Analyzing Female Gender Roles in Marvel Comics from the Silver Age (1960) to the Present (2014)

Murphy, Katherine

Comic books, a form of American popular culture, offer a window into time, allowing researchers to track societal changes over several decades. The purpose of this study was to determine if, how, and how much female gender roles have changed in Marvel Comics from the Silver Age (1960) to the present (2014) to help understand how popular culture portrays and treats female characters. It was hypothesized that female gender roles in Marvel Comics in the last decade have become less stereotypical and more equitable as determined by the seven-point quantifiable rubric as compared to the 1960's. The seven-point rubric underwent inter-rater reliability tests twice with ten experienced raters. The researcher reviewed 68 Marvel titles for a total of 788 Marvel Comic Books broken down by decade from 1960-2014. Through the quantitative content analysis, the average overall female gender role scores for Marvel comics consistently went up by decade from 12.20 for 1960-1969 to 22.50 for 2010-2014, which supported the hypothesis and was very highly significant at .001. Results were also tracked for the seven rubric categories (score range 0-5)—average cover art (.39 for 1960-1969 to 2.61 for 2010-2014), Bechdel Test (1.21 for 1960-1969 to 2.72 for 2010-2014), storyline (2.55 for 1960-1969 to 4.00 for 2010-2014), occupation (1.50 for 1960-1969 to 3.16 for 2010-2014), balance of power (1.45 for 1960-1969 to 3.14 for 2010-2014), female sexualization (1.88 for 1960-1969 to 3.53 for 2010-2014), and violence against women (3.22 for 1960-1969 to 3.32 for 2010-2014) with significance noted in these sub-sets.

Awards Won: