Final Paper

Author Name(s), First M. Last, Omit Titles and Degrees

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Mulan is an animated movie and it was adapted by America’s animated movie production house, Disney in 1998. The plot revolves around, Mulan (who also happens to be the protagonist of the story) and tells her life story when she takes on the role of a man to save her kingdom from the opponents. In the movie, China’s sovereignty and freedom are at stake and Huns try to attack through the great wall of China. The emperor sends a letter in every household to send a male member to fight alongside the army. When the letter reaches Mulan's home, she gets anxious because she does not have any male members except for her elderly father who Cannot fight because of his ailing health. This anxiety becomes her strength and she decides to offer her services in the army. This movie is significant because it offers a strong female protagonist but at the same time, in the movie, her reception is not perceived as a female. For instance, she is repeatedly told to man up” to save her country (Kline, 2016). This essay extensively focuses on the portrayal of female masculinity, masculinity and its effects on women. It also discusses the idea of fragile and toxic mentality. Moreover, Mulan’s comparison has also been established with the class readings.

In *Mulan,* Female Masculinity has been projected because when the word masculine is used it means a muscular man, having lots of physical strength and possessing strong leadership qualities such as decision making and bravery. On the other hand, if the word feminine appears it points to a woman figure who is soft, weak and fragile. More than her intellectual abilities, her physical traits and features are acknowledged. Moreover, her persona is built around her timid nature and her eloquent language. However, both the masculine and feminine traits are not subjected to male and female gender respectively. Similarly, Female Masculinity states that masculinity can also be found in women, transgenders, and lesbians because these traits are based on the grounds of mental capabilities more than the physical abilities. Similarly, Mulan can be seen fighting aggressively and having a strong power of will, moreover, she does not let her physical traits stop her from fighting along with men in the army. Moreover, gender is a social construct believe and it has nothing to do with being a male or a female. For instance, Mulan had to show her masculine side because in a patriarchal society it gets exceedingly hard for women to prove themselves in a male-dominated society. Besides, she is not a feminine girl and she has the spirit of sacrifice in her and according to her grandmother, she would face trouble in the future because a man would not marry her. She goes into the war dressed as a man and with her resilience learn all the necessary war-related skills and protects her country from being a woman. If there is a thing, she can fail at is portraying herself as a traditional Chinese woman because she takes up a bow and arrow instead of beautifying herself and courting men (Sulistia, 2016). However, this female masculinity also restricts her from revealing her true identity because of her disguise, other men believe her to be a man. She cannot express her feelings towards captain Shang because she is perceived as a man and not a woman.

Mulan’s female masculinity does not save her the burden of stereotypes because even when she fights heroically her gender comes in question. For instance, captain Shang admires her bravery and says “she’s a hero!” and in response, Chi-Fu says “she’s a woman! She’ll never be worth anything!” (Mulan). Chi-Fu's dialogue highlights the common perception of a patriarchal society that they cannot value a person while ignoring his or her gender. Multiple qualities and traits are interlaced with both the genders, for instance, a man has to brave because he cannot be a coward. Similarly, a woman has to be soft-spoken and feminine because she is a woman and they do not fight. In the movie, Mulan could never be allowed to fight without a disguise and she had to disguise herself for that because no one would have taken her bravery and courage seriously. The song lyric "you'll bring honor to us all" is ironic as initially, her society wants her to get a gentleman so that she can bring honor to her family by getting married. She does bring honor to her family but it is in a great and more impactful way by fighting for her country. Her sacrifices and bravery are linked with her gender and at the end of the movie, she is shown developing a romantic affection with Captain Shang who is both influential and a gentleman. The movie concludes at the same old stereotypical rhetoric that a girl can only bring respect to her family and society by getting married because she cannot move around on her own in society. Through the song, “A girl worth fighting for” the movie is depicting an anti-feminist theme by focusing on the patriarchy that a girl can only fight for her culinary skills and her beauty. “That's what I said/ A girl worth fighting for/ My girl will marvel at my strength, adore my / It all depends on what/ she cooks like / My girl will think I have no faults, / That I'm a major find” (Mulan). These lines portray a sexist image of men in the society that they are free of faults and a girl will be fortunate if she gets to marry a gentleman. Moreover, it also points to toxic masculinity culture that a man has to show off his battle scars to woo a girl. In an instance, when the soldiers ask Mulan that what would be the qualities of her ideal girl, she chooses intellect “How ‘bout a girl who’s got a brain/ Who always speaks her mind?” (Mulan). She or ping is mocked at by her fellows and they state that a woman does not have to have this quality as this is a male trait and her place is in the kitchen, cooking and doing the dishes. Besides, they say that a woman has to be pretty and she must have childlike innocence and for that, she has to act dumb. In a sexist society, women have to act dumb so they can find suitors who will provide for them. The film strongly sends the message that a woman has to take over the domestic duties while a man is only suitable for outside duties. Moreover, men telling about how a woman should act to get a fortune in the form of a husband also points at mansplaining (Kline, 2016).

