From Kitty to Cat: Kitty Pryde and the Phases of Feminism

MARGARET GALVAN

“This chapter is an argument for pleasure in the confusion of boundaries and for responsibility in their construction.”
—Donna Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto”

Why would Chris Claremont and John Byrne, the creative team behind The Uncanny X-Men in the late 1970s and early 1980s, make a young teenage girl the newest member of the international group of superheroes? Over the first half of the 1980s, both fans and fellow characters questioned whether Kitty Pryde, not only on the basis of her age, but also her inexperience—the unknown potential of her mutant abilities, coupled with her immature attitude and its consequences in fights—was more of a liability than an asset to the team. Professor Xavier even momentarily demotes her from the X-Men because she is “too young” and “too little is known about [her] powers” in The Uncanny X-Men #167 (Mar. 1983). In a fan letter, Daniel Kaufman agrees with Xavier’s assessment, but expands these sentiments into a harsher critique by adding gender to the list of disadvantages: “I always found it hard to believe a 14 year old kid whose only powers are phasing, looking cute and drooling over Colossus could pull the X-Men’s fat out of the fire as it seems she’s done almost every issue” (The Uncanny X-Men #173 [Oct. 1983]). Although Kaufman belittles Pryde by calling her a “kid” and naming her flirtations with Colossus as among her “only powers,” he cannot help but admit that she often aids the X-Men in victory. Pryde may seem innocuous, but she challenges these superficial evaluations with each success. When she earns back her spot on the team in The Uncanny X-Men #168 (Apr. 1983), she proves herself to Xavier not by acting more mature and demonstrating the full potential of her mutant abilities. Rather, she defeats her enemies with her youthful persistence and her
wits when an enemy temporarily deactivates her powers. Fighting against expectations, Pryde extends the field of what powerful superheroines look and act like.

Claremont, the writer on *The Uncanny X-Men* for nearly two decades (1975–1991), is known for helping to develop a number of powerful female heroines during his tenure. Jean Grey and Storm stand out as two of these iconic heroines, and, as Ramzi Fawaz astutely tracks in an article in *American Literature* (2011) that focuses on the beginning of “The Phoenix Saga” in 1977, these characters “[dramatize] two distinct but overlapping feminist projects of the mid–1970s... the desire for female autonomy and self-actualization and the development of alternative intimacies and solidarities outside of the scheme of heteropatriarchy” (374, 376). Fawaz aligns the former project with Grey as a stand-in for a “white liberal feminist worldview” and the latter with Storm and “radical women of color” (376). Importantly, in his analysis of “The Phoenix Saga,” Fawaz draws out how Grey’s drastic transformation into Phoenix, representative of the race-and-class-blind drive for female liberation, alienates not only her black female teammate, but her male teammates, as well.1 In this storyline’s denouement, Fawaz locates the possibility for reconciliation as Storm offers up her life to help save Grey (380). This exchange, however, is far from equal: one gives, one takes.2 The unevenness of this dynamic underlines the incompatibility of these feminisms and signals the sea change of the 1980s where disenfranchised feminists insist that difference must be at the heart of any conception of feminism. It is in this evolving milieu that Pryde comes of age.

When Claremont and artist Byrne added Pryde to the team in *The Uncanny X-Men* #138 (Oct. 1980), not only was she the first new addition to the X-Men since the team changed its roster dramatically in *The Uncanny X-Men* #94 (Aug. 1975), but she also represented a clear replacement for Grey, who died in the previous issue. Like Pryde, Grey also started her tenure while still a teenager as Marvel Girl before blossoming into the empowered Phoenix that Fawaz aligns with a particular strain of 1970s feminism. Even though Pryde is young, her determined spirit distinguishes her from Marvel Girl who Fawaz labels as a “shrinking violet persona” before Claremont dramatically reconceives her when he begins writing the series in 1975 (373). By marked contrast, Pryde, in her first appearances before she even joins the team and has any formal training, ably evades capture, infiltrates enemy headquarters, and alerts Nightcrawler that other X-Men have been detained (*The Uncanny X-Men* #129–130 [Jan.-Feb. 1980]). While her ability to phase through solid objects initially may make her seem like a mysterious wallflower when she disappears through barriers, with this power, Pryde actively challenges notions of stability at their most basic, physical level. How she employs these trans-
gressive powers in concert with a plucky persona make Pryde an often overlooked powerhouse and a figure of the multivalent feminism that thrived in the 1980s.

