Ballroom Dancers to Go-Getters: Shift in the Representation of Women in

Disney Animated Films

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DECLARATION BY STUDENT

I hereby declare that the data presented in this Dissertation report entitled, "Ballroom Dancers to Go-Getters: Shift in the Representation of Women in Disney Animated Films" is based on the results of investigations carried out by me in the Discipline of English at the Shenoi Goembab School of Languages and Literature, Goa University under the Supervision of Ms. Nafisa Oliveira and the same has not been submitted elsewhere for the award of a degree or diploma by me. Further, I understand that Goa University or its authorities will not be responsible for the correctness of observations / experimental or other findings given the dissertation.

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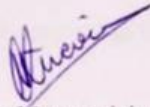
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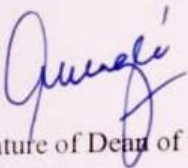Date: 16/04/2024
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This is to certify that the dissertation report "Ballroom Dancers to Go-Getters: Shift in the Representation of Women in Disney Animated Films" is a bonafide work carried out by Ms. Lisa Emerciana Fernandes under my supervision in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Mater of Arts in English in the Discipline of English at the Shenoi Goembab School of Languages and Literature, Goa University.

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Abstract

This dissertation titled 'Ballroom Dancers to Go-Getters: Shift in the Representation of Women in Disney Animated Films' examines the portrayal of women in Disney Princess animated films, charting a significant shift from traditional archetypes to more empowered and diverse representations. Through a thorough analysis of selected films spanning several decades, it investigates how Disney has evolved its depiction of female characters, reflecting changing societal attitudes towards gender roles and empowerment.

The study begins by exploring early Disney Princess films, characterized by passive, romantic heroines primarily defined by their relationships with male counterparts. It then delves into the emergence of more assertive and independent princesses in later productions, such as Mulan, Merida, and Moana, who challenge traditional gender norms and embark on self-driven journeys of growth and empowerment. Using feminist lenses, representation, and media studies within its framework, the dissertation examines the impact of these evolving portrayals on audiences, particularly young viewers, and their perceptions of gender roles and aspirations. It also addresses critiques and controversies surrounding Disney's representation of femininity, including issues of gender, race, sexism, body image, and cultural appropriation. By analyzing the trajectory of female representation in Disney Princess films, this research offers insights into broader societal shifts and the role of popular media in shaping attitudes towards gender and empowerment. Ultimately, it argues that Disney's evolving portrayal of women reflects a growing recognition of the importance of diverse and empowering narratives for contemporary audiences.

Keywords: Disney; Representation; Gender roles; Stereotypes; Empowerment; Feminism; Media; Diversity; traditional archetypes; Cultural shifts.

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CHAPTER ONE: THE BEGINNING

1.1 Introduction

Disney movies have a significant role in the lives of individuals. They cater to the needs of entertainment, education, and inspiration. Disney has served as a platform to educate young minds. It has a wide global reach and is recognized for its animated movies. Animation is a method of bringing drawings or images to life. Disney has used animation outstandingly as it aids children and adults to understand the story, and the emotions, delivering the idea in a much simpler manner. Disney came up with the creation of the Disney princess movies, with its first full-length movie, *Snow White and the Seven Drawfs* released in 1937, this film served as a pioneer and later laid the foundation for the advent of the Disney Princess franchise. Here onwards Disney started producing a series of princess movies that were recognized as the classics. The origins of Disney princess movies are rooted in a combination of Walt Disney's vision, a fascination with classical fairy tales, and the folklore of various cultures.

1.2 Importance and Reasons for the Proposed Research

In this paper Ballroom Dancers to Go-Getters: Shift in the Representation of Women in Disney Animated Films, the study will focus on analysing the shift seen in the portrayal of female characters in the select films through the feminist lenses that would comprise the application of concerned Feminist theory as well as media theories and various representation theories as and when applicable.

For the longest time, Disney had a stereotypical approach towards portraying women in their animated films for instance, it glorified royalty, fair skin, long hair, and blue eyes, women were situated within the domestic sphere, waiting for Prince charming, etc. This would serve as the norm of what an ideal woman

would look like. However, with the changing times and introduction of feminism; Disney has commenced with the portrayal of women as strong, and empowering and the movies to be female-centric as reflected in the contemporary Disney Animated Films. For instance, in the movie *Encanto* released in 2021, the protagonist Mirabel is a simple Colombian girl who has no royal lineage, believes in herself, and wants to make her family proud. This change was necessary to favour various reasons. For instance, they considered the change in social norms, diverse storytelling, empowerment, independence, relatable characters, female audience, market demand, and social responsibility. This led to Disney recognizing its role in influencing and reflecting societal attitudes.

1.3 Scope and Limitations of the Research

The Walt Disney Company has played an important role in influencing and delivering thought-provoking messages. That would righty direct the young minds. This research aims to analyse the select films using the representation views of certain critics and feminist lenses to study the films, during which selected films will be analysed with regards to how the stereotypical ideals are reflected in the Princess Disney animated films which are claimed as the classics. However, the primary focus will be an approach to analyse the shift and how the shift has been brought through the inclusivity of diverse representation of women in Disney animated films. Furthermore, the research analysis will dwell on Disney's facilitation of strong and empowering women characters through the movies.

A consequent limitation of the research is that the study does not incorporate all the films from the princess series of Disney animated movies. The analysis within the research will only cling to Disney Animated movies in English. Due to time constraints, the research will only analyse the select texts with concern to

themes that reflect women as strong and empowering while considering modern films. Another drawback is that the study will only adhere to the theories of Feminism, Media, and Representation by various researchers, critiques as applicable. The analysis of the select films within the writing is entirely based on the sole comprehension of the researcher's understanding of the theory mentioned above and the feminist lens.

1.4 Research Question

- Are classic Disney Animated films reflecting stereotypical representations of women?

- How apt has the diverse representation brought a significant shift in the portrayal of women by challenging the stereotypes in Disney animated films?

1.5 Relevance and Necessity of the Proposed Research

1.5.1 Necessity in the field of Language and Literature

Disney's animated film can be similarly interpreted and analysed as any written work of literature. The elements of fiction are common within the movies and written works of literature. Analysing the shift in the portrayal of women within the animated films can lead to a better understanding of how Disney is contributing to the changing scenario of the representation of women by including a diverse representation that portrays women as strong and empowering. Thus, benefiting language and literature by challenging the ideal stereotypical representations of women. This shift aids in providing better role models that would reshape the conventional beliefs among individuals furthermore, catering to more inclusive language and literary landscape.

1.5.2 Relevance to the Society

Media has a huge impact on consumers and can serve as a good source or platform for delivering the right message and contributing to a positive outcome. The purpose of research by analysing the study area within the princess Disney animated films is to present an idea by educating the fact that inclusivity of various genders, races, and ethnicities is a must among Disney Princesses. This assists in building a positive change for children and parents. Also assisting in changing the preconceived mindset of the ideal woman or Princess. The change in the portrayal of female characters among the Disney princesses is more real and relatable to modern times. Women are beautiful in all shapes, and sizes, and possess feminist or masculine traits, this creation of diversity would help combat stereotypes against women. Therefore, this way of depicting women in the Disney Princess series is healthier, thought-provoking, and as stated afore a positive approach towards rightly shaping and educating the society.

1.6 Objectives of Research Proposed

• To discuss how women have been negatively portrayed in Classic princess Disney animated films.

• To carry out a study of selected Disney animated films.

•To study common themes as seen in the select Disney films.

• To recognize and study the paradigm shift in the portrayal of women in contemporary animated movies.

• To analyse how these representations are empowering while challenging the stereotypes.

• To postulate the views of the Feminist movement, Representation, Media theory, and other Feminist Lenses as applicable during the study of the select Disney animated films.

1.7 Literature Review

The portrayal of women in media has often been negative. Media is often used as a tool to represent women wrongly sets stereotypes and also wrongly guides the audience. Disney is one such platform to telecast women wrongly by setting ideal examples within its classic princesses in Disney animated films. For the longest time, Disney has had a stereotypical approach toward the portrayal of women in animated films. However, with the changing times and introduction of feminism; Disney has commenced with the portrayal of women characters to be strong and empowering and the movies to be female-centric as reflected in the contemporary Disney Animated Films. The following researchers and research papers have relevant studies adhering to the representation of women in Disney animated films.

The research titled "The Transformation of Female Images in Disney Animated Films from the 20th to the 21st Century in the Context of American Feminist Movement." Elucidates how American Walter Disney came up with The Walt Disney Company. The production initially started with the Disney princess series. Within which women characters were portrayed to be fragile as glass. They often belonged to the elite lineage or had to marry a prince to have an elite status. Furthermore, the researchers have situated the outbreak of feminist movements in America, like the women's liberation movement or women's movement which took place through various phases and served as the birthmark for the change in portrayal of women. This was the shift from waiting for Prince Charming to having their

individuality stand out. The researchers have analyzed movies from the 20th and the 21st Centuries animated movies (Liu and Mo).

Similarly, the research paper "Perspective Shift in Fairy Tales: Study on the Portrayal of gender roles in Disney Princesses." Analysed the depiction of princesses as fair, and domesticated and their lives revolving and concerned around the domestic sphere to how feminism has assisted in changing these perspectives and these new princesses have an even more important concern than marring their prince charming. They no longer focus on love stories but rather claim females to have an individual's identity (Sherin). To add to this, in the study done on "Embodying Disney Dreams: The Representation of Femininity and Whiteness in Recent Disney Animated Films." The portrayal of Disney's ideal princesses is a medium of breeding feminine characteristics and whiteness in princesses as the ideal beauty standards serve to be the norm of the day. The research also goes on to justify how this can be a marketing strategy for commercial products having Disney images for advertising for advertising will make the purchaser purchase the product (Maplesden).

Furthermore, in "Trapped in the Mouse House: How Disney has Portrayed Racism and Sexism in its Princess Films." This paper deals with studying how sexism and racism are used as tools by patriarchy to make women subordinate and refrain them from having any liberty. The paper discusses how the princesses had to be under male dominance all the while and even if they had any motives of liberation they were recaptured by the male characters within the same movie with their sexist opinions. Thus, this is a Disney influence on society and vice-versa (Laemle).

In addition,"Animating Gender Roles: How Disney is Redefining the Modern Princess." This research has divided the princesses about situating them

within the waves of feminism and periods like pre-transition, transition, and progression. Further, the study categorizes the princess about the gender role into the aforementioned categories. For instance, Snow White and Cinderella were naïve, and dependent on male heroism, contributing to gender stereotypes and portraying women in the domestic sphere of her own life. Later the transitional phase elaborates on movies like *The Little Mermaid,* where Ariel is shown to be curious and seeks adventure, depicting the progress of independent women also this movie falls back in the category of a princess needing a prince. The same plot centers around *Beauty and the Beast, Aladdin, The Princess and the Frog, and Tangled* where all these movies show how the princesses take a stand for themselves but in the end the male turns out to be the hero rather than the female. Finally, with the release of *Brave* in 2012 Disney started showing progress within the female characters. Merida is not like any other female character so far who is the dependent female counterpart. Also, movies like *Frozen* portray female leads through the characters of Elsa and Ana to be strong and independent. Further, the research also explains how Disney portrays the women influencing gender roles as a tool aiding them in Disney's commercial progress (Garabedian).

Disney films have explored a variety of locations that capture the imagination of audiences of all ages. Kevin M. Scott and Siobhan, in their article "Disney and the Art of Adaptation: From Fairytale to Fantasy," M. Hart argues that the settings of Disney films are essential to their success. They point out that Disney films often take place in fantastical and exaggerated versions of real places, such as the African savannah in *The Lion King* or the streets of Paris in *Ratatouille*. These settings are not the background to the story, but also add depth and dimension to the characters and plot. Another aspect of Disney's film production is the use of

cultural references. In "The Cultural Politics of Disney Animated Films" Ella Shohat and Robert Stam explore the use of cultural references in Disney films and their impact on audiences. They argue that Disney films use cultural references to create a sense of familiarity and identification with viewers, but also to perpetuate stereotypes and reinforce cultural hegemony. For example, the depiction of Middle Eastern culture in Aladdin has been criticized for perpetuating stereotypes and cultural appropriation. However, Disney has also been praised for trying to diversify its setting and characters in recent years. Katie Foss and A. Javier Treviño examine the use of Polynesian culture in Moana and the positive representation of indigenous culture and feminism in Disney's Moana: "A Case Study of Indigenous Feminism and the Decolonization of Cultural Production". They argue that *Moana* represents a shift in Disney's approach to storytelling, one that values diversity and inclusion. The setting of Disney films plays a vital role in telling the story and engaging the audience. An excellent setting, cultural references, and a versatile presentation contribute to the success of a Disney film.

A notable research gap that is found after thorough analysis and close reading of the research papers mentioned above is that not all the contemporary Disney Animated films were studied in detail. Furthermore, the movies selected within this research paper are not thoroughly covered before nor have the movie been incorporated together as a whole within a study. Thus, this benefits the research paper to flourish in studying the shift in the portrayal of women characters in Disney animated films. Also, the incorporation of Representation views, Feminist Lenses, and other Media theories to analyse the select films in Disney princess animated films can add to the research gap, thus, serving a wide scope.

1.8 Hypothesis

There has been a significant shift in Disney's stereotypical representation of women through Disney Princesses.

1.9 Research Methodology for the Proposed Research

- This research employs a qualitative research design to study the selected Disney animated films.

- Close reading is used as an approach to analyse the primary sources. This method will aid in a detailed examination and deep exploration of the select Disney films.

- To understand the Feminist Movement and its impact on Disney princesses. Feminist Lenses will be used as a research tool, also other Representation views alongside Media theories will be considered within the study.

- Primary sources will include the study of select films*:*

    i. Analysis of the ideal representation of women in the classic Disney animated princesses will include films like *Cinderella* (1950), *Sleeping Beauty* (1959*), Beauty and the Beast* (1991)

    ii. Analysis of the inclusive shift in the portrayal of women as strong and empowering in the Disney animated princesses will include films like *Mulan* (1998), *Brave* (2012), *Moana* (2016*), Raya and the Last Dragon* (2021), *Encanto* (2021)

- Secondary sources will comprise research articles, scholarly papers, journals, online websites, secondary texts, YouTube interviews, TEDx talks, etc will also be dealt with during research.

1.10 Chapterization

Chapter One: The Beginning

This chapter briefly provides an idea of what the research is about through the objectives, hypothesis, scope, limitations, necessity in the field of language and literature, relevance to society, Theoretical framework is briefly stated. Overall the chapter will aid in the general understanding of the research.

Chapter Two: Tracing Feminism, Media, and Disney

Media as a source of mass communication and how women are often negatively portrayed are glanced at in this chapter. Tracing the outbreak of the feminist movement and how the media reacted to the same. Also, background to Walt Disney, Disney Studios, an understanding of gender and shift in gender portrayal, Disney's impact on children's minds, and finally the understanding of Hyperreality concludes this chapter.

Chapter Three: Critique of the Representation of Women: A Study of Select Classics from Disney Animated Princess Films.

The chapter deals with an overview of the waves of feminism that will be provided, the focus of the study within this chapter incorporates views of various critiques on representation, and how for the longest time Disney has been catering to the stereotypical representation of women through Disney princesses and Disney animated films will be analysed using select themes. The feminist movement can also be traced within the analysis of the select classics. The chapter concludes with an understanding of Disney. Further, stating Disney's depiction of gender, body image, racism, and sexism.

Chapter Four: Thematic Analysis of the Shift in the Portrayal of Women in Select Contemporary Disney Animated Princess Films.

The aforementioned chapter focuses on the shift in the portrayal of women in select Disney animated films of contemporary times. And how the select films represent strong and empowering women characters with the aid of themes.

Chapter Five: The End

This will be the concluding chapter of the study; overall research will be summarised. The chapter also incorporates reverting to the hypothesis, and the scope for future research.

1.11 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that underpins this study attracts a multifaceted array of theoretical views and ideas to offer a complete analytical basis, with a focal point on the effect of Disney movies on viewers' perceptions of the portrayal of female characters and in turn how this affects gender and gender roles. The Feminist movement will be traced locating the select films within different feminist waves and periods to understand how this contributed to the shift in representation. The first key theoretical aspect is Social Cognitive Theory, as proposed with the aid of Albert Bandura, which emphasizes the importance of observational mastering and cognitive methods in influencing an individual's behaviors and beliefs Bandura, (1977). In the context of this study, this concept elucidates how viewers, in particular children, interact within side the commentary and internalization of gender representation depicted in Disney movies, thereby shaping their very own attitudes and behaviors regarding gender roles Bandura (1986). Additionally, the framework contains Feminist Theory to take a look at the ancient development of gender portrayals inside Disney movies and their alignment or divergence from

feminist ideals hooks (1984). This lens allows an exploration of the energy dynamics among male and lady characters and gives insights into ability implications for gender equality. Media Effects Theory, as proposed by Gerbner (1998), is some other important detail of the theoretical framework, making an allowance for an exam of ways media content material, inclusive of Disney movies, can exert each instantaneously and extend results on viewers. This angle is instrumental in comprehending how publicity of positive gender stereotypes in media can mold viewers' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors, in the end contributing to the shaping of broader societal norms. Furthermore, in understanding hyperreality, Jean Baudrillard recognizes Disney's interpretations and experiences. Cultural Studies views, as mentioned with the aid of Hall (1980), are also woven into the framework to scrutinize Disney movies as merchandise in their cultural and ancient contexts.