In the movie, Mulan is being taught all the possible ways through which she can act like a man such as walking, spitting or talking in a man like fashion. She excels at this example of gender performativity; however, she excels at performing the chores society has designated for her gender. This reveals that gender is just a biological difference and it does not have anything to do with an individual’s intellect and performance when it comes to reversing the fixed gender roles. Besides, the fixed gender roles are uprooted in the society shown in *Mulan,* for example, Shan Yu speaks this dialogue to challenge the masculinity of the emperor and his army “Tell your emperor to send his strongest armies. I’m ready” and “The little girl will be missing her doll. We should return it to her” (Mulan).

In the background of stereotyping females and glorifying men in *Mulan,* it proclaims that no matter what a woman does she has to painstakingly prove her self to the society and these gender roles are too good to be broken. At the end of the movie, she has to return to her family because once her identity is revealed she cannot be offered a place in the army because of her gender. Moreover, she goes back to her home like a complying daughter and does not resist the society's stereotypical gender roles because she reaffirms it after all her heroic acts that woman is a silent figure and she cannot question the tradition. When she goes back to her home, her grandmother highlights the social doctrine “Great, she brought home a sword. If you ask me, she should have brought home a man” (Mulan). The attempts of female empowerment in the movie are futile because it ends up falling in the same trap of gender stereotyping. The movie emphasizes on Mulan’s bravery but the song “I’ll make a man out of you”, “did they send me daughters, when I asked for sons?” (Mulan). Similarly, “This guy’s got them scared to death” (Mulan) and the chorus “be a man” (Mulan) all evoke the gender stereotypes strongly that women are weak and it is men’s responsibility to defend them. Men fuel their masculinity at the expanse of portraying women as weak and submissive characters. Moreover, such a discourse also influences internal misogyny which can be seen in the dialogues of Mulan’s grandmother and her neighboring women. Besides, they testify these stereotypes by internalizing them through everyday behavior and discourse.

The movie Mulan fails at challenging the male hegemony and the idea of war exemplifies toxic masculinity. Mulan can be seen taking cues from Li Shang and choose to remain silent when her peers pose sexist remarks towards the ideal type of woman. likewise, she fights with a male identity by becoming Ping and not remaining herself (Sulistia, 2016). When she initially decides to fight in the war, she does not think twice but when she returns as a veteran soldier, she questions her decision. "Maybe I didn't go to my father. Maybe what I wanted was to prove I could do things right, so when I looked in the mirror, I'd see someone worthwhile. But I was wrong. I see nothing" (Mulan). This dialogue resonates with her feelings but instead of talking out loud she acts submissive and defensive in the movie. She is afraid of getting her true identity revealed because she does not challenge the male hegemony instead, she submits herself to it (Kline, 2016). Her heroic efforts fail to get her any place in the society except for few gifts from the country’s emperor. He thinks that she has done a lot of damage by disguising herself and creating turbulence and then afterward he admires her bravery. “I’ve heard a great deal about you, Fa Mulan. You stole your father’s armor, ran away from home, impersonated a soldier, deceived your commanding officer, dishonored the Chinese Army, destroyed my palace … and you have saved us all” (Mulan).

