



Masculinity of the Woman in Character of Merida in Andrews and Chapman's Movie Brave

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Abstract. This research aims to investigate and analyze the masculine characteristics of the character Merida in *Brave*, produced in 2012 by Pixar and released by Disney. This research talks about Merida's character in the film, starting from how she responds to problems, how she behaves, how she solves problems, and what she says. The analysis uses content analysis, where each scene and dialogue will be observed more deeply, including facial expressions and the atmosphere in the film. In addition to analyzing Merida's character, this research also talks about what hidden messages Merida conveys in every dialogue and song she sings. These messages point to Merida's artistry and resilience in fighting the myths.

Keywords: Masculinity, Woman, Brave, Merida, Social

1. Introduction

Patriarchy is something that women today are afraid of. Patriarchy constitutes a prevailing social force within a distinct domain of social existence[1]. Patriarchy poses significant problems for women in various aspects of life. Economically, women often face wage gaps and discrimination in employment and promotion opportunities. Gender-based violence is a serious problem, with many women being victims of domestic violence and sexual harassment in the workplace and public spaces [2], [3], [4], [5] Women's health and reproductive rights are also restricted by patriarchal controls that hinder access to reproductive health services and freedom to make decisions about their bodies. Education is also not immune to the impact of patriarchy, where limited access and gender bias in teaching materials and methods reinforce stereotypes and limit women's aspirations[4], [6].

Gender stereotypes reproduced by media and social pressures narrow women's roles and choices, while their political participation is often hindered by structural and cultural barriers that reduce their representation in decision-making[7]. In addition, women who challenge patriarchal norms usually face social isolation and stigma and must bear the double burden of work and household responsibilities, leading to stress and burnout. The study about character has been explored to find the implication in education [7]-[10] These issues demonstrate how complex and pervasive patriarchal influences are in women's lives, necessitating sustained efforts to promote gender equality through policy, education, and cultural change.

The gap in researches in the current study is the limited exploration of the embodiment of masculinity and how it interacts with patriarchal structures and women's empowerment across many cultural narratives. Existing analysis effectively characterises Merida's traits, behaviour as well as problem-solving methods as traditionally masculine. It neglects to examine the portrayal of Merida's masculinity can serve as a vehicle for broader cultural critiques of patriarchy, nor does it address the fluidity of masculinity and how such representations might influence the audience's understanding of gender identity. This study explores the dimensions mentioned above to ultimately contributes to a wider understanding of women's agency in various sociocultural contexts

In his 2010 work *Masculinities in Theory*, Todd W. Reeser posits the argument that masculinity is not an identity that is essential or exclusive to men, but rather a social and cultural construction that can be performed by any individual, including women. Reeser emphasises that masculinity is characterised by fluidity and performativity, suggesting that it can be acquired, enacted, and reimagined within diverse sociocultural contexts. Within this theoretical framework, four fundamental elements have been identified as pivotal in shaping and perpetuating masculinity: image, myth, discourse, and practice [12].

The initial element, 'image', pertains to the visual depictions of masculinity across diverse cultural mediums, including cinema, advertising, and artistic creations. These representations have the capacity to influence people's perceptions of how masculinity should be presented, for example through a strong body, a cool expression, or certain clothing. The second element, myth, refers to recurring cultural narratives that shape common beliefs about masculinity. This myth can be defined as the view that men should be characterised by assertiveness, bravery and emotional restraint. The third element, discourse, refers to the construction of masculinity through language and narratives that govern how masculinity is talked about and understood in society. Finally, the concept of practice pertains to concrete actions or daily behaviours that are indicative of masculinity, including speech, gait, decision-making and other related aspects.

This phenomenon demonstrates that masculinity is not biological or confined to male identity, but can be a malleable form of performative identity. The performance of masculinity by women is characterised by the adoption of behaviours and appearance that align with conventional masculine stereotypes. These characteristics include dominance, rationality, aggression, and the wearing of masculine clothing. However, this performance is constrained by the prevailing social framework, which imposes specific expectations and constraints on the expression of masculinity by women. However, within patriarchal cultures that strictly delineate gender roles, expressions of masculinity by women are often perceived as ambiguous or even rejected.

The movie *Brave* is a strong example of animated cinema with gender equality as its main theme. *Brave* is an all-ages movie produced by Pixar for Walt Disney [13]. The story follows the journey of a *Brave* princess named Merida, who refuses to follow the traditions that bind her to marriage and instead chooses to determine her destiny. In the movie, Merida faces conflicts with her mother and a society that expects her to adhere to patriarchal norms.

