“A Girl Worth Fighting For”

Gender roles have been reflected and defined for decades in American pop culture, even making their appearance in children’s movies. This is conveyed in the song I chose “A Girl Worth Fighting For” from the movie, *Mulan*. I grew up with the movie’s songs, singing along, and I thought it was interesting how Mulan fights society’s gender roles while meeting disapproval, ranging from fellow soldiers to her family. This song portrays how essential gender roles in her society were and highlights the importance of keeping them clearly separated.

The song, “A Girl Worth Fighting For” is about tired soldiers marching to battle, imagining the girl they are fighting for. One pictures a girl “paler than the moon, with eyes that shine like stars, who will marvel at my strength, adore my battle scars” (“A Girl Worth Fighting For”). All describe their ideal woman, who happens to conform to all gender stereotypes in society. Although I did not find any hidden meanings in the song, I noticed the lyric, “You can guess what we have missed the most since we went off to war” (“A Girl Worth Fighting For”). This was a lyric that held no special meaning for me as a little girl singing along, but I recognize the intimation being made now as someone aware of human sexuality. Although this song is about the stereotyping of women, the gender norm of men discussing sex in the Western culture is very much present in this song.

“A Girl Worth Fighting For” reinforces typical gender stereotypes, which are brought up throughout the song. The most obvious example of gender roles occurs when Mulan asks, “How ‘bout a girl who’s got a brain, who always speaks her mind?” (“A Girl Worth Fighting For”) (Mulan is trying to act as a male character at this point, thinking of what a man might want in a woman.) I think this part of the song references that men do not like women being in power; the
fact that being a “girl and in power is not” something that men want to experience (Valenti 57).

Furthermore, I think the soldiers are thinking they are putting women in their place as they quickly dismiss the idea that a woman could actually speak her mind (88). This idea is quickly dismissed by the entire army. The men in this song appear to want a woman who conforms to all traditional gender roles and seem to believe that if any of the norms are violated, their manly ways will charm the woman into complying with their stereotype of what a woman should be (“A Girl Worth Fighting For”).

The song, “A Girl Worth Fighting For” contains different messages related specifically to power and gender performance. Power is a main theme of the song. For example, the men singing assume the girls they sing about will marvel at their strength and battle scars. They also seem to think they “have no faults, that I’m a major find” (“A Girl Worth Fighting For”). I believe that this theme throughout the song gives young children watching Mulan poor ideas about being a woman or man. Firstly, young girls might think that they should be cooking for her husband or following society’s beliefs about what is beautiful (“A Girl Worth Fighting For”). Another error in thinking that may occur among boys; thinking that their wives should be doing all the cooking and wanting their wife to look like other women (“A Girl Worth Fighting For”).

An additional theme of the song “A Girl Worth Fighting For” is gender performance. Although the movie has Mulan fighting typical gender norms by joining as a boy in a girl’s body (since girls could not join), this song still could have dangerous consequences when listened to by young people. When listening to this song, one may notice that typical gender roles are being performed. Men reference sex, fighting, and winning (“A Girl Worth Fighting For”). In contrast, the song talks about women cooking, caring, and loving (“A Girl Worth Fighting For”). All of these qualities are typical qualities of both genders in our societies. Men are expected to be
masculine and not female, aggressive (fighting in the war), successful (Battle scars typically signify success.), sexual (“you can guess what we have missed since we went off to war” (“A Girl Worth Fighting For”)), self-reliant, and embody/transcend traditional views of masculinity (Wood 173-179). These are all alive within this song except for embodying/transcending traditional views of masculinity and self-reliance (which would not have fit within the movie’s time period). Women are expected to care about their appearance (paler than the moon), be sensitive and caring (discussion about women loving), accept negative treatment, (Mulan does not stick up for herself.) and be superwoman (179-184). These qualities are all very present within this song. Therefore, it is obvious that although, one might think “A Girl Worth Fighting For” is just a song, its stereotypical content contains much more.

This song is definitely a man singing about a woman, and I think this is the only way the song could be sung. It would not be possible for a woman to sing this about a man (although it is possible for the topic to be a woman singing about a woman), due to the song referencing girls and ladies, as well as using the pronoun she and her.

I believe that the lyrics in this song have the potential to offend, although the typical listeners would not be the offended parties. Although the song does not insult me, one could think that the song is teaching gender stereotypes to young listeners when watching the movie *Mulan*. Another potentially offensive part of the song involves the lyrics “a girl who’s got a brain, who always speaks her mind,” which is quickly dismissed (“A Girl Worth Fighting For”). To conclude, I think that one could take offense to the song if they listened to the lyrics carefully.

I believe that songs have a more important role in society than many may believe. Many say that they just listen to the music, not the lyrics; however, I think that the lyrics are still
listened to for a reason. This is dangerous in children’s songs; although children might not understand the lyrics completely, listeners still have the potential to learn parts of them.

The songwriter of “A Girl Worth Fighting For” was not a soldier during the Han Dynasty, but he does know what it feels like to be a male, which is what the song is about. The writer also knows different gender stereotypes, which he reflects within this song. Therefore, I would conclude that the writer of the songwriter does have relevancy in writing this song, even though he was not living during the time period of Mulan.

I learned a lot from my analysis of the lyrics within “A Girl Worth Fighting For.” I think the most noticeable for me was the message of sexuality within the song; this was not something I noticed as a girl watching, but it was one of the first things I noticed when writing this paper. Another thing I noticed was the reference to men wanting a beautiful woman, which really helped me to realize that a woman having to be beautiful is not just something from this class, but prevalent in all of society (even in a children’s movie).

In conclusion, this paper has taught me a lot about how many messages are contained in one short song that intimates all men want from women is a tasty meal and sex. Although Mulan tries to fight gender roles within the movie, this song confirms that this was not supposed to be the point of the movie. This movie was set during this time period, yet I think all things discussed within the song were prevalent, which is something we need to change, starting with songs meant for children. Although young viewers may not understand the lyrics completely, they still recite them, giving the lyrics the opportunity to become an engraved piece of their future.
Works Cited

