



# Challenging Gender Norms: The Representation of Princess Merida in Movie Brave

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DOI: 10.37729/scripta.v12i2.7112

**Abstract.** Women in social structures are often depicted as feminine, as seen in Disney movies. However in the early 2010s, Disney cartoons like *Brave* showed a shift in the image of women. Women previously depicted in Disney movies have been portrayed as submissive, dependent and passive. Female characters in the *Brave* movies are portrayed as individuals in their own right, capable of leading, active and not needing men. This research aims to analyze how the film *Brave* challenges traditional gender roles through its portrayal of a female protagonist with traits typically associated with masculinity. This study used liberal feminism. The results of this research construct women as protagonists in the *Brave* movie (Princess Merida), resulting in portrayal of male characteristics, such as being strong, rational, brave, independent fighter, and able to negotiate. It is hoped that the thesis of this research will explain the importance of media for women and reference gender studies.

**Keywords:** Feminism, Movie, Liberal feminism, Restriction

## 1. INTRODUCTION

According to Dari et al, literature is a diverse collection of ways in which people have expressed themselves via words, whether orally or in writing [1]. It is a study that is focused on people, their lives, and the associated activities. Another way for people to convey their feelings, thoughts, or ideas is through literature. The human kind of literature contains aesthetic and artistic aspects. As time passed, literature was written in its original form, and later it was dramatized. Due to the advancement of science and technology, literature has undergone significant changes, transitioning from text-based to visual.

There are several kinds of literature, including: movie, drama, prose, and poetry. There is fiction and non-fiction literature. Fiction literary works are imaginative creations designed to entertain. Examples of literary works include: short stories, novels, and fairy tales. Non-fiction literary works are based on facts or actual events, for example, biography, business, cooking, and history. A kind of literature is a movie, which is a literary work that uses animated live images to create the appearance of moving visuals and is typically enjoyed as a kind of entertainment. Making a movie using visual art as a medium for conveying thoughts, feelings, opinions, experiences, perspectives, and moral messages.

As one of the first animated movie makers, Walt Disney has been a significant part of American and global culture, making a huge impact, especially on children, for many years. Disney's animated characters, songs, themes, and merchandise are cultural icons respected and trusted by adults and children alike, living in both cities and rural areas, around the world. This is what motivates the researcher to focus on animated movies produced by the Walt Disney Company in this study.

The *Brave* movie was produced by Pixar Animation Studio and released by Walt Disney Pictures in theaters on June 22nd, 2012. In this movie, Princess Merida, as the princess and the main character, encourages women to fight for their rights to engage in activities they enjoy, even if they are typically performed by men, like riding a horse and archery, to challenge the definition of beauty that designates women as beautiful, and to reject arranged marriages. Even if there is gender equality now, many patriarchal societies that are unjust to women might still exist, according to the realities of the time.

The study about character building has been explored to highlight the positive one for author [2]- [4]. In education, it can motivate audience to immitate or do something or even give an inspiration [5]-[8]. Another research of literature, some character will talk personally to author and do conversation interactively [9]-[12]. Aninda, M., Nadia, D., & Dewi, S., claimed that patriarchy derives from the word

patriarchal and that it refers to a social structure in which men are the only ones who matter and who control everything [13]. The patriarchal structure that governs society creates gaps and gender inequities that have an impact on many facets of human activity. Men play a key controlling role in society, while women have limited say or, in some cases, no rights in the overall economic, social, political, and psychological aspects of society, including the institution of marriage. Restrictions on the role of women in patriarchal culture make women become shackled and get discriminatory treatment.

Fighting for gender equality between men and women is the goal of the feminist movement. People in this research have emphasized that men and women can accomplish the same goals and have fought to raise the social standing of women and the caliber of men who are marginally disadvantaged. When women are denied the opportunity to participate in society, the validity of their occupations, or the ability to inherit wealth, they are inferior to men. In other words, feminism can be seen as a conviction in the necessity of significant societal reforms aimed to empower women.

## 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Liberal feminism is more about allowing certain women to do everything they want than it is about allowing women to accomplish whatever men can do. Given their equality with males, women are free to express themselves in any way they want. Women are free to express themselves by their choices and are not restricted in what they may accomplish. One individualistic subset of feminist ideology is liberal feminism, which emphasizes women's capacity to demonstrate and uphold their equality by their own decisions and behaviors. This movement seeks to advance social-cultural equality, freedom, education, politics, and the rule of law.

