

## **THE REPRESENTATION OF WOMAN IN SUPERHERO MOVIE ENTITLED “*BIRDS OF PREY*” BY CATHY YAN**

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### **Abstract**

This study aims to analyze the representation of woman in "Birds of Prey" movie. The problem in this study is how is woman represented in the superhero movie entitled “Birds of Prey”. The research method is the qualitative method. Power Feminism Theory from Naomi Wolf’s is used to analyze the data. This research analyzed therepresentation of woman in Birds of Prey movie by Cathy Yan. The data was collected through watching the movie, screenshotting, classifying, and previewing. This study found that women named Harley Quinn as the main character in the Birds of Prey movie is represented as a superpower Women. The characterization of a superpower can be denoted through; (1) emancipating herself from the domination of man, (2) enhancing her femininity as outstanding, (3) women as super heroin, (4) being free from Joker’s shadow. It is suggested that Birds of Prey tried to replace the man role as the dominant figure in the superhero genre films.

**Keywords:** Power Feminism, Representation, Superhero, Woman

## **INTRODUCTION**

The term woman refers to girl who has reached a certain age in their development, i.e., the age at which they enter the stage of adult development, i.e., 20-40 years. During this time, a girl under the age of 20 cannot be considered a woman (adult), but the girl does not qualify as a teenager until she reaches adulthood or attains 1 age 21 (Harlock, 1990). According to Backer (1993), the term woman describes a girl who has matured emotionally and can freely determine her goals and objectives in life. In this discussion, the woman in question is a woman who has determined her purpose in life and shows her ability to do something.

Women are essentially the same as men in many aspects, in health, work, justice, and others. Women also have abilities and degrees that are equal to men in the eyes of humanity

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so that women have an equal position with men. One of them is also in the aspect of roles in movies. The movie delivers messages through audiovisual and storytelling. In movies, women are often depicted as female, while men are depicted as male. Without realizing it, gender prejudice grows in patriarchal society and culture. In the media, especially movies, women are often described as weak, dependent on men, and needing protection. Men will be responsible for being strong and being the courageous protectors of women. Male actors are often described as preferring sexy women. They show masculinity ranging from protecting women from crime or violence.

Several movies portray women as weak figures and become a bone of contention for men, for instance, the character of Mikaela in the *Transformers 1* and *2* movies, and the character of Mary Jane in the movie *Spiderman*. They represent the role of women is mainly described only as of the sex sector that has a beautiful face and highlights the parts of her body. Another example of a character that portrayed women as weak individuals is Mary Jane. She is described as weak, needs protection, emotional and passive and also relies on male actors. Her role has never been higher than that of men. A woman is constructed to have a feminine side, while men have a masculine side, as common sense or social convention. This kind of convention is also supported by mass media for a long time. However, not every movie represents women as weak and dependent on men. *Wonder Woman* movie is an example of the different discourse about women. Themyscira, the place setting of the movie, is led by a woman. All the women who were there were able to fight. Diana's character is also described as a woman who can fight, be tough, and make her own decisions to solve problems. She is also cooperating with others, is strong-willed, and has a high desire to achieve a definite goal to achieve her identity. Diana would be in the front row with the men who helped her behind during the war. Men usually perform Diana's war like role; this is in contrast to the image of women in a patriarchal society where men are usually the leader in society. In this movie, the female lead and save many people.

This article is going to discuss *Birds of Prey* movie (2020) produced by Warner Bros. *Birds of Prey* and the Fantabulous Emancipation of One Harley Quinn, abbreviated *Birds of Prey*, is a 2020 American superhero movie based on the DC Comics team *Birds of Prey*. *Birds of Prey* is the 8<sup>th</sup> DC Extended Universe (DCEU) movie. The movie is directed by Cathy Yan, written by Christina Hodson, and starred by Margot Robbie as Harley Quinn, Mary Elizabeth Winstead as Helena Bertinelli, Jurnee Smollett-Bell as Black Canary, Rosie

Perez as Reene Montoya, Chris Messina as Victor Zsasz, Ella Jay Basco as Casandra, Cain and Ewan McGregor as Roman Sionis or Black Mask.

*Birds of Prey* tell the story of Harley Quinn (Margot Robbie), who recently broke up with the Joker. She wants to move on and end all her dependence on the Joker. It is triggered by the people around her who underestimated her that she could not live without the Joker. Harley also tries to continue living and maintains a hyena named Bruce. In this movie, Harley wants to show that she can escape from the Joker's shadow by changing her appearance to be funkier by cutting her hair short. This short hair becomes the symbol of a new identity as an independent person who can escape the Joker's shadow. In this movie, Harley Quinn wants to show the power of women as an independent. In addition, the strength of women shown by Harley Quinn is how women can get out of a problem and solve the problem by themselves. Then, how can women fight the enemies that come without men's help. Harley Quinn, in this movie, is no longer a woman as a dependent person in general but independent. This movie emphasizes how the woman is free from toxic male influences and transforms into a strong, challenging, and independent woman. Moreover, able to fight everything that exists in front of her by herself without any help from men. Even though Harley's appearance in this movie looks funky, it can show her as an independent, intense, and demanding person who can live without even a man.

