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**The Gendered World of Disney:  
A Content Analysis of Gender Themes in Full-Length  
Animated Disney Feature Films**

**BY**

**Beth A. Wiersma**

**A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment**

**of the requirements for the degree**

**Doctor of Philosophy**

**Major in Sociology**

**South Dakota State University**

**2000**

**The Gendered World of Disney:  
A Content Analysis of Gender Themes in Full-Length  
Animated Disney Feature Films**

**This dissertation is approved as a creditable and independent investigation by a candidate for the Doctor of Philosophy degree and is acceptable for meeting the dissertation requirements for this degree. Acceptance of this dissertation does not imply that the conclusions reached by the candidate are necessarily the conclusions of the major department.**

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## Abstract

### The Gendered World of Disney: A Content Analysis of Gender Themes in Full-Length Animated Disney Feature Films

Beth A. Wiersma

December 1, 2000

Research has focused on the gender messages portrayed in television programs, cartoons, advertisements, literature, picture books, and fairy tales. One venue that has not received as much attention in the research is the Disney<sup>1</sup> full-length animated feature films. This is a qualitative study of the gender themes and portrayal of gender roles in full-length animated feature films by The Walt Disney Company. The findings in this research indicate there has been little change in the stereotyped portrayals of Disney characters from the release of the first full-length animated feature film *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* in 1937 to the release of *Toy Story* in 1995. Male characters continue to outnumber female characters. Women are portrayed as performing more in-home labor, less out-of-home employment, and hold little familial or societal power. Small changes are noted in the presentation of character traits for both male and female characters. Perspectives from the sociology of knowledge and the social

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<sup>1</sup> Disney and The Walt Disney Company are registered trademarks of The Walt Disney Company.

construction of reality serve as a theoretical framework to explain Disney's continual stereotyped portrayal of gender roles. Within this framework this study demonstrates how the abstract processes of objectification and legitimation occur in the production of gender typifications in the Disney films. The study concludes with a discussion of emerging gender themes and suggestions for future research concerning Disney films.

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## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

The name Disney<sup>1</sup> means many different things to many people. From the time The Walt Disney Company, as it is known today, began in 1923 until present day, Disney has permeated many areas of American culture and has expanded beyond America's borders. Beginning with animated short subject films, Disney has expanded its empire to include motion picture companies, television stations, interactive computer software, a National Hockey League team, a baseball team, stores, theme parks, hotels, Broadway shows, galleries, music soundtracks, books, merchandise and home-videos. The company has also entered into contracts with other major corporations such as Mattel and McDonald's to produce and market Disney characters mainly tied to theatrical and home video releases (Walt Disney Company 1996b).

The magnitude of The Walt Disney Company is difficult to imagine. Not only is Disney "Hollywood's biggest single movie producer ... [it is also] ... the strongest programming brand name in the world" (Maney 1995:163-164), but this has not always been the case. When Michael D. Eisner and Frank G. Wells took over leadership of Disney in 1984 as Chairman/CEO and President/COO respectively, they were looking for ways to raise profits. One way they are doing this is by offering the Disney classics, the full-length animated feature films, for

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<sup>1</sup> Disney and the Walt Disney Company are registered trademarks of The Walt Disney Company.

sale at low prices. The idea was to make videos affordable for all households so people would buy instead of rent movies (Luckett 1994).

The strategy worked. Disney realized profits of more than one hundred million dollars in 1986 (Gomery 1994). Buena Vista Home Video (BVHV) distributes Disney videos both nationally and internationally. BVHV North America remains the industry's top-ranked home video company. In sell-through business alone, it is nearly twice the size of its nearest rival (Walt Disney Company 1996a). In 1993 *Aladdin* became the number one selling home video of all time only to be surpassed by *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* in 1994 which was surpassed by *The Lion King* in 1995. *The Lion King* sold over 30 million units (Walt Disney Company 1995a and 1995b). These home videos also fared well on the international market with *Aladdin* selling 15 million units, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* 16 million units and *The Lion King* 23 million units (Walt Disney Company 1995a).

### **The Problem**

There are an estimated 101,041,000 households in the United States (U.S. Census 1999) and when one considers *The Lion King* sold over 30 million units, over one-fourth of U.S. households own a copy. According to Landis (1993) the Disney animated features are re-released to theaters on a seven-year rotation to attract a following in each new generation. As the videos are also re-released the number of households owning copies of these videos is most likely higher than

previously indicated. Romer (1981) notes that preschoolers watch an average of three to five hours of television each day, which results in passive learning. It is likely that some of the hours spent watching television actually include time spent watching home videos or rentals. "With corporations securely in control of TV and other forms of information and entertainment production, these institutions have gained unprecedented power to represent the world to both children and adults" (Steinberg & Kincheloe 1997:15-16).

Research has been conducted for years on the gender messages children get from television programs, cartoons, advertisements, literature, picture books, and fairy tales. But, little research has been done on what kind of gender messages are presented to children in the Disney animated feature films. The portrayal of gender roles in Disney animated feature films is the focus of this study. The following question will serve as the research problem.

**How are gender and gender roles presented in Disney full length animated feature films?**

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this research is three-fold: (a) to determine if the wonderful world touted and portrayed by Disney is in fact rich in gender stereotypes as are other venues of media; (b) in keeping with the progress made by women in U.S. society, this research will serve to inform whether changes in the portrayal of gender and gender roles have kept pace in the Disney films; and (c) to discover

emerging themes related to gender that may or may not have been addressed in other venues portraying stereotyped gender roles.

### **Significance of Study**

Disney films have been largely ignored in the research. This may be due to the power Disney holds as a cultural icon. Disney is considered the ideal of wholesome family entertainment. By viewing Disney films with a critical sociological imagination it may be possible to determine whether the films produced by the Walt Disney Company are the utmost in family entertainment. It is possible this research may break the magic Disney seems to cast upon the consumers of their animated feature films.

It is expected that this study will empirically add to Berger and Luckmann's theory of the social construction of reality. Within the framework of the social construction of reality this study seeks to demonstrate how the abstract processes of objectivation and legitimation occur in the production of gender typifications in Disney films.

### **Looking Forward**

This dissertation begins with a review of the literature specifically addressing what has been found in other venues with regard to gender role portrayals in media. Chapter three addresses the sociology of knowledge and a theoretical framework of the social construction of reality. Chapter four explains the

qualitative methods employed in this research. The findings of these qualitative methods are presented, analyzed and discussed in the remaining chapters.

More specifically noted is how the portrayal of male and female characters and the gender roles they portray have or have not changed over the past six decades. Areas for further research related to Disney films are also suggested.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Literature Review**

#### **Introduction**

This literature review examines the presentation of gender and gender roles in the media. This review includes these presentations across all venues of media including television, books, cartoons, commercials, music videos, motion pictures, and commercials. The literature review covers a wide array of the portrayal of gender and gender roles including the disparity between the number of male and female characters, the presentation of stereotyped character traits, the activities in which male and female characters engage, and the physical appearance of characters. This review covers more than two decades of literature, which allows for the determination of change in these portrayals.

#### **Socialization and Gender Roles**

Socialization is a process whereby people become functioning members of society by learning the cultural values, beliefs, attitudes and norms of behavior for that particular society (Durkin 1995; Kornblum and Julian 1998; Lindsey 1997; Remafedi 1990; Romer 1981). Many theorists maintain that gender identity as well as the prescriptions and proscriptions (what is acceptable and what is not) of gender roles are acquired through the process of socialization (Durkin 1995; Mackey and Hess 1982; Peirce 1989; Remafedi 1990).



The term “gender role” refers to “everything a person says and does to indicate to others or to the self the degree in which one is male or female or ambivalent” (Remafedi 1990:59). From birth, males and females are differentiated by their sex (biological genitals). In American culture gender roles are differentiated according to dress, physical activity and work (Lindsey 1997). As children grow they learn there are certain behaviors expected of them based on their sex. Children are socialized from birth into gender roles through various agents such as family, school, church, peer groups and the mass media. According to Steinberg and Kincheloe (1997:27) “the advent of electronic hyper-reality has revolutionized the ways knowledge is produced in this culture and the ways children come to learn about the world.” “TV programs usually have a set of values and beliefs they present to children in an action-packed, highly stylized, and repetitive fashion. These values almost always include adherence to traditional sex roles” (Romer 1981:25). Television is not the only source in mass media to portray traditional gender roles.

### **Gender and the Media**

Numerous studies have been conducted on gender representation on television and in books, advertisements, and cartoons. Gender stereotypes present in early studies still exist today in children’s television programming (Busby 1974; Peirce 1989), cartoons (Mayes and Valentine 1979; Thompson and Zerbinos 1995), children’s books (Peterson and Lach 1990; Williams et al. 1987),

television advertisements (Lovdal 1989), and prime-time television programming (Signorielli 1989) and Disney videos (Hoerner 1996). In all venues examined, males were found to outnumber females by a ratio of 2 to 1 to as much as 4 to 1 (Busby 1974; Hoerner 1996; Levinson 1975; Mackey and Hess 1982; Remafedi 1990; Streicher 1974; Thompson and Zervinos 1995; Williams et al. 1987; Zebrowitz-McArthur and Resko 1975). In the Media Report to Women (1997) it was reported women account for 22% of characters in music videos, 37% in motion pictures, 42% in TV commercials and 45% in television programs.

Peterson and Lach (1990) and Williams et al. (1987) found the disparity between the number of males and females is narrowing, but is still not equal. In a study of eleven Disney films Hoerner (1996) found the number of females (n=28) were almost equal to the number of characters whose gender could not be determined (n=29). Males accounted for 57% of the characters, females 21%, and undifferentiated characters 22%. Kortenhaus and Demarest (1993) and Levinson (1975) found that when the gender of animals can be determined in children's literature, males again outnumber females. Males outnumber females in the voice-overs on television commercials (Lovdal 1989; Streicher 1974), and female characters in television cartoons have fewer lines (Streicher 1974).

## Gender Typifications

The way the mass media portrays the character traits of females and males fall along stereotyped gender lines. Females are depicted with those traits traditionally considered feminine. The women and girls in children's television programs and cartoons were found to be affectionate, emotional, sensitive and expressive of romantic interests (Busby 1974; Streicher 1974). Signorielli (1997) found women are shown whining and crying in movies and on television. 1st

Females were shown as nurturing in prime-time television, picture books and children's literature (Kortenhaus and Demarest 1993; Signorielli 1989; Williams et al. 1987) and were depicted as passive in comic strips, cartoons, picture books and children's television programming (Busby 1974; Levinson 1975; Mooney and Brabant 1990; Williams et al. 1987). Giroux (1997) found Disney female characters to be subordinate to men and Romer (1981) notes that adult women in television commercials were portrayed as childlike and unintelligent.

Males, on the other hand, are characterized with those personality traits traditionally thought of as masculine. Kortenhaus and Demarest (1993), Streicher (1974), and Williams et al. (1987) found males characterized as independent. Males are also shown to have prestige and power (Signorielli 1989), to be assertive and athletic (Streicher 1974), to have authority and the ability to solve problems (Kortenhaus and Demarest 1993), and to use physical force and brawn (Signorelli 1997).

The activities in which males and females participate are stereotyped in the various venues whether the characters are children or adults and whether they are at home or on the job. Hillman (1976) found little change from the 1930s to the 1970s in children's literature and the portrayal of males and females in the number of occupational roles. Males were depicted in a greater variety of occupations when compared to females, and the ratio of five male occupations per one female occupation changed only slightly over the years to a ratio of 4:1. Lovdal (1989) found more variety of occupations for men in television commercials while women were portrayed in stereotyped roles such as wife and mother. In television commercials adult women were depicted as not concerned with non-home related creativity and were only interested in home and family. The women in these commercials were also depicted as unconcerned about employment (Romer 1981). In children's television programs, Busby (1974) found the occupations in which women were portrayed are those at the bottom of the job hierarchy; wives took care of the home and child-care while men performed maintenance chores and yard work.

This is consistent with the findings of Mackey and Hess (1982) and Levinson (1975) which showed women are more often depicted in socioemotional roles compared to males who are more often shown in task oriented or instrumental roles. Socioemotional roles are those associated with nurturing and meeting the needs of the family. These activities are more likely to be thought of as taking place in the home whereas instrumental tasks such as

those that “deal with overt behavior manipulating the physical environment: e.g., building, fighting, plowing...[or]...clearing land” (Mackey and Hess 1982:204) are thought of as taking place outdoors. Mooney and Brabant (1990) in their study of comic strips found females less likely to interact with others outside the home and that daughters are not pictured outdoors as much as sons. Females were found in the home more often in television commercials (Zebrowitz-McArthur and Resko 1975) and picture books (Williams et al. 1987).

The location in which men and women are pictured has an impact on what type of objects they are shown using or selling. In a study of what type of artifacts are used by women and men in children’s books, Crabb and Bielawski (1994) found women are mostly shown using artifacts related to home labor such as those for cleaning, cooking, or family care while men use those related to outdoor activities like transportation and construction. Females were found to represent in-home products in television commercials (Lovdal 1989; Zebrowitz-McArthur and Resko 1975), and men were not depicted doing housework in cartoons (Streicher 1974).

Gender stereotypes are reinforced by the physical appearance of characters in the media. This may be true for females more than for males considering the attention focused on women to socialize them to the belief that they must be thin and attractive to have worth. Among the most potent messages from mass media are that “women (particularly if young and “attractive”) are decorative sex objects, sexually available to men” (Lott

1997:287). Disney is associated with family values. The fear of undermining this view led to the insistence of Disney executives that Ariel the mermaid wear shells for a bra instead of being nude above the waist (Wally 1996). Apparently sexuality is not an issue for Disney, only nudity. In the Media Report to Women (1997) researchers found women's and girls' appearance were commented on in television programs and commercials and movies significantly more than for men and boys.

Abel (1995:187) found that the MGM Studio presents its female cartoon characters in heavily stereotyped ways. Abel identified three typifications of women in these cartoons: "the domestic woman, either a housewife or a servant ... the sex symbol with a highly exaggerated hourglass figure; and the comic old woman, an offshoot of the matron of the 1930s screwball comedy, sometimes elegant, sometimes dowdy, but always laughable in her attempt to mimic the sexual desirability of the young sex symbol." Trites (1991) reports that Disney presents good as fair and uses dark to represent evil. They have recently associated weight with evil in response to America's fascination with thinness.

Relationships also appear to be a focus of women in the media.

Signorielli (1997) reports that messages and stereotypes about the priority of relationships in girls' lives are spread across various media. In contrast, the priority presented for males is a career. Abel (1995) also found that the MGM Studio relies on the "normative heterosexual ideal" in cartoons. After hours of observing children and adolescents, Barrie Thorne (1994:170) found "active

efforts to get and keep a boyfriend lead many young women to lower their ambitions, and the culture of romance perpetuates male privilege.”

## **Summary**

This review of recent literature indicates the presentation of gender roles has not changed much over the past two to three decades. This review indicates stereotyped portrayals of male and female characters are present across all forms of media. The disparity between the number of male and female characters found in the earlier literature stills exists as indicated by the recent literature. The media continue to present males and females in traditional masculine and feminine gender roles respectively, with females portrayed as emotional, passive, subordinate, nurturing and romantic and males portrayed as independent and assertive, as having power and prestige, and as exercising physical force. This study seeks to determine if the presentation of gender and gender roles in full length animated Disney films parallels the findings in other forms of media and whether these presentations have changed over time.

## CHAPTER 3

### Theoretical Perspective

#### Introduction

The focus of this chapter is on how the media, and more specifically film producers, construct traditional gender roles and stereotypes. The presentation of these gender roles and stereotypes contribute to children's understanding of gender roles. The social constructionist perspective will provide the framework of this discussion.

The media present the typifications of what it means to be male or female, masculine or feminine. A review of the literature indicated that more males are presented in the media and more often. Males are also portrayed as independent, assertive, athletic, physically forceful and possessing power, prestige and authority. Females, on the other hand, are portrayed as emotional, nurturing, sensitive, romantic, passive and submissive. Women are portrayed as wives and mothers, caring for the children and doing housework. When women are portrayed in occupations outside the home, they are in occupations with little status or prestige, those at the lower end of the occupational hierarchy. According to West and Zimmerman (1991:29) "gender differences, or the sociocultural shaping of 'essential female and male natures' achieve the status of objective facts. They are rendered normal, natural features of persons and



provide the rationale for differing fates of women and men within the social order.”

The consumers of mass media see what the producers of that media present as appropriate for gender roles. These constructions of reality take on subjective meaning for individuals. Socially constructed reality may become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Sociologist W.I. Thomas addressed this in his statement “if people define situations as real, they are real in their consequences” (Thomas and Thomas 1928:572). This now famous statement known as the Thomas Theorem means that once people have ideas or beliefs of what it means to be appropriately male or female, they will behave or engage in activities in accordance with those beliefs. They have thus turned their subjective meanings into objective reality.

As previously stated the traditional gender roles and stereotypes children view in films contribute to their understanding of gender roles. According to Romer (1981:26) “since young children believe that television tells the truth, they may think that ‘the truth’ involves extreme versions of sex roles.” The assumption is made here that if children believe television tells the truth so too does film or more specifically, Disney films. The remainder of this chapter will outline the social constructionist perspective to explain how traditional gender roles and stereotypes were constructed and continue to be reconstructed by the media.

## **The Social Construction Framework**

The social constructionist approach has its roots in symbolic interaction which focuses on “interactions among individuals in their specific social situations” (Howard and Hollander 1997:39) and their social construction of reality. The social world, as people know it is created and re-created by individuals in interaction. Social constructionists propose that reality is socially constructed. According to Kanagy and Kraybill (1999:18), construction refers to “the way in which humans have created social worlds.”

The social world consists of the culture of a society, i.e., the values, beliefs and patterns of behavior that exist in that society. Berger and Luckmann (1966:3) focus on the “processes by which any body of ‘knowledge’ comes to be socially accepted as ‘reality’.” For Berger and Luckmann (1966:5-6) the analysis of the social construction of reality is the concern of the sociology of knowledge. They borrow the root proposition of the sociology of knowledge from Marx noting that:

**Man’s consciousness is determined by his social being ... What concerned Marx was that human thought is founded in human activity (“labor,” in the widest sense of the word) and in the social relations brought about by this activity. “Substructure” and “superstructure” are best understood if one views them as, respectively, human activity and the world produced by that activity.**

The social constructionist approach is concerned with the process of how reality is constructed. The focus is on the interplay of individual actors creating a subjective meaning from the patterned interactions or objective reality. It is this combination that creates reality for individuals (Berger and Luckmann 1966;

Kanagy and Kraybill 1999). Hutchison and Charlesworth (1998:44) summarize the central ideas of the social constructionist perspective as:

- Actors are free, active, and creative.
- Social reality is created when actors, in social interaction, develop a common understanding of their world.
- Social interaction is grounded in “linguistic conventions, as well as cultural and historical contexts” (Witkin and Gottschalk, 1988:213).
- People can modify meanings in the process of interaction.
- Society consists of social processes, not social structures.

### **Phases in the Social Construction of Reality**

Berger and Luckmann (1966) present the social construction of reality as a three-phase process, which includes externalization, objectification and internalization. Kanagy and Kraybill (1999) refer to the externalization phase as the construction phase and have added a fourth phase they refer to as renovation. These phases are viewed as dialectical meaning that there is a back and forth relationship between products produced and those who produce them. The dialectic process applies to actors and structures and past, present and future circumstances. Berger and Luckmann (1966:61) describe this dialectical process of the social construction of reality as follows:

The paradox [is] that man is capable of producing a world that he then experiences as something other than a human product ... it is important to emphasize that the relationship between man, the producer, and the social world, his product, is and remains a dialectical one. That is, man (not, of course, in isolation but in his collectivities) and his social world interact with each other. The product acts back upon the producer. Externalization and objectivation are moments in a continuing dialectical process ... only with the transmission of the social world to a new generation (that is, internalization as effectuated in socialization) does the fundamental social dialectic appear in its totality.

## **Phase I: Externalization**

Externalization, the first phase of the social construction of reality, refers to how the social order as a particular society knows it, came to exist. Humans are responsible for creating social worlds (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Kanagy and Kraybill 1999). The social world consists of the cultural patterns created and sustained over time and include the values, behaviors, institutions, and organizations of a particular society. "Through interaction, we negotiate particular interpretations; that is, we create meaning. Through talk, through participation in the rituals of social interaction, through our active engagement with the symbols and material realities of everyday life, we literally create what we recognize as real" (Howard and Hollander 1997:35).

