

## Wonder Woman's Costume as a Site for Feminist Debate

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### Article abstract

In this article, I examine how much of the fierce debate and discourse around Wonder Woman has centred around her costume. While several academics have addressed the relationship between Wonder Woman and feminism, my article engages with these works to examine the arguments surrounding Wonder Woman's dress, particularly in the context of comic books and graphic novels that feature the character. The article argues that it is Wonder Woman's apparel, and not her status as a superhero, that is the site of the controversy surrounding her persona and role as a feminist figure.



# WONDER WOMAN'S COSTUME AS A SITE FOR FEMINIST DEBATE

JACLYN MARCUS

*Abstract | In this article, I examine how much of the fierce debate and discourse around Wonder Woman has centred around her costume. While several academics have addressed the relationship between Wonder Woman and feminism, my article engages with these works to examine the arguments surrounding Wonder Woman's dress, particularly in the context of comic books and graphic novels that feature the character. The article argues that it is Wonder Woman's apparel, and not her status as a superhero, that is the site of the controversy surrounding her persona and role as a feminist figure.*

*Résumé | Dans cet article j'examine comment les âpres débats et dialogues suscités par Wonder Woman sont en réalité centrés sur son costume. Alors que plusieurs chercheurs se sont penchés sur la relation entre Wonder Woman et le féminisme, mon article utilise leur travaux pour examiner les arguments concernant le costume de Wonder Woman, en particulier dans le contexte des bandes dessinées et des romans graphiques qui mettent en scène ce personnage. L'article défend l'idée que c'est en fait l'habit de Wonder Woman, et non pas son statut de super héros, qui est au centre de la controverse qui entoure sa personnalité et son rôle d'image féministe.*

As the first female superhero to ever receive her own comic book, Wonder Woman has existed in popular culture for 75 years. She is typically depicted wearing a golden tiara, blue star-covered shorts, and a red bustier with a golden eagle on the front. She carries a golden lasso that, when wrapped around its victim, has the ability to make them tell the truth, and her golden bracelets can deflect bullets. According to DC Comics Wonder Woman has “been a feminist icon since her star-spangled intro in 1941” (“Wonder Woman”). Wonder Woman has superhero strength and speed, but it is her costume that allows her to be recognizable as an icon in society, the press, and scholarship. By the same token, her clothing—its design, fit, length, colouring, and even accessories—has also been leveraged in these same arenas to prove why she is or is not a feminist icon (figure 1). Yet why is it that the character can only be reinvented through her clothing? Moreover, why have male superheroes not historically undergone the same relentless scrutiny of their clothing and its changes? I will understand the history of Wonder Woman as aligned within the tradition of women, both real and fictional, who have been defined and even restricted through their dress within patriarchal structures, due to the multiple, nuanced meanings ascribed to their appearances. For Wonder Woman, costume is one of the most significant aspects of her persona. It is tied not only to recognition of her character, but to questions of morality surrounding her worth as a role model for girls and women.

Wonder Woman's relationship with feminism has sparked debates on a number of topics: these include whether or not Wonder Woman should be seen as a feminist role model, whether she was created for male or female enjoyment, and, most recently, whether she should serve as the United Nation's Ambassador of the Empowerment of Women and Girls. To combat these controversies, Wonder Woman has undergone multiple changes, for example, her loss of costume and superpowers in the late 1960s and her recent makeover in 2010, which had her wearing long pants and a leather jacket as opposed to a strapless top and shorts. Julie D. O'Reilly writes that, "Central to Wonder Woman's legend is the questioning of her status as a hero because she is subject to the approval or disapproval of her Amazon mother and sisters" (275). Even in her own fictional world, Wonder Woman has inspired debate and had to prove her worth as a superhero. In the real world, however, Wonder Woman's worth has been inextricably tied to her costume and its reflection of her feminist values.

