC 28403-5933

(910) 962-7932

Fax (910) 962-7062

mcdaniela@uncw.edu

Anita K. McDaniel is an Assistant Professor of Interpersonal Communication at the University of North Carolina Wilmington where she teaches in the Department of Communication Studies. For the last ten years, she has presented papers at national conferences and published in an international journal on the intertextual play between the visual and written texts represented in comic books. Her most recent publication "Dave Sim on *Guys*" appears in the *International Journal of Comic Art* (2005).

WOMEN IN COMICS–POST GOLDEN AGE

> *On the topic of gender issues in superhero fiction, it seems that, in the action-adventure fantasy world parity between the sexes is a good thing. Whereas this is fantasy serving the forces of commerce, the forces of commerce in return serve the forces of fantasy. People would not pay to read and see the tales of these fictional heroes if the lessons–explicit and implicit–of the fictions did not feed their psyches and souls.... Each generation makes the fictional heroes it needs. What should inspire–or terrify–us are not the hero's powers or gender, but what the heroes represent about our needs, our fears, and our attitudes.*
>
> Danny Fingeroth[1]

The post Golden Age of comics is most notably marked by the rise and evolution of the superhero genre. It was during this time that comic book pulp fiction was replaced with the heroic exploits of super powered men and women in masks and brightly colored spandex uniforms. DC Comics led the way with superhero icons such as Batman, Superman and Wonder Woman until Marvel Comics emerged with its version of super humans like the Fantastic Four, X-Men and Spiderman.

Initially superhero narratives consisted of crime fighting and epic struggles against alien threats and supervillians. But, as time went on, the stories incorporated battles against various social injustices and inner demons (i.e., rape,

racism and substance abuse). Lead characters were allowed to change and grow beyond their origin narratives and appeared in forms other than "good guy, white guys in tights." Mainstream comic book readers were exposed to antiheroes like Sandman (DC/Vertigo), Punisher (Marvel Comics), and Hellboy (Dark Horse Comics); superheroines like Catwoman (DC Comics), Laura Croft (Image Comics), and *STAR WARS* Shaak Ti (Dark Horse Comics); and minority characters like Black Panther (Marvel Comics), Spawn (Image Comics), and Static (Milestone Comics).

As the superhero genre was allowed to develop and thrive during this time, the industry saw great change as well. From the beginning of this time period until the early 1970s (also referred to as the Silver Age), DC and Marvel Comics set the agenda for the story lines and themes presented in comics as well as how to do business. From the mid 1980s to the present (also known as the Modern Age), independent, creator driven publishing companies (such as Image, Slave Labor Graphics, Sirius Entertainment, Milestone, and Dark Horse Comics) began to change the way readers viewed mainstream comics and challenged the "business as usual" business practices of the Big Two.

One of the more significant changes that has occurred post Golden Age is the infusion of women in the production of comics. Since the beginning of the Golden Age, the comic book industry has been dominated by men--male creators/writers/artists producing male oriented subject matter for male readers.

From the late 1970s until the present, women have had the opportunity to influence the superhero genre as editors, writers and artists of well known titles such as *Incredible Hulk*, *Doom Patrol*, and *Conan The Barbarian*; and become creators of independent titles like Flo Steinberg's *Big Apple Comix*, Colleen Coover's *Small Favorsl,* and Colleen Doran's *A Distant Soil*. As a result, a new voice spoken by women is being heard in comic books and is helping to shape readers' perceptions of the superhero.

One outstanding, independent, female creator/artist who began her career as a freelance penciller/inker for Marvel, DC and other comic publishers is Jill Thompson. In 1997, she created *The Scary Godmother*, a children's story about a winged witch who has access to magic but would rather solve problems using her ingenuity. After a successful first printing by Sirius Entertainment, Thompson wrote three more *Scary Godmother* books, three related comic books, and two related comic mini series. Select *Scary Godmother* stories have been translated into Spanish, Italian, and German for greater distribution. For her achievement as a female creator, she received the Lulu of the Year Award in 1999. In 2007, she was presented with the Will Eisner Award for Best Painter/Multimedia Artist for three stories—"A Dog and His Boy" in *The Dark Horse Book of Monsters*, "Love Triangle" in *Sexy Chix* (Dark Horse), and "Fair Division" in *Fables: 1001 Nights of Snowfall* (Vertigo/DC).

