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Disney's Female Gender Roles: The Change of Modern Culture

Figure 1

McKenzie Barber

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Table of Contents

Abstract

Disney Animation and their films are a huge part of the entertainment industry in America. They influence and reach children through many avenues, not just with movies, but through clothing, games, and toys. Disney has been around for over 80 years, and during that time, they have played a role in how society displays gender roles. As modern culture goes through changes, Disney can also be seen making changes in the way they represent their characters, especially females.

While looking specifically at Disney princesses, the depiction of females and their gender roles can be described in at least one of three ways. One, the original portrayal of Disney princesses is the stereotypical damsel-in-distress, and very domestic. This can be seen through Snow White, Cinderella, and Sleeping Beauty. A second portrayal arose and shifted the roles of female characters to be seen as rebellious and ambitious. This picture can be seen through the characters of Ariel, Mulan, and Rapunzel. Lastly, a final shift has taken place and the female characters are portrayed as independent and free spirited. This type of depiction can be seen through seen through Merida, Anna and Elsa. Through different researches and literature reviews, including the movies themselves, Disney can be seen slowly making strides along with the surrounding culture and changing times in America.

Introduction

Once upon a time, in a not so far off place, a man named Walt Disney changed the way of fairy tales in a fantastic and ground-breaking way. From fairy tales to love stories, Disney has been a part of the lives of millions for over 80 years. The company started by a man and a mouse, has become the leader in animated movies. With being a huge part of the entertainment industry, they are compared to the surrounding culture and ideals that it represents.

Disney has for many years been at battle with the public and their audience for being accused of portraying their characters, specifically females, in stereotypical ways. Gender roles and their connotations are a huge part of society, and can impact viewers in the way they compare themselves to the others around them. Media already has a substantial influence, portraying what is expected from society and social norms (Garnder, 2015).

Disney was chosen because through its history, the roles of men and women pictured in their films have mirrored the cultural perspective and beliefs of social norms and expectations on gender roles and identity. Disney, therefore, becomes a great illustration and representation of following cultural trends and developments. Also with that, Disney is a great way to follow the influence of views and expectations of behavioral norms linked with males and females.

Disney has been around for many decades, and they still seem to remain a leader in the entertainment industry. The culture that surrounds Disney is ever-changing, and going through different challenges with each era. If they are to please audiences from decade to decade, do their values and depictions change in order to appease the viewers? In order to determine the significance of the change of Disney, the influences of media and gender roles in general need to be researched and described. Further, if Disney is changing in order to adapt to the surrounding culture, there must be certain movies or time frames that show a shift and change. What are these

cultural changes, and do they play into the adaptation and representation of the Disney central themes when it comes to their princesses?

Over the years, Disney has shifted its portrayal of women, specially their princesses, to depict the times and cultural ideals. Although it is already known that Disney is a monumental leader in the entertainment industry, it is unknown if and how they have adapted to the changing values and beliefs on social norms and gender roles. Thus, I propose conducting literature reviews through previously published articles and journals on such topics, while also researching cultural trends and changes throughout time from the release of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* in 1937, to *Frozen* in 2013.

While conducting research through various literatures, journal articles, and the film themselves, some key questions that will be focused on will surround the culture and social ideals of various time frames in America. This will be done by focusing in on eight of the original Disney princess fairy tales in order to represent key eras and changes in Disney Animation. These eight Disney films will be *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, Cinderella, Sleepy Beauty, The Little Mermaid, Mulan, Tangled, Brave, and Frozen*. These eight films were selected to be reviewed and researched on a deeper level because they were released during various times representing various ideals. What needs to be discovered remains along the lines of why the influence of media is important and how society influences and impacts gender roles? What were/are the cultural stereotypes or expectations throughout the history in the United States? Also, how does Disney change their representation of character stereotypes? Does the change of values and beliefs over time in the United States actually represent itself through their films? Furthermore, what are the main defining characteristics of the Disney princesses and did these characteristics actually change, or were they stagnant over time?

Influences of Media

The time and culture that America lives in revolves around technology, advertising, and different forms of media consisting of music, video games, movies, and television. The children and adolescents of this generation have grown up with this type of lifestyle and its influence on the world around them. The influence of television alone has become one of life's most essential features. According to statistics, there are 116.4 million homes in the United States that have at least one or more televisions (Newswire 2015). On top of that, Americans alone spend collectively 250 billion hours per year watching television (Tonn, 2008).

