Professor Marston and the Wonder Women

Adaptation Choices and Their Effects on Alternative Lifestyles and Acceptance

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ABSTRACT

Jill Lepore tells the story of Wonder Woman creator William Moulton Marston in her book *The Secret History of Wonder Woman*. His story is an interesting tale about a "charismatic" man who adored women (Lepore 109). The film, *Professor Marston and the Wonder Women*, directed by Angela Robinson, was released in 2017. In this article, I argue that in the film, *Professor Marston and the Wonder Women*, director Angela Robinson makes directorial choices that highlight positive aspects of alternative lifestyles, as well as showing support for the LGBTQ+ community. I discuss how her choices change the representation of the historical figures portrayed in Jill Lepore's book *The Secret History of Wonder Woman* to elicit empathy for the characters in the film and their lifestyle choices. She accomplishes this with specific elements of mise-en-scéne such as lighting, framing, costuming, and acting styles.

JILL LEPORE TELLS the story of Wonder Woman creator William Moulton Marston in her book *The Secret History of Wonder Woman*. Marston was a noted psychologist who taught at several universities before becoming Wonder Woman's creator. Marston's story is an interesting tale about a "charismatic" man who adored women (109). According to his DC comic editor, Sheldon Mayer, Marston "had a rather strange appreciation of women. One was never enough" (118). His love of women is evidenced by the relationships he had with three women: Sadie Elizabeth Holloway (5-6), Olive Byrne (57), and Marjorie Wilkes Huntley (109). Neighbours would have found these living arrangements "abnormal" (147). In fact, Les Daniels believes they "may have accounted for some of Moulton's career changes" (31). Throughout his life, Marston had many schemes, most of which ended up failing. The lie detector was one of Marston's proudest creations; it was even mentioned in his obituary (259). Wonder Woman was created to represent Marston's idea of feminism for the world. In 2017, a film version of Marston's story, directed by Angela Robinson, was released.

This paper argues that both the character of Wonder Woman and director Angela Robinson's adaptation choices in her film *Professor Marston and the Wonder Women* (2017) shed light on the positive aspects of alternative lifestyles and support for the LGBTQ+ community, eliciting both sympathy and empathy from the audience. For example, how the film highlights the relationship between Holloway (Rebecca Hall) and Byrne (Bella Heathcote) challenges the concept of Holloway as a scorned or bitter wife, or Marston (Luke Evans) as a philandering husband. The fact that Byrne and Holloway continued to live together even after Marston died, and were, in fact, "inseparable," promotes the acceptance of love between same sex couples (Lepore 273). According to Associate Professor of Communication Andrew R. Spieldenner in his article "Altered Egos: Gay Men Reading Across Gender in Wonder Woman," the character of Wonder Woman is popular among gay men (235). He states, "Comic books are major sites for representing and transforming cultural images" (236). Spieldenner means that Wonder Woman's status as a comic book hero can help transform the current culture of negative or hostile feelings towards members of the LGBTQ+ community because she represents acceptance of "the same sex society of her upbringing, the constant emphasis of tolerance and defending the victimized, her search for her own place in the world, and her penchant for transformation" (238). Building on this beloved

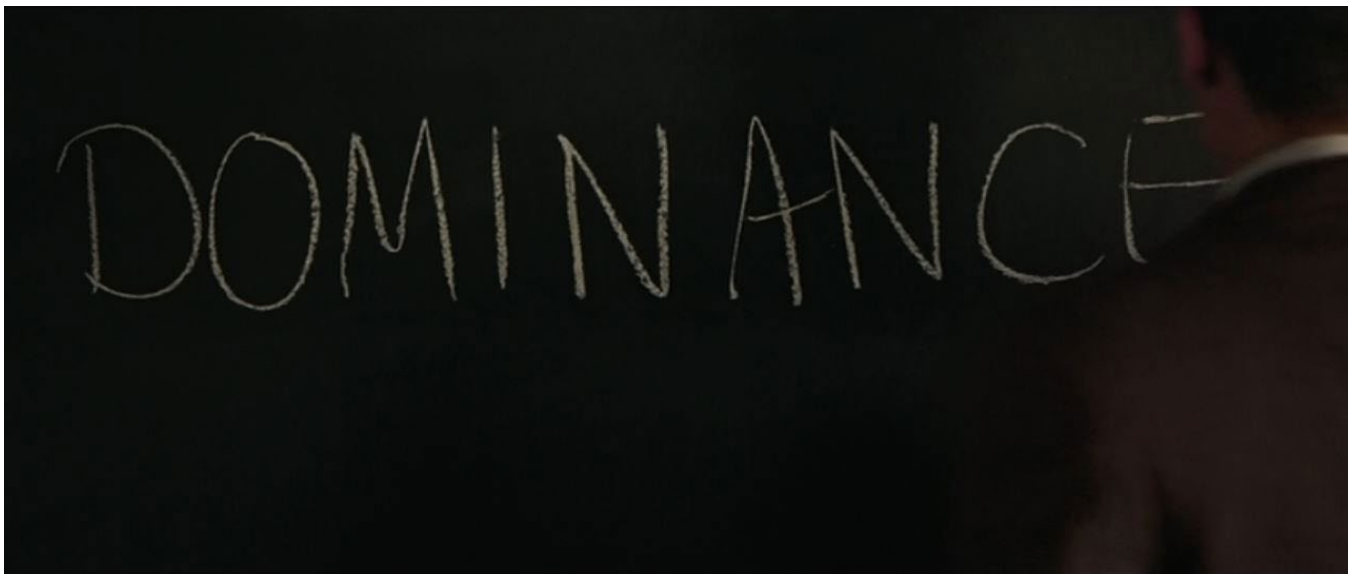

Fig. 1 | Marston writing the first intertitle, *Professor Marston*, 09:35. Opposite Field Pictures, 2017.

icon and her creator, film adaptations like Robinson's will help open the door for future directors and adaptations to continue presenting positive representations of members of the LGBTQ+ community.

Wonder Woman was strong, independent, and fought for justice. She was also created to spread Marston's idea of feminism and emotional theories to the world. In *Wonder Woman Unbound: The Curious History of the World's Most Famous Heroine*, comic book historian Tim Hanley describes Marston's emotional theory, called Dominance, Inducement, Submission, and Compliance (DISC) theory, as the idea that there are four types of emotions and that men are usually dominant while women are usually submissive (15). On the other hand, according to author Geoffrey C. Bunn in "The Lie Detector, 'Wonder Woman' and Liberty: The Life and Work of William Moulton Marston," Marston believed women and men could either be dominant or submissive, and gender does not determine which behaviour a person adopted (104).

Robinson strategically frames her film using intertitles to transition between different sections of the film that align with the components of Marston's DISC theory (Fig. 1). Intriguingly, the sections do not exactly follow the acronym's natural order. Instead, the sections are dominance, inducement, compliance, and then submission (or DICS). Robinson uses this order of transitions because each one introduces a section of the film that revolves around that specific component.

