

BEYOND THE MODERN FILM CRITIC

AN ANALYSIS OF FILM PARATEXTS AND THEIR RELATION TO POSTFEMINISM

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Abstract

This paper examines how female superheroes are depicted in primary film paratexts – their posters – in their solo movies that have been released in theaters in the past four years, namely, *Wonder Woman* (2017), *Captain Marvel* (2019), *Dark Phoenix* (2019), *Birds of Prey: And the Fantabulous Emancipation of One Harley Quinn* (2020). The goal is to understand the relationship between postfeminism and the paratexts. Semiotics and iconography are applied to the posters of the movies found on the official Instagram accounts of the films in order to deconstruct the meaning of the multimodal discourses present. The analysis of fourteen posters shows that there are postfeminist tropes present in the posters and that they are examples of femvertising too. This study draws attention to how postfeminist values are used by popular culture paratexts, and it is intended to inspire broader research into this area.

Keywords: Postfeminist critique, semiotics, iconography, paratext, multimodal discourse analysis, female superhero movies, postfeminism, femvertising.

Type of Project: Research Report

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The superhero genre – from comic books to films – always seems to have been a ‘boys’ club.’ Most features have skewed towards a male audience (Hickey 2014). But, seemingly aligning with an ever-advancing fight for equality between the sexes, in recent years Hollywood studios have invested more into the female superhero character than ever before (Bacon 2018). This evolution of the genre has been long overdue, and there are dozens of female characters that now have their own features, and dozens more that should.

As the genre evolves and matures, it deserves a greater analytical eye. It is one which traditionally has been defined by the ‘male gaze’, a certain type of sexual politics which implies a manner of looking which objectifies women and empowers men (Loreck 2016). It is an obvious start to assess how these female superheroes are portrayed, and to ask how this aligns with the era in which the films are produced. Therefore, there is a great opportunity to approach these analyses through the lenses of feminist discourses.

But where to begin? Much has already been written about the actual content of the films themselves (Miller, Rauch and Kaplan 2016; O'Reilly 2005), but what about the surrounding paratexts, such as posters, trailers, interviews, or merchandise, that convince the intended audience to consume content itself but are generally omitted from the analysis? How are these female protagonists portrayed in these paratexts, and why are these particular portrayals important? To take it a step further, if we now find ourselves in a postfeminist era – that is, an era of an interrogative and self-reflective critique of feminisms and other discourses including neoliberal individualism (defined more robustly below) – to what extent do these portrayals make a connection?

This paper will try to join the dots between some of these questions. Its purpose is to understand how far semiotics can be applied to multimodal discourses in specific films in this genre, and examine their relationship with postfeminism. Moreover, its purpose is also to become a springboard for broader research into this area, looking at other paratexts used to convince audience to consume the texts themselves, and making deeper comparisons with the original comic books.

Paratexts are important because they are the ‘thresholds’ of the text which convince the audience to consume the texts themselves, by creating hype and signifying to us what to expect. Following Genette’s suggestion, “a text without a paratext has never existed, but a paratext

without a text can exist” (Genette and Maclean 1991, 3), Gray suggests (2010, 10) suggests, some paratexts are produced for a specific target audience but some of them are addressed to the public in general. It is crucial to remember that many more people are in contact with the paratexts, seeing, reading, and engaging with them, than the texts themselves. For this reason, analyzing paratexts is important.

“Originally, paratexts are those liminal devices and conventions, both within and outside the book, that form part of the complex mediation between book, author, publisher, and reader: titles, forewords, epigraphs, and publishers’ jacket copy are part of a book’s private and public history” (Genette 1997, i). It applies to literary products and other media products such as films as well.

These paratexts for films, to be more specific are: trailers; TV spots; stills; toys and action figures; merchandise; gifs; memes; interviews; fan-made creatives; and posters. Posters are particularly important because of how much active and passive interaction audiences have with them. According to Cavalcante (2012, 93), “the poster hails a broader, more mainstream audience, inviting viewers to enter the film through safe and familiar thematic pathways.” This is explained in greater detail below.

A poster is usually defined as “a large, physical, printed sheet that often contains pictures, and is posted in a public place so as to promote something” (Merriam-Webster 2020). Even though film posters are perceived as a promotional tool to market a film, this is quite a narrow definition. There is a designer, a creative, and an ideology behind any poster before its creation. There is an artistic or an ideological purpose behind it. Therefore, posters are not just a promotional tools, they are communication tools between/in cultures.

The ideology behind the poster creation could be given in different ways. There could be a picture, a painting, an illustration, or words, or all of them together. There is a hierarchical structure in the posters and the consumer perceives it according to this structure.

Importantly, posters in this context are graphic and highly visual. For our purposes, they are good objects of analysis because of the originally graphic nature of the subject content – superheroes were originally found in comic books, and continue to excite through these comic books’ ongoing appeal.

The first superhero comic books emerged through the 1930s to 1960s, and “a dedicated comic book fandom... emerged with enthusiasts continuing to read and collect comics for years, even

decades. To reward (and exploit) this interest, publishers began placing a greater emphasis on continuity, with narrative threads continued across multiple issues.” (Burke 2019). “Superheroes are stronger than anyone, defeats every villain, is always in the right and gets the girl” (Brown 2016, 131). These superheroes were started to be seen in not just comic books, but in intertextual content such as, toys and textiles.

Comic book adaptations for the screen were simply a matter of time, as the comic book publishing houses looked to build on the popularity of their creations in TV and cinema. For the purposes of this analysis and paper, we focus on contemporary times where the superhero genre is already firmly established: superheroes have started to generate wider interest than the fan base; comic book sales have even been seen to increase after the films (Cox and Steinberg 2017). After such successes, new superheroes have been created to adapt to TV, and Hollywood’s interest towards these texts has scaled up even more (Burke 2016).

Disney made a deal with Marvel in 2009, and acquired ownership of more than 5,000 characters (The Walt Disney Company 2009). However, very few of these characters have live action movies. Moreover, Marvel Entertainment is not the only comic book company which reproduces its stories. There are two other big comic book companies in the US alone: DC Comics and Dark Horse Comics. Since 1944, Marvel Comics has produced 59 live action movies, DC Comics, 33, and Dark Horse Comics, 21.

What is significant for this analysis is that within these 113 live action movies which were released in theatres, only nine of them have a female lead. In other words, a paltry 8% of these movies have a female lead.

Consequently, it makes sense to ask the question why there have been so few female lead superhero films. Hollywood has notoriously been a male-dominated industry both on- and off-screen for decades and unfortunately has shown little sign of progress until recently. A 1998 study shows that among all top 250 films, the percentage of the women in the roles of directors, producers, editors, and cinematographers was only 17% (Lauzen 2017). In 2016, the research was conducted once again, and almost twenty years later, the result was the same: still only 17% of the roles belonged to women (Lauzen 2017).

The interview with *Green Street Hooligans* director Lexi Alexander is a showcase how problematic women’s presence in the industry and representation of women on-screen as well

as off-screen. When they asked about if she would want to direct the movie *Wonder Woman*, she gives below answer;

“Imagine the weight on my shoulders. How many male superhero movies fail? So now, we finally get Wonder Woman with a female director, imagine if it fails. And you have no control over marketing, over budget. So without any control, you carry the fucking weight of gender equality for both characters and women directors. No way.” (Alt 2014).

For a very long time, the target audience of the comic books was overwhelmingly male. According to recent research that was conducted in 2017, 63% of comics and graphic novels are purchased by men, 37% by women (Alverson 2017). We can assume that men have been the primary consumers of this media for years, which makes it clearer why the comic book industry prominently deployed the ‘male gaze’ in the books (Stevens 2020).

However, according to research, women are the most powerful ‘consumers’, driving 70-80% of all consumer purchasing through a combination of their buying power and influence (Bloomberg 2018). Aligned with that, when we look at the film industry, we encounter similar results. In the US, the number of female movie goers is greater than male overall; and strikingly young women aged between 15-24 lead weekly admissions, responsible for an average 2 million per week, with 1.7 million for their male counterparts (Marcel 2019). It may well be that because of this, we see more female lead movies in theatres now.

Because there is a greater emphasis on female leads and female audiences, it is logical to examine this phenomenon through the lens of feminist and post-feminist theories. There are many and varied definitions, but in this context, feminism is defined as the “belief in social, economic, and political equality of the sexes” (Burkett and Brunell 2002). It defends women against oppression and inequality they have faced by being a woman, and defends women and others who are being hurt within patriarchal systems: by sexism, misogyny, and oppressions of every kind (Harquail 2020).

In the first wave of feminism, women were mainly fighting for their legal rights, such as having the right to vote during the 19th and 20th Centuries, especially in the Western World. Second wave feminism is best recalled through Simone De Beauvoir’s book *The Second Sex*, in particular her well-known quote that “one is not born, rather becomes, a woman” (de Beauvoir 1973, 301) which signifies that being a woman is a cultural object. During the second wave,

women fought for their social rights including the right to equality in the workplace, and in the family itself, while criticizing male dominance in institutions and in society (Pierceson 2016). Third wave feminism emerged in the 1990s and is more intersectional than the second wave, and is an iteration which paid great focus to the reproductive rights of women.

‘Postfeminism,’ however, is more complex. It is neither a wave of feminism, nor negating feminism. At its heart it is a contradictory mode of critique which in fact seems to mix many different ideas and values – from feminist conceptions of equality to neoliberal values of individualism, plus many other ideas that refer to, and challenge the patriarchy, including sexualization, retraditionalization, even class categorization.

For authors who critique it, postfeminism is important because it “signals more than a simple evolutionary process whereby aspects of feminism have been incorporated into popular culture—and thereby naturalized as popular feminism” (Tasker and Negra 2007, 4). Postfeminism in the media is observed through the consumption of popular culture such as TV series, music videos, and advertisements. Feminist discourses in these media appear more liberating and empowering – as Rosalind Gill says, “young women in adverts are now frequently depicted as active, independent, and sexually powerful” (Gill 2008, 35) – but this points to a much darker side too, whereby it appears (falsely) to the consumer of this media that basic feminist objectives of empowerment are achieved. However, these active, independent and sexually powerful young women are predominantly white, Western-looking women with ‘ideal’ slender bodies – hardly representative of billions of women worldwide. This is clearly highly problematic and for these reasons it is interrogated at length by Gill (2007; 2008; 2009; 2012; 2017), McRobbie (2004), and Tasker and Negra (2007) amongst many others.

Many companies are also using these feminist elements when they are pitching their products, and it has become such a major trend that it garnered the name ‘femvertising’ – the act of using feminist tropes in advertisements. In fact, since 2015 femvertising awards have been distributed to “honor brands that are challenging gender norms by building stereotype-busting, pro-female messages and images into ads that target women and girls” (She Media 2016). According to, Samantha Skay, CEO SheKnows Media, “women are increasingly demanding that brands build more respectful and empowering messages and images into their ads that target women” (Cannon 2018). It is clear that other industries could adopt this approach for their brands, products, and content – such as the film industry, which we analyze in this paper.

These postfeminist elements are visible in media, but are they observable in the media paratexts as well? According to the media research of Creative Artists Agency (CAA) and innovation consultancy Shift7, female-led films that pass Bechdel test outperform at the box office for 2014-2017, which measures the portrayal of women in film (Pulver 2018). In the films, there is an improved representation of the women in those three years. However, before watching the film, the audience must first consume the paratexts.

So, as discussed above, if the superhero genre was originally targeted towards men, is there any indication that there is difference in superhero movies in recent years – namely, 2017 onwards? Based on current trends, the analysis will be on lead female representations of superhero movies in paratexts, and how they engage with postfeminism. For accuracy I will ask how female superheroes are portrayed in paratexts, and whether there is any relation between the ways they are depicted and postfeminism.

This first chapter was to make some definitions and narrow the scope of the paper so the research is more focused. It will now introduce the theoretical frameworks in which we need to situate ourselves, supported by a brief, integrated literature review. This section that will help us comprehend the data in the analysis. In this study, we will look at specific paratexts - posters that are shared on official, international Instagram accounts - of the four most recent female lead superhero movies: *Wonder Woman* (2017), *Captain Marvel* (2019), *Dark Phoenix* (2019), and *Birds of Prey: And the Fantabulous Emancipation of One Harley Quinn* (2020). The selected posters will be analyzed semiotically to reveal the meaning of the posters as well as the ideologies that lie behind them. Semiotic analysis, particularly Roland Barthes' visual semiotics, Kress and Van Leeuwen's social semiotics, and Erwin Panofsky's iconography, will be employed to understand the social meanings of the posters.

With these foundations in place, the methodology is presented, including focused research questions and hypotheses. This will try to assess how these female characters are portrayed and see if there is any link between their portrayal in paratexts and their postfeminist context. The subsequent chapters on analysis are followed by a discussion of the results, reflections, and suggestions for further research.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework & Literature Review

This section will provide a basis for understanding the theories used in this paper. Overall, the research is framed within the tradition of cultural studies and we start broadly here, then narrowing the focus before explaining the methodology.

2.1 Cultural Studies

According to Stuart Hall, culture is “experience lived, experience interpreted, experience defined” (Hall 2016, 33), and cultural studies tries to find “common forms of experience and shared definitions by which a community lives” (Hall 2016, 33). Cultural Studies examines the way of how people shape and experience their lives in a cultural and social environment. Cultural studies have a broad definition, and it brings together different approaches from different fields, such as literature, anthropology, philosophy, gender studies, and examine each of them critically. It analyses how different groups use and convert the culture in time or for a specific purpose. The success of Cultural Studies comes from the way it approaches excluded cultural forms, such as popular culture, and minority culture (Bourse and Yücel 2017, 9). Cultural studies first examined the popular culture, and after the 1990s, it spread in the areas of Visual Studies, Post-Colonial Studies, and Gender Studies as well.

As Althusser and Gramsci presented in their ideas, ideologies are in everywhere, in the language and the texts (Allen 1992; Storey 2002). When people consume or are exposed to the byproducts of them, people identify themselves and “others” according to factors such as race and gender, which are actually not “natural” but “naturalized” by the media (Littlejohn and Foss 2009, 271). That’s why the relationship between the text and the people is meaningful because there is a buried ideology in the cultural product.

