

Analyzing the Avatar of Lois Lane: What We Learn from the Daily Planet Reporter

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When we watch movies, many times the whole design of the film is for escape. We can become the characters we see, vicariously living out adventures we would never have in real life. The same is true, of course, for books, comics, and other media as well. What draws us in, whether print or visual form, are characters that attract us, either because we identify with them or secretly desire to be them—good or bad, hero or villain. Fictional characters allow us to step into another world and either accent the parts of our personality that we see within the characters or help us draw out facets we didn't know we have.

In other words, then, the characters serve audiences in much the same way we craft an avatar for a video game. An avatar is a visual representation to others that depicts both physical features and personality traits, such as moods and attitudes that the creator deliberately selects. According to Yee (2006), who studied the motivations for avatar use, the personal gains or "emotional investment" were the primary reasons why people chose to spend free time playing games involving role-playing. If this is true of game playing, it could also be true for other media forms.

According to Williams (1986), we identify with certain long-lasting, well-known characters because readers develop a relationship with characters "whose history the audiences has followed....[C]haracters have a 'history,' so to speak,—and their activities become more meaningful the more we are acquainted with this history" (p. 4). And, if we identify with specific characters, we find compatible traits in their personality that we find in our own. Tracing a character over time, then, can be crucial for examining not just the qualities or the personality, but also how the character grows or changes to meet the needs of the audience.

Lois Lane has been a constant part of popular culture since the creation of Superman in *Action Comics #1* in June 1938. She was an independent career girl long before it was fashionable, and despite some seeing her character as only a love interest for the hero, her storylines often *didn't* involve being solely a romantic partner

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for Superman (DC Comics, 2013). Instead, she often is a major character who is investigating Superman, attempting to dig into his identity and origins. This chapter will investigate, primarily, not just Lois as an avatar for the audience, but also how one specific moment—how various versions of Lois discover Clark Kent and Superman are one and the same—provides insight into Lois Lane's representation of women in specific times. Examining how Lois Lane does—or does not—see behind Clark Kent's disguise in various Superman versions reveals insight into her progressive image as well as how audiences are becoming more sophisticated in their expectations of women in popular culture.

Origins: Lois Lane in the Beginning

From the beginning, Lois Lane was designed to be an independent career girl. In *Lois Lane: A Celebration of 75 Years*, she is described as a “firecracker right from the start” (DC Comics, 2013, p. 6). Her independent, willful attitude is showcased in the first issue to help define her character. She focuses on her career, she ignores Clark Kent, and she slaps a man when he gets fresh with her. She cuts to the quick with her words, and she readily tells Clark that he's too meek for her (DC Comics, 2013). These qualities are woven throughout most incarnations of the character through the ages.

Surprisingly, Lois's work assignments reflect her independent image. In the early issues and through the forties, she often tackles crime assignments rather than just features or human-interest stories. She is actually frustrated over having what might seem as a feminine story in the first issue, stating, “I've been scribbling ‘sob stories’ all day long!” (DC Comics, 2013, p. 14). These early issues also help cement what Fleisher (1978) describes as the set up for a traditional Superman story with three parts: Clark feigns fear, then secretly shows up as Superman; Lois tries to capture the story by herself, sometimes dangerously; and lastly, Clark has mysteriously scooped her by writing the story first (pp. 414-415).

During the 1940s and 1950s, Lois's curiosity in Superman's secret identity starts to become more central to her storyline. In addition to being competitive with Clark Kent over stories, she begins to have suspicions about Superman's identity in 1942. In “Man or Superman?” Lois has been comparing Clark and Superman. One thought bubble shows timid, shy Clark, while the second paints the portrait of strong, heroic Superman. She senses there's more to this than what she can prove—but in the end, she doesn't get any further with her investigation. She is relieved at the end, just happy to make it out of the dangerous situation alive, stating, “Both Clark and I will die—and all because I was silly enough to suspect him of being Superman!” (Siegel & Shuster, 1942, p. 11, panel 6). Lois appears to have lost interest, then, in uncovering Superman's secret identity; she even seems to believe her assumptions were wrong, even silly. Interestingly, this issue sets up what might be the most successful—or repetitive—pattern for a *Superman* story. Suspicious, Lois tries to get Clark to admit he is Superman when he rescues her; however, Superman manages to save Lois from a dangerous situation without revealing his identity (Siegel & Shuster, 1942).