After a short introduction, the first transition screen shows a hand (Marston's) writing the word "dominance" on a chalkboard (9:29). In the film, Marston uses inducement to define dominance, stating that to "seduce somebody to your way of thinking, dominating them so completely that what you want is what they want and they love giving it to you and that …is the key to life, to love, to happiness, to peace" (15:27). This section of the film focuses on establishing the relationship between Marston, Holloway, and Byrne. The scenes that follow include several elements of dominance, including Holloway telling Byrne "not to fuck [her] husband" (08:43), the Marstons secretly watching Byrne spank a pledge at the "baby party" (19:41), and Marston telling Holloway that "the world can't stop [them]" from loving more than one person (37:19). These scenes highlight instances of dominance between the major characters, connecting the film to Marston's theory.

It takes a lot of strength to admit being wrong as well as professing love for another person, especially if that relationship may be judged by outsiders.

The section of the film that focuses on inducement begins with another hand (Marston's again) writing "inducement" on a chalkboard and focuses on Holloway and Marston persuading Byrne to join their relationship. Important scenes in this section related to inducement include Holloway telling Byrne she would be willing to have sex (38:26), using the lie detector to determine who loves whom amongst Holloway, Marston, and Byrne (44:07), and the sex scene between the three main characters (46:51). Each scene involves characters using inducement in some way to get what they want.

Compliance is the next section of the film and highlights the negative experiences of the three main characters. When the hand writes the word on the chalkboard, it writes harshly, as if in anger (56:23). This perceived anger is appropriate because this section deals with the reaction of others about their polyamorous relationship. Scenes include having to find new jobs because of being fired for their alternative relationship (55:08), the rope-binding scene at Charles Guyette's (J. J. Field) store (1:08:45), the angry confrontation with the neighbours (1:24:01), and forcing Byrne to leave (1:28:14). According to

Marston, the subjects he interviewed during his DISC research believed that "the word 'compliance' seems to suggest … that the subject is moving himself at the dictates of a superior force," which could mean that they do not have a choice but to do something they do not want to do (Marston 108). Therefore, several of the scenes in this section show characters dealing with negative aspects of their relationships.

The last section is submission and it importantly signifies Holloway's submission to a polyamorous lifestyle. In contrast to the harsh writing of compliance, the word "submission" is written softly and slowly, even sensually (1:40:58). The softness of the writing could also be related to the happiness that comes from submission, according to Marston's logic. It is also the only time the word written on the chalkboard is underlined, underscoring the significance of submission for Marston and this love story. This intertitle appears right after Holloway promises to love Byrne for all of her days (1:40:34). Once Holloway submits to Byrne, at the encouragement of Marston himself, she has submitted to a loving authority. This possibility of a polyamorous relationship generating a happy, peaceful life is borne out by the longevity of the two women's relationship.

While Wonder Woman was useful for spreading Marston's ideals about feminism, she also became an icon for alternative lifestyles. For example, she has become a major icon within the gay community, demonstrating yet another way that Marston's creation of Wonder Woman showed that alternative lifestyles should be embraced, rather than shunned or hidden. Spieldenner argues that comic book readers can identify with their heroes, even across the gender spectrum (235). Spieldenner also states, "Comic characters come to represent relations to other ideas" (238). This assertion means Wonder Woman could represent gay identification as well as other LGBTQ+ identifications.

Gay men identify specific characteristics with Wonder Woman. These main characteristics are "same-sex society, fighting intolerance, finding one's place and thriving in transformation" (Spieldenner 235). Wonder Woman exemplifies each of these qualities throughout her comics. For Wonder Woman, Paradise Island is the same-sex society she was born into. This community is "compelling for homosexuals" (Spieldenner 239). Members of the gay community, or any alternative community, seek the safety of communities or neighbourhoods where others of their lifestyle live. In other words, they find their own Paradise Island. Throughout the comics, Wonder Woman is in a constant battle for tolerance and protecting victims. Although she has always battled against the Nazis, more recently her "defence of the victimized has expanded to include myriad issues," such as "young girl self-esteem clubs, self-defence classes for women, and women's shelters" (240). While these recent examples are for women, there is a strong possibility Wonder Woman will be reaching out to the LGBTQ+ community in the future. Phil Jimenez, the comics creator who has worked on Wonder Woman since 2000, is openly gay, and his experiences and ideals appear in the comics as Marston's had (Spieldenner 237). Another way that Wonder Woman advances the goals Spieldenner outlines is by trying to assimilate to the world outside of Amazon, navigating relationships, both friendly and romantic, and facing old enemies. Wonder Woman is always trying to find her place, which is similar to "'coming out' for gay men" (240-241). Finally, transformation is a major part of Wonder Woman's life. Not only does she transform between the superhero, Wonder Woman, and her alter ego, Diana Prince, but several times she has been "total[ly] recreat[ed] in the comics" (241).

These transformations help "gay reader[s]…manag[e] a shifting identity" (241)[1]. The appeal of transformation involves the acceptance of being more than what society expects of a person.

In light of the defining characteristics of same-sex society (tolerance, defense, community, and transformation), members of the gay community also identify with Wonder Woman's secret identity (236). Many gay men also hide their true identities when faced with cultural stigmas. This revelation can "alter relationships" (241). In independent cultural studies sch Ellen Kirkpatrick's article "TransFormers: 'Identity' Compromised," she asserts Wonder Woman's "transforming spin visualizes the identity moves performed by this character" (125). By transitioning between her alter ego Diana Prince and her Amazonian Princess through spinning, Wonder Woman changes her identity, which parallels the movement between genders or identities, an action that speaks to gay readers. The combination of these characteristics, Marston's ideals of strong women, BDSM, and polyamory, makes Wonder Woman the perfect vehicle to encourage acceptance of alternative lifestyle choices. Robinson demonstrates this possibility for acceptance in her film.

While Lepore's book tells the story of Marston and his life with the women he loved, it does not focus much on the relationships between the women; but in the film adaptation, writer and director Robinson highlights the relationship between the two women as a major theme, thereby altering Marston's larger-than-life personality through the use of different elements of mise-en-scène and cinematography. The film tells the story of Marston, Holloway, Byrne, and the creation and controversy of Wonder Woman. Robinson became fascinated with the Marstons after reading a book by Daniels and spent eight years researching the family before writing the film. She shares her interest in the polyamory of the main characters, but she particularly found the relationship between the two women compelling. She states that she was "especially struck by the fact that Elizabeth and Olive lived together for 38 years after Marston died" (Reisman). Several reviewers of the movie also agree that Robinson positively portrays the Marstons' lifestyle.

According to freelance writer, critic, and film historian Pamela Hutchinson, not only is *Professor Marston and the Wonder Women* "a love story and a very touching one primarily and most passionately between the two women," but it also serves as "a dignified plea for the acceptance of non-heterosexual love, [and] unorthodox households" (75). In her article "Kinks! Pleasures!

Fig. 2 | Holloway in her typical clothing of pants and a button-down shirt, *Professor Marston*, 03:05. Opposite Field Pictures, 2017.

