



The Construction of Merida's Self-Determination in Pixar's *Brave* (2012): A Characterization Study

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Abstrak

This study examines the construction of Merida's self-determination in Pixar's *Brave* (2012) through characterization analysis. The film presents Merida as a young princess who struggles to define her own path amid family expectations, royal tradition, and social pressure. Her character is significant because her conflict is not only about rejecting an arranged marriage, but also about the human need to be heard, respected, and allowed to choose one's own life direction. This study aims to explain how self-determination is represented through Merida's dialogue, actions, and relationships with other characters. The research uses a qualitative descriptive method and applies Abrams and Harpham's theory of characterization, especially the distinction between showing and telling. The data are taken from selected scenes and dialogues that reveal Merida's inner conflict, independence, and emotional growth. The findings show that Merida's self-determination is built through her direct speech, rebellious actions, and changing relationship with Queen Elinor. The study concludes that *Brave* portrays self-determination as a human process involving freedom, responsibility, misunderstanding, and reconciliation.

Keywords: Self-Determination, Characterization, Merida, *Brave*,

1. Introduction

In Animated films often reflect social values, family relations, and personal struggle. In many contemporary films, female characters are no longer presented as passive figures, but as individuals who question tradition, negotiate identity, and seek personal freedom. Merida in *Brave* is one of the clearest examples of this shift. Her character stands at the center of a story about choice, family expectations, and the struggle to be understood.

Several studies have already discussed *Brave* from different perspectives. Some focus on voice and agency in the mother-daughter relationship, while others discuss feminism, characterization, identity, or psychosocial development. These studies show that Merida is an important figure in animated film research. However, there is still room to explore her self-determination as a human and emotional experience, not only as a feminist symbol or rebellion against patriarchy. This study takes that direction.repo.

Self-determination refers to a person's ability to make choices based on personal values and inner conviction. In literary and film analysis, this concept is closely related to characterization because a character's actions, dialogue, and relationships reveal what they want and what they resist. A character who struggles for self-determination often faces pressure from family, society, or tradition. In this way, self-determination becomes both an internal and external conflict.

Beyond the mechanics of characterization, self-determination theory provides a vital lens through which Merida's psychological development can be understood. In narrative terms, self-determination is not merely a static trait possessed by a protagonist; it is an evolving process that drives the plot forward and shapes character dynamics. Merida's desire to choose her own path is continuously tested by the institutionalized expectations of her kingdom and the deeply ingrained traditions of DunBroch. This friction transforms her personal quest for autonomy into a central dramatic engine, forcing the audience to evaluate her choices not as reckless rebellion, but as a necessary pursuit of personal integrity and human agency.

The tension between tradition and individual choice is embodied primarily in the domestic sphere of the royal family. Merida's mother, Queen Elinor, acts as the primary custodian of social order and gender expectations within the narrative. Elinor's insistence on decorum, marriage, and political diplomacy reflects a worldview where individual desires must be sacrificed for the stability of the realm. Through this mother-daughter dynamic, the film establishes a complex arena for self-determination. Merida's struggle is not directed against an overtly malevolent oppressor, but against a well-meaning parent whose love manifests as strict regulation, making Merida's push for autonomy emotionally fraught and ethically complicated.

In analyzing how Merida's identity is constructed, Abrams and Harpham's distinction between "showing" and "telling" becomes indispensable. While dialogue ("telling") directly articulates the ideological conflict between mother and daughter, the visual and behavioral elements ("showing") reveal the deeper layers of Merida's psychological landscape. Merida's physical posture, her untamed red hair, and her mastery of archery serve as powerful visual indicators of her inner conviction. Archery, in particular, is not merely a skill or a pastime; it

functions as an extension of her agency, representing a domain where she exercises total control, precision, and freedom beyond the restrictive boundaries of the castle walls.

The film's visual narrative frequently utilizes space and environment to dramatize Merida's pursuit of self-determination. The contrast between the rigid, enclosed interior of the castle and the vast, uncultivated landscapes of the Scottish Highlands symbolizes the tension between societal containment and personal liberty. Indoors, Merida is subjected to corsets, lessons in etiquette, and structured protocol; outdoors, she rides freely on her horse, Angus, and interacts directly with nature. These spatial dynamics visually reinforce her characterization, demonstrating that her desire for autonomy is deeply connected to her sense of bodily freedom and unmediated connection with the world around her.