This early version of Lois Lane, then, creates the portrait of a woman that the time period had created—and, perhaps more importantly, could relate to. Women were permeating the work force, and the war had presented even more opportunities for women with both factory jobs and careers. However, the fact that Lois did always need saving—and couldn't figure out Clark's identity—is in stark contrast to the assertive career woman that was often the only female in the Daily Planet workplace. In other words, this Lois was strong when the stories needed her to be strong. This contrast reflected the mixed feelings of the audience at the time for women's place in society. "Lois Lane was a powerful symbol, one whose ambition would have to be kept in check if the status quo was to be preserved" (Williams, 1986, p. 74). She didn't figure out Superman's secret identity because this knowledge might have given Lois too much power, and the audience might not be ready for this growth in Lois's character.

In the comics, as well as television's popular 1950s series *The Adventures of Superman*, rarely did anyone find out the secret. If they did, usually they died or lost their memory. This pattern, then, where Lois might come close to discovering the secret became a formula for many *Superman* plots. It also seems as if Lois's assertive, free-thinking personality was tampered to meet the desires of the audience. Although she was still a career woman, and she competed with—and complained about—Clark Kent, her role in the series was more muted; this was even present in the way the "disguise dilemma" is presented on the show.

For example, in one episode, titled "The Secret of Superman," an evil scientist becomes obsessed with figuring out Superman's identity. Notice that it's the villain, not Lois, who is creating the conflict this time. He tricks Lois into drinking some coffee laced with a truth serum, leaving her vulnerable and drugged. As he contemplates who Superman might be, he realizes that Clark and Superman are never in the same place at the same time (Root & Carr, 1952). Still drugged when Superman arrives to save her, Lois mumbles, "You are Clark Kent" (Root & Carr, 1952). Of course, she doesn't remember the truth once the drug wears off, resetting the show back to the original dynamic by the end of the episode.

In order to become what the audience—most particularly the female viewers—would want, the show runners "softened Lois's character, transforming her from a hardened, fearless big-city front-page journalist to a bland love interest whose only concern was the uncovering of Superman's secret identity in the hopes of marrying him" (Tresca, 2013, p.17). She remained a passive plot device for the rest of the show's run through 1958, waiting, figuratively and literally, for someone to rescue her.

Lois Lane Becomes the Iconic Independent Woman?

A noticeable shift in Lois's character occurs in the comics in the 1970s, corresponding to the women's movement. Lois Lane scholar Jeanne Pauline Williams (1986) argues that Lois returns to her independent roots in 1977 with the *Superman Family* comic issue "The Great Superman Locked-Room Puzzle." Several noticeable changes

occur with this story. First, Lois is now more equally invested in Clark as a person, and friend, than before. Second, she tried not to pressure Clark into admitting he was Superman. This reframing of her character allowed her to grow with the audience. Once again, she was evolving to become a character that the women, or the readers in general, could relate to. She had other functions other than trying to “land Superman” as a husband. Some interpretations of the comics at this time could be that Lois actually *did* know—she just chose not to confront Clark about it. As Williams concludes, “If she indeed knew the truth about Clark, the reader was no longer able to feel superior to her. In effect, the flighty, immature character from the 1950s and 1960s was gone” (p. 104).

Analyzing this transformation of the character—and in a way the reader as well—can reveal even deeper insight. As we grew more aware of women’s multiple roles in society, we expected our fictional avatars to become multidimensional also. One reason this transition into the women’s movement might have been even more apparent was the rise of Jenette Kahn, who became a publisher for DC Comics in 1976. Within a year, the comics focused on regaining lost readers and respecting comic creators with changes in vision and identity (Greenberger, 2011). As a result of these changes, the brand grew. As for *Superman*, the comics began to focus on, much like the origin stories of Siegel and Shuster, Lois in a variety of roles, such as sidekick, co-worker, and even advocate in comics like “The Man Who Stole Superman’s Eye” and “Celebration.” Her character changed with the times, even exploring social concerns. For example, in the famous issue of *Superman’s Girl Friend Lois Lane* “I Am Curious (Black),” a Kryptonian Plastimold Machine transforms Lois’s appearance, making her skin temporarily black. In this issue, she learns about racism and prejudice in a new way, sadly stating, “He’s *wrong* about me...but *right* about so many others” (Kanigher & Roth, 1970). Lois’s character was not focused on gaining Superman as a husband; she had returned to her independent roots. Thus, as the readers or viewers changed in their perceptions of themselves, writers changed the way the character of Lois Lane was written, corresponding to this shift.

This shift in characterization is also echoed in the cinematic versions of the character. The most memorable incarnation of Lois Lane, perhaps, appeared in 1978 with the big screen classic *Superman: The Movie* (1978). This version of our independent career girl shows she is, indeed, a well-rounded person. We see her with a stellar apartment and a successful career. When we meet this version of Lois, she is finishing up a new story and pitching ideas for a regular crime column. We know she’s successful, for Jimmy Olsen is following her around, in wonderment over her track record. When he asks how she “gets all the great stories,” Lois staunchly replies, “A good reporter doesn’t get great stories; a good reporter makes them great!” (Donner, 1978). She is confident and self-assured, and in the next scene, a mugging, she is the one who tries to take charge and kick the armed assailant who tries to take her purse. Right away, we see a Lois who has the modern day independent streak that we could believe Siegel and Schuster would approve of.

However, this Lois is not drawn perfectly; she is a realistic woman of her times with many facets to her personality. She is cynical, often sarcastic. When Clark wants to send half his pay to another address, she first thinks it is his bookie; she then guesses that it is for his mother (Donner, 1978). In addition, she is not above having a crush. She is enamored with Superman—blushing and stammering during their first interview—but she writes a hard-nosed article about him that earns her the front page, too. Although she is eager to catch the story, she is presented in this film as a strong woman that both Clark and Superman would be attracted to.

Much like the comics of this time, in this first film, Lois is not overly concerned with figuring out Superman's identity; she's too busy catching stories and writing about him. After Superman and Lois's first "date," Clark comically arrives at Lois's front door for their date. She is so bemused by her time with Superman that she barely registers Clark. Rather than Lois thinking that Clark and Superman look alike, it is Clark who almost initiates the conversation of his alter ego's identity. Standing up straight and taking off the glasses, he speaks with Superman's strong voice: "Lois, there's something I have to tell you...I'm really..." (Donner, 1978). However, he changes his mind when Lois returns to the room. Viewers can easily see that Lois is still thinking about Superman—so much so, she misses the glimpse of Clark without his glasses, and the moment is lost. A tiny moment at the end of the film has Lois give it consideration, but she is distracted from pursuing this idea because of Jimmy saying that Superman cares for her (Donner, 1978). After her traumatic ordeal with the earthquake, she is happy to be safe and alive, giving Superman's identity no further thought. Instead, it becomes a major plot device for the sequel, *Superman II* (1980). Perhaps the audience, much like Lois, was not yet overly concerned with who was behind the glasses.

Superman II opens in the *Daily Planet* with Clark invisible as usual. When Clark arrives at Perry White's office, he finds out Lois is in Paris, working on a dangerous terrorist story: "If Paris is going to go kablooiie, I want my best reporter right in the middle of it" (Lester, 1980). Immediately, in the first scene, we are shown that Lois is not just capable—she is *more capable* than Clark. White even comes out and makes this judgment definitive, summing it up clearly: "No offense, Kent, you're good, but Lois Lane's better" (Lester, 1980). As Tresca argues in "The Evolution of Lois Lane in Film and Television," this focus on Lois's career accomplishments demonstrates that "Lois is amazingly intelligent" (2013, p. 20). Her powers of deduction then become a major plot point for the film, as Lois suspects Clark and Superman are one and the same person. She then, like the "good reporter that she is, sets out to prove it" (p. 20).

Lois and Clark pose as a newlywed couple to dig up dirt on scams at Niagara Falls. When Clark gets condensation from standing near the water, Lois takes his glasses off and polishes them. When she goes to return them, she sees Clark—Superman—without his glasses. She is further convinced when a young boy falls over the railing into the water and is rescued. As she puts the pieces together, she reasons, "And Clark is not around as usual!" (Lester, 1980).

