**Lesson 28: Cold War Virtue, Domesticity, and Femininity**

**Daddis**

**Intent:** Understand how comics’ representations of women reinforced Cold War gender hierarchies, while delineating what was “acceptable” female behavior.

**Scheme:**

1. Containing the Dangers of Independent Women
2. Nurses Reinforcing Sexism and Misogyny
3. The Feminist Critique of a Male-Dominated Industry

**WARNO:** How did heroes like Wonder Woman offer an alternative to Cold War domesticity?

***Review***

* to not show something is just as powerful as showing something
* if creators of superhero comic book storyworlds do as they do—to extrapolate, distill, then reconstruct from the building blocks that make up reality—then Latinos should be abundant
* the more present the will to style, the more likely the Latino comic book superhero will *make* new our perception, thought, and feeling about real Latinos
* whereas Anglo superheroes tend to defend the nation but are somehow apart from it, Latino superheroes tend to be linked to the community
* Latino superheroes in the mainstream have tended to be identified more with their bodies and emotions (usually raw and out of control) than minds
* the writers characterize The Whip as a vigilante who defends the rights of the exploited – the poor and naïve Mexicans of the fictional town Seguro
* the Latino as sociopath had a greater hold in the industry than do-gooders like The Whip
* multiethnic superheroes do not seek to defend the status quo but rather the conditions of freedom that allow citizens to decide whether to maintain or change the status quo
* with a few exceptions, urbanized Latinos are one way or another locked into vigilante profiles
* the urban Latino superhero performs superheroic deeds to fight urban crime – especially street-level drug dealing – but as outlawed figures trying to bring justice to the people
* vigilantes pose the problematic question: What is the social validity of vigilantism? Is it
* G. Willow Wilson: “Let’s scrap the word diversity entirely and replace it with authenticity and realism…This is not a new world. This is the World.”

***Gardner, Girls Who Sinned in Secret and Paid in Public***

92 “Pick-Up Boulevard,” where girls wait on benches for boys in cars to roll up and take them for a spin; Gail sees it as an exciting adventure, a “lottery of love!”

92 “Shortcut to Love” is a cautionary tale

92 at the end of the story the “Prince Charming” of Gail’s dreams rather churlishly refuses to acknowledge their relationship in public, considering her just an ordinary pick-up

93 how a girl meets a boy is just as important as who the boy is

* *How did these comics depict “real and genuine love”?*
* *What did these stories tell us about an economically prosperous post-war society that was experiencing rapid and uneven social and cultural change?*
* *Was a young woman’s sexuality “dangerous”? If so, why?*

93 Gail’s behavior in allowing herself to be “picked up” by Don indicates a general level of sexual promiscuousness

93 Gail does *not* participate in “an ordinary pick up,” but rather reserves her kisses for someone who would realize she was “a *woman* yearning for *love*”

93 themes: ambiguity surrounding Gail’s mature or immature status, uncertainty as to what maturity means, the explicit connection between maturity and sexual behavior

94 the stakes were high as girls maneuvered uneasily through this minefield of maturity, sex, and class

* *Why was the confessional format so popular in romance comics?*
* *How did they telegraph ideals of the normative feminine and masculine?*
* *Note that certain kinds of bodies and behaviors were rewarded, both in stories and ads.*
* *Why was class such an important part of these storylines?*

94 in a time when juvenile delinquent was a figure of national anxiety, the public display of immoral or indecent behavior was an offense punishable by law

94 but there were subtler, though equally damaging consequences to a girl’s wild behavior

94 in the absence of clearly defined boundaries, a girl’s actions and her family’s class status depended on the approval of others and conformity in the face of peer scrutiny

* *How does paying a social and personal price for acting “irresponsibly” serve to “contain” certain behaviors?*
* *Why was a girl’s independence and maturity deemed to be dangerous? Was this more than just fears of their sexuality?*