Traditionally, in mass communication there is linearity - sender/message/receiver- which is criticized being disregarding the “production, circulation, distribution, consumption and reproduction” (Hall 2001, 163). According to Hall, there are coded ideologies in the texts and as long as they are coded with a meaning in the message, the message could be decoded.

Cultural studies analyzes popular culture including TV series, celebrity, fashion or sports, and they are interested in both texts and audiences. In other words, whatever role text plays in popular culture sits under cultural studies.

Popular culture is a contradictory study area. It is a struggling place go be the dominant culture, between the ‘high culture’ and the ‘low culture’. For scholars, popular culture is a category of

consumption – emerging from the efforts of consumers to make cultural offerings their own through acts of resistance and appropriation (Fiske 2010, xxvii). On the other hand, another definition means music, TV, cinema, books, etc. that are popular and enjoyed by *ordinary* people, rather than experts or highly educated people (Cambridge Dictionary 2003). Even the different definitions are the showcases of this struggle.

According to Stuart Hall, capital had a stake in the popular culture because to sustain the social order, continuity is gained by the necessary spending of capital. As a consequence of this, there was a monopoly of the cultural industries in popular culture (Hall 2011, 74). However, after the First World War together with the change in relationships among people and classes, popular culture for ‘other’ classes became more visible through their various different perspectives on culture. In addition, as a struggle, “feminine culture is in constant struggle to establish and extend itself within and against a dominant patriarchy” (Fiske 1987, 197), and especially within forms of media.

Cultural studies is important here, since the objects of analysis are cultural products. I will analyze paratexts, namely posters, which are popular culture products, to understand the ideology behind them, and the contradictory nature of the values that they convey.

2.2 Feminism and Critical Approaches

Essentially, feminism is a way of thinking that desires absolute equality between men and women. The origin of the word is derived from the Latin word for woman, *femina*, and hopes to evaluate everything through the eyes of the woman, with great attention paid to the concerns of women and their positions in society. The main protagonists within feminism are women themselves and widely discussed are their status in society, their roles in and outside of the home, their oppression and exploitation, gender differences, patriarchal social structures, and male dominant power approaches and pressures. The fact that the issues in question are being discussed today, as in the past, is due to the fact that the related problems continue. As a result of the existing discussions about women, which are the main objects of feminism, it caused new discourses, actions, perceptions, and theoretical approaches to emerge.

There have been different feminisms throughout history, and theories are still evolving based on historical, social, economic, and political changes but mainly, feminism is considered with three main waves as briefly mentioned in the background section.

However, third wave feminism is particularly important it has several things in common with postfeminism. That said, there is a discussion regarding these terms upon which not everyone agrees: for example Rosalind Gill uses third wave feminism and postfeminism as an equivalent. However, for some other scholars they are not the same.

To be able to differentiate between third wave feminism and postfeminism, a third wave pioneer who is the co-founder of the Third Wave Foundation, an organization addressing injustices against Women of color and LGBTQA communities, Rebecca Walker's article *I am the Third Wave* will shed some light. She says;

“To be a feminist is to integrate an ideology of equality and female empowerment into the very fiber of my life. It is to search for personal clarity in the midst of systemic destruction, to join in *sisterhood* with women when often we are divided, to understand power structures with the intention of challenging them.” (Walker 2001, 80).

She concludes by saying, “I am not a postfeminism feminist. I am the Third Wave.” (Walker 2001, 80). This suggests that postfeminism and third wave feminism are different from each other: third wave is more collective and fights against the power structures in social and political life, and postfeminism, based on the article, is and does not.

According to another scholar, whereas third wave feminism is demanding “an end to all the forms of oppression that keep women from achieving their full humanity... postfeminism relies on competitive individualism and eschews collective action” (Piepmeier 2006).

Postfeminism is important for cultural studies and popular media because it has different perceptions. Postfeminism began as a critique of second-wave feminism for being negligent to women of color and working-class women like in the third wave. However, it lost its collective soul and encouraged individual empowerment instead. Moreover, it is deeply enmeshed with neoliberalism, which has extraordinary visibility in media (Gill 2016, 4).

Postfeminism then, “broadly encompasses a set of assumptions, widely disseminated within popular media forms, having to do with the “pastness” of feminism, whether that supposed pastness is merely noted, mourned, or celebrated.” (Tasker and Negra 2007, 1).

Moreover, there are some scholars sees postfeminism as a backlash. According to Susan Faludi (2006, 86);

“Feminism is ‘so seventies’, the pop culture’s ironists say, stifling a yawn. We are postfeminists now, they assert meaning not that women have arrived at equal justice and moved beyond it, but simply that they themselves are beyond even pretending to care. It is an indifference that may, finally, deal the most devastating blow to women’s rights.”

For Rosalind Gill (2007, 162),

“Postfeminism constructs articulation or suture between feminist and antifeminist ideas, and this is effected entirely through a grammar of individualism that fits perfectly with neoliberalism”

Moreover, it is an active idea including contemporary popular culture and keeps being effective by undoing feminism while becoming more engaging (McRobbie 2004). McRobbie hammers her point home,

“My argument is that postfeminism positively draws on and invokes feminism as that which can be taken into account, to suggest that equality is achieved, in order to install a whole repertoire of new meanings which emphasize that it is no longer needed, it is a spent force.” (McRobbie 2004, 255)

Furthermore, there are different feminisms which also have similarities with postfeminism such as Robert Goldman’s ‘commodity feminism’ (1991). This is something that Gill assesses has a postfeminist trajectory and criticizes it by asking the following questions:

“Where are the concerns about low pay, about migration, about poverty? Where are the public sector workers in health or education or social services? Where are the activists who work in food banks, who campaign against deportations, who take to the streets to contest cuts in funding to disabled women or organizations supporting women who experience domestic violence?” (Gill 2016, 15).

This suggests that postfeminism does not have some of the fundamental discourses of feminism anymore. In fact, it indicates that postfeminism takes an approach that the objective of equality, a central pillar of feminism, has been achieved. Authors have primarily highlighted and criticized the individualist, neoliberal, neglecting political nature of postfeminism. Gill says, “I look forward to the day when the constellation of values and ideas signaled by “postfeminism”

no longer exert their chilling cultural force, but in the meantime, regrettably, we are a long way from being post-postfeminism.” (Gill 2016, 17).

According to Gill, there is an intimate relation between feminism and neoliberalism and she outlines the characteristics of postfeminism and it is possible to analyze the contemporary cultural products to understand the gender in media. She identified categories in her article as we may consider them the “constellation of values” of postfeminism in her article *Postfeminist Media Culture* (2007):

1. *‘Femininity as a Bodily Property.’* In the past, femininity is defined as a property and women’s source of power instead of structural definitions such as motherhood (Gill 2007, 149).
2. *‘The Sexualization of Culture.’* The intense focus on women’s bodies as the site of femininity is closely related to the pervasive sexualization of contemporary culture (Gill 2007, 150). For example, in the magazines which target young girls and women and publish content about emotions and relationships says to young girls and women that they are responsible from building a desirable identity, pleasing men sexually, protecting themselves from pregnancy etc. (2007, 151). And in those magazines, men are presented as complex and vulnerable human beings (Gill 2007, 151).
3. *From Sex Object to Desiring Sexual Subject.* The sexually autonomous heterosexual young women who plays with her sexual power and is forever up for it (Gill 2007, 151). This represents modernization of femininity. Professor Hilary Radner use a term ‘technology of sexiness’ and identifies it as, “the task of the Single Girl is to embody heterosexuality through the disciplined use of make-up, clothing, exercise and cosmetic surgery, linking femininity, consumer culture and heterosexuality” (Radner and Lockett 1999, 15).
4. *Individualism, Choice and Empowerment.* Women use power to please themselves, and it represents women who entirely have free agency. Yet it is very striking that this autonomous postfeminism is demanded by neoliberalism (Gill 2007). According to Gill, ‘empowerment’ is itself sexualized, the term’s real meaning and its significance emptied, and it is used to sell different products, from diets to pole dancing classes (Gill 2012, 738). It signifies that this visibility could be seen in anywhere. It is a youthful and hip feminism and it has moved “beyond” feminism now (Gill 2016, 5).

5. *Self-Surveillance and Discipline*. This woman can be seen in women's magazines in which bodily shape, size, muscle, tone, attire, sexual practice, career, home, finances, are the woman's responsibility (Gill 2007, 155).
6. *Makeover Paradigm*. First having a problem and lack of joy and quality of life, and second, working with lifestyle experts to have modified consumptions and better quality of life (Gill 2007, 156).
7. *The Reassertion of Sexual Difference*. Praising and reasserting the sexual difference between men and women by birth. Popular media translates communication, customs and oddities which re-eroticizes power relations between men and women (Gill 2007).
8. *Irony and Knowingness*. Hailing audiences as sophisticated, knowing consumers, flattering them with their awareness of intertextual references, and the notion that they can 'see through' attempts to manipulate them (Gill 2007). This irony takes place in lads' magazines as well. For example, FHM organized a competition to find the best breasts in Britain with the name of 'Chesticle.'

Several other authors and works have analyzed contemporary popular culture through the lens of postfeminist critique. We may briefly look at Disney films with a female lead. A semiotic analysis of Disney Princesses, based on the trailers, posters and the animations of the films *Tangled* (2010), *Brave* (2012), and *Frozen* (2013), showed that Disney has attempted to repackage the princesses to meet new social conventions in this century, and the princesses are defined with an emphasis on bravery. However, detailed analysis shows that Disney is still enforcing the overtly gendered ideologies of beauty onto its princesses and its audience (Wilde 2014).

Another piece of research shows that a postfeminist lens should be applied to the health and fitness industry. Based on multimodal discourse analysis of the Lorna Jane Retail website (more on this theory below), the 'empowerment' discourse is portrayed in a limited, individualist way, which "emphasizes neoliberal physical and psychological self-improvement as a pathway to female "empowerment" (Nash 2016, 227). This is a common theme across the industry.

The other example is about *Girlfriend* magazine published in Australasian countries. A focus group with girls aged 11-14 was carried out and assessed how the consumers of the magazines' "spoke freely about all manner of sexual expression." (Jackson and Westrup 2010, 372). However, for these confident girls to become "sexually savvy", they had to be the "consumers

of the magazine first, which was primarily targeted to white, heterosexual girls which have to have enough resources to purchase the magazine.” (ibid. 373). This is an obvious limitation, and along with the categorization of an individual consumer, another feature of postfeminism is to have sexual knowledge as well.

Perhaps most visually striking, the Hawkeye Initiative is an interesting fan art project worth mentioning. Between December 2012 and October 2014, 521 posts were posted in the blog, and viewed more than three millions times. It calls attention to women’s portrayal in comic books by crossplaying the women superheroes with male counterparts (McGee 2015). This inverts “the ‘male gaze’ of comic book culture back on itself” (Scott 2015, 151). Clearly, there is an overt sexualization of the female characters, and by flipping the genders of the protagonist the authors are able to highlight this disparity.



Figure 1. Spiderman Hawkeye Initiative
Source: <https://thehawkeyeinitiative.tumblr.com/>

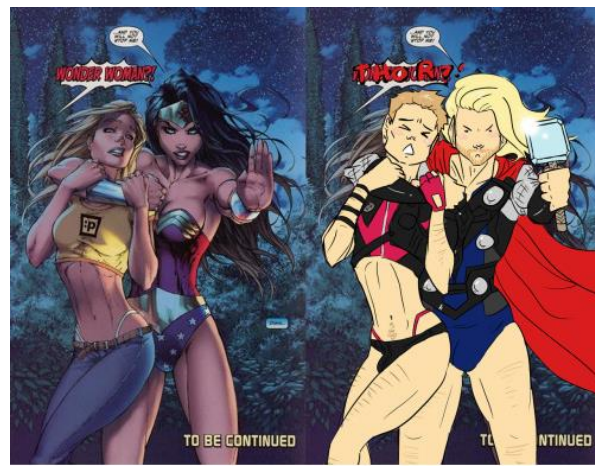


Figure 2. Thor Hawkeye Initiative
Source: <https://thehawkeyeinitiative.tumblr.com/>

We can tie this analysis to promotional content, namely femvertising, as outlined above. The relationship between femvertising and postfeminism is complex, but in many ways femvertising is a tool that encourages consumption of products through feminist tropes and values. Therefore, for critics of postfeminism, it might be argued that femvertising is in fact a tool that encourages the consumption of feminism itself.

Femvertising normalizes postfeminism. Femvertising is sometimes described under the banner of *ad-her-tising* as well, but the concept is the same. Baxter defined these advertisements as those which empower women and focus on feminism, women’s equality and activism. However, these advertisements are insincere because they are temporary like “soft soap,” and “their ultimate goal to make a profit and sell a product” (Baxter 2015, 51). Moreover, she criticizes some larger multinationals such as Procter & Gamble for their double standards:

marketing to female customers with #LikeAGirl versus objectifying women in their other brand's Gillette's '*First Girlfriend vs. First Real Girlfriend*' (Baxter 2015). Therefore, brands encourage a faux feminism and merge it with postfeminism's individualist, empowered portrayal of women, adapting it to femvertising to reach individual customers and sell their female-targeted products.

According to Becker-Herby (2016), there are five pillars of femvertising:

1. *Utilization of Diverse Female Talent*. She explains it as having “intersectional elements in the advertisements, reflecting women and girls by using race, body size and age. Moreover, it rarely showcases a group of cookie-cutter ‘ideal’ supermodels.” (2016, 18).
2. *Messaging that is inherently pro-female*. Giving key empowering messages, providing the consumer self-confidence and motivation instead of implying that she is not good enough (2016, 19).
3. *Pushing Gender Norm Boundaries/Stereotypes*. Challenging perceptions of how a woman/girl should be; it portrays women outside of the traditional stereotypes, such as doing housework or marriage and mostly in an athletic and competitive environment (2016, 19).
4. *Downplaying of Sexuality*. Sexuality should not cater to the male gaze. In femvertising there is no excessive makeup or unrealistic sexual poses; their skin or body are portrayed in a more authentic way where relevant (2016, 19).
5. *Portraying women in an authentic manner*. The first four pillars weave authenticity, referencing all aspects from their scenario to styling to the talent used (2016, 19).

