

Wonder Woman and Her Disciplinary Powers

The Queer Intersection of
Scientific Authority and Mass Culture

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Searching High and Low: Introducing Wonder Woman

A commercial medium often assumed to exist solely for a juvenile and “low-brow” audience, comic books have been largely ignored by academic scholarship. There are some exceptions within the fields of American studies—for instance, the work of Thomas Inge—popular culture studies, where writers gather in a Comic Arts subdivision of the Popular Culture Association, and cultural studies, with work by writers such as British author Martin Barker. But most contemporary scholars working in the history of science, technology, and medicine would probably not expect an argument that U.S. comic books have a place within the twentieth-century history of science, technology, and medicine. Nevertheless, they do; and one comic in particular, *Wonder Woman*, will show us how. One of seven U.S. comic books to enjoy continuous publication since the medium’s 1940s inception, *Wonder Woman’s* monthly stories presently are distributed by the media conglomerate DC Comics/Time Warner. The comic sells in every English-speaking nation and is translated for export to numerous countries, including Japan, Indonesia, Spain, Mexico, France, and Germany. In addition to “her” comic book appearances, this amazon body floats globally throughout commodity culture in commercial tie-ins

and Internet subcultures—graphic novels, children's games, records, costumes, makeup kits, refrigerator magnets, place mats, plastic cups, coffee mugs, T-shirts, caps, posters, action figures, dolls, and reruns of a 1970s syndicated television series starring Lynda Carter, all of which are lovingly detailed in fan e-mail news groups and websites dedicated to the superhero sister of Superman and Batman. The "mass" of *Wonder Woman's* textual body in this postmodern era is indeed amazing, and attests to a hegemonic status.

Feminist historians Elaine Tyler May and Susan Faludi have both glossed this amazon's power as part of the "Rosie the Riveter" phenomenon—the U.S. government's instrumental use of popular culture during World War II, the reshaping of dominant American gender paradigms to place women into wartime industries. Even a cursory glance at the amazon's stars-and-stripes uniform in the 1940s comic confirms Tyler May and Faludi's readings, reinforced by the periodic War Bond ads placed at the end of stories as well as by the heroine's mythic purpose. *Wonder Woman*, amazon princess Diana, is summoned by Aphrodite and Athena to help defeat Nazis, to "help save America—the last stronghold of *freedom* and *democracy!*" (Sensation Comics no. 6, "Summons to Paradise," 1). However clear the instrumentally patriotic nature of this text, the kind of cultural power embodied by *Wonder Woman* is not femininity created only for World War II. The comic-book heroine is also propelled by powerful discourses of science, reform, and sexuality. Traces of *Wonder Woman's* early discursive build persist within the first production period of the comic, 1941–48, and become evident when reading her "Amazing Amazon Adventures" alongside some equally striking scientific writings by her official creator, Dr. William Moulton Marston, a Harvard-educated lawyer with a Ph.D. in psychology. Scripted with Marston's neurologically based theories of emotion, *Wonder Woman* emerged within a surprising national network of academic intellectuals, reform ideologies, science, and mass culture, a network focused not on what kind of cultural objects would further a short-term national war effort, but on the long-term resolution of national social ills through new forms of cultural literacy.

In short, the 1941 amazon heroine is sent off to war not just with evil Nazis but to be an agent in a culture war *within* the United States. Marston's scientific writings and published commentary on *Wonder Woman* by his U.S. intellectual contemporaries—Cleanth Brooks, Robert Heilman, Walter Ong, and Fredric Wertham—show that this amazon body is not simply a figure of "American" cultural hegemony, but in fact is tied to and part of an historically complicated debate about what cultural forms should be upheld as U.S. hegemonic norms. Not coincidentally, this debate specifically delimits these norms

for and through female sexuality, norms that are defined through scientific and moral discourses of reform. Within the writings of Brooks, Heilman, Ong, and Wertham, *Wonder Woman's* mass cultural amazon body both disturbs and marks norms of sexuality and gender roles as pivotal for their varied schemes of national cultural health, as "she" is charted within larger discourses of science, education, moral behavior, and criminology.

Uncovering this lively site of interchange, I will first locate Marston and his scientific writings within a larger U.S. intellectual and scientific landscape before turning to his theories as inscribed onto the pages of *Wonder Woman*. Within those theories we will find formations that both challenge and reinscribe a normative construction of U.S. gender and sexuality. The specifics of Marston's revisions and challenges to those norms come into relief when juxtaposed to the readings of *Wonder Woman* generated by his intellectual contemporaries, who heatedly engage what I call Marston's "deviant science." "Deviance" here should not be understood as a negative social quality as it has been represented in earlier twentieth-century U.S. sociological and psychological writing, but as a term reclaimed by contemporary queer theory. Methodological terms such as "deviant historiography" and "perverse presentism" have been offered by contemporary queer feminist scholars who are developing a new history of sexuality by examining the medical and scientific discourses that permeate the twentieth century.¹ I close my essay with the question of the lesbian subject within the 1940s *Wonder Woman*, as the amazon is surrounded both by Marston's deviant science and by more theoretically familiar models of psychoanalysis. Noting a complementary agenda for cultural studies of science, technology, and medicine and for queer theory because of science and medicine's pervasive presence in modern sexuality, I argue for the treatment and instrumental use of contemporary theory within a larger trajectory of intellectual and cultural history, and emphasize that an interdisciplinary cultural history of psychology is crucial for the advancement of our knowledge of modern sexuality.

