

Wonder woman comics: history and development wonder woman costume



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Wonder Woman Costume

For over 60 years, Wonder Woman has filled the pages of her magazine with adventures ranging from battling Nazis, to declawing human-like Cheetahs. Her exploits thrilled and inspired many young girls, including Gloria Steinem. Through all of this, she has had to pilot her invisible jet through territories that her male counterparts have never had to. She is constantly pulled in two directions; her stories must be entertaining and none threatening to the male status quo, while simultaneously furthering her as the original symbol of 'Girl Power.' She is praised for being an icon of strength to women everywhere, but chastised for wearing a skimpy costume and tying men up, as if she were no more than a male fantasy. No comic book character has had to endure as much scrutiny as Wonder Woman. That's because Wonder Woman represents an entire gender, at a time of important social flux. Although she was created by a man to influence a male audience, Wonder Woman has evolved into an important symbol of the feminist movement.

An Amazon is born

Shortly after Superman made his appearance in 1939, a noted psychologist by the name of William Moulton Marston wrote an article in Family Circle magazine, praising comic books. According to Les Daniels in Wonder Woman: The Complete History (Chronicle Books, 2000, pp. 22-24), his article caught the eye of M. C. Gains of DC Comics. Gains was so impressed by the article, he hired Marston into a new position at DC Comics. Within a year, at the urging of his wife, Marston set out to create a female superhero. By February 1941, Marston handed in his first script for 'Suprema: The Wonder
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Woman.’(We owe a debt of thanks to whoever dropped the Suprema.)

Marston created a unique heroine, based loosely on Greek Mythology. Diana was the Princess of Paradise Island, a mystical place inhabited by Amazons. Her mother, Hippolyte (sometimes referred to as Hippolyta), Queen of the Amazons, wanted a child and petitioned the Goddesses of Olympus to give her one. She was instructed to sculpt a child from clay. When she was done, the goddesses imbued the statue with life. Diana was raised as the princess of her nation, until one day, an aircraft carrying one Steve Trevor crashed off the shores of the island. Diana rescued him and nursed him back to health. The Goddesses decreed a contest should be held to find an Amazon champion to return Trevor to the United States and also help with the war effort. As the princess, Diana was forbidden to enter the contest by her mother, the Queen. Diana disguised herself and won. Reluctantly, Hippolyte awarded Diana the costume of the champion and sent her on her way, and a legend was born.

Marston had said his aim with Wonder Woman was to influence a male audience with the notion that females could be just as powerful as men, through the use of their own gifts. A reoccurring theme is the dominance of women over men, by teaching them ‘loving submission.’ The reality is that the early issues of Wonder Woman almost always contained scenes of bondage. Wonder Woman’s one weakness was to have her bracelets chained together by a man. Many, many men took advantage of that. Because he was on the team that developed the first polygraph, Marston gave Wonder Woman a magic lasso that would enable her to extract the truth from its victim or make them susceptible to her suggestions. Of course, they had to

be tied up. If Wonder Woman wasn't chained up, she was busy tying someone else up to do her bidding. When you combine that with a seductive costume, (The costume created such a ruckus, DC Comics editor, Dorothy Roubicek wrote a memo to Gains suggesting the costume be given a more Greek tunic look. (Daniels, pp. 62-63)) the early Wonder Woman comes off as a fetishistic fantasy. That may be one of the biggest reasons it was such a huge success with a male audience.

Artist H. G. Peter illustrated Wonder Woman for Marston's entire tenure on the book. Although he was required to delineate Wonder Woman in bondage motifs and other sundry escapades, his art was not overly sexual. This was one of the factors which helped establish Wonder Woman among female fans. She was strong and athletic, but without an unreal body image.

Many of her adventures pitted her against a real life enemy, the Nazis. This was World War II, after all, and women were doing their part to help the war effort. Wonder Woman was a symbol of the emergence of women in active roles. But, even before the war was over, Marston began introducing costumed villains. Interestingly enough most were female. Dr. Poison, the very first costumed villain, was actually a Japanese princess, disguised as a man. As her Rogues Gallery grew, it became more populated with women, than men; The Cheetah, Queen Clea, and Giganta, just to name a few. It seemed that Wonder Woman would be relegated to fighting her own gender. It was another way that she could be interpreted as powerful, without upsetting the status quo. She was rarely seen as someone who could overpower a strong male villain.

Wonder Woman did continue to be an important symbol in those early days. She was the only female superhero in the Justice Society of America (A forerunner of the Justice League of America), although she was relegated to the office of secretary. Again, it was a large stride while being subservient to the male heroes in the book. You can almost see her serving coffee at JSA meetings. Her magazine debuted a backup feature called 'Wonder Women of History' in which an important female historical figure was profiled. It seemed that the intention of her being a symbol of feminism were there, while the actions of the stories painted a different, more sexual picture. This is a contradiction that survives even into today.