The social world as people know it, the types of houses that are built, the jobs people work at, the activities engaged in for recreation, clothing fashions, modes of transportation, family constellations, laws, values and beliefs are all human creations. They did not fall from the sky. The social world was created throughout history and it is continually reproduced. According to Berger and Luckmann (1966:52) "Social order is the result of past human activity and ... exists only and insofar as human activity continues to produce it."

Lorber (1994) offers a history of the development or construction of gender roles. According to Lorber gender roles have their origin in culture not in biology or the genitals with which males and females are born. In early societies both males and females along with children hunted and gathered food and were

responsible for production. As the technology of food gathering and production changed over time roles became differentiated by sex. As the technology of how hunting was conducted changed, children were no longer able to accompany the parents. The women remained behind to mind the children and teach them the ways of society until such time that they could be productive. Women became responsible for cooking, clothing, tanning, and trapping small animals

Over the years these roles became routine, ritualized, and the norms of society. Societies were now divided as women and men, girls and boys. As the children grew, daughters spent time with the mothers learning housework and childcare while the sons learned the roles of the fathers. Those who behaved and fulfilled the roles as prescribed were rewarded and those who did not risked being ostracized.

## **Phase II: Objectivation**

Human activity that is continually repeated becomes habit or established as a pattern. These patterns of behavior and beliefs become meaningful for people who routinely engage in them. These social patterns then take on an objective status even though they are subjective processes (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Kanagy and Kraybill 1999). This objective status or objectivation is the second phase in the social construction of reality. Berger and Luckmann (1966:60) define objectivation as “the process by which the externalized products of human activity attain the character of objectivity.”

Kanagy and Kraybill (1999:20) define objectivation as “the process by which aspects of the social world become “real” to people ... [and] the firmly established patterns of social life that are accepted as social facts.”

Language is an important part of objectivation. “The language used in everyday life continuously provides ... the necessary objectivations and posits the order within which these make sense and within which everyday life has meaning...” (Berger and Luckmann 1966:22). Thus, language serves to maintain common objectivations. Language allows for the transmission and understanding of meanings to others both in the present and the future. The transmission of these meanings or “knowledge” must be transmitted by a social apparatus or transmitters, which serve to legitimate “knowledge” (Berger and Luckmann 1966).

The mass media not only entertains it also educates members of society. The media (such as television or film) serve as the transmitters of “knowledge” or objectivated meanings. Researchers have addressed this issue regarding fairy tales, animated films, and television. Giroux (1997:53) sees animated films as producers of culture in that “these films appear to inspire at least as much cultural authority and legitimacy for teaching specific roles, values, and ideals as do the more traditional sites of learning...” Lieberman (1989) found that women are acculturated to traditional social roles through fairy tales, and Stone (1975:48) notes that the fairy tale may “inform your attitudes and acts.”

The media present social constructions of reality i.e., gender roles, in that they present what are considered the cultural ideals. The media present portrayals and interpretations of reality and viewers believe these are the socially sanctioned norms of behavior (Sallach 1974). According to Connelly Loeb (1990:249) "television programs present an image of a socially constructed reality that appears 'objective' but is based on the social values and ideas held by a particular culture or subculture as true." The images presented by the media are persuasive and provide meaning for those who view them. According to Lott (1997) the mass media is the most potent communicators of how to do gender.

The roles constructed for men and women throughout history become objectivated. Berger and Luckmann (1966) referred to the social reality of everyday life as a continuum of typifications and reciprocal typifications as an institution. For Berger and Luckmann roles are the typifications of what others expect in specific social situations. The reciprocal typifications are how individuals present themselves as male or female and the activities they perform in any social situation. People perform in accordance with their gender by the clothes they wear, their body language, the way they talk, and the props they use. They also expect the same from others in accordance with their gender. In Goffman's (1976:69) terminology this is a "display."

Goffman formulates gender display as follows: "If gender be defined as the culturally established correlates of sex (whether in consequence of biology or

learning) then gender display refers to conventionalized portrayals of these correlates.” The point here is that once values, beliefs and behaviors become typified and expected as roles individuals’ behavior will then be viewed in any given situation as gender appropriate or inappropriate. According to Romer (1981:25) “advertisers and toy manufactures ... play on children’s desire to be appropriate males or females. In doing so, they contribute to the process of sex-typing children by defining what is available and what is sex appropriate.”

The threat of being held accountable for one’s behavior is the driving force behind gender performance (Howard and Hollander 1997). When individuals do not abide by the socially accepted and prescribed presentations of gender, there may be penalties of formal or informal sanctions (Lott, 1997; Lorber 1994; O’Brien 1999). Family members, peer groups, teachers, employers, as well as others may impose sanctions. Individuals who do not remain within the boundaries of socially prescribed gender roles risk being ostracized. Learning the consequences of appropriate and inappropriate behavior becomes a method of social control to reinforce conformity to social norms of behavior. According to Lindsey (1997:54) “social control remains effective particularly when socialization processes encourage the perpetuation of stereotyped portrayals of the genders.” In essence, social control reinforces gender stereotypes.

The objectivation of gender roles along with the threat of social sanctions leads people to believe they have little choice in the roles they play or their activities. In a sense they feel “locked in” to the gendered world into which they



were born. This is what Berger and Luckmann (1966) referred to as reification: that human products are viewed as natural. As much as people believe these social facts and the social order are fixed, they are in fact, not. Kanagy and Kraybill (1999), point out how easy it is to forget that people construct the social order and that no matter how ingrained routines become, they can be changed. Change is evident by the number of wives and mothers currently working outside the home.

### **Phase III: Internalization**

Internalization is the third phase in the social construction of reality. Internalization is an important part of socialization. It is the process by which the norms and values of a society are passed on to the next generation and become the norms and values of that generation. Kanagy and Kraybill (1999:21) describe the process of internalization as “the objective social world ‘out there’ becomes personal. It becomes ‘mine and ours.’ Social reality becomes subjective reality. Social beliefs turn into personal ones...” Berger and Luckmann (1966:61) define internalization as a process “by which the objectivated social world is retrojected into consciousness in the course of socialization.”

As people become socialized into their culture or social world they begin to believe their choices are limited or that they have no choice but to believe certain things or behave in a specific way. It is as if people become prisoners of their own or others creations. This process is referred to as reification.

According to Berger and Luckmann (1966:89) people tend to view their social world “as facts of nature, results of cosmic laws, or manifestations of divine will.”

Not only do individuals create social reality but they are also constrained by the social realities created by those who lived before them (Hutchison and Charlesworth 1998). People tend to forget the products of culture such as the norms of behavior or laws, were created by people, and that as the producers of culture they are also able to change the products of their culture. It would be like moving into a new home and believing that the outside color must remain the same because the siding cannot be painted. The person would still have the choice to reside the house. Berger and Luckmann (1966:61) describe a reified world as a dehumanized world because the dialectic of man as the producer of products is lost to consciousness. They sum up the social construction of reality as: “Society is a human product. Society is an objective reality. Man is a social product.”

Social constructionists maintain that gender identity as well as the prescriptions and proscriptions (what is acceptable and what is not) of gender-roles are acquired through the process of socialization (Durkin 1995; Mackey and Hess 1982; Peirce 1989; Remafedi 1990). Mackey and Hess (1982:212) point out that “the socialization process includes the development of gender identity, as well as the learning of the dominant social definitions of reality, including gender-roles.”

The term "gender role" refers to "everything a person says and does to indicate to others or to the self the degree in which one is male or female or ambivalent" (Remafedi 1990:59). From birth, males and females are differentiated by their sex. In American culture gender-roles are differentiated according to dress, physical activity and work (Lindsey 1997). As children grow they learn there are certain behaviors expected of them based on their sex.

The mass media provides a wide array of sources for gender roles and their socializing effect on children. The research focuses on the characters children identify with or want to be like, the relationship between amount of time spent watching television and the strength of gender stereotyped attitudes, and the perceptions of gender-typed behaviors.

Some studies have found that the more television a child watches the more he or she endorses traditional gender stereotypes (Beuf 1974; Frueh and McGhee 1975; Morgan 1982). Frueh and McGhee (1975) found the association between watching high amounts of television and stronger traditional sex-role development did not change with age and held equally for girls and boys. Morgan (1982) found the amount of television viewing by girls was significantly correlated with scores on a sex-roles stereotype index.

Children have been found to identify with, recall and reproduce activities, and model the behaviors of gender stereotyped television and film characters (Busby 1975; Maccoby and Wilson 1957; McArthur and Eisen 1976; Miller and Reeves 1976; Reeves and Miller 1978). Reeves and Miller (1978) found that

children have a strong tendency to identify with same-sex television characters. This tendency was especially true for boys. In a study of 7<sup>th</sup> grade children, Maccoby and Wilson (1957) found the children identified themselves with same-sex leading characters in films.

In a study of 3<sup>rd</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> grade children, Miller and Reeves (1976) found about half the children nominate television characters as someone they want to be like when they grow up. The justification of the girls' choice was based on physical attractiveness while the boys based their choice on physical aggression. Signorielli and Lears (1992) found a significant relationship between the amount of television children watch and having gender-stereotyped attitudes about chores.

The mass media is one of the influential structures of a society and the Disney films are a part of this institution. The patterned and repetitive messages put forth in the media including the Disney films (which include the attitudes, values, and beliefs of what is appropriate behavior for males and females) can be considered social facts. These messages are external to the individual yet may become part of individuals' thinking, become objectified, and become reality to the individual. According to Hewitt (1994:98) "among the earliest facts about the social world that children learn about and incorporate as a basic part of their conceptions of themselves is that the social world is gendered."

#### **Phase IV: Renovation**

Kanagy and Kraybill (1999) have added a fourth phase to the social construction of reality, which they refer to as renovation. In general terms renovation means that objective reality, as people know it, can change. Even though children are socialized into an already objectified world, when they become adults they may change their values, beliefs or behavior in contrast to their prior socialization. Kanagy and Kraybill (1999:22) define renovation as “the process by which individuals and groups re-create their social worlds, rejecting certain aspects constructed by previous generations and incorporating new ideas, beliefs, and behaviors.” Renovation can occur at the individual level such as changing religions or at the institutional level such as granting equal rights to women. Change may be slow but the point is, it is possible. In other words, what people produce and what they believe to be natural or beyond change, can in fact be changed.

Gender roles and stereotypes are constructed by the collectivity of individuals who make up societies. “Because members of social groups must constantly (whether they realize it or not) ‘do gender’ to maintain their proper status, the seeds of change are ever present” (Lorber and Farrel 1991:9). These may not be the same for all societies. Some believe gender roles are fixed and based on biological sex, i.e., their reproductive functions determine that men and women must perform specific functions in society because it is natural for their

sex category. A social constructionist approach would argue that gender roles were created and are reproduced throughout the course of history.

If gender roles were in fact natural and unchangeable due to biological sex, gender roles would be the same for males and females across all cultures. The fact that this is not the case provides support for Kanagy and Kraybill's (1999) fourth phase of renovation. Cultural studies present evidence that male and female roles are not required because of the biological sex of individuals. Lorber (1988:215) makes reference to "African and American Indian societies that have a gender status called manly hearted women – biological females who work, marry and parent as men ... they do not have to behave or dress as men to have the social responsibilities and prerogatives of husbands and fathers; what makes them is enough wealth to buy a wife."

It is possible for biological males and females to learn and practice the opposite of what are considered the traditional gender roles for their sex. The strategies women use to construct and maintain gender was revealed in Garfinkel's famous study of a transsexual named Agnes. Agnes was born with male genitals but underwent sex reassignment surgery at age 17. Before and after the surgery Agnes would present himself as a female by his clothing, use of makeup, hairstyles, presenting "feminine" mannerisms and holding a "feminine" job (Garfinkel 1967).

While some small steps toward reducing gender stereotypes were noted in the literature review, there is still a long way to go for the media to renovate or

reconstruct the presentation of gender roles. Examples of renovation of gender roles are visible in American culture and these changes attest to the possibility of change. Women won the right to vote, the ability to control their own reproduction through the use of birth control and/or abortion, and the right to inherit property. They have also become major participants in the institutions of higher education and the world of work outside the home.

The portrayal of women in the media has lagged behind these seeds of change. The year Walt Disney died, 1966, is the same year the National Organization for Women (NOW) was established. This organization has continued to lobby and secure rights for women for more than three decades. It appears The Walt Disney Company is one organization NOW has not been able to influence. According to Jackson (1996:51) "The Disney vision punctuated by fairy-tale love stories, benevolent nature, and classic American virtues such as hard work remains unchanged since Walt Disney master-minded it years ago."

The media serves as both producers and reproducers of knowledge. For this reason it is important to explore Walt Disney's subjective meaning of reality and whether he incorporated his personal viewpoints into the films produced during his reign at The Walt Disney Company. Closely related to this is the question of whether Walt Disney's view of women and society in general, influence the more recent films or whether these films parallel the changing roles of women in society?

## **The Social Construction of Reality and Disney Films**

Walt Disney lived from 1901 to 1966 (Bart 1999; Jackson 1996). He lived during the depression and WWII. This was a time of a changing society.

Women had gone to work to help with the war effort and it was the time of the rise of labor unions. In 1941 Walt Disney found himself in labor disputes with his employees who went on strike (Rigby 1997; Schickel 1968). It was at this time Walt Disney adopted a right wing conservative stance (Hearne 1997; Ostman 1996).

Disney held strong beliefs informed by the Protestant, white Anglo-Saxon values (Ostman 1996; America's Sorcerer 1998). Disney held very patriarchal views about women that reflected the cultural beliefs in the 1940s (O'Brien 1996; Mosley 1990). According to Watts (1997:356), Disney held a "very old-fashioned view of women ... he held to a set of traditional ... attitudes ... [such as] ... as woman's natural place was in the home as a wife and mother."

Directors and producers of film and other forms of media include their personal beliefs, attitudes and values into the products they produce (Street 1983; Cantor 1974). During the 1930s Disney personally picked a group of nine male animators who would serve as the creative production team for the next forty years. This group commonly referred to as "the nine old men" also served as Disney's board of directors (Eliot 1993; O'Brien 1996; Walley 1996).

According to O'Brien (1996) Disney did not believe women had the creativity to work as animators.



According to Abel (1995:185) "the work of the Disney studios defines the gender norm for the rest of the cartoon world." This world in Disney films is one of patriarchal values or what according to Watts (1997:326) "might be called the Disney Doctrine: a notion that the nuclear family, with its attendant rituals of marriage, parenthood, emotional and spiritual instruction, and consumption was the centerpiece of the American way of life. [This was] illustrated through a long string of productions." Watts (1997:329) describes the idealized female according to Walt Disney as "self-sacrificing moral instructors, skilled domestic managers, and compassionate caregivers." Watts continues that to counter threats to this ideal Disney portrayed the female villains in opposition to this ideal to show violations of proper conduct for women.

After Walt Disney's death the company floundered financially and in the output of animated films. Walt's nephew, Roy E. Disney, left the company in 1977 due to creative differences, although he did remain on the board of directors. In 1984 when Michael Eisner took control of The Walt Disney Company, Roy E. Disney returned to the company as the chairman of animation (Carvell 1997). Roy E. Disney sees himself as a link to the past and offers suggestions on how to make each film better (Goldman 1997).

Eisner has continued Walt Disney's vision of "a firm belief in core values" (Capodagli and Jackson 1999:201). According to O'Brien (1996) the Disney characters continue to perpetuate patriarchal values. This should come as no surprise when one considers that Walt Disney established his own training

program that continues today and serves to reinforce “the Disney culture and its values ... [and strives] ... to meet the exacting standards Walt established ... Eisner may be more Walt than Walt” (Capodagli and Jackson 1999:5 & 200).

Walt Disney held very patriarchal views of women and society in general. According to the research presented in this chapter Disney carried these viewpoints into his business. Based on this research it can be expected these viewpoints will be reflected in the full length animated Disney films that are the focus of this study. According to Berger and Luckmann (1966:70) “objectivated meanings of institutional activity are conceived of as “knowledge” and transmitted as such.” The Disney films in this study serve as the social apparatus used to transmit “knowledge.” The “knowledge” transmitted by these films are the objectivated meanings of what it means to be male or female. If the findings of the present study reflect the findings of stereotyped presentations in other forms of media and of what it means to be male or female then it is assumed that the patriarchal values held by Walt Disney will be the “knowledge” transmitted by the films in this study.

In order for the message or “knowledge” conveyed in the Disney films to be internalized it must be legitimized. Legitimation is “the process of ‘explaining’ and justifying” and is built into the vocabulary of the social apparatus (Burger and Luckmann 1966:93). “All transmissions of institutional meanings obviously implies control and legitimation procedures. These are attached to the institutions themselves and administered by the transmitting personnel” (Berger

and Luckmann 1966:71). Thus, Walt Disney and his team of male animators served as the legitimators or transmitting personnel of “knowledge” transmitted by the Disney films produced before 1970. The current legitimators include the employees at the Walt Disney Company who have a creative impact on the films produced. This group of employees includes those who write the stories and animators. Michael Eisner, Roy Disney Jr., and the board of directors at the Walt Disney Company serve to administer the legitimation process. The research previously cited and the pilot study conducted by this researcher indicate the current executives at The Walt Disney Company continue to transmit “knowledge” or gender roles in the same fashion as Walt Disney himself did, in a stereotyped fashion. It is assumed the same or similar objectified meanings will be present in the films in this study.

## **Summary**

This chapter discussed the social constructionist perspective as a framework to explain the construction of traditional gender roles and stereotypes in the media. The roots of this perspective are found in the symbolic interaction approach. The four phases in the social construction of reality constitute a majority of this discussion. The four phases are externalization, objectivation, internalization, and renovation. Particular emphasis was placed on the second phase, objectivation, which is the process of patterns of social life attaining objectivity. This process involves legitimators transmitting objectivated meanings

through a social apparatus. The media is one such way in which this process takes place.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **Methodology**

#### **Introduction**

The design of this research was qualitative content analysis. One approach to content analysis is a "fishing expedition" (Krippendorff 1980) which involves collecting the data, looking for themes or patterns that emerge during the coding and collapsing of the data, identifying the variables, and analyzing the data. Some of the concepts identified in the theoretical literature review served as sensitizing concepts to the types of behavior, attitudes and characteristics that became important during the coding process. These concepts included but were not limited to: the words or phrases indicating what character traits the various characters possess and their attitudes related to what behaviors are appropriate for males and females. The context of how these behaviors and attitudes were modeled or reinforced in the films was also recorded.

The methodology employed for this research involved a spiraling process (Berg 1998), which required continually going backward and forward during the research process making many decisions based on what emerged from the data. As is typical of qualitative research, data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously (Berg 1998; Lofland & Lofland 1995). This chapter describes in detail how this process was carried out. This description explains how the sample was selected, tentative hypothesis derived from a pilot study, the coding

frame utilized including the reliability of this coding frame, and how the data were analyzed.

### **Population and Sample**

The population for this study included the full-length animated feature films produced by the Walt Disney Company. At the time this research began there were thirty-seven of these films. The time period of these films spans from 1937 to 1997. This population includes only those films that are fully animated and were originally produced for theatrical release. This excludes such films as *Mary Poppins* and *Pete's Dragon* where actors and actresses are combined with animation.

A sample of sixteen Disney films were selected as meeting the following criteria: (1) they are on the top 25 best selling home video list; (2) there is a plot to the story; and (3) they are rated G for general audiences. The sample for this study includes sixteen films. These films span the time period from 1937 to 1995 (Table 1). This includes *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) which is the first full-length animated feature film released by the Walt Disney Company.

The top best selling films were used in the sample because they are owned and viewed by the largest number of people. Seventeen of the top 25 all time best selling home videos are full-length animated Disney films (Walt Disney Company 1998). The seventeenth Disney film on the top 25 best selling list is *Fantasia*. This film was excluded from the sample due to the nature of the film.

Fantasia is more about special effects and music and rather than a story with a plot.

**Table 1** **Films Included in the Sample**

<b>Film</b>	<b>Release Date</b>	<b>Industry Wide Ranking</b>
Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs	1937	2
Pinocchio	1940	21
Bambi	1942	9
α Cinderella	1950	4
Peter Pan	1953	18
Lady and the Tramp	1955	22
✶ 101 Dalmatians	1961	19
The Jungle Book	1967	13
The Aristocats	1970	23
The Fox and the Hound	1981	20
✶ The Little Mermaid	1989	8
α Beauty and the Beast	1991	6
α Aladdin	1992	3
The Lion King	1994	1
Pocahontas	1995	10
✶ Toy Story	1995	5

Walt Disney Company (1998).

