Lois Lane: In Step with Second-wave Feminism

Joshua Roeder

Lois Lane has been described as “impetuous, reckless, irrepressible, impulsive and unpredictable.” She is “too common.” She is “a combination saint, sinner, imp, imbecile, smartypants, snob, Samaritan.” She is “snoopy, inquisitive, curious, a pest, and can’t keep a secret.” Lane has also been described as “being attractive, ingenious, a star reporter, loyal to SUPERMAN and a terrific booster of worthy charities.” At first glance, the main characteristic of Lane is her enigmatic qualities. However, taking a step back from the character reveals that the framework of women's history in which Lane was originally put into had begun to change.[1] Creators of the character, Joe Siegel and Joe Shuster, had Lane appearing “as a fixture in Superman’s life from 1938 on, even before Lex Luthor and Supergirl, she challenged, undermined, superseded, and sometimes, if necessary and convenient, aligned herself with the roles women were assigned in society.”[2] Since her inception, Lois Lane has had to navigate her way through multiple feminist waves, ideologies, and the perpetual reincarnation by various artists.[3] This is because characters like these are outlets for artists and writers to express their individual perspectives on life. In the case of Lane, she is an expression for what her creators thought a woman like her should be. This expression becomes sensational when the character takes the lead in her own comic book, *Superman’s Girl Friend, Lois Lane*.

Lois's comic book iteration, *Superman's Girl Friend, Lois Lane*, is important because the series both paralleled and reflected the second-wave of feminism. The publication spans from 1958 through 1974, a total of 137 issues.[4] Professor of American Studies and Women's and Gender Studies, Amy Erdman Farrell states that "scholars have paid little attention to the role of popular culture in forming a collective oppositional consciousness among women in the 1970s and 1980s."[5] Catching the tail end of the era of the "atomic family" and through the emergence of the second-wave feminism, *Lois Lane* provides a unique reflection of this period as the series shows the evolution of the character. By examining what feminism looked like during this period, what has been previously said about *Lois Lane*, and examining the comics themselves, the

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[1] Mort Weisinger (ed), "Letters to Lois," *Superman's Girl Friend, Lois Lane* #12 (Oct. 1958), National Comics Publications, Inc. [Superman DC National Comics], 22; Weisinger (ed), "Letters to Lois," #13 (Sept. 1959), 22; Weisinger (ed), "Letters to Lois," #16 (Apr. 1960), 12; Weisinger (ed), "Letters to Lois," #20 (Oct. 1960), 21.

[2] Nadine Farghaly, ed., *Examining Lois Lane: The Scoop on Superman's Sweetheart* (Maryland: Scarecrow Press, Inc, 2013), vii.

[3] Ibid., viii.

[4] For the remainder of this discussion the abbreviated title *Lois Lane* will be used.

[5] Amy Erdman Farrell, *Yours in Sisterhood: Ms. Magazine and the Promise of Popular Feminism* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 5.

character Lois Lane and the series will show to be aligned with what was occurring during the rise of feminism in the real world.

As mentioned, Lane began her series in the late 1950s. The culture of postwar America in the 1950s was that of domesticity and "the nuclear family," which emphasized the suburban white, middle class lifestyle as the norm. This lifestyle was comprised of more would-be fathers being able to achieve a college education that allowed them to receive an income that could support an entire family instead of having individual member's pool wages. This meant that it was no longer necessary for women to leave the house to get a supplemental income to add to the family's, but instead they could spend more time at home and focus on being a housewife. Stephanie Coontz states that the dominant imagery of the 1950s "nuclear family" was a product of popular culture. Family life during this period, was however, "as nuanced, troubled, and fragile as it is in contemporary life."[6] The 1950s saw women assigned roles that were seen as essential to the family structure and fundamental to the overall American society. This decade also witness the rise in nonconforming women who saw such roles as stifling.[7]

With the fluctuation of men leaving lower white-collar positions for World War II, American society saw a surge in the number of women entering the work force. Then consequently, the purge of women from the workforce in post WWII as the need for women to fill in vacant positions vanished as men returned. Women were pushed back to the role of child bearers and homemakers. Despite this push, the 1950s saw the rise of white-collar jobs and the number of women in those positions, even if upper management was closed off. Even by 1950, "women made up 20 percent of the total workforce and, of those women, 50 percent were married." In 1952 "two million more wives were working than at the peak of war production."[8] The number of women in the workforce in 1955 was higher than in any previous year. Decades that followed showed a steady increase in the number of women who choose to work rather than stay at home. Society demonstrated that when it was in need of labor, it could rely on women to do what was considered to be a male-only position. Women knew this was the time to insert themselves into what was previously conceived as male-dominated worlds. But, it was not just the workforce sphere they wanted into.