Wonder Woman's clothing is an inescapable part of her character; her costume helps to define who she is. This is illustrated in her first-ever story arc, "Introducing Wonder Woman." As O'Reilly explains, Wonder Woman's final trial to prove whether or not she is "worthy" of "fight[ing] for liberty and freedom and all womankind" is a game of "bullets and bracelets," where her gold accessories deflect

the gunshots aimed at her (273). Wonder Woman's accessories literally define whether or not she may stand as a representative and protector of other women. Jill Lepore also cites fashion's importance for feminist interpretations of Wonder Woman's character in the introduction of her book, *The Secret History of Wonder Woman*: "Wonder Woman isn't only an Amazonian princess with badass boots. She's the missing link in a chain of events that begins with the woman suffrage campaigns of the 1910s and ends with the troubled place of feminism fully a century later" (xiii). While a number of academics have addressed the relationship between Wonder Woman and feminism, in this article I review works by Edward Avery-Natale, Ann Matsuuchi, and Jill Lepore, among others, to illustrate how much of this controversy and change have been addressed through Wonder Woman's costume. To do so, I have divided the controversies surrounding Wonder Woman's apparel into subsections: the creation of Wonder Woman, hypersexual representations of Wonder Woman, her depiction as a consumer, her first rebirth, her second rebirth, and depictions of Wonder Woman in the twenty-first century. As we will see, it is Wonder Woman's costume and not her power and agency as a superhero that is the site of the debate surrounding her character and role as a feminist figure. Fashion plays a pivotal role in the reception of the Wonder Woman character, particularly regarding her position as a feminist role model.

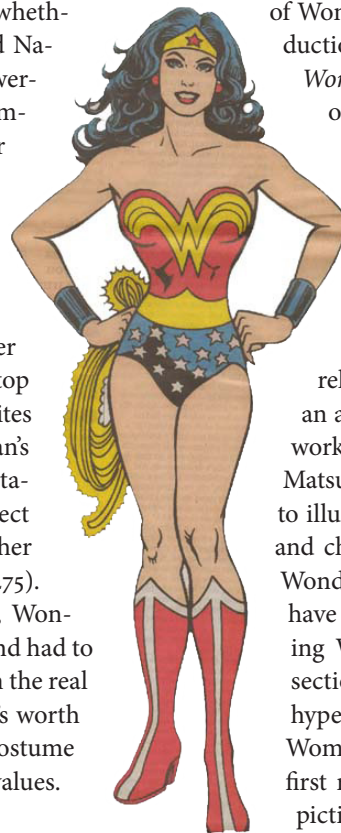


Figure 1. Wonder Woman in one variation of her costume. JJ\_Dread, Wonder Woman, 11 December 2015, Flickr, [www.flickr.com/](http://www.flickr.com/), accessed 24 October 2018.

### The Creation of Wonder Woman

Since her “birth,” Wonder Woman’s costume has been central to her character. Though clothing has long been understood as a key influencer of social identity (see Barry; Entwistle; and Wilson), for women fashion takes on even greater importance. In discussing the impact of fashion on plot and character, Bruzzi and Church Gibson write that “traditionally [it has] been women whose character, identity and femininity have been understood through their mode of dress and self-presentation” (116). In the case of Wonder Woman and her inventors, her costume was one of the first aspects of her character to be developed; nuances of her personality and superpowers were defined through her clothing.

Wonder Woman was created in 1941 by Dr. William Moulton Marston, an academic who also invented the lie-detector test. Marston hired artist Harry G. Peter to illustrate the first drafts of the superhero. Lepore explains how, in 1941, Peter sent sketches to Marston that included Wonder Woman’s red shirt, tiara, gold bracelets, and skirt, instead of the shorts that became a part of her more classic outfit. Lepore notes that “Marston liked everything but the shoes.” One of the first critiques of Wonder Woman’s dress was thus made by the creator himself. Marston also pointed out in a subsequent illustration “that the collar on [Wonder Woman’s] halter top would look dated quickly” (Lepore). Strict instructions regarding how Wonder Woman should be dressed continued to accompany her creation: “Everyone agreed about the bracelets [...] she’d wear a tiara [...] she had to be super patriotic. Captain America wore an American flag [...] Like Captain America—because of Captain America—Wonder Woman would have to wear red, white, and blue, too. But ideally, she’d

also wear very little” (Lepore 196). Regardless of her feminist origins in Marston’s ideals, Wonder Woman had parts of her costume modelled after what male superheroes at the time were wearing. We can also see that her bracelets were initially one of the least censored aspects of her costume, despite Wonder Woman’s later links to bondage leading to criticism of her accessories. This account highlights how much detail and discussion went into each piece of her outfit, illustrating its importance.

