'Disney's Damsels'

A representation of femininity in Disney's animated movies *Snow White, Mulan, and Brave.*

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Preface

Blood, sweat, tears, and a little more than two years it has cost me; but the moment in which I can say out loud "my master thesis is finished" has finally arrived. In front of you lies the result of my, at times endlessly seeming, research. With this thesis I am finalizing my academic carrier at the Radboud University. I would like to say that it is now time to say goodbye to my years as a student, and to start living the grown-up life, but that would be untrue. When I just started writing this thesis, I received a job offer to which I just could not say no. This job has taught me so much and makes me go to work with a smile on my face every day. The downside of this however was the fact that my thesis did not receive the attention that it deserved for quite some time. But in the end, I am proud of the result that is now lying in front of you.

For this thesis I luckily chose a topic that will always continue to peek my interest. Disney and all its magic will forever continue to enchant me. To me this topic will never lose its value. This love for Disney has been my internal motivation throughout the entire project. By choosing a topic that was so dear to me, I have been able to put a piece of myself into this research, which is what at least to me, makes this thesis so special.

Before I really say goodbye to the Radboud, there are a few people whom I have to thank for their support during this process. First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor Laslo Muntean, who has showcased a new dimension of patience during this project. His feedback on the right time and place has provided me with the tools to continue the writing process, and ultimately complete this work.

I would also like to thank my fiancée Caius, for his never-ending support and patience with me, for his ability to understand my moodiness whenever I wanted to quit, and for his ability to motivate me at times when I could not motivate myself.

Last but not least, I want to thank both of my parents. Mom, Dad, thank you for your endless patience and your unconditional trust in me. Not only during my master but perhaps even more so during my bachelor. It is mainly because of you guys that I can now say that I am the proud owner of both a bachelor and a master's degree. Thank you!

Maddy Salden.

Introduction

        "Try to imagine a world without Walt Disney. Imagine a world without his magic, whimsy, and optimism" (Green 4). To me, trying to think of a world in which Walt Disney never existed, is almost as if one is trying to imagine a world in which there is no entertainment industry at all. This man changed the way in which people would look at the entertainment industry for good. Not only because Disney introduced the public to concepts such as Technicolor and feature-length animation movies, but also because he created an entirely new branch of entertainment: theme parks. Nowadays, the scope of the Walt Disney Company is very broad; it ranges from Mickey Mouse and Snow White to their world-famous theme parks such as Disneyland. The company's success became unprecedented with the creation of the first animated full-length movie, *Snow White*, which went into theaters in 1937. As Christopher Finch points out in his book *The Art Of Disney*: "The reviews were sensational. *Snow White,* justifying all of Disney's hopes for it, was an overnight success-impressing itself on the imagination of the Western World" (Finch 73). Ever since the first princess appeared on the big screen, Disney movies have touched the hearts of millions. These princess movies that were produced during the first half of the twentieth century have gained popularity ever since the 1990s so-called 'Walt Disney revival': a time during which a lot of new animated features were produced, and the Disney Classics were re-released into movie theaters. The popularity of movies such as *Snow White*, *Cinderella*, and the *Little Mermaid* exploded, and the company's marketing team responded accordingly: during this time Disney merchandise became tremendously popular. Halloween costumes, mugs, sleeping bags, t-shirts, dolls, VHR's, you name it and the Disney Company was not only producing it; people were buying it, and lots of it. The growth of their merchandise during the 1990s is illustrated in the following quote from the company's CEO Michael Eisner in 1999: "The Disney Stores' fortunes have paralleled those of Licensing. They grew explosively throughout the decade, you wouldn't believe how many Halloween costumes we sold this year." (The Walt Disney Company 4). People literally took Disney into their homes.

Research Question

This immense growth of the Disney Princesses among young girls could be considered harmless, as Disney movies mostly depict fairy tales and try to incorporate a moral lesson here and there to give the movie that "magic Disney touch". However, with that much exposure to, and influence on young children, the question that needs to be asked is whether these princesses actually teach the youngsters realistic, contemporary values about life, marriage, and what it means to be a woman? Or do these stories tend to linger in the values of the past? Has the representation of women remained the same, of has the Disney Company acknowledged the gradual shift in the way society sees women, and women see themselves? Disney movies can often depict women in a stereotypical, role-confirming manner. The question whether this stereotypical portrayal remained the same over the last seventy-five years, or if the female movie characters evolved with time is the question that is going to be central throughout this thesis. For the analysis a movie from every era is chosen; a movie from the 'classic period' (1937-1967), one from the 'Eisner Period' (1989-2005), and one from the 'Iger Era' (2005-present). The exact definitions of these periods are going to be addressed further on in this thesis. In order to find an answer to the question: *How are female characters represented in the Disney animated movies Snow White, Mulan, and Brave?*

In addition to the introduction, this thesis consists of six chapters. The work starts with a theoretical framework in which a brief explanation of gender theory is provided to pave the way for more complex theories on performativity, aesthetics, and the male gaze by Simon de Beauvoir, Laura Mulvey, and Judith Butler. In the theoretical framework attention is also paid to the BEM Sex Role Inventory. These themes and theories are then linked to Disney animated movies. Since Disney is such an important part of this thesis, the next chapter is going to focus on the ways in which the Disney Company has developed itself into the worldwide media conglomerate it is today. Previous research on Disney, and their influence on this thesis will be addressed in the last part of my theoretical framework.

In the following chapter the research design for this thesis is presented. The methodologies are introduced here: narrative analysis, and analysis of the mise-en-scène. Hereafter the case studies that will be analyzed, thus the three Disney movies, are introduced and are each being described.

Each chapter is going to focus on one movie, and is divided into three sub-chapters: Aesthetics, Love and Marriage, and Women and the Other. In this research's conclusion, the answers to the research question is summarized. The conclusion ends with an overview of this

research's limitations and recommendations for further research on the topic. This thesis is finalized by presenting an overview of the literature that was used.

Scientific Relevance

Scientists believe that frequently watching television can contribute to a subtle changing perception of reality (Gerbner & Gross 4). This theory thus illustrates that media has a significant influence on society. Disney, being an important player in the media entertainment industry, can thus influence the lives of many adults and children.

This research, however, is not focusing on the effect that this influence has on society, but rather on the ways in which the stories and characters change over, and with time. The emphasis is therefore on the narrative analysis of the theme that can be found in the research question: femininity.

Disney's influence on the lives of both adults and children, as well as the company's role in our contemporary society is a popular research topic and has been written about on numerous accounts. The storylines, and character analysis of Disney movies have also been frequently addressed. What however is missing, is the incorporation of the historical development that the female character has made. The value of this research can be found in that it does not focus on one period of the Disney history, but it looks at one movie from every period to put them into contrast with one-another.

Social Relevance

Researching the development of the female character in Disney movies is interesting because media can have a substantial influence on societal behavior. In our contemporary world, the role of media is only continuing to increase, which is why it is important for people to realize just how substantial the influence of media can be on society. As previously mentioned, the influence of Disney movies on children is not to be underestimated. This research will demonstrate to the audience whether the representation of femininity in Disney movies adapts to the image of time, or if the company has failed to do so and continues to linger in the past when it comes to female representations. By creating awareness amongst the audience, people can now choose to educate their children about topics such as gender representation in these movies.

Research Justification

The number of Disney movies to choose from is almost endless; from the first feature length movie *Snow White* in 1937, until one of their latest blockbuster movies *Frozen*, and countless movies in between. Being a Disney-fan at heart, eliminating films based on personal preference was not going to be an option. As I do not have a favorite animation movie, they are all equally dear to me. A plan to select three movies was thus what I needed, and therefore I started reading about the Disney Company, its production of films, its employees, and its management. During this initial research, Amy Davis' book *Good Girls & Wicked Witches* came to my attention. In this book Davis argues that Disney films can be considered a cultural mirror when addressing the ways in which females are portrayed, as she argues that "in their representations of femininity, Disney films reflected the attitudes of the wider society from which they emerged, and that their enduring popularity is evidence that the depictions they contain would continue to resonate as the films were re-released in later decades" (Davis, 1). In her book Davis very clearly divides the Disney movies into categories: the first category she refers to as "The Classic Years", the second category she calls "Middle Period", and the last period that she mentions in the "Eisner Period" (Davis). Since Davis' book was published in 2006, she was not able to incorporate the latest management switch that occurred within the company, a period that is referred to by Grace Pollock as the "Iger Era". By categorizing the Disney movies into these four groups, it soon became apparent that, in order to provide a chronological analysis of the development of female representations in Disney movies, I had to choose one movie from each category. For the movie analysis in which the representations of female Disney princesses, the "Middle Period" would prove to be impossible to incorporate within the research. During this period the Disney Company did not produce any movie in which there was a 'human' female protagonist, and since that is one of the most important criteria of the subject that I want to analyze, the movies that were made during this time period could not be used within the scope of this paper.

In order to present this analysis in a chronological manner, the analysis starts with a "The Classical Years". This period lasted from 1937 until 1967 and is not merely named the classic years because of all the Disney movies that are often referred to as the 'classics' were produced during this time. The main reason why this period is often referred to as the classic years, is because these were the years in which Walt Disney himself still played an important role within the Disney Company. During this period a wide variety of films were produced, but as this thesis wants to address the movies in a chronological matter, the movie to start the analysis with is the first ever feature-length princess movie that the Disney Company ever

made. Not only is it interesting to analyze the company's first feature-length film because it was their first work but also because of the time in which it was produced: the 1930s; a time in which gender roles were enacted and enforced in a different way than they are in our contemporary society. *Snow White* thus is an interesting choice because it is the first animated princess movie that comes from a time in which the gender roles were very different from the way that they are now. Because of these reasons *Snow White* is going to be the movie from the Classic Years that is going to be analyzed.

The second category called "The Eisner Period", or as people often refer to it "the Disney Renaissance" lasted from 1989-2005, and during this period a lot of this changed for the Disney Company. Janet Wasko addresses these changes in *Understanding Disney*. After Walt passed away in 1967, his brother Roy took over the management of the company, but until 1971 when he died. Walt's son-in-law Ron Miller was appointed head of film-productions and the films that were produced during this time "fell far short of previous Disney successes" (Wasko 30); it was thus time for a leader. This change in management meant that more women than ever before were installed in higher positions, more celebrities were cast for voice-overs and the movie's theme songs, and perhaps the most important change: the company hired Michael Eisner, former head of Paramount Pictures, as their new manager. During this period in which the management changed, the company started to produce one successful movie after the other, as Wasko points out "Animated features, such as *The Little Mermaid*, *the Lion King,* and *Beauty and The Beast* have been wildly successful" (Wasko 43), and therefore providing a large list of films to choose from for the analysis. For this analysis the movie *Mulan* was chosen, not only because this film provides new perspectives on gender in Disney animation movies, but also because the film is set in an Asian country, and thus the way in which the company dealt with the topic of gender within a different cultural setting can also analyzed.

