

# That lightsaber belongs to me!: star wars the gender swap

[Sociology](#), [Feminism](#)



A long time ago in a galaxy far far away... the very words that began one of the world's most recognized and well-established franchises. Star Wars, a beloved series that continues to have an ever growing fan base. However, when one considers the fan base of the film series, it is easy to associate its image with that of a male figure. During the original trilogy fans had Luke Skywalker, Han Solo, Obi-Wan Kenobi, Darth Vader and Princess Leia.

In the prequels there was Anakin, Mace Windu, Count Dooku, Yoda, and Padame. Noticing a trend here? All of these characters to some degree fulfill the role of the archetypal male hero with a female companion, which is something the audience is accustomed to seeing, though naturally they are not all the same. Why is that? Perhaps that is the question viewers should ask themselves when watching anything from the Star Wars series.

It is no surprise that Star Wars is a series loved by many throughout the world, as it offers a sense of science fiction and epic take on fantasy.

However, it has been recognized to have a bit of a gender problem or suffer from what is known as the "Smurfette Effect". Much like its counterparts in Lord of the Rings, and Harry Potter, which offers multiple male-led roles, accompanied by one or two other female roles.

In the original trilogy - episodes four through six - the three main characters that stuck out were recognized as Luke Skywalker (Mark Hamill), Han Solo (Harrison Ford), and Leia Organa (Carrie Fisher). However, the role that stood out the most was that of Princess Leia, known as the leader of the rebel alliance, and iconic figure who had the courage and potential to dismantle the operations of those who sought to destroy everything she stood for.

<https://assignbuster.com/that-lightsaber-belongs-to-me-star-wars-the-gender-swap/>

She even was presented the opportunity to save such male roles and remained as the only empowered female character throughout all three original films. However, this was all viewed as a secondary thought as the roles played by men were seen as the primary entity to the series, but this still was seen as a major breakthrough for females in film. Around the time the series was released the role and idea for a strong female lead character to exist was revolutionary and had a major impact on the way viewers and directors looked at films and the way female roles were handled.

This of course would set the path for future films to be released. We would see this once again when the prequel films were released - episodes one through 3 - as characters such as Padme Amidalla, Keira Knightley, and other female Jedi roles came to light. Once again these characters were portrayed to be women of power and viewed as a great importance to the public. However, once again these features were viewed as a second thought and taken behind the roles of men and their importance to the series.

Making it no surprise that the target demographic for the series was predominantly male-oriented. Despite this, Star Wars has an audience of female fans equal to those of their male counterparts and with such a large number of female fans. You would think that the universe would have more populated with roles of woman shining beyond or sharing the roles of men. Sadly, this was not the case and women presented were often shown to fall short of being any type of role model-like figure.

It was seen as though if boys were to watch Star Wars films, they can idolize or plays as Obi-Wan or Anakin, characters who were portrayed to be cunning, brave, and would face danger head on. Girls on the other hand, were they supposed to support being submissive, and in need of a hero like that of Leia and Padme? Was this the trend that all of the series films would fall victim to? Women depending on men to shape and care for their futures? These types of questions remained unanswered for the longest time, until recent years when the Star Wars franchise announced it would return to the big screen in 2015 under the name " Star Wars: The Force Awakens".

However, this would not be a " per usual" Star Wars film dominated by white male men and their secondary female counterparts. No, this film sought to abolish all of the stale characteristics the series had become known for, and decided to give the series a twist no one could have seen coming. As the film itself was presented with the idea of having the franchise's first female lead role, first female villain role, first African American lead, and include more minor female characters in unexpected areas.

The film was also set to have a wide This sent the world into a complete frenzy as it had a mixed reception from fans. Some found they loved and looked forward to the idea of a fresh take on the series and moving along with modern times. Fans could now be open to an entire new world, and see what could come from such a diverse cast of characters.

Others however, took this as an insult, and saw the series falling prey to the social justice warrior movements and being nothing more than mere

propaganda that would harm the series. Causing multiple Men's Right Activists to call for boycotts of the film, and multiple online protests, as several stated it was an attack on the hold men had throughout the series. In weeks leading to the release of the film, trailers and images taken for the film were tagged with "#BoycottStarWarsVII" and "#StarWarsaMensGalaxy".