Similarly, the idea of toxic masculinity is highly amplified through the choice of dialogues and characters such as Shan Yu, Yao, Ling and, Chein Pao. These characters build upon the idea of toxic masculinity by considering war as a heroic and only suitable act for a man to show his masculinity. For instance, words like “tough guy” and “Ping the bravest” symbolize the gender roles and stigmas attached through which men suffer too in a patriarchal society. Moreover, when the emperor specifically asks for men to enroll themselves in the army it evokes the stereotype that men are only suitable for this work and they cannot be shown weak and tender. In the movie, men characters are flawed but they do not bring out these topics for discussion because they think highly of themselves. The song, “I’ll make a man out of you” is highly ironic as it reveals the ideas of toxic masculinity in a great deal “You're a spineless, pale pathetic lot, And you haven't got a clue. Somehow, I'll make a man, Out of you” (Mulan). Men do not like to be the subject of a joke as it clashes with their high personality but when Mulan reveals her identity, they all are taken aback that a woman was fighting among them. The dialogues such as "b a man" and fight bravely dismissive the idea of a man as a weak figure. Moreover, Li Shang is shown as a gentleman and a brave soldier and Mulan are smitten by him, also reveals that a man has to be ideal to win the heart of a girl. Yao, Ling and, Chein Pao can be seen as bullying Ping because men joke at fellow men's vulnerabilities and soft at heart nature (Kline, 2016).

Mulan falls in the pattern of stereotypical media ideals of gender roles and gender stereotyping as they evoke the ideas of a week woman and a strong male figure. Moreover, the texts that are read in the class also emphasize the need for bashing gender stereotyping because they are replicated and amplified through media avenues. Moreover, the classic literary texts and essay also emphasize the patriarchal stereotypes by assigning domestic roles to women and powerful roles to men. Both the movie and texts are filled with specific dialogues that point at fragile masculinity (Sulistia, 2016). For instance, a man cannot fix his appearance or go to a saloon because this is considered a female trait. Similarly, in the movie, men cannot play dumb or weak because they are supposed to act manly. When Mulan rescues captain Shang while riding a horse, this image speaks that how a man is saving another man during war and showing comradeship. Had it been the other way, Mulan would not have been able to be in the war in the first place because she would be too busy doing the dishes and making herself look pretty.

*Mulan,* shows fragile and toxic masculinity in a more focused way, although it is considered a film where women are empowered but I disagree with this idea because to fight like a girl she had to become a man first. The male characters in the movie can be seen patronizing her by telling her how to fight, what ideals to keep and how to act like a man in the battlefield. The dialogues direct jokes at women by hitting at the male egos and using women as a tool to satisfy their toxic masculinities. Moreover, men are not allowed to act weak as this is considered a female trait (Sulistia, 2016).

To conclude, Mulan cannot be seen as an ideal movie for female empowerment because it mocks at them and changes the whole idea of fight as a woman into, to fight, you will have to become like men. Her masculinity is portrayed as female masculinity but still, she cannot outdo her role because of her gender and its constraints. The dialogues, characterization and the plotline all portray Ping as a hero and not Mulan as a heroic figure (Sulistia, 2016). The constant reminders of a patriarchal setup such as women have to stay indoors, marry a potential match and bring honor reveals the old mindset which is amplified and projected through this movie. Mulan is questioning her decision to fighting as a disguised man and trying her best to conceal her identity so that she cannot be publicly shamed because of her gender among men. In the movie, male characters are dominant on the female characters and the female characters are indulged in internal misogyny because they cannot challenge the social discourse.

References

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