After she tries to get Clark to admit it—or save her—to no avail, she feels silly. She is dejected, and she mumbles, “If Perry White could see me now” (Lester, 1980). Perhaps Clark felt bad for Lois, perhaps it was an accident, or perhaps he was so busy trying to think about how to distract her from thinking about her embarrassing fall into Niagara Falls, but Clark stumbles and falls into the fire pit, where his glasses fall in. Unconsciously, he pulls them quickly from the fire. The ruse is now up, as Lois scans him for burns. “You are Superman!” she exclaims in wonder (Lester, 1980). Clark takes off the glasses and admits that she is correct.

Whether this original theatrical version or the Richard Donner Cut (2006), Lois’s power of deduction is what leads to the big reveal. In the Richard Donner Cut, Lois watches Clark from across the newsroom and then draws glasses, literally, over a picture of Superman on the newspaper in front of her. After several misfires—like with the theatrical version—she concocts a sure-fire (pun intended) plan to get Clark to admit his alter ego. She pulls a gun on Clark and shoots him. Despite Clark’s criticisms of her plan, Lois had one final trick up her sleeve: the bullets were blanks (Donner, 2006).

In short, despite different versions, one vision of this Lois Lane is clear: she is an independent, gutsy, and determined woman who tries to solve problems on her own, whether it is kicking a would-be mugger or trying to punch Kryptonian terrorists. Therefore, this new Lois could not simply be labeled as Superman’s girlfriend: “This was a Lois Lane for a new era. Kidder’s update of Lane could appeal to audiences schooled in Superman comic books and those increasingly accustomed to strong female imagery in popular culture” (Weiss, 2013, pp.133-134). Lois Lane’s new strength mirrored the new vision for women in the 1970s. She was a carefully revised character who evolved to become capable; she could now see the truth behind the glasses all on her own.

The Modern Avatar of Lois Lane

The 1990s brought about the modern age of comics, and after a wide-scale reboot by DC Comics as a whole, the Lois Lane character in print was refocused to reflect the modern woman. Much like Kidder’s Lois Lane, this version was a “tough-as-nails reporter who rarely needed rescuing” and was also independent and sensitive (*Lois Lane*, 2013). Lois also finally learns—without a memory wipe or other interfering event—Superman’s identity in *Action Comics* #662, titled “Secrets in the Night.” In the documentary *Look, Up in the Sky!* (2006), Mike Carlin, the Senior Group Editor at DC Comics, revealed that this decision to allow Clark to reveal his secret was prompted by the writers “being a little tired of Lois not figuring it out. It was starting to make her look a little stupid. And you can’t be a top reporter and be stupid.”

As a result, Lois’s image and role progressed in the 1990s’ comics, such as with “Secrets in the Night.” Lois and Clark moved from co-workers and friends to a romantic couple. But, while Lois has been less concerned in the modern age with Superman’s secret identity, Clark has now decided that, if he and Lois are now engaged, he

should reveal his biggest secret. While snuggling on the couch one night, Clark begins his revelation: "There's something I've been wanting to tell you, Lois...something you should know about me if we are to marry..." (Stern & McLeod, 1991). However, with a bit of comedic timing, Lois interrupts with a snarky reply, "Let me guess... you snore!" (Stern & McLeod, 1991). While Clark gathers his thoughts and Lois piddles in the kitchen with their date-night popcorn, Silver Banshee abruptly breaks through the front door in an attempt to find Superman.

In Superman tradition, this interruption will put Clark's major event—telling Lois his secret—on hold. Interestingly, now in this new version, it's Superman's musings and doubts over the secret rather than Lois's questions and concerns that we as readers hear: "Why didn't I say it? Why didn't I just come out and tell her that I have to go because I am Superman?" (Stern & McLeod, 1991). It is interesting that we are getting a different perspective of Superman—that Clark, not Superman, is the identity he considers the most truthful. At the end of the issue, he does reveal his secret to a stunned Lois. Her mouth is open in a gasp as he not only takes off the glasses, but also reveals the famous symbol hidden under his shirt (Stern & McLeod, 1991). While Lois's immediate reaction is surprise, it is perhaps more interesting to the readers that we are, in the moment, reacting to the "big news" that we will find out—like our avatar—that Clark and Superman are one and the same. This comic sets up the ensuing relationship, courtship, and eventual marriage of Superman and Lois in *Superman: The Wedding Album* (1996). It seems that Lois is, like the audience, able now to be in love with both Clark and Superman—yet still be capable of having her own career and storylines. The 1990s was a pivotal time as this modern Lois Lane was showcased on television in a different type of show: a romantic drama.