Wonder Woman's "Creation" in the Disciplinary Networkings of Dr. Marston

In William Marston's case, normalizings of feminine sexuality may initially seem quite deviant for us as contemporary readers, as they prescribe the "loving submission" of all subjects to a female figure who closely resembles a dominatrix—she who induces "passions" through her own emotional state of

"captivation." Marston's emphasis in his scientific work and in *Wonder Woman* on "normal emotion" through the "emotional re-education" performed by Amazonian captivators may seem decidedly unhegemonic, as the forms of sexuality that are emphasized and normalized have little to do with a domestic, familial structure centered on heterosexual reproduction. But Marston's post-World War I emergence as both scientist and mass-cultural producer occurs within ongoing white middle class bids for the expansion and preservation of American capitalism, what Donna Haraway (1989) has called "the therapeutics of labor: human engineering" (61). Through the advice of different kinds of scientific and social experts, therapeutic engineering sought to eliminate social conflict, secure the national welfare, and advance "Western" civilization. With this explicit reform agenda, the work of these experts often crossed scientific work with new popular culture forms. While these links are now being explored in cultural studies work on science, technology, and medicine,² earlier readings of mass culture or science often missed the intersections that have existed between academic science, political reform movements, the history of sexuality, and mass-cultural productions, links that Marston's career represents so well. Instead, if these realms were treated at all, they were presumed to be divided, subsumed within what Andrew Ross identified in *No Respect* (1989) as "the historically fractious relationship between intellectuals and popular culture" (5). However, Marston's instrumental involvement in science and mass culture indicates a relationship historically different from that claimed by Ross.³

As a mid-century scientist, scholar, writer, and entrepreneur, Marston's intellectual productions are quite astounding. His career as a writer ended with *Wonder Woman*, which he was writing when he died in 1947 of cancer after bouts with polio, but it began at Harvard University in the early 1900s in the psychology laboratory set up by William James. At Harvard his focus on subjectivity and the body developed through his coursework on philosophy, criminology, education, and theories of emotion. His army service during World War I enabled him to refine polygraph techniques that would be the first to be used in a U.S. trial and involved him in the psychological "rehabilitation" of returning combat veterans.⁴ His emphasis on gender evolved both while he was working at the Bedford Hills Clinic, a mental hospital run by the progressive Edith Spaulding, who pioneered the experimental cottage-based women's prison, and also while he taught and ran psychology experiments with the women students at Radcliffe—including Elizabeth Holloway, a master's student who became his wife and intellectual partner. After she finished her M.A. in psychology and they both completed law degrees, they coauthored a 700-

page textbook with C. D. King called *Integrative Psychology*. After finishing his Ph.D. in psychology, Marston worked for the National Committee on Mental Hygiene, studying school children in New York City and prison inmates in Texas. Between 1917 and 1934 he published twelve scholarly articles and books on lie detection, color theory, and emotion. Simultaneous with this academic work, both Dr. and Mrs. Marston immersed themselves in emerging popular texts, she in editing for *McCall's* and *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, and he in writing an entire oeuvre of "lowbrow" literature, including hundreds of articles for the Hearst newspaper and magazine syndicate, two popular psychology texts—*Try Living* (1934) and *March On!* (1941)—advising readers how to be happy, a novel entitled *Venus with Us: A Tale of the Caesar* (1932), a book with screenplay writer Walter Pitkin on how to generate "healthy and appealing screenplays" called *The Art of Sound Pictures*, numerous mystery novels authored under different pen names, a book giving a nostalgic look at vaudeville, and, of course, seven years of the *Wonder Woman* comic book scripts.

With such a diverse résumé, we might wonder about Marston's academic status while he adventured in all these popular forms. His writing circulated as wholly legitimate academic science, having the weight behind it of a Harvard-trained Ph.D. licensed to practice and teach law and psychology, which he did at a number of universities, including New York University, Columbia University, the University of Southern California, and American University. *The Emotions of Normal People* was published in England and the United States in 1928 as part of a prestigious series of texts edited by British psychologist C. K. Ogden, called the International Library of Philosophy and Scientific Mind. This series places Marston's text in the company of prominent twentieth-century intellectuals such as Wittgenstein, Piaget, Adler, Hulme, and I. A. Richards.⁵ *The Emotions of Normal People* establishes his theory of emotional normalcy as dependent on the presence of a captivating female, theory that thirteen years later he directly inscribed into *Wonder Woman*.

