On Damsels and Heroes: The Influence of Third-wave Feminism on Contemporary Walt Disney Films.

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By submitting this thesis, it almost feels like I am concluding chapter of a book. As cliché as this might sound, I do not consider myself to be the same person as I was when I started this Bachelor’s programme. Hence why I would like to thank a few of the people who have shaped some of these past years as well as provided support in writing this thesis.

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Abstract

The aim of the thesis is to reveal the influence of third-wave feminism on Disney films between 1989 and 2016. The research will focus on the Disney princess franchise, and it will analyse four case studies in doing so. The research seeks to compare and contrast the manner in which earlier Disney films compare to modern Disney films in relation to representations of gender and race through third-wave feminism. A visual, as well as narrative analysis will be conducted in regards to four case studies, which include *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *Mulan* (1998), *The Princess and the Frog* (2009), and *Moana* (2016). The findings of this research indicate that recent Disney movies showcase a progressive movement in regards to the portrayal of feminist ideals, yet, Disney falls short when it comes to the accurate depiction of racial matters.

**Keywords:** Film, Gender, Hegemonic Masculinity, Intersectionality, *Moana, Mulan,* Performativity, *The Little Mermaid, The Princess and the Frog,* Walt Disney.
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Introduction

Everyone has that one guilty pleasure. As many young children still do today, I also devoured *Walt Disney* films. As a white woman, I always identified with the princesses shown, and longed to be like them later in life. There is nothing more satisfying than watching a film with an ending that is guaranteed to be a happy one. To this day, I still occasionally enjoy watching these Disney movies, although perhaps not for the same reason. Princess narratives, in particular, are largely popular with younger girls and boys because of their dreamy atmosphere and animated aesthetic. As addressed by researcher Karen Wohlwend in “Damsels in Discourse: Girls Consuming and Producing Identity Texts through Disney Princess Play,” by including this dreamy attitude, Disney films provide a source of entertainment, yet also contain a hidden message that children as well as adults are impacted by (57).

Feminism is a discourse that has been around for a long time. With three existing waves, and being in the midst of a fourth one, the feminist movement has formed a large influence on one’s every day life. Without the existence of feminism, women would not be allowed to vote or divorce. Whereas its initial goal constituted large scale changes such as women’s suffrage and abortion rights, later waves of feminism can be considered to be more nuanced. Feminism, a discourse that began as a socio-political movement, gave birth to fields like gender studies, and also showcases its influence in literature- and film studies. Nowadays, feminist activity is directly visible in movements such as #MeToo or Time’s Up, as well as indirectly visible when it comes to the representation of women on screen in Hollywood film.

The focus of this research then, is the influence of third-wave feminism on Disney films. A study like this fits within the field of gender studies, as well as film studies. The thesis will also address the issue of racism through sexism. Disney fairytale narratives provides an interesting topic for academic research, since the target demographic of these types of movies
is young children. The influence of film on children is large due to their impressionable nature. Films like these are able to install, for example, harmful gender-, as well as racial stereotypes. It is, thus, necessary to apply a critical way of thinking onto these Disney films. The topic also lends itself for research because of a recent rise in attention towards gender-and racial debates within Hollywood, which has resulted in the commencement of movements like #TimesUp, as well as Black Lives Matter. These socio-political movements have sparked a fire within the film industry. A large amount of film producers has taken inspiration from these movements, and utilized them within their products, resulting in, for example, altered female representations. An example of the aforementioned change in representation within Hollywood movies is visible when one examines Tomb Raider (2018), and compares it to its predecessor Lara Croft: Tomb Raider (2001). The depiction of the iconic character of Lara Croft as, on the one hand, the sexualized woman in the 2001 version, and on the other hand the powerful fighter in the most recent version, forms a stark contrast. The Tomb Raider franchise is a prime example of developments spurred on by third-wave feminism. Society, as well as Hollywood producers, have experienced an increase in awareness concerning the representation of women, but, at times, also struggles to adapt to these new images. Consequently, the research question that this thesis aims to answer is: What role does third-wave feminism play in the potential difference between Disney movies from 1989 until 2016?

Because of the influence Disney movies are able to exert on young children, it is necessary to examine the underlying messages and developments within these Disney films. The reason why the focus for this thesis is Walt Disney Productions in particular is because of the influence the company has on Hollywood in general. The Walt Disney conglomerate is one of the largest media enterprises in the world. It is a distributor of amusement parks, and a large influencer of children through the production of their animated movies. Walt Disney also recently took over FOX-studios, constituting one of the largest world-wide production
companies. As illustrated by researchers Fouts et al. in “Demonizing in Children’s Television Cartoons and Disney Animated Films,” these Walt Disney films are able to both educate and influence children. Fouts proposes that “children’s exposure to modeled behavior on television and in the movies influences a wide range of attitudes and behaviors” (16). The aforementioned animations provide idolized images for children, often showcasing an idealized fairytale image of reality.

The topic of Walt Disney Films as a means for gender analysis is not a novelty. Previous research on the topic includes, for example, analyses on the representation of female characters in Disney animated films. Davis proposes in Good Girls and Wicked Witches that “there has been a noticeable shift in its characterizations of women” (218). Davis emphasizes that the majority of Disney characters have dead mothers, but alive fathers. She also claims that “rather than sitting contentedly, waiting for their princes to find them, the young women (…) sought knowledge in some form” (Davis, Good Girls and Wicked Witches 218). She also concluded that romance in recent Disney films is less of a goal, but rather something pleasant. A second exemplification of previous research is published by researcher Juliana Garabedian. She explains how recently produced Disney films such as Frozen and Brave depict the “modern Disney princess,” shattering gender norms and encouraging equality between both genders (25). In addition to female protagonists in Disney films, male characters in Disney fairytale narratives were also investigated. Davis studied the status of masculinity and male characters. In her book Handsome Princes and Vile Villains (2015), Davis proposes that in modern day Disney narratives, the prince, or male love-interest is made at least as influential as the female character, which provides a contrast to earlier Disney films where princes are often depicted as merely a bystander (Davis, Handsome Princes and Vile Villains 149).

This research will analyze four case studies, with one case study per decade, to identify whether a regression or progression has occurred. Since utilizing the entire Disney canon as
case studies is impossible for this research, this might result in an outcome that is not fully comprehensive. The four case studies selected for this research are *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *Mulan* (1998), *The Princess and the Frog* (2009), and *Moana* (2016). To be able do conduct the most adequate analysis possible, the case studies solely consist of Disney princess movies, which include women in a leading role. Anticipated findings for this research are that the Disney films analyzed will showcase a progressive line concerning female representation. However, it also anticipates for the case studies to not be devoid of racist and sexist flaws, since it is extremely rare for Hollywood movies to feature perfect representation of foreign cultures from a Western point-of-view, as addressed by Jason Smith in “Between Colorblind and Colorconscious: Contemporary Hollywood Films and Struggles Over Racial Representation” (791).

The first case study was released before the rise of third-wave feminism, whilst the other three were produced during, or after. *The Little Mermaid* is Walt Disney’s last princess film before the rise of third wave feminism, as well as one of its last white princesses before Disney introduced Jasmine, Disney’s first non-white princess in 1992. *The Little Mermaid* will serve as a frame of reference for the other case studies. *Mulan* was selected for this research because its eponymous lead depicts Disney’s first Asian princess, an because of the fact that the majority of the film centers around gender discourse. *Mulan* was released in the midst of the third wave. The third case study, *The Princess and the Frog* makes for an adequate case study because it was introduced eleven years later at the end of the third wave, and introduced Disney’s first African-American princess. The fact that its release instigated racial discussions adds to its value as a case study. The last case study, *Moana*, is Disney’s most recent princess film, centering around a Polynesian princess. Because *Moana* and *The Princess and the Frog* are Disney’s most recent princess films, little to no research has been done on the topics. By examining one princess film per decade, this thesis will aim to answer the aforementioned
research question of: what role does third-wave feminism play in the potential difference between Disney movies from 1989 until 2016?

The following section will clarify the structure and methodology of this thesis. The first chapter of this research will be dedicated to the theoretical framework. I will utilize a literature review to introduce the third-wave feminist movement, as well as the most influential theories and theorists of the time. Theories by Judith Butler, Kimberle Crenshaw, Bell Hooks, and Raewyn Connell will be employed to conduct the analyses, for they are lead academics when it comes to third-wave feminist theory. The analysis of the two films that were produced before and during the third wave, namely The Little Mermaid and Mulan, will constitute the second chapter. The third chapter is dedicated to the analysis of two case studies that were produced at the end and after third-wave discussions had died down, The Princess and the Frog, as well as Moana, where a comparable analysis will be conducted. The conclusion that will follow after these three chapters will then summarize and compare the way in which third-wave feminist theory has influenced all four movies.

