

**Holding Out For a Hero(ine): A Postfeminist Analysis of Superhero
Stories from the 1980s**

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Abstract

This research thesis focuses on the 1980s and how postfeminism in media was established during this period. Postfeminism exists as an ideology that believes feminism “died,” or at minimum completed and no longer functions as necessary, as women seem to have legal equality now. This thesis looks at postfeminism through the lens of superhero stories from the 1980s. Ultimately, the stories presented show how the overall rejection of the ideology of feminism in favor of post-feminism after the “success” of the second wave affected superhero comic culture in America. Additionally, this thesis looks at the inclusion of this ideology around women’s rights in the 1980s in a part of pop culture traditionally produced for men. Superhero stories as a medium were more gender-biased toward men in the 1980s because men were the primary consumers of this type of media, so the inclusion of feminism (or the lack thereof) demonstrated how second-wave feminism and postfeminism impacted the presentation to several groups, including those that were not necessarily affected by these movements.

On an average Saturday morning in 1985, American boys and girls alike settled in front of their television sets to enjoy their cartoons. As the technicolor show began to play, 80s synth pop blaring from the speaker, a cast of characters appeared. The main character—Adora—explored the land of Etheria with her band of friends and allies as they attempted to protect its citizens from the evil Horde. After running into the leader of the Horde, Adora pulled a large sword out and yelled, “For the honor of Grayskull!” After this, a transformation from Adora to She-Ra, Princess of Power began. Her hair grew longer, held back by a golden crown with a red stone in the center. Her clothes switched from a red leotard to a short, strapless dress that almost evoked that which would be worn by an ancient Greek goddess. A red cape draped itself around her shoulders, and she could fight off whatever villain wished to try and stop her. She-Ra, and other superheroes of this time, exemplified the postfeminist action girl trope. Tough and strong, she still maintained her femininity and charm.

Introduction

The 1980s in America saw a meteoric rise in consumerism among the general public. Scholars have proposed many reasons for this, including the Ronald Reagan presidency, the rise in shopping malls, and a general interest in popular culture and consumption of consumer products during this decade. This rise in consumerism coincided with the decreasing popularity of feminism. After second-wave feminism, which largely focused on gender equality in the workplace as well as legal equity, gained a lot of ground in the 1970s, it began to lose stamina as more women argued that the goals of the Second Wave had been achieved. This loss of support gave way to a new ideology: postfeminism. Though postfeminism included the word feminism in its name, it functioned as a rejection of feminism, and aimed to bridge the gap between feminists and antifeminists through a change in terminology. Postfeminism rejected feminism in favor of

the idea of “girl power,” a way to support “strong women” without aligning with the controversial buzzword “feminism.” “Girl power” simply referred to being a strong woman—the ambiguity of this phrase made it ideal for producers of consumer goods as they could market it to feminists and anti-feminists alike. The rise in American consumerism amplified this interest in marketability, as capitalist producers wanted to sell merchandise that appealed to both sides of the debate: feminists who believed in more power for women as well as anti-feminists who supported more traditional gendered roles and behaviors. Post-feminism existed in the middle ground of not quite being feminist, while avoiding being anti-feminist as well.

The mark of postfeminism could be seen across popular consumer culture, but for the sake of this essay I will be focusing on one aspect of this trend: 1980s superhero stories. She-Ra in the 1980s exemplified the “girl power” action hero touted by postfeminism. Tough and strong, but still feminine, she also had stronger male counterparts like He-Man. Reading comic books was already not a popular activity in the 1980s, and typically men and boys read these stories, so half of the population was ignored. In this thesis, I will look into how an ideology that focuses on women appears in a medium typically written for a primarily male-identifying audience. This thesis will be divided into four parts: first, an explanation of postfeminism; second, an explanation of the Frankfurt and Birmingham Schools of thought and how they apply to pop culture theory; third, an in-depth look at a few superhero stories from the 1980s; and finally, an analysis of all these topics together. Ultimately, the stories presented in this thesis show how the overall rejection of the idea of feminism in favor of the idea of “girl power” after the “success” of second-wave feminism permeated American superhero popular culture and acted as a part of the overarching ideology surrounding women’s rights in the 1980s. Additionally, this research

thesis demonstrates how postfeminism in media was present before it was prevalent— postfeminist ideology truly took off in the 1990s, but it impacted stories well before that time.

Postfeminism

An analysis of how postfeminism impacted the superhero genre necessitates an explanation of postfeminism's origins and goals. The ideology has been interpreted variously, with three main interpretations coming to the forefront: postfeminism as a political position, as a feminist historical shift, and as anti-feminist backlash.¹ Toril Moi, a feminist theorist and professor at Duke, first introduced the term in 1985 to advocate for a type of feminism that bridged the gap between liberal and radical feminism². Liberal feminists wanted to simply get women the same legal, political, and social rights as men; radical feminists wanted to completely restructure society to gain gender equality. While Moi's intention was simply to bridge the gap between liberal and radical feminism, the usage of "post" in this situation led to semantic confusion on the goals of the ideology, as the prefix implies an ending. This led to postfeminism's temporal definition.

The notion that second-wave feminism's goals had been accomplished functioned as one facet of postfeminism's definition. In the 1980s, women's history sometimes discussed how the creation of a "community" for women, or specific spaces designated for women, proved both helpful and detrimental in the long run.³ While this separate community provided shared experiences and a way of connecting for women, it also leaned into the "separate spheres" ideology, a concept that emphasized the idea that women belonged in the domestic and private

¹ Rosalind Gill, "Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of a Sensibility" *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 10, no. 2 (May 1, 2007): 147-166.

² Kavka, Misha, "Feminism, Ethics, and History, or What is the 'Post' in Postfeminism?" *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 21, no 1 (Spring 2002): 29-44.

