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FROM WONDER WOMAN TO AEON FLUX:
WOMEN HEROES, FEMINISM AND FEMININITY
IN POST-WAR NEW ZEALAND

LYNDA CULLEN

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ABSTRACT

When a woman gains a foothold as a hero, as a warrior or tough woman in popular culture, the gender order is threatened. For the warrior woman’s identity to be legitimated she must perform a coherent subjectivity that negotiates femininity and toughness without appearing to be a pseudo-male or a bimbo (sex object). This study investigates the influence of female heroes in popular culture in New Zealand from the emergence of Wonder Woman in comic book form since World War II up to and including warrior women in twenty-first century popular culture: Xena, Buffy, Aeon Flux and their heroic sisters.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Introduction

Historically, the male action hero in popular culture has disciplined his body and emotions in order to overcome evil and achieve mastery in the name of good. The hero’s taut and muscled body expands to fill the comic book frame or the film or television screen. His presence cannot be overlooked as he revels in his masculine prowess. This project aims to study not the position of the male action hero in popular culture, but the position of the female action hero, from pre-second-wave feminism in the 1950s (Wonder Woman) through to the myriad female heroes that emerged in popular culture after the 1980s.

Central Questions Concerning the Autonomy of the Warrior Woman in Popular Culture

In consideration of the aim of this thesis, I ask: does the woman warrior in popular culture aid women’s autonomous grounded and space-taking subjectivity, or does she abet the demoralizing of women’s sense of autonomy in the western world? Many writers of popular films and television series which have tough women as the main protagonists are and have been male,1 but the complex ways that readers interpret the texts should be the focus of feminist theorists: “What sort of feminism is found in these spaces and to whom is it speaking?” asks Angela McRobbie,2 and one could also ask: what sort of femininity is found in these spaces and to whom is it speaking?

The (white) female hero disrupts the narrative tradition, but does she have the capacity to “effect alterations in the way we conceptualise female agency and subjectivity”?3 Or, as suggested by Susan Bordo, does she simply become a parody, a pseudo-male?4 Hers is not a passive role: the woman hero is given many of the attributes of the male warrior, either through bodily development (muscles) or magic (the television series Charmed, for example), or hereditary powers (as in the case of Wonder Woman or Buffy the Vampire Slayer). However, the woman warrior is eroticized (body, dress, beauty), and this is feminisms’ dilemma.

1 See Appendix
Method

Using a kind of case-study approach, I will examine particular warrior women historically, beginning with Wonder Woman in the 1940s and 1950s. In a linear manner, the decades will unfold, revealing historical events pertinent to New Zealanders and New Zealand women particularly, along with representations of warrior women from popular media, predominantly television and film. The central questions as they apply to this thesis are concerned with representations of feminism and femininity and whether warrior women in popular culture aid women’s sense of autonomy or are, after consideration, to be labeled ‘pseudo-male’ or whether they are promoting the patriarchal cause by reinforcing to-be-looked-at-ness and other traditional feminine attributes.

An analysis of the material requires the understanding of how the text fits in a cultural context and the historical period that the text (in this case, television programme, film or other media) emerges from and how it is received. For example, Emma Peel of The Avengers was seen in a very different light in the 1960s than she is today. The film of the series, also titled The Avengers and produced in 1998, failed to capture the mood of the original series, possibly attributable to the inability of the producers and directors to translate British irony. Uma Thurmin also failed in her attempt to re-present Emma Peel. The Atlanta Journal suggests that Uma Thurman as Mrs Peel is ‘trumped by the cool, feline memory of Diana Rigg, who originated the role’. The remake also needed to address discourses that framed the beliefs and attitudes of the time: a recognizable recreation would be the sign of a good cultural and temporal understanding of baby-boomers in the 1960s. Reception of a text is pertinent to the acceptance or rejection of the hero. In the case of The Avengers, the movie, the original Emma Peel was remembered and reaffirmed as a sophisticated and tough forerunner of contemporary warriors, and she is not to be replaced so easily: even Wonder Woman desired Mrs Peel’s attributes.

Each of the chapters in the thesis has a slightly different focus, depending on the concerns at the time. In the 1950s, for example, Wonder Woman suffered anxieties surrounding marriage and family because being a housewife was the ultimate feminine career. In the 1960s, Wonder

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7 See Chapter 2.
Woman abandoned her super powers and became a ‘wannabe’ Mrs Peel of *The Avengers*. Mrs Peel was a fashion icon, and lived a life of sophisticated hedonism and adventure. She lived alone without being ‘on the shelf’ and was able to do so because she was widowed, and there were limited expectations placed upon her. Wonder Woman has spent her whole life on earth in an ambivalent stasis, and her adventures and identity crises are mapped out as an underlying theme in all of the following chapters. In the 1980s the scarcity of women warriors was reflected in Wonder Woman’s abandonment of earth, and in the 1990s her body was toned and muscled, quite a different look to Wonder Woman’s soft curves of the 1940s. In the early years of the twenty-first century Wonder Woman emulated the male hero and killed a man (to protect Superman, but it is still a violence that she had never resorted to in the past). These incidents give an indication of the shifting focus within and across chapters, depending on the cultural mores and social attitudes at the time.

**Literature on Warrior Women in Popular Culture**

From the 1990s up until the present there has been an increase in popular media (films, television series and so on) that feature heroic female characters as the main protagonist, and consequently much of the theory applicable to the rise of the woman warrior has been written during the last ten or so years. Authored books and anthologies written and edited by gender and women’s studies theorists, and historians, have evaluated discourses that depict women action heroes as positive role models. Interest in the issues of female agency and subjectivity has been expressed through an examination of the female action hero, in various media (mostly television), from Wonder Woman to Aeon Flux. 8

A key theorist, Dawn Heinecken, is particularly interested in analyzing this new female body as what Anne Balsamo defines as a “product and a process”. 9 Heinecken studies body boundaries, bodily control, anxiety over the body, bodily pleasure and the ways in which the female hero operates within current social mores and cultural beliefs. Her material has been

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influential in my writings on the female body in space, and notions of body boundaries. Lillian S. Robinson in her book *Wonder Women: Feminisms and Superheroes* writes on various comic book characters and she examines Wonder Woman from a feminist perspective – committed to a “worldview directed at understanding and remaking society”.

Her material on Wonder Woman was invaluable for my analysis of feminism and femininity in the particular texts I reference in my research. Robinson is Principal of the Simone de Beauvoir Institute at Concordia University in Montreal, and rightly or wrongly, I associate her writings on Wonder Woman with de Beauvoir’s words, “One does not acquire virile attributes by rejecting feminine attributes”.

I took a special interest in Robinson’s observations concerning conventions of beauty and how these applied to Wonder Woman and, also, how they applied to other women warriors who had captured my attention. *Athena’s Daughters* is an edited volume that addresses such second-wave feminist issues as feminist subtext in television series, concrete relationships among women, and a belief in changing power relations. The most useful references in this edited book are those relating to Xena, the warrior princess; to Buffy the Vampire Slayer; and to the French film, *La Femme Nikita*, all of which I discuss further on in my thesis.

The woman action hero is also addressed in the writings of Sherrie A. Inness. Inness has written one book, and edited another, on the woman hero. In her book *Tough Girls: Women Warriors and Wonder Women in Popular Culture* she examines tough women in American popular culture since the 1960s and concludes that toughness is used both to reinforce and to undermine gender stereotypes: cultural ambivalence appears to accompany notions of changing gender roles according to Inness. In the introduction to her edited text this concept is reiterated: ambivalence still attends the figure of the ‘action chick’ and she can inhabit a stereotyped female role while challenging the stereotype. As opposed to the warrior ‘woman’, Susan Hopkins’ approach concentrates on ‘girl power’. In *Girl Heroes: The New Force in Popular Culture* Hopkins takes an approach that is post-feminist (post-feminism is discussed further on in this introduction), and she states that Madonna and the *Spice Girls* influenced the girl culture of contemporary times. This text is Australian, unlike those above which are written from a United

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14 Inness (1999).
States perspective. All of the above literature informs my evaluation of the female heroic figure. I have also relied on primary material – *New Zealand Listener* and *New Zealand Woman's Weekly* – to flesh out pertinent issues and responses to the texts I examine throughout the decades of this study, and to emphasise particular New Zealand cultural moments or trends.

Definitions of femininity and feminism as attributes of the warrior woman are debated in much of the literature that follows. Feminism and/in popular culture is examined in reference to issues concerned with second-wave feminism, girl power, post-feminism, and third-wave feminism. Some of this terminology creates confusion, and clarity of the meaning of these terms is important. Feminisms’ engagement with the media, and in particular, with popular culture is evaluated within the abovementioned texts, but has been a central focus of writers such as Joanne Hollows, Rachel Moseley, Angela McRobbie, Susan Faludi, Ann Brooks, Elizabeth Wilson, and Lorraine Gamman and Margaret Marshment.17

In her book *Feminism, Femininity and Popular Culture*, Hollows inspects the ideas of Gamman and Marshment in order to bring the reader’s attention to the question of whether feminism “is a presence at all, or whether, in order to enter the mainstream, feminism is co-opted by being harnessed to other discourses which neutralize its radical potential”.18 This has been and still is the cause of many second-wave feminists’ anxieties concerning feminism within popular culture. Gamman and Marshment reject the co-option model and suggest as an alternative that “feminist ideas are negotiated within the popular...with results that might not be free of contradictions, but which do signify shifts in regimes of representation”.19 This can be noted in the reception of *Charlie's Angels* in the 1970s. The Angels were the object of the male gaze, but they furthered the cause of the tough woman in popular culture through the roles they enacted. Also, importantly, they encouraged and protected each other through a supportive ‘sisterhood’.

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19 Ibid.
Post-feminism has opposing meanings. It is associated negatively with the backlash for certain theorists, and yet others consider post-feminism as a positive development from second-wave feminism. The New Woman of third-wave feminism, who developed from such popular heroes as Wonder Woman and Mrs Peel in New Zealand, reflects a certain ambivalence as regards feminism and traditional notions of femininity. Joanne Hollows cites Angela McRobbie’s research wherein young women negotiate feminism and femininity, yet do not consider themselves feminist.\textsuperscript{20} Feminism represented in popular culture requires feminist theorists to negotiate texts, to recognize the position of young women and their reluctance to name themselves feminist, and to “think very carefully about the power relations that sustain feminisms’ legitimacy”.\textsuperscript{21} Angela McRobbie says that “the old binary opposition which put feminism at one end of the political spectrum and femininity at the other is no longer an accurate way of conceptualizing young female experience”.\textsuperscript{22} In popular texts there is very little or no reference to feminism, per se, yet, in fact, some writers such as Joss Whedon (\textit{Buffy the Vampire Slayer}) write their scripts specifically in order to empower young women.\textsuperscript{23}

Joanne Hollows believes that feminist scholarship has separated itself out from the ‘ordinary woman’ in society and so the understanding of the connections between feminism and popular culture has been clouded. She is concerned that the “feminine ‘other woman’ was a necessary fiction in order to produce an ‘oppositional’ feminist identity”:\textsuperscript{24} the feminine antiheroine is opposed to the feminist heroine.\textsuperscript{25} In simplistic terms, young women who benefited from the politics of second-wave feminism recognize this ambivalence between the feminist and the ordinary woman and in true postmodern style, have created a montage—a juncture of two points of view (feminism and femininity) to create the beginnings of new concepts within the popular.\textsuperscript{26} Hollows suggests in her conclusion in \textit{Feminism, Femininity and Popular Culture} that

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{20} Hollows (2000) 203.
\item \textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 203.
\item \textsuperscript{22} McRobbie (1994) 158.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Hollows (2002) 17.
\item \textsuperscript{25} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{26} In third-wave style, the debates between second and third wave feminists (generational disputes) often take place on the internet: www.msmagazine.com/winter2004/thirdwave.asp; www.gwu.edu/medusa/thirdwave.html; www.bitchmagazine.com; www.manifesta.net/manabout.html; www.thirdwavefoundation.org/about/history.html; Riot Grrrl online (retrieved 15 August, 2006). However, two texts are of particular interest: Rory Dicker and Alison Piepmeier, eds., \textit{Catching a Wave} (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2003) and Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards, \textit{Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future} (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000).  
\end{itemize}
“instead of popular culture being the object of a feminist ‘makeover’, analyzing ‘the popular’ could teach feminists how to ‘make-over’ feminism”.  

This comment is made in the spirit of third-wave feminism – recognition of and respect for the history of feminism combined with a recognition that women take pleasure in the feminine and particularly within popular culture.

Joanne Hollows teamed up with Rachel Moseley to continue the debate on feminism and femininity within popular culture in their edited 2006 publication *Feminism in Popular Culture*. Hollows and Moseley state that “apart from women actively involved in the second-wave of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s, most people’s initial knowledge and understanding of feminism has been formed within the popular and through representation”. This, they suggest, is also one reason for inter-generational disagreements (second-wave, post- and third-wave feminisms). The process whereby feminism has been incorporated into popular culture has not been a smooth, linear and ‘osmotic’ movement, but one that has been fraught with complexities, not least of which has been the backlash against feminism of the 1980s. The notion of the binary – inside/outside, feminism/femininity, theoretical/popular – is one that postmodern/post-structuralist feminist theories have attempted to deconstruct or destabilize, hence a more ready acceptance from the 1980s onwards of both feminism and femininity within the popular.

**The Warrior Woman in Popular Culture: Concepts of Feminism and Femininity**

Within popular culture, the definitions of feminism and femininity are hotly debated and contested. These two highly charged areas influence the reception of the woman warrior. The female hero disrupts the narrative tradition of the male warrior, creating an imbalance in the normative power relations. This impacts on our sense of self, our subjectivity, and causes us to think about why this should be so. When investigating the relationship between feminism, femininity (subject positions) and popular culture, the history of feminism (second-wave feminism) also needs to be taken into account. In the 1960s and 1970s both radical feminisms and liberal feminisms rejected certain feminine practices, often in opposition to each other. Radical feminisms mostly rejected and condemned cultural reproduction of the ‘violent’ and ‘pornographic’ – a sense that sexism and femininity were conflated to create negative images of

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29 Ibid., 2.
31 Hollows (2000).
women. Liberal feminisms (and I use the plural in a contemporary acknowledgement of the range of approaches taken by second-wave feminist groups) avoided ‘elitist’ criticism of femininity in ways which included women’s involvement in fashion, reading pulp culture, or being sexually liberated.\textsuperscript{32} It is often these same debates that inform the issues concerning representations of women in popular culture today. The warrior woman in popular culture is a complex and ambivalent subject, performing as “both ‘eye candy’ and a figure of power”.\textsuperscript{33}

Beauty and power are exemplified in Wonder Woman, the Amazonian Princess Diana, who was written by her creator William Moulton Marston in terms of what we may consider to be a feminist character, a kind of eroticized essentialist feminist.\textsuperscript{34} Her character expressed the autonomy one would associate with Amazons. That is, women who lived without male companions, yet her body was soft which was an indication that she retained the desirable quality of a feminine, malleable body in spite of the fact that she was a warrior. Her alter-ego, Diana Prince, showed deference to (American) men and negated many of her feminist possibilities through enacting stereotypical 1940s feminine norms. However, for Marston, her belief in peace and love placed her above her male counterpart, who was caught up in beliefs of war and violence as methods to create peaceful societies: Wonder Woman was, as Marston believed of women in general, superior to men. Alternatively, and moving forward into the 1990s, \textit{Xena: Warrior Princess} was never considered by its producers and actors to promote a feminist reading of the text, yet the character Xena offers a combination of femininity and feminism that many writers find optimistic and refreshing.\textsuperscript{35} It becomes apparent that the notion of a female warrior as a legitimate feminist performance is one that is still being debated many decades since the inception of \textit{Wonder Woman}.

Although each chapter in this research tends to have a particular area of focus subject to the social concerns of the time, the central argument concerns concepts of feminism and femininity. Representations of femininity prior to second-wave feminism place “high value on artifice, nurturing, performing the role of care-giver...that firmly endorses the link between romantic love and sexual monogamy, and view[ed] this as the site of a woman’s fulfillment”.\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{32}Elizabeth Wilson, ‘Feminism and Fashion’ in \textit{Adorned in Dreams} (London: Virago, 1985) 228-247.
\textsuperscript{33}Heinecken (2003) 29.
\textsuperscript{34}See Chapter One.
\textsuperscript{35}See Chapter Five.
In other words, woman’s role was defined in society, and any radical departure from this performance was considered deviant. Rebecca Arnold suggests that discarding concepts of femininity in the 1970s was liberating for many second-wave feminists. It was a way for women to compete equally with men. Behaviours other than those purported to be of a feminine persuasion were encouraged, such as sensible clothes, especially trousers; minimal cosmetics; short hair styles and other appearance management behaviours; in order for women to avoid being considered sex objects. Of course, in hindsight, it can be seen that these appearance modifications caused women to look ‘like men’. For women to be treated as equals, normative masculine attributes were adopted, rather than men moving towards the adoption of normative feminine attributes.

In post-feminist terms, Susan Hopkins writes that the “girl hero embodies the contradictions of the post-feminist era: she is both radical and conservative, real and unreal, feminist and feminine”. The female hero is young, beautiful, aggressive, strong and sexual. What is less certain is whether the conflation of feminism with the new femininity is of women’s making, that is, as the thesis develops, I suggest that the notion of female autonomy will become fraught with complexity and the warrior woman in popular culture will be seen to be an extremely ambivalent character. The performativity of the heroic woman must be undertaken with an awareness that causes the hegemonic hero to be displaced and also causes the female hero to radically recontextualise or rearticulate the ‘doing’ of hero, otherwise the warrior woman will fall into the trap of self-objectification – that is, create a self that appears to be bold, brave and savvy, but is inevitably for the consumption of men. The performativity that is enacted by warrior women in popular culture may offer some realistic and empowering roles as well as the more fantastic stuff of dreams, or perhaps the mimicry invites suspicion in that she may be for male pleasure: a failed performance in feminist terms.

In terms of real women in the real world of contemporary New Zealand gender relations, empowering roles such as those offered by the warrior woman appear to be the ‘more fantastic stuff of dreams’. Violence against women by men is extremely prevalent, and mostly in domestic situations – and the practice is not abating. During December 2005 and January 2006, New Zealand

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Zealand Police attended nearly 11,000 instances of family violence,\textsuperscript{39} and from October to December 2005, Women’s Refuge provided 29,230 bed-nights – 15,562 women and 13,668 children. Between November 2005 and January 2006, six women were killed by a partner or previous partner, and it is a fact that 50 per cent of all homicides of New Zealand women are committed by the woman’s partner or ex-partner. 15 per cent of residents in women’s refuges have a permanent disability as the result of battering, and in the 2002 Cedaw Report\textsuperscript{40} statistics include the fact that 15 per cent of women are hit or raped in marriage at least once in their lifetime; 15 to 21 per cent report having experienced physical or sexual abuse and 44 to 53 per cent report having experienced psychological abuse in the previous twelve months.

The 2006 Cedaw report also printed sexual violence statistics, which indicated that the rate of victimization of young women (26 per cent) and Maori women (23 per cent) was also higher than for other population groups. These statistics tells us that women are still considered to be second-class citizens, open to bullying and abuse by men, and it is important to realize that the performance of the warrior woman, the tough girl, or the female hero does not appear to be translating into the real world and real lives of women in New Zealand.

In the conclusion to their text \textit{Gender, Culture and Power} from 1989, Bev James and Kay Saville Smith state that “the gendered culture must be a primary target for those committed to building a more equitable society, for it is the structure in which the inequalities of class, race, and sex flourish”\textsuperscript{41} They also say that the vast majority of New Zealanders are either “Maori, unpropertied, or women”,\textsuperscript{42} and our common interest is “in the creation of new forms of masculinity and femininity”\textsuperscript{43} If the image of the warrior woman changes women’s beliefs about themselves, or their abilities, or their relationships with men, even the slightest amount, then she has the makings of a positive role model in popular culture. This matter will be investigated and reported on in the Conclusion.

\textsuperscript{39} All the statistics listed here are from the Statistics New Zealand website: www.stats.govt.nz (retrieved February 24, 2006); the Cedaw Report 2002 and 2006 found on the Ministry of Women’s Affairs website: www.mwa.govt.nz (retrieved January 4, 2007); the Amnesty website ‘Stop Violence Against Women’: www.amnesty.org.nz (retrieved January 4, 2007); the Preventing Violence in the Home website: www.preventingviolence.org.nz (retrieved January 4, 2007); the New Zealand Women’s Refuge website: www.womensrefuge.org.nz/FACTUPLOAD/ (retrieved January 25, 2007); as well as the \textit{Suffrage Day Resource Kit 2006} put out by the New Zealand Union of Student’s Associations to be used by The Tertiary Women’s Focus Group.

\textsuperscript{40} Cedaw Report, 2002.

\textsuperscript{41} James and Saville Smith (1989) 108.

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 109. These comments are still relevant in contemporary New Zealand society.

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 109.
Subject Areas for Possible Future Research

Issues that are not developed within this thesis that could be developed in future research, particularly in New Zealand culture, are those concerned with race and ethnicity. The warrior women in popular culture in the west that have most currency are white and curvaceous: they tend to conform to classical Greek norms of desirability and ideal beauty – even Tank Girl is attractive within her punk character.44 Maori women have remained out of the equation in this thesis simply by not being mentioned in the history. Maori, like many ethnic minorities worldwide in lands that were colonized by westerners – Dutch, French, British, and so on – were discouraged by the dominant colonial presence from developing and maintaining their own culture. The urban drift in the 1960s in New Zealand when Maori moved into cities in order to gain employment and earn money created a cultural shock for many Maori, who were required to renegotiate their way of acting in the world, from dress to manners and other negotiations that ensured appropriate performances in the pakeha urban environment. Concepts of wahine toa, or strong Maori women, influenced through the iconic images of white women heroes in popular culture may be found lacking. Strong Maori women warriors have not been common in popular culture in New Zealand, but ‘blaxploitation’45 in the form of American black women heroes has also not been included in this research due to a lack of space.

It is interesting to realise that the white female hero in popular culture is somewhat of a stereotyped generalization, although this is no reason not to explore orientalist attitudes. One exemplar is the Wonder Woman of 1970s television fame, Lynda Carter, who was Mexican, and she, and, by default, Wonder Woman, is claimed as a hero by Mexican women and the Mexican media.46 Complexities and complicated relations may both negate and affirm the subject positions of warrior women and those who see them as role models. Wonder Woman may have had an emphatic and defining role to play in the life of many differing ethnicities in New Zealand, but we are most aware of her primary role as a white, middleclass heterosexual

44 See Chapter Six.
45 Movies made by and for blacks. The term ‘blaxploitation’ is a reference to the continued genre of trashy films from the 1960s rather than the use of black actors by white studios. Shaft is the most well-known blaxploitation film, and a black American woman heroic figure can be found in Foxy Brown (the film). A useful website reference can be found at www.blaxploitation.com (retrieved 19 March, 2006).
construct of a beautiful and curvaceous warrior who has both feminine and, in her 1940s incarnation particularly, feminist attributes.

Another area that is given only token attention in this project due to lack of space, is sexuality, particularly queer theory.47 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick says that ‘queer’ turns towards “the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances, and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or can’t be made) to signify monolithically”; 48 and Judith Butler confirms this, stating that gender is one of the means of regulating sexual preference.49 Homosexuality becomes a threat to normative concepts of masculinity and femininity, and the sexuality of the woman warrior is required to be mapped onto a body gendered feminine. ‘Deviant’ sexuality (non-heterosexual) is discussed only briefly and particularly with reference to Xena: Warrior Princess. It is hoped that eventually certain elements that emerge from general discourse will enter popular culture, creating ambivalences that will lead to an acceptance of the ‘queer’, that is, all conceivable sexualities. Meanwhile, the woman hero in popular culture in the western world remains white, middle-class and heterosexual, even although she appears to disrupt master narratives.

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to study audience reception, but such studies involving New Zealand audiences would enable theorists to recognize resistance or acceptance as well as ambivalence towards the warrior woman created within popular cultural media.50 I will, however, overview some notions concerning the pleasures involved in postmodern viewing as put forward by John Storey in his essay ‘The sixties in the nineties: pastiche or hyperconsciousness?’ 51 Storey discusses postmodern popular entertainment as being more complex than a simple pastiche or nostalgic recycling – he sees it as a kind of parody on ways of understanding historical eras. He cites various cultural theorists as saying that popular films borrow from each other; that there is an intertextual recognition as the narrative conventions and cultural stereotypes are subverted in a playful manner. He also describes how reception takes

part in the making of meanings, and the production of a television series or an episode from a television series becomes a form of reception as it rearticulates representation.\textsuperscript{52}

As audiences have become more media savvy and sophisticated, so, too, does the screen become a site of conflicting cultural messages, and it is the role of the viewer to articulate these, always mindful of what is at stake, and for whom.\textsuperscript{53} Although Storey is discussing the postmodern as it applies to the 1990s, this particular ‘post’ was already recognized in the 1960s. Michael O'Shaughnessy in the introduction to his text on media and society highlights the fact that classification into genres has become almost impossible in contemporary life: “fiction, fact, high culture, low culture, Westerns, musicals, documentaries, plays, films, operas, pop music ...”\textsuperscript{54} all of these genres blur and boundaries are challenged. Documentaries, too, contain soap opera, as ‘real people’ act their ‘part’. Theorist Judith Butler suggests that we are constantly acting a part, are performing our ‘selves’. She suggests that our identities are developed through particular discourses; that we are influenced by family, media and institutions.

The world we inhabit has culturally specific boundaries, which makes it difficult for us to change the way we have conditioned our bodies to function. For example, heterosexuality is a compulsory system, and as a strategy of survival, gender performance is required to be believable.\textsuperscript{55} The resistance of normative performativity of gender is exemplified in the warrior woman, and the ambivalences associated with the performativity of this heroic figure in popular culture will be investigated and addressed throughout this research project. I utilize television, film, comic book and video game heroes in order to explore the role of the warrior woman in popular culture. In this way my approach is similar to that of Sherrie A. Inness\textsuperscript{56} and, like Inness, I have concentrated on ‘breadth’ rather than ‘depth’ in my study, given the array of texts and genres in which warrior women appear. This is, I believe, necessary in order to emphasise the

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 245-247.

\textsuperscript{53} Television, as a medium is easier to experiment with when creating different roles for women than mainstream films: it is less costly to experiment with one television episode than to spend millions of dollars to create a major film that may have a negative reception. (Sherrie A. Inness (2004)).

\textsuperscript{54} Michael O'Shaughnessy, \textit{Media and Society: an introduction} (Victoria, Australia: Oxford University Press, 1999) 264.


\textsuperscript{56} Inness (1999).
“pervasive nature of the tough girl in popular media in general”. I also acknowledge that I have chosen to focus my attention on certain tough women in media and not on others.

**Chapter Outline of Thesis**

Each of the chapters in this thesis evaluates the role of the woman hero in a particular temporal framework and relative to New Zealand cultural and social mores. Wonder Woman, as has been observed, will form a connective thread throughout the chapters, her fortunes wavering dependant on the relative status of women at the time. An accompanying cultural narrative based on articles from the *New Zealand Woman’s Weekly* and the *New Zealand Listener* is used to reaffirm aspects of appropriate norms of gendered behaviour, yet these articles often surprise in their subversive and oppositional tone. For example, on one page there may be an article on beauty or etiquette, but on another there could be a critique on equal pay, or instruction on self-defense for women, or an encouragement of the warrior woman in popular culture.

In Chapter One the reader is introduced to Wonder Woman whose creator, William Moulton Marston, believed that women were superior to men. Wonder Woman was an early radical, or difference, feminist. In the post-war United States a woman’s role as mother and nurturer of the family was promoted as a traditional gender identity, and Wonder Woman was vilified by commentator Dr Frederic Wertham as an unhealthy ideal for girls. Wonder Woman was, of course, created through parthenogenesis, could not marry a human without losing her powers and being rejected by the Amazons, and had no children. All of these characteristics were the antithesis of the normal American woman and therefore considered suspect by Dr Wertham. New Zealand women’s identity was also mapped out along similar gendered lines as those of the United States, and in New Zealand, too, the moral majority expressed concern regarding Wonder Woman and other comics that may have a negative effect on New Zealand youth. Judith Butler’s notions of performativity of self are also introduced in Chapter One, along with the investigation of bodily practices that encourage women to act in a ‘feminine’ manner which are

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57 Ibid., 7.
58 For example, Sydney from the television series *Alias* (2001) is one of many warriors listed in the appendix, but who is discussed only briefly in the body of my thesis.
61 Butler (1990).
found in Iris Marion Young's essay on comportment. Wonder Woman's dress and appearance management are also critiqued in consideration of western ideals.

Chapter Two moves on into the 1960s and the revolutionary ‘flower power’ movement which characterizes the coming of age of the baby-boom children, post World War II. This was the age of television, and the heroic Mrs Peel from *The Avengers* was introduced to New Zealand television channels in 1965. Mrs Peel was a sophisticated ‘new woman’ and she dispelled the notion of what women ‘ought’ to be and do. Her appearance coincided with the rejection of marriage as the *only* alternative for young women. Mrs Peel was a fashion guru, adventurous, and a free agent. As a widow, it was permissible for her to live a particular lifestyle, but many young women challenged social mores and began to realize that to live life outside of the dream of marriage did not necessarily result in being stigmatized, but had exciting potential. In the 1960s Wonder Woman rejected her costume, began to wear ‘mod’ gear and adopted the alias Diana Prince as a permanent identity. She chose to become mortal and gave up her super powers because she was infatuated with Mrs Peel and her lifestyle.

Chapter Three introduces television programmes in the 1970s that place women in the position of protagonists and action heroes. *Charlie's Angels* is a programme that is discussed at length for its ambivalent representation of warrior women, as is the use of disguise as a liberating agent for the Angels. Disguise is also pertinent for the televised Wonder Woman programme of the 1970s that starred Lynda Carter. She is remembered for her ‘twirl’ as she changed from her Women’s Air Corp identity, Diana Prince, into her Wonder Woman costume and her true self, Princess Diana. Interestingly, as Diana Prince, she is madly in love with Steve Trevor, her boss, yet as Wonder Woman aka Princess Diana, it is Steve Trevor who swoons over the super hero. It is in the 1970s that feminism and femininity begin to be conflated, where notions of identity outside of that of home-maker become reality: Charlie’s Angels can be racing car drivers or beauty queens, nurses or sporting stars.

Chapter Four concerns the decade of the 1980s, when women entered the workforce en masse as men’s equals. There is reference to the backlash against feminism, and a detailed

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64 Wonder Woman does find Steve Trevor attractive, however, and this often causes her to question her purpose.
account of the various uses of the term post-feminism, some positive for feminism, others negative, and an introduction to third-wave feminism which is also fraught with ambiguous definitions. Madonna, the pop star, entered the world’s field of vision in the 1980s and instigated girl power. Tough film characters Ellen Ripley from Alien and Sarah Connor from Terminator continued to reinforce new ways of ‘doing’ femininity, and Wonder Woman’s ongoing adventures are chronicled. Extracts from Jane Ussher’s book on femininity and performance are evaluated, too, and her theory of ‘being, doing, resisting or subverting “girl”’ is mapped on to the performances of the warrior women included in the chapter.

