

## **GENDER STEREOTYPES CHANGES OF MERIDA'S CHARACTER IN DISNEY MOVIE *BRAVE***

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### **ABSTRACT**

This research is aimed to reveal of how Merida's character deal with gender stereotypes, whether she fall within the stereotypes rule or not, the writer used the theory of Sex Role Inventory by Sandra L Bem to measure Merida's masculine and feminine traits. Next purpose is to examine the process of Merida's gender stereotypes changes by using the theory of Feminist Identity Development by Nancy E Downing and Kristin L. Roush. This research is categorized as a qualitative research and it applied the technique of coding in analyzing data. The result of this study found out that Merida's character did not embrace the gender stereotypes due to her dominated masculine traits character rather than feminine as contradictory to gender stereotypes. Merida's character has ten masculine traits and three feminine traits. Furthermore, the process of Merida's stereotype changes began from revelation stage and the climax is she survived to the stage of active commitment.

**Keyword:** Gender Stereotypes Change, Masculinity, Femininity

### *ABSTRAK*

*Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengungkap bagaimana karakter Merida menghadapi stereotip gender, apakah ia jatuh dalam stereotipe gender atau tidak. Penelitian ini menggunakan teori Sex Role Inventory oleh Sandra L Bem untuk mengukur sifat maskulin dan feminin Merida. Tujuan selanjutnya adalah mengkaji proses perubahan stereotipe gender Merida dengan menggunakan teori Pengembangan Identitas Feminis oleh Nancy E Downing dan Kristin L. Roush. Penelitian ini termasuk penelitian kualitatif dan menggunakan teknik pengkodean dalam menganalisis data. Dari penelitian ditemukan bahwa karakter Merida tidak menganut stereotip gender karena sifatnya yang dominan maskulin, bukan feminin yang bertentangan dengan stereotipe gender. Karakter Merida memiliki sepuluh sifat maskulin dan tiga sifat feminin. Selanjutnya proses perubahan stereotipe Merida dimulai dari tahap revelation dan berakhir tahap komitmen aktif.*

**Kata Kunci:** *Perubahan Stereotip Gender, Maskulinitas, Feminitas*

## **A. INTRODUCTION**

Disney produces many animated films especially movies with princess theme such as *Snow White and The Seven Dwarfs*, *Cinderella*, *Sleeping Beauty*, and so on. As one of the largest film companies, Disney has a large market especially children who tend to like cartoon movie. These princess movies carry a similar format in portraying princess as female character. Although the films depict the positive nature of the princesses but in the end the film only shows traditional gender stereotypes.

In 2012 there was a Disney animated movie which is offering new pattern in presenting woman roles, the movie title is *Brave*. Instead of following the traditional gender stereotypes like previous princess series, *Brave* is performed as the first Disney princess movie which introduces a main female character who challenge the male dominant. The film focuses on the character of Merida. Merida is a princess of the kingdom in the Scottish Highlands. She lives with her mother Queen Elinor, her father, King Fergus, and her three little brothers. Queen Elinor taught her how a “good” princess supposed to be.

Merida is different from other Disney princesses. She comes as a powerful and independent protagonist. Her figure gives the impression that women do not always have to be feminine. Thus, *Brave* can be analyzed from a gender perspective, as it dares to present a new pattern of female representation in Disney princess series. Merida is able to be herself and dare to follow the path that she thought is right as her courageous to get out from traditional gender stereotypes by behaving as she want.

In essence, through *Brave* movie Disney offers an alternative film which is different from previous princess series. This is interesting to be discussed. Based on the things above, the researcher decides to use character in this film as object of the research and focus on gender stereotypes changes of Merida’s character. This research is aimed to reveal of how Merida’s character deal with gender stereotypes, whether she fall within the stereotypes rule or not. The next purpose is to examine the process of Merida’s gender stereotypes changes.

## **B. RELATED LITERATURE**

### **1. Development of Gender Stereotypes**

For understanding the stereotypes changes, the previous thing has to be known is the process of developing gender knowledge and because “along with the process of developing gender knowledge comes gender stereotyping” (Brannon 164). Brannon gave example of 6 years old children who show a pattern of selective stereotyping while they make gender stereotypical judgmental to other children who have similar toys interests with them but then they failed when try to make gender stereotypical judgmental to whose toy interests are different from them.