Female Power!" American film critic Manohla Dargis considers the movie "a reminder that once upon a time people had sexual appetites and relationships as complex as those of today (or of 18th-century France)" and that Robinson presents Marston's complex story "with wit, sympathy and economy" (Dargis). This sympathy is evidenced by the fact that the film was nominated for several awards including the Dorian Award for Unsung Film of the Year from the Society of LGBTQ Entertainment Critics (GALEC) and the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) Media Award for Outstanding Film (Wide Release). Robinson tells Riesman she "[is] really happy that it's being embraced by the poly community and that some people are telling [her] it's the only positive depiction they've seen" (Riesman). The reason for this acceptance lies in the adaptation choices Robinson makes in the film.

Holloway and Byrne have different personalities in the book and movie. In Lepore's book, Holloway is described as "bold" and "unflinching" (18), and someone who "always wanted everything" (21). Byrne was active in college; she participated in plays, campus clubs, sports and joined a sorority (107). Both women believed in "free love" (Lepore 105). Holloway was the breadwinner and Byrne the caretaker (145). Byrne wanted the truth of their lives to remain hidden and "kept secret" (147). In the movie, the personalities are clearly delineated, and sometimes reversed, through the use of elements of mise-en-scène including costuming and acting style, which helpfully reveal the personalities of the film's female leads.

The actors who portray Holloway and Byrne use specific acting styles that highlight Holloway and Byrne's unique personalities. The acting style of actor Hall represents the "bold" and "unflinching" Holloway (Lepore 18). Specifically, she displays these traits through strong, coarse dialogue, created by the screenwriter Angela Robinson. Within the first 12 minutes, Hall begins using this abrasive language in lines, such as

At this moment, the audience can see the connection become more between Holloway and Byrne and less between all three.

"cocksuckers," "load of horseshit," and even the word "fuck" (or its variation) a minimum of four times (03:58–11:58). Using such strong language creates a sense of masculinity in Holloway. On the other hand, the acting style of Heathcote, who plays Byrne, uses little coarse language. In fact, she is more soft-spoken. The first time she has a conversation with Holloway, her voice has an almost child-like, nervous quality to it (08:12). Other examples of Byrne being more soft-spoken than Holloway includes the moment she asks Marston how he felt watching her spank her sorority pledge (22:17) as well as during the picnic scene when she asks Holloway about meeting and falling in love with Marston (27:01). These examples reinforce Byrne's strong sense of femininity, the opposite of Holloway's masculinity.

Another element of mise-en-scène, costuming, provides further evidence of how the personalities of Holloway and Byrne deviate from descriptions found in the book. In the film, Byrne is shown wearing softer, flowing items of clothing, while Holloway is dressed in more structured attire. The first time the audience sees Holloway, she is wearing pants and a button-down shirt opened at the collar (03:05) (Fig. 2).

Even though she sometimes wears skirts, they are more streamlined and body conforming rather than free-flowing. The first time we see Byrne in the film, she is wearing a soft, button-down sweater with maroon buttons and skirt of light, unassuming colours (02:52) (Fig. 3).

She wears similar types and colours of clothing throughout the film. Although there are times Byrne wears shirts or dresses of bolder colours like green and blue, Holloway tends

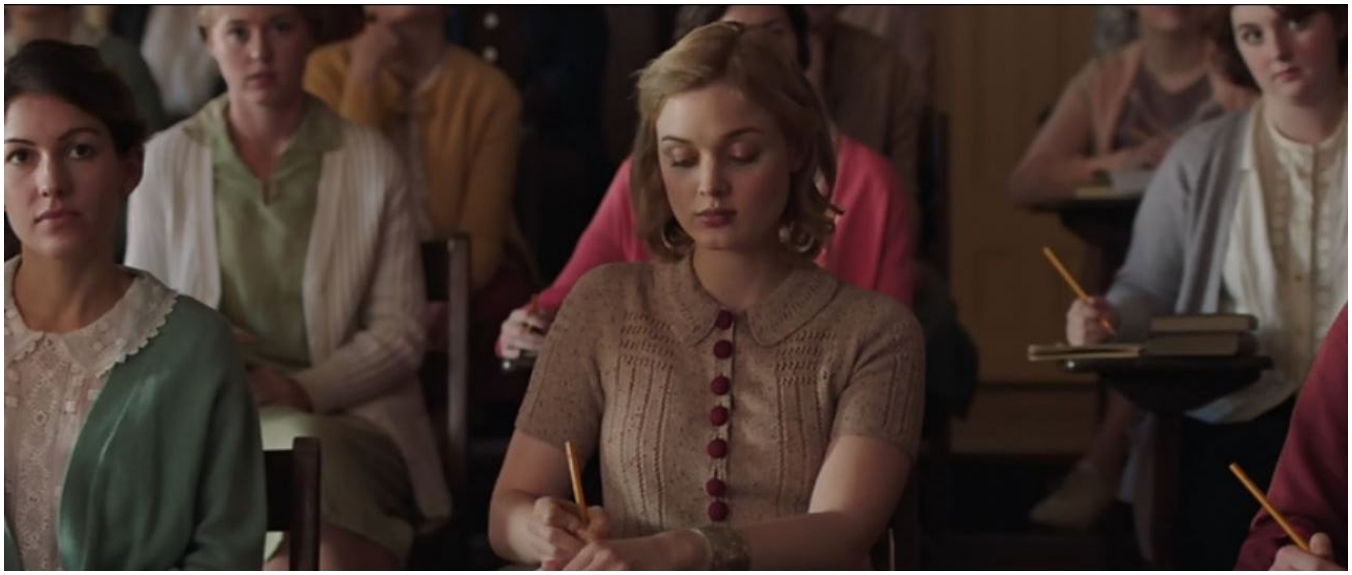

Fig. 3 | Byrne's more feminine style of clothing, *Professor Marston*, 02:52. Opposite Field Pictures, 2017.

to wear them more often. Choosing to apply specific materials and tones adds a second layer to Holloway's masculinity and Byrne's femininity.

In the book, however, the pictures of Holloway and Byrne, with one exception, show the women in typical dresses of the time. There is not one moment that shows either one wearing pants. According to Lepore, although when Holloway was young, she "liked to pretend she was a boy" (13) and when she was older, she had a bob haircut, which was still considered radical at the time, she continued to wear outfits expected for the time (19). While Byrne also wears the common dress for the time period in the majority of the pictures throughout the book, there is one from her senior year at Tufts University that shows her androgynous features (109). That year she cut her hair short and dressed like a boy. This makeover does not happen at all in the film. Because the women convey looks that are both masculine and feminine, they are associated with a transitional process which connects them to secret identity characteristics that members of the gay community identify with Wonder Woman.