Chapter Five evaluates new technologies and new warriors such as Aeon Flux. Backlash phenomena include the film La Femme Nikita, a Pygmalion tale, and Thelma and Louise offered a heroic double suicide drama. Girl power and the Spice Girls are essential ingredients of third-wave feminism, and the heroes for the younger girl, Sailor Moon and the Powerpuff Girls take their place alongside Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Xena Warrior Princess. The 1990s saw the creation of myriad warrior women, all of whom asserted themselves by operating forcefully in public spaces, yet it appears that their performances are conflated with femininities that allay any fears of subversion of the gender order.

Chapter Six is the final chapter. The twenty-first century warrior women are but a shadow of their former selves. Some have been party to nostalgic remakes which have had some success (Charlie’s Angels) or have “bombed” at the box office (Charlie’s Angels Full Throttle, The Avengers, Aeon Flux) and some have committed suicide (Xena Warrior Princess, Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Max from Dark Angel). It appears that the backlash against women’s autonomy is still active and that the performance of the warrior woman is punishable by either physical or box office death. Or is it that, further to Thelma and Louise’s resisting of incorporation by driving off a cliff to their deaths, contemporary warrior women have died as “an imaginative feminist move forward dedicated to mythic if not immediately realizable alternatives”? The questions raised by this more optimistic notion are whether it can be realised in a post-feminist and third-wave feminist world, and where girl power would fit in this equation. These ruminations will be expanded upon in my Conclusion.

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Feminism recognizes that it is through the visual that gender is written onto bodies, particularly in the west. Feminism has been most productive of theories concerning the visual since the 1970s, influenced primarily by John Berger's text *Ways of Seeing* and secondarily by Laura Mulvey's 1975 essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'. Contemporary feminist scholarship also encourages an examination not only of the text, but the processes of its reproduction. This naturally leads to a consideration of absence (within the text and of texts that are not produced) as well as presence. If a woman claims visibility in the public sphere, is being seen or visible, she may be able to renegotiate visual power. By becoming visible, or creating the spectacle usually associated with masculine visibility and establishing an acceptable and successful performativity of the hero, she may dissolve current discourses of to-be-looked-at-ness. The reception of the female hero as legitimate warrior in her own right or stereotypically as object of male desire may depend not only on her believable performance but also on changing cultural attitudes to women's (and men's) bodies.

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69 Mulvey (1975).
70 Ibid.
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Wonder Woman, Equality and Femininity

In the introduction, it was made apparent that the warrior woman in popular culture was seen to be subverting notions of ‘normative’ femininity. In this regard, New Zealand society in the 1950s held attitudes that are no different to those in the twenty-first century, particularly concerning the performativity of gender (although notions of feminine and masculine performance per se have evolved since then). In post-war New Zealand a woman’s role was that of nurturer and home-maker. There was a need to create a certain order and comfort as a reaction to the chaos and discomfort brought about during the war. Women left their war-time jobs and moved into the home as men replaced them in the public arena of paid labour. Wonder Woman came from a land where women lived in harmony without men, and reproduction was through parthenogenesis – a direct contrast to normative 1950s beliefs in New Zealand, Britain and the United States.

In this chapter, Wonder Woman in comic book form is studied in relation to a woman’s place in 1950s New Zealand popular culture. She is castigated for her subversive role by the moral right for inciting juvenile delinquency while, simultaneously, offering many of her readers an alternative to the ‘norms’ of femininity. Her ability to commit herself fully to adventure, her assertiveness and her bodily and vocal (her voice was the voice of authority) command of space are juxtaposed to her ambivalence concerning her love for a man and the pressure to ‘fit in’. None of these issues were lost on her young New Zealand readers.

Wonder Woman: The Amazing Story Unfolds

Wonder Woman is one of the longest-lived female heroes in western popular culture and the only one to have a totally female lineage. Wonder Woman has been in print in comics since 1941 (there was a short hiatus in 1986-87, but comics featuring Wonder Woman are still being produced). Wonder Woman had many of the characteristics applauded by first wave feminism – she was nurturing and caring, peace loving, and promoted truth and justice for all – she stood on

71 Wonder Woman aka Princess Diana was conceived through parthenogenesis. See Les Daniels, Wonder Woman: The Complete History (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2000).
high moral ground and is based extremely loosely on Greek myth: the Amazons (the tribe to which Wonder Woman belongs) were a powerful nation of women until Hercules tricked Queen Hippolyte into giving him her magic girdle\(^73\) and he then enslaved her people. With help from the Goddess Aphrodite, the magic girdle was returned, but Aphrodite insisted that all Amazonians wear the bracelets as a reminder of their former slavery and a warning to “keep aloof from men”\(^74\). The tribe settled on an island they named Paradise (which was seated in the Bermuda triangle) and the author saw fit to create a second, younger generation (Wonder Woman, aka Princess Diana, is Queen Hippolyte’s daughter). Similar to the text written by Charlotte Perkins Gilman in 1915, *Herland*, there are no males with which to procreate.

However, heterosexual desire overwhelms the princess when a crashed World War II pilot washes up on Paradise Island and she nurses him back to health. In the process, she falls in love with him. Wonder Woman flies him back to the United States in her invisible plane after she has healed him, and she then takes on a Women’s Air Corp identity, Diana Prince, in order to not only be close to her love, but also to fight the good fight of democracy against Germany in order to end the war. Queen Hyppolite had been concerned about the turn of events outside of Paradise Island, and she was advised by the goddesses Athena and Aphrodite to send an Amazon champion with the pilot (Steve Trevor) to fight for “America, the last citadel of democracy, and of equal rights for women”\(^75\).

Queen Hyppolite provided the snazzy red, white and blue costume that Wonder Woman would wear, along with the magic girdle. She wore her bracelets of amazonium (although this was renamed ‘feminum’ in the television series)\(^76\) and a magic lasso which forced those it encircled to tell the truth. Armed thus, she was ready to fight, and to protect the man she loved, of course.

Parthenogenesis, or the ‘wonder’ of reproduction without males, fades into oblivion in the 1950s after Marston’s death, when the “theme of heterosexual romance was insistently fore

\(^{73}\)The magic girdle may signify virginity, but it has also been referenced as the source of both strength and of youth, as different writers at different times were extremely liberal in their reading of the symbolism attached to Wonder Woman’s accessories.

\(^{74}\)Daniels (2000) 29.

\(^{75}\)All Star Comics December 1941-Jan 1942 cited in Daniels (2000) 25.

grounded" in *Wonder Woman* comics. Not only did Wonder Woman learn to fly in this period but a new origin story was created whereby the Amazonian background was eliminated and "hence the non-reproductive creation of the Amazons themselves and of the queen's daughter." Her powers become gifts from the gods and her parents are now human. Wonder Girl also appears at this point—a teenager.

Wonder Woman is encapsulated in Lillian S. Robinson's book *Wonder Women: Feminism and Superheroes*. In this text, Robinson examines a large selection of heroes from comics, but the chapters of interest are those that specifically relate to the heroic figure of Wonder Woman—her creation, and the female collective (the Holliday College Girls) who helped Wonder Woman when required. This notion of a collective rather than an autonomous stand-alone hero is a theme that will be examined further in my thesis. The chapter 'Genesis' in Robinson's book discusses the originator of *Wonder Woman*, William Moulton Marston, a psychologist who used the pseudonym Charles Moulton, and his belief that women are superior to men and that in order to achieve worldwide peace, men must bow down to woman—submit. Wonder Woman's readers have been predominantly male, and Marston believed that it was males that needed his message most. In his book *Wonder Woman: the Complete History*, Les Daniels suggests that Marston may have exposed millions of boys—the young men of the 1960s—to the ideals of feminism. This notion of a male author promoting feminism is visited further on in my thesis, with such writers as Joss Whedon (*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*).

Lillian S. Robinson states that the author "devised his kick-ass heroine as an activist who could force evil to destroy itself 'unless Wonder Woman can bind it for constructive use'". Marston's stance could be considered similar to radical, or difference, feminism in that he believed that women were peace-loving and nurturing. In his scientific life he contributed heavily to research which resulted in the development of the lie detector, and *Wonder Woman's*

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80 Robinson (2004).
82 Daniels (2000).
83 See Katha Pollitt, 'Marooned on Gilligan's Island: Are Women Morally Superior to Men?', *The Nation* (December 28, 1992), which references various radical feminist texts, among them: Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).
lasso serves a similar purpose in the comic: as soon as she traps a victim with her golden lasso they cannot help but tell the truth. Marston was also extremely interested in power relationships—"dominance, compliance, submission and inducement". Many of the studies he conducted in his professional life became fodder for Wonder Woman plots. For example, as a psychologist he studied undergraduate sorority rituals, which became integrated into Wonder Woman comics in the form of Etta Candy and the "one hundred beautiful, athletic girls" (the aforementioned Holliday College Girls): a band of 'sisters' to help Wonder Woman in her quest for peace (and democracy) in the world.

Marston's personal life was somewhat unusual for the times. He married young and later, the student who assisted him in much of his work on power relations and truth experiments began living harmoniously with him and his wife. Each of the women had two children. The relationship is reflected in the triangular relationship between Wonder Woman, Diana Prince and Steve Trevor, although this theme also occurs in Superman comics between Superman, Clark Kent and Lois Lane. Marston died in 1947, and under the new creative regime, Wonder Woman lost many of her feminist characteristics. Lillian S. Robinson comments: "Wonder Woman did pioneer a kind of feminist questioning, however commercially packaged and conceptually limited, at a time when few other voices in American society were raising such questions," and from a personal point of view it is true that she was instrumental in changing attitudes, however slowly, to how girls could and should act.

When America joined the allies in 1942 in the fight against Hitler and Japan, Wonder Woman was sent to help win the war and although the other Superheroes also helped in the war effort, Wonder Woman was the only comic character consistently operating within this narrative. However, her warrior stance was soon diluted by a post-War backlash:

As a 40s bombshell, Wonder Woman struggled not to swoon over Steve, brushing him aside, putting her mission first... After Marston died of cancer in 1947, the idealism began to weaken. She constantly fretted about her secret identity (a powerful McCarthyism vibe runs through these issues) and whether she should chuck it all and marry Steve. A standard scenario had Wonder Woman walking

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85 Ibid., 35.
down the wedding aisle only to be interrupted before vows by would-be world dominators.\textsuperscript{87}

War propaganda played on two themes in encouraging women’s support. Firstly, womanly support of male loved ones; and secondly, the theme of fascism as a destroyer of women’s rights. Wonder Woman, however, belonged to a tribe/community which rejected male authority. New Amazons were created through parthenogenesis,\textsuperscript{88} therefore, in post-war ideas about family, there was ambivalence concerning the notion that a warrior woman could bear and nurture children in a heterosexual relationship.

Comics, Juvenile Delinquency and the Post-war Backlash

The dilemma that faced Wonder Woman was the lot of women in post-war allied countries: propaganda promoted the normalization of American women’s domestic role and traditional gender identities. Heterosexuality and consumerist notions of femininity worked together to promote the right way to be a post-war woman, and these concepts were intimated and spelled out in mass media, advertising, popular psychology, mainstream religion, schools, and all cultural institutions. Perhaps it was \textit{Wonder Woman}'s Amazonian past that caused Frederic Wertham to comment at the time that \textit{Wonder Woman} is a “frightening image for boys and a morbid ideal for girls”.\textsuperscript{89}

The comic was considered by many to be a corrupting and corrupt “form of discourse”\textsuperscript{90} and Frederic Wertham considered comics as “an invitation to illiteracy”\textsuperscript{91} and a means of encouraging criminal and delinquent behaviour. Psychologically, they “stimulate unwholesome fantasies”\textsuperscript{92} according to Wertham. He also believed that Batman and Robin were homosexual and \textit{Wonder Woman} was lesbian:

She is physically very powerful, tortures men, has her own female following, is the cruel ‘phallic’ woman. While she is a frightening figure for boys, she is an

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{87} Hank Stuever, ‘Wonder Woman’s Powers: As the Superheroine Turns 60, She Maintains Her Grip on the Psyche’, \textit{Washington Post} (Wednesday April 18, 2001) C01.
  \item \textsuperscript{88} A later expansion by Marston on the origin story was that Queen Hippolyte sculpted a statue and induced Aphrodite to grant it life.
  \item \textsuperscript{89} Wertham (1953) 193
  \item \textsuperscript{90} Reynolds (1992) 7. For a local and less rigid comment, see Rev. William Heerdegen (Vicar of Rangiora), ‘What About Comics?’, \textit{New Zealand Woman’s Weekly} (December 13, 1951) 60.
  \item \textsuperscript{91} Wertham (1953) 118
  \item \textsuperscript{92} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
undesirable ideal for girls, being the exact opposite of what girls are supposed to want to be. 93

The 1954 Congressional hearings on juvenile delinquency and comics led to the concept of a self-censoring code by the writers and publishers of comics. The ideological message contained within this code is that crime does not pay. Reynolds indicates that by the mid-1980s this code had been rescinded, with comics being promoted for a “mature audience”. 94 In New Zealand, the Mazengarb report (The Report of the Special Committee on Moral Delinquency in Children and Adolescents) of 1954, also investigated moral delinquency in children and adolescents. 95 There was a Government inquiry into vice in the United Kingdom in the same year too, as the ‘problem’ of unhealthy sexual practice and delinquency in teens was fore-grounded in these post-war allied countries. 96 Page seven of the Mazengarb Report concerns itself with sexual wrongdoings in Lower Hutt by adolescents, resulting in the belief for a need for sex education and an investigation of community morality. Particularly concerning was the precocity of girls. It was recognized in the report that comics have a strong influence on children, and similarly to the American Congressional hearings, it was strongly recommended that comics be registered and that “printed matter injurious to children” (that is, printed matter that places undue emphasis on sex, crime or horror) 97 be banned.

In Standing in the Sunshine, Sandra Coney points out that: “Between 1945 and 1954 more than 5000 homes had been erected in Wellington’s Hutt Valley” 98 (the initial area concerned in the moral panic which led to the Inquiry) and “42 per cent of that population was under 24 years old. Elbe’s Milk Bar was the gathering place for the local youth”. 99 Coney indicates, too, that milk bar culture was a new phenomenon in New Zealand society and “a legacy of the American

93 Ibid., 33, 34.
95 Post-war, the question of sex education by parents, and behaviour of teens, was included as part of the general cultural discourse contained in the New Zealand Woman’s Weekly: Mary Miller, ‘Daughters in their Teens’, New Zealand Woman’s Weekly (June 19, 1952) 54-55; Mary Miller, ‘It’s Different for Young Folks Today’, New Zealand Woman’s Weekly (Feb 14, 1952) 50-51; Mary Miller, ‘Should a Girl be Shy or Forward?’ New Zealand Woman’s Weekly (May 15, 1952) 60-61; and Bernard L. Calmus (The Psychologist’s Consulting Room), ‘Practical Interests For Adolescents’, New Zealand Woman’s Weekly (May 8, 1952) 52-53.
97 Ibid., 23.
99 Ibid.
servicemen who visited during the Second World War. The post-war backlash in New Zealand also promoted a normalized, heterosexual, domestic and nurturing role for women and encouraged marriage and reproduction. As part of the moral panic associated with delinquent youth and the Mazengarb enquiry, the role of mothers was put under the spotlight, and many were found to be ‘irresponsible’ – working, and therefore not creating positive domestic role models for their daughters (although of the teenagers involved in the inquiry, only 24 per cent of mothers worked, and of these, all but three had made alternative arrangements for their children).

**Teenagers, the Movies and Marriage**

A direct result of the Mazengarb Report was the *Police Offences Amendment Act 1954* which resulted in the banning of contraceptives or contraceptive information to under 16-year-olds. This legislation only served to indicate to those outside the culture that New Zealand was a prudish and narrow society. ‘Teenager’ was a word that entered New Zealand’s vocabulary and a concept that entered consciousness in the 1950s, and consistent with Kelly Schrum’s arguments in *Some Wore Bobby Sox*, the term became synonymous with male teenage culture rather than female. For example, the New Zealand and Australian ‘bodgie’ derives from the British Teddy Boy. He rides a motorbike, wears greased hair, listens to rock’n’roll and has a ‘widgie’ girl on the back of his motorbike, as a kind of appendage to his identity: “In the public imagination, teenagers first appeared in the 1950s, complete with distinct dress, habits, music, and culture. And they were primarily white and male.” Schrum suggests that the female teenager began to emerge in the United States in the 1920s. The teenage awareness of ‘cultural cool’ in the 1930s particularly – through reading, listening to the radio, and observing the behaviour of older girls such as wearing stylish dress and accessorizing, as well as what was ‘in’ and what was ‘out’ is documented in Schrum’s introduction. *Seventeen* magazine, the first teenage magazine, appeared in 1944, and the first edition, published in the United States, sold out its print run of

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100 Dunedin Evening Star cited in Coney (1993) 175.
101 In *Wonder Woman*, most of the women who are employed, even in wartime, are unmarried, and Wonder Woman expresses envy of the wife and mother. See Robinson (2004).
104 Ibid., 2.
105 Ibid., 1-10.
106 The first New Zealand teenage or ‘young woman’s’ magazine was *Thursday* which appeared in 1968 although overseas teen magazines including *Seventeen* had been available for some years before this at booksellers.
400,000 copies in six days. Schrum states that "before World War II, manufacturers, marketers, and retailers in some industries, such as fashion, were among the first to recognize high school girls as a discrete social group with purchasing power".

During World War II, the American troops who were stationed in New Zealand had a strong influence on the culture. They were paid well and "carried the ersatz sophistication of Hollywood movies". Hollywood movies had impressed themselves on the romantic imagination of many New Zealand women, and this was reflected in the fact that over 1,000 young New Zealand women married American servicemen once the war was over.

Danielle Sprecher, in her thesis on appearance and gender in interwar New Zealand cites various statements which indicate that American films had begun to influence public taste between the wars both in Britain and in New Zealand. However, New Zealand's continued attachment to British culture was reflected in radio programmes, the content of which was mainly derived from the BBC. Ruth Butterworth states that:

During the post-war reconstruction of a narrowly materialistic and male-dominated and narrow-minded society, radio provided in one sense an alternative voice. If only in the kitchen, it placed a seal of approval on the despised activities of mind and spirit and reinforced the intellectual activities of nonconformers.

Conforming, for women, in post-war New Zealand consisted of a career as nurturer. The 1950s was the Golden Age for New Zealand society, with a British market for dairy products and high prices for wool. There was little unemployment, and the 'baby boom' of the post-war years raised the population to two million people by 1952; there was a massive housing boom from

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109 Between 1942 and 1944 more than 100,000 Unites States servicemen spent various periods in New Zealand: Hamish Keith, New Zealand Yesterdays: A Look at Our Recent Past (Surrey Hills, NSW: Reader's Digest, 1984) 278.
110 The New Zealand government saw the U.S. as a major ally after World War II, and joined the Australia, New Zealand and United States (ANZUS) as well as the South East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) and fought with the U.S. during the Korean and Vietnam wars.
111 Keith (1984) 279
112 Ibid., 278
1954 until the early 1960s; and consumption levels guaranteed to make up for the rationed war years. A woman’s role was that of nurturer, housewife and consumer.

Prosperity post-war and the new home appliances that “lessened the housewives’ physical burden” meant assumedly, that there would be less domestic labour required and that wives and mothers would have more freedoms. However, the ideology of the time encouraged women to look to their family and ignore their own needs. A domestic media emerged in New Zealand – Aunt Daisy on the radio along with a noticeable change in the New Zealand Woman’s Weekly magazine which pointedly focused on the importance of housekeeping. Young women’s fantasies, fed by Hollywood movies, were channeled into practical ways of keeping one’s husband ‘interested’, or expectations that one would conform to the norm of marriage and motherhood. For example, in an Editorial entitled ‘The Age of Chivalry – Dead?’, the woman under discussion, the woman secretary, recognizes that particular forms of chivalry are out of place in the office “But...she frequently carries her ‘equality’ over into her private life and so often robs her escort of the opportunity to be gallant...”.

Women were expected to conform to a particular behavioural style or sense of ‘femininity’. While the New Zealand Woman’s Weekly also published articles debating women’s role in society, it mostly reinforced ‘feminine’ behavioural norms.

Wonder Woman, Equality and Femininity

Gloria Steinem, in her introduction to Wonder Woman states that she read Wonder Woman comics from the age of seven. As a woman of a similar age, yet living in a country town in New Zealand, I can verify that I also read Wonder Woman comics from the age of seven. This was in 1957, and any copies of DC Comics or Sensation Comics, which also featured Wonder Woman, which arrived in New Zealand prior to the 1960s, would have been odd shipments with no continuity, as DC Comics did not become regular imports into New Zealand until the 1980s. The other Superheroes were very readable, but Wonder Woman was particularly

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115 Laurie Barber, New Zealand: A Short History (Auckland: Century Hutchinson New Zealand, 1989).
119 Ibid.
121 DC Comics is a trademark name.
122 Jeremy Bishop, Manager, Gotham Comics, Auckland. (E-mail communication 29 March, 2006).
special. She converted her enemies to a belief in equality, and a respect for the rights of others, and her magical/scientific accoutrements were desirable. She had to be more stoic than Superman because she did not have the ability to fly (not yet, anyway), and nor did she have his strength. As I entered high school, television culture came to New Zealand, but *Wonder Woman* was one of the few positive female super heroes for New Zealand girls to relate to in the comic world. Steinem asks “How many mothers...tamed their daughters instead of encouraging their wildness and strength?”123 This question is pertinent to the accepted performance of femininity, and the role of the Warrior Woman in popular culture since *Wonder Woman* appeared.

The comic book *Wonder Woman* offers a subversive role model in many ways, and stimulates possibilities for acting outside of the norms of femininity. In the early comics, this notion was reinforced by a continuing series within the comic’s pages, ‘Wonder Women of History’, which told the story of heroic role models (for example, Amelia Earhart).124 However, always already containing ambivalences that are only too human, Wonder Woman’s need to protect the man she loves allows the reader to identify with her dilemma: normative behaviours versus subversive behaviours. Wonder Woman’s reliance on the Holliday girls also offers a sense of collectivity, a notion which was a moving force in the early women’s movement. Although *Wonder Woman*’s creator believed that women would achieve equality worldwide by the end of the Second World War, this, unsurprisingly, did not eventuate.

However, woman as peacemaker was foremost in the mind of at least one New Zealand journalist in the wake of the violence and devastation of World War II. Dorothea G. Bremner asks in 1953, “Will Women Rule the World?” in a review of Sir Julius Vogel’s predictions from his book *Anno Domini 2000* (written in the late nineteenth century).125 Vogel predicted that the British Empire and the United States would be ruled by women, and the article in itself was timely, as Princess Elizabeth (a woman) had been crowned Queen of England on June 2, 1953. Dorothea Bremner was forward thinking, because her contributions to the *New Zealand Woman’s Weekly* tended to promote women as the equal of men in the public sphere. For example, an earlier article in July 1952 titled: ‘Woman’s True Place in a New World’ provides the reader with a history of women’s inequality. She asks: “Why can’t they [women] compete in a modern world

on an equal footing with men and receive a fair deal?"126 William Moulton Marston, creator of Wonder Woman, would have agreed emphatically with Bremner’s criticisms of women’s inequality and the undervaluing of women’s virtues: “intelligence, honesty, courage, business acumen...”127

Continuing this trend of women and equality in the early 1950s, the New Zealand Woman’s Weekly published a “candid comment on women’s wages”128 by a woman reader who believed that women should fight for “man-sized wages”.129 Captions under the photographs in this article indicate that women can do men’s work and can also handle heavy machinery on farms.130 This transgressive femininity is at odds with the traditional domestic role of women. The ‘learned helplessness’ associated with ‘a man to the rescue’ had to be eliminated during the war years when women were required to either be self-reliant or rely on each other. This spirit opened women to new considerations about their “true place”131 in peace time. The New Zealand Woman’s Weekly was also responsible for a 1952 article demonstrating jiu-jitsu holds in order that a woman could handle herself in a threatening situation with a man. The article is entitled ‘Hold that Man!’132 which is a tongue-in-cheek reference to romance (and the ultimate dream of ‘catching’ a husband).133

The sub-heading accompanying this article reads: “A woman can be more than a match for a man – if she knows how”.134 The article may have been considered quite novel or unusual to the reader of the New Zealand Woman’s Weekly in the 1950s. Very few women would have considered learning jiu jitsu (and self-defence is still, today, not taken up by women as a matter of course), yet the appeal was similar to the fantasy associated with a heroic figure such as Wonder Woman. When World War II ended, New Zealand women sought to reconfigure their lives to include socializing with men again, as most of the men left ‘at home’ were the old, the

126 Dorothea Bremner, ‘Woman’s True Place In a New World’, New Zealand Woman’s Weekly (July 31 1952) 15, 54.
127 Ibid.
129 Ibid.
130 Ibid.
131 Bremner (1952) 15.
132 New Zealand Woman’s Weekly ‘Hold that Man!’ (May 8, 1952) 32-33.
133 As early as 1908 The Girl Peace Scouts, as well as giving badges for first aid and caring for a baby, introduced girls to self defence in the form of jiu jitsu, and Sue Lytolis continued this trend of women’s and girls’ self-defence in the late 1970s.
134 ‘Hold That Man!’ (1952) 32.
young, and the infirm. Also, many women had lost their husbands in the war, and vulnerability to unscrupulous men was a reality.

As Sherrie Inness points out in her book on tough girls, ours is “a culture where women are often considered the ‘natural’ victims of men”, therefore the fantasy of being able not only to defend oneself, but to change the dynamics and the outcome, would be energizing, to say the least. However, for the majority of women, learning jiu jitsu was considered to be as fantastic as the adventures of Wonder Woman. In this age (1950s), a woman married her husband (was ‘given away’ by her father to another man) and then adopted his full name (for example, Mrs George Smith), relinquishing her identity. Being independent and ignoring social mores was a sign of deviance (madness, hysteria, man-hating, attention seeking) and almost never considered to be ‘lady-like’. A grown woman was feminine, and learned to hold her body in a confining way in a confined space: “Men act and women appear”. In other words, men are active and dynamic and women are passive and to be looked at. John Berger suggests that a man’s presence is indicative of “what he is capable of doing to you or for you...power which he exercised on others. By contrast, a woman’s presence expresses her own attitude to herself, and defines what can and cannot be done to her”.

The authority of the husband or father was upheld in law in the 1950s, and women were required to be under the protection of a man for their own safety and wellbeing. “Men have strength, and women don’t, and need the protection of a man” was a belief that Colette Dowling grew up with in the 1950s. Dowling also informs the reader that the myth that exercising could compromise a woman’s ability to conceive was still valid well into the twentieth century. In her introductory chapter, Dowling offers the theory of the frailty myth: In the nineteenth century women were restricted physically and mentally because reproduction required all of their energies, and fertility was the ‘cult of true womanhood’. Victorian men believed that if women were not defined through a particular lens of ‘femininity’ which involved “an appropriate

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135 Inness (1999) 8. Although Inness is talking about the United States, New Zealand women are vulnerable to the same beliefs.
136 Berger (1972) 47.
137 Ibid., 45-46.
139 At High School in the 1960s there were many girls at my school in Auckland who were excused from physical education when they were menstruating.
140 Dowling (2000) 4. Of course, this discourse is one of middle and upperclass Victorian womanhood, as lower class women had few options regarding hard physical work.
‘character’, and an appropriate ‘look’\textsuperscript{141} which emphasized frailty and fragility (emotional and physical), then the whole of the race would be threatened. That is, if women did not concentrate on their fertility and their children, the generations would be lost. This notion of femininity, the frailty myth, was reproduced in a new guise in the 1950s. Women were discouraged from recognizing “their physical strength and spirit”:\textsuperscript{142} discourses of frailty encouraged women and girls to believe that their physical development was limited or that it was in their best interests to limit their physicality in order to preserve notions of ‘femininity’. Discourses of frailty encouraged women and girls (as well as men and boys) to believe the myth of women as frail, “turning them into physical victims”\textsuperscript{143} and a paradigm of victimhood was created and was ‘naturally’ associated with femininity.

Iris Marion Young’s essay \textit{Throwing Like A Girl}\textsuperscript{144} explores aspects of ‘femininity’ such as bodily comportment and use of space and movement. She notes that women confine their bodies in space by such things as taking small steps, keeping their arms close to their sides, hugging a load to their body, and so on. She notes that “women often do not perceive themselves as capable of lifting...women tend not to put their whole bocies into engagement in a physical task with the same ease and naturalness as men”\textsuperscript{145} and she goes on “…a space surrounds us in imagination that we are not free to move beyond”.\textsuperscript{146} As women, we are uncertain of the capabilities of our bodies. We are inhibited, and Young suggests that the feminine body is experienced as fragile – as a ‘thing’ that “exists as looked at and acted upon”\textsuperscript{147} - women are distanced from themselves and self-imposed restrictions on embodiment (comportment, motility and spatiality) are directly related to women’s position in society, that is, “physically inhibited, confined, positioned and objectified”.\textsuperscript{148} Also, a woman lives with the threat of invasion of her body space (inappropriate touching, rape) directly related to her ‘belief’ in her frailty, and creating a confined space in which to operate is a way of distancing any threat.\textsuperscript{149} Voice is another area that has been controlled in women. Women collude with notions of propriety and ‘femininity’ by not speaking out and this same silence accompanies women’s fear. Speaking out is a challenge to women’s

\textsuperscript{141} Ibid., 4.
\textsuperscript{142} Ibid., 4.
\textsuperscript{143} Ibid., 6.
\textsuperscript{144} Young (1990).
\textsuperscript{145} Ibid., 145.
\textsuperscript{146} Ibid., 146.
\textsuperscript{147} Ibid., 150.
\textsuperscript{148} Ibid.,153.
\textsuperscript{149} Ibid.
sense of powerlessness in social situations. Ros Comins reminds her readers that men take up airspace in various ways, from grabbing attention in the classroom as boys to constantly interrupting women’s conversation as men, to verbal abuse of each other and women in public spaces.\(^{150}\)

Naturally, in the 1950s these second-wave feminist issues were not spelled out, but in retrospect, the expected performances of normative femininity were contrasted to the ‘rational unified subject’ of the white European male. Judith Butler’s later theory of performativity and her emphasis on performative speech acts – those that bring into being that which they name such as the birth of the child and the cry “It’s a girl”\(^{151}\) – indicate that Marston was attempting to destabilize traditional concepts of identity. Butler, in *Bodies that Matter* points out that the production of an identity comes about through discourses concerned with expectations of what male bodies are and do, and what female bodies are and do. The cry ‘it’s a girl’ compels particular discourses about what ‘girl’ means, and the “girling”\(^{152}\) of the girl begins at birth. Butler says that “Femininity is thus not the product of choice, but the forcible citation of a norm, one whose complex historicity is indissociable from relations of discipline, regulation, punishment”.\(^{153}\)

Few bodies conform to the ideal feminine female (or masculine male) and so ‘passing’ depends on a performativity that has been honed (often painfully) through practice. Butler states that:

> Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being.\(^{154}\)

Acts, gestures, body and voice all contribute to a normative feminine or masculine identity. These normative identities are mapped onto heterosexual bodies, and masculine performance has

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\(^{151}\) That which Butler calls the ‘girling of the girl’: Judith Butler (1993) 232.