Form the short summary of the story above, this article highlights the issue feminism that is the power of feminism. Naomi Wolf conceptualized power feminism as an approach emphasizes that women have a right to appearance and power. She believes that women must experience two traditions: victim feminism and power feminism to gain power. According to Wolf, victim feminism can slow down women's progress and become victims because women's psychology and living conditions have undergone such extraordinary changes. It is no longer possible to pretend that the urge to dominate, attack, oppress, or exploit others is a "characteristic" of people, especially men, so that feminism is considered to be out of date (Wolf, 1993). At the same time, the tenets of power feminism are that men and women play an important role in life; women have the right to determine their fate; women's experiences are meaningful, not just unnecessary bullshit; Women have the right to speak the truth about their own experiences. Women must be respected by others, respect themselves, education, safety, health, representation, and financial status (Wolf, 1993: 204).

This study is applied qualitative descriptive analysis and approaching the data through power feminism concept from Naomy wolf. It is dealing with the explication of women' ways in emancipating themselves, how to deal with their feminine traits and power.

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**POWER FEMINISM IN *BIRDS OF PREY* MOVIE**

**Emancipation of Woman from Male domination**

In the movie *Birds of Prey*, the character of woman as the main character reverses the situation about the nature and character of weak women to be strong and stand firm in the movie. Harley Quinn's character in the movie shows the opposite trait that is more masculine than feminism. Every woman must possess this solid and opinionated character; the strength referred to here is not giving up easily under any circumstances and solving all problems on her own. Every woman has the right to what is on her. For example, the scene shown in the movie is Harley's appearance, which was previously more feminine when she was with the joker. She completely changed her appearance to be more accessible and funkier. A scene that shows the independence of Harley Quinn in the movie can be seen in the following scene at the duration of 00:06:20-00:07:43

Picture 1. Harley Blows up a Chemical Factory in a Truck



- Harley : “Some people have the Eiffel Tower, or Olive Garden. The Joker and I? Our love bloomed in a highly toxic industrial processing plant. And luckily for me, I have all my best drunk.”
- Harley : “I have the best idea!”
- Truck Driver : “The fuck? Hey! Hey! Come back here!”
- Harley : “This is where it all began, Puddin’. You motherfucker! It was the closure I needed. A fresh start. A chance to be my own woman.”

In this scene, Harley has the idea to blow up a chemical factory by using a truck parked on the street. The chemical factory that she blew up was where they first started their love story and became a monument symbol of their love story. However, Harley decided to blow up their monument of love as a sign that Harley and Joker were no longer in a relationship. Harley Quinn's stance here is

powerful to escape from the Joker's shadow and her desire to live her life as a free and unfettered woman she can finally achieve. This shows that Harley Quinn represents the concept of the power of feminism from Naomi Wolf that women have rights and decisions about themselves. So Harley has accomplished that on its own merits for being independent. The scene that shows Harley to be independent and free from other people's bonds is shown in the scene at 01:35:39-01:36:06

Picture 2. Harley Surrounds Roman Sionis



Harley : “Here’s the thing, Roman baby.”  
Harley : “You’re protection is based on the fact that people are scared of you.  
Just like they’re scared to Mr. J.”  
Harley : “But I’m the one they should be scared of.”  
Harley : “Not you, and not Mr. J.”  
Harley : “Cause, I’m Harley fucking Quinn.”

In that scene, when Harley points her gun at Roman, she tells Roman that she does not need protection from him, and so far, people have been asking him for protection because people are afraid of Roman. Harley wants to emphasize that she can also stand alone without any protection from Roman or the Joker because Harley wants to show that women can live without protection from men. In this context, Harley has shown what has been explained by Naomi Wolf about power feminism that women deserve respect from others, respect themselves, and women also have a place in society to be seen as equal to men.

### Harley Quinn’s Femininity

Femininity is a form of female traits such as gentleness, patience, usefulness, and others. Femininity positions women as objects of patriarchal power, meaning that all the characteristics and roles inherent in women benefit men. However, Harley Quinn shows

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herself as an independent person, and she can release herself from the Joker's shadow. Harley has shown her femininity as Harley is more open to people around her. She has returned to her nature as a woman. As Naomi Wolf (1993: 202) stated that women know that the choices made by women can affect the lives of those around them and can change the world.

Picture 3. Harley Brings Cassandra Cain to her House



Harley: “Milk.”