There are different perspectives towards femvertising, but one of the main problems is similar to postfeminism and is criticized for emptying the political meaning of the ideology (Zeisler 2016). One of the main discussion points is that femvertising causes a different way of perceiving feminism. The femvertising advertisements are not using the objectified women or traditional female portrayal when they target women. However, they do objectify when they are targeted towards men. Therefore, the sincerity of these advertisements are questionable. Moreover, though they do not promote traditional roles of women, they still promote a certain type of women which is ‘empowered.’

Female stereotypes and how these females are portrayed is an interesting research point, and should include measuring the impact on the female audience itself (Akestam, Rosengren and Dahlen 2017). Since it is a newly emerging concept, the number of academic papers are limited, but there is enough data from different territories to make broad observations.

According to a study from the Spain, which uses the five pillars of femvertising by Becker-Herby to analyze advertisements, the advertising strategies of Kaiku and Desigual are connected with popular culture (Pérez and Gutiérrez 2017). Moreover, their advertisements are actually showing a ‘faux activism’ because even though they portray powerful women, there are only white, young, attractive females.

Furthermore, a semiotic analysis of Nike advertisements in Turkey shows that with the increasing number of women who support ‘feminism,’ the sympathy for brands supporting women has also increased (İnceoğlu and Onaylı-Şengül 2018).

Another piece of research, designed as an experiment with a questionnaire conducted in the US, also reached a similar outcome: “Femvertising has a positive impact on ad and brand opinions, purchase intentions, and emotional connection to brands” (Drake 2017, 593). Since they are advertisements, an essential measurement of success is the actual purchase of the product as well. Research conducted in India reached a similar conclusion as Drake’s work, but includes more detail about the purchase: they found out that the purchase intention varies across different age groups (Kapoor and Munjal 2017).

2.3 Paratextual Analysis

The term paratext was used by Genette in his book *Paratexts*, and was first used for literary products. According to the scholar, paratexts are written or other produced elements accompanying a literary work, such as the author’s name, title, preface, and visuals. These elements are produced to surround the text, going beyond to help the product be consumed (Genette 1997). Paratexts are the thresholds for consumption because of their informative, easily-consumed format.

For Genette, the paratext is itself a text: “if it is still not *the* text, it is already *some* text.” (1997, 8). Therefore, it carries an important message from the *sender* to the *addressee* to show it is worth a closer look. The *sender* could be the author as well as the publisher, and they might put forward one discourse over another or make aesthetic changes based on their purpose. However,

“the paratextual element is always subordinate to “its” text, and this functionality determines the essence of its appeal and its existence” (Genette 1997, 12).

According to Casetti and di Chio, a text means, “a signifying structure made of signs and codes, a construction that works upon symbolic material (signs), obeys specific rules of composition (codes) and produces certain effects of meaning” (M. Oliva 2020). The text could be a literary work as well as any other cultural product; such as a film, a video game, or a music album. Therefore, along with the literary paratexts, different media paratexts could also be analyzed. The variety of different paratextual elements of media products gave an opportunity to ask historical, social, media, and gender related questions as well to read the texts in different manners (Stanitzek 2005).

Jonathan Gray applied paratextual analysis to contemporary media and investigated the paratexts which surround the primary text of the industry. In this context, merchandising and licensing of the franchised *text* is also a paratext which makes paratextuality a big business and sometimes even more significant than the film (*text*) itself; therefore, paratextuality has a relationship with consumerism and advertisement as well (Gray 2010, 8).

Film theorist Elsaesser says buying a film ticket is similar to buying a fantasy because you do not actually see the film, you only see the paratexts (Elsaesser 2002). Without consuming a paratext, you cannot be aware of a film and be convinced to watch it. It is all about expectations, and the paratextual study shows how a text creates meaning for consumers within popular culture and society more general (Gray 2010, 26). Therefore, what meaning paratexts carry, is important because sometimes, they are responsible for *selling* a fantasy.

Paratexts also show an audience how to read a text: it uses intertextuality as well, which refers to building meaning by using another film or program and calls the audience to use previously-seen texts to make sense of the one at hand (Gray 2010, 117). Intertextuality is an important element to reach the audience, and especially in the posters the producer generally makes use of the starring actors’ reputations, reminding us of the actor’s past roles and public performances (Gray 2010, 53).

Since paratexts are the secondary text which surrounds the primary text, it is a fruitful investigation area for different creative industries. A textual analysis of the movie *TransAmerica* shows that in the paratexts, double the amount of work has been done to influence a particular segment or convince it to consume the text (Cavalcante 2012). Some

paratexts, such as the reviews about the film and interviews with the director emphasize that the film is actually a family comedy, but some others emphasize the main character's transgender identity more. He identified that, in the arthouse poster, she is depicted in front of the well-understood issue concerning toilets, whether she should go to the male or female lavatory, while in the official poster, she is depicted in a more traditional way, in a parental role with a white, heterosexual look (Cavalcante 2012).

Another textual analysis that is carried out within the music industry shows that artists such as Taylor Swift and Madonna use feminist elements in their paratexts, which are tied to neoliberal values of postfeminism. Their paratexts help embody this branded feminism (McNutt 2020).

Research about the gaming industry also focus on paratexts and reaches similar results to other industries. Based on a textual analysis of a sample of 80 video game covers, it is demonstrated that some video games, on their covers, tend to emphasize specific values over others (Oliva, Perez-Latorre and Besalu 2018).

Conversely, research has been carried out into paratextual absence, and how another paratext used as a critique of gender portrayal by the fans. After the success of the films, the Star Wars franchise expanded into merchandising and comic books, and even more so after its purchase by Disney. The fan activism #whereisrey was started after a toy company launched a toy line for 'Force Friday', but only with male characters. This is despite the fact that the protagonist of *The Force Awakens* is female, vigorously demonstrating "how paratexts shape and are shaped by gendered conception of franchising" (Scott 2017, 145).

Therefore, we can conclude that the paratexts do not always have to link with the text itself; they could portray favorable depictions of the text based on the different aims of the author to build a specific narrative, and to reach a wider audience considering the cultural, and social status quo in the society. Moreover, paratexts could be used as an area of critique of codified discourses.

2.3.1 Comic books

Before advancing to the methodology, we must have a mention previous research regarding the portrayal of women in comic books, which are of course where most if not all of these characters are derived. It is therefore important to mention them before discounting them for the analysis. Women's portrayal in comic books is an interesting topic that has undergone extensive investigation. Different female and male characters were analyzed using different methods and

perspectives, and gender roles and stereotypes are one of the most common topics to investigate (Demarest 2010; Murphy 2016; Coyne, et al. 2014). Based on a quantitative research of comic book covers for 40 years, starting from the 1960s, the number of women characters and depiction has been increased (Palmer 2008).

How they are depicted has also been investigated. Between the years of 1993 and 2013, a total of 14,599 panels in 144 issues from 24 different titles were analyzed, and in every issue, sexually objectifying portrayals of women were found (Cocca 2014). Moreover, especially in the female lead titles, it was observed that there are even fewer female characters in the issues, and the place where these female characters objectified the most, is the cover of the comic books (Cocca 2014) which is the paratext of the comic book. There are surveys carried out on a group of women, including comic book fans and those who do not read them. The result was similar; they all agreed that there is objectification of women in the comic books, which makes those women feel ‘uncomfortable,’ ‘insecure,’ and ‘inferior’ because they could not relate themselves with those superheroes (Turberville 2017).

The female portrayal in the comic books was also seen to be being dismissive of female readers as they are depicted from the ‘male gaze’ and thus losing half of their potential audience (Neumann and Parks 2015). As it has been done for comic books, female superhero portrayals in films were also analyzed. Marvel Superheroes such as Black Widow, Scarlet Witch, and Mystique, none of whom are the lead characters in the films but have significant roles, were positioned equal to their male teammates. However, in the film and the paratexts, they faced those same challenges that men have never have to face (Joffe 2019).

The portrayal of the female superhero within comic books and in their paratexts is an interesting (and popular) object of analysis. It is the intention that some of the methodology outlined in this paper could be reapplied to these analyses too, since it can be used as a platform for more robust research.

In summary, the presentation of women in the media in general is different from the 1960s-1980s because now ‘feminism’ is part of the cultural field. It is therefore ripe for analysis using the vibrant fields of postfeminism and its critiques. In this study, a critical postfeminist lens will be applied to the four most recent female lead superhero movies; *Wonder Woman* (2017), *Captain Marvel* (2019), *Dark Phoenix* (2019), and *Birds of Prey: And the Fantabulous Emancipation of One Harley Quinn* (2020).

Chapter 3: Methodology

This section will explain how I intend to employ the above theoretical framework to my dataset. The study overall aims to assess different visual realizations implemented by the film studios in the paratexts through semiotic analysis, understanding how they are produced to reach the audience, and examine their relationship with postfeminism. As a reminder, a paratext is a secondary text that surrounds the primary text of a piece of content. Its purpose is to ‘introduce’ the main text and is the threshold for the people to consume the primary text. The objects of the study are the primary paratexts of four superhero films, *Wonder Woman* (2017), *Captain Marvel* (2019), *Dark Phoenix* (2019), *Birds of Prey: And the Fantabulous Emancipation of One Harley Quinn* (2020).

The main hypothesis is that the depiction of today’s female superheroes in their primary paratext is a reflection of postfeminism and femvertising. To be able to investigate this hypothesis further, I will ask below questions;

Research Question 1: How are female superheroes portrayed in paratexts?

Research Question 2: Is there any relation between the way they are depicted and postfeminism?

I will use semiotics and iconography as primary methods to investigate these questions and to understand the ideology in the design of multimodal texts.

In the study, fourteen posters will be analyzed. Since there are visual images and as well as words on the posters, multimodal analysis is the most sensible method.

3.1 Objects of Study

For this study, I have chosen four films; *Wonder Woman* (2017), *Captain Marvel* (2019), *Dark Phoenix* (2019), *Birds of Prey: And the Fantabulous Emancipation of One Harley Quinn*, and a total of 14 posters from these films, in order gain more in-depth observations about these portrayals.

As mentioned before, the posters are the primary promotional paratexts of films. Instagram has become an important medium to disseminate all sorts of paratexts - the actual content direct from source, including posters, interviews, gifs etc. But one poster can be used in 360° marketing campaigns – they can be on billboards, at cinemas, online, on social media etc.

Additionally, film posters themselves have historical significance too. Before, there were no trailers or TV spots to promote films, meaning that posters were more heavily relied on.

Starting from 1944, in the past 76 years, 113 live-action comic book adaptations were released in theaters. Among those films, there are only nine female lead superhero movies. This is less than 8% of the total overall. Moreover, there is an apparent density of the releases; four of them were released in the last four years. Therefore, these four movies, considering the frequency in the releases, might tell us more than we thought.

As opposed to their precedent *Cat Woman* (2004), which is criticized for not being feminist enough (Thompson 2019), and created box office revenue less than its production cost, these four films that will be analyzed created profit. Moreover, *Cat Woman*'s IMDB Film score is 3.4, reflecting a dissatisfaction among its audience; another comic book-led female film *Elektra* (2005) also has a very poor rating of 4.7 (IMDB 2005). On the contrary, fifteen years later, these four films both succeeded in the Box Office and all reached a score above 5.5 in the audience' eyes. Moreover, According to Box Office Mojo data three of them (*Wonder Woman*, *Captain Marvel* and *Birds of Prey*) even finished the year they have released in the top 10 of the Worldwide Box Office. (Box Office Mojo 2017; 2019; 2020).

The object of analysis here is the highly visual and internationally visible use of Instagram for poster dissemination. The democratizing features of social media in general means that this specific paratext has not been localized to individual markets, audiences, genders, classes, etc. They are 'all-purpose' for all territories, and therefore the best to use for analysis to help understand the surrounding discourse.

3.1.1 *Wonder Woman* (2017)

Wonder Woman is a very iconographic character and a major franchise for *DC Comics* since 1942. The brand has a significant number of TV episodes and comic book publications over nearly eighty years. She has been recognized as an icon by marginalized groups such as women and LGBTQ+ as well (Jimenez 2018). *Wonder Woman*'s first live action movie as the lead was distributed in only 2016. The estimated production budget was \$149,000,000 and the cumulative gross box office was \$821,847,012, having been released in more than 65 territories (IMDB 2017). It created more than 500% revenue.

Moreover, the director and a large part of the production team was female, suggesting that there was a dominant female perspective on this movie.

3.1.2 Captain Marvel (2019)

This is the first Marvel superhero female character film who had her own film. The estimated production budget is \$160,000,000 and the cumulative gross box office \$1,128,274,794, having released in more than 63 territories (IMDB 2019). Brie Larson starred in *Room* before, where she was kept in a room with her son for seven years by a man, and won an Oscar in the category of *Best Performance by an Actress in a Leading Role*; later she starred in *Kong: Skull Island* and several other blockbusters before she became *Captain Marvel*.

The particularly interesting case of *Captain Marvel* is that in the original comics, the protagonist of that name was actually male. The character in the film is actually the first Ms. Marvel – Carol Danvers – who in July 2012 assumes the title ‘Captain’ after the death of the male character in the comics. A side note is that there have been several Ms. Marvels who share common superpowers through Kree technology or genetic mutation - the most recent iteration to become Ms. Marvel is Kamala Khan, the first Muslim woman superhero – surely an area of investigation in its own right.

There were two co-directors for this film, who are also partners, Anna Boden and Ryan Fleck.

3.1.3 Dark Phoenix (2019)

The estimated production budget was \$200,000,000, and the cumulative gross box office was \$252,442,974, having released in more than 55 territories (IMDB 2019). The Marvel production created 25% more revenue than its production budget.

I am using this movie as an unusual but significant object of study. Despite the title protagonist being a relatively minor character in the broader X-Men franchise (as opposed to the two previous superheroes), the producers saw that there was a significant hype both over concept of a female superhero lead generally, but also a potentially lucrative actress playing the role (in this case Sophie Turner, who had found fame as Sansa Stark in the international hit TV series *Game of Thrones*).

It is the only title which did not have a female director.

