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# Creating Gender in Disney/Pixar's WALL-E.

Brittany Long

*East Tennessee State University*

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Creating Gender in Disney/Pixar's *WALL-E*

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of Honors

By

Brittany Agnes-Marie Long  
The Honors College  
Midway Honors Program  
East Tennessee State University

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C. Wesley Buerkle, Faculty Mentor

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction and Literature Review**

As technology advances, so does the possibility of one day living in a world such as that portrayed on *The Jetsons*, with robots completing chores and people traveling to work in flying cars. The Jetsons have their faithful robot Rosie. Rosie may be a robot that technically has no gender, but she often displays feminine qualities. Rosie's outfit consists of a maid's uniform with bolts that resemble earrings and wheels that resemble high heels. Rosie also depicts a stereotypical feminine voice characterized by a softer and higher pitch than males. Not only does Rosie physically portray feminine qualities, she also performs what society considers traditional feminine roles such as cooking in the kitchen, doing laundry, taking care of the children, and performing other domestic activities. In a commercial that has aired in the past decade, Rosie advertises dishwashing detergent. Rosie is not just a robot; she is a part of the Jetsons' family. Anthropomorphizing, or assigning human characteristics to an inanimate object, helps to achieve this connection. Through being anthropomorphized, Rosie's gender is created.

Decades after *The Jetsons* aired on television, Disney/Pixar released the movie *WALL-E*. This movie follows the adventures of two robots, WALL-E (Waste Allocation Lift Loader, Earth-Class) and EVE (Extraterrestrial Vegetation Evaluator), who are trying to save Earth. As with Rosie in *The Jetsons*, WALL-E and EVE are anthropomorphized and assigned gender, when in fact they are gender-neutral, inanimate objects. Despite the fact that WALL-E and EVE are

suppose to be gender-neutral due to the absence of a biological sex, Disney/Pixar creates a masculine gender identity for WALL-E and a feminine gender identity for EVE. The imposition of gender where none exists makes *WALL-E* the perfect Disney/Pixar movie to analyze for gender portrayal. As an audience, we expect gender to be created for characters who are biologically male or female, but Disney/Pixar started with a *tabula rasa*, or a clean slate, when creating the characters of WALL-E and EVE. In spite of this clean slate, they still felt the need to create gender for both robots.

Understanding how Disney/Pixar creates gender in *WALL-E* is significant because media is a common tool for the education for children. As a result, children are learning about society's expectations for masculinity and femininity from media representations. Therefore, it is essential that we understand the messages that are being communicated to society's youth. Anthropomorphism plays a part in the reinforcement of these expectations due to the fact that anthropomorphism of inanimate objects helps to create a closer bond between the object and the child consuming the media.

In this thesis I will look at Disney/Pixar's creation and portrayal of gender in the film *WALL-E*. In particular I will be looking at two areas of interest: (1) The ways in which Disney/Pixar anthropomorphizes and creates gender for WALL-E and EVE, the two main robots featured in the movie, and (2) whether or not Disney/Pixar's representations of masculinity and femininity follow the stereotypical representations of male dominance or if this representations challenge this stereotype. In this chapter, I will begin with a brief overview of previous studies in the areas of anthropomorphism, gender representation in children's media, and the effects of gender portrayal in children's media. In Chapter 2 I will then move into a description of feminist criticism, the method by which I plan to analyze *WALL-E*. In Chapter 3, my analysis will be looking at Disney/Pixar's creation of gender for WALL-E and EVE, the degree of male centeredness and male dominance present in *WALL-E*, and the ways in which females are marginalized and femininity is portrayed as non-normative.

### **Anthropomorphism**

Like *The Jetsons*, *WALL-E* illustrates how anthropomorphism can be used to create gender for gender-neutral, inanimate objects that should not be able to depict gender due to the absence of sex. This assigning of gender to gender-neutral objects illustrates society's need to assign gender to everything. Previous research on anthropomorphism finds that children are learning to anthropomorphize inanimate objects through interactions with educators in the classroom, from their textbooks, and from other media that they encounter on a daily basis. Researchers have concluded that in the absence of sex, gender stereotypes are often used to create the perception of gender for nonhuman entities.

Katherine Bumby and Kerstin Dautenhahn analyze children's interactions with and responses to robots, finding that child often assign human characteristics to the robots. Bumby and Dautenhahn find in the first part of their study that children are likely to assign human features to robots when they are asked to draw a picture of what they believe a robot might look like. This is also the case when Bumby and Dautenhahn instruct the children to write a story about the robot they had previously drawn. During interactions with an actual robot, children are likely to assign free will to the robot by using phrases such as, "Come to me!"

Bumby and Dautenhahn's conclusion that children often assign human characteristics to robots, suggests that children have to be learning this process somewhere. Children are being taught this process of anthropomorphism from several sources, including movies such as *WALL-*

E. Teachers are even exposing children to the anthropomorphic speech in the classroom. Susan Thulin and Niklas Pramling find that of 128 instances of anthropomorphic speech in a preschool science setting, 104 were made by the teachers. Based on these numbers, Thulin and Pramling suggest that anthropomorphic speech acts as strategy for connecting with children's experiences in order to help them develop an understanding of new concepts and ideas, which would explain the use of anthropomorphic speech in the classroom.

While the research suggests that anthropomorphic speech can aid in children's learning, it can also be problematic. Gender stereotypes, such as the aggressive and competitive male and the domestic and maternal female, are often used to create the perception of gender for nonhuman entities that are absent of gender. For example, Emily Martin addresses how science textbooks talk about reproduction, particularly the attribution of gender-roles to the sperm and the egg. Martin emphasizes that the gender roles and attributes that are assigned to the sperm and egg in science textbooks are stereotypical with the sperm being portrayed as aggressive and the egg being portrayed as passive. Martin suggests that these images of the egg and the sperm paint males as being superior to females, which suggests that these images serve as a form of reinforcement for male centeredness and male dominance.

