

# Gender Stereotypes: Masculine & Feminine Traits Represented by Mulan in Mulan Movie Launched in 2020

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## KEYWORDS

Gender Stereotypes,  
Mulan Movie (2020),  
Masculine- Feminine Traits,  
Characterization,  
Film Studies

## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the representation of gender stereotypes through the characterization of Hua Mulan in Disney's live-action film *Mulan* (2020). It aims to identify and analyze both masculine and feminine traits displayed by the protagonist and explore how these traits reflect or challenge traditional gender norms. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, the research is grounded in the gender stereotype frameworks proposed by Brannon (2016), Copenhaver (2002), and Evans & Davies (2009). The analysis also utilizes the characterization theory by Boggs and Petrie (2008), focusing on five cinematic techniques: appearance, dialogue, external action, internal action, and reactions of other characters. The findings reveal that Mulan exhibits six masculine-coded traits such as assertiveness, bravery, risk-taking, independence, leadership, and strategic thinking; and three feminine-coded traits such as emotional expression, nurturing, and empathy. The masculine traits are more dominant, suggesting a shift away from conventional portrayals of female characters. Nevertheless, the presence of feminine traits presents Mulan as a multidimensional figure, one who embodies both strength and sensitivity. Through her development, Mulan evolves from a constrained and misunderstood daughter into a self-actualized warrior, defying gender expectations and affirming that courage, empathy, and leadership are not confined to a specific gender. The study concludes that *Mulan* (launched in 2020) offers a progressive depiction of femininity that challenges rigid gender binaries, promoting a more inclusive vision of heroism and identity in modern cinema.

**How to cite:** Lamba, L. F. F., Fermadez, S., & Huan, E. (2025). Gender Stereotypes: Masculine and Feminine Traits Represented by Mulan in *Mulan* Movie (2020). *SPARKLE Journal of Language, Education and Culture* 7 (1) 73-84

## INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, cinema has become a significant cultural artifact that not only entertains but also shapes public consciousness, including perceptions of gender roles. According to Bordwell (2008), film serves as a powerful medium through which social ideologies and cultural values are constructed, reinforced, and disseminated. As such, the representation of characters in film plays a crucial role in either perpetuating or challenging dominant narratives, particularly those related to gender. Gender representation in film especially the portrayal of masculinity and femininity has long been a subject of critical inquiry in media and cultural studies.

Historically, female characters in mainstream media, especially in early Disney films, were often depicted as submissive, domestic, and emotionally dependent. Lips (2005) observes that these portrayals have contributed to shaping societal expectations of women by promoting narrow and stereotypical ideals of femininity. However, in recent years, Disney has increasingly portrayed more complex and empowered female protagonists. Characters such as Elsa (*Frozen*), Moana (*Moana*), and Merida (*Brave*) reflect a shift toward independence, leadership, and agency. These films mark a broader evolution in how femininity is represented, often challenging traditional gender norms.

Several recent studies have explored gender representation in Disney films. Ramadhan (2019) analyzed *Moana* (2016) and found that the protagonist reflects both masculine and feminine traits, with bravery and independence as dominant qualities. Putri (2023) examined *Frozen* (2013) and emphasized themes of female leadership and emotional strength, while Wardah and Kusuma (2022) studied *Raya and the Last Dragon* (2021) and highlighted the visual portrayal of women as strong and independent. While these studies provide valuable insights, most of them focus on symbolic or thematic feminist readings, without closely analyzing the protagonist's personality traits in relation to gender-coded stereotypes. Moreover, they often overlook cinematic characterization techniques in constructing gender identity. This study fills that gap by offering a detailed trait-based analysis of Hua Mulan in *Mulan* (2020) using gender stereotype theory and cinematic methods.

Disney's *Mulan* (2020) offers a compelling case for such analysis. As a live action adaptation of the 1998 animated version, *Mulan* (2020) presents a more grounded and culturally respectful retelling of the Chinese legend of Hua Mulan, a young woman who disguises herself as a man to join the imperial army in place of her ailing father. Unlike many classic Disney narratives, the film eliminates romantic subplots and musical elements, focusing instead on martial valor, loyalty, and personal identity. Central to the film is the negotiation of gender roles through the protagonist's characterization and development.

