

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### A.1. Background of the Research

Gender stereotypes are preconceived notions about typical behaviors and roles of men and women, shaping societal expectations (Koenig, 2018). These stereotypes, embedded in institutions like media, often portray men as dominant and rational and women as nurturing and submissive, reinforcing restrictive gender norms (Gayathri & Bhuyan, 2024). Such portrayals can foster sexism and body dissatisfaction, particularly among women, by idealizing narrow feminine traits (Santoniccolo et al., 2023). *Wonder Woman* (2017), directed by Patty Jenkins, challenges these stereotypes by presenting Diana, an Amazon warrior, as a powerful, independent heroine, offering a critique of patriarchal norms through her actions and visual representation.

Feminism seeks social, economic, and political equality by dismantling patriarchal systems that marginalize women (Guy & MSc, 2024). Judith Butler's Gender Performativity Theory provides a critical lens, positing that gender is not a fixed identity but a social construct enacted through repeated performative acts, such as behaviors and gestures (Butler, 1990). In *Wonder Woman* (2017), Diana's actions—such as leading the No Man's Land battle or defying male authority—constitute performative acts that subvert stereotypes of female passivity, redefining femininity as powerful and agentic. These acts reflect gender potential (capacity for leadership), gender freedom (autonomy from norms), and gender equality

(challenging patriarchy), contributing to feminist goals of equitable gender narratives.

Cinematography Theory complements Butler's framework by analyzing how visual elements construct gender narratives. Laura Mulvey's concept of the "male gaze" critiques cinema's tendency to objectify women for male viewers (Mulvey, 1975). In contrast, *Wonder Woman* (2017) uses cinematographic techniques—such as wide shots and dynamic angles—to emphasize Diana's agency, subverting the male gaze (Bordwell & Thompson, 2019). For instance, the No Man's Land scene frames Diana as a commanding figure, highlighting her leadership through visual storytelling. This study employs both Butler's Gender Performativity Theory and Cinematography Theory to examine how *Wonder Woman* (2017) portrays gender equality, explores its various forms, and assesses whether Diana consciously performs these acts.

The global fight for gender equality, spanning education, employment, and governance, underscores the urgency of challenging discriminatory norms (World Bank Group, 2024). *Wonder Woman* (2017), set during World War I, portrays Diana as a compassionate yet authoritative heroine who challenges Hollywood's male-dominated superhero genre. Created by William Moulton Marston in 1941, Diana's character defies stereotypes through performative acts, such as rejecting military orders, offering a narrative of female agency (Garner, 2014). Previous studies, like Curtis and Cardo (2018), highlight Diana's agency but note that idealized femininity may limit feminist impact, while Cocca (2016) identifies feminist

themes without exploring performative or cinematic aspects. This study fills these gaps by analyzing how Diana's actions and their visual portrayal challenge gender norms, contributing to feminist scholarship.

Feminism is a movement dedicated to ending the oppression of women by pushing for their full equality in social, economic, and political spheres. It takes aim at patriarchal systems—those deeply rooted structures that have long sidelined women—and works to break down discriminatory practices, from unfair policies to restrictive cultural norms. At its heart, feminism is about empowering women, ensuring they have control over their bodies, equal access to opportunities, and freedom from violence or inequality (Guy & MSc, 2024). It's a broad movement with many voices, but all share the goal of building a fairer, more just society for everyone, regardless of gender (Guy & MSc, 2024).

Feminist scholars dive deep into the issues that hold women back, like discrimination, objectification, unequal pay, and rigid gender expectations—many of which are amplified by media portrayals. For example, the way media often reduces women to objects of beauty or submissive roles can erode their autonomy and self-worth, causing real psychological and social harm. Economic gaps and power imbalances also keep women from resources and leadership roles, while stereotypes, as seen in media, trap them in outdated roles. These interconnected issues fuel the feminist fight to challenge and change the systems that sustain gender inequality (Guy & MSc, 2024). The term "feminism" itself comes from the Latin word *femina*, meaning "woman," or "female" (Finlayson, 2016). Moreover, Lisa

Tuttle describes in *Encyclopedia of Feminism*, the term Feminism and began replacing “womanism” in the 1980s to describe the push for women’s rights and equality (Tuttle, 1986).