In Lepore's book, the snippets of information about Byrne exemplify her as a strong but secretive woman. At the beginning of Robinson's film, she does not appear to be a strong woman, but by the end of the film, she transforms into one. Unlike the book, the film shows that she is not the one who demands secrecy; instead, Holloway does that. Two scenes in the film highlight Byrne's transformation into a strong woman. The first is during the rope-binding class at Guyette's lingerie store (1:06:18). As Guyette explains and demonstrates the process of binding a woman with rope, Marston, Holloway, and Byrne watch. Holloway looks skeptical or even a bit disgusted. At the end of the demonstration, Guyette holds out the rope towards the trio and asks if they want to try. Byrne accepts. As Marston starts to tie Byrne's wrists together, Holloway tells her not to let him do that. Byrne simply responds, "I don't mind" (1:08:43). Holloway leaves and Marston goes after her. While they are arguing, Byrne transforms into Wonder Woman, putting on a tiara and a bustier similar to the one Wonder Woman wears in the comics (1:11:23) (Fig. 4).

The costume's similarities to Wonder Woman's outfit shows Byrne's feminine strength and her ability to make decisions about her own sexual activities, thereby amplifying her autonomy.

While the scene in Guyette's lingerie shop shows Byrne's strength, it also demonstrates Holloway's strength. Even though Holloway leaves in disgust and argues with Marston about his proclivities outside of the room while Byrne makes her transition, she comes back. When Marston and Holloway walk back into the room, they see Byrne standing on the stage backlit so the front of her is in shadow. As Byrne steps forward out of the shadows into the light, Holloway walks toward her and then joins her on stage. After making sure that Byrne consents, Holloway ties her arms and wraps the rope around her chest. Once finished with the task, Holloway points the end of the rope in Marston's direction as she stands centre frame with Byrne to the right and Marston to the left (1:14:43). This scene represents the director's desire to demonstrate the strength of consent, or how a woman can make her own sexual choices without judgment. In the DVD's supplementary featurette, "A Dynamic Trio: The Minds Behind a Feminist Icon," Robinson indicates that she sees Byrne "as the strongest character in the movie" (05:20) and that she wanted to show how Byrne "really knew what she was doing and decided to do it" (06:29). Also, Byrne's stepping out of the shadow and into the light is symbolically similar to a gay person coming out, yet another example of the gay icon that Wonder Woman has become. Additionally, the scene where Holloway drops to her knees to ask Byrne's forgiveness and express her love for Byrne is one more example of Holloway's

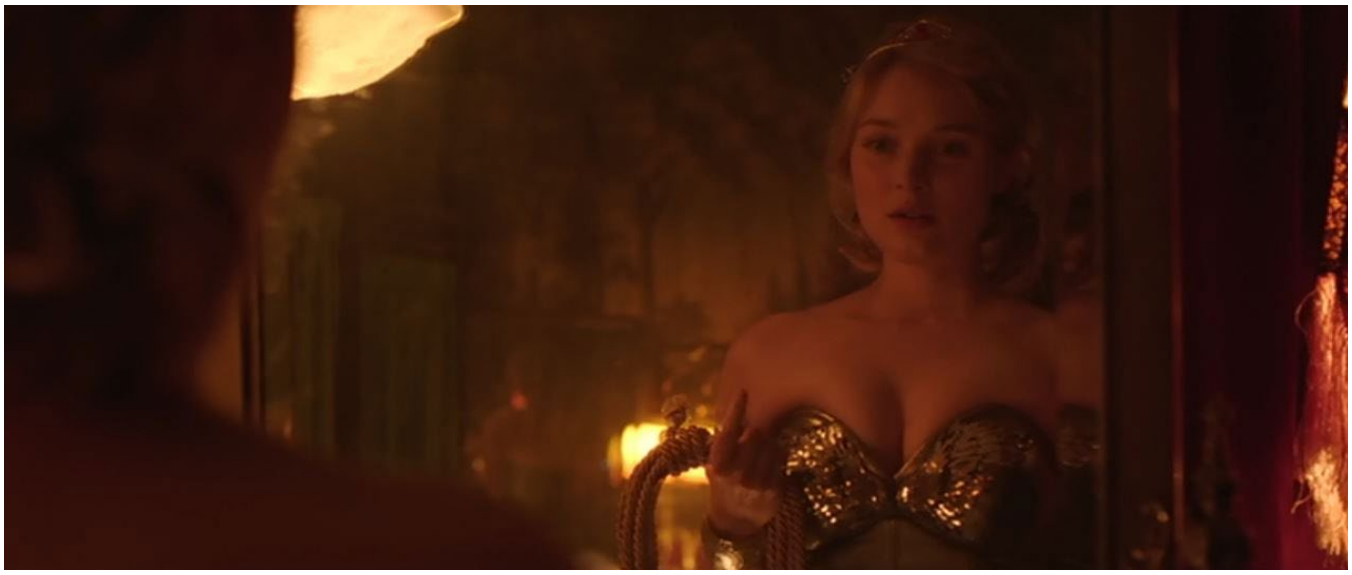

Fig. 4 | Byrne transforming into Wonder Woman, *Professor Marston*, 1:10:48. Opposite Field Pictures, 2017.

strength (1:38:17) (Fig. 5). It takes a lot of strength to admit being wrong as well as professing love for another person, especially if that relationship may be judged by outsiders.

The second scene that portrays Byrne's transformation comes near the end of the movie. After a neighbour walks in on Marston, Holloway, and Byrne practicing what they learned at Guyette's, Holloway orders Byrne to leave as she does not want the children to deal with bullying; Byrne moves out with her two sons (1:27:54). Upon being diagnosed with cancer, Marston requests that Byrne come to the hospital to help reconcile Holloway and Byrne by forcing Holloway to "beg for forgiveness" (1:37:37). Throughout this scene, Marston and Holloway face Byrne. Marston is slightly off-centre to the right, while Holloway is slightly off-centre to the left. When Holloway finally begs on her knees, Byrne simply replies, "No" (1:37:37). When Holloway says she cannot live without Byrne, Holloway is framed slightly centred left, and Byrne's left shoulder is blurred out in the right side of the frame; Marston is not in the shot at all. Several times during the exchange between Holloway and Byrne, Marston is blurry while the women are in focus. Once Holloway admits she cannot live without Byrne, Byrne negotiates for a new stove, babysitting time, and, her most important request, for Holloway "to love [her] till the end of [her] days" (1:40:28). As Byrne makes that request, she looks only at Holloway, appearing to not include Marston in that request. This moment not only supports Byrne's transition into a strong woman, but the long, uninterrupted gazes coupled with edging Marston out of the scene further reinforce the strong relationship between the two women.