This study aims to examine how gender stereotypes are reflected in *Mulan* (2020) and to analyze the masculine and feminine traits represented through Mulan's characterization. It also explores how these traits function to reinforce or challenge traditional gender norms within the cinematic narrative. This study focuses exclusively on Mulan as the object of analysis, examining selected scenes, dialogue, and cinematic elements to identify her personality traits. This research is significant both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, it contributes to gender and film studies by offering a focused examination of how cinematic characterization constructs gender identity in a major global film. Practically, it provides educators, students, and viewers with a critical framework to interpret media representations of gender, fostering deeper media literacy and more inclusive understandings of identity.

By analyzing how *Mulan* (2020) depicts masculinity and femininity through a single female protagonist, this research highlights how strength and sensitivity, leadership and empathy, can coexist within one character. The film thereby challenges the binary view of gender and promotes a more integrated and progressive vision of heroism in contemporary storytelling.

## METHOD

This research uses a qualitative descriptive approach to analyze how gender stereotypes are represented through the character of Hua Mulan in the live action film *Mulan* (2020). A qualitative descriptive method is appropriate because the study seeks to explore and interpret the personality traits and gender-related representations that appear in a film text. This method focuses on describing and analyzing data in the form of dialogue, character actions, visual appearance, and narrative events that reflect both masculine and feminine traits. The primary object of the study is the Disney film *Mulan* (2020), directed by Niki Caro, with specific attention to the characterization of the protagonist, Hua Mulan. Other characters are considered only in terms of how they influence or respond to Mulan's character. The main data sources consist of selected scenes and dialogues from the film that reveal the character traits of Mulan. These were obtained through repeated viewings, screenshot documentation, and transcription of significant scenes. The researcher also used analytical notes to support the interpretation process. The theoretical frameworks used in this study include gender stereotype theories by Brannon (2016), Copenhaver (2002), and Evans & Davies (2009), which categorize personality traits as either masculine or feminine. In addition, the characterization theory proposed by Boggs and Petrie (2008) was used to identify Mulan's traits through five elements: appearance, dialogue, external action, internal action, and the reactions of other characters. Data were collected through documentation techniques, including observing and identifying important scenes, selecting relevant quotations

or visual cues, and organizing them according to the characterization types and gendered trait categories. The data were then analyzed thematically and interpretively to describe how Mulan's traits represent masculine and feminine qualities and how these traits either reinforce or challenge traditional gender roles.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the analysis of the film, a total of nine gender-related traits were identified in Hua Mulan's characterization, six categorized as masculine and three as feminine. While masculine traits such as bravery, independence, and leadership appear more prominently, the presence of feminine traits like empathy and nurturing adds complexity to her portrayal. The table below summarizes the classification and construction of these traits, using gender frameworks by Brannon (2016), Copenhaver (2002), Evans & Davies (2009), and cinematic characterization methods by Boggs and Petrie (2008).

*Table 1 Mulan's Gender Personality Trait Classification (Adapted from Evans & Davies, 2009) Masculine Traits (Evans & Davies, 2009):*

No	Trait	Gender Classification	Characterization
1	Assertiveness	Masculine	Dialogue, External Action
2	Risk-taking	Masculine	External Action, Internal Action
3	Independence	Masculine	Internal Action, External Action
4	Leadership	Masculine	Reactions of Others, External Action
5	Strategic Thinking	Masculine	Internal Action, External Action
6	Bravery	Masculine	Appearance, External Action
7	Emotional Expression	Feminine	Dialogue, Internal Action
8	Nurturing	Feminine	Dialogue, Internal Action
9	Empathy	Feminine	Dialogue, Reactions

As shown in Table 1, Mulan's characterization reveals a stronger presence of masculine-coded traits, positioning her as a character who challenges traditional female roles through courage, initiative, and leadership. However, her moments of emotional openness and care also reflect feminine-coded traits, allowing for a more balanced and humanized depiction. The following section explores each trait in detail, beginning with the masculine-coded characteristics:

### Masculine Traits Represented by Mulan

Masculine traits refer to characteristics traditionally associated with men such as bravery, independence, leadership, assertiveness, and rationality which are often linked to control, emotional restraint, and strength (Brannon, 2016; Copenhaver, 2002; Evans & Davies, 2009). These traits are not naturally exclusive to men, but are socially constructed expectations that influence how gender roles are depicted in media. Below are the masculine traits represented by Mulan in the film, as identified through selected scenes and cinematic characterization:

#### 1. Assertiveness

Assertiveness is one of the most dominant masculine traits expressed by Mulan. As defined by Brannon (2016) and Evans & Davies (2009), assertiveness involves the ability to state opinions confidently, take control of a situation, and express oneself even in the face of social disapproval. It reflects initiative and directness, traits traditionally coded as masculine. In contrast, women are often encouraged to be silent, agreeable, and avoid drawing attention. Mulan's assertiveness frequently brings her into conflict with the behavioral expectations of her society.