Through this narrative, *Brave* presents themes relevant to modern life, such as the importance of women's right to make their own choices, pursue their dreams, and defy restrictive social expectations. The movie depicts Merida's struggle to find her personal freedom and highlights the dynamics of the household and the relationship between mothers and daughters. With stunning animated visuals and a powerful story, "*Brave*" not only entertains but also delivers a profound message about respecting and encouraging women's freedom and strength in a society often bound by patriarchal traditions. As such, the movie serves as an inspiring example in cinema to raise the issue of gender equality and individuals' right to determine their destiny [14].

The movie *Brave* not only raises the theme of gender equality through Merida's story of seeking her freedom but also illustrates how women should behave if they face injustice in terms of gender equality. Merida, as the main character in this movie, shows a strong, brave, and unyielding attitude in pursuing her desire to determine her destiny. Merida refuses to submit to the traditional expectations that bind her to marry and follow the rules. This reflects her attitude of not wanting to be limited by the patriarchal norms in her society. She takes great risks to choose a different path, inspiring and challenging traditional views of women's roles in society.

Merida also shows that injustices in gender equality can be overcome with a firm attitude and the courage to speak up. Throughout her story, she fights against the social expectations that bind her and faces the challenge of gaining recognition for her desire for self-determination. In this way, the movie gives a strong message about women's importance in defending their rights and fighting for equality in all aspects of life. Overall, "*Brave*" not only inspires with its narrative of Merida's courage and struggle to free herself from restrictive conventions but also conveys an important message of how women should behave in the face of injustice in gender equality: with courage, persistence, and determination to defy norms that limit their potential.

This research aims to prove how the character of Merida in the movie *Brave* represents the concept of masculinity in a feminist context. The analysis will reveal how Merida's body language, the atmosphere in the movie, and the narrative express courage, independence, and rejection of social expectations that limit women in a patriarchal society. Through observation of Merida's gestures, facial expressions, and body movements, this research will highlight how the character exhibits attitudes against existing gender norms. The movie's atmosphere and the story's setting will influence how the audience perceives Merida's actions and decisions in the context of conflict with family traditions and expectations. As such, this research is expected to provide a deeper understanding of how the representation of characters in media can stimulate discussions about masculinity and femininity and the construction of gender in popular culture.

The present article focuses on the use of expressions, vocabulary, and emotions together to emphasize masculinity. It differs from other studies, such as those by Tirta Agraprana Dharpa, Sugianto,

Yeni Prabowati, and Yulis Setynowati (2024), which have a special focus on the activities and habits of Merida. In a similar vein, Hega's research (2022) explores the presence of gender stereotypes in the film *Brave* through the lens of dialog. This research's added value lies in the integration of visual and textual data, which enhances the study's validity. Furthermore, the research is limited in scope, focusing exclusively on the depiction of masculinity in Merida's character. For an in-depth discussion, this research uses 2 research questions.

1. What are the indicators that depict the existence of female masculinity in female characters in the movie *Brave*?
2. How does *Brave* represent patriarchy, feminism, and masculinity?

2. METHOD

This section discusses the research methodology. In a study, it is necessary to have a research method that fills in the procedures for conducting research both including the type of data, the object, the data collection, and the analysis process. The selection must certainly be accompanied by a strong enough reason. This research describes its research methods as follows

Underlying Theory

Reeser posits that masculinity is not a fixed construct but rather a dynamic set of traits and behaviour that can be acquired, reinterpreted, and enacted across different sociocultural contexts. This theoretical framework assists in analysing the character of Merida in *Brave*, focusing on her interactions and responses to challenges as manifestations of traditionally masculine traits such as bravery, independence and assertiveness. The study engages with the themes of masculine characteristics in Merida, the research also contributes to a broader understanding of how women navigate and express masculine attributes in various cultural narratives. Ultimately, the study aims to further illuminate the social underpinnings of masculinity and enables a nuanced discussion of gender identity within contemporary discourse.

Type of study

This study aims to explore the masculine character of a royal princess named Merida. This study requires an in-depth analysis of each result found, which will be proven through answers to the questions contained in the research question, with attention to the underlying reasons and truths[15]. Due to its nature, which requires an in-depth understanding of culture and social interaction, this research uses a qualitative research type with an ethnographic study approach.