In attitude and age, Pryde easily matches the young, feisty females who take over the silver screen in 1980s teen films. When Xavier says that he will demote her because of her youth, Pryde responds by intoning, "Professor Xavier is a jerk!" in a memorable one-page splash opening *The Uncanny X-Men* #168 (Apr. 1983). This outburst echoes Molly Ringwald as Andie's exclamation, "Duckie, you're being a real jerk!" in *Pretty in Pink* (1986). Moreover, just like the teenagers in most of John Hughes' films, Pryde hails from the Chicago suburbs.³ The plot of the comics often highlights Pryde's youth by showing her daily habits, including reading comics, studying, and attending dance practice, amidst her responsibilities to the X-Men. Her youthful energy also radiates from her face: in early issues, Pryde is most often depicted in close-up, emoting or reacting to something rather than showing off her powers. This premise holds even in "Demon," an issue where Pryde defeats a N'garai demon while she's alone in the X-Mansion on Christmas Eve (*The Uncanny X-Men* #143 [Mar. 1981]). Although she uses her phasing abilities in combination with her technical aptitude to triumph over the enemy, her emotional reactions as she figures out her next course of action visually dominate the panels instead. Not only do these visual cues mark her as Brat Pack *avant la lettre*, but they distinguish her from Storm, whose offensive tactics are on display in the issue's flashback splash page that shows her full body in flight battling a group of N'garai.⁴

But, even if Pryde superficially matches these peers, her identity as a mutant sets her apart. Her mutant identity closely aligns with this surface, evidenced by a text box in the issue where she officially joins the team: "She's 13½, cute, bright, spunky—and she walks through walls" (*The Uncanny X-Men* #138 [Oct. 1980]). These primary descriptors could name any number of Brat Pack characters, but Pryde's difference lies in the hyphen that introduces her powers. It is at the point of these mutant abilities that her narrative diverges from the John Hughes paradigm. Although Molly Ringwald often plays the role of an empowered misfit, she ably discards this identity by the film's end. When one of the rich characters derisively refers to Ringwald's Andie as a "mutant" in *Pretty in Pink* and chastises his friend for speaking with her, such a mark is an ephemeral insult. In the last shot of the film, Andie's locking lips with the rich guy of her dreams.⁵ In theorizing Ringwald's strong female characters in her Brat Pack films, Anthony C. Bleach argues that the characters fit within a post-feminist paradigm as they decide to leverage female empowerment for capitalist social advancement (28).⁶ However, as a genetic mutant who lives apart from society, such gains are never fully available for Pryde.⁷
Although she comes from a good family in the suburbs, Pryde's mutant identity limits her ability to latch onto the upwardly mobile trajectory opened up by straight white feminists in the 1970s. In fact, Grey's death signals the shortcomings of 1970s white liberal feminism to achieve a sustainable vision. By marked contrast, Storm thrives in the 1980s, redefining herself (*The Uncanny X-Men #173* [Oct. 1983]) and besting Cyclops for leadership even during a period of powerlessness (*The Uncanny X-Men #201* [Jan. 1986]), all of which underscores the flourishing of multicultural feminism that takes place in the decade. In forging a relationship with Storm respectful of her wisdom and leadership, Pryde represents a new breed of feminist who operates horizontally in how she transgresses boundaries and builds partnerships. When Pryde is introduced in January 1980, the narrative text box surrounding her form intones, "Katherine Pryde is heading home from dance class. She's 13 years old, going on fourteen—and her world is slowly falling apart." (*The Uncanny X-Men #129*). On the surface of the plot, the dissolution of "her world" signals the impending divorce of Pryde's parents, but it rests alongside and thereby resonates with the moment where Pryde first experiences her mutant abilities that will necessarily distance herself from both her parents—divorce or no. As she negotiates a family imploding from all angles, any sense of a unified feminism was crumbling in the real world.

In some ways, the 1980s is a decade stuck between the second-wave of 1970s feminists and the third-wave that arises in the early 1990s. Pryde is both a product and a figure of this liminality. But, what occupies the space between these waves? If Pryde is a 1980s feminist, what does that mean? As Erica E. Townsend-Bell summarizes in a 2012 article reviewing the voices of diverse feminists in the 1970s and 1980s, "The writing of the 1980s focused even greater attention on the question of coalitions, interrogating the basis for assumed unity" (129). This skepticism about the possibility of coalition, joined particularly around the contentious issues of sexuality and race. By decade's end, Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the idea of intersectionality in "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex" (1989) to argue for an attention along and valuation of all lines of identity difference, but, as Jasbir Puar notes in a 2011 article, arguments for a nuanced and multifaceted approach to identity in feminism resonated throughout the 1980s (par. 2). Puar pinpoints Andre Lorde's essay, "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference," first delivered as a paper in 1980 and then published in the 1984 collection, *Sister Outsider*, as thinking through these issues (par. 2).