*Figure 1. Mulan attempts to save the tea utensils using both her hands and feet (00:18:00–00:18:34)*



*Screenshot from Mulan (2020), 00:18:00–00:18:34*

In a tea ceremony scene, Mulan's sister is frightened by a spider crawling nearby. Reacting quickly and without hesitation, Mulan attempts to protect her sister and the ceremonial objects. She uses not only her hands but also her feet to balance and catch falling teacups. Though the intention is protective, her actions escalate into chaos. The matchmaker is outraged, and Mulan's family is left in shame.

This moment demonstrates external action and dialogue that illustrate Mulan's assertiveness. She does not freeze or defer to others; instead, she acts on instinct, takes control, and disrupts the ritual. Though unintended, the disruption itself symbolizes her resistance to femininity's passive, graceful ideal. Her boldness and initiative challenge what Brannon describes as the Cult of True Womanhood, which upholds submissiveness and domestic composure as feminine virtues. Mulan's actions foreshadow her refusal to conform to those expectations, revealing a deeply rooted assertiveness often linked with masculinity

## 2. Risk-Taking

Risk-taking is a significant masculine-coded trait embodied by Mulan. Brannon (2016) and Evans & Davies (2009) define it as the willingness to face uncertainty or danger in pursuit of a greater goal. It typically involves courage and disregard for personal safety. In many cultures, taking risks is considered a masculine trait, whereas women are expected to avoid confrontation and danger. Mulan subverts this stereotype multiple times throughout the film.

*Figure 2. Taking Her Father's Armor and Sword (00:22:00–00.24:30)*



*Screenshot from Mulan (2020), 00:22:00–00.24:30*

In this powerful sequence, Mulan quietly prepares to leave home at night. She binds her chest, cuts her hair, wears her father's armor, and departs on horseback. The scene is silent but emotionally charged, emphasizing her internal action and determined facial expression. This act is not only brave but unlawful, imperial law forbids women from enlisting. Mulan knowingly risks death and dishonor.

Her decision illustrates risk-taking through internal conviction and external action. She acts without consulting her family, driven by a moral code rather than fear. The choice marks a dramatic shift in her character arc: she no longer tries to fit in, but actively reclaims agency and control. Her actions redefine heroism as independent of gender.

*Figure 3. Mulan kneels in front of Commander Tung and reveals her true identity (01:12:15–01:13:45)*



*Screenshot from Mulan (2020), 01:12:15–01:13:45*

After saving her battalion during a surprise ambush, Mulan chooses to reveal her identity to Commander Tung. She appears in civilian attire, without armor, and kneels in front of the army. Her voice trembles, yet she speaks truthfully: "I would rather be executed than hide who I am." The emotional weight and vulnerability of this moment highlight another dimension of risk, the emotional and social cost of authenticity. This scene reflects not just physical danger, but the risk of social rejection and punishment. It further disrupts the gender norm that expects women to remain compliant and hidden.

### 3. Independence

Independence, a key masculine trait according to Copenhaver (2002), involves self-reliance and autonomous decision making. Within patriarchal frameworks, men are expected to act independently, while women are often socialized to depend on others. Mulan, however, repeatedly demonstrates independent thinking and action throughout the film.

*Figure 4. Military Training Perseverance (00:33:24–00:50:43)*



*Screenshots from Mulan (2020), 00:33:24–00:50:43*

In the rigorous training camp, Mulan engages in sword-fighting, archery, and strength exercises. One of the most symbolic moments is when she carries two water buckets up a steep mountain. Many male soldiers fail this task, but Mulan endures, grits her teeth, and finishes without asking for help. She shows mental discipline, stamina, and a refusal to give up, key expressions of independence.

This long sequence involves both internal and external action. Mulan internalizes her hardship but turns it into fuel for self-growth. No one encourages her, and no one assists her. This process of silent endurance illustrates the masculine-coded expectation to "prove oneself" through action rather than emotion. Through this independence, Mulan challenges both physical and gender limitations, positioning herself as a warrior among men.