In 1993, Warner Brothers launched *Lois & Clark: The New Adventures of Superman*. The first clue that this show would be slightly different than other versions—Lois's name appears first. This show could easily be family television, much like the 1950s *Adventures of Superman*, but it was also much more of a romance. In the show, Lois is drawn to both Clark and Superman. Despite traditional plot formulas such as the villain of the week and Lois getting into trouble that only Superman can help her get out of, this show was different in that it was deliberately drawn as a postmodern romance. Clark, played by Dean Cain, is compelling, interesting, and pretty much a hunky reporter who happens to wear glasses. He is attractive to Lois, and after a season of working together and flirting, they become involved as a couple. As a viewer, you are rooting for Clark as much as Superman; if there is a third-wheel in the relationship, it might just be, surprisingly, Superman. Further, our superhero is present only in a few scenes per episode, sometimes to save the day with a heroic act, sometimes to be mere eye-candy. According to Freeman (2013) in his essay, "Woman on Top," this character reversal switches Laura Mulvey's classic concept of male gaze theory—that women are present to be looked-at by the men. Both Superman and Clark are there for Lois—and the female viewers—to gaze upon. As Freeman concludes, Clark is the more equally drawn and supported character,

while Superman "...is constructed less as a character in *Lois & Clark* and more as the object of female desire" (2013, p. 195). It is Lois's journey, Lois's vision that takes top priority, and it is clear early on that Lois spends more time worrying about Clark's whereabouts than Superman's—often expressing frustration at his mysterious absences or abrupt departures.

"And the Answer Is..." is the season finale for season two (1995), and it showcases the explicit difference with her preoccupation with Clark rather than Superman. The episode begins with Clark, picking Lois up for a breakfast date, waiting in the living room while she finishes getting ready. This scene plays like a bit of homage to a similar scene in *Superman: The Movie* (1978), where Clark waits for Lois to get a sweater and debates telling Lois his double-identity. Clark sees a framed picture of the two of them on the table, picks it up, and starts practicing how he will tell Lois in a variety of ways: serious, comical, straight-forward, and heart-felt (Blake & Jackson, 1995). Just as he begins, "You know you are always complaining that I seem to run off every time we start talking about something important?...It has nothing to do with my fear of intimacy or falling in love or anything like that. I think I should just tell you this as simply and as honestly as I can. Lois, I'm super—" his important revelation is interrupted comically by the telephone's ring (Blake & Jackson, 1995).

Lois's frustration with Clark is evident, as she confronts him later at work. As Clark tries again to explain, and perhaps tell Lois his secret, she angrily interrupts him: "Don't! I cannot listen to one more stupid story about your barber or your doctor or how you suddenly have to return a book to the library. What you owe me is some respect. I am so tired of the excuses, Clark. How can we have a relationship if you're not going to be honest with me?" (Blake & Jackson, 1995). This conversation shows that the Lois of the 1990's isn't just concerned with who is behind the glasses; she is concerned with being treated fairly by her partner, super or not. At one point, she says, "I thought you were the last honest man. I thought you were... Clark Kent. Who are you?" (Blake & Jackson, 1995).

Interestingly, this set-up reveals more about Lois than Clark. This modern woman wants to uncover more about the man she loves—but this scene makes it clear that the love interest is Clark, not Superman. This Lois wants to see behind the walls that Clark has built—not to learn about Superman, but rather Clark himself. In every incarnation before now, Clark has been a friend, a co-worker, a rival, and a sounding board. Now, the modern Lois sees him as her love interest. The biggest revelation might be about Lois's character, not Superman's. *Lois & Clark* "goes the furthest to humanize the character than any other Superman adaptation and does so by challenging the notion of what we've come to expect from Superman – the idea that Clark is the disguise and Superman is the 'real' person" (Esposito, 2013). At the end of the episode, you think the build up has been to Clark telling Lois his secret. Instead, he proposes. Again this plot development reinforces that Clark is the more important character; he proposes as himself, the "real" person.