Within this milieu of heightened identity politics, feminist theorists Gloria Anzaldúa and Donna Haraway produce work that seeks to find synthesis across difference. Their desires to think more capaciously about identity and difference lead them both to theorize the liminal identities of the mestiza and
the cyborg, respectively, who, like Pryde, are challenged by and themselves challenge theoretical and physical borders and boundaries. Haraway, in “A Cyborg Manifesto,” first germinated as a conference paper in 1983 and then developed and published in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* (1991) and Anzaldúa in *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987), question the permeability of social barriers and how identities in-between get marked by them. These thinkers seem apt theoretical companions for a superheroine who actively transgresses supposedly stable physical boundaries. Moreover, not only must Pryde continually fight critiques that undervalue her on the basis of superficial criteria, but she also holds three minority positions as Jewish female mutant. All of these simultaneously ever-present identities embody the concerns of 1980s feminism by putting pressure on monolithic ideas of identity. While this chapter will focus on the intersection of her mutant and female selves, her Jewishness is a rich area that invites further research and reflection.

Pryde’s body itself illustrates the difficulty of negotiating multiplicity through the seemingly superficial teenage indecisiveness that surrounds her appearance and code name. In the early years of Pryde’s existence, her look radically shifts continuously enough to prompt frustrated fan responses to silly costume changes and proposals for different looks (*Uncanny X-Men* #156 [Apr. 1982]; *Uncanny X-Men* #168 [Apr. 1983]). Printing these proposals in the pages of the comic creates further multiplicity, not less. Although the response to a fan letter in #156 (Apr. 1982) chalks up Pryde’s ridiculous costume in #149 (Sep. 1981) to the vagaries of youth, every new look challenges desires for stasis, for two-dimensional characters in one-dimensional looks. While Pryde’s personality evolves gradually, her uneven appearance resonates with a decade in flux. Her subversive malleability reaches a fever pitch when she more powerfully manipulates her look to help save the team in *Uncanny X-Men* #157 (May 1982). While she and Nightcrawler are hostages of the alien Shi’ar in *Uncanny X-Men* #155–157, she discovers a Shi’ar device that can change not only her clothes, but also her makeup and hairstyle. Her first transformations are superficial and silly, including a Darth Vader costume that exasperates Nightcrawler (*Uncanny X-Men* #155 [Mar. 1982]). She, however, ultimately wields the device in combination with her powers to change into a ghost-like Phoenix who can disappear through walls, which allows her and Nightcrawler to stop the Earth’s destruction by terrifying the Shi’ar (*Uncanny X-Men* #157 [May 1982]). This moment as Phoenix emphasizes how Pryde not only challenges physical structures by penetrating them with her body, but how she breaks down barriers between and within identities.

In extending her transgressive force beyond simply phasing through walls, Pryde employs a feminist worldview that reshapes both her environment
and herself. Building from Pryde's potential to capaciously wield her powers, we will now turn to consider Pryde as a feminist blazing the trail against anti-mutant sentiment, starting with the two-issue "Days of Future Past" storyline (The Uncanny X-Men #141–142 [Jan.–Feb. 1981]) and opening up across the 1980s. Following this exploration of Pryde as mediator and freedom fighter in concert with her teammates, we will explore how Pryde confronts and rebuilds her own sense of self in Kitty Pryde and Wolverine, a six-issue miniseries (Nov. 1984–Apr. 1985). These storylines develop Pryde's complexity while always footnoting her youth, emphasizing her multimodal identity and underscoring the fact that she is a feminist making her way in the 1980s.

