

THE IMPLICATIONS OF FEMALE FORCE: POSTFEMINIST
PROPENSITIES IN *ATOMIC BLONDE* AND *WONDER*
WOMAN

by

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The Implications of Female Force: Postfeminist Propensities in *Atomic Blonde* and
Wonder Woman

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This thesis concerns postfeminism in two female-led action films: *Atomic Blonde* (2017) and *Wonder Woman* (2017). Postfeminism compels feminine-identifying individuals to perform in a manner that indicates the achievement or progress of feminism but does not acknowledge or work to eradicate the existence of systemic structures such as misogyny. I discuss the film's postfeminist tendencies in separate case studies and why it is important to identify postfeminism within these films. In *Atomic Blonde*, I discuss how protagonist Lorraine Broughton epitomizes postfeminism through her work ethic, appearance and skills; the film's normalization of misogyny; how the film's female, queer plotline is postfeminist; and lastly, the ways in which the film is reminiscent of the *James Bond* films. In the *Wonder Woman* case study, I highlight the ways in which media coverage reveal postfeminist tendencies, and how the film can be considered postfeminist through Diana's responsibilities, work ethic, appearance and skills. I conclude that both films have postfeminist implications that support or obscure underlying misogyny while encouraging feminine-identifying individuals to adopt specific values within the postfeminist sphere.

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Introduction

Research Questions

The purpose of this thesis is to define how contemporary postfeminism manifests in two female-led action films that premiered in 2017: *Atomic Blonde*, an espionage thriller about a female British spy on a mission in 1989 Berlin, days before the fall of the Berlin Wall; and *Wonder Woman*, the iconic comic book character's first ever stand-alone feature film that chronicles her battle against Ares, the God of War, set during World War I. Postfeminism is a mode of thought that compels feminine-identifying individuals to visibly perform in a manner that indicates the achievement or progress of feminism while simultaneously masking the existence of systemic oppression and conforming to specific gendered ideals. By using a postfeminist mode of ideological critique, this thesis will address two questions:

1. How does contemporary postfeminism manifest in *Atomic Blonde* and *Wonder Woman*?
2. What are the implications of these postfeminist tendencies?

In this thesis, I frame these films as case studies that have their own analyses separate from each other. In the first case study of *Atomic Blonde*, I divide my argument into four sections. First, I explore how protagonist Lorraine Broughton's feminine identity and physical body enable her to accomplish the near-impossible mission to which she's been assigned. Second, I posit that the film normalizes misogyny in the workplace by framing Broughton as a postfeminist individual who easily handles the misogyny with which she is confronted. Third, I analyze how *Atomic Blonde*'s queer plotline, in which Broughton and female spy Delphine Lasalle have a casual, sexual

relationship, accepts and values Broughton's identity while minimizing Lasalle's. Lastly, I compare and contrast the characteristics and relationships of male action film hero James Bond to Broughton's, finding that Broughton is caught between Bond's misogyny and the Bond Girl's subordinate femininity. In my case study of *Wonder Woman*, I first analyze the discourse leading up to the film's production and theatrical release. I discuss the complexity and difficulties of creating a contemporary *Wonder Woman* media text, arguing that the expectation of the film's perfection and misogynistic online treatment of *Wonder Woman* actress Gal Gadot perpetuates postfeminist tendencies. Next, I identify postfeminist tendencies in two scenes in the film: firstly, a flashback scene in which Diana's Aunt Antiope teaches her combat skills growing up; secondly, when Diana impulsively leaves the Allied trenches to face the German army firsthand. By identifying postfeminist tendencies in *Atomic Blonde* and *Wonder Woman*, I hope to highlight how misogyny can be present in contemporary female-led action films, even when they appear to be progressive or feminist at first glance.

Literature Review & Methodology

This thesis uses a postfeminist framework to apply an ideological critique to *Atomic Blonde* and *Wonder Woman*. Rosalind Gill defines an ideological critique as an analysis "on the connection between cultural representations – meanings – and power relations, affirming the importance of images, values and discourses in constructing and reproducing the social order."¹ Contemporary postfeminism insists that oppression, such as misogyny, no longer exists or causes problems for feminine-identifying individuals.

¹ Rosalind Gill, *Gender and the Media* (Cambridge and Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2007), 54.

These discourses are reinforced or even amplified through feature films like *Atomic Blonde* or *Wonder Woman*, so applying an ideological critique by identifying the films' postfeminist characteristics is of the utmost importance.

I primarily base my argument on the findings of Rosalind Gill, who developed a working definition of postfeminism. In "Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of Sensibility," Gill argues that postfeminism is a "distinctive visibility" in which there is a "performance of successful femininity."² In my own analysis of the two case studies, I use three of these characteristics as a postfeminist basis of thought: first, that "the possession of a 'sexy body' is presented as women's key (if not sole) source of identity" and that there is "an intense focus on women's bodies" in media culture; second, that "all our practices are freely chosen... which present women as autonomous agents no longer constrained by any inequalities or power imbalances;" and lastly, that femininity requires "constant anxious attention, work and vigilance."³ In "Post-Postfeminism?: New Feminist Visibilities in Postfeminist Times," Gill remarks on how misogyny is framed within the media, "as an individual rather than structural or systemic issue, let alone connected to other inequalities or located in the broader context of neoliberal capitalism." She also discusses postfeminism's version of confidence in her follow-up article to "Elements," "The Affective, Cultural and Psychic Life of Postfeminism: A Postfeminist Sensibility 10 Years On." She describes confidence as a "cult" and suggests that the outcomes of women's lives are at the mercy of their own confidence – rather than as the result of systemic issues like misogyny.⁴ Gill's postfeminist literature

² Rosalind Gill, "Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of a Sensibility," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 10, no. 2 (2007): 147, 155.

³ Gill, "Postfeminist Media Culture," 149-50, 153, 155.

⁴ Rosalind Gill, "The Affective, Cultural and Psychic Life of Postfeminism: A Postfeminist Sensibility 10 Years On," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 20, no. 6 (2017): 618.

forms the basis of my research questions, which aim to shed light on the subtle ways in which misogyny informs and supports the postfeminist characteristics of Diana and Broughton's female identities. Sarah Banet-Weiser also makes similar arguments regarding feminism, misogyny and popular culture; but in her book, entitled *Empowered* she discusses the overlapping concept of "popular feminism." Banet-Weiser describes confidence as a "personality trait."⁵ She also discusses how misogyny and its media portrayals emphasize only the most dramatic, visible instances of sexism, such as in "anomalous individuals."⁶ I also draw on some of the ideas of feminist scholar Angela McRobbie and her text "Post-Feminism and Popular Culture," where she discusses the implications of personal responsibility on the individual, feminist life. She says, "choice is surely, within lifestyle culture, a modality of constraint. The individual is compelled to be the kind of subject who can make the right choices."⁷ She also discusses the concept of a "hyper-culture of commercial sexuality," which I use to highlight how both Diana and Broughton's feminine identities and sexualities are used to make them successful, desirable protagonists.⁸

Furthermore, an important tenant of postfeminism (as mentioned by these scholars, and more) is its connections and similarities to neoliberalism. Catherine Rottenberg, who coined the term "neoliberal feminism," describes neoliberalism as thus:

"Collective forms of action or well-being are eroded, and a new regime of morality comes into being, one that links moral probity even more

⁵ Sarah Banet-Weiser, *Empowered: Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2018), 94.

⁶ Banet-Weiser, *Empowered*, 34.

⁷ Angela McRobbie, "Post-Feminism and Popular Culture," *Feminist Media Studies* 4, no. 3 (2004), 261.

⁸ McRobbie, "Post-Feminism and Popular Culture," 259.

intimately to self-reliance and efficiency, as well as to the individual's capacity to exercise his or her own autonomous choices."⁹

In this thesis, neoliberal influences on both *Atomic Blonde* and *Wonder Woman* are evident. Although I address neoliberalism second to postfeminism, some of the framework of postfeminism has its roots in neoliberal thought – such as Broughton and Diana's work ethics, how their individual responsibilities are framed in regard to their femininity, and so on. Gill includes a discussion of neoliberalism in "Postfeminist Media Culture," which sheds light on postfeminism and neoliberalism's synonymic qualities. She says, "it is clear that the autonomous, calculating, self-regulating subject of neoliberalism bears a strong resemblance to the active, freely choosing, self-reinventing subject of postfeminism."¹⁰ Banet-Weiser says that "popular feminism recognizes gender inequalities – through its mainly neoliberal solutions to address these inequalities."¹¹ This can be applied to postfeminism as well, but it is important to note that while the concept of popular feminism acknowledges inequality, postfeminism obscures or renders it to be nonexistent. Jess Butler regards postfeminism as a "neoliberal discursive formation," where feminism is not intersectional.¹² An overarching characteristic of postfeminism, as illuminated in this thesis, is its lack of acknowledgement of privilege and oppression; thus, obscuring or reframing an individual's advantages or disadvantages as of their own culpability. Diana has many advantages in her battle against the God of War, Ares – she has special powers, special equipment and an upbringing specifically designed for that goal. Lorraine Broughton

⁹ Catherine Rottenberg, "The Rise of Neoliberal Feminism," *Cultural Studies* 28, no. 3 (2014): 421.

¹⁰ Rosalind Gill, "Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of a Sensibility," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 10, no. 2 (2007): 154.

¹¹ Sarah Banet-Weiser, "Postfeminism and Popular Feminism," *Feminist Media Histories* 4, no. 2 (2018): 154.

¹² Jess Butler, "For White Girls Only?: Postfeminism and the Politics of Inclusion," *Feminist Formations* 25, no. 1 (2013): 36.

enters the narrative of *Atomic Blonde* a highly skilled, already successful spy, the reason why she received the Berlin mission in the first place. What makes neoliberalism so significant in its connections to postfeminism, and therefore this thesis, is how its implications for gender and feminism benefit it. Gill concludes “Postfeminist Media Culture” by saying, “could it be that neoliberalism is always already gendered, and that women are constructed as its ideal subjects?”¹³ Neoliberalism has a specific predilection for influencing sociocultural matters regarding gender and oppression, and its influence can be seen throughout this thesis.

My interest in this project, in fact, stemmed from a curiosity regarding female-led action films, not postfeminism. Occasionally, I employ the use of some sources that are within the realm of film studies. These sources do not necessarily discuss postfeminism or feminism, but instead analyze action heroines in film or television. I occasionally use this type of academic sources to round out and support my arguments on the films’ postfeminist tendencies. Jeffrey A. Brown touches on feminism in his analysis of stripper action films, including the *Blonde Justice* franchise. He makes some points regarding misogyny that I connect to my analysis of misogyny in *Atomic Blonde*. He argues that misogyny often depicted to be present in a few specific individuals, not as systemic or widespread.¹⁴ Katharina Hagen also discusses systemic misogyny, as well as other analyses, of *Atomic Blonde*. She touches on *Atomic Blonde*’s nostalgic, Cold War-era feel and the nuances of Broughton and Lasalle’s casual, sexual

¹³ Rosalind Gill, “Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of a Sensibility,” *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 10, no. 2 (2007): 164.

¹⁴ Jeffrey A. Brown, “If Looks Could Kill: Power, Revenge, and Stripper Movies,” in *Reel Knockouts: Violent Women in the Movies*, eds. Martha McCaughey and Neal King (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001): 74.

relationship.¹⁵ Her article informs my queer reading of *Atomic Blonde*, as well as the connections I draw between the film and the *James Bond* franchise. In my analysis of *Atomic Blonde* and the *James Bond* franchise specifically, I inform my discussion of Bond Girls through sources that discuss them specifically. Tim Hoxha argues that women in the films can be used as collateral damage in order to maintain the patriarchal status quo, which is reminiscent of how Lasalle's death is portrayed in *Atomic Blonde*.¹⁶ Anna Katherine Amacker and Donna Ashley Moore's chapter on Bond Girls helps frame my own analysis of how Bond's character is so similar to Broughton's.¹⁷ These sources, which focus on gender through a film theory lens, inform my analyses of each film's postfeminist tendencies.

I employ all of these sources in my analysis of *Atomic Blonde* and *Wonder Woman*, where I highlight the ways in which the films can be considered postfeminist. My analysis of *Atomic Blonde* reveals the ways in which postfeminism normalizes misogyny – especially if the protagonist is a strong, capable character. It also highlights how Broughton's work ethic and skills as a spy can be normalized by postfeminism in a manner that downplays her advantages and makes her mission look almost effortless. Next, much of the way that *Wonder Woman* is postfeminist is revealed through misogynistic media and social media discourse, as well as the Hollywood film industry's anxiety over creating female-led, female-directed action films. I also discuss

¹⁵ Katharina Hagen, "Atomic Blonde, Neue Deutsche Well, and 'Jane Bond,'" *International Journal of James Bond Studies* 1, no. 2 (2018): 1-5.

¹⁶ Tim Hoxha, "The Masculinity of James Bond: Sexism, Misogyny, Racism, and the Female Character," in *James Bond in World and Popular Culture*, eds. Robert G. Weiner, B. Lynn Whitfield and Jack Becker (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), 204.

¹⁷ Anna Katherine Amacker and Donna Ashley Moore, "'The Bitch is Dead': Anti-feminist Rhetoric in *Casino Royale*," in *James Bond in World and Popular Culture*, eds. Robert G. Weiner, B. Lynn Whitfield and Jack Becker (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), 146.

how Diana is a subject of postfeminism through her responsibilities, advantages as an Amazon woman and desirability as a female protagonist and superhero. *Atomic Blonde* and *Wonder Woman* are exciting action films that feature powerful and resilient protagonists – but the implications of female force are not always free of misogyny.

***Atomic Blonde* is a Postfeminist Force to Be Reckoned With**



Figure 1: Broughton smokes a cigarette in her Berlin hotel room.

Introduction

Atomic Blonde is a conventional action film with, to put it simply, a female protagonist instead of a male one. It checks all the boxes: an emotionally distant and independent protagonist with a troubled past; intense hand-to-hand combat (where the protagonist always emerges triumphantly); and the glamour of casual sex and hard liquor on the rocks. But that is where the similarities end. *Atomic Blonde*'s protagonist, British spy Lorraine Broughton, has a postfeminist disposition that allows her to accomplish her mission. She is also subject to misogyny from both the film's camera movements and the male characters themselves, which further indicates a postfeminist subtext in the film.

Firstly, the construction of *Atomic Blonde*'s plot singles out Broughton as the individual solely responsible for the high-stakes mission to which she's been assigned. Given this task, Broughton must rely on her physical appearance, espionage and combat skills as well as her frosty demeanor to succeed. Broughton's responsibility, which is to

find a list of spies on both sides of the Cold War (“The List”), is treacherous because the lives of those spies, including herself, are at stake. Broughton is compelled as an individual to make decisions that are in everyone’s best interests. No matter how the Berlin mission goes, its outcome is on Broughton’s shoulders only. Broughton employs a specific type of persona, one that is cold and restrained, and wears a sensual, black-and-white wardrobe of trench coats, high heels and off-the-shoulder tops – in order to be taken seriously in such a male-dominated environment. Postfeminism encourages individuals, especially those who identify femininely, to pursue and employ confidence as a primary quality.¹⁸ It also compels individuals like Broughton to use her physical body and appearance for success.¹⁹ Broughton is confident in every sense of the word, and the choices she makes enable her to be successful.