\(^{152}\) Ibid., 232.

\(^{153}\) Ibid.

\(^{154}\) Butler (1990) 43-44.
been valued over feminine performance. Misperformance is often punished.\textsuperscript{155} For instance, when one inspects Wonder Woman's tough performance, although she was criticised by Frederic Wertham in the 1950s, it was mediated by her adherence to feminine beauty and her sense of ethics, or the belief that women are more moral than men.

Wonder Woman was the ideal of femininity in so many ways, yet in others she destabilized traditional notions surrounding the performance of normative femininity. She was powerful and did not 'throw like a girl' and she said exactly what she thought. It was as Diana Prince, her secret identity, that her 'femininity' expressed itself. As secretary to Steve Trevor she took direction from him and as such, she was powerless and obeyed the 'feminine' laws of comportment, motility and spatiality, as well as being vocally agreeable. It may be through her Diana Prince character that she became acceptable as Wonder Woman, as a woman warrior who did not threaten the gender order,\textsuperscript{156} because in her human disguise she recognized and followed the 'heterosexual norm' of the time.

**Wonder Woman, Gender and Appearance Management**

As well as the heterosexual norm operating during the 1940s and 1950s, early twentieth century advertising created a critical attitude towards bodies, and encouraged self-monitoring in this arena too, offering a variety of products and solutions from which to create the 'ideal' body (for both men and women).\textsuperscript{157} The 'ideal' of femininity in the 1940s was emulated by Wonder Woman – smallish breasts, tiny waist and hands and feet, big hips and solid arms and legs. By 1950 she had become more curvaceous with larger breasts, slimmer legs and arms and bigger feet and hands (although in the 1950s, it was still a sign of femininity to have a small shoe size). The pin-up queen, calendar girl and beauty queen were all popular objectifying representations of women in the post-war era, and were images that many women in the western world attempted to copy, encouraged by advertising within popular media, or movie stars on the big screen. Wonder Woman fulfilled all the requirements of the ideal body in the 1950s – thanks to her new

\textsuperscript{155} In the film *The Long Kiss Goodnight*, Geena Davis's tough character uses her hands to snap a deer's neck out of mercy in the opening sequence, and this may have contributed to the film's lack of success. Her toughness, although humane, was a misperformance of femininity. That is, although it was a humane gesture, it was too radical for a contemporary audience to accept because women's performance in connection to animals has always been one of nurturing and kindness and helplessness in the face of such tragedy – a man would necessarily be called upon to kill the poor creature.


\textsuperscript{157} See for example, 'Become Beautiful in a Week', an advertisement for Crème Tokalon White Colour from *New Zealand Woman's Weekly* (4 January, 1940) which promises youth and beauty for women.
illustrators – a body that was beyond the abilities of most women to ‘achieve’ regardless of potions and products available in the marketplace. However, because Wonder Woman’s everyday dress was that of the beauty pageant or calendar girl, she could be related to more as a fantasy ‘inner’ self: her dress was symbolic of the United States. Her star spangled outfit embodied all things held dear by patriotic Americans.

It must be remembered that in the 1950s (and late 1940s) women’s dress compromised women’s ability to act in ways that were considered unfeminine, as well as promoting an image of women as fertile. For example, ‘slacks’ were frowned on as street wear (casual activities such as barbeques and ‘lounging’ were appropriate venues for women in trousers) and ‘pedal pushers’ were acceptable wear for sports and by teenagers. Woman as flower ready for pollination, (shirtwaister dress, that is, belted at the waist and gathered with fullness – often accentuated through numerous ‘stiff’ petticoats) and woman as fetish (pencil-slim skirt and four inch stilettos) were the most approved and most popular styles.

Dress is a bodily practice and bodies are always situated in culture. All cultures ‘dress’ the body in some way – through clothing, tattooing, cosmetics, perfume and other body enhancers. Dress is one of the means by which bodies are given meaning and identity socially. Appearance management involves personal notions of the self or selves, and acceptance of this appearance in the public sphere. Joanne Entwistle is a dress theorist who is aware of the way in which particular bodies are received in society, and that certain bodies such as the female body-builder, are considered subversive and unsettling.158 Luckily for Wonder Woman, she is not from the western world, but was ‘born’ in one of those mysterious islands in the Bermuda Triangle. She is from Paradise Island, and western clothing conventions do not apply – or do they? Her short pleated skirt changed to culottes after the first issue when it was realized that her physical actions required a more ladylike garment, and over the next few years Wonder Woman’s baggy shorts become tighter and shorter (befitting the calendar girl image). Her bodice had always relied on her breasts to hold it up, but towards the end of the 1950s the wings of the golden eagle depicted on the bodice grew to encompass her ever expanding breasts. Her 1940s bossy high-heeled boots which emulated the Greek shin protectors in shape were exchanged in the 1950s for flat soft undemanding shoes that tied like espadrilles. Her prim 1940s brunette hair with its natural

permed look gave way to a softer style, longer and wavy like a brunette Rita Hayworth. Her tiara widened to compensate for the missing permed curls above her forehead, and her facial appearance completely changed: her 1940s small round face with high arched brows, exposed eyelids and dark red lipstick on cupid lips was transformed into a 1950s longer face with different shaped brows, no obvious lid on the eyes and full lips painted pale pink with nail polish to match. Harry G. Peter illustrated *Wonder Woman* comics until just after the death of Marston, and from 1949 onwards, there were various artists involved in both cover work and the story illustrations, each with their own individual interpretation of Wonder Woman and their own take on current notions of femininity.

Wonder Woman’s appeal is that her dress and appearance practices are far removed from western norms in certain ways (her strength, her ‘magic’ accessories, her costume and her body appears to be both flawless and hairless), and approach the ‘ideal’ of western norms in other ways (her beauty and her ‘perfect’ body). Wonder Woman’s weakness is in her bracelets. The bracelets are a reminder for Amazons not to succumb to the seductive power of the opposite sex. It is therefore only when a man chains or welds them together that she loses her super strength. Because she will never submit willingly, it is only through blackmail (being forced to protect others) or through being drugged that this can happen: that she will allow the bracelets to be connected, resulting in a loss of her super strength. If the bracelets are removed completely, Wonder Woman reverts to savagery: irrational, lacking strategic thought and allowing for dangerous and destructive possibilities. The bracelets allow her to take part in culture by engaging both mind and body. On a physical level, the bracelets are useful bullet-deflectors.\(^\text{159}\) Marston may be suggesting that the enslavement of women was not nice, but that without the remnants of the shackles (the bracelets) women could not take part in culture. This is not a feminist concept, but neither is a ‘Paradise’ Island inhabited by women only wearing what appear to be orientalised harem costumes (and these evolve into shortie-nightie negligees in the television series in the 1970s). Children use clothing in order to relegate people to gender categories from a very early age.\(^\text{160}\) There are only two gender categories (only two ‘normative’ categories), and social expectations are such that females have traditionally been assumed to have an interest in feminine pursuits such as appearance management and beauty culture, and men are


expected to show little interest in such things. Even when cultural realities change, individual perceptions often take some time to change. Fashion often expresses tensions between new ways of performing gender and paradigmatic stereotypes. This becomes clearer throughout the following chapters in relation to Wonder Woman’s appearance management throughout the decades into the twenty-first century.

However, even in the 1940s and 1950s, Wonder Woman was a complex and ambivalent subject. Her body shape and costume changed to suit the conventions and fashions of the times, and her heterosexual love for Steve Trevor was in direct conflict with Amazonian lore. Her secret identity, Diana Prince, caused her even more confusion as she attempted to find happiness in a world where successful performance of self was gauged in terms of the white European male. Issues of importance socially in the post-war era such as marriage, heterosexuality, femininity, motherhood, nurturing and home-making were all played out in the comics, constantly threatening Wonder Woman’s identity as an Amazon. These ‘problems’ were also the site of ambivalence in the 1950s housewife.

Betty Friedan’s 1957 assertion that: “there was a strange discrepancy between the reality of our lives as women and the image to which we were trying to conform, the image that I came to call the feminine mystique” was made in her home country, the United States, but was echoed in a 1959 article in the New Zealand Listener which criticized the boredom of the domestic role for women and the lack of “educational opportunities” for women. Sandra Coney states that:

It wasn’t until the 1960s – when the daughters of those post-war mothers were spear-heading the modern women’s movement – that the psychological hazards of the ‘traditional’ lifestyle began to be publicly uncovered…Suburban neurosis was soon to become the buzzword of the decade.

The ‘daughters of those post-war mothers’ included among them, those who, like myself, read Wonder Woman comics and wanted to have our freedom, but also hoped for marriage. Our ambivalence was echoed in the dilemma faced by our comic book hero concerning the air force pilot she had rescued.

In Chapter One, Wonder Woman faced the dilemma of being a warrior woman with feminist tendencies in post-war America. This is because in the 1950s, marriage and the family were promoted as the ultimate career for women. In the 1960s, marriage was still a desirable career, but these were the years of discontent, the rise of youth culture and challenges to conventional ways of thinking and questioning of cultural mores.

This chapter will evaluate the tough character Mrs Peel, her influence in the ‘swinging’ sixties, and the continuing ambivalence concerning femininity and gender relations. Much of this chapter is devoted to fashion and dress, because of the upheaval created by boutiques and their effect on fashion houses. The boutique was synonymous with individuality, and Emma Peel wore only the very latest of fashions, all originals. She was the first to wear a mini skirt, purchased from the designer Courrèges three months before the style appeared in boutiques. Mrs Peel represented the New Woman who rejected the Old Order of British propriety. The storylines of *The Avengers* redefined roles available to women in television, and Mrs Peel, as a single woman, offered an alternative to marriage as a career.

**Television, The Avengers and Modernity**

In hindsight, Britain and the United States were rival cultural influences in New Zealand in the 1950s and early 1960s. As a former colony, New Zealand adapted the British model for Government administration and education and although New Zealanders considered themselves, unlike the British, to have no class system, British cultural mores and popular culture influenced New Zealand media and society in general. However, New Zealand was influenced by United States popular culture, particularly films. This influence was mainly due to the presence of American soldiers in New Zealand during the war years. In the 1960s, television became the predominant medium through which the cultural rivalry was played out.

In 1960, television entered the New Zealand cultural equation and by 1963 most homes or neighborhoods in the main cities had a television set. Each centre had its own local programmes,

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as the overseas shows had to be flown from centre to centre, similar to the processes of the Film Society in New Zealand today, and it was not until 1969 that the first national news broadcast simultaneously in all main centres. 165 Paul Smith writes that the entertainment provided was “wholesome, generally innocuous...clearly had families in mind”. 166 However, Susan J. Douglas points out that the entertainment offered generally presented women as dependent on men, from Mr Ed through to The Wonderful World of Disney and, therefore, not at all wholesome and innocuous. 167 One of the new frontiers in the 1960s, was space exploration, which provided huge scope for television programme themes: Lost in Space, My Favourite Martian, Star Trek and Thunderbirds were all United States programmes that screened during the 1960s, yet “seventeen of the top twenty-one programmes from 1966 to 1971 were British” according to Paul Smith, 168 which reflected New Zealand’s continued colonial ties.

One British programme from the late 1960s that had a significant impact on viewers was The Avengers with the lead characters John Steed and Emma Peel. The Avengers had begun life in 1961 on British television and Patrick Macnee (the actor who plays John Steed) said that the series concerned “two men in dirty macs going around looking macho and being buddies”. 169 In the second series, 1962-3, John Steed exchanged his trench coat for dapper suits, bowler and umbrella – a dandy yet recognizably tough. He now had an aristocratic class identity. He had various male, then female partners. Marc O’Day states that “as pop assemblages, Steed and his partners had lots of fun, demonstrating their superiority through the exercise of good taste and refinement based on a combination of traditional and modern elements – especially in the Peel years...” 170 Of the early female partners, the actress Honor Blackman as the widow Mrs Catherine Gale was the most memorable and she was retained for the third series in 1963-4. Honor Blackman’s black leather costumes began to influence fashion, and the series eventuated into a pop culture phenomenon. Chapman states that “One of the claims frequently made on behalf of The Avengers is that it was the first popular television series to provide roles for women

who were portrayed as being equal to men. In particular, Blackman's character of Catherine Gale has been claimed as a feminist heroine".171 She had intelligence, having earned a PhD in Anthropology and she had technical skill, as evidenced by her judo expertise. She also had sex appeal and she appeared to be Steed's equal. The Avengers' parodies of the thriller genre; the attention to style rather than content; the themes concerning discourses of technology; and modernity teamed with the conflicting interests of traditionalists, created a cult following. In 1964 Honor Blackman left the series to play the part of Pussy Galore in the James Bond film Goldfinger, and Steed makes playful reference to this in their last episode together.

In the fourth series, the Shakespearian actress Diana Rigg was cast as Emma Peel, and this was the series bought for New Zealand television. The New Zealand Listener from November 26, 1965 carried a front page image of Emma Peel172 and an inside article which overviewed the series and noted that the New Zealand Broadcasting Corporation (NZBC) viewing committee had picked up the newer series starring Emma Peel because the film quality was much better than in the earlier series. The first Peel/Steed series was black and white, and the second was in colour. New Zealand viewers were lucky enough to be watching each episode only weeks after they had been screened in Britain. The series began screening on Auckland television (AKTV2) and Wellington television (WNTV1) in December, 1965.173 According to Chapman, Emma's name was a pun – the heroine was to have 'man-appeal' or 'M-appeal', thus 'Emma Peel'.174 Peel was an intelligent and sophisticated widow who preferred karate to judo, and her wardrobe rejected the leather of Honor Blackman and adopted the notion of fashion leadership. John Bates, London fashion designer was asked to create Emma Peel's wardrobe specifically for the series.175 Mrs Gale (Blackman) and Steed had a certain camaraderie, but Steed and Mrs Peel created an onscreen sexual tension that left the viewer unsure of their relationship. This fourth and a fifth series which also starred Diana Rigg and Patrick Macnee are considered the classic period of The Avengers. The narratives border on the fantastic and parody the notions of chaos versus order – a constant theme is the notion that traditionalists found it hard to accept modernity.

172 The caption reads: 'Shakespearian actress Diana Rigg is the gun-toting, judo-throwing heroine of the Avengers', coming on television'. New Zealand Listener (November 26, 1965) (front cover).
173 New Zealand Listener (December 10, 1965) 38.
Emma Peel was John Steed’s equal, supposedly, but in true 1960s style, her character was qualified as having ‘man-appeal’. Ambivalence in the character reflects changing notions concerning women’s capacities and abilities, but within a man’s world. From the position of a fifteen-year-old girl living in Auckland in the suburbs and about to embark on a ‘secretarial course’, Emma Peel was as unbelievable yet desirable as Wonder Woman. School Certificate was the highest qualification needed or perhaps mentally able to be achieved by a girl according to my mother, who was influenced by 1950s stereotypes of what a woman should be/do. Emma Peel was beautiful, witty, charming, a martial arts expert, and able to hold her own in any verbal and most physical battles. She was truly a heroic female figure in popular culture. However, she was created by men, one of whom said, when referencing Honor Blackman’s character, Mrs Gale: “She was the first really emancipated feminist, and I’m quite proud that we did it first”.176 Emma Peel as introduced in the New Zealand Listener in 1965 was:

...a doll who can blink her eyes and say ‘Hands up’ in most languages. She looks at ease in mink, in a Dior, or in leather. She is a small-arms expert and skilled in judo, yet her extremely feminine charms give her unquestioned access to places that Steed might hesitate to enter.177

The quote above references Emma Peel’s femininity and her toughness. However, in keeping with notions of femininity, when the actress playing Emma Peel (Diana Rigg) is discussed, her ‘measurements’ are a necessary part of the description.178

The Avengers was inspired by James Bond movies, but Steed and Mrs Peel reinscribed gender roles, and the juxtaposition of tradition and modernity, genre mixing, parody, and intertextual practices make it a subversive text in the rather staid programming practice then in force in national television in New Zealand.179 Emma Peel takes on the active role, rejecting that of the victim even when the going gets tough, and manages to operate in a calm and confident manner with a humorous or witty quip at the ready. It being the 1960s, however, there is a certain class-ism and orientalism within the series, but aspects of post-modernity such as an emphasis on style and a move away from realism, compounded by the notion of instability of identity opened viewers to new considerations of ways of being in the world. Series four and five – which

178 Ibid. The quote reads “she ... has a 36-24-36 figure”. This objectification was a normal description for an attractive woman subjected to the media gaze.
179 The fantastic ninja in the series titled Samurai, was an exception, and an early evening must for the young.
featured Emma Peel – were watched by millions. Chapman states that in the late 1960s the series earned millions of pounds and was screened in over seventy countries – an estimated 30 million viewers. Emma Peel allowed for those New Zealand women and girls ‘tuned to the frequency’ to see a deconstruction of the stereotype of women’s role as breeder and keeper of the home. She lived alone without anxiety about ‘being on the shelf’, and dispelled myths about what good girls ‘ought’ to do.

Mrs Peel was no ‘dolly bird’ but a sophisticated ‘new woman’, leading the way for teenage baby boomers such as myself. Diana Rigg, who plays the character, is quoted as saying: “I identify with the new woman in our society who is evolving. Emma is totally equal to Steed. The fighting is the most obvious quality”. Yet she is also quoted as saying quite the opposite: “Emma isn’t fully emancipated”. Her ambivalence mirrors the confused sexual politics of the 1960s which is also reflected in a male journalist’s comment concerning Diana Rigg after an interview with her regarding her role in The Avengers: “A delightful girl, but I wish she hadn’t felt it necessary to help me on with my coat”. This statement is emulated in the narrative contained in The Avengers: tradition versus modernity and paradigmatic attitudes confronted by the sexual revolution.

Baby Boomers, Bricolage and the Old Order

The ‘swinging sixties’ was truly a time of revolution in the western world: in music (Bob Dylan, Jimi Hendrix, The Beatles); the space race between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R.; the building of the Berlin Wall; the Vietnam conflict; the death of Marilyn Monroe; the Cuban missile crisis; the Cold War; the assassination of President Kennedy; the invention of the contraceptive pill; student riots in Europe; the assassination of Martin Luther King; and Woodstock music festival in New York. In New Zealand, Laurie Barber writes from the point of view of an opinionated observer: “In the 1960s kaftan-wearing, woolly-bearded alternative lifestylers and their beaded, bra-less mates staged ‘love-ins’ and summoned the world to ‘ban the bomb’ and ‘legalise marijuana’”. With the advent of television, New Zealand was in more

181 A term used to refer to 15+ United Kingdom teen girls who were fashionable and up with the latest trends. Diana Rigg who played Mrs Peel was 28 years old.
182 Miller (1997) 73.
183 Ibid.
184 Ibid.
185 Barber (1989) 175.
immediate contact with the rest of the world, and New Zealand baby boomers became even more aware of the gap in thinking between the generations. Their parents had accepted authority and the law without question, but the new generation questioned all authority and this was reflected in music, social relations, and examination of cultural mores. Young women, too, began to question women’s role in society as the feminist movement gained momentum. The *Feminine Mystique* was published in the United States in 1963 and in 1966 the author, Betty Friedan, helped found the National Organization for Women, which coined the phrases ‘Women’s Lib’ and the ‘glass ceiling’. ‘Suburban neurosis’, or a feeling of being trapped in the home and separated from other women in the community, was experienced by women in New Zealand as more and more women needed psychiatric treatment for illnesses related to restricted housewife and mother roles and, others, according to Christine Dann, vented their dissatisfaction by publicly demanding societal changes.¹⁸⁶ For example, in opposition to doctors, most of whom were male, and as early as 1954, a family planning clinic opened, offering advice and practical help to women, as many New Zealand women had little knowledge about contraception. Dann makes it clear that feminism was finding new forms in that it was channeling women’s discontent into “efforts to raise the status of women”.¹⁸⁷

Women’s discontent was not deliberated in a radical manner in the popular women’s magazine *NZ Woman’s Weekly* which had, since the end of World War II, mostly reinforced stereotypical attitudes to femininity. In 1968 the need for a public forum for women’s voices was filled by an alternative magazine called *Thursday*, founded in order to cater to young New Zealand women. The question of woman’s role was hotly debated in the magazine. Young women tended to disassociate themselves from the old order, and the ‘generation gap’ was a very real phenomenon, so although women of all ages read *Thursday*, opinions expressed by older women were ignored or discounted by the young.

Young women demanded change in the uniformity of fashion, too. In the 1950s, the little shop or ‘boutique’ came into vogue, propelled by the need for change from the middle-of-the-road styles contained in the department store and in most magazines. Mary Quant started her

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 3.
boutique Bazaar in 1955 in London\textsuperscript{188} and the beginnings of street style, a personal approach to appearance management, began to influence fashion.\textsuperscript{189} Nova magazine appeared on the London scene in 1965 and was also shipped to the antipodean magazine stores in Auckland, New Zealand. The magazine advertised itself as “a new kind of magazine for the new kind of woman”.\textsuperscript{190} It encouraged individuality and a personal approach to appearance management such as visiting the haberdashery department or the opshop in order to create a personal fashion statement. Bricolage was a very prominent aspect of Nova magazine which set it apart from other contemporary magazines. Nova did not even offer prices or stockist information in its fashion features. In a similar vein to The Avengers, style took precedence over content. The magazine appealed to the new woman who wanted to distance herself from her mother’s generation in every way.

The generation gap may not have been a new phenomenon, but it received more attention worldwide with the advent of the new tele-visual communication network. From The Avengers to Bewitched (Samantha was continually disrupting Darren’s notions of what a good wife should be) to the eruptive emotions of screaming female Beatles’ fans, young women were increasingly questioning the expectation that they were required to marry and be ‘tied to the kitchen sink’ with large families. In fact, both young men and young women had taken the threat of nuclear war to heart: the Cold War between the U.S. and U.S.S.R. was also an ‘arms race’ whereby each tried to outdo the other in the amassing of nuclear armaments, and many, not just in New Zealand, but within the western world, felt strongly about bringing new life into such a depressing and nihilistic society.

Many of these anxieties, insecurities and a questioning of the old order were addressed or satisfied to an extent in pop cultural themes: The Avengers represented all of the ambiguities of the new modernity or post-modernity in the fantastic and surreal chaos versus order episodes that many New Zealanders looked forward to every week. As a plus, women got to experience, vicariously, a way of being which spoke of freedom and adventure yet was still strikingly feminine, in the form of the awesome Mrs Peel. To me, as a young woman about to enter the

\textsuperscript{189} Fashion had always been dictated by the fashion houses before this, and there were really only one or two fashionable ‘looks’ and versions thereof.
working world, Mrs Peel spoke of freedom and sophistication, yet autonomy was not a long-term option because I was still caught up in the ultimate dream of marriage and ‘being taken care of’. As it eventuated, Mrs Peel disappeared from public life into the home when her long-lost husband reappeared: as a widow she had freedoms that were denied her in marriage. The married woman had a different position in society than the young single working woman or girl in the 1960s. Wives often had to rely on the generosity of their husband for their allowance, and articles such as that written by New Zealand Woman’s Weekly staff writer Patricia Hill introduce some practical statements made by the New Zealand Marriage Guidance Council on what an allowance is, and its importance to a wife as an “independent person”.191 The ‘Teen View’ in the same issue of the magazine concerns etiquette: “Nothing makes a girl feel better than to have doors opened for her, a helping hand offered when she is teetering down steps in high-heeled sling backs…”192 More so than in the 1950s, articles in the New Zealand Woman’s Weekly swung between notions of stereotyped femininity and notions of individualism and autonomy. The latter concepts were mostly mapped onto the teenager or ‘new woman’: the baby-boom generation coming of age, stepping out into the workforce in the post-war economic boom, when businesses were growing in New Zealand. Many young women such as myself were employed in ‘supportive’ roles such as receptionist or telephonist or secretary.

Mrs Peel: Fashion, Toughness and Cool

Sherrie A. Inness notes that the ‘new woman’ in the form of Mrs Peel in The Avengers was quite revolutionary, and qualifies this statement by saying: “The Avengers played an important role in demonstrating that women could be just as tough as men yet also helped support stereotypes about women.”193 Inness believes that Mrs Peel was a warrior, or tough, but also notes that The Avengers emphasized her femininity and sex appeal. However, in the 1960s her character represented a radical departure from 1950s considerations of acceptable femininity. Like Wonder Woman in comics, Emma Peel was subverting notions of ‘normative’ femininity in the new medium of television. Some of Inness’s discomfort with Mrs Peel’s performance dwells in the use of disguise. Emma Peel disguises herself variously as a nurse,194 a salesgirl,195 a

191 Patricia Hill, ‘What Percentage of a Man’s Wage Should be a Wife’s Allowance?’ New Zealand Woman’s Weekly (October 11, 1965) 4, 5, 47, 52.
194 The Avengers television episodes: ‘The Masterminds’ and ‘The Gravediggers’
dancing girl in a harem,\textsuperscript{196} and a sin queen.\textsuperscript{197} However, she also impersonates a journalist\textsuperscript{198} and is an anthropologist with an extensive knowledge in many areas: her male counterpart, John Steed, relies on her brainpower in many situations.

In a panel discussion on empowered women, Julie D’Acci and Ronald Smith say: “the 1960s had a trend of empowered women on TV...these women were still constrained by stereotypes of femininity, they were part of an expansion out of more limited roles”.\textsuperscript{199} Like Wonder Woman before her, Mrs Peel was a positive role model for young women but also an object of desire. Disguise, suggests Inness, undermines Mrs Peel’s toughness: “...her toughness can be seen as only another example of her play with disguises; we need not fear her if we can believe that underneath the tough exterior a ‘true’ woman resides”.\textsuperscript{200}

This negative reading of disguise could also be considered in a more positive light. That is, although most women perform a ‘self’ at some time in their life that ensures protection in a dangerous or undermining situation, such as agreeing with a masculine view or carrying out a task not in keeping with their worldview, the ability to read another’s body language can also be used in an empowering manner – and this latter approach is adopted by Mrs Peel. Her ability to ‘pass’ has similar implications to those of Diana Prince, Wonder Woman’s secret identity: it is within the performed persona that stereotypes of femininity are enacted. ‘Diana Prince’ and whatever disguise Mrs Peel happens to don enables the discovery of that which would not be revealed to the tough, empowered, intelligent, cool, witty and beautiful woman that is Mrs Peel (or Wonder Woman). Performing the ‘feminine’ in a knowing manner can, therefore, be a useful tool if it is used as a positive means to a productive feminist end.

\textsuperscript{195} \textit{The Avengers} television episode: ‘Death at Bargain Prices’
\textsuperscript{196} \textit{The Avengers} television episode: ‘Honey for the Prince’
\textsuperscript{197} \textit{The Avengers} television episode: ‘A Touch of Brimstone’
\textsuperscript{198} \textit{The Avengers} television episode: ‘Honey for the Prince’. It should be noted that women had formerly been men’s helpers on television programmes, and yet the audacious Mrs Peel had the capacity to be both a harem dancer and a sharp witted journalist in the same episode.
\textsuperscript{200} Inness (1999) 35.
Inness also takes issue with the emphasis on Mrs Peel’s sexuality which undermined her toughness: “She frequently wore clothing that revealed her every curve”. In the 1960s Emma Peel was the definition of ‘cool’ and epitomized the new woman, and her taste in clothes was one of her main draw cards. In every episode she would adopt four or more different outfits, and in hindsight, her harem costume or bondage gear can be seen as part of her disguise. The Avengers is concerned with conflict between tradition and modernity, therefore wearing the costume of desire such as veil or corset, under protest – being drugged and dressed in bondage gear or disguise such as harem-wear to uncover plots – is yet another aspect of this conflict. In contrast to the tradition of woman’s place (concubine or sex mistress), as preferred costume Mrs Peel unhesitatingly adopts the modern, the pop art, the op art.

Mrs Peel began her partnership with John Steed encased in the black leather favoured by her predecessor Mrs Gale (Honor Blackman) but soon began to prefer exclusive designer fashions. As stated when discussing Wonder Woman, fashion is often a visual expression of the tension between new concepts of gender performance and old stereotypes. John Bates was the designer who introduced the mini skirt and the ‘emmapeeler’ catsuits. Marnie Fogg states that “…Bates’ agenda was to show Rigg as an entirely new sort of heroine: modern, sexy and provocative”. His trademark features were cutaway armholes that exaggerated the shoulders and seductive circular cutouts, particularly in the ‘emmapeelers’ to reveal the skin beneath.

Bates was, himself, a bricoleur, having created his first mini-dress from oilskin found in some obscure and grubby retail premises. He was also influenced by such designers as Mary Quant and Courrèges (the op-art influence) and he, in turn, became well known when his fashions were modeled by icons like the model Twiggy. The designer of Emma Peel’s clothes for the later episodes was Alun Hughes. Mrs Peel’s clothing was often used to offset the patriarchal dress and attitudes of the ‘traditional’ in 1960s Britain. Toby Miller, in describing an excerpt from the episode ‘Castle De’ath’, states: “She arrives in her Lotus (convertible car) wearing a tartan catsuit and a tweed oatmeal jacket. At a candlelit dinner she contrasts with the men, who are dressed in lace and velvet, by entering with bare midriff, bra-top, modesty jacket, hipster trousers and ankle...”

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201 Ibid., 36.
202 The Avengers television episode: ‘A Touch of Brimstone’
203 The Avengers television episode: ‘Honey for the Prince’
205 Ibid., 38.
boots all under the sign of lamé”.206 One can imagine the intake of breath of the older males in traditional dinner dress, and their mixed emotions of outrage and admiration. Emma Peel would have been well aware of her impact, but mostly took everything in her stride. The change in costumes in ‘Escape in Time’ include “red evening gown for a hunt ball; emmapeeler pantsuit, black leather gloves, and a sky-blue coat; wide, short black jacket; an 18th Century lady’s court gown complete with a beauty spot on the cheek; and a car mechanic’s overalls”.207 Costume was an integral part of the series, and imperative in juxtaposing the traditional to the modern and traditional notions of ‘feminine’ with the feminine new woman.