Young women along with early nonconformists, "pioneered the social movements of the 1960s--civil rights workers, campus activists, and youthful founders of the women's liberation movement" that will be seen later in the 1960s.[9] Feminist leaders were encouraged by the Civil Rights movement, through which many of them gained experience in organizing such events. Even though these women often played key roles in the Civil Rights movement, they were shut out of leadership roles for the most part. These women were shutout for the same reason they

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[6] Vibiana Bowman Cvetkovic, "Feminine Mystique: *Superman's Girl Friend, Lois lane* in the "Silver Age" of Comics," in Farghaly, 49.

[7] Farghaly, *Examining Lois Lane*, xv.

[8] Cvetkovic, "Feminine Mystique," 49.

[9] Wini Breines, "THE "OTHER" FIFTIES: Beats and Bad Girls," Joanne J. Meyerowitz, ed. *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 383.

were cut off from upper management positions in white-collar work environments. They were women. Rather than to be continually pushed to the fringes, these women split off from such movements to from their own.

In order to gain more equality in the work force, the group National Organization for Women (NOW) was founded in 1965. Betty Friedan gave a name and voice to discontented women in her 1963 book, *The Feminine Mystique*.[10] In it, Friedan "homogenized American women and simplified postwar ideology; she reinforced the stereotype that portrayed all postwar women as middle-class, domestic, and suburban, and she caricatured the popular ideology that she said had suppressed them."[11] These women formed "a new civil rights group... that could pressure the government to enact and enforce laws against sexual discrimination."[12] NOW had become the "women's rights" branch of the reemerging wave of feminism. While NOW was pressuring the government, the women's liberation movement was generating a huge amount of literature in local communities. "While these journals were produced largely for members of the movement, Gloria Steinem's Ms. Magazine, founded in 1971, expanded the audience to the general public at a national level. It publicized the problems ordinary women faced, published inspirational stories of successful women, and covered grassroots activist efforts across the country."[13]

As the women's liberation movement evolved through the decade, there was a splinter of radicalism. Betty Friedan's generation sought:

> not to dismantle the prevailing system but to open it up for women's participation on a public, political level. However, the more radical "women's liberation" movement was determined to completely overthrow the patriarchy that they believed was oppressing every facet of women's lives, including their private lives.

Radical feminists began gaining public recognition through their militant campaign for abortion law repeal, one of their many issues that resounded with their fundamental demand of genuine self-determination.[14] The role that radical feminism played in the overall period was subverting the traditional values and destabilizing what was considered the traditional family makeup. It was not just expectations that drove these women. "Women, including mothers, go to work not only out of sheer economic necessity... but because feminism has made it socially acceptable for women to want a life outside the home." The expansion of women's opportunities led to more

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[10] Sara M. Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Random House, 1979), 16.

[11] Meyerowitz, *Not June Cleaver*, 3.

[12] Evans, *Personal Politics*, 19.

[13] "THE 1960S-70S AMERICAN FEMINIST MOVEMENT: BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS FOR WOMEN," TAVAANA, accessed February 15, 2015, https://tavaana.org/en/content/1960s-70s-american-feminist-movement-breaking-down-barriers-women.

[14] Alice Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 198, vii.

interesting work and aspirations for the increased independence/mobility that came from earning even a modest wage.[15]

There was also an expansion of opportunities in the world of art as the number of feminist works began to rise towards the end of the 1960s. Women have always been the subject of works of art by male artists. The women in these art pieces have always been shown as the idealized feminine body. In the 1960s, sexualized "images of women circulated via mass media. Those in the form of pin ups were usually well known personalities, but like earlier depictions of women they were presented as sexual objects, their sole purpose to flaunt their sexuality for men."[16] Women artists such as Judy Chicago and Hannah Wilke defied the constructs that tradition imposed, producing a new way for the female subject to be shown in the world of art. When interpreted by women, "the female body became a powerful weapon against the social constructs of gender."[17] As these women artists began their work in the 1960s, the dawn of this second-wave feminism coincided with a different era's ending, the "Golden Age of Comics."