Even though it is older research, McGhee and Fruch suggest that substantial television viewing may play a role in a child's knowledge and understanding of expected behaviors and characteristics associated with males and females (1980). Television viewing has more of an impact than just entertainment; it influences our attitudes and perceptions about ourselves and others (Tonn, 2008). Through the thousands of images, sounds, and words that viewers see flashed or play out on a screen, it impacts their identities and relationships, blurring the lines between reality and fantasy (Palmer, 2013).

Even though entertainment presented on the television is not real or an accurate picture of what life is actually like, some children believe that it is (Tonn, 2008). Children often compare themselves to the characters on the television show and the life that they portray. They also get an influence of social norms and produce intolerance among their peers (Palmer, 2013). A child's sense of self is often intertwined with the very prominent surrounding presence pop culture.

Gender Roles

One way to define gender roles is that they are a perceived set of behavioral "norms" that are usually linked in association to males and females in a social group or structure (Yerby, Baron, and Lee). Certain attitudes and behaviors are associated with a specific identities or stereotypes. Our society tends to outline what it means to be a male or female, and then define what depictions and traits of normal behavior they are each to portray (Gardner, 2015). These depictions and traits then get reinforced through products, clothing, and even media for what is considered appropriate (Gardner, 2015).

Gender roles that are constructed for males and females present themselves very early in a child's life (Palmer, 2013). These expectations and social norms that society presents to children have an impact and influence. In today's society, girls are pictured in bright colors, dresses, playing with dolls and tea-parties. On the other hand, boys are expected to play with tools, sports, and video games. The expectations of the social norms that children are to portray have consequences if they step out of those boundaries. Those children risk getting harassed, discriminated, and even abused by their peers and adults. (Gardner 2015).

Many children get their information about gender roles and other beliefs or values from media sources (Tonn, 2008). These sources that are reinforced in the United States' culture are through the forms of children's media, children's literature, and mythical figures (Tonn, 2008). In other words, children make sense of their identity, surroundings, and behaviors through popular movies, fairy tales, and stories.

Why Disney?

Disney was created by a man named Walt Disney, and he changed the way of fairy tales like never before. From his rough beginnings of commercials, to the multi-billion dollar company, Disney has made several stories and fables come to life (Biography.com Editors). He introduced the enchanted world of princes and princesses and far away kingdoms to the lives of millions of children and even adults. The company started by a man and his cartoon mouse, has become the leader in animated movies. Disney animated films are a part of most children's lives and the prominent growth has only continued to rise.

Disney's influence has reached far beyond just films. It is one of the major contributors to the numerous influences that surround children. According to an article last updated in 2013, Disney owns several films and theater companies, music and radio companies, parks and resorts, publishing and television companies, and various other things (Columbia Journalism Review, 2013). The influence has stepped out of just movies, but through advertising and merchandise. Disney can be seen marketing children's toys, games, books, cartoons, and even clothing. They are very present in the lives of children here in just the United States alone.

The power of Disney and their influence is bigger than just their capacity to reach children and adults through the various avenues already presented. Disney and their films are an important aspect to focus in on because their stories have become a major influence on children. They present powerful and sustained messages about gender and social relations that are the expected and standard norms of society (Tonn, 2008).

Just as times have changed and the stereotypical roles for males and females have evolved, so has the roles of the characters presented in Disney films. Throughout its history, the roles of men and women pictured in their films have mirrored the cultural perspective and beliefs

of social norms and expectations on gender roles and identity. Disney, therefore, becomes a great example and representation of following cultural trends and the influence of views and expectations of behavioral norms linked with males and females.

Disney and Gender Roles

In Disney films, gender roles of both male and female are very prominent. The major change throughout the history of Disney has taken place in the portrayal of female characters. The depiction of females and their gender roles can be described in at least one of three ways. One, the original portrayal of Disney princesses is the stereotypical damsel-in-distress, and very domestic. This can be seen through Snow White, Cinderella, and Sleeping Beauty. A second portrayal arose and shifted the roles of female characters to be seen as rebellious and ambitious. This picture can be seen through the characters of Ariel, Mulan, and Rapunzel. Lastly, a final shift has taken place and the female characters are portrayed as independent and free spirited. This type of depiction can be seen through seen through Merida, Anna and Elsa.