### 4. Leadership

Leadership, according to Brannon (2016), is a masculine-coded trait often linked to authority, initiative, and influence. Society often reserves leadership roles for men, particularly in militaristic or hierarchical structures. Mulan, however, gradually earns the authority to lead by demonstrating courage, intelligence, and moral clarity.

*Figure 5. Mulan leads her friends to fight and enter the emperor (01:22:45–01:22:51)*



*Screenshots from Mulan (2020), 01:22:45–01:22:51*

Following her victory in the battlefield, Mulan leads her comrades into the palace to stop Bori Khan. She takes command decisively and confidently, despite her outsider status. Commander Tung acknowledges her contributions with the words, "The kingdom is forever in your debt." This public recognition from a high-ranking male official affirms Mulan's status as a leader.

This moment reflects characterization through external action and reactions from others. Mulan is not just accepted; she is trusted and followed. The transition from outsider to leader underscores her



transformation and the acceptance of her authority. Her leadership is not rooted in dominance, but in service, clarity, and moral courage.

#### 5. Strategic Thinking

Strategic thinking defined by Copenhaver (2002) as logical, analytic decision-making geared toward long-term goals is traditionally coded as masculine. Men are expected to lead with logic and calculation, while women are often assumed to act emotionally. Mulan's ability to assess complex situations and devise original solutions directly contradicts this stereotype.

*Figure 6. Mulan fires a catapult toward a nearby mountain (01:07:48–01:11:17)*



*Screenshots from Mulan (2020), 01:07:48–01:11:17*

In a key battle, Mulan realizes that attacking the enemy head-on would be futile. Instead, she fires a catapult at a nearby mountain, causing an avalanche that wipes out the enemy force. This plan is not suggested by any male soldier or commander; it is hers alone.

Her actions reflect both external and internal strategic mastery. She considers topography, weapon placement, timing, and outcomes, all in a moment of chaos. The use of terrain as a tactical advantage shows Mulan's brilliance not just in combat but in leadership through foresight. Her actions redefine the role of women in war, not as pawns, but as intelligent agents of victory.

#### 6. Bravery

Bravery is one of the most celebrated masculine traits in both historical and contemporary narratives. According to Brannon (2016), bravery refers to the willingness to confront fear, danger, or adversity with courage and determination. Evans and Davies (2009) similarly classify bravery as a masculine trait, particularly in contexts involving physical or moral risk. In traditional representations, men are expected to be brave especially in war or leadership roles while women are often portrayed as fearful, gentle, or in need of protection. In *Mulan* (2020), however, the main character defies this convention through repeated displays of bravery from childhood through adulthood, positioning herself not only as a warrior but as the central heroic figure.

*Figure 7. Mulan is running across rooftops to catch a chicken that has escaped (00:01:49–00:03:22)*



*Screenshots from Mulan (2020), 00:01:49–00:03:22*

At the very beginning of the film, young Mulan is shown chasing a runaway chicken through her village. She runs across rooftops, balances expertly, and leaps between buildings. Her athleticism and fearlessness astonish the villagers, who expected her to act properly; quiet, restrained, and graceful.

This scene illustrates the earliest form of Mulan's external bravery. It introduces her as someone who naturally challenges gender expectations. Rather than staying indoors or behaving passively, she engages in bold physical activity typically reserved for boys. As Brannon (2016) explains in his "Sturdy Oak" model, bravery is linked to fearlessness, strength, and bold action; traits Mulan already exhibits as a child. Her parents' reaction, especially her father's concern that she must "hide her gift," further reflects societal discomfort with bravery when expressed by a girl.

*Figure 8. Mulan rides alone through the night and camps in the wilderness*



*Screenshots from Mulan (2020)*

In one of the most emotionally powerful sequences, Mulan is shown riding through the wilderness after leaving home in disguise. She camps alone under harsh conditions, without certainty of survival or support. There is no dialogue, only her solitude, fear, and silent endurance.

This moment, characterized by internal and external action, illustrates bravery at both physical and psychological levels. She does not merely face physical hardship; she accepts total isolation and the risk of discovery or death. This type of courage aligns with masculine ideals of fearlessness and endurance. Yet Mulan's version of bravery includes emotional vulnerability. She is not unafraid, but she acts despite the fear. This distinction enhances her humanity and deepens the complexity of her courage.

