



SEXISM IN MARVEL COMIC BOOKS

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ABSTRACT:

Comic Books have been one of the most successful forms of entertainment for more than a century. Apart from being a medium of expression comic books had also ceased to be just a book for comic relief and diverted to represent the society. The people, their culture and the manners they behave have been represented in Marvel Comic books since the World War days. However the sexuality which they present their characters has become questionable as the superheroes in Marvel Comic book have been over represented or sometimes under represented considering the societal standards. Women characters have been hyper sexualized in their drape. Stan Lee the mind behind Marvel chose to put his superheroes in the extremity of either masculine or feminine standing. Men were shown to be too manly and women too womanly. Even Aliens are reduced to follow some of the Earthly livelihood ways that included being muscular for menfolk or being curvy for women. Women were mostly depicted as an object of desire or some detachable side kick who had no mission of her own but followed from some higher male agency. Moreover the American way of life is represented in Marvel Comics in minute details many of which would have been better if these had been done away with.

KEYWORDS: Benevolence Sexism, Bisexuality, Censoring, Hyper-Sexualisation, American Culture.

INTRODUCTION

Comic books had been a popular genre of art which has been used as a gratification or comfort by many people who wishes the world to have been otherwise. Before the time when Cartoons or Animations became popular comic books had already gained the popularity of the vast majority of the people that varies from young kids to teenagers alike. Marvel Comic books was one of the premier American Comic book company that had only the DC comics to challenge its supremacy in the comic book market in America and beyond. Comic books have been often debated over its nature; on whether it could be considered a part of literature or not. But as comic books have spoken dialogues and long and short narrations apart from the pictorial art just as dramas have; it is worthy enough to be considered in the line of literature.

In the past years there have been many accusations that spoke of comic books to have the elements of sexism in it. Stan Lee himself spoke against sexism and racism of all kinds and he wanted his Marvel Comic Books to be free of such aspects. But in his Marvel Comic books we find many instances of sexism.

The hypothesis of this paper is: Women are overrepresented or underrepresented or hyper-sexualized in Marvel Comic Books. Women had always been an un-detachable character in any comic books and Marvel Comics has none the less in this matter. But often women are not represented as they actually are or as they actually want themselves to be represented. Women are taken up simply as

objects of desire or a side kick for her male counterpart. The physical artwork of women superheroes in Marvel does not carry any necessity to achieve what they can achieve.

X-Men is a group of Superheroes in Marvel Comics who are brought together by their mutant abilities in the Xavier School the Home for the Mutants. There are various type of Mutants in this superhero group; both males and females some are powerful and others not so much. Among the powerful mutant superhero is the telekinetic woman Jean Gray; who had her powerful gift of mutant power of telekinesis. She lived in the Xavier School as a teacher with her live in boyfriend Scott Summers. But despite having an always close and a gentleman mate she is shown to be drawing towards another mutant, Logan. Logan also known as Wolverine had a healing factor which heals any cuts in his body within seconds. Logan has a desire for Jean Gray and despite having a boyfriend Jean Gray is not repulsive towards him. In one of the X-Men issue, she is shown to be kissing Logan in the school park with her boyfriend Scott watching them from upstairs. This shows the benevolent sexism of women as a care giver of a devotee towards men. It was an absurd scene when Jean Gray kisses the Wolverine because she was a telekinetic and she knows who stood around her to quite a distance. So she practically knew her boyfriend standing there a little away from her upstairs but despite that Stan Lee saw her as an object of desire and a benevolent care giver and a sidekick to the desires of the men around her.

Female superheroes are described with a good emphasis on their physical appearance; it can be seen in the quoted text below as it describes the X-Men member Emma Frost:

A diamond-sculpted seductress with the brains to back up her body of work, Emma Frost amassed wealth and influence enough to attract the attention of the planet's social elite. As White-Queen of the exclusive Hell-Fire Club, Frost's power plays frequently put her at odds with the heroic X-Men. (www.marvel.com)

Women are positions at the central part of the story but not as the central agency themselves. Women characters in Marvel comics does not seem to have any mission of their own; they simply act as the sidekicks for their men. Women are often made into a powerful lever or a strong twine but not so much as a strong pillar.

In one of his interviews that he gave to the entertainment site Newsarama Stan Lee said,

"I think the world has a place for gay superheroes, certainly, But again, I don't see any reason to change the sexual proclivities of a character once they've already been established. I have no problem with creating new, homosexual superheroes."

