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ANIM 344: History of Animation 1906- 1950

Professor Crawford

Saving the World Before Bedtime”: The Powerpuff Girls, Citizenship, and the Little Girl
Superhero

For this animation essay assignment there was an essay entitled “*Saving the World Before Bedtime*”: *The Powerpuff Girls, Citizenship, and the Little Girl Superhero*.” This was an essay that was written by Lisa Hager. At the beginning of the article Hager discusses the differences between the traditional comic book female super heroes, and the Powerpuff Girls. Hager writes that, “While representations of adult female action heroes in comics, film, and television are common, young girl superheroes have been generally absent from print and screen fiction” (Powerpuff Girls). In the written article Hager secondly describes the two types of citizenship that the Girls exhibit of which are infantile citizens, and diva citizens, and lastly it explains what Chemical X did to the girls, and to Mojo Jojo and the repercussions that followed when it was accidently poured onto both the Powerpuff Girls, and their arch- nemesis Mojo Jojo.

She also writes that the reason that the young girl superhero has not been featured in film and cartoons are because of the fact that “writers and animators have focused primarily on the maturing bodies of adolescent girls who are discovering their superpowers and their sexualities” (Powerpuff Girls 1). Then in complete reversal then what is seen in more adult oriented shows, in the

“genre of children’s animated series, girls have

recently taken on the central and active roles usually reserved for boys. The most popular and culturally pervasive of these new girl superheroes are the Powerpuff Girls” (Powerpuff Girls 1).

In the series of the Powerpuff Girls it depicts the three young female characters of Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup, who have dedicated their lives to fighting crime in the small town of Townsville. In the series of the Powerpuff Girls; Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup all take “center stage as action heroes” because of the fact that they are “both little girls and superheroes, and, just as adult female action figures challenge gender stereotypes, the Powerpuffs revise definitions of girlhood within mainstream American popular culture” (Powerpuff Girls 1). One of the main characteristics of the Powerpuff Girls that distinguishes itself different than other shows the feature female action heroes is that these little girls are disenfranchised as girls rather than women, and in turn “challenge the notions of femininity” (The Powerpuff Girls). As one of the quotes in the essay reads,

“these young superheroes function as role models for girls in much the same manner of female comic book superheroes, and, much like adult female action heroes, the girls both inhabit and challenge stereotypical notions of gender. The Powerpuff Girls encourages identification with not just one but three different types of girls” (Powerpuff Girls 1).

When asked creator, Craig McCracken states on the phenomenon that, “I get a lot of girls saying that they look up to them... There are girls who say, ‘My best friend’s a Buttercup, but I’m a Bubbles.’ They identify with the different personalities.” The three main girls are superheroes, so in turn they then inhabit a “fairly conventional style of girl hood with heir cute dresses and Mary Jane- style shoes, all- girl slumber parties, and pastel- colored bedroom. Also

like real- life children, they are subjected to the authority of adults, as they are required to do chores, go to school, and abide by a bedtime. Since the Powerpuff Girls are both little girls and superheroes the show must account for how subordinate little girls can occupy a position of extreme power within the State” (Powerpuff Girls 3). The first cartoon to feature young girl superheroes was Cartoon Network, and it was called The Powerpuff Girls, and it ran from 1995 and 2006. In focusing on

“three little girl superheroes the Powerpuff Girls works within and against broader constructions of the superhero in American comics and animation, marking a definite departure from both 1980s girl- oriented cartoons that featured plots largely centered on teaching girls stereotypically feminine behaviors and boy- oriented action cartoons with token female characters” (Powerpuff Girls 3).

The next thing that the article talks about is the different types of citizens that the Powerpuff Girls inhabit. Those of which are infantile citizens, and diva citizens. A diva citizenship is defined “as a moment in which a previously abject citizen states a dramatic coup in the public sphere in which she does not have privilege” and temporarily makes her radical critique central to the dominant discourse, thereby disrupting its fictional universality.” Then secondly an infantile citizenship is a citizen that makes “visible the State’s inability to live up to its ethical principles” (Powerpuff Girls).

The article then goes on to continue to talk about different episodes of the series that exhibits the ways in which the girls are infantile citizens, and diva citizens. The Powerpuff Girls changed a generation young girls, including me. I remember watching the Powerpuff Girls at such a young age, and remembering that Buttercup was my all time favorite. In conclusion, the series shaped American girl culture for generations to come.