Wonder Woman’s connection to fashion can also be found in her familial history. Lepore explains that Wonder Woman’s mother, Hippolyte, “recounts for her daughter, Diana [Wonder Woman’s alter-ego], the history of the female race,” citing her magic girdle as the reason she was able to beat her nemesis in one-on-one combat and secure the Amazon women’s freedom (Lepore 199). However, her girdle is then stolen, and the Amazon women are captured by men (Lepore 199). When they are finally freed, it is decided that they “must always wear these bracelets fashioned by our captors, as a reminder that we must always keep aloof from men” (qtd. in Lepore 199). In this account, the very history of femininity and Wonder Woman is tied to materiality; it is from clothing—a girdle—that all their power is sourced, and their future depends on jewelry, which serves as a symbol of their values. It is also Wonder Woman’s mother who “stitches for her a red, white, and blue costume,” linking Wonder Woman’s matriarchal past with clothing (Lepore 200). Entwistle argues that “Women have long been associated with the making of clothes,” in part as a means of gaining financial independence from men (146). That Wonder Woman’s mother, a ruler over a land of women exclusively, crafted Wonder Woman’s costume illustrates materiality’s importance in the superhero’s legend and aligns her with this real-life

history. Here, clothing is depicted as responsible for maintaining women's freedom, feeding into both positive and negative readings of fashion's impact and its relationship with feminism.

Once she was created, representations of Wonder Woman as a feminist figure can be seen through the first press release surrounding her character. Lepore's description of the release again cites fashion as an important aspect of her character and values: "'Wonder Woman' has bracelets welded on her wrists; with these she can repulse bullets. But if she lets any man weld chains on these bracelets, she loses her power" (220). Here, Wonder Woman's accessories reveal her status as independent from men, as per her familial history. Although the press release seems to imply that Wonder Woman was created as a positive figure, in March 1942, one year after her creation, Wonder Woman was placed on the National Organization for Decent Literature's list of "Publications Disapproved for Youth" because "'Wonder Woman is not sufficiently dressed'" (Lepore). The organization does not specify the meaning of the word "sufficiently;" her clothing is defined as indecent for youth without further explanation. As we shall see, accusations eventually took on additional force, particularly surrounding what was understood as her character's sexual nature.

#### Hypersexual Representations of Wonder Woman

Descriptions of Wonder Woman's character often include her clothing, which in turn is often tied to her sexuality: "She wore a golden tiara, a red bustier, blue underpants, and knee-high, red leather boots. She was a little slinky; she was very kinky" (Lepore xi). For Wonder Woman scholar Mitra C. Emad, the superhero can be read as hypersexual based on representations of her clothed, physical figure,

"marked by a large amount of flowing hair" and "large breasts and a costume that barely covers her body" (975-6). Emad is not the first to point out the relationship between Wonder Woman's clothing and her sexuality. A female editor of *Wonder Woman* commented that "There has been a tendency in the past to play up WW as a rather sexy creature [...] Her costume may be one of the reasons why she creates this impression," followed by the suggestion that she wear a skirt as opposed to shorts (qtd. in Lepore 239). Here, Wonder Woman's costume is specifically mentioned as a reason she may be viewed as hypersexual. Similarly, according to Edward Avery-Natale, a female writer for *Wonder Woman* "requested that the character's breasts be reduced in size to make her more realistic, but her request was denied" (75). These instances indicate that Wonder Woman was created as a purposefully hypersexual character. As Michael R. Lavin explains in "Women in Comic Books," the "contradiction is that between women as role models and as sex objects [...] they are invariably depicted as alluring objects of desire, wearing the scantiest of costumes" (94). While Marston intended Wonder Woman to be a feminist figure, her character ended up as an object created for heterosexual male pleasure because the male writers of Wonder Woman rejected the suggestions of their female co-creators.