The sample includes at least one film from each decade beginning in 1937. Eight of the sixteen films in the sample were produced before 1970. The remaining eight films were produced from 1970 to 1995. The Jungle Book (1967) was the last film produced before Walt Disney passed away in 1966. This served to allow for a clear and equal division in order to make comparisons between the films from the first three decades while Walt Disney was living and those from the

most recent or last three decades after his death. These are referred to as the earlier films and later or most recent films respectively, in the research findings, discussion and conclusions.

### **Design of this Study**

One purpose of this research was description. Therefore, the films were transcribed in order to examine the words or verbal text of the characters, to assess attitudes about the nature of work, and to discover the indicators of their character traits. The films all contained closed captioning, which allowed for transcription of the words spoken along with other descriptors of actions. The research strategy was to describe, compare, and contrast how males and females are portrayed in these films. It was also exploratory in that emerging themes were noted and described in keeping with a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss 1967). The transcriptions allowed for more concrete data and a more in-depth analysis of the verbal text that may not have been possible while only viewing the films.

The use of content analysis allows for flexibility in formulating hypotheses and allows for drawing tentative conclusions from the content. Based on the literature review and a pilot study conducted by this researcher, the following served as guiding hypotheses:

- H1:** The male characters in the Disney films will outnumber the female characters.



- H2:** The female characters in the Disney films will be observed participating in more typical stereotyped female activities in the home than will male characters.
- H3:** The female characters in the Disney films will not be portrayed in outside-the-home employment.
- H4:** The male characters in the Disney films will be portrayed as holding societal power and the female characters will not.
- H5:** The male characters in the Disney films will be portrayed with traditional masculine character traits and the female characters will be portrayed with traditional feminine character traits.

### **Data Collection and Categorization**

The data were collected while watching the Disney films, transcribing the verbal text, and completing a coding frame for each film (Appendix A). Each film was viewed a minimum of five times. Two viewings were for the purpose of transcription. It was during this process that themes began to emerge.

Transcribing the films allowed for a hard copy of the text in the films. Words and sentences could be coded in the margins as fitting into one of the categories on the coding frame. This also served as a way to check the reliability of the verbalizations of the characters in the films.

The films were watched a third time to complete the coding frame. The coding frame was also completed from the transcriptions of the verbal text. Themes emerged in some films, making it necessary to view the films again to determine if these themes were present in the other films. The films were viewed

again six months later to verify themes and to ensure that as much data as possible were coded. This also served to verify intra-rater reliability.

Data were also collected from the descriptions on the back of the video tape boxes as these descriptions give information about the characters such as the major characters in the story, their character traits, and the plot. Physical descriptors of the characters and age were other information provided on the boxes.

A coding frame was used to analyze data in the five areas explored by Busby (1974). These five areas included: physical appearance, character traits, in-home labor, out-of-home employment, and familial or societal power. Appendix A provides an example of the coding frame utilized while viewing the films. Below are the initial tentative coding categories used in this research.

1. Physical Appearance: male or female, body size, shape, build or figure, clothing, hair, and apparent age.
2. In-Home Labor: activities related to the up keep of the home and/or yard.
3. Out-of-Home Employment: occupation or job title.
4. Societal or Familial Power: authority, status, holding an important position.
5. Character Traits: traditional stereotyped feminine and masculine traits including: passive or aggressive, dependent or independent, emotional or unemotional, and romantic or unromantic.

The coding categories reflect what was found in the literature review in Chapter 2 and the areas in which males and females are traditionally

stereotyped. The coding frame was completed while viewing the videos and from the coding completed on the transcriptions of the films. The coding frames were completed using descriptive terms as opposed to counting as is sometimes done in content analysis. The coding with descriptive terms included both the verbalizations of the characters and non-verbal communication such as the activities or actions in which the characters engaged.

According to Berger and Luckmann (1966) language plays an important role in the transmission of objectivated messages. Language is not only important in presenting “knowledge” as it also provides meaning to those who are the receivers of that “knowledge.” These films serve as the social apparatus to transmit objectivated meanings or “knowledge” of what it means to be male or female. Individuals form subjective meanings from objectivated reality, not only from what they hear but also from what they see. Therefore, it was necessary to code both the verbal and non-verbal communication presented in these films. The coding frame serves to determine what “knowledge” is being transmitted both verbally and non-verbally in Disney films.

### **Coding the Characters**

Most of the data recorded for physical appearance, occupation, in-home labor, and societal or familial power could be recorded with single words. The

transcriptions were utilized to support the data on the coding frame and to examine the words and phrases that indicated the attitudes and beliefs of the characters toward male and female roles.

The ratio of male to female characters was determined by tallying the characters with speaking lines or who played a major role but didn't speak. This included characters portrayed as human or human like (such as mermaids) and animals or objects (such as a clock or teapot) (Appendix B). The characters were coded as male or female based on their name, physical appearance, clothing, heterosexual couplings, and pronouns in the verbal text. In some instances the names and voices did not allow for a distinction to be made and the use of pronouns was lacking. In these cases the character was not coded.

Character traits were coded for the major male and female characters and also for the villains. This determination was based on the characters centrality to the plot and the role they played. The major male character is the hero and the major female character is the heroine. Both male and female characters portrayed villains. These categories emerged during the two viewings to transcribe the verbal text. The titles of the films and the description of the stories on the back of the videotape boxes also provided support for the determination of these major characters and their centrality to the plot. Animals are central to many of these films; therefore if they were the major characters their gender related attributes and behavior were also coded.

The films and transcriptions were also analyzed for emerging themes that related to gender. Based on the results of a pilot study of five Disney films by this author, romance and heterosexual couplings were considered possible emergent themes.

### **Character Traits and Indicators**

Initially in the research process undertaken here the coding frame did not include a specific list of traits for coding the characters in the films. As the list of traits associated with the characters in the films studied grew beyond manageability it was determined a specific list of traits would need to be developed. A list of traits was developed from the gender typifications identified in the literature review.

The literature review in Chapter 2 indicated that women are portrayed in the media with traditional stereotyped feminine traits. These stereotyped traits included: affectionate, emotional, expressive of romantic interests and sensitive (Busby 1974; Streicher 1974), crying (Signorielli 1997), passive (Busby 1974; Levinson 1975; Mooney and Brabant 1990; and Williams et al. 1987), and nurturing (Kortenhaus and Demarest 1993; Signorielli 1989; Williams et al. 1987). Males were portrayed in the media with traditional stereotyped masculine traits. Males were portrayed as assertive and athletic (Streicher 1974), independent (Kortenhaus and Demarest 1993; Streicher 1974; and Williams et al. 1987), as

having power and prestige (Signorielli 1989), and as using physical force or brawn (Signorielli 1997).

A pilot study conducted by this researcher revealed themes related to traditional stereotyped gender roles and traits. A narrowing process of the list of traits revealed in the literature review and the themes discovered in the pilot study resulted in the selection of eight character traits for coding characters in the present study. These traits were put into matrix form (Appendix C) to code the hero, heroine, and villain in the sixteen films studied.

The following indicators were used to code the character traits for the male heroes, female heroines, and villains.

**Passive:** compliant, accepting without objection

**Aggressive:** bossy, controlling, acting in hostile manner or physically fighting

**Dependent:** needs to be rescued or taken care of

**Independent:** self-reliant, does not need others

**Emotional:** crying

**Unemotional:** does not cry

**Romantic:** expresses interest in opposite sex, flirting, kissing, marriage, offspring

**Unromantic:** no interest in opposite sex expressed

Counts were not made of how many times a character expressed or was portrayed as possessing a specific trait. If a character was portrayed with the indicator for a trait the box was marked on the matrix. It was possible for a

character to be coded as both passive and aggressive and dependent and independent. A character coded as emotional (cried) could not be coded as unemotional (did not cry). The same was true for characters expressing interest in the opposite sex and coded as romantic. Once a character expressed this interest they could not be coded as unromantic or having no interest in the opposite sex.

### **Data Reduction and Analysis**

Data analysis was both inductive and deductive and was accomplished through content analysis. This analysis included the verbal text and visual representations in the films. Data from the coding frames were displayed in tables to discover patterns and differences between male and female characters. This also allowed for the determination of changes in the presentation of the characters over the years. Data were displayed in tables for male and female characters for the following: number of male and female characters, emerging categories of characters, in-home labor, out-of-home employment and societal power. Indicators used to determine character traits were also displayed in tables. These tables are presented in the findings.

Physical appearance indicators were put in a cross tabulation format to determine if patterns or themes were present with respect to how the characters were physically presented. This was also used to identify the emerging categories of characters. A cross tabulation format was also used to identify

patterns of character traits. It was expected that other categories for analysis would emerge during the research process.

### **Reliability of the Coding Frame**

Inter-coder reliability was utilized to assess the reliability of the coding frames and for confidence in the accuracy of the findings for physical appearance and character traits (Appendix C & D). This process incorporated the use of a cross tabulation format for the second coder. A non-traditional college student was recruited for this task. Physical appearance and character traits were singled out for reliability checks because they comprise the most subjective portions of this study. In-home labor, occupation and societal power could be substantiated by the words in the verbal text transcriptions. The coder was provided with a definition of each item on the coding frame. Reliability coding was completed for the male hero, female heroine, and the villain in one-half or eight of the films in this study. Inter-coder reliability resulted in 93% agreement on physical appearance and 92% agreement on character traits. This falls with the recommended guidelines of 90% agreement recommended by Miles and Huberman (1994:64).



## CHAPTER 5

### Findings

The five classifications used by Busby (1974) to define sex-role standards in network children's programs were used for analyzing the gender content in the Disney films. The five areas include: physical appearance, character traits, in-home labor, out-of-home employment, and societal and familial power. The sixteen films studied tend to follow the gender messages and stereotypes in the literature reviewed. In some instances the Disney characters crossed traditional gender lines. This was most evident in character traits.

#### Male-Female Ratios

Males outnumber females in all but one of the films when all the characters are considered including the animals (Table 2). The number of males to females ranged from almost equal in *Cinderella* (1950) to a high of 12 males to 1 female in *Aladdin* (1992). The remaining films had a ratio of males to females within this range with the exception of *Bambi* (1942). In *Bambi* (1942) there were 6 male and 8 female characters.

The ratio of males to females hit a high of more than 6 to 1 in 1967 with *The Jungle Book* and then appears to decline for the next two and a half decades until it hit an all time high of 12 male characters to 1 female character in *Aladdin* (1992). The three most recent films in this study (*The Lion King* 1994,

*Pocahontas* 1995 and *Toy Story* 1995) indicate the number of male characters is still more than twice the number of female characters.

**Table 2** NUMBER OF MALE AND FEMALE CHARACTERS

Film	Males	Females
Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs	10	2
Pinocchio	11	2
Bambi	6	8
Cinderella	9	8
Peter Pan	13	11
Lady and the Tramp	23	10
101 Dalmatians	19	10
The Jungle Book	20	3
The Aristocats	17	6
The Fox and the Hound	8	3
The Little Mermaid	8	3
Beauty and the Beast	10	4
Aladdin	12	1
The Lion King	9	4
Pocahontas	10	3
Toy Story	14	5

Seven of the films in this study have a narrator at some point in the story.

Males narrate six of the films in this study. *Cinderella* (1950) is the only film narrated by a female. Male characters who appear in three of the films also narrate the story. These include: Jiminy Cricket in *Pinocchio* (1940), Bagheera in *The Jungle Book* (1967), and Pongo in *101 Dalmatians* (1961). The narrator at the beginning of *Aladdin* (1992) is shown as a character but is not a character that plays a role in the actual story.

## Categories of Female Characters

Five categories of female characters emerged during this study (Table 3). These categories emerged based on the role the character plays and their physical appearance. The first category is the female heroine who is the central female character in the story. This category includes: Snow White, Cinderella, Wendy, Pocahontas, Jasmine, Ariel, and Belle. These characters are central to the story and are young and attractive.

**Table 3** CATEGORIES OF FEMALE CHARACTERS

<b>HEROINES</b>	<b>YOUNG ATTRACTIVE</b>	<b>YOUNG UNATTRACTIVE</b>
Snow White	Nakoma	Anistasia
Cinderella	Blue Fairy	Drucella
Pocahontas	Tinkerbell	
Jasmine	Tiger Lily	
Ariel	Mermaids	
Belle	Mary Darling	
Girl from man village	Anita	
Wendy Darling	Darling	
<b>MATRONLY OLDER WOMEN</b>		<b>UNATTRACTIVE OLDER WOMEN</b>
Madame		Stepmother
Fairy Godmother		Queen
Nanny		Ursula
Mrs. Tweed		Cruella DeVille
Carlotta		Aunt Sarah
		Indian Woman

A second group of females are young and attractive but play a supporting role to the central female character. These characters include: Nakoma, the Blue Fairy, Tinkerbell, Tiger Lily, the girl from the man village, Mary Darling, Anita, Darling, and the mermaids. Anita in *101 Dalmatians* (1961) and Darling in *Lady and the Tramp* (1955) are the central female character but are considered supporting female characters because the stories in these two films are more about the animals involved, Pongo and Perdita and Lady and Tramp, respectively.

The third category of female characters is also made up of supporting characters but are matronly type older females. These characters include: Madame, the Fairy Godmother, Nanny, Mrs. Tweed, and Carlotta. Madame and Mrs. Tweed are the major female characters in *The Aristocats* (1970) and *The Fox and the Hound* (1981) respectively. But again the story is more about the animals in the stories. These women are portrayed as kind, gentle and caring.

The fourth category of female characters is women who are old and unattractive. These characters are considered to be in a supporting role as the stories in which they are portrayed are more about other female characters whether the characters are portrayed as people or animals. This category of female characters includes: Cruella DeVille, Ursula, the Queen, the stepmother, Aunt Sarah, and the Indian woman. None of these women possess attractive character traits, as they are loud, rude, and abrasive. Some of them also play the villain in the story. A fifth but small category includes young unattractive

females. This category includes only two characters, Anastasia and Drucella, the stepsisters in *Cinderella* (1950). These females are also considered supporting characters.

### **Physical Appearance of Female Characters**

The heroines and the majority of the young supporting female characters are attractive, shapely, petite, and feminine looking: Most of the heroines have long hair (Ariel, Jasmine, Pocahontas, Belle, and the girl from the man village) while two (Snow White and Cinderella) have shorter hair. Snow White's hair is about chin length and Cinderella's hair is about shoulder length. The hair colors cover the spectrum of hair color: blonde, brunette, red, and black.

These female characters are thin with hourglass figures and developing or developed breasts. Wendy and the girl from the man village are exceptions to having breasts, but they still have the shape of an hourglass with a narrow waist and defined hips. The young female characters all appear to be well under the age of thirty. Ariel is actually 16-years-old as she makes reference to her age in *The Little Mermaid* (1989). Most of the female heroines appear to be a couple years older or a couple years younger than Ariel.

Belle, Jasmine, Pocahontas and Tinkerbell appear to be a couple years older as do Snow White and Cinderella. Wendy and the girl from the man village appear younger. In *The Jungle Book* (1967) Mowgli is ten-years-old and the girl from the man village appears to be about the same age. In *Peter Pan* (1953)

Wendy appears to be about 14-years-old but she still sleeps in the nursery and is referred to as a child.

These characters have small facial features such as their nose, mouth, chin, cheeks, and ears. The eyes are small on some of these characters such as Snow White, Pocahontas, Cinderella, Nakoma, the Blue Fairy, Mary Darling, Anita, and Darling. The other characters have big bright eyes such as Jasmine, Ariel, Belle, Tinkerbell, Tiger Lily, the girl from the man village and the mermaids. These characters' big eyes are differentiated from the old unattractive women by the colors used around the eyes. The unattractive females with large eyes have dark colors (such as black, gray or blue) or heavy makeup on their eyelids or underneath their eyes such as eye shadow or eyeliner. The color and makeup is exaggerated and over done in such a way as to make them look gaudy and unattractive. The young females also have very distinguishable eyelashes, which is not the case with the older women. The eyelashes are not always present or at least not as visible in the older women. Eyelashes are one feature that distinguishes the female animal characters from the male animal characters.

All of the matronly older supporting females are presented as fat with the one exception of Madame who is tall and thin. These women are presented with white or gray hair that is either short or worn up on top of their head. These women have small facial features, wrinkles, and are soft spoken.

The women presented as old and unattractive are equally divided between thin (the stepmother, the Queen, and Cruella DeVille) and fat (Aunt Sarah,

Ursula, and the Indian woman). Some of these women are portrayed with small facial features but with an elongated face. The others have large exaggerated facial features such as a large mouth, big teeth or a big nose. In some cases the nose is long and pointed and in other cases the nose is pug like. Some of these women have fat cheeks or double chins.

In either case, the makeup and colors previously mentioned are used in such a way as to make them unattractive. Lines on the face extending from the nose down the sides of the mouth are another way these women are made to look unattractive. These lines are not visible on the faces of the young attractive females whether they are the heroine or a supporting female character. The voices on the old unattractive females are loud, sinister or deeper than the voices of the young attractive female characters or the matronly older women.

The hairstyles of these women are not flattering. Cruella DeVille and Ursula have hair that looks like it hasn't been combed in a month. It looks as if they did try to comb it they may not be able to get the comb through their hair. The other women wear their hair up on their head.

The two stepsisters in *Cinderella* (1950) are portrayed very similar to the old unattractive supporting female characters. Even though Anastasia and Drucella are young and somewhat thin, they also have unattractive faces and exaggerated body parts. These girls have the lines on their faces the other young female characters are lacking. These two females also have big noses,

big feet and protruding butts. Their voices are loud and have a screeching sarcastic tone to them.

With the exception of Jasmine, all the female characters are wearing dresses. Jasmine is wearing balloon pants with a shirt that extends just below her breasts so that her stomach is fully visible. The female characters also wear earrings, necklaces, and bows in their hair. The animal characters in some films are distinguishable as females by their clothing or adornments such as the female mice in *Cinderella* (1950) wearing aprons, dresses or scarves and Marie in *The Aristocats* (1970) wearing a pink bow.

### **Categories of Male Characters and Physical Appearance**

Six categories of males emerged during data analyses, which include: the heroes, young supporting males, fathers, villains, children/boys, and a group of males who serve as an assistant to another male character (Table 4). There are similarities in the physical appearance of the heroes and the young supporting males and between the fathers, villains, and group of male assistants. The male children do not lend themselves to the same analysis as the adults as they all appear to be 10-years-old or younger and are for the most part nondescript. One exception to this is Lampwick in *Pinocchio* (1940) who displays some of the same unattractive features as the villains and the group of male assistants.



other male characters in these two categories, he proves to be the exception to the generalizations of the physical appearance of these men.

The category of heroes includes the Prince in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), the Prince in *Cinderella* (1950), the beast as the Prince in *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), Eric, Aladdin, John Smith, and Peter Pan. The facial features of these characters are proportionate meaning that their eyes, nose, mouth, teeth and ears fit the size of their face and head. These features are not exaggerated or shaped as unattractive. These men also have a chiseled look to their face with a strong jaw line. They do not wear facial hair such as a beard or mustache and their eyebrows appear well groomed. Peter Pan is once again the exception as he does have pointed ears. Just as some of the young attractive female characters are presented with small eyes and some with large eyes so too are the attractive young male characters. The males with big eyes have eyes that are bright and appealing not deep, dark or beady as the males in the other categories.

The heroes are presented with what could be described as an average build meaning not too thin and without a protruding stomach. These characters are tall, have broad shoulders, big chests, narrow waists and what appear to be muscular arms and legs. Once again Peter Pan is the exception as he is thin and does not appear to be muscular even though his physical activity indicates he may be strong. Peter Pan also does not appear to be tall even though Wendy

indicates he is taller than she expected. In the film he does not appear to be much taller than Wendy.

The young supporting male characters include: Gaston, Kocoum, Thomas, Jim and Roger. While these characters appear to be in the same age range as the heroes not all of them display the same physical appearance. Gaston and Kocoum possess proportionate features, are of average build, are tall, have broad shoulders, and appear muscular. Thomas fits this description as well but doesn't appear as big. This may be because he is presented next to bigger male characters such as John Smith and Governor Ratcliff. Jim and Roger are portrayed differently in that their height is the only characteristic they have in common with the other male characters in this category. These two men are thin, Jim has facial hair and Roger has an exaggeratedly big nose. Roger is still described as handsome by Pongo, the narrator of *101 Dalmatians* (1961).