Secondly, Broughton is subject to a barrage of misogynistic behavior in *Atomic Blonde*, but she deftly fights back without hesitation. Misogyny is present in all of *Atomic Blonde*’s male characters. Sexism in the workplace (even if it is underground, 1989 Berlin) is normalized in the film and framed as a series of obstacles that Broughton must overcome in order to continue her mission. She is successful despite these setbacks; however, approaching misogyny from an individual standpoint does not actually have any effect on such a widespread issue. Because postfeminism obscures the existence of misogyny, Broughton is framed as having the primary responsibility of handling misogyny as it comes to her.²⁰ Postfeminism encourages feminine-identifying

¹⁸ Rosalind Gill, “The Affective, Cultural and Psychic Life of Postfeminism: A Postfeminist Sensibility 10 Years On,” *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 20, no. 6 (2017): 618.

¹⁹ Rosalind Gill, “Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of a Sensibility,” *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 10, no. 2 (2007): 149.

²⁰ Sarah Banet-Weiser, *Empowered: Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2018), 20; Angela McRobbie, “Post-Feminism and Popular Culture,” *Feminist Media Studies* 4, no. 3 (2004), 258.

individuals to face misogyny when they see it, but it does not make motions to address misogyny's vast root system.

Thirdly, the film's queer storyline is problematic in its postfeminist and misogynistic characteristics. *Atomic Blonde* is based on the 2012 graphic novel *The Coldest City*. The film adaptation is mostly based on the graphic novel, with one of the only major changes being the addition of a queer subplot – in which French spy Pierre Lasalle becomes Delphine Lasalle.²¹ Actress Charlize Theron, who plays protagonist Lorraine Broughton, was also involved as a producer on the film. Theron was interested in making the film because she wanted to make something “refreshing” and that challenges the perceptions of women, such as with the stigma around one-night stands and hookup culture.²² Broughton and Lasalle develop a casual, sexual relationship over the course of the film, but it ultimately ends with Lasalle's murder at the hands of British spy David Percival. Their storyline does challenge the notion that only male action heroes like James Bond engage in intimacy in order to accomplish their espionage goals, but their relationship is still curbed by the film's male gaze and plot.²³ Broughton and Lasalle's storyline minimizes the female, queer experience. Broughton is framed as the dominant individual and Lasalle the subservient, which drives the postfeminist notion that Broughton represents the ideal feminine performance. Lasalle and Broughton's relationship is a step in the direction of increased female, queer

²¹ Antony Johnston and Sam Hart, *Atomic Blonde* (Portland: Oni Press, 2017), 41; Nicole Sperling, “Charlize Theron Breaks Down her Steamy Love Affair in *Atomic Blonde*,” *Entertainment Weekly*, April 26, 2017, <https://ew.com/movies/2017/04/26/charlize-theron-breaks-down-her-steamy-love-affair-in-atomic-blonde/>.

²² Sperling, “Steamy Love Affair.”

²³ Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” *Screen* 16, no. 3 (1975): 6-18.

representation in action films – but *Atomic Blonde*'s male gaze and diegesis masks its misogyny.²⁴

Furthermore, Broughton's character and her relationship with Lasalle is reminiscent of James Bond and the "Bond Girls" of the *James Bond* franchise. Bond tends to seduce the women he meets on his missions (even enemies), and his character is weighted by misogyny and female objectification. Bond, being the male protagonist and main instigator of his casual sexual relationships, is framed to have power and agency over his choices. Charlize Theron, who plays Broughton and served as a producer on *Atomic Blonde*, was attracted to the idea of creating a film where the female protagonist had some of the same characteristics as a typical male action hero such as Bond. She wanted to challenge the role that women play in hookup culture, saying that people tend to get "weirded out" by women "taking ownership" the way Bond does in his films.²⁵ Like Bond, Broughton takes power and ownership in her mission and decision-making. They have obvious similarities: emotional restraint, a knack for espionage and hand-to-hand combat and seducing women in their narratives. Broughton's relationship with Lasalle, in some ways, mirrors those of Bond and the "Bond Girls." "Bond Girls" are the female characters in which Bond develops relationships within the films. These women are sometimes Bond's friend, foe or acquaintance, but all have little power within the narrative.²⁶ While Broughton is dominant, experienced and unemotional, Lasalle lacks as much agency in the film and is inexperienced and sentimental. By juxtaposing the sexual relationships that Bond has

²⁴ Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (1975): 6-18.

²⁵ Sara Vilkomerson, "Blonde, Sweat & Tears," *Entertainment Weekly*, July 24, 2017, 12-14.

²⁶ Steve Persall, "Four Kinds of Unforgettable Bond Girls," *Tampa Bay Times*, Nov. 8, 2012, <https://www.tampabay.com/features/movies/four-kinds-of-unforgettable-bond-girls/1260412/>.

with Bond Girls, misogyny in Broughton and Lasalle's relationship becomes visible. However, Broughton is also subject to misogynistic treatment like Lasalle and the Bond Girls. The film objectifies her and encourages the postfeminist notion of using physical appearance to achieve success.²⁷ Broughton is caught between harnessing the masculine force that is reminiscent of James Bond with the misogyny wielded against her and Lasalle in the film.

Atomic Blonde might be an exciting, action packed film heavy with 80s nostalgia, but it reveals how contemporary postfeminism disguises misogyny behind a veil of cultural progress. The film portrays Broughton's advantages, such as her skill, appearance and unemotional persona, as the keys to success. Oppositely, Broughton is subject to misogyny through the film's characters and camera movements. These postfeminist regulations work to dominate femininity under the guise of sociocultural progress.

²⁷ Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (1975): 6-18; Rosalind Gill, "Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of a Sensibility," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 10, no. 2 (2007): 149.

Broughton as a Postfeminist Subject



Figure 2: One of Broughton's red stiletto heels lies on the concrete after a fight in a moving car.

In the weeks before the collapse of the Berlin Wall, Lorraine Broughton was tasked with a life-and-death mission: to obtain a list of spies from opposing countries on each side of the Cold War. If she were to fail, the consequences would be dire. "A lot of good, hard-working folks, brave men and women are gonna show up dead... you and I included," a superior says to Broughton a few days into her mission. "I understand the severity of the situation, sir," she responds coldly. She does find The List, and it is a triumph. Broughton could not have finished her mission without her confidence, wit and sex appeal. She is skeptical of the people she encounters and maintains a cold, distant demeanor when communicating with them. She prefers to work alone, making connections and carrying out tasks without much help. In the bleak, masculine environment of police and spies in Berlin, Broughton's blonde bob, trench coats and thigh-high boots give her postfeminist sexual agency, and it stands out. She wears black and white pieces with red accents, has at least one glamorous evening gown at her disposal and always wears a shoe with a three-inch heel. In addition to a kick-ass

wardrobe dripping with sex appeal, Broughton is skilled in combat. Because she almost exclusively fights men that are double her size, Broughton often uses her wit to incapacitate them. *Atomic Blonde* individualizes Broughton by giving her the crucial responsibility of finding The List and preventing lives from being lost. In order to do so, Broughton uses her physical appearance, combat skills and frosty demeanor to succeed. *Atomic Blonde* is dominated by postfeminist modes of conduct in this manner.



Figure 3: Broughton's injuries from the Berlin mission, as seen in flash-forwards.

Broughton's physical appearance and demeanor are key to her success in *Atomic Blonde*. Her combat skills, combined with her coldness, independence and red stilettos, complete an identity dominated by postfeminism. Her persona is established almost as soon as the film begins: in London before her mission debrief, she rests in a bathtub of ice water, physically beaten and exhausted. To the viewers, her condition is a mystery. The story does not begin to unravel until she begins telling it to her superiors in a mysterious, windowless room made of metal. Under the surface, Broughton is in survival mode. She anticipates the wrath of her interviewers, confident in the decisions

she made in Berlin. Broughton is under pressure to make the right decisions, to work as hard as she possibly can, and make it look effortless. Gill remarks that confidence is necessary in order for women to be successful consumers, members of society, or even to feel sexy.²⁸ Banet-Weiser also discusses the prevalent culture of confidence, and that confidence is now considered an “individual personality trait.”²⁹ Further, Gill argues that postfeminism encourages having a “sexy” body, and that it is the key to the most successful version of femininity.³⁰ Broughton’s career is “high powered,” and she does not get any second chances if she makes a mistake. The outcome of the Berlin mission is entirely her fault, no matter what happens. *Atomic Blonde*’s postfeminist features begin to show here, where Broughton is expected to recount, analyze, and justify her choices – all while maintaining a cool, confident demeanor. That’s what makes Broughton powerful. She stands tall, walks lightly across the dark pavement in stilettos, and speaks in flat, short sentences. She often wears dark sunglasses with her lips taut to not betray a glimmer of emotion. In her circumstances, having anything *but* confidence is unacceptable due to the lives at stake. Equating “sexiness” with confidence is postfeminist in that it is framed as the only possible way to a successful life. Since there is little background or history on Broughton as a character, *Atomic Blonde* frames her appearance and demeanor as her personality.

The package of traits that postfeminism encourages also includes intelligence and skill. Broughton’s espionage skills are unprecedented. The film hints at her years of

²⁸ Rosalind Gill, “The Affective, Cultural and Psychic Life of Postfeminism: A Postfeminist Sensibility 10 Years On,” *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 20, no. 6 (2017): 618.

²⁹ Sarah Banet-Weiser, *Empowered: Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2018), 94.

³⁰ Rosalind Gill, “Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of a Sensibility,” *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 10, no. 2 (2007): 149.

experience, and she approaches the Berlin mission with a “been there, done that” energy. She easily knocks out and kills her adversaries and schmoozes information out of her fellow male spies. When grilled by her supervisors in the flash-forwards of her debrief in London, she easily defends herself in the interrogation room’s high-pressure environment. She knows that she is unable to take down a man twice her size with just her strength, so she uses wit and tools in order to do so. When Broughton arrives in Berlin, she is tricked by Russian KGB agents who are intent on killing her and preventing The List from being found. She catches on and beats the agents while the car is still speeding. In order to kill the driver, Broughton purposely grabs the steering wheel and pulls it towards the highway barrier, flipping the car. She holds on to her seatbelt during the flip and eventually crawls out of the wreckage as if it is of no consequence. Here, Broughton demonstrates her quick wit and confidence in making decisions at a moment’s notice. The scene establishes her cool-headedness and ability to make it out of difficult situations in seconds. Further, Broughton makes it look easy. She seems to anticipate her opponent’s every move and know how they fight. When she was ambushed by German police officers in an apartment, she smoothly jumps off of the apartment balcony, holding a hose attached to one of the agent’s necks. In the scene, she used kitchen items to fight, such as a cooking pot or microwave door. She employs these random objects as weapons and extensions of her skill and strength and is successful. In the postfeminist and neoliberal sense, Broughton makes the right kind of split-second decisions, revealing her intelligence and wit. She can easily defeat her opponents in combat, trick them into giving her information, all the while revealing no emotions and looking gorgeous in the process.

Lastly, different plot points in *Atomic Blonde*'s narrative highlight the film's commitment to neoliberalism. Neoliberalism insists that an individual is responsible for their own decisions, successes and failures.³¹ Broughton's mission of finding The List is high-stakes, and halfway into the film discovers that she is responsible for the deaths that could occur if she does not find it. Broughton's situation reflects a common misconception within the realm of postfeminism. Her sense of independence is extreme in that she does not trust anyone she meets (except perhaps Lasalle). Gill argues that postfeminism ignores the existence of prejudice in relation to the broader context of neoliberal capitalism.³² Her mission is framed as an individual matter and not related to any larger, systemic issues. In the narrative, Broughton becomes forced between the demands of her superiors and the factors that impeded her in finding The List. She accuses her superiors of sending her into "a fucking hornet's nest." She says, "this was never about stopping the war. It was about saving your ass. You couldn't bear the embarrassment of the sins that we committed in the Cold War. And I was stupid enough to give my life for it." Broughton's bosses placed the responsibility of solving their own problems onto her, putting her into a situation where misogyny and neoliberalism are rampant. Her appointment in Berlin does not address or acknowledge systemic sexism. *Atomic Blonde* may present Broughton as a strong, confident woman who is able to face tough decisions, but the film frames her mission and any issues that arise as her responsibility. Postfeminism dominates Broughton in *Atomic Blonde*, and all of her choices are intimately scrutinized in its distorted attempt to show women and femininity as equal to its counterpart: men.

³¹ Catherine Rottenberg, "The Rise of Neoliberal Feminism," *Cultural Studies* 28, no. 3 (2014): 421.

³² Rosalind Gill, "Post-postfeminism?: New Feminist Visibilities in Postfeminist Times," *Feminist Media Studies* 16, no. 4, 615-16.

Misogyny in *Atomic Blonde*'s Workplace

Atomic Blonde normalizes the existence of misogynistic work environments. Not only does the film highlight her femininity within an environment of masculinity and murder, but it also treats misogyny as if it is something that must be accepted and dealt with accordingly. Broughton is the subject of a barrage of sexist comments and actions in the film. Percival, the leading aggressor of misogyny against Broughton, has a personality so arrogant that it is acceptably humorous when he casually responds to her at one point, "you should see my balls... then you'd be really impressed." Russian agents attempting to kill Broughton call her a "bitch," but she sweeps these comments off with her cool demeanor, denoting her dedication to the task at hand. Eric Gray, Broughton's MI6 boss, looks down on her during their interview in the flash-forward scenes. He approaches the debrief with suspicion and mistrust, as if she did not accomplish the mission's agenda at all. "I actually did my job," she says coldly to him. "I succeeded where you failed." Like Hagen points out, Broughton is not considered to be a hero or role model in the film.³³ Instead, her male superiors, coworkers and opponents constantly attempt to kill her or throw her off-track. Broughton would not succeed had she not ignored or fought misogyny on all sides. *Atomic Blonde* perpetuates the idea that Broughton must simply be a "Girl Boss" and "overcome" sexism in order to succeed, all without acknowledging the fact that misogyny is systemic and not the fault of the individual.³⁴ The treatment of Broughton by the male characters in the film

³³ Katharina Hagen, "Atomic Blonde, Neue Deutsche Well, and 'Jane Bond,'" *International Journal of James Bond Studies* 1, no. 2 (2018): 4.

³⁴ Sarah Banet-Weiser, *Empowered: Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2018), 20; Angela McRobbie, "Post-Feminism and Popular Culture," *Feminist Media Studies* 4, no. 3 (2004), 258.

emphasize her femininity and implicate that a misogynistic work environment is something that she, individually, must handle herself.

Percival is the largest and most direct source of misogyny in *Atomic Blonde*. Percival's words come from a place of arrogance and lack of skill in interpersonal communication. When Percival finds out that Broughton survived their failed mission of moving a valuable defector from East Berlin to West Berlin, he says, "a beautiful Italian girl once said to me... you can't unfuck what's been fucked." The other people in the room do nothing to check him, revealing how misogyny can be sustained by *other* men who do not confront it. Hagen uses the idea of "diffusion" to describe the horizontal layout of misogyny in *Atomic Blonde*: "misogyny is much more diffuse and is centered in no one man in particular, but within the inferiority of all men at large."³⁵ Some men do not express misogyny themselves but instead silently support it. Percival's character is also not unique; the combination of rudeness, discrimination and confidence is a formula found often in action films, such as the *James Bond* franchise.³⁶ Banet-Weiser says that the media reframes misogyny as within "anomalous individuals," therefore "consciously or unconsciously ignoring and obscuring" misogyny and the patriarchy.³⁷ Brown, when speaking of the *Blonde Justice* franchise, points out that films will have only a few men "encapsulate" misogyny. These characters are mocked or deemed lunatics, and then killed by the female protagonist.³⁸ In this sense, Percival is anomalous within the story, thus masking overarching

³⁵ Katharina Hagen, "Atomic Blonde, Neue Deutsche Well, and 'Jane Bond,'" *International Journal of James Bond Studies* 1, no. 2 (2018): 4.