The last category to select a movie from is the "Iger Era", starting in 2005 and continuous throughout today. After Eisner resigned, Robert Iger became was appointed as the new head of the Disney Company, and under his management the company grew ever more successful and profitable with the purchase of other companies such as Pixar, Marvel, and Lucas films, as is shown in **image 1** from the economist. In the past the Disney Company had already collaborated with Pixar for films such as *Toy Story, A Bug's Life*, and *Finding Nemo*, and in 2006 the Disney Company purchased Pixar, adding another piece to their puzzle of growing success. Since the Iger period is a period in which computer animation became increasingly popular, this analysis also needed to address a movie that was not drawn by hand

but animated by computers, to symbolize the growth of the Disney Company, but also to place it within a more contemporary time frame. This automatically led to *Brave,* which is the only movie produced by Pixar in which the main character is a woman. Thus, by addressing these movies in a chronological manner, the development of the representation of female characters should become apparent.

Image 1. Revenues Disney Company (economist.com)
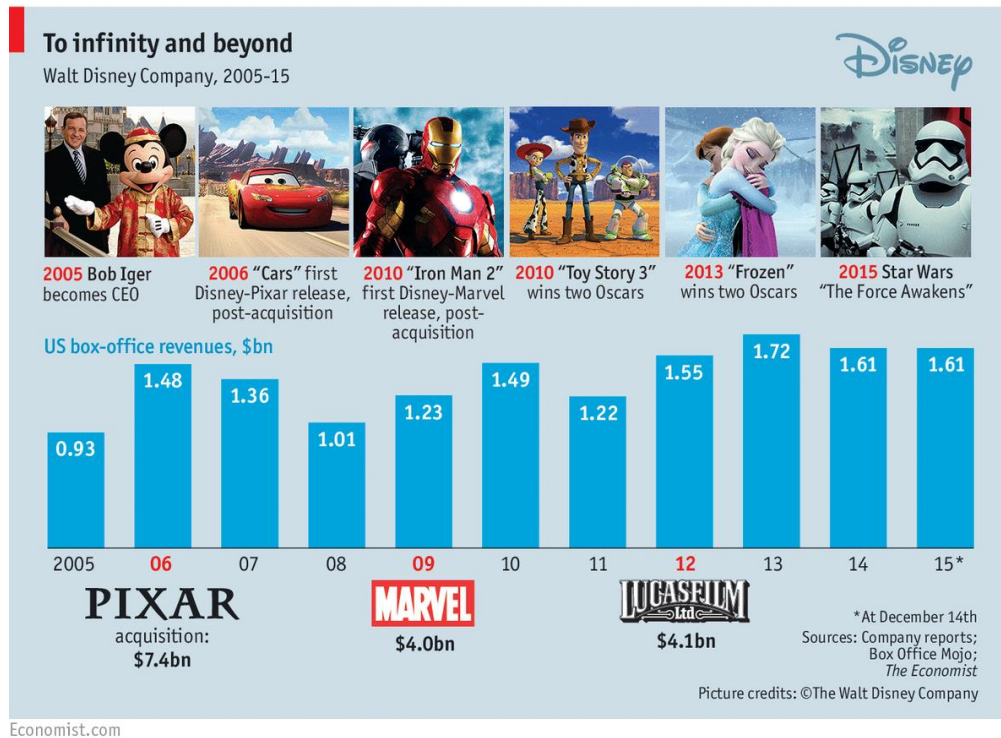
1. Theoretical Framework

In order to provide an insight into the notion of gender, a working definition of the term has to be provided. The term 'gender' and the understandings about what gender is and what it means, have gradually changed over time. Therefore, it is important to touch upon the definition of gender. For this definition not merely Judith Butler's understanding of what gender is will be used, as she has provided new insights into gender as a construct, but also definitions from other theorists such as Susan Golombok are implemented. This provides a broader understanding of what gender is as Golombok has conducted research on the ways in which gender can be "manufactured", the influence that being raised by same-sex parents, i.e. she focuses on contemporary issues which makes her research very relevant and interesting.

1.1 Gender theory: a general overview

Gender and sex are often used interchangeably. These two concepts, however, are not the same thing, and since this thesis addresses the topic of gender on a frequent basis, a clear definition has to be provided. The complexity and ambiguity of this word is addressed by Susan Golombok, author of the book *Gender Development*. Gender is a word that is used on a frequent basis, often in combination with words such as 'identity' and 'role'. Golombok's definition usage of a gender identity is as follows:

> *Gender identity* is a person's concept of him-or herself as male or female, as reflected in the statements "I am a boy" or "I am a girl" *Gender role* includes the behaviors and attitudes considered appropriate for males or females in a particular culture. *Sexual orientation* refers to a person's sexual attraction toward a person of the other sex (heterosexual sexual orientation) or the same sex (lesbian or gay male sexual orientation).

(Golombok 3)

A person's gender identity is almost always the same as his/her biological sex, which thus means that when someone is born as a biological female, that person is most likely to develop a female gender identity, too. When studying gender, there are more themes that are worth looking into because of their frequent usage: *sex typing,* and *sex stereotype*. Sex typing is a concept used to define as to what extent a person conforms to the expected gender roles. This thus means that a boy that meets the masculine sex type, is a boy who does a lot of things that society associates with the male sex such as playing soccer, have a love for cars, and likes to fight. Sex stereotypes are the actual characteristics that society believes "to be typical of men and women or boys and girls" (Golombok 5). Important concepts that are used within gender studies are the words femininity and masculinity, and according to Benshoff and Griffin,

authors of the book *America on Film: representing race, class, gender, and sexuality at the movies* these concepts within the film studies are defined as follows: "Femininity (as defined by patriarchy) is usually associated with being small, quiet, passive, emotional, nurturing, non-aggressive, dependent, and weak. Masculinity (as defined by patriarchy) is usually associated with being large, loud, and active, with non-emotional aggression and strong leadership abilities" (Benshoff 214). These definitions clearly illustrate that both society and culture have a strong influence on what is considered masculine and what feminine. This thus means that when a person is born with a certain sex, but his/her gender role is a construct that society poses on him/her. A boy's behavior becomes masculine because it is shaped that way by society. Society leaves hardly any room for a person's gender identity to differ from the sex that he/she was born with.

1.2 Beauvoir, Butler, and Mulvey

When addressing feminist film theory, a good starting point is Simone de Beauvoir, a writer, political activist and feminist who is known for her book *The Second Sex*, which was published in 1949 and which is often considered the onset of the second wave of feminism. In this book Beauvoir looks at women first from a historical perspective, analyzing their role in society from the ancient Greek times up until the present. She starts by describing a woman's life from her childhood years on, arguing for instance that a woman has no 'innate' maternal feelings, but these are almost forced upon them by their families and society. Beauvoir then moves on to the marital life and argues that marriage for the larger part consists of service work. She points out that a woman's life is centered around marriage, because even if a woman is not married it controls her life, simply because marriage is so high on the list of priorities. When looking at Beauvoir's work, it is highly influential for feminist works that followed in the years after, and she is also considered to be the first feminist theorist to make the divide between the concepts "sex" and "gender". As Beauvoir states "One is not born, but rather becomes, woman. No biological, psychic, or economic destiny defines the figure that the human female takes on in society; it is civilization as a whole that elaborates this intermediary product between the male and the eunuch that is called feminine" (Beavoir, 283). Arguing that a woman *becomes* a woman over time, it is an identity that is constructed and not something that she is born with.

Influenced by the second wave of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s, films were slowly becoming a topic of interest among feminist scholars. Not only the ways in which women were depicted was critically analyzed, but also the narratives, and stereotypical gender

depictions. Through the analysis of these representations of women in movies, links to society's view of women were made. Among these scholars who studied women in film, was feminist theorist Laura Mulvey, who wrote her most famous article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" in 1973, in which she uses psychoanalytic theories to prove that our society heavily relies on patriarchal structures when watching a movie. She argues that within movies women are merely used as a tool to provide men with a pleasurable viewing experience. Mulvey states that "In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly" (Mulvey 837). This is what Mulvey refers to as the "male gaze", a theme that is going to be elaborated on further on in this research.

In addition, theories from gender theorist Judith Butler are used. Butler was very much influenced by Beauvoir's thinking and her understanding that "one is not born, but rather becomes, woman" (Beauvoir 283). In her book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, a book that Butler published in 1990, Butler's main argument is that gender is performed. What people thus consider to be masculine or feminine, is not inherent within the person itself, it is something that society has made us perform over the years. Butler not only relies on Beauvoir's findings, but also draws from Michel Foucault's argument that the soul is imprisoned within the human body. This can substantiate Butler's claim that gender is a social construct, and this thus also constructs concepts such as heterosexuality and homosexuality. Butler's notion of gender can be summarized into:

> "Gender proves to be performative--- that is, constituting the identity it is
> purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a *doing,* though not a doing by a
> subject who might be said to preexist the deed." (Butler 25).

Through the application of theories by these three important feminist theorists to popular Disney movies I will provide a critical analysis of the representation of female characters in Disney animation movies.

1.3 Performativity, Aesthetics, and the Male Gaze

The Disney Company has had a tendency to represent its characters in a conservative way. Slowly but surely the Disney Company is starting to adapt these stereotypical depictions of femininity, creating an image of a slightly different princess than the ones that the audience is used to; they are constructing a new identity for their princesses. As mentioned earlier,

there is a difference between a person's sex, and a person's gender, the first being of a biological nature, the latter is considered a social construct.

The influence of the male gaze on Hollywood films should not be underestimated, as Benshoff and Griffin point out: "As it is a fundamental ideological tenet of patriarchy that men and masculinity are privileged over women and femininity, it should come as no surprise that Hollywood film has always privileged men and male roles over women and female roles" (Benshoff 213). The fact that in movies men are always portrayed as active heroes who are powerful, and women are most likely to be portrayed as a person who is just waiting around for love, is something that is not only applicable to live-action movies, but also to animated movies, as this research is going to show.

The understanding that one is not *born* with a specific gender, becomes apparent in the first sentence of volume II from Beauvoir's *Second Sex*: "One is not born, but rather becomes, woman" (Beauvoir 283) With this sentence Beauvoir instantly argues that gender is something that is constructed by society. She points out that society itself has created the image of the woman as 'the Other'. Beauvoir points out that men have created a situation in which "He is the Subject, he is the Absolute--- she is the Other" (Beauvoir xxii). This means that if the male is the subject, the woman automatically becomes the object. This objectification of women is a topic that Beauvoir addresses frequently throughout her book, also in relation to female aesthetics. Women learn the value of appearance at a very young age, and as Beauvoir points out they learn "the meaning of the words such as 'pretty' and 'ugly'; soon she knows that to please, she has to be 'pretty in the picture'" (Beauvoir 293). She starts to critically look at her mirror image, and then she starts to compare herself to others; to the princesses and fairies in the tales. It is through these same stories that the hierarchy, in which the man is in control, constantly is confirmed. She learns that men discovered the world, men built the Roman Empire, she hears about Hercules, Lancelot, Achilles; the male superiority is everywhere.