Building on the critique of media-driven stereotypes and systemic oppression discussed earlier, this theory highlights how women’s lived realities can reshape our understanding of power and inequality, providing a powerful tool to confront patriarchal norms (Wood, 2012). *Wonder Woman* (2017), directed by Patty Jenkins, is a landmark superhero film featuring Diana, an Amazon warrior created by William Moulton Marston in 1941 (Garner, 2014). Set during World War I, the film portrays Diana as a strong, compassionate heroine who challenges Hollywood’s male-dominated superhero genre. Her performative acts, such as defying military orders in the No Man’s Land scene, subvert stereotypes of women as weak, presenting a narrative of female agency and moral courage (Butler, 1990; Garner, 2014).

This study analyses how *Wonder Woman* (2017) portrays gender equality through Diana’s performative acts and cinematic framing, using Butler’s Gender Performativity Theory and Cinematography Theory. Previous studies, such as Curtis and Cardo (2018), highlight Diana’s agency but note limitations due to idealized femininity, while Cocca (2016) identifies feminist themes without exploring performative or cinematic aspects. This study fills these gaps by examining how Diana’s actions and their visual portrayal challenge gender norms, contributing to feminist scholarship.

## **A.2. Problem of the Research**

Based on the above background, the formulation of the problem in this study focuses on what kinds of gender equality represented in the movie *Wonder Woman* (2017) ?

## **A.3. Objective of the Research**

This study aims to promote gender equality through the portrayal of a female hero who leads, speaks, and acts with authority equal to her male counterparts, challenging traditional gender roles and emphasizing that women are equally capable of strength, leadership, and moral judgment.

## **A.4. Significance of the Research**

**Theoretical Significance:** This study enriches media studies by applying Judith Butler's Gender Performativity Theory and Cinematography Theory to *Wonder Woman* (2017), offering a novel framework for analyzing how female characters challenge gender norms through actions and visual representation. It advances feminist scholarship by exploring cinema's role in promoting equitable gender narratives and provides an academic reference for future research in the fields of gender studies, film analysis, and feminist criticism.

**Practical Significance:** The findings of this study provide practical insights for encouraging audiences—particularly students, educators, and media practitioners—to critically examine cinematic portrayals of gender, thereby fostering informed discussions on gender equality in academic forums, public discourse, and advocacy initiatives. It inspires filmmakers to create diverse and

empowering female characters that challenge stereotypes, promotes inclusive storytelling in the entertainment industry, and supports advocacy for equitable gender narratives in media. Ultimately, this research contributes to broader societal shifts toward inclusive perceptions of gender roles and empowers communities to challenge discriminatory norms through creative and educational means.

#### **A.5. Limitations of the Research**

This study is limited to analyzing gender equality in *Wonder Woman* (2017), focusing on Diana's performative acts and cinematic portrayal through Judith Butler's Gender Performativity Theory and Cinematography Theory. It does not examine audience reception or the broader societal impact of the film. The analysis is confined to a single film, potentially limiting generalizability to other superhero films. The qualitative approach may introduce interpretive subjectivity.

#### **A.6 Definition of Key Terms**

**Gender Equality:** The state in which individuals of all genders have equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities, as reflected in Diana's performative acts in *Wonder Woman* (2017).

**Movie:** A cinematic narrative, such as *Wonder Woman* (2017), that conveys cultural and social themes through visual storytelling.

***Wonder Woman*:** An American action-adventure-fantasy film released in 2017, directed by Patty Jenkins.

**Diana:** The protagonist of *Wonder Woman* (2017), portrayed by Gal Gadot, an Amazon warrior challenging patriarchal norms.

**Gender Performativity:** The concept that gender is constructed through repeated performative acts, central to Judith Butler's Gender Performativity Theory (Butler, 1990).

### **A.7 Thesis Structure**

This thesis is structured into five chapters. Chapter I: Introduction presents the background, research questions, purpose, significance, limitations, and key terms. Chapter II: Literature Review builds the theoretical framework, exploring Gender Performativity Theory, Cinematography Theory, and prior studies to identify research gaps. Chapter III: Research Methodology details the qualitative approach, data collection through narrative textual analysis, and data analysis using Butler's and Cinematography theories. Chapter IV: Findings and Discussion analyzes how *Wonder Woman* (2017) represents gender equality, focusing on six key aspects of representation. The chapter explores how the film challenges traditional gender roles, highlights women's leadership and decision-making, and critiques patriarchal norms through cinematic and performative elements. Chapter V: Conclusion and Suggestions summarizes findings, reflects on implications, and offers recommendations for the future research.