³⁶ See "The James Bond Effect."

³⁷ Banet-Weiser, *Empowered*, 34.

³⁸ Jeffrey A. Brown, "If Looks Could Kill: Power, Revenge, and Stripper Movies," in *Reel Knockouts: Violent Women in the Movies*, eds. Martha McCaughey and Neal King (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001): 74.

patriarchal tendencies. The killing of sexist offenders by the film's female protagonist does nothing to eradicate misogyny, though. Brown concludes, "If only it were that simple in real life."³⁹ Broughton might have killed Percival at the end of the film, but his death is not a victory for feminism; but rather a violent postfeminist mask. The easy relief of killing Percival does not acquit him of his sexist actions, but rather it emphasizes his actions. Lastly, Broughton is subject to harassment by her opponents. They often call her a "bitch," attempting to make her angry by belittling her. The use of the term is most dramatic when a massive KGB agent attempts to choke Broughton to death. He cries, "take this, bitch!" She manages to overpower him, stab him and shout "am I a bitch now?" Broughton kills him moments later, also seeming to eliminate that specific source of sexism. In reality, his death accomplishes nothing for furthering of gender equality. Banet-Weiser describes misogyny as "inherently flexible, reprogrammable, and infinitely expandable."⁴⁰ Female protagonists killing sexist characters and opponents does not change the way that misogyny works to permeate popular culture, and this is reflected in the film.

In *Atomic Blonde*, Broughton is framed as a "Girl Boss" who overcomes misogyny in the workplace. In her discussion of Lund, a female detective in Scandinavian neo-noir television, McCabe says, "Lund has cultivated a steely resolve to navigate the androcentric politics of the traditional male working environment in which

³⁹ Brown, "If Looks Could Kill," 74.

⁴⁰ Sarah Banet-Weiser, *Empowered: Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2018), 34.

she operates, where sexism prevails regardless.”⁴¹ Broughton is expected to succeed in a workplace with misogynistic odds stacked against her by way of the patriarchy.

Queer Experience Blurred

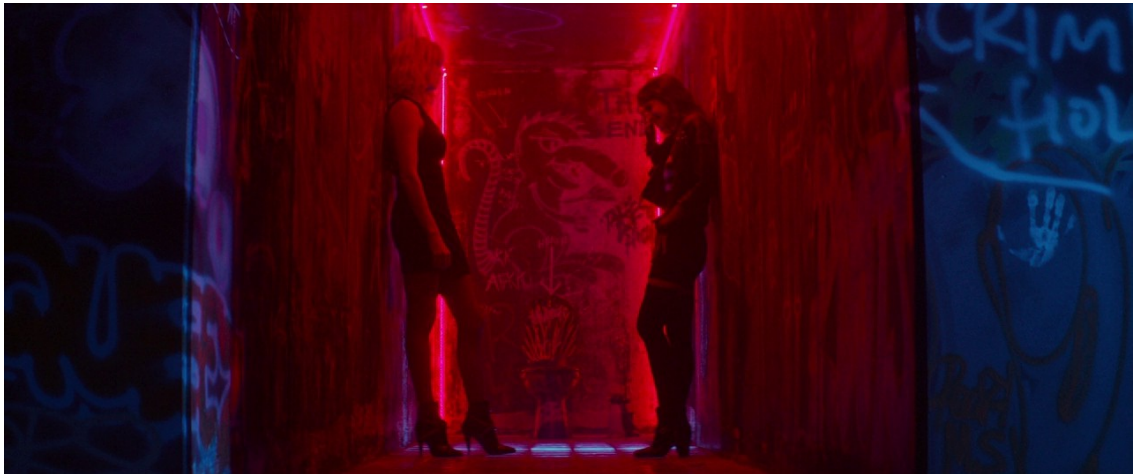


Figure 4: Broughton and Lasalle in the women’s bathroom of a Berlin nightclub.

Atomic Blonde is home to a lesbian subplot. The relationship between Broughton and French spy Delphine Lasalle might be a win for queer female representation within the postfeminist sphere. However, since postfeminism obscures the existence of oppression and its effects on everyday life, *Atomic Blonde*’s portrayal of queerness is tendentious. The depiction of Broughton and Lasalle’s relationship minimizes female queer experience and frames Broughton as a desirable postfeminist subject at the expense of Lasalle. She is a foil of Broughton, which strengthens Broughton’s identity by framing her individual traits as the most advantageous. Their demeanors and attitudes are opposites; while Broughton is tough, hardened, and skilled in espionage and combat, Lasalle is inexperienced, fearful and emotional. *Atomic*

⁴¹ Janet McCabe, “New Disconnected Heroines, Icy Intelligence: Reframing Feminism(s) and Feminist Identities at the Borders Involving the Isolated Female TV Detective in Scandinavian Noir,” in *Feminisms: Diversity, Difference and Multiplicity in Contemporary Film Cultures*, ed. Laura Mulvey and Anna Backman Rodgers, 30. Amsterdam University Press, 2015.

Blonde uses Lasalle to highlight the postfeminist characteristics of confidence and individualism that make Broughton successful. In addition to the film's attention on Broughton's postfeminist desirability, it fetishizes and belittles female queerness through voyeuristic camera movements. Further, Lasalle's murder minimizes the visibility and value of her identity. Her status as a woman of color is rendered illegitimate, reinforcing whiteness as a primary, neoliberal component of Broughton's success in her mission. Lasalle was a minor, troubled character in *Atomic Blonde*, and her death by a white man confirms it. *Atomic Blonde* minimizes and distorts the female queer experience by asserting that postfeminist characteristics, such as the ones Broughton portrays, are more desirable and indicative of success.

Broughton and Lasalle exemplify contrasting personality traits that can be recognized as stereotypically male or female, respectively. In this way, their relationship is marked by a postfeminist imbalance of power that allows Broughton more autonomy and control because she acts in a way that is more traditionally 'masculine.' Lasalle, immediately, is shown to be weak and inexperienced. Lasalle tells Broughton that she became a spy because she thought it would be "fun," and that she is terrified to be in Berlin. As Broughton and Lasalle begin to develop their relationship, Lasalle shows a warm, sentimental side. "When you tell the truth, you look different. Your eyes change," Lasalle says to Broughton softly. Broughton thinks Lasalle's emotions are juvenile and she often responds acerbically. She reveals to Lasalle a deep-rooted bitterness towards her work as a spy, which strengthens her tough side in contrast to Lasalle's soft one. "You should have been a poet," she remarks to Lasalle, highlighting the dangers of being a spy in the Cold War era. Lasalle consistently

represents what Hagen describes as a “softer femininity,” which renders her incapable of successfully carrying out a mission.⁴² Even though Lasalle gives Broughton key information in the third act, Broughton never relies on her while working to find The List. She displays both self-reliance and efficiency, key components that make up postfeminism and neoliberalism. Rottenberg writes of an period of rising neoliberalism, “a new regime of morality comes into being, one that links moral probity even more intimately to self-reliance and efficiency.”⁴³ It is the contrasting characteristics that serve to only aid Broughton and cause Lasalle to look incompetent and needy, no matter how much she tries to deny it. For example, she threatens Percival near the end of the film, saying, “I can play this game better than you think!” When Percival attacks and kills her minutes later, those exclamations are rendered presumptuous. Through contrasting personas, the film frames Broughton’s success largely as coming from her extreme sense of independence and her frosty, bitter demeanor. By placing Broughton and Lasalle in the film as opposites who work together, postfeminist and neoliberal tendencies come to light.

⁴² Katharina Hagen, “Atomic Blonde, Neue Deutsche Well, and ‘Jane Bond,’” *International Journal of James Bond Studies* 1, no. 2 (2018): 4.

⁴³ Catherine Rottenberg, “The Rise of Neoliberal Feminism,” *Cultural Studies* 28, no. 3 (2014): 421.



Figure 5: Lasalle whispers to Broughton, fearing that her hotel room is bugged.

Postfeminism also enables the constant sexual objectification of Broughton and Lasalle's bodies via camera movements. The first shot of Lasalle in the film, in which she watches Broughton exit the Berlin airport from afar, features her straddled on a motorcycle, the pan starting at her feet and moving upwards over her body until her face comes into view. There is a similar shot of Broughton in a flash-forward, in which the camera pans over her naked, bruised body as she settles into an ice bath. Postfeminism, which enforces specific ideas concerning feminine-identifying individual's bodies and how they appear on screen, masks these kinds of visuals in the film as an intention to showcase female sexual agency, empowerment and queerness. Broughton is not a submissive, inadequate character. Even though Lasalle displays softer, more emotional tendencies and a lack of skill, she doesn't lack sexual agency or empowerment. Both women are largely confident and demonstrate strength in the face of jeopardy and fear. Their bravery in the film complicates readings of sexual objectification. Because postfeminism places an importance on the physical body, and the use of it for success, Broughton and Lasalle do not seem objectified. Their first, steamy sex scene, which occurs after they meet and make out in a night club, seems like a triumph for queer,

female representation; but their relationship is actually fraught with misogyny. Génz and Brabon argue of queer representation in the sitcom *Will & Grace*, “what we witness in *Will & Grace* is part of a developing commoditization of gay and lesbian culture, where glamour is sexualized and deployed to sell ‘queer chic’ to the ‘hetero-masses.’”⁴⁴ The film works to delegitimize their relationship and Lasalle’s identity, along with objectifying queerness. When Broughton and Lasalle first lock lips, and later when they have sex, the camera movements echo the voyeuristic gaze of someone watching them. The moment is so sensual and glamorous that it becomes an exciting spectacle, one where queerness is presented for a male, heterosexual audience. “It could be argued that most media representations of LGBT persons and lifestyles are deeply heteronormative and represent little challenge to the existing structures of gender and sexuality,” Gill says.⁴⁵ Because of *Atomic Blonde*’s objectification of queerness and adherence to postfeminist principles, Broughton and Lasalle’s relationship is not a sufficient example of female, queer representation. Their relationship fits into a postfeminist and patriarchal structure, rather than challenging it.

⁴⁴ Stéphanie Génz and Benjamin E. Brabon, *Postfeminism: Cultural Texts and Theories* (Edinburgh University Press: 2009), 127, ProQuest eBook Central.

⁴⁵ Rosalind Gill, *Gender and the Media* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 71.



Figure 6: Lasalle moments before she is murdered by Percival.

Lastly, Lasalle's murder by Percival reinforces postfeminism's preoccupation with whiteness. Even though feminine-identifying individuals and people of color fall within the postfeminist sphere, their oppression is not challenged or acknowledged by postfeminism.⁴⁶ Instead, postfeminism "reinstates whiteness as the standard," which is harmful to media depictions that actually feature women of color, like Lasalle.⁴⁷ In the case of *Atomic Blonde*, Lasalle is a woman of color who demonstrates significant weaknesses in her job and is murdered by a white male because of those weaknesses. By killing off Lasalle, the film dismisses her experiences and further highlights Broughton's successes. *The Playlist* calls the scene a "sexy, homophobic/misogynistic murder scene"⁴⁸ in which Lasalle is home dressed in lingerie when Percival breaks in and attacks her. Lasalle's vulnerable position sexualizes and glamorizes her murder. Second to Broughton, Percival has a tremendous amount of agency. He is secretive and duplicitous, secretly obtaining The List to use for his own agenda, betraying England.

⁴⁶ Rosalind Gill, "The Affective, Cultural and Psychic Life of Postfeminism: A Postfeminist Sensibility 10 Years On," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 20, no. 6 (2017): 618.

⁴⁷ Jess Butler, "For White Girls Only?: Postfeminism and the Politics of Inclusion," *Feminist Formations* 25, no. 1 (2013): 48.

⁴⁸ Lena Wilson, "Female Fans Deserved Better than 'Atomic Blonde,'" *The Playlist*, August 4, 2017, <https://theplaylist.net/female-fans-deserve-better-atomic-blonde-20170804/>.

Percival is a typical character in Hollywood films: a conventionally attractive white, heterosexual male who displays a great deal of cockiness and acerbity. In this reading, both Broughton and Percival's whiteness and agency over the plot place them in a primary, neoliberal position. Gill writes, "I'm... troubled by which versions of feminism garner visibility – the largely white, heteronormative, corporate and neoliberal-friendly versions."⁴⁹ The way Broughton is framed in the film places her appearance, especially her whiteness, on a pedestal of expectation. Lasalle's death confirms the lack of intersectionality in *Atomic Blonde* that is required of feminism. Wilson, for *The Playlist*, scathingly writes, "female characters are never going to improve or get more interesting if women continue settling for superhuman shells whose most impressive trait is their ability to simultaneously abet male self-identification and cater to the male gaze."⁵⁰ By killing off the only queer woman of color in the film, *Atomic Blonde* follows a long line of films poor in queer and non-white representation. Lasalle falls into the postfeminist sphere in a way that regards her characteristics as disadvantageous.

⁴⁹ Sarah Banet-Weiser, Rosalind Gill and Catherine Rottenberg, "Postfeminism, Popular Feminism and Neoliberal Feminism? Sarah Banet-Weiser, Rosalind Gill and Catherine Rottenberg in Conversation," *Feminist Theory* 0, no. 0 (2019): 13-14.

⁵⁰ Lena Wilson, "Female Fans Deserve Better than 'Atomic Blonde,'" *The Playlist*, Aug. 4, 2017, <https://theplaylist.net/female-fans-deserve-better-atomic-blonde-20170804/>.

The James Bond Effect



Figure 7: Broughton seconds before she ambushes German police officers.

While researching *Atomic Blonde* critic reviews, I noticed a recurring name: James Bond. The legendary British action hero, his character originating from a series of novels and short stories transformed into 24 films starring six different actors, is a white male protagonist known for his sexual relationships with beautiful women and his ability to kill opponents with elegance.⁵¹ Broughton and James Bond’s similarities and differences reveal how *Atomic Blonde* handles gender politics reductively. Broughton is alluring while she takes down her enemies and engages in a sexual relationship with another attractive female spy in the meantime. Consequently, it is reasonable that film critics and Charlize Theron herself might compare the atmosphere of *Atomic Blonde* to that of the *Bond* films – and that Broughton’s tough but glamorous brand is associated with Bond. Queer culture website *AfterEllen* remarks of the film,

“For anyone who ever wanted a female James Bond, Broughton is literally it: same British foreign intelligence service, (spoiler alert) same trope of sleeping with a woman just to have her die later in the movie by

⁵¹ Jeff Ewing, “‘James Bond’ by the Numbers,” *Forbes*, Sept. 26, 2018, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jeffewing/2018/09/26/studied-not-stirred-bond-in-numbers-analyzes-everything-james-bond/#1b6cca9f4e1a>.

the hand of the villain, and same propensity towards guns and violence (but rather than a shaken martini, Broughton sips a Stolli vodka on the rocks).”⁵²

Sight & Sound also compares the glamour and spectacle of *Atomic Blonde* to the James Bond franchise: “Atomic Blonde’s spirit is most like the Bond franchise, which has always walked the line between worldly sleekness and over-the-top nonsense, often in a single film.”⁵³ In two *Entertainment Weekly* interviews, Theron remarks on the cultural stigma surrounding women having casual sex – especially in action films. She uses *Atomic Blonde* as an attempt to change the stigma around women participating in hookup culture. She says, “Everybody says you can’t do that — which is such bullsh— ... Why is it that James Bond can sleep with every girl in every movie and nobody says, ‘Wow, he’s not in love with them?’”⁵⁴ She also remarks, “‘he doesn't fall in love with them, he doesn't have a family with them... They're not making love, it's sex... There's a real power in a woman taking ownership. It's weird how we get weirded out by women doing that.’”⁵⁵ However, *Atomic Blonde* tends to objectify its female characters and is implicit in its misogynistic tendencies, all of which perpetuate specific ideas about “the affective life” that postfeminism defines.⁵⁶ Broughton and Bond are hypersexualized representations of their respective genders, but Broughton’s is even more complex in that she has characteristics of both Bond and a “Bond Girl,” a nickname given to the beautiful women Bond has relationships with in the films. A *Tampa Bay Times* article

⁵² Karen Frost, “Could this be the Dawn of the Lesbian Action Heroine?” *AfterEllen*, Oct. 12, 2017, <https://www.afterellen.com/movies/546269-dawn-lesbian-action-heroine>.

