

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter outlines the theoretical foundation for analyzing gender equality in *Wonder Woman* (2017) through Judith Butler's Gender Performativity Theory and Cinematography Theory. It examines how the film represents equality, the forms it reveals, and whether Diana's acts are consciously performed, highlighting how narrative and visuals challenge patriarchal norms and promote equitable gender narratives.

B.1 Theoretical Framework

Judith Butler's Gender Performativity Theory posits that gender is not a fixed or inherent identity but a social construct enacted through repeated performative acts, such as behaviors, gestures, and representations (Butler, 1990). Unlike essentialist views that tie gender to biology, Butler argues that gender is produced through actions that conform to or challenge societal norms. In *Wonder Woman* (2017), Diana's actions—such as leading the No Man's Land battle or defying male authority in the Military Meeting—function as performative acts that subvert stereotypes of women as passive, redefining femininity as powerful and agentic. For example, Diana's decision to cross No Man's Land despite male objections enacts gender freedom (autonomy) and gender potential (leadership), challenging patriarchal structures to promote gender equality (Butler, 1990). This

study examines whether Diana consciously performs these acts, shaped by her Amazonian upbringing, or if they are intuitive responses to patriarchal constraints.

Cinematography Theory complements Butler's framework by analyzing how visual elements construct gender narratives. Laura Mulvey's concept of the "male gaze" critiques how cinema often frames women as passive objects for male viewers (Mulvey, 1975). In contrast, *Wonder Woman* (2017) uses cinematographic techniques—such as wide shots, dynamic angles, and mise-en-scène—to highlight Diana's agency. For instance, in the No Man's Land scene, wide shots capture Diana's commanding presence, subverting the male gaze, while close-ups emphasize her determination, framing her as an active subject (Bordwell & Thompson, 2019). Cinematography Theory examines elements like camera movement and lighting to understand how films create meaning. This study uses it to analyze how visual techniques reinforce Diana's performative acts, portraying and strengthening the film's representation of gender equality

Supporting concepts include gender stereotypes, which prescribe communal traits (nurturing, submissive) to women and agentic traits (assertive, dominant) to men (Koenig, 2018), and the male gaze, which objectifies women in media (Mulvey, 1975). Butler's theory also emphasizes the potential for performative acts to disrupt normative gender roles. Diana's consistent portrayal as a compassionate yet authoritative warrior—seen in her interactions with Steve Trevor or her combat training on Themyscira—reflects gender potential (the capacity for women to embody leadership and strength) and gender freedom (autonomy to

act outside restrictive norms). These acts contribute to gender equality by challenging patriarchal structures that privilege male authority (Butler, 1990). By applying this theory, the study examines whether Diana consciously performs these acts that promote gender equality, shaped by her Amazonian upbringing, or if they are intuitive responses to patriarchal constraints.

B.2 Review of Related Studies

This section reviews studies on gender equality in superhero films, particularly *Wonder Woman* (2017), to identify gaps in applying Judith Butler's Gender Performativity Theory and Cinematography Theory.

Curtis and Cardo (2018) analyze *Wonder Woman* and *Captain Marvel* through third-wave feminism, highlighting Diana's agency in scenes like the No Man's Land battle as a form of gender equality. However, they note that idealized femininity, such as Diana's portrayal as both strong and aesthetically pleasing, may limit the film's contribution to gender equality (Feminist Media Studies, 18(3)). Their textual analysis lacks a sociological lens to explore the film's broader cultural impact. Curtis and Cardo (2018) analyze *Wonder Woman* (2017) and *Captain Marvel* through a third-wave feminist lens, using textual analysis to explore Diana's agency in scenes like the No Man's Land battle, where she defies male authority (Feminist Media Studies, 18(3), 926–932). They argue that Diana's strength represents gender equality but note that her idealized femininity may reinforce aesthetic expectations, limiting feminist impact. Their study does not use Gender Per-

formativity Theory to examine performative acts or Cinematography Theory to analyze visual framing, nor does it address Diana's consciousness of promoting gender equality.