Furthermore, Merida's self-determination is constructed through explicit moments of refusal, most notably during the highland games tournament for her hand in marriage. This sequence represents a critical turning point where characterization through "showing" reaches its dramatic peak. By stepping onto the field, taking up her bow, and competing for her own hand, Merida actively disrupts the patriarchal ritual and reclaims her bodily autonomy. Her physical performance on the archery field serves as a public declaration of self-ownership, visually demonstrating that her capacity for agency matches, and indeed surpasses, that of the suitors selected for her.

The narrative function of Merida's self-determination, however, is not without complexity or consequence. In its initial stages, her drive for autonomy is characterized by impulsiveness and a lack of empathy for the burden her mother carries. Her decision to seek a magical solution from the witch highlights the perils of unmediated self-will detached from foresight and emotional responsibility. This narrative choice prevents Merida from being portrayed as an idealized archetype of defiance, grounding her instead as a flawed, realistic young protagonist whose journey toward true self-determination requires cognitive and emotional maturation.

As the story progresses, the function of self-determination shifts from resistance against authority to an active engagement with reconciliation and accountability. The transformation of Queen Elinor into a bear forces Merida to assume a protective and guiding role, altering the balance of power within their relationship. In this inverted dynamic, Merida's agency is no longer used merely to push her mother away, but to protect her and bridge the ideological chasm between them. Self-determination thus evolves from an act of individual separation into a mechanism for mutual understanding and relational repair.

The cinematic medium enhances this construction of agency through specific auditory and visual techniques. The musical score, rich with traditional Scottish instrumentation and soaring melodies, often accompanies Merida's moments of liberation, emotionally validating her desire for freedom. Conversely, tight camera framing and muted color palettes during scenes of courtly instruction visually mirror the suffocation Merida feels under her mother's reign. These cinematic choices work in tandem with literary characterization, ensuring that the audience experiences Merida's struggle for self-determination as both a psychological state and a sensory reality.

It is also crucial to examine how Merida's agency impacts the broader sociopolitical structure of DunBroch. Her refusal to submit to an arranged marriage initially threatens to plunge the allied clans into civil war, demonstrating the high stakes of her individual choices. However, as her self-determination matures, she uses her voice not to dismantle society, but to renegotiate its rules. Her speeches to the clans toward the climax of the film illustrate a shift from direct confrontation to persuasive diplomacy, proving that personal autonomy and civic responsibility can coexist when traditions are adapted rather than blindly obeyed.

The role of the supernatural in constructing Merida's agency deserves careful consideration as well. The will-o'-the-wisps, which lead Merida into the forest and toward the witch's cottage, serve as narrative catalysts that test her resolve and moral compass. While these mystical entities suggest a degree of fate or destiny, Merida's actions remain fundamentally driven by her own choices. The magical intervention does not grant her an easy escape; instead, it amplifies the consequences of her desires, forcing her to actively navigate the crisis she inadvertently created through her own agency.

From a narrative perspective, Merida's journey redefines the classic hero's journey within the context of family drama. Unlike traditional epic protagonists who leave home to defeat an external evil, Merida's quest is fundamentally internal and domestic. Her primary adversary is not a monster, but the rigid expectations that threaten to erase her individuality. The true triumph of her narrative lies not in physical conquest, but in achieving emotional clarity and securing the freedom to define her own future while remaining integrated within her family unit.

Merida's self-determination also functions as a critique of conventional animated princess tropes without falling into cynical deconstruction. Unlike historical predecessors whose narratives frequently resolved through romantic union, Merida's story deliberately leaves her unpartnered. Her ultimate fulfillment is derived from personal growth, restored familial bonds, and self-acceptance. By prioritizing self-determination over romantic resolution, the film offers an alternative narrative structure where a female protagonist's completeness is not contingent upon a male counterpart.

The interplay between direct commentary by other characters and Merida's actual behavior reveals subtle nuances in her characterization. King Fergus and the clan leaders often view Merida's stubbornness through a lens of

indulgent amusement or political inconvenience ("telling"). However, Merida's decisive actions throughout the film ("showing") consistently subvert these trivializing perspectives. Her physical competence, tactical thinking during crisis moments, and emotional resilience demonstrate a depth of character that resists being categorized simply as adolescent petulance.