> She learns that to be happy, she has to be loved; to be loved, she has to await love. Woman is Sleeping Beauty, Donkey Skin, Cinderella, Snow White, the one who received and endures. In songs and tales, the young man sets off to seek the woman; he fights against dragons, he combats giants; she is locked up in a tower, a palace, a garden, a cave, chained to a rock, captive, put to sleep: she is waiting. *One day my prince will come...Someday he'll come along, the man I love.* (Beauvoir 305)

The only thing that a woman thus has to do is wait for love to come along, and in order to make this process as easy as possible, she has to win over the man's heart with her

appearance. This is something that Beauvoir continuously emphasizes throughout her entire work; women are passive and only valued for their appearance, which is something that society has spread upon them from the day they were born. Not only does Beauvoir address this passivity and the focus on appearance, Laura Mulvey writes about this, too: "Their condition is the condition of all women, born to be defined by their physical attributes, born to give birth, or if born pretty, born lucky; a condition which makes it possible and acceptable, within a bourgeois ethic, for girls to parade, silent and smiling, to be judged on the merits of their figures and faces" (Mulvey 3). Mulvey also addresses the male spectatorship and refers to it as active, whereas female spectatorship is considered to be passive. Women are looked from a strong visual and erotic perspective, something that Mulvey also refers to as their "to-be-looked-at-ness" (Mulvey 809). The role of the male character in the movie does not focus on sexual objectification, but he rather takes on active role that carries the story further. Women are as Mulvey calls them the "Icon" of the film, "displayed for the gaze and enjoyment of men, the active controllers of the look" (Mulvey 811).

1.4 Literature Review

Disney movies have received a lot of scholarly attention in the past, and there are countless books that have been written about them; about the drawing-styles that were used, the representations of ethnicity, and of course the representations of gender. Amy M. Davis author of the book *Good Girls & Wicked Witches: Women in Disney's Feature Animation* is one of these scholars who has paid a lot of attention to gender in Disney movies. In this book Davis looks at the ways in which female characters are represented in Disney animation movies. Not only does Davis look at concepts such as female passivity, she also places these concepts within the timeframe in which they were produced, Davis thus works from the assumption that the films serve as a sort of mirror that shows the ruling attitudes of society within a particular timeframe. Davis divides the films into three periods, "The Classic Years", "The Middle Era", and "The Eisner Era" (Davis), and by using these categories she provides a historical overview. In her analysis Davis not only takes into account the Disney princesses, but she also analyses relatively unknown characters such as Wendy from *Peter Pan,* and Eilonwy from *The Black Cauldron*, making her analysis diverse in the type of characters that she addresses. In her analysis of "The Classic Years" (1937-1967), Davis points out that this period was one in which American society changed a lot when looking at the shift in women's rights, but these changes are not reflected in the movies. Female characters during this era, Snow White, Cinderella, and Sleeping Beauty, are either portrayed as being evil and in power,

or as a sweet, passive girl who does not take fate into her own hands and just waits for the prince to come and recue her. In the section that addresses "The Middle Era" (1967-1988) Davis goes into films such as *The Rescuers, The Fox and The Hound,* and *The Black Cauldron*. She argues that the 1970s and 1980s were decades of "a rising feminist consciousness" (Davis 165) however this rise is not represented in the female characters that appeared on the screen during this period. She argues that the characters during this period were not very positive feminist role models, ranging from an evil maniac, to a passive, sweet and caring grandmother. Davis links the lack of positive female representations is to 'threat' that these new feminist ideologies could create, and that because of this there are hardly any female characters in the Disney movies during this time. The last period that Davis addresses is "The Eisner Era" (1989-2005), a time in which a lot changed within the Disney Company, as Davis argues: "The images of the happy home-maker and contended wife and mother did not disappear, but neither did they remain the only acceptable alternative show to be available to "respectable" women" (Davis 169). Davis argues that during this period, there was an increase in strong female personalities in Hollywood television who were more confident about their sexuality, a clear example of which is Julia Roberts in *Pretty Woman* (1990). This new development was also apparent in the Disney films that were produced during this time. Previously Disney only produced princess movies in which the girls were all made to be the "Good Daughter", but now their protagonists could also be a "Tough Gal" (Davis 175). Particularly the tough girls are strikingly different according to Davis, as "these characters exhibit a kind of strength, brashness, and confidence not to be found elsewhere amongst most of Disney's animated heroines" (Davis 207). The Disney heroines of the Eisner Period, Jasmin, Ariel, Belle, Pocahontas, etc. are all in search of something other than love. Knowledge and justice were the main motivators for these young women to go out on an adventure, rather than to wait for true love to find them. As Davis thus clearly points out, there have been some developments within Disney animated movies that correspond to the developments within society, although it is all within the fairly limited boundaries of a fairytale world created by Disney.

Another book that deals with the gender representations of women in Disney films is *Diversity in Disney Films: Critical Essays on Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Sexuality and Disability* edited by Johnson Cheu. Within this collection of essays, there is chapter that addresses the gender roles of female protagonists in Disney animated movies, and the emphasis particularly is mostly on the ways in which Disney villains are represented. Author Amanda Putnam, professor at the Roosevelt University, argues in the chapter "Mean Ladies:

Transgendered Villains in Disney Films" that the female villains in Disney movies very often have a lot of masculine characteristics. This is, according to Putnam, a very large contrast to the "hyper-heterosexual" (Putnam 145) representations of the heroes and heroines who fall in love and live happily ever after. The ways in which the Disney princesses are often depicted is to and emphasize their heterosexuality by showing cleavage and tiny waists, but also through their personalities by doing domestic work, and waiting for their true love who is going to marry them. Not only does Putnam argue that the evil character traits of a person are very often related to a male's character, hence the masculine character traits of female villains, she also argues that by creating these almost transgendered characters and portraying them in a very negative manner, the Disney Company also tries to reflect the societal view on transgender people. The article of Putnam thus argues that Disney films often depict the princesses in an almost stereotypical, heterosexual manner, whereas the female villains are very often attributed both masculine physical as well as masculine character traits. She thus argues that the Disney Company sends out the wrong message to its younger audience.

Both of these books address different aspects of gender representations in Disney's animated movies, and they can be considered relevant to the field of research, however the research question of this thesis is also valuable, as it not only combines the two different approaches and angles that are being used in the books mentioned above, but it also adds new, critical analysis of movies that at the time were not even in the theatres. For example, *Brave* is a movie that was made during a new Disney era: The Iger era (2005-present). A time during which not only the methods shifted from movies that were drawn by hand to computer animated movies, but also society changed and with it the representation of women in Disney movies did too.

1.5 The Disney Company

In order to understand what Disney movies are all about, an understanding of the man who started it all has to be provided, which is why a brief historical overview of both Walt's life as well as the general history of the Walt Disney Company is going to be provided. In the book *The Art of Walt Disney: From Mickey Mouse to Magic Kingdom* Christopher Finch addresses Walt's life as a child, up until his death in 1967. Walt Elias Disney was born on December 5, 1901 in Chicago. Walt grew up in the countryside of the Mid West, where he was taught to work hard. It was then and there that Walt's interest in drawing was picked up, and at the age of fourteen he started to attend classes at the Kansas City Art Institute. In 1919 Disney started working for a company called Kansas City Film Add, that produced

commercials and "Laugh-o-Grams" (Finch 19) which were illustrated funny short films that were animated by Walt and crew that he himself had put together. In 1923 Walt moved to Hollywood and started working on new short films that combined live-action with animated, and in 1928 the first Mickey Mouse movie called "Steamboat Willie" was released. From this moment on, Disney started to produce more and more cartoons, all of which were short black and white animated films. In 1931 the first full-color animation film was released, and "this cartoon caused a sensation in the industry" (Finch 33). In 1934 Walt wanted more, the short movies were not enough; he wanted a feature length animated movie, and that was when the idea of Snow White first came into his head. Three years, at a cost of $1,500,000, later the movie premiered in Hollywood. The success of the movie was unquestionable, and for once and for all put Walt Disney on the map: "*Snow White* was an immediate hit, setting attendance records around the USA" (Wasko 14). After the success of *Snow White,* the Disney Company continued producing animated films such as *Pinocchio* (1940), *Bambi* (1942), *Cinderella* (1950), *Peter Pan* (1953), *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), *101 Dalmatians* (1961), and the last movie that was ever produced by Walt himself was *The Jungle Book* (1967) (Finch).

Not only was Walt a man with a vision when it came to movies, he also had a vision for other branches of the entertainment industry: theme parks. In 1952 he set up an organization called WED (the initials of his own name) to begin planning the park in earnest. At a very early stage he already knew what the park should look like: a railroad that would mark the outer borders of the park, with the train's main station at the entrance of the park, the visitor would then enter the rest of the park through Main Street USA, a street that was heavily influenced by his childhood in the Midwest. At the center of the park was Sleeping Beauty's castle, and from this point the visitor had access to four different 'zones': Fantasyland, Frontierland, Tomorrowland, and Adventureland. In 1955 Disneyland Anaheim opened its doors, and in the first year the park had over four million visitors. Due to the large number of visitors of Disneyland Anaheim, Walt wanted to build a second park on the East coast, preferably in Florida because of the year-round sunny climate. Walt died and never saw the big brother of Disneyland finished, but to honor him, the park would be called Walt Disney World, and opened its doors in 1971.

After Walt's death, his brother Roy took over the scepter at the Disney Company, but shortly after the opening of Walt Disney World, Roy too passed away. Card Walker, formerly in marketing, now became president of the Disney Company. During the period in which Walker was in charge of the company, the numbers dropped and the company could not reach the same level of success that it had reached when Walt was still alive. As Wasko also

mentions in her book this perhaps had to do with the fact that the company did an "attempt to cling to the past, attempting to reproduce successful Disney films and avoid the changes being adopted by the rest of the industry" (Wasko 31). In 1978 Walt Disney's son-in-law Ron W. Miller became president of the Disney Company, and under his management the company wanted to join the science fiction trend that occurred after *Star Wars*, and movies such as *The Black Hole*, that cost the company millions to make, but the film turned out the be a complete flop. In 1984 former Paramount man Michael Eisner was brought into the company, and he lifted the company up to its old level again. Under his management blockbuster movies such as *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *The Lion King* (1994), *Tarzan* (1999), and *Finding Nemo* (2003) were produced. Not only the film business was booming again, but also the theme parks, as they added locations of Disneyland in Tokyo, Paris, and Hong Kong. Because of the growing number of theme park visitors, the company decided to not limit their great hospitality to the hotels at the theme park resorts, but to invest in a new leisure activity in 1996: The Disney Cruise Line. The company was thus continuously expanding and exploring new fields of entertainment. In 2005, after more than 20 years, Michael Eisner left the Disney Company and made room for Bob Iger. Under his management the company would expand even further with purchases of Pixar animation in 2006, Marvel movies in 2009, and Lucas films in 2012. (Wasko)

1.6 Disney style

Disney animated movies induce a very distinct look and feeling, and when watching a Disney movie its audience can easily identify the movie as one that is produced by the Disney Company due to its "predictable plot featuring a collection of formulaic characters" (Wasko 112). Not only the way in which storytelling is used gives away that it is a Disney movie, but also the themes that are addressed, as well as the values and ideologies that are represented within the films are easily identifiable as 'classic' Disney. A large number of the movies that are considered Classic Disney are modern adaptations of ancient folk tales, that are changed by adding that special Disney touch, a process that is often involved Americanization, and is referred to as "Disneyfication" (Wasko 113). Classic Disney movies all work along the lines of the following model:

"Style:

- Light entertainment
- Music
- Humor (usually physical gags and slapstick)

Story:
- · Often revised fairy tales or folklore
- · Classic Hollywood cinema model

Characters:
- · Anthropomorphized, neotenized animal characters
- · Formulaic heroines, heroes, villains' sidekicks
- · Stereotypical representations of gender and ethnicity

Themes/Values:
- · Mainstream American
- · Individualism
- · Work ethic
- · Optimism
- · Escape, fantasy, magic, imagination
- · Innocence
- · Romance, happiness
- · Good or evil" (Wasko 114).