Martin, Wood and Little explained this behavior comes as reflection from developing knowledge of self or other like self which extended to gender.

When people believe that activity is related to one or the other sex, they feel comfortable in thinking in terms of this categorization. This perceptual bias acts to maintain stereotypes. That process allows them to maintain the stereotypes which are already prevailing in the society. However, according to Susskind in Brannon there is a study that indicated children do not ignore counterstereotypical information, and the presentation of such information may be a way to diminish gender stereotypes. The flexible application of gender stereotypes increases with age, younger children relied more on gender information than on information about individuals when making judgments about people, whereas older individuals took into account information about deviations from gender stereotypes. This pattern of development indicates that the acquisition of full information concerning gender stereotypes is accompanied by greater flexibility in the use of stereotypes.

The fact that stereotypes can develop shows that person's gender role can also change, a theory developed by Downing and Roush presents an instrument that describes the development stage of women's identity in the face of gender stereotypes, later referred to as "Feminist Identity Development". This study began with the premise that women struggle against discrimination that is sometimes not realized. There are 5 stages of the development of feminist identity which will be displayed in the following table.

**Table 1. Feminist Identity Development**

<b>Stage 1</b>	Passive Acceptance	Passive acceptance of traditional sex role and discrimination, belief that traditional roles are advantageous; men are considered superior.
<b>Stage 2</b>	Revelation	Catalyzed by series of crisis, resulting in open questioning of self and roles and feeling of anger and guilt: men are perceived as negative.
<b>Stage 3</b>	Embedddness-emanation	Characterized by connectedness with other select women, affirmation and strengthening new identity. Eventually more relativistic thinking and cautious interaction with men.
<b>Stage 4</b>	Synthesis	Development of an authentic and positive feminist identity; sex-role transcendence; "flexible truce" with the world; evaluate men in individual basis.
<b>Stage 5</b>	Active commitment	Consolidation of feminist identity; commitment to meaningful action, to a nonsexist world. Action are personalized

		and rational. Men are considered equal but the same as women.
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Sources: Downing and Roush “From Passive Acceptance to Active Commitment; A Model of Feminist Identity Development for Women” *The Counseling Psychologist Journal* (1985) p 695-709

### 2. BEM sex role inventory

Sandra L. Bem in *The Measurement of Psychological Androgyny* introduced her Sex Role Inventory. She described the development of a new sex-role inventory that treats masculinity and femininity as two different dimensions thereby making it possible to characterize a person as masculine, feminine, or "androgynous" as a function of the difference between his or her endorsement of masculine and feminine personality characteristics. Bem classified human gender into four types; masculine, feminine, androgyny, and undifferentiated. The Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) consists 20 characteristics for each masculine and feminine, and one additional row for neutral. In line with Bem’s androgyny theory, this research will use Bem Sex Role Inventory as the indicator to measure the masculine and feminine traits in Merida’s character in Disney movie *Brave*. For more detail, the classifications of the masculine and feminine traits according to Bem are as followed:

**Table 2. Items on the Masculinity, Femininity, and Social Desirability Scales of the BSRI**

No	Masculine items	No	Feminine items
1	Acts as a leader	1	Affectionate
2	Aggressive	2	Cheerful
3	Ambitious	3	Childlike
4	Analytical	4	Compassionate
5	Assertive	5	Does not use harsh language
6	Athletic	6	Eager to soothe hurt feelings
7	Competitive	7	Feminine
8	Defends own beliefs	8	Flatterable
9	Dominant	9	Gentle
10	Forceful	10	Gullible
11	Has leadership abilities	11	Loves children
12	Independent	12	Loyal
13	Individualistic	13	Sensitive to the needs of others
14	Makes decisions easily	14	Shy
15	Masculine	15	Soft spoken
16	Self-reliant	16	Sympathetic
17	Self-sufficient	17	Tender
18	Strong personality	18	Understanding
19	Willing to take a stand	19	Warm