The Golden Age of Comics (1930s-1940s) was the time where comics expanded from comic strips and superhero tropes such as alter egos, origin stories, and recurring super villain antagonists were shaped. Female characters at this time were situated in three different archetypes: the career orientated woman (who was always seeking employment as a nurse, a secretary, or a school teacher, but rarely actually employed), the romantic role (the character was either the atypical "Good Girl" who get their heart broken or "Bad Girl" who breaks the boy's hearts), and the perky teenager role. It is during this time period where women also first appear as superheroes. Limited, however, to the style of "'femme fatale', who was a sexually aggressive woman."[18] The Silver Age (1956-1970s) began with the revival of some of the more famous Golden Age male superheroes, but also a new direction with publishers wanting to target a younger audience. Young girls were comic book consumers who represented a largely untapped market at the time of the Silver Age. Such aimed comic books include: Charlton's *Nurse Betsy Crane*, Marvel's *Millie the Model*, and Archie Comics' *Betty and Veronica*. There was even a batch of romance genre comics: DC's *Young Romance*, *Young Love*, and Charlton's *My Secret Life*. After being featured in DC's *Showcase* for two issues in 1957 as the main character, Lois Lane finally stared in her own comic book in 1958.[19]

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[15] Ibid., xi-xii.

[16] Jessica Holt, "The Changing Representations of Women: The Art of Hannah Wilke, Lynda Benglis, and Cindy Sherman," *Brooklyn College Undergraduate Research Journal*, Vol. 2 (2010), accessed March 15th, 2015, http://www.brooklyn.cuny.edu/pub/departments/bcurj/pdf/HoltJessicaART.pdf, 1.

[17] Ibid., 1-2.

[18] "Women in Comics: Article Covering the Role of Women in Comics Throughout the Ages," Comic Vine, last modified May 21, 2014, accessed March 13, 2015, http://www.comicvine.com/women-in-comics/4015-43357/.

[19] Cvetkovic, "Feminine Mystique," 41. It should also be mentioned that the spinoff before Lois Lane, *Superman's Pal, Jimmy Olsen* (1954), was a success. This probably helped convinced the viability of the new comic book.

An issue with *Lois Lane* is that at first glance, the series appears to be just another stereotypical female character in a role similar to the other romance comics. One can see why Lane could be passed over for more popular female characters at the time like Wonder Woman. One of the reasons why *Lois Lane* is important to scholarly attention is that the series requires an in-depth study to achieve any sort of understanding. Vibiana Bowman Cvetkovic is one of the first writers to analyze *Lois Lane*, she suggests that the reason Lois Lane obtained her own title was the result of America's reaction to the "Age of Nuclear Anxiety" and the changing economic/cultural realities. "While a close reading of the *Silver Age of Lois Lane* does not reveal a feminist or even a proto-feminist, it does reveal a strong, smart, independent woman--one who does not completely conform to the standard notions of femininity depicted in the popular culture of the time."[20] Cvetkovic describes Lane as "[f]eminine and professional. She dressed fashionably but not fixed. Her demeanor was approachable but proper and no-nonsense. She was well spoken and intelligent. She loved her job as a reporter and she was good at it."[21] Cvetkovic's observations shows that she remains unconvinced of Lois Lane's character to be a true "feminist," but rather a professional woman who embraces her feminine side.

An issue with Cvetkovic's analysis is that there is little discussion on specific issues of the *Lois Lane* series. Another author to analyze *Lois Lane* is Jennifer K. Stuller, who suggests that "while stirrings of feminism had already manifested in popular culture by the way of television, a feminist consciousness had yet to reach mainstream comics."[22] According to Stuller, the issues and concerns of the women's movement do not appear until the late 1960s, starting with #80, and in particular with issues #121 and #122. By this time, Lois Lane "has reflected societal attitudes toward women—particularly career women—for over 70 years. This makes her a unique marker of changing American ideas about gender, perhaps even more so than her contemporary, Wonder Woman."[23] Stuller presents the idea that it was not until "Splitsville for Lois and Superman!" (issue #80) that DC realized that Lois was becoming something more than Superman's girlfriend. However, Stuller suggests that it was in later issues, specifically, "Everything You Wanted to Know about Lois Lane * But Were Afraid to Ask!" and "77 Coffins!" (issues #121 and #122 in 1972) that Lois Lane finally embraced the feminist movement.

