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Reflection

Should societal standards define a person? In *Mulan*, society sets the standards for people. As Mulan tries to fit the mold that her society determines for women, she could not fit into that mold. She tries to become the daughter she *needs* to be in order to bring honor to her family. However, she falls short. Because she does not fit society's mold, Mulan begins to wonder who she truly is. After her father gets drafted for war, she sneaks away to join in her father's place. That decision changes how she views herself. As Mulan discovers more about herself, the movie interweaves components to aid its argument of self-discovery rather than conforming to society's standards.

As Mulan struggles with her identity and family honor, she slowly sees herself as more than her reflection. After she wrecks her only chance – as a woman in her society – to gain honor, she looks at her reflection in the pond and begins to question her role in society. The song she sings shows how she sees herself. During the song, Mulan enters the temple and takes a look at herself through her ancestors' tombstones and wipes off the makeup. Wiping off the makeup is her way of taking off the mask. Before she cuts her hair, she looks into her sword, into her reflection. The reflection in the sword signifies her strength and sureness in her decision. After being revealed as a girl, Mulan looks at her reflection in her helmet and begins to doubt herself again. Trying to figure out our identity is a bumpy road. Sometimes looking at a reflection only tells us a lie while other times it shows us the truth.

Through the choice of the color of the clothes, *Mulan* reveals more about the main character. At the beginning and end of the movie, Mulan's clothes mainly consist of blue. While blue is a masculine color in western countries, blue is a feminine color in China. When Mulan wears blue, everyone knows she is a girl. In western countries, blue also stands for peace. While she saves China and restored peace, she wears a blue outfit. As a man, Mulan wears green. Green means new life and hope in China (Scott-Kemmis). When she puts on her father's green armor, she changes the course of her life. In a way, the moment she joined the army she began a new life for herself – one where she could redeem her family honor.

As dragons recur throughout the movie, they highlight the characteristics of Mulan. Chinese dragons symbolize valiancy, boldness, perseverance, and heroism. As she takes her father's place in the army and as she faces the Chinese army after being revealed, Mulan shows valiancy and boldness. She perseveres through the training and humiliation. Saving China shows her heroism. A characteristic of dragons is decisiveness. While sitting under the Great Stone Dragon, she decides to take her father's place. When she takes her father's scroll and prays to the ancestors, the Great Stone Dragon can be seen. The hilt of the sword with an engraved dragon is shown just before she cuts her hair. Just as dragons are known for protection, Mulan takes on the role of protector in her family ("The Almighty Dragon").

After being told she could never bring honor to her family and even that she brought dishonor upon her family, Mulan still goes and does what she thinks needs to be done. In doing so, she brings home the ultimate honor to her family. The movie *Mulan* presents a story of a girl who stopped allowing society to define her as a person. Now the question is: do we still allow society to define us?

Works Cited

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