Another aspect of Wonder Woman's character that helped to create her hypersexual reputation was her connection to bondage. As Avery-Natale explains, "female characters, particularly Wonder Woman, are often portrayed in bondage, frequently, though not exclusively, to other women, promoting a kind of heterosexual male, lesbian fantasy" (76). Marston himself was criticized for often including panels where Wonder Woman was tied up or restrained using links, chains, and ropes (Lepore 236). Along



with her golden bracelets, other accessories such as her lasso link Wonder Woman to themes of tying, restraining, and binding. However, in using and controlling her lasso Wonder Woman can also be understood as an active participant in bondage, implying that it is not just for male pleasure, but for her own as well. Additionally, Wonder Woman can be read as a dominatrix figure (Brown 65). Wonder Woman's costume and accessories are evidence of her construction as both a hypersexual character created for heterosexual male pleasure and as a figure who uses her sexuality for her own pleasure and in her own right (figure 2). Because of the many representations of Wonder Woman available, the reader's interpretation of these iterations and their overall motivation and meaning may vary in response to visual and textual constructions of her persona.

#### Wonder Woman as Consumer

Given the tendency in patriarchal capitalism to stereotype women as naturally inclined towards shopping, particularly in the realm of fashion, it is unsurprising that there are allusions in Wonder Woman's history to her character as a consumer. As Joanne Entwistle explains in *The Fashioned Body*, "For centuries woman has been associated with 'fickle' fashion, vain display and indulgent narcissism"; women are both encouraged and discouraged from spending time and resources on how they look, despite being read through the lens of appearance (145). In the 1950s comics, alter-ego Diana Prince is employed as a fashion model (Lepore). Moreover, in *Wonder Woman* #203, Diana is approached to endorse a department store as her *celebrity* alter-ego, Wonder Woman. According to Ann Matsuuchi, the store-owner's plan is to "appropriate the image of Wonder Woman and of women's liberation for commercial purposes,"

playing on Wonder Woman's status as a feminist figure and its potential negative consequences (130). For Wonder Woman, consumerism dilutes the strength of her feminist message.



Figure 2. Wonder Woman restrained with chains in the *Wonder Woman: Earth One* series. Grant Morrison (w) and Yanick Paquette (a), *Wonder Woman: Earth One* (April 2016), DC Comics; Richard Guion, "Wonder Woman- Yanick Paquette," Flickr, 1 April 2016, [www.flickr.com/](http://www.flickr.com/), accessed 31 July 2018.

In attempting to escape moralistic judgements of the character's appearance and dress, Wonder Woman's writers have created changes to her costume. However, Avery-Natale argues that for many female superheroes, these costume changes "[display] their supposed love of fashion and frequent changing of their minds with regard to clothing" (89). Wonder Woman's

fictional character's position as a feminist figure is compromised each time her dress is modified, regardless of the style or functionalism of these changes, as I will demonstrate in the next two sections of this article. These moments of extreme change can be categorized as "rebirths," and though they have sparked controversy, they also offer key insights into the ways in which Wonder Woman's costume has shaped feminist interpretations of her character and the pivotal role her dress plays in these interpretations.

#### Wonder Woman's First Rebirth, or, the "Diana Prince Era"

Clothing changes in both reality and fiction were often prompted by all-too-real political and social events. Wonder Woman's first rebirth began to take shape during the aftermath of World War II. Americans began to worry about the effects that comic books were having on society, particularly on youth, and Wonder Woman's costume was once again heavily analyzed and criticized. Lavin explains that a 1948 symposium on the "Psychopathology of Comic Books" resulted in the creation of "the Comics Code Authority, a voluntary industry group which established a written code of acceptable comics publishing guidelines" (96). This major event in comic book history occurred only seven years after Wonder Woman's creation (Lavin 96). One year later, Wonder Woman was depicted being carried over a stream by a man, as opposed to previous covers that displayed battle scenes. This moment reflects the beginning of a slow, subtle shift in her persona: "Instead of her badass, kinky red boots, [Wonder Woman] wears dainty yellow ballerina slippers" (Lepore 271). A change in Wonder Woman's character mirrors changes in both costume and society.