"Days of Future Past" complicates Pryde's hitherto immature character by introducing an older version of Pryde, Kate Pryde, who psychically travels back in time and temporarily switches minds with her younger self to help prevent a murder that puts into motion anti-mutant sentiment and creates a dystopian world in Kate's future. Although these two Prydes only encounter each other in passing through time, this evocation of multiple selves echoes Joanna Russ's famed feminist science fiction novel, The Female Man (1975). In this text, four characters, who are variations on a theme of each other and shaped by their societal circumstances in their alternate timescapes, meet and reevaluate gender roles in their own worlds based on the experiences of the others. Russ's text, as much rhetoric as it is narrative, parallels her own feminist theorizing, where she suggests that the science fiction genre offers unparalleled opportunities to create well-rounded female characters with complex narrative trajectories. Following Russ's line of reasoning, integrating speculative elements into The Uncanny X-Men allows Pryde to ultimately discard the plot offerings and trajectories of a more conventional tale, giving her the freedom to break away from the Brat Pack.

We see such possibility in how the future Pryde inhabits her younger self's form with a particular seriousness. Gone are the up-close reaction shots that generally accompany Pryde's actions. Rather, we see her full-body in profile, running interference to prevent the assassination. With Pryde at the center of the plot, this narrative anticipates and acts as a more progressive, feminist version of James Cameron's Terminator (1984). Rather than a son coming back from the future and teaching his mother to have fighting spirit, this comic ignores such twisted heteropatriarchal dynamics by putting a future Pryde at the center of the action, performing a one-to-one swap with herself. Moreover, it is significant that Pryde, who is still so young and who only begins her training as an X-Man right before the temporal swap, is the protagonist in this dystopian future as one of the few surviving X-Men. Despite her status as the newest and youngest member of the team in the present, her survival and lead-
ership role in the future further her character’s multiplicity while also emphasizing her strength and the accompanying viability of her feminist politics.

But more than just establishing her complexity, this storyline wields Pryde to illustrate the hateful and apocalyptic course of anti-mutant sentiment. Although the X-Men often deal with animosity from humans, this story centralizes the high stakes of this prejudice. Moreover, while this storyline and subsequent ones that evoke this dystopia make future discrimination present, the introduction of the Morlocks, a subterranean community of mutants who hide themselves from humanity on account of their harrowing appearances and powers, in *The Uncanny X-Men* #169 (May 1983) foregrounds the presence and price of discrimination in the present. Pryde involves the X-Men in this narrative when she becomes infected and captured by the Morlocks in *The Uncanny X-Men* #169–171 (May–Jul. 1983) and later kidnapped in *The Uncanny X-Men* #178–179 (Feb.–Mar. 1984). Whether as freedom fighter or captive, Pryde forces the X-Men to engage issues of discrimination.

Pryde’s highlighting of these uncomfortable issues, bringing them across the boundaries of the future or the sewers into the forefront of the narrative, further aligns her, in particular, with the work of Anzaldúa in *Borderlands/La Frontera*. While this critical work was both a success when it was published in the late 1980s and remains in the critical consciousness today, AnaLouise Keating, editor of *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* (2009), asserts in her introduction that some of the provocative or uncomfortable parts of Anzaldúa’s oeuvre remain underexamined (5). In one of these overlooked chapters in *Borderlands*, “La herencia de Coaticue/The Coaticue State,” Anzaldúa explores her mysticism, its connection to her body, and how such a relationship marks her as an outcast:

I was two or three years old the first time Coaticue visited my psyche, the first time she “devoured” me (and I “fell” into the underworld). By the worried look on my parents’ faces I learned early that something was fundamentally wrong with me. When I was older I would look into the mirror, afraid of mi secreto terrible, the secret sin I tried to conceal—la señã, the mark of the Beast. I was afraid it was in plain sight for all to see. The secret I tried to conceal was that I was not normal, that I was not like the others. I felt alien, I knew I was alien. I was the mutant stoned out of the herd, something deformed with evil inside [64–65].