The characters portrayed as fathers include: Powhatan, the Sultan, Maurice, the Chief, King Triton, George Darling, Geppetto, and the King. None of these characters have the exact same characteristics as each other nor do they appear to be physically similar or similarly attractive as the heroes. The physical characteristics are the contributing factors to these characters not being attractive. These physical characteristics vary and include: tall, short, facial hair, lack of facial hair, exaggerated features, proportionate features, balding, or a full head of hair. The one feature all the fathers have in common is that they are old. Powhatan provides the major exception to the variety of physical features

because age is the one factor that differentiates his appearance from that of the heroes.

The physical appearance of the villains and the group of male assistant characters contain the same variety of physical features as the group of father characters. The category male assistants have one feature in common which is older age. Two features common to all eight villains are that they are all old and they all have exaggerated facial features. Most of the villains are tall and fat, and some have broad shoulders. Others are tall, thin and lanky. The exaggerated features include one or more of the following: fat cheeks, long faces, double chins, slanted eyes, overly large eyes, bushy eyebrows, large teeth, a big mouth, or an oversized nose or ears. At least half the villains have facial hair - a beard, a mustache or both.

### **In-Home Labor**

The sixteen films analyzed were coded for what types of in-home labor were performed and whether that labor was performed by a male character or female character. In-home labor is any activity related to the upkeep of the home or yard. Overall there is not a great deal of in-home labor portrayed in these films but the number of female characters performing in-home labor far outweigh the number of male characters doing so (Table 5). The ratio of female chores to male chores is more than 6:1.

**Table 5**                      **Characters by Gender Performing In-Home Labor**

<b>Film</b>	<b>Female Characters</b>	<b>Number of Chores</b>	<b>Male Characters</b>	<b>Number of Chores</b>
Snow White and The Seven Dwarfs	Snow White	4		
Cinderella	Cinderella Mouse	7 1		
Peter Pan	Mary Darling Wendy	1 1	George Smee	1 1
Lady and the Tramp	Darling Aunt Sarah	2 1		
101 Dalmatians	Anita Nanny	1 4		
The Jungle Book	Girl	1		
The Aristocats	Duchess	1	Edgar	2
The Fox and the Hound	Mrs. Tweed	4	Slade	1
The Little Mermaid	Carlotta	2		
Beauty and the Beast	Belle Mrs. Potts	1 1	Lumiere	1
Aladdin	Jasmine	1		
Pocahontas	Pocahontas Nakoma	1 1		
Toy Story	Andy's mom Sid's mom	3 1		
<b>Total Chores Performed</b>		<b>39</b>		<b>6</b>

Twenty different female characters performed twenty different tasks for a total of thirty-nine chores compared to five male characters performing four different in-home chores for a total of six chores. The in-home labor the male characters portray are serving food, feeding the dog, ironing, and cooking. In one instance the serving of food was on a ship and all the characters were men. The ironing and cooking were performed by Edgar the butler in *The Aristocats* (1970) and could be considered part of his job. In another instance the cooking is implied. In *The Fox and the Hound* (1981) the dog Chief makes a comment about Slade cooking grits and fatback but he is never actually shown in the kitchen or cooking.

**Table 6** **IN-HOME LABOR**

<b>FEMALES</b>		<b>MALES</b>
Sweep	Decorate tree	Serve food
Dust	Gather water	Feed dog
Laundry	Knit	Iron
Cook	Feed animals	Cook
Bake	Serve food	
Build fire	Gather Food	
Iron	Give birthday party	
Wash windows	Carry wood	
Bathe animals	Feed baby	
Wash Floors	Put kids to bed	
Sew	Rock baby	
Baby sit	Push baby in stroller	

The female characters engage in a wider variety of in-home chores traditionally considered women's work (Table 6). These chores include:

sweeping, dusting, washing windows and floors, cooking, baking, washing clothes, ironing, collecting wood, building a fire, gathering food and water, sewing, knitting, feeding animals, feeding or serving male characters, decorating the Christmas tree, and bathing the pets. Other tasks depicted are related to child care and include feeding the children, rocking a child in a chair, pushing a baby stroller, babysitting, and putting the children to bed.

In *Cinderella* (1950) Cinderella is treated as a maid in her own home. Her stepmother and both stepsisters order her to do everything around the house. They do nothing for themselves. Once when Cinderella tells her stepmother she has the work done she is told to do it again. In *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) Snow White is also treated as a maid in her own home. When she finds the dwarfs' cottage, she immediately goes to work cleaning. Later when Snow White wants to stay with the dwarfs, she offers to keep house and cook for them in exchange for a place to stay. These two characters perform a large portion of the in-home labor cited.

### **Out-of-Home Employment**

The characters in the films were coded for out-of-home employment. The coding was based on the character having an occupation or job title. Those characters having a title of royalty were not included in coding out-of-home employment. These characters are included in the coding for societal power based on their titles such as King, Queen, Prince or Princess.



that would be considered white-collar middle class jobs. George Darling makes a reference to not being able to show his face in the office if he misses a party but there is no mention of what type of office so one can only assume this may be considered a white-collar position.

Some of the characters depicted in occupations are not what can be considered good role models or positions to which people would actually aspire. The sailors on the ship in *Pocahontas* (1995) are planning to take gold and land from the Indians and will kill them to do so. The Huntsman in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) has to take orders from the Queen and is to kill Snow White and return with her heart. In *Pinocchio* (1940) the coachman is buying children, and in *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) the head of the asylum is going to take Maurice to the asylum and lock him up so that Gaston can pursue Belle's hand in marriage.

Only one female character in the sixteen films is indicated to have held a position and it was in the past. In *The Aristocats* (1970) George Hautecourt mentions that Madame was at one time in Carmen. She admits that it was her favorite role and she reminisces about celebrating her grand premiere. The other occupations depicted for female characters are a stretch as employment. In *Toy Story* (1995) Bo Peep tends sheep. In *101 Dalmatians* (1961) Cruella DeVille is a thief who steals puppies to make fur coats. Tinkerbell, the Blue Fairy and the fairy godmother all "do" magic which are their jobs, but these are not



positions of employment for which people really train or aspire. There were no other female characters portrayed as having or having had a job or occupation.

### **Societal Power**

Characters were coded based on the societal or familial power they hold which means the character holds an important position or has authority or status. Most of the characters coded as having societal power were coded as such due to the titles they hold (Table 8). These titles in and of themselves are indicative of position, status and authority. The male characters with a title or societal power outnumber the female characters by more than five times.

**Table 8 CHARACTERS HOLDING SOCIETAL POWER**

<b>MALES</b>		<b>FEMALES</b>
Prince (Snow White)	Royal Vizier	Princess: Snow White
Bambi: Prince	Indian Chief	Princess: Tiger Lily
Stage: Prince of Forest	Chief Powhatan	Princess: Jasmine
Prince (Cinderella)	King's Messenger	Queen: Stepmother
Prince Eric	Governor Ratcliff	Madame
Prince/Beast	Captain Hook	
Prince Achmed	Captain John Smith	
Prince Ali (Aladdin)	Colonel Harty	
Prince Simba	Sergeant (Toy Story)	
King (Cinderella)	Policeman	
King Louie	Dogcatcher	
King Triton	Sheriff (Woody)	
King Mufasa	Shere Khan	
Sultan	Peter Pan	
Grand Duke	Gaston	

Four female characters have societal power based on a title of royalty. The four characters are Snow White who is a Princess, Snow White's stepmother the Queen, Tiger Lily a Princess, and Jasmine a Princess. The Queen exhibits her power when she orders the Huntsman to kill Snow White. Jasmine also utilizes her power when she orders the guards to "unhand him, by order of the Princess" (*Aladdin* 1992). Madame in *The Aristocats* (1970) holds societal power by the nature of her wealth. This woman owns stocks and bonds, a mansion and a country chateau, jewelry, and at the end of the film establishes a home for cats.

Most of the male characters possessing societal power do so by the nature of a position of title. Not all of these titles are those of royalty although they are the majority. Of the male characters holding societal power, 16 of them have a title of royalty. These include eight characters as a Prince, four as Kings, and one each as Grand Duke, Sultan, Royal Vizier and the King's messenger in *Cinderella* (1950) who has the authority to try the glass slipper on every maiden in the land. Ten male characters hold titles that indicate status, authority or position but are not considered royalty. These include two captains (one of sailors on a ship and one of the pirates also on a ship), two Indian chiefs, and one each of Governor, Colonel, Sergeant, sheriff, policeman and dogcatcher. The dogcatcher is included because in *Lady and the Tramp* (1955) the dogcatcher does have authority in the lives of the dogs, and most of the story is about the dogs.

Five male characters are portrayed as having societal power but it is not due to their having a position with a title of royalty or authority. In *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) Gaston appears to have quite a bit of status and authority. The town people sing about Gaston and how great he is and people fall all over themselves for him. He also is able to get the head of the asylum to lock up Maurice in an effort to convince Belle to marry him. In *The Jungle Book* (1969) Shere Khan has societal power as everyone in the jungle fears him.

Peter Pan is the third character with status and authority but without title. Everyone in Never Land looks up to Peter Pan and looks to him for help but they also do what he asks and follow his orders. The exception is Captain Hook who doesn't hold Peter Pan in esteem but fears his ability to feed him to the crocodile. In *101 Dalmatians* (1961) Pongo has societal power, as he is able to enlist the help of the other animals to help find the missing puppies. On the journey to find the puppies, Pongo appears to have status among the other animals, as they are all willing to help in any way they can. In *Toy Story* (1995) Woody is the leader of the toys. Woody conducts the meetings of the toys in Andy's room and assigns tasks to each toy. Woody does have the title of Sheriff but this does not appear to be what gives him status and authority. It appears to be based on his leadership abilities.

Three male characters hold titles previously mentioned; sergeant, colonel and captain, but it is not evident they have any societal power in the sense it is used here. These three characters are all in *101 Dalmatians* (1961) and include

Captain a horse, Colonel a sheepdog, and Sergeant Tibs a cat. These characters are referred to by the names Captain, Colonel and Sergeant but they do not appear to have any more status or authority than any other character in the story. Another male character not included as having societal power is Chief, a dog in *The Fox and the Hound* (1981). It appears this is the name Slade gave his dog. Two female characters have names that may indicate royalty but these two characters were not counted as females with societal power. These two characters are the cows Duchess and Queenie in *101 Dalmatians* (1961). Once again these appear to be only a name and there are no indicators of societal power associated with these characters.

### **Familial Power**

Familial power is not evident in all the films studied. In the films where no family power is evident there are mothers, fathers, or both, but the characters show no exercise of authority in that position of power. The films where this is the case include: *Pinocchio* (1940); *Lady and the Tramp* (1955); *The Aristocats* (1970); *The Fox and the Hound* (1981); *Beauty and the Beast* (1991); and *Toy Story* (1995).

The number of male characters and female characters displaying familial power are almost equal. Male characters display instances of exercising familial power in six of the films. Four of the fathers exercising power are doing so with their daughters. Powhatan orders his daughter Pocahontas to stay away from

the white men; King Triton orders Ariel to stay away from the surface of the water and the humans; the Sultan is forcing Jasmine to marry; and George Darling lays down the law when he decides Wendy must move out of the nursery and grow up.

In *101 Dalmatians* (1961) Roger makes the decision they will keep the puppies and stands up to Cruella Deville as Anita tries to be nice. Pongo also has familial power and earns status from Roger due to his fertility. In two situations Roger comments about the number of puppies he thinks Pongo has sired when he says "Fifteen puppies! Why Pongo boy, that's marvelous. It's fabulous. Why you old rascal." Roger refers to him as an old rascal again at the end when they count 101 puppies. Mufasa exercises authority over Simba, his son, when he orders him to stay away from certain areas beyond the borders of the Pride Lands.

Female characters exercise familial power in only four of the stories. The Queen in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) is also Snow Whites' stepmother. She forces Snow White to work as a scullery maid in her own home. In *Cinderella* (1950) the stepmother and the two stepsisters order Cinderella to do all the housework and to wait on them constantly. At times the stepmother takes control but at other times the stepsisters are allowed to do what they want toward Cinderella such as ripping her dress to shreds before the ball.

In *Bambi* (1940) Thumper's mother is constantly reminding him about what is appropriate and inappropriate to say. At times she asks Thumper "what

did your father say?" but the father is never seen in the movie so Thumper answers to his mother. In *The Jungle Book* (1967) Winifred, the mother elephant and wife of Colonel Harty, stands up to her husband and threatens to take over command of the herd. Colonel Harty backs down and does what Winifred wants.

### **Emerging Themes**

Numerous themes emerged during the analysis of the data. The verbal text and the physical action in the films reveal views of women and their place or role in society. Themes that became apparent about the views of women include terms to refer to women, the importance of their physical appearance and the importance of that in attracting a male, the role of women in society, women's emphasis on attracting a mate and marriage, what women look for in men, and indicators of character traits presenting female characters as emotional, passive and dependent.

### **Terms Used to Refer to Women**

Throughout the films studied, women are referred to with terms other than their names (Table 9). Terms used to refer to a particular individual female character include: "babe" (*Pinocchio* 1940), "baby" (*Lady and the Tramp* 1955; *The Aristocats* 1970), "sweetheart," "dearie," "honey," "dames" and "trick" (*Lady and the Tramp* 1955), "dolls" (*Toy Story* 1995), "shrew" and "pussycat" (*Aladdin* 1992) "chicks" (*Aristocats* 1970), "wench" (*Peter Pan* 1940), and "duckie" (*101*

*Dalmatians* 1961). One specific word, “little,” is used repeatedly when speaking of female characters. This was evident in *Lady and the Tramp* (1955) “little blubinski,” *101 Dalmatians* (1961) “little tarter,” *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) “little wife,” *Toy Story* (1995) “little lady,” and *Aladdin* (1992) “little woman.”

**Table 9**

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**TERMS REFERRING TO FEMALE CHARACTERS**

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Babe	Little lady
Baby	Little tarter
Chicks	Little wife
Dames	Little woman
Dearie	Pussycat
Dolls	Shrew
Duckie	Sweetheart
Honey	Trick
Little blubinski	Wench

---

**Descriptors of Female Characters**

Women were not only referred to with labels but also in descriptive terms (Table 10). These include “difficult and stubborn” (*Beauty and the Beast* 1991), “crazy woman driver,” “mad old lady,” and “sweet simple,” (*101 Dalmatians* 1961), “full of wicked wiles” (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* 1937) “girls talk too much” and “a jealous female can be tricked into anything” (*Peter Pan* 1953), “picky” (*Aladdin* 1992), “foolishness” (*Pocahontas* 1995), “damsels in distress”

(*Aristocats* 1970), and “bungle-headed,” “meddlin” and “empty headed” (*The Fox and the Hound* 1981).

**Figure 10**

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**DESCRIPTORS USED TO DESCRIBE WOMEN**

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Bungle headed	Fragile
Crazy	Full of wicked wiles
Damsel in distress	Jealous
Delicate	Mad
Difficult	Meddling
Empty-headed	Picky
Foolish	Talk too much

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**Physical Appearance Descriptors: Female Characters**

The importance of the physical appearance of the female characters is evident in both the actions they perform and the verbal comments made by other characters regarding the female characters' appearance. In at least half of the films studied at least one female character is described as beautiful. Snow White's beauty surpasses that of the Queen. This angers the Queen to the point of trying to have Snow White killed. One of the dwarfs describes her as “beautiful, just like an angel” while another dwarf comments that “she's mighty pretty” (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* 1937). The narrator in *Cinderella* (1950) describes her stepmother as “bitterly jealous of Cinderella's charm and beauty.” In *101 Dalmatians* (1961) Pongo is searching for a mate for Roger



when he notices Perdita. He describes her as “the most beautiful creature on four legs.”

In *The Aristocats* (1970) O'Malley offers to help Duchess and the kittens get back to Madame. He tells them “helping beautiful dames...is my specialty.” In *The Fox and the Hound* (1981) Vixey is sitting in the sunlight and Big Mama tells her not to move because she looks beautiful. When Tod sees Vixey for the first time he comments that she is “the most gorgeous, most beautiful.” In *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) Gaston describes Belle as “the most beautiful girl in town and that makes her the best.” The beast makes the remark “she’s so beautiful.” In *Aladdin* (1992) Aladdin describes Jasmine as “smart and fun and beautiful...she’s got these eyes that just...and this hair, wow, and her smile.” In *The Little Mermaid* (1989) Eric doesn’t actually describe Ariel as beautiful but says she “had the most beautiful voice.”

Female characters are described in other terms equated with physical appearance. In *The Little Mermaid* (1989) Ursula wants Ariel’s voice and tells her that she will still have her pretty face and that she should not underestimate the importance of body language. As Ursula tells her this she shakes her body seductively. In *101 Dalmatians* (1961) Pongo sees no reason Roger doesn’t “deserve an attractive mate.” As women walk by the house Pongo watches them through the window and rates them as too short, too fat, and too fancy.

Tony the chef advises Tramp that Lady is “a pretty, sweet kid...you take Tony’s advice and settle down with this one” (*Lady and the Tramp* 1955). In

*Bambi* (1942) the owl describes mating to Bambi, Thumper and Flower. Mating is referred to as “twitter patted.” The owl tells them:

Nearly everybody gets twitter patted in the springtime. For example you’re walking along minding your own business. You’re looking neither to the left or to the right when all of a sudden you run smack into a pretty face. You get weak in the knees, your head’s in a whirl, then, you feel light as a feather. Then before you know it you’re walking on air. And then you know what? You’re knocked for a loop and completely loose your head.

At this point the owl was not referring to one particular female character as having a pretty face but the next thing that happens is the female skunk and rabbit appear and Flower and Thumper get “twitter patted.”

The verbalizations about beauty and pretty faces are not the only indicators of the importance of physical appearance. A number of the female characters engage in actions that also indicate the importance of their physical appearance. Snow White’s stepmother the Queen seeks assurance from the mirror that she is the fairest in the land. The Queen becomes jealous of Snow White’s beauty, as does Cinderella’s stepmother. Both women are so jealous they go to great lengths to undermine their stepdaughters, the Queen wants Snow White dead and Cinderella’s stepmother goads the stepdaughters into tearing apart the dress Cinderella is going to wear to the ball.

The Queen is not the only character to consult a mirror about her appearance. Jasmine, Madame and Tinkerbell are also shown in front of the mirror checking themselves out. Madame touches up her hair just before George Hautecourt is to arrive. While Tinkerbell is standing on a mirror she looks at

herself, runs her hands simultaneously down both sides of her body to her hips then holds her hands out in front of her in such a way as to show the measurement of her hips.

Clothes are also important to appearance. In *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) Snow White runs inside when the Prince rides up on his horse. Snow White looks at her ragged clothes as if that is the reason she ran away from the Prince. In *Cinderella* (1950) the stepmother will allow Cinderella to attend the ball if she “can find something suitable to wear.” When the fairy godmother measures Cinderella for a dress, she wants something that will go with her eyes, something that is “simple but daring too.” In *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) Belle is supposed to have dinner with the beast. The wardrobe is trying to convince Belle to dress for supper. When the wardrobe offers Belle a dress she tells her “you’ll look ravishing in this one.”

### **Physical Appearance Descriptors: Male Characters**

Comments on physical appearance are not limited to the female characters. Female characters are also interested in male characters who are handsome as is indicated by the verbal remarks they make. In *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) the dwarfs want Snow White to tell them a true love story. As she starts to tell the story the dwarfs interrupt with questions about whether the Prince is big, tall, strong, and handsome. Snow White responds that there is nobody like him anywhere. She had seen the Prince one time and the

only word he said was “wait.” After the clock strikes midnight and Cinderella must leave the ball everything reverts to its previous state. As Cinderella sits with the mice she recounts to them her evening with the Prince telling them “he was so handsome” (*Cinderella* 1950).

In *Pocahontas* (1995) Pocahontas takes John Smith to meet Grandmother Willow (a tree). Upon this first meeting Grandmother Willow gives her approval by telling Pocahontas “he has a good soul and he’s handsome too.” In this same film Nakoma tells Pocahontas she thinks Kocoum is handsome. In *101 Dalmatians* (1961) Pongo is describing the bachelor life Roger leads and how he needs a mate. Pongo describes Roger in the following manner. “As humans go Roger was a rather handsome animal in his own way.”

In some situations the male character is told directly he is handsome. In *Lady and the Tramp* (1955) Peg walks up to Tramp and says “hi handsome” and does so with a seductive voice. In *The Aristocats* (1970) Abigail and Amelia (the geese) tell Duchess “your husband is very charming and handsome.” At the end of the movie Madame says, “Duchess, it’s wonderful to have you all back.” As she combs O’Malley’s hair she continues, “this young man is very handsome. Shall we keep him in the family? Of course we will.” In *Aladdin* (1992) Jasmine is on her balcony as Aladdin is going to leave and she tells him “good night my handsome prince.”