All of this surprising plot development leads to one more twist.

Lois takes a breath and replies, "Who's asking? Clark or Superman?" (McNamara, 1995). This Lois Lane is independent, like the Lois Lanes before her, but she may be the beginning of a new step in the path of the modern woman. She can choose in her love life, and she can select the object of her gaze, whether it is Clark or Superman. The glasses, much like their relationship, are in her hands.

The show even makes a few light-hearted jokes about the glasses as an effective disguise throughout season three of the show. In "Don't Tug on Superman's Cape," Lois picks up Clark's glasses from the table and puts them on. After looking at her reflection in the glasses, she states with disbelief, "These glasses fooled me for two years!" (Simkins, 1995). In real life, Teri Hatcher was part of a popular skit on *Saturday Night Live* that also did the same joke—how obvious it is to see behind the glasses. She comes right out and makes vocal the audience's central question about Clark's disguise, clearly stating that a modern Lois would be able to see behind the charade: "The main difference in this version of Superman is that I, Lois Lane, know that Clark Kent is Superman. I mean, how could you not know? Clark Kent wears glasses and Superman doesn't. Right?" (Abrash, 1996). As a follow up, cast members actually did just this—appearing both with and without the glasses. Teri, making fun of her character, or perhaps audiences of the past, would feign not recognizing them. Both funny and truthful, this idea was modern—that finally, in some way, Lois Lane would be in on the joke.

By 2000, though, we were ready for a new Superman—and a new version of Lois Lane. While we had made strides by thinking of Lois as an independent, well-developed character in her own right, the next generation was ready to construct a new avatar, this time set with a younger Lois. Rather than focusing on her hunt for the best story and Mr. Right in Metropolis, *Smallville* was set instead in the town where Clark grows up and learns his powers. Growing from high school adventures to college and real-life dilemmas, this show spoke to a different generation and audience. Instead of being the romantic comedy of *Lois & Clark*, this television drama focused on the teen and young adults who were, like Clark, trying to figure out both the world and their place within it. Since Clark's journey began in high school, Lois Lane was, interestingly, not present in the beginning of the show—only first appearing in Season Four's opening episode, "Crusade" in 2004.

This Lois quickly became a fan favorite, adding to a crowded field of strong women on the show: Chloe Sullivan, Lana Lang, and Martha Kent. Each of these characters—Lois included—was created to allow Clark to grow in new ways, whether it was motherly advice from Martha Kent, friendship and support from Chloe, or first love with Lana.

Although viewers might have expected Lois Lane to generate some romantic heat with Clark right away, the show put their evolution as a pair on a slow burn. Rather than having Clark enamored with Lois right away—or having Lois running around obsessing over Superman's secrets—the two were friends for several years first, almost having a brother-sister bond with regular ribbing and teasing, as Lois often calls Clark "Smallville." This choice allowed the viewers to

spend time with Lois first as a character—not just as a love interest or “other half” to Clark. In many episodes, she was more focused on her own life, her sister, or her career to be overly concerned about Clark except when their interests bumped up against each other’s. For example, in Season 6, Lois is desperate to find a great story, and she finds a crumpled up picture that her cousin, Chloe, has thrown in the waste bin. She follows the lead and ends up running into Clark at the same underground boxing ring in “Combat” (Meyer & Septien, 2007). Adventures (or misadventures) like these became the staples of the show, allowing both Clark and Lois to grow into their adult selves separately yet intertwined.

Season 6 also sets up the first romantic stirrings—albeit with the standard plot device of a memory wipe for Lois—in “Crimson.” Lois buys lipstick laced with red kryptonite—and a love potion. Thinking she is in love with Clark, she kisses him. Despite others’ hints that they have chemistry, Lois proclaims that they are like “hot fudge and halibut” (Souders & Peterson, 2007). Lois and Clark’s relationship in this episode is forced—as they are set up for a Valentine’s Day party—but yet this doesn’t propel the characters together. Instead, Lois offered Clark friendly support as he dealt with his lingering feelings over Lana Lang, his first love. Their friendship blossomed, and at the beginning of Season 8, they began to see each other in a more romantic light after Clark starts working at the *Daily Planet*.