In addition to becoming a popular topic in journals and articles, liberal feminism has been used as a theme in a number of books and movies. Princess Merida, the protagonist of the movie *Brave*, exemplified a few instances of liberal feminism. The protagonist of *Brave* movie was discussing women's liberation or the women's movement, which battled for her independence.

Hastuti et al, say women are treated differently from men in a culture that is described by feminism [14]. Feminism holds that this difference in treatment is cultural, changeable, and not just the way the world is and must be. Feminism encourages assimilation into as many other cultures as possible. Activists bring personal and societal change in the direction of a more desired culture, which also falls under the umbrella of feminism. Fitri Apriyanti Rahmi Aulia Nurdini state that the equal rights of men and women in every area of life are the main focus of liberal feminism [15]. According to liberal feminism philosophy, each person is free to make their own decisions without being constrained by society or the law. In addition, it is related to reason and the division between the private and public spheres.

Hasna & Rahayu state that the main objective of the social movement known as feminism is gender equality [16]. People have argued that men and women can perform the same throughout history and have fought to raise the social standing of women and the standards of males who are marginally underprivileged. Due to the disparity in the status of men and women in Japan, Europe, and the United States at the time, modern feminism emerged in the 19th century. When women are denied the opportunity to participate in society, the validity of their occupations, or the ability to inherit money, they are truly inferior to men.

Ni'mah says that a movie can use a media narrative to communicate a variety of messages to viewers [17]. As a storytelling and idea-expression tool for artists and filmmakers, movies are also a kind of creative expression. Movies have an influence that affects community communicators. Each movie conveys a message through music, color, and moving pictures. The movie industry is a persuasive medium. The message being sent may be expressed explicitly or implicitly. Movies have the strength and capacity to penetrate all social strata, allowing them to have a significant influence. Unlike other forms of mass communication, movies are significant social institutions. The film's elements have the power to both reflect and create reality.

According to Indah Pratiwi et al, the movie or films were regarded as a very important and popular form of entertainment, as well as a means of propaganda [18]. They were also regarded as a powerful method in all subjects, including education. The movie or film can illustrate that every person has a character. They give the plot a real purpose, and they make the viewer care about what occurs in the movie. They play an important role in films, especially for the main characters. They have a lot of clout when it comes to representing the most essential message in a movie. Character and personality are intimately connected. The character was one of the necessary intrinsic elements. Character is a human representation that is useful in constructing the storyline of a tale to be shown in a film.

The *Brave* movie is a fantasy comedy created by Pixar Animation Studios and released by Walt Disney Pictures. The *Brave* movie won several prestigious awards, including the Golden Globe Award and the Academy Award for Best Animated Feature. According to Shehatta, Disney portrayed women as either princesses, queens, homemakers, or heroines [19]. These female characters were portrayed as being delicate, obedient, and lovely. They endure silent suffering as victims in a patriarchal society, but in the end, they are rewarded by getting married to charming princes and leading happy lives. However, in the *Brave* movie, the main character, a princess, was not depicted in that manner. Instead, she was depicted as a princess who is disobedient and whose behavior is limited because she carries out activities that are typically prohibited as a princess.

Dezas Perdani says that the *Brave* movie narrates a royal princess who makes decisions that endanger her family and tradition [20]. Few people are willing to challenge tradition, and Princess Merida, the main character in the movie, is one of the rare people who has great bravery. When Princess Merida and her mother debate about Princess Merida's future, she makes decisions that have far-reaching consequences she never anticipated. Princess Merida must battle natural forces and ancient curses to rescue her mother and return to her original form. Once consulting a witch to facilitate, Princess Merida changes her mother into a bear, and then she must undo the spell by herself before it is too late.

Prior to the *Brave* movie, there were only a few articles that mentioned or commented on it. According to some articles, the *Brave* movie exemplifies the feminist spirit. The data, however, are insufficient to support this study. More information regarding feminism in the *Brave* movie is not provided in the articles. One thesis that was taken into consideration by the researcher will enable them to increase their understanding of feminist theory.