The film establishes the budding romance between the two women early through an acting style involving long gazes. When Marston and Holloway take Byrne to a speakeasy to convince her to join their research team, it becomes apparent that there is a romantic attachment building between the two

Robinson's adaptation choices represent her fascination with the women's relationship separate from Marston.

women (13:07). The professor and his wife sit across from Byrne and, as the three discuss the challenges for women in education, and "penis envy," increasingly longer gazes are shared between Holloway and Byrne (13:30). In this scene, Marston is framed slightly behind Holloway, who is centred in the frame while leaning towards Byrne. Holloway's face is lit while Marston, to the right of the frame, is more in shadow. There is an intense moment of long gazes exchanged between Holloway and Byrne during the sorority initiation baby party (21:00). Unbeknownst to her sorority sisters, Byrne has hidden Marston and Holloway upstairs on a landing so they can observe for psychological purposes. Byrne must discipline her pledge by spanking her with a paddle, for the most part keeping her eyes shut. Upstairs, Marston and Holloway, previously amused, become enthralled by the activities. Holloway becomes aroused and Marston begins to touch her. As Holloway is looking down, Byrne suddenly opens her eyes and fixates on Holloway. The longer they stare at each other, the harder Byrne spanks her pledge, demonstrating that she is aroused as well. When Byrne is directed to stop, Holloway pushes Marston's hand away. At this moment, the audience can see the connection between Holloway and Byrne intensify. By contrast, in the book, Holloway does not attend the sorority party. Robinson's adaptation choices represent her fascination with the women's relationship as one that develops as separate from Marston.

Altering the personality of Marston in the film provides the opportunity for him to be more likeable, and less of a womanizer. In the book, Marston is described as "tall and devilishly

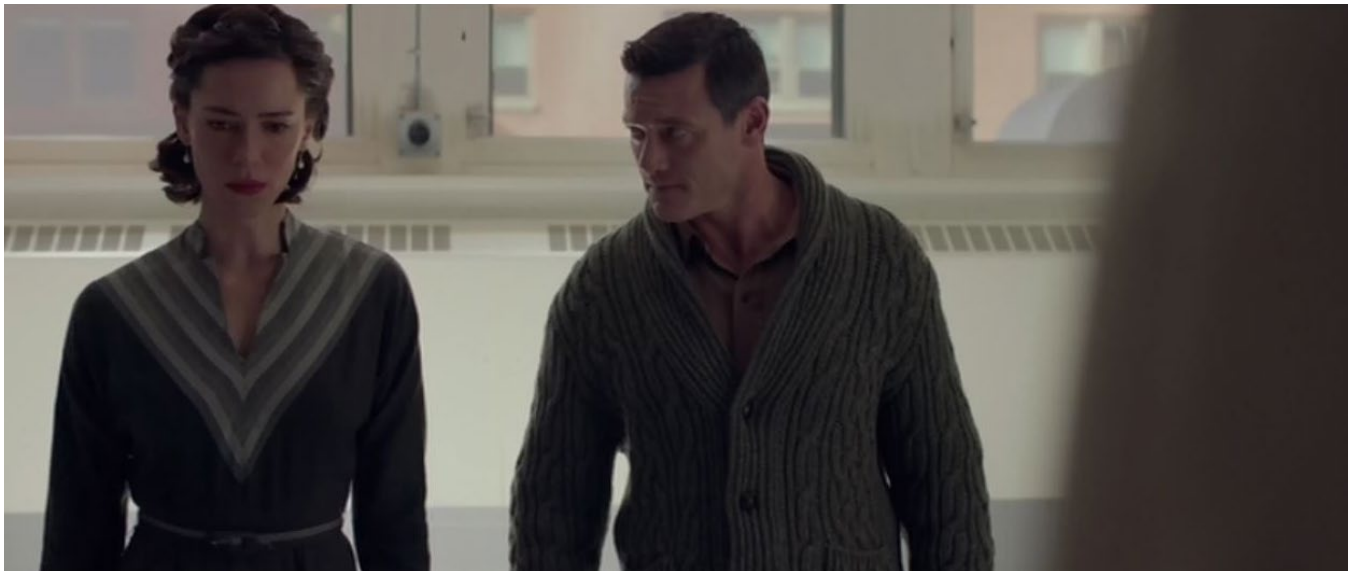

Fig. 5 | Marston encouraging Holloway to beg Byrne's forgiveness, *Professor Marston*, 1:38:14. Opposite Field Pictures, 2017.

handsome" (5) and "awesomely cocky" (39). Hanley describes him as "a bit of a huckster" (11). He was opinionated and high-handed at times. He did not like the name Sadie or Elizabeth, so he called Holloway "Betty," which she did not like, but allowed anyway (44). In the film, Marston calls Holloway "Elizabeth" instead of Betty (03:56). In the book, it is Marston who gives Holloway an ultimatum regarding Byrne: "Either Olive Byrne could live with them or he would leave her" (118). In the movie, Holloway gives permission to Marston to be with Byrne, but then temporarily reverses her decision citing professional jealousy as opposed to sexual jealousy (11:34). Lepore further describes his later years: "he was big and he was loud and he drank and he thundered when he was angry" (180). Evans does not portray Marston in this way, although there are moments in the film when Evans does use physicality to evoke Marston's character. Evans walks with a conventionally strong and masculine gait as Marston. He stands tall and there is an occasional swagger as he moves around. Also, Marston's personality is revealed when, in response to being told to "reduce the kink by fifty to sixty percent" he instead increases it (1:19:54) (Fig. 6).

When a comic book illustrator (Tom Kemp) says to him, "Doc, there's like twice as much bondage stuff in here," Marston arrogantly replies, "Three times. I tripled it" (1:19:58). Evans's physical acting style highlights the larger-than-life personality of Marston while still demanding sympathy for him from his audience.

In addition to his physical acting style, Evans adjusts Marston's tone of voice to make him appear more supportive and less aggressive. When Holloway rants about not getting a PhD from Harvard, Marston tries to placate her, but it only aggravates her more (03:59). She yells and uses foul language while he tries to calm her down with a gentle voice by saying, "[y]ou are very brilliant" and "smarter than me" (04:59). Even when he confronts Holloway about telling Byrne "[o]h, and if you fuck my husband, I'll kill you," he raises his voice, but just slightly for emphasis (8:47). When he chases after Holloway during the binding scene at Guyette's and when he argues with Holloway in the hospital at the end of the film, Evans yells in a hushed manner (1:35:51). The only time he truly raises his voice is at the end of the movie when he wants Holloway to admit her feelings for Byrne and he wants Bryne to come back to their family. He yells, "I am not speaking for you. I am speaking for myself!" when Holloway interrupts him after he politely asks her not to (1:35:55). Given that Marston was known for being selfish and "big" and "loud" and "thunder[ing] when he was angry," this behaviour is out of sync with the historical Marston (Lepore 180). Evans's acting style alters Marston's personality enough that in her film review, Hutchinson describes him as "boyishly earnest in his enthusiasms" (75). The historical Marston would never be described in this manner as he was more forceful than earnest. Without this softening, sympathy for Marston can potentially diminish.