94 in romance comic stories of the early 1950s, the negotiation of a girl’s independence and maturity frequently took place in a sexual context, and nearly as frequently involved a question of class status

95 Gail got off relatively lightly; her humiliation is private, and her future status is not hopelessly blighted by public exposure of her sexually errant behavior

* *Why was the public taint of promiscuity such a severe punishment?*

95 romance comics often acknowledged the existence and the strength of adolescent female desire, portrayed with sympathy the frustration of girls’ romantic dilemmas, and addressed the role that class status anxiety played in girls’ fears surrounding mature sexual relationships

95 romance comics made up a full quarter of the comic book market

96 Joe Simon and Jack Kirby’s *Young Romance* was soon selling over a million copies per issue

96 the early 1950s: “teenagers of all classes … were able to function as group not only in market terms but self-referentially as well”

* *What do we make that the creators of romance comics were men?*

96 the stability of relationships was a desirable thing for teens among the anxieties of the Cold War and a nuclear-armed world but “adult reactions to the practice were overwhelmingly negative”

* *How can we place romance comics into their Cold War context? Why was domesticity so important to larger Cold War policies?*
* *In terms of perceived threats, how were anticommunist tactics linked to, even supportive of, the social crusade of “domestic containment”?*

97 the disjunction between the directives of the older generation and the actuality of teenage dating practices was especially hard on girls

97 Ann Landers’ “rules”: when discussing anything beyond necking, her rules for girls were punitive and aimed at frightening readers into compliance

97 it was a girl’s responsibility to avoid situations that would lead to horrible consequences

* *What do we make of this “responsibility”? Do ideas like this persist?*
* *Who, then, was defining “proper” behavior in these morality tales?*

98 comic books extended to their readers a sense of understanding

98 characters that ended up heartbroken were flawed, but were usually not inherently bad

100 “Thrill Crazy” – punitive story because the heroine ends up heartbroken *and* under arrest

100 her real transgression: wanting “thrills,” or as it is presented, a lifestyle that is not domestic

100 Johnnie’s fast-moving and rather predatory sexual advances

* *What were the implications for female independence when these stories suggested that women were incomplete without a man?*
* *Note that many of the romance comics urged restraint, self-denial, and accommodation on the part of the woman.*
* *Does masculinity not exist except in relation to femininity, and vice versa? Is gender comparative?*

100 the social function of romance comics emphasized middle class values and traditional gender roles as a “domestic containment policy” integral to the Cold War “home front”

100 this “containment” reassured an older generation that the disruptions of WWII and the expansion of popular culture would not cripple the country’s youth, and therefore its future

* *What did it mean when romance comics encouraged women to marry young and grow up quickly from school girl to devoted housewife?*
* *Did this suggest that men were not attracted to ambitious, independent women?*
* *Note that “his” happiness comes first and she will be become happier by accommodating his wishes.*

100 a backlash against “realism” in romance comics contributed to a storm of criticism among parents, newspapers, and legislators

101 before the introduction of the code, romance comics presented the pitfalls and problems that girls encountered along the way, often addressing the ways that girls’ physical arousal, fear of social disapproval, and the desire to appear “adult” in interactions with boys clashed in situations that could be awkward, frustrating, or frightening

***Hayton & Hayton, The Girls in White***

129 nursing pioneered first wave feminism in the nineteenth century, becoming the principle “acceptable” career for women outside the home

130 female-gendered nursing accepted a subordinate position relative to the male-gendered, scientific, rational medical profession, in exchange for limited autonomy

* *Why would deeming nursing an acceptable ‘female profession’ have found support in American society, especially for a society at war?*
* *Are definitions of “professionalization” gendered?*

130 four principal media images: the “ministering angel”; the “battle-axe”; the “doctor’s handmaiden”; the “naughty” or “sexy nurse”

130 depictions of nurses in the 1930s and 40s American comics tended to portray them as independent, adventurous, and, particularly, heroic women