These different types of portrayals of women through the various films can be seen lining up with the cultural aspects of what was happening around that same time frame. The social expectations and standards for female gender roles have changed and evolved over time. With that, the media becomes a visual representation of those social norms that are expected in the surrounding culture and society.

Domestic Era

The role of women started to be questioned and fought for as early as the 1920s. Women were once seen as only child-bearers and were to remain in the home. As times were changing, women in 1920s era fought for equality and started to challenge those traditional standards and expectations of women and their gender roles (Moran, 1989). The women's right movement continued to grow, especially with the passage of the 19th Amendment, allowing women the right to vote (Moran, 1989). The fever for women activist slowed down near the end of the 1920s era, and almost vanished completely during the Great Depression (Moran, 1989).

The early thirties in the United States was a defining era because of a worldwide economic depression (Gene, 2008). This severe depression caused thousands of American workers and farmers to be out of jobs and homes (Gene, 2008). In the later part of the 1930s, the economy started to rise, but there was not a full recovery before the United Stated was drawn into World War II (Gene, 2008).

This depression in turn affected the role women and a revival of the traditional view that women were meant to be in the home caring for their husband and children. The culture and society reinforced this stigma, expressing that working women were "un-American" and stole jobs from men providing for their families (Moran, 1989). The era during and following the Great Depression created a portrayal of women that was a mother who was self-sacrificing, devoted all of her time and efforts for the care of her family, and was not in the realm of paid work (Walker, 1996). This idea that women were to be home-makers was not only shown by the people of society, but reinforced through ideal depictions in media.

Snow White

In 1937, Disney released their first full-length animated film, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (Disney Animated Studios). This story was based off of an original gruesome tale created by the Grimm Brothers, but was changed to create more entertainment to a generation that needed it (Abler, 2008). Although Disney took away the gore, violence, and unpleasant realities, he created a story that talked of romance with cheerful music and a happy ending.

Through the cheerful music, funny characters, and happy ending, the character Snow White starts the Disney trend of a domestic woman who becomes a damsel-in-distress relying on a prince to come an save her. This young, pretty, sweet-natured princess portrays the societal views of what was expected of females and their gender roles (Yerby, Baron, Lee). The domestic work that viewers can see Snow White doing does not faze her at all. These tasks consist of doing the dishes, cooking, cleaning, and being a mother figure for those seven dwarfs. This picture that Snow White was portraying was only to reinforce the expectations of women being home-makers, especially during the post Great Depression Era. Snow White could have been a story about a young girl making her discoveries of who she is, but instead creates a representation to other women and young girls the idea of domesticity (Garabedian, 2014).

During World War II, many women entered into the work force. With many men entering into the war to serve military demands, several women went into manufacturing jobs to help the economy (WGBH Educational Foundation). Many women for the first time were working outside of the home, and for the first time experienced a sense of freedom from the roles that society had pressed on them for so long (Bryant, 2009). This type of mentality and the encouragement for women to work was only allowed while America was still in war.

Afterwards, all was to return to normal with women in their traditional home-maker roles with their paying jobs being replaced with men (WGBH Educational Foundation).

America in the 1950s is showcased as a happier time leading out of World War II, with families moving into suburbs and fostering a happy life with the American Dream (Holt). Family was huge during this time, and was often pictured in the advertising and media. With men returning from war and women supposedly returning to the kitchens, came a sense of the re-constructivism of gender roles once again. Men were supposed to be the bread-winners for the family, while women were domestic caregivers caring solely for the children and the home. The media created the ideal woman who was always portrayed the same way time after time baking or cleaning, to imitate the proper roles that women were to have in society (Holt).

Cinderella

In 1950, the film *Cinderella* was released, and was once again based from another Brothers Grimm tale. Even though it came from such a gruesome tale, Disney once again shaped the story and the movie to idealize the classic rags to riches story that mirrored American post-war culture (Chrisman-Campbell, 2015). Following the same formula as *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, the story of *Cinderella* has a romantic theme, with cheery music, and cute little helping animals.

