DISNEY ANIMATIONS AND GENDER ROLES

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Abstract

Animated films are considered an important socializing agent for young children who apply the messages to their understanding of and interactions with the people and the world around them. Disney feature-length animated films are no exception; their dominant position in the children entertainment industry has ensured them as a powerful source of learning about societal constructions and of shaping adult identities, expectations and values across various generations. Drawing in audiences of all ages, Disney animation is considered universal, wholesome and magical, promoting innocent fantasies. Until recently this view has gone uncontested; however, increasingly, it gave way to certain 'disenchantment 'with Disney, experienced by audiences as well as emphasized by research. The more critical assessment follows the trend of re-negotiating the relationships between media and audiences, with audiences as consumers becoming wary of mainstream corporate media products and institutions.

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The message conveyed by Disney features, previously unnoticed or overlooked in favor of the colorful, musical and happy ending plots, contemporarily appear controversial, in particular gender messages. Thus, it is noteworthy to inquire into what gender messages Disney features convey and to what extent the fantasy world presented reflects the social and ideological 'reality' in which they are embedded. What follows is a brief reflection on the construction of gender as well as its intersection with age, race, class and sexuality, in eight of the most celebrated animated films from the Disney's Classics Collection: Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937), The Jungle Book (1967), The Little Mermaid (1989), Beauty and the Beast (1991), Aladdin (1992), Pocahontas (1995), The Hunchback of Notre Dame (1996) and Mulan (1998). Various, more or less systematic, rankings and classifications exist for Disney animated features, with every fan having his or her own. In this case, the criteria of choice distinguish features from the prolific period of the 1990s, with human protagonists (and partly anthropomorphic in the case of Ariel from The Little Mermaid) and with plots centred around romance, which emphasize gendered interactions.

Two earlier success features are included to allow the possibility of comparison. All the sampled features are potent sites for the creation, circulation and consumption of gendered images; nevertheless, the gender messages are a double bind. In some cases, they reflect progressive developments in gender relations, while in others they fail to adapt to societal changes in gender (in)equality. To provide a clear illustration of the construction of gender in Disney feature-length animated films, the present analysis will focus on gender visibility, gender roles and messages, gendered bodies, gender intersections and gender performance.

In the following article we shall first discuss briefly thr history of Walt Disney animations, following up with their history of animated productions after which we shall discuss what gender roles stand for and then carry forward discussing how with Disney with their access to the masses conveyed gender roles through their productions.

Walt Disney Animations Brief History

Walt Disney Animation Studios is an American <u>animation studio</u> headquartered in <u>Burbank, California</u>. It was established in 1923 under the name, Disney Brothers Cartoon Studio and in 1929 it re-established as part of Walt Disney Productions. It has been known for producing animated feature films for <u>The Walt Disney Company</u>.

Although the animation studio was first established on October 16, 1923, <u>Walt Disney</u> began the move into features in 1934, pulling selected animators away from the <u>short subjects</u> <u>division</u> that had previously been the whole of Walt Disney Productions. The result was the first full-length animated feature in English and <u>Technicolor</u>, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. *Snow White* became an unprecedented <u>success</u> when it was released to theatres in February 1938, and it and many of the subsequent feature productions became <u>film</u> classics. These first features were presented as being made in 'multiplane technicolor', since both the <u>multiplane camera</u> and the full-color Technicolor process were still something new in the area of animation. The early high-water mark came with *Fantasia*, an

experimental film produced to an accompanying orchestral arrangement conducted by <u>Leopold Stokowski</u>.[1]

Production of features was temporarily suspended due to <u>World War II</u>, between the releases of *Bambi* and *Cinderella*. This was partly because many of the animators got drafted, partly because the European market was cut off by the war, and partly because a huge amount of what the studio produced was for the army, especially propaganda films. From 1942 to 1943, 95 percent of the studio's animation was for the military.[2] The next several features consisted of package films composed of short subjects, some already pre-existing. Two, *Song of the South* and *So Dear to My Heart*, were a combination of animated and live-action footage. Production of original features resumed after World War II, leading to the 1950 release of *Cinderella*, proving the viability of the animated feature. Several hits followed throughout the 1950s.

List of Animated Films Produced by Walt Disney Animation Studio

The following is a list of the animated films that were either entirely produced in-house by Walt Disney Productions prior to 1986, or were produced by Walt Disney Animation Studios, formerly known as Walt Disney Feature Animation, after 1986.[3]

For advertising purposes, The Walt Disney Company began to affix numbers to each of the films in the late 1980s.[citation needed] Through this method, they could proclaim the film to be "Disney's *n*th full-length animated film". When the numbering system was introduced, the group of films included became collectively known as the "Disney Animation Canon."[citation needed] Many film historians and animation fans refer to them as Disney "classics" or Disney "features." The numbering system remains today, as recent press releases for such products as the 20th anniversary edition of *Oliver & Company*,[4] as well as the opening and closing logos and marketing materials for *Tangled*,[5] still refer to the film's number.[6] Some foreign numbering systems of Disney Animated Classics exclude *Dinosaur* and include *The Wild*.[7] However, *The Wild* was not produced by Walt Disney Animation Studios.