The fact that a male character is handsome matters more to some female characters than to others. In *The Fox and the Hound* (1981) Big Mama tells

Vixey she is looking for Tod who is new in the forest. Vixey acts coy and responds "Oh, new? Ah, well, what does he look like?" Big Mama responds, "Oh, he's young, about your age, and handsome." Vixey takes notice and replies "Handsome? Oh, gee, ah, he sure sounds nice." In *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) Belle doesn't feel she fits in and there is no one to whom she can talk. Maurice (her father) responds "How about that Gaston? He's a handsome fellow." Belle replies "he handsome all right, and rude and conceited...he's not for me."

Two situations were noted in which some other descriptor rather than handsome was used to describe the physical appearance of a male character. Bambi was described as "cute" by all the animals that came to see him when he was born. The second situation was in *The Little Mermaid* (1989) when Ariel saves Eric from drowning. After she has him to safety she notes, "he's breathing, he's so beautiful."

### **Rescues: Female Characters**

Many of the major female characters are rescued in some way and some more than once (Table 11). Snow White has to be saved three times, once by the Huntsman who spared her life and told her to run; once when the dwarfs came to save her from the Queen posing as a hag but they were too late; and a third time when the Prince gives her love's first kiss to save her from eternal sleep. Bambi saves Faline twice, once when wolves are chasing her and another time during mating season when a stag is pushing her into the trees.

**Table 11**                      **CHARACTERS WHO ARE RESCUED**

<b>FEMALES</b>	<b>MALES</b>
Snow White	Pinocchio
Faline	Bambi
Cinderella	Mowgli
Wendy	O'Malley
Lady	Tod
Duchess	Eric
Ariel	Beast
Jasmine	Aladdin
Belle	Simba
Nala	John Smith
Bo Peep	Geppetto
Tiger Lily	Maurice
Tinkerbell	Buzz
Perdita	Woody

The mice rescue Cinderella when her stepmother locks her in the attic. She is rescued again when the Prince marries her and saves her from a life of servitude. Peter Pan rescues Wendy on three occasions. Twice he catches her as she is falling; once when the lost boys shoot her down and again when Captain Hook makes her walk the plank. Peter also has to get Wendy away from the mermaids when they try to drown her. Peter Pan rescues Tiger Lily and Tinkerbell from Captain Hook.

In *Lady and the Tramp* (1955) Lady is rescued by Tramp when dogs chase her and get her cornered. Lady is rescued again when Tramp tricks the beaver into getting the muzzle off her. In *The Aristocats* (1970) O'Malley comes to the rescue to get Duchess and the kittens back home. During the trip O'Malley rescues Marie when she falls in the river and again when she falls from the back

of a moving truck. Ariel is also rescued more than once. Eric rescues her when Ursula takes her voice, gives her legs, and she washes ashore. King Triton tries to rescue her when Ursula holds a pitchfork against her but Ursula turns him into a creature. Aladdin must rescue Jasmine twice. The first time he comes to her aid when she steals from a vendor in the marketplace and he convinces the vendor she is crazy. Aladdin comes to the rescue again when Jasmine is going to be forced to marry Jafar.

In *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) the beast must rescue Belle when she falls through the ice and the wolves are after her. In *The Lion King* (1994) Mufasa saves Nala and Simba from the hyenas but she would not have been in the situation in the first place if it had not been for Simba. Simba comes to the rescue of the female lionesses when he returns to the Pride Lands because Scar is starving the animals to death. In *Toy Story* (1995) Woody must save Bo Peeps' sheep.

In *101 Dalmatians* (1961), Pongo and Perdita search for the kidnapped puppies. Along the way Perdita states "Pongo, oh Pongo. I'm afraid we're lost. Oh what will we do?" and "Oh Pongo, how will we get to the van? Pongo I'm so afraid." It is questionable whether this is really a rescue situation but Perdita presents herself as helpless and if it were not for Pongo the viewer doesn't know if Perdita could get the puppies home on her own. There are no situations in which female characters have to be rescued in *Pinocchio* (1940); *The Jungle Book* (1967); *The Fox and the Hound* (1981) or *Pocahontas* (1995).

### **Rescues: Male Characters**

There are five films in which males do not need to be rescued. These include: *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937); *Cinderella* (1950); *Peter Pan* (1953); *Lady and the Tramp* (1955); and *101 Dalmatians* (1961). Male characters did need to be rescued at some point in the remaining eleven films. Some of the male characters need to be rescued more than once and some as many as four times. Aladdin had to be rescued four times, which accounts for the most rescues of one single male character. Three male characters, Mowgli, Maurice, and Tod, are rescued three times each. Pinocchio, Simba and Woody are each rescued twice. The male characters who only need to be rescued once include Bambi, O'Malley, Eric, the beast, John Smith and Buzz Lightyear.

At times female characters are responsible for the rescues, in fact ten times in seven of the films. The female characters who rescue male characters are the Blue Fairy, Abigail and Amelia the geese in *The Aristocats* (1970), Mrs. Tweed, Ariel, Belle, Jasmine, and Pocahontas. Belle, in *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) is responsible for rescuing her dad Maurice three times. The first time she sacrifices herself to get Maurice freed by the beast. She rescues him again so he won't freeze to death in the forest and again when Gaston is going to have him hauled away to the asylum. Belle also rescues the beast by falling in love with him, which results in his not having to live the remainder of his life as a hideous looking monster. Pocahontas is another female character who is willing to sacrifice herself to save a man. When John Smith is to be hanged, she throws



herself on him and states "if you kill him you will have to kill me too" (*Pocahontas* 1995).

In *The Little Mermaid* (1989) Ariel saves Eric from drowning when he is thrown under the water during a hurricane. O'Malley is also saved from the water by the geese in *The Aristocats* (1970). It is questionable if it would have been necessary had the geese not caused the situation to begin with when they intentionally break the tree branch on which he is hanging. The remaining rescue situations involving a female character as the rescuer include: the Blue Fairy rescuing Pinocchio when Stromboli locks him in a cage; Mrs. Tweed saves Tod from being shot by Slade twice in *The Fox and the Hound* (1981); and Jasmine saves Aladdin from the guards by ordering them to release him.

Male characters are also responsible for rescuing other male characters. Jiminy Cricket saves Pinocchio from being turned into a donkey, a stag saves Bambi from the burning forest, Baloo and/or Bagheera save Mowgli from Ka the snake, the mangy monkeys and the vultures, and Copper saves Tod twice when Slade is going to shoot him. Abu saves Aladdin when he is caught stealing. Aladdin is also saved by the Genie twice, once when he is going to drown and the other time when he is in the cave. Simba is saved from the hyenas by Mufasa and is taken in by Pumba and Timon when he is alone with nowhere to go. In *Toy Story* (1995), Woody and the other toys rescue Buzz Lightyear when he is strapped to Sid's rocket and about to be blown into space. Buzz Lightyear

returns the favor when Woody needs help getting out from under the toolbox and when he needs help getting away from Sid's dog.

### **Emotional Characters**

Females are traditionally stereotyped as emotional. Any emotion expressed outwardly could technically be considered being emotional. For example, if a person is angry and while experiencing this emotion yells or throws something, they are showing emotions or being emotional. The traditional stereotype of females as emotional relates more to crying and the idea that big boys and men do not cry or they are sissies. The films studied provide numerous instances of characters being emotional when crying is used as the indicator. In fact, instances of crying are noted in fourteen of the sixteen films analyzed. What is interesting is that while thirteen females were coded as crying, so too were nine male characters (Table 12). In some instances two or more female characters cry in the same film. This is also true for the male characters.

### **Crying: Female Characters**

In two situations the female character is seen crying when she thinks the person she loves is dying or dead. Jasmine cries when she thinks Aladdin is dead thinking he was killed by the guards. Belle cries when she thinks the beast is dying as a result of the attack by Gaston and his men.

**Table 12**                      **EMOTIONAL CHARACTERS: CRYING**

<b>FEMALES</b>	<b>MALES</b>
Snow White	Pinocchio
Cinderella	Geppetto
Ariel	Bambi
Belle	Captain Hook
Jasmine	Smee
Pocahontas	Mowgli
Nakoma	Baloo
Lady	Simba
Tinkerbell	Dwarfs
Perdita	
Nanny	
Cruella DeVille	
Mrs. Tweed	

In *Pocahontas* (1995) Nakoma and Pocahontas both have a tear in their eye when Pocahontas and John Smith say goodbye and he leaves. In this case the tears are over having to give up something, mainly letting a loved one go. This same situation is played out in *The Fox and the Hound* (1981) when Mrs. Tweed must release Tod into the wild. While she does this she reminisces about how they came together and how she loves him but must let him go. In *101 Dalmatians* (1961) Nanny cries when the puppies are stolen. Perdita cries earlier in the story when she thinks Cruella DeVille is going to get the puppies. These two characters both appear to be crying over a loss or the fear of a loss of loved ones.

In *The Little Mermaid* (1989) Ariel cries when her dad breaks a statue of Eric and forbids her from going near the humans. It is difficult to determine

whether she is crying because she is angry, feels she has lost the one she loves or whether it is self-pity. In *Peter Pan* (1953) Captain Hook bates Tinkerbell into getting angry because Peter Pan brought Wendy to the island. Tinkerbell is already jealous so Captain Hook proceeds to make her angry by going on about Wendy coming between her and Peter Pan. In *Lady and the Tramp* (1955) Lady is jealous of the other female dogs that others have associated with Tramp. Even though Lady is jealous and expresses this in her sarcastic tone, she has also just been released from the dog pound. At this point it is unclear whether she is crying because of the jealousy, embarrassment or self-pity.

Three other female characters, Snow White, Cinderella, and Cruella DeVille, appear to cry as a result of self-pity. It is possible there could be another explanation or reason for the emotional outburst other than self-pity in each of the following situations. In *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) Snow White falls to the ground crying after she runs through the forest. She is running because the Huntsman tells her of the Queen's plan to have her killed and that she better leave and never return. It is possible she is crying out of fear and not actually feeling sorry for herself.

In *Cinderella* (1950) Cinderella gets ready for the ball with the help of the mice and the birds. Her stepmother and stepsisters do not think she will be attending so when she appears ready to go they rip her dress to shreds. Cinderella runs to the garden crying. Again, she could be crying because she is angry but it also could be self-pity over the lost opportunity to meet the Prince. In

*101 Dalmatians* (1961) Cruella DeVille drives off the road while in pursuit of the puppies and ends up down below a bridge. She is obviously angry but whether she is crying out of anger or because of self-pity over losing the puppies cannot be determined.

### **Crying: Male Characters**

As previously mentioned, there are instances when male characters also cry. Five male characters cry because someone they love has died or they believe has died. In *The Lion King* (1994) and *Bambi* (1942) Simba and Bambi respectively, have lost a parent. Simba loses his father Mufasa and his uncle Scar leads him to believe he is responsible for the death. Bambi cries when his mother is shot.

In three films the male characters cry when they believe someone they love is dead but as it turns out they are not. At the end of *Pinocchio* (1940) Geppetto believes Pinocchio has drowned. In *The Jungle Book* (1967) Mowgli and Bagheera think Baloo has been killed after his fight with Shere Khan. Mowgli is crying while Bagheera is eulogizing Baloo. Baloo himself is so moved by what Bagheera says about him that he also cries. In *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) the dwarfs cry when they think Snow White is dead not realizing she is only in eternal sleep and that it can be reversed with love's first kiss.

Two male characters shed tears when they are afraid. Captain Hook cries when he thinks Peter Pan is going to feed him to the crocodile. Captain Hook has good reason to be fearful as the crocodile ate his arm and that is the reason he wears a hook. In *Pinocchio* (1940) Pinocchio cries when he is locked in a cage by Stromboli. In both of these situations the character gets themselves into the situation that makes them fearful.

The last male character to cry is Smee in *Peter Pan* (1942). Captain Hook is goading Tinkerbell about Wendy coming between her and Peter Pan. When Tinkerbell starts to cry so does Smee. It is possible Smee is a sentimental person and feels sorry for Tinkerbell. The two films in which neither a male nor female character cries are *Toy Story* (1995) and *The Aristocats* (1970).

### **Female Dependency on Males**

Women are traditionally stereotyped as dependent on others to take care of them. The idea that a woman needs a man to take care of her is evident in some of the films studied. In *The Little Mermaid* (1989) King Triton tells Sebastian that Ariel “needs someone to watch over her, to keep her out of trouble.” In *Aladdin* (1992) the Sultan wants to make sure that Jasmine is “taken care of, provided for.” In *Pocahontas* (1995) Powhatan, her father, states, “She needs a husband to be safe from harm.”

In *Lady and the Tramp* (1955) Boris and Bull (two dogs) are having a conversation about Tramp. Boris is talking about Tramp “meeting someone

different. Some delicate, fragile creature who's giving him a wish to shelter and protect." Bull responds with, "Like Miss Park Avenue" referring to Lady. Boris says, "could be." In *The Aristocats* (1970) Madame decides she and Duchess should keep O'Malley in the family because they "need a man around the house."

In the case of Jasmine and Pocahontas their fathers, the Sultan and Powhatan respectively, have decided whom their daughters should marry. Neither girl is interested in their fathers' choice for a husband. Not only do some of the films indicate women need men to take care of them, there are also indicators of what some of the men think a woman or wife should be or do. In *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) Gaston pursues Belle for his wife. He makes a statement about "my little wife massaging my feet while the little ones play on the floor...we'll have six or seven...strapping boys like me."

In *Aladdin* (1992) Jafar is trying to force the issue that Jasmine must marry him because a suitable suitor has not been found. Jasmine is shocked by this idea. When Jafar sees her reaction he comments, "you're speechless I see, a fine quality in a wife." In *The Little Mermaid* (1989) Ursula wants Ariel's voice. Ursula tells her she will still have her looks and body language. Ursula leads Ariel to believe that having a voice isn't that important anyway and tells her:

The men up there don't like a lot of blabber. They think a girl who gossips is a bore. Yet on land it's much preferred for ladies not to say a word...They're not all that impressed with conversation. True gentlemen avoid it when they can. They dote and swoon and fawn on a lady who's withdrawn and she who holds her tongue gets her man.

There are other situations that indicate the views men have of women. These situations deal with what is appropriate behavior for women or what is considered women's work. In *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) Belle loves to read. Gaston takes a book from Belle and says, "how can you read this, there's no pictures. It's not right for a woman to read. As soon as she starts getting ideas, thinking..." In *The Aristocats* (1970) O'Malley takes Duchess and the kittens to his home. O'Malley realizes it is not what they are used to but Duchess is polite and tells him, "all it needs is a little tidying up and ...a little feminine touch."

In *The Jungle Book* (1967) Winifred tells her husband Colonel Harty he needs to help find Mowgli. Winifred threatens to take over the herd and he responds with "What? A female leading my herd, preposterous!" In *The Lion King* (1994) Scar says, "It's the lionesses job to do the hunting." In *Cinderella* (1950) a female mouse tells a male mouse "leave the sewing to the women, you go get some trimming."

In *The Lion King* (1994) Timon and Pumba befriend Simba. When Nala shows up and they watch the interaction between Simba and Nala, Timon comments that if they "fall in love...our trio is two. His carefree days with us are history, our pal is doomed."

### **Bravery and Strength: Male Characters**

Men are traditionally stereotyped as brave, strong and aggressive. The physical actions of men serve as indicators of these character traits. In a



majority of the films studied male characters engage in fighting. In *Bambi* (1942) a stag is trying to push Faline into the forest during mating season. She is yelling for Bambi so he fights the stag and the stag leaves. In *Peter Pan* (1953) Peter Pan engages in a sword fight with Captain Hook. In *Lady and the Tramp* (1955) Lady is on the streets alone and is out of her element. A pack of dogs come after Lady and have her backed into a corner. Tramp sees what is happening and fights the dogs until they leave.

In *The Jungle Book* (1967) Mowgli stands up to Ka (the snake), Baloo (the bear), and Shere Khan (the tiger). Mowgli is not afraid of any of the animals, especially Shere Khan. He fights with Shere Khan, hitting him with a club and ties a burning stick to Shere Khan's tail. In *The Fox and the Hound* (1981) Tod fights a bear to protect Vixey. In *The Little Mermaid* (1989) Eric and King Triton fight with Ursula under the sea. Ariel even got in on this fight and Ursula was eventually killed by the bow of a ship. In *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), Gaston and his men go to the castle to kill the beast. The beast and Gaston fight. Gaston falls from the top of the castle and it appears he dies.

In *The Lion King* (1994) Nala convinces Simba to return to the Pride Lands. When he returns he confronts Scar about the death of Mufasa. Scar and Simba get into a fight and Scar falls over a cliff. In *Pocahontas* (1995) the white men and the Indians plan to fight each other. This includes both John Smith and Kocoum. Kocoum gets shot and killed by Thomas but John Smith never actually fights. Smith shows his bravery when he is going to be hanged. He tells

Pocahontas "I've gotten out of worse scrapes than this." In *Toy Story* (1995) Buzz and Woody fight with each other but later become friends.

Male characters show their physical strength in ways other than fighting. In *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) the Prince shows his strength when he carries Snow White from the coffin and puts her on the horse. He also lifts the dwarfs up to Snow White so she can kiss each one. In *101 Dalmatians* (1961) Pongo exhibits strength when he climbs into the back of a moving van. O'Malley does almost the same type of action in *The Aristocats* (1970) when he jumps into the back of a moving truck after saving Marie. In *Toy Story* (1995) Woody shows physical strength by climbing up the side of the bed and Buzz shows it when he chases the moving truck.

### **Bravery and Strength: Female Characters**

Female characters demonstrate their courage in less physical ways. In *The Fox and the Hound* (1981) Mrs. Tweed is not afraid of Slade and stands up to him. Mrs. Tweed actually takes Slade's gun and shoots the radiator in his truck. In *The Lion King* (1994) Nala leaves pride rock and goes out on her own to find food. She attacks Timon and Pumba until she finds out they are friends of Simba.

In three situations daughters stand up to their fathers or oppose them because of a man. In *Aladdin* (1992) Jasmine stands up to the Sultan when he is

trying to find a husband for her. The law says she must be married by her next birthday, which is in three days. Jasmine tells her father:

The law is wrong...I hate being forced into this. If I do marry I want it to be for love...I've never done anything on my own... I've never had any real friends...I've never even been outside the palace walls...maybe I don't want to be a princess anymore.

Jasmine eventually sneaks out of the palace and runs away. She then meets Aladdin in the marketplace.

In *Pocahontas* (1995) Powhatan wants Pocahontas to marry Kocoum. Pocahontas wants no part of this. She tells her father "I think my dream is pointing me down another path." She also wants to be able to choose her own husband. The matter is dropped at that point. Later in the story Pocahontas stands up to her father again when they are going to hang John Smith. Pocahontas tells her father "if you kill him you will have to kill me too." When Powhatan orders her to stand back, she refuses because she loves him and tells her father this. Her father relents and with his club raised above his head says: "My daughter speaks with the wisdom beyond her years. We have all come here with anger in our hearts. But she comes with courage and understanding."

In *The Little Mermaid* (1989) Ariel swims above the water and her father King Triton finds out about it. He yells at Ariel and refers to the humans as barbarians and dangerous. Ariel stands up to her father telling him they are not barbarians. She says to her father "I'm 16-years-old. I'm not a child..." Her father yells and orders her to stay away from the surface. In *The Jungle Book* (1967)

Winfred stands up to her husband Colonel Harty. She threatens to take over command of the herd if he doesn't help find Mowgli.

In *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) Belle stands up to Gaston. Gaston tells Lefou that Maurice (Belle's father) is a "crazy old loon." Belle hears this and tells Gaston "don't talk about my father that way...my father is not crazy, he's a genius." Belle also stands up to Monsieur d'Arque (the head of the asylum) when he tries to take her father. Belle tells him "my father's not crazy...I won't let you..." Belle stands up to the beast when she refuses to come to dinner with him. She tells him she is not hungry and says she will stay in the room forever.

### **Flirting**

*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) is the first full-length animated feature film by The Walt Disney Company. In this film Grumpy, one of the dwarfs, makes known his view of women when he makes the following comments:

She's a female and all females is poison. They're full of wicked wiles...I'm warning you, you give them an inch and they'll walk all over you.

Grumpy admits he doesn't know what wicked wiles are but he is against them. It becomes apparent that even though he can't explain to the other dwarfs what wicked wiles are, he is able to recognize them. Snow White requires the dwarfs to wash before eating and all of them but Grumpy decide to do so to please her.