Martin's analysis of science textbooks supports the conclusion that children are exposed to gender stereotypes on a daily basis. The articles reviewed in this section illustrate that children are learning to anthropomorphize inanimate objects and because of the absence of sex, gender stereotypes are often used to create the perception of gender for nonhuman entities. As a result, it is important to understand the gender representations that are appearing in children's media.

### **Gender Representation in Children's Media**

Anthropomorphism might rely on gender stereotypes to create a more believable persona for inanimate objects, but these gender norms are supported in other areas as well. Television, books, and film are almost always involved in the socialization of children in today's society. Research concerning gender representation in children's media has found that films are indeed agents of socialization, males were and still are the central figures in children's media, and that even though the presence of female roles have increased, these roles are consistent with stereotypes associated with femininity. This section will also address Disney's role in the socialization of children and the themes that are present in Disney films with findings showing that Disney's characterizations of males and females often follow gender stereotypes.

Carmen R. Lugo-Lugo and Mary K. Bloodsworth-Lugo make the argument that animated films act as "agents of socialization" and provide children with the "tools to reinforce expectations about normalized racial and sexual dynamics" (166). They analyze the films *The Road to El Dorado*, *Shark Tale*, *Dinosaur*, and *Toy Story* to illustrate the messages that are being communicated to the children that are watching these movies. For example, in the movie *Shark Tale*, Oscar tries to teach Sykes a complex shake using his fin. With Sykes unable to learn the shake, Oscar simply says that most white fish are unable to learn it, suggesting that Oscar identifies as something other than white. As another example, Woody's fight for Little Bo Peep in *Toy Story* is an example of the sexual dynamics learned through animated films with children learning that the reliable male is the best option for the female. After viewing these films, Lugo-Lugo and Bloodsworth-Lugo make the argument that animated films act as a teacher of race and sexuality for children.

As evident by Lugo-Lugo and Bloodsworth-Lugo's study, children learn a significant amount about gender norms from media, including that our society centers on males. The

presence of males and females in children's media is one indication of male centeredness. Elizabeth Grauerholz and Bernice A. Pescosolido look at trends in the presence and centrality of males and females in American children's picture books of the twentieth century finding that males outnumbered females in both titles and central characters. The earlier and later periods analyzed during the course of the study showed more equal representations of females in titles and central roles. Grauerholz and Pescosolido hypothesize that this could be a result of the actual number of books that featured male or female central characters in the earlier periods.

Focusing primarily on the twenty-first century, Angela Gooden and Mark Gooden make the argument that illustrated books are prominent sources for learning and developing gender. Gooden and Gooden look at eighty-three Notable Books for Children from 1995-1999 to analyze these books for gender of main character, illustrations, and title. Gooden and Gooden find that steps toward equity have advanced based on the increase in females represented as the main character. Although females are represented more, gender stereotypes are still highly present in children's books, which suggest that children are still being exposed to gender stereotypes even as a move towards equality is being made.

The advertising aired during children's television viewing times often acts as a communicator of gender stereotypes. Adrian Furnham, Staci Abramsky, and Barrie Gunter look at two sets of television advertisements that were recorded from weekend children's television. Furnham, Abramsky, and Gunter look at nine criteria that include gender of the people appearing, gender of central character, and any voice-overs in the commercial. They find that males appear more frequently in commercials, provide more voice-overs for commercials than females, and generally occupy more central and authoritative positions.

With children learning gendered expectations of society from media, it is imperative that we not only understand and pay attention to the frequency of the appearance of males and females but the images that are being portrayed in children's media as well. Kaysae Baker and Arthur A. Raney look at whether superheroes are portrayed in gender stereotypical ways. Baker and Raney see few instances of traditional gender-role stereotyping; however, there is a trend toward defining superheroes in traditionally masculine terms. Baker and Raney find that males are more likely to be the leader of groups and less likely to have a mentor in the cartoon. From this we learn that although a move has been made towards showing both females and males in strong and powerful roles, it seems that traditional feminine traits that are not associated with power in order to balance the portrayal as strong and powerful, thus some gender stereotypes are still present.

Females may be present in more powerful roles when it comes to superheroes, but cartoons do not show this shift. Cartoons have been a long time favorite among viewing choices of children. Teresa L. Thompson and Eugenia Zerbinos found that both male and female characters were portrayed stereotypically in many cartoons. Males were given more prominence, appeared more frequently, and talked significantly more than female characters. Although it was found that males and females are still being portrayed in stereotypical ways, it was also found that there has been a shift to less stereotypical portrayals, especially regarding female characters.

Disney has been responsible for a great deal of the media that is used by parents to entertain their children and, as a result, contributes to the socialization of these children. Disney has long been criticized for their portrayals of females in their films. Arguments have been made that Disney often places their female characters in stereotypical roles. Naomi Wood addresses the appearance of this norm in Walt Disney's popular fairytale *Cinderella* through images of domesticity and objectification. Wood illustrates the emergence of objectification in *Cinderella* by discussing the framing of Cinderella in a way that focuses on her legs and feet as she walks into

the ball. Wood also argues that while the theme of the story is that dreams really do come true, these dreams are domestic dreams: “She waits on her step family hand and foot, . . . cleans everything beautifully, and still has time to sing and dream” (36). Cinderella may have her dreams, but those dreams are grounded in her sense of domestic obligations.

