

## CINEMATOGRAPHIC APPARATUS AND OBJECTIFICATION OF WOMEN IN *WONDER WOMAN 1984* THROUGH THE PRISM OF LAURA MULVEY

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### Abstract

*This article aims to delve light on male gaze theory postulated by Laura Mulvey (1975) in her famous essay Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema. It is a perspective of only the male audience in which all women are depicted as sexual objects for the pleasure of male viewers only. It has three tools such as man behind the camera, man in the audience and man in the work field. This theory has been applied on Wonder Woman 1984 directed by Patty Jenkins, the researcher has identified each and every scene of the movie through the lens of male gaze. Two major female characters named Diana Prince and Major Barbara are the center of attraction of this male gaze. The representation of women plus being objectified according to the desires and criteria of men in movies as well as their roles have been highlighted in this article. This is a qualitative study and all the three tools have clearly been explained in terms of their purposes and comprehension.*

**Key words:** Desires, male audience, male gaze, Mulvey, objectification, visual pleasure.

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1 Background of the Study

In this world, women consist half of the total world population. Their contribution, importance and existence cannot be ignored and neglected. In order to proceed further both in educational as well as economic corridor of any country, the participation of both genders (male and female) is mandatory. But unfortunately, in the patriarchal society, few roles of a woman have been shown. Besides giving birth to children and managing house chores, her identity and role is controlled by a man. In one way or another, a woman has been shown as a passive and subservient creature in front of a man. Her body structure and appearance have always been judged, noticed and enjoyed by men.

A journalist as well as critic Schmiedeler (2017) critically holds this view that in the world of film making, all women have been positioned as passive and show piece just for the desires of men. In this case, a man takes the role of an observer whereas a woman takes the role of being observed. She has critically been examined and noticed by men. Wherever she goes or whatever she does, she has always been objectified and looked at for the sensual pleasure of a man.

In regard to this, Laura Mulvey in her famous essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975) talks about male gaze at women. Male Gaze theory is basically a perspective and viewpoint of male audience in which all the female characters are depicted and portrayed as sexual objects for the pleasure of male viewers only. In the world of films, this theory has been dominant in cinematographic apparatus.

Juliana Star (1993) in her essay *Men looking at Women Through Art* depicts the central character looking at a painting that describes different men looking at a nude or seminude woman in contrast to the fully dressed man. In this painting a woman becomes the source of visual pleasure both for the spectators within the painting and a man (spectator) who is looking at the painting.

This article throws light on male gaze theory by Laura Mulvey and its practice on the female characters in the movie *Wonder Woman 1984* Directed by Patty Jenkins. The main character Diana prince of Themyscira is the embodiment of male gaze. Throughout the movie, she has been shown in revealing clothes, although she was an immortal warrior but instead of being focused on her intellectual talent, empathetic nature and a passion to save the world, her features and appearance have been focused. How women are controlled by men in film making is the main focus of attraction in this article. There are three tools of this theory:

- Man behind the camera
- Man in the audience
- Man in a work field

Two major female characters, Diana Prince and Barbara Minerva have been analyzed through the lens of these three tools. The camera has focused their bodies, hair styling, choice of clothes, facial features, way of communication and beauty standard that men have set for women in a film world.

Tores et al. (2024) presents the “Oby Gaze 12” data that comprises of thousands of clips showing the objectification of women in films. Female characters have been objectified by using AI and other technical computational methods. It can be said that with the advancement in the field of technology, females have been more focused on due to the eager demands and interest of men for such kind of portrayal of women in films.

### **1.2 Significance of the study**

The main significance of this study is that readers will analyze this fact that how women are represented and portrayed in the world of films. The concept of objectification and fragmentation will be highlighted in this study. Whenever any film will be directed, all these points such as heterosexual perspective of the male audience, interests and criteria of men regarding film making and moreover the readers will realize as it is expected that this male gaze is partially responsible for all the illegal acts, mis happenings, rape, harassment and insecurity of women among men. Apart from their body structure, appearance, features and a source of pleasure, their contribution in this world is much more as compared to men. Diana is the paragon of all those women who are resilient, strong, powerful and passionate. But still in the arena of male dominating society, she completely resides under their sway.