Between the Big Two, women like Dorothy Woolfolk (DC Comics' first female editor) used their feminine perspectives on the social world to guide the narrative interpretations of artists and writers. Female writers, such as Gail Simone (*Birds Of Prey*), Devin Grayson (*Nightwing*), and Ann Nocenti (*Daredevil*), developed characters beyond the stereotypic conventions of "male superheroes are strong" whereas "female superheroes are just pretty." And, women who became pencillers, colorists, and inkers gave male and female readers new forms to incorporate into their classic views of the superhero.

The most well known woman in Big Two comics began her forty-seven year career doing touch up artwork for EC Comics. Marie Severin joined the Marvel Bullpen as a support colorist in 1955. Her longest running projects at Marvel were penciller and support colorist for the *Sub-Mariner* (1955-1957 and 1961-1992) and penciller and inker for *Conan* covers (1968-1987). She also worked as a penciller, inker and support colorist on various titles from 1988-1998 for DC. Severin has worked on over fifty different titles for the Big Two during her long career. As a result, she has been the recipient of many awards and honors such as, the Academy of Comic Book Artist Award for Best Penciller (Humor Division) in 1973, and Best Penciller (Humor Division), Best Inker (Humor Division), and Best Colorist in 1974. In 1988, she received the Inkpot Award, and was inducted into the Women Cartoonists Hall of Fame in 1997 and the Will Eisner Comics Hall of Fame in 2001.

A cursory description of the achievements of all of these women (and others) would not do justice to their contributions to post Golden Age comics. Therefore, the innovations of three women--a DC editor, a freelance writer, and a Marvel artist--will be offered as examples of the overall effect that women have had on the superhero genre and perceptions of female superheroes in particular. Often it has been stated that female superhero titles do not sell—that their stories do not appeal to (male) readers. As a result, characters (created by men) who began as a good idea, devolved into two dimensional stereotypes, plot devices for the stories of male superheroes, and industry jokes. These characters became well known in the DC and Marvel Universes, but for the wrong reasons. Three such superheroines degraded by male writers and artists were Wonder Woman, Batgirl, and She-Hulk. The talented work of Karen Berger (editor), Barbara Kesel Randall (writer), and Jan Duursema (artist) are noteworthy because they exemplify attempts by women in comics to restore dignity and "super" status to superheroines.

Karen Berger and Wonder Woman

A comic book editor is responsible for getting the book completed on time. To do so, he/she needs to know something about the creative process (i.e., plotting, story conversation, and placement of the dialogue balloons) and the business end of comics (i.e., promotion of the title and finding artists and writers who can "sell" new projects and current titles). Karen Berger has been editing

comics for DC since 1979. She has a bachelor's degree in English with a minor in Art History from Brooklyn College. She entered the industry as an assistant editor based on the referral of a friend where she began working on superhero titles such as *WONDER WOMAN*, *THE LEGION OF SUPERHEROES* and *SWAMP THING*. Berger is best known in the industry and to many female readers as the current Executive Editor of DC Comics Vertigo line–a group of dark fantasy, crime fiction, war, and real life comic books with controversial subject matter similar to independent titles.

One of the more important functions of a comic book editor is to facilitate the development of a cohesive vision for a text between the writer and the artist. That text might be an individual character, or a specific story that occurs across several issues, or a completely new title. When discussing her approach to superhero texts, Berger said, "The [superhero] genre stuff that I did <u>had</u> to have strong elements of realism.... I don't like having a story that is total fantasy or that has no basis in reality."[2] Realism is a defining characteristic of Modern Age comics. For example, Golden Age heroes protected fictional cities like Gotham and Metropolis from space invaders and super powered villains. Modern Age heroes, however, establish residence in real locations like Boston, Los Angeles and various parts of New York City where sitting mayors and heads of state make cameo appearances in their books. When Berger worked with George Perez on a

revision of Wonder Woman, she contributed a different kind of realism–a woman's view of feminism.