³ Hewitt, Nancy, "Beyond the Search for Sisterhood: American Women's History in the 1980s." *Social History* 10, no. 3 (October 1985): 293-321.

sphere and men belonged in the social and public sphere – essentially, it assigned men and women different social roles. These “separate spheres” appeared in media long after the inception of the concept. This separation contributed to the mentality of keeping women in the house instead of allowing them to get jobs; backlash against this led to a main goal of second-wave feminism: equal work opportunities for women and men.⁴ Legally, second-wave feminism saw several accomplishments. These included the passage of the Title IX Education Amendments of 1962, which mandated that no person be excluded from school activities like extracurriculars or classes on the basis of sex⁵; the United States Supreme Court’s historic 1973 *Roe v. Wade* legal abortion ruling⁶; and the Equal Pay Act of 1963, which prohibited wage discrimination based on sex.⁷

In addition to the belief that feminism’s goals had been accomplished, the 1980s saw a continuing rise in conservatism in the United States that culminated with the election of Ronald Reagan as president in 1980. This rise in conservatism also saw a concurrent rise in anti-feminism, meaning that more people were arguing for women to stay in traditional roles. In fact, feminism played a role in both the presidential elections of 1980 and 1984, which was seen through a phenomenon known as the “gender gap.” The gender gap refers to the tendency of women to vote differently from men and to use their votes to bring about policy changes that directly impact themselves.⁸ Some consistent outcomes of the gender gap in U.S. presidential

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ “Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972,” U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, last modified November 19, 2020.

<https://www.hhs.gov/civil-rights/for-individuals/sex-discrimination/title-ix-education-amendments/index.html>

⁶ “Jane Roe, et al., Appellants, v. Henry Wade,” Legal Information Institute, Cornell Law School

<https://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/410/113>

⁷ “The Equal Pay Act of 1963,” U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

<https://www.eeoc.gov/statutes/equal-pay-act-1963>

⁸ Carroll, Susan J, “The Gender Gap as a Tool for Women’s Empowerment: The Formative Years, 1980-1984,” in *The Legacy of Second-Wave Feminism in American Politics*, ed. by Angie Maxwell and Todd Shields (Springer International Publishing, 2018): 135-164.

elections include women being more likely to vote for a Democratic candidate and having more interest in policies that advocate for women's rights.⁹ The interest in the Equal Rights Amendment and the campaign efforts of the National Organization for Women likely assisted in making the gender gap more apparent in the 1980s because the votes women cast had an obvious impact on policies affecting them.¹⁰ In addition to this rise in women's impact on politics and the overall conservative bent of the 1980s, some early postfeminist theorists believed that "by the 1980s a new era dawned when women attained full equality thanks to new laws, new agencies, and new protections."¹¹ The idea that culture did not exist as a separate thing from politics, but rather a major part that both affected and saw effects from politics functioned as an important element of early postfeminism.

In addition to the political implications of postfeminist ideology, creating a cohesive female identity that aligned with the intentions behind it functioned as another influential facet of postfeminism. This appeared through the creation of a "new woman" by content creators for the late twentieth century that embodied several female identities.¹² This "postfeminist woman" existed as "an antifeminist backlasher, a sexually assertive 'do-me feminist,' a prowoman pseudo-feminist and a feminine Girlie feminist,"¹³ a collection of identities that contradicted, complicated, and confirmed one another. This woman was created to be strong and feminine, while avoiding being explicitly feminist or anti-feminist.

⁹ Ibid, 139.

¹⁰ Ibid, 140.

¹¹ Gerhard, Jane F, "A Prehistory of Postfeminism," in *The Dinner Party: Judy Chicago and the Power of Popular Feminism, 1970-2000*, by Jane F Gerhard, Claire Potter, and Renee Romano (University of Georgia Press 2013): 230-236.

¹² Genz, Stéphanie, "Singled Out: Postfeminism's 'New Woman' and the Dilemma of Having it All," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 43, no. 1 (January 2010): 97-119.

¹³ Ibid.

Ultimately, the representation of the “postfeminist woman” in media created a young, single woman who rapidly switched between “anxiety and determination... haunted by backlash images of the deviant and abject singleton as well as elated by Girlie feminism’s successful chick/chic achiever.”¹⁴ The “postfeminist woman” in popular culture demonstrated an inversion and reminder of second-wave feminism’s ideas.

The sexual liberation of women functioned as another important element of the origins of the postfeminist movement. The fragmentation of the feminist movement contributed to the creation of postfeminism. The “sex wars” of the mid-1980s functioned as one cause of this fragmentation.¹⁵ These were a series of disagreements between second-wave feminists on whether women should be protected from sexual objectification through pornography or allowed to participate in pornography as a mode of sexual liberation.¹⁶ These arguments played out in articles, debates, and in governmental policy. This conflict came to a head in 1984 when the Minneapolis City Council passed an ordinance to ban pornography—later vetoed by the mayor. Feminists drafted this ordinance but it garnered support from noted anti-feminists like Phyllis Schlafly.¹⁷

These “sex wars” led to a shift in how women were portrayed as sex objects in the media.¹⁸ Instead of being portrayed as innately or passively sexy, women acted as willing participants in their own sexualization—actively selecting the outfits or participating in sexualizing behaviors.¹⁹ This shift created a new dynamic for those who wished to criticize this

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Butler, Jess, “For White Girls Only? Postfeminism and the Politics of Inclusion,” *Feminist Formations* 25, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 35-58.

¹⁶ Ibid, 38.

¹⁷ Ibid, 39.

¹⁸ McRobbie, Angela, “Post-feminism and popular culture,” *Feminist Media Studies* 4, no. 3 (2004): 255-264.

¹⁹ Ibid.

sexualization, as the postfeminist woman could be sexy but not a sex object—she took agency in her own sexuality, and thus seemed to avoid sexual objectification.²⁰

All the original facets of postfeminism contributed to its relationship with consumer capitalism. A marketable form of pseudo-feminism, postfeminism focused on the politically neutral idea of “girl power” rather than the controversial idea of “feminism.” A demonstration of this happened through the “action girl” trope, with a tough and self-reliant woman who still maintained her femininity. In fact, one element of postfeminism emphasized “the expression of female empowerment through the acquisition of consumer goods (especially clothing and attire).”²¹ A relationship between feminist sensibilities and capitalism still exists in the present day—seen through popular feminism’s “Feminist” merchandise—but the late twentieth century preferred the term “girl power” over “feminist.”²²

Additionally, postfeminism recognized the power of women as consumers and citizens, and capitalist producers followed this realization by marketing directly to them.²³ This women-centered marketing approach appeared in many places, but women’s fashion magazines were a notable arena.²⁴ *Vogue* magazine, for example, worked to emphasize consumer-driven empowerment. It also “relegat[ed] the feminist struggle to the past” to encourage women to start dressing provocatively again. With the goals of second-wave feminism achieved, women no

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Lebovic, Anna, “Refashioning Feminism: American Vogue, the Second Wave, and the Transition to Postfeminism,” *Journal of Women’s History* 31, no. 1 (Spring 2019): 109-132.

