Wonder Woman has unique powers and abilities and grew up in an all-female society. In what ways has her unusual upbringing shaped who she is and how she relates to the rest of the world? Tate provides a history of Wonder Woman—both of her own history and that of her creators—and explores issues of gender stereotypes as they relate to Wonder Woman. He reveals how psychological research illuminates her view of herself in the world and how others see her.

WONDER WOMAN first appeared in December 1941 and has become one of the best known superheroes. The popularity of Wonder Woman may lie in the fact that unlike her female hero predecessors, she was gender atypical in many ways.¹ Her creator Dr. Wil-

¹ Wonder Woman is not the oldest female superhero. Olga Mesmer, the Girl with X-Ray Eyes, appeared in one issue of Spicy Mystery Stories (October 1938) and is arguably the oldest superhero (pre-dating Superman by one year). Wonder Woman was also preceded by Invisible Scarlet O’Neill, the ghost-like maiden who saved children from fires and the like.
liam Moulton Marston (who wrote the stories under the pseudonym “Charles Moulton”) was clear about the social purpose of Wonder Woman from the outset. In a 1943 article in *The American Scholar* Marston wrote:

> Not even girls want to be girls so long as our feminine archetype lacks force, strength, and power. Not wanting to be girls, they don’t want to be tender, submissive, peace-loving as good women are. Women’s strong qualities have become despised because of their weakness. The obvious remedy is to create a feminine character with all the strength of Superman plus all the allure of a good and beautiful woman.

Marston was a psychologist trained under the famous Hugo Münsterberg and used his training to diagnose a social problem and attempt a remedy in the popular (though not critically regarded) medium of illustrated fiction. Thusly, Suprema, the Wonder Woman (shortened to “Wonder Woman” before publication) was created. Yet, contained in Marston’s quote is the almost invisible struggle that Marston and the subsequent writers of *Wonder Woman* have endured—a struggle between U.S. gender stereotypes and the origin of Wonder Woman, which runs counter to these stereotypes; a kind of “gender stereotype balancing act.”

As a psychologist, Marston would likely appreciate a revaluation of Wonder Woman with current psychological theories. Marston used many then-current theories of the 1920s and ’30s to develop the storylines for Wonder Woman and advance his social philosophy. Future writers took the ideas further, but what they all had in common was they portrayed a Wonder Woman driven more by U.S. societal stereotypes than the logic of Wonder Woman’s nature and upbringing.

**WONDER WOMAN’S PSYCHE FROM A SOCIAL STRUCTURE ANALYSIS**

*Social structure theory* is an attempt to explain differences (and similarities) between men and women in any society (Eagly, 1987; Eagly

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2 I prefer the term “illustrated fiction” to “comic books” because the stories of superheroes are illustrated and fictional and usually not funny. The common name comes from the same publication format as *Archie Comics*, which were funny.