Sticking to this particular model rather than changing to more innovative storylines is what is often considered to be the great success of Disney movies. Characters in the movies are all very carefully developed along the lines of certain standard procedures that provide the audience with a character base that they know. Most of the times the movie revolves around a protagonist who is very beautiful and often has a royal or upper-class background and is most likely to team up with a funny sidekick. The protagonist than has to take it up against the villain, who is always depicted in the same manner; very exaggerated. Disney villains for the larger part are tall and skinny, or overweight and have very strong facial features such as large noses or a long chin. When it comes to the appearances of their characters, Disney movies continue to follow the same model as well as with their storylines: pretty, slender female protagonists versus the strong features extremely overweight of extremely thin villain.

The way in which the Disney Company represents its characters in many ways provides insights into the ways in which this company looks at the world and society in general; a view that has changed very little over the last decades according to Wasko. Although the princesses, Belle, Jasmin, etc, from the more recent Disney movies are more independent than their predecessors such as Snow White and Cinderella, Wasko points out that they "still live in male-dominated worlds, and ultimately find fulfillment through their romantic relations with Prince Charming" (Wasko 116). Their flawless appearance is also a recurring theme in every Disney princess movie. All of Disney's damsels are very thin, have

pretty hair and big eyes, and are thus "perpetuating norms of physical beauty prevalent in mainstream American culture" (Wasko 116).

2. Methodology

For this research an observational research method will be used, in which Disney's animation movies serve as a case study in order to find an answer to the broader question: *How are female characters represented in the Disney animated movies Snow White, Mulan, and Brave?* As far as the movie selection is concerned there thus are three films, and three important feminist (film) analysis themes, coming down to a total of nine focus points that are going to be analyzed in order to find an answer to the sub question, "is femininity represented in a continuous, progressive way throughout the films, into more conservative values toward the later movies, or visa versa? The main focus for this research is thus going to be on three main topics: love & marriage, women as the Other, and the importance of aesthetics. As previously mentioned, these topics are of great importance when analyzing femininity and its representations in popular culture, but they are also themes that are often central themes within the films.

By complementing the narrative form and mise-en-scène analysis with the theory from feminist theorists such as Simone de Beauvoir, Judith Butler, and Laura Mulvey, different angles of female representations in the Disney movies are analyzed.

2.1 Narrative Form

Without stories, our world would not exist in the way that it is existing now. Stories are everywhere: from the novels that we read, to the tales that are told to us through religion, stories are everywhere. And without a story, there can be no movie. Every movie thus makes use of a narrative form in one way or another. Narrative form as defined by Bordwell and Thomas is "a chain of events linked by cause and effect and occurring in time and space" (Bordwell & Thompson 73). A narrative thus starts with at a beginning, after which a series of changes follows according to the patter of cause and effect, ultimately leading up to a new situation. The audience is expected to link these events together to make out the narrative/story. For this narrative form analysis, the focus is on female characters and character traits. Character traits are considered narrative form because the characters can trigger and react to events during the story. When analyzing character traits, attention must be

paid to: "attitudes, skills, habits, tastes, psychological drives, and any other qualities that distinguish him or her"(Bordwell & Thompson 77).

2.2 Mise-en-scène

Mise-en-scène literally means "placing on stage" and was first being used in the theater world. Later the term lingered through into the film business, when film directors started to use the term to illustrate the control of the director over the film image. Mise-en-scène consists of movie elements that are overlapping with elements from theater: décor, costumes, props and lighting.

For this analysis I am mainly focusing on costumes, make-up and props as they play a significant role in each of the films. Also, I believe that these mise-en-scène components contribute most in terms of a characters' gender identification.

2.2 Story Overview

Although the story of Snow White might be well-known to most people, the other two stories that are a part of this research might not be that well-known. A brief overview of all three films is provided before starting the argumentative part of this thesis.

2.2.1 Snow White

When the Disney Company started working on Snow White in 1934 it was a film that was the first in a list of things: it was the first feature-length animation film, it was the first animation film with a woman as the leading star, and it was the first film in which the animated character was a 'real' person. Snow White became the standard for any other animation movie to come, as Wasko in the book *Understanding Disney* points out: "Snow White became the first definitive animated fairytale film -definitive in the sense that it was to define the way other animated films in the genre of fairy tale were to be made"(Wasko 129). The story of Snow White is one that is well known, but in short the story goes as following: Snow White is a young girl who lives with her stepmother, the evil queen. The queen is obsessed with her appearance, and each day she asks her magic mirror the same question: is she still the most beautiful woman in the kingdom? One day the mirror answers the queen saying that she is no longer the most beautiful, but Snow White is. The evil queen then orders a huntsman to kill Snow White, and to bring her back the girl's heart in a box. The huntsman cannot do the job, and tells Snow White to run away and hide. Snow White finds refuge in the cottage of seven little dwarfs, where she can stay, and in return she cooks and cleans the house. The evil queen in the end finds out that Snow White is still alive, and decides to take

matters into her own hands by poisoning Snow White with a poison-apple. Snow White eats this apple, which puts her in an eternal sleep from which she can only wake-up by true love's kiss. At the end of the movie Prince Charming finds Snow White, kisses her, wakes her up, and they live happily ever after.

2.2.2 Mulan

With the creation of *Mulan*, the Disney Company deviated from the classic 'Disney narrative' as the audience has come to know it. Not only is the protagonist from Asian descent, she also rebels against the ruling image of the way in which a woman was supposed to shape their lives. In short, the movie tells the story of Mulan, a young Chinese girl who finds out that her sick father has to go and fight the Huns, with whom the Chinese are at war at the time. Mulan realizes that her father is too sick to survive these battles, and so she decides to take matters in to her own hands. Mulan decides to take her father's place during the war, disguising herself as a male warrior called Ping. Before she leaves to go to war, she prays to her ancestors to provide her with protection and good luck. Her ancestors decide to send her a dragon called Mushu to help her. When Mulan arrives at the army's basecamp, she first struggles to keep her identity hidden, but as time progresses, she gains the trust of her male companions. During an attack in the mountains the Huns attack the soldiers and Mulan manages to save the lives of everyone, however she does get injured. Because of her injury, Mulan receives medical attention, and this means that she is no longer able to keep her gender hidden. Captain Shang, who is angry with Mulan because she deceived him, leaves Mulan in the mountains with only her horse and few supplies. Mulan discovers that the Huns were not killed during the attack but are on their way to the Imperial City. Mulan, who now presents herself as a woman again, tries to talk to Captain Shang and warn him that the Huns are coming. Shang however does not want to listen and tells her to go away. Once the Huns attack, Mulan saves the Emperor, and regains the respect of everyone. Her actions have ultimately earned her family a medal of honor. At the end of the movie we see Captain Shang at Mulan's house, and she then invites him to stay for dinner.

2.2.3 Brave

During this movie, the audience is taken to the Middle Ages in Northern Scotland. The plot focuses on Merida, who lives with her father King Fergus, her mother Queen Elinor, and her three little brothers. As a princess, there are certain obligatory activities in which she has to engage, among which are 'princess lessons' during which Queen Elinor teaches her daughter how a princess is expected to behave. When Merida is not busy with her so-called

princess lessons, she likes to ride her horse Angus, and shoot arrows, as archery is her greatest passion. One night Merida's parents tell her that it is time for Merida to get married to one of the son of one of the kingdom's lords. This comes as a shock to Merida, and she objects loudly to this proposition. Her parents however stick to the plan, and arrange an archery tournament, and whoever wins, wins Merida's hand in marriage. During the tournament Merida presents herself as a contestant who is shooting for her own hand, and she wins the tournament, leaving the three suitors empty handed. Merida's mother does not respond in a positive way to the scene that Merida caused, and the two end-up having a huge fight. Merida is so angry with her mother that she tears-up a tapestry that has her family depicted on it. The young princess decides to run away, and when she arrives in the forest she stumbles upon a witch, who claims she can help. The witch has a spell that cannot only change Queen Elinor, but also can change Merida's fate. When Merida returns back home, she gives her mother the cake (that contains the spell), and a few moments later her mother is transformed into a bear. Merida and Elinor are both in a state of shock, but decide to leave to the forest together as her father, King Fergus has a huge dislike for bears. Merida and her mother find out that in order to break the spell they have to 'mend the bond torn by pride', which they both believe to be about the torn tapestry. Merida and her mother head back to the castle to fix the torn tapestry, but King Fergus discovers the bear in the castle, and chases the bear (Elinor) into the woods. When he wants to kill the bear, Merida comes rushing in screaming 'I'll not let you kill my mother' and she fights her father. Merida hugs the bear, and then Queen Elinor turns back to her human form. The bond that was torn had thus nothing to do with the tapestry, but it was the bond between mother and daughter. The movie ends with Merida saying that you can change your fate, if you have to courage to do so.

3. Snow White: The Fairest Of Them All

3.1 Aesthetics: "Magic mirror on the wall, who fairest one of all?"

The movie starts by showing the audience a book that looks medieval, and in which the story is introduced to the audience in calligraphic letters. On the first page of the book Snow White is referred to as a "lovely little girl" who has a "vain and wicked stepmother" who is afraid that Snow White's beauty is going to surpass her own, which is why she forced the little girl to work as a maid, dressed in rags. The second page illustrates just how vain the queen really is, as she demands to know on a daily basis "who is the fairest of them all?" During the first minute of the movie it already becomes evident that aesthetics is a very important aspect in the life of one of the main female characters,

Image 1.1   "The Evil Queen"

that it is a theme that is going to return throughout the movie. The following scene introduces the audience to the queen. The scene is set inside the castle, that from the outside appears to be very serene, as it is projected in bright and vibrant colors, but as soon as we enter the castle, the colors change to very dark, combined with mysterious music, it creates an ominous setting. The setting already gives away that the queen is not likely to be a

soft, kind person. When the queen is first shown to the audience, an adult woman is presented in a black and purple robe, wearing a large golden crown, as shown in *Image 1.1*. Her figure is shaped as an hourglass, with a narrow waist, large breasts, and wider hips; features that are all considered to be feminine at the time. She wears heavy makeup, with red

Image 1.2 "1930s beauty magazine addvertorial"

painted lips, dark eyeliner and eye shadow, and pink blush; these all tie in with the 1930s American beauty ideal, as *image 1.1* below shows. *Image 1.2* was taken from a beauty magazine from the 1930s, and this image clearly illustrates that the thinly plugged eyebrows, the red lips, the rosy cheeks, and dark eye makeup were what was considered beautiful at the time.