²² Popular feminism refers to the twenty-first idea of being a feminist in name only. People who fall into this category often use the term “feminist” to describe themselves for attention without doing anything to advocate for feminism; Banet-Weiser, Sarah, Rosalind Gill, and Catherine Rottenberg, “Postfeminism, popular feminism, and neoliberal feminism? Sarah Banet-Weiser, Rosalind Gill, and Catherine Rottenberg in Conversation,” *Feminist Theory* 21, no. 1 (January 2020): 3-24.

²³ Banet-Weiser, Sarah, “Postfeminism and Popular Feminism,” *Feminist Media Histories* 4, no. 2 (April 2018): 152-156.

²⁴ Lebovic, “Refashioning Feminism” 109-132.

longer had to feel the need to dress gender neutrally—further cementing the magazine’s support of the postfeminist movement.²⁵

While postfeminism garnered significant support in the late twentieth century, it still had its critics. First came the objection that term implied that feminism had ended, though its goals were not yet achieved. To demonstrate the point of the prefix “post” implying temporality, postcolonialism came about after World War II, but feminism lacked a finish.²⁶ Further, claiming feminism ended after the second-wave ignored race, class, and sexuality—only women with some element of privilege had truly achieved their goals after second-wave feminism, so arguing that feminism was over erased the experiences of many women.²⁷

The assumption that society was now gender-neutral was a central part of postfeminism’s ideology. This assumed that gender had no impact on a person’s experience in society, which rested on the assumption that a woman’s status in society was the product of her choices—she had the same rights as a man, so if she had a lower-paying job, it must have been her decision.²⁸ American lawyer and legal theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw received credit for coining the term “intersectionality” in a 1989 paper to refer to the intersection between identities that created a unique experience for people with the reality of oppression and privilege.²⁹ Postfeminism’s gender-blind assumption ignores the impact other identities can have on privilege—while women technically had the same rights as men, not all women had privilege in other aspects of their identities. Additionally, while women had legal equality, they still faced oppression in American culture. Women were still expected to subscribe to certain oppressive gender roles,

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Postcolonialism refers to the ideology that came about after World War II which looks at the historical period after the end of Western colonialism; Kavka, “Feminism, Ethics, and History,” 30.

²⁷ Butler, “For White Girls Only?”

²⁸ Ferber, Abby L, “The Culture of Privilege: Color-blindness, Postfeminism, and Christo-normativity,” *Journal of Social Issues* 68, no. 1 (March 2012): 63-77.

²⁹ Ibid.

like existing passively, or allowing men to make decisions for them, and being judged by certain prejudices, such as the Madonna-whore complex.³⁰

While postfeminism garnered popularity—especially in media—it was not founded on universal experiences. The idea of “girl power” and the concept of a “strong female character” were appealing to most people, but it featured the false belief that second-wave feminism’s success had been universal. Many women still struggled to find equality, even if society had reached “gender-blindness,” because of the intersectionality of oppressed aspects of their identities. Overall, the “postfeminist woman” presented in media did not represent all women’s experiences.

Popular Culture Theory

Two schools of thought dominate analyses of media and popular culture. First, the Frankfurt School established itself as a founding site for Critical Theory, which refers to a “series of critiques of other thinkers and philosophical traditions.”³¹ Essentially, it allowed scholars to engage with works in a critical way, and it spread beyond just academic works to include works in the popular culture canon.

The Frankfurt School utilized the concept of the “proletariat”—Marx’s term for the working class—as an agent to integrate philosophy and social analysis.³² Early Marxist thinkers believed the proletariat would rise to create high culture, but instead found popular culture, which included television shows and comic books. In 1930s Germany, this was viewed as a new phenomenon that challenged the aristocratic viewpoints of cultural scholars.³³ This led the

³⁰ A term coined by Sigmund Freud to refer to the viewing of women in a dichotomy of either being pure, virginal, and “good,” or promiscuous and “bad.”

³¹ Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923-1950* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1996); *Ibid.*, 41.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Arnold Schuetz, “The Frankfurt School and Popular Culture,” *Studies in Popular Culture* 12, no. 1 (1989): 1-14.

German Marxist scholars, including philosophers and social scientists associated with the Frankfurt School, to criticize mass culture.³⁴

Critical Theory utilized Marxist beliefs of the function of arts in society. Marxists viewed the arts as a result of economic circumstances—put simply: when a person had the time and money for it, art was good, and when they did not, art was either nonexistent or bad.³⁵ The Frankfurt School viewed popular culture as an industry in and of itself—it created products for a specific market, and was not a result of intellectual and economic circumstances, but an industry actively contributing to them.³⁶ Further, the Frankfurt School believed that this industrialization had destroyed the creativity of individuals in society, as art now “grant[ed] a private life for the sole purpose of recuperating energies for the office and shop, thus making it purposeful for industrial society, and considering it wasteful if it goes beyond it.”³⁷ Finally, the Frankfurt School believed that true art had the power to function as a “means to resist the manipulative pressures of mass society”³⁸ while popular art did not have this power.

The Birmingham School was another school of thought regarding popular culture theory that believed in a more complex relationship between producers and consumers than the Frankfurt School did—popular arts did not necessarily keep the masses from liberation, and instead the consumers had to think about both the text and the context of a piece of media.³⁹

Instead of simply proscribing popular media as oppressive and unable to be used as a “tool” to break out of systems, the Birmingham School viewed it as a conversation between consumers and producers. While producers created content directly for the consumers, the consumer could

³⁴ Arnold Schuetz, “The Frankfurt School and Popular Culture,” *Studies in Popular Culture* 12, no. 1 (1989): 1-14.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Schuetz, “The Frankfurt School and Popular Culture,” 5.

³⁹ Sean Johnson Andrews, “The Birmingham School of Cultural Studies,” *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication* (October 2020)

interact with it and assign meaning to said media. Producers were not necessarily able to determine what would be considered “true art” as the consumer could have a complex relationship with the media presented and consider context and subtext to assign a true meaning to it outside of its status as part of an “industry.”

