

STEREOTYPES AND FEMINISM IN THE MOVIE *MULAN* BY WALT DISNEY

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ABSTRACT

The topic of this paper is the relationship between feminism and the stereotypes in the movie *Mulan* by Walt Disney (1998). *Mulan* is the representation of a tough and brave woman. The movie raises the issue of *Mulan*'s feminism as the main character and gender stereotype that suggests women as inferior to men. This paper focuses on the main character and how she tries to break the stereotypes in her society. Liberal feminist theory is used as an approach in this paper. The sources to conduct the analysis are journal, articles, book and the internet. The result of the analysis shows that women can also participate in public and society when they are given the same opportunity as men have.

Keywords: feminism, stereotypes, liberal feminist, public places

INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses about the relationship between feminism and the stereotypes in the movie *Mulan*, by Walt Disney (1998). The issue in this movie is interesting because *Mulan*, the main character, tries to break the rules in her society. Being a woman is not as easy as people think. To support the analysis, Liberal Feminism theory is used as a tool to analyze the issue arised in this movie..

This movie begins with the Huns attacking a dynasty in China. This made the Chinese emperor have to set a conscription where each family must send male members to join the war, including *Mulan*'s family. The only man in the

Mulan's family is his father but he is a war veteran with an injury to his leg. Under these conditions, Mulan was secretly disguised as a man to replace his father in the war.

In Mulan's residence, the women should be able to be a beautiful person in order to be a good wife later. Mulan is unable to fulfill it and is deemed not to bring the honour to his family. When she joins the war, the war is successful and the enemy loses. Mulan not only becomes an honour for her family but she also becomes an honour for many people.

Feminist Theory

Stereotypes are labelling to the groups or people and the characteristics but most of stereotypes tend to be negative. In this world women have the stereotype of being weak or as inferior class. Women are also considered as less educated figures. Because of this stereotype women feel uncomfortable. Besides that, women are not the same as men. Finally women made a first movement in 1840 - 1925 to speak about their anxiety. McCann says that feminism comes from France, *femme* which means "woman" with the suffix *ism*, meaning political position (Wood, 2009). The real meaning of the word feminism is women's political position but now the meaning changes, the focus is not only in politics but broader.

Feminist theory reminds that the relationship between men and women in society is often unequal and reflects a particular patriarchal ideology. Patriarchy is like a system in which men take control over the women. Because of this statement many people think that feminists hate men. Feminists hate unequally rights. Many women are just silent even though they are treated unfairly.

There is another definition of feminism according to some people. Katha Pollitt says (Jones, 2017),

"To me, to be a feminist is to answer the question "Are women human?" with a yes. It is not about whether women are better than, worse than, or identical with men. ... It's about

justice, fairness, and access to the broad range of human experience....it's about women having intrinsic value as person. ... human beings, in the other words. No more, no less."

Jennifer Baumgardner also says (Sen, 2017),

"Feminism is a word that describes a social-justice movement for gender equity and human liberation. ...By feminists we mean each and every politically and socially conscious woman or man who works for equality within outside the movement."

From two explanations above, it can be concluded that feminism is not about women are better or worse than men, but it is about justice of both gender and the value of women as human being.

Based on the history, feminism is divided into three waves. Each wave has its own focus. The first wave focuses on the rights politics of women. It happened in 1840-1925. The second wave that occurred in 1960-1995 produced some types of feminism those are:

1. Radical feminism, it focuses on oppressed women.
2. Lesbian feminism, it responds to women who has distorted orientation.
3. Liberal feminism, it focuses to the equality in all aspect.
4. Multiracial feminism, it believes that race is main power in the societies.
5. Power feminism, it believes that society does not oppress women because women have the power to control what happens to them.

And the third wave is courage to end violence against women. It aims to limit the ability of parents to participate in work to get paid.

Liberal feminism is a movement that demands the equal rights between men and women. Men always be side who always get the benefits, liberal feminism argues that the patriarchal system is the cause of oppression of women. In this paper the writer agrees with the liberal feminism because the focus on the individual rights and equal opportunities. Liberal feminism also argues that changing social and legal policies can help women to achieve both of those. I choose this theory because Mulan is a figure who chooses to act without thinking about gender roles and ignoring the rules about how women should behave. She shows that any of us can do anything that we want to do.

METHODOLOGY

Descriptive qualitative is used to analyze the topic in this paper. This study used library research as its method to analyze the issue of feminism in *Mulan* movie. The sources are based on the books, articles, journals, and the internet. The steps used in this research are watching the movie, doing close-reading to the dialogue several times, and then reading the theory of characterization, stereotype, and liberal feminism. This research used liberal feminism theory as an approach to analyze the relationship between feminism of Mulan's character and gender stereotype in Mulan's society. It helped the writer to analyze how Mulan, the woman main character, fights for her rights to be equal to men in her society, which still holds a strong gender stereotypes about femininity and masculinity. Liberal feminism theory provides an understanding that women have the same rights as men. This theory believes that women have to be equal to men. The last step was the writer took conclusions based on the analysis in the discussion.

DISCUSSION

Being a woman is not easy. This could possibly be a saying for most women who live their life in a society that place them as inferior to men. Having a setting of place in a village that still upholds cultural values where men are number one and always superior to women, Mulan is trapped in the rules and traditions that are not in favor of women's life. Mulan is the representation of one of the tough women in her society. She does not take for granted what women are supposed to do and to be in her society. Through this movie, it is shown how a woman should give the best impression in front of men in order to become an ideal woman for men. It is shown that Mulan's body is measured by two old women. This scene shows how a woman must look attractive in front of men by wearing beautiful clothes and having a slim body.