Amala say that in her thesis, "manifestation of the spirit of feminism as reflected in Barbie and Fairy" [21]. She concentrated on Barbie's equality and femininity in feminism. She discovered that the Barbie characters in the movie play various roles in advancing the ideals of equality and feminism. Barbie may be a woman, but she may still save her boyfriend without becoming more like a male. Despite the fact that the movies are fairy tales or fiction, she demonstrates how Barbie becomes the major character as a result of the feminist movement and cultural change in the society. She has also noted that, in contrast to classic tales that have been around for centuries, male and female characters play various roles in fairy tale movies. She practices the third wave of feminism. There are Gender Equality and the Patriarchal System coupled with Traditional Gender Role.

However, this research aids the researcher in expanding their understanding of Princess Merida, the main character in the *Brave* movie. The researcher believes that Princess Merida was portrayed as a feminist character by analyzing Princess Merida's path to liberation using the Feminist Identity Development Model and Liberal Feminism.

### 3. METHOD

The researcher chose qualitative data collection to analyze the *Brave* movie by watching the movie multiple times, reading the summary, writing a synopsis, taking notes, understanding the script, identifying words and dialogues, reading books, e-books, and articles, and finding references on internet related to analysis. The main theoretical framework the researcher utilized to explore the study's object is feminist criticism theory, namely, two supporting concepts. Liberal feminism and the feminist identity model are the concepts involved. The principles described above will be used in the data collecting and identification process.

Liberal feminism will be the first notion utilized to demonstrate Princess Merida's feature of action in relation to its concept. The concept is then connected to the feminist identity model, which comprises five stages, by the researcher to understand Princess Merida. The researcher seeks to identify Princess Merida's feminist identity through these stages. The researcher also examines the filmography as evidence for the topic. The Giannetti theory of cinematography is referenced by the researcher. However, the researcher's analysis of this movie is limited to the camera angle, framing, and language. These theories will help the researcher identify Princess Merida's actions that demonstrate her feminist identity.

### 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the researcher will explain how liberal feminism is portrayed in Disney's courageous movie "Brave" in this study. The movie describes how Princess Merida, the main character who was made the focus of this movie, was denied the freedom to live her life as she pleased. The theory of feminism itself employs a gender analysis methodology to examine the subject of inquiry. It turned out

that problems like the injustice or oppression of women were not the direct cause or effect of gender construction, which was unfair to women.

According to Shehatta, women were either shown by Disney as heroines, princesses, queens, or housewives [19]. These female characters were shown as beautiful, submissive, and delicate. As victims in patriarchal culture, they suffer in silence, but eventually they are rewarded by marrying handsome princes and living contented lives. The protagonist, a princess, was not portrayed in such a manner in the movie *Brave*. Rather, she was portrayed as a wayward princess whose conduct was constrained due to her engagement in things that are forbidden for a princess.

Dezas Perdani say that the story of a royal princess who makes choices that endanger her family and reality is told in the movie *Brave* [20]. Few individuals were prepared to question convention, and Princess Merida, the protagonist, is one of the few who have courage. When Princess Merida and her mother argue about her future, Princess Merida makes choices that she never would have imagined would have such a big impact. In order to save her mother and transform back into her former self, Princess Merida must fight against both natural forces and old curses. Princess Merida transforms her mother into a bear after seeking assistance from a witch, and she has to break the enchantment on her own before it's too late.

The researcher will analyze several scenes from the movie *Brave* that show that the movie is using liberal feminism:

### **A masculine-like appearance is not preferable for a princess**

The theory of Inclusive masculinity gives insights into gender polarization, rejects stereotyped gender roles, and offers a release from the rigidity of the male/female binary. The models discussed above provided a link between men's studies and the anxieties faced by boys and men due to the mandatory adherence to social norms. It is enormously important that such conceptual tools are formulated and reformulated to keep pace with the dynamic nature of gender studies. The move from 'masculinity' to 'masculinities' has democratized gender roles and has been a liberating and empowering process both for men and women [22]. Queen Elinor or Princess Merida's mother always teaches Princess Merida how to be a good and true princess. A princess must walk slowly and carefully, and her upright body must not bend. When eating, a princess must not eat loudly or in a hurry, and must sit up straight. A princess must look beautiful, neat, and elegant, so Princess Merida was also told by her mother to take care of her body and face. Of course, a princess must also behave well, speak polite words, and have a kind, friendly nature towards everyone. It is highly discouraging to do otherwise or act like a man. From the explanation above, it can be depicted to be feminism because a princess must have feminine energy and should not behave or act like a man.