Mrs Peel was, it appears, luxuriating in her challenges to convention. According to Kaja Silverman, clothing makes our bodies culturally visible.208 Fashion is a site which allows women self-expression and is a way to constitute notions of the feminine, which reflect attitudes to social and cultural constructions. Of course fashion is also influenced by technological developments. Richard Wolfe notes: “The development of pantyhose in the early 1960s made possible...the miniskirt”209 and with the miniskirt came the rejection of the panty-girdle and a more natural shape in underwear. Wolfe describes these changes as “liberation from the constraints of the past”.210 He also notes that trousers for women were in a transitional stage in the early 1960s, and it took some time for employers to accept women wearing trouser suits to work. I distinctly remember sewing a navy blue linen trouser suit with red inset bands on flared cuffs and sleeves. Fashionable items were only stocked in high fashion boutiques in Auckland, and the emphasis was on originality, so home sewing was often the only option. I worked in government offices where the trouser suit was accepted by 1966. Emma Peel had no qualms about wearing trousers. The emmapeeler catsuit was an action uniform, so did not count in the scheme of bifurcation. However, hipster trousers and trouser suits were common fare for this sophisticated yet tough warrior woman, and the following quote indicates how serious this subversive appearance management was considered to be:

In the 1960s the majority of women could not wear trousers to work at all...One young woman was refused entrance to an exclusive London restaurant because

207 Ibid., 50. Miller appended this description with: “Suck on this, Madonna.” He truly is a fan of Mrs Peel!
210 Ibid., 28.
she was wearing a trouser suit; having removed the trousers she was allowed in wearing the tunic top only, which passed muster as a mini-dress. Semi-nudity was more acceptable than bifurcated garb.211

It was the Parisian designer Courrèges who introduced the trouser suit, and Elizabeth Wilson believes that this fashion prefigured the greater acceptability today of trousers.212 But Courrèges also designed op art and space age minis, which tended to operate in opposition to that which trousers stood for: that is, the mini skirt created a ‘little girl’ look contrasted to the ‘business-like’ appearance of the trouser suit. The mini also restricted movement – one needed to be cautious of bending and reaching actions while the trouser suit allowed for freedom in movement with no threat of exposed underwear. Mrs Peel cheerfully took on the challenges attached to both forms of dress – social and practical – with a total lack of self-consciousness. Male desire is aroused when Emma Peel is zipped, cut away, encased in a catsuit and throws her victims with graceful martial arts moves, but most males I have spoken to who are old enough to remember the series also admired her for her cool and her witty banter. Her persona was certainly one that impressed young women such as myself who, to this day, associate her beauty and style with those zany plots and her tough, brave attitude was influential for young women about to go out on their own.

Lipstick, Hairpins and Rationality

The final criticism that Inness makes concerning the reinscribing of gender conventions or concepts of normative femininity in relation to Mrs Peel is that Mrs Peel was rescued on a regular basis by her partner, John Steed. Inness says: “As tough as she was, she was not tough enough to be equal to him or other men. Thus she did not threaten the masculinity of the male viewer…”213 Mrs Peel did, often, rescue Steed, and he, being a gentleman, recognized her efforts. For example, in ‘The Living Dead’, Emma machine-guns Steed’s would-be executioners and he thanks her with a kiss on each cheek. Unlike most female characters in dire circumstances Emma Peel always kept her cool. She was feminine in her sense of style and deportment. She used kung fu and tai chi as preferred methods of fighting, and took up a great deal of space with the least amount of effort – her makeup was never smudged and her voice never rose above a sharp

warning cry to her partner. She never screamed, never sweated, and rarely lost her breath. Even Wonder Woman thought she was fabulous and wanted to be her.

In 1968 Princess Diana, also known as Wonder Woman, appeared on the cover of the September-October 1968 issue of Wonder Woman in a mini-dress as her alter ego Diana Prince—but looking hip rather than her usual mousy. The story line was that she was required to fit in with a crowd at a hippie club in order to free Steve Trevor of criminal charges. In the next issue of the comic, Paradise Island, Wonder Woman’s home, had been transported to another dimension, and Wonder Woman chose to abandon her powers to stay on earth. She chose this option because she was jealous of her alter ego (yet again) for attracting the attention of Steve Trevor with her new clothes. One of the scriptwriters at the time said that making Princess Diana earthbound and a high achiever “according to my mind, was very much in keeping with the feminist agenda” but feminists complained that DC Comics had weakened an important symbol. Another writer stated: “We were all in love with Diana Rigg and that show she was on.” Diana Prince wore clothes that could have been created for Emma Peel: her favourite outfit was a white jumpsuit with a large white hipster belt and white boots—very like an emmapeakeeler. She trained with a martial arts expert (remember that she is no longer Princess Diana and has no powers) and learned to defend herself. The new Diana Prince would not—could not—be a victim.

The notion of woman as victim is considered by Toby Miller with respect to The Avengers: “...horror-film methods of demeaning woman...the idea of disfigurement as a gendered punishment, taking away women’s principal currency in a patriarchal cultural economy, is referenced in unknown men cutting up pictures of...Mrs Gale and Mrs Peel”. The ‘woman as victim’ plot in The Avengers takes place in isolated rural dwellings involving some kind of mental cruelty which results in a sense of powerlessness. However, Mrs Peel comes out on top, sometimes through her own resources, sometimes helped by Steed. In ‘The House that Jack Built’, Mrs Peel has to deal with a man who is obsessed with her and she has to slash a giant photograph of herself in order to escape. By mutilating her own image she rejects the passive or

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214 Daniels (2000) 126. Second-wave feminism was in its infancy in 1968.
215 Ibid., 126.
216 Ibid., 129.
victim role, taking charge and disrupting the male gaze through her actions.\textsuperscript{218} However, always beautiful, she paradoxically invites the gaze as she “peers back out through the cutup portrait of her face”.\textsuperscript{219} Steed arrives but is not needed because Mrs Peel has saved herself through “lipstick, hairpins and rationality”.\textsuperscript{220} Mrs Peel’s role did not threaten the ‘masculinity of the male viewer’ because her clothing and accessories both signified male action – catsuits, guns – that male viewers would identify with, and revealed the female body and feminine practices – lipstick, hairpins – that male viewers would delight in. One could say that Mrs Peel’s approach was subversive in that she rejected the norms of what a woman should be, yet she did not threaten the gender order with any outrageous unruly behaviour. She understood the fine line that she was required to tread in order to be an acceptable new woman.

The Swinging Sixties, Sexual Revolution and Tradition

Mrs Peel captured the 1960s Zeitgeist – the demise of the grand narrative and the rise of the individual – from boutique shops to sexual revolution to the questioning of authority. Hilary Fawcett writes of her youth in Newcastle and London in the 1960s:

\begin{quote}
The changing fashion system allowed young people like myself to reinvent ourselves in terms of social status through the ever-changing subtleties of fashion…However confused I may have been about my role in the world, on the outside I looked in control, totally of the moment.\textsuperscript{221}
\end{quote}

Fawcett had the ability to be a fashion leader, and this allowed her to feel powerful in at least one area of her life. Young women needed only to tune in to \textit{The Avengers} on television to see Mrs Peel in the very latest fashions, avenging crimes of the most outrageous sort in the most surreal surrounds, ironic quip on her lips and martial arts at the ready. In his review of Toby Miller’s book on \textit{The Avengers}, Chad A. Martin states that “Gale and particularly Peel represent women of the future, overflowing with ability, confidence and sexuality. They were women who could write a paper on thermodynamics, then slip into a black leather catsuit to toss thugs around like rag dolls without ever disturbing their makeup.”\textsuperscript{222} However, although Mrs Gale and Mrs

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{218} Ibid.
\bibitem{219} Ibid., 113-114.
\bibitem{220} Ibid., 116.
\end{thebibliography}
Peel may have been full of confidence and self-esteem, many dedicated followers of fashion were desperately trying to slim down to the new lithe 1960s body. A close look at the new Diana Prince body in her wanna be Mrs Peel style reveals a much slimmer and unmuscle body than that of Wonder Woman pre-1968. Emma Peel had a slim body with broad shoulders and narrow hips, perfect for displaying fashion, but impossible for a lot of her fans to achieve.

Mrs Peel was a tough woman engaged in individual empowerment rather than demanding social change for women, but her actions were seen as empowering for those of us who saw her as a role model. The world of *The Avengers* while recognizing change, was concerned with controlling chaos and restoring or maintaining order. In the 1960s societal order basically benefited white males, yet Mrs Peel offered a new role for women on television which disrupted the stereotype of the housewife or ‘helper’. The female viewer in New Zealand such as myself modelled her ideal on Mrs Peel. In the mid to late 1960s, still attached umbilically to the United Kingdom, young New Zealand women were less aware of the normative prescription Mrs Peel filled – white, pretty, thin, heterosexual, unmuscle, classist and racist – and were more aware of her warrior or tough woman status combined with her sense of style.

The ‘sexual revolution’ had created a sense of ambivalence in women – notions of propriety jostled alongside concepts of ‘hip’ coolness. In other words, ‘good girls’ and ‘bad girls’ became less distinctive stereotypes, but only in particular contexts and still within particular parameters of femininity. ‘Unruly’ women – loud, large or lesbian – were still social outcasts, and normative concepts of femininity were rewarded, whereas subversive femininities were monitored and often punished.

The final appearance of Mrs Peel in *The Avengers* (20 March 1968 in Britain) contained the narrative whereby she was reunited with a husband who had been presumed dead. She became wifely, and the subtext in the script was that a single woman, or widow, could become a secret agent, or adventurer, but that this was not tolerated in married women. In 1997, Geena Davis appears to reverse this notion of femininity and women’s roles in *The Long Kiss Goodnight* as a government agent who, having lost her memory becomes a domestic nurturer and ‘mom’. However, as her parenthood was unplanned, when she does regain her memory, her

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223 Inness (1999) note 34.
sense of emotional attachment ‘kicks in’ and the audience breathes a sigh of relief as she fulfils her parental role rather than rejects it. The ‘swinging sixties’ was a time of complex ambiguities. Notions of femininity changed dramatically in some instances, and yet did not change at all in others. Diana Rigg, like Honor Blackman, left The Avengers to become a ‘Bond’ girl in a James Bond film (much to my chagrin), and in the 1960s Wonder Woman in comic book form had relinquished her lasso, her bracelets, the invisible plane, cast off her belt and cast off her identity to become plain ‘Diana Prince’. She was an Emma Peel ‘wanna be’ who wore fashionable clothes, practiced karate and owned a boutique. Such was the ‘appeal’ of Emma Peel. However, unlike Emma Peel, she had an adviser mastermind who went by the esoteric sounding name ‘I Ching’224 and it was he who taught Diana Prince martial arts. This was probably the most profound identity crisis that Wonder Woman had experienced so far in her comic book life and this because her creators were implicitly under the spell of the television persona of Emma Peel.225

Revolution and experimentation were synonymous with the 1960s and the text of The Avengers redefined the roles and options available for women in television and opened the door to programmes such as The Bionic Woman and Charlie’s Angels which were produced in the 1970s. Wonder Woman, too, was given a new lease on her old life in 1972 when Gloria Steinem and the other founding editors of Ms Magazine got permission to put her image on the cover of the first issue and to reprint the 1940s ‘Golden Age’ episodes inside the magazine.226 The tough Mrs Peel offered a positive role model for young women and yet the patriarchal backlash was already active in the 1960s: just as Mrs Peel was finding her feet, so to speak, her husband symbolically appeared on the scene and her career was terminated.

In New Zealand, Mrs Peel was remembered mainly for her portrayal of a single woman living a life of adventure, and this added to the hotly debated issue of career versus marriage and full-time homemaker. In many instances, once a woman had married, she was expected to leave the workforce and become a housewife. This is, of course, exactly the action taken by Mrs Peel when her husband was found alive – she became a homemaker. The producers of The Avengers

225 Daniels (2000) 129.
were obviously sensitive to issues which related to gender norms, and although the series was groundbreaking and had enormous influence internationally on popular culture, Mrs Peel bowed to pressure and literally became invisible (the series retired her character). She no longer belonged in the public sphere, and one can only imagine how bored stiff she must have been. Thank goodness for second-wave feminism, which was just around the corner.
Women’s Liberation: feminism and femininity in the 1970s

Chapter Two evaluated the influence of the sophisticated tough new woman, Mrs Peel from *The Avengers*, on young women in the ‘swinging sixties’. While simultaneously challenging traditional attitudes to women in relation to individualism, the series adhered to particular beliefs about women’s role in society. In the following chapter, *Wonder Woman* on television and in DC comics is examined, along with a more in depth investigation of the tough personas put forward by the three protagonists in *Charlie’s Angels*. Sherrie A. Inness and Anna Gough-Yates have written extensively on *Charlie’s Angels*, and their writings on feminism and femininity within the series have been influential in the structuring of this chapter.

Suffering Sappho! Wonder Woman’s Comic Book Identity Reinstated

During the 1970s there was recognition of the woman’s movement and the notion of autonomous female power in both film and television. Yvonne Tasker notes that Jane Fonda led the way in this representation of female protagonists firstly in *Barbarella* (1968) and then in *Klute* (1970), and a tough Sigourney Weaver starred in *Alien* in 1979. Television programmes such as *Charlie’s Angels*, *Policewoman*, *The Bionic Woman*, and *Wonder Woman* all “placed women at the centre of the action narrative”. Tasker states that “the cult British television series of the 1960s, *The Avengers*, had mobilized...fantasy traditions, out of pop art in the leather-clad, tough, fighting heroines”. The *Avengers* series which starred Mrs Peel was extremely influential: in fact, the Wonder Woman of comic book fame ditched her identity in the 1960s to become a wanna-be Mrs Peel. As Diana Prince, Wonder Woman’s alter ego continues to have identity problems into the 1980s when, as Robinson observes, she eventually abandons “Man’s world forever”.

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229 An expletive commonly used by Wonder Woman when taken by surprise.

230 Yvonne Tasker, *Spectacular Bodies: Gender, genre and the action cinema* (London, New York: Routledge, 1993). The movie *Alien* will be referenced in the next chapter, the 1980s, even though it was produced in 1979.

231 Ibid., 19.

232 Ibid.

1968 were aware that Abbie Hoffman had been arrested for wearing a shirt representing the American flag while engaged in a protest against the Vietnam War. By relinquishing her patriotic uniform and adopting Mrs Peel’s mod gear, any ambivalence concerning Wonder Woman’s patriotism was avoided. Whether this was true or not, Wonder Woman was not seen in her red, white and blue costume again until 1973.

Mrs Peel’s final appearance in The Avengers was in 1968 in Britain, and it must be remembered that she was reunited with a husband who had been presumed dead, so in some ways this new image of domesticity impacted on the writers of Wonder Woman comics in conjunction with the symbolism of Wonder Woman’s costume and notions of patriotism. The result was a Wonder Woman, as Diana Prince, who expressed her anxiety through wearing symbolic white, and facing emotive situations such as her mother’s death or capture by her arch-enemy and even being forced into marriage. It seemed as though there was no possibility of her return as Wonder Woman. However, in July 1972, the founding editors of Ms magazine, including Gloria Steinem, who had “been rescued by Wonder Woman in their childhoods... decided to rescue Wonder Woman in return”. Steinem states that it was difficult to persuade the publishers of Wonder Woman comics to put Wonder Woman on the front of a new feminist magazine but they agreed, and also agreed to reprint her 1940s episodes within Ms. The cover headlines read: ‘New Feminist: Simone de Beauvoir’; ‘Body Hair: The Last Frontier’; Gloria Steinem on How Women Vote; ‘Money for Housework’; and on a lighter note, ‘Wonder Woman for President’. Wonder Woman is depicted on the cover as a colossus striding through a city. A billboard on a building reads ‘Peace and Justice in ‘72’. She protects what appears to be an Asian city with her magic lasso of truth, and on her right is a scene of devastation referencing the Vietnam War. Lillian S. Robinson notes that Wonder Woman “is not, in fact, able to stop the attack, but she presents a clear alternative to this representation of war and injustice”.

When producing the next series of Wonder Woman in 1973, DC comics, aware of the rise of feminism, “hired its first woman editor for the series and restored Wonder Woman’s original
costume, paraphernalia and abilities." Yet one can see from the covers that Wonder Woman still wrestled with her identity. In fact, there is a Wonder Woman on a parallel or alternate world, Earth 2, who came to light during the Diana Prince 1960s era, as well as this restored Wonder Woman who, to confuse issues, has a twin, Nubia, who believes she should be the true Wonder Woman. Lillian S. Robinson writes that "the new narratives do emphasize female power and female solidarity, but they continue for some time, to be illustrated so as to send the old, sexist message to anyone experiencing comic books chiefly on the level of the visual". Wonder Woman’s body appears to be more sexualized in her new incarnation: she wears shorter shorts and has bigger breasts, and her body language is self-aware, almost posed. She appears to be fully aware of the male gaze.

Les Daniels indicates that the media coverage of *Ms* magazine and the visibility of Gloria Steinem’s advocacy of Wonder Woman as a feminist hero brought her to the attention of television, and she joined Superman and Batman in the animated cartoon *Super Friends* in 1973. A new young audience of television viewers was created, and this expanded to include most family members when Lynda Carter portrayed Wonder Woman in the 1975 television series of *The New, Original Wonder Woman*.

**Fighting For Our Rights: Wonder Woman on Television**

In 1974 John D.F. Black developed a made-for-television movie on *Wonder Woman* starring a blonde, Cathy Lee Crosby. Les Daniels, a *Wonder Woman* historian, indicates that there was an attempt at humour, but that the movie was not liked by the audience. A year later *The New, Original Wonder Woman* screened as a pilot on television, and starred Lynda Carter. Wonder Woman’s ‘twirl’ in which she changes from Diana Prince to the superhero was a television invention. In the comic she encircled herself with her lasso. Her swirl is pivotal to her identity: from Diana Prince, prim and proper, she spins around and around and “explode[es] into such inexplicable gloriousness”. The process became too costly, however, and it was replaced.

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238 Robinson (2004) 83. The woman editor was replaced after about four months.
239 Steinem (1995) 15. The alter ego, Diana Prince, is a meek and mild secretary-type.
241 Daniels (2000) 139.
242 Possibly the same John D.F. Black who later wrote scripts for *Charlie’s Angels*.
by an explosion and a puff of smoke, yet it is that liminal moment, that in-between-ness of selves that is most exciting, and the place that many of her admirers find to be most fascinating.245

Carter wore her outrageous outfit which consisted of strapless bustier with extremely pointed breasts combined with satin pants cut across the top of the thigh, and boots high up to the knee. Lynda Carter states that the bustier she wore was quite restrictive in that although she could be active while wearing it, she need to place herself on a slanting plank to rest while in uniform because Wonder Woman’s girdle and bustier were quite inflexible.246 With an irony not unfamiliar to Wonder Woman, in The Action Heroine’s Handbook, the recommendations for bustier as costume reads that the bustier:

should be tight but should not constrict breathing. A tight-lacing acts as a brace and will ensure that your breasts will receive maximum support. Since your ribs are constricted, you must take care not to hyperventilate. Take slow controlled breaths. If the bustier is not giving sufficient support, alter your arm action to restrict breast movement.247

Lynda Carter as Wonder Woman wore her costume with confidence on screen, and was a symbol of women’s reclamation of public space,248 although this may not have been what the producers had in mind. Her approach to the humour within the script was “in a very human way, and it’s sort of a dry way. I tried to play her like a regular woman who just happened to have superhuman powers”.249 The televised version of Wonder Woman was extremely successful and made Carter into a worldwide star, as can be attested to by the websites that are dedicated entirely to Wonder Woman aka Lynda Carter.250 Lynda Carter, today, is synonymous with a particular visual image of the warrior woman. Little girls (and boys, who have confessed to me) dressed up as Wonder Woman in her star-spangled costume, wearing the belt, headdress, bracelets and

245 This sense of liminality or suspended identity, when superheroes change from their alter ego, is emulated in Sailor Moon, a contemporary children’s animated cartoon starring the Sailor Scouts including ‘mighty Sailor Moon’.
248 The iconic figure of Wonder Woman appearing on heavily congested city streets was a sort of coded message to me that ‘sisters were doing it for themselves’.
249 Lynda Carter, cited in Daniels (2000) 138. This humour was very different to that of the 1970s televised Batman and Robin series, which was camp and full of irony.
sporting the lasso of truth which were available as part of the merchandise attached to the identity of the super hero.

In the comic book world, Wonder Woman had to have her bracelets welded together by a man in order to lose her powers, but in the television version, if her belt was removed she would lose her powers. Perhaps the political fervour surrounding equal rights for blacks was too recent to make reference to the Amazonian women as slaves, or perhaps it was just a little too feminist to reflect the notion of women as domestic slaves. However, one concession that is very charming is that in the comic book the material the bracelets were made from was known as 'amazonium' and in the television show it was named 'feminum', and was used in the title of one of the 1975 episodes (two parts) entitled 'The Feminum Mystique', a pun on Betty Friedan's book *The Feminine Mystique*, a founding text of second-wave feminism.

In the pilot programme for the television series with Lynda Carter, when Wonder Woman defeats the German spy, Marsha, she says to her:

The Nazi's don't care about their women. They let you fend for yourselves, and any civilization that does not recognize the female, is doomed to destruction. Women are the wave of the future, and sisterhood is stronger than anything.

Lynda Carter indicates in an interview from 2005 which is included in ‘The Complete First Season’ on DVD, that some people felt that the programme was too feminist, particularly with speeches such as that above, but she states that it was necessary to be oppositional to a degree in order to find a middle ground. She believes that Wonder Woman led the way for such actors as Roseanne Barr to be on television, and notes that there were few roles for women on television at that time other than those of secretary, mother, or hooker. Carter, as Wonder Woman, wanted to make a statement for women, because that was what was inherent in the concept of *Wonder Woman* the comic strip. One senses that she is talking about the original 1940s comic strip here, as the later Wonder Woman of the 1960s and 1970s was foundering and looked more like a 1960s Emma Peel than her original self created by Marston. However, in the television series, the

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253 Ibid.
Amazons of Paradise Island are dressed in 'shortie-nighties' made of semi-transparent layers of nylon similar to that worn by Hugh Heffner’s ‘sunnies’ even today, which would make any feminist slightly uneasy. Although theoretically these women would not ever be seen by men, the television audience became voyeur, and the Amazonian women were subject to the male gaze. Paradise Island was depicted as the ideal pleasure garden of every red-blooded heterosexual western male and reinforced, for women, how important it was to have a particular kind of beauty and a sexy body in order to fulfill all the gender requirements of perfection.

Lynda Carter as Wonder Woman had a certain attitude that endeared her character to all, and although her heritage as a movie star was Irish-Mexican254, as Wonder Woman she completed to perfection the role of white, heterosexual, privileged and beautiful superior being.255 Wonder Woman’s quest every week involved helping or saving Steve Trevor, whom she desired in a very non-Amazonian way, yet the trick was to let him believe that he was the hero, in order to preserve his ‘male ego’. In effect the series was far less feminist in its leanings than Charlie’s Angels in certain ways – the ‘girls’ in Charlie’s Angels did not have constant boyfriends and worked collectively – and more feminist in other ways – Wonder Woman was fearless and straightforward (coming from another civilization and all) and the Angels were more likely initially to squeal in fear in the face of danger, or flirt in a highly sexualized manner in order to glean information (from men, naturally).

**Charlie’s Angels: Representatives of Feminism?**

The producers of Charlie’s Angels acknowledged both femininity and feminism in the series: they required that the ‘girls’ get out of difficulties by themselves, and this often resulted in them using their sexuality to secure their safety. The character Bosley, contact for the Angels and middleman between Charlie and the Angels, often inadvertently caused the Angels to become further immersed in difficulties rather than being of help to them, and more than once they had to rescue him.256 Bosley was not very adept at performing masculinity, however, being somewhat of a bumbling ‘cuddly bear’ rather than a protector. Charlie’s Angels, according to Cherrie Inness, “depicted pseudo-tough women to imply that their toughness was less effectual than men’s. In

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this fashion, the show addressed the very real societal unease about second-wave feminism. Created, produced, written and directed by men, Charlie's Angels was an instant success. The writer's guidelines stated that Charlie's Angels was Angie Dickinson times three, a reference to the sexy female star of a detective series, Policewoman, and that the show was based on The Rockford Files, a realistic private eye series, but with humour. The writers insisted that the three most beautiful girls on television would be required to display their assets each week, although disguise was an important element too (the mousy secretary, and so on), in order that the contrast would enhance the notion of just how beautiful they were. Cast as former police officers, the Angels were capable of doing everything a man could do and more.

One episode that aired in the US on September 28, 1977, was titled Pretty Angels All in a Row. Written by John D.F. Black, it concerned sabotage of a beauty pageant. Black stated that he enjoyed writing the story and said: "The only reason to do a beauty pageant story is to send it up. Nobody else was writing Charlie's Angels like a comedy, and I thought that is what it should be." Could it be that Black had been influenced by feminist attitudes to women's bodies being paraded as 'meat' in these contests? There were certainly many who considered a beauty pageant to be worthy of support and to be taken seriously. By 'sending it up', and highlighting the fact that women were rewarded financially for having a beautiful body, Black was being supportive of feminist concerns. However, the use of comedy did not impinge on the effectiveness of the Angels. Scantily clad, yet puritan; Janet and John story lines, yet wry humour; apparently vacuous, yet able to overcome the bad guy without masculine help – Charlie's Angels was about watching "women working together to solve a problem and capture, and sometimes kill, really awful, sadistic men, while having great hairdos and clothes."

However, on the offensive, a Time magazine report in 1976 attacked the Angels, stating that although 59 per cent of television viewers in the United States tune in to the programme each week, the dialogue is borrowed from Batman cartoons (and this notion of the comic book – shallow intellect and shallow emotion – is extended to Wonder Woman and Bionic Woman and, most probably Police Woman, as there is a photograph of Angie Dickinson included in the article's image gallery) and the show "is a kind of 'heavy-lidded, soft-core porn. Typically, in

258 Ibid., 34-35.
each Angel episode, at least one of the co-stars strips down to a bikini in the first ten minutes.”

*Time* magazine calls the programme “a mild erotic fantasy that strikes an unashamed responsive chord among the most respectable men and women” and one suspects that it was the humour within the plots combined with such an unlikely trio ‘kicking butt’ that caused the programme to be so popular not only in the United States, but also when it aired on New Zealand television in the mid 1970s. *Charlie’s Angels* was a programme in which the three female protagonists were definitely representatives of feminism: acting collectively and supportively and taking a ‘girls can do anything’ approach. However, the characters expressed ambivalence: their feminism was softened by their inability to deal directly with the sexism of Charlie; their own biases against other women; and their inability to confront many of the patriarchal beliefs of the 1970s.

**Women’s Liberation, New Zealand, and the 1970s**

In New Zealand in 1972, before either of these programmes aired, Germaine Greer had undertaken her controversial tour of New Zealand to promote her book *The Female Eunuch*. These were what Sue Kedgley called the “early, heady days of women’s liberation”. One of the warnings contained in both Greer’s lectures and her books was for women to avoid seeking equality of opportunity within the existing, male status quo. Kedgley cites Greer as saying that “...it is not a sign of revolution... when the oppressed adopt the manners of the oppressors and practice oppression on their own behalf. Nor is it a sign of revolution when women ape men or compete...for a man’s distinction in a man’s world...as good as a man and much more decorative.” In popular culture in the 1970s the warrior woman’s role sat uneasily between a legitimate and subversive gender performance, and television producers were careful in their depictions of feminism and femininity.

Journalist Cherry Raymond reports in the *New Zealand Women’s Weekly* on Greer’s lecture in Auckland 1972 which promoted the book and also marked International Woman’s Day. She cites Greer on many issues concerned with women’s identity. For example, Greer on marriage: “It certainly isn’t in women’s interests today. Nobody should have proprietary rights

262 Ibid., 53.
over another person..." Greer had been invited to New Zealand by Auckland Women's Liberation, which had formed in 1971, and she was an instant media sensation – issues addressed by women's liberation were reported in the media and reached many New Zealand women. These ranged from equal rights in public bars, to beauty contest protests, to information on abortion and contraception, to equal rights for equal pay, to reclaiming women’s history, to the creation of a Working Women’s Charter.  

The *New Zealand Women's Weekly* was one media source that reported on the topics concerned with women’s liberation: in 1971 the magazine published an article written by Margaret Mead in which she states: “The movement has verve, excitement and drama. But has it the potentialities for revolutionary change? I think no.” Mead’s consideration of the women’s movement was but one aspect of the debate concerning the status of women in New Zealand. The *New Zealand Women's Weekly* and the *New Zealand Listener* published articles on women’s independence, on equal pay, on working wives, and on role reversal by both men and women. Groups in opposition to women’s liberation are also given space.  

Social topics of concern to women’s liberation that were visited and revisited during the decade by these two publications were rape, family violence and battered wives, abortion, ...
de facto relationships,\textsuperscript{278} natural childbirth,\textsuperscript{279} sexuality,\textsuperscript{280} and the Domestic Purposes Benefit.\textsuperscript{281} Revolutionary attitudes to the body that were reported on included women taking part in karate to the highest levels,\textsuperscript{282} women wearing trousers for all occasions,\textsuperscript{283} and cosmetic surgery for ‘Mrs Average’.\textsuperscript{284} In September 1977 there was also a documentary series entitled ‘Women’ on Auckland’s TV1 on a Monday evening\textsuperscript{285} which investigated, in consecutive weekly episodes, the representations of women in popular media; marital depression as a major problem affecting New Zealand women; Maori women in a Pakeha world; childcare; and sexual relationships.

