

The Cultural Depiction Of Wonder Woman And Gender Notions Surrounding Her Character

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Wonder Woman and the Emergence of the Female Superhero

In the early age of comic books, the industry was taken by storm by super-powered male characters such as Batman and Superman, who became instant hits. It wasn't until 1941 that William Moulton Marston created a female character that would take an inner lead in its comic book. The concept and Character of [Wonder Woman](#) that Marston had created echoed with women's liberation. The first issue of the feminist Ms. Magazine featured Wonder Woman on its cover in 1972. The character Marston developed is based on a liberated, unconventional, and powerful modern woman, as he imagined in his days. The character would not just conquer with firepower or fists but with love.

Wonder Woman's most appealing part is the character and personality endowed to the character itself. Wonder Woman, unlike other heroes, chose the right thing from her perspective of love and compassion. Greek mythology was a substantial part of her fictional stories. She would be Athena's champion who would always strive for a peaceful solution to a conflict, and her reluctance to fight led her enemies to underestimate her at times. She is the Amazonian princess who was born and raised in Themyscira, a Paradise Island where only a race of women exists. Diana journeys later as she grows up to the world of men on a mission of peace. The Amazons had taught her lessons of love and peace as well as the skills of a warrior. When an American pilot, Steve Trevor, crashes on her Island, she becomes the one who would take him back to man's world and be an ambassador of the Amazons. In her fictional origin story, after returning Steve Trevor, she fought during World War II or, in some depictions, World War I, alongside American allies. As a character, she has had many incarnations individually and as a member of the Justice League in DC Comics and its adaptations.

In 2017, the modern adaptation of the Wonder Woman character was made by Patty Jenkins, who directed the film. The story began in the present and recalled the memory of Wonder Woman or Diana Prince during her role in World War I. The story portrays her in mostly the same way as she had been in the new versions of the comics (The New 52). She was raised in Themyscira, where she realizes that Ares, the Greek mythical god of war, has brought an endless war to the world of men, and the only way to stop it is to kill Ares using the god-killer sword. On her island, Chris Pine's character crashes lands and tells the Amazons about the great war. Convinced that it must be Ares who is responsible, she leaves with Trevor, believing it to be her duty to destroy Ares. The character

showed a combination of untapped strength and innocence, which was guided by her desire to protect men and her sense of justice. She is portrayed as a woman with intelligence, confidence and combat prowess, and her engagement with the outside world challenges her idealistic notions as she encounters the views of pragmatic men leading the war. Without hesitation, her sense of justice and duty often lets her stand up to them.

Feminist Marketing and Contradictions in the Modern Film

The film was marketed as a feminist product, however many contemporary feminists, found themselves at odds with some of the themes of the film that they were not expecting, as the film depicted a lot of men to be higher than their baser qualities. Steve Trevor was portrayed as self-sacrificing and courageous. The men who worked with Diana displayed respect and love for her, and all members of the team had their flaws and strengths. Diana was strong and wise but naïve and had a very simplified worldview. The film showed that although men could be cruel, stubborn and warmongering, they could also be loving and self-sacrificing for the greater good and could rise to greater heights. Their view of Diana changed as they worked with her, just as the view of the Amazons changed when they interacted with Steve Trevor (Snyder).

The film depicted a rather sophisticated form of feminism that did not centre around bashing men, but it elevated women and carried messages about how, despite their differences, men and women had much in common. No one was better than the other. Diana needed her team members' support and contributions despite having abilities to do many things a lot better than the men around her. Women were shown in positions of power, such as Antiope and Hippolyta, Etta ran the war operations whereas Dr. Maru, the villain was in charge of the whole department. Diana progressed to being the leader of her team. The film depicted that, in some instances, women still seemed subservient to men, but there are ample suggestions of their potential contributions and competence that were on par with men. It depicted how different the halls of leadership might have been, where women were allowed to be inside (Snyder). In the film, Diana is also not depicted to be perfect just for being a woman with superpowers.

She learned her lessons as her assumptions about the world were proven wrong. Her desire to be a force for good and her convictions in love and peace would remain a constant part of her character. The depiction of Diana Prince in the film is different from how women in central film roles have usually been depicted. Instead of enticing audiences with her sexualized depictions, Diana's character traits offered unique perspectives to female leads not seen before in movies of this genre. Her optimism, purity of heart, empathy, and compassion are firmly portrayed and not shown as a weakness but the kind of qualities that provide her clarity of purpose and be a hero to those suffering. The ending sees Dianna extend her optimism and compassion to all of humanity (Snyder)

Gender Difference, Heroism, and Alternative Visions of Feminism

The feminist themes explored in Patty Jenkins's Wonder Woman often did not agree with the versions of feminism we find commonly depicted in the media today. One of the striking aspects of the film, missing for many feminists, was the main-hating politics of grievance that sometimes follow depictions of female empowerment projection. The film is not a negative one; it is not anti-men but rather shows men and women working together. Diana's leadership style is also more collaborative. Patty's version of Wonder Woman is an icon of female strength and a role model for women and little girls, whose motivation and anger are driven by love and compassion for the world and whose leadership entails a cooperative style depicting a positive vision for empowerment – something not enough seen in today's real world (Robinson).