Audiences embraced this new Lois. Fan pages have been established to worship Durance’s Lois. One article focused on “Five Reasons Why Erica Durance is the Best Lois Lane Ever” (2013). Focusing on not just her looks but also her intelligence and physical prowess (she looked believable in a fight), fans found this version of Lois was a character that they could relate to and root for: “She had her own struggles to deal with, like finding her place and purpose in the world, and deciding how best to do what she believed was right, which gave her depth that we often don’t get to see from Lois Lane” (Ramos, 2013). Because we had seven seasons to watch her evolve into Lois Lane as a woman, reporter, and love interest, she had more layers that the modern audience could relate to.

If Lois in the 1990s was considered to be independent and intelligent enough to figure out Superman’s identity on her own, this Lois is equally capable—perhaps even more so. Lois has suspicions about Clark, believing he is holding something back from her. She keeps digging, thinking that the evidence she finds points to Clark being influenced by Smallville’s meteor rocks. In the pivotal Season 9 episode “Salvation,” Lois’s sleuthing uncovers Clark’s hidden journal of Kryptonian symbols and artifacts. At the same time, Clark has come to profess his love—and perhaps his secret. However, when he doesn’t, Lois throws out that she has been offered a promotion to a *Daily Planet* station in Africa. Still not getting the response or openness that she desires, she pushes Clark for more: “I would stay for you. As important as my career is to me, you are more important. I would give up Africa for you...but only if we stop keeping secrets from each other” (Meyer & Septien, 2010). At his, “I don’t know what you’re talking about, Lois,” she pushes further, pleading, “Come on. I need you to be honest with me” (Meyer & Septien, 2010). Durance

is especially proud of this aspect of Lois's character, stating that she "always liked" this character "because of her strength and independence and that she didn't see herself as a victim" (Goldman, 2008).

At the end of the episode, Zod presses Lois for Clark's hidden artifact. When she touches Zod's hand, she is suspicious that he is not "The Blur"—and decides to test her theory, stating, "I hid it where I confessed to you that you were the most important person in my life" (Meyer & Septien, 2010). Standing her ground, she concludes matter-of-factly, "You're not really him!" (Meyer & Septien, 2010). At the conclusion of the episode, with the Kryptonian artifact and Lois safe, Clark—as the Blur—kisses Lois, leaving Lois now completely sure of her hero's true identity as she mumbles his name partly with recognition, partly with surprise: "Clark!" (Meyer & Septien, 2010).

This new Lois represents a fully fleshed-out character; she reflects all of the Lois incarnations before her—the co-worker, the sidekick, the love interest—while adding other labels as well, including protector and even Justice League member, as she served as their official investigator. Karen Hirmer argues in "*Smallville's* Lois Lane: From New Woman to Female Hero" (2013) that these qualities make Durance's Lois more than just an updated version of a traditional female character. Instead, she is a modernization, a new construction of a female character that is "appealing and compelling to a young female audience" (p. 254). By pulling all of the pieces together of all the Lois Lanes before her—along with a few new traits, too—this Lois became yet a new avatar for the audience. She need not be just a love interest or a co-worker. Instead, she is a complete woman who is a partner and support to Superman—she is the character this young audience could see as inspiring.

After the misstep of *Superman Returns* (2006), featuring an underdeveloped Lois Lane—and as many think, a miscast, too young Kate Bosworth—audiences were ready for the next Lois Lane. But, with the popularity of Kidder and Durance's incarnations, the reboot of the Superman franchise would need a strong Lois that could honor the past, but also take her character to a new level.