Stuller makes a compelling interpretation of the following two issues. The story for issue #121 has Lois returning to Metropolis several weeks after her sister's death. After being mugged, then consequently being rescued by a female bystander, Lane has an epiphany. She quits her job at the *Daily Planet* so that she can work freelance on important stories. She also tells Superman that they are finished, and moves into an apartment with three roommates (all female).[24] Stuller

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[20] Ibid., 42.

[21] Ibid., 45.

[22] Jennifer K. Stuller, "Feminism: Second-wave Feminism in the Pages of Lois Lane," in *Critical Approaches to Comics: Theories and Methods, ed. Randy Duncan and Matthew J. Smith* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 235.

[23] Stuller, "Feminism: Second-wave," 240.

[24] Dorothy Woolfolk and Ethan C. Mordden (ed), Cary Bates (w), Werner Roth (p), Vince Colletta and Murphy Anderson (i), "Everything You Wanted to Know about Lois Lane * But Were Afraid to

concludes that, for the representation of women in *Lois Lane*, the "dialogue is contrived and stereotyped, with talk about “woman power” and “chicks sticking together: and clichés that trivialize feminist politics." However, "[r]ather than focus on the affections of Superman, Lois is focused on her career and her friends—making her much more independent, and suggests the dynamic character she's capable of being."[25] Stuller's analysis is correct to a point, issues #121 and #122 definitely display Lane with a certain level of women's liberation value. This is a more definite conclusion compared to Cvetkovic's, placing Lane more on the side of feminism than just being feminine and professional.

However, contrary to what Stuller has said, issues before #80 of *Lois Lane* reveal information that shows just as much, if not more connections to the women's liberation movement. By examining the “Letters to Lois” column of these comic books, the importance of these earlier issues becomes clearer. What exactly is the “Letters to Lois” column? If a reader felt compelled enough, he or she could write a letter to the editor of the series and the letter might be published in the column with a response from the editor. The letters are usually written in the style of being critical of the work, praising it, or stating simple opinions/suggestions as to what should happen with the series. The readers' letters cover a wide variety of subjects such as spanking, hairstyles, fashion, and the Lois/Lana/Superman love triangle. Apart from these casual topics, there are numerous letters that are more concerned with Lane's political position, specifically her stance in regards with the then current women's liberation movement.

These letters show direct interaction between the consumers and the producers of this specific comic book. The responses by the editors reveal the kind of mentality and mindset that were a huge part in putting together the comic book that audiences, both the targeted youth and older readers, were taking in. For instance, in the late 1950s (still in the nuclear family era), a letter from Ethel Guiness appears in “The Girl Who Stole Superman's Heart!” (issue #7). In it, she says:

> You've given us stories in which we've seen Lois Lane as a waitress, a pretzel-bender, and actress, a WAC and a convict. Apparently, Lois Lane's line is anything and everything, so let's see her as a spy, a model, a big-game hunter, an ambassador, a daredevil, an heiress, and a queen.[26]

An interesting suggestion, one in which the author of the letter would like to see Lois Lane in more assertive roles than she normally appears. It is also similar to what women felt during the postwar era in regards with entering a previously male dominated work force. Just like these assertive roles, upper management was denied to women.

Ask!," Superman's Girl Friend, Lois Lane #121 (Apr. 1972), National Periodical Publications, Inc. [DC], 1-24.

[25] Stuller, "Feminism: Second-wave," 249.

[26] Mark Voger and Kathy Vogelsong, *Hero Gets Girl!: The Life and Art of Kurt Schaffenberger, Illustrator of Lois Lane and Captain Marvel* (Raleigh: TwoMorrows Pub, 2003), 49.

In response to this letter, the editor admits that “our versatile Lois can handle all the professions you suggest, but we think the career she prefers most is being a house-wife for SUPERMAN!”[27] A similar response was given to one letter writer when they asked if Lana Lang (Lois Lane’s best friend and rival for Superman’s love) would ever get her own comic book series. The editor responded by saying that the “only book Lana is interested in is a cookbook--so she can whip up tempting meals for SUPERMAN after she lands him for a husband.”[28] When asked why Lois Lane could not be trusted with Superman's secret identity, the editor says that "[e]verybody knows that no woman can keep a secret."[29] Patricia Newland inquired about why Lois Lane was so persistent in trying to figure out who Superman really was. The editor answered back by asking, "Did you ever know of a woman who could take "No!" for an answer?"[30] It is apparent in some of the replies to the readers' letters by editors that the issues brought up were not taken seriously. This might simply be the own editor's opinion on the matter or that they did not feel the column was a place for serious responses at that time.

In some of the letters, the writers seem agitated at the way the series portrays women in certain settings and how they interact with other characters. In Judith Stevens' letter, she voices her opinion by commenting that:

> don't you think it was rather mean of SUPERMAN to embarrass Lois Lane in front of Lana Lang? I think it's awful the way you insult women, and particularly the way you heap abuse upon Lois. You're always saying she's snoopy, inquisitive, curious, a pest, and can't keep a secret. Well, men aren't angels, either![31]

A similar letter comes from Ronnie Raney, saying that he "liked the story, "Lois Lane's Anti-Superman Campaign," but I think you're anti-female. You show nearly all men around Lois' booth when she's campaigning for the Senate. I'm only a teen-ager, but I think more women would be interested in voting for her. Replying back, the editor writes that “[w]hen you're old enough to vote, vote as you please. In the meantime grant these guys the same right. Besides, can you blame them for flocking around a pretty chick?” Like most women trying to enter the political scene, Lane found it hard trying to be taken seriously as politician.

Interesting enough, as early as "The "Superman-Lois" Hit Record!" (issue #45), there is a letter from Elva Evans which goes against Cvetkovic's analysis that Lois Lane "does not completely conform to the standard notions of femininity depicted in the popular culture of the time."[32] In Evan's letter, she states "I just adore Lois Lane. She's cute as a button, always getting into hot water. (She reminds me of Mary Tyler Moore, of the Dick Van Dyke TV show, the way she

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[27] Ibid.

[28] Weisinger (ed), "Letters to Lois," #21 (Nov. 1960), 21.

[29] Weisinger (ed), "Letters to Lois," #10 (Jul. 1959), 24.

[30] Weisinger (ed), "Letters to Lois," #9 (May 1959), 22.

[31] Weisinger (ed), "Letters to Lois," #16 (Apr. 1960), 12.

[32] Cvetkovic, "Feminine Mystique,” 42.

is always getting into trouble and crying her pretty little head off.)"[33] In response to this, the editors seemed to agree that Lane sometimes gets in over her head in some situations.

Another response was given to Anne Zeek, in which she asked in her letter about what would happen between Lois and Clark Kent's rivalry at the *Daily Planet*. "Will this rivalry exist even after their... marriage? If so, what would happen if Lois feels that Clark stole a story she was working on?" Replying back, the editor says, "We don't think this problem will come up. SUPERMAN believes that a wife's place is in the home." A common theme among the responses from the editors is beginning to show itself.[34] Letters and the responses to them are common throughout the first eighty issues. If there is already this much reader response to Lane in the early years of the series, then the amount of concern after she liberates herself from Superman's shadow in 1968 will be apparent.

Without having to read the entire story in the comic book, there is a blatant enough statement being made on the cover as Lois Lane begins her change in issue #80 in 1968. The cover shows Lane throwing the "Girl Friend" part of the title on the ground. She then demands Superman to leave her magazine as she wants to start a new life without him. As the more independent sounding Lane is shown with her luggage in the background, the only thing Superman can do is stand there, in shock. Inside the issue, sobbing on her bed, Lane says, "I've been kidding myself and everyone else! The whole world knows I've tossed away my life waiting for Superman! I'll bet everybody's laughing behind my back!"[35] Lane is determined to start a new life without Superman, even to go so far as to get an entirely new wardrobe, dispose of all the souvenirs from Superman, change her name, and start fresh in a new city. Meanwhile, Superman/Clark Kent has become bored at the *Daily Planet* due to the lack of trouble-prone Lois Lane and her attempts of going after "scoops." The next time that they inevitably cross paths, Superman asks her, "You said you wanted to get me out of your life... is that really true?"[36] To which she repeatedly says "yes." With this giant step in the direction of Lois reaffirming her independence from Superman, it would seem as if she is finally breaking her own mold.