⁵³ Violet Lucca, “Reviews: *Atomic Blonde*,” *Sight & Sound*, Oct. 2017, 54-55, Academic Search Premier.

⁵⁴ Nicole Sperling, “Charlize Theron Breaks Down her Steamy Love Affair in *Atomic Blonde*,” *Entertainment Weekly*, April 26, 2017, <https://ew.com/movies/2017/04/26/charlize-theron-breaks-down-her-steamy-love-affair-in-atomic-blonde/>.

⁵⁵ Sara Vilkomerson, “Blonde, Sweat & Tears,” *Entertainment Weekly*, July 24, 2017, 12-14.

⁵⁶ Rosalind Gill, “The Affective, Cultural and Psychic Life of Postfeminism: A Postfeminist Sensibility 10 Years On,” *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 20, no. 6 (2017): 610.

classifies the Bond Girls in four categories: “the heroes,” who help Bond on his mission; “the femme fatales,” who are his enemies; “passing fancies” who are distractions from his mission and “sacrificial lambs” who lay down their lives for Bond.⁵⁷ She draws her power from misogyny and accomplishes her mission through her sexual life, emotional restraint and espionage skills, but is also objectified by the film’s misogynistic leanings. Broughton is attractive, appears to easily seduce women and is a skilled spy capable of accomplishing missions. However, she is also objectified through slow camera pans over her body and subject to misogynistic behavior from the film’s male characters. Lasalle also comes to resemble a Bond Girl, which culminates in her brutal murder at Percival’s hands. She is objectified through the film’s plot and camera movements as well. She has little agency over the plot, only providing Broughton with pleasure or useful information. Her status as a Bond Girl is further demonstrated through murder at the hands of Percival. Lasalle can be considered a Bond Girl, but so can Broughton. Objectification and empowerment do not cancel each other out, but rather create an even more complex space in which femininity works and is portrayed. Postfeminism works within the in-between space of female objectification and female empowerment.

⁵⁷ Steve Persall, “Four Kinds of Unforgettable Bond Girls,” *Tampa Bay Times*, Nov. 8, 2012, <https://www.tampabay.com/features/movies/four-kinds-of-unforgettable-bond-girls/1260412/>.



Figure 8: Broughton and Lasalle in a Berlin nightclub.

Broughton and Bond are similar in that they both present a specific set of traits and lifestyles – emotional restraint, a knack for espionage and a visible, casual sex life – which serves and encourages postfeminist thought. Amacker and Moore note that Bond’s character is established through his masculinity, sexual relationships with women and his success as a spy.⁵⁸ Yes, *Atomic Blonde* makes plain that women can be accomplished spies who are capable of intense combat, manipulation and sexual seduction; but the core power that serves these skills within action cinema is still misogynistic. By being in the shadow of Bond’s legacy, Broughton’s characteristics become less original and more masculine. Broughton is an action film protagonist who represents the general characteristics of action film leads such as Bond; she just happens to be female. From a postfeminist standpoint, these stereotypical traits imprinted onto Broughton are veiled as a progressive accomplishment within feminism. Broughton and Bond both make espionage look effortless. In one of the most violent scenes *Atomic Blonde*, Broughton takes down multiple KGB agents in an apartment stairwell within

⁵⁸ Anna Katherine Amacker and Donna Ashley Moore, “‘The Bitch is Dead’: Anti-feminist Rhetoric in *Casino Royale*,” in *James Bond in World and Popular Culture*, eds. Robert G. Weiner, B. Lynn Whitfield and Jack Becker (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), 146.

minutes, severely injuring herself in the process but finding the strength to escape. In a spectacular fight through a glass ceiling and scaffolding, Bond kills double agent Craig Mitchell in *Quantum of Solace* (2008).⁵⁹ Postfeminism also encourages the use of appearance and physical body for success, and both Bond and Broughton rely on that in their missions.⁶⁰ Bond is often dressed in expensive suits, and Broughton wears the feminine equivalent – costly high heels, long trench coats and evening gowns. Their glamorous looks, especially in Broughton’s case, allow them to be taken seriously by their colleagues or enemies. They also seduce women to further their respective mission objectives, and their pleasure is visually enthralling on-screen. Hagen argues that Broughton becomes her own kind of “Bond Girl” because she has a sexual relationship with a woman who also needs to be rescued.⁶¹ Broughton and Lasalle are reminiscent of Bond’s casual relationships with women in the franchise, such as Lucia Sciarra in *Spectre* (2015).⁶² Bond’s hookups with Bond Girls establish his dominance and masculinity in a visually appealing manner that conforms to misogynistic notions of female objectification. So does *Atomic Blonde*’s hookup plotline. Broughton establishes her dominance in the relationship through her emotional restraint and espionage skills. Lastly, both Broughton and Bond have a cold demeanor that reveal little emotion or personal details, making them mysterious. This combined with their appearances serve to create a specific persona that is guaranteed to succeed in both *Atomic Blonde* and the Bond franchise. Maintaining such a persona requires indomitable self-restraint. Only

⁵⁹ Marc Forster, dir. *Quantum of Solace*. London, United Kingdom: Eon Productions, 2008.

⁶⁰ Rosalind Gill, “Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of a Sensibility,” *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 10, no. 2 (2007): 149.

⁶¹ Katharina Hagen, “Atomic Blonde, Neue Deutsche Well, and ‘Jane Bond,’” *International Journal of James Bond Studies* 1, no. 2 (2018): 4.

⁶² Sam Mendes, dir. *Spectre*. London, United Kingdom: Eon Productions, 2015.

then will the individual, held to a high standard of performance, achieve success. Hagen describes Broughton as a protagonist who is restricted by “the mythic archetype of Bond.”⁶³ Their similarities reveal postfeminist implications regarding individual performance, self-control and expectations of appearance and demeanor.



Figure 9: Plenty O'Toole and James Bond in *Diamonds are Forever* (1971).

Lasalle's position in *Atomic Blonde* also reveals similarities to aspects of the Bond franchise and reveals how postfeminism masks misogyny for feminist progress. Lasalle is a Bond Girl; or a woman who is subject to misogyny and whose value is derived from her relationship with the protagonist. Hoxha says, “the Bond lessons conclude that women and villains, alike, are disposable and justified forms of collateral damage and, above all, seduction of women, whether friend or foe, is a necessary tool of social control to protect the power structures that comprise the status quo.”⁶⁴ Lasalle

⁶³ Katharina Hagen, “Atomic Blonde, Neue Deutsche Well, and ‘Jane Bond,’” *International Journal of James Bond Studies* 1, no. 2 (2018): 4.

⁶⁴ Tim Hoxha, “The Masculinity of James Bond: Sexism, Misogyny, Racism, and the Female Character,” in *James Bond in World and Popular Culture*, eds. Robert G. Weiner, B. Lynn Whitfield and Jack Becker (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), 204.

has little power in driving the plot of the film forward; instead, she provides Broughton with pleasure and useful information while being objectified by postfeminist and misogynistic means. Lasalle reveals her fears and weaknesses to Broughton as soon as they meet, which only highlight Broughton's secretive nature.⁶⁵ Further, the way in which *Atomic Blonde* shows Lasalle's murder deepens the comparison to Bond Girls. Lasalle is wearing lingerie in her home when she is ambushed by Percival, which intensifies the film's male gaze by associating her sexuality and femininity with the masculine violence wielded against her. Plenty O'Toole in *Diamonds are Forever* (1971) received a similar, deadly fate. Lasalle is unable to be saved by Broughton, who arrives to find her dead on the floor. The hookup plotline in the film takes a drastic turn with Lasalle's death. By revealing Lasalle to be a Bond Girl, *Atomic Blonde*'s intention to portray queer female characters in a usually male-dominated genre is shown to be rooted in misogynistic tendencies.

Broughton and Bond differ in that Broughton is subject to misogyny and objectification in the same way as a Bond Girl. Her femininity is derived from her sex appeal and physical appearance, but her skills as a spy complete her postfeminist identity. Génz and Brabon posit that gender identity is not consistent and fixed, but rather a "complex set of signposts" that allow an individual to move freely about its vast range.⁶⁶ Broughton moves around this range, displaying traits that are both feminine and masculine, or reminiscent of James Bond. Broughton has many similarities to Bond, but her gender and feminine presentation mean that postfeminism has a unique hold on her identity while still being complicit in misogyny. Broughton is capable of fending off

⁶⁵ See "Queer Experience Blurred."

⁶⁶ Stéphanie Génz and Benjamin E. Brabon, *Postfeminism: Cultural Texts and Theories* (Edinburgh University Press: 2009), 126, ProQuest eBook Central.

unwanted male attention, such as from Percival, but the reality is that she is compelled to accept a misogynistic work environment as normal and appropriate in her line of work. In a postfeminist manner, Broughton is tasked with individually facing the systemic issue of misogyny, which is present in varying degrees in men in all walks of life. *Atomic Blonde* objectifies Broughton's unapproachability by linking it to her sex appeal in the same way that *Dr. No* (1962) objectifies Honey Ryder's unfriendly but bikini-clad demeanor. The camera lingers on Broughton's body in many instances in *Atomic Blonde*: from the first shot of Broughton bruised in an ice bath to having sex with Lasalle. Broughton is similar to James Bond, but she is objectified for male pleasure in the film, which makes her position more complex and precarious within popular culture than his. Postfeminism obscures misogyny behind a cloak of feminine resiliency, and both *Atomic Blonde* and the James Bond franchise illustrate this.

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Figure 10: Broughton defends herself against KGB agents in a vicious battle.

Broughton and Bond share a knack for espionage and seducing women while keeping a cool, attractive demeanor. But the difference is that Broughton is a woman. Through comparisons to Bond, Broughton becomes a tool used to uphold misogynistic

tendencies while falsely communicating that she represents a more progressive shift towards gender equality. Further, Lasalle’s similarities to Bond Girls make her own kind of “Broughton Girl.” Hoxha says of Bond Girls, “These women are constructed as iconic symbols of femininity and sophistication whose unblemished skin, perfect features, ample cleavage, and classic bodies – tall, lean, and young – exuded a halo of perfection.”⁶⁷ Action films have a penchant for portraying women this way, and Broughton and Lasalle fit into the mold. It is postfeminism that highlights these tendencies and gives misogyny the mask it needs to evolve in response to new feminist rhetoric.

Conclusion



Figure 11: Broughton during her Berlin mission.

Postfeminism manifests in *Atomic Blonde* by obscuring its problematic treatment of female, queer characters while working to portray a false sense of sociocultural progress. The film presents a queer female protagonist working in a male-

⁶⁷ Tim Hoxha, “The Masculinity of James Bond: Sexism, Misogyny, Racism, and the Female Character,” in *James Bond in World and Popular Culture*, eds. Robert G. Weiner, B. Lynn Whitfield and Jack Becker (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), 202.

dominated field who is accomplished and successful, and challenges notions regarding hookup culture and femininity in the contemporary action film genre. However, protagonist Lorraine Broughton relies on a specific set of characteristics and skills to succeed that is reminiscent of Gill's argument that contemporary postfeminism attempts to influence feminine performances.⁶⁸ Broughton, in a postfeminist manner, is individualized by the narrative through her extreme sense of independence and an emotionally reserved, sensual persona. Broughton shows little emotion in the film. Externally, she is primarily concerned with the tasks of her mission. Further, postfeminism employs the use of the physical body and its interpretations of femininity in achieving success.⁶⁹ Broughton's wardrobe is clear-cut and starkly defined but intensely feminine; which, combined with her serious demeanor, makes her intimidating. Broughton does this in *Atomic Blonde* by presenting an unambiguous brand that both conforms to postfeminist ideals and enables her to succeed in finding The List. Furthermore, she is subject to an extraordinary set of responsibilities that perpetuate neoliberal ideas of labor.⁷⁰

Secondly, Broughton must navigate Berlin and the tasks of her mission while also dealing with a misogynistic work environment, perpetuating the postfeminist idea that misogyny is the responsibility of the individual to handle. Banet-Weiser remarks on this phenomenon, which tends to emphasize the existence of misogyny in "anomalous individuals."⁷¹ Postfeminism renders the existence of misogyny as nonexistent or

⁶⁸ Rosalind Gill, "Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of a Sensibility," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 10, no. 2 (2007): 147-166.

⁶⁹ Gill, "Postfeminist Media Culture," 149.

⁷⁰ Catherine Rottenberg, "The Rise of Neoliberal Feminism," *Cultural Studies* 28, no. 3 (2014): 421.

⁷¹ Sarah Banet-Weiser, *Empowered: Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2018), 34.

illegitimate, and thus frames Broughton as only needing to address the most visible or intense of instances.⁷² Broughton might easily address or move past misogyny in *Atomic Blonde* (or even kill its main aggressor, British spy David Percival) but her individual commitment does nothing to solve the systemic issue as a whole.

Thirdly, Broughton's casual sexual relationship with Lasalle masks misogyny through its intentions to portray female queerness and challenge notions of hookup culture within the narrative. Their relationship juxtaposes their differences, which serves to benefit Broughton in a postfeminist manner by framing her persona and skills as the most respectable and acceptable. Lasalle's emotions and inexperience, on the other hand, are rendered illegitimate. Lasalle's murder by Percival also minimizes her existence as a queer, woman of color within the narrative. Lasalle succumbed in an environment of misogyny unable to save herself. Misogynistic authority took advantage of Lasalle's vulnerability. This reveals how postfeminism protects and masks the forces that deem some performances of femininity and queerness as invalid.

Lastly, a comparison to the *James Bond* film franchise reveals Broughton's complex position within *Atomic Blonde*. Her characteristics and relationship with Lasalle echoes some of Bond's tendencies and his relationships with the "Bond Girls" of his films. Bond and Broughton are similar in that they are emotionally reserved, excellent in combat and engage in casual sexual relationships amid their work environment's danger and chaos. However, Broughton is still subject to misogyny through the film's male gaze and portrayal of her just as Bond Girls are. Further, Lasalle is reminiscent of the traits of Bond Girls due to her subordinate position in

⁷² Rosalind Gill, "Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of a Sensibility," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 10, no. 2 (2007): 153.

relation to Broughton and the film's narrative as a whole. *Atomic Blonde* actress Charlize Theron said publicly that she intended the film's casual queer hookup to be "refreshing" and unlike other action film narratives; but in reality, Broughton and Lasalle's relationship is caught in misogyny the same way that Bond's is with various women in his films.⁷³ Postfeminism masks *Atomic Blonde*'s misogynistic tendencies and perpetuates the myth that some performances of femininity are more acceptable, but an adjunct analysis of the characteristics of films in the *James Bond* franchise reveals them.