In spite of her iconic status, most incarnations of Wonder Woman (a.k.a. Princess Diana) have exploited her Amazon origins to the point of almost ruining her as a female superhero. She has been presented in sexist ways ranging from the stereotypic warrior "ice princess" to the bondage submissive implied by numerous stories where being tied up was a common theme in her stories. An editor sustains the life of a title or character by injecting new ideas into it and/or encouraging new approaches to the genre–not by recycling antiquated cliches. Referencing Perez's *WONDER WOMAN*, Berger said, "As an editor I tried to bring out the best in what his vision was.... This was another time when I think being a woman helped. There was a lot of me in there and I had a total emotional commitment to that book."[3] The Perez-Berger relaunch of the title presented a truer vision of what a female superhero could be–a woman who is motivated to serve and protect humankind without dominating or being subservient to men or trying to "fight like a man."

Too often the feminist perspective is considered by men and women to be a monolithic ideology–a perspective based on the superiority of women over men with an emphasis on "women's issues." In reality, feminism is about empowering women by validating the role they play in society. As such, it is as fragmented as any other ideology in its means to achieve its goals. In the first seven issues of his

run on *WONDER WOMAN*, Perez emphasized the mythological origins of the Amazons by highlighting their connection to the Greek gods. He described these women as a race envied and then enslaved by men. However, under the guidance of the gods, Hippolyte (Princess Diana's mother) freed the Amazons, defeated the men who oppressed them, and led them to their current home on Paradise Island.

In the process of defeating their captors, a philosophical rift occurred among the Amazons similar to that within feminist ideology. One group of women took an adversarial stance against men and embraced violence as a means to combat their former oppressors. The other group of women (from which Princess Diana is a direct descendent) chose to work with men to achieve a better society and to protect humankind from the evil that existed below Paradise Island and beyond–a recurring theme for the title. Adopting an adversarial, anti-man approach to life is different from adopting a cooperative and protective, pro-woman approach to life. Although it would have been easy for Perez to associate all of the Amazons with the pro-woman approach to feminism (as other writers have done), he chose to introduce the reality of at least two competing views of the ideology. Given that attention to a more realistic presentation of the *WONDER WOMAN* Amazons, Berger's influence seems evident on Perez's narrative choices.

As both artist and writer for his run on *WONDER WOMAN*, Perez's vision of Princess Diana did not depict her as someone who either dominates or submits

to men. Wonder Woman was not drawn in a way that sexualizes her character. That is, Perez did not "pose" her for the other male characters or readers. In spite of appearing almost exclusively in a uniform that is basically a strapless bathing suit and knee boots, Wonder Woman's feminine features were not enhanced in a way that made her seem less heroic.

Also, Wonder Woman was not written in a way that made her inferior or superior to the male characters in the story. She was not compelled to fall in love with the lead male, Steve Trevor, nor did she continually save him from danger. Wonder Woman was the star of her title, but not at the expense of the male egos of her supporting cast or the readers. It may have been easier for Perez to avoid stereotypic narratives and visual cliches because he was both the artist and writer of the title, but it was the editor who nurtured his efforts.

Finally, Berger's influence was seen in Princess Diana's ability to resolve conflict "like a man." A common theme in superhero narratives is to defeat various threats to humankind with physical force or near lethal uses of super powers. In the initial story arc, Princess Diana defeated Ares, the god of war, in his campaign to rule the world. However, the contest did not end with a predictable physical confrontation. Diana did not beat Ares because she "fought him like a man;" she emerged victorious because she "did it like a woman." She used her golden lasso (a gift from the female gods and the Earth Mother Gaea) to show Ares that he could not rule the world by destroying everyone on it. Wonder

Woman was not physically strong enough to defeat the god, so she used what was available to her as a woman to find a way to help him see the truth. In the end, Perez may be credited with restoring Wonder Woman to her superhero icon status, but he acknowledges that he achieved that distinction with the help of a female editor.