Despite the protests, and negative feedback from multiple activists and fans, the film generated \$529 million its opening week. Stomping out the superstitions that this one film would ruin the image of Star Wars that was established. However, the biggest victory this film had, was with its characters and their roles in the film as director JJ Abrams made it clear that The Force Awakens was something that would change the Star Wars forever.

Many speculated that, despite the latest additions to the franchise would still be dominated by men, and have small hints of a woman being in power. However, when the film debuted many found the story's main character, Rey, a mysterious character with a hidden backstory, was not only cunning and well-rounded. She was truly independent, did not rely on another character, find herself in the middle of a love scene, or eagerly waiting for a knight in shining armor to come save the day.

The closest she comes to something of that sort, is her companion Finn, who also made a splash being the franchise's first African American lead role. However, it comes across as two friends looking after one another, it could even be recognized as a bond strictly forged by survival. However, this was not the only shocker of the film, as another twist to the plot of the story

comes during the climax of the film. When Rey would even defeat, and overpower the films only white antagonist known as Kylo Ren in a lightsaber battle.

Some would say that it was one of the most horrific fight scenes on a Star Wars film to date, but not if you take a closer look as the fight itself has a hidden meaning. Analyzing the fight scene, Kylo toys with Rey and does not face as a real opponent. Taunting her, and showing his superior strength to push her to a weakened state but at the one point he offers her a chance to join him as an apprentice and teach her what she lacks as a Jedi.

This can be seen as a moment of man beating down the thought of a woman taking on such a role. Demonstrating that a woman such as Rey is not meant to be so strong. That she is not meant to stand as a warrior, or as someone who can stand their ground and can easily fall prey to the words of a man who appears to be stronger and offers a way out a difficult situation.

However, as Rey, struggles to hold off her opponent, she takes a moment to reflect on who she is, and why she is fighting. She then becomes focused and forges a stronger bond between herself and the force which allows her to become more powerful than Kylo could have ever become in such a short time. Rey, who has never fought with a lightsaber, never used the force in anyway, or faced an evil as strong as Kylo Ren emerges victorious.

Making an impression on the young man, and the audience that this female character is not one to be taken so lightly, that women can take on such a role, and be just as good of a Jedi warrior worthy of wielding a lightsaber in

battle. This scene alone can be indicated as one of the most iconic, visually pleasing, and outspoken of all time, with the simple message it carries through its actions and depiction. Just one more thing for the world to fall in love with, and that it did.

Following the success of the film came the monstrous demand for the toys, and video game figures that the public would be open to collect and enjoy. The new line of Star Wars figures and video games included almost every single cast member and their costumes, all except one major piece. Rey herself, was not found to be included in any of the merchandise produced by toy distributor Hasbro, except for one. One that was part of a "Speeder Bundle", a pre-sale toy bundle before the film was released.

However, this one toy absolutely robs Rey of any gender as she is fully masked and clothed. One would not even notice it was a female character in the form of a toy. This of course drove a massive callout from fans and gender activists, both raising the question as to why? Why was this important female character being left out when so many were calling for her to appear?

The answer came from an inside report from Hasbro that stated toymakers were specifically directed to exclude Rey from their products because "Star Wars toys were geared toward boys and boys don't like playing with female action figures. No boy wants to be given a product with a female character on it." Which brought both Hasbro and Disney to come forward and made a

thin excuse saying their intentions were "mistaken, as they did not wish to reveal or spoil anything for anyone who had not seen the movie."

It was also found that both Disney and Hasbro invested heavily in the white antagonist male character Kylo Ren as many executives expected his role to be the breakout role of the century. Returning old world views of woman not being able to have as strong of a hold in the entertainment industry as men and bringing forth the question of whether or not this trend would continue with the later series of episodes the Star Wars franchise planned to release in years to come.

Although the answer may not be fully known, it is clear that creators and directors under with the Star Wars brand are working toward undoing the damage set forth by past films for their portrayal of women. With the latest installments of Star Wars: The Clone Wars Animated, Rogue One, and The Last Jedi - all featuring more independent and empowered female characters, the franchise is on the right path but still has a large road ahead till many see women equal to men.