#	Film	Date of original release	Notes
1	Snow White and the	December 21, 1937 (premiere)	

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1 ^ http://www.disneyanimation.com/aboutus/contact.html
2 http://www.thehistorychannelclub.com/articles/articletype/articleview/articleid/60/wartoons
3 http://www.disneyanimation.com/aboutus/history.html ase). Walt Disney Studios.
4 http://www.dvdizzy.com/oliverandcompany-pressrelease-0203.html (Press release). Walt Disney Studios Home Entertainment, Inc. via UltimateDisney.com. 2008-10-20. Retrieved 2009-06-03.
5 Tangled: Count Up to 50th Animated Motion Picture on YouTube(official posting by Walt Disney Animation Studios; contains images from films 1-50 by number, ends with special "50th Animated Motion Picture" closing logo used for Tangled)
6 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disney_A_to_Z Third Edition, by Dave Smith, page 33
7 http://www.magicmovies.se/filmkategori.asp?id=1 MagicMovies], The most comprehensive database of Disney movies in Swedish. The Wild is listed as number 46.

#	Film	Date of original release	Notes
	Seven Dwarfs	February 4, 1938	
2	Pinocchio	February 7, 1940	
3	Fantasia	November 13, 1940 (premiere/roadshow) January 29, 1941 (RKO roadshow) January 8, 1942	[note 1][note 2]
4	Dumbo	October 23, 1941	
5	Bambi	August 13, 1942	
6	Saludos Amigos	August 24, 1942 (premiere) February 6, 1943	[note 1][note 2]
7	The Three Caballeros	December 21, 1944 (premiere) February 3, 1945	[note 1][note 2]
8	Make Mine Music	April 20, 1946	[note 1]
9	Fun and Fancy Free	September 27, 1947	[note 1][note 2]
10	Melody Time	May 27, 1948	[note 1][note 2]
11	The Adventures of Ichabod and Mr. Toad	October 5, 1949	[note 1]
12	Cinderella	February 15, 1950	
13	Alice in Wonderland	July 26, 1951	
14	Peter Pan	February 5, 1953	
15	Lady and the Tramp	June 16, 1955 (premiere) June 22, 1955	[note 3]
16	Sleeping Beauty	January 29, 1959	[note 4]
17	One Hundred and One Dalmatians	January 25, 1961	
18	The Sword in the Stone	December 25, 1963	
19	The Jungle Book	October 18, 1967	
20	The Aristocats	December 24, 1970	
21	Robin Hood	November 8, 1973	
22	The Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh	March 11, 1977	[note 1][note 2]
23	The Rescuers	June 22, 1977	
24	The Fox and the Hound	July 10, 1981	

#	Film	Date of original release	Notes
25	The Black Cauldron	July 24, 1985	[note 4]
26	The Great Mouse Detective	July 2, 1986	
27	Oliver & Company	November 13, 1988 (premiere) November 18, 1988	
28	The Little Mermaid	November 14, 1989 (premiere) November 17, 1989	
29	The Rescuers Down Under	November 16, 1990	
30	Beauty and the Beast	November 22, 1991	[note 5][note 6]
31	Aladdin	November 25, 1992	
32	The Lion King	June 15, 1994 (premiere) June 24, 1994	[note 5][note 6]
33	Pocahontas	June 16, 1995 (premiere) June 23, 1995	
34	The Hunchback of Notre Dame	June 19, 1996 (premiere) June 21, 1996	
35	Hercules	June 14, 1997 (premiere) June 27, 1997	
36	Mulan	June 5, 1998 (premiere) June 19, 1998	
37	Tarzan	June 12, 1999 (premiere) June 18, 1999	
38	Fantasia 2000	December 17, 1999 (premiere) January 1, 2000	[note 1][note 2][note 5]
39	Dinosaur	May 19, 2000	[note 2][note 7]
40	The Emperor's New Groove	December 10, 2000 (premiere) December 15, 2000	
41	Atlantis: The Lost Empire	June 3, 2001 (premiere) June 15, 2001	
42	Lilo & Stitch	June 16, 2002 (premiere) June 21, 2002	
43	Treasure Planet	November 17, 2002 (premiere) November 27, 2002	[note 5]
44	Brother Bear	October 20, 2003 (premiere) November 1, 2003	
45	Home on the Range	March 21, 2004 (premiere) April 2, 2004	
46	Chicken Little	October 30, 2005 (premiere)	[note 6][note 7]

#	Film	Date of original release	Notes
		November 4, 2005	
47	Meet the Robinsons	March 30, 2007	[note 6][note 7]
48	Bolt	November 21, 2008	[note 6][note 7]
49	The Princess and the Frog	November 25, 2009 (premiere) December 11, 2009	
50	Tangled	November 24, 2010	[note 6][note 7]
51	Winnie the Pooh	July 15, 2011	[note 2]
52	Wreck-It Ralph	November 2, 2012[6]	[note 6][note 7][note 8]
53	Frozen	November 27, 2013[7][8]	[note 6][note 7][note 8]
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Gender Roles

A gender role is a set of social and behavioral norms that are generally considered appropriate for either a man or a woman in a social or interpersonal relationship. Gender roles vary widely between cultures and even in the same cultural tradition have differed over time and context. There are differences of opinion as to which observed differences in behavior and personality between genders are entirely due to innate personality of the person and which are due to cultural or social factors, and are therefore the product of socialization, or to what extent gender differences are due to biological and physiological differences.[8]

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[8]   "What do we mean by "sex" and "gender"?". World Health Organization. Retrieved 2009-09-29.