This method permits an exploration of ways in which societal norms, values, and energy systems are each meditated and reinforced through Disney's storytelling. By using these methods, this study aims to become aware of precise symbols, representations, and storytelling techniques contributing to the portrayal of gender roles and stereotypes. Lastly, the framework encompasses ideas of Media Literacy, as endorsed with the aid of using Aufderheide (1993), emphasizing the significance of equipping individuals, in particular younger viewers, with the capabilities required to significantly examine and deconstruct media messages, inclusive of the ones associated with gender in Disney movies. Through the mixing of the aforementioned multifaceted theoretical views, this research seeks to provide a comprehensive and nuanced evaluation of Disney's function in shaping and probably reworking gender stereotypes, thereby improving information on ways

media's content material can affect and reflect societal perceptions of gender. This method contains the works of numerous outstanding theorists and scholars within the fields of psychology, feminism, media research, and cultural research to offer a firmly grounded theoretical basis for the study.

1.12 Why Disney?

Disney has brought to life many stories and tales from the rough beginnings in advertising to a multi-billion-dollar enterprise (Editors of Biography.com). Mr. Disney introduced the enchanted world of princes, princesses, and distant kingdoms to the lives of millions of children and even adults. The company was founded by a man named Walter Disney and he created the cartoon mouse, which served as the icon for the Initial Walt Disney Company. Disney's animated movies are a part of most children's lives and the significant growth is only increasing. Disney's influence has extended far beyond the movies. This is one of the most important factors around children. According to an article recently updated in 2013, Disney owns several film and theatre companies, music and radio companies, parks and resorts, publishing and television companies, and more (Columbia Journalism Review). The influence has grown beyond just movies, but also through advertising and merchandise. Disney can be seen in children's toys, games, books, cartoons, and even clothing. The power and influence of Disney are greater than just their ability to reach children and adults through the various mediums already presented. Disney and its films are important aspects to focus on because their stories have become a major influence on children. They present powerful and lasting messages about gender and social relationships that are noted and serve as standard social norms (Tonn). Times have changed and the stereotypical roles of men and women have been updated, just like the roles of characters in Disney movies. Throughout

history, the male and female roles portrayed in their films have reflected cultural perspectives and beliefs about social norms and expectations of gender roles and identity. Therefore, Disney becomes a good model and representative to follow cultural trends and be influenced by the views and expectations of the standards of behaviour related to men and women.

CHAPTER TWO: TRACING FEMINISM, MEDIA, AND DISNEY

2.1 Role of Media

Feminism as a movement underwent various stages better defined as "waves." Media as an industry has a wide global reach, it helps define and shape narratives. Viewers worldwide are highly dependent on media as it plays a significant role in every individual who consumes media. Media for the longest time has been a tool to breed ideas in the minds of consumers. It has always aided in creating the power of the dominant section over the other, further portraying one section to be stronger than the other. There is certainly no doubt that the media has very often intentionally or unintentionally generated corrupt matters that have very often assisted in manipulating thoughts. It was sometimes used as a weapon to target a particular section of society, for instance, the representation of women. Across media representation of women has often been very negative, it has bred toxic ideas on women. Media has played a very significant role in delivering stereotypical notions about women. Thus, to a larger extent it suites Patriarchy to further push women towards the margins while patriarchy and men take the center. However, with the advent of the feminist movement, which was held in various waves, media again played a significant role in bringing to limelight the crust of the feminist movement.

2.2 Locating the Significance of Media while Tracing the Waves of Feminism

The first wave of feminism commenced approximately around 1848-1928. The right to vote for women was the need of the hour during this wave. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, a Civil Rights Activist, was a prominent figure during this period. Stanton delivered the Seneca Falls Declaration claiming equity to women and also within the political sphere women having equal opportunity and access. This event

in 1848 occurred at Seneca Fall Convention, in New York. The masses at the event included two types of populations one that paraded for the women's right to vote and the other population that was contrary to the opinion of the women's suffrage movement. "Mr. Colton of Connecticut", thought that women belonged "at home, instead of engaging in strife and contention of the political world" (Women Rights Convention). However, irrespective of the critics the women pledge to fight for their voting rights. Post this convention the women's movement gained a significant response. The first ever newspaper in the United States to be owned, edited, and published by a woman was the 'Lily' by Amelia Bloomer. The paper highlighted "temperance, Women's rights, and dress reform." The reform in dress included women choosing pants over skirts which they usually wore. "bloomers" were this style of pants known after Amelia. The means to attain the newspaper increased drastically over the years. *Lily* had a yearly subscription of fifty cents, and the audience grew as the years went by. The first issues had a circulation of two to three hundred, with an increase to eight hundred after the first year, and eventually grew to over four thousand by 1855 (Watson).

The reform brought about by dress had a huge impact on the women masses. Thus, introducing the agenda-setting theory "Media shape the public agenda. Media do not tell us what to think, only what we should be thinking about" (Littlejohn et al.). The agenda-setting contains two distinct levels. Level 1 establishes the important general issues. Level 2 determines the parts or aspects of those issues that are viewed as important (Scheufele 103-122). The newspaper *Lily* used this aforementioned theory to elucidate in the first level to discuss women and the issues they were facing. In the second level, the newspaper pointed out a specific step that could be taken to address women's equality, dress reform. *Lily* discussed a change

in society, and readers recognized this, so the change went off the paper and into our everyday lives (Johnson).

The movement was further boosted with the advent of *Woman's Journal* by Lucy Stone, with association with the American Women Suffrage Association, (AWSA) "America's most prominent and long-lived suffrage periodical" (Richardson 36-53). These two aforementioned publications acknowledged women's issues aided the masses of the women to further propagate the women suffrage movement at a larger scale. The continuous fight to gain the right to vote for women finally led to states like Wyoming, and Utah, to grant voting rights to their women population. Media had an impactful role during the occurring events. This led to different outcomes to justify, according to the study done in 1996 analyzed ten Wisconsin newspapers considered from the year 1911 to 1919, how the events were described during the suffrage movement. It was analyzed with the study on the way media would put forth the message to the readers, for instance, the choice of words, and other factors. What could be drawn out from the study was that if a newspaper had an editor who was in terms with the political issue, for instance, in favor of the whole suffrage movement then that would result in portraying a strong positive message with regards to the whole movement and vice-versa (Burt 620-634). However, the media as an agency covering news ought to clearly state the facts and be unbiased but this doesn't happen so the practice continues with the media house to give their personal opinion with regards to any news article delivered.

The presidency of Woodrow Wilson drew the 19th Amendment in August 1920. This news was covered by various newspapers on such encased at *Newseum Santa Fe New Mexican*. Which reads "Women Will Vote in Next Presidential

Election in November; Tennessee Thirty-Sixty and Final State to Ratify the Susan B. Anthony Amendment" (Newspaper Coverage of the Ratification of the 19th Amendment). This further illustrates media effects theory, which states that media shapes public opinion (Littlejohn et al.). This purely justified that women as rational, human beings oughtto be granted their rightful rights such as the right to vote and own property.

Feminism in the second-wave was identified in the 1960s- 1990s. At this point, women had to meet beauty ideals and they had to adhere to physical traits that were worldly seen or glanced and there was no importance given to personal achievements. This was schooled by media in a way when they emphasized the message portrayed on television depicting how women were generally to be associated with the domestic sphere and other sidelined works that gave them no freedom or space of their own. This, however, generates an idea of the gender norms and aids the stereotypical image of an ideal woman. This wave of feminism was bridged to other events of this period at large like the Anti-Vietnam War, Civil Rights, LGBT, and Black Power. The outrage of these various protests also led to the claiming of further rights like equal pay, workplace equality, and child care support (Janowiecki). The thoughts propagated by the feminist individuals and groups were encased and circulated aided by manifestos. For instance, SCUM Manifesto by Valeria Solanas, Redstockings Manifesto by Redstockings, Black Woman's Manifesto by Third World Women's Alliance, The Personal is Political by Carol Hanisch. An enchantment to aid this second wave to more severe depth was the book by Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, according to which "Mystique" equals "sexual passivity, male domination, and nurturing maternal love" (Friedan). The highlight of the media generally went to portray women as

being concerned with every other issue except to be anything but generous and take care of themselves. The major issue concern here was that it showed that women generally had no political influence leading to better the world. The book *The Feminine Mystique* exemplified the Spiral of Silence Theory, which states that the individuals who perceive that their opinions are popular express them, whereas those who do not think their opinions are popular remain silent (Littlejohn et al.). A mass population of women agreed with what the book said they reflected on how women need to take care of themselves and they are much beyond the small frame within which they were placed to be obedient housewives to their spouse. The revival of the 1965 Cosmopolitan magazine, by Helen Gurley Brown was another significant boost to the wave. Initially, its advent was family-centered but with the rebirth it dealt with issues of female individuality. Women's sexuality was identified and taken into regard, the stereotypes of obedient wives were now challenged so it brought to limelight women to be individuals who would take care and provide for themselves. They need not be under the shelter or guidance of any man at any point in their life. Woman were liberated from the shackles of any domination and were given a voice of their own. However, the major concern still at hand while the feminist movement was gaining momentum is worthwhile noted and of great interest that the representatives, grants, and protests were done by usually upper-class white women who at this time considered themselves to be civilized and demanded within the movement with soul consideration for themselves (upper-class white women). 'It is the white man's burden to civilize the uncivilized population'. The first two waves were mainly concerned with upper-class white women. The obvious major drawback of the first two waves was the failure to incorporate the representation of women of colour or any other women oppressed.

Thus, these waves were at a halt. The outreach of the first and second waves was soul dependent on monetary grants to media which was no battle to the upper-class white women. Their monetary benefits gave them a platform and a voice which they rightly advocated.

The feminist movement with its third-wave was more appropriate as it had considered women of colour and gave them a voice. This wave was more intersectional. The term *intersectionality* was coined By Kimberly Crenshaw. The wave in 1992 was co-founded now by an African-American, Jewish feminist, Rebecca Walker, the famous magazine was MS. Magazine which quoted Rebecca Walker as *"I am not the post-feminism feminist. I am the third wave".* The movement led to "politicize and organize young women from diverse cultural and economic backgrounds" (Bronstein 783-803). The advancement of this movement now did not depend on the monetary factor alone but rather emphasized the voice and the action that mattered. Unlike the previous waves where women only advocated for women of similar backgrounds or status. This movement onwards was not so, the era of social media brought about a significant change in this perspective. A lot of things went up on social media that could be viewed globally. This led to different people irrespective of their background, status, or ethnicity to relate and understand another individual's grievance leading to better communication. This was a great pro for the third wave of feminism.

The impact of social media was viewed on Women's March. The march was planned as a resistance march against the harmful political dialogue that hurt members of many oppressed communities, such as the LGBTQ, racial minorities, people with disabilities, survivors of sexual violence, religious freedoms, and of course women (The Women's March Washington). The famous social media

platform of this time, Facebook aided in the widespread that it needed. This movement spread globally, for various protests came to be held in various regions of the globe. Thus, bringing the feminist movement to its peak. A study was conducted in 2005 by Carolyn Bronstein where she analyzed how third-wave feminism was being framed and determined whether journalists were recycling stock frames used during the women's movement of the 1970s (Bronstein 783-803). Media framing theory refers to the process of putting a news story or other type of media message together, including how a story is organized and structured (Littlejohn et al.). Bronstein looked at news stories published between 1992 and 2004. The findings stated how society as a whole was affected by the movements and how the views towards women changed to have a positive and rightful impact (Bronstein 783-803).

It was during this wave of feminism that the movement appreciated and acknowledged inclusivity. There was a wide audience who were isolated within the first and the second wave of feminism and finally found a voice. The third wave of feminism explored the broad spectrum of challenges that were dealt with by a particular community and individual, now an individual had their agency within their hand, it embraced its individuality. There was some sense of power and autonomy that an individual could now carry. It was this movement that media also gave a voice to sexual exploitation and one of its kind was the 1990s when Anita Hill accused Clarence Thomas, a member of the United States Supreme Court, of sexual harassment. This was largely viewed by the audience on a large scale giving a voice to many more incidents of this kind in the future. Many among the spectators now began to resonate with this assault done on Hill. Two scholars, Valerie Renegar and Stacey Sowards, examined the third-wave feminist texts having common

themes which included, the absence of a coherent definition of third-wave feminism, the use of negative labels as terms of empowerment, a resistance to simple and singular identity position (Littlejohn et al.). To further exemplify the views of the wave that is seen as oppressive to one individual may not always be oppressive to another individual but rather a willing choice and decision taken by one.

These contradictions identified during this movement led to a platform created for ever-changing views. Making space for self-determination, new ways of imagining, and new forms of social action that can serve as a model for social movements facing complex circumstances and goals (Littlejohn et al.). Simply it would drive to the fact that there is a specific political understanding of the term feminism, but rather acknowledging the fact that collective ideas make feminism and there is no definite definition to the term feminism. But rather a collective understanding on a large scale.

The fourth wave of feminism identified from the period of 2012 to the present was rather more outreaching as it was with the advent of various exploitation of women. Sexual harassment, rape culture, body shaming, and misogynist microaggression were out called. "The Me-Too movement," a term coined by Torana Burke played a significant role during this wave. Similar to the assault of Hill during the third wave. The fourth wave was driven by the case of 2014 where, Alyssa Milano, an actress accused film producer Harvey Weinstein of sexual assault. Slut march was another prominent aspect of this wave.

The feminist movement was aided by the media to a large extent. The media has been a boost at the same time biased toward the feminist movement and women in general. The whole feminist movement happened over media. It has still failed

to identify the rightful position of women. Women to date within the frames of media are negatively portrayed for various reasons, one such cause is the long reign of patriarchy over any fight for women's liberation. Whatever is portrayed in media is generally blindly consumed by the audience. This is a serious issue and needs to be addressed properly. It is only after this issue is addressed to the crust will the diverse representation of women happens properly. Thus, eradicating gender norms and stereotypical representation. The diverse representation however can be identified with the whole feminist movement happening over media. Specifically, the third wave of feminism drastically brought a change and its soul lay in social media. It was however after the breakout of the third and the fourth wave that a significant change was recognized with regards to media portraying women.

2.3 The Impact of Media

The time and culture in America revolve around a variety of media, including technology, advertising, music, video games, movies, and television. Worldwide the generation of children and teenagers have grown up with this lifestyle and it affects the world around them. The influence of television alone has made itself an important part of life. In addition, Americans alone engage in watching television on a scale of a total of 250 billion hours a year (Tonn). Although, a study by McGhee and Fruch concluded that television viewing plays an important role in education and children's intelligence, their attitudes and expectations related to men and women (McGhee and Frueh 179-188). Watching television is often associated with entertainment. It influences individuals' attitudes and feelings toward themselves and others (Tonn). Thousands of images, sounds, and words that flash or play on the screen influence the viewer's identity and relationships and blur the lines between reality and fantasy (Palmer 123-143). On

the screen, the entertainment is an accurate picture of what life is like, and some children believe it (Tonn). Children often compare themselves to the characters and the lives they represent on screen. They are also influenced by social norms and emotional relationships among their peers (Palmer 123-143). A child's appearance is often intertwined with the popular culture in which he or she lives. One such franchise of the huge media industry was Walt Disney and it played a huge role in impacting viewers. The Walt Disney Company began in 1923 and has since influenced many people all around the world through his film productions. Watt explains:

> Walt Disney has been, arguably, the most influential American entertainer of the twentieth century… Walt Disney himself has become encrusted in myths that diverge sharply. On one hand, his disciples worship Saint Walt as a beloved purveyor of innocent imagination, uplifting fantasy, and moral instruction. On the other hand, his denouncers bitterly criticize Huckster Walt as an artistic fraud, an imperialist, a cynical manipulator of commercial formulas, and a saccharine sentimentalist (Watts).

Despite several criticisms of Disney, his work remains popular and influential, and his legacy continues to prosper. The Walt Disney Company has been criticized for the portrayal of sexism and gender roles in several productions, particularly the Disney princess films.

2.4 Walt Disney

Walter Elias Disney was born in 1901 to Elias and Flora Disney. Throughout Walt's life, he had many struggles, including the death of his two oldest brothers (allegedly due to abuse by their father) leaving only Walt to aid his father support the family. He also struggled while getting older, in school, and trying to

make it as a cartoonist (Bryman). As a teenager, Walt had very little interest in school, but as he got older he became interested in drawing (much to his father's displeasure). When he reached his teenage years and his desire to draw increased, he decided to take an art course. Although Walt's drawing was interrupted when he was sent to France in World War I in 1918, on his return in 1919 he picked up drawing again. He started working as a cartoonist for several companies, still struggling as an artist, but everything changed in 1923 (Bryman).

Roy Oliver Disney a brother of Walt Disney encouraged Walt to continue drawing cartoons and it was at this time that the brothers started together, Disney Brothers Cartoon Studio in California. (with the help of a distributor named Margret Winkler) which today is recognized as The Walt Disney Company. Even after the brothers founded the company, they continued to struggle for success, creating cartoon after cartoon until their first feature film, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, in 1937. After Disney's first princess movie, the company began to grow significantly. After Snow White, Walt created two more princess films, *Cinderella* in 1950 and *Sleeping Beauty* in 1959. In 1966, Walter Disney died, but Walt Disney's production in his name continues to date (Bryman). After Walt's death, the company was very worried about what would happen. The activities of Walt Disney Productions after Walt's death can be explained in three stages: The first was the Disney Troika, where Roy and two other men directed the company. When Roy died, the second phase began where they looked for proper management, and the third phase where Michael Eisner and Frank Wells took over. Wells died in 1994, and Eisner continued to run the company until 2005 when Bob Iger, then chairman took over as CEO. Between these phases, there were questions as to whether or not the company would survive and whether it would be as Walt would have wanted it

to be. Many employees came and went through these stages (Bryman). When Eisner took over, he joined Walt's company and wanted to create the same things that Walt and his colleagues created. He began to focus on the films themselves and creating what he felt would reflect Walt and Walt Disney Productions. He made movies like *The Lion King* and *Beauty and the Beast*, and Walt Disney Productions re-emerged in the movie industry (Bryman). Disney princess movies turned out to be the most profitable. In 2001, Disney princesses became even more popular when Disney launched its "Disney Princess line as an advertising and marketing campaign aimed at young girls" (England et al. 555-567; Orenstein). The goal of their marketing was to "encourage children to identify personally with the characters so that ... they would buy related products" (England et al. 557).