The 1970s was a time of re-evaluation of women’s position in New Zealand society, and *Charlie’s Angels* echoed many of the social anxieties which accompanied this new identity – it placed women at the centre of the action, but reinforced their femininity through fashion and sexuality. These very issues are addressed by Christine Dann in her history of women’s liberation in New Zealand. Firstly, one of the most powerful symbols associated with the women’s liberation movement is the burning bra. Dann states:

In 1968 American women’s liberationists protesting outside the Miss America pageant dumped bras, girdles, curlers, false eyelashes, wigs and women’s magazines, which endorsed these things, into a Freedom Trash Can. They

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\textsuperscript{276} Jenny Wheeler, ‘Family Violence is Ignored in New Zealand’, *New Zealand Woman’s Weekly* (December 4, 1978) 50-51; *New Zealand Woman’s Weekly*, ‘New Zealand Needs to Know its Battered Wives’, *New Zealand Woman’s Weekly* (June 5, 1978) 11, 24-26 – includes a questionnaire.  
\textsuperscript{278} Lesley Lundy, ‘Love contracts instead of conventional vows’, *New Zealand Woman’s Weekly* (January 30, 1978) 11.  
\textsuperscript{279} Frances Parkin, ‘Giving birth back to the Mothers’, *New Zealand Listener* (April 16, 1977) 18.  
\textsuperscript{280} Frances Levy, ‘Shere Hite Stirs Sexual Revolution: attitudes are changing, thanks to study of female sexuality’, *New Zealand Woman’s Weekly* (May 15, 1978) 38-39; Lesley Lundy, ‘Few women should really be frigid’, *New Zealand Woman’s Weekly* (September 4, 1978) 30-31; David Young, ‘What were you taught about sex?’, *New Zealand Listener* (December 10, 1977) 17; Lesley Lundy, ‘Is this the legacy of our permissive society? Burnt out 20-year-olds!’, *New Zealand Woman’s Weekly* (June 20, 1977) 4-5.  
\textsuperscript{281} Brian Easton, ‘Solo Trials’, *New Zealand Listener* (August 14, 1976) 22-23.  
\textsuperscript{282} Marie Mihajlovic, ‘Discipline, sport, philosophy – karate covers them all...’, *New Zealand Woman’s Weekly* (October 30, 1978) 16-17.  
\textsuperscript{284} Judy Byrne, ‘Faces lifted and bosoms reshaped – the easy pay way’, *New Zealand Woman’s Weekly* (January 15, 1979) 12-14.  
\textsuperscript{285} *New Zealand Listener* (September 3, 1977) 80.  
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intended to emphasise the artificiality of modern concepts of beauty and to express their belief that women should be valued for their real qualities...286

The media reported that bras had been burnt and this action is still (wrongly) associated with Women’s Liberation throughout the western world.287 However, in relation to Charlie’s Angels, the ‘freed’ body is an integral aspect of the series. The Angels have thrown out their corsets and they never squeeze into tight fitting clothes except when in disguise, and Farrah Fawcett (Jill) rarely wears a bra. The fact that her breasts are free and her nipples are easily ‘seen’ through her clothing fits well with feminist notions of ‘the natural’, but because her body is white and slim and her breasts are full and round, she also becomes an invitation for the male gaze – an object to be looked at. Dann also writes that women’s liberationists objected to media reporting, particularly the news, “which describe men in terms of their actions and opinions and women in terms of their appearance, marital and maternal status.”288 By 1972 the use of ‘Ms’ rather than ‘Miss’ or ‘Mrs’ had become popular with feminists, although this usage was considered to be a ‘fad’. This new more ambiguous title allowed women to be recognized for themselves, outside of their marital status, and an attempt was also made to rid New Zealand language of the generic term ‘man’ and replace it with a less loaded term such as ‘person’ or ‘human’. New Zealand Women’s Weekly articles which report on the actors in Charlie’s Angels refer to their age, marital status, height and weight,289 but gone is the bust-waist-hip measurement that was reported in describing Emma Peel in the New Zealand Listener in 1965.290

Feminism and Femininity in Charlie’s Angels
Each episode of Charlie’s Angels begins with the phrase “Once Upon a Time, There Were Three Little Girls Who Went to the Police Academy...”291 and images of the ‘girls’ pre-Angels show them in the more passive roles of police work – clerical duties and the like. The producer, Barney Rosenweiz, is cited in an article on Farrah Fawcett as saying that “the show has great appeal to women because of the buddy system. There are three dynamite ladies in charge, and

286 Dann (1985) 103.
287 Faludi (1991) 75.
288 Dann (1985) 105.
289 New Zealand Woman’s Weekly, ‘Long Tall Texan is the Gentlest Angel’, New Zealand Woman’s Weekly (October 24, 1977) 6-7; New Zealand Woman’s Weekly, ‘She’s Charlie’s Top Paid Angel’, New Zealand Woman’s Weekly (August 8, 1977) 6-7; and Harry Altshuler, ‘Charlie’s New Angel is a Ladd called Cheryl’, New Zealand Woman’s Weekly (October 17, 1977) 19-22.
290 New Zealand Listener (November 26, 1965) 7.
291 Charlie’s Angels, Produced by Aaron Spelling and Leonard Goldberg, Starring Kate Jackson, Farrah Fawcett-Majors and Jaclyn Smith, in association with Columbia Pictures, 1977.
they like each other. Their relationship does not grow out of the traditional male view of women. The Angels were unique in that they don’t need any help.” However, although the Angels may have added to the trend of incorporating feminism into popular culture, Charlie’s disembodied voice was the voice of patriarchy, and the Angels were fulfilling the role of moral watchdog. Charlie’s offscreen dalliances were tolerated by the Angels: his behaviour reflected the rise of the ‘playboy’ as a ‘harmless’ masculine occupation (influenced by James Bond films), but the ‘real’ baddies were dealt with in a serious manner. In their discussion of male and female culture in New Zealand, James and Saville-Smith state:

While women’s dependence underpins their real subordination to and exploitation by men, the motif of woman as Moral Redemptress portrays women as powerful beings able to save men, and indeed society, from male anarchic tendencies.  

The Angels may have acted in concert when they frowned on Charlie’s antics and when they dealt swiftly with the serious criminals, but they were less magnanimous and often dismissive in their interactions with other women. I am reminded of Germaine Greer’s speech at the International Woman’s Day luncheon in Auckland in 1972, where there was a placard protest outside by women who couldn’t afford to attend the luncheon. Greer defended the venue and costs, saying that the money should come from “rich bitches”, and later she said:

Middle-class women, who are freer than most, can make moves that other women can’t. They can take risks, they can go to jail, they can press for...all kinds of legal reforms for women. We must be prepared to go in and bat for women who aren’t in a position to do it for themselves.

It is this attitude that is reflected in Charlie’s Angels’ feminism. The Angels are fulfilled (not lacking) “because they have found the balance between women’s lib and traditional forms of femininity” — but to do this they have separated themselves from ‘ordinary’ women, defeating the concept of a collective consciousness raising for women’s liberation. Gough-Yates states that, like Greer’s notion of ‘women’ outside of the middle class, other females in the programme were lacking in some way – not able to fight for feminist values through a lack of awareness (and

293 James Saville-Smith (1994) 55.  
295 Ibid.  
297 Ibid., 91.
that lack of awareness was often accompanied by non-normative qualities such as ‘ugliness’ or some other ‘disability’ such as poverty). Gough-Yates believes that Charlie’s Angels is a deeply contradictory text where “the aims of the programme producers were to reconcile the ‘feminist’ with the ‘feminine’... ‘Feminism’ is co-opted by the market, turned into a simple ‘attitude’ which can be purchased in a perfume or a fashionable outfit”.

In recognition of a need to combine feminism with femininity, Sherrie A. Inness believes that a primary reason for Charlie’s Angels’ popularity was sexuality. Yet she reminds the reader that in the 1970s the Angels had much more autonomy than most women on television; most roles were passive – secretary, housewife, and so on. The Angels’ adventures involved bravery and toughness reinforced by their support for each other. They are as adept at chasing and catching criminals as their male counterparts, driving cars with confidence and boldness, using weapons with ease, and not hesitating to run after and collar the baddies. Yet, as in her critique of Emma Peel, Inness believes that disguise undermines the Angels: because their adopted disguises are artificial, their toughness may also only be, and be seen to be, a performance. The producers of Charlie’s Angels were well aware of the popularity of Mrs Peel in The Avengers and ‘undercover’ work was certainly seen as a desirable component of the series. Through the use of disguise, the Angels were able to enact roles which would otherwise be denied them, such as racing car driver or researcher. The Angels adopted empowering roles as well as those traditionally ‘feminine’ roles of “prostitutes, nurses, professional roller-skaters, dancers, air stewardesses, bodyguards and even traffickers in black market babies”. The roles are not so much ‘undermining’ as expressive of an ambivalence that appears to have always attended the tough female hero.

This experimentation with identity in the public sphere was of the zeitgeist, in the spirit of the times. Women were considering themselves in a new light, and tough women such as the Angels enacted their personas with flair and fun. Unlike Inness, Gough-Yates saw positive results for viewers from the Angels’ use of disguise. She says that “Bosley’s [the frontman] function is to provide the Angels with information on the cover stories for their assignments, but beneath this

298 Ibid., 91.
299 Ibid., 91.
300 Ibid., 93.
‘wrapping’ await a few surprises for those who judge the detectives solely on their outward appearance.”

*Charlie’s Angels* did, however, concern glamour and consumption – there are often six to eight costume changes (times three) throughout each episode. The fashion designer was Nolan Miller, and daywear was casual; evening wear was glamorous; and disguise allowed for even more variation. When writing a script, the writers operated within particular guidelines, and one guideline read: “Insofar as our Angels are concerned...we must afford them an opportunity to display their assets each week”, and although this was a reference to costume, it also referenced the notion that was prevalent in the 1970s that it was a legitimate performance of femininity if women used sexual allure to gain information. The equation went something like this: the Angels needed information. To get the information they would dress up in disguise. The information was almost invariably held by men. Men succumb to feminine wiles in one of two forms – either they sense the promise of sexual tryst if they hand over the information, or the Angel wears so little clothing that the sexual tryst is pretty much a given. The series was engaged with what Gough-Yates describes as shifting discourses around femininity and the lifestyle of the single woman. *Charlie’s Angels* was created at a time of revolutionary changes in attitude to femininity. Gough-Yates suggests that the:

‘liberated’, action-glamour femininity ... three single, sexy, curvaceous, dedicatedly careerist ex-policewomen turned private eyes – paralleled a dramatic shift in attitudes towards women, and particularly single women, in America during the 1960s and 1970s.

The pop cultural notion of the single girl as a positive character and the focus of young women on career rather than marriage was affirmed by feminism and, as Gough-Yates points out, the ‘star’ quality of feminists such as Gloria Steinem signaled a sense of safety rather than some disruptive change through a feminism “in which it became possible to evade the confines of marriage and domesticity while retaining...sexual attractiveness” Susan J. Douglas notes that Steinem’s public persona allowed her to:

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301 Ibid., 94.
304 Ibid., 86. Steinem was attractive, white, heterosexual and had a curvy figure.
continue to shave my legs, wear mascara, covet nice clothes, sleep with men, and still be a feminist...[she] made me feel that women could cobble together elements of the codes of femininity they were unable to expunge with a feminism they were eager to adopt.  

Gough-Yates also notes that discourses surrounding femininity and feminism and the ‘single girl’ in the 1970s owed a debt to Helen Gurley Brown’s Sex and the Single Girl from 1962. It was a best-seller which prompted women to use sex as a way to get to the top and Brown wrote that a career was important for a girl’s economic independence. Shere Hite’s The Hite Report in the mid-1970s added to notions of sexual liberation for women and Charlie’s Angels epitomized all these things while offering themselves up to the male television viewing population, the male gaze, with their constant changes of costumes, many of which enhanced the ‘jiggle’ effect.

The Performance of Gendered Identity

Unlike the ‘cool’ Mrs Peel, who wore mini skirts and jumpsuits, the Angels dressed in American casual, and trousers were very much a part of their fashion wardrobes. Gough-Yates discusses the adoption of similar fashions by women at the time in order to emulate a lifestyle radically different from that they were accustomed to. These actions, according to Gough-Yates would indicate that “the products of commercial capitalism could be configured not as symbols of women’s oppression (as many feminists had argued), but as agents for women’s liberation”. Similarly to Mrs Peel, the undercover identities that the Angels assume are those that they have adopted for subversive purposes. By experimenting with identity, all women opened their horizons not just to performance, which involved appearance and action, but to possibilities for performativity: ways of acting that, through repetition over a period of time, may subvert notions of femininity that had been sustained by American culture through the 1950s and much of the 1960s. Butler writes that “If the inner truth of gender is a fabrication and if a true gender is a fantasy instituted and inscribed on the surface of bodies, then it seems that genders can be neither true nor false…” Sara Salih, a Butler scholar, deduces, therefore, that “it must be possible to

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307 Shere Hite, The Hite Report on Female Sexuality (A Nationwide Study of Female Sexuality), (New York: Macmillan, 1976). ‘Demonstrates that sex as we define it is a cultural institution...that should be changed to include the stimulation women desire.’ www.hite-research.com/ (retrieved February 10, 2007).
310 Ibid., 136.
‘act’ that gender in ways which will draw attention to the constructedness of heterosexual identities”. Butler allows her reader to consider that gender is not something that is with us at birth, but is a sequence of repeated acts that solidify over time into a semblance of normative gender practices. This leads Butler to suggest that one could repeat one’s gender differently, using the tools one already has, in order to subvert notions of normative gender practices. Subversive performances are those that destabilize existing heterosexual power structures.

The performativity of gender as enacted by the Angels was ambivalent. They were allotted one masculine trait each – the intellect, the athlete, the streetwise – and an overriding feminine trait – the angelic, the romantic, the sensitive. The Angels took up space more so than Emma Peel – they sprawled in chairs, and were generally casual rather than formal in their everyday deportment. They refused to be victims in a time when men still thought it was their right to manhandle women, and to display a sense of ownership of women in general. For example, the notion of men not being able to control their sexual passion was still current in the 1970s, and in the episode ‘Night of the Strangler’ it was interesting to note how the Angels translated an attempted rape as eager sexual attention, and even joked about it. Contemporarily, in the twenty-first century, the efforts of second-wave feminism have caused the myth of male sexuality as uncontrollable to be virtually debunked, and sexual harassment laws have allowed for recognition of that which personal autonomy entails. For example, inappropriate sexual comments and actions are currently punishable by law.

The producers of Charlie’s Angels were smart enough to offer tough warrior women with a balance between masculine and feminine signifiers, so that the show did not, in so many words, threaten the gender order, but was subversive enough to contribute to the notion that women were capable of toughness.

Both Wonder Woman and Charlie’s Angels screened on New Zealand television, and young girls (and boys) were enamoured of Lynda Carter’s Wonder Woman. Lynda Carter will be equated “forever” with the character Wonder Woman, but in the late 1970s she had stopped

312 Butler (1990) 145.
being the exception to the rule in what Hank Stuever calls a “jumble of strong pop culture heroines” in his reference to the bionic woman, to the police woman, and to Charlie’s Angels. Charlie’s Angels, as Time magazine indicated, appealed to many and varied viewers. When a woman asserts herself in public space, she threatens aspects of the gender order, yet if she adheres to particular notions of femininity, she allays any fear that may arise concerning her gendered identity. In the 1970s Charlie’s Angels enabled women to position themselves, or at least imagine themselves as having an identity in the public sphere quite different to the role of home-maker.

Kedgley’s essay, Heading Nowhere in a Navy Blue Suit, discusses women entering the working world, an area that had been denied to many women, particularly on an equal footing (pay and work). Her point is that the working world was created by men, and:

when women enter the same world, they find themselves in unfamiliar territory, with no idea what the rules are or how to play the game...Their traditional upbringing has taught them to be “feminine”: supportive nurturing and subservient, qualities ill-suited to a world which is based around competition and aggression, where emotional involvement with people is seen to be unproductive, and the overriding goal is to win.

Kedgley writes that she inadvertently became one of the padded-shouldered suited and ‘absorbed’ managerial women in the workplace – she had ignored Germaine Greer’s advice and become a pseudo-male. Wonder Woman would never let that happen to her! And Charlie’s Angels, despite their bimbo appearances, were worldly wise and approached their assignments with humour and sisterhood. There was a decline in the appeal of Charlie’s Angels in the late 1970s with shifting images of the ‘liberated woman’ as a power-dressing and business oriented character and “The same sense of guileful feminine ‘performance’ was still there, but the Angels’ low-cut tops and bikinis had now given way to Joan Collins’ shoulder-pads and big hair” and breasts were armoured with bras once again.

315 Ibid.
In the previous chapter, Wonder Woman was reinstated as a super hero by the editorial staff of *Ms* Magazine after her stint as a wannabe Mrs Peel. She was also the focus of a television programme, *The New Original Wonder Woman*. The actor who played the role of Wonder Woman created a character which she felt was true to the original Wonder Woman: a role model to empower women. It was also noted that the directors of *Charlie's Angels* attempted to conflate feminism with glamour, femininity and consumption. They achieved a certain success in this goal at a time when attitudes to sexuality and the single girl were undergoing massive changes, and roles for women on television were still mainly limited to housewife, secretary or nurturer of some sort. In the following chapter, as well as continuing to map the course of Wonder Woman’s adventures, the characters Ellen Ripley from *Alien* and Sarah Connor from *Terminator* are evaluated for their toughness, and the pop star Madonna is considered for her warrior attitude in her career moves. It is Madonna’s influence on popular culture and her importance to academic theorists in the 1990s that allows her inclusion in this research. Madonna’s ‘girl power’ stance paved the way for *The Spice Girls* in the 1990s, and she became a role model for the millions of young teens who grew up influenced by her music videos (her voice was remarked on as distinctive yet not outstanding, but she made up for this with her performance).

**Power Dressing, Politics and Post-feminism**

In New Zealand the 1980s mirrored some of Sue Kedgley’s anxieties that liberal feminist concepts of ‘equality with men’ somehow equated to being like men. Richard Wolfe writes of “menacing shoulder pads, to reflect the corporate outlook that controlled the new mirror-glass towers…the age of conspicuous consumption, as seen on *Gloss*, the television soap opera that followed the… fortunes of local high-flyers”. Although he is referencing male dress, women, too, were wearing corporate suits with ‘menacing’ shoulder pads. The local soap *Gloss*, shared screen time with the popular American soaps *Dynasty* and *Dallas*.

Political and legislative reforms targeting women’s status began to take effect in concrete ways in New Zealand society. The Domestic Purposes Benefit was established in 1973 to provide

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support for single parents over 16 with dependent children; the Domicile Act 1981 allowed for a woman to live separately from her husband; the divorce laws allowed for equal division of property in 1976 (women had fared badly before this time); in the late 1970s, discrimination against women was dealt with, increasingly, through the law; and the Contraception, Sterilisation and Abortion Act was passed in 1977. More women were employed in supposedly male areas of work – commercial airline pilots, firefighters, and women in factories were able (by 1981) to work night shifts. The Ministry of Women’s Affairs was established in 1983 and the Homosexual Law Reform Act was passed in 1986, decriminalizing sexual conduct between consenting adults and, in the next year, 1987, the New Zealand Prostitutes’ Collective was formed (although prostitution was still a criminal offense). In 1980, the Maternity Leave and Protection Act allowed women to take unpaid maternity leave without fear of dismissal from employment, and women were integrated into most areas of the workforce during the 1980s. As Sue Kedgley states, though, the notion of a feminization of this process was somehow lost along the way, and ‘equality with men’ somehow equated to being like men.

In spite of this progress for women, it is important to note that the 1980s was a time of mass unemployment in New Zealand, which impacted particularly on the less-skilled workers, and consequently, once again, women were encouraged to move back into the home. Joyce Herd suggests that “it is time that an informed debate was held on the value we place on women’s childbearing and rearing role in society” particularly in consideration of the idea that when unemployment is low, women are encouraged to enter the workplace, and when unemployment is high, women are discouraged from the workplace. New Zealand women professionals – doctors, dentists, lawyers, managers – all increased in numbers in the 1980s (according to Herd, the percentage of female medical students rose from 25 per cent in 1975 to nearly 60 per cent in 1988, and she believes that “these women not only serve as important role models for younger women, but enable women to deal with members of their own sex in professional and business matters”).

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322 Ibid.
323 Ibid.
324 Ibid., 38.
325 Ibid., 43.
In social and/or sexual matters, the good girl/bad girl concept had changed in the 1980s in keeping with the ‘sexual revolution’ which began in the 1960s – the introduction of the contraceptive pill and the passing of the Contraception, Sterilisation and Abortion Act (1977) freed up women’s sexuality. In an article in the *New Zealand Listener* entitled ‘Are Men Up To it?’ sex therapists discuss changes that had begun to occur through feminism emphasizing such notions as women’s changing role from passive to active in matters concerning sexuality. The idea that sexual problems originated with women was a wide-spread belief. Women were the second-rate partner, with orgasmic, frigidity and dis-interest ‘problems’. The article makes the point that “Feminism, effective contraception and jobs for women have all helped...to break down this attitude”. Also concerned with women’s sexuality, feminists campaigned against incest, child abuse, corporal punishment, sexual harassment, and pornography, and this was reflected in the increase in the number of women’s refuges and rape crisis centres in New Zealand.

By the 1980s, feminism was recognized in the plural (feminisms), which indicated that women’s perspectives are not necessarily all the same; that the term ‘woman’ has different meanings for different people in differing situations. In this same period, a backlash against feminism became apparent. The term post-feminism was used in a negative context (for feminism) around this time.

‘Post-feminism’ has two distinctive definitions. Firstly, post-feminism as a negative definition (for feminists) was noted by Faludi as a construct promoted by the media. She believes that at a time when both older and younger women were naming themselves feminist (mid-1980s), the media wrote that feminism was “the flavour of the seventies” and that a post-feminist younger generation “reviled the women’s movement”. Faludi cites a male

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327 Ibid., 20. (A series of documentaries called Women, which featured through September 1977 on Television One in New Zealand had already opened the nation’s eyes to aspects of marriage and relationships.)
328 Christine Dann, ‘Feminism: the road to equality’, *New Zealand Listener* (September 14, 1985) 27, 29.
330 Ibid., 14.
331 Susan Faludi toured New Zealand to promote her book with a series of lectures, one of which was: Susan Faludi, *The Backlash against Feminism*, Dunedin, Open lecture delivered in Castle Theatre 18 June, 1992.
journalist as saying: "Post-feminism is the backlash".332 For Faludi, then, post-feminism has become synonymous with the backlash against feminism.333

A second definition or reading of ‘post-feminism’ is that which signifies a shift in feminist theory. Post-feminism is a frame of reference that does connect feminism with the other ‘posts’ – postmodernism, post-structuralism, postcolonialism – but as “an expression of a stage in the constant evolutionary movement of feminism”,334 recognizing pluralism and difference.335 Joke Hermes, in her essay in *Feminism and Femininity in Popular Culture* cites Moseley and Read’s belief that post-feminism may mean the loss of a political agenda, or the foundations for a new one, where it signposts the overcoming of unproductive old distinctions between feminist and feminine.336 The period most often associated with post-feminism is the mid-1980s through to the 1990s, and has evolved into third-wave feminism in this more positive (for feminists) reading.

**Pop Culture, Girl Power and Women’s Empowerment**

In this same period, the 1980s, Girl Power in New Zealand had its beginnings in promotional material published by the Vocational Training Council: “Girls Can Do Anything”.337 This project encouraged girls to move into the public arena and offered alternatives to the expected ‘feminine’ roles that girls had enacted in the past. In the western world, the Girl Power revolution was underway. Susan Hopkins writes: “If 1970s feminism was built on the ideals of authenticity and solidarity, Girl Power is built on dreams of celebrity and

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332 Ibid., 15.
335 Suzanna Danuta Walters, in her chapter ‘Postfeminism and Popular Culture’, *Material Girls* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1995) 116-142, elaborates on the difference between the popular (backlash) version of post-feminism, and the feminist theoretical challenge to identity politics (also known as post-feminism). There are other versions, such as that of Alice, cited in Brooks (1997) who believes that post-feminism was a term used in the U.S. before 1960 (in a positive manner). Also, in their *Introduction to Postfeminism* (Cambridge, New York: Icon Books, 1999) 3, Sophia Phoca and Rebecca Wright state that post-feminism (the pro-feminist sort) came into being on 8 March 1968 in Paris on International Women’s Day.
self-advancement". Girl Power has at least three definitions. Firstly, Girl Power can be a form of empowerment, about taking control, such as the Girls Can Do Anything project, or the underground Riot Grrrl movement of the late 1980s. Secondly, Girl Power is seen as a destructive element, as taking on masculine behaviours (the less desirable behaviours) such as loud mouthed aggression and generally rude behaviour. Thirdly, Girl Power is considered to be a combination of feminist awareness while playing with sexist stereotypes. This third definition uses aspects of what a 1990s girl is expected to be, and with The Spice Girls and Madonna as popular culture role models, creates a character that recognizes the ambivalences involved in negotiating 'girlness'. This new generation of young women had benefited from second-wave feminist challenges to discrimination against women: in pay rates, in the types of workplace where women were 'allowed' to be employed; changes to marriage and to divorce laws; abortion reform laws; legal recognition of women as home owners; and many other areas. The Girls Can Do Anything motto now had a ring of truth.

Second-wave feminism, Girl Power, and post-feminism (the pro-feminist sort) all lead to the notion of third-wave feminism. Third-wave feminism questions the construction of gender identities, even the construction of sexual identity, and recognizes that there is a range of women's voices, not just white, middleclass woman, and situated positions inclusive of class, ethnicity, and age. Third-wave feminism tends to be used as an umbrella term to encompass various feminist positions from the 1980s onwards. Third-wave feminism includes young women who have grown up with the ideas of feminism – those who were born in the 1970s. A co-director of a New York-based organization, the Third Wave Foundation, which supports

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338 Hopkins (2002) 11. This text also offers excellent critique on Madonna and the Spice Girls as well as the television series Charmed and Buffy the Vampire Slayer.
341 See the following online sites: Lisa Jervis, 'The End of Feminism’s Third Wave', Ms Winter 2004 online (www.msmagazine.com/winter2004/thirdwave.asp). Adapted from a speech given by Lisa Jervis (co-founder of Bitch: Feminist Response to Pop Culture) at the 2004 conference of the National Women’s Studies Association (USA) (retrieved June 20, 2006); Amy Schriefer, 'We’ve Only Just Begun: Translating Third Wave Theory into Third Wave Activism' The Laughing Medusa online (www.gwu.edu/~medusa/thirdwave.html) (retrieved June 20, 2006); Tamara Straus ‘Lipstick Feministas: Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards create a manifesto for Third Wave feminism, Metroactive features online (www.metroactive.com/papers/cruz/11.29.00/feminism-0048.html) (retrieved June 20, 2006); Jennifer Friedlin, 'Second and Third Wave Feminists Clash Over the Future', Women's ENews, 05/26/02 on line (www.womensenews.org/article.cfm/dyn/aid/920/context/cover) (retrieved June 20, 2006); Online sites: Third Wave Foundation (www.thirdwavefoundation.org/about/history.html) (retrieved June 20, 2006); Manifesta: Young women, feminism and the future (www.manifesta.net/manabout.html) (retrieved June 21, 2006).
young women, states: "I think that the impact of the feminist movement was in helping women to achieve a voice...Now, we are articulating that voice in a multiplicity of ways."342

Popular culture is one area that has been seen as a significant forum for the dissemination of feminist notions, particularly since the 1980s. Media inclusive of magazines, films, and television, and readers of the popular texts have been influenced and informed by second-wave feminism: there is an acceptance, rejection or negotiation of feminist ideals, particularly in terms of notions of femininity.343 Femininity as a contemporary companion to feminism, that is, stereotypical notions of femininity such as sexy appearance and dress (high heels, exposed cleavage, red lips, and so on), is a difficult concept for many second-wave feminists to accept. These feminine attributes were associated with the very same values of "passivity, submissiveness and dependence"344 that defined women. The media, particularly in the 1950s, encouraged women to submit to the role of housewife and mother in the home.345 However, the idea of a passive and gullible audience who believe in and attempt to perform one particular notion of femininity has been debunked. Hollows uses Meyerowitz (1994) and Hall (1981) to make the point that audiences engage with texts "to produce different readings based on the knowledge and experience that is a product of the social and cultural groups to which they belong".346

Betty Friedan’s *Feminine Mystique* promoted a kind of liberal feminism that encouraged women stepping out of the 1950s to adopt masculinist behaviours: avoid certain (s)mothering behaviours, have a career, and so on.347 Hollows notes that this binary – masculine as superior to feminine – was also advocated by Germaine Greer in 1970 when she encouraged women to adopt “the masculine virtues of magnanimity and generosity and courage”,348 and it will be noted that Germaine Greer expresses ambivalence when it comes to adopting masculine attributes: her advice to women to reject masculine behaviour is noted in Chapter Three. However, women were encouraged to emulate men in order to prosper in the public sphere, which created a sense of identity anxiety in women: the adoption of masculine behaviours undermined the validity of

343 Joanne Hollows uses the example of the film *Pretty Woman* as a film that engages with feminism, while negating feminist ideals. Hollows (2000) 193.
347 Ibid., 12.
feminine behaviours. Liberal feminist concepts of empowerment involved the shedding of many feminine attributes such as domesticity and housewifery, and excessively feminine enhancements like makeup and stilettos, in favour of a more somber and serious outlook.

Notions of empowerment, women’s control of their own bodies and sexuality, and ideals concerning warrior women in popular culture during the 1980s are reflected in two major films of the period, *Alien,*\(^{349}\) starring Sigourney Weaver as Ellen Ripley, and *Terminator,\(^{350}\) starring Linda Hamilton as Sarah Connor. *Madonna* the singer/songwriter/actress must be included here as a warrior woman in the fight to free up women’s sexuality and autonomy. Madonna also confused her audiences with her virgin/whore performances. These three women, or personas, will be discusses below after an evaluation of the continuing identity crises suffered by Wonder Woman into the 1980s.

### Warrior Women and the Backlash

In 1982, the golden eagle which was emblazoned onto Wonder Woman’s bustier was replaced with a stylized letter ‘W’.\(^{351}\) The president of DC Comics had decided that to commemorate the super hero’s fortieth birthday, a Wonder Woman Foundation should be established to honour the lives of particularly inspirational women over the age of forty. This recognition of feminism was extremely short-lived. In 1986, not only did one of the writer’s allow Wonder Woman to marry Steve Trevor in the *Crisis on Infinite Earths,*\(^{352}\) but in the next issue (March 1986), Wonder Woman had devolved and the clay from which she had been moulded was sent back in time to Paradise Island. Les Daniels says that this act would allow for her regeneration,\(^ {353}\) but I argue that *Wonder Woman* in comic book form (the warrior woman who has survived from the 1940s through to the twenty-first century in various guises) suffered from the backlash against feminism.\(^ {354}\) Wonder Woman was far too unruly, and her determination to marry was punished or her unruliness was punished with marriage. Either way, it was a no-win situation for the warrior woman.

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\(^{349}\) *Alien* (1979) (film), Directed by Ridley Scott, Story by Dan O'Bannon, Executive producer, Ronald Shusett.


\(^{351}\) Daniels (2000) 151.


In her book *The Sexual Wilderness: Men and Woman in New Zealand*, Sue Kedgley affirms the fact that the backlash was taking effect in New Zealand in the 1980s. Critics stated that feminism had devalued motherhood as an occupation and that women who were still financially dependent on men were considered to be “non-persons”\(^{355}\) by feminists. Other issues raised were that life had been simpler and less problematic before ‘liberation’, and that women were carrying out dual roles, that of homemaker combined with that of wage or salary earner. Sympathetic women were “put off by the anti-male rhetoric of feminists...and fear they will lose male approval if they admit to any public association...” \(^{356}\) Whenever the status quo is threatened, there will be controversy because of the fear of change to gendered role designation, and to the power differential.