*Cinderella* is not the only Disney film that has been criticized for the way the female gender is portrayed. Laura Sells focuses on the Disney version of *The Little Mermaid*. Sells argues that *The Little Mermaid* incorporates the stereotype of women as subservient. Sells admits that “the film is a problematic text for a feminist resistant reading, because it teaches us that we can achieve access and mobility in the white male system if we remain silent, and if we sacrifice our connection to ‘the feminine’” (181). To support this argument, Sells uses the scene in which Ursula convinces Ariel to give up her voice to show that although Ariel is an independent woman and wants to succeed on her own, she must be willing to sacrifice her voice and remain silent to have access to the life she wants.

Although claims that Disney stereotypes females, arguments have been made that Disney has started to stray away from these stereotypes. Ken Gillam and Shannon Wooden focus on how Disney/Pixar have started to stray away from the stereotypical female leads and traditional representations of gender. Gillam and Wooden use *Cars*, *Toy Story*, and *The Incredibles* to illustrate this. For example, although the male leads of the movies are at first portrayed as the stoic male who appears to be lacking in emotion, by the end of the movies the males learn how to be more caring towards and reliant on others. In the movie *Cars*, Lightning McQueen goes from being selfish and caught up in winning to showing a more caring side when he sacrifices the race in order to ensure that the wrecked King finishes his last race. This supports the idea that Disney/Pixar has made progress in their portrayals of male characters so that males are portrayed in less traditional terms. Gilliam and Wooden argue that it is good for male children to “be aware of the many sides of human existence, regardless of traditional gender stereotypes” (7). Gilliam and Wooden may emphasize how male children can benefit from the exposure to all sides of human existence and not just the normal gender identities, but all children could benefit to the exposure of gender roles that are not necessarily considered traditional.

As we can see, television, books, and film are indeed apart of the socialization of children. As a result, it is important to understand what images of gender are being portrayed in children’s media. Previous research has found that even though the presence of female roles has increased, these roles are consistent with stereotypes associated with femininity and males are still consistently the central figures in children’s media.

## **Media Effects**

It is important to understand the portrayal of gender because through these depictions of gender stereotypes children are taught what acceptable masculine and feminine behaviors are and what is expected of them in regards to their sex. Previous research regarding gender and media effects shows that certain programming containing stereotypes influences the way children perceive the people around them. For example, children gain a more positive view of people from different backgrounds after viewing programs featuring these ethnicities in a positive light. can often effect what children perceive as appropriate jobs for each gender, such as males being perceived as being better suited for professions such as mechanics.

A study conducted by Diana M. Zuckerman, Dorothy G. Singer, and Jerome L. Singer assesses 155 third, fourth, and fifth grade children in terms of their racial, sex-role attitudes and

family's television view habits, and demographic background. Zuckerman, Singer, and Singer find that children's and parents' viewing of specific types of programming can predict children's racial prejudices and girls' sex prejudice. For example, viewing programs that featured black characters helps to predict more positive views of black children. Certain programming containing stereotypes can in fact influence the way children perceive the people around them and the expectations that they have for those people.

In response to their findings, as discussed above, about the ways in which females and males are portrayed in cartoons, Thompson and Zerbinos continue their investigation by interviewing 89 children from four to nine years old to assess their perceived presentations of male and female characters in cartoons. The children perceive most cartoon characters in stereotypical ways with males being thought of as more violent and active and females being domestic and concerned with appearance. Thompson and Zerbino also find that there is a relationship between noticing gender-stereotypic behaviors in cartoon characters and then reporting more traditional job expectations for their gender. For example, boys frequently choose occupations such as a fire-fighter or police officer and girls select occupations such as nurse and teacher.

Evident by Thompson and Zerbino findings, gender stereotypes can often affect what children perceive as appropriate jobs for each gender. Sue Jackson investigates this idea further. Jackson questions young children about illustrations depicting women and men's work in two early school readers. Jackson finds that children have a variety of different meanings about gender and work in both the illustrations and children's perceptions. In some cases, women would be assigned agency and equality while other cases place them in a gender hierarchy below men. For example, one of the children had no problem identifying a woman as a mechanic in one of the readers, but showed hesitation in answering whether she would be able to fix a car. This shows that there has been an increased understanding by children that females can do the same jobs that males can do, but there are some gender stereotypes that are still present.

While children are developing an increased understanding that females can succeed in the same professions as males, Jocelyn Steinke and colleagues believe that mass media portrayals of males and females impact the way that children perceive women in the fields of science, engineering and technology. To assess this hypothesis, Steinke and colleagues conduct a Draw-A-Scientist test. Prior to being asked to draw a scientist, participants are either assigned to a control group, a discussion only group, and a discussion plus viewing of television and film clips featuring women. Boys are more likely to draw male scientists and to include other stereotypes of scientists, such as lab coats and glasses. The main resources that were listed as sources for the information were media related. Steinke and colleagues' findings did not differ between the three groups.

Ronald S. Drabman and associates look at the immediate impact on preschool and elementary school children of a televised presentation in which the traditional sex roles of physician and nurse were reversed. Drabman finds that preschool, first-grade, and fourth-grade students select male names or pictures for the physician and female names or pictures for the nurse even if the male was depicted as the nurse and the female as the physician. This shows that children do retain gender stereotypes that they encounter and apply them to their everyday lives.

This is not the only example of research that shows children are impacted by the gender stereotypes that they encounter in the media. Kevin Durkin and Bradley Nugent look at the predictions made by four and five year old children in response to the sex of persons that would carry out a variety of common activities and occupations on television. The children's answers



show strong gender stereotyped expectations and that with age children were more likely to have stereotyped judgments about men and women's abilities to perform certain activities. These findings suggest that the more children are exposed to the gender stereotypes found in the media, the more likely they are to retain and use the gender stereotypes as they grow older.