Moreover, the film uses the motif of tapestry—both literally and symbolically—to illustrate the construction of Merida's identity. The central family tapestry, woven by Elinor, represents the fixed, pre-determined narrative of royal lineage and duty. Merida's act of slashing the tapestry with a sword is a dramatic visual manifestation of her rejection of that pre-written fate. The subsequent mending of the tapestry near the end of the film symbolizes a re-woven relationship where Merida's autonomy is integrated into the fabric of the family, rather than discarded or suppressed.

The psychological evolution of Merida's agency is closely tied to her capacity for vulnerability. True self-determination requires not only the strength to resist external pressure, but also the humility to acknowledge one's mistakes. Merida's emotional breakdown in the ruins of the castle, where she accepts responsibility for the spell cast upon her mother, marks the point where her agency becomes fully adult. This moment demonstrates that agency is not merely about demanding freedom, but about accepting the moral weight of the consequences that freedom entails.

In evaluating the relationship between authorial technique and audience perception, Abrams and Harpham's framework allows for a structured analysis of character consistency. Merida's traits—her fierce independence, her strong sense of justice, and her stubborn pride—are established consistently across various scenes. Whether she is interacting with her young brothers, challenging her suitors, or negotiating with the witch, her core drive for self-determination remains the primary motivator of her actions, giving her character a high degree of narrative coherence and psychological believability.

The construction of Merida's self-determination also offers a nuanced representation of adolescent identity formation. Her struggle reflects the universal developmental task of differentiation—the process by which an individual establishes a distinct selfhood while maintaining connection to the family system. By portraying this process with emotional honesty, the film elevates Merida's experience from a localized fairy-tale conflict to an archetype of human psychological growth, making her agency relatable to audiences beyond the specific historical or magical setting.

In addition, the comparative dynamics between Merida and her father, King Fergus, provide another layer of characterization. While Fergus shares Merida's boisterous nature, love for physical action, and resistance to formal etiquette, he ultimately defers to Elinor on matters of tradition and governance. Merida's refusal to similarly defer highlights her unique commitment to her own values. She does not merely imitate her father's wildness; she pushes beyond it, seeking a level of existential autonomy that neither of her parents fully anticipates.

Ultimately, the narrative function of Merida's self-determination is restorative rather than destructive. By refusing to conform to an ill-fitting social script, she forces her family and society to confront their own rigidities and adapt to changing realities. Her individual journey becomes a catalyst for collective growth, proving that the pursuit of personal freedom does not inherently alienate one from community, but can instead renew and strengthen social structures when pursued with empathy and moral courage.

Here are **25 new academic paragraphs** designed to further expand your study. These paragraphs deepen the literary and filmic analysis by exploring the nuance of Abrams and Harpham's theory of characterization, visual motifs, psychological self-determination theory, character design, and broader narrative structures.

To fully appreciate how Merida's agency is constructed through characterization, it is necessary to examine the specific mechanics of "telling" as articulated by Abrams and Harpham. Direct characterization in *Brave* frequently manifests through voice-over exposition, royal decrees, and maternal admonitions. In the film's opening sequence, Merida's own voice-over frames her worldview, explicitly informing the audience of her desire for freedom and her deep attachment to the rugged Highland landscape. Conversely, Queen Elinor's spoken directives represent the authoritative "telling" of social norms, continually listing the traits a princess "should" or "should not" possess. This verbal layer of characterization establishes the explicit ideological framework against which Merida's internal convictions are measured.

However, the primary weight of Merida's self-determination is communicated through "showing"—the dramatic representation of character through action, physical behavior, and visual cues. While the spoken dialogue articulates the societal rules, Merida's physical actions consistently subvert them. Her habit of slumping in her throne, stuffing her mouth with pastries during formal gatherings, and surreptitiously slipping out of the castle walls are subtle yet persistent acts of behavioral resistance. Through these unscripted, non-verbal moments, the film shows an individual whose physical body inherently rejects the rigid behavioral constraints imposed upon her, illustrating that her drive for autonomy is an intrinsic aspect of her nature rather than a superficial phase.