2.5 Disney and Gender Roles

One way to define gender roles is that they are a set of behavioral "norms" that are closely related to individuals that is men and women of a particular social group or structure (Yerby et al.). Certain attitudes and behaviors are associated with certain traits and characteristics. Society tends to define what it means to be male or female, and then define the characteristics and descriptions of normal behavior that each person will display (Gardner 31-36). These representations and attitudes are reinforced by products, clothing and even advertising in an appropriate way (Gardner 31-36). These social expectations and norms are imposed by society on children who have interest and influence. In today's world, girls wear bright clothes, play with dolls, and enjoy tea. Boys, on the other hand, should play with gadgets, sports, and video games. The expectations of societal norms demand that children will succeed when they step outside those boundaries. These children are at risk of being bullied, discriminated against, and mistreated by peers and adults (Gardner

31-36). Many children receive information about gender roles and other beliefs or values from media sources (Tonn). These sources of information, established in American culture like that of The Disney Studios Company, appear to have a significant role in children's stories, children's literature, and forms of fiction (Tonn). That is, children understand their identity, environment, and behavior through popular movies, cartoons, and stories.

Throughout history, the roles of men and women in movies have reflected cultural and religious views on social norms and expectations about gender roles and identity. Disney therefore follows cultural norms serves as a significant role model and shows the influence of ideas and expectations on behavior patterns related to individuals' gender. Both male and female gender roles are very clearly presented in Disney films. The biggest change in Disney's history has been in the portrayal of female characters. The portrayal of women and their gender roles can be described in the way of seeing women on screen through Disney Princess is the depiction of stereotypical young women often portrayed in scenarios depicting misery and in a domestic environment. It can be identified in, princesses like Snow White, Cinderella, and others (classic princesses), they lack any adventure in their lives. However, there has also been the advent of princesses or female characters who are shown to be rebellious and ambitious. This image is represented in women characters like Moana, Merida, Mulan, and Raya (modern princesses). These different female characters through different movies can be seen in harmony with the cultural aspects of the events of the same period. Social expectations and norms related to women's gender roles have changed and evolved over time and in this process, media becomes a visual representation of the social norms that are

expected in the surrounding culture and society for the representation seen in classic princesses and new princesses.

2.6 Evolving Female Portrayal Beyond Gender Stereotypes in Disney Films

Disney's portrayal of gender roles and stereotypes has been a topic of conversation for years. The company has been criticized for perpetuating traditional gender roles and stereotypes, limiting the portrayal of women in leadership positions, and portraying men as static and emotional. In recent years, however, Disney has tried to change gender stereotypes with its characters and storylines and has created more gender-neutral and diverse shows in its content. Stereotypes are society's beliefs and assumptions about how men and women should behave and present themselves, based on their principles. Sexual Stereotypes are often based on cultural norms and expectations and can influence people's perceptions and behavior. Traditional gender roles portray men as dominant, strong, and lacking feelings, while women are nurturing, emotional, and inclined. These stereotypes are often perpetuated in media and entertainment such as movies, television shows, and advertisements, and influence children's perceptions of gender at an early age.

Disney has been accused of perpetuating traditional gender roles and stereotypes, as male characters are often portrayed as heroes who save the day, while female characters are portrayed as princesses in need of rescuing. Female characters are often depicted as passive, nurturing, and focused on finding a partner, while male characters are depicted as active, courageous, and confident. For instance, this depiction started with Disney's first full-length animated *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) and the chain continued with *Cinderella* (1950), *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), and *Beauty and the Beast* (1991). These images limit the representation of women in leadership positions and reinforce traditional gender

roles, making it difficult for children to imagine themselves in a role that defies those stereotypes. Disney has made great efforts to change gender stereotypes in recent years.

Disney commenced recognizing the importance of diversity and inclusion in media and entertainment. The company introduced more complex characters that break traditional gender roles and represent people of different races, and ethnicities. For example, in the movie *Moana* (2016), Disney presented a strong female protagonist, Moana, who defies traditional gender roles by taking a leadership role in the community and embarking on a journey to save her people. The character of Moana is defined by her gender and her story shows that a hero can be regardless of gender. Disney has also presented more diverse and complex male characters that break traditional gender stereotypes. In *Frozen* (2013), Disney presented Kristoff who defies traditional male roles by being emotional, nurturing, and caring. The character of Kristoff challenges traditional gender roles, showing that men can be sensitive and caring without compromising their masculinity. Disney has strived to create more diverse and inclusive stories that challenge traditional gender roles. Another instance is identified, in *Mulan* (1998), where Disney presented a female protagonist who takes on the role of a warrior to save her father and her country. The character of Mulan challenges traditional roles, showing that women can be strong, independent, and succeed in male-dominated roles.

Disney has also worked to change gender stereotypes through its television shows and theme parks. On the TV show *Doc McStuffins* (2012-2018), Disney introduced a young girl who aspires to become a doctor, breaking traditional gender roles by portraying a girl interested in science and medicine. In Disney theme parks,

the company introduced more diverse and inclusive attractions, with female superheroes and characters from diverse backgrounds. Disney has now challenged and refuted traditional gender stereotypes in their films. This is reflected in the portrayal of female characters as strong, capable, and independent, as well as in the increased representation of characters from different backgrounds. For example, in *Mulan*, the titular character defies gender norms by disguising herself as a man to join the army and protect her family. In *Frozen,* the relationship between sisters Anna and Elsa is at the center of the story, not a romantic relationship with a male character. Over time, Disney has changed the way women are portrayed, especially their princesses, to reflect and suit the changing times. Therefore, from the appearance of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* in 1937 to the appearance of *Frozen* in 2013 there has been identified a significant shift in the representation of women characters.

2.7 Disney's Imprints on Children's Minds

The impact of gender stereotypes in media, especially children's media, has been an ongoing topic of debate for years. One of the most influential and widespread media companies in the world is The Walt Disney Company, with a wide range of children's films, television programs, and products. Disney has been criticized for perpetuating gender stereotypes in the media, including portraying female characters as passive and submissive and portraying male characters as aggressive and dominant. Considering Disney's gender stereotypes on children, including their beliefs about gender roles and behaviors and their perceptions of themselves and others. According to media researchers, children's media, including Disney, often reinforces traditional gender stereotypes. For example, in classic Disney films such as *Cinderella, Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, and Sleeping*

Beauty, female characters are usually portrayed as helpless and men come to rescue them. Male characters, on the other hand, are portrayed as powerful and can save the day.

Recent Disney films such as *Frozen* and *Moana* have attempted to break away from traditional gender stereotypes by presenting strong and independent female characters. However, some critics argue that these films continue to reinforce gender stereotypes in other ways, such as portraying female characters as emotional and nurturing, while male characters are presented as rational and logical. The effects of Disney's gender stereotypes on children have been there. The subject of many studies. It is identified that exposure to media gender stereotypes can shape children's beliefs about gender roles and behavior and influence their attitudes toward themselves and others. It can examine the effects of Disney movies on children's gender roles. It depicts that children who watched Disney films in traditional gender roles had stereotypical views of gender roles. In contrast, children who watched films in non-traditional gender roles were more likely to have non-stereotypical views of gender roles. For another matter, it contributes to the effect of Disney princesses on teenage girls. For instance, it would narrate to the girls who identified with princesses were more likely to fulfill traditional gender roles, such as nurturing and acting passive, and less likely to participate in physical activities considered masculine. Schercado also showed that exposure to sex stereotypes spread in the media can affect children's self-esteem and body image. Girls exposed to media that emphasize thinness and beauty as ideals can develop a negative body image and low self-esteem. Boys exposed to media that emphasize masculinity and toughness as ideals can develop body dissatisfaction and risky behaviors, such as drug abuse and aggression. In addition, exposure to media gender stereotypes can

also affect children's social and emotional development. Boys exposed to media that promotes aggressive and controlling behavior may engage in bullying and other forms of aggression. Girls who are exposed to media that promotes passive and submissive behavior may have low self-esteem and difficulty coping with social situations. The impact of Disney gender stereotypes on children is a complex and multifaceted issue. Although Disney attempted to break away from traditional gender stereotypes in recent films, its media continues to reflect many traditional gender roles and behaviors.

2.8 Comprehending Simulation, Simulacra, and Hyperreality

Simulation and Simulacra are a theory developed by Jean Baudrillard in 1981 that studies reality and representations of reality. Baudrillard's theory states that there are imitations of reality. These imitations are considered real and can be permanently recreated; they are created so many times that the real one disintegrates into an unrecognizable imitation. The danger of this process, argues Baudrillard, is that the recreated imitations can become detached from the original so that no connection to the original can be made. He states: "menacing genius between "true" and "false", between "real" and "imaginary" (Baudrillard 3). If individuals can no longer understand what is "true" and "false" and what is " real" and "imagined", this is the creation of hyperreality. One example that Baudrillard uses to explain hyperreality is Disneyland. Baudrillard explains that Disneyland is a place that represents real American life, and hides the fact that he does so. Disneyland offers people a place to go to escape "reality". Disneyland was created for children, but adults perceive it as an opportunity to escape from the "real world" and "adulthood". Baudrillard states that "Disneyland exists to hide that it is a 'real' land... It is presented as imaginary to make us believe that the rest is real... and that everything

around it is no longer real but instead belongs tothe hyperreal order and the order of simulation" (Baudrillard 12). When Baudrillard discusses hyperreality, he states that:

> The real is produced from miniaturized cells, matrices, and memory banks, models of control—and it can be reproduced an indefinite number of times from these. It no longer needs to be rational, because it no longer measures itself against either an ideal or negative instance … it is no longer the real because no imaginary envelops it anymore. It is a hyperreal, produced from a radiating synthesis of combinatory models in hyperspace without atmosphere (Baudrillard 2).

Therefore, Baudrillard's theory suggests that it is impossible to know the real from the false because simulations have blended the two. As Baudrillard also states, "It is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real … never again will the real have the chance to produce itself…" (Baudrillard 2). Baudrillard believes that the process of hyperreality happens through four "phases of the image." In these four phases, "it" refers to the imitations of the original:

> It is the reflection of a profound reality;
>
> It masks and denatures a profound reality;
>
> It masks the absence of a profound reality;
>
> It has no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure Simulacrum. (Baudrillard 6).

To further explain these steps, supportive instances can be drawn to illustrate how the transition from original to hyperreality occurs in oral tales. As a first step,

identify the simulations of oral folktales. Oral folktales are passed down time and time again orally from person to person and are modified and changed depending on who and where the story is told (Oring). In the second stage, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's literary version of the folk tales *Kinder und Hausmaerchen* (1812, first edition). Between collection and publication, the Brothers Grimm edited the oral fairy tales, removing erotic or sexual elements, adding Christian allusions, and "emphasizing specific models for male and female protagonists according to the dominant patriarchal code of the time; many of the stories are domestic or more masculine according to taste, using diminutives, charming expressions and beautiful descriptions (Zipes 14). This is how they built a folk tale about their narration. Here, Grimm's version of the folk tale disguises it as a simulation (edited version) that consists of several intermingled oral stories, including and omitting some parts, and is not the original story itself. Then, in Baulilard's third stage, these Grimm stories are turned into a film; such as the Disney princess movies. Disney used several Grimm Brothers fairy tales, including Snow White and Cinderella, in their adapted films. Disney "Americanized" a version of Grimm's fairy tales that represents the "innocence of male power" and women as tame, innocent, and passive (Zipes 24). Disney hides the fact that its princess movies are reconstructed folktales inspired by the Brothers Grimm's version of normal fairy tales; Disney movies are not original stories. While going to the screen the movie narrates the Disney version of the fairy tale, which is understood as the "original story", and where the "image" is completely disconnected from the "real" - it creates hyperreality. Since Baudrillard's theory suggests that in the fourth stage simulation becomes "real", this extended theory to the fairy tales from Disney movies reflects how simulation is part of regular life, representations of American life as

transmissible ideologies taken as real-life models of gender roles, gender performances, and relationship scenarios. The Disney version of a fairy tale aka "false reality" becomes its reality where spectators yearn for this ideological fantasy life. Some viewers are unable and unaware of the line between the real and the unreal and begin to live their lives through the hyperreality of models created by Disney (Baudrillard 6-7). Other writers on cultural criticism and feminism, including Stone (2008), Greenhill and Susan (2010), and Zipes (1988), have argued similar points.

CHAPTER THREE: CRITIQUE OF THE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN: A STUDY OF SELECT CLASSICS FROM DISNEY ANIMATED PRINCESSES FILMS

3.1 An Overview of Feminism

Feminism finds its traces back in the year 1792 through the work of Mary Wollstonecraft (Gedalof et al.). Here the discussion only focuses traces on a small part of feminism, which is related to the historical social context of, *Cinderella* (1950), *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), and *Beauty and the Beast* (1991). It is significant to note that Disney has responded to feminist criticisms with their films and changed the representation of women, which in turn changed some of the issues discussed further. The actual word "feminism" entered the English language from France in the 1890s, and at the time "feminism" had negative connotations (Walters). Although written in the context of the French Revolution, Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* dealt with similar problems that women faced in the United States,

> *"*Women had not previously "existed" because political and social ideologies...either did not acknowledge their equality with men or took their existence for granted, and thus, worse, did not need to acknowledge their existence*"* (Gedalof et al. 25).

> "Women were viewed as "biological creatures," they were passive, submissive, overlooked, and only needed for reproduction purposes, child-rearing, and domesticity*"* (Gedalofet al. 25). The struggle to change traditional gender roles led to feminism." Supportive evidence can be traced in Disney Princesses like Cinderella and Aurora. The history of Feminism

is broken down into waves: first wave, second wave, and third wave, and the most recent is the fourth wave.

First-wave feminism:

> Arose in the context of industrial society and liberal politics but is connected to both the liberal women's rights movement and early socialist feminism in the late 19th and early 20th century in the United States and Europe. Concerned with access and equal opportunities for women, the first wave continued to influence feminism in both Western and Eastern societies throughout the 20th century (Krolokke & Sorensen 1). The first wave in the United States "was characterized by diverse forms of intervention that have continued to inspire later feminist movements" (Krolokke & Sorensen 3).

Second-wave feminism "emerged in the 1960s to 1970s in post-war western welfare societies, when other "oppressed" groups such as Blacks and Homosexuals were being defined…*"* (Krolokke & Sorensen 1-2). Second-wave feminism fought for women *"politically and in their own private lives"* so women would have the right to make decisions based on their situations, such as "abortion, divorce, and non-legislative partnership—and against sexism both in bourgeois society and within the socialist movements" (Krolokke & Sorensen 1).

Second-wave feminism:

> Refers mostly to the radical feminism of the women's liberation movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s…that generated an explosion of research and teaching on women's issues, which has now grown into a diverse disciplinary field of women's gender, or feminist studies (Krolokke & Sorensen 15).

The second wave of feminism, similar to the first, fought for equality, it also raised a combat on sexual oppression and gender inequality both within cultural and political spheres of life, fighting to break stereotypical, traditionally practiced gender norms and giving women their deserved right to make their own decisions with regards to private life. This led to the third wave of feminism.

Third-wave feminism is the result of the struggles and movements of both the previous waves. *Beauty and the Beast* was produced at the time of this particular wave. Women were empowered and could "generally see themselves as capable, strong and confident social agents" (Krolokke and Sorensen 15).

Third-wave feminism:

> Seeks to overcome the theoretical question of equity or difference and the political question of evolution or revolution, while it challenges the notion of "universal womanhood" and embraces ambiguity, diversity, and multiplicity in transversal theory and politics. … It marks a move away from thinking and acting in terms of systems, structures fixed power relations, and thereby also "suppression" toward highlighting the complexities, contingencies, and challenges of power and the diverse meanings of goals and agency (Krolokke & Sorensen 21). Third-wave feminism embraces diverse women and empowers them to perform outside the "gender norms" they were once expected to be within.

In the 1960s and 1970s, feminists began to criticize the media for misrepresenting women. Criticizing the stereotypes of gender roles presented in television and movies, which "normalized the dominant cultural values and customs that legitimate male domination of women" (Watkins and Emerson 152). During the second wave in the 1970s, several studies were conducted on the portrayal of

women in popular media, many with similar results "Studies showed that women tended to be portrayed in secondary roles such as housewives, secretaries, while men were often portrayed in roles of authority for example, as domestic supporters, or within the professional work sphere" (Watkins and Emerson 152). Therefore, representations of women in popular media reflected traditional stereotypical gender norms (Watkins and Emerson, 152). Not surprisingly, Disney has been the target of much feminist criticism for their portrayal of gender in their Disney princess films. Following this it is important to note the discussion by selected feminist critiques on Disney films and the application of theme to the select Disney films.

3.2 Synopsis of the Select Disney Classic Princess Animated Films

Cinderella (1950)

Cinderella is about a woman who was raised by an evil stepmother and has two evil siblings. The king hosts a party one evening, hoping to find a suitable wife for his son. With the aid of the fairy godmother, Cinderella could be present at the ball, on the condition only until midnight. The clock strikes midnight, and Cinderella rushes out of the ball and mid-conversation with the prince and loses her glass slipper. The prince raises the glass slipper only to order the royal soldiers to look for this girl in the kingdom who lost her glass slipper. Having found the perfect fit of the glass slippers on Cinderella, the soldiers happily take her back to the palace, the tale happily ends when Cinderella finally marries her prince.