Anzaldúa’s delineation of this phenomenon equates not only to Pryde’s own experience of her mutant identity, but also to the harrowing experiences of mutant discrimination in the 1980s that we encounter through Pryde’s meditation. In this autobiographical vignette, Anzaldúa describes the negative parental reaction to difference and the embrace of self-hatred, secrecy, and fear that grows out of this initial response by seeking to protect the self from further rejection and retribution on account of this selfhood.
In fact, Anzaldúa’s autobiographical snippet here could easily be the backstory of any number of outcast mutants, and the potential consequences of such actions are explored in *New Mutants* #45 (Nov. 1986). In this issue, Pryde befriends a young man named Larry, who’s bullied by his school peers and called a mutant on account of his intelligence. Successfully hiding his mutant identity but stressed to the limit by the verbal abuse of his peers, he commits suicide. On the last page of the issue, Pryde delivers the eulogy for Larry, transforming the moment into a public service announcement that attempts to expansively encompass all coalitions of outcasts and pariahs in a call to disavow “the label, the brand, [the] personal ‘Scarlet Letter’” that people use to mark and exile each other. We do not see the many bodies that Pryde invokes here in words, aside from her own that she identifies at the beginning of her speech as “a four-eyed, flat-chested, brat, chick, brain, hebe, stuck-up Xavier’s snob freak!” However, we do see Pryde’s body represented from multiple angles as she delivers her speech at a podium. Both this eulogy and its representation is feminist: Pryde puts her own body on the line as she speaks for multiplicity and inclusion, actively recognizing and making (her) difference visible. Moreover, just like “Days of Future Past” where she’s in the center of the fray preventing the murder and thus hopefully quashing future anti-mutant sentiment, right after this speech she springs into action alongside the X-Men in *The Uncanny X-Men* #211–212 (Nov.–Dec. 1986) to fight the Marauders, a team of mutant assassins, who are massacring the Morlocks. In putting her politics into direct action, she incurs a serious injury whereby she cannot become solid matter and remains in a phased state. She eventually heals, but this battle injury resonates with the increasing gravity of radical politics in the latter half of the decade as the AIDS crisis devastates a marginalized populace, who must rally even as their bodies fail them.

Establishing how Pryde functions within the team as a force of feminism, we now must consider how Pryde more personally and bodily operates along the tenuous tenets of 1980s feminism. Haraway’s musings on the figure of the cyborg are particularly evocative here, for, in a certain sense, Pryde fulfills many of Haraway’s cyborg criteria, which Haraway describes succinctly near the outset of her manifesto: “From another perspective, a cyborg world might be about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints” (154). Starting with the two most physical elements in this construct, Pryde has strong alliances with both “animals and machines” that often crucially help her succeed. For example, in the aforementioned “Demon” issue, Pryde employs the technologies of both the Danger Room and the Black Bird jet to defeat her enemy. Her skills supplement her physical prowess in allowing her to dispense with an intruder.
Likewise, during a confrontation with the Brood in *The Uncanny X-Men* #166 (Feb. 1983), a small purple dragon helps save Pryde and becomes her long-time companion and sidekick in future fights when she smuggles it back to Earth with her. In addition to these important kinships that push Pryde's body ever past the bounds of her own flesh, I want to circle back to Pryde herself and ask how her bildungsroman miniseries, *Kitty Pryde and Wolverine*, formally illuminates what it means to be a cyborg feminist and what possibilities it suggests for younger women, who grew up amidst the second-wave of the 1970s, but who came into their own during this following decade.

Although *Kitty Pryde and Wolverine* unsurprisingly features Wolverine, no other X-Men play a sustained role in this six-issue miniseries. Rather, the narrative takes both characters out of the United States as Pryde follows her father to Japan after eavesdropping on a business meeting and realizing he is in trouble with Japanese gangsters (*Kitty Pryde and Wolverine* #1 [Nov. 1984]). Wolverine trails her to Japan, but before he can find her, she's brainwashed by an evil ninja master named Ogun in cahoots with the Japanese gangsters threatening Pryde's father (*Kitty Pryde and Wolverine* #2 [Dec. 1984]). In her brainwashed state, Pryde dons Ogun's demonic facemask and battles Wolverine with expert ninja skill. When he knocks off her mask and is shocked to see her face, she unhesitatingly stabs him through the chest and nearly kills him (*Kitty Pryde and Wolverine* #3 [Jan. 1985]). As he recovers, Wolverine serves as her mentor, training her physically so that she can develop the strength to fully overcome the brainwashing and reclaim her will (*Kitty Pryde and Wolverine* #4 [Feb. 1985]). The final two issues feature Pryde heading back to Tokyo to defeat the gangsters and Ogun (*Kitty Pryde and Wolverine* #5–6 [May–June 1985]).