Image 1.3 shows a live-action movie from 1935, in which a queen is also depicted in the same manner as the queen in Snow White is presented. From these images it can thus be concluded that the queen was drawn in the image of the US beauty standards of the 1930s. The importance of female aesthetics and the constant pressure that women experience to be pretty becomes apparent in the Evil Queen's longing to be the most beautiful woman in the kingdom. Being a woman of middle age, the desire to be one of the country's most beautiful women almost seems unrealistic, as she is 'competing' against much younger

women. Simone de Beauvoir addresses this struggle that women experience with growing older, emphasizing that a women's sexuality is lost, as she grows older. Beauvoir points out that women are "struggling against a misfortune that was mysteriously disfiguring and deforming her" (Beauvoir 649). This struggle with growing older can be found in the Evil Queen's way of constantly comparing herself to a younger girl and continuously looking for a sort of confirmation that she still is beautiful. Once this confirmation is no longer there, she feels the need to punish the girl that is said to be more beautiful than her. She not only wants to punish Snow White, she wants to murder the young girl merely because she no longer is the most beautiful woman in the country.

The importance of beauty is again stressed because the Disney Company not only wants to educate its audience that evil never goes unpunished, but also that women who take action women that are "strong, active, and no-nonsense people who stop at nothing to get things done" (Davis 107) are unhappy and frustrated. The message that the audience gets from this is that in order to live a happy life, women have to be passive and not take action. Happiness thus appears to be linked to beauty, goodness and passivity. This also appears to be the case for Snow White and the Evil Queen; the beautiful young girl is willing to wait for happiness to come to her, and in the end Prince Charming finds her and they live happily ever after. Whereas the Evil Queen, whose beauty can never surpass that of Snow White and who actively pursues her goals, does not end-up happy; she even ends up dead. This constant emphasis on a woman's appearance is not something that only exists among women; it is also very much an issue among men. Men all want to have the most beautiful wife, and her looks

appear to be one of the most important assets a woman can have. As Beauvoir point out over and over again; a woman is merely valued for het appearance.

3.2 Love and Marriage: "Someday my Prince will come".

The first scene in which Snow White is introduced to the audience shows a young girl who is dressed in old rags, scrubbing the castle's terrace. The colors that are used in this scene are much brighter than the colors used in the introductory scene of the evil queen, and this use of color immediately changes the mood of the scene. Not only the colors create a peaceful and friendly setting, but the fact that doves, a symbol of peace, sensitivity, and vulnerability, surround the young girl give away some hints about Snow White's personality as well. After the audience sees the girl scrubbing the floors, they hear her singing next to a well, which she refers to as a wishing well, and she starts to sing: "I'm wishing, I'm wishing, for the one I love, to find me today". The importance for Snow White to find love as a young teenage girl is thus stressed in the first scene, making this a topic that is going to be important further on in the movie. During this song, Prince Charming arrives on his noble steed, and after he peeks over the castle walls and sees Snow White, he instantly decides that he wants to marry her.

Love as presented in Disney movies is very closely related to appearance, as is also the case when analyzing the relationship of Snow White and Prince Charming. Their first encounter could be considered love at first sight, however two people that meet for the first time and instantly fall in love merely provides the audience with unrealistic expectations about love. Beauty and appearance again prove to be very important, as these two people merely judge each other based on their appearance, and because they like what they see, they decide that they want to get married and spend the rest of their lives with each other.

As *Snow White* is an American movie from the 1930s, there are certain morals from that era that are incorporated into the movie, such as the importance of marriage to women. Women during this period were considered homemakers; it was expected that they stayed at home and would take care of their family, performing all of the chores that come with this; cooking, cleaning, doing the laundry, and taking care of her husband and children. The way in which Snow White behaves, and talks about marriage and love ties in perfectly with these conservative, 1930s notions about a female behavior and female expectations of life.

Throughout the movie, Snow White is constantly cleaning the house, cooking and doing laundry. And although she is not yet married, she constantly stresses how badly she wants to get married, as she also expresses for example in these lyrics:

" someday when spring is here, we'll find our love anew,

and the birds will sing, and the wedding bells will ring,

someday when my dreams come true."

With the performance of this song, Snow White shares her hopes and dreams, again stressing the importance of marriage in the life of a young woman at the time. As the prince takes her away at the end of the movie, and they are said to live happily ever after, it can thus be said that her ultimate wish and goal: love and marriage were met. This constant longing for love is described by Beauvoir as well "She learns that to be happy, she has to be loved; to be loved she has to await love." When analyzing the ways in which Snow White behaves, the link to Judith Butlers performativity can also be made. Snow White cleans, cooks, and does the laundry while she is also taking care of seven other men. These are chores and tasks that society imposed on women and are now defined as feminine tasks. Butler argues that "gender is the cultural meanings that the sexed body assumes" (Butler, 9), which is true in the case of Snow White. She performs all of these tasks that are considered to be feminine because a dominant social structure over time has come up with a set of norms and ideas about what "it means to be a woman".

3.3 Women as the Other: *"What do you do when things go wrong?"*

The very concept of 'woman', de Beauvoir argues, is a male concept: woman is always 'other' because the male is the 'seer': he is the subject and she the object – the meaning of what it is to be a woman is given by men. By positioning women as the Other, they are considered weak, passive and are waiting for men to come and 'save' them, as they are the ones who are active, creative and inventive. This concept of women as the Other is interwoven in the movie *Snow White.* In the book "America on film: Representing race, class, gender, and sexuality at the movies" written by Harry Benshoff, the representation of women in early cinema is being addressed. In this book Benshoff stresses that during the first decades of the 20th century 'good' women were portrayed as helpless, childlike human beings that were in need of protection, and they "needed fathers and husbands to protect them" (Benshoff 218). Women in the early Disney movies were portrayed in precisely this manner: passive, in need of help, and can appear childish at times. These traits can also be found when looking at *Snow White.*

When searching for examples that can be found in *Snow White*, the scene in which the Huntsman tells Snow White to run away and to never come back, Snow White decides to run into the forest. In this scene the background is painted in very dark colors, as are the 'monsters' in the scene, which create a very dark and frightening setting that ties in perfectly with Snow White's emotional state at that particular moment, as she is clearly upset and panicking. Once she gets out of the forest, Snow White falls down to the floor and starts to cry. In this particular scene Snow White very much lives up to the idea that women are weak and passive, as in this particular moment Snow White does not undertake any action, she just lays on the ground crying. This passive attitude is also described as characteristic for the portrayal of women in films during these early years of cinema, as women were expected to sit and wait patiently for the male to undertake action, as is the case when looking at Snow White's situation.

Image 1.4 "Snow White in forest"

As Snow White is crying in the forest, all kinds of animals are crawling towards her: bunnies, squirrels, birds and deer; all indicators to suggest that women are "naturally cute and defenseless" (Benshoff 218). In this particular scene Snow White is not only defenseless but also passive, a female character trait that the Disney Company uses a lot in their movies. In a journal article called "things Walt Disney never told us" author Kay Stone addresses both the original Grimm fairy tales as well as Disney's adaptations, and when discussing the role that women have within these fairytales Stone says "if the Grimm heroines are, for the most part, uninspiring, those of Walt Disney seem barely alive. In fact, two of them hardly manage to stay awake."(Stone 44) Stone points out how women in Disney movies, with the exception of the villains, are not capable to make decisions and undertake action themselves. This passivity can also be found when analyzing the way in which Snow White deals with her problems, or rather not deals with her problems. This naïve, passive attitude is often also attributed to the role of the character's mother in Disney movies. If the mother is present, as is the case in for instance Disney's *Sleeping Beauty*, the mother is also helpless and passive. The mother can do, or does not do anything to help and protect her daughter; she is powerless, she is the Other. However, in many Disney movies the main character's mother has passed away, and is not given any attention. But the influence that they have on their children can still be significant, for instance when looking at Snow White. She is naïve and passive, but who can blame her? Since she has had nobody around to show her how to be an adult, other than her wicked stepmother. Her naivety is emphasized over and over again, another example is when the Evil Queen has turned herself into the old wicked witch and has decided to poison Snow White with the poison apple. Even though Snow White has been warned on numerous occasions by the Seven Dwarfs to not talk to strangers, she does open the door when the old witch comes by.

Not all women are represented in a naïve manner, as can be seen in the character of the Evil Queen. She has a strong personality, is the ruler of the country, and has no man by her side to support her. In many ways she can be considered the ideal image of a contemporary woman, however during the time in which the film was produced, woman were not supposed

to take on such active roles in politics let alone without a man. That is why it can be argued that the Disney Company chose to represent the Evil Queen as the personification of the independent woman. Women in the 1930s-1940s were supposed to stay at home to take care of their families instead of being in charge of an entire country, and an independent woman was thus considered as something negative, which is why one could argue that the 'independent woman' in the movie *Snow White,* is represented in such a negative manner; as evil. In the movie's final scene, Beauvoir's 'Otherness' can be linked to Laura Mulvey's concept of the Male Gaze. In this scene we see a dead Snow White, lying in a glass coffin. In this moment she can be seen as the perfect princess; beautiful, innocent, and passive. She is unconscious and can be seen as a body upon which men can project all of their desires. Snow White at this point is the perfect object of beauty; passive and subject to the male gaze of all the men that are standing around her glass coffin.

4. Mulan: "The flower that blooms in adversity is the most rare and beautiful of all"

4.1 Aesthetics: "With a Great Hairdo You'll Bring Honor to Us All"

Girls grow up with the idea planted into their head that their appearance is an important determiner for the course that their life is going to take, as Beauvoir points out they learn "the meaning of the words such as 'pretty' and 'ugly'; soon she knows that to pleased, she has to be 'pretty in the picture'"(Beauvoir 293). In order to please the other, you have to be pretty, is the message that is given to young girls. This intense focus on appearance and female aesthetics can also be found in *Mulan*. During one of the first scenes Mulan is going to meet with a matchmaker in order to find a suitable man with whom she can marry. For women it is an important task to find a man who can take care of them financially, and only once they have found a suitable man, the girl brings honor to the family for doing so well. Mulan's mother supports Mulan in this process, as she takes her daughter to a salon in which young girls are prepped in order to impress the matchmaker. The women sing to Mulan about how they have a perfect recipe for becoming an 'instant bride', in which they will primp and polish her to make her 'glow with pride'. The first step of the recipe to become a suitable bride thus merely focuses on polishing up a girl's appearance. The women say that with a great hairdo, and a tiny waist, she will make men go to war for her. The entire process of finding a husband is thus directly linked to the physical appearance of the girl, as there is no mention of her character traits at all. The women completely change the way in which Mulan looks: at first she is wearing a simple green, Chinese dress with her hair down, and she is wearing no make-up. After the ladies from the salon are finished, Mulan is wearing white foundation to make her skin look as pale as possible, eyeliner, pink blush, red lipstick, and is wearing her hair up (see *image 2.1 and 2.2*). She also changed into a pink dress that instantly ties in with the 'girlie' image that the women are trying to create.