The methodology applied in this thesis consists of two components. I will primarily make use of a narrative analysis by using the plot of the film as a basis for investigation. I aim to analyze these four case studies using a theoretical framework that consists of theories within the third-wave feminist canon. Since the case studies are animated films, I will also examine screenshots using Gillian Rose’s method of critical visual analysis. Gillian Rose explains in her book Visual Methodologies (2007) what a critical visual methodology entails. Rose proposes that one conducting a critical visual analysis needs to be careful when taking images into account, since the effect of visual representations is different depending on the image. It is necessary for critical analyses to address the production of “social inclusions and exclusions” (16). In order to perform a critical analysis, it is also of importance to be aware of the subjectivity of your own person. Each person has a different way of looking at images due to
the influence of historical, geographical, cultural and social factors. It is therefore necessary to be disclosed that the analyses are conducted from the perspective of a white woman.
Chapter 1

1.1 History of Feminism

To fully comprehend the core of this research, one has to be aware of what third-wave feminism entails. But how do we define the feminist movement, and in particular, third-wave feminism? The idea of feminism originated in 1405, when the French writer Christine de Pizan published her work *The Book of the City of Ladies* (1405). De Pizan’s book describes a fictional city inhabited by historical heroines. As historian Judith Bennett explains in her book *History Matters: Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism* (2006), de Pizan utilized female history to expose the manner in which others had depicted the female sex as “inherently weak and evil” (6). *The Book of the City of Ladies* might not be an ideal example of feminist history, but the work managed to provide an inspiration for feminist activism. It was not until much later, in 1792, that another significant work was written that served as a foundation for the feminist movement. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), Mary Wollstonecraft reflected on the way earlier male philosophers addressed the notion of female education. These works served as inspiration for feminist activity that originated during the late 19th and early 20th century, which marked the rise of the suffragette movement. The suffragette movement was a movement focused on gaining women’s suffrage, but also incorporated rights such as civil rights, property rights, and the right to divorce (Bennett 8), which the movement eventually managed to gain. The earliest forms of feminism found themselves to be intertwined with the abolitionist movement, which advocated for the abolition of slavery; as well as the temperance movement, which advocated for restrictions on the consumption of alcohol.

Second-wave feminism, a later branch of the same movement, which originated in the 1960s, broadened the spectrum of issues feminists aimed to address. Forasmuch as first-wave feminism particularly focused on female suffrage and rights to enable gender equality, second-wave feminism emphasized issues such as (sexual) assault towards women, and
custody laws. Comparable to first-wave feminism, second-wave feminism, too, was influenced by consequential literary works. The most renowned one, Simone de Beauvoir’s book *The Second Sex* (1949), was foundational to second-wave and third-wave feminism. In *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir identified the female sex as the “other” in society.

The black, the Jew, and the woman, she concluded, were objectified as the Other in ways that were both overtly despotic and insidious, but with the same result: their particularity as human beings was reduced to a lazy, abstract cliché. (Beauvoir 13)

With the aforementioned phenomenon of “otherism”, de Beauvoir illustrated how society perceived masculinity to be the norm, and how they then concluded that members of the female sex were abnormalities. De Beauvoir categorized women in the same socio-political category as marginalized groups, including black people and Jews, to illustrate their societal status of “the other.”

Furthermore, de Beauvoir introduced the concept of gender, although she did not coin the term. Biological sex and gender were often encapsulated by the same word, or deemed to be the same phenomenon. Notwithstanding, de Beauvoir delineated the discrepancy between the two. She clarified in *The Second Sex* that no biological, psychic or economic factors determine what determines a person to be “female” (330). What is understood to be the “feminine standard” is essentially constituted by society. De Beauvoir highlighted this phenomenon in her famous quote, “one is not born, but rather becomes, woman” (330). She thus distinguished what is currently understood as the two terms sex and gender, from one another in meaning, which would play a crucial part in the future of feminist theory. De Beauvoir’s work presents a strong case for later feminist activity, and serves as one of the founders of feminist theory.
1.2.1 Third-Wave Feminism

The third feminist wave commenced in the early 1990s, and originated in the United States. The movement emerged after several events served as its catalyst. One of the central reasons for the establishment of third-wave feminism was the testimony of sexual harassment from Anita Hill. Third-wave feminism did not necessarily advocate for civil and human rights since these had already been acquired by the previous two waves. Instead, they built on what their ancestors had established, and introduced new movements and theories within the boundaries of their wave. Third-wave feminism manifested itself at the beginning of the 1990s. In “Navigating the Third Wave: Contemporary UK Feminist Activists and ‘Third-Wave Feminism,’” Kristin Aune and Rose Holyoak explain that the movement differentiated itself from post-feminism, as well as the white middle-class feminism of the previous generation (4). Third-wavers, as these activists are labeled, sought a break from the influence of previous forms of feminism.

Third-wave feminists have grown up with pre-existing feminism, resulting in a diverging agenda from their predecessors. Third-wavers have been particularly vocal about posing as their own separate movement, a movement in which feminism has been engrained by having the opportunity to build on two earlier waves. In *Listen Up: Voices from the Next Feminist Generation* (2001), author Barbara Findlen proposes that having feminism as a legacy creates “a sense of entitlement” (99). This “sense of entitlement” exists because third-wavers have grown up with the pre-existing rights and social justice movements that their ancestors had to fight for.

Important aspects of third-wave feminism, then, are the advocacy for diversity, the inclusivity of men as well as trans- and non-binary people, and the further rejection of the patriarchal system. Third-wave feminism also exerts a large influence on popular culture. Their manner of activism, too, is different from previous feminist waves. Third-wave feminism
includes online activism as for example. The new movement brought with it many new theories in the field of gender studies, some of which will be addressed over the course of this research, as well as their visible influence on popular culture.

1.2.2 Feminist Masculinity

A first significant matter the third-wave feminist agenda acknowledges is that of toxic masculinity. Toxic masculinity signifies the enforced norms of typical masculine behavior that are harmful to society and men themselves. This behavior manifests itself in sexual assault, violence, and misogyny. Bell Hooks, a well-known third-wave feminist writer, addresses this notion of toxic masculinity in her book *Feminism Is for Everybody* (1992). Hooks argues that patriarchal norms would encourage men to be “narcissistic”, childish, as well as corrupted by the male privileges they possess. According to Hooks, men experience feelings of threat through the idea of losing these privileges, because it is precisely these patriarchal privileges that constitute their “meaningful core identity” (Hooks, *Feminism Is for Everybody* 70). The feminist perspective on this issue of toxic masculinity would then be that it aims to reconcile men with their inner emotions, for this reconciliation would allow men to spiritually grow.

Hooks’ explanation conveys how third-wave feminism embraces the ideal of feminist masculinity. Third-wavers support and love the male sex. The movement also demands rights comparable to the ones they desire for women. One is able to connect Hooks’ term ‘feminist masculinity’ to a broader aspect of gender theory, namely that of hegemonic masculinity. The phrase ‘hegemonic masculinity’ is a term coined by R.W Connell in her book *Masculinities* (1995). Connell explains hegemonic masculinity as a “configuration of gender practice” that fits within the current dominant norm and supplies the dominant position of men as well as a subordinate position of women (Connell 77). Author Mimi Schippers further defines this notion in “Recovering the Feminine Other” by explaining that hegemonic masculinity does not
merely subordinate women, but also other forms of masculinity like homosexual masculinity (86). Hegemonic masculinity thus presents a tool through which men are able to legitimize male domination over women, but also over other men. Hegemonic masculinity is established when there is a correlation between institutional power and cultural ideals, and the concept is noticeable in, for example, film characters presented in Hollywood movies. Characters that conform to hegemonic masculinity are oftentimes portrayed as physically strong, dominant, emotionally closed-off, heterosexual heroes, to form a clear contrast between women and homosexuals who, as Connell suggests, function as their subordinates. Hegemonic masculinity is a socially constructed strategy, which entails that it is not a constant, but a fluctuating concept. When patriarchal norms change, so does the basis for the dominance of a particular masculinity. Third-wavers, then, advocate for representation that does not focus on the hegemonic masculine norm. They aim to replace this notion of hegemonic masculinity with the notion of feminist masculinity (Hooks, Feminism Is for Everybody 70).

Hooks takes this concept of feminist masculinity to a racial level. In Black Looks: Race and Representation (1987), she introduces the reconstruction of black masculinity. She proposes that current media represents black men as “failures”. These black men often have psychological problems, are violent, dangerous, and obsessed with sex (Hooks, Black: Looks Race and Representation 89). These men are portrayed as such because they fail to live up to their masculine destiny, which all takes place within a racist context. Whilst the aforementioned portrayal of black masculinity is often represented in popular media, Hooks counters this dominant notion about black masculinity by pointing out that such stereotypes form a way for white people to erase black labor from history. A last point she addresses is that black masculinity differs from white masculinity, illustrated by the example of male "idleness", which does not have the same negative connotation in African-American culture as it does in Western culture (Hooks, Black: Looks, Race and Representation 91). For example, during the
19th century, idle activity was deemed as an ‘evil’ concept, yet for Native Americans as well as Africans, idleness was regarded as the opposite.

This entails that the norm for masculinity fluctuates depending on cultural environment. Black masculinity in particular, is often misrepresented in forms of popular media. Third-wave feminism in general, then, emphasizes the importance of divergence from the hegemonic masculine ideal to ensure that boys and men who do not fall within this category of hegemonic masculinity are perceived as equals.

1.2.3 Female Agency

Another component of third-wave feminism that this thesis will address is the concept of reclaiming female agency and norms of femininity. Femininity and sexual agency constitute central values within third-wave feminism, and also provide a manner in which third-wave feminists differ from previous feminist waves. In Promiscuities: The Secret Struggle of Womanhood (1998), author Naomi Wolf proposes a comparison between the two waves, and explains that second-wave feminism is a brand of “victim feminism” in which feminists are “anti-sexual and sexually judgmental” (15). Whilst Wolf might address an extreme stereotype of second-wave feminism, the true meaning of this statement is that third-wave feminism has evolved into a more sexually aware, as well as a less sexually judgmental form of feminism. Third-wave feminists take on a more active sexual approach in comparison to previous waves. They embrace female sexuality, and strive to claim sexual pleasure in order to erase the double standard concerning sexuality, whether it be heterosexual sexuality or otherwise.

In addition to the reclamation of sexual agency, third-wave feminism also reclaims norms of femininity. Members of the movement utilize tabooed symbols of female enculturation. These are symbols that are affiliated with the theory of gender performativity, such as make-up, high heels, and frilly dresses. Third-wave feminists disregard these taboos
and make these symbols their own in an effort to reclaim their agency. This reclamation of certain feminine traits also signifies a refusal to accept the role of ‘victim’ of the patriarchy, previously referred to by Wolf. As an example, third-wavers use previously tabooed and rejected notions of femininity to signify that these are not necessarily negative things. Instead, they take pride in these feminine symbols. This phenomenon of “Girl Power” or “power feminism” as coined by Naomi Wolf, showcases women’s security in their femininity (Wolf 15).