Sleeping Beauty (1959)

The princess named Aurora is cursed by an evil fairy called Maleficent; to prick her finger in a spinning pin on her 16th birthday, falling into a deep sleep like death which could be broken only by a "true love kiss". For Aurora's safety, the three

fairies (godmothers) take her to live in the forest and give her the identity of Brier Rose, a peasant girl. When it's time for Aurora's 16th birthday, the fairies prepare "Brier Rose" a party and reveal Aurora's true identity to herself. Aurora, upset, returns to the castle to claim to be the princess again. At the palace, Maleficent previously cast a spell to make her (Aurora) move to the highest tower. Aurora pricks her finger, sliding into a deep sleep. The fairies cast a spell on the entire kingdom to keep still until Aurora awakens. With the assistance of the fairies, the prince arrives at the highest tower where Aurora is asleep in bed, kisses her, pulls Aurora out of the curse, and they go to the ball to marry which was witnessed by people from all kingdoms.

Beauty and the Beast (1991)

Narrates the tale of rebellious Belle who exchanges her father's custodian in the Beast's castle for her own life. In the palace, she is acquainted with animals and vice versa. The beast wants Belle to fall in love with him and save him from the cast spell, where he being a prince was disguised to be a beast. Belle finally falls in love with the beast releasing him of the spell only to be a handsome prince again. This shows a little reversal in gender roles on who saves whom.

3.3 Views by Feminist Critiques and their application to the identified themes in the Select Classics

Eminent feminists' critiques namely, Towbin, Haddock, Zimmerman, Lund, & Tanner, 2008; Stone, 2008; Greenhill and Susan, 2010; England, Descartes and Collier-Meek, 2-11; and Cheung, 2005; have criticized several themes prevalent in the Disney princess films. The area focuses on feminist gender critiques and gender representations seen in select Disney films previously listed. Furthermore, adhering to these critiques to discuss how gendered images in films

can affect viewers in their everyday lives. As Towbin states "Given Disney's dominance of children's media, it is important to examine the gender messages contained in these films..." (Towbin 21).

3.3.1 Princesses to be the Epitome of Beauty

Towbin states the first theme of Disney films, "a woman's appearance is valued more than her intelligence, women are helpless and need protection, and women are domestic and probably marry*"* (Towbin et al. 30). In the film the female characters like that of Cinderella and Aurora, there is a clear indication that "a woman's value was determined by appearance, not talent or intelligence" (Towbin 30).

In the two films that is *Cinderella* and *Sleeping Beauty* the subject of beauty is very prominent, to the princesses. It is they who feel the urge to look beautiful for them to meet a prince, fall in love, and get married. They often dress and dream only of royalty. For instance, in the movie *Cinderella,* all the women are seen competing with each other to charm the price with their beauty. Also, another instance traced was the fact that they dress well in lavish gowns to catch the prince's attention at the ball. For Aurora's, celebration of the birthday as an infant, one of the fairies, Mistress Flora blesses her with "the gift of beauty." "One gift of beauty rare, Gold of sunshine in her hair, lips that shame the red, red rose…" (*Sleeping Beauty* 01:09:00). Similarly in the case of Cinderella, the prince is enchanted with the beauty of Cinderella over all other maidens of the kingdom showcasing the idea that only a beautiful woman can stand a chance to win the prince's glance. Ultimately causing him to fall in love, leading to the concept of "love at first sight" the reason being beauty. However, the narration slightly shifts in *Beauty and the Beast.* In the characters of princesses, Belle is a woman who enjoys reading, is

engrossed in books, and often pays visits to the library. Although represented with an intellect, her beauty is still highly valued and admired by villagers like Gaston, who desire to marry her. The village women folk mock her, calling it strange because she loves books and rejects going about in search of suitors. The villagers mock her and call her "Funny" because she reads and thinks, something that is not identified with what women do. Also, Gaston in the same film adds on to say to Belle "The whole town talking about it. It's not right for a woman to read. Soon she starts getting ideas, and thinking..." (*Beauty and the Beast* 01:16:00). The shift in representing the theme of beauty is further visible through the image of the monster in Beauty and the Beast; it constitutes of what is the meaning behind beauty and what true beauty is reflective of. It emphasizes the idea that beauty is within individuals. Belle falling for the inner beauty of the beast, re-gains his true princely charms. While films like *Beauty and the Beast* adhere to morals rather than beauty that is externally visible and would eventually fade.

3.3.2 Fragile as Glass

Towbin secondly adheres that women are helpless and need a man to save them has also been criticized by feminist scholars such as Cheung (2005), Swan (1999), and Greenhill and Matrix (2010). The aforementioned statement by Towbin is visible in classics like *Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, and Beauty and the Beast*. Cinderella cannot save herself from the cruel treatment exhibited by her stepmother until was chosen to be the wife of the prince. Under means she is expected to shift from her maternal house where her stepmother ruled to the palace of the king. In the case of Aurora, she resumes existing back to life from a deep sleep to find that a true kiss from a prince has rescued her. Beast saves Belle from a wolf in the forest.

All these instances are identical to the fact that Disney wanted to portray women as weak and only needing men's security.

A man was depicted as a strong masculine figure who would save the princess from harm. However, the shift in the replication in the plot where only the prince rescues the princess is seen to change in the movie *Beauty and the Beast*, where the ultimate ending of *Beauty and the Beast* is about actually Belle saving the Beast through her love. It is also Belle who saves her father from being captive to the beast in exchange for her own life. Belle is a woman who is shown with feminist characteristics. Also, being a movie of 1991, it stands past to some extent of an ideal rescue on screen where princesses were saved by princes. The movie stands to the fact that if an individual loves someone then they can do anything. This is illustrated in the fact of what Belle does for the Beast by ignoring his appearance, concentrating on his behavior and good heart, these being the qualities of a good human at heart and what true love means.

This movie situated in the second and third wave of feminism was a prime factor in challenging the represented images of women on screen until now. It was through the female character of Belle that Disney re-considered about situating women within a frame. The third wave of feminism was about seeking prominent questions about reclaiming and redefining through media the ideas and choice of words about womanhood, beauty, gender, and more. Therefore, unlike the previous two princesses Cinderella and Aurora who blindly fall in love with their respective men over just one meeting and marry the very next instant. Belle is a female character who is shown to be an intelligent girl and stays with the beast and realizes that he is much more than his beastly appearance. Contrary to Cinderella and Aurora's typical approach shown toward their respective man, Belle is much more

composed, at her own pace trusting the process, stays with the beast, eventually gets to know him, and only then makes a move to marry, which is a very smart decision and an ideal thing to do with regards to love and marriage. Through this representation, it is identified from the fact that women are represented as fragile beings, waiting for rescue. To the shift of portraying women like Belle to be generous and trusting of her skills and abilities. Thus, making her own choice to marry the beast.

3.3.3 Women Situated within the Domestic Sphere

The next argument foundation by Towbin states that women are tamed and must marry, also supported by (Swan, 1999; Laying 2001; England et al. 2011). The role of women began to be questioned and fought for as early as the 1920s. Women's only duty was procreation and managing the domestic chores. As times changed, women fought for equality in the 1920s and began to challenge traditional norms and expectations for women and their gender roles (Moran). The women's rights movement continued to grow, especially after the passage of the 19th Amendment, which gave women the right to vote (Moran). The fever of women's activism slowed down in the late 1920s and almost disappeared during the Great Depression (Moran). In the United States, the early 1930s was a crucial period due to the global economic depression (Gene). Thousands of American workers and farmers lost their jobs and homes because of that severe depression (Gene). In the late 1930s, the economy began to recover, but a full recovery did not occur until the United States exited through World- War I (Gene). This depression in turn affected the role of women and the recovery. The traditional view was that women had to stay at home to take care of their husbands and children. Culture and society reinforced this stigma, arguing that women workers were "un-American" and stole

jobs from men who cared for their families (Moran). The era during and after the Great Depression created an image of a woman as a devoted mother, who devoted all her time and effort to taking care of her family and was not included in paid work (Walker). The idea that women should be housewives was not only demonstrated by people in society but reinforced by idealized images in the media.

Cinderella (1950) is based on another Grimm story. Disney rewrote the story and film again to idealize the classic rags-to-riches story that reflected postwar American culture (Chersman-Campbell). Following the same pattern as *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, the story of Cinderella has a romantic theme, happy music, and cute little loving animals. The story of Cinderella was not a typical media reinforcement of gender roles, in the 1950s. Most of the pressures of culturally created gender roles have been about the woman who wants to be the one to clean the house and cook to make others happy. Although Cinderella was depicted many times as finding ways to find joy in such classic household tasks as baking, cleaning, and tidying, she still dreamed of being happy. Cinderella is a picture of a typical damsel in distress because only the prince can save Cinderella. Cinderella was forced into slavery until she was freed by marriage (Yerby et al.). This corresponds to the social views of women at the time, who idealized marriage and the role of having children and taking care of a husband. The topic concerning domestication appears fairly in Cinderella. Locating the films that were produced between 1937 and 1950, when patriarchy was still significant Abler contested, it is not surprising that the women in the films were passive, submissive, and tamed. They lacked any agency of their own. *Cinderella* being produced in 1950 represented the vulnerable sides of womanhood like that of her serving as a maid in her household under stepmothers. For another instance, Cinderella's biological

father had married Lady Tremaine only for the fact that a woman ought to look and rear a child. Which is again a reflection of the stereotypical approach towards women's role in society and within the institution of marriage and family. It is often reflected that a woman needs to be under the protective circle of a man. They could live a life of their own and women ought to be surrounded by men at any phase or stage of their life. It portrayed motherhood as a biologically assigned duty only to women and mothers to nurse and look after their children. Cinderella's submissive nature and the passive attitude towards her stepmother are seen in her domestic activities which she politely agrees to do like cooking and cleaning. The theme of marriage is also reflected as an instant action after falling in love, as seen in *Cinderella* and *Sleeping Beauty*. *Sleeping Beauty* another Disney film that appeared and was released in 1959, the film presented the third princess of Disney, Aurora. Like many other Disney films before it, including *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and *Cinderella*, the fairy tale comes from multiple authors and adaptations. In this film, Disney used adaptations of Charles Perrault and the Brothers Grimm and further adapted it to suit the audience of the time (O'Brien). *Sleeping Beauty* uses music, action, and a heroic prince fighting for true love to follow the same story formula as the previous princesses. The Disney adaptation of this story features a princess who is hopelessly cursed and the only way to escape. is "The Kiss of True Love". Aurora is no different from the other two princesses because they rely on the prince's rescue to get out of their problems. This social mentality of creating an ideal woman who is fragile and unable to save herself is represented again in this film.

The princesses meet the prince and immediately fall in love and with a blink of an eye they are married. *Beauty and the Beast*, Belle doesn't marry until she falls

in love with the Beast, it is contrary to "love at first sight" and "Waiting for love to find them" is changed for the better in Belle's scenario. As Towbin suggests, love seems to be "easy", but *Beauty and the Beast* shows that love genuinely requires effort, understanding, and patience. Belle is the first princess who does not fall in love "at first sight"(Henke and Umble 326-327). The theme that women must marry Towbin et al. (2008) is extended to the topic discussed by Cheung (2005): that love leads to "happily ever after". This can be seen in every Classic Disney movie. The princesses Cinderella, Aurora, and Belle, live happily ever after on marrying a prince, representing a blind idea that marriage means happiness.

England and others also discussed how the role of women was stereotypically expected to be homemakers and mothers (Coltrane and Shih), as represented in Cinderella, Aurora, and Belle. Both Cinderella and Belle's value is based on their beauty and how well they manage their domestic chores, as they have no other "traits". Aurora's only quality is her beauty because she is not tamed like Belle and Cinderella. King Hubert also wants his son Prince Philip to marry Aurora so she can bear him Grandchildren. While King Hubert and King Stefan wait for Aurora's return, King Hubert also goes on to reveal his plans for the future of their respective children who would unite in marriage. He further goes on to say. "new home…children need a nest of their own… place to raise their little broods, eh" (*Sleeeping Beauty* 00:33:48). Similarly, in the film *Cinderella* the party is hosted for the prince to choose a princess only on the purpose of the king wanting Grandchildren. *"*I want to see my grandchildren before I go… there must be at least one who'd make a suitable mother*…"* (*Cinderella* 00:24:32). This is ideal to the fact of the gendered role identified with women to procreate and rear children out of their choice and make someone else or family happy. However, a visible shift is

noticed in the portrayal of the character Belle, drawing attention to what second-wave feminism fought for: women are more than housewives, she chooses to read and think regardless of the opinions she is surrounded with.

Feminist criticism aims to make people aware of the mutilation of women, change the representation of women in the media, and fight for equality and against gender oppression (Lying). Through these feminist critiques it is evident that the representation of gender roles is being replicated in Disney princess films, Disney has gradually reshaped how the female characters in these films are portrayed. As movies have evolved, some gender representations have changed though visible in small changes. O'Brien argues that: "films are cultural texts produced under historically specific economic and social conditions, to give meaning to audiences...Disney adapted fairy tales to appeal to the society in which its films are made." (O'Brien). Furthermore, performances criticized by feminists in the aforementioned movies became examples of intended generated performances suiting regular life, as stated by Budillard's hyperreality theory.

3.3.4 Portrayal of Love

The princesses follow the idea of love at first sight. All princesses end up with that jolly prince they know and have only met him once or twice. There is no information about how their romantic relationships develop. They all fall in love, get married, and somehow live happily ever after (Towbin et al.). It also conveys the message that when a man and a woman meet, they fall in love immediately. Time does not have to pass, and other general factors do not have to be in place for love to happen (Towbin et al.). For instance, Cinderella and Aurora meet their prince and marry their respective prince immediately. However, as mentioned before it was only Belle who took time and reflected on the values of true love. But,

she does dream of love and a prince. These three princesses are afraid of being alone and always dream of the day they will meet their prince. They all sing about the possibility of falling in love and finding instant happiness. Their entire story as a character finds a happy ending through romance (Whelan). The princesses also depend on their male counterparts to rescue them. References to marriage and weddings were also very common in all three films. They want to choose the right partner and still be able to fulfill their dreams (Whelan). However, Love is also depicted as something that develops over time, especially in the classic, *Beauty and the Beast*, which shows progress in the portrayal of love (Towbin et al.). Although the former two princesses that is Cinderella and Aurora replicate to portray some traditional stereotypes of romance, their ultimate goal is still to find a suitable partner for marriage (Do Rozario). The film also suggests that they enter into a romantic relationship that will probably lead to marriage. Love and marriage are a way to domesticate and tame these rebellious women, allowing them to settle down (Whelan). For instance, Belle who usually voices her opinions and thinks, is suggested by Gaston and the other villagers to find a suitable match for herself. For instance, Gaston goes on to say "… it's time you focus on more important things, like me" (*Beauty and the Beast* 01:16:50). It seems that their happily ever after still depends on finding a husband (Junn).

So also, marriage is an institution to tame rebellious women and a family is built on marriage. Many classic movies have celebrated this theme. The princesses secretly yearn for a happy and loving union. Considering Cinderella, the first meeting with the Prince is as long as the dance, and *Sleeping Beauty* is as long as the song. They usually sing that 'love at first sight' is true love that lasts forever. Her angelic and unique appearance act as catalysts for love at first sight. Disney has

been campaigning 'love at first sight' for over 50 years through classics like *Cinderella,* and *Sleeping Beauty* both of them find their respective suitors in prince charming, a handsome- dashing gentleman. But, this kind of love is usually about physical attraction. The traditional model of love at first sight no longer applies to the prince when *Beauty and the Beast* appear in "The Beast" and the traditional male role has changed. For Belle Beast's positive outlook allows him to change. The main character, Belle, finds hope in being with the Beast. Eventually, they start dating, completely rejecting the concept of love at first sight. While the Beast is an outsider among the nobility, Belle is an outsider in a traditional patriarchal society. This brings a small transition of *Beauty and the Beast* being a movie showing a change that is needed in the perception of love. They both like to read and like to think. Belle, who previously sang for 'Prince Charming', has made a good choice of her own rather than blindly falling in love with a prince, as seen in princesses like Cinderella and Aurora. Belle on the contrary takes her time and gets acquainted with the beast and only then does she approve of him. Whereas in the case of Cinderella, for the misfortunes she suffered in her maternal surroundings, she could be saved by the nameless prince charming. Similarly, in Aurora's plot, she is wakened from her death-like sleep by a curse that could be broken by only a true love's kiss. Both Cinderella and Aurora are seen to have placed their happiness and rescue in the hands of the other. Contrary to this fact is Belle choosing a fearsome and terrifying animal over the handsome knight Gaston was Belle's choice. Because the Beast is more in tune with his thoughts and feelings (evil on the outside, but better at heart), Gaston only tries to control him and escalate the war. The Beast, on the other hand, makes logical decisions to control his aggressive nature when making life-or-death decisions. In an environment of respect and patience, the two

love each other. Unlike the pursuit of grace and dreams in the late 20th century, in the 21st century, with the advancement of women's rights and true self-esteem, more women understand the importance of personal dreams over marriage and family.

Considering romance Disney portrays men as settlement agents who just help princesses like Cinderella and Aurora to find their true happiness, which was in the hands of the prince charming. Being unpractical the aforementioned princesses blindly put their happiness in the hands of the Prince. Love is found in contrast with the beauty that the princesses pose. They did not get time to even get acquainted with each other. Supportive evidence can be traced in Cinderella and Aurora where the former gets to meet the price over the first dance and the latter meets the prince as a peasant girl in the forest. There was hardly time for interaction and talk. They fall in love within an acquaintance of a few minutes and they are expected to spend the rest of their lives happily with the prince. Also, in the movie *Cinderella,* all the women aim to find true love, and their physical qualities are trained to be so. For example, the stepsisters Drizella and Anastasia are learning the art of singing and playing the piano, and all the women in the film are shown to focus on their physical appearance look attractive to the prince and accepted by him. The princesses have no personal aim for themselves and are constantly seeking love. They are dreaming about finding their one true love and that is shown to be their only true purpose in life, if they had to have any achievement at all it was that of finding love and marrying a prince.