Image 2.1 "Mulan Natural"

When Mulan finally meets with the matchmaker it turns out that she is not that impressed by Mulan's beauty, as the matchmaker clearly wants Mulan to know that she thinks Mulan is far too skinny, which makes her 'not suitable for bearing sons.' This scene illustrates that women are mainly judged on their appearance. Men want them to be pale, skinny.. But not too skinny, and walking around in a lovely gown because otherwise they are not considered a suitable partner for marriage. After the matchmaker turns Mulan

down, Mulan starts to question herself: "I will never pass for the perfect bride, or the perfect daughter".She wants her parents to be proud of her, and see her for the daughter she really is behind the make-up façade. Mulan even refers to it as 'playing a part that she was not meant to play' and that is she were to be her true self, she would break the hearts of her family. She wipes of all the layers of make-up to reveal her true

Image 2.2 Mulan at Matchmaker

self, and after this scene Mulan decides that she is going to take her father's place in the army and she cuts off her long hair. By doing something as drastic as cutting her hair, Mulan sends out a message that she does not care about appearance, she just wants her father to be proud of her. This is where Disney first showcases a sign of progressiveness' in the stories that they are sending out into the world, and into the homes of young girls. Although Mulan herself might not care as much about her appearance, her fellow soldiers continuously stress that a woman should be beautiful, as is also the case in the song 'a girl worth fighting for' where one of the men sings " I want her paler than the moon, with eyes that shine like stars". During the entire song the men merely discuss the looks of their ideal woman, which Mulan tries to challenge at one point by asking them how they feel about a girl who speaks her mind, but none of the men seems interested in a talkative, intelligent woman. They would rather have a silent woman, which is also what the matchmaker told Mulan, that a woman should know when it is time to shut her mouth. Beauvoir also stresses that men value a woman who looks the part. She claims that "he wants his wife to make him proud; for her to be elegant, pretty of at least

presentable". This again points out what can also be seen when analyzing the role of women in the movie *Mulan;* women are considered objects of lust, they are the other, merely valued for they appearance. Features of a woman's personality are rarely to be found on a man's "wish list" for his future spouse.

Although the society in which Mulan lives puts a lot of emphasis on a woman's appearance, Mulan rebels against these notions by stepping away from what is expected of her and doing what feels right. Another clear example of Mulan going against the grain is the scene in which Mulan prepares to leave her parent's house to go to war and she cuts of her long shiny hair; something that deeply associated with being feminine. The women that prepped Mulan for the matchmaker also stressed that with "a great hairdo" she would bring honor to the family. Having long hair would help Mulan in her quest of finding a suitable husband. When she thus cuts of that long shiny hair, she sends out the message that she does not want to be valued for her appearance; that she does not care for those ancient traditions. She just wants to do what feels right for her, and in this case that means taking her father's place in the army. With this step Disney has made its first attempt to portray their female protagonists in a way that does not rely as heavily on conservative understandings of femininity.

4.2 Love and Marriage: "She brings home a sword. If you ask me, she should've brought home a man!"

The importance of marriage within the ancient Chinese culture in which the movie is set becomes apparent within the first five minutes of the movie. Mulan's father is praying to the ancestors, hoping that Mulan is going to find a suitable husband: " dear ancestors, please help Mulan impress the matchmaker today". This statement instantly sets the stage for the entire movie, because the praying father sends out a message that he wants nothing more for his daughter than to be married, as he also could have wished for a healthy and happy daughter, but instead he wishes for her to find a suitable man. On the next day, Mulan has to go and meet the matchmaker, and she says to her father that she will not disappoint him and bring honor to the family. The only way for a young woman to bring honor to a family at the time was thus by going to the matchmaker and ensuring a good result. Mulan could not just show up at the doorstep of the matchmaker, she first had to practice her 'skills', so she recited the traits that she should show the matchmaker in order to impress her. Before the actual meeting with the matchmaker, Mulan undergoes a transformation, turning her into a sort of porcelain doll. The way in which a marriage was arranged at the time, had nothing to do with

romance and love; it was an arrangement in which a man could choose a beautiful woman. As the women who are prepping Mulan say to her: "with this skin, soft and pale, how could any fellow say 'no sale'?", thus indicating that men are merely concerned with the appearance of the girl. Arrangement thus is the right choice of words to describe the way in which marriage was seen at the time. It had nothing to do with love or friendship; it was about making a good deal that would please both the man, as well as the girl's family. For Mulan this negotiation part was very problematic, as she valued her family very much and did want to bring them honor, just not in the way that they initially would have expected.

Although marriage is presented as something that is central in a woman's life, Mulan breaks away from this societal expectation. She chooses to bring honor to her family in an entirely different manner; by going to war. Fulfilling the role of a domestic goddess was never meant for Mulan, as she herself wanted to contribute something to society instead of standing behind a man who does so. Disney's classic understanding of marriage is on the one hand still clearly present in the film as the people who are close to Mulan continuously stress the importance of marriage in a woman's life. Mulan herself on the other hand, breaks away from these values by listing to her heart instead of doing what is expected from her. This however does not mean that Mulan does not want to find a man, because in the end she *does* find a man, but her focus is on other things. At the end of the movie, Mulan and Shang are going on a date, but their interest in one another appears to be genuine, as they have come to know each other under difficult circumstances, and became friends. It is implied that the two are in love with each other, but they are taking it slow. If the film were to end in classic Disney fashion, the audience would see an image of the two getting married, but instead they are taking it slow and go on a date. By choosing to take a different approach on marriage and love, Disney sends out the message that marriage does not have to be the traditional institution in which the woman caters to the man, and is based on nothing more than a 'contract' or aesthetics, but that it can be something more. Marriage can also be the result of two people who are friends, fall in love and eventually decide that they want to spend their lives together. Marriage between Shang and Mulan is not even addressed in the movie, which illustrates that they take things slow, and thus set an example for the audience when it comes to relationships between men and women.

4.3 Women as the Other: "A Girl Worth Fighting For"

As Beauvoir and Butler have stressed, femininity is a concept that is socially constructed. Because women are 'supposed' to fulfill certain roles in life, and there are certain things that are expected of them, their behavior and character turns out in a certain, often-stereotypical manner. This is also true when addressing the representation of femininity in Mulan. Mulan is raised in a time during which family honor was considered very important to people. For men this often implied financially taking care of their family, and as this was a period in which the Chinese we often at war to expand their territory, it also meant going to war. From women, different qualities were expected; women were supposed to find a good husband and become a worthy wife. Although the movie is from the late 1990's, the story of the movie is set in ancient China, around the year 500 a.d. The roles that men and women had in everyday life were very different at the time. For women life mostly revolved around cooking, cleaning and taking care of their family, that often consisted of parents, aunts and uncles and grandparents that lived together in a small 'community'. Women were seen as being subordinate to men, something that is stressed throughout the course of the movie. During one of the first scenes, when Mulan's father is called out to go to war by the Emperor's advisor Chi Fu, Mulan stands up for her father, who is clearly too old to partake in the war. She tells the advisor that her father should be spared as he already served the Emperor twice before, to which Chi Fu answers shocked: "Silence! You would do well to teach your daughter to hold her tongue in a man's presence." Both Mulan's father and the Emperor's advisor are reacting to Mulan's behavior in a disapproving way, as her father tells her that she has dishonored him and that he considers it an honor to fight for his country and protect his family. He then also tells Mulan that he knows his place, and that it is about time that she learned her place. This particular moment is a key moment in the movie when it comes to women who are considered Other. Clearly there are very set rules in their society about what is acceptable behavior for men, and what is acceptable behavior for women. Men in this case are expected to be brave, tough, and strong. Whereas women are supposed to be great cooks, look pretty and obey their husband. Throughout the movie these differences between men and women are stressed. When Mulan first arrives at the soldier base camp, she is nervous and afraid that she is going to be discovered, so Mushu tells her to pay attention to everything that the other men are doing and imitate these moves. Mulan then walks past all kinds of men and she sees men picking their noses, picking dirt from their feet with chopsticks, and greeting each other by punching one another. Mulan, who had clearly no experience with these types of men thinks that 'they are disgusting', to which Mushu replies

"No they are just being men". A few moments later Mulan gets in a fight with her fellow soldiers, and when the captain asks Mulan why the trouble started she lowers her voice and answers: "Sorry you had to see that. You know how it is when you get those manly urges and you just have to kill something, fix things, and cook outdoors". What she does here is basically just reciting character traits that are considered masculine, because from her perspective this is what men do and what they sound like. Because this is Mulan's first day in which she is pretending to be a man, she tries to copy the behavior of the other men, and rely on typical character traits that are considered to be 'manly'. These traits are again stressed in the song 'I'll make a man out of you' in which the army's captain is preparing his men for battle by doing all kinds of excises. At first, all of the soldiers fail the tasks that they are asked to do: archery, catching fish with their bare hands, shoot canons, fight, and break cement blocks with their hands. Then the captain start to sing to his men, and starts to teach them how to be a man: "Be a man, we must be swift as the coursing river. Be a man, with all the force of a great typhoon. Be a man, with all the strength of a raging fire, mysterious as the dark side of the moon. Eventually the men, and of course Mulan, all successfully complete the tasks they were asked to complete by the end of the song. The song thus implies, not only because of it's lyrics, but also because of the visuals that are shown during the song, that men have to be able to fight, they have to know how to hunt and they have to be athletic; swift, force, strength, and being mysterious are pointed out as traits that men should posses.

The movie thus clearly stipulates what defines a man, but what do they say about being a woman? As mentioned earlier, Mulan has to find a suitable husband in order to bring honor to her family. To find a suitable man, she visits a matchmaker who can help her to find the perfect man. Before Mulan actually meets the matchmaker she receives a makeover, and the women who are scrubbing Mulan in the tub, and do her hair tell her: "We all must serve our Emperor, a man by bearing arms, a girl by bearing sons". It over and over becomes clear where the role of a woman should be: at home taking care of her children and her husband. But in order to find a suitable husband, Mulan first has to convince the matchmaker that she is worthy. However, Mulan does not do so well while being at the matchmakers; she continuously does things that she is not supposed to do, such as poor the tea in the wrong way, speak without permission, and on top of that her body type apparently is not good for baring sons, which in China was considered important because men could look after their families, whereas girls married and moved away from them. According to the matchmaker a decent wife should at least posses the following traits: dignity, poise, silence and refinement.