In these final issues, as she travels to face her foe and thereby test herself, Pryde articulates a new and more nuanced sense of purpose and identity. Although the form of the bildungsroman almost requires this moment of realization and growth, the comic also pushes back against a sense of linear character development through its very covers. In each of the six covers, a vertical line runs down the center, dividing each cover into two halves. In the first cover and a number of the following covers, Pryde's body straddles that divide, emphasizing from the outset and throughout her always transgressive form. As Haraway argues that her manifesto exists as “an argument for pleasure in the confusion of boundaries and for responsibility in their construction,” these covers illustrate those dynamics as Pryde continually and determinedly confuses boundaries (150). It is not a matter of Pryde learning to do away with that sense of fragmentation, but learning how to responsibly embrace it. In the first issue, Pryde impulsively plunges from Chicago to Tokyo, which is depicted on the cover where half of the page shows each locale. Her distressed
facial expression on this first cover recurs on the sixth cover, where again the
cover's divide visually cuts her body in half. Here she stands between Ogun
and Wolverine, who both penetrate her body with their metal weapons. Given
the fierceness of her brainwashed visage in the third cover where she confronts
Wolverine and a more determinedly aggressive stance in both the fourth and
fifth covers as she trains with Wolverine and then departs to confront Ogun,
this sixth cover seems to signal an unfortunate regression.

Yet, what we see here on the sixth cover is not downfall for Pryde, but,
rather, a valuing of the initial self that leads Pryde to Tokyo in the first place.
In the sixth issue, most of which covers the match-up with Ogun, Pryde's
inability to physically carry out the murder of Ogun paradoxically signals her
release from Ogun's mental hold as it foregrounds a loyalty to her core values
and a retention of her childlike innocence. The last panel of the miniseries
makes this point extremely well as it illustrates Pryde in perhaps the most juve-
nile pose in the story as she, wide-eyed as ever, grins over a huge sundae. Yet,
the Pryde who eagerly indulges in ice cream is simultaneously the Pryde who
takes to Wolverine's training and hones her battle skills to a fine point. That
she can capaciously encompass this multiplicity is part and parcel of what
makes her most especially a figure of the genealogy of 1980s feminism.

Even though there's a recursiveness built into the narrative's end, this
experience grounds Pryde more fully in her multivalent sense of self. This evo-
lution is most evident in the fifth issue where, in preparing for her faceoff with
Ogun, we see her calmly and confidently negotiating both her old mutant
powers and her new ninja skills in an easy synthesis. In one panel that spans
much of the bottom half of a page, she expertly walks on air above Tokyo in
full ninja garb as she describes in the accompanying narrative boxes her powers
and how they have opened up a different world for her. In these boxes, she
confidently acknowledges her triumphs, doing so in a varied register where
the seriousness of how she "slide[s] the molecules of [her] body between" is
accompanied by the casual conclusion that this phasing is a "pretty neat trick,
huh?" As soon as she safely makes it across the air to the roof of the next sky-
scraper, the inset panel at the bottom right of the page depicts her partially
removing her ninja mask to reveal her youthful visage, visually stressing her
multiplicity as she reflects, "I'm glad it's almost over." She is both youthful
and mature, klyzy and powerful, nurturing apparent contradictions in order
to thrive, embracing "new couplings, new coalitions" as any feminist in Har-
away's cyborg vein does (170). Such an expansive embrace is fairly unique in
this divisive decade. Her rare posture is illustrated visually in her ability to
bridge impossible gulfs, just as feminists in this coalitional spirit attempted
to do throughout the 1980s, particularly in anthologies like the fittingly titled,
This Bridge Called My Back (1981).
Following this key moment is yet another epiphany, another climax of self-definition that resonates more forcefully off of the pages of the comic and into the society that produces them. As she boards the Tokyo subway to dispense with Ogun after facing some lower-level threats, she again muses on her past as she stares at her reflection in the subway window. As she hypothetically ruminates on the potential paths open to her, her reflection morphs into the easily relatable wide-eyed past self and then into an action shot of her present ninja self scaling buildings. Across this apparent chasm of selves, her thoughts intone, "Would it have been so bad to live a normal ordinary life? Is it too late to try?! Go to college, meet some guy, have 2.4 kids, live happily ever after. That's what other women do—lots of them—why not me?! Except—normal people don't sky-dance." This active eschewing of the “normal” narrative for “other women” puts pressure on that construct, as she, actively blurring both reflections by fogging up the window with her hot breath, resolves, “Even without any super-powers, I’ll never settle for what society—or my parents—expects of me.” Her action and her thoughts create a tabula rasa from which a more complicated self can emerge.