Barbara Kesel Randall and Batgirl

A comic book writer is responsible for creating narratives suitable for new and/or existing characters. To do so, she/he needs to be able to tell a story that readers want to read and develop characters that have the potential to grow. However, writers are not free to do whatever they want with a character in order to tell a good story. According to the DC/Marvel paradigm, a character cannot be changed to the point where the hero is unrecognizable to the reader, or changed in ways that interfere with the marketing of the character. Thus, writers for superhero comics create stories in which lead characters experience forms of psychological or relational change that denote their ability to cope with personal fears, limitations, and weaknesses, and/or provide motivation for future exploits.

Barbara Kesel Randall entered the industry as a freelance writer for DC in 1981. She has a bachelor's degree in Drama from Cal Poly Pomona and had intended to become a playwright upon graduation. However, after writing a ten page letter to a DC editor complaining about their negative and stereotypic portrayals of female characters, she was given an opportunity to write a Batgirl

back up story for Detective Comics during her sophomore year in college. Over the course of her career, Kesel has written stories for DC Comics, Marvel Comics, Image Comics, Dark Horse Comics, and Wildstorm and superhero characters such as Batgirl, Ultra Girl, Supergirl, Hawk and Dove, and the members of Wild.C.A.T.S.. To date, her most impressive work in comics has been the *MERIDIAN* series published by CrossGen Comics. The series is about a teenaged girl named Sephie who begins the story as a fairytale princess and grows to become a strong and intelligent woman "who fights when necessary and heals when possible."

Not surprisingly, Kesel's main contribution to the superhero genre is her positive/pro-woman portrayals of female superheroes. "If there's anything I hate with a passion, it's characters behaving out of character, especially when it involves a smart woman being stupid for no reason."[4] Therefore, her noteworthy portrayals of Barbara Gordon (a.k.a. Batgirl) will be addressed here. Kesel's version of Batgirl established her as a character separate from Batman and Robin– a woman motivated to do what men do but alone and in her own way. Her *BATGIRL SPECIAL* and *SECRET ORIGINS* countered the victimized and objectified presentation of Barbara Gordon/Batgirl in Alan Moore's acclaimed *THE KILLING JOKE*. "My job was to make people give a hoot that poor l'il Babs had her spine shot out."[5]

Victimization and objectification are common narrative themes for women in superhero comics. Although objectification is more obvious in the visual representations of women, how the female character is written provides the artist with clues as to how she should/could be drawn. Victimization, on the other hand, is exclusively within the province of the writer. Too often women in comics (female superheroes and relational partners) are tortured, raped, maimed, killed, depowered, or made to go insane to further the development of a current storyline for a male character and/or to establish a premise for a future story. "Women/Girlfriends in refrigerators syndrome," as it has been referenced, has its roots in the pulp fiction narratives that later spawned comic books. This style of writing not only devalues female characters, it sexualizes their existence and demise. Many readers and individuals within the industry believe that Barbara Gordon became a "better" character after she was paralyzed, but few people comment on the specifics of the event that allowed her to become that "better" character.

Paralyzing Batgirl was not the subject of Moore's story; it was a plot device designed to traumatize her father. Barbara Gordon was not portrayed as the intelligent and resourceful woman who assumed the Batgirl persona; she was portrayed as a cocoa-serving, homemaker overly concerned with the mess her father was making cutting and pasting news clippings. At the end of the story, Moore did not cause the reader to care about the fate of Barbara Gordon; his

emphasis was on the transformation of the relationship between his two lead characters, the Batman and the Joker. Industry insiders speculate that Batgirl was allowed to be done away with in this manner because she was outdated. However, it is likely that if audiences had grown tired of Batgirl, it was not because she was a bad character, but because she had been written badly.

Moore and Kesel use a similar writing style to develop their stories and versions of Barbara Gordon–the script. Script writing is a process in which the writer plots each panel in graphic detail (i.e., character placement, pieces of dialogue, the mood of the scene, character motivations, etc.) in order to help the artist tell the story. In *THE KILLING JOKE*, the Joker was the star of a tale that centered around the genesis of his criminal insanity. Barbara Gordon and her father were merely the objectified victims of the Joker's madness. Moore scripted the Joker in a way that helped the reader understand his insanity and ultimately feel sympathy for him. However, Barbara Gordon and her father were not treated as well.