The story of Cinderella was not the typical media reinforcement of gender roles that was as apparent as other during the 1950s. Most of the pressures that were coming from culture-created gender roles, were that of a woman who wanted to be in the home cleaning and cooking while making others happy. Even though Cinderella was pictured many times finding ways to see the joy in the classic house-keeping things like baking, cleaning, and tiding, she was still dreaming of her happily ever after. Cinderella is a picture of the typical damsel-in-distress

because only the prince can save Cinderella. Cinderella was stuck in her enforced servitude for the rest of her life until she could escape with marriage (Yerby, Baron, Lee). This lines up with the social views of women during that time that idealized marriage and the role of being in the home making babies and caring for the husband.

Sleeping Beauty

Another Disney movie that was released during the 1950s era was that of *Sleeping Beauty*. This film was released in 1959, and was the reveal of Disney's third princess, Aurora (Disney Animation). Like many of the other Disney movies made before this, including *Snow White and Cinderella*, the fairy tale comes from several authors and adaptions. With this particular film, Disney used adaptions from Charles Perrault and Brothers Grimm, while adapting it even more to fit the audiences of that time (O'Brain, 2005). *Sleeping Beauty* uses music, action, and a heroic prince fighting for true love to follow the same story formula as the previous princesses.

Disney's adaptation of this story describes a princess who hopelessly falls into a curse, and the only way to be saved is by "true love's kiss". Aurora is no different than the two previous princesses because in order to escape their troubles, they rely on a prince to come and rescue them. This social mentality of creating the ideal woman to be fragile and unable to do their own saving, is again represented through this film. The 1950s rationality of gender roles and stereotypes are evident in *Sleeping Beauty*. The idea that women were to find a hard-working man to come and take care of them, instead of caring for themselves, was reinforced through this Disney film. Just like other media and advertisements of that time, this film, sadly, is no different.

Rebellious and Ambitious Era

The late 1960s and early 1970s created the opportunity for change and the second wave of feminist movement—challenging the social views of gender roles, especially that of women (Garabedian, 2014). Profound cultural changes were taking place in this era, and it was all redefining the role of women within society in America. After the long stretch of society telling women they were to be domestic and stay at home, it did not stop women from entering into the workforce. The 1960s brought out courage and determination by women seeking equal opportunities, pay, and advancements in the work place and in society (Walsh, 2010). Women were seeking to change the way society and American culture characterized, spoke about, and respected women.

A fundamental shift was on the rise in America because women fought to be seen equal to men and not inferior because they were biologically different (Wood, 2010). The Equal Pay Act created the law that it was illegal to have different pay rates for men and women, but that still did not prevent private business owners from hiring men instead of women. A monumental moment came in 1968 which prohibited discrimination in the workplace on the basis of race and gender (Wood, 2010).

By the 1980s, most of the major battles of the women's right movement had been won, and this can be seen through women being accepted into college, women in the work place, and the access to things like birth control and abortion (Wood, 2010). Even though the equality was not perfect, women would continue to step up for their equal rights. With all of this going on in the surrounding culture, it was represented in media.

Disney started off marketing to the public that the ideal princess was a damsel-in-distress and in need of saving by a prince to gain their happy ever after ending. With the cultural changes

that were happening in America, Disney also started making changes in their princess movies. The pattern that arises in this Disney phase is that the main female protagonist is seeking to be released from her societal bonds and expectations (Garabedian, 2014). The princesses in this era, specifically from 1989 to 2010, can be seen as rebellious and ambitious because of they seek for their own freedom and role, but they still get some sort-of happily ever after.

The Little Mermaid

The first movie that was released in this era was _Disney's The Little Mermaid_. Ariel was the fourth Disney princess, and was released in 1989 (Disney Animation). Following the women's right movement, Ariel would start the trend for a girl to step outside of the box designed for the typical princess, and create a new role model for women and young girls to follow (Yerby, Baron, Lee). _The Little Mermaid_, comes from the famous story written by Hans Christian Andersen (Disney Animation).

Ariel is different than princesses that came before her not only because of her outfit, but because of her personality, ambition, and bravery. Ariel was the first Disney princess to show her mid-drift and appear to be sexy only wearing a bikini made of sea-shells. Ariel's character intentionally stands out from her hair and wardrobe being different than that of her sisters. Instead of staying near the castle and being with other mermaids, she is often out with her fish friend Flounder seeking things form the human world. She also does not submit to authority and desires to be her own person, her own way.

