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POW!

Fighting the Good Fight in Mainstream Superhero Comic Books

Superheroes have never really gone out of the public eye. From the Superman radio show of the 1940s to the releases of *Iron Man*, *The Incredible Hulk*, and the Batman movie *The Dark Knight* over the coming months, each decade since their inception has reinvented familiar characters in various ways for the consumption of a willing audience. The box office receipts of superhero movies made in the last eight years have only gone to prove that the superhero genre is still being well-received by viewers.

With these movies bringing superheroes perhaps even more often in the public eye than usual, it cannot come as a surprise that more and more readers are looking to—or returning to—the source material. With the inception of the “trade” or “graphic novel,” where issues are published collectively by storyline or from one chronological point to another, nostalgic readers can now go back to familiar incarnations of characters that they loved as children, and readers new and old can easily catch up with what is being published today.

Some of these nostalgic readers are now writers of comic books themselves. In 2004 Joss Whedon, the Oscar- and Emmy-nominated television and film writer, turned his hand to comic book writing with a four-year run on publishing company Marvel Comics’s *Astonishing X-Men* title and currently writes for another Marvel title,

Runaways (“Astonishing X-Men Vol. 1”; “Runaways: Dead End Kids Premiere”). Jodi Picoult, the *New York Times* bestselling author, took on four issues of rival company DC’s *Wonder Woman* that were recently released as a hardcover trade (“Wonder Woman: Love and Murder”). Reginald Hudlin, writer, director, and President of Entertainment for the television station BET, helped relaunch the title *Black Panther*, which follows the adventures of “the world’s first black superhero” (“About Me”). It is not a leap of faith to suggest that these writers have brought with them at least a part of their fan bases, although there are no statistics exist that I can find on the specific percentage of resulting new readers. But in a *PublishersWeekly.com* blog entry from 2006, it is plain to see that Whedon’s work was selling consistently well, better than many of the other Marvel titles (O’Brien).

Finally, the legitimization, for lack of a better term, of comic books as an art form has de-stigmatized the works for adult readers. Art Spiegelman’s work *Maus* won a Pulitzer Prize in 1992, proving that there is a place in the medium for in the literary world (“The Pulitzer Prizes”). Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons’s *Watchmen* made *Time Magazine*’s list of “the 100 best English-language novels from 1923 to the present,” calling the graphic novel “a heart-pounding, heartbreaking read and a watershed in the evolution of a young medium” (Grossman and Lacayo). *Watchmen* is primarily the story of vigilantes rather than the powered superheroes that are most popular in among the Marvel and DC characters (Batman withstanding); however, Moore’s character Doctor Manhattan is altered by a terrible accident to become “a being who could walk through walls, move from one place to another without covering the intervening distance and rearrange things completely with a single thought” (Moore). *Watchmen* bridged the gap

between superhero comics and literature, as evidenced by its Hugo Award in 1988 in the newly-created category “Other Forms” (“The Hugo Awards: 1988 Hugo Awards”).

While these things may lead an adult reader to comic books, they do not address why feminists should read comics. The simple response to this is that comic books become another medium through which to view society and can therefore offer another perspective on society’s views of women. By comparing modern versions of some of these iconic characters to their earlier incarnations, we can see how society’s view of women has progressed and/or regressed through time. We can then use that information to pinpoint problematic issues and work to resolve them, creating dialogues with each other and the industry using the internet.

Jean Grey: Mutant, Madwoman, Murdered...and then murdered again, I guess

One title that often lends itself to examination by academics is *X-Men*, due to its themes of alienation and othering. In 1963, Stan Lee created the X-Men after his previous successes with *Spider-Man* and *The Fantastic Four*. Lee was looking to find a new way to bestow “unique powers” upon another team of characters, “[b]ut I knew I couldn’t keep hitting the public with a constant barrage of rays and radiation” (7). Instead, he hit upon the idea of “mutants”:

We all know that mutations occur in nature. For no apparent reason a frog will be born with three legs, or a banana will be the size of a watermelon, or a child prodigy will have the ability to play Mozart at the age of three. And the beautiful thing about such mutations is they don’t require any

explanation. They can happen to anyone. Once I decided that our little cast of characters would have mutant powers, the rest was simplicity itself.

(7)

A result of this, something that Lee did not seem to have in mind during the creation of the characters, is that the X-Men have been been relevant to every time period since their inception. In their article “Tapping into Parallel Universes: Using Superhero Comic Books in Sociology Courses,” Kelley J. Hall and Betsy Lucal explain that “[t]he anti-mutant sentiment in X-Men titles easily corresponds to institutional and everyday racism, (hetero)sexism, homophobia, and anti-Semitism” (Hall and Lucal 63). This can be seen in such articles as Michael J. Lecker’s “‘Why Can’t I Be Just Like Everyone Else?’ A Queer Reading of the X-Men,” Matthew Diebler’s “‘I’m Not One of Them Anymore’: Marvel’s X-Men and the Loss of Minority (Racial) Identity,” Neil Shyminsky’s “Mutant Readers: Reading Mutants: Appropriation, Assimilation, and the X-Men” and P. Andrew Miller’s “Mutants, Metaphor, and Marginalism: What X-Actly Do the X-Men Stand For?”

X-Men also lends itself to feminist analysis. By looking briefly at the changes in the character of Jean Grey over time, it will hopefully become clear how a feminist analysis of a superheroine could prove to be a useful tool in examining the shifting roles of women in the last four decades.

Jean Grey is one of the original five members of the X-Men and the only female in the team. From the onset, she is seen as weak and passive in comparison to her teammates. According to *X-Men: The Ultimate Guide*, “When she first joined the X-Men, Jean primarily used her telekinetic powers to lift small objects” (Sanderson, *X-*

Men: The Ultimate Guide 27). Her male counterpart (and eventual husband) Scott Summers also has problems controlling his powers, but his difficulty stems from a head injury he suffered after being “forced to leap from his father’s burning plane” (Sanderson, *X-Men: The Ultimate Guide* 18). This courageous act leads to a “somewhat tragic” figure, as Scott cannot ever look upon another human being with his own eyes (Lee 7). Instead, he needs to view the world through ruby quartz lenses, which “diffuse his eye beams harmlessly” (Sanderson, *X-Men: The Ultimate Guide* 18).