The vocal performance of the character further bridges the gap between direct and indirect characterization. Vocal timbre, cadence, and emotional inflection serve as critical instruments in showing a character's inner state. Merida's voice exhibits a dynamic range—shifting from playful, melodic tones when she is outdoors with her

horse to sharp, defiant cadences when confronted by courtly expectations. This vocal vitality contrasts sharply with the measured, highly controlled speech of Queen Elinor. Through vocal delivery alone, the film demonstrates Merida's raw emotional authenticity, framing her refusal to adopt a subdued, regal tone as a refusal to censor her true identity.

Visually, Merida's physical design functions as one of the most prominent markers of her self-determination. Her voluminous, untamed mane of fiery red curls stands in stark visual opposition to the sleek, tightly braided hair of her mother. In animation studies, hair often serves as a visual metaphor for wildness, emotional expression, and bodily autonomy. Merida's hair refuses to stay contained beneath a traditional maiden's wimple; it spills over her shoulders and frame, defying the visual symmetry typically associated with royal iconography. This design choice serves as a perpetual visual reminder of her uncontainable spirit and her rejection of artificial social containment. The material culture depicted in the film also creates a powerful symbolic binary between domestic containment and agentic projection. The tapestry loom and the embroidery needle represent traditional female domesticity, precision within prescribed boundaries, and the passive recording of male history. In contrast, the bow and arrow represent physical agility, strategic foresight, and active intervention in the world. Merida's explicit preference for the bow over the needle signifies her refusal to be a passive observer or record-keeper of tradition; she insists on being the architect of her own destiny, using her chosen tool to project her power outward into the world.

Furthermore, Merida's physical rendering marks a deliberate departure from the historic design conventions of animated heroines. Rather than displaying the hyper-delicate proportions and fragile grace typical of traditional fairy-tale princesses, Merida possesses a grounded, sturdy physique built for athletic exertion. Her movements are characterized by momentum, weight, and force—whether she is climbing the craggy face of the Fire Falls or sprinting through the woods. By imbuing her character with physical power and muscular competence, the animators ensure that her pursuit of self-determination is grounded in a believable, capable physical presence.

The dynamic of intergenerational transmission plays a pivotal role in shaping Merida's struggle for autonomy. Queen Elinor's rigid enforcement of patriarchal traditions is not portrayed as malicious, but as a protective mechanism born from her own internalized understanding of survival within a feudal society. Elinor genuinely believes that preparing Merida for an arranged marriage is the only way to secure her daughter's safety and social standing. By contextualizing the mother's motives, the film avoids a simplistic good-versus-evil binary, presenting self-determination instead as a complex negotiation between a daughter's need for self-actualization and a mother's instinctual drive for social preservation.

The narrative pivot—Elinor's transformation into a black bear—serves as a profound metaphorical device that alters the mechanisms of characterization. Stripped of her human speech and regal attire, Elinor can no longer rely on verbal "telling" or social status to command her daughter. This forced silence creates a narrative space where "showing" becomes the sole medium of communication between mother and daughter. As Elinor is forced to navigate the wild environment in a monstrous body, she experiences firsthand the physical vulnerability and raw instinct that Merida thrives upon, opening a path for mutual empathy that words had previously failed to establish. In analyzing the narrative function of self-determination, the character of Mor'du—the ancient prince who was transformed into a demonic bear—functions as a crucial shadow self and cautionary tale for Merida. Mor'du also sought self-determination, but his pursuit was driven by selfish ambition, pride, and a refusal to share power with his brothers, ultimately leading to his complete dehumanization and solitary destruction. By juxtaposing Merida's journey with Mor'du's tragic fate, the narrative establishes a clear ethical boundary: self-determination that destroys community and isolates the individual leads to ruin, whereas self-determination that ultimately seeks harmony and mutual respect leads to redemption.

This contrast with Mor'du illuminates the subtle psychological distinction between toxic self-will and authentic, empathetic autonomy. Merida's initial mistake—using magical intervention to force her mother to change—echoes Mor'du's desperate attempt to alter his fate through dark magic. However, unlike Mor'du, who embraced his beastly isolation, Merida is horrified by the unintended consequences of her selfishness. Her willingness to confront her own mistake and fight to restore her mother's humanity demonstrates that her self-determination matures from a desire for unchecked personal liberty into a principled commitment to care for others.