3.3.5 Women Identified with Only Two Calls

Additionally, the theme that Cheung (2005) found was good versus evil, and of course good always wins over evil. For instance, Cinderella's kind nature and

simplicity reign over her stepmother and sisters' efforts to stop her from trying on the slipper, they fail in the end and Cinderella gets to "live happily ever after" with the prince. In *Sleeping Beauty*, Maleficent's wicked curse does not kill Aurora. Aurora has awakened and continues her happy life with the prince. In *Beauty and the Beast*, Gaston's evil deeds to kill the Beast do not bear success over Belle's love for the Beast. Anyway, it is visible that the characters representing good win and the characters representing evil lose at the end, for some "bad" characters the punishment also included death.

However, the good and bad traits are further assigned to women what constitutes making an ideal princess a good woman, and that is to say what constitutes making a cruel wicked woman. It portrayed here that women have only two calls to be princesses like Cinderella and Aurora, who were shown as good and well-behaved and at the mercy of others. They were polite and never opposed to anything. This is exactly how the image of women is represented on screen to be vulnerable, the way they ought to behave. Never questioning any injustice. For instance, Cinderella is shown to be happy with the domestic chores assigned to her even if they were unjust she never argued with the stepmother. On the contrary, if a woman was opinionated and possessed any power she was shown as wicked, cruel, and a witchy figure on the screen. For instance, the stepmother's, authoritative nature is equated to be wicked and cruel. This is representative of the fact that an ideal woman ought to be liked only if she is polite, gentle, and kind regardless of the circumstances she is situated in. These character traits of goodness were often shown to be homogeneous behaviors of all the Disney princesses. However, Belle is a Disney princess who owns the power to question. She argues and is shown discussing with Gaston. Also, is supportive of the fact that the

princesses were depicted as "soft, helpful, restless, shy, thoughtful, and described as beautiful*"* (England et al. 562*)*.

3.4 Extending Disney's Depiction of Gender in the Real World

Disney princess movies influence the portrayal of women, which has a particularly strong effect on children. The effect of Disney films on viewers is important because Disney films can potentially influence patterns of gender norms and representations in everyday life (Greenhill and Matrix, 2010; Towbin et al. 2006; England et al. 2011; Padilla-Walker et al. 2013; Fouts et al. 2006). Greenhill and Matrix (2010) analyze and criticize themes and motifs that are translated from written fairy tales into films, themes that can be associated with gender representation, such as princess characters, and themes of novels and female characters to be saved. Greenhill and Matrix suggest that children watching Disney films see "the story minimized and replaced by unenhanced images, songs, and dances that reinforce moral lessons" (Greenhill and Matrix 45) and this replaces enhanced images, songs, and dances which gives children a chance to "escape from reality". Thus, Disney films may be able to create a "hyperreality" through the images they project, where children "escape reality" using images from the films as models for their everyday morals and actions. Towbin et al. make a similar argument to Greenhill and Matrix (2010), stating that "children learn about social constructs such as gender from many sources, but the media is a powerful source of learning" (Greenhill and Matrix 21); they also suggest that "media images influence the formation of children's beliefs and values... and because research shows that media present many gender...stereotypes" (Greenhill and Matrix 21). Therefore children's beliefs and values are influenced by their Disney film stereotypes. English et al. argue that "Disney films are not specifically shown to

present stereotypical sexual images" (Greenhill and Matrix 556). Furthermore, other studies show that viewing sexual images affects viewers' actual sexual attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors, so it can be said that these Disney princess movies can convey gender-related attitudes and beliefs (Morawitz and Mastro 131). If gender values and beliefs are traditional stereotypical roles for women, such as seen in Snow White, Cinderella, and Aurora, children may watch these films and act out traditional gender roles. In the article *The Animated Woman* Laying states:

> Real (1989) contends that media provides role models for children that influence personal identity. Barry Brummett (1991) argues that this occurs through the process in which "the bits and pieces of everyday life, popular culture, participate in and influence the management of meaning (Laying 2).

Thus, the representations presented in the Disney princess films function as action models through the role models (the prince and princesses) in the film. Children identify these representations and consume gender meanings that affect their sexual performance in everyday life. While many argue that Disney's sexual representation affects children negatively, (Walker et al.). Further, Disney cartoons lead to prosocial behavior, "extending a definition of prosocial behavior to include a range of prosocial behaviors that reflect actual behavior" (Laura et al. 394). According to these studies, Disney films have been criticized for their stereotypical gender roles (among other presentations), which portray Disney films in a "negative light"; but the results of their study show that children who watch Disney movies behave more socially and "Disney movies reflect real-life behavior." Their findings suggest that Disney movies actually "reflect reality quite well, which ... suggests that children are more likely to notice and remember (and then imitate) these actions" (Laura, et al. 407). In O'Brien's article "The Happiest Films on Earth: A Textual and

Contextual Analysis of Walt Disney's Cinderella and The Little Mermaid", she states that:

> Fowler and McCormick (1986) argue that the introduction to fairy tales at an age when the distinction between fantasy and reality is blurry leads readers to accept the stereotypical conventions of fairy tales: stepmothers are wicked, princesses are mistreated, and everyone lives "happily ever after," In addition elements of realism that otherwise would be questioned remain unchallenged because the audience believes that fairy tales should be "accepted, not analysed" (O'Brien 177).

Because Disney's princess films are so successful, O'Brian suggests that audiences are willing to accept Disney's version of the fairy tales recreated in their films, in opposition to performances, since performances are the "dominant ideology of society" (O 'Brien 181). The disinfection of various Disney fairy tales is designed as a kind of "cinematic fantasy". In Disney princesses like *Cinderella* and *Sleeping Beauty*, traditional gender roles stick to traditional gendered roles that are expected to be performed by a particular gender. But in *Beauty and the Beast* there is an identified change in the representation of female characters, because despite attempts to return to patriarchy, feminists fought back, giving new depictions of women from the 1991 *Beauty and the Beast* (Swan). From the statement, there is an identification of the gendered representation by Disney films that affects children and affects their ideal of sex and gender performance in everyday life. These films affect the children who view them, claiming that when Disney started making these films, it was to escape the reality of war at a time that impacted America. The portrayal of gender roles in Disney princess films has been shown to follow stereotypical views of men and women. The princess is weak, passive, subservient

to men, obedient, and unable to live an independent life (Lee and Whelan). All Disney princesses identify typical feminine homogeneity within the traits depicted that are portrayed as helpful, emotional, needy or victimized, shy, attentive, sensitive, caring, loving, physically weak, and physically attractive (England et al.). Especially the first princess like Cinderella is more submissive and follows more traditional gender stereotypes compared to Belle. For Cinderella, her task is to be submissive and a way to win appreciation from her stepmother and stepsisters by being their servant (England et al.).

3.5 Disney's Depiction of Body Image

Disney represents the female form to reflect socio-cultural assumptions about what a woman's body should represent (Herbozo et al.). Classic Disney princesses represent society's Western standards of beauty such as being thin, graceful, young, and attractive to romantic suitors of the opposite sex (Do Roazario). The idealistic concept of beauty is preserved by princesses, who have "very light skin colour, small waist, delicate limbs, and full breasts", (Inglismaa et al.556). For example, Cinderella's delicate features are emphasized by the smallest feet in the kingdom, proving her identity by fitting her feet into glass slippers. (Do Rozario). Exposure to these media images significantly affects body dissatisfaction in adolescent girls (Herbozo et al.). The advent of the initial princesses was under the direct supervision of Walt Disney and encapsulated beauty in her hair, lips, and ability to sing melodiously and dance. For example, in *Sleeping Beauty*, Aurora receives three gifts from the fairies. Two of her gifts were beauty and song, which later attracted her prince. Disney filmmakers created an infinite loop of time where the princess is a continuous entity, re-releasing the films and marketing several products. Its products are "forever young and forever available" (Do Rozario 36),

just like all its princesses. Furthermore, in the princesses, sexuality is integrated through identity. The way they are drawn and how they attract potential suitors (Do Rozario). They move with a burlesque attitude and are more sexually provocative.

Disney draws attention to show their princess to be the prime epitome of beauty. Cinderella, Aurora, and Belle perpetuated narrow standards of beauty. They all reproduced with the same European or Western standard leaving no room for diversity. The princesses serve to be the epitome of stereotypical beauty standards. Beauty is idealized and every princess seems to hold her beauty in high regard. It is for their appearance that they are worth calling a princess. The ideal beauty standard is the persuasive way of what makes a woman look beautiful. These are socially expected beauty standards that Disney first produced in 1937 with *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and since then has only reproduced a similar-looking princess on screen.

The female gender is shown to be so very delicate and pretty and seldom possess wisdom or brains that could think sharply. Disney's main idea to replicate the princesses being beautiful and always concerned with their beauty is to show the female gender to be only concerned about their beauty and be least interested in anything else. Thus, stereotyping the female gender. Beauty serves to be the identity of the princesses and the greatest precious asset that they could ever have. The distinction between beauty and ugliness and the linking of the former with goodness is associated with how inner beauty is associated with behaviors like gentle, kind. Similarly, wicked traits like jealousy, playing tricks, and rudeness were reflective of the visible ugliness. For instance, Cinderella who is kind and generous is shown as very pretty and is juxtaposed from the cunning stepmother Lady Tremaine. Similarly, Aurora an innocent babe was cursed by the cruel traitor Maleficent.

Disney Studios woven the depiction of the female body on screen in a very unrealistic manner. Keeping in mind only the Western beauty standards and outright rejecting to acknowledge inclusivity and diverse representation, leaving nothing else to fit the frame.

The ideal beauty portrayed lacks credible anatomical basis within the confines of the characters. Their breast and waist size are beyond healthy achievement, reflecting the small frame they would carry and, how beautiful it would look while she appeared that way. These implausible bodies are representations of the "ideal feminine body-subject" which means women are taught to be "smaller than a man, demure, and take up little space" (Giovanelli). Although, this representation is not healthy and degrading, never remained unnoticed. The physical expectation of women could be a result of the emergence that appeared after World War II when the conventional gender roles were at their peak a period that boosted domestic idealism in the United States. However, the artists and producers are very aware and did not leave out of this gender expectation represented in the media. With the emphasis on the hourglass figure, Susan Bordo argues that this hourglass figure is a representation symbolic of maternal femininity prevalent in the nineteenth century. Cinderella, Aurora, and Belle are each of the princesses who are well-fitted in the frame. They had long frame faces, bathed in make-up that is to say they had red rosy lips, large blue eyes, long slender necks, rounded breasts, broad shoulders and comparatively thinner waists, thin writs, slender elongated legs whenever exposed, and always wore shoes which were pointed at the toes. Fair skin and long light-coloured hair. They were always expected to be well groomed all the time and look attractive to men.

The title of the movie and the characters were also reflective of the beauty

that ought to be represented, Cinderella the titular character whose name means in French "little ashes" is reflective of what she is reduced to under the mentoring of the stepmother; *Sleeping Beauty* is a way to say how women have the least to say or any opinion of her own. Aurora's name signifies dawn, and *Beauty and the Beast* which is again representative of how beautiful a woman ought to be irrespective of who she encounters like a beast. Belle signifies in French and Latin a word for beautiful. Additionally, in the animation of *Sleeping Beauty*, Aurora is blessed by the three Good Fairies with gifts like, "Gift of Beauty… Gold of sunshine in her hair, lips that shame the red, red rose, she'll walk with springtime wherever she goes" (*Sleeping Beauty* 01:09:00). "Gift of song" and the "Gift of True Love Kiss". This is significant of the fact that a woman only ought to possess beauty by birth and intelligence is not at all on the scale because a woman cannot be both intelligent and beautiful all at once. Adding to the aforementioned statement Belle, however, is a character of 1991 and she generally is not much concerned about the way she looks and appears. She is engrossed in reading and she uses her ability to think, she often thinks and ponders on thoughts when she tries to converse with others her speech is cut off mid-sentence, jumps in puddles, and plays with farm animals therefore villagers call her "a beauty, but a funny girl". This is a direct implication of the fact that women are only supposed to be looking beautiful and they ought to take care of their beauty and not ruin her beauty by thinking or reading.

The whole purpose of a woman's life should be in connection to her beauty and least on the scale could there be any room for intellectual activities like reading or thinking. But, Belle irrespective of what the villagers have to think or say about her is still passionate about reading. She is also the character among the Disney princesses who by choice visits the library over the ballroom and kitchen.

3.6 Racism and Sexism as Portrayed by Disney

Disney is one of the most powerful companies in the entertainment industry and manages to captivate viewers with its timeless stories. Since the company was founded in 1923, its value has grown to more than $110 billion (Dennison). Disney has an international customer base that engages with its content and products - new movies, characters, and products as well as classics that are regularly released from the Disney vault. Customers put money into the company to enjoy the magic of Disney, which is marketed as "innocent, wholesome family fun" (Cappiccie et al. 57). But, consumers don't realize Disney's marketing campaigns and iconic films. Disney is not as progressive as their image suggests. When the meaning of the stories and characters individuals equate with, there resemble gender stereotypes and racism. Disney incorporates gender stereotypes and racism in ways that are not visible to the viewer and for sure not to children, who make up a large part of their market. Disney is a big influence and knows the effects of using stereotypes and racist images on the generations that watch these movies and participate in the sales associated with them. Although Disney's animations, special effects, and plots have evolved over the company's history, princesses are still mostly portrayed in strictly feminine roles, and those films contain many racial references.

There can be traces of how several princess movies portray gender and racial stereotypes, the implications of this reality, and the impact of those stereotypes, on children who watch these movies and read these stories, especially girls. Disney became a household name in the film and animation industry. But after the deaths of Walt and Roy Disney the company was in trouble and "debt increased" (May 2). Disney's popularity and revenues declined until Michael Eisner and Jeffrey Katzenberg took over. The Renaissance 1980-1990 "promoted the revival of Disney

with 12 feature films" (May 2). Including *The Little Mermaid, Beauty and the Beast, Aladdin, and Pocahontas.* These films demonstrate the moderate success of Disney in holding the waves of feminism; however, "the representation of gender roles does not seem to have changed much after the death of Walt Disney" (Wiersma 104).

The next era of princesses, often called the Post-Renaissance, includes *The Princess and the Frog*, Disney's first film with a black princess. Disney has always been led by white men, and princess movies have been produced by white men. This provides a reason for why every princess movie contains some form of gender and racial stereotyping, why "seven of the eleven official Disney princesses are white" (Cordwell 15). And why those who are not are taken by fairy tales that present women through racist European points of view. Disney came up replication of white feminine traits the ideal white women representation where they showed women to be of white origin. The onset of the representation of white elite women on screen came to serve as the benchmark to be the representation of what women as a whole would look like in general this could be the very obvious result of the colonial oppression and mindset, that led to the preconceived notion of the very first princesses that came up to be the reason of only replicating the white feminine traits of who could be worthy of representation in media. They failed to recognize the diversity in race that existed on a large scale among women. The advent of the feminist wave also came about to be the reason for the identification of the white women's struggle and how they wanted certain liberty for themselves. The impact of the first wave was also seen on Disney where they very easily showed the representation of white women on the screen and white women were considered as the norm.

The features that were shown on screen were mostly those identified with white women. They owned a very ladylike demeanor that was a replication of the elite and set a prime example for how a woman should look. Their white features were mostly identical to European fairy tales and novels. Representation of Disney's white princesses also played with the very racial idea that is to say that only a white woman ought to be well-mannered and sophisticated, only she could possess these qualities that were more socially accepted and further, she would be socially accepted. However, it was only the white women who were at the apex of capitalism. The class perspective makes it possible for her to have an approach to learning and educate herself with lady-like traits.

The attire of the Disney princesses is often visible in the long ballroom gowns that they carry themselves. This gown is not owned but earned at times and for some maidens, it is a dream. For instance, Cinderella's appearance on is screen initially shows her wearing domestic attire that was well resonated with the European style of a domestic help, Cinderella however is happy the way she is and comfortable in the domestic attire that is feasible for the chores she engaged herself in. However, when the question arises to go to the ball the dress she was carrying herself in is ripped apart by her stepmother Lady Tremaine as they are getting ready for the ball in the court of the reigning king of the Kingdom. The invite being sent to "all suitable maidens" or "every suitable maiden of the Kingdom" is directly reflective of the fact that what kind of maiden could appear at court and surely not the ones in lowly attire or rags like that worn by Cinderella. Even the action of Lady Tremaine ripping off Cinderella's dress shows that she was consciously aware of what was suitable and socially acceptable for the evening at the royal place.

The ball again was thrown open to find a suitable match for the prince and

every maiden was expected to appear in their best attire, to be well-groomed, and polished to catch the attention of the prince. This is also reflective of the class hierarchy, that the events like balls were only meant for women wearing gowns and sophisticated appearances. The magic happens for Cinderella when her fairy godmother appears and with the aid of the magic wand, she is transformed into someone who can now appear at the ball. For another instance, in *Beauty and the Beast*, Belle is seen in domestic attire and she is shown to be attractive to men like Hunter Gaston. It is only once she is seen in the palace of the beast (again who was once a prince turned into a beast by a curse) when she is seen in the best of gowns. Also, in the considering Aurora from *Sleeping Beauty* she appears wearing an attire of a woman in exile but that is not the same attire she is wearing when she is reconciled with her father and mother, the king and queen. The three fairies emphasized her wearing a gown on her sixteenth birthday. She had to present herself to her parents but they were of the royal lineage and therefore she ought to look presentable for the occasion. Ideology reflected here is that of is that of who could associate themselves with the royalty. The idea of royalty portrayed here is that of the woman only wearing a gown and only then was she called a princess and could identify herself with the royal lineage. The pose, the way they carried themselves holding their respective gowns that each wore is to say how naturally it came to these women though none of them were formally trained or tutored on how to go about or behave in their courtly lives. For one instance they are in the common domestic sphere and the very next moment they wear the gown they carry themselves in a royal way that is expected of them.