On the fogged window, she marks her presence with an X as she names herself: "I’m not a kitty anymore—much as I wish differently—I’ve grown up. I’m a cat. And I like the shadows a whole lot more than the daylight. Shadowcat. I like it. Suits me better than Ariel or Sprite, that’s for sure.” Just as she previously dispenses with the identities that parents or society lined up for her, here she rejects previous codenames given to her by fellow teammates and fashions her own moniker out of the bits and pieces of herself. Discarding these nominal ties allows her to draw greater strength from within herself, as is evident during her fight with Ogun where she evokes Shadowcat as an identity solely under her control, completely separate from the girl Ogun brainwashed. In latching onto this name as battle cry, Pryde performs the same rhetorical moves that Haraway and Anzaldúa do when they theorize the potential of the cyborg and mestiza identities to challenge and overcome the borders and boundaries that try to marginalize these subject positions.

Part of how Pryde can so complexly operate as an agent of 1980s feminism is due to her existence as a popular, recurring character in a monthly comic title. The import of such stability in developing a multivalent, transgressive figure can be seen if we look to underground feminist comics production in the period. Given page limitations in the feminist series where many female artists published, the ability to develop a character arc was circumscribed, and many artists produced timely one-off vignettes for their contributions. By developing over the course of the decade, Pryde can be more than a flat character and can rally for multiple rights, calling on her various collectivities as needed. She acts as a complex, multifaceted character who does not
simply regurgitate feminist politics, but who actively engages in feminist practice and continually subverts patriarchal expectations with her transgressive body.

NOTES

1. Fawaz scrutinizes how the cover of *X-Men* #101 (Oct. 1976) illustrates Grey’s alienation from her teammates as her empowered rise out of the water threatens them with drowning (374–376).

2. This pattern where the white woman takes from the woman of color echoes throughout woman of color feminism critical of the tunnel-vision dynamics of 1970s feminism and seeking to create a more equitable collectivity. In “Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference” (1980), Audre Lorde spells out how women of color face the burden of always having to make themselves legible to white feminists: “In other words, it is the responsibility of the oppressed to teach the oppressors their mistakes. I am responsible for educating teachers who dismiss my children’s culture in school. Black and Third World people are expected to educate white people as to our humanity. Women are expected to educate men. Lesbians and gay men are expected to educate the heterosexual world. The oppressors maintain their position and evade responsibility for their own actions. There is a constant drain of energy which might be better used in redefining ourselves and devising realistic scenarios for altering the present and constructing the future” (114–115).

3. In addition to *Pretty in Pink* (1986), the suburbs of Chicago or Chicago itself appears in a number of Hughes’ other hit films like *Sixteen Candles* (1984), *The Breakfast Club* (1985), *Ferris Bueller’s Day Off* (1986). Pryde’s suburban background also echoes the “all-white suburban cast” of the original X-Men, as opposed to the new international recruits introduced in *Giant-Size X-Men* #1 (May 1975) (Fawaz 363).

4. Although, retrospectively, it makes sense to understand Pryde alongside the Brat Pack as the popular figure of 1980s adolescence, she actually predates the grouping by a number of years. The first Brat Pack film, *The Outsiders*, was released in 1983, and the concept of the Brat Pack was defined in a 1985 *New York* magazine article.

5. By contrast, Pryde’s romantic attachment to Colossus ends in failure as he becomes unwillingly attracted to another and breaks up with Pryde in *The Uncanny X-Men* #183 (Jul. 1984).

6. With this argument, Bleach proposes a more nuanced version of Susan Faludi’s idea of backlash culture articulated in *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (1991) whereby pop-culture’s post-feminism does not mean the defeat of feminism, but that there can be feminism woven into a narrative that may, ultimately, choose post-feminist trajectories (Bleach 27).

7. José Esteban Muñoz’s off-the-cuff assessment of the X-Men as “social pariahs” in *Cruising Utopia* (2009) resonates here and fruitfully suggests the space for more queerly theoretical considerations of these characters (130).

8. The use of “alongside *here*” here resonates with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s non-dualistic approach to criticism that she lays out in *Touching Feeling* (8–9).