A theory that constitutes a significant component of third wave feminism, and which came to be foundational to the concept of femininity, is the theory of gender performativity. This notion was first introduced by philosopher Judith Butler. Butler describes gender performativity in her book *Gender Trouble*, yet states that the exact notion of performativity is hard to define. According to Butler, the performativity of gender does not refer to gender being a “fake” performance, but rather that the inherent notion we perceive as gender is in fact constituted by repeated motions and practices of the body, such as wearing dresses, or undertaking another action that is considered ‘typically’ feminine. “Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a rigid regulatory frame which congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a ‘natural’ kind of being” (33). The performativity of gender, as Butler proposes, showcases the notion of internalized gender as a set of repeated actions or practices, and not as something biological or internal, but as it is repeated, gender is produced by particular things we do. In *Performing Gender Identity* (1997), Deborah Cameron elaborates by expressing that gender has to constantly be reaffirmed and publicly displayed through acts and practices that are in agreement with cultural norms (Cameron 329). Third-wave feminists incorporated this concept in their theoretical canon. The theory of performativity builds on an aforementioned citation by Simone de Beauvoir, where
she proposes that being a woman is not a natural thing, but rather something that has to
constantly be reaffirmed.

In addition to the reclamation of sexual agency and theories on norms of femininity,
third-wave feminism also manifests itself in the rejection of patriarchal norms and sexist
thinking. Patriarchy refers to the socio-political system in which men are put in a dominating
position simply because they are men. Other people, especially women, are deemed weak and
put in a subordinate position. (Hooks, “Understanding Patriarchy” 1). She elaborates in
Feminism Is for Everybody by explaining that women are conditioned by the patriarchy to
believe that their value comes from their appearances, and whether they are found attractive by
men (Hooks, Feminism Is for Everybody 31). Hooks addresses here what third-wave feminism
aims to reject.

The rejection of patriarchal norms for female appearance originated in first- and
second- wave feminist activity, but nevertheless forms a basis for contemporary feminist
thinking. Third-wavers struggle to end eating disorders, which, as society has made us believe,
constitutes the normative female body image “because our nation’s obsession with judging
females of all ages on basis of how we look was never completely eliminated” (Hooks,
Feminism Is for Everybody 33). Patriarchy’s involvement in female beauty standards originates
from the fact that heterosexual women are in competition for male attention, and because of
that “they often emulate sexist representations of female beauty” (34). Mass media generally
complies with these patriarchal instilled norms by showcasing only images that fall inside this
patriarchal determined norm, primarily resulting in a non-diverse media landscape.

Third-wave feminism advocates for diversity, body-positivity and the rejection of sexist
thinking. They do so by reclaiming their female agency and rejecting the notion of victim
feminism, aiming for a more diverse media-landscape. Third-wavers also advocate for a
number of other cases, which has resulted in various other sub-movements as well as a wider canon of gender theory.

1.2.4 Intersectionality

The last, and perhaps the most significant point third-wavers introduced, is the notion of intersectionality. In their theories and advocacies, the first- and second-wave feminist movements built on the concept that all women share a common experience. Third-wave feminism introduces a break from this view, taking on an intersectional perspective. “Intersectionality,” a term coined by Kimberle Crenshaw, proposes the following: societal constraints, such as race, gender, sexuality, class, etc. are able to intersect and uniquely shape people’s experiences (Crenshaw 2). In Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color (1991), Crenshaw addresses the neglect of intra-group differences by identity politics. Intersectionality aims to fill this gap by focusing on the “multidimensionality” of women. She explains that society is constituted by intersectional systems such as race, class, gender, ethnicity, and disability, which are able to intersect (Crenshaw 5). For example, if a woman is black, she faces sexism, but falls victim to racism. Crenshaw illustrates that there are other perspectives aside from that of the white woman, which earlier wave automatically assumed. Crenshaw points out that women of color do not experience racism in the same way as men of color do, but are also not victim to sexism the same way white women are. Marginalized groups, such as women of color, do not share the same experiences as white women who have always been treated as the norm for feminist activity. Intersectional experiences can be deemed “greater than the sum of racism and sexism” (140), meaning that society knows a lot of oppressive facets. Previous waves are unable to accurately express the concerns of diverse women because earlier waves do not take
intersectionality into account. Crenshaw’s analysis forms the basis for a key argument in the third wave feminist movement.

Rebecca Walker, a feminist activist and author, addresses the importance of intersectional feminism in *To Be Real: Telling the Truth and Changing the Face of Feminism* (1995). Walker focuses on the feminist identity, and explains that the manner in which feminists have practiced feminism before, in which they conformed to an identity and a certain lifestyle without individuality and complexity is difficult to accomplish in our current society. Modern society is filled with people who are interracial, transgender, bisexual, or otherwise diverse (22). It is thus crucial for the third-wave feminist movement to move away from its single identity attitude, and start pushing towards a more inclusive point of view.

Therefore, third-wave feminism aims to accommodate more identities than its predecessors. Intersectionality is further exemplified by authors Heywood and Drake in their book *Third Wave Agenda*, who illustrate that second-wave feminism used to assume a binary gender division. Third wave feminism “generally has a non-essentialist approach to thinking about gender, transgender fits much more fully into third-wave understandings of gender and sexuality than did second-wave thinking” (Heywood, 326). Third-wave feminism casts aside the unified category of women that first- and second- wave feminism assumed, and forms a more diverse type of feminism, focusing on individual experiences rather than collective experiences. This results in the inclusiveness of women of color, as well as members of the LGBTQ+ community.

Third-wave feminism thus poses a new type of movement with new theories and new ideas in the field of gender theory. The movement differs from earlier waves in the manner with which it takes on a more diverse point of view, focusing on Crenshaw’s theory of intersectionality. Third wavers also focus on the act of reclaiming feminine stereotypes and
normalizations, sexual agency, as well as the rejection of patriarchal standards. Lastly, third-wavers embrace men, and advocate for the acceptance of diverging forms of masculinity beyond the hegemonic norm. The third-wave feminist movement regards earlier waves as a legacy, but aims to differentiate itself from their predecessors. Despite the broader spectrum of feminist theory affiliated with third-wave feminism, this thesis will focus on the aforementioned components of third-wave feminism. The following chapters include four visual and narrative analyses of the four case studies selected for this research.
Chapter 2

2.1 The Little Mermaid (1989)

*The Little Mermaid* (1989) is a film produced by Walt Disney, based on the famous fairytale by the Danish writer Hans Christian Andersen. *The Little Mermaid* was produced before the third feminist wave, therefore makes it a good frame of reference for any case studies produced after the commencement of the third feminist wave. The film centers around a young female mermaid princess, named Ariel. Ariel is obsessed with the human world and collects human treasures. One day, Ariel saves a human prince, named Eric, and falls hopelessly in love with him. Eric does not know what she looks like, but he is able to recognize her voice. The Sea King, Triton, who is Ariel’s father forbids her to see the prince a second time, resulting in Ariel’s despair. She goes to the sea witch Ursula for help, who proposes a trade: Ariel loses her voice and gains a pair of legs, but, if she manages to persuade Eric to kiss her within three days, her voice will be restored. Ariel accepts the proposition, and lives on land with prince Eric for a few days. Eric, however infatuated by Ariel’s appearance, is still searching for his mysterious savior, but, except for the sound of her voice, does not know anything about her. Ursula uses Ariel’s voice to transform into a beautiful lady, enchanting Eric, who thinks Ursula is the one who saved him. In the end, Ursula’s plan fails, and Eric saves Ariel from Ursula, returning Ariel’s voice. The story ends with the both of them married, living happily ever after.

2.1.1 Defying the Patriarchy

Despite finding its origin before the commencement of third-wave feminism, *The Little Mermaid* possesses certain elements that allow for a feminist reading of the film. The film depicts a subversion of the damsel in distress trope, a concept which is stereotypically reserved for male characters. Contrary to Eric rescuing Ariel, Ariel saves Eric from death by shipwreck at the beginning of the movie. Ariel possesses the characteristics of being naturally curious and
ambitious in her wish to move away from the confines of the underwater world. To satisfy this curiosity and ambition, she collects items from the human world and gains knowledge on humanity. According to Amy Davis, who conducted a study on the evolution of Walt Disney princesses in *Good Girls and Wicked Witches: Changing Representations of Women in Disney's Feature Animation 1937-2001* (2011), the fact that Ariel possesses these characteristics makes her different from earlier Walt Disney princesses such as Aurora in *The Sleeping Beauty* (1959). Davis points out that Ariel must work to overcome obstacles that prevent her from being with prince Eric, and prevent her from living in the human world. Ariel has to grow legs, and learn how to navigate a strange environment, which constitutes a world where she literally does not possess a voice (Davis *Good Girls and Wicked Witches* 176). Ariel’s sense of curiosity and ambition is not supported in the situation Ariel inhabits, which means Ariel’s defiant behavior can be seen as a form of protest against the patriarchal society she lives in.

