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# A Princess's Defiance In Brave Movie

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**Abstrak**

Studi ini meneliti konstruksi dan fungsi maskulinitas perempuan dalam film animasi Brave (2012), dengan fokus pada bagaimana protagonis, Merida, menegosiasikan identitas non-tradisionalnya dalam struktur keluarga patriarkal. Menggunakan Teori Performativitas Gender Judith Butler dan kerangka kerja maskulinitas sebagai konstruksi sosial R.W. Connell, makalah ini menganalisis bagaimana ekspresi kekuatan fisik, kemandirian, dan pembangkangan Merida bukan hanya ciri-ciri terisolasi tetapi secara dinamis dibentuk oleh interaksinya dengan orang tuanya, Ratu Elinor dan Raja Fergus. Sementara Elinor mewakili penegakan domestikitas tradisional yang kaku, Fergus bertindak sebagai arketipe budaya maskulinitas hegemonik yang tanpa disadari ditiru oleh Merida. Melalui analisis tekstual dan dialog kualitatif dari skenario film, temuan mengungkapkan bahwa penampilan maskulin Merida memiliki tujuan ganda: ia bertindak sebagai mekanisme untuk pembentukan identitas pribadi dan beroperasi sebagai katalisator untuk perubahan budaya sistemik di kerajaannya, mendefinisikan kembali batasan agensi perempuan dalam media kontemporer.

**Kata Kunci:** Maskulinitas Perempuan, Performativitas Gender, Berani, Ratu Elinor, Representasi Media.

**Abstract**

This study examines the construction and function of female masculinity in the animated film Brave (2012), focusing on how the protagonist, Merida, negotiates her non-traditional identity within a patriarchal familial structure. Using Judith Butler's Gender Performativity Theory and R.W. Connell's framework of masculinity as a social construct, this paper analyzes how Merida's expressions of physical prowess, independence, and defiance are not merely isolated traits but are dynamically shaped by her interactions with her parents, Queen Elinor and King Fergus. While Elinor represents the rigid enforcement of traditional domesticity, Fergus acts as an unwitting cultural archetype of hegemonic masculinity that Merida emulates. Through qualitative textual and dialogue analysis of the film's screenplay, the findings reveal that Merida's masculine performance serves a dual purpose: it acts as a mechanism for personal identity formation and operates as a catalyst for systemic cultural change within her kingdom, redefining the boundaries of female agency in contemporary media.

**Keywords :** Female Masculinity, Gender Performativity, Brave, Queen Elinor, King Fergus, Media Representations.

## INTRODUCTION

In contemporary cinematic landscapes, particularly within mainstream animated features, the representation of gender has undergone a profound paradigm shift. Historically, corporate giants like Disney and Pixar constructed animated princesses through a lens of traditional femininity characterized by passivity, domestic obedience, and an inherent reliance on male rescue (Morrison, 2022). However, twenty-first-century narratives have increasingly challenged these binary restrictions by introducing complex female protagonists who embody traits historically monopolized by male characters—such as physical autonomy, tactical leadership, and emotional stoicism. A seminal manifestation of this narrative evolution is observed in the 2012 Pixar Animation Studios production, Brave, which centers on Merida, a royal protagonist who overtly rejects the conventional codes of princesshood.

While initial scholarship often analyzed Merida strictly through the singular paradigm of liberal feminism or psychological rebellion, contemporary gender theory invites a more nuanced exploration of her character as an embodiment of female masculinity. According to Connell and Messerschmidt (2018), masculinity must be understood as a fluid social construct rather than an anatomical inevitability. It encompasses an array of behaviors, practices, and discourses that can be enacted by individuals regardless of their biological sex. When a female character performs these traits, it does not signify a mere mimicry of manhood, but rather a distinct identity formation that exposes the artificiality of the traditional gender binary (Allen, 2025).

Previous studies on Brave have mapped Merida's deviation from established social norms using semiotic frameworks (Augustine, 2021) or positioned her within the historical trajectory of heroines balancing masculine and feminine traits (Alexander, 2021). Nevertheless, an analytical gap persists: existing literature frequently treats Merida’s behavioral defiance as an isolated personal trait, overlooking the communicative and relational dialectic between her and her parents, Queen Elinor and King Fergus.

To prevent analytical redundancy and provide an original contribution to media studies, this article examines Merida’s masculine performance through a relational lens. It investigates how her physical prowess, independence, and resistance are structurally provoked, mirrored, or validated by the parental dynamics within the DunBroch household. By analyzing specific textual dialogue and scenario units, this study addresses two core inquiries: How is Merida’s female masculinity performatively constructed in relation to Queen Elinor and King Fergus, and what narrative functions do these interactions serve in subverting traditional gender boundaries?