Harley: “I’m not going soft or nothing, but I gotta admit, it was kinda nice having the kid around.”

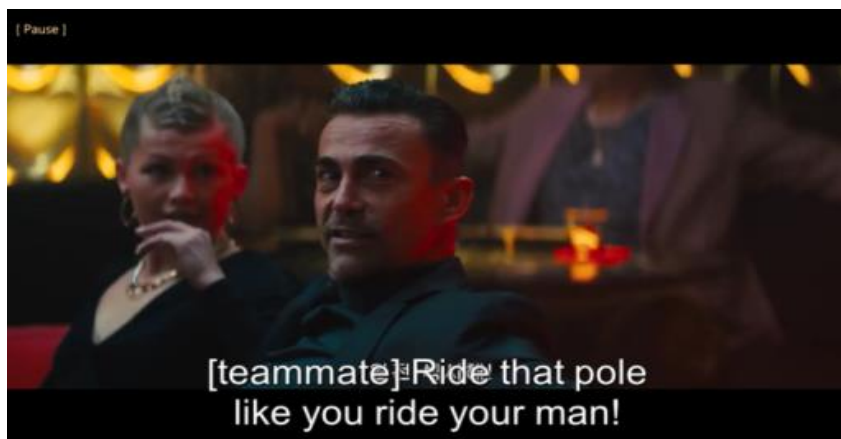
In the display scene, Harley Quinn pictured has succeeded in rescuing Cassandra from prison and bringing Cassandra to her residence. Harley previously only lived with Hyena, and she felt happy to be near Cassandra. Harley's purpose in bringing Cassandra to her home is to help remove the diamond that Cassandra has swallowed. Harley has promised to help Cassandra in getting the diamond out, and she has promised that she will always protect Cassandra.

From the explanation above, Harley has shown her femininity as a woman; namely, she feels happy towards small children and has a kind and gentle nature in treating small children. It can also be seen that Harley did not have the heart to force the diamond to come out as soon as possible, but she waited until the child could take out the berry. From there, Harley showed her femininity by having a gentle and loving nature towards children, and Harley did not have the heart to commit acts of violence against this child because Harley did not want to hurt this child. Knowing that the choices made by women can affect the lives of those around them and can change the world. Harley has also shown her feminist strength; namely, Harley can make the right choices to protect the people around her.

## The Super Power of the Super Heroin

In the feminism concept, Gender equality refers to the full equality of men and women to enjoy a full range of political, economic, civil, social, and cultural rights. This concept also refers to a situation where no individual is denied access to these rights, or those rights are deprived of them because of their gender. However, as in the movie *Birds of Prey*, the gender equality that Harley Quinn should obtain is arguably still not sufficient and fair. Hence, Harley, which also represents woman, must uphold the principle of feminist power to equalize the position of every gender that exists. In the movie. The concept explained by Naomi Wolf is that men and women have the same position and are entitled to respect for themselves and others in any field. (Wolf, 1997: 204). Power feminist here is a principle that women must hold and use to achieve equality with men. Power feminist here is also used as a shield by women to ward off disturbances from other parties who want to demean women; for example, in this movie where Harley Quinn, throughout the storyline, gets unfair treatment from most men in the movie. So, Harley must equalize herself with men by acting like them by also committing violence, with the aim of Harley here being able to get respect and an equal position and even more in the surrounding environment. The scene that shows Harley is showing the power of feminists to get gender equality are in the scene at 00:03:40-00:04:07 duration.

Picture 4. Harley Breaks Driver Roman Sionis' Leg”



Ladies: “Ride that pole like you ride your man!”  
Roman’s Driver: “God damn it! Sit the fuck down!”  
Harley: “What?”  
Roman’s Driver: “I said... sit your skinny ass down, you dumb slut.”  
Harley: “Okay.”  
Roman’s Driver: “You broke my fucking legs!”  
Harley: “Oh, boo-hoo.”

In the scene, Harley Quinn is dancing on a pole and spills her drink on Roman's

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driver, sitting on the sofa. Not accepting this, the driver Roman Sionis reprimanded Harley to get down from the pole and sit on her lap, using harsh words that insulted Harley. She heard the driver's words with a cheerful face, complied with the Roman driver's request. However, when Harley came down from her dancing pole, she immediately jumped at the driver's leg, placed it on the table, and broke it. The driver felt pain because Harley had broken his leg, but Harley's response was to mock the driver because his leg had been broken.

As seen above, Harley shows the concept of power feminism from herself by breaking the leg of the Roman driver as revenge for degrading Harley with her insults. In this case, Naomi has also mentioned in her book that women must be free to give or receive; build or even destroy what women receive, both praise and insults. So this gives birth to what is called equality between men and women and shows that women also have the power and right to retaliate like men, also do not act weak and passive when they feel disturbed. In addition, Harley also shows a strong and courageous attitude in defending and gaining respect for himself, emphasizing mutual respect between one gender and another.