3.1.4 Birds of Prey: And the Fantabulous Emancipation of One Harley Quinn (2020)

Another DC film, the estimated production budget was \$84,500,000 and the cumulative worldwide gross at the box office \$201,858,461, having been released in more than 54

territories (IMDB 2020). The Birds of Prey and Harley Quinn did not have a comic book together with both titles included, but after the film, DC created a comic book as well. This is an unusual reversal.

Harley Quinn was the therapist of Batman's nemesis The Joker, who subsequently dated with the latter and then split up. Throughout their relationship Harley Quinn was notably manipulated by The Joker, and it is emphasized that she didn't have her own agency – she was his puppet. In this movie, we find Harley newly single, and the plotline is formulated around her apparent lack of male protection which leaves her supposedly vulnerable to male revenge attacks. The film focuses on her counter-attacking with other strong female leads who were previously vulnerable, manipulated, or wronged by male characters. Notably, Harley Quinn is 'insane' and this is highly visible in the film, making it different from the other female leads. Her irrationality is something that sets her apart in particular from the 'heroic' characters of *Wonder Woman*, *Dark Phoenix*, and *Captain Marvel*.

Whereas irrationality in the past may be considered a defining and damning trait associated with 'the female', this dominating character has her take ownership of this trait and flip it.

All the cast and production crew were female on this film, which is particularly important for the paratext to be analyzed.

3.2 Sample and Data Collection

I will use the posters which are posted on official Instagram accounts of these films to analyze.

As outlined above, producers create many and varied posters for distribution depending on the territory. The posters that are posted on Instagram are for an international audience and are multi-purpose. There are a variety of paratexts to post on Instagram: gifs, music clips, images, interviews, and fan-led paratexts. However, I will interrogate only film posters because they are intertextual: producers and distributors are able to use them in magazines, inside theatres, indoor and outdoor billboards, so their reach is much broader than these other paratexts. The posters they post on Instagram are for everybody from different demographics and from everywhere to consume. For example, a poster of *Wonder Woman* on a bus stop hoarding may reach a ten-year-old boy or a seventy-year-old woman – neither of these are a 'target' audience yet they still consume this multipurpose content. This is in comparison, for example, to a movie trailer in the cinema, or an interview in a magazine designed to reach a certain demographic.

The selected period will be the sharing of the first poster until the related films' release date. Paratexts, especially posters, are trying to convince the audience to consume the text. The posters until the release date are more important than those after the release since they tend to be producer-led, rather than influenced by the audiences reaction to the text itself.

Title	Number of Posters	First post	Release date
Wonder Woman	6	27.07.2016	02.07.2017
Captain Marvel	3	18.09.2018	08.03.2019
Dark Phoenix	3	12.10.2018	07.06.2019
Harley Quinn	2	17.09.2019	07.02.2020

Note that these posters from Instagram are those which do not have a specified medium for dissemination. They do not, for example, include special posters designed for IMAX, DOLBY or Comic Con, or those which are produced by fans, which were also shared on Instagram.

3.3 Analytical Approach

As stated briefly in the theoretical framework, social semiotics and iconography are applied to multimodal discourses (mainly images). I am interested in analyzing the values and ideology that the posters convey. A qualitative approach that uses semiotics will aid the collection and analysis of individual sample, since it allows me to analyze how meaning is constructed and conveyed in all kinds of texts (including the paratexts). Meanwhile, iconography, which is interested in visual motifs, will also support this analysis.

3.3.1 Semiotics

Broadly speaking, semiotics is an interpretative methodology which seeks to address how meaning is constructed and conveyed through signs, codes and texts.

According to Barthes – a pioneer of this approach – at the start of analysis there are two layers of meaning. In his visual semiotics, the central concept is layering the meaning. The first layer is 'denotation'. It is the layer that everybody sees, and it is the explicit meaning of the visuals. The second layer is 'connotation,' and it is the implicit meaning of the creative where ideas and values which the represented people, places and things 'are signs of' (Barthes 1964, 89).

These two layers, signifier and signified come together and creates the sign, creates the meaning. Additional to that, there is a further step; the *myth* which creates a discourse to understand.

It is a peculiar system, a signifier signifies something, and that signifier and signified creates the sign. The sign, is also a signifier and with the new signified, they created the myth.

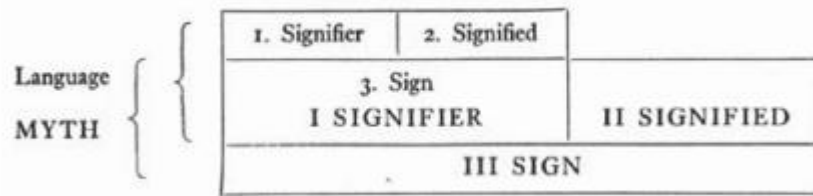


Figure 3. Myth

Source: Barthes, *Mythologies* 1972, 113

Moreover, myth naturalizes those layered meanings, and it promotes a particular meaning. Therefore, the myth does not just transmit a message, it naturalizes the ideological meaning of the message, which serves the status quo as well. Since it is a combination of layered meanings, and since the meaning is a construction, it can be deconstructed so the ideological meaning can be revealed.

Other authors have also suggested models of analysis identifying different levels of meaning, for example Fiske, who introduces the idea of the "social code". According to Fiske, there are three level of social codes in television and the meaning could be deconstructed by looking at these codes.

"The first layer is reality. In this level there are elements which helps to constitute a *reality* 'appearance, dress, make-up, environment, etc. Level two is *representation*; which shapes the representation by using such as narrative, and setting. The third level is the *ideology* which are organized by the ideological codes such as individualism, patriarchy and race" (Fiske 1987, 5).

The first two levels are relatively easily identified and these presentations are not in television only, these modes could be identified in the posters as well and identifying these codes will help understanding the message.

Kress and van Leeuwen, following the tradition of semiotics, introduce 'social semiotics', which is interested in the evolution of semiotic codes and signs that they call semiotic resources, and the relationship between them and society.

They also use the concept of multimodality to talk about texts that use different languages. Their analyses of multimodal discourse helps to understand language, images and other media

texts and the way they function in a systematic way. According to the scholars, there are four essential domains of practice in which meanings are dominantly made; these are: Discourse, Design, Production, and Distribution (Kress and Leeuwen 2001). The discourse means socially situated forms of knowledge about (aspects of) reality (Kress and Leeuwen 2001, 20), and this form of reality could be created by language only, visuals only, or both simultaneously. Their development of a rubric for interpreting visual communication (*Reading Images*) will also be very useful to analyze images such as posters.

3.3.2. Iconography

Along with semiotics, these posters will also be analyzed by considering other posters from different genres, and paintings or sculptures where applicable using the guidance of Iconography. I am concerned with identifying visual motifs that repeat from one visual representation to another. In this context, Iconographical techniques help to trace the origins of the motifs and the meanings that are carried with them, including a reflection of their social and historical background.

Both Iconography and Visual Semiotic Methods are asking the same questions: what do images represent and how are they represented. They both look at the images and understand ‘hidden meanings’. Although Roland Barthes’ ‘visual semiotics’ treat cultural meanings as a given currency, Panofsky’s iconology pays more attention to the context: how, and why is that image produced and distributed (Leeuwen 2001, 95).

In Iconography, there are three layers: representational meaning, iconographical symbolism, and iconological symbolism. Representational meaning of the visual is very similar to Barthes’ first layer of meaning, where he looks at the denotation and what is depicted in the content. Therefore, in order to give the analysis more robustness, I will merge and use them within the first layer analysis.

In Iconographical symbolism, textual and contextual analysis are carried out to make symbolic interpretations of represented people, places and things (Leeuwen 2001, 101). In the third step of Iconography, there is Iconological Symbolism, and it is the step where analyzing conventional meaning is finished and move to the interpretation by considering the economic, political, cultural, emotional, and psychological spheres (Leeuwen 2001, 115).

3.4 Data Analysis Procedure

In the light of these aforementioned analysis methods, 14 posters will be analyzed using the below table to identify the First Layer and Second Layer Meanings.

Categories			Denotation	Connotation
Verbal				
Visual	Social codes /signifiers	Costume		
		Physical traits (skin color, hair, complexion...)		
		Pose		
		Objects		
	Representation al codes / signifiers	Background		
		Colors		
		Angle		
		Framing		

The categories, social codes and representational codes are figured based on the work of Fiske and Kress and van Leeuwen's *Reading Images*. The poster will be analyzed based on nine different categories in total.

In the first step, I will identify what is on the poster and what is denoted. In the second layer, I will interpret them. The iconographical elements are less measurable in this context though are commented on if present. In the final step, the myth will be investigated and mentioned in the Discussion section.

Verbal signifiers, such as film title and actor names will be analyzed because they are used to cohere the image and give meaningful information. Moreover, there are additional taglines used in some of the posters, and what they signify will be analyzed as well.

The costume that figures wear will be identified and analyzed considering elements such as repetition or color palette. The *objects*, including accessories they wear and weapons they carry is another branch to analyze, which will help to identify the icons to look at the poster from Iconography's perspective when they are present.

The pose of the character such as facial expression and *physical traits* such as the actress' skin color, will be identified and analyzed.

The background in the poster where the characters are portrayed and their environment is also important to understand its composition. The dominant *colors* on the poster will be identified as *color* is also a semiotic mode and a mode of communication (Leeuwen and Kress 2002).

The angle will be another category that will help us to understand from which point of view the creators want us to see the poster. Vertical angles suggest power relations, others show content from a single perspective, others still suggest detachment or involvement, and frontal angles say that which we see is part of our own world or reality, whereas an oblique angle implies something that we are not involved with (Kress and Leeuwen 1996, 124). Moreover, there is the eye level, high level and low level angles which are worth taking into account as they might be helpful in understanding power relations (Kress and Leeuwen 1996, 124).

Framing is the last category that will be looked at to understand the power relations that are built. The size of the frame is important; the choice between close-up, medium shot and long shot are significant too.

In the third stage, an iconographic analysis will be carried out based on the aforementioned theories. This stage will enable comparison between posters from similar movies, overarching generic themes and forms, and move towards discussing their relationship with postfeminism.

In the fourth stage, the *myth* will be revealed, to be commented on in our discussion.

3.5 Limitations and Anticipated Ethical Issues

Using producer-led paratexts on official Instagram accounts will minimize ethical issues. These materials are open to the public and easy to reach for everyone. However, any conclusion that will be reached will reflect the researcher's perspective.

Also, the codes will be determined by the individual researcher and eventually, identifying a code depends ultimately on our ability to identify its smallest signifying unit or the base of its hierarchy (Fiske and Hartley 1989, 64).

Additionally, only a textual analysis will be carried out. Therefore we will not be able to find potentially multi-layered reasons for which the author created the objects of study in the ways that they have. Furthermore, as mentioned above, we cannot know how the audience interprets these portrayals.

Also, within this framework, we are necessarily constrained within the perspectives of our own biases. For example, to take an extreme example, it might be argued that particular (post)feminist-oriented perspectives proposed by a non-female might be constrained purely as a result of lived experiences of the researcher. Layers of analysis will be missed - not because they are not there - but because unconscious biases restrain them from seeing those layers. Equally, my own upbringing and experience within a society like Turkey is different to those experiences in Spain and unconscious biases become more apparent when interrogated through research such as objects, clothing and poses of the characters.

Chapter 4: Results

In this section, I will analyze all 14 posters individually, dividing them into layers as described in the methodology section. After identifying the first and second layers, iconographic perspectives will be examined. The tables which are used to breakdown the layers are to be found in the Appendix.

4.1 *Wonder Woman* (2017)

4.1.1 Poster 1



Figure 4. *Wonder Woman* Theatrical Poster 1
Source: (*WonderWomanFilm* 2016)

First Layer

The words are the tagline. Power, grace, wisdom, and wonder have strong meanings, and they are used to describe the character. These are her virtues and her most important characteristics. A tagline is very important for a poster, and it is the only verbal text that is used to persuade the audience and they are powerful (BBC 2019). Her costume made from metals, which signifies her armor and weaponization. She is depicted in a strong “chest out” pose and looks ready at an as yet unknown

threat. The sword is in darkness and shadows, and the lighting is at the point of the sword. She is resting but ready to fight. The background is of the dusty orange ground and a blue sky.

Second Layer

The word ‘wonder’ is both a noun and a verb. The word signifies *Wonder Woman* herself, but it also advises the audience to wonder about her. The important characteristics are her power, grace, and wisdom, and wonder, but the poster’s call to action is asking people to ‘wonder’ more. The orange and blue background is generally used by blockbuster action movies. These action movies are primarily targeting the male audience with male lead actors; it is very unusual to use female leads in these films (Evans 2014). The dusty ground suggests that significant action has happened but she is still standing, which means she has survived.

We see her body, her posture, but not her face because of the oblique angle, and it does not include the viewer in her world. She is alone, and she is alright. She is depicted in a medium-shot, which indicated some distance from the audience (Kress and Leeuwen 1996, 125).

Iconography

The pose with a sword in hand is a very familiar pose that is used in the posters before, especially for the science fiction, action genre. This poster resembles a poster for *Transformers: The Last Knight* (2017), which is the fifth movie of that franchise which has been active since the 1980s. It has a toy line, motion pictures, and licensed products. *Transformers'* primary target audience is male, and they even licensed textile products for young boys. There is a resemblance in Wonder Woman's pose with the character on the poster below. A powerful male robot's pose is being mimicked. Because the audience is familiar with the pose, *Wonder Woman's* first poster is proving that she is also powerful as much as her male precedents. Wonder Woman could be said to own the pose of a historically male brand.

The blade also has iconic importance. The sword is an object that we are used to seeing in war-related scenes, generally in the hand of a man and with an ancient heritage. According to the legend of King Arthur, for example, he, as the most worthy man pulled out the sword from the stone. A sword can make a 'man' a king, and in the *Wonder Woman* poster, she is holding this symbolic power in her hand.

In the context of postfeminism, it transposes a clearly feminine character directly onto the world of the 'masculine' – sword in hand. In warfare, women are traditionally the nation itself, the vulnerable, or the bearer of the next generation of warriors, but very rarely the warrior themselves.



