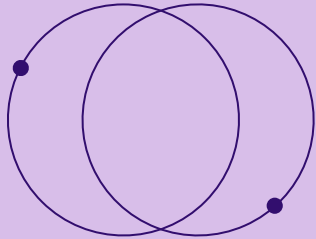




Feminism and Gender Performance in Charlie's Angels



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Current Issues | Aiko Yoshioka



Introduction

- American action movies overwhelmingly dominated by male heroes
 - Increase in female representation in recent years, but male characters still act as the leaders
 - Women often get to be feminine **or** strong and multi-dimensional, not both
 - *Charlie's Angels* has three strong female characters who do both -- relatively uncommon in the early 2000s
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Breaking Stereotypes



Multi-Talented

Multilingual, create disguises, can break into high-security areas, defuse bombs, fight with their hands tied

Physical Ability

Physically strong, have extensive martial arts training, very flexible, can use various weapons

Adaptability/Creativity

Quickly create elaborate plans, adapt when things go wrong, stay calm and work together easily

Relationship with Charlie

Charlie places full trust in their abilities, rarely appears in the film other than to explain their next assignment, supportive relationship



Individuality



- Female characters stereotypically portrayed as one-dimensional, only a love interest or supporting character to men
- Each of the Angels have their own personality, love lives, interests, etc. that the others do not
 - Natalie: Bubbly, socially awkward, falls in love with a bartender, has knowledge of bird calls
 - Alex: More serious, already in a relationship with an actor, struggles with revealing her identity, has an interest in cooking
 - Dylan: Sarcastic, a bit more boyish, likes words and playing Scrabble, doesn't end up in a relationship but sleeps with both Chad and Knox
- Each have individual importance to the team
- Differences and weaknesses humanize them, make them seem more real



Femininity as a Performance

- Use feminine stereotypes to trick men & get the information they need
- Dress up in revealing clothing, go undercover, flirt with men to distract them
 - Deliberately over-perform their femininity
- Displays the sexism women face, men only seeing women for their beauty
- Their performance of femininity changes based on the situation



Criticism & Support



- Argument that the film sexualizes women for men's enjoyment
 - Ex. conventionally attractive actors, revealing clothing, showcases their looks
- Some see it as anti-feminist and a waste of time
 - Possibly influenced by the campy, unserious tone, doesn't explicitly tackle the issue of feminism and occasionally falls into stereotypes
- Negative comments primarily come from men
 - Lack of experience feeling empowered from seeing a powerful female character on screen
 - cannot connect to the film in that way
- Women generally responded positively; enjoyed the upbeat tone and that the women were powerful and had a strong relationship

Influences from American Feminism



- **Second Wave Feminism:** 1960s-1980s, fighting social/legal discrimination, re-evaluating existing gender roles
- **Third Wave Feminism:** began in the 1990s, focus on intersectionality, sexual and individual expression, diversity, putting women in positions of power
- Feminism in films began increasing as well
- *Charlie's Angels:* shows women in powerful, traditionally masculine positions, resists gender roles about women being weak, express individuality and sexual desire
 - Lack of diversity/intersectionality, gives into cultural stereotypes
 - Still shows off their beauty, elements of the male gaze



Conclusion

- Sometimes stereotypical, but includes many elements of feminism and breaks tradition
- Female characters are talented, independent, unique individuals
- Inspired by second/third wave feminism
- Represents a step in the right direction in the early 2000s, but still had room to improve