The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to explore and understand the social and cultural context surrounding Merida's masculine characteristics. The ethnographic study allows the researcher to be directly involved in the daily life of Merida and the surrounding community, gaining a deep understanding of the social norms, cultural values, and actions that shape gender identity and the concept of masculinity in that context[16].

With this approach, this research is expected to provide deep insights into how Merida's masculine character is represented in the cultural and social context of the story and how it relates to the concepts of masculinity and gender identity. In addition, the results of this study are also expected to contribute to our understanding of how women can explore and express masculine characteristics in broader cultural narratives[17], [18].

Object of the study

The objects of this study include:

The Material Object: *Brave*

Brave is a 2012 animated fantasy film produced by Pixar Animation Studios and released by Walt Disney Pictures. Directed by Brenda Chapman and Mark Andrews, the film features the character of Merida, a Scottish princess who defies societal norms and expectations. The story revolves around Merida's journey as she rejects an arranged marriage, showcases her expertise in archery, and seeks to determine her own destiny. The movie is notable for its exploration of gender roles and the tension between tradition and individual freedom.

The Formal Object: Masculinity

Masculinity, as explored in this study, refers to a set of traits, behaviours, and roles traditionally associated with men [19]-[21]. These traits often include bravery, assertiveness, independence, and physical strength. This research focuses on the representation of masculinity within the character of Merida, particularly how these traits manifest in her actions and choices, which challenge the conventional

expectations of her role as a princess. Through this analysis, the study investigates how *Brave* portrays masculinity in a female protagonist and how this portrayal interacts with broader societal expectations.

Type of data and the data source

In this study, the data from Merida's character includes her facial expressions, behavior, manners, way of speaking, and dialogue in the film "*Brave*." Each of these aspects is analyzed to understand the masculine characteristics displayed by Merida in the context of the story. Through her facial expressions, Merida may reflect courage, determination, or dissatisfaction with her social expectations as a royal princess. Her behaviors, such as her archery skills and her courage to pursue adventure, portray strong masculine traits. Her manners may indicate a lack of adherence to royal norms, while her speech and dialogue may contain a rejection or desire for self-determination. By analyzing these data, this study aims to understand how Merida's masculine characteristics are reflected in different aspects of her behavior and how they affect the overall narrative of the film "*Brave*."

Therefore, in this study, data was collected from every scene in the movie "*Brave*" that features the character of Merida. Each scene was carefully explored to identify the facial expressions, mannerisms, manners, speech, and dialogue displayed by Merida. By thoroughly investigating each scene, this research aims to understand how Merida's masculine characteristics are reflected and developed throughout the film's narrative. The data collected from each scene will be the basis for analyzing Merida's role and portrayal as a royal princess who exhibits strong masculine traits.

Technique of collecting data

The technique used to collect data in this research is observing the content in the movie "*Brave*." The researchers directly observed every scene involving Merida's character, focusing on the facial expressions, behavior, manners, speech, and dialogue displayed by Merida in different situations. Each scene was carefully analyzed to identify how Merida's masculine characteristics are reflected and developed in the story's context.

Using this observation method, the researcher was able to directly observe the interactions between Merida and other characters and how the characters reacted to various situations and challenges in the story [22], [23]. Direct observation allows the researcher to obtain accurate and detailed data about the behavior and expressions of Merida's character without any intervention or influence from outside.

In addition, the observation method also allowed the researcher to gain a deep understanding of how Merida's masculine characteristics are reflected in the overall narrative of the movie. By paying attention to each scene and interaction involving Merida, the researcher could identify patterns and themes that emerged in the character's portrayal and how they contributed to the overall narrative development of the movie "*Brave*."

Technique of analysis data

The analysis in this study uses the content analysis method, which involves an in-depth understanding of the content present in the movie "*Brave*," specifically relating to the character of Merida. The content analysis method allows the researcher to explore and analyze various aspects of the observed content, focusing on Merida's facial expressions, mannerisms, manners, speech, and dialogue in each scene. By using the content analysis method of Krippendorff (2018), this research uses the steps:[24]

First, the researcher identifies units of analysis, which are relevant information relating to Merida's masculine characteristics. These units of analysis can be certain facial expressions, Merida's actions or behaviors, the words she speaks, or the interactions between Merida and other characters in the film.

