

### **Natalie Lyman: *Cinematic Superheroes and Ideals of Love (Wen)***

I am interested in conducting research on superheroes and romantic relationships, particularly how romantic relationships contribute to superheroes' larger gendered roles and identities. My project would build upon research I conducted this past semester while writing a research paper on gender representations in *Marvel's "The Avengers"* (2012) for Professor Jade Aguilar's Gender in Society class. This assignment granted me the opportunity to combine skills suited to my English major, specifically close reading and deconstructive interpretive strategies, with a sociological approach to gendered representations in the media.

In my LARC project, I plan to address the gendered representations of superheroes in recent film adaptations through the lens of their romantic relationships and love interests. My specific question is, *how does love influence a superhero's actions and sense of identity?* How do superhero stories currently idealize love? I will apply ideas from sources such as Stuller's *Ink-Stained Amazons and Cinematic Warriors*, Robinson's *Wonder Women: Feminisms and Superheroes*, and Galician's *Sex, Love, and Romance in the Mass Media* to conduct a close reading of recent superhero films and their characters' romantic, gendered relationships. These films include the ongoing *Marvel's Avengers* franchise, Christopher Nolan's *Dark Knight* trilogy, and the *X-Men* movies. Using deconstructive, feminist, and sociological theoretical approaches I have learned in *Literary Theory and Gender in Society*, I hope to clarify the many nuances concerning power dynamics and super-heroic relationships in film that I uncovered while writing my recent sociology paper. Also, I am enrolled in *Feminist Film Criticism* for Spring 2013, which should further prepare me for undertaking this work.

In working with Prof. Wen, I plan to include in my individual project a comparison of my findings (focused on Hollywood films and U.S. superhero culture) with hers on romance and love in East Asian media. I am not familiar with East Asian media and so am interested to learn how similar or different it may be compared to Hollywood films. Furthermore, as discussions in my Gender in Society class have revealed, there is an increasing concern over the influence of social ideals disseminated through U.S. media abroad. In conducting my research, I plan to use comparisons to East Asian media to understand how idealized love relationships in U.S. superhero films may parallel, contrast with, or influence love relationships in non-U.S. media.

This project will allow me to continue building my interpretive skills in close reading and theoretical approaches to media, as well as deepen my study of contemporary superhero stories. I plan to continue researching and analyzing superhero films over the next two years in preparation for writing my English senior thesis, in which I hope to build on my findings regarding gendered representations, romantic relationships, and power dynamics.



## References

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