Views on gender-based differentiation in the workplace and in <u>interpersonal relationships</u> have often undergone profound changes as a result of <u>feminist</u>and/or economic influences, but there are still considerable differences in gender roles in almost all societies. It is also true that in times of necessity, such as during a war or other emergency, women are permitted to perform functions which in "normal" times would be considered a male role, or *vice versa*.

<u>Gender</u> has several definitions. It usually refers to a set of characteristics that are considered to distinguish between male and female, reflect one's biological sex, or reflect one's <u>gender identity</u>. Gender identity is the gender(s), or lack thereof, a person self-identifies as; it is not necessarily based on biological sex, either real or perceived, and it is distinct from <u>sexual orientation</u>. It is one's internal, personal sense of being a man or a woman (or a boy or girl).[9] There are two main genders: <u>masculine</u> (male), or <u>feminine</u> (female), although some cultures acknowledge more genders. <u>Androgyny</u>, for example, has been proposed as a third gender.[10] Some societies have more than five genders,[11] and some non-Western societies have three genders – <u>man</u>, <u>woman</u> and <u>third gender</u>.[12] Gender expression refers to the external manifestation of one's gender identity, through "masculine," "feminine," or gender-variant or gender neutral behavior, clothing, hairstyles, or body characteristics.

Gender role theory posits that boys and girls learn the appropriate behavior and attitudes from the family and overall culture they grow up with, and so non-physical gender differences are a product of socialization. Social role theory proposes that the social structure is the underlying force for the gender differences. Social role theory proposes that the sex-differentiated behavior is driven by the division of labor between two sexes within a society. Division of labor creates gender roles, which in turn, lead to gendered social behavior.

The physical specialization of the sexes is considered to be the distal cause of gender roles.[13] Men's unique physical advantages in terms of body size and upper body strength provided them an edge over women in those social activities that demanded such physical attributes such as hunting, herding and warfare. On the other hand, women's biological capacity for reproduction and child-bearing is proposed to explain their limited involvement in other social activities. Such divided activity arrangement for the purpose of achieving activity-efficiency led to the division of labor between sexes. Social role theorists have explicitly stressed that the labor division is not narrowly defined as that between paid employment and domestic activities, rather, is conceptualized to include all activities performed

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[9] <u>GLAAD Media Reference Guide, 8th Edition. Transgender Glossary of Terms</u>", "<u>GLAAD</u>'', USA, May 2010. Retrieved on 2011-11-20.

[10] Eleanor Emmons, Maccoby (1966). <u>"Sex differences in intellectual functioning"</u>. The Development of Sex Differences. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press. pp. 25-55. <u>ISBN</u> <u>978-0-8047-0308-6</u>.

[11] Graham, Sharyn (2001), <u>Sulawesi's fifth gender</u>, Inside Indonesia, April–June 2001.

[12] Roscoe, Will (2000). Changing Ones: Third and Fourth Genders in Native North America. Palgrave Macmillan (June 17, 2000) <u>ISBN 0-312-22479-6</u>
See also: Trumbach, Randolph (1994). London's Sapphists: From Three Sexes to Four Genders in the Making of Modern Culture. In Third Sex, Third Gender: Beyond Sexual Dimorphism in Culture and History, edited by Gilbert Herdt, 111-36. New York: Zone (MIT). <u>ISBN 978-0-942299-82-3</u>

[13] Eagly, Alice H.; Beall, A.; Sternberg, R. S. (eds.). (2004).The Psychology of Gender (2nd ed.). New York: Guilford Press. ISBN 978-1-59385-244-3.

within a society that are necessary for its existence and sustainability. The characteristics of the activities performed by men and women became people's perceptions and beliefs of the dispositional attributes of men or women themselves. Through the process of *correspondent inference* [14], division of labor led to gender roles, or gender stereotype. Ultimately, people expect men and women who occupy certain position to behave according to these attributes.

These socially constructed gender roles are considered to be hierarchical and characterized as a *male-advantaged gender hierarchy*. The activities men were involved in were often those that provided them with more access to or control of resources and decision making power, rendering men not only superior dispositional attributes via *correspondence bias*, but also higher status and authority as society progressed. The particular pattern of the labor division within a certain society is a dynamic process and determined by its specific economical and cultural characteristics. For instance, in an industrial economy, the emphasis on physical strength in social activities becomes less compared with that in a less advanced economy. In a low birth rate society, women will be less confined to reproductive activities and thus more likely to be involved in a wide range of social activities. The beliefs that people hold about the sexes are derived from observations of the role performances of men and women and thus reflect the sexual division of labor and gender hierarchy of the society.