History of the Superhero

Scholars recently began including superhero stories in academic and scholarly research. Most of this research has been published in the last decade, which shows the growing popularity of mass media scholarship in recent years. Additionally, much of the research on superhero stories has focused on cinematic counterparts—such as the Marvel Cinematic Universe and animated television shows—rather than comic books themselves. Most of this research has been presented in the form of master’s theses and doctoral dissertations. Finally, postfeminist research has largely focused on content produced in the 1990s and later, so this thesis has a somewhat unique focus on the 1980s. However, this uniqueness does not stretch to the findings—many of the conclusions made in research focusing on the twenty-first century aligns with the conclusions I came to in my own research on the 1980s.

One such article analyzed the postfeminist implications in the CW Network’s 2015 television show *Supergirl*, based on the Detective Comics (referred to as DC Comics in this thesis) comic book. The authors conclude that while *Supergirl* explicitly professes feminism at times, the show reduces it to an “empty signifier” and *Supergirl* continues to support “heteronormative femininity” instead of subverting it, leading to the show being postfeminist instead of feminist as it claims.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Ibid.

A doctoral thesis looking at postfeminism in films based on Marvel Comics has a similar conclusion. Marvel movies often utilize “girl power,” and the author concludes that Marvel films should be situated “within a globalized, postfeminist and postracial media culture which encourages a universal ‘womanhood’ based on the ‘common oppression’ of all women.”⁴¹ Another doctoral thesis limited the films studied to just Marvel’s *Avengers* franchise, but the conclusion aligned with other studies regarding Marvel movies as postfeminist, and went a step further to conclude that female-presenting characters in Marvel movies were sexually objectified. This study even goes on to argue that postfeminist pop culture “endorses sexism as normal and even empowering for women.”⁴²

While some postfeminist analyses of superhero stories have come out in recent years, other analyses focused on the larger, more general topic of women in superhero stories. One journal article analyzed the implications of how women and men were presented in superhero movies. The findings included the fact that male characters were seen more frequently and worked alone more often, while female characters often appeared in groups. Additionally, men were more likely to be violent, evil, and powerful, while women were as attractive, afraid, and seductive.⁴³ The authors discussed the impact of portraying these gender roles in this way—children look at superheroes as role models, which impacts the way children view the world.⁴⁴ Children also look at cartoons. One study found that children’s superhero cartoons subscribed very strongly to anti-

⁴¹ Miriam Kent, “Marvel Women: Femininity, Representation and Postfeminism in Films Based on Marvel Comics” (PhD diss., University of East Anglia, 2016), 43.

⁴² Mary DeMarchi, “Avenging Women: An Analysis of Postfeminist Female Representation in the Cinematic Marvel’s *Avengers* Series” (Master’s Thesis, DePaul University, 2014)

⁴³ Tatyana Kaplan, Monica Miller, and Jessica Rauch, “Gender Differences in Movie Superheroes’ Roles, Appearances, and Violence,” *Ada A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology* 10 (2016).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

feminist gender roles, with female characters less likely to be in positions of power and more likely to be stuck in the house.⁴⁵

This thesis largely agrees with the analyses presented of modern superhero stories but apply them to 1980s superhero stories. Scholars largely agree that the superhero genre remains postfeminist, even as other forms of feminism, like the intersectional fifth wave, have gained popularity.⁴⁶ In my research, I take this a step further and analyze how this postfeminist lean has existed since at least the 1980s in superhero comic books and children's animated shows.

Superhero Stories

Introduction

Mass culture led to several forms of media, including comic books. While comic books did not exclusively pertain to superhero stories, the two quickly became associated. Cartoons existed as a precursor to comic books, and these gained popularity in the early 1800s in Western society. Eventually, these cartoons were compiled into collections, which were the first comic books. Comic books as a genre took off in 1938, with the origin of the superhero. Comic books have been organized into different “ages,” which focus on the cohesive styles and movements throughout the genre in different eras. The comic books that are examined in this thesis come from the “Dark Age” of comic books, which lasted from 1985-1996. Anti-heroes were popular during this time, and content consumers preferred darker, less optimistic stories than those of prior eras.⁴⁷ As comic books gained more popularity, superhero stories began to expand into

⁴⁵ Kaysee Baker and Arthur A. Raney, “Equally Super?: Gender-Role Stereotyping of Superheroes in Children’s Animated Programs,” *Mass Communication and Society* 10, no. 1 (2007).

⁴⁶ The present-day wave of feminism at the time of writing, which features organized political activism and targets the systemic and implicit misogyny perceived in modern societies.

⁴⁷ Jesse Kowalski, “Comics: Comic Books,” Illustration History Archive, Norman Rockwell Museum <https://www.illustrationhistory.org/genres/comics-comic-books>

more artistic mediums than just graphic novels, including television shows, movies, and several others.

Within this thesis, I will investigate how postfeminist media tropes manifest in Dark Age comic books and superhero stories. These specific media tropes include the “girl power action hero,” the quintessential strong and heroic female character who still appears vulnerable and stereotypically feminine. Another element of postfeminist media tropes is the sexualization of female characters, often in a way that is somewhat diminishing to women while empowering to heterosexual men. This is presented within the media as “empowering” for the character, though she is often presented in “sexy” outfits that verge on impractical, given the fighting she must do.

Watchmen

Created by writer Alan Moore, artist Dave Gibbons, and colorist John Higgins, *Watchmen* exists as a comic book maxiseries inspired by a couplet from singer-songwriter Bob Dylan’s 1965 hit “Desolation Row”: “At Midnight all the agents and the superhuman crew/come out and round up everyone who knows more than they do.”⁴⁸ Its publication happened from 1986-1987 by DC Comics, and depicted an alternate universe where vigilante superheroes emerged in the 1940s, which altered the course of American history and had effects like America winning the Vietnam War in the 1960s. The main group of heroes in the 1940s was the Minute Men. *Watchmen* follows a nonlinear narrative structure but largely situates itself in 1985 with the United States and Soviet Union verging on war and vigilantism—once popular in this alternate universe—now illegal.