Television, books, and film are almost always involved in the socialization of children in today's society. Research concerning gender representation in children's media has found that films are indeed agents of socialization, males were and still are the central figures in children's media, and that even though the presence of female roles has increased, these roles are consistent with stereotypes associated with femininity. It has also been found that certain programming containing stereotypes influence the way children perceive the people around them and gender stereotypes can often affect what children perceive as appropriate jobs for each gender.

Children are exposed to gender stereotypes on a daily basis, even when they are in the classroom, so it is important to understand what types of media they are being exposed to and the content of that media. *WALL-E* shows Disney/Pixar's willingness to create a movie that stars two robots that clearly are gendered yet are completely absent of sex. As a result, I want to look at how Disney/Pixar portrays gender roles for the two robots in *WALL-E*. First I will look at how Disney/Pixar anthropomorphizes and assigns gender to WALL-E and EVE in the movie *WALL-E* and then I will be looking at whether or not Disney/Pixar's representations follow the stereotypical representations of male dominance or if they challenge this stereotype.

## Chapter 2: Method

*WALL-E* became a particular interest to me because Disney/Pixar manage to create gender for two robots who are absent of sex. This brings me to my research questions. First, in what ways do Disney/Pixar anthropomorphize and create gender for WALL-E and EVE, the two main robots featured in the movie? Second, do Disney/Pixar's representations of masculinity and femininity follow the stereotypical representations of male dominance and the marginalization of women, or do these representations challenge this stereotype? In order to explore these questions, I will conduct a feminist criticism of *WALL-E*. Donna Nudd and Kristina Schriver characterize feminist criticism as the use of rhetorical criticism to apply a "feminist lens" to analysis of a text, particularly mediated forms of communication, such as film, because of their ability to spread messages, including messages pertaining to gender, rapidly (276). Similarly, Sonja K. Foss defines feminist criticism as an analysis of rhetoric in order to ascertain the ways in which rhetorical production of gender is used as a means for creating and sustaining domination. Foss also argues that this process can be challenged in a way that allows people to be aware of their capacity to perform in the world in the way they choose.

As a result of there being multiple outlines for conducting feminist criticism, rhetorical critics often conduct feminist criticism in different ways. Although there are numerous approaches to feminist criticism, two key themes can be identified as being of interest to feminist critics. The first area of interest is the creation of gender. In order for a character to be identified as masculine or feminine, gender must be created and established. The second area focuses on the hegemonic nature of masculinity and how this creates a sense of male centeredness and can result in male

domination. Masculinity seems to be the norm in today's society and is repeatedly able to find a way back to being the norm no matter how often it is challenged. Feminist critics argue that this male centeredness and domination is part of the reason that females are often pictured as marginalized and dominated by males and femininity is often considered non-normative.

Foss argues that masculinity and femininity are constructed in ways that depict what is considered normal, desirable, and appropriate behaviors for males and females. Janice Hocker Rushing discusses society's obsession with objectifying women who have made their living by being in the media spotlight. In particular, she focuses on Princess Diana. Rushing brings up the concept of the cinematic gaze, which is the belief that men enjoying looking at women and women enjoy watching themselves being watched. Rushing then relates this concept to the obsession in clothing and appearances that seems to develop in females, particularly those who are featured on screen. This suggests that women are expected to be the object of men's desires and therefore should be concerned about their appearances, thus creating this expectation of the feminine gender identity. The foundation of Rushing's article is rooted in the creation and portrayal of gender because, as a society, we have created expectations for masculinity and femininity that are expected to be portrayed in our celebrities.

The way that society chooses to define and construct masculinity and femininity allows masculinity to remain the norm of society and also allow masculinity to continue to find its way back to the center no matter how often marginalized groups challenge it. Bonnie J. Dow focuses on the hegemonic nature of masculinity in her analysis of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*. Dow defines hegemony as, "the various means through which those who support the dominant ideology in a culture are able continually to reproduce that ideology in cultural institutions and products while gaining the tacit approval of those whom the ideology oppresses" (262). Dow focuses on several different hegemonic devices used to contradict the feminist front that *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* has. In particular, Dow argues that even though *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* puts up a feminist friendly front by featuring a female lead who appears to be a strong, independent woman, this front is contradicted by the way her relationships and roles are defined.

One particular relationship that Dow looks at is that of Mary Richards and Lou Grant. Dow argues that although Mary may appear to be the independent working woman, her relationship with Lou undermines this belief. Mary is constantly seeking out Lou for advice and hoping to gain his approval. Dow argues that because of this, Mary's relationship with Lou is more of a father/daughter relationship rather than an employee/boss relationship. This relationship illustrates that even though Mary is supporting herself, Lou still has some control of her life. She allows him to guide her decisions instead of making the decisions on her own, which supports male dominance and allows masculinity to once again become the norm.

Similar to Dow, Derek Buescher and Kent Ono illustrate that Disney's *Pocahontas*, a story about a Native American tribe's encounter with some of the first settlers, incorporates images and portrayals of gender that results in male domination being reinforced. For example, Kocoum instructs Pocahontas to stay near the village and cease her walks outside the village and, ultimately, his control. By forbidding Pocahontas to continue her walks, Kocoum illustrates the same kind of paternal control over Pocahontas that Lou shows toward Mary. Once again, masculinity is established as the norm and the authority.

Male centeredness and dominance often results in females being marginalized and silenced. Ann Johnson addresses this issue using *The Man Show* as the subject of her criticism. Johnson's main focus is the sexism that appears in the show, emphasizing the marginalization of women. One issue that Johnson uses to illustrate this marginalization is trivialization of women's

efforts to improve their status and to voice their opinions. These efforts are often ignored or downplayed. *The Man Show* even uses these efforts as the subject of the jokes and sketches that appear throughout the show. For example, Oprah has been the center of several sketches on the *Man Show*. In one sketch that Johnson discusses, Oprah is accused of brainwashing American women, suggesting that women with power are a threat.