### **1.3 Rationale of the study**

The researcher chose this topic because this thing is common in the society where a woman always feels insecure about being looked at by others. This thing needs to be highlighted because a woman is the part of the world. In fact, the whole cosmos hinger upon her existence. This study aims to determine whether this male gaze is highly responsible for all the misconduct and wrong doings with women or it is the desire or standard set by the male audience to depict and show women in the film world in such a way that should arouse the expectations, temptation and sensual pleasure of men. Men are shown as fully covered while women are supposed to look beautiful only in revealing clothes and having a nice attractive body features. It will further carry out in research.

#### 1.4 Statement of the Problem

The main statement of the problem is that whether this male gaze is behind this objectification of women not only in film making but everywhere a woman is found or it is the criteria and stereotypical standards set by men in society.

#### 1.5 Research Questions

1. What is male gaze?
2. How a woman is represented as an object for the visual pleasure of males only?
3. What is the role of gaze in *Wonder Woman*?

#### 1.6 Research Objectives

1. to identify the main motive behind the male gaze.
2. to identify women as representation of erotic pleasure for men in *Wonder Woman 1984*.
3. to identify the role of gaze in *Wonder Woman 1984*.

#### 1.7 Organization of the study

The entire study has been carried out in five chapters. Chapter one is the Introduction, it further contains the background, significance, research questions, research objectives, rationale of the study and statement of the problem. Chapter two is the Literature Review, it carries the opinions and reviews of scholars, critics, researchers and different authors on the relevant literature. Chapter three is the research methodology. It carries the method of data collection, limitations of the study and the framework. Chapter four is the analysis. This chapter analyzes the topic in a detailed manner. Chapter five is the conclusion. It concludes the entire study and further gives recommendations ahead.

### 2. Literature Review

This chapter carries the reviews of relevant literature regarding male gaze theory and its dominance in different Hollywood movies. It covers the standpoints and opinions of different scholars, critics and researchers.

A distinguished writer Tannen (1990) has rightly differentiated the concept of “look” and “gaze”. He said that look holds the view when a person looks generally at something without having any motives in his mind but gaze refers to the specific type of looking at things with an accentuated aim and concept. Men and women have been designed differently but it does not indicate an unequal treatment with both these genders.

An American author and feminist Bell Hooks (1992) challenged the concept of male gaze postulated by Laura Mulvey. She says that black women are different as compared to white women because they question their identity and representation in films. They don't adopt such role that might harm their identity. White women are known for their beauty but black women are known for their power.

A researcher Jacobson (1999) says that in the world of films, male gaze actively controls the women's behavior. They are totally dependent on men in film making. The women who are catchy and attractive gain more attention and they are the cynosure of men while those women who are talented, genius, caring and above all those who work hard, they hardly catch any attention of men. This is the reality in the circle of film making.

A scholar Gibson & Rosemary (2000) are of the opinion that this male gaze is obvious in magazines and print advertisement. Women are not only depicted as objects but this idea is strongly and deeply rooted in patriarchal society. It should be challenged by the culture. Again, there are men behind these advertisement agencies who control the movements, angle and clicks of women taken by them.

In the movie *Transformer* (2007), the character of Mikaela Banes was again the paragon of male gaze. As she fixes the car's engine, despite her talent and work should have been shown,

the camera focuses on her physical appearance. The way men want to see women have realistically and ideally been portrayed in movies.

In the movie "X-Men: First Class" (2011), there is a character named Emma Frost. Her power was to freeze things. Throughout the movie, she has been shown in her revealing clothes. Her appearance was the limelight in this movie. Her traits and qualities were neglected and her attractive body was focused. It depicts the idea that the male audience as well as the one who is behind the camera when recording this scene want to derive pleasure for their own visual satisfaction.

A critic as well as researcher Cieślak & Rasmus (2012) uses the term "subversion" as a main thing in a film. As this is a patriarchal society, subversion of male gaze solely on women is necessary for the production and creation of blockbuster movie. It operates on a cultural level. Although in a film, a woman plays her role actively but still she remains passive because she operates on the commands of her film director who is again a man. Again, she is submissive and passive, while her male counterpart is energetic, dominant and active.

A director and film maker, Garcia (2021) says that this male gaze affects women according to their race, gender and sexuality. In movies such as *The Harder They Pass* (2021) and *Passing* (2021), all the women have been designed and shown according to the aesthetics of men. They were black women and their skin was the center of attraction for men.