*Figure 9. Mulan kneels in front of Commander Tung and reveals her true identity (01:12:15–01:13:45)*



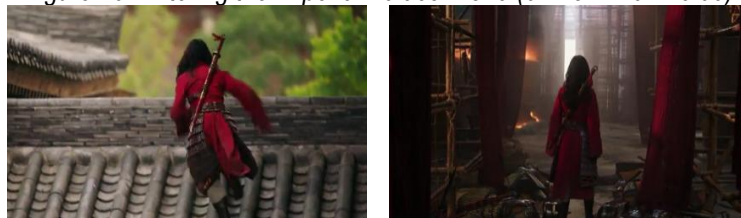
*Screenshots from Mulan (2020), 01:12:15–01:13:45*

After a victorious battle, Mulan returns to the camp and reveals her true identity. She walks in without armor or weapons, kneels before Commander Tung, and confesses, "I would rather be executed than hide who I am."

This dialogue-driven and internal-action scene is one of the clearest examples of bravery in the film. Mulan confronts not an enemy, but a patriarchal institution that forbids women to serve. She risks being punished or exiled not for failing, but for succeeding under false identity. Her action redefines bravery not as brute strength, but as the ability to be honest and vulnerable in a system that devalues your presence.

True bravery involves conscious choice to face danger. Mulan's act is deliberate, moral, and transformative not just for herself, but for those around her. In Brannon's "Sturdy Oak" model, such fortitude is masculine-coded. In Mulan's case, however, it is deeply feminine too because it comes from her identity as a woman, not despite it.

*Figure 10. Entering the Imperial Palace Alone (01:25:12–01:26:00)*



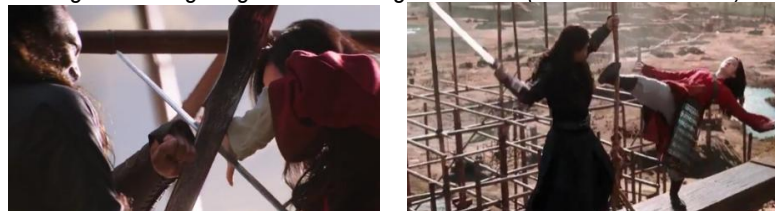
*Screenshots from Mulan (2020), 01:25:12–01:26:00*

After learning of Bori Khan's plans, Mulan chooses to enter the palace alone. She walks toward danger without orders or backup, determined to stop the attack and save the Emperor.

Here, external action and appearance show that Mulan has fully embraced her role as protector. Her posture is upright, her gaze focused, and her stride steady. She does not flinch or hesitate. Unlike typical

portrayals of female heroes who need assistance, Mulan takes full initiative. She is the one stepping into danger, uninvited, to save her nation.

*Figure 11. Fighting and Defeating Bori Khan (01:30:12–01:34:06)*



*Screenshots from Mulan (2020), 01:30:12–01:34:06*

In the climactic final battle, Mulan faces Bori Khan one-on-one. She outmanoeuvres him using agility, swordsmanship, and strategic thinking. Her expression remains composed, her decisions swift. She defeats him not through brute strength but through intelligence and fearlessness.

This moment, rich in external action and reaction, places Mulan in the archetypal hero's role, yet she performs it without masculine disguise. She fights not as "Hua Jun" (her male alias), but as Mulan, fully in her identity as a woman. The scene redefines the hero's role itself: bravery is no longer a masculine trait; it is a human one.

In conclusion, Mulan's character reveals a strong and consistent portrayal of traditionally masculine-coded traits, including assertiveness, risk-taking, independence, leadership, strategic thinking, and bravery. Each of these traits is illustrated through detailed scenes and supported by cinematic characterization techniques, offering a comprehensive understanding of how gender identity is constructed in the film.

Mulan's characterization subverts conventional gender roles. She does not passively conform to societal expectations; instead, she challenges them, not by discarding her femininity but by embracing traits that are typically denied to women. Her actions show that strength, courage, intelligence, and leadership are not exclusive to men. They are universal human attributes.

Through Mulan, the film presents a modern, multifaceted image of a female protagonist; one who is emotionally expressive yet rational, vulnerable yet brave, obedient yet rebellious. These masculine-coded traits, far from erasing her identity, help redefine what it means to be a hero in contemporary narratives.