Watchmen features an ensemble cast of characters but finds itself a victim of a term colloquially known as the “Smurfette Principle,” coined in a 1991 *New York Times Magazine*

⁴⁸ Bob Dylan, “Desolation Row,” recorded August 4, 1965, track 9 on *Highway 61 Revisited*, Columbia Records, 1965; Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons, *Watchmen* (California: DC Comics 1987), 6.

article by Katha Pollitt to refer to an ensemble featuring several men and exactly one woman.⁴⁹ Laurie Juspezyk (Silk Spectre II) functions as the “sole woman” in *Watchmen*. She inherits the mantle “Silk Spectre” from her mother, Sally Jupiter, a former member of the Minute Men.

While *Watchmen* saw great commercial success in the 1980s, it did not originally exist to pander to the public. In fact, people viewed the medium of comic books as separate from the mainstream and when it eventually began taking off, “comics fans were partly pleased, partly disappointed, that [their] medium, for so long overlooked, had been spotted by the larger world.”⁵⁰

Dave Gibbons, *Watchmen*’s artist, wrote in an introduction included in the 2014 reprinting of the *Watchmen* complete collection that, “the prime decision for the [story]teller has always been what to reveal and what to withhold... the narrator must be clear about what is to be shown and what is to be hidden.”⁵¹ This quote demonstrates the level of communication between creator and reader aimed for with *Watchmen*—Gibbons and Moore were actively considering what the reader would think while reading the story. Additionally, Gibbons’ status as the artist behind *Watchmen* adds another layer to this quote—Gibbons actively chose what to include or exclude as a visual. This pushes back against the Frankfurt School’s ideology that popular media functioned to oppress the masses, and instead indicates that *Watchmen* should be read and then interacted with, and that what could be seen on the page did not necessarily function as the only thing for a reader to consider. Gibbons’—and Moore’s, by extension—intentions with *Watchmen* align more with the Birmingham School’s belief that popular media does not oppress the masses and

⁴⁹ Katha Pollitt, “Hers; The Smurfette Principle,” *New York Times*, April 7, 1991.

⁵⁰ Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons, *Watchmen* (California: DC Comics, 1987), 6-7.

⁵¹ Dave Gibbons, *Watchmen* (California: DC Comics, 2014), 7.

has a more complex existence as a conversation where the content producer presents media and the consumer assigns meaning to it based on their own experience with it.

Watchmen's depiction of Laurie showcased several traits of postfeminist media, and sometimes even verged on anti-feminism. For one, *Watchmen* strictly followed traditional gender roles. While readers could see Laurie as strong at times, she often found herself as the character put in danger and in need of saving, shown both in fight scenes, and in less intense scenes as well: on one occasion Dr. Manhattan—also known as Jon Osterman, the “true superhero” of *Watchmen*, a character who gains god-like powers after being trapped in an intrinsic field chamber—takes Laurie to Mars and she gasps for air for a few comic panels before Dr. Manhattan creates an atmosphere around her to allow her to breathe.⁵² Laurie also cleans around the house of Dan Dreiburg (Nite Owl II), a fellow member of the Watchmen and Laurie's eventual boyfriend, which reinforces the separate-spheres stereotype from before the second-wave.⁵³

Laurie is consistently relegated to the love interest character in *Watchmen*. For the first part of the comic, she dates Dr. Manhattan, but she leaves him because he pays more attention to his work than to her as a girlfriend.⁵⁴ This happens relatively early in the story, and after their breakup she goes to dinner with her friend and fellow Watchmen, Dan, who harbors feelings for Laurie. He invites her to stay with him, and the two develop a romantic relationship shortly after.

The depiction of Laurie's superhero costume as “sexy” functions as another common postfeminist media trope shown throughout *Watchmen*. Slight subversion of this trope occurs, with Laurie complaining about wearing the costume, and describing how her mother convinced

⁵² Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons, *Watchmen* (California: DC Comics, 1987), 282.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 213.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 81.

her to wear the costume, but she wears the costume without switching it out for something more practical or comfortable, all the same.⁵⁵

While Laurie functions as the primary female character in *Watchmen*, her mother, Sally, also plays a role throughout the comic. Early in the comics, a backstory reveals that Sally was the victim of a sexual assault in the 1940s by a fellow member of the Minute Men, Eddie Blake (The Comedian).⁵⁶ While Sally changed out of her superhero costume, Eddie walked in and commented, “You gotta have some reason for wearin’ an outfit like this, huh?”⁵⁷ Sally attempts to say no, but Eddie Blake beats her up and forces her to the floor. Eventually, another Minute Man—Hooded Justice—rescued her, but by including this depiction, the creators sexually objectify Sally and place her in a situation where she needs to be rescued. Additionally, the creators could have used a “fade to black” method, where they strongly imply that an assault happened, but do not show it, but they chose to depict the events. The later reveal that Eddie Blake fathered Laurie—the result of a consensual encounter between Sally and Eddie after the assault—only adds to this anti-feminist bent.⁵⁸ While postfeminism touted the ability of women to be sexually liberated, the depiction of a woman being sexually assaulted—a situation she has no agency in—does not align with the concept of sexual liberation, and this lack of agency causes this scene to lean postfeminist.

While the writers depict the character of Sally in an anti-feminist way at times, her character still leans into some postfeminist media tropes. To elaborate, Sally seemingly chose to allow Silk Spectre to be sexually objectified. She selected her costume and seems to feel some amount of pride at the viewing of herself in a sexual manner in her heyday. Gibbons and Moore

⁵⁵ Ibid, 33.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 49.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 48.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 304.

demonstrate this through her calling attention to and bragging to Laurie about a pornographic comic made about her in the 1940s sent to her by a fan in the 1980s.⁵⁹

Ultimately, *Watchmen* shows the postfeminist ideology prevalent in the late 1980s through Moore and Gibbons' depiction of women throughout the story. While Laurie is a superhero, by all intents and purposes, she often needs to be saved, and consistently functions as the love interest for male characters. In addition to all of this, she dresses more provocatively than her male counterparts and acts in traditionally feminine roles. Her character reinforces some slightly antiquated gender roles, and the hyper-feminization of her character balances out her ability to fight. Additionally, the depiction of Sally and her experiences with sexual assault characterized her as sexually objectified by other characters, but she acts fine with the objectification and seems to imply that the assault did not shake her too much.⁶⁰ This confirms Rosalind Gill's analysis that women who are in an oppressive society are forced to justify being presented as a sex object.⁶¹ This justification often manifests as women acting as though they enjoy this sexualized presentation.