"Men want girls with good taste. Calm. Obedient." (00.07.10 – 00.07.18)

The sounds from two women in this scene also adds pressure to women that they should fulfill the criteria to attract men. Therefore, most women only carry out activities at home because they think that one of the functions of their existence is to be a decoration to make a man proud of herself. The word 'obedient' here implies that women have to obey to all kinds of rules and orders from men. In eastern culture that still holds a patriarchal system, men act as leaders and women are subordinates. In the community where Mulan lives, all people, both men and women, strongly believe in cultural values and they do not mind the inequality between men and women.

Besides that, having an ideal body has the aim to bear her children in the future.

The Matchmaker: "Too skinny."

The Matchmaker: "Not good for bearing son."

(00.09.23 - 00.09.27)

This is a demand for women because they are asked to have children. Indirectly they must be at home to take care of children and other homework. In addition to her physical appearance to attract men's attention, women must be obedient to men especially when they talk. This is shown when Chi-Fu is talking to Mulan's father with angry intonations. He says that women should hold their conversation before men.

Chi-Fu: "Silence! You would do well to teach your daughter to hold her tongue in a man's presence."

(00.15.26 - 00.15.29)

He does not like that any woman who argues his speaks. He thinks that women do not have rights to do that. He thinks that men are more powerful than women, and women always are the inferior class. This scene represents the condition that mostly happens in a patriarchal society. According to Hartmann (in Zwiech, 2009), patriarchy is a set of social relations that have basic material. What is a sign of the existence of patriarchy is the hierarchical relationship and solidarity between men that allows them to control women. This explains that

patriarchal culture supports the notion in society about men having the power to control women.

Mulan: "How 'bout a girl who's got a brain? Who always speaks her mind?"

(00.49.00 – 00.49.06)

Chi-Fu: "That creature's not worth protecting."

Li Shang: "She's a hero."

Chi-Fu: "She's a woman! She'll never be worth anything"

(01.15.31 - 01.15.35)

Grandmother: "She brings home a sword, if you ask me, she should've brought home a man."

(01.19.57.59)

Chi-Fu is a misogynist, he considers that women are never valuable even if they have a great achievement. This situation is just as described by Madsen (in Veronika, 2008) that relate to cultural system of patriarchy. He explains that patriarchy is a term that refers to government by men. Patriarchy is a cultural system that prioritizes men in all things, masculine, and a political system that places power in the hands of men, and serves the interest of men at the expense of women. In this scene, we can see how the women do not allow to take part in the public. For men, the intelligence of women is not important because physical appearances are more important. Not only men, older people are also the component from the society which gives the value to women. The act of Grandmother also proves that the intelligence of women is nothing. For old people, women who have husbands are more important.

These acts above show that Mulan does not have freedom to express herself. Mulan does not have rights in the society even when she had reached the great achievement. In addition, she lives in a stereotypical circle about how a woman should act. It represents women in real life. Gender stereotype is one of the kinds of stereotypes that best describe Mulan's situation. Gender stereotypes

are the depiction of men who strongly suggest as strong, adventurous, and brave. Those traits are labelled to men who are then more often referred to 'masculine'. On the other hand, women are considered to be good at performing household and taking care of their appearances. Women are depicted as having a gentle, timid nature, and weak. These traits are suggested that it is then called as 'feminine' (Pujiyanti & Zuliani, 2014).

Mulan lives in a society who believe that women are in charge of the house and taking care of their appearances. Mulan's character is described not to give up easily to her circumstances that make her marginalized. She wanted to go against the rules and traditions in order to be able to prove that women also deserve to be in the position of men.

The scene when Mulan cuts her long hair (00.18.53) proves that she is really serious with her plans. She also wanted to break the stereotype that women have to be beautiful of their appearances and weak in their action. For women, hair is a crown and many people assume that beautiful women are women who have long hair. Mulan already ignores the rules that exist in the society, especially related to physical appearances. She prepares herself carefully to take the role as a man. She leaves her home to carry out activities in the public spaces which are usually dominated by men. This is also an emphasis that gender roles are not important for her.

Mulan proves that a woman can do what a man can do. In this situation she is able to fight. Fight or war is something big in Chinese culture and society. If she can do great things like participate in a war then she can also do other things. Usually heavy works such as climbing, fixing things, and other work that need physical strength are only done by men. Mulan shows that all work can be done by anyone regardless of gender. This movie shows that actually men are not too strong figures. They also need help from others. This is shown when Mulan helps Li Shan when he traps in an avalanche (00.57.55 - 00.57.56). It is also proves that feminist does not hate men. If she hates men, she will leave Li Shang or she will not replace her father. Feminist hate inequality not person. Mulan is a

reflection of feminist. Although she just replaces his father, she finds her purpose. She can refuse to replace her father with the reason that she is a woman, but she does not. Mulan feels that she does not fill the criteria as a woman in the society then she looks for other criteria.

Mulan breaks the rules in her society but she still takes the responsibility. She faces the consequences. She also proves that women can get a place in the public. Liberal feminism has goal to pursue the equality in all aspect but still pay attention to the responsibility. Not being the same as stereotyping in society is not wrong. Here is the role of liberal feminism, helping women to break the stereotypes that are considered wrong in society.

CONCLUSION

Mulan is one example of a victim of the stereotypes of her society, especially gender stereotype. Mulan's character is well-illustrated as a woman who has power and a strong mind. It proves that she is a feminist who doesn't want to take for granted what women are supposed to be in her society. Mulan is the representation of most women who take serious action in fighting for women's equality. Inequality will always be present in society, besides that the role of stereotypes makes this problem more complicated. Through this film, it can be learned that women basically can be in the public space as long as they have the same opportunity as men have. In addition, wrong stereotypes can be broken as long as they are able to take the responsibility for them.

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