White male dominance has the effect that "the stereotypical persona of princesses only changed in the late 20th century, during the third wave of feminism"

(Trulson). Although the feminist movement was underway long before that time. As Ostman (1996) and America's Sorcerer (1998) note, "Disney had a strong belief system based on Protestant white Anglo-Saxon values" (Wiersma 30). Disney had what Watts (1997) describes as "a very old-fashioned view of women"(Wiersma 30). That a woman's place is in the home. By creating princess films, Disney Americanized European fairy tales "so that they reflected mainstream values such as the Protestant work ethic" (Wormer and Juby 583- 584). In *Cinderella* (1950), stereotypes are reinforced when Cinderella is told to keep the house clean and do chores (Gamboa et al. 76). Despite the abuse, she remains innocent, kind, and gentle, interacting with animals and looking for the good in everyone (Gamboa et al. 79). The next classic princess film *Sleeping Beauty* (1959) also follows feminine norms of stereotypes as reflected by Cinderella, and Aurora as they take care of the home and take care of others. She is also a peasant girl. The three fairies give Aurora gifts that emphasize female ideals of beauty, the ability to sing and sleep until she receives the kiss of true love (Gamboa et al. 81-82). The homogeneity of the representation of these female characters and the white paradigm of femininity is not surprising, since these films were created at a time when "the housewife was commonplace" (Higgs 64). Disney's portrayal of women as young and delicate, clad in cloaks, admired for their beauty, and damsels in distress waiting for a heroic knight to rescue them (Lewis 24). This reinforces society's long-held views of women.

The Princesses like Cinderella and Aurora are classic princesses that were created before second-wave feminism and they portray women equally in terms of roles and quality of life (Lin), indicating that Disney has not progressed in promoting the role of female leaders. Representing women in this way sends the

message that they "are soft, submissive, too emotional and dependent on men*"* (Matyas 10). And that *"*they find true happiness, stability, and health only after finding their true loves" (Davis 49). Even the names of these princesses show how women were thought of. The words snow and white indicate something pure and innocent; "Cinderella" refers to ash, which is something that can easily blow away, and Aurora, renamed "Briar Rose", represents a flower that has only temporary beauty (Higgs 64). In 1989, after several years without princesses, Disney released a new generation of films that coincided with the third wave of feminism.

Third-wave feminists criticize the second-wave for "ignoring issues of race, class, and orientation" and recommend embracing multiple perspectives of femininity (Ebersol). Also, the movies in the second wave of feminism and that it was men who made their choice of the woman. The best pick would win them a lottery for life. Belle reflects society's evolving beliefs about women: how they should behave and how they should be treated (Ebersol). For instance, when Belle is rudely spoken to by the beast and ordered to appear at the dinner table she outright rejects his behavior. It is at this point the life-like cutlery given a voice and role in the movie suggests to the beast that he ought to be polite and patient, and this is exactly how a man is supposed to behave towards the woman. These princesses are "cheesier than their classic sisters"(Hill 84). *Beauty and the Beast*, belle is beautiful intellectual young woman; However, this potential is questioned by Gaston, who says: "How can you read it, there are no pictures. It is not right for a woman to read" (Wiersma 87).

Additionally, Belle is incredibly loyal and tries "to find the humanity of the animal despite his emotional and verbal abuse" (Breaux 403). It teaches girls that it is excepted to be in an abusive and humiliating relationship and that they must

accept such treatment if they want to secure a man's love. Belle's ambitions override her needs. She willingly imprisons herself to save herself. She compromises to find an earthly life to help the beast reverse the curse. During the development of the princess franchise, white princesses were portrayed as more feminine than princesses of colour (May 12-13). "Ethnic princesses are praised for being hardworking, dedicated and courageous" (Hill 89). And have more "masculine behaviors than white princesses" (May 17). Classic white princesses wear coats that emphasize feminine features such as breasts and a small waist. Conversely, racially and ethnically diverse princesses are portrayed in more stereotypical ways, such as Pocahontas, who is seen as tougher and less feminine (American stereotypes). While Disney films appeal to a wide audience, their primary target is the princess young girl franchise. Disney offers us timeless stories and has the power to influence and educate young girls; and as Giroux and Pollock (2010) point out, Disney has "a major interest in the nation's cultural capital—our children" (as Wormer and Juby 583). Thus, Disney films reflect and produce individual's actions, modern culture (Griffin et al. 874).

For years, America's younger generations have used their favorite princes as models of what to believe and how to act, "ultimately learning social cues imitating their favorite animated movies" (Garabedian 23). Sociologists say that "individuals learn roles by observing others and through external experiences that show how an individual performs certain tasks" (May 6). Regardless, children (and adults) believe what they see in these Disney movies, and Disney dominates the portrayal of fairy tales in our society. Disney's depictions of these timeless fairy tales are versions of the original stories highlighting gender stereotypes or racial prejudices (Lester 295).

Throughout the Princess franchise, girls are introduced to traditional female roles and behaviors that limit women's freedom. Unfortunately, "girls use these visual and environmental representations of the princess to understand their place in the world" (Hill 84). If they are presented in a certain way or not in these stories, children feel low self-esteem, especially if they cannot identify with the characters. Studies show that "Disney had a detrimental effect on others who did not allow; representation of race in films" (May 6). When black children are not represented in these famous stories, it makes them question their place in history and wonder about their identity. Before the introduction of Tiana, the race message was clear: "Princesses are white, and if you are not white, then you cannot be a real princess" (Hill 84). However, in terms of race, Blackness is not universal and Tiana can't be expected to represent all Black girls. It is difficult to escape Disney's influence on society. Under the Disney business model, any culture or message can be sold if it is mass-produced and marketed properly. Because "Walt Disney's films are specifically aimed at young impressionable children, one must continue to interpret the messages" (Matyas 42). And "question the values that Disney teaches and represents and how these messages are interpreted" with which he tries to form the identity of children" (Wormer and Juby 579). Disney has a social responsibility to set the standards for the representation of female characters and people of various origins in film and they must do their part to challenge past and current stereotypes. "Disney's writers and animators are tasked with instilling positive, progressive ideas so that children do not revert to more traditional gender roles" (Garabedian 25).

Although Disney has begun to address this with their current Disney Princess films, they must do more than present several different princesses to compensate for fifty years of cultural hegemony" (Guizerix 52). Just because an

African princess is portrayed once on screen doesn't mean that the efforts towards racial equality have been enough. Blackness is not ordinary (Redden). There are many diverse ethnic and cultural African Americans - just Tiana, Jasmine or Pocahontas is not enough to represent an entire race of people. However, the change has come and is happening, Disney is introducing princesses of diversity. The focus now should be that Disney commences to show culturally sensitive narratives. Mark Twain said: "History does not repeat itself, but it often rhymes''. Disney, reflect that stories are as old as time. As our society evolved, princess movies continued to portray very similar ideals. They "rhymed". To stop this cycle of racism and sexism, consider Audre Lorde for a powerful explanation. Audre Lorde advises that "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House". This means that using systems of white male dominance and patriarchy to destroy racism and stereotypes does not work. One cannot rely on Disney based on white male dominance to break these stereotypes. Instead, what is the need of the hour is to create new systems or companies to challenge Disney to improve the representation of women and different races. It cannot be argued that racism and sexism are ingrained in the Disney culture. There are ways to solve these problems. Disney can listen to competition advisors and use the feedback to improve future films. They can also hire consultants to ensure that they adequately address gender equality and demonstrate a more progressive feminist perspective. Disney can also expand its corporate staff, animators, and writers to include younger, more progressive thoughtful leaders.

CHAPTER FOUR: THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF THE SHIFT IN THE PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN SELECT CONTEMPORARY DISNEY ANIMATED PRINCESS FILMS

4.1 The Commencement of Change

The Walt Disney Company has thrilled audiences young and old with its timeless tales of heroism, love, and adventure. But beneath the surface of these vibrant masterpieces lies a complex social impact. Disney's storytelling power goes beyond mere entertainment; it has a markable ability to shape, reflect, and even challenge cultural norms. One of the most fascinating aspects of this influence is Disney's role in creating and then changing gender stereotypes through the shift in the representation of women characters. From the tender femininity of Snow White to the fierce independence of Mulan, Disney's characters and stories have constantly presented evolving insights. Considering gender roles, these depictions are not limited to any era or genre but form a continuum that follows the evolution of society's perception of sex. This chapter aims to identify the shift in the portrayal of characters specifically women. Having said that woman characters have evolved. Thus, breaking through the clusters of stereotypes. The chapter provides a study of contemporary releases, portrayals of femininity, the functionality of Disney characters, and messages about gender equality. In addition, as Disney increasingly acknowledges diversity and inclusion in its storytelling, it is important to examine the studio's efforts to represent a wider range. Looking at the perspectives of gender identities and expressions Disney navigates the complex landscape of gender representation in the 21st century and the extent to which these representations influence audience perceptions of the world. Stories and fables are woven throughout the history of human civilization. A cultural fabric that is a timeless

story for children and young people. These stories were often the basis for the creation of beloved cartoons. These stories are more than just a way to comfort and delight a child's imagination, they also serve as channels to communicate social norms and cultural values. These stories contained lessons that burned into the hearts and minds of children, leaving an indelible mark on their understanding of the world. Children are born to fall in love with the characters they most identify with, and oftentimes characters become idols. They try to imitate the deeds and virtues of their beloved characters to glorify their ideals. In this way, fairy tales become a vessel through which children discover the complexities of appropriate behavior and their role in society. Although these stories are effective in shaping the minds of young people, they also have the potential to manipulate and influence children.

The portrayal of certain groups in these stories can significantly change the views, behaviors, and thought patterns of those groups. In recent years, discussions about gender equality, representation, and diversity have arisen in the media as well as in society. Disney as a media giant plays a significant role in reflecting and shaping contemporary gender dynamics. The primary aim of this chapter is to identify the positive interpretation that Disney narrates after the wide struggle of Feminism, considering Disney's contemporary storytelling. Today, Disney operates on a global stage and extends its adaptation of stories to different cultural contexts. It is important to explore how Disney navigates the complex interplay of culture, entertainment, and gender representation. The analysis will look at the queer representation on screen. The representation of gender in the media, especially for young audiences, has significant ethical and social implications. Understanding the

potential consequences of Disney's portrayal, whether empowering or limiting, can contribute to the discussion of responsible media production and consumption.

4.2 Synopsis of the Select Disney Contemporary Princess Animated Films

Mulan (1998)

The Huns invade China, and one male from each family must join the army. Mulan's father, Mr. Fa, had already fought in a war and is scarred. Mulan, his daughter, disguises herself as a man and takes his place in the army to save him. When her secret is discovered, she loses credibility but continues to fight. With the help of Mushu, a dragon, Mulan proves herself as a skilled and courageous soldier. She defeats a huge Hun army single-handedly but is wounded and exposed as a woman. Despite losing her credibility, Mulan continues to fight and leads the way to save the emperor from being kidnapped by the Huns. With her determination and creative thinking, Mulan helps defeat the Huns and saves China from impending attack. Through her bravery and strength, she becomes one of the best soldiers China has ever seen. Despite facing challenges, Mulan's resilience and courage make her a hero in the end.

Brave (2012)

Merida, the fierce but brave daughter of King Fergus and Queen Elinor of Scotland, is an experienced archer who wants to find her way in life. His defiance of ancient tradition angers the Highland Lords and leads to chaos in the kingdom. Merida seeks help from an eccentric witch who grants her an unfortunate wish. Now Merida must discover the true meaning of bravery and break the treacherous curse before it's too late.

Moana (2016)

An adventurous teenager sets off on a daring mission to save her people. On her journey, Moana eventually meets the powerful demigod Maui, who guides her in her quest to become a master scholar. Together, they sail across the open ocean on a swift journey to face massive monsters and impossible odds. Along the way, Moana completes an ancient quest to find her ancestors and discovers the one thing she's always been searching for that is her identity.

Raya and The Last Dragon (2021)

500 years ago, Kumandra was a prosperous land where people lived alongside dragons until they were destroyed by the drunkards and mindless spirits that turned living things to stone. Sisu, the last surviving dragon, used his magic to destroy the drunkards, but the dragons did not survive. The nation of Kumandra was divided into five states named Tooth, Heart, Back, Claw, and Tail, each corresponding to their location on a giant dragon-shaped river. Currently, Benja leads the Heart Tribe, which possesses the gem and trains Raya, the warrior princess, to protect it. During a feast to unite the tribes, Raya befriends Namaar, the princess of the Tooth Tribe, who betrays her in a plot to steal the gem. The gem is broken into five pieces, releasing the drunkards who ravage the heartland. The tribal leaders each take a piece of the gem and flee, while Benja sacrifices himself to save Raya. Six years later, Raya sets out to find Sisu and reassemble the gem to banish the drunkards. Along her journey, she gathers companions who have lost loved ones to the drunkards and confronts Namaar, who is still chasing after her. As they collect the gem pieces, Sisu sacrifices herself to save Raya, leading to the defeat of the drunkards. In the end, Raya and Namaar come together to reunite the gem, which releases a powerful magic that revives everyone turned to stone, including the dragons. The tribes and dragons unite in Koro, restoring balance to Kumandra.

Encanto (2021)

It follows a multi-generational Colombian Madrigal family led by a matriarch whose children and grandchildren - except Mirabel Madrigal - miraculously receive magical gifts that help them serve the people of their rural community called Encanto. When Mirabel learns that the family is losing its magic, she sets out on a quest to find out what's going on and save her family and their magical house.

4.3 The Evolving Female Characters in Disney Films

Although the roles of male and female characters in the Disney Princess series have evolved, the male characters have always been more androgynous and their gender roles have not changed much. However, contemporary princesses like Mulan, Merida, Moana, Raya, and Mirabel, have paved a different image in front of the public, showing that they can deal with their problems on their own. They also changed the idea of perfect women through the respective narratives, that were once considered particularly meant for men. These diverse representations have gone beyond the replicated narratives of Disney. The female characters in contemporary times are depicted performing and practicing actions like fighting a dragon with a sword in hand (*Raya And the Last Dragon*), believing in herself (Mirabel from *Encanto*), and achieving goals (Moana, *Moana).* Examining media in early childhood is particularly important because these years lay the foundation for gender development over time (Bussey and Bandura), and media can act as an important socializer for the development of gender roles. Children, a tender individual can interact with Disney characters in a variety of ways across the princess line, which includes movies, toys, clothing, and more. According to Orenstein (2011), parents generally enjoy Disney princesses and consider them safe compared to other media models that are highly sexualized. Some critiques, on the

other hand, question the sense of security associated with the Disney brand and suggest that teenage girls may be particularly vulnerable to harmful effects (Best and Lowney, 2009; Ehrenreich, 2007). Criticized for glorifying passive characters who need men to save them (Ehrenreich, 2007; Orenstein, 2011) Disney was a dominant force in popular culture for nearly a century, and the locations and characters of Disney films were important. In cultural understandings of gender roles and stereotypes. Society has evolved over the years and so has Disney in portraying the role play and stereotypes of Disney movies. This study further examines how Disney has established and changed gender stereotypes in the plot of its films through the analysis of certain themes as reflected in contemporary Disney films.

4.4 Analyzing Select Films Through Feminist Themes

4.4.1 Trust in Women as Leaders

Until now, women have been portrayed as passive and unequal to men. Therefore, it is believed that men are ultimately worthier to rule and become leaders. In addition, women are not considered suitable as leaders, because women's duty was only related to performing household chores and following all the rules established by men (Puspita and Supratman 91-104). Although the social status and legal rights of women increase every year, men still dominate management (Fisk and Overton 319-332). The media hardly highlights important issues related to women, such as leadership, women's movements, and social contribution to society, because the media still often portrays women as people who do not dare to express their opinions and make their own decisions (Thadi 27-38). If a woman decides to become a leader, she must convince others that women have the same abilities as men. Disney has started with the depiction of women as bold and having agency of

their own. The movies post the third wave of feminism, and happening in the fourth way of feminism has situated women to be much stronger and beyond any stereotypical barriers.

Mulan is a character who is kind and brave. She engages in tasks like protecting her country and loving her country. Even though is burdened with societal expectations she needs to find a suitable suitor and settle down. She joins the army making it her task to win freedom for her homeland. She finds her true purpose and goal. Though at every point she is challenged and needs to face society's stereotypes she boldly proves her worth. Breaking the stereotype that women are only suitable to be homemakers. The first Wibisono (2018) deals with the protagonist's struggle. Second, Listiani (2020) deals with finding out the values of feminism, especially the representation of radical feminism in the character of Mulan. Thirdly, Sulistia (2016) deals with revealing masculinity or the bold representation of women. Masculine characters as reflected in the main character presented in the Disney film *Mulan*. In *Mulan*, she defines her masculinity which affects her ideas about relationships with the opposite sex. Fourth, Wijayati (2020) deals with the protagonist's struggles and life paths finding her happiness. Fifth, Rahmayanti (2019) deals with the protagonist's struggle not to let herself be discouraged from realizing his dream. In addition, especially the main character's efforts to fight for women to have equal rights with men, without thinking about the various risks that she bears. Representation of liberal feminism in Mulan is portrayed as women can do what they want: Mulan's mother was disappointed in Mulan's father, who allowed his daughter to act out of control and join the army whereas according to societal gender norms. According to which daughter should be gentle, graceful and grow to save the family honor, but here, Mulan behaves in

a boyish manner, which only humiliates the Hua family. This is also supported by the dialogue in the scene, which explains that Mulan must bring honor to the family, whereas in (Chinese) village culture, women are believed to bring honor to their family by finding a mate or marrying soon. It is believed in the village that an elegant woman will make a good man. Based on the above information, it can be concluded that Mulan does whatever she wants, such as acting and raising chickens, which upsets her mother because of the local tradition that girls should behave nicely. Women have the same potential, as men: Mulan's father advised Mulan to hide the gift her ancestors had given her and who would become a young woman and it was her father's duty to protect her. However, Mulan did the exact opposite of what her father suggested. When she joins the military (China).