The consequences of gender roles and stereotypes are *sex-typed social behavior* because roles and stereotypes are both socially shared descriptive norms and prescriptive norms. Gender roles provide guides to normative behaviors that are typical, ought-to-be and thus "likely effective" for each sex within certain social context. Gender roles also depict ideal, should-be, and thus desirable behaviors for men and women who are occupying a particular position or involving in certain social activities. Put it another way, men and women, as social beings, strive to belong and seek for approval by complying and conforming to the social and cultural norms within their society. The conformity to social norms not only shapes the pattern, but also maintains the very existence of *sex-typed social behavior*.

In summary, social role theory "treats these differing distributions of women and men into roles as the primary origin of sex-differentiated social behavior, their impact on behavior is mediated by psychological and social processes", including "developmental and socialization processes, as well as by processes involved in social interaction (e.g., expectancy confirmation) and self-regulation".

The cognitive development theory of gender roles is mentioned in Human Sexuality by Janelle Carroll. This assumes that children go through a pattern of development that is universal to all. This theory follows Piaget's proposition that children can only process a certain amount of information at each stage of development. As children mature they become more aware that gender roles are situational. Therefore theorists predict that rigid gender role behavior may decrease around the ages of 7 or 8. Carroll also mentions a theory under the name of "Gender Schema Theory: Our Cultural Maps" which was first proposed by Sandra Bem. Bem believed that we all thought according to schemas, which is a cognitive way to organize our world.

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[14] Through the labyrinth: the truth about how women become leaders - Page 215 By Alice H. Eagly, Linda L. Carli Copywright 2007 Harvard Publishing Company.

She further said that we all have a gender schema to organize the ways we view gender around us. Information is consistently being transferred to us about gender and what it is to be masculine and feminine. This is where Bem splits from cognitive theorists who believe gender is important "to children because of their physicalistic ways of thinking". Carroll also says that the gender schema can become so ingrained that we are not aware of its power. [15]

Social Construction of Gender Difference

This perspective proposes that gender difference is socially. Social constructionism of gender moves away from socialization as the origin of gender differences; people do not merely internalize gender roles as they grow up but they respond to changing norms in society.[16] Children learn to categorize themselves by gender usually by the age of 3.[17] A part of this is learning how to display and perform gendered identities as masculine or feminine. Boys learn to manipulate their physical and social environment through physical strength or other skills, while girls learn to present themselves as objects to be viewed.[18] Children monitor their own and others' gendered behavior. Gender-segregated children's activities create the appearance that gender differences in behavior reflect an essential nature of male and female behavior.[19]

Judith Butler,[20] in works such as *Gender Trouble* and *Undoing Gender*, contends that being female is not "natural" and that it appears natural only through repeated performances of gender; these performances in turn, reproduce and define the traditional categories of sex and/or gender. A social constructionist view looks beyond categories and examines the intersections of multiple identities, the blurring of the boundaries of essentialist categories. This is especially true with regards to categories of male and female which are typically viewed by others as binary and opposites of each other. By deconstructing categories of gender, the value placed on masculine traits and behaviors disappears. However, the elimination of categories makes it difficult to make any comparisons between the genders or to argue and fight against male domination.

Gender Visibility in Disney Animations

In the considered features sample, five out of eight protagonists are female (i.e. Snow White, Ariel, Belle, Pocahontas and Mulan compared to Mowgli, Aladdin and Quasimodo). Even in the features with male protagonists, such as The Jungle Book

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[15] Carroll, J. L. (2013). Sexuality now: embracing diversity: Gender role theory. Belmont, CA Wandsworth.p.93

[16] Deustch, F. M. (2007). Undoing gender. ''Gender and Society, 21,'' 106-127.

[17] Pate, J. s.d ''What everyone should know about gender and sexuality''http://jamespatemd.com/Pubs/gendersexuality.htm

[18] Cahill, S. E. (1986).The male communication pattern and traits tend to be honest, direct, and factual, and is considered the "report" type of talk. When a male speaks, he is basing his information on facts and is being direct as possible without beating around the bush with back-channeling or holding words (Svecz. A,M. 2010). Childhood socialization as recruitment process: Some lessons from the study of gender development. In P. Alder and P. Alder. (Eds). ''Sociological studies of child development.'' Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

[19] Fenstermaker, Sarah (2002). Doing Gender, Doing Difference: Inequality, Power, and Institutional Change. New York: Routledge. p. 8. ISBN 978-0-415-93179-3.

