

COMING SOON: STRONG FEMALE CHARACTERS

are feminist values making their way into movies?



KATNISS EVERDEEN: *THE HUNGER GAMES*

"She's brave, strong-willed, does whatever she feels is needed for the situation, and doesn't settle for anything less."

-Whitney Huff, sophomore

QUEEN ELSA: *FROZEN*

"She can stand up for herself. (I don't know, maybe she lifts weights.) Seriously though, she has to be strong of heart."

-Carly Rogers, junior

BY EMILY WILKINSON

The market has spoken. With movies like *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire* and *Frozen*, both featuring prominent female leads, topping the box office for weeks at a time, feminism appears to be back on the popular movie ticket to the delight of many female moviegoers.

"Some people believe that feminism is just rights for women and putting them above men, but really feminism is equality for both women and men, bringing women up to the men," sophomore Kate Anderson said. "A strong female character shouldn't have to rely on a love, whether it be male or female. She shouldn't have to rely on romantic backstory in order to give her that strength."

However, some moviegoers question whether it's physical strength in particular that sets these characters apart.

"There's different types of strength. There's physical strength, there's mental strength, and emotional strength," counselor Nichole Dosland said. "A good character has all three of those."

Recently, movies including *Gravity*, *American Hustle*, *Dallas Buyers Club* and *Philomena* each include women as leading characters and have all received Oscar nominations for Best Picture.

According to Anderson, it isn't the strength of female characters that necessarily make or break feminism in storytelling.

"A feminist character does not rely on a man necessarily, and if she does, it's OK. She knows that she can have a life without needing or depending on a man or on another person in general." Anderson said. "I don't think necessarily that a female character needs to be strong to be interesting. I mean, there are plenty of side characters in books and movies that aren't necessarily strong characters, but they have really interesting attributes. Even if the main character is a male, it doesn't necessarily say that females are inferior, and it shouldn't say that."

In particular, many feel that this generation of young girls has the most to gain from the recent re-emergence of strong female role models.

"It's important to show girls that they have a role in life and it's not just sitting in the kitchen making sandwiches," sophomore MacKenzie Miller said. "Showing young girls as just weak female characters gives them the idea that, 'I can be just like Bella from *Twilight* and have a sparkly, 90-year-old boyfriend that'll save me every time I trip.' Girls need to learn that they can do more than what they're told they can do."

As the mother of a young daughter, math teacher Molly Fast realizes the importance of female role models now more than ever.

"Since my daughter, Veronica, is only 9, I want her to stay a little girl and not grow up too fast, so I like characters that act age-appropriate. I don't like the shows where the little girls are sassy and sarcastic and try to act like teenagers. I like her to have age-appropriate role models," Fast said. "I think overall, females are more respected in society than how they were when I was growing up. When I was growing up, it was pretty much, 'Men are doctors. Women are nurses,' and now Veronica can see herself as being anything she wants to be, even the president, which I never would have thought that could happen!"

While girls like to relate to female characters they feel represent them, titles like *The Hunger Games*, however, come off as so outlandish that movie-goers like junior Ian Yost find that the main characters' may translate as less than heroic.

"[Female role models] teach girls the correct values in life," Yost said. "I could tell by the way *The Hunger Games* was written that Katniss really enjoyed killing everybody and stealing their food. She is definitely a sociopath, not deep down, but on the surface: not even a high-functioning one."

Nevertheless, strong female role models will hardly be remembered for their stories, but for the younger generation of girls that will grow up emulating their behavior.

"I know when I'm teaching there are certain girls that I'll look at that seem to have it all together: really good students, active in some way in school, but don't appear to be troubled by peer pressure," Fast said. "I always think that's what I want Veronica to grow up to be like."

CHRISTINE DAAE: *THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA*

"They work for what they want, and they know how to get it without putting up with anything from anyone."

-Morgan Domenico, freshman

CLARY FRAY: *MORTAL INSTRUMENTS*

"I think being brave and not afraid to sacrifice yourself for other people even though those people are mean to you."

-Brittany DeMars, freshman