### **Feminine Traits Represented by Mulan**

Feminine traits refer to characteristics traditionally associated with women, such as emotional expression, nurturing, and empathy. These traits are commonly linked to sensitivity, compassion, and relational awareness (Brannon, 2016; Copenhaver, 2002; Evans & Davies, 2009). Like masculine traits, they are socially constructed rather than biologically determined. Below are the feminine traits represented by Mulan in the film, as identified through selected scenes and cinematic characterization.

#### **1. Emotional Expression**

Emotional expression is frequently cited as a core feminine-coded trait. As defined by Copenhaver (2002), it refers to the willingness or ability to display vulnerability, care, and sensitivity. In contrast to the masculine ideal of emotional stoicism, women are often expected to express their feelings. Particularly those related to empathy, sorrow, or emotional conflict. In *Mulan* (2020), emotional expression emerges most clearly when Mulan experiences internal turmoil between her true self and societal expectations.

*Figure 12. Talking with Her Family about Marriage (00:14:40–00:14:55)*



*Screenshots from Mulan (2020), 00:14:40–00:14:55*



In this quiet scene, Mulan sits with her family as they discuss her arranged marriage. Her parents express hope that she will bring honor to the family by fulfilling this duty. Mulan does not object; she softly replies, "I will bring honor to our family." Her voice is low, her tone restrained, and her expression empty.

This moment reflects internal action and dialogue that highlight Mulan's emotional conflict. She hides her discomfort and submits to the discussion to avoid disappointing her family. The scene demonstrates how women, under societal expectations, often suppress true feelings to maintain harmony. Brannon's (2016) theory of "feminine passivity" applies here: Mulan does not rebel in this moment she conforms, but her silence conveys deep inner struggle. Her restraint is not weakness, but a gendered form of emotional endurance.

*Figure 13. Mulan's father told her to hide her Chi (00:05:27–00:06:13)*



*Screenshots from Mulan (2020), 00:05:27–00:06:13*

From childhood, Mulan's father tells her to suppress her *chi*, insisting it is "too strong" for a girl. He tells her to hide her gift and become someone acceptable in their society. Her silence in response reflects both obedience and pain.

This early scene frames Mulan's lifelong emotional suppression as something culturally conditioned. As Evans & Davies (2009) note, young girls are taught to manage their expressions in favor of compliance. Mulan's journey of self-restraint begins here, showcasing how emotional expression even when subdued is gendered, taught, and internalized.

*Figure 14. Mulan's face is filled with worry of what to do (00:33:22–00:34:00)*



*Screenshots from Mulan (2020), 00:33:22–00:34:00*

Later in training camp, Mulan shows hesitation and fear during the morning briefing when they are warned about punishment for dishonesty. Her facial expression conveys concern, not only about her secret being discovered, but about what that would mean for her identity and the people around her.

This visual moment shows a rich layer of emotional expressiveness without words. Her silence, again, reflects her internal conflict, caught between survival and truth. According to gender theory, this form of emotional complexity marked by quiet suffering and psychological tension. It is culturally linked to femininity, yet here it builds narrative empathy.

## 2. Nurturing

Nurturing is the tendency to care for, support, and protect others. It is traditionally considered a feminine trait, as outlined by Brannon (2016) and Evans & Davies (2009), and often associated with motherly roles or emotional caretaking. However, Mulan's nurturing does not emerge through domesticity, but through moral responsibility and sacrifice on the battlefield.

Figure 15. *Mulan fires a catapult toward a nearby mountain to protect her soldiers (01:07:48–01:11:17)*



*Screenshots from Mulan (2020), 01:07:48–01:11:17*

This scene, earlier analyzed for Mulan's strategic thinking, also powerfully illustrates her nurturing quality. Faced with a life-or-death decision, she chooses to redirect the catapult not toward the enemy directly, but toward the mountain, triggering an avalanche that protects her fellow soldiers and defeats the enemy.

Her decision, while brilliant, is also motivated by concern for the safety of others. Mulan's nurturing here is not passive. It is active, forceful, and deeply selfless. Rather than seeking glory or asserting dominance, her actions are guided by care and protection. This reflects what Evans & Davies (2009) describe as "compassionate agency". Acting with strength not for power, but for others' well-being. It reframes nurturing as not only feminine, but as a vital quality of leadership.

