



THE ILLUSION OF EMPOWERMENT: A FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF DISNEY'S HERCULES

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ABSTRACT

Disney's Hercules, which features both a strong male and female lead, and has the potential to appeal to and influence a larger group of child viewers. Meg the female lead is often touted as a feminist character, which is also praised for her independence from men. But still Meg lacks agency and acts within the confines of traditional gender roles which reinforces stereotypes about gender. This essay includes a feminist media analysis of Hercules focusing specifically on how Meg's physical appearance and agency work to construct gender in the movie. This interaction contributes to the creation of the fictional post feminist world in which feminism is no longer necessary.

Disney princess are especially well known and have historically presented very limited and narrow definitions of feminist (Towbin's, Haddock, Zimmersman Lund, Tanner 2003), though not a princess movie, Disney's Hercules is a movie with a prominent female character (Meg). Hercules provides an interesting opportunity in analyzing because the male lead and the presence of very strong female character allow it to be considered as a gender neutral film. Hercules was released in the midst of the "Renaissance princess era", in which the princess fights against her patriarchal system yet still reinforces many of the same old values. Meg is often considered as an empowering Disney's Feminist; despite her independence she still enforces traditional views of gender. Meg positions as both powerful and subjugated, and establishes her not only as a feminist character but also as a member of post feminist Disney's universe.

KEYWORDS :

THE REAL MCGOY:

The movie centers on Hercules who's born as a god but changes into a mortal and left on earth by minions of the evil god Hades. Upon discovering his true parentage, Hercules embarks on a journey to restore his godhood by becoming a true hero; Hercules encounters Meg for the first time and saves her from a monster. Meg falls in love before her betrayal is revealed but, Meg sacrifices her life for Hercules in return Hercules restores his godhood. The movie ends with; Hercules decides to stay on earth with Meg at the price of his immortality. There are many numbers of changes that this movie makes to the original Hercules myths. Hercules is one among few Disney movies that depicts the non-western beliefs, which changes the original story in order to fit into the dominant paradigm of our society, potentially ignoring the original myth moral (Towbin et al 2003,38) The major change to the original Hercules myth is the role of Hera. In the original myth, Hercules is the Zeus's bastard child whom Hera despises. In Disney's Hera, Hercules doting mother whose only role in the film is just that: this reinforces the idea that a woman's main role is to be a mother and the women overall are nurturing, loving and affectionate.

THE ONE-LINERS:

Meg drops an empowering and seemingly feminist one-liner that encourages us to see her as strong and independent. Meg has numerous other one-liners throughout the films that continue to characterize her in a way opposite to how she is actually depicted. One example of how Disney (has) often appropriated the "rhetoric of feminism" throughout the film, it that a prominent one in Hercules. A number of these others lines includes: "Well, you know how men are. They think 'no' means 'yes' and 'get lost' means 'take me' I'll be alright, 'tie my own sandals and everything'. This statement clearly demonstrates that Meg is aware of the issue the modern woman often faces. And these lines are designed to resonate with men. Meg describes herself as tough and capable of everything but yet, ultimately she needs to be saved by Hercules multiple times to both survive and enjoy freedom, from Hades. Meg one-liners often perceived her as strongest personality quirks and the one- liners are used as a tool to further push the idea of post- feminism.

TYING HER OWN SANDALS:

The most complicated aspect of Meg as a character in her agency which is not constant throughout the movie. When at first Meg is seen in the clutches of monster, she doesn't have much agency and though it is assumed Hercules has restored her freedom when he saves her, we quickly learn of her servitude to Hades. Thus she starts out with very little personal power. Hades consistently taunts Meg with her freedom throughout the movie. The status of Meg's independence and personal power is adequately summarized in one quote said by Hades: " Meg, Meg, Meg, my sweet, deluded little minion, aren't we forgetting one teensy, weensy but ever so critical little tiny detail? I own you! (

Dewey, Clements, Musker 1997). Meg is often perceived by being a feminist character. Disney's attempts to characterize the world as a post-feminist one are to at least some degree successful. We view feminism and its goal of equality as something that has been already achieved (at least in this movie). Throughout the film Meg's agency \freedom is depicted as her main goal. Here Meg is not entirely passive, not entirely active, but listed in the category of female character. This classification acknowledges Meg's constraints while still recognizing that she wishes to be in control of her own life. She frees herself through action which is not done for her, but which implies that a woman should act out of self-interest or with regards to her own safety, which again contributes the idea of post- feminism because the scene implies Meg has made her own decision, yet still reinforces traditional gender roles in terms of self sacrifice.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION:

Meg is constructed as a feminist Disney character that embodies a fierce spirit and a rejection of traditional gendered expectations and she is often remembered in this way. This analysis reveals that Meg reinforces traditional standards of beauty, and which also appropriates the rhetoric of feminism in order to be seen as more realistic and relatable. Additionally Meg's characterization serves to promote a post-feminist agenda that creates a more positive view of Meg's status in life and also in the eyes of the viewer that is actually constructed in the movie itself. This paper supports (Daalman's and van Hessels conclusion 2014) about the positive representations of women in Disney movies that while the female leads may appear to be forward thinking and representations of modern women, the traditional stereotypes about female and male roles are still incorporated in the narrative (19). And additionally this demonstrates that Meg's narrative continues to promote three of four tropes of women in Disney films as identified by (Towbin et al 2003) a woman's appearance is more valued than her intellect, women are helpless and in need of protection, and women are domestic and likely to marry, these dialogues in the movie serves to promote an air of progressiveness and female empowerment that is directly constrained and nullified by the actual narrative plot. Disney movies are portion of popular culture ripe for continuous study especially as these studies continue to reveal the stagnant nature of Disney's representation of gender.

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