Released in 1968, *Wonder Woman* #178 was the beginning of the "Diana Prince Era," when Wonder Woman lost both her costume and superpowers (Lepore). With the change in clothing, Wonder Woman transforms into a mod Diana Prince, stripped of any references to her past self (Lepore). Interestingly, this phase in Wonder Woman history has been cited as not being feminist, in particular because Wonder Woman is perceived as not being true to herself (Matsuuchi 129). The biggest contention surrounding her role as a feminist icon appears to have been the loss of her costume. Despite these criticisms, it was during this time that an attempt at a feminist plotline was launched (Lepore). The first cover of this story arc, released in December 1972, depicted Wonder Woman in a white unitard and long sleeves and long pants (Lepore). This was a shift from her short shorts and strapless top, though the tight fit remained. Lavin writes, "Some feminists applauded the change, especially now that Diana had lost the provocative costume [...] others complained she had been stripped of her strength" (97). This reaction prompted DC Comics to abandon the new storyline, returning her to her former character powers, and costume.

#### Wonder Woman's Second Rebirth

The credit for Wonder Woman's second rebirth and return to her most iconic costume goes to the readers who identified as feminists and were angry about the changes made to the beloved superhero they had grown up idolizing (Matsuuchi 134). To these women, including icon Gloria Steinem, Wonder Woman's costume was an essential part of what defined her as a feminist figure, and they employed several strategies to encourage its return: "In 1972, the founding editors of *Ms.* put Wonder Woman on the cover of the magazine's

first regular issue. They hoped to bridge the distance between the feminism of the 1910s and the feminism of the 1970s with the Wonder Woman of the 1940s, the feminism of their childhood” (Lepore). Co-founded by Steinem, “Ms. was meant to be an organ for a revived feminist movement,” making Wonder Woman’s return to her original costume on its cover particularly relevant (Lepore 283). Wonder Woman’s clothing was seen as key symbol of the second-wave feminist movement.

Thanks to these women’s efforts, in 1973 Wonder Woman reappeared with her superpowers, accessories, and costume restored in *Wonder Woman #204* (Matsuuchi 134). This time period is popularly known as the *feminist* rebirth of Wonder Woman’s character (Matsuuchi 134). However, it is important to note that her first rebirth had originally been intended to be feminist as well; both of these stages are open to readers’ own interpretations and opinions of her apparel, informed through the context of the comics themselves. Nevertheless, “This chapter in Wonder Woman’s history [...] provides a revealing insight into the relationship between American comic books and second-wave feminism” (Matsuuchi 120). Wonder Woman was a lens through which to view the feminist debates occurring at the time. Referring to these conflicts, Lepore writes, “In that battle Wonder Woman wasn’t caught in the crossfire; Wonder Woman was the ammunition” (290). This sentiment summarizes the idea that Wonder Woman, *and her costume*, were used to reflect feminist values and debates. These conflicts continued through twenty-first-century representations of her character, shaped by contemporary conflicts, debates, and forms of representation in new media.

### Wonder Woman Today

The chapter “Wonder Woman & Black Canary Fight the Gender War” from the 2008 graphic novel *Justice League: The New Frontier* includes Wonder Woman’s breastplate catching on fire, prompting her to pummel her male opponents with her burning bra (Matsuuchi 138). This image of Wonder Woman as a “bra burner” is an overt reference to her feminist ties, represented through an engagement with fashion and her costume. Gloria Steinem is referenced in the comic as well, linking her both to the icon and the character’s feminist background. In this interpretation, Wonder Woman is understood as a part of feminist history, signaled to readers through her dress.