Mulan does not impress the matchmaker, on the contrary: The matchmaker tells Mulan in front of the entire village "You may look like a bride but you will never bring your family honor!" So when a young woman is not silent, refined and poised she is not considered to be a woman that is capable of being a good wife to someone. This again stresses that there are certain traits that a woman should posses in order to be seen as a 'good and suitable woman'. Another trait that is considered to be feminine has to do with hygiene and taking care of your body. When Mulan is taking a long bath, she is nearly discovered by the other men, as she takes more time than she initially calculated, to which Mushu responds "yeah, yeah, stand watch Mushu while I blow our secret with my stupid girly habits." Cleanliness is also associated with the femininity, as they are supposed to always look clean and pretty, whereas for men it is okay to be covered in dirt from working so hard. After this scene, when she gets dressed and puts on her armor, Mulan becomes a sexualized subject of the male gaze. When she is done bathing and comes out of the water to put on her armor Mushu says to her: "My eyes can see straight through your armor you know". Mulan however does not consent with this Male gaze, as she answers his impudence remark with a slap on his face. This again illustrates that Mulan is being portrayed as a progressive female character; she does not want to be looked at as if she were some trophy or an object of lust.

Desirable so-called female traits are mentioned again during a song that the soldiers are singing, called 'a girl worth fighting for'. During this song the men are singing about their ideal women, what they look like, the way that they should behave etc. During the song no reference to a girl's personality is being made, the men only talk about a woman's quality as a subordinate being: "a girl who marvels at my strength, adores my battle scars. It all depends on what she cooks like." Here it again becomes apparent that women belong in the kitchen, and are supposed to place their husband on a pedestal. When Mulan, who obviously does not agree with her fellow soldiers, she says: "How about a girl who's got a brain, who always speaks her mind?" to which all the men reply: "NAH". This thus means that to men it is more valuable for a woman to have a tiny waist, to be subordinate, and to know her way around the kitchen than it is for her to have a mind of her own. These statements from the soldiers illustrate that the movie is still holding on to conservative notions of what it means to be a woman is some ways. By stressing that the men in this movie value characteristics such as appearance, cooking skills and a passive personality a link could be made that all men value these characteristics and could thus be picked up by the young girls that watch these movies. Mulan however continues to rebel against these notions by not meeting up to these wishes of the male characters, and still ending up achieving her goals by the end of the movie. She

wants to bring honor to her family, and at the end of the movie the Emperor is so impressed with what Mulan has accomplished that he wants to make her a member of his council, which she kindly declines as she wants to return home to her family. However, when her father hears of all this, he says to Mulan that he is honored to have her for a daughter.

5. Brave: "You can determine your own fate."

5.1 Aesthetics: "I can't move, it's too tight"

When first looking at the appearance of the leading lady of the movie, the audience might be surprised: Merida is not at all the average Disney princess. She does not wear a pastel colored gown, she does not have the perfectly styled hairdo, and she wears no make-up; this does not immediately sound as if she is a fairytale princess. So what does she look like then? Merida has red, long, frizzy hair and a freckled face, she is still thin but is far more voluptuous in comparison to the other princesses, and overall she does not appear to be interested in her appearance at all. Merida's hair is not like the hair of the other princesses; it is not straight and perfectly in place. When Elinor wants Merida to wear a bonnet, there constantly is a string of hair that peeps out under the bonnet, and no matter how many times Elinor and Merida push back the string of hair, it continuous to peep out. In many ways this 'rebellious' string of hair is a representation of Merida's personality as she on numerous occasions refuses to do as she is told. Although a mother who does value a woman's beauty raises her, Merida tends to make up her own mind about the importance of aesthetics. Before Merida meets with the three suitors who are going to compete for her hand, Merida's mother wants to show her daughter the dress that she picked-out for her to wear to this special occasion. Merida does not respond very enthusiastic to this dress, her mother however reacts excited when she sees her daughter in this formal dress:

> "Elinor: you look absolutely beautiful
>
> Merida: I..I can't breathe!
>
> Elinor: Give us a twirl
>
> Merida: I can't move! It's too tight!
>
> Elinor: So it's perfect."

Elinor forces her daughter to wear this traditional gown, even though Merida pointed out more than once that the dress was very uncomfortable. The queen however probably expected Merida to remain seated during the tournament in which the men shooting for her hand. This however worked out differently, as Merida decided to shoot for her own hand, which thus meant that she had to use her bow. When she wants to aim her bow, she rips up the dress to have a better range of motion when it is her turn to shoot the arrows. This particular example not only illustrates that Merida does not care about traditions, be it aesthetic traditions or social traditions, but it also illustrates that Merida thus likes her clothing to be functional

rather than aesthetically pleasing. Merida is therefore in many ways the first Disney Princess who breaks away from the standard Western concept of beauty, and of the standard image of a Disney Princess. Although in the end Merida can be considered a milestone in terms of female body imagery in Disney movies, this particular topic has been up for debate for quite some time after the movie came out. With the movie being a huge success, the Disney Company was going to increase the types of merchandise that were going to come out, but the image way in which they portrayed Merida on these products was not the same as the way in which Merida was shaped in the movie. They slimmed down her face and waist gave her sleeker hair, larger breasts and a dress that was more cut out as can be seen in *image 3.1.*

Image 3.1 "Merida before and after body adaptation"

The public reacted so strongly to this princess makeover that the website change.org eventually created a petition to keep Merida as she is. The website states "the redesign of Merida in advance of her official induction to the Disney Princess collection does a tremendous disservice to the millions of children for whom Merida is an empowering role model who speaks to girls' capacity to be change agents in the world rather than just trophies to be admired."(change.org) 260,000 people eventually singed the petition. It is not clear whether it was the petition that changed the minds of the management, or if they in the end noticed themselves that this 'new' Merida was not going to work, but the designs never made it into the actual stores. On the one hand one could argue that these plans to change Merida's appearance proves that the Disney Company is holding on to these 'classic' understandings of what it means to be a Disney Princess, and more so, the way in which these princesses should look. The reason behind the company's sudden change of heart has never been made public, but looking at the context, you could argue that Disney decided that a princess who ties in more with the aesthetics of their other princesses, is more profitable than the rebellious, fuller look of Merida, as they changed her appearance during the time in which the merchandise was coming into the stores. On the other hand, this whole debate and issue about Merida's physical appearance can be considered a positive development, as this situation proves that people actually care about women and their role in society. Although the

Disney Company thought about changing the princess' appearance, in the end they decided (for whatever reason) not to go through with their plans. This can be seen as a positive development because not only has the topic been part of a fierce discussion, in the end the outcome is still a large step in the development of the new and more progressive representation of a Disney Princess.

5.2 Love and Marriage: "I am Merida. Firstborn descendant of Clan Dunbroch, and I'll be shooting for my own hand"

As *Brave* is a movie that is set in the Middle Ages, a time in which marriage for princesses often meant the expansion of social and strategically developed networks rather than marrying because of romance. The movie however chose to not be historically accurate in that sense, and Disney chose to do something entirely different with this young princess. Merida is the first Disney princess who does not have a love interest over the entire course of the movie. The men who are supposed to court her, do not play an important role in her life, where as in other Disney movies the male characters that were love interests played a very important role in the princess' lives. In previous movies, 'prince charming' always was the one to either rescue the princess, or complete her life, whereas Merida clearly sends out the message that she is content being on her own. She does not dream about marriage, love, and starting a family of her own; at one point she even states that she might not ever be ready to be with a man. In one particular scene Merida is practicing the conversation she is about to have with her mother about her betrothal, and then she imitates her mother as she wants her mother to say to her father: "You can just tell the lords the princess is not ready for this. In fact she might not ever be ready for this." By stating that she might not ever be ready for marriage, the movie tells its audience that it is okay when a woman wants to be on her own. The message that it is okay if marriage and love are not a part of a woman's plans for the future, and that it is okay if she has wants to pursue other things in life, is a very important part of the movie. Traditional female roles are thus challenged, as the focus is no longer on the importance of becoming someone's wife or mother, but on the values that a young woman herself thinks of as important. By showing that Merida is capable of solving her own problems instead of relying on/ waiting for a man to come and solve the problems for her, the message that a woman has to be confident and believe in her own talents is stressed. One of the most powerful scenes is the scene in which the king and queen have organized an arrow shooting competition to which they have invited the sons of a few important clans. Whoever

wins this tournament is becoming Merida's husband. Merida however, has stated quite a few times that she is not ready to get married. When her parents choose to not listen to Merida's wishes, she decides to take matters into her own hands. When the tournament has started, and all the suitors are introduced to the public, Merida shows up saying "I am Merida, first born of clan DunBroch. And I will be shooting for my own hand!". Immediately the queen reacts shocked, as she has been working so hard to prepare her daughter for this significant moment in her life. When Merida tries to aim the bow at the target, she is stuck in the tight dress that her mother has picked out for her, and she cannot move properly. She then rips open the dress, again shocking her mother and the audience that has come to watch the tournament. The ripping of the dress stresses that Merida is breaking away from what is expected of her, that she is breaking free to do what she wants instead of doing what is expected of her. She does not want to be in a forced marriage and thus she does something about the situation. This thus illustrates that Disney wants to portray Merida as a woman who is powerful enough to make her own decisions rather that doing what society expects from her.

Even though the movie does not lead up to a romantic love relationship between a man and a woman, as we are used to from Disney movies, the movie *does* focus on another kind of love relationship: namely that of a mother and her daughter. The relationship between Merida and her mother is difficult from the start. The queen throughout the movie tries to polish Merida, make her as feminine as possible. The queen is literally constructing Merida's gender over the course of the movie, as she denounces all masculine activities that Merida likes and constantly pushes her to partake in activities that are considered feminine such as painting, using needle and thread etc. Not only does the queen want to shape Merida into a perfect woman, she wants to shape her into the perfect princess which means that Merida has to become knowledgeable of her kingdom, she can not doodle during paint classes, she cannot eat too much food at once etc. The queen constantly pushes Merida into a direction that Merida clearly does not want to go in, which in the end creates a wedge between mother and daughter. After Merida wins the tournament, she gets into a huge fight with her mother and tells her "you're never there for me! This whole marriage is what you want! Do you ever bother to ask what I want? No! You walk around telling me what to do, what not to do! Trying to make me be like you! Well, I'm not going to be like you!". This again points out that the queen constantly tries to force Merida into doing this that she does not want. After this fight Merida runs away from home and runs into a witch. She asks the witch for a spell that changes her mother and her fate. This 'change' then turns out to be quite literal as her

mother changed into a bear, and the only way to undo this spell is by mending the bond between mother and daughter. On this journey, Merida and her mother, who is now a bear, grow closer together and in the end their bond is mended. The movie thus does not focus on the love between a man and a woman, but it focusses on the love between parents and their child. In the end, Merida shows her parents that it is okay to be your own person, to take fate into your own hands. Her parents in the end decide that their daughter is good as she is and love her no less for that. Merida thus does not need a man in her life, as she believes in her own self-worth, but she does need her family.