A critic such as Martinez (2021) postulates his opinion that male gaze theory has challenged different stereotypical roles of women. In movies such as *Power of The Dog* (2021) and *Pieces of a Woman* (2020), women have been objectified and the director has solely focused on the fragmented bodies of women. Rather than focusing on the scene and spectacle, curves of women have been focused.

A critic as well as a film maker Nina Menkes's (2022) presented a documentary named *Brainwash: Sex-Camera-power*. She explains that in this documentary, the angles, lightening and position of a camera were focused on a woman. It reinforces the idea of dynamic culture made by men. They were just represented as a fragmented body for the pleasure of male viewers. Women's identity was completely neglected and diminished.

Sarah, Hussain, & Shehzin (2023) opine that this male gaze is predominant in a movie *Fifty Shades of Grey* (2023). The main protagonist Anastasia Steele was an embodiment of this gaze. A young student of literature contrast with Christine Grey, a dominant and billionaire have been represented in a film differently. She has been depicted as a sexual object for the pleasure of male viewers only. Her role was passive and entertaining for men and Christine's role was ideal, groomed and active.

### **3. Research Methodology**

#### **3.1 Qualitative and Descriptive Research**

Qualitative research for this study has been carried out because it cannot be analyzed under the quantitative lens. The theory that has been used in this study in male gaze theory by Laura Mulvey. The movie upon which the research is going to be conducted is *Wonder Woman* directed by Patty Jenkins. There are three basic tools of this theory:

#### **3.2 Man Behind the Camera**

A person who controls the angles of the camera is a man. It means that he deliberately focuses on the details of the body just to arouse the sensual pleasure of men. The camera man has focused on the attractive physical features of Diana Prince. In this way a man entertains himself by showing and recording such scenes of a woman.

#### **3.3 Man in the Audience**

The role of men in the audience is the same as a man behind the camera. If there is any female sitting in the audience then her viewpoint and way of gazing will be just like a man. All the viewers and audience are men who for the sake of their own sexual pleasure automatically imagine Diana as her female counterpart. They begin to idolize her and expect the same competency like Diana in every woman.

### 3.3.1 Scopophilia and Voyeurism

The terms scopophilia and voyeurism are the elements of male gaze theory. Both indicates the meaning of deriving sexual pleasure by watching women when they are naked or engaged in sexual activity. It also implies the fact that not only men in the audience will experience the same feelings but also women who will identify their gaze as men. In accordance with such standards and interests of men, women consider to imagine themselves as objects whose purpose is to make their counter parts happy both physically and sensuously.

Megan M. Mobley's (2020) dissertation on the topic *Voyeurism: Being Experienced and Seen in the Modern Age* depicts the idea that this thing excels beyond the world of film making. The difference between spectators and performers, the way of looking and looked at creates disruption among the characters as well as the audience in the film. It badly affects the psychological, emotional and physical nature of both genders. All women are put on exhibition according to the desires and expectations of the male audience because they witness the live performance.

### 3.4 Man in a work field

As it is obvious that only men are there in these three tools, a man in a work field performs the same role as men in the audience. They experience and see everything in person, they begin to idealize everything according to their own fantasy. Objectification is the effect of self-objectification of women.

These three tools have been used in order to further carry out this research. Moreover, all the dialogues, scenes and the main theme regarding this theory have further been elaborated in this study. The main characters Diana Prince and Dr Barbara Minerva have been analyzed through this theory. In accordance with this, stereotypical roles associated with a woman have been challenged and interpreted as a result of female objectification in films.

### 3.5 Method of Data Collection

By watching the movie *Wonder Woman* Directed by Patty Jenkins three times in order to have the background knowledge, associate all the dialogues and scenes in accordance with male gaze theory by Laura Mulvey. The duration of this movie is one hour and twenty minutes. The researcher has watched the movie for two times in order to have a strong concept of the Male Gaze that has been dominant in it.

### 3.6 Limitations of the study

The whole study revolves around this *Male Gaze Theory* by Laura Mulvey on *Wonder Woman 1984* by Patty Jenkins. No irrelevant material has been used in this research. It has further been analyzed only through the lens of cinematographic apparatus.

## 4. Analysis

The researcher has chosen the movie *Wonder Women 1984* directed by Patty Jenkins as a study for male gaze theory. As it is explained earlier, the heterosexual perspective of the male

audience is dominant and shown throughout the movie. By watching the entire movie, the researcher has captured some scenes of the movie for the better understanding of both the theory and its use in the film.