Amazonian Contests: Prescribed Normalcy Deviance through the Female "Sex" in *The Emotions of Normal People*

Marston himself linked his progressive-era science and World War II amazon in an article he called "Why 100,000,000 Americans Read Comics," published in the 1945 winter edition of the *American Scholar*. Here he declares that his first involvement with comic books was as an academically authorized "emotional re-educator," "acting in the role of the reformer . . . retained as a consult-

ing psychologist by comics publishers to analyze the current shortcomings of monthly picture magazines and recommend improvements" (8). *Wonder Woman* was a direct result of those "recommended improvements." Marston narrates how he persuaded comics publisher M. C. Gaines to try putting out a comic with a female superhero, and highlights his view that gender reconstructed through mass culture is the key site for social reform: "It seemed to me, from a psychological angle, that the comics' worst offense was their bloodcurdling masculinity" (8). Marston suggests the comics revise their gender paradigms for both male and female readers:⁶ "It's sissified according to exclusively masculine rules to be tender, loving, affectionate and alluring. 'Aw, that's girl stuff' snorts our young comics reader. 'Who wants to be a girl?' And that's the point; not even girls want to be girls so long as our feminine archetype lacks force, strength, power" (8). He concludes that the solution for this situation is *Wonder Woman*: "Women's strong qualities have become despised because of their weak ones. The obvious remedy is to create a feminine character with all the strength of a Superman plus all the allure of a good and beautiful woman" (8-9).

Wonder Woman's superpowers, however, are inspired as much by Marston's progressive-era psychological work as by the "bloodcurdling masculinity" of 1940s comics. In fact, for Marston it is the former that makes the latter visible. His 1928 scientific tract *The Emotions of Normal People* outlines a theory of the body called "the psychonic theory of consciousness" that highlights the role of sexuality in achieving his view of potential American cultural prowess. Calling for what he names the "love leadership" of women, Marston writes in his conclusion,

Women have already undertaken participation in public life, though not yet with satisfactory results, at least in America. It should be an important part of the emotional re-educator's constructive programme for women to offer emotional analysis of existing political and social methods and procedures. (396)

Explicitly advocating an agenda of social reform, this "emotional re-educator's constructive programme" marshals particular forms of what we now call queer sexuality,⁷ forms centered around the emotions of "captivations and "passion" engendered by female "love leadership." These sexualizing emotions are grounded not in a binary of masculine/feminine and homo/hetero identity, but are explicitly bound to the amazon body, and the powers and pleasures offered by that body's disciplinary realm. Marston elaborates on the powers of bondage performed by women in his outline of the constitution of normal emotional states through the "psychonic theory of consciousness." The

psychonic theory of consciousness stems from neurology, sketching out a relation between neurons and consciousness. Marston argues that consciousness can be physically located in the energy generated between two neurons firing, a space he calls the psychon. The psychon is impacted by another bodily force, called "motation," the body's sense of moving through physical space. Combined, these two forces generate different sorts of emotions, "simple" and "complex." It is in his explanation of the complex "love emotions" passion and captivation that Marston offers up the powers of the female body for emotional—and therefore social—normalcy. This normalcy rests in the successful management of what he defines as "simple emotions"—dominance, submission, inducement, and compliance—that embody potential reactions to or an assertion of power. The psychonic theory of consciousness rests upon the principle that the human organism must learn how to manage power relations without experiencing abnormal emotions. Marston writes in his introduction, "I do not regard you as a 'normal person,' emotionally when you are suffering from fear, rage, pain, shock, desire to deceive, or any other emotional state whatsoever containing turmoil and conflict" (1-2). States of passion and captivation forestall the generation of these abnormal emotions.

This position is counter to many schools of thought contemporary with Marston, especially behaviorism, which normalizes fear and pain as primary stimulus motivators; psychoanalysis, in its scripting of anxiety and fear as the central and regular forces in the psychic life of the unconscious; modernist theories that normalize suffering as part of the human condition; and also Marxist plans for revolution that see turmoil and conflict as necessarily part of the working-class seizure of the modes of production. In line with other "up-beat" liberal U.S. progressives like his friend Teddy Roosevelt, Marston wants people to be happy. His bid for the truth value of his work is explicitly grounded in an offering of normalizing pleasure to the modern world. As he says in the introduction to his 1930 popular psychology text *Try Living*, people should "Live, Love, Laugh and be Happy!" (1).