Despite this, Wonder Woman remains a polarizing figure in relation to feminism; her clothing continues to be reinterpreted, as do the undertones and debates surrounding her costume. In 2010, for the 600<sup>th</sup> issue of *Wonder Woman*, artists chose to revamp her apparel. This time, they placed her in tight black pants, a red tank top, a navy jacket, and flat black boots. Her accessories—the bracelets, tiara, and lasso—remained. According to Deb Waterhouse-Watson and Evie Kendall, the purpose of this makeover was to “celebrat[e] the Amazonian superhero’s longevity in print media”; however, they also mention that the new costume was “less revealing” (114). As they explain, the character’s “shift to more practical, less sexualised wear arguably reflects changing attitudes about gender and the growing female presence in the comics industry. Nevertheless, the change prompted some controversy online amongst fan communities, again highlighting the problematic history of the representation of women as powerful figures” (Waterhouse-Watson and Kendall 114). Despite the fact that costume choice was meant to reflect



contemporary, female-positive sentiments, once again analysis, debate, and controversy followed. This may be the reason that Wonder Woman is still most often shown dressed in her iconic apparel.

An additional reboot followed in 2011, resulting in the reappearance of the 1970s Diana Prince comics. In this version, Wonder Woman appears dressed again in her all-white costume, which she describes as “(o)ne of the outfits I wore after I renounced my powers [...] before I realized who I really am” (Matsuuchi 138). Here, she is once more without superpowers or her original costume. In this representation, a “confusing final panel points to [the idea that] despite the intentions of the men and women who created her, Wonder Woman remains an uncertain, complicated icon, claimed by a legion of fans with widely disparate needs and expectations” (Matsuuchi 138). In *Adorned in Dreams*, Elizabeth Wilson argues that “we may view the fashionable dress of the western world as one means whereby an always fragmentary self is glued together into the semblance of a unified identity” (11). Wonder Woman’s identity is constantly being recreated with each costume change, preventing a coherent, stable perception of the character.

Media interest in Wonder Woman continues today, even outside of the realm of comic books and graphic novels. Twenty-first-century representations largely interpret Wonder Woman’s character as feminist, though debate surrounding her clothing persists. The character continues to be referenced across multiple forms of media, from the popular television series *Gilmore Girls: A Year in the Life* to fashion catwalks (figure 3). In another example, Lux Alptraum’s article “30 Halloween Costumes for Badass Feminists” (2016) claims that “Wonder Woman’s

been inspiring girls and women for decades [...] now that she’s got the option to wear trousers, she’s even more feminist than ever.” Statements such as this one within popular media illustrate the significance of Wonder Woman’s clothing in constructing her position as a feminist figure.

The 2017 *Wonder Woman* film brought on further discussion of Wonder Woman’s iconic apparel and how it should be represented today (figure 4). In “The ‘Wonder Woman’ Costumes Are A Celebration of Female Empowerment” by Fawnia Soo Hoo, costume designer Lindy Hemming relayed the extensive research and effort that went into creating a costume that would harken back to Wonder Woman’s original outfit while avoiding hypersexualizing the character; as the designer, Hemming was thoughtful, even cautious, when creating Wonder Woman’s costume. Hemming outlined the careful balance she aimed to strike between historically maintaining Wonder Woman’s iconic dress and allowing herself to be influenced by current fashion trends such as athleisure and modern interpretations of the character (Soo Hoo). Much like the debates which took place between various comic book artists as they created Wonder Woman’s original characterization, Hemming touched upon the changes she made to the Wonder Woman costume, which she had “tweaked since its debut” in the *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* film in 2016 (Soo Hoo). Given that *Wonder Woman* is an action movie, her apparel had to be functional on screen, prompting Hemming and her team to remake the costume in lighter materials and to “re-[design] Wonder Woman’s over-the-knee boots into a sportier sandal-boot hybrid” (Soo Hoo). Even today, it is not just Wonder Woman’s character that is subject to change, but her dress as well. Adjustments to Wonder Woman’s clothing are in part what allow her to

remain an icon for the modern-day consumers who engage with her.



Figure 3. Students adorn superhero symbols and costumes. Elena Siemens, Student Models at "Superhero Fashion Catwalk," University of Alberta, September 2016.