At this point Grumpy comments "hah, her wiles is beginning." Grumpy's statements may have been a preview of what was to come in future films.

It seems that "wicked wiles" are what women do to get men to do what they want. In other words, women flirt to get what they want and what they want are men. Women engage in various behaviors that could be considered flirtatious. The behaviors include acting coy, tilting the head, glancing away but then returning the gaze, looking back over the shoulder while turned away from the target of the flirting, batting one's eyelashes, and invading another character's personal space with or without physical contact. In other words flirtatious behaviors are romantic overtures.

Numerous characters flirt in the films studied. It appears this behavior is unique to the female characters. In *The Little Mermaid* (1989) Ariel is given instructions from Ursula and Sebastian on how to get a man. After Ursula tells Ariel "don't ever underestimate the importance of body language," she shakes her body to show Ariel how to do it. Because Ariel has to get Prince Eric to kiss her in order to get her voice back Sebastian tells her "you've got to look your best. You've got to bat your eyes, pucker up your lips."

In *The Aristocats* (1970), Madame and Duchess flirt with George Hautecourt and O'Malley respectively. Madame prepares for George when she looks in the mirror and says "we must both look our best for George." After George arrives he kisses her hand and she giggles as she responds with "you're a shameless flatter George". Duchess flirts with O'Malley by licking her paws,

priming her face, looking at him sideways with her head tilted, and batting her lashes. Later when they are with the scat cats, she plays the harp and sings a song about "if you want to turn me on."

In *Bambi* (1940), Thumper, Flower and Bambi are warned about "twitter patting" and what will happen when they run into a pretty face. Immediately after this warning a female skunk comes out of the grass and lays it on thick. She giggles, tilts her head, waves, bats her eyelashes and kisses Flower. Next, a female bunny is shown and Thumper stops in his tracks and watches as she strokes her ears, waves her ear, bats her eyelashes, turns her tail toward him and looks back over her shoulder at him, bats her eyelashes some more then says "hello." Faline moves in toward Bambi and licks (kisses?) his face. In all three instances the male characters, Thumper, Flower and Bambi, get dazed and their eyes roll backwards. Flower turns red in the face and follows the female skunk into the grass while giggling. After Thumper's eyes get dazed, he falls on his face. In the case of Bambi, Faline funs off and he follows her as a song about romance begins playing.

In *The Fox and the Hound* (1981) Vixey positions herself in just the right way so when Tod sees her she is at an advantage. Vixey sits with her back toward Tod then coyly looks back over her shoulder. When Tod tries to tell Vixey his name, his eyes get dazed and roll backwards. At this point Boomer makes a comment that "it looks like the farm boy is making it big with her." After awhile

Vixey makes the first physical move when she nuzzles her head under Tod's chin.

In *The Jungle Book* (1967) the girl from the man village flirts with Mowgli while she is fetching water. This girl strokes her hair, tilts her head and looks sideways. While Mowgli is watching her, he falls out of a tree and she giggles, obviously aware he was watching her. As she walks away with the pot of water on her head, she turns and looks back at Mowgli to make sure he is watching. As she does this she lets the pot of water drop. Baloo and Bagheera are watching this and Baloo remarks, "she did that on purpose." Bagheera responds "obviously". Mowgli fills the pot with water, offers it to her and as she walks away looking at him, Mowgli gets a lovesick look on his face, smiles, and follows the girl to the man village. It becomes obvious she wants a man (or in this case a ten year-old boy) because as she collects water she sings about having a husband and a daughter who will fetch the water.

In *Lady and the Tramp* (1955) Lady and Peg both flip their ears (as if it were hair) and strut. Peg also wiggles her butt as she talks about how bad she has it for Tramp. After Tramp and Lady eat spaghetti, stroll around town in the moonlight, and put their paw prints inside a heart on the sidewalk, Lady turns her head and acts coy. In *Toy Story* (1995) Bo Peep flirts with Woody after he saves her sheep. After she thanks him she raises her eyebrows and in a sultry, seductive voice says, "what do you say I get someone else to watch the sheep tonight?" Woody just laughs so Bo Peep says "remember I'm just a couple of

blocks away” and walks away swinging her hips. In *Cinderella* (1950) Cinderella’s two stepsisters very unsuccessfully try to flirt when they meet the Prince. They are not at all good at flirting and the King is even disgusted by what he sees.

There are instances of flirting where the female character being flirtatious is not directing her actions toward the male character in whom she has a romantic interest but toward another male character in order to get something she wants. In *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) Belle flirts with Cogsworth to get him to take her to the part of the castle she has been ordered to stay away from. She builds him up with flattery and tickles what would be his stomach had he not been turned into a clock. Snow White does the same type of thing with the dwarfs and kisses each one of them on the head when they leave for work. Snow White also acts coy with the Prince when she runs from him at the beginning of the story. She runs into her home but then looks at him from the balcony then closes the drapes.

In *Aladdin* (1992) Jasmine flirts with Jafar to get Aladdin and herself away from him. She tells Jafar “I never realized how incredibly handsome you are...you’re tall, dark, well dressed...you’ve stolen my heart.” She even goes so far as to kiss him.



## Heterosexual Couplings

Romance, coupling or mating are the end result in almost all of the films studied (Table 13). In all cases the couples are heterosexual. In some films the hero and heroine get married at the end of the story. In other cases the couple is together but the viewer does not know whether they marry. In the stories where the hero and the heroine are animal characters their coupling is indicated by the presentation of offspring.

**Table 13** HETEROSEXUAL COUPLINGS

FILM	MALE	FEMALE
Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs	Prince	Snow White
Bambi	Bambi	Faline
	Thumper	Female Rabbit
	Flower	Female Skunk
Cinderella	Prince	Cinderella
Lady and the Tramp	Tramp	Lady
101 Dalmatians	Pongo	Perdita
The Jungle Book	Mowgli	Girl fetching water
The Aristocats	O'Malley	Duchess
The Fox and the Hound	Tod	Vixey
The Little Mermaid	Eric	Ariel
Beauty and the Beast	Prince	Belle
Aladdin	Aladdin	Jasmine
The Lion King	Simba	Nala
Pocahontas	John Smith	Pocahontas
Toy Story	Woody	Bo Peep

## Human Couples

In seven of the sixteen films studied human characters are paired as couples. Four of these couples get married at the end of the film but in other

films it is only implied. In *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) Snow White dreams of the day her Prince will come and they will "be happy forever." When she tells the dwarfs a true story about love they continually interrupt with questions about whether she is the princess and if the Prince said, "I love you" and if he stole a kiss. Snow White responds to these questions with "he was so romantic I could not resist." As Snow White cooks she sings of the Prince coming, going to the castle and being happy forever, and how in spring she will find love a new and wedding bells will ring. At the end of the film the words are shown on the screen, "and they lived happily ever after."

In *Cinderella* (1950) the Prince approaches Cinderella at the ball and they dance. They go out on a patio and continue dancing with no one else around. At this point a song about "so this is love...this is the miracle I've been dreaming of" begins to play. Cinderella and the Prince start to kiss as the clock strikes midnight. As Cinderella runs off the Prince yells, "wait, come back, please come back. I don't even know your name." The next morning the King is ready to make arrangements for the wedding and declares it a national holiday. The Grand Duke informs the King that the girl got away but that the Prince

...loves her. He won't rest until he finds her. He's determined to marry her...The Prince sire, swears he'll marry none but the girl that fits this slipper.

After the Grand Duke and the King's messenger find Cinderella and the slipper fits there are wedding bells. Cinderella is in a wedding dress, and she and the

Prince get in a carriage. After they are shown kissing the words "and they lived happily ever after" appear on the screen.

In *The Little Mermaid* (1989) Ariel saves Eric from drowning. Ariel sings "I know something's starting right now." Ursula is watching this and laughs as she says, "I can't stand it. It's too easy. The child is in love with a human. And not just any human, a Prince." King Triton notices Ariel has "been acting peculiar...daydreaming [and] singing to herself." Ariel finds the statue of Eric that sank with the ship. She pretends he is asking her to run away with him. When King Triton happens upon this scene and yells at Ariel about staying away from humans she yells "daddy I love him."

When Ursula takes Ariel's voice she gives her three days to get the Prince to fall in love with her and she will remain human. Ariel has to get Eric to kiss her. It can't be "just any kiss" it has to be "the kiss of true love." Back at the castle Eric informs Grimsby that, "I'm going to find that girl and I'm going to marry her." At the end of the story King Triton realizes Ariel "really does love him" and gives her legs. Eric walks toward her on the beach, kisses her, and wedding bells sound. Eric and Ariel are married and sail off on a ship. They are shown kissing at the end.

In *Aladdin* (1992) Jasmine tells her father she wants to marry for love. After she meets Aladdin he realizes she has to marry a prince and he thinks of himself as a fool for thinking about her. Aladdin is obviously interested in Jasmine because when the old man confronts him in the dungeon Aladdin says,

“but the law says only a prince can...” After Aladdin meets the Genie and the Genie asks him what he wants most Aladdin replies, “well there’s this girl...” The Genie can’t make anyone fall in love so Aladdin has the Genie turn him into a prince so he will be in contention for Jasmine’s hand in marriage. When Aladdin meets the Sultan he convinces the Sultan to “just let her meet me. I will win your daughter.”

After Jasmine figures out Aladdin is the boy she met in the marketplace and cools down after being lied to, she puts her head on Aladdin’s shoulder. He takes her back to the castle and they say their goodnights. Before he leaves they kiss. At the end of the story the Sultan declares that the Princess can marry whom she wants. Jasmine wants Aladdin. In the last scene Jasmine and Aladdin are shown in different clothing but it is difficult to tell if they are wedding clothes. Aladdin is wearing a robe for royalty but Jasmine is not wearing a traditional wedding dress. They kiss and fly off on the magic carpet.

In *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) Belle doesn’t want to get to know the beast. After he shows her the library she warms up to him. As the beast is taking a bath to prepare for dinner Lumiere tells the beast that there will be music and romantic candlelight. He tells the beast “when the moment is right you will confess your love.” After Belle and the beast eat they are outside under the stars and the beast holds her hand. Belle admits she is happy there with him. The beast allows Belle to go to her father and they return to the castle together when Gaston and his men go after the beast.

After the fight Belle thinks the beast has died and she cries "please don't leave me, I love you." The beast is transformed back into a Prince and after they look into each other's eyes and touch each other's face, they kiss. Fireworks then go off, everything in the castle turns bright, and the appliances turn back into people. It is not possible to tell if Belle and the Prince actually get married but he is in dress clothes and she is in a golden gown. Chip asks Mrs. Potts "are they going to live happily ever after mama?" and she replies, "of course my dear, of course." Belle and the Prince are dancing alone on a big ballroom floor and a crowd encircles the dance floor. It is possible this was the dance at their wedding but the viewer doesn't know for sure as Belle is not in a traditional wedding dress.

In one of the films in this study the hero and heroine are not pictured in a wedding scene but they appear to end up together. In *The Jungle Book* (1967) Mowgli follows the girl to the man village. She had been singing of having a husband and a daughter so one could assume that was why she showed an interest in Mowgli by flirting with him. After Mowgli leaves Baloo says, "he's hooked." Bagheera responds, "it was inevitable Baloo. The boy couldn't help himself. It was bound to happen. Mowgli is where he belongs now."

In *Pocahontas* (1995) the hero and heroine do not end up together. Although they are attracted to each other and have kissed a couple times, they part ways in the end. John Smith was shot and the men need to get him back to England. John Smith asks Pocahontas to come with them to England.

Powhatan tells Pocahontas she “must choose her own path.” She decides her people need her and she will stay. Smith then says, “I will stay with you.”

Pocahontas tells him he needs to go back. She tells him “no matter what happens, I’ll always be with you forever.” At this point they kiss and the white men leave on the boat.

### **Animal Couples**

In the films where the hero and heroine are animals there is no marriage to indicate they end up as a couple. In some of these films the coupling is indicated by the fact that they have borne offspring. In *Bambi* (1942) the animals go to the thicket after Thumper and Flower make a commotion and wake up the other animals. After the animals assemble the Owl says, “Well sir, I don’t believe I’ve ever seen a more likely looking pair of fawns. Prince Bambi ought to be mighty proud.” Flower and Thumper also have baby skunks and bunnies respectively following them. One baby skunk does refer to Flower as “papa.”

In *Lady and the Tramp* (1955) Lady and Tramp have obviously mated as they have four puppies. One puppy looks like Tramp and the other three look like Lady. Trusty and Jock come to visit and Trusty comments, “There’s no doubt about it, they’ve got their mother’s eyes.” Jock responds with “but there’s a little bit of their father in them too.”

At the end of *The Lion King* (1994) Simba and Nala are sitting together and rub faces. Rafiki comes up to them and holds a baby lion cub up in the air.

This and two situations earlier in the story lead the viewer to believe the cub belongs to Simba and Nala, which would indicate they have coupled and mated. Earlier in the story Zazu informed Simba and Nala they are betrothed to each other. Zazu has to explain that it means marriage and they have no choice because "it's a tradition going back generations." When Timon and Pumba witness the interaction between Simba and Nala, Timon comments that he can see what's happening and that "they don't have a clue...they'll fall in love...disaster's in the air."

In *The Aristocats* (1970) Duchess and O'Malley haven't actually had kittens by the end of the story but it is implied that they will in the future. Madame has decided to keep O'Malley in the family to have a man in the house. She instructs George (her lawyer who is writing her will) that he "must be sure to provide for their future little ones." Earlier in the story O'Malley made reference to the idea that the kittens "need a...well a sort of...well a father around." Duchess appears to take this as a proposal of sorts and replies, "Thomas that would be wonderful. But darling, if only I could." O'Malley wants to know why she can't and the reason is because she couldn't leave Madame. As they have this conversation they are sitting next to each other with their tails entwined.

*101 Dalmatians* (1961) is a little different than the other stories because Pongo and Perdita meet and have their puppies early in the story. In *The Fox and the Hound* (1981) Tod and Vixey do not have baby foxes at the end of the story. They still appear to be a couple as they are sitting on a hill next to each

other with their heads nuzzling against each other. At one point in the story Vixey counts to seven when she sees seven baby ducks following their mother. Vixey tells Tod "I think six would be just right." Tod asks "six what?" and Vixey just giggles. She has obviously indicated an interest in having six offspring.

The three remaining movies, *Pinocchio* (1940), *Peter Pan* (1953), and *Toy Story* (1995), do not end with the hero and heroine together although romance is indicated in two of the stories. In *Peter Pan* (1953) Peter Pan does not end up with a female but Tinkerbell must have some romantic interest in Peter Pan or she would not have been so jealous of Wendy.

In *Toy Story* (1995) Bo Peep shows interest in Woody and has tried to get together with him. Woody does not appear to have much interest but may have warmed up to the idea at the end of the story. Bo Peep grabs Woody by the neck with her hook. Woody says, "there's got to be a less painful way to get my attention." Bo Peep seductively wishes Woody a Merry Christmas while she holds mistletoe. When Woody asks, "isn't that mistletoe?" Bo Peep responds "unh huh" then there are giggles and kissing sounds. What actually happens is not seen by the viewer and is left for the viewer to decide.

*Pinocchio* (1940) seems to be the one exception to the theme of romance or coupling. There does not appear to be romantic interests for any of the characters in this story. At the end of the film Figaro (the cat) does kiss Cleo (the fish) but this doesn't appear to be a romantic interlude.



### Changes in the Portrayal of Gender Since Walt Disney's Death

The presentation of male and female characters along with the portrayal of gender roles does not appear to have greatly changed since the death of Walt Disney (Table 14).

**Table 14**      **NUMBER OF CHARACTERS PORTRAYED IN THE THEMES STUDIED BEFORE AND AFTER THE DEATH OF WALT DISNEY**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Films Before Disney's Death</b>	<b>Films After Disney's Death</b>
Ratio of males to females	2:1	3:1
In-Home Labor		
Males	2	3
Females	10	10
Out-of-Home Employment		
Males	13	13
Females	2	2
Societal Power		
Males	16	14
Females	2	3
Familial Power		
Males	2	4
Females	4	0
Emotional		
Males	8	1
Females	7	6
Rescued		
Males	4	10
Females	7	7
Bravery/Strength		
Males	6	8
Females	1	6

The gap between the number of male and female characters narrowed in some of the more recent films but also widen in others. One notable change was

that there are more human or human-like characters. The physical appearance of these characters has not changed. The heroes and heroines are still young, thin and attractive whereas the supporting characters are not.

The portrayal of in-home labor has changed most notably by the lack of characters portrayed as performing home-related chores. In the older films female characters were portrayed as performing many more home-related chores than male characters. No notable changes were observed in the portrayal of women holding jobs or societal power. A decrease in the portrayal of maternal characters was noted, as was an increase in the portrayal of paternal characters.

Changes were noted in the number of male characters portrayed as emotional (crying) but not for female characters. In the films since Walt's death only one male character was portrayed as emotional whereas the number of female characters portrayed as emotional remained about the same. The portrayal of male characters needing to be rescued increased in the recent films but remained the same for the female characters.

Female characters became more independent since Walt Disney's passing yet there was an increase in the references to these female characters needing a male to take care of them. In essence, these characters became more independent but were treated as dependent by the male characters. The final area where no change was noted is the coupling of the hero and heroine and the fairy tale ending of "happily ever after."

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **Discussion and Conclusions**

#### **Introduction**

The gender stereotypes depicted in other forms of mass media and literature are also present in the Disney films studied here. There are some situations where females defy these stereotypes but in most cases they are the exception. The gender imbalances that remain very evident in the films studied are found in the ratio of male to female characters, in-home labor, out of home employment and societal power. Changes in the presentation of female and male characters were found in some character traits especially in the more recent films.

This chapter will discuss how the findings in Chapter 5 support or fail to support the five guiding hypotheses outlined in Chapter 4. Emergent themes discovered during the research process will also be discussed. After revisiting the social construction of gender roles this chapter will conclude with a discussion of the limitations of the present research and suggestions for future research.

#### **Male to Female Ratio**

Even though strides have been made to equal the gap between the number of male and female characters in different forms of media, gaps still

exist. The ratio of male to female characters in the Disney films studied, reflect the research cited in the literature review. The findings presented in Table 2 support the **first hypothesis that the male characters in the Disney films will outnumber the female characters.** The gap between male and female characters in the Disney films in this study still remains high in the recent films. The findings revealed that two of the five films produced in the 1990s still have a ratio of more than 2 to 1. The highest ratio of male to female characters is 12 to 1 in *Aladdin* (1992). Males outnumber females whether the characters are human/human like or animal/object. Males also outnumber females as narrators in these films.

The number of characters presented as human or mostly human (mermaids) and as animals or objects are almost equal; 51% human or human like characters compared to 49% animal characters or objects. These results are similar to what Hoerner found in her study of eleven Disney films. Hoerner (1996) found that animals accounted for almost half (46%) of the Disney characters. Hoerner differed in her coding as she divided humans and fantasy characters such as Ursula who morphs into several different forms i.e., octopus, teenager, and devil. Hoerner coded 38% of Disney characters as humans and 16% as fantasy characters.

The number of male and female characters does not represent reality where the percentage of males and females is almost equal. Male characters have more prominence than female characters in the Disney films studied. The

“wonderful world of Disney” remains a man’s world. As a result of fewer female characters girls are provided with fewer role models.

### **Categories of Female Characters**

Five categories of female characters emerged during data analysis. These five categories are based on physical appearance and the role portrayed in the story. The five categories include: heroines, young attractive females who play a supporting role to the heroine, young unattractive females; matronly older women; and unattractive older females. Physical traits of characters in the Disney films studied follow what has already been found in other venues, the characters with good, positive and socially acceptable attributes are attractive. The heroines are young and attractive. These characters are thin, most have developed breasts, a narrow waist and defined hips giving them an hourglass figure. These characters also have proportionate facial features and are soft spoken. The young and attractive supporting female characters possess the same physical traits as the heroines.

Young and unattractive female characters are presented with the same physical traits as the unattractive older women. Not only are these characters unattractive, they are loud, rude and abrasive. They may be fat or thin, but they have exaggerated features whether they are on the face or body. Dark colors are used on the faces of these women and they are sporting unattractive

hairstyles. These women also possess unattractive character traits as they are mean spirited (the stepsisters) or play the role of villain.

The problem remains that these other categories such as the matronly older women do not play major roles in these stories. This is most likely related to the issue of what people will buy and profit margins. Most people don't want constant reminders of what it means to grow old. The fact is everyone is going to grow older and it doesn't necessarily have to be portrayed as an unpleasant experience. As the baby boom generation continues to age, there will be a larger proportion of older people in society. Children should be presented with positive, strong, independent older characters, especially female characters.