The forest environment in *Brave* operates as a classic liminal space—a realm outside the jurisdiction of societal laws where social roles dissolve and psychological transformations occur. Within the castle, rigid courtly protocols dictate behavior; within the forest, physical survival and genuine emotion take precedence. It is in the forest that Merida teaches her mother how to fish, and it is where Elinor begins to shed her regal composure. The spatial shift from castle to forest facilitates a corresponding shift in characterization, allowing both women to strip away their social masks and reveal their fundamental human needs.

The non-verbal interactions between Merida and bear-Elinor highlight the role of bodily intelligence in constructing agency. In the forest, Merida assumes the role of teacher and guide, demonstrating a mastery of the natural world that her mother previously dismissed. Through shared physical labor—such as catching salmon in the river—the characters communicate through touch, eye contact, and shared laughter. These moments of non-

verbal intimacy re-educate Elinor about her daughter's intrinsic competence, forcing the Queen to recognize that Merida's unconventional skills possess genuine value and utility.

Reconciling individual desire with communal duty is one of the central narrative problems explored through Merida's character. In traditional fairy tales, female autonomy is frequently punished, or resolved by subsuming the heroine's will into a marital union that stabilizes the state. *Brave* offers a structural alternative: Merida's self-determination does not destroy her society, but revitalizes it. When she addresses the assembled lords, she does not advocate for the abolition of the clans or the abandonment of heritage, but for the evolution of their customs, demonstrating that authentic self-determination can serve as a constructive force for cultural renewal.

The subversion of the traditional courtship plot is another key structural element that highlights Merida's self-determination. In most classical animation, romantic love functions as the ultimate reward or the primary catalyst for character transformation. By deliberately omitting a romantic interest for Merida, the film insists that a young woman's narrative journey can be entirely centered on her internal identity, her talents, and her familial relationships. Merida's happy ending is not defined by finding a partner, but by finding her voice and securing the freedom to choose her own future in her own time.

When placed in historical context, Merida represents a significant milestone in the evolution of animated female protagonists. Earlier generations of heroines were largely characterized by passivity, domestic grace, and endurance in the face of suffering. Subsequent eras introduced heroines with greater ambition and active desire, yet their narratives still frequently prioritized romantic resolution. Merida pushes this trajectory further by framing self-determination not as a secondary trait, but as the absolute core of her characterization, offering a model of female agency that is unapologetically self-authored and unanchored to romantic validation.

The narrative also employs physical slapstick and visual humor to ground Merida's agency without reducing her struggle to mere melodrama. Her interactions with her mischievous triplet brothers and her exasperated reactions to the pompous suitors inject levity into the story. This comedic layer serves a specific narrative function: it humanizes Merida, ensuring that her fierce independence does not render her cold or aloof. Her ability to laugh, play, and engage in chaotic antics demonstrates that her pursuit of autonomy is driven by a vibrant love for life rather than bitter resentment.

Applying the psychological framework of Self-Determination Theory—which identifies autonomy, competence, and relatedness as essential human needs—provides a structured method for evaluating Merida's growth. At the beginning of the film, Merida possesses high competence (her archery and survival skills) but experiences severely thwarted autonomy due to her mother's expectations. This imbalance leads to emotional distress and reckless defiance. The narrative progression can thus be understood as Merida's attempt to restore balance by claiming autonomy without permanently severing her sense of relatedness to her family and community.

Merida's achievement of competence is shown systematically throughout the film's set pieces. Her mastery over her bow is not presented as an innate, effortless gift, but as the result of dedicated practice and physical discipline initiated in her early childhood. When she strikes the center of the third target during the tournament, splitting her suitor's arrow, the visual execution emphasizes her precision, focus, and technical control. This display of competence validates her demand for autonomy, proving to both the suitors and the audience that her confidence is rooted in genuine capability.

The dimension of relatedness is paradoxically preserved through the very conflict that threatens to tear the family apart. Merida does not seek to abandon her family; her anger stems precisely from the fact that she loves her mother and deeply desires her mother's approval, but cannot accept that approval at the cost of her own identity. Her journey proves that true autonomy does not mean absolute independence or emotional isolation; rather, it requires the renegotiation of relationships so that intimacy can exist alongside individual authenticity.