#### 4.1 Scopophilia and Voyeurism

At first, Diana Prince, the immortal warrior, princess of Themyscira and a daughter of Queen Hippolyta where only women are present as well as only, they rule the place has been depicted as the superhero and the one who is the saviour of the people. She has been described as well as shown as powerful, compassionate, kind and resilient. Despite of all these qualities in a woman, her beauty and grace has been accentuated and is given prime importance over the qualities. In this scene, Diana comes to the shopping mall in order to save people from the thieves who try to steal something valuable. Her costume has been designed to attract the attention of the viewers as well as the spectators. Her thin arms, legs, waist and chest are clearly shown in order to show piece her desired and ideal body. She could have been shown wearing a dress that is supposed to cover her entire body but the costume maker and the director chose to show her in revealing clothes. It automatically diverts the attention of the male audience who starts to admire the women by watching them through such angle. Throughout the film, Diana Prince has been shown in such costume that automatically starts to become her identity.

There are three important tools of Male Gaze Theory:

- Man behind the camera
- Man in a work field
- Man In the audience

#### 4.2 Man Behind the Camera



Man Behind the camera means, the person who controls the angles of a camera during film making is definitely a male. He has focused some sexually stimulated details of the female protagonist. Despite of having a strong character and a woman whose strength, confidence and perseverance were the plus points, the camera has specifically focused on her legs. All the spectators start watching her at that time due to her eximious beauty and a catchy body She was wearing a white dress, clearly naked from the bottom. According to the instructions and demands of the male characters as well as the audience (men), a woman's sole purpose is just to entertain her male counterparts, to make them happy, to satisfy their lust both emotionally and physically.

Mulvey (1975) opines that in a world of films specifically if one talks about visual pleasure, then it has been divided and reversed between a man and a woman. A man will stay active in visual pleasure whereas a woman will stay passive. Her job is to fulfill her role of making the male audience satisfied.



This is the scene of the movie where Queen Hippolyta, the mother of Diana Prince was noticing and observing the challenges in the form of games where her daughter and other Amazonian women participate. Here if it is observed from the tool "man behind the camera"

then the camera man has surely focused the woman from the bottom. All the other women standing behind are shown in such a way to arouse the eagerness and visual interest of the audience. Apart from their other qualities, women are wholly and solely presented to entertain the male audience as well as to catch their attention too.

#### 4.3 Man in the Work field



Here is another scene from the movie where Diana Prince was fighting with her opponent named Barbara Minerva, she was losing her battle with her. Well, man in work field has the same purpose and aim as the man in the audience. They are literally the spectators. When different scenes are recorded on the set, then obviously there are some men who are there. They satisfy their eager desires of having an ideal woman, an ideal body and the one who can easily subdue to their demands and desires.

