

Panic over Comic Books

A Case Study of
Popular Culture
Self Regulation

Your Experience?

- Who among you read comic books now or when you were younger?
- Which ones did you read?

The Exigency

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Fredric Wertham Left His Mark

Born Friedrich Wertheimer was an influential and progressive psychiatrist.

In 1953, Congress held hearings on juvenile delinquency and he was an invited witness.

Published numerous articles and, of course, the notorious book, *Seduction of the Innocent*.



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What were the concerns?

- Horror Comics
- Crime Delinquency
- Overly Sexualized
- Implicit Homosexuality

Again, perceived threats to children led to a social panic. Keep in mind there was no rating system and comic books sold for a dime.

Horror



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Horror



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Superman = Fascist?

“The Superman type of comic books tends to force and super force. Dr. Paul A. Witty, professor of education at Northwestern University, has well described these comics when he said that they ‘present our world in a kind of Fascist setting of violence and hate and destruction. I think it is bad for children, he goes on, to get that kind of recurring diet . . . [they] place too much emphasis on a Fascist society. Therefore the democratic ideals that we should seek are likely to be overlooked . . .’ (*Seduction of the Innocent*)

Ghost of Nietzsche

Nietzsche wrote about the *Übermensch* in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. A popular translation of the word (which literally means over or beyond) was Superman.

Since Nietzsche was embraced by Hitler & Nazis in general, it is understandable that the title Superman would concern some despite the fact that S’s creators were both Jewish. Kal El is Hebrew & the character was introduced as hero of the oppressed.

Sex



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Misogyny/Violence Against Women



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Crime



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My Step-Grandfather in Comics...



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Implicit Homosexuality?



Bruce Wayne and Dick Grayson in two side by-side beds. Panel from *Batman* #84 (June 1954), page 24.

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Wonder Woman as Lesbian & Negative Role Model

She is physically very powerful, tortures men, has her own female following, is the cruel, 'phallic' woman. While she is a frightening figure for boys, she is an undesirable ideal for girls, being the exact opposite of what girls are supposed to want to be. (*Seduction of the Innocent*)

"The homosexual connotation of the Wonder Woman type of story is psychologically unmistakable. The *Psychiatric Quarterly* deplored in an editorial the appearance of an eminent child therapist as the implied endorser of a series . . . which portrays extremely sadistic hatred of all males in a framework which is plainly Lesbian'. (*Seduction of the Innocent*)

Self Regulation Through a Code, adopted in 1954



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Frederick's Report Now

Frederick is Not 100% Wrong,
but I want to follow up
in two ways

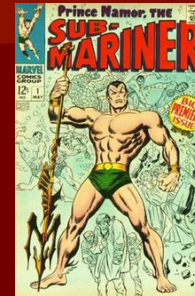
Though the Industry was set back by the Comic Code, in the late 1960s what is known as the "Silver Age" of comics emerged despite the Code.

OK, Boomer

- As a Boomer, I was an avid fan of Marvel Comics in the late 1960s/early 1970s.
- I once owned the following:



Marvel's Answer to Aquaman



Did Marvel Bust the Code?



Did Marvel Bust the Code?



Did Marvel Bust the Code?



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Media Industry Self-Regulation

Industry Produced Rating Systems have followed the Code for other Media:

Movies: 1966, updated in 1969.

Song lyrics: 1985 Parental Advisory labels

Video Games: 1994

TV: 1996 (initially to enable the V chip)

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