Article

The Representation of Liberal Feminism in Cinema: A Study on *Wonder Woman* Film

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Abstract: Gender equality is the goal of the feminist movement as a social movement to understand one's position within the social framework of society; gender becomes an essential analytical tool. This study aims to investigate how the discourse of feminism is portrayed in this American film by using a qualitative approach and liberal feminism as the perspective. The film Wonder Woman is selected as the primary data, and the secondary data is from another relevant text or media. Diana, who actualizes female dominance in the visual and aural aspects of the film's appearance, becomes a symbol of the feminist movement in the film. The results show that feminism is expressed in aspects through the setting, place, dialog, characters, and clothing.

Keywords: American Studies; Feminism; Wonder Woman

1. Introduction

Feminist theory's central tenet is that women have been subordinated to males from the dawn of human civilization due to the influence of masculine-dominated social discourse and Western philosophical heritage. Every civilization's history demonstrates that women have always been placed in a subservient position, unable to reclaim their identity unless they revisit, investigate, and ultimately reestablish it via their own experiences and discoveries. Women must identify themselves in opposition to the gendered norms and attitudes inherited from males to investigate their own distinct identities. They have built a dominating system because these ideas generate female socialized subjects to support the system's ideals. Men degrade and take advantage of the physical cosmos in a similar way to how women are exploited, reducing them to submissive objects and selfless creatures—the movement known as feminism was born out of women's demands for equal rights alongside men. The phrase was initially employed in late 19th-century French political discussions. Feminism is defined as a focus on women's independence (Hannam, 2007). Specific bodily components must be emphasized to maintain this disparity, as shown using corsets, bras, and specific clothing (King, 2004).

In summary, males have greatly influenced women and the environment in all three domains: philosophical or epistemic tradition, historical legacies, and ecological inhalation. Jewish women were influential in every facet of the American feminist movement, pushing for gender equality, the Equal Rights Amendment, peace, better working conditions for women, birth control, and reproductive rights. Jewish women such as Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem, Bella Abzug, and Letty Cottin Pogrebin established second-wave feminism in the early and mid-1960s. Researchers that specialize in Standpoint Theory, such as Sandra Harding and Julia Wood (Griffin, 2006, pp. 482-483), assert that understanding women's and girls' perspectives is a valuable approach to understanding how the world functions. from the perspective of marginalized community groups, such as women. As well as contributing to our experience and knowledge, our social group

membership significantly impacts how we perceive and interact with the environment, other people, and ourselves (Griffin in Perdana, 2012). By the decade's end, many young Jewish women had pioneered radical feminism. Two-thirds to three-quarters of members of certain women's liberation organizations are Jewish. American feminists have not always acknowledged Jewish women's challenges and accomplishments. Women's rights activists occasionally have antisemitic, anti-immigrant, or anti-Zionist opinions. Jewish women are among the most ardent supporters of feminism despite occasional difficulties (Joyce, 2021). Many Hollywood companies have started to increase their production of movies featuring a female hero or heroine as the main character. However, male superhero characters who receive more screen time typically replace female hero characters in movies as sidekicks or minor characters. However, Warner Bros. released a movie in 2017 featuring Wonder Woman as the beginning of a female renaissance. After that, Wonder Woman appeared in various contexts, including children's entertainment, where she first appeared in comic books, toys, and cartoons. Because Wonder Woman is often presented as intellectual, beautiful, visionary, independent, adventurous, and active, she represents the ideal image of a woman in the entertainment industry. When examined through the lens of cultural studies, the problems associated with Wonder Woman's character culminate in the definition of the ideal female representation, which includes, for example, an appearance defined as a woman having an ideal body, a beautiful face, an ideal physique, and even an attractive demeanor. Wonder Woman covers her body in clothing that overtly draws attention to her sexual appeal, namely revealing and tight clothing. The Wonder Woman film portrays the tale of Steve Trevor, an American pilot portrayed by Chris Pine, who met Diana Prince, played by Gal Gadot, after an accident and crashed onto the island of Themyscira. After that, Civilot informed him about the ongoing World War. With her departure from home and her attempt to become a superhero, Diana attempted to aid in the First World War (WW I).

Wonder Woman is a story about Diana. She is an Amazonian of goddess heritage, descended from Queen Hippolyta and the deity Zeus in her native Themyscira. Diana's mother once informed her that Ares, the Greek mythological god of battle, was to blame for the war's happenings. Zeus even rendered Ares paraplegic, although it was long ago. Ares is now rekindling the war's fires. Diana thinks Ares is equally to blame for Trevor's experience in the battle. First, Diana and Steve visited Ares, who could change into a different human figure. The sense of female supremacy permeates every aspect of this Wonder Woman film, from Diana as Wonder Woman to the other female characters. Nevertheless, the movie takes place during the First World War, which is ideally controlled by the god of war, Ares, and typified by the might of men.