Cocca (2016) examines feminist themes in *Wonder Woman* (2017) across comics and film, using qualitative content analysis to highlight Diana's defiance of stereotypes, such as her leadership and strength. As Cocca notes, "*Wonder Woman* has consistently challenged stereotypical depictions of women in comics and film through her physical prowess, leadership, and moral agency" (Cocca, 2016, p. xx). The analysis is presented in her book *Superwomen: Gender, Power, and Representation*. While identifying gender equality, the study does not apply Butler's or Cinematography theories to analyze performative acts or visual techniques, nor does it explore Diana's consciousness.

Brown (2018) studies audience responses to *Wonder Woman* (2017) via social media analysis, finding that Diana's portrayal as a strong, compassionate heroine fosters gender equality and sparks discussions on equality (*Journal of Popular Culture*, 51(4), 873–892). The study identifies empowerment but focuses on reception, omitting Butler's or Cinematography frameworks and Diana's consciousness.

Setyanto et al. (2019) use semiotic analysis to identify feminist symbols in *Wonder Woman* (2017), such as Diana's sword and shield, which signify agency and challenge gender norms (EAI Proceedings, doi:10.4108/eai.27-4-

2019.2286824). Their focus on visual signs reveals gender equality but does not address performative acts or cinematographic techniques.

Weiß (2024) employs critical discourse analysis to explore Diana's challenge to male authority in *Wonder Woman* (2017), identifying gender equality in her active role as a "shero" (Portrayals of the Shero). The study highlights how the film represents gender equality but does not use Gender Performativity Theory to examine performative acts or assess cultural impact.

Killian (2018) conducts a qualitative analysis of *Wonder Woman* (2017), noting Diana's strength as a marker of gender equality but arguing that sexualized depictions, such as form-fitting costumes, may undermine feminist goals (*Journal of Feminist Family Therapy*, 31(1), 59–61). The study highlights gender equality but does not use Butler's or Cinematography theories to examine performative acts or visual construction.

Helford (2020) analyzes *Wonder Woman* (2017) as a feminist icon, using textual analysis to highlight Diana's resistance to patriarchal norms through her physical and moral strength (*Wonder Woman: The Female Body and Popular Culture*). While identifying gender equality, the study does not apply Butler's or Cinematography theories or address consciousness.

Brown (2021) explores how gender is portrayed in superhero films, including *Wonder Woman* (2017), using a cultural studies approach. He argues that Diana's character challenges male-dominated superhero narratives (*Superhero Comics and Gender: The Cultural Politics of Representation*). The study shows

some forms of gender equality, such as female empowerment, but it does not apply Judith Butler's theory or focus on performative aspects or cinematic representation.

Gilpatric (2020) traces the evolution of female action heroes in films like *Wonder Woman* (2017), using content analysis to highlight Diana's shift from passive to active roles (*Journal of Popular Film and Television*, 48(2), 76–85). The study recognizes gender equality in her leadership but does not use a performative approach to explain how her actions shape the idea of gender. It recognizes gender equality but lacks a performative or cinematographic approach.

Stabile (2019) examines *Wonder Woman* (2017) as a feminist fantasy, using discourse analysis to show how Diana challenges patriarchal norms through strength and compassion (*Cultural Studies*, 33(6), 921–943). While the study highlights gender equality, it does not use Gender Performativity Theory to analyze Diana's performative acts. This study applies Butler's theory to fill that gap by focusing on how repeated actions in the film construct and challenge gender norms. These studies collectively highlight *Wonder Woman* (2017) portrays gender equality through Diana's leadership and resistance to stereotypes.

Most previous studies focus on general feminist themes or audience responses without using Judith Butler's Gender Performativity Theory to examine how Diana's repeated actions challenge gender norms. This study fills that gap by applying Butler's theory to analyze performative acts, cinematic techniques, and Diana's consciousness in the film.