When we first meet Amy Adams' Lois Lane, she is getting out of a helicopter at a frigid air force military base. She's hot on the trail of her next story. After a soldier gushes that he liked her warfront pieces from the field, she replies, "What can I say? I get writer's block if I'm not wearing a flak jacket!" (Snyder, 2013). She is obviously a fish out of water, surrounded by military personnel and soldiers. As she greets the ranking officers, the viewers learn right away that this new Lois is not about to be a damsel-in-distress. She readily asserts herself, not cowering to the military officials: "Look—let's get one thing straight, guys, okay? The only reason I'm here is because we're on Canadian soil, and an appellate court overruled your injunction to keep me away. So, if we're done measuring dicks, can you show me what you found?" (Snyder, 2013). Her blunt, to-the-point response gets no response—other than surprise—from the men who seemed to not expect her to hold her own. Adams explains in the *Journey of Discovery: Creating Man of Steel* (2013) documentary that she first really got a grasp of Lois's character when she follows Clark—then unknown to her down a dark passageway at the base: "That's when

I sort of understood the fearlessness of this character. And not that she didn't possess fear—but that she had the strength to work through the fear to find the story and get to the truth" (Snyder, 2013). Adams' new version of Lois, then, reflects strength, building on the blocks that the other Lois Lanes had started constructing before her.

The most important difference in this incarnation of Lois is that she learns that Clark is Superman on her own and solely because of her own sleuthing skills. At first, she is determined to uncover the mystery of the unknown hero who saved her. She is dogged in her determination, especially since *The Daily Planet's* editor, Perry White, has refused to print her story on the "spaceship" and her mysterious rescuer. Eventually, due to her sleuthing, Clark tracks her down to discuss why she wants his story. Despite her eagerness for the scoop, she is swayed by his appeal to her that "if the world found out who I really was, they would reject me out of fear" (Snyder, 2013). At this point in most Superman stories, Superman would turn back time, or her memories would be wiped clean, or even a drug would steal the knowledge from her. However, the construction of this Lois allows for her to be *in the know* for the rest of the film. Instead of being his weakness, she is his supporter, able to be involved in the fight—literally. At the climax of the film, when Superman has reluctantly killed Zod, she is there to comfort him (Snyder, 2013). She is perhaps enamored with Clark, but this fact is not the reason why she is constructed to know the truth. This modern version of Lois Lane doesn't need glasses to protect her or hide a truth she can't handle. She can't be categorized as only a love interest or damsel-in-distress, and her storyline focuses on her job, not being in love with *either* Superman or Clark at this point. If Teri Hatcher's Lois could poke fun at Clark's disguise, then our new Lois creates the inside joke with her parting line, "Welcome to the planet" (Snyder, 2013).

It remains to be seen how this new Lois Lane will grow with the new *Man of Steel* franchise. She might have her memory wiped; she might end up differently. But, judging by the audience's connection to this Lois, her fierce, direct portrayal is meeting the audience's expectations of a modern Lois. If Disney can produce a princess film like *Frozen* that features a protagonist whose primary relationship involves her sister rather than a Prince Charming, I think it's now safe to say that the female characters that this generation desires should be more developed and self-sufficient to be merely a love interest or plot device. Ashley Fetters (2013) argues in "*Man of Steel's* Lois Lane is a 'Modern' Heroine—Just the Lois Lanes Before" that each of the representative versions of the star reporter have reflected the values of the time and have been slightly progressive, even if "Lana and Lois spent much of the 1950s and 1960s competing over who would become Superman's wife." Fetters concludes that "Adams' efforts to deliver an up-to-date, self-actualized Lois...designed to fit some of the ideals of an America experiencing the 'rise of women'" (2013).

In the end, we can use characters such as Lois Lane as not just a pop culture topic, but an important audience analysis as well. What is interesting about studying the various versions of Lois Lane is that she is one of long-running female characters who has changed in both appearance and focus over time. Truitt (2013) argues that she

was one of the most original characters when she was created in the 1930s, and that was “atypical of other female characters of the day.” But, more importantly, her path can be a useful tool to use to trace the struggles, obstacles, and even roles that women had within each time period. Lois Lane can serve a positive role model because whichever version you spotlight, “whether or not she was romantically involved with Clark Kent or Superman, Lois would still be in that story. That’s why I think women like her as a character...she has a reason to be there” (Truitt, 2013). She’s the avatar each generation can craft for themselves, slightly—or severely—changing her role to reflect their values. And audiences can easily uncover the truth here—no glasses or disguise needed.

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