Atomic Blonde's intention to challenge sociocultural norms regarding hookup culture and femininity by presenting a female queer protagonist in a conventional action film was not achieved without the influence of misogyny within the narrative. The film highlights postfeminist ideals regarding female physical appearance, persona and capability. Lorraine Broughton is an ideal postfeminist subject due to her serious nature, sensual but professional wardrobe and excellent espionage skills. Her position within the postfeminist sphere is further confirmed by the film's misogyny. She is objectified through the film's focus on her physical body and is also compelled to face misogyny within her workplace without recognition of it. Broughton is representative of a postfeminist package of traits and skills, which work to perpetuate the notion that they are the only means to a successful end. Postfeminism encourages a specific type of visible performance from the individual, and Broughton performs perfectly.⁷⁴

⁷³ Nicole Sperling, "Charlize Theron Breaks Down her Steamy Love Affair in *Atomic Blonde*," *Entertainment Weekly*, April 26, 2017, <https://ew.com/movies/2017/04/26/charlize-theron-breaks-down-her-steamy-love-affair-in-atomic-blonde/>.

⁷⁴ Rosalind Gill, "Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of a Sensibility," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 10, no. 2 (2007): 155.

Wonder Woman Rebels Against Men, but Not too Much



Figure 12: Gal Gadot as Diana of Themyscira in *Wonder Woman*.

*“Bet all that gold gets heavy
Weighin’ on her
I wonder if it’s scary
Always tryin’ not to get hurt”*⁷⁵
— Kacey Musgraves, “Wonder Woman”

Introduction

A film that takes place in both a mythical island of paradise and the trenches of World War I is actually a contemporary postfeminist media text. *Wonder Woman* (2017) reinforces postfeminism through Diana’s feminine identity, her work ethic and the sheer weight of her responsibilities. The legacy of the film’s creation, as well as all of the criticisms that the film and actress Gal Gadot received, also reveals postfeminism. But before 2017, Wonder Woman had existed in American minds since 1941, her first appearance in being in the comic book *All-Star Comics*.⁷⁶ Diana’s creator, William Moulton Marston, strongly supported the first-wave feminist

⁷⁵ Kacey Musgraves, vocalist, “Wonder Woman” by Amy Wadge, Hillary Lindsey, Jessie Frasure and Kacey Musgraves, track 10 on *Golden Hour*, MCA Nashville, 2017.

⁷⁶ Jill Lepore, *The Secret History of Wonder Woman*, New York: Vintage Books, 2014, insert pg. 2.

suffragette movements and was inspired to create the female superhero after he noticed how distinctly masculine comic books were.⁷⁷ His intention for Wonder Woman to represent feminism and dissent came true. In 1972, for example, she appeared on the cover of feminist magazine *Ms.*'s first regular print issue. The issue was released in June, during a period of political change in which Shirley Chisholm, the nation's first black Congresswoman, was running for President on the Democratic ticket.⁷⁸ Wonder Woman's popularity, which had declined in the 1950s but resurged with the second-wave feminist movement of the 1960s, led ABC to create a hit television show starring Wonder Woman. In 1976 *The New Original Wonder Woman* premiered, starring *Miss World* 1972 participant Lynda Carter as Diana.⁷⁹ Wonder Woman became a feminine cultural icon – and now, her recent return to the American psyche is fulfilling Marston's dreams over again. But Diana's journey to the 2017 *Wonder Woman* feature film was not linear. There were numerous attempts to revive her character, especially in television, but no project reached the finish line. There was a 2011 television pilot that was not picked up by a major network. Another attempt to write a television pilot, by the CW network, was scratched.⁸⁰ These difficulties in creating brand-new Wonder Woman media texts reveal postfeminist tendencies of perfection and veiled misogyny. Media producer Joss Whedon publicly stated that Carter's "goofy" performance in the

⁷⁷ Mitra C. Emad, "Reading Wonder Woman's Body: Mythologies of Gender and Nation," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 39 no. 6 (2006): 957.

⁷⁸ My mention of Chisholm does not imply that Wonder Woman came to symbolize intersectional feminism at this time; intersectional feminism belongs to a later, 21st century feminist wave. Instead, I reference the period in which Title IX was passed, only promising no discrimination "on the basis of sex." Jill Lepore, *The Secret History of Wonder Woman*, New York: Vintage Books, 2014, 284-85.

⁷⁹ Lepore, *The Secret History of Wonder Woman*, 290-91.

⁸⁰ Lesley Sandberg, "CW's 'Wonder Woman' Prequel 'Amazon' Gets New Writer: 'Heroes' Aron Eli Coleite," *The Hollywood Reporter*, May 16, 2013, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/live-feed/cws-wonder-woman-prequel-amazon-524002>; Charlotte E. Howell, "'Tricky' Connotations: Wonder Woman as DC's Brand Disruptor," *Cinema Journal* 55, no. 1 (2015): 144-46.

1970s television show had lasting impressions on audiences, which is why he found recreating the television show difficult.⁸¹ Further, media discourse pondering Wonder Woman's return to culture was rampant with expectations of perfection – such as a *CinemaBlend* article titled “What does #DCTrinity Mean, and How Will Wonder Woman Live Up to It?”⁸² Articles like this reflect on cultural tendencies, especially within the film industry, to hold feminine-identifying individuals to high standards of quality and performance.⁸³ Postfeminist modes of thought inform these tendencies and highlight the characteristics of a desirable feminine identity that still is complicit in misogyny.

Firstly, the discourses surrounding Gal Gadot and *Wonder Woman*'s premiere reveal postfeminist tendencies. *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* (2016) was the first time that Wonder Woman appeared in a DC superhero film. Her return to audience screens was announced in 2013, during *Batman v Superman*'s pre-production.⁸⁴ Immediately upon her casting, Gadot was subject to online criticism over her physical body's suitability for the role of Wonder Woman. Despite Gadot's history as an Israeli citizen who served in the Israeli Defense Forces, internet users attacked her for not having enough muscles or big enough breasts.⁸⁵ When the film's first trailer was released in the spring of 2017, internet users noticed that Gadot had hairless armpits in

⁸¹ Benjamin Svetkey, “Wonder Woman: The Missing Superhero,” *Entertainment Weekly*, Nov. 19, 2010, <https://ew.com/article/2010/11/19/wonder-woman-missing-superhero/>.

⁸² Gabe Toro, “What Does #DCTrinity Mean, and How Will Wonder Woman Live Up to It?” *CinemaBlend*, 2012, <https://www.cinemablend.com/new/What-Does-DCTrinity-Mean-How-Wonder-Woman-Live-Up-It-66518.html?pv=search#comment-1517557348>.

⁸³ Matt Donnelly, “Women Directors Make Strides, but Studios Are Still Lagging on Gender Parity,” *Variety*, Apr. 3, 2019, <https://variety.com/2019/biz/news/hollywood-female-directors-1203178814/>.

⁸⁴ Kevin Jagernauth, “Has It Really Come to This? Gal Gadot Defends Breast Size for Wonder Woman Role in ‘Batman vs. Superman,’” *IndieWire*, Dec. 27, 2013, <https://www.indiewire.com/2013/12/has-it-really-come-to-this-gal-gadot-defends-breast-size-for-wonder-woman-role-in-batman-vs-superman-90614/>.

the film, despite Diana growing up on the isolated, hidden island of Themyscira.⁸⁶ The dispute over Diana's body hair reveals her place as an instrument within contemporary feminist debates. These criticisms reveal a postfeminist tendency to place high value upon an individual's body as a means for success – audiences seem to think that her only suitability for the role was contingent upon her physique and appearance.⁸⁷

Lastly, postfeminism can also be seen inside the film. In *Wonder Woman*, Diana's brand of feminist entrepreneurialism is key to events unfolding within the plot and the ways in which the film perpetuates postfeminist notions of individual responsibility. Two scenes in particular have these postfeminist qualities. Firstly, Diana's background story is established at the beginning of the film, which includes her years of hard training under her Aunt Antiope. Antiope's approach, of which Diana must train "harder and faster" than any other Amazon, reinforces postfeminist and neoliberal notions of success being contingent on hard work and the existence of the ideal female body.⁸⁸ Diana's innate femininity and beauty is also constantly being improved and remarked on through her training, which supports the postfeminist notion of using self-surveillance and body policing to achieve success.⁸⁹ Secondly, Diana's first encounter with the front lines of World War I, where she single-handedly takes on

⁸⁵ Rikke Schubart, "Bulk, Breast and Beauty: Negotiating the Superhero Body in Gal Gadot's *Wonder Woman*," *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* 33, no. 2 (January 2019): 166; Lorraine Cink (@lorrainecink), "A Little Disappointed that Wonder Woman Looks So Willowly I Could Break Her," Twitter, Dec. 4, 2013, <https://twitter.com/lorrainecink/status/408310383213305858?s=20>.

⁸⁶ Susannah Breslin, "Wonder Woman Doesn't Have Armpit Hair Because Women's Bodies Freak Men Out," *Forbes*, Mar. 19, 2017, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/susannahbreslin/2017/03/19/wonder-woman-armpit-hair/#2984b1551f41>.

⁸⁷ Rosalind Gill, "Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of a Sensibility," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 10, no. 2 (2007): 149.

⁸⁸ Gill, "Postfeminist Media Culture," 155; Catherine Rottenberg, "The Rise of Neoliberal Feminism," *Cultural Studies* 28, no. 3 (2014): 421.

⁸⁹ Rosalind Gill, "Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of a Sensibility," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 10, no. 2 (2007): 155.

the Germans and enables the Allies to leave their trenches and advance, is postfeminist. Diana is an empathetic and driven leader, but her individual desire and choice to solve such a massive and systemic issue is indicative of postfeminist and neoliberal ideals working within the film. It is also the first scene in the film in which Diana dons her iconic Wonder Woman costume. Her costume emphasizes her femininity and success in the face of war and masculinity. Therefore, it is representative of postfeminism's emphasis on hyper-femininity as the means to success. In *Wonder Woman*, Diana is a desirable and beautiful protagonist who successfully defeated the God of War, Ares, with her special combat training, superpowers, femininity and compassion. Her body is emphasized in the film because it represents the special powers that will, ultimately, save humanity from the war. She represents dissent in the face of masculinity and hardship, but postfeminist tendencies of body policing and hard work in the film still lead the film to be complicit in misogyny that regulates feminine identities and performances.

A Film Decades in the Making

What Does #DCTrinity Mean, And How Will Wonder Woman Live Up To It?

 WRITTEN BY GABE TORO

Figure 13: Gabe Toro's take on *Wonder Woman* for *CinemaBlend*.

Perfectionism within the expectations for the first stand-alone Wonder Woman film can be attributed to postfeminism. Perfection was a deciding factor for the acceptance of a female superhero film franchise into the DC superhero universe. Gabe

Toro, in an article for *CinemaBlend*, clearly iterates this tendency. At the end of the piece, which explores the concept of the “DC Trinity” and how Wonder Woman will “live up to” the prestige of Batman and Superman, Toro writes, “after fifteen Batman and Superman movies, all it will take is one good Wonder Woman to put her in that company, to let her earn a place within the #DCTrinity. Make this one count, Warner Bros.”⁹⁰ The connotation of Toro’s words may be that DC wants to hold Wonder Woman to the highest standards of cinematic excellence (even though the idea of cinematic excellence is subjective to individual opinion). But, holding DC or Warner Bros. accountable to make *Wonder Woman* great and give it the respect it deserves is a double-edged sword. DC *should* consider the film of high importance and impactful on audiences, but Toro implies that the acceptance of *Wonder Woman* into the DC Trinity and in the eyes of audience members is conditional on what is a “good film.” In other words, by giving Wonder Woman conditional acceptance into the superhero film industry based upon the success and quality of her first stand-alone film, she is set up to fail and disappoint audiences.

Lexi Alexander says 'no way' to directing Wonder Woman film citing 'fking weight of gender equality'**

She might be a former fighting champion, but not even the Publisher: War Zone director will risk this DC project

⁹⁰ Gabe Toro, “What Does #DCTrinity Mean, and How Will Wonder Woman Live Up to It?” *CinemaBlend*, 2012, <https://www.cinemablend.com/new/What-Does-DCTrinity-Mean-How-Wonder-Woman-Live-Up-It-66518.html?pv=search#comment-1517557348>.

Figure 14: Lexi Alexander refused to direct *Wonder Woman*, citing tall expectations.

Director Lexi Alexander, after turning down the directing role for *Wonder Woman*, publicly stated her reason: “without any control, you carry the f**king weight of gender equality for both characters and women directors. No way.”⁹¹ Here, Alexander reveals the possible implications of a failed film. Hollywood executives often cite the failure of female-led or female-directed films as a reason not to continue to produce them, despite the high number of male-led and male-directed flops. Of the eight feature films that star Superman or male-majority superhero cast, half of them have less than a 50 percent rating on review aggregator site Rotten Tomatoes. That does not include *Man of Steel* (2013), which holds a 56%.⁹² In an interview for *Variety*, producer and Women in Film founder Cathy Schulman discusses the way in which studios are more likely to assign monetarily high-risk projects to more men than women. “we can make a case that studios specifically have been willing to allow emerging male directors to take bigger jumps than women,” she says.⁹³ In an interview for *BBC Culture*, cartoonist Diana Tamblyn mentions the influence of female-led superhero flops on the possibility of a *Wonder Woman* film: “Hollywood likes to point to the failures of *Supergirl*, *Elektra* and *Catwoman* as proof that superhero films with a female lead can’t be successful.” In terms of the numerous efforts to revive the *Wonder Woman* character post-2000, there

⁹¹ Matilda Battersby, “Lexi Alexander says ‘No Way’ to Directing *Wonder Woman* Film Citing ‘F**king Weight of Gender Equality,’” *Independent*, Nov. 12, 2014, <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/news/lexi-alexander-says-no-way-to-directing-wonder-woman-film-citing-fking-weight-of-gender-equality-9856047.html>.

⁹² Films include *Justice League* (2017), *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* (2016), *Man of Steel* (2013), *Superman Returns* (2006), *Superman IV: The Quest for Peace* (1987), *Superman III* (1983), *Superman II* (1981) and *Superman* (1978); “Superman: Movies,” Rotten Tomatoes, accessed Nov. 6, 2019, https://www.rottentomatoes.com/franchise/superman_the_movie/; “Justice League,” Rotten Tomatoes, accessed Nov. 6, 2019, https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/justice_league_2017.

⁹³ Matt Donnelly, “Women Directors Make Strides, but Studios Are Still Lagging on Gender Parity,” *Variety*, Apr. 3, 2019, <https://variety.com/2019/biz/news/hollywood-female-directors-1203178814/>.

was a vague but pointed idea present in media coverage of the attempts that revealed the postfeminist notion of perfectionism. Charlotte Howell touches on this notion by framing Wonder Woman as “DC’s brand disruptor,” pointing out how Wonder Woman’s feminist tendencies and themes make her different than other DC heroes and more difficult to incorporate into their brand. In an analysis of how the word “tricky” is used to indicate discomfort in the creation of a Wonder Woman franchise, Howell remarks, “franchise branding of Wonder Woman often seeks to minimize that which makes her unique: her close ties to feminism, which are seen industrially as unmarketable, especially to male superhero fans.”⁹⁴ When approaching large superhero franchises, studios create films that they believe are marketable money-makers. When a major studio does not think that Diana’s femininity or ties to feminism are marketable to its audiences, that reveals the studio’s specific idea of perfection does not include some of the major themes present in Wonder Woman’s character. In 2013, CW Television Network announced that they were in the process of re-developing a Wonder Woman-prequel *Amazon* by introducing new screenwriters to the project. In a story about the upcoming show for *The Hollywood Reporter*, CW President Mark Pedowitz used the word “tricky” to describe Wonder Woman. “We do not want to produce something that doesn’t work for that particular character – it is the trickiest of all the DC characters to get done,” he said.⁹⁵ Connotatively, Pedowitz could be referring to the efforts made to depict Wonder Woman in a way that is not sexist and true to her character and values, which is important to the film’s success. However, his words

⁹⁴ Charlotte E. Howell, “‘Tricky’ Connotations: Wonder Woman as DC’s Brand Disruptor,” *Cinema Journal* 55, no. 1 (2015): 143.

