

Panel Title: Her Own Heroine: Feminism and Diversity in the Comic Book Industry

Moderator:

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First Speaker:

Veronica Harris  
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Title: "Breaking the Mold: Ororo Munroe and the Entertainment Industry"

Proposal:

Throughout the history and development of comic books, there has been adaptations of the characters to different media venues. Storm, or Ororo Munroe, is no exception. She comes from the African country of Kenya born to a native woman and American man. Her mother comes from a line of priestesses said to hold mystical powers to protect their tribes. At a young age, she experiences a tragic plane crashing into her home, which traps her under her mother's body and rubble. She develops claustrophobic tendencies, which awaken her powers. Later in life, she comes to teach at the Xavier School for Gifted Youngsters, i.e. mutants, and becomes one of the most powerful X-Men. Representations of Storm occur in many different forms of visual media, such as movies and comics. However, the medium of film limits the development of her backstory and heritage because of the film industry's shift to an emphasis and focus on white males taken from comics. This shift has resulted in restricting and restraining women of color. On the other hand, cartoons, such as *Wolverine and the X-Men* and *X-Men Evolution*, do provide some space for her. Although even in comic space restricts and restrains women of color and becomes analogous to Storm's claustrophobia. The industry focuses heavily on male centered roles, which causes limited attention to women, like Storm, and others from story and plot development. Female characters lack space to develop and grow, which can cause them to suffocate under the popularity of other men characters in comics. Thus, the comic industry and Storm must not be confined to these narrow representations. Doing so would create a powerless situation for both her and the industry.

Second Speaker:

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Title: "Who am I?: Analyzing the Constrained Identity of Rogue"

Proposal:

Among the great male heroes, like Captain America and Wolverine, female superheroes are equal in strength and diversity. For example, Anne Marie, also known as Rogue, is considered one of the most powerful female mutants in Marvel Comics. While kissing her first boyfriend, Rogue's mutant power absorbs Cody Robbins' memories into her mind and shocks him into a

permanent coma. Traumatized by this horrible experience, Rogue wears body-concealing clothing to avoid skin-to-skin contact with others. Struggling with her powers and the tragic death of her parents, Rogue runs away and joins Mystique's Brotherhood of Mutants. However, distraught with her lack of control causes Rogue to seek the help of Professor Xavier, the creator of the X-Men and founder of the Xavier School for Gifted Youngsters. Even though Rogue has the capability to tap into unlimited power, she is essentially stripped of her human qualities, which forces her to create emotional detachments with others. Her absorption powers conform Rogue to the idolized virgin stereotype of chastity and purity. She lacks self-identity because the victims she consumes become embedded into her subconscious, which form alter egos of her psyche. When the multiple personalities take over Rogue's mind, she is transformed into an uncontrollable monster. Rogue's character development seems to empower women; however, her restricted abilities portray female heroes undependable as leaders and restrict them as part of the plot development for their male counterparts.

Third Speaker:

Rachel Andrews

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Title: "Kamala Khan: A Heroine for the Modern Age"

Proposal: The comic book industry has long been dominated by stories and heroes directed at an Anglo-centric male audience. Heroines like the young, Pakistani-American girl Kamala Khan, who takes the name of Ms. Marvel, are a dramatic turn away from the norm. Kamala is aimed at, not just women, but young, non-white women. Hers is an identity that has existed in America for decades, yet has been grossly unrepresented in comic books, despite the fact that young, non-white girls and women have been interested in superheroes for as long as anyone else.

Kamala's introduction to the Marvel universe comes at a vital time in American history. The major media outlets and tabloid newsmakers are aggressively pushing and encouraging racism and islamophobia, and generally fear-mongering, creating an environment that is dangerous and rejecting towards young girls who might identify with a girl like Kamala.

She is a girl who many who are not of her same racial heritage would also relate to. She's an avid fan of Carol Danvers (who was the original Ms. Marvel, and now operates under the Captain Marvel title) from whom she took her hero name; this near hero-worship is something young fans can identify with. Like them, Kamala gets giddy and nervous to meet her hero. Like many young girls and women who love the world of superheroes, she writes fanfiction, sometimes getting so involved in her writing that she forgets her other "normal human" responsibilities.

Having a book series dedicated to a young girl of middle-eastern descent is important for the comic book world. Girls of all ages and nationalities need to know that they are important- that their stories matter. Kamala Khan's record breaking comic book series is a flagship for change in the industry that can only be for the better.

AV Requirements: screen, projector, and internet access