Elizabeth Traube has this to say about the backlash in the United States:

During the 1980s...Unlimited ambition in women continued to be constructed as a threat, requiring either their subordination to the appropriate men or their expulsion from the imagined community. During the Reagan era...a fantasized threat of female power, embodied in women and in feminized enemies, became instrumental to an ongoing ideological project of remasculinization.\(^{357}\)

To this end, the film *Fatal Attraction*, released in 1987, reflected anxiety regarding second-wave feminism, and featured a ‘feminised’ enemy in the form of the actress Sharon Stone’s character. And Wonder Woman? She was reborn in the late 1980s with more muscle, more cleavage, and less costume, but by 1987 her writers had eliminated her weakness, that is, she was not vulnerable when her wrist cuffs were chained together. She was placed in ‘soap opera’ situations in ‘Man’s World’ and “spent a lot of time hanging around...wearing sweaters and offering advice on everything from teenage romance to hot flashes”.\(^{358}\) She never really rediscovered her heroic self until 1992. However, unlike Wonder Woman in the 1980s, the following two warrior women bravely venture forth into the ‘world of men’, discarding much of their femininity.

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\(^{356}\) Ibid., 62.


\(^{358}\) Daniels (2000) 179.


**Alien (Ellen Ripley) and Terminator (Sarah Connor)**

The plot outline of *Alien* (1979) is one involving a mining ship that, investigating an SOS, lands on a planet with strange creatures and ‘eggs’ which are parasites. The ship itself is like a large womb, and the crew is woken by ‘Mother’ (the computer). The scene is primal – a rebirth. As events unfold, Ripley (actress Sigourney Weaver) is the first officer who has to take control. Cynthia Joyce from *Salon* magazine states that “she [Sigourney Weaver] became the anti-Barbie – big-brained and small chested. She was the first of a new generation of actresses to play a strong female lead with composure and dignity…”

When I last viewed *Alien*, Sigourney Weaver (Ellen Ripley) seemed to perform femininity in a way that was appropriate in the late 1970s, early 1980s: she felt uncertain when her insistence that protocol be followed was undermined by her male crewmates. That is, the sick or dying crew member should not have been allowed on board until he had been decontaminated. She hesitated, not wanting to appear to be a cold and inhumane female, and succumbed to the crew’s demands, and of course, this action precipitated their downfall. It took Ellen Ripley some time to be legitimated in her role of command. There was a sense of androgyny in her dress, in her position of command on the ship, and in her performance in the geographical spaces of the ship. However her femininity, which was reinforced by the sensuality of her stripping to her underwear, the anxious hunt for the cat, and her non-aggressive, non-macho physicality, was in direct contrast to the Ellen Ripley in uniform, gun blazing, with a steady and determined ‘no fear’ gaze. Cynthia Joyce says that “without Ripley, there would be no Lara Croft”, because for Joyce, Sigourney Weaver was the first and best female action hero, who created a tough persona, emotionally self-contained, in a film that had no romantic interest. Weaver states in an interview from 1984 – when she visited New Zealand – that any character she plays must be “actually on her way somewhere and the man might be part of it”, which is a creed that was embraced by the more light-hearted *Charlie’s Angels* and adopted by future warriors and tough women, including Lara Croft.

Feminist film theorist, Barbara Creed, believes that the creature in *Alien* is representative of the psychoanalytic monstrous-feminine, which must be repressed in order to ensure the status

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360 25th October, 2006
361 Joyce (1999): 1
quo or continuance of the social order, and the final scene, where Ripley undresses in front of the camera is a reassurance of the pleasurable female body (the cat also reinforces this notion).\textsuperscript{363} Regardless of any ‘shoring up of the patriarchal order’ that may occur in \textit{Alien}, the film expresses anxiety concerning the gender order, and the character Ripley paved the way for other women warriors to be accepted within various genres in popular culture. Weaver explores the character, mindful of the attitudes in the late 1970s, and creates a warrior in the manner of the male hero – the ambivalences within the many readings of \textit{Alien} create healthy negotiations of text and subtext and reflect the anxiety within popular culture concerning the gender order and the influence of second-wave feminism.

The character Sarah Connor (actress Linda Hamilton) from \textit{Terminator} (1984) is also involved in a narrative involving aliens (cyborgs and machines) and reproduction.\textsuperscript{364} The plot concerns a young woman (Connor) who is to be the mother of a future leader. A robotic ‘terminator’ is sent back in time by authorities to kill her before she has the child. Her son (in the future time) sends back in time an assistant to protect his mother. Sarah Connor changes from frightened victim to an increasingly resourceful player as the plot unfolds and in the closing scene in the film (her lover and the terminator dead) she is pregnant and traveling to Mexico, calm and determined and already planning her son’s life.\textsuperscript{365}

The 1980s is considered to be a transitional era between the industrial and information ages, with major and futuristic developments in various technologies. Electronically, home computers and electronic games such as Pacman and Space Invaders became available to the individual consumer, as did videocassette recorders and cassette players, all contributing to the rise of the information age. Scientifically, the beginnings of genetic research\textsuperscript{366} may have contributed to notions of subjectivity, cloning and science fiction, but the naming of the AIDS


\textsuperscript{364} It appears that the anxieties surrounding in vitro fertilization and other scientific advances concerned with the body were being expressed in popular cultural form.

\textsuperscript{365} \textit{Terminator} is from 1984, and is considered a technological film noir (shows the dark side of technology) and it was Arnold Schwarzenegger’s breakthrough film. The Sarah Connor character really only came into her own in \textit{Terminator 2: Judgment Day} (1991) as a warrior woman. The issues surrounding single motherhood versus heroism are debated in the text of this sequel.

\textsuperscript{366} Robyn Rowland, ‘Test-tube danger?’, \textit{New Zealand Listener} (October 20, 1984) 23-26. The subheading reads: “The new technique for helping childless couples – in vitro fertilization and other ‘advances’ in genetic engineering – have been hailed around the world. But are there dangers ahead for society? Are the medical teams doing this work playing God? And should women’s bodies be used as living laboratories?”
virus, gay rights, and the open declaration of ‘deviant’ sexuality by musicians such as Boy George caused a mainstream shoring up of conservative family values\textsuperscript{367} and a continued portrayal of women in television commercials as sex objects in the home – “deliriously happy among detergents and docilely dependent on men”.\textsuperscript{368} As a ‘positive’ side-effect and a way of contributing to post-industrial consumer-oriented paradigms, the sexist portrayal of women in advertisements would encourage women to purchase glamour and buy in to notions of normative femininity.

\textit{Alien} and \textit{Terminator} are films that offer strong female lead roles, but both conform to some degree to the nurturing stereotype expected of women (Ellen Ripley rescuing the cat, and Sarah Connor as mother of future world saviour), and both conform to particular heterosexual gendered values of beauty. In so far as television programmes were concerned, strong female leads were mostly absent in the 1980s. Feminism was mostly “watered down, negotiated and limited”.\textsuperscript{369} In early episodes, \textit{Cagney and Lacey} criticized inequities – sexism and racism – but ‘women’s issues’ became the focus of the later episodes.\textsuperscript{370} \textit{Roseanne}, the situation comedy from the same period, is more ambivalent in its acknowledgement of housewife versus feminist notion of women claiming the public sphere, but on a positive feminist note Roseanne controls her household and, like Madonna, who will be discussed next, has no interest in what others think of her. However, unlike Madonna, Roseanne is plain and large and loudly crude. Madonna may have legitimated crotch grabbing on stage for women, but if the action had been performed by a large plain woman such as Roseanne, an audience would have rejected her. The beauty myth\textsuperscript{371} lives on not just in consumer advertising, but in film and in television and in music video.

\textbf{Madonna and the Negotiation of Femininity}

Madonna came into the public eye in New Zealand through magazines, and her videos from the 1980s featured on local and imported music programmes. The music video was quite a new phenomenon in the 1980s, and was criticised by musicians and music aesthetes as a

\textsuperscript{367} Louise Guerin, ‘Give it Everything’, \textit{New Zealand Listener} (August 3, 1985) 18-19. The subheading reads: “Steering the Homosexual Law Reform Bill through Parliament has proved more of an ordeal than Fran Wilde ever thought it could be.”
\textsuperscript{370} Ibid.

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concentration on surface rather than substance. Michael Jackson and Prince also promoted their image with the music video medium. Madonna’s video ‘Burning Up’ first featured on MTV (which was not available in New Zealand at the time), and the single ‘Burning Up/’Physical Attraction’ was released in March 1983 and, according to Marc Bego, “represented America’s first look at the girl who was destined to rival ‘Dynasty’s’ Alexis as the dominatrix of the airwaves”.372

In the video, the story unfolds:

...It looks like Madonna is going to be hit by a car driven by a handsome guy...at the end of the song, Madonna is driving the car – she has gotten rid of the guy. Leave it to Madonna to ditch the guy – and get to keep his car. This is truly a case of art imitating life.373

The video concreted the notion of a Madonna ‘look’ with her bleached hair, black thick eyebrows, red lips, white skin and unconventional fashion, as well as her sexuality and dominance. To Madonna her career came first, always: “All those men I stepped over to get to the top, every one of them would take me back because they still love me and I still love them”.374 Her first live performance tour in the mid 1980s allowed the world to realize just how much influence this performer had on young teen and pre-teen girls. Her style of dress was mimicked – torn t-shirts, and lacy bras, black rubber bangles up the arms, bows tied in hair.

Madonna’s videos always conveyed a narrative, but the narrative became more elaborate and cinematic, with character and plots expressing her sexuality and religious symbolism and references to gender and social issues. The Madonna ‘wannabes’, including those teens in New Zealand who were exploring notions of identity, were offered a new concept of femininity – one that rejected notions of good girl/bad girl for a femininity that was concerned with personal achievement – a femininity that incorporated strength. Madonna was a subversive pop cultural icon who refused to “allow herself to be constructed as a passive object of patriarchal desire.”375 Madonna’s sexual persona was self-defined, and Susan Bordo cites John Fiske’s reasons for her young teen following as her flaunting of the ‘rules’ of feminine conduct, that she “...rejected the male gaze, teasing it with her own gaze, deliberately trashy and vulgar, challenging anyone to

373 Ibid., 82.
374 Ibid., 82.
call her a whore, and ultimately not giving a damn how she might be judged." In other words, she was subverting notions of femininity, and young women considered her performance as desirable, and adopted her as a role model.

In the conclusion to her treatise on femininity, Jane Ussher has this to say about women’s negotiation of the ‘rules’ of feminine conduct:

In order to ‘do girl’ women have to negotiate the scripts of femininity which are currently in play and then reconcile the contradictions and inconsistencies, if they want to get it ‘right’ (or reject and subvert the scripts if they choose deliberately to get it ‘wrong’). Ussher suggests that there are four different positions from which women operate in their performance of femininity: “Being, doing, resisting or subverting ‘girl’”. Being girl is a wholehearted acceptance of the law of the father; it is about being a good and virtuous girl. Doing girl is about playing the part of girl in a knowing manner – it is deceitful and artful and the ability to “shift between appearing to be girl and ridiculing the very performance of femininity and the rituals of romance is part of the pleasure”. Ussher suggests that the woman doing girl teeters on the edge of the Madonna/whore complex and may be subject to male rage and female derision. She will be punished for not really being girl. Ussher states that most of the young women she interviewed came into this category: they did not believe in the script of femininity but were prepared to act ‘as if’ in order to get what they wanted – including marriage – because they also wanted to be autonomous and to follow their own path. Also, in order to negotiate their desires while enacting the feminine:

Women appeared to take up different positions in different contexts: cynicism with friends, acquiescent femininity with a man, condemnation of the myth of romance, juxtaposed with a deep desire to be ‘in love’; a desire to be independent alongside a desire to be looked after and protected.

The third category put forward by Ussher, resisting girl, is one where all the dichotomous notions of doing or being girl are rejected. The woman treats men as equals, is active in sexual desire and practice without artifice and is not particularly interested in beauty practices. An

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376 Ibid., 268.
378 Ibid., 445. Racial and ability positions of ‘girl’ are not taken into account by Ussher – they may not ‘fit’ the four different performance levels in her treatise on femininity.
379 Ibid., 451. The television programme Sex and the City has a lot of aspects of ‘doing’ girl about it.
380 Ibid., 454.
example here in popular culture would be Roseanne from the television series of the same name. Heterosexual women who appear independent and strong, those who resist girl, are warned that they may find it hard to attract men because men, too, can be caught up in notions of being or doing masculinity, complementing being or doing femininity. For some women, resisting girl can be fun, a way of subverting gender expectations and playing with masculinity.381

The final category that Ussher offers is subverting girl. This is the category in which lesbians defy notions of femininity: the drag king or the ‘lipstick lesbian’,382 and the drag queen, perform girl in a way that negates any idea that femininity is ‘authentic’ and ‘natural’. Pop idol Madonna fits into this category of subverting girl. In the 1980s, Madonna was just beginning to understand audience reactions to subversive performance of femininity. She had a purpose – fame – and an excellent understanding of sexual desire:

...at one moment doing girl, at another openly taking up the position of ‘whore’, harlot, vamp, temptress, or of ‘lipstick lesbian’...As she plays with her desires, she plays with the desires of her readers, and demonstrates that the positions we take up are never ‘natural’ always constructed, always a performance, which is open to resistance, modification and change.383

Fractured identity is, ironically, synonymous with the identity that is Madonna. Madonna transgresses the boundaries of gender – she refuses the normal categories associated with gender. In the 1980s Madonna’s videos began, also, to subvert notions of the gaze as a system of unequal power relations. She created a narrative in her rock videos that offered her point of view. She threatened the concept of heterosexual femininity by acting whore, by taking control – of her body and her career – and through her insensitivity to social mores. For example, when she was asked why she wore so many crucifixes, she replied: “Because there’s a naked man on them”384 and when she was asked about losing her own virginity in the press, she replied: “I didn’t lose my virginity until I knew what I was doing”.385 This was a new feminism/femininity – the beginnings of ‘girl power’.

381 Ibid., 455-458.
382 A ‘femme’ lesbian has long been criticised for not looking ‘authentic’, for being too close to the notion of heterosexual beauty. ‘Lipstick lesbians’ stand up to rigid ideals of what a lesbian should be and defy old concepts, much as second-wave feminists, who wanted to celebrate femininity by wearing high heels and shaving their legs, insisted that they could have a feminine appearance while still adhering to feminist beliefs.
385 Ibid., 106.
Madonna offered a very public and visual subversion of femininity. Ussher’s notions of four positions in which femininity is enacted should be recognized as:

Scripts of femininity which are fluid and shifting, always open to modification and change...the boundaries between these different positions are flexible, not fixed. Indeed, as women rewrite and rescript what it is to be ‘woman’, the boundaries...are remade and reframed.387

However, it is important to realize that there are boundaries that define femininity, and there is continuous negotiation of these boundaries. Transgressors are still punished, often violently. A global star such as Madonna allows girls to evaluate her performance and either identify with her ‘tough woman’ stance which takes aspects of doing and resisting girl, or they can reject her performance as promiscuous, self aggrandizement, trashy, and so on. Madonna’s pop cultural influence flowed into the 1990s, and she also became the subject of academic theory, particularly as subjectivity and gender performance was examined by feminists and queer theorists. Madonna has contributed enormously to the acceptance of ‘subversive’ feminine/feminist practice through the 1990s into the twenty-first century.388

Whose Gaze is it Anyway? And What Are You Looking At?

In her essay on Feminism and the Politics of Power (subtitled ‘Whose Gaze is it Anyway’), Shelagh Young says that in recent years, feminism seems to be incorporating the popular as the political. However, she recognizes the “internal contradictions and tensions that affect feminism’s relation to popular culture”.390 The example of Madonna is used often in feminist discourse because she breaks the rules both of femininity and of feminism. Her aggressive sexuality coupled with her disregard for feminist mores (using her body in risqué videos, for example) are in fact the product of the feminist second-wave project.391 Young cites Janice Winship as saying that the feminist movement is what has allowed the contemporary

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386 Through her pop videos and live stage act on tour.
390 Ibid., 177.
391 Ibid.
cultural space in which “to play with gender and heterosexuality”\(^\text{392}\). Both Young and Winship sense that the cultural model of the ‘New Young Woman’ (the first glimmerings of ‘girl power’) knows the difference between feelings of power and those of powerlessness. Young uses the instance when Madonna “confidently returns the fetishist’s gaze while wearing his favourite sexual accessories, she reveals herself to be in the possession of knowledge; she *knows* because she has looked and is now *looking back*”\(^\text{393}\). The feminine and the feminist gaze appear to be conflated, and as Pamela Robertson suggests, Madonna’s attitude resonates with particular notions not only of postmodernism\(^\text{394}\) but also with certain ideals of post-feminism.\(^\text{395}\) Post-feminism is sometimes considered a positive development from second-wave feminism, and at other times it is considered negatively as a watered down late twentieth century version of feminism that is acceptable to the status quo. If it is accepted that post-feminism is recognition of plurality and an acknowledgement that aspects of femininity contribute to feminism and vice versa, then the warrior women discussed in this chapter represent various positions in the negotiations of the script of femininity.\(^\text{396}\)

In the 1980s Wonder Woman’s identity fluctuates between *resisting* and *subverting* girlness. Of course she is not from this world, so the patterns of learned performance of *being* and *doing* girl are irrelevant, but notice that she is duly punished for her subversive act of marrying Steve Trevor, a human, or is it that this is her punishment for being a warrior woman in a time of backlash? Both meanings make sense, and within Ussher’s categories there still are multiple readings of performativity of ‘girl’. Ellen Ripley in *Alien* and Sarah Connor in *Terminator* also reside within the categories of *resisting* and *subverting* girl. Their learned reactions of *being* girl – apologies for using up space, ‘feminine’ reaction to unusual situations (screaming) – are replaced by more warrior-like actions over the space of the sequels *Aliens* and *Terminator 2*.

It would appear that the warrior woman, through repeated performance or acts, can affect the appearance of a new sense of femininity. Jeffrey A. Brown analyzes Judith Butler’s underlying themes pertaining to gender trouble or troubling performances of gender in his essay.

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\(^{394}\) Notions of bricolage (cobbling together disparate items to create a whole) and fractured identity, to name but two aspects of post-modernism.


\(^{396}\) Ussher (1997).
on the action heroine.\textsuperscript{397} He suggests that unlike parodic performances of gender such as drag, the warrior woman or “masculinized heterosexual woman”\textsuperscript{398} whose behaviour is not gender appropriate “reveals the arbitrariness of gender in a way that is not easily discounted...her performance, her narrative function, and her very body emphasizes the artificiality of gender roles”.\textsuperscript{399} This new muscular female body was only just beginning to develop in the 1980s. By introducing changes that are occurring in society, popular culture forums such as comics, movies and television programmes contribute to changing concepts of feminism and femininity. However, these concepts are often undermined by competing narratives; notions of women as lacking or women as men’s helpers in, for example, advertisements or soap operas, in an attempt to reaffirm the old heterosexist gender order.

Lieutenant Ripley, Wonder Woman, Sarah Connor and Madonna were all poised at the door of the gym, waiting for the appropriate signal that allowed them to develop abs, pecs and calf muscles, and sure enough, the taut and toned female body became accepted appearance management practice for women and girls in the 1990s.

\textsuperscript{398} Ibid., 56.  
\textsuperscript{399} Ibid., 56.
Warrior Women: Sensational and Subversive

In chapter four, Warrant Officer Ripley from *Alien* (1979) and Sarah Connor from *Terminator* (1984) expanded on the repertoire of the tough female warrior through their developing physical prowess. Tempered by the backlash against feminism, girl power in the shape of Madonna was also inspected as a factor in the growing reputation of the tough woman hero in popular culture. Dawn Heinecken notes in her book, *The Warrior Women of Television*, that there has been an explosion of female heroes in the 1990s. In this chapter, some of the emerging warriors of the 1990s are discussed, and girl power is considered in a more in depth manner, inclusive of Madonna's ongoing fame into the 1990s, and her influence on the *Spice Girls*. For the younger television viewer of the 1990s there are the girl warriors of *Sailor Moon* and *The Powerpuff Girls*. Although there is an 'explosion' of female heroes, femininity and feminism are awkwardly negotiated and the backlash against feminism is a constant threat to the warrior woman.

Men's Anxieties and Women's Empowerment: *La Femme Nikita* vs *Thelma and Louise*

1990 was the year of the creation of a New Zealand Bill of Rights, which gave citizens basic rights, including freedom from discrimination on the grounds of sex and marital status. Helen Clark had been appointed the first woman deputy Prime Minister in 1989, and Sylvia Cartwright became the first woman Chief District Court Judge in New Zealand. This trend for women to hold high office continued in 1990 – Dr Penny Jamieson was ordained Anglican Bishop of Dunedin; Dame Cath Tizard became Governor General and Ruth Richardson became the first woman Minister of Finance.

Throughout the 1990s and into the twenty-first century, individual women continued to break new ground in traditional masculine areas in management in New Zealand. However, the

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400 Heinecken (2003) 137. The proliferation of warrior women and tough girls in film, television, comics and video games in the 1990s was quite possibly a pop cultural reaction to the rise in media reporting of violence perpetrated by men against women, and also a reaction to women's interest in developing strong, fit and muscular bodies: women's membership at local fitness centres escalated in the 1990s. (See Pamela Stirling, 'Gym Junkies: Why women are dying to be thin and stay young', *New Zealand Listener* (March 20, 1999) 18-21). From an audience viewpoint, women empathized (mostly) with the plight of Thelma and Louise, caught up in patriarchal machinations. For the young woman, girlpower was a factor in the popularity of such television series as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

401 Herd (2005).
‘ordinary’ family found it difficult to survive on one wage, and two-income families had become the norm by the 1990s. The government also made cuts to welfare payments in 1990, and welfare payments were further reduced by the 1991 budget.402 Many women found themselves working a double shift – having a day job while being the main worker within the home – cooking, cleaning, ferrying children to after-school events, and so on, being a ‘super woman’ so to speak. There was, too, more diversity within relationships – more solo parents (mainly women), and fewer children within marriage, with childbearing at a later age becoming more of a trend.403 Joyce Herd states that “staying at home with babies as a taken-for-granted female activity has been challenged over the past 30 years as never before in our society”.404

The introduction of the Domestic Purposes Benefit in 1973 allowed women to leave violent or unsatisfactory marriages and relationships, although they then had to depend on the state for survival. Domestic violence had begun to be seen in a more serious light by the law in the 1990s, and perpetrators were being seen as criminals. The notions of public and private (‘it’s just a domestic’) were now conflated when dealing with abusive situations. Sexual harassment complaints to the Human Rights Commission by women were on the rise in 1991, and the commissioners ‘hoped’ that it was “due to less acceptance of it by women rather than an increasing incidence”.405 All of these rejections of patriarchal control perpetrated by the state and by husbands and fathers in the home and men generally in the workplace, were a sign that women of all ages were demanding equal treatment and respect. Such icons as Madonna only reinforced what was already in motion.

The 1990s was a time when unions lost out to employers, and the government introduced individual employment contracts, avoiding the problems of unified strikes over pay rates and conditions. Unemployment was high, and although domestic abuse was now considered a matter for society to recognise rather than a private problem, male abuse of female partners appeared to be higher than was previously thought.406 Deborah Telford cites Stephen Jacobs, then national coordinator of Men for Non-Violence as saying: “…what stops men changing … is fear they will

403 Herd (2005).
404 Ibid., 17
405 Elizabeth Dickson, ‘Human Rights and Wrongs’ New Zealand Listener (August 26, 1991) 22.
be labeled as unmanly, because they are not in control’.\textsuperscript{407} This attitude permeates New Zealand culture and reinforces the hegemonic order\textsuperscript{408} allowing men to bully women and children.

Issues surrounding violence and men’s violence to women were investigated in the media in the 1990s, and the Women’s Refuge collective brought the issue to the attention of the general public through promotions on television and street fundraising appeals. Women’s empowerment and a continuing backlash against feminism were also apparent in the media in the 1990s: patriarchal loss of power and fear of women’s autonomy were encapsulated in the film \textit{La Femme Nikita}.

\textit{Nikita} is a French film which tells the story of a convicted murderer (a woman) who is recruited as a government assassin. Released in 1990, this is the Pygmalion tale retold.\textsuperscript{409} The \textit{New Zealand Listener} review was extremely ambivalent saying: “This is one for the café set—superficial, violent, even nihilistic, rough, stylish, and yet, for all that, oddly moving.”\textsuperscript{410} Laura Grindstaff writes that this film may reflect collective fears and desires about the nature of self and identity, the fate of phallic women (she of the hard body) under patriarchal rule, and the intrusion of state authority into one’s personal life, especially the so-called private sphere of family and home. Grindstaff also ponders the problem of how we can retain our independence and self respect, while treating each other in a humane manner. These issues were intriguing enough to cause the 1997 television spin off \textit{Nikita} to last for five seasons. Like the heroes of \textit{Alien} (Ripley) and \textit{Terminator} (Sarah Connor), the male/female binary is threatened, but these two are driven to their heroic deeds through their maternal instinct, whereas the hero of \textit{Nikita} is moulded from chaos into a masculinist order. Nikita is also reborn (her training site is an underground complex) on her birthday when she undertakes her first job. This rebirth analogy becomes more obvious when she has to escape down the food hatch from the kitchen: “…[she] emerges from the dumpster below covered with an ‘afterbirth’ of food, blood, and muck”.\textsuperscript{411}

Unlike the patriarchal control wielded in the case of Nikita, \textit{Thelma and Louise} cut their ties to the past to create a brief and wild freedom. It is a fantasy film for ‘pissed off’ women.

\textsuperscript{407} Ibid., 28
\textsuperscript{410} \textit{New Zealand Listener}, ‘Film Reviews’, \textit{New Zealand Listener} (July 15, 1991) 43.
\textsuperscript{411} Grindstaff (2001) 149.
Released in 1991, it grossed millions in its first month. A *Newsweek* review states that “the most revelatory aspect of this film is its unmistakably female point of view” (commonly ‘othered’ contemporarily as a ‘chick flick’).412 The article states that a truth every woman is aware of is that when she is in the public sphere, she is in men’s territory, and Thelma and Louise grapple with this fact. This is a road movie, about two friends who drive off for a two-day break. When Thelma gets drunk, a man attempts to rape her in the parking lot and Louise shoots him dead. The fugitives go on the run to Mexico, avoiding Texas, where Louise had been raped some years earlier. In the final stages of the movie, the women are trapped on the edge of a cliff between the police and the Grand Canyon. They drive to their death into the canyon.

The *Newsweek* article states: “Of course they were feminists, but not because they have pistols tucked in their jeans. This is a movie about two women whose clasped hands are their most powerful weapon”.413 The knowledge that men’s abuse of women, as well as the incapacity of the law to take women’s complaints seriously was illustrated in *Thelma & Louise*, and was recognized by women around the world, causing the movie to be extremely controversial: (“pathetic stereotypes of testosterone-crazed behaviour”; 414 “bloody, sadistic...explosive revenge”; and also extremely popular with women).415 It is highly problematic, however, that the only possible solution for women who refused to be second class citizens was to drive over a cliff and die, but in the first years of the twenty-first century some of the most promising of warrior women, too, ended their lives. Sarah Crosby suggests that these women may have killed themselves for two main reasons: their subversive and ‘monstrous’ femininity would be punished by patriarchal power; and/or the characters acted as they did in order to resist incorporation by the patriarchy.416

**Women in Control: the Assassin and the Punk**

Aeon Flux, the television cartoon character, died every episode. She was included in MTV’s *Liquid Television* for two seasons, and each episode ran for 2 or 3 minutes. *Liquid Television* aired from 1991-4 in the United States, and *Aeon Flux* appeared on our screens for the

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413 Ibid.
414 Ibid.
415 Ibid.
very short time that MTV was on air in New Zealand. It was amazing just how varied the audience was for *Liquid Television*.\(^{417}\) Dawn Heinecken notes that MTV has a strong influence on contemporary visual culture and “the network’s trend-setting reputation and appeal to youthful audiences garner its shows both critical and popular attention.”\(^{418}\) Designed by Peter Chung (*Rug Rats*), Aeon’s body is influenced by the drawings of the artist Egan Schiele. She is a spidery assassin who wears exotic and bondage-type clothing. She is an agent of the free country of Monica and each episode consists of her attempts to sabotage Trevor Goodchild, the dictator of the neighbouring country of Bregna. Their relationship is ambiguous and one of love/hate. The series is known for its weird rituals and its extreme violence.\(^{419}\) On the DVD set\(^{420}\) there is a commentary featuring Peter Chung in which he states that he wanted to eliminate anything that may have allowed the viewer to predict Aeon Flux’s actions. As with the story, so with the dialogue – the viewer had to guess what conversations were in play, because the only sounds emitted by the actors were sighs, grunts, and so on. Aeon was not a patriot or a crime fighter. She was no hero at all, neither bad nor good. She was not given orders, had no relatives or family, and one could make no assumptions about her at all. Chung did not want his viewers to feel comfortable, reassured, or familiar with the characters or the story or the format.\(^{421}\) Dawn Heinecken believes that *Aeon Flux* is the ‘mother’ of the female action hero trend of the 1990s, but she also states that *Aeon Flux* was named in *Esquire’s* top 20 list of ‘Women We Love Even Though They Can Kick Our Ass’ in 1996.\(^{422}\) Viewers may “see her as a woman who never bows down to anyone, who sets the man in his place. She is an ‘unruly’ woman, whose liminal status signals destruction”.\(^{423}\)

*Aeon Flux* provided a hero on which to offload anxiety concerning the threat of technological invasion of society and of the human body. New reproduction technologies were being realized; computers were infiltrating every household and the DVD player would be accessible by 1995; security cameras were making their appearance in shops and on some streets and even in offices and workplaces. *Aeon Flux* was also an appropriate arena (Aeon was the

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\(^{417}\) An MTV series in 1995 entitled *Aeon Flux* consisting of ten episodes of 30mins each went on air. Dialogue became necessary, and a story emerged. The movie *Aeon Flux* was released in New Zealand in 2006 and fared badly under fire of the reviewers and theatre-goers alike.


\(^{419}\) [www.moria.co.nz/sf/aeonflux.htm](http://www.moria.co.nz/sf/aeonflux.htm) (retrieved April 22, 2006)

\(^{420}\) *Aeon Flux: the complete animated collection*, Director’s Cut, Peter Chung, MTV Networks (2005).

\(^{421}\) Ibid.

\(^{422}\) Heinecken (2003) 68

\(^{423}\) Ibid.
ultimate postmodern fragmented self) in which to come to terms with notions of self-regulation. Anna Yeatman, feminist theorist, writes that the state in New Zealand in the early 1990s encouraged women to be independent and to participate in the labour market, regardless of personal situations. Women who wanted to be ‘independent’ yet were single parents or beneficiaries due to particular circumstances, were caught up in issues of equal opportunity versus economic dependency. Yeatman defines the situation as “a market-oriented version of self-regulation which withdraws paternalistic protection from women”, and this ‘positive’ step for women is confounded by a non-recognition of ‘non-legitimate’ (child rearing) working roles of women in our society. Aeon Flux is symbolic of the fragmented self, caught up in non-traditional storylines, powerfully independent, yet subject to the frailties of the human body. Like Thelma and Louise, she dies at the end, but unlike Thelma and Louise, Aeon Flux returns next week with a sense of purpose – again. Aeon Flux believes that natural processes are best. Aeon’s name suggests her association with such natural processes. Her name ‘aeon’ connotes timelessness, while ‘flux’ concerns transition and change.