⁹⁵ Lesley Sandberg, “CW’s ‘Wonder Woman’ Prequel ‘Amazon’ Gets New Writer: ‘Heroes’ Aron Eli Coleite,” *The Hollywood Reporter*, May 16, 2013, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/live-feed/cw-wonder-woman-prequel-amazon-524002>.

reveal an anxiety over whether introducing a new Wonder Woman television show to audiences would be successful at all. Pedowitz is publicly communicating that the CW is working hard to create the show, but implies that her gender is already inhibiting her success. Rosalind Gill connects the postfeminist notion of “self-surveillance and discipline” to the way in which women’s bodies are constantly monitored for improvement, but this tendency can also be connected to the tall expectations of a “perfect” Wonder Woman film. Gill frames femininity as a “performance,” which emphasizes how femininity can “perform” or look appealing to audiences.⁹⁶ In the case of Wonder Woman, executives like Pedowitz allude to perfecting the Wonder Woman-themed television script; but in reality, the probability of creating a perfect show is low. The postfeminist and neoliberal tendency to accept certain types of femininity, such as the specific brand of Wonder Woman’s, is conditional on an initial, perfect performance. Any “mistakes,” or any aspect of the performance that is deemed unmarketable or does not conform to patriarchal ideals, ruins the chances for a future shift in how those mistakes are perceived. Despite being a fictional character, Wonder Woman is subject to an expectation of perfection within the postfeminist (and patriarchal) sphere.

⁹⁶ Rosalind Gill, “Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of a Sensibility,” *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 10, no. 2 (2007): 155.



Figure 15: Twitter user @lorrainecink on Gal Gadot's casting.

When Gal Gadot was cast as Wonder Woman for the upcoming film *Batman v Superman* (2016), she was bombarded by intense criticism over her body and appearance that never truly ceased. From questions over whether her breasts were too small for the role, or public debates over her lack of armpit hair, Gadot's looks became well established within the greater talking points of Wonder Woman's first standalone film. The intense focus on Gadot's body by both audience members and the media reinforces the postfeminist understanding of the female body and appearance as key to cultural success. At the end of 2013, *Batman v Superman* director Zach Snyder publicly announced her casting, as well as an allusion to Wonder Woman's future within the DC universe. Snyder described Gadot as having a "magic quality," but many DC and Wonder Woman fans were not happy with the decision.⁹⁷ In a sociological analysis of Wonder Woman's body and muscles, Rikke Schubart discusses the ways in which Gadot was ridiculed for the differences between her and Wonder woman's physique. Social media users thought she was too thin and weak for the role. "While not hugely

⁹⁷ Justin Kroll, "Gal Gadot to Play Wonder Woman in 'Batman v. Superman,'" *Variety*, Dec. 4, 2013, <https://variety.com/2013/film/news/gal-gadot-wonder-woman-batman-vs-superman-1200918310/>.

muscular, she had a body shaped by military service, weapons, combat, and motorcycles. Yet this did not convince comic books fans,” Shubart says.⁹⁸ A little less viciously, many people took to social media to sarcastically remark on Gadot’s thin, lean body: “A little disappointed that Wonder Woman looks so willowy I could break her. Give that girl some Wonder bread?”⁹⁹ Gadot’s breasts were also criticized for being too small for the role. While being interviewed on the Israeli television show “Good Evening with Guy Pines,” Gadot is asked if her breasts will be larger in the film.¹⁰⁰ David Edelstein’s review of the film for *Vulture*, which drew public backlash for its sexism and fetishization of Gadot, calls Gadot a “superbabe” and a “treat,” not to mention describing Israeli women in general as “a breed unto themselves.”¹⁰¹ This type of public and highly visible body criticism is reminiscent of Gill’s notion that postfeminism looks to women’s bodies as their dominant source of power.¹⁰² If Gadot *already* had larger breasts or more muscles and curves, then she would be qualified to play the role. Even though such heavy scrutiny on Gadot’s body does not negate other conversations regarding her performance or the significance of the film within feminism, the visibility of these discourses support postfeminism’s notion of using the

⁹⁸ Rikke Schubart, “Bulk, Breast and Beauty: Negotiating the Superhero Body in Gal Gadot’s Wonder Woman,” *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* 33, no. 2 (January 2019): 166.

⁹⁹ Lorraine Cink (@lorrainecink), “A Little Disappointed that Wonder Woman Looks So Willowy I Could Break Her,” Twitter, Dec. 4, 2013, <https://twitter.com/lorrainecink/status/408310383213305858?s=20>; see also: Alex Zalben, “Gal Gadot is Wonder Woman: the Internet Reacts,” *MTVNews*, Dec. 4, 2013, <http://www.mtv.com/news/1718455/gal-gadot-wonder-woman-fan-reaction/>.

¹⁰⁰ Kevin Jagernauth, “Has It Really Come to This? Gal Gadot Defends Breast Size for Wonder Woman Role in ‘Batman vs. Superman,’” *IndieWire*, Dec. 27, 2013, <https://www.indiewire.com/2013/12/has-it-really-come-to-this-gal-gadot-defends-breast-size-for-wonder-woman-role-in-batman-vs-superman-90614/>.

¹⁰¹ David Edelstein, “Wonder Woman Is a Star Turn for Gal Gadot, But the Rest Is Pretty Clunky,” *Vulture*, June 1, 2017, <https://www.vulture.com/2017/06/movie-review-wonder-woman-is-a-star-turn-for-gal-gadot.html>.

¹⁰² Rosalind Gill, “Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of a Sensibility,” *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 10, no. 2 (2007): 150.

female body as power. The controversy over Gadot’s breasts in the first place can be attributed to what Gill describes as a “pervasive sexualization” of women in today’s culture and media.¹⁰³ Sexual appeal, especially to male audiences, is conditional for cultural acceptance in this context. Postfeminism reinforces notions of sexual appeal in specific parameters, such as breast size, in order to acquire power. In the case of Gadot, she was subject to the postfeminist criticisms of her body and how changes made to it will lead to her success in the role of Wonder Woman.



Figure 16: Twitter user @racheltunnard on the *Wonder Woman* hairless armpit controversy.

When the first *Wonder Woman* trailer was released in March of 2017, no one could have predicted that such a highly visible and heated conversation would emerge from a clip in the trailer that is maybe 1/10th of a second: a shot of Gadot in her

¹⁰³ Gill, “Postfeminist Media Culture,” 150.

Wonder Woman outfit, raising her arms, revealing an obvious lack of armpit hair.¹⁰⁴ Audiences took to Twitter to discuss this incredibly important detail regarding whether Amazon women shave or even *have* body hair in the film.¹⁰⁵ Media and social media frenzy over Gadot's hairless armpits in one of the film's trailers is indicative of a shift in societal perceptions of the female body; however, Wonder Woman's lack of body hair supports postfeminist notions regarding the presentation of female bodies. Regardless of a lack of public knowledge about the specific reasons why Gadot's armpits were lighter and more hairless than the rest of her body, audiences took to social media to point out Hollywood's support of culturally enforced anxiety over female body hair.¹⁰⁶ Cultural, (and postfeminist) anxiety over female body hair has existed in the Western world for centuries. According to a piece on female body hair by *Allure*, hairlessness was indicative of the upper class in the European Renaissance period and of bodily hygiene. Razor brand Gillette began selling a razor marketed to women's armpit hair in 1915. Since then, media representation and capitalism have enforced the cultural notion of female body hair being unclean, vulgar and unfeminine.¹⁰⁷ With the development of laser hair removal, new feminine razors designed for legs and underarms and celebrities like Kim Kardashian discussing their body hair removal routines with the media, a public display of underarms or hairy legs goes against the cultural grain. For example, when model Arvida Byström was

¹⁰⁴ "WONDER WOMAN – Official Origin Trailer," Warner Bros. Pictures, Mar. 11, 2017, YouTube, <https://youtu.be/INLzqh7rZ-U>.

¹⁰⁵ Sophie Hirsh, "Wonder Woman Shows Off Hairless Armpits in the New Trailer, Internet Reacts," *Teen Vogue*, Mar. 20, 2017, <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/wonder-woman-hairless-armpits>.

¹⁰⁶ Susannah Breslin, "Wonder Woman Doesn't Have Armpit Hair Because Women's Bodies Freak Men Out," *Forbes*, Mar. 19, 2017, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/susannahbreslin/2017/03/19/wonder-woman-armpit-hair/#2984b1551f41>.

¹⁰⁷ Loren Savini, "A Retrospective Look at Women's Body Hair in Popular Culture," *Allure*, Apr. 23, 2018, <https://www.allure.com/gallery/history-of-womens-body-hair-removal>.

photographed with unshaven legs for an Adidas advertising campaign in 2016, she received rape threats and was harassed on social media.¹⁰⁸ Oppositely, in the last few years, there has been an increase in social media campaigns and hashtags which encourage women to embrace their natural body hair. In the case of Wonder Woman's smooth pits, the release of the first trailer ignited backlashes against it and even backlashes *against* those backlashes. "Controversial hot take," one person tweeted. "I wish #WonderWoman had armpit visible armpit hair. She was raised on an island of women w/no Schick advertisements!"¹⁰⁹ Another Twitter user thought that anger over Diana's hairless pits was missing the point: "First female superhero film for 17 years and all the talk is about her armpits..."¹¹⁰ Sophie Hirsh, in a piece for *Teen Vogue*, points out that it's unknown whether Gadot herself chooses to shave, or if the filmmakers asked her to. Hirsh also makes another good point in the piece: regardless of whose choice it was to have Gadot go hairless, and the increase in body hair visibility on social media, her smooth underarms are representative of how the film industry still polices female body hair.¹¹¹ The complexity and intensity of online conversations about Wonder Woman's shaving routine reveals that the choices Gadot makes about her body

¹⁰⁸ "Model Arvida Byström Gets Rape Threats After an Advert Featured Her Hairy Legs," *BBC Newsbeat*, Oct. 6, 2017, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/newsbeat/article/41522160/model-arvida-bystrm-gets-rape-threats-after-an-advert-featured-her-hairy-legs>.

¹⁰⁹ Paul Roth (@paulidin), "Controversial hot take: I wish #WonderWoman had armpit hair," Twitter, Mar. 11, 2017, <https://twitter.com/paulidin/status/840798480050278401?s=20>; Shannon Carlin, "Is Wonder Woman Allowed to Have Armpit Hair?" *Refinery29*, Mar. 15, 2017, <https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/2017/03/145425/wonder-woman-armpit-hair-photoshop-twitter-reaction>.

¹¹⁰ Rachel Tunnard (@rachelstunnard), "First Female Superhero Film for 17 Years and All the Talk is About Her Armpits," Twitter, Mar. 17, 2017, <https://twitter.com/rachelstunnard/status/842646119821840384?s=20>; see also: Adam White, "Wonder Woman Faces Wrath of Fans for 'Digitally Blurred' Hairless Armpits," *The Telegraph*, Mar. 20, 2017, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/films/0/wonder-woman-faces-wrath-fans-digitally-blurred-hairless-armpits/>.

¹¹¹ Sophie Hirsh, "Wonder Woman Shows Off Hairless Armpits in the New Trailer, Internet Reacts," *Teen Vogue*, Mar. 20, 2017, <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/wonder-woman-hairless-armpits>.

(or the ones that are made *for* her) have an impact on both her public worth and Wonder Woman's. Postfeminism plays a role here through themes of self-surveillance and encouraging women to use their bodies as a key source of power. Intense criticism of a detail such as armpit hair also reveals a pointed attempt by social media audiences to find ways to discredit the film's quality. Many argued that Diana should have armpit hair based on the assumption that Amazon women did, which would make the film less accurate. Given how media audiences, such as comic book fans, demand loyalty to exact details and plotlines within media multiplicities, it makes sense that Wonder Woman's audience demand that Gadot's portrayal is true to the Wonder Woman origin story. However, this militant loyalty to accuracy plays out through the misogynistic, postfeminist sphere that Wonder Woman sits squarely in.



Figure 17: Diana watches an oncoming plane as it crashes into the sea before Themyscira.

Constant discourse about and criticism of Gal Gadot (and by extension, Wonder Woman) reveals a tendency by media and media audiences to hold women and femininity to a unique standard of perfection that is so impossible to achieve, these criticisms are unavoidable. As defined by Gill, the tendencies of postfeminism include

self-surveillance and encouragement of women to use their bodies to gain power. Furthermore, postfeminist goals that include traditional beauty standards and gender norms are conditional on conceptions of perfection. By analyzing the ways in which the first Wonder Woman stand-alone film was held to high, near-impossible standards of perfection by both media companies and media audiences, the ways in which postfeminism masks anxieties over the sheer of existence of Wonder Woman are revealed. Production companies, such as the television network CW, attempted to create a Wonder Woman television show but implied that her gender may inhibit the show's success. Further, postfeminism can be seen within conversations about casting Gal Gadot for the role of Diana. The primary critique of Gadot in relation to playing the part was that she did not have enough muscles or curves, nor were her breasts big enough. These discourses, which were highly visible on social media and received international media attention, reflect a tendency by audiences to judge a famous woman's worth on the type of body she does or doesn't have. Conversations about Gadot also imply that her worth and acceptance into the DC/superhero film universe is contingent on her appearance, which is postfeminist in that it relegates power based on the size of breasts or muscles. Postfeminist implications of power were also revealed when Gadot and the film received criticism over Gadot/Diana's lack of armpit hair. The criticism by fans based on the assumption that a lack of armpit hair meant that the film was inaccurate or of lesser quality also exists within postfeminism. Well before *Wonder Woman's* release, audiences were already attempting to discredit the film's quality on the basis of Gadot's appearance, supposed inaccuracies and anxieties over the mere existence of another female superhero film- especially one that was Wonder Woman's. Jill Lepore, in her

historical account of Wonder Woman's origins, discusses Wonder Woman's connections to different eras of feminist movements, such as second-wave feminism of the 60s and 70s. Lepore says, "Wonder Woman wasn't caught in the crossfire, Wonder Woman was the ammunition."¹¹² After a period of dormancy following the end of Lynda Carter's television show, Diana fell out of the public eye until the late 2010s. When audiences began asking 'where is the Wonder Woman movie?' a slew of failed Wonder Woman projects were attempted before Wonder Woman's first contemporary appearance in *Batman v Superman*. But the production and release of Diana's 2017 film once again made her the ammunition of contemporary feminist and even postfeminist movements. In one piece, Trina Robbins asked five male acquaintances she knew about why straight men are so anxious over Wonder Woman's existence. One of her friends said of straight men: "they hate her not only because she is stronger than man, but because she is better and more discretionary at using those strengths."¹¹³ *Wonder Woman* perfectly captures Diana's compassion for others and her commitment to justice, as well as her comfort in living without men on Themyscira. Discourse about Wonder Woman, especially regarding her 2017 stand-alone film, reveals patriarchal anxieties over the existence of powerful women. When someone like Diana symbolically threatens further existence of the patriarchy, there will always be media audiences who feel so threatened by her that they will find any way to discredit her—whether it is with expectations of perfection or criticism of her appearance.