The cover to "No Witnesses in Outer Space!" (issue #81) cover shows Superman and Lane in space, with Superman apparently ripping apart Lois' air tube and her exclaiming, "Gasp! Superman's snapped my air-hose because I won't marry him. He's committing the perfect murder!"[37] This could just be the writer's hook to get potential readers, maybe they still have Lois Lane breaking the mold. Unfortunately, they did not. Lane eventually proclaims her born-again love for Superman. In "Death House Honeymoon!" (issue #105), when Lane approaches the editor to allow her to cover a story, Lois exclaims, "Let me get you the inside story... It's a woman's story!" Clark Kent responds by stating, that it is too dangerous of an assignment and that "It's a man's job!"[38] Perry White, the editor, says, "Clark's right! The... story is no assignment

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[33] Weisinger (ed), "Letters to Lois," #45 (Nov. 1963), 22.

[34] Weisinger (ed), "Letters to Lois," #22 (Jan. 1961), 21.

[35] Weisinger (ed), "Splitsville for Lois and Superman!," #80 (Jan. 1968), 1.

[36] Ibid., 30.

[37] Weisinger (ed), "No Witnesses in Outer Space!," #81 (Feb. 1968), 1.

[38] Bridwell (ed), "Death House Honeymoon," #105 (Oct. 1970), 4.

for a woman! It's yours, Clark!" Lois responds, "That's not fair, Perry! You're discriminating against me because I'm a woman! I protest!"[39] Though, short in length, this new attitude of Lois' is only just the beginning and if anything a nod to women's liberation movement's goal for equal employment.

Not too long before that particular comic book issue came out, the federal government began to recognize women's issues in the work force. In1964, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act, that included the decisive Title VII. This prohibited discrimination by private employees, employment agencies, and unions on the basis of sex as well as race, color, religion, and national origin.[40] An agency titled Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) was set up to enforce the law's protection of women workers. Feeling that EEOC was not carrying out its job adequately, in 1965, the group National Organization for Women (NOW) was founded. These women formed "a new civil rights group... that could pressure the government to enact and enforce laws against sexual discrimination."[41] Apparently the government had not reached the offices of the *Daily Planet* yet when #105 was published.

In the next comic book, Lois Lane takes on a then relevant cultural issue. In "I Am Curious (Black)!" (issue #106), editor E. Nelson Bridwell created a series of opportunities for cultural frontier-crossing, including juxtaposing the single, white, professional Lois Lane of the 1970s into the black community. Lane receives the assignment of her life, to get the inside story of Metropolis' Little Africa. Lane is shown receiving a glimpse into the daily lives of black men, women, and children. Though this single comic book did not end the racial divide at the time, it does mirror the early activities of women who attempted to be more prominent and active in fighting for civil rights. As mentioned beforehand, young women helped pioneer the social movements of the 1960s, including the civil rights movement. Through working with these early movements, many women gained experience that would help in developing the women's liberation movement.

Not too long after this issue, Lane confronts the social issues of another minority group, as seen in "Indian Death Charge!" (issue #110). Lane takes an assignment to cover a rain dance by a group of Pueblo Indians on a reservation near Santa Fe. The story takes off as Lane and Superman resolve an issue of a dam being built that would potentially destroy the reservation. Afterwards, Lane is thrust into the role of a mother as she is forced to adopt a child of a Native American until the father of said child is found after escaping a POW camp in Vietnam. Again, Lane deals with early movements that young women had a hand in during the 1960s (Native American and the Anti-War Movements).

Some readers were not too acceptable of the inclusion of social issues. Albert Tanner from Baltimore believes that women's liberation should be separate from entertainment when he says:

> I must agree with those readers who feel *Lois* has become too much oriented toward "social causes," "minority groups" and so on. A comic book must primarily be a source of

[39] Ibid., 5.