Wonder Woman (2017). A Critical Discourse Analysis Study by Safitri and Feni Yusnia on the Representation of Feminism. This study examines how the main female character in the Wonder Woman movie represents feminism using Sandra Harding and Julia Wood's perspective theory and Sara Mills' critical discourse analysis method. This study discovered that Wonder Woman brought up seven feminism-related issues: lesbians, women as aggressive key characters, women's empowerment, women's leadership, men's engagement, and women's freedom of opinion and expression. This study also demonstrates that the Wonder Woman movie refers to the liberal feminist category (Safitri, 2019)—Wonder Woman's Gender Representation by Retno Indriyani and Yuliana Rakhmawati. In addition to Roland Barthes's semiotic analysis, this study employs qualitative and descriptive methodologies to characterize Wonder Woman's feminism and to ascertain its underlying meaning. Time and space, character, conflict, and purpose are only a few of the narrative film characteristics examined in this study. Feminism in struggle, feminism in decision-making, feminism in willpower, and feminism in love are the four pillars of feminism that Wonder Woman embodies, according to the research. Also,

this study demonstrates Diana's monoandrogynous nature, as she simultaneously exhibits traits of both femininity and masculinity (Indriyani & Rakhmawati, 2018). This study reveals the dominance of women in Wonder Woman through semiotic analysis by Roland Barthes and qualitative and descriptive methodologies. Micro and macro elements of the movie, including the title, theme, setting, characters, dialogue, wardrobe, photography, and music, were examined in the research. According to the study, Wonder Woman uses a variety of feminism-related symbols and indicators to represent female dominance in a patriarchal society.

Additionally, this study demonstrates how closely connected the historical elements of Wonder Woman, which feminist figures conceptualized, and the movie's portrayal of women's supremacy are (Irwanto, 2018). Several types of research focus on gender construction in Wonder Woman films. This study focuses on portraying women from a liberal feminist perspective. Liberal feminism is a prominent movement within feminist theory that focuses on gender inequality and women's liberation within the context of liberal democracy (Sangeetha et al., 2022). It emphasizes individualism and equal rights, advocating for women's rights to be recognized and respected on par with men's (Enyew & Mihrete, 2018). Liberal feminism does not seek to establish women as superior to men but aims to ensure that women have the freedom and opportunities to pursue their goals and aspirations (Miskiyah & Sofyan, 2023). This perspective holds that there are minimal inherent differences between men and women in law, politics, and work; thus, women should have equal access and representation in these areas (Diana, 2022). Liberal feminism is rooted in the belief that women should have the same opportunities and rights as men without being limited by traditional gender roles and expectations (Fakhrian & Islamiyati, 2017).

2. Materials and Methods

A descriptive-qualitative approach was used in writing this study, along with data analysis. Qualitative research methodology aims to provide comprehensive knowledge about phenomena by focusing on meaning, context, and process. In descriptive qualitative research, data is collected through observation, literature review, and document analysis to characterize and explain the phenomenon under study. Then, a comprehensive data analysis is conducted to identify themes, patterns, and interpretations that emerge from the research findings. Thus, qualitative research procedures that use descriptive research aim to provide a comprehensive description and in-depth knowledge of a phenomenon without changing the variables under study. In this case, the author uses secondary data from sources limited to books, articles, and websites with discussions that lead to the theory of feminism in America and also the movie Wonder Woman.

3. Results

The roles female characters play in movies impact the feminist themes they convey. Because of this, female characters in movies may be shown in various positions and contexts that demonstrate how equal and even more powerful women can be than males. Feminism has evolved throughout time to include an analysis of the proper conduct of women in society (Rachma, 2014). Feminism is defined in scientific research as a movement that seeks to establish, uphold, and promote equal political, economic, and social rights for women. People and the environment are viewed as equally vital by feminism, which promotes gender equality (Sulastri, 2011). In addition to being visible, the indicators might also be social, psychological, or subconscious.

Figure 1. Diana's Appearance

Most of the 141-minute Wonder Woman film consists of action-packed battle sequences, including sword and gunfights. In this instance, Diana serves as Wonder Woman's primary character. Whenever she battles her male opponents, her efforts as a superhero always come out on top. Diana is a strong female character in this film, surrounded by friends and rivals. More robust than Hercules, quicker than Mercury, more intelligent than Athena, and more attractive than Aphrodite.