The Silver Age

After Marston's death, Robert Kanigher took over the duties on Wonder Woman. In a rare occurrence, Kanigher served as both writer and editor for over 20 years. Gone were the Nazis, and many of Wonder Woman's original foes. In their place, Kanigher began writing stories centered on Wonder Woman's romantic life. In Sensation Comics #97 (May-June 1950), Wonder Woman becomes the romance editor of a women's magazine. Instead of battling evil villains, Wonder Woman herself became the center of conflict, as characters like Bird-Man and Mer-Man vied for the affections of the Amazon Princess. Other times, she would have a whole story dedicated to explaining to poor Steve Trevor that they could not marry until her services as a hero were no longer required. It seemed that Wonder Woman had been relegated to the role of the maiden fending off numerous suitors, as if she were a southern belle. It is interesting to note that during this time, 'Wonder Women of History' was replaced with a feature called 'Marriage a la Mode,' <https://assignbuster.com/wonder-woman-comics-history-and-developmentnWonder-woman-costume/>

celebrating the marriage customs of different cultures. Wonder Woman of the 1950's was in a flux, just like American women. They had been asked to do their part during the war, but when the men came home, it was time to go back into the kitchen. The problem was most women realized an untapped potential to be more than a wife and mother. This would show up in the form of modern feminism in the next decade. It must be pointed out that most of the supporting cast was made up of other women; (Hippolyte, other Amazons, and even a younger version of Wonder Woman, Wonder Girl) but the stories were still centered on marriage and boyfriends.

The artistic team of Ross Andru and Mike Esposito hiked Wonder Woman's star-spangled shorts a bit, but still the art was very respectful to the female body. No larger than life breasts or pencil thin waists. Wonder Woman had an athletic build and was considered statuesque.

A Change Will Do You Good'

1968 was an interesting year for our Amazing Amazon. After Kanigher's departure, Editorial Director Carmine Infantino assigned writer Dennis O'Neil and penciller Mike Sekowsky to the title. When a new writer is assigned to a title, the direction of the character usually shifts, but no one could predict the direction O'Neil and team were about to take.

" What they were doing in Wonder Woman, I didn't see how a kid, male or female, could relate to it. It was so far removed from their world,' recalled O'Neil.' (Daniels p. 125) His solution was to remove Wonder Woman's powers, effectively putting a normal female out into the world to fend for her self. Gone were the magic lasso, bulletproof bracelets, and invisible jet.
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Wonder Woman was now outfitted in mod 60's clothes and partnered with an Asian mentor, I Ching. She relied on martial arts instead of Amazon strength. O'Neil believed that by making her a normal person struggling in an extraordinary world, she would be a more viable feminist symbol. Many people agreed and sales skyrocketed. Wonder Woman was kept in this direction for almost two years before a very prominent feminist took a very anti-de-powered Wonder Woman stance: Gloria Steinem.

In July of 1972, Steinem's new magazine, Ms. hit the newsstands with a familiar face on the cover. Beneath a banner that read ' Wonder Woman for President' was a rendering of Wonder Woman, in her traditional costume. Essayist Joanne Edgar took up two pages of the premier issue to denounce the changes made to Wonder Woman, and to assure readers that Wonder Woman would return to her roots in 1973. Steinem also wrote the forward to a hardcover collection of Marston-era Wonder Woman stories, and took the opportunity to denounce the changes herself. Steinem and others felt that by robbing Wonder Woman of her powers and tools, they had weakened an important symbol. She was no longer a unique person. It could also be suggested that because the idea came from a man, that it was an attempt by males to negate a woman as a powerful force. It seemed that Wonder Woman had been adopted by the feminist movement as a powerful symbol of what a woman could aspire to. It is probable that most women who invoked Wonder Woman in their feminist rhetoric had not read some of the more outrageous of Marston's stories.

Wonder Woman finally got her tiara back in Wonder Woman #204 (January-February 1973). Robert Kanigher was again the editor, if only for a few
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issues. The adoption of Wonder Woman by Steinem and company appeared to have an immediate influence, as Wonder Woman became a very active superhero, with all manner of villains. For the most part, stories did not center on romance or bondage, but rather on costumed villains and other action oriented heroics. Wonder Woman was finally getting the recognition of being a top notch Super Hero.

It was at this time, Wonder Woman finally appeared on network TV. In the fall of 1975, *The New, Original Wonder Woman* aired on ABC. Starring Lynda Carter, the first episode dealt with Wonder Woman's origin, sticking very closely to the comic book version. The ABC show was very tongue in cheek, but was a hit and aired on ABC and CBS, until 1977. Lynda Carter became the first woman to star in an action/adventure TV series, giving more credence to the ties between Wonder Woman and feminists.

The comic book version continued in the same vein through the late 70's and early 80's. The only notable event was the change in her costume in 1982. In *Wonder Woman #288* (February 1982), the eagle emblazoned on her bustier was traded in for a stylized double w. The change was to herald the creation of the Wonder Woman Foundation, created by DC Comics president Jenette Kahn. The purpose of the foundation was to honor (financially) women over 40 who have made a contribution to society. It was launched to coincide with Wonder Woman's 40th anniversary.