In 2016, Wonder Woman was assigned both her biggest and potentially most controversial role yet: as United Nations Ambassador of the Empowerment of Women and Girls. As Veronica Arreola writes, this appointment sparked intense debate: "While many are fans of Wonder Woman, they would rather see the UN finally select a real-life woman to lead the global entity." Importantly, Wonder Woman's costume was cited as one of the concerns with the appointment. Again, Wonder Woman is described as being "scantily clad," making her "not suitable for an ambassador" (Arreola). The United Nations' Wonder Woman campaign had been accompanied by slogans, such as "Think of all the wonders we can do: stand up for the empowerment of women and girls everywhere" and "The women and girls who rise up for a better world, and the men and boys who support and stand



Figure 4. Gal Gadot in the Wonder Woman costume created for the 2017 Wonder Woman film. Brenda Rochelle, Wonder Woman Featured, 5 June 2017, Flickr, [www.flickr.com/](http://www.flickr.com/) accessed 24 October 2018.

with them, are superheroes in their own right" ("Stand Up"). It is interesting to note that the photo that accompanied Wonder Woman's webpage was cut off at the neck, potentially attempting to negate any criticism about her clothing and costume, along with criticism of her body itself (Aizenman). Only her tiara and the top of a cape and top can be seen. The United Nations' hashtags #RealLifeWonderWoman and #WithWonderWoman further moved the controversy surrounding the superhero as a feminist figure forward into the twenty-first century. Despite efforts to maintain the success of the campaign, Nurith Aizenman explains that Wonder Woman was unceremoniously removed from her role

“less than two months later” due to the above criticisms. This final, most recent example encapsulates the conflict that has dogged Wonder Woman's character since first inception, of which clothing is a part.

Wonder Woman's costume is an essential part of her superhero character. Even without it, as Diana Prince, a new costume is created in the old one's stead. The treatment of the clothing of this fictional female superhero illustrates the important role fashion plays in the realm of feminism and more widely in popular culture as well. Clothing is the lens through which these characters are created, designed, and redesigned as values and motives shift. In reframing the academic works that have studied Wonder Woman, feminism, and fashion, it is clear that her costume has been the key focus of the debates surrounding her character and her validity as a feminist icon. With the recent United Nations controversy and film release, these discussions continue.

### Conclusion

Wonder Woman remains caught up in a conflict that women have faced for centuries. As I have illustrated throughout this article, Wonder Woman is judged based on her appearance and clothing, forcing her to consistently shift and change based on the perceptions and criticisms of others. Dress, it seems, is more influential even than Wonder Woman's bracelets or lasso, and has the power to reduce her from a woman to be admired to a woman scorned. Because of her controversial apparel—too sexual, too traditional, too modern, too unrealistic—Wonder Woman's position as a role model is contested. The conflicts surrounding Wonder Woman as a feminist

figure have centered on her dress, and each costume change allows a new perspective on feminism, female role models, and representations of women within popular culture to unravel and be recreated.

Whether readers choose to understand Wonder Woman as a feminist figure or not, interpretations of her character are difficult to separate from her dress. As the superhero Hawkman says upon first meeting Wonder Woman in *All-Star Comics* #11:

“Diana Prince—why, you must be Wonder Woman!”

“Why, how did you know?”

“The Justice Society manages to learn many things!”

Diana changes into her Wonder Woman costume and joins the fight” (Lepore 204).

It is only once she has changed into her costume that Wonder Woman is ready for battle.

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## Image Notes

Figure 1. Wonder Woman in one variation of her costume. JJ\_Dread, *Wonder Woman*, 11 December 2015, *Flickr*, [www.flickr.com/](http://www.flickr.com/), accessed 24 October 2018.

Figure 2. Wonder Woman restrained with chains in the *Wonder Woman: Earth One* series. Grant Morrison (w) and Yanick Paquette (a), *Wonder Woman: Earth One* (April 2016), DC Comics; Richard Guion, "Wonder Woman- Yanick Paquette," *Flickr*, 1 April 2016, [www.flickr.com/](http://www.flickr.com/), accessed 31 July 2018.

Figure 3. Students adorn superhero symbols and costumes. Elena Siemens, *student models at "Superhero Fashion Catwalk"*, University of Alberta, September 2016.

Figure 4. Gal Gadot in the Wonder Woman costume created for the 2017 *Wonder Woman* film. Brenda Rochelle, *Wonder Woman Featured*, 5 June 2017, *Flickr*, [www.flickr.com/](http://www.flickr.com/), accessed 24 October 2018.