Despite Ariel’s character marking a switch in the development of Disney princesses, *The Little Mermaid* cannot be categorized as a feminist film. The film is set in a fantastical underwater world, which, regardless of its fictionalities, is based on a patriarchal system. Patriarchy, as aforementioned, refers to a socio-political system in which males are perceived as inherently dominating, and women are regarded as their subordinates (Hooks, “Understanding Patriarchy” 1). The underwater universe in which Ariel lives is run by a single male figure, King Triton. The King, who is Ariel’s father, is simultaneously the only parental figure Ariel knows. Both Ariel and her sisters follow her father’s rule, as exemplified by the opening scene in which they are to perform a musical performance for him. The song “Daughters of Triton” serves as an introduction for Ariel as a character, yet is depicted as a form of propaganda for King Triton. The line “Great father who loves us and named us well” (Menken), clearly indicates that Triton is held in the highest regard. Apart from her sisters,
there is no mention of her mother or any other female figures in her life. Instead, Ariel’s father is a dominant and violent man. This dominant nature is shown when Triton discovers Ariel’s infatuation with the human world, Triton’s feelings of anger result in him blowing up her hideout. Ariel is devastated, yet is powerless to retaliate because there is an unequal footing within their power-relationship. Henceforth, the film exemplifies the underlying notion that men are the only figures fit to be rulers of a kingdom as well as rulers on a familial level, and also focuses on the patriarchy at work, portraying men who physically and mentally exert their hold over women who feature as their subordinates.

The film, then, essentially depicts most women as subordinates. This idea that the film propagates of women as objects is further exemplified by the manner in which Ariel is forbidden from gaining any knowledge about the human world. Stimulating her mind is deemed dangerous by her father and his servants. She hides her knowledge in fear of her father’s wrath. This idea of women as the lesser sex is a notion Simone de Beauvoir addressed in her book *The Second Sex*, which was published in 1949. Simone de Beauvoir’s theory provides the foundation for future waves of feminism, including the third wave. De Beauvoir mentions that a woman is more comparable to a man’s “servant” instead of a man’s equal. (142). Women are essentially seen as lesser beings, an important factor within patriarchal society. *The Little Mermaid* represents men as heads in a patriarchal hegemony and women as their subordinates, which connects to Beauvoir’s theory.

The movie also represents the subordinacy of women through Ariel and Eric’s relationship. Ariel has to depart from her world in order to be with Eric, but Eric does not have to relinquish anything. Eric merely has to look into Ariel’s eyes in order for her to fall hopelessly in love with him, resulting in her wish to leave her life as a mermaid to find her true love. There is a sense of inequality in their relationship. Ariel is required to literally lose her voice, providing unequal footing in their relationship. She is being silenced all throughout the
movie, resulting in a significant lack of female agency. This lack of agency, then, is again emphasized by one of the songs used in _The Little Mermaid_. The song “Kiss the Girl” propagates rape culture, putting sexual agency in the hands of men. Ariel is powerless when it comes to these sexual desires. The lyrics “It don't take a word, not a single word. Go on and kiss the girl” (Andre), perpetuate the idea of sex without consent. Here, women take on the role of sexual object, as described by de Beauvoir in _The Second Sex_.

In addition to the familial and romantic relationships, patriarchal power is also emphasized in other manners throughout the film. The song “Poor Unfortunate Souls,” features the line “It's she who holds her tongue who gets a man” (Caroll). The song focuses on the silence of women, women’s appearance, and women as subordinates with the pleasure of men as its ultimate goal. By including this lyric, the song propagates the idea that the only way in which a man would fall in love with a woman would be if the woman is thin and silent, taking on the role of subordinate, as well as living up to the feminine ideals that patriarchal hegemony has devised. Women, in this scenario, are thus expected to conform to feminine ideals conceived by men. This concept of conforming to sexist ideals of femininity aligns with what Bell Hooks mentions in her book _Feminism Is for Everybody_. According to Hooks, sexism has conditioned women to believe that their value is defined by their appearance and whether or not men perceive them as attractive (Hooks, _Feminism Is for Everybody_ 31). _The Little Mermaid_, then, merely reaffirms Hooks’ claims, which signify the exact notions that third-wave feminism aims to combat.

Ariel is not the only character that has to conform to these feminine ideals. The only woman who possesses significant power in the movie is depicted as the villain. Ursula, the sea witch, is the only female figure who enjoys a position of leadership in the underwater world. However, _The Little Mermaid_ has Ursula compete with Ariel for a man’s affections, and thus propagates the idea of women as rivals or enemies. When Ursula transforms into her human
form, she assumes a completely different appearance. Instead of her bigger body, shorter hair and heavy make-up, she changes into a thin, long-haired natural beauty (Fig. 1). Despite her villain status, Ursula does not seem to be immune to the patriarchy, feeling the need to conform to stereotypical patriarchal notions of femininity in order to live in a man’s world.

2.1.2 Masculinity in The Little Mermaid

Most of the men in The Little Mermaid conform to the stereotypical masculine ideal. Prince Eric, Ariel’s love interest, is presented as a hero. Eric’s skin color is white and he is visibly muscular. He has large, round eyes, and black wavy hair (Fig. 2). Eric is an adventurous, physically strong individual, living as a seafarer, something that can bear the connotation of a masculine profession. He is portrayed as the perfect masculine man, something R.W Connell refers to with the term “hegemonic masculinity” (77). Hegemonic masculinity, as discussed before, refers to the current socially dominant form of masculinity within the gender hierarchy. Hegemonic masculinity features women, as well as other forms of masculinity, as subordinates.

The Little Mermaid incorporates hegemonic masculinity and utilizes it as a superior masculine form. In addition to prince Eric, it is King Triton who accurately embodies this concept of hegemonic masculinity. King Triton’s character design features a set of broad shoulders and a muscular back, to signify his physical strength and power, as well as a grey beard to emphasize his intellect (Fig. 3). Triton is the King of the Sea, as well as the patriarch of Ariel’s family. His masculinity is emphasized by his appearance, as well as the power he possesses. The Little Mermaid emphasizes this hegemonic masculinity by showing other forms of masculinity in the same shot. Prince Eric’s servant, for example, has a skinny, twig-like build, contrasting Eric and Triton’s, which signals his status of subordinate (Fig. 4). The manner in which Walt Disney presents hegemonic masculinity in The Little Mermaid can be
considered a stereotypical fashion in which one has to possess stereotypical masculine features, such as strength and masculine beauty, to be perceived as powerful and successful.

2.1.3. Race in *The Little Mermaid*.

It is never disclosed in which country exactly *The Little Mermaid* is set, yet what is obvious by the character design is that all characters are white. The protagonists, Ariel, Prince Eric, and King Triton, are all white, heterosexual, and cis-gender, which translates to the matching of biological sex and gender. Even the background characters are drawn as white, thin women or muscular men (Fig. 5). *The Little Mermaid* is, then, a story portrayed from the focal point of a white woman. According to researcher Dorothy Hurley, in “Children of Color and the Disney Fairy Tale Princess”, Disney movies possess the ability to serve as means of identification, as well as education, for children. Hurley emphasizes that media such as film and television constitute “vehicles” that take on the role of teachers (226). This is why it is of importance for people utilizing these forms of media as teaching methods to be aware of the amount of white privileging as well as the symbolism of binary colors in these vehicles, because children’s popular culture has a tendency to create an association of white as “goodness” and black as “evil” (226). This presents a potentially harmful factor for children, since their impressionable nature is easily influenced by these types of media, which aids in the production of inherent racist values.

*The Little Mermaid*, then, presents a contrast between white people and people of color. The only non-white character is Sebastian, the crab who based on his accent, has a Caribbean background. Sebastian’s sole goal is the serving and contentment of King Triton, as well as making sure Ariel leads a happy life. This alludes to the notion that white lives are more important than those of people of color, which, as addressed by Dorothy Hurley, has an effect on the perception of characters of color by children (226). The underrepresentation of people
of color in *The Little Mermaid* entails that children of color cannot share in the *Little Mermaid* experience, being unable to identify with an all-white cast. This is another notion that the third wave feminist movement tries to combat. Using a diverse approach, something that *The Little Mermaid* pays no heed to.


The second case study in this research was produced during the start of the third-wave feminist movement, and features Walt Disney’s first Asian princess. *Mulan (1998)* is set in ancient China. The story centers around Mulan, the sole daughter of the Fa family, who is preparing for a meeting with the town’s match-maker when her father is called for enlistment in the Chinese army in a battle against the Huns. Fearing her father’s bad health, Mulan secretly joins the army disguised as a man named Ping to replace her father. She is trained and taught to behave like a male soldier by general Li Shang, but her real identity is discovered after getting wounded in her first battle. Mulan escapes a death sentence, but is required to leave the army nonetheless. After observing that the Huns survived the battle, she decides to warn Shang, who he brushes her off. Mulan takes matters into her own hands, devising a plan to stop the Huns. Her plan succeeds, and the emperor declares her to be the national heroine of China. Mulan returns to her family with General Shang, and a happily ever after is implied.

2.2.1 Defying the Patriarchy in *Mulan*

Similar to *The Little Mermaid*, *Mulan* also takes place in a patriarchal world. In fact, patriarchal norms and values constitute a large part of *Mulan*. The first example of this patriarchal influence is depicted when the conditions for joining the army are addressed. Mulan takes place in ancient China, where ancient culture relies strongly on the notion of patriarchy. The Chinese army does not allow women to join, only accepting men in their troops. Whereas the army used
to not be accessible for women, the current Chinese army does allow for female military soldiers. Disney therefore specifically opted not to include women in the army, instead focusing on a society in which women are expected to remain within the private sphere.

Both the opening scene, as well as the song “Honor to Us All” explicitly address the power relations between men and women. In the opening scene, the protagonist, Mulan, is practicing her lines on how to be a ‘good woman’. She is expected to know etiquette, as well as correspond to the image of the traditional Asian beauty, wearing a full face of make-up and a pink-colored dress, which has the connotation of a stereotypically feminine color in Western culture (Fig. 6). The lyrics of the subsequent song “Honor to Us All” which state that “Men want girls with good taste. Calm. Obedient. Who work fast-paced. With good breeding. And a tiny waist. You'll bring honor to us all” (Salonga). It perpetuates the same sense of subordination as is addressed in The Little Mermaid. The notion of women competing for a man’s affections, as well as conforming to patriarchal norms of feminine beauty can be linked to what the third-wave feminist movement try to reject. Both these films contain a strong power divide between men and women. The women of ancient China in Mulan are expected to stay home, go to a “match-maker” who pairs women off if they are deemed ‘feminine’ enough. And the Little Mermaid only showcases images of heteronormative women.