Figure 5. Transformers Poster
Source:
http://www.impawards.com/2017/transformers_the_last_knight_ver2.html

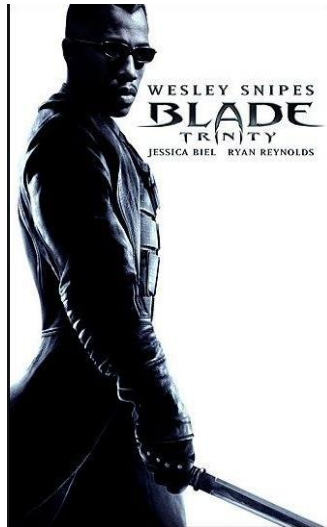


Figure 6. Blade Trinity Poster
Source:
http://www.impawards.com/2004/blade_trinity_ver3.html



Figure 7. King Arthur Poster
Source:
http://www.impawards.com/2017/king_arthur_legend_of_the_sword_ver9.html

4.1.2 Poster 2



Figure 8. Wonder Woman Theatrical Poster 2
Source: (WonderWomanFilm 2016)

First Layer

Diana Prince is the wonder in the poster, holding her sword with her muscular arm and looking at the audience with daunting eyes. She has a tiara and wears arm cuffs, or gauntlets. The lighting focuses on her sword and her forehead in the dark orange and blue background, and she is wearing the same costume.

Second Layer

According to Emma French who worked on *Hamlet* posters, “deployment of the close-up in the poster emphasizes characteristics of the Hamlet audiences might be expected to readily comprehend: introspection, heightened

emotion, and an intimate connection between protagonist and audience” (French 2006, 43). In the poster, we do not see Gal Gadot’s face fully, so this close-up does not relate to the actress

herself, it is all about the character and her ready to attack pose. There is a light on her tiara, according to Hinduism and Buddhism, where we have our third eye, which may link with enlightenment (McKenna 2015). Also, tiara symbolizes majesty. It is portrayed in close shot.

Iconography

Her muscular arm and pose resemble the ‘We Can Do It’ poster. During World War II, in the United States, housewives were turned towards traditionally male jobs in factories. They were manufacturing parts for tanks, bombers, and ships – the instruments of warfare – again, a male pursuit. Later, this poster was used to promote feminism. Eventually, it became a feminist icon, and today it became the modern day myth (Kimble and Olson 2006).



Figure 9. We Can Do it Poster

Source:

https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/We_Can_Do_It!



Figure 10. Beyonce We Can Do It Pose

Source:

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/jul/23/beyonce-rosie-the-riveter-feminist-icon>

4.1.3 Poster 3



Figure 11. *Wonder Woman Theatrical Poster 3*
Source: (WonderWomanFilm 2016)

First Layer

The word ‘power’ is present. She is wearing the red, yellow, bustier armor in this poster, following other types in previous posters. Her arms are crossed and in front of her body and face.

Second Layer

The lighting in the poster is focusing on her bustier armor and arm cuffs. However, it does not highlight her body parts in a sexualized manner, which will have been a key theme in comic book paratexts.

The word ‘power’ signifies her strength. The crossing of her arms is also one of *Wonder Woman*’s ‘signature moves’ to stop bullets or

other projectiles. A close shot was used for the audience to engage with her emotions: in this case it is her owned power and determination. Notably she requires no weaponry or additional tools except her armor. This signifies that she requires no other outside help, and this is emphasized by the close-up shot and that no other characters are present in the poster. The angle of the character is at eye level, reminiscent of equality. The background is black suggesting that something dark has happened, and blockbuster action movie colors are present again. From a gender perspective, she looks equal to her male counterparts, but she is not fighting anymore, only defending herself.

Iconography

This poster resembles another very well-known Marvel character that has cartoon series, films, and comic books with proven success in the box office, *The Wolverine* (2013). When Wolverine transferred to the big screen, he was part of the X-Men team, but after some while, the character also was given his own solo movies.

In fact, X-Men is inherently a masculine group – even in *Dark Phoenix* movie this name ‘X-Men’ was criticized for its implied lack of diversity by another female character, Mystique.

Her pose connotes the traditional skull and crossbones image too. Its implied meaning has always been used to denote danger; today, it is still used to warn of danger (Weiss 2020). Also, the crossed arms means stop, in many cultures.



Figure 12. The Wolverine Poster 1

Source:

<http://www.impawards.com/2013/wolverine.html>



Figure 13. Danger Sign

Source: <https://www.amazon.com/Che3423erth-crossbones-Warning-Novelty-Aluminum/dp/B07PM5P54D>

4.1.4 Poster 4



Figure 14. Wonder Woman Theatrical Poster 4

Source: (WonderWomanFilm 2016)

First Layer

The word courage is used to describe her in this poster. She is depicted “in action” and running towards a place of battle just out of shot, as denoted by the sparks coming from her shield. There is blue and orange dominant background as with the previous posters. She looks fearless and determined. She is running at speed, as denoted by her body position and wind in her hair.

Second Layer

She is someone who does not seem afraid of any war or action, and the meaning emphasized with the word ‘Courage’ as well. She is brave, she can put herself in danger to achieve her goals, and she also

gives ‘courage’ to the people that she is going to fight for. She is ‘faster’ than other soldiers who are predominantly men. She is a woman who is wearing armor in a battle pose, but she is carrying a shield, which is a defensive weaponry so it implies that she protects. She is portrayed in close shot.

The dominant background is blue and orange again, the generic palette used by male-targeted action movies (Gates 2006). These two colors also symbolize fire and water, dusk and dawn, which creates a contrast and alludes to her immortal heritage. The lighting on her face is suggestive of her as a protector-goddess.



Figure 15. G.I. Joe: Retaliation Poster
Source: http://www.impawards.com/2013/gi_joe_retaliation_ver2.html

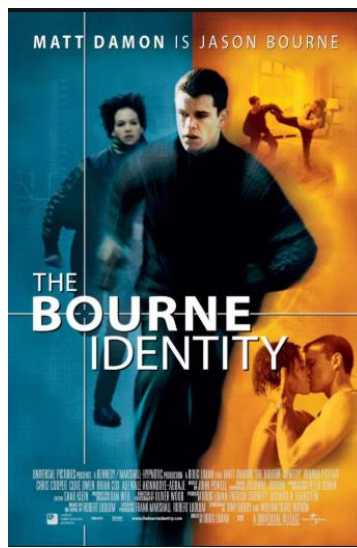


Figure 16. The Bourne: Identity Poster
Source: http://www.impawards.com/2002/bourne_identity_ver2.html



Figure 17. Blade Runner 2049 Poster
Source: http://www.impawards.com/2017/blade_runner_twenty_forty_nine_ver4.html

Iconography

At face value, the shield is usually part of a masculine combination for mortal warfare. However, in many classical Greek and Roman myths, female goddesses are depicted with shields and spears (her other hand is out of shot but we assume that she is holding a weapon). Goddesses who have been tasked with protecting and/or emblemizing a city are always depicted with shields. Athena, Britannia and Ukraine are just a few examples amongst many other cultures where embodiment of the ‘nation’ is predominantly feminine. Their iconography is correspondingly female as the mother/protector figure.



Figure 18. Britannia

Source:

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Britannia>

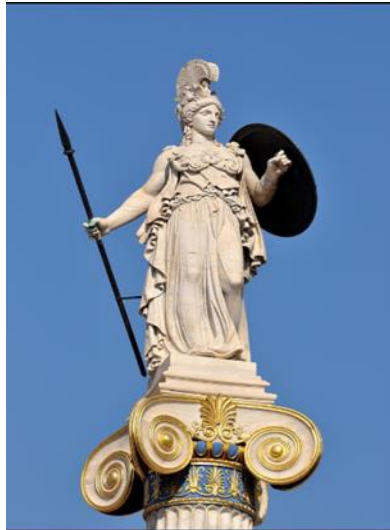


Figure 19. Athena

Source:

<https://tr.pinterest.com/pin/260716265913360967/>



Figure 20. Mother Ukraine

Source:

<https://www.oddcities.com/mother-motherland-kiev-ukraine/>

4.1.5 Poster 5

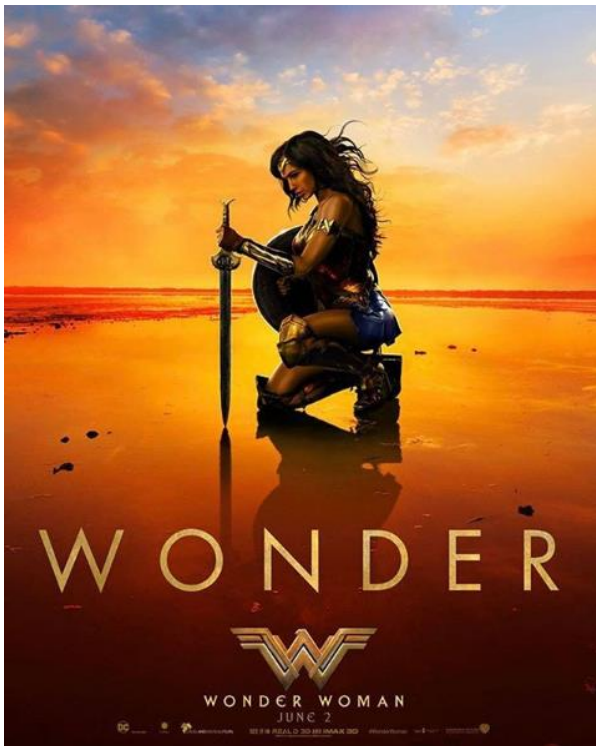


Figure 21. Wonder Woman Theatrical Poster 5

Source: (WonderWomanFilm 2017)

First Layer

The word ‘Wonder’ is used as a verb and noun to describe Diana Prince again. She is wearing all her war gear, looking strong, holding her sword, hair is blowing towards her back, and looking at the audience with her left eye. There is nothing behind her, the background is empty and the dominant colors in the poster are orange and blue again.

Second Layer

The way she holds her sword is very confident, but in a restive position. She is looking at the viewer with a daring one eye and she looks intimidating. According to *Reading Images*, when the character looks at the viewer with

cold disdain, the viewer is asked to relate to them, perhaps as an inferior relates to superior (Kress and Leeuwen 1996, 118). She hints that the audience should show her respect.

It feels like her fight was finished on an empty battlefield. It resembles postfeminist tropes: the fight to gain equality has finished and women have succeeded. We see her entire body in shot. She is alone but there is also motion because of the way her hair is slowing in the wind behind her. It is quite apocalyptic, pensive, and mystical, reminds thoughtfulness or regret. It shows respect for people that might have died, as when a soldier lowers a weapon so as to not be threatening. She is portrayed in long shot.

Iconography

Her pose in poster is similar to *Wolverine*'s and *Gladiator*'s posters, holding a blade and shield, resting or showing respect for those that are lost. The blue orange background is present like in previous posters.

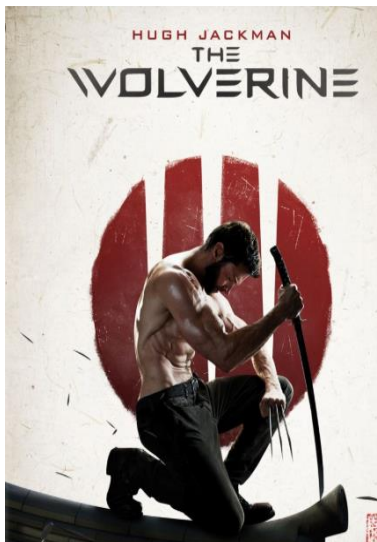


Figure 22. The Wolverine Poster 2

Source:
<https://www.thecinemashow.it/4332/james-mangold/the-wolverine/#prettyPhoto>



Figure 23. The Wolverine Poster 3

Source:
http://www.impawards.com/2013/wolverine_ver2.html

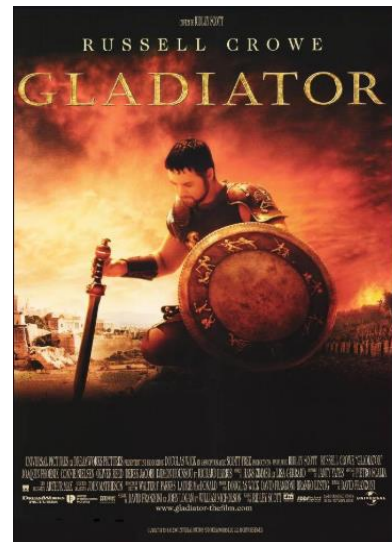


Figure 24. Gladiator Poster

Source:
http://www.impawards.com/2000/gladiator_ver3.html

4.1.6 Poster 6

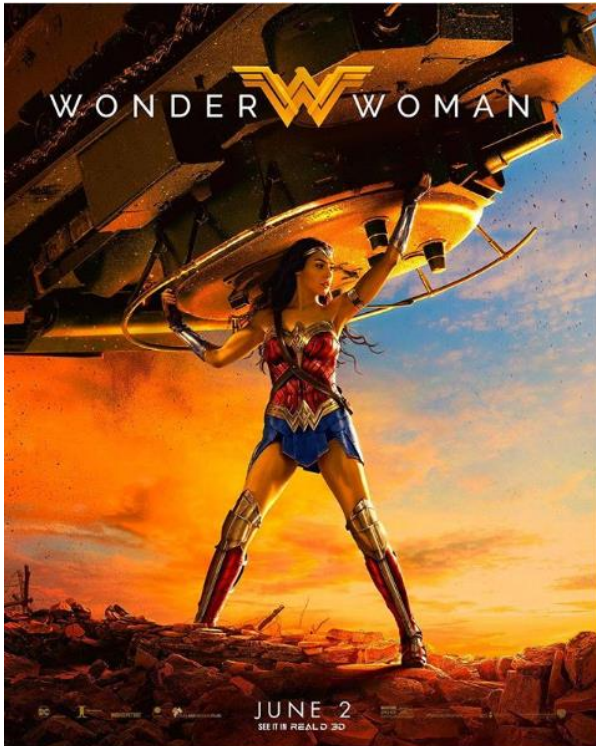


Figure 25. Wonder Woman Theatrical Poster 6
Source: (WonderWomanFilm 2017)

First Layer

She is holding a tank on her head and ready to throw it. She does not have any difficulties in keeping it aloft, her legs and arms are solid. She is wearing her war armor with red metal and a blue skirt. She is standing on the ruins of a battlefield in front of a blue and orange background.