Figure 2. Diana fights the enemy

Princess Diana, the embodiment of Wonder Woman, was raised in Themyscira among the Amazon tribe. Came to bring about peace, vanquish Areas, and combat injustice in Man's World. She represents authentic liberty. Wonder Woman is an empathetic, opinionated, obstinate, competitive, gregarious, and immortal Amazon. Wonder Woman is a natural warrior. Although she tries to avoid confrontation, when pressured, she will fight and occasionally become lost in the joy of the fight. Wonder Woman is determined to achieve her goals without fear. She will not think twice about breaking the law if it serves the larger good. She always puts herself out there to take the fallout and will not run from her actions. In a battle where victory is essential, Wonder Woman slays several individuals. Diana, the dependable and powerful heroine in the Wonder Woman movie, is a reminder that women are capable of being strong and taking on challenges previously believed to be exclusive to men. This is because Greek mythology still upholds strong patriarchal ideals that define what it is to be a man.

On the other hand, closer inspection reveals that Wonder Woman's existence is an attempt to challenge patriarchy and the idea of masculinity. Wonder Woman's abilities demonstrate this. Wonder Woman is a demigod, a half-god, half-human being, but she can beat Ares, the god of war, in combat, proving that she is a pure deity and not a masculine demigod.

3.1. Dialogue Elements in Wonder Woman Movie

Wonder Woman's dialogue with Diana embodies verbalized feminine dominance. Diana confronts Steve in the cave and coerces him into joining Ares on the battlefield in a significant dialogue about dominance. Diana responds, *"Now I'll show you the way out of this island, and you take me to Ares."* Steve nodded, *"Agree."* Diana's dominance or compulsion over Steve is explained in the dialogue. Diana was quickly agreed upon by Steve, who had stopped negotiating with her. Diana's mother forbade her daughter from leaving the island.

Additionally, in the warfare scenario, Diana befriends a war widow who confides in her about her family's plight. She moves Diana, and she wants to assist her. She disregards Steve's advice to keep focused on their quest to see Ares despite his prohibiting her from aiding the family's relatives.
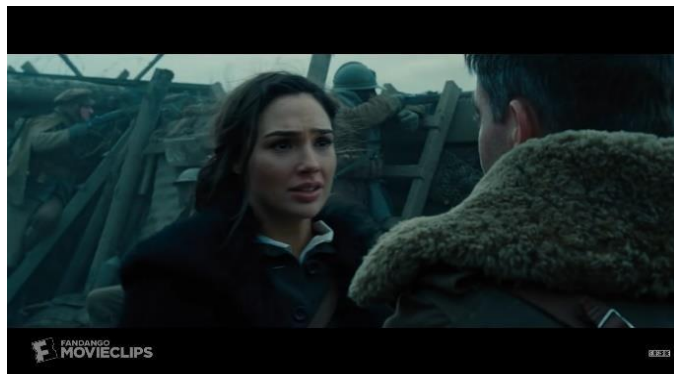

Figure 3. Diana Argues to Steve

Diana ignores Steve even though he is a British secret agent in the scenario and is well-versed in the conditions on the battlefield.

"We are in a land without humans," Steve stated. It follows that nobody can cross. Are you following? It had been about a year since the British and Allied soldiers arrived. They are also unable to seize even an inch of land.

Furthermore, there are German soldiers over there pointing their machine guns at every angle in this area. *"There is no way for us to cross here."* *"So, we are just going to do nothing?"* inquired Diana. Then Steve said, *"No. We are going to act."* The fact is that not everyone can be saved in this battle. Diana disregards Steve's counsel and confronts the German soldiers on the battlefield in the following scenario. Despite the patriarchal nature of the military environment, it is evident from the dialogue and situations that women are still in control over males.

Figure 4. Diana's Dress, as the Leading Actress of the Movie by Scene and Place

Diana may be seen wearing a dress that falls and black boots with high heels in Wonder Woman's opening sequence, which takes place in Europe. Diana's clothing and high heels from the film's start demonstrate the director's intention to highlight Diana's feminine features. The filmmaker has made it clear to the audience from the beginning that a woman is the main character in the film. Diana's outfit serves as a representation of this. Diana's bold persona is furthered by the prominent red hue of her clothing. The lives of Diana and the other Amazons in Themyscira are then shown to the spectator via a backward storyline. Diana appears in this image sporting gold-accented Amazonian women's apparel, which tends to accentuate a woman's body contours. However, there is also something savage about it because attractive clothing is constructed with metal components like armor. Diana's miniskirt shows that the filmmaker intended to show off Diana's thighs. Diana's intentional bearing of her upper chest serves to emphasize sexism and feminism further.