[20] Butler, J. (1990). ''Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity.'' New York; Routledge.

and The Hunchback of Notre Dame the female counterparts/love interests, Jasmine and Esmeralda, are individualized and given extensive dialogue lines, even more so than early features' male counterparts/love interests, such as Snow White's nameless prince or Ariel's prince Eric. Nevertheless, numerically, across all characters in the sample, females are underrepresented. From Snow White living with seven male dwarfs to Pocahontas and Mulan being surrounded by armed groups of men, Disney females live in a 'man's world'. They are, moreover, mostly individualized through situations in which they interact with males. Their sidekicks are invariably male (e.g. Ariel's fish friend Flounder, Pocahontas's two pets Meeko and Flit or Mulan's Chinese dragon guardian Mushu) and, except for Mulan, female leads are deprived of a mother's presence or other positive female role models.

This memorable, yet minority group of female representations gives way to a singular and rather coherent image of what being a female constitutes, despite the paradoxes it encompasses. They are young and attractive, both rebellious and demure, eager to defy expectations held on them but also eager to fall in love. Meanwhile, given their greater number and presence, male representations are more varied and less easily patterned. A comparison could be drawn to 'traditional' society expectations in which males enjoy a greater liberty of behaviour, while females' experiences are more restrictive. This is not only because of the legacy of the past in so far as the lack of equal opportunities in education and the labour market, but also due to the fact that men hold the hegemonic power of defining and regulating gender boundaries as well as the authority to sanction gender transgressions [21]

Disney's Gender Roles and Messages

The innocent promotion of beautiful and adventurous Disney princesses along with brave and charming princes might be hardly objectionable. Nonetheless, this oversimplification of the more developed gendered representations does accurately describe the construction of gender as a principle of binary division and captures the stereotypical nature of the gender roles and messages reproduced in Disney features, especially in the case of female images.

A significant gender segregation maintained is the gendered division of labour. While leading and secondary male characters are portrayed in an array of occupations besides royalty, including miner, music composer/conductor, inventor, sailor, soldier, hunter / huntsman, vizier, governor, bell ringer and minister of justice, all of them related to the public sphere, females are restricted to the domestic tasks of keeping house – sweeping, cooking and washing, that is when they are not just … being princesses.

In the Jungle Book, while the majority of the plot is set in the heart of the Indian jungle, ruled by male animals, in the last scene, Mowgli reaches the human village. What is emphasised as the mark of 'humanity', through the young girl's song, are the ascribed gender roles, passed on from generation to generation:

> *"Father's hunting in the forest*
> *Mother's cooking in the home*
> *I must go to fetch the water*

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[21] Handbook of the Sociology of Gender edited by Janet Saltzman Chafetz 2006 published by Springer.

'Til the day that I'm grown
(...)Then I will have a handsome husband
And a daughter of my own
And I'll send her to fetch the water
I'll be cooking in the home."

Similarly strict gender expectations are straightforwardly described in Mulan, released thirty years later. The citizens of China must serve their Emperor, "A man by bearing arms/ a girl by bearing sons". Considering the societal progress registered in gender (in)equality in labour force participation, the features' division of labour, strongly skewed toward males, and the expectation of males as breadwinners and females as mothers become problematic.

Comparably, the indirect message of recent features, increasingly, is that of young women defying the pre-established social order. It is the young heroine's independent-mindedness and nonconformity that mark the crucial starting points of the action in the plot. Their rebellion, mostly against their fathers, symbols of patriarchal expectations, as well as their desire for adventure and expansion of their horizons, depicts them as empowering positive role models. Ariel rebels against her father's authority, Jasmine revolts against the law requiring her to marry, Pocahontas challenges her people's beliefs about the English, while Mulan decides to resists ascription. These female protagonists are also the ones who, for most of the screen time, are shown outside of the home/castle, compared to Snow White or Belle.[22]

Even so, despite their most promising start, both Pocahontas and Mulan remain in the end in their domestic environments. Pocahontas has the opportunity to leave for London, yet she decides to remain with her people. Mulan is actually offered a position as a member of the imperial council, which she declines in order to return home to her family. Female characters' devotion to their families and their concern for their loved ones is at times a setback in claiming their independence. One noteworthy illustration of conflicting gender role messages is Esmeralda in The Hunchback of Notre Dame, the gypsy who earns money by dancing on the streets of Paris. She is identified from the start as an outcast, both due to her ethnicity and her lack of adherence to societal expectations. Her eroticism and economic independence, which escape the male ruling, end up stigmatising her as a witch, for which she is sentenced to be burned. On the one hand, the witch stigma carries from the villainess Queen in Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs and Ursula in The Little Mermaid. On the other hand, in Esmeralda's case, the witch label can be read as a more 'children friendly' alternative to the prostitute or at least erotic dancer. Her gestures are ostentatious beyond a G rating (for general audiences), including her winks and the pole dance performed in front of whistling men, while her apparel reveals skin at just the 'right places.' Despite or maybe because of her eroticism and independence, Esmeralda is a strong and empowered female character who stands up for her convictions and for the disenfranchised, including her gender.

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[22] Ballinger, A. (1996.) The Guilt of the Innocent and the Innocence of the Guilty: The Cases of Marie Fahmy and Ruth Ellis. In Wight, S. & Myers, A. (Eds.) No Angels: Women Who Commit Violence. London: Pandora.