A scientific alignment between happiness and love is forged in Marston's formulation of the "love emotions, captivation and passion. Captivation is a force of domination, while passion stems from desires to submit to a dominator. Marston instructs that these two "complex love emotions" are only mistakenly confused and are distinct: captivation "is the active, attracting aspect," while passion indicates "a longing to be subjected" (1930, 103). These emotions affect both body and soul, manifesting physical and psychic sexual attractions. Captivation is "normally" feminine: "We have also observed that the human female organism possesses a double physiological love endowment, capable of

building up both active and passive love emotion patterns" (1928, 356). The male body apparently lacks this "doubleness," and is "normally" equipped only for "submission." Marston hereby comes up with a scientific normalization of the dominatrix, a fairly deviant move for him to make within a progressive-era field dominated by an international eugenics.⁸ The dominant strain of U.S. psychology until after World War II, eugenics strongly condemned any forms of nonreproductive sex and specifically diagnosed bondage as perverse, anti-social sadomasochistic sexuality. An attractively lurid example of such condemnation comes from the pages of Dr. Maurice Chideckel's popular 1938 psychology text *Female Sex Perversion, the Sexually Aberrated Woman as She Really Is*, published by the New York Eugenist Society. Chideckel announces in chapter 24, "Sadism in Women: A Most Abnormal Perversion," that "sadism is a most unnatural perversion in woman because of her inherent passivity," except "for women schoolteachers or policewomen," for whom "sadism is a very common perversity" (169-70).

But for Marston the eugenicist's exception is the rule, as the results of some of his fieldwork with college students (1928, 306-9) attest.⁹ Placed in the "Love" chapter, the chart inventories answers to such questions as "Enjoys being subjected by sophomores? Enjoys subjecting freshmen? Submits to man or woman? Choice of unhappy master (M) or happy slave (S)?" and makes no negative judgments of "perversion." If there were any remaining doubt about the "queerness" of Marston's model of the "normal emotions" captivation and passion, we need only read his concluding comments on "emotional re-education," which sounds like a call to abandon what we now call the closet:

The only practical emotional re-education consists in teaching people that there is a norm of psycho-neural behavior, not dependent in any way on what their neighbors are doing, or upon what they think their neighbors want them to do. People must be taught to love parts of themselves, which they have come to regard as abnormal. (1928, 391)

In Marston's therapeutic scene, the open sexualization of "normal people" is necessary, is normal, and requires the promotion of a physiological understanding of the body/subjectivity. Instead of spoken truths in a confessional psychoanalytic session, we have diagrams of the space between nerve endings, prescriptions of physical activity, and the patient's self-discovery of her/his own bodily pleasures. Pleasures and desires that have been closeted are revealed not so that they may then be redirected into a "normal" familial libidinal economy, but so that the patient understands they are "completely normal." Marston

makes clear that the body in need of a "cure" is the social body, which creates the need for "re-education" in the first place.

This instruction occurs gradually through the "love leadership" of the progressive era's New Woman, who provides "emotional re-education," a redefining of normalcy for patients, shifting their self-concept away from social givens and toward her body. Marston proposes an understanding of the body as made up of impulses of dominance and submission that, if acted out with love instead of fear, rage, or deception, will grant them "normalcy." The individual body is understood to also be the social body, as Marston calls for the "love leadership" in the social world to bring about the "emotional re-education" of all. His progressive-era construction configures sexuality with political, liberal reformist aims to counter the claim that women have "inherent passivity." Through *Wonder Woman* Marston circulates this scientific reform project into an expanding wartime arena of mass culture.

Reforming Amazons and "Captivating" Femininity

Reading *Wonder Woman* in light of Marston's theories, we quickly see that his scripting of the amazon body is organized around his science of "normal" subjectivity. In the comic book narratives, this progressive science normalizes otherwise "deviant" forms of sexuality for its juvenile audience, as the amazons enact "the Laws of Aphrodite." The inscription of the principles of captivation and passion explains the dynamic most frequently noted in *Wonder Woman* by contemporary comic book historians Ron Goulart and Michael Fleisher, namely a prevailing appearance of bondage and torture scenes. *Wonder Woman* is forever being tied up, bound with ropes and chains, and tortured, as well as rescuing other women from the same scenarios with her famous golden lasso. Elongated panels frequently display an amazon in chains, showing her straining against bondage. This sexualized display is built into a kind of amazonian discipline. To assert her role as captivator, she must break ropes, straps, or chains placed on her body by a villain. The women on Paradise Island in fact undergo vigorous physical and psychic training to resist the restraining domination by another, and wear heavy metal bracelets at all times to maintain an amazon body.

The force of captivation, however, comes from more than the brute strength of domination that allows the breaking of chains and escape from torture scenes. "Loving submission" to Aphrodite is essential, as the chains of female power rise up to the Olympian clouds. She is the ultimate "love leader," according to the

comic, and inspires her subjects to perform “emotional re-education” in her name. Goddess of love—not of female reproductive powers—Aphrodite reigns supreme over all Amazons, though she is usually invisible, a symbolic presence through gifts of power granted to the Amazons, including immortality, protection from Hercules, Mars, and other patriarchs, Queen Hippolyte’s super-strength-giving magic girdle, and Wonder Woman’s truth-inducing magic golden lasso. In return the women of Paradise Island must follow her “love leadership” by obeying her laws, which technically prohibit the presence of men on Paradise Island and explicitly forbid any submission or marriage of an amazon to a man. Amazons serve Aphrodite as her agents, enlisted in a struggle against the god of war, Mars, for the possession of human souls in “Man’s World” and throughout the universe, spreading an ethic of love via the “normal” relations of dominance and submission.