In *X-Men #57*, published in 1969, Jean is portrayed as a “modern woman,” balancing out heroic actions with traditional roles. In a short story at the end of the issue, she uses her telekinetic ability to pick and peel apples and do housework, telling the reader, “Not only can I lift heavy stuff like this chair—but I can even whisk all the dirt and dust outside, where it belongs!” (Fite 2). She is then shown using her power in action sequences, making quips like “And I can never turn down a date on a pretext that I’m all tied up!” as she telekinetically brings scissors toward her bound hands (3) and “This is a great way to escape a dull garden party” as she uses her powers to levitate (4). On the same page, she states that she has “the ability to conquer a villain thru sheer brain power!” and that she “can will a person to be defeated—without ever using physical force—!” The accompanying image is Jean standing behind the villain, poised for telepathic attack—a position that would be considered sneaky and unchivalrous for a man. Jean’s very powers mean that her “active” role in the *X-Men* primarily consists of avoiding action entirely.

Finally, Jean thwarts a purse-snatcher without anyone realizing what has occurred. She concludes by telling the reader, “Pretty soon things are back to normal! And, part of

being normal—is to turn men’s heads without really trying!” (5). She is shown with two men behind her, both of whom have disconcertingly wide eyes and big smiles on their faces. Given the way that the eyes are drawn, the men appear almost manic in their interest in her. But, as we are told, this is “part of being normal.”

In the issue itself, Jean has little to do. On pages three and seven, she is seen but not heard, as the rest of her teammates fight (Thomas et al.). She finally speaks on page nine, where she tells her teammate Angel that “Nothing’s ever hopeless, Warren—not if —” before she is cut off by another teammate. When they discover another character’s apartment in shambles, Jean suggests that the young woman may have done it herself (7). She does not speak for the rest of the fifteen-page issue and is only seen waving goodbye to a character who says that if Jean were missing, Scott would come to try to find her (10). So much for an active role in her team.

Jean came to the forefront in the eighties with writer Chris Claremont at the helm. Jean developed heightened abilities after coming into contact with a “cosmic entity” known as the Phoenix Force and eventually becomes corrupted by the power, killing billions on another planet. Jean is held accountable for her actions and chooses to commit suicide rather than let anyone else suffer at her hands. Jean dies a hero, albeit a flawed one (Claremont et al, *The Dark Phoenix Saga*). This is later changed by Marvel staff members who wanted to bring Jean back to life but wanted her to be blameless of any guilt. The history is “retconned” (comic book jargon short for “retroactive continuity” that means that the newer storyline “overwrites” the older one) so that the Phoenix and Jean are completely separate and “[t]he entity duplicated Jean’s body, her memories, her personality, and absorbed some of her consciousness” (Barney-Hawke and

Moreels 22). Jean's heroic sacrifice is negated, and the powers "she" acquired are only accessed when the (almost always male) writers have use for it, and at the strength level they choose.

This storyline alone warrants a much closer look than can be done within the scope of this paper, as it asks many questions about how women with power are portrayed, especially in the time period of its publication. Certainly, a connection can be drawn between other heroines of the late 1970s through the beginning of the 1990s who seem to be assertive and powerful but ultimately need rescuing by a man (an example of this perhaps being Lois Lane in the *Superman* films). In his scathing comparison between the 2006 Dark Phoenix adaptation *X3* and its comics counterpart, Peter Sanderson says in his blog *Comics in Context* that "[i]n comics or film, 'The Dark Phoenix Saga' runs the risk of being interpreted as arguing that women can't control their own passions or powers" (Sanderson, "Comics in Context #135: The Passive Aggressive Phoenix Saga").

Upon Jean's return, she quite literally comes into conflict with herself: she finds that her lover Scott Summers (Cyclops) has married a woman who looks and sounds just like her, and the two now have a son. In Jean's absence, this woman, Madelyne Pryor-Summers, has stepped into Jean's life, in a sense completing the role that the Jean of 1969 most likely desired. Jean and Scott are immediately reunited, and Madelyne, like her predecessor, is corrupted and turns down a dark path in Claremont's *Inferno* storyline. Madelyne finds that she is a clone of Jean, created by the villain Mister Sinister, that was given life—and fragmented memories—by the Phoenix Force. Madelyne tells Jean "I am what I am because you refused to take back what was rightfully yours . . . Power was

what you shoved away” (Claremont et al, *Inferno*). Again, power wielded by a woman is shown to be something corrupted, and something that should be rejected, as Madelyne, the “bad mother,” eventually tries to kill her son, Scott, and Jean, and it is only by the X-Men’s cooperation that the family is saved at the cost of Madelyne’s life.

The early-to-mid 1990s became a time in X-Men history when a sort of “gender-free” writing began to appear. Popular writer Fabian Nicieza and writer/artist Rob Liefeld made everyone big and powerful, whether they were male or female. A more assertive Jean Grey can be seen proposing to Scott to *Uncanny X-Men* #308 (Lobdell et al) and insisting upon using her powers to allow the paralyzed Charles Xavier, her mentor, to dance with her at her wedding in *X-Men* #30, her face as her power manifest almost threatening in its appearance (Nicieza et al).

In the new millenium, however, the happy marriage of Scott and Jean Summers is torn apart and Jean is once again killed off. According to the Cyclops biography in the Marvel Encyclopedia Vol. 2: X-Men, “the marriage sometimes suffers from Scott’s distant and distracted manner” and Scott “is worlds away, either physically or emotionally” from his wife (Barney-Hawke and Moreels 16, 22). Jean has completely ceased to be the passive woman she had been in previous times, as shown when she discusses her temper, which she says is “the worst,” with her teammate Lucas Bishop, telling him “I run around the world preaching peace and brotherhood and when I come home, the first thing I do is fight” (Morrison et al). Scott and Jean’s problems come to a head during Grant Morrison’s “Riot at Xavier’s” storyline, where Scott is revealed to be having “a psychic affair” with teammate Emma Frost. Once again, Scott is married to one woman and involved with another, and once again Marvel resolves the conflict with

the wife's death, this time Jean's in Morrison's "Planet X" storyline. Once again, Jean Grey—the only female character of the original team—is dead.

Then, to no one's surprise, Jean is forcibly resurrected and re-destroyed the very next year in 2005's *Phoenix: Endsong*, a five-issue series by Greg Pak and Greg Land. Many questions arise from this need to return to the character and how the character's many deaths and resurrections are dealt with by the writers: Is Jean such an essential part of the X-Men team that, without her, the team falters? Or is she an object—a puppet, perhaps, that the writers take out and put back at their whims? A closer look at the events leading up to Jean's death—particularly Scott's affair with Emma Frost, the "bad girl" to Jean's "good girl"—could also prove to give valuable insight into the modern view of relationships.