Given that Gal Gadot was formerly Miss Israel, the filmmaker purposefully highlights her attractive figure in Wonder Woman. He did this to make the feminist movement more political in his movie. The politicization of the female body has preserved its natural shape. Certain bodily parts, such as the breasts, waist, buttocks, and hips, must remain on women since they are viewed as "other humans" or the otherness of males (King, 2004).
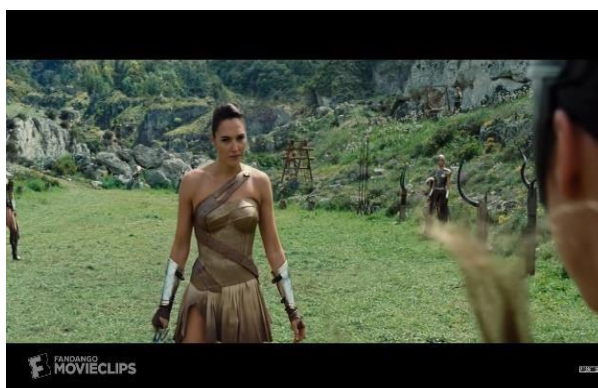

Figure 5. Sexism in Diana's Appearance

Certain body parts must be highlighted to maintain this disparity, such as corsets, bras, and specific clothing. This is likewise the case with the London scene when Diana is dressed in a 1918 European woman's coat; the only difference is that the hat subtly accentuates the feminism of the ensemble. However, this does not give off a feminist vibe. There are a few differences between Diana's attire in Themyscira and the one she wears in the combat scenario in continental Europe. All that's happening is that her hair is curled to make her gender obvious. Afterward, weapons such as swords, lasso straps, and shields were added, along with headgear in the shape of a tiara.

Figure 6. Diana on The Battlefield

When Wonder Woman is on the battlefield, her attire predominantly features red, the color of bravery. The Wonder Woman outfit blends aspects of masculinity and feminism with a feminine aesthetic for use in combat. With her hair down, Wonder Woman's physique proves that women exist. Other fashion accessories include Tiaras, bracelets that double as sharp swords, and seductive armor that accentuates the body's features. Wonder Woman's weaponry, which includes swords and lasso ropes, contrasts with her feminine attributes. In order to further emphasize the visual penetration of feminism, weapons that are identical to those of males are purposefully presented.
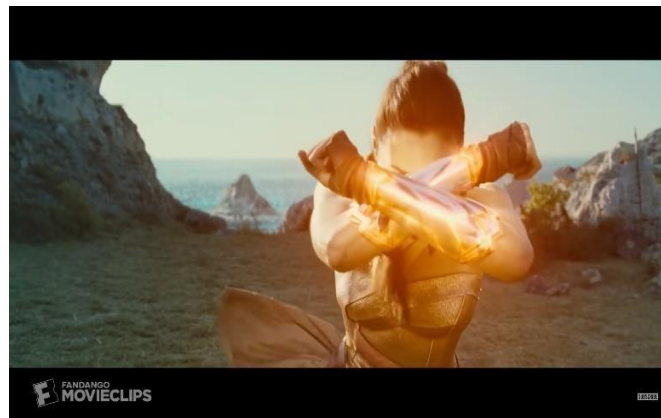

Figure 7. Diana's Super Power

Once she was created, representations of Wonder Woman as a feminist figure can be seen through the first press release surrounding her character. Lepore's description of the release again cites fashion as an essential aspect of her character and values: 'Wonder Woman' has bracelets welded on her wrists; with these, she can repulse bullets. However, she loses her power if she lets any man weld chains on these bracelets". Here, Wonder Woman's accessories reveal her status as independent from men, per her familial history. Although the press release seems to imply that Wonder Woman was created as a positive figure, in March 1942, one year after her creation, Wonder Woman was placed on the National Organization for Decent Literature's list of "Publications Disapproved for Youth" because "'Wonder Woman is not sufficiently dressed'" (Lepore). The organization does not specify the meaning of the word "sufficiently;" her clothing is defined as indecent for youth without further explanation. As we shall see, accusations eventually took on additional force, particularly surrounding what was understood as her character's sexual nature. In March 1942, Wonder Woman was added to the National Organization for Decent Literature's list of "Publications Disapproved for Youth" because "'Wonder Woman is not sufficiently dressed,'" despite the press release's apparent suggestion that she was created as a positive figure (Lepore). Her clothes are defined as inappropriate for young people without any more justification by the organization, which does not define the term "sufficiently." It will be seen that with time, the charges gained more weight, especially about the perceived sexual element of her persona.