Little to no background information was offered for either character; and both characters were sexually victimized. However, Barbara's father was allowed to maintain his identity as Police Commissioner Gordon. Even though he had been stripped naked and was forced to look at nude photographs of his injured daughter, he remained determined to "bring in the Joker, by the book." Barbara Gordon, on the other hand, had no real identity beyond "some innocent girl" who

was shot by the Joker. No reference was made to the loss of her Batgirl persona. She became just another faceless, sexualized, female victim.

In *SECRET ORIGINS* and *BATGIRL SPECIAL*, Kesel (writing under her married name, Randall) gave Batgirl an identity and established her as a superhero. Kesel's stories preceded Moore's story. The point of her stories was to help the readers understand that paralyzing Batgirl was a significant loss to the superhero world. In *SECRET ORIGINS*, Kesel portrayed Barbara Gordon as a Batman-like young woman whose drive and independence were motivated, in part, by childhood losses. Emphasis was placed on the natural talents (i.e., her photographic memory and skill with computers) and acquired talents (i.e., superior intelligence, athletic ability, and desire for justice) needed for Barbara Gordon to become Batgirl. The narrative was complimented by artwork that focused the reader's attention on the development of a female superhero instead of just "some innocent girl" who wanted to be like the men in tights.

In *BATGIRL SPECIAL–The Last Batgirl Story*, Kesel scripted Batgirl's attempt to capture Cormorant–an man who battered women and nearly killed her in an earlier encounter. In the story, Batgirl felt compelled to bring Cormorant to justice even though she was afraid of another confrontation with him. Kesel carefully developed Batgirl's fears so that readers could appreciate the character's ability to overcome them. Batgirl's independence and deliberate approach to crime fighting remained a constant throughout the story, but she was allowed to

grow from someone in a costume who was afraid that she could die being a vigilante into a hero who was committed to facing danger in order to protect others. In the end, Kesel reimagined the Batgirl persona as a superhero worthy of recognition and respect. In general, female writers seek opportunities to validate female superheroes–to give them meaningful background stories and proper motivation for future exploits. If Kesel's goal was to make readers care about Barbara Gordon a.k.a. Batgirl, she succeeded.

Jan Duursema and She-Hulk

A comic book artist is responsible for telling a story with or without words. Ideally, he/she takes direction from the writer and creates visual representations of the character, the physical setting, and the mood of a panel, page, or an entire book. Comic art may take the form of black and white drawings with ink, pencil and ink images with computerized color, or full color, painted illustrations. The monthly titles for Marvel and DC require the services of a penciler, inker and colorist–sometimes with one person playing more than one role in the artistic process. However, the artistic credit is most often given to the penciler. Whatever the means of creating the visual component of a comic book, the artist has to complete the work by a specific deadline. That means, artists for the Big Two have to be able to work fast.

Jan Duursema has a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the Joe Kubert School of Cartooning and Graphic Arts. While there, she developed a camera

man's eye for comic art. Her philosophy is, "When you're laying out a page, keep the camera moving around and don't stand still or it gets boring."[6] Duursema began her career with Marvel as the artist for *STAR WARS* when the company published the title and went on to be the penciler and/or inker for superhero titles such as, *THE AVENGERS, THE INCREDIBLE HULK, X-MEN, X-MAN, X-MEN 2099* and *X-FACTOR*. Currently, she is know for her artwork on various *STAR WARS* projects published by Dark Horse Comics. Two of the female characters that she created, Jedis Shaak Ti and Aayla Secura, caught the attention of George Lucas and appeared in recent STAR WARS films *Episode Two: Attack of the Clones* and *Episode Three: Return of the Sith*.

Duursema enjoys the creative process involved in drawing new or established characters.