Supergirl: From "Maid of Might" to "Mighty Skinny"

The writing is only half the story in comic books. The other half is the artwork and, with the right (or "wrong") artists, a beloved female character can go from powerful to puny in one quick sketch. This can be seen by comparing an earlier incarnation of Kara Zor-El—Supergirl—to her newest incarnation as drawn by Michael Turner.

The Supergirl mythology is dense and confusing, even for a fan. The character of Kara Zor-El, Superman's cousin, however, is clearer: There is Pre-Crisis Kara and Post-Crisis Kara.

The terms "Pre-Crisis" and "Post-Crisis" refer to the storyline "Crisis On Infinite Earths," written by Marv Wolfman and drawn by George Perez. Published in DC Comics

in 1985, the “Crisis” storyline was the result of a cluttered “universe” filled with “parallel Earths” where different versions of the characters were allowed to flourish. Wolfman writes in his introduction to the published collection of the storyline,

At this point in its history DC Comics had Earth-One, Earth-Two, Earth-Three, Earth-B, etc. There were super-heroes on each Earth and though the old-time readers had no problem understanding DC continuity, it proved off-putting to new readers who suddenly discovered there was not one but three Supermans, Wonder Womans, Batmans, etc.(6)

To resolve this, Wolfman and Perez created a twelve-issue storyline that collapsed the DC “universe” into one continuity, where the characters knew there had been a “crisis” where they saved the world at the expense of some of their friends and teammates, but none retained memories of destroyed worlds, or of any history previous to that given after the Crisis.

For DC fans, the terms “Pre-Crisis” and “Post-Crisis” are necessary ones used to keep the complex continuity straight, especially as it pertained to characters like Supergirl, who died during the storyline, but were replaced by other incarnations as time went on. Fans did not want a DC universe without Supergirl and new characters such as Linda Danvers and Matrix took up the mantle. Kara Zor-El stayed quite dead, for good reason, as Wolfman explains when he answers in his introduction the question “Why did we kill Supergirl?”:

Before CRISIS it seemed that half of [Superman’s home planet of] Krypton survived its explosion. We had Superman, Supergirl, Krypto, the Phantom Zone criminals, the bottle city of Kandor and many others. Our

goal was to make Superman unique. We went back to his origin and made Kal-El the only survivor of Krypton. That, sadly, is why Supergirl had to die. (7)

Although this was incompatible with the idea that the heroes retained the memories of their fallen comrades, this was not uncommon in the awkward time after the Crisis as the company struggled to figure out how to deal with its aftermath. In a sense, things could begin anew; in another sense, the rich history of the characters could not be wiped away, so while characters like Kara Zor-El disappeared from memory, others, like Barry Allen (The Flash) were remembered as heroes who paid the ultimate price.

Writer Jeph Loeb, who brought Kara Zor-El “back” into Post-Crisis continuity, calls Supergirl in his introduction to the work, “a great idea and those simply can’t and shouldn’t stay dead.” He praises artist Michael Turner for the way he “imbues all his female characters with a strength, both externally and internally.” And yet Turner’s depiction of Kara Zor-El shows no external strength. But we will get to that.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

First, we must look at the original, Pre-Crisis Kara Zor-El. Figure 1 shows the cover from Kara's *Action Comics* debut in 1959, while Figure 2 shows Kara during the "Crisis on Infinite Earths" storyline. The later Kara has a different hairstyle, a headband, and a modified costume which include a shorter skirt and a higher "S" symbol on her chest. She is also noticeably stronger-looking than her previous incarnation, with rounded, muscular arms and legs.

As with Jean Grey, we see the character grow more powerful in the 1980s only to be weakened again in the new millennium. Turner's 2004 incarnation of Supergirl is thin to the point of emaciation, with her midriff exposed to reveal a concave stomach (fig. 3). The long, tight sleeves of the top emphasize her thin arms, and yet the sleeve still appears to have wrinkles in it from where it is too loose.



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

Unfortunately, Turner's image plays right into the pro-anorexia movement, where the disorder is seen as "a life-style choice" (Giles 464). For the girls of the "pro-ana" movement perhaps this Supergirl is ideal; according to the source material, she is not. *The DC Comics Encyclopa* lists Supergirl's height at 5'5" and her weight at 135 pounds even as it shows a picture of Turner's Supergirl dominating the page (Beatty et al 299). These figures, so to speak, do not seem to match up, and instead Supergirl appears incredibly frail, with no sign of the "strength" that Loeb refers to in his introduction.

However, Kara's costume is not the only problematic thing that she wears. In the first issue of the storyline, she wears nothing at all, and covers up with an unbelted trench coat and, in the final image, a loosely-draped sheet that only covers a little of her lower torso that can still warrant publication with her cousin's cape held in front of her breasts (Loeb and Turner). Later, when Superman, in his everyday persona of Clark Kent, takes his newly-discovered cousin around his home city of Metropolis, she is wearing low-rise jeans with thong straps clearly showing and another midriff-bearing top (fig. 4). Turner also draws a small space between Supergirl's thighs to emphasize the thinness of her legs.

These clothes, we are told, are bought by Superman's wife Lois Lane, as her costume is designed and sewn by Superman's wife Martha Kent. The older women characters supposedly see no problem with dressing a newly-arrived alien girl provocatively. Writer Loeb says in his introduction that "Kara reminded me of my daughter, Audrey" and the reader wonders what Audrey has in *her* closet, but Loeb also says that he finds Turner's artwork "sexy" so the whole introduction becomes problematic and, quite frankly, a little disturbing.

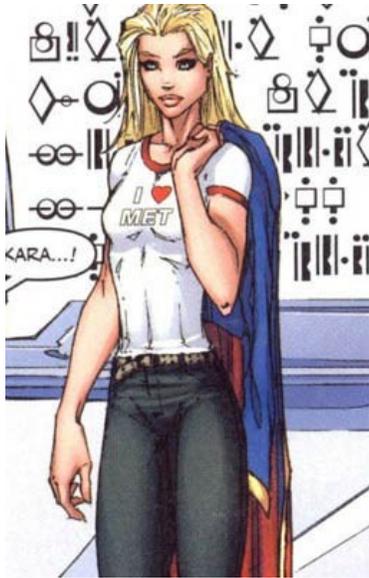


Fig. 5



Fig. 6

However, there is good evidence that Turner is only writing what he knows. On the Livejournal community scans_daily, a poster by the name of “odditycollector” made a strong argument for socialite Paris Hilton being the basis for Supergirl’s new look, putting images from the comic next to shots of Hilton in strikingly similar attire, the clearest example of which can be seen in figures 5 and 6 (odditycollector).