Evans's acting style establishes Marston as a person with strong affection for both Holloway and Byrne. Several times in the movie, Marston's character defers to Holloway both physically and emotionally. After noticing his interest in Byrne, Holloway gives him permission to be with Byrne. Evans effectively uses his tone of voice and body language to convey surprise, giving Marston's character a softness regarding Holloway that is not always evident in the book. In the final hospital scene, Marston mediates the reconciliation between Holloway and Byrne. It is unlikely that the historical Marston would have committed the same action as he tended to think about his needs before others' needs. In the documentary "Crucial Point of View: Directing Professor Marston and the Wonder Women," Robinson states she "wanted to explor[e] aspects of Marston's misogyny within the movie" (03:20). Evans's portrayal of

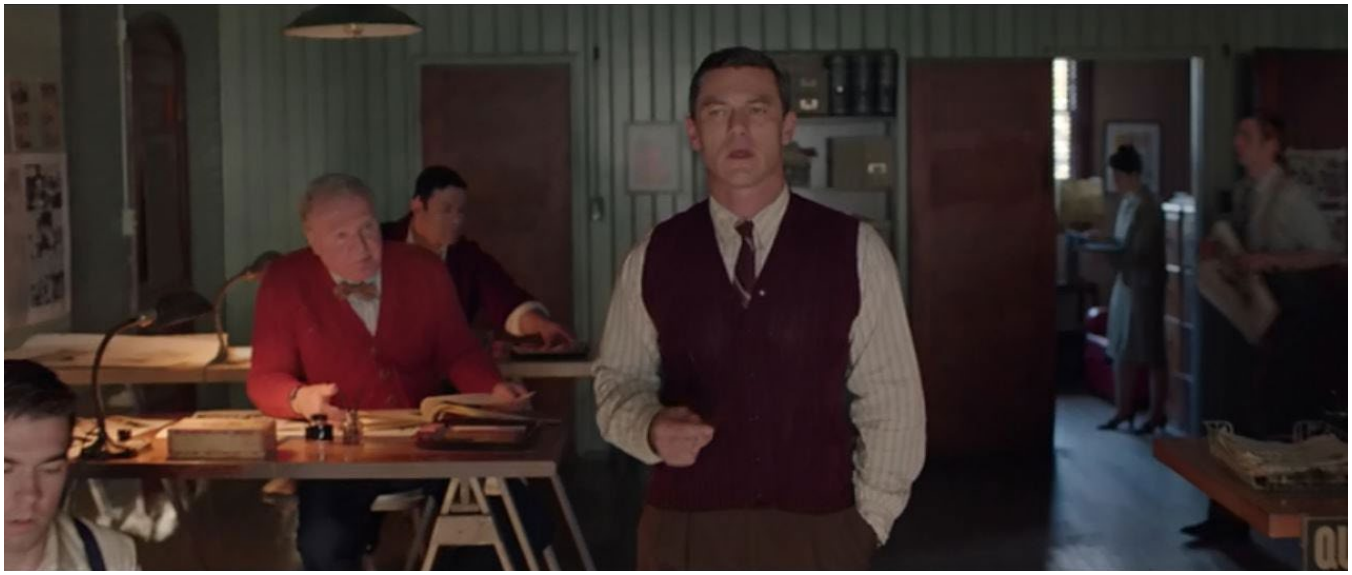

Fig. 6 | Marston increasing amount of kink in his comic, *Professor Marston*, 1:20:03. Opposite Field Pictures, 2017.

Marston, while showing some character flaws, lacks the misogyny evident in Lepore's book. Making Marston less selfish with regards to the women in his life removes the stigma surrounding his polyamory and places the focus on the relationship choices made by all three involved (instead of by a single person).

During the rope-binding class, Robinson makes an interesting adaptation choice that completely relegates Marston to the outside of Holloway and Byrne's relationship by having Holloway be the one that binds Byrne instead of Marston (1:06:18). The first person Marston has an affair with, Marjorie Wilkes Huntley, was into bondage, and she could have introduced him to that lifestyle (Lepore 56). While writing the Wonder Woman comics, Marston "describe[s] scenes of bondage in careful, intimate detail, with utmost precision" (234). Presumably, only someone familiar with bondage would be able to be so specific. Given Marston's personality and fixation with DISC theory, Marston would most likely have been the one to bind Byrne, not Holloway. Robinson's decision makes Holloway and Byrne the main couple in the scene, changing an established threesome to a couple.

The film's protagonists demonstrate different levels of participation in BDSM as it relates to Marston's DISC theory. The D in both acronyms stands for dominance (Hanley 15). While in real life, Marston would have seemingly been the dominant participant in this poly relationship, in the film Holloway is the dominant one. During the rope-binding lesson, Marston chases after Holloway when she runs out (1:09:06). However, according to American academic Lewis Call, sexual power is switchable, and therefore, a dominant could also be submissive (28). In the film, Marston is both dominant to Byrne and submissive to Holloway as evidenced by his interactions with Holloway when he defers to her time and again. For example, she is the one to give him permission to be with Byrne. Also, during the reconciliation scene near the end of the film, Marston looks at Holloway and says, "You cannot dominate all the time" (1:37:49). Meanwhile, Holloway is clearly dominant towards Byrne. When Holloway follows Byrne to the gym, she will not let Byrne kiss her until she decides (46:36), and it is Holloway who invites Marston to join her and Byrne in their first sexual encounter (47:59). Also, the scene depicting their first encounter ends with Marston lying on the stage with Byrne straddling him and Holloway standing with a guiding hand on Byrne (50:37) (Fig. 7).

Framing, another film technique, and the editing technique of shot/reverse shot strongly connect the three main characters in the film and their relationship with each other.

Byrne is mostly submissive. During the rope-binding lesson, Byrne chooses to have the rope tied around her, prompting Guyette, the store owner, to comment on her being "the submissive" (1:09:06). However, it is interesting to note that she is the one who binds Marston's wrists that first time. This dynamic could have evolved because she is also dominant, or it could be because Marston, as the dominant, told her, the submissive, to bind his wrists.

Another significant element of mise-en-scène in the film can be found in the props like the rope. The use of the rope in the binding lesson and throughout the Wonder Woman comics is tied to the B in BDSM: bondage. It connects to Marston's DISC theory through acts of inducement and submission. Someone could induce a person to participate in bondage and a submissive can regularly submit to bondage. There are three instances where bondage takes place in the film. The first instance happens during the initial sexual encounter when Byrne wraps a scarf