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Masculinity as a Pluralistic Social Construct Deconstructing the concept of masculinity requires moving away from biological essentialism toward a structural understanding of gender. Connell and Messerschmidt (2018) assert that masculinities are historically configurations of practice that are generated through social interactions. This pluralistic view implies that multiple forms of masculinity coexist within a single cultural space, including "female masculinity"—a phenomenon wherein women occupy spaces, adopt linguistic markers, and perform physical tasks traditionally designated as masculine (Li, 2021). In media spaces, this flexibility allows characters to redefine power dynamics, demonstrating that authority and emotional resilience are not inherently sex-linked (Assa et al., 2022).

Judith Butler's Gender Performativity Theory

To understand how an animated character can embody these configurations, this study relies on Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity. Butler argues that gender is not an internal essence but a continuous series of stylized acts, repetitions, and speech behaviors that create the illusion of a natural binary (Langner, 2016). For an animated protagonist, identity is established textually and visually through the repetition of specific choices. When Merida chooses archery over tapestry or direct verbal confrontation over submissive silence, she is executing performative acts that actively construct a masculine identity (Russo, 2024).

The Influence of Cultural Backdrops on Familial Hierarchies Cinematic representations of folklore, particularly those drawing from Scottish historical backdrops, frequently utilize highly polarized archetypes. Traditional Scottish clan narratives often depict a social structure where men fulfill the roles of warriors, hunters, and political leaders, while women manage domestic diplomacy and lineage preservation (MacLeod, 2019). Within Brave, this historical division is directly split between King Fergus, who embodies the boisterous, physical warrior archetype, and Queen Elinor, who maintains civil order and cultural refinement (Campbell, 2020). Consequently, Merida's developmental environment becomes an ideological battlefield where she must navigate two conflicting models of adult identity.

## METHODOLOGY

This inquiry utilizes a qualitative literary and media research design, executing a systematic textual analysis of the official screenplay of Brave (2012) written by Mark Andrews and Brenda Chapman (Sugiyono, 2023; Pratiwi et al., 2024). Rather than examining the protagonist in a narrative vacuum, the analytical focus is placed upon the conversational interactions, linguistic choices, and confrontational dialogue exchanges between Merida, Queen Elinor, and King Fergus.

The operational steps for data processing were adapted from contemporary textual analysis models (Warsah et al., 2023; Setyawan & Lestari, 2025):

1. Contextual Immersions: Multiple viewings of the visual media were executed alongside close readings of the official script to ensure accurate interpretation of textual cues, direct statements, and parenthetical actions.

2. Relational Coding: Dialogue units were extracted and classified into thematic categories based on the specific form of masculinity displayed, cross-referenced with the presence or response of either parent.

3. Theoretical Synchronization: The coded exchanges were evaluated through Butler's performativity theory and Connell's gender configurations, specifically observing how parental opposition or modeling altered the trajectory of Merida's identity performance.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Performative Forms of Merida's Masculinity within the Familial Axis

1. Physical Prowess and Tactical Emulation of the Father

Merida's affinity for outdoor survival, archery, and equestrian exploration represents a direct enactment of traits traditionally reserved for male clan leaders in Scottish folklore (MacLeod, 2019). However, a relational analysis reveals that this physical mastery is not merely an intuitive rebellion; it is a direct emulation of her father, King Fergus, which sets her in immediate ideological opposition to her mother.

Consider the baseline ideological conflict established early in the narrative screenplay:

Merida: "*Some say fate is the path we're given. But I say fate is something we make for ourselves. With my bow and my horse, Angus, I can go anywhere, do anything.*"

Servant: "*Princess Merida! Your mother says you must practice sewing and etiquette today!"*

Merida: *"Etiquette can wait. The forest is calling, and there is no better place to learn strength."*

In this segment, Merida's linguistic construction connects physical autonomy with "strength"—a value consistently demonstrated by King Fergus throughout the film's subplots. Merida projects an identity rooted in geographic and physical freedom, deliberately rejecting the cloistered domestic arts enforced by Elinor. This performance shifts from a personal hobby to a political disruption during the archery tournament scene:

Lord MacGuffin: *"The contest is for the sons of the clan leaders only! No place for a girl!"*

Merida: *"The rules say any heir may compete. And I am the heir of DunBroch! Watch this!"*

Here, Merida exploits a legalistic loophole regarding her status as the "heir." By stepping onto the field and out-shooting the male suitors, her action becomes what Butler defines as a highly subversive performative act (Langner, 2016). Crucially, this act directly mimics the competitive warrior culture that King Fergus celebrates. While Fergus reacts with an undercurrent of instinctual pride at her skill, Elinor perceives it as a catastrophic breach of diplomatic decorum. This demonstrates that Merida's physical masculinity functions by drawing from her father's archetype to break her mother's domestic expectations.