[40] Evans, *Personal Politics*, 16.

[41] Ibid., 19.

> entertainment if it is to sell and it is easy to jeopardize its success in this respect by overemphasizing moral messages. This applies to Lois' Women's Lib convictions also... I'm sure the great majority of both men and women readers would not like her as a militant Women's Lib extremist.[42]

The letter from Tanner suggests that the "social issues," "minority groups," and political viewpoints have caused *Lois Lane* to be less of an entertaining comic book and more of a moral guide trying to exert itself onto readers.

If it is not already clear through analysis, it was clear to the readers that the amount of social issues that Lois confronts in these comic books is a noticeable change. *Lois Lane* is no longer just about Lane chasing Superman, but rather a woman confronting very real social problems of this time. The fact that this is only issue #110 and there is already a letter from a reader stating that "if Lois sounds off about Women's Lib in every issue, she'll get to sound like a broken record," shows that a closer examination of *Lois Lane* has already yielded more convincing evidence of feminism.[43]

As shown, women's liberation movement issues began to appear more often in the stories themselves after issue #80, but well before and just as prominent as the issue #121. Aside from the stories in the series, there is also an increase in letters concerning this change, showing that the readers took notice. For example, in Mark Thomase's letter:

> I complain about--Lois Lane supporting Women's Lib? Heaven forbid! Lois has shown, subtly that she supports it. Why? She is an attractive girl--she nearly has Superman at her feet. She is a reporter on the *Daily Planet* and it looks like she's practically living in luxury. She must get a good salary. Lois has shown that women can get equal pay for equal jobs! What more does Women's Lib want? DO they want to go to Viet Nam and fight in the front lines?[44]

Thomase's letter suggests that Lane has achieved enough personal equality to quit actively supporting the women's liberation movement any further. His last statement implies, however, that women should be grateful for not being too equal as they are not forced to fight in a foreign conflict. Gerard Triano's letter displays a more conservative side of women's liberation:

> About the subject of Women's Lib, Lois is carrying it too far and Superman not far enough. He must realize that "woman power" means more than fisticuffs and inane clichés, and that being loved and needed doesn't mean being enslaved. Her actions in the last two issues show that she must believe this. Her crack about "cooking in the kitchen" is the reason that some of the women I know hate the movement. It makes the woman who

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[42] "Your Mystery Columnist," *Superman's Girl Friend, Lois Lane* #126 (Sept. 1972), National Periodical Publications, Inc., [DC].

[43] Ibid., 33.

[44] Woolfolk (ed), "77 Coffins!," #122 (May 1972), 49.

> wants to fulfill herself "just" as a wife and mother feel worthless. What Women's Lib should boil down to is the right of every woman to choose the life she wants for herself and to be able to live it. I hope Lois and Supie both wake up.[45]

This letter suggests that Lane has become too radical in her support of the women's liberation movement. One of the main oppositions of radical feminism at this time came from women who believed that there was nothing to be ashamed of in finding fulfillment as a housewife. Triano falls into this group, as the letter would suggest.

B.J. Reed from Oxnard, California also believes that Lois is taking the women's liberation movement to the extreme by losing her feminine side:

> The need for better and equal terms doesn't mean a woman has to stop being female. A woman cannot be a man, is not as strong as a man, and cannot think like a man–I know because I'm married to one, and he doesn't think like I think!
>
> Lois wants many things for her fellow women: equal pay, rights, etc... the same things any man enjoys. But should Lois scream about her rights as a woman, while in the same breath criticizing Superman for wanting to behave like a man? A woman's normal instincts are to be feminine and coy. A man's are to flex his muscles. Who likes a feminine man? Nobody! So who likes a masculine woman?[46]

Reed's letter suggests that Lane has taken feminism so far as to have almost completely lost her gender identity as a woman. What makes letters like these important is that they are able to show the readers' opinions of what they know about the women's liberation movement and then compare it to what they see happening in *Lois Lane*.