Women have always been hit by excessive social pressure and expectations in the past. They are starting from how to dress, talk, age of marriage, and others. Women have to struggle to get through all the disturbances and injustices they receive for their independence. They have been suppressed for an extended time in history. Even today, women are still looked down upon simply because of their gender. However, women also have the same abilities as men, so they are entitled to opportunities and treatment in an equal life like men. These opportunities are opportunities to access education, health, justice, employment, and others. Women also have the right to respect and place in society as equals to men, and it is a big mistake when one party demeans women just because of their gender. In general, this wrong stereotype that spread in society explains that women are weak and cannot solve all their problems on their own and must rely on other parties, namely men, to solve their problems, is a response and statement that is wrong to corners women. However, by adhering to the principle of feminist power as explained by Naomi Wolf in her concept, that is ready or not, "society" no longer has the power to replace them with women. Women who are now influential in elections have created conditions for equality (Wolf, 1997: 40).

Based on this concept, women are aware and have adhered to the principle of the power of feminism so that they can overcome all obstacles in their lives as strong as men. In the movie *Birds of Prey*, Harley Quinn's character here gets many problems and disturbances in fighting for her ideology to be free and detached from the Joker's shadow. For example, in

one scene in the movie, Harley must survive the pursuit of her enemies and must struggle to solve her problems to live in peace and safety. However, as seen in the movie, all the problems she faces can be overcome by her. Because Harley here holds fast to her stance in fighting amid an unsafe surrounding environment. Harley is also here to show the representation of women who have a strong feminist ideology in fighting for themselves as women. The scene that represents women with strong characters in the power of feminism shown by Harley is in the duration of 00:14:09-00:15:40

Picture 5. Harley is Being Chased by Reene Montoya



- Harley : “It had been six short hours since my little stunt at Ace Chemicals announced to the world that Mr. J and I were dunzo. The immunity I’d enjoyed for so long was gone.”
- Harley : “Cops who never would’ve dared come after me before were suddenly doing this.”
- Harley : “Ooh!”
- Reene : “Freeze!”
- Harley : “And what’s worse? Every person I ever wronged now felt free to come and take their pound of flesh. Turns out I wronged a lot of people.”
- Harley : “Come on, boy. Get him!”
- Harley : “Oh...”
- Harley : “Finally.”
- Harley : “And then..”
- Harley : “We’re gonna get through this, okay?”
- Harley : “tragedy struck.”

The scene above shows Harley chased by Reene Montoya, a policewoman in Gotham City. Just six hours after Harley blows up a chemical factory and announces she has broken up with the Joker, she suddenly ambushed by Reene. When Reene wanted to catch Harley, she ran away, and suddenly Reene chased after her. Harley gets many tackles from the people she has ever hurt in the pursuit. However, from the many obstacles that Harley found, Harley

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could finally get through it all. However, when Harley thought she was safe from Reene's pursuit, Reene suddenly ambushed her from the side without Harley realizing it.

From the scene shows, it can be seen how big problems are experienced by Harley when she has announced her breakup with the Joker. This resulted in all the criminals and the people who had hurt Harley when she was with the Joker instead of taking revenge on Harley. As long as Harley is dating the Joker, she gets protection and immunity to do anything to anyone because she is under the auspices of the Joker. This is also a problem when Harley no longer has that immunity, and as a result, she becomes hunted by criminals or people who have hurt Harley. The power feminist shown by Harley here is that she can solve her problems without any help from anyone. In this scene, Harley also shows that women with feminist strengths have intelligent attitudes and thoughts to deal with their problems and quickly solve them. Not following women who do not have the power feminism in themselves will be more likely to surrender to the situation because they do not have the strength to rise and solve problems with their abilities. Harley here represents a woman with solid and rigid feminist power and can get through all the problems in front of her.

## CONCLUSION

From the analysis, it can be concluded that Harley shows the power of feminism since the women have equalized with men through education, income, and even women can work harder and do what they want without depending on men. The analysis above insisted that Harley has shown that she can escape the Joker's shadow. Women can get out of toxic men by starting a new life on their own and doing whatever they want without the help of men, to have a place to live and solve all the problems they need to face on their experience and knowledge. Based on what Harley describes, showing women's ability to determine their destiny through the courage to make decisions may indicate that women can make their own decisions based on their experiences. The movie displays women can determine their path through the courage in making decisions and their experiences. As already explained that the principle of power feminism, according to Naomi Wolf, is that men and women play an important role in life, women have the right to determine their destiny, meaningful experiences for women are not just nonsense, women have the right about their experiences, and women have the right to respect for others, their dignity, education, security, health,

representation, and financial situation. This is what women want; is equality between men and women.

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