5.3 Women as the Other: "A bow Fergus?! She's a lady"

Where in previous princess movies, the leading ladies often partook in domestic activities that were considered an important aspect of a patriarchal society such as cooking, cleaning, and doing the laundry, Merida does not partake in these activities. She does not care for these stereotypical 'feminine' tasks, as her interests are horseback riding, fishing, archery and climbing; activities that are much more considered to be 'masculine'. Her mother does not always approve of Merida's hobbies; her father appears to be more progressive when it comes to the divide between male-female activities. A scene in which this is clearly illustrated is the scene of little Merida's birthday. Fergus walks up to the table and places his bow on the table, to which Elinor responds: "Ach Fergus! No weapons on the table!" Young Merida runs up to the table and asks her father is she can shoot an arrow, and picks up the large bow from the table. As the bow is far too big for the little girl, she falls on the floor. To which her father responds: "Not with that. Why not use your very own bow? Happy birthday wee darling", and he present her with a small bow. In this scene it becomes apparent that Elinor holds on to traditional, patriarchal values whereas Fergus approaches gender in a more modern way. He does not care about Merida playing with 'boys toys', his wife Elinor on the other hand appears to be more conservative when it comes to femininity. When Merida left the room Elinor says to her husband: "A bow Fergus?! She's a lady! A princess should not have weaponry in my opinion" This thus illustrates that Elinor does not approve of Fergus' present for their daughter. Throughout the movie Elinor pressures her daughter to fit in with what society, and she herself, expect from her. The scene after this bow-incident we see Merida eating an apple, to which her mother non-verbally responds that she should wipe her face and not eat an apple straight from the hand. Merida wipes her face and then the audience hears her say: "I'm the princess. I'm the example. I've got duties, responsibilities, and expectations. My

whole life is planned out, for the day I become, well, my mother! She's in charge of every single day of my life". Elinor thus wants her daughter to step in her footsteps, becoming a woman who stands by her man, and focuses on domestic chores and the upbringing of her children. These are all but the things that Merida wants from life, as she is much more self-determined. It can thus be argued that Elinor places Merida in a position where she is constantly seen as 'Other', as she wants Merida to fit in with the stereotypical understandings of what is expected of women. Another way of looking at Merida's upbringing is much more related to Judith Butler's notion of gender performativity. Butler claims that gender is not something that a person is born with, it is something that a person 'leans' to perform. When Butler's theory is boiled down, it comes down to the following example: when a person is raised in a setting that in which the males are more dominantly present than women, the person (boy or girl) is more likely to be interested in sports, climbing and other activities that are considered 'masculine'. This upbringing can lead to a girl who turns out to be more of a tomboy according to Butler. When looking at the way in which Merida is raised, we see that she does not naturally act in a way that is considered feminine; she leans more towards boyish activities and character traits, as she spends a lot of time with her father at a younger age. Thus because Merida in her primal years is surrounded by archery, fighting and other 'masculine activities', her personality at a later stage in life is therefore considered to be a bit 'boyish'. Her mother however constantly forces her to act in a feminine way, because this is what society expects of her. These two notions constantly clash throughout the movie, and the audience sees the young girl struggle between doing what is expected of her, and what feels right. In the end, Merida has the courage to choose for her own well-being, and by showing her mother that she is capable of standing up for what she believes in, she in the end convinces her mother that being yourself is enough.

Another final aspect of the movie that ties in with Butlers' theory of performativity is the fact that Merida is able to handle herself in dangerous situations. She thus takes on a role that usually would have been performed by a male character. On several occasions throughout the movie Merida comes to the rescue of another person. During the last scene of the movie her father wants to kill her mother (who is still in bear form), as her father believes that the bear is the evil creature Mor'du (a bear from a Scottish folk tale that has attacked her father before). Merida does not sit around and wait for someone to come and rescue her mother, she grabs a sword and fights her father. This illustrates that Merida possesses traits that one would consider to be masculine: she is brave, strong, and decisive. Merida thus rescues her mother

during this scene, an action that in other Disney movies would have been acted out by a man. Here the damsel in distress is thus not saved by a prince or king, but by another damsel.

6. Conclusion

Women and girls come in all shapes and sizes; they can pursue love or choose not to. They can be thin or maybe a little curvier; they can enjoy archery or sewing. Whatever their preferences may be, Disney is trying to cater to them all. With the creation of their latest films, such as *Brave* and more recently *Frozen*, the Disney Company is shying away from the traditional gender roles that they represented during the years before these two movies were made. Disney only used to make movies in which their princesses needed a prince to come and rescue them, Disney movies are now shifting towards a storyline in which the princess is a modern heroine. Where princesses used to be sensitive, dependent, and caring, the modern Disney princesses are brave, independent and strong. Because the princesses are gradually changing into this modern heroine, the audience sees strong and independent women who are no longer dependent on their male counterparts but who can proudly stand along side of them. By choosing to move in this direction, the Disney Company stands by the idea that men and women are equal; that women do not only belong in the kitchen, but they can get to be whatever they choose to be. For this research I have used theories from three feminist (film) theorists Simone de Beauvoir, Laura Mulvey, and Judith Butler. By using their theories I have demonstrated not only that the notion of femininity for a large part is constructed by the person's environment, but also that one can go against these environmental pressures. Whereas in the 1930s gender and femininity had to stick to a very strict understanding of what it meant to be a woman, during the scope of this thesis I have demonstrated that over the course of the 20th century this understanding started to shift into a situation where females were making choices of their own. When addressing Disney's first princess movie *Snow White*, the Disney Company chose to represent their women in a conservative, almost stereotypical manner. The importance of a woman's beauty was stressed over the course of the entire movie; the young and beautiful girl in the end lives happily ever after, and the powerful, independent woman ends up dead. The image that a woman should be passive, gentle and beautiful thus was the message that was conveyed to the audience. The fact that Snow White takes no accountability for what happens to her, and is dependent of Prince charming to come and rescue her, also sends out the message that a woman needs a man to save her, and to make her happy in the end of the story.

As times evolved, and the role of women in society gradually changed, the Disney Company, with the creation of *Mulan*, tried to give its audience a stronger leading female protagonist. No longer was the leading lady waiting around for a handsome man to change her

storyline; Mulan chose to decide for herself what would bring her happiness, and in her case happiness meant bringing honor to her family. She decided to bravely take her fathers place in the army, where she was taught how to fight along side male soldiers. Over the course of the movie she continuous to push her boundaries even further, and by doing so she drifts further and further away from all of the character traits that are tied to the conservative notion of femininity. As Mulan recites early in the movie, a perfect female can be described as someone who is "quiet and demur, graceful, polite, delicate, refined, poised and punctual". When looking at the way in which Mulan presents herself throughout the movie, she checks none of these boxes. She is not quiet, graceful or refined. But she still is a woman, even though her character traits are considered to be more masculine rather than feminine. Mulan thus is a clear example of the performativity of gender.

Mulan in many ways is not the typical princess that people were used to at the time. She does not tie in with the expectations that society has for women; finding a suitable husband and look after him and the children. Mulan chooses to chase after what she wants, which in her case is to save her father the trouble of going to war. She is not the passive princess who is going to sit and wait until prince charming comes by to save the day, she actively takes matters into her own hands. She derives from the stereotypical image of what it means to be a woman. She learns how to fight, she is brave, she is strong; all of these traits are usually attributed to men; however, Mulan shows that women can too be brave and can manage to take care of themselves without the help of a man. At the end of the day however, Mulan *does* fall in love, which then leads the audience to believe that love in the end is the key element to happiness. Although Mulan throughout the movie was independent and was not in need of a man, in the end there comes 'prince charming' that sweeps her of her feet. The importance of love and marriage in the end is stressed once more, in typical Disney fashion. Not only does Mulan in the end take off with a guy, she is also not one hundred percent herself in this movie. She is not being a woman in a man's world, she is imitating to be a man, and thus being a substitute son to her parents. In order to obtain her parent's respect, she has to let go of her female values and pretend to be a man. Thus although Mulan can be considered a movie that is progressive, as the classic female values are not the only ones that are presented to the audience, the movie can also be considered problematic as it implies that the only way for a woman the be respected if she is not feminine, is to act as a man. Instead of embracing the fact that femininity can come in many shapes and sizes, the movie in a way devalues femininity.

Brave can be considered the first movie from the 'Iger Era' in which the representation of women was drastically different from all of the previous movies. For the first time ever, the Disney Company created a movie in which the leading lady completely derived from the usual paths and ruling female stereotypes. Where every princess movie before *Brave* showed its audiences that, in order to 'live happily ever after', a woman has to get married or at least find a man, Merida now showed audiences all over the world that a girl can choose her own path and be an independent individual. Where other Disney movies used to lean more towards the patriarchal message that women are inferior and they should give up their free will to men, as was the case in *Snow White, Sleeping Beauty, Cinderella, Beauty and the Beast* ea, the plot of *Brave* is focusing on breaking away from this message, as Merida fights to choose her own fate in life. When her parents tell her that she should marry one of the men from the other clans, she responds ""I suppose a princess just does what she's told?" which indicates that she does not agree with the way in which her parents try to take away her free will in the matter of marriage. In terms of relatability, *Brave* also scores high on the ladder as Merida is easy to relate to for young girls. The problems that Merida encounters, are problems that a lot of teenage girls encounter on a daily basis; being in a fight with your mother, the feeling that her parents do not understand her at all. Young girls who watch *Brave* can see that they do not have to wait passively for either a man or their family to change their lives, it rather shows them that they have the power to change their own fate.

Even though it took the Disney Company almost 80 years to change the representation of women in their animated movies, they *have* taken steps to adapt their characters to our modern world. This thus means that for children that are growing up in our contemporary society, there is hope that the representations of women that they encounter in popular media such as Disney movies continue to evolve and adapt to fit our modern world. What I have tried to demonstrate in this text, is that Disney can take on the role of social instructor and take small steps towards a world in which the traditional patriarchy evolves into a world with strong, independent women. By creating movies in which the leading ladies are strong and independent, children get the opportunity to see that there does not have to be a difference between men and women on that part; they can be equals without having specific roles assigned to them.

6.1 Recommendations for further research

When looking at the ways in which the scope of this study could be extended, a possibility for further research could be looking at the ways in which the challenging 'new female character' has developed in relation to their male counterparts. Did the male characters evolve with these 'new women', or did the male counterparts remain in their stereotypical representations of a classic male hero? A study of both the older Disney movies, as well as the later 3D animated movies could provide interesting information on whether these dynamics have changed or remained the same. Now that there are more and more 3D animated movies that are being produced, there could also be looked at the change in aesthetic from cell to digital animated films.

When having a quick glance at a number of Disney 3D animated films, it can be seen that some of these movies, like *Brave*, continue the line of movies with a strong female protagonist. These female characters often rebel against their families and want to break away from what their families expect from them. In *Moana* for instance, the young girl does not want to step into her father's footsteps, but she wants to find her own path in life. This movie again does not have a male 'hero' to rescue her from difficult situations. Another 3D animated movie that has a strong leading female protagonist is *Frozen*, but here we see that there is room for a male counterpart with whom she works together to make sure that everything is going to be okay in the end. This is also a different approach than the ones that we are used to seeing in Disney movies; the female and male characters work together to achieve their goals. The representation of this male character is also very different from the ones we are used to seeing in previous Disney movies, which would make it an interesting case study.

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