Since the new Supergirl’s inception, though, positive change has occurred, which comic book blogger Melissa Krause attributes to the fans, calling it “a very obvious case [for an example of positive change] in which the frustration of fans and the failure to reach a particular branch of the audience lead to actual discussion and new direction for the character.” This exchange between fans and the industry is a dialogue that feminists can and do engage in, in order to affect change.

The Internet: Connecting Everyone with Everyone Else Since 1995

I turned to the internet, as people do nowadays, when I found myself starting to become frustrated with certain narrative and artistic choices in comic books, like the advent of a super-thin Supergirl. I probably should not have been so surprised to find a thriving feminist comic book community, and yet I was. The possibilities for direct dialogue with the industry had not yet occurred to me, although once I began to click from blog to blog to forum to organization website, I saw that this was indeed what was occurring.

The industry has always listened to fans, though primarily and originally through the “letters pages” of their titles. Fans write in and voice opinions or ask questions and, if they are lucky, their letters are published and responded to. However, the editors choose which letters will be published from presumably a large batch, and the often short responses of the editors make it feel as if their responses are given little thought.

With the internet, there is no industry editing. Opinions are voiced in full, at any time, and in the venue of the fan’s choosing—whether it be in the comments section of a posted interview, a personal blog, a forum, etc. An author, by word of mouth or a Google search, might find a post pertaining to his- or herself and feel the need to respond.

This happened with Karen Healey, president of Girl-Wonder.org and author of the blog *Girls Read Comics (And They’re Pissed)*. In her post “Birds of Prey: Goddess and Fanboy,” Healey criticizes writer Gail Simone’s choice to portray a female and a male character having sex following a scene where the female character seems to be turning the male character down, arguing that the female character’s change of mind should have

been detailed for the reader. Simone responds to this in the Girl-Wonder forum thread specifically created for the post, defending her choice. The thread becomes problematic when one of Simone's comments is edited (to remove a real name of one of the other commenters) and Simone chooses to leave the discussion, but the fact remains that the ability to have this conversation at all opens doors for a give-and-take between the industry and the fans where the fans are given the kind of level playing field they never had on a letters page.

The internet also offers ways for feminists to connect with each other and the female artists and writers the industry so desperately needs. Organizations like Girl-Wonder.org “support female artists by hosting webcomics” as well as “provid[ing] a deliberately safe space for others to speak with clearly defined rules of discourse (Healey). The Ormes Society, founded by Cheryl Lynn Eaton, is “dedicated to supporting black female comic creators and promoting the inclusion of black women in the comics industry as creators, characters and consumers.” Melissa Krause, who co-runs a “linkblog” called *When Fangirls Attack*, helps fans “find conversation about issues regarding women and women's issues in comics.”

These sites do not go unnoticed by people like Rachel Edidin, who does double duty as both a blogger of women's issues on Girl-Wonder.org and an editor at Dark Horse Comics. Edidin utilizes both her work and personal experiences to shine a much-needed light on important topics such as the visibility of women within the industry and sexual assault.

What the internet provides for everyone is the means for communication. Feminist comic book fans harness this not only to discuss issues amongst themselves, but

also to initiate positive change within the industry, and these created resources make it easy for a new reader to join the existing dialogues.

The End of the Issue(s)

While the primary focus of this paper has been adults returning to or beginning to read comics to see how society informs comics, it would be foolish to discount the ways that comics inform society, specifically where children are involved. In his article “Qu(e)rying Comic Book Culture and Representations of Sexuality in *Wonder Woman*,” Brian Mitchell Peters states, “Comic books mark a pertinent role in the formation of ideology and the young: not only does a comic represent its era and often youth culture, but its crystallization of ideas, both in surface and subtext, caters to the formation of pop-culture trends in its pubescent, and later adult, audience.” With educators like Kelley J. Hall and Betsy Lucal bringing comics into the classroom and the numerous superhero television shows, cartoons, and movies saturating the market, superheroes are just as prominent today as they have been for the last almost seventy years. It is not just the epic struggle between good and evil that is being played out in these superhero stories, but also the struggle of women to be viewed as strong and powerful. By engaging in feminist dialogues about superhero comics, we are not only looking into our past and our present, but our future.

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Jennifer Estep’s Survey

1) Who are you and what is your involvement in the comic book fandom/industry?

My name is Jennifer Estep, and I write the Bigtime paranormal romance series for Berkley Books. The books are basically female-centric, light-hearted spoofs of the comic book genre and its conventions (secret identities, disguises, etc.).

The first book in the series, *Karma Girl*, was released in May 2007. The second book, *Hot Mama*, came out in November 2007, and the third book, *Jinx*, will be released in September 2008.

I’m also a certifiable fangirl, a gamer, and an authority on fantasy literature and culture.

2) When did you first start reading comics?

As a kid, I used to read the “Archie” comics from the magazine racks while I was waiting for my mom at the grocery store, mall, etc. (Although I didn’t even realize I was reading a comic at the time).

As I got older, I got hooked on fantasy novels by J.R.R. Tolkien, Terry Brooks, David Eddings, etc., and didn't read comics. However, I've always enjoyed superhero-themed movies and television shows (Batman, Spider-Man, X-Men, Lois & Clark, Smallville, etc.)

Over the past few years, I've really started reading comics and graphic novels, due in part to the increasing popularity of superhero movies and television shows, and my interest in creating my own comic book world/mythology with my Bigtime books.

3) Who is/are your favorite character(s), male or female?

Batman and Wonder Woman are my two favorite characters.

I like Batman because I think he's the most realistic superhero out there. He doesn't have any special, supernatural powers or skills. All he has to rely on are his own brain, strength, and whatever gadgets he can dream up. Batman often outsmarts villains instead of outfighting them, and I admire that sort of cleverness.

Wonder Woman has been a favorite of mine ever since I first saw the television show with Lynda Carter as a kid. I loved the fact that the woman was the one who was the smart, witty hero, the one with the secret identity and all the special powers. (That cool, shiny tiara didn't hurt either). I wanted to be Wonder Woman as a kid, to the point of putting a towel around my shoulders and pretending it was a cape.

4) Who are the writers and artists you trust to write/draw women well?