9. For a comprehensive overview of 1980s feminism, see also Chela Sandoval’s “U.S. Third World Feminism” in *Methodology of the Oppressed*. 
10. See Russ’s essay, “What Can a Heroine Do? or Why Women Can’t Write.”
11. Certainly, scholars have argued for a feminist understanding of the Terminator franchise through Sarah Connor’s gradual empowerment. To read interpretations along these lines, see Diana Dominguez’s “It’s Not Easy Being a Cast Iron Bitch,” Jeffrey A. Brown’s “Gender and the Action Heroine,” and Donald Palumbo’s “The Monomyth in James Cameron’s The Terminator.” Noted queer scholar Jonathan Goldberg performs a reading along LGBT lines in “Recalling Totalities.”
12. Throughout the 1980s, various storylines pick up on this dystopian future as Rachel Summers time-travels backwards in “The Past of... Future Days” (The Uncanny X-Men #184, Aug. 1984) and an extremely powerful mutant-hunting nemesis, Nimrod, follows Summers back to try to exterminate all mutants in that present timescape, starting in The Uncanny X-Men #191 (Mar. 1985).
13. In The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader, Keating contrasts this chapter from Borderlands/La Frontera with the frequently anthologized “La consciencia de la mestiza/Towards a Mestiza Consciousness.” Of “La herencia de Coaltlque/The Coaltlque State,” she argues: “Given its provocative linkages between spirituality, sexuality, revisionary myth, and psychic experience, it’s not surprising that scholars rarely examine ‘La herencia de Coaltlque.’ However, these issues were crucial to Anzaldúa herself and represent some of the most innovative, visionary dimensions of her work” (5). To not attend to these insights is to miss the heart of Anzaldúa’s theory.
14. The cloistered nature and precarity of mutant life, highlighted by this teenage suicide, necessarily resonates with the struggle against discrimination faced by lesbian and gay youth in the 1980s. As Eve Sedgwick asserts in “How to Bring Your Kids Up Gay,” originally composed for a 1989 Modern Language Association panel, “it’s always open season on gay kids” (155).
15. By naming herself with slurs, Pryde embraces the fraught nature of her identity. Similarly, both Lorde and Anzaldúa often cataloged their various identities, refusing to dissociate from unpopular positions or privilege one identity above the others. Like Pryde confronts an audience with her in-your-face catalog, so does Lorde: “Perhaps for some of you here today, I am the face of one of your fears. Because I am woman, because I am Black, because I am lesbian, because I am myself—a Black woman warrior poet doing my work—come to ask you, are you doing yours?” (41–42). In “The New Mestiza Nation,” Anzaldúa highlights how the mestiza continually negotiates and recognizes all identities: “Using mestiza as an umbrella term means acknowledging that certain aspects of identity don’t disappear, aren’t assimilated or repressed when they are not in the foreground” (211).
16. Although this injury takes her out of the X-Men line-up for the rest of the 1980s, her departure nearly coincides with the joining of some new members, including the heroines, Psylocke in The Uncanny X-Men #213 (Jan. 1987) and Dazzler in The Uncanny X-Men #214 (Feb. 1987), helping ensure that the X-Men retain a diverse and deep roster.
17. See Eve Kofsky Sedgwick’s “Interlude, Pedagogic” in Touching Feeling (2003) for a pithy consideration of the coalitional possibilities among different marginalized bodies that arose in political organizing during the AIDS crisis.
18. Other important anthologies in this 1980s coalitional feminist vein include But Some of Us Are Brave (1982) and Home Girls (1983). The formation of Kitchen Table, a woman of color activist press, in 1980, served as a home for some of this work. The
press itself was founded on the principles of coalition as Barbara Smith describes in a short essay: "...most people of color have chosen to work in their separate groups when they do media or other projects. We were saying that as women, feminists, and lesbians of color we had experiences and work to do in common, although we also had our differences" (11). After This Bridge struggled with its first publisher, Persephone Press, a white feminist venture that foundered, Kitchen Table Press coordinated the second edition and rerelease of the book.

19. Two well-known exceptions to this are Aline Kominsky-Crumb and Alison Bechdel, both of whom are extensively analyzed in Hillary Chute's landmark Graphic Women (2010), one of the first critical texts in comics studies to make female artists the primary focus. Over the course of her career, Kominsky-Crumb produced many autobiographically-inflected comics of different lengths that satirized herself as The Bunch, which have been collected in Love That Bunch (1990) and Need More Love (2007). Bechdel, who began her career after the downturn in underground comics production and did not publish primarily in those venues, began drawing Dykes to Watch Out For as a strip with a cast of recurring characters and story arcs in the mid 1980s and was successfully syndicated in many newspapers.

WORKS CITED


Claremont, Chris (w) and Jackson Guice (a). "We Were Only Foolin.'" *New Mutants* #45 (Nov. 1986). New York: Marvel Comics. Print.
Hull, Gloria T., Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith, eds. All the Women are White, All the Blacks are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women’s Studies. New York: Feminist Press, 1982. Print.