Further, *Watchmen* had a predominantly male target demographic, which meant that feminism did not concern the creators as much as it would have if the demographic skewed female. However, Gibbons and Moore did utilize feminism in an interesting way—*Watchmen* existed as a doom-and-gloom Cold War comic that utilized fear to market to its demographic. The Doomsday Clock appeared often in the advertisements for the comics, and this reinforced the panic that the public felt regarding the near-constant threat of nuclear war facing the world in

⁵⁹ Ibid, 46.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 44.

⁶¹ Rosalind Gill, "Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of a Sensibility," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 10, no. 2 (May 1, 2007): 147-166.

the 1980s.⁶² People—especially conservatives—also feared change in the 1980s. After second-wave feminism’s popularity in the 1960s and 1970s, this group feared the idea of losing power because women were gaining it. Before this time, most ensemble comic books featured men as the main character, and this was considered the traditional norm by the late 1980s. By having a woman—Laurie—as the apparent main character of *Watchmen*, Moore and Gibbons subverted the expectations of the average comic book reader, even if the representation of her leaned anti-feminist at times.

Wonder Woman

George Pérez wrote *Wonder Woman* as a 1986 reboot of the popular superheroine’s comics partially inspired by the success of the 1975-1979 *Wonder Woman* live-action television show, starring Lynda Carter. The timing of the show made the character of Wonder Woman a second-wave feminist icon, and DC Comics wanted to attempt to continue to capitalize on this success in the 1980s.

Pérez’s *Wonder Woman* included more Greek mythology than the comics plotlines of his predecessors, and this contributed in part to its success. In his version, different gods of Olympus gifted Diana (Wonder Woman’s alter ego), various gifts and skills, including wisdom from Athena and beauty from Aphrodite, among others.⁶³ Diana thus gained godlike powers, and this contributed to her powerful status in the comics.

The Wonder Woman franchise saw a spike in interest in the 1970s with the Lynda Carter television show as well as the popular *Super Friends* children’s cartoon, but in the 1980s DC Comics, *Wonder Woman*’s home comic company, saw overall dismal sales. DC Comics

⁶² This was a symbol created in 1947 by the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* to represent the likelihood of a global catastrophe caused by human actions. It is mainly influenced by climate change and the potential for nuclear disaster.

⁶³ George Pérez, *Wonder Woman Volume 1 Issue 1* (California: DC Comics, 1986)

executives decided to attempt to ameliorate this by rebooting *Wonder Woman*, which aligned well with the Frankfurt School's ideology of media producers creating content specifically for cultural consumers.

Second-wave feminism heavily influenced the 1980s *Wonder Woman* reboot. This appeared in multiple elements of the plot, but her relationships act as a notable place to start. Diana interacted with many humans in *Wonder Woman*, but historically discussions around her human relationships in the comics focused on Steve Trevor, her primary love interest. While Steve Trevor still plays a role in the 1980s reboot, her main human relationships are platonic and with women—her primary friend being a professor of Greek mythology named Julia Kapatelis, who also functions as a surrogate mother in the mortal world for Diana.

Further, the increase in women's involvement in *Wonder Woman* did not end with the pages of the books. George Pérez acted as *Wonder Woman*'s writer and artist for the first 24 issues but stepped back from the artistic side and two women—Jill Thompson and Colleen Doran—replaced him for the next five years of the series' publication.⁶⁴ This real-world event followed a second-wave feminist ideal of gaining more equality for women in the workplace and allowed women to be involved in the presentation of *Wonder Woman* to mass consumers. This gave women power in choosing how to present a superhero marketed towards a largely female demographic, creating a situation that did not necessitate sexualization to entice men to interact more with the comics.

Wonder Woman had a more feminist bent than other superhero stories of the era and subverted the postfeminist "girl power" trope. Diana grew up on the fictional island of Themyscira, populated exclusively by a group of warrior women called Amazons. Throughout

⁶⁴ George Pérez and Jill Thompson, *Wonder Woman Volume 2 Issue 25* (California: DC Comics, December 1988)

the comics, these Amazons are consistently shown to be able to best men in combat, which indicates an idea that women can be stronger than men.⁶⁵ Postfeminist women typically were strong on their own but were not consistently defeating men, instead working with them and relying on them in some capacity.

Wonder Woman has a complex relationship with postfeminist representations in media, however. While it has clear influence from second-wave feminism, it also falls into (and subverts) some of the tropes common in postfeminist media. The postfeminist idea of a strong female character needing a boyfriend to be complete acts as one of these tropes. While Diana has other human relationships that take a bigger role than her relationship with Steve Trevor, he introduces her to the mortal world. However, Diana also showcases the very feminist idea of rarely appearing as the damsel in distress, instead often acting as her own savior.

In addition to being a prominent female superhero herself, *Wonder Woman* also featured a few female supervillains. The Cheetah acted as one such villain and first appeared in Volume 2, Issue 9 of Pérez's arc as writer. The Cheetah, or Dr. Barbara Minerva, worked as an archaeologist who discovered a tribe in Africa while out researching. A guardian with the powers of a cheetah protected this tribe, until dying in an attack on the tribe during Barbara's visit. The powers then passed to her. A problem arose because the powers only functioned as a blessing when the recipient was a virgin, and Barbara was not, which meant she ended up being cursed. In human form, she felt extreme pain, and in cheetah form, she felt extreme bloodlust.

This requirement of the person who possesses the powers of The Cheetah to be a virgin at least implies a fear of sexual liberation. This works as both an anti-feminist concept and a second-wave feminist concept—as mentioned prior, the “sex wars” of the mid-1980s focused on

⁶⁵ George Pérez, *Wonder Woman Volume 1 Issue 1* (California: DC Comics)

whether it was possible for a woman to be sexually liberated in a patriarchal society. This led to a fracturing in the second-wave feminist movement; some feminists argued that sexual liberation was an important element of equality to men and other feminists argued that it was simply sexual objectification and the women who were “sexually liberated” were tricking themselves into enjoying their oppression from men. Additionally, the character of The Cheetah often tended towards jealousy, with this rendition of The Cheetah desiring Diana’s Lasso of Truth—a gods-given gift of rope that requires whoever it binds to tell the truth—and being willing to kill for it.⁶⁶

While on the surface-level The Cheetah appears to lean anti-feminist, her relationship with feminism is more complex than that. To reiterate, her sexual liberation seems to align with the ideology of the anti-pornography feminists of the late second wave. Diana, on the other hand, is sexually liberated without being cursed in the way The Cheetah is. The fact that the writers pitted these two women against each other almost functions as an allegorical representation of the feminist sex wars of the mid-1980s.