Looking at Brave from a feminist critical perspective reveals that it is not full of patriarchal events like previous princess movies were. Libe Garcia Zarranz states, "The construction of the Disney heroine has become a contested site for discussing stereotypical femininity and sexuality according to the demands of the dominant patriarchal system" (Zarranz 55). For example, Gillan Youngs analyzes the film Mulan, often praised as "a story about transgressing conventional gender boundaries and roles, about a woman's ability to be as strong, aggressive, cunning as a man" (Youngs 312). Mulan's confidence broke with the traditional princess role of being graceful and anxious about marriage. Youngs, however, observed that "Mulan is a woman in a man's world" (Youngs 312) and "Finally, Mulan is too pseudo substitute for a man. She represents a son who is not in his family" (Youngs 313). Mulan didn't have to pretend to be a man and mostly gave up her femininity to be respected. This is problematic because it suggests that femininity is bad and the only alternative to the traditional role of a woman is to become masculine.

Instead of celebrating femininity in its many forms, Mulan downplays it. Unlike Mulan, Merida, the princess of *Brave*, did not want to become less feminine and more masculine, but wanted to be valued as a female being and given. The right to choose whatever she wants.

The heroic nature of the protagonist is linked to feminist values represented by her transgressive actions. One of the qualities that defines Moana as a feminist heroine is her empowering nature. According to Kabeer (1999), empowerment is "necessarily related to the condition of disempowerment and refers to the processes by which those who are disenfranchised gain such agency" (Kabeer 437). In this context, Motunui island adheres to only one strict rule, repeatedly reinforced by Moana's father: "No one goes over the reef" (*Moana* 01:14:30); However, Moana has always felt a strong attraction to sailing the sea: "I would like to be a perfect daughter, but I return to the water no matter how hard I try" (*Moana* 01:16:30). Chief Tui represents an authoritative figure who "irons out Moana's potential leadership position successively, demanding that she remain obedient to his vision of her life and behavior" (Hollowell 7). Similarly, Moana's mother shows that she has passively accepted their role in the community: "Sometimes what we hope to be and what we wish we are just not meant to be"(*Moana* 01:15: 55). Despite Chief Tui's strict prohibition to sail outside the reef: "the island gives us what we need, and no one leaves" (*Moana* 01:11:26). The protagonist feels empowered to challenge this authority. Therefore, although the young heroine received permission from her parents and assumed the role of the next chief, she decides to break the rule to prevent the spread of darkness in her village: "Moana is not only fearless, willing and brave: she is also who actively decides her action. she does not need to be saved by others -she saves -" (Colombo and Muir 4) - making and encouraging

him (Maui) to act according to her principles and the interests of Motunui. Likewise, the powerful lyrics she sings as she leaves the island: "Every turn I take, every road I take is a choice I've made, now I can't go back" (*Moana* 00:31:11). Moana finally mastered "the power of choice" (Kabeer 437); Which forms the basis of feminist thought. As a young and inexperienced girl, Moana's choice to leave Motunui is very significant. *"*Motunui is paradise, who would want to go anywhere else*?" (Moana* 01:04:38) asks Chief Tui rhetorically, comparing the island to what lies beyond the reef: "storms and rough seas" (*Moan*a 01:04:26). Although Motunui is a safe place for its inhabitants, the main character is willing to sacrifice the idea of paradise, get out of her comfort zone and travel beyond the reef to regain the heart of Te Fiti.

The villagers assure Moana *"*that you must find happiness right where you are" (*Moana* 01:09:26). But, she feels a strong obligation to her people, and "despite her first attempt to get out of the reef, she doesn't. Therefore, she represents "what it means to be free to follow your passions, to make choices and fully enjoy the responsibility of your actions" (Devlin 115). Moana is an empowered heroine who trusts her physical and mental abilities to make decisive decisions. In addition, the agency is another value that characterizes her feminist heroism. Abrams (1999) is based on Diana Meyer's concept of self-determination and she defines agency "as defining how a person thinks about herself in terms of achieving goals and for a human species with certain values and characteristics, a person considers herself" (Abrams 824). Moana's goal is to complete her mission to save Motunui and her commitment and determination lead her to success. From the beginning, the main character is determined to fulfill her mission because she resists being influenced by Maui's arrogant attitude and boldly tells him: "You are not my hero ... I am here

because you stole the Te's heart. Fit in my boat, sail across the sea and put it back*"* (*Moana* 00:37:51).

In addition, Moana's faith increases her willingness to perform traditional masculine tasks such as sailing: "Teach me to sail " (*Moana* 00:51:45) she says to Maui, but the demigod judges her: "It's called wayfinding, princess" (*Moana* 00:51:57) she replies, implying that Moana lacks the necessary knowledge to develop princess-like skills. However, the main character insists that *"*I'm not a princess*,* I'm a chief's daughter" (*Moana* 00:52:08). To distance herself from the incompetent princess label and show that she is as qualified as Maui to sail. This determined attitude shows that "she defines herself as a strong and independent young woman who can live her life on her terms" (Devlin 116). Moana's sailing skills come to the fore when "she develops expertise as a traveler and grows from a helpless traveler ... to eventually becoming an independent guide" (Devlin 113). In addition, furthermore, Moana's hesitation before entering the world of monsters is outweighed by her anger and devotion when she believes she may find herself in risky situations. This behavior annoys Maui, who says, "So, chief's daughter, I thought you were staying in the village, kissing babies and stuff" (*Moana* 00:55:34). Suggesting that the role of Moana consists of being passive and caring, instead of going on a dangerous adventure. Finally, her will to achieve her goals is also reflected in her persistence approach, which is evident in situations where Maui gives up, suggesting that she does not see her partner as an indispensable background figure in the face of enemies. As a result, the agency that appears in the action of Moana is questioned about Maui's gender expectations and joined by Chief Tui. *"*Congratulations on not dying, girl. You surprised me*"* (*Moana* 00:49:13). The demigod declares after their encounter with Kakamora. Moana

speaking as a "girl" shows that Maui did not expect a young girl to fight and defeat the coconut army like the main character. After winning their next battle, with Tomatoa, Maui in a serious tone asserts, "I appreciate what you did there. I braved ... for a little girl, baby, whatever it was there, you made me solid" (*Moana* 01:05:51). This scene reflects how his discourse begins to change.

For another instance, in the movie *Raya and The Last Dragon*, Chief Benja believes in Raya, his daughter that she can lead the divided countries to unite in harmony. It helps break the stigma that only men deserve the power to lead a community. Chief Benja said, "I think we'll be Kumandra again… But someone has to make the first move," (*Raya and the Last Dragon* 01:19:02) looking expectantly at Raya. This dialogue revealed that the one who had to make the first move was Raya. In addition, when Chief Benja, started to give up, he asked Raya not to give up and put his hope and faith in her to lead the people of Kumandra. This is a sign that patriarchal power is no longer exercised, so women can also be trusted as leaders and heroes for the common good. Women are shown as people who can be trusted to solve problems.

Also, in *Encanto*, Alma Madrigal is the matriarch of the Madrigal family and grandmother of the protagonist Mirabel. Initially in the film, the stage directions found in the film's script are described as "warm, nurturing and intimate". She is first introduced as Mirabel's warm loving grandmother, as many females are portrayed in Colombian culture until she returns to the modern-day feminist woman character. Alma is depicted in an upright pose, symbolizing strength, as well as having solid white hair with no strings attached. In place, a purple dress that covers her neck to her wrists and feet with very little skin, dark eyeshadow on her eyelids, thin lips with dark red lipstick, and long pearl earrings throughout the film (Gillis).

This image of her is very conservative but strong, she seems to be feminine and she demands a perfect image of her entire family; an image upheld by almost all Latin American matriarchs. Alma believes that she represents the Madrigal family as a perfect family that must help the community; the belief of almost all Latin Americans consists of the value of family and the needs of the community over individual needs and the value of solidarity in the community, which Alma believes in (Smith).

4.4.2 Emphasizing Friendship Over Romance

The plot of *Brave* focuses on repairing the relationship between two women, mother and daughter, rather than romantic love. Merida doesn't want to get married. She fights for her right to choose if marriage is the right path for her. The movie ends without her having any love, and Merida is very happy about that. Girls must see and understand that they have a choice if they do not follow the traditional marriage norm. If a man and woman are acquainted with each other the outcome is not always love or romance. The teaming of Maui and Moana proves that both are equally ready to challenge monsters because their activity is balanced, respecting their respective fences. Furthermore, the heroine's transition from her position in the action story as a secondary character to the central role of the action heroine, character. Unlike the conservative film, her performance does not focus on male interests throughout the film, but on overcoming dangerous situations. The only time Moana consciously pays attention to other characters is during fight scenes to defeat enemies. Similarly, characters like Moana "break both cinematic genre codes and cultural gender codes" (Hills 38), blurring the line between feminine or masculine cultural practices through their liberal representation. Thus, she shows an arbitrary distinction between gender behavior, which shows women equally

capable of performing functions traditionally attributed to men and a change in representation that transformed the Disney female characters from damsels in distress to active heroines.

Fourth-wave feminism is characterized by digital activism as a contemporary practice of movement participation. Munro (2013) argues that the Internet is central to the fourth wave because it "facilitated the creation of a global feminist community that uses the Internet for both discussion and activism" (Munro 23). Social networks like Twitter have helped create global communities through hashtag activism. As Tombleson and Wolf (2016) noted, contemporary writers define this new discipline as "fighting for or supporting a cause using hashtags as a primary channel to raise awareness of an issue to encourage discussion on social networks"(Tombleson and Wolf 2). Hashtags have been used in feminist discourse such as #MeToo, #EverydaySexism, or #NoMore, to take advantage of the sensations of solidarity and protection among women that online communities engender: "Telling personal stories online connecting disintegrates previously feminist forms of personal. political hashtag feminism" (Clark 2). In the context of Disney, the film industry adapted relationships between women and abandoned the stereotypical evil stepmother and female villain repeated in classic films in favor of a generous treatment between them. Moana can be considered a fourth-wave feminist Disney film, because of the supportive relationship between the main character and her grandmother. Empathy for women in difficult situations is crucial for them to feel supported, and online communities provide a space to spread such support: "Feminist solidarity collective action is based on beliefs about the role of individuals in communication, others give rise to radical, visionary change standing up and working together" (Sweetman 217). Moana's grandmother plays the same

role in the digital support community, helping her granddaughter realize her dreams despite her father's strong opposition. Even as Moana is taught by the community to fulfill her duties as the next chief, her grandmother positions herself as the only supporting figure for Moana's true dream: "You can hear a voice inside and when the voice begins to whisper to follow the farthest star. Moana, that voice inside is the one you know" (*Moana* 01:10:02). The solidarity expressed by the grandmother allows the main character to feel supported and move on a journey beyond the reef.

According to Cobb (1976), social support refers to "the knowledge that makes the subject believe that he is cared for and loved" (Cobb 300). This knowledge is passed on to Moana when her grandmother reveals to her where her desire to navigate comes from and shows her the village's hidden canoes. Moana excitedly notes that "we were travelers" (*Moana* 01:26:03). To show her faith in Moana, grandmother believes in Te Fiti's heart. She guides her into the heroic role for which she was born. Even when the grandmother falls sick, she (Moana) does not want to leave the island, the old woman assures her: "You cannot go if I am not with you" (*Moana* 01:30:16). These courageous and encouraging words make Moana feel cared for and loved (Cobb 300), which serves the same purpose as online communities, providing support and safety among women. In addition, "Moana brings a positive change by introducing two secondary female characters, Moana's mother and grandmother" (Colombo and Muir 11). The role of her mother is also crucial because she empathizes with her daughter and instead of forbidding her journey, she defies her natural husband and allows Moana to travel (Moana 00:30:50).

Also, another defining factor attributed to the support includes "information that makes the subject believe that she is valued and appreciated" (Cobb 300),

which occurs during the heroine's departure from Motunui. Her grandmother, a personified manta ray, follows her, strengthening Moana's sense of self-worth: "Yes, I know I can go ... Soon I will know how far I can go" (*Moana* 01:31: 37). Avoiding women's loneliness is also a goal in digital communities as part of the solidarity they promote. Finally, Grandma reappears to help Moana in a crucial situation. For instance, after being rejected by Maui, she questions her role in taking on such a task: "I'm not the right person, you have to choose someone else" (*Moana* 01:18:09) laments the heroine's self-doubt "This moment of doubt in Moana's journey strengthens her position as a female hero" (Mouzakis 72). Because according to the decision she makes, she may or may not bring prosperity back to the village. To resolve the inner doubt the granddaughter, asks her the question: *"*Do you know who you are?*"* (*Moana* 01:20:47). This human approach drives Moana's awareness of her potential and confidence to continue the adventure: "I carry you here in my heart, you remind me that whatever comes, I know the way, I am Moana" (*Moana* 01:21:50) Therefore proves the central role of the grandmother towards Moana as a female character and her heroic success.

Today the main focus has shifted from the portrayal of marriage and happily ever after to emphasizing friendship within recent movies. The films focus on the complex dynamics of friendship and other relationships that women can have with individuals. Also, another feminist aspect is the focus on friendship or any other relationship that two women can share. In the movie *Raya and the Last Dragon*, the story focuses on the bond of friendship and trust shared between Raya, Namaari, and other friends from different countries. The fact that there is no romance in this movie shows that women do not always seek and need a man to live life and survive. It is also indicative of the fact that women can contribute to engaging in different

sorts of relationships and do not always need to be loved. Love is a feeling that is not always shared with the opposite sex but with any other individual. Also, the role of men in this film is minimal. They are introduced only as supporting characters who do not participate in much decision-making, like Raya's friend from Tongamaa. This shows that patriarchal dominance is no longer valid in this film. The close relationship between women and traditional gender roles is due to romance, where men feel more powerful than women.

A common myth in society is that women always need a man to solve problems or make decisions about something. Romantic relationships are often the cause of traditional male dominance over women. Scenarios of romantic relationships occurring in the social structure lead to women's attachment to men, as well as the appearance of psychological dependence (Heiss 575-591). Girls would be better shown as individuals who can control their destinies instead of always needing a male character for their adventures (Garabedian 22-25). As in this film, male and female characters there is the absence of a dominant romance or love between them and the lack of participating male roles shows that not all women need a man who will always be there for them. Raya is the epitome of a woman who doesn't expect a supportive prince to rescue her at any moment. It shows that women can stand up for themselves, be autonomous, and support other women to fulfill their dreams without the influence of patriarchy and dependence on any men in their lives.

4.4.3 Redefining Beauty

Brave's main character, the feisty princess Merida, breaks the patriarchal princess tradition in several ways, starting with her appearance. Merida's most notable feature is her large amount of messy bright orange curls. Her tousled hair

is a striking contrast to the perfectly coiffed hair of other Disney princesses and defies stereotypical notions of female beauty. Even when her mother tries to put her hair under the hood to look worthy in front of the Clans, one key resists and hangs down, and Merida hugs the rebellious key and pulls it out when it's stuck. Merida's hair is untamed and reflects Merida's refusal to obey. Merida also has freckles and doesn't have the "air-tanned" look of the former princesses. Although she is still slim, she has more realistic body proportions than the previous princesses, with a slightly protruding stomach and wider hips, and is generally not hypersexual. Merida's face is significantly rounder than her fellow princesses.

Even though Merida wears a dress, she insists that her clothes be comfortable so she can enjoy her active lifestyle. She loathes the restriction of feminine dresses, which are more traditional for princesses of her region, and when forced to wear one, she deliberately rips the dress to allow a better range of motion to aim the bow and arrow. Overall, Merida looks more like a real young woman than a male fantasy. Merida's appearance differs from previous princesses and fights against patriarchal traditional ideas about beauty. Merida has a strong personality that goes against the patriarchal idea of a weak, troubled young woman. Merida does not participate in the "feminine" domestic activities promoted by the patriarchy and often performed by former Disney princesses. Princesses such as Snow White and Cinderella are often shown cleaning, tidying, or sewing, but Merida enjoys physical activities such as horseback riding, rock climbing, and archery. She loves her prized bow, despite her mother's belief that guns are unfit for a woman. She's confident and doesn't hesitate to take control when she has to, like coming up with a plan to sneak Elinor's bear out of the castle or get food while she's in the woods with her mother.

She insists on thinking for herself, exemplifying the feminist principle of self-determination. Although her decisions may not always go the way she intends, she is strong enough to make her own choices instead of doing what her mother and father tell her. When she is told that she has to marry one of the son's gentlemen, Merida insists that she is not ready and demands that her parents respect her wishes. She does not show a submissive reaction nor fulfill a request; she respects herself enough to fight for what she believes is right, going to an old witch to try to change her fate. She asserts that her thoughts and opinions have value and she does not passively give in when others refute her opinion. Although going to the witch was a mistake, it showed the courage and determination that Merida was actively trying to change her life, for the better. Merida's personality defies the stereotypical princess persona and the patriarchal idea of women as submissive.