I chose to analyze *WALL-E* using a feminist criticism because the questions that I found myself asking after viewing the trailers and advertisements for this movie are the same questions that previous feminist critics have asked regarding the creation and portrayal of gender. *WALL-E* is an animated film that was produced by Pixar. The film focuses on the adventures of two robots, WALL-E and EVE. Even in the advertisements for this movie, it is clear that WALL-E is meant to be perceived as a male robot and EVE is meant to be perceived as a female robot. This is where *WALL-E* establishes itself as a great subject for a feminist criticism. In order for Pixar to establish that WALL-E is male and EVE is female, gender must be created for both due to the fact that robots are absent of sex.

For the purposes of my analysis, the first step that I will be taking will be to analyze how the writers of *WALL-E* construct the masculinity and femininity of the two robots that are featured in the movie. I will be looking at what Pixar portrays as normal and acceptable behaviors for each gender represented by the robots WALL-E and EVE. Specifically I will be looking at the behaviors exhibited by both robots and then determine if these behaviors are reinforced or punished in a way that leads the robot to believe that the behavior is either acceptable or not. I will also be looking at the mannerisms and appearances that Pixar has assigned to both robots. I will be dividing these areas into four divisions; physical appearance, mannerisms, voice and language, and job and task assignments.

Male centeredness is often represented in media by the number of roles that feature males in positions of authority. This is where my second area of interest regarding Disney/Pixar's representation of male dominance generates from. After analyzing how Disney/Pixar depicts masculinity and femininity, I will analyze Disney/Pixar's depiction of masculinity and femininity in terms of the idea of male dominance as stereotypical. I will specifically be looking at the extent Disney/Pixar supports the stereotype of male domination or if Disney/Pixar challenges this stereotype and offers a different narrative.

### **Chapter 3: Gender in *WALL-E***

*WALL-E* (2008) is an animated film produced by Disney/Pixar that centers on the adventures of two robots, WALL-E and EVE. By 2805 A.D., products from the powerful multinational Buy N Large Corporation cover Earth, and WALL-E cleans up the mess. EVE, a reconnaissance robot, arrives on Earth to find proof that life is once again sustainable. WALL-E rescues EVE from a dust storm and shows her a living plant he found amongst the rubble. Consistent with her programming, EVE takes the plant and automatically enters a deactivated state except for a blinking green light. One day a ship comes to reclaim EVE, but WALL-E hitches a ride on the outside of the ship to rescue EVE.

The ship arrives back at a large space cruise ship, which is carrying all of the humans who evacuated Earth centuries earlier. The auto-pilot prevents EVE from presenting to the captain the plant from Earth by stealing the plant. WALL-E, EVE, and the captain rebel against the auto-pilot and save the space resort, allowing the space resort and humans to return to Earth and rebuild. WALL-E is damaged in his attempt to help during the revolt, and EVE becomes desperate to repair him when they return to Earth. EVE rushes to WALL-E's stores of extra parts to repair him. EVE then sparks his memory with an awkward "kiss," or a peck where lips would be on humans.

## **Creating Gender for WALL-E and EVE**

Throughout *WALL-E*, Disney/Pixar is constantly creating a definition of femininity and masculinity. The way that society chooses to define and construct masculinity and femininity allows masculinity to remain the norm of society and also allows masculinity to continue to find its way back to the center no matter how often marginalized groups challenge it. As a result, I will begin my analysis with looking at the ways that Disney/Pixar constructs gender for WALL-E and EVE in order to better understand the extent that this creation supports male centeredness and dominance. Disney/Pixar creates and establishes gender for WALL-E and EVE in four primary ways: physical appearance, voice and language, mannerisms, and jobs/tasks. I chose these categories because each category contributes to the image of masculinity and femininity that Disney/Pixar wants to project through the characters of WALL-E and EVE.

### **Physical Appearance**

The physical appearance of WALL-E and EVE is a significant contributor to the creation of WALL-E and EVE's gender identities during the course of the movie. Physical appearance is important in creating gender identity for both WALL-E and EVE because the first thing the audience is exposed to are the physical features of each robot. The audience has the ability to see what WALL-E and EVE look like even before viewing the movie due to the packaging of the video, which features stills of scenes from the movie, and trailers featured on television and in theaters. This exposure to images from the movie gives the audience a chance to form knowledge of the characters based on physical appearance. The physical appearances of WALL-E and EVE are Disney/Pixar's first opportunity to start creating and portraying gender for WALL-E and EVE.

The first robot that the audience encounters when viewing the movie is WALL-E. WALL-E is noticeably disproportionate and not taken care of, suggesting a masculine gender. Susan Bordo discusses that in the media, a male's body is not anatomized or objectified to the extent that female bodies are. This can be seen in Disney/Pixar's depiction of masculinity through WALL-E. For example, WALL-E's hands are very chunky, which seems to make it difficult for WALL-E to grasp smaller objects. WALL-E's eyes are square and rather large and seem to be set a distance

apart because of their size. WALL-E moves around on wheels that appear to be large in comparison to the rest of his body. WALL-E's body itself is very square and very sizable with a compartment that he uses to store items to transport them when he is not using this compartment to compact trash. Overall, WALL-E's features do not make him as pleasing to look at as EVE. These features enhance WALL-E's masculinity because it enforces Bordo's idea that males are not objectified in the ways that women are.

Bordo also discusses how males are depicted as focusing on things other than their physical appearance and are not concerned with how they look. WALL-E exemplifies this trait because the most noticeable attribute of WALL-E is the rust and dirt that has accumulated over the years that he has been on Earth. When on the space resort, WALL-E even leaves behind him a trail of dirt and grime that is labeled as a foreign substance to the custodian robot. WALL-E's physical features help to establish WALL-E as the male of the two robots, or at least the more masculine of the two.

