

Wonder woman: a symbol of sexism and the modern woman

[Business](#)



Until fairly recently, the world of comic books have been a predominately male centric industry. Constantly scrutinized, comics have been accused of various atrocities ranging from sexism to the corruption of the innocent. The business realized it needed to grow-up and throughout the years has matured the ways it has treated its characters.

An interesting case study is Wonder Woman, and how the comic book industry has portrayed a woman who's modust operardi is being a strong female character. However, her symbolism has changed over the years as well as how her creators have handled her character, the values she promotes, and what it really means to be the most powerful woman alive. Throughout the ages, women comic book characters have regularly been subject to horrific violence, a trend that many felt reflected negatively on America's values. Gail Simone, the first female ongoing writer for Wonder Woman, has pointed out that many women were being brutally murdered "just as plot points for the male characters, who could then vow revenge against the killer" (Simone). Wonder Woman was a solution to such a trend that the modern woman found to be in poor taste.

Her character reflects an independent woman who does not need a male character to vow revenge for her sake, due to that fact that she can fight her own battles. Her strength without a man is a highly relatable topic as more women find themselves living their lives single, raising families without fathers, or taking executive jobs that years ago was only considered to be man's work. The values that Wonder Woman promoted to the comic book community were very similar to the values reflected onto America's more modern society. She symbolized the empowerment of women, and labeled <https://assignbuster.com/wonder-woman-a-symbol-of-sexism-and-the-modern-woman/>

anything lesser as sexism. However, the term “ sexism” is also a rather modern term and was not in common use during Wonder Woman’s more formable years. Along with Batman and Superman, Wonder Woman is one of few characters to have been continuously circulated by her publisher since her December 1941 introduction (Hendrix).

While her character was popular enough to sustain such a long shelf life, women in the 1940s were not reading comic books. If a woman was even aware of Wonder Woman’s existence, it was usually due to her son having a stack of her comic books cluttering his bedroom. The Ninetieth Amendment was only passed twenty-years prior, and a majority of women were still too busy serving as homemakers to even acknowledge the magnitude of the change that Wonder Woman was creating. A woman super hero was a ground breaking change in these early times, and her writers were aware of this factor. Afraid of low sales, creators would usually pair her up with a strong male characters such as Superman in hopes of boosting her sales.

Another aspect of her character that they hoped would increase profits was her sexual appeal, which could be easily witnessed as she fought evildoers dressed in only a leotard and heeled-boots. A spandex suit, a cape, and burley mussels may be what comes to mind when thinking of a typical super hero however, the icons associated with Wonder Woman are none of these stereotypes. Clad in the red, white and blue of American nationalism, Wonder Woman’s outfit is directly based off the American Flag, even down to the stars that decorate the bottom of her unitard. However, regardless of this patriotism, there have been speculations that Wonder Woman’s weapons

have a more adult aspect. Over the years, the equipment that she uses have been analyzed to have been associated to carry a type of bondage element. For example, her weapon is a golden lasso, which critics have called an erotic symbol of sexual control since she uses it to make her adversaries obey her commands.

Another of her more commonly used weapons are her Amazon bracelets, which she uses to deflect bullets. These bracelets have been said to be symbols of her all-female tribe's enslavement under Hercules (Stuever). In the early publications of her stories, creators's writings of her often had the bondage elements of being tied up and helpless, often with role-reversal, playing with the meaning of power and using sex as one of the ingredients. While the idea of sexual undertones may lead some to believe that Wonder Woman was objectified, there is another way to spin this interpretation. The idea of sexism in the Wonder Woman story-lines have been a looming black cloud above the franchise for decades.

Instead of seeing her as being used as a sexual product for young adult male consumption, it could be spun that Wonder Woman used her sexuality as a means of empowerment. By being self-aware of her sexuality, Wonder Woman is able to gain control of the situation instead of hiding sheepishly or covering up her femininity. She knows she holds the most powerful weapon against men which is not a lasso or pair of magical bracelets, but sex appeal. By not being afraid to acknowledge this, she has proven that superiority is not repressing sexuality, but embracing it and using it to her advantage. As mentioned previously, Wonder Woman was not always a strong feminist

icon. It was not until the early 1970s that she was adopted as a role model by feminist and even appeared on the cover of the inaugural issue of the publication Ms.

magazine (Crawford). Over the years, Wonder Woman has been used to end the objectification of women, a task which ironically led her to own creation. Once a woman who was only seen to be a tongue-in-cheek representation of a dominatrix from a male's sexual fantasy, her mission has changed to bring the ideals of love, peace, and sexual equality to a world torn by the violence of men. Her role as a female icon has changed as rapidly and significantly as that of America's modern woman. Simply by being a female super hero, from the very beginning Wonder Woman was tiptoeing on the thin line between empowerment and sexism.

Created by Dr. Charles Moulton, Harvard psychologist, Wonder Woman was a feature of what Moulton believed to be a strong, assertive, and dominating woman. Following the guidelines of the Comic Code Authority, Moulton designed his super hero as a muscular female drawn "realistically without exaggeration of any physical qualities" (Les Daniels). Her strength as a strong female icon can be compared to that of Rosie the Riveter from early American war propaganda.

Wonder Woman has become a symbol of not only female sexuality, but of the battle that every woman must face in society. Whether it is supporting a family, or trying to break into the business world as a CEO, every woman is fighting against human sexuality, gender discrimination, and the constantly changing values of American society. All women, like Wonder Woman, work

<https://assignbuster.com/wonder-woman-a-symbol-of-sexism-and-the-modern-woman/>

tirelessly to overcome these obstacles, making her not only a relevant character in popular culture, but also a highly relatable character in modern society.