Out of the Disney princesses that came before her, Ariel was the first to sing and talk about her own desires and wanting to be different than those around her. Ariel was curious by nature, had a sense for adventure, and would stop at nothing to get what she wanted. Even though she was the first princess to become a rebel and strive for what she wanted, her story

ultimately falls back on her need for a prince (Garabedian, 2014). Her story also was centered on finding true love, and would only be content if she got her happily ever after with Prince Eric.

Ariel's character was a huge change for Disney and their previous examples of female protagonists in their films. Her character is the start of a new era for Disney and a model for the Disney princesses that would follow her.

Mulan

Nine years after the release of *The Little Mermaid*, and several other films portraying Disney princesses speaking their minds and becoming their own person, a film was created that was a different type of story. In 1998, Disney released the film *Mulan*, which once again changed the portrayal of a female protagonist. Like Ariel, Mulan is brave and independent, but does not focus on finding love. Based off of a true story and medieval Chinese legend, Mulan was adapted by Disney and showcased a different type of princess (Yerby, Baron, Lee).

This story of Mulan is drastically different than the beginnings of Disney and where they began. Mulan fights with her own bravery and independence. She breaks out of her defined gender role to follow her own path. The women in Mulan's culture, including her family, tell her that she is to be a quiet, respectful wife, not drawing attention to herself. This is not okay with Mulan, and she feels like she is so much more than what society tells her. She cuts her hair, dresses as a man, and fights in her father's place. She risks being caught and even killed for doing such a thing, but Mulan knows that it is what she has to do to restore honor to her family. Mulan has her own sense of determination and disciple in order to become the best and strongest fighter. She strips away her female identity in order to fight alongside men and defeat the Huns. She found her sense of worth and identity by stripping away what her culture was telling to be. What sets Mulan apart from the damsel-in-distress is that she does not need saving by a prince.

Mulan does not fight or chase after love, but for her family's honor. With doing so, she wins the heart of the man she fought alongside with, creating her happily ever after. Mulan's character fits into this era because she is drastically more independent and ambitious than Disney's first era of princesses.

After the defining moment in Disney with creating Mulan's character, a princess who did not need a man, but instead fought like one, came more Disney movies portraying stronger female gender roles.

Tangled

As women in society were gaining more and more independence and breaking social barriers, Disney would also create strong female protagonists that would break and continue to break the princess pattern. Several Disney movies that followed Mulan would continue to push those boundaries showing that women did not need saving, but could actually do the saving themselves.

The last movie in this type of Disney era is *Tangled*. This movie was released in 2010, being adapted from another Brother Grimm's fairy tale about a girl trapped in a tower. Even though it has similar characteristics, Disney drastically changed the story adding in comedy, cheerful music, and adventurous female wanting to explore the world she had never seen.

Rapunzel, like the many princesses that came before her, wanted so much more than the life she was living. Rapunzel had a natural sense of adventure and thought about leaving the tower several times, but just could not push herself to do it. When she meets Flynn Rider, she stands up for herself and what she wants. Rapunzel knows that he is her one chance for getting out of the tower, and she is determined to explore the outside world.

This movie tends to fall back in line with the classic fairy tales that came before it, and this is because she only decides to leave the tower with the help of a male. Rapunzel depends on this bandit, not a prince, to escort her. Flynn Rider is the macho man, with a comedic side that has already seen it all in comparison to the beautiful blond who knows nothing since she was locked away her entire life. Then, the only other people that they come across are males who are pictured drastically larger than the frail lost princess. Rapunzel's hair is also magical, and her strength seems to come from it giving beauty and youth. With this occurring several times throughout the film, it places an importance on the aspect of beauty and being young.

Despite all of this, Rapunzel does represent a sense of change in Disney's representation of princesses. After she discovers who she really is, and realizes what has happened to her, she becomes determined not to stay in the tower. There is a sense of light and change in this movie because in the end it is Rapunzel who does the saving with a heroic sacrifice and a little girl-power. It was by her act of true love that saved Flynn Rider. Even though Tanged had aspects of Disney's original damsel-in-distress, it quickly makes a turn around with a character that is rebellious and ambitious with a little spunk to get what she wants. Like the princesses that came before her, Rapunzel speaks her mind and stands up for herself.

The transition in Disney, specifically from 1989 to 2010, changes within itself leading up to a more defining moment in which once again Disney would shift their portrayal of a princess.