Figure 1. Princess Merida had a dinner with her family

From the picture above, Princess Merida had dinner with her family at the dining room table in their palace. Princess Merida told her family, especially her father, about her experience of riding a horse, archery, and drinking Fire Falls to everyone present at the place. King Fergus or Princess Merida's father was surprised that Princess Merida managed to drink Fire Falls. Her mother was surprised too when she heard that Princess Merida told them that she tried to ride a horse and shoot with a bow. These two activities are activity that are done by men, and a princess should not do these activities. For her mother, a princess must behave gracefully and should not do activities that men generally do. Princess Merida was immediately reprimanded by her mother and was forbidden to ride a horse and shoot with a bow again. Her mother insisted that Princess Merida should behave like a good and proper princess.

From the explanation above, her father and her mother forbade Princess Merida from doing activities that are generally done by men, such as riding a horse, archery, and drinking from Fire Falls. This instance discriminates against women and suggests that they are weak since it shows what men can do

that women cannot do. In this instance, feminism is practiced because women face discrimination, are viewed as inferior beings, and blur the lines between gender rights.

### **Single is not highly recommended for a princess**

The theory of Inclusive Masculinity maintains that declining homophobia leads to social inclusion of ‘subordinate’ and ‘marginalized’ masculinities. It leads to a proliferation of “multiple masculinities”, with lesser hegemony and hierarchy. Inclusive masculinity is about the inclusion of gay men and of straight men who do not feel compelled to embody hyper-masculinity but are comfortable to reveal the feminine side of their personality [23]. Anderson believes that this in turn leads to decreasing sexism and ultimately erodes patriarchy. In general, as we know, a woman is obliged to be married. It cannot be denied that a princess is also obliged to marry. Without exception, in the *Brave* movie, Princess Merida is required to get married like other princesses who must get married. Therefore, Queen Elinor or Princess Merida’s mother invited the three kingdoms to discuss an arranged marriage between Princess Merida and one of the three princes. Below is the photo of three kings who lead three different kingdoms, one of whose princes will be betrothed to Princess Merida.



Figure 2. The Three Kings

When Princess Merida discovered that her mother was planning to marry her to a prince from another kingdom, she immediately opposed it. She is not ready to get married that quickly because she still wants to live freely and do various things she likes. However, her mother still forced Princess Merida to marry because it was an obligation for women, including a princess. By marrying Princess Merida to one of the princes of the kingdoms, the two kingdoms can be united, and it will benefit the two kingdoms because their cooperation results in prosperity for the people of each kingdom. With great compulsion and because of persuasion from her mother, Princess Merida finally accepted her mother’s request to be betrothed to one of the princes from the three kingdoms chosen by her mother. Because there are three prospective princes to be betrothed to Princess Merida, a competition must be held, and the winner will be betrothed to Princess Merida. Princess Merida asked her mother if she would decide what kind of competition the prince would win. Of course, Princess Merida’s chosen competition is archery, because she really likes archery. This situation depicts feminism because women’s life is governed by social rules that women should be married, so they cannot determine their own lives and do not have freedom of life because they have to be married.

### **Prohibition for conducting male activities to a princess**

A gender is a socially constructed binary, and “men” and “women” are welldefined categories that abide by the discursive construction of gender through their bodies, behaviour, personality, and desires [24]. During the archery competition to choose one of the winning princes and match with Princess Merida, it turns out that none of the three princes can successfully shoot the arrow right on target in the middle of the circle. Then Princess Merida takes a bow and arrow to show everyone present at the competition, especially to show the three princes that she is very good at archery. Below is a photo of Princess Merida showing her skill in archery. Princess Merida shot at the three target boards that the three princes had shot at, and she was able to hit the target in the middle of all the circles.



