



Embracing Asexual and Aromanticism in Elsa and Merida: A Critical Analysis of Disney's Frozen and Brave

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Citation: Dr. M. John Suganya et al. (2024), Embracing Asexual and Aromanticism in Elsa and Merida: A Critical Analysis of Disney's Frozen and Brave. *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*, 30(5), 8734-8736
Doi: 10.53555/kuey.v30i5.2601

ARTICLE INFO ABSTRACT

In a world where the spectrum of human identity is as vast as the colours of the rainbow, it becomes imperative to unravel and celebrate the myriad ways individuals experience attraction, love, and connection. Aromantic individuals may not experience the same pull toward romantic relationships as society often expects. Asexual individuals may not experience sexual attraction, and their identities are recognized as distinct from other sexual orientations. Queer studies provide a platform for understanding and validating diverse experiences, identities, and orientations that fall outside the heteronormative and cisnormative frameworks. This article delves into the exploration of aromanticism and asexuality within the characters of Elsa of Disney's Frozen and Merida of Disney's Brave. These beloved and iconic characters challenge the conventional narratives of romance and desire in the realm of animated storytelling. Elsa's journey in Frozen and Merida's adventure in Brave are dissected to uncover subtle hints and nuances that suggest potential representations of aromanticism and asexuality. By navigating the intricacies of these characters' narratives, this article aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on inclusive representation in mainstream media, shedding light on the importance of acknowledging diverse romantic and sexual identities.

Keywords: Animation, Aromanticism, Asexualism, Cisnormative, Heteronormative.

In the enchanting realm of animated films, heroines have transcended the boundaries of traditional storytelling, evolving into powerful and multifaceted characters that captivate audiences of all ages. Animated movie heroines serve as more than mere protagonists; they embody strength, resilience, and a profound sense of individuality. These characters navigate whimsical worlds and face challenges that resonate with universal themes, making them timeless icons in the ever-evolving landscape of cinematic storytelling. This article embarks on a journey into the vibrant tapestry of animated heroines, exploring their transformative roles in shaping narratives, challenging societal norms, and inspiring generations with narratives that reflect the diverse spectrum of human experiences. From classic tales to modern masterpieces, animated heroines stand as beacons of empowerment, leaving an indelible mark on the collective imagination.

In the vibrant tapestry of animated storytelling, the depiction of diverse identities and experiences is an essential stride towards inclusivity. This research aims to delve into the nuanced exploration of asexuality and aromanticism within the characters of Elsa in Disney's Frozen and Merida in Brave. Animated heroines of the 21st century, Elsa and Merida transcend the conventional, guiding audiences through tales that challenge traditional narratives of romantic love. Unlike many traditional Disney narratives, Frozen and Brave notably lacks a central romantic subplot for Elsa and Merida. They emerge as a trailblazer in the realm of animated storytelling. Their journey is not defined by a romantic interest, deviating from the typical arc of a Disney princess. This absence of a romantic storyline for Elsa and Merida challenges the assumption that a character's completeness is contingent on a romantic relationship. By analyzing their transformative journeys, this article seeks to unravel the subtleties of asexuality and aromanticism in these characters from the movies to illuminate the complexity of their narratives.

Frozen released in 2013, is a cinematic phenomenon that transcended conventional fairy-tale storytelling. The film revolves around the kingdom of Arendelle and the journey of its heir, Elsa. Elsa, the Snow Queen of Arendelle transcends the boundaries of traditional animated heroines. Elsa, born with magical ice powers, represents self-discovery, empowerment, and acceptance of one's unique individuality. Elsa's tale is defined by internal conflict from the start, which is brilliantly captured in her early slogan to hide her emotions and conceal her true nature. The mantra, a product of societal expectations and the fear of judgement, mirrors the struggles faced by individuals navigating asexuality and aromanticism in a world that often places undue emphasis on conventional romantic relationships.

Elsa's magical abilities become a metaphor for her uniqueness, setting her apart from the conventional princess archetype. Her isolation, both self-imposed and forced by societal expectations, reflects the challenges many asexual and aromantic individuals encounter in navigating a world that often prioritizes romantic narratives. The pinnacle of Elsa's character development occurs in the iconic song of the movie. In this transformative anthem, she sheds societal expectations and embraces her true self, marking a departure from the limitations imposed by conformity.

"The cold never bothered me anyway," becomes a mantra of liberation, symbolizing Elsa's newfound empowerment through self-discovery- a sentiment that resonates strongly with themes associated with asexuality and aromanticism (Elsa, Frozen). Importantly, Elsa's narrative defies the traditional Disney princess trajectory by omitting a central romantic subplot. Her story challenges the normative idea that a princess's tale must revolve around romantic pursuits. Instead, Elsa's journey becomes a celebration of familial bonds and self-acceptance. "Love will thaw, love will open up the gates," emphasizes the broader spectrum of love beyond romantic entanglements, positioning Elsa as a symbol of diverse forms of connection and fulfillment (Elsa, Frozen). Elsa's character arc is marked by resilience and strength as she grapples with the responsibilities that come with her powers and the expectations placed upon her as a ruler. Her internal struggles and external conflicts make her journey relatable on a universal level, creating a character whose narrative goes beyond the fantastical elements of her magical abilities.