Second Layer

The tank is something that people ought to be scared of. It is a ubiquitous war machine. It is framed in the long shot which indicates that the audience should respect her and the angle at high vertical eye level means she is the one who is holding the power over audience. The

title has been put in a different position which also draws attention to the tank.

She is burdened with something much bigger than her that she carries with ease. The light is coming from various different sources which makes it appear that it is actually coming from her – alluding to her goddess status again. It looks post-apocalyptic, indicating her status as a survivor. From a postfeminist perspective, it looks like the iconic female supporting all of us in an environment where a masculine-dominator society is finished.

Iconography

There are repetitive patterns with the previous posters. The same action movie background color is used and she is wearing the same costume with other posters. Moreover, this poster resembles the iconic painting of Delacroix, *Liberty Leading the People*, 1830. In the poster, the figurative woman is encouraging the ‘men’ behind her to fight for freedom, standing on ruins and corpses. Wonder Woman is wearing full gear instead of a torn dress.



Figure 26. *Liberty Leading the People*

Source: https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/La_Libert%C3%A9_guidant_le_peuple

4.2 *Captain Marvel* (2019)

4.2.1 Poster 1



Figure 27. *Captain Marvel* Theatrical Poster 1

Source: (CaptainMarvelOfficial 2018)

Further and Faster. The title treatment *Captain Marvel* is in red and eye-catching. There is an orange line that resembles an explosion and something moving fast. March 8 is the release date

First Layer

Carol Danvers is standing alone in a power pose in front of a half-open door. She is wearing a costume that superheroes wear for a mission. It looks thick and reminiscent of armor. Her suit looks practical to wear with functional pockets and zips. It is not a traditional spandex costume. The lower arm of the costume is shining, and she clenches her hands.

There is a blue sky behind her which darkens into space. The focus is in the center; the periphery of Carol Danvers is darker. There is a cat on the bottom left, going out of the frame. This cat has significance within the film.

There are three comparative adjectives positioned at top middle on the top: Higher,

Second Layer

The cat is going off the poster into the dark; there must be something interesting for it (and us) to discover. An open door is an introduction, she is a new character and there are dark parts in the poster, suggesting there are many more things about this character which we are yet to find out, including unexpected, large-scale events (Verdesoto 2018). The release date is March 8, which is International Women's Day. It is a deliberate choice: it is the first female superhero movie of Marvel. The comparative adjectives signify that she is markedly more powerful than others; in this case, the others are other male superheroes. The fighter jets behind her mean that she is in fact in an aircraft hangar, a traditionally male place of warfare. She seems very powerful in the pose, and this is enhanced by the lighting around her body which places her at the center of the frame. Distance is used to signify respect for authorities of various kinds (Kress and Leeuwen 126). Therefore, the poster suggests that the audience should respect her.

Iconography

Generally, when an introduction is necessary, and when something new comes along, the door visual is used. However, this introductory portrayal was mostly used for male characters. Although *Captain Marvel* shows that she is new and different, there is familiarity for the audience due to the previous male lead posters.



Figure 28. *The Crow* Poster
Source:
http://www.impawards.com/1994/crow_ver2.html

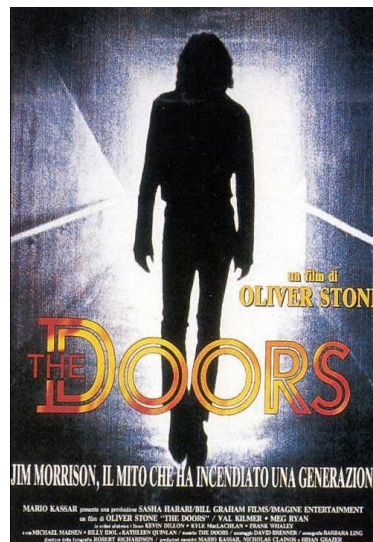


Figure 29. *The Doors* Poster
Source:
http://www.impawards.com/1991/doors_ver2.html



Figure 30. *Doctor Strange* Poster
Source:
http://www.impawards.com/2016/doctor_strange_ver3.html

4.2.2 Poster 2



Figure 31. Captain Marvel Poster 2
Source: (CaptainMarvelOfficial 2018)

First Layer

On the left, spaceships are descending, and on the right there are three planes ascending. Carol Danvers is in the middle and more significant than the other figures behind her. Her body is charged with energy, and her costume is the same in Poster 1. The title is larger and the release date is prominent, as well as the presence now of the names of other actors in the movie.

Second Layer

The release date is March 8, again recalling International Women's Day. She looks unharmed so this is one of her abilities but not her full capacity. It is even more than the figures behind her. Low angles generally give an impression of superiority, exaltation and triumph (Kress and Leeuwen 1996, 140). The

angle suggests to audiences that she is someone to admire. She is depicted in a medium shot, which indicated some distance from the audience (Kress and Leeuwen 1996, 125). She is not sexualized in this shot in any visible way. Even her bust in the armor is obscured by electricity. This is obviously in complete contrast with sexualization in comic books.

Iconography

The blue and red costume is iconic. She is wearing the same color costume as her male antecedents such as Spiderman, Superman and Captain America.



Figure 32. Spiderman Poster
Source:
http://www.impawards.com/2014/amazing_spiderman_two_ver8.html



Figure 33. Superman Poster
Source:
http://www.impawards.com/2006/superman_returns_ver2.html



Figure 34. Captain America: The First Avenger Poster
Source:
http://www.impawards.com/2006/superman_returns_ver2.html

4.2.3 Poster 3



Figure 35. *Captain Marvel Theatrical Poster 3*
Source: (*CaptainMarvelOfficial* 2019)

First Layer

There is the introduction of a team in this poster. The other group is wearing black suits and all men and women are wearing the same costume. There are different rune-like symbols on either side of the *Captain Marvel* title treatment, which perhaps are not from this world.

Carol Danvers is in the middle of both groups, and is depicted in a black suit, as well as the familiar blue and red. There are warplanes, and they are engaged in battle with the enemy as we look at an orange smoky explosion. There are structures on the right-hand side of the poster behind Jude Law. The structures look like they are from the brutalist movement architecture, which often helps to depict dystopia.

Second Layer

Captain Marvel is depicted two times in the same poster, implying a dual significance. Her hands are full of energy; her hands are her weapons. The man with a black suit and tie signifies a governmental official. The team above her wearing the same costumes implies their gender or race is not important in the context of the movie. The costumes themselves are quite masculine, and do not show any particularly feminine parts or traits to sexualize the wearer any more than a male counterpart. The only visible skin part of the women are only their faces. Blue on a black background is the go-to color scheme for action movies, usually with a vivid splash of orange in the form of fire (BBC 2019). If the picture is at eye level, then the point of view is one of the equality and there is no power difference involved (Kress and Leeuwen 1996, 140).

The main color in the frame is the red and gold worn by *Captain Marvel*. The light on her face and blonde hair is also quite startling and draws the attention. Lighting again comes from all

places to make her glow. She is depicted in medium-shot which indicates some distance from the audience (Kress and Leeuwen 125).

There is little movement in her pose, suggesting stability. Male figures are relegated to behind her, both in the primary and secondary frame. She is not using any weaponry. The power comes from her directly. Her expression is determined.

Iconography

The triangle pose is commonly used in film posters, but more in male lead movies, such as *Men in Black*, *Goodfellas* or *Spiderman*.



Figure 36. *Men in Black 3* Poster
Source:
http://www.impawards.com/2012/men_in_black_iii_ver3.html

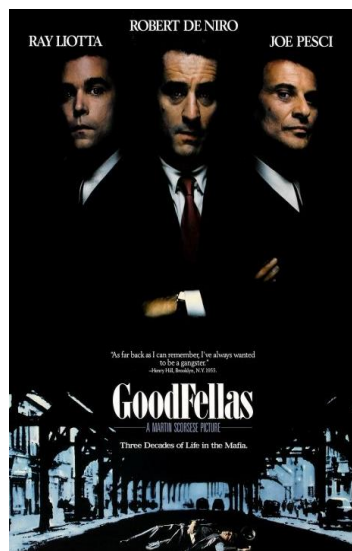


Figure 37. *Goodfellas* Poster
Source:
<http://www.impawards.com/1990/goodfellas.html>



Figure 38. *Spiderman* Poster
Source:
http://www.impawards.com/2019/spiderman_far_from_home_ver7.html

4.3 *Dark Phoenix* (2019)

4.3.1 Poster 1



Figure 39. *Dark Phoenix* Theatrical Poster 1
Source: (xmenmovies 2018)

First Layer

There is black, purple, red, orange, and white color domination in the background and white dots on them, which resembles the sky at night. There is a person's silhouette in black in a colorful background with long hair that might be recognized as a woman. She is wearing a coat. The orange and red-colored cloud elements resemble smoke and the flame. The purple and white-colored cloud elements resemble the colors of an explosion.

Second Layer

The woman is depicted in front of everything. Her pose is dignified and graceful, and the focus of the creative is her. There is a sky behind her, with

no ground visible. In fact, only the stars are visible emphasizing a massive, cosmic space behind her. The smoky rays of light stand in a diagonal shape, and the woman is in the center. The source of the lights and flames is not shown, but there are two options. In one, it is behind the woman, and she is the source of everything. In the second, the lights are coming from four different perspectives and targeted at the woman. In any case, we see a woman standing in front of everything with no visible harm coming to her, but rather that she has survived or has the power to endure. The diagonal angle of the lights looks like there is an 'X' behind her.

We know that this is a woman because we know the name and the story, but actually, by looking at the silhouette of *Dark Phoenix*, we could have said it could have been a man too since we only see a human being with long hair. The woman is wearing a coat that hides her hands and arms and the breasts, which suggest her existence is not related to her gender, but rather her power and capabilities.

The red smoke is reminiscent of flames, so there could be a fire or it could be hell. The white light suggests an explosion, lightning, or a holy light. In nature, flowers, fruits, and meat are

red as well as fire and blood. In Western contemporary culture, it is associated with danger and stopping a threat. Purple, meanwhile, suggests royalty and empire.

The letter 'X' in the *Dark Phoenix* is like a symbol shows she is a part of the X-Men team and they are in the same universe.

The phoenix is a mythological fire bird that is reborn from its own ashes, and exists in many different cultures. In Ancient Egypt, the fabulous bird is associated with the worship of the sun, and it associated with immortality: that symbolism has had a widespread appeal since late antiquity (Britannica 2020). It was also widely interpreted as an allegory of resurrection and life after death – ideas that also appealed to emergent Christianity (Britannica 2020).

The word 'dark' in this context means arising from or showing evil traits or desires. It connotes danger, fury, or something sinister. In this case *Dark Phoenix*, we are not sure whether she is going from bad to good or the inverse. By looking at the poster, viewers may be convinced that either of these two could happen. She is portrayed in close shot.

Iconography

The silhouette pose is a very recognizable pose from different male lead, major box office and arthouse hit movie posters. *Dark Phoenix* is depicted with a similar pattern in the poster.



Figure 40. *Gran Torino* Poster
Source:
http://www.impawards.com/2008/gran_torino_ver2.html



Figure 41. *Batman Begins* Poster
Source:
http://www.impawards.com/2005/batman_begins.html



Figure 42. *Logan* Poster
Source:
http://www.impawards.com/2017/logan_ver3.html

4.3.2 Poster 2



Figure 43. *Dark Phoenix Theatrical Poster 2*
Source: (xmenmovies 2019)

First Layer

The woman, Jean Grey, is in the middle of the shot, and she is divided in two. One side is in front of the blue shade, and the other is red/orange. She is wearing a two-piece suit in the left side where another character on the left, Mystique, is also wearing the same suit, which shows they are in the same team. On the right side of Jean Grey, we see two new characters on the bottom and two old characters on the top. The left side of the creative is dominantly blue, and there are white radiances all around. On the right, there are cracks in red and ashes.

Second Layer

We see two different characters in the same body. Jean Grey is at the center, and in front of everybody. In one part, she is cracking and

burning, although she is in a solid pose. Her feet are not visible, which implies she is flying: she is the phoenix, the mythological bird. She may be trying to stop everybody or trying to gather the characters behind her because her position shows that she is capable of doing both.

The clothes she is wearing are unisex. Both female and male characters in the background are with short hair and also with unisex costumes, and just a small part of their skin is visible. The poster does not seem to emphasize gender either through the clothing or the poses. It is framed in a long shot, with a high level angle.

Iconography

The iconography is inherently religious, with arms outstretched in the Christ pose. A key theme in Christianity is duality, such as heaven and hell, light and dark. Cracks on the right, like volcanic magma, reminds us of hell. Blue angelic light on the left reminds us of heaven.



Figure 44. Jesus Christ Sacred Heart Painting
Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sacred_Heart



Figure 45. Jesus Christ Statue, Tibidabo
Source: <https://www.dreamstime.com/royalty-free-stock-photos-tibidabo-jesus-christ-image6288968>



Figure 46. Johns Hopkins Hospital, Jesus Christ Statue
Source: <https://www.pbase.com/image/149415352>



Figure 47. Dark Phoenix Theatrical Poster 3
Source: (xmenmovies 2019)

4.3.3 Poster 3

First Layer

There is a diagonal form, and Dark Phoenix is on the left in front of a red flame. On the right side of the poster, there are other characters in blue hue because of the lighting. There is an action on the poster. Jean Grey's hand is in front, and she is doing something with her hand. The logos, release date and the title treatment forms are the same with the other posters. There is a new tagline on the top, 'The Phoenix Will Rise'.

Second Layer

She is above the others with all other characters beneath her. Her hand looks like the talons of a bird trying to reach for something, else to control or stop.

The hand, according to Aristotle, “is the tool of tools” and is often associated with strength, power and protection (Heavilin 2009). However, here her hand is on the ‘evil’ side of the split, which suggests that her action will be negative or destructive. The implication is that she could be dangerous.

The tagline contains meaning. As mentioned previously, the mythical phoenix is genderless and immortal, and is the name used by the producer of the poster for Jean Grey. The producer chooses a mythical name to exaggerate her existence and her powers. The word ‘rise’ implies her ascendance, and Jean Grey is thus implied to be above all mutants present on the poster as well. It is framed in close shot, and the angle is high level.