Many feminists did not agree with the notion of how a strong male character was still leading Diana in many scenes and levelled criticism on why she depended on men. They view the film to be filled with sexist clichés; although many depictions are natural to the days of World War I, she was transported to. Modern feminists also criticized her for her dependence on men who constantly told her how to behave, what to wear, where to go, or the fact that she is told by generals to stay quiet for being a woman. These portrayals did not go down well with those wishing to see the film depict an idealized feminist fantasy (Elle).

The Character of Wonder Woman is among the few comic books that have remained in publishing since its origins in the 1940s. Throughout these years, her depiction and portrayal have often evolved due to prevailing circumstances and social conditions. For a long period, her body and dress were associated with nationalistic symbolism and notions of American freedom. Her initial target audiences were adult men and women who supported the war effort, the images of which were constructed specifically with representations of nationalism and nation. After World War II, when American women were exhorted to return home to families and kitchens and not compete with returning soldiers, Wonder Woman's portrayal entered a phase where she was chased by Steve Trevor to convince her to marry him. Ms Magazine's cover photo showed Wonder Woman with a dangerous and enlarged body that attempted to span the feminine realm of justice and peace with the masculine realm of politics and war, reflective of the discourses relating to the 1970s women's movement (Emad). At that moment, Wonder Woman's portrayal demonstrated that as long as femininity was beautiful and feminine, it would not be corrupted by power and hence could coexist with a nation.

Changing Representations of Female Strength in Popular Culture

In the early 1990s, Wonder Woman began to emerge again as a symbol of female power and had a

muscular and toned body, with a more functional superhero costume and a determined expression. During this time, the character's identity became more personal and individual. By 2001, Wonder Woman's portrayal had become deeply hypersexualized. Almost all authors and artists began to depict her with large breasts and in a revealing costume that barely covered her essentials. Wonder Woman's hypersexualized body showed that nationalist iconography still saw the primary purpose of a woman's body to be an object for male sexual pleasure and that female power reigns in that fact. The patterns noted were that Wonder Woman's images seemed to become more sexualized and subject to bondage, as feminine nationhood tended to become more masculine in approach (Emad).

The 2017's modern depiction of Wonder Woman and its success raised many gender issues. In male superhero films, the usual narrative is that gaining powers transforms the hero's moral character towards being more empathic or caring, whereas Wonder Woman is different in that aspect from her male counterparts, in the sense that those qualities were already a part of her character. Her strength was not her love, super strength or compassion but a desire to remain in and fight on behalf of the world she is in. This was not a trait that should be related to femininity or masculinity but to humanity. Her virtues are, therefore, human and not necessarily feminine. Wonder Woman's overall journey shows that only ignorance and illusions can come as a consequence of isolationism. It may be painful or difficult to connect across cultural, gender or ideological divides, but it is necessary to stop evil from being spread. The message itself is, therefore, progressive. It asks deep questions, such as whether it is possible to live the virtues or espouse the values of hope, love, and peace while still being able to remain effective in the strife-torn world (Norma Jones).

The mid-70s was an era which lessened the focus on legal issues of women's organizations, such as the right to vote and was taken over by other more important social issues, like reproductive rights and domestic violence, for the one who grew up in an environment where masculine qualities were much more appealing than ladylike ones. In such times, Wonder Woman was an appealing personality for those who perused pop culture associated with their moral values. Some interesting remarks from a radio show for the new film were:

Costume, Sexualization, and the Politics of the Female Body

"I never liked Wonder Woman on TV; I felt like she was parading around in a bathing suit. I didn't know what I was missing until I felt it. Wonder Woman was not sexualized. There's no cleavage; she's not wearing underpants like previous incarnations of Wonder Woman to the male gaze in that exact way" (Norma Jones)

According to (Emad), the new personification of Wonder Woman is a revision of women's power and strength. And this is not a small achievement. Her physical appearance can't be visualized as the powerful and strong woman that she is. I firmly believe that this movie can open the way for more dynamic representations.

When Wonder Woman was produced by William Moulton Marston with the determination of women's betterment, at the start, his idea of sexual emancipation was doubtful, either in theorization or actual practice. Wonder Woman's skimpy and whipped dressing was not innocent. Overall, Marton did a great job, but he still missed some points. According to Patty's modern [point of view](#), this movie doesn't come under the category of the sexually objectified or "the gaze," i.e., the heteronormative manly aspect from which most of the time movies are produced. For Jenkins, It is important what should be expressed in the film in portraying the character because she wants viewers to watch Wonder Woman with a unique view, not as a sex object, but as a soldier and athlete.

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