As the comic constructs Aphroditic captivation and teaches “love leadership,” it regularly delivers a passionate male suitor for Wonder Woman, Air Force Col. Steve Trevor. Because Wonder Woman is attracted to Steve but prohibited by amazon law from marrying him, their interaction is a continuous source for Marston’s play with amazonian femininity, “Man’s World” masculinity, dominance, and submission. A 1945 story line (published in *Sensation Comics* No. 46) entitled “The Law Breaker’s League” directly illustrates this play. In this episode, Steve is granted special psychic-physical powers through the present of a magic orb held by a criminal redhead named Ferva Shayne. Echoing Marston’s neurologically based psychonic theory of consciousness, the magic orb magnifies brain waves sent to muscles in one’s body, rendering Steve stronger than our amazon heroine. Ferva believes that if Steve is physically stronger than Wonder Woman, he can finally exercise dominance over her, compelling her to marry him. Ferva rather strikingly informs her villain Rodriguez Callabos that old-fashioned domesticity is the only possible way Wonder Woman can be subdued:

Wonder Woman is our real menace. Nobody can kill that wench, but Trevor can subdue her! Once she marries him the mighty Amazon’ll become a meek housewife who will never bother us. If Trevor becomes stronger than Wonder Woman, she’ll go ga-ga over him and stay at home as he commands. (5)

Steve unwittingly follows Ferva’s plot, accepting the new powers and exerting physical dominance over Wonder Woman. He picks her up and twirls her around, declaring, “Now I can boss you around, ha ha!!” (7). Wonder Woman responds with ambivalence, telling him, “No man can boss an Amazon,” while

secretly thinking to herself, “But Steve’s new strength is thrilling!” Steve increases his physical hold, grabs her wrists, and says, “Whenever I asked you to marry me, you’ve always brushed me off. This time I’ll make you listen.” (8). The amazon replies, “So this is what it feels like to be bossed by a strong man.” In a close-up of her face, she contemplates this new dynamic: “Some girls love to have a man stronger than they are to make them do things. Do I like it? I don’t know—it’s sort of thrilling. But isn’t it more fun to make the man obey?” By the close of the narrative, Wonder Woman refuses domestication and reasserts her amazonian status as dominant, as captivator. When Steve says, “I’ll release more brain energy into my muscles—then you’ll marry me,” she responds, “No, I won’t, Steve—I’ve discovered that I can never love a dominant man who’s stronger than I am!” (12). As a proper masculine role model, Steve then submits to her “love leadership” and breaks the magic orb over his head while declaring, “If you prefer me weaker than you, to heck with this gadget!”

Other narratives outline the proper, “normal” relations of women among themselves, echoing the “inter-class College Girl Survey” from Marston’s “Love” chapter in *The Emotions of Normal People*. Part of a “normal” woman’s feminine cultivation of captivation also involves a submission to a female captivator. She has to know what passion feels like before she can induce it in someone else. As agents of Aphrodite, the amazons—and especially Wonder Woman—transmit their “Laws of Aphrodite” to other women, both by acting as “love leaders” and by training these other women to be “love leaders” themselves. This feminine bonding takes place in any location where Wonder Woman may travel, but it is explicitly configured in two exclusively female spaces that resonate as progressive-era scenes despite the World War II setting: a woman’s prison off the coast of the Amazon’s Paradise Island, and a woman’s college in “Man’s World.” The first of these settings, “Reform Island,” is basically an Amazonian equivalent of Bedford Hills, the reformatory where Marston worked early on in his scientific career. Modeled on the cottage setting of progressive-era Bedford Hills, Reform Island transforms its subjects differently than does the “monastic cell model” of Michel Foucault’s often cited reading of the Panopticon. Discipline does still “proceed from the distribution of individuals in space” through a cellularly constituted body, but not the solitary space of the monastic cell (Foucault 1979, 141). Grouping the women together to model and enact the proper social environment, the Amazon trainer/therapist Mala “transforms, through discipline and love, the bad character traits of women prisoners.” (Fleisher and Lincoln 1976, 176). This “love” in Marston’s terms is by definition not coercive but compelling in its work of emotional re-education. Indeed, in another episode, Mala announces

that Reform Island is “‘not really a prison,’ but rather, ‘sort of a college where we teach girls how to be happy!’” (176). This “happiness” again comes from passion induced in a body through bondage, physical and mental (the line between these two categories is fairly indistinguishable in Marston’s theory). Upon arriving at the reformatory, prisoners are placed in a “Venus girdle,” which, as Michael Fleisher describes, induces “loving submission” via Aphroditic pleasure:

Every prisoner on Transformation Island must wear a magic Venus girdle—a special belt designed to make the wearer “enjoy living by peaceful principles”—until such time as she can “worship Aphrodite” and “submit to loving authority” without the power of the girdle to help her. (1976, 176)

With the girdle, prisoners do not need to be locked in cells to encourage soul transformation, but the girdle still works at a cellular level, as Queen Desira of Venus explains: “‘Girdles of magnetic gold charge every body with vitalizing currents and harmonize the brain. When brains become normal . . . [they] lose their desire for conflict and enjoy serving others and submitting to loving Authority’” (WW no. 12/3, Spring 1945, “The Conquest of Venus”). The cellular transformation works on the body via the neurological, as in Marston’s scientific psychonic theory of consciousness. A 1948 story gives us a particularly vivid image of the impact of this kind of transformation. Villainous leader Eviless, freed from the girdle’s power because it was not properly fastened, tries to lead a prison revolt. She announces that the guards have been captured, and tells the group she will release them from their girdles. But they quickly respond, “No, no! We don’t want our girdles removed!” (Fleisher 1976, 11). They have been successfully disciplined by Amazon technology, brought into “normal” emotional relations in which they resist submission to harm (Eviless) but embrace submission to Aphrodite and the Amazons.

Out in “Man’s World,” Wonder Woman undertakes similar transformations of young girls in a girl’s school setting. Contemporary historians of sexuality have taken up boarding schools and women’s colleges as they generated forms of lesbianism identifiable in a ritualized language of “crushes” and “smashes.” These historians see these formations as specific to the progressive era, arguing that administrators later moved to suppress the girls’ erotic rituals, fearing their students’ sexualities would cause reprisals against their new women’s educational institutions (Chauncey 1983; Faderman 1991; Vicinus 1990). But in *Wonder Woman’s* “Holliday College for Girls,” these ritualized forms of lesbian sexuality reemerge as students are brought into the Amazon fold, first by Wonder Woman and then by the initiated students. Since their emotions are not as

misaligned as those of their criminal counterparts on Reform Island, the Holliday Girls are not bound by the “Venus girdle”; but their discipline is still bodily, constituted by physical exercise and forms of bondage to promote this exercise. A panel from the March 1944 story line in *Sensation Comics* (No. 27) shows a “Man’s World” girl talking with Amazon scientist Paula Van Gunther. To build her muscles and remind her of her necessary, strength-giving obedience to Aphrodite, she wears heavy chains on her wrists. Anticipating a visit from outsiders, Paula instructs her to remove the chains, feeling their “Man’s World” visitors will not understand their meaning. But like the prisoners on Reform Island, the girl is reluctant to be unbound, indicating her pleasure in “loving submission” and faith in its positive pedagogical force on her body.

“Emotional re-education” in “Man’s World” is taught not just by Amazons from Paradise Island but also by those women who are emotionally reeducated. Another Holliday Girl, Etta Candy, figures prominently in these 1940s stories as Wonder Woman’s main disciple of Amazonian discipline. She models herself after Wonder Woman and like her role model rises as a leader among the other girls in her “Greek” sorority. In the same story with Paula von Gunther and the submitting girl, Etta initiates a new girl, Gay, into their fold, ordering her to dance for her own and the others’ pleasure. Gay, who had been in prison and suicidal, learns pleasure in submission and physical activity, transforming herself into a happy Holliday Girl. To reeducate Gay, to teach her that “there is a norm of psycho-neural behavior, not dependent in any way on what [her] neighbors are doing” (Marston 1928, 391), Etta assumes the role of “love leader.” Taking on the commanding presence of Aphrodite as she sits in a throne, she orders that Gay name her pleasure: “I command you, neophyte, to tell me the dearest wish of your childish heart” (5). Hesitating, Gay answers that she would like to dance, but never learned how. Soon she happily spins around, thinking to herself “Oh! This is fun!” as the other girls commend her dancing—“Bravo!” “Pretty!” “Nice Work, Gay!” “You’re good, kid!” Pleasure, bodily pleasure incited by the presence and disciplinary powers of other females, “reforms” Gay into an order of Amazonian discipline and love.

Despite their “deviance,” these prescriptions can be clearly read as a bid for hegemony because Marston’s theories are based on the psychological discourse of emotional hygiene and normalcy—literally on the grounds of progressive-era prison reform and education—the territories of Maurice Chideckel’s fearsome and sadistic “schoolteachers or policewomen” (170). Focused on bodily, cellular emotion and the nonreproductive pleasures of bondage without indictments of perversity, this resexualization competes against the reproductive sexuality of familial discourse. However, I do not

want to hold up Marston's theories as an exemplar for contemporary queer theory and cultural studies. In competition for hegemonic force, Marston's theory naturalizes vertical power relations with his cellular model of subjectivity, a naturalization made more palatable by offering the pleasures of non-reproductive sexuality. *The Emotions of Normal People* even in its title signifies this middle-class discourse of normalization; and as Marston's criminological training strongly indicates, the theory contained within is about disciplining rather than liberating the modern "American" population. The powers offered by *Wonder Woman*, then, should be understood as intentionally part of that disciplinary project, as a middle-class normalizing discourse that explicitly operates through gender and sexuality.