### **Categories of Male Characters**

Six categories of male characters emerged also based on physical appearance and the role they play in the story. These six categories include: heroes, young supporting males, boys/children, fathers, older male assistants, and older male villains.

The heroes correspond to the heroines in that they are physically attractive and good. These male characters are young, tall, strong and muscular. Most of these characters have broad shoulders and none of them wear facial hair such as a beard or mustache. The facial features of these characters are proportionate, all of them have hair, and their eyebrows are well groomed, not bushy or wild as some of the male characters in the other categories. These

men have strong jaw lines and chiseled faces. Just as the heroines, the heroes do not have dark colors on their face, especially around the eyes.

The physical appearance of the characters in the category of boys is not described in the same way as the other characters because they are children. It does not seem appropriate to describe the physical appearance of children in the same way as one describes the older characters whether they are older teenagers or adults. This may be due to the sexual meaning attached to the body as it matures. For the most part, these characters are portrayed as children age four to ten with proportionate body and facial features.

The remaining three categories of male characters (fathers, older male assistants and older male villains) are very similar in their physical appearance. There is no single descriptor that covers the appearance of all these male characters. The physical traits of these characters are exaggerated in some way. These men may appear as short and fat, tall and fat, or tall and lanky. Some of these characters have facial hair such as a beard, mustache or bushy eyebrows. They also have exaggerated facial features, oversized and disproportionate to the face or head size. These features may include their eyes, nose, mouth, ears and double chins. Gaston in *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) is one character that proves to be a major deviation from the physical appearance of the rest of these characters. He is the villain in the story but fits the physical appearance descriptors of the heroes.

One difference between the categories of male and female characters becomes apparent. The female characters who portray the stepmothers of the heroines are the villains whereas the male characters categorized as fathers are a separate category from the villains. The father characters do not try to cause intentional harm to their child. This may be due to the fact that the female villains who try to harm their child are portrayed as the stereotypical “evil” stepmother and thus may not have the maternal instinct or bond to the non-biological child.

### **In-Home Labor**

In-home labor has traditionally been stereotyped as women’s work. The Disney films in this study follow these same stereotyped ways of presentation. The findings presented in tables 5 and 6 support the **second hypothesis that the female characters in the Disney films will be observed participating in more typical stereotyped female activities in the home than will male characters.** The types of household chores portrayed by female characters in these Disney films outnumber those portrayed by male characters 6 to 1. The findings show that more female characters in the Disney films studied performed a wider variety of home-related chores than did the male characters. Twenty different female characters performed in-home labor compared to only five male characters. Overall female characters performed twenty-four different types of chores whereas male characters performed only four different types of chores.



These twenty female characters performed a total of thirty-nine chores compared to the four male characters performing a total of six home-related chores.

Cinderella and Snow White both perform a wide variety of home-related chores. In fact, they both provide the entire upkeep of the homes in which they live and do so without complaint. Snow White also performs the same chores when she lives with the dwarfs as a trade-off for a place to stay. The most recent films from the 1990s overall depict very little in-home labor whether for females or males. In fact, it is almost non-existent in these films.

Signorielli and Lears (1992) found that children's stereotyped attitudes toward chores are positively related to television. The more television children watch, the more likely they are to classify chores based on sex. O'Bryant and Corder-Bolz (1978) found that children classify roles as being for males or females more when they have seen those roles portrayed on television. Based on these results it could be expected children who watch these Disney videos over and over again would tend to do the same thing.

Even though there is much less in-home labor portrayed in the more recent films there should still be concerns about the message presented to children. Because these films are considered timeless masterpieces and are re-released for each generation, young children may not be aware some of these films date back more than sixty years. As a result the viewers of these films only see in-home labor mainly performed by female characters.

## **Out-of-Home Employment**

**The third hypothesis that the female characters in the Disney films will not be portrayed in outside-the-home employment is supported by the findings presented in Table 7. The findings show the range of occupations depicted in the films in this study is much wider for the male characters. Twenty-six male characters were depicted as holding titles of employment while occupations were depicted for only four female characters. Most of the occupations mentioned, shown or depicted by title do not give boys or girls much to which they can aspire. If one considers those occupations also depicted as possessing societal power, there are still not many occupations for female characters. According to Signorielli (1997:1) "adolescent girls form ideas about their own lives by observing how girls and women in the media look and behave, their motivations and their goals, what they do with their time and their lives." The Disney films in this study do not provide many examples of what options are available to women outside of marriage and motherhood. In fact, the portrayal of women in positions outside the home, are almost non-existent. What girls are left with is the dream of romance and marriage.**

The roles of Queen and fairy are not occupations to which girls can actually aspire. The other options based on these films are actress, sheep tender, thief, wife and mother. Girls could aspire to be a princess, but the odds of it actually happening in real life are about zero, especially in this country. As Hillman (1976:4) states "the limited range of occupational roles for women

presents a restrictive, servile view of adulthood to many children...authors are not portraying many females in exciting, prestigious, well-paying jobs. If children's literature is a force in the socialization of youth, this narrow view could severely limit children's aspirations." In these films no women worked for pay. This may be related to the time period in which the stories are set. In feudal societies there is little wage labor. Even so, there is the issue of whether children would actually make this distinction.

The above statement by Hillman (1976) is also true of the occupations presented for men in these stories. Seventeen characters are depicted as royalty such as Kings and Princes, or else men who work for royalty. Since positions of royalty are based on birthrights, they do not provide realistic examples of men holding occupations in this country.

Realistic representations are presented for male characters with much more variety. While there are occupations for males that could be considered prestigious or well paying such as doctor or lawyer, they account for a small proportion of the occupations represented. Other occupations depicted by title hold status by the nature of the title such as Governor or sheriff. There are also occupations that can be considered low status or blue collar including pizza delivery person and dogcatcher. Not all of the occupations portrayed in these films are portrayed in a positive manner as the villains hold some of these positions.

## **Societal Power**

Societal power is another area where male characters outnumber female characters by 5 to 1. The findings presented in table 8 provide support for the **fourth hypothesis that male characters in the Disney films would be portrayed as holding societal power and the female characters would not.** The findings reveal thirty male characters in the Disney films studied hold titles indicating societal power whereas only five female characters held titles indicating the same. Most of the characters with societal power have that status or authority based on a title of royalty such as King, Prince, and Princess. This is true for male and female characters. If only the characters without titles of royalty or royal position are considered, male characters with societal power, status or authority still outnumber female characters by 3 to 1.

In a majority of these films men have status, prestige, and one assumes wealth, due to their position. Most of the female characters in these stories get their sense of identity from men as they dream of the man they will marry. Fairy tales then “are not just entertaining fantasies, but powerful transmitters of romantic myths which encourage women to internalize only aspirations deemed appropriate to our ‘real’ sexual functions within a patriarchy” (Rowe 1989:211).

## **Familial Power**

Familial power is not evident in all the films in this study and not all parental figures portrayed exercise familial power. The number of male and

female characters exercising this power or authority is about equal. Fathers were portrayed as exercising power over their children most of whom were daughters. The fathers who exercised familial power over their daughters include Powhatan in *Pocahontas* (1995), King Triton in *The Little Mermaid* (1989), the Sultan in *Aladdin* (1992) and George Darling in *Peter Pan* (1953). Female characters were portrayed exercising their familial power as wife or mother. These characters include the Queen/stepmother in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), the stepmother in *Cinderella* (1950), Thumper's mother in *Bambi* (1940), and Winifred the mother elephant in *The Jungle Book* (1967). What is interesting is that in the case of the mothers with familial power, there is no male parent in the story. In the case of the male parents with familial power mothers are not present.

Many of the heroes and heroines in these stories have only one parent and in some situations they are orphans. Many of the characters do not have what is considered the "traditional" family, two parents and their offspring. This observation is interesting because one could point to the culture at the time the earlier movies were made to maintain that the gender stereotypes in some fairy tales represent the culture at that time. Yet, the older Disney films do not represent the traditional family of that time. The more recent films, with their lack of maternal characters are no better. The lack of mother figures in these films indicates patriarchal fathers are still dominant and the norm. These fathers are very dominant over their children to the point they want to decide who their

children will or won't marry as was the case with Jasmine, Pocahontas, Ariel and Belle. The lack of mother characters provides an explanation for the equality between male and female characters portrayal of familial power.

### **Villain Character Traits**

The characters portraying villains in the films studied are similar in almost all their personal character traits. Mainly, they have no character. All sixteen of these characters display aggressiveness at some point in the story. This aggressiveness is portrayed by fighting or acting in a hostile manner such as yelling or throwing something. Some of the male villains who displayed aggressive behaviors include Jafar (*Aladdin* 1992), who orders the guards to kill Aladdin, Captain Hook who fights with Peter Pan (*Peter Pan* 1953), Stromboli (*Pinocchio* 1940) who sells boys and locks them in cages, and Governor Ratcliff who fights the Indians in *Pocahontas* (1995). The female villains also displayed aggressive behaviors. The Queen in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) tries to have Snow White killed, the stepmother in *Cinderella* (1950) trips the King's assistant so the glass slipper breaks, Aunt Sarah hits Tramp in *Lady and the Tramp* (1955) and Ursula fights King Triton, Eric and Ariel in *The Little Mermaid* (1989).

Most of the villains are unemotional. Captain Hook in *Peter Pan* (1953) is the only male villain who cries whereas Cruella DeVille in *101 Dalmatians* (1961) is the only female villain who cries.

The majority of the villains are dominant. These characters are controlling, bossy and give orders to others. In a study of five Disney films Henke, Umble and Smith (1996:244) describe the female villains as “magnificent in their strength, presence and rage. Usually they loom large and dark on the screen as they trick, manipulate, and threaten. They control others’ options and access to money, shelter and relationships.” The findings in table 4 indicate almost all these villains have a sidekick or assistant. These characters help the villains do their dirty work. The fact that they need these assistants indicates they are not independent in the sense they are self-reliant. Yet, these characters are independent in the sense that they make their own decisions about how to be devious and then order others to carry out the deed.

None of the villains, whether male or female, express romantic interest. One situation arose that expresses sexual interest but not romance. In *Bambi* (1940) a stag is trying to push Faline into the woods during mating season. Faline doesn’t want to go and yells for Bambi to help. This scene is somewhat disturbing because it depicts the attempt of one character to force sex on another character who doesn’t want it.

### **Male Hero and Female Heroine Character Traits**

**The last hypothesis that male characters in the Disney films will be portrayed with traditional masculine traits and the female characters will be portrayed with traditional female traits** is only partially supported by the

research findings. The data supports this but with three exceptions.

Surprisingly, male characters in the more recent films are portrayed as dependent. Also, almost all the male heroes are portrayed as romantic. In the more recent films the female heroines are portrayed as more independent yet they are still portrayed as dependent. Females are still portrayed as emotional, passive and romantic and males are still portrayed as aggressive and unemotional.

### **Emotional versus Unemotional**

Most of the male hero characters are portrayed as unemotional. The findings in table 12 indicate only four male heroes (Pinocchio, Bambi, Mowgli and Simba) shed tears in the films studied. All four of these characters, whether human or animal, are children. The main reason they cry is because someone has died or they believe they are dead.

The findings in table 12 also indicate twice as many female heroines are portrayed as emotional. Two of these heroines (Belle and Jasmine) cry because someone has died or they think has died. As with the male characters that cry as a result of death or believed death, it is appropriate to express this emotion in this situation. It is more difficult to determine the reason the remaining female characters cry because the internal emotion accompanying the external act of crying must be assumed. The action that triggers the emotion is what has to be considered. It is possible the remaining female heroines who cry do so because they are angry, sad or feeling sorry for themselves. Snow White cries when she



finds out the Queen tried to have her killed, Cinderella cried when her dress was torn to shreds by her stepsisters, Ariel cries when her father orders her to stay away from Eric and Pocahontas cries when John Smith leaves. The point is that female characters are portrayed as more emotional than male characters and cry for a wider variety of reasons. It not necessarily the fact that a character cries that makes them emotional but has more to do with the reason.

### **Passive versus Aggressive**

Most of the male hero characters are aggressive. Some of these male characters act aggressively toward the villain to save the heroine. Bambi had to fight a stag to save Faline (*Bambi* 1942), Peter Pan fights Captain Hook (*Peter Pan* 1953), and Tramp fights a pack of dogs to save Lady (*Lady and the Tramp* 1955). Mowgli puts fire on Shere Khan's tail (*The Jungle Book* 1967) and Tod fights a bear to save Vixey (*The Fox and the Hound* 1981). Hoerner (1996:225) found that the heroes resort "to physical violence to triumph over the villain and is rewarded for his deeds." In some situations the hero ends up as the responsible party for the death of the villain. Others act aggressively to save themselves. Eric is partially responsible for killing Ursula (*The Little Mermaid* 1989), Simba is partially responsible for killing Scar (*The Lion King* 1994), and the beast is partially responsible for the death of Gaston (*Beauty and the Beast* 1991).

Only two female heroines were coded as physically aggressive. Ariel helped fight Ursula (*The Little Mermaid* 1989) and Nala fights with Pumba and

Timon before she discovers they are Simba's friends (*The Lion King* 1994). This is also consistent with Hoerner's research (1996:223), in which she found "male heroes displayed significantly more aggressive behaviors than did female heroes." Female characters are presented as passive but this only appears to be true for the female heroines in the early films. The female characters in the earlier films are inactive in decision-making and unconditionally did what others asked or ordered them to do. This was especially true of Cinderella and Snow White who passively did what others, particularly their stepmothers, ordered them to do. These characters are portrayed as compliant without objection. The one exception is the Blue Fairy in *Pinocchio* (1940).

### **Dependent versus Independent**

One character trait stands out as present in the eight most recent films that is not present in the earliest eight films produced. The findings in table 11 indicate the male heroes in all eight of the recent films are portrayed as dependent because they have to be rescued. Eric was rescued from drowning (*The Little Mermaid* 1989), the beast was rescued from living his life as a hideous beast (*Beauty and the Beast* 1991), Simba was rescued from the hyenas (*The Lion King* 1994), and Aladdin is rescued when Jafar was going to have him killed (*Aladdin* 1992). John Smith was rescued from being hanged (*Pocahontas* 1995), Tod was rescued from being shot (*The Fox and the Hound* 1981), and Woody was rescued from an attack by Sid's dog (*Toy Story* 1995).

This suggests that the traits portrayed by the male Disney characters have changed over time. This also indicates that while these characters are portrayed as independent, these traits do not need to be presented as either/or traits but are dependent upon the situation in which the characters find themselves. This is not true for all heroes in the earlier films. In some cases the hero has to be rescued more than once.

The findings in table 11 also indicate almost all of the female heroines need to be rescued at some point. Twelve of the sixteen female heroines needed help from another character at some point. These characters include: Snow White, Faline, Cinderella, Wendy, Lady, Duchess, Ariel, Jasmine, Belle, Nala, Bo Peep, and Perdita. This makes them dependent on others, yet some of them also exercise independence. This independent attitude also results in their not being portrayed as passive. This is not true of the female heroine in seven of the eight early films.

In the more recent films, those who produce the Disney films not only portray the male hero as more dependent but also portray the female heroine as more independent. Ariel, Belle, Jasmine, and Pocahontas stand up for themselves against men. These female characters want no part of the male character their father wants them to marry. Belle also refuses the beast's order that she join him for dinner. Ariel stands up to her father while defending Eric. Even though she is ordered to stay away from him she still took a chance to stand her ground. Hoerner (1996:223) found the same thing in her observations

noting that “Ariel talked back to her father, and Belle made retorts to the Beast during her forced confinement in his castle.” Nala stands up to Simba and ventures out on her own to find food. Vixey stands up for herself when Tod calls her an “empty-headed female”. The Walt Disney Company is making positive changes to portray the male hero and female heroine on more equal terms. This corresponds to Hoerner’s (1996:224-5) observations. She describes Ariel, Belle and Nala as independent and strong. Hoerner states that they are characters with “problem-solving abilities and actions on a more equal footing with their male peers.”

### **Romantic versus Unromantic**

Two character traits stand out as being common to the majority of female heroine characters. A majority of the heroines flirt and show a romantic interest in the male hero. These female heroines express romantic interest in a male character as evidenced by the outward flirting and the heterosexual couplings. The heterosexual coupling is portrayed through physical touching, kissing, marriage, and offspring. The findings in table 13 indicate the hero and heroine end up together as a couple at some point in the story.

The female characters are the aggressor in these relationships as they are the ones who flirt. This flirting is evident in the physical actions of the female characters. These girls appear to have all the moves such as tilting the head, batting the eyelashes, stroking their hair (or ears in the case of animals) and

acting coy. These female characters put themselves out there indicating to the male characters they are available and willing. This goes against what girls are taught; males are to be the pursuer. Girls wouldn't need a turn-around or Saddle Hawkins dance to make it socially acceptable for them to pursue boys if this were not the case.

Romance is the major common theme in almost all the films in this study. This is true for the male and female characters although the female characters are the ones who pursue the male characters. What stands out most in this theme of romance is how the female and male character meet and fall in love. Lieberman (1989) addressed the issue of courtship and marriage in fairy tales. She refers to marriage as the "fulcrum" of most fairy tales and describes being beautiful and chosen as the reward system in these stories.

The romantic interest expressed by both male and female characters happens almost instantly. In one situation the male and female character kiss before they even know each other's name. In *Cinderella* (1950) the Prince and Cinderella are kissing when the clock strikes midnight. Cinderella comments she didn't meet the Prince and as she runs away the Prince tries to stop her saying he doesn't even know her name. This immediate romantic interest is not unique to this film. Ariel, Jasmine, Snow White and the girl from the man village are in love or in lust after meeting their mate one time. The comments made by these characters indicate the male's physical appearance is an important quality in a person to fall in love with them. Snow White ran away from the Prince the first

time he approached her yet she tells the dwarfs he was so romantic and she sings of marrying him. Ariel rescues Eric then tells her father she loves him. She does not know his name or who he is.

Male characters also express this same love interest almost immediately. In *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) the Prince has spoken one word to Snow White before he kisses her and takes her away to live happily ever after. In *Bambi* (1942) not only does Bambi fall in love with Faline, Thumper and Flower follow the female skunk and rabbit respectively, after the first meeting. Eric is determined to marry the girl with the beautiful voice and he not only doesn't know her name, he doesn't know what she looks like.

The beast is in love with Belle and she with him after a day or two in the castle. Belle doesn't know his name or that he is a prince. Aladdin and Jasmine are in love after spending one day together in the market place and running around town. Tod is so taken with Vixey upon their first meeting that he stutters when he tries to speak. Mowgli exhibits how taken he is with the girl from the man village when he falls from the tree and his eyes get dazed.

It becomes apparent that Disney presents distorted images of love. Love is shown to happen at first sight. The male and female characters in these films base life decisions on superficial qualities such as looks or the sound of a voice. Female viewers are presented with the idea that looks are what count and that a pretty face is all that is necessary to get a husband. If girls are getting these

messages and are led to believe only pretty girls get husbands than the reverse may be true. If one is unattractive don't count on marriage.

The characters never really get to know each other, have no idea about the other characters' personality traits, or their history. This goes against what parents try to teach their children, that getting to know a person is important in a relationship. Society is skeptical of whirlwind romances, instead stressing getting to know someone before making major decisions. Girls equate sex with love so if a male is attractive, she is in love, and it is okay to let the relationship go further. It may be a stretch but in modern times is it any wonder boys and girls see an attractive person, think they're in love and end up with multiple sex partners.

Another issue involved with the heterosexual couplings in these films is the age of those involved. The female characters in these films mostly appear as teenagers. The girl from the man village in *The Jungle Book* (1967) is prepubescent. The male characters on the other hand, appear to be older. These portrayals present the message that women (or girls in this case) marrying older men is socially acceptable. This has been a traditional view in this society while the opposite, older women marrying younger men, has not. Contemporary women are not socialized to marry as teenagers. In fact, it is frowned upon.

Granted these stories are fairy tales and people should be able to fantasize about the romantic aspects, but marriage is a reality for many people and it does not live up to the fantasy presented in these Disney films. These

stories show nothing of what happens after the marriage ceremony. The audience never knows if the female characters marry into a life of servitude as wife and mother or if the rest of their lives live up to the fantasy. Rowe (1989:217) addresses what the female character gains from marriage when she states that "because the heroine adopts conventional female virtues, that is patience, sacrifice, and dependency, and because she submits to patriarchal needs, she consequently receives both the prince and a guarantee of social security through marriage."