Ultimately, *Wonder Woman* demonstrates a clear relationship with second-wave feminism and influences from the movement. From its inception as a reboot to pander to former second-wave feminists in the 1980s to its depiction of Wonder Woman and her associates as feminist characters, it leans heavily into the ideals and goals of the movement. Further, the behind-the-scenes events during its publication (hiring female artists and allowing them to be in charge of how a woman was depicted to women, for one) only added to its status as a feminist publication of the 1980s.

She-Ra: Princess of Power

⁶⁶ George Pérez, *Wonder Woman Volume 2 Issue 9* (California: DC Comics, 1987).

While comic book culture in the 1980s did not have the somewhat expansive popularity seen today, television shows were quite popular. Especially among children, cartoons were a common form of entertainment. *He-Man and the Masters of the Universe*, also referred to as just *He-Man*, which ran from 1983-1985, was one such cartoon.⁶⁷ One of the most popular cartoons of the 1980s, it found most of its audience in young boys. As *He-Man* began to wrap up, the production company behind it, Filmation, decided they wanted to attempt to create a *He-Man*-type show for young girls. *She-Ra: Princess of Power*, or just *She-Ra* for short, ran from September 9, 1985, to December 2, 1986. It ended up being a collaborative effort between Filmation and the toy company, Mattel, to create the characters and television show as well as a line of action figures and dolls.

She-Ra followed He-Man's twin sister, Princess Adora. He-Man rescued her from the Horde in the first episode, which had brainwashed her into being a leader of a Horde squadron. After her rescue, she joined the Great Rebellion, a group of people fighting against the Horde's tyrannical rule, and received a magical sword that allowed Adora to transform into the action hero, She-Ra.⁶⁸

She-Ra has some clear connections to the Frankfurt School's analysis of Critical Theory. Namely, media producers created it for a specific demographic of content consumers in the hopes that they could continue to make money from *He-Man*'s success. To reiterate, the Frankfurt School believed that mass culture media oppressed the proletariat and did not allow for conversation between creator and consumer. *She-Ra* aligns with this belief of complexity because it was not necessarily created to allow a conversation between producers and consumers—instead, it was intended to feed on the interest content consumers had in *He-Man*

⁶⁷ Lou Scheimer, *He-Man and the Masters of the Universe*, directed by Gary Goddard, 1983-1985.

⁶⁸ Larry DeTillo and J. Michael Straczynski, *She-Ra: Princess of Power*, directed by Gwen Wetzler. 1985-1986.

and continue to profit from that. In addition to aligning well with the Frankfurt School, it also aligns with the marketability important to postfeminism.

She-Ra often appears blatantly postfeminist, with storylines that heavily emphasize “girl power,” costumes that make the female characters in it appear more attractive, and its association with the marketable feminism seen from a lot of postfeminist media producers. *She-Ra* used the concept of “girl power” to attract a young girl audience.

While Adora was the main character of *She-Ra*, the first few episodes followed He-Man. He set out to save Adora from the Horde, but she did not believe him saying that the Horde was evil and refused to come with him. The first few episodes come close to depicting Adora as a stereotypical “damsel in distress,” though this was more caused by a sense of ignorance regarding what the Horde was doing on the part of Adora. Adora does almost free herself from the Horde without He-Man’s assistance but ends up unsuccessful.⁶⁹ The need for He-Man to save Adora exemplifies the postfeminist influence on *She-Ra*.

Analysis of 1980s Superhero Stories

In the 1980s, superhero stories mostly upheld postfeminist ideologies. Some, like *Watchmen*, leaned more into the anti-feminist ideologies as they presented strong female characters, while others, like *Wonder Woman*, leaned more toward second-wave feminism as they attempted to attract a certain demographic (former second-wave feminists and others who agreed with the ideology of the movement). Ultimately, these stories were all greatly affected by the demographic they wished to attract as fans—*Watchmen* with men and *Wonder Woman* with feminist-leaning women.

⁶⁹ Larry DeTillo and Michael Straczynski, *She-Ra: Princess of Power* Season 1, Episode 2: “Beast Island,” 1985.

Though not all the superhero stories upheld feminism or postfeminism in the same way, some commonalities still existed between them. First, all the stories featured women dressed provocatively, and the main characters were all thin, white, conventionally attractive women. This aligned with the willful ignorance of race in postfeminism—while people were aware that racial tensions existed, they did not think about it—as creators did not feel any kind of pressure to feature women of color in superhero stories in the 1980s. Further, these women were all depicted as cisgender and heterosexual, which ignores the number of women who identified as LGBTQ+. *Watchmen* included one lesbian character—Silhouette—as a member of the Minute Men in the 1940s who faced expulsion from the group after the reveal of her homosexuality. Shortly after, she and her lover were murdered, which did not offer positive representation for young LGBTQ+ women.⁷⁰ This representation showcased negative aspects of coming out for young LGBTQ+ women and could have contributed to fear and anxiety regarding this.

“Girl power” functioned as another commonality between these superhero stories. *Wonder Woman* and *She-Ra* utilized this more than *Watchmen*, though Laurie still fit the description as well, albeit in a slightly more muted way. *Wonder Woman*, *She-Ra*, and *Silk Spectre II* all demonstrated an ability to fight (and look pretty while doing so, an important requirement of postfeminist media). Though all three characters could defeat the villains they faced, for the most part, they continued to be depicted as feminine and caring through various tropes. For example, Diana continues to behave in a loving and caring way towards her close ones even as she defeats the bad guys.

Superhero stories do not wholly fit into one side of the perceived dichotomy between the Birmingham and Frankfurt schools of thought. Some superhero stories—like *Watchmen*—very

⁷⁰ Gibbons and Moore, *Watchmen*, 27.

clearly align with Birmingham, while others—like *She-Ra*—clearly align with Frankfurt. Still others, like *Wonder Woman*, exist in the grey area between the two schools of thought, with its creation meant to pander to a specific demographic but its execution creating a more complex relationship between the creators, content, and consumers.