Even though there are examples of women's liberation values in the stories of the series, the fact that there are responses from the readers in which they themselves took the time to examine the same values in the character is a validation of Lois Lane's transformation to being more aligned with the feminist movement. While some question or criticize the women's liberation movement's values in the series, there are some letters from readers who believe that *Lois Lane* could without exerting such overtones. Gary Kimber from Ontario ponders if it even possible to have "women's lib in a comic book? How can a medium that sports men in underwear doing impossible feats hope to deal seriously with something so real?"[47] Keith Griffen from Alabama rejoices when the women's liberation movement overtones in issues are not as heavily asserted. For one issue, he exclaims: "Hooray! The one and only LOIS LANE has returned! Many thanks... for turning out the best LOIS script in a long time... There were no roommates to detract from Lois' role in the tale, and no heavy "women's lib" overtones."[48]

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[45] Woolfolk (ed), "Death Rides the Wheels!," #125 (Aug. 1972), 22.

[46] "Your Mystery Columnist," #126.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Asherman, Allan. "Letters to Lois." Superman's Girl Friend, Lois Lane #137 (Sept. 1974). National Periodical Publications, Inc. [DC].

Gerard Triano of Elmont, New York was getting bored by the repetitiveness of the Women's Liberation theme: "Why must every ish allude to Women's Lib? I can't tell you how boring the subject has become."[49] On the other side of the United States, Scott Gibson from Sterling, Colorado believes that audience for *Lois Lane* has become too narrow, saying, "the magazine may be selling well among Women's Libbers, but it's too much for anyone else."[50] Triano and Gibson's letters suggests that the series has become too specialized in dealing only with women's liberation issues and that it has started to alienate itself from the general readership who apparently do not share the same political views. An example of this alienation is expressed by Susan Bregman who finds Lane's attempts to be a feminist agitating. In her letter, she says, "LOIS LANE is not liberated. LOIS LANE is a fool... Her goal in life seems to be to prove herself better than men... Her concept of liberation seems to be yelling at Superman when he rescues her, instead of batting her eyes and sighing."[51]

Even though readers complained about the series, *Lois Lane* was important because when it ended, there were very few other comic books on the market to accompany to the women's liberation movement. DC Comics attempted to introduce feminist values into Wonder Woman during the Diana Prince era (1968-1972). This "new" Diana captured the tone of the women's movement by having the character embrace her civilian side of life more so than her superhero side. This contradicted the Amazonian values, which alarmed editors of *Ms.*, who praised the original version. In 1972 and 1973, "Marvel Comics, keen to hitch its wagon to the women's movement, produced three "women's comics"---*Night Nurse*, *Shanna the She-Devil*, and *The Cat*; all failed after fewer than half a dozen issues."[52] These never obtained the mainstream popularity or success as the other aforementioned ones. Perhaps this is because these new characters were not as successful at emulating the times in which they were created. It also could be due to the fact that the Silver Age of Comics was coming to an end and publishers began shifting focus on what was being published and for whom it was being published.

Unlike other comic books with a female lead, *Lois Lane* is important because the character resonates with the time period. A lot of social movements occurred at the beginning of the 1960s that carried on well past the end of the decade. Unlike Wonder Woman, a women's movement magazine never championed Lane. Although, at its peak in popularity in 1962, *Lois Lane* was the third bestselling comic book, third only to *Superman* and *Superboy*.[53] The comic book series is an important piece to pop culture history as it reflects the second-wave of feminism in a form of media that deserves more attention. Even without superpowers, Lois was

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[49] E. Nelson Bridwell, "Letters to Lois and Rose," *Superman's Girl Friend, Lois Lane* #128 (Dec. 1972), National Periodical Publications, Inc., [DC].

[50] "Your Mystery Columnist," *Superman's Girl Friend, Lois Lane* #126.

[51] Kanigher, Robert. "Down Lois Lane." *Superman's Girl Friend, Lois Lane* #133 (Sept. 1973). National Periodical Publications, Inc. [DC].

[52] Jill Lepore, *The Secret History of Wonder Woman* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014), 289.

[53] John Jackson Miller, "1962 Comic Book Sales Figures," COMICHRON: THE COMICS CHRONICLES, accessed October 15, 2014, http://www.comichron.com/yearlycomicssales/1960s/1962.html.

able to reach a mass audience; an audience who read and took in what was presented to them; an independent and intelligent woman who had a career that was fulfilling.