The presence of Merida's younger triplet brothers offers another layer of indirect characterization. The triplets enjoy an uninhibited, chaotic freedom within the castle that Merida is strictly denied simply because of her gender and her position as the eldest heir. Merida's affectionate, co-conspiratorial relationship with her brothers shows her nurturing capacity, while simultaneously highlighting the double standard present in her upbringing. Through her interactions with them, the film shows that Merida does not resent childhood freedom, but deeply grieves its premature withdrawal from young women.

The chromatic design of *Brave* acts as an implicit storytelling device that visualizes Merida's emotional and agentic state. Cold, muted tones of grey, brown, and deep blue dominate the formal castle interiors, visually symbolizing constraint, ancient obligation, and emotional suppression. In contrast, vibrant greens, deep earth tones, and Merida's signature fiery orange hair dominate the outdoor sequences. When Merida enters the formal halls, her vivid hair acts as a splash of unassimilated color against the drab stone, visually asserting her refusal to blend into the somber environment of royal expectation.

The megalithic stone circle—the Ring of Stones—serves as a crucial spatial motif where destiny and self-determination intersect. Sacred, ancient, and shrouded in mist, the stone circle is the site where the magical will-o'-the-wisps appear to guide Merida. In literary analysis, such ancient monuments often represent fate or immutable cosmic laws. By placing Merida's most transformative choices within this space, the film suggests that

her struggle for self-determination is not a modern aberration, but a deeply rooted, almost mythic human drive that aligns with the deeper forces of nature.

The specific Scottish setting and cultural context enrich Merida's characterization by tying her fierce independence to a broader heritage of highland resistance and territorial pride. Merida's defiance is not presented as an imported, modern ideology, but as an expression of the very spirit of her homeland—untamed, resilient, and fiercely protective of its freedom. Her characterization draws upon the romantic literary tradition of the Scottish Highlands, where identity is intimately bound to the rugged terrain and an unyielding defense of personal and tribal sovereignty.

The temporal structure of the film adds narrative urgency to Merida's quest for agency. The curse placed upon Queen Elinor carries a strict time limit: if the tapestry is not mended and the emotional rift not healed by the second sunrise, Elinor will remain a bear forever. This ticking clock forces an acceleration of Merida's internal maturity. She can no longer afford the luxury of teenage angst or passive resentment; she must act decisively, take ownership of her mistakes, and exercise mature, strategic agency under intense psychological pressure.

Importantly, the film avoids endorsing an unchecked, neoliberal model of individual freedom that ignores social obligation. Merida's ultimate realization is that absolute, unyielding self-will leads to chaos and heartbreak, just as absolute, unyielding tradition leads to oppression. The ideal state of self-determination depicted in the film is relational and adaptive. It recognizes that true freedom requires the courage to stand firm in one's values, alongside the wisdom to bend, compromise, and listen to the lived experiences of others.

This study focuses on two questions: how is Merida's self-determination constructed in *Brave*? and how does that self-determination function within the narrative of the film? To answer these questions, this study applies Abrams and Harpham's theory of characterization, especially the concepts of showing and telling. This approach is relevant because it helps explain how the film presents Merida's identity through direct and indirect characterization.

2. Research Method

This research uses a qualitative descriptive method because the object of analysis is a film text that requires interpretation. The film *Brave* is treated as a narrative work in which character, dialogue, visual behavior, and conflict all contribute to meaning. The primary data source is Pixar's *Brave* (2012), and the units of analysis are selected scenes and dialogues involving Merida and Queen Elinor.

Data were collected through repeated viewing of the film and note-taking. The researcher focused on scenes that reflect Merida's desire for independence, her rejection of arranged marriage, and her emotional conflict with her mother. Important dialogues were transcribed and interpreted in context. Visual cues such as facial expression, movement, posture, and tone of voice were also considered because they help reveal character traits and emotional tension.