Figure 3. Princess Merida shoots an arrow

Everyone who attended the competition was very surprised to see what Princess Merida did; she was very skilled at archery, despite being a princess who was not supposed to be allowed to participate in archery, as it was considered an activity for men. However, it turned out that the three princes could not do archery even though it was supposed to be an activity done by men. Queen Elinor or Princess Merida's mother was also very surprised that her daughter was very good at men's activities, namely archery. After the incident, Queen Elinor immediately reprimanded Princess Merida that a princess should not do archery because it is an activity for men. In addition to archery, Princess Merida is also skilled in horse riding. She often goes to the forest to ride a horse and shoot arrows while riding a horse without her mother's knowledge. Here is a photo showing Princess Merida riding a horse while holding an archery bow in the middle of the forest. She really enjoys riding a horse and archery because it has been her hobby since she was a child, without her mother's knowledge.



Figure 4. Princess Merida is riding a horse while shooting an arrow

Gender, sex, sexuality, and the body are fictional products of gender discourse born out of heterosexual normativity. Gender identity is a cultural performance, which creates a “hallucination” of being an extension of some innate essence through its repeated stylized acts. Butler seeks to ‘subvert’ the construct of identity and destabilize the defining institutions of heterosexuality and phallogocentrism. This consequently creates the possibility for resistance and change [25]. When Princess Merida was still a child, she often watched her father, King Fergus, shoot arrows. She wanted to try archery like her father. However, her mother didn't allow her to do it because a princess was not allowed to hold a weapon; only men were permitted to do so. Unlike her mother, her father allows Princess Merida to shoot an arrow like him. Therefore, when Princess Merida had her birthday when she was a child, King Fergus gave Princess Merida a bow for archery. How happy she was when she received the gift she wanted from her father. After that, her father teaches Princess Merida how to use a bow. Because Princess Merida likes archery, she had no difficulty learning archery. With regular and persistent practice, Princess Merida can shoot archery fluently and expertly. In addition to archery and horse riding, Princess Merida is also skilled in using a sword. Even though a princess is not allowed to use a sword because only men are supposed to use swords, here is a photo of Princess Merida practicing using a sword. Princess Merida can use a sword because her father taught her to use it. According to her father, it is okay for a princess to use a sword for the purpose of protecting herself. Without her mother's knowledge, Princess Merida and her father were practicing using swords. But one day, her mother saw Princess Merida and her father practicing with swords. Queen Elinor immediately reprimanded Princess Merida, and her father forbade Princess Merida from practicing with swords because it was an activity typically reserved for men. It was not appropriate for a princess to be skilled with a sword.

Queen Elinor strongly opposes the activities carried out by her daughter. She assumed that a princess should not engage in masculine activities such as archery, riding a horse, and using a sword. These activities do not reflect a princess; only men are allowed. Even when Queen Elinor saw her daughter engaging in these activities, she would scold her and forbid Princess Merida from doing that again. From these explanations, it can be described that this behavior is considered feminism because women, especially a princess, are prohibited from carrying out activities by men. There is discrimination against women, because women are considered to have a position below men.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Based on this paper, it is concluded that the topic of this paper was feminism, more especially liberal feminism in *Brave* movie (2012), which addresses issues of women's independence, gender equality, and oppression. Covering all feminist-related subjects, but especially liberal feminism, as seen in the 2012



*Brave* movie, this was interwoven with feminism-related concerns that arose in the neighborhood and patriarchal society. This research focused more on a detailed examination of the same topic than earlier studies that were utilized as matrices or references. In order to provide a more detailed description of each piece of evidence, it also included data with a variety of subjects, including an image about the event that was connected to the problem the researcher had brought up, along with some scripts and durations of the image. In order to verify the validity of the evidence, the reader can utilize this to view the movie scenes that were utilized as support for this study. This paper was split into two sections by the researcher: one based on research for a different study and the other on society.

For research purposes, the researcher recommended that future researchers carry out more thorough studies on a related subject. However, the goal of the social component was to increase awareness of gender equality in the environment and help the community understand that women should be treated with the same respect as other people and should be allowed to live freely. The researcher of this study believes that it will help future researchers who wish to apply it on related topics and that it will give additional readers some advantage. The researcher also believes that this study will help a lot of people or readers comprehend and provide further details about the characters in the movie, as well as other messages or meanings related to.

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