Independent and Free Spirited Era

Even though the revival and wave the feminism movement happened in the late 1960s and early 1970s, that still did not stop the ripple effect for the years that would follow. Like mentioned previously, monumental strides were made for women's rights and equality in the United States. The mentality went from in the 1970s with two-thirds of Americans believing that women belonged in the home caring for the family, to the 1990s with two-thirds of American rejecting that notion (Coontz, 2013). Women are seen more and more in the workplace, on college campuses, and leaders within society.

The social view and cultural representation of women has drastically changed since the early 1930s. Gender roles, even though they have changed and shifted, are still being represented by the surrounding culture and society. Through different outlets, both women and men are being portrayed with certain characteristics. This has led to both positive and negative effects, especially on younger children and audiences. Even though there have been advances for equality with not only gender, but with race, disabilities, and sexual orientation, there is still this stigma for the ideal representation for men and women in today's culture (Tonn, 2008).

Brave

With the surrounding culture and audiences changing over time, Disney has changed their representation with the typical Disney princess. In 2012, for the very first time, Disney created a story about a princess that would completely break the pattern and stereotypes of all the princesses that came before her. With the release of *Brave*, Disney would show audiences that a princess does not need to get happiness from a man or through marriage. A princess can be independent and unique, and realizing that their worth is so much more than marriage and babies.

Brave is about a Viking princess named Merida, who is clever, independent, strong-wiled girl who refuses to be anything but herself. Merida, steps out of the princess stereotype because she refuses to be confined by the bonds of marriage or even be fought for in a competition (Garabedian, 2014). She would rather fight for her own hand then let some man decide her fate.

Even though her mother is trying to train her to be a princess and to act like a lady should, Merida continues to be her own person. Her wild, defiant side not only makes her a rebel like the princesses that came before her, but she is also strong-willed and free spirited. She goes after her own destiny and seeks it, instead of sitting around and waiting for it to happen. Merida is different than the princesses that came before her because she embodies a 21st century young girl pictured in mid-evil Scotland (Mesri, 2013).

Merida's character is easier for girls to relate to because she is not only rebellious, sloppy, and blames everything on her mom, but she feels misunderstood and alienated (Mesri, 2013). Her character is strong and can fend for herself, breaking away from the stereotypical label for a girl because she proves to herself and others that she can live in the wilderness, climb trees and mountains. The idea of beauty and perfection is not important to Merida, because being true to who you are and being yourself is more important. Merida's character also steps up and realizes that she made a mistake and tries to right her wrong, and she is the one that saves the day, not a man. Through her personal discovery, she learns the importance of family, and how sometimes one has to make sacrifices for what is most important in his or her life.

What also sets Merida apart from the princesses that came before her is that she is not focused on love and marriage. She could care less about boys and even finding her one true love. Merida's character is more worried and concerned about her independence and not just doing

what everyone else thinks is normal. Instead of focusing on romance, this Disney movie is about a mother-daughter relationship and fixing a broken bond between them.

For the first time with the movie *Brave*, Disney creates a princess that becomes a turning point in their history. Merida represents how far Disney has come, and the stereotypical labels that Disney once made, but continues to change. Their creation of Merida sets the standard for the princesses to come after her, breaking away from the domestic, dependent female, to an independent, free spirited, true hero character.

Frozen

Not long after the creation of *Brave*, Disney would release another princess movie that would also break the labels and expectation of social norms. In 2013, Disney released the movie *Frozen*, which destroys all gender role expectations and limitations (Disney Animation). The movie *Frozen* contains two strong female lead characters, Princess Anna and Queen Elsa, for the first time in Disney history.

Unlike the Disney princess that came before them, their story is about the development and growth in their relationship together as sisters. Queen Elsa has magical powers that she in convinced she has to hide in order to protect her sister Anna. Rightfully so, because Anna is the one thing she loves most, and she accidently injured her as a child. When Queen Elsa has an accident and exposes herself, she runs off into the wilderness causing an eternal winter. Anna selflessly goes and searches for her to tell Elsa that it is okay. This story becomes about the importance of family and sister relationships.