As Simone de Beauvoir, who provided one of the ground theories for third-wave feminism, states, women are often otherized: “the subject posits itself only in opposition; it asserts itself as the essential and sets up the other as inessential, as the object” (27). The process of ‘othering’ the female sex is prevalent in Mulan too. Mulan features numerous scenes that present an “us vs. them” mentality when it comes to the two sexes. After Mulan’s true sex is discovered and she is cast from the army base, she follows the troops to warn them about the Huns that are coming. The first thing her commander, and love interest, Li Shang says is that “[she doesn’t] belong here.” The film features many other dialogues of a similar nature. In
these instances, women are depicted as the ‘other’. They do not belong in a man’s world, but are seen as the object in contrast to the male subject position.

2.2.2 Performativity in Mulan

*Mulan* can be interpreted to incorporate elements of gender performativity, which is a concept introduced by theorist Judith Butler. Gender performativity perpetuates the idea that gender is not internal, but rather something that is produced. Performativity of gender centers on the correlation between the anticipation and the phenomenon it anticipates. It is not a separate action, but rather repeated motions or practices that become effective because they are being naturalized by the body (Butler 14).

Elements of the aforementioned notion of gender performativity are incorporated in *Mulan* on numerous different occasions. As previously mentioned, ancient Chinese culture knows strict gender rules for women, which is exemplified by the song *Honor to Us All*. From a societal perspective, Mulan, is portrayed as an imperfect woman. She struggles with who she really is inside. The song *Reflection* showcases Mulan’s internal feelings, indicating that the role of the perfect feminine woman she is playing is merely that of a performance. She even mentions wearing a mask, along with a costume, taking the ‘performance’ of gender literally (Fig. 7).

I will never pass for a perfect bride, or a perfect daughter. Can it be I’m not meant to play this part? Now I see that if I were truly to be myself. I would break my family's heart. Who is that girl I see staring straight back at me? Why is my reflection someone I don’t know? Somehow I cannot hide who I am though I’ve tried. When will my reflection show who I am inside. (Salonga)
One is able to interpret the song as a woman struggling to accept the cultural norms assigned to her gender. Mulan is seen to not perform her part as a woman adequately, resulting in her visible discomfort within this role.

Failing to fit within this feminine identity is not the only angle in Mulan. The film, then, also displays how Mulan struggles to live up to a new set of rules, namely those of the male gender. This notion of taking on a new role, performing what is known to be the masculine gender, is exemplified in the song “I’ll Make a Man Out of You:”

Let's get down to business, to defeat the Huns. Did they send me daughters, when I asked for sons? You're the saddest bunch I ever met, but you can bet before we're through.

Mister, I'll make a man out of you. (Osmond)

The song showcases the set of rules and actions one needs to follow to be considered a ‘real man’ in a literal manner. This coincides with Butler’s view that gender is performative. Through repeated stylizations and actions, one can achieve what they anticipate. (Butler 25).

The notion of performativity is further exemplified by Mulan’s imitation of masculine acts and masculine social cues. As soon as she walks into the camp, Mulan is showcased to copy practices, such as spitting on the floor and altering her way of speech, since these actions are perceived as stereotypically ‘masculine’. She also changes her appearance. Instead of wearing her long hair down, she starts wearing it in a bun, and puts on the army uniform (Fig. 8). The outward assumption of a masculine appearance ties in with Butler’s example of drag in relation to gender performativity.

If one thinks that one sees a man dressed as a woman or a woman dressed as a man, then one takes the first term of each of those perceptions as the “reality” of gender: the gender
that is introduced through the simile lacks “reality,” and is taken to constitute an illusory appearance. In such perceptions in which an ostensible reality is coupled with an unreality, we think we know what the reality is, and take the secondary appearance of gender to be mere artifice, play, falsehood, and illusion. (Butler 22)

Here, Butler makes a distinction between drag and gender performativity. Drag depicts the appearance of gender as something that is unreal because the performance lacks reality. She addresses drag as something that is a tool to parody subversion. The difference between drag and gender performativity, however, is that gender performativity is something that produces a gender identity due to the repetition of certain acts and practices.

Drag in particular, is exemplified within a specific scene in Mulan itself. Mulan includes a cross-dressing feature, in which she and a couple other male soldiers dress up in a feminine fashion, disguising themselves as concubines to enter the imperial castle (fig. 9). There is a clear contrast between their masculine behavior and their feminine disguise, resulting in a lack of reality. Despite Butler’s distinction between the two, Flanagan presents Mulan’s disguise as the male soldier Ping as cross-dressing too. She elaborates by illustrating that Mulan is one of the few children’s films that “parody gender performances as overtly as drag” (33). However, it is problematic to merely reduce Ping to a drag performance. Butler primarily depicts drag as a tool to showcase subversion, and it often depicts a contradictory identity from what is visually presented. Ping’s male exterior in Mulan is also used as a tool, but one of a different nature. Unlike with drag-queens, Mulan’s disguise is a necessary means to fit within a strictly male environment. It is necessary for her drag performance to be devoid of a lack of reality, for detrimental consequences will follow if she is exposed as a woman. Because of her failure to adhere to the image of the perfect feminine woman, she displays features that make her appearance as a male soldier believable at times. Unlike Butler’s statement about drag
suggests, there is not always a lack of reality during Mulan’s performance as the soldier Ping, which is exemplified by her fellow soldiers who perceive Mulan as masculine, making it impossible to write Ping’s performance off as cross-dressing.

In addition, *Mulan*, also challenges elements of Butler’s theory of gender performativity by showcasing how Mulan fails to completely adhere to her masculine role. Mulan’s repeated actions illustrate how masculinity is constituted through repeated actions and motions of the body, however, she fails to produce a masculine identity through performativity. As a result, Mulan seems to fluctuate between gender performativity and drag. She fails to conform to the image of the perfect bride and daughter, but also fails at being the masculine soldier. *Mulan*, then, showcases a hybrid of Judith Butler’s gender performativity and drag.

2.2.3 Masculinity in *Mulan*

The manner in which masculinity is represented introduces another interesting aspect in *Mulan*. Similar to *The Little Mermaid*, *Mulan*, too, showcases hegemonic masculinity. The film explicitly mentions what Western hegemonic masculinity entails in the song *I’ll Make a Man Out of You*. “To be a man. You must be swift as the coursing river. With all the force of a great typhoon. With all the strength of a raging fire. Mysterious as the dark side of the moon” (Osmond). The song addresses a gender hierarchy, insinuating that these soldiers are not masculine enough to be considered worthy. *Mulan*, here, portrays hegemonic masculinity as the superior form of masculinity. Despite the fact that these soldiers are biologically male, they do not possess the traits that constitute hegemonic masculinity, which places them below the General, who does possess them. He is required to teach them to acquire these traits of hegemonic masculinity so they, too, can be superior.

Whilst *Mulan* seems to, at first, emphasize the superiority of hegemonic masculinity, it does not fully embody this perspective. This is exemplified by the characteristics of Li Shang’s
character. Shang is portrayed as the stereotypical masculine hero. He is physically strong, a born leader, and possesses all the characteristics addressed in “I’ll Make a Man Out of You” that are needed to be a ‘real man’. He seems to be the epitome of hegemonic masculinity. Certain shots in Mulan, however, allow for a bisexual reading of Shang’s character. When Mulan, then known as the male soldier named Ping, saves the troops from the Huns during their battle, the camera lingers on Shang for a beat too long (Fig. 10). By deliberately focusing on Shang’s reaction to Ping, the film hints at the possibility of Shang harboring hidden emotions. He can also be seen smiling or sneaking looks at Ping on numerous other occasions, which presents Shang as a possible bisexual. This would be an interesting observation, since hegemonic masculinity would clash with his perceived sexuality, as homosexual masculinity is an inferior type of masculinity. According to Connell, Hegemonic masculinity forms the top of the male gender hierarchy, when homosexual masculinity marks the bottom of the aforementioned hierarchy (Connell 77). Li Shang provides a significant change in comparison to previous Disney princes who all possess traits of hegemonic masculinity.

2.2.4 Intersectionality in Mulan

Mulan is the first Disney princess of Asian descent. The Asian representation in Mulan adds a diverse point of view to a series of, what had up until 1998, nearly only consisted of white Disney princesses. Mulan, who is a woman of color, provides a source of education as well as inspiration for children of color, as addressed by Hurley in “Seeing White: Children of Color and the Disney Fairy Tale Princess.” Mulan addresses some major theories introduced by the third feminist wave, yet the film is not a flawless feminist masterpiece.

On the one hand, the character of Mulan is a significant improvement from the passive Ariel in the aforementioned case study, since she essentially refuses to conform to the stereotypical feminine gender norms bestowed upon her by the patriarchy. She breaks the rules
of ancient China to restore her family’s honor, and saves the country. Mulan is a quick thinker; she even rescues her entire army, and in the end is respected and accepted as a hero by her entire country. While Mulan possesses some feminist elements, the protagonist does still have to conform to the hegemonic masculine norm in order to be taken seriously. The movie continues to portray men in a superior position, and Mulan only receives recognition by doing what she does disguised as a man. The only way to work her way up through China’s patriarchal system is to essentially become an actual man.