Disney features are also double bind as far as the intellectual abilities of their female characters. At first glance, mostly in earlier features, intelligence is dismissed as superfluous and possibly a dangerous quality in a woman. The most obvious is the villagers' ridicule of Belle's peculiarity, i.e. her intellectual initiative. "It's not right for a woman to read. Soon she starts getting ideas, thinking", voices Gaston. Similarly, when Mulan asks her male colleagues' opinion about wanting "a girl who's got a brain/ who always speaks her mind", they unanimously answer "Nah!". Nevertheless, when considering the overall context of these messages, they appear as mistaken. This is most obvious in later features. Pocahontas shows "wisdom beyond her years" in resolving the conflict between the English setters and the Native Americans. And it is Mulan's ingeniousness that distinguishes her above her male army colleagues, that saves all of them and, in the end, the Chinese Empire.[23]

Body Image and Gender Through Disney's Eyes

Most famous for animating classical childhood fairy tales and creating the theme park 'inhabited' by the characters of these stories, the Disney Company's standards have strived to promote wholesome values. Nonetheless, steering away from stereotypical representations of gendered bodies can prove difficult. Gender expectations get inscribed on (parts of) the body, which becomes a 'visible' physical means of shaping and controlling them (West and Fenstermaker 1995). This relationship between gender and the body is maintained by often exaggerating and commodifying the biological attributes of the two sexes (ibid.). Accordingly, the mainstream form of femininity rewards physical beauty and small bodies, while that of masculinity places value on physical strength and large body frames. Disney animated features call into question the masculine ideal; yet remain faithful to the feminine one.

In Disney animated features, male's unnecessary display of physical force and disgusting habits are derided. Men's untidiness and lack of proper hygiene is often mentioned, from the dwarfs failing to wash their hands to Mulan's "disgusting" male army colleagues, whom Mushu defends as "They're [just] men!". The hallmark of 'brawly' men remains Gaston fromBeauty and the Beast. Accepted by his peers as an intimidating specimen of "a man among men", Gaston takes pride in his huge size, thick neck, biceps "to spare", cleft chin and his "every last inch covered with hair" as well as fighting, wrestling, shooting and expectorating skills. Nevertheless, Gaston is also the villain of the story, the example of 'how not to be' and his patriarchal inspired advances are refused by Belle. In turn, accepted male love interests, from Ariel's prince Eric to Mulan's army captain Li Shang, display a more proportionate body frame and a mannered manliness, also dictated by their status as princes or elite combatants. Their heroic nature, saving the day and the girl, is of course also an intrinsic feature.

Physical appearance is moreover emphasized in females, as well as valued over and above their intellect or abilities. The construction of femininity is done from a male standard, appreciative of obedience and beauty. Disney's earliest feature-length animated film, Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, conveys the message that a woman's beauty is her most valuable resource, but also a source of jealousy and

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[23] Butler, Judith. 1999 [1990]. Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity. New York: Routledge.

discontent. Belle's name literary translates 'beautiful'; "her looks have got no parallel" making her the object of desire of the village men and the object of envy for the women. Ariel's lack of voice is no obstacle for winning Eric's love; the sea witch Ursula makes evident that: "[Men] (…) don't like a lot of blabber/ they think a girl who gossips is a bore." The Chinese matchmaker in Mulan also agrees that "Men want girls with good taste/ calm/ obedient/ who work fast-paced/ with good breeding/ and a tiny waist".

Disney's Social Ladder: The Intersection of Age, Race And Class With Gender In Disney's Animated Films

The gendered representations in Disney features appear more problematic when considering that "all [animated] social exchanges are simultaneously 'gendered', ['aged'], 'raced' and 'classed'"[24]. In accordance with their deemed 'aesthetic' role, female characters are often portrayed as very young and particularly younger than men. Snow White, Ariel and Jasmine are 16 years old, and it can be assumed that Mulan and Pocahontas are around the same age. Meanwhile their love interests are slightly older. The youngest male protagonist is Mowgli, yet even he appears older than the village girl he eventually follows. In addition, inearlier features such as Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs and Beauty and the Beast, older women are often depicted as haggard peddlers.
Exceptions are Pocahontas' grandmother Willow and Mulan's grandmother Fa who appear wise, offer advice and guidance. Whether they are portrayed more favourably due to their ethnical background or not, these older women's representations are more positive than older men's. Belle and Jasmine's elder fathers are portrayed as inept, clumsy, silly and almost childlike, needing their daughters to take care of them rather than the other way around[25].