Iconography

The most iconic thing in the poster is her hand. It resembles Darth Vader’s hand while he is using his power, generally for destruction.



Figure 48. Darth Vader Toy
Source: <https://www.darksidetoy.com/de/shop-by-theme/star-wars/star-wars-rotj3A-darth-vader-deluxe-13A6-scale-figure-by-sideshow-detail.html>



Figure 49. Darth Vader Comic Book Cover
Source: <https://www.previewsworld.com/Article/238940-Get-a-Sneak-Peek-at-Star-Wars-Darth-Vader-1>

4.4 *Birds Of Prey: And the Fantabulous Emancipation of One Harley Quinn* (2020)

4.1 Poster 1



Figure 50. *Birds Of Prey* Theatrical Poster 1
Source: (*BirdsOfPrey* 2019)

First Layer

We notice the tagline ‘Mind over Mayhem’ in a tattoo form on her neck, and there are shadows of some objects on the title. There are flying characters, depicted in poses ready-to-fight. Harley Quinn and one known as Huntress have weapons in their hands. She is wearing pink and yellow clothes, and is wearing red lipstick.

Second Layer

The tagline ‘Mind over Mayhem’ is a play on words, resembling the popular idiom ‘Mind over Matter’. The word mayhem has the element of shock. It implies that you find a solution to a problem by thinking on it, but by

changing the noun, they are drawing the attention to the mayhem, which in this context is shocking and destructive. The flying characters are the titular birds of prey in the film.

The necklace she wears resembles jewelry of punk rock culture. According to punk artist Pat Thetic, “punk rock is a statement against the status quo. Punk rock is about fighting against the status quo and trying to find other ways of seeing the world that are more productive and less destructive to people” (Constantinou, Richmond and Watson 2008, 197). The tagline ‘Mind over Mayhem’ is in tattoo form, in pink, and it resembles a choker. Tattoos are popular and part of the popular culture but they were taboos and part of subculture for a very long time (Perraudin 2018). The color pink is associated with female gender, and the tagline implies this ‘mayhem’ will be in the hands of women. The rainbow colors in the background bring the LGBTQ+ flag to mind. The font of the title treatment is specialized for this title. There are shadows of potential weapons behind the title treatment: a baseball bat, hammer, and knuckleduster. There are women with their hands on guns, and while men are depicted above women, it looks like the poster stands against the men.

The flying characters are like cartoon birds when someone gets hit over the head. She is 'cuckoo' crazy – a common insult towards a woman set to disregard her anger or sadness and emphasize male superiority (O'Malley 2014).

She is pouting in an explicit red lipstick, but her sexuality is removed from the poster aside from this pose. Wide eyes could mean dazed and insane, or innocent and sexual. A close shot is applied at the eye level angle.

Iconography

The main visual motif is of the flying birds overhead. It is used very often in cartoons or comic books to signify confusion, drunkenness, or craziness.



Figure 51. Birds Over Head Vector Photo

Source: <https://www.dreamstime.com/drunken-man-birds-pop-art-vector-fly-over-head-retro-illustration-bad-feeling-metaphor-comic-book-style-imitation-image104746629>

4.2 Poster 2

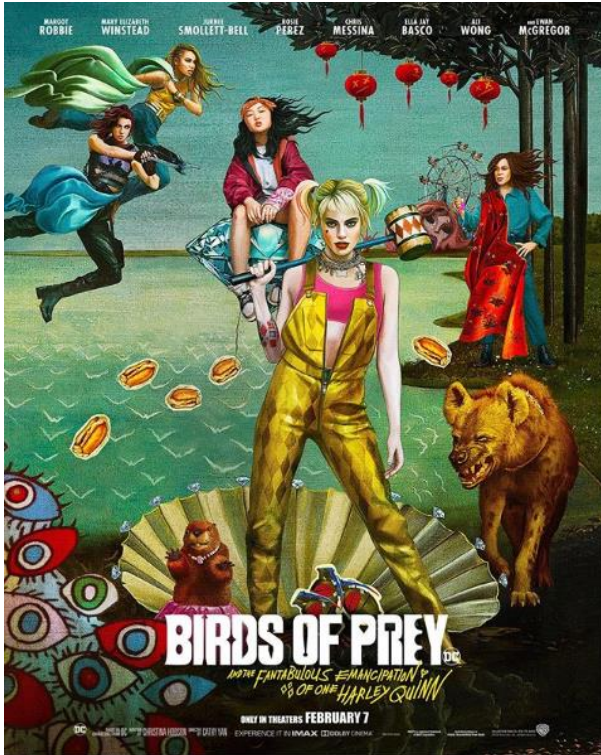


Figure 52. *Birds of Prey Theatrical Poster 2*
Source: (*BirdsOfPrey* 2019)

First Layer

There are the actors' names on the top of the poster, greater in number than the characters in the poster. The costume of Harley Quinn is a yellow jumpsuit with harlequin pattern with a pink top, her midriff is exposed and she holds hammer. She looks fearless and threatening, as well as the other female characters behind. Another character, Black Canary, is ready to kick, and the Huntress seems ready to loose her arrow, and Renee Montoya is clenching her fist. The background is very crowded, and it looks like a painting. There are three bombs under her, and painted eyes on the left.

Second Layer

The missing character depictions, even though they have names on the poster, are the males. The horror tunnel in the broken amusement park is in the shape of a woman screaming. It resembles a woman who died in pain, and the other women are there to take revenge.

Diamonds are the symbol of marriage and of the traditionally male-instigated proposal. Harley Quinn is standing still and showing her midriff, which is a discourse of feminine empowerment (Gill 2009).

There is the suggestion of the idiom “diamonds are a girl’s best friend,” and there are these jewels across the whole picture. It implies ownership of diamonds rather than being about their gifting by a man. In the storyline the diamond itself is important.

The laughing hyena suggests ferocity but also is a negative emblem of hysteria as well, which together suggest uncontrolled, psychopathic laughter. The fairground in the background is an emblem of insanity in popular culture. The random symbols also suggest her madness.

Iconography

The poster looks like the iconic painting, *The Birth of Venus*, 1486, by Botticelli. Venus is the goddess of love and beauty. She is portrayed as nude, looking perfect and pure like a pearl (Uffizi 2020).

The simplicity of Botticelli's painting is part of its appeal. Art historians may agree that there are few 'hidden meanings' yet with such a familiar iconographic piece, the film poster is filled with them, inviting the viewer in.

Harley Quinn is holding a hammer and showing her midriff instead of all her body. This allegorizes the portrayal of women – and their places in society – have changed from innocence, beauty, and seduction, to dominance, ownership, and the potential to aggression.



Figure 53. *Birth of Venus*, 1486, by Botticelli
Source: <https://www.uffizi.it/en/artworks/birth-of-venus>

Chapter 5: Discussion and Reflections

This section will discuss the findings in the previous section and suggest recommendations for future studies on this topic. First, I will review the questions and hypothesis. Before advancing further, the last layer of meaning, the ‘myth’ will be revealed and briefly discussed, and in the second part, I will talk about the conclusion and future research which could be initiated. As suggested in the introduction, the theoretical framework outlined in this paper can be viewed as a springboard for other investigations.

5.1 How are female superheroes portrayed in paratexts?

- In eight of the posters, women are portrayed at eye level. In five of them, above eye level and in one, below eye level. As mentioned before, according to Kress and van Leeuwen, angle is related to power relations and the majority of woman depiction is in the eye level with the audience, which signifies equality with the audience. In other words, in 58% of the posters, women are portrayed as equal to everyone.
- In six of the posters, women framed in close shots, five of them long shots, and three of them medium shots. In other words, women are framed in 43% of the posters close shots where the audience engages her emotions on the poster and in 36% they are framed in a long shot – demanding respect from their audience.
- In nine of the posters, women are depicted alone in the center, and in five of them with their teammates. In other words, in 65% of the posters, women portrayed individually and in the 35% they depicted with their teammates.
- In twelve of the posters, there is the use of inherently male-led, blockbuster action movie genre colors in the poster. In other words, in 86% of the posters, women are portrayed in an equal environment with their male antecedents.
- In eight of the posters, women are depicted in a pose showing they are ready-to-fight, in three of them in fight, in two of them at rest, and in one, kissing. In other words, in 58% of the posters, women are depicted not in fight but ready to wage war.
- In seven of the posters, there are additional taglines which concern the film and the character. In other words, in 50% of the posters there are additional positive/empowering verbal messages.

- In nine of the posters, women are depicted in armor-like costumes, in four of them in more casual costumes (*Dark Phoenix*'s second poster is excluded). In other words, 65% of the posters, women are depicted in warrior costumes.

- In twelve of the posters, the actors are depicted with facial expression and skin color visible. In other words, in the 86% of the posters, there are depictions of white women.

When we look at the iconographical patterns, we see various realizations in the posters. Mainly, the objects the women use or hold such as the sword, shield, rope, or hammer consubstantiate with the male world. Along with these objects, poses of the women resemble either feminist icons such as the 'We Can Do It' poster, ironically mimicking paintings such as 'The Birth of the Venus', or resembling very popular male lead film posters. There are very significant poses which are the evidences of very well-known figures, both religious figures from the history, and mysterious male figures from the films.

To sum up, in the posters, there is a depiction of white, standing alone, individual women, who are young, hair blowing, empowered with an intimidating/vengeful look on their face, in a familiar environment where dominantly male lead action movies shot with the objects that dominantly males use.

5.2 Is there any relation between the way thes are depicted and postfeminism?

It is observed that there are similarities with topics outlined in the theoretical framework concerning the portrayal of female lead superhero film posters.

In the posters, we see the depiction of women pushing gender norms – as well they should – and these women are not looking after kids or doing housework (Becker-Herby 2016, 19). Their femininity as Rosalind Gill describes it looks like their own bodily property (Gill 2007, 149). In the posters, there is not a highlight of a sexy or sexualized body, but there is the emphasis on their body as their source of power. As previously mentioned, posters are intertextual texts, so it is impossible to separate the actors from the movies in which they star. It is therefore necessary to comment that they all have 'supermodel' bodies; notably, Gal Gadot, the actress playing *Wonder Woman* was picked Miss Universe in 2004.

There is not a distinct 'male gaze' in the posters, nor excessive make up or unrealistic sexual poses. The women depicted are 'authentic,' to an extent. These women are not featured as in

traditional advertisements related to motherhood, for example, and the scenarios in the posters are markedly not the usual depictions of women in posters. These posters though, as both promotional tools and communication mediums, are samples of femvertising, since they fulfill the majority of the femvertising pillars previously discussed in my theoretical framework (Becker-Herby 2016, 19).

The majority of the women are depicted in close shots where the emotion on their face is more vivid and for the viewer to engage. Considering the vengeful, determined look their face we could say this is also related to postfeminism. According to Rosalind Gill, the vengeful woman set up also became another standard character in advertising (2008, 46).

Moreover, all the women look empowered: this is essentially the prerequisite of postfeminism. However, they are all white actresses, each having a certain size and bodily shape, and they look 'self-surveilled and disciplined.' They are emblematic of the empowered woman, whose confidence and adventurousness has been sexualized (Gill 2012, 738).

It should be noted that Harley Quinn's portrayal is different from the others. She carries certain characteristics of the objectified woman with her pouting red lipstick pose, and she appears 'crazy,' linking to the irrational feminine stereotype. However, she expresses it using irony and knowingness. This is another important characteristic of postfeminism that I mention in the framework. She mimics the paintings which is related with beauty and purity of the feminine, yet inverts it as she wields her hammer weapon.

The concept of 'superhero' is also worth exploring. These are very powerful individuals that can achieve many things that public institutions cannot. This in and of itself is also reminiscent of neoliberal values, simultaneously linking it with postfeminist individualist thought.

5.3 The Myth

Dominant ideologies can represent themselves using popular culture. As is mentioned in the methodology section, Barthes discusses the creation of the myth and describes it as adding new signifiers to the sign and creating a new meaning. This new meaning is the myth, and serves the dominant ideology, power or status quo. By looking at the posters, we see a certain type of female depiction or 'sign' which is put in another context. In other words, we see a dominant ideology behind the depiction of the posters through popular culture: postfeminism which is criticized by being enmeshed in neoliberalism as mentioned in the theoretical framework.

In addition, in the comic books, Captain Marvel's story was very different. To begin with, Captain Marvel was a male and Carol Danvers was actually Ms. Marvel, but this changed as previously mentioned in the methodology. In the comic books, similar to other female superheroes;

“Marvel superheroines suffer from stigmatized personal and social problems such as domestic violence (The Wasp), mental illness (Aurora and Scarlet Witch), experiencing a miscarriage (Invisible Woman), and even rape (Mockingbird), and unfortunately, Carol Danvers suffered a combination of the worst of these treatments” (Stevens 2020, 6).

However, the way she is depicted does not reflect the way they are depicted in comic books. These original comic book characters now have a new meaning. As mentioned above, women were objectified in the comic books and depicted from the ‘male gaze’. After many years, these comic book female superheroes have gained a new identity.

If we live in a postfeminist era, its ideology started to manifest itself through popular culture products which cherish youthfulness and empowerment, taking a stand against patriarchy in the society. As stated by Gill, postfeminism is deeply enmeshed with neoliberalism (Gill 2016, 4), and it appears that the basic objective of feminism has achieved its goal: both women and men are equal and this is something to celebrate through cultural media products.

The individual, empowered, strong woman discourse coded in the posters is something to consume now more than an ideology. Popular culture has taken postfeminist ideology and these female superheroes, and turned them into, in Barthes term, the ‘myth’ from which we can now deconstruct the meaning.

5.4 Conclusion

The aim of this study was investigate the accuracy of the main hypothesis that the depiction of today's female superheroes in their primary paratext is a reflection of postfeminism and femvertising. I sought to answer two questions;

RQ1: How are female superheroes portrayed in paratexts?

RQ2: Is there any relation between the way they are depicted and postfeminism?

After conducting semiotic and iconographic analysis of fourteen posters, I hope to have shown that the majority of these posters portray a female depiction which carries ‘postfeminist’ values and characteristics of femvertising.