> I throw my creative energies totally into the lives of the characters and try to understand what motivates them–how they walk, gesture; when they smile; what makes them angry or sad. I try to give each character their own visual personality and identity in the way they move and react. When I'm done with a story, I want to feel like I made these characters come alive for the reader.[7]

Comic book superheroes need to get the attention of readers visually. For male characters, artists focus on their colorful uniforms and imposing physical statures to enhance their heroic appeal. For female characters, artists tend to focus on

their feminine form and exaggerations of features which have little to do with being a hero. According to industry professionals, good art is creating a visual representation of who that character is and not just generating a composite of masculine or feminine features. Unfortunately, the industry standard for good comic book art has become drawing men to look strong and brave and drawing women with large breasts.

Commodified femininity is a term used to reference the visual objectification of women by the media. It means that media agents signify femininity by visually emphasizing the line and curve of the female body along with a code of poses, gestures, body cants and gazes.[8] Common examples used by comic artists are visual angles that feature perfectly shaped bottoms, demure gazes that accentuate bedroom eyes and moist lips, and clothing stretched across or precariously perched upon large, anti gravity breasts. Female artists have attempted to combat this trend by featuring women of different body types and drawing ladies who "pose" less seductively and wear more clothing. The commodified female is a damaging trend for female superheroes because it robs them of their identity as superheroes. A well documented example is She-Hulk.

THE SAVAGE SHE-HULK appeared in 1980 as a spin-off from *THE INCREDIBLE HULK*. During time of stress, frustration and/or extreme anger, petite lawyer, Jennifer Walters, would transform into the nearly seven foot tall, 650 lbs., green, female version of the monster. However, unlike the Hulk, She-

Hulk retained her awareness of her other personality and intelligence that rationalized a desire to protect innocent individuals while seeking justice. The character possessed super strength and a fierce independence, and her narratives contained a strong, feminist message–slightly more anti-man than pro-woman. During the twenty-five issue run of the title, She-Hulk was drawn with a shapely figure, full bosom, moist lips, and painted nails probably to enhance her femininity–to remind readers that she was a female hero and not the Hulk in a torn dress.

The character was resurrected in 1989 in *THE SENSATIONAL SHE-HULK*. In this series, She-Hulk maintained her strength and independence, but she became popular because she broke the fourth wall–the literary separation between the audience and the characters. Because She-Hulk was aware that she was in a comic book, she was "in on the joke" of how to play to a male audience using her feminine assets. Somehow, making the character aware that she was being objectified was supposed to lessen the exploitation. Cover art and pin up posters of She-Hulk bursting out of her clothing, scantily dressed, or suggestively posed became the preferred method of selling the title rather than emphasizing the heroic stories inside the book. Figure 1, penciled and inked by Steven Geiger and colored by Paul Mounts for Marvel's Swimsuit Special #2, represents the commodified view of She-Hulk.



FIGURE 1

SHE-HULK. TM and (c) 2008 Marvel Characters, Inc. Used with permission.

As a piece of comic art, the illustration is a near perfect representation of the female form. All of the body parts are well proportioned, appropriately hued,

and cleanly crafted. However, the illustration does not tell an accurate story of who She-Hulk is or was. Because her pose consists of an arched back, up lifted chin, and hands behind the head; the eye is drawn to the line and curve of She-Hulk's breasts and lower body, further emphasized by a string bikini. Her long, lean form accentuated as such looks more supermodel than superhero. In fact, so little of She-Hulk's identity exists in the drawing beyond the green hair and skin, she could be anybody and, thus, becomes recognized as no one. No acts of heroism are implied or inferred. She-Hulk is nothing more than an object for the male gaze.

Duursema was never an artist for a She-Hulk title, but her image of the character for Marvel's Swimsuit Special #4 exemplifies her approach to drawing women. Duursema is known for creating strong women–physically strong and strong in character. Readers are reminded constantly that these women do something besides look pretty. Her illustrations of female superheroes seem to strike the proper balance between representations of beauty and valor. Figure 2, penciled and inked by Duursema and colored by Tom Smith, stands out from other She-Hulk pin ups in that it reinforces an identity for the character separate from her physical beauty.



FIGURE 2

SHE-HULK. TM and (c) 2008 Marvel Characters, Inc. Used with permission.