Overall, I would say Neil Gaiman and Joss Whedon, as far as writers go. Both of them always create deep, interesting, complex characters, whether they're male or female. Although they occasionally write things I don't particularly enjoy.

But I've really been enjoying Whedon's new "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" comic, based on the television show (which I also loved).

5) Who are the writers and artists you will never give money to again?

I haven't read any comic book writer/artist that I disliked so much I'd never buy their work again. I usually give people a couple of chances to hook me on their writing/art/etc., whether its comic books, novels, or something else.

6) What would you say are the three biggest (feminist) issues you have with comics?

Body type would be my number-one issue. Just about every woman in comics suffers from the Barbie syndrome—small waist, huge breasts, and long, flowing hair. They're all sexier and more well-endowed than the prettiest supermodel. These women would tip over in real life! Plus, I've never seen a real, live woman with sculpted thighs the size of tree trunks, but they're a dime a dozen in comics.

Skimpy costumes is another issue for me. The female superheroes' costumes are usually tighter and far more revealing than the male heroes' costumes. I don't know about you, but if I was out fighting evil and kicking butt, I'd want a little more support and coverage than a bustier and some fishnets. Don't they ever get cold, especially in the winter?

I also think there's a lack of diversity in how women are portrayed. Again this goes back to body type, as most of the women are young and exceptionally gorgeous. I'd like to see more women of all ages, shapes, sizes, body types, ethnicities, religions, etc. And women tend to be victimized far more often than men in comics. The hero saving his girlfriend/love interest from the villain over and over again is a staple in the genre.

7) What would you say have been the three biggest instances of misogyny in the comic book industry in the past few years?

I don't know if it's an instance of misogyny, but one story that bothered me was in the "Sandman" series by Neil Gaiman. One of the books features a story about a writer who essentially buys a Greek muse, Calliope, from another man who's holding her captive. One of the lines goes something like this: "His first act was to hesitantly rape her." (I'm paraphrasing here).

There's nothing hesitant about rape. I understand Gaiman is showing that the artist has to take possession of Calliope before she'll work for him, but I don't know that the rape scene was necessary—especially the use of the word "hesitant."

Calliope is also portrayed as very docile and submissive in the story. She doesn't fight her attackers or try to escape. She just wasn't a strong character, which disappointed me.

8) Where have you seen real change?

[Unanswered.]

9) Do you feel the industry is purposefully trying to drive girls and women from comics?

No, not purposefully. But I think there are several things that work together to keep some girls/women from trying comics or graphic novels.

First of all, the majority of writers, artists, editors, etc. are men. They're writing from a male perspective. And the vast majority of readers are also men. So, it's inevitable that male writers would write male-centric stories for a male audience. Those kinds of stories don't always appeal to women.

I also think society as a whole has made it more acceptable for guys to read "geeky" things like comics and do "geeky" things like dress up as their favorite character or go to cons than girls, who are supposed to focus on being pretty, popular, and cool. Plus, it can be intimidating for some girls/woman to walk into a comic book store—especially if they're the only female in the room.

Then, there's the general stereotype that girls/women just aren't interested or won't read comics. I recently bought some graphic novels at a used bookstore. When the clerk rang

up my purchase, he said, “Oh, these must be for your boyfriend.” No, I corrected him. Those are for me.

10) What do you think you’ve done to initiate change and what do you think others can do to help?

I don’t know that I’ve initiated any change. My goal as an author (no matter what I’m writing) is to tell a good story, first and foremost. To entertain and make people feel like my books are time and money well-spent.

That being said, my books are female-centric—written in first person from a woman’s point of view. I write strong female characters—women who can take care of themselves. They aren’t all necessarily kick-butt superheroes, but they all have college educations, jobs, and are self-sufficient (even the villains). That’s a message I think is important to send, however subtly.

As for my female superheroes themselves, they’re just as smart, strong, and talented as my male characters. Again, women being strong and equal to men is another message I think is important to send to all readers – male and female.

What can others do to help? Cut down on the sexy drawings and show more realistic depictions of female figures. Quit victimizing women. Show a variety of women – of all body types, ages, sizes, ethnic backgrounds, religions, etc. Develop more female-centric characters/storylines that would appeal to female readers. Encourage female writers/artists already within the industry and actively search out new ones. Actively market comics/graphic novels to girls/women.

These are just a few things the industry as a whole could do to make comics more appealing to women, who are a vast, untapped readership who could help support the industry. I think it would be a win-win for everyone involved.

Karen Healey’s Survey

1) Who are you and what is your involvement in the comic book fandom/industry?

I’m Karen Healey and I’m the president of Girl-Wonder.org. I also write the column Girls Read Comics (And They’re Pissed) and I’m currently writing my dissertation on superhero comics culture as a productive fandom.

2) When did you first start reading comics?

When I started reading, though I didn’t have access to superheroes. Eventually I moved past Asterix, TinTin and those illustrated classics comics and left it for a while, until I was given Kingdom Come by a friend when I was about 20. After that, I was blown away, and dived in to superheroes.

3) Who is/are your favorite character(s), male or female?

Tricky, because so much depends on the writer, artist and editorial team of the time. When I say “I love Black Canary”, I’m talking about my idea of Black Canary more than any particular incarnation. (I do love Black Canary). My favourites are Oracle, Connor Hawke, Misfit and Jaime Reyes, the third Blue Beetle (the latter two, I think significantly, have had very few writers at this stage).

4) Who are the writers and artists you “trust” to write/draw women well?

Right now, Gail Simone, Adam Hughes, Ross Campbell, Brian K Vaughn, Nicola Scott, Joss Whedon, Alan Moore, Neil Gaiman, Michael Gaydos, Colleen Doran, Jill Thompson, Cecil Castelluci, Aaron Alexovich, Mike Carey... I’m probably forgetting a bunch.

5) Who are the writers and artists you will never give money to again?

That’s a leading question. I can’t say there’s anyone I absolutely refuse to believe could come up with something that would make me want to read their stuff ever. For example, right at this moment, I don’t read JLA because I can’t take Ed Benes’ buttalicious art, but he’s done reasonable work in the past and could do it again.

6) What would you say are the three biggest (feminist) issues you have with comics?

Rape as origin story or most horrible dreadful thing to happen to a female character’s *partner*; art, costumes and poses that continually place female characters as objects, not subjects; and the lack of women of color in comics.

7) What would you say have been the three biggest instances of misogyny in the comic book industry in the past few years?