Disney/Pixar establishes EVE as a complete opposite to WALL-E, reinforcing her feminine gender. EVE's features establish her as more aesthetically pleasing than WALL-E and she appears to be better maintained. According to Rosalind Gill, representations of women in today's media focus on women being eye candy or desiring sexual objects. In describing advertisements, particularly for lingerie, that have appeared in the media, Gill often describes the female being slim and curvaceous. It is easy to conclude that these images have contributed to women's obsession with weight and body image, which has led to women being more concerned about their body image than men.

When constructing EVE's feminine gender, Disney/Pixar relies on similar gender stereotypes. For, example, when EVE first emerges from her transport ship, her gleaming white body is in direct contrast to the rusty and dirty body of WALL-E. EVE obviously gets taken care of, and it is clear that it is important that she is properly maintained, supporting the notion that females should be concerned with their appearance. This becomes even clearer when EVE returns back to space resort. Upon returning to the space resort, there is a scene in which it is thought that EVE has been damaged and is not working properly. EVE is then rushed to diagnostics where she is examined. EVE gets cleaned and polished as diagnostics are run. Unlike WALL-E's box-like body, EVE is much curvier and is made of very few straight lines. EVE's body also appears more in proportion compared to WALL-E's. Her eyes are also smaller and set much closer together. EVE's physical features help to establish her as female.

In terms of physical appearance, Disney/Pixar constructs gender in a way that suggests women are expected to be well groomed and are expected to take care of themselves while it is much more acceptable for males to be less rigid in their grooming habits. EVE is a perfect example of this because her body is gleaming white and she is rushed to diagnostics to moment that it is believed she is damaged. WALL-E, on the other hand, is left rusty and dirty throughout the entire movie. A curvy body is considered aesthetically pleasing on a female, but is not encouraged for males. This norm manifests itself in the movie as a result of WALL-E being portrayed as having a box-like figure while EVE does not have many straight lines and the lower part of her body is almost oval shaped. The use of these physical features by Disney/Pixar in creating WALL-E and EVE makes it easier for the viewing audience to identify WALL-E as masculine and EVE as feminine.

### **Mannerisms/Behaviors**

Physical appearances are not the only way Disney/Pixar creates gender for WALL-E and

EVE. Neither robot has been designed with a mouth nor programmed with a large vocabulary base. Because of this, mannerisms become important in creating gender for WALL-E and EVE because they primarily communicate through body language, which they use to communicate with not only each other but the remaining characters in the film as well.

Throughout the film *EVE*, often correcting WALL-E's deviant behaviors, acts in a motherly fashion toward WALL-E. This helps to depict WALL-E as childlike and places EVE in a nurturing role. These traits are stereotypical. Julia T. Wood argues that women are more likely to be involved in caring for others, suggesting that females are more nurturing than males, which we can see in *WALL-E*. In addition to being nurturing, females are more likely than men to address feelings (Kunkel and Burleson). In contrast, males are often portrayed as engaging in behaviors that are considered active, such as chasing girls and engaging in deviant behaviors (Thompson and Zerbinos).

It is easy to see that WALL-E's mannerisms have a childlike quality to them. For example, WALL-E has a very curious nature and is constantly gathering items to add to his collection. He even carries a lunch box with him to store the items as he is sifting through the rubble. WALL-E's childlike nature also shows in his excitement to share his trinkets with EVE after taking her to his home. WALL-E's curiosity often gets him into trouble and causes him to engage in deviant behavior throughout the movie. For example, once he reaches the space resort WALL-E manages to set loose several broken robots. The audience first gets to see EVE in a motherly role when she scolds WALL-E like a mother scolding a child after WALL-E frees the broken robots. Not only does EVE scold WALL-E like a mother would, she tries to protect him by forcing him into a ship to send him back to Earth before he can be caught.

Adrienne W. Kunkel and Brant R. Burleson argue that women are more likely than men to address feelings. At first it appears that roles are reversed, with WALL-E being the first to express his emotions to EVE and EVE appearing to be cold and emotionless. For example, WALL-E expresses his emotions when he holds EVE's hand while she is in her deactivated state, working to protect her during the first storm, and racing after her when she is retrieved. WALL-E also moves in close to EVE when he is near her. EVE at first, however, has trouble expressing her emotion and is portrayed as being cold and almost emotionless, even aiming her vaporizing gun at WALL-E when she first sees him. Considering that displays of emotions are traditionally feminine, Disney/Pixar creates WALL-E in a way that portrays him as childlike. As a result, WALL-E is able to get away with expressing his emotions because he is portrayed in a childlike manner, which allows Disney/Pixar to place EVE in a nurturing role, thus establishing her feminine gender further.

While the portrayal of WALL-E as childlike and EVE as mothering works in the beginning, roles shift throughout the movies. By the end of the movie EVE begins to express her emotions for WALL-E, suggesting a switch to the stereotypical idea that women are more likely to discuss and express emotions. This is evident when EVE becomes desperate to repair WALL-E when they arrive back on Earth, rushing to his home in order to find the parts that she needs to fix the damage that WALL-E has suffered. When EVE realizes that WALL-E has no memory of her, she tries everything to spark his memory. She holds his hand, continuously says her name, and even plays the video that WALL-E was so fond of. In the end, it is EVE's "kiss" that sparks WALL-E's memory at the conclusion of the movie.

### **Job Assignments**

Disney/Pixar uses the assignment of jobs as another way to create gender for WALL-E

and EVE. This works because our culture has created stereotypes for which jobs and tasks are appropriate for males and females. Drabman and associates support this idea in their findings that young children have difficulty recalling the name or picture of a male nurse and female physician.