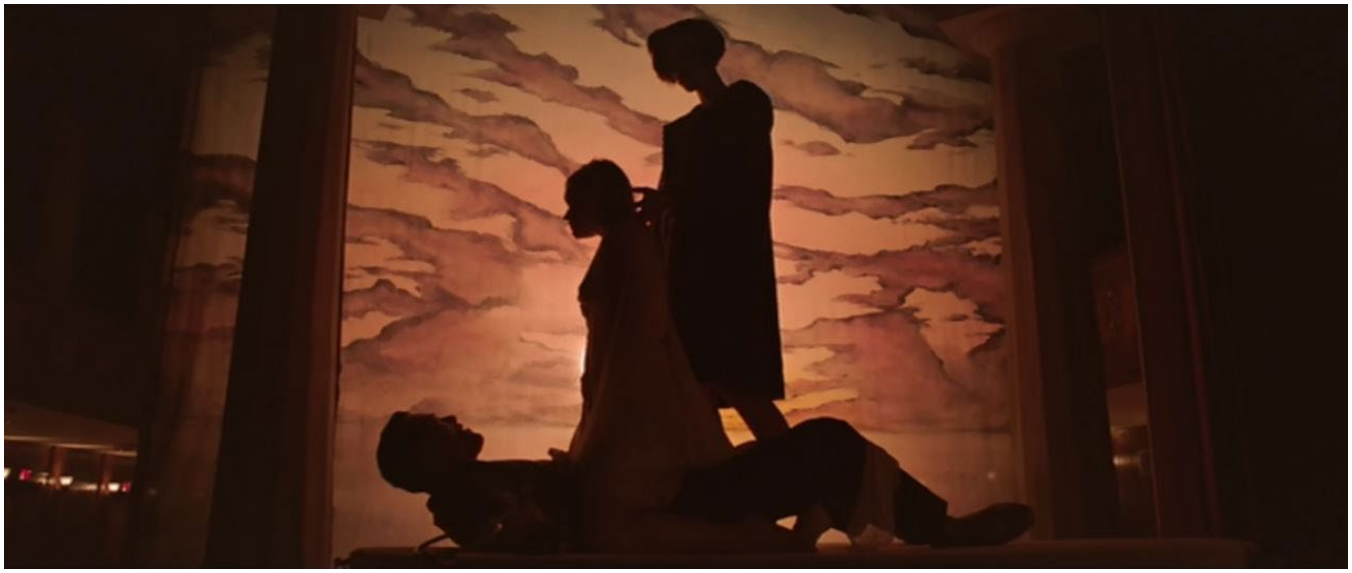

Fig. 7 | Holloway, Byrne, and Marston's first sexual encounter, *Professor Marston*, 50:37. Opposite Field Pictures, 2017.

around Marston's hands (50:06), the second instance occurs during the binding lesson in Guyette's store (1:12:30), and the last one during the Marston's sexual roleplaying where Byrne ties together Marston and Holloway (1:22:03). In the comics, the rope—Wonder Woman's Lasso of Truth—could also be used for inducement, especially the times it is used to compel someone to be honest. The lie detector could also be seen as an inducement device functioning in a similar manner to the rope. It gets tied around the person's chest and they answer questions that show whether or not they may be telling the truth. This connection is evidenced in the scene where the three main characters reveal their feelings for each other through the use of the lie detector.

In addition to acting style and props, the mise-en-scène element of lighting effectively adds tonal qualities to respective scenes. A group of scenes that emotionally connect Holloway, Marston, and Byrne are lit in a similar fashion and include the lie detector that Marston created (Fig. 8). The lighting techniques used during these scenes highlight the emotional tone. When the lie detector machine is not being used on Holloway, Byrne, or Marston during emotional moments, the lighting is normal. The first time the audience sees the lie detector sitting in the school lab, there is a bright, light colour to the scene using natural light shining through the office windows (07:54). It is the same when Marston, Holloway, and Byrne are putting the detector together and testing it (24:24). The first time they use it on each other, however, the lighting is darker, almost an orange or sepia colour from the lamp's artificial light (29:07).

This lighting decision creates a sense of intimacy because it softens the outlines of each person in the scene. The area behind the actors is shrouded in black. In this scene, Holloway asks Marston some questions, which he answers with truth and with lies. The machine does not work as they hope. It is Byrne who suggests the questions need to have weight, prompting Holloway to ask Marston about who he loves, including herself and Byrne. During this scene, the audience discovers that Byrne is in love with Holloway. The second time that the lie detector is administered by Marston is to determine how Holloway feels towards Byrne (35:36), and the third time is when Byrne is interrogated about what she wants are lit in the same fashion (43:12). The effect of this lighting choice emphasizes the emotional connection between Marston, Holloway, and Byrne.

Another scene that uses lighting to demonstrate the emotional connections between the three main characters occurs towards the end of the film. Marston is lying in the hospital bed, centre frame (1:33:35). He looks up toward the hallway door and sees a blurry, backlit shadowy figure. As the shadow moves closer and loses its blurriness, the figure separates and becomes two, Byrne and Holloway. This event clearly exemplifies exactly what Holloway and Byrne mean to Marston. In the film, Marston describes Holloway and Byrne. Of Byrne he says, "she is beautiful, guileless, and pure of heart," while he describes Holloway as "brilliant, ferocious, hilarious, and a grade-A bitch" (36:15). For Marston, Holloway and Byrne together make "the perfect woman" (*Professor* 36:23). The use of lighting and cinematography in this scene underscores Marston's sentiment regarding the two women he loves.

The sepia tone of lighting appears not only in scenes between the main characters, but between members of the family. Marston's son Donn (Christopher Paul Richards as Chris Richards) gets into a fight at school because kids are "telling lies about" the threesome (1:23:45). This hostility prompts a confrontation between the Marstons and their neighbours. After this altercation, Marston talks with his son in the bedroom. The scene is backlit by a tableside lamp with Donn lying in bed more clearly lit than Marston, who sits in shadow over his son to discuss how intellect is more important than physical reaction (1:26:15). Robinson often uses this lighting technique

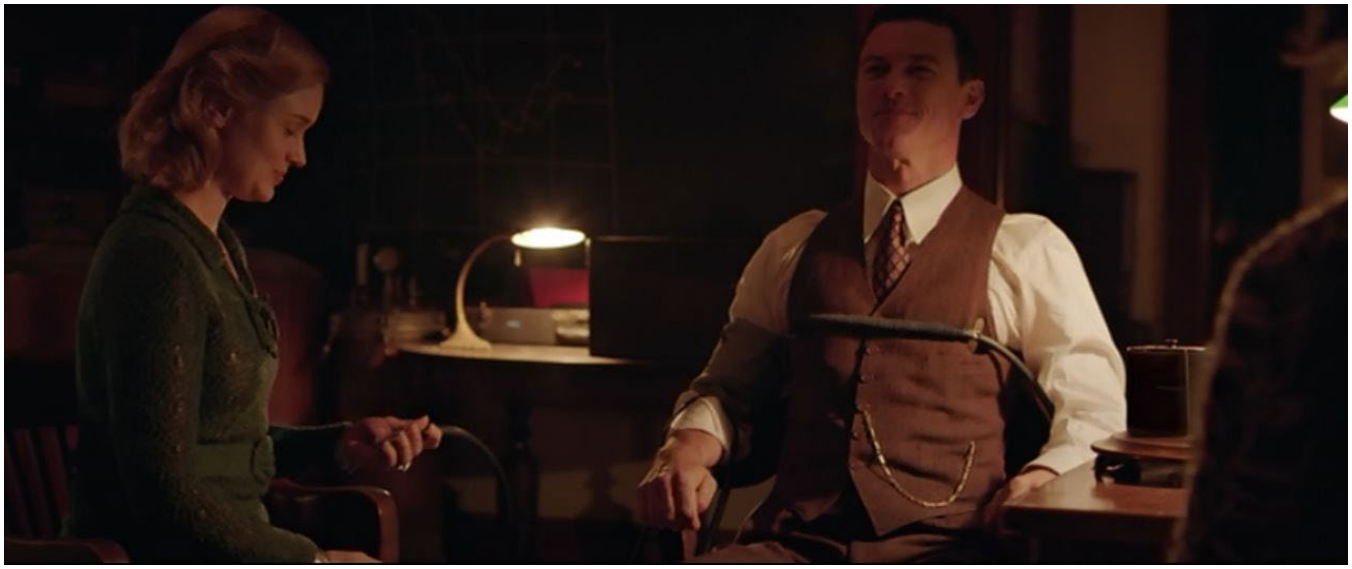

Fig. 8 | Testing the improved lie detector the first time, *Professor Marston*, 29:25. Opposite Field Pictures, 2017.

in her work. She also used it in romantic and dramatic scenes when she directed an episode of the television series *The L Word* (2004-2009), as well as an episode of *True Blood* (2008-2014) that she wrote and directed.

