

The Transformation of Black Widow and What It Means for American Cinema

Jillian Coleman

My proposal is centred on Whedon's most current incarnation of Black Widow in his movie *The Avengers*, and how his portrayal of her is a step forward for feminism in comic book culture and cinema. Typically women in cinema are portrayed in a degrading and/or sexist manner, leaving little to no room for individuality or personalities to be explored. This is extremely common in mainstream media and is just as bad, if not worse, in the representation of women in comic books and other media inspired by comic characters and storylines. Whedon took on a monumental task when he decided to write in a character like Black Widow, since many comic book fans know her to be a sex object to fulfil the desires of male viewers, and nothing more. Black Widow is not a new face being presented to the world, but a well-known trope that was directly maligned to the positive portrayal of women in as people in media. What makes Whedon's genius so apparent is the fact that he did not rewrite Black Widow's past or behaviour but altered the way her behaviour was perceived, creating an intelligent, strong, independent woman who uses other people's gender expectations against them. It is my hope that after the box office success of *The Avengers*, producers and writers of cinema and other forms of media will see that audiences are ready for strong female characters in their work, and learn that good writing sells better than sex and exploitation.