WALL-E's job as a trash compacting robot is depicted as physically demanding, often leading to injuries and leaving WALL-E dirty. This is consistent with the stereotype that males are more likely to engage in tasks that are more physically demanding. Jackson supports this stereotype when she finds that young children place males in job positions that involve physical labor, such as a mechanic, and females in job positions such as answering the phone.

Disney/Pixar illustrates just how physically demanding WALL-E's job can be by showing him collecting parts from damaged WALL-Es that are not longer in commission. This suggests that WALL-E will eventually need to replace parts as he continues his job. His job is not only physically demanding but also a dirty one. In one scene the audience gets sees a sign that says "Working to Dig You Out," and later in the movie, WALL-E leaves behind a dirt trail on the space resort.

In contrast, EVE's programming instructs her to do reconnaissance work on Earth in order to determine if life is once again sustainable on Earth. Jackson's study shows that our culture typically places females in jobs that require little physical labor. EVE depicts this stereotype. Her job may require her to travel across Earth to look for plant life amongst the rubble, but her technology makes her job seem effortless. Traveling is even made easier for EVE because she is able to hover above the surface and does not have to contend with the buildup of trash as she is traveling across the Earth. EVE's job suggests femininity because her creators have ensured that her job is effortless and will take little time, unlike WALL-E's job that has been going on for centuries. Because EVE's job requires very little physical labor, her job is obviously does not require her to get dirty, evident by the fact that she is gleaming white with no visible dirt on her throughout much of the movie. Placing EVE in a job that require little physical labor and does not require her to get dirty allows Disney/Pixar to establish EVE as feminine.

Males are also expected to be able to handle doing a job without much supervision. Baker and Raney supported the presence of this stereotype when finding that male superhero characters are more likely to be the leader of groups and less likely to have a mentor in the cartoon while female superhero characters are almost always assigned a mentor. WALL-E, who has been left alone on Earth for centuries, is a good example of this expectation. EVE, on the other hand, must be monitored by others and cannot be left to monitor herself. Even though EVE's creators place her on Earth alone, they are able to monitor her from a distance, which becomes clear when she is placed in a deactivated state and later reclaimed instead of allowing her to return on her own. The fact that EVE is rushed diagnostics and her technology is assumed to be flawed upon the disappearance of the plant that she has acquired while on Earth also suggests that her creators feel that she cannot be trusted. This lack of independence for EVE fits the stereotypical female portrayal.

Our culture has succeeded in creating stereotypes regarding what jobs and tasks are appropriate for males and females to engage in. Males are expected to have the more physically demanding jobs that often result in injuries and require them to get dirty. It is often considered unattractive for females to have these types of jobs. Males are also expected to be able to handle doing a job without much supervision, while females need to have supervision to ensure that their job is done properly. Given these stereotypes, the conclusion can be made that WALL-E and EVE's jobs are consistent with the stereotypes found in typical male and female job assignments.

## **Language and Verbal Attributes**

As stated earlier, physical attributes, such as physical appearance, mannerisms, and job assignments become the most dominant ways that Disney/Pixar creates gender for WALL-E and EVE because they use very little verbal communication. However, Disney/Pixar does rely on some verbal cues to create gender for WALL-E and EVE.

Typically, a male's voice is characterized by a deeper and lower pitch than a female's voice. Disney/Pixar uses this tactic in defining WALL-E as masculine and EVE as feminine. Although WALL-E, voiced by actor Ben Burtt, has a voice that is higher than normally seen in males, his voice appears to be lower in pitch than EVE's, voiced by Elissa Knight. While these characteristics are not the dominant factor in creating gender for WALL-E and EVE, they do help to depict WALL-E as masculine and EVE as feminine.

Foss argues that masculinity and femininity are constructed in ways that depicts what is considered normal, desirable, and appropriate behaviors for males and females. Through this analysis we see that Disney/Pixar creates and establishes gender for WALL-E and EVE in four primary ways: physical appearance, voice and language, mannerisms, and jobs/tasks. Through their creation of masculinity and femininity, Disney/Pixar constructs gender in a way that suggests women are expected to be well groomed and are expected to take care of themselves while it is much more acceptable for males to be less rigid in their grooming habits. According to Disney/Pixar's creation of femininity, women are more likely to be involved in caring for others while men are expected to be self reliant and able to survive on their own with no help from others.

## **Male Dominance and Female Marginalization in *WALL-E***

The way that society chooses to define and construct masculinity and femininity allows masculinity to remain the norm of society and also allows masculinity to continue to find its way back to the center no matter how often marginalized groups challenge it. As a result, I want to look at Disney/Pixar's representation of male dominance. I will specifically look at the ways in which Disney/Pixar construction of gender supports the stereotype of male centeredness, male domination, and the ways in which Disney/Pixar challenges this stereotype and offers a different viewpoint.

While analyzing *WALL-E* it becomes clear that Disney/Pixar tries to challenge the typical role of man as dominant in several different ways. The first way in which Disney/Pixar challenges this stereotype is by placing EVE in a position of authority. Disney/Pixar achieves this by placing EVE has a higher level job than WALL-E. When EVE exits the space ship, the audience can immediately tell that she has been maintained and cared for better than WALL-E. This signals that EVE's job of collecting information from Earth is more important than WALL-E's job of compacting trash. Elizabeth Aries argues is typically males are found in positions of leadership in mixed-sex groups. So, placing EVE at a higher job level challenges male dominance because she is now the one who is placed in a position of leadership.