When gender interwines with race, women's image turns erotic while men's dangerous, a contested double standard[26]. While recent features increase the visibility of other cultural profiles, they achieve it by stereotyping the 'exotic' traits in women. The clothes of Arab Jasmine, the Indian Pocahontas and the gypsy Esmeralda cover less of their bodies, their waists are smaller and their eyes bigger, compared to their counterparts of European origin. Meanwhile, Chinese Mulan is even more fully covered and her feminine features downplayed. This "tokenistic, objectifying, voyeuristic inclusion of [ethnically different] women is at least as dis-empowering as complete exclusion"[27]. In contrast, racially diverse men are represented as displaying character faults such as thievery - Aladdin, the Arabs and the gypsies; narrow-mindedness and backwardness - the Chinese; or violence and lack of civilization – the Native Americans. The stereotypically racialised gender images would indicate support of the ideological apparatus that links gender and race in society.

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[24] West, Candace and Sarah Fenstermaker. 1995. "Doing Difference." Gender and Society 9(1): 8-37.
[25] Towbin, Mia A. et al. 2004. "Images of Gender, Race, Age, and Sexual Orientation in Disney Feature-Length Animated Films." Journal of Feminist Family Therapy 15(4): 19-44.
[26] Nagel, Joanne. 2003. Race, Ethnicity, and Sexuality. Intimate Intersections, Forbidden Frontiers. London: Oxford University Press
[27] Williams Crenshaw, Kimberlé. 1994. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Colour." pp. 93-118 in The Public Nature of Private Violence, edited by M. A. Fineman. London: Routledge.

Disney features explicitly problematise class in Aladdin, where Jasmine's social status is higher than Aladdin's, which, at first, impedes their union. The higher status also appears to give Jasmine less agency; due to her position in the social hierarchy she is required to marry at a certain age and with a certain social class. Meanwhile, in earliest features, including Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs and The Little Mermaid, the protagonist couple has the same social status of royalty, distinguished through their idleness from the other characters which appear working-class and in a variety of occupations. In later features, Beauty and the Beast, The Hunchback of Notre Dame or Mulan, most of the leading male characters have higher statuses than the leading females, a situation mostly derived by the fact that women have no occupation.

Gender Roles and Characters' Performance in Disney Animations

Starting with Butler's[28] work, gender is understood as a performance, a set of codes, gestures and adornments used, rather than a 'real' aspect of individual identity. Disney features do their best not to confuse these gender codes by having female characters invariably wear dresses or skirts (aside from Jasmine, whose cultural background has her wearing a belly dancer pantaloon outfit) and sometimes even bows in their long hair. Gender performance proves most obvious in drag, a practice that debunks gender identity. Mulan, the most recent feature in the sample analyzed, perfectly illustrates the point. Mulan appears as a tomboy from the start, defying the social expectations that her family and society have of her gender.

Moreover, she goes on and actually successfully masquerades as a male. At one point she also convinces three of her male army colleagues to masquerade as concubines, granted "ugly concubines". Mulan is aware that external appearances must be maintained, albeit they do not reflect one's internal personality.

Aside from Mulan's transvestite performance, there are elements of drag in most Disney villains. They display inverted gender behaviour as well as over perform their gender roles. On the one hand, male villains have exaggerated gender traits, such as Gaston; show effeminate sophistication, like Sheer Khan, the tiger in The Jungle Book; or are a mixture of both. Jafar, the vizier in Aladdin, has a deep voice and a square masculine profile, however he is slim, wears a long dressy robe and uses manipulation and magic to achieve his purpose, proving weak.

Similarly, Radcliffe, the governor in Pocahontas, has a disproportionately large upper body and considers that "a man is not a man unless he knows how to shoot", nonetheless, a closer look reveals traces of makeup on his eye-lids and bows in his two pigtails.

On the other hand, the Queen from Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs and Ursula from The Little Mermaid are rather accurate representations of drag, overdoing their 'womanly' roles, wearing excessive makeup, long hair and polished nails. Moreover, Ursula waives her hips, puckers her full red lips and knows "not [to] underestimate the power of body language".

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[28] Butler, Judith. 1999 [1990]. Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity. New York: Routledge.

Representing the villains and the outcasts in the plots, these characters' display of unconventional gender performance becomes immediately ridiculed, stigmatised and labeled as 'wrong'. Audiences might gladly continue endorsing the polarisation of gender performance along the binary gender division, since conventionally it was considered unproblematic, its potential for stereotyping interactions and restricting identities remaining overlooked.[29]

Disney and Modern Gender Role Performances by the Characters

When gender intertwines with sexuality, the result is a heteronormative ideal that aligns itself perfectly with the formula of magic, romance, marriage and thus a happy ending that Disney features promote. Re-emphasising the importance of female appearance above other qualities, Disney animated characters fall in love at first sight and between the first meeting and contracting marriage learn very little about each other. The Prince falls in love with Snow White just from hearing her song and laying eyes on her.

Even at his young age Mowgli falls in love with the young Indian girl on the spot, similarly after hearing her song and seeing her. The same happens between Ariel and Eric, with Eric firm in his decision to marry the girl whom he only saw a glimpse of, but whose song had enchanted him. The 'just a sight and a song' effect is less strong for heroines and their love interests of later features, such as Belle and the Beast, Pocahontas and John Smith or Mulan and Li Shang. These couples take more than a few moments of screen time to realize they are falling in love with one another and to weigh the possibility of a future together.