¹¹² Jill Lepore, *The Secret History of Wonder Woman*, New York: Vintage Books, 2014, 290.

¹¹³ Trina Robbins, "Wonder Woman: Queer Appeal," *International Journal of Comic Book Art* 10 no. 2 (2008): 93.

Postfeminism within *Wonder Woman*

Diana's Intense Training Regimen



Figure 18: Diana begins to realize the extent of her special powers.

“You will train her harder... than any Amazon before her,” Hippolyta says to Antiope. Diana’s intensive training regimen while growing up on Themyscira sets a postfeminist and neoliberal tone for the rest of the film. Her training regimen reinforces the postfeminist notion that hard work will most definitely lead to success. Gill argues that the extent of postfeminist labor must not be revealed; or rather, the efforts taken to self-improve are hidden by the individual.¹¹⁴ In the case of *Wonder Woman*, Diana’s training routine reflects the even tighter hold neoliberalism has on society, as Gill argues.¹¹⁵ Since neoliberalism has developed into “a central organizing ethic of society,” its perception within postfeminism has evolved from the idea of “hiding” neoliberal labor to explicitly showcasing the effort.¹¹⁶ Because of Diana’s destiny and powers, she trained “five times harder, ten times harder” than any other Amazon woman. She

¹¹⁴ Rosalind Gill, “Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of a Sensibility,” *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 10, no. 2 (2007): 155.

¹¹⁵ Rosalind Gill, “The Affective, Cultural and Psychic Life of Postfeminism: A Postfeminist Sensibility 10 Years On,” *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 20, no. 6 (2017): 606.

¹¹⁶ Gill, “The Affective, Cultural and Psychic Life of Postfeminism,” 608.

practiced hand-to-hand combat, sword fighting, archery, and more. Her work paid off, too – later in the film, she single-handedly fought the Germans on the warfront and destroyed Ares.



Figure 19: Diana holds the Lasso of Truth around the God of War, Ares.

Diana’s training scene in *Wonder Woman* reflects current trends of neoliberal labor, and postfeminism’s control over portrayals of femininity. Neoliberalism is encouraged to become incorporated into feminine identities. Banet-Weiser argues that neoliberalist values are “embraced/adopted by girls and women as a way to craft themselves.” in *Wonder Woman*, Diana embraces the intense work ethic expected of her; further, it is her destiny. The outcome of her training, which is successfully safeguarding humanity by defeating her identity, is intrinsically part of her identity.

Secondly, Diana’s training is reminiscent of the postfeminist implications of body policing – in which femininity is expected to be constantly evaluated, surveilled and updated in order to achieve success.¹¹⁷ Viewers get the first look at grown-up Diana in the training scene, which highlights her physique and beauty through her

¹¹⁷ Rosalind Gill, “Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of a Sensibility,” *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 10, no. 2 (2007): 155.

inspirational combat skills. Her physical beauty, in combination with her passionate work ethic, is demonstrative of McRobbie's notion of a "hyper-culture of commercial sexuality."¹¹⁸ Diana's femininity and sexuality is amplified in the film because it is intrinsically connected to her identity and the successful outcome of her legacy, which is to defeat Ares. Commercial sexuality falls into the postfeminist sphere because it connects neoliberal notions of hard work and postfeminist notions of body surveillance. Diana has "commercial sexuality," which encourages women to be the entire package—beautiful, slender but strong, successful and more.¹¹⁹ In Wonder Woman's present day, Diana is a grown woman who has finished her training and is capable of defeating Ares. She represents the endgame of what postfeminist and neoliberal ideals work to create. Her training was successful, and thus her outcome and destiny. In a conversation with Banet-Weiser and Catherine Rottenberg, Gill describes a new kind of feminism: "this feminism seemed to be very similar to the postfeminist sensibility in the ideological work it was doing, except that it involved a strong – oftentimes even defiant-sounding – championing of feminism as an identity."¹²⁰ Wonder Woman was created during the era of first-wave feminism, and has represented a multitude of feminisms over the decades.¹²¹ She, still, is intrinsically intertwined with feminist ideologies; but now Diana in Wonder Woman represents and displays postfeminist and neoliberal notions of femininity that are inherent to contemporary gender expectations.

¹¹⁸ Angela McRobbie, "Post-Feminism and Popular Culture," *Feminist Media Studies* 4, no. 3 (2004), 259.

¹¹⁹ McRobbie, "Post-Feminism and Popular Culture," 259.

¹²⁰ Sarah Banet-Weiser, Rosalind Gill and Catherine Rottenberg, "Postfeminism, Popular Feminism and Neoliberal Feminism? Sarah Banet-Weiser, Rosalind Gill and Catherine Rottenberg in Conversation," *Feminist Theory* 0, no. 0 (2019): 11.

¹²¹ Jill Lepore, *The Secret History of Wonder Woman*, New York: Vintage Books, 2014, 284-85; Mitra C. Emad, "Reading Wonder Woman's Body: Mythologies of Gender and Nation," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 39 no. 6 (2006): 957.

Diana in No Man's Land



Figure 20: Diana faces the German trenches alone on the front of World War I.

Diana's reveal of her costume and powers on the front of World War I has significant implications in *Wonder Woman's* postfeminist tendencies. The scene reflects aspects of postfeminism that demonstrate how Diana moves through a war-torn world, using her strength of individual choice, advantages as an Amazon woman and femininity to succeed in her goal of defeating Ares. *No Man's Land* is powerful in its effect on the warfront and the showcasing of Diana's independent spirit. In the scene, Captain Steve Trevor, an American spy who becomes Diana's mission partner, attempts to convince Diana not to interfere with warfare because they must advance forward into Germany to complete their mission. Instead, Diana is angered by the civilian and soldiers' suffering and dons her costume, sword and shield for the first time. She steps into the space in between the trenches of the Allied forces and the Germans – also known as *No Man's Land*. She advances toward the Germans, deflecting bullets and grenades with her shield and forearms. She only uses defensive tactics until she reaches their trenches. When she does, Diana focuses on destroying their weapons and methods

of attack. As she advances, the Germans begin to retreat, which gives Trevor and the Allied forces the confidence they need to move forward. Thus, Diana gave the Allied forces the confidence they needed to advance; she only initiated the tactic and used her defensive combat skills while doing so. No Man's Land reflects *Wonder Woman's* postfeminist tendencies in the following ways. Firstly, some decisions that Diana makes – such as this somewhat impulsive choice to enter No Man's Land – are framed as independent of her advantages as an Amazonian woman with superpowers. This postfeminist approach to the active life disregards outside factors that give individuals advantages or disadvantages in their life, such as systemic misogyny. In addition to her decision-making, Diana successfully defeats Ares in the film because she has an advantage through her destiny as the “God Killer” and unique Amazonian upbringing, in which she was able to hone her skills to their full potential. The No Man's Land scene highlights these advantages; this is the first time in the film that audience members get their first look at Diana's armor and outfit. Secondly, her sole decision to leave the trenches and face the Germans serves as a visual metaphor for the film's postfeminist tendencies. The shots of Diana, alone in No Man's Land and defending herself against gunfire, reflect her postfeminist and neoliberal circumstance as a single individual tasked with saving millions of people by stopping the war. Postfeminism's tendency to allocate the responsibility of solving systemic issues onto the individual is shown visually in the juxtaposition of the vast greyness and death of No Man's Land with Diana's presence. Thirdly, postfeminism is displayed in this scene through Diana's costume, powers and her spectacular display of femininity in No Man's Land. Her physical body and appearance, such as her powers, costumes, armor and physique, is

used to enforce her power and agency on the battlefield. Until she reaches the German soldiers, Diana only uses her power defensively to deflect bullets and grenades, which serves to highlight her visual femininity even further. *Wonder Woman's* "No Man's Land" scene serves to show the ways in which the film is postfeminist as a whole. The pivotal scene, in which Diana first dons her Wonder Woman armor and weapons, is a visual metaphor for multiple of the film's postfeminist tendencies. Diana's lone figure, defending herself against flying bullets among the rubble, represents her status as an individual charged with the seemingly impossible task of stopping the war. The gravity of the situation in the trenches reinforces the significance of her costume and its postfeminist meanings of self-surveillance and body policing.¹²²

Firstly, Diana's compassion and sympathy for the suffering and injured are her driving motivation for taking on the Germans. Her decision is somewhat impulsive and rebellious in the eyes of Trevor, who does not understand her power and insists that entering No Man's Land would be treacherous. In this way, Diana takes a risk in doing what she feels is morally right and succeeds while doing it. Her individual choice in stepping into the front is highlighted by the exchange with Trevor and her anger from seeing civilians and soldiers in agony. However, Diana is only able to succeed in this instance because of her status as the most powerful Amazon woman and the destined "God Killer." Gill argues that postfeminism pays no attention to the effect of sociocultural inequalities on an individual's successes and failures.¹²³ No ordinary civilian or soldier would survive that kind of German gunfire, even if armed with

¹²² Rosalind Gill, "Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of a Sensibility," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 10, no. 2 (2007): 155.

¹²³ Rosalind Gill, "Post-postfeminism?: New Feminist Visibilities in Postfeminist Times," *Feminist Media Studies* 16, no. 4, 615-16.

Diana's steadfast resolve and magical shield and sword. Diana's intrinsic power, strength and skill as an Amazon enables her to advance – not just her compassion and determination to do what she feels is moral. Even though *Wonder Woman* makes a great display of Diana revealing her costume, shield and sword before climbing out of the trench, more attention was initially paid to Diana's individual choice in facing the Germans. Her compassion is the sole factor. If she had not been so moved and angered by the suffering in the trenches and Belgian village, the No Man's Scene may not have happened at all. In this manner, the film pays less attention to Diana's socio-cultural advantages.

Next, *Wonder Woman* frames Diana's success in No Man's Land as through her sense of confidence, which further downplays Diana's inherent advantages. Banet-Weiser argues that confidence is now considered to be an individual personality trait.¹²⁴ Diana's sense of confidence is so visible in her persona that it is one of her primary characteristics. Postfeminism encourages feminine-identifying individuals to adopt confidence as part of their identities, and Diana demonstrates this thoroughly. Since postfeminism is so concerned with crafting the ideal "woman" or feminine identity, confidence becomes what Banet-Weiser describes as "an end in itself." If one is confident, then one will be successful. In the simplest of terms, Diana displays confidence in the No Man's Land scene and is successful because of it. She does not try to turn back towards the trenches or reveal any hesitation on the warfront. Diana is determined and confident, not unsure or hesitant. The scene's straightforward manner veils Diana's upper hand of having special powers, armor and gear. This makes her

¹²⁴ Sarah Banet-Weiser, *Empowered: Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2018), 94.

situation on the front uncomplicated, and an ideal representation of postfeminist notions of confidence. Furthermore, McRobbie says that postfeminism supports sociocultural pressures on the individual to “make the right choices.”¹²⁵ The No Man’s Land scene downplays Diana’s advantages as an Amazon and superhero, but that does not mean that her initial choice to enter No Man’s Land was not postfeminist as well. Diana has an advantage in No Man’s Land through her innate power and skill, but this instance is also postfeminist because she felt internal pressure to make “the right choice.” Making decisions that are correct is inherently subjective to an individual’s sense of what is right. Diana, as a continuation of Wonder Woman’s legacy, represents the values of feminism, compassion and bravery.¹²⁶ Thus, Diana feels that these values lead her to make the “right choice” and was compelled to display these values in No Man’s Land. Here, Diana’s representation of feminism is demonstrated through her rebellious decision to face the Germans, which reflects the inherently rebellious nature of feminist movements. Diana’s compassionate nature leads her to feel compelled to address the problem in this method, and she relies on her bravery to carry her decision out. Her decision to enter No Man’s Land is treated as a product of her strength and resolve. Diana’s confidence and determination are postfeminist because it treats the scene’s conflict in an uncomplicated manner, but it also downplays her advantage as an individual with superhuman genetics and an Amazon background.

¹²⁵ Angela McRobbie, “Post-Feminism and Popular Culture,” *Feminist Media Studies* 4, no. 3 (2004), 261.

¹²⁶ Rikke Schubart, “Bulk, Breast and Beauty: Negotiating the Superhero Body in Gal Gadot’s Wonder Woman,” *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* 33, no. 2 (January 2019): 162-63.



Figure 21: Diana defends herself against German gunfire.

Furthermore, *Wonder Woman* frames the war as Diana's personal responsibility, which perpetuates the postfeminist idea that conquering the patriarchy should be on an individual, not institutional, basis. The No Man's Land scene reflects this implication through Diana's choice to take on the Germans as an individual person. In the film, Diana is independent, which is reflected through the choices she makes. Brown frames contemporary notions of individualism as a characteristic in which one must be "self-reliant and self-governing."¹²⁷ The scene reveals how postfeminism enforces individualism as the sole method to success. When Diana was moved to enter No Man's Land, she did so independently and without an expectation that others, such as Trevor, were going to help her. Further, women like Diana must act as "Girl Bosses" to succeed, but without acknowledging systemic oppression – which is the fault of collective society, not individuals.¹²⁸ *Wonder Woman* occurs right in the middle of World War I and does not address its causes. The film presents the war as the status

¹²⁷ Jeffrey A. Brown, *Beyond Bombshells: The New Action Heroine in Popular Culture* (University Press of Mississippi, 2015), 169. ProQuest eBook Central.

¹²⁸ Sarah Banet-Weiser, *Empowered: Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2018), 20; Angela McRobbie, "Post-Feminism and Popular Culture," *Feminist Media Studies* 4, no. 3 (2004), 258.

quo, without the acknowledgement of it being a product of governmental forces, which are larger than an individual person. Diana embraces the conflict as an individual and personal issue that she must solve. She is one person, not a team of Wonder Women or anything of the like. Diana may have a team and Trevor as her mission partner, but because of her special powers and creation she is individually obligated to solve an institutional conflict. Postfeminism encourages feminine-identifying individuals to tackle institutional issues, such as the patriarchy, on an individual level because it does not address the core size of it. Banet-Weiser argues that the media conceals the existence of misogyny by attributing it to specific, “anomalous” individuals.¹²⁹ *Wonder Woman* is about Diana’s mission to stop World War I, but her method is defeating the God of War, Ares. But defeating Ares will not stop the likelihood of conflicts like this from occurring again. Instead, in a postfeminist manner, Ares is the anomalous individual attributed to causing institutional conflicts like World War I. Further, Gill and Banet-Weiser’s ruminations over “gendered neoliberalism” implicate that women specifically are held to high standards – to make choices that benefit the postfeminist and neoliberal way of life.¹³⁰ The task Diana set out to do early in *Wonder Woman*, to stop the war by defeating Ares, is a large one that would be impossible for an average individual without the training, powers and tools she wields. Thus, Diana is held to a high standard of performance in the film. The warfront situation was so dire that she looked to be the world’s best change at regaining peace. Diana is pressured to make the right choices and sacrifice her well-being for the world’s sake. In the No Man’s Land

¹²⁹ Banet-Weiser, *Empowered*, 34.