Disney/Pixar challenges male domination again by allowing EVE to have dominance and control over WALL-E and his actions. Power and control emerges when EVE's technology is showcased. For example, WALL-E fears EVE when he first actually meets her because EVE is equipped with weaponry to protect herself while WALL-E is almost defenseless. While the sight of this weaponry does not frighten WALL-E at first glance, as evident by WALL-E's appearance of fascination in the weaponry, fear quickly develops when EVE attempts to use it on him, thus creating power for EVE. WALL-E's actions are also controlled by EVE in the beginning of the



movie. For example, once WALL-E and EVE make it make to the space resort, EVE is the one that has to get WALL-E out of trouble. WALL-E isn't even given a choice about leaving the space resort. He is forced to leave when EVE takes him by the hand and leads him through the space resort to the transport ship that will send WALL-E back to Earth. EVE once again saves WALL-E when he accidentally sets the transport ship to self-destruct. While Disney/Pixar makes an effort to challenge male domination by allowing EVE to hold a more powerful job than WALL-E and giving EVE some control over WALL-E, there are still parts of the movie that reinforce the stereotype of male domination and once again place masculinity at the center.

One common theme used to reinforce male dominance involves casting the male in the role of savior and the female is cast in the role of heroine. Laurie P. Arliss argues that children become familiar with the theme of young maidens finding themselves being rescued by strong capable men. Disney/Pixar first reinforces male domination by incorporating this theme into the movie when they place WALL-E into the role of protector. WALL-E is first cast into the role of protector when he rescues EVE from a storm and when he watches over EVE while she is in her deactivated state. In another scene, WALL-E grabs onto the space ship that comes to take EVE back and continues to hold onto it while it is racing through space because he feels so protective of her and wishes to free her from the ship. While on the space station, WALL-E, in a misguided attempt, once again "rescues" EVE from what he believes is torture. WALL-E causes mayhem in order to get EVE out of the diagnostics lab, showing that he will do anything to make sure that EVE is safe, even if that means getting the both of them put on the most wanted list aboard the space resort. Placing WALL-E in the role of protector competes with the child-like mannerisms WALL-E displays suggesting that even at a young age males are taught to protect females.

At first it may appear that EVE challenges the stereotype of male dominance because she seems to have more authority and power than WALL-E, but toward the end of the movie, the male is once again placed in a position of power. For example, although EVE's programming recognizes the importance of the plant that is recovered on Earth, while WALL-E's does not, it is WALL-E who finds the plant after it has been stolen and it is WALL-E who finally presents the plant to the captain of the space resort. The plant is a huge finding for the space station. Now that Earth has been proven sustainable once again, the humans are able to return. When the plant is once again put in danger, WALL-E not only protects EVE, but the human race as a whole when he sacrifices himself in order to stop the autopilot from destroying the plant and taking over the space station.

Disney/Pixar does try to challenge male dominance by creating a strong female lead who is able to gain control and establish authority at first. These same traits, however, illustrate the hegemonic nature of masculinity because the traits of power and authority are often considered masculine. In other words, in order for EVE to challenge male dominance, she must embody masculine traits, such as appearing cold and distant, in an overstated manner in order to compensate for her feminine gender.

Despite trying to challenge the hegemonic nature of masculinity and the resulting male dominance, *WALL-E* clearly illustrates that constructing masculinity and femininity in stereotypical ways allows masculinity to remain the norm of society. These stereotypical portrayals also allow masculinity to continue to find its way back to the center no matter how often marginalized groups challenge this norm. *WALL-E* manages to do this by creating WALL-E as the protector and savior of the movie instead of EVE.

## Chapter 4: Conclusion

*WALL-E* illustrates how anthropomorphism can be used to create gender for inanimate objects that should not be able to portray gender due to the absence of sex. The means by which Disney/Pixar creates and establishes gender for WALL-E and EVE fall into four primary categories. Those four primary categories include: physical appearance, voice and language, mannerisms, and jobs/tasks. This assigning of gender to gender-neutral objects illustrates society's need to assign gender to everything. While anthropomorphic speech can aid in children's learning, it can also be problematic. Gender stereotypes are often used to create the perception of gender for nonhuman entities.

This trend presents itself in Disney/Pixar's creation of gender for WALL-E and EVE. Through their creation of masculinity and femininity, Disney/Pixar constructs gender in a way that suggests women are expected to be well groomed and are expected to tend to their appearance while it is much more acceptable for males to be less rigid in their grooming habits. According to Disney/Pixar's creation of gender, women are more likely to be involved in caring for others. Men, on the other hand, are expected to be self reliant, to survive on their own with no help from others, and to ultimately be the knight in shining armor at the end of the movie.

The way that society chooses to define and construct masculinity and femininity allows masculinity to remain the norm of society and also allows masculinity to continue to find its way back to the center no matter how often marginalized groups challenge it. We see this happen in *WALL-E* with the character of EVE. Disney/Pixar first paints EVE as strong and authoritative. However, this portrayal is troublesome in itself because in order to construct EVE as powerful and authoritative, they rely on stereotypical masculine traits. Throughout the movie, we see EVE's character shift and soon her role depicts her as the stereotypical female who needs to be saved by a strong male character.

These findings are important because television, books, and film are almost always involved in the socialization of children in today's society. Lugo-Lugo and Bloodworth-Lugo even make the argument that animated films act as a teacher of race and sexuality for children. They then argue that these films act as "agents of socialization" and provide children with the "tools to reinforce expectations about normalized racial and sexual dynamics" (166). This use of media as a tool for socialization is a major reason why our society needs to understand the content of the media that is created for children.

From the exposure to these forms of media, children often learn the norms of our society, whether we recognize these norms or not. Often gender stereotypes find their way into the portrayal of the characters that children encounter in the media. Children are exposed to these gender stereotypes on a daily basis, even when they are in the classroom, and because of this, it becomes even more important to understand what types of media they are being exposed to and the content of that media. Through these portrayals of gender stereotypes, children are taught what acceptable masculine and feminine behaviors are, and what is expected of them in regards to their sex.

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