A problem with the way marriage is portrayed in these fairy tales is that the story ends after the marriage and the audience is led to believe they live happily ever after. The problem is this is not realistic. Liberman (1989:199) states that the "focus upon courtship, which is magnified into the most important and exciting party of a girl's life, brief though courtship is, because it is the part of her life in which she most counts as a person herself...when fairy tales show courtship as exciting and conclude with marriage...children may develop a deep-seated desire to be courted since marriage is literally the end of the story." These fairy tales present the dream of, or belief in, the "happily ever after" but with a divorce rate in this country of about fifty percent, the "happily ever after" does not exist for half the people who marry.



## **Revisiting the Social Construction of Gender Roles**

The social constructionist approach is concerned with the process of how reality is constructed. The focus is on the interplay of individual actors creating a subjective meaning from the patterned interactions or objective reality. The social construction is a four-phase process that includes externalization, objectivation, internalization and renovation. Objectivation is “the process by which aspects of the social world become “real” to people ... [and] the firmly established patterns of social life that are accepted as social facts” (Kanagy and Kraybill 1999:20). Language allows for the transmission of objectivations and provides meaning for those who receive them.

The construction of gender roles emerged throughout the course of history. Along with the construction of gender roles also came stereotypes of what it means to be male or female and masculine or feminine. Over time these roles and stereotypes were objectified and became accepted as social facts. The acceptance of these roles and stereotypes only serves to reinforce and perpetuate them. Popular culture and more specifically the Disney films are one venue that serves as the social apparatus to transmit these objectivated gender roles and stereotypes.

The Walt Disney Company is not much different than other media sources in the presentation of the typifications and objectivations of what it means to be male or female. Traditional masculine and feminine character traits along with stereotyped gender roles have become institutionalized and comprise a large

portion of the “knowledge” presented in the Disney films. The analysis of the films in this study indicates The Walt Disney Company continues to produce and reproduce patriarchal views of gender roles. Even though some female characters are portrayed in these films as independent, the predominant view is that females still need males to take care of them.

These films are marketed to children who are the intended receivers of the “knowledge” presented in the stories. According to Berger and Luckmann (1966:70) “institutional meanings tend to become simplified in the process of transmission, so that the given collection of institutional ‘formulae’ can be readily learned and memorized by successive generations.”

The patriarchal representations apparent in the Disney films really comes as no surprise considering Walt Disney held very patriarchal views of women and family. The subjective beliefs Walt Disney developed about the roles of males and females in society became objectivated social facts in the films he produced. As objectivations are transmitted to new generations, they must be legitimated or explained and justified. Berger and Luckmann (1966:92) describe the function of legitimation as “to make objectively available and subjectively plausible the ... objectivations that have been institutionalized.” In the Disney films studied here the explanation or justification of the objectivations, are that women (girls) who are young and attractive and possess certain character traits will find a man, couple and live “happily ever after.”

Legitimation requires someone to administrate the process. From 1937 when Walt Disney produced *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (the first full-length animated feature film) until 1967 when *The Jungle Book* (the last film in which Walt Disney had creative input) was released, Walt Disney himself was the administrator of the legitimation process. The “nine old men” Walt Disney picked as his creative team served as the animators or legitimators of the “knowledge” in the films.

Even though women have greatly expanded their roles over the past forty years, it does not mean they are treated the same way as men. Women have moved into positions and roles traditionally held by men yet they are still subjected to differential and sexist treatment. It could be argued that The Walt Disney Company continues to reproduce these gender roles and stereotypes because they reflect what is valued in society. A better explanation is that Walt Disney’s influence is still present in the company today.

Over the years the legitimators and the administrators of this process at The Walt Disney Company have changed but the changes noted in the films are minimal. This is most likely related to the fact that Walt Disney picked his successor. Walt Disney’s brother Roy Disney took control of the company when Walt Disney died. Roy Disney saw to it his son Roy Disney Jr. was appointed to the board of directors, which was also comprised of the “nine old men” hand picked by Walt Disney. The board of directors picked Michael Eisner (who currently serves as the administrator of the legitimation process) to oversee the

company in 1984. At the same time, Roy Disney Jr. who had earlier left the company, returned to oversee the animation department.

These men were able to turn the company around financially which partially resulted from the sale of the full-length animated feature films on home video. This indicates there is a large market in this country for entertainment portraying traditional patriarchal family values. The small differences noted in the more recent films (in-home labor and independent females) serves as an indicator that the legitimators at the Walt Disney Company are very slow in reconstructing roles for their female characters.

### **Conclusions**

The findings in this study parallel those found in other forms of media and those found by other researchers studying Disney films. The ratio of male to female characters and narrators is still heavily weighted toward males. While efforts may be under way to rectify the gap between male and female characters these efforts are slow. Until more female characters are provided as role models for girls, men will appear to be more valued than women.

The physical appearance and the portrayal of female characters as young, attractive and good have not changed since Disney started producing full-length animated feature films in 1937. Older women are still portrayed as unattractive although some are kind and gentle while others are dark and evil. The physical appearance of the male hero is consistent throughout the films studied. The

heroes are portrayed as young, attractive and strong. Once again the message presented is that attractive people have positive traits and that unattractive people don't. In other words, if people want to be happy, they must be attractive. While most other research cited presents the male and female characters as young and attractive or old and unattractive, the present research suggests that male and female characters actually fit into an expanded categorization. This is evident from the five categories of female characters and six categories of male characters that emerged in this study.

The young female heroine characters in this study fall along many of the traditional stereotyped lines but changes are evident. Many of these characters are portrayed as passive, dependent, emotional and romantic. The heroines in the more recent films do defy traditional stereotypes in that they are portrayed as more independent. These female heroines are portrayed as standing up for themselves to male characters. The problem is that these females are still subjected to the stereotyped belief that females need someone to watch over them, take care of them, and provide for them. Disney would do better to eliminate the portrayal of these female characters as passive or dependent and present them as strong and independent. This would provide expanded roles of female characters to the viewers of these films.

The male hero characters are still portrayed as strong, independent and aggressive. One change noticed in the portrayal of the hero is that in the more recent films they are portrayed as dependent in that they need to be rescued. If

children identify with and want to be like characters they see portrayed on television and in movies then the aggressive behaviors of the "good" male heroes should be a concern. One must question if this is the behavior parents want to see their children emulate.

For the most part, the female characters in the Disney films in this study have no family, societal or economic power. This lack of power subjects women to dependency on others. Female characters are over-represented in the number and types of in-home labor portrayed in these films. The opposite is true for out-of-home employment. Males far outnumber females in the portrayal of employment. The portrayal of women performing home-related chores has decreased in the recent films. But, as the female role in the home decreased the occupational roles and status in society or the family have not increased. In fact, options for out-of-home occupations remain almost nonexistent for female characters. The fact that the stories portrayed in these films are more about romance and adventure explains some of this.

As long as the number of male characters continues to outnumber female characters there will remain fewer options in the presentation of female characters. It can be assumed that when there are more female characters they will be portrayed in a wider variety of roles. The lack of female characters portrayed in occupations sends a message that women have no place in the world of work. The world of work presented in the Disney films is a man's world. This lack of power keeps women in their place in the patriarchal societies

presented in the films studied whether that place is in the home or restriction from the world of employment and economic independence.

The male characters are attracted to the female characters whose physical appearance represents the cultural ideal of young, thin, and beautiful. The female characters are aware of how to use their appearance to their advantage. That advantage is the ability to use their looks to flirt and attract men. Heterosexual couplings are presented as the major or main option for women in the "wonderful world of Disney."

Romance and heterosexual couplings are the major themes in almost all the Disney films studied. The female characters initiate these romances when they present themselves as available and interested. This is evident from the flirting. The female characters express interest in older handsome men. Getting to know a person before marriage is not important as love in these films is based on physical appearance. This is true for male and female characters. The idea that marriage results in living happily ever after is a major distortion yet that is the romance of fairy tales.

One purpose of theory in sociological research is to explain what happens and to provide an explanation for why it happens. The social construction of reality is only one theory that could have been utilized to explain the findings in this study. Alternative theoretical perspectives that could have been utilized in this study include a structural-functionalist approach and a feminist conflict approach.

A structural-functionalist approach would argue that traditional masculine and feminine gender roles and traits are functional for society in general, and functional for males and females specifically. It could be argued from the findings in the present study that it is functional for the female characters to possess traditional stereotyped traits in order to attract a mate. The female characters in the films studied did not hold positions of employment outside the home therefore they need someone (a husband) to provide for them. Because the female characters need a husband these traditional gender roles and traits become functional for them to that end. This is then functional for the male characters because many of the lead male characters were royalty and therefore they need a wife for the production of heirs.

A feminist conflict perspective would explain the portrayal of traditional and stereotyped gender roles as a way for one group to dominate and control another group. By perpetuating gender inequality, males as a group are able to dominate females as a group. The lack of opportunities for the female characters in patriarchal societies is one method males use to maintain and exercise their dominance and exploitation of women.

Future research could test the structural-functionalist and conflict-feminist perspectives with the findings in the present study. While the messages in the films would remain the same, alternative explanations and conclusions may result.



## **Limitations**

A number of limitations became apparent during the research process. The limitations were not apparent in the beginning and resulted in a narrowing of the scope of the research. Due to the spiraling process of the research method employed, these limitations resulted in having to go backward, making decisions as the limitations arose. Some of the limitations resulted in boundaries having to be established for some of the categories in the coding frame. The following are limitations in the research process employed here.

1. By the time this project reached completion the sample only constituted a little over one third of the Disney films that would fit the population described. The findings in this study cannot necessarily be generalized to the other Disney films in the population. Replication with another sample would be useful to this end.
2. It was not possible to code the characters as major and minor based on the number of lines they spoke in the film. This was tried for two films and it turned out that there were numerous characters with approximately the same number of lines.
3. While the animals and objects could be coded as male or female, it was not possible to describe their physical appearance in the same terms used to describe the human characters. It was not possible to determine the age of these characters or their physical build in the same manner as the human characters.

4. It became almost impossible to code every character that made an appearance on the screen. This became a problem while trying to count the number of males and females that appeared in groups because they appeared on the screen briefly. This was the case when large groups of male characters were shown on ships as sailors or pirates, and when men and women were shown as large groups in a town or Indian tribes were depicted. This was also true for herds, flocks and other groups of animals. Therefore these characters were not included in the ratio of male and female characters.
5. It was not possible to determine the character traits of all characters with speaking lines in the story. Some of these characters were shown very briefly and never seen again. Others were never shown in their entirety. The lower half of the body or the legs of some characters that spoke were all that were shown.
6. Coding character traits is very subjective. As the list of coded traits expanded beyond manageability, a narrow list of traits was developed. It was also unmanageable to code these traits for almost 300 characters therefore the list of characters coded for character traits was reduced to three categories of characters; the male heroes, the female heroines, and the villains. This limitation may be offset somewhat by previous research. Some of the character traits on the expanded list were addressed in research on prosocial and antisocial behaviors portrayed by characters in

Disney films. That study included a sample of eleven Disney films. (Hoerner 1996). Hoerner's entire sample of eleven Disney films was included in this study. This limitation was also offset with assessment of inter-coder reliability.

7. The sex, background and history of the researcher may have resulted in unintentional and undetected biases. These biases may be due to age, socioeconomic background, education level, and the fact that this researcher is female.

### **Future Research**

Numerous themes emerged during this research that lend themselves to possible research on Disney films in the future. These themes may or may not be related to gender issues. One area for possible research is the portrayal of smoking and drinking in the Disney films. The Disney films are marketed as wholesome family entertainment yet this seems to be contradicted by the portrayals of smoking and drinking in the films studied.

Some examples of this were noted during the coding process although it was not an issue addressed in this research. Characters were noted smoking a pipe, cigar or cigarette in *Pinocchio* (1940), *Peter Pan* (1953), *Cinderella* (1950), *Lady and the Tramp* (1955), *The Aristocats* (1970), and *The Little Mermaid* (1989). Numerous instances of drinking were also noted in some of these films. Drinking was portrayed in *Pinocchio* (1940), *Peter Pan* (1953), *101 Dalmatians*

(1961), *The Aristocats* (1970), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), and *Pocahontas* (1995).

What is disturbing about these portrayals is that these films are made for and marketed to, children. Adult characters are not the only characters engaging in these behaviors as Pinocchio and Lampwick smoke and drink in *Pinocchio* (1940) and Peter Pan and John Darling smoke in *Peter Pan* (1953). While much of this behavior is portrayed in the earlier films, three of the recent films portray smoking: *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) and *Pocahontas* (1995).

It is somewhat surprising these behaviors are still presented in these films considering the stance that has been taken against smoking in the United States. Various states are currently involved in lawsuits against the tobacco companies and the laws against underage smoking are being more strictly enforced. Anti-smoking education programs are also being presented in the schools. These portrayals seem rather inconsistent considering the traditional gender roles presented in these films for the most part have not changed. If parents believe the Disney films present good values maybe they need to take a closer look at what their children are presented in these films.

Another area for future research is good versus evil. All of the films in this study contain a villain who does or tries to do something to the hero or heroine. In some of these stories the villain is killed in the end, as is the case with Gaston, Scar, Ursula and the Queen in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937).

Closely related to good versus evil is violence. The violence portrayed in the films in this study span the continuum of violent behavior. In numerous instances there are portrayals of slapping, pushing or shoving, hitting with or without objects, stabbing, shooting, attempted rape, and death.

It appears that the violence in these films is acceptable when it is “the good guys” or heroes who are engaging in these acts. The villains who engage in violence many times end up dead and the hero suffers no consequences. Apparently violence is acceptable for certain reasons and good people who are violent do not suffer consequences. In the end bad or evil people get what they deserve. With the current concerns of the violence children see in television programs, movies, and video games, it seems that parents should also be concerned with the violence in the supposed sanitized Disney films. An actual determination of the level and amount of violence portrayed in Disney films may prove interesting at the very least.

Cultural diversity including race and socioeconomic status provide yet other topics for future research. Class issues become apparent when royalty become involved with those beneath their position. This is true in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), *Cinderella* (1950), *Lady and the Tramp* (1955), *The Aristocats* (1970), *The Little Mermaid* (1989), and *Aladdin* (1992). Issues of race became apparent in *Pocahontas* (1995) and *Peter Pan* (1953). In both films the race issues are with the Native Americans although this isn't necessarily the term used to describe them.

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It appears there is a moral to the story or a lesson to be learned in many of the films in this study. The moral of the story becomes apparent while watching the story but it is also indicated in the description of the story on the videotape box. Some of these lessons include friendship, "true beauty comes from within" (*Beauty and the Beast* 1991), learning "to be himself" (*Aladdin* 1992) and "how dreams can come true" (*Cinderella* 1950) or "the power of believing in your dreams" (*Pinocchio* 1940).

Future research should be concerned with the passing of patriarchal views of gender roles to children. The research should focus on how children perceive and interpret the stories and characters in these films. During socialization children learn through language and by visual representations what roles and behaviors are appropriate for their sex. They inherit an already constructed world of gender roles. Just as in reality these roles become typifications of how to present one's self as male or female and the appropriate roles that accompany those presentations.

Many of the films in this study contained a moral to the story or a lesson to be learned. This indicates the executives (legitimizers) at The Walt Disney Company must realize the impact media have on what children learn and how often where they learn it. The present research along with the research of others present some of the messages transmitted in the stories produced by The Walt Disney Company. Thus, the purpose of future research should address what, if any, socializing effect these films have on children and their construction of

gender roles. The task will be to determine the subjective interpretations children construct based on the "objective" reality they observe in these Disney films.

The present research should serve to debunk the beliefs of those who think Disney presents only good family entertainment in their "G" rated films for children. More importantly, the present research has demonstrated how the abstract processes of objectification and legitimation occur in the production of gender typifications in some of the Disney films.

**APPENDICES**



## Appendix A

## Coding Frame

<b>5 AREAS OF ATTRIBUTES</b>	<b>Character</b>	<b>Character</b>	<b>Character</b>	<b>Character</b>
<b>PHYSICAL APPEARANCE</b> Male or Female Body size, shape, build, figure Clothing Hair Apparent age				
<b>PHYSICAL ROLE</b> Type of physical activity the character engages in				
<b>IN-HOME LABOR</b> Activities related to the upkeep of the home and/or yard				
<b>OUT-OF-HOME EMPLOYMENT</b> Occupation or job title				
<b>SOCIETAL OR FAMILIAL POWER</b> Authority, status or holding an important position				
<b>CHARACTER TRAITS</b> Passive, Aggressive Dependent, Independent Emotional or Unemotional Romantic or Unromantic				

Appendix B. **CHARACTERS CODED AS MALE AND FEMALE**

<b>Film &amp; Characters</b>	<b>Males</b>	<b>Females</b>
Snow White	Prince Huntsman Mirror Voice 7 Dwarfs	Snow White Queen
Pinocchio	Pinocchio Geppetto Jiminy Cricket Honest John Stromboli Coachman Lampwick Carnival Man Alexander Monstro Figaro	Blue Fairy Cleo
Bambi	Bambi Thumper Owl Flower Stag 2 <sup>nd</sup> Stag	Bambi's Mother Mother Rabbit Faline Faline's Mother Female Rabbit Female Skunk Mother Raccoon Mrs. Quail
Cinderella	Prince King Grand Duke Gus Jaq King's Messenger Lucifer 2 Male Mice	Cinderella Stepmother Anistasia Drucella Fairy Godmother 3 Female Mice

## Appendix B. (continued)

<b>Film &amp; Characters</b>	<b>Males</b>	<b>Females</b>
Peter Pan	George John Michael Peter Pan Captain Hook Smee Chief 6 Lost Boys	Mary Wendy Tinkerbell Tiger Lily Indian Woman 6 Mermaids
Lady and the Tramp	Jim Jock Trusty Tramp Tony Joe Bill Toughy Mutt Pedro Bull Boris Man at Chicken Coop Beaver Policeman Man on Sidewalk Salesman Doctor 5 Men at House	Darling Lady Aunt Sarah Peg 6 Women at shower

## Appendix B. (continued)

<b>Film &amp; Characters</b>	<b>Males</b>	<b>Females</b>
101 Dalmations	Pongo Roger Jasper Horace Van Driver Mechanic Minister Terrier Captain Towser Labrador Collie Danny Colonel Tibs 4 TV characters	Perdita Anita Cruella Nanny TV woman Queenie Duchess Lucy 2 Cows
Jungle Book	Mowgli Shere Khan Bagheera Baloo King Louie Ka Colonel Harty Baby Elephant Wolf Leader Father Wolf 3 Male Elephants 3 Male Monkeys 4 Vultures	Winifred Mother Wolf Girl from village

## Appendix B. (continued)

Film & Characters	Males	Females
Aristocats	George Hautecourt Edgar Toulouse Berlioz O'Malley Roquefort Uncle Waldo Napoleon Lafayette 1 <sup>st</sup> Truck Driver 2 <sup>nd</sup> Truck Driver Scat Cat Milk Truck Driver 4 Singing Cats	Madame Duchess Marie Amelia Abigail Frou Frou
The Fox and the Hound	Slade Tod Copper Chief Dinkey Boomer Badger Porcupine	Mrs. Tweed Vixey Big Mama
The Little Mermaid	King Triton Prince Eric Grimsby Sebastian Scuttle Chef 2 Henchfish	Ariel Ursual Carlotta

## Appendix B. (continued)

<b>Film &amp; Characters</b>	<b>Males</b>	<b>Females</b>
Beauty and the Beast	Gaston Lefou Maurice Beast/Prince Baker Bookstore Man Asylum Head Lumiere Cogsworth Chip	Belle Mrs. Potts Wardrobe Dust Brush
Aladdin	Aladdin Sultan Jafar Genie Gazeem Tiger God Rasoul Prince Achmed Old Man 3 Guards	Jasmine
Lion King	Scar Mufasa Zazu Simba Timon Pumba Banzai Ed Rafiki	Nala Sarabi Nala's Mom Shenzi

## Appendix B. (continued)

<b>Film &amp; Characters</b>	<b>Males</b>	<b>Females</b>
Pocahontas	John Smith Powhatan Kocoum Governor Ratcliff Wiggins Lon Ben Thomas Nanontack Advisor to Chief	Pocahontas Nakoma Grandmother
Toy Story	Woody Buzz Andy Sid Mr. Potato Head Ham Slinky Rex Sergeant Army Men (many) Mr. Spell Shark Pizza Man TV Voice	Molly Andy's Mom Hannah Sid's Mom Bo Peep











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