Tank Girl has none of the sophistication of Aeon Flux. Influenced by punk culture, she is an animated character who is most well-known for her representation by Lori Petty in the 1995 film of the same name. Created by Jamie Hewlett and Alan Martin in 1988 as a comic strip for Deadline Magazine in the United Kingdom, Tank Girl definitely expresses ‘girl power’. She is a punk with a tank who drinks beer, smokes, fights and wears sexy punk-oriented dress and combat boots that are too big. She is raucous and delightful in the film, living under the ideals of ‘live hard, fight dirty, and die young’, although at least one reviewer felt that censorship stopped the movie from being a success (that is, that if the censorship rating had been for an older audience, the character could be expressed more positively). Tank Girl’s best friend Jet Girl is a mechanic who blossoms in the friendship, learning to be much more assured in her approach to life, and to ‘take up more room on the planet’ and be bold and daring, with nothing to lose. Tank Girl was great, but like the initial punk, she has disappeared from our lives. Her creators have moved on to what may be considered a much less worthy project, the animated rock band Gorillaz which takes ideas of crossover between animation and real life to new extremes. Tank Girl did, however, contribute to the warrior woman legacy with her unruliness and autonomy and devil-may-care attitude.

424 Anna Yeatman, ‘Feminism and Power’ Women’s Studies Journal Vol 10 No 1 (March 1994) 79-100.
426 There were animated sequences in Tank Girl the movie (in recognition of the original comic book format).
Girlpower and the 'Tweens: from clueless Cher, to saving the world before bedtime

Tank Girl was one aspect of girlpower – acting out, being unruly, and generally causing shock. Cher, in Clueless (1995), offers an exceedingly feminine concept of girl power. Possibly influenced by Jane Austen’s Emma, one cannot help but enjoy the vacuous yet canny Cher. These two aspects of girl power – the muscled, tough, unkempt, seemingly uncaring Tankgirl versus the soft-bodied, pristine, pink and perfect Cher – are reflections of historical concepts of female identity and of questions concerning feminism and femininity which are ongoing into the twenty-first Century. The 1990s was also a time when Madonna created her hard muscled dance body. She went on her Blonde Ambition tour and produced the video In Bed With Madonna/Truth or Dare which documented her backstage ‘private’ life. “Madonna the popstar that ate feminism” is the way that Susan Hopkins describes the capacity of Madonna’s media entourage to pick out aspects of culture and rework these. A Madonna mythology is created that many feminists consider to be a positive influence on young girls and women: “Dressed in black lingerie and feminist discourses, she was embraced as a model of female empowerment”. Madonna’s ability to create new personas for herself was a postmodern tactic which influenced the creation of the girl band, the Spice Girls.

March 1993 was the year the Spice Girls was formed – five girls were chosen from hundreds who answered an advertisement to form a girl band. The girls were required to be 18-23 with the ability to sing or dance, be streetwise, ambitious, outgoing and determined. In 1996 they released their first single. They became the biggest selling girl group of the twentieth century. The Spice Girls saw themselves as being dominant and influential within popular culture without losing their femininity. They dressed in fashionable and outrageous ‘gear’ such as micro minis with six inch platform boots and ribbons in their hair. The phrase ‘girl power’ reverberated throughout the 1990s, and influenced millions of young teen and preteen girls. The girl power advocated by the Spice Girls has been both criticized and defended. Angela McRobbie considers them to be an aspect of popular feminism, “fighting in a playful way for self-assertion and sexual enjoyment, disassociating themselves from an older generation of tired, white, middle-class

428 Ibid., 45.
429 Rebecca Cripps and Mal Peachey, Real Life: Real Spice the Official Story (London: Zone, 1997).
Yet others have considered the Spice Girls to be a highly commercial aspect of performances instigated by Madonna and the Riot Grrrls. The word ‘girl’ has been used assertively by other feminists: the Guerilla Girls monitor the position of women in the art world and school-age young women were encouraged that ‘girls can do anything’ in the 1980s and 1990s. In New Zealand, for example, the Labour Department of the time attempted to encourage girls to take up apprenticeships in areas that had traditionally been male territory, and girls were encouraged into maths and science rather than the traditional humanities. Riot Grrl is an internet site cited by Germaine Greer as appropriating girl power:

Under the guise of helping spread the word, corporate media has co-opted and trivialized a movement of angry girls that could be truly threatening and revolutionary, and even besides that; it has distorted our views of each other and created hostility, tension and jealousy in a movement supposedly about girl support and girl love.

However, Greer supported the Spice Girls “being who you wanna...not taking any shit” and Greer also indicates that this girl power influence changed girls’ behaviour in school yards, causing them to claim public space that had once been dominated by boys. The claiming of public space is one thing that the warrior women of the 1990s are successful in achieving. Even Cher from Clueless, the character who appears to be the most feminine, causes those around her to finally take notice and recognize her right to take up space. She does this through commanding attention with her attention to appearance management (fashionable dress, makeup), through her dedicated friendships, and through her sense of ethics rather than through embodied actions, thus reaffirming her right to act in a normative ‘feminine’ manner quite unlike that of, say, Xena, the Warrior Princess or even Buffy, the Vampire Slayer.

The notion of girl power in the school yard was one of the themes in Buffy the Vampire Slayer, the movie, from 1992. Written by Joss Whedon, the film was not extended into a television series until 1997, but it was definitely part of the genre of young woman’s empowerment. Buffy is the one girl in all the world who is the ‘chosen one’ with all the strength and skills to kill vampires. However, she requires training and is a reluctant slayer, preferring

431 A subcultural movement of young feminists who pull no punches, with a defensive and slightly aggressive upholding of girl power.
shopping and 'coolness' to vampire slaying. In this film boys and men still ‘own’ girls and women and still try to be the heroes. The Buffy of this 1992 movie has a Madonna-esque look, blonde, with thick dark eyebrows and her white dress and white boots she wears to the formal are strongly influenced by the fashion that Madonna helped to create. The formal is the climax of the plot in this movie, and when the dance floor is piled with vampire corpses that Buffy has dispatched, Pike, her boyfriend says: “I saved you a dance, I spose you wanna lead?” Buffy says: “No”, and Pike says: “This is a good thing”, in such a manner that the audience senses a certain equality in their roles (in contrast to the macho attitude of most of the men in this movie).434

Buffy the Vampire Slayer television series ran from 1997 until 2003. Joss Whedon wrote the Buffy character as a young woman who was quite capable of looking after herself and her friends. He says that at high school you have to “wake up to the real world and your place in it...you have to start taking responsibility for your actions...everybody can relate to that.”435 There is a certain Brechtian element to the series – an attempt to break up the narrative – a certain risk taking with form and content. In one episode in 1999 there was a 26 minute stretch with no dialogue; a 2001 episode used music only; and another 2001 episode was a musical.436 The fact that Buffy’s high school is situated over ‘Hellmouth’ (a gateway to the world of demons) is metaphoric – many young people find high school (and real life) to be threatening. For example ‘Out of Mind, Out of Sight’437 tells the story of a young girl who is constantly ignored and who feels alone and invisible. She does literally become invisible and, mentally unstable, attempts to get her own back on the perpetrators of her anonymity through murderous vengeance. Buffy saves the day, and the invisible student is incarcerated (she joins other invisible students in an institutionalized detention centre).

Buffy the Vampire Slayer is not only part of the current history of popular culture, and has a cult following,438 but an academic discipline known as Buffy Studies, was also developed in the 1990s. Buffy Studies encouraged scholarship in girl power in popular culture. Buffy is often used as an exemplar text in third-wave feminist theory. Buffy is teen-oriented television. Rachel Fudge writes in the on-line magazine Bitch that “with mixed messages about feminism and femininity, 434

434 Buffy the Vampire Slayer (1992), Written by Joss Whedon, Produced by Kaz Kuzui and Howard Rosenman.
437 Buffy the Vampire Slayer, ‘Out of Mind, Out of Sight’, Season One, Episode Eleven.
438 There are many on-line sites devoted to Buffy.

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all tied up in the pretty bow of marketability, Buffy could be the poster girl for an entire decade of girl-oriented mass media/culture..." However, Michele Byers considers the hero Buffy to provide “a radical reimagining of what a girl (and a woman) can do and be: powerful, independent, strong, smart, a slayer, a witch, an activist. And in this reimagining, the potential for heroism belongs not to an honorary man but to girls and women”. Buffy is an example of femininity being accepted as part of the feminist character.

Introducing feminine younger viewers to heroic female cartoon characters was an obvious next step in the 1990s: in 1996 the very young New Zealand female viewer, the ‘little’ girl, could choose to watch the animated character, *Sailor Moon*, based on a comic book hero created by the female manga artist, Naoko Takeuchi. Writing in the *New Zealand Listener*, Diana Witchell considered Sailor Moon to be “champion of justice and archetype of the tiara trend... she righted wrongs and triumphed over evil”. Sailor Moon operates with her sisters (Sailor Scouts named after the planets) to foil the baddies, transforming “from sailor-suited schoolgirls who dream of becoming models to sailor-suited butt-kicking superbabes who dream of becoming models”. The Sailor Scouts have adopted Wonder Woman’s television spin to change into their supercostumes. For the younger viewer, the repetition of lyrics and music which emphasise the Scouts’ change from school girls to superheroes provides a distinction between the norm and fantasy and thereby offer a space in which to posit an identity.

*The Powerpuff Girls* was another animated series for the young that appeared on our screens in 1998, a little later than *Sailor Moon*. *The Powerpuff Girls* were created by Craig McCracken when he was an art student in the United States. The three Powerpuff Girls, in their animated construction, were meant to be perfect little girls, made in the laboratory by Professor Utonium. He combined sugar, spice, and everything nice, but his assistant knocked a glass of ‘Chemical X’ into the mix, which resulted in the dynamic super power heroes. Blossom

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439 Rachel Fudge, Bitch (No. 10) www.bitchmagazine.com (retrieved February 6, 2006).
441 Every weekday morning on Channel Two.
444 Ibid., 64.
445 In the 1990s *Wonder Woman* comics had a new artist, and her persona became more aggressive-looking – less approachable. She also became more detailed with exacting gums, teeth, muscle shading and so on, and her costume became skimpier with the leg-line arched to the hip, in keeping with leotard fashion in the gym subculture.
(redheaded), Bubbles (blonde) and Buttercup (brunette) each have their own personality and special power. The girls had to be taught by their ‘father’ (Professor Utonium) how to use their powers in a productive manner, and the heroes always attempt to be good little girls.\textsuperscript{446} The storyline is good versus evil, and some of the more famous lines are “saving the world before bedtime”\textsuperscript{447} and “not all superheroes wear tights. Some wear pretty dresses”.\textsuperscript{448} \textit{The Powerpuff Girls} are an example of femininity – sugar, spice and everything nice – combined with feminist superpower qualities. The concepts are rather confusing for child audiences – the need for Blossom and her sisters to be good little girls is often overpowered by the Chemical X circulating in their bodies, and it is their ‘father’ who teaches them how to conform to a particular path of superpower goodness.

\textbf{Backlash with an unforeseen Xena: the sexual playmate, the warrior princess and the pseudo-male}

An animated figure created mainly for young (and older) men was the videogame hero Lara Croft. Lara was created in 1996 by Toby Gard and she has starred in a number of \textit{Tomb Raider} games, one of which has just been released as I write.\textsuperscript{449} The first game \textit{Tomb Raider} sold twenty-one million copies between the years 1996 and 2000, and although Lara Croft is a digital creation, she is treated like a real person. For example, she was on a wealthy celebrity list, has fan sites which treat her as though she is ‘real’, was rated ‘sexiest woman of the year’ by a magazine poll, and so on.\textsuperscript{450} Kurt Lancaster writes that Lara Croft’s role does not, like many women heroes discussed so far, challenge masculine dominance. Rather, it “feeds it and makes this dominance acceptable through feminine curves, seductive lips, and over-sized eyes...she embodies male fantasy, becoming, like a porno star, the empty shell to be filled by male desire”.\textsuperscript{451} In discussing the actress Angelina Jolie who plays the Lara Croft character in the films,\textsuperscript{452} Lancaster says that

\textsuperscript{446} Power Puff Girls (2002) (film). Craig McCracken, originator of the television characters, was creator and producer.
\textsuperscript{447} Independent Movie Database online: www.imdb.com/title/tt0289408/taglines (retrieved September 23, 2005).
\textsuperscript{448} Independent Movie Database online: www.imdb.com/title/tt0289408/taglines (retrieved September 23, 2005).
\textsuperscript{449} \textit{Tomb Raider: Legend} was released in May 2006.
\textsuperscript{450} Kurt Lancaster, ‘Lara Croft: The Ultimate Young Adventure Girl or the unending media desire for models, sex and fantasy’, \textit{Performing Arts Journal} 78 (2004) 87-97. (retrieved online from Project Muse, April 10, 2006.)
\textsuperscript{451} Ibid., 88.
when associated with the animated heroine, Jolie becomes a "sexual playmate" as well as a "masculine companion for the quintessential masculine adventure". He also references the 'ought' of what women and men have been coded to want in a heroic woman — "curvaceous, flirtatious, and comfortable with her sexuality". Lara Croft's breasts grow larger with every new animated game, and unlike other heroic female figures, Lara Croft never associates with other women on a 'buddy' level. A male Tomb Raider player is cited in Claudia Herbst's essay on Lara Croft as saying: "She is so beautiful and has these incredible breasts but still she is totally under my control. Whenever does this happen in real life?" Lara is a little like Batman in her situation — self-sufficient with servants, a private fortune and a large house. She has a sense of aesthetics and a hint of aristocracy (good school) and a body 'to-die-for', with similar sorts of vengeance issues concerning family that Batman has. She is not a bimbo, but neither is she a character most women can feel affinity with. It is her sense of adventure, her training and her autonomy that cause her to be included as a warrior woman in this research. Women want what Lara Croft has (most of all, her lifestyle), and men desire her (most of all, her body), or perhaps she is desired for the ideal that she represents.

Xena is a very different character to Lara Croft, and is readily identifiable with by many women and admired by both young girls and boys as a popular culture icon on television since the mid-1990s. Xena: Warrior Princess is not a feminist programme as such, according to its stars, but the show does reconstruct myths in a way that includes women's stories as being equally or more important than those of men.

Xena first appeared on the small screen in New Zealand in mid 1995 in two episodes of Hercules: The Legendary Journeys. Her debut season in her own programme was in September 1995. Xena is dear to the hearts of New Zealanders, firstly because the series was filmed in New Zealand.
Zealand and secondly, the actress who plays Xena and many of the cast are also from New Zealand. By 1999 Xena was extremely popular globally. She is credited with paving the way for such television shows as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997), *Dark Angel* (2000), *Alias* (2001), and The Bride in Quentin Tarantino’s *Kill Bill* movies (2004-2005). Diana Witchell, in her review of *Xena* in the *New Zealand Listener* is rather scathing in her description that Xena has the strength of ten men and the support of cast-iron underwear. Witchell expresses a cynicism that labels the hero as monstrous feminine or ‘man-in-drag’ (she also uses this analogy to reflect on Helen Clark’s performance as prime minister). Witchell entertains with comments such as:

Yes, leather fetishists and lovers of classical history, another opportunity to travel to a time when jerky special effects plagued mankind and the sound of American producers laughing all the way to the bank rang through the land.

Or:

Grown men quake at the sight of thighs that could, and probably will...snap a man’s neck in an instant. She had a 15 metre blind Cyclops blubbering like a baby, without mussing her hair.

In the same month (July 1996) that Witchell was deriding the Warrior Princess, Donna Minkowitz wrote in *Ms* magazine:

In successive weeks, a mortal woman rescues Prometheus, defeats the war god Ares, enters the underworld and returns from it. In between, she saves poor farmers from enslavement and defends women from a roving band of rapists. ‘You like shoving women around so much?” she says to one. ‘Try me!’ Many feminists have been dreaming of mass-culture moments like this since feminism came into being.

Lucy Lawless (the actress who plays Xena) comments on the fact that women in New Zealand are only disadvantaged by their own fear, although she does not expand on this statement. As a young girl she had no desire to be a superhero because, in so many words, she felt ‘equal’ with men. There would be many women in New Zealand who would disagree with

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459 Diana Witchell, ‘Top Brass (TV Review)’, *New Zealand Listener* (July 6, 1996) 64.
460 Ibid., 64.
461 Ibid., 64.
463 Ibid.
464 Ibid.
her comment concerning the ‘lot’ of New Zealand women. Not only is she is expressing a point of view that comes from the lips of a curvaceous, tall, beautiful and noticeably white woman, but she also disregards the notion of sisterhood or collective struggle as a means to overcome structural oppression. However, like Wonder Woman before her, Xena has placed the Amazons in a more favourable light, and opened up classical tales to feminist readings. Joan Morreale says that Xena’s character offers masculine and feminine traits in a feminist context in a story that is told in a traditionally patriarchal manner. The ambivalences in Xena “enable viewers from different subject positions to read their own meanings into Xena”. Sherrie A. Innes overviews Xena’s predecessors, saying Xena: Warrior Princess relies on much imagery associated with the “chick in the brass bra”, including Valaria in Conan the Barbarian (1981) and Sonya Blade in Mortal Kombat (1995) as well as warrior women in various video games, but Xena “rewrites her in a fashion appropriate for the postmodern 1990s”. Xena is self-sufficient, athletic and powerful, relying on her strength and swordswomanship, and sometimes relying on advice from her sidekick Gabrielle who accompanies her on all her adventures.

The character Xena, as a female hero, is stronger, naturally (she does not rely on magic or superhero devices), than most men. When she is in trouble, no-one rescues her (although Gabrielle, her side-kick tries her best to save Xena but often resorts to guile rather than strength or expertise with weapons). Xena’s nemesis (or one of them), Callisto, is also a great female fighter and these heroic women never express fear of men. The series shows women as naturally able to have equal strength to men. Xena’s sexuality, too, is not obviously heterosexual; she rejects male overtures constantly, and has no permanent lover; is often bored by male attention. Her relationship with Gabrielle is an intensely close friendship. They care for each other deeply, and the series allows for a certain ambiguity in the relationship.

Xena’s reflective qualities (her evaluation of her behaviour) are often tinged with guilt about her reckless and evil past, but her musings are often humorous. Sherrie A. Inness offers the following example of dialogue between Gabrielle and Xena. They are musing on why men fall for the warrior princess so often:

467 Ibid., 166.
“Why does this always happen?” Xena remarks. “The blue eyes, the leather”, Gabrielle replies. “Some guys just love the leather.” “I think a wardrobe change is in order.” “You could wear chainmail.” “Yeah, but I think that would just attract a kinkier group,” Xena sighs.⁴⁶⁸

*Xena, Warrior Princess* is a fun romp with seriously strong and deadly warrior women who embrace postmodernism inclusive of irony and pastiche.

In 1997, there was an attempt to represent the strong warrior woman in film in the form of *GI Jane⁴⁶⁹* (directed by Ridley Scott of *Alien* fame). The film, unlike *Xena,* was completely lacking in humour. *GI Jane* attempted to address the question of whether women should go into combat in the armed forces but it was too, too serious and fitted into the woman-as-pseudo-male genre.⁴⁷⁰ *GI Jane* appeared not long after *Tomb Raider,* which starred the Lara Croft virtual woman as hero. Claudia Herbst writes that: “Lara is no sissy…she shows no weakness and there are no variations to her obedience. In accordance with fascist ideals, Lara has no alternative but to follow each and every command…Her compliance is guaranteed.”⁴⁷¹ As with *Lara Croft,* *GI Jane* has a hard body, apparently void of nurturing and associations connected to reproduction (nothing wet or soft).

Herbst suggests that “when women are identified with death, rather than life, this ‘cultural norm’ is challenged”.⁴⁷² *GI Jane* is attempting to rid her body of the ‘feminine’ in order to be accepted and not seen as a threat to GI Joe (her reproductive properties and sexuality are neutralized). Lara Croft, meanwhile, was created by an adolescent young man as a sexually desirable virtual woman (also with nothing bodily wet or soft), but her tiny waist makes it impossible for her to reproduce. Her inability to create life makes her acceptable as an instrument of sex and of death. The female hero is caught in a bind. Her body is either fashioned to be hard surfaces and invulnerable with a neutralized maternity, or maternal, using her skills to protect the

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⁴⁷⁰ Philip Mathews, ‘Vanity Fare’, *New Zealand Listener* (December 6, 1997) 43.
⁴⁷² Ibid.
weak, an indication that she is soft and therefore under perpetual threat of violence and penetration.

**Wonder Woman and Appearance Management in the 1990s: body image and identity crisis**

Wonder Woman, too, is caught up in the need to present herself as feminine in order to discount any notions that she has masculine traits – even though her body is never wet or soft. In the 1990s Wonder Woman experienced major traumas and crises of identity: in 1990 her costume was replaced with Greco/Roman variations on the toga, still incorporating the stars and stripes, and by 1993 the Amazon nation had moved away from earth, leaving Wonder Woman in civilian dress, uncertain of her superpowers. However, her recovery from the backlash in the mid-1990s shows that she had incorporated the new femininity into her dress and appearance.

The new femininity in the 1990s, as part of the ongoing promotion of the beauty myth by commercial producers, incorporated cosmetic makeovers. This process had caught the public imagination, and through ‘makeover’ programmes on television, self-enhancement through invasive procedures had become accepted by both old and young, including stomach stapling, facial botox injections, eye-lifts, and breast enhancement. Working out at the gym, too, had become a ‘normalised’ part of life for both women and men. Wonder Woman’s new costume had briefs cut extremely high on the hip – although as Wonder Woman she probably had no need of a bikini wax – hard muscles, and to counteract her toned body and reinforce her femininity, extremely enhanced breasts. In 1997 Wonder Woman’s identity ambivalence once again caused her demise: she crumbled into the clay from which she had originated, but she will, of course, be back.

Wonder Woman’s continued crises of identity are reflected in notions of normative femininity and the earthly practice of reinforcing the heterosexual gender order: warrior women have to contend with issues of surveillance and constant threat of bodily invasion or death while operating in the public sphere, historically a masculinist territory.

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473 Wonder Woman has, however, been known to sweat: *Wonder Woman*, No. 83 (Feb. 1994), cover image.
475 *Wonder Woman*, No. 121 (May 1997).
Warrior Women and Gendered Identity: Sensational and Subversive

The femininity of the warrior woman in popular culture is informed by feminism from Emma Peel in the 1960s to Aeon Flux in the twenty-first century – feminism combined with a transgressive femininity influences the reception of the warrior woman. Skills and performance which have been attributed to the male body, not only in the world of popular culture, but also in the ‘real’ world, are enacted by feminine heroes. Gendered assumptions (binary stereotypes such as feminine/masculine, passive/active, weak/strong, and so on) are resisted. In retrospect, the tough or warrior women in this chapter assert themselves in public space, yet adhere to particular notions of femininity. Although their actions may seem to threaten the gender order, their performance of femininity in some way or another allays any fears of subversion.

In her epilogue ‘Female Heroes and Postfeminism’, Dawn Heinecken points to the complexity and contradictory nature of texts on warrior women such as Buffy, Xena and Aeon Flux. The girlpower heroes, the Spice Girls, as well as Madonna, can also be considered ‘texts’: they perform ‘selves’ which conflate notions of feminism and femininity which appeal to young women, yet fulfill ‘to-be-looked-at-ness’ ideals that appeal to young men. These ideals include heterosexuality, beauty, fashionable aesthetics, and so on, as well as gaining admiration by both women and men for their drive and ambition. I echo Sherrie Inness’s belief that “we are always confronted with a messy and contradictory message about women’s toughness that seems to take one step forward and two steps back”. The question is whether the warrior woman of the twenty-first century will continue on the road to autonomy; whether she will retain her femininity and her feminism; and whether she will keep her sense of humour; or whether she will succumb to the backlash. One cannot help but be anxious that such a meteoric rise in the number of tough women warriors in the 1990s will result in a crash and burn outcome in the twenty-first century.

Chapter five studied the growing trend of warrior women in popular culture in relation to
girl power influences. In the new millennium there is a reversal of this 1990s trend: nostalgia for
heroes from the 1960s and 1970s such as Charlie’s Angels and Mrs Peel from The Avengers are
re-presented on the big screen. It seems as though the tough woman hero has not succeeded in the
fight against patriarchal attitudes, and girl power, in its efforts to combine feminism with
femininity, has been ineffectual in changing belief’s about women. The first half of the chapter
notes the trials of some of the most-loved and heroic women in popular media, for example, Xena
and Buffy, and some newly created warrior women are also evaluated. In the second half of this
final chapter, the ambivalence expressed in the first few years of the twenty-first century
concerning the role of the warrior woman478 will be overviewed.

The new millennium: new technology, the new conservatives and nostalgia

From the late 1990s onwards – as part of ongoing promotion of the beauty myth479 by
commercial producers – cosmetic makeovers, once relegated to the United States, have caught up
with the New Zealand public. Self-enhancement through invasive procedures is not just
restricted to ageing baby-boomers: vanity and a desire for the media concept of ‘attractiveness’
influences even the young, who sculpt themselves into ‘acceptable’ beauties.480 Working out at
the gym has become a normalized part of life for many New Zealanders over the age of sixteen,
and Pilates is the in vogue exercise routine.481

The new century, too, is very much an age of visual culture. Cell phones have ‘morphed’
into cameras and instant portraits can be sent across town or across the globe in seconds. An
electronic I-pod as small as a playing card and as slim as an after dinner mint can contain
hundreds of photographs, music videos and films in its memory. Under the title ‘Shock of the
Next’, Russell Brown of the New Zealand Listener investigates the five top technology trends in

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478 Some suicides, some new creations, and some nostalgia for an idealized past have been the result of the warrior
woman’s feminine, feminist, and masculine attributes in the new millennium.
beauty myth.
New Zealand – and the world. The Internet will offer a replacement for the telephone as we know it, and CD, DVD and television information will be delivered via the Internet: basically, computers, television, DVD players, digital recorders, games’ consoles and telephones will merge. A cell phone will also be a credit card and possibly a means to communicate one’s identity. Alternative fuel such as hydrogen will be a reality and nanotechnology already allows for the creation of new ‘smart’ textiles and futuristic medical concepts such as ‘nanobots’ that live in the bloodstream and diagnose and treat disease. The Terminator series of films, which began in the 1980s, expressed societies’ anxieties at intelligence applied to machines and at scientific advances concerned with the body. It appears that humans still have difficulty in accepting alien surveillance mechanisms within the bloodstream (nanobots) as a positive advancement. However, in the self-surveillance realm, looking good and keeping fit and slim are expected qualities which often have to be maintained through rigorous eating and exercise regimes. Legislation demands smoke-free environments, too, which encourage smokers to reject the habit: private practices became public issues. Moving on to the more general surveillance realm, the rise in the trend towards gated communities in the new millennium is questioned by Bruce Ansley in the New Zealand Listener: “And what are these exclusive enclaves doing to the New Zealand way of life?” he asks. It appears that gated communities are an attempt to connect with some nostalgic sense of ‘community’ that harks back to the ‘abundant’ 1950s when, in fact, women were at home feeling unfulfilled and men were burdened with achieving ‘success’ and supporting a family until retirement.

Bruce Ansley notes a further reference to the nostalgic Golden Age of the 1950s in a feature on the new conservatives. As reported by Ansley, New Zealand political parties, particularly Labour and National, are following a right wing path, and according to his research, a period of conformity is underway: there appears to be a need for stability connected to moral and social conservatism and an embracing of the status quo. Young women want to stay

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483 Ibid.
487 Ibid.
home with the children, with the most conservative age group being sixteen to twenty-four year olds. The researcher states that the women in this age group are reacting to the thirty-somethings: the women who have a degree and a career but no children or partner. The new generation women will get a degree but they want to get married and stay home with the kids. And yet, there has been a steady increase in women’s employment. In 2001 women made up 45.6 per cent of the New Zealand labour force, although the average woman’s income was well below that of men.488

By 2002, 28 per cent of Members of Parliament were women and in 2003 the Ministry of Women’s Affairs launched An Action Plan for New Zealand Women, and a task force was set up to investigate pay and equity problems. The average income for women in 2004 was $22,000 compared with $37,000 for men, even though by 2002 women outnumbered men in educational qualifications at all tertiary institutions except in doctorates, “where men were the majority 274 to 247”.489 It will be the current generation of ‘thirty-something’ women who make use of their degrees, according to Ansley’s article: the young women of tomorrow will dust their framed degree or diploma with no regrets, along with the rest of their housewifely tasks.

Moral conservatism had no part in the decision in 2003 to decriminalize prostitution, because prostitution is destabilizing of heterosexual normative relations. Prostitutes discourage monogamous relationships and “share the goal of proliferating sexual deviancies in order to undermine the mechanisms through which women ... continue to be subordinated”.490 This legislation allowed, theoretically, for the safeguarding of sex workers. Other liberal legislation included the creation of the Civil Union Act,491 which recognized same sex relationships, but marriage was not an option for same sex partners and within New Zealand and most of the western world, the practice of the shoring up of the heterosexual gender order has not abated in popular culture. The backlash against feminism also continues in the new millennium. Xena may dabble with sexual inclination – the ambiguous relationship between Xena and Gabrielle – and women may cheer on the warriors in popular media such as Buffy, Xena and the Powerpuff Girls, but in the first years of this twenty-first century some of the most promising of warrior women (like Wonder Woman in the mid-1980s) have given up on trying to make an impression on this world – in other words, they have found it too hard to pave the way for a new way of thinking.

491 Herd, 2005) ix.
about gender relations – and have ended their lives. Buffy ended her reign as vampire slayer in a self-inflicted death leap, and Xena, too committed suicide, while Max from Dark Angel died from a self-inflicted gunshot wound – all this in the first years of the new century. Sarah Crosby suggests two opposing interpretations of these suicides: firstly, punishment by patriarchal power against the monstrous-feminine (those skull-crushing thighs of Xena’s) and secondly – more optimistically – a resistance by the characters to incorporation by the patriarchy.

Crosby indicates the necessity in popular cultural media for these heroes to recognize guilt; the need to reject their toughness (to want to be normal); and their need to recognize that the only good community is a patriarchal community. Feminist narratives are transformed into patriarchal affirmations and this is an excellent environment in which to insinuate notions of nostalgia. Nostalgia is emotive and reconstructs a utopian concept of a past that never was. The new conservatives – the age group sixteen to twenty-four as referenced in Ansley’s article – idealise the pre-1970s period as a time of stability and moral family values. They are suspicious of the two parent working family and consider the single working adult with no children to be an unfulfilling social role and have, instead, adopted a nostalgia for the past. In an ironic and complementary manner, postmodern pastiche also relies heavily on plundering the past (for emotive and playful purposes) and so consequently in the early years of the twenty-first century there was a run on nostalgic remakes of television series such as The Avengers and Charlie’s Angels.