Doctoring Feminine Sexuality: 1940s *Wonder Woman* Received

Marston's bid for normalization in fact put him smack in the middle of a culture war over normalcy. Receptions of *Wonder Woman* authored by other expert guardians of U.S. culture—psychologists and literary critics—assert that the comic book is a "deviant" body, a corrupting mass-cultural formation of femininity that is a threat to national health. Psychologists, psychiatrists, and literary critics, including Cleanth Brooks, Robert Heilman, Walter Ong and Fredric Wertham, all reacted in print to the "Amazon Adventures" of *Wonder Woman*. Published between 1945 and 1954, their negative reviews show their larger concerns for the state of culture in modern American capitalism without mention of World War II. Their ideological perspectives on culture are by no means unitary, ranging dramatically in cultural location and ideological orientation; we have two southern agrarian conservatives, a northern Catholic conservative, and a German Jewish immigrant with Marxist tendencies. But as critics of *Wonder Woman*, they all either mock or reject the normalization of amazonian subjectivity. They contest how and where the gendered female body should be located in culture, and in what forms it should exist. As in Marston's reform plan, feminine sexuality figures social relations and the fate of culture, although the imagination of that fateful outcome varies for each doctor.

Literary critics Cleanth Brooks and Robert Heilman respond sharply to Marston's claims of the amazon's curative, hygienic force with a three-page letter to the editor of *American Scholar*, published in spring 1945. Contemporary readers familiar with modern literary history know that Brooks and Heilman helped create a movement called the New Criticism, which was, among other things, a pedagogy that sought a scientific rigor for standardizing the reading

practices of the masses, especially of poetry, through the technique of close reading.¹⁰ Their *American Scholar* letter competes with Marston's defense of comics as a vehicle for cultural literacy, indicated by his declaration that "If children will read comics, come Hail Columbia or literary devastation, why isn't it advisable to give them some constructive comics to read? After all, 100,000,000 Americans can't be wrong—at least about what they like" (Marston 1945, 6). "Literary devastation" certainly is not an acceptable vehicle for Brooks and Heilman; and so their letter rebuts Marston's celebration in a satiric counterargument.

Foundational to the tone of their satire is an ironic occupation of Marston's populist rhetoric. They pretend to agree on the power of comics as presented by Marston:

Our own research indicates that Brother Marston's article contains a good deal more profit than meets the eye. This we sensed without empiric confirmation, for we were always impressed by the quotation of six and eight digit figures. We are confirmed Gallupians: vox populi vox dei. (248)

Positioning themselves as also engaged in "research," Brooks and Heilman cue their readers as to the laughability of Marston's claims, which they frame as simultaneously fictional, "without empiric confirmation," and number-driven, with "the quotation of six and eight figures." After aligning themselves with Marston's populist science, Brooks and Heilman perform a close reading of his writing, looking at its "constants"—in New Criticism, words repeated throughout a piece of writing that cue a reader to the center of the writing's meaning. "In the five significant passages on his legend of a good woman," they write, the "constant" is the regular appearance of the word "alluring." Certainly this "constant" is the captivating woman.

However, Brooks and Heilman have a very different understanding of the powers of captivation; for them it is a corrupting cultural power. They extend their identification as "Brother" empiricists and discuss their own "experiments" with the "alluring" *Wonder Woman* in *their* "laboratory"—the literature classroom:

Like Brother Marston, we are teachers. . . . We have applied Brother Marston's phrase "moral educational benefits for the younger generation." In all our classes we now have the aid of two alluring young things clad as "Wonder Woman." Part of the time two alluring young things stand, gracefully poised, on either side of the lecture desk. At least once during each hour

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we pause while the two beauties do a modern dance routine, and you have no idea how it livens things up. Our class enrollments are truly marvelous. Our joint seminar in Vedic Mysticism has grown in size from 2 to 367. Who dares say that 367 American university students can be wrong?" (249)

The outrageousness of this story and its straight-man narration counters Marston's popular literary science, his "poetry." "Who dares say that 367 university students can be wrong?" mimics his suggestion that the excitement of "100,000,000 Americans" over the comic book medium indicates its moral and pedagogical superiority over literature. Focusing on Marston's proposed pedagogical force of "moral educational benefits for the younger generation," Brooks and Heilman circle in on the moralism and reform offered in Marston's scene of comic book education. It can be safely assumed that their moralism differs from Marston's project of "love leadership" as indicated by their treatment of the "two alluring young things." Seated at the site of knowledge production and transmission—the classroom—Brooks and Heilman suggest that Marston's "moral" reform program, his "alluring woman" prescribed to fend off "blood-curdling masculinity," is a simply cheap tease:

The climax of each hour comes when our two lovelies reach over and tap us on the head with charming pearl handled hammers, and as the bell of dismissal rings we fall cold (not really, of course). Thus the enemy is vanished; thus do our Wonder Women add, to their allure and their altruistic homilies, a convincing demonstration of power. All in all, we have helped remove the shackles of MAN'S SUPERIORITY, PREJUDICE, AND PRUDERY from lovely woman. (249)

This last phrase borrows an image from *Wonder Woman* published with Marston's *American Scholar* essay. Bursting out of chains, she familiarly enacts the principles of "captivating femininity" surrounded by words that foreground a feminist agenda, breaking "man's superiority, prudery and prejudice." Brooks and Heilman's classroom "experiment" (whether or not they actually performed it) empties out the promotion of female agency in Marston's popularized practice of his deviant science, as the "convincing demonstration of power" of "our two lovelies" is "not really, of course" convincing. Any feminist force of this Amazon body is deflected as trivial with their "bell of dismissal," reinforcing a binary gender division between men (the professors) and women (attractive props for male knowledge).

During the same year—1945—Walter Ong also commented on *Wonder Woman*, both in an article on comic books and fascism published in a issue of the *Arizona Quarterly* and a *Time* magazine article on the social scientists' debates about the influence of comics on young readers. Ong comments with both his moral authority as a Jesuit priest and his academic expertise in literacy. In a less theatrical and more overtly judgmental manner, Ong makes clear his belief that comic book superheroes are fascist, that they encourage young readers to follow a single individual instead of relying on their own individuality. He calls *Wonder Woman* "Hitlerite paganism," saying that the comic heroine "is only a female Superman, preaching 'the cult of force,' spiked, by means of her pretentiously scanty 'working' attire, with a little commercial sex" (68). Like his *New Critic* contemporaries, Ong also identifies the "alluring woman" as an attractive but "cheapened version of femininity," as *Time* magazine reports that "Ong finds *Wonder Woman* sexy." Not surprisingly, his judgment turns moralistic, as he advises that "this is not a healthy sex directed toward marriage and family life, but an antisocial sex made as alluring as possible while its normal term in marriage is barred by the ground rules." Ong insists on a specifically domesticated femininity and sexuality, "directed toward marriage and family," diametrically opposed to Marston's configuration of "normal emotions." He thus directly responds to Amazonian "deviance," rendering that deviance as abject, "antisocial," and definitely not "normal," and assumes its mass-cultural dissemination to be a social hazard.

In addition to these literary criticisms of *Wonder Woman*, the comic received its most intense review from Fredric Wertham, a psychoanalyst who established the Lafargue Clinic in Harlem and linked the new comic books to a rise in violent, sadistic behavior. A Jewish German neurologist with Frankfurt school links who immigrated in the early 1920s, Wertham also critiques comic books as fascist and sexually "perverse," though he ideologically differs from Ong's conservative American Catholicism, critiquing the violence of capitalism against urban working-class populations, especially African Americans.¹¹ Wertham's diagnosis of comic books is contained in the infamous *Seduction of the Innocent*, which, published during the era of Cold War McCarthyism, fueled both congressional hearings on comics and the comic book industry's subsequent self-regulation through the Comics Code.

Like Marston, Wertham also wrote with concern for the "bloodcurdling masculinity" of comics, distressed by the abundant scenes of violence against women. But his commentaries on *Wonder Woman* show this concern to be grounded in a completely different and opposing construction of gender, one which sees women as naturally weaker—a rhetoric of women's "inherent passivity" that we

6. Until the 1950s, readership for comic books was equally divided along gender lines. The medium lost female readers when the Comics Code gutted romance comics narratives. See Barker 1989 and Sabin 1993.

7. "Queer" here refers to forms of sexuality that exceed both normative hegemonic heterosexual categories of sexuality and gender oriented around biological reproduction and the resulting binary definitions of *heterosexual* and *homosexual*. See Sedgwick 1993.

8. Another version of this article attends to racial discourse in "human engineering" and its links to sexuality both in eugenics and Marston's deviant productions. See Rhodes 1997. For related discussions of race and sexuality, see Duggan 1993; Gilman 1993; Hinjosa Baker 1992; Mercer 1994; Terry 1991; and Wiegman 1995.

9. Marston's 1930 book *The Art of Sound Pictures*, coauthored with Walter Pitkin, also explicitly discusses the production of both normal emotion and bondage scenes, with empirical research presented on the galvanic responses of subjects who were shown particular film images while wired to polygraph machinery.

10. See Brodkey 1987; Said 1982; and Wayne 1987.

11. See Rhodes 1997 for a chapter on Wertham and his twenty-year relationship with Richard Wright.

12. Wertham has an even longer homophobic reading of Bruce Wayne and his young "ward." See Medhurst 1991 for related queer batboys.

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