Sources: Downing and Roush “From Passive Acceptance to Active Commitment; A Model of Feminist Identity Development for Women” *The Counseling Psychologist Journal* (1985) p 695-709

20	Willing to take risks	20	Yielding
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Source: Bem, Sandra L. "The Measurement of Psychological Androgyny." *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 42.2 (1974): 155-162

## C. RESEARCH METHOD

### 1. Research Design

This research is qualitative research which it aims to explore the meaning of human as individual and social beings. The information that will be analysed in this research is information that is not obtained directly but in the form of written content, thus this research is content analysis. The object of this research is a fictional character and data source is in the form of film scripts, which is not a communication that is obtained directly from real life.

### 2. Data and Data Sources

The data is text taken from movie script that consists words, dialogues, phrase or sentence. The main data source is Disney movie *Brave* script. The secondary sources are related material from various references like previous studies, journal, thesis, and dissertation ascribe to issue of gender stereotypes and stereotypes change.

### 3. Data Collection

At the beginning of the step the researcher did deep exploration not only on the data source but also on related studies. Then the researcher made raw notes of data criteria, in this case the necessary data is anything that show masculine and feminine traits of Merida's character and how does she deal with gender stereotypes. The next step, the researcher watched the whole movie of *Brave*, followed by reading the movie script. The researcher focused on Merida's character as the object of the research. Finally, the researcher took a note of obtained data from the narration, dialogue or Merida's depiction according to the criteria. The data criteria categorized into three part which are; Merida's masculine traits, Merida's feminine traits and Merida's feminist identity development.

### 4. Data Analysis

In analysing data the researcher involved activities such as categorizing, elaboration, and arranging pattern (Bogdan and Biklen 1). In conducting content analysis, the researcher encoded Bem Sex Role Inventory and Feminist Identity Development as indicator of the research.

### 5. Research Instrument

The instrument of this research is the writer herself. It is because the author did the analysis, by observing, interpreting and collecting the data in order to answer the research's problems.

## **D. FINDING AND DISCUSSION**

This section contains findings and discussion which are the answers of the research questions. The findings would be displayed in written form obtained from data analysis supported by several theories mentioned. The data were analyzed using two main supporting theories, Bem's sex role inventory by Sandra L. Bem and Feminist Identity Development Model by Nancy E Downing and Kristin L Roush. The researcher divided this chapter into two sub-chapters, first is the sub-chapter of the findings and discussion of Merida's traits and the second one is the sub-chapter of the findings and discussion of Merida's stereotypes change. The researcher presented the findings and discussion of this research in the following;

### **1. Merida's Masculinity Traits**

Masculinity is a gender role which distinguished from biological properties. One of Merida's masculinity trait that found is athletic. Athletic refers to person who is physically strong, fit, active or relating to characteristics of an athlete (Cambridge, Meriam-Webster). The researcher found data of this indicator portrayed by narration as follow;

"MERIDA wakes up, **takes bow and quiver of arrows, runs downstairs** to angus (**horse**) **and rides off** in the meantime, she **shoots, carves on her bow**, keeps company with angus, **climbs a rock**, dances and drinks of the waterfall nearby-"

(Chapman 8)

If gender stereotype claims that women have low physical skills, here, Merida acted as a character who has strong physical skills. The data shows when Merida rode Angus to accompany her adventure in exploring jungle. Not only good at riding a horse, Merida was also good at archery and climbing rock cliff. According to the definition of athletic above, Merida was active and fit. Thus, this data is appropriate as the evidence that Merida has athletic traits.

Other Merida's masculine trait is aggressive. An aggressive person has certain characteristics such as; energetically hunt the high or dominant position in any situations, hostile to anything that prevents them from reaching their target, they attach importance to their own needs though it should be sacrificing the rights of others, ignoring the truth and more concerned with personal gain, and bad at controlling themselves. Referring to the data source of this research study, the researcher found some findings that appropriate to the explanation of aggressive characteristics in Merida's self. Those findings would be explained in the following paragraphs

Merida: Oh! This is so unfair!