The imagery of the media itself also shows this relationship between content producers and consumers. Men functioned as *Watchmen*'s target demographic, and the imagery of the comics evoke senses of fear and despair. The covers of the issues reference the Doomsday Clock, in the backgrounds of several different scenes one can see imagery meant to remind the viewer of the shadows left on the pavement after the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the whole concept of the comic surrounds the end of the world and what happens when people fail to be heroes at a time when it matters most. In stark contrast, the imagery of both *Wonder Woman* and *She-Ra* features bright colors and fun stories. Where *Watchmen* is dark and gritty, *Wonder Woman* and *She-Ra* are hopeful and optimistic.

Further, the director of the Birmingham School, Stuart Hall, edited a book that featured a chapter attempting to explain the absence of girls and young women in popular cultural studies. A level of invisibility exists when looking at girls and subcultures—a subculture is a group within a particular culture that separates itself from that original culture in some way—and this raises several questions, including whether subcultures even exist for girls.⁷¹ Subcultures appear more masculine-focused, but the male domination of the field of sociology at this time could contribute to that perceived imbalance.⁷² This lack of focus on women in subcultures has created

⁷¹ Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber, "Girls and Subcultures," in *Resistance Through Rituals Second Edition*, ed. by Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson (London: Routledge, 2006) 1-15.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 4.

perceived invisibility for them, possibly contributing to the idea that women only engaged in subcultures as part of the fringe—never truly involved, instead only taking minor roles.⁷³

As for how this applies to superhero stories: in the 1980s creators focused mostly on men when creating these stories. This led to women largely left out of the narrative when looking at superhero fans at this time. The lack of female superhero fans contributed to a lack of female-centric superhero stories; *Wonder Woman* stayed the most prevalent superheroine as a plethora of male superheroes continued to gain popularity. This imbalance created a negative feedback loop with getting women interested in comic books—production of stories about female superheroes did not happen because female fans did not make up a large portion of the demographic, but women did not have an interest in superhero stories because the stories largely focused on a male demographic.

Conclusion

Overall, the superhero stories of the 1980s were strongly influenced by the second-wave feminist movement, and the stories they present function as reactions to this movement. While some existed in a borderland between the feminist and the anti-feminist—*Watchmen*—others strongly aligned with the second-wave feminist ideals of the prior decade—*Wonder Woman*. *She-Ra* truly exemplified postfeminist media tropes, with its creation specifically for a broad feminine—not necessarily feminist—audience and its girl-power storylines. In a way, *She-Ra* had style with no substance—it featured a strong, powerful, action-hero girl, but it stopped just before any feminist implications could be made.

This portrayal as strong but not feminist matters because, as discussed by Kaysee Baker and Arthur A. Raney in their article “Equally Super?” children look at cartoons and other media

⁷³ Ibid, 5.

they consume and see role models.⁷⁴ This means that when a child sees a character that they recognize as their gender, they interpret the behaviors of that character as what they are expected to be doing. While studies are lacking to determine whether this exposure fully influences a child without critical thinking to latch on to these roles, there can be no denial that children are fed these norms from a young age, and some children do end up following them. Further, while postfeminist ideology and the tropes and stereotypes that align with it no longer appear as prevalent in media as they were in the late twentieth century through the early twenty-first century, they still appear in media today. This was demonstrated through the research of other scholars regarding postfeminist tropes in modern-day superhero stories such as the ones produced in the Marvel Cinematic Universe.

Along with modern-day superhero stories containing postfeminist tropes, all three of the stories analyzed in this thesis had reboots in the late 2010s. First, *Wonder Woman* came out in 2017 and managed to garner criticism for a postfeminist lean. Filmmakers created this *Wonder Woman* to appeal to a universal audience, thus her feminism was downplayed. This version of *Wonder Woman* did not concern herself with equal rights, because the issue did not appear to affect her in the first place.⁷⁵ On the other hand, *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power* (2018) received both positive and negative comments for the feminist and queer representation the reboot offered. *She-Ra*'s new character design proved divisive, as she was intended to inspire young girls wanting to be warriors and not appear "sexy." Further, instead of giving Adora a boyfriend, she ends the series with a girlfriend, which only further serves to separate *She-Ra and*

⁷⁴ Kaysee Baker and Arthur A. Raney, "Equally Super?: Gender-Role Stereotyping of Superheroes in Children's Animated Programs," *Mass Communication and Society* 10, no. 1 (2007).

⁷⁵ Jill Lepore, "Wonder Woman's Unwinnable War," *The New Yorker*, June 2, 2017, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/wonder-womans-unwinnable-war>

the Princesses of Power from *She-Ra: Princess of Power* and update it for a new audience.⁷⁶

Finally, *Watchmen* (2019) differs from the other two reboots as it functions as a sequel to the original story. This version of *Watchmen* still features a woman as the main character, and still does not have feminism at the forefront. The 2019 limited series emphasizes themes of race that were barely hinted at in the 1986 maxiseries.⁷⁷ All three reboots attempted to fit the stories to the late 2010s, which meant focusing on different issues than what the 1980s versions paid attention to.

Ultimately, the stories presented in this thesis show how the overall rejection of the idea of feminism and embracing of “girl power” after the “success” of second-wave feminism permeated popular culture and acted as a part of the over-arching ideology surrounding women. They also demonstrate how the concept of “postfeminism” in media existed before it truly took off as a popular ideology, as these stories are from the 1980s and most postfeminist media scholarship analyzes stories from the 1990s and later. Postfeminism greatly impacted media, demonstrated through either a subversion of the expected, an attempt to return to the second-wave era while maintaining the appeal of postfeminism, or just following postfeminist tropes throughout the story and its subsequent representation.

⁷⁶ David Betancourt, “Netflix’s ‘She-Ra and the Princesses of Power’ is a youthful revamp bursting with big sword energy,” *The Washington Post*, November 7, 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/arts-entertainment/2018/11/07/netflixs-she-ra-princesses-power-is-youthful-revamp-bursting-with-big-sword-energy/>

⁷⁷ Emily Nussbaum, “The Incendiary Aims of HBO’s ‘Watchmen,’” *The New Yorker*, December 2, 2019, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/12/09/the-incendiary-aims-of-hbos-watchmen>

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