Spoiler’s titillating torture scene was pretty fucking disgusting. The Heroes for Hire cover - not so much the cover itself, but the stream of self-justifying disingenuous bullshit that flowed from everyone involved after the fact, including the implication that only women who were ugly could possibly be upset by that cover. And recently, the whitewashing of Vixen.

8) Where have you seen real change?

It’s incremental, really. I get email and comments fairly often saying “I used to think that stuff was okay, but now I see it’s not” - so there’s definite change in the fanbase, and I see that reflected in other venues, not just as the specifically feminist sites. There’s more awareness of what things are not okay, and why. (Of course, there’s also a backlash. There always is - it’s a sign we’re doing something).

In the comics, I’ve talked to industry people who have gone “Oh, yeah, I’ll do that another way next time”, or people have contacted us and asked for advice. Then there are positive things within the comics themselves, like this probable return of Stephanie

Brown, and the issue of Thunderbolts that poked fun at that dreadful Mary Jane statue as part of its ironic look at horrific marketing.

9) Do you feel the industry is purposefully trying to drive girls and women from comics?

God, no, I think that as an industry, DC and Marvel would love more women and girls to read comics. They want more *everyone* to read comics! The establishment of the Minx line, DC's appeal for women to start reading Supergirl, the revival of low-selling but well-loved by women titles like Spiderman Loves Mary Jane, Spider-Girl, and Manhunter... these are signs that the industry is reaching out, if only because there's money there.

But I do think the idea of giving up on exploitative art and stories in their main lines sends them into a flurry because they expect that they make a lot of money selling the tits and ass to male readers, and change is awful and scary (and to be fair, difficult). There's this attitude of "But we're *giving you girl comics*! What do you mean, our guy comics are sexist? We don't want to change!" And often, from interviews and so on, it appears they can't even *see* it, which is not encouraging.

10) What do you think you've done to initiate change and what do you think others can do to help?

Just being visible and speaking up is important, but Girl-Wonder.org has also provided a deliberately safe space for others to speak with clearly defined rules of discourse, which I think is important. (As safe as we can make it. Sometimes the mods slip up). We've run letter campaigns, support female artists by hosting webcomics, and we have several projects up the pipeline, including a scholarship and an e-resource for creators that helps with those tricky questions like "how can I display diversity well?"

I think people can do what they can. If they're creators, taking a minute to think "is this good? Is this exploitative? Do I have only one girl in this work?" can have extraordinary effects. If they're fans, talking with other fans or creators at cons about what they do and don't like, and why. If they're critics, making sure the representation of gender and diversity are things they consider when reviewing a piece. You have to have awareness before you can have cultural change, and I think we're in that stage now, where people are just starting to become aware of this stuff on a wider scale.

Melissa Krause's Survey

1) Who are you and what is your involvement in the comic book fandom/industry?

I'm a comic blogger under the username kalinara and a freelance columnist at Blog@Newsarama under my real name: Melissa Krause. I've got no connection to the comic book industry itself. I also co-run a feminist centered linkblog called "When Fangirls Attack."

2) When did you first start reading comics?

I'm a relative newcomer to superhero comics. I started in January 2005, on recommendation of a friend. Before that I'd been a fan of manga for about ten years though.

3) Who is/are your favorite character(s), male or female?

Hmm, I think my current favorite characters are Guy Gardner/Green Lantern (DC), Sanderson Hawkins/Sand/Sandy the Golden Boy (DC), Nick Fury (Marvel), and Kara Zor-L/Power Girl (DC).

4) Who are the writers and artists you "trust" to write/draw women well?

I'm not actually terribly picky about writers and artists. There are a few that I tend to be wary of, but in general I try to go by a comic by comic basis.

That said, I usually assume I'll enjoy anything by Geoff Johns, Dave Gibbons, Gail Simone, Greg Rucka or Grant Morrison when it comes to the portrayal of women, writing-wise.

I don't pay as much attention to artists, I admit. Though I've fondness for Pat Gleason, Amanda Conner, Aaron Lopresti and Rags Morales.

5) Who are the writers and artists you will never give money to again?

I'm not sure I'd go *that* far. I'll give anything a shot if I like the characters or if the summary looks interesting, on the hope of "Even a broken clock strikes true twice a day."

I admit though, I tend to be wary of writers like Judd Winick or Frank Miller. It's not that I think they're bad, but I don't usually find their work to my taste particularly when it comes to their use of women in narrative.

I'm less picky about artists, but I admit, I really wish certain artists would stop tracing porn stills for female characters.

6) What would you say are the three biggest (feminist) issues you have with comics?

Most of my issues involve the disregard of female characters in favor of the men. I'm not saying that I think, for example, Jade should have been more prominent than Kyle Rayner in Green Lantern, or anything, since it's fairly clear who the main character of the story ought to be. However, I resent when it seems as though the female character is designated solely to fill a narrative role because of her gender without regard to the particulars of her character.

Or translation into coherent English, I don't like it when it feels like the women are

interchangeable. That so-and-so is in this plot because she's a woman in the lead character's life without much concern for her individual character.

I don't like the prevalence of sexualized violence. I'm not saying that I don't think female characters should be targeted/killed sometimes if it's the story, or even that rape or sexual assault should never happen to female characters. But sometimes I think writers get so carried away that it becomes almost a shorthand for "this character is eevil!" That prevalence then cheapens even good or powerful stories that might utilize the same sort of plot.

Finally, I get annoyed when female characters get suddenly portrayed as weaker than the male characters to facilitate dramatic rescues or romantic scenes, especially if said female character has more experience or more physical durability than the male character. Checkmate/Outsiders had a crossover that was particularly annoying. One issue ended with both male hero Captain Boomerang (a relative amateur without active superpowers) and female hero Sasha Bordeaux (an experienced ex body-guard, espionage agent enhanced with nanites and able to walk off explosions) being tortured quite badly. However, by the next issue, Captain Boomerang was on his feet and able to fight his way out, while Sasha was swooning, weak and required carrying with horribly pathetic dialogue. It would have been one thing if both characters were out of commission, given the situation, but the rapid recovery with seemingly no ill-effects of the male while the physically enhanced and more experienced female continued to suffer the ill-effects (a rapid reversal from the previous issue, in which he was quite out of commission and she was strong and defiant) was very frustrating.

7) What would you say have been the three biggest instances of misogyny in the comic book industry in the past few years?

I don't agree with the use of the word "misogyny" in this context. I think it tends to demonize the creators of comics and impart a willful maliciousness against women that I don't think exists. I think that mistakes are made based on thoughtlessness and adherence to stereotype and long standing sexist narrative roles. But that's not the same as misogyny.