The complexity of Elsa's character lies in her ability to evolve, not merely as a ruler but as an individual who learns to embrace her true self unapologetically. Her journey becomes an anthem for self-acceptance and authenticity, echoing the experiences of individuals who navigate the complexities of asexuality and aromanticism in a society that often struggles to understand diverse forms of love and identity.

Released in 2012, Brave takes us to the rugged landscapes of Scotland, where Merida, the fiercely independent princess of DunBroch, challenges societal expectations. Her exceptional archery skills and resistance to an arranged marriage form the crux of the narrative. Merida's skill of archery is inherited from her father, as said by Suganya et al. in their article "Mood Fluctuations and Familial Ambience of Army Brats in My Super Papa by Bella Meraki and The Lords of Discipline by Pat Conroy". Merida's journey is one of self-discovery, as she navigates the complexities of familial relationships and defies traditional gender roles. The film stands out for its celebration of independence and the prioritization of personal agency over conventional romantic narratives.

Set against the rugged landscapes of medieval Scotland, Merida's character defies conventional expectations, challenging societal norms and celebrating independence in a narrative that transcends traditional princess tales. From the first frame, Merida's defining feature is her unruly red curls, a visual metaphor for her untamed spirit and refusal to conform to societal expectations. Her exceptional archery skills and spirited nature set her apart as a character who rejects the traditional gender roles typically assigned to animated princesses. Merida declares that she is shooting for her own hand, in a moment of defiance, which encapsulates her determination to chart her own destiny (Merida, Brave). This proclamation sets the tone for her character's journey, one that prioritizes personal agency over the traditional notion of romantic entanglements. The sentiment echoes the themes often associated with asexuality and aromanticism, where individuals assert their autonomy and reject societal pressures to conform to conventional relationship norms.

Brave unfolds as a tale of self-discovery, familial bonds, and resistance to an arranged marriage that Merida vehemently rejects. Her journey becomes a celebration of independence, challenging the predefined roles imposed upon her as a princess. Merida's refusal to be a pawn in a political marriage and her insistence on determining her own fate resonates with those who navigate the complexities of identity outside of traditional romantic narratives. Importantly, the heart of Merida's narrative lies in her relationship with her mother, Queen Elinor. The familial dynamic becomes a central theme, showcasing the significance of connections beyond romantic love. Merida's realization that one's fate resides within themselves and it requires bravery to uncover, underscores the importance of self-discovery and forging one's path- an idea closely associated with asexuality and aromanticism narratives. Merida's character is not only defined by her physical prowess but also by her emotional growth and maturation. Her journey becomes a universal exploration of the complexities of parent-child relationships, making her relatable on a human level beyond the fantastical elements of the story.

Merida serves as an exemplar of a heroine challenging societal expectations. Her exceptional archery skills and rejection of an arranged marriage showcase her defiance of traditional gender roles. Merida's expression that she is shooting for her own hand, resonates with themes of autonomy and self-determination often associated with asexuality and aromanticism.

Merida's central conflict lies in her resistance to societal expectations of romantic entanglements. Her journey becomes a celebration of independence and familial bonds over traditional romantic pursuits. She says that she is not a prize to be won, which encapsulates her refusal to conform to the prescribed notion of love, reflecting the broader sentiment of embracing diverse paths to fulfilment (Merida, Brave).

The narratives of Elsa and Merida intertwine through their emphasis on independence, the rejection of traditional gender roles, and the absence of central romantic subplots. By challenging traditional norms and showcasing characters who find fulfillment outside of romantic relationships, Elsa and Merida serve as trailblazers in fostering a more inclusive and understanding society. Their journeys not only validate asexual and aromantic experiences but also encourage audiences to embrace a broader spectrum of identities and relationships. Moreover, as elucidated by Suganya et al. some concepts and notions become deeply ingrained in our minds without our awareness. These ideas can be incredibly resistant to change or removal, even if they are inaccurate. Elsa and Merida's stories highlight the enduring struggle against societal expectations and the resilience required to break free from them.

Inclusivity in media is essential for stimulating compassion, acceptance, as well as a sense of belonging in viewers. When people find themselves represented in the narratives they read, it might have an enormous effect on their perception of themselves, confidence, and sense of societal acceptance. According to Malaravan et al. in their article "Psychological Implication and Impact of Racism in Children with Reference to the Invincible Summer of Juniper Jones," just as racism affects children's psychological development, societal expectations around romance and sexual attraction can shape people's understanding of themselves and their place in the world. Furthermore, exposure to varied perspectives fosters a more knowledgeable and empathic audience, reducing preconceptions and promoting a more equitable culture.

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