Even though Anna is surrounded by three male characters, she makes decisions for herself. She does not depend on a man to go and save her sister, and in fact she tells the prince perusing her hand in marriage to stay back and tend for the people. She sets off into the wintery

wilderness to bring back and save her sister. Showing the important thing in Anna life is that of family, and she will do anything to protect, save, or even sacrifice for her sister Elsa.

Even though this movie has elements of romance threaded throughout, it does not become the focal point, but rather the comedic aspect of it. When Anna wants to marry a man she just met, Queen Elsa does not understand why she would want to marry a complete stranger and does not give her permission. It almost seemed like a joke Disney played on themselves several times in the movie, pointing out their typical Disney princess formula. Later in the movie, Anna needs to have a true love's kiss in order to save her life. She thinks that it is Prince Hans, but in fact he never loved her. In her last dying moments, she could have been saved by Kristoff, but she decides to save her sister instead. Her last moments were with her saving Elsa's life from Prince Hans. The act of true love is that of a sister, not the love for a male lead (Garabedian, 2014).

The movie *Frozen*, was a huge shift from Disney's very beginnings with *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. Queen Elsa and Princess Anna are just one example of how Disney has changed over the last few years in order to reflect modern times (Garabedian, 2014). After both *Frozen* and *Brave*, Disney is showing audiences that women can be in control of their own lives, futures, and destinies. The Disney princess does not need a man to save her nor to make her happy, but realize the more important lessons in life and what truly makes them happy. This Disney era of the princesses being independent and free spirited is just beginning to grow and shape itself. With future releases of Disney princesses that more multi-cultural, and multi-ethnic, they are enlightening their audience's perspective of gender role, and the larger essence that women cannot be defined just one way.

Wrap Up and Closing

From early on, Disney has been impacting the lives of adults and children, taking them to far off kingdoms and magical worlds full of princesses, talking animals and cheerful show tunes. Disney has a huge impact on the entertainment industry, and only continues to grow bigger expanding their influence from movies, to clothing, to games and toys. Disney has been around for over 80 years, and during that time, they have played a role in how society displays gender roles. As modern culture goes through changes, Disney can also be seen making changes in the way they represent their characters, especially females.

The influence of media is a huge aspect to consider because of the role that it plays in the lives of many adults and children. Research has shown that substantial television viewing may play a role in a child's knowledge and understanding of expected behaviors and characteristics associated with males and females (McGhee and Fruch 1980). Television viewing has more of an impact than just entertainment; it influences our attitudes and perceptions about ourselves and others (Tonn, 2008). Through the thousands of images, sounds, and words that viewers see flashed or play out on a screen, it impacts their identities and relationships, blurring the lines between reality and fantasy (Palmer, 2013).

On top of the significant influence that media has, another aspect that was looked at was the idea of gender role and how society reflects what is socially acceptable and normal among males and females. Many children get their information about gender roles and other beliefs or values from media sources (Tonn, 2008). Children make sense of their identity, surroundings, and behaviors through popular movies, fairy tales, and stories.

Disney was chosen to review and research because of its large impact it has on the entertainment industry and the influence of millions of children around the world. In Disney films, gender roles of both male and female are very prominent. The major change throughout

the history of Disney has taken place in the portrayal of female characters. The depiction of females and their gender roles can be described in at least one of three ways. One, the original portrayal of Disney princesses is the stereotypical damsel-in-distress, and very domestic. A second portrayal arose and shifted the roles of female characters to be seen as rebellious and ambitious. Lastly, a final shift has taken place and the female characters are portrayed as independent and free spirited.

These different types of portrayals of women through the various films can be seen lining up with the cultural aspects of what was happening around that same time frame. The surrounding culture, beliefs, ideals, and expectations were seen represented through the various Disney films that were selected for review and research.

Disney has for many years been an influential icon for many young children as they create role models and characters that children often time fall in love with and try to replicate. The bigger picture is that through the media and different elements in our society, there is an expectation and social norm that people are to match up to or else they are seen as outcasts. Disney over the years has represented those social norms and ideals through their various characters, especially their princesses. Disney has changed over time just as modern culture has changed. Disney's progressive change throughout their history can be seen making significant strides and modeling to viewers more than just a happy ending. Disney is continuing to grow and creating more and more movies. They are still trying to grow and develop the idea of princesses that more multi-cultural, and multi-ethnic. Disney will continue to enlighten their audience's perspective of gender role, and the larger principle that both men and women cannot fit within a label.

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