Love and marriage might remain seemingly innocent embodiments of heterosexuality. The same cannot be said though about more explicit signals, such as the stereotypical gaze of men on women's bodies. At young ages, children might not perceive sexualised images and gazes as such. In fact, these might only draw the attention of adult audiences. The similarity of Esmeralda's dance performance with that of a pole dancer; the fact that she is almost caught naked by Quasimodo when he stumbles into her tent; or the fact that Ariel stands most probably completely naked in front of Flounder, Sebastian and Scuddles right after she gets legs instead of her mermaid tail, might be missed by very young viewers.

However, the more explicit signs of men's stares, including enlarged eyes, popping out of their sockets, open gaping mouths and whistling are harder to miss or dismiss. Moreover, since men gaze equally at eroticised Esmeralda and virginal Belle, the avid gaze becomes not necessarily attached to the beauty of the object of desire, but to the performance of (heterosexual) masculinity[30]. Even the infantilised dwarfs spend a moment staring (less sexually) at sleeping Snow White.

A possibly dangerous precedent of heterosexual masculinity 'in action' is set by a fugitive scene in Beauty and the Beast. Despite the violent potential of the Beast, it is the more charismatic Lumiere (the anthropomorphic candelabra) that sets a bad

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[29] Wood, J. T. (1998). Gender Communication, and Culture. In Samovar, L. A., & Porter, R. E., Intercultural communication: A reader. Stamford, CT: Wadsworth.

[30] Martin, Karin A. and Emily Kazyak. 2009. "Hetero-Romantic Love and Heterosexiness in Children's G-Rated Films." Gender and Society 23: 315-336.

example[31]. As he continuously woes the French maid feather-duster, there is one scene in which, coming out from behind a curtain, the feather-duster persistently says 'No, no, no', while Lumiere insists 'Yes, yes, yes'. The message of the scene requires little decoding and, again, might escape young audiences. Nevertheless, its intent in a feature that has children as its target audience is highly questionable.

Just as males maintain their heterosexual masculinity, the young heroines, even if seemingly rebellious, ascribe to hegemonic notions of femininity, especially when interacting with males. They can be obedient and quite helpless when the romantic plot requires it. The reward for this proper gender performance is getting a man/husband; being worthy of marriage means adhering to traditional gender behaviors and patriarchal norms. The best illustration is Mulan's both physical and psychological preparation to meet the matchmaker. The universal message Disney features seem to be transmitting to girls throughout their plots is that the purpose of women is to strike a good match.

Disney Animation's 'Happy Endings' and Gender Roles

The happy endings in most of the discussed Disney features are marriages or the prospect of one in the near future. The tradition of the happy end does not in fact carry, as one would immediately tend to assume from original childhood fairy tales, most of which in fact would seem to encourage and support a conservative status quo, the reassurance that the traditional American values and society would not disappear. The successful formula for achieving it rested in the happy ending and in heteronormativity.

Therefore, the marriage at the end could be read as a final symbol of the appropriation of women by men, supporting the traditional patriarchal understanding of gender, as a system of male dominance. Jasmine adequately captures the injustice of women being treated as "prize[s] to be won", with men deciding their future and exchanging their ownership from father to husband. Disney's happy endings prove to be romanticised reflections of a societal patriarchal social order with a gender binary.

As animated versions of fairy tales, Disney features polarise good and evil. Along the same binary they thus categorise appropriate and inappropriate gender images, behavior and codes. The present analysis aimed to show how Disney animated features, through their stereotypical gender construction and its reproduction across the features, could represent a strategic and efficient means of 'naturalising' and giving legitimacy to gender categories and their intersections with age, race, class and sexuality.

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[31] Towbin, Mia A. et al. 2004. "Images of Gender, Race, Age, and Sexual Orientation in Disney Feature-Length Animated Films." Journal of Feminist Family Therapy 15(4): 19-44.

The Disney features present highly gendered scenarios. Gender images increase in complexity across the features, nevertheless, the gender messages are double bind. Female characters are memorable yet underrepresented; prove rebellious and adventurous however they remain limited to domestic roles and spheres. Their ingenuity ensures a happy ending but they are still valued mostly for their appearance and eroticised when racially different. Male images in turn oscillate from heroic and mannered to disgusting and vigorous, and are awarded greater flexibility as far as their expectations of them. Moreover, the stigma of witch craft is still associated with female unruliness, whilst inverted or overt displays of gender behaviour are deemed villainous.

Disney's classical collections of animated feature length-films continue to be re-released periodically and enjoyed by children and grandchildren of parents and grandparents who were children themselves when first released. Although previously sheltered from criticism due to their universal association with childhood innocence and fantasy, Disney features are experiencing criticism for their formulaic gender images and scenarios, modelled after patriarchal gender expectations. In part, their messages become anachronistic due to their still registered success. That is why it is worthwhile to re-evaluate the relationship we have as audiences with Disney features, understanding the context in which they were first released and moving beyond the image of innocence created around them. Even if that leads to certain disenchantment as Disney fans.