¹³⁰ Sarah Banet-Weiser, *Empowered: Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2018) 20; Rosalind Gill, “The Affective, Cultural and Psychic Life of Postfeminism: A Postfeminist Sensibility 10 Years On,” *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 20, no. 6 (2017): 611.

scene, she is obligated to alter her path to personal victory so she can assist others. She halts hers and Trevor’s mission in order to single-handedly face an entire army of German soldiers. In his analysis of the *Blonde Justice* franchise, Brown comments on how action films tend to approach feminism reductively. His argument, regarding the implications of female protagonist killing her sexist male counterparts, reveals how action films tend to frame these instances as a step in the feminist direction.¹³¹ *Wonder Woman* frames the war in a similar, reductive manner. The film treats Ares as the key to solving all conflict, and that only Diana can defeat him and achieve peace. But issues such as the patriarchy are not that simple. There is no sexist “God” that one superfeminist must defeat to achieve gender equality. The patriarchy is large, vast and spread out – not solely existing in a few individuals. Diana’s efforts in No Man’s Land are significant and heroic, but do not accomplish anything on a larger scale.



Figure 22: Diana reveals her new armor, which includes her late Aunt Antiope’s headband.

Lastly, Diana’s femininity and sexuality, demonstrated in No Man’s Land scene through her costuming and defensive tactics, is postfeminist because it is essential to her

¹³¹ Jeffrey A. Brown, *Beyond Bombshells: The New Action Heroine in Popular Culture* (University Press of Mississippi, 2015), 169. ProQuest eBook Central.

success and desirability as a superhero. In a conversation with Banet-Weiser and Catherine Rottenberg, Gill remarks on her study of women working for women's magazines, and how the texts tended to use feminism as a primary tenet of one's individual identity.¹³² Because of Wonder Woman's background and creation being rooted in feminist thought and the strength of feminine identity, Diana in *Wonder Woman* is grounded in femininity similarly. In the scene, when she initially makes the decision to face the German front, Diana unpins her hair, takes off her coat and reveals her armor. The camera sweeps over her armored calves, lasso and Antiope's headband. Diana's feminine identity is core to her persona and actions on the front. These distinctly feminine aspects of her physical appearance are essential to her success in facing the Germans. They also represent Diana's commitment to her goals, whether it is her training on Themyscira or finding Ares. Gill argues that postfeminism regards femininity as conditional upon "anxious attention, work and vigilance" by the individual.¹³³ Diana's sword, made for her, is reminiscent of her goal of defeating Ares, and Antiope's headband is reflective of Diana's intensive combat training. In this way, Diana's values and way of life are communicated through these objects with feminine implications. Further, while on the warfront, Diana walks defiantly towards the German front. She is confident and stands tall. Her armour's shape is distinctly feminine, emphasizes her legs and collarbone and contrasts her long dark hair. McRobbie's notion of a "hyper-culture of commercial sexuality" comes into play in this impression of

¹³² Sarah Banet-Weiser, Rosalind Gill and Catherine Rottenberg, "Postfeminism, Popular Feminism and Neoliberal Feminism? Sarah Banet-Weiser, Rosalind Gill and Catherine Rottenberg in Conversation," *Feminist Theory* 0, no. 0 (2019): 11.

¹³³ Rosalind Gill, "Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of a Sensibility," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 10, no. 2 (2007): 155.

Diana.¹³⁴ Her feminine identity is strengthened and highlighted because it is her only identity. She has physical and individual traits that are socially regarded to be ideal, such as her slender but muscular physique, long dark hair and even hairless armpits. She is an amalgam of the most ideal feminine traits, and these are highlighted through her persona and skills. Diana's "commercial sexuality" is also put on display in this scene because the environment of war and violence is inherently masculine and juxtaposes her intense femininity. Her difference to Trevor and the world outside of Themyscira are striking. Lastly, because of this amalgam of ideal traits and persona, Diana is a popular and highly desired protagonist. In her analysis of the feminist implications of female cops and detectives, Dole argues that media insists on the "desirability" of the female protagonist.¹³⁵ When femininity is not desirable, it loses the power of visibility and interest. Diana is a woman who is strong, beautiful and can take even the toughest of opponents. She is the whole package, and *Wonder Woman* would not be successful without a protagonist with desirability – just enough beauty, brawns and determination to beat her opponent but not disrupt any social rules or existing conditions of femininity. Diana's feminine identity is a key component in her success, in both *No Man's Land* and the film as a whole. This, combined with her self-reliance and intrinsic advantages as a superhuman Amazon women, give Diana a postfeminist framework in which she fights patriarchal and opposing forces.

¹³⁴ Angela McRobbie, "Post-Feminism and Popular Culture," *Feminist Media Studies* 4, no. 3 (2004), 259.

¹³⁵ Carol M. Dole, "The Gun and the Badge: Hollywood and the Female Lawman" in *Reel Knockouts: Violent Women in the Movies*, eds. Martha McCaughey and Neal King (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001): 99.

Conclusion



Figure 23: Diana during her battle against Ares.

Wonder Woman's contemporary adaptation in the DC superhero universe is significant in the journey of its creation and postfeminist representation of femininity. *Wonder Woman* was a project years in the making and was fraught with anxieties over Diana's casting, attention to authenticity and expectations of perfection. The film's odyssey reveals postfeminist tendencies of surveillance and expectations of improvement on women's bodies and femininity, especially of Wonder Woman herself.¹³⁶ Instead, a few failed attempts to create a television show or feature film, and two female action film flops, defined the general consciousness of Wonder Woman for years. Creators such as Joss Whedon, whose Wonder Woman television pilot did not get picked up, worked within specific parameters of purity and perfection that delayed

¹³⁶ Rosalind Gill, "Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of a Sensibility," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 10, no. 2 (2007): 155.

Diana in making a brand-new appearance on audience screens.¹³⁷ Postfeminism masked these attempts in creation as an initiative to create something flawless, but in actuality there existed a pointed, gendered anxiety over the existence of a contemporary female superhero which fed into postfeminist and misogynistic agendas. This phenomenon can be seen in a public statement made by CW president Mark Pedowitz. He described Diana as “the trickiest of all DC characters to get done.”¹³⁸ His statement reveals the implication of gendered hesitations over her character. Media discourse surrounding Diana’s return to audience screens was also inundated with subjective opinions regarding perfection and purity of a decades-old character. Gabe Toro’s *CinemaBlend* piece, in which he discusses the prospect of Wonder Woman returning to the “DC Trinity” of their most popular superheroes, reveals a pointed effort to give Diana only a single chance to make a desirable performance in *Batman v. Superman*, despite numerous Batman or Superman films having failed in ratings or the box office.¹³⁹ Misogynistic anxieties over the mere existence of Wonder Woman in contemporary culture is masked by visible effort to hold creators to a high standard of quality. Further, the gendered anxieties regarding strong female protagonists and female superheroes in feature films never ceased. Gal Gadot was announced to be cast as Diana for *Batman v.*

¹³⁷ Charlotte E. Howell, “‘Tricky’ Connotations: Wonder Woman as DC’s Brand Disruptor,” *Cinema Journal* 55, no. 1 (2015): 144-46.

¹³⁸ Lesley Sandberg, “CW’s ‘Wonder Woman’ Prequel ‘Amazon’ Gets New Writer: ‘Heroes’ Aron Eli Coleite,” *The Hollywood Reporter*, May 16, 2013, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/live-feed/cws-wonder-woman-prequel-amazon-524002>.

¹³⁹ Gabe Toro, “What Does #DCTrinity Mean, and How Will Wonder Woman Live Up to It?” *CinemaBlend*, 2012, <https://www.cinemablend.com/new/What-Does-DCTrinity-Mean-How-Wonder-Woman-Live-Up-It-66518.html?pv=search#comment-1517557348>; “Superman: Movies,” Rotten Tomatoes, accessed Nov. 6, 2019, https://www.rottentomatoes.com/franchise/superman_the_movie/; “Justice League,” Rotten Tomatoes, accessed Nov. 6, 2019, https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/justice_league_2017.

Superman in 2013.¹⁴⁰ A slew of critiques over her physical body and its suitability for the role of Wonder Woman reveal another postfeminist tendency; one of body policing and importance of it in achieving success.¹⁴¹ Many Twitter users critiqued Gadot as being too skinny or her breasts too small, drawing on memories of Diana's visual depiction in the comics.¹⁴² This backlash against Gadot revealed that Wonder Woman and comic book fans tended to regard bodily characteristics, such as breast size, as a primary condition for Gadot's successful character adaptation and performance. When the first trailer for *Wonder Woman* was released in the months before the film's premiere, there was a complex media backlash regarding Diana's seemingly hairless armpits.¹⁴³ Some users Tweeted about the possibility that the new film was not authentic to the Amazon way of life and used Diana's hairless armpits as an example, while others remarked that Diana's armpits paled in comparison to the film's significance as the first stand-alone Wonder Woman feature film.¹⁴⁴ In these instances, some users attempted to discredit *Wonder Woman*'s authenticity before its premiere. The standard practice of policing female body hair has been around for decades, but

¹⁴⁰ Kevin Jagernauth, "Has It Really Come to This? Gal Gadot Defends Breast Size for Wonder Woman Role in 'Batman vs. Superman,'" *IndieWire*, Dec. 27, 2013, <https://www.indiewire.com/2013/12/has-it-really-come-to-this-gal-gadot-defends-breast-size-for-wonder-woman-role-in-batman-vs-superman-90614/>.

¹⁴¹ Rosalind Gill, "Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of a Sensibility," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 10, no. 2 (2007): 155.

¹⁴² Lorraine Cink (@lorrainecink), "A Little Disappointed that Wonder Woman Looks So Willowy I Could Break Her," Twitter, Dec. 4, 2013, <https://twitter.com/lorrainecink/status/408310383213305858?s=20>.

¹⁴³ Shannon Carlin, "Is Wonder Woman Allowed to Have Armpit Hair?" *Refinery29*, Mar. 15, 2017, <https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/2017/03/145425/wonder-woman-armpit-hair-photoshop-twitter-reaction>; Adam White, "Wonder Woman Faces Wrath of Fans for 'Digitally Blurred' Hairless Armpits," *The Telegraph*, Mar. 20, 2017, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/films/0/wonder-woman-faces-wrath-fans-digitally-blurred-hairless-armpits/>.

¹⁴⁴ Paul Roth (@paulidin), "Controversial hot take: I wish #WonderWoman had armpit hair," Twitter, Mar. 11, 2017, <https://twitter.com/paulidin/status/840798480050278401?s=20>; Rachel Tunnard (@rachelTunnard), "First Female Superhero Film for 17 Years and All the Talk is About Her Armpits," Twitter, Mar. 17, 2017, <https://twitter.com/rachelTunnard/status/842646119821840384?s=20>.

Wonder Woman's armpits reflect a new, contemporary luminosity regarding the practice and its postfeminist implications.¹⁴⁵ Media discourses surrounding criticism of Gadot's body in relation to Wonder Woman perpetuate public misogyny through postfeminist notions that encourage feminine-identifying individuals to live in specific ways. The journey to *Wonder Woman* is reflective of cultural anxieties over visible portrayals of femininity, especially such an important portrayal like Diana's.

Postfeminist discourses also occur inside *Wonder Woman*. The beginning of the film sets a postfeminist tone for hard work through the scene of Diana's background in combat training. In the scene, Queen Hippolyta and General Antiope make a plan to train young Diana in combat skills in case she faces Ares when she is older. Diana spends her childhood fighting and shooting under Antiope's strict and disciplined eye. Diana's body and its capabilities (as played by Gadot) reflects the training she has completed. Like the difficulties in getting *Wonder Woman* made, the training scene also represents the high standards that Diana is held to perform at. These specific notions of postfeminist femininity, in which individuals are expected to police their bodily appearance, seem to be intertwined with the neoliberal work ethic.¹⁴⁶ These postfeminist ideals are reflected in Diana's character arc. Postfeminist notions of femininity and the work ethic are also reflected in the No Man's Land scene, in which Diana defies Trevor's advice and steps into the empty space between the German and Allied forces' trenches. The scene frames the primary reasons for Diana's success as through her choices and not her advantages. Her compassion and empathy for others leads her to

¹⁴⁵ Rosalind Gill, "Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of a Sensibility," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 10, no. 2 (2007): 149; Loren Savini, "A Retrospective Look at Women's Body Hair in Popular Culture," *Allure*, Apr. 23, 2018, <https://www.allure.com/gallery/history-of-womens-body-hair-removal>.

¹⁴⁶ Gill, "Postfeminist Media Culture," 149.

become rebellious and disregard advice. Her decision-making is uncomplicated and perpetuates neoliberal notions regarding the responsibility of choice.

Lastly, Diana would not be successful in No Man's Land without her feminine desirability.¹⁴⁷ The film emphasizes Diana taking down her hair and coat to reveal her final form: her new Wonder Woman armor, complete with Antiope's headband. The wide shot of Diana striding towards the Germans highlights her intense femininity in the face of masculinity and violence. Her appearance is rooted in her identity as an Amazon woman, and the kind of identity that is successful within the postfeminist sphere. Diana's femininity is so strongly highlighted in the film that it is reminiscent of McRobbie's notion of a "hyper-culture of sexuality."¹⁴⁸ Diana is a desirable protagonist because she is beautiful, highly skilled and performs the expectations expected of her perfectly. Wonder Woman's first ever stand-alone feature film sits squarely in a postfeminist time and space.

¹⁴⁷ Carol M. Dole, "The Gun and the Badge: Hollywood and the Female Lawman" in *Reel Knockouts: Violent Women in the Movies*, eds. Martha McCaughey and Neal King (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001): 99; Rosalind Gill, "Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of a Sensibility," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 10, no. 2 (2007): 149.

¹⁴⁸ Angela McRobbie, "Post-Feminism and Popular Culture," *Feminist Media Studies* 4, no. 3 (2004), 259.

Conclusion

During my research, I found that *Atomic Blonde* and *Wonder Woman* conform to postfeminist ideals regarding physical appearance, individual labor and responsibility. Broughton and Diana's characters are a culmination of postfeminist traits and qualities which present a whole, complete package of successful femininity to audiences. Broughton and Diana both have an individual responsibility in their respective narratives to address issues that are systemic and influenced by misogyny. The stakes are high: while Broughton must find The List before it gets into the wrong hands and results in the disclosure of multiple spies (including herself) on both sides of the Cold War, Diana must find and defeat the God of War, Ares, in order to stop the atrocities of World War I. They are both responsible for the outcomes of their narratives, despite not having a direct hand in creating the Cold War or World War I. Broughton and Diana are subject to tall expectations of perfection when facing these conflicts, but both of them perform almost impeccably because they are able to. They have their advantages, which also makes them desirable protagonists. Broughton uses her years of espionage and combat skills, and Diana uses her superpowers, armor, sword and shield when facing Ares and No Man's Land. Part of their advantages are their appearances and personas, which authenticate them and their decisions. Broughton's blonde hair, trench coats, stiletto heels and cool demeanor make her a desirable protagonist who uses her physical appearance for success; Diana's beauty in combination with her special armor, sword, shield and superpowers give her the advantage she needs to defeat Ares. Postfeminism is a tendency that encourages feminine-identifying individuals to employ a specific package of traits, values and skills to themselves in order to be successful members of

society, all the while obscuring the existence of oppression and insisting that individuals are solely responsible for themselves. Lorraine Broughton and Wonder Woman are beautiful, brave, highly skilled and successful within their narratives – but ensnared within the sociocultural status quo that normalizes underlying misogyny and masks the existence of privilege.

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