### 3. Empathy

Empathy; the ability to understand and share the emotions of others is closely tied to femininity in gender literature. Copenhaver (2002) and Evans & Davies (2009) frame empathy as a socially cultivated emotional intelligence that allows for relational harmony and communal care. While often excluded from heroic archetypes, empathy in *Mulan* (2020) becomes essential to her human complexity.

Figure 16. *Mulan's face is filled with worry of what to do (00:33:22–00:34:00)*



*Screenshots from Mulan (2020), 00:33:22–00:34:00*

This same moment discussed under emotional expression also reveals Mulan's empathetic dimension. Her anxiety is not solely about being discovered. It is about the impact her exposure might have on her fellow soldiers. If she is revealed, it could lead to disorder or disgrace among her comrades.

Her silence and restraint reflect a calculated, compassionate decision not to protect herself, but others. She chooses to withhold her truth because she understands the potential social fallout.

Emotionally aware decision-making is a defining marker of empathy. Mulan's empathy operates quietly but powerfully. It shapes her moral compass and deepens her connection to the people around her.

While the film foregrounds Mulan's masculine-coded attributes, her feminine traits are equally important in building a full and realistic character. Emotional expression, nurturing, and empathy do not weaken her image as a hero; instead, they enrich it. These traits show that femininity is not incompatible with courage and power. Mulan's journey reflects the possibility of integrating both sides of the gender spectrum: she is assertive and caring, brave and vulnerable, independent and empathetic.

This blending of masculine and feminine qualities supports a more humanized and progressive representation of gender. Rather than adhering to rigid gender binaries, Mulan's character reflects

contemporary understandings of gender as fluid, performative, and multidimensional. Her heroism is not defined by how much she resembles a man, but by how she embraces her full self; strong, kind, and true.

### **Gender Stereotypes Reflected and Challenged in *Mulan* (2020)**

The characterization of Hua Mulan in *Mulan* (2020) presents a dynamic negotiation between traditional and progressive gender representations. At the outset, the film reflects conventional gender stereotypes aligned with Brannon's (2016) framework: Mulan is expected to embody obedience, modesty, and domesticity; traits rooted in *The Cult of True Womanhood*. These expectations are evident in scenes where her family urges her to marry and hide her chi, reinforcing the notion that strength and ambition are incompatible with femininity.

In contrast, the military setting upholds *Male Sex Role Identity*, portraying leadership, bravery, and independence as inherently masculine. Mulan must conceal her identity to enter this space, suggesting that only men are culturally permitted to possess such traits.

However, the film simultaneously challenges these norms. As the story unfolds, Mulan demonstrates that attributes like courage, strategic thinking, and leadership are not exclusive to men. Her success stems not from rejecting her femininity but from integrating both masculine and feminine-coded traits; assertiveness and bravery coexist with empathy and care. This portrayal destabilizes binary gender roles and aligns with the notion that gender is socially constructed and fluid, as proposed by Brannon (2016) and Butler (1990).

In sum, *Mulan* (2020) both reflects and subverts traditional gender stereotypes. By crafting a protagonist who thrives in a male-dominated domain without suppressing her emotional depth, the film promotes a more inclusive and humanized understanding of heroism, one that embraces a full spectrum of gendered traits.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study explored the representation of gender stereotypes in Disney's *Mulan* (2020) by analyzing the masculine and feminine traits embodied by the protagonist, Hua Mulan. The analysis identified six masculine-coded traits and three feminine-coded traits, revealing that Mulan's characterization is more strongly shaped by traditionally masculine qualities such as assertiveness, bravery, and leadership. These traits allow her to succeed in a male-dominated world and challenge gender norms that associate strength and authority solely with men.

However, the inclusion of feminine-coded traits such as emotional expression, nurturing, and empathy illustrates that her heroism is not defined by masculinity alone. Instead, Mulan embodies a balanced integration of both sides of the gender spectrum, challenging the binary constructs of gender identity. Ultimately, *Mulan* (2020) presents a progressive portrayal of female identity, showing that strength, compassion, and resilience are human traits, not limited by gender.

These findings not only deepen our understanding of gender representation in film but also open pathways for future studies to explore how female characters are portrayed in similar live-action adaptations. Researchers may also consider comparative analyses between animated and live-action versions to examine shifts in gender ideology across time and media. Additionally, audiences are encouraged to engage critically with cinematic narratives, recognizing the subtle ways in which gender roles are constructed, reinforced, or reimaged.

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