Loki is the son of Odin the King of Asgard and the younger brother of Thor. Loki had been presented with a strange sexuality. Loki had the power of shape shifting. He could change his shape into anyone including animals. He would play various tricks being someone else. In X-Men there is a character called Mystique who is also a shape shifter. But there is a broad difference between Loki and Mystique; while Mystique could only be the other person she wanted to be, Loki could turn himself completely into the other person's sexuality. When Loki changed shapes he took the other person's character including the body language. But even when Mystique changed into a man her behaviour would still be like herself. For instance when she walked in the shape of a man her walk carried the female flaunt. Loki on the other hand changed shape in a flawless manner including his change into the other gender. Loki even had children with some of the beasts that he slept with. One of his children was a huge wolf and the other was a large serpent. It is not easy to assume which gender Loki changed into in order to bring out these children. He is in short bisexual.

In Marvel Comics there has always been the half-naked women, the seductive enchantresses of desire who are shown as the measures itself which often leads to the fall of gentlemen. Women are the ones whose body is uncensored. While male superheroes in Marvel had all the proper and rich coverings starting from crowns or helmets to the soles of their shoes; the female superheroes are very ill clad. These women superheroes are over emphasized on their lady parts. Of course these over representation of lady parts had nothing to do with their superpowers but yet they are shown with their feminine parts in the most developed form.

In matters of appearances the male superheroes carried muscular body figures while the women were shown with a feminine gaiety. These muscular superheroes and their damsel counterparts represented the American Society where the workforce was mainly the men and the housekeeping left to the women in the days of World War whence these comic books began their popularity. Their attire too was American as the superheroes are usually shown wearing the American costumes and not any other. For instance we do not see any Marvel Superhero wearing a Saree or a Kimono. And the women superheroes were mostly in high heels when everyone knows the discomfort of high heels during fighting.

To further the appearance of Marvel Comic Superheroes, the men wore hard muscles while the women were in the shape of wide hips with a narrow waistline. The men had broad shoulders and usually a narrow waistline. These were drawn to show their robustness and strength. Women in Marvel Comics come mostly in blonde and the men are shown in a little darker shade in order to show their manual hardworking life. Even the hair of those men was painted black while the hair of the women came mostly in blonde. This seems an over representation of both men and women in comic books even if they were to represent the American society as most of the American men might have been pot-bellied and the women too had some muscles somewhere as they too are the workforce of the country. But these over representations were accepted without any raise of questions by the people as an exemplary standard of physicality. Stan Lee said in a 2016 interview with *The Big Issue*,

“The world always needs heroes, whether they’re superheroes or not, since time immemorial there were stories and legends about evil people who had superpowers, and some human being had to find a way to conquer them. It seems to be part of the human condition.”

There were the Aliens of course in these comics but these aliens too are reduced to either male or female categorization irrespective of the number of genders or the kind of genders in their native planets. And often a male categorized alien superhero would be painted in deep colours like green or red and the female aliens would be painted in light colours like yellow or pink. This has been made probably to satisfy the American sexuality with regards to colours of manly or womanly nature. And aliens are mostly uncovered to a great extent so that their difference from the human beings could be identified in their odd body shapes. However they are maintained in the highest human sexual standards like having large breasts for females and well developed muscles for men.

Karl Larew wrote in her book *Planet Women: The Image of Women in Planet Comics, 1940 1953* published in 1997:

“The analysis of comic book cover art seems to be the only consistent factor that researchers have explored. These explorations include the number of women on the cover, the number of female superheroes in relation to the number of male characters, the size and proportion of the female characters, and their activity, passivity, or both (Larew, 1997, p. 596).

Often a Marvel reader might see the characters in tightly fitted swimsuits. This is done so that the inner curves of the muscles in these men could be clearly seen. In case of women too these swimsuits are drawn so that their feminine sexual features could be heightened. Often Men were decorated with heavy metal belts to emphasize their strength. And often a cape is attached to these superheroes. A cape does little for these superheroes except for Dr. Strange. The reason for making them wear a long cap behind them is to give the readers a distinct view of these superheroes against the one colour background to emphasize their sexuality.

CONCLUSION:

So these Marvel Comics book characters inspired the American men and women to be as the superheroes in these comic books. In the early Golden Age of comic books comic books tried to influence the American Women to take up various jobs while their men went to fight the Nazis. So women were sexualized as household gems and the men took the role of defence mechanisms. Women were sexualized as a class of people weaker to males; and who could not survive on their own and needed male support in all his robustness. And even though the values of men and women in American

had changed yet comic book characters continued to be represented in that manner for a long time after that.

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