In this work, semiotics and iconography were applied to multimodal discourses, namely posters, on the most recent female lead superhero movies with the lens of postfeminist critique and femvertising. Along with many scholars, especially Rosalind Gill's postfeminism critiques, observations and descriptions were used along with Becker-Herby's femvertising pillars. The most common realization of the pillars in the posters, which are the primary promotional tool of the films, is 'individualism, choice and empowerment.'

We may learn from popular culture, whose discourses are instantly transmissible and widely circulated through mediums such as Instagram. However, what we may learn about feminism in this 'postfeminist era' through popular culture may be misleading. Gill notes that postfeminism is deeply enmeshed with neoliberalism (Gill 2016, 4), and the appearance that feminism has achieved its central goal (absolute equality) through cultural media products is clearly premature. In advertisements and in other promotional tools, companies portray an image where women have a self-disciplined figure and an empowered look and thus magically equality between the sexes has been achieved. Because of this portrayal, there is the frustrating suggestion that any inequality is because of the woman's lack of confidence – it was her fault. Yet they do not discuss the background, or that women are being held back by patriarchal capitalism and institutionalized sexism (Gill 2017, 618).

On that note, the intention of the research is also to act as a platform for further investigation. As a woman born and raised in Istanbul, I experience postfeminist tropes in a very different manner from those who are from both more religious and less religious background, or people who live in metropolis or rural areas, in different countries, and in a different way from men. Therefore, different upbringings, location and gender based investigations would also bring another perspective to this topic to research.

Also, perhaps, another avenue of research would be to gain insight from the consumers of the posters themselves. As discussed, these primary paratexts are not restricted in their audience, and thus have very broad demographic appeal. It would be very interesting to learn more from those who choose to consume the main text, and those who don't, and what their interpretations of the posters are. For example, according to research among 5-9 year old boys and girls, it turned out that 18% of the girls look up on female sci-fi/superhero characters, versus 36% of the boys who look up on the male sci-fi/superhero characters (WMC, BBC America 2018). What do young people think about these posters; how are they affected? Do these portrayals give them confidence or do they find them intimidating?

The fourteen posters analyzed have been viewed by millions of people by now, at the bus stop, in magazines, on screen, all around the world, by many different age groups. The use of an ideology or a social concept in media products, and the meaning which is conveyed or hidden in these products is important to consider both academically, and indeed when we view them outside of the scholarly sphere.

Appendix

Wonder Woman 1

Categories			Denotation	Connotation
Verbal			Power, Grace, Wisdom, Wonder, Summer 2017, Company Logos.	Character description and film description, release date
Visual	Social codes /signifiers	Costume	Red and yellow metal bustier, a blue skirt	Armor
		Physical traits (skin color, hair, complexion...)	white skin, black long hair	Postfeminist look
		Pose	Chest out pose from the profile. One hand is clenching fist, the other hand holding a blade, hair blowing	Ready for the fight or won the fight
		Objects	Lasso rope, a sharp blade, metal arm cuffs and metal boots.	War weapons
	Representational codes / signifiers	Background	Dusty background without any objects	Fight
		Colors	Orange and Blue dominant colors	Blockbuster action movies
		Angle	High Level Vertical	Equality
		Framing	Medium Shot	Distance from the audience

Wonder Woman 2

Categories			Denotation	Connotation
Verbal			Wonder, Summer 2017, Company Logos.	Character description, message to audience
Visual	Social codes /signifiers	Costume	Red and yellow metal bustier, a sword, a shield, a metal arm cuffs	Armor
		Physical traits (skin color, hair, complexion...)	White skin, black long hair	Postfeminist Look
		Pose	Angry look towards the audience, the sword on the air	Ready to fight or won the fight
		Objects	A sword, a tiara, metal arm cuffs	War weapons, enlightenment, highness
	Representational codes / signifiers	Background	Foggy Background	A chaos, disorder
		Colors	Orange and Blue dominant colors	Blockbuster action movie
		Angle	Eye Level	Equality
		Framing	Close Shot	Emotion

Wonder Woman 3

Categories			Denotation	Connotation
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BEYOND THE MODERN FILM CRITIC

Verbal			Power, Summer 2017, Company Logos,	Character description, message to audience
Visual	Social codes /signifiers	Costume	Red and yellow metal bustier, metal arm cuffs, metal pediment	Armor
		Physical traits (skin color, hair, complexion...)	White skin, black long hair	Postfeminist Look
		Pose	Arms cross, angry eyes, close shot,	Stop sign, danger sign. Ready to fight
		Objects	Arm cuffs, Tiara	Defense, highness
	Representational codes / signifiers	Background	Dusty black and orange background without any objects	Chaos, darkness
		Colors	Orange and Blue dominant colors	Blockbuster action movie
		Angle	Eye Level	Equality
		Framing	Close shot	Emotion, involvement

Wonder Woman 4

Categories			Denotation	Connotation
Verbal			Courage, Summer 2017, Company Logos.	Character description, message to audience, release date

Visual	Social codes /signifiers	Costume	Red and yellow metal bustier, metal arm cuffs, metal tiara, and a shield	Armor
		Physical traits (skin color, hair, complexion...)	White skin, black long hair	Postfeminist Look
		Pose	Running pose, determined look.	Courage, In fight
		Objects	metal arm cuffs, metal tiara, and a shield	War weapons, highness
	Representational codes / signifiers	Background	Dusty blue and orange background with an explosion behind.	Fight, warzone
		Colors	Orange and Blue dominant colors	Blockbuster action movie
		Angle	Eye level	Equality
		Framing	Close shot	Emotion

Wonder Woman 5

Categories			Denotation	Connotation
Verbal			Wonder, June 2, Wonder Woman, Company Logos	Character description, message to audience
Visual	Social codes /signifiers	Costume	Red and yellow metal bustier, metal arm cuffs, metal pediment, a shield, metal boots, a sword	Armor

		Physical traits (skin color, hair, complexion...)	White skin, black long hair	Postfeminist Look
		Pose	Knee down pose	Resting, war is over or respect for the death
		Objects	metal arm cuffs, metal pediment, a shield, metal boots, a sword, tiara	War weapons, Highness
	Representational codes / signifiers	Background	Immense water, sky, sunset	Aftermath
		Colors	Orange and Blue dominant colors	Blockbuster action movie colors
		Angle	Eye level	Equality
		Framing	Long shot	Respect

Wonder Woman 6

Categories			Denotation	Connotation
Verbal			June 2, Wonder Woman, Company Logos	Character description, message to audience
Visual	Social codes /signifiers	Costume	Red and yellow metal bustier, blue mini skirt, metal arm cuffs, metal pediment, metal boots,	armor
		Physical traits (skin color, hair, complexion...)	White skin, black long hair	Postfeminist look.

		Pose	A standing pose, holding a tank on her head without difficulty	Power, In fight
		Objects	metal arm cuffs, metal pediment, metal boots, a tank	War weapons
	Representational codes / signifiers	Background	Ruins on the ground, smokes, ashes and sky	War
		Colors	Orange and Blue dominant colors	Blockbuster action movie colors
		Angle	High Level	Respect
		Framing	Long shot	Respect

Captain Marvel 1

Categories			Denotation	Connotation
Verbal			Captain Marvel, Marvel logo, film companies logos, March 8, Higher, Further, Faster	Description of the character, film title, release date
Visual	Social codes /signifiers	Costume	A very thick blue and red bodysuit with shiny lower arms	Armor
		Physical traits (skin color, hair, complexion...)	White skin, blond hair	Postfeminist Look
		Pose	A chest out, standing strong legs pose	Ready to Fight

		Objects	Door	Introduction
	Representational codes / signifiers	Background	A very big, heavy, open door, with a logo on the doors. There is a blue sky going dark on the top, and parking planes.	Hangar, where war pilots are.
		Colors	Dominant colors are blue, yellow and orange	Blockbuster action movie
		Angle	Low vertical	No hegemonic power
		Framing	Long shot	Respect

Captain Marvel 2

Categories			Denotation	Connotation
Verbal			Brie Larson, Samuel L. Jackson, Ben Mendelson, Djimon Hounsou, Lee Pace, Lashana Lynch, Gemma Chan, with Annette Bening, with Clark Gregg, and Jude Law, Copyright owners, Captain Marvel, March 8	Actors, film title , release date
Visual	Social codes /signifiers	Costume	One piece, thick blue and red costume	Armory
		Physical traits (skin color, hair, complexion...)	White skin, blond hair	Postfeminist look

		Pose	Chest out pose, with the decisive look on the face	Ready to fight
		Objects	Planes	War
	Representational codes / signifiers	Background	Two different background, there is a planet behind her on the left with two space craft. On the right, there are three planes look earthly.	War
		Colors	Blue and red are the dominant colors	Superhero colors
		Angle	High Level Vertical	Power hegemony
		Framing	Middle Shot	Some distance

Captain Marvel 3

Categories			Denotation	Connotation
Verbal			Brie Larson, Samuel L. Jackson, Ben Mendelson, Djimon Hounsou, Lee Pace, Lashana Lynch, Gemma Chan, with Annette Bening, with Clark Gregg, and Jude Law, Company names, Captain Marvel, In Cinemas Soon, Symbols next to the Captain Marvel	Actors, name of title, release dates, copyright owners
Visual	Social codes /signifiers	Costume	Carol Danvers' costumes, blue and red armory and a black and green suit, a man with	Armor

			a suit and a man with a matching costume with the team above.	
		Physical traits (skin color, hair, complexion...)	White skin, blond hair	Postfeminist Look
		Pose	Carol Danvers is in the middle with the same pose in Poster 2. Looking at directly to audience. Other characters pose still	Ready to fight
		Objects	Planes	War
	Representational codes / signifiers	Background	An explosion, planes and a space ship, structures from another planet. Smokey environment around the black suit team	There is a fight
		Colors	Dominant colors are black orange and blue	Blockbuster action movie
		Angle	Eye Level vertical	Equality
		Framing	Middle Shot	Some distance

Dark Phoenix 1

Categories			Denotation	Connotation
Verbal			Dark Phoenix, June 7, Company Logos	Title of the film, the release date,
Visual		Costume	A coat	Unisex costume

	Social codes /signifiers	Physical traits (skin color, hair, complexion...)	Hair blowing	A mysterious character
		Pose	Head down pose from the profile	Mystery
		Objects	Not present	Not Present
	Representational codes / signifiers	Background	Smoke on a dark background with white dots	Space
		Colors	Red, Orange, White, Purple	Star Wars, Guardians of the Galaxy Posters
		Angle	Eye level	Equality
		Framing	Close shot	Emotion

Dark Phoenix 2

Categories			Denotation	Connotation
Verbal			Dark Phoenix, June 7, Company Logos	Film title, release date, copyright owners
Visual	Social codes /signifiers	Costume	Two different types of costumes, a two-piece squad costume, and a coat and jeans.	Two identities
		Physical traits (skin color, hair, complexion...)	White skin, golden/brown color of hair	Postfeminist Look

		Pose	Jean Grey is in the middle with open arms and hands, vertically divided.	Ready to Fight
		Objects	Hands	Tools, Weapons
	Representational codes / signifiers	Background	There is a colorful background with other characters on an X shape format	Characters in the movie
		Colors	Dominant colors are purple, Red, Blue	Star Wars Colors
		Angle	High Level Vertical	Power
		Framing	Long shot	Respect

Dark Phoenix 3

Categories			Denotation	Connotation
Verbal			Dark Phoenix, Company Logos, In theatres on June 7, The Phoenix Will Rise	Film title, release date, tagline
Visual	Social codes /signifiers	Costume	X-Men Squat costume, 2 pieces unisex clothes, jackets, jeans and shirts.	Coat
		Physical traits (skin color, hair, complexion...)	white skin, golden/brown hair color	Postfeminist woman look
		Pose	One hand up pose, determined look	In fight
		Objects	Hand	Weapon

	Representational codes / signifiers	Background	A sky at night, explosions and lighting	A fight.
		Colors	Orange and blue dominance	Blockbuster action movie
		Angle	High level vertical	Power
		Framing	Close shot	Emotion

Birds of Prey: And the Fantabulous Emancipation of One Harley Quinn 1

Categories			Denotation	Connotation
Verbal			Mind Over Mayhem, Birds of Prey and the Fantabulous Emancipation of One Harley Quinn, Only in theatres February 7	Actors, film title, release date, tagline
Visual	Social codes /signifiers	Costume	Pink shirt, gold shoulder strap, metal jewelry, necklace and earrings	Crazy look
		Physical traits (skin color, hair, complexion...)	White skin, blond, colorful hair	Crazy look
		Pose	Pouting face post	Kissing
		Objects	necklace	Punk culture
		Background	Plain, colorful background	Focus to character

	Representational codes / signifiers	Colors	Green, yellow, orange, red, purple, blue	LGBTQ colors
		Angle	Eye level Vertical	Equality
		Framing	Close Shot	Emotion

Birds of Prey: And the Fantabulous Emancipation of One Harley Quinn 2

Categories			Denotation	Connotation
Verbal			Margot Robbie, Mary Elizabeth Winstead, Jurnee Smollett-Bell, Rosie Perez, Chris Messina, Ella Jay Basco, Ali Wong, and Ewan McGregor, Birds of Prey and the Fantabulous Emancipation of One Harley Quinn, Only in Theatres February 7	Actors, film title, release date
Visual	Social codes /signifiers	Costume	Pink shirt, jumpsuit, heeled shoes, pants, jeans, shorts, shirts, sweatshirts	Crazy look
		Physical traits (skin color, hair, complexion...)	white skin, blond hair, midriff	Postfeminist Look

		Pose	Harley Quinn is in the front, standing with her hammer, her midriff is open, her eyes in the front, looking at the audience fearlessly, Black Canary and Huntress are in the air ready to attack, Cassandra Cain is sitting, The police is standing in the back, one hand is clenched	Ready to fight
		Objects	hammer	Weapon
	Representational codes / signifiers	Background	Diamonds, water, eyes, a broken amusement park, toasts, bombs, seashell,	Insanity
		Colors	Blue and Green dominant colors	Birth of Venus painting
		Angle	Eye level vertical	Equality
		Framing	Long shot	Respect

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