Duursema used two qualities to distinguish her drawing of She-Hulk–a heroic pose and an emphasis on form that focuses on her super power. She-Hulk

is depicted lifting a boulder on her back while standing in a pool of water. The pose is reminiscent of sculptures of Atlas, a Greek hero, upholding the world. Although She-Hulk looks like she is enjoying posing for the camera (denoted by her direct eye contact with the reader and coy smile), she is not playing to the male gaze. Her pose is a display of her super strength–a primary identity marker of her superhero persona. The eye contact and coy smile signify her awareness of the fourth wall–another identity marker. However, this time, the awareness signifiers do not necessitate exploiting her feminine assets.

Additionally, the She-Hulk form demonstrates that she is equal parts beauty and power. Because the image appears in a spoof of *SPORTS ILLUSTRATED Swimsuit Issue*, an attempt had to be made to display the character's beauty and femininity. Therefore, She-Hulk is drawn with her customary wild green hair and moist lips and wearing a skimpy bathing suit to accentuate her full bosom. But the other features of her body that draw the reader's eye are her muscular legs that imply power more than definition. Almost half of the space on the page is devoted to the character's legs creating a balance between the character's feminine qualities and her superhero qualities. The eye does not go immediately to her breasts because the legs compete for the reader's attention. Duursema's image of She-Hulk is important because she refocuses attention on the identity of the character; she visually reminds the reader of the

savage and sensational She-Hulk qualities that made the character noteworthy in the Marvel Universe.

Conclusion

The post Golden Age superhero genre has benefited from the contributions of women during comic book production. As editors, writers and artists (i.e., pencilers, inkers and colorists), women have and still influence the perception of the female superhero by injecting multiple feminist perspectives into their stories which create more opportunities for character development and decreasing objectification. According to Fingeroth in the opening quote, "Each generation makes the fictional heroes it needs." Hopefully, the feminine voice in the comic industry helps readers of the superhero genre understand that they need an improved view of the female superhero.

Works Cited

1. Fingeroth, Danny. *Superman on the Couch: What Superheroes Really Tell Us About Ourselves and Our Society*. New York: Continuum, 2004.

2. Contino, Jennifer M. A Touch of Vertigo: Karen Berger [Online June 2006]. Sequential Tart website. <http://www.sequentialtart.com/archive/feb01/berger.shtml>.

3. Ibid.

4. Contino, Jennifer M. The Accidental Writer: Barbara Kesel [Online June 2006]. Sequential Tart website. <http://www.sequentialtart.com/archive/may00/kesel.shtml>.

5. Ibid.

6. ____. The Artists: Jan Durrsema [Online August 2006]. The Unofficial Guide to the DC Universe website. <http://www.dcuguide.com/hawkworld/creator_duursema.php>.

7. Jozic, Mike. SBC Interview: A Conversation with John Ostrander and Jan Duursema [Online August 2006]. Silver Billet Comics website. <http://www.silverbulletcomicbooks.com/features/105074255766497.htm>.

[8]Goldman, Robert, Heath, Deborah and Smith, Sharon. L. Commidity Feminism. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication, 8,* (1991), 333-351.

Further Readings

_____. Grand Comic Book Database [Online July 2006]. <http://comics.org/index.lasso>.

_____. Who's Who in American Comic Books [Online July 2006]. <http://bailsprojects.com/S(zrcnn255vtenj45jdzf45))/WhosWho.aspx>.

Duursema, Jan, Duursema, Jan and Smith, Tom. "She-Hulk." *MARVEL SWIMSUIT SPECIAL 1, 4* (1995).

Lee, Stan, Kraft, David Anthony, Buscema, John and Vosburg, Mike. *Savage She-Hulk #1-25*. New York: Marvel Publishing, Inc., 2006.

Moore, Alan, Bolland, Brian, Higgins, John and Starkings, Richard. "Batman: The Killing Joke." *DC Universe: The Stories of Alan Moore.* New York: DC Comics, 2006.

Perez, George, Wein, Len and Potter, Greg. *Wonder Woman: Gods and Mortals.* New York: DC Comics, 2004.

Randall, Kesel, Kitson, Barry and Patterson, Bruce D. "The Last Batgirl Story." *BATGIRL SPECIAL 1*, (1988).