On the other hand, whilst Mulan possesses feminist elements, Walt Disney fails to be racially unbiased. Despite its seemingly inclusive nature, Mulan fails at showcasing an intersectional perspective. Because the story features an Asian woman as its protagonist, Disney has the opportunity to address both sexist, and racial problems in the movie in order to mark a progressive change. However, Mulan is shown to misrepresent ancient Chinese culture. Disney overgeneralizes Chinese culture by depicting Asia as one single cultural entity. An example of this can be found at the beginning of the film. Mulan wears a kimono and geisha make-up, but these are Japanese traditions, not Chinese. A recurring theme within the movie is that of the cherry blossom flower, a flower that is also distinctly Japanese. The film also features stereotypical modern Chinese inventions, such as the Great Wall of China, and dynamite, even though both did not exist at the time the film is set in. Disney, thus, overgeneralizes and stereotypes Chinese culture to make it more appealing to a Western audience.
Chapter 3

3.1 The Princess and the Frog (2009)

The third case study this thesis will address is *The Princess and the Frog* (2009). *The Princess and the Frog* features the first ever African-American princess. The aspects of gender and racial discourse included in the film make for an adequate analysis. The film centers around the hardworking female protagonist Tiana. Tiana is the daughter of an African-American seamstress in New Orleans during the 1920’s. She works two waitressing jobs to achieve her dream of someday owning her own restaurant, a dream she conceived together with her father, who has sadly passed away in World War I. One day, she encounters a prince named Naveen, who has been transformed into a frog by voodoo magic. She kisses the prince, after he persuades her to kiss him by saying it would turn him back into a human. Tiana concedes, but by kissing him she turns into a frog herself. The film focuses on Tiana and Naveen’s quest to find a remedy for their predicament, travelling through the bayou to find a woman named Mama Odie, who possesses the magic to turn them both to humans again. During their journey, the two of them fall in love. Tiana and Naveen find Mama Odie who tells them that, if Naveen kisses a princess before the clock strikes twelve on Mardi Gras, the two of them will transform back into humans. They fail to locate a princess on time, but seem content to stay frogs forever. The film ends with their wedding, which, in the end, manages to transform them back into their human forms. This is set in motion by their marriage, which has made Tiana a princess at last. The film ends with an epilogue in which Tiana and Naveen own a restaurant together, resulting in Tiana’s dream becoming a reality.
3.1.1 Defying Patriarchal Society

Like *Mulan*, *The Princess and the Frog* constitutes another first in Disney history. Among all the princess movies Walt Disney has produced, there has never been a black princess. Tiana is the first female African-American protagonist in a Disney movie (Fig. 11). The film *The Princess and the Frog* is set during a time when the black community was still reeling from the Jim Crow laws, as well as America’s fairly recent abolishment of slavery. To counteract the repeatedly used stereotype that African-Americans are lazy, Tiana embodies anything but laziness. In “Cultural Representations in Walt Disney Films: Implications for Education”, an article focused on the correlation between education and Disney movies, Juby and Wormer describe Tiana as “a strong-willed and talented heroine who is resourceful enough to participate in her own rescue” (589). The aforementioned traits are exemplified throughout the film. The song “Almost There,” for example, situates Tiana as an independent woman, not looking for love of any kind, instead opting to focus on her career:

Mama, I don't have time for dancing. That's just gonna have to wait a while. Ain't got time for messing around. And it's not my style. This old town can slow you down. People taking the easy way. But I know exactly where I'm going. And getting closer, closer, everyday. And I'm almost there, I'm almost there. People down here think I'm crazy but I don't care. Trials and tribulations have had my share. There ain't nothing gonna stop me now cause I'm almost there. (Rose)

Tiana uses “dancing” as a metaphor for romantic love. She says she does not have time for “messing around,” insinuating to not care about relationships at all. At the beginning of the movie, she is depicted to be working two different waitressing jobs hoping to achieve her
dreams of someday owning her own restaurant. The film provides an explicit focus on her career instead of on romantic love.

Contrary to the Disney films earlier examined, Tiana and her family subvert certain patriarchal standards. Her mother is the breadwinner of the family, while her father works in the private sphere. In the beginning of the film, Tiana’s father is shown to prepare a large bowl of Gumbo for the entire neighborhood (Fig. 12), while her mother is working out of the house as a seamstress for a rich family. By never disclosing her father’s job, Disney puts emphasis on him as the one who is responsible for domestic work. In “Understanding Patriarchy,” Bell Hooks elaborates on patriarchy by explaining that according to this socio-political system, men view everyone else as “weak,” especially females, and feel it is their right to exert this dominance through, for example, violence (Hooks, “Understanding Patriarchy” 1). Whereas earlier Disney films have oftentimes portrayed men in line with Hook’s patriarchal definition The Princess and the Frog tries to divert from this notion through the portrayal of Tiana’s family. The Little Mermaid, for example, depicts a familial relationship that features a patriarch who perfectly embodies Hook’s version of patriarchal relations. King Triton exerts his power over all his daughters through violence and emotional dominance. Tiana’s family situation, however, breaks with this image of the dominant violent male as head of the family by portraying Tiana’s father as a caring, soft, homemaker, while his wife functions as the breadwinner.

3.1.2 Masculinity in The Princess and the Frog

The Princess and the Frog also includes an interesting portrayal of the African-American male. Bell Hooks addresses her issues with the portrayal of black masculinity in her book Black: Looks, Race, and Representation. She explains that current media do not “interrogate the conventional construction of patriarchal masculinity” (89). Mass media usually excludes black
men who do not follow the stereotypical patriarchal norm for black masculinity, so only focuses on the ones that do. But media tends to merely accentuate African-American men who are dominant and violent, which often results in the misrepresentation of black men in popular culture. *The Princess and the Frog,* however, seems to aim at producing an exception to this trend by reversing the gender-roles in Tiana’s family. Her father is not at all portrayed as violent or dominant. Instead, Disney depicts him as a friendly family-man.

In addition, her relationship with prince Naveen also contains elements that are unconventional for Walt Disney. Earlier versions of Disney princes generally embody the epitome of hegemonic masculinity, as exemplified by the aforementioned prince Eric or General Li Shang. In accordance to this trend, Prince Naveen does also possess a stereotypically masculine body. He has broad shoulders, straight white teeth, and resembles a prince in every sense of the word (Fig. 13). He is at times shallow, irresponsible, and obsessed with women, all alluding to the ideal of hegemonic masculinity.

However, in comparison to previous Walt Disney princes, Naveen does not possess a large amount of skill. Contrary to Tiana, Naveen does not know how to cook, he is clumsy, and at times naïve. Tiana, then, seems to be taking on the more dominant role within their relationship. Another example of a role reversal can be found in the scene where Tiana teaches Naveen how to mince mushrooms. She is depicted to adhere to a stereotypically masculine role in a famous Hollywood trope. She does so by assuming a position behind Naveen, taking his arms, coaxing him to imitate her stance and skill. The scene lends itself for an almost parodical reading (Fig. 14). The aforementioned position that Tiana assumes is a recurring trope in Hollywood, which is traditionally used to educate a less-skilled woman how to perform a certain action. *The Princess and the Frog,* then, partly falls in line with what third-wave feminism is advocating for by showcasing the layered nature of Naveen’s character.
By portraying different sort of masculinities from the ones that are perpetuated in most Hollywood films, *The Princess and the Frog*, could influence the way boys of color perceive themselves, as well as the way they should behave, as Hooks mentions that contemporary black men have been shaped by the narrow representations and perpetuated stereotypes of black masculinity on screen (Hooks, *Black: Looks, Race and Representation* 89).

### 3.1.3 Race in *The Princess and the Frog*

In addition to the inversion of traditional gender-roles, Walt Disney’s aim is to be more inclusive by featuring its first black princess in the Disney Princess franchise. *The Princess and the Frog* is a way for Disney to showcase a strong protagonist, which, contrary to earlier Disney princesses who are white, possesses the opportunity to be an icon for black women too. An African-American princess would provide the African-American community with a vehicle for identification. The reason why the representation of a black protagonist in a medium such as Disney films is significant is because of its influence on children. In a research conducted by Dorothy Hurley on the perception of princess tales by children, she describes that children perceive white as “goodness” due to the fact that children have been exposed to a “pervasive racist value system” in mass media, which has resulted in internalized white privilege (222). Hurley continues to explain that “the problem of pervasive, internalized privileging of Whiteness has been intensified by the Disney representation of fairy tale princesses which consistently reinforces an ideology of White supremacy” (223). Disney, then, seems to aim for a break from this internalized white supremacy by focusing on the perspective of more diverse princesses. Instead of the previously dominant white princesses, Disney extends its range by including other ethnicities, as seen in *Mulan*, which would result in more diverse experiences, as well as more diverse viewpoints.
Firstly, the film includes positive aspects of African-American culture. It is overflowing with forms of black music, as well as black voices and creole accents. There is a sense of community within the big streets of New Orleans. Tiana and her family might live in a less privileged neighborhood, but there is a sense of kinship in their black neighborhood, that lacks in the city landscapes shown further into the film. This sense of a tight-knit black community becomes evident by the way in which Tiana’s father is cooking Gumbo for the entire neighborhood, showcasing that the sharing of a meal is a normal occurrence in their everyday life (Fig. 15). This portrays community as a part of black identity.

Contrastingly, *The Princess and the Frog* does not manage to refrain from being completely void of racial bias. Despite being rich in elements from African-American culture, the film does not manage to accurately portray the struggles of black women in America during the 1920s. The film takes place during the Jim Crow era, in the deep South of the United States, yet there is no mention of racial inequality or racial segregation at any point during the movie. Tiana is close friends with the privileged white family the LeBoeufffs, something that is highly unrealistic considering the time and place the movie is set in due to its aforementioned setting. The film features an American Dream narrative, with an attitude focused on the notion that “hard work pays off”. This narrative is not unusual in Disney films, but considering its setting, it is highly unrealistic. The film does not address any of the racist struggles African-American people were faced with, failing to accurately showcase an intersectional point of view. By not explicitly addressing any of the struggles Tiana, an African-American woman, would encounter in real life, Disney neglects the black woman’s perspective. Disney also fails to refrain from depicting harmful racial stereotypes. An example of this would be the character of Mama Odie, the fairy godmother of the characters. Mama Odie is an old, wise woman, located deep within the bayou. She seems to portray the motherly figure in the narrative, employed to help Tiana and Naveen reverse the cure laid upon them (Fig. 16). Despite Disney’s
intentions, Mama Odie is reminiscent of the ‘Mammy’ stereotype, a harmful stereotype targeted towards black people, invented when slavery was still happening in America.