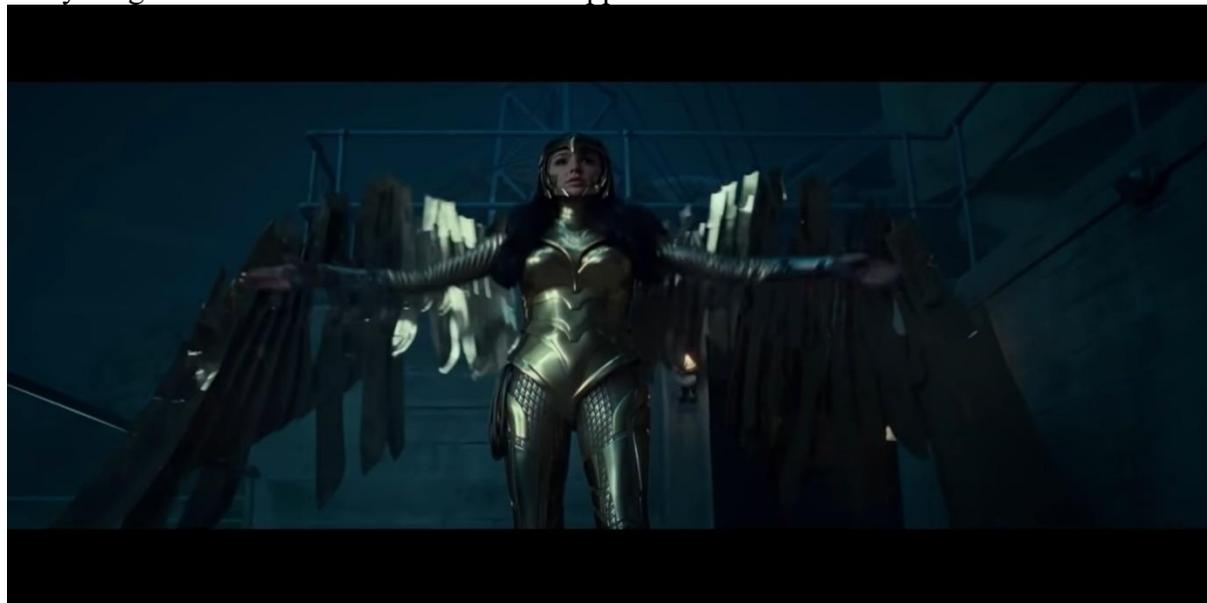


This scene is clearly an example of spectators who suddenly divert their attention to Barbara Minerva. She comes to the party where all men start looking at her as a center of attraction. Her black revealing clothes, high heels, open hair and wearing makeup adds charm to her beauty. Such things have been decided by the director, what to wear and how to wear.

Again, men are dominant and ruling over such things too. Same is the case with men in a work field. They perform the same role as spectators in the audience do.

#### 4.4 Man in the Audience

This is a common phenomenon that all men who watch the movie, they are audience and perform the role of spectators. They stimulate their sexual interest and begin to imagine everything in their real life. Here is another appearance of Diana Prince from the movie:



This is the scene when Diana was is about to fight with Barbara Minerva. She is shown by wearing a golden leather Chiffon costume that includes the gold headband, wings, wrist cuffs and a gold belt. It clearly accentuates this idea of showing the body parts, featuring her legs, chest and waist. Apart from her strength, power, compassion and other traits, the audience also entertain themselves by watching her in in this appearance. This is also called fragmentation. Fragmentation means to strip women away from their qualities only to show their erotic body



parts. This scene is obviously the result of fragmentation. Although here in this movie, she has been depicted as a super hero, but still, she is not wearing full clothes. Her chest is quite visible,

her arms and arm pits are openly shown as well as her collar bone too. Men in the audience enjoy such kind of scenes that clearly neglect woman's reputation, her status in a society and imagine her only for entertainment and satisfaction.

### 5. Conclusion

To sum up all this, male gaze theory is particularly a gaze from the side of men who depict women a heterosexual phenomenon for the pleasures of male viewers only. They depict women and show them in a film world in such a way just to stimulate the sexual feelings of men. Two women (Diana Prince and Barbara Minerva) are the center of attraction in this movie. There are three tools of this theory:

Man behind the camera has focused on particular body parts of the main character, Diana Prince along with Barbara Minerva. The camera has specifically focused on revealing clothes, body and attractive features of these two women.

Man in the work field has performed the same role as spectators usually do. They literally enjoy the recorded scenes realistically in person. They were eye witnessed of each and every scene.

Man in the audience were the spectators as well as the viewers too. It is said that this concept (male gaze theory) has pejorative effects on the minds of people (both men and women). Women convert their gaze as men. They begin to imagine and idealize their bodies. In terms of all these aspects, physical features and attractiveness should be given secondary importance in the society. Beauty is hard to ignore but in case of women, only their bodies and appealing features should not be highlighted in the movies. *Wonder Women 1984* has been directed by a woman named Patty Jenkins who has understood this inevitable phenomenon about women being the center of attraction not only in movies but everywhere has been designed and shown both these female characters (Diana and Barbara Minerva) in such a way to attract the attention of the spectators, viewers and the audience. This thing should be given prime importance about the representation of women in movies. Everything matters a lot, beauty, traits, other attributes. Only one feature should not be enough to surmount everything else. Male gaze theory is the result of body shaming in the society too. Women begin to idolize their bodies and they don't feel confident if they put on some weight.

Fredrickson and Roberts' (1997) opine that objectification of women results in women taking the perspective of 3<sup>rd</sup> person of their bodies. This thing leads to many problems such as nervousness, body shaming, increased anxiety and depression. Such are the major issues that women in society usually suffer from. If these things are not given due consideration, then it aggravates the situation.

The researcher further gives recommendation about studying this theory and its otherwise results in the world of films. Moreover, it should further be given a sound study in order to deduce its implications both in society and upon the minds of people.

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