Merida's performance also challenges stereotypical gender roles as she plays many roles traditionally associated with male characters. For example, one day Merida rides into the forest and climbs a giant rock to drink from a waterfall called Fire Falls. When Merida tells her family about her adventure that day, her father replies, "Fire falls? " because it was believed that only ancient kings were brave enough to drink fire. Merida's feat was considered something that only the powerful could achieve. This is a very oppressive patriarchal view. Merida rejects this patriarchal view and her father is proud of her for it. She also defies her assigned gender role when instead of letting her suitors compete to win her hand in an archery contest, she defiantly declares, "I shoot with my hand" and beats her suitors. competition. Merida's unabashed break from tradition also shows a strong sense of agency as she makes her own choices rather than giving in to what society has deemed appropriate for her. Merida bravely and consistently takes actions that are

considered "inappropriate" for a woman, despite the disapproval of those around her, and is thus a strong example for others who do not conform to society's narrow concepts of gender. Merida is not the only character in *Brave* to show a shift away from gender stereotypes. Merida's mother, Elinor, also rejects the patriarchal notion that women are subordinate to men. Although Fergus is king, it is clear that Elinor is equally powerful in the kingdom. When everyone starts fighting in the castle hall, Elinor can end the fight simply by calmly walking down the hall picking up her husband and the other three clan leaders, and demanding respect. This shows that Elinor is highly respected by the people of the kingdom. Elinor's influence can also be seen when knowing that the suitors must make a decision, the lords go to her instead of the king to ask for an answer.

Regarding physical attributes, the main character has the strength and skill traditionally attributed to heroes, which allow her to defend themselves and skillfully attack their enemies, which is evident in every battle. Similarly, Knight (2010) argues that while men—not women—set the standard for the portrayal of heroines" films such as *Moana* "show that the action is not only for men" (Knight). Moana is a character portrayed in a very transitional effort by Disney, where she is least concerned about her beauty and her main focus is on the goal that she has assigned herself. Her aim is not to look beautiful and attract male but she is determined and focused on the pursuit of what she wants.

Raya's clothes show that even a princess or girl doesn't always have to look feminine and elegant. Contrary to the existing stereotype that women should wear elegant clothes, women can also wear clothes with a manly touch. In this case, the blue suit, stockings, and tie worn by Raya as a child are indicative of the fact that women's dressing choices are acknowledged, which her comfortable, and suit her

choice. Where the pants worn by Raya facilitate sporty activities such as self-defense and fighting. In addition, the red color of the costume symbolizes courage and yellow symbolizes optimism. Raya also brought, namely the keri (dagger) from Indonesia, mainly from Java. Keristat itself is considered a symbol of heroism, strength, and courage in Java. In addition, keris also has another philosophy: teachings about the harmony of life with nature and people (Siswanto 83-97). The hat worn by Raya was used as a shield while Raya explored Kumandra and fought her enemies. Raya's characters overall showed that Raya was indeed present as a strong courageous warrior ready to fight for the harmony of life between nature and humans to unite Kumandra.

Women are often made to wear elegant women's clothes and sometimes have no opportunity to choose a style of clothing that matches their personality. However, the clothes worn by Raya showed that women are free to choose any look that is not bound by certain standards of femininity. Raya dressed in an androgynous style that incorporates elements of masculinity and femininity in one garment. An androgynous style is a form of women's freedom from gender boundaries and a concept that reinforces the natural differences between men and women (Joedo and Susanto). By wearing unmade clothes, women also represent the nature embedded in them. Clothes not only function as a cover and body protection, but also as a means of conveying personality and character (Hendariningrum and Susilo 25-32). Raya, wearing an androgynous style of clothing, cavalier, matches her character, who is a strong and bold woman.

Another consideration can be drawn on the character of Luisa Madrigal from the movie *Encanto,* a 19-year-old who is represented as a woman carrying weights using the floors of the "casita" as a treadmill. Breaking the stereotypes that would

limit women otherwise. Luisa is presented as the most masculine woman in the family, especially since she is constantly compared to her sister, who is an icon of femininity. She is depicted with considerable muscles, broad shoulders, and a small chest. Every woman in this film wears a dress, and Luisa is no exception, although she has her hair tied in a bow, she is the only woman in the film who wears a blue dress, which is almost always used to represent men. Luisa admits in "Surface Pressure" that "under the surface, I'm pretty sure I'm worthless unless I can be useful," which makes her question her purpose in the family if she doesn't always turn around. Throughout the film, she becomes a background character who doesn't discuss her problems until the last scene. During the last track at (*Encanto* 01:22:04). Luisa says "I may not be as strong, but I'm getting smarter.*"* As she also announces, she is happy for who she is and recognizes herself which is very important in feminism. From the strongest character, everyone trusts someone who is still strong but puts her own needs first. "Women in today's society ought to present themselves as strong individuals who can do whatever society throws at them, even if at some point they need help and or are about to break under pressure" and because "she represents strength in a gender-neutral way that she is the most responsible and the most caring. And then she suffers from anxiety, which is also common among the different sexes. "Luisa broke all the stereotypes that are usually attributed to the female Colombian woman. Latin American women are usually portrayed as very sexy women seen in Hollywood under the care of Sofia Vergara and Salma Hayek. But Luisa breaks those barriers through her performance and the internal struggles she faces (Pressler). Luisa's character development follows her decision to put herself first and accept help, instead of always taking it all and constantly trying to achieve those goals set by her family's impossible expectations.

4.4.4 Challenging Societal Norms

There are traces of liberal feminism in the movie *Mulan* including women can do what they want. This is demonstrated by the portrayal of the character of Mulan, who does whatever she wants like acting and catching chickens, which disappoints her mother according to the local tradition that a girl should behave nicely. Women have the same opportunities as men (Clifford) liberal feminism assumes that the subjugation of women is based on legal restrictions that exclude or prevent the full and equal participation of women in the electoral arena. In the film, it is known that the presentation of liberal feminism is seen in the form of the main character Hua Mulan, who has the same potential as men, the character of Mulan is shown to have the same potential as male soldiers. The film also presents that women have a choice and can think individually and rationally. This is shown by the character of Mulan, who accepts the decision to marry, though initially disappointed, but follows the decisions made by her family, especially her mother. Here, Mulan cannot do what she wants. However, the culture in which she lives, and her family, especially her mother, insists on Mulan to find a partner (Tong). Explains that according to liberal feminism, a woman has the right to marry, work, and change herself for the better if it is her personal choice and the woman feels that that choice is the best for her. Liberal feminists are inspired by Enlightenment principles that men and women have the same opportunities and rights, so there is no need for discrimination because if women are involved in different roles (social, political, economic), then it is considered good without thinking about the functioning of the genitals because they are not considered an obstacle (Umar).

According to liberal feminists, "rights" should be prioritized as "goods". In other words, the entire system of individual rights is justified, because those rights

provide a framework within which individuals can choose, what is best for each of them, as long as one does not take away rights from others. Liberty rights to enforce some of these liberal thinkers to continue to increase equality (Eidelweis). Liberal feminism is a feminist movement that claims that women have equal rights to achieve freedom in various fields such as politics, religion, education, and work (Eidelweis). The goal of the liberal feminist movement is to create a just and compassionate society where freedom develops and grows healthily (Tong). Courage is a theme with a feminist message in Merida's resistance to what she has to do and lets her choose her destiny. Patriarchy is rooted in the belief that women are inferior and therefore should surrender their free will to men.

The entire plot of *Brave* revolves around fighting against the patriarchal message as Merida fights for the right to choose her path in life. However, Merida is the first Disney princess to fight for the right to make her own choices. Mermaid is a big step for Disney towards positive representation of women and maintaining feminist messages. The definition of (cultural) gender necessarily in contrast to (biological) gender was questioned at the end of the 1980s. Simone De Beauvoir (1949) argued that gender is a cultural construct consisting of the social meanings and values associated with being male or female, while Judith Butler went a step further and argued that gender is an activity, consisting of actions: "performative achievement, which everyday social audiences, including the actors themselves, learn to believe and perform in a space of belief" (Butler 179). Since gender is a binary category, some performance practices are considered masculine or feminine in ideological state apparatuses that reinforce hegemonic discourses of gender roles. So, it is with the film industry, that Hollows (2000) reports the erroneous "assumption that the media act as a 'window to the world', that media images are or

should be reflections or representatives of society" (Hollows 2-22). Instead, she argues, "the media does not represent or present false gender identities but seeks to construct and structure the meaning of gender" (Hollows 22). Therefore, the film actively participates in the construction of gender by assigning a female or male value to the adapted performances. Furthermore, the way gender is presented and justified through film production has allowed the perpetuation of conservative presentations of femininity. Johnston (1999) describes Hollywood as a machine that constructs a myth of feminine practices: "Myth, then, as a form of speech or discourse ... mediates and transforms the ideology of sexism and makes it invisible once visible. It disappears - and therefore natural" (Johnston 32).

In the Disney film industry, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), *Cinderella* (1950), and *Sleeping Beauty* (1959) are the main examples of traditional femininity embodied by the main characters. On the contrary, the opening scene of Moana paves the way to debunk myths about the femininity of Disney princesses. Moana's terrifying story of monsters threatening the island of Motunui is said to strike fear in children, while the main character is full of anticipation and intrigue. In this case, she reflects her brave spirit as a baby and a woman. This aspect foreshadows her defiant femininity for the rest of the film. The fact that Moana is legible breaks the traditional representation. Femininity is about showing a woman's body on the silver screen, based on Beauvoir's view of gender as cultural, Butler (1988) describes the body as a "cultural sign"(Butler 522) that adheres to sexual expectations of a given moment: "The body is always the embodiment of possibilities and conditioned and limited by historical convention" (Butler 521). In this regard, at the beginning of the film industry, the representation of the female body was constructed according to the conservative gender discourse of the time.

Laura Mulvey (2006) developed Freud's theory of scopophilia, using the theory of the male gaze to explain the representation of the female body as an object of male pleasure: "In their traditional roles exhibited, women characters are exhibited simultaneously with their appearance, with a strong visual and erotic effect, so that they can be said to be related to observability" (Mulvey 346). In Disney cartoons, this theory refers to passive and objective presentations such as sensitive and vulnerable characters represented by classic Disney princesses who yearn to be saved by the long-awaited prince. However, second-wave feminists argued for a change in the representation of women, which led to a new presentation of femininity, in which female characters actively participate in the development of the genre film train.

Tasker (2002) claims that "action heroes and heroines are kinematically constructed almost exclusively through their physicality, and displaying the body is an essential part of the visual excess of the muscular action film" (Tasker 35). So, *Moana* is not considered a happy Disney story, but an action film because of the active performance and physical athletic performance of the protagonist. Moana's heroic nature is rooted in her destiny, as her childhood dream of finding what lies beyond the reef becomes her mission as soon as she decides to navigate the unknown sea to ensure the well-being of her people. Moana's performance of action that presents her as a heroine can be seen in three different battle scenes. In her quest to restore the heart of the nature goddess Te Fiti, she encounters supernatural beings, followed by the demigod Maui, who is responsible for threatening the village. First, instead of finding safety on the boat, the heroine's unconscious reaction is to fight alongside Maui in their encounter against the coconut pirate army Kakamora. Although the demigod surrenders and flees, Moana cannot accept

defeat, defying Maui's words "They will only kill you" (*Moana* 00:47:57). Later, when they face Tomatoa, a giant crab, Moana manages to escape from prison to help Maui and encounters the giant creature, she finally tricks him into defeating her. As a result, she not only catches Maui's magic hook but also saves his life. The third fight scene shows Moana's ability to sail when she uses a boat to trick the lava monster Te Ka and successfully crosses the barrier to reach Te Fiti. In terms of the dynamics and meaning of these events, in each of the final scenes, Moana's intellectual wisdom in leading the monsters astray exceeds what Hills (1999) sees as typical of heroines: "female characters who occupy traditionally ``masculine'' central spaces in the action film, draw their strength from their ability to think" (Hills 39).

Raya's courage and determination are also indicative of the fact of how the qualities of determination and courage are beyond gender and sex. The film proves that women can be as determined to achieve goals as their contemporary male counterparts. Raya, who failed many times but was able to rise again, showed an indomitable and courageous attitude even when faced with so many enemies. In addition, Raya was skilled in martial arts battles and easily defeated her enemies, showing that she had a superior position compared to the other male characters. The position of men in this film is also insignificant, women have an important role in making decisions and leadership.

A hegemonic gender concept, seeing women as less competent than men, creates notions about how women and men should behave (Anthony and Okorie 311–334). Society believes that women are not naturally as bright and strong as men. Thus, their role is either excluded or limited to every other sphere other than domestic; where again women's potential cannot be fully developed (Indriyani and

Rakhmawati 183–201). Women in society only play a role in domestic life, they are usually not trustworthy and often seen as objects. In this case, an object means a sexual object (Thornham). However, Raya is presented differently in the respective films; exactly, the character of Raya represents the concept of first-wave feminism, namely freedom and equality of rights and responsibilities equal with men. Finally, Disney no longer identifies with princesses who depend on men and always need assistance, or play a secondary role in her own life.

Also collecting reference from *Encanto* Mirabel is shown as a character with strong views on herself though at times encroached on self-doubts, through this character Disney has portrayed healthy cognitive concerns and feelings. Mirabel is very different from the usual female Disney characters, being of average size and small-breasted, with short curly black hair and big round glasses. She wears a green and white dress embroidered with butterflies and flowers, which is more in line with Colombian than American standards. Mirabel represented a common theme of femininity in Colombian culture at her age, and her goal is to discover her role in the family and how she fits in compared to others, also seen when she is the best, represents the transition of childhood to womanhood- she finds it difficult to compare herself to others, she cannot deal with the fact that she has no expectations, unlike her sister's extremely high expectations and during the film she has to learn that the other women who she thought were better also struggles under the weight of expectations and that she has in her family and place in the world - she goes from mindlessly comparing herself to other women to sympathizing with her sisters and realizing the value of her abilities and qualities, not just because she's a madrigal. Mirabel goes through an emotional development as she learns that, even though she may be different from the rest of the family because she doesn't have a unique

power, she is still valued in her family. She feels that she is somehow special, and because of this, even without a gift, she becomes confident a trait well resonated with feminism.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE END

Disney has brought a significant shift in their portrayal of women characters within their Disney princess animated films. The company has reframed the concept of gender stereotypes in its films, which is a deliberate attempt to support more inclusive and progressive storylines. Notably, a number of its most recent films have purposefully questioned established gender norms, offering audiences strong and unconventional character portrayals. Films such as *Brave* and *Moana,* in which the lead characters, Merida and Moana, respectively, break free from the limitations of stereotypical ideas of what it means to be a woman, serve as good examples of this change. The conventional story of defenseless princesses waiting for rescue is subverted by these characters, who are shown as strong leaders. Similar to this, the titular character Raya in *Raya and the Last Dragon*, who has traits typically associated with male protagonists, breaks the pattern with her brave and resolute nature. By presenting strong female characters that exemplify empowerment.

Disney has always faced criticism for its depictions of characters and plots that perpetuate archaic gender stereotypes. In the classic Disney animated princess films. Female characters were frequently shown as passive, waiting for rescue or fulfillment through marriage, which helped to perpetuate the image of the damsel in distress in the company's early animated films, such as *Cinderella* and *Sleeping Beauty* from the mid-20th century. In contrast, traditional ideas of masculinity were reflected in the portrayal of male characters, who were usually seen as strong and assertive. Disney has, however, demonstrated a change in its ideals and representations in more recent decades, mostly in reaction to shifting societal attitudes and expectations. The appearance of characters like Mulan in 1998—who broke gender stereotypes by dressing like a man in an ancient Chinese role—and

later figures like Merida in 2012's *Brave* caters to be the prime examples of Disney's evolving female characters through Disney Princesses. Thus, reverting to the hypothesis; it has been proved that there has been a significant shift in the representation of women charcters in Disney princess animated films. The shift is seen from the princesses to be stereotypical archetypes of women, who were passive and subbimissive to the trasition of princesses to be empowered, and inclusive of diverse female character portrayal.

The themes of empowerment and self-reliance that these strong, independent, and assertive characters promote are in line with the growing call for more inclusive and progressive narratives. This change appears to indicate that Disney is aware of the need to adjust to the shifting sensibilities and ideals of gender equality and empowerment among its audience. Some variables, such as the need to be competitive and relevant in the entertainment industry as well as the growing demand for diversity and representation in media, may be driving this adaptation. Disney's efforts to develop more diverse and powerful narratives show a desire to adapt its beliefs and characters in line with the changing social landscape, even in the face of occasional criticism for maintaining certain stereotypes.

Disney has had a significant influence on cultural trends, especially those related to gender stereotypes. Disney has not only helped to maintain gender stereotypes through its popular movies and characters, but it has also started a slow change in how characters are portrayed, encouraging a more inclusive image. These prejudices have a complex effect on people's attitudes and behaviors. One way that gender stereotypes have influenced people's ideas of their roles and skills is by reinforcing society's expectations, which in turn portrays women as weak and in need of rescuing and men as strong and dominant.

At times, this reinforcement has lowered people's expectations since it causes these stereotypes to be internalized and self-limiting ideas to emerge. However, Disney's progressive approach of late, which features strong female characters and a range of gender expressions, has begun to subvert these conventional wisdoms and encourage a more tolerant and welcoming attitude among viewers. This change has encouraged people to embrace a more expansive perspective of gender roles and possibilities and has contributed to a greater consciousness of the need for diverse and inclusive representations in media. Consequently, Disney's changing representation of gender stereotypes has influenced and subverted social standards. Disney is perceived as intentionally attempting to present stories and characters that defy the typical assumptions and constraints that come with gender roles. This suggests that Disney is recognized for taking conscious steps to present stories and characters that defy conventional, often constrictive notions about how men and women ought to act or be portrayed in the media.

During the analysis, there was a significant scope noticed for future study. While Disney has commenced with the portrayal of strong female characters. It is worthwhile to note that the male characters have barely evolved over the years. Disney still has to focus more on how its male characters are portrayed. This implies that there might be an imbalance in the representation of male characters, possibly supporting certain prejudices that should be addressed to produce a story that is more inclusive and balanced. Also, while Disney has started depicting the female characters of diverse cultures the future scope of the study can look at how genuine is the diverse culture representation done by Disney.

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