Dark Angel was a series that ran from 2000-2002. Max Guevara was a genetically enhanced female child supersoldier (with cat DNA). She escapes from a government institution along with other experimental soldiers. The world she lives in, 2019, is post-apocalyptic and dystopian. Max searches for her fellow ‘transgenic’ soldiers while trying to live a ‘normal’ life with her superior strength and capabilities. Created by James Cameron of Terminator fame. The following reference criticizes Max as being more about sex than superpowers: Alicia Thompson, ‘Maddening Max’, www.poppolitics.com www.poppolitics.com/articles/printerfriendly/2001-03-29-max.shtml (retrieved May 22, 2006).


Crosby elaborates on the female hero’s guilt: The male hero feels a sense of guilt if he fails, but the female hero feels a sense of guilt because of her heroism. Like Eve, she has ‘eaten of forbidden fruit’, or performed functions (toughness, autonomy) that are the domain of men (or in the case of Eve and the apple, the domain of God). Through public censure and self-censure, the weight of transgressive toughness is often extremely difficult to bear. Crosby (2004) 155.

Crosby, here, shows that the backlash is still in operation. Community choice is narrow: the hierarchical masculinist community actively discounts feminist community as ‘unimportant’ or ‘dystopian’ to quell any uprising or threat to the gender order. Crosby (2004) 155.

Ibid., 155-156.

Ansley (June 12-18, 2004).
Angels and some new women warriors were created for television series. In a more economically driven vein not associated with nostalgia, computer generated characters such as Lara Croft were redesigned for the big screen.

The Avengers, the film (1998) was a nostalgic remake of the ground-breaking 1960s television series, and it failed not only to recognize the discourses circulating in the post-war baby boom era, but it also failed to take advantage of postmodern pastiche to create a collage that could satisfy fans of the original and attract a new young generation of viewers. Mrs Peel was but a shadow of her former self, reliant on her body to dazzle, rather than her wits. The subtle and quirky trademark conclusions of the episodes in the television series were rejected for a Hollywood climax: a phallic orgasm of guns, explosions, nature threatening to engulf the protagonists (but not succeeding), and all that is associated with masculinist conquest. The nostalgic expectations of the film of The Avengers were manipulated to satisfy the growing conservative element in the community; contrary to the revolutionary baby-boom generation of the 1960s who had demanded changes to societal mores. In contrast to the film The Avengers, the success of the first Charlie's Angels film came about because it refused to take itself seriously. It also relied heavily on the original series to create parodic and ironic situations that would be appreciated by a contemporary audience.

Charlie's Angels, the film (2000), twenty-five years on from the original television series “is one of the most successful female action movies ever produced". The remake places the Angels in contemporary America, with contemporary mindset, that is, rather than second-wave feminist strivings that symbolized aspects of the original television series, the new Angels take female autonomy as a given, and Susan Hopkins tells us that “these super-functioning, girl powered characters are equally at home with macho martial arts and self-conscious, sexualized femininity”. The film is thoroughly postmodern in its recognition of the sexist stereotype that often accompanied the original series. The new Angels create a pastiche that involves a knowing narrative: “With Amazonian prowess, they destroy their opposition with physical force and the odd ironic punchline”. Susan Hopkins believes that the film would not have been such a success without girl power themes, but I suggest that the only real change is temporal. That is,
ways of representing women with ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ traits is not new to the new century and Charlie’s Angels, the television series, was just as, or perhaps even more, successful in the 1970s. Two of the stars of the film, Cameron Diaz and Drew Barrymore are quoted in Hopkins’ book Girl Heroes: The New Force in Popular Culture as saying that the original television Angels made a huge impression on their own lives.503 The three most important points relevant to girl power and Charlie’s Angels are firstly, that the original trio loved each other and worked as a team; secondly, they enjoyed themselves and loved to laugh; and thirdly, that they were feminine and sexy.

In the film, the Angels operate in exactly the same manner as the original Angels – working for Charlie, directed by Bosley, and supporting each other as well as using disguise to extract information. However, the new Angels have little compassion for those not attuned to the girl power wave length. The mild-mannered woman secretary is rudely brushed aside by the new Angel attitude: “not all forms of femininity are equal”.504 The movie is also, however, full of nostalgic references to television and movie classics, Farrah Fawcett hair flicks, and “girls striking poses in the Madonna tradition”.505 The sequel, Charlie’s Angels: Full Throttle (2003), fell flat at the box office. The first film placed three beautiful women, already popular and well known stars, in a nostalgic revisiting of an extremely watched television series from the 1970s. The sequel had lost the novelty drawcard, and viewers commented on its over-the-top action sequences as being too nonsensical and just plain ‘bad’.506

As well as providing nostalgic revisiting of pre-millennium tough women, the early twenty-first century offered film versions of cartoon characters Aeon Flux and computer game heroine Lara Croft. In an interview in the New Zealand Herald, the creator of Aeon Flux, Peter Chung, when asked how he felt about the film version, stated: “I think it might be best to forget you had ever seen the animation and just look at it as something else”.507 Some of the elements of the original animated series are recognizable, but Chung has difficulty with Aeon’s role as hero in the film version; her directive (she had no supervisors in the animated series); the happy ending; and the translation of the personalities. However, the film does reinforce the athletic, skilled and

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503 Ibid., 135.
504 Ibid., 137.
505 Ibid., 138.
violent warrior woman persona, which had proliferated in the 1990s and extended into the new millennium.

Lara Croft translated extremely well from computer game to big screen, and the first film Lara Croft: Tomb Raider (2001) made millions at the box office.\(^{508}\) Studio estimates gave Charlie’s Angels’ audience as 45 per cent male and Tomb Raider’s as 55 per cent male.\(^{509}\) Male audiences appeared to accept the aggressive action of the female stars, but it should also be pointed out that the warrior women were beautiful and conformed to the feminine ideal. However, Tomb Raider: Cradle of Life (2003) the Lara Croft sequel, fared no better than the Angels sequel, and although Cat Woman\(^{510}\) and Elektra’s\(^{511}\) heroes both “donned Victoria’s Secret-inspired costumes”\(^{512}\) these films, too, foundered at the box office. Christina Larson\(^{513}\) believes that despite their beauty and sex appeal, it was self-absorbed internal questioning and not enough action and humour that caused the demise of these tough women. However, one suspects that the ‘new world order’ of young new conservatives may be more extensive than first thought. All the warriors who failed at the box office or who were put out of their small screen misery—even those who provided plenty of action and humour—appear to be husbandless and either childless or inappropriate parents (Xena, for example). This reading or interpretation becomes more believable when one considers such programmes as Charmed and Alias.

**All in the family: witches, the CIA and genetic engineering**

The series Charmed began in 1998 and was finalized in May 2006. It was the longest running show of all time that had an all-female cast. The series was introduced a year after Buffy the Vampire Slayer appeared on television. Very much an Aaron Spelling-formula series, the three sisters (whom I have heard referred to as ‘Charlie’s witches’) are good witches who are extremely beautiful, and support each other in times of stress and danger. In similar vein to Charlie’s Angels, there are many wardrobe changes in each episode, and much cleavage exposure. These women did not bulk up in the gym, but used magic, their inherited powerful

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\(^{509}\) Ibid.


\(^{512}\) Ibid.

\(^{513}\) Larson (2005).
weapon against evil forces. The focus was on family as central to the women’s lives, to the
degree that the finale included family from the past and also future generations. Susan Hopkins
writes at length on the emergence of young practicing witches coinciding with popular culture
texts such as Charmed since the 1990s. The witch does not take on ‘masculine’ warrior traits,
preferring to use ancient feminine traits such as intuition. Hopkins suggests that the “fast-growing
market of witchcraft commodities – Wiccan books, magazines, ritual tools, wands and scents…is
aimed mostly at young female newcomers…Popular witchcraft promises empowerment
facilitated by consumption”. Hopkins also notes that “These ‘nice’ white witches rarely
question the boundaries between good and evil, victim and villain, real and unreal…Charmed
lacks the…camp sophistication of Buffy the Vampire Slayer”. Aaron Spelling’s ‘power of
three’, however, mesmerized television audiences. Spelling ensured that the division between
right and wrong is clear cut; that his three heroes are beautiful, sexy, intelligent and have
contrasting personalities; that there were maximum wardrobe changes; and that the magic (as
with the Angels of Charlie’s Angels fame) only worked when the three supported each other.
This formula appears to be infallible, because Charlie’s Angels was watched by a huge audience
in the 1970s and Charmed was also extremely popular, as demonstrated by the series’
longevity. The audience for Charmed included those such as myself and other of my academic
friends who felt guilty pleasure at watching a programme with such a lack of depth. One could
speculate and say, perhaps, that the importance of family in Charmed is what appealed to
audiences living in such a fractured society as ours.

Unlike Charmed, the series Alias starred a solo warrior: Jennifer Garner acted as Sydney
Bristow, a CIA agent who searched for and recovered artifacts of importance from the
Renaissance period. When watching this programme, one is aware that, as with Charmed, there is
an emphasis on family relations that are in this instance, complex and emotion-laden. Sydney’s
relationship with her father, for example, is strained and explosive. She idealises her mother,
whom she assumes is dead. The series has intricate plotlines concerned with concealment of

514 Most episodes involved action in the domestic sphere – the home.
516 Ibid., 173.
517 In the United States, 59 per cent of television viewers regularly tuned in to Charlie’s Angels. See Time magazine
(November 22, 1976) 53.
identity, double agents, imposters and lost memory. As an undercover agent, Sydney is the mistress of disguise, an intrigue that made the series extremely popular.518

‘Family’ has a rather different meaning for Max of Dark Angel. The series was shortlived, and ran from 2000 until 2002 and was created by James Cameron (Terminator). Max is the genetically engineered hero, escapee from a government facility where she had been developed to be the ultimate soldier. She spends her time trying to track down others like her – her ‘family’. Cameron’s warrior woman is, unfortunately, a male experiment. Her libido is connected to her power. She trades on her sexuality in a serious and brooding manner with none of the lighthearted knowing attitude of Charlie’s Angels (2000), and even Lara Croft has more respect for men than Max does. Gender relations are at their worst in this series, where men succumb to Max’s sexy body and Max considers men to be prisoners of their genes.519 However, to her credit, Max of Dark Angel has her own agenda and sense of purpose, and her sassy attitude reinforces many attributes that are considered, by her fans, to be empowering.520

And how empowered is Wonder Woman in the new millennium? In April 2003 she loses her powers – again – and dresses in symbolic white – again – and by June of the same year she has her powers back, but has cut her hair (for the first time in her history) as a disguise. Her costume shrinks and expands depending on the current illustrator, as do her breasts. Most significantly, in July 2004, “Wonder Woman resorted to killing a man to save the Man of Steel”521 (Superman). It is shocking to think that Wonder Woman had no alternative but to murder a man. This outrageous act by such a peace-loving warrior is indicative of the contemporary acceptance of violence and killing in the female hero genre.

One need look no further than Quentin Tarantino’s homage to Asian cinema, Kill Bill 1 (2003) and Kill Bill 2 (2004) in which warrior women perpetrate graphic and bloody depictions of violence. Admittedly the Kill Bill films are a ‘revenge’ story: ‘The Bride’ was pregnant when she was shot through the head and left for dead in the church along with the rest of the wedding party. The character survives and systematically kills all those involved. A black comedy, the Kill

518 Created by J. J. Abrams, this was a family oriented series. The series began in 2001 and lasted until 2006.
520 Ibid.
Bill story pays homage to all of Tarantino’s movie heroes. For example, The Bride’s yellow tracksuit is from a Bruce Lee film, and a Bruce Lee character also influences the masks worn by the members of the Crazy 88 gang. Although the main female character in the Kill Bill films is a trained and skilled fighter, this story is not about girl power or tough women in their own right. Rather, it concerns Quentin Tarantino and his agenda in the film world. As the director, he treats The Bride as a spectacle or a specimen to be put under duress and to be played with in an experimental manner to see how much she can take. The Bride is a vehicle through which Tarantino exhibits his witiness and cool. He also references his earlier film, Pulp Fiction and the script he wrote for Natural Born Killers.

With reference to the notion of family, The Bride is almost demonic in her successful attempt to avenge the death of her unborn child, but she becomes ‘heroic’ in her attitude when she – and the audience – realizes that the foetus was taken from her ‘dead’ body and that her daughter is alive and well. She is not just a killer, she is a mother, and there is, therefore, hope that she will change. Her nurturing instincts normalize her. She is soft and gentle with her young daughter when they finally meet, and the audience sees a very different side to the assassin. Unlike our beliefs about the masculine killer, there is hope that The Bride can be rehabilitated through her daughter, that her ‘instincts’ will kick in and she will reject her chosen line of work. However, Tarantino will always have the upper hand in her story – he will introduce yet another element in order to ‘test’ her mental and physical capacity and challenge her identity. One suspects that the Kill Bill films are backlash material disguised under a veneer of ‘cool’.

The pattern that appears to emerge in the new millennium is one that celebrates western notions of normative behaviour: women as nurturers, as desirous of marriage, a family and a happy home. Xena, Buffy, and Max from Dark Angel were too subversive to survive in a patriarchal world, and it appears that although Sydney from Alias, and the white witches from Charmed were all family-oriented, by 2003 the warrior woman had outlived her ‘used-by date’. Furthermore, sequels to the first films on Charlie’s Angels, Charlie’s Angels: Full Throttle, and to Lara Croft, Lara Croft Tomb Raider: Cradle of Life, were not well received by audiences. Admittedly this is not unusual with sequels, but these outcomes compounded the belief that the warrior woman had become as ‘unfashionable’ as the Terminator. So far as Aeon Flux, the film,

522 Kill Bill I, written and directed by Quentin Tarantino. ‘Special Features’ include the making of Kill Bill.
is concerned, the originator of the animated series indicated strongly that the narrative was tamed for a general audience and left very little of the original character intact. Wonder Woman was still experiencing identity issues, as she had done for the whole of her super powered career: one suspects that her lapse in judgment in killing a man stemmed from a belief that changing circumstances, that is, violent times, required violent reprisal in order for our hero to maintain respect. This approach undermined all that Wonder Woman has stood for throughout her sixty-four year reign as a keeper of the peace.
Conclusion

In the 1950s I wanted to have Wonder Woman’s abilities and, failing that, I wanted to combine my best girl qualities of understanding and caring with the best boy actions of strength, courage and leadership. In the decades since Wonder Woman’s creation, warrior women have experimented with the mix, finding a certain success when the gender order is not threatened by their actions, and being punished when the actions are subversive to the point of undermining the gender order. Mrs Peel’s\textsuperscript{523} independence became threatening and so her husband was ‘found’ after being thought dead, and she dropped out of public life. The woman who took her place in the series was much more ‘girlie’, younger and less sophisticated.\textsuperscript{524} Wonder Woman never really threatened the gender order because she was from an alien land, but she, herself, was influenced by western society and continually questioned herself about her motives. The Angels\textsuperscript{525} made sure that they got just the right mix of femininity and feminism in order to appeal to most audiences, and so on.

There has, too, been a generalized movement from a femininity that was soft, passive, and of the private sphere (the home in the 1950s and 1960s) to a feminist-informed femininity that was and is toned or muscled, active, and currently operates in the public sphere and has done so quietly since The Avengers, gathering more momentum through the decades and into the new millennium. The woman hero of the new century has many of the attributes of the male warrior. She takes up as much space as she requires in order to operate successfully rather than politely making herself as small as possible as if to apologise for being in a sphere that has traditionally been male. She has also learned to use her voice with authority, and along the way has learned to express herself in other ways – the new Angels\textsuperscript{526} squeal with pleasure whereas the old Angels\textsuperscript{527} squealed with fear or shock.

Because this is a patriarchal society, the woman hero has often resorted to violence in order to hold her own. Claudia Herbst suggests that although definitions of power can be flexible, they are “invariably formalized by those in power. In the past, killing has been defined as the ultimate

\textsuperscript{523} The Avengers.
\textsuperscript{524} Miller (1997).
\textsuperscript{525} Charlie’s Angels (1976).
\textsuperscript{526} The film (2000).
\textsuperscript{527} The television series (1976).
power, a power generally attributed to men’. Herbst suggests that the generosity in allowing women to share in this power through tough images of warrior women will be a short-lived sharing because scientists will soon create life outside the womb, and the power of life (once the prerogative of women) and not death will be the ultimate definition of power. Herbst suggests that women will always be second class citizens, never able to share in a patriarchal society—and yet women are experimenting with new patterns of identity regardless. In the 1990s and early years of the twenty-first century, the pattern that emerges is that to be a successful woman one should take on masculine qualities. I believe women have walked this path already, when second-wave feminism was at its peak, and liberal feminist ideals were those that allowed for women to move into the workforce and yet still be keeper of the home: a wonder woman. Apart from the adoption of masculine qualities, a ‘successful’ woman should embrace feminine qualities, and it is important that she know the balance that allows her to be accepted, otherwise she may be labeled ‘deviant’ and be punished in some way.

In the early 1990s as a way of celebrating young women’s power and as part of the ongoing trend to resignify terms of derision, the Riot Grrr’s reclaimed words like ‘slut’ and ‘bitch’. For them being a girl also meant reclaiming “knitting, the colour pink, nail polish, and fun... rock n’roll, porn, and judgement free pleasure and sex”. Baumgardener and Richards state that the influence of Madonna, the Spice Girls, Buffy, Xena, Wonder Woman and films such as Clueless mean, for girl power, that: “using makeup isn’t a sign of our sway to the marketplace and the male gaze; it can be sexy, campy, ironic or simply decorating ourselves without the loaded issues”. By adopting terms associated with masculinity such as ‘warrior’, ‘tough’, ‘hero’, and ‘power’, and connecting them to women rather than men (for example, ‘girl power’ and ‘warrior woman’), an opportunity was created that could bring into being a new identity that may possibly override any notion of ‘pseudo-male’. However, some images of tough women were not acceptable. Stephanie Mencimer muses on ‘violent femmes’:

No doubt our action heroines have come a long way since Wonder Woman, but the feminist critics are right: women are still only allowed to be violent within certain parameters largely proscribed by what men are willing to

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529 Ibid.
530 Virginia Haussegger, Wonder Woman: the myth of ‘having it all’ (Sydney, Australia: Allen & Unwin 2005).
532 Ibid., 136-137.
tolerate...Women playing real action figures who menace real men still don't sell as Geena Davis discovered in Long Kiss Goodnight. In the opening scene...She kills Bambi, snapping a deer's neck with her bare hands. That scene alone probably sank her movie.\textsuperscript{533}

Mencimer states that the violence of the successful tough woman is sterilized, pristine and pure. Celebrating women's power comes in a non-threatening and highly sexualized package,\textsuperscript{534} and the anxieties attached to heteronormativity create a popular cultural tough woman associated not only with the word 'aggressive', but also with the words 'white', 'sexual', 'beautiful', and 'desirable'.

In conclusion, then, does the female hero have the capacity to effect alterations in the way we conceptualise female agency and subjectivity? Has she succeeded in aiding women's autonomy? Sherrie A. Inness, in consideration of the female (and male) hero at the beginning of a new century writes: "The increasingly self-reflexive quality of the popular media when it comes to the creation of heroes...is a sign that notions of the heroic are in flux".\textsuperscript{535} The warrior woman is restricted to essentialist narratives of maternity and nurturance or her sexuality is emphasized, detracting from her heroic performance, and yet she is independent, autonomous and powerful. Inness suggests that she is "a multivalent representation that can be read in numerous and even paradoxical ways".\textsuperscript{536} If women can be associated with toughness, a traditional masculine attribute, then the gender order is thrown into disorder. However, there is anxiety by women themselves concerning the signifiers of femininity, hence the reinforcement of feminine traits through the adoption of appearance management behaviours such as wearing high heels, lipstick, and showing cleavage.

There is a distinct ambivalence in women's attitudes to toughness: toughness is associated with power in patriarchal society, yet the violence of 'The Bride' in Kill Bill is disturbing to those of us who believe that nothing is black or white, right or wrong, and that self-reflexivity causes our identity to be constantly in flux, in the making as it were. Unlike The Bride of Kill Bill, Wonder Woman is an excellent example of a warrior woman whose identity is constantly in flux.

\textsuperscript{533} Stephanie Mencimer, 'Violent Femmes-cinema', Washington Monthly (September 2001) www.finarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1316/is_9_33ai_78682185/ (retrieved July 7, 2006).
\textsuperscript{534} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{535} Inness (1999) 176.
\textsuperscript{536} Ibid., 179.
Her self-reflexivity causes her to be uncertain at particular times, and confident of her direction at others.

The girl power of Buffy the Vampire Slayer is sexy and strong, and yet there is an ethics of caring in the programme. Susan Hopkins, who writes on girl power, describes the girl hero as “both sexy and strong, tough and glamorous, masculine and feminine. The girl hero has a ‘masculine’ capacity for aggression and dominance, but has also mastered the ‘feminine’ arts of image management”. Hopkins suggests that girl power heroes are more interested in aggression and image management than ethics of caring (although Buffy cares, and even Tank Girl had a soft heart).

John Leland agrees with Hopkins, saying that girl power heroes such as the Angels in the 2002 film are “literally impenetrable, in love or in war...they do not drop the armour for amour”. Also, as suggested by Gough-Yates, the Angels separate themselves from the other females in the television programme who were lacking in some way. Gough-Yates’s notion that feminism is “turned into a simple ‘attitude’ which can be purchased in a perfume or a fashionable outfit” seems to become a given ‘truth’ by the 1990s. Women warrior and girl power attitudes are conflated with sexy feminine and tough feminist attributes.

Yet the notion that girls can do anything has created a femininity that is valued by girls. Ultimately, the question of whether women have achieved certain autonomy through images of the warrior in popular culture has no one defining answer. All the tough women discussed in this thesis have in some way or another experimented with aspects of ‘femininity’, ‘masculinity’ and feminism and the experimentation will hopefully continue in 2007 in some new heroic form. Even Lara Croft, although perhaps intended almost exclusively for a male audience, offers a role model to some degree for girls – she is educated, smart, and refuses to be sidelined by any man. Theorist Patricia Pender suggests that texts would be best viewed as “sites in which cultural negotiations over the meaning of terms like feminism and female power take place”, and Dawn Heinecken says that female power, individuality and heroism are enacted in tough warrior films

539 This attitude was highlighted in the film, too, when other women such as the secretary, were treated badly by the Angels.
and other media in ways that allow for feminist critique and "expressions of feminine discontent".542

Frances Early and Kathleen Kennedy, too, point out that the new woman warrior who emerged in the 1990s mastered violence as an independence measure, but "the new woman warrior has remained primarily white and has evinced ambivalence about the political goals of feminism".543 They also cite Kent Ono when suggesting that girl power relegates feminism to a subtext: "Girl power politics...concerns itself solely with white-middle class individualist and ostensibly pleasurable notions of female identity, most of them produced by commercial enterprises largely responsible for the continuing gendered and racialised exploitations of labourers globally".544 It is important to consider attitudes to minorities in these popular cultural texts. For example, Ono states that Buffy the Vampire Slayer "re-establishes neo-colonial power relations and links this to the heroification of white women".545 Similarly, Inness, in discussing Xena: Warrior Princess notes that "Blacks and Asians are rare in Xena’s world, and the only darker people to appear are usually swarthy enemy warriors...whom she quickly dispatches..."546 There is also a pattern in these texts of dismissal or of poking fun at the less beautiful, the less intelligent and the less enlightened.547

Xena, in the real world, is an actress who has been quoted as saying that as a young girl (growing up in New Zealand) she had no desire to be a superhero because, in so many words, she felt ‘equal’ with men.548 But that women do actually share equal status with men, according to statistics, is not the case with many New Zealand women.549 Statistics on violence against women in New Zealand make it plain that women are still considered to be second-class citizens and many men feel they have the right to bully and violently abuse women, particularly those they live with. The warrior woman consciousness does not appear to have been influential on how women of both the older and younger generations enact their roles in New Zealand society. The

544 Ono cited in Amy-Chinn (2006) 185
545 Ibid.
547 Charlie's Angels the series; the film of the same name; and in episodes of Xena: Warrior Princess. For example, in one episode of Xena a large woman was dismissed for her hope of being crowned ‘beauty pageant queen’.
white, beautiful and untouchable tough woman is weighed down with ambivalence: adopting ‘masculine’ traits has been accompanied by anxieties that have seen her revert to extremely ‘feminine’ practices, often to the detriment of her feminist tendencies. Her desire to care has been outweighed by her penchant for violence that has often ended in self-recrimination, but just as often the violence has been ‘naturalised’ within her performance. She has not done or been enough to instil autonomy and independence in many young New Zealand women. The complex and contradictory nature of texts on warrior women, and the redefinition of ‘girl’ with the advent of girl power all create a sense of female identity in the popular media which is simultaneously forward-thinking and regressive. The experimentation by the tough woman in popular culture has impacted on the way women and, most importantly, young women, act within society, but women’s interactions with men on an intimate level, as James and Saville-Smith suggest, need radical rethinking.\(^{550}\)

The (heterosexual) warrior woman in popular culture has not been as successful in her romance as she has been in righting wrongs and dispelling evil. Perhaps the reason that *Charmed* fared so well on the small screen is because the characters had reasonably ‘healthy’ relationships, albeit heterosexual and of the traditional courting- and marriage-type. Amazonian practices of living in isolation from men are not practical in contemporary society, and warrior women need to be seen to be experimenting with their romantic inclinations within popular cultural forums: showing their amour as well as their armour in a more significant and believable manner. It takes strength to show vulnerabilities and, of course, ‘amour’ is opening up to emotional confusion. The warrior woman needs to be seen to have control, be assertive, yet be able to love and care and, yes, even to nurture: watching a warrior woman kick ‘butt’ on television is only a part of the story, particularly if your partner is due home any minute, drunk, aggressive and needing to feel powerful and in control.

It appears that the warrior woman, if she can survive the first decade of the new millennium (and I am waiting with anticipation for the Wonder Woman film directed by Joss Whedon),\(^{551}\) must now overcome her postmodern penchant for slick surfaces, slick talk and a sexy mirror-glass exterior. The warrior woman in all her incarnations has enabled us to glimpse an alternative


performativity of gender relations but she does not “effect alterations in the way we conceptualise female agency and subjectivity.” Images of the warrior woman are simultaneously regressive and progressive offering stereotypes of femininity as well as ‘deviant’ feminist attitudes. These images, when juxtaposed to women’s real life and actual situations – the violence of men against women, the inequality of economic opportunity vis a vis men, and limits to empowerment in a masculinist society – are found to be unrealistic. If she survives into the next decade of the twenty-first century the warrior woman must perform in ways that offer a radical rethinking of the gender order.

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**Filmography**


**Television series**


- ‘The Masterminds’
- ‘The Gravediggers’
- ‘Death at Bargain Prices’
- ‘Honey for the Prince’
- ‘A Touch of Brimstone’
- ‘Castle De’ath’
- ‘Escape in Time’
- ‘The Living Dead’
- ‘The House that Jack Built’


Tapert, Robert and Raimi, Sam (1995-2001). *Xena: Warrior Princess*. USA: Syndication. Specific reference is made to the following episode:

Whedon, Joss (1997-2003). *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. USA: The WB and UPN. Specific reference is made to the following episode:

**Comics:**

*DC Comics.* *Wonder Woman* No. 329 (February 1986).

*Further information is provided on these items in the Appendix*
Appendix

Television and Films
Listed in date order with Creators, Writers and Promoters of Warrior Women in Popular Media

(1942) Wonder Woman. (comic book character). Created by William Moulton Marston with contributions by various artists and writers into the twenty-first century, mostly male with one or two female artists/writers. The most noticeable female input was in 1986 when Tina Robbins' cover art re-presented the legend of Wonder Woman.


(1976) Charlie's Angels (television series). Each episode of the television series was written, directed and produced by a variety of men. However, episode eight, which first aired in November 26, 1976 in the United States, titled 'Lady Killer' was written by a woman, Sue Milburn. Ironically, this episode involved a woman killer of centerfold girls.


(1991) Aeon Flux (animated television series). Peter Chung created the animated figure of Aeon Flux, and wrote the storylines for MTV.


(1992) Buffy the Vampire Slayer (film). Joss Whedon originated the concept, screenplay, and wrote and directed the movie. He was interested in encouraging female empowerment.
(1993) **Spice Girls.** Invented by Chris Herbert, a 22 year old male in the record industry supported by his business partner, his dad. The idea was to assemble a female pop act which young girls would identify with.


(1995) **Clueless (film).** Directed and written by Amy Heckerling.

(1995) **Xena: Warrior Princess (television series).** Xena was devised by Robert Tapert and Sam Raimi and was based on an evil princess from kung fu films starring the actress Lin Ching Hsia. Xena’s first appearance was in the television series *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys,* also devised by Tapert and Raimi.

(1996) **Lara Crofts: Tomb Raider (computer game character).** A computer animated figure devised initially by Toby Gard and formulated by a design team who created her persona – enhanced her original physical appearance designed by Gard – and her ‘real’ history.

(1996) **Sailor Moon (animated television series).** Based on the comic book by a woman, Naoko Takeuchi.


(1997) **GI Jane (film).** Directed by Ridley Scott (*Alien*). Story by Danielle Alexandra, screenplay by David Twohy.

(1997) **Buffy the Vampire Slayer (television series).** The television series was based on the original film of 1992. Written and directed by Joss Whedon.

(1998) **Charmed (television series).** Produced by Aaron Spelling. The creator and executive producer was a woman, Constance M. Burge. She was replaced by a man, Brad Kern, before the third season, but she stayed on as story consultant until season four.

(1998) **The Avengers (film).** Based on nostalgia for the British series of the 1960s. Produced by Jerry Weintraub. Director was Jeremiah Chechik and the screenplay was written by Don Macpherson.


(2000) **Charlie’s Angels (film).** Based on nostalgia for the Aaron Spelling television series from the 1970s. Produced by Leonard Goldberg, Drew Barrymore (who is also one of the Angels in the film) and Nancy Juvonen. Written by Brian Rowe, Ed Solomon and John August.


(2002) **Power Puff Girls (film)**. Craig McCracken, originator of the television characters, was creator and producer.


(2003 and 2004) **Kill Bill I and II (films)**. Written and directed by Quentin Tarantino. More revenge films than warrior films, but influenced by the tough woman history that had preceded them. Tarantino is known for his fascination with black comedy and kung fu movies.

(2005) **Aeon Flux (film)**. The director of the film was Karen Kusama (*Fight Girl*). Peter Chung, the originator of the animation refused to have any connection to the movie, which was created in a much more palatable format than his original concept, for a general audience.