That said, I thought some of the worst instances of thoughtless unintentional sexism were:

The fairly wretched tentacle porn-resembling cover for Heroes for Hire and the way in which the creative staff seemed to go out of their way to try to dismiss any and all criticism of it.

The initial implementation of the current Supergirl. I think she's improved quite a bit since, but certain creative choices and sexualization at the very beginning were things I found somewhat appalling.

The entire One More Day fiasco. Not so much for breaking up Peter and Mary Jane's

marriage, but the grotesque way in which the fate of Aunt May was used as leverage for the whole deal as well as certain advertisements that seemed themed around Peter being destined to lose one of the women in his life.

8) Where have you seen real change?

I think there's been a lot of change. Supergirl is a big example, because you have a very obvious case in which the frustration of fans and the failure to reach a particular branch of the audience lead to actual discussion and new direction for the character.

I think that through discussion at fan conventions, letters, communications, the creators have been made more aware of certain problems and are visibly making efforts to improve on things. Even if they don't always succeed. And in the case of controversies like the Heroes for Hire cover or the Stephanie Brown memorial case, we also get to see folk like Joe Quesada and Dan Didio publicly speak about the choices made and answer accusations of sexism. Even if the answers aren't necessarily what we want to hear, it means something that the questions are being asked and acknowledged.

9) Do you feel the industry is purposefully trying to drive girls and women from comics?

No. I think the accusation's patently ridiculous, honestly. No one's trying to lose a significant portion of a potential audience here. I think it's simply that the creators are used to specific methods and trends and are used to directing their efforts to a particularly vocal part of their audience. I think many creators also rely on narrative cliché and trends without considering how their finished product may come across to women (or to minorities for that matter in cases regarding racism or sexual orientation issues).

The industry is insular, but I think that's less a deliberate thing and more a case of cluelessness.

10) What do you think you've done to initiate change and what do you think others can do to help?

I don't know that I've ever set out with the intention to initiate change so much as I've always intended to express my own opinion and perspective about the comics that I read.

When my blogging partner Ragnell/Lisa Fortuner came up with the idea of "When Fangirls Attack" (I provided the name) it was mostly intended to be a resource that would enable interested people to find conversation about issues regarding women and women's issues in comics. I think it did have something of a positive effect because while we don't find every post or discussion ever made surrounding these issues, we compile enough links to prove that there is a significant audience out there who are very concerned with these issues.

I think that the best thing people can do to help feminism in comics is to just keep

talking. Letters, message board posts, blog posts, in person conversations, it doesn't really matter so long as we are all making our voices heard. We're here, we exist, and we care about these matters. The more we talk about them, the more we find other people who care too.

Rachel Edidin's Survey

1) Who are you and what is your involvement in the comic book fandom/industry?

I'm Rachel Edidin. I'm an assistant editor at Dark Horse Comics, and I'm both a board member and a columnist at Girl-Wonder.org. I'm also a freelance journalist and writer.

2) When did you first start reading comics?

I've been reading comics for as long as I can remember--I think I started with my parents' Sylvia collections and branched out from there. However, I didn't start reading mainstream comic books until high school, ten or so years ago.

3) Who is/are your favorite character(s), male or female?

Oh, hells. That's a really long list. And I'm assuming you're just talking about comics, so no books or movies or...heh.

Kate Corrigan (Hellboy / B.P.R.D.)

Jack Knight (Starman)

Street Angel (Street Angel)

Hopey Glass (Locas, Love & Rockets)

Cyclops (X-Men)

Jo and Galahad (Sparks)

Gert (Runaways)

Courtney Crumrin (Courtney Crumrin)

Aleph (Global Frequency)

Spider Jerusalem (Transmetropolitan)

Scott Pilgrim and Ramona Flowers (Scott Pilgrim)

Bruno (Bruno)

Hellboy (Hellboy)

Longshot (X-Men)

Sharon Ford (Baker Street)

4) Who are the writers and artists you "trust" to write/draw women well?

SO many. At this point, I'd say there are more writers I'd explicitly trust than writers I explicitly wouldn't. Bear in mind that some of these folks are digital / 'zinesters; many of them haven't done much or any mainstream work; I've also only included artists and writers whose work I'm more than passingly familiar with, so there are other good ones

I'm leaving out just 'cause I don't feel confident generalizing about them. And this is the off-the-top-of-my-head list, so I'm sure I'm forgetting someone...

John Arcudi
Christopher Baldwin
Matt Bayne
Alison Bechdel
Anina Bennett
Ross Campbell
Amanda Conner
Colleen Coover
Guy Davis
Barry Deutsch
Terry & Rachel Dodson
Sarah Dyer
Jennifer Finch
Phil and Kaja Foglio
Frank Frazetta
Neil Gaiman
Shaenon K. Garrity
Melinda Gebbie
Phoebe Gloeckner
Devin Grayson
Rebecca Guay
Renato Guedes
Pia Guerra
Paul Guinan
Jaime Hernandez
Lea Hernandez
Faith Hicks
Nicole Hollander
Lisa Jonté
Jack Kirby
Francisco Marciuliano
Lawrence Marvit
Kel McDonald
Dave McKean
Carla Speed McNeil
Dylan Meconis
Mike Mignola
Erica Moen
Alan Moore
Rachel Nabors
Bryan Lee O'Malley
Jim Ottaviani
Trina Robbins

Jim Rugg
Greg Ruth
Mark Sable
Jemma Salume
Marjane Satrapi
Stephen Seagle
Gail Simone
Louise Simonson
Spike (I don't know her real name)
Raina Telgemeier
Jill Thompson
Dean Trippe
Joss Whedon
Chris Wisinia
Bryan Vaughn

5) Who are the writers and artists you will never give money to again?

[Declined to answer]

6) What would you say are the three biggest (feminist) issues you have with comics?

First off, the invisibility/othering of female comics professionals. Women have been making comics, editing comics, and publishing comics for a LONG time. We're not rare birds, and within the industry itself, we're not even particularly exotic--it's far less isolating to be a woman in the comics industry than to be a female comics professional in public perception and media. It's great that women in comics are getting more attention, but I read article after article that focuses on one woman and makes her out to be a vast anomaly, rendering the many, many other women who work in this industry invisible and inconsequential, and further exoticizing the idea of a female comics pro.