Walt Disney, then, aims to create a progressive and diverse film, and, one could say, succeeds in comparison to its predecessors like *The Little Mermaid*, which features solely white characters. However, *The Princess and the Frog* fails to accurately portray the racial struggles Tiana would have faced considering the film’s setting. It also fails to completely eliminate racial stereotypes, leaving *The Princess and the Frog* with its shortcomings.

3.2 *Moana* (2016)

The last case study this research will address is *Moana* (2016). *Moana* is the most recent Disney princess film, and also features its first Polynesian princess. *Moana* lends itself for a comparison to the earlier case studies due to the fact that the film was produced after third-wave feminist debates had already started to cease. The film is set in ancient Polynesia on an island called Motonui, and focuses on the daughter of a long line of Polynesian rulers. The protagonist, by the name of Moana longs for a life beyond her island borders, but her parents forbid her to ever leave Motonui. One day, when the fishermen of her island are unable to catch more fish, she discovers that this is due to the demigod Maui. Maui has stolen the heart of a Polynesian goddess by the name of Te Fiti. Against the orders of her parents to never leave Motonui, Moana sets out to find Maui, and the heart of Te Fiti, the goddess. Moana finds Maui and in exchange for the heart of Te Fiti Moana is forced to go looking for Maui’s magical hook. After retrieving Maui’s hook, the two encounter Te Ka, an evil island spirit. The two figure out that Te Ka is actually Te Fiti without a heart, and, despite their, at times, clashing personalities, they manage to restore Te Fiti’s heart. After Te Fiti has once again settled down, Moana says goodbye to Maui, returning to Motonui.
3.2.1 Female Agency in *Moana*

As was the case with the previous case studies, Disney seems to aim at challenging sexist thinking with *Moana*. The film’s titular character, Moana, fails to conform to Western patriarchal norms of beauty. Moana’s build is muscular, her clothes practical for living on an island, her hair is frizzy and wild, and she’s not wearing any signs of visible make-up (Fig. 17). According to Bell Hooks in *Feminism Is for Everybody*, it is common for the film-industry to portray women as the Western feminine ideal. Hooks states that “in movies, on television, and in public advertisements images of reed-thin, dyed-blonde women looking as though they would kill for a good meal have become the norm” (Hooks, *Feminism Is for Everybody* 34).

Compared to previous princesses examined, with the exception of *Mulan* whose goal was to actively achieve a masculine appearance, Moana is depicted as the only princess who does not conform to Western patriarchal beauty standards. Moana’s character design features prominently visible muscles, as well as strong dark, almost unruly hair and eyebrows. In contrast to previously released Walt Disney films, these features on Moana’s character can be considered realistic features when one keeps her lifestyle in mind.

The reason why Moana’s character is important to feminist discourse is because she adds representation in the form of a diverse body-type in Western media. Moana’s body proportions reflect her physical and mental power. The character of Moana is highlighted to be independent, but also physically strong. She utilizes her muscular build to fight, and manages to sail a boat without failure. Hooks proposes that “young girls and adolescents will not know that feminist thinkers acknowledge both the value of beauty and adornment if we continue to allow patriarchal sensibilities to inform the beauty industry in all spheres” (Hooks, *Feminism Is for Everybody* 36). By including a protagonist with a body-type that differs from the Western norm, *Moana* manages to reach precisely those people who do not fit within these beauty standards, adding to the diverse representation in Western mass media.
Disney wants to convey that Moana’s value does not rest on appearance. This notion is made even more explicit because Moana does not, at any point in the movie, have a romantic storyline. There is no mention of romance, and Maui is not made into her love-interest, but both characters are amicable. Instead, Disney could have added a romantic narrative, or turned Maui into a possible romantic candidate. The film does not, however, feature a romantic undertone of any kind. This, then, contests Bell Hooks statement that “all females young and old were socialized by sexist thinking to believe that our value rested solely on appearance and whether or now we were perceived to be good looking, especially by men” (Hooks, *Feminism Is for Everybody* 31).

The prospect of leaving her home does not scare Moana, but rather seems to excite her. She oftentimes defies her father and Maui, the two male figures in the film, to get her way. Henceforth, *Moana* seems to further challenge patriarchal norms with her wish to see the world. As was the case with earlier Disney princesses, Moana struggles with the expectations her family has put on her, which is depicted in the song “How Far I’ll Go”. The lyrics of the song share a similar tone as the earlier song “Reflection” from *Mulan*.

I've been standing at the edge of the water. Long as I can remember. Never really knowing why. I wish I could be the perfect daughter. But I come back to the water. No matter how hard I try. (Cravalho)

The song conceives the same idea presented in *Mulan*, namely the struggle to play the part of perfect feminine figure.
3.2.2 Masculinity in Moana

On one hand, Moana seems to reject patriarchal norms by including different representations of the stereotypical Disney princess. On the other hand, the film fails to completely divert from showcasing the stereotypical Disney male who conforms to the hegemonic masculine ideal. The demigod Maui, the male protagonist in Moana, possesses an exaggerated muscular body, which bears the connotation of an overtly masculine man (Fig. 18). One could say his body reflects his personality. Maui seems to be overly confident, and because of his status as a divine entity, he looks down on humans. Maui’s egotistical character traits are exaggerated throughout the film as a form of comedic relief. At first glance, he seems to possess the male characteristics described by Bell Hooks: “pathologically narcissistic, infantile, and psychologically dependent on the privileges (however relative) that they receive simply for having been born male” (Hooks, Feminism Is for Everybody 70).

Although Maui seems overly confident in his abilities as a demigod, as Moana progresses, Maui’s inner insecurities find their way to the surface of his character. Maui was thrown into the sea as an infant, and later rescued by the Polynesian Gods, who granted him divine powers. Because of this, Maui suffers from feelings of rejection, as well as a lack of validation. After he loses his hook, he is at loss of what to do. He feels unworthy as well as powerless and voices these insecurities. On the surface, Maui appears as a superficial alpha-male, but as the film progresses, one comes to the conclusion that his character is more layered. The fact that Maui possesses the courage to voice his insecurities, instead of merely disguising them, is encouraged by third wave feminists like Bell Hooks, and falls in line with what she deems “Feminist Masculinity:” “A feminist vision which embraces feminist masculinity, which loves boys and men and demands on their behalf every right that we desire for girls and women, can renew the American male” (Hooks, Feminism Is for Everybody 71). Third-wave feminism aims to reconnect men with their inner emotions, “to reclaim the lost boy within and
nurture his soul, his spiritual growth” (70). The character of Maui, then, cannot be considered a stereotyped version of the hegemonic masculine male because he displays visible insecurities, but he also does not completely fit within the borders of feminist masculinity because he does display characteristics, such as arrogance and narcissism, that are deemed hegemonically masculine.

3.2.3 Race and Moana

Despite its progressive features, Moana, like The Princess and the Frog, has failed to remedy some of the earlier issues represented in Disney films. Moana offers the perspective of a girl who is not part of the white Western norm, much like Tiana from The Princess and the Frog, who are both part of an ethnic minority. Journalist Aisha Harris clarifies in Slate that “Disney went to great lengths to avoid gross stereotyping. […] The film’s devotion to community and reverence for ancestors feel as carefully drawn as the vivid tattoos covering not just Maui but Moana’s grandmother” Contrary to what Robinson proposes, Moana is not an adequate representation of Polynesia. Moana’s specific Polynesian heritage is not explained in nuanced detail, but rather shown as one large encapsulated culture. Disney uses prominent features and stereotypes found in Polynesian culture to portray the culture itself. The music choices, for example, over-generalize Polynesian culture by using vocals in the Tokelauan language, and not Hawaiian. Despite this overgeneralization of Polynesian culture, Moana does provide a Polynesian perspective by showcasing its first Polynesian Disney princess. Despite its overgeneralizations of Polynesian culture, the culture itself is never explicitly showcased in a bad light.

The movie does have its cultural faults, but this overgeneralization is not a new phenomenon in Walt Disney productions, as is exemplified by Mulan in an earlier chapter. It seems that with Moana, Disney aims to, again, showcase a progressive heroine. The film
includes feminist elements, including a titular character who deviates from the beauty standards instilled by patriarchal norms. The film shows a different male perspective by including a male character who fluctuates between hegemonic masculinity and feminist masculinity, by occasionally being in touch with his emotional and sensitive side. Yet, in their attempt to engage with feminist elements, *Moana*, much like with *Mulan*, neglects the cultural depiction of Polynesia and takes on an otherist point of view through which it overgeneralizes Polynesian culture. This again signals Walt Disney’s failure to showcase an intersectionalist perspective, since it fails to accurately represent Polynesian culture, neglecting the fact that race and gender are able to intersect.
Conclusion

The research question that this thesis aimed to answer was: what is the influence of third-wave feminism on Disney films from 1989 until 2016? After analyzing four case studies, which are respectfully a decade apart, the findings will now be presented.