Framing, another film technique, and the editing technique of shot/reverse shot strongly connect the three main characters in the film while signifying their relationship with each other. In *A Short Guide to Writing About Film*, Professor Emeritus of English and Cinema Studies Timothy Corrigan explains that framing "forms the borders [of the image] and contains the [mise-en-scène]" (63). Framing also determines the location of a character within a shot. This technique includes close-ups and medium shots. Close-ups focus on a character's head, while medium shots show most, but not all, of a character's body (29). Editing connects shots to create scenes in a film (67). Shot/reverse shots alternate between actors as if in a conversation (68). The framing and editing in this particular film exemplify the carousel-like lifestyle of Marston, Holloway, and Byrne, and also emphasize the love between all three.

Placing the characters in different sections of the frame give the person in the centre a place of authority. Usually, one member of the threesome would be centred with the other two on either side, left or right of centre (Fig. 9). Sometimes, two characters would be centred opposite a single character, who is also centred. Many times, the characters form a triangle in the camera frame. The first time is when Holloway and Marston take Byrne to the speakeasy (11:55). Holloway and Marston face Byrne, who is centred. As conversation takes place, shot/reverse shot editing shows the back-and-forth dialogue between the Marstons and Byrne. Sometimes when Holloway and Marston are on screen facing Byrne, Marston is centred, but for most of this scene, when Holloway and Marston are framed, Holloway is centred.

The adaptation choices she makes remove the stigma of a polyamorous relationship and bondage from the main characters of the film.

At the end of the film, Marston stands in the centre of the frame as he gives a press conference about Wonder Woman. Holloway and Byrne stand together at the back of the hall. When they are on screen, they are in the centre of the frame. Using shot/reverse shots between Marston on stage and the women in the back communicates Marston's feelings toward the women. Collectively, they are his Wonder Woman. Placing the two women standing together in the centre of the frame makes them a single entity, equal to Marston. Using this cinematography technique also highlights the polyamorous relationship between the three main characters.

People are often judged for their sexual orientation and have been for a long time. In *Professor Marston and the Wonder Women*, Josette Frank (Connie Britton), the person interviewing Marston throughout the film, states that "lesbianism is an emotional illness" (34:34). Since 1936, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) has been aware of and advocating for the rights of people who choose "non-conformative" lifestyles including polyamory, like the Marstons ("LGBT Rights"). While Lepore discusses all of the women in Marston's life because she was fascinated by them, Robinson focuses on the two women he loved the most, Holloway and Byrne, who continued to live together even after Marston died (Lepore 273). This choice showcases a type of relationship that many fans of Wonder Woman would identify with, therefore eliciting sympathy from the audience.

In the documentary "Crucial Point of View: Directing Professor Marston and the Wonder Women," Robinson states

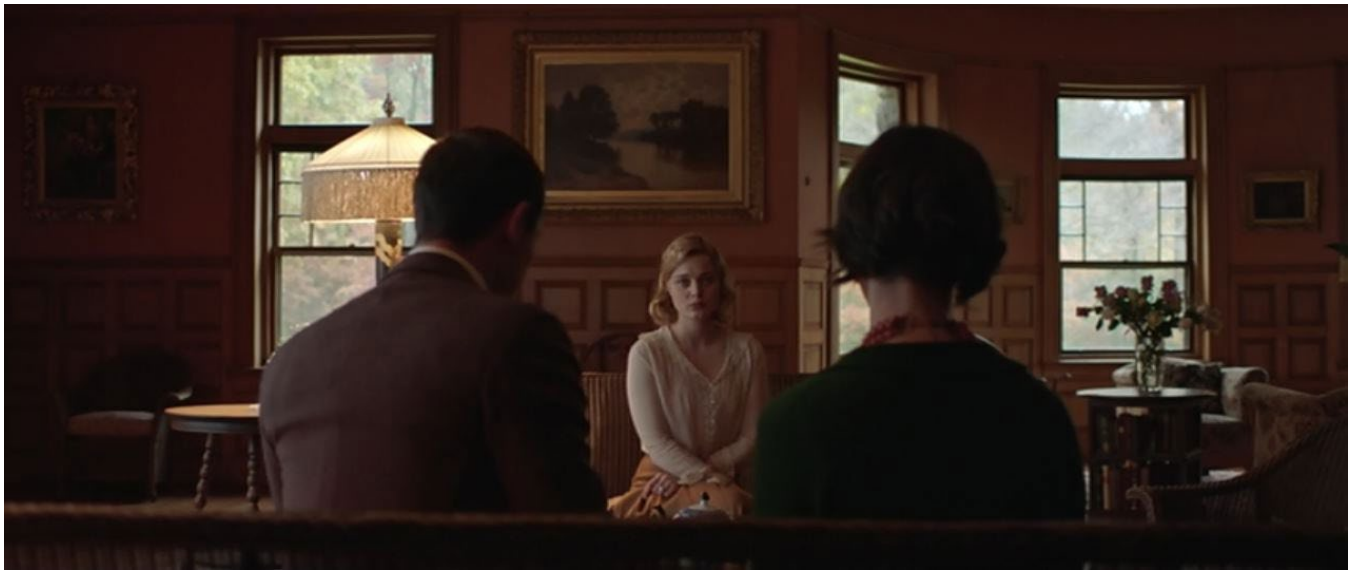

Fig. 9 | Holloway apologizes for offending Byrne, *Professor Marston*, 11:55. Opposite Field Pictures, 2017.

that she wants the audience to be invested in the relationship between the three main characters (0:36). She discusses the relevance of the film and how "it discusses love and tolerance" (05:57). Robinson relies on specific acting styles of the actors who portray the three main characters, as well as elements of mise-en- scène and cinematography techniques to tell the story of Marston, Holloway, and Byrne. The adaptation choices Robinson makes remove the stigmas surrounding polyamorous relationships and bondage. After all, as Angela Robinson says, "love is love" (05:41). Ultimately, Robinson's adaptation promotes the acceptance of alternative lifestyle choices as much as it evokes sympathy and empathy for the struggles that those people experience. ▪

NOTES

1 See Spieldenner 241 for examples of Wonder Woman's transformations.

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