Rebirth

In 1986, the entire DC Comics universe was given a makeover. Many

characters, including Wonder Woman, had amassed a large and convoluted
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history, thanks to the ever revolving door of writers and editors. The solution was a 12 issue series entitled Crisis on Infinite Earths. Every character in the DC Universe (DCU) was rebooted, but none was as drastic as Wonder Woman. In Crisis #12, she was attacked and devolved into the clay from which she was formed. The clay then spread itself over the shores of Paradise Island. The stage was set for a comeback.

George Perez took on the daunting task of breathing new life into the Amazon Princess. He was well aware of the fact that he was tinkering with an icon. Perez spent copious amounts of time researching Greek Mythology, and also feminism, discussing the project with his wife, editor Karen Berger, DC President Jennette Kahn, and of course, Gloria Steinem. Wonder Woman and feminism were about to become one and the same.

Perez did not tinker with Wonder Woman's origin too much. He did move her to present day, instead of World War II. She was still a princess, and was raised on an island of amazons. He did, however, give a very feminist slant to the creation of those amazons. In Wonder Woman #1, (February 1987), it was shown that the amazons were the re-incarnated souls of women ' whose lives had been cut short by the ignorance of man.' As they migrated to Themyscira (Paradise Island) they became enlightened women, who spent their days learning and constructing. They were no longer the warrior race of mythology. As the champion of the contest that sent her to the Patriarch's World, Wonder Woman was an ambassador of her nation, charged with espousing the ideals of her Olympian Gods. This Wonder Woman needed no day job; she had an ambassadorial post at the United Nations. She was first a teacher, second, a hero. It is amazing that Perez was able to use Greek

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Mythology and give it a feminist slant. In the hands of a lesser writer, the task would have failed. Greek Myth is rife with the subjugation and humiliation of women. Perez was able to center on the female contingent of Olympus, and keep the males as chauvinistic as before.

Perez also handled the art chores, and made Wonder Woman look very real and very feminine, without resorting to objectifying art. Her physique was that of an athlete. She was tall, not too slender, and very muscular. In action sequences, you could see the muscles on her body strain as she attempted feats such as tossing tanks around.

During Perez's run, Wonder Woman spent as much time on the lecture circuit as she did fighting off bad guys. The sales of the comic were strong, but DC was anxious to use their revamped character in more action oriented stories. William Messner-Loebs, took over as writer, but the major change was in the artist, Mike Deodato, Jr. To many people, all the work that was done to portray Wonder Woman as a strong, intelligent female hero flew out the door as Deodato brought his brand of art to the title. Wonder Woman now had very large breasts, a teeny tiny waist, and legs that went on for miles. Sales of the book were incredibly strong, but much of the attention was on the stylized, sexual appearance of the Amazon. Wonder Woman had never looked quite so slutty. Many claimed that Wonder Woman had become cheesecake, never the less, Deodato stayed on until issue #100.

A Look To The Future

Phil Jimenez took over the book and attempted to reconcile some of the continuity problems that had already surfaced on the series. Another <https://assignbuster.com/wonder-woman-comics-history-and-developmentnwonder-woman-costume/>

talented writer/artist, Jimenez nurtured Wonder Woman through some very tough times. Like a mirror to actual world events, 2001 was a very difficult year for Wonder Woman. Themyscira was embroiled in a heated civil war, which resulted in the abolishment of the matriarchy and the loss of the title of princess for her. In a staggering galactic war, Hippolyta her mother and supporting character since the beginning of the book, was killed. Wonder Woman was shown as a woman who had very human problems to cope with. Her battles were not always with super villains or natural disasters. Jimenez showed a hero who had to deal with mother/daughter issues in a way that had rarely been shown in the series. Wonder Woman and her mother did not always get along! In one of his best issues (Wonder Woman #172) Jimenez weaved a tale of jealousy and forgiveness, as a protective mother (Hippolyta) gave her life to protect her seemingly ungrateful daughter. Jimenez was not afraid to show Wonder Woman in an unflattering light. She was jealous of her mother donning similar armor and leaving the shores of Themyscira to become a hero in her own right. Stories such as these brought some very female oriented issues to the forefront. Wonder Woman had never had to deal with issues of her royal status, her relationship with her mother, and the grief of losing a parent. Of course, she came through all of this on top, and ready to fight the good fight, but it was a difficult and interesting journey.

As 2003 begins, writer Walter Simonson has revisited the non-powered concept of the 60's. With only 2 issues out, only time will tell if it will be as radical a change as it was before.

In the new millennium of Xena, Lara Croft and other female action heroes, is Wonder Woman still relevant to the feminist movement? Without her example, many of these franchises would not have had the inspiration to become a reality. Those choppy territories Wonder Woman covered have paved the way. Many writers and artists can use Wonder Woman's history as a blueprint for what works, and also what doesn't. Wonder Woman continues to mirror the complexities of feminism; strong and assertive, yet caring and nurturing. All the while balancing family issues and fighting against stereotypes. As her comic book moves ahead, Wonder Woman will continue to tackle issues relating to every woman, and even, every human.

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