131 by the beginning of the early Cold War era, the heroic nurse and the naughty or sexy nurse, were the two images of nursing predominating in comics

* *What do these four principal images tell us about how popular culture depicted women in the early Cold War era? Do they persist today?*

131 the nurse-war connection echoed the origins of the profession

131 in war contexts, nurses usually remained heroic

131 however, in romance comics nurses were frequently portrayed as romance-seeking husband hunters

132 the basic nurse image during this period is the young, pretty, white, feminine, heterosexual female

* *If wartime nurses were romance-seeking, did that put into question their patriotism?*

132 the Korean War afforded opportunities to explore difficulties faced by young lovers when one or both were taking part in the conflict

132 In “Army Nurse,” *Young Romance #78*, two nurses, while brave and self-sacrificing, have an on-going romantic interest in a doctor and a soldier, that persists despite the urgency of events

* *What does this tell about how the comics reinforced popular notions of a woman’s supposed inability to control her emotions?*

134 *Our Army at War #78* – “Battle Nurse” – set in WWII, the tale involves Jennie’s persistence in following her soldier boyfriend to Europe and then the Pacific by becoming an army nurse

135 Sgt. Rock in *Our Army at War*: in “A New Kind of War” a nurse refuses to abandon a wounded Sgt. Rock when the Allied forces have to retreat

135 Rock to have to ‘eat’ his earlier words when he had claimed that war and women don’t mix

136 there’s no doubt in early Cold War era comics that women were better suited to nursing than men

136 they are often pure and innocent women, whose natural nursing propensities manifest when emergency situations arise

* *What do we make of the “innate caregiver” notion?*

136 however, battle-axes often lurked in the background of nurse romance stories

136 usually career women whose sacrifice of love and marriage for the sake of nursing is indicated indirectly by others referring to them as “Miss”

137 while the young nurse represents temporary female independence and self-sufficiency, the battle-axe serves as a reminder of what she will become if she doesn’t use the opportunity to find a suitable male provider

138 the sexy nurse as a means of power reversal

138 the nurse is signaling her availability or vulnerability to the male patient, who can overturn the temporarily inferior position brought upon him due to illness or injury

* *Note that “real” men still retain their power over women, even while in need of care.*

138 Nellie’s naivete and innocent sexuality became a source of visual exploitation for the male characters

138 the male patient’s predatory behavior is not only given acceptance and reinforcement as a norm but is also held up as a sign of his good health

138 *First Love Illustrated #6* – “My Hospital Romance” – a doctor’s inappropriate remarks are tolerated by a young nurse

138 upon seeing her from behind, as she scrubs the floor he remarks, “Imagine *that* in a bathing suit!”

138 his language thus objectifies her, and he proceeds to pursue her aggressively

* *And yet these romance comics were intended for women. How, then, did they reinforce notions of sexism and misogyny?*

139 romance figures prominently in the stories featuring nurse protagonists

139 in many of these stories nursing in inferred as a path to matrimony

139 in order to achieve their romantic aims, some nurses are shown as manipulative and scheming

141 nursing ad at the back of *Harvey Comics Hits #58*: “As a graduate nurse you can have the most satisfying career of service open to women… Later, as a wife and mother, your education will prove invaluable.”

143 while kissing a patient when on duty is unethical, in the context of the romance story it becomes excusable

***Galvan and Golomb, Wimmens Comix***

* These women’s comics challenged misogyny as form by producing a range of liberated women’s bodies on the page
* The women’s underground comix scene focused on women’s sexuality, self-actualization, and the challenge of succeeding in an industry dominated by men
* Couching their political critiques in this visual, often humorously irreverent form won these comics few fans among the women’s movement
* The juxtaposition of text and image in these comics allows them to more viscerally realize and challenge the tenets of feminism through women’s own bodies
* These comics sought to revise rhetorics and forms, but, as outsider feminist theorists, they were also interested in exploring the pressures of the time in the space of the page