

# Disney vs. the future of men

[Technology](#), [Future](#)



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Thesis: The constructs of masculinity found in most Disney movies create an environment of images that shape and define what young boys view as masculinity. By presenting sexist relationships, physical expectations, and violence and dominance to represent power, young boys are left feeling emotionally unattached and physically inadequate. How many Disney movies did you see as a child? How many of those movies did you watch over and over again? And how many of the songs you so lovingly watched over and over again can you still sing today?

The Walt Disney Company has been a powerful force in creating childhood culture all around the world. Disney's massive success is based on images of innocence, magic and fun. Its animated films in particular are praised as wholesome family entertainment. These movies are endorsed by teachers and parents, and are obviously immensely popular with children. The fun and innocence may have its value, but it is important to understand how these movies are representing the moral characteristics that the children viewing them will eventually grow up to represent themselves.

Most alarmingly is the representation of masculinity throughout many classic Disney movies such as *Mulan*, *The Lion King*, and *Beauty and the Beast*. These movies are presenting masculine complexes to young boys all over the world, giving them distorted images of what it means to be a man, and also how to relate to women. What is most dangerous about the way Disney movies represent masculinity is that the process is not a quick one. The means in which the media influences the way we think is less immediate, and has a much less straight forward impact on the way we think.

Disney movies in particular create a certain environment of images that we grow up with and eventually become used to. An example of such a group of images is the constant representation of the male body in Disney movies as buff, and chiseled. After a while these images begin to shape what young boys know and what they understand about the world around them. This is not an immediate effect, but instead a slow accumulative effect that is much more subtle than we are aware of.

One of the biggest problems with this process is that the Disney conglomerate has pned over nearly five generations, so no one thinks to challenge the idea that an animated Disney movie is a great way to entertain children while simultaneously sharing with them a piece of traditional culture. One of the most destructive ways in which classic animated Disney movies are providing young boys with false and distorted images of masculinity, are the ways in which men are shown in relationship to women. Most Disney movies revolve around a heterosexual relationship containing a hero and heroine.

Feminists have studied what these characters tell girls about themselves, but it is just as important if not more important to understand what these movies are telling boys about how real men interact with and treat women. Often the message to boys both explicitly and implicitly is that men should view women as objects of pleasure or as servants to please them. A perfect example of this misrepresentation is in the movie Mulan. In Mulan, an entire song called “A Girl Worth Fighting For”, explains what a man is looking for in a woman.

Some of these traits include cooking, cleaning, and looking beautiful for her husband. This quote from the song shows exactly what type of sexist characteristics are represented in *Mulan*. “ I want her paler than the moon, with eyes that shine like stars, my girl will marvel at my strength, adore my battle scars. I could care less what she’ll wear or look like, it all depends on what she cooks like” Another highly destructive construct that Disney movies present to young boys is the representation of the male body.

Disney movies glorify one particular body type above all others. Chiseled abs, a barrel chest and massive arms are typical of a male Disney character. Men with any other body type are generally viewed as outcasts, weak or subservient. One of the most extreme examples can be found in “ *Beauty and the Beast*”, where the contrast between the powerful male heroine figure, Gaston and his sidekick, LeFou is undeniable. The song entitled simply, “ *Gaston*” is entirely dedicated to glorifying Gaston’s manly physique and strength.

In contrast to this, LeFou is shown as short, chubby, and bucktoothed. In “ *Mulan*”, when Mulan attempts to join the Japanese army by passing as a man, she is taught very quickly that masculinity is defined by strength and physical ability alone. In the song, “ *I’ll Make a Man Out of You*” Mulan is taught that in order to achieve true manhood she must overcome strictly physical obstacles and challenges as opposed to any emotional ones. Other movies such as “ *Hercules*” and “ *Tarzan*” depict their main characters as buff, muscular men, with almost super human strength and ability.

While Tarzan surfs tree branches and swings from vine to vine with ease that can be compared to an Olympic gold medalist, Hercules lifts giant boulders,

and sleighs a three-headed mythological beast. Though the aspect of fantasy plays a role in these movies, the take home message is that characters like Tarzan and Hercules are men to be admired, imitated and idealized. Not only do most Disney movies glorify their characters bodies but also the level of violence and dominance they exhibit. Masculinity in relation to violence and dominance is very clear in most Disney films.

Not only is the victory of a battle glorified, the unwillingness of a character to fight is often shown as pitiful or weak. An example of such an instance is in the animated movie, Beauty and the Beast. In a scene where Gaston has beaten the beast to the ground he exclaims, “ What’s the matter beast? Too kind and gentle to fight back? ” This is prime example of how movies such as these are teaching boys that violence is the answer, and that any challenge to that idea is thought of as weak or emasculating. The climactic scene in most films is a battle between two men.

A violent battle to win the love of a woman or maintain pride and status is the most important scene in establishing which of these characters is the “ better” man. There are two major problems with this idea. First, that boys are being taught that dominance and violence is something to strive for and respect. Second, that these types of behaviors are necessary if not mandatory in gaining the acceptance and love of a woman. Never in a Disney animated movie will you see the losing character of a battle win the woman in the end.

Because a lot of the most popular animated Disney movies were created in the mid to late 1900’s a lot of the themes shown in them are completely sexist and have no validity in current society. So basically, as long as parents

continuing showing their sons Disney movies in which a character has to achieve some physical task instead of showing affection, or an emotional connection, men will continue to have no idea what women want. Because we as Americans feel such a deep, loving connection to the

Disney movies we grew up with, it is only natural that we sit our children down in front of the television in an attempt to share with them a piece of our own childhoods. However as much as Disney has become embedded in our subconscious as wholesome and magical, today the world is a different place with different people and different ideas. The harmful effects of showing a child a Disney movie, especially a young boy can leave a dangerous mark. From body distortion, to dysfunctional relationship issues, the potential these movies have to alter a child future is certainly enough to switch off the Disney channel and turn on Lifetime.