2. Assertive Resistance and Linguistic Defiance of the Matriarch

Masculinity within fictional narratives is frequently signaled through linguistic dominance, direct speech, and the refusal to submit to authority figures (Russo, 2024). Merida's performative masculinity manifests through her assertive conversational style, which directly confronts Queen Elinor's efforts to socialize her into passive diplomacy.

Queen Elinor: *"A princess does not run wild through the woods, Merida. You must learn to behave like a lady, marry well, and unite the clans."*

Merida: *"I am not a prize to be won! My life is mine to live. I will not let anyone choose my path for me."*

This dialogue uncovers the core gender polarization within the family. Elinor views gender as a strict set of duties designed to preserve political stability. Conversely, Merida articulates a masculine-coded demand for personal autonomy and self-determination (Davis & Carter, 2022). Her assertion that she is "not a prize to be won" actively strips away the traditional commodification assigned to fairy-tale princesses.

The linguistic friction escalates into a physical and symbolic rupture during the structural climax of the second act:

Queen Elinor: *"You humiliated our family and broke every rule of tradition! What have you become?"*

Merida: *"I have become myself! Tradition is not meant to chain us! If it makes us unhappy, it is not worth keeping!"*

By positioning "tradition" as a set of chains, Merida uses an assertive rhetoric that mirrors the revolutionary stance of historic male leaders demanding freedom (Chen, 2023). She refuses to offer the apologies or submissive concessions that Elinor expects. Through this ongoing linguistic refusal, Merida validates her autonomy, constructing her identity through repeated acts of verbal resistance.

**The Dual Functions of Relational Masculinity in the Narrative**

1. Driving Conflict Resolution Through the Deconstruction of Parental Archetypes

Merida's masculinity does not simply generate narrative chaos; it serves the vital narrative function of forcing her parents to modify their own rigid gender expectations. The second half of the screenplay demonstrates that Merida's courage and independent survival skills become the sole mechanism capable of saving her mother after Elinor's transformation into a bear:

Merida: *"The woods are dark and full of danger, but I must go alone. If I want to fix what I broke, I cannot rely on anyone else."*

This monologue marks a shift from juvenile rebellion to mature, protective masculinity—a role historically assigned to the male protector (Morrison, 2022). When entering the wilderness, Merida stops being a dependent child and becomes the active leader of the survival journey.

This performance alters her relationship with both parents. Queen Elinor, forced into a wild, silent form in the forest, learns to appreciate the practical value of Merida's outdoor abilities, realizing that survival requires the very traits she previously tried to suppress. At the same time, Merida's independent actions force King Fergus to confront the limits of his purely physical, battle-oriented masculinity, as the crisis cannot be resolved through brute force alone, but requires emotional accountability and shared understanding.

2. Initiating Systemic Cultural Change Within the Kingdom

The final function of Merida's female masculinity is its ability to rewrite the cultural laws of the DunBroch kingdom. By using her assertiveness to command a political room filled with aggressive male clan leaders, she demonstrates a form of statecraft leadership that blends masculine authority with empathetic insight:

Merida: *"We do not have to follow the old ways forever. We can write new stories. Strength is not only in swords and battles, but in choosing our own path."*
This speech redefines "strength" by removing it from the domain of physical violence ("swords and battles") and re-framing it as the right to individual choice. The success of this rhetorical performance is confirmed when King Fergus publicly validates her leadership:
King Fergus: *"Our daughter has shown us that strength comes in many forms. Tradition is important, but freedom is what makes us truly alive."*

Fergus's explicit approval marks a crucial shift in the story: the traditional patriarch accepts and integrates the masculine performance of his daughter into the state's ideology. This dual validation where Elinor accepts the necessity of independence and Fergus acknowledges a broader definition of strength proves that Merida's defiance successfully challenges and updates rigid gender expectations for the entire community (Davis & Carter, 2022).

## CONCLUSION

This study shows Merida's masculinity in Brave grows from her parental relationships. She copies King Fergus's freedom. She rejects Queen Elinor's domestic rules. This builds an alternative identity challenging traditional princess tropes. Her masculine traits, like independent problem-solving, are not destructive. They actually save her family and modernize the kingdom.

Brave offers a modern model for animated stories. It proves female heroes can show courage and leadership without losing family bonds. Future research should study supporting characters. It should explore how animated parents change their behavior when facing non-traditional gender expressions.

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