The first case study, *The Little Mermaid* (1989), can be considered to carry the least third-wave feminist influences, which is a feasible conclusion since the film was produced before the rise of the third wave. *The Little Mermaid*, however, manages to provide a frame of reference for the case studies that do include third wave influences. The film heavily relies on patriarchal relations, as illustrated by the role of male characters featured in *The Little Mermaid*. The superiority of these characters, especially Eric and Triton, is accentuated by their leadership role, and their behavior is emphasized as dominant, at times violent, and physically overpowering. The film also presents hegemonic masculinity as the masculine norm by supplying contrastive elements in the form of Eric’s servant and Ariel’s comrades. As for diversity in *The Little Mermaid*, the film solely features white heteronormative characters. The exception is Sebastian the crustacean, who is presented as a servant with a Caribbean accent, alluding to the inferiority of non-white characters.

Out of the case studies analyzed for this research, this film contains the most problematic aspects. It lacks in diversity, and perpetuates patriarchal values. *The Little Mermaid*, then, is not the most sufficient vehicle of identification for people who are not part of the straight, white norm. It also fails to provide an adequate tool for education because it is void of progressive ideals, and instead showcases an outdated view of society. Because the film was released before the third wave, it is understandable for it to not be the most progressive film in the Walt Disney animated canon. It does, however, supply a perfect example of how older Disney movies seem to feature a magnitude of elements that third-wave feminist activists would disagree with in our current society.
The following case study, *Mulan* (1998), includes slightly more feminist influences. On the one hand, *Mulan* seems to present some more progressive features by incorporating components of Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity. It also features elements of cross-dressing. This research concludes that, while *Mulan* possesses elements of both drag and gender performativity, it cannot be completely categorized as one or the other. *Mulan*, then, assumes a position in between the two aforementioned phenomena. In addition to gender discourse, *Mulan* adds to racial debates by introducing a princess of color. She is Disney’s first Asian princess. By depicting Mulan as a national heroine, Disney showcases a character with more female agency than her predecessors such as Ariel in *The Little Mermaid*.

On the other hand, *Mulan* is not a flawless representation of third-wave feminism. In focusing on gender discourse, *Mulan* seems to overgeneralize cultures. Disney fails at accurately representing Chinese culture by portraying the aforementioned culture as a mix of separate East-Asian cultural components. It, then, demonstrates progress by focusing on gender issues, yet fails to tackle any racist issues, which were also present in previous *Walt Disney* animations. *Mulan*, like *The Little Mermaid*, still relies on a patriarchal society. By choosing ancient China as its setting, Disney deliberately focuses on a society in which men are perceived as superior to women.

*The Princess and the Frog* (2009) constitutes this research’s third case study, and also shows slight progress in the Disney princess canon. Where Mulan was Disney’s first Asian princess, Tiana is their first African-American princess. Her character is also visible step forward when compared to Ariel in *The Little Mermaid*. Tiana, unlike Ariel, represents a hard-working woman who speaks her mind. Disney’s portrayal of Tiana as a hard-working black woman counters an earlier stereotype which depicts African-Americans as lazy. The film sheds a positive light on the American black community, and, in comparison to the two
earlier case studies, presents familial relationships that subvert patriarchal standards. This inversion is depicted by the contrast of working women and stay-at-home husbands. The film features a diverging representation of black masculinity by representing black men as soft and caring, creating a dissimilar depiction to that of black men in other popular media. Disney propagates the idea that men do not solely have to conform to a dominant and harsh exterior, which is oftentimes portrayed in other forms of media. *The Princess and the Frog* seems to cast aside the ideal of hegemonic masculinity to embrace other forms of masculinities.

Contradictory to these progressive features, the film is by no means flawless. *The Princess and the Frog* cannot be said to be devoid of stereotypes. Similar to *Mulan*, the movie fails to adequately address and tackle racial issues, by solely focusing on sexist discourse. *The Princess and the Frog*’s major flaw lies in its failure to showcase an intersectional perspective. Disney ignores the existence of racial segregation and racial inequality, which gives the movie an unrealistic value. Because Tiana is a black woman in the 1920s United States, it is impossible for her to not experience racism in any way. Disney puts emphasis on the reversal of gender roles, but neglects to address racial issues. By doing so, it ignores the ability of societal constraints, such as racism and sexism, to intersect.

The final case study, *Moana* (2016), is Disney’s most recent princess production. The film was released in 2016, a year in which attention towards the third wave had already lessened. The film does differ from earlier case studies by incorporating these third-wave feminist ideals in the character design. From a Western perspective, the character of Moana no longer seems to be the ideally shaped woman. Moana is muscular, and, contrary to previous princesses with the exception of *Mulan*, does not conform to Western standards of beauty. The film also features the first Disney princess who does not have a love-interest at
all, an angle *The Princess and the Frog* hinted at but did not explore, which highlights Moana’s female independence and agency.

Despite *Moana*’s status as the most recent princess, the film, like the aforementioned examples, still includes problematic aspects for third-wave feminism. The film overgeneralizes culture, as seen in *Mulan*, by encapsulating different elements of Polynesian subcultures, and transforming it into one brand of ‘Polynesian’ culture. Unlike Tiana’s father in *The Princess and the Frog*, the male character in *Moana*, Maui, is inconsistently portrayed. The film features a divergent perspective on hegemonic masculinity that is partly similar to the one showcased in Naveen’s character in *The Princess and the Frog*, by including a male character who contains elements of hegemonic masculinity, but also a softer form of masculinity. Maui can thus be considered to fluctuate between elements of soft masculinity, but also oscillates between hegemonic masculinity.

Based on these findings, this thesis is able to conclude that a correlation between third-wave feminism and Disney films does exist. Forasmuch as *The Little Mermaid* largely contains problematic elements in regards to race and gender, most of these issues do see some kind of improvement in Walt Disney films that are produced afterward. *Walt Disney* films produced after *The Little Mermaid* reveal a progression in regards to matters of female agency, as well as a change in the representation of black masculinity. The topic of race, however, remains a problematic aspect within Disney films. At times, *Walt Disney* overgeneralizes cultures, as well as neglects the intersection of race and gender, creating a very Western perspective on intersectional issues.

The results of this research, then, align with the outcome that was anticipated. What I expected to find was a progression in regards to third-wave feminist ideals within Disney films. However, what was also expected was that Disney would still struggle with its racial representation of women of color and non-western cultures. I did not expect to find flawless
representation within these animated movies, because Western companies within Hollywood often struggle to accurately portray foreign cultures. Walt Disney, then forms no exception.

Although, regardless of Walt Disney’s faults, it is necessary to take into account that it is of high importance for a company of this size to include such a large amount of princesses of different ethnicities in one franchise. Building a franchise based on a wide range of diverse female protagonists is important for current mass media, because the inclusion of princesses with different backgrounds would provide a means for children and adults, who share these different backgrounds, to feel represented.
Further Research

• Because the scale of this research is too small to make an accurate analysis incorporating all Disney movies, or even just the Disney Princess franchise, for any further research, I would advise to research the influence of third wave feminism on Disney princess films in general, broadening the scope of this research to include all princess films, resulting in an even more comprehensive result.

• By conducting a similar research with fourth-wave feminism instead of third-wave feminism, one is able to fill a niche, due to the recent origin of this movement, as well as newer case studies that lend themselves for examination. By researching the impact of fourth-wave feminism on Disney movies, one is able to address even more current issues.

• A research on the representation of race, as well as racial stereotyping in Disney movies would analyze these issues in more detail. By elaborating on the racial stereotypes and faulty representations of cultures in Walt Disney films, it could aid in solving the racist issues exposed in this thesis.

• A similar research to this one can be conducted on another franchise that spans longer than a decade, such as, for example, *The Lord of the Rings and the Hobbit, Star Wars, or Jurassic Park*. This would indicate whether it is only the Disney princess franchise which deals with a change in representations, or if other franchises experience the same phenomenon.
Figure chart

**Figure 1**: Ursula’s human form. She is a thin long-haired beauty, conforming to the feminine ideal of what a woman should look like.


**Figure 2**: Prince Eric is the epitome of hegemonic masculinity with his broad shoulders, big blue eyes, and seafarer’s clothing.


**Figure 3**: King Triton has broad shoulders to emphasize his physical strength, as well as a long grey beard to signify his mental intelligence.


**Figure 4**: Grimsby (left) is Eric’s servant. He is shown as physically thin, as well as insecure, creating the connotation of inferiority as opposed to his hegemonic masculine master.

Figure 5: Other characters shown in The Little Mermaid. All of them are represented as white, cis-gender.

Figure 6: Mulan is wearing feminine dress. The color scheme is filled with pinks and purples, bearing a feminine connotation.

Figure 7: Mulan during the song Reflection. She wipes off the ‘mask’ that she has to wear by conforming to the feminine ideal. She literally puts on a performance.

Figure 8: Mulan disguised as the male soldier Ping. Her character design changes, as do her mannerism, feeding into the notion that gender is performative.
Figure 9: The combination of their obvious masculine silhouette with their feminine dress creates, what Butler describes, as a lack of reality, which is an important element of drag. 


Figure 10: Shang (right) with Ping (left). Shang touches Ping’s shoulder, and tells him he is amazing. Interactions like these combined with Shang’s facial expressions provide a homosexual subtext in the movie.


Figure 11: Tiana is the first African-American princess. She is a skilled waitress, countering the repeatedly used stereotype.


Figure 12: Tiana’s father is cooking dinner, while her mother is working outside of the house.

Figure 13: Prince Naveen looks like the stereotypical prince, sporting broad shoulders and a bright smile.


Figure 14: A role-reversal of a stereotypical Hollywood trope. Instead of Naveen teaching Tiana, Tiana teaches Naveen.


Figure 15: Depiction of the black community in The Princess and the Frog. Tiana and her family are sharing their gumbo with the entire neighborhood.


Figure 16: Mama Odie is reminiscent of the 'Mammy' stereotype due to her wise and motherly character.

Figure 17: Moana’s character design features muscular features, as well as curly unruly hair, and an outfit suitable for the climate she lives in.


Figure 18: Maui (left) has an exaggerated muscular physique, as well as tattoos to emphasize his demigod status.

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