The analysis followed three steps. First, the researcher selected relevant scenes. Second, the scenes were categorized according to showing and telling. Third, the data were interpreted to show how Merida's self-determination develops across the story. The interpretation was guided by characterization theory and supported by related studies on Merida and *Brave*.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Merida's inner resistance

The analysis shows that Merida's self-determination begins with inner resistance to control. From the beginning of the film, she is shown as active, energetic, and unwilling to accept restrictions that do not reflect her own wishes. Her love of archery and wilderness is not only a personal hobby, but also a sign that she prefers freedom over ritual obedience. This is an important example of showing because the audience learns about her character through action rather than direct explanation. ejournal.unida.gontor.ac+1

Her resistance becomes clearer in the scene where she refuses the tradition of choosing a suitor. Her speech expresses a direct claim to personal choice, and this moment functions as telling because she openly states what she wants. At the same time, her body language and emotional intensity show that this is not a superficial act of disobedience. It is a serious struggle to protect her own sense of self. ojs.deakin.edu+1

3.2 Conflict with family expectations

A central part of Merida's character is her conflict with Queen Elinor. Their disagreement is not simply a clash between mother and daughter, but a conflict between two ways of understanding life. Elinor values duty, order, and tradition, while Merida values choice, independence, and individuality. This tension gives the film its emotional force and makes the theme of self-determination more realistic and human. ojs.deakin.edu+2

Merida's behavior toward Elinor shows both courage and immaturity. On one hand, she refuses to silence her own voice. On the other hand, her resistance sometimes becomes impulsive and emotionally driven. This complexity makes her character more believable than a simple rebel figure. The film does not present her as always correct; instead, it shows that self-determination can involve misunderstanding, pride, and pain. ojs.deakin.edu+1

3.3 Showing through action

Much of Merida's personality is constructed through showing. Her archery skills, horseback riding, climbing, and independent movement across the landscape all reveal that she is not bound by conventional princess behavior. These actions help the audience see her as strong and self-reliant. Her physical independence becomes a visual expression of her desire to shape her own life.[ejournal.unida.gontor.ac+1](#)

This mode of characterization is important because it allows the film to present self-determination without heavy explanation. Instead of simply telling the audience that Merida wants freedom, the film lets the audience see it in her habits and decisions. Her refusal to wear imposed symbols of femininity, her discomfort with formal expectations, and her preference for open spaces all support this reading. The result is a character who communicates through action as much as through words.[dspace.uib+1](#)

3.4 Telling through dialogue

Dialogue also plays a major role in presenting Merida's self-determination. When she speaks against the planned marriage, her words directly reveal her refusal to accept a future designed by others. This is an example of telling because the film clearly gives verbal form to her desire for control. Her speech is often blunt, emotional, and honest, which makes her frustration easy to understand.[ojs.deakin.edu+1](#)

Other characters also contribute to the telling of her personality. Queen Elinor describes Merida as irresponsible or resistant, which helps the audience understand how her behavior is perceived within the family and social order. These remarks do not simply criticize Merida; they also show that self-determination can be misunderstood as rebellion. This is one reason why the film feels emotionally realistic. Human desire for independence is often read by others as stubbornness or defiance, especially in family settings.[e-journal.unmas.ac+2](#)

3.5 Humanistic meaning

What makes Merida's self-determination interesting is that it is not presented as a simple victory over authority. The film shows that freedom has consequences, and that personal choice can hurt others when it is expressed without reflection. Merida's story therefore moves beyond a one-sided celebration of independence. It becomes a human story about learning how to speak, how to listen, and how to repair relationships.[dspace.uib+1](#)

This humanistic dimension is important because it makes the character relatable. Merida is not perfect, but she is sincere. She wants to be herself, yet she also longs for understanding and love. The film suggests that true self-determination is not only about rejecting control; it is also about becoming mature enough to make choices with awareness and empathy. This interpretation is consistent with studies that see Merida as a character shaped by autonomy, agency, and developmental growth.

4. Conclusion

This study concludes that Merida's self-determination in *Brave* is constructed through a combination of action, dialogue, and emotional conflict. Her archery, her refusal to accept arranged marriage, and her confrontations with Queen Elinor all show her struggle to define herself. Through characterization, the film presents her as a young woman trying to protect her voice in a world that expects obedience.[ejournal.unida.gontor.ac+2](#)

The study also finds that self-determination in *Brave* is not represented as a simple act of rebellion. It is shown as a human process that involves pain, misunderstanding, growth, and reconciliation. Merida's character reminds viewers that independence is meaningful only when it is connected to responsibility and emotional maturity. In this sense, the film offers a strong and natural portrayal of human agency in animated storytelling.

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