Figure 8. Diana with Her Dart Gun

Diana lives and strolls about the stations and harbor scenes in the Wonder Woman movie. The passing male troops are the main focus of the set. This scene shows male troops packing to either go back home or head out to fight. Everybody who walks past has guns, weapons, and other combat gear strapped upon their bodies. Despite a few women in the scene, most of the ladies were bringing or receiving family members to and from the battlefield. Diana is the lone female who travels to the battlefield among the males on the station and harbor sets. Diana even spots the male victims of war who have just gotten off the ship and are injured in the port-set scenario as she goes to the battlefield instead. The audience is shown how prevalent women are in both the group and the wider world. Director Patty Jenkins used the location of an air base and munitions manufacturing as justification to increase feminism's penetration. Men predominated where the air base and bomb factories were located during World War I.   It is a given that any ladies found in places like bomb factories and air bases are not just any old random people.

The sole female character on this set is Elena Anaya's portrayal of Doctor Isabel Maru, also known as Doctor Poison. The primary researcher for the development of a deadly weapon that would be deployed in the First World War is played by Wonder Woman in the film. Also, Wonder Woman's supremacy was shown in Belgium, the location of the movie's battleground—the superiority of women over males. The sole formidable lady in this group is Diana. Diana was able to avert the First World War with the help of her four men and the little group Global Conflict One. A shield, lasso, sword, and whip are among Wonder Woman's armaments. However, she managed to defeat the German forces when fighting them and their allies on the battlefield.

As per Steve's conversation, the German Army and its coalition had been at war with the British Army and its allies for almost a year, and the Germans had managed to hold their ground and not move one inch. The filmmaker, Patty Jenkin, aimed to portray women as able to rule in a male-dominated society, but with references to this battle scenario. Wonder Woman may even thrive in this group, surpassing the guys in terms of power. With a radical historical viewpoint, Director Jenkin is familiar with Werlhof's thesis, which states that patriarchy first emerged in the war tradition. However, Jenkin purposefully sets up a conflict so that Wonder Woman may win a fight in which every opponent is a male. Because of her superiority, Wonder Woman can defeat any opponent, including the masculine god of war, Ares. The patriarchal system, which often views males as the dominating class due to their physical power, is successfully overthrown in this film through the utilization of military scenes.

Figure 9. Wonder Woman Movie as an Icon of Feminism

Because she is a strong, independent, and self-sufficient character, she is the ideal woman in the eyes of feminism. Wonder Woman (Jenkins, 2017) first appears to be a character that advances the notion of feminism. She has traditionally had a role in advancing women's emancipation. Being connected to women's empowerment helps to make her more comprehensible. According to Kate Millett, personal issues often speak to political problems that exist in a community. There is amusement included. The prevalent worldview influences how men and women are portrayed in entertainment, much like in movies. Patriarchy is the prevailing philosophy of Wonder Woman. Wonder Woman's creation confirms the patriarchal worldview norm established by males. These several shortcomings in Wonder Woman's portrayal show how she adheres to patriarchal ideology's ideal of a woman, which holds that women are inferior to each other. According to Millett, young toddlers have been indoctrinated to assume specific roles associated with males and females.

5. Conclusions

Wonder Woman is a movie that tells the story of Diana trying to help in the First World War (WWI). Wonder Woman's story about Diana is that she is an Amazon of godly descent, descended from Queen Hippolyta and the god Zeus in her native Themyscira. Diana's mother once told her that Ares, the god of war in Greek mythology, was the cause of the war. Zeus even paralyzed Ares, although that was a long time ago. Ares is now reigniting the flames of war. The aspects and elements in this movie imply that women also have power that can dominate a situation. In this case, the character aspect, Diana, as the leading player, has a strong character towards the establishment. Diana is also portrayed as a strong figure and can fight Ares, who is known to be solid and male. In addition, the dialog in this film also depicts the figure of Diana, who can dominate Steve in every decision. The element of dress also shows strong feminism in the main character. The last element is the selection of place settings in ports, battlefields, and bomb factories that men dominate. However, Diana can adapt and participate in the fight against these men. Because of these elements, this movie can be said to be an icon of feminism. The difference between this research and previous research is in the view of the theoretical methodology used. In this study, researchers used the theory put forward by Mary Wollstonecraft and June Hannam, which emphasizes the independence and ability of women who can be superior to men. This case also proves that women have an equal position and can even be higher than men. In addition, it proves that women can be a reliable figure under challenging situations and can also be a place for men to depend on.

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