Second is probably the way mainstream and industry newsmedia treat comics as a boys' club--it's like any misogyny or macho bullshit is acceptable because of the basic, fallacious assumptions that a)no girls are here anyway, and b)if they are, it doesn't matter what they think. Wizard Magazine is by far and away the worst, but they're not the only ones who pull this shit--and I've seen/heard it from a surprising number of industry professionals and editors, too. This goes hand-in-hand with the patronizing attitude a lot of these guys have toward female readers and creators.

Third is the issue of habitual misogyny in comics themselves. Many readers are so convinced that the blanket objectification of female characters is an ingrained feature of the medium that they never think to question it and laugh off the critics who do. The attitude that "that's just what comics are like" does more harm to this industry than maybe any other philosophy.

7) What would you say have been the three biggest instances of misogyny in the comic book industry in the past few years?

Oooh, I don't know. The three that jump to mind are Wizard Magazine's apparent plan to systematically alienate their entire potential audience ("match the rack" featurettes, "#1 Men's Entertainment Magazine" banner); the general public and industry response to Jenna Jameson making a comic (You can find some of my thoughts on the most recent development there at <http://www.girl-wonder.org/insideout/2008/04/10/oh-blow-me-away/>); and the whole Wonder Woman-on-Playboy's-cover debacle (again, I have a more thorough response to that here: <http://www.girl-wonder.org/insideout/2008/02/11/less-than-wonderful/>).

8) Where have you seen real change?

The most visible place is the industry itself! More young women are working in and involved in comics now than ever before, and while many of them are assistants and newcomers now, in ten or fifteen years, the industry will be FULL of women with experience, power, and serious chops.

The other big change is that women and girls are starting to be taken seriously as a fan demographic. I think a lot of this is at least indirectly linked to the internet, which female fans have used incredibly effectively as a networking tool. They've gone from isolated, frustrated voices to an organized group that's grown impossible to ignore.

9) Do you feel the industry is purposefully trying to drive girls and women from comics?

Nope. That would be spectacularly stupid, since there's a direct correlation between the number of people buying books and the amount of money publishers, merchandisers, etc. make. To deliberately alienate half of comics' potential readership would be nuts.

However, I DO think that much of the industry assumes that a) girls and women are not a significant portion of comics' readership, and b) that's inherent to the medium. Which drives me nuts, because it's so obviously nonsense, especially the second part, and it prevents publishers, merchandisers, media, etc. from actively pursuing more female readers.

10) What do you think you've done to initiate change and what do you think others can do to help?

Remember that stuff above, about networking? I'm involved with a lot of it--most visibly at [Girl-Wonder.org](http://www.girl-wonder.org), but also through Sequential Tart, Friends of Lulu, and the comics blogosphere in general.

As an independent scholar, I do a fair amount of research and writing on gender and gender transgression in comics, and I'm helping to build up the body of feminist comics scholarship.

Within my work at Dark Horse, I've consistently challenged and called out sexism when I saw it, started conversations about gender in comics (and I think it speaks to the general awesomeness of DH as a publisher and my coworkers as people and professionals that the responses I've gotten have been overwhelmingly positive), and approached and promoted female creators. One of the most visible places I've been involved in that was as the assistant editor of CONAN, during which time I convinced my editor to let me devote several letter columns to an ongoing discussion of the depiction of sexual violence in comics in general and Conan in particular (more on that here: <http://www.girl-wonder.org/insideout/2007/04/16/sexual-assault-in-comics-awareness-month-conan-12-revisited/> and here: <http://www.girl-wonder.org/insideout/2007/05/23/sexual-assault-in-comics-awareness-month-coda-the-widowmaker-revisited/>).

1) Who are you and what is your involvement in the comic book fandom/industry?

Hello! My name is Cheryl Lynn Eaton and I am the founder of the Ormes Society (www.theormessociety.com). The Ormes Society, named after the legendary pioneering cartoonist of color Jackie Ormes, is an organization dedicated to supporting black female comic creators and promoting the inclusion of black women in the comics industry as creators, characters and consumers.

2) When did you first start reading comics?

Early. I'd have to say I was around eight. My mother would buy me Archie comics from the grocery store to keep me quiet on car trips or in department stores. A couple of years later I stopped reading comics until I was reintroduced to them in my teens. I switched from Archie and Sabrina to Storm and Wolverine.

3) Who is/are your favorite character(s), male or female?

As a teen my favorite character was Storm of the X-Men. As I grew older I developed a fondness for Misty Knight because I could identify so much with the character. There was a shared race, ethnicity, culture and even a birthplace there. Plus, the fact that Misty had brown eyes and kinky hair was quite important to me. The character's existence emphasized that stereotypically black features could be beautiful and desirable. Of course, there are characters that I adore from all backgrounds, but Misty holds a special place in my heart.

4) Who are the writers and artists you "trust" to write/draw women well?

I honestly can't say. A writer or artist is only as good as his or her last comic. Any creator has the potential to produce something horrifically offensive or astoundingly inspiring.

5) Who are the writers and artists you will never give money to again?

I remain open to all creators. Anyone has the potential to improve if he or she cares to.

6) What would you say are the three biggest (feminist) issues you have with comics?

The miniscule number of women writers currently working at American comic companies disturbs me. I think it's important to see a larger number of women writers gaining a foothold at companies like Marvel, DC, Dark Horse and Image. Honestly, that is my one and only gripe. I feel that if that particular problem is rectified, the others will fade away. Once we have a strong voice we won't have issues with the way that women are being depicted, because we will be able to counter any negative depictions with our own positive ones.

7) What would you say have been the three biggest instances of misogyny in the comic book industry in the past few years?

Bigotry in the comic industry is more akin to a steady drip than crashing waves. There are no big misogynistic moments. Just smaller, consistent indignities and exploitation.

8) Where have you seen real change?

I think there's a greater level of interaction between female fans and creators. When I see more comics with female leads and a slowly increasing number of female artists getting work, I can't help but feel hopeful. I also see that certain artists have taken the time to develop more realistic depictions of female characters.

9) Do you feel the industry is purposefully trying to drive girls and women from comics?

Not at all. I think that some of the people working at certain comic companies are simply clueless where marketing is concerned. They want to reach out to female readers, but they've been catering so long to a specific segment of male readers that they have no idea how to do that.

10) What do you think you've done to initiate change and what do you think others can do to help?

I hope that I've created an atmosphere where creators are more open to listening to fan feedback when it comes to depicting minority characters. I also hope I've helped black women with an interest in the comic industry to feel less isolated. I think fans and creators can help to foster change simply by communicating more often with each other.