Elinor: Huh! Unfair?

Merida: You were never there for me! This whole marriage is what you want! Do you ever bother to ask what I want? No! You walk around telling me what to do, what not to do! Trying to make me be like you! Well, I'm not going to be like you!

Elinor: Ach! You're acting like a child!

Merida: **And you're a beast! That's what you are!**

Merida points her sword at the family tapestry that Elinor had been working on

(Chapman 39)

In this data, Merida strongly showed her resistance to the queen, who stood in the royal tradition, to do arrange marriage to her. Merida raised her voice when spoke to the queen. She even said harshly and threatening the queen. The worst thing she did was ruined a family tapestry, which made by the queen. Although many times the queen has warned Merida, but she ignored it. The dialog above showed how bad Merida was in controlling her emotions. As a royal princess, with various moral values that have been taught, it is not fitting for Merida to act that way. If in his theory, Dr. George Simon mentioned that one of the characteristics of an aggressive person is bad at controlling herself, thus Merida included into this category. This is positively proving that Merida is aggressive.

## **2. Merida's Femininity Traits**

The researcher has observed and analyzed Merida's character through those items. The result Merida has cheerfulness personality. Cheerfulness trait as a variety of personal traits which include laughter, amusement and smiling. Here, the researcher found two findings which appropriate to the definition of cheerfulness according to Ruch. Those findings are portrayed when Merida laughs as written in the following:

Young Merida laughs as she hides under the table

(Chapman 2)

In the early scenes, the film showed the Queen who was trying to find Merida who was hiding under the table. Merida hid while laughing because her mother could not find her. They seemed to enjoy the time. Ruch said that someone who has cheerfulness trait will easily laugh and enjoy every time for amusement. The data showed that Merida was a child who easily laughs and entertained. This data proved that Merida is a cheerfulness person.

## **3. Merida's Stereotypes Change**

the researcher found that Merida's character from the beginning was in the revelation stage. She rebelled from the obligations imposed on her as a woman. The following are findings that show Merida's reaction to gender stereotypes;

Merida V/O: I became a sister with 3 new brothers, the princes Hamish, Hubert, and Harris. Wee devils more like. They get away with murder. **I can never get away from anything!**

**Merida bites an apple as a door opens.** Queen disappointed and hints that she presents herself properly. Merida discards apple and wipes mouth with sleeve (caution: this is not proper manners. should use a convenient hanky.)

(Chapman 06)

Merida compared her situation with her triplet brothers. Three of his brothers are free to do anything, inversely proportional to the state of Merida which is bound by tradition where she must act like a royal princess. Then the feminist identity of Merida developed to the stage of embeddedness-emanation. In this stage woman must separate her anger toward a system that perpetuates discrimination against women from her anger against individuals in her life (McNamara and Rickard 187). Although individual in Merida's life in this case was her mother may fall into system that she rejected but the individual was not the system itself.

Then the feminist identity of Merida developed to the stage of active commitment. Women at this stage have a strong and deep commitment to make social change for the future in which the role of sex is not only seen from a physical level but is a transcendent that is valued and upholds justice for all humans. Compared to before when Merida acted recklessly, at this stage she was more able to see the situation and she considered various issues so that her goals were more on target and socially effective. Instead of frontally opposing the betrothal from the clans, Merida opened the conversation by recalling the collaboration between clans in the past that this kingdom was built with blood and shared sweat.

## **E. CONCLUSION**

From 20 indicators of masculinity traits based on BSRI, the researcher found that Merida's character has 9 of masculinity. She has three traits of femininity indicators according to BSRI from the total 20 indicators. the results of observations on Merida's attitude toward gender stereotypes show that she did not fall into gender stereotypes because her character in the film is not only portrayed as a feminine figure, but dominated masculine traits in her character. From five stages of feminist identity development the researcher found three stages were stepped by Merida as her effort dealing with gender stereotypes, the three stages are: revelation, embeddedness-emanation and active commitment. Meanwhile for two other stages, which are revelation and synthesis the researcher did not find any suitable data for each indicator.

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