Then, the researcher classifies and groups the data based on emerging themes or patterns. For example, data about Merida's courage in facing challenges can be classified together, while data about non-compliance with social norms can be grouped separately. The researcher analyzes each data unit in detail, looking for the meaning and hidden interpretation behind it. This involved understanding the social and cultural context of the movie, as well as how Merida's masculine characteristics are reflected in that context.

In the final stage, the researcher undertakes a comprehensive analysis of the research findings, distilling them into a succinct summary. By identifying significant patterns or findings, the researcher will provide an in-depth interpretation of the meaning of the masculine characteristics displayed by Merida in *Brave*.

3. FINDINGS

This section contains the results of this research which includes analysis of expressions, actions, habits and dialog of Merida in Masculinity.. A thorough investigation yielded evidence substantiating Merida's role in applying masculinity within Todd W. Resser's theoretical framework on masculinity, particularly the segment dedicated to examining masculinity in women. Resser's argument posits those four fundamental elements influence masculinity: image, myth, discourse, and practice. This study identifies these four elements in Brave, focusing on Merida. The subsequent section will provide a detailed explanation of these elements.

Image

Beginning by the notion of Image, this study finds that Merida's portrayal challenges the normal visual and behavioral representations of femininity. Her character design and demeanor exhibits traits typically associated with masculinity, such as physical strenght and assertiveness. The movie emphasizes her independence through visually striking moments. Her refusal to conform into prescribed roles presents her as a figure of empowerment. This exploration of image is pivotal in analysing how visual representations can both reflect and reshape societal perceptions of gender.



Figure 1. Red hair

Thus a departure from stereotypical depictions of women in animated narratives. Moving onto the literal image of merida in the movie itself, we can see symbolism relating to empowerment and her refusal to conform into a predestined roles in society.

Merida's red hair is a symbol of bravery, assertiveness and masculinity as well as her identity in the lore of the movie itself. In Western culture, red hair is frequently linked to notions of magical prowess, assertive temperament, and nonconformity. This association is exemplified by the Celtic myth of "wild women." A comparison with other Disney princesses is warranted. Conventional archetypes of femininity, exemplified by figures such as Cinderella or Rapunzel, are often characterised by meticulously groomed hairstyles, frequently in shades of blonde or brown, which serve as a symbol of orderliness and compliance with societal norms.



Figure 1. Merida's Dress

Merida's "unbridled" hair can be interpreted as a visual metaphor for resisting social control over the female body. Merida's unconventional hairstyle is indicative of her nonconformist identity.

A further symbolism can be seen in Merida's dress, the green bow and tunic are components of a larger ensemble. Merida's attire is typically characterized by a green tunic, complemented by shorts and boots, reflecting a practical and functional approach to clothing. The color green is frequently linked to natural environments, autonomy, and maleness. For instance, the character Robin Hood is often depicted wearing green attire, thereby symbolizing qualities associated with freedom and masculinity. The act of refusing to

wear a corset is a form of protest that some individuals have employed as a means of expressing discontent with the societal norms surrounding body image and the pressure to conform to specific beauty standards. The scene in which Merida declines to don a blue dress with a constricting corset, as mandated by her mother, can be interpreted as a visual metaphor for the repudiation of conventional beauty standards that impose limitations on physical mobility

Further, Merida's body language is seen as a further image of her masculine characteristics. Maintaining a rigid posture is imperative. Merida is frequently depicted with her legs separated, holding her waist with her hands, or holding a bow in a dominant stance. This pose is most frequently associated with male figures of heroism, such as Hercules or Thor. The subject's facial expression is as follows: Her gaze is fixed and her jaw is set, both of which serve to underscore her determination. A comparison of this to the softer, passively smiling expressions of other Disney princesses is warranted.

MYTHS

The second element, myth, delves into the societal narratives that inform the expectations surrounding masculinity and femininity. The application of the image in this brave movie starts with little Merida being interested in archery.



Figure 3. Merida and Archery

As illustrated in the provided image, Merida's evident interest in arrows can be interpreted as an initial element in the composition. Myths, as defined by Reeser, are representations that serve to persuade an individual's interest in specific subjects. In the context of masculinity, the incident is characterized as an impulsive behavior associated with the development of masculine qualities. This incident will provide ideas about future things. A close examination of the text reveals that Merida's mother does not appear to share her daughter's enthusiasm for archery, as evidenced by her remark, "*Fergus, no weapons on the table.*" This statement suggests a prohibition against Merida's father's possession of the archery equipment that has captured her interest.

Through direct observations, the study reveals several key masculine traits in Merida's behaviour including courage and independence which shows that Merida frequently defies traditional gender roles. Merida also shows leadership and assertiveness when she takes charge in critical situations and her willingness to take risks and decisiveness reflects traditionally masculine characteristics. Merida takes charge in critical situations, such as when she ventures into the forest to undo the curse she inadvertently placed on her mother.

Merida's facial expressions and body language further emphasize her masculine traits to form an image of bravery and confidence. In scenes where Merida confronts her mother or other authority figures, her raised chin, direct eye contact, and firm posture convey assertiveness and self-assurance. During moments of adversity, such as when she battles Mor'du or navigates the forest, Merida's clenched jaw and focused gaze highlight her resilience and determination, traits often coded as masculine. Merida also shows her character through the way she speaks and the dialogues presented in the movie. Merida often speaks bluntly and directly, such as when she tells her mother, "I don't want to get married. I want to stay single and let my hair flow in the wind as I ride through the glen, firing arrows into the sunset." This straightforwardness contrasts with the more traditionally feminine trait of indirect communication. Merida frequently challenges societal norms and authority figures, as seen in her confrontations with her mother and the lords. Her dialogue reflects a rejection of passive femininity and an embrace of autonomy.

Merida's interaction with other characters highlights the contrast between her masculine traits and the more traditionally feminine expectations placed upon her. An example of this is during The tension between Merida and her mother stems from their differing views on gender roles. While Elinor embodies traditional femininity (grace, obedience, and diplomacy), Merida's rebelliousness and physicality challenge these

norms. In another context. Merida's interactions with male characters, such as the lords and their sons, often subvert traditional gender dynamics. For example, her victory in the archery tournament undermines the expectation that men should dominate in physical competitions.

Themes and patterns that Merida has shown throughout the movie that reveals recurring themes that underscore Merida's masculine characteristics. For example, Merida's rejection and traditional gender roles where she consistently resists the societal expectations placed on her as a princess, opting instead to forge her own path. The emphasis on individuality and freedom that Merida possess reveals that her journey is one of self-discovery and empowerment, emphasizing the importance of personal freedom over conformity. She represents the perfect integration of masculine and feminine traits While Merida exhibits many masculine traits, her character also demonstrates emotional depth and vulnerability, suggesting a blending of traditionally masculine and feminine qualities.

Discourse

Discourse refers to the narratives, dialogues, and symbolic communication that construct societal norms. Merida's speech actively challenges patriarchal expectations as she rejects established matrimonial practices constitutes a form of nonconformity within the context of social norms and traditions as shown below



Figure 2. Merida getting angry

In her culminating argument with Queen Elinor, Merida asserts: "I have no desire to marry. I aspire to remain unattached and chart my own unique course." This discourse directly contradicts the expectation of medieval Scottish clans that women prioritize marriage for political alliance. Her defiance has been shown to redefine femininity as self-determined rather than passive.

In the context of the competition, Merida's actions are characterized by a usurpation of the suitors' traditional rivalry, accompanied by a proclamation that underscores her sense of self-efficacy and determination. The subject indicated that his objective was to shoot at his own hand. This line subverts the conventional gendered power dynamic characteristic of the tournament—a ritual intended to showcase male strength—by portraying Merida as the agent of her own destiny.

Merida also shows her masculine traits in discussions of the process of negotiating with other leaders as she plays a pivotal role in mediating peace among the warring lords by appealing to their shared history and logic, employing rhetoric typically reserved for male leaders. Her persuasive speech effectively challenges the prevailing notion that diplomacy is an exclusively masculine domain.

Practice

Practice encompasses physical actions and routines that reinforce or redefine identity. Merida's behaviours align with traits Ressler associates with masculinity in various forms. Her achievements of mastery in the discipline of archery aligns with traditional masculine archetypes of precision and physical strength. In contrast to the archetypal Disney princesses, who are typically associated with singing or the use of magic, Merida's primary "tool" is her weapon.

The phenomenon of reckless adventurism has been a subject of considerable interest in recent discourse as our female protagonist rides her horse, Angus, through perilous terrain, scales cliffs, and engages in combat with a demonic bear. These actions are frequently depicted as "masculine" in medieval hero narratives. These practices are indicative of independence and risk-taking, traits that are often ascribed to male characters and denied to female characters. Merida also clearly rejects feminine rituals as she exhibits a rebellious disposition, evidenced by her decision to remove her corset-dress, resist posture lessons, and evade etiquette training. These acts are indicative of her rejection of conventional feminine roles and values, opting instead for a more mobile and autonomous lifestyle.

4. DISCUSSION

What are the indicators that depict the existence of female masculinity in female characters in the movie *Brave*?

Central to this analysis is the application of theories regarding the fluidity and performativity of gender, which posit that femininity and masculinity are constructs that can be performed and adapted in various contexts. Reeser's theory of masculinity illustrates this by showcasing how elements traditionally associated with masculinity can be adopted by a female without undermining her femininity. Instead, it enriches her character, allowing for a broader narrative that encompasses both strength and vulnerability.

The film *Brave* employs a visual and narrative strategy to portray female masculinity through the character of Merida's defiance of traditional gender roles. Her physical appearance functions as a primary indicator, with her wild, fiery red hair symbolizing rebellion and nonconformity. This is in sharp contrast to the groomed, subdued hairstyles of classic Disney princesses, such as Cinderella. This unconventional aesthetic finds its roots in Celtic mythology, specifically the portrayal of "wild women" who defy societal norms. In a similar vein, her functional attire—comprising a practical green tunic, boots, and a deliberate repudiation of corsets—rejects the confines of traditional feminine fashion, instead emphasizing autonomy and mobility. The corset, a cultural artifact that symbolizes the historical subjugation of women's bodies by patriarchal societal norms, is explicitly rejected by Merida, thereby positioning her attire as a form of resistance against conventional beauty standards.

Merida's actions and behaviors serve to reinforce traditional notions of female masculinity. Her proficiency in archery, a historically masculine domain (e.g., Robin Hood), defies conventional gender expectations, especially when she secures her own marital alliance—a role typically assigned to the male counterpart. Her dominant body language, characterized by her stance with legs apart and holding a bow, evokes poses typically associated with male figures such as Hercules. In contrast, her facial expressions, marked by a set jaw and direct gaze, diverge from the passive, smiling demeanor often associated with traditional princesses. From a narrative perspective, her repudiation of conventional feminine practices, evidenced by her rejection of etiquette lessons, refusal of ostentatious attire, and evasion of posture training, serves as a testament to her disdain for passive femininity. Furthermore, her leadership in crisis (undoing the bear curse, negotiating peace among clans) and reckless adventurism (riding through forests, battling Mor'du) align with traits historically reserved for male protagonists in hero myths. Merida's speech and dialogue serve to reinforce her masculine traits. Her communication style is characterized by its directness, as evidenced by her explicit declaration of her desire to avoid matrimony. This approach stands in contrast to the prevailing societal expectation of women exhibiting politeness and compliance.

How does *Brave* represent patriarchy, feminism, and masculinity?

The text's author has undertaken a critical analysis of the patriarchy, with the objective of exposing the constraints imposed on women by this social system. The plotline of an arranged marriage serves as a prime example of this phenomenon. Merida's anticipated matrimony, driven by political considerations, is likely to diminish her autonomy, relegating her to a more passive and instrumental role. Queen Elinor embodies patriarchal expectations, enforcing grace, obedience, and restrictive clothing (e.g., corsets), which Merida rejects. The film also highlights gendered spaces, such as archery and leadership, which are initially framed as male domains. Merida's triumph in the archery tournament—a ritual intended to showcase male strength—defies these norms, thereby challenging the patriarchal association between masculinity and power.

The film's narrative places significant emphasis on the character Merida's autonomy, thereby serving as a proponent of feminism. Her act of defiance is not merely attributed to obstinacy but rather understood as a reclamation of bodily autonomy and self-determination. By modifying her destiny during the tournament, she reinterprets femininity as self-determined rather than passive. The resolution of her conflict with Queen Elinor—a mutual recognition of respect—suggests progress beyond rigid gender roles, advocating for a feminism that embraces dialogue and compromise.

Brave also redefines masculinity by decoupling it from male bodies. Merida's courage, resilience, and leadership—traits traditionally gendered as masculine—are celebrated as universal virtues. Her integration of emotional vulnerability, as evidenced by her reconciliation with her mother, challenges the prevailing notion that strength requires emotional detachment, a stereotype often associated with masculinity. The film thus expands cultural definitions of masculinity to include traits like empathy and collaboration, while framing independence and assertiveness as gender-neutral qualities.

Brave ultimately disrupts patriarchal norms, champions feminist agency, and reimagines masculinity as fluid and inclusive. The argument presented herein posits that qualities such as courage, leadership, and

autonomy ought to transcend gendered constructs. This position advocates for a world wherein identity is self-defined as opposed to being dictated by societal expectations.

Merida's behavioural tendencies, including her bold and courageous facial expressions, adventurous behaviour, physical skills (archery), rejection of ritual femininity and royal norms, and outspoken and self-determined speech, demonstrate an adherence to masculine traits (courage, determination, independence, leadership, risk-taking) as conceptualised by Todd W. Resser. The interplay between these elements, namely the visual (image), the narrative and the dialogue (discourse), the action (practice), and the interest/heredity representation (myth), serves to reinforce each other, thereby contributing to the construction of a character who actively challenges and rejects social expectations of being a passive, submissive princess, one who is limited by traditional feminine norms. Her courage is not only physical, but also manifests in her verbal and visual rejection of the systems that limit her, thus establishing her as a powerful representation of masculinity in women who redefine the concepts of princess and heroine.

5. CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates that the character of Merida in *Brave* offers a radical representation of masculinity in a feminist context, challenging patriarchal norms through visuals, actions, and narratives. Her appearance, which includes wild red hair symbolising rebellion, practical clothing (green tunic, boots) rejecting the corset (a symbol of patriarchal oppression), and dominant body language and stern facial expressions, visually rejects Disney's passive feminine stereotypes. Her behaviours, such as her proficiency in the use of the crossbow (a traditionally masculine field), participation in risky adventures, rejection of feminine rituals, and leadership in crisis (rescue of the mother, reconciliation of the clan), serve to substantiate her claim to traditional masculine traits (courage, independence, leadership). Her outspokenness, most notably her explicit rejection of arranged marriages ("I want to determine my own fate!"), becomes a discourse of direct opposition to authority and social norms.

This depiction of Merida functions as a critique of the patriarchy, which imposes restrictions on women through political marriage, beauty norms, and the compartmentalisation of gendered spaces (such as the dart tournament reserved for men). Her triumph in the tournament can be interpreted as a symbolic conquest of the patriarchal associations between power and masculinity. Concurrently, the film advocates feminism by asserting bodily autonomy, agency, and an active and independent redefinition of femininity. Furthermore, the film under scrutiny here, *Brave*, expands the definition of masculinity by detaching it from the male gender. Traits such as Merida's courage, resilience and leadership are presented as universal human qualities. Her reconciliation with her mother, which combines strength with emotional vulnerability, challenges stereotypes of toxic masculinity. At its core, the film *Brave*, which tells the story of Merida, conveys a message of liberation. It asserts that human identity and potential (such as courage, leadership and determination) are not confined to a particular gender, and that the right to "self-determination" is fundamental.

The application of Reeser's theory of the fluidity and performativity of masculinity serves as an underlying framework to comprehend Merida's complexity. By viewing masculinity as a dynamic set of attributes rather than fixed characteristics, this study highlights how Merida's depiction allows for a broader dialogue regarding gender fluidity. It implies that individuals can access and enact traits considered masculine, thereby fostering a more inclusive understanding of gender identity. This insight encourages audiences to reconsider and dismantle rigid gender classifications, promoting the idea that traits associated with either masculinity or femininity can coexist within one individual.

The study further emphasizes the implications of Merida's portrayal for broader cultural narratives. By serving as a symbol of empowerment, Merida invites audiences—particularly young viewers—to engage in conversations about identity and gender fluidity. This exploration serves to inspire individuals to embrace diverse expressions of identity, breaking free from the constraints of conventional gender roles. Ultimately, this analysis underscores the necessity of creating and promoting narratives that acknowledge and celebrate the multifaceted nature of gender, encouraging society to move towards a more equitable understanding of individual identity regardless of gender norms.

In conclusion, this study affirms that Merida's character in *Brave* is not simply an aberration within traditional narratives but rather a progressive step towards redefining masculinity and femininity. By exploring her character through the lens of Reeser's theory and a qualitative analytical framework, the findings reveal how animated storytelling can serve as